

# Funding for an innovative program to support caregivers

8 January 2025



Most children who lose a parent rightly receive empathy and practical help. That's not usually the case for children who have a parent in prison, leaving them open to psychological, social and physical harm. It can also nudge them towards destructive behaviour.

The Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation has committed \$411,000 over three years to an innovative new program developed by Prison Network, a charitable organisation that has worked with women in Victorian prisons for 80 years. The network delivers high-impact, evidence-based programs for women in prison and wraparound support when they leave.

CEO Amelia Pickering, who has been with Prison Network for more than four years, says most women in prison have experienced family violence and trauma, ultimately resulting in engagement in criminal activity.

She said that when fathers are incarcerated, most children remain in their family home and are cared for by their mother – but when mothers are sent to prison, children often need alternative arrangements.

“Children with mothers in prison are a hidden and vulnerable cohort,” Amelia said, adding that there is no requirement for police, courts, or corrections to ask about the status of any affected children.

“Caregivers are often not equipped to effectively support a child when a mother is suddenly incarcerated,” Amelia said. “In Victoria, there is no coordination in the provision of services to children affected by parental incarceration.”



*Children with mothers in prison are a hidden and vulnerable cohort. Photo courtesy Prison Network*



“When a child's mother suddenly goes to prison, the impacts can be profound, and for new caregivers in Victoria there are currently no resources or support tailored to these unique circumstances.”

Amelia said Prison Network’s existing Keeping Kids Connected program had traditionally focused on the needs of mothers and children, with caregivers being indirect beneficiaries,

“However, this new project takes a different approach by centring support and resources on the needs of the new caregivers with the care and responsibility of these children,” Amelia said. “We are very grateful to the Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation for their investment in strengthening vulnerable Victorian families.”

The key deliverable in the ‘Supporting Sudden Caregivers’ project will be the recruitment of a support worker who will engage with Dame Phyllis Frost Centre and Tarrengower Prison. The worker will visit homes and schools across Melbourne and in country Victoria.

The worker will also develop and deliver resource packs for new caregivers. The packs will include parenting resources effective for children with attachment difficulties and experiences of trauma, as well as a directory of services, and children’s activity packs.

The Prison Network aims to distribute 50 packs within the first 18 months of the project, support 50 caregivers each year through respite, material aid, emotional support, and referrals to other agencies, and work with other organisations to create wraparound support for caregivers.

The CEO of the Brian M. Davis Charitable Foundation, Anita Hopkins, said the project aimed to directly support 130 caregivers and children, and there could be up to 800 indirect beneficiaries.

“This ambitious project will mean caregivers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and access to resources to effectively parent the children in their care, contributing to the stability and functioning of the family unit,” Anita said. “Receiving the right care and support will reduce the risk of the children having education difficulties or behavioural issues down the track.

“The Foundation is excited to support this project. We believe it will make a huge difference to these children and their caregivers.”

Visit <https://www.prisonnetwork.org.au> for more information about the organisation’s work. ■