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**Subject:** LITERACY CHANGES LIVES, OPENS DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY  
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NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Education

LITERACY CHANGES LIVES, OPENS DOORS TO OPPORTUNITY

KAMLOOPS - No one knew when they started out that this reading program would take people trapped by a life of crime or addiction and give them the tools they need to set themselves free.

Street School, part of the Kamloops-Thompson school district, is led by national literacy award winner Pete Grinberg. It is a school that helps transition vulnerable adults back into society through education.

"The pace I set for myself on the streets, my life of crime and drugs, was fast and crazy. There was no time for anything else. I had served myself a life sentence," said Damon who started with the program while incarcerated. "When I came into Street School my life started over again, kind of from where I last left off, at 13."

"Damon's powerful story is one of many and hearing it reminds us that literacy is truly a survival skill," said Education Minister Margaret MacDiarmid. "Every time someone chooses to open a book, they are choosing to open the door to a life full of possibilities."

Through ReadNow BC, the Province has been working with B.C. Corrections to improve literacy services for inmates and those under community supervision, with a focus on adult students transitioning back into the community.

"We often say that literacy is a piece of making you whole, and Street School believes that meaningful learning and significant advances in literacy are more likely to occur when the students are coping better with the challenges of daily living," said Grinberg. "School district 73 and Kamloops regional correctional centre have shown progressive leadership, and have given us the support needed to make a difference in the lives of our students."

Literacy is the foundation for success and opportunity in life, and September 8, 2010 marks International Literacy Day.

The Street School program is supported by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and the

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General.

Since 2001, the Province has invested nearly \$1.4 billion in literacy and literacy-related initiatives, such as StrongStart BC early learning programs, \$17 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn, and \$2.7 million for the LEAP BC resources that encourage literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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#### BACKGROUNDER

#### DAMON'S STORY

Damon grew up in East Vancouver and by Grade 8, he dropped out of school and entered into a life of drug addiction and crime for nearly 17 years, eventually finding himself incarcerated at the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre (KRCC). It was there that he met Pete Grinberg and his team who were schooling other inmates in the same situation.

During his time at KRCC, Damon decided he was ready to change his life and began his journey to earn his Dogwood diploma. After being released from KRCC into a treatment centre, Tonia, an outreach worker from Street School, showed up and asked if he was "ready to go". This was the transition he needed to stay on track and never lose sight of his goal.

Since picking up where he left off at 13 years old, Damon, now in his early 30's, has completed his Dogwood diploma, and just recently reached his one-year mark of being clean and sober. He credits Pete and his staff for their support and for never giving up on him.

#### MEREDITH'S STORY

Meredith is a mother of four who had struggled with addiction for a number of years. She came to Street School two years ago to work on getting her Dogwood diploma and to get her life back on track.

Today, Meredith continues to move forward with her education. She plans to take a home support care worker program in university and is currently self-employed, working together with her husband on their family business. She now believes that education and literacy open doors, and all it took was finding the right support in the Street School program.

#### LYNN'S STORY

Lynn is a single mom of four, who had struggled with addiction for many years. Two years ago, she was introduced to Street School and set a goal to achieve her Dogwood diploma.

Since beginning the program, she has received her Dogwood diploma, upgraded courses, recently wrote the English 12 provincial exam, and will be attending Thompson River University this fall. Lynn has been clean and sober for 10 years and now has a job as a support worker in a local addictions centre for other women who shared the same struggles as her.

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