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# The Reading Bear Society Newsletter



Valentine's Day Edition | February 14, 2018



**Joanne Roussy**  
RBS President and Co-founder

Dear Friends,

In this Valentine's Day edition, you will catch a glimpse of just a few of the remarkable Reading Bear volunteers and students who have inspired us. In the past year, our volunteers have visited a record number of children and schools and delivered our highest number of books and bears. We are also excited that medical students have engaged in Reading Bear visits to preschools and kindergarten in Kelowna, reaching over 400 children.

We look forward to a new year and are pleased to announce that the RBS will soon be going to Prince George. Our new website online registration has helped us make great strides, but of course, it is the commitment of everyone involved in Reading Bear that helps shine a positive light on our communities. Thank you each and every one of you for your gifts of time, countless efforts, talents, and charitable donations.



WE  OUR  
volunteers

Underpinning all these achievements is the support we receive from our administrative team, FLEX committee, and members of the advisory committee. These are the people who make the impossible happen. To that end, I wish to say thank you for your valued contributions to sharing the love of reading.

 Bear hugs for Valentine's Day.

# From Our Student Leadership team



**Paul Abraham**  
Chair of Students

Dear Reading Bear Family,

The Reading Bear family would not be complete without our student body of volunteers who work tirelessly to aid in the exposure and progress of the organization. This year we saw many new additions to the team who brought their own sense of creativity and imagination. I would like to greet all of our new volunteers and thank them for their service.

Our fall started strong with a successful MUS Clubs Night bringing new exposure to UBC Medical Students orchestrated by Rebecca Spouge (MD2020) and Ivan Chiu (MD 2020). Rebecca and Ivan are also responsible for the Canuck Place visits which have become a budding cornerstone of our outreach. This year our primary outreach focus with volunteers has been the well-attended StrongStart visits. We saw particular success with our new volunteers who jumped right into the opportunity and instantly made an impact in the lives of many young children. Thank you to ambassadors Emily Ko, Daniel Alley, Gilmar Gutiérrez, Rosemary Hu, Ivan



Chiu, and Santi Ayla Perez who visited schools including Crossroads Elementary, Strathcona, Admiral Seymour, and Queen Alexandra.

Our monthly student leadership council meetings at VGH were the perfect opportunity to collaborate and grow. We were able to showcase in particular the efforts of our Kelowna MUS Club which has been a rousing success. Their passion for extending the reach of the Reading Bear Society to school children in Kelowna is truly remarkable.

In addition, we were able to see the growth of our UBC gathering which has been led by Santiago Ayla Perez. He along with a group of dedicated classmates have put together an impressive resume of book drives and holiday fundraising events. Santiago is featured in this newsletter as our new Co-Chair of Fundraising.

We are only half-way through the year and already have accomplished so much. I feel truly fortunate to work with a group of such hard-working and passionate young individuals. I cannot wait for the year to come.



## New to the student leadership team: Santiago



**Santiago Perez**

Co-chair of Fundraising

I am a Biochemistry Major at UBC, currently striving toward a career in Nanopediatrics. I have invested the majority of my life in youth empowerment, primarily through my work at Catching the Spirit Youth Society. With this organization, which delivers leadership camps of environmental stewardship, I designed and instructed the facilitation of leadership development



programming focused on principles of self-reflection, appreciation, and determination. I was drawn to the RBS because I believe this program cultivates those same values. On a more personal note, having been raised by a newly immigrated single mother, I was moved by the RBS's dedication to supporting underprivileged youth. I am convinced that early



intervention in children's educational careers can have profound and lasting changes throughout their lives.

I have loved taking part in school visits where I can read to the children, and I've had a lot of fun dressing as up a bear. I really enjoy the whole process, from collecting donations, to packing the book and bear bags, and to promoting the volunteer program. I have also been working at UBC to establish fundraising partnership with campus clubs in the form of book drives and teddy bear donations. I am constantly astounded by the generosity of UBC students to support their local community. I hope to develop our presence on UBC campus to tap into the well into this well of talented and generous young people. However, what really keeps me passionate about the program is being able to take part in their joy as we read, learn and play.



### Holiday Canuck Place Visits

Reading Bear Ambassador and Chair of Administration Victoria Kan visited children and families at the Canuck Place on December 21st. Together with president Joanne Roussy, they made over 25 Christmas centrepieces for children and staff. Children received snow leopards and books (compliments of TELUS and Kidsbooks) to take home. Thank you to everyone who came and offered a helping hand. Not only did the centrepieces make for gorgeous decoration, they filled the halls with the fresh smell of pine and got everyone in a festive mood!

## Fall School Visits



**Rosemary Hu**

Reading Bear UBC Ambassador

I have had the very rewarding opportunity to be part of the Reading Bear team since September 2017. The entire team was so welcoming, supportive, as well as informative from the very get-go. I think Reading Bear is so successful because of these hardworking compassionate people who invest all of themselves into the work we do in fostering spaces where children feel listened to and heard, and get to share the experience of the joy and importance of literacy! The school visits where we dress up as bears and bring

armfuls of stuffed teddy's while we read at circle time to a group of cute attentive little listeners is truly an amazing experience to get to be apart of. The knowledge that we can help children see and believe in their full potential is a very warm feeling. I am very grateful to get to be part of the team and look forward to growing with everyone in this year.

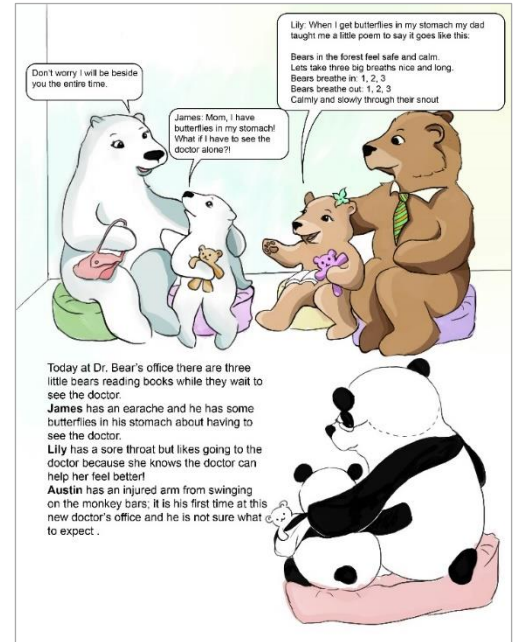


Get Into Volunteering  
with the Reading Bear  
by Umayahl Nageswaran



In early November, The UBC Reading Bear Club participated in the Science Undergraduate Society's "Get Into Volunteering Night"; an opportunity for students to learn about the various volunteering opportunities available at UBC with a connection to the sciences. The Reading Bear Society had its own booth filled with bears, books, and passionate RBS members. The booth was met with great interest, as students were inquiring about the core values of The Reading Bear Society and all the meaningful work done by its members. They were happy to hear of the integration of values such as multiculturalism and truth and reconciliation in the Reading Bear Program, and of how the RBS has had a positive impact on both its members and the children involved. With over half those in attendance signing up to learn more and become involved with the RBS, we can most definitely call this night a success.

# The Reading Bear's FLEX students



*My Bear Book* artwork created by medical student Jennifer Ji.



**Isabel Chen, MD, MPH**

RBS Co-founder and Vice President, Chair of FLEX

Happy New Year, RBS Family! It is with great pleasure that I share this update as our incredible FLEX students have done and continue to do such inspiring work.

FLEX students Amy Plessis and Thomas McFarland are doing fabulous work in Kelowna. These two dedicated students have visited a record number of schools, bringing the joy of RBS to so many classrooms on their bi-weekly visits!

In addition to all of the classroom trips, Amy is also working hard to design a children's book with fellow student, Jenn Ji. Jenn's beautiful graphics capture the spirit and energy of the RBS and we are so grateful for her talents!

And please give a warm welcome to new FLEX student, Valerie Ward, who is hoping to expand the RBS family to Prince George! And come March, we will officially welcome Jennifer Wildi of Vancouver and Gabby Levesque of Kelowna.

This new year brings with it so much excitement and energy to strengthen our already wonderful community. As we look ahead to what lies ahead of us, we could not dream of the impact we have achieved thus far without the tireless support of President Joanne Roussy. Her patience and vision inspire us and keep this community thriving! Thank you to Joanne and the rest of the RBS family for their infinite support of students (in all phases of training).

## The Kelowna Chapter – FLEX Students



**Thomas McFarland, MD 2020**  
Co-chair of the Kelowna RBS Chapter

Being new to the Kelowna region, I have found it incredibly rewarding being part of such a wonderful project that brings me into the community. Being from a large Ontario family with many young cousins and family friends, I spend much of my time at home around kids. Being a member of the Kelowna RBS group has given me the opportunity to not only spend more time playing and laughing with children, but also to educate and inform them, and share in their learning.

I love the Reading Bear Society because of its pursuit of building mentorship between medical students and young children. One of the best parts of being a medical student in second year is that although you really don't know anything about medicine yet, you are an ambassador for the field of medicine. This means that you get to go in to a classroom full of children, and encourage them that going to the doctor, which is really you at these visits,



Written consent has been obtained by parents and guardians for all photos of children.

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Being a member of the Kelowna RBS group has given me the opportunity to not only spend more time playing and laughing with children, but also to educate and inform them, and share in their learning.

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and engaging to be a part of now, and I think the children really feel that way as well.

So far in the Kelowna chapter we have been able to recruit over 20 volunteers, and bring our teaching module to over 15 schools, with a grand total of 21 visits and 436 children! Every visit we have incredible feedback from teachers, and even more teachers,

parents, guardians that want us to come to their primary schools and StrongStart programs to spend some time with their children! Our program is truly growing quite strong here in Kelowna, with no shortage of bookings with our schedule, and visits to classrooms twice a week! We have had so much interest, that I have decided to begin creating an orientation video for incoming volunteers for future years. This has allowed me to

record some of our visits and share pictures and media within the Reading Bear Society group at all sites, to show how much fun we are having!

The best part of my week is when I'm in the classroom. When I say that, I don't mean sitting in lecture listening about heart disease, I mean turning a cardboard box into an x-ray machine so that children can scan their teddy bears and tell me what's wrong with them. The children never cease to amaze me with how brilliant they are, by saying "stethoscope" better than I can. Who knows, maybe they should be wearing the white coat instead of me. I love being with the Kelowna RBS group because every time we have a visit it reminds me that we are all kids at heart.

## Meet the newest Reading Bear FLEX students



### Valerie Ward, Northern Medical Program

I am a second-year medical student attending UBC in the Northern Medical Program. Born and raised in British Columbia, I am grateful to call Prince George home for the next couple of years (and hopefully longer). I enjoy crafts and anything outdoors, including hiking, swimming, camping, paddling, and snowshoeing. I am excited to be working with the Reading Bear Society because I love working with children, and I am excited to be able to bring the Reading Bear Society to Prince George.



### Jennifer Wildi, Vancouver Fraser Medical Program

I am a first-year medical student in the UBC Vancouver Fraser Medical Program. Having grown up in Vancouver, I love spending time outdoors – my happy place is in the mountains hiking, running and xc skiing, or on the ocean sailing. I love working with kids and helping them achieve a fun, healthy, and active lifestyle. I'm looking forward to being a part of the Reading Bear Society and becoming a member of such a great community.



### Gabby Levesque, Southern Medical Program

I am a first-year medical student at UBC attending the Southern Medical Program in Kelowna. I am originally from Penticton, BC, so I am very excited to be back in the Okanagan. I love anything outdoors, including hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, playing soccer, beach volleyball and kayaking. I also enjoy playing piano, painting, gardening and doing woodwork. I coached youth soccer in Penticton and loved seeing how excited kids got running around outside. I am very grateful to work with the Reading Bear Society.



“It was a pleasure to meet the new entering medical students at the FLEX fair day. To experience their youthful energy and to see all the interesting learning opportunities that they can engage in during their students made for a dynamic afternoon.”

- Trevor Newton, UBC MD '87

RBS Founding Member, Secretary & Treasurer

Pictured from left: Trevor Newton, Emerald Yep, Joanne Roussy, and Katrina Hsu

# Communications & Administration Teams



**Victoria Kan**

Chair of Administration

The administration team has been working hard on refining the registration process for new RBS volunteers and ensuring processes run as smooth as possible. Special thank you to Danica and Steven for all their help from reformatting documents and making adjustments to our website! As the RBS continues to grow, we hope to expand our administration and communication teams to keep up with the demand, so please do not hesitate to reach out if you would be willing to lend a helping hand. Another thank you and warm welcome to our new communications volunteers including Tiana Lee, who designed the beautiful Reading Bear themed Valentine's Day graphic you see featured in this newsletter.



Artwork by Tiana Lee, RBS Graphic Design

## New to the team: Welcoming Danica, Steven, and Tiana

### Danica Federizo, Administrative Support

I am an administrative volunteer for the Reading Bear Society. I came across Joanne Roussy while working as an Office Supervisor at the Allan McGavin Sports Medicine Centre at UBC. I loved all that Joanne and the RBS strove for: helping to make a difference in the development of children by promoting early literacy, social well-being, and emotional health. With a background in admin, a genuine love for children and a passion of spreading love and positivity to the community, I was excited to find the opportunity to help in any way that I can. My main interests are yoga, volleyball and discovering new music.

### Steven Xu, Website Manager

I graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Mathematics before embarking on my studies in medicine at UBC. My passion for sharing knowledge and belief in the value of early education led me to the RBS, an organization empowering children through literacy. I look forward to bringing my experience in web development to the RBS team as website manager.

### Tiana Lee, RBS Graphic Design

When I first discovered that graphic design was a passion of mine, I had never thought to have studied it. Seven years later, I found myself applying to Kwantlen Polytechnic University for the Graphic Design for Marketing program. I was accepted and began attending the four year program in September 2015. I wanted to make a difference through my design work, but also wanted to be involved in something I was passionate about. I decided to join the Reading Bear Society because I was able to identify myself with the organization, as I had trouble with English and reading when I was younger. Being able to put my skills towards something that benefits society was a goal I made when I entered post-secondary, and I hope to accomplish that at RBS.



# Volunteer Profile: Katrina Hsu

In each newsletter, we hope to profile some of the long-time supporters of the Reading Bear Society. This month features Katrina Hsu, Director of Communications.



## Tell us about yourself:

I recently finished my M.Sc. in Global Health at McMaster University this past summer. I had the amazing opportunity to study at different universities around the world: completing courses in healthcare technology and innovation in the Netherlands, presenting my scholarly paper abstract at a conference in India, and collaborating on a transnational research project on illicit drug use in Portugal. Since finishing my degree, I am now taking a break from studying and am working at St. Paul's Hospital in the Renal Transplant Program.

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

I first became involved as a third-year undergraduate student at Simon Fraser University looking for a meaningful way to spend my extracurricular time.

## What is your best memory of RBS?

One of my favorite memories involving the Reading Bear was when I had the opportunity to take the program internationally in 2015. I adapted the Reading Bear's

StrongStart modules to present at a school in Zambia, bringing a reading bear and books for the classroom, and extra books for the kids to take home.

I was worried the kids might not be interested as they had no other books in the classroom and might never have listened to books read aloud to them before. Instead, I read books to a captivated classroom, rows of kids sitting wide-eyed and attentive as if they had story time every day of the week. I was struck by two things: how similar the children were to their Vancouver counterparts, and the amazing and universal power of stories told through books.

## What is your current role with the RBS?

I currently manage the communications branch of the Reading Bear as Director of Communications. I have been editor of the newsletter since 2014 and have helped develop our social media presence and work on our internal communications policies and other documents.

## Why do you support the RBS?

When I first joined the RBS, it was about my personal love for reading and a desire to share the joy and rewards of reading with children in Vancouver who may not have grown up with many books in their home. Over the past years, I have been continually surprised by the complexity behind the simple concept of a reading bear and a book. The Reading Bear is not just about reading! Behind the books and bears are lessons on diversity, mindfulness, environmental stewardship, emotional resilience, Indigenous values, healthy living habits, and much more. As a project which maintains a close partnership with UBC's Faculty of Medicine, it makes sense that the Reading Bear is not simply about reading – it's about promoting the health of children in Vancouver in the most complete sense: physical, mental, and social well-being. Healthier children lead to healthy communities, and I am proud to support an organization dedicated to this effort.

# News

## Annual RBS Christmas Cheer holiday party



From left: Katrina Hsu, Victoria Kan, Mary Zheng, Emily Ko, and Katrina Dutkiewicz

The annual Reading Bear holiday party had its biggest turnout yet, with over 60 guests of volunteers and supporters in attendance. For photos, click [here](#).

## MUS Clubs Night

The Reading Bear was excited to spread the word of our goals at this year's Medical Undergraduate Society (MUS) night on September 12th, all while encouraging new faces to join the club. Our accomplishments and fun volunteer experience spoke for themselves as we were able to pick up many keen members! We are looking forward to more Reading Bear visits this 2018 with these fresh faces.

## FLEX Activity Day 2018



Pictured: Directors Emerald Yeh and Katrina Hsu welcome new FLEX student Jennifer Wildi

On January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Joanne Roussy, Trevor Newton, Emerald Yeh, and Katrina Hsu represented the Reading Bear at the UBC Faculty of Medicine's annual FLEX Activity Day.

## Board Meeting

From left: Dr. Trevor Newton



(treasurer/secretary), Victoria Baronas (Director of Students), Dr. Joanne Roussy (President), Emerald Yeh (Director-at-Large), and Katrina Hsu (Director of Communications)

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, the Reading Bear held its first board meeting of the season. They are excited for this year of new volunteers and looking forward to its fifth year celebration.

## M2M Book delivery



On this sunny day, bags of books were delivered today to the children of Mom2Mom.

Pictured: Jess Chany, Executive Director

M2M and Julie Roussy-Newton, RBS Book Coordinator

## Congratulations



Dr. Isabel Chen (UBC MD '15), RBS VP and co-founder received an award from the American Academy of Family Physicians as

one of the best residents in the country! Isabel is also a recipient of the **2018 CHS Alumnae Association's Junior Achievement Award**.



Best of luck from the Reading Bear family to **Mary Zheng** who was nominated by Isabel Chen for the **YWCA**

**Young Woman of Distinction Award**.



We are pleased to announce that **Dr. Andrew Deonarine**, FLEX committee member, has been

selected as a semi finalist for the **President's Innovation Challenge at Harvard University**.



**Carolyn Norton** began her MSc Speech-Language Pathology at UBC in September.

# Thank you!

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

## FINANCIAL DONORS

The RBS is grateful for the financial donations from Café Crepe, Z Gallery, Jean-Pierre Cote, Maria Harris, and Emerald Yep.



## BOOK AND BEAR FUNDRAISING



Many thanks to Watson Inc (<https://www.watsoninc.ca>) for collecting these beautiful books for the Reading Bear during their Christmas book drive, particularly Lise Guay, Marla McNally, and Liz Watson.



Joan Fortier, Mary Loukas, Michelle Mezei, Judi Narduzzi, and Barb Newton for hosting book drives and to Shenul Dhalla for the teddy bear donations. Amy Gill for raising the 50 teddy bears courtesy of Shaw.



Nicole So, administrative assistant at CAV at UEL for collecting books at the annual Christmas party that was held on December 5, 2018. Thank you to everyone who donated a book!

The Gentlemen of the Alpha Delta Phi for their support and efforts in their recent 'Books and Bears' drive. Best of luck for your future Literacy Days!



Ted Baker, manger of CIBC UBC branch for the donation of stuffed penguins.

Carol-Ann Kunimoto, from the Micahel Audain Grizzly Bear Foundation, for the lovely furry grizzly bears.



## HOLIDAY CARD SALES

A special thank you to all those involved with our holiday season greeting cards: designer **Jennifer Ji**, **Zohra Bonnis** and her two daughters **Anais** and **Antonia** for selling the most cards, **Heather Morris**, Head of Service Learning at **St. George's Senior School (SGS)** and the **SGS Grade 8 Class Big Buddies** for selling cards, and of course, the student committee involved with coordinating everything!



And finally to our new Reading Bear volunteers, **Santiago Ayla Perez**, **Jordan Squire**, **Daniel Alleyn**, and **Gilmar Gutierrez**, who assisted with the sorting of over 200 books and packing of over 70 book bags and teddy bears which were delivered to StrongStart children this fall.



And thank you to **Tiana Lee** for lending her graphic design skills to our special Reading Bear themed Valentine's day graphic.



The next edition of the Reading Bear newsletter will be sent in September 2018. Please email [rbs.newsfeed@gmail.com](mailto:rbs.newsfeed@gmail.com) if you have any stories or photos you would like to share with us!

In the meantime, please like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) to stay up to date with all the Reading Bear activities!