



# Strong Start to reading™

“Making a difference in the life of a child”

Strong Start Annual Newsletter • December 2022

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Detailed program results and stories can be found on our website: [www.strongstart.ca](http://www.strongstart.ca)

Follow us on social media



## From Response to Recovery - We are Here to Help!

We are so happy to be sharing our annual update with all of you, our stakeholders: parents, volunteers, donors, funders, program partners and community champions. We invite you to read our impact stories on how you have supported young children and families, since we last reported to you. You will also read about the exciting new funding we received early this year, to help fuel the expansion of our school-based *Letters, Sounds and Words* program, to help mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on young children’s reading and learning.

Last February the Ontario Human Rights Commission released their Right to Read Report. This report has cast a very bright light on the importance of all children learning to read as well as the supports needed to achieve this. It also detailed recommendations for explicit teaching of reading and the literacy foundations needed to be a successful reader. We were heartened to read this report and its recommendations as it aligns with our vision of All Children Read, and with the strategies and design of our three programs, *Baby Connections*, *Get Ready for School* and *Letters, Sounds and Words*. In *Letters, Sounds and Words*, thousands of trained Volunteer Coaches bring extra capacity to schools and provide the 1:1 attention that children need. The pre-assessments allow volunteers to tailor the program to meet each child where they are in their learning journey. We feel truly inspired that we can play a significant role in this important work, especially now when the need for support is higher than ever.

In addition to our trained Volunteer Coaches, Strong Start is finally able to engage community members in a new way. With our National Program Deployment Centre now open, we have been able to welcome individuals and small teams to help us assemble the games, activities and kits used in our programs. This support is truly appreciated as it helps keep our costs low. Additionally, our volunteer Board of Directors play a significant role contributing their time and expertise in helping to guide and govern our organization. This past spring the entire Team and Board of Directors worked together to set the exciting strategic direction of Strong Start for the next three years. Our ultimate goal is to grow our impact by helping more children learn to read.

We hope you will enjoy reading the stories and updates in this year’s newsletter. We could not do what we do without our program partners, volunteers and donors. Strong Start is a beautiful example of community rallying around its children to help them learn to read.

Thank you for all you do to make what we do possible!

With heartfelt appreciation,



*Machelles Denison*

**Machelles Denison,**  
Chief Executive Officer



*J King*

**Jennifer King,**  
Board Chair

“

*She did not know anything about English language. She learned many words. She started making friends and basic sentences in English to communicate with people.*”

*Get Ready for School parent, 2022*



# Impact That Lasts.....



**Letters, Sounds and Words™**  
A Strong Start to reading program

## Strong Start: A Path to My Academic Journey

Heidi Amadei

Literacy has always been important in my personal and academic path. At a young age, I understood how literacy is integrated into everyday life. Growing up with an illiterate parent, I saw the barriers they faced in daily life, from signing documents to dealing with banks, doctors and my school. For us children, it was a barrier too, as we could not go to them for help with school. Due to this first-hand experience, I wanted to pursue a life of helping others in their literacy journey.

Fast forward to 2019, now a parent myself of a three-year old daughter, I worried about her transition to kindergarten and wanted to do more to set her up for success. A family member recommended the Strong Start

“*Growing up with an illiterate parent, I saw the barriers they faced in daily life, from signing documents to dealing with banks, doctors and my school.*”

Get Ready for School program. Once there, I learned about their *Baby Connections* and *Letters, Sounds and Words* programs.

That same year, I enrolled in Conestoga College's Bachelor of Early Learning Development, to make a difference in children's development and literacy. To gain experience I wanted to volunteer with children where I could positively impact their literacy journey.

At that moment, I remembered that Strong Start had a *Letters, Sounds and Words* program for school-age children. I trained to become a Volunteer Coach at my daughter's school. It has been one of my most fulfilling experiences, providing many inspirational moments. I could see the children make the connections to new learnings and see their confidence



grow each week we met. In fact, I loved coaching so much that I am now near the end of my Bachelor's program. For my last placement, I asked for a non-profit organization. Surprisingly, I was placed with Strong Start. It felt fitting as I had learned so much from them about literacy and the importance of building meaningful relationships with people and communities. I love this position. I am learning new aspects of literacy programming, which will make me a more rounded educator.

I see myself being involved with Start Strong for many years. I will take what I've learned with me as I continue towards my ultimate goal of becoming a college professor teaching early learning.



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21 years and counting!

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

## 2021-2022 PROGRAM YEAR by the numbers

**Thank You!** To date Strong Start has **400** annual program sites, reached over **51,774** children through **594,396** volunteer hours, **35,408** volunteers and **YOUR** generous donations.

The numbers above reflect the totals for the 2021/2022 program year for *Letters, Sounds and Words™*, *Get Ready for School™* & *Baby Connections®*

**6 Regions Across Ontario**

Ontario by FreeVectorMaps.com

### Strong Start Timeline

2011: *Baby Connections®* est.

2018: *Letters, Sounds and Words™* Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford est.

2019: *Letters, Sounds and Words™* Bruce Grey and Hamilton Region est.

2020: Strong Start Relocation and Global Pandemic

2021: *Letters, Sounds and Words™* Hastings, Prince Edward, Lennox, Addington, Frontenac est. / Strong Start At-Home Resources

2022: *Get Ready for School™* Bruce Grey est. / *Baby Connections®* Bruce Grey / *Baby Connections®* Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford est.



## My 18-Month-old Loves to Read

Jessica D. – parent

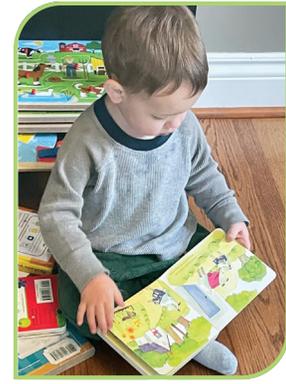
Last year, my son and I participated in the *Baby Connections* program through the Kitchener Public Library. We had a lot of fun in the program and learned many new tips. My son, Elliot, now 18-months old, loves reading and we still use the books you gave us in the *Baby Connections* Kit.

I honestly think this program is a big part of why Elliot loves reading so much today. Before, I always thought that reading was something you do with an older child, like a toddler. I didn't think that it would be very beneficial for a younger baby. I know now that reading to a young baby

“*Had I not realized, that it was so beneficial to introduce books and reading to my baby, things might have been different.*”

from day one has such a big impact. With this knowledge, my partner and I started reading with our son much more than before. He loves all the different books we have at home. We have a book about trucks, and he will often fill in words as we read it together, saying “honk, honk”. He just loves books and reading.

Sometimes he will bring books over to us and we read them together. Other times, he sits and ‘reads’ the books out loud himself. His favourite book from the kit is *Fuzzy Bee*. Every night, he will sit and read. He takes a book and babbles to every single page as he goes through it. It's very hard to figure out what he is saying, but it is so cute to watch. He reads



the book to himself. Had I not realized, that it was so beneficial to introduce books and reading to my baby, things might have been different. I walked away after the program

having learned something new as a parent that changed how I engage with my baby and books. I can see the impact of that.

We still use the information and all the resources we received as part of the program. The value of the program led us to making a decision to pay it forward by making a donation. With our donation, we hoped to help another family benefit from the program.



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**Get Ready for School™**

A Strong Start to reading program

Based on the research of Dr. Juliana Baciu 2010

## She asks for books for her birthday

Eduardo Amaya – parent

We found the *Get Ready for School* program on the internet because we were worried about our daughter's start to kindergarten. We are a Latino family and speak Spanish at home all the time. At the time, my daughter had little English because Spanish was the first language for Sofia.

The transition that happened during the program was amazing. It is an amazing program. It helped her to warm up to the idea of school. We found the program very useful for her situation. We have four children and Sofia is the youngest. If we knew about the program earlier, we would have used it for our other children, too.

At the beginning, the first and second days, she cried. It was hard for us as parents. As her daddy, I am very protective of her, so it was hard. Everybody there was amazing and she



got used to the program fast. After a short time, we noticed great improvements with her. Before, she had only 1-2 friends and in class she had made

many more friends. She loved coming to class and was saying things in English, singing songs and starting to read words. She even wanted to voluntarily eat fruits and vegetables. I found out that's what they had for snack in class. I remember at the end of the program there was a little family event for the graduation. We were there with my mom who came from Columbia for a visit. My mom was very impressed because Sofia looked so happy and proud of her achievement.

The first day we went to kindergarten with Sofia, we saw some kids were crying or upset. It made me think of the difference the program made for her and could have made for other children. I know that for sure because I had a different experience with my son. Sofia is my youngest and is the only one who went to the *Get Ready for School*

“*She loved coming to class and was saying things in English, singing songs and starting to read words. She even wanted to voluntarily eat fruits and vegetables.*”

program. My son who didn't go to the program was upset when he started school. It was really hard for us and for him. We didn't have the same experience with Sofia. She didn't cry at all. In fact, she was so happy and enthusiastic about going to school. It was amazing. She thought she would have the same type of fun and good time at school that she did in the program.

Now, she's in grade 4 and still loves school. She is in French immersion and is doing great. She is in piano and gymnastics and doing lots of things in her life. She still loves to read. Just last Friday, it was her birthday and party. Before the party, all the parents of the friends she invited to come were asking her what presents she would like. She asked for books for her birthday.



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# Thank You.....

**We couldn't do this without you.**

Your financial support enables us to offer our quality programs.



An agency of the Government of Ontario.  
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario.



- Anonymous Fund
- Berg Family Trust Fund
- Blasman Family Fund
- Collins-Wright Fund
- Daidy & James Flavelle Fund
- Jane and Ken Wright Family Fund
- Langdon Hall Fund
- Marion Edgar Fund
- School Sisters of Notre Dame Legacy Fund
- Terry & Margaret Osbourne Fund



Edith H. Turner Foundation Fund



- United Way Brant
- United Way Haldimand Norfolk
- United Way Halton & Hamilton
- United Way Waterloo Region Communities



- Alex & Trish Brown Family Fund
- Alex Schmidt Memorial Fund
- Bickerton Family Fund
- Brian & Pauline Fisher Fund
- Community Fund
- David & Eleanor Yach Family Fund
- Erb & Good Family Funeral Home Community Fund
- Jim & Sue Hallman Family Fund
- Horace & Rita Coelho & Family - Unsong Heroes Fund
- Landmann Family Fund
- Machelle & Tony Denison Family Fund
- Sharon & Paul Good Fund
- TD Employees Endowment Fund
- Waterloo Region International Plowing Match 1995 & 2012 Fund
- Woolwich Community Fund



Steffensen Family Fund  
Terry and Margaret Osbourne Fund



- COVID Relief Fund
- Doug Tarry Limited Community Fund
- Great-EST Needs Fund
- Mable Blakely & Harold O'Connor Family Fund
- Mac & Joyce Hepburn Fund



- Kitchener-Conestoga Rotary Club
- Rotary Club of Dunnville
- Rotary Club of Kitchener-Grand River
- Rotary Club of Waterloo
- Rotary Club of Norfolk Sunrise

## Thank you to all our financial and in-kind supporters.

Your investment in helping young children read is making a lasting difference and will pay dividends now and in the future.

### Foundations

Brant Community Foundation  
Donald and Jo-Anne Wilkin  
Donor Advised Fund  
Canada Helps  
Literacy For All Fund  
Partner Giving Fund  
Giving Tuesday Paypal Promotion  
Centre Wellington Community  
Foundation  
100 Men Who Care  
The Excellence in Literacy  
Foundation  
D.H. Gordon Foundation  
J.P. Bickell Foundation  
London Community Foundation  
Oxford Community Foundation  
William & Mary Mackesy Fund  
Lessif Family Fund  
PayPal Giving Fund Canada  
S.M. Blair Family Foundation  
Samuel W. Stedman Foundation  
Social Venture Partners -  
Waterloo Region

### Corporate

Bell Match Donations  
Elemental Interior Design  
Execulink Telecom  
Fiskars Brands, Inc.  
RLB Management Partnership  
SAP  
S.G. Cunningham Ltd.

### Clubs, Schools, Groups

Elementary Teachers'  
Federation of Ontario  
Ontario English Catholic  
Teachers' Association  
Optimist Club of St. Jacobs  
Retired Teachers of Ontario  
District 11  
Simcoe Lion's Club  
South Wellington Community  
Lion's Club  
St. Alexander School (North Bay)

### Third Party Events

In Honour of Celia Laur &  
Steve Melczer Wedding  
Elmira Maple Syrup Festival  
Julie Hause Facebook Birthday

### Government

City of Brantford  
City of Guelph  
City of Kitchener

### In-Kind

2WA Consulting - Anne  
Birmingham  
Aagam Jhaveri  
Arrowsmith Corporation  
Bill Schwarz  
The Canadian Shield  
Carolyn Vandenberg Coaching  
& Consulting  
Chris Howlett  
Carol Jankowski  
Shannon Morris  
Jeff Posluns  
Simpson Print  
TechSoup Canada and Partners

### Individuals

Anonymous (39)  
Divya Ahuja  
Alan Alpasha  
Kristy Andersen  
Jim and Marsha Arnald  
Beth Arnott  
Janet L. Baker  
Nat Blagden  
Sasha Brown  
Cheryl Bauman  
Douglas Bundock  
Marianne Burke  
Aime Bwakira  
Steve & Patricia Cameron  
Catherine Chamberlain  
Dove Champagne

Ron & Rita Cherkewski  
Benjamin Creary  
Addie Denison  
Tony & Mabelle Denison  
Jessica Dewell  
Sarah Disher-Neddow  
Felix Duchaine  
Tania Dunn  
Linda Fabi  
Constance Finn  
Lewis & Inge Ford  
Mike Gallo  
Claudia Haack  
Jim & Sue Hallman  
Christopher & Lynn Howlett  
Timothy Huver  
Carol Jankowski  
Mary Klymko  
Henry Kwan  
Senem Lacasse  
Karen Lintott  
Deborah MacLatchy  
David Maggiori  
Ella Marklevitz  
Theresa Marks  
Judy McDonald  
Brandon McKinnon  
John Medley  
Hulene Montgomery &  
Michael Graham  
Colette Moffat  
Claire Morcos  
Robin Muller  
Bryan & Jackie Murdoch  
Susanne Murdoch  
Stan & Donna Nahrgang  
Raluca Nuta  
Sean O'Brien  
Janet Peddigrew  
Veronica Popova  
Sharon Rampersaud  
Sid Ratna  
Lois Reichard

Jonathan Rennie  
Eric & Jodi Ritter  
Sophie Russwurm  
Hank & Pam Salin  
Beverley & Stan Saliwonchyk  
David Sangster  
Marg Schiel  
Bob & Mieke Schroeder  
Laura Scott  
Nancy Silcox  
Ken Silvester  
Caitlin & Craig Smith  
Dianne Snyder  
Kim Snyder  
Tim Sothern  
Jessica Stern  
Alfred Stoner  
Surenanthan  
Tharumakulasingam  
Teresa Tropea  
Miriam Trump  
Wanda Van Bakel  
Ryan West  
Scott Williams  
Tammy Willms  
Julie Witmer  
Nicole Wood  
Christina Young

### Other Gifts

Thank you for all named  
memorial gifts received in  
memory of:

Susan Bloos  
Lynda Silvester  
Joe and Beatrice Snyder

Strong Start thanks everyone  
who made a gift in honour or  
in memory of a family member  
or friend.

***This list reflects gifts  
received between July 1,  
2021 to October 31, 2022.***



**Strong Start to reading™**

"Making a difference in the life of a child"

# News & Events.....

## TD READY COMMITMENT

The **TD Ready Challenge** is an annual North American initiative, which provides ten (10) \$1 million grants to organizations developing innovative, impactful and measurable solutions for a changing world. The focus of their 2021 TD Ready Challenge was supporting innovative solutions to address the predicted learning loss in math and reading for disproportionately impacted students in grades K-12, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strong Start's application shared that our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program is an innovative solution that will help children in Year 2 Kindergarten to Grade 3, whose literacy skills have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The esteemed TD judging panel agreed and Strong Start was awarded \$1 million to scale this program by 100 schools per year for 3 years. This program expansion will see over 7,600 more children benefitting as a result.

## Volunteers Lend a Helping Hand



When COVID-19 restrictions lifted in April, we were thrilled to open the doors of our National Program Deployment Centre and welcome volunteers to help assemble games and activities for our early literacy program kits. Volunteers included retirees, post-secondary and high school students, newcomers, parents, corporate groups and service club members. We are truly grateful for their gift of time. Since reopening, we have welcomed 64 volunteers who gave 1,722 hours in our Program Deployment Centre. Included in this total are 15 high school students who were able to complete their required volunteer hours for graduation. Teams from Simmwave, Gore Mutual, the Optimist Club of Waterloo and MacKay CEO Forums also came to assist with material assembly. In addition to our seasonal volunteers, we benefit greatly from the dedication of our regular weekly volunteers.

One of our summer volunteers shared: "One of the main reasons that I stay is just the people here. The positive energy, even if we are working in the warehouse, taping or labeling, the people here are so friendly. I love working here because of that." *Saisha – Volunteer*

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## Meet the Team

### Board of Directors:

- Jennifer King** Board Chair
- Teresa Norris-Lue** Vice-Chair
- Jodi Ritter, CPA, CMA** Treasurer
- Dr. Kristiina Montero** Secretary
- Steve Cameron** Past Chair
- Dr. Valerie Nielsen** Director
- Sydney Pereira** Director
- Jamil Shamji** Director
- Kendra Siddall** Director

*Thank you and best wishes to retiring Directors, Mark Hallman and Kimberly Hogan.*

### Team Members:

- Machelle Denison**  
Chief Executive Officer
- Caitlin Smith**  
Chief Operating Officer
- Brooke Eby**  
Director of Development & Communications
- Lisa Williams**  
Director of Program
- Carol Broer**  
*Letters, Sounds and Words* Program  
Co-ordinator for Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk
- Kirsten Carr**  
*Get Ready for School* Program Co-ordinator
- Iwona Dmitrienko**  
Program Operations Specialist  
*Baby Connections* Program Co-ordinator
- Claudia Haack**  
Bookkeeper
- Julie Hause**  
Development & Communications Officer
- Craig Smith**  
Process & Project Specialist
- Jean Stacey**  
*Letters, Sounds and Words* Program  
Co-ordinator, Waterloo Region
- Caroline Stamp**  
*Get Ready for School* Assistant Program  
Co-ordinator
- Mary Tuumanen**  
Operations Co-ordinator

**Please visit our [website](#) to read more about our team.**

Thank you to all our program and operation staff and volunteers who deliver and support *Letters, Sounds and Words*, *Get Ready for School* and *Baby Connections*. We are so grateful for your enthusiasm and time to help children learn to read. We couldn't do this without you.

# Stronger Together.....



## Get Ready for School™

A Strong Start to reading program

Based on the research of Dr. Iuliana Baciu 2010

- Activa Sportsplex, Kitchener
- Bridgeport Community Centre, Kitchener\*
- Centreville Chicopee Community Centre, Kitchener
- Chandler Mowat Community Centre, Kitchener
- Country Hills Community Centre, Kitchener\*
- Downtown Community Centre, Kitchener
- Forest Heights Community Centre, Kitchener
- Grand View Public School, Cambridge
- Grow Community Centre, Cambridge
- Huron Community Centre, Kitchener
- Kinbridge Community Centre, Cambridge
- Kingsdale Community Centre, Kitchener\*
- Langs, Cambridge
- Linwood Community Centre, Linwood
- McCormick Branch Library, Waterloo\*
- Stanley Park Community Centre, Kitchener\*
- St. Basil's Catholic Elementary School, Owen Sound
- Victoria Hills Community Centre, Kitchener
- Williamsburg Community Centre, Kitchener
- Wilmot Family Resource Centre, New Hamburg
- Woolwich Memorial Centre, Elmira



- Bruce County EarlyON
- Cambridge Family Early Years Centre
- EarlyON Stratford
- EarlyON St. Mary's
- EarlyON Waterloo Region, YMCA of Three Rivers
- Family & Children's Services
- Idea Exchange (multiple locations)
- KidsAbility Centre for Child Development
- Kitchener Public Library (multiple locations)
- London Public Library
- Our Place Family Resource and Early Years Centre
- Project READ Literacy Network (multiple locations)
- Region of Waterloo Healthy Babies Healthy Children
- Region of Waterloo Infant and Child Development Program
- Region of Waterloo Public Library (multiple locations)
- Waterloo Public Library (multiple locations)

*\*Sites also offering a Baby Connections program*

*This list reflects program partners between September 1, 2021, to November 1, 2022. For a list of current program partners, please visit our website.*



## Letters, Sounds and Words™

A Strong Start to reading program

- Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board
- Bluewater District School Board
- Braemar House School
- Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board
- Brantford Christian School
- Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board
- Carizon Encompass Program
- Central Baptist Academy
- Grand Erie District School Board
- I.L. Thomas Odadrihonyanita Elementary School
- Jamieson Elementary
- KidsAbility School
- Kitchener-Waterloo Bilingual School
- Koinonia Christian Academy
- Laurentian Hills Christian School
- Lloyd S. King School
- Thames Valley District School Board
- W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind
- Waterloo Catholic District School Board
- Waterloo Region District School Board
- Wellington Catholic District School Board

### Program Supporters

- Conestoga College
- Fanshawe College
- Mohawk College
- Six Nations Polytechnic
- University of Guelph
- University of Waterloo
- Western University
- Wilfrid Laurier University

## Strong Start Launches 750 in 750 Campaign – Accelerating Impact

There continues to be genuine concern for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young children and their learning. For over two years, their classroom learning was interrupted. When the pandemic first hit in March of 2020 and schools closed, there was a rapid move to provide online learning. Parents, schools and school boards scrambled to find devices and internet services for the children and families to use. Educators moved swiftly to adopt technology tools and redesign their lessons to be delivered in a virtual setting. Parents juggled working from home and supporting their children's online learning experience. Everyone did their best!

**750 more schools in Ontario in 750 days**

The timing of the interruption of classroom learning was particularly impactful for the very young, not only for their critical foundational literacy and language development, but also for their social and emotional development. Strong Start continued to believe that our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program could play a key role in helping them catch up once volunteers could go back into schools.

Grants from The TD Ready Commitment and a generous anonymous foundation are enabling Strong Start to expand our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program to 750 more schools in Ontario over the next 3 years. A successful campaign

will mean nearly 40,000 more children will be helped to learn to read. We have already welcomed the Blue Water District School Board and have expanded the number of schools in the Algonquin, Lakeshore Catholic District School Board and the Thames Valley District School Board this year. We are underway with our outreach and promotion. A special thank you to all who are helping us. To learn more about bringing Strong Start to your school or community, visit [www.strongstart.ca](http://www.strongstart.ca).



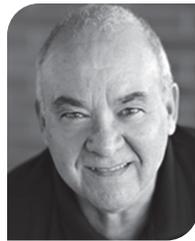
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## Introducing...

Strong Start is no stranger to developing proprietary technology solutions. In 2011 we developed Site SOURCE™, our secure online database, which supports the implementation of our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program.

This purpose-built application provides schools with an online dashboard where they can look-up and assign Volunteer Coaches to their Round of the program, record volunteer hours worked and download resources to support the program's implementation. In 2015 this software was redeveloped (2.0) for the cloud, providing limitless data capacity to enable us to scale the program. Chris Howlett guided the development in 2011 and personally executed the development of Site SOURCE 2.0, in both cases as a volunteer! Chris has given thousands of hours creating this game-changing technology.



Chris' latest innovation is the *Volunteer Information Portal™* aka ViP, which will transform the way trained Volunteer Coaches connect with the schools that need them. He knew this

would lead to more children being helped. ViP empowers schools to post volunteer requirements. Trained Volunteers log into the portal, enter their postal code and the distance they are willing to travel. They will instantly see a list of schools in that radius; with one click they will see the schools that have postings. With another click they can make a direct connection with the school's Strong Start Site Co-ordinator. Selecting their mode of transportation; car, walk or public transit, they will be given the appropriate route to the school and even the transit details! The portal will also house tutorial videos to refresh the Volunteer Coaches' training and as well answers to frequently asked questions.

More schools, more connections, more children helped! Thank you, Chris, for your incredible gift.



## Make a Gift Today to Help Children Learn to Read

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.

Create even more impact by registering as a Monthly Donor!



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**Please make a gift today to help set a child on a path for success:**

**Online:**

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

**Cheque by mail:**

Strong Start Charitable Organization  
1-565 Kumpf Drive  
Waterloo, ON, N2V 1K3

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

**Call:** 1-833-419-READ (7323)



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

Charitable Registration  
#825948060RR0001

## DID? YOU KNOW

**Our help is needed more than ever!**

Research says that the pandemic left many children with a **6-12** month learning loss. Strong Start is playing an important role in the recovery.

At-Home Resources have had **11,121** views since their launch.

**1,000** Volunteer Coaches were trained since July 1, 2021.

**57** children participated in a condensed *Letters, Sounds and Words* program in July. This was a special request from WRDSB to help address the learning gap. It was delivered by **37** Volunteers.

**282** at-risk preschoolers benefitted from our 2022 *Get Ready for School* program, which was one of the first community programs in the region to return safely to in-person learning.

**384** babies received their *Baby Connections Kit*. More parents than ever shared that they could not afford to buy books for their babies.

**48** volunteer material assistants donated **1,200** hours this summer, including **33** high-school students.

## Thank you Ruth Mills!



For over seven years, Ruth served as the Regional Program Co-ordinator for the *Letters, Sounds and Words* program in Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk. Known as a friend and tireless advocate for children, Ruth has truly advanced the cause of early childhood literacy.

Ruth led community engagement activities and forged lasting relationships with Foundations, United Ways, Brant Family Literacy and school communities. Ruth's hard work impacted thousands of children during her time with Strong Start.

She engaged the Brantford Blast hockey team, Tim Horton's Smile Cookie initiative and many local service clubs. We wish Ruth good health and all the best in her retirement.

## Thank you for your vote!

Strong Start was very humbled to be nominated as one of the top 10 charities in the 2022 Waterloo Region Record Readers' Choice Awards, for the third year in a row. We are delighted to share that we have won Diamond, the top honour, in the Non-Profit/ Foundations category.

