Kayla and Kendra Ball represent hundreds of families benefiting from the Imagination Library program. ©Chris Minnick/Lilly Endowment 2019
Special Delivery!

“Every month, our little boy looks forward to receiving his own book in the mail, and he has started to bring them to us when he wants to hear a story,” shares Sarah Sparks, mother to young Charlie. “What I like most about the program is how happy Charlie is when we open the mail. The books are addressed specifically to him, so it makes it even more special that it’s his name on the book.”

Charlie is one of 1,534 children receiving a special delivery from the Dollywood Foundation, thanks to Hancock County Community Foundation’s adoption of the Imagination Library program. Easy access through home delivery plays a role in getting literacy materials in the homes of families.

“Currently Charlie’s favorite book is ‘Sleep Train’ by Jonathan London. He asks to read it every night before bed. He enjoys starting to count the train cars and making train noises as we read,” said Sarah. “He received another book, ‘Little Excavator’ by Anna Dewdney, in the mail recently, and he was very excited as he loves all heavy machinery. It may soon take the lead as his favorite book!”

Jon and Sarah love reading with Charlie. “We appreciate the opportunity to have this program in our county and recommend it to all new parents!”

Read, Shop, Give!

Denna Gundrum, owner of Penny’s Florist Home Décor & More, feels nothing but passion and inspiration for the Imagination Library program. Gundrum is an avid supporter and feels the early childhood literacy program is an opportunity and blessing for every Hancock County family. “The pure joy of reading to an infant is both rewarding and magical. Sharing a storybook with a child is a bonding experience as well as an opportunity to teach your child, encourage reading, and be able to laugh with one another,” shares Denna.

Denna personally supports and donates, but she also has taken the opportunity to involve her business in spreading the love of literacy. Penny’s Florist Home Décor & More has hosted the Imagination Library Bowling Event and the We’ve Got Your Back Campaign. Each year, shopping specials are tied to Imagination Library Giving Week to encourage customers to give and enrol in the program.

“While the foundational purpose of this program is to enhance kindergarten readiness, I feel this opportunity is so much more,” says Denna. “Books open the mind to knowledge, creativity, invention, and fantasy. Creating this early desire to read will definitely give children an advantage that will serve them throughout their life.”

“Children are our future,” says Gundrum. “Why would we not want to encourage and support any opportunity to guide their path to knowledge?”
Sharing a Love of Reading with the Next Generation

Mary Anne Siurek has had an accomplished career and is now enjoying retirement. However, nothing tops being a grandmother. When her friend Susie Billings shared information about the Imagination Library program, another door opened in her relationship with her granddaughter, Beatrice Anne…reading the program’s high-quality, age appropriate books together.

The Imagination Library program’s enrollment is available to Hancock County residents born on or after January 1, 2016. Benefits to families transcend generational boundaries. “Never did I ever think I would benefit from Imagination Library with my family, as my grandkids were all born and live in Ohio and Illinois,” Mary Anne says. “However, in 2016 my youngest granddaughter was born in Hancock County and became a part of Imagination Library.”

“Beatrice Anne now receives a book every month until she is 5 years old! Reading is very important in her life and she reads books every day, thanks to Imagination Library,” shares Mary Anne. Beatrice is now two and able to personally share her thoughts on the program. “How kind of you for giving me my books.”

“Literature is one of the best ways to help children understand something without necessarily having to experience it for themselves, building their understanding of humanity and the world around them.”
– ReadBrightly.com

Educators and School Children Are On Board!

“Eastern Hancock Elementary proudly supports Imagination Library. We love giving the kids the opportunity to help others learn to love reading. It is a win, win situation, because it is a tangible way for our students to help support that mission.”
– Amanda Pyle, Eastern Hancock Elementary School Principal

Studies have shown that “the more words that are in a child’s language world, the more words they will learn, and the stronger their language skills are when they reach kindergarten, the more prepared they are to be able to read, and the better they read, the more likely they will graduate from high school.”
– PBS.org

©Random House Children’s Group

We have raised 96% of our goal!
Left to raise: $80,839

Enroll at: giveHCgrowHC.org/imagination-library/
The Need: Since the birth of the Hancock County Community Foundation (HCCF) in 1992, educational attainment of Hancock County residents has been a high priority for the organization. Based on fall 2015 assessments, HCCF identified a major gap in our community in the preschool population: 40% of Hancock County children entering kindergarten scored below literacy readiness standards. As of fall 2018, that percentage remains steady at 43%*.

The Action: In 2016, the HCCF Board of Directors broadened its educational attainment efforts to the youngest of our citizens through a partnership with the Hancock County Public Library and the Dollywood Foundation. Together, we have introduced the Imagination Library program to Hancock County. Access to the Imagination Library program is provided through personalized, age appropriate books that are delivered monthly to the home. Enrollment began with children born on January 1, 2016. By the child’s fifth birthday, they will receive a library of 60 high-quality books. As of August 1, 1,534 Hancock County babies and toddlers are enrolled in the program.

The Importance: Early language and literacy development begins in the first three years of life. Early literacy skills develop in real life settings through positive interactions with literacy materials and other people. Mailed in a clear wrapping, colorful books provide an invitation to adults to interact with their children. Regardless of parental reading levels, the program’s important activity of turning pages together contributes to early literacy behaviors and sets the stage for life-long educational attainment.

The Ask: The program is free to families, but not free of charge. While economical, at $26 per year per child, the cost to the community can become daunting when multiplied by the number of children enrolled. Committed to sustaining the program, HCCF established the Imagination Library Endowment Fund with the goal of raising $2 million by the end of 2020. With the help of a very generous community, the endowment now stands at $1.9 million. With your help, we can meet the funding gap during 2019’s Imagination Library Giving Week…one year ahead of schedule.

*This data is collected from the Reading Foundation strand of the NWEA, (Northwest Educational Assessment), and the Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) and First Sound Fluency (FSF) scores on the DIBELS, (Dynamic Indicators of Early Learning Skills).