



FIRST BOOK CANADA

2025 IMPACT REPORT



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A CHILD'S **“FIRST BOOK”** IS NOT NECESSARILY THEIR FIRST READING EXPERIENCE – IT IS THAT *FIRST BOOK THAT THEY CONNECT WITH*, WHICH SETS THEM ON A LIFELONG PATH OF LEARNING AND INSPIRATION. A BOOK CAN UNLOCK A CHILD'S OWN STORY.





At First Book Canada, our mission is to transform the lives of children in need by leveling the educational playing field. We provide new, high-quality books to children who might otherwise have none of their own.

ABOUT US

Through a market-driven model, First Book Canada makes books and other educational resources accessible within communities in every province and territory.

Our partner network, of over 20,600 educators and community leaders, serves families in need through schools, shelters, clinics, social services, and newcomer programs, and other non-profit organizations.

We continuously evaluate our programs to measure impact, remain accountable, and ensure we are meeting the evolving needs of the children and communities we support.

LETTER FROM THE **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Books are essential. Books are transformative.

2025 was a year of strong momentum for First Book Canada. Through expanded partnerships, deeper program delivery, and strengthened operational capacity, we reached over 178,500 children and youth across the country with books and educational resources designed to support those facing the greatest barriers to access.

By focusing on curated collections and community-specific initiatives, we were able to direct resources where they are needed most: supporting early childhood literacy, refugee-serving organizations, and high-needs communities throughout Canada. While working in every province and territory we continue to seek & expand partnerships in Canada's North.

We believe every child deserves the opportunity to build a healthy, hopeful future for themselves and for the communities around them. By helping children build home libraries of their own, we are investing not only in literacy, but in resilience, confidence, belonging, and long-term educational equity. For this reason, First Book Canada's programming prioritizes not only literacy development, but also diversity, inclusion, social and emotional learning, S.T.E.A.M. education, amplifying Indigenous voices and fostering youth empowerment.


Studies continue to demonstrate the profound and lasting impact of access to books and reading experiences early in life. Reading aloud with infants supports cognitive development. Exposure to books and language in the early years dramatically expands vocabulary development before kindergarten. Around the age of eight, children begin developing a stronger sense of identity and self-perception – making representation in books critically important. Seeing yourself reflected in empowered, diverse characters who look, speak, and live like you fosters confidence, empathy, belonging, and possibility. And long-form reading develops attention span needed for learning and studying – even more necessary in the age of social media distraction. The books we place into the hands of children provide windows into a wider world.

We are eternally grateful for our dedicated donors, publishing partners, corporate & foundation supporters, community leaders, educators, and volunteers.

On behalf of the First Book Canada team – thank you.



Heather Farquharson
Executive Director



WHY? **BOOKS ARE ESSENTIAL**

Throughout Canada, too many children are growing up without the basic tools they need to thrive in school and in life. Literacy and numeracy are foundational skills that shape everything from educational success to career opportunities and participation in society, yet access remains unequal.¹

IN ONTARIO, **ONLY 74% OF GRADE 3 STUDENTS MET READING STANDARDS IN 2025**, WHILE IN NOVA SCOTIA **NEARLY ONE IN THREE GRADE 3 STUDENTS READS BELOW GRADE LEVEL.**² **INDIGENOUS, RACIALIZED, AND NEWCOMER CHILDREN, AND THOSE LIVING IN POVERTY** OR FACING OTHER BARRIERS, ARE MORE LIKELY TO FALL BEHIND AND CARRY THESE CHALLENGES INTO ADULTHOOD.

Recent findings underscore the urgency, as intensifying academic needs, growing financial strain, and escalating social and emotional challenges have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic.³ Without resources that support learning at home, these gaps widen over time, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage.

Literacy and numeracy are foundational skills that shape everything from educational success to career opportunities and participation in society, yet access remains unequal.

One of the simplest and most powerful ways to support children's learning is also often overlooked: **ensuring they have books of their own at home.** Research consistently shows that children who grow up in homes with books develop stronger reading and learning skills and achieve more in school and beyond. But in Canada, access to books is deeply unequal. For families facing financial hardship, including food and housing insecurity, buying new books is often out of reach.

¹ OECD. (2016). *Skills matter: further results from the survey of adult skills*. OECD Skills Studies.

² Ontario Ministry of Education. (2025). *EQAO Reading Results (Grade 3)*. Nova Scotia Department of Education. (Recent provincial literacy assessments).

³ Pathways to Education Canada. (2025). *Canada's youth are in crisis: New report highlights growing barriers for youth in low-income communities*.

That's where First Book Canada comes in. By providing new, high-quality, carefully curated books for children to take home and keep, FBC helps build home libraries for the 1.4 million children in Canada living in low-income households. The children we serve include those whose families cannot purchase books, newcomers building their lives in Canada, and children staying in shelters, among others.

Each book placed in a child's hands is more than a story: it is an invitation to imagine, learn, and grow. Over time, these books foster a love of reading, strengthen literacy and social-emotional skills like empathy, innovation, and creativity, and open doors to greater opportunity. Together with our partners, we are helping children across Canada build the skills and confidence they need to shape brighter futures.

In 2025, we deepened our commitment to reaching children throughout Canada with programs that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve, including increased programming in French and Indigenous languages. We also strengthened our national reach, delivering programs in all 13 provinces and territories. Together, these efforts reinforce the national framework built over the past 16 years, positioning us for greater impact in the years ahead.



LOOKING FORWARD, OUR GOAL IS AMBITIOUS AND CLEAR: BY 2030, WE AIM TO REACH **AT LEAST HALF OF ALL CANADIAN CHILDREN LIVING AT OR BELOW THE POVERTY LINE** ANNUALLY.



IMPACT SNAPSHOT READING WITHIN COMMUNITIES

January

- Turn the Page Pop-Up Book Distribution was held with Jays Care Foundation and TD Bank Group at Rogers Centre in Toronto, where over 100,000 books were distributed.
- A Reading Celebration took place in Edmonton at M.E. LaZert High School, supported by RBC Foundation, where 120 Grades 11 to 12 students received copies of *Light Enough to Float* by Lauren Seal.

February

- A Reading Celebration was held in Montreal at Académie Marymount International School, supported by RBC Foundation, where 120 Grade 11 students took home copies of *Taxi Ghost* by Sophie Escabasse.

March

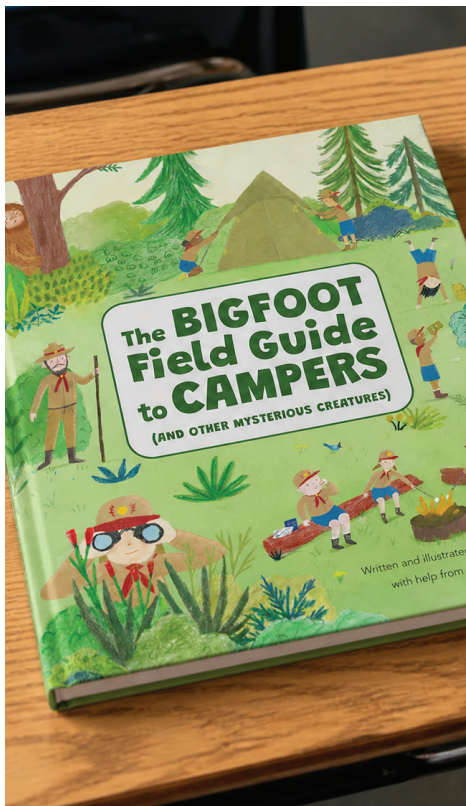
- *A Reader is Born*, supported by Bank of Montreal, provided 240 newborn children with book bags containing three board books each in Terrace, BC. This program supports new parents by providing families with a mini library of their child's first books and reinforces that parents are their child's first teachers and that it is never too early to read together.

April

- In April, the New Beginnings: Mini Libraries for Kids program distributed 5,000 books to 1,000 children across 10 schools and programs in Western Canada. This program provides newcomer children with book bags containing five new books, distributed through schools, community programs, and organizations that support immigrant and refugee families.

May

- A **Reading Celebration** was held in British Columbia at Britannia Elementary School, supported by TD, where 80 students in Grades 1 to 3 received copies of *The Bigfoot Field Guide to Campers* by Jami Gigot.



June

- The **Raptors 905** hosted the launch event for its 8th annual **Summer Reading Challenge** at MLSE LaunchPad. The **Summer Reading Challenge** focuses on recognizing representation in reading and encourages students to read books that reflect and celebrate diverse voices and stories, while aiming to prevent summer slide.
- **Reading Celebrations** were held in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario, supported by BMO, TD, and Tata Group, where 335 children received books for their home libraries.



July

- In July, the **Raptors 905 Summer Reading Challenge** was well underway, with over 150 students across the GTA receiving five books to read over five weeks. Each week, students attended a virtual session to meet the book's author and a **Raptors 905** guest, and then submitted a book report reflecting on that week's reading.
- An event at Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre in Montreal included a bookmark competition and a mini book fair, where 130 books were distributed to 60 children.
- A **Time for Change** Workshop was held with library staff and volunteers at the Montreal Children's Hospital, engaging 80 participants on the topic of "Growing Changemakers and the Power of Books." Funding was also provided to update the hospital's library shelves and book carts with changemaking-themed books. The **Time for Change** program equips educators and young people with the skills needed to take action and create sustainable change in their communities and beyond.

August

- Books were provided to support MinibiblioPlus's **Sunshine & Storytime** program in Montreal.



September

- The **New Beginnings: Mini Libraries for Kids** program distributed 16,000 books to 3,200 children across 27 schools and organizations in Central Canada.
- **Amazon** supported 57 **Book-Bag-Builds** across Canada, distributing 21,000 books to 4,200 children under the age of 12.
- A **Reading Celebration** was held at a boys' detention centre, where 60 youth aged 12-18 met author Kern Carter and received copies of his book *Is There a Boy Like Me?*.
- Our **Edmonton Pop-Up Book Distribution**, supported by **BMO** and hosted by **Santa's Anonymous**, distributed 16,029 books to 88 registered educators.
- 80 books were provided to support the **Autism Family Friends Association** in Vancouver for their first annual fundraiser.

October

- 2,000 books were donated to the **Reading Partnership** and distributed to 2,000 children.
- At the **Chiefs of Ontario Early Learning Conference** in Mississauga, **Time for Change** training information and resources were provided along with two books each for 300 educators.

November

- Our **Niagara Pop-Up Book Distribution**, supported by **TD**, saw 275 people registered and 45,400 books distributed.
- **BMO** supported a **Book-Bag-Build** for the **Calgary Immigrant Women's Association**, providing 600 books to 200 recipients.
- A **Time for Change Workshop** was delivered to **Park Street Education**, engaging 25 participants who are active teachers in Ontario and tutors with the organization.

December

- Thanks to **TD's** commitment to children's literacy, 11,397 books and resources were provided to community members directly through their partnership. This includes 229 members throughout Canada, serving 6,860 children.
- **KPMG** supported **Book-Bag-Builds** in 3 locations across the country, distributing 1,725 books to 345 children.
- A **Reading Celebration** was held in Montreal with **Tata Group**, where 94 children received copies of *Froggy: A Pond Full of Pals* by **Paige Waishe**.
- Our **Halifax Pop-Up Book Distribution**, supported by **Jays Care Foundation**, saw 95 people registered and 31,642 books distributed.
- 700 books were donated to a **Kwanzaa Reading Celebration** at **WoodGreen Community Services** for their **Rights of Passage** participants.



AMPLIFYING VOICES: **FIRST BOOK CANADA MARKETPLACE**

The First Book Canada Marketplace is our eCommerce site, exclusively available to the First Book Canada Network, a national community of educators and professionals working in classrooms, after school programs, childcare facilities, shelters, health clinics, libraries, and other settings serving children in need. The Marketplace provides access to a wide selection of brand-new books, school supplies, digital learning tools, and basic needs items at deeply discounted prices. Every item is carefully curated with educators and students in mind, with a strong emphasis on diversity and inclusion. In 2025, more than 1,500 members accessed the Marketplace, distributing over 94,000 books and reaching more than 45,000 children.

This year, a key focus of the Marketplace was to amplify French and Indigenous voices. This included increasing the availability of French-language titles to support literacy development in both of Canada's official languages, alongside expanded offerings in Indigenous languages and resources that reflect Indigenous cultures, histories, and perspectives. In 2025, hundreds of French-language resources were distributed, contributing to stronger literacy outcomes and supporting the vision of building a more inclusive and connected Canada. At the same time, thousands of Indigenous resources reached communities across the country. This work supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 63 by improving access to learning materials that deepen understanding of Indigenous histories and foster intercultural learning.

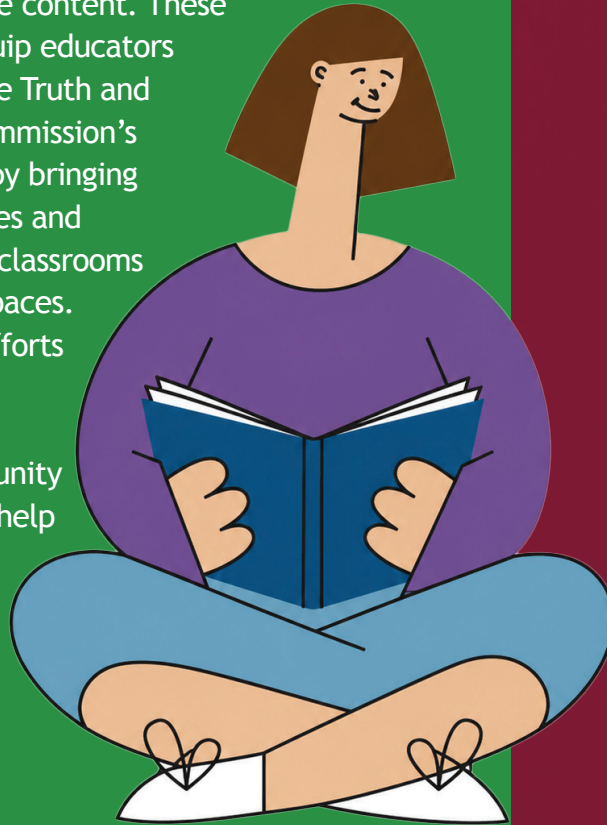


COMMUNITY

By expanding access to French and Indigenous books and resources, the **Marketplace** is helping educators and community organizations better serve children whose identities and experiences have historically been underrepresented. For French-speaking children and those learning in French, increased access to relevant materials supports language development and strengthens literacy in one of Canada's official languages. This contributes to a more inclusive society where children can fully participate and connect across communities.

For Indigenous children and communities, access to books in Indigenous languages and stories that reflect their cultures fosters a sense of pride, belonging, and connection. In 2025, more than 7,700 Indigenous resources and hundreds

of French-language materials were distributed through the **Marketplace**, reflecting a growing demand for diverse and representative content. These resources also equip educators to engage with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 63 by bringing Indigenous histories and perspectives into classrooms and community spaces. Together, these efforts support identity development, strengthen community connections, and help build a stronger Canada for everyone.



PARTNERSHIP

The success of the First Book Canada **Marketplace** is made possible through the support of corporate and publishing partners. Financial contributions from corporate partners help expand the range of books and resources available, while also enabling First Book Canada to provide gift cards and promotional codes that allow members to access materials at no cost. With support from **TD Bank Group**, we provided thousands of dollars in gift certificates so that 37 new community members were able to purchase 8,478 new books and resources. This ensures that educators serving children in need can select the resources that are most relevant to their communities without financial barriers.

Publishing partners also play a critical role by offering books at significantly reduced prices, making it possible to sustainably provide high-quality, brand-new titles at rates well below market value. Together, these partnerships ensure the **Marketplace** remains accessible, responsive, and impactful, allowing more educators to access the tools they need and more children to benefit from meaningful, representative learning resources.

OPEN ACCESS TO CURATED DIVERSE STORIES

When Oscar's classroom received new, curated books through the First Book Canada Marketplace, and he was able to take books home for his personal library, they quickly became some of his most treasured belongings.

For children like Oscar, access to new, high-quality books can spark a love of reading and open the door to new ideas, cultures, and possibilities. With stories that reflect diverse voices, including French and Indigenous perspectives, children are able to see themselves in what they read while also learning about the world around them.

Through the Marketplace, books are more than just learning tools. They are sources of joy, confidence, and connection, helping children like Oscar build literacy skills and a lifelong relationship with reading.

Dear Donors,
My name is Oscar and I just want to thank you for helping me and my classroom get new books. To be honest most other classes don't get a lot of books. It's also changed the way I thought of reading.

I also want to thank you because you have helped me and others create a library in their homes. I feel more welcome and I feel like this is a great opportunity to change my thought of reading and help me fix my reading disability.

Because of you I have gone up 2 reading levels in the past 3 months. I started at a reading level of 4.5 and I am now at a 6.5 reading level.

Thank you for your generosity and kindness. Thank you for your time and have a wonderful day.

Sincerely

Oscar.

NEW BEGINNINGS: MINI LIBRARIES FOR KIDS

The **New Beginnings: Mini Libraries for Kids** program is helping newcomer children throughout Canada build a sense of belonging through books of their own. Through this initiative, approximately 10,000 children received book bags filled with 5 brand-new, carefully selected books, along with personalized bookplates and handwritten notes of encouragement, creating a meaningful first step in building a home library.



Books were distributed through social service organizations and public schools that support new-immigrant and refugee families. This program aims to welcome and ease the transitions to family life in Canada. Educators consistently highlight the powerful impact these books have on newcomer children and their families. The diverse and representative titles allow children to see themselves reflected in stories, fostering both connection and confidence. For many families, these book bags are more than a collection of stories—they are an invitation into literacy, learning, and community. Educators report increased engagement among children who were previously hesitant to read, as well as stronger connections with these families through reading-focused events and conversations about the importance of reading together at home. Access to children’s books in the home also benefits the rest of the newcomer family through literacy outcomes.



COMMUNITY

Beyond supporting children directly, the program is strengthening communities and expanding access to resources. Book distribution has created new opportunities for educators and program leaders to connect with newcomer families, fostering welcoming spaces where learning and belonging can flourish. By supporting early literacy development, easing newcomer integration, and opening pathways to long-term educational and economic opportunity, the program helps lay the foundation for lasting success. As New Beginnings expands into Atlantic Canada and The North, it will continue to deepen its impact—ensuring more children have the tools they need to learn, grow, and thrive.



PARTNERSHIP

Support from **The Rossy Foundation** made the New Beginnings program entirely possible. As part of a \$30 million national charitable initiative, **The Rossy Foundation** directed funding to 25 organizations making meaningful contributions to communities nationwide, including First Book Canada, providing the critical resources needed to build resilient communities.

Beyond its direct impact, this funding reflects a broader commitment to supporting Canadian development through initiatives that promote child development, educational opportunity, and community well-being. **New Beginnings** is one piece of this larger effort—working alongside other initiatives to address systemic inequities and ensure that all children, regardless of background, can learn, grow, and succeed.



SUPPORTING EDUCATORS, SUPPORTING KIDS

At the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association in Saskatoon, books became the foundation for connection, learning, and confidence among newcomer children attending summer camp. Through support from First Book Canada, 300 brand-new books reached 60 children, many of whom were new to Canada and building their English language skills for the first time.

Educator Viktoriia Z. and her team transformed these books into an engaging, camp-wide literacy experience. A dedicated reading corner and a creative “Reading Challenge” encouraged children to track their progress using personalized “Reading Passports.” Campers worked together in small groups, motivating one another to read, share stories, and celebrate milestones. Those who completed the challenge were recognized as “Reading Ambassadors,” taking on leadership roles and distributing books to their peers, an experience that fostered both pride and a sense of belonging.

The impact was immediate and lasting. Every child read at least five books, with many going even further, eager to earn rewards and recognition. Educators observed noticeable improvements in English language skills, as well as increased confidence and enthusiasm for reading. More than that, the program created a space where children could connect with stories, with each other, and with their new community.

AS VIKTORIIA SHARED, **“MANY STUDENTS WOULD EXCITEDLY SAY, ‘I’VE ALREADY FINISHED MY FIVE BOOKS! I CAN’T WAIT TO SEE THE BOOKS I WON!’”** WHAT BEGAN AS A BOOK DONATION BECAME SOMETHING MUCH MORE: A SHARED EXPERIENCE THAT FOSTERED TEAMWORK, CREATIVITY, AND A LASTING LOVE OF READING.



TIME FOR CHANGE: DREAM. ACT. CHANGE OUR WORLD.

First Book Canada's Accelerator is a free digital resource hub designed to support educators, youth leaders, and non-profit partners with high-quality, ready-to-use learning materials. Working alongside the First Book Canada Marketplace, the Accelerator ensures that access to books is paired with practical tools, such as lesson plans, activity sheets, and professional development resources, that bring those books to life in meaningful ways.



In 2025, the First Book Canada Accelerator was strengthened through the Time for Change program. Through the support of Audemars Piguet and collaboration with Ashoka Canada, First Book Canada was able to invest in the creation of new Canadian-focused content, expanded professional development opportunities, and increase national reach. The program is designed to foster a “changemaking” mindset in students, particularly those in under-resourced communities, by equipping educators with tools and resources that inspire young people to identify community challenges and develop creative, sustainable solutions. Guided by direct feedback from educators and community partners, new multi-lingual resources were developed specifically for Canadian contexts. These materials are simple, adaptable, and aligned with key themes of empathy, leadership, teamwork, and action, ensuring they meet the real needs of those supporting children.

In addition to English and French, resources are also offered in multiple Indigenous languages as part of a response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action 63. This approach helps build student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect, while centring Indigenous voices and supporting the flourishing of Indigenous innovators today and into the future. Together, this work reflects a broader vision: to build a dynamic, responsive hub that evolves alongside educators and the communities they serve.



COMMUNITY

The program is rooted in listening to the needs of educators and non-profit partners across Canada. Teachers noted that they need resources that are easy to use, require minimal preparation, and fit seamlessly into existing lessons. Community-based organizations emphasized the importance of professional development and tools that empower volunteers and strengthen program delivery. In response, First Book Canada developed practical, culturally relevant resources and delivered hands-on educator & youth training workshops across the country. Author reading events further enriched these experiences, creating meaningful connections.

The result has been a significant increase in engagement across the network. Educators are better equipped to foster literacy, critical thinking, and social-emotional learning, while organizations are building stronger, more connected learning environments. By pairing books with accessible, high-quality resources, the program is helping ensure that children can fully benefit from the opportunities reading provides.

PARTNERSHIP

The progress made in 2025 demonstrates the transformative impact of resource development funding and strong partnerships. Looking ahead, there is a clear opportunity to expand into high-demand areas such as financial literacy, social-emotional learning, and digital literacy.

EMPOWERING YOUTH WITH CONFIDENCE

At Grove School in Ontario's Durham Region, students in grades K to 12 are navigating treatment and rehabilitation, often arriving with experiences of instability, and in some cases, without ever having owned a book. With limited time and resources, educators face the challenge of supporting both the academic and emotional needs of these students. Through the Time for Change program, access to high-quality stories, adaptable lesson plans, and affordable resources has transformed classrooms into spaces for meaningful engagement. Teachers report deeper discussions, stronger participation, and new opportunities for students to explore empathy, leadership, and civic responsibility.

The impact reaches beyond the classroom. Inspired by what they've learned, students organize biannual fundraisers, creating and selling handmade items in support of the Humane Society of Durham Region. These experiences allow them to give back, shifting how they see themselves and their role in the community. Rather than only receiving support, students are beginning to see themselves as changemakers. For youth facing significant barriers, this sense of agency is transformative: building confidence, fostering belonging, and reinforcing that their voices matter.

“THE **TIME FOR CHANGE PROGRAM**

HAS HELPED THESE STUDENTS FEEL LIKE CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF SOCIETY... THE ENTHUSIASM THEY SHOW AT BEING ABLE TO GIVE BACK IS HEARTWARMING.”

– Lynn G., Educator



PREVENTING THE
SUMMER SLIDE:

RAPTORS 905 READING CHALLENGE



The Raptors 905 Reading Challenge is designed to address “summer slide,” a learning loss that disproportionately affects children from low-income communities during the months school is out for the summer. Research shows that while higher-income students often gain literacy skills over the summer, those facing economic barriers can lose ground, with these gaps compounding year-over-year. In Ontario, where a significant proportion of children continue to live in low-income households, these disparities highlight the urgent need for accessible, high-quality summer learning opportunities.

For the 8th year, this five-week program provided Grade 5 students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) with the opportunity to learn, connect and be inspired by great novels, authors and Raptors 905 mentors. The program combines structured literacy development with creativity, encouraging participants to read one book per week from a curated selection of diverse, high-quality titles. These books, primarily written by Canadian and BIPOC authors, offer culturally relevant stories that both reflect participants’ lived experiences and expand their perspectives.



Weekly virtual sessions connect students directly with authors and Raptors 905 representatives, transforming reading into an interactive and encouraging experience. Complementary activities, including creative book reports, storytelling sessions, and writing exercises, reinforce comprehension while encouraging self-expression, critical thinking, and imagination. By integrating literacy with creativity and community engagement, the program not only helps prevent summer learning loss but also builds positive reading habits that extend well beyond the program itself.

COMMUNITY

In 2025, the program reached over 200 students from high-needs schools across the GTA, including Toronto, North York, Brampton, and Scarborough, in partnership with classroom teachers in First Book Canada network schools. By engaging both educators and families, the program extended beyond the classroom, encouraging children to continue reading at home and reinforcing consistent literacy habits throughout the summer.

PARTNERSHIP

This program is made possible through the generous support of **Tangerine Bank** and **University of Guelph-Humber**. Through **Tangerine Project Forward**, Tangerine invests in initiatives that empower youth with confidence, leadership, and a sense of belonging—values that are deeply embedded in the Reading Challenge. **The University of Guelph-Humber** brings a shared commitment to education, community connection, and student success, reinforcing the program's

impact, in addition to STEM activities for program participants from their Early Childhood Learning program. Together, these partners enable equitable access to books, mentorship, and enriching literacy experiences for children who need them most. Their support ensures the program not only addresses immediate learning loss, but also contributes to stronger, more resilient communities by empowering young readers to thrive.



BOOK REPORTS ARE FUN!

For many students, the Raptors 905 Summer Reading Challenge transformed reading from a task into something to look forward to. As one participant shared, “I really enjoyed the encouragement to read regularly. It motivated me to spend more time reading and made the experience exciting.” Weekly activities, creative book reports, and the anticipation of prizes kept students engaged and motivated throughout the summer.

The program also fostered meaningful connections. Students read alongside friends, held each other accountable, and connected directly with authors. One parent reflected that “book selection is key... when characters are relatable to them and their diverse perspectives,” it becomes easier to inspire a love of reading. Beyond literacy development, the program fostered confidence, self-expression, and a sense of belonging.

By combining structure, creativity, and community, the program helped students build confidence, strengthen literacy skills, and develop positive reading habits that will last well beyond the summer.



EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY: **A READER IS BORN**

The foundation for literacy begins long before a child enters school. From birth to age two, a child's brain develops at an extraordinary pace, forming the neural connections that support language, learning, and communication. Early experiences, such as reading, talking, and singing, build vocabulary, strengthen cognitive development, and foster secure emotional bonds. Yet across Canada, many children arrive at school already behind, often reflecting unequal access to books and language-rich environments in the home.



As part of the Bank of Montreal Reads for the Future programming, the A Reader is Born project addresses this gap at its earliest stage. By providing newborn families with a mini library of three tactile board books, the program helps establish early childhood literacy routines at home, from day one. Delivered in partnership with a public library and maternity hospital, it also introduces families to ongoing community resources that support lifelong reading habits and learning.



COMMUNITY

Through this program, 240 new families will receive book bags filled with high-quality books—often a child’s very first. These resources empower parents and caregivers to embrace their role as a child’s first teacher, building daily reading habits that support early language development and connection.

The impact extends across the family. For many, especially newcomer households, these books offer an accessible entry point into literacy, supporting both children’s development and caregivers’ confidence. By linking families to their local public library, the program also strengthens community connections and ensures continued access to books, programs, and support networks by encouraging library membership for all family members. Together, these efforts help create strong, language-rich home environments that set children on a path toward long-term learning and success.

PARTNERSHIP

In 2025, BMO’s support helped strengthen early childhood development in Ksyen Regional Hospital in Terrace, BC by connecting two critical needs: access to neonatal care and early literacy. Following a \$150,000 contribution to the hospital’s Closer to Home NICU Campaign—which enabled the opening of a new Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and Special Care Nursery—BMO also partnered with First Book Canada to support families at the very beginning of their child’s learning journey.

BMO’s commitment ensures that more children throughout Canada can begin life with books of their own, helping to lay the foundation for stronger literacy outcomes, healthier development, and greater opportunity in the years ahead. This investment comes at an important time, as many growing families face rising economic pressures and may need to make difficult choices amongst essential resources. Together, these investments help ensure that families can stay close to home for care while also building strong foundations for literacy, bonding, and lifelong learning from day one.

STRENGTHENING MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT

Reading aloud to children is widely advocated to promote emotional understanding, cognitive development and increase attention-spans. **A Reader is Born** enables the establishment of an early literacy tradition within newborn families where they read aloud to their children from their first days and encourage language comprehension development, critical for school preparation and compounding education outcomes.

“THE ACT OF READING TOGETHER SECURES PEOPLE TO ONE ANOTHER, CREATING ORDER AND CONNECTION, AS IF WE WERE QUILT SQUARES TACKED TOGETHER WITH THREADS MADE OF STORIES. THAT’S NOT JUST ANOTHER METAPHOR, AS A TEAM OF NEUROSCIENTISTS AT PRINCETON HAS DISCOVERED. EVEN AS READER AND LISTENER ARE ENJOYING THEIR BOUQUET OF NEUROCHEMICALS ... THEIR BRAIN ACTIVITY IS SYNCHRONIZING, CREATING LITERAL ORDER AND CONNECTION IN A PROCESS KNOWN AS NEURAL COUPLING.”

– **Meghan Cox Gurdon, *The Enchanted Hour: The Miraculous Power of Reading Aloud in the Age of Distraction – A Neuroscience Guide for Parents on Brain Development and Family Bonds***

KEY TAKEAWAYS & GOALS

FOR 2026

In 2025, First Book Canada advanced its mission in response to a clear and urgent need: too many children throughout the country still lack access to the books and resources essential for learning and long-term success.



With literacy gaps persisting and access to books deeply unequal, particularly for children experiencing poverty, newcomer families, and Indigenous communities, our work continues to focus on getting high-quality books into the hands of those who need them most. Through programs like **New Beginnings**, children receive their first home libraries, fostering belonging, confidence, and early literacy. The **Accelerator** and **Time for Change** equip educators with practical, Canadian-focused tools, while **A Reader is Born** supports families from the earliest stages of a child's development. At the same time, the **Marketplace** expands access to affordable resources nationwide, with a focus on Indigenous and French language materials to support inclusion and reconciliation. Delivered in all 13 provinces and territories, and powered by strong partnerships, this work reflects a coordinated effort to break cycles of disadvantage and build brighter futures.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Looking ahead, First Book Canada will build on this momentum by expanding both access and impact. A key priority is increasing the availability of French-language content through the development of a Canadian warehouse, addressing longstanding distribution barriers and allowing us to better serve French-speaking children throughout the country. This infrastructure will also support a broader expansion of Marketplace offerings, increasing the diversity and volume of titles available while reducing costs and delivery times for members.

We will continue to prioritize reaching children in Northern and remote communities, particularly in the territories and within Indigenous communities, where access to books remains a significant challenge. At the same time, a strong focus on early childhood literacy will guide program growth, ensuring more children develop foundational skills before the age of eight. For older youth, we will explore new opportunities to develop financial literacy resources, working with partners to provide practical tools that support long-term success.

Engaging our existing network more deeply will also be critical. While our community has grown significantly, increasing active participation in programs and the Marketplace will help extend our reach and impact. Finally, strengthening collaboration with like-minded organizations across the literacy sector will enable more coordinated, community-driven approaches and unlock new funding opportunities. Together, these efforts will move us closer to reaching over 700,000 children annually within the next five years.



PARTNERSHIP IN COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Many thanks to the thousands of individual
Canadians who donated to support kids in need!

Book Publishing

ABRAMS, Annick Press, Biblioasis, Blackstone Publishing, Capstone, ECW Press, Firefly Books, Greystone Books, Groundwood & House of Anansi Press, Hachette Book Group, HarperCollins Canada, Inhabit Media, KidsCan Press, Lerner Publishing Group, Nelson, Nimbus Publishing, Orca, Owl Kids Books, Penguin Random House Canada, Raincoast Books, Scholastic Canada, Second Story, Simon & Schuster Canada, Sutherland House, Tradewind Books, UBC Language Sciences, University of Toronto Press

Corporate

Amazon, Audemars Piguet, Bank of Montreal, Gildan Activewear Inc, Kewit Development Company, KPMG, The LEGO Group, Northbridge General Insurance Corporation, Orbis Investments (Canada) Limited, Tangerine Bank, Tata Group, TD Bank Group, Trisura Guarantee Insurance Company

Non-Profit

Armagh House, Ashoka Canada, Book Clubs for Inmates, Canadian Children's Book Centre, Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation, Chiefs of Ontario, ChIRP, Downsview Park, Forest of Reading, Langlely School District Foundation, Let's Talk Science, Lire Inspire Read (Montreal Hospital), MinibiblioPLUS (Fraser Hickson Institute), Moisson Montreal, Park Street Education, Raptors 905, Room To Read, Santa's Anonymous, Start2Finish, Teachers On Call, Toronto Community Housing, Toronto Holocaust Museum, Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre, United for Literacy, United Way Winnipeg, WoodGreen Community Centre

Foundation and Government

Arno Family Foundation, Jay's Care Foundation, The Mariano Elia Foundation, The McGuire Family Foundation, The Riggenschach-Courtney Foundation, The Robert Bell Family Foundation, The Rossy Foundation, HRSDC

IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

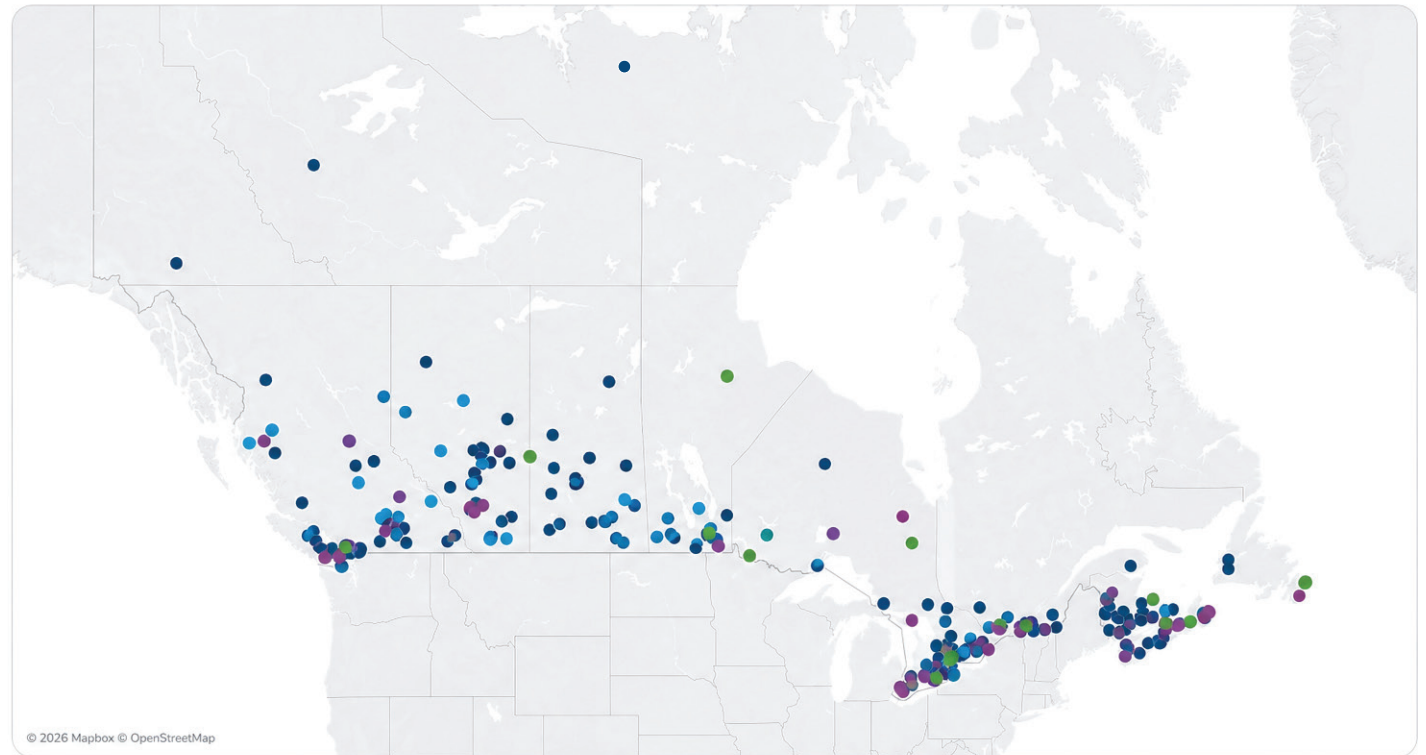
178,500+
children served

357,000+
books distributed

20,600+
educators & community
leaders in our network

\$4,000,000+
in books & educational
recourses (at market value)
distributed into the hands
of kids in need

● Marketplace Sales ● Other Book Sales ● Reading Celebrations ● Book-Bag-Builds



Map of 2025 reach of impact by First Book Canada.

THE **FIRST BOOK CANADA** NETWORK

We could not achieve our goals without the input and partnership of educators and community program leaders in every province and territory.

2025 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

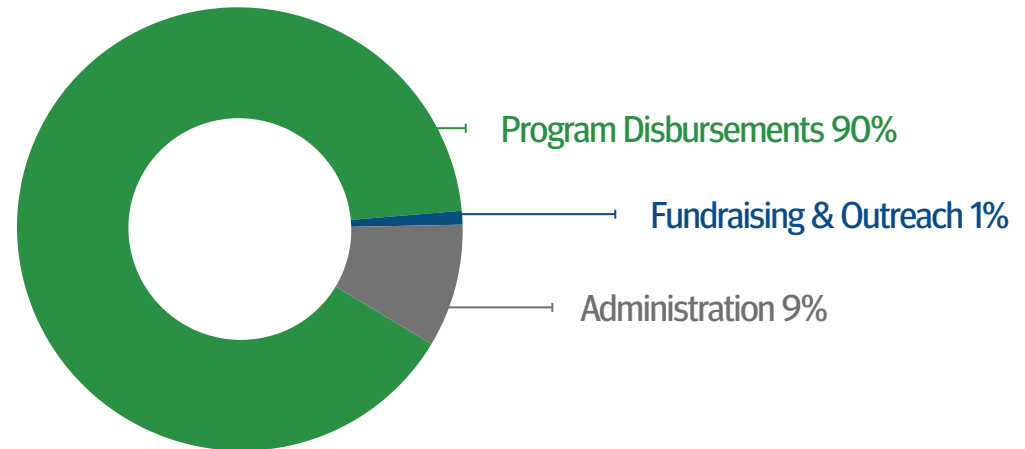
REVENUE

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Grants | \$1,651,885 |
| Fundraising & Donations | \$2,210,569 |
| Interest / Investment | \$664,260 |
| TOTAL | \$4,526,714 |



EXPENDITURES

| | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| Program Disbursements | \$3,519,762 |
| Fundraising & Outreach | \$24,478 |
| Administration | \$366,212 |
| TOTAL | \$3,910,452 |



THE FIRST BOOK CANADA TEAM

STAFF

Heather Farquharson, Executive Director

Gurdeep Dhaliwal, Strategic Alliances Manager

Julie Mai, E-Commerce & Data Manager

Lindsay Yates, Program Manager

Jenny Pullon, Non-Profit Partnership Manager

Riley van der Linden, Social Impact Knowledge Manager

Olivia Stone, Marketing Coordinator

Alana Scuzillo, Program Operations Coordinator

Lynda Nkrumah, Program Coordinator

Mena Maraj, Data Visualization Analytics and Reporting Intern

BOARD OF DIRECTORS (2025)

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Senior Vice President, Corporate Communications | RBC

Rumeet Billan Ph.D, Vice-Chairperson

Chief Executive Officer (Founder) | Viewpoint Leadership Inc

Adam Mamdani, Vice-Chairperson

Senior Vice-President, Distribution and Channel Management | Sun Life Financial, Retail Advice & Solutions

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Brian Slomka

Partner | Odgers Interim & Professional Search

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND COMMITMENT
TO FIRST BOOK CANADA'S MISSION!**

THANK YOU

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CHARITY INTELLIGENCE 2025

**TOP 10 CANADIAN
IMPACT CHARITY**



FIRST BOOK CANADA

