



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Impact Report 2023



2023

Impact at a glance

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

Early Words/Premiers mots

34,000

Total early literacy interactions and books
distributed to families with children up to age 6

25,000

Children reached

699

Professionals who support families trained to
provide early literacy guidance

69

Clinics in 7 provinces (BC, AB, SK, MB, ON, QC,
NB) and all 3 territories, with 31 of those clinics
joining in 2023



Visitors admiring *Lost & Found* art.

At the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation,
we focus on the key challenges that impact
reading development across Canada and prioritize
nation-wide solutions.

Our impact is possible because of a network
of committed partners and supporters across
Canada. Together, we are driving systemic change
to address Canada's literacy crisis.

Lost & Found/Les histoires retrouvées

5,100

Children participated in workshops with 1,135
parents and caregivers

1,500

Stories exhibited

118

Educators facilitated workshops

40

Delivery partners

5

Celebratory launch events

Policy Solutions

54

Multisectoral partners endorsed our early literacy
policy recommendations in our 2023 Federal
Pre-Budget Submission

Why literacy matters

Literacy shapes our whole lives, and it begins in early childhood. Children who experience high-quality early learning environments at home, in the community, and at school are more likely to become capable and confident readers.

The benefits last a lifetime. Children with stronger literacy skills generally stay in school longer, access better jobs as adults, and enjoy better physical and mental health.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Canada already had a literacy problem. Pandemic-related disruptions exacerbated it.



Writer-illustrator Michael Khan reading his book *The Seed* to families at a *Lost & Found* event at BGC Yukon.

Recent data shows:

More than 25 per cent of children start school without the developmental skills needed to learn to read.



An estimated 30 per cent of Grade 1 students are not meeting reading benchmarks, up from 24 per cent in 2013.



For low-income children, the situation is worse, with roughly 40 per cent of those students not meeting reading expectations, compared to 27 per cent in 2013.



Many of these children won't catch up unless we collectively and directly address hurdles to early literacy.

About us

Our aim at the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation (CCLF) is to drive necessary systemic change so all children in Canada can become strong readers.

As part of our commitment to advancing equitable access to educational opportunity, we are committed to removing structural and systemic barriers that prevent children from becoming readers.

While barriers to reading exist for all children, those in families and communities of low socioeconomic status generally experience lower literacy. Additional factors such as race, geography, family structure, mental and physical well-being, and education can further harm literacy levels in these communities.

Focus areas

- **Partnering with healthcare providers to ensure all families with young children receive early literacy support — starting from birth**
- **Identifying and sharing information with families and educators so they can effectively support children's development of strong literacy skills**
- **Advancing evidence-based policy recommendations so that existing child-serving systems better support children on their reading journey**



Participants in CCLF's *Lost & Found* and *Early Words* programs.

Everyone's story matters

Lost & Found is a unique storytelling project that empowers children across Canada to share their stories of truth, love, resilience, and community during the pandemic.

Launched in late 2022, *Lost & Found* helps children to express themselves, while supporting families to develop literacy skills and build community connections.

Working in partnership with a diverse coalition of 40 child-serving organizations, we hosted interactive *Lost & Found* workshops at over 100 sites across Canada with 118 educators and local authors working with more than 5,000 children and 1,000 parents and caregivers.

In the spring of 2023, the *Lost & Found* project culminated in a pan-Canadian exhibition of over 1,500 children's stories through both in-person and digital exhibits.

While *Lost & Found* workshops are now finished, families can still [download the storytelling toolkit](#) to fuel their child's creative process at home.

Canada

Lost & Found was made possible by the Government of Canada.

Lost & Found LES histoires retrouvées



Storytime with Colonel Chris Hadfield at *Lost & Found*'s launch event at the Malvern Family Resource Centre in Scarborough, ON.

"After the pandemic, many kids struggled with communication, anxiety, self-esteem, and fear. *Lost & Found* helped them find their voice and gain confidence. I see such a difference in our kids."

Samantha Singh, Educator, Malvern Family Resource Centre (Scarborough, ON)

Stories of discovery as told through art, words, and videos



Claire Tan with CCLF CEO Ariel Siller (right) at an interview with CBC Radio's "Fresh Air" with host Ismaila Alfa (left).

[Listen to Claire's interview here](#) ▶

Trivien Wang and his family, with CCLF CEO Ariel Siller and VP Programs Coralie D'Souza, after interview on CBC Radio's Metro Morning about the *Lost & Found* program.

[Listen to Trivien's interview here](#) ▶



Susan Campbell talked to the *Lost & Found* project about how the pandemic impacted her grandchildren.

[Listen to Susan's story here](#) ▶

Helping children connect with their emotions and experiences

During the COVID-19 pandemic, children and families struggled with isolation and fear. Gaps in learning opportunities resulted in many children falling behind in pre-reading and reading skills.

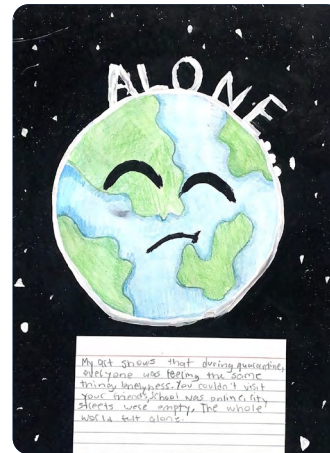
With the guidance of educators and local authors, *Lost & Found* workshops across Canada helped children to identify their emotions and develop narratives based on their own experience. They created stories using words, drawing, and oral storytelling.

The *Lost & Found* workshop facilitators used a trauma-informed toolkit that was created for our program and is available in Arabic, Cree, English, French, Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, and Ojibwe. Dozens of dedicated local educators and community partners ensured *Lost & Found* reflected the unique needs of each community and celebrated the strengths of the children and families.

Stories covered a range of topics, from spending time with family, enjoying nature, finding companionship with pets, and navigating uncertainty, to missing friends and family, dreading “Zoom school,” wearing masks, and enduring the sting of hand sanitizer.

Participating children and families had the option to share their stories through in-person and digital exhibits. This resulted in 1,500 curated stories of children’s pandemic experiences from across the country being shared through our digital exhibit (lostandfoundstories.ca).

Children learned that everyone’s story matters — including their own!



Examples of *Lost & Found* stories submitted by children across Canada. [See more stories here.](#)



Children and educators talk about what was *Lost & Found*.

[Watch here](#)

Integrating early literacy into children's healthcare

Our *Early Words* program helps healthcare professionals bring early literacy into patient care through practical, evidence-based training.

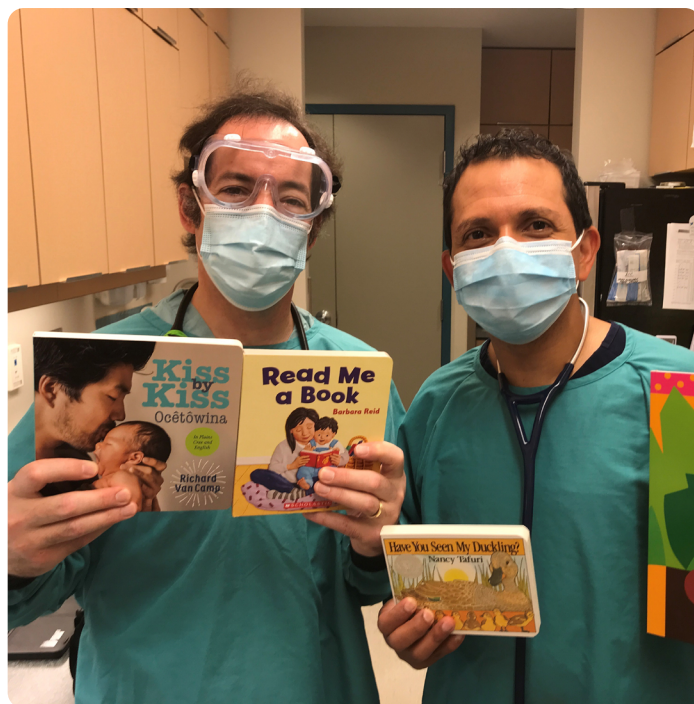
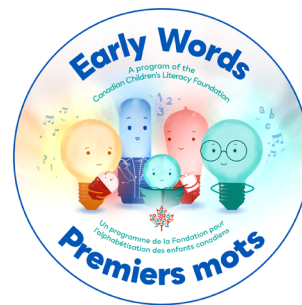
Healthcare providers are a universal point of contact for families with young children. *Early Words* supports families to receive early literacy advice at routine healthcare visits and then gift books to foster more reading at home. The goal is to inspire families to start children on a joyful reading journey by surrounding them with words right from birth.

Moving into its fourth year, *Early Words* added 31 new sites in 2023, bringing the total to 69 clinics in seven provinces and all three territories.

We are poised for expansion to 95 sites across Canada by 2025. *Early Words* is also piloting work with medical residents to assess implementation outcomes and test new models of delivery, including book nooks and connections to community.

Evaluation data demonstrates that *Early Words* is having a significant and positive impact on healthcare providers and families, while informing future program delivery and sustainability.

We extend our thanks to the support of healthcare providers, literacy partners, our Health Leaders Council, and generous funders.



Dr. Eddsel Martinez and Dr. Matthew Lazar from Sterling Lyon Pediatrics hold up *Early Words* program books (Winnipeg, MB).



Early Words in action

Early Words offers:

- Evidence-based training developed alongside literacy experts and healthcare leaders such as the Canadian Paediatric Society
- A curated selection of high-quality, developmentally appropriate children's books to build families' home libraries
- Linguistically and culturally relevant resources to share with families, including tip sheets based on the latest research
- Help to connect families with community resources to deepen early literacy practices



Helping families build early literacy skills.

"The response from families is incredible. It provides a leaping off point to discuss early literacy with each of my young patients. As a pediatrician, I am concerned not only with acute issues that make a child sick, but also with optimizing their health when they are well. *Early Words* is such a great way to show it."

Dr. Isaac Elias, Pediatrician, Paramount Pediatrics (Surrey, B.C.)



Dr. Isaac Elias and staff at B.C. Women's Hospital, Neo-natal Follow Up Clinic (Vancouver, BC) with books from the *Early Words* program.

An *Early Words* family tells their story

Krista Rogers did not expect to walk away with a free book for her 10-week-old baby when she visited the Gateway Community Health Centre in Tweed, Ontario.

Waiting for an appointment, Krista was approached by Rene Young, a Gateway early childhood educator, who told her about the *Early Words* program. Krista immediately saw the value for her newborn daughter, Sadie.

Speech and language delays

Krista's first child, Harley, is now six years old. When he was three, the family realized he had speech and language delays.

"In the early days of the pandemic, Harley was only around me and his dad. We were so focused on making sure he had whatever he needed and keeping him safe. When he pointed, we knew what he wanted and never really encouraged him to use his words to ask for things."

It was only when Harley started daycare that Krista and her husband learned of his delays in speech and language development skills. The guidance they received included reading regularly with their son. "We started reading every single night, a couple books before bed to really drive it home and to help him learn."

When Sadie came along Krista and her husband were encouraged to develop the baby's language skills by reading and talking to her. At first, they were not sure what to say.

One of the Gateway Community nurses suggested talking about daily activities and pointing at and naming objects.

"Mommy's washing the dishes! Or mommy's doing this. Might sound a little bit silly with a newborn, but it helps, right? ... Little ones absorb everything."

Krista loves the connection she feels with Sadie, particularly when she sings. "When I sing to her, she locks eyes with me and just smiles and coos the whole time." And as soon as Sadie starts to explore her grip — tugging on hair, grabbing blankets, and hanging onto her shirt — Krista knows the little board book from *Early Words* will come in handy.

Krista reflected that many parents and caregivers may be unaware of the little things that help kids develop in these crucial early years. She appreciates the information and support from the *Early Words* program to encourage her to read, talk, sing, and share stories with Sadie in the years leading up to school.



Sadie with a *Let's Point!* book.

Supporting healthcare providers to connect literacy and wellness

Early Words is having a significant impact across Canada by supporting families to engage more often in early literacy activities with their little ones.

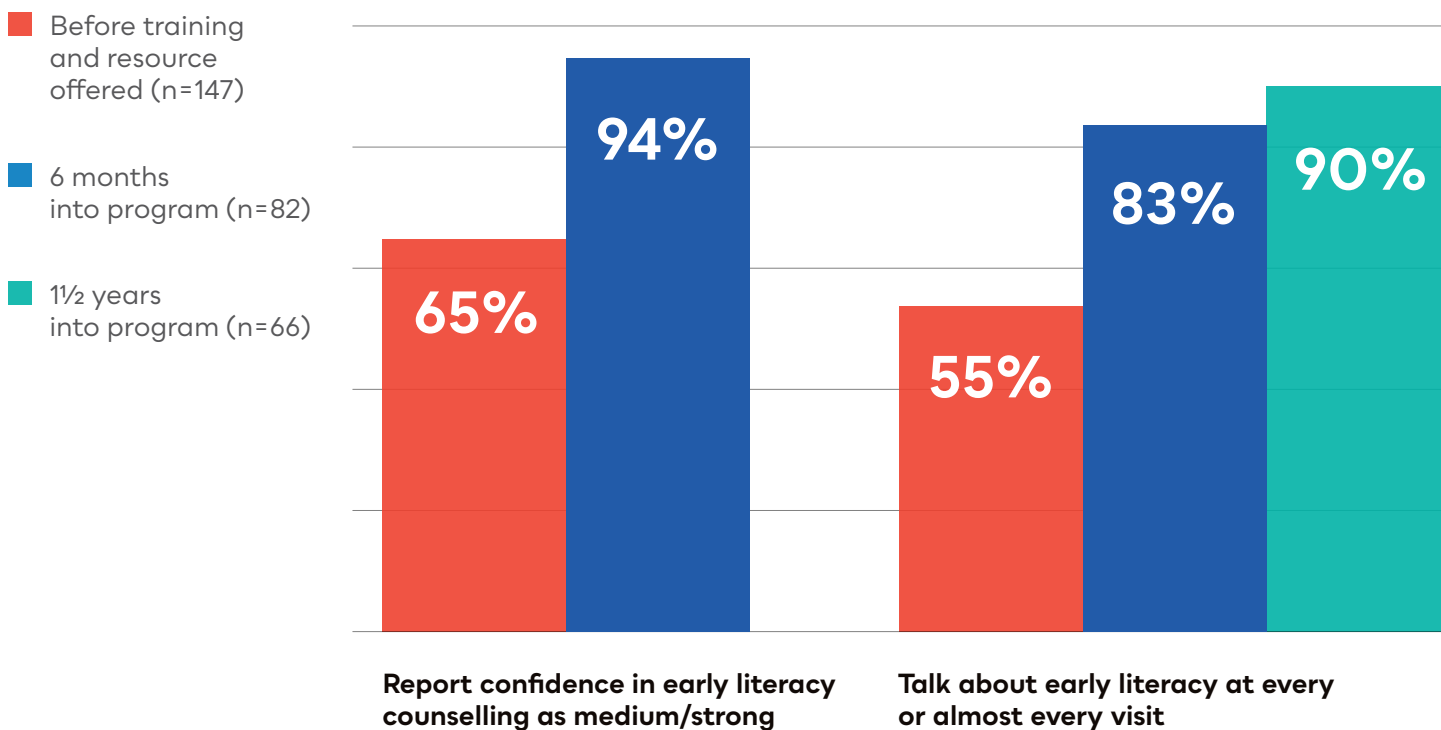
Healthcare providers are reporting greater confidence in delivering early literacy support to families, and this leads participating families to more actively engage in early literacy activities with their young children.

Evaluation input was gathered at pre-training, six months, and 1½ years using a combination of surveys and interviews. The results are striking.



Prior to *Early Words*, only 17 per cent of participating healthcare providers and one per cent of medical residents had any early literacy training.

We've achieved a significant boost in confidence and active engagement with patients:



Families are benefiting from *Early Words*

95% Are more actively responding to their baby's expressions, interests, noises, and movements

91% Are sharing more books with their children

89% Are talking more to their child during everyday activities

"Our doctor gave us a book at one of our first appointments and said it is never too early to start reading to him. I would never think to read to a newborn, but we went home and started reading. We've done it ever since. Knowledge is power. The more knowledge we get from our doctor, the better."

Sarah Balcom, Parent (Winnipeg, MB)

"Many of the families we serve have limited access to books and therefore their children aren't raised in literacy-rich homes. Providing these books to families gives them the opportunity to grow a small library that the children can call their own. This – along with the messaging to parents about the many benefits of reading, singing, and talking to their babies – will support these children in becoming lifelong learners."

Rachel Shabada, Registered Nurse, Acadia Community Health Centre (Calgary, AB)



Early Words providers (Public Health Nurses) at Acadia Community Health Center with a young patient (Calgary, AB).

Uqaaq, Taiguuq, Huqullaaq, Unipkaaqtigit Talk, Read, Sing, Share Stories

The success of *Early Words* across Nunavut is a story of commitment, belief, and the power of community building.

Since 2020, *Early Words* has worked alongside Nunavut's public health professionals to build meaningful relationships within the Qikiqtani and Kivalliq communities and support families to develop early literacy skills.

In March 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, *Early Words* launched at a single public health clinic in Iqaluit. By 2023 it had expanded to 18 remote and isolated communities across the Qikiqtani and Kivalliq regions and secured multiyear funding from the Government of Nunavut.

Raising readers together

In the early days of the pandemic, healthcare providers in Nunavut realized that families who were already struggling with isolation and low literacy would be further impacted by pandemic-related closures.

They knew how to help. Healthcare teams started to talk to families during routine healthcare appointments about the importance of literacy-building activities at home, and then provided high-quality, culturally reflective books during routine appointments.

Further support came from Nunavut's Community Health Representatives, who work with communities to implement health promotion and illness prevention initiatives.



Early Words sites across Nunavut.



Illustration done by Inuk artist Becky Kilabuk for the *Early Words* program in Nunavut.

Uqaq, Taiguaq, Huqullaaq, Unipkaaqtigit Talk, Read, Sing, Share Stories

Collaborating for impact

Thank you to the many community leaders who generously shared knowledge, time, and resources to ensure *Early Words* reflects local Indigenous perspectives.

Since the start, all *Early Words* books offered to families in Nunavut have been relevant to local communities and available in Inuktitut. A Nunavut-specific Tip Sheet (available in English, French, and Inuktitut, **with an example Inuktitut Tip Sheet on the right**) is also available with advice about screentime and links to existing digital resources to support Inuktitut language learning.

The commitment by everyone involved in *Early Words* has been nothing short of remarkable and has propelled us from a seedling pilot in 2020 to a robust program with substantial funding from the Government of Nunavut today.

We're excited and honoured to continue to work alongside professionals in Nunavut to help expand access to literacy skills in Nunavut.

"I always tell moms, even if they struggle with literacy themselves, that even holding the books for the kids and interacting with them and the pictures is great for early literacy practice."

Oopik Aglukark, Public Health Nurse
(Arviat, NU)

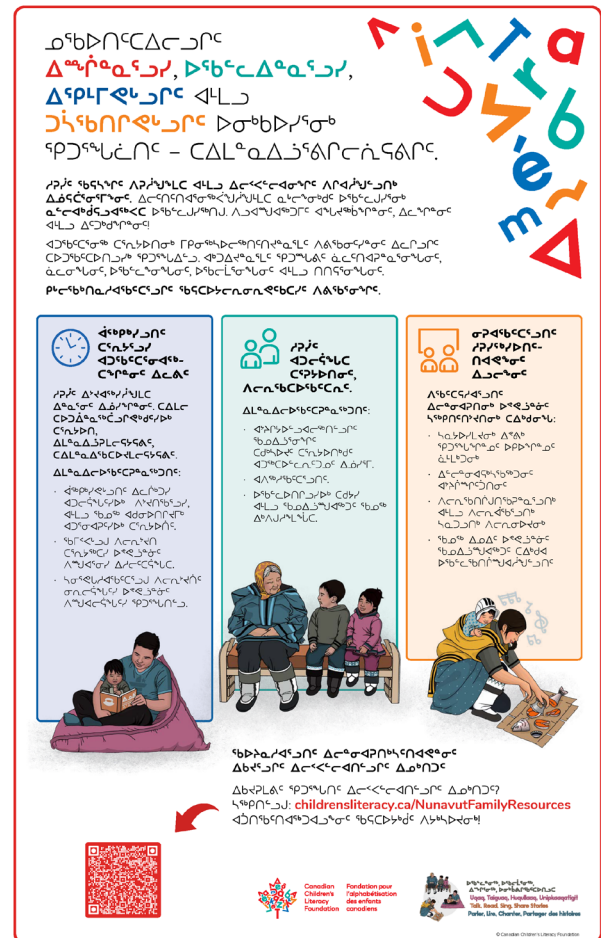


Illustration done by Inuk artist Becky Kilabuk for the *Early Words* program in Nunavut.

Making early literacy a national priority

Our policy recommendations

All children in Canada deserve equal access to high-quality early learning and childcare programs; however, many community groups, families, and professionals operate in isolation with limited literacy-related resources and training. This results in missed opportunities to scale best practices that support children in building strong early literacy skills.

That's why we're mobilizing child-serving organizations throughout Canada to advance our policy recommendations for a Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system in which improved early literacy is a goal. We are pleased to see ongoing progress.

Our policy recommendations — endorsed by 54 leading multisectoral partners — are outlined in our 2023 Pre-Budget Submission to the Government of Canada.

We call for the following:

- **Additional early literacy training for early childhood educators;**
- **Increased support for community-based early literacy programs that support the home learning environment; and**
- **Better longitudinal data collection on literacy from birth to adulthood.**

To support governments in implementing these recommendations, we commissioned a research report from the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation to identify and analyze the most promising early literacy policies in Canada and internationally. We look forward to sharing the report in spring 2024.

This work is made possible by the generous support of The Gerald Schwartz & Heather Reisman Foundation, the Max Bell Foundation, and Innoweave.

FEBRUARY 10, 2023

Submission to the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2023 Federal Budget



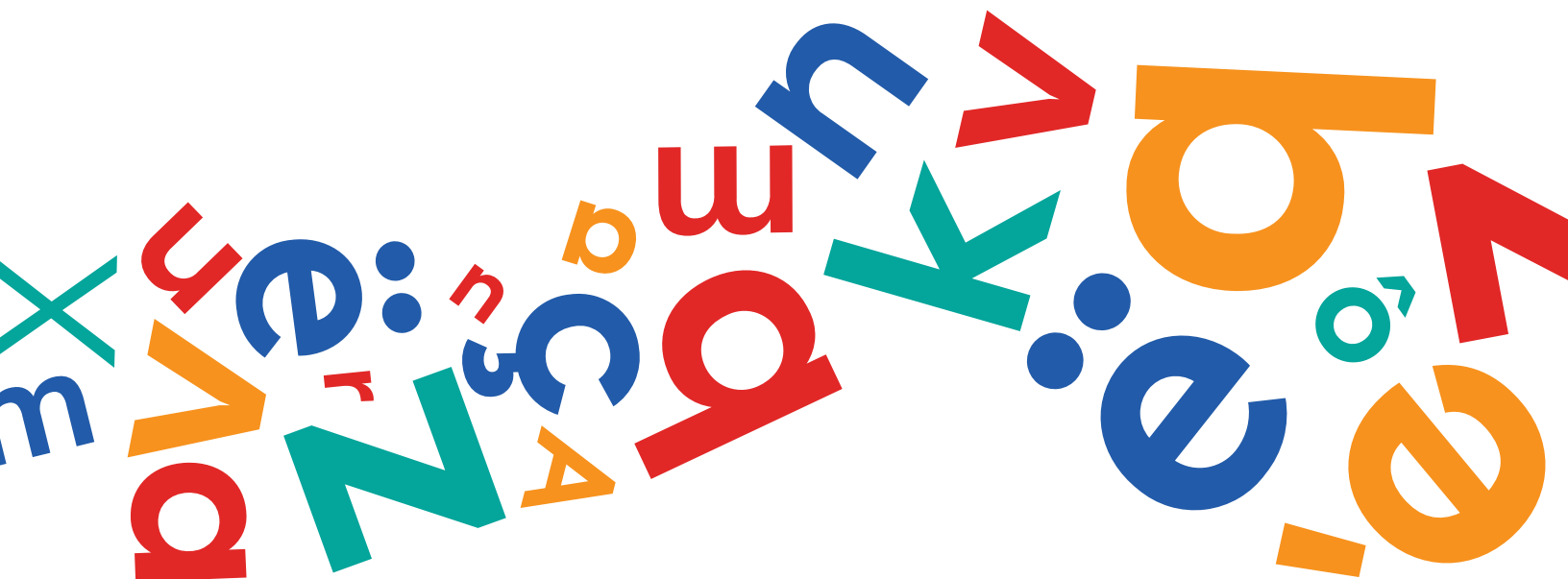
Financial snapshot

As of October 2023, for the 2024 fiscal year (April 2023 to March 2024), CCLF has received funding commitments of approximately \$2.28 million and anticipates expenses of approximately that amount. We have additional multiyear funding commitments of approximately \$1.15 million to support our future program growth. We continue to seek additional funding to support the growth of our programs.

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



Materials from the *Lost & Found* workshop curriculum.



Looking to the future

Literacy is a human right. Currently too many children in Canada, particularly in low-income and marginalized communities, are denied the opportunity to develop this fundamental life skill.

What is at stake is not only the right to read, but an equal right to a bright future.

Since beginning operations in 2018, the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation has worked with focus and dedication to tackle inequities in literacy development across the country. Over the last few years, we've made significant progress toward our goals. Our impact is through our programs with healthcare providers, educators, children, families, and our expanding network of like-minded stakeholders across the country.

We are entering a unique window of opportunity to drive even greater change. We know more today than ever before about how to support children so they can become strong readers — both how to engage little ones in early literacy activities and how best to teach children in school. Alongside a growing and robust network of partners, including governments, we're focused on putting in place the systemic changes needed for children to become strong readers.

All that we achieve is due to the support of donors, partner organizations, and the hundreds of professionals who are deeply committed to advancing literacy where they live and across the country. We are beyond grateful for your continued commitment and support.

Together, we're creating a stronger, more equitable, and more prosperous future. Join us to enable all children in Canada to develop the literacy skills they need to reach their full potential.

Co-Founder and Co-Chair
Heather Munroe-Blum

Co-Founder and Co-Chair
Heather Reisman

Chief Executive Officer
Ariel R. Siller



Children participate in the *Lost & Found* storytelling workshops at BGC Eastview (Toronto, ON).

Thank you!

None of what we achieved in 2023 would have been possible without the support of our generous funders and partners. Thank you for believing in our work and supporting children's literacy!

Funders

We are pleased to acknowledge the support of the following funders that generously donated \$5,000 or more between October 1, 2022, and September 30, 2023.



In-kind Support



People



Board of Directors

Heather Munroe-Blum

Co-Founder and Co-Chair,
Canadian Children's Literacy
Foundation; Chair, Canada
Pension Plan Investment Board

Heather Reisman

Co-Founder and Co-Chair,
Canadian Children's Literacy
Foundation; Chief Executive
Officer, Indigo Books and Music

Jordan Banks

Co-Founder,
Thunder Road Capital

Louise Dennys

Publisher Emerita, Penguin
Random House Canada

Chris Hadfield

Colonel, Astronaut
(ret'd), and Author

Ellis Jacob

President and Chief Executive
Officer, Cineplex

Deepak Kaura

Pediatric Radiologist and Chief
Medical Officer, 1Qbit

Alika Lafontaine

Anesthesiologist and Past President,
Canadian Medical Association

Konata T. Lake

Partner, Tors LLP

Peter Mansbridge

Journalist and Author

Daniela O'Neill

Professor and Director,
Children's Communication Lab,
University of Waterloo

Maryanne Wolf

Professor and Director, Center
for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners,
and Social Justice, University of
California, Los Angeles

David Walmsley

Editor-in-Chief,
The Globe and Mail

Staff

Ariel Siller

Chief Executive Officer

Coralie D'Souza

Vice President, Programs

Nina Jobanputra Shukla

Director, *Early Words*

Elizabeth Attisano

Program Support Specialist

Carrie Chun

Program Manager

Taryn Graham

Program Support Specialist

Amulanga Khechieva

Program Support Coordinator

Cecile Henderson

Program Manager, Nunavut

Zoe Keefer

Program Manager

Hoda Ossoble

Fundraising Manager

Emily Patrick

Program Support Specialist

Kaitlyn Parks

Applied Research Consultant

Cindy Patrino

Finance Manager

Omar Siddiqui

Communications Specialist

Vikki Quocksister

Program Consultant

**A special thanks to the following people who helped
deliver our vision over the last year:**

Shannon Charnock-Davis, Monique Danielle,
Katy Miller, Dorin Greenwood, Sonya Bonin,
and Sonia Kania.

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

 @CanLiteracy

 @CanLiteracy

 @CanLiteracy

 Canadian Children's
Literacy Foundation

 Canadian Children's
Literacy Foundation

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



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

