

Table of Contents

PAGE 1

Chair message

PAGE 2

FLEX and the Reading Bear

PAGE 5

Update from our student leadership team

PAGE 6

Valentine's Day visits

PAGE 7

A mother-daughter volunteer team

PAGE 8

New advisory board member Danielle Neer

PAGE 9

News

PAGE 11

Thank you!

 [www.facebook.com/thereadingbear](http://www.facebook.com/thereadingbear)

 [https://twitter.com/UBC\\_ReadingBear](https://twitter.com/UBC_ReadingBear)

 [www.thereadingbear.ca](http://www.thereadingbear.ca)

# The Reading Bear Society Newsletter



Valentine's Day Edition | February 14, 2017



Melanie Moore, Mary Zhang, Ivan Chiu, and Julie Gelson at this year's Valentine's Day visits

## Chair message



**Joanne Roussy**

President, Co-founder, The Reading Bear Society

Happy Valentine's Day!

This edition of the newsletter celebrates the love of reading and the friendships we've formed through classroom visits by our ambassadors and volunteers to schools across the city.

You'll learn about our new FLEX committee, which was created to help support medical students in their projects with the RBS. In the five years since the RBS was formed, medical students have been central to our mission and goals, from volunteering as ambassadors to developing our program. Steered by Dr. Isabel Chen (2015 UBC FoM), co-founder and vice-president of

RBS, the committee includes a diverse group of advisors, mentors, and students.

Our organization continues to grow: we are delighted to announce our first visit to the Canuck Place Children's Hospice classroom. You'll also read the stories of members and volunteers who've joined the RBS recently.

And of course, we are delighted to launch our new website. Special thanks go to the website team, including Anthony Morris for his logo and web design, along with Dr. Ryan Melsom and Nadine Harding. Visit us at [www.thereadingbear.ca](http://www.thereadingbear.ca), and stay connected with us on Twitter (@UBC\_readingbear) and Facebook (@thereadingbear).

# FLEX and the Reading Bear



**Dr. Isabel Chen**

Chair of FLEX  
Committee, Co-  
founder & RBS  
Vice-President

Happy Valentine's Day! I am thrilled to share some updates on what 2017 holds for our organization.

The UBC Faculty of Medicine recently launched the FLEX Program and has included the RBS as a community partner. The main purpose is to allow especially motivated medical students to enroll in specific community projects to help teach students the meaning of civic engagement and the myriad of social determinants of health. Many thanks go to leaders Drs. Cooper and Greenman and the Faculty of Medicine for identifying the RBS as a prime example of social justice initiatives led and organized by alumni and current students.

To all of our new FLEX members and students, welcome! The RBS is a fantastic family of warm, like-minded and passionate advocates for early literacy. As a group, there is significant



support from the RBS Advisory Committee. I would especially like to thank Dr. Vo, Danielle Neer, and Jessica Land of the Vancouver Board of Education for reviewing student materials.

As our structure continues to evolve, we continue to give thanks to the incredible relationships we maintain over the years. Five recent graduates of the Faculty of Medicine, despite being busy in their residency training programs, have stayed on with the RBS. This includes Dr. Andrew

Deonarine, who continues to assist our development even from his new role at Harvard. We are so proud of the intergenerational mentorship that we continue to forge.

Over the past few years, the RBS has been expanding its reach to more schools throughout Vancouver and leaving lasting impacts on the city's youth. Thank you, wholeheartedly, from the entire RBS team for your continued support. I look forward to connecting with you all in the near future!



## *With Love from Harvard*

Dr. Andrew Deonarine kindly sent a bear from Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to join our collection of visiting school bears. This bear is hoping to eventually do research with the Reading Bear on the impact of reducing the sense of isolation in vulnerable youth by building friendship and a sense of connection with books and love.

# Meet the RBS FLEX Committee



**Dr. Isabel Chen, Chair of FLEX committee**

Isabel Chen brings a strong passion for health equity and human rights to the program. While completing her BA and MPH degrees from Yale, she focused on the social determinants of health among underserved populations. Isabel graduated from the UBC Faculty of Medicine in 2015 and is now completing her Family Medicine residency at the Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center.



**Dr. Andrew Deonarine, Chair of FLEX research**

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. He will be completing his residency in clinical informatics at Harvard University with the funding from Friedman Award for Scholars in Health.



**Dr. Janet Greenman, FLEX Mentor**

Dr. Janet Greenman is a general pediatrician. She completed medical school at the University of Calgary and a pediatric residency at UBC. She is currently the associate director of the UBC pediatric residency program, and practices in the Pediatric Residents' Continuity Clinic, the RICHER pediatric program in the Vancouver Downtown Eastside and in a private practice.



**Dr. Trevor Newton, FLEX Mentor**

Dr. Trevor Newton is an emergency room physician at UBC and past director for ten years of the emergency department at Langley Memorial Hospital. He is a graduate from the UBC Faculty of Medicine (1987) and CCFP (EM) certified. He is a strong supporter of medical student education via ongoing ER and RBS mentorship.



**Dr. Joanne Roussy, FLEX Activity Supervisor**

Dr. Joanne Roussy is the Founder and President of the RBS. She holds a PhD in Nursing from UBC (1999), as well as an MSc and BSc from l'Université de Montréal. She is a lecturer at UBC Medical School, a family volunteer at Canuck Place, a mentor and co-founder of Mom2Mom.



**Victoria Baronas, FLEX Student Representative**

Victoria graduated from UBC in 2013 with a BSc (Honours) in Pharmacology, and soon after began the MD/PhD program at UBC. Victoria's experiences drew her to the RBS, 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 as the Director of Students and Board Member.



**Cristian Vadeanu, FLEX Student Representative**

Cristian Vadeanu is currently a fourth-year medical student at UBC. Cristian first joined the RBS as a SDPO student in 2014 and as a Chair of Fundraising. His involvement with the RBS and FLEX as a student representative and mentor allows the integration of his many interests through mentorship in team-oriented settings.



**Kay Fung, FLEX Mentor**

Kay graduated from UBC in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in Nursing before moving to Alberta to work as a registered nurse. She returned home for medical school and graduated with her MD degree in 2016. Kay was in the first cohort of medical students (2013) to work alongside the Reading Bear. She is currently a UBC family practice resident at UBC with an interest with working with marginalized and under-served populations.

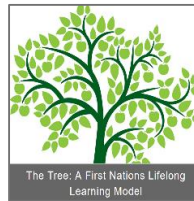
# Reading Bear FLEX projects



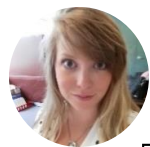
**Paul Abraham,**  
MED 2019

Prior to entering medical school, I was a French Immersion high school science teacher in Surrey. I joined the RBS because of shared goals in adolescent advocacy and mental health. One goal in my first year of FLEX was to develop a resource package for the adolescent program that best suited the new curriculum from the BC government, as well as the ever-changing needs of our youth. My work with adolescents and experience with the curriculum has given me important insight into curriculum implementation and facilitation. My experience has been especially valuable in forging new relationships with our partner high schools. I started focus

groups in the high schools to gather preliminary data on the effectiveness of the program and will continue to use this information to fine tune resources. Another goal which I continue to work on is to incorporate an online environment for students, parents, and teachers in the adolescent program. To meet this need, I have constructed an online reflective writing platform, which will be integral to the evolution of the program and a stepping stone for further mental health research and program evaluation.



Read more about Paul's experience with peer orientation visits on [the Reading Bear Blog!](#) 



**Cheryl Gascoyne,**  
MED 2019

For as long as I can remember, I have been interested in supporting healthy childhood development. I strongly feel that early childhood is a critical period that impacts a child's developmental trajectory and life course. Armed with a BSc focused in developmental psychology and years of experience working with children, I came across the RBS and the opportunity to further explore and help support early childhood development. The strongest contributors to a child's early development are their caregivers. This is the reason why I chose to focus my

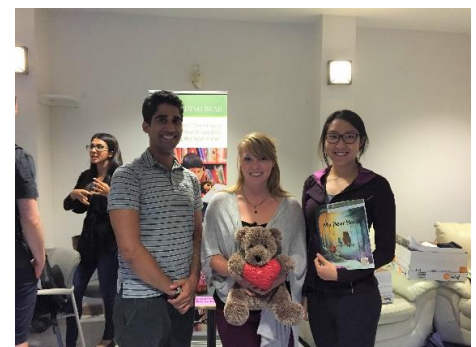
FLEX project on creating a resource for caregivers. My goal was to create an easy-to-use resource that explains the importance of early literacy and empowers caregivers to support their child's literacy development. The information is divided based on age groups and provided a basic outline of developmental milestones and easy-to-do-at-home activities that aim to support early literacy. I also included sections on how to get more books in the home on a budget, how to identify possible learning disabilities, and where to get help regarding a concern. These resources will be put on the RBS website, and moving forward will be summarized on a series of handouts to go home with the children who participate in the RBS program.



On Monday, October 17<sup>th</sup> at UBC, Life Science Center, Cheryl Gascoyne and Paul Abraham presented at FLEX Activity Day a Reading Bear Society Community Engagement Poster.



Paul Abraham presenting the Reading Bear at York House School



Paul Abraham, Cheryl Gascoyne, and Jennifer Ji at the UBC Medical Undergraduate Society (MUS) Clubs Night 2016 in September.

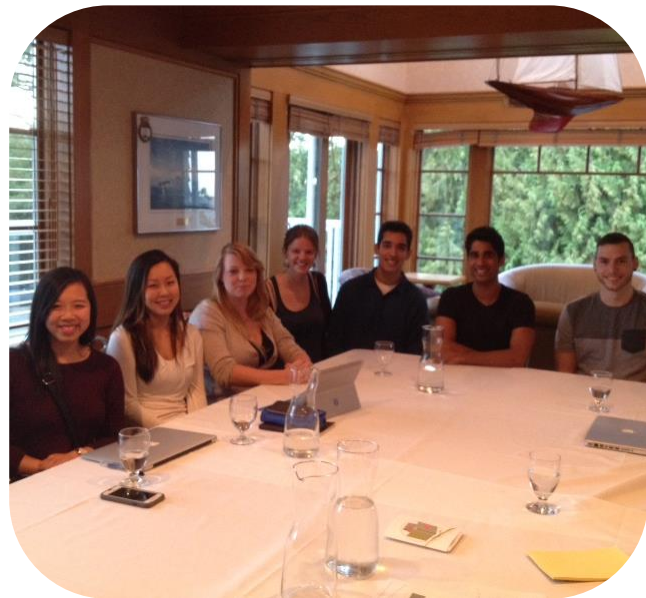
## Update from our student leadership team



**Victoria Baronas**

RBS Director and Chair of Students

Our leadership team has grown and flourished since we first started in September! Together, we have worked diligently toward creating the website with the help of Anthony Morris, Dr. Ryan Melsom, Nadine Harding, and many, many others. Our FLEX students, Paul Abraham and Cheryl Gascoyne, have been working toward making the RBS more sustainable by creating online orientation modules for all incoming volunteers, students, and teachers. Paul has given a great start to the whole program by organizing the orientations for the kindergartners, teens, and teachers. I would especially like to express a thank you to the elementary school teachers who wholeheartedly support the FLEX students and ambassadors. Special thanks goes to Julie Gelson, Colleen Sturrock, and to Andrea Wilks. We closed the 2016 year with a holiday card fundraiser designed by Kindergarten students from Seymour Elementary and organized by Julie Roussy-Newton. I am very proud of what we have accomplished so far, and am excited to see the projects that are coming up in the next few months!



## Volunteer experiences: community connections



**Carolyn Norton**

Ambassador

As adults, it may seem hard to remember how exciting a new face (or giant stuffed bear) can be in your Kindergarten classroom. But recently, I was reminded of how memorable visits from members of the community can be when a child arrived at my workplace. I turned the corner into the lobby, expecting to meet a shy, kindergarten boy unsure of his first lesson.



“Hey!” His eyes lit up. “You came with a giant bear!”

He was ecstatic.

While this example is small, it reminds us of the power of connections that we foster with community members. I had been into this student's classroom once, for forty-five minutes nearly four months ago, but he immediately felt less nervous and comforted to see a familiar face. It is our hope that these connections continue to happen: that Reading Bear alumni can always find comfort in the connections and relationships they have built with their peers, reading buddies, and volunteers; find it easier to develop connections of their own as they mature; and feel at home knowing they are connected and cared for by the community around them. Even as adults, we still know how nice it is to see a familiar face walk around the corner.

# Valentine's Day visits



**Ivan Chiu**

RBS Ambassador

As Valentine's Day loomed around the corner, nine Reading Bear Society team members visited children in eleven Kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms at various schools throughout the Lower Mainland. Not only did these team members read to the young students, but they also gifted each child a book, Valentine's Day card, and hand heart! And of course, big bear hugs. Each classroom also received a bagful of books and bears to encourage further reading. But what is a classroom without teachers? So, the teaching staff were also gifted with chocolates and cards for the amazing work they do.

Like all the schools we visited, Queen Alexandra Elementary School received our presence with warmth and

happiness. Thanks to the skills of the classroom teachers, the children sat attentively as the RBS team read stories, sang songs, and shared bear facts with them. For example, have you been slipping on the ice? Here's why polar bears don't slip: Polar bears have tiny suction cups on their feet that prevent them from slipping on the arctic ice! One of the most memorable moments from that visit was the enthusiasm and energy that poured from the children when we asked them to show us their bear roar! One child's roar was deafening and he smiled from ear to ear.

Finally, we are delighted to announce our first visit to Canuck Place Children's Hospice (CPCH) in RBS history! CPCH is a one-of-a-kind establishment focused on providing world-class management for children with challenging or unique medical conditions. As with the other schools, the RBS members visited both children and staff at CPCH and gifted books, cards, heart stamps, and chocolate! At the end of the visits, no one could say they did not feel uplifted from the amazing experience.

 **More Valentine's Day photos can be viewed [here](#).**



*"My best Valentine's day gift was the hug I received from a young girl who thanked me for coming in to visit her for Valentine's Day" - Grade 11 student*

Teens from Prince of Wales and Crofton House School visited the Grade 1 and Kindergarten classroom at Admiral Seymour. They spent time reading their new books and filling out Valentine's Day cards. Each child received a bag of books, notepads, a stuffy, and a box of Valentine's Day cards to take home. Seeing these interactions and the smiles was the best gift one could have for Valentine's Day. [Click here for more pictures!](#)



Ivan Chiu and Ellen Suarez, Director,  
Volunteer & Support Services at Canuck Place

# A mother-daughter volunteer team

Each newsletter, we hope to profile some of the long-time supporters of the Reading Bear Society. This month, let us introduce you to Emerald Yeh-Lau



Emerald with her daughter Jada and their reading bears.

## Tell us about yourself:

I am a businesswoman from Hong Kong, mother of two children who are currently studying in Canada.

## How did you become involved in the Reading Bear Society (RBS)?

I became involved with the Reading Bear Society when my son was in Grade 11. He came home one day very excited and handed me ten packages of Reading Bear Christmas cards. They were drawn by little children he said, and the money raised from the sale of the cards went towards helping promote literacy for little kids who may not even have books at home. I was curious and reached for my wallet to give him money to support yet another "school project" but he told me that he had used his Christmas budget to buy all of us these cards, so he didn't want

money from me. He explained that he bought the cards because the money would go much further when donated to a cause that promotes the love of reading and learning through books. As a mum, it was the best Christmas present that I received that year, knowing that my son

could discern what was truly meaningful

and expressive of the season: the act of giving back.

## What is your current role with the RBS?

Currently, I have been active in recruiting students from my daughter's school and organizing book drives. We have visited at least two schools every year and participated in the program at various levels. This year we are also involved with helping provide the RBS team with t-shirts and tote bags.

## Why do you support the RBS?

I believe that the "givers" (the older students) gain much more than they bargain for as I witness the delight on their faces when they are reading to the little ones. It is truly a win-win situation and one that I endorse wholeheartedly. I believe that in supporting programs such as the RBS we are giving back to our community and modelling the values that we want to pass to our children.

Thank you for taking the time to speak to us and for your continued support of

RBS!

## Another mother-daughter team

Watch the video to hear about a Strathcona parent and her daughter's experience with the Reading Bear.



# New Advisory Board Member Danielle Neer



Danielle's inspiration for becoming a part of the RBS Advisory Board comes from her belief that stories and story-telling are a powerful way for children to develop and to learn about themselves and the world; when this experience is shared with another person, the possibilities for growth are further expanded.

Danielle has witnessed the power of a collaborative learning environment when she worked alongside a strong team of educators and support workers at Admiral Seymour Elementary, one of the schools where Reading Bear visits are scheduled on a monthly basis. She has taught in both public and private schools since earning her teaching degree in 2005. She holds an MEd from the University of Western Ontario and a MA in Child Study and Education from the Eric Jackman Institute of Child Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in

Education at the University of Toronto. She is currently a teacher with the Vancouver School Board, a volunteer with organizations in the West End neighbourhood, and a mom to two young (and active) boys. For the past 14 years, she has worked in many different areas of education, participated as a research assistant in diverse research projects aimed at improving care and learning for children, and volunteered with local initiatives aimed at helping people connect to others.



The Reading Bear's SFU Representatives Amy Gill and Chelsea Almadin were at SFU's Clubs Days in the fall recruiting student volunteers for the SFU RB Club.

If you're an SFU student looking to get involved with the club, contact [rbssf@sfu.ca](mailto:rbssf@sfu.ca) for more information.

Have you seen the new Reading Bear [Website](#)?



After several months of design and calling upon many volunteers, the Reading Bear has a new logo and a more interactive website.

It's the same address as before but now we have fresh new features. You can now:

- Apply online to volunteer for a variety of positions
- Login through a dedicated page if you're a FLEX practicum student
- Read our new blog that features event photos, articles by literacy experts, and current Reading Bear happenings
- Follow us and keep up to date on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) too





# News



Paul Abraham, Dr. Janet Greenman, Jenny Lee, Victoria Baronas, Katrina Hsu, Dr. Lorna Kan, Dr. Joanne Roussy at this year's holiday party.

## Annual RBS holiday party

Our annual holiday party this year was graciously hosted by Drs. Joanne Roussy and Trevor Newton at their beautiful home with some delicious food and drink! It was a great gathering to bring together everyone that has been involved with the Reading Bear, and for people involved in different facets of the program to meet and share stories and ideas. Dr. Janet Greenman, a pediatrician, and Dr. Lorna Kan, a family physician, shared their experiences in the medical field with the RBS leadership team, many of which are in medical school or in medically-related fields in undergraduate and graduate degrees. It was wonderful to see some new faces and others that have been around the RBS since its inception. Overall the party was a wonderful holiday gathering to celebrate the season and all of the dedication of the people present (and some who couldn't make it!) to make the RBS shine.

Many thanks to Carlton Paniccia for the professional photography of the event! More photos can be accessed [here](#).

## Successful RBS booth at "Get Into Volunteering" event in October

Get Into Volunteering (GIV) is a yearly event facilitated by UBC SCI Team, a program that aims to support undergraduate science students develop both professionally and personally. As GIV is a fair-style event inviting speakers from local organizations making an impact on the community, it presents an opportunity for science students to explore both on- and off-campus experiences. The RBS was asked to attend this meaningful event and continue to promote the benefits of early childhood literacy development along with mentorship across different socio-economical communities. Jenny Lee, Julie Roussy-Newton, and Mary Zhang attended to represent the RBS. Many students were excited to learn of this unique organization and eager to reach out and expressed interest in assisting in our cause in any way possible.

## "Like" The Reading Bear Society on Facebook

The Reading Bear has ventured into the world of social media! Come "like" our page on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/thereadingbear/> where we will post about events hosted by Reading Bear as well as news about reading, early literacy, books, bears, and everything in between!



Our beloved founding member Dr. Ryan Melsom, moved to Ottawa this past summer with his two sons, John and Sam. However, he has continued to stay on as a communication expert with the RBS advisory board.

## RBS Chair of Students wins Vanier Scholarship

Victoria Baronas, an MD/PhD student at UBC in her fourth year, has been volunteering with the Reading Bear for the past three years. She was delighted to find out that she was awarded the Vanier Scholarship to support her studies in her PhD program in pharmacology. Victoria is very grateful to all of the people who helped and supported her throughout this journey, especially her supervisor, Harley Kurata, and RBS founder and mentor Joanne Roussy.

## September elementary school ambassador visits

Ivan Chiu and Carolyn Norton were involved in the first Ambassador visits at Queen Alexandra Elementary School and Lord Strathcona Elementary School in September. With the help of two Grade 5 volunteers and Denise the Bear, they introduced the Reading Bear 2016-2017 program to a buzzing Kindergarten to Grade 1 audience in Julie Gelson's classroom at Queen Alexandra. The students were very excited to listen to two bear stories, did very well with their first mindful "Bear Breathing" exercise, and



From left: Carolyn Norton, Ivan Chiu, and Denise the Bear

enthusiastically shared their knowledge of bears. To end our visit, both Kindergarten to Grade 1 classes loved singing "If You're Happy and You Know It".

Carolyn had the pleasure of bringing Denise along to Colleen Sturrock's Kindergarten classroom at Strathcona Elementary, where the students also listened to two bear books, shared their bear facts, and practiced their mindful bear breathing. These kindergarteners were excited to colour their totem-pole

colouring pages following story-time, and since the September visit will have likely coloured many of the *My Bear Book* pages with their peer partners.

As always, the Special Education Assistants and volunteer community members are great assets during our Reading Bear ambassador sessions, and help ensure all students are able to participate in these school visits. Thank-you for your efforts and supporting our visits.



Congratulations to Ivan Chiu, RBS Ambassador, on his recent engagement

*"A little about the photo, Sarah and I embarked on a five day trek to Machu Picchu last August; and, unbeknownst to her, I had carried the engagement ring with me the entire time. So, once we were at the peak of the ruins, well the rest is history!" - Ivan*

Ivan and Sarah's wedding will held in May 2017 in Vancouver.

# Thank you!

Your gift of heart ensures we will be able to foster literacy across generations and as a foundation for lifelong learning.

Our successes are achieved only because of the hard work and dedication of each and every one of you. On behalf of everyone at the RBS, we thank you for your dedication and commitment to our youth and organization.

- **Ted Baker**, Financial Advisor and Retirement Specialist from **CIBC Imperial Service**
- **Ron Ezekiel**, lawyer at **Fasken Martineau**, for his ongoing legal assistance and advice regarding our logo
- **Emerald Lau** for providing the Reading Bear Society with book bags and T-shirts
- **Desmond Lum and Cici Fan** from **D2D Destiny Foundation**
- Thank you to **Maryam** and her two sons **Arya and Bardia Boomer**, from Prince of Wales Secondary School, who kindly donated boxes of Valentine's Day cards to all of the children
- **Ryan Melsom** from **Melsom Communications** for his assistance in helping us create our new website <http://melsomcommunications.com/>
- **Nadine Harding** of **Pulse Marketing** for helping design our new Reading Bear website
- **Bruce Murton** for providing us with the bear costume for our classroom visits
- Thank you to **Café Crepe, Watson Inc., and Z Gallery Arts** for their generous financial contributions to the Reading Bear Society





# Book drives

Thank you to everyone who donated books!

A big thank you to all our individual donors: Dr. Jim Frankish, Bernie and Pauline Hadley-Beauregard, Nadine Harding, Tina Kam, Carol-Ann Kunimoto, Larissa Roux, and Jean Yuen; as well as to the following book clubs for collecting books for us: Jackie Bevis, Cathie Busby, Joan Fortier, Debbie McElroy, Judi Narduzzi, Barb Newton, Pam Grassi and the Grade 3 class at Annie B. Jamieson Elementary School. Thank you to the Junior School students from West Point Grey Academy (WPGA), especially Molly Young (WPGA Service Learning Coordinator) and Danielle Wing (WPGA Junior School Librarian) for holding their first book drive for the RBS.



## Book drive at West Point Grey Academy

In December, Junior School students from West Point Grey Academy held a book drive to collect books for the Reading Bear Society. Five boxes of books for young readers were donated from students across every grade, from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 7. This is the first book drive at WPGA for the Reading Bear Society, but the school looks forward to participating in another book drive in the near future. Many thanks to Ms. Molly Young, the Junior School Service-Learning Coordinator and Ms. Danielle Wing, the Junior School librarian for their effort in bringing books into the lives of so many children.



# Holiday card sales

Thank you to all those who helped with our holiday card sales!

A special thank you to Mr. Cristian Jensen's and Mr. Scott's class at Admiral Seymour Elementary School who were the designers behind our Christmas cards this season and the SFU Reading Bear Club and Emerald Lau for their assistance with the sale of the Christmas cards. Also, a huge thank you to SML Printing for printing the cards.

