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Alumni make a difference in Minnesota Reading Corps

Summary: Ashley Johnson '08 and Luke Elward '08 provide one-on-one literacy assistance through Minnesota Reading Corps

(March 31, 2009)-Literacy is one of a child's most valuable lifelong skills. Unfortunately, a rapidly growing number of Minnesota children cannot read at their grade level, which has an effect on their success in school—and their futures.

Ashley Johnson '08 and Luke Elward '08 make a difference in the lives of children by providing one-on-one literacy assistance through [Minnesota Reading Corps](#) (MRC). Johnson, an anthropology and history major, works with students at Taylors Falls Elementary School in Taylors Falls. Elward, an English major, works with students at Pratt Community School in southeast Minneapolis.

On a typical day, Elward and Johnson work one-on-one with as many as 16 kindergarten through third grade students for about 20 minutes with each child. They use specific interventions and techniques aimed at improving reading fluency, and test each student on a weekly basis to measure improvement. The results are overwhelmingly positive.

"Many children are making great strides with their reading," says Elward. "It's the thing I enjoy most about serving with the MRC. The most important aspect is helping struggling children, many of whom come from a degree of poverty."

Johnson agrees: "I feel like every child I work with goes away with an improved ability to read, but it is also up to them to continue practicing and making themselves better readers."

And the kids have made an impact on Elward and Johnson, too. They have both applied to continue MRC service next year, completing the maximum two years of service. Johnson is contemplating heading back to school to pursue a master of elementary education.

An opportunity to tutor students in the Morris community through a work-study arrangement inspired Elward to work with children. He says: "The experience at UMM helped prepare me for the school environment and taught me ways to approach children not only as a friend, but also as a tutor and authority figure.

He continues: "Serving with the MRC has given me a greater respect for the problems facing our schools. With generational poverty and neglect, it can be difficult for children to rise above their disadvantages and achieve, but programs like the MRC are there to help."

The MRC will recruit more than 500 members for the 2009-10 school year with a goal of reaching 15,000 Minnesota school children. Full-time MRC members receive a living stipend, financial support for college or student loans, and health insurance.

Photo: Luke Elward '08 and Ashley Johnson '08

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