

Adult educators open do

Workplace issues, concerns differ from traditional teacher settings

Todd Sloane has been in jail a long time. But he gets to leave at the end of the day.

Sloane is a teacher for the Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES, which serves Ontario, Seneca, Wayne and Yates counties. He works at the Wayne County Jail, and this adult educator knows it is where he belongs.

"Without a doubt, the majority of offenders are undereducated," Sloane said. "Eighty to 90 percent of people arrested are unemployed at the time of their arrest. We know if we provide them with skills and credentials while they're here, there's a huge drop in the likelihood that they will offend again."

NYSUT-affiliated adult educators such as Sloane work in jails, at BOCES centers and in traditional K-12 settings throughout the state. Others work at Educational Opportunity Centers — EOCs — established through the State University system as a bridge to college.

Non-traditional roles

Few people, they say, understand the importance of what they do in their non-traditional teacher roles, and they struggle with low salaries and often with crude working conditions.

Classrooms for those seeking adult education are found in libraries, community centers, alternative learning centers, community rooms of public housing buildings, rehabilitation centers, immigration centers, migrant worker camps and even converted car dealerships.

Adult education services include GED, English as a Second Language, career and technical education, workplace readiness, adult basic education and vocational skills. Classes are offered both day and evening.

Students are generally older, frequently financially disadvantaged, often struggle with a disability and sometimes do not speak English as a native language. Many of the teachers who educate them are members of local unions affiliated with NYSUT.

"Adult educators provide a

great service to the adults they teach, as well as to society," said NYSUT Vice President Maria Neira. "Any time we can return a citizen to the community who has acquired life skills and is better prepared to enter the work force, it is a positive outcome for all involved."

All told, the cost associated with educating inmates is far less than the cost to incarcerate them, Sloane notes.

While typical adult education costs were not immediately available, the average school district spent \$9,900 per pupil in 2005-06, according to State Education Department figures.

By comparison, last year it cost Wayne County more than \$48,000 to house a single inmate at the county jail for a year, the state Department of Correctional Services reports.

"People are here because they have a goal that's meaningful to them. You generally have students eager to learn," said Sloane, a vice president at-large for the Wayne-Finger Lakes BOCES Educators Association, led by President Pam Modzel.

Adult education is essential to the well-being of a community, said NYSUT Vice President Kathleen Donahue, whose office oversees BOCES issues for the statewide union. With education and training, Sloane's students become productive members of a community, who are less likely to return to jail.

Still, with all these educators do, there is an overwhelming lack of awareness about their work.

"When people think of 'teacher,' they traditionally think of a schoolteacher in front of a room full of children," said Sloane, whose students learn in a converted gymnasium at the county jail.

Lack of resources and low wages are a consistent battle, said Susan Hoff-Haynes, an adult educator with the NYSUT-affiliated Capital District EOC, which serves economically and educationally disadvantaged adults. "We teach the people who are the least valued in society."

Classrooms often reflect this. Photos of adult ed classrooms taken by EOC educators and pre-



KEVIN RIVOLI

Todd Sloane's adult education classes take place in a converted

sented to the SUNY Board of Trustees several years ago depicted damage from ongoing flooding and lack of heat.

In one EOC, "The ambient temperature was 50 degrees in cosmetology," said Hoff-Haynes, who heads the EOC Alliance local.

Hoff-Haynes is also a member of the EOC Concerns Coalition, composed of adult educators from her local at Hudson Valley Community college; from United University Professions, representing State University of New York; and from the Professional Staff Congress, representing City University of New York —all NYSUT affiliates.

The Coalition was formed to stave off threats to EOC's mission, recalls member Lorna Arrington, Buffalo EOC adult educator.

"We didn't know who to contact at the various EOCs," said Arrington. "NYSUT was instrumental in pulling us all together."

Coalition members prepared an academic white paper on working conditions and paired it with the

photos presented to the trustees.

They have since presented another paper on the need to bring EOCs back to their original goal of including college preparation for some students.

Since the paper was presented several years ago, Hoff-Haynes said working conditions "have improved somewhat."

"They're beginning to address the problem," said Arrington, who also chairs UUP's own EOC Concerns Committee.

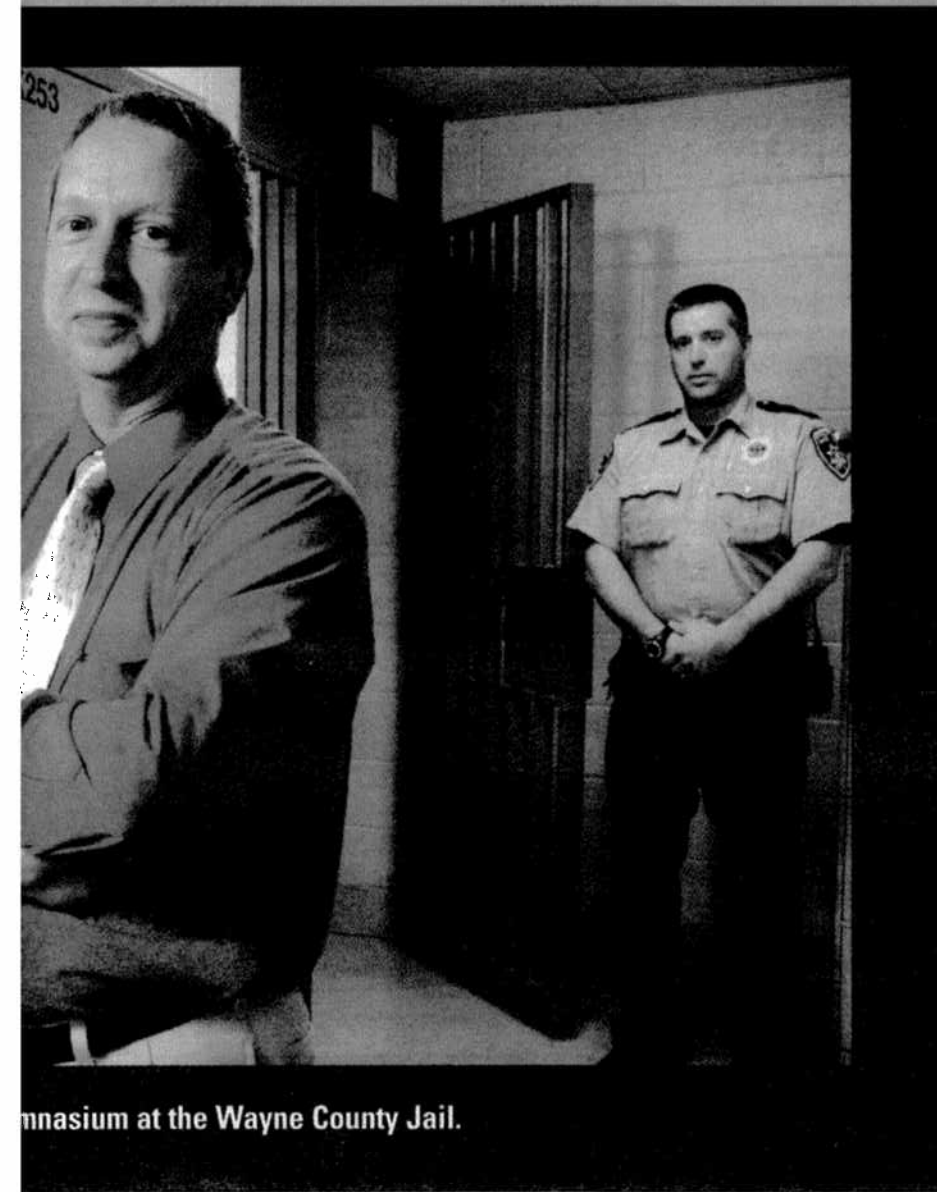
She noted that University at Buffalo's EOC is slated to get a new building in a few years, and SUNY Brockport's Rochester EOC is pursuing new facilities as well.

In her 38-year career, Arrington continues to see the need for adult education.

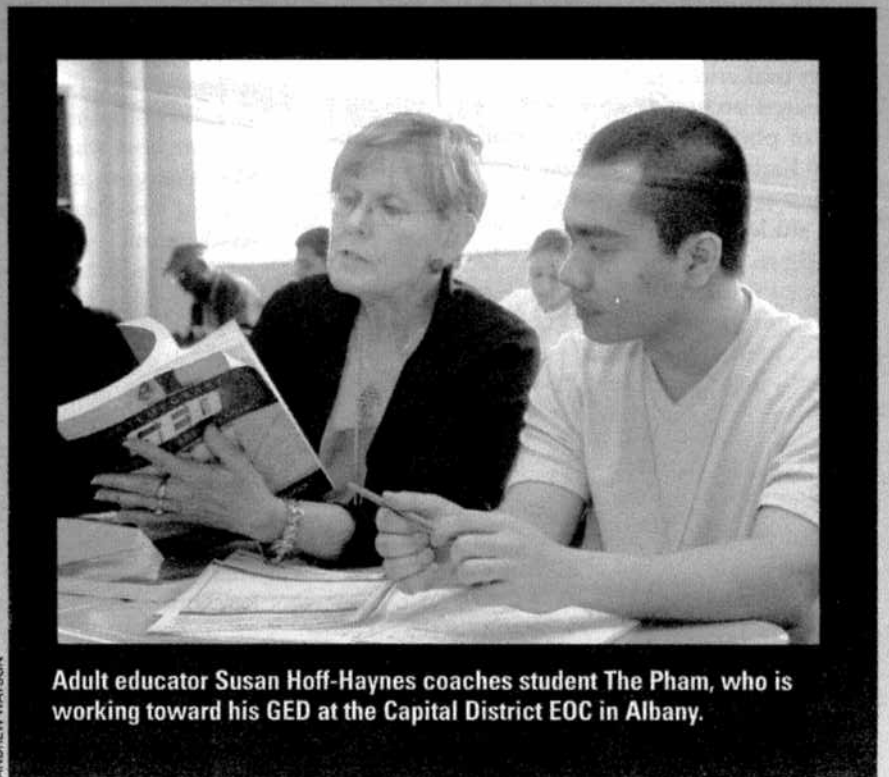
"First it was more veterans and displaced homemakers. Now we're doing more GED work, and there's more unemployment," she explained.

More people are looking for jobs that can provide living wages to support their families,

rs to better life for many



gymnasium at the Wayne County Jail.



Adult educator Susan Hoff-Haynes coaches student The Pham, who is working toward his GED at the Capital District EOC in Albany.

said, the NYSUT-affiliated adult educators are trained and accredited classroom professionals.

Most are traditionally certified teachers. Those who work for a school district but do not have certification may be recommended by the superintendent of the employing district for an adult education instructor certificate.

Teachers in occupational subjects such as cosmetology must have three years of experience or preparation in their subject.

Some EOC courses, such as certified nursing assistant, require instructors with professional licenses.

In the EOC college settings, adult educators usually earn less than their campus colleagues, said Hoff-Haynes, a member of NYSUT's Higher Education Council. Starting salaries are calculated differently than other higher ed faculty, as are contract hours.

Some adult teachers can be laid off if enrollment is low, Sloane said.

EOC educators do not know their class size from week to week. Except for nursing and cosmetology, new students enter programs every week.

"It forces us to do a lot of individualized education," Hoff-Haynes said.

Along with adjusting to individual disabilities, educators have to address language differences. Hoff-Haynes said her class has students from Vietnam, Africa and Spanish-speaking countries.

Some have attention deficit disorder; others are emotionally disturbed. Sometimes, school is court mandated for them.

"It's a choice to teach adult ed," said Dorothy Valachovic, a member of the Schenectady Adult Educators local union, who teaches English as a second language and parenting life skills. "It's a great joy to see people more empowered and self-sufficient, who can take care of their children and get off public assistance."

Looking to get students more active and involved in issues that affect their lives, Hoff-Haynes brings them to Albany to meet with state lawmakers.

Herself dyslexic, Hoff-Haynes feels "a commitment to helping people who grew up in difficult situations."

Lori Hammond, who teaches ESL at Schenectady's Washington Irving Education Center, gets a thrill when her students become well-informed and eager to vote.

The best thing adult educators can do, Sloane said, "is raise awareness about what we do every day." He urges colleagues to get involved with their local unions and with professional organizations such as the New York Association for Continuing/Community Education.

Hammond agreed. "You have to advocate for yourself," she said, "just like we teach our students to do."

— Liza Frenette



Dorothy Valachovic is an adult educator in Schenectady.

Arrington said.

Funding adult education is unlike pre-K-12 education or traditional higher education. Adult ed is included in the budgets of some school districts and BOCES. Off-site programs may be funded by the state.

Other adult ed programs are funded through community col-



Lori Hammond teaches ESL at the Washington Irving Education Center.

leges, four-year colleges and by grants from specific state programs and foundations. Statewide, a dozen EOCs run by both CUNY and SUNY are funded through SUNY's Office of Academic and Workforce Development, Arrington said.

While the term "adult educator" is tossed around freely, Sloane