

BETWEEN THE *Lines*

*Brittany Turner,
Head Volunteer*



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.

This year, the program has expanded from six readings per year to eight readings per year. In addition to volunteers working with inmates at the Men's Medium Security Facility in Plain Dealing, the program is now also working with the Women's Maximum Security Facility. This expansion further meets the mission of the program, as women in state prisons are more likely to have minor children than men (62% to 51%).¹ The majority of inmates are serving sentences between five and seven years. Project volunteers work with inmates to select an age- and interest-appropriate 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 giftware the storybooks, mailing them to the children to coincide with important events 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.

In addition to expanding to the Women's facility, the project has begun soliciting feedback from inmates to identify future improvements and better meet the needs of participants. When asked why inmates chose to participate in the program, one female inmate responded, "Because my son is up in Maine and I am so far from him. I want anything I can do to make him feel closer to me." Another respondent indicated that she would like "to send my daughters a [Christ]mas present since I won't be there and I know they'll enjoy my voice." A Bossier City inmate stated, "I'm very excited. I signed up because I think it's a great program. It's awesome that people actually care we are not with our children." An inmate serving her sentence from another state added, "We need more programs like yours. Us as mothers made mistakes by being here so you coming to do this for us really gives us hope."

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 con-

tinues to explore avenues of possible expansion, including military personnel anticipating deployment and the use of video in addition to the audio recordings.

¹ US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2000.



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