

## [Parton pours herself a cup of ambition](#) [1]

Written by [Anton Howes](#) [2] | Monday 7 March 2011



The singer Dolly Parton is [extending her Imagination Library scheme to cover all of Scotland](#) [3]. Having already established itself in various communities in the UK and North America, the project distributes a free book every month to children under five. Unlike Philip Pullman, who campaigned to maintain taxpayer funding for libraries, Mrs Parton is demonstrating that government doesn't have to provide all services. Whilst admittedly working with local authorities, funding comes from local businesses, schools, education foundations and other civic organisations.

The Imagination Library is a key example of how communities and society can self-organise to care for some of the most disadvantaged in society. It's also an example of how celebrities ought to be acting. Instead of dismissing the whole idea as "patronising nonsense", Dolly Parton is acting on something she's passionate about, putting her money where her mouth is and encouraging others to volunteer their efforts too.

But imagine if the government had tried to provide this scheme itself. Instead of relying on the voluntary contributions and passion of individuals and groups, it would have been funded through taxation, the costs dispersed over the entire population. There would have been little or no incentive for Mrs Parton to try to move the organisation to Scotland.

Politicians would also not have quite the same passion and drive for providing the service - after all, it's not their own money they're spending, so it's not as if it holds the same value to them as a voluntary investment. Trying to increase funding would then mean taking more money from people rather than encouraging them to volunteer it, further limiting the scope for expansion and innovation.

This dispersal of costs through taxation is particularly significant - statisticians and socialists often argue that we have a moral obligation to pay taxes. But really, arguing for higher taxes and public spending is arguing for us to disperse personal moral responsibility for others, onto others. The tax system removes us from any direct emotional attachment to those who benefit from our money. It transforms a very personal investment of compassion into an impersonal financial burden. Dolly Parton is just one of many examples showing we don't have to.

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