

Impact Report 2024



Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Why Literacy Matters

LITERACY SHAPES OUR ENTIRE LIVES and leads to children staying in school longer, having better job prospects, and experiencing improved physical and mental health.

Yet despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world, Canada has a reading problem: children's literacy rates are declining.

This trend is reversible, and the time to act is now. Today, we know more than ever what children need to become strong readers, and how reading with children from birth can transform not just their lives but Canada's future.

With your help, we are continuing to lay the groundwork for profound and sustainable systemic change that will make children in Canada the strongest readers in the world.

About Us

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation (CCLF) is dedicated to providing equitable access to opportunities that strengthen children's reading abilities.

As Canada's accelerator for evidence-based initiatives that improve children's literacy, we work collaboratively to launch and scale proven solutions that strengthen families' capacity to raise readers. To date, we've enabled over 100,000 children in Canada to get a stronger start on their reading journey.

Our Impact

CCLF's programs aim to:

- Equip adults to support children's reading development.
- Provide underserved communities with access to opportunities to strengthen literacy.
- Highlight Canada's literacy challenges and drive national solutions.



A family with their Early Words book at Paramount Pediatrics



ACF Pediatrics' Nurse Practitioner Sylvie Beaudry (left) and Dr. Annika Klopp (right)

Early Words:

Integrating early literacy into children’s healthcare and beyond

OUR EARLY WORDS/PREMIERS MOTS PROGRAM continues to expand and bridge gaps between health and literacy by providing practical, evidence-based training to integrate early literacy into healthcare practice.

Through this program, pediatricians, family physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners and allied health professionals in participating clinics are:

- Distributing high-quality children’s books to build families’ home libraries, which reflect the families’ cultures and the child’s stage of development.
- Providing guidance to or counselling families on how to embed early literacy into their daily lives.
- Connecting families to other community resources to deepen at-home early literacy practices.



Twins enjoying their Early Words books at Mississauga Hospital

“[The] program makes a huge difference to the 0-5 year olds in our clinics when they come for their vaccinations. Not only does it offer them a great reward, but it also facilitates literacy discussions and gives parents and children the opportunity to create a positive bond after their appointment.”

Chantal Cormier, Registered Nurse,
Rogersville Health Centre,
Rogersville, New Brunswick




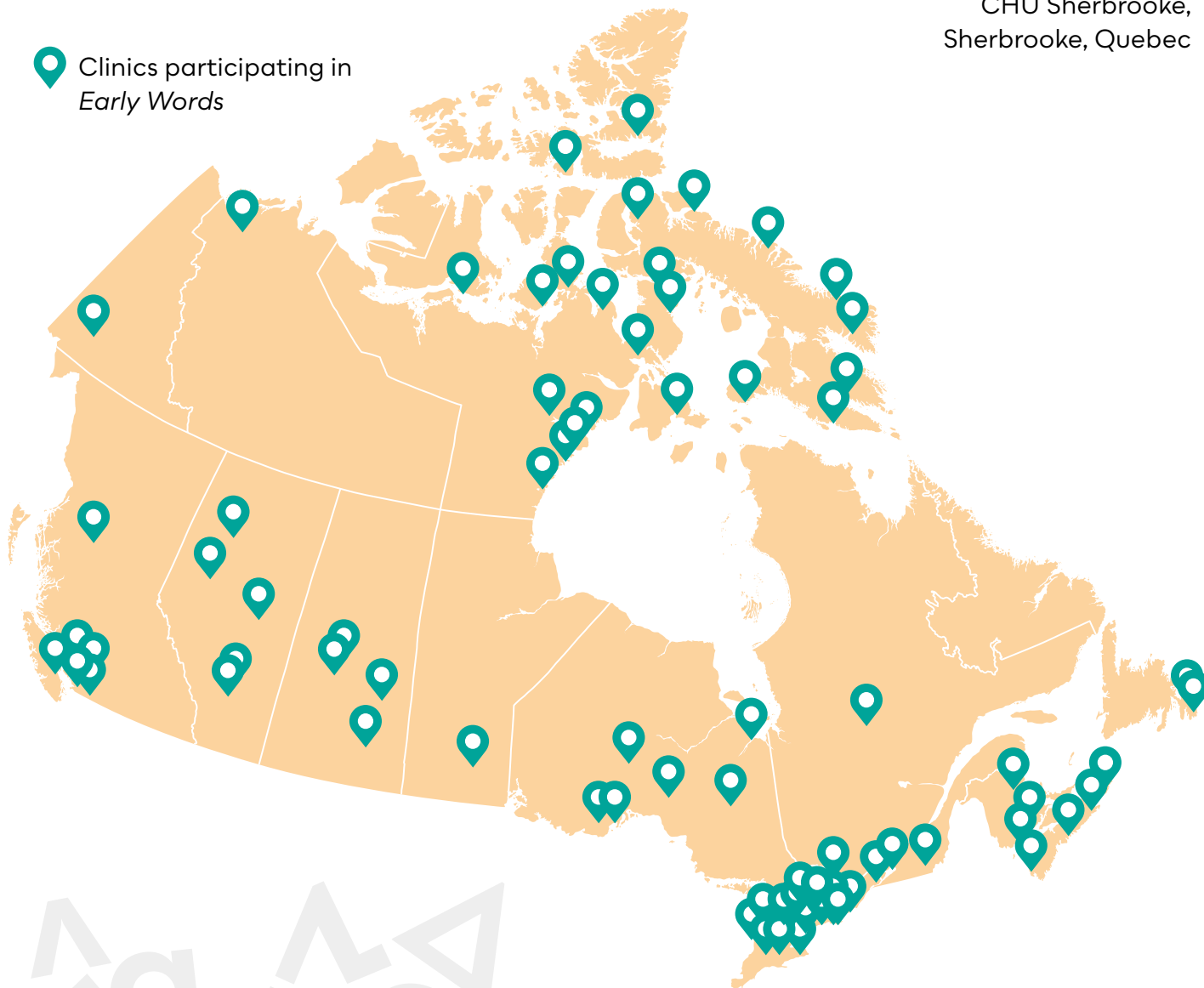
CCLF Program Manager Emily Patrick (left) and Sterling Lyon Pediatrics’ Dr. Jina Pagura (right)

The *Early Words* program has made significant strides over the past four years and is now active over 100 clinics across 12 provinces and territories. Over 1,500 healthcare professionals have been trained, facilitating over 104,000 early literacy conversations and distributing books to over 44,000 families.

“I love this program. It allows me to have something constructive and positive to say to families experiencing vulnerability, to have positive moments with them, and to model positive interactions for parents and caregivers.”

Clara Low-Décarie, Pediatrician,
CHU Sherbrooke,
Sherbrooke, Quebec

 Clinics participating in *Early Words*



Provencher Pediatrics:

An *Early Words* clinic tells its story

An *Early Words* clinic tells its story

COMMUNITY-BASED PEDIATRICIAN Dr. Rachael Gardner has always been passionate about the connection between healthcare and literacy. Since starting practice seven years ago, she has focused on guiding her patients in supporting their child's development through building word-rich environments. She was excited to learn how the *Early Words* program could enhance her literacy efforts by providing her clinic with resources and books for families.

“It’s been really nice seeing patients come back with that memory of having got a book, and hearing how they enjoyed it.”

Provencher Pediatrics, a family-run clinic in Winnipeg, Manitoba, is one of this year's newest *Early Words* sites. Dr. Gardner leads the clinic with her husband Daniel O'Halloran, who serves as clinic manager. Occasionally, their seven-year-old daughter Lucy takes the *Early Words* inventory, a process she describes as “easy.”



Provencher Pediatrics' Dr. Rachael Gardner



Provencher Pediatrics' inventory of *Early Words* books

When the clinic participated in a pre-survey measuring families' awareness of early literacy, Dr. Gardner was shocked by the results: only 14% of respondents could recall hearing her talk about the importance of talking, singing, and reading. "I realized that as much as I'm passionate about talking about literacy, I need to actually be doing it every time."

Since Provencher has started delivering the *Early Words* program, Dr. Gardner has seen a shift in her own approach to literacy counselling.

"Having a book to give to parents is just a very physical reminder to work literacy into the conversation."

She can already see the program's impact: after just six months, 92% of families surveyed can now recall hearing Dr. Gardner talking about the importance of talking, singing, and reading.

Families who previously did not know they could start reading to their children at such a young age are visibly finding joy in the act of sharing books. "It's been really nice seeing patients come back with that memory of having got a book, and hearing how they enjoyed it. That definitely sticks out for me: people reporting back how interested in the book their baby was, and how surprised they were by that, or even that they started reading a little bit more with a sibling!"



Provencher Pediatrics' Clinic Manager Daniel O'Halloran

Literacy awareness in medical education

OUR VISION for *Early Words* is that early literacy counselling becomes as standard in children's healthcare as weighing and measuring. To that end, we are working to reach healthcare providers at every stage of their educational journey.

Over the past year, CCLF successfully developed eight multiyear partnerships to embed early literacy into medical learner education across Canada. By offering pre-service training, we can teach healthcare providers about early literacy right at the start of their careers. And through in-service training, we can reach healthcare professionals outside of the *Early Words* program.

In July, we delivered training to pediatric residents at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine. The residents discussed how to weave this knowledge into their efforts to serve Northern Ontario's patient population, and expressed their appreciation for the evidence-based information, concrete tips, and resources we shared.



Years 1-4 Residents at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine

“At NOSM, we recognize literacy as a social determinant of health and see the value of a robust literacy promotion program for children in northern Ontario. Our staff and residents were delighted to invite the CCLF team to share their expertise on this critical subject.”

The training session was a wonderful opportunity to build on our social pediatrics curriculum. Sharing this critical information with our residents early on in their careers ensures they are supported in proactively building relationships with families for years to come.”

Dr. Athena Young,

Pediatrician and Resident Program
Academic Coordinator, Northern Ontario
School of Medicine

Partnerships with Indigenous Communities

WE ARE COMMITTED to partnering with Indigenous communities across Canada to co-create literacy and wellness solutions.

Since 2023, CCLF has collaborated with the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay to offer *Early Words* in the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee. One site in Mistissini is already participating in the program.

We have also been working with the NWT Literacy Council and the Government of Northwest Territories to develop a framework to implement *Early Words* across the Northwest Territories. The program operates at two pilot sites in Inuvik and Tsiigehtchic, reaching over 200 children. Ongoing consultations with Elders, community members, and healthcare professionals will ensure the program reflects local values and traditions.

“Families are very happy to receive a book with their well-child check ups. It is a great opportunity for us to discuss how important reading is to baby and language development!”

Barb Lennie, Registered Nurse,
Inuvik Public Health

Images from top to bottom:

Children visiting the Northwest Territories Literacy Council booth at this year's Baby Expo in Yellowknife, NWT

Oopik Aglukark, Public Health Nurse (Arviat, NU) with Early Words books

Children receiving books at the Northern Store community event in Baker Lake., NU



In Nunavut, *Early Words* has grown to be offered in 24 out of the territory's 25 communities, thanks to reciprocity, transparency, and collaboration with the Government of Nunavut's Department of Health, Inuit owned publishers, and local partners including Elders, community organizations, Public Health Nurses and Community Health Representatives.

“Prior to *Early Words*, I was shy to talk about literacy in Nunavut. I recognized that part of Truth and Reconciliation is promoting language revitalization, but I did not feel equipped to do this as an English-speaking nurse. I am thankful to the *Early Words* program for providing me with a platform to address those calls to action.”

Chloe Norris, RN, Public Health Nursing Practice Consultant for Kivalliq Region



Gabriela Goodman, Territorial Director Population Health, Department of Health, Government of Nunavut



Seepoolau Nauyuk, Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program Coordinator (left), and Katie Hughes, Executive Director, Tasiuqtiigit Society (right)



Inuktitut Early Words books



Teaching Our Children to Read

OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, CCLF has partnered with The Reading Partnership and The Black Health Alliance on a research project exploring the systemic and sociocultural challenges Black children face in developing literacy skills.

The upcoming report, “Teaching our Children to Read: Understanding the Reading Journey of Black Children in Canada,” reveals that despite Black families’ and service providers’ strong support for literacy, anti-Black racism remains a significant barrier.

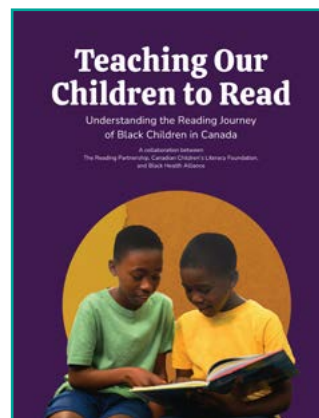
Several key recommendations are offered in the report, including:

- Researching best practices to enhance literacy;
- Providing funding for Black-led organizations to develop literacy programs;
- Mandating schools to partner with community organizations supporting Black literacy; and
- Establishing literacy programs for older children and youth with low literacy.

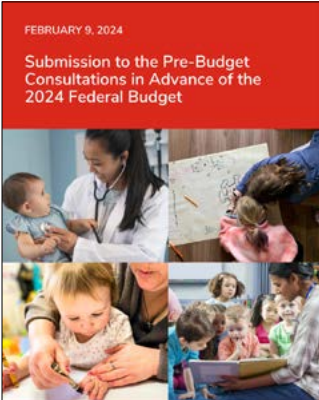
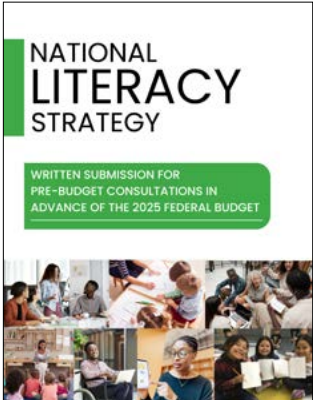
This report serves as a roadmap for creating a more equitable educational landscape, addressing systemic inequities so that Black children can experience a supportive, empowering educational journey that nurtures their literacy skills and unlocks their potential. We look forward to applying the recommendations made within to help create equitable opportunities to strengthen literacy for all.

“This project seeks to better understand how Black families have successfully supported their children despite the odds, learn about the barriers and challenges they face, and identify viable solutions that address their specific needs.”

Camesha Cox, Executive Director,
The Reading Partnership



Guiding Systemic Change



AS PART OF the Canada-wide Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) System, we're calling for the Government of Canada to partner with provinces and territories to:

- Enable early childhood educators to access quality training that includes the *why* and *how* of developing children's early literacy and language skills;
- Strengthen additional pathways to children's literacy for families that do not yet participate in early learning and childcare programs; and
- Include data on the effectiveness of the ELCC systems in improving children's literacy development as part of the broader ELCC data strategy.

To help advance this work, we're excited to be nearing completion on a comprehensive research report aimed at equipping children's support networks with the information needed to help children develop five foundational literacy skills. Entitled "Five by Five," the report will offer evidence-based recommendations to help policymakers ensure that early literacy becomes a core component of Canada's ELCC system. The report will be available in early 2025.

We thank the Max Bell Foundation and the Rotary Club of Calgary for supporting this project.

We were pleased to have these recommendations endorsed by 65 organizations. We are also working with a coalition of 25 literacy organizations on a National Literacy Strategy that will provide policymakers with literacy solutions for people of all ages.





A Message from our Leadership

THE EVIDENCE HAS LONG BEEN CLEAR:

Literacy feeds brain development from birth and shapes the quality of our lives. Reading to a child from birth helps sets the foundation for developing strong literacy skills and the ability to become stronger readers. Strong readers will stay in school longer, have better job options as adults, and experience greater physical and mental health throughout life.

So it might be a surprise for Canadians to learn that Canada has a reading problem. Despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we are facing a decline in children's literacy rates. More than one in four Canadian children are starting school without the developmental skills they need to learn to read, and many of these children are starting behind and staying behind. A one per cent increase in adult literacy would create an economic benefit of \$67 billion gross domestic product for Canada per year.

How is Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation responding to this challenge?

By equipping every adult that affects a child's life with the information and skills needed to help children develop literacy skills.

The path to supporting children in becoming strong readers is clear. Today, we know about the power of reading to children from birth, the power of science-aligned reading instruction in schools, the importance of access to early diagnosis and support for those children with reading differences, and the five key skills children need to be strong readers.

At the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation, we're disseminating this information to the professionals who are best



Siblings reading together at Mississauga Hospital

positioned to act on it. We're also focusing on reducing reading barriers in communities, and advocating for the literacy needs of children at a national and provincial level. Lastly, we are continuing to deliver effective programs and close collaborations with healthcare providers, Indigenous leaders, educators, families and policymakers across the country.

These initiatives would not be possible without the unwavering support of our donors, partner organizations, and the professionals across the country who are committed to children's literacy. We thank you for your dedication and belief in our mission.

By taking bold action together to reverse the decline in literacy, we are supporting Canada's children in reaching their full potential. We invite you to join us on this journey to building a better future for Canada.

Heather Reisman, Co-Founder & Co-Chair
Heather Munroe-Blum, Co-Founder & Co-Chair
Sommer Wedlock, CEO



Financial Reports

TO DATE,* for the 2025 fiscal year (April 2024 to March 2025), CCLF has received funding commitments of approximately \$2.4 million and anticipates expenses of approximately that amount. We have additional multiyear funding commitments of approximately \$6 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 2024



Thank you

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2024 would not 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 and In-Kind Support Make It Possible

We are pleased to acknowledge the support of the following funders that generously donated \$5,000 or more between October 1, 2023, and September 30, 2024.



In-kind Support



Literacy Champion Spotlight:

Tessa Kalinowski's Early Literacy Half IRONMAN

In July 2024, Tessa Kalinowski ran the Calgary Half IRONMAN and raised almost \$6,000 for the *Early Words* program in memory of her beloved mom and grandmother. Tessa knows they would have wholeheartedly supported *Early Words*.

“As a teacher, my mom understood ... just how important literacy is to a child’s lifelong learning, ability to succeed in life, and love of reading. My grandma was much the same.”

“My mom and grandma loved to read, and I have so many memories with them involving all things books and literacy, and credit much of my love of reading to them.... We spent many days exchanging books ... and I had the immense joy of watching both her and my mom read to my kids when they were tiny. Those memories will always be some of my favourites.”

CCLF is grateful to Tessa and those who supported her race. Champions like Tessa make our work possible.



Tessa high-fiving her daughter mid-race



Our Board and Staff

Board of Directors

Heather Munroe-Blum

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

Jordan Banks

Co-Founder, Thunder Road Capital

Chris Hadfield

Colonel, Astronaut (ret'd), and Author

Deepak Kaura

Pediatric Radiologist and Chief Medical Officer,
1Qbit

Konata T. Lake

Partner, Torys LLP

Daniela O'Neill

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

Heather Reisman

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

Louise Dennys

Publisher Emerita, Penguin Random House Canada

Ellis Jacob

President and Chief Executive Officer, Cineplex

Alika Lafontaine

Anesthesiologist and President,
Canadian Medical Association

Peter Mansbridge

Journalist and Author

Maryanne Wolf

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

Staff

Sommer Wedlock

Chief Executive Officer

Coralie D'Souza

Vice President, Programs

Nina Jobanputra Shukla

Director, *Early Words*

Carrie Chun

Program Manager

Cecile Henderson

Program Manager, Nunavut

Zoe Keefer

Program Manager

Emily Patrick

Program Manager

Elizabeth Attisano

Program Support Specialist

Taryn Graham

Program Support Specialist

Kaitlyn Parks

Program Support Specialist

Hajar Seiyad

Program Support Specialist

Amulanga Khechieva

Program Support Coordinator

Lise Johnston

Finance Manager

Omar Siddiqui

Communications Specialist

With special thanks to **Ariel Siller**,
Mathura Maheswaran, **Hoda Ossoble**,
and **Cindy Patrino**.





Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation


Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation
620 King Street West, Suite 400
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1M6

info@childrensliteracy.ca
www.childrensliteracy.ca

 @CanLiteracy

 @CanLiteracy

 @CanLiteracy

 Canadian Children's
Literacy Foundation

 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.

Charitable Registration No. 714760923 RR 0001