

# BETWEEN THE *Lines*



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Between the Lines empowers incarcerated people to assist in the development of early literacy skills among their loved ones while also enabling them to participate in important milestones as they serve their sentences. The program not only promotes family literacy, it also strengthens the bond between children and their incarcerated family members, despite the many barriers to contact and communication.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, in 2007, an estimated 1.7 million children had at least one parent in prison.<sup>1</sup> This number swells when expanded to include aunts, uncles, grandparents, and siblings. Between the Lines allows these family members to reach through the prison bars and connect with the children in their lives. It also helps break the cycle of adversity, as poor literacy skills are closely tied to predictors of future challenges, including poverty, school dropout rates, and potential incarceration.<sup>2</sup> The National Center for Education Statistics found that early literacy skills are significantly more advanced in children who are read to in the home compared to those who rarely participate in family reading activities.

With six readings per year, Between the Lines volunteers visit the Men's Medium Security Facility located in Plain Dealing. The majority of inmates are serving sentences between five and seven years. Project volunteers work with inmates to select an age- and interest-appropri-

ate book and then create an audio recording of the inmate reading the story along with a personalized message. After the readings, the volunteers burn the recordings onto CDs and giftwrap the storybooks, mailing them to the children to coincide with important milestones like Thanksgiving, Christmas and Hanukkah, Valentine's Day, and the beginning and end of the school year. Packages are sent to families across the country, with the greatest concentration in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.

Between the Lines, a national program established by the Junior League of Portland, was adopted by the Junior League of Shreveport-Bossier in 2012. The program is currently exploring avenues of possible expansion, including military personnel anticipating deployment and the use of video in addition to the audio recordings. The group is also eager to solidify a relationship with the Women's Maximum Security Facility, as women in state prisons are more likely to have minor children than men (62% to 51%).<sup>3</sup>



## Thank you

Thank you, Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, Alpha Rho Chapter, for your generous donation of 33 books to Between the Lines.

Delta Kappa Gamma Society is an honorary society of teachers that supports organizations that foster literacy in children.