

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 2, 2020
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United Way of Hastings Discontinues Imagination Library Initiative

(HASTINGS, MN) The United Way of Hastings (UWH) has been a proud supporter of the Hastings area educational initiatives for over 55 years, contributing thousands of dollars to impact the learning and development of children and youth. The Imagination Library is one of several educational outreach initiatives that UWH has funded. Through a partnership that United Way Worldwide established with the Dolly Parton Foundation, United Ways can sponsor the Imagination Library in their local communities. UWH has provided Imagination Library books to children in its service area, Independent School District #200, from birth to age 5 for over 10 years, at **no cost to parents**. Currently, UWH provides nearly 800 books per month to area children.

To be good stewards of the funds that donors entrust, UWH continually assesses initiatives to determine impact. While many studies confirm that early childhood reading helps prepare children for kindergarten, it is not possible to correlate if Hastings children receiving Imagination Library books are better developed and ready to start school versus children who do not receive the books. Outcomes data is crucial to potential funders.

The cost of the initiative is approximately \$20,000 annually, with UWH absorbing the administrative cost to implement the initiative. Given that UWH is a small United Way with limited resources and challenged with providing outcomes data regarding the Imagination Library, the UWH Board of Directors decided to discontinue the Imagination Library initiative, beginning on May 1, 2020. Books will be delivered to currently registered children through April.

UWH will continue its commitment to families and early childhood development and encourages those that are impacted by this change to seek alternatives to the Imagination Library books by visiting:

1. The local library in Hastings. The Pleasant Hill Library has excellent resources and free programs for children and families.
2. The community education center. Hastings Community Education at the Tilden Community Center has many early childhood education resources.
3. The county's early childhood resources. Dakota County provides many services for infants, toddlers and preschoolers to make sure they are on the right track in their development.
4. Local used bookstore or local donation centers. The Dustjacket Bookstore in Hastings and Hastings Family Service provide many books at discount prices.

Reading aloud benefits your child in many ways such as building motivation/curiosity/memory, coping skills during times of stress or anxiety, and establishing a crucial bond between you and your child. UWH encourages parents and grandparents to continue reading to your children.

UWH has reached out to community groups seeking funds for Imagination Library but has not been successful to date. Please contact mari@unitedwayofhastings.org if you are involved with organizations or parent groups that may look to fund Imagination Library.

The UWH is an independent United Way that has worked for over 55 years serving Hastings and the surrounding rural communities within Independent School District #200. Its mission is to build partnerships to improve the lives of people in our community. Donations are accepted year-round. For more information about the UWH and the agencies it funds, visit www.unitedwayofhastings.org.

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