

United Way Blackhawk Region

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LiveUnitedBR.org



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United Way launches Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

United Way Blackhawk Region invests in book gifting program in Beloit, Edgerton and Janesville

JANESVILLE – United Way Blackhawk Region announced its investment in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library at a press conference held Wednesday at Blackhawk Technical College.

Acknowledging the generosity of its donors, unanimous support from its Community Impact Council and Board of Directors, United Way Blackhawk Region announced a \$150 thousand dollar investment in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. "We know lack of parental education and low income levels can have an unfortunate impact on child literacy. But, the mere presence of books is powerful enough to overcome that impact," said United Way Blackhawk Region President & CEO Mary Fanning-Penny. "Research has shown children who grow up in homes with at least 20 books attain on average 3 more years of schooling than students from bookless homes – regardless of parental income, education or economic class."

Intended as a three year and incremental roll-out, United Way announced initial beneficiaries of the Imagination Library will be the communities of Beloit, Edgerton and Janesville and said it hopes to expand the program to additional communities in the Blackhawk Region in the future.

Inspired by her own father's inability to read and write, Dolly Parton's dream was to foster a love of reading among preschool children and their families by gifting them with a specially selected book each month. This means a free, age appropriate book will be mailed each month to children enrolled in the program from birth to age 5 living in Beloit, Edgerton or Janesville.

During Wednesday's announcement, Janesville School District Superintendent Steve Pophal, Edgerton School District Superintendent Dr. Dennis Pauli, and Beloit School District's Interim Superintendent Dr. Darrell Williams, praised United Way's investment in the Imagination Library program and touted myriad benefits of reading to preschool children.

While enrollment in Imagination Library is open to everyone, funding is limited. Fanning-Penny stated, "We will be working strategically to ensure organizations that provide support to underserved families will have Imagination Library enrollment materials on hand, particularly community hubs such as local public libraries, HeadStart, food pantries, and others."

Families interested in enrolling eligible children may visit LiveUnitedBR.org/freebooks to learn more. United Way focuses on education, financial stability and health, the building blocks for a good life and

a strong community. With a belief that success in life begins with literacy and education that spans from cradle to career, United Way helps ensure every child gets a strong start in life, youth have the tools to learn and grow, and young adults thrive in the job market.

It only costs \$30 dollars to support a child's participation in the Imagination Library program for a year or \$150 dollars to support a child from birth to age 5. Donations can be made payable to United Way Blackhawk Region's Imagination Library by check or online at LiveUnitedBR.org/freebooks.

More than 40 local leaders attended the launch event, including members of the respective school boards, teachers, representatives from Beloit, Hedberg and Edgerton public libraries, municipal leadership and elected officials, as well as United Way Blackhawk Region's Board of Directors, Community Impact Council, Program Partners and other literacy advocates.

Attendees enjoyed a walking-choo-choo-train of preschool children from two United Way funded programs, Janesville Community Day Care and the YWCA Rock County's Childcare Program, as well as a cake-cutting and two readings from Dolly's book list. Beloit City Manager Lori Curtis Luther read the bilingual book, *Jake at Gymnastics* by Rachel Isadora and Janesville Police Department Chief David Moore read *Pretend* by Jennifer Plecas.

About United Way Blackhawk Region

United Way fights for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in every community. We win by Living United, by forging unlikely partnerships and by finding new solutions to old problems; by mobilizing the best resources; and inspiring individuals to join the fight against a common foe, each community's most daunting social crises. United Way Blackhawk Region Lives United against poverty, family violence, hunger and homelessness to name a few, by providing community grants and resources to 62 human services programs at 28 nonprofit agencies in Rock County, Wis. and northern Winnebago County, Ill. More information is available at LiveUnitedBR.org.

About Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a book gifting program that mails free, high-quality books to children from birth until age 5, no matter their family's income. After launching in 1995, the program grew quickly. First books were only distributed to children living in Sevier County, Tennessee where Dolly grew up. It became such a success that in 2000 a national replication effort was underway. By 2003, Dolly Parton's Imagination Library had mailed one million books. It would prove to be the first of many millions of books sent to children around the world. To learn more about Dolly Parton's Imagination Library visit ImaginationLibrary.com.

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