



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Justice and Customs

Senator the Hon Amanda Vanstone
Senator for South Australia

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NATIONAL SCHEME TO SUPPORT PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The Minister for Justice and Customs, Amanda Vanstone, today announced the first stage of a national scheme, *Prisoners and their Families*, to provide practical support to the children and families of prisoners, and to improve the parenting skills of prisoners.

“Children of offenders can become the innocent victims of their parent’s crimes. Research indicates that many children of prisoners experience feelings of grief and loss, social isolation and practical difficulties as the result of their parent’s incarceration. These children have high needs that are frequently overlooked by the criminal justice system.”

“The scheme will assist the children and families of prisoners, by providing counselling, support and protection where violence is an issue, transport for children who want to visit their parents in prison, and negotiating with family support agencies for state wards to see incarcerated parents.”

“This will also involve programs for prisoners who want to learn how to become better parents. A recent evaluation of the pilot program in Risdon Prison, Tasmania, found that prisoners who completed the program gained increased communication skills, conflict resolution skills, and confidence and willingness to participate in parenting. Significantly, the evaluation also found that these prisoners exhibited less aggressive behaviour,” Senator Vanstone said.

As one prisoner put it, “My whole attitude has changed due to this course. It made me realise that there’s nothing out there, not a thing, more important out there than my children.”

The project will be managed by *Good Beginnings* Australia Ltd, a community organisation with a long track record of assisting Australian children and their families.

The *Prisoners and their Families* program will begin in Tasmania and South Australia, with projects in other States and Territories to follow. It is expected that the sites will include the maximum security Yatala Labour Prison in Adelaide and the low to medium security Mobilong Prison, about 75 kilometres east of Adelaide.

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