



The Charles County Public Library has reached a significant milestone in its efforts to promote early literacy, with the Imagination Library of Charles County program mailing over 100,000 free books to children under five as of July 2025.

The program, which delivers one age-appropriate book each month to enrolled children, operates in partnership with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library and the Southern Maryland Regional Library Association. It aims to build home libraries and encourage reading habits from an early age.

"This milestone is a testament to the incredible support from our community and the unwavering belief in the power of books to shape young minds," said Kenneth Wayne Thompson, executive director of Charles County Public Library. "The Imagination Library is a shining example of how CCPL creates opportunities for our community to engage, discover, and learn...one story at a time."



Most people support reproductive rights.

It's time to ignite our unstoppable power. For rights. For choice. For all.

Pledge to Support Reproductive Freedom



Sponsored by International Planned Parenthood Federation

Powered by Public Good

The achievement aligns with the library's strategic goals to expand access to early literacy resources and enhance community engagement. Since its inception, the Charles County Imagination Library has enrolled more than 5,400 children and distributed over 105,000 books, supported by contributions from the Citizens for the Charles County Public Library and various local donors.

Children in Charles County who are 4 years and 11 months old or younger qualify for the program, receiving books directly at home until they turn five. This can result in a personal collection of up to 60 books, selected for developmental suitability and including options like bilingual English-Spanish editions. Audio and Braille versions are available through collaborations with publishers. Parents or guardians handle registration, either online or via paper forms at library branches, with books arriving six to nine weeks after signup.

The Charles County Imagination Library draws from Dolly Parton's broader initiative, started in 1995 in Tennessee to honor her father's inability to read. Nationally, the program has mailed over 200 million books since its launch, reaching one in seven children under five in the United States by 2024. In Maryland, about 9% of eligible children statewide participate, with 33,917 enrolled as of recent data. Studies linked to similar efforts show participants enter kindergarten with stronger vocabulary and narrative skills, as analyzed in reports from Tennessee's Governor's Books from Birth Foundation.

Locally, the Charles County Imagination Library complements other library initiatives focused on early childhood development. For instance, the 500 by 5 program encourages families to read 500 books to children by age five,

offering incentives like tote bags and tracking logs to build daily reading routines. Story time sessions at library branches introduce rhymes and activities for toddlers, while paired fiction-nonfiction resources target skill-building in areas like letter recognition. These efforts address literacy gaps, with Maryland assessments indicating that consistent book exposure improves readiness scores.

The Charles County Public Library, serving a community centered in La Plata with branches in Waldorf, Potomac, and Indian Head, positions the Imagination Library as a key tool for family involvement. Registration requires proof of residency, and families must update addresses to ensure continuous delivery. The program launched in Charles County in 2021, following advocacy for expanded access to free resources amid growing awareness of early education needs.

Funding comes from a mix of library budgets, grants, and community donations, ensuring no cost to families. Individuals can contribute through the library's support page, helping sustain book shipments. Similar affiliates in nearby areas, like Cecil County, report enrollment growth tied to partnerships with local organizations.

Beyond distribution numbers, the Charles County Imagination Library emphasizes long-term benefits, such as increased parent-child bonding through shared reading. Research from program evaluations highlights how monthly mailings create excitement and routine, leading to broader literacy practices in homes.

The library encourages eligible families to enroll promptly, as children aging out miss remaining books. For those interested, details on the Charles County Imagination Library, including forms and portals, **are available online**. Donations to maintain the program can be made via the **support section**.

This milestone underscores the role of public libraries in Southern Maryland as hubs for educational equity, where programs like the Charles County Imagination Library provide foundational tools without barriers. As enrollment continues, the initiative stands to influence thousands more in the coming years, building on a model proven effective across states.

