

## 2021 Elizabeth Kelly Foundation Literacy Tutoring Program

Alyssa and Rob dedicated their summer to improving children’s literacy rates in Mississippi Mills. Alyssa, the Literacy Program Coordinator, currently enrolled in Masters of Health Science in Speech-Language Pathology at the University of Toronto, revamped the program to include new literacy skills development techniques. Rob, an elementary school teacher during the school year, offered practical experience and creative techniques as well, like the cloud wall shown below. The following End of Program Report highlights the revised program’s success.

Improving reading levels and confidence would not have been possible without the support from the Elizabeth Kelly Foundation.

Thanks you!

Christine, Monica, MMPL staff and Board.



## Mississippi Mills Public Library - Literacy Tutoring Program 2021 End of Program Report

The Literacy Tutoring Program at the Mississippi Mills Public Library was a success, once again this year. There were two tutors who worked a total of 500 hours to support 28 students in grades 1-4 from Holy Name of Mary Catholic School, Naismith Memorial Public School, Pakenham Public School, and R. Tait McKenzie Public School over the course of three two-week sessions, running from July 5th to August 13th, 2021. The one-on-one tutoring sessions focused on meeting students at their current level, then using fun and interactive activities to build early literacy skills. The goal was to increase both the student's reading abilities and their enjoyment of reading.

We were very excited to be able to run this program in-person at both the Almonte and Pakenham branches of the library this summer, to accommodate as many students as possible. All COVID-19 safety procedures were adhered to (including wearing masks, maintaining physical distancing, and disinfecting materials and surfaces) to ensure a safe, comfortable, and effective learning environment with no negative effects on the program or on the students' learning experiences.

Improvements in the students' reading abilities were observed by both the tutors and the parents. On average, students showed an improvement of one grade level in their phonological awareness skills. Phonological awareness refers to a student's understanding that words are made up of sounds and their ability to manipulate these sounds within a word. This is an important precursor to reading as it helps students to become better decoders when they are sounding out and blending new words. Students also showed an average improvement of half a grade level in their ability to decode new words when reading. This included recognizing different spelling patterns for various sounds when reading (e.g., learning that *ie*, *i\_e*, *igh*, and *y* are all ways of spelling the sound /i/). Improvements were also observed in the students' fluency when reading aloud and in their comprehension when reading, or when being read to by the tutor or by their parent(s). Parents reported further improvements in these areas at home, as well as increased confidence shown by their child when reading and increased enjoyment of reading. One parent commented about their child's experience, "The amount of progress in 2 weeks has been astounding. We will keep up the reading and hope to keep up his enthusiasm." Another parent wrote about their son's interest in reading, "It has increased by 100%. He had no interest in reading before the program. Now he wants to go to the library every day." Many parents wished the program could have been longer and expressed an interest in a similar type of after school program that runs through the year, asking "Would this be available after school or on March break?"

The program was enjoyed by both students and parents, and the quality of resources available through the library to support this program were described as "exceptional" and "absolutely amazing." Another parent commented, "We are so grateful that this program exists." Another

aspect of the program that parents really appreciated were the daily conversations with the literacy tutors about their child's progress. Especially since these students have been in online school for the past year, telling the parents what we worked on during the session and explaining how they can use similar strategies to continue building those skills at home was valuable feedback for many parents. By providing this feedback daily (rather than just at the end of the 2-week session), it allowed parents the opportunity to try the strategy on their own at home and then follow-up with the tutor about any questions they had. This enabled the parent and the tutor to troubleshoot together and empowered the parent to take on a bigger teaching role to support their child's literacy development. This aspect was highlighted by a parent in their written feedback about the program, "The daily feedback was very good and enabled me as a parent to focus more on the key areas of interest."

We hope to continue this format of regular informal feedback to parents next year, in addition to the written feedback that is provided at the end of the two-week session. Since not all parents dropped off and picked up their child, this extra support was not as easily available to all parents. For next year, a written communication system is recommended so that the tutor and parent can communicate about the child's learning and progress, even if the parent is not able to be the one interacting with the tutor during pick-up/drop-off.

We received fewer referrals this year than we did in previous years. This was likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers may have had a harder time completing literacy assessments and determining students' reading levels through an online medium. Additionally, both teachers and parents are likely receiving a higher volume of emails than in previous years, and it is possible that email communications about the program were not received and read promptly by teachers and/or parents. It is also possible that parents weren't comfortable with their child attending an in-person program, despite the appropriate COVID-19 safety protocols that were followed. We expect enrollment to increase again next year. To help ensure this increase in enrollment, we recommend that the literacy tutoring program be advertised to parents on the Mississippi Mills Public Library website and social media pages for next year. This advertisement should ask parents to contact their child's teacher if they have a child in grades 1-3 who is struggling with literacy skills. This can then prompt the teacher to complete a referral form to send-in to the literacy program coordinator. Another way to increase the number of referrals again for next year is to provide each of the participating schools with a post-program summary of the program. By including the schools in this process, it will increase their knowledge and awareness of the program, which may serve to increase participation from teachers and principals in future years.

In addition to the in-person tutoring, literacy kits for kindergarten students were also created and distributed this year. These kits included instructions and materials for simple activities parents or caregivers could do at home with their kindergarten-age student to promote literacy development. These kits were available for pick-up at the library or online through the library website, for parents or caregivers to print at home. Since the tutoring sessions were not able to accommodate kindergarten students this year, this was an effective and accessible alternative to allow for continued support of these students. Many parents have expressed excitement

about trying these activities at home. More formal feedback has not been generated about these literacy kits, but a download counter has been installed on the website to help determine the number of students that we are able to reach in this way.

Parents, students, and tutors are appreciative of the continued support of the Elizabeth Kelly Library Foundation for making this program possible. As one parent writes, "I would like to thank the library, sponsor of this program, and tutor and other staff who made this happen. Keep up the excellent work! This was the perfect summer camp [my child] could get during the pandemic. I would suggest having more sessions like this for the children out there." Another parent was moved to tears at the end of the two-week program, "I just want to thank everyone involved, sincerely, for helping my child really come into his own love for reading. It has been a long haul helping him through his difficulties these last few (strange) years, but he seems to have turned a corner with this program. We are so grateful for the encouragements and support that you have offered. I *\*think\** we have a reader on our hands!"

Alyssa Stowe  
Literacy Program Coordinator