



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Impact Report

2022



A message from our leadership

At a time when children’s literacy is in peril, in part because of COVID-19–related disruptions, the Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation is working collaboratively to build a brighter, more literate future for children in Canada.

Over one million children in Canada are not reading at grade level. **The Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation (CCLF) is taking bold action to address this literacy gap by leveraging the skills, passion, and capacity of families, professionals, and other child-serving organizations.**

Together, we’re enabling children throughout Canada to develop the literacy skills they need to reach their full potential.

To enable more equitable access to educational opportunity, CCLF delivers solutions that expand access to early literacy and drives systemic changes in how children are supported on their reading journey. All our work is informed by best-in-class research on how to raise readers in a multilingual, multicultural Canada.

For example, our signature *Early Words/Premiers mots* program trains healthcare providers to engage families with children up to age six in conversations about early literacy. As of 2022, the program is now offered in 38 clinics across six provinces and territories, reaching over 20,000 children with critical literacy supports.

We’ve mobilized 40 multisectoral partners from coast to coast to coast to advance our recommendation that improved literacy become a goal of Canada’s new Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system and to advocate for the new policies required to achieve that goal. Our recommendations are based on consultations with governments, academics, associations of early

childhood educators, other literacy organizations, community groups, and our own survey, which shows that most early childhood educators lack sufficient knowledge of how to support early literacy development.

In addition to growing our existing initiatives, we are pleased to be working with a national coalition of child-serving organizations on *Lost & Found*, a national literacy project and exhibition that enables children and families to share their COVID-19 pandemic experiences with each other and the world.

None of what we achieved this year would have been possible without the support of donors, collaborating organizations, and the hundreds of professionals who are deeply committed to advancing literacy where they live and beyond. We are grateful for their continued outstanding support.

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

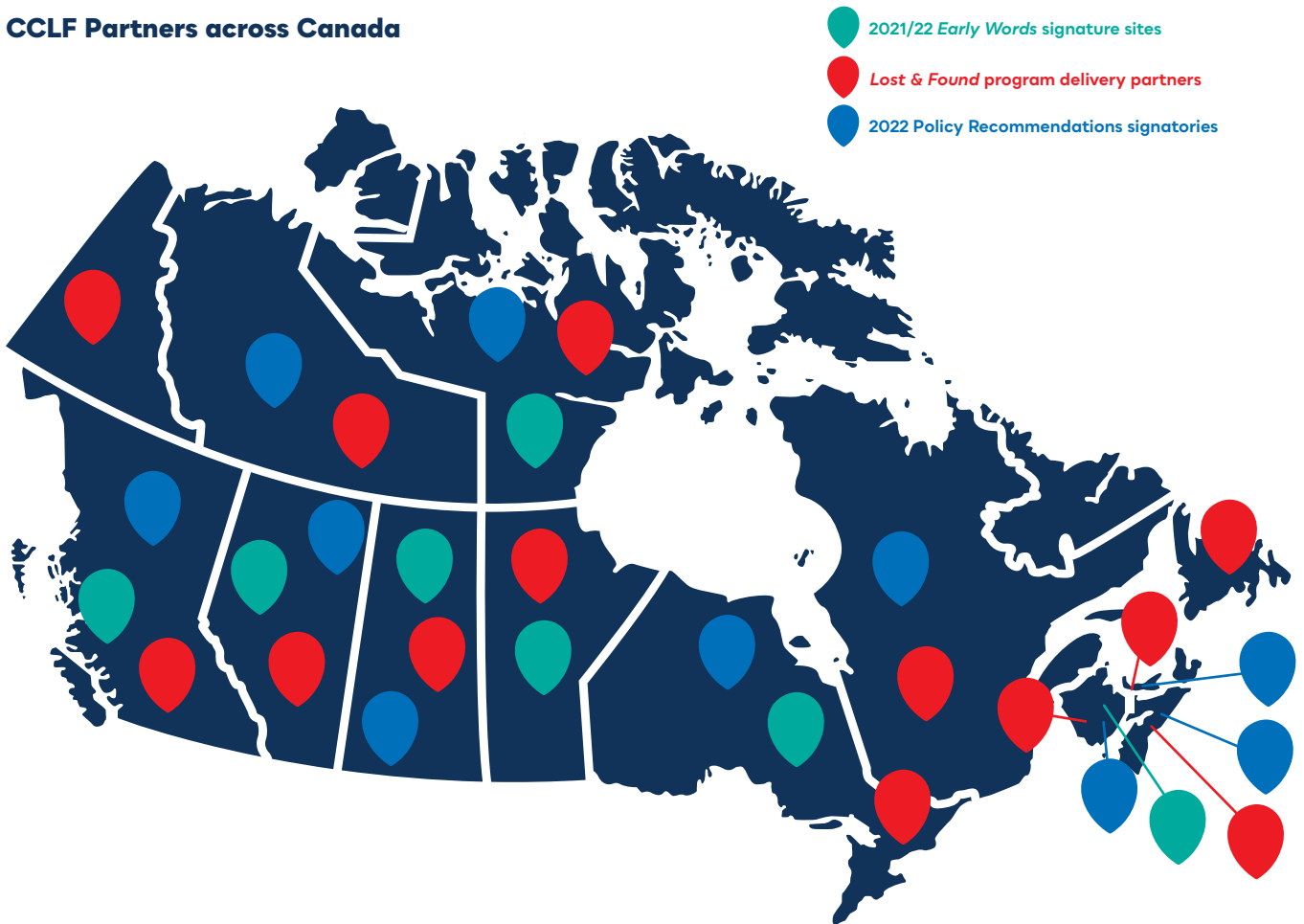
Heather Munroe-Blum
Co-Founder and Co-Chair

Heather Reisman
Co-Founder and Co-Chair

Ariel Siller
Chief Executive Officer

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation's Impact in 2022

CCLF Partners across Canada



20,000

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

700

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

30+

community partners delivering *Lost & Found* storytelling workshops for kids under 12

40

leading multisectoral partners endorse our policy recommendations in our Federal Pre-Budget Submission



Early Words/Premiers mots

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

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

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 38 clinics in six provinces and territories, and is poised for expansion to 95 sites across Canada by 2024.

Integrating early literacy into primary care

Early Words/Premiers mots in action

Four-month-old Cali has come to the Acadia Community Health Centre in Calgary with her mum, Theresa, and dad, Jericho, for a routine immunization visit. Originally from the Philippines, the couple has set down roots in Calgary after first settling in Manitoba. Theresa and Jericho are also parents to five-year-old Mishka, so they already know what to expect from well-child appointments. But this visit is different.

For the first time, the nurse spoke to Theresa and Jericho about the importance of talking, reading, and singing with Cali every day, and how surrounding her with lots of words will help her develop a healthy brain. The nurse then gave them a brand-new board book to take home to read with Cali.

“It’s a nice surprise to get a book, especially from the clinic,” says Jericho. He expected to get just a copy of Cali’s vaccination record, but he and Theresa were delighted to learn that this book is theirs to keep.

“We get to keep the book and read it to Cali,” says Theresa. “Her older sister will probably read it to her, so it’s really nice.”

Since Acadia Community Health Centre is an *Early Words* site, from now until Cali turns six, her healthcare providers will share early literacy advice with her parents and will give her a new age-appropriate book at each visit so her family can put that advice into practice.



Thanks to donor support, at Cali’s recent immunization visit her parents received early literacy guidance and a brand-new board book to take home.



Early Words is helping kids become readers

94% of healthcare providers say *Early Words* training increased their knowledge of how to integrate early literacy into their routine practice.

91% of healthcare providers say the training increased their awareness of the importance of early literacy counselling.

87% of healthcare providers believe they are making a positive impact on families by talking to them about early literacy.

83% of healthcare providers talked to families about the importance of early literacy at every (or almost every) visit.

“It’s been so great to be able to provide the books and talk about reading [to babies],” says public health nurse Rachel Shabada. “A lot of people don’t know how important interactions are to their baby’s brain development, so it’s a great way to start.”



Thanks to generous donors like the RBC Foundation, the Azrieli Foundation, the Lawrence Schafer Foundation, and others, 377 trained *Early Words* providers delivered important early literacy guidance and 20,000 books to families across Canada.



Healthcare providers and families love *Early Words!*



“Early literacy is about creating a good foundation for development, preventive health, and setting kids up for success.”

– Dr. Sarah Gander, pediatrician (Saint John, NB)

“I enjoy reading, so it’s something I hope to pass on to [my son]. I try to read to him once a day.”

– Toni, *Early Words* parent



Rachel Shabada
Registered Nurse at Acadia Community Health Centre
Calgary, AB

Hear from healthcare providers themselves about why they love *Early Words/Premiers mots* ([click to watch video](#)).

Early Words provides healthcare professionals with training and resources, enabling them to talk to families about early literacy at routine health visits for kids under the age of six. At each visit, families are gifted a high-quality children’s book to take home and put the early literacy advice into action. We asked three *Early Words* healthcare professionals to share their program experiences with us – watch the video above to learn more!

Early Words testimonials



“The response [from families] to *Early Words* has been incredible. In addition to providing a leaping off point to discuss early literacy with each of my young patients, it reinforces that as a pediatrician, I am not only concerned with the acute issues that make the child ‘sick’ – I am also very concerned with optimizing their health when they are ‘well.’ We are fully committed to the health and well-being of the children in our care, and *Early Words* is such a great way to show it.” – Dr. Isaac Elias, pediatrician (Surrey, BC)



“When I do [developmental] screening, I like to read the books with pictures to the children. I had one little two-year-old yesterday who was looking at a picture of a baby crying. Her expressions changed to show concern and she said, ‘Oh, he’s crying!’ It’s beautiful to see children reflect empathy.” – Amy Ris, *Early Words* Community Advisory Group member (Vancouver, BC)

“Parents are delighted to receive their books and the children absolutely love them. I had three French-speaking families already this month and they were so happy to receive a book in their home language. I’ve had at least one family who told me they did not have any books at home, and this was their child’s first book. Win!”
– Daphne Jackson, pediatric physiotherapist (Toronto, ON)

“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 (Calgary, AB)

“We appreciate the ability to engage with families [about literacy] outside of their traditional care and to be able to send a book home with them, making the discussions more tangible.”
– Maranda Fullerton, community social pediatrics social worker (Saint John, NB)



Transforming children's primary healthcare in Canada



Thanks to the support of TELUS Health and TELUS Friendly Future Foundation, we are innovating healthcare technology to support early literacy development across Canada. [\(Click to watch a video about the electronic medical records project.\)](#)

One of CCLF's goals is to inspire systemic change – and enabling healthcare professionals to share important early literacy guidance with families at routine healthcare visits is one of the key ways we're enabling this.

Together, with TELUS Health and TELUS Friendly Future Foundation, we're working to embed early literacy prompts into electronic medical record (EMR) systems. EMR systems are the software healthcare professionals use to organize their patient notes and appointment workflow. By seamlessly integrating early literacy reminders into the system, we are reinforcing the importance of providers routinely sharing this information with the families of young children.

Thank you to the volunteers on our Community Advisory and Clinical Advisory Groups who promote early literacy in their communities.



Thank you to all local literacy champions, who (like Sean Freedman, above) are supporting children's literacy in Canada!

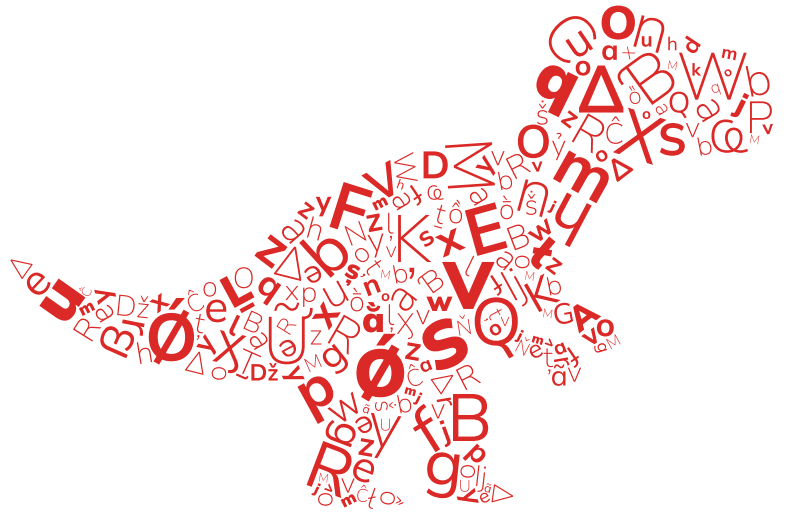
Local literacy champions

Sean Freedman (father of two and owner of Guelph, Ontario-based shipping logistics company Freightzy) is passionate about children's literacy. When the pandemic hit in 2020, he self-published a children's book, *Heroes Behind the Wheel*, which paid tribute to frontline workers in the transportation sector during the pandemic. He has generously donated all proceeds to CCLF.

"This was a fun passion project for me, and I wanted to support an organization making a positive difference in the lives of children, parents, and educators."



Lost & Found[®]



Pandemic stories of discovery, as told by kids in Canada

For many families, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a struggle. Lockdown measures and their knock-on effects have affected children's mental and physical health, development of literacy skills, and connections to their communities. Yet the stories of children in their own words have largely been absent from our collective narrative.

That's why CCLF was thrilled to launch *Lost & Found*, a unique storytelling project that empowers children across the country to craft their pandemic memoirs and share their stories of truth, love, resilience, and community. By expressing themselves using stories, children and families are building their literacy skills, developing an understanding of the power of their words, and delighting in the pleasures of sharing their stories with others.

In partnership with a diverse coalition of child-serving organizations, we are delivering storytelling workshops to 5,000 children up to age 12 (with family members as the primary storytellers for the youngest children). Led by educators and local authors, these workshops provide a forum for children and families to identify, shape, and share their pandemic narratives. *Lost & Found* will culminate in spring 2023 with a pan-Canadian exhibition featuring these important children's stories through both in-person and digital exhibitions.

We thank the Government of Canada for funding *Lost & Found*.



Funded by the
Government
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Financé par le
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Canada

**Lost & Found's
projected reach
in 2022/23**

30+
community partners

**60 sites delivering up to
200
workshops**

5,000+
targeted reach to
children nationwide

Convening and collaborating for greater impact

Bringing evidence-based early literacy programs to under-served communities

“CCLF has its finger on the pulse of what’s happening in all [literacy and child-serving] organizations and [is] making connections so we can collectively have greater impact than if we were working apart.”

– Camesha Cox, Executive Director, The Reading Partnership

Convening and collaborating with like-minded people and organizations to improve children’s literacy in Canada is one of the keys to CCLF’s success. Together with Scarborough, Ontario-based non-profit The Reading Partnership, we are undertaking a multicity consultation through which members of communities facing disproportionate barriers to literacy share recommendations for advancing more equitable access to literacy. These consultations will result in the refinement, expansion, and nationwide implementation of the *Reading Partnership for Parents* (RPP) initiative.

This empowering “train-the-trainer” program was created and developed by Camesha Cox, an Ontario-certified teacher and the founder and Executive Director of The Reading Partnership.



Camesha Cox, Executive Director of The Reading Partnership, reflects on collaborating with the Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation.

RPP is an evidence-based early literacy training program targeting low-income communities, where most participants identify as racialized women. RPP equips these parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources to help their children in JK to Grade 1 learn to read using a play-based approach.

We are proud to collaborate with The Reading Partnership to support the delivery of early literacy training and to partner with families in communities across Canada. Key insights from this community research project will ensure our programs continue to reflect the voices of the communities we serve and inform future programming.

Our work together on the *Reading Partnership for Parents* is made possible in part thanks to support from TD Bank Group through the TD Ready Commitment.





Leading change in early learning and child care

Making improved children's literacy in the early years a national priority

Children who get a strong start on their reading journey right from their earliest days are more likely to become capable, confident readers. A high-quality early learning environment in child care, alongside a word-rich home environment, is critical to enabling that strong start.

While CCLF supports the continued building of a historic Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) system, we see significant gaps in the way early literacy development is supported within current policies. That's why we've been mobilizing child-serving organizations throughout Canada to advance our policy recommendations for a Canada-wide ELCC system in which improved early literacy is a goal.

The key elements of our policy recommendations, as articulated in our 2022 Pre-Budget Submission to the Government of Canada, are:

- **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.**



The Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation made a presentation to the Hon. Karina Gould about the importance of including early literacy as a cornerstone of Canada’s Early Learning and Child Care system.



These recommendations were endorsed by 40 multisectoral partners and are based on consultations with governments, leaders in research and healthcare, associations of early childhood educators, other literacy organizations, and community groups. The recommendations are backed up by [our survey with the Canadian Child Care Federation](#) showing that most early childhood educators lack sufficient knowledge of how to support early literacy development.

We’ve been pleased to present our recommendations to many senior leaders in governments throughout Canada, including the Hon. Karina Gould, Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development. We look forward to continuing to advance early literacy within the evolving ELCC system as a convener and leader in early literacy policy.

The support of the Gerald Schwartz & Heather Reisman Foundation, the Max Bell Foundation, and Innoweave was critical in enabling CCLF to achieve these milestones in advancing public policy on early literacy.



FEBRUARY 25, 2022

Submission to the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2022 Federal Budget

Our 2022 Pre-Budget Submission to the Government of Canada was endorsed by 40 national multisectoral partners. (Click to read our recommendations.)

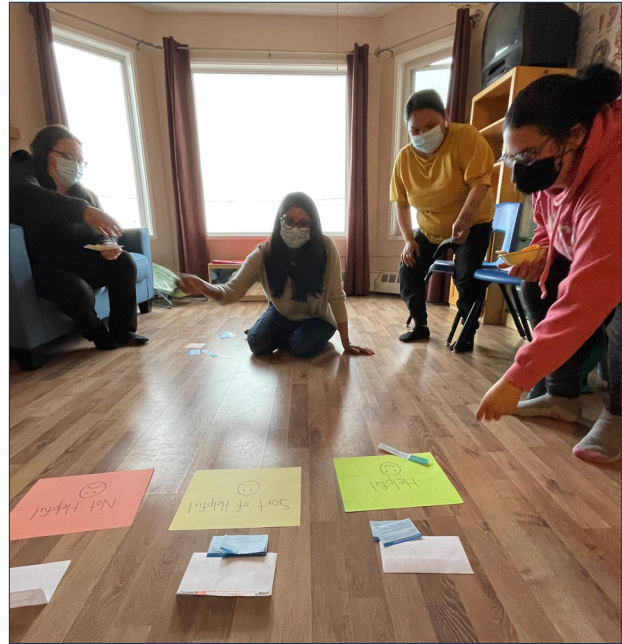
Knowledge in action

Helping families support children’s literacy at home

A great deal of research has emerged in recent years about the importance of reading, talking, and singing to children in their early years, and about how early literacy supports healthy brain development and school readiness. CCLF is working with partners across Canada – in academia, healthcare, social services, and beyond – to translate knowledge into action and ensure families know how to support children’s reading and language development at home. This important work informs and underpins our current and future programming.

CCLF strives to ensure that all our programs are relevant to the communities we serve by co-developing materials with local partners whenever possible. We recently connected with a range of diverse individuals in Nunavut, including early childhood educators, cultural and governmental groups, and health centre staff, to ensure the messaging and resources shared at our *Early Words/Premiers mots* sites in the territory are Inuit-centred. These new resources integrate traditional and contemporary Inuit knowledge of early literacy and story-sharing practices and are informed by the experiences of young families and those supporting them.

We are also proud to collaborate with the multisectoral *Ensuring Full Literacy in a Multicultural and Digital*



Senior Program Manager Nina Jobanputra Shukla (centre) gathers insights about the experiences of families and community members in a focus group in Iqaluit, NU.

World project and Dalhousie University’s Language & Literacy Lab – two entities at the cutting edge of early literacy and language development research. Through these partnerships, [we’ve created accessible, easy-to-understand resources for families and professionals supporting children](#). These resources address common questions about early literacy and feature practical tips to help little ones on their reading journeys.

This work is made possible in part thanks to the in-kind support of research and knowledge mobilization non-profit Mitacs.

In the media

CEO Ariel Siller and Senior Program Manager Nina Jobanputra Shukla shared tips in *The Globe and Mail* on [how parents can support children at home to become resilient readers](#).



Our funders

None of what we achieved in 2022 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 in Canada – we're so grateful!

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation is pleased to acknowledge the support of the following funders, who generously donated \$5,000 or more between October 1, 2021, and September 30, 2022.

Funders



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Financial snapshot*

To date, for the 2023 fiscal year (April 2022 to March 2023), CCLF has received funding commitments of approximately \$2.8 million and anticipates expenses of approximately that amount. We have additional multiyear funding commitments of approximately \$2.1 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.

**As of October 2022*

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  Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation

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.