

Project Description

Country: USA

Location: Verde Valley, AZ

Total Budget: \$4,000

Area of Focus: Basic education and literacy

Activity Type: Education: Scholarships

Project Summary: Short sentence to explain the project. This project description should provide information about what activity is being funded, who is benefitting from the activity, and the name of the location of the project or activity, including the city or country. For example, "Five computers provided to schools for children in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia."

160 Verde Valley AZ children birth-5 years will receive scholarships for one new age-appropriate book monthly for 1 year.

Project Description: You should include what needs have been identified, how the project will meet those needs, and the timeline for your project. Please specify what the project funds will be used for and how club members will be involved.

This is a collaborative ongoing project sponsored by all the Rotary Clubs in the Verde Valley. This grant application is for the Rotary Club of Sedona. The other participating clubs, the Rotary Club of the Sedona Red Rocks, Rotary Club of Sedona Village, and the Rotary Club of the Verde Valley are submitting separate grant applications for the VVIL project.

The Verde Valley Imagination Library (VVIL) is dedicated to improving early childhood literacy skills by promoting and funding Dolly Parton's Imagination Library for all qualified children living in the Verde Valley area of Arizona. Language and literacy skills of children living in the Verde Valley are significantly behind children from other states. Only 39% of children can pass the 3rd grade state literacy test (AZMerit). Poverty levels are high with 67% of school children qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Arizona ranks 48th in the country for early childhood education and high-quality childcare for working parents is costly and in short supply.

90% of brain architecture is established by age 5 years. Basic neural pathways develop for language and early literacy skills in the first three years. The achievement gap is measurable at 18 months of age and significant by age 3 years. Studies show that children from low income homes have heard 30 million words by their 4th birthday – a huge contributor to language delay and literacy. These are the same children most likely to struggle in school, need remedial help and drop out. Books in the home and early exposure to positive interactive talking, singing and reading starting in infancy makes a lifelong impact on learning. Every dollar invested in early childhood education saves taxpayers up to \$13 in future costs.

Dolly Parton's renowned Imagination Library is a book program for children birth to five that inspires a love of books and reading. Kids receive a carefully selected new book in the mail every month with their name on it. They love getting mail and beg their parents to read to them. Busy parents have easy access to high quality books that they may not be able to afford or think to read. The program increases the time parents spend reading with their children and significantly improves kindergarten readiness for enrolled children. Recent studies show improved early literacy skills. Books are selected by developmental specialists to be stimulating, age-appropriate with positive themes that promote self-esteem, confidence and regard for diversity. Tips for parents are on the back flap of the books. Her foundation provides the Book Order System, publishes and mails the books. Local sponsors (Rotary volunteers) enroll preschoolers, manage the Book Order System, promote the program, and raise funds for books and postage. Parents pay nothing. The inclusiveness and popularity of this "children's book club" removes the stigma associated with targeting only underachieving or low-income children.

The Rotary Club of Sedona began funding the imagination Library for children living in Sedona in 2012. In July 2016, all Rotary Clubs in the Verde Valley collaborated to expand the program to all children 0-5 years living in the Verde Valley. In November 2016, a new non-profit was formed called The Verde Valley Imagination Library (VVIL) with bylaws calling for at least half the board to be active Rotarians representing all participating clubs, **Currently 1850 children receive books every month, up from 400 in July 2016.**

Goals for the VVIL are to: 1. Assure children 0-5 yrs have access to high quality books in their home. 2. Increase parental understanding that talking and reading with their infants, toddlers and preschoolers every day is critical for healthy brain development and long-term learning. 3. Collaborate with community partners who work directly with parents who need coaching to improve their skills. Partners include community libraries, Healthy Families AZ Program, Parents as Teachers, Yavapai County Community Outreach, Head Start, WIC, and more. We are tracking 3rd grade AZMerit Reading scores and screening test scores at kindergarten entry.

Funding for books and postage comes from each Rotary Club's contribution matched by Rotary District money, with additional support from other charitable foundations. The VVIL is completely volunteer run and has no facility overhead.