



VOLUNTEER READERS PROGRAMME

2022-23 ANNUAL REPORT

In September, 2022, the majority of TDSB children returned to their schools with only a very few studying virtually. Further, the press made the public aware of the serious setbacks in early literacy skills as a result of the pandemic. With fewer than 100 Volunteers in June and unsure how many of these would be comfortable returning to the schools, we hoped to provide VRP to 12 or 13 schools by early October. Over the next four months, the program unfolded as follows:

- Volunteer ranks swelled to 160 with new applications and the welcome return of many pre-pandemic Volunteers;
- 11 of the 13 schools we approached wanted to continue with VRP, and another 12, most of which had never previously worked with VRP, contacted us to request the program, finding us through our website and word-of-mouth among fellow educators;
- Learning there were insufficient Volunteers to meet the demand, several schools offered to find Volunteers from their communities if we would train and manage them;
- VRP continued to provide our virtual program to one online class;
- Requests were received from 4 schools for our self-direct Literacy Program package.

Notably, the Fall also marked the beginning of a partnership between VRP and York University's Faculty of Education. Fifteen York Teacher Candidates read with us, each for ½ day weekly, as a co-op placement in their first year program. With our training, they provided VRP to grades 2 and 3 struggling readers in 4 of our schools.

Following the release of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read report (2022), we increased our efforts to offer training to our volunteers in the highly recommended phonological approach to reading with online videos, developed and produced by VRP Board Director Marjie Calla, on incorporating phonics and phonemic awareness into our reading sessions.

By June of 2023, VRP was operating in 26 TDSB schools and, in our graduation ceremonies, we presented certificates of accomplishment and gift books to more than 400 children. Accolades from schools

included the following:

- *“It is an excellent program that has helped and supported our lowest grade 1 readers move forward in their literacy journey and has developed their enjoyment for reading!”*
Principal, Bridlewood PS
- *“On behalf of the students, staff and families of Gosford Public School I would like to extend our most sincere thanks for the work you do at our school. Please know that your work with our young readers does make a difference. The students look forward to working with you each week and we can see their reading confidence grow as a result of the work they do with you.”*
Principal, Gosford PS
- *“Thank you very much for volunteering your time and effort every week to come read with our young students. Having one-on-one time with a caring, patient and skilled adult reader means so much to them; they really look forward with joy and excitement to your sessions. I love seeing their big, bright smiles every week as they prepare to go read with you! Happy holidays and see you all in January!”*

Teacher, Earl Beatty PS

VRP’s February Fundraiser Love for Literacy Month raised almost \$23,000 from our many generous supporters. Over the year, we were also supported by the following Foundations: The Coffey Family Foundation, GHW Memorial Fund, The Joan and Clifford Hatch Foundation, Lamb Foundation, The Ryley Family Foundation and the Weppler Family Foundation.

As always, I wish to close this report with an expression of gratitude to all the Volunteers who so generously dedicate their time and skills to the children reading with VRP.

Lenora Butler

Lenora F. Butler, Ph.D.
Executive Director
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