

Our Goal

Our goal is to “Keep Families Connected Through Reading.” We will make a digital recording of each North Central Unit inmate-parent as he reads a book to his child. Then we will mail the book and the CD recording to the child. (Children’s ages are from one year through fifteen years old.) The Storybook Project helps inmates stay connected to their families. Just as important, the Project promotes literacy by encouraging the inmates and their children to read more.

For the past thirteen years, The Storybook Project/Cherokee Village has offered this program to Grimes and McPherson Prisons at Newport. Similar projects are underway in Mississippi, New York, Texas and Illinois. We want to bring The Storybook Project to the North Central Prison at Calico Rock. We are a separate organization, but The Storybook Project/Cherokee Village has given and will continue to give us guidance, instruction and information.

How the Project Will Work

Twice a year, we will hold a volunteer training session. A few days later we will make digital recordings at the prison. Depending on the number of inmates who want to participate, the recordings may take two days.

The Storybook Project volunteers will set up in the visitors area of the prison. In groups of twelve at a time, inmates will look over 200 or more children’s books displayed on tables. After an inmate chooses a book for his child, he will sit with a volunteer at one of the tables scattered around the room.

The Cherokee Village volunteers tell us that some inmate-parents haven’t seen their child or children or heard from them since being imprisoned. That is unsettling to both parent and child. Many have limited contact with their children. Others have no contact at all because of distance and financial difficulties. The children of Arkansas’ prisoners are scattered across the United States.

The simple act of reading a story to a child enables an inmate to continue building a relationship with that child while also encouraging the child to read. Each inmate-parent speaks a personal message to his child or children.

After each set of recording sessions, volunteers will mail the books and CD recordings to the children.

History of The Storybook Project/Calico Rock

In March, 2011, Susan Varno described The Storybook Project in Cherokee Village to Warden David White. He was enthusiastic about bringing the Project to the North Central Unit. The warden predicts about 200 inmates will want to participate each year.

“Most of the men at the North Central Unit are ‘short timers,’” he said. “They will be getting out in the next few years. They’ve made serious mistakes, but they care about their children. I think this program can help keep them from coming back to prison.”

The Storybook Project/Calico Rock held an organizational meeting on July 21st. Twenty three people attended. From talking to local organizations and through e-mails, Varno has had a positive response. Eighteen people have volunteered to make recordings at the prison, fifteen volunteered to do fundraising and eight to do mailings.

In September, The Calico Rock Museum Foundation (bridgethepast.com/foundation.html) agreed to sponsor The Storybook Project/Calico Rock. We are now a part of the Museum's programs. This allows us to use their 501 c 3 designation for fundraising and purchases. We will also have Project information posted on the museum website. The Calico Rock Cumberland Presbyterian Church is providing space for us to store our materials, hold training sessions and to do our mailings.

Since October, we have focused on fundraising. Volunteers are asking for donations from business owners, individuals, churches and organizations. Donations and pledges have been received, but we do not have enough yet to carry out the program for an entire year.

What We Need for the First Year

This first year we need to purchase ten digital recorders and at least 300 books as well as CDs, jewel cases, batteries, mailing supplies and postage plus fundraising expenses (mostly printing and postage). Not including the cost of the digital recorders, this comes to about \$16.00 for each book recorded and mailed.

300 books on average \$10.00 each	\$3,000.00
200 CD's at 20c each	40.00
200 jewel cases at 30c each	60.00
200 padded envelopes at 60c each	120.00
postage for 200 books at average of \$3.00 each	600.00
CD and mailing labels, printed forms, etc.	60.00
Fundraising expenses of about \$1.00 per book	200.00
10 Olympus digital recorders at 51.50 each (Amazon price as of 1/17/2012)	515.00
Total	\$4,595.00

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