Building a foundation for reading and learning through books for Tennessee’s children.
Working Together for a Shared Goal

75% of all of Tennessee’s third-graders proficient in reading by 2025.

The ‘Read to Be Ready: Building Thinkers in Tennessee’ campaign aims to raise Tennessee students’ reading scores, with the goal to have at least 75 percent of all third-graders proficient in reading by 2025. As a contributing partner, GBBF seeks to support the Read to Be Ready goal of promoting school readiness and literacy, emphasizing reading to children from birth as a keystone to reading proficiency.

Our partnership with DHS gives parents the opportunity to enroll their child into Tennessee’s Imagination Library at more than 130 DHS offices across the state. Case workers at each of the DHS offices now inquire about enrollment in the Imagination Library as part of their in-person interview with a family seeking support services.

Our partnership with DCS and an annual grant from the Verizon Foundation allows every child birth to age five in foster care custody to be enrolled into Tennessee’s Imagination Library program. This partnership gives each child in foster care the gift of books to call his own.

Through our partnership with the Tennessee Department of Health’s Welcome Baby program, each newborn family is mailed a welcome letter signed by the Governor and First Lady that includes our enrollment brochure.

Birthing Hospital Initiative

The Birthing Hospital Initiative is a three-way partnership between GBBF, the county Imagination Library program, and a local birthing hospital to introduce Tennessee’s Imagination Library program to parents and families of newborns prior to discharge from the hospital. Through this partnership, parents are given the opportunity to enroll their newborn child into Tennessee’s Imagination Library program and are encouraged to begin reading with them before ever leaving the hospital. Every child enrolled at the hospital will receive a copy of The Little Engine That Could to take home as a tangible example of this wonderful gift mailed each month.
We are preparing children for lifelong learning through reading.

Governor’s Books from Birth Foundation, in partnership with Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library and our statewide county affiliate programs, builds a foundation for reading and learning through books for Tennessee’s children. All children from birth to age five are eligible to receive books at no cost to families. Providing books in the home is a unique opportunity for family engagement, vocabulary and reading skills development.

How this works

Each local affiliate program enrolls children, promotes the program in its community and raises funds for half of the cost of books and mailing.

Through an annual state grant, the GBBF funds the other half of the cost of books and mailing and supports local affiliate programs through fundraising, volunteer training and public relations.

The Dollywood Foundation manages selection, pricing and distribution of the books.

This is a dynamic public-private partnership unlike any other in the U.S. today.

A Healing Effect on the Community

Positive effects of Imagination Library participation go beyond literacy to the program’s deeper impacts on whole communities, including:

- a “healing effect on the community” manifesting in emerging neighborhood initiatives, increased library usage and literacy
- child development program collaboration.

The establishment of reading routines seeming to bring about increased stability, emotional well-being and improved atmosphere in families facing difficulties (such as poverty and stress experienced by families where parents work long hours and have limited support raising children).
What are the impacts of IMAGINATION LIBRARY PARTICIPATION?

Children are more prepared for school and have stronger early reading skills.

Imagination Library participants outperformed non-participants on Kindergarten Literacy assessments and continued this trend even into second and third grades, according to recent Tennessee studies.  

One of the key milestones on the path to success is learning to read in the early grades.

Children who participate in the Imagination Library have significantly higher reading readiness scores than their non-participating peers. Giving children early access to books and reading significantly improves cognitive skills and supports preschool education, recently confirmed by a Tennessee study.

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Children develop essential life skills.

A child begins to establish his or her self-image in early years.

Imagination Library participants of all backgrounds arrive at kindergarten having read the same books, giving them common ground and confidence that supports socialization skills development.

"Five of my students knew the Imagination Library stories by heart. Almost all the others said, “I have that too!” or “I love this book.” It was a great ice breaker for the first week of school, and gave all the children something common to share.” — a Tennessee teacher

Imagination Library fosters strong speech and vocabulary.

A child’s brain grows to 80% of its adult size by age three, creating a critically important window of opportunity for learning words and language. Language is the key to a child’s future academic success. Parents of children receiving Imagination Library books say they read together more often, which improves speaking skills and develops vocabulary.

Studies show by age three, children from low-income families may hear roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers.

Families connect around books. Imagination Library participation has consistently been shown to increase the amount of one-on-one reading time and nurturing between children and adults. The value parents place on reading to children is a strong influencer in a child's language and literacy development. In the DPIL model, parents are encouraged to read with the child, instead of to the child, and are encouraged to use reading engagement activities recommended by the GBBF and local libraries. HighScope Educational Research (2003); Gordon (2010); Tennessee parent and educator focus groups (2006 and 2014).

Children begin school with book handling skills and an understanding of letter & word concepts. Imagination Library participants have access to books prior to entering kindergarten, exposing them to basic print awareness and book handling skills, both essential concepts for future literacy development. Teachers and parents of these children say that their Imagination Library students have a high degree of book appreciation and understanding of separate word and letter concepts.

Children who haven't seen books don't know how to interact with books. Children who have received Imagination Library books have had exposure and know the correct way to hold a book and how to turn pages. A statewide survey of pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers conducted by the Tennessee Board of Regents (2007, 2008a, 2008b); multiple interviews and focus groups conducted in 2014 with Tennessee early grades educators.

Books in the home support a child’s continued success. Having books in the home has consistently proven to be a predictor of children's academic success. Governor’s Books from Birth Foundation and the Imagination Library help each family build their own library of as many as 60 books, instilling pride and a sense of self-esteem in the young recipients. The variety and age-appropriateness of these books introduces families to the concept of reading levels even before kindergarten. It also promotes future library use. Evans, Kelley, Sikora, & Treiman, 2010

Children with as few as 25 Books in the home completed an average of two more years of schooling than those with no books.

Children are excited about books and reading! Love and an understanding of reading are shared among children, families, and communities of this program. On all levels, from a child jumping by the mailbox thrilled by the sight of a book parcel with her name on it, to a parent looking forward to reading with a child in his lap, to a group of community volunteers partnering with a health clinic for a literacy event, Imagination Library creates a model for learning that cannot be rivaled in its simplicity and outreach.

"Our sons always look forward to getting their very own piece of mail every month and they work very hard to share with each other - although that doesn't always happen. But if they are going to fight over something, I'd rather it be books!"

– an East Tennessee mother
Invest in Tennessee’s Future
“A BOOK IS A GIFT YOU CAN OPEN AGAIN AND AGAIN.”

Garrison Keillor

Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is a gift of up to 60 books – at no cost to families – for all preschool children in Tennessee. It takes the commitment of many people at all donor levels to keep the program thriving.

DONATE
Support your Imagination Library through donation.

$12 provides for the purchase and delivery of 12 books to one child for a full year.

$24 provides for the purchase and delivery of 12 books to two children for a full year.

$60 provides the full library – 60 books – to one child over five years.

VOLUNTEER
Get involved in your community!

More than 500 dedicated volunteers throughout the state are needed to:

1. enroll children in the Imagination Library.
2. raise funds for half the cost of books and mailing.
3. promote the program in their community.

ANY AMOUNT OF TIME OR DONATION
directly supports the purchase and delivery of books to Tennessee’s children.

To donate or volunteer, visit GovernorsFoundation.org.

By the Numbers

More than
27 Million
books have been delivered since October 2004.

More than
500,000
five-year-olds have graduated from the Imagination Library.

All of Tennessee’s
407,813
children under the age of five have access to the Imagination Library.

Stay connected to Governor’s Books from Birth:

www.GovernorsFoundation.org

THANK YOU PARTNERS!

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