

**NEWS RELEASE**

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**New Leadership, Sustainability Re-Energize Local Program After Two Decades**

*Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library Going Strong at 20 Year Mark in Hamilton County*

**(Chattanooga, TN) August 21, 2024 –** 2004 was the year Facebook officially launched on college campuses. But did you know it’s also when Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (DPIL) started distributing free books to Hamilton County’s children?

Fast forward twenty years, and the local program is managed by Signal Centers, which has installed new leadership and an endowment fund to ensure long-term sustainability. With these crucial elements in place, the organization is pushing to get every eligible area child enrolled.

Signal Centers made a key hire in Lesa Witt, a native Chattanoogan and lifelong resident, who will serve as the new director. In her role, Witt will reach out locally to ensure all families know about the program that inspires a love of reading by gifting books free of charge to children from birth to age five. Statewide, she will work with the Tennessee Child Care Resource & Referral Network to ensure families in the Tennessee Department of Human Services' Child Care Certificate Program are enrolled.

Research shows that early access to age-appropriate books sets children up for success in school and life. Nationally, the Imagination Library boasts incredible outcomes: 90% of parents that receive Imagination Library books for their children report an increase in their child’s vocabulary. Meanwhile, a household with 25 age-appropriate books will see their children complete two more years of education than a household with zero books.

“Here at Signal Centers, we want to see kids succeed and grow into the best they can be, and the statistics tell us that process starts at an early age,” says Donna McConnico, Signal Centers CEO. “That’s why it was crucial for us to hire a strong director for our program, and we are pleased to have found that in Lesa Witt.”

Witt recently served as the program manager for Read20, where she enjoyed helping children reach their full potential by guiding them on their literacy journeys. She has worked in the nonprofit and educational sectors for more than 20 years, including with Chattanooga Room in the Inn, Hickory Valley Christian School, Siskin Children’s Institute, and McCallie School. Currently, she serves on the Soddy Daisy Library Read20 Advisory Board and Duoloyi Ministries Board.

Through local program partner, Signal Centers, DPIL serves 13,000+ Hamilton County children each month. To ensure the program has staying power, Read20 recently gifted the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga with their endowment fund designating as the Dolly Parton Imagination Library Endowment Fund. Gifts to the fund can be made by visiting the [Foundation’s website](https://cfgc.fcsuite.com/erp/donate/create/fund?funit_id=4399). Additionally, the Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation matches every dollar donated. Meaning that with a gift of only $25, donors can purchase a year’s worth of books for a local child.

Signal Centers, Inc., a nonprofit 501(c)(3) known for its statewide literacy efforts, has been a cornerstone of the Chattanooga community since 1957. The organization’s comprehensive services include high-quality early childhood education, developmental therapies, independent living and employment support for adults, technology assistance, parental support, and professional training in the education field, all aimed at fostering lifelong learning and independence.

The major funding partners who help make Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library possible locally include: Robert Finley Stone Foundation, The City of Chattanooga, Hamilton County Government, Women of Distinction, and Governor’s Early Literacy Foundation.

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