



Evaluation of **DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY** for Looked After Children in Scotland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) was launched in Scotland in 2011. The aim of the project is to foster a love of reading and to improve accessibility to books among Looked After and Accommodated Children (LAAC) aged 0-5. This is done via the gifting of age appropriate books sent directly to children's homes. Since the initiative started in August 2011, over 60,500 books have been mailed to looked after children in Scotland.

In June 2015, an evaluation was commissioned to understand the *processes* involved in implementing and delivering the initiative in Scotland. The evaluation was based on the analysis of telephone interview data from 30 participating Local Authorities, as well as analysis of online, self-completion survey data from 19 authorities.

FROM A PROCESS PERSPECTIVE, THE KEY FINDINGS FROM THE EVALUATION ARE THAT:

- local administration and implementation runs smoothly, and the main challenge is keeping abreast of movement of children between homes and updating the Book Order System (BOS);
- awareness of the initiative among Local Authority Social Work staff is good but there is a need for continuous communication between DPIL and Local Authorities to keep the initiative fresh in people's minds, especially as staff change over time;
- while several authorities already link DPIL with other similar initiatives, including Bookbug, more opportunities could be pursued, given time and budget;
- several partners are getting involved in the local delivery of the Imagination Library and there is willingness for others to come on board in the future; and
- there may be scope for more engagement with parents/carers to promote the benefits of the scheme and to encourage the more efficient return of participation mandates to ensure that as many children can benefit from the initiative as possible.

Most authorities expressed that the initiative was well received locally but recognised that they needed to more actively engage with parents/carers to measure *impacts* in the medium and long term. Anecdotally, staff reported that children look forward to receiving books, and that the resources are being used appropriately by parents/carers to engage children in reading and to assist with wider bonding activities. Gifted books are being used more widely than for the target child alone e.g. with older siblings, and this demonstrates added value from the initiative. Access to books is also being improved via the initiative, it was felt.

Overall, budget and staff movement are the biggest barriers to the successful implementation and operation of the scheme and to its widening out, but the initiative and the way that it runs in itself requires little change. Sharing of practices and lessons learned between authorities may also be of benefit for developing the initiative in the years ahead. Going forward, it will also be essential to measure impacts more precisely. This will help with understanding the value for money that DPIL provides, although it is recognised that many of the benefits cannot be measured in economic or monetary terms.

For a copy of the full evaluation report please contact the **Dollywood Foundation UK**,
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