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Editor's Note:

Please send articles for future newsletters to katrinah@sfu.ca
Follow us!



The Reading Bear Society Newsletter

Valentine's Day Edition



Ambassadors Andrew Pursell and Julia Zazoulina read to kindergarten students at Queen Alexandra Elementary School.

REPORT



From President Joanne Roussy, February 2015

"If you light a lamp for someone it will also brighten your own path." Buddhist Proverb

The start of a new year is a time for reflection, and as I look back on our wonderful successes during the past year, I am once again impressed by the tremendous amount of collaboration among all levels. We accomplished a great deal during the

past year, and all of you had a hand in our many achievements. To name but a few – the development of the RBS manuals (orientation, communication, school clubs, teachers) and the successful launch of the website, blog, and internal newsletter. In February, to celebrate Valentine's Day, all kindergarten classrooms received books. In April, at our monthly meeting we had all groups represented: ambassadors, directors, and advisory board members. For the second year, in May, all StrongStart children received bags of books and



THE READING BEAR

crafts. In June, we received our first major gift. In August, the work begun with Colleen Sturrock laying the foundation for the buddy sessions and RBS school manual. In October, the ambassadors introduced the Reading Bear to kindergarten classrooms. This was a huge hit! For the third consecutive year, Christmas/Holiday cards were made by the children, with the funds going to StrongStart children.

Our successes are achieved only because of the hard work and dedication of each and every one of you. I want to take this opportunity, on behalf of everyone at the RBS, to thank you for your dedication and commitment to our youth and organization.

This Valentine's Day edition is focused on intergenerational mentorship, one of the foundational pillars of the RBS. One component of this pillar is the contributions of

medical student ambassadors. This edition is devoted to all of their undertakings. A special, heartfelt thank you to all of the generous contributions from our expert advisors! The wisdom and experience from Dr. Linda Siegel, Colleen Sturrock, Julie Gelson, Dr. Vo, and Stephanie Gold, to name but a few have been profound and instrumental in the creation of materials. Thank you to all of our advisors!

Warm regards,
Joanne Roussy, President
The Reading Bear Society



Artists: Wayland, 13 years old, St. George's and Ethan, 5 years old, Graham Bruce

RBS and the Year of Reconciliation

In recognition of the Year of Reconciliation and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the Reading Bear Society (RBS) is dedicated to promoting principles of mutual recognition and respect. By doing so, the RBS acknowledges the traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations, on which we live, work, and learn.





THE READING BEAR



From Isabel Chen, Co-founder and Director of Students

Dear Reading Bear community,

Happy New Year! Greetings from my perch at UBC medical school!

This holiday season, I had an incredible opportunity to reflect on the amazing progress in all realms of the Reading Bear. As a student, it is beyond humbling to see how the entire organization, our city partners, and our supporters have donated countless hours and resources to realize our mission of a healthy, more compassionate community built on early literacy.

A bit about the Ambassadors:
The Ambassadors are a young group, primarily consisting of medical students, who are passionate about childhood education, health, and wellness! Together, they work on building and nurturing city-wide friendships with thoughtful, sustainable programs and activities. They are also actively involved in finding cutting-edge research on

mindfulness, heart-mind connection, and general wellness to inform the Reading Bear buddy initiatives! They welcome all enthusiastic students - at all ages of their education - to reach out and share their thoughts and ideas with our team. In their words, "We are stronger, together!"

As a group of many student volunteers, we coordinate several key areas including communications, fundraising, recruitment, research, school clubs, and school visits.

If you have any questions about any of our areas of focus, please do not hesitate to contact me via email at isabel.chen23@gmail.com

Yours in the Reading Bear Society,
Isabel & the Student Ambassadors



Video: Meet the ambassadors of the Reading Bear Society

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/hp8ckstuv8an8ef/Reading%20Bear.mov?dl=0>



Meet the RBS Student Ambassadors!



Isabel Chen

Isabel is currently in her 4th year of medical school. She brings a strong passion for health equity and human rights to the program.



Victoria Baronas

Victoria began her MD/PhD program at UBC in 2013. She is a strong believer in the importance of early education and the lifelong benefits it precipitates.



James Dueckman

Currently a second-year medical student, James was excited by the prospect of working with children and promoting literacy through the RBS.



Katrina Dutkiewicz

Katrina donated many childhood books to the RBS in her first year of medical school. Now, as a third-year student, she is involved in the project as ambassador.



Kay Fung

Being a passionate advocate for children's health (and being a big kid at heart herself), Kay became involved in the RBS last year as part of a self-directed project.



Katrina Hsu

Katrina is in her fourth year at Simon Fraser University majoring in Biomedical Physiology. Her passion for reading is what drew her to the project.



Rachel Liu

Rachel hopes to gain more understanding of the community's needs and contribute to the collection of data that shows the enormous value of the RBS.



John Peel

A Toronto native, John moved to Vancouver for medical school. John and his teddy have worked their way through many books, with a preference for medical or political non-fiction.



Dr. Andrew Pursell

Andrew is currently in his second year of medical school at UBC. As a life-long learner, he has grown to appreciate the value of education and its importance in creating a happy, balanced society.



Cristian Vadeanu

A current second-year medical student, Cristian is becoming actively involved in researching the efficacy of the Reading Bear program on different aspects of childhood development.



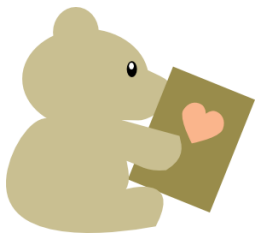
Christine Wang

Christine is a third-year medical student at UBC. Currently, she is working with three second-year medical students to expand the project in two different aspects.



Julia Zazoulina

Julia is currently a second-year medical student at UBC. Julia sees the RBS as a sustainable model that builds a foundation of literacy and encourages the joy and culture of learning.





THE READING BEAR



Cristian Vadeanu, Ambassador, Chair of Fundraising, on Kindergarten Visits

Recently, Victoria and I had the opportunity to visit a few kindergarten classrooms to introduce the Reading Bear program. The experience of visiting and working with the teachers and children was extremely rewarding. To see what role the breathing exercise, stories and the bears played on the children's anxiety and overall comfort was extraordinary. Children became instantly interested in further learning about bears, and continuing to read to their bears. The sense of warmth and love immediately became apparent when the bears were introduced to the children, who then had

the chance to hug them and pass them around. The two stories that were read were dynamic and informative, and had children involved and engaged. Towards the end of the visit, children were left calm and satisfied, longing for more storytelling and group activities. These visits were amazing experiences for me, and had left me wondering of the endless possibilities that this program can offer for our youth. I am left content and with wonderful memories



Slideshow: Ambassador Kindergarten visits

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/cqw16plmg142v51/Kindergarten%20visits.m4v?dl=0>



Andrew Pursell, Ambassador, Chair of Research

My original desire to get involved with the Reading Bear stemmed from my personal belief that education is the mechanism that allows us to succeed in the world, and every child, no matter where they come from, deserves a good education. However, what continues to inspire me on a daily basis is how naturally effective the Reading Bear approach is. We continuously observe that when you bring together a kindergarten child and an adolescent as reading buddies something truly profound happens. The relationships that they form are powerful, and not only do they facilitate the formation of literacy skills, they also inspire empathy and deep connection.



program so more children can have access to this wonderful opportunity. I work as the ambassador to Saint George's School, where I completed my high school education. This school has been a powerful supporter in the pioneering of the program and every grade 8 student participates in the Reading Bear. My role has been to act as a liaison and mentor to a committee of boys who fundraise and support the program. It has been inspirational working with the adolescents, and I am continually astonished by the energy and maturity of the boys. As Director of Research, I am overseeing a study aimed at validating the effectiveness of the Reading Bear intervention and reflective writing. These will be formally assessed in the coming year with the help of several medical students from the University of British Columbia. It is very exciting to contribute to the evidence that supports the Reading Bear so we can convince others to adopt such an impactful program.

As an ambassador, my goal is to focus on engagement and advocacy so we can continue to expand the



The Reflective Writing Component for Peers

Another component of the Reading Bear is the reflective writing for adolescents. After each buddy visit, the adolescents are asked to complete a reflective writing exercise.



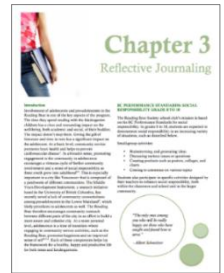
Rachel Liu and Victoria Baronas, RBS Student Ambassadors



The benefits of community service are wide-ranging and include personal awareness, civic engagement and academic performance. Without a reflective process to integrate and consolidate the experience, however, these benefits are either diminished or absent. Reflective journaling involves a creative and cognitive process to make sense of the kindergarten visit and its meaning with respect to each session's theme, and then creating a written narrative. Each journal entry is centered on the day's theme and, through questions, quotes and videos, encourages meaningful reflection. These Reading Bear



sessions and journal entries are designed to fall within the Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines. In addition, reflection itself is an important skill to practice and develop. The ability to reflect on our own strengths and weaknesses is important for understanding ourselves, from what to focus on when studying for an exam to the decision to aim for a higher milestone on the path to our goals and aspirations. In fact, critical reflection is an important determinant of well-being and success in life.



Dr. Andrew Deonarine, co-investigator, Cambridge University



Dr. Deonarine is an expert in using technology to improve literacy, and will be managing the journaling database which will provide novel real time analysis and trend discovery, as well as be

analyzed with standard analytical approaches to identify concepts, themes, and other trends in reflective writing entries providing a multidimensional, comprehensive picture of how adolescents may be benefitting from the RBS sessions.

Santhe LeBlanc, RBS Director, Head of Grade 8, SGS



The overall observation was that students were more consciously engaged with their buddy and were better prepared for the diversity of circumstances. By incorporating the reflection component, students were given the opportunity to revisit their thoughts, and share with their peers questions and

observations about their visit. This component has proven to be significant for both the students and their teacher advisors, as both have engaged in deeper connection to the program. In our upcoming visit, we are hoping to push this even further by introducing an inquiry model, which will allow boys to engage conceptually with their personal experiences.



“My Bear, My Buddy, and Me: A Friendship Book”

John Peel and Julia Zazoulina, RBS Ambassadors



An exciting development for the Reading Bear is the ongoing production of an exercise book to be used in upcoming visits. “My Bear, My Buddy, and Me: A Friendship

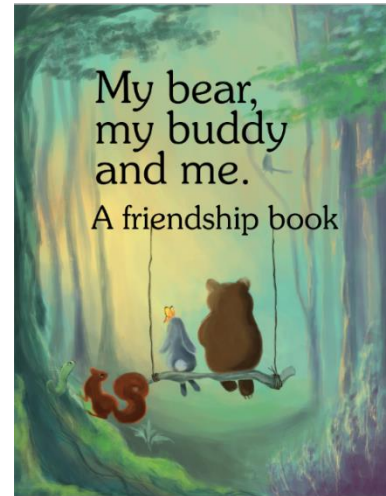
Book”, endearingly nicknamed “the Bear Book”, is an activity book to be completed by each buddy pair through a year’s visits. The idea behind this book is simple: a collection of creative and literacy exercises that are centred on the

theme of each visit. Every chapter opens with the beginning of another adventure for our protagonist Brown Bear, and each exercise builds up to

the conclusion of the story at the end of the chapter. As buddy pairs go through the book helping Brown Bear and his friends, they encounter rhymes, spelling, and opportunities for creative expression. The objective of this learning tool is that it will supplement and standardize the visits, as well as providing opportunities for big and little buddies to work together. Through the Bear Book, buddies will learn to share their strengths, build a trusting relationship with each other, and have fun while learning!

Content is being developed by medical student ambassadors John Peel and Julia Zazoulina in collaboration with numerous teachers, scholars, and board members; feedback from all of these sources is being included at every step of the way to ensure

the success of this project. Black and white illustrations are being donated by the talented Jennifer Ji - a new and welcome addition to the Reading Bear Society.



The effectiveness of the Bear Book is to be formally assessed in the coming year and documented in scientific literature, as part of the medical student’s DPAS project, and they are all very excited to contribute to the evidence that supports the Reading Bear. Many thanks to **Dr. Linda Siegel, PI for the RBS study**, Ms. Colleen Sturrock, Ms. Julie Gelson, as well as to all of the kindergarten teachers for their assistance in the creation of the bear booklet. Keep your eyes out for more developments on “My Bear, My Buddy, and Me: A Friendship Book”!





THE READING BEAR

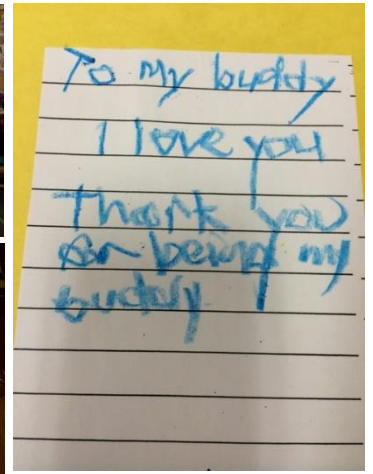
AMBASSADORS CELEBRATE VALENTINE'S DAY



Naomi Roome, RBS volunteer, 2nd year medical student



It was such a pleasure to deliver Valentine's Day Reading Bear boxes this year with Victoria. The children looked so surprised and excited to have had a Valentine's Day visit from some of their mentors. We read books, delivered valentine day cards from their big buddies and a red bed for their classroom bear. I think that this program is very special and I was so happy to be a part of delivering a Valentine's Day surprise to several Kindergarten classes across the city. We also delivered Valentine's books and bears to the children of Mom2Mom.



L ♥ V E
Is who you are.
L ♥ V E
Is what you do.
L ♥ V E
Is why you are here.



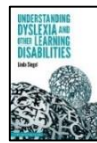
INTRODUCING

Dr. Linda Siegel – RBS Advisory Board Member



Dr. Linda Siegel, Principal Investigator of the RBS Study, is the Dorothy C. Lam Chair in Special Education and a Professor in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. She has conducted research on early identification and intervention to prevent reading problems, dyslexia, reading and language development, mathematical concept learning, mathematical learning disabilities, and children learning English as a second language. She has been the President of the Division of Learning Disabilities of the Council on Exceptional Children. In 2010, she was awarded the Gold Medal for Excellence in Psychological Research from the Canadian Psychological Association. In 2012 she was awarded the Eminent Researcher Award from the Learning Difficulties Association of Australia.

Understanding Dyslexia and other Learning Disabilities



Understanding Dyslexia and Other Learning Disabilities by Dr. Linda Siegel addresses how our educational system has failed to identify many children with learning disabilities and calls for the adoption of straightforward diagnostic techniques so that treatment options can be implemented at a young age.

Dr. Adele Diamond – RBS Advisory Board Member



Dr. Adele Diamond is the Canada Research Chair Tier 1 Professor of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience in the Department of Psychiatry at UBC. Her work integrates developmental, cognitive, neuroscience, and molecular genetic approaches to examine fundamental questions about the development of the cognitive control abilities that rely on the prefrontal cortex. Dr. Diamond received her BA from Swarthmore College Phi Beta Kappa in Sociology-Anthropology and Psychology, her PhD from Harvard in Developmental Psychology, and was a postdoctoral fellow at Yale with Patricia Goldman-Rakic in Neuroanatomy.

Turning some ideas on their head



Dr. Adele Diamond gave a talk on the power of Executive Function and its impact on student learning at the 2014 TEDx event in West Vancouver.



THE READING BEAR

NEWS

iKonnnect Fundraiser for RBS

By Jenny Lee, Student Volunteer

On Tuesday, January 20th, I convened a table for the Reading Bear at UBC Brock Hall. iKonnnect is a charitable healthcare networking event. As a part of science week at UBC, it is tailored towards undergraduate students with interest in research and the health sector. The event brings together students and health care professionals to mix and mingle! Ambassador Cristian Vadeanu introduced the evening to a crowd of over 200 undergraduate science students. This year, The Reading Bear was iKonnnect's Charity of Choice for its efforts promoting early literacy and mentorship in vulnerable children from different socio-economic backgrounds in our local community. Many compassionate students donated and showed great interest in volunteering for the Reading Bear this evening!



The Reading Bear

Each year, iKonnnect team selects a charity to support. This year we have selected The Reading Bear.

The Reading Bear is a program that aims to connect kindergarten students with older (grades 2-5) students from different schools around Vancouver. This is a local community project that aims to induce sustainable connectedness amongst vulnerable youth.

Doctor, Patient, and Society Lecture, Faculty of Medicine



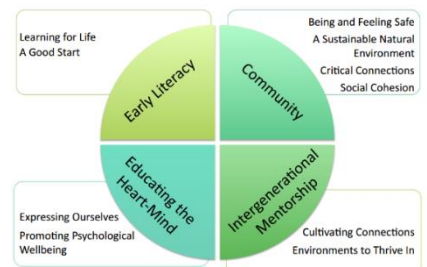
By Andrew Pursell, RBS Ambassador

Recently, Julia Zazoulina and I gave a presentation to the UBC Medicine class of 2018 about the Reading Bear and how it addresses important determinants of health in our city's children. This is the third year that the talk has occurred and Julia and I enjoyed giving our views on why we feel the Reading Bear is such an important initiative. We also used the opportunity to kick off the second annual province-wide Reading Bear Book Drive. Donated books are given to children who would not otherwise have books in the home.

Meeting with City Official, Vancouver Healthy City Strategy



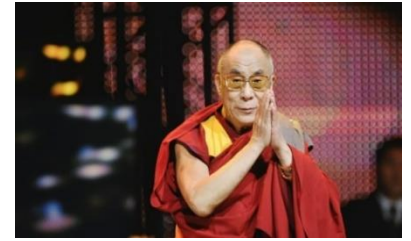
On September 16, at the School of Public and Population Health, the RBS board members and Ambassadors met with Stephen Owen, City of Vancouver official for the Healthy City Strategy. This was an opportunity to discuss the parallels between the Healthy City Strategy and the RBS pillars.





Dalai Lama Visit

Complimentary tickets for the Dalai Lama visit at the Vancouver Convention Center on October 21st were generously donated by the Dalai Lama Center. The conference was attended by Lani, Santhe, and Liz of the RBS and two medical students.



RBS Christmas/Holiday Season Party

On December 4th, the RBS hosted its second annual Christmas/Holiday Season party. Donors, volunteers, and friends of the RBS enjoyed Christmas cheer and friendship.



Right: First row: James Dueckman (ambassador), Lani Morden (director), Julia Zazoulina (ambassador), Andrew Purssell (chair of research), John Peel (ambassador), Joanne Roussy (president)

Second row: Santhe Leblanc (director), Colleen Sturrock (advisory member), Isabel Chen (director), Andrea Wilks (head teacher, Seymour), Rachel Liu (ambassador)

Left: Grace Pieters, daughter of Andrea Wilks, head teacher at Seymour school.



CONGRATULATIONS

On behalf of the Reading Bear, we would like to congratulate Colleen Sturrock, RBS Advisory Board member, as recipient of the Prime Minister Award for Excellency. On November 25th, Strathcona Elementary held a very special assembly to honour teacher Colleen for winning the prestigious award.

<http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/pmte-ppmee.nsf/eng/wz02135.html>






CHRISTMAS AND HOLIDAY CELEBRATION VISIT



On December 4th, St. George's grade 8 boys visited their reading buddies and made special reindeer hats. Singing happened. Crafts were made. Books were read. Christmas activity sheets were completed. Some St. George's kids went home with reindeer crafts made with lots of love especially for them by their little buddy!

Little buddies made special Christmas cards for their big buddies. Big buddies also received a gift of hot chocolate and candy canes for their big buddies with the following note attached. Together, they made hand wreathes by cutting out big buddies and little buddies hand prints.

*When the weather outside is frightful,
Snowman Soup can be delightful!*

*May it warm your spirit & soul,
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!*

*When you feel a chill or "burr",
Use the candy cane to stir*

*Add hot water & sip it slow,
Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!*





LETTERS FROM TEACHERS

From Director and co-founder, Lani Morden, MEd

Dear RBS Ambassadors,

Thank you so much for your hard work and support for the Reading Bear Project this term. I hope you have had a positive and productive term. We have all certainly benefited from your involvement in this program.

What a delight it was to have the program at Graham Bruce Elementary start in November. As Victoria and Katrina witnessed, the K/1 children thoroughly enjoyed the "kick off" with bear stories, all the stuffed bears, the paw prints and the bear mitts.

It was such a neat experience for me to see one of the K's who had been sad and crying almost every day for over a month, actually smile as she hugged the stuffed bears and tried on the bear mittens. It was the FIRST time I had seen her smile.

Our first big buddy visit from Grade 8 St. George's boys was a big success as well. I am not sure who were happier, the kids or the teachers. Everyone seems to be embracing the opportunity. It's so much fun to witness the big buddies engaged - down on the carpet or sitting in little chairs reading to their buddies. Our buddies brought books to give their elementary buddies on their first visit which, of course, was a huge hit.

Last week, I had the joy of seeing one of our new K's sit with his classroom bear on his lap and "read" the bear three books. From the perspective of an educator, it was a beautiful thing.

Sincerely,

Lani Morden

Principal of Graham Bruce School





MANY THANKS TO



ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL
SINE TIMORE AUT FAVORE

Brian Lee, Associate Principal of Student Life at St. George's School for his assistance in selling Christmas cards and **St. George's School** for their assistance in having the bear book

photocopied. We had a meeting at St. George's School with the headmaster Dr. Tom Matthews, Head of Service Learning Heather Morris, Head of Grade 8 Santhe Leblanc, Head at York House School Kathy Keeley, Grade 5 teacher Marine Seliwoniuk, and ambassadors Victoria Baronas and Andrew Pursell.

To **the children at Queen Alexandra Elementary School** for sharing their artistic talents with the RBS. This year the children made two beautiful Christmas/Holiday cards. The sales go to the StrongStart programs at Queen Alexandra and Seymour.



Edwin Tsui, Emi Hughes, Nicholas Ho, Anna York, Charlotte Driscoll, Nio Duva pictured right.



Leanne Children's Foundation for a \$300 grant. This foundation was created in memory of 11-year-old Leanne by her family to assist children to reach their full potential. The foundation is based out of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia.

<http://www.LeanneChildrensFoundation.ca>

Kidsbooks owner **Phyllis Simon** for the donation of bear books and phonetic books for 11 kindergarten classrooms. See below picture for a few of the books that were selected. The latest addition is *Something About Bear* (2014), which presents bears from all over the world, and at the end each child has a teddy bear!





THE READING BEAR



Larry Garfinkel, owner of **Native Northwest** (aka Garfinkel Publications) publishing company for the donation of a First Nation West Coast image of a mother bear. This image will be used as a coloring sheet for the first visit to kindergarten children as a post-visit activity. The image is titled "Bear Family" and was created by Ben Houstie.



The Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education for their donation of tickets to the Heart-Mind Summit! Students and educators attended the event on October 21st at the Canada Place-Vancouver Convention Center.



Rebecca Irani, Marketing and Communications Manager of the **UBC Bookstore** for the donation of five large bears that will serve as classroom bears for the kindergarten classrooms.



Whistler artist **Vanessa Stark** for the donation of her art to RBS. We plan to use these images inside of the RBS book intended for K teachers. Please visit her website for more images. The colors are amazing! <http://www.vanessastarkart.com>



Dr. Jim Frankish, Director, Centre for Population Health Promotion Research for the donation of children's books.



THE READING BEAR



Emily Newton for her photography expertise.

Barb Newton and her book club for donating new books.

Lori Pursell for assistance with this year's book drive.

Private donor **Ms. Zohra Bonnis**.

Carlton Paniccia, Student Broadcaster, for the creation of the Meet the Ambassadors video (link on page 2).

RBS IN THE MEDIA



"The Reading Bear Hand-drawn Cards"
St. George's School eNews (November 2014)



"Giving back: how a 26-y.o. med student became a DTES pioneer"
Westender (December 19, 2014)



"Building Global Citizens: Service Learning"
The Many Faces of Saints, St. George's School 2013-2014 Report Card

READING BEAR PROGRAM

The Reading Bear engaged the entire Grade 8 cohort – more than 150 students who visited East Vancouver Elementary Schools 5 times throughout the school year to provide and read books with Kindergarten students.