

The Reading Bear Society Newsletter



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Valentine's Edition | February 14, 2023



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

Dear RBS Friends,

We love Valentine's Day at the Reading Bear Society (RBS) as it best represents our mission: to spread as much love as possible across BC through loving interactions and sharing story books and teddy bears.

We are so happy to be back in-person this year. All four chapters—Prince George, Kelowna, Vancouver, and Victoria—have been busy visiting schools across the province to present the Dr. Bear program to young preschool, kindergarten, and Grade 1 students. All chapters have also been busy hosting book and teddy bear drives during the holidays to support children via various partner organizations across BC.

In this newsletter, you will meet our new RBS volunteers and hear from each chapter. We are delighted to be restarting visits to the Canuck Place Hospice for Children and expanding to the Abbotsford location, the Dave Lede House. On the communication team, we are delighted to have launched the RBS resources via Twitter and to welcome Mari Humphrey from the Kelowna chapter, who has joined as co-chair of newsletter and website management.

RBS chapters have received a grant from Doctors of BC thanks to the leadership of Zoyva Wasylyk, Victoria chapter co-chair. FLEX medical and practicum students have worked on projects such as a symptom checker for fever and translating the Dr. Bear book into Farsi. We also highlight long serving volunteers like Stephenie Gold, FLEX advisor, who makes all of this work possible.

I'd also like to send special congratulations to Brett Collinge, RBS director of communications, who has moved to complete his final year of his doctoral studies at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland.

On behalf of the entire Reading Bear board, we would like to personally thank you for volunteering your time across our four RBS chapters. The support we provide for children and RBS ambassadors truly could not be possible without your commitment to a brighter future.

Every task, big or small, has an impact on our communities and is the light that inspires us all.

Happy Valentine's Day,

Joanne Roussy, PhD



The Reading Bear's FLEX Students



Isabel Chen, MD MPH 2015
& Kay Fung, MD 2016

RBS FLEX Committee Co-Chairs

Happy Valentine's Day, beloved RBS community! This is a very special time of year, where we uplift the love that drives our work and the love that we nurture in each other through our relationships. It has been such a joy to see the growth of all the students involved with FLEX and the Reading Bear Society and to see their projects come to fruition throughout the years. The RBS [resource section](#) has continued to grow since 2017 and we now have 20 tip sheets on a wide range of early childhood topics including healthy eating, sleep, and reducing needle fear. This is paired alongside some of our favourite [children's books](#) on these selected early childhood topics. We also have [videos](#) on many topics including 'Bear Belly Breathing', 'Visiting Dr. Bear', and 'Bear Yoga' All this [work throughout the years](#) certainly could not have been done without our wonderful advisors who volunteer their time who provide invaluable guidance and mentorship to our students.

As we head into 2023, it has been such a joy to see the growth of all the students involved with FLEX and the Reading Bear Society and to see their projects come to fruition. But this certainly could not have been done without our wonderful advisors who volunteer their time who provide invaluable guidance and mentorship to our students. Please meet a few of our outstanding students and advisors:



Stephenie Gold, MA RCC

RBS FLEX Advisor

Stephenie is a Registered Clinical Counsellor and Co-Founder/Director of LEAP Clinic where she has been supporting the mental health of children, youth, and families since 2003. For the last 20 years, Stephenie has worked on several large school-based anxiety prevention and early intervention curriculums, and most recently is an expert consultant and content developer for *Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators* (or EASE), a free resource for all elementary and secondary educators in BC and the soon to be released *EASE for the Early Years* (age 0-6). As a past frequent contributor and project coordinator for Anxiety Canada, Stephenie co-authored the sections for teens and was one of the original consulting developers for the Mindshift CBT app. Stephenie feels passionate about helping parents and educators support the healthy emotional development of children and is honoured to have been a part of RBS for the last nine years providing feedback on early childhood resources. Stephenie is also the proud mom of two teens who push her to grow up right alongside them.

Left to right: Isabel Chen (FLEX committee co-chair), Joanne Roussy (FLEX activity supervisor), and Trevor Newton (FLEX content expert)





Anisha Bains, MD 2023

Anisha grew up in the Lower Mainland and attended Simon Fraser University to complete her Bachelor of Science, where she majored in Biomedical Physiology. Through her work, Anisha has developed a passion for early childhood education and developing and advocating for programs that promote mental and physical well-being for children of various age groups.

Project: Anisha Bains, fourth-year medical student, completed her third FLEX rotation with the RBS. For her final FLEX cycle, Anisha created a [symptom checker for fever](#).



I wanted to take a moment to thank all the RBS advisors for the feedback and guidance you have provided for my FLEX project this year. Moreover, I would like to thank everyone for the guidance provided on the other projects I have worked on throughout my past three terms with the Reading Bear Society. The work I have been able to do with the Reading Bear Team will remain a highlight of my medical school journey. – Anisha



Fever Symptom Checker

Children Aged 0-12



What is a Fever?

A fever is an increase in body temperature. This can be a normal, healthy response when the body is fighting an infection. A temperature is considered to be a fever if:

- Higher than 37.5 C (99.5 F) by mouth
- Higher than 38.0 C (100.4 F) by rectum

Causes of Fever


Childhood fevers can be caused by many different conditions:


- Viral infections such as the flu, COVID, RSV, or hand, foot and mouth
- Bacterial infections like pneumonia
- Immunizations
- Heat exhaustion
- Inflammatory diseases
- Certain medications

Fever Prevention

The best way to prevent fevers in your child is to reduce their exposure to infectious diseases. You can reduce the spread of infectious diseases by:

- Encouraging handwashing
- Childhood immunizations, which can decrease the risk of fever-related illnesses
- Staying home if you or your child is feeling unwell





This symptom checker is only a quick guide. If you are worried about your child, please see a doctor.

Fever Myths

- All fevers are bad for children.**
Fever is a good sign that the body's immune system is working to fight an infection.
- Teething can cause fevers.**
Teething can cause a small increase in body temperature, but it does not cause a true fever. If your child has a fever, consider other illnesses.
- The higher the temperature, the more serious the illness.**
In childhood fevers, how your child feels or is acting is more important.

How to Take a Temperature

Temperatures can differ depending on how you take them. The most common ways to measure temperature are:

- Under the tongue: most accurate for children 5 years and older
- In the rectum: most accurate from birth to 5 years old
- In the armpit
- In the ear

Although it is important to monitor your child's fever, how your child looks and behaves is more important than the number on the thermometer.

Past projects: Anisha's first two projects consisted of creating a manual for teachers for the virtual Visit to Dr. Bear and a tip sheet and video for Bear Breathing.



Bear Belly Breathing

with the Reading Bear Society



May 2021



Bear Belly Breathing Video

Belly Button Breathing Tip Sheet



Kiarash Bahari, UBC Biology 2023 RBS Social Media Coordinator

Kia was born in Esfahan, Iran, and moved to Canada in 2017. He is a fourth-year Biology major at UBC. He has four young cousins whom he enjoys spending time with and he has worked with children in various volunteer positions including Strive Living Society. As a musician, Kia has taught music to children for the past six years. He is excited to be a part of the RBS where his goal is to do his best to make children's lives filled with beauty, love, and knowledge. Currently, he is taking Early Childhood Education courses as a part of his studies. His first language is Farsi.

Project: Last fall, Kia embarked as a practicum student to translate the *A Visit to Dr. Bear* book to Farsi.



View *A Visit to Dr. Bear* book in Farsi



Alissa Zhang, MD 2024

Alissa is a medical student at the University of British Columbia. She graduated from McMaster University from the Bachelor of Health Sciences program with a Child Health Specialization. Alissa has worked as a rugby instructor and sport development facilitator for children and youth across Toronto and Hamilton, working to improve physical literacy for children.



Project: Alissa was a past RBS Vancouver chapter-co chair who also worked on various projects as a practicum student such as the children's book corner. She also created a Bear Yoga video (artwork by Jennifer Ji, MS/PhD 2023, RBS FLEX team committee member). This video consists of several easy poses and flows to help relax and practice mindfulness in a child-friendly way. She is excited to help strengthen physical literacy while having fun and practicing Bear Breathing.



RBS Kelowna Chapter



Casey Li, MD 2025
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



Brayden Griffiths, MD 2026
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair

Brayden was born and raised in Langley, BC, and completed his Bachelor of Science Honours degree in Biology at the University of the Fraser Valley. He has now moved to Kelowna and is a medical student at UBC. For over

eight years, Brayden worked in his community as a lifeguard and water safety instructor where he taught children swimming lessons, aquatic safety, and first-aid skills. During this time, he conducted pediatric clinical research at BC Children's Hospital and helped facilitate studies with children who were visiting the emergency room. Brayden continued his work as vice president of Langley Pos-Abilities Society where he helped children living with disabilities. He looks forward to bringing his passion for working with children to the Reading Bear Society and to help build relationships between the children of Kelowna and the greater medical community.

Hello from the RBS Kelowna Chapter!

We are so happy that we have been able to restart our Dr. Bear visits in person this year! In October and November 2022, the RBS Kelowna chapter has worked with 227 students in 10 schools in Kelowna in our Visit to Dr. Bear program.

In addition, we are excited to have engaged our community in our annual Christmas Book Drive. This year we donated all our books to the Central Okanagan Family Hub, which distributed the books to families and children in need in our community. We partnered with schools including AS Matheson (Victoria Lou), Bellevue Creek (Mariam Rajabally), and Davidson Road (Madison Horvat) to collect book donations from students and families. We have also partnered again with Once Upon a Bookstore, which kindly donated many new books. Thank you to all our donors!

We are excited to collaborate again with the school board to deliver Dr. Bear visits in the upcoming months.

– Brayden and Casey, RBS Kelowna Chapter Chairs





Kelowna's co-chairs, Brayden Griffiths and Casey Li, holding some of the books collected in the Christmas Book Drive



Kelowna's co-chair, Casey Li, with the Central Okanagan Family Hub

From left to right: Ruba Qumi from COFH, Wendy Williams from COFH, Casey Li from The Reading Bear Society Kelowna

RBS Prince George Chapter



Carmen Huang, MD 2025
RBS Prince George Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



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

Crystal grew up in Bruce County, ON, but has lived in many different places (from Moose Factory to Windsor, ON). For the last decade, she has worked primarily as a bedside nurse.

Crystal obtained her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Nipissing University, and her Master of Science in Nursing from Western University. Crystal is currently studying at the Northern Medical Program of UBC and has an interest in rural pediatric medicine. In the past, Crystal has enjoyed working with children through pageants, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Girl Guides Canada, and the Children's Hospital of Western Ontario. Crystal is looking forward to meeting many 'future' healthcare professionals, and becoming better acquainted with the Prince George community through the RBS.

Hello from the RBS Prince George Chapter!

We have been busy as a bee this year in the north! Our team is growing as we have recruited three new volunteers since the new year. With the return of in-person Dr. Bear visits, last fall/winter we worked with 57 students and completed four Dr. Bear visits. Over the holidays, our team was busy reaching out to schools and organizations to collaborate on Dr. Bear visits and Book & Bear drives. We have 25 Dr. Bear visits planned from January to April throughout our community with Strong Start programs, elementary schools, and Sparks groups. For January and February, we are partnering with the Big Brothers and Big Sisters for a Book & Bear drive. All donations will be given to the children they serve in time for Valentine's Day and their Pink Shirt Day fundraiser. In January, the Prince George chapter was featured in the *Prince George Citizen* and the Newsflash section of Doctors of BC for all the work we have been doing lately. We are so thankful for our amazing team and look forward to what the future will bring!

– Carmen and Crystal

RBS Prince George Chapter in the News

The *Prince George Citizen* interviewed Crystal McLeod, RBS Prince George chapter co-chair, about what RBS does and the chapter's plans to expand their outreach.

Click [HERE](#) to read the article.



Isabella de Goeij and Bailey Eberherr in a Dr. Bear visit



Left: **Crystal McLeod** reading *A Visit to Dr. Bear* with a kindergarten class
Right: **Sonia Kandola** and **Bailey Eberherr** collecting over 100 teddy bears from the College Heights BC Liquor Store for the Book & Bear Drive with Big Brothers and Big Sisters



Smiling after a Dr. Bear visit

From left to right: Isabella de Goeij, Carmen Huang, Ms Pirillo from Van Bien Elementary, and Bailey Eberherr

RBS Victoria Chapter



Alexa Tymkiw, MD 2025
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair



Zovya Wasylyk, MD 2025
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair



Cole Daley, MD 2025
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



Val Swanston, MD 2026
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair

Valerie is a first-year student at the Island Medical Program. She is originally from Victoria but recently completed her undergraduate studies at Western University. She loves Vancouver Island and is very excited to be back! While at Western, she developed a passion for children's health while volunteering for a student-led children's health promotion program. In her spare time she enjoys running, hiking, skiing, and reading.

Hello from the newest chapter edition to the Reading Bear family!

We are so excited to be involved in the Reading Bear initiative and are feeling very proud of the work we have done in the Victoria community thus far this year.

To kick off our year, we organized our first annual Holiday Book Drive, partnering with local businesses to collect children's books. We are so grateful to the businesses that hosted our donation boxes, donated books, and/or advertised our initiative, including Yoga Lab Victoria, Fresh Coast, Munro's books, the UVic Library, the Medical Science Building at UVic, Russell Books, and Fernwood Cafe. Following the holiday break, we picked up our donation boxes and were overwhelmed by the generosity of the community. We were able to donate over 300 books to [The Cridge Centre for the Family](#), a local non-profit that provides a multitude of meaningful services to families within Victoria.

We are also delighted to have completed two out of our six organized Dr. Bear Visits for this year. Four of our members attended St. Michaels University Junior School in mid-January and had the pleasure of working with their elementary teachers and classes to conduct our inaugural Dr. Bear visits. We are so looking forward to the rest of our visits and are grateful to Northridge Elementary School and Strawberry Vale Elementary School for partnering with RBS to bring this program into the Greater Victoria School District No. 61.

Thanks for taking the time to read our update - we can't wait to share our future successes with you!

Love,

Alexa, Cole, Zovya, and Val





After our first Dr. Bear session

From left to right: Val Swanston (co-chair), Juliette Wong (volunteer), Cole Daley (co-chair), and Michelle Moore (volunteer)



Victoria Chapter Holiday Book Drive

From left to right: Val Swanston (co-chair), Cole Daley (co-chair), Sharon Crozier (fundraising database specialist and admin assistant at Cridge), and Alexa Tymkiw (co-chair)

RBS Vancouver Chapter



Sanya Grover, MD 2025
RBS Vancouver Chapter Co-Chair



Jannie Ko, MD 2025
RBS Vancouver Chapter Co-Chair

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



Annaliese Beck-McKenzie, MD 2025
RBS Vancouver Chapter Co-Chair

Annaliese is a second-year medical student at the Vancouver Fraser Medical Program. Before medicine, she graduated from the University of Regina with a BSc (Hons) in Biology. When Annaliese isn't learning medicine or helping with RBS, she enjoys running, biking, hiking, painting, and singing.

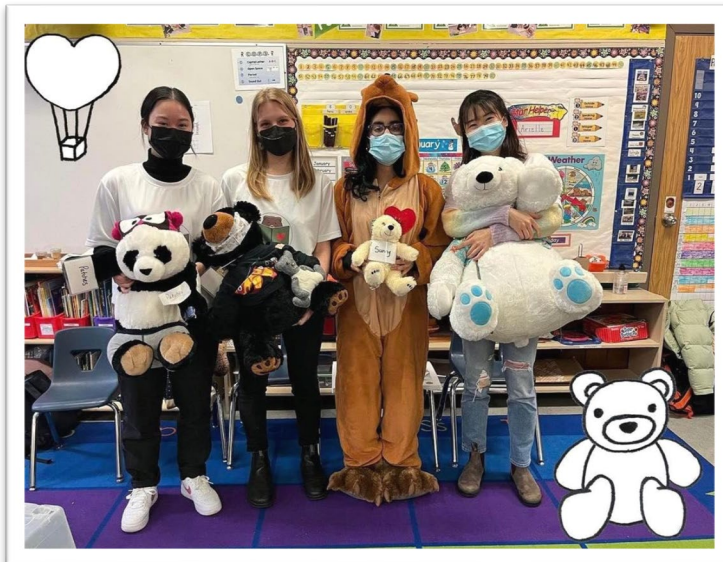


A warm hello from the RBS Vancouver Chapter!

This academic year, we recruited over 15 volunteers. We have built connections with new Montessori and Catholic preschools this year and were able to host four in-person Dr. Bear visits (one in November 2022 and the remaining in January and February 2023) where we helped kids become more comfortable with going to the doctor. Through our visits, we were able to reach over 40 students ranging from preschool to Grade 1. It warms our hearts to learn with and from the children through play. One of the children told us that we weren't so scary because we were wearing bear costumes! A huge thank you to the following schools, and their teachers, for helping us coordinate these visits and for having us: University Hill Preschool, St. Jude Elementary School, Tom Thumb Preschool, Monarch Montessori.

On December 10, RBS visited the annual M2M Christmas party! This year, it was held at the Cineplex theatres in Vancouver, where children enjoyed some delicious pizza before watching a movie. Dressed up as Santa Claus and an Elf, Sanya and Alissa handed out teddy bears to the kids and spread some holiday cheer! We already can't wait for next year's Christmas gathering. We also capped 2022 with a successful annual Holiday Book Drive, collecting over 100 books for distribution to children in need this Valentine's Day. A special thanks to our donors, especially Jill Bendziewicz Tacey. We are also pleased to be starting our visits with the children and families at Canuck Place Children's Hospice again this year, with one visit per month!

– Sanya, Jannie, and Annaliese



At St. Jude Elementary School for a Visit to Dr. Bear in both kindergarten and grade 1 classrooms

From left to right: Joanne Chi, Annaliese Beck-McKenzie, Sanya Grover, and Ruth Liu



At Tom Thumb Preschool for a Visit to Dr. Bear

From left to right: Kia Bahari, Kaitlyn Chang, Annaliese Beck-McKenzie, and Elle Fulford

"The other day with the two-year olds, one little boy told me that his bear didn't want a vaccine, but after we tried our calming techniques (bear breathing) with our bears together, we calmed his bear down and were able to give the vaccine! He decided it wasn't so bad after all. So cute!"

– Annaliese

A Christmas Visit with Mom2Mom



On December 10, RBS visited the annual M2M Christmas party! This year, it was held at the Cineplex theatres in Vancouver, where children enjoyed some delicious pizza before watching a movie. Dressed up as Santa Claus and an Elf, Sanya Grover and Alissa Zhang handed out teddy bears to the kids and spread some holiday cheer! We already can't wait for next year's Christmas gathering.



"Visiting the M2M Christmas party was such an incredible experience! It was heart-warming to watch the children's faces light up with excitement and surprise when they saw us dressed up with holiday spirit. My favourite part was getting to know them through conversation. As we chatted about the event, the holidays, or the different books we had, we were able to form a small connection with each child and personalize each bear with their name before we handing it to them – a true token of our love!"

– Sanya

RBS Fundraising Committee



Julie Roussy-Newton
RBS Vancouver Fundraising Coordinator



Anaïs Bonnis
RBS Vancouver Fundraising Coordinator

I am delighted to present Anaïs Bonnis as the incoming co-chair of fundraising. Anaïs has been volunteering with the RBS for the past eight years. She is currently a Grade 9 student at Prince of Wales Secondary School and speaks French, Greek and English. In her spare time, she is an avid chess and volleyball player. She also studies artificial intelligence and loves to draw and bake.

Anaïs contributed to our very successful Christmas holiday book and teddy bear drive, starting by collecting books and bears in early November. We made a record number of deliveries on December 6 to Kindergarten children at Thunderbird, Queen Alexandra and Strathcona elementary schools and to the children at Mom2Mom. RBS first delivered books and teddy bears in 2013 and has been doing annual Christmas gifts of books and bears since then.

A book drive at York House Elementary School was led by parent Laura Wardle. A number of books were delivered to their sister school, Queen Alexandra Elementary School. A huge thank you to lead parent Laura Wardle and all parents who assisted in this large book drive. On Valentine's Day, books and teddy bears will be delivered to Queen Alexandra StrongStart classroom. We will also be having a visit to the Canuck Place Children's Hospice to deliver teddy bears and Valentines.



Top: Anaïs with Brad Toews, principal at Thunderbird $\text{šx}^w\text{əx}^w\text{a}?$ Elementary School

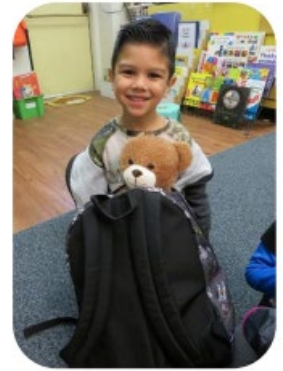
Bottom: Anaïs with Julie Gelson at Queen Alexandra Elementary.



Left: Laura Wardle, parent, at York House Elementary

This holiday season, we received our largest number of donated teddy bears from BC Liquor Stores across the city of Vancouver. A special thank you to the participating store managers:

- Dunbar – Maria Selezneva
- Jericho Village – Martin Tran
- Yaletown – Perri Douglas
- Marpole – David Gazin
- Harbour Centre – Darren Oliver
- Kerrisdale – Brandon Waugh



These teddy bears were and will continue to be delivered to various inner-city schools, our community partners at Mom2Mom, the Community Women's Initiative (CWI) and the Canuck Place Hospice for Children in Vancouver and Abbotsford.

The RBS partnered with CWI in 2020 under the leadership of former RBS Vancouver chapter chair and FLEX student Eloise Moss. Over 70 bears were received by Chantal Percival, president of CWI, where the bears will go to children in shelters.



From Chantal, CWI president (pictured): "Thank you so much for your generous donation of over 70 teddy bears to Community Women's Initiative! We are currently distributing the bears to various shelters and organizations supporting women across the Lower Mainland. CWI provides tutoring services for children connected to these organizations, and we are very excited that we will be able to provide them with their own teddy bears."



The RBS would like to thank Maria Rodrigues, teacher at UHill preschool for hosting a third annual book drive. Thank you to all parents at UHill preschool for their generosity. These books will be delivered to children in need this Christmas season.



The Reading Bear Visits Canuck Place



Introducing the CPCH Coordinators:



Joanne Chi, MD 2026

CPHC Vancouver Coordinator

Joanne is a first-year medical student at UBC and received a Bachelor of Kinesiology at UBC. Before entering medical school, Joanne worked as a behaviours interventionist with children on the autism spectrum and has volunteered with the Reading Buddies program at her local library. She loves helping children develop a passion for science, improving literacy skills, and creating a safe learning space.



Iman Lahouaoula, MD 2024

CPCH Abbotsford Coordinator

Iman Lahouaoula is a third-year medical student at UBC. She graduated from McGill University with a Bachelors in Honours Psychology. Working in various volunteer and workplace settings with children her whole life, Iman has developed a strong passion toward child health and development, and education more broadly. She's looking forward to spending time with children and families by leading the inaugural Reading Bear program at the Canuck Place Abbotsford David Lede House.

What we do during the CPCH visits: Medical student ambassadors arrive dressed in full bear attire, including bear feet, bear hats, and bear outfits. We bring along a special suitcase filled with various types of books (including touch and feel books and interactive books where you press musical buttons). We read bear books and sing songs, sharing our family of bears and fun bear facts and artifacts. We also read some of our all-time favourite books by

Todd Parr. Children are left with a special teddy bear and a note from the visiting medical students.

A special memory from our visits: "Years back as we were leaving a visit to the hospice, a young boy ran out to ask me if I had another teddy bear so he could give it to his brother, who was there for end-of-life care. I had no teddy bears left, but with such a request I drove home to bring back a teddy bear for the young sibling. When I arrived the young boy was playing hockey outdoors with volunteers. When he saw me arrive with the bear, he ran forth with a smile, thanked me and ran into the home to deliver this teddy bear to his dying brother. We are honoured to be a small part of the little things that can sometimes make a difference at a challenging time."

– Joanne Roussy, RBS President



Photo: Amy Plessis with Dr. Hal Siden, Canuck Place Medical Director, and Canuck Place therapy dog Poppy

We are delighted to be back to doing monthly visits to the CPCH, the first free-standing hospice in North America. New this year are visits to the Abbotsford site, the Dave Lede House.

The visits at the hospice were initially started by medical students Ivan Chiu and Amy Plessis (currently a third-year pediatric resident in Victoria and RBS FLEX student advisor).

RBS Communications Team



Brett Collinge, PhD (candidate)

Director of Communications

I am delighted to introduce three new members who have joined the RBS communications team. Our first medical student from Prince Edward Island, Mari Humphrey, has joined the newsletter team as co-editor as well as manager of the website. I am also delighted to welcome Kia Bahari, a UBC fourth-year biology student who has joined the social media team, and Thumri, who has launched the Twitter account with Elle Fulford.



Mari Humphrey, MD 2026

Website Manager and Newsletter Co-Editor

Mari is from Souris, Prince Edward Island and is a graduate of Dalhousie University where she studied pharmacy. She is currently studying medicine at UBC's Southern Medical Program in the beautiful Okanagan Valley. Mari's previous work with children brought her to the Reading Bear Society, which included volunteering in therapeutic riding programs providing horseback riding as a form of therapy to children living with disabilities and tutoring newcomer youth. She recognizes the importance of early health literacy and is excited to be a part of the Reading Bear Society.



Kiarash Bahari, UBC Biology 2023

Social Media Coordinator

Kia was born in Esfahan, Iran, and moved to Canada in 2017. He is a fourth-year Biology major at UBC. He has four young cousins whom he enjoys spending time with and he has worked with children in various volunteer positions including Strive Living Society. As a musician, Kia has taught music to children for the past six years. He is so excited to be a part of the Reading Bear Society where his goal is to do his best to make children's lives filled with beauty, love, and knowledge. Currently, he is taking Early Childhood Education courses as a part of his studies. His first language is Farsi, and he aims to translate RBS materials to expand their reach to Farsi-speaking parents and children.



Thumri Waliwitiya, MD 2024

Social Media Coordinator

Thumri is a medical student at UBC. She completed her undergrad 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. She looks forward to working with other Reading Bear Society members to promote lifelong learning to kids of all ages.

Volunteer Profile: Crystal McLeod

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 Crystal McLeod, MD 2026, Co-Chair of RBS Prince George Chapter.

Tell us about yourself.

Hi! My name is Crystal and I am a first-year medical student at the Northern Medical Program. However, I am a bit far from what you may think of as a 'typical' first-year student. With about 15 years of healthcare experience behind me, I am definitely a 'seasoned' healthcare professional and the road to get here has been winding to say the least!

I started in healthcare as a housekeeper; primarily assigned to the 'bed pager' shift (required to clean beds 'on-demand', following the doctors as they made discharges). I found housekeeping hard work but loved the hospital setting and found the wide variety of floors thrilling. In time, I slowly progressed into other healthcare roles like personal support worker, registered nurse, and operations manager. Undoubtedly, working bedside in pediatric and neonatal intensive care were my favourite roles! (I mean...so far!)

Although, I must say an 'old dog' can learn a new trick, as this school year has brought a lot of different, but exciting challenges. I moved across the country to a city I had never been to before, been trying to camp/hike with more frequency, and currently find myself



wading through the great divide that is provincial health programs.

How did you become involved in the Reading Bear?

In working with critically ill children and infants, one can easily lose track of what is a typical 'childhood' experience for most kids. This year, I made it my goal

to engage with a few different organizations that would allow me to connect with children in a community (over hospital) setting.

I currently lead a Girl Guides group (Sparks), volunteer with a youth mentorship program, and enjoy classroom visits with RBS!

What is your current role with the RBS?

I am currently the co-chair of the RBS Prince George Chapter with the wonderful Carmen Huang.

What is your best memory of RBS?

During a Dr. Bear visit, a student asked if I was a teenager! I of course promptly told him, "yes!"

What is your favourite caffeinated beverage?

Coffee with lots of 2% milk! Cinnamon if I'm feeling fancy ;)



Thank You

Thank you to Doctors of BC

The Reading Bear Society would like to thank the Doctors of BC for their grant. The funds will be used to support the Visit to Dr. Bear program and its delivery in all four RBS chapters (Kelowna, Prince George, Vancouver, and Victoria).



Thank you to our Teddy Bear Donors

Vancouver BC Liquor Stores & their Store Managers



Thank you to York House School

Thank you to York House School for their generous book donations!





The next edition of the Reading Bear Newsletter will be sent in October on Thanksgiving 2023. 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:



@thereadingbear



@thereadingbearsociety



www.thereadingbear.ca