



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Impact Report 2021



Our mission:

To build a brighter,
more literate future
for all children in Canada,
enabling them to achieve
their full potential.



Raising children to become readers begins with words.

Talking, singing, reading and sharing books with little ones – right from the beginning – lays the foundation for kids to become readers.

Unfortunately, not all families have access to the information and resources they need to give their children this strong start on their reading journey.

The result is that more than one million children in Canada lack the literacy skills needed to reach their full potential in school and life.

The pandemic has made the situation worse by disrupting access to school, libraries and other supports. Some children are as much as a year behind in their learning. The impact has been greatest on children from low socioeconomic status households and communities that face greater challenges accessing literacy resources.

Thanks to the support of our many partners, the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation is making strides toward addressing this inequitable access to educational opportunity.

In 2021, we grew our programming initiatives, with a focus on our *Early Words/Premiers mots* program, through which we partner with healthcare providers to provide counselling to families on the “how” and “why” of early literacy. We led the award-winning *Read On Canada!*/

Lisons Canada! coalition through its second summer, distributing children's books through food banks and offering enriching reading activities online to help fill gaps in access to reading resources exacerbated by the pandemic. We enhanced awareness and understanding of early literacy among policymakers, professionals and families.

All of this work is critical to the future of our country. **We envision a Canada in which all families know why - and how - to give their children a strong start on the road to reading.** This will help to make Canada a place where all children develop the literacy skills they need to reach their full potential.

To the many partners, supporters and others who are working alongside us in pursuit of this vision – thank you. Together we're building a world of opportunity for all children in Canada.

Heather Munroe-Blum
Co-Founder and Co-Chair

Heather Reisman
Co-Founder and Co-Chair

Ariel Siller
Chief Executive Officer

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation's impact in 2021

Thousands of children are getting a stronger start on their reading journeys.

55,000+ families received literacy resources and support.

160,000+ books are now in the hands of children who need them most.

260 professionals who support families are now trained to provide early literacy guidance.





Our *Early Words/Premiers mots* program helps healthcare professionals bring early literacy into their practices.

This helps to ensure families receive the support and information they need to give their babies and young children a strong start on their reading journey.

Through *Early Words* we provide healthcare professionals with:

- Training developed with healthcare leaders, including the Canadian Paediatric Society
- A curated selection of high-quality children's books to build families' libraries
- Linguistically and culturally relevant resources to share with families
- Help connecting families to community resources that can deepen their early literacy practices

Thanks to the support of healthcare providers, literacy partners, our Health Leaders Council and generous funders, *Early Words* is now active in 14 clinics in Nunavut and Manitoba, and is poised for expansion to 95 sites across Canada over the next three years.

“Early literacy is an important building block for the health and well-being of children as they grow into adulthood. Encouragement from health professionals can support families to incorporate literacy development into their children’s routines, setting them on the pathway to reaching their full potential.”

– Ian Culbert, Executive Director, Canadian Public Health Association



Jasper's new book: *Early Words* through the eyes of a child

Nine-month-old Jasper loves his new book. He holds it and flips the pages. He puts it in his mouth. And he points and smiles as he looks at all the bright pictures.

Jasper has just come home from his latest visit to the doctor in Winnipeg, who gave his mom, Katie, a brand-new board book along with some great tips on early literacy.

"I love that it slows things down for a second, allows Jasper a moment to come and sit and pause," Katie says. "Our family is Indigenous, and storytelling is at the heart of who we are. It is really special to have received a book with Indigenous language in it, so Jasper has his own stories he can share and appreciate and look at."

Katie says receiving the book was a great reminder of the importance of sharing books and telling stories together. It also gives Jasper's big brother something fun to do with the baby. Katie adds, "Jasper is already grasping the concept of flipping to the next page, which is cool. He loves the faces. During COVID the only faces he saw were his family, so it was nice to see faces in books. It's a different world he can look into."



Jasper shares a book with his mom and his healthcare provider.

The book that Jasper received came through the *Early Words* program. While she wasn't expecting to head home from the clinic with a book, Katie loves the idea.

"It was such a lovely surprise," she says. "It is nice to know that families have opportunities to grow their libraries, and it's not something you have to sign up for or apply for. If the books are going to everyone, it doesn't alienate people and that is beautiful."

“Conversations about early literacy are a great way for a healthcare provider to assess a new parent’s well-being and engagement with the child during the early weeks and months post-partum. It’s also an opportunity to help build a sense of accomplishment when families learn that the talking and singing they are doing with their baby is supporting crucial brain development.”

– Dr. William Ehman, Chair of the Maternity and Newborn Member Interest Group of the College of Family Physicians of Canada



Early Words in Clyde River, Nunavut

When nurse Barb Anderson sits down with a parent and young child at the health centre in Clyde River, Nunavut, the first thing she does is give them a book – even if the baby is as young as two months old.

“That’s how I get everyone relaxed and comfortable, then I move on to other developmental assessments,” she says.

Because the clinic is part of the *Early Words* program, families who come in for well-child visits leave with ideas on how to support literacy at home – as well as a book in English, French or Inuktitut.

For families, this information is valued, as is the encouragement to read, sing and speak with their young children in the language they prefer, which for many in Clyde River is Inuktitut.

“Most parents really like that we suggest they sing, talk and read with their little ones in Inuktitut,” says Barb. “They want their children to learn and keep their own language but they worry that if they don’t speak English in the early years, the children will have a difficult time when they get to school. We tell parents that what’s important is that children are surrounded by lots of words. So if Inuktitut is the language families are most comfortable with, we encourage reading, speaking and singing in Inuktitut.”

She adds, “It’s so great to have books in a family’s own language because that’s the language they want their children to learn and hold onto as they grow up.”

Barb and her colleagues in Clyde River recognize how fundamental early literacy is to the development of babies and young children, and they welcome the joy that books bring to the families in their clinic too!





“Early Words delivers training and resources so a physician or nurse can make early literacy counselling part of every visit with a young family. It’s my hope that one day soon early literacy promotion in healthcare settings will be as routine as conversations about nutrition, weight and other milestones in a child’s early years.”

– Dr. Leslie Rourke, Co-Creator of the Rourke Baby Record, an evidence-based guide for primary healthcare practitioners for children in the first five years of life that is endorsed by the Canadian Paediatric Society, the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and Dietitians of Canada

The public health team in Clyde River, ready to greet families with their joyful literacy-friendly waiting room.

Early Words in Winnipeg

Pediatrician Dr. Jina Pagura cannot remember a time when books and reading were not part of her life. Believing deeply in the importance of literacy, she wants to help the children in her practice gain a strong start on their own reading journeys.

That's why she played an instrumental role in bringing the *Early Words* program to Sterling Lyon Pediatrics, the Winnipeg-based clinic where she works.

“My colleagues and I are passionate about literacy,” says Dr. Pagura. “The rate of cognitive development and brain expansion is so rapid in a child’s early years that starting to support literacy at a young age is very important. We know that reading and language is a large part of how kids communicate and interact with the world, and is one of the main parts of child development.”

The *Early Words* program provides the team at Sterling Lyon with the tools they need to guide

families on how to support their children with early literacy. This includes training, tip sheets, handouts, posters and other resources – as well as high-quality, enriching and joyful books.

Families are often excited and surprised. Many say, “We get to keep this?!” And that makes Dr. Pagura and Dr. Ruth Grimes, also a pediatrician at Sterling Lyon, happy because they know they are providing parents with great resources to continue their children’s literacy development at home.

“Literacy, in terms of early book exposure, reading, speaking and singing, is teaching that child language. It’s teaching and helping them to develop their identity, their place within this world, their place within their family. And one of the best ways to have an impact on a child’s mental health is to address literacy,” says Dr. Grimes.

Talking about *Early Words*

Bringing early literacy into the exam room: CCLF’s Zoe Keefer spoke to doctors Jina Pagura and Ruth Grimes about their experiences with *Early Words*.

Click [here](#) to watch!



“The language development that then leads to reading that then leads to academic and social-emotional achievement is so crucial. When you help a child get ready to read by sharing books, you’re enriching that relationship between the parent and child, and you’re enriching that family. That is an awesome responsibility but also a privilege that I think every physician should take on wholeheartedly.”

– Dr. Ruth Grimes, Pediatrician,
Sterling Lyon Pediatrics, Winnipeg



Keeping kids reading on through another pandemic summer



Read On Canada!/Lisons Canada! is an initiative we developed and led, starting in June 2020 in collaboration with literacy groups across Canada in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our goal: to empower and inspire all kids to keep moving forward on their reading journeys, even on their darkest days.

Read On Canada! has distributed children's books through food banks and shared fun, enriching reading activities online for all families to enjoy. In 2021, we extended our reach by incorporating training for food bank staff. This gave them the tools they needed to share reading tips along with the books.



Read On Canada!
was honoured with a
2021 World Literacy
Award for Significant
Response to Literacy
in the Pandemic.

We were honoured to develop and lead this coalition initiative and so deeply inspired by the engagement of children, families, literacy partners and food bank partners.

Learn more about *Read On Canada!* and check out our summary report [here](#).

With the support of our food bank partners and generous publishers and funders, between June 2020 and September 2021, the *Read On Canada!* coalition has:

Distributed **300,000 new, engaging books** through food banks

Reached 178 communities, across all provinces and territories

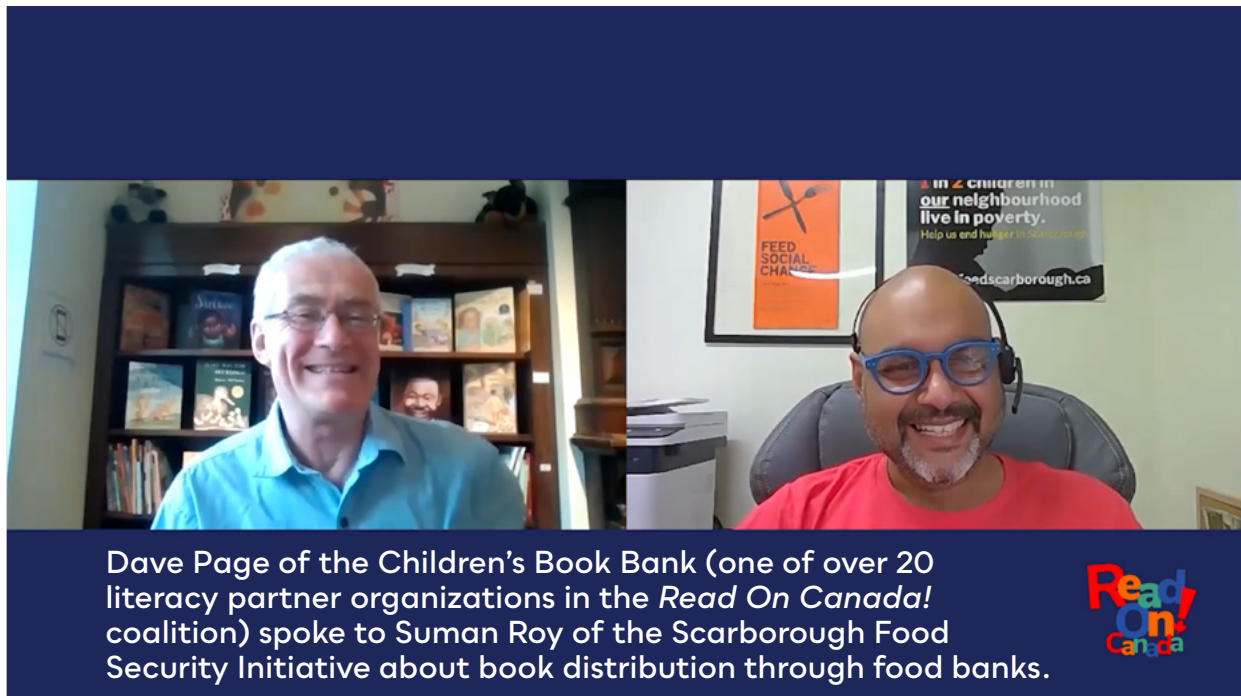
Put books into the hands of **100,000 families in need**



“Our clients were hungry for more than just food! While chatting with our clients, one said to me, ‘It is great that you are now also feeding our soul.’ That comment almost brought a tear to my eye.”

– Lynda Hynes, Inventory Coordinator, Boundary Community Food Bank, Grand Forks, B.C.

How books and literacy are nourishing minds:



Click [here](#)
to watch!

Advocating for stronger literacy as part of a more equitable future for all

As we collectively respond to the impact of COVID-19, we believe it's crucial to help policymakers understand what is at stake if Canada fails to prioritize early literacy.

Some children are now as much as a year behind on their reading because of pandemic-related disruptions to their learning. If high-quality early literacy programs and resources are not integrated into Canada's pandemic response, many of these kids will stay behind. This would have devastating consequences for us all.

Throughout this turbulent year, we rallied early learning and literacy champions from across Canada to encourage governments to embed early literacy priorities into existing and new policy frameworks.

We support the federal government's commitment to a Canada-wide system of Early Learning and Childcare, and have been active in working toward making improved children's literacy a foundational priority in early learning and childcare. One step in this work included bringing together more than 30 organizations from across the early years, education and healthcare sectors as signatories to our pre-

budget submission to the government in February 2021. In that submission, we called for the development of a high-quality, accessible and affordable early learning and childcare system in Canada with improved children's literacy as one of its goals.

This is just the beginning. With the generous support of the Max Bell Foundation and others, we will continue to champion literacy in Canada in the year ahead, working hand-in-hand with the many groups and individuals supporting families and children across the country.



Translating research into useful advice for families

Researchers are building a body of crucial information about the importance of raising readers, the barriers that can get in the way and what can be done about them.

But families – and the professionals who support families – do not always have easy access to this information.

That's why we've been working closely with leading researchers over the past year to:

- **identify and address barriers to literacy, with an emphasis on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **help to ensure that families and professionals know about and understand critical research on how to raise a reader**

We're proud to be a knowledge translation partner for *Ensuring Full Literacy in a Multicultural and Digital World*, a research project led by Canadian and international scholars, and industry and community organizations, which are working to bridge the many dimensions of literacy acquisition in our multicultural and digitally connected world.

“What an impact the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation is making on knowledge-sharing across Canada! The way CCLF is moving world-class literacy research into practice is formidable and exciting, and it will have an impact on generations of kids and families to come.”

– Dr. Janet Werker, University Killam Professor and Canada Research Chair in the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia

PROGRAMS – KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

We regularly share tips and guidance with major media outlets and on social media, with the goal of building widespread awareness about raising a reader.



What is one thing we can do about children's learning loss during the pandemic? [Put a book in their hands.](#)



From graphic novels to audiobooks, [tips to get kids reading more.](#)



A million children in Canada have [below grade-level reading skills.](#)



[“We cannot afford to wait”: Reading experts warn struggling readers falling further behind.](#)

Looking ahead

This has been an exciting and inspiring year at the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation. We are supporting families who are struggling today, while building a stronger and more equitable Canada for tomorrow.

A key aspect is our plan to scale up *Early Words* nationally. Thanks to generous funders, we are now positioned to expand to 95 clinics and hospitals across Canada over the next three years – and we are already well on our way. Through *Early Words*, upwards of 44,000 more children will gain access to early literacy guidance and wonderful books to help give them a strong start on the road to reading.

In the year ahead, we will also continue to champion literacy among those who help to shape a child's world. In collaboration with other organizations and experts, we will move toward our shared vision of enabling all children to achieve their full potential.

Visit www.ChildrensLiteracy.ca to learn more.

And make sure you talk, sing and read with the children in your life.

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Financial Snapshot*

To date, for the fiscal year 2022 (April 2021 to March 2022), we have received funding commitments of approximately \$1.5 million, and we anticipate expenses of approximately that amount. We have additional multi-year commitments of approximately \$3.2 million to support our program growth over the next few years. We continue to seek additional funding to support further growth of our programs.

Our audited financial statements from previous fiscal years are available [here](#). Additional information is available on request.

* As of November 2021

Thank you to our generous funders



Aggregate commitment:
\$3,000,000+



Aggregate commitment:
\$2,000,000+



Aggregate commitment:
\$400,000+

Amazon Reads campaign
Anonymous (2)
Book Depot
Government of Canada's
Emergency Community
Support Fund
In Memory of Margaret Hunka
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This list to the left represents funders who have donated \$5,000 or more to the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation in 2021. We are grateful to them, and to the many other people and organizations who support our work.



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We acknowledge that the land on which our Toronto office is located is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat, peoples and that it is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.