

2025 Harriet Larson Founders Grant Winner

Friends of the Salem-South Lyon District Library



The Friends of Michigan Libraries awards the Harriet Larson Founders Grant up to twice annually. This year the Friends of Salem-South Lyon District Library were awarded the grant for their innovative approach to awarding a scholarship to a high school senior. Here is what they did. It is a great story about how a Friends group challenged their high school seniors and in doing so brought together their community and highlighted the great work of their library staff.

Last year, their Friends board decided to advocate for their library in a unique way – by offering a scholarship to local graduating seniors that would celebrate the impact and the potential of community libraries. The students didn't need to work or volunteer for the library. What they did need to do was show – through a written piece, visual artwork, music or other genre – what kind of impact their wonderful Salem-South Lyon District Library has had on them growing up, and what they saw as their library's future role within the community. They called it the **"Imagine the Possibilities"** scholarship, and it was inspired by SSLDL's stated goals to foster lifelong learning, enhance community awareness and involvement, and engage community youth in literacy, technology and learning.

They had only one criterion: that the applicant needed to be a high school senior residing within the South Lyon Community Schools district or who had an SSLDL library card. No minimum GPA, transcripts or letters of recommendation were required, and the scholarship winner could apply funds toward any 2-year or 4-year college, university, trade or technical school, or certificate program.

The response to this scholarship opportunity has been tremendous. It has increased the visibility of both their Friends group and the SSLDL within the greater community – through school bulletins, community Facebook pages and more, we're reaching families who might not be regular library users or, if they are, might not know much about what our Friends group does. It has shown library staff just how valuable they are to the youth and our entire community – in these times, when there are threats to ban books or reduce federal funding to vital library services, this local scholarship program has reminded our amazing librarians what a difference they make to people, and the countless ways in which community librarianship absolutely matters. And, just as importantly, it has asked our young leaders and future voters to consider the invaluable role that libraries play for everyone.

The SSLDL, Friends members, volunteers, school staff and people throughout the community all helped spread the word about this wonderful local scholarship opportunity. They also work alongside the library's marketing team to develop scholarship flyers, list in library newsletters, and post on social media. Although all of this help was free, its value is priceless because so many people feel invested in the scholarship program – we all want it to succeed!



"Connecting Friends Across Michigan"