

2025 Impact Report

Little Red Reading House & Book Bank



The Little Red Reading House

The Little Red Reading House hosts guests from across the community, including families, school groups, and community organizations. The House is a welcoming space for curious young learners, one that sparks imagination and inspires a love of reading.

7837

people visited the House in 2025

33

community organizations visited

24

school field trips were hosted

Each guest visit includes open exploration of the House, story time with a House host, and the opportunity for every child to pick a book to take home and keep. Book ownership is a core part of the House's mission, supporting the growth of home libraries and a lifelong connection to reading.

Some highlights this past year...



Six-year-old Eliana created her own book club when she was five. She hosted one of her book club meetings at the Little Red Reading House.



A visitor got to meet a furry friend when Alberta-based author and farmer, Christina Hatton-Fearnley, visited. She read from her series of children's books and brought small animals for guests to interact with.



Local illustrator and art educator, Vanja Kragulj, joined the Little Red Reading House to host a children's illustration workshop.

"This was a great literacy opportunity for our younger students. We saw them become excited about reading when they got to choose their own book and practice literacy at home."

- Teacher

The Little Red Reading Van

Each spring and summer, the Little Red Reading Van brings the magic of the House into neighbourhoods across the community, expanding access to books and literacy experiences. Our team visited schools, attended community gatherings, and met with families at several non-profit organizations including Miskanawah, YW, Youth Centres of Calgary, Families Matter, Immigrant Education Society, and Discovery House.



11

schools visited
in 2025

1379

students
engaged

1400

books
distributed

33

appearances at
community
events

“We are incredibly thankful for the amazing experience provided by the Little Red Reading Van team. The cozy and inviting setup was absolutely perfect, it truly captivated our children and kept them engaged. The excitement the children felt when seeing the van was heartwarming. Thank you for your commitment to our children and to early literacy, it makes a world of difference!”

- Jackie Fecho, Site Coordinator, Providence McKenzie Towne



The Van gave out books at Treat Accessibly, a community-led event that makes it easier for children with disabilities to enjoy trick-or-treating. A record-setting 2000 people participated in 2025.



Several classes got to meet with the Van team at a school run by Providence, an organization that provides educational and therapeutic programs for children with disabilities.

Book Bank

The Book Bank is an important part of the Little Red Reading House, supplying all books that children get to take home and keep. Beyond that, the Book Bank provides books to organizations across the community to expand access to reading, especially for children furthest from opportunity.

36,075 books were given out across the community by the Book Bank in 2025

through visits to the Little Red Reading House, Little Red Reading Van, and partner organizations

We partner with dozens of organizations across the community, including:

- Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- Alberta Children's Hospital
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Brenda Strafford House
- Calgary Food Bank
- Families Matter
- Habitat for Humanity
- Kids Cancer Care
- The Mustard Seed
- Women's Centre of Calgary

Partner spotlights...

The Little Red Reading House Book Bank has partnered with the **Calgary Food Bank** since 2015. Through this collaboration, the Book Bank supplies up to 500 books each month to stock the Food Bank's Birthday Room, a special space where children and youth can choose a book to celebrate their birthday.



Welcome basket provided by the Book Bank

The Book Bank creates welcome baskets for families supported by **Habitat for Humanity**, an organization that partners with families to build safe, affordable homes. Each basket is thoughtfully curated to reflect the ages of the children and is filled with books, toys and handmade pillows and quilts made by volunteers. In 2025, the Book Bank created 29 welcome baskets containing 615 books for families.

The **Books on Buses** program is a collaboration between the Book Bank and the Calgary Board of Education to make books available on school buses for kids to read on their journeys to and from school. In 2025, the Book Bank provided 2415 books through this program.

"The Little Red Reading House Book Bank is the backbone of Families Matter with all the early literacy support they provide to us and our families! We could not be more thankful for the work they do. Our agency and our clients are never without books. Thank you!"

- Families Matter



Photo: Adobe Stock Images

"With the books provided to us by the Book Bank, our tutors help students build comprehension skills while cultivating a love of reading. These books offer kids who have experienced cancer more than stories - they offer choice, shared literacy experiences, and a joyful pathway to learning so they can thrive in body, mind, and spirit."

- Kids Cancer Care

Research and Learning



Dr. Lorraine Reggin interacts with guests at the Little Red Reading House

The Little Red Reading House and Book Bank are a part of the Owerko Centre at the University of Calgary, a relationship that provides unique opportunities to move research beyond the university and into the community. In early 2025, Dr. Lorraine Reggin, PhD, served as the Westman Researcher in Residence, supporting program coordination and research integration activities for the Little Red Reading House. A major focus of this work was launching the Early Words in Health Care Research Project, a partnership with the Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation, Alberta Health Services, and Owerko Centre.

The study explores the impact of including literacy counselling during well child visits. More than 75 healthcare providers have been trained to help carry out this engagement with families. The project team have also developed evaluation tools, received research ethics approval and recruited family participants. Since launching in summer 2025, there have been 1285 families expressing interest in participating. With four Calgary health clinics participating in the project, engagement continues to grow with the overall goal to recruit 3200 participants.

Reggin also contributes to several other research projects using longitudinal data from the All Our Families cohort, examining how early language development relates to later attention, social skills, and mental health and identifying developmental links between early vocabulary, core and pragmatic language, attention problems, and social functioning. These projects all contribute to a growing body of research on how early language impacts children’s learning, relationships, and mental health.



Dr. Jessica-Lynn Walsh (back row) with members of the All Our Families research team at the Owerko Centre

Building on this foundation, **Dr. Jessica-Lynn Walsh**, MB BCh BAO MSc, joined the Owerko Centre as Manager of Community-Partnered Research and Engagement and Westman Researcher in Residence, expanding the Little Red Reading House’s role as a hub for research-informed programming and community partnerships. With an extensive background in epidemiological methods and knowledge mobilization, she is a passionate champion for children’s literacy and works at the intersection of research, community engagement and program innovation.

Walsh leads a research strategy that integrates knowledge generated at the Owerko Centre into Little Red Reading House programming, to create accessible and actionable resources to support literacy and wellbeing. By sharing information that reflects the diverse experiences and needs of Alberta families, the Little Red Reading House is a space that helps bring evidence to practice.

Evidence shows early reading helps reduce inequality, build self-regulation skills, and support positive mental health.

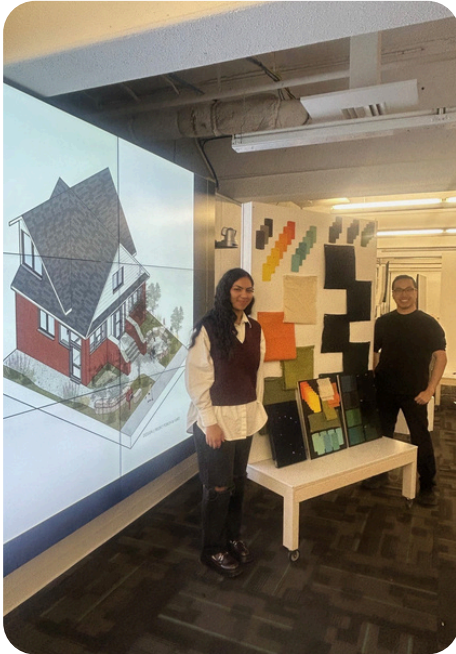
Reading together builds trust, lowers stress, and strengthens bonds that last a lifetime.

Reading helps kids learn to manage emotions and focus on tasks.

Under Walsh’s direction, key initiatives include translating literacy research into accessible tools for parents, educators, and community organizations and gathering community feedback to inform inclusive and responsive programming for neurodivergent and disabled children. This work addresses important gaps in Canadian data on children’s reading experiences and is strengthened through collaboration with education, health, and community partners across Alberta.

Partner spotlights...

The Owerko Centre and Little Red Reading House are partners with the **Kids Literacy Collective (KLC)**, a network of educators, community leaders and literacy advocates working to ensure that all children have the opportunity to learn to read by grade three. We contribute research and evidence-based tools that KLC shares with communities to help grow awareness of the importance of literacy in child wellness.



For a second year, the Little Red Reading House has partnered with UCalgary's **School for Architecture, Planning and Landscape (SAPL)** on student design projects. In 2025, the students focused on two priority areas for the House: the integration of Indigenous perspectives and enhancements that better support neurodivergent visitors.

The students spent months consulting with advisors, experts, families and community members to develop evidence-based design concepts. This collaboration provided unique, hands-on experience for students while making important enhancements to the House. With special support from the Rotary Club of Calgary Downtown and the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation, the team has made great progress in moving these projects forward, with construction and installation planned in 2026.

SAPL students, Karen Uppal and Justin Li, were among the students exploring design enhancements to the Little Red Reading House

The Little Red Reading House continues to engage students from UCalgary's **Werklund School of Education** through experiential learning opportunities where aspiring educators gain hands-on experience working with children and families. The students serve as House hosts and support Little Red Reading Van visits, engaging children with stories and books to foster literacy skills and a love of reading. These educators-in-the-making are gaining insights to bring into their future classrooms where they can create environments that nurture literacy.



Werklund School of Education students supporting a Little Red Reading Van visit in the community

Philanthropy

We are very grateful for the support we receive from generous donors through the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation. Together, with the Foundation, we are advancing a mission to inspire literacy to foster the best health and best future for all children in our community.

Alongside this support, the Little Red Reading House and Book Bank rely on book donations from generous community members throughout the year, helping ensure that more children can take books home to build their own libraries. This year, our community went above and beyond, making it possible for tens of thousands of children to discover the joy of reading.



Owen proudly holds some of the hundreds of books he donated to the Book Bank

Donor spotlights...

Last year, eight-year-old **Owen** suffered a spinal cord stroke and has since been in rehabilitation. Inspired by the care he received, he decided to collect books to give to the Alberta Children's Hospital. As an avid hockey player, he turned to his teammates and together they collected more books than the hospital could accept. Wanting a place for the remaining books, Owen learned about the Book Bank and was saddened by the number of children who don't have books in their homes. He donated 750 children's books to the Book Bank so that other kids can discover their own love of reading.



Volunteers spend weeks gathering book donations from across the community for the Big Book Sale

Thanks to junior high school students from **McKenzie Highlands School**, the Little Red Reading House was awarded \$5000 by the Youth Philanthropy Initiative, an organization that empowers young people to support their communities. The students nominated the Little Red Reading House for this award, allowing for the purchase of 792 new children's books.

Every year, the Calgary Reads Big Book Sale, supported by the Rotary Club of Calgary, attracts thousands of book lovers. Rotary Club members and volunteers work tirelessly to collect book donations for this epic, multi-day event that raises funds to support literacy initiatives across the community, including the Book Bank. This support allows the Book Bank to put more books into the hands of children every year.

We are deeply grateful for the **volunteers** who give their time to support the Little Red Reading House, Van, and Book Bank, helping with everything from sorting books and organizing deliveries at the Book Bank, to hosting family visits at the House to travelling across the community in the Little Red Reading Van.

42 dedicated volunteers gave **1076** hours of time to support the Little Red Reading House, Van and Book Bank



In memory - Donna Brown

Donna was a dedicated volunteer at the Little Red Reading House and Book Bank. During her decades-long career as an educator and Assistant Principal, she was a strong advocate for education and literacy and touched thousands of lives through her passion for teaching and storytelling.

After Donna passed away last year, her family generously invited members of her community to honour her memory by donating children's books.

At her celebration of life, 430 books were collected for the Little Red Reading House, with additional donations made to the House in the weeks that followed. Through her time as a volunteer, and further through these gifts, Donna leaves an incredible legacy and is deeply missed.

Our team



Dr. Susan Graham, PhD, RPsych,
Director, Owerko Centre,
University of Calgary



Dr. Jessica-Lynn Walsh, MB BCh BAO,
MSc, Manager, Community Partnered
Research and Engagement, Owerko
Centre; Westman Researcher in
Residence, Little Red Reading House

Parisa (Paris) Radmanesh, BA,
Coordinator, Little Red Reading
House



**Lucas Field, Community
Engagement Assistant, Little Red
Reading House**



Dawn Cruickshank,
Administrator, Book Bank



Thank You!

Thank you for being a supporter of the Little Red Reading House and Book Bank at UCalgary's Owerko Centre. Not only are you championing literacy, reading, and book ownership for thousands of children each year, you help advance research and thought leadership that strengthens literacy and child health across our community.



Want to connect? Reach out to us at owerko.centre@ucalgary.ca or hello@littleredreading.house.