



**Written Submission for the
Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the
2021 Federal Budget**

By: The Dollywood Foundation of Canada

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – Support early literacy initiatives

The government, with leadership from Employment and Social Development Canada, Canada Child Benefit/Family Benefit and/or Early Learning-Child Care Provincial agreement, support early literacy initiatives. We recommend government support and funding for non-profit organizations that provide evidence-based, effective early literacy programming and resources that fill the widening gap created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation 2 – Improve school readiness and literacy outcomes with book ownership in the early years

Book ownership is directly linked to early childhood literacy development and school readiness. Presently 25% of Canadian households do not own a single book.¹ We propose the government support and fund book ownership for infants and preschool-age children to help offset the long-term consequences caused by decreased access to early childhood educational support.

Recommendation 3 – Prioritize children’s social-emotional development, mental health and resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic, and beyond

Decades of research have established a link between a child’s exposure to trauma and its effect on their neurological and behavioural development. Children under five are living through the coronavirus crisis during a critical time in their development. The long-term impact will be felt for some time and it is disproportionately affecting those who are already vulnerable, especially our youngest children. Support for our most vulnerable and youngest children needs to be prioritized during the crisis response and to be delivered using an approach that can provide continuity as we move on to the recovery phase.

¹ First Book Canada (2020) <https://www.firstbookcanada.org/the-need/>

Literacy is Critical to Canada Economic Development

Education is an equalizer! Research shows that our economy is greatly enhanced when our citizens have higher literacy levels: a one per cent increase in average literacy scores leads, over time, to a three per cent increase in GDP per capita and a five per cent increase in labour productivity. **In Canada, that could mean another \$50 billion per year in GDP.**²

Effective literacy skills open the doors to more educational and employment opportunities enabling people to pull themselves out of poverty and chronic underemployment.

- *Equity and opportunity:* Early childhood programs and services give children, especially those from underserved or hard-to-reach backgrounds, the resources they need to be more successful and have more opportunity in life.
- *ROI:* The business case—every dollar invested in early childhood programs produces better education and workforce outcomes and reduces costs for health, social services, criminal justice, etc. for children down the line. Depending on the study and the outcomes being measured, the ROI on every \$1 of Early Childhood investment can range from \$3 to \$17.
- *Family and home environment:* Early childhood programs offer parents and families the support they need to provide a nurturing home environment during the most important years of a child's development.

In Canada, there is an assumption that all Canadians can read; however, while most can read, not everyone can read well enough to realize their economic potential.³ We share a deep concern that far too many Canadian children are falling behind in their journey to become capable and confident readers. With each passing day, those who struggle with literacy in their earliest and most formative years are at greater risk of being further left out of Canada's social, economic and political life in adulthood.

It is **essential** that the **Government of Canada act quickly and effectively with the provinces and territories to promote literacy during early childhood.** Expenditure on literacy should be considered an investment in a skilled future workforce, sustained economic growth, fuller employment, and increased social justice – paying long-term dividends for national harmony and prosperity in Canada as a whole.

Why Is Early Literacy So Important?

- Nothing is more basic, more essential, more foundational, and more important to a child's success in life than the ability to read well.
- By talking, reading and interacting with their infant children, particularly during the first 5 years of a child's life, parents provide a sound and positive foundation on which to build as the child grows through formal education and adulthood.
- Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health. The experiences children have in early childhood shape the brain and the child's capacity to learn, to get along with others, and to respond to daily stresses and challenges.⁴
- MRI provides evidence that reading to children before Kindergarten (home literacy environment)

² Schwerdt and Wiederhold. Literacy and Growth: New evidence from PIAAC. 2019. cwf.ca and DataAngel.ca Coulombe, S. Tremblay, J.F and Marchand)

³ What Now? Busted: 11 enduring literacy myths, Canada West Foundation, Policy Brief September 2019.

⁴ McCain MN, Mustard JF, Shanker S. Early years study 2: Putting science into action. Toronto, ON: Council for Early Child Development; 2007.

positively influences the developing brain when it is most sensitive to nurturing experience.

- For 80 per cent of children, simple immersion in reading and books will lead to independent reading by school age.⁵
- Canada ranked eighth out of 15 countries evaluated by the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) on the percentage of adults with adequate literacy skills. The assessment found that the percentage of adults with inadequate literacy skills (48 per cent) has increased significantly over the previous decade.⁶

⁵ How to Make Your Child a Reader for Life, Paul Kropp, Random House Canada, 2000

⁶ [OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies](#), 2013 Statistics Canada; OECD; The Conference Board of Canada

ABOUT US

The Dollywood Foundation of Canada is dedicated to providing quality, age-appropriate literacy resources to children from birth to 5 years old. Our mission is to give books to children once a month to promote early literacy and a love of reading.

Launched in Canada in 2006, the Dollywood Foundation of Canada has delivered over 1.7 million books to children throughout every province and territory in Canada. Operating in five countries, the Foundation has mailed over 144 million books globally and has 1.6 million children registered monthly.

To serve the most children and attain the largest impact, we partner with local community organizations to administer programs. The Dollywood Foundation of Canada covers overhead and administration costs for programmatic components to include administering, fulfillment and mailing of the books and overall local program support costs. Local communities promote the program, find and enroll children, secure local funding and pay negotiated reduced book costs and reduced postage rates. Local funds stay local.

With over 270 affiliates across Canada, our partners include libraries, literacy organizations, schools, provincial Metis organizations, tribal organizations, First Nation communities, Inuit communities, service clubs and many other organizations with a strategic plan to increase literacy for their community. Each partner embeds our book gifting program into their early literacy strategies and programming. Here are some of our partners across Canada:

Local Partner	PROV	Local Partner	PROV	Local Partner	PROV
Calgary Military Family Resource Center	AB	Wrench Memorial Foundation	BC	Anishinaabeg Kabapikotawangag Resource Council	ON
Cochrane Public Library & The Optimist Club of Calgary	AB	Child and Youth Cluster	MB	Bracebridge Imagination Library Committee	ON
Imagination Library of Wood Buffalo	AB	First Nations Education Resource Centre	MB	Curve Lake First Health Centre	ON
Langdon Community Association	AB	Frontier School Division	MB	Fort William First Nation	ON
Metis Nation of Alberta	AB	Ginew Wellness Center/Roseau River Anishinabe F	MB	Four Corners Algonquin	ON
Rotary Club of Hinton	AB	Grandplains Ethelbert Literacy Organization	MB	Friends of the Library - Norfolk County	ON
The Rotary Club of Grande Prairie After Five	AB	Indian Birch Health Care	MB	Glen Morris & District Lions	ON
The Rotary Club of Whitecourt	AB	Nelson House Family and Community Wellness Pro	MB	Hamilton Imagination Library/Eva Rothwell Centre	ON
Village of Consort	AB	Peguis Family Centre Head Start Program	MB	Hiawatha First Nation	ON
Whitefish Lake First Nation	AB	Pinaymootang First Nation Health - Aboriginal Hea	MB	Independent First Nations (IFN)	ON
Canim Lake Band	BC	Riverton & District Friendship Centre	MB	Kanhiote Library	ON
Chamber of Commerce, Stewart	BC	Skowman School--Peer Program	MB	Kenora Public Library	ON
Chetwynd Public Library	BC	Southquill Aboriginal Headstart Program	MB	Kids Can Fly - Early Child Development and Parenting	ON
Esquimalt Military Family Resource Center	BC	Swan Lake First Nation Headstart Program	MB	Lynden Lions Club	ON
Fort St. John Literacy Society	BC	Waywayseecappo Maternal Child Health Program	MB	Metis Nation of Ontario	ON
Haisla Nation Council	BC	Winkler Imagination Library	MB	Migisi Sahgaigan School	ON
Houston Link to Learning	BC	Anglophone East School District	NB	Mississauga of the Credit First Nation	ON
Klahoose First Nation	BC	Carleton North Imagination Library- Inc.	NB	Nishnawbe Aski Nation	ON
Lakes Literacy	BC	Central Carleton Chamber of Commerce	NB	Optimist Club of St Clair Beach	ON
Literacy Haida Gwaii	BC	Future Footprints Family Centre Inc	NB	Pays Plat First Nation - FWBP	ON
Ministry of ARR	BC	Gagetown School	NB	Rockton Lions Club	ON
New Westminster Imagination Library	BC	Geary Lions Club	NB	Rotary Club of Wawa	ON
Optimists Club Chilliwack	BC	Jemseg Lions Club	NB	Rotary HIP	ON
Robson Valley Community Services	BC	Rotary Club of Chatham	NB	Sagamok Anishnawbek Education Department	ON
Rotary Club of Cumberland Centennial	BC	Rotary Club of Grand Manan	NB	Six Nations Imagination Library	ON
Rotary Club of Dawson Creek Sunrise	BC	Rotary Club of Sussex- NB	NB	St. Francis of Assisi Catholic School	ON
Rotary Club of Duncan	BC	Chebucto Connections	NS	Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation	ON
Rotary Club of Mission AM	BC	Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey	NS	Zhiibaahaasing First Nation	ON
School District #46 (Sunshine Coast) SPARK!	BC	Richmond County Literacy Network	NS	Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI	PE
Sea to Sky Community Services	BC	Rotary Club of Wolfville - Mud Creek	NS	Cree Nation of Waskaganish	QC
Sources Community Resource Society	BC	The Cole Harbour Foundation	NS	Fillmore Lions Club	SK
Sumas First Nation	BC	BeautyMark	NT	Janke LLP & Lacroix Drug	SK
Terrace Women's Resource Centre Society	BC	Deh Gah School	NT	Kid's First North	SK
Tla'Amin First Nations	BC	The Rotary E-Club of Canada One	NT	Muskoday Community Health Centre	SK
		McConchie Trucking	NU	Yukon Imagination Library (Yukon Reads Society)	YT

Recommendations Expanded

Recommendation 1 – Support early literacy initiatives

The COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying public health response has been identified as a crisis particularly impacting young families.⁷ Families with infants, preschoolers and school-aged children are struggling to support the developmental and educational needs of their children without the traditional support provided by childcare, public libraries, or community organizations. Research demonstrates that families have the greatest influence on a child's school readiness.⁸ An identified key to success is providing parents adequate resources, education and support. In addition to a reduction in traditional supports many parents are struggling to balance their child's care and education needs while working from home or with a modified schedule.

While school-age children have been supported through distance learning, preschoolers and infants have been left with extremely limited resources. This currently includes virtual storytimes provided by public libraries or other organizations. The inconsistent access to essential high-speed internet connections presents a further barrier.⁹ Access to physical materials has also been diminished as public libraries have had to shut-down, limit service and quarantine items. These issues will continue while we navigate the second and possible additional waves of this pandemic. We suggest that the government support programs that allow for parent-led at home programming. This can be accomplished through the distribution of resources and curriculum that empowers caregivers to support their children's cognitive and literacy development in the critical early years. We strongly encourage the following.

- Programs that offer support in both physical mail-out formats and online that are accessible on low bandwidth.
- Providing parents with hands-on materials with easy to follow prompts to help mitigate the loss of traditional early literacy supports.
- Funded programming should be accessible regardless of internet speed, personal financial resources or geographic location.
- Programming that provides consistency and continuity for both parent and child while we navigate the ongoing pandemic.

⁷ Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadian families and children. *Stats Can* (2020).
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200709/dq200709a-eng.htm>

⁸ Pivik, Jayne (2012). *Environmental Scan of School Readiness for Health: Definitions, Determinants, Indicators and Interventions*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: Human Early Learning Partnership with the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health.

http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/media/publications/environmental_scan_health_and_school_readiness_2012_pivik.pdf

⁹ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. (2019). High-Speed Access for All: Canada's Connectivity Strategy,
https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/139.nsf/eng/h_00002.html#b

Recommendation 2 – Focus on improving school readiness and literacy outcomes through increased book ownership in the early years

Early literacy development, from birth to age five, is critical for school readiness and overall academic success. To help mitigate the impact the pandemic has had on early childhood literacy programming and supports we propose that the government provide funding for increased book ownership for infant and preschool-aged children. Book ownership has an extremely high correlation with literacy development.¹⁰ First Book Canada¹¹ has identified that approximately 25% of Canadian households do not own a single book. This pre-pandemic statistic is startling. When the other factors of reduced access to literacy development supports are factored in, it is clear that one of the simplest strategies to improve school readiness, academic outcomes and later on a prepared workforce, is to invest in book ownership for children. We propose that the government allocate funding or partner with book-gifting organizations to increase book ownership across the country.

¹⁰ Bracken, S., & Fischel, J. (2008). Family Reading Behavior and Early Literacy Skills in Preschool Children From Low-Income Backgrounds. *Early Education and Development*, 19(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10409280701838835>

¹¹ First Book Canada (2020) <https://www.firstbookcanada.org/the-need/>

Recommendation 3 – Prioritize children’s social & emotional development, mental health and resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic

Not all children and youth respond to stress in the same way, experts recommend that parents be present, patient and supportive. A majority of the population anticipates that the mental health impact of the pandemic will be long-lasting.¹² With this in mind, how can the government best support parents and young children through this difficult time? Parents reading aloud to children in the early years has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the social-emotional development of children including positive long-term outcomes.¹³ Evidence-based research indicates that parental/caregiver involvement builds a lifelong capacity to have a long term emotional well-being and a lifelong ability to cope with life stressors. Evidence suggests spending time with a caregiver can build a child’s sense of value and importance. Equally supported is the notion that giving resources and tools to parents/caregivers has a positive impact on their investment in their children’s emotional needs.

Dr. Jean Clinton stated, “*We are now fully cognizant of the fact that we should not wait for social and emotional problems to become manifest, but rather must look for opportunities to ensure that adults who have important roles in the emotional and social development of children interact with children in ways that foster and nurture healthy development.*”¹⁴

Children under five are living through the coronavirus crisis during a critical time in their development. From birth to age 5, a child’s brain develops more than at any other time in life; and early brain development has a lasting impact on a child’s ability to learn, build relationships and to succeed in both school and life. The quality of a child’s experiences in the first few years of life – positive or negative – shapes how their brain develops. The coronavirus pandemic, and the Canadian response to controlling its spread, has inevitably put stress on all families, but it will have a particularly negative impact on families in vulnerable communities and those experiencing high levels of stress due to precarious financial situations and relationship breakdown, where they cannot safely access their usual support networks. Increasing book ownership and home-literacy support will serve to meet the cognitive, emotional development and mental health needs of families and young children throughout the pandemic and into the future.¹⁵

The power of sharing books and literacy opportunities at home is perhaps more important now than ever before. Establishing reading routines have evidence-based results linking reading to healthier mental outcomes.

¹² Addictions & Mental Health Ontario. (2020). <https://amho.ca/mhw-poll/>

¹³ Mendelsohn, A., et al, Reading Aloud, Play, and Social-Emotional Development. *Pediatrics* May 2018, 141 (5) e20173393; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2017-3393>

¹⁴ [Paediatr Child Health](#). 2009 Dec; 14(10): 671–672

¹⁵ Neyer, S., Beyond the numbers: Social and emotional benefits of participation in the Imagination Library home-based literacy programme. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* 0(0) 1–22



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