

For the Love of Literacy



Literacy Legacy Fund



of Michigan

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Supporting a literate Michigan citizenry of all ages

Dear Donors & Friends,

It's hard to believe that another year has passed. As we embrace the new year, it is exciting to look back with gratitude at all we have accomplished. We continue our amazing partnership with The Dollywood Foundation/Dolly Parton's Imagination Library program, as well as our collaborations with Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Health, Copper Shores Community Health Foundation, and Wayne State University, among others. We have seen the impact our small nonprofit has throughout communities across the state. When people come together to support literacy skills that shape lives, a positive impact is made as we fulfill our mission.*

In 2025, LLF Michigan was honored to be the focus of a GivingTuesday case study highlighting our 2024 GivingTuesday campaign. This project and the supporting materials we created were shared at gatherings held by the GivingTuesday organization with nonprofits and groups around the world. Our Michigan Dogs and Cats Advancing Literacy Grant with Michigan Pet Alliance resulted in Friends of Detroit Animal Care and Control publishing a community project-based book that is now for sale. We also collaborated again with Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly Upper Michigan Chapter on our Bertha's Buddies Special Outreach program. In addition, LLF Michigan continues its outreach across Upper and Lower Michigan, advancing our mission through other activities highlighted in this report.

While 2025 was a year of much gain, we also experienced great loss with the passing of our beloved, long-time board member, Carolyn Jane "CJ" Blough. Moving forward, we are committed to honoring her contributions in making LLF Michigan what it is today.

We invite you to support our efforts in honor of or in memory of someone, or to help ensure continued programming. Please return the enclosed donation envelope or visit www.literacylegacyfund.org to donate.

We extend our profound gratitude to all of you who support our efforts.

Sincerely,

LLF Michigan Board of Directors

**Our Mission: To support the improvement of a literate Michigan citizenry for all ages through the distribution of charitable funds to enhance literacy efforts.*

The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan is a section 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.
EIN 26-3673521

Outstanding Support

2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Colleen Whitehead, M.M.A. (Secretary)
Gloria J. LaPointe, B.S., CPA (Treasurer)
Carolyn Jane Blough, M.A. (Member-at-Large: Jan.- Aug. 2025)
Melinda Vokal, A.A. (Member-at-Large)

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Dave Bammert, M.A., Roxanne Daust, B.S., Angela Hentkowski, J.D., LL.M.,
Laura Lamp, B.S.N., Gwendolyn O'Donnell Graham, M.A.,
Heather Picotte, B.S., and Kristin Tessman, J.D., B.S.

VOLUNTEERS & ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANCE

Brett Hanson (Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Data Clerk), Jennifer Bruggink
(Board Assistant), Heather Griffith (Communications Support), Vivian Lasich,
Patricia Pellett, Arianna Picotte, and Margaret Schwalm (Volunteers)

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS FOR SUPPORT

Brian Maki, Computer Technician; Tony Beres, La Dolce Video & Design; Elise
Bur, Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Health; Dayna Browning,
Student Leadership Advisory Council of the Keweenaw; Kevin Store, Copper
Shores Community Health Foundation; Victoria Leonhardt, GivingTuesday; Grow
& Lead: Community and Youth Development; Lauren Wirt, Regional Director,
The Dollywood Foundation; Marquette-Alger RESA

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FRIEND

LLF Michigan remembers longtime board member, Carolyn Jane "CJ" Blough. CJ was integral in the development of LLF Michigan and worked tirelessly to support its mission. At the time of her passing, she was actively serving on the LLF Michigan Board. She will be missed for her grace, insight, and contributions to enhance literacy throughout the state.



Inspiring the Imagination

DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY

Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan is proud to continue its long-standing partnership with The Dollywood Foundation to offer Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) in six communities within Marquette and Alger counties. DPIL is a children's book gifting program that distributes 3.1 million books each month across the U.S. and four other countries. Each enrolled child receives one free, age-appropriate book in the mail monthly from birth to age five, with no cost, obligation, or income requirements. Parents or guardians may enroll a child online or by submitting an official registration form.

The Dollywood Foundation oversees DPIL book selection, processing, mailing, and distribution. LLF Michigan guarantees the annual \$26 of partner expenses per child in our Program Partner communities. Marquette-Alger RESA assists LLF Michigan financially, also. LLF Michigan promotes DPIL to parents of young children through posters, special events, social media outreach, and through recognition at various events annually. Additionally, as the Local Champion for children in the Marquette 49855 zip code, LLF Michigan manages enrollments, resolves address inconsistencies, and is a point of contact for parents with questions about the program or book deliveries. In 2025, over 570 children in the Marquette 49855 area were served by the DPIL program.

A total of 343 additional children were served in 2025 in the LLF Michigan Program Partnership areas served by Local Champions: Autrain-Onota Public Schools, Burt Township Schools, Ishpeming Public Schools No. 1, Munising Public Schools, and Powell Township Schools.



Scan QR code to learn
more and view LLF's
DPIL reel.



Celebrating 30 Years

DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY



“YOU CAN NEVER GET ENOUGH
BOOKS
INTO THE HANDS
OF ENOUGH
CHILDREN”
Dolly



A child enrolled in Dolly Parton's Imagination Library proudly shows the variety of books he received through the program (Photo credit: The Dollywood Foundation).

At right, a special parent poster was created highlighting the DPIL Marquette 49855 program. LLF Michigan extends its gratitude to the outstanding businesses and organizations who helped make this possible. Funds from the sponsors help support poster development and other program costs.

**FREE BOOKS EACH MONTH
FOR KIDS
0-5 YEARS OLD
IN THE 49855
ZIP CODE**

Inspire a love of reading in a child!

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a free book gifting program that mails one new book per month to each child from birth to age five with no cost, obligation, or income requirement for the child's family/guardians. Funding is made possible through The Dollywood Foundation, along with the local program partner, the Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan, which contributes to the Foundation.

Who is eligible?
Children under 5 residing in the 49855 zip code

How to enroll?
Visit literacylegacyfund.org to download a registration form. Or use the QR code to obtain a registration form or register online at imaginationlibrary.com.

Questions?
Visit literacylegacyfund.org or contact llf@socialmichigan@gmail.com.

Thank you to our generous 2025 sponsors who make this program possible:

MARK AHO Eagle Mine **BELL FINANCIAL**
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EYE ASSOCIATES OF MARQUETTE
JANDRONS FINE JEWELRY - KARA APPLEKAMP STATE FARM
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ZONTA CLUB OF THE MARQUETTE AREA

MARKETING SUPPORTERS
GLOBE PRINTING - LA DOLCE VIDEO & DESIGN
NORTHERN LIGHTS CHILD ADVOCACY CENTER

Spotlight Legacy Award

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP IN HONOR OF DR. JACQUELINE TILLES

LLF Michigan provides a scholarship in honor of Dr. Jacqueline Tilles, who served as an educator for 45 years, retiring in 2015 from Wayne State University, where she was an Associate Professor of Reading, Language, and Literature. Described as a “Teacher’s Teacher,” Dr. Tilles helped her students to understand literature and how to engage students to appreciate a wide range of works, especially literature representing various ethnic groups.

The 2025 scholarship (\$3,500) recipient, Olisha Philyaw, a graduate student pursuing a Master’s degree in elementary education (a Renaissance High School graduate), is the 16th recipient of a scholarship in honor of Dr. Jacqueline Tilles. Through 2025, a combined total of \$27,050 in scholarships has been awarded by LLF Michigan and donors giving directly to Wayne State University.



Dr. Nancy Wiseman Seminoff and Dr. Jaqueline Tilles

Scan QR code to learn more about Dr. Tilles.



WSU and LLF Michigan leadership attend the 2025 WSU Scholarship luncheon. Pictured left to right: Joye Clark, WSU Director of Development; Gwen O’Donnell Graham, LLF Michigan Advisory Group Member; Denise Taliaferro Baszile, Dean, WSU College of Education; Julie Osburn, WSU Senior Director, University-Wide Philanthropy.

Legacy Award

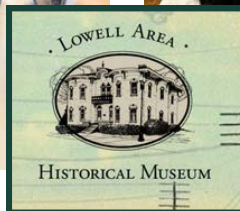
LOWELL AREA HISTORICAL MUSEUM IMMERSION PROGRAM

The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan completed the seventh funding cycle for the Lowell Area Historical Museum's "Immersion Program" for third graders in the spring of 2025. Once again, 275 students and 11 teachers from 3 schools participated in the legacy grant-funded project.



Henceforth, LLF Michigan's contribution to this project will be identified in memory of Carolyn Jane Blough, former LLF Michigan Board Member and firm supporter of this project.

Objectives met by the program: 1) Support, expand and supplement social studies curriculum through direct exposure to historical artifacts, exhibits, techniques and interaction with local historians; 2) Connect learning in the classroom to the local community; 3) Model methods of historical research and writing through student-driven activities during their time in the museum with the guidance of historians. This program has been very successful and has consistently made adjustments to in-person learning with the supplementation of videos and activity ideas.

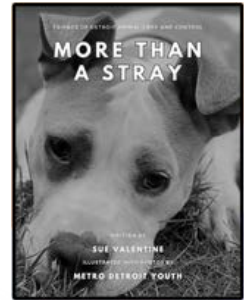


Michigan Dogs & Cats Advancing Literacy Grant

A LITERACY-BASED GRANT FOR MICHIGAN ANIMAL SHELTERS

In 2024, LLF Michigan and the Humane Society of Macomb Foundation jointly funded a Michigan Dogs and Cats Advancing Literacy Grant, designed to inspire shelters to incorporate new programs that use literacy to improve the lives of shelter animals. The funds were provided to the Michigan Pet Alliance, who then awarded them to Friends of Detroit Animal Care and Control (FoDACC) for their program, “Paws and Pages: A Community Storytelling Project.” The project saw community members of all ages participate in photography and illustrations for the book, *More Than a Stray*, based on a poem written by Detroit Animal Care and Control staff member, Sue Valentine. A representative for LLF Michigan attended the 2024 MPA’s “Better Together – One Voice” Conference in Grand Rapids to formally introduce the grant and present the award.

In 2025, the book, *More Than a Stray*, was published and released, providing readers with a moving storybook sharing the emotional journey of a once-forgotten dog who finds her way to an animal shelter in Detroit. Told through the dog’s perspective and brought to life with soulful photographs taken by local children, the book captures moments of fear, hope, and the joy of finding a loving home.



Through tender scenes and real shelter imagery, the story celebrates the compassion, resilience, and the powerful bond between people and animals. Designed for readers of all ages, *More Than a Stray* invites the community to see shelter dogs not as strays, but as individuals deserving of love and belonging. The book can be purchased on the FoDACC website at www.friendsofdacc.org/shop-our-merch or by using the QR code below.



Read to Your Shelter Pet

UPPER PENINSULA ANIMAL WELFARE SHELTER (UPAWS) SPECIAL PROJECT

Upper Peninsula Animal Welfare Shelter (UPAWS) of Marquette County's "Read to Your Shelter Pet Program," a part of the shelter's Kids Clubs programming, was established with funding from LLF Michigan in 2018-2019. LLF Michigan provided the initial \$3,250 to support the purchase of a bookcase, cushions, and ice cream social receptions.



This program pairs children with adoptable shelter pets and fun books to read to them. Reading aloud fosters socialization for the pet, a chance for human contact, while increasing the child's reading and comprehension skills in a safe, non-critical setting. UPAWS's program objectives included developing youth-involved initiatives at UPAWS while improving the quality of life and behavior of adoptable animals.

For current information and updates regarding this program, please refer to upaws.org/kids-resources or scan QR code below to view the page.

Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Read to Your Shelter Pet Program

Go to upaws.org/kids-resources for information



Sponsored by The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan

Northern Partnerships

NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH DAY ESSAY CONTEST

Every third Thursday in November, LLF Michigan, NMU Center for Rural Health, and the Michigan Center for Rural Health (State Office) host the National Rural Health Day Essay Contest. The contest is open to high school seniors who reside and attend school in the Upper Peninsula, are college/university bound the following fall semester, and intend to pursue a health care career in human medicine. Each contest participant wrote an essay identifying two challenges people encounter regarding preventative health care in their rural area of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and then provided two solutions for overcoming these challenges. LLF Michigan provides \$500 for each first-place winner.

Winners for the 2025-2026 academic year include:

Eastern Region Winners

- 1st Place: Delaney Hill, Pickford, MI
- 2nd Place: Ashley Dzelak, Newberry, MI
- 3rd Place: Ellie Emrich Rudyard, MI

Central Region Winners

- 1st Place: Katelyn Given, Ishpeming, MI
- 2nd Place: Emily Janowski, Marquette, MI
- 3rd Place: Abigail Pizziola, Marquette, MI

Western Region Winners

- 1st Place: Ayden Rau, Bessemer, MI
- 2nd Place: Josie Hammerstrom, Atlantic Mine, MI
- 3rd Place: Dalten Wagner, Stephenson, MI

Learn more about the NMU Center for Rural Health at: www.nmu.edu/ruralhealth



Expanded Legacy Award

NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR RURAL HEALTH ORAL HEALTH LITERACY INITIATIVE

LLF Michigan partnered with the Northern Michigan University Center for Rural Health, Copper Shores Community Health Foundation, and the Student Leadership Advisory Council of the Keweenaw (SLACK) to expand the Oral Health Literacy Project across Michigan’s Central and Western Upper Peninsula. This project is implemented annually during “March is Reading Month in Michigan.”

Through engaging, age-appropriate reading and hands-on learning, nearly 1,000 second-grade students in 17 elementary schools improved both their reading engagement and oral health knowledge. Using the book *Curious George Visits the Dentist*, students participated in guided reading, interactive discussions, and demonstrations on proper brushing and flossing—led by NMU health sciences students in Marquette and Alger Counties and high school student leaders in Houghton County.

Each child received a copy of the book to take home, along with an oral health kit and family resources to reinforce learning beyond the classroom. A QR code inside the book links to a video read-aloud, extending literacy practice into the home and encouraging shared reading with caregivers. Pre- and post-assessments showed increased understanding of oral hygiene and healthy habits.

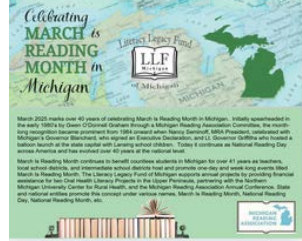


The Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan’s expanded investment in 2025 made it possible to grow this program into the Copper Country. Its new designation as a Legacy Award ensures this evidence-based, literacy-centered project will continue for years to come. By integrating reading, youth mentorship, and health education, this collaboration strengthens literacy skills, supports family learning, and promotes healthier futures for children across rural Michigan.

Special Celebrations

MARCH IS READING MONTH IN MICHIGAN

A special social media campaign was developed to educate the public about the history of “March Is Reading Month In Michigan,” in recognition of more than 40 years since its inception.



Initially spearheaded in the early 1980's, the month-long recognition became prominent in Michigan in 1984, when Michigan's Governor Blanchard signed an Executive Declaration for the celebration, and a balloon launch was held at the state capital with Lansing school children, with then Michigan Reading Association (MRA) President Nancy Seminoff and MRA Committee Chair Gwendolyn O'Donnell (now Graham). It also continues to have an impact as “National Reading Day across America” and has evolved over more than 40 years at the national level.

“March Is Reading Month in Michigan” continues to benefit countless students in Michigan as teachers, local school districts, and intermediate school districts host and promote one-day, week-long, and month-long events as part of this celebration.

Supporting Teachers

MICHIGAN READING ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE SUPPORT

For the 2025 MRA 69th Annual Conference, LLF Michigan was proud to support the keynote speaker luncheon with Author John Schu by providing new paperback copies of his book for a book giveaway during the event. LLF Michigan has been a contributor to MRA's conference for over 15 years, providing professional development awards to assist educators in attending the annual conference and, more recently, assisting with event support.



Cultural Literacy Event

CELEBRATING MARCH IS READING MONTH IN MICHIGAN

LLF Michigan coordinated with Superior Strings Alliance (SSA) Chamber Players to host a special spring Cultural Literacy Event, a "Jane Austen Salon Concert," highlighting music of the Jane Austen era. SSA Chamber Players performed and shared information on Jane Austen's literacy and musical contributions and also assisted with project planning. The First Presbyterian Church of Marquette served as site host and Young Mountain Tea provided tea for the reception. Additional information on the connection between literacy and music is available on the LLF Michigan website: <https://literacylegacyfund.org/events-news-3/>.

Pictured below, Superior Strings Alliance Chamber Players Danielle Simandl (violin), Dr. Theresa Camilli (piano) and Adam Hall (cello) perform for the Cultural Literacy Event as part of "March is Reading Month in Michigan." SSA Chamber Players perform professional chamber music concerts throughout Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Pictured at right, guests enjoy a Jane Austen-themed reception as part of the event with information on LLF Michigan activities and opportunities to donate.



Fundraising Fun

TRENARY TOAST CAFE AND DOLLY PARTON'S IMAGINATION LIBRARY READING IS SWEET EVENT

LLF Michigan and Trenary Toast Cafe collaborated for “Reading is Sweet” – a week-long fundraiser and enrollment campaign celebrating 30 years of Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library (DPIL). Community members in the Marquette and surrounding areas were invited to Trenary Toast Cafe during the celebration to learn about the program and sign up for DPIL.

Trenary Toast Cafe donated proceeds from the sale of a special strawberry sparkle lemonade (created specifically for the event). They also offered coupons for free cinnamon rolls to families who enrolled children under five in DPIL during the “Reading is Sweet” event online or in person.

Representatives from LLF Michigan were on-site for a special registration day at the cafe to help answer questions and sign up children in local DPIL programs. Funds raised helped to support DPIL Marquette 49855.



READING IS SWEET LITERACY CELEBRATION
August 11 - 15th, 2025

Trenary Toast Cafe is proud to partner with **Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan**

Pair your...
Strawberry Sparkle Lemonade
with...
Cinnamon Roll
French Toast
Avocado Toast
a BLT
...or more!

Portion of proceeds benefit...
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library!

FREE BOOK EACH MONTH FOR CHILD 0 to 5th BIRTHDAY IN THE 49855 ZIP CODE. See www.imaginationlibrary.org for details.

Celebrating 30 Years

Fundraising Initiatives

TEXAS ROADHOUSE DINE TO DONATE

LLF Michigan loaded up Dolly's life-size cutout and invited organization supporters and the community to a "Dine to Donate" Texas Roadhouse Fundraiser to support Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL). Patrons came out to enjoy delicious Roadhouse fare, with the restaurant giving back 10% of meal sales for the night to LLF Michigan.

It was a fun evening of activity, held just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday, which served as a potential break for those hosting and planning a big holiday meal. Participants had the opportunity to learn about LLF Michigan and DPIL as well as to register children under age five to receive free DPIL books. A total of \$470 was raised for LLF Michigan by this special fundraising event.



Donor Appreciation

BREWS & BITES



A special "Brews & Bites" LLF Michigan donor appreciation reception was held October 4, 2025, to celebrate those who support literacy. LLF Michigan President Nancy Seminoff, gave each participant a chance to visit, celebrate LLF Michigan efforts and partnerships, and escape from the rain during a chilly fall day.

Giving Tuesday

RURAL LIBRARY BOOK DISTRIBUTION

Literacy Legacy Fund of Michigan donated new children's books to rural libraries in both Upper and Lower Michigan as part of an extended GivingTuesday celebration. Twenty-eight books were distributed by LLF Michigan leadership, overseen by Laura Lamp, Advisory Group member and project coordinator. The books selected for 2025 were: *Dream* by Barbara O'Connor, *The Luminous Life of Lucy Landry* by Anna Rose Johnson, and *Josie Dances* by Denise Lajimodiere. The project reached six Upper Peninsula and six Lower Peninsula counties.

Libraries that received *Dream* included AuTrain-Onota Public School Library, Forsyth Township Public Library, Ishpeming Carnegie Public Library, Millington Arbela District Library, Montmorency County Public Library – Lewiston Branch, and Powell Township School Library.

Libraries that received *Josie Dances* are Mackinaw Area Public Library, Negaunee Public Library, Ontonagon Township Library, Otsego County Library – Johannesburg Branch, Republic-Michigamme School Public Library, and Richmond Township Library.

Libraries that received *The Luminous Life of Lucy Landry* included Bayliss Public Library, Mackinac Island Public Library, Mancelona Township Library, Mayville District Public Library, Montmorency County Public Library – Atlanta and Hillman Branches, Munising School Public Library, Ojibwa Community Library, Pellston Branch Library, Presque Isle District Library – Grand Lake, Millersburg, Onaway, Posen and Rogers City, Superior Central School Library, and Wells Township School Library.

LLF Michigan's 2024 GivingTuesday project was highlighted in a special 2025 case study and shared as part of the organization's outreach across the U.S. and other countries. The impact report demonstrated how small acts of generosity can inspire other giving efforts. Additional information is available at <https://literacylegacyfund.org/giving-tuesday/>.

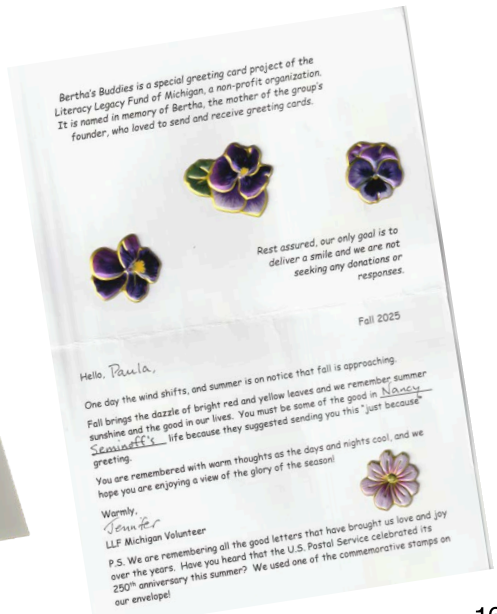


Creating Connections

BERTHA'S BUDDIES CORRESPONDENCE PROGRAM

LLF Michigan once again hosted its Bertha's Buddies program, a special correspondence project that brings joy into the lives of adults, usually, but not limited to, senior citizens who may not receive an abundance of personal mail during the year. This project was initiated in memory of Bertha Wiseman, mother of the LLF Michigan founder, and was launched by the Board in February 2021. Bertha loved to send cards to those who were often alone to extend to them a ray of sunshine.

In 2025, LLF Michigan partnered again with Little Brothers - Friends of the Elderly Upper Michigan Chapter to send cards. Approximately 149 cards were sent to Upper and Lower Michigan individuals through the spring and fall mailings. Participants received uplifting cards with stickers and a positive message. Each card reflects the individual recommending the recipient to receive a card. LLF Michigan invites and encourages the community to nominate those who may benefit from such correspondence by reaching out to the LLF Michigan office or website at literacylegacyfund.org.



School Literacy Efforts

THE DICTIONARY PROJECT MARQUETTE LIONS CLUB

LLF Michigan supported the Marquette Lions Club's The Dictionary Project in partnership with Mary and Larry Larson. This initiative puts brand-new dictionaries into the hands of third-grade students at no cost, provides them with a lifelong resource to support literacy, and encourages learning. Dictionaries act as a frontline resource for aspiring writers. Through this project, LLF Michigan reached five Upper Peninsula elementary schools, providing resources to 237 students.



Some impacts from using a dictionary include: fostering a deepening of understanding of language, building more independent learners, improving both vocabulary and comprehension, supporting better writing, encouraging creativity and self-directed problem solving, improving research, critical thinking, and confidence, learning context and nuance...to name a few.

Independent learning and self-directed learning help the young mind grow and desire learning. In effect, dictionaries don't just provide us with words — they teach us how to understand and utilize words. Used correctly and thoughtfully, they're powerful tools for lifelong learning. Together, these partnerships support lifelong literacy.



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We're honored to have this annual business support, and
we are grateful for all our donors!

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