

Imagination Library recipient of 100 Women Who Care's \$23,000 gift

Members of 100 Women Who Care—Elk Rapids voted to give their August 2023 collective donation of \$23,000 to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library - GTR (Grand Traverse Region). Antrim County is currently the only county in the five-county Grand Traverse Region that does not offer Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. This gift will change that, providing over 160 Antrim County children with a new, age-appropriate book from birth through their 5th birthday, at no cost to the family.



Louise Wenzel (100 Women Who Care nominating member), Jan Engle (DPIL - GTR lead coordinator), Cindy Zarow (100 WWC member), Bob Robbins (Books from Birth chair), Betsy Morath and Carol Heles (100 WWC members) surround "Dolly Parton." Courtesy photo

"Supporting initiatives that improve the quality of life in Antrim County is our mission. Expanding Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to reach our youngest residents will do exactly that, and our members are thrilled to be able to assist" stated Carol Heles, co-founder of 100 Women Who Care - Elk Rapids Area.

A key component of this campaign is educating parents and caregivers about the important role they play in their child's early brain and language development. "Birth to age 5 is the most critical period for brain development. Reading aloud to a child is the single most important thing a parent can do to prepare their child for kindergarten," says Bob Robbins, chair of *Books from Birth*.

The need for early intervention in our five-county region is great; 56% of children are not ready for kindergarten and 52% are not reading at grade level by the end of 3rd grade. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program will help counter these statistics by providing monthly books mailed directly to each child.

Later this year, all Antrim County babies born at Munson will be eligible to participate. An advisory board composed of representatives from area libraries, schools and organizations serving children ages 0-5 will also work to connect older infants and children to this program. Pam Williams, director of the Elk Rapids District Library and member of 100 Women Who Care - Elk Rapids Area will serve on the advisory board. She says, "So many people are invested in this project. I'm proud of this community and its commitment to get the word out to families about this amazing project."

To learn more about the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, visit DPIL-GTREGION.