



The Reading Bear Society Newsletter

Thanksgiving Edition | October 9, 2023

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Joanne Roussy, PhD
RBS President and Co-founder

Dear RBS Friends,

In this newsletter, I am delighted to introduce you to an enthusiastic new leadership team in the four RBS chapters across the province. We have new chapter chairs and volunteers who have joined us, as well as our longstanding volunteer team who remain committed to their roles. You will meet the new FLEX students and learn what they have been working on, our summer practicum student who was busy restarting visits to the Ronald McDonald House and the Canuck Place Children’s Hospice, and new members of the communications teams. For all the chapter chairs entering their third-year clerkships, we wish you all the best and thank you for your incredible leadership.

We are delighted to be back in full swing again this year, and we reached a record number of Dr. Bear visits last year. See our numbers below.

The visits are greatly appreciated by the children, teachers, and school boards. I’m happy to share this note from Andrea Locke, health promotion schools coordinator for Central

Okanagan Public Schools, which reads:

“Our students loved the Reading Bear program; feedback was very positive. I was lucky enough to be at one of the schools for the visit and thoroughly enjoyed myself. The volunteers were very knowledgeable and shared great information with our primary students. We would like to take part again next year.”

Seeing the relationships created within the RBS are the gifts that keep us giving back.

On behalf of the board of directors, we wish you and your loved ones a Happy Thanksgiving and a festive fall!

Joanne Roussy, PhD

Number of Children Visited 2013–2023*

**No in-person visits occurred from 2020 – 2022 due to the COVID pandemic*

Peer Buddy Reading Program	2516
StrongStart / Kindergarten / Gr.1 Visits	4204
Doctor Bear Visits	1944
CP, M2M, RMH	468
TOTAL	9132

Number of Children Visited in 2023

Doctor Bear Visits: All Chapters	992
CP, M2M, RMH	95
TOTAL	1087

 @thereadingbear
 @thereadingbearsociety
 www.thereadingbear.ca

The Reading Bear featured in BC provincial prevention and early intervention program

The RBS “Bear Belly Breathing” video has been incorporated into a new program, Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Early Years (EASEY), created by the **BC Ministry of Children and Family Development**, Child and Youth Mental Health Policy.

The tipsheet “Belly Button Breathing: Children Aged 3-5” created by FLEX student Anisha Bains (MD 2023) in collaboration with the RBS FLEX advisory team, has also been incorporated into an evidence-informed, online professional development course that is currently in development for early years professionals and providers in British Columbia.

The course, Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Early Years (EASEY), is being developed alongside the Ministry’s ‘s Child and Youth Mental Health Policy team. It is part of an initiative to provide free, high-quality mental health prevention and early intervention resources for early years educators and providers.

EASEY will provide practitioners with an overview of child anxiety, help increase mental health literacy, and include practical, evidence-informed anxiety management strategies for them to incorporate into daily practice with young children and their families. EASEY is an extension of the EASE school-based collection for grades K-12 and, once released, will be available on the Healthy Minds BC website.

If you register on [HealthyMindsBC](https://www.healthymindsbc.ca) and sign up for the course, you will have immediate access to the program at launch.



Bear Belly Breathing
with the Reading Bear Society



Bear Belly Breathing Video

Belly Button Breathing Tip Sheet



Dr. Caroline’s Corner

Read the latest blog by Dr. Caroline Erdos, Literacy Expert:

[Preparing Your Child for Preschool](#)

FLEX Student Advisors



Isabel Chen,
MD MPH 2015
RBS FLEX
Committee Co-Chair



Kay Fung, MD
2016
RBS FLEX Committee
Co-Chair



Joanne Roussy,
PhD
RBS FLEX activity
supervisor

We are delighted to welcome two new [RBS FLEX student advisors](#) to the team: Dr. Gurkirat Kandola and Dr. Eloise Moss. In this section, you will meet them, along with our new FLEX students. We will also explore two completed projects presented by departing FLEX students and hear from a summer practicum participant. And we are delighted to showcase the talent of our resident artist, Dr. Jennifer Ji.

As we step into the fall season, we want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your unwavering support. Our goal is to provide a nurturing environment that empowers and advances the scholarly pursuits of medical students.



Gurkirat Kandola
RBS FLEX Student Advisor

Dr. Gurkirat Kandola, MD 2022, is a pediatric resident and advisor to the RBS Prince George chapter and has joined the FLEX student advisors along with Dr. Eloise Moss (MD'23). Gurkirat was born and raised in Prince George, BC, and after completing her BSc (Hons) in biochemistry and molecular biology at UNBC, she graduated from the UBC Northern Medical Program in 2020 before entering the UBC Pediatrics Residency Program. She has always enjoyed teaching, coaching and mentoring children and youth through her roles as a Punjabi teacher, Kirtan teacher, and youth camp counsellor. During her first two years of medical school, she enjoyed volunteering for the Teddy Bear Clinics and Talk to Your Doctor youth workshops. Gurkirat is excited to join the RBS program and work towards promoting child literacy and healthy living in Northern BC.



Eloise Moss
RBS FLEX Student Advisor

Dr. Eloise Moss, MD 2023, joined the Reading Bear Society as a FLEX student, investigating the benefits that connecting with nature offers young children as well as creating three videos for children, one pertaining to hand washing and wearing a mask ([insert links](#)) and the Visit to Dr. Bear. Before medical school, Eloise completed her BSc at UBC, studying physiology and neuroscience with a focus on early childhood development. She dedicated her undergraduate research efforts to understanding the effects of bilingualism on attention networks in the infant brain. Eloise has always had a passion for working with children and families in many settings. Throughout her undergraduate and medical degrees, she became involved in numerous organizations that allow her to support the health and well-being of young families.

Jennifer Ji, MD/PhD 2023, Artist in Residence



Jennifer Ji, MD/PhD

RBS FLEX Artist in Residence

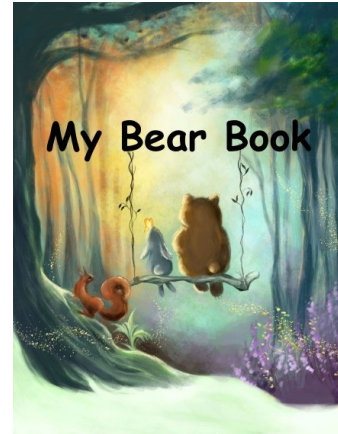
We are delighted that Dr. Jennifer Ji, MD/PhD 2023, a longstanding volunteer (2015) will be entering her eighth year as artist in residence to the RBS FLEX team. She is also entering her residency program at UBC in diagnostic and molecular pathology. Jennifer is our in-house artist and created the images for the *My Bear Book*

(the buddy reading program) and for the children's book, *A Visit to Dr. Bear*. She has also designed the Christmas/holiday season greeting cards and images for [RBS videos](#) including "Bear Yoga."



Jennifer completed her PhD studying the protein and metabolic landscapes of clear cell ovarian cancer. From a young age, she has been passionate about visual art, and she is grateful for the opportunity to use her art to help foster a love of reading in young children. Through her illustrations for the *My Bear Book* and *A Visit to Dr. Bear*, she is honoured to support the Reading Bear Society in achieving its vision of bringing children a sense of belonging and connection. Jennifer also has a three-year-old daughter, who enjoys her teddy bear!

Jenn also published an [article in the UBC Pathology Laboratory Medicine](#) magazine.





Annaliese Beck-McKenzie, MD
 2024
 RBS FLEX Student

Annaliese Beck-McKenzie is a third-year medical student at the Vancouver Fraser Medical Program. Art has always been an important part of her life, and she finds joy in sharing this with others. As such, she wanted to explore how visual art can promote mental well-being in children, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. This year as a FLEX student, she investigated both peer-reviewed and grey literature, while consulting with experts to explore the benefits of visual arts activities for promotion of mental health in preschool aged children. She created a scholarly literature review and an [information pamphlet](#) containing information and practical tips on how families can integrate visual arts activities into their children's daily lives. The information pamphlet was reviewed by a variety of experts and contains a curated list of resources for parents including videos, articles, printable guides, and links to workshops.



Jannie Ko, MD 2024
 RBS FLEX Student

Jannie Ko is a third-year medical student and completed her BSc in pharmacology at the University of British Columbia. She loves to read and enjoyed teaching children in community programs and summer camps before entering medical school. Jannie is passionate about promoting a healthy lifestyle for children and families, including nutritious eating, joyful movement, and supporting mental health. As a FLEX student with the RBS, Jannie created the info sheet "[All about Sugars.](#)"

Nurturing Your 3- to 5- Year-Old Child's Mental Health with Visual Arts Activities



Benefits of Visual Arts Activities for Your Preschool-Aged Child

Creative activities promote mental health in early childhood by helping children form secure relationships, manage their emotions, and learn. These skills serve them well for life.

One accessible and fun way to strengthen your relationship with your child and nurture their mental health/development is to do visual arts activities together. Visual arts involves creative, expressive, and playful activities such as drawing, painting, playing with clay, and doing crafts. Creating art with your child can:

- Increase their independence and self-confidence
- Improve their attention span
 - This can help at school
- Strengthen their social skills and relationships (especially when doing art with peers, parents, or teddy bears)
- Build their reflection, self-expression, and communication skills
- Enhance their ability to adapt, manage change, and cope with stress
 - Art can help your child [calm down](#)



A Framework for Visual Arts Activities

- 1) Prepare the materials
 - Use materials that are available and child-friendly
 - Examples include drawing supplies (e.g., crayons), painting supplies (e.g., tempera paints and brushes/fingers), items found in the house or nature, clay, and pastels
- 2) Introduce the activity and any guiding rules
- 3) Spark imagination
 - Try singing or listening to a song, reading and acting out a story, [doing a feelings check-in](#), discussing an experience, or playing with interesting objects your child found
 - Encourage problem-solving. Ask your child: what can we make with these materials? Can we make a story through our art? This approach can improve your child's literacy
- 4) Get creating
 - Don't forget to take breaks
 - Your art does not have to be perfect. The important thing is to enjoy the process with your child



All About Sugars For Children 2-5 Years



What is sugar?

- Sugar is a carbohydrate (like bread, pasta, and rice), which is the primary source of energy for the brain and muscles. It is necessary for children to have energy to learn and play. Sugar can be part of a nutritious diet.
- Sugar is naturally found in fruits and vegetables. It is also found added in other foods such as cakes, cookies, candies, and pastries.

Is sugar harmful?

- Sugar in moderation is a part of a balanced diet. Having sugary foods or beverages on occasion will not impact overall health and is part of important life events such as birthdays and cultural celebrations.
- Too much refined sugar can contribute to health problems such as diabetes, cavities, and weight gain.
- It is important not to restrict sugar as it can lead to disordered eating in children, increased cravings of sugar, and feelings of guilt around food.



What are the recommendations?

- Total sugars include both added sugars and free sugars. The World Health Organization recommends that free sugar (includes added sugars and sugars naturally present in honey, syrup, and fruit juice) consumption should be reduced and should be less than 10% of total calorie intake. For a toddler aged 2-5 years, this would be approximately 24 to 32 grams of free sugars per day, depending on their weight and activity level.

Nutrition Facts		Valeur nutritive	
Per 1 cup (250 mL) pour 1 tasse (250 mL)			
Calories 110	% Daily Value*		
Fat / Lipides 0 g	0 %		
Saturated / saturés 0 g	0 %		
Trans / trans 0 g	0 %		
Carbohydrate / Glucides 26 g	0 %		
Fiber / Fibre 0 g	0 %		
Sugars / Sucres 22 g	22 %		
Protein / Protéines 2 g	0 %		
Cholesterol / Cholestérol 0 mg	0 %		
Sodium 0 mg	0 %		
Potassium 450 mg	10 %		
Calcium 30 mg	2 %		
Iron / Fer 0 mg	0 %		

New % Daily Value for total sugars

New footnote to help interpret the % Daily Value

Ingredients: Sugars (maple molasses, brown sugar, sugar) • Flour • Vegetable oil • Phosphoric acid • Liquid whole egg • Salt • Sodium bicarbonate • Spices • Allura red • Contains: Wheat • Egg



- Added or free sugars are often called "hidden sugars" because they aren't separated from naturally occurring sugars on nutrition labels, as seen in the image on the left from [Health Canada](#).
- However, you can identify them from the ingredients list below from Health Canada. Added sugars are refined sugars and are grouped together. You can also identify them by looking for sugars (such as brown sugar), syrups (such as cane syrup), or ingredients that end in "ose" (such as sucrose).
- Some common foods that contain high amounts of sugar added are frosted breakfast cereals, granola bars, flavoured yogurt, and chocolate milk.



Thumri Waliwitiya, MD 2024

RBS FLEX Student

Thumri Waliwitiya is a fourth-year medical student at UBC and incoming RBS FLEX student. She completed her undergraduate degree at McMaster University with a Bachelor of Health Sciences. Being a book lover herself, Thumri joined the Reading Bear Society, as she feels passionate about promoting literacy to kids of all ages. She has been working with kids through the Canucks Autism Network, Kids4Kids, and Smiling over Sickness Committees at the McMaster Children's Hospital, as well as tutoring through Frontier College.



Nastaran Moarefi, MD 2026

RBS FLEX Student

Nastaran Moarefi is a second-year medical student in the Island Medical Program. She feels strongly about improving primary care and accessible education on public health issues. She is very passionate about multilingualism and its capacity for cognitive and social well-being in children. Prior to her medical school training, she discovered her love for teaching in South Korea, which led her to the Reading Bear Society. For her FLEX project, she hopes to combine these interests and gain an appreciation of health literacy and knowledge translation for children and how that may be leveraged to evaluate the Dr. Bear program.



Nikita Menon, MD 2024

RBS Summer Practicum Student

Nikita Menon is a fourth-year medical student enrolled with the Vancouver-Fraser Medical Program at UBC who previously studied microbiology and immunology. She has experience facilitating dance, sport, and art programs for children aged 2-7 in her local community, as well as tutoring children in reading comprehension and math. Nikita is passionate about creating an inclusive and encouraging environment for children to learn, play, and develop their literacy skills. Nikita joined the RBS as a volunteer assisting with visits to the Canuck Place Children's Hospice. She also restarted the Ronald McDonald House visits and created a new manual for these visits, along with visiting the children at the summer Mom2Mom picnic.



Precilia Kong, MD 2026

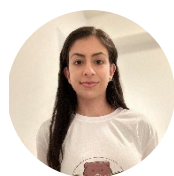
Precilia Kong (she/her) is pursuing her MD at the University of British Columbia, where she earned her Bachelor of Science and Master of Public Health degrees. Throughout her academic and professional journey, she actively engaged with organizations promoting healthcare equity, advocating for mental health, and supporting underserved communities both locally and globally. This included roles with the National Core for Neuroethics, the Centre for Cognitive Development, BC Children's Hospital Research Institute, and FoundryBC. As co-founder of Ignite the Warmth Society, a youth-centred registered nonprofit, Precilia actively participates in community-driven initiatives and mentoring. Currently, she is working with UBC's Allard School of Law on a peer mentorship program to empower youth (ages 18-25) in creating a socially just world while promoting self and community care.

RBS Kelowna Chapter



Brayden Griffiths, MD 2026
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chairs:



Ravneet Sohal, MD 2027
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair

Ravneet Sohal was born and raised in Abbotsford. She graduated as valedictorian of her class and received entrance scholarships from both the University of British Columbia and the University of the Fraser Valley. She ultimately decided to pursue a Bachelor of Kinesiology degree, with a specialization in the exercise stream at UFV. She completed her degree and received the Governor General's silver medal in June 2023. Along with completing her degree, she enjoyed spending her time being the co-director of PowHERful, a nonprofit organization focused on guiding high school students towards strength training. She also worked as a support worker for the Canucks Autism Network and volunteered with the Physical Literacy Action Network and the Big Brothers

Big Sisters program in the Lower Mainland. She has also really enjoyed coaching youth soccer teams over the past few years. She is beyond excited for the opportunity to be co-chair and is looking forward to an amazing year!



Richard Mageto, MD 2027
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair

Richard Mageto was born in Kenya and moved to Canada in 2009. He lived in Surrey for most of his time in Canada before moving to Kamloops to pursue his undergraduate degree while playing basketball at Thompson Rivers University. He is now in Kelowna attending medical school at the University of British Columbia. During his free time, he enjoys playing and coaching basketball. He has coached kids of all ages in Kamloops through the Northern Bounce Basketball Program. Richard has also participated as a basketball coach for the Kamloops Special Olympics basketball team. Richard is excited at the opportunity to work with the great group of people who are part of the Reading Bear Society as well as a chance to engage with and leave a lasting impact on the children in this community.

Greetings from the RBS Kelowna Chapter!

We're thrilled to introduce you to our dynamic duo of first-year co-chairs, Ravneet Sohal and Richard Mageto. They've eagerly joined the RBS family, bringing with them an abundance of experience in educating children. Thanks to this exciting addition to our team, we're setting our sights even higher this year. With the collective efforts of our passionate members, we're determined to surpass last year's milestone of reaching 389 students. A heartfelt shout-out goes to our returning second-year students, whose unwavering dedication was the cornerstone of our success last year. We can't wait to team up with them once more, alongside the new members of the SMP Class of 2027. With so many helping hands, we're thrilled to announce that our annual Christmas Book Drive will be continuing this year. Our mission is to support the Central Okanagan Family Hub and all the incredible work it does in our community. We're also excited to continue our partnership with the Okanagan School Board, ensuring that Dr. Bear's visits will continue to inspire and educate children throughout the 2023/24 school year. Together, we'll continue to create a brighter, healthier future for the children of Kelowna.

- Brayden Griffiths, Ravneet Sohal, and Richard Mageto, RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chairs

RBS Prince George Chapter



Crystal Mcleod, MD 2026
RBS Prince George Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



Leanne Flinton, MD 2026
RBS Prince George Chapter Co-Chair

Leanne was born and raised in the interior of BC. Prior to medical school, she obtained her Bachelor of Science (Honours) in biochemistry and molecular biology from UNBC. Now

that she is studying at the Northern Medical Program, Leanne is excited to volunteer with the Reading Bear Society and promote health literacy and awareness in children. In the past, Leanne was able to foster healthy development in children through volunteer work with Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Rainbows and Sunbeams programs, and in a previous role as a community health educator. When she's not studying, you can find her expanding her photography portfolio or trying fun new recipes. Leanne is looking forward to having a larger role with the Northern BC chapter this coming year!

Hello from the RBS Prince George Chapter!

This year has been our busiest to date in the north! We had the pleasure of bringing Dr. Bear visits to over 500 students across Prince George in the spring semester and already have many visits scheduled for the fall season. We are looking forward to welcoming back our Year 2 volunteers and meeting new members of the chapter from the Year 1 class! Excitingly, this semester we are also partnering with the UNBC Nursing Program to expand the inter-professional networking of our chapter, with medical and nursing students teaming up to provide visits.

To make connections with potential volunteers to add to our team, we will be tabling at the inaugural NMP Clubs Day in September. Opportunities to connect with the community at large continue to be important to our chapter, and we are anticipating another successful fundraising season ahead.

- Crystal and Leanne



Dr. Bear Visits and fall have kicked off at the Northern Medical Program! Second-year Tiffany Campbell and co-chair Leanne Flinton (above) headed out visit Van Bien Elementary this past week. Tiffany was among the first volunteers to ever hold an in-person Dr. Bear visit and is still going strong with the group this year!



Leanne and Crystal, Prince George co-chairs at this year's first Dr. Bear visit of the semester!



The Prince George Chapter partnered with the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northern BC for a Spring Book & Bear Drive. Thank you to our drive hosts: Second Cup, Gingerbread Toys, Books and Company, Auto Magic, Mastermind Toys, and the Northern Medical Building. A big thank you to the College Heights BC Liquor store for their generous donations of teddy bears. This drive was a huge success as we received hundreds of books, toys, and stuffies. All donations will be split between the Big Brothers Big Sisters In School Mentoring Program, Before and After School Care Centres, and the new 3–5 year old Child Care Centre!

Photo: Bailey Eberherr, Carmen Huang, Jane Gauthier (Communication Manager from Big Brothers Big Sisters), and Ella Wedel smiling with all the donations collected from the Spring Book & Bear Drive

The Reading Bear Society: Promoting Early Health Literacy in the North

BY CRYSTAL MCLEOD & LEANNE VARNEY, READING BEAR SOCIETY NORTHERN CHAPTER CO-CHAIRS

The Reading Bear Society (RBS) was created in 2013 to promote health literacy among school-aged children in metro Vancouver. In 2020, students of the Northern Medical Program began a new RBS chapter in Prince George. The hope of this new chapter was to offer RBS community programs in a way that suited and benefited northern BC. Three years on, the largest community deliverable from the Prince George chapter is classroom-based presentations with 'Dr. Bear'. In this program, medical students present a story of teddy bear patients visiting Dr. Bear and then invite students to learn about health by providing a 'check-up' to their own teddy bear (often brought from home).



For children participating in the program, it is hoped they benefit by becoming familiar with healthcare procedures and equipment. Previous research from the United States has shown that children who participate in 'Teddy Bear Clinics' like our Dr. Bear visits feel more at ease in healthcare settings. In the north, we also hope the visits act as an early touchpoint for children to learn about careers in healthcare that they may not have been exposed to yet.



The RBS has roots in community relationship building to foster empathy, compassion and inclusivity. This network extends beyond elementary classroom visits to enhance the teamwork capacity of those who volunteer with the organization. The experience offers medical students valuable opportunities to work with young children (we currently visit children aged 0-6 years).

The Prince George RBS Chapter is excited to begin a partnership between the Northern Medical Program and the UNBC School of Nursing. This partnership will see student volunteers across healthcare disciplines working together to deliver programming. In the current training model, healthcare trainees are often siloed. This can make it more difficult to appreciate how the roles come together for patient care in a team context. We hope this collaboration will positively impact the recognition of what each discipline provides for patient care within a team model.

RBS Vancouver Chapter

Introducing New Chapter Chair:



Joanne Chi, MD 2026
RBS Vancouver Chapter Chair

Joanne Chi is a second-year medical student at the University of British Columbia and has her Bachelor of Kinesiology from UBC. Before entering medical school, Joanne worked as a behaviour interventionist with children on the autism spectrum and has volunteered with the Reading Buddies Program at her local library. She thoroughly enjoys helping children develop a passion for science-based knowledge, improving literacy skills, and creating a safe learning environment. She looks forward to joining the Reading Bear Society and helping to enhance health literacy among the younger demographic.

The Reading Bear delivered 25 bags of books and teddy bears to the StrongStart children at Queen Alexandra elementary school.



Photo: StrongStart teacher Sandy Yun (left)



On September 27, the Reading Bear Society hosted a booth at the annual Medical Undergraduate Society's Clubs Night, led by Vancouver Chapter chair Joanne Chi. She helped recruit new volunteers for the upcoming fall in-person Dr. Bear visits and talked to medical students about RBS's mission and activities. She is excited to welcome and work with our new RBS volunteers through organizing and attending Dr. Bear visits with local schools for this 2023/24 school year.



Medical students Nastaran Moarefi and Jannie Ko participating in Dr. Bear visits

On July 15th, 2023, three RBS volunteers visited the annual Mom2Mom picnic. Hosted at MacLean Park, this was a wonderful opportunity for RBS volunteers to engage with moms, children, and volunteers. We were grateful to be able to deliver a wide array of books, with options for all ages from infants to teens. Connecting with children through reading stories, practicing bear breathing, and sharing fun facts about bears was a memorable experience for all the volunteers. We were able to form small connections with each child, and gift them each a teddy bear with their name on it. It was an incredible experience, and we are already looking forward to next year! - Nikita Menon, MD'24



Nikita Menon, Sanya Grover, and Daniel Guo from the RBS Vancouver Chapter attended the annual Mom2Mom Summer Picnic on July 15, 2023. They enjoyed sharing books with children of all ages and ensured that each child left with a teddy bear and a bag full of books! The RBS has been a community with M2M since its inception in 2014.

Canuck Place Children's Hospice & Dave Lede House



Joanne Chi, MD 2026

CPHC Vancouver Coordinator

The Reading Bear Society had the privilege this summer of visiting the Canuck Place Children's Hospice in Vancouver. It was such a heartwarming experience as a medical student to be able to interact with and read to the kids in a comforting and happy environment. We read bear-themed books, gifted each child with a stuffed teddy bear, which was generously donated through the BC Liquor Store's "Share a Bear" campaign, and sang songs together before bedtime. Seeing the smiles and infectious laughter among the kids and their siblings melted our hearts during each visit. Not to mention, the staff and volunteers at the Canuck Place have been absolutely lovely in coordinating and supporting our new volunteers. We can't wait to continue our visits in the upcoming year!



Joanne Chi and Sanya Grover pictured at the first back-to-in person visits at the Canuck Place Children's Hospice, March 2023



Iman Lahouaoula, MD 2024

CPCB Abbotsford Coordinator

The Reading Bear Society has had the privilege of continuing with the first summer visits to the Dave Lede House - Canuck Place in Abbotsford. At the visits, medical students have had the pleasure of reading to the kids staying at the house and their siblings. Notably, we visited around Canada Day, when the house was well decorated and served as a great backdrop for story time. We had

hands-on material, which the kids particularly loved. Every visit brings something new, and we feel touched to be in the presence of every child and their families during their stay. We also thank the staff for the warmth and great welcome they have given the Reading Bear Program. We are excited to continue to develop the program in Abbotsford!



Above: Iman Lahouaoula and Rebecca Zhuang attend the first visit at the Canuck Place Hospice for Children at the David Lede House in Abbotsford: "We had a fantastic time introducing the Reading Bear to the Dave Lede House in Abbotsford, an inaugural event! We read to the children in the house there, who very much enjoyed their experience, and we are grateful to have been given this opportunity."

RBS Victoria Chapter



Val Swanston, MD 2026
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



Juliette Wong, MD 2026
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair

Juliette Wong grew up in Vancouver, completed her undergraduate degree in kinesiology and psychology at UBC, and is currently a second-year student in the Island Medical Program. She became passionate about working with children while coaching gymnastics for youth and athletes with special needs. She has pursued this passion in many roles over the years, as a youth leader, camp counselor, pediatric clinical research assistant, and oncologic child life volunteer. She is very excited to continue learning and help RBS continue building connections in the Greater Victoria community this year!



Photo from left to right: Cole Daley (co-chair), Stefania Kassaris (volunteer), Veda Smith (volunteer), Juliette Wong (co-chair), Nastaran Moarefi (FLEX student), and Valerie Swanston (co-chair)

Hello from the RBS Victoria Chapter!

We have officially been ratified as a new MUS club and so excited about the community connections we were able to make in the spring semester through our inaugural Dr. Bear visits. We engaged with 102 students at Strawberry Vale Elementary, Northridge Elementary, and St. Michaels University Junior School, and can't wait to continue expanding our outreach to more schools this year. We are working with Greater Victoria School District No. 61 to bring Dr. Bear into more classrooms and looking forward to getting more passionate Island Medical Program students to support early literacy and healthy habits!

Love,

Val and Juliette

RBS Communications Team



Brett Collinge, PhD (candidate)

RBS Director of Communications

I am pleased to introduce this year's communications team for the Reading Bear Society. The communications team is responsible for the important job of connecting the Reading Bear with the communities we work with, whether that's through our website, social media posts, newsletter, or printed materials. This year, joining Mari Humphrey, newsletter editor and website manager, is Mason McClement and Emma Goucher as co-editors. Nikita Menon, fourth-year medical student, has also joined the social media team. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Christopher Wong, who has been assisting with website management for the past two years. All the best for your last year of computer sciences at UBC.

Welcoming New Members



Nikita Menon, MD 2024

Social Media Manager

Nikita Menon is a fourth-year medical student at the Vancouver-Fraser Medical Program at UBC, who previously studied microbiology and immunology. She has experience facilitating dance, sport, and art programs for children aged 2-7 in her local community, as well as tutoring children in reading comprehension and math. Nikita is passionate about creating an inclusive and encouraging environment for children to learn, play, and develop their literacy skills. She looks forward to joining the Reading Bear Society and sharing her love for reading with children and their families at the Ronald McDonald House.



Mason McClement

Newsletter Co-Editor

A recent UBC graduate in the department of sociology, Mason McClement is extremely passionate about supported and self-advocacy through legal and social systems. Life has taught him that effective leadership starts with exploring readership. Many of the most powerful life lessons are related in some way or another to books and storytelling, whether it was the alphabet or exploring new social milestones. With a deep appreciation for multicultural education and languages, diverse communities supported through reading inspire new ideas and hobbies most importantly explored together. Mason is joining the RBS communications team as a co-editor of the newsletter.



Emma Goucher

Newsletter Co-Editor

Emma is a third-year undergraduate majoring in neuroscience at UBC. She grew up in Montreal, where she received her Diploma of Collegiate Studies in environmental sciences at Dawson College. Emma is interested in pursuing molecular neuroscience in her upcoming academic years and will be working as a summer intern for the Douglas Research Centre in Montreal. Having grown up in Quebec, she had the opportunity to grow up bilingual in English and French and looks forward to incorporating both languages while working with the Reading Bear Society.

Volunteer Profile: Brayden Griffiths MD 2026

In each newsletter, we profile some of the many valued supporters and volunteers of the Reading Bear Society. In this edition, we are proud to feature Brayden Griffiths.

Tell us about yourself.

I am originally from Langley, BC, where I was born and raised. In 2019, I graduated with honours from the University of the Fraser Valley, obtaining a Bachelor of Science in biology. In 2022, I moved to Kelowna to pursue my studies at UBC Medical School. Previously, I worked with children as a lifeguard in the Fraser Valley for over eight years. I also volunteered at BC Children's Hospital, where I conducted pediatric research in the emergency department. Additionally, I served as vice-president at Langley Pos-Abilities Society, a nonprofit charity. In this role, I organized and facilitated diverse programs aimed at supporting individuals living with disabilities. Beyond my professional pursuits, I have a passion for strength training, volleyball, reading, and video games.



How did you become involved in the Reading Bear?

I began my journey of volunteering with children at my local community centre when I was 12 years old, which ignited my passion for working with children ever since. Childhood development and education hold a special place in my heart, and even as I entered medical school, I knew I wanted to continue pursuing this path. It was during my early days in medical school that I first discovered RBS and became immediately drawn to their programs. Learning about their impactful work inspired me to lend a hand in their initiatives. When I learned about the opportunity to become a co-chair for the Kelowna Chapter, I was thrilled at the chance to not only continue volunteering with children but also contribute to the facilitation of RBS programs within the Okanagan School District. My goal is to make a difference in the

lives of children and to support their growth and education.

What is your current role with the RBS?

I am currently the co-chair of the RBS Kelowna Chapter and a Dr. Bear visit volunteer.

What is your best memory of RBS?

During one of our Dr. Bear visits, we distributed teddy bears to all the children, allowing them to simulate

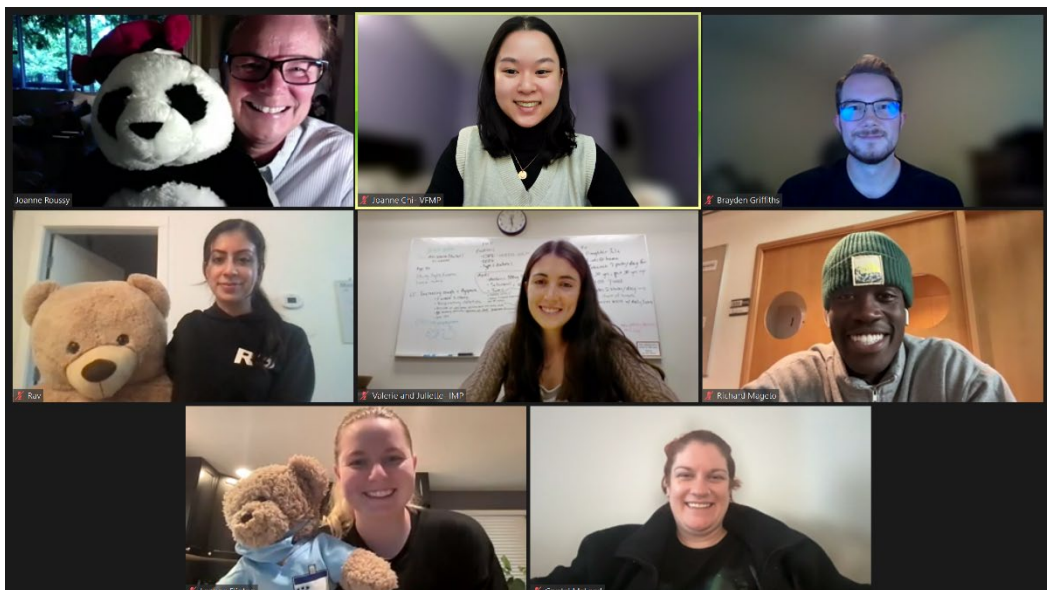
various aspects of a medical visit that they may encounter in their lives. This included experiences such as receiving a shot or having their heart examined with a stethoscope. Just as we finished discussing our "bear breathing" principle, which teaches children the technique of taking three slow, deep breaths to stay calm, an announcement came over the PA system, indicating that the school was conducting a surprise lockdown drill. Instantly, all the kids gathered in a corner, while the teacher promptly turned off the lights and secured both classroom doors. As we sat on the floor in complete silence, I observed many of the children practising bear breathing with each other and their teddy bears, which they still held tightly in their hands. It was truly remarkable to witness how they harnessed their nervous energy and regained control by regulating their breath. This real-life application of our program's lessons was an incredible experience. Seeing how the children immediately put into practice the techniques we had taught them reinforced the significance of our efforts and the best impact we were making in their lives

News

A huge congratulations to our two graduates, **Dr. Jennifer Ji** and **Dr. Eloise Moss**. Eloise is entering the pediatrics residency program in Vancouver and Jennifer is entering diagnostic and molecular pathology. We are so very proud of you. Best wishes to for your residency programs!

Dr. Jennifer Ji, MD/PhD 2023 has been volunteering with RBS since 2015 and will be continuing in her role with RBS as artist in residence.

Dr. Eloise Moss, MD 2023, former RBS FLEX student and chapter chair has joined the RBS FLEX student advisory committee. We are delighted to have you join the RBS FLEX team.



On Thursday September 28, the RBS chapter chairs held their first meeting of the year in preparation for the delivery of the upcoming Dr. Bear visits. Last school season they reached a record of visits and children. We welcome our new team of chapter chairs and second years who have stayed on for a second year.

Thank You

A huge thank you to the parents and teachers at Westside Montessori School for their yearly donation of children books.

These books went to M2M children.



A special thank you to the UNBC School of Nursing for their support in recruiting nursing student volunteers to assist with the Dr. Bear visits: Dr. Caroline Sanders, associate professor, and Phil Dovey, senior lab instructor. We are delighted to have nursing students join the Reading Bear.

A special thank you to Michele Ng, special projects coordinator, for her assistance in recruiting computer science students to assist with the management of the RBS website.



The RBS family would like to thank our outgoing chapter chairs (pictured below) for all their time, leadership, and dedication. We wish them all the best in their medical training and are very proud of them!



Casey Li (Kelowna); Carmen Huang (Prince George); Alexa Tymkiw, Cole Daley, and Zovya Wasylyk (Victoria); Annaliese Beck-McKenzie and Sanya Grover (Vancouver)



Our Founder Denise Roussy who inspires use all at the Reading Bear Society.



The next edition of the Reading Bear Newsletter will be sent in February 2024. Please email rbs.coms@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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