

# Media Release

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## Friends group receives funding for innovative program

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An innovative local project that helps keep children in contact with parents who are in prison has received a funding boost from the Victorian legal regulator.

The Friends of Castlemaine Library was awarded a \$62,000 grant over three years for their Read Along Dads and Mums initiative, as part of the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's annual Grants Program.

The Read Along program involves recording inmates reading a story for their children. A CD of the recording, together with the book, is then mailed to their children who get to listen to their parent's voice while reading along with them.

Denise Jepson from the Friends of Castlemaine Library said the program had a clear positive influence on the lives of the children whose parents were in prison, as well as on the parents themselves.

'Our program aims to make over 350 recordings each year and provides a vital connection for around 140 families,' Ms Jepson said.

'Since we started the program in 2012, approximately 1,000 families have benefited. When you think about how many children this has reached, that number may be as high as 3,000'.

The program supports and develops the literacy skills of both the parent and the child, and currently operates in the Loddon, Middleton and Tarrengower prisons.

'This new funding will allow us to expand our reach to the Port Philip Prison, where we will partner with the existing literacy programs and reach more families and children.'

The Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner is the regulator of the legal profession. Since 2007 the Grants Program has distributed over \$44 Million to more than 200 projects that support the development of accessible legal services, legal education programs and law reform.

Quotes from past participants:

"He is having trouble at school, and this is my way of showing him that reading is important and can be fun as well."

"I read the whole book to myself, before I came here to do the recording. It was a really good book, and now it gives me something to talk about with him."

"He is moving around a lot, from state to state, and I hardly get to see him. Sending him books has been a consistent thing that I can do, wherever he is he can get a book."

For further information, please contact Denise Jepson of the Friends of Castlemaine Library on: 0438 469 090 or 5473 4470. Please also see the following link: [Stories from the Inside – ABC Television](#) and [www.readalongdads.org.au](http://www.readalongdads.org.au)

For further information about the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner's Grants Program, please contact Alicia Semple, Manager Strategic Communications and Engagement on: 0407 127 701