



Opening the world of learning in our community.



Youth artist: Josephine Bissig (11)

Annual Report

November 13, 2025

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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

"If you grow up in a household where there are books, where you are read to, where parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins read for their own pleasure, naturally you learn to read. If no

one close to you takes joy in reading, where is the evidence that it's worth the effort?"

- Carl Sagan

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 skills, including reading, writing, and math, by providing tutoring and a variety of other programs.

Words from the Chair

It is hard to believe this will be my final year on the VLC Board. It has been a pleasure to serve on the Board and to see all the incredible work that VLC is doing.

As we gather for this year's Annual General Meeting, I am reminded of the profound impact that literacy has on individuals and communities alike. Literacy is more than the ability to read and write—it is a gateway to opportunity, empowerment, and connection. It enables people to engage in society, access essential services, pursue education and employment, find meaning and enjoyment, and express themselves with confidence. Strengthening literacy in our community today means a stronger community tomorrow.

At Victoria Literacy Connection, we have seen firsthand how literacy transforms lives. Whether it's a child discovering the joy of reading or an adult gaining the skills needed for a new career, each story is a testament to the importance of our mission.

This year has been one of growth, resilience, and collaboration. None of our achievements would be possible without the dedication of our volunteers and staff. Your passion, creativity, and commitment have made a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve. Thank you for your invaluable contributions.

I am excited to see what 2026 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. Together, we are building a more inclusive and literate community—one word, one learner, one book at a time.

With gratitude,

Erin Halma

Chair, Victoria Literacy Connection

Programs

Child Programming

Child Youth 1:1 Tutoring with Volunteers

This year we narrowed the focus available to new learners. We offered support with reading in Grades 2-4 only, while continuing to match learners from the waitlist with reading, writing, spelling and math needs. Matches were made on an ongoing basis.

Reading Partners

In the 2024- 2025 school year, 9 schools from SD61 Victoria and from SD62 Sooke participated in the Reading Partners Program, where volunteers provided reading support for learners in grades 2-4 during school hours. Three 8-week sessions were run at each school where tools are used to increase students' ability to apply phonemic awareness, phonic knowledge and work attack skills as well as improved reading fluency, expression and stamina.

eReading Club

This online program provides reading support in small group settings with three learners and a volunteer facilitator where they read digital stories and discuss content to advance comprehension. Though it was very important during the pandemic, interest in this program has waned. Therefore, the 1:1 online and in-person tutoring is now encouraged as a replacement.

Reading Blast

Starting as an after-school program in 2023 for grades 2-4, it was a great success. However, the following year's learner participation was low. It was therefore decided to focus more efforts on Reading Partners during school hours, which uses similar learning approaches.

Family Literacy

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

Adult Programming

Adult 1:1 Tutoring

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

Foundry Victoria

VLC collaborates with Island Health's partner, Foundry Victoria, to provide 1:1 tutoring for their young adult clients at the organization's offices in downtown Victoria. Our partnership with this organization began in September 2024 and has been very successful so far. Young adult learners are registered in high school and post-secondary courses or are preparing for other academic assessments. They are supported by coordinators in Work and Education Program at Foundry Victoria

Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Center

This year we have continued working with the representatives from VIRCC and SD 62 to have VLC volunteers return to tutoring in the on-site school program.

Adult ELL Conversation Groups

VLC offered an online English conversation group for a small group of beginner-level learners in the fall of 2024. English Language Learning for small groups is now on hold.

VIRL Sooke Branch

In collaboration with the Sooke Library, a VLC volunteer facilitated an English Conversation Circle once a week in the library. VLC participated in this program for the full year; however, the program has been put on hold due to lack of attendance.

Financial Literacy

In collaboration with Junior Achievement BC (JABC), VLC hosted a two-part Financial Literacy workshop. The Personal Finance workshop was for young adults aged 16 – 25 years old. There has been a request for financial literacy programming for seniors, which is being considered.

Drop-In Program

In April, we launched a Drop-in Program for VLC's adult clients and volunteers. The program takes place once a week in the VLC office. Clients and volunteers attend to get their questions answered, get support with coursework, or get support completing tasks for which literacy is a barrier.

On-Call Tutoring

We offer the opportunity for learners to ask for tutoring for one or two sessions to get immediate help with a task.

Tech Tutoring

Our digital literacy program, now in its fifth year, offers personalized, one-on-one support tailored to each learner's goals and experience level. Participants receive help using their own devices—whether computers, smartphones, or tablets—in ways that are meaningful to their daily lives. Adults join the program to build skills for personal use, education, or employment.

Popular topics include online safety, job searching and applications, file management, office software, video conferencing, social media, typing and more.

In 2024–25, the program supported 77 learners, including participants in our volunteer-led 1:1 matches and the new monthly Computer and Job Skills Class at WorkBC Victoria (a social enterprise venture). This work was made possible by 30 dedicated volunteer tutors and one paid instructor.

This year, we also introduced foundational content on artificial intelligence—an increasingly important topic in today's digital world.

Inter-Generational PenPal Club

Now in its fifth year, the Intergenerational PenPal Club connects people ages 10 to 110 across Southern Vancouver Island through letter writing by mail or email. Each PenPal pair includes at

least a 20-year age difference to support meaningful intergenerational connections. Youth and vulnerable adults are matched with screened VLC volunteers to ensure a safe and positive experience.

This year, we welcomed more young adults than ever and saw a rise in referrals from partner organizations supporting people with diverse abilities. In 2024–25, 109 individuals were matched with PenPals, and since the program began, over 1,800 letters have been exchanged!

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 judgment-free.

Volunteers

We truly couldn't do what we do without our amazing volunteers! From tutoring and administration to Board and Committee work, volunteers keep VLC running strong. This year, they contributed over 3,000 hours to support literacy in our community.

We're so grateful to everyone who steps forward to help. Volunteers support VLC in many ways, including:

- Tutoring – one-to-one or small group support
- Drop-in navigators – helping learners during weekly drop-in sessions
- On-call team – short-term one-to-one help (1–2 sessions)
- Work bees – organizing Reading Partners materials
- Office / Admin support – helping with tasks at VLC's office
- Program support – assisting Program Coordinators
- Communications – helping with social media and outreach
- IT solutions – coding for custom tools and systems
- Data management – maintaining Keela and Better Impact
- Promotions – sharing VLC info around the community
- Workshops – creating and leading sessions for learners or volunteers
- Board and Committees – our Board includes 10–12 active members and four Committees: Programs, Finance, Governance and Administration, and Community Engagement

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 2024-2025 Board:

Erin Halma (Chair)	Holly Kinkaid (Vice-Chair)
John Connell (Treasurer)	Caroline Ewen (Secretary)
Donna Ellis	Deborah Begoray
Kathryn O'Shaughnessy	Fionn Yaxley
Ruchir Mehndiratta	Jodi Mucha
Sergio Aguirre	Renu Gill

Retired from the Board in 2025: Caroline Ewen, Donna Ellis, Jodi Mucha, Sergio Aguirre, and Renu Gill

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
Fionn Yaxley	Caroline Ewen	John Connell	Holly Kinkaid
Barbara Newton	Alesha Bogdan	Donna Ellis	Kathryn O'Shaughnessy
Janine Hannis	Franca Pastro	Ruchir Mehndiratta	Deborah Begoray

Community Engagement Committee Report

The committee planned VLC's first annual fundraiser, which took place at the Belfry Theatre on May 30th facilitated by Benji Duke's Quiz This! Sponsorships and in-kind donations for the donation table were collected. Four teams took part in the quiz competition: one from the Dock, one from Paper Street Theater (the winner), and two teams recruited from the audience. After the show, there was a VIP event with chocolate and whiskey tasting facilitated by Sirene Chocolates and Artemis Whiskey respectively. Funds were brought in, new connections in the

community were made, and much enjoyment was had. We look forward to raising more funds at next year's event scheduled for May 29th, 2026.



Beni Duke and two of the four teams battling it out in the Quiz This! game.

A special thanks goes to the fundraising event's sponsors and donors.



Programs Committee Report

- Onboarding new committee members & updates to TOR

New members were oriented to the committee's mandate, priorities in recent years, and ongoing initiatives. The committee met to discuss and propose amendments to the Terms of Reference, which were accepted by the Board. Going forward, there are opportunities to further refine the committee Terms of Reference to further clarify mandate and responsibilities, as well as to articulate expectations for the level of committee member engagement needed to ensure productive, collaborative work.

- Meetings with VLC Executive Director & Staff to understand needs

The committee met with VLC's Executive Director and the adult literacy coordinator to better understand where committee efforts could contribute to VLC program success. An opportunity related to resource development for onboarding of new volunteers surfaced but paused in early 2025 due to evolving priorities. Going forward, there may be further opportunities for the committee to support staff with project components related to volunteer onboarding and resource development.

- Committee review of Life Skills programming

In early 2025, the committee carried out a review of new proposed programming, the "Life Skills Workshop Series", drawing on information shared by VLC's Executive Director (including a program overview, budget) to assess proposed programming for alignment with VLC mission and financial plan. This assessment was consolidated into a document that included a Q&A section to outline key questions the committee asked in relation to the proposed programming. Going forward, the committee aims to formalize this new program review process and is currently developing a process guide to consolidate understandings related to steps, roles, and responsibilities for new program review at VLC.

- Opportunities to contribute to evaluation framework(s), processes in 2026

It is likely that the committee will focus energy on supporting development/refinement of program evaluation frameworks for child literacy programming in 2026. The committee will work closely with the Board Chair, Executive Director, and outgoing Committee Chair to support the onboarding of new members and facilitate transition of ongoing work items.

Finance Committee Report

The Committee held 5 meetings during the fiscal year.

At each meeting, to-date financial statements compared to budget were reviewed and discussed with the ED. As part of the discussion, a list of grants and major donations received/anticipated was reviewed and during the year a cash flow projection was added.

The Committee also:

- reviewed and confirmed the Finance Committee Terms of Reference,
- discussed and put in place reporting for a grant received on behalf of GVAL for VLC to be its host organization,
- reviewed the VLC Cost of Living Program for staff wages and recommended an amendment to the Board as well as the Fiscal 2025/26 adjustment,
- reviewed and recommended to the Board the draft Fiscal 2025/26 Budget,
- reviewed the draft Fiscal 2024/25 financial statements compiled by Doane Grant Thornton and recommended they be approved by the Board.

Governance and Administration Report

The committee worked on the following issues:

- Renewal of office lease
- Planning of strategic plan exercise 2026-2028
- Review of policies and explored new additions as required

Staff

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

- Christine Bossi - Executive Director
- Marla Ilo - Intergenerational PenPal Club and Digital Learning Coordinator and Administrator
- Karen Gonzales - Youth Coordinator
- Katerina Weller - Adult Coordinator

Karen left our team in the summer of 2025 to become a full-time grandma. We will miss her!



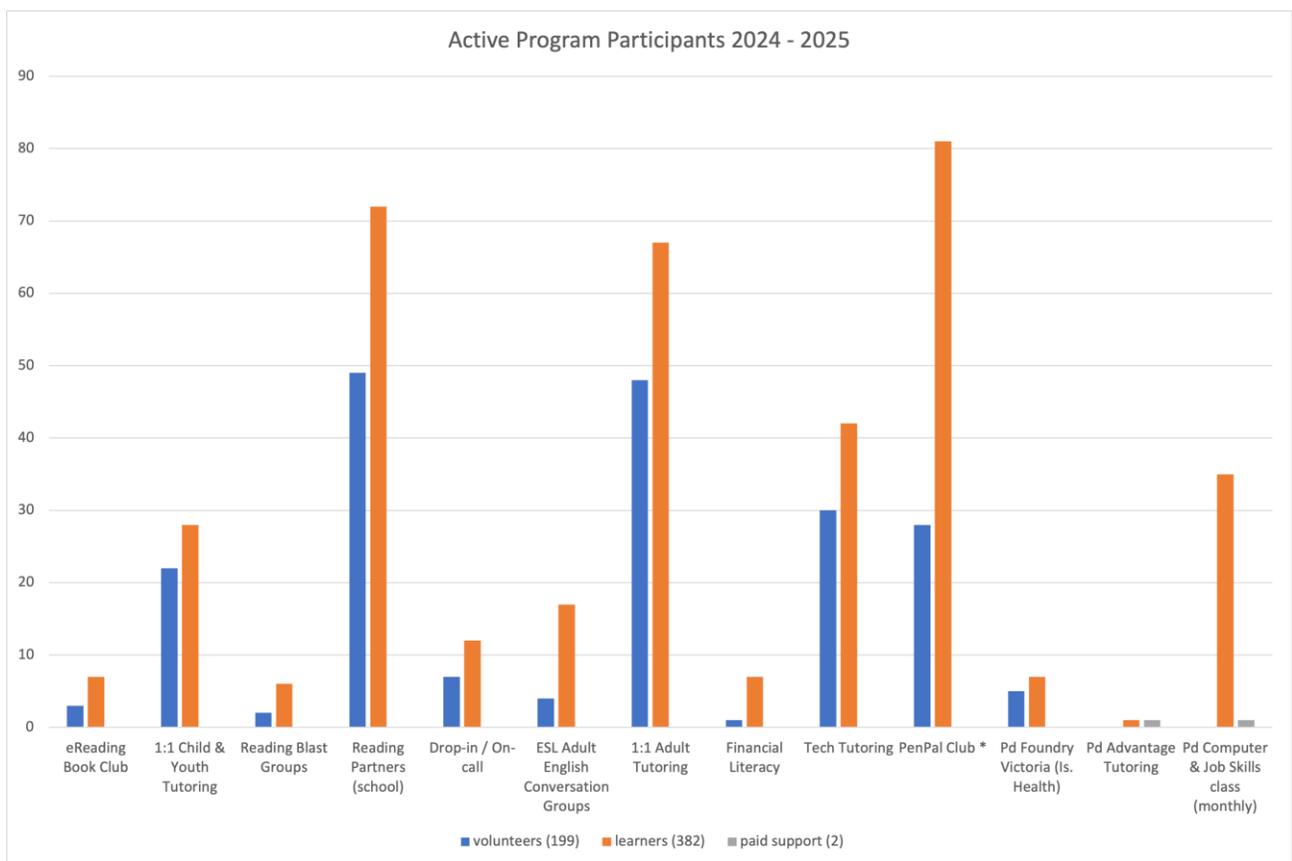
The VLC Dream Team!

from l. to r. Christine Bossi (ED), Marla Ilo (All-Knowing Office Super Woman), Karen Gonzales (Youth Literacy Torchbearer) and Katerina Weller (Adult Literacy Champion)

Statistics

Below are some statistics that provide an overview of all operations.

Learners, Volunteers and Staff



VLC reaches more learners through service provider partnerships, where tutors meet the learners in the safe spaces created by the service provider such as elementary schools (Reading Partners), Work BC Victoria employment centre (computer classes) and the Foundry (adult literacy). 1:1 tutoring is still an important program to help with individual issues, giving learners the ability to get the leg up in their learning journey. Matching has proven to be complicated as learners, especially children, are not always keen to meet when soccer and dance activities are so much more fun! VLC tutors show that reading can be fun too, through books that interest the individual, games and animated and confidence-building interaction.

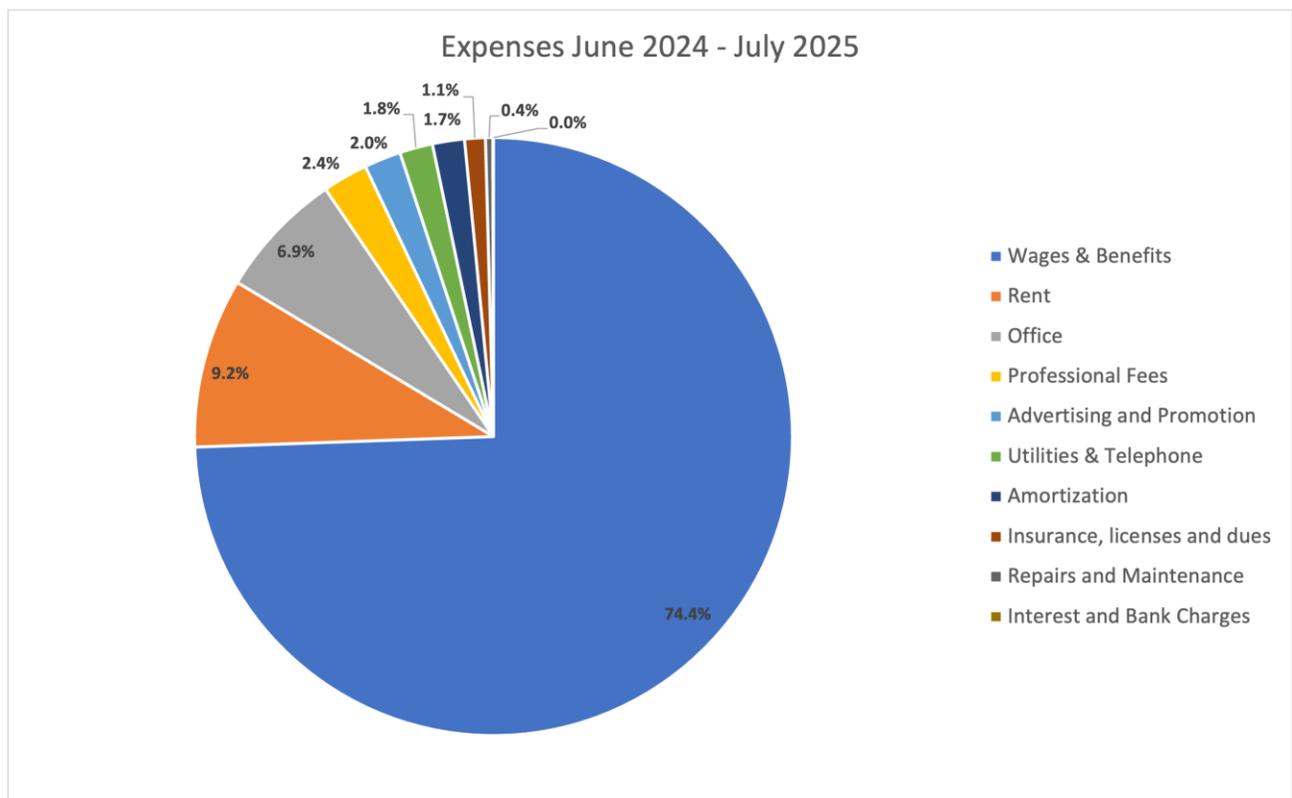
Tech Tutoring remains an important program especially for seniors, who wish to keep up with the times, navigate the internet safely and gain access to important resources.

The weekly drop-in for adults, who just need to get help with “that one thing”, and financial literacy are new developments and are gaining traction.

The Inter-Generational PenPal Club, which started during the pandemic, is still going strong where some of our senior pen pals have multiple correspondents, connecting generations as well as communities.

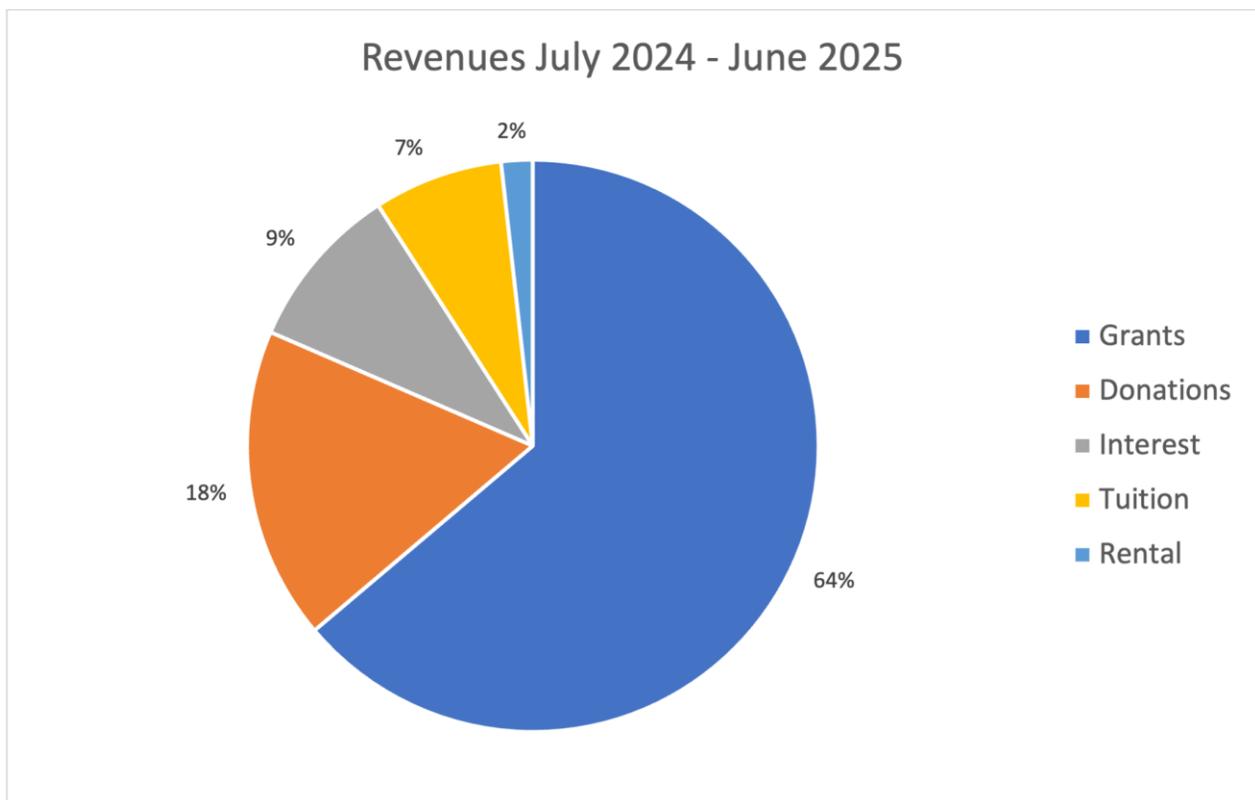
Tutors are very educated, experienced and capable, so much so that they switch between VLC programs, showing their commitment to literacy and increasing the amount of time volunteers stay with VLC. They are also excellent volunteer recruiters!

Expenses



As VLC is a volunteer facilitated service provider where no goods are purchased and distributed, wages and administration are the biggest expenses. Marketing costs are kept to a minimum by using social media, newsletters, flyers in Little Free Libraries, press releases and encouraging community engagement.

Income



VLC receives most of its funding through regional grants, while community donations account for almost a fifth of its income. Interest depicts earnings from GICs. Tuition has increased through a contract with Work BC Victoria for facilitated group computer learning sessions for adults seeking employment. Other similar contracts, where various paid literacy services could be provided, are being sought. Rental is due to space and office usage fees paid by non-profits.

Partners

VLC is grateful for the growing number of individuals, organizations and businesses that support literacy by contributing to VLC in so many forms. Below is a special mention of partnerships that have been especially beneficial to VLC's program facilitation.

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 for our adult literacy programming

The Little Free Library Network (LFL), through Greater Victoria Placemaking, provides books for our own LFL, distributing VLC's program flyers and including VLC in community fundraising opportunities.

Volunteer Victoria supports volunteer organizations with volunteer recruitment, capacity-building training courses, promotion of services, advocacy and more. Non-profits would be struggling far more without them!

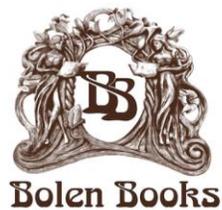
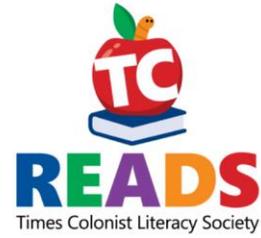
School Districts SD61 Victoria and SD62 Sooke have been extremely helpful in facilitating access to learners in elementary schools that need the most support in our community.

VLC is part of various literacy coordination groups, primarily the **Greater Victoria Alliance for Literacy (GVAL)** network of regional literacy providers. Through these meetings we identify needs and gaps and coordinate programming for southern Vancouver Island. It also hosts Family Literacy Week in January, where VLC and other literacy organizations contribute with projects and readings to celebrate.

VLC also coordinates with **many social service providers** supporting seniors, youth, the unemployed, individual working on their mental health etc., whereby there are mutual referrals of clients so that our learners get the best possible support available in our community.

With Thanks to Our Program Funders

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



Words From Our Learners and Volunteers

"I am an adult with a very low level of English. With you, I found support and hope. I felt I am not alone in this journey of learning in a new country. Thank you, VLC, for believing in me. Thanks to everyone in your organization — you don't just teach English, you help entire families move forward and build a better life."

- Adult ELL learner (49), small-group learning (spring 2025)

"VLC was amazing, the staff was super helpful and went above and beyond to find a tutor that fits your needs. Highly recommended! Thank you VLC Team."

- Adult literacy learner (53), 1:1 Tutoring and Drop-in Program (Jun 2025)

"When VLC knew that I needed to take an English exam, the staff was so helpful and helped me to find a tutor quickly. The tutor is patient and professional. He provided lots of feedback and support to help me to pass the exam. I highly appreciate their effort."

- Adult 1:1 literacy learner (Nov 2024)

"I really appreciate the tutoring I had with you. I would not have passed my high school equivalency without them. The help I received with my cell phone and tablet was really valuable."

- Adult digital literacy learner (Dec 2024)

"The penpal program has been an awesome experience. It was my first time doing anything of the sort, and I have recommended it to several people I know. I discovered the program via a postcard that was left in a little library near my house and decided to register on a whim. The registration process was not too difficult, and the people were friendly and kind. Almost 2 years later, my penpal and I are still corresponding once a month or so and those letters always make my day."

- PenPal aged 21, matched for 2 years

I have met an incredible young person, learned more about their passions, had a snapshot of their life and received some beautiful, thoughtful writing. Being a pen pal has introduced me to new perspectives, fresh ideas, and confirmed values that I now know, transcend generations. I treasure this experience. Thank you for making it possible.

- PenPal aged 67, matched for 2 years

"I found the Reading Partners experience rewarding. The students on the whole were engaged and several of them showed great progress over the year. On my last day in May, I had one of the students that I had on my first day in November and her progress was remarkable. Even the teacher commented on how much her reading had improved over the months."

- VLC Reading Partners Volunteer

"Everyone was so accommodating to the changes that were needed due to working in an elementary school. This flexibility is needed and appreciated with diverse groups of children. Every volunteer came in ready to read and always brought the energy! Thank you very much!"

- Reading Partners School Liaison – SD61

"The VLC volunteers were engaged and professional. My students looked forward to reading with them each day."

- Reading Partners Classroom Teacher – SD61