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The Reading Bear Society Newsletter

September 2016 Back-to-School Edition



Joanne Roussy

President, Co-founder, The Reading Bear Society

"Trust in what you love, continue to do it, and it will take you where you need to go." – Natalie Goldberg

The Reading Bear is entering its fourth year. Having reached over 1,400 youth to date, we are excited to once again start another school year. In this edition, you will be introduced to our new board members as well as to our dynamic leadership team.

The RBS held its second annual AGM on June 21, 2016. We elected new board members and I am excited about the outstanding leadership we will have in this upcoming year.

First, we're proud to welcome Lynne Stanger, Victoria Baronas, and Victoria

Kan to our board of directors. We also thank Trevor Newton for continuing in his role as Treasurer and Isabel Chen as Vice-President, who is now Chair of FLEX medical students.

We want to extend a special thank you to Dr. Ryan Melsom, who has finished serving three years as our Director of Communications. His incredible service and love for the Reading Bear is apparent in everything he does. Lani Morden and Santhe LeBlanc, who served as Director of Education and Director of Schools, are both now on our advisory board. Their wisdom and guidance helped make the RBS what it is today, and we thank them for their continuing leadership and friendship.

Introducing our new board members

Lynne Stanger

Lynne is pleased to continue her connection with the Reading Bear Society on the board this year. Lynne has a BA in Communications, a Master's Degree in International Education, and has worked in the field of education in a variety of roles and countries for the past 20 years. Lynne is currently the Director of Admissions at West Point Grey Academy and previously served as the Director of Service-Learning and Global Learning at York House School. Through her work with KidSafe, Queen Alexandra School, and the Reading Bear Society, Lynne has experienced first-hand the value and impact of mentorship programs, school partnerships, and literacy initiatives.



Victoria Kan

Victoria holds a Bachelor of Science and a Masters of Health Administration from the University of British Columbia. She has a strong background in clinical research, having worked as a researcher at Vancouver General Hospital for the past six years. During this time, she worked closely with vulnerable patient populations, including the economically disadvantaged, the homeless, and those with chronic health conditions. She has also worked amongst youth, facilitating workshops on relationships, bullying, and



gender stereotypes. Through these experiences, she developed a passion for health promotion and advocacy. Victoria was drawn to the Reading Bear Society because of her belief in the value of early childhood literacy and education, not only on individual health, but on the overall health of a community. She contributes her background in administration and research to the RBS, and is excited to continue to grow with the program. She is currently working towards completing her degree in nursing at UBC.

Victoria Baronas

Victoria grew up in Colombia, but moved to Vancouver at the turn of the century. She graduated from UBC in 2013 with a BSc (Honours) in Pharmacology, and soon after began the MD/PhD program at UBC. Throughout her years as an undergrad, Victoria has worked with marginalized youth as a volunteer at the BC Children's Hospital, as well as having spent a summer in Uganda volunteering at an HIV/AIDS organization. In addition, her belief in the importance of education has driven her to teach science experiments to elementary students and pharmacology classes to university exchange students. These experiences drew Victoria to work with the Reading Bear, which seamlessly weaves the power of education with social empowerment of underprivileged kindergarten students in Vancouver. She is excited to continue to grow her role in this organization as the Director of Students and Board Member.



Our 2016/17 student leadership team



Victoria Baronas

RBS Director and Chair of Students

I'm very excited and honoured to be the Chair of Students this year, along with Paul Abraham as vice-chair! We have an amazing team this year that is passionate about early childhood literacy and strengthening the social fabric of the city through the Reading Bear program. The Chair of Volunteer Recruitment this year is Chelsea Almadin and vice-chair is Victoria Kan. Victoria Kan is also this year's amazing Chair of Administration. Chairing Fundraising is Amandeep Gill, and her vice-chair, Cheryl Gascoyne, in conjunction with Hiran Nourbakhsh, the Book and Bear Drive Coordinator. We are grateful to have Katrina Hsu back again this year as Chair of Media and Communications. Chair of School Visits this year is Paul Abraham and vice-chair is Carolyn Norton. We will be starting off the school year with our orientation visits to the kindergarten and high school classrooms, with the help of our York House and Queen Alexandra Ambassador Katrina Dutkiewicz, and our St. George's, Seymour, and Strathcona Ambassador, Ivan Chiu. This school year will be one of growth for the Reading Bear Society, and I am thrilled to be a part of all of the wonderful things our all-star team will accomplish this year!



First student leadership meeting of the school year took place on August 24th.



Clockwise from left: Dr. Andrew Deonarine, Jenny Lee, Victoria Kan, Joanne Roussy, Denise Roussy, Victoria Baronas, Paul Abraham, Carolyn Norton, Amy Gill, Chelsea Almadin, Katrina Hsu, Cheryl Gascoyne

2016/2017 Calendar

September 2016

- September 26th: Teacher Orientation
- Peer-buddy matching by teachers and RBS school liaisons
- MUS (Medical Undergraduate Society) Clubs Night booth
- Ambassador orientations to kindergarten and high school classrooms begin

October 2016

- Children selected by principals to make Christmas/holiday season cards.
- First buddy visit: *My Bear, My Buddy and Me*

November 2016

- Buddy visit: *B is for Bear*, peer introduces the activity book titled *My Bear Book*
- Christmas/Holiday sales commence
- FLEX fair

December 2016

- Buddy visit: *Bear Celebrates*
- December 8th: Christmas Party
- Second year FLEX practicum begins

January 2017

- Buddy visit: *Bear Bedtime*

February 2017

- Buddy visit: *Special Bear*
- Valentine's Day ambassador kindergarten visit
- Book and bear delivery to Mom2Mom children
- February 14th: Valentine's Day Edition of the RBS newsletter

March 2017

- Buddy visit: *Happy Bear*
- SGS high school fair ambassador booth

April 2017

- Buddy visit: *Earth Bear*
- First year FLEX practicum begins

May-June 2017

- Book delivery to StrongStart classrooms at Queen Alexandra and Admiral Seymour Elementary Schools
 - Ambassador end of year visit and classroom bear collection
-

My Bear Book

After piloting *My Bear Book* last year, this summer, volunteers Cheryl Gascoyne and Carolyn Norton revised *My Bear Book* using teacher feedback from the 2015/2016 school year. The revisions include activities that promote participation and inclusion, and aim to promote literary confidence through learning about different bears. New images, rhymes, and phoneme repetitions were added to touch on phonic awareness. We are excited to have this year's *My Bear Book* ready for use in our elementary schools this September! Many thanks to the editors of the previous editions for bringing us to a place where we are now able to tailor this activity book to the children using it.



The artist behind the *My Bear Book* illustrations



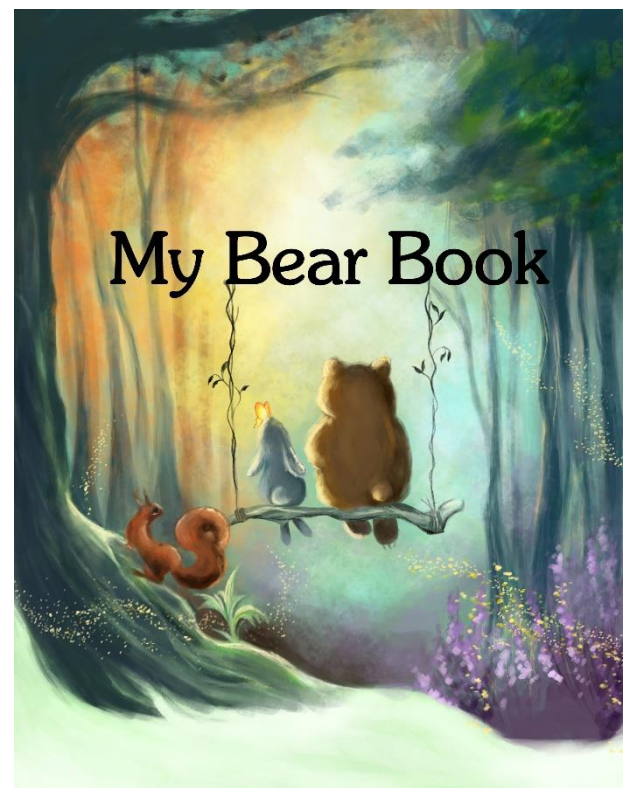
Jennifer Ji

I graduated from the UBC-BCIT Biotechnology program

and am currently a second year MD/PhD student at UBC. I started drawing when I was young and continued through my undergraduate degree. Recently, I finished illustrating for *My Bear Book*, and it has been my great pleasure to work with the Reading Bear team. Integrating my skills in visual arts with medicine and science is a long term goal of mine. My enthusiasm for this project sparked when I heard about the premise of the society - caring for young children while instilling a sense of responsibility in their high school buddies. My enthusiasm grows as this project matures and I look forward to working further on the *My Bear Book* and creating illustrations to inspire Vancouver's youth.

About Carolyn

Carolyn Norton is a recent alumna of UBC, where she graduated with a BA in Speech Science and a Minor in Linguistics. Her background in literacy and language acquisition initially got her interested in working with children in Vancouver elementary schools in 2013. Carolyn is currently working as an instructor at Symbols Learning Centre and as a behaviour interventionist working with children on the Autism spectrum. She hopes to pursue a Master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology.



End of the year visits



Paul Abraham
Chair of Student Visits

The end of another school year is a time for gratitude and closure. It is a bittersweet, but necessary occasion for the young buddies. Over the school year, teachers opened up their classes to the Reading Bear program. The older peers developed a connection with their buddies, in addition to improving their literacy skills and sense of well-being. The final

peer-buddy session, titled “Thankful Bear”, touches upon the topic of closure. This concept of closure is of specific importance to the buddies given the limited time they spend together. This last peer-buddy session sets the stage for the final ambassador visit of the year, where the topic of closure is revisited as the



class says farewell to their classroom bear. The ambassadors visit each classroom and prepare the students for the departure of the classroom bear as he/she plans to reconnect with his/her mother, Denise the Bear, for the summer vacation.

The ambassadors visited Lord Roberts and Queen Alexandra on June 21st, and Strathcona and Seymour on June 22nd. Each classroom eagerly accepted the ambassadors and were pleased to see Denise the Bear

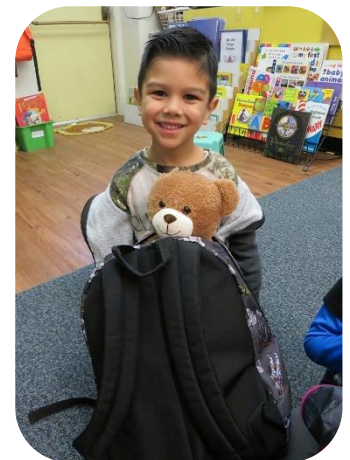


once again. Many of the students could not help but steal a quick hug from the adorable mother bear. Throughout the course of



Katrina Dutkiewicz, Ambassador to Queen Alexandra and York House, Paul Abraham, and Julie Gelson, Queen Alexandra teacher and RBS advisory member.

each visit, the ambassadors laid out the purpose of the visit and the importance of reuniting the classroom bear with Denise the Bear. Using activities and books focusing on the theme of closure, the buddies learned that their classroom bear would be spending an enjoyable summer fishing, eating, and playing with their mother, Denise. Towards the end of the session, each student had the chance to share a moment with both Denise and the classroom bear. The buddies took this as an opportunity to not only hug both bears, but to also share their personal final thoughts and feelings.



The end of year visit is yet another excellent example of the efforts put forward by our volunteers and educators. We cannot thank them enough for their gifts to the program. The impact of this visit is so evident in the smiles of the students as they greet us at the door. This meaningful interaction will have a lasting impact on the buddies as they use the social-emotional skill set they have developed over the last few months for years to come.

St. George's School volunteer fair



Ivan Chiu

Ambassador to St. George's, Admiral Seymour, and Lord Strathcona

It was a cloudy Tuesday afternoon on April 5th, 2016, as students and guests alike gathered within the Great Hall of Saint George's Senior School for its Volunteer Fair. Like the rest of the presenters showcasing their volunteer organizations, I was there to represent the Reading Bear Society, and share its mission, progress, and opportunities. There was a strong turnout from the high school students with both veteran and new volunteers expressing interest in the RBS. And so, this fair was another great opportunity to recruit future volunteers as well as bring greater public attention to the RBS.

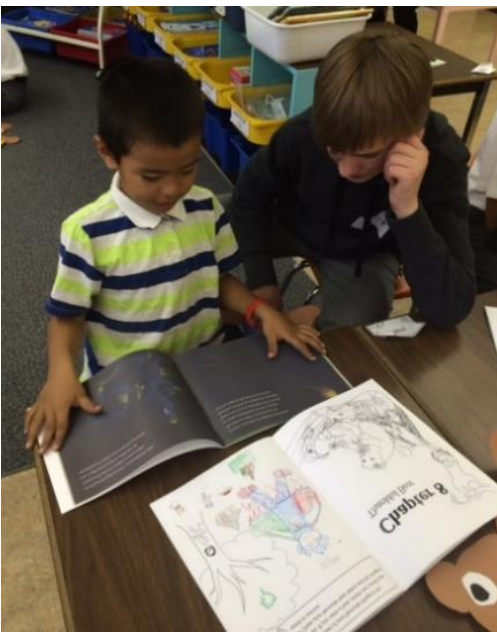
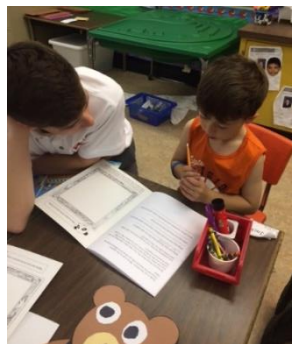
About Ivan

Ivan currently works as a civilian and military paramedic. He attended the University of British Columbia and graduated with a BSc in Psychology and BA in Philosophy in 2012. Through volunteering for organizations such as Canuck Place Children's Hospice, Ivan discovered an interest in early childhood intervention and the long-term effects of socioeconomic factors on health. Therefore, as an Ambassador, Ivan looks forward to providing enriching experiences and life-lessons to children who would not have been able to otherwise. He will be starting medical school this year at UBC and looks forward to his ongoing work with the RBS team.



Sp'e'qum [spay-come]

Children are regarded as a flower that needs nourishment, love, and care. Think of our children as a garden, they need a place to show their beauty and pride.
(Cowichan Coast Salish)



News



Mom2Mom Mother's Day breakfast

The RBS was at [Mom2Mom's](#) 2nd annual "I Love Mom" breakfast fundraiser on May 3rd. The Reading Bear donated two gifts boxes of books, bears, and children's crafts to the M2M silent auction! Almost \$7,000 was raised in support of creating connections and opportunity for moms and kids in Vancouver's inner city! Mom2Mom featured the RBS on the website in January. Read their note [here](#).



Photo from left: M2M Executive Director Melinda Markey, RBS advisory board member Dr. Adele Diamond, RBS President and Co-founder Joanne Roussy



Dr. Deonarine receives Friedman Award for Scholars in Health

Dr. Andrew Deonarine will be completing his residency in clinical informatics at Harvard University with the funding from this scholarship. Clinical informatics involves physicians developing software systems such as electronic medical records, databases, artificial intelligence, and decision support systems to help improve the practice of medicine. Andrew hopes to gain experience in this new subspecialty and bring that experience back to Canada to improve health care on a national level, and meet the health challenges of the future.

Andrew joined the RBS advisory board committee in 2013 and has been advising SDPO and FLEX medical students in the development of the analysis platform for the adolescent reflective writing component of the Reading Bear program.



Chelsea Almadin

Chair of Volunteer Recruitment, SFU Representative

simon fraser
student society

We are excited this year to be able to create and develop the **Simon Fraser University (SFU) Reading Bear Society** - a campus club in support of the Reading Bear Society. Our group aims to support the RBS through fundraising, educating students and the community about the Reading Bear's initiatives, learning more about early childhood literacy, and fostering a welcoming environment of friends.

Our initiatives truly resonate across faculties and I have met numerous students asking about how to get involved and anticipating the introduction of our group in the Fall semester. As the Chair of Volunteer Recruitment, it is very moving to see such enthusiasm and I cannot wait to see what is in store for us this year! The SFU Reading Bear Society is excited to kick off the Fall semester at the SFU Burnaby campus, so stay tuned for news about SFU Clubs Days and our Fall Icebreaker.

If you are an SFU student looking to volunteer with us, contact rbsfsu@sfu.ca for inquiries!

Congratulations to our medical school graduates!

May was a momentous occasion for three of our RBS volunteers as they graduated from UBC Medicine. As an organization, we thank them for their leadership and volunteerism spirit to RBS over the last four years, and we wish them all the best as they begin the next phase of their medical careers. And from what we've heard, some of them might still be sticking around to help out with the RBS!



Katrina Dutkiewicz

Katrina Dutkiewicz, YHS Ambassador since 2013 is now pursuing a residency in Internal Medicine in Vancouver. She was happy to be able to attend the bear send-off at Queen Alexandra Elementary before the summer. She will be staying on as Ambassador to YHS and hopes to participate as much as possible in Reading Bear events at the school despite a busy residency!



Christine Wang

Christine Wang first joined Reading Bear Society as a SDPO student in January 2013. She was Chair of Volunteer Recruitment 2014-2016 and Chair of Students 2015-2016. As an outgoing Chair of Students, Christine is currently assisting with the transition to the Reading Bear's new student leadership team and we are delighted that she will stay on as a member of the RBS advisory board. Christine is now a Family Medicine resident in Edmonton, Alberta.



Kay Fung

Kay Fung is currently pursuing her residency in Family Practice at UBC. Her involvement with the RBS started with health presentations to kindergarten students as part of her DPAS project. She hopes to integrate her passion with working with underserved populations into her future career as a family physician. Kay will be continuing on as RBS Newsletter Co-Editor.

“There is a growing awareness that physicians, in addition to attending to the medical needs of patients, should also address the patients’ social, emotional, and community connections in order to improve their total well-being.”

-Health advocacy in action: The implementation of an early literacy initiative in Vancouver. UBCMJ 2016: 7.2

Click [here](#) to read the rest of the article in the UBC Medical Journal, Volume 7, Issue 2 (Spring 2016)



Gratitude

An immense thank you to all of our supporters.



- **Anthony Morris** for the creation of our new logo and website
- **Ms. Louisa Wong**, Manager, Client Experience UBC CIBC Banking Centre, for her ongoing donations of bears



- **Mary Loukas**, staff and students at Kerrisdale Annex
- **Pam Grassi** and students at Dr. Annie B. Jamieson Elementary
- **Ms. Rosberg** and students at McKechnie Elementary



- **Michael** at SML Print & Copy Centre and to East Van Graphics for their generous sponsorship of our printed materials. Thank you to the team at East Van Graphics for printing the new revised edition of *My Bear Book*



- **Joan Fortier** for her ongoing support for book drives and Lord Kitchener Elementary School in Vancouver
- Book donations from **Diamond Elementary School** in Surrey, **Wind and Tide Preschool** in Ladner, as well as generous families in the Cloverdale community

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