

# Blind volunteer helps others to read



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News contributor

When Mike Brodsky lost his sight unexpectedly in the early 1970s, he accepted the challenge to learn to read braille.

As an 18-year volunteer with the Victoria READ Society, Brodsky, 88, helps those with sight tackle their own challenges in learning to read the printed word.

Brodsky's calling came to him while walking one day, he asked someone which corner he was at. When the individual couldn't read the sign, but was able to spell the names to him, he thought, "here's a chance to do something interesting."

Reading had always been a great passion for the 26-year veteran of the Canadian Army, and with persistence, he was accepted into the training program for the literacy organization - it took a little convincing; after all, "How could a blind person teach someone to read?" he acknowledges.

But now, almost two decades later, he's shown just how

"I feel it's something I can do that's useful and you enjoy meeting the students and making progress," he says. That said, "you look forward to the day they don't need you anymore" as well, he adds.

The challenges Brodsky enjoys in the position are likely the same as sighted volunteers: "What is the best way to explain this or that to this student," he says, pointing out that as individual's needs differ, so too does the way they learn best.

"People are always saying, 'How do you do it?' And I say I use all the standard methods," he says with a chuckle.

When a student struggles with a word or phrase, for example, instead of looking at the word, Brodsky simply asks them to spell it out.

He helps students explore the rules of grammar and sentence structure, and because many times "illiteracy" actually involves difficulty comprehending what's read, Brodsky helps those students break down what they've just read to build greater

understanding.

"It's important to challenge students each time, but also to ensure each session includes successes. That's a big part of the job - to build self-confidence," Brodsky notes.

And perhaps that's a major part of what Brodsky brings to teaching - if this fellow can teach himself to read braille at mid-life, maybe he is in fact very well-equipped to help others overcome a life-long challenge of illiteracy.

And while some are undoubtedly skeptical as they begin the journey, many have reaped the results of the hard work, sometimes moving on to further their education, change jobs or pursue a promotion that had been out of their grasp.

"Every so often I'll meet (a former student) in the street and in some cases, they're doing quite well. It makes you feel good when you hear something like that," he reflects.

"We all want to feel useful in some way. If we don't feel useful, life isn't very satisfactory."



Don Denton/News Staff

Mike Brodsky is blind, but accompanied by his guide dog, Talbot, has volunteered at the Victoria READ Society since 1990. He is listening to Steve Pickford read.