

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation

Building a brighter, more literate future for all children in Canada

2020 – Year in review





Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Message from the Co-Chairs and CEO

It's clear that people who have strong literacy skills are better able to navigate the many challenges facing Canadians, especially in this year of unrelenting adversity.

Strong literacy allows us to separate fact from fiction. It supports informed decisions about life's necessities. It enables us to communicate messages of hope and empathy. It lets us escape into books. Literacy is a core ingredient in learning new skills and adapting and moving forward with confidence.

Literacy shapes our whole lives, and it begins in early childhood.

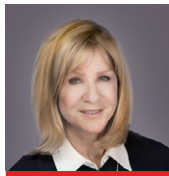
The sobering reality is that over one million of our children are struggling to read well enough to keep up with school expectations and their peers. Many of these kids never catch up. Learning disruptions caused by COVID-19 will make it even harder, with the greatest impact on kids who are already the most vulnerable.

That's why the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation is committed to supporting children and families to ensure all our children have access to early childhood learning opportunities and resources during this pandemic and beyond. Read on to see how our vision is coming to life.

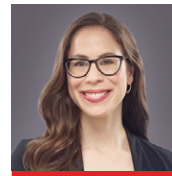
As we all seek an equitable, inclusive recovery from the pandemic, we need to pursue a Canada in which all children have the necessary literacy skills to reach their full potential and contribute to Canada's success. We invite all Canadians to join with us in pursuit of that goal. Our kids are counting on us.



Heather Munroe-Blum
Co-Founder & Co-Chair



Heather Reisman
Co-Founder & Co-Chair



Ariel R. Siller
Chief Executive Officer

Our vision is a Canada in which
all children develop the literacy skills
they need to reach their full potential.

Together we are building a brighter and more literate future for all children in Canada

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation has a big mission: to ensure that all children in Canada are equipped with the literacy skills they need to reach their full potential.

We were founded in 2017 by Canadian leaders Heather Munroe-Blum and Heather Reisman, who recognized the inequities in children's literacy development across the country. Our goal is to drive change that will enable children in Canada to become the most literate in the world.

A strong start on the road to reading can make a big difference to a child's success in school and life. Talking, singing and sharing books with children, from birth, builds a solid foundation that will help them become confident readers.¹ Surrounding young

children with words in a nurturing environment builds attachment, empathy, and social and emotional skills. It helps build rich vocabularies, and knowledge of letters, sounds and words.² This all helps young kids to learn to read, which is central to thriving at school.

A baby's brain develops millions of new neural connections every second. It is important to make the most of the critical years before age five to help set the stage for reading.³



¹ Canadian Paediatric Society. (2018, January). Read, speak, sing to your baby: How parents can promote literacy from birth. Caring for Kids. https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/read_speak_sing_to_your_baby

² The Reading Agency. (2015, June). Literature review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment. BOP Consulting. <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/The%20Impact%20of%20Reading%20for%20Pleasure%20and%20Empowerment.pdf>

³ Center on the Developing Child. (2007). InBrief: The science of early childhood development. Harvard University. <https://46y5eh11fhgw3ve3ytpwxt9r-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/03/InBrief-The-Science-of-Early-Childhood-Development2.pdf>

“Literacy is one of the most powerful tools we can give our children. It impacts them in a way that cannot be overstated. It should not be seen as a gift, but as a right. The right to read.”



Peter Mansbridge
Journalist, Author and Canadian
Children's Literacy Foundation
Board Member



Children who have limited exposure to words and books in the early years are less prepared to learn when they reach school age. This is due to gaps in important areas, including communication and social-emotional skills, and weaker knowledge of books and words. In Canada, approximately one quarter of kids start Grade 1 without the fundamental skills they need to learn to read.⁴ Many of these children never catch up.

The reasons are complex. Many families do not have access to resources to help their children build early literacy skills. For some families, resources like libraries or early literacy programs are not available or easily accessible in the community or families don't know about them. Some families may avoid book-based activities fearing they don't read well enough.

Or, they may not understand the value of talking or singing with a baby who is too young to talk or sing themselves. And some families may have been told, or shown, that their language and culture were not valued.

Approximately one million Canadian children under the age of 15 are estimated to have below-grade-level literacy skills.⁵

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these issues and the consequences could be generational. That is why our work is focused on addressing inequities and supporting an inclusive pandemic recovery.

⁴ Offord, D., & Janus, M. (2018). *The early development instrument* [Fact sheet]. EDI: Early Development Instrument. <https://edi-offordcentre.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/01/EDI-fact-sheet-2018.pdf>

⁵ Deloitte LLP. (2020, November). *An economic overview of children's literacy in Canada*. Deloitte LLP. <https://childrensliteracy.ca/ccif/media/PDFs/Deloitte-Report-An-Economic-Overview-of-Children-s-Literacy-in-Canada.pdf>

2020 Program Highlights

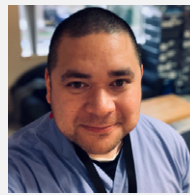
Supporting families through innovative early literacy programs

Early Words/Premiers mots: Healthcare providers as literacy champions

Nearly all Canadians with young children connect with healthcare providers. Decades of research show that families are twice as likely to read, speak and sing with their babies when their healthcare provider talks with them about how important it is to do so.⁶ However, this type of structured healthcare-based early literacy counselling is still relatively uncommon in Canada.

To change this, we are working with our Health Leaders Council of preeminent healthcare professionals and with local community groups who have deep knowledge of community-specific needs and expertise in culturally relevant content. Together we are developing the innovative **Early Words/Premiers mots** program.

“As I reflect on the key influencers who helped me overcome barriers to reading as a child, I know firsthand the impact that health providers have on children’s reading journeys.”



Dr. Alike Lafontaine
Anesthesiologist, Past
President Indigenous Physicians
Association of Canada and
Canadian Children’s Literacy
Foundation Board Member



⁶ Reach Out and Read. (2020). The evidence. Reach Out and Read. <https://www.reachoutandread.org/why-we-matter/the-evidence/>

Our goal is to support doctors, nurses, midwives, speech therapists and other professionals working with families by providing them with early literacy information, training, and resources. In turn, they work with families to help them build word-rich environments in their homes and communities.

In 2020, we launched our first **Early Words/Premiers mots** program in Iqaluit. The goal is to build an ongoing dialogue between families and healthcare providers about the importance of building early literacy skills.

Families receive a children's book in their chosen language, Inuktitut, English or French, as well as tips on surrounding their child with words to support literacy development at home.

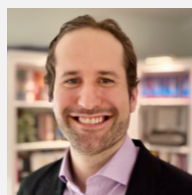
Healthcare professionals are a universal point of access and often trusted as a source of support for families across the country.

Despite the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, the public health nursing team in Iqaluit has had more than 200 literacy-focused interactions with families of children between the ages of two months and five years. Their active involvement reflects that this programming is an important addition to supporting children's development during a challenging time.

We thank the healthcare teams who are embracing **Early Words/Premiers mots** and are taking the time to talk regularly to families with young children about early literacy and brain development. We are grateful to our Health Leaders Council and the local community groups for their support and insights, and to our generous funders as we expand the program across Canada.



“In this pandemic, families are struggling to access critical literacy resources and supports. Healthcare providers are uniquely positioned to act as early literacy champions, working with families to address gaps caused by the pandemic and build early literacy skills at home.”



Dr. Holden Sheffield
Chief of Pediatrics, Qikiqtani
General Hospital, Iqaluit, Nunavut

All children deserve support to get a strong start on the road to reading. Our goal is to make early literacy support and encouragement during a health visit as routine as weighing and measuring growing babies and children.

Promoting critical research on early literacy and learning

Children's literacy in Canada: Understanding the issues

In November 2020, we released [An Economic Overview of Children's Literacy in Canada](https://childrensliteracy.ca/ccif/media/PDFs/Deloitte-Report-An-Economic-Overview-of-Children-s-Literacy-in-Canada.pdf). Prepared by Deloitte Canada, the report frames what is at stake if we fail to invest in literacy at all ages, particularly in the early years. We commissioned Deloitte to undertake this work to fill a critical data gap and build our collective understanding of issues relating to children's literacy.

The findings are sobering. It is estimated that approximately one million Canadian children under the age of 15 have below-grade-level literacy skills. A disproportionate number of kids who are struggling in school come from low socioeconomic communities and/or households.⁷

“Enhancing children’s literacy can play a role in reducing inequality and is a key plank in helping to foster a more inclusive economic recovery and a higher standard of living in the long term.”



Craig Alexander
Chief Economist, Deloitte Canada



⁷ Deloitte LLP. (2020, November). *An economic overview of children's literacy in Canada*. Deloitte LLP. <https://childrensliteracy.ca/ccif/media/PDFs/Deloitte-Report-An-Economic-Overview-of-Children-s-Literacy-in-Canada.pdf>

The report reinforces that investing in early childhood learning is highly effective and has a greater economic return than making investments when a child is older. It highlights that we need to make early learning resources more accessible to all families and provide extra support for those in low socio-economic status communities.

The researchers also confirmed what the literacy community already knows: we have

incomplete and inconsistent literacy data, particularly for children aged 0 to 5.⁸

Building on the findings, we look forward to hosting virtual events with key stakeholders throughout 2021 to discuss the report's recommendations for better data and literacy supports for families. These conversations will help frame our approach to developing and implementing effective early literacy strategies across the country.

Mobilizing knowledge: Bridging the information gap

The research is clear – early exposure to words and books is good for the body, heart and mind.^{9 10} Yet, many of the people who play an important role in bringing words and books to children may not be informed of best practices or barriers facing families in creating word-rich environments for kids.

27 per cent of Canadian children begin Grade 1 inadequately prepared to learn.¹¹

We are fortunate to work with researchers and professionals who are passionate about sharing their knowledge and who understand its power to transform lives. We also recognize the importance of connecting people working on the ground in literacy programs with the evolving science and best practices, and connecting families with practical resources.

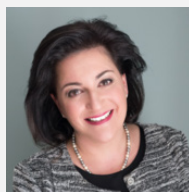
Over the past year, we have played an integral role in a number of efforts to bridge the information gap. We are very proud to be

“Literacy changes the brain of the individual, which changes society, which changes the future of our species.”



Maryanne Wolf
Director of the Center for
Dyslexia, Diverse Learners and
Social Justice, UCLA, and
Canadian Children's Literacy
Foundation Board Member

“Igniting human capital begins at birth when children are surrounded by books and words.”



Naomi Azrieli
Chair and CEO, Azrieli
Foundation, and Canadian
Children's Literacy Foundation
Board Member

⁸ Deloitte LLP. (2020, November). An economic overview of children's literacy in Canada. Deloitte LLP. <https://childrensliteracy.ca/ccf/media/PDFs/Deloitte-Report-An-Economic-Overview-of-Children-s-Literacy-in-Canada.pdf>

⁹ Dewalt, D. A., Berkman, N. D., Sheridan, S., Lohr, K. N., & Pignone, M. P. (2004). Literacy and health outcomes: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 19(12), 1228–1239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1525-1497.2004.40153.x>

¹⁰ The Reading Agency. (2015, June). *Literature review: The impact of reading for pleasure and empowerment*. BOP Consulting. <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/The%20Impact%20of%20Reading%20for%20Pleasure%20and%20Empowerment.pdf>

¹¹ Enns, J. E., Brownell, M., Janus, M., & Guhn, M. (2019, October 18). *Early childhood development in Canada: Current state of knowledge and future directions*. Public Health Agency of Canada, 28. https://edi-offordcentre.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2019/10/Early-Childhood-Development-in-Canada_EN_20190918.pdf

serving as a **knowledge mobilization partner** for the *Ensuring Full Literacy in a Multicultural and Digital World* research project. This exciting multi-year partnership project involves leading academics from across the country who are exploring the changing landscape of literacy.

Armed with this research, Canadians will be better positioned to raise readers in a digital era. They will also have a stronger understanding of the needs of children with diverse linguistic home learning environments. It is funded by the federal government's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).¹²

By Grade 3, one quarter of children are not reading at grade level. This affects their ability to learn.¹³

We are also working with partners from different sectors to develop tools and resources for professionals. In 2020, we teamed up with the Canadian Paediatric Society to identify a practical approach to inform professionals who work with families about early literacy and practical strategies to support literacy building at home. We are co-creating **an online learning module** that will be available in English and French. We look forward to rolling it out in 2021 through our website and the Canadian Paediatric Society's professional learning platform.

In addition, we moved quickly to support and encourage Canadians through the challenges of self-isolation early on in the pandemic. We mobilized the knowledge gained from working with researchers and professionals to

share ideas and guidance on how to use simple tools at hand to engage kids. Our goal was to help families feel empowered and inspired to create word-rich environments and to recognize that they could make a big difference to their children's lives by simply talking, singing and reading.

"Literacy is fundamental to democracy. It shapes our ability to think critically and understand the world around us."



David Walmsley
Editor-in-Chief, The Globe and Mail, Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation Board Member

Looking ahead to 2021, we will continue to consult with literacy researchers and community partners to identify areas of need and leverage our programs and networks to connect professionals and families with the knowledge they require to support literacy efforts.

Every 1 per cent increase in the literacy skills of adults creates an economic benefit of \$67 billion in gross domestic product.¹⁴

¹² The University of British Columbia. (2020, May 29). Psychology researchers receive SSHRC funding to advance their research. The University of British Columbia. <https://psych.ubc.ca/news/psychology-researchers-receive-sshrc-funding-to-advance-their-research/>

¹³ Deloitte LLP. (2020, November). An economic overview of children's literacy in Canada. Deloitte LLP. <https://childreosliteracy.ca/ccf/media/PDFs/Deloitte-Report-An-Economic-Overview-of-Children-s-Literacy-in-Canada.pdf>

¹⁴ Ibid.

2020 Program Highlights

Building a national alliance and a common voice

Early Literacy Matters: Roundtable consultations

While there are hundreds of Canadian organizations supporting families and children to develop literacy skills, many groups, particularly those working in marginalized communities, are small and under-funded. As a result, they work in isolation and are not able to connect with similar groups to learn and share.

Literacy is the great enabler for people to lead healthy, productive and socially engaged lives.

To help strengthen the impact of Canadian organizations with an early literacy mandate, we are building **a network of support** that enables greater collaboration and efficiency, particularly during this time of intense need and rapid change.

“No single organization can solve the complex issue of low literacy alone. We need to work together to break down the complex barriers that are keeping children from revealing their full potential through the power of literacy.”



Mélanie Valcin
Regional Director – Quebec,
Nunavut and Atlantic Canada,
Frontier College



Early Literacy Matters Roundtable, Halifax

Over the past year, we have connected with hundreds of individuals and organizations to learn about their challenges and opportunities and how we can all work together.

The Early Literacy Matters Roundtables are a cornerstone of this work. In early 2020, our co-hosted roundtables attracted 100 attendees from 59 different organizations. To our knowledge, no similar national consultation on early literacy has been conducted in the past decade.

Families play a crucial role in building literacy in the home. They are often children's first and most important teachers.

Participants highlighted the importance of sharing best practices, resources and ideas. They reinforced the need for a common voice for children's literacy and the exploration of Canada's literacy challenges, especially how to support families from low socioeconomic communities and/or households who may be struggling to build early literacy at home.

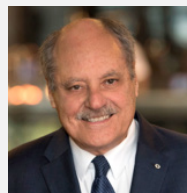
It was deeply inspiring to witness everyone's dedication to building a more literate society, and how grounded we all are in the need for partnership and collaboration – with each other, with families, with other sectors and with governments.



Early Literacy Matters Roundtable, Vancouver

We would like to thank our co-hosts: Decoda Literacy Solutions in Vancouver, Centre for Family Literacy in Edmonton, Frontier College in Montreal, Read to Me in Halifax and Bookmates in Winnipeg (the Winnipeg event was postponed due to the pandemic). All deeply rooted in their communities, these organizations provided critical insights into their local and regional literacy landscapes.

“By supporting children in developing the literary skills they need, we are building a better future for our whole community.”



Ellis Jacob
President & CEO, Cineplex, and
Canadian Children's Literacy
Foundation Board Member

The impact of this work is already being felt as organizations share best practices, resources and ideas. We look forward to partnering with other literacy organizations to co-host more events throughout 2021 that will strengthen connections and inform early childhood education programs and policies.



Early Literacy Matters Roundtable, Montreal

2020 Program Highlights

Responding to the pandemic

Read On Canada!/Lisons Canada! : Tackling hunger in minds and bodies

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, families were locked down and facing the challenge of supporting their children without help from community resources such as early years centres, childcare or library programs. Many were overwhelmed as they navigated economic stress, job loss or working from home with toddlers on their laps.

25 per cent of Canadian families reported early on in the pandemic that their children were reading between zero and two times a week while at home. This is insufficient for the development of strong literacy skills.¹⁶

In early spring 2020, we recognized the widening educational resource gap caused by COVID-19 disruptions. We rapidly mobilized literacy organizations from across Canada to give families a helping hand under the banner of **Read On Canada!/Lisons Canada!**

Together we generated \$1.4 million in donations of brand-new books from generous publishers. Then, in partnership with Food Banks Canada, we distributed 140,000 books to families across Canada.

“Because of our partnership with Read On Canada, not only did families with children receive much-needed food supplies, each child received a book, which can open up a world of possibilities. They know that someone cares for their physical well-being and their development.”



Chris Hatch
CEO of Food Banks Canada



¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2020, July 9). Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadian families and children. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/200709/dq200709a-eng.pdf?st=CxdsVAYk>

“Growing up with a single mom in a financially challenged household, books and libraries gave me the opportunity early on to ‘travel the world’ and get inspired by people and places with which I never otherwise would have had access.”



Jordan Banks
President, Rogers Sports & Media
and Canadian Children's Literacy
Foundation Board Member

We also rallied high-profile Canadians to encourage children to read. Inspiring messages came from public figures, including Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, and Ministers Chrystia Freeland, Catherine McKenna and Ahmed Hussen. Poems, stories and other messages were offered by Margaret Atwood, Chris Hadfield, Peter Mansbridge, Mahtab Narsimhan, Debbie Ridpath Ohi, David A. Robertson, Michelle Aung Thin, Dave Williams and many more.

Read On Canada! distributed 140,000+ new books through food banks to children in 150+ communities across Canada.

With our collective strength and determination, **Read On Canada/Lisons Canada!** reached some of the most vulnerable children during these extraordinarily challenging times. We also raised awareness of the importance of reading to support mental health and wellness.



Justin Trudeau
June 28 · 🌐

Hey parents! If you're looking for something that'll keep your kids engaged and entertained this summer, a good book is the way to go. And I'm not just saying that as a teacher - there's nothing like the power words have to transport us to new worlds and teach us new things.

That's why the [Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation](#) has partnered with [Food Banks Canada](#) to launch the [#ReadOnCanada](#) initiative. Check out Sophie's post and visit their website to learn more about the work they're doing and how they're putting books into the hands of kids across the country:



Heading home from Winnipeg Harvest

Looking ahead

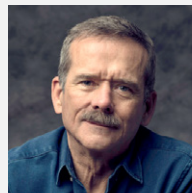
We don't know when our post-pandemic new normal will arrive or what it will look like. We do know that strong literacy skills are fundamental to a thriving, resilient people and society.

Investing today in early childhood education and resources for families will support Canada's economic recovery from the pandemic and will set up a generation for the years to come.

We are the only national charity focused exclusively on advancing early literacy and school readiness for young children.

Together, we can build a brighter, more literate future for all children in Canada.

“Literacy – reading the ideas and knowledge of others – gave me the key to the stars.”



Chris Hadfield
Colonel, Astronaut (ret'd) and
Canadian Children's Literacy
Foundation Board Member

Financial snapshot

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation is a small not-for-profit organization with big ambitions. We promote and develop literacy initiatives, champion literacy partners across Canada, and empower people to build literacy skills in their homes and communities.

We are able to deliver this work through the generous support of our funders and supporters. Funding commitments to date for Fiscal Year 2021 (April 2020 to March 2021) are approximately \$1.6 million. We anticipate expenses this year of \$1.4 million.

More information about this year's income and expenses will be available at the end of the fiscal year. For more details on our Fiscal Year 2020, please see our audited financials at <https://childrensliteracy.ca/About-Us/Finances-and-Reports>.

Board of Directors and Funders

Our work and impact would not be possible without the support of our dynamic Board of Directors and dedicated funders. On behalf of all children and families in Canada – thank you.

Board of Directors – 2020

Naomi Azrieli
Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Azrieli Foundation

Jordan Banks
President, Rogers Sports & Media

Chris Hadfield
Colonel, Astronaut (ret'd)

Ellis Jacob
President and Chief Executive Officer, Cineplex

Alika Lafontaine
Anesthesiologist, Past President Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada

Peter Mansbridge
Journalist and Author

Heather Munroe-Blum
CCLF Co-Founder and Co-Chair
Chairperson, Canada Pension Plan Investment Board

Heather Reisman
CCLF Co-Founder and Co-Chair
Chair and Chief Executive Officer, Indigo

Maryanne Wolf
Director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners, and Social Justice, University of California, Los Angeles

David Walmsley
Editor-in-Chief, The Globe and Mail

Our Funders



The Emergency Community Support Fund



Foundation

The Peter Mansbridge Charitable Foundation

We are grateful to the many other people and organizations who support our work.

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation
620 King Street West, Suite 400, Toronto, Ontario M5V 1M6
info@childrensliteracy.ca www.childrensliteracy.ca

