



Strong Start to reading™

"Making a difference in the life of a child"

Strong Start Annual Newsletter • December 2019

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Detailed program results and stories can be found on our website: www.strongstart.ca

Follow us on social media



Thanks to You, We Just Keep Growing

Each year we look forward to reflecting on our impact and accomplishments as a charitable organization and sharing them with our program partners and community stakeholders.

This has been another incredible year at Strong Start and we must start by sincerely thanking all of you who have helped make this possible. We have welcomed new program partners, volunteers, donors and literacy champions to our goal of helping young children learn to read. We have renewed commitments and nurtured relationships with those of you who are already on this journey with us. From the start, it was our hope and dream that we would grow our programs so more children could have a Strong Start learning to read. Because of your commitment, that dream is becoming a reality.

Starting in 2001 as a community project using handmade games, expertly designed activities and a handful of volunteers in one school in Kitchener, Ontario, Strong Start has grown to a viable organization offering a continuum of programming for children from six months to nine years of age. We are active in six regions in Southern Ontario, supporting more than 5,000 children annually.

Many ingredients make up our recipe for success. Our dedicated volunteers are essential, and this past year nearly 3,100 of them gave 49,605 hours of their time. Strong Start finished the 2019 program year with 325 active program sites and this fall we are adding some 30 more.

Such growth would not be possible without our charitable donors and funders. As a children's charity that receives no direct government funding, we rely entirely on the generosity of our donors and grant makers to ensure we not only sustain what we have achieved, but also continue to grow our impact. We have welcomed local donors in new communities and even national organizations that are glad to be able to support us in multiple regions.

Among the many highlights of the year was the formation of the Strong Start Education Caucus at Queen's Park. This non-partisan caucus of MPPs is using its influence to raise awareness of the importance of early literacy and support the work and expansion of Strong Start in communities across Ontario. Conestoga College joined our rally this year by providing two Capstone teams who used their newly-minted education in technology development to help accelerate two major tech projects at Strong Start. And lastly, tech startup EPOCH shared its volunteer recruitment app to expand our engagement with corporate volunteers.

We now invite you to sit back for a good read as we share what's new at Strong Start!



Machelle Denison

Machelle Denison,
Executive Director



Steve Cameron

Steve Cameron,
Chair of the Board

“

@Strong_Start My son was in the Get Ready for School program last year and is doing amazing in JK now.

Sabrina Stashans
@sabinastashans via Twitter

”



Impact that Lasts.....

Ten Apples Up On Top

Easton's story as shared by his mother, Sarah

Easton is my handsome, sweet, oldest child with short brown hair, blue eyes and olive complexion. He's a thoughtful and energetic kid who loves math and hockey.

Bedtime stories were part of our daily routine and I could see him struggling to read on his own. When we went to the library, he would pick out a book he found interesting, but I would have to read most of it to him.

When Easton came home with the Strong Start letter, he was in speech therapy. We were happy that he was identified for the reading program and would be getting the help he needed to succeed.

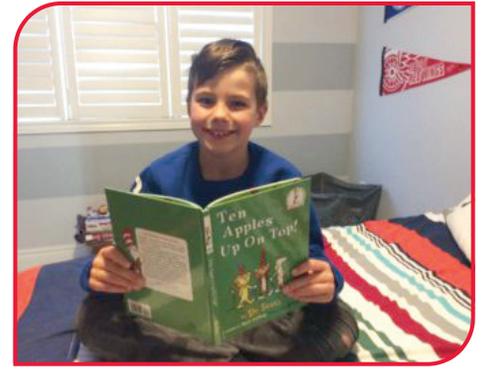
He was enrolled in the Letters and Sounds strands. He looked at the program as an enjoyable activity and

“Oh look Mom, Batman said this” He was reading the subtitles instead of listening to what was being said.

Sarah, Easton's mother

described his sessions as “reading and playing games.” It was important to me that Easton did not view reading as a chore and that he would learn to enjoy reading. Reading is everywhere!

The improvements have been slow, but sure! I encourage him to read books that are recommended for his reading level, and also books he has already read, to help him gain some fluency. A few weeks ago, we were watching a Batman cartoon and I'd accidentally turned on the subtitles. I didn't realize it until Easton pointed to the TV and said, “Oh look Mom, Batman said this” He was reading the subtitles instead of listening to what was being said.



My “aha!” moment, however, came last summer when we were in the children's section of the new Chapters store in Cambridge. It was a rainy day and we were sitting at a round table. I was sipping on my Starbucks latte when Easton walked up to the table with “Dr. Seuss' Ten Apples Up On Top!” and read the whole book, cover-to-cover, on his own! He looked at me after he finished, beaming with pride, and asked if we could buy the book. To this day, he continues to reread this book as an old favourite.



Letters, Sounds and Words
A Strong Start to reading program™

Hudson Was Nervous, But Ready!

I first heard about the *Get Ready for School* program through a friend of a friend. As a stay-at-home mom, I always had Hudson with me, and I was worried he would not be ready for Kindergarten which was just a few months away. I shared my fears with my friend and she encouraged me to sign up for this program.

Right away, I could tell the program was benefiting him. The Instructors were wonderful and worked with us to ease his anxiety, engaging him in play as soon as he entered the classroom. Very quickly he started loving the program. At home, he would often sing the songs he learned in class. He went from not knowing many letters to knowing most of their sounds. He was always excited to read the little books. I could not have been happier. The program exceeded my every expectation. No longer was I worried about his transition to school.

The Instructors were wonderful and worked with us to ease his anxiety, engaging him in play as soon as he entered the classroom.

Hudson's mother

On the first day of Kindergarten, Hudson was nervous but ready! He had a smooth start, which I believe is a direct result of his participation in *Get Ready for School*. He is enjoying school and doing very well. His teacher has shared with me how impressed she is with Hudson's attention span, focus, and determination to complete what he's asked to do. As one of the youngest children in the class, he is also more ready to read, and is now able to read some words in his story books.

Hudson changed from being a “watcher” to becoming a “doer.” He is excited about learning and reading and feels confident enough to take risks. He has made new



friends in class and generally enjoys school. I am very proud of him.

I am eternally grateful to the *Get Ready for School* program. I plan to become a volunteer coach for the *Letters, Sounds and Words* program. I want to pay it forward and make a lasting difference in the life of a child, as the *Get Ready for School* program made such a difference for Hudson.



Get Ready for School
A Strong Start to reading program™

™ Based on the research of Dr. Juliana Baciu

My Baby's Reading Journey

I first heard about the Baby Connections program, through a friend, when I was about nine months into my maternity leave. My daughter, Claire, was one of the older babies enrolled in the program at the Early Years Centre. Baby Connections is a wonderful opportunity for parents to learn how they can promote their children's early literacy development.

As a parent, I found the focus on early literacy particularly helpful. My husband and I were already reading to her at home, but the program helped me understand what markers and milestones to look for, on my child's developmental journey. For example, when Claire turns

“*Claire absolutely loved the book we received at the end of each class. The book with the baby faces is her all-time favourite.*”

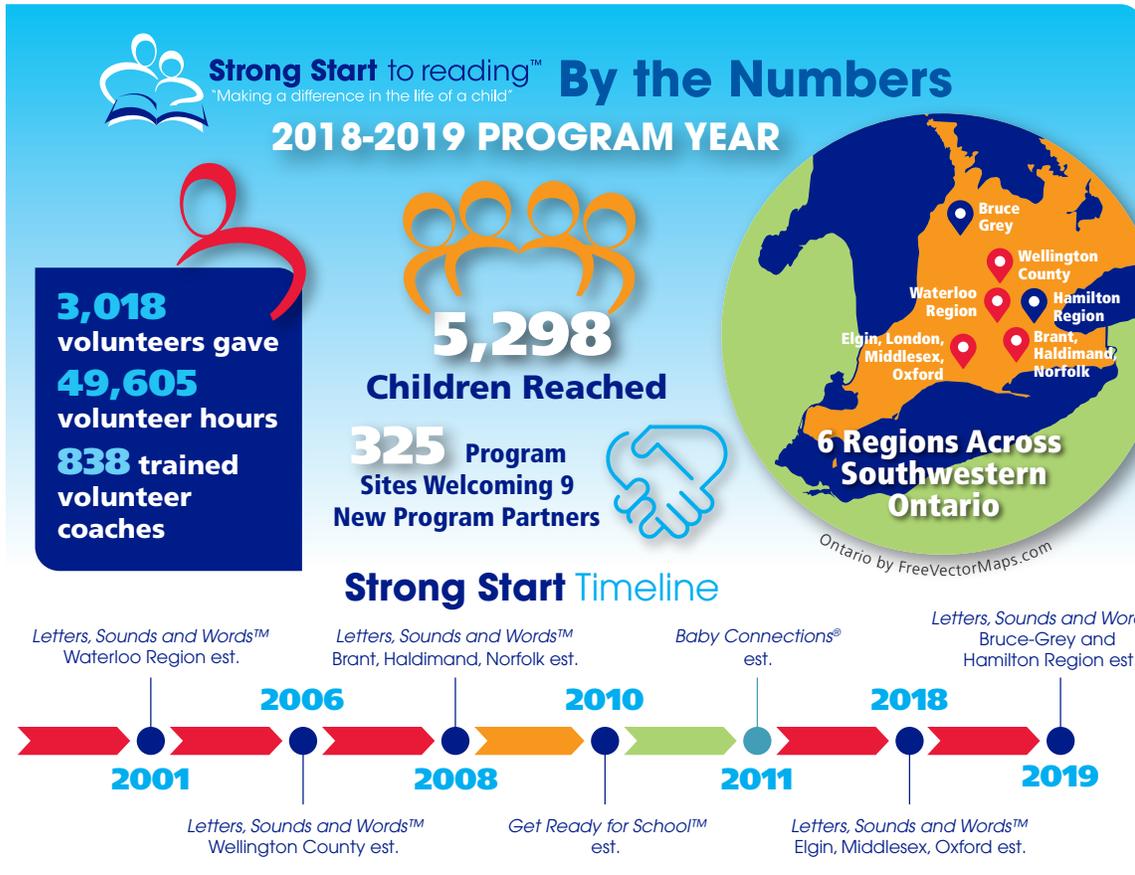
the page of a book we're reading, her ability to do so, is a precursor to reading. Tips like these were a way for me to know she was developing at pace.

Claire absolutely loved the book we received at the end of each class The book with the baby faces is her all-time favourite. When her grandparents visited, she would share the book with them and point to the baby's eyes, nose, ears, etc. when asked. That book has been read so many times, it is now held together with tape!



I strongly encourage parents to sign up for Baby Connections. The program will benefit both you and your baby. It gets you out of the house and into a supportive environment with other parents. If that's not enough, you also get a book at the end of each session. I still can't believe that such a powerful program is free!

<https://babyconnections.ca>



Thank You To date Strong Start has reached over **44,239** children through **535,618** volunteer hours, **31,145** volunteers and **YOUR** generous donations.

The numbers above reflect the totals for the 2018-2019 program year for Letters, Sounds and Words™, Get Ready for School™ and Baby Connections®.

DID? YOU KNOW!

- 33%** of children who had a full year developmental gain in receptive vocabulary in *Get Ready for School™* program
- 10%** made a year and a half gain in receptive vocabulary in *Get Ready for School™*
- 120** # of children on waitlist *Get Ready for School™* program in 2018
- 5** # of First Nations schools
- 17** # of independent schools representing cultural diversity, faith-based diversity and specialized programs for students with unique needs

Thank you.....

We couldn't do this without you.

Your financial support enables us to offer our quality programs.



LYLE S. HALLMAN
FOUNDATION



Josslin Insurance
a Real Insurance broker



The Cloverleaf Foundation
A family working together to make a difference



Wilson Family Foundation



Anonymous Fund
Collins-Wright Family Fund
The Marion Edgar Fund
Langdon Hall Fund
Berg Family
Jane & Ken Wright Family Fund
Blasman Family Fund
Daidy & James Flavelle Fund
Terry & Margret Osborne Family Fund

Victoria J. Suljak Memorial Fund
Waterloo Region Record Literacy Fund
Alex & Trish Brown Family Fund
Alex Schmidt Memorial Fund
David & Eleanor Yach Family Fund
Woolwich Community Fund
Motz Family Endowment
Landmann Family Fund
TD Bank Financial Group Employees
Endowment Fund
Community Fund
Spinnaker Fund
Anonymous Fund

Optimist Club of Westvale-Waterloo
Optimist Club of St. Jacobs
Optimist Club of Waterloo North

Thank you to all our financial and in-kind supporters.

Your investment in helping young children read is making a lasting difference and will pay dividends now and in the future.

Corporate

A Girl Named Trenholme
Digital Chaos
Electricity Distributors
Association - Niagara Grand
Gilt Restaurant
Graffiti Market
HM Advisors
Infinity (X) Group
Kitchener-Wilmot Hydro
M R & R Data Services
Manulife
Mitsui High-Tec
RLB Management Partnership
Shopbrain
Stacey Muirhead Capital
Management
TD Wealth Management
The Olde Heidelberg
Restaurant & Tavern
Your Neighbourhood Credit
Union

Clubs, Schools, Groups

100 Women Who Care Wilmot
Beechwood Park Homes
Association
Brier Park Public School
CUPE Local 2380
Elementary Teachers'
Federation of Ontario
Grand Erie Elementary
Teachers Federation
Kitchener Rangers Jr. A Hockey
Club
Kiwanis Club of Brantford
May Court Club of Kitchener-
Waterloo
May Court Club of London
Ontario English Catholic
Teachers' Association
OSSTF District 24
Rotary Club of Brantford
Charitable Foundation
RWTO - Brant

The Park Baptist Church
Christian Friends
Waterloo Region Occasional
Teacher Local
Westvale Public School

Foundations

Brant Community Foundation
Caledonia Community
Foundation
Centre Wellington Community
Foundation - Middlebrook
Community Fund
Elgin-St.Thomas Community
Foundation
Vancouver Foundation -
Enbridge Gas
Guelph Community
Foundation - Mildred Christie
Fund
Port Dover Community
Foundation
Samuel W. Stedman
Foundation
The D.H. Gordon Foundation
Toronto Foundation - SAP
Canada
United Way of Greater Toronto
United Way Waterloo Region
Communities

Government

Canada-Ontario Job Grant
City of Cambridge
City of Guelph
City of Kitchener

Third Party Events

Conestoga College - Events
Marketing Groups
Elmira Maple Syrup Festival
GREAT Conference

Kitchener Waterloo Fast Ball
Promotions
Rachel's 8th Birthday Party

In-Kind Support

Arrowsmith Corporation
Carol Jankowski
Chris Howlett
Mesbah Abdulrahem
Simpson Print
SVP Waterloo Region
Wilke Movers & Storage

Individuals

Anonymous (20)
Coleen Adams
Sheila Ainsworth
Janet L. Baker
Shirley Baldwin
Cheryl Bauman
Greg Brown
Ron & Rita Cherkewski
Bill & Mary Cressman
Addie Denison
Tony & Mabelle Denison
Susan Dusick
Luan English-Ferguson
Sandra Ewald
Muriel Ferguson
Lewis & Inge Ford
Ivy Friedman
Susan Gerth
Joan Good
Linda Gumble
Jim & Sue Hallman
Rebecca Hamm
Jennifer Hanson-Barry
Holly Herteis
Patti Hobler
Susan Hood
Christopher & Lynn Howlett
Carol Jankowski

Natasha Krahn
Julie MacKenzie
Deborah MacLatchy
Bob & Gayle MacMillan
Melissa Martz
Patricia McConachie
Hulene Montgomery &
Michael Graham
Gary & Ruth Mills
Bryan & Jackie Murdoch
Susanne Murdoch
Stan & Donna Nahrgang
George Nurse
Laurene Palubeskie
Leslie Parker
Carol Parsons
Bernie Pickett
Matt Pleil
David & Maureen Rich
Noella Roy
Beverley & Stan Saliwonchyk
Bob & Mieke Schroeder
Amy Sergi-Hammond
Nancy Silcox
Ken Silvester
Caitlin & Craig Smith
Ruthann Thwaites
Dan van Leeuwen
Ariane Wieck
Scott Williams
Marilyn Wilson
Hilde Wong
Sheri Wunder
Christina Young

Other Gifts

Thank you for all named
memorial gifts received in
memory of Dr. Vera Good,
Donald Pullen, Jim McDougall,
and Lynda Silvester.

*This list reflects gifts given
between July 1, 2018 and
November 20, 2019.*



News & Events.....

TIM HORTONS® Annual Smile Cookie™ Campaign Raises a Record Amount of (Cookie) Dough for Local Children's Charities

Tim Hortons Smile Cookie Campaign in Brantford raised a record \$97,234.95 in support of local children's nutrition and early literacy development.

The Brantford community was buzzing during the week-long campaign! Just think, in one week, in 19 restaurants, more than 97,000 cookies were sold! More than 100 hundred volunteers assisted the hard-working, enthusiastic Tim Hortons team members who led the effort: baking, decorating and promoting the cookies from morning to night during the campaign. Thank you to all the Tim Hortons teams for your efforts and thank you to the volunteers who gave their time to support them. Thank you to the schools, companies, agencies and individuals who purchased cookies in support of the children in Brantford. We are all smiling with sincere gratitude.



Canada Post Foundation Puts Its Stamp on Strong Start



This fall, Strong Start received a generous \$25,000 grant in support of its programs in Waterloo Region, and the counties of Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk, Wellington, Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford. We are absolutely thrilled to receive this support.

At a cheque presentation at their Bridgeport Road store in Waterloo Region, we learned that the foundation raises its funds through the sale of special-edition stamps. A portion of the sale goes to the Foundation to be later granted to charities.

While at the celebration, three of the customers who came in to purchase stamps were Strong Start volunteers!

Area Politicians Rally for Children's Literacy

We are delighted to share that a Strong Start Education Caucus has been formed at Queen's Park, supported by 15 MPPs from across the communities where Strong Start is delivering its *Letters, Sounds and Words* program.

This group of impassioned leaders, representing all parties, believes in the importance of literacy for children and come to the table ready to work together to create the brightest future for the children of Ontario. They are using their profile, networks and influence to raise awareness for our cause and make important introductions for Strong Start throughout the province of Ontario.

Waterloo MPP Catherine Fife used her Member's Statement to highlight the work of Strong Start. We invite you to watch the video on our website: strongstart.ca/news/area-politicians-rally-for-childrens-literacy/

Strong Start thanks former MPP and Speaker Dave Levac for getting the Caucus started while he was still serving. We also appreciate his willingness to serve as our Volunteer Caucus Advisor.

Meet the Team

Board of Directors:

Steve Cameron Chair of the Board
Keith Martin Board Member
Linda Fabi Board Member
Mark Hallman Board Member
Jennifer King Board Member
Kimberley Hogan Board Member
Teresa Norris-Lue Board Member
Kristiina Montero Board Member

Team Members:

Machelle Denison
Executive Director

Colette Moffat
Director of Program & *Letters, Sounds and Words™* Program Co-ordinator for Wellington County, Bruce-Grey & Hamilton Region

Caitlin Smith
Director of Operations

Susie Gamble
Warehouse Co-ordinator

Iwona Dmitrienko
Get Ready for School™ Program Co-ordinator

Kirsten Carr
Get Ready for School™ Program Co-ordinator

Ruth Mills
Letters, Sounds and Words™ Program Co-ordinator for Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk counties

Jean Stacey
Letters, Sounds and Words™ Program Co-ordinator for Waterloo Region

Introducing:

Mary Tuumanen
Administrative Assistant

Christine Giese
Letters, Sounds and Words™ Program Co-ordinator for Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford

Please visit our [website](#) to read more about our team.



Thank you to all our program staff and volunteers who deliver *Letters, Sounds and Words™*, *Get Ready for School™* and *Baby Connections®*. We are so grateful for your enthusiasm and time to help children learn to read. We couldn't do this without you.



Stronger Together.....

Our program partners



Letters, Sounds and Words
A Strong Start to reading program™

- Braemar House School
- **Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board**
- Brantford Christian School
- **Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board**
- Carizon Encompass Program
- Central Baptist Academy
- Emily C. General Elementary School
- **Grand Erie District School Board**
- Hamilton Region Pilot Schools
- I.L Thomas Odadrihonyanita Elementary School
- International School of Cambridge
- Jamieson Elementary
- KidsAbility School
- Koinonia Christian Academy
- Laurentian Hills Christian School
- Lloyd S. King School
- MAC Maple Grove School
- Oliver M. Smith Kawennio Elementary School
- **Thames Valley District School Board**
- W. Ross Macdonald School for the Blind
- **Waterloo Catholic District School Board**
- **Waterloo Region District School Board**
- **Wellington Catholic District School Board**
- Conestoga College
- Fanshawe College
- Mohawk College
- Six Nations Polytechnic
- University of Guelph
- Western University
- Wilfrid Laurier University



Get Ready for School*
A Strong Start to reading program™

* Based on the research of Dr. Juliana Baciu

- Activa Sportsplex, Kitchener
- Bridgeport Community Centre, Kitchener*
- Centreville Chicopee Community Centre, Kitchener
- Chandler Mowat Community Centre, Kitchener
- Country Hills Community Centre, Kitchener*
- Downtown Community Centre, Kitchener*
- Forest Hill United Church, Kitchener
- Grow Community Centre, Cambridge
- Kinbridge Community Association, Cambridge
- Kingsdale Community Centre, Kitchener*
- Langs, Cambridge*
- Linwood Community Centre, Linwood
- McCormick Branch Library, Waterloo*
- Preston Heights Community Group, Cambridge
- St. Peter's Catholic Elementary School, Cambridge
- Stanley Park Community Centre, Kitchener*
- The Family Centre, Kitchener
- Victoria Hills Community Centre, Kitchener*
- Williamsburg Community Centre, Kitchener
- Wilmot Family Resource Centre, New Hamburg*
- Woolwich Memorial Centre, Elmira



- Carizon Family & Community Services
- Country Hills Recreation Association
- EarlyON Listowel
- EarlyON Waterloo Region, YMCA
- Family & Children's Services
- House of Friendship
- Idea Exchange (multiple locations)
- KidsAbility Centre for Child Development
- Kitchener Public Library (multiple locations)
- Langs
- LINC English at First
- Project READ Literacy Network (multiple locations)
- Region of Waterloo Healthy Baby Healthy Children
- Region of Waterloo Infant Child Development Program
- Region of Waterloo Public Library (multiple locations)
- Waterloo Public Library (multiple locations)
- Wilmot Family Resource Centre

**sites also offering a Baby Connections® program*

This list reflects program partners between September 1, 2018 to November 15, 2019. For a list of current program partners, please visit our website.

Helping More Children in More Places

This past year saw the expansion of our programs.

In Waterloo Region, our *Get Ready for School* program expanded to Linwood and we added a program in Cambridge, bringing our total number to 20. Nearly 400 children attended this 88-hour program and gained letter-sound knowledge, grew their vocabulary, developed social skills and learned self-regulation, all essential building blocks for a successful entry to school and reading.

We also are thrilled to see our *Letters,*

Sounds and Words program expanding to 30 schools in Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties. We have also proudly added nine public schools in Hamilton Region and 11 Catholic schools in Bruce-Grey counties.

There are now more than 325 sites in Ontario running Strong Start programs, helping more than 5,000 children prepare to read this past year. Knowing our programs get measurable results, that is a lot of impact!

The recent expansion in London and Hamilton has been generously supported by the Fyfe Foundation, The Cowan Foundation and Sifton Foundation, with more donors and foundations joining us annually. Our growing impact is only possible if the communities in which we provide programming support us with their gifts of time and treasure. We sincerely thank our donors and volunteers on behalf of the children and families we serve.

Meet Our EPOCH New Time-Saver

EPOCH is an innovative solution that connects companies and their employees with social-impact opportunities such as volunteering and events.

Our partnership with EPOCH, started in early 2018, strengthened our ability to connect and develop relationships with many local technology companies and larger, private organizations.

EPOCH saves everyone time by replacing a lot of the back-and-forth of organizing a corporate volunteer activity.

In the last year, through EPOCH, we've had more than 50 volunteers from Shopify, North and Miovision assemble thousands of games and activities. To learn more about it, visit www.epochapp.com.

Conestoga Capstone Teams Bring Capacity and Tech Talent

On an evening in December 2018, during a pitch night at Conestoga College, students lined up for the chance to work with Strong Start. With the hopes of engaging one Capstone team, we were so heartened by the response that we took on two!

Strong Start engaged these teams to help launch two tech projects that will impact the Volunteer Coach experience. Strong Start relies on volunteers to deliver our *Letters, Sounds and Words* program, and this year we had more than 3,000 Volunteers helping over 4,000 children in this program.

Committed to continuous improvement, we launched two projects. The Volunteer Portal project will let trained volunteers watch tutorial videos on how to play the games and activities in *Letters, Sounds and Words*, and access Volunteer Coach positions posted by schools in their local communities. With this innovation we are confident that even more volunteers will be connected with the schools that need them, and volunteers will be able to perfect their coaching skills by having access to ongoing training.



The second project is a proprietary registration system where new coaches will be able to sign up for Volunteer Coach training sessions and directly create their volunteer profile in SiTE SOURCE™, Strong Start's proprietary database and program delivery system. This innovation is estimated to save more than 250 hours in data manipulation.

The two teams worked with Strong Start and our volunteer Senior Developer, Chris Howlett, to create the prototypes. The contributions of these skilled teams really helped kick-start the projects. Thank you to Conestoga College and the talented senior students who applied their skills to achieve an excellent product and road map for the future. Thank you to the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation for supporting these projects.



Make a gift today to help children learn to read

The vision of Strong Start continues to be one of communities rallying around their children with time and resources to help children learn to read. Please note that your gift can be designated to a specific program or community.

Please make a gift today to help set a child on a path for success:

Online: www.strongstart.ca

Cheque by mail:
Strong Start Charitable Organization
20 Crestview Place
Kitchener, ON, N2B 0A2

Email: info@strongstart.ca

Call: 519-743-9578

Material Volunteers:

Thank you to all the groups who volunteered with us this past year, to assemble program games and materials to help more children reach their potential.



Strong Start to reading™
"Making a difference in the life of a child"

Charitable Registration
#825948060RR0001

Get in touch with us to find out how your corporate group can volunteer with us!