



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation

Impact Report 2025

Families like Sarah and Noah's
remind us why every child
deserves the gift of
early literacy.



A Message From Our Leadership

Shaping Canada's Future

The earliest years shape everything.

Talking, singing, reading, and sharing stories with children from birth all build the brain connections that allow them to thrive in school and in life. Children surrounded by words are more likely to succeed academically, enjoy better health, and participate fully in society.

Yet Canada faces a literacy crisis. One million children under the age of 15 have below grade-level literacy skills. This is unacceptable. Children who start school behind are far more likely to remain behind, limiting their opportunities and compounding inequities over a lifetime. Even modest improvements in literacy strengthen outcomes for children and generate significant long-term benefits for Canada's economy and well-being.

It's not too late to change this trajectory. This year, we expanded our *Early Words* program, extending literacy promotion from healthcare into early learning settings. Through the program, healthcare providers and early years educators are steadily reaching more families each year, creating a powerful, integrated network of support during children's most formative years.

We are also launching a national public awareness campaign on early literacy. Through a powerful Public Service Announcement and engaging content, the campaign will raise awareness, spark a national conversation, and inspire families to make reading part of daily routines. By amplifying trusted voices and sharing simple, joyful strategies, we will foster meaningful parent-child connections and help ensure more children grow up with the skills and confidence to thrive.

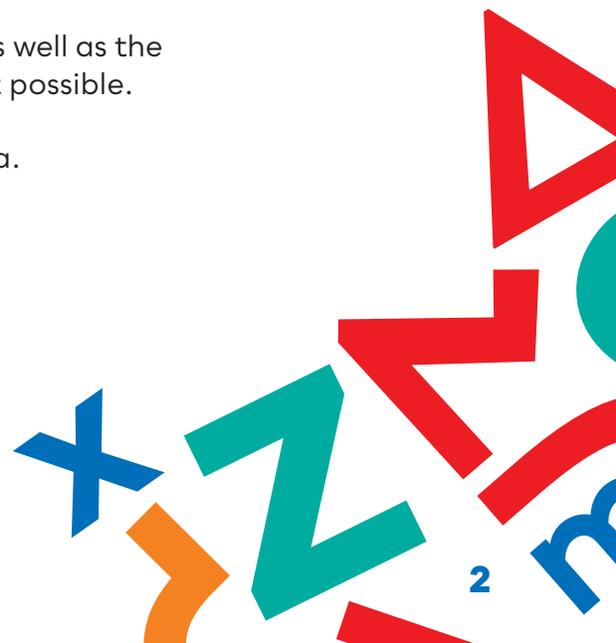
We are grateful to our dedicated donors, partners, and staff, as well as the families we serve. Your commitment makes every achievement possible.

Together, we are changing the story for children across Canada.

Heather Reisman and Heather Munroe-Blum

Co-Chairs & Co-Founders

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation



Our Progress at a Glance

In 2025, *Early Words* expanded through strategic partnerships with the Canadian Child Care Federation and public health clinics in key jurisdictions, deepening engagement from public health teams and dramatically increasing our impact.

More families learned about the program through their healthcare providers, more early years educators attended training sessions, and additional medical education presentations highlighted literacy in paediatric care – resulting in growth in reach, training, and partnerships nationwide.



6,011%

increase in the number of early years educators trained, going from **36** in 2024 to **2,200** in 2025.*

28%

increase in the number of publicly operated clinics (public health and community health centres) offering *Early Words*, going from **86** in 2024 to **110** in 2025.



17%

increase in total number of children reached, going from **64,000** in 2024 to **75,000** in 2025.



66%

increase in healthcare providers trained, going from **452** in 2024 to **751** in 2025.



34%

increase in number of books distributed, going from **50,200** in 2024 to **67,032** in 2025.



*The large increase is due to the launch of our *Early Words for Early Years Educators* program.

A Literacy Moment That Lasts

How Sarah and Noah Found Literacy During a Checkup



Sarah Sankar and Noah Sankar-Schuster

“Every time we read together, Noah is building vocabulary and learning how to understand the world.” Sarah believes literacy-focused conversations during healthcare visits offer something powerful: trust. “Families may not always know how important early literacy is,” she says. “But when it’s brought up by someone they trust, it opens the door to learning and connection.”

Noah has been a patient at St. Boniface Hospital – ACF Pediatrics since he was two weeks old, under the care of Dr. Annika Klopp. From the very beginning, literacy has been part of Noah’s health journey.

To donors, her message is simple: “Thank you. Please continue supporting this work. These small moments and conversations make a big difference in the lives of families like mine.”

“I remember Dr. Klopp telling me it was okay for Noah to explore books with all his senses – even if that meant chewing on them as a baby,” Sarah says. “That small reassurance stayed with me. It was the first time a healthcare provider talked to me about early literacy.”

Now three-and-a-half years old, Noah is full of energy and curiosity. Reading together has become a cornerstone of his development. “It reminded me that literacy isn’t just about stories,” Sarah explains. “It’s about communication, confidence, and long-term health.”

“ Families may not always know how important early literacy is, but when it’s brought up by someone they trust, it opens the door to learning and connection. ”

Sarah Sankar, parent and Early Words program participant.





Dr. Alika Lafontaine on Literacy as a Pathway to Equity and Health

CCLF Board Member and Indigenous physician championing early literacy

Dr. Alika Lafontaine has long believed that literacy is more than just a skill: it's a pathway to equity, empowerment, and health. As an Indigenous physician in Alberta and the former President of the Canadian Medical Association, he sees early literacy's impact on health and well-being daily – but he also has personal experience with it.

In grade school, Dr. Lafontaine was diagnosed with a learning disability, and his parents were told by school officials that he'd never graduate high school. "I had difficulty hearing and making the sounds I was supposed to be reading," he recalls. "At that time the prevailing opinion was that kids like me were untreatable."

Dr. Lafontaine's parents never gave up on him. They walked through countless doors until they found experts who understood that fostering language and literacy required his family to be as much a part of overcoming his challenges as the education and health professionals supporting him. Seeing firsthand how literacy support from trusted adults could benefit children like him left a lasting impact. "Being able to read and express yourself through language is a necessary aspect of inclusion and equity," he says. "If people aren't literate in the languages they need to navigate education, health, or employment, their ability to advocate for themselves will be limited. Literacy isn't just a social good – it's a necessity for a thriving society."

That conviction stayed with him into adulthood, shaping his commitment to increasing early literacy support for others, and ultimately his decision to join the Board of Directors of the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation in 2018.

At CCLF, he contributes his knowledge and experience to the organization's healthcare programming, shaping initiatives like *Early Words* that meet children and caregivers where they are through tools that make a lasting difference.



*Dr. Alika Lafontaine, MD, FRCPC
Board Member, Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation*

Early Words for Healthcare Professionals

Since 2020, *Early Words for Healthcare Professionals* has integrated early literacy promotion into healthcare settings through provider training, practical resources for families, and high-quality children's books. The evidence for this approach is compelling: **families are two-and-a-half times more likely to read to their children if they are advised to do so by a healthcare provider.**

This year, the program expanded to another 25 clinics, reaching a total of 121 sites in nine provinces and all three territories. Since launch, we've distributed 175,000 books to families in clinics and hospitals throughout the country and trained 2,400 professionals to have conversations with families about early literacy.

As a recognized leader in early literacy and early relational health, we continue to reach both medical learners and practising providers through medical education sessions at universities and hospitals, including Academic Half-Days for residents, hospital Grand Rounds, and in-service training.

Looking ahead, we're expanding partnerships with medical education programs while collaborating with public health departments and regional health authorities to embed early literacy into regional child health and development systems. Together, we're co-creating approaches that are locally relevant and align with community and government priorities.



2025 Medical Education Partners:

- University of British Columbia – Faculty of Medicine (Vancouver)
- University of Western Ontario – Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry (London)
- McMaster University – Michael G. DeGroot School of Medicine (Hamilton)
- University of Saskatchewan – College of Medicine (Saskatoon)
- Centre hospitalier universitaire de Sherbrooke (Sherbrooke)
- Health Sciences Centre Winnipeg (Winnipeg)
- St. Michael's Hospital/Unity Health (Toronto)
- IWK Health Centre (Halifax)
- St. Mary's Hospital Centre (Montreal)





McMaster paediatric residents Nadia Narendran (left) and Lina Chen (right) presenting their study *New Chapters: Addressing Literacy Insecurity Through Family Reading* at the Canadian Paediatric Society Annual Conference 2025.

New Chapters: How two residents are tackling early literacy in healthcare

In 2024, McMaster paediatric residents Dr. Nadia Narendran and Dr. Lina Chen were attending the Canadian Paediatric Society's annual conference when they came across the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation's booth.

Having long been passionate about the connection between literacy and health, they were thrilled to see an organization advocating for increased literacy promotion in healthcare settings. "We know that early literacy has a profound influence on things like academic achievement, health outcomes, and long-term economic success," they explained. "In Hamilton and the surrounding area, a lot of children lack access to age-appropriate books and supportive materials due to systemic barriers, and if those barriers go unaddressed, it can negatively impact the children's future health."

Inspired by CCLF's work, the pair set out to conduct a clinical study entitled *New Chapters: Addressing Literacy Insecurity Through Family Reading*. Like CCLF's *Early Words for Healthcare Professionals* program, the project seeks to make literacy promotion a part of routine care.

"Our aim is to not only address immediate literacy needs, but also to foster a long-term commitment to reading and learning within all families."

New Chapters provides families with literacy support kits which include books, literacy activity guides, and valuable information on local community resources, such as guidance on how to register for library cards, details about reading programs, and contact information for literacy support organizations.

The project also focuses on ensuring healthcare professionals are aware of the importance of literacy as a determinant of health. To that end, Drs. Narendran and Chen invited the *Early Words* team to deliver an Academic Half-Day session on early literacy promotion to the residents at McMaster in August. This session was designed to help the residents feel equipped to address literacy even in the limited time available in clinical settings.

"By having CCLF share this information with the next generation of healthcare professionals, our hope is that we're helping close the literacy gap and promoting a culture of reading that is inclusive of all voices and experiences in our community."

Our Kids' Health Partnership

Bringing Inclusive Early Literacy Resources to Families Across Canada



On Family Literacy Day, we announced an exciting new partnership with Our Kids' Health (OKH) Network, based at St. Michael's Hospital, Unity Health Toronto.

Together, we are launching a series of online resources that promote evidence-based early literacy practices at home in collaboration with healthcare providers. These resources will be available across multiple cultural-linguistic channels, with the number continuing to grow as the platform expands. The series includes demonstrational videos that will also be integrated into our upcoming healthcare provider training programs.

Our Kids' Health is an online platform dedicated to children's health, wellness, and development. By offering resources in 10 languages and prioritizing cultural representation, OKH provides parents and caregivers with expert advice, practical information, and tools to help their children flourish.

This partnership reflects our shared mission to provide accessible, inclusive, and culturally relevant resources. By working together, we are strengthening our ability to reach underserved families, helping them navigate the diverse challenges of raising children in today's society, and giving every child the foundation they need for literacy success.



Helping Families Build Brighter Beginnings

Made Possible Through the Strength of Partnership

Early Words is reaching families in almost every province and territory, from urban clinics to remote northern communities, ensuring more children begin life with the strong literacy foundations they need to thrive.

Over the years, the *Early Words* program has brought special moments to families all over the country: Elders in Sanikiluaq, Nunavut gathered with young families to share traditional stories; in Toronto, providers conduct a neonatal follow up visit with a premature baby who was previously in the NICU and is now thriving; and in Winnipeg, baby Jasper sat on his mother's lap as they read together during a clinic visit, guided by their healthcare provider. These moments reflect the program's reach and its power to connect generations.

With culturally meaningful books in hand and guidance from trusted healthcare providers, caregivers feel more confident, children are more engaged, and communities are better connected. Together, we're helping to make early literacy a standard part of every child's healthcare journey — a vision made possible through the commitment of partners like Waltons Trust.

Early Words for Early Years Educators

Early years educators are well-positioned to help children develop pre-literacy skills, yet gaps remain in their knowledge and practice of the subject.

To address this need, we launched *Early Words for Early Years Educators*, a training initiative that provides educators with research-backed tools to support early language and literacy development in children aged 0–5.

The program offers a foundational literacy module made up of three workshops that help educators use everyday moments such as play, storytelling, and reading aloud to build key early literacy skills.

Developed with experts, these trainings are accredited through the Canadian Child Care Federation.

Nearly 2,200 educators have been trained through virtual and in-person sessions. Training has been delivered in partnership with the following organizations:

- NetWORDing
- Centretown Ottawa
- The Beguiling/Little Island Comics
- The Canadian Child Care Federation
- Early Childhood Development Association of PEI
- Social Research and Demonstration Corporation
- Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador
- YMCA of Southwestern Ontario

Next year, we aim to connect with early childhood education programs nationwide, enabling even more early years educators to support literacy from the very start.



Empowering Educators

How an early investment paved the way for the *Early Words* for Early Years Educators Program

Thanks to early seed funding from the Hewitt Foundation, we've built strong national momentum to equip early childhood educators with the tools and confidence to nurture literacy in the earliest years.

Since their investment, a national advisory group of experts has come together to guide the work, a bilingual structured literacy curriculum has been developed, and workshops are already reaching thousands

of educators. Partnerships with major early childhood education associations, like the Canadian Child Care Federation, are paving the way for accreditation and nationwide delivery.

This early boost has accelerated progress, attracted new funding, and set the stage for lasting change — ensuring more children in early years programs develop the strong literacy foundations they need to thrive.



What Would It Take...

A National Roadmap for Early Literacy

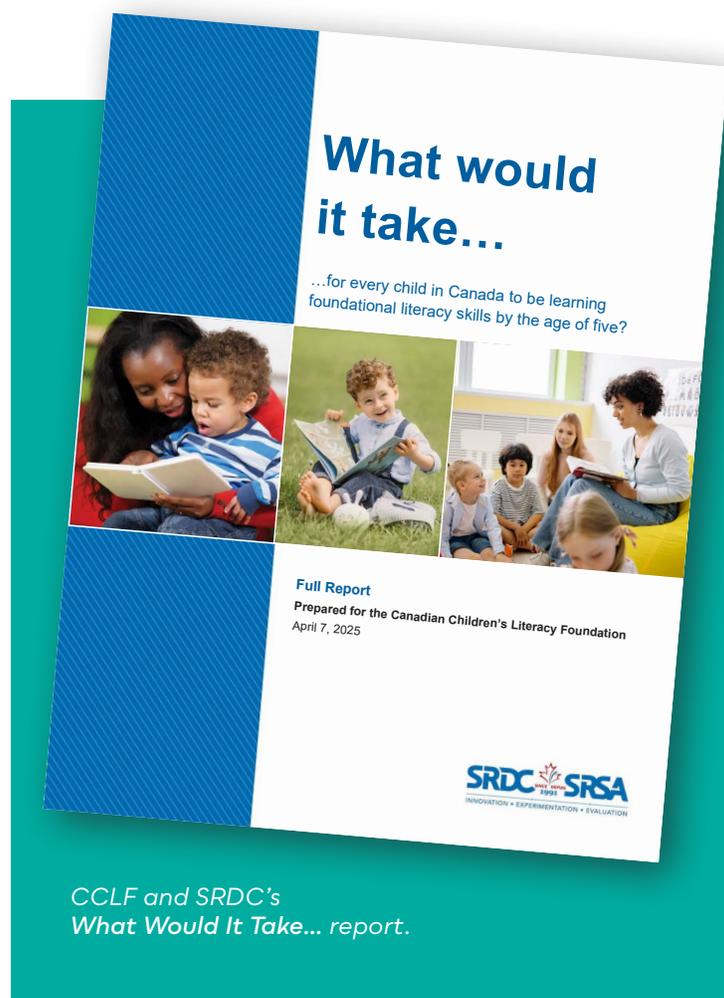
In June 2025, CCLF released *What Would It Take...*, the first evidence-informed roadmap to achieving early literacy equity across Canada. Commissioned by CCLF and authored by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation, with support from the Max Bell Foundation and Rotary Club of Downtown Calgary, the report asks: *What would it take for every child in Canada to be learning the five foundational literacy skills for reading by age five?*

We launched the report in partnership with the Canadian Child Care Federation to nearly 300 childcare administrators and policy leaders from all levels across Canada. The report provides comprehensive analysis and actionable recommendations to ensure all children begin school with essential literacy foundations.

Key findings highlight urgent needs in three areas:

- High-quality early childhood education programs
- Structured evidence-based literacy instruction
- System-level responses to persistent challenges like childcare shortages, workforce gaps, and the absence of a national pre-literacy curriculum

The report presents a bold vision for national collaboration across governments, educators, families, and community organizations. By calling for foundational literacy to be embedded into the Canadian Early Learning and Child Care system, *What Would It Take...* charts a path for how Canada can advance long-term literacy and social equity.



CCLF and SRDC's
What Would It Take... report.

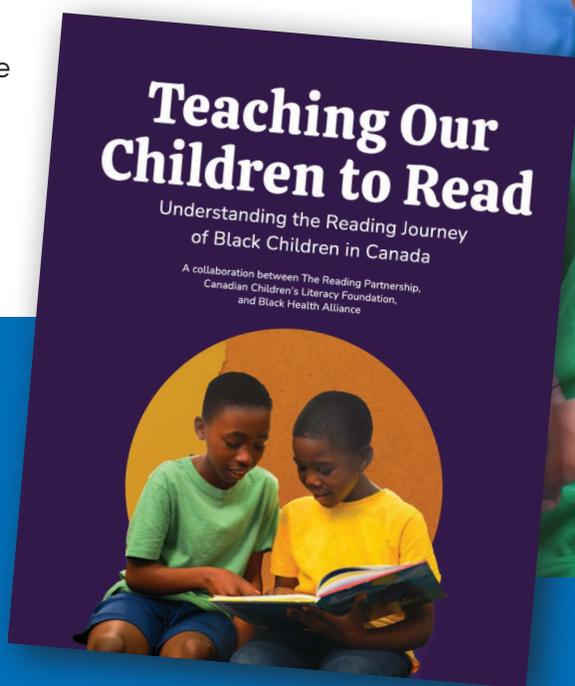


Teaching Our Children to Read

Understanding the Reading Journey of Black Children in Canada

Although literacy is a human right, it is currently being denied to far too many children in Canada – particularly Black children. For the past three years, CCLF has been collaborating with The Reading Partnership and Black Health Alliance on a first-of-its-kind study on the reading journeys of Black children.

Teaching Our Children to Read dives into the systemic, institutional, and sociocultural barriers experienced by Black children in Canada, and how these challenges limit their future education and employment opportunities. It aims to shed light on the issues that Black families and service providers face when teaching Black children to read, and to identify opportunities for government, educators, local agencies, and community members to get involved and ensure that the right to read is realized for all Black children in Canada.



CCLF, The Reading Partnership, and Black Health Alliance's *Teaching Our Children to Read* report.

A National Call to Read Together

Establishing the Foundation for a Campaign That Sparks Daily Connection

Too many children in Canada are falling behind in literacy and reading, but we can change this. It starts with awareness.

CCLF is working on launching a direct-to-family public awareness campaign that will inspire all Canadians to create a daily reading ritual with the young children in their lives, starting with as little as 10 minutes a day. Research has shown that children who are read to daily from birth perform better

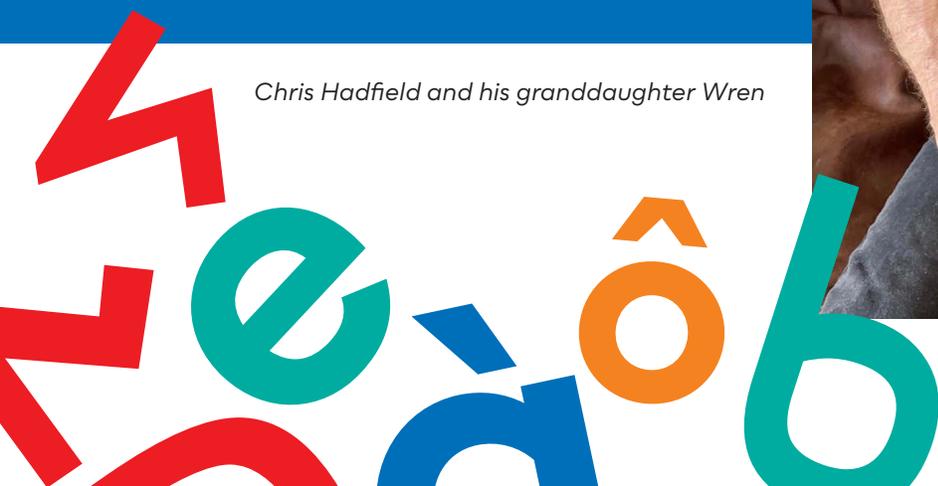
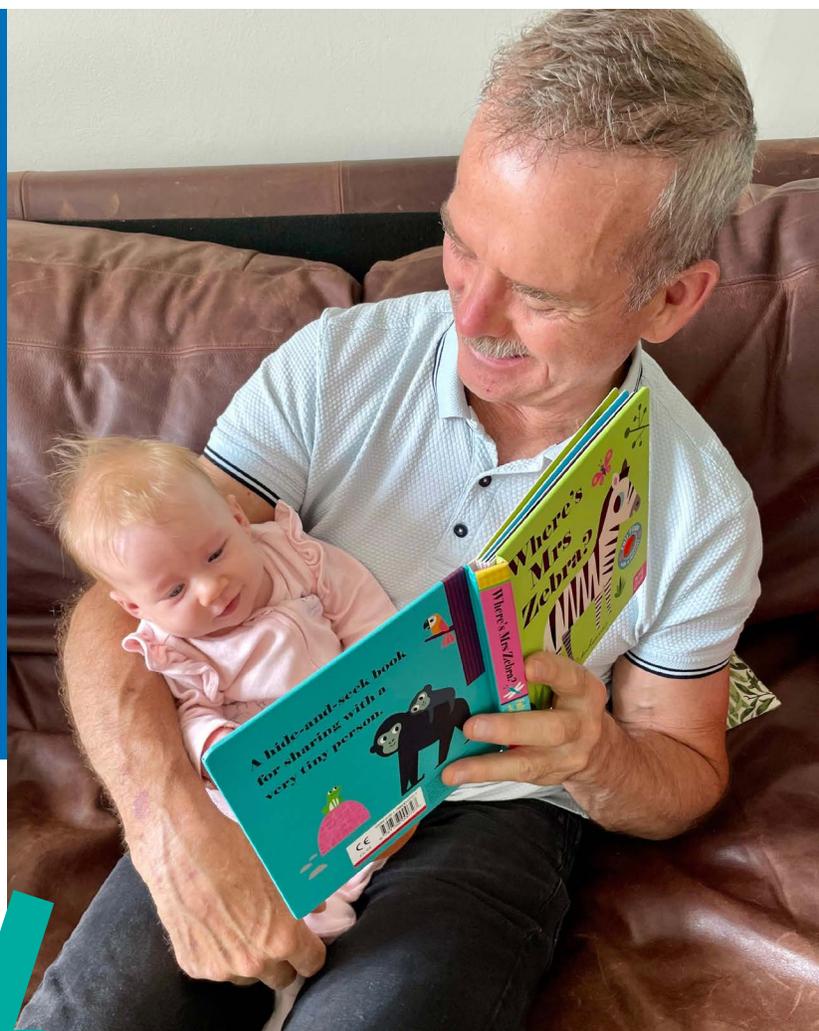
in language, literacy, and cognitive tests when they reach preschool and school age – setting them up for success in school and in life.

Families are a child's first and most important educators. This campaign – which will leverage CCLF's existing healthcare and early learning distribution channels to reach families – will remind them of the power they hold to shape their children's future through small, everyday actions.

“Reading with my granddaughter is one of life's greatest joys – it's where imagination takes flight and bonds are built. The foundation for lifelong learning begins in those earliest moments, with a book and a loving voice. That's why I'm proud to support the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation and their work to give every child in Canada the chance to grow up with the stories, skills, and confidence they need to reach their full potential.”

Chris Hadfield, Retired Astronaut, Author, and Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation Board Member

Chris Hadfield and his granddaughter Wren



Financial Overview

Every Dollar Is an Investment in Children's Futures

At the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation, we are committed to strong financial stewardship and transparency. Each year, we carefully manage our resources so that donor contributions and partner investments are used effectively to advance early literacy across Canada.

Our audited financial statements — which provide a detailed account of our revenue, expenses, and fund balances — are available on our website.



Our Supporters

Our achievements in 2025 were made possible by the generosity of our funders, sponsors, partners, and hundreds of individual donors. We're deeply grateful to everyone helping us make a difference for children and families throughout the country.

We are pleased to acknowledge the support of the following funders who generously contributed \$5,000 or more in financial or in-kind support between October 1, 2024, and September 30, 2025.



Jordan and Faith Banks



Max Bell Foundation



Peter Mansbridge Charitable Foundation



A Lifelong Reader, A Lifelong Believer

Why Margaret Mackey Gives Monthly



Margaret Mackey,
lifelong educator
and CCLF monthly
donor

For Margaret, the joy of reading with a child is more than a cherished memory — it's a lifelong passion.

A monthly donor since 2021, Margaret has been a steady supporter of the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation's mission to make early literacy a priority in Canada.

A retired teacher, librarian, and university professor in Alberta, Margaret has spent her life helping children discover the magic of stories. "Bringing young children and books together is a very high priority for me," she says. "That window of opportunity is relatively short, but the impact can last forever."

Throughout her career — and in her roles as a sister, parent, aunt, and grandparent — Margaret has witnessed how early experiences with reading can shape a child's world. "Even very young readers can develop fascinating insights into what makes reading 'go' in the mind," she says.

To her, supporting early literacy is essential. "Some children grow up surrounded by books, with easy access to stories, time to read, and the freedom to choose what speaks to them. But not every child has those opportunities. Supporting early literacy helps close that gap, ensuring every child can experience the joy and confidence that comes from being a reader."



Margaret's favourite children's book? *The Elephant and the Bad Baby* — a go-to read with her grandchildren that still makes her smile. These shared reading moments, she says, are more than stories. They're memories, foundations, and the beginning of lifelong learning.

"Please support this work," she says. "There's nothing quite like watching a child become a reader and realizing that, with the right support, they've always had that power within them."

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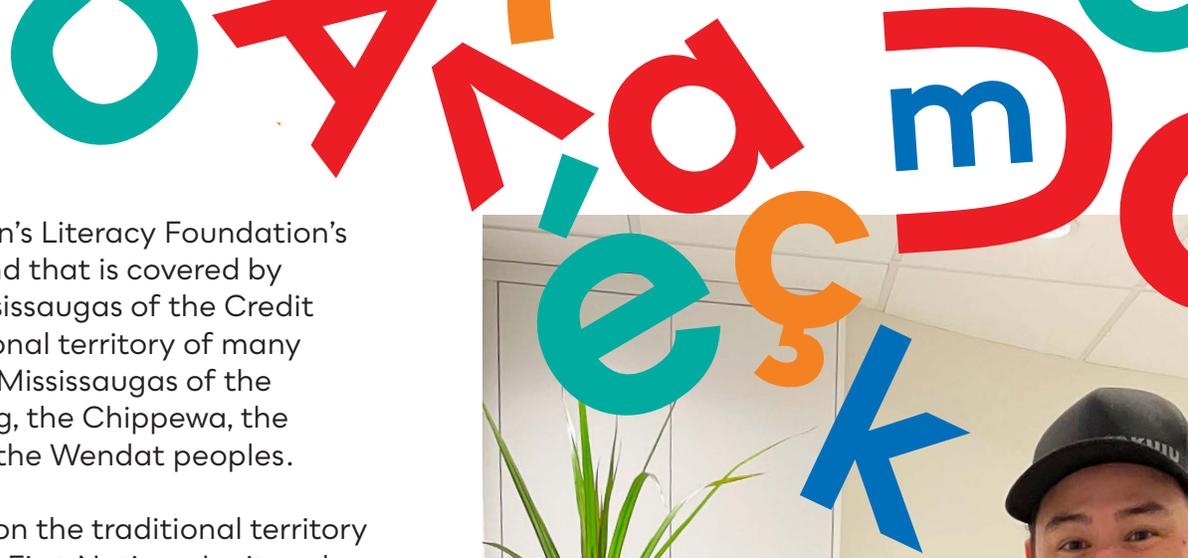
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A special thanks to the following people who helped deliver our vision over the last year:
Ariel Siller, Nina J. Shukla, Lise Johnston, Hajar Seiyad, and Amulanga Khechieva.



The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation's office is located on land that is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit and that is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

Our work takes place on the traditional territory and enduring home of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples across the country now known as Canada. Core to our beliefs is that oral and written storytelling contribute to honouring, respecting, and protecting the languages and cultures of Indigenous Peoples, who have lived here for millennia.

We are committed to learning about the traditions and current realities of the Indigenous Peoples of this land. We strive to listen to and learn from Indigenous ways of nurturing literacy in children and to support those traditions in communities where we are invited to work together.

Charitable Registration No. 714760923 RR 0001



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