UNITED WAY
Henry County
and Martinsville

For Immediate Release

September 4, 2026

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library has operated in Martinsville and Henry County since October 2014 under the care and direction of our MHC Partners for Children, formerly known as Smart Beginnings. Over the last twelve years, the program has had more than 8,000 registered area children who have received free books each month from birth to age five.

Inspired by her father and her own love of reading, Dolly began The Imagination Library in her hometown of Sevier County, Tennessee. Her goal was to encourage children toward a lifelong love of reading by providing free books, regardless of income, to all children registered from birth to age five.

In Martinsville and Henry County, early childhood literacy remains a critical priority for school readiness and future community development. Research consistently shows that children who grow up with books in their homes achieve higher levels of education and literacy skills; however, many families in our region face financial constraints that prevent them from purchasing supplemental educational materials.

The local affiliate of Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) provides a solution to this gap. As the program is completely free to participating families, regardless of household income, it serves as an equitable resource that ensures every young child in Martinsville and Henry County can begin kindergarten with a personal library and a foundation for lifelong learning.

Following the recent passing of Dolly Parton, Erica James, our MHC Partners for Children's Early Literacy Coordinator, has observed a significant increase in registrations, bringing the total to 2,297 current enrollments. Additionally, United Way of Henry County and Martinsville has received individual donations specifically to support the Martinsville-Henry County DPIL affiliate. The cost to support one child for an entire year is only $31, which covers the expenses for books and mailing.

Donations may be made directly on our website, through the mail with a check at PO Box 951, Martinsville, VA 24114, or in-person during business hours, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

If you would like to receive more information on this program or register your child by phone, please contact Erica James, Early Literacy Coordinator, 276-638-3946, X113.

Elizabeth Carter Bailey
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Website Link: https://www.unitedwayofhcm.org/dolly-partons-imagination-library