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Editor: Mari Humphrey

The Reading Bear Society Newsletter



Valentine's Edition | February 14, 2024



Joanne Roussy, PhD
RBS President and Co-founder

Dear RBS Community,

On this Valentine's Day, I am delighted to be celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Reading Bear. It has been a phenomenal journey to witness the exponential growth of RBS over the past decade as we expanded across the province to UBC's four medical sites (Vancouver/Fraser, Kelowna, Prince George, and Victoria) with over 500 volunteers delivering four programs (buddy reading, Dr. Bear, community outreach, and UBC FLEX medical



student practicums) and reaching over 10,000 children. And our materials were incorporated this year into a provincial mental health program called [Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Early Years \(EASEY\)](#) for educators and parents of young children.

This growth is powered by love—an infinite source of human potential—and the willingness to believe in something greater, bigger, and better for young children.

Our story first began at Mom2Mom with a gift to one young girl of a teddy bear, a book, and a letter from her bear. This small act of kindness made its way to her heart to let her know she was loved at a vulnerable time in her life. From that moment, the Reading Bear was born. I have witnessed countless times over the past decade that small acts of



Center picture is Denise Roussy, who is the heart and soul of inspiration for that the RBS was founded upon. Left is Rozlyn Boutin (MD/PhD 2022) and right is Jennifer Wildi (MD 2021).

kindness can make a difference at a sensitive time in a young child's development.

We've been able to reach so many children because of the dedication of our volunteers and the willingness and trust of teachers to invite us into their classrooms. Our success is the connection with the children, to speak to children in their language, the language of imagination, creativity, joy, fun, and laughter. We're also honoured to celebrate the diversity at the heart of the RBS by sharing nature's gift of the eight bear species within our programs. Our programs would not exist without teachers and volunteers, and we admire the work you do each day to create a better society.

The energy, passion, and commitment of volunteers, teachers, medical students, committee members, RBS medical alumni, and our donors is what fuels the engine of our success. You have all played invaluable roles in this incredible

dynamic effort to create a brighter future for young children, and I have been truly honoured to have this opportunity to get to know you. THANK YOU.

A very special thank you to my sister Denise for reading bedtime stories and teaching me the importance of story books and teddy bears and most of all that every child matters. To the members of the board who have been with me since day one, you have honoured and inspired me on every part of the journey. I can only imagine what awaits us, but we have witnessed that the possibilities are limitless.

We continue the RBS story in this newsletter, featuring the teachers of the advisory board who have launched a new children's book corner on mental health, news from each RBS chapter, our FLEX medical students, and our fundraising efforts.

Wishing you a Happy Valentine's Day,

—Joanne Roussy, PhD



New Teachers Book Corner on Mental Health Topics

In honour of our 10th anniversary, the RBS teachers have come together to create a new addition to the book corner section of the website that features [young children's books on topics surrounding mental health](#). Together these teachers share decades of experience and a vast, first-hand understanding of the daily interactions with a diverse student population. Also, a special thank you to third- year medical students and past Vancouver chapter chairs Annaliese Beck-McKenzie and Sanya Groover for their assistance in creating these materials.

Welcoming two new teachers to the RBS advisory committee

We are delighted to welcome teachers Camilla Ting and Maria Rodriguez to the RBS advisory committee. Both teachers have been with the RBS for the past several years and have hosted the Dr. Bear visits and medical students in their classrooms. Camilla also previously hosted the buddy reading program, and Maria has hosted a yearly Christmas book drive since 2019 that reaches the RBS outreach community children's program.



Camilla Ting

Camilla has been a teacher since 2001 and has taught at Thunderbird ʃxwəxwəʔəs Elementary School in East Vancouver since 2004. Born and raised in Vancouver, she grew up going to Dr. A.R. Lord Elementary and Templeton Secondary. She later attended UBC, where she received a Bachelor of Science, a Bachelor of Education, and a Diploma in Education supporting English Language Learners. She is an avid reader and feels privileged to be able to share books with her students each day.



Above: Camilla with med students



Maria Rodriguez

Maria has been an early childhood educator at the University Hill (UHill) Preschool since 1996 and the supervisor since 2005. She completed her early education at St. Joseph Covenant School. She holds a bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Karachi in Pakistan. Before joining UHill, Maria researched and worked in Montessori programs and earned her Montessori certificate from the Association Montessori International.

Maria is fluent in three languages: English, Urdu, and Hindi. She finds teaching young children to be both rewarding and challenging, and she continuously seeks to improve her skills by attending workshops and staying up to date with new philosophies and ideas. In her daily classroom activities, Maria incorporates singing, even for the simplest tasks, such as washing hands or preparing a snack.



Above: Atoussa Alikashami, Maria Rodriguez, Joanne Chi, Sanya Grover, Iris Guo

On November 8th, 2022, the Vancouver RBS went back to in-person Dr. Bear visits at UHill preschool. The children listened to a story of four little bears visiting the doctor's office and had a chance to practice on toy medical instruments on their teddy bears.

Reading Bear Advisory Committee Spotlight

Featuring Julie Gelson

As a Kindergarten teacher at Queen Alexandra Elementary School since 2013 and the mother of two daughters, Julie has seen the importance of early literacy firsthand in both her professional and personal life. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at the University of British Columbia, followed by a Bachelor of Education (Primary), and a Diploma in Education with a focus on Language and Literacy. Her own love of reading started early and led her to her role as an educator. Julie's goal is to inspire a love of reading in her students that will follow them throughout their lives. She believes reading can open our hearts and our minds.

She is honoured to have been part of The Reading Bear Society initiative for the last ten years and is excited to continue this partnership for many years to come.

Julie Gelson is a founding member of the RBS. At the very beginning, Julie launched the buddy reading program between kindergarten children at Queen Alexandra Elementary and Grade 5 students at York House School with Lynne Stanger. Along with a team of early literacy experts, including Dr. Linda Siegel, Julie piloted the *My Bear* activity booklet completed at each buddy session, which was created as an educational tool based on social and emotional learning and celebrates diversity via the eight bear species.

As a member of the RBS advisory committee, she is mentor to the FLEX medical students. Her wealth of

experience and daily interactions with young children and parents are of great value to the medical students' projects.

"The Reading Bear Society is so fortunate to have community champions like Julie Gelson on the team.

From the moment I met Julie, she warmly welcomed us all into her classroom, put everyone at ease, and showed her willingness to try something new for the benefit of her school, her students, and their families. More importantly, she was a mentor to all students, from her Kindergarten class and our high-school students, and modelled the value of listening, caring, empathy, and kindness. Julie is acutely aware of the importance of developing the social and emotional needs of her students and has been a valued member of the Reading Bear Society. It is because of her hard work and commitment, that the longstanding partnership between York House, Queen Alexandra Elementary and the Reading Bear Society continues today."

—Lynne Stanger, RBS Founding board member

"Every time I have entered Julie's classroom, I am in awe of the love she pours into her classroom. We are always greeted with the most loving smile and kindest heart. I have so much appreciation for the work Julie does. Truly her work, along with the kindergarten and early childhood educators, plays a pivotal role in the foundation of healthy and happy early years."

—Joanne Roussy, PhD, RBS President



Moments with Julie Gelson



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

Dear Reading Bear friends,

Wow! I cannot believe the Reading Bear Society (RBS) is celebrating their ten-year anniversary this year. It has been such a privilege witnessing the incredible growth of this organization from its humble beginnings in 2013 and the seeing vision of our amazing co-founders - Lani Morden, Dr. Joanne Roussy, and Dr. Isabel Chen come to life.

I first learned about the RBS in a classroom presentation done by Dr. Roussy and Dr. Chen (then also a medical student) in my "Doctor, Patient, & Society" (DPAS) as a first-year medical student. Something about their incredible passion for early childhood literacy and character development in students made me know that it was something that I wanted to be a part of! In my next year, I then decided to do a "Self-Directed Practicum Option (SDPO)" project [now known as Flexible and Enhanced Learning (FLEX)] alongside two other classmates. It was during this time that I got to work quite closely with Dr. Roussy, who was such a wonderful mentor not only for my student project but throughout my time in medical school.

Since these early days, 48 medical students (96 FLEX cycles) have been involved with the RBS FLEX Program. I have gotten the opportunity to see first-hand the incredible talent and projects that have come through RBS as Co-Chair of the FLEX Committee

and Director at Large on the RBS Board of Directors. I believe this is only the beginning and I am so excited to see what the next ten years will bring for RBS.

Warm regards,

Kay Fung, UBC MD'16

What a landmark milestone to celebrate! This is a truly special community and thank you everyone for your tireless leadership and love that is embedded into the very DNA of this organization.

What an incredible anniversary filled with everything that we love: dedicated volunteers who share their time, hearts, and passion for literacy with so many communities across the province. We are so, so grateful to everyone who has shared their invaluable resources with us and our communities. What we are also incredibly amazed by is our inspiring cohort of FLEX students, Sydney and Precilia. The student enthusiasm is contagious, and they really remind us of how bright the future is!

—FLEX Student Committee

RBS FLEX Students and Projects

Introducing New RBS FLEX Students



Sydney Lai, MD 2026

RBS FLEX Student

Sydney is a second-year medical student at the Vancouver Fraser Medical Program and is excited to join RBS as a FLEX student for this upcoming year. She was born and raised in Vancouver before moving to Hamilton, Ontario, to complete her undergraduate studies in health sciences at McMaster University. Sydney has always had a strong passion for working with children and families, engaging with many youth-centred organizations and activities both in Vancouver and Hamilton. She is interested in learning how communication between caregivers and children can foster healthy relationships and development. Sydney is also interested in global health and women's health, partnering with a local community-based organization in Kisumu, Kenya, to understand the community impacts of post gender-based violence care. In her spare time, Sydney enjoys playing sports, being outdoors, travelling, and spending time with family and friends.



Precilia Kong, MD 2026

RBS FLEX Student

I believe storytelling, especially picture books, holds transformative power. The literature shows it can empower children to navigate complex emotions and teach them vital skills like emotional regulation and self-care. My FLEX project focuses on analyzing over 50 mental health picture books for children aged four to six in British Columbia. The aim is two-fold: to examine how these mental health topics are portrayed and depicted in these books and to assess the implications of these representations. Key questions include what topics are most prominently depicted, such as grief, trauma,



On January 29, 2024, at the UBC Life Sciences Centre, Reading Bear FLEX medical students Cydney Lai and Precilia Kong took part in the FLEX afternoon where students have the opportunity to present a poster and oral presentation of their FLEX project topic and research. It was wonderful to be back in person and to be able to showcase their FLEX projects that both focus on the topic of mental health of young children.

depression, and ADHD; how accurately they are portrayed; and the characteristics of characters with such "mental health conditions." The project seeks to determine if these books can serve as positive educational tools for teachers and caregivers to help children understand themselves and others better. Our approach is informed by concepts like the "Circle of Security," which really emphasizes the importance of secure attachment in nurturing emotional resilience as children grow.

The end goal of the project is to consolidate and create education materials for caregivers and parents and to inform my personal passion project: writing and illustrating a culturally sensitive picture book promoting mental health literacy in children.



Our evolution in the past ten years: FLEX medical practicum students

Joanne Roussy, RN, PhD, FLEX Activity Supervisor

In 2013, three medical students and I joined forces to build the RBS foundation: Christine Wang (MD '16), Kay Fung (MD '16), and Isabel Chen (MD '15), who continue to assist in leadership roles: Isabel, vice-president and co-chair of the FLEX committee, along with co-chair and board director, Kay, and Christine as a RBS FLEX student mentor. Kay and Christine were part of the first group practicum students. This is outstanding leadership and commitment to service.

In the past nine years, the RBS has had the opportunity to support 37 medical and practicum students in the [RBS FLEX program](#), many doing all three FLEX cycles for a total 56 cycles. Since the start of the RBS, medical student projects have contributed to developing three areas of the RBS: 1) buddy reading program, 2) A Visit to Dr. Bear, and 3) resources on early childhood topics. Learn more about the [history of RBS FLEX](#).

The Buddy Reading Program. For the first four years, the focus was on creating an activity booklet for the *buddy reading program*, which promotes social-emotional health and early literacy. The [My Bear Book](#) was created with a team of early literacy experts, including Dr. Linda Siegel and elementary school teachers and was piloted for three years. The activity booklet was designed by artist Jennifer Ji (MD/PhD '23) of the FLEX committee. The buddy reading program continues to run independently in schools in Vancouver with great success and has reached nearly 3,000 students, with hopes that it will restart next fall after an 18-month break.

A Visit to Dr. Bear program. In 2018, Amy Plessis (MD '20), founder of the RBS in Kelowna, member of the student advisor committee, and second-year pediatrics resident, created the first draft of *A Visit to Dr. Bear* as a FLEX student. Many students followed her, including former student and current board director, Paul Abraham (MD '19) and Bhavan Panghali, (MD '20) student advisor, second-year pediatric resident, who continued to pilot this program which is now being delivered virtually with a [module guide](#) for teachers and a video for at-home viewing entitled *A Visit to Dr. Bear at Home: [An interactive guide](#)*.

Resources on early childhood topics. The first tip sheets were developed in 2013 by

Christine Wang for young families on when to bring a child to the doctor. There are now 19 resources, including [info sheets and videos](#), and a [book corner](#) on topics relevant to young families such as handwashing, healthy eating, and more.





Kay Fung MD'16, right



Isabel Chen and Joanne Roussy when Isabel won the YWCA Young Women's Award 2014



Board members Dr. Trevor Newton, MD, Emerald Yeh, Joanne Roussy, Katrina Hsu



Christine Wang, first group of FLEX (SDPO) students 2014



Board member Dr. Paul Abraham, MD'19, former FLEX student Cheryl Gascogne



FLEX students: Jeremy Mak, Vikas Sharma, Dr. Amy Plessis, MD'20, RBS FLEX advisory board and founder of the RBS Kelowna chapter and fourth year pediatric resident, Dr. Victoria Baronas, MD/PhD '20, RBS board member and fourth year surgical resident

Communications Team



Brett Collinge, PhD

candidate '24

RBS Director of Communications

Ten years ago, we were fortunate to have had our first director of communications, Dr. Ryan Melsom, lay the initial foundation for the communications portfolio at the RBS. He was recruited by Dr. Isabel Chen, a medical student at the time who was being interviewed by Ryan for her former high school newsletter. Ryan was so touched by her story of co-founding the RBS that he offered to assist us. He created the first newsletter and our initial materials, such as the first RBS logo.

He was followed by Katrina Hsu, a student at SFU who created the first SFU RBS club. With her incredible capacity, Katrina quickly rose to being a member of the board and director of communications. She served for seven years until she moved on to pursue her studies in medicine at University of Alberta. Katrina was instrumental in laying a solid foundation and created many of our manuals and assisted medical students with the communications aspects of their FLEX projects.

I joined the RBS as a volunteer and did school, Christmas, and summer visits with the children at Mom2Mom and then joined the board as director of communications. During the pandemic, along with a group of medical students, we created materials to best support families and children. I am currently in Maryland at the US National Institutes of Health completing my PhD and look forward to being back in Vancouver this year.

To move on to our present date, I am delighted to introduce two new members of the communications

team, Mave Hur and Parth Sanan. They are both students in the UBC Computer Science department and joined last fall to manage the website. Welcome to you both! Other members of the team include Nikita Menon, a fourth-year medical student who continues to manage our social media profile, Thumri Waliwitiya, who manages the Twitter account, and Mari Humphrey at the Kelowna RBS chapter, who is our newsletter editor.

Thank you all for contributing your time and creativity to the Reading Bear. The relationships built with our community across BC could not be accomplished without your work.

Welcoming New Members



Mave Hur

Website Co-manager

The Reading Bear communications committee is delighted to welcome Mave Hur, a third-year computer science student at the University of British Columbia. She is dedicated to fostering a virtuous cycle of youth education and community collaboration. Her journey began during her BA studies in English language and literature in South Korea, where she mentored students in English, coding, and math, driven by her own experiences of overcoming challenges with the support of mentors and teachers. Now, she's pursuing computer science to create a more tangible impact. Mave actively contributes to the community as a web developer at the Vancouver Black Library, where she's building a website to unite and educate the Black community, and as a software developer at the UBC Computer Science Student Society, working on a volunteer

management system for blood donation, affiliated with Canadian Blood Services. In her role as an RBS website co-manager and Dr. Bear visits, she is excited to collaborate with the RBS team and connect with children, furthering her mission to support and enrich the lives of young learners.



Parth Sanan

Website Co-manager

The Reading Bear communications committee is delighted to welcome Parth Sanan, a freshman studying computer science at the University of British Columbia. Using experience of having volunteered with organizations that worked for the upliftment of children in underrepresented communities, Parth strives to achieve similar goals while working with RBS. As the website manager, Parth hopes to enhance RBS's online presence by continuing to do what he loves: programming for an impact. Parth is beyond excited to meet like-minded individuals at RBS and keep giving back to the community.



Nikita Menon, MD 2024

Social Media Manager



Thumri Waliwitiya, MD 2024

Social Media Coordinator



Mari Humphrey, MD 2026

Newsletter Editor



Mason McClement

Newsletter Co-Editor



RBS Vancouver Chapter



Introducing New Chapter Co-Chair:



Joanne Chi, MD 2026
RBS Vancouver Chapter Chair



Kia Bahari
RBS Vancouver Chapter Chair

Greetings from the RBS Vancouver Chapter,

I am pleased to introduce you to our new chapter co-chair, Kia Bahari. Kia has volunteered with the RBS family for over a year, managing our social media accounts as well as helping out with various Dr. Bear and outreach visits. We are so grateful for his continued dedication to RBS and our mission in improving health literacy among kids.

At the start of the new year, we were able to host three in-person Dr. Bear visits thanks to our amazing volunteers and the lovely daycare instructors at UBC Child Care Services and Catholic elementary school teachers. Through our visits, we were able to meet over 50 students ranging from preschool to Grade 1. It makes us so joyous to learn with and from the kids as they become more comfortable with going to the doctor and learning about health and medicine! We would like to give a huge thank you to the following schools and teachers for helping us coordinate our Dr. Bear visits: St. Jude Elementary School, Kittiwake Daycare, and Pioggia Childcare Centre.

Our monthly Canuck Place Children's Hospice visits have also been going strong! The children love reading bear books with the medical student volunteers while also playing with a special gifted teddy bear from the visiting volunteers at the end of every visit. We are so excited to continue all of these visits in the upcoming year and continue to create a brighter, healthier future for all children.

On December 14, 2023, RBS also visited the annual Mom2Mom Christmas party at the Cineplex theatre in Vancouver. Dressed up as Santa Claus and some elves, Joanne Chi, Kia Bahari, and Annaliese Beck-McKenzie handed out teddy bears to the kids and spread some holiday cheer before they enjoyed some delicious pizza while watching a movie.

—Joanne Chi, RBS Vancouver Chapter Chair & Canuck Place Coordinator



Canuck Place
CHILDREN'S HOSPICE



mom2mom



RBS Canuck Place visit: Joanne Chi, Diana Le and Sanya Grover



Mom2Mom Christmas party: Joanne Chi, Kia Bahari, Annaliese Beck-McKenzie



RBS visit, January 9: Precilia Kong, Joanne Chi, Sanya Grover



RBS visit, January 11: Joanne Chi, Julia Pei, Jessie Miller, Diana Le



RBS Vancouver Chapter Fundraising



Anaïs Bonnis
RBS Fundraising Coordinator



Julie Roussy-Newton
RBS Fundraising Coordinator

I have had the incredible opportunity to be a part of the Reading Bear since its inception and witness the generosity of so many donors over the past decade. Anaïs also began her journey with the RBS at the very beginning alongside her older sister and mother, and each and every year, we have delivered books and teddy bears to Kindergarten classrooms.

We have been very fortunate to have had many book and teddy bear donors over the past decade. Our first stuffed animals were donated by Telus and delivered at Christmas time to Kindergarten children at Thunderbird ʃxʷəxʷaʔəs Elementary School by Crofton House students. They delivered bags of books and letters from their stuffed animals and spent time reading, singing, and having fun with their young buddies. Soon after, a teacher at Admiral Seymour School donated a box of teddy bears from BC Liquor Stores, one of which entered the home of one child at Mom2Mom. That one teddy bear eventually led to the creation of the RBS.

In the past five years our major teddy bear donors have been BC Liquor Stores, and we are especially grateful to Maria Selezneva for coordinating these donations. We are also grateful to Phyllis Simon of Kidsbooks, who initially supported us with a generous donation of books from her publishers on key topics that touched on social and emotional health. And we are grateful for the yearly book drives from teachers and parents at Westside Montessori and UHill Preschool, whose books fill the RBS tote bags donated by board member Emerald Yeh. These teddy bears and books find homes at the Canuck Place Children's

Hospice, Mom2Mom children at their summer picnic and Christmas party, inner-city schools, the UBC Community Women's Initiative for children in shelters, and any child who is in need of a teddy bear and books.

This past holiday season, volunteers Anaïs Bonnis, Grade 10 student at Prince of Wales, and Nate Stewart, Grade 10 student at St George's, initiated book drives and the delivery of books and teddy bears to Queen Alexandra and ʃxʷəxʷaʔəs Thunderbird elementary schools. We would like to thank Crofton House school, Joan Fortier's book club, and the book donors mentioned above for filling up these bags with wonderful books.

We have many more book donors noted on our donor page in this newsletter. Thank you each and every one of you. We could not do this work without you. Your gifts of books and teddy bears help ensure that the Reading Bear can keep fostering and promoting literacy across generations in the Vancouver area. Literacy and teddy bears open up worlds and connect people with one another across space and time. Truly, along with love, it is the fabric of society.

—Julie Roussy-Newton



Denise Roussy packing bags of books in December 2013 for the first Thunderbird Elementary school buddy reading visit



Mom2Mom Director Stephanie at M2M,
November 2020



Nate Stewart, Grade 10 student pictured with Julie Gelson and his Christmas book drive initiatives. These books were delivered to Queen Alexandra kindergarten teacher, Ms. Gelson.



University Hill Preschool



Anais Bonnis and Brad Toews, principal at Thunderbird Elementary school

RBS Kelowna Chapter



Brayden Griffiths, MD 2026
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair



Ravneet Sohal, MD 2027
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair



Richard Mageto, MD 2027
RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chair



Hello from the RBS Kelowna Chapter!

We are so excited to continue visiting more elementary schools this year! In October and November of 2023, the RBS Kelowna Chapter visited eight different schools and collaborated with over 300 Kindergarten and Grade 1 students in our Visit to Dr. Bear program.

We also continued our annual tradition of engaging with local schools to collect books for the Central Okanagan Family Hub. The books were received by Ruba Qumi, the hub facilitator. These books were donated to over 70 families who came in for the local food program. Thank you to Ellison Elementary, Helen Gorman Elementary School, Bankhead Elementary School, and Mar Jok Elementary School, which contributed and generously donated books for local families.

In the past few visits, we had many enthusiastic students who were eager to both ask and answer questions during the sessions. One student in particular asked a lot about what we studied in school and why we wanted to be doctors. As she was rotating through one of the stations at the end of the session, she mentioned that she thought everything she learned was really fun and that she wanted to be a doctor when she got older. This was a small heartfelt moment that reminded us of the impact these short visits can have on students. We are looking forward to continuing to teach and learn from more young minds this coming semester.

—Rav, Richard, and Brayden, RBS Kelowna Chapter Co-Chairs

RBS Prince George Chapter

Introducing New Chapter Co-Chairs:



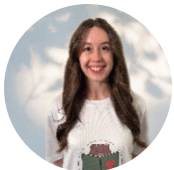
Alisha Thapar, MD 2027
RBS Prince George Chapter Co-Chair

Alisha was born in Quesnel, BC, and raised in Surrey, BC. She completed her undergraduate degree at the University of Northern British Columbia where she received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing. She enjoys working with children and has previously volunteered at summer day camps run by the City of Surrey. In her free time, she enjoys taking naps and going for walks. Alisha cannot wait to work with the Reading Bear Society in a fun and meaningful way!




Jayden Boxeur, MD 2027
RBS Prince George Chapter Co-Chair

Jayden grew up in Williams Lake, BC, and moved to Prince George to attend the University of Northern British Columbia. She completed her Bachelor of Health Sciences degree and is now a student in the Northern Medical Program. Jayden enjoys working with children and teaching them about health and wellness. She has experience working in several day camps, summer camps, and the Rainbows and Sunbeams programs, as well as in a previous role as a child and youth counsellor. In her free time, Jayden enjoys skiing, hiking, and playing board games with friends! Jayden is grateful to be part of the Northern chapter of the RBS.



Sydney Overland, MD 2027
RBS Prince George Chapter Co-Chair

Sydney was born and raised in the interior of BC. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology at SFU and is now a first-year medical student in the Northern Medical Program. In the past, Sydney has enjoyed volunteering with the Whistler Adaptive Sports program, which involved helping introduce children with disabilities to sports and outdoor recreation. She has also been involved in youth education through both tutoring and science outreach. Outside of studying, she loves exploring the outdoors through hiking, biking, and skiing. Sydney is excited to be joining the RBS team and is looking forward to helping promote health literacy.

The Prince George Chapter has been busy over the last few months. In the fall, we recruited nine new volunteers to join our team. Jayden Boxeur, Sydney Overland, and Alisha Thapar have also joined our team as the new chapter co-chairs. Furthermore, our team was able to visit 11 different elementary schools and meet with over 400 students during the fall and winter months! This gave children the opportunity to explore healthy living and medical office procedures within their classrooms. Throughout the holidays, we were able to hold a book and bear drive with Gingerbread Toys in Prince George as well as the faculty and students in the Northern Medical Program. The donations were provided to Carrier Sekani Family Services to support children within the community. We are excited to have booked 15 Dr. Bear visits at different elementary schools and daycares in the upcoming months. We are so grateful for our team and look forward to seeing our chapter grow!



Cameron Ardiel and Shannon Ross after a Dr. Bear visit



Joelle Regier and Jayden Rae Boxeur after a Dr. Bear visit



Clockwise from top left: Aaron Boehmer, Kudrat Mundi, Sydney Overland, Alisha Thapar, Jayden Rae Boxeur, Tiffany Campbell, Crystal McLeod, and Leanne Flinton, the second-year volunteers and co-chairs



Tiffany Campbell and Leanne Flinton ready for a Dr. Bear visit!

RBS Victoria Chapter



Val Swanston, MD 2026
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair



Juliette Wong, MD 2026
RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chair

Happy Valentine's Day from Reading Bear Society's Victoria Chapter!

We have had a busy start over the past few months with 15 new volunteers joining us! Our team has been having so much fun bringing Dr. Bear visits to over 130 kindergarten and grade 1 students so far. We would like to extend a big thank you to the teachers and students at Northridge Elementary, Strawberry Vale Elementary, Tilicum Elementary, and Quadra Elementary for being so wonderful to work with! The RBS IMP team is very excited to continue connecting with classrooms in the upcoming months with the rest of our Dr. Bear visits and expanding our capacity to serve to Greater Victoria community!

Love, Val and Juliette, RBS Victoria Chapter Co-Chairs



Left to right: Andrew Mitchell, Genevieve Ward, Olivia Ireland, and Juliette Wong with Dr. Bear after a great morning visiting Strawberry Vale Elementary School!



Victoria Chapter, Christmas 2023



Volunteer Profile: Joanne Chi, 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 Joanne Chi, MD '26 medical student, RBS Vancouver chapter chair, and Canuck Place Children's Hospice Coordinator.

Tell us about yourself.

Hi there! I was born and raised in Richmond, BC, and graduated from UBC with a Bachelor of Kinesiology. I am currently a second-year student at the UBC Medical Program in Vancouver. In my spare time you can find me going on some fun runs, vibing at a local music concert, and endlessly scrolling through Instagram (definitely trying to cut down on my social media consumption! 🥰).

How did you become involved in the Reading Bear?

I wanted to get involved with various clubs as a first-year medical student and upon signing up to volunteer at my first Dr. Bear visit at a preschool, I fell in love with the purpose/initiative of RBS! I am so fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of the Reading Bear Society and work with other incredible volunteers in supporting early childhood literacy and accompanying children in hospice. I look forward to continue supporting this organization even as I progress throughout my medical career by volunteering with and learning from the kids.

What is your current role with the RBS?

I am currently a co-chairs of the RBS Vancouver chapter, and my role involves coordinating Dr. Bear visits at local schools and daycare centres, as well as visits at the Canuck Place Children's Hospice in

Vancouver! I help lead a team of passionate volunteers who contribute towards allowing our programs and activities to run smoothly.

What is your best memory of RBS?

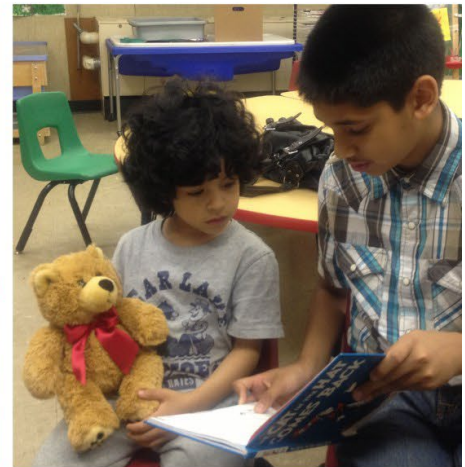
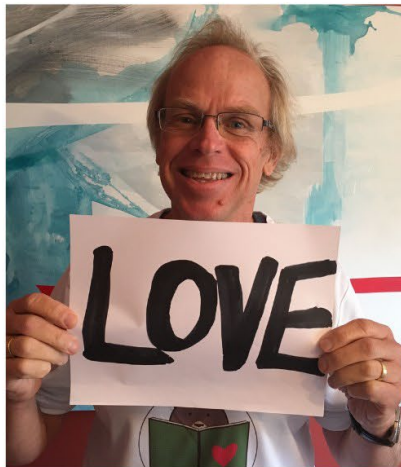
My favourite memory of RBS so far would be during my first visit to the Canuck Place Children's Hospice. I was quite nervous, not knowing what to expect or how to communicate with some of the children who are non-verbal. However, upon meeting the kids, I found myself able to relax and simply spend time with them, reading books and providing care and human connection. The lovely staff and volunteers at the Canuck Place also reassured me that oftentimes the children simply enjoy hearing soothing voices, and I found it so incredibly rewarding to be able to share such a special moment with the kids.



Why do you support RBS?

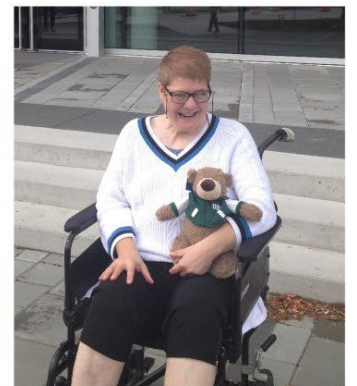
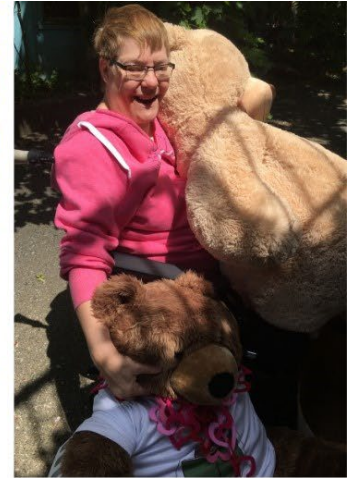
I support RBS, as I believe empowering children through spreading knowledge and health literacy starting at an early age will ultimately allow them to gain confidence in making their own informed decisions as they grow older. RBS has provided me and my colleagues the opportunities to build upon our interpersonal strengths while still being able to make a difference in people's lives.

Celebrating 10 Years of the Reading Bear Society





♥ Denise, the inspiration behind RBS



Thank you, Denise,

Without you, the Reading Bear would not exist. You always inspire me and fill me with the love that allowed me to create the Reading Bear. You read to me when I was young, and I will never forget those special moments. You make everyone that crosses your path a better person. Thank you from all of the Reading Bear team.

—Joanne

Congratulations & Thank You

Congratulations to **Katrina Hsu**, for her entrance to medical school at University of Alberta. Katrina was the extraordinary former RBS director of communications for seven years and founded the SFU Reading Bear club.

Congratulations to **Ceilidh Mathews**, for her entrance to medical school at University of Toronto. Ceilidh started volunteering in high school with the Reading Bear and served as the chair of fundraising in Vancouver.

Thank you to **Dr. Christina Voss**, director of the FLEX program at Faculty of Medicine, who served as a member of the RBS FLEX committee for four years. Her expertise was greatly appreciated by the FLEX medical students.

Thank you to **Iman Lahouaoula**, coordinator of the Dave Lede House, Canuck Place in Abbotsford, for her assistance in starting visits at this home. We are sending Iman all the best for her upcoming graduation from medical school.

We wish to thank the BC Liquor Store managers for their record number of donated teddy bears this year, with special thanks to Vancouver store managers Alysha Moore (Dunbar), Mario Sizerman (UBC), David Grazin (Marpole), Martin Tran (Kerrisdale), Perri Douglas (Yaletown), and Darren Oliver (Hastings). **BC LIQUORSTORE**



Thank You to Our Supporters

We are so grateful to our many donors over the past decade who have made this all possible. Thank you for believing in us and for your outstanding contributions to help spread the gift of early literacy and healthy lifestyles to the children of BC.



kidsbooks





The next edition of the Reading Bear Newsletter will be sent in February, Valentine's 2025. 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



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www.thereadingbear.ca