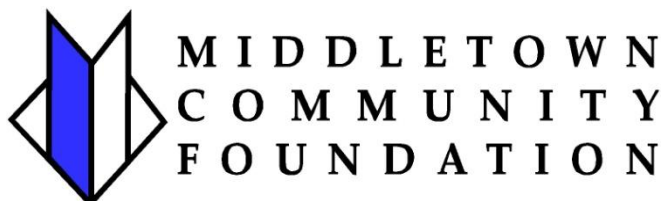


Celebrating Little Dreamers



*An Analysis of the First 18 Months of Dolly Parton's Imagination
Library in Middletown, Ohio*



By T. Duane Gordon, Executive Director
Middletown Community Foundation



Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Background	2
History	4
Initial Impact on Entering Kindergarteners	10
Survey Results	11
Appendix: Survey Questions	18

On the cover: Middletown Postal Carrier Donell Johnson presents the 10,000th book in the Middletown chapter of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Nick and Jenelle Moore and their newborn daughter, Julianna, at a ceremony held in the Middletown Public Library lobby in April 2010. The 10,000 books had a market value of approximately \$100,000 but only cost the local sponsors about \$25,000 to purchase and distribute. Photo by Robert Osborne.

On this page: Dolly Parton presents the 25 millionth Imagination Library book at a ceremony held at Dollywood in June 2010 to Kumar Stewart of Birmingham, Ala., next to his sister, Shineria, and in front of his parents, Ray and Shalisha Stewart, and brother, Keylon. Photo by T. Duane Gordon.

Background

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library was created by the Dollywood Foundation in Sevier County, Tennessee, in 1996 to provide one free, age-appropriate, expert-selected hardcover book each month from birth to age 5 for any child in the county. Its goal was improving early childhood literacy and, consequently, later school performance by instilling in preschoolers the love of reading. The idea for the program came from the fact that many members of its founders' family, including her own father, were illiterate, and followed the success that the Dollywood Foundation had already experienced in educational initiatives with older students to reduce the community's drop-out rate. Success of the Imagination Library in its first three years attracted much attention from other communities, prompting the Dollywood Foundation in late 1999 to begin allowing others to replicate the project with local support.

Under this replication process, the Dollywood Foundation continued to handle the administration of the program from its central location in Tennessee including convening the panel to select each year's books, negotiating greatly reduced prices from the publisher, managing the online database of all registered children, coordinating the ordering and mailing of each month's books, and publicizing the program on a national (and later, international) scale. Local communities that choose to replicate it are responsible for publicizing the project locally, entering the names and addresses of local children into the database as they register, and raising the funds to pay for the actual costs of book purchase and mailing for their community, approximately \$28 per child annually. The program expanded into Canada in late 2006 and Great Britain in late 2007.

The Middletown (Ohio) Community Foundation launched a chapter of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library serving children from birth to 5 living within the borders of the Middletown City School District (Figure 1) in late 2008. The five-year cost of the program was estimated to be about \$200,000, which was covered by a five-year, \$150,000 commitment from the Middletown Community Foundation and grants from the Miriam G. Knoll Charitable Foundation, Middletown Rotary Foundation, Kiwanis Club of Middletown, Arthur Harvey Foundation, and Barnitz Fund of JP Morgan Chase plus smaller contributions from individual donors. At the time, there were six other chapters of the program in operation within the state of Ohio, of which all were countywide and managed by their local United Way. (Today, there are 1,200 chapters worldwide, of which 18 are located in Ohio.)

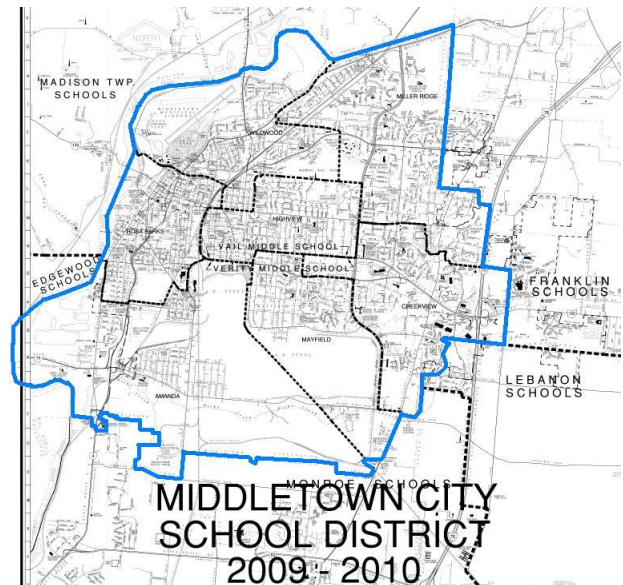


Figure 1: Map of Middletown City School District

Using data from the Census Bureau, the service area's total population under the age of 5 was believed to be about 3,700 eligible children. Using the Dollywood Foundation's experience that in most communities approximately 70 percent of eligible children eventually participate in the program and

that it takes five years to ramp up to that maximum level of penetration, the five-year target population was 2,590. Given that children continue to “graduate” from program every month as they age out, we would expect by the end of that fifth year to have served as many as 5,000 children in the community.

These children represent a population that, according to the Census Bureau (using current statistics since many of these children have yet to be born), is 82.1% white, 11.4% African-American, 2.0% Hispanic-American, 2.3% mixed race, 0.9% Asian-American, 0.3% Native American, and 1% other. This population is also, again according to the Census Bureau, 35% beneath the federal poverty line and 65% above the poverty line. Included within this total population is an estimated 50 percent of Appalachian ancestry, as estimated by the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*.

The first books were mailed in January 2009 to 316 children, or 12 percent of the target (Figure 2). At the time of the survey, late June 2010, the program had grown to 782 enrolled children, or 30 percent of the target. At this time, it had also “graduated” 267 children who had aged out of the program on their fifth birthday for 1,049 local children who had participated in the program since inception and a total of 11,972 books sent locally in its first 18 months. Coincidentally, this was also the month that the international program celebrated distribution of its 25 millionth book since inception.

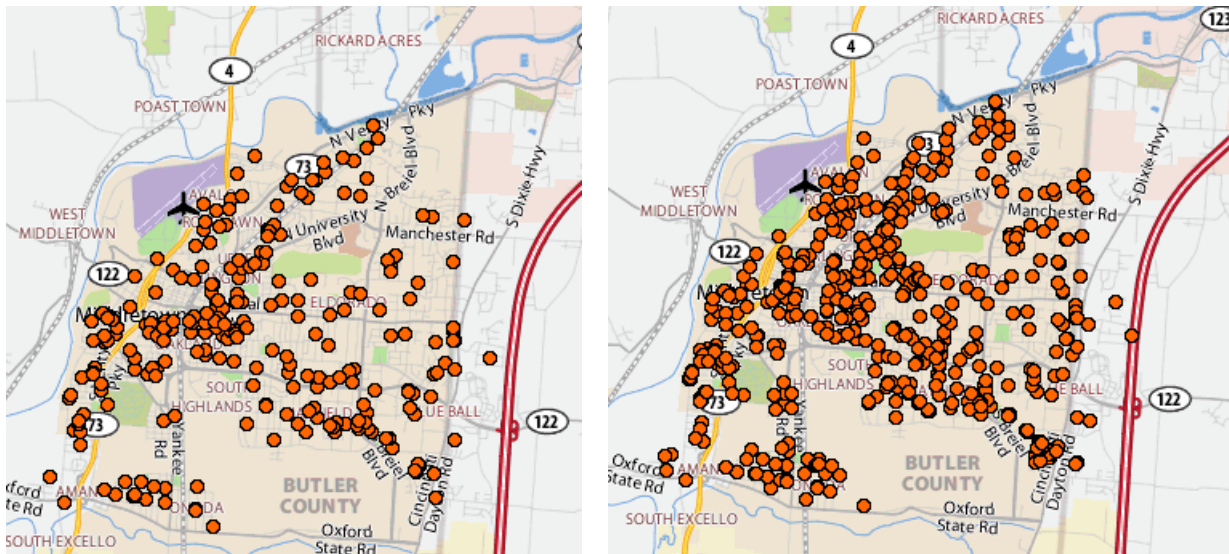


Figure 2: Growth of program in first six months from 316 children in January 2009 mailing, left, to 650 children in June 2009 mailing, right. A year later, June 2010, 782 children were registered. Maps by Yahoo.

In late 2009, a partnership with the United Way of Greater Cincinnati-Middletown Area’s Women Living United initiative was finalized in which that group of volunteers agreed to raise the necessary funding to expand the local chapter to three surrounding school districts – Madison, Monroe, and Edgewood – which have an estimated combined under-5 population of about 3,750, roughly equal to that in Middletown, meaning the local chapter will double in size once those additional communities are added. It is hoped that the chapter will begin registering children in those districts in early 2011.

A survey was mailed to 350 parents representing 390 children who were enrolled in the Middletown chapter at the time of the survey and had been receiving books for between 12 and 18 months. Families whose children had been registered for fewer than 12 months were not contacted. Parents were given two weeks to return the survey. 89 completed surveys, or 25.4 percent of the pool, were returned.

History

The Middletown Community Foundation chose to launch the program locally largely due to a major problem in students being inadequately prepared to enter kindergarten.

Ohio administers to all entering kindergarten students a test called the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L) exam. Most educators accept that a score of 19 out of the 29 possible points is prepared to enter school, and students score an average of about 20 points statewide. Test results are further broken down into three tiers: 0-13 points, 14-23 points, and 24-29 points. Statewide, about 20 percent of students score in the lowest tier (indicating very significant literacy deficiencies that will require “intense instruction” to overcome) and about 40 percent each in the middle and upper tiers (indicating in the former literacy deficiencies that the kindergarten curriculum is supposed to be designed to overcome within the school year and the latter indicating the child has already developed proficient literacy skills at or above the exiting kindergarten level).

At the time we were considering this program, the most recent test data (for students entering the 2007-2008 school year) showed an average Middletown score of 16.49, ranking the city school district in the bottom 7 percent statewide. A full 41.25 percent of students scored in the lowest tier, roughly twice the state average, indicating they were significantly unprepared for school and placing the city in the worst 5 percent of school districts statewide for that number. These numbers remained statistically stagnant for several years (2005’s average score was 16.46 and 2006’s was 16.41). They have increased slightly in recent years, rising to 17.60 for the 2008-2009 school year and dropping back down to 17.24 for the 2009-2010 school year, still well below the accepted level for adequate preparedness and much lower than the average of most surrounding districts in the region (Figure 3).

KRA-L Scores	2007					2008				
	District	Tested	Average	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tested	Average	Tier 1	Tier 2
Dayton	1101	15.85	40.51%	40.69%	18.80%	1086	16.66	37.94%	40.88%	21.18%
Middletown	480	16.49	41.25%	33.75%	25.00%	551	17.6	31.58%	41.56%	26.86%
Hamilton	692	17.3	32.66%	43.79%	23.55%	762	17.62	31.63%	43.44%	24.93%
Cincinnati	2674	17.3	32.12%	44.05%	23.82%	2731	17.8	30.98%	40.64%	28.38%
Fairfield	685	19.17	24.23%	40.15%	35.62%	694	20.35	18.59%	39.19%	42.22%
Monroe	153	19.65	20.92%	47.06%	32.03%	177	21.08	11.86%	46.89%	41.24%
Edgewood	264	20.45	14.77%	47.73%	37.50%	222	20.03	18.92%	40.99%	40.09%
Talawanda	204	21.67	13.24%	38.73%	48.04%	227	22.09	11.45%	33.48%	55.07%
Madison	84	22.01	10.71%	42.86%	46.43%	83	21.82	12.05%	40.96%	46.99%
Lakota	1308	22.31	11.62%	35.17%	53.21%	1231	22.76	10.56%	31.44%	58.00%

Figure 3: 2007 and 2008 entering kindergartener KRA-L test scores for Middletown and select surrounding districts from the Ohio Department of Education. Comparative data for 2009 were not yet available at the time of this report. Tier 1 is the lowest testing band.

Unfortunately, the testing shows that when students start off so far behind, it is nearly impossible for them to catch up. According to the district’s “report card,” literacy scores remain significantly below the



Middletown Mayor Larry Mulligan reads a story to children gathered at the Middletown Public Library for the kick-off of the local Imagination Library affiliate. Photo by Matthew Dixon.

state average for all subsequent Middletown grades, placing a severe strain on our education system. At all elementary and middle school grade levels in Middletown, the literacy rate is a full 15 percentage points below the state average, rising to just 10 points below state average by 10th grade and 5 points below average by 11th grade, although that has more to do with low-performing students dropping out than any actual improvement.

Upon assessment in early 2008 of the Middletown Community Foundation's activities, it was brought to the Board's attention that our grantmaking largely ignored the youngest members of the education continuum. Although we supported several programs in our local schools, multiple extracurricular activities for school-aged children, and hundreds of annual scholarships for high school seniors to continue to college, we were generally not supporting programs aimed at assisting children before they enter the school system.



The Middletown Community Foundation recognized its Imagination Library partners at the 2009 Butler County National Philanthropy Day luncheon. Shown are, from left, Michael McNeil and Tom Hazelbacker representing Middletown Rotary Foundation, Middletown Community Foundation Executive Director T. Duane Gordon, Middletown Kiwanis Club Vice-President Tammy Robert, Middletown Public Library Children's Team Leader Jessica Chamberlain, Middletown Kiwanis Club President Bill McCall, Women Living United Chair Elaine Garver, 2009 United Way Middletown Campaign Chair Cindy Tepe, and United Way of Greater Cincinnati – Middletown Area Director Mike Sanders.

Before starting this program, we researched an earlier failed books program, interviewing individuals involved in the effort to identify why it did not succeed and whether there were enough differences between the two projects to suggest a different outcome. The previous literacy initiative, Let's Read Together, had received funding from the United Way and Community Foundation.

Starting in 2000, children were registered only at birth. Then they received one book on their birthday each year. Unfortunately, the small number of books being purchased resulted in their having to pay retail or barely below retail for each title. In addition, the once-a-year communication resulted in numerous books being returned as undeliverable when parents moved during the 12 months between shipments. At one point, as many as 50 percent of books were returned as undeliverable. Also, the program relied on volunteers to select the books, buy the books, address the books, and take them to the post office, where expensive first class postage was used (the numbers were too small to use bulk mail). With the labor-intensive effort, the volunteer pool shrunk. Finally, the program ceased completely in late 2003 due to low participation from volunteers and lack of funding. A \$20 donation sponsored the costs associated with sending a book to one child (the book purchase cost, postage, and overhead such as advertising and promotion).



During the biennial international conference for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., in June 2009, attendees were surprised to have an unannounced visit from the program's founder herself. Shown are, from left, standing: Randy Fleming of Pensacola, Fla.; Scott Peterson of Boston, Mass.; Dolly Parton; T. Duane Gordon and Matthew Dixon of Middletown; seated, Sharon Fleming of Pensacola, Fla.; Don Farmer of Milan, Tenn.; Peggy Davis of Trenton, Tenn.; and Phyllis Bradley of Dickson, Tenn. Photo courtesy the Dollywood Foundation.

Many differences were immediately noted with Imagination Library. First, it uses an expert committee to select the books so that local individuals aren't charged with trying to determine what is appropriate. Secondly, they are purchased in extremely high volume through special negotiated deals with the publisher (over 6 million books annually), resulting in a cost tremendously below retail. A third party handles the mail preparation instead of volunteers at a volume which allows less-costly nonprofit bulk mailing. Communicating with the child and parents on a monthly basis allows for a much better developed relationship and much more frequent contact, which should keep the mailing list more accurate than the once-a-year contact provided. Although it costs 40 percent more annually per child, the Imagination Library sends 12 times as many books for a greater impact. Interviewees noted that they believed this program appeared very likely able to overcome the hurdles that had curtailed the earlier book program.

We also contacted several Imagination Library affiliates throughout Ohio to learn about their experiences with the program in their communities, and all were very positive.

Once we decided to move forward, we recognized that the program would require significant partnerships, both in the form of financial support as well as in-kind services and cooperation. Middletown Kiwanis Club proved one of our strongest allies. Their volunteers worked with Head Start teachers to register every Head Start child in the city prior to the first book mailing in Middletown. Then Kiwanis volunteers provided the data entry to input each child's information into the Imagination Library database upon return of their registration forms. But perhaps most importantly, Kiwanis volunteers visited the Head Start classrooms each month in the school year to read that month's books.



A thank you card from a local Head Start class for Kiwanis volunteers reading Dolly's Imagination Library books to them each month during the school year.

We reached out to our local nonprofit television station, TV Middletown. They produced for us a public service announcement that was aired in heavy rotation during peak viewing times for the first several months of the project to inform parents it was available. Our local newspaper, *The Middletown Journal*, placed the announcement of the project at the top of its front page on Election Day: McCain and Obama had the left four-fifths of the page and the Imagination Library had the right fifth of the page. Our local hospital, Atrium Medical Center, agreed to distribute registration information to all Middletown mothers who give birth at the hospital, and they recently began distributing them in their low income pediatric clinic as well. The Middletown City School District agreed in addition to tracking average KRA-L scores for children who participate in the program to also publicize it to parents in case they have younger children at home who could register. Local day care centers and pediatricians agreed to distribute information to parents. The Middletown Public Library promotes the program on its website, and its children's librarians encourage parents to register. Realtors are placing the registration forms in their welcome packets for new homebuyers. And, as happens in every chapter of the program, a small number of books each month would be undeliverable due to parents moving and not providing forwarding information – but the Middletown Postmaster returns those books to us, providing a source of books to donate to other local children's charities. However, to help keep this number low we send a periodic newsletter to parents throughout the year featuring reading tips from the Middletown Public Library, using the returned pieces to assist us in updating addresses.

We helped facilitate a partnership between the Middletown Public Library and our local United Way to install Reading Readiness Centers in each of the Library's three branches to promote early childhood



Dolly Parton receives a 2009 honorary doctorate from the University of Tennessee, largely in recognition for the impact of her Imagination Library on the children there, where it is a statewide program. Her commencement address expounded on the motto of the Dollywood Foundation: "Dream More, Learn More, Care More, and Be More." Image by UT Video and Photography Center.

literacy. Part of that United Way grant also provided for duplication of an instructional DVD of reading tips that was prepared by the Public Library's children's librarians and produced free-of-charge by TV Middletown. We mailed them to every parent in the program to help them get more out of the books than simply reading. We continue to send the DVD to new registrants about once a quarter. Our United Way partnership has since expanded to include working to expand our affiliate to the surrounding school districts.

The best illustration of why the program is important came four months after its launch. As part of the *Middletown Journal's* multi-part profile of Butler County Children's Services, an article focused on one family in the system. A year earlier, the family and two infants lived in squalor in an abandoned house without electricity or running water, garbage strewn throughout, and dog feces on the floor. At the time of the story, the parents had married, had enrolled in GED classes, and lived in suitable housing. However, the image that the reporter chose to frame the family's current circumstance was the little 3 year old leaping up when her caseworkers entered the home, running to them waving her Imagination Library book in the air and tugging at one of the caseworker's pants so excited that it had come. Knowing that our program was bringing such happiness to a child with so many strikes already against her young life really hit home as to why we do what we do.

Initial Impact on Entering Kindergarteners

One important component of the program to gauge its impact over the years will be monitoring of KRA-L scores for entering kindergarteners. The Middletown Community Foundation was very pleased when the Middletown City School District agreed prior to the program's launch to assist in capturing the scores of students entering the school system who had participated in the Library. The District added a question to the demographics section of the test asking whether the child participated in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. This allows them to pull data for those who answered "yes" and compare it to those who answered "no," information that they agreed to share as an evaluation tool. (The superintendents in the three surrounding districts to which the program plans to soon expand have also informally agreed to similar tracking and sharing of test data.)

As students entering kindergarten in Ohio must be 5 years old by September 30 of the school year in which they begin classes, students taking the test in 2009 would have received between one and nine books in the program before the test was administered at their entrance into the school system, depending on in which month the child turned age 5 and in which month between November 2008 and August 2009 that a parent registered the child for the Library.

A total of 69 students had parents indicate on the test that the child had participated in Dolly's Imagination Library. The average score for these participating students was 17.88 versus an average score of 17.16 for the 535 non-participating students, translating into 4.2 percent better performance for participating students versus non-participating. The combined average for all 604 tested students was 17.24, meaning the 69 participating students alone raised the District's overall average by 0.47 percent (Figure 4).

While this number of students is small and the difference in scores between the two groups is also small, the initial indication of improved student test scores is promising. In addition, anecdotally, kindergarten teachers in the District have informed us they can tell based on observation which students were in the program and which were not – even for that brief of a time – and that they believe those who were participants are performing better in classroom work than those who were not.

2009 KRA-L Scores

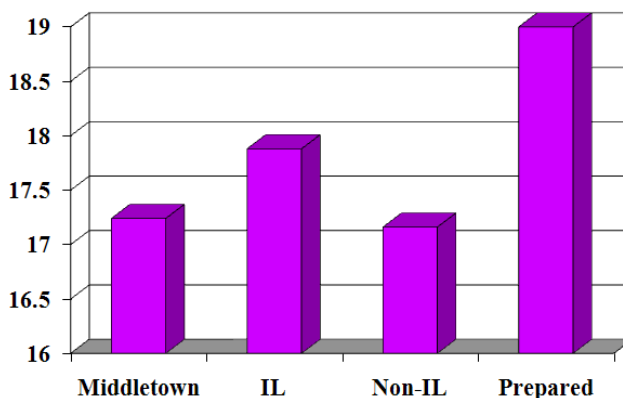


Figure 4: Average KRA-L scores for 2009-2010 school year for Middletown overall, students who participated in Imagination Library, students who did not participate in Imagination Library, and the accepted level to be considered adequately prepared to enter kindergarten.

Survey Results

The survey was largely a composite made from questions asked on previous surveys that had been distributed in various Imagination Library communities: one used for a 2003 study of the program in South Dakota, Tennessee, and Georgia titled *Literacy Outcomes and the Household Literacy Environment: An Evaluation of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library*, conducted by the nonprofit High/Scope Educational Research Foundation and funded by a grant from the Anne E. Casey Foundation; one used in 2007 by the chapter operated by the Allegan County, Mich., United Way; and one used in 2007 by the University of Hawai'i Center on the Family to assess chapters throughout that state.

About the Families

The 89 respondents to the Middletown survey represented the parents of 116 out of the 390 children in the program for 12-18 months at the time, or 29.7 percent of the total pool (the survey responses represented parents of a total of 123 participating children, but seven of the children were under the age of 1 and consequently had been enrolled in the program for less than 12 months with an older sibling who had been in the program for 12-18 months). The average age of the children was 2.6 years. A total of 67.4 percent of respondents had one participating child in the home, 27.0 percent had two participating children, 5.6 percent had three participating children. No families had four or more children currently in the program.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents were from homes where both parents were present, 6 percent had a parent and step-parent, 18 percent were single-parent homes, 2 percent were living with a grandparent, and 1 percent were with a foster parent.

The split between low income and non-low income households was almost even, with 45 percent meeting the federal guidelines for low income and 55 percent middle-to-upper income.

Parental education attainment was 7 percent who had not completed high school, 16 percent high school diploma or equivalent, 33 percent some college but no degree, 11 percent an associate's, 20 percent a bachelor's, and 13 percent a master's degree.

Satisfaction with Program

A full 100 percent of parents who responded were satisfied with the program. Of these, 94.4 percent indicated they were "very satisfied," 2.2 percent were "fairly satisfied," and 3.4 percent were "satisfied."

Impact on Parental Behavior

A total of 41.6 percent of parents indicated that an adult reads to their child multiple times every day, while 33.7 percent read once a day, and 24.7 percent read multiple times in a week. No parents indicated the lower frequencies of once a week or less than once a week.

The vast majority of parents, 81.8 percent, reported that their frequency of reading to the child increased after Imagination Library books began arriving in their home. Specifically, 20.4 percent reported that it increased "significantly," 50.0 percent reported that it increased "some," and 11.4

percent reported it increased “a little.” Only 18.2 percent reported no change, and no parents reported a decrease in the frequency with which they read to the child.

We attempted to ask whether the program had changed the parents’ awareness of their child’s reading abilities, but a typographical error made the question confusing, and consequently about a sixth of respondents did not answer the question. Many of those placed a question mark next to it, apparently to indicate that they did not understand it. Of those who answered, 64.5 percent said yes and 35.5 percent said no.

They were also asked whether the program had changed the way they spend time with their child, and 60 percent said no while 40 percent said yes.

Parents were asked to identify whether any of the following barriers sometimes kept them from reading to their children. Their responses were:

<u>Impediment</u>	<u>% Yes</u>	<u>% No</u>
a. There’s not enough time	46.1	53.9
b. I’m too tired.	32.2	67.8
c. My child would rather do something else.	29.1	70.9
d. I have trouble reading.	2.4	97.6

Changes in parental behavior appeared to be most marked in low income households. Nearly 98 percent of low income families reported increasing the frequency with which they read to their child after enrolling in the program, compared to 69 percent of middle-to-upper income households. 69 percent of low income households indicated that they had a better understanding of their child’s reading abilities as a result of the program, compared to 61 percent in non-low-income homes. And 63 percent of parents with low incomes reported the program changed the way they spend time with their children, compared to 39 percent of other households.

Impact on the Child’s Behavior

The vast majority of parents, 92 percent, reported that their child’s excitement and enthusiasm about books increased after Imagination Library books began arriving in their home. Specifically, 48.9 percent reported that it increased “significantly,” 35.1 percent reported that it increased “some,” and 8.0 percent reported that it increased “a little.” Only 8.0 percent reported no change, and no parents reported a decrease in the child’s level of excitement and enthusiasm about books.

Nearly all children, almost 90 percent, increased the frequency with which they ask to be read to since enrolling in the program, parents reported. A total of 34.1 percent reported it increased “significantly,” 42.4 percent reported it increased “some,” and 12.9 percent reported it increased “a little.” Only 10.6 percent reported no change, and no parents reported a decrease.

Likewise, nearly 90 percent of children increased the time they spend alone with books after enrolling in the program, parents indicated. A total of 19.3 percent increased the time “significantly,” 56.9 percent “some,” and 13.6 percent “a little.” Only 10.2 percent reported no change, and no parents reported a decline.

Parents were asked whether the program had made their children more interested in books, and 96.5 percent said yes. Only 3.5 percent said no.

They were asked if the child looks forward to his or her book every month, and 91.6 percent said yes. Only 8.4 percent said no, and several of them further explained their answer by writing on the survey some variation on “because of age” or “too young” if they felt the child was not old enough to understand the book arrivals.

Parents were asked whether their child felt differently about the Imagination Library books than they do other books, and the result was pretty evenly split with 54.2 percent responding yes and 45.8 percent responding no.

Income level appeared to have an impact on the child’s reaction to the program just as it did the parent’s, although the differences between the two groups were not as dramatic. For example, 95 percent of low income families reported their children have a greater level of enthusiasm and excitement about books since starting the program, compared to 92 percent of non-low-income homes. Likewise, 97 percent of low income parents reported their children asking to be read to more since enrolling in the program than before, compared to 85 percent of middle-to-upper income households. A full 100 percent of low income families reported that the Imagination Library made their child more interested in books than before enrolling, compared to 93 percent of non-low-income families. Finally, 95 percent of low income families reported their children look forward to each month’s book arrival, versus 89 percent of other families.

Impressions of the Books and Program

Parents were asked to identify their favorite book in the program and their child’s favorite. The responses were quite varied, with parents listing 36 separate titles (in addition to “no preference” or “all”) as their favorite and 30 separate titles as the child’s favorite. The top choices were:

<u>Parent’s Favorite</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Child’s Favorite</u>	<u>%</u>
1. No preference or “all”	25	1. No preference or “all”	33
2. Llama Llama Mad at Mama	8	2. The Little Engine That Could	7
3. Llama Llama Red Pajama	7	3. Llama Llama Mad at Mama	6
The Little Engine That Could	7	Firefighters to the Rescue	6
4. Officer Buckle and Gloria	6	4. Llama Llama Red Pajama	5
5. Dimity Duck	3	Raindrop Plop	5
		5. Officer Buckle and Gloria	3
		ABC Look at Me	3
		Where Butterflies Grow	3

In open-ended questions, parents were asked to share what they like most and least about the program.

<u>Like Most</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Like Least</u>	<u>%</u>
1. Variety/quality of books	29	1. Did not answer	39
2. That books are free	14	2. Like everything about program	35
Child’s excitement for books	14	3. Soft covers	5
3. Child likes getting mail	10	Label stuck on book	5
4. Did not answer	9	Did not like a specific book/books	5
5. Frequency of books	6	4. Duplicate book sibling already got	3
6. Delivery directly to the house	5	5-year-old cut off for program	3
7. Chance to read together	4		
8. Age-appropriateness of books	2		
That it is open to all children	2		
What the children learn from books	2		

Most responses from parents for what they liked the most about the program easily fell within one of the above categories. Those that did not and were only listed by one respondent each were: when books correspond to a holiday, everything about the program, and the illustrations.

For like least, answers that did not fit into one of the above categories and were given by just one parent were: would like an option to choose the next book each month, would like Christian children's books included, post office does not deliver the book every month, having to wait to receive the book each month, having the child's name printed on the book, and the books seem too economical.

In January 2010, the books for older children in the program were changed to soft cover volumes. The reason for the change was two-fold: first, a handful of chapters have dropped the program each year due to difficulty raising money to cover its cost, and soft cover titles cost less to produce and less to mail, resulting in approximately 20 percent savings annually on each chapter's costs. (As an added bonus, the use of less paper material in making the books and the reduction of fuel consumption to ship them due to the lighter weight should make them more environmentally friendly.) Secondly, the U.S. Postal Service had previously attempted to change postal fees that would require greater physical flexibility for items mailed at the rate currently used to ship the books. Hardcover books are not able to meet those standards, which would place them in the cost-prohibitive parcel mailing rates, so the change was partly a pre-emptive move given concern that this fee structure proposal will be raised again in the future. For now, the youngest children continue to receive board books (where each page is glued onto hard cardboard) because of their sturdiness and how rough babies can be with books, but older children (for 2010, those born in 2008 and earlier; in 2011 that will change to those born in 2009 and earlier) began receiving soft cover titles. The books remained the same size with the same quality paper inside, same illustrations, same everything. The only difference was the front and back covers were no longer glued to hard cardboard to make them hardcover.

After receiving between six and 12 hardcover books in 2009, depending on how long they were enrolled in the program, and their first six soft cover books in 2010, parents were asked for their opinion on the change.

Prefer soft cover	9%
Fine with soft cover books	43%
Kudos for reducing costs	2%
Prefer hardcover but OK with soft cover	8%
<u>No opinion or no answer</u>	<u>18%</u>
Total accepting of soft cover or no opinion	80%

A total of 20 percent of respondents were opposed to the switch to soft cover books. Complaints included that they rip more easily when children handle them and that postal carriers have damaged the books folding them to place them into mailbox slots. Multiple parents noted that their child was two years old and still too rough with the soft cover books to keep them undamaged very long. One even noted that their child had difficulty with soft cover books due to a disability.

Those who noted that they prefer the soft cover over hardcover reported that they were easier to store, took up less room, and were easier to take with them on trips.

The ages of children whose parents said they opposed the soft cover books were mixed, but the most common age was 2 years old, the youngest age at which a child would begin receiving the soft cover titles. About half of them were 2, a little more than a quarter age 3, and a little less than a quarter age 4.

Parents were asked to estimate the number of books in the home and how many of them were Imagination Library books. The average home had about 100 books, of which 19 were from the Imagination Library. (Although the maximum number of books per child that could be in the home would be 12-18 due to the length of time in which the program had operated, nearly a third of survey responses were from parents with two or three children in the program. Consequently, the average number of books per home is in excess of the maximum per-child number.) In low income households, the average was 79 books, of which 19 were from the Imagination Library, compared to an average of 123 books in higher income households, of which 20 were from the Imagination Library.

The program was responsible for one-sixth or more books in the homes of 76.5 percent of respondents. It made up more than a quarter of books in the homes of about half of parents who responded and more than half of the books in the homes of 20 percent of parents who responded. Imagination Library books comprised a majority of books in 31 percent of low-income households, compared to 14 percent of non-low-income homes.

Parental Comments

Parents were also provided a space to share any other thoughts about the program. A selection of their comments follows:

1. I think it's a wonderful program that promotes children to love reading.
2. Keep it up! Expand to educational toys to teach how to read?
3. I think this is an awesome program especially for parents that can't afford to buy books for their children.
4. Wonderful thing to encourage reading – we could all do it more and be reminded how important even when we are busy.
5. This is a wonderful program to encourage children and parents to read.
6. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to enjoy these lovely books. Love this program. Will surely recommend it.
7. Thanks for introducing us to new books that we probably would not have read.
8. I really appreciate it and think it is a great program.
9. A few times we have received a book we already own. It would be nice if the program offered a free return, so the book could go back to the program.
10. Keep up the work. Your program really helps children want to read more.
11. It has helped me and my son to bond and read together.
12. My daughter couldn't wait to open a new book every month. She loves to be the one who opens the plastic wrap because it's addressed to her. Thank you. :)
13. The kids really love getting the books! They will "read" by themselves as soon as they arrive, then ask to be read to at bedtime. We just love this program and all it helps provide our children! Thank you :)
14. LOVE it. Really like that the books are age-appropriate.
15. Every time I get a new book for the kids it's always a totally different book from the last time and the books can stay with the kids for many years. The books are for all ages.
16. It's a great program! Thank you Middletown Community Foundation and thank you Dolly!
17. It's an AWESOME program.
18. My family and I appreciate the books and are very grateful!!!

19. I appreciate what this program is doing for Middletown children.
20. I think it's wonderful to get children interested in reading at an early age.
21. This is such a wonderful program. Our family really appreciates being recipients of these books.
22. My son was enrolled but now he is too old. We go to Pigeon Forge, TN, every July. My daughter gets excited knowing about Dolly.
23. Love this program!
24. This is a good way to make kids excited about receiving books.
25. Me and my kids love it, so thank you!
26. I hope it continues. It is a great program to help kids get a head start on reading. Keep up the great work! :)
27. My kids enjoy getting their books! We have to read them as soon as we get them. Aiden got The Spiffiest Giant in Town today and we REALLY liked it.
28. My daughter loves the books. She gets her own mail and it adds to her library.
29. We really look forward to receiving these books every month! It's much appreciated. Thank you!
30. I would prefer to have books for younger age groups (2 and under) that have one-three words per page.
31. A wonderful program to get books to kids – the older kids look forward to the new books too and help read them to the little ones.
32. It is an amazing program! The children are getting a great opportunity to receive quality stories.
33. This is a great program. I think it should be advertised more throughout the community. Thanks for all you do!
34. We think it is a wonderful program. Our children go to the mailbox and want to see if their new book is here, every day.
35. We have always been readers and greatly enjoy the library. This program is outstanding and we are blessed to have this program in Middletown.
36. We love this program! The kids get sooo excited and check the mailbox. And when we get a new book we have to read it right away.

Conclusions

The impressive satisfaction rate of all parents, even those who had one or two complaints about specific aspects of the program, exhibits how well it has been embraced by those who have registered their children thus far. In addition, as it is accepted that reading to young children is the single most important factor in preparing them for school, the change in a majority of parental behavior to increase reading time with their children – with the change being near-universal in low-income households, where statistically parents tend to spend the least amount of time reading to their children – is a testament to how effective this project is. The early indications of increased literacy skills of entering kindergarteners who had been in the program for only a few short months is also very promising and something that will continued to be monitored closely over the next several years to see if longer term exposure to the program results in greater increases compared to the control group of children not enrolled in the program as it expands.

The degree of collaboration seen in development and implementation of the program, however, cannot be understated and is likely a key to its early successes. Based on the results reviewed in this report, it is apparent that Dolly Parton's Imagination Library's first 18 months in Middletown have proven a stunning success and that the program has the potential to evolve into one of the most vital assets in our community. Whether these successes continue as the project increases its enrollment to more and more families over coming years will be the true test of its worth.

Appendix: Survey Questions

Our records indicate you have one or more children in your household who have been participating in the Middletown Community Foundation chapter of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for 12 months or more. So we can get an idea of how the program is working in our community, we would greatly appreciate if you would please complete this anonymous survey and return it in the enclosed postage-paid envelope by July 2. **Thank you so very much for helping us evaluate this project!**

Number of children in this house receiving books from Dolly's Imagination Library: _____

Age(s) of children in this house in Dolly's Library: _____

Please circle one answer for each question below:

1. How satisfied are you with Dolly's Imagination Library in Middletown?
Very satisfied Fairly Satisfied Satisfied Fairly Unsatisfied Very Unsatisfied
2. How often do you or another adult read to your child?
Multiple times a day Once a day 2-5 times a week Once a week Less than once a week
3. Has the frequency of how often you read to your child changed since enrolling in Dolly's Library?
Increased significantly Increased some Increased a little Did not change Decreased
4. Has your child's level of enthusiasm/excitement about books changed since enrolling in the program?
Increased significantly Increased some Increased a little Did not change Decreased
5. Since enrolling in the program, has how often your child asked to be read to changed?
Increased significantly Increased some Increased a little Did not change Decreased
6. Since enrolling in the program, has the amount of time your child spent alone with books changed?
Increased significantly Increased some Increased a little Did not change Decreased
7. Has Dolly's Imagination Library made your child more interested in books? Yes No
8. Does your child look forward to the arrival of each month's book? Yes No
9. Does your child feel differently about our books than other books? Yes No
10. Has the program your awareness of your child's reading level or ability? Yes No
11. Has the program changed the way you spend time with your child? Yes No
12. Do you experience any of the following barriers that sometimes keep you from reading to your child?
 - a. There's not enough time Yes No
 - b. I'm too tired. Yes No
 - c. My child would rather do something else. Yes No
 - d. I have trouble reading. Yes No

Please write out an answer for each of the following questions:

13. What is your favorite Imagination Library book? _____

14. What is your child's favorite? _____

15. What do you like most about the program? _____

16. What do you like least? _____

17. The program recently changed its books for older children from hardcover to soft cover because they are less expensive and easier to mail. What are your thoughts on this change?

18. Approximately how many children's books are in your home? _____

19. Approximately how many of these are from Dolly's Imagination Library? _____

20. Is there anything else you would like to share about the program? _____

For classification purposes, please answer the following by circling one answer for each question:

- I. Your child or children live with:
- a. Both parents
 - b. A parent and a step-parent
 - c. Single parent
 - d. A grandparent or grandparents
 - e. Another family member
 - f. A non-family adult (such as foster parents)

- II. Our household currently has this number of residents:
- 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 or more

- III. The highest education level completed for each parent living with the child is:

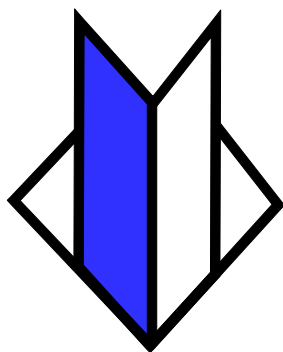
You: Grade 8 or less 9 10 11 12 Some college/no degree Associate's Bachelor's Master's+
Parent 2/Step-parent: Grade 8 or less 9 10 11 12 Some college/no degree Associate's Bachelor's Master's+

- IV. Our household income last year was:
- a. \$0-\$10,000
 - b. \$10,001-\$20,000
 - c. \$20,001-\$30,000
 - d. \$30,001-\$40,000
 - e. \$40,001-\$50,000
 - f. \$50,001-\$75,000
 - g. \$75,001-\$100,000
 - h. More than \$100,001



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Middletown, Ohio, is a project of the Middletown Community Foundation in partnership with the Miriam G. Knoll Charitable Foundation, Barnitz Fund of JP Morgan Chase, Middletown Kiwanis Club, Middletown Rotary Foundation, United Way of Greater Cincinnati-Middletown Area/Women Living United, The Arthur Harvey Foundation, Middletown Public Library, TV Middletown, Atrium Medical Center, Middletown Post Office, Middletown City School District, and individual donors. Registration is open to any child under the age of 5 residing in the Middletown City School District. Look for registration forms around town or complete paperless online registration at mcfoundation.org/library. The Middletown project is expected to expand to the Monroe, Edgewood, and Madison school districts sometime in 2011. The program is administered nationally and internationally by the Dollywood Foundation in Pigeon Forge, Tenn.

The Middletown Community Foundation works to improve the lives of those in the greater Middletown area by serving as a permanent source of funding for projects to benefit the community. Founded in 1976 as part of the Middletown United Way, the Community Foundation became an independent organization in 1986 and over the past 34 years has distributed tens of millions of dollars in grants and college scholarships, with nearly \$25 million granted out in the past 10 years alone.



M I D D L E T O W N C O M M U N I T Y F O U N D A T I O N

T. Duane Gordon, Executive Director

300 North Main Street, Suite 300

Middletown, OH 45042

513-424-7369

F 513-424-7555

info@mcfoundation.org • www.mcfoundation.org