



Annual General Meeting

November 14, 2024



VICTORIA
Literacy Connection

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 WSÁNEĆ (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

Let us remember: One book, one pen, one child, and one teacher can change the world.

- Malala Yousafzi

Vision

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

Mission

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

Words from the Chair

It has been an honour to serve as Chair for Victoria Literacy Connection's board for the past year, which has been both inspiring and challenging for VLC.

VLC's work is inspiring, as it continues to serve the Greater Victoria community, offering high quality literacy services, primarily in reading, writing, and digital literacy. VLC's dedicated volunteers, staff, and Executive Director ensure learners' literacy needs are met, time and time again. I am continually amazed at, and so grateful to, the number of volunteers that reach out to VLC to support its work and the diversity of skills and knowledge they bring to our organization. I am so thankful to live in a city where so many people believe in the power of learning and knowledge and come together in support of VLC's mission.

However, VLC continues to face challenges funding the programs that our community relies upon. VLC's Executive Director and staff do an incredible job of working within a tight budget, but costs continue to rise or stay high while donations and grants have not kept pace with inflation over the past few years. While there are several ways we plan to address this, the one I am most excited about is being led by the Community Engagement committee – the creation of a signature fundraising event that will bring the community together and support local literacy programs.

I believe that VLC is up to the challenge, and that our community will continue to support the important programming we provide. I am excited to see what 2025 has in store for VLC as VLC continues to work toward ensuring that everyone in Greater Victoria has opportunities to acquire the literacy skills they need to function effectively in today's society.

Sincerely,

Erin Halma

Board Chair

Programs

VLC has programs that are in-person, online and even hybrid models, trying our best to accommodate learners and tutors alike. VLC has noticed that due to covid and screen fatigue, most learners and tutors prefer to meet in-person. Sessions typically take place at the VLC office, partner agencies, public libraries and schools, if not online.

Child Youth Programs 2023 -2024

Child Youth 1:1 Tutoring with Volunteers

In the 2023 – 24 year we continued to support youth Grades 2-12 with reading, writing, spelling, math, and English Language Learning.

In the 2024 – 25 year we are narrowing the focus of new intakes to support with reading in Grades 2-4 only, while continuing to match learners from the waitlist with reading, writing, spelling and math needs. Matches are made on an ongoing basis.

Child ELL Conversation Groups

In the 2023 – 24 year we hosted two conversation groups at the VLC office for 8 summer sessions and another two groups briefly in January 2024. Groups were facilitated by paid qualified ELL instructors. Due to low learner turnout, the winter groups were discontinued.

Reading Partners

We were excited to see the return of our in-school reading support program this year. Two schools in SD62 Sooke completed the eight-week (24 sessions) Winter and Spring 2024 terms and one school in SD61 Victoria participated in the Spring 2024 term.

In the 2024- 25 school year we are hoping to be up and running in seven SD61 Victoria schools and three SD62 Sooke schools by the Spring 2025 term.

eReading Club

We continued our interactive small group on-line reading club with three - six-week (12 session) terms during the 23-24 school year. This club is for learners in Grades 2-6 and was led by volunteer facilitators along with the Program Coordinator.

We are pausing the 2024 fall club and may offer again in 2025, depending on volunteer availability.

Reading Blast

Reading Blast is a fun, interactive, after-school reading group designed to help developing readers in Grades 2-4 improve their reading skills and confidence. Overall results show an increase in students' ability to apply phonemic awareness, phonic knowledge and word attack skills as well as improved reading fluency, expression and stamina. Most importantly, families and learners report an increase in enjoyment, independence and confidence with reading, as well as connection with other learners and their teachers. In the 2023-24 fiscal year, a total of ten eight-week (16 sessions) groups were completed across five locations (VLC Office, Juan de Fuca and Sooke Libraries, and Happy Valley Elementary School). Groups were led mostly by paid facilitators (Advantage Tutoring educators.)

Reading Blast groups in the 24-25 school year will be facilitated by Volunteers (with an education background). We are starting small with one group at the VLC office in Fall 2024 and may offer more in Winter and Spring 2025.

Advantage Tutoring

We continued our paid 1:1 tutoring service in the 23-24 school year, expanding services to a wide variety of learners, educational needs and funding sources. Over two years Advantage Tutoring provided support to thirty-two learners with ten paid tutors/teachers, but with the cost of this paid service a prohibitive factor for most families and the amount of staff time it took to accommodate matches, we decided to discontinue at the end of August 2023 along with Level B Assessments. Although our tutoring efforts and connection has had a great impact for our learners, it was not sustainable as a revenue generating enterprise for supplementing free child/youth programming for VLC.

Adult Programs 2023 -2024

Adult 1:1 Tutoring

We continue to support adults with literacy needs in reading, writing, spelling, math, and course work support. Matches are made on an ongoing basis and continue throughout the year.

Adult ELL Conversation Groups

Last year we hosted 3 conversation groups regularly through the academic year. The three groups met with paid qualified ELL instructors twice a week, for eight weeks, over three terms. The groups were leveled, including a higher-level group who met online in the evenings. The lower-level groups met in person at the VLC office. Several volunteers also hosted small tutoring groups for English Language learners in public, at the VLC office and online.

Adult ELL Drop-in Conversation Circle

In May and June 2024, we hosted a drop-in English Conversation Circle. Learners with all levels of English were welcome to drop-in to practice their English in a relaxed and welcoming environment. The program was hosted by volunteers who brought a variety of topics and activities.

Family Literacy

Family Literacy, which supports preschoolers and their newcomer parents in English reading, is currently on hold due to discontinued funding, but we hope to resume it again as it was such a highly regarded program.

Tech Tutoring (Digital Literacy)

1:1 volunteer-led tutoring adapted to the unique needs and goals of each learner. Support can include basic device use (computers, tablets and smartphones), adult upgrading for school or work, online safety, online job search and application, file management, office programs, video conferencing, social media and more. Now in its 4th year, VLC's Tech Tutoring program is open to adult learners 19+. In that time more than 100 learners have been supported by 58 volunteer tutors. A second series of small group beginner classes for newcomers are planned at VIRCS for Fall 2024.

Intergenerational PenPal Club

Now in its 4th year, there have been over 1,000 PenPal letters exchanged to date! The PenPal Club is open to folks aged 10 to 110 on Southern Vancouver Island. PenPals are matched with a minimum 20-year age difference (in some cases, decades more). PenPals can exchange letters via Canada Post or email, with measures for youth or vulnerable adults regarding safety. PenPals participate for a variety of reasons: the simple joy of connecting with others, practicing literacy skills, or as volunteers to support the learner PenPals.

Our Community

Learners

Our learners are from all generations and walks of life. They are Indigenous, Canadians and Newcomers seeking ways to improve their circumstances or want to educate themselves further. VLC is honoured to accompany each and every one on their respective learning journeys.

Volunteers

Over the past year, we have expanded the opportunities for volunteers to support VLC beyond tutoring. Our tiny (but mighty) staff team has been so grateful for the extra support! Our wonderful volunteer community has responded in many helpful and much-appreciated ways, including:

Drop-in 'navigator' – A weekly time at VLC helping learners with a single topic or task (such as completing digital forms, registering for services, sending emails and more).

On-call Team – An 'as needed' service for learners needing help with a goal that can be achieved in 1-2 sessions. Offered remotely or in-person.

Work bees – helping primarily with getting materials organized for the School Reading Program.

Office support – whatever is needed (organizing the library / leveling books, archiving, or whatever priority tasks are identified by Program Coordinators).

Program volunteers – ongoing or project-based help with some of the administrative tasks in specific programs (identifying potential tutor/learner or PenPal matches, communications, and more).

Communications – supporting social media and other communications.

Tech Working Group – uniquely skilled volunteers are supporting VLC's transition to a new volunteer and client management software solution (Volunteer / Client Impact) to be launched early 2025!

Data management – a well-managed database requires oversight and tending. Thanks to the volunteers who have helped with Keela and preparations for Volunteer Impact!

Volunteer Engagement – We were lucky to have someone with an HR and non-profit background assist with volunteer onboarding this year.

"I'm available tomorrow, what can I do to help?" – We're grateful for the volunteers that have the time and capacity to help as needed / when needed!

Promotion of VLC's programs in the community – from delivering flyers to Little Free Libraries and service organizations in their communities, to setting up their own display at this year's Moss Street Paint-In.

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 2023-2024 Board:

Erin Halma (Chair)	Holly Kinkaid (Vice-Chair)
Donna Ellis (Treasurer)	Caroline Ewen (Secretary)
Melanie Teh	Sameer Shah
Kathryn O'Shaughnessy	Fionn Yaxley
Ruchir Mehndiratta	Alice Kedves

Retired from the Board in 2024: Melanie Teh, Sameer Shah & Alice Kedves.

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
Sameer Shah	Fionn Yaxley	Donna Ellis	Holly Kinkaid
Barbara Newton	Alice Kedves	Ruchir Mehndiratta	Kathryn O'Shaughnessy
Janine Hannis	Caroline Ewen	Erin Halma	
Melanie Teh	Laurie Bogner		
	Franca Pastro		

Community Engagement Committee Report

This committee is comprised of two past board-chairs and two directors. VLC is still exploring a manner to have a successful annual signature event. The Belfry Theatre has generously agreed to let VLC use their facility for an annual fundraiser, the first one being on May 30th, 2025. As

this will be a bit of an operation, volunteers from the community will be recruited from various sectors to support in putting it all together and through event participation. Stay tuned!

Financial Committee Report

VLC's Finance Committee held 5 meetings in fiscal 2023/24 during, which it completed the following:

- Recommended significant changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference to more appropriately reflect the governance role of the Committee and its relationships to the Executive Director and to the Board.
- Reviewed quarterly financial reports comparing actual results to budget, identified when significant corrections were required prior to presentation to the Board, and highlighted significant variances (e.g. shortfall in grant revenues) to the Board.
- In consultation with the ED, made investment decisions including the purchase of GICs in November and the repayment of the CERB loan, and subsequent redemption of some GICs to meet VLC's cash flow needs.
- Further clarified VLC's status and responsibilities regarding the collection of GST on some revenue sources.
- Recommended a change in the approval process for expense claims submitted by the Executive Director so that these are approved before payment is initiated.
- Reviewed the draft annual operating budget for 2024/25 presented by the Executive Director, assessed key assumptions
- Decided to continue with Grant Thornton as external accountant for preparation of the 2023/24 year-end financial statements.
- Reviewed the June 2024 year-end financial statements prepared by Doane Grant Thornton, supported the underlying basis of accounting.

Governance and Administration Committee Report

During the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the VLC Governance and Administration Committee undertook the following work:

1. The committee reviewed its Terms of Reference
2. The committee created a new policy template and began applying to existing policies
3. The committee updated the Incident Report
4. The committee Identified potential future performance metrics for ED role

Programs Committee Report

1. For the past year the Programs Committee worked on:

- Updating the Committee's Terms of Reference
- Creating the Feedback Framework Summary Report from responses to the Learner Exit Survey, the purpose of which is to understand strengths/weaknesses in programming; summarize positive feedback to celebrate wins and to promote programming to external audiences, including community partners & funders, and; to understand and learn from negative feedback. The final draft will be shared with the Board and staff by December 2024.
- Onboarding new Committee members to VLC programs and processes (e.g. SharePoint).

2. The Programs Committee met nine times throughout the year. All meetings were virtual.

3. Committee membership fluctuated over the year. At the end of the summer, two members had to step away and two additional members are likely to join in November

The Committee will finish the year with five members.

4. The Committee is planning to discuss what the focus for next year will be at our next meeting on November 18. There is potential for the Committee to pick up/advance several of the opportunities identified through the summary of the Learner Exit Surveys, including strategies to increase response rates to the Learner Exit Survey; tailoring the survey(s) (or alternate forms of assessment) to better suit the needs of different learner types, and; integrating program evaluation more closely into class cycles.

5. Thank you to the team.

Staff

The team has remained constant, working together in strengthening literacy on Southern Vancouver Island.

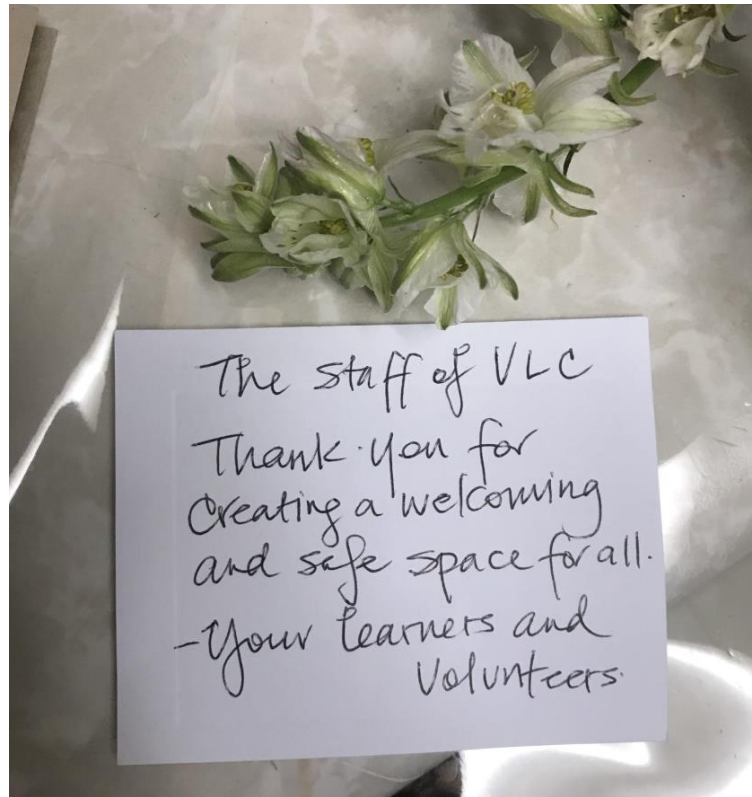
Christine Bossi - Executive Director

Marla Ilo - Intergenerational PenPal Club, Digital Learning and Outreach Coordinator with Admin.

Karen Gonzales - Child and Youth Coordinator plus Advantage Coordinator

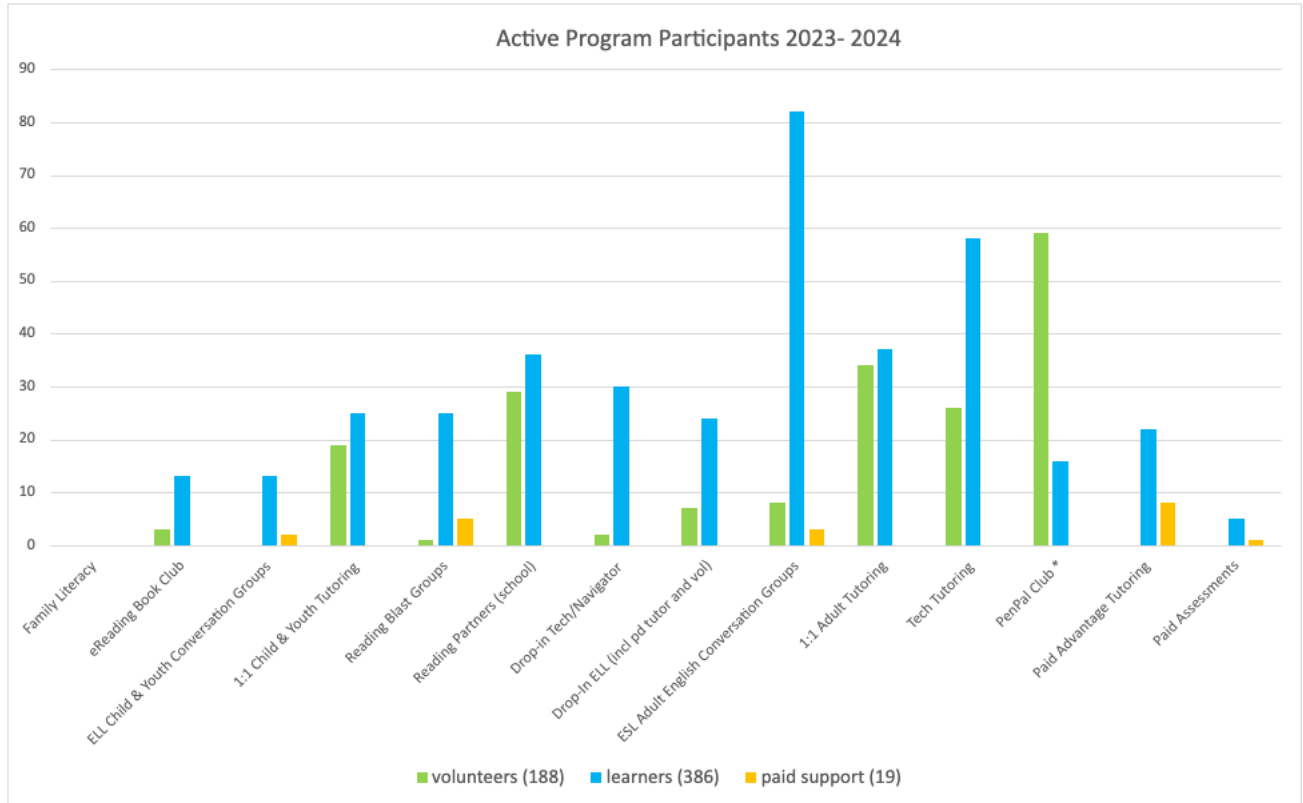
Katerina Weller - Adult Coordinator

Staff have received many kind words from our learners and tutors, including the picture below. Where staff make every effort to make services accessible to all.



Some Statistics

Learners, Volunteers and Staff



This table represents active participants in our programs. There were many more people throughout the year that were newly enrolled and/or awaiting matches. Word seems to be getting around about VLC services, in addition to establishing new service agency partnerships

Child Literacy: VLC had returned to in-school Reading Partners support post-pandemic and is growing its numbers through a collaboration with SD61 (Victoria) and SD62 (Sooke). VLC will be approaching SD63 (Saanich) for Fall 2024. Sessions also took place after school at the VLC office through the intensive Reading Blast program. Both programs are increasing in numbers as many children are still feeling the effects of “covid-lag”. Traditional 1:1 tutoring continues to take place, where some are getting extra support with English Language learning.

Adult Literacy: VLC received many referrals from the two immigrant agencies in Victoria and post-secondary institutions, whereby it was determined wise to support the immigrant agencies with literacy capacity-building support for their volunteer tutors, to better advance their mandates, in addition to clarifying roles between agencies to avoid duplication of services. VLC will continue to provide English Language Learning in a general manner in community. 1:1 learning in general literacy remains steady. VLC has been approached by

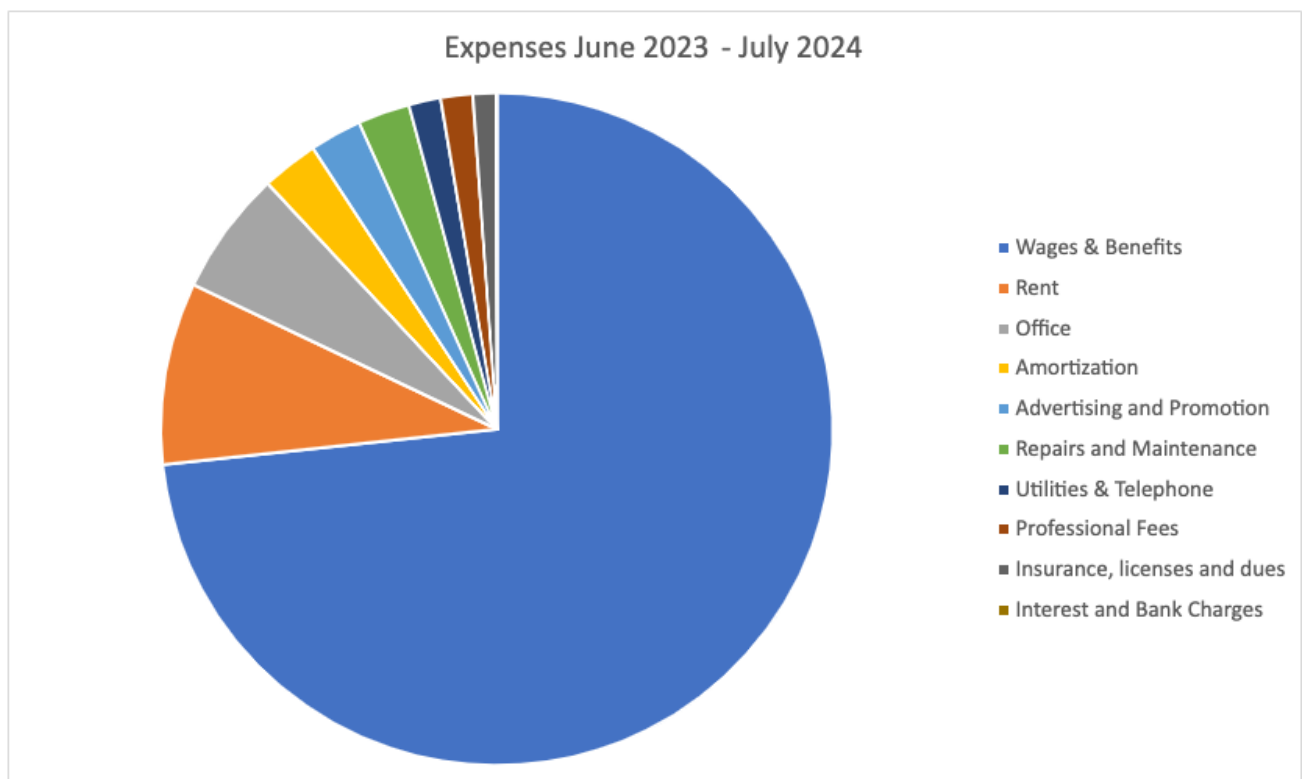
multiple partner agencies wanting to support their clients' literacy journey such as Foundry Victoria operated by Island Health. These agencies have small training budget line items that are fortunately being offered to VLC for services rendered. In addition, VLC aims to resume its activities at Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre.

Tech Tutoring: The average age of learners was 65 this year, consistent with previous years (65-70). One-to-one sessions are generally held once weekly, and matches are made for 3-month blocks. Tutoring can support basic digital literacy skills on the learner's devices of choice. Topics and tutoring styles are customized to the unique needs of the learner.

PenPal Club: For this table PenPals are represented as volunteers or learners, however, many PenPals do not fall into either category but are instead 'Community PenPals'. In this table 'volunteers' = all adult PenPals that are not learners and 'learners' = all youth and adult learner PenPals. This fiscal year 75 PenPals exchanged approximately 375 letters.

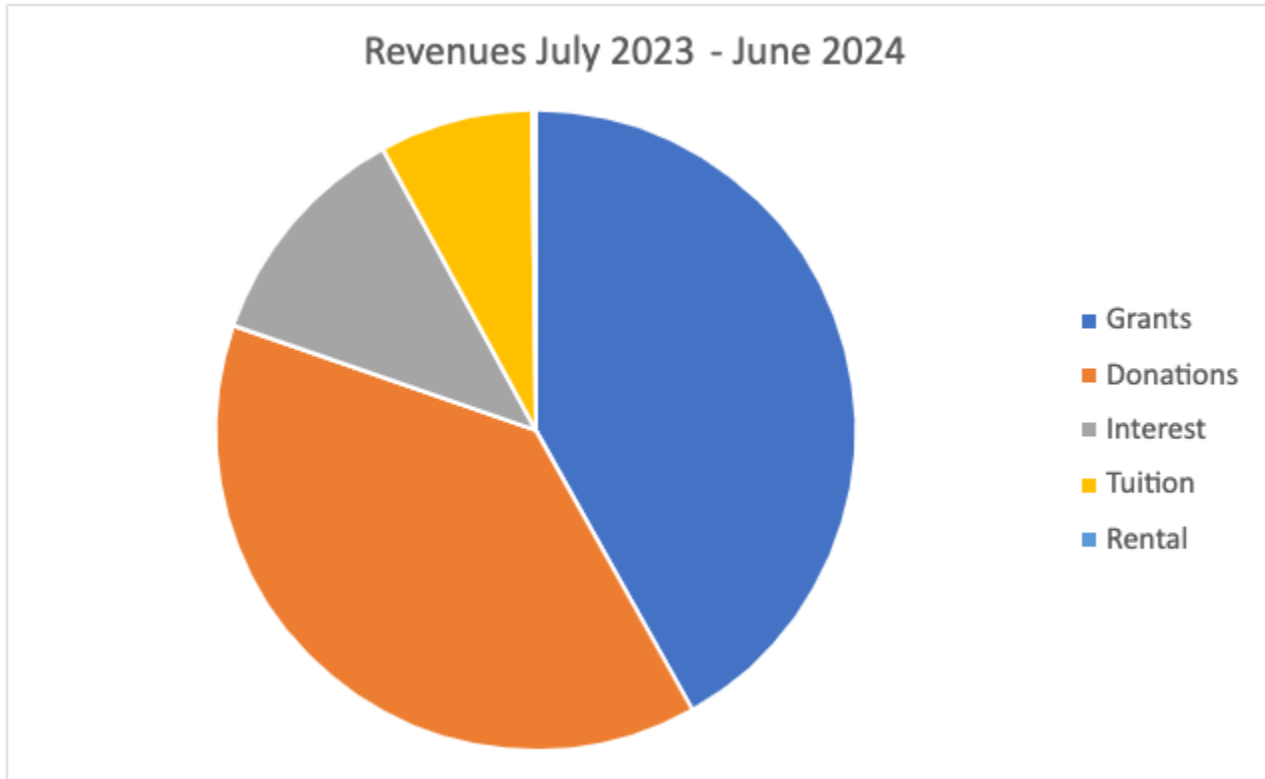
Advantage Tutoring and Literacy Assessments: After years of trying to earn an income through our Advantage Tutoring and Literacy Assessments, and despite increasing our efforts in the last couple of years, it was deemed more effort than actual gains. It was decided that VLC should pivot and try to cover some operational costs through fee-paying services for clients and employees of regional agencies.

Expenses



As VLC is a service-oriented organization, most VLC's expenses are naturally wages for staff and paid tutors. Since volunteers facilitate most of the programming, wages mainly for core staff managing programs. Next highest expenses are rent, office expenses and professional services that include IT support and accounting.

Funding Sources



VLC was less successful with grants this year, making for a shortfall in the budget, but it is reassuring to see a steady stream of both private and corporate donations. VLC will continue mine grant databases, where it is hoped that more relevant grants might be attained as the regional grants are no longer sufficient. Further cultivation of donations and larger gifts will take place through VLC's upcoming fundraising event May 30th, 2025, and other methods identified through our fundraising strategy.

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

February at Hillside Mall, where VLC and other literacy organizations contribute 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 provided by **Teale Phelps Bondaroff's Little Free Library network**. Anyone may come and take books to either keep or share in the community. In addition, Teale has been helpful in sharing our promotional materials with 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 social media posts as follows.

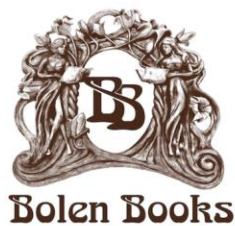
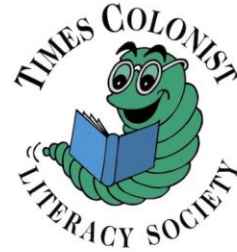
Volunteer Victoria has been a reliable and effective manner to recruit volunteers, whether they are tutors, committee or board members. In addition, our staff have benefitted from the many insightful and educational learning sessions, as well as peer meeting groups.

We are also grateful for the **local artists and artisans** who continue to create a warm and inviting space at our office and provided a new image for our thank you cards - see cover photo (Sam aged 14).

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.

With Thanks to Our Funders

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



Words From Our Learners and Volunteers

Adult Literacy

[My tutor's] help has literally been life changing! Can't say enough good things about [my tutor] and Victoria literacy connection! I have told so many people about this resource and how life changing it has been for me to get help with my Math 11.

- Adult learner, age 28

I had my first lesson with [my tutor] this morning. I cried on my way back as I felt so fortunate to have you and her. Thank you so much for introducing me such a wonderful teacher! I really appreciate it. My friend just now contacted me and said she has started in your organization and felt fantastic. I don't know how to express my gratitude but you changed my life.

- Adult learner, age 46

I was so pleased with my first contact with Marla. She was very pleasant and helpful. Then she found a perfect match for tutoring me. In the future, I would like to volunteer with VLC because I understand you are a great organization and you offer great help to the community.

- Adult tech learner, age 77

I feel very lucky to have found this program! It has opened up my world!

- Adult Tech Learner, age 59

Thank you for creating a welcoming and safe space for all your learners and volunteers

- VLC volunteer

Thank you, Literacy Connection! My dreams are coming true. Thanks for the assistance.

- Adult learner, age 49

Child and Youth Literacy

"Volunteering with the Reading Partners program was the highlight of my week for the spring session. Supporting readers as they discover new words and stories was simply a delight and I am very much looking forward to the next session."

- Reading Partners Volunteer

"We are so grateful to the Reading Partners who have supported our school this past spring. To see the students grow as readers and receive some valuable extra one on one time was fantastic. Looking forward to growing the program in our building."

- Reading Partners School Administrator

"Everything about this program is awesome!"

- eReading Student

"My daughter was experiencing reading challenges and did not enjoy reading at all. She worked with Karen, her Advantage Tutor, for several months and gained skills, confidence, and a love of reading. I highly recommend this program!"

- Advantage Tutoring Parent

