

BETWEEN THE LINES

Strengthening Bonds Through Literacy



Between the Lines (BTL) has been a volunteer-led committee with the Junior League of Minneapolis (JLM) since 2010.

The program aims to strengthen the bonds between children and their caregivers when they face lengthy separation because of incarceration or military deployments.

They accomplish this by creating recorded readings that will later be delivered along with the book to their child.

Bridging the Separation

The BTL committee has reached over 400 children who face lengthy separation from their parents. Currently the committee focuses on reaching women at the Minnesota Correctional Facility located just outside the Twin Cities in Shakopee, MN.

In the past, when there have been large scale military deployments in Minnesota, committee members

have partnered with Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, a similar program for military families.

Recording books not only addresses literacy for children, but each positive interaction an incarcerated woman has with a community volunteer reduces her rate of recidivism by 7%.

Fast Facts

The Committee



12-14 women serve on the Between the Lines Committee each year. Due to necessary background checks, many shifts cannot be open to the general membership.



Volunteers visit Shakopee Women's Correctional Facility 6 times: once for mandatory on boarding and five additional times for scheduled reading events.

The Books



The Junior League of Minneapolis (JLM) has a library of over 300 books to choose from. These were either donated or purchased by the committee depending on demand.



Books are divided by age appropriateness. For babies and toddlers, the most popular themes center on love.

"Once you learn to read, you will forever be free." - Frederick Douglass

The Process: Recording at Shakopee Correctional Facility

The committee gathers at 7:30am on a Saturday morning at the Shakopee Correctional Facility. BTL members all arrive in blue committee t-shirts and begin the check in process. They give their ID to the officer at the desk, from there obtain a security badge, and then pass through the metal detector.

Once everyone clears security, JLM members enter the secured portion of the facility in groups of six and then proceed to the hallway in the center of the facility to set-up the "library."

There are two sessions for each event. When the first group of women arrives, half start by selecting books, and then the

second group starts writing the notes to their children. Once a woman has her book(s) she is paired up with a BTL committee member. Then both women go to one of the five designated areas to begin the recording session.

In the recording room, BTL members walk the woman through the process of the session. The women can start the recording by greeting their child and introducing the book and why they chose this particular book for them.

If they have a relatively short book, they can read the whole story; if it's a larger chapter book for an older child, the mother or



grandmother will read the first chapter. At the end of the book, the woman can close out the reading and leave another brief message for the child and encourage them to follow-up with them on their next phone call or in-person visit.

Around 80-90 books are recorded at each event.

The Wrap Party



"When people think of prison, they imagine hardened criminals. We go in and we meet women who are mothers, and grandmothers, that are allowing themselves to be vulnerable by reading in front of us. It's a very touching experience and it's an honor to be allowed to participate in this program." - Lauren Bear

After each event a new book is ordered for each recording, and the Director of Technology transfers each recording onto a CD for each child. Once the books arrive and the CDs are ready, the committee meets again for a "wrapping party."

During each wrapping party, the committee members match-up the book, CDs and cards, wrapping them up so each child gets a gift from their mom or grandmother. Packages are then sent to each child.

For more information, please contact current committee chair Melissa Hanson or incoming chair, Lauren Bear.