



# Annual General Meeting

October 13, 2022



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

*Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her potential.*

- Kofi Annan

### Vision

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

### Mission

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

## Words from the Chair

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

2022 has been an incredible year of growth for Victoria Literacy Connection. We moved into a fantastic new space which is bright, spacious and inviting. We had a wonderful Grand Opening in May and have been welcoming back learners for in-person sessions since last spring.

It has been a true privilege to be part of such a dynamic team of staff and volunteers. Our volunteers range from tutors, board members, committee members and even partners of staff members! Both staff and volunteers have done an incredible job of creating this wonderful new space through time, vision or elbow grease, and it is appreciated by everyone who walks through the front door.

In addition to the return of in-person activities, VLC continues to support learners through online programming and is expanding our offerings to meet the changing needs of the clientele. VLC has been at the forefront of reimagining what learning can look like, and is now offering innovative programming to meet all levels recognizing both in-person and online needs.

Our staff has grown as we expand our programming. I am confident that we will continue to thrive in the years ahead with the level of talent and expertise we have on both the board and in the staff.

I wish all the staff, board, committee members, volunteers and learners an amazing year ahead. It's been my honour to work with this incredible team.

Sincerely,



Janine Hannis  
Board Chair

## Programs

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

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

## Ongoing Programs

### 1:1 Child, Youth and Adult Volunteer Tutoring

Individualized literacy support in all scholastic subjects by knowledgeable and trained volunteers.

### Kids E-Reading Club

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

### Adult English Language Conversation Group

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

### Digital Learning

Adapting to individual digital needs and gaps, learners are supported by trained volunteers to be able to navigate the internet, write emails, connect with loved ones through online communication and social media, and be aware of pitfalls to avoid abuse and disinformation. Our eldest learner to have had her horizons broadened is 94 years old!

## Intergenerational PenPal Club

After having successfully pivoted to online learning, we saw the need for some community members to return to pen and paper. To reduce isolation and return to some old-school ways, the Intergenerational PenPal Club was formed. At first the youth were engaged through the schools, whereas the elders were recruited from the community. After one year with this approach, it was felt that the correspondence frequency from the youth would increase if they were equally recruited from the community as their motivation might be greater. This has proved to be the case. All correspondence is screened unless the adult has undergone a vulnerable sector criminal record check and full volunteer onboarding. More than 550 PenPal letters have been exchanged so far!

## Advantage Tutoring

Though our volunteers are absolutely amazing, there are some learners that require more targeted approaches with regards to academics and addressing the anxiety many youth are experiencing. In such cases, VLC has a team of certified teachers or similar educators to support. This program is fee based, and any financial gains are directed back into present subsidized programming.

Advantage Tutoring will provide two streams of Programs beginning Fall 2022:

- Foundations Program: Grades 1-5 – focused on developing foundational skills and competencies in support of the learner's school literacy and numeracy programs.
- Boost Program: Grade 6-10 – focused on boosting skills and competencies in support of the learner's school program in Reading, Writing, Math, and other school subjects.

Advantage Tutoring for French Immersion learners will be available upon request.

## Literacy Assessment

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

## Programs On Hold

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

## Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre (VIRCC)

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

## Reading Partners

Reading support for elementary school children that are in the "grey-area" i.e. needing a little extra support to overcome minor reading obstacles. Book bins are in each school, where volunteer Reading Partners select books that are at the appropriate level for the child.

## Programs in the Works

### Financial Literacy

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

### Family Literacy

Providing parents or guardians with English Language Learning, while simultaneously engaging their preschool children in integrative literacy approaches. At the end of the respective sessions, the parents and children are brought together to re-enhance the literacy support process. VLC wishes to run at least four series in parallel: two in Victoria at the VLC office, one in West Shore and one on Saanich Peninsula.

## Digital Capacity Building

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

Depending upon organizational needs, VLC would provide:

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

Customizable packages will be in development Fall/Winter 2022/23

Fees generated will help subsidize other VLC programs.

## Critical Thinking and Presentation Skills

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



## 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

VLC volunteer tutors have been absolutely amazing during the pandemic and in these “post-COVID” days, showing their strength, flexibility and knowledge in supporting learners and VLC. We would not be able to run our volunteer facilitated programs without them all!

For the first time, the social media reins were handed over to a very talented volunteer, who has been posting diligently on Facebook and Instagram. This has been a great relief to staff.

Special thanks go to Hank Mathias (VLC Board Director) and his brother-in-law, Stewart. We were so floored by all of their energy, resources and sense of humour that they put into getting the worst of the renovations of the new office done and making it such a welcoming space.

### Committees

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

<b>Community Engagement Committee</b>	<b>Program Committee</b>	<b>Finance Committee</b>	<b>Governance and Administration Committee</b>
Barbara Newton	Holly Kinkaid	Sameer Shah	Erin Halma
August Miles	Anita Nazareth	Hank Mathias	Hank Mathias
Corrie Groot	Laura Hadwin	Ruchir Mehndiratta	Ian Culbertson
Heather Kohler	Vicki Roberts	Dana Anderson	Janine Hannis
Janice James	Nisha Agrawal		Dawn Minty
Stefania Carsoni	Alice Kedves		
	Erik Searle		

With gratitude, we would like to acknowledge the committee members who are off on new adventures: Dana Anderson, Erik Searle

## 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 2021-2022 Board:**

Janine Hannis (Chair)	Ian Culbertson (Vice-Chair)
Erin Halma (Secretary)	Sameer Shah (Treasurer)
Dana Anderson	Holly Kinkaid
Hank Mathias	Vicki Roberts
Dawn Minty	Ruchir Mehndiratta
Alice Kedves.	

Retired from the Board: Dana Anderson, Vicki Roberts

## Staff

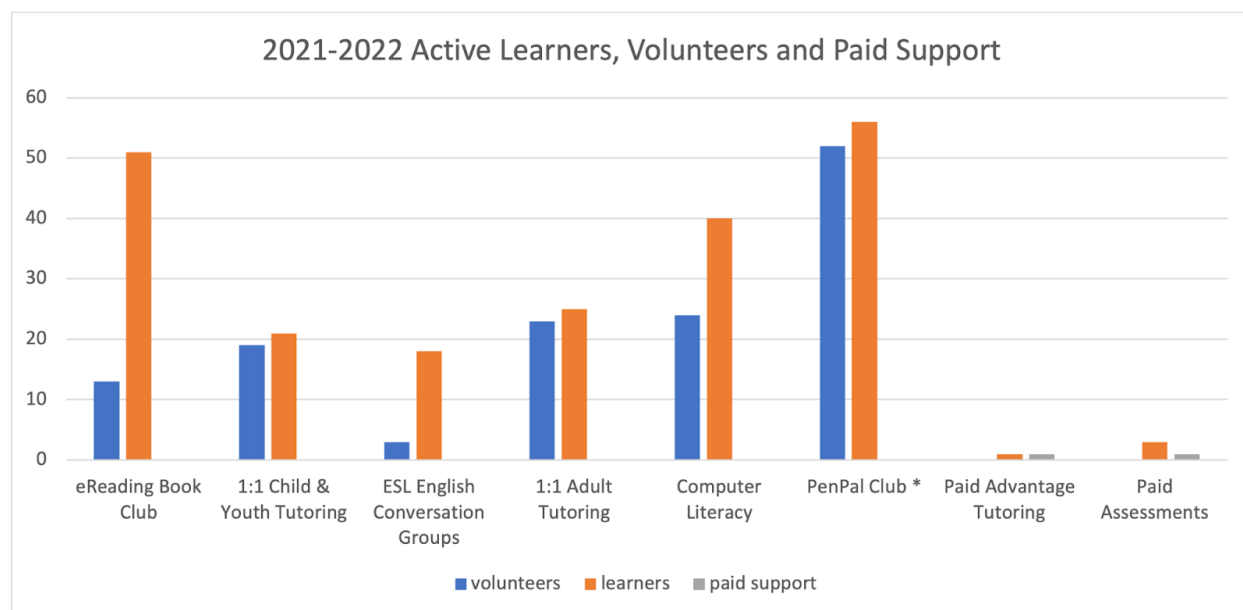
Our staff made the move to a new location in January 2022, which turned out to be the old haunts of Literacy Victoria around two decades ago!

We were fortunate to welcome a new member to our small yet mighty team, namely retired principal Karen Gonzales, who will be responsible for our Advantage Tutoring and other paid services.

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

## Some Statistics

### Learners, Volunteers and Staff



Learner numbers overall were up 65% from the previous year.

\* PenPal Club: adult PenPals = volunteers, child/youth PenPals = learners

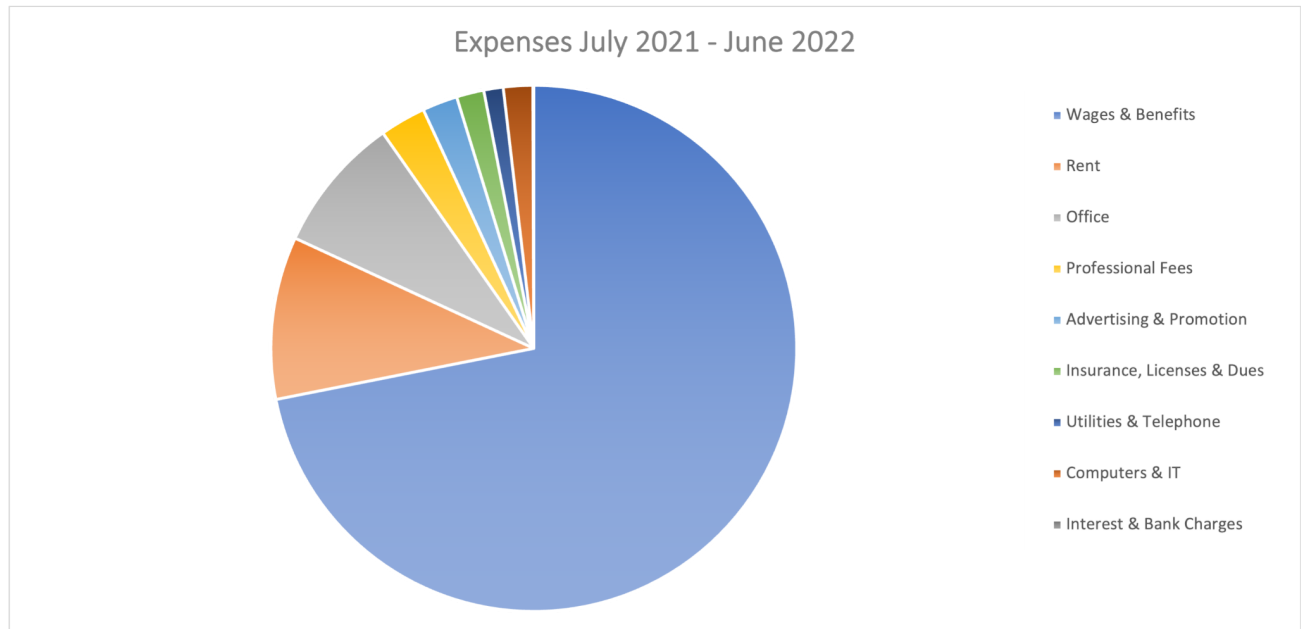
The pivot to online learning happened in April 2020. This was indeed a great success, but we noticed some of the excitement waning in the second year of online learning for some. While some learners and tutors appreciated and even thrived with online learning, some were awaiting the return to face-to-face instruction. VLC only resumed in-person tutoring in summer 2022. An increase in learners and tutors is expected in the coming year accordingly.

English Language Conversation Groups were limited due to lack of trained ELL facilitators. A new recruitment round is anticipated. Sessions may take place at the VLC office, online, or a hybrid version where the learners sit in the VLC boardroom and the facilitator teaches online with the session being projected on a screen.

VLC also hopes to resume both in-school learning as well as tutoring at Vancouver Island Regional Correctional Centre.

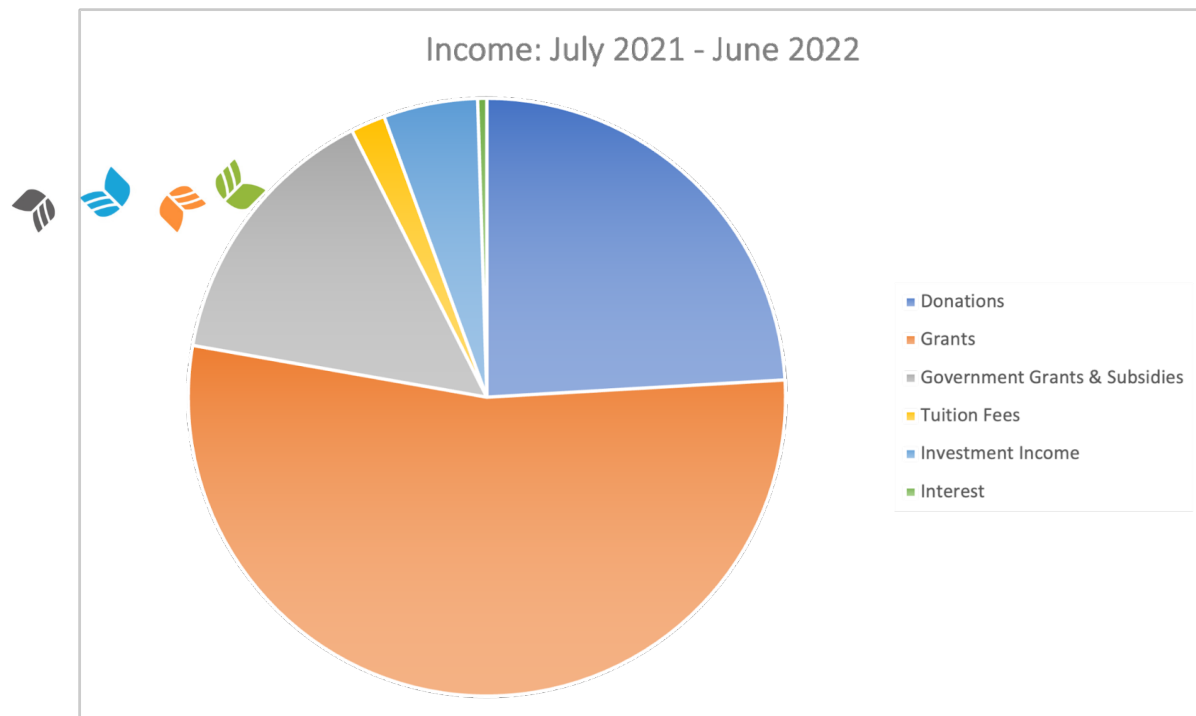
The fact that we still had an increase in learners from last year came down to wider recognition of our online support and the fact that we started Digital Learning Support and the Intergenerational PenPal club.

## Expenses



As VLC is a service-oriented organization, the majority of VLC's expenses are naturally wages. With a new larger location, rent comes in second, followed by office expenses. Thanks to our volunteers, we are able to provide free services through our subsidized programs being accessible to many individuals in our community.

## Funding Sources



VLC is still rather grant dependent, but is taking more determined steps towards fee-paying services with its Advantage Tutoring and new digital capacity building social enterprise. With the hiring of a new Advantage Coordinator, VLC looks forward to new income streams through paid services, which will in turn support subsidized programming.

Naturally, donations and bequests are always encouraged, as they permit VLC to put the funds to areas that are needed most if not otherwise earmarked. In the next year, management will be actively cultivating larger gifts as well.

## 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. There we meet extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic peers that all work towards improving literacy in our communities.

## Supporters

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

MP Laurel Collins

MLA Grace Lore (Victoria, Beacon Hill)

MLA Lana Popham (Saanich South)

North Park Neighbourhood Association

With the new office, we were fortunate to receive in-kind donations of office furniture from **Highway 3 Solutions, United Way South Vancouver Island, Dixon Davis and Co. and Mercy Ships**. We also received 5 laptops from **MLA Lana Popham's office** that were refurbished by the **Electronic Recycling Association (ERA)**.

**CBC Radio Victoria** is very gracious to invite VLC to speak about new programming on the radio. We always notice an uptake in new volunteer applications after these appearances!

**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 to the community.

We are also grateful for the **local artists and artisans** who have helped to create a warm and inviting space at our new offices: Angela Gabaldon (The Artful Peddler), Victoria Modern Quilt Guild, and young artists: Ava, Brookelyn, Sam and Josie.

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. This year we had someone perform intuitive readings by donation which they in-turn donated to VLC, and a group of folks ran a bottle drive for which VLC benefitted!

The **VLC BOOK BASH!** challenges readers of all ages to obtain pledges from friends and family for every 100 pages they read throughout August. From the 6 year-olds who delight their grandparents by reading 100 pages, to the keen reader who decides this is the summer to re-read all the Canada Reads winners, participants are invited to set a reading target, pick a theme (or not), and take part in the challenges and event buzz on social media.

We wish to include the **VLC Book Bash! champions** from this year's Book Bash as well: Chris Coleman, Fred and Cathy Haynes, Dean Murdock, Steve Newton, Jim Swanson, Harvey the HarbourCat, Janine Hannis, Melanie Ihmels, Emma Shelford, Jack Knox, Teale Phelps Bandaroff, Kathryn Marlow and Valerie Green.

The community was generous with gifts to provide as prizes for the winners of the book bash and of what remained were auctioned off, which proceeds went to VLC programming.

#### Book Bash Supporting Partners:



Monk  
Office

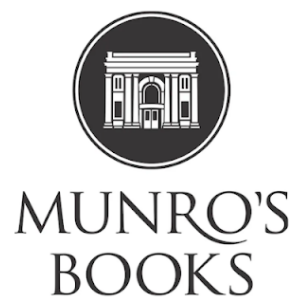


TIMES COLONIST

Last but not least, we wish to thank all those **community members** who donate their time, expertise and funds to help support Victoria Literacy Connection in its mission to support literacy on the South Island.

## With Thanks to Our Funders

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





## Words From Our Learners and Volunteers

*My granddaughter's ability to read improved significantly with this program. She was so resistant to reading at home with family. This experience online with peers at a similar level works!! Thank you all!! - grandparent of Kids eReading Club participant*

*CB brings joy and companionship to my life and I appreciate her so much. I am a handicapped low-income senior and anyone that gives freely of their valuable time and energy is a gem in our society. ... - JA age 75, digital learner*

*Thank you for all of the open communication and collaboration this year. I really appreciate all of the accommodations you've been willing to try with us. ... - JR, support worker for digital learner with diverse abilities*

*Many thanks to L for the eReading sessions she conducted for K. She is so kind and did such a great job with getting K engaged. I have noticed a significant difference in K's confidence in reading out loud. She is way more likely to try words that she normally would quickly give up on without trying even once. This has been an invaluable resource and we are very grateful. - parent of eReading Club learner*

*L is a fantastic tutor. ... She has completely changed how my daughter feels about reading. Thank you! - parent of Kids eReading Club learner*

*I am working with ... a wonderful computer coach. I am feeling more confident on the computer and cell phone which is an asset, because with covid and as a result of my age, I find I am using webinars and online information more than ever before so being up to date is really important. - RE age 69, digital learner*

*Thank you to VLC for matching me with someone who is so keen on improving their reading ... We've been learning and reading together [for 3 months] and the most noticeable thing is the improvement in [their] overall CONFIDENCE... Yes, their pronunciation [and comprehension] is improving. But it is their improved confidence now to "have a go" at reading texts that would have intimidated them in the past. They realize that needing to read a short poem multiple times to grasp its meaning is OK (and fun!). Stumbling over the pronunciation of a foreign word is OK. It's all OK... When we looked back at song lyrics, poems, and stories we had initially read a few months ago, my match was so surprised at how much easier reading these same texts has become... - SM, adult literacy tutor*

*My first "assignment" ...was born with many challenges facing her. During our first session, she told me "I can't read". "Well", I said, "you can't read now, but you will." ...Eventually, she did read, and her confidence (and mine) grew. I nearly burst into tears when her mother told me that she was reading her books to the kindergarten class at her school! - TP, child & youth literacy tutor*