The U of R, SIAST and Regina Community Living have teamed up to explore a new approach to improving literacy among people with intellectual disabilities. The pilot project provides an opportunity for two adults with intellectual disabilities to attend classes at the U of R, where they receive tutoring from their classmates. The project is already producing benefits for everyone in the classroom.

“The project grew out of research I did, which showed that of the more than 11,000 adults in Regina with intellectual disabilities, less than one percent have access to literacy programming,” explains Joan McCulloch, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at the U of R. “If you put them out there with the opportunity to develop their capabilities. And, we know that our literacy programs and services don’t reach out; we don’t exercise them, they wither away.” McCulloch’s findings, which were submitted to the National Literacy Secretariat, led to the formation of an advisory committee consisting of various community and government agencies. The committee decided to seek out opportunities at the post-secondary level for people with intellectual disabilities. “David Friesen (associate dean of the Faculty of Education) initially opened the door,” McCulloch says. “Then the Registrar, Judy Chapman, found bursaries for the students. and Roxanne. SIAST will join the program in 2007. We’re thrilled with the support we’ve received.”

Joan McCulloch and Roxanne Charpin have been attending a course in health education instructed by Darlene Schie, a professor of health sciences, who is currently teaching the project. When the course began, they talked about their literacy abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and she invited them to volunteer to tutor Friel and Charpin to improve their literacy in specific areas. The response was so strong Schie had to limit the number of tutors to four each. Together they planned out the areas they wanted to work on. Both students are working on their reading and computer skills. Friel is also improving her abilities in mathematics. Charpin works out in the gym with one of her tutors. “We had an ‘a-ha’ moment a few days ago when Roxanne and Jana figured out the spelling for the word ‘gym’. They are figuring out and their confidence is up. It’s about giving them tools to assist in their lives.”

As a result of the project, the students are working on their reading and computer skills. Friel is also improving her abilities in mathematics. Charpin works out in the gym with one of her tutors. “We had an ‘a-ha’ moment a few days ago when Roxanne and Jana figured out the spelling for the word ‘gym’. They are figuring out and their confidence is up. It’s about giving them tools to assist in their lives.”

The project offers an opportunity to be supported. When these students learn how they’re also going to be better able to help other special needs people because of their experience.”

What do Friel and Charpin think of the experience? “Awesome,” they chimed in together. “I used to be at home all the time. It’s better to go out more.” Friel adds. They agree they’ll miss the class when it ends, although their classmate plan to stay in touch through email and instant messaging. They also agree they’d come back to campus for another course. That will depend on finding the funding to expand and extend the pilot project.

**Openings to doors for learning all**

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