



**PEI Literacy Alliance Dolly Parton Imagination Library - Family Survey
Findings Report**

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Submitted to: PEI Literacy Alliance

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In February 2026, the PEI Literacy Alliance surveyed families enrolled in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program. The survey was distributed to 3,458 families, with 834 responses received. The survey explored families' experiences with the program, its impact on shared reading habits, and its role in improving access to books across PEI.

Overall, findings show the program is highly valued and is contributing meaningfully to early literacy engagement, family reading routines, and home library development.

High Satisfaction and Strong Engagement

Nearly all respondents (95%, 788) reported enjoying receiving a book each month very much, with an additional 5% (40) enjoying it somewhat.

Families most often learned about the program through a family member or friend (48%, 401), followed by social media (32%, 263) and Public Health Clinics (28%, 231), highlighting the importance of community networks and public health partnerships.

Increased Shared Reading

The program supports stronger family reading habits:

- 76% (632) read together more often since joining, including 50% (413) much more often.
- 61% (512) developed more regular reading routines, such as bedtime reading.

Even families who already read regularly noted that the monthly book delivery adds excitement and variety.

Improved Access and Home Library Growth

Cost remains a consideration for many families:

- 27% (223) said purchasing books was a challenge prior to joining.
- 44% (367) said it was somewhat a challenge.

Importantly, 75% (618) reported the program helped them build a home library they may not otherwise have had. Many indicated they would otherwise rely on libraries or second-hand books.

Early Literacy and Communication Development

Among children under 2 (531 responses):

- 85% (449) show interest in books.
- 76% (405) enjoy being read to.
- 69% (368) follow pictures with their eyes or point to images.

Among children aged 2–5 (519 responses):

- 83% (432) ask to be read to.
- 80% (418) show excitement during reading.
- 75% (389) look at books independently.
- 67% (350) show increased interest in books or reading.

These findings show that many families are noticing positive changes in their child’s interest in books, early reading skills, and communication development.

Overall Impact

Participants’ open-ended comments about the program were overwhelmingly positive. Families most often highlighted:

- Children’s excitement when receiving books (approximately 120 comments)
- Stronger reading routines and a growing love of reading (approximately 95 comments)
- Gratitude and appreciation for the program (approximately 85 comments)
- Improved access to books and reduced financial barriers (approximately 35 comments)

At the same time, some parents shared a few concerns about their experience. These mostly related to age appropriateness, duplicate books for siblings, occasional delivery issues, and the durability of books for younger children.

Conclusion

Survey findings demonstrate that the Dolly Parton Imagination Library is making a meaningful contribution to early literacy and family engagement across PEI. The program is not only increasing access to books but also strengthening family reading routines, fostering children’s excitement about reading, and supporting early communication and literacy development.

PEI Literacy Alliance

Dolly Parton Imagination Library - Family Survey Findings Report

Introduction:

The Dolly Parton Imagination Library is an early literacy initiative that provides free, high-quality books to children from birth to age five. Founded by Dolly Parton in 1995, the program was created to foster a love of reading, support early language and literacy development, and ensure that all children—regardless of family income or location—have access to books in their home. Enrolled children receive a new, age-appropriate book in the mail each month, addressed personally to them, helping to build home libraries and create regular opportunities for shared reading.

The program operates in partnership with local organizations and communities across Canada and internationally. In PEI, the program is administered locally by the PEI Literacy Alliance, which serves as the provincial contact and supports enrollment, coordination, and community awareness.

This report presents findings from a February 2026 survey of families enrolled in the Imagination Library in PEI. The survey was sent to 3,458 families and a total of 834 completed it. The survey was conducted by the PEI Literacy Alliance to better understand how families are experiencing the program, how it influences reading habits and early literacy development, and the role it plays in improving access to books and building home libraries. The results highlight the ways in which the program supports children’s excitement about books, strengthens shared reading experiences, and contributes to early literacy and family engagement across PEI.

How Families Learned About the Program:

As shown in Table 1, nearly half of respondents learned about the program through a family member or friend. Social media and the Public Health Clinic were the next most common sources of information.

Table 1: How Families Learned about the Program (n=834)

Methods	Percentage	Frequency
Family or friend	48%	401
Social media	32%	263
Public Health Clinic	28%	231
Daycare or Early Childhood Centre	4%	36
Radio	3%	23
News story	3%	24
Public institutions – e.g., hospital, library, etc.	1%	10
Community programs – e.g., Best Start, CHANCES, etc.	1%	7
Speech-Language Pathology Clinic	1%	6
Bus stop poster	<1%	3
Online self-search	<1%	5
Professional referrals	<1%	3
Workplace	<1%	2

Length of Participation in the Program:

As reflected in Table 2, respondents reported receiving books through the program over a range of time periods, highlighting participation from both newly enrolled families and those who have been engaged for several years.

Table 2: How Long Families have been Receiving Books (n=834)

Length of Time	Percentage	Frequency
Less than 1 year	29%	239
1 year	26%	214
2 years	19%	155
3 years	11%	92
4 years	16%	136
Missing	<1%	2

Number and Age of Children Participating:

The vast majority of respondents (77% / 645) reported having one child enrolled in the program. An additional 21% (175) have two children participating, while 1% (12) reported three

children enrolled. Fewer than 1% (6) indicated that four or more of their children are involved in the program.

The age ranges of children participating in the program vary, as outlined in Table 3, with representation across all early childhood stages. This distribution suggests that the program is reaching families at multiple developmental stages - from infancy through the preschool years - and that many families remain engaged over time as their children grow.

Table 3: Ages of Children (n=834)

Age Ranges	Percentage	Frequency
Under 1 year	29%	241
1-2 years	28%	237
2-3 years	24%	199
3-5 years	38%	320
Missing	<1%	1

Enjoyment of Receiving Books:

When asked how much they enjoy receiving a book in the mail each month, nearly all respondents reported a very high level of enjoyment. Overall, 95% (788) indicated that they enjoy receiving the book *very much*, while 5% (40) reported *somewhat*, and fewer than 1% (1) indicated that they do not enjoy receiving it.

Family Experiences with the Program:

More than three-quarters of respondents (76%, 632) noted that since joining the program their families read together more often, as highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4: Enhanced Reading Together (n=834)

Rating	Percentage	Frequency
Much more often	50%	413
A little more often	26%	219
About the same	23%	191
Less often	<1%	1
Missing	<1%	3

In the comment section of this question, participants took the opportunity to share their experiences with the program. Most comments (≈ 60) reflected strong enjoyment and appreciation for receiving the books, while ≈ 45 noted the excitement children feel checking the mailbox and receiving something addressed specifically to them. Approximately 30 respondents highlighted the role the books play in supporting shared reading and family time, and ≈ 25 noted that the program helps build home libraries and foster a love of reading from an early age. A smaller number of responses (≈ 15) identified some challenges, most commonly related to book age-appropriateness, occasional duplicate titles, and inconsistent monthly delivery. Overall, responses suggest the program is highly valued by families, creates meaningful excitement for children, and supports regular shared reading experiences at home.

“Absolutely love it and look forward to it each month.”

“It’s the highlight of the month.”

“New book day is always a big deal — we sit and read right away.”

“My son’s face lights up every time he receives one.”

“She feels so special when the book arrives addressed to her.”

“We check the mailbox every day in anticipation.”

“It brings her such joy to receive a book in the mail.”

“We usually read the new book together that same night.”

“Such a nice thing for them to bond over.”

“It definitely encourages a love of reading from an early age.”

“It’s hard to afford books, so it’s nice getting sent a new one each month.”

“We love the program, but some books aren’t always age appropriate.”

“Half the books aren’t good — would prefer more classic titles.”

"We don't always get one every month, but when we do we're excited to have a new book."

Development of Reading Routines:

Overall, 61% (512) of respondents reported that they have developed more regular reading routines, such as incorporating books into bedtime, while 37% (312) indicated that their routines have stayed about the same.

In the comment section of this question, respondents shared additional context about their reading routines and how the program fits within them. Approximately 30 comments indicated that families already had established reading habits prior to joining the program, often describing themselves as "big readers," noting nightly bedtime routines, or reading multiple books each day. About 20 responses highlighted that, while reading was already a consistent practice, receiving books through the program adds excitement, variety, and new titles to their home libraries. In addition, ≈12 respondents noted that the books reinforce existing routines, including bedtime and nap-time reading, and create special shared moments when a new book arrives. A smaller number (≈7) indicated that the program has helped strengthen or formalize routines over time, particularly for families who enrolled at birth or during infancy.

"We have always had strong reading routines, but new books bring excitement."

"We already read quite a bit — our routine is the same, just with more books to choose from."

"We read 3 books a night at bedtime."

"We always had reading included in our bedtime routine."

"We have a special reading time when we first receive the new book."

"We still read at night but now the boys get more excited about reading when they have a new book."

"The program has been part of our routine since infancy."

"Bedtime for sure and other times during the day too."

“Reading is central for us no matter what, but the surprise of a new book each month is always exciting.”

“We still read the same amount but building our home library has been so fun and rewarding.”

Changes in Family Reading Frequency:

Since joining the program, half of respondents (50%, 413) reported that they read together as a family more often. An additional 26% (219) indicated that they read together a little more often, while 23% (191) noted that their reading frequency has stayed about the same.

In the comment section, respondents shared additional details about their reading routines and how the program fits within them. Approximately 70 respondents noted that their families were already reading regularly prior to joining the program, often describing themselves as “big readers” or referencing established daily bedtime routines. Many respondents (≈45) highlighted that, while reading was already a regular habit, receiving books through the program adds excitement, variety, and new titles to their home libraries. Approximately 20 respondents noted that the books help reinforce routines, maintain motivation to read consistently, or expand family collections. A smaller number (≈10) indicated that the program helped establish or strengthen newer reading routines, particularly for those who joined when their child was very young. Overall, the comments suggest that the program complements existing reading habits for many families while also supporting consistency, variety, and enthusiasm around shared reading.

“We already read daily but the program helps introduce new books and we're always excited to read them when they arrive.”

“We read multiple books every day together.”

“Every night before bed, and typically once more in the morning.”

“It's exciting to add new books to our rotation.”

“We read the new book as soon as it comes and then on repeat.”

“It's our form of family bonding especially before going to bed.”

"Books can be expensive... this is fantastic."

"The beginning of a new habit for a new family."

"These books renew the excitement of reading."

Cost of Books and Access:

Around 27% (223) of respondents indicated that, prior to joining the program, the cost of purchasing books was a challenge for their family. A further 44% (367) noted that it was somewhat a challenge, while 30% (247) indicated that cost was not a barrier.

In the comment section of this question, respondents shared additional context about access to books and whether cost or availability would have been a barrier without the program. Approximately 25 comments suggested that families would likely have relied primarily on libraries, second-hand books, or donated books if the program were not available. About 18 respondents directly referenced the cost of books, noting that purchasing new books regularly can be expensive or not always a priority within household budgets. Another 10 comments highlighted that the program supports the development of home libraries and provides access to new books that families may not otherwise purchase each month. A few additional responses noted that, while cost was not necessarily prohibitive for their family, the program still adds value by increasing variety and introducing new titles.

"Books are very expensive."

"We usually buy second-hand books and use the library a lot."

"We probably wouldn't have as many books if it wasn't for this program."

"Being on maternity leave this is a nice way to get new books when money is limited."

"We live in a small community and are far from places selling books."

"It helps to know what books are appropriate for each age."

"The program has helped us build a library for our kids."

"Having a free program means any kid can receive the gift of reading."

Building Home Libraries:

A total of 75% (618) of respondents indicated that the program has helped them build a home library they might not have had otherwise. An additional 23% (190) noted that it has somewhat contributed to building their home library, while 4% (30) indicated that it has not.

In the comment section, respondents shared further reflections on how the program has influenced the types and range of books available in their homes. Approximately 20 comments highlighted that the program has increased the variety and diversity of books available to families, including titles, authors, and themes they may not have selected on their own. Another 12 responses noted that the books have helped expand existing collections or support the gradual development of a home library over time. In addition, eight comments indicated that while families may have had access to books through gifts, hand-me-downs, or purchases, the program provides valued additions and has introduced new favourites.

“I love the variation in authors and content — it really helps expose different types of stories.”

“The program provides books that I may not have chosen, helping create a more diverse selection.”

“We love the variety of books and the Indigenous titles we may not have found otherwise.”

“It has definitely added to our library.”

“Although we could afford books, I don’t think we would have developed a library and habit like we have.”

Changes in Interest in Books and Early Communication (Under Age 2):

Families with children under the age of 2 were asked whether they had noticed any changes in their child’s interest in books or early communication since participating in the program. As shown in Table 5, many respondents reported early signs of engagement with books and shared reading, including increased interest in books, responsiveness during reading time, and emerging communication behaviours.

Table 5: Changes in Children Under 2 Years (n=531)

Changes	Percentage	Frequency
Shows interest in books (looking at pages, touching or mouthing books)	85%	449
Enjoys being read to or cuddling during reading time	76%	405
Follows pictures with their eyes or points to images	69%	368
Responds to my voice during reading (smiling, cooing, vocalizing)	60%	317
Babbles or makes sounds during reading	58%	307
Pretends to read or explores books independently	54%	285
I have not noticed any changes	2%	9

In the comments section, ≈10 respondents described clear engagement with books, including children having favourite books, pretending to read, selecting books independently, or wanting to read frequently throughout the day. About six responses noted emerging early literacy or communication skills, such as recognizing letters or numbers, babbling during reading, or incorporating books into daily routines like bedtime or car rides. Five respondents indicated that their children are still very young or have not been enrolled in the program long enough to notice changes.

“Our baby LOVES opening her books when they arrive in the mail.”

“She takes them to her chair and ‘reads’ them to herself, pointing at the pictures and babbling.”

“My 1-year-old loves books — he would have me read all day if he could.”

“Before bedtime he always picks his favourite book.”

“He has favourite books and reads them to himself.”

“Enjoys picking books off the shelf and looking at them.”

“We read as a family during the day and before bed each night.”

“They get excited to look at the new book right away.”

“Still very young, but we’re starting to build the routine.”

“Too young to notice big changes yet, but already very interested in books.”

Changes in Interest in Books and Early Literacy (Ages 2–5):

Families with children between the ages of 2 and 5 were also asked about changes they have observed in their child’s interest in books and early literacy development. As outlined in Table 6, respondents noted a range of positive changes related to shared reading, independent book use, and early language and literacy skills.

Table 6: Changes in Children 2 to 5 Years (n=519)

Changes	Percentage	Frequency
Asks to be read to or brings books to me	83%	432
Shows excitement during shared reading (smiling, pointing at pages, turning pages)	80%	418
Looks at books independently	75%	389
Shows more interest in books or reading	67%	350
Recognizes pictures, letters, or familiar words	66%	345
Pretends to read or tells stories using books	66%	341
Names objects, makes sounds, or uses words while reading	62%	324
I have not noticed any changes	<1%	3

In the comment section of this question, a smaller group of respondents shared additional observations about their children’s interest in books and reading. Approximately 12 comments described strong enthusiasm for books and reading routines, including children enjoying books at bedtime, wanting to read immediately when books arrive, or incorporating reading into daily routines. About six responses noted early literacy development, such as recognizing words, reading independently, or engaging more actively with books. Another five comments highlighted children’s excitement about receiving books in the mail or having favourite titles they return to often.

“Now my daughter loves to read a book at bedtime.”

“He is 4 and can actually read most words in these books — even new ones.”

“My son is almost 4 and can read independently now.”

"It has created a nice time to cuddle yet learn."

"Our daughter is SO excited to receive the books in the mail. She feels really special getting them sent to her."

"Excited for mail, and for immediately reading his new book."

"There are a few certain books that she absolutely adores and will go pick them out specifically."

"We read a lot, and so the Imagination Library books are an addition to our good reading habits."

Overall Themes from Open-Ended Feedback:

Overall qualitative feedback on the program was overwhelmingly positive, with several clear themes emerging among responses mentioned 10 or more times. The most common theme was the excitement and joy children feel when receiving a new book each month (≈ 120 comments). Families frequently described book delivery day as the highlight of the month, with children eagerly checking the mailbox, feeling proud to receive their own mail, and wanting to read the book immediately. Closely tied to this was the program's impact on building a love of reading and strengthening reading routines (≈ 95 comments). Many parents shared that the books support bedtime reading, encourage children to ask for stories, and help foster early literacy skills and vocabulary development. Respondents also expressed strong overall appreciation and gratitude for the program (≈ 85 comments), often describing it as wonderful, valuable, or life-enhancing for their family.

Another major theme was the quality and variety of the books (≈ 55 comments). Families appreciated being introduced to titles they might not have chosen themselves and valued the mix of classics, newer stories, and culturally diverse or Canadian-authored books. Many also highlighted the program's role in family bonding and shared reading time (≈ 45 comments), noting that books bring parents, siblings, and caregivers together for regular reading routines and special moments. In addition, respondents emphasized how the program improves access to books and reduces cost barriers (≈ 35 comments), helping families build home libraries and making books more accessible, especially for those who might otherwise struggle to afford them.

"It's the highlight of the month."

"New book day is always a big deal — we sit and read right away."

"My son's face lights up every time he receives one."

"She feels so special when the book arrives addressed to her."

"We check the mailbox every day in anticipation."

"It brings her such joy to receive a book in the mail."

"Getting a book in the mail is one of my child's favourite things."

"Our daughter is SO excited to receive the books in the mail."

"When the book arrives in the mail, the children are excited for bedtime."

"My kids get very excited about receiving mail for themselves, especially when it is a new book."

"It definitely encourages a love of reading from an early age."

"We usually read the new book together that same night."

"We read the new book as soon as it comes and then on repeat."

"My daughter loves reading and receiving new books."

"Since joining the program, our family reads together more often."

"These books renew the excitement of reading."

"My daughter is speaking in sentences and I believe it is due to how often we read."

"We read every night before bed."

"My son loves when I read to him and even looks through the books himself."

"Absolutely love it and look forward to it each month."

"This is such a wonderful program! Thank you!"

"Very grateful for this program."

"Best program ever."

"We truly appreciate this wonderful program."

"It's an incredible resource!"

"Such a meaningful program that encourages early love for reading."

"So thankful to have these wonderful books."

"This program is a wonderful light in an otherwise difficult world."

"I love the variation in authors and content."

"The program provides books that I may not have chosen."

"Lots of great books that I would typically not come across."

"It's exciting to add new books to our rotation."

"Very entertaining choice of books."

"We enjoy the books received, the types of books vary and tend to be quite different from what we would traditionally purchase."

"It's our form of family bonding especially before going to bed."

"We read as a family during the day and before bed each night."

"It has created a nice time to cuddle yet learn."

"My oldest son loves to read to his little brother."

"Life can get so busy, but we look forward to cuddling up and reading a book."

"It brings families together to enjoy reading time together."

"We have a special reading time when we first receive the new book."

"Reading is central for us no matter what, but the surprise of a new book each month is exciting."

"It's hard to afford books, so it's nice getting sent a new one each month."

"We probably wouldn't have as many books if it wasn't for this program."

"Having a free program means any kid can receive the gift of reading."

"This program helps us build a library for our kids."

"We rely on the library and second-hand books, so this is wonderful."

"A great help for families who can't always buy books."

A small number of respondents also noted some challenges with the program. The most common concern was age appropriateness or developmental fit (≈30 comments). Some parents reported that certain books felt too advanced, too long, or not engaging enough for their child's stage, particularly for infants and toddlers. Another recurring issue was duplicate books for families with multiple children enrolled (≈25 comments), with some families noting that receiving the same titles reduced excitement for younger siblings. A smaller but notable theme involved delivery and logistics issues (≈12 comments), including missed or inconsistent deliveries, books being folded or damaged in mailboxes, or difficulties updating addresses. Finally, some respondents raised durability concerns (≈10 comments), particularly for younger children who need sturdier books or thicker pages.

"We love the program, but some books aren't always age appropriate."

"Most books we received are fairly long."

"The books are a little beyond for the age (under 1)."

"I wish the books were more age appropriate/fun to read."

"Would love more books for younger readers."

"A few books didn't match my child's age level."

"With siblings enrolled we have gotten duplicate books."

"It would be nice if siblings got different books."

"We didn't sign up our second child because of repeats."

"Lots of duplicates years apart between kids."

"We don't always get one every month."

"The post worker folded the book in the mailbox."

"It's been great but not always monthly."

"The books don't seem to come every month."

"We've missed a couple of months."

"Some books arrive damaged."

"Board books would last longer."

"For under 2 it would be great if pages were thicker."