



# Strong Start to reading™

"Making a difference in the life of a child"

December 2016

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## See Insert For:

- Thank you to our generous donors
- Our team
- Strong Start contact information

## Online

Detailed program results and stories can be found on our website:

[www.strongstart.ca](http://www.strongstart.ca)

Follow us on social media including Instagram  
[@Strongstarttoreading](https://www.instagram.com/Strongstarttoreading)



*The Letters, Sounds & Words program made such a difference for Kelsey - thank-you so much @Strong\_Start! #loveofreading*

– Susan Cook-Scheerer  
[@Daytime20](https://twitter.com/Daytime20) via Twitter

## 15 years of helping children learn to read

### *Celebrating a commitment to early literacy in our communities*

It is hard to believe that it has been 15 years since Strong Start began as a grassroots community project — with handmade games and activities — in just one school in Waterloo Region. The challenge was to engage the community to rally around its children with time, treasure and talent to help them learn to read; literally to give them a strong start not only in school but in life. You responded to the challenge in the most generous ways.

Many communities in Ontario joined the rally and we now have helped more than 30,000 children acquire this fundamental life skill. As an organization that relies on charitable giving and volunteers, we must celebrate this milestone together. Without the gift of over 400,000 hours of volunteer time and your generous financial support, this would not be possible. On behalf of children and families we've served, I extend my heartfelt appreciation.

This year, Strong Start helped more children than ever before. Our programs grew in Waterloo Region with our *Get Ready for School™* program expanding to four more sites in 2016 for a total of 16. Brant Haldimand Norfolk region started 24 more *Letters Sounds and Words™* programs. Their communities in this region have embraced our program and are generating support and volunteer engagement in new and exciting ways.

What really keeps us fuelled in our mission is our belief in the importance of early literacy development for young children. A child's ability to read can be a real game-changer in their lives, enhancing their confidence and self-esteem and their ability to learn across all subject areas. When a child sees himself or herself as a successful learner, anything is possible. Literacy has proven links to health and wellness, crime prevention, poverty reduction, employment and more. This early investment pays dividends for all of us as these precious young citizens reach their potential and strive for success. Thank you for being a part of their life story through your support of Strong Start.

All the best,

Machelle Denison,  
Executive Director



# Strong Start changed our lives

*Evelyn's story as a Volunteer Coach turned Early Childhood Education student*



## Letters, Sounds and Words

A Strong Start to reading program™



My daughter was in Senior Kindergarten when her teacher told me she was not demonstrating the literacy skills she needed to succeed in school. She recommended Strong Start's *Letters, Sounds, and Words* program.

After my daughter went through the program, I saw a night-and-day difference in her. She went from knowing a couple of her letters and a couple of her sounds to being able to read a book. She gained confidence and self-esteem, and just took off. I'll never forget the look of joy in her eyes.

When I saw how much she benefitted from the program, I knew I wanted to get

involved. I volunteered on the days I was off from work, and quickly found that my volunteer position provided a greater sense of accomplishment than my full-time career did at the time. I saw tremendous changes in the children I worked with, from improvements in their language and literacy skills to their confidence and self-esteem. I felt so fulfilled that I knew this is what I was meant to do. I researched Early Childhood Education programs, and enrolled at Conestoga College, leaving my full-time career behind.

I was terrified, and at moments I wondered what I was doing. But I had the support of my family, financial support and the positive experiences instilled in me from being a Strong Start volunteer. I knew it would be OK. The impact I had on the children I coached gave me a sense of self-worth that I had never experienced before.

In my final term at college, I completed an atypical placement in Strong Start's *Get Ready for School* program because I wanted to give back to the organization that inspired me so much. I found this new

*"If I had not started volunteering in the Letters, Sounds and Words program, I would never have made such a tremendous revelation, changing career paths, and going back to school."*  
– Evelyn Sawatzky

passion there that I had always had, but never had the opportunity to use. It just changed me.

I appreciate everything that Strong Start has done for my child, for my family, and for me as a professional. Making a career change was a huge step, but the confidence I have in myself now makes me excited to go forward into the field as an Early Childhood Educator.

*Note: To watch the video version of this story, visit the "News" tab on our website: [www.strongstart.ca/stories/strong-start-helped-my-daughter-and-changed-my-life/](http://www.strongstart.ca/stories/strong-start-helped-my-daughter-and-changed-my-life/).*

# Learning and growing through the *Get Ready for School* program

*Ryder's Story, as told by his mother, Angie Williams*



## Get Ready for School\*

A Strong Start to reading program™

\* Based on the research of Dr. Iuliana Baciu

Ryder is a smart, social and independent little boy. He's advanced academically, but isn't always the best listener. Before starting the *Get Ready for School* program, we weren't sure how he would do in a learning environment. My husband and I worried he wouldn't listen to the instructors, and would be too distracted by the toys to learn anything new. We wanted him to be challenged; to learn and to grow. We worried that he wouldn't fit in with the other children. Boy, were we wrong!

From the very first class I saw an improvement in his attitude. He was excited to be going to "little school," as we called the program. It took a few weeks for Ryder to settle into a new routine, but then he really started to thrive. He made friends, and became a leader, even helping the other children learn to recognize their names. He enjoyed the small groups and learned so much from the activities. I couldn't have been more proud of my little one. His listening and social skills developed so much.

Life is full of moments when you see just how incredible your children are. For me, one of these moments was watching Ryder read a story with one of the instructors. It wasn't just that he was finally reading, it was that he was sounding words out, and using his hands to clap the syllables of each word. I was truly amazed.

The *Get Ready for School* program didn't just help Ryder prepare for school, it also helped me. I got into a routine and really benefited

*"He tells us he needs to use his walking feet, and to be safe."*

– Angie Williams,  
Ryder's mom.



from having other moms to talk to about parenting. It was a wonderful community that we built, one where we could lean on one another for support.

Over the summer, Ryder continued to get more and more excited for school. He had learned so many new skills, I was sure he would be ready for this exciting new chapter. The program gave Ryder such a positive start, and I can't wait to see how he grows next.

# Talking, singing, playing and reading with babies

Setting children on a path for success starts from birth.



Talking, singing, playing, and reading with babies are all wonderful ways to help support their brain development at a time when the impact is at its peak. These are the ideas behind the *Baby Connections®* program. Here are a few tips on how to have fun with literacy, as shared by the *Early Literacy Alliance of Waterloo Region* of which Strong Start is a member:

**Talk:** When you're at the grocery store, talk about the food you will buy and what you will do with it.

**Sing:** Sing a children's song like "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," and change your voice as you sing. For example, sing about a big star in a loud voice and a little star in a quiet voice.

**Play:** Build a block tower with your baby. Talk about the different shapes and sizes of the blocks, make patterns, and count what's around you.

**Read:** Look for the first letter of your baby's name in books and point it out when you find it. For example, "I see the letter /S/, that's the first letter of your name, Sam!"

The benefits of a strong literacy foundation will pay dividends in the future as babies develop into lifelong readers and learners. To sign up for a *Baby Connections* program near you, visit: [www.babyconnections.ca](http://www.babyconnections.ca).

# Saying thank you & farewell

*Strong Start says goodbye to our Director of Program and a long-time Board Member*

**Inge Ford**, Strong Start's Director of Program, is retiring at the end of this year. Inge has had a tremendous impact on Strong Start over her eight years with our organization. As a seasoned early literacy expert, Inge co-authored our *Get Ready for School* program with Dr. Iuliana Baciuc and spearheaded many enhancements to our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program. A sincere thank you, Inge, for your talent and dedication on behalf of all of us at Strong Start and the children we serve.



This year marks the end of **Carol Jankowski's** six-year term on Strong Start's Board of Directors. Carol has dedicated countless hours offering wisdom, insights and communications expertise, both at the boardroom table and behind the scenes as a volunteer writer and editor. We thank you, Carol, for years of dedication to Strong Start and to the children we serve.



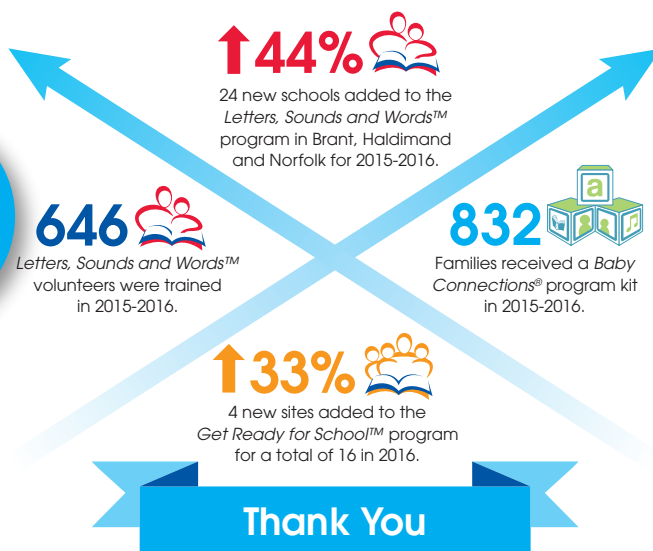
*Thank you, Inge and Carol, for your dedication and service to Strong Start.*



## By the Numbers



The numbers above reflect the totals for the 2015-2016 program year for *Letters, Sounds and Words™*, *Get Ready for School™* and *Baby Connections®*.



To date Strong Start has reached over **30,165** children through **402,725+** volunteer hours, **22,730** volunteers and **YOUR** generous donations.



## TD Canada Trust expands its support of early literacy

TD Canada Trust cares about community.

The firm has a long history of supporting literacy and education causes, even conducting its own research studies into the economic benefits of reaching children early. Since 2011, TD Canada Trust has been a vital partner in helping young children learn to read, providing more than \$30,000 in grants to Strong Start programs.

TD Canada Trust has been an avid financial supporter of the *Letters, Sounds and Words* program across Waterloo Region, Wellington County, and Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk counties, and encourages branch employees to volunteer with the program in neighbourhood schools. This year, the company extended its financial support to our preschool program, *Get Ready for School*, providing an even earlier intervention for children's long-term success. We thank TD Canada Trust for their continued partnership and commitment to improving children's literacy in many communities.



From left: Ryan Bennett, TD District Vice-President and Nelson Araujo, TD Stanley Park Branch Manager, present Machele Denison, Executive Director with a \$10,000 cheque in support of Strong Start's early literacy programs.

## Retired Teachers of Ontario partner for success

It was an incredible year for partnerships at Strong Start, with two districts of the Retired Teachers of Ontario (RTO) supporting children in developing their literacy skills. As a group representing retired teachers, school and board administrators, educational support staff and college and university faculty, these individuals understand the importance of investing early. RTO District 11 represents the educational community in Waterloo Region, and RTO District 12 the community in Norfolk County.

Each group has generously provided \$4,000 in support of our literacy programs for children, with District 11 providing additional in-kind support to our preschool program, *Get Ready for School*, which is only available in Waterloo Region. With shared interests and a commitment to giving children the best start to life, we look forward to continuing to work with both groups over the coming years. We thank each and every member for spending their careers educating and supporting our youngest citizens.



Members of RTO District 12 present Ruth Mills, Program Co-ordinator, Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk (centre) with a cheque in support of the *Letters, Sounds and Words* program in Norfolk County. Photo credit: Jeff Tribe, Norfolk News.



From left to right: Inge Ford, Director of Program, Machele Denison, Executive Director, Wayne Buchholtz, President RTO District 11, Christina Proctor, Development and Communications Officer, and Ken Silvester celebrate our 2-year partnership to help more young children learn to read.

## Building a strong future for children in our community

The Strassburger family has built a successful company from its beginning more than 60 years ago. They supply the construction trade with



beautiful, high-quality windows and doors, and build community by generously sharing the fruits of their success with charitable organizations across Waterloo Region. Strassburger Windows and Doors has been a Legacy Partner and Legacy Builder with Strong Start since 2010, continuing to support our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program.

Each year, the Strassburger family makes their gift in honour of two schools in our region with which they have a personal connection. "The relationships children develop with the volunteers that give their time to help children makes such a lasting and positive impact on them," says Robert Strassburger, President. "It's not only an impact at the time they are children, but as they mature and grow they take these experiences with them. It is this kind of support in the child's early years that will continue to build and shape our youth, and for that we are honoured to support Strong Start."

Strassburger Windows and Doors has generously made another three-year commitment to our cause, which will help more children build a strong foundation for literacy success. Thank you, Strassburger family, for being true literacy champions.

## Celebrating grand opening by paying it forward

Tepperman's, a family-owned and operated furniture, mattress, appliance and electronics retailer celebrated its Grand Opening in Kitchener this past summer by donating a total of \$50,000 to local charities. Along with nine other organizations, Strong Start received a \$5,000 gift to help ensure more children learn to read.

The Tepperman family has a long history of community involvement. They encourage their employees to volunteer in causes they care about and donate to initiatives that improve opportunities for children and youth, while also supporting larger community needs.

Each organization selected to benefit from Tepperman's support was personally chosen by the family. "We wanted to support Strong Start because of the growing number of children impacted, the engagement of an incredible number of volunteers, and the fact that the programs are focused on a root cause that has a very positive upside," says Andrew Tepperman, President. "The absence of the ability to effectively read and communicate reduces a person's chances, exponentially, of succeeding in life."

Community outreach is rooted in the foundation of this business. With store locations in Windsor, Chatham, Sarnia, London and Kitchener, Tepperman's is committed to doing business in a way that benefits families as a whole.



Above photo: Steve Cameron, Strong Start Board Chair (left), Christina Proctor, Development and Communications Officer (centre), and Machele Denison, Executive Director (centre) receive a cheque from Andrew Tepperman, President (right).

# Thank you...

## We couldn't do this without you.

Your financial support enables us to offer our quality programs.



LYLE S. HALLMAN  
FOUNDATION



Optimist Club of Waterloo-North  
Optimist Club of Conestoga-Winterbourne



### Corporate

Essroc Canada Inc.  
Giant Tiger  
Investors Group  
M R & R Data Services Inc.  
Norwex Canada  
Paul A. Bender Insurance  
TD Wealth  
Toyota Motor Manufacturing  
Canada Inc

### Clubs, Schools, Groups

ETFO - Waterloo Occasional  
Teachers' Local  
IL Thomas School Community,  
Six Nations  
Jarvis Public School  
Kiwanis Club of Brantford  
Lansdowne-Costain Public  
School  
Lynndale Heights Public  
School  
Ontario English Catholic  
Teachers' Association - Waterloo  
Unit  
Rotary Club of Cambridge  
North  
Rotary Club of Kitchener  
Tait Street Public School  
Waterford Public School  
Westvale Public School  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Students

### In-Kind Support

Arrowsmith Corporation

Thank you for all **memorial gifts** received in memory of Ruth Clark, Rose Innes, Marion Thwaites, and Teresa Smid.

Rotary



Rotary Club of Kitchener-Conestoga  
Rotary Club of Kitchener-Westmount



Josslin Insurance  
a Real Insurance broker



### Brantford Blast Hockey

Organization  
Chris Howlett  
Simpson Print  
Social Venture Partners  
Waterloo Region  
Staples Business Depot -  
Brantford  
Westmount Moving &  
Warehousing

### Foundations

Bridgeway Foundation  
Catholic Community Foundation  
of Waterloo Region  
D.H Gordon Foundation  
Samuel W. Stedman  
Foundation

### Government

City of Brantford  
City of Cambridge  
City of Kitchener

### Third Party Events

Elmira Maple Syrup Festival  
Mighty Machines  
Peter Braid Celebration of  
Service  
Peter Hallman Memorial Fast  
Pitch Tournament  
Spring into Strong Start -  
Conestoga College Event  
St. Andrew's United Church  
Quarter Charity Auction



The Guelph Community  
FOUNDATION  
Community Fund for Canada's 150th  
Hugh and Lorna Guthrie Fund



The Cloverleaf Foundation  
A family working together to make a difference



Alex and Trish Brown Family Fund  
Alex Schmidt Memorial Fund  
Community Fund  
Erb & Good Family Funeral Home  
Community Fund  
Greater KW Chamber of Commerce  
- Corporate Challenge Fund  
Lonsdale and Roberta Schofield Fund  
Paul Kuntz Legacy  
TD Bank Financial Group Employees  
Endowment Fund  
The David and Eleanor Yach Family  
Fund  
The Jim and Sue Hallman Fund  
The Savvas & Lenia Chamberlain Fund  
The Spinnaker Fund  
The Waterloo Region Record Literacy  
Fund



Cambridge & North Dumfries  
Community Foundation

Anonymous Fund (2)  
Berg Family Fund  
Blasman Family Fund  
Collins-Wright Family Fund  
Daidy and James Flavelle Fund  
J.D. Walden Fund  
Langdon Hall Fund  
Preston Chapter IOOE  
Terry and Margaret Osbourne Family Fund  
The Marion Edgar Fund



### Individuals

Erin Abreu  
Anonymous (12)  
Mark Augé  
Nancy Barros  
Cheryl Bauman  
Glen & Robin Boy  
Graham Brown  
Ron & Rita Cherkewski  
Shirley Clairmont  
Bill & Mary Cressman  
Laura Crits  
Megan DeMille  
Addie Denison  
Tony & Machelie Denison  
Annette Denny  
Leo & Joan Doodchenko  
Wray & Ted Dougherty  
Gail Eby  
Linda Gumble  
Jim & Sue Hallman  
Mark Hallman  
Margaret & Carl Hennig  
Noreen Hishon  
Karen Hodgson  
Stephanie Hodgson  
Karlee Holroyd  
Elissa Jacobson  
Carol Jankowski  
Patti Johnson  
Bonnie Jones  
Rosalind & Dieter Kays  
Darlene Koebel  
Kathryn Lamoureux  
Jeremy Levitt  
Christine Loker  
Shauna Lynn Simon  
Bob MacMillan  
Rick & Nancy Martin

Carrie McGinnis  
Hulene Montgomery &  
Michael Graham  
Angela Mick  
Andrea Miller  
Joanne Mumford & Ted  
Schlotzhauser  
Susanne Murdoch  
Stan & Donna Nahrgang  
Kirk Omand  
Jeannie Orchard  
Jesse Ottogalli  
Karen Pound  
Ross Robertson  
Teresa Rymon-Lipinski  
Beverley & Stanford Saliwonchik  
Helen Samuel  
Susan Sanderson  
Jocelyn Seeley-Baechler  
Ken Silvester  
Laura Siwak  
Caitlin & Craig Smith  
Shannon Smith  
Teresa Sothern  
Jennifer Stockall  
Angela Szijarto  
Colin Telford  
Louise Thompson  
Ruthann Thwaites  
Amanda Vreeland  
Toby & Phillip Williams  
Scott Williams  
Joyce Wong

This list reflects gifts given between July 1, 2015 and November 19, 2016.



**Strong Start to reading™**  
"Making a difference in the life of a child"

# Strong Start Team

**Board of Directors:** Steve Cameron (Chair), Linda Fabi, Keith Martin, Mark Hallman, Kimberley Hogan, Jennifer King

**Executive Director:** Machelie Denison

**Director of Program:** Colette Moffat

**Director of Operations:** Caitlin Smith

**Development and Communications Officer:** Christina Proctor

**Program Support Specialist:** Darlene Koebel

**Get Ready for School™ Program Co-ordinators:** Ashley McKinnon (on leave), Iwona Dmitrienko, Kirsten Carr

**Letters, Sounds and Words™ Program Co-ordinators:** Colette Moffat (Wellington County), Leslie Tinning (Waterloo Region), Ruth Mills (Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk)

## Gifts of Time

We are so grateful to the thousands of volunteers who generously gave their time to help children learn to read. We know the one-on-one time a caring adult spends with a child is vital to the *Letters, Sounds and Words* program. Our *Get Ready for School* volunteer's help staff ensure preschool children have a positive early learning experience. The many individuals and groups including BlackBerry, Desire2Learn, Economical Insurance, SAP, and WalterFedy, who package literacy materials at our warehouse and other locations help keep our costs low. To all of you, we say a heartfelt "Thank You."



In April 2016, the contributions of two outstanding Strong Start volunteers were recognized at the Kitchener-Waterloo Volunteer Action Centre's Volunteer Impact Awards. Dawna Whitehead won in the category of Youth Mentorship and is one of Strong Start's longest standing *Letters, Sounds and Words* volunteers. Marian Snyder won in the category of Administrative Action, going above and beyond to help the staff at Strong Start's office in a variety of tasks. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to both Dawna and Marian on their awards and thank them so much for their commitment to our community. To read the full story, we invite you to visit the "News" tab on our website.



**Strong Start to reading™**  
"Making a difference in the life of a child"

The vision of Strong Start continues to be one of communities rallying around their children with time and resources to help children learn to read. Please note that your gift can be designated to a specific program or community.

## Please make a gift today to help more children learn to read:

Online: [www.strongstart.ca](http://www.strongstart.ca)

**Cheque by mail:** Strong Start Charitable Organization  
20 Crestview Place, Kitchener, ON, N2B 0A2

Charitable Registration #825948060RR0001

Email: [info@strongstart.ca](mailto:info@strongstart.ca)

Call: 519-743-9578

# Program Partners



**Letters, Sounds and Words**

A Strong Start to reading program™

- Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board
- Brantford Christian School
- Grand Erie District School Board
- I.L. Thomas Odadrihonyanita Elementary School
- Islamic School of Cambridge
- KidsAbility School
- Laurentian Hills Christian School
- Lloyd S. King School
- MAC Maple Grove School
- Oliver M. Smith Kawennio Elementary School
- Plattsville Christian School
- W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind
- Waterloo Catholic District School Board
- Waterloo Region District School Board
- Wellington Catholic District School Board

- Conestoga College - Brantford
- Mohawk College
- Nipissing University
- Wilfrid Laurier University



**Get Ready for School®**

A Strong Start to reading program™

\* Based on the research of Dr. Juliana Baciu

- Bridgeport Community Centre, Kitchener \*
- Centreville Chicopee Community Centre, Kitchener
- Chandler Mowat Community Centre, Kitchener
- Country Hills Community Centre, Kitchener \*
- Downtown Community Centre, Kitchener \*
- Grow Community Centre, Cambridge
- Kids and I Resource Centre, Elmira
- Kinbridge Community Association, Cambridge \*
- Kingsdale Community Centre, Kitchener \*
- Langs, Cambridge \*
- McCormick Branch Library, Waterloo \*
- Our Place Family Resource & Early Years Centre, Kitchener \*
- Preston Heights Community Group, Cambridge
- The Family Centre, Kitchener
- Victoria Hills Community Centre, Kitchener \*
- Williamsburg Community Centre, Kitchener

\*sites also offering a Baby Connections® program



**baby connections®**

building blocks to literacy

Cambridge Early Years Centre • Carizon Family and Community Services/Mosaic Counselling • Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region • Highland-Stirling Community Group • House of Friendship • Idea Exchange (multiple branches) • KidsAbility Centre for Child Development • Kitchener Public Library (multiple branches) • Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) English at First • Our Place Family Resource and Early Years Centre (multiple locations) • Project READ Literacy Network (multiple locations) • Region of Waterloo Public Library (multiple branches) • Region of Waterloo's Healthy Babies • Healthy Children program • Region of Waterloo's Infant Child Development Program • Waterloo Public Library (multiple branches) • YMCA Early Years Centre (multiple locations) • YMCAs of Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo