

## Dolly Parton's Imagination Library



### Goals

The goals of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library are the following: 1) to increase young children's access to books, 2) to increase parent-child reading frequency, and ultimately 3) to contribute to kindergarten readiness.<sup>1</sup>

### Program Features

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is an early literacy program that mails age-appropriate books to registered children on a monthly basis. The books are mailed in the child's name in an effort to create a sense of excitement about getting new books. Children can receive the books from birth to their fifth birthday, regardless of family income. The sponsoring organization selects a geographic area to target for book distribution and raises the funds to cover the cost of the books. Parents can also register children online.

Organizations that provide Imagination Library need to make staff available for several tasks which include (a) recruiting families; (b) coordinating with partner organizations to help spread the word and encourage families to enroll; (c) utilizing outreach and media (including social media) to recruit families and, possibly, help families enroll; (d) picking up of undelivered books from local post offices; (e) securely entering and managing family information in a program web-based database; (f) facilitating parent surveys or other evaluation measures; and (f) managing monthly invoices.

In addition, it may be helpful to check with your local postmaster to determine what, if any, local guidelines or paperwork need to be completed. Organizations considering DPIL should also consider the need for bilingual or Spanish versions of recruitment, enrollment, and survey documents. And, while DPIL is designed for any child ages birth through five, it may be helpful to determine whether or not your organization will target specific populations, such as highly vulnerable populations within your community. For more

### Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Snapshot

- **EC Profile Indicator:** FS 20 Percent of Parents/Guardians Who Report Reading to Their Children Daily
- **Clearinghouse Rating:** None
- **Research supports** use with children birth to 5 years of age
- **Related Smart Start outcomes:**
  - Increase in frequency of parent and child shared reading
  - Increase in the adult's use of recommended reading strategies
- **Purveyor training required:** No
- **Smart Start information or guidance:** Yes, see LP Central
- **Frequency:** Monthly
- **Dosage:** One book per month
- **Minimal service threshold:** at least 4 months of books
- **Suggested Assessments:** Smart Start Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Survey
- **Implementation Guidance:** <http://www.imaginationlibrary.com/> and see LP Central for Smart Start guidance

information regarding Dolly Parton Imagination Library use this link: <http://www.imaginationlibrary.com/>.

**Target Audience:**

Children birth to 5 years of age

**Documented Outcomes**

	Type of Study	Child-outcomes determined through standardized assessments or research studies	Parent-reported child outcomes		Parent-reported family outcomes		
		Improved child academic skills	Increased child enjoyment/ interest in shared reading	Increased oral language/ vocabulary development	Increased sharing reading*	Increased access to books	Increased use of library
Shelby County Books from Birth program (2013) <sup>ii</sup>	Quasi-experimental	✓					
Seidz & Capuozzo (2011) <sup>iii</sup>	Non-experimental; gains within treatment group		✓		✓		
Ridzi et.al. (2011) <sup>iv</sup>	Non-experimental with comparison groups				✓		
Thomason (2008) <sup>v</sup>	Non-experimental with comparison groups				✓	✓	✓
Fong (2007) <sup>vi</sup>	Non-experimental				✓		
Gordon (2010) <sup>vii</sup>	Non-experimental		✓		✓	✓	

*This table contains outcomes found to be associated with the program or approach. Individual studies may contain additional outcomes that were tested and not found to be associated with the program or approach.*

\*Aligned with Smart Start outcome *Increase in frequency of parent and child shared reading*

**Research Evidence for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library**

- The program is most often linked to an increased number of books in the home and increased or improved shared reading practices between adults and children.
- The program may be aligned with higher language and mathematics scores when children were assessed at kindergarten entry.
- Program effects may be amplified for low income or highly vulnerable families or children.

## Review of Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Studies

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Shelby County Books from Birth program. (2013). Evaluating the relationship between the Imagination Library early childhood literacy program and kindergarten readiness.</b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	Secondary data were collected on 263 new kindergarten students who had entered kindergarten in fall 2011. All children were enrolled in public elementary schools in Memphis Tennessee (Shelby County).
<b>Methodology</b>	Quasi-experimental; comparison of participants to a matched cohort of non-participants
<b>Purpose</b>	The study used a comparison of DPIL children with matched, non-DPIL, children to determine whether or not children who participated in DPIL had better scores on measures of kindergarten readiness (Kindergarten Readiness Indicators, or KRI). In particular, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills were assessed and confounding factors (such as child age, poverty indicators, participation in prekindergarten, race, and family reading practices) were controlled.
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten Readiness Indicator</li> <li>• Family Reading Habits Survey</li> </ul>
<b>Study Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study asked about DPIL participation during kindergarten registration activities.</li> <li>• There were no significant group differences on age, gender, race, or economic status. There were significant group differences on prekindergarten participation and family reading habits.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	N/A
<b>Key Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On measures of language, children who participated in DPIL scored, on average, 9.64 points higher (out of 86 total) than children who did not participate in DPIL.</li> <li>• On measures of mathematics, children who participated in DPIL scored, on average, 2.01 points higher (out of 27 total) than children who did not participate in DPIL.</li> <li>• Age, poverty, participation in prekindergarten, and family reading habits were significantly associated with language scores, as was participation in DPIL. Further, the complete model explained 26% of variance in language scores. After controlling for confounding factors, DPIL was associated with an average languages score that was 8 points higher for program participants.</li> <li>• Age, poverty, participation in prekindergarten and family reading habits also were significantly associated with mathematics scores, as was participation in DPIL; the model explained 19% of variance. After controlling for confounding factors, DPIL was associated with an average mathematics score that was 1.8 points higher for program participants.</li> </ul>

## Review of Meta-Analyses

None

## Review of Descriptive and Non-Experimental Studies

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Seitz &amp; Capuozzo. (2011). One-year evaluation on Alaska's Imagination Library Program. Anchorage Alaska: University of Alaska at Anchorage.</b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	<p>The study contained two surveys. The first survey was administered to families who were newly enrolled in DPIL in Anchorage, Brevig Mission, Dillingham, Emmonak, Homer, and Point Hope. A total of 2,435 participants received the survey and 1,435 participants completed it.</p> <p>The second survey was administered to families who had been in the program for more than one year, from Anchorage, Seward/Moose Pass, and Angoon. A total of 1,858 participants received the survey and 348 participants completed it.</p>
<b>Methodology</b>	Gains within treatment group (but no external comparison group)/ Single-case design
<b>Purpose</b>	<p>The study was designed to answer questions about the effect of DPIL on children and families, with a focus on improvements in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of books in the home;</li> <li>• Child's enthusiasm toward books and reading;</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency of parent reading to child in a week; and</li> <li>• Perceived parental importance of reading and books.</li> </ul> <p>Survey 2 also was used to examine these questions, in addition to the extent to which DPIL has helped prepare the child for kindergarten. In addition the survey contained questions that asked if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The parent encouraged others in the community to join the program;</li> <li>• The parent felt their child looks forward to the arrival of the book each month;</li> <li>• The parent felt he or she reads more since joining the IL; and</li> <li>• The parent attended any events in their community that involved books for young children.</li> </ul>
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	Two surveys were created for the study
<b>Study Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Telephone surveys were used in an attempt to boost response rate in Anchorage survey #1</li> <li>• Enrollment volunteers helped gather survey data; data were entered into Survey Monkey</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	The study used enrollment volunteers to collect participant data.
<b>Key Findings</b>	<p>Survey 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of books at home: of the 1423 respondents, 36% reporting having either 1-10 children’s books or 20 or more children’s books.</li> <li>• Enthusiasm towards books and reading: of the 1395 respondents, 51.8% reported that their child was very enthusiastic about books and reading</li> <li>• 1421 respondents were awaiting their first book from DPIL. Of these, 89.4% reported that reading and books are of some importance to child development.</li> </ul> <p>Survey 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of times read to child: of the 348 respondents, 77% reported reading to their child every day of the week</li> <li>• Importance of reading and books: of the 345 respondents, 94.7% believed reading is very important for child development</li> <li>• DPIL helps prepare children for kindergarten: of the 343 respondents, 93.2% reported their child was more prepared because of participation in DPIL</li> <li>• Read more to child: of the 343 respondents, 53.9% reported reading more since starting DPIL; 39.9% reported that they did not read more since starting the program</li> </ul>

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Ridzi, F., Sylvia, M.R., and Singh, S. (2014) The Imagination Library Program: Increasing parental reading through book distribution. Reading Psychology, 35:548–576.</b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	170 DPIL participants responded to a program survey. Of those who responded, 73% were English-primary language speakers, 69% were born in the United States, 47% were Caucasian, 17% were African-American, and 54% were female. The program was based in Syracuse, New York.
<b>Methodology</b>	Non-experimental with comparison groups
<b>Purpose</b>	The study addressed whether or not book distribution programs, such as DPIL, were associated with sharing reading practices within the home. The study also sought to determine if there were important confounding factors such as socioeconomic status, race, home language, or parent education.
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	The program used a 12-question survey.
<b>Study Implementation</b>	The authors matched survey responses to book distribution logs to calculate variables for program participation (i.e., total months of enrollment).
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	N/A
<b>Key Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of time in the program was significant associated with reading frequency. Specifically, as regards the percent of participants who reported reading to their child or children “three times or more per week” or “every day”, 59.7% of participants who were enrolled in the program for four months or less responded in the affirmative, compared to 85.2% of participants enrolled for more than four months.</li> <li>• As regards the percent of participants who reported reading to their child or children “not at all” or “1 or 2 times”, compared to those reading “three or more times per week” or “every day”, there was not</li> </ul>

a significant difference in reading behaviors among participants enrolled for four months or less (40.3% reported the lesser frequency while 59.7% reported the higher frequency). Among participants enrolled more than four months, 85.2% reported reading at the higher frequency, compared to 14.8% who reported reading at the lesser frequency.

- Among participants who were enrolled for four months or less, 29% reported reading “every day” (compared to 71% reporting all lesser frequencies). Among participants who were enrolled for more than four months, 59.3% reported reading “every day” (compared to 40.7% for all lesser frequencies). These differences were statistically significant, with a moderately strong effect size.
- The authors also found that total months of enrollment was a significant predictor of daily reading, after controlling for child age at the time of the survey. Total months of enrollment remained a significant predictor after accounting for parent education, family income, race/ethnicity, parental birthplace (United States or not), English-primary language, and child sex. Further analyses revealed that respondents who were African-American or not born in the United States were less likely than others to conduct daily reading (findings were statistically significant).
- Additional findings addressed the question “How often do you talk about the story and ask your child questions about the story?” In brief, 36% of respondents with four months or less enrollment reported “usually”, compared to 55% of respondents with more than four months enrollment (statistically significant finding). Further, longer enrollment was statistically and positively associated with the percent of respondents reporting “usually.”

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Thomason, G.B. (2008). The impact of the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy on the home literacy environment. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 69(8), pp. 3026.</b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	A total of 2100 participants from five age groups were surveyed (Group 1 was 0 to 11 months enrolled; Group 2 was 12 to 23 months enrolled; Group 3 was 24 to 35 months enrolled; Group 4 was 36 to 47 months enrolled; and Group 5 was 48 to 59 months enrolled).
<b>Methodology</b>	Non-experimental with comparison among enrollment groups.
<b>Purpose</b>	The study responded to the question “Among families whose children are enrolled in the FFCL, is there a relationship between the home literacy environment, measured by a scale survey, and the length of time enrolled in the program?”
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home literacy survey, which was a survey reviewed by a panel of four reading specialists and nine early childhood teachers</li> <li>• The home literacy environment scale used for the survey was adapted from the Get Ready to Read Home Literacy Environment Checklist</li> </ul>
<b>Study Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expert panel reviewed the survey for content. A pilot study was conducted to assess internal reliability.</li> <li>• Once families were sorted into enrollment groups, a random sample of 420 families was selected from each. Each sampled family received a survey.</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	N/A
<b>Key Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scores on the home literacy environment scale had a positive but small correlation program enrollment. There also was a positive (but low) correlation between enrollment and home literacy survey score.</li> <li>• There were statistically significant differences among the five enrollment groups. Of note, each enrollment group experienced increases in home literacy environment scores associated with length of enrollment, with the largest mean increase identified between Groups 1 and 2 (4.63 mean increase). A comparison of Groups 1 and 5 reveals a mean score difference of 7.09 on the home literacy environment scale.</li> <li>• While most parents, on average, reported reading with children almost daily, they also reported a lack of adult-oriented reading materials (such as books, newspapers, and magazines).</li> <li>• Some of the parent respondents reported an increase in use of the library, with their child. Further, increases in library use were positively associated with length of enrollment.</li> <li>• There was a positive association between length of enrollment and number of children’s books in the home, as well as with adult-child frequency of book sharing (but not total minutes per day of read-aloud time, after Group 2).</li> </ul>

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Embree, L. (2009). A study of the impact of Imagination Library participation on kindergarten reading achievement. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences , 71(3).</b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	The study targeted kindergarten students in Sullivan County TN, using DPIL participation as an independent variable. A total of 90 students were randomly selected from a pool of 187 children; 97 kindergarteners participated in DPIL in their prekindergarten years. Of the 90 sampled students, 45 were randomly selected from the pool of students who participated in DPIL and 45 were randomly selected from the pool of students who did not participate in DPIL. Stratification variables included free- and reduced-price lunch eligibility, and sex.
<b>Methodology</b>	Quasi-experimental
<b>Purpose</b>	The study assessed whether or not DPIL and the reported frequency of read-aloud sessions impacted reading achievement in kindergarten students.
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scott Foresman Reading Street Baseline Test</li> <li>• Kindergarten registration questionnaire</li> </ul>
<b>Study Implementation</b>	Kindergarten teachers administered the baseline assessment. Data collected at kindergarten registration were used to identify the (reported) frequency of read-aloud sessions and length of participation. The authors noted that missing data on some questionnaire items may have affected findings.
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	N/A
<b>Key Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study failed to find significant differences between DPIL (mean score of 72.8) and non-DPIL (mean score of 66.11) students on measures of reading achievement.</li> <li>• The study found a statistically significant difference between students who did (mean score of 64.47) and did not (mean score of 74.02) qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch (FRL) but the interaction of group and FRL status was not statistically significant. More specifically, among students who did not qualify for FRL, DPIL participants had higher average scores (DPIL mean: 74.23; no DPIL mean: 73.63; differences not statistically significant). Among students who did qualify for FLR, DPIL participants had higher average scores (DPIL mean: 69.64; no DPIL mean: 61.97; differences not statistically significant).</li> <li>• There was no statistically significant correlation of reading frequency or length of DPIL participation (among DPIL students) on reading achievement.</li> <li>• There appears to be a program effect that is stronger for female students.</li> <li>• The author noted the trend for DPIL students to have higher mean reading achievement scores, although findings failed to have statistical significance. Further, the author noted that program effects may be stronger for children in poverty, and that program enrichments such as supplemental information or materials or parent education may be helpful.</li> </ul>

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Fong, G. F. (2007). A report on Hawaii's Imagination Library Program. University of Hawai'i Center on the Family: Honolulu, HI.</b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	Surveys were provided to 1765 program participants; 747 were received. Of those who responded, 56.5% had children aged 36 months or older; the remainder had children aged birth to 35 months. Sixty-three percent respondents were from Maui County (Maui, Molokai, or Lanai); 19% were from the Big Island (Keaau, Kau, or Pahoia) and 18% were from Oahu (Kalihi).
<b>Methodology</b>	Non-experimental
<b>Purpose</b>	The study was conducted to determine the program's impact on adult-child reading frequency.
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	The author distributed a survey to all registered families.
<b>Study Implementation</b>	N/A
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	N/A
<b>Key Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants reported on reading behaviors before and after participating in DPIL. More specifically, when participants reported on behaviors prior to DPIL, 51.7% reported reading to or with their child once a day or more than once a day (26.5% more than once a day, 25.2% once a day). When the participants reported on behaviors after enrolling in DPIL, 81.3% reported reading to or with their child once a day or more than once a day (49.4% more than once a day, 31.9% once a day). In addition 77% of families who reported reading to their child(ren) several times a week before DPIL reported reading to their child(ren) once a day or more than once a day after enrolling in DPIL.</li> <li>• Reading frequencies increased across all age groupings for children.</li> </ul>

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Gordon, T. D. (2010). Celebrating little dreamers: An analysis of the first 18 months of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Middletown, Ohio. Retrieved from: <a href="http://usa.imaginationlibrary.com/medias/file/Middletown_Imagination_Library_Report(1).pdf">http://usa.imaginationlibrary.com/medias/file/Middletown_Imagination_Library_Report(1).pdf</a></b>
<b>Population and Sample</b>	There were 89 parent respondents to the survey, representing 116 children (out of a total of 390 children served for between 12 and 18 months). Of the children represented, the average age was 2.6 years. More respondents were from dual parent households and had one participating child. In addition, 45% of respondents met federal guidelines for low income and seven percent had not completed high school (while 16% completed high school diploma or equivalent, 33% completed some college but no degree, 11% completed an Associate's, 20% complete a Bachelor's, and 13% completed a Master's degree).
<b>Methodology</b>	Non-experimental; a study survey was made available to 350 parents (representing 390 participating children) in Middletown Ohio. Only families who were enrolled between 12 and 18 months were surveyed.
<b>Purpose</b>	The study examined program impact on child literacy skills and parent behaviors.
<b>Measures &amp; Assessments</b>	A survey was created and contained questions from other DPIL program surveys or studies.
<b>Study Implementation</b>	The authors noted a relatively high "non-delivery" rate for participants; at one point in time, as many as 50% of books were returned. The authors noted that "once a year" communications may have contributed to the high return rate.
<b>Staff Qualifications</b>	Volunteers
<b>Key Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As regards scores on Ohio's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment-Literacy (KRA-L), there were data for 69 students, whose parents also reported enrollment in DPIL. Among these students, the average score was 17.88 (compared to an average of 17.16 for non-DPIL students, n=535, and an overall average of 17.24, n=604). Further, kindergarten teachers reported anecdotally that they were aware of when students were DPIL participants.</li> <li>As regards parent behaviors, 41.6% of respondents reported reading with their child multiple times a day; 33.7% reported reading once a day and 24.7% reported reading multiple times a week. Of note, no parents reported reading once a week or less than once a week.</li> <li>Of the parent respondents, 81.8% reported increasing the frequency of adult-child reading after enrolling in DPIL (20.4% reported that frequency increased "significantly", 50% reported increasing "some", and 11.4 reported increasing "a little"; 18.2% reported no change but no parent reported a decrease in reading frequency).</li> <li>Forty percent of parent respondents indicated that the program changed the way they spent time with their child.</li> <li>Of the responding parents, the program effects appear to be stronger in lower income families with 98% of low-income families reporting an increased frequency of adult-child reading after enrolling in DPIL (compared to 69% of middle- or upper-income families). Further, 69% of lower income families reported having a better understanding of child reading abilities after enrolling in DPIL (compared to 61% of higher income families). Finally, 63% of lower income families reported changing how they spent time with their child (compared to 39% of higher income families).</li> <li>Ninety-two percent of respondents reported an increase in child excitement and enthusiasm about books (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.)</li> <li>Other important outcomes include: (a) almost 90% of children increased how often they asked to be read to; (b) almost 90% of children increased the amount of time spent alone with books; (c) 96.5% of parents reported that their child was more interested in books; and (d) 91.6% of parents reported that their child looked forward to the book every month.</li> <li>Parents indicated an average of 100 books in the home; on average, 19 were from DPIL. The authors noted that DPIL was responsible, on average, for more than a quarter of books in about 50% of respondents and more than half of books in 20% of respondents. Among low-income families, DPIL accounted for majority of books in the home.</li> </ul>

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. (2012). Dolly Parton's Imagination Library, [Website]; Available from: <http://www.imaginationlibrary.com/>

<sup>ii</sup> Shelby County Books from Birth program. (2013). Evaluating the relationship between the Imagination Library early childhood literacy program and kindergarten readiness.

<sup>iii</sup> Seitz, H., & Capuozzo, R. (2011). One-year evaluation on Alaska's Imagination Library Program.

<sup>iv</sup> Ridzi, F., Sylvia, M. R., & Singh, S. (2014). Imagination Library Program: Increasing parental reading through book distribution. *Reading Psychology*, 35:548-576.

<sup>v</sup> Thomason, G.B. (2008). The impact of the Ferst Foundation for Childhood Literacy on the home literacy environment. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 69(8), pp. 3026.

<sup>vi</sup> Fong, G. F. (2007). A report on Hawai'i's Imagination Library Program. University of Hawai'i Center on the Family: Honolulu, HI.

<sup>vii</sup> Gordon, T. D. (2010). Celebrating little dreamers: An analysis of the first 18 months of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Middleton, Ohio. Retrieved from: [http://usa.imaginationlibrary.com/medias/file/Middletown\\_Imagination\\_Library\\_Report\(1\).pdf](http://usa.imaginationlibrary.com/medias/file/Middletown_Imagination_Library_Report(1).pdf)

## Additional Resources

Governor's Books from Birth Foundation. (2015). An impact analysis: Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in Tennessee, 2004-2014.

Ridzi, F., Sylvia, M. R., & Singh, S. (2011). Imagination Library: Do more books in hand mean more shared book reading? A Curar Working Paper, pp. 1-17.

Ridzi, R., Sylvia, M. Qiao, X., and Craig, J. (2015). Executive Summary - Examining the Impact of the Imagination Library Program on Kindergarten Readiness. Center for Urban and Regional Applied Research.

Tabors, P.O., Snow, C. E., & Dickinson, D. K. (2001). Homes and schools together:

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Supporting language and literacy development, in *Beginning literacy with language: Young children learning at home and school*, D.K. Dickinson and P.O. Tabors, Editors. Brookes: Baltimore, MC. pp. 313-334.

Note: Research summaries could include verbiage directly reproduced from the research literature. Quotes and italics may be used to show a direct quote but not always.

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