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Smart Start of New Hanover County Receives Funding to Implement Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Wilmington, NC -- Smart Start and Dolly Parton's Imagination Library are working together to bring books to North Carolina's youngest children through funding provided by the North Carolina General Assembly. Smart Start of New Hanover County is able to enroll 5,000 children under age five in New Hanover County. Enrolled children will receive a book in the mail each month until their fifth birthday.

During the 2017 legislative session, North Carolina state lawmakers included \$3.5 million in the first year of the budget and \$7 million in the second year for the Smart Start network to offer free books through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to children across the state. Imagination Library is a program created to foster a love of reading among children aged birth to five through the gift of a specially selected book delivered right to their homes each month.

"I'm thrilled that my Imagination Library is going to be offered to so many children in North Carolina" stated Dolly Parton, the founder of Imagination Library. "Working together we can help children dream more, learn more, care more, and be more."

Smart Start of New Hanover County has begun registering families at their office, at community events, and by working with community partners such as the New Hanover County Health Department and the WIC (Women Infants and Children) program. Families with children under age 5 can stop by the Smart Start office at 3534 South College Road or register on-line at <http://www.smartstart.org/dolly-partons-imagination-library/>.

“Children adore getting their very own books mailed directly to them. This encourages children to learn to love books and to ask adults in their lives to spend time with them reading. Reading aloud to a child not only helps their language and cognitive skills, but also provides a time for nurturing, cuddling, and building creativity,” said Jane Morrow, Executive Director of Smart Start of New Hanover County.

“Our state leaders clearly understand how important an early love of reading is for each child's success in school and later in life,” stated Cindy Watkins, the President of the North Carolina Partnership for Children that oversees the Smart Start Network. “Smart Start works in every community to ensure young children have a strong foundation for starting kindergarten – now we can offer this important literacy program to that critical work.” Funding for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library is coordinated through the North Carolina Partnership for Children and will cover 98 of North Carolina’s 100 counties.

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[Smart Start of New Hanover County](#) is part of a network of 75 local nonprofit partnerships that comprise North Carolina’s Early Childhood Initiative. Smart Start of New Hanover County acts as a local leader in the development a comprehensive, collaborative approach to serve the needs of all children, birth to 5, in New Hanover County.

[Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library](#) is a book gifting program for children from birth to age five. The mission of the program is to foster a love of reading in preschool children and ensure that every child born has books, regardless of their family’s income.