



Annual General Meeting

October 12, 2023



Opening the world of learning in our community.

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Territorial Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the land upon which we gather and learn is within the traditional territories of the Lkwungen (Esquimalt, and Songhees), Malahat, Pacheedaht, Scia'new, T'Sou-ke and <u>W</u>SÁNEĆ (Pauquachin, Tsartlip, Tsawout, Tseycum) peoples.

Victoria Literacy Connection's Direction

Some Definitions

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

- UNESCO

"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free."

- Frederick Douglass

Vision

Everyone in Greater Victoria has opportunities to acquire the literacy skills to function effectively in today's society.

Mission

We help children, youth, and adults improve their literacy skills, including reading, writing, and math, by providing tutoring and a variety of other programs.

Words from the Chair

It is a bittersweet moment as I write my final Chair Report. I have been Board Chair for the last two years and on the board for the last six years, and my term is finally ending. It has been my honour and my privilege to serve this board over the last six years.

During my time on the board, there have been some significant changes. I had only been on the board for a few months when we had the special meeting to officially amalgamate to become the Victoria Literacy Connection, a merger of Literacy Victoria and the READ Society. It was an exciting time to recreate this new literacy organization to build upon the good work that was done by the previous parent organizations. It was a time of growth, change and expansion.

Some of the biggest changes that have taken place in the last few years include moving to our current location on Pembroke Street, adding more programs, increasing the number of staff, and becoming part of numerous collaborations! The Victoria Literacy Connection is truly becoming the Literacy Hub we had envisioned, and we continue to work to include more of the community around us, as well as expand our services to the whole CRD region and beyond.

I am truly excited about the new and innovative programming that is currently underway and coming over the next year. Victoria Literacy Connection is thriving, and it is with a full heart as I step off the Board and into my new role as ad-hoc volunteer. Therefore, for me, it is not "goodbye", but "see you later" as I will be happy to continue to volunteer and help where I am needed, to continue to strengthen this wonderful organization.

Sincerely,

21/-

Janine Hannis

Board Chair

Programs

VLC is so proud to have shown the ability to quickly meet learners' needs by pivoting to online programming. As we observed how we were able to reach learners and volunteer tutors with varying mobility and health issues, we decided early on to continue to run online programming even when in-person sessions could resume. We are even embracing hybrid sessions where learners can meet in-person at VLC, though the facilitator is projecting from a screen.

As we wish to meet the learning needs in the community, we remain open to adapt to gaps and trends that are identified by the authorities, partners within and outside of literacy circles and naturally our learners and tutors.

Ongoing Programs

1:1 Child, Youth and Adult Volunteer Tutoring

Volunteers provided 1:1 sessions with a variety of learners both in-person (at VLC or a public space) or online. Reading, spelling, writing, math, and general homework support are given. Some matches carried over through the summer, while others are ready to resume, find new tutors or fit into new programs this fall.

Kids E-Reading Club

Volunteers facilitate online reading in groups of 3 children with similar reading levels between grades 2-6 in English, French and English Language Learning.

Adult English Language Conversation Group

Online and in-person sessions of up to five to ten adults with trained English Language Learning facilitators. These learners still need to become more comfortable with the English language in order to progress on to other important skills to integrate into Canadian society.

Digital Learning (aka Tech Tutoring)

1:1 volunteer-led tutoring adapted to the unique needs and goals of each learner. Learners receive support in operating their devices (computers, tablets and smartphones), staying safe online, email and attachments, file management, digital forms, navigating the internet, basic office programs, social media, video conferencing and more. Plans were initiated in fiscal year 22-23 to offer a small group 'beginner' series. The first of these will be held Fall 2023 at VIRCS for newcomers to Canada, with plans for a series in early 2024 to be hosted at VLC. Open to adults of all ages, the average age of participants is 65 and our eldest learner is currently 95 years young!

Intergenerational PenPal Club

Now in its 3rd year, the PenPal Club shifted in 2023 to meet community demand for more age-inclusive options. Rather than matching only youth with seniors, the PenPal club is now open to folks from 10-110! Keeping with the intergenerational theme, PenPals are matched with a minimum 20 year age difference (in some cases decades more!). We have been pleasantly overwhelmed by the response and are working hard to match all registrants. Individuals may participate in the PenPal Club for a few reasons: the joy of creating connections, to practice their literacy skills, or as volunteers to support the learner PenPals. To-date more than 700 PenPal letters have been exchanged!

Family Literacy

This program provides parents or guardians with English Language Learning, while simultaneously engaging their preschool children in integrative literacy approaches. At the end of the respective sessions, the parents and children are brought together to re-enhance the literacy support process. Several groups met at the VLC office on Pembroke Street, on the Saanich peninsula and online. We aim to continue with the program as it was deemed useful and desired by the community. A collaboration is underway with Story Studio on materials and strategies for Family Literacy sessions in the year ahead.

Reading Blast

Reading Blast is a six week after school reading support program for struggling readers in Grades 1-3 and 4-5. The purpose is to address gaps in foundational reading skills created by "COVID lag" and general reading difficulties. Based on "Science of Reading" research, students receive small group and 1:1 targeted instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, high-frequency words, reading strategies, fluency and comprehension. 45 minute in-person learning sessions, twice per week.

- 2 programs piloted in 2022-23 February and March at the VLC Office and July and August in the Westshore at the Juan de Fuca Library.
- 3 programs planned for the 2023-24 school year:

Fall: October-November

Winter: January-February

Spring: April-May

- 3 locations in the South Island: Victoria (VLC office 830 Pembroke Street), Westshore and Sooke
- Discussions with SD61 for implementing at school sites this year as well.

Advantage Tutoring

It has been an exciting year of re-building and growth for the Advantage program. 240 learning sessions were delivered 1:1, primarily in-person, but some were remote. Advantage tutoring is a learner-focused paid tutoring service facilitated by educators, under the supervision of the BC Certified Teacher/Program Coordinator. We have started to implement up-to-date intervention strategies for students with reading disabilities and have widened the scope of learners to support those with more complex learning needs. Many of our learners and two of our teachers have moved on, so we have the challenge of recruiting new tutors and learners for the 2023-2024 school year.

Literacy Assessment

VLC provides diagnostic academic assessments on a fee-paying basis for children and youth in the Greater Victoria area. Assessments are administered by qualified Level B Assessors and identify gaps and learning deficiencies in Language Arts or Mathematics. This permits the parents to understand what level their child is at and in which field they need more support. Four child/youth and two adult Level B Assessments were completed between September 2022 and August 2023.

Programs On Hold

We have not re-entered VIRCC and the schools since pre-pandemic times, as the former is still not admitting external facilitators with the exception of the main educator, and the latter have understandably not been able to assure VLC's volunteer reading supporter's consistent presence at the elementary schools with varying Public Health Office recommendations. VLC continues to keep excellent relations with all three school districts on the South Island.

Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre (VIRCC)

Directed by VIRCC's main educator, VLC volunteer tutors support inmates in classrooms or inmate cells with attaining secondary, post-secondary and practical certificates.

Reading Partners

Reading support for elementary school children that are in the "grey-area" i.e. needing a little extra support to overcome minor reading obstacles. Book bins are in each school, where volunteer Reading Partners select books that are at the appropriate level for the child. Discussions are underway with SD61 Literacy Coordinator for reimplementing this program in schools during the 2023-24 school year.

Programs in the Works

Financial Literacy

In collaboration with ABC Life Literacy, VLC wishes to support firstly adults, and eventually youth, with financial literacy through basic sessions and then supported with trained and experienced volunteer mentors adapting to the individual's circumstances.

Media Literacy

Using Media Smarts materials, youth and adults will learn more about how to navigate the media information blast through the internet and elsewhere in a safe and constructive manner, providing tools to make sound opinions and decisions.

Digital Capacity Building

Through our interaction with the literacy community in the province of British Columbia and various nonprofit and for-profit sector networks, VLC has understood that not all organizations managed to pivot to online communications with ease, or actually has online programming but their clients are not able to follow due to their discomfort with this newer medium. VLC is prepared to support both organizations and their clients to overcome their obstacles towards a smooth and rewarding digital experience. VLC aims to support organizations and their clients where geography has no-bounds.

Depending upon organizational needs, VLC would provide:

- a computer literacy guide
- learner recruitment, assessment and goal setting
- volunteer tutor recruitment, screening and training
- marketing tools to attract learners and tutors

Customizable packages will be in development Fall/Winter 2023/2024.

Fees generated will help subsidize other VLC programs.

Critical Thinking and Presentation Skills

Through conversations with our education network, it was understood that many youth are lacking some skills that are very important in academic and professional situations. VLC is preparing a program primarily for youth in grade 9, with opportunities for older youth and adults, to improve upon their critical thinking skills: being critical of sources, communicating clearly through various mediums in an appropriate manner etc. They can be implemented through the eye of project development, natural and social science learning or increasing business acumen. Once established among the youth, a similar program will be developed for adults.

Our Community

Learners

Our learners are from all generations and walks of life. VLC takes extra steps to provide an environment that is welcoming and inclusive.

Volunteers

What would we do without our volunteers, whether they be tutors, committee or board members? They all contribute so much with their enthusiasm and knowledge!

Though we get prospective volunteer tutors reaching out to VLC, we still need so many more for both in-person and online support. Tech volunteers are in particularly high demand.

Special thanks go to Hank Mathias (VLC Board Director) and his brother-in-law, Stewart, who voluntarily continue to keep our offices in such wonderful working condition!

Committees

These volunteers have stepped up to the plate, providing invaluable support on the organizational side of operations during the fiscal year:

Community Engagement	Programs	Finance	Governance & Administration
Corrinne Kosik	Ruchir Mehndiratta	Janine Durette	Ian Culbertson
Barbara Newton	Holly Kinkaid	Sameer Shah	Hank Mathias
August Miles	Anita Nazareth	Hank Mathias	Dawn Minty
Corrie Groot	Alice Kedves		Erin Halma
Melanie Teh	Laura Hadwin		
	Nisha Agrawal		
	Fionn Yaxley		
	Caroline Ewen		

Community Engagement Committee Report

This committee has met 9 times since the October 2022 AGM. We have met virtually for all meetings and have been joined several times by Janine Hannis (Board Chair) and our ED, Christine.

- We started our year by updating our TOR to match our new committee's name.
- We updated our committee purpose to read: The purpose of the Community Engagement Committee is to fulfill the dual roles of offering ideas and providing support to the Board and Executive Director with respect to community engagement and fundraising projects.
- In the new year we organized an Appreciation event at the VLC offices (Blind Date with a Book); handing out wrapped books with hints to guests and literary named mocktails. We were happy about the theme but a little disappointed in the low attendance. We will revisit our approach and plan another appreciation event for 2024.
- In May, the committee had a guest presentation from Aiden Henry, a local event promoter talking about what was required to tackle a big fundraising event. The committee has used the term 'big event' to be a fundraising event that brings in \$20,000 or more. Board gave support for a future fundraising event.
- Committee members August Mills and Corrie Groot are moving on to other adventures. We thank them for the support and wish them all the best!

Programs Committee Report

- The Program Committee met 6 times since the 2022 AGM. We did not formally meet in September due to member commitments but provided feedback to program proposals via email.
- We reviewed VLC's Strategic Plan for 2023-25.
- VLC's current learner and program evaluation procedures were reviewed and new guidelines drafted, granted Board approval and shared with staff.
- A summary of existing learner evaluations was drafted.
- In October 2023, the Committee agreed that it will continue to focus on evaluation while ensuring that the Committee's scope of the work aligns with the current ToR and VLC's strategic plan.
- We also intend to explore opportunities to weave in reconciliation and embed a diversity, equity and inclusion lens into our work.
- Laura Hadwin and Nisha Agrwal exited the Committee with our gratitude and best wishes.

Finance Committee Report

VLC's Finance Committee held 5 meetings in fiscal 2022-2023.

Auditor, Accounting and Financial Statements

- The Finance Committee reviewed 2021-2022 draft financial statements prepared by Grant Thornton and presented to the AGM in October 2022. No further adjustments were required after the AGM and final 2021-2022 financial statements were approved by the Finance Committee on November 28, 2022.
- The Committee investigated the requirement to charge GST on some of our revenue sources: room rental, social enterprise activities and sale of items. Grant Thornton advised that there is no requirement to charge GST if we don't expect to surpass total revenue of \$30K from these sources of income. We recommended that VLC should register for GST in 2023-2024 if the volume of these types of services approaches \$20K (2022-2023 total is estimated at \$10K).
- The Finance Committee decided to retain Grant Thornton as VLC's auditor for an additional year for following reasons: new Treasurer, Grant Thornton holds VLC's Quickbooks license, fees are reasonable, they are responsive to VLC ad-hoc requests and with no additional charge. Grant Thornton confirmed that their 2022-2023 fees will be \$3,200.
- Discussions were held on allocating VLC overhead costs to VLC programs, and the committee recommendation is to seek guidance from Grant Thornton on CRA thresholds before booking overhead allocations starting in fiscal 2023-2024. We also recommended that Grant Thornton review our T3010 charitable tax returns for fiscal 2022-2023 to ensure we are in compliance with changing CRA guidelines.
- The Finance Committee reviewed the 2023/2024 budget presented by VLC Executive Director and recommended approval to the Board.
- A 2022/2023 Grants Summary was prepared by VLC staff, reviewed by the Finance Committee and presented to the Board for approval.
- The Finance Committee reviewed VLC Profit & Loss statements throughout the year and met on August 31st to review preliminary year-end 2022-2023 financials prior to Grant Thornton adjusting entries.

Governance and Administration Report

During the 2022-23 fiscal year, VLC's Governance and Administration Committee actioned the following pieces of work:

- The committee did a review of all existing VLC policies, and created a shortlist of policy gaps that may be present across the organization.
- The committee developed and implemented a new Cost of Living Policy and Salary Band policy.
- The committee, in collaboration with the finance committee and the ED, reviewed all current salaries, perks, and benefits.
- The committee passed some amendments to VLC's bylaws to better reflect its current operating needs.
- The committee worked on succession planning for board seats (particularly important this year as some long-standing board members are timing out from their board commitments).

Board

VLC relies on the help and guidance of amazing individuals with a wide range of expertise and experience who dedicate many hours of their time to the organization. Each member of the VLC Board is on at least one committee.

Thank you all who participated in 2022-2023 Board:

Janine Hannis (Chair)	Erin Halma (Vice-Chair)
Janine Durette (Treasurer)	Ruchir Mehndiratta (Secretary)
Hank Mathias	Sameer Shah
Holly Kinkaid	Ian Culbertson
Dawn Minty	Corrinne Kosik
Alice Kedves	Melanie Teh

Retiring from the Board in 2023: Janine Hannis, Hank Mathias, Ian Culbertson, Janine Durette, Corrinne Kosik

Though many will be staying on as advisors, we wish them all good luck on their next adventures!

Staff

VLC is fortunate to have such a spirited and efficient team, with plenty of ideas on how we can further support the South Island within literacy.

- Christine Bossi Executive Director
- Sofia Lopez Fuertes Volunteer Literacy Coordinator
- Marla Ilo Intergenerational PenPal Club and Digital Learning Coordinator and Administrator
- Karen Gonzales Advantage Coordinator

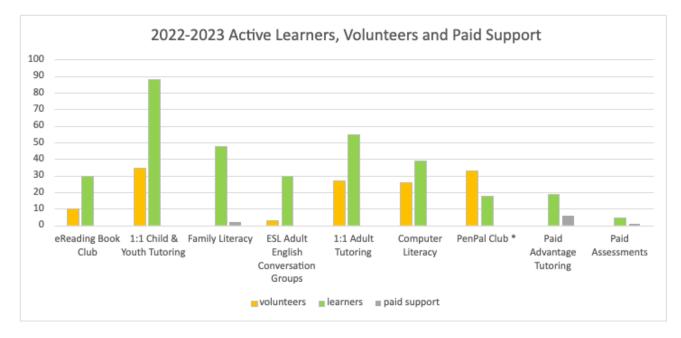
During the summer, Sofia decided to go on new adventures. With this new development, the staff made some changes internally.

In September 2023, we welcomed Katerina Weller to the team:

- Christine Bossi Executive Director
- Marla Ilo Coordinator: Outreach, Tech & PenPal Programs
- Karen Gonzales Coordinator: Child, Youth & Advantage Programs
- Katerina Weller Coordinator: Adult Literacy

Some Statistics

Learners, Volunteers and Staff



This table represents active participants in our programs. There were many more throughout the year that were newly enrolled and/or awaiting matches.

1:1 tutoring for children, youth and adults has been in-demand post-covid. The need to have individually catered learning experiences for those who need that extra support is evident.

Family Literacy was introduced in Spring 2023, for preschoolers aged 2-5 accompanied by their immigrant parents and grandparents. Though this round took place mostly at the VLC office as a trial, we aim to have this program take place all over the South Island for immigrant and non-immigrant families.

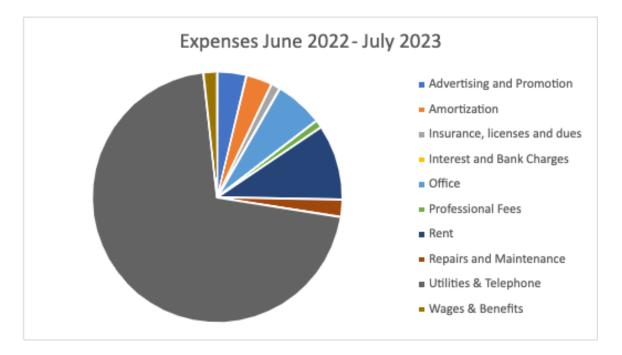
English Language Learning has had 2-3 groups running throughout the year with approximately 5 adults per group. Once the learners have gained enough vocabulary, they are encouraged to become a 1:1 learner, so that they can advance to reading and writing, leaving room for new learners to join the groups.

Computer Literacy caters mostly to older adults, our oldest learner being 95! Sessions are usually once a week for an hour addressing basic tech skills on the device of their choosing. This individualized approach has been deemed as a successful model for this particular demographic. This program has attracted another age group of volunteers as well, namely thirty somethings, though we are seeing some of our tech learners becoming literacy tutors in other programs themselves once they have mastered the skills for online program delivery.

The PenPal Club now includes English language adult learners, which has broadened the scope demographically, while at the same time youth are less enthusiastic to take pen to paper if schools are not directly involved in the project.

Advantage tutoring is a paid service requiring paid teachers to support learners in areas that go beyond the normal "grey area" of learning. Our numbers for this program have actually tripled this past year. It has been noticed that many youth in particular have increased anxiety during the pandemic, therefore requiring a structured learning plan and a professional educator. In addition, we have noticed several adult learners with dyslexia, who are stepping forward and desiring professional support, which VLC is willing and able to address.

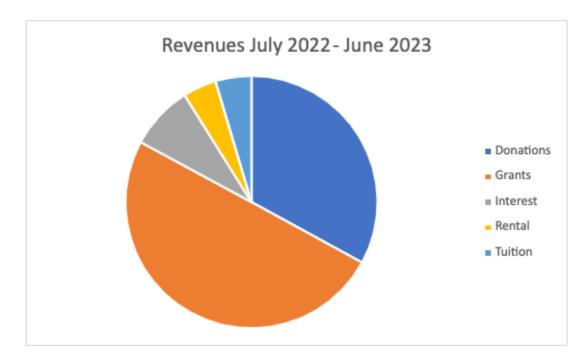
Expenses



As VLC is a service-oriented organization, most VLC's expenses are naturally wages, followed by rent and office expenses. We invested more in advertising this year as we noticed that learners and tutors were not coming out as much as anticipated this year. We also advertised in "Legacy" editions of the two regional newspapers and some marketing videos to attract larger donations.

Thanks to our volunteer tutors, VLC can keep most of its programming free for learners. It should be noted that we have noticed that the English Language Conversation groups have become more difficult to facilitate on a voluntary basis and we are considering paying for teachers to enable continuity of service. Collaborations with one organization that supports newcomers to Canada are being explored around English Language Learning in general, as well as tech tutoring. Such a contract could support the instructor fee.

Funding Sources



VLC is still rather grant dependent but did manage to double donations thanks to the Provincial Employee Community Services Fund and our steadfast, honoured and anonymous major donor.

By hiring a new staff member dedicated to boosting our fee-paying services through Advantage Tutoring, this program has already more than tripled in revenue and is still growing. With this momentum, we hope to cover the Advantage Coordinator's wages and turn a profit in the next fiscal year, which in turn will subsidize other programming.

Thanks to the Greater Victoria Alliance for Literacy securing a grant from the Victoria Foundation, VLC also managed to secure rental of our spare office space and board room, where other non-profit organizations could meet.

Naturally, donations and bequests are always encouraged, as they permit VLC to put the funds to areas that are needed most if not otherwise ear-marked. The Community

Engagement Committee is developing a strategy to secure major gifts through a charity event and cultivating donors.

Partners

We are grateful for the growing number of individuals, organizations and businesses that support literacy by contributing to VLC in so many forms.

VLC is part of various literacy coordination groups, namely: South Island Literacy (Saanich Peninsula, Sooke and West Shore, and Victoria) as well as the Greater Victoria Alliance for Literacy (GVAL). The latter hosts Family Literacy Week in January, where VLC and other literacy organizations contribute with projects and readings to celebrate. Through these meetings we identify needs and gaps, and coordinate programming, improving literacy in our communities.

Supporters

We wish to acknowledge the following (in no particular order):

Decoda Literacy Solutions provides a library of much needed books for adults with literacy issues. The books are ordered by the tutor and land at their doorstep not long afterwards, a very efficient and admired service.

ABC Life Literacy provides access to valuable teaching resources, which we found particularly useful for our digital learning and in preparation for our upcoming financial literacy programming.

VLC also hosts a Little Free Library for children, youth and adults inside our entrance connected to the **Victoria Placemaking Society's Little Free Library network,** which is largely organized by **Teale Phelps Bondaroff**. Anyone may come and take books to either keep or share in the community. In addition, Teale has been immensely helpful in sharing our promotional materials in the community. We have noticed that this has been a successful way to recruit tutors and learners not only through the VLC promotion materials he leaves behind but also through the Placemaking Society's social media posts (examples follow).



Volunteer Victoria has been a reliable and effective manner to recruit volunteers, whether they are tutors, committee or board members. In addition, our staff have benefitted from the many insightful and educational learning sessions, as well as peer meeting groups.

We are also grateful for the **local artists and artisans** who have helped to create a warm and inviting space at our office and recently provided a new image for our thank you cards - see cover photo by Ukrainian Kerasinka aged 15.

Sometimes our community is inspired to support our work through their own **community fundraisers**, showing up with full hearts and big smiles sharing the proceeds of their efforts with VLC. Sometimes it's local book clubs who donate a small amount each meeting to support literacy programming, or a local organization that asks their clientele to donate to a worthy cause. For example, we were the grateful recipients of proceeds from **Hoyne Brewing's** monthly fundraiser, and **Munro Books** customers are invited to donate their points to VLC which we use to purchase books for our programs.

This year, we had a special treat, namely tea towels designed by **Ocean Spray Galiano** artist, **Jenna Falk**, who approached us with this cute and practical idea. <u>https://www.victorialiteracyconnection.ca/tea-towel-fundraiser-for-vlc/</u>

With Thanks to Our Funders

Without you we could not meet the literacy needs of our community!

















BENEFACTION













Ocean Spray Galiano KNITS AND PRINTS





Words From Our Learners and Volunteers

"My daughter had a positive and joyful experience at Reading Blast. She was able to learn in a fun and interactive way. Karen was kind and patient with my daughter. I was provided with material that I could practice with at home. I'm looking forward to my daughter participating in the next Reading Group!"

- parent of youth learner

"Karen, thank you so much for all your help and support this year. Having you believing in our grandson and giving him the encouragement he needs has been invaluable."

- grandparent of youth learner

"My daughter has improved her reading skills, both fluency and comprehension. Her self-confidence, self-esteem and interest in reading for fun has also increased. I highly recommend Advantage Tutoring"

- parent of youth learner

Just wanted to send a quick note to express how grateful I am for my tutor N's help. She is kind, patient and understanding. I have learned many things so far, but there is still more to learn so that I can more fully use emails, set up files, create documents etc.

I had fallen so far behind the general knowledge of computer use that so many of my peers have. It was an impediment to confidence in general and limited my ability to learn through online courses, communicate with family, organizations (ie. my co-op board of which I am a member) etc. I have a real sense of compassion for those who don't know how to read the written word or have to struggle to learn a new language. Computer literacy is essential to get along in today's world.

So, thanks for enrolling me in your program. Kudos to my tutor N as well!

- Tech learner, age 70

I loved my time spent volunteering with the Victoria Literacy Connection. Meeting new learners was always so much fun, and I learned quite a few new skills and programs to keep up with them that I otherwise wouldn't have had the opportunity to! I highly recommend volunteering with the Victoria Literacy Connection to anyone looking to share their knowledge.

- Tech tutor

I have had a few tutors from VLC. And feel that they have done an excellent job in tutoring me on my computer skills, and math skills. during my upgrading journey at Camosun College. from which I graduated. and I also graduated from the Indigenous Family Support program. Being a stroke survivor, I am very glad that I was able to do this with help from VLC. THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH.

- Tech, Literacy/Math learner, age 67

As an octogenarian diagnosed with MCI (Mild Cognitive Impairment) feeling very anxious about how quickly computer skills once mastered had 'disappeared' I was delighted and fortunate to be accepted into the Victoria Literary Connections' programs for one-on-one tutoring via zoom.

With two excellent tutors I recovered the basics and progressed to advanced computer skills, developed my own manual, regained confidence, enjoyed learning anew and graduated full of thanks, appreciation and gratitude.

- Tech Learner age 82

I came across VLC as a resource about 5months after my separation. I found myself after 17yrs of being a stay-at-home mom with a lot of anxiety and insecurity about returning to the workforce.

I had just finished a WorkBC back to work program and still felt computer illiterate. If I had not had such a positive, supportive and immersive experience connecting with VLC, I would not have the confidence to move forward concretely towards launching my own business.

The VLC tutor was friendly, clear in what we were going to cover...

Having a stronger understanding of how to navigate the internet, how to access resources... has been instrumental in feeling like I can move forward with my life with resilience and independence.

Marla guided me through this program with warmth and patience. I'm grateful for her friendly approach. I felt raw this past year with very little time to process the chaos of my personal life... Being treated with respect, dignity and kindness in such a small way was impactful to me. I'm grateful she connected with C as a tutor...

Thank you for making a rough year less so for me with access to computer literacy. Education is empowering.

- Tech Learner age 49

They are earth angels!

- Tech Learner age 59