

students to prison inmates to teach others how to read. Methods range, as I said, from one-on-one tutoring to actual work in the streets with those who have turned off and dropped out of our society.

This particular program, called "Beat the Street", has received wide publicity. It is an amazing success story of a former long-term prison inmate who broke his pattern of crime, having learned to read and write for the first time at the age of 32. With another former offender, he initiated a program to go directly into the community which they knew best—the street people of Toronto—to pass on what they had learned through Frontier College. This program works. It is successful. It is recognized and supported by the Ministry of Community and Social Services in Ontario and the Toronto Board of Education.

Senator Gigantès: How long does the training to teach people to teach literacy take?

Senator Fairbairn: In the "Beat the Street" program?

Senator Gigantès: Yes.

Senator Fairbairn: I would say that the training is open-ended. There is no specific beginning or end to this kind of instruction. It is because of the lack of instruction that many of these people have dropped out of the system. This program literally takes place in the streets, by using such things as street signs or licence plates to learn how to read and add.

Senator Gigantès: How long does it take to train a tutor?

Senator Fairbairn: I cannot answer that question. Frontier College also has programs upgrading adult learning. It assists in native education in urban areas. It trains students to tutor their peers in high schools. It provides a voluntary tutoring program for federal inmates in the Kingston area and also a job placement program for those who have finished their term in the penal institutions. The training manuals of Frontier College are aimed at teaching volunteers and community organizations anywhere in the country how to begin the tutoring process with illiterate youths and adults.

Senator Gigantès, you and I and all those in this chamber could become tutors to an illiterate person. This is one of the handbooks available. I think the question as to how long it would take to master the technique would depend upon individual considerations, but each of us could do it. Another such organization is Laubach Literacy of Canada, which recruits and trains volunteer tutors to work with adults in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and Ontario. Like Frontier College, they produce their own materials, and the two regularly exchange and share information.

I have mentioned World Literacy of Canada whose focus and network links awareness and initiatives in Canada with other nations in the world. There is the Learning Disability Association of Canada, which works here in Ottawa constantly to enhance government recognition of the special difficulties of the learning disabled. And in Calgary there is the Foothills Academy, a provincially approved school dedicated to providing a direct community service for identifying learning dis-

abled children. It also provides an outreach program throughout western Canada for educators and parents.

These are some of the organizations which have developed a public image, and they have been very helpful in helping me to understand. But they are no more important than the countless community groups and volunteers in the provinces and territories who provide the front-line action of persuading those with difficulties to come forward and then offering the help they need.

A great deal of activity in the private sector has been generated in recent years by everything from the chartered banks to mining companies, oil companies, publishing houses, magazines, transport companies, television networks and national hockey, football and baseball associations. Well-known Canadians from all sectors are beginning to speak out as volunteers, and the public is becoming aware of projects like the "Right to Read" and fund raising drives such as the Gift of Literacy Campaign which some of you may have seen in the book stores, which is conducted by the Book and Periodical Development Council to support literacy groups.

Honourable senators may have noticed that I have not yet indulged in that favourite Canadian pastime of saying that the government must solve the problem, that it is completely up to the government. The reason is that this is one area where the government simply cannot do it all. It is not equipped to do it all, and it does not have the expertise or the essential contacts to do it all. As Mr. Pearpoint told the House of Commons Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration last fall:

If the government tries to deliver literacy programs directly, you will write-off an enormous number of resources that are available in this country. That is precisely because this is a community issue—a public issue affecting every Canadian. The resources required to deal with illiteracy are Canadians.

● (1600)

He went on to say that if the government were to respond to the problem by simply creating a ministry of literacy, it could be a very costly investment in failure. Canadians would conclude that it is solely a government problem and would sit back and wait for the government to find a solution, and that is not the way to go.

Having said that, I must very quickly add that such comments do not let the government off the hook—not by a long shot. Federal government leadership—and that means everyone from the Prime Minister down—is critical to this issue, because the government has something that no other group or individual in Canada has: It has a national presence; it has a national responsibility and it has national facilities to use.

The federal government is uniquely poised to tell Canadians that this problem is a top-priority problem in every corner of this country; to explain the problem and how it cripples its victims, and to counsel tolerance to all of us in dealing with an issue that causes such deprivation and humiliation to those who suffer from it. The federal government must tell Canadians that the problem can be solved and that they are crucial to