



## MiniBiblioPLUS Changing young lives one book at a time

Peter Kerr

October 22, 2019

Many of our readers are familiar with the Fraser Hickson Library and the issues it faced in finding a new home. In 2012, Helen Fortin (then Fundraising Consultant) conducted a needs analysis, and made recommendations to the Board of Directors. The result was the emergence of the MiniBiblio outreach model. It's mission – 'to raise literacy levels by empowering partners to instill in children a life-long love of reading and learning from birth and to enable free access to books and animation services.'

The benefits of increased Canadian literacy are measurable; making what may first appear as a "feel good" program into a significant economic initiative with real benefits... a one per cent increase in average literacy scores leads, over time, to a three per cent increase in GDP per capita and a five per cent increase in labour productivity. In Canada that could mean another \$50 billion per year in GDP. (2019 Schwerdt and Wiederhold. *Literacy and Growth: New evidence from PIAAC*. [cwf.ca](http://cwf.ca) and [DataAngel.ca](http://DataAngel.ca) Coulombe, S. Tremblay, J.F and Marchand). With improved literary skills at the outset, more youth will opt to stay in school resulting in better employment opportunities. There is a corresponding reduction in costs of welfare and health care services.

The first MiniBiblio was established in 2013 at the YMCA in NDG, followed by another nine by year's end. Helen Fortin was appointed CEO the following year, and with her leadership and the inspired work of a dedicated team; the MiniBiblio model has gained popularity and rapidly expanded.

*“Reading to a child is not rocket science, it’s all about personal connection.”*

... CEO Helen Fortin

With forty-five locations by 2017, MiniBiblio transitioned into MiniBiblioPLUS, adding the Early Literacy Component (ELC) program. ELC was developed to expand services and to enable partners to draw on the knowledge of qualified staff and volunteers, who demonstrate hands-on to parents and partners how best to read to children and discuss with them the critical importance of literacy development.



### 2019 Report shows 106 programs in 76 locations

The project has now captured the attention on the national stage as Ms. Fortin was invited to present MiniBiblioPLUS at the L'Association de bibliothécaires du Québec/Quebec Library Association Conference in May 2018, and again at the Ontario Library Association (OLA) Super Conference in January 2019. Encouraged by major literacy organizations and with funding provided by INNOWEAVE to hire a consultant, a national launch via a series of pilot projects is planned.

Helen recalls her own incentive to read: “When I was a little girl in Sherbrooke, I saw people going into a building and coming out with books. I went in and asked ‘May I have a book too?’ The kindly librarian gave me a children’s book to take home – and my Mom encouraged me to continue reading.” Confidence in a child is everything and we want to encourage that same value of reading with our programs.”

For more information, or to make a donation, please visit: [www.minibiblioplus.org](http://www.minibiblioplus.org) or call 514-872-0517.