BLG Reads to Kids supports hands-on children's literacy since 2003

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This year is a monumental year for BLG, as we celebrate both the firm's 200th anniversary and the 20th year of BLG Reads to Kids, our cornerstone community involvement initiative that supports literacy for young children.

With a focus on marginalized communities, BLG Reads to Kids provides one-on-one and group reading to children in elementary schools, organizes book drives and donates funds and resources to schools in British Columbia, Alberta, Québec and Ontario, as well as communities in Nunavut with the help of Team North.

Over the last few years, the firm – and the world – has had to adapt. Although the program had to pivot during the pandemic, one thing remained the same: BLG Reads to Kids continues to be one of our most celebrated initiatives.

The genesis of BLG Reads to Kids

With a desire to build a national charity initiative with a focused cause, BLG's David Scott and Doug Mitchell – recognized community involvement leaders – created the national co-chairs committee in 2000 to design a project where all firm members from coast to coast could participate in hands-on work for a focused cause.

Throughout the summer of 2001, the committee conducted surveys in each office to decide what area firm members were most passionate about pursuing with this program. Children's literacy received the most support. As legal professionals, BLG understands the importance of literacy as a fundamental for learning and growing, and it was clear to firm members that not all schools in their regions were receiving the same resources to set up students for academic success. For this reason, it was decided that the program would focus on marginalized communities.

"I'll never forget the very first school principal we worked with explaining that some of these kids only had two books at home – the phone book and a Sears catalog," says Jane Bachynski, one of the original members of the national co-chairs committee and current national chair of BLG Reads to Kids.

Not only is the hands-on reading time a hugely important aspect of the program, but the donation of books and other resources allows the children to expand their home and school libraries to encourage children to read new stories beyond the BLG Reads to Kids sessions.

“The books provided by BLG are such a valuable addition to our students' homes and the books in the classrooms provide a rich variety of genres and topics for our students to dive into,” says a principal from Ontario.

Since launching in 2003, BLG volunteers continue to read with hundreds of children per year from junior kindergarten to Grade 3. BLG Reads to Kids volunteers are passionate about spreading word of the program in an authentic way — whether it’s speaking to a client, new firm member, friend or community member – it is clear that the experience is not just helping the students.

“Volunteering opens people’s eyes to the fact that not all schools are equally resourced and seeing these schools firsthand makes us realize we need to level this playing field,” adds Jane. “We aren’t just throwing money at an issue. It isn’t passive.”

Celebrating 20 years of improving children’s literacy in Canada

Over the last 20 years, our volunteers have had the privilege of forming close and impactful relationships with the teachers and principals of the schools that BLG works with. Through these connections, they’ve learned that classroom supplies that seem like essential items are often provided through a teacher’s personal funds.

To thank teachers for all they do to foster the love of reading and education while honouring some of the firm’s milestones, the BLG Reads to Kids committee has put together *Future Stars Classroom Toolkits* – a curated kit of school supplies – for 200 classrooms across the country. Through discussions with the teachers and principals, the BLG Reads to Kids Committee was able to assemble toolkits containing essential items that give teachers a jump start on building a classroom that promotes creativity and growth.

“It felt like Christmas morning,” said a teacher who received a toolkit for her classroom in Québec. “It brings relief knowing that we are not spending out of pocket for basic materials. Many teachers purchase a lot of supplemental items and goods out of their own wallet to create a stimulating academic environment.”

In addition, this year, BLG Reads to Kids is teaming up with the folks from Team North to expand our regional reach and deliver 40 of the 200 *Future Stars Classroom Toolkits* to schools in Nunavut.

Looking to the future

The BLG Reads to Kids Committee and its volunteers thank every student and school employee who has invited us to their space and shown unwavering commitment to advancing children's literacy.

As we look to the future, the BLG Reads to Kids Committee is excited to explore new ways of delivering the most personal, interactive and fun literacy experiences to the students in our communities. We'll be listening to the needs and desires of the teachers to help fill their classrooms with the tools to help their students grow.

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