



Network Message from NSWALC Chairperson Bev Manton

Books Behind Bars.

NSWALC's Governing Council wants to see more books, and less people, behind bars in NSW.

NSWALC is backing moves to increase the amount of books and educational materials for inmates in the more than 30 prisons and correctional centres throughout the State as part of a campaign to improve prison conditions and highlight the increasing incarceration rate.

We are concerned, in particular, about the lack of such materials currently flowing to Aboriginal prisoners.

NSWALC has publicly expressed its concerns about the alarming incidence of Aboriginal people being jailed in NSW, particularly our youth.

Recent reports have shown Aboriginal youth in NSW are nearly 26 times more likely to be jailed than their non-Aboriginal peers.

Imprisonment rates are increasing but this appears to be due to changes in remand and sentencing procedures rather than increased offending.

NSWALC's Governing Council has resolved to continue to highlight these issues through a public awareness and advocacy campaign in coming months, particularly one which highlights successful diversionary programs for our people.

Council had also decided to take practical action now.

We have decided to back moves by the Australian Prison Foundation to extend its National Prison Book Program into New South Wales.

The Foundation is a Victorian-based not-for-profit organisation which seeks to improve the lives and communities of prisoners in the hope of reducing the likelihood of their return to the prison system.

Research by the Foundation has shown that many prisons cannot keep up with the demand for educational resources and books.

The Foundation provides free books and educational materials to prisoners and prison libraries in Tasmania, the ACT and South Australia, along with selected facilities in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria.

It has recently written to the NSW Government seeking permission to extend its reach into New South Wales.

It has also been looking for organisations in NSW to become collection points for donated books and educational materials.

NSWALC's Governing Council has written to the relevant authorities in NSW in support of the initiative.

It has also provided a special one-off grant of \$5,000 to assist the Foundation with its administration costs, particularly those related to transport and promotion of the voluntary scheme.

NSWALC's Parramatta and Zone Offices have also been nominated as collection points for donated books and resources for the National Prison Book Program in New South Wales.

We would like to see the initiatives taken up throughout the land rights network particularly given the high number of Aboriginal people in NSW prisons.

We would obviously appreciate books and educational materials collected in New South Wales being sent, primarily, to prisons in this state.

NSWALC has held discussions with the Library Services section of Corrective Services in NSW to ensure this happens.

We have been informed the donation of books and educational materials to the prison system in NSW are an important component of the stocks available to inmates, particularly in the smaller correctional centres.

There is a great demand and need for Aboriginal specific books and educational materials with constant requests by inmates for Aboriginal specific books and resources.

In Council's view the work of the Australian Prison Foundation would augment the book donations currently being received by Corrective Services NSW for distribution to prison libraries here and assist attempts to create a safer community and more humane prison environment.

Council has also decided to allocate a sum of \$5,000 to kick off its Books Behind Bars program.

We will be approaching the four major Aboriginal publishers to see what stocks they have available.

The Books Behind Bars campaign is being co-ordinated by NSWALC's Media and Marketing Unit.

The major collection point will be the NSWALC Aboriginal Resource Centre on the ground floor of our Parramatta headquarters.

Inquiries about the program can be directed to the Director of Media and Marketing, Chris Graham and/or Resource Centre Co-ordinator Sarah Puckeridge.

Council believes this is a practical initiative worthy of widespread support from across the land rights network. Further details are contained in the two Fact Sheets which accompany this message.

I'd ask each LALC Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer to ensure that all LALC members become aware of the aims and objectives of this program by circulating this network message and its attachments to all LALC members and the wider Aboriginal community.

Bev Manton
NSWALC Chairperson
February 25, 2010