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# The Reading Bear Society Newsletter

Valentine's Day Edition | February 14, 2019



Joanne Roussy, RN, PhD  
RBS President and Co-founder

Dear friends,

In the spirit of love, our Valentine's Day newsletter celebrates the power of relationships across the city of Vancouver and to our Kelowna chapter. This is always a special holiday for the Reading Bear, as we believe it best reflects the message of love we hope to spread by sharing books and teddy bears with children.

We continue to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Reading Bear this year, and we've made a special video highlighting what the Reading Bear means to our volunteers. As well, our ambassadors honoured this milestone with December visits

to the Mom2Mom Christmas party and the Canuck Place Hospice for Children annual Christmas celebration, which you'll read about in this newsletter.

Along with news from our Kelowna chapter and our busy committee chairs, you'll also hear about a new module our current FLEX medical students are piloting this season in Vancouver, called A Visit to Doctor Bear. These new visits will introduce preschoolers to what doctors do by letting them bring in their teddy bear for a "check-up" and practice caring for their bears.

Wishing you all a Happy Valentine's day and many bear hugs.



**Click to watch our special video!**

A huge thank you to Brett Collinge for creating this video and to all the volunteers who shared their experience with us.

- [www.facebook.com/thereadingbear](http://www.facebook.com/thereadingbear)
- <https://www.instagram.com/thereadingbearsociety/>
- [https://twitter.com/TBC\\_ReadingBear](https://twitter.com/TBC_ReadingBear)
- [www.thereadingbear.ca](http://www.thereadingbear.ca)

# From Our Student Leadership team



**Paul Abraham, MD 2019**

Chair of Students

With the new year upon us, it presents an excellent opportunity to reflect and look forward to the future. The influx of new volunteers has produced astounding growth for the organization and I am so thankful for each and everyone's contributions. In particular, I would like to highlight our student leadership who has taken amazing strides to push our mission forward and inspire our volunteer base. Their participation and imagination will continue to serve the Reading Bear Society well at this time and for years to come. I am also thankful for the support provided by our donors who share our vision and have contributed immensely. Our students will continue their work organizing StrongStart and Canuck Place visits as well as newer initiatives that look to expand our educational reach. As always, I am immensely grateful to the organization for the impact it has had in my life. I will be completing my medical school journey and hope to continue to work with these amazing people into the future. I will never forget the connections and memories I have made. Finally, I am comforted knowing that what first brought me to the Reading Bear Society remains strong and true. That is that we continually strive to make a difference in the lives of those around us.



**Rozlyn Boutin, MD/PhD 2022**

Co-Chair of School Visits

I have been so lucky to have had the opportunity to join the RBS last fall as Co-Chair of School Visits. Umayahl and I visited the Seymour StrongStart program in the fall, giving us the opportunity to promote reading and well-being in preschool children. The children were ecstatic to receive their bags of books and bears! This coming year, we are excited to be focusing on growing the Reading Bear school visit programs and starting Visits to Dr. Bear in preschool and kindergarten classrooms. It is sure to be a great year ahead as we continue to promote reading and healthy habits through our bear friends! This past Christmas, Jenn, Rebecca, and I attended the annual Canuck Place Christmas Party along with a large family of bears dressed for the occasion! Dressed in our bear suits ourselves, we had the opportunity to share in the Christmas joy by reading with children and families while they waited patiently in the (very long!) line to see Santa. It was a truly amazing and heart-warming event, and such a pleasure to give the gift of reading. Madalon and I visited the M2M Christmas Party on behalf of the RBS this year and surprised all the children with story time and Christmas book bags filled with tons of books, bears, and gifts. It was a fantastic event to be a part of and all of the children were very engaged and excited about the stories and gift bags. They especially liked our big bear slippers! It was a wonderful feeling to be able to promote early literacy while also delivering such Christmas joy to these families!



*We ❤️ our volunteers!*



# The Reading Bear visits Mom2Mom's Christmas Party

Rozyln Boutin and Madalon Burnett delivered 46 gift bags including advent calendars, teddy bears, coloring books and tons of books for each child at the M2M annual Christmas celebration. The Reading Bear is delighted to be a partner with Mom2Mom and has been supporting M2M in its early literacy efforts since its inception. The Reading Bear was born out of M2M with the realization that most children had no books in the home.



From Stephanie Connolly, Executive Director of Mom2Mom

*"It's my privilege to be involved with the incredible work that Joanne started with Mom2Mom. Now, through this partnership with the Reading Bear we have another way to be bringing joy, hope, imagination, and confidence to the children we serve.*

*The children were SO excited about the bags you prepared for them this Christmas - especially because they were so beautifully decorated and came with the extra treats of a stuffy and a chocolate calendar! Thank you for making them feel so special. It was such a lovely way to spark their interest in those books! "*



# The Reading Bear's FLEX students



**Kay Fung, MD 2017**  
Co-Chair of FLEX

It has been a pleasure this year to work alongside Dr. Isabel Chen as co-chair of the FLEX committee. This past fall, we have had a total of five medical students work on FLEX projects with the RBS both in Vancouver and Kelowna.

Gabby Levesque and Jennifer Wildi have been hard at work on a Healthy Living Pamphlet that include tips and resources for promoting healthy living to parents and children centred around specific Vancouver and Kelowna elementary schools. In the pamphlet, a map of a healthy day for a toddler/preschool aged child is outlined.

Bhavan Panghali and Darren Guenther have continued to build upon the A Visit to Dr. Bear program started in Kelowna last year by Thomas McFarland and Amy

Plessis. They are currently in the process of revising the Doctor Bear book and looking to incorporate the idea of emotional regulation into the A Visit to Dr. Bear visits.

Nancy Lin has connected with students and teachers from St. George's School to obtain qualitative feedback on the impact of the RBS Buddy Reading program. This

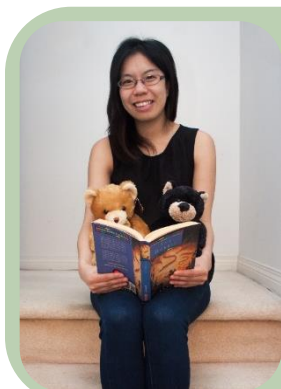
feedback is key as it will help the RBS program grow and develop and influence how the program can be better delivered in the future.

All five students have worked tirelessly on their respective projects, and it has been incredible seeing their growth as learners and patient advocates over the last several months. A tremendous thanks goes out to all the teachers, parents, and allied health professionals who have

worked alongside our students providing them an environment to learn and grow.



The RBS welcomes fourth year FLEX medical students: Cheryl Gascoyne and Paul Abraham (front from left), Joseph Goody, Matthew Heron, and Peter Wang (back from left)



## Introducing Kay Fung, Co-Chair of FLEX

Dr. Fung has been a supporter of the Reading Bear Society since its early beginnings. She was part of the first group of FLEX (formerly known as SDPO) medical students in 2013. She later became Co-Editor of the RBS newsletter, served as a mentor and content reviewer on the RBS Advisory Board. She now is the FLEX Committee Co-Chair. She graduated from the University of British Columbia with a Doctor of Medicine and is currently a locum family physician in the Lower Mainland with a passion for working with vulnerable and underserved populations.



# FLEX Student Project Profiles

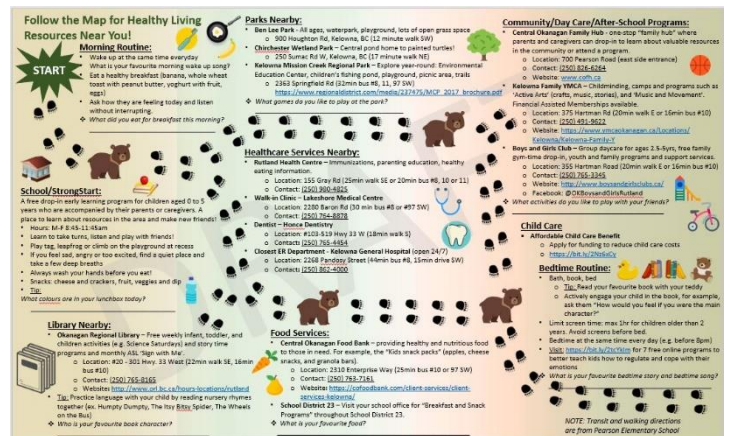
## Healthy Living Pamphlet



**Gabby Levesque, MD 2021**  
FLEX Student

It has been an incredible experience working with the community, teachers, and parents of Kelowna to create this Healthy Living Pamphlet for toddlers. We are focused on providing basic exercise, nutrition, screen time and bedtime routine recommendations, as well as literacy tips and links to local resources. I have had the honour of working directly with StrongStart teachers and parents from Pearson Elementary, as well as individuals at the local library, YMCA, Mamas for Mamas, food bank, Central Okanagan Family Hub, Boys and Girls Club, and Health Centre. Each visit has been an inspiration with the devotion, knowledge, and passion of the community towards promoting health in our youth. I believe that instilling healthy lifestyles and promoting

healthy living early on in a child's life is key to reducing the burden of future chronic disease and illness. It is my hope that this pamphlet helps link families to the tools and access the resources they deserve to lead a healthy life. I am excited to pilot this pamphlet published and spread throughout Kelowna in the near future!



## Adolescent Peer mentors and the RBS Buddy Reading Program



**Nancy Lin, MD 2021**  
FLEX Student

Adolescence is a particularly turbulent period of growth as one transitions between childhood and adulthood. It involves development in physicality, intellectuality, and identity, all of which are heavily influenced by their external environment. Having closely worked with struggling adolescents as a tutor and mentor, I am especially interested in interventions available in promoting positive youth development. As such, I am very excited to be working with the Reading 2019 © The Reading Bear Society (S-0062398)



Bear Society to study how its cross-age mentoring program has impacted its adolescent peer mentors in terms of their character and psychosocial development.

I started focused interview groups in a partner high school to gather preliminary data on the students' experience with the program. I am currently in the process of categorizing the data into themes and will present them in the form of a narrative, tying it to research in the field. Another goal I wish to accomplish is to use the feedback I have gathered to continue to improve the program. I am looking forward to sharing the results with everyone in the near future. Thank you to Ms. Catherine Holmen for her assistance and guidance on my FLEX project.

## We asked Grade 8 boys participating in the buddy reading program about their thoughts on the Reading Bear!

Thank you to Catherine Holmen, Head of Service Learning at St. George's School, who kindly collected the students' responses.



*"It's nice to be able to help out, especially when it comes to recent immigrants and helping them learn English. It's the little things we can do to make a difference"*

*"I think it is important because we get to see other kids' perspectives growing up ... It's also helping me see what it might be like to take care of a kid"*

*"Can we make the Reading Bear every two weeks?"*

*"Reading Bear is really fun. We're developing strong connections with our buddies. I have a really good friendship with my pal"*



*"Reading Bear is a very good experience, teaching us a lot about maturity. We have to think about how we're acting to be role models for the young ones"*

**From a mother:**

*I can say firsthand how exceptional your program is - I have two boys at Saints - my older son (now in Grade 11) did it a few years ago it had a huge impact on him. He had a wonderful little boy and over the course of the year was able to forge a great friendship with him, getting him to read with him and eventually calling out to him when he would arrive with the other Saints boys. I know people focus on how much the program helps the little kids, but I can attest to how much the program impact the kids who are the "helpers"! My other son just had his first time yesterday with the program. He thought it was wonderful and is looking forward to visiting his buddy throughout the year.*





## Kelowna Chapter Update



**Bhavan Pangali, MD 2021**

Co-chair of the Kelowna RBS Chapter

Last semester, the Kelowna chapter of the Reading Bear ran a total of six sessions in both Kelowna and West Kelowna (five kindergarten and one StrongStart) each with approximately 15-20 children, reaching a total of over 100 children. We delivered hour-long modules which introduce children to the environment, healthcare providers, physical exams, and medical tools they may encounter during visits to a doctor's office. We have recognized the immense interest by the community in these visits such that we have decided to pursue re-focusing the visits as an opportunity to advocate overall healthy lifestyle behaviors for young children. One new important aspect of our classroom is updating our feedback surveys provided to teachers after a visit. We have created more specific surveys directed at teachers and also look to do the same with surveys directed at children who participate in the visits.

There is one particular part of the classroom visits that I look most forward to. One of the activity stations is to introduce students to a stethoscope. First, we use our stethoscopes to show the children how to listen to teddy bear's heart. Then, we ask the student if they

would like to listen to teddy bear's heart and we place the stethoscope in their ears and help them locate where teddy bear's heart is. While they listen, we will prompt the children's thoughts with questions a healthcare provider may ask themselves. How would they describe the heart beat – is it fast or slow? Does it sound like a beating drum? Is it loud or quiet? Last, we ask if the student would like to listen to their own heart. We help the student locate their own heart, like they did on teddy bear, and listen with the stethoscope.

It is this moment that I find immensely gratifying. There is a common expression that nearly every child has the moment they first hear their own heart. Their eyes widen. There is a look of awe which floods my heart with warmth. Then,

a smile slowly crawls across their faces as they realize that while they listened to teddy bear's fast or slow, quiet or loud heart, their own hearts have a genuine and audible loud and fast drum-beating sound that they can now connect with.

The RBS is such a worthy organization for the Okanagan. I look forward to what the future of the Okanagan Chapter holds – even more advocacy for healthy lifestyles amongst children and families and, of course, more giggles and learning with teddy bears!



Kelowna Chapter Co-Chairs Darren Guenther and Bhavan Pangali with David Bubyn from CIBC who donated 180 stuffed penguins for children who participate in Teddy Bear Clinics



### Introducing Bhavan Pangali, Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair

I am a second-year medical student with UBC at the Southern Medical Program site in Kelowna. Born and raised in the small town of Merritt, BC, I have developed a great passion for advocacy and community service in underserved populations. The Okanagan has been my home for the past seven years, and in my free time I enjoy spending time outdoors playing soccer and hiking in the summer or snowboarding in the winter. I am very eager to work with the Reading Bear Society and look forward to helping such a worthy community.

## Volunteer Profile: Rozlyn Boutin

In each newsletter, we profile one of the many valued supporters and volunteers of the Reading Bear Society. In this edition, we are proud to feature Rozlyn Boutin, MD/PhD 2022, Co-Chair of School Visits.

### Tell us about yourself.

I am originally from Edmonton, Alberta but completed my bachelor's degree at Carleton University in Ottawa before moving to Vancouver, where I am currently in my fourth year of the MD/PhD program. Through my experiences as a varsity athlete doing volunteer work with the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa and as a volunteer with Let's Talk Science, I have had the opportunity to volunteer with children and youth in various capacities since high school. I have always been passionate about engaging children in learning and helping them to achieve a strong start in life. My PhD research project is aimed at identifying some of the early life determinants of health and disease, and I find it very rewarding to be able to see the benefits of positive early life experiences on the children touched by the RBS.

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

I became involved in the Reading Bear Society after hearing about the RBS through my classmates and colleagues. Now mid-way through my research project, I was looking for a way to become more of an advocate for children and wanted to give back to the community by being a part of something that would have lasting, positive benefits for children of all walks of life. I was lucky enough to meet Joanne very shortly after joining the RBS and was very inspired and energized by her love and passion for what she does with the RBS!

### What is your current role with the RBS?

My current role with the RBS is as Co-Chair of School Visits, primarily helping with organizing StrongStart visits and working with Jenn Wildi on implementing the Visits to Dr. Bear in StrongStart and Kindergarten classes this year. I also had the opportunity to help out with some Canuck Place visits and the Mom2Mom Christmas party last year.


### What is your best memory of RBS?

Even in the short time that I've been with the RBS so far, I have had so many wonderful memories!! My favourite, however, would have to be when I helped out with a Canuck Place visit last year. There was a very small group on this particular day and one young boy who was very shy at first, but as we read books together he opened right up to me. By the end of the visit he was bringing me penguin teddies to sit in my, his, and the giant Polar Bear's laps while we read together! It was so heart-warming and amazing to see how just a small amount of time spent reading together with a bear could make such a difference in a child's day. I felt so lucky to be a part of something so special and rewarding.



### Why do you support the RBS?

I am very inspired and humbled by the genuine passion everyone at the RBS has for improving the lives of children. The most amazing part about the RBS initiatives is the enduring positive benefits they have not only on a child's literacy, but also on their well-being, emotional resilience, and sense of love and belonging. The laughter and delight brought to each child as they read with and hug the giant bear teddies is truly priceless, and my favourite part of each StrongStart visit is watching their faces light up as the children learn that they get to take their very own bear home!

 *"The most amazing part about the RBS initiatives is the enduring positive benefits they have not only on a child's literacy, but also on their well-being, emotional resilience, and sense of love and belonging"*



# News

## Hijulez Garden Party

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, hijulez hosted a garden party sale. Part of the proceeds went to support the RBS and Mom2Mom.



RBS Secretary Dr. Trevor Newton, hijulez Julie Roussy-Newton, and Mom2Mom executive director, Stephanie Connolly

## MUS Club Night



On August 30<sup>th</sup>, Director of Communications Katrina Hsu and RBS FLEX student Jennifer

Wildi hosted a booth at the Medical Undergraduate Society Club Night, signing up over 50 UBC medical students interested in volunteering.

## Family Medicine Conference Poster

Senior FLEX students, Paul Abraham and Cheryl Gascoyne, submitted a poster and abstract for the 2018 BC College of Family Physicians Fall Conference held on November 2-3, 2018. The poster focused on the Reading Bear's approach to early childhood literacy, the relevant literature, and its impact.



## FLEX Activity Day Jan. 28<sup>th</sup>



### Posters:

- Kelowna: *The Reading Bear Society: A non-profit aimed at vulnerable children*, Bhavan Panghali & Gabby Levesque (second year students)
- Vancouver: *An asset-based community initiative supporting early-childhood literacy and health promotion*, Paul Abraham (fourth year student)

### Presentation:

- Vancouver: *The Reading Bear Society - A Healthy Living Pamphlet for Vulnerable Populations*, Jennifer Wildi (second year student)

### Booth:

- Vancouver: Jennifer Wildi (second year student), Rozlyn Boutin (MD/PhD student), Katrina Hsu (MSc, RBS Director of Communications)

## YWCA Nomination



Jennifer Wildi has been nominated by Dr. Kay Fung, FLEX Advisory Member, for the YWCA Young

Women's Achievement Award.

## Congratulations



Congratulations to **Victoria Kan**, Director of Administration, on her engagement.

Congratulations to proud new father, **Darren Guenther**, RBS Co-chair of



the Kelowna Chapter. His son was born on October 30<sup>th</sup>. Best wishes of health his new family

## Our twins!



Paul Abraham (MD 2019) RBS Director and Rozlyn Boutin (MD/PhD 2022) Co-Chair of School Visits share something very special in common:

They are both twins with their other sibling also studying medicine at the University of Alberta!

# 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 donations

Thank you to our financial donors **Z Gallery** and **Shenul Dhalla**, as well as to **Shelby Elkes** for leading a Christmas fundraising campaign at the **Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP)** at UBC.

## Book drives



From Book Drive Coordinator Julie Roussy Newton:

This February, we received a large number of new books from **St. George's Junior School**. A special thank you to **Mr. Stephen Sturgeon** for organizing this drive. Once again, we received numerous book donations especially at Christmas time. I would like to send a special thank you to books clubs who have been hosting a drive of new books for the past four years.



**ST. GEORGE'S SCHOOL**  
SINE TIMORE AUT FAVORE



Thank you to the book club of **Barb Newton, Cheryl Hoover, Jackie Bevis, and Joan Fortier**

**Mary Loukas**, staff and students at **Kerrisdale Annex Elementary School**



**KERRISDALE**  
SCHOOL ANNEX

**Westside Montessori School** for hosting a second annual book drive for the RBS

**Michelle Mezei** at UBC



**Deb Carter** and family



Thank you to **Emerald Yeh** and **Joe Lau** for donating another 1000 RBS tote bags!



Thank you to **David Buby**n, CIBC General Manager in Kelowna, and to the rest of the CIBC team in Kelowna for the donation of 180 Percy the Penguin stuffed penguins.



Thank you to **Stong's Market** for their ongoing support of the Reading Bear. Every child at the Mom2Mom Vancouver Christmas party received an advent calendar brought to them in part by the Reading Bear and Stong's!



The next edition of the Reading Bear Newsletter will be sent in September 2019. 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 follow us on our social media accounts to stay up to date with all the Reading Bear activities!



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