



IMAGINE A BOOK FOR EVERY CHILD

As far as we can tell, this is the first time INCITE has ever had an international celebrity on our cover. Imagine that. It's caused all sorts of excitement around the office water cooler, and we are indeed honoured to have Dolly Parton on the cover of this issue to mark the launch of her international Imagination Library initiative in Australia.

Dolly Parton is truly a star. Let's get the staggering showbiz statistics out of the way first. Dolly has been singing since the 1950s, she's recorded 42 studio albums, sold 100 million concert tickets and written more than 3,000 songs. This much perhaps you may have known. But that Dolly is also a tireless philanthropist and has for decades been a stalwart supporter of efforts to improve early childhood literacy may be news to you.

Perhaps pondering the words for all those songs had something to do with inspiring Dolly to put her considerable influence behind the Imagination Library. Growing up "dirt poor" certainly did. As Dolly told Fran Kelly in an interview on Radio National last December, she really appreciates "everything good that happens to you".

The Imagination Library project distils this sentiment into practical support for parents struggling to help their children get off to a good start with the literacy skills we now know are critical to a bright future. The program supplies a new book to each child every month from birth to the age of five.

It's a simple and direct approach that embodies both practical support and inspiration for children and their parents, starting children on the road to loving reading with their very own libraries, and encouraging families to read and learn together.

CUE THE NEXT STAGGERING STATISTIC: SO FAR THE IMAGINATION LIBRARY PROGRAM HAS DELIVERED 56 MILLION BOOKS TO CHILDREN IN FOUR COUNTRIES.

United Way, a global not-for-profit with a local network across Australia, is proud to bring the Imagination Library to Australian kids and communities. As part of their mission they work closely with early childhood organisations, councils, public libraries and community groups. Amongst the first public libraries to get involved have been those in Doveton, Glenelg Shire and Ballarat in Victoria, and Acacia Ridge Public Library in Queensland.

Doug Taylor, CEO of United Way Australia says it is especially satisfying to be working so closely with local libraries.

"Our public libraries are much-loved and very involved with their communities," he says.

The library staff we have worked with have been enormously helpful to us in engaging with families in their area."

Jessica Broom, Children's Services Librarian at the Casey-Cardinia Library Corporation in Victoria was invited to join the Imagination Library Book Selection Committee along with representatives from a number of organisations in her area with a passion for early childhood learning. She says the aim of bringing these people together was to draw on their range of expertise and share their passion.

"Working with United Way to roll out the Imagination Library in Doveton has been personally and professionally rewarding. The book selection committee was a great opportunity to meet other early childhood educators and make lasting connections," Jessica says.

"Our library members are benefiting from the program as well. It is a pleasure seeing smiles on children's faces when they tell me about the books they have been receiving in the mail."



United Way Australia CEO Doug Taylor shares Dolly's determination to help children learn to read.

Glenelg Shire Libraries' Children & Youth Services Officer Sara Taylor became involved as a member of the project's Literacy Coalition Committee and has been assisting with planning and roll-out of the program across the Shire's branches at Portland, Casterton and Heywood.

"The Glenelg Shire Council believes it is essential to lay the foundation of a love of reading and books in the formative childhood years and are happy to support free access to books and programs to help instil a life-long love of reading," Sara said.

Dolly says she wanted to help children who, like her, did not have access to educational opportunities growing up in a disadvantaged community. "If you can read, you can self-educate," she told Fran Kelly.

We know in Australia our literacy rates are slipping. The simple truth is that this will condemn many young children to missing out on the futures they could have had because, without functional literacy skills, they simply can't take advantage of the opportunities out there. There are many library professionals who are dedicated to helping to change this. If you or your library would like to participate in the Imagination Library program, visit the website for more information at imaginationlibrary.com.au or email read@unitedway.com.au.



www.unitedway.com.au