

TELLING TALES

Case for Support 2025

Telling Tales Festival | October 4 & 5, 2025

Year-round Community Engagement | February - November 2025

School Programming | January - June 2025

About Telling Tales:

Telling Tales presents year-round children's arts programming dedicated to promoting literacy and a lifelong love of reading. Each year, our season features an exciting lineup that connects more than 120 of Canada's finest published children's authors, illustrators, and performing artists with families and classrooms through a series of in-person and virtual presentations across Hamilton and Burlington.



The season culminates in our flagship event, the annual Telling Tales Festival, held each fall at the Royal Botanical Gardens. This celebration offers a unique opportunity to connect children and their families with stories, nature, and art. It features interactive sessions with authors and illustrators that spotlight new Canadian children's books through readings and themed activity stations—thoughtfully designed to welcome children of all neurotypes and abilities to engage with stories in their own way!

We believe that stories are magic. By supporting Telling Tales, you align your brand with:



Telling Tales Mission, Vision and Promise

OUR MISSION: Is to deliver outstanding literary programming for children and youth that raises awareness of the importance of literacy in our communities.

OUR VISION: Is to inspire a love of reading, empower storytellings, and provide exposure to diverse perspectives, in order to improve literacy, critical thinking, and dialogue skills for all children and youth.

OUR PROMISE:

- To celebrate contributions to the changing Canadian identity.
- To foster understanding, compassion, inclusion, accessibility, and environmental awareness.
- To inspire a love of reading by connecting children and youth, with authors, illustrators, storytellers, and performing artists—prioritizing Canadian artists and representing a diversity of genres and forms.
- To encourage curiosity, nurture critical thought, and develop informed perspectives amongst children and youth.



“I think it is the perfect event to take a child. My daughter was so happy, doing the walking trail and reading and getting videos too. She was super eager to fill a backpack with books. As soon as we got home, we looked at everything she picked up. We have special books that were signed by the author which will be kept as a memory for years to come.”

Festival Attendee, 2022

OVERVIEW:

This request is to support Telling Tales' 2025 Festival Enhancements and related Administrative Capacity.

Funding from your foundation will support Telling Tales in the development and delivery of our 17th Annual Festival Season, helping us reach a record number of children and families through live-streamed events, in-person presentations, and our annual literary festival.

This season will showcase **over 120** of Canada's finest published children's authors, illustrators, storytellers, musicians, dancers, theatre artists, sculptors, and spoken word performers. We will connect children and families across Hamilton and Burlington with these talented artists through **99 live and virtual presentations**, culminating in the 17th Annual Telling Tales Festival at the Royal Botanical Gardens.

Our year round community programming is delivered in partnership with the City of Hamilton's Division of Children's Services, the City of Hamilton's Civic After School Programs, EarlyON Child and Family Centres, community festivals like Imagine in The Park Children's Arts Festival at Gage Park, as well as at our flagship festival at Royal Botanical Gardens' Hendrie Park.

Our in-school programming connects students from the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board with authors and illustrators through a series of virtual visits broadcast to classrooms over the course of the school year, developed in collaboration with both boards. In addition, students from across Ontario engage with some of Canada's most dynamic graphic novelists during our annual *Celebrating Graphic Novels* event—a three-day virtual experience held during the second week of June, designed specifically to engage even the most reluctant readers as well as our growing StoryScapes Series, with the goal of monthly installments.

Our programs make a lasting impact on children, families, and educators—especially as schools face increasing budget cuts. By offering free, accessible programming that supports curriculum and complements after-school initiatives, we meet each unique group of children where they are. Following our Story Makers series, one supervising educator shared feedback that beautifully captures the value of our work:

I wanted to reach out and thank you so much for putting together the Telling Tales event yesterday. I cannot express how incredible the feedback was from both the children and educators. The detail that went into the signed copies with the children's names really supports the sense of belonging we believe is essential in our programming. The educator Ally took away some wonderful ideas that inspired her to change and implement elements of their experience into her programming. Ally shared that it went even better than expected, the children really bonded with the volunteers, and she has never seen them so engaged. What a great opportunity for our program

-Supervising Educator at Umbrella Family and Child Centres of Hamilton, 2025



TELLING TALES FESTIVAL

The 17th Annual Telling Tales Festival takes place on **October 4th and 5th** at Hendrie Park, the largest of Royal Botanical Garden's (RBG) four cultivated gardens. Nestled between the slopes of the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve and the western head of Lake Ontario, RBG is located within both Hamilton and Burlington city limits.

In 2024, our flagship Telling Tales Festival saw tremendous success, exceeding our attendance projections and attracting 12,000 visitors—doubling the previous year's audience for the second consecutive year. Utilizing post-festival surveys and data from Humanatix registrations, we were able to gain valuable insights into our growing audience. We found that 31% of festival guests travelled more than 40 km to attend, 59% were first-time festival-goers, and 87% expressed their intention to return next year. An impressive 94% of festival attendees stated they would recommend Telling Tales to others.

RBG's natural surroundings are the perfect location to bring stories and natural history alive and kindle a deeper appreciation for nature. Authors will present their stories, illustrations, and songs, in five programming tents across Hendrie Park with drop-in style activities, and presentations employing many modalities for learning and engagement. This year we are excited to incorporate activity/active spaces connected to all presentation tents to incorporate multiple learning modalities (visual, auditory, reading/writing, kinesthetic) targeted to a specific age group (e.g., early on, elementary, middle grade, teen). This means parents and children will be able to move between storytime experiences and related activities or activations to help explore themes and content from the book and maintain audience engagement.

Visitors can discover hidden gardens throughout Hendrie Park by following an interactive story walk featuring Scholastics' T is for Terry: An ABC of Courage—where audiences can discover the inspiring journey of Terry Fox, a true Canadian hero; Native Plant Walk led by Burlington Green; and walking tour of the Dan Lawrie International Sculpture Collection led by RBG. Along the paths, they might meet real-life garden fairies, roaming musicians, and story-book characters performed by student actors from local theatre schools, as well as site-specific theatre in partnership with Arts for All's Kinderfest. Finally active play zones have been created around the Festival featuring literacy based prompts and magical spaces to encourage imagination and regulation.

To learn more about the Telling Tales Festival and year round season review our [Telling Tales 2024 Impact Report](#).

2024 FESTIVAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Average family with

4 members

80%
Female

45%
Age 25-49

43%
Age 0-10

70% | **13%**
Live in Hamilton/Halton | Live in GTA

82%
Household income of \$50k+

94%
College or Higher Education



ENHANCEMENTS:

Our commitment to aligning operations and programming with principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) remains steadfast. Telling Tales' Board has established an EDI Committee to ensure that all our programming, HR policies, marketing, and operations are designed through this framework. Both our Board and staff are committed to integrating equity principles into our decision-making regarding policies, practices, programs, partnerships, and services. In 2024, Telling Tales completed an EDI plan together with Evenings & Weekends Consulting. This plan includes recommendations resulting from community, staff, and core stakeholder listening campaigns to guide Telling Tales Equity Diversity and Inclusion plans include:

By 2027, we want Telling Tales to:

- 1** Create a staff resource plan which includes open conversations and efforts to mitigate strained capacity and burnout for staff; evaluate pay equity and pay staff living wages; provide Role Clarity for staff by increasing onboarding resources and mentorship opportunities.
- 2** Actively involve greater diversity in decision-making roles specifically related to Board, volunteers, and artist selection.
- 3** Improve the accessibility of programming by expanding on efforts to include neurodiverse children and youth, transportation and physical layout of programming spaces, and visibility in the community.
- 4** Increase competency in addressing equity topics through conversation, spaces for feedback, available resources for feedback in other languages, and offering relevant training.
- 5** Enhance partnerships with those reaching underserved communities and those that align in values towards equity, diversity and inclusion to create opportunities for reciprocal benefit.
- 6** Advance equity in programming as it relates to additional artistic characters, themes, and genres represented while strengthening opportunities for emerging artists.
- 7** Continuously revisit staff Cultural Values to ensure they are clear and reflective of the current team.
- 8** Revise EDI Statement and post on tellingtales.org.



Recommended Strategic Directions & Goals:

To support the mission, embody the vision and honour its promises, the following **5 Strategic Directions** articulate the priorities of the organization and are recommended to guide Telling Tales' actions from 2024-2027.



By 2027, we want Telling Tales to:

- 1 Be known as a leader in engaging children and youth, an advocate for literacy, and a champion of developing critical thinking skills in youth.
- 2 Be an organization with stable funding and resourcing.
- 3 Have deeper and reciprocal connections with our community—organizations, families, industry, and creatives.
- 4 Increase the diversity of our staff, attendees, volunteers, partners, authors, policies, and operations to better reflect the diversity of our society.
- 5 Create accessible, and welcoming spaces and presentation formats for our activities for all neurotypes and different types of ability.

NEEDS ANALYSIS:

Telling Tales' inclusive, community-based literary programming features engaging presentations from Canada's finest children's authors and illustrators who have the power to foster imagination and ignite a passion for lifelong reading. Early literacy skills lay the foundation for future learning, helping young people to develop crucial skills like empathy and an understanding of the world around them. We believe all children need to be exposed to a world where reading for fun takes centre stage. Decades of research has shown that children who have access to reading materials, and whose families value the development of an array of communication skills (reading, writing, drawing, performance, music) will have better health and social outcomes later in life (Canadian Language & Literacy Research Network [CLLRN], 2009; Grenier, 2008; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007).

Many of the communities we serve include families with limited access to recreational or creative arts programming that supports literacy, personal development, and mental well-being. We know that engaging children in the arts and strengthening their literacy skills fosters self-confidence, resilience, and can contribute to long-term academic success. At Telling Tales, we believe that connecting children with storytelling artists through engaging, year-round events makes reading and storytelling exciting and accessible. These experiences encourage parents to read with their children, support literacy by adapting activities for diverse learning styles, and help address the growing need for enriched literary programming within the public school system.

The need for children's literacy initiatives was accelerated by over two years of school closures due to COVID 19. Social isolation, coupled with reduced support and services for children, resulted in the "pandemic slide" that has left many children months behind in their reading and numeracy. Province-wide EQAO testing scores revealed that by Grade 6, only 47% of students were meeting the provincial standard in math. Reading scores were only slightly higher (Toronto Star, Thursday October 20, 2022. Ontario Students Struggle With Math, Testing Reveals <https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2022/10/20/covid-19-pandemic-hit-math-achievement-the-hardest-ontario-eqao-testing-shows.html?rf>.)

Recent reports on Hamilton Wentworth District School Board's EQAO scores for Grade 3 children showed students performed worse in reading, writing, and math than their pre-pandemic counterparts in the first provincial EQAO tests since the 2018-19 school year. Results for the 2021-22 standardized test show just 44% of Hamilton's Grade 3 students met the provincial standard of a B-minus in math, down from 48% in 2018-19, and performed only slightly better in reading (HWDSB-EQAO, 2021-2022, Hamilton Spectator, March 29, 2023). Teachers, students, and parents alike are searching for free quality programming that complements their children's curriculum and counters this learning loss.

Since piloting our School and Community Series in 2021-22, Hamilton teachers, Early Childhood Educators from the City of Hamilton's EarlyON Child and Family Centre network, and families attending the annual Telling Tales Festival have consistently reported that children leave our presentations more engaged and excited about developing their own reading, writing, and storytelling skills.



Children value the opportunity to follow along with live demonstrations and workshops, and they're inspired by having their questions answered by real, published Canadian authors and illustrators. They want to learn how to write, how to construct a story, and how to illustrate it. Through hands-on engagement and direct encouragement from the creators, children build self-confidence, feel motivated to improve, and begin to envision themselves as future authors, illustrators, and storytellers.

Parents and caregivers often leave our events feeling inspired to spend more time reading together as a family, with a renewed appreciation for the importance of nurturing literacy skills in their children. Telling Tales is unique in delivering this kind of enriching, literacy-focused programming year-round—exclusively for children and families—setting us apart from other literary festivals.

**Estimated Year-round Community
Engagement Audience:**

2,900+

**Estimated Year-round Virtual In-school
Audience:**

7,200+

2024 Festival Attendance:

12,000+

Estimated 2024 Total Audience Reach:

22,000+



17TH ANNUAL TELLING TALES SEASON 2025: TIMELINE

- January-March 2025: HWDSB & HWCDSB Priority Classroom Series–Eight live-streamed author visits with HWCDSB (2) and HWDSB (6)
- February 2025: Telling Tales at Frost Bites–One presentation at a partner outdoor winter festival.
- March 2025: Telling Tales at BGC March Break Camp–Four presentations at BGC Hamilton-Halton Ellis Avenue.
- April-June 2025: Pilot Story Makers in After School Program–Six presentations at City of Hamilton partnered After School locations (ages 6-12).
- June 2025: Telling Tales at Imagine In The Park–Two authors (with live ASL) at a free arts festival in Hamilton’s Gage Park.
- June-September 2025: EarlyON Storytimes–Eight author presentations at Hamilton EarlyON Child and Family Centre sites.
- June 2025: Celebrating Graphic Novels–Three live-streamed workshops featuring four writers/artists.
- July 2025: Youth Inclusive Tales Event–Author event featuring two virtual and one in-person appearances, programmed by Story Makers Youth Mentees.
- July-August 2025: Telling Tales at Summer Camps–Two authors at two Summer Camps within Hamilton TBC.
- August 2025: Telling Tales at Westfield Heritage Centre–Presentation of the 2025 Reading List and curated activities.
- **October 4th and 5th: The 17th Annual Telling Tales Festival at RBG**
- October 2025-March 2026: StoryScapes–Four live-streamed author presentations open to all Canadian classrooms.
- November 2025: Telling Tales at WAHC–One author at WAHC's 2nd Saturday family program.



2025/2026 PARTNERSHIPS:

Telling Tales is all about collaboration and partnership. Pillars of the organization are co-hosts: the Hamilton Public Library and Rotary Clubs of Burlington and Hamilton. Each organization promotes Telling Tales and is committed to helping it to grow.

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board have been partners since 2009. Telling Tales collaborates with them to produce a series of virtual classroom visits featuring over 16 Telling Tales authors annually. The City of Hamilton partners with Telling Tales to deliver in-person author visits to EarlyON Child and Family Centres and After School Programs located across Hamilton.

Community partners include a growing number of organizations that support Telling Tales outreach and operations, including: Autism Ontario, BGC Hamilton Halton, Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg, Down Syndrome Association of Hamilton, YMCA of Hamilton, Burlington and Brantford, Centre francophone Hamilton, Burlington Public Library, Art Gallery of Burlington, Dundas Valley School of Art, Hamilton Philharmonic, Hamilton Music Collective, Hamilton Children's Choir, A Different Drummer Books, Epic Books, Arts for All, Burlington Student Theatre, Imagine In The Park Festival, Hamilton Verse, gritLIT Festival, and Forest of Reading. Our community partners assist us by promoting our messages through their channels. We support them by showcasing their services at Telling Tales Festival.

The Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) is chaired by Katelyn Granger (Manager of Youth Services, HPL) and Brynley Eckhart (Digital Resource and Collections Librarian, BPL). 2025 SAC Members include: Chukky Ibe, Executive Director of Hamilton Verse; Setareh Masoumbeiki, Programmer for Hamilton Arts for All and Community Arts Consultant; Jenny Sterzaj, French-speaking Social Worker and Recreation Therapist; Angela Ventresca, Indigenous Education Consultant (K-12); Jennifer Mook-Sang, best-selling Burlington-based author; Macklin Loosely-Millman, bookseller with Another Story Bookshop based in Toronto; Khadeeja Makland, Grade 12 student from Saltfleet District High School; George Zeng, Grade 12 student from Westmount Secondary School and Student Council President; Nicole Clarke, freelance writer and producer based in Burlington; and Althea Hindra, Grade 12 student and avid reader.

The Educator Advisory Committee (EAC) has three (3) members: Victoria Riddle, Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDsb) Senior Learning Commons Technician; Lois Mercanti, retired HWCDsb primary teacher; Colleen MacFarlane, HWCDsb teacher; Kari-Lynn Winters, Ph.D., Children's Author, Educator, Researcher.

2025/2026 PARTNERSHIPS:

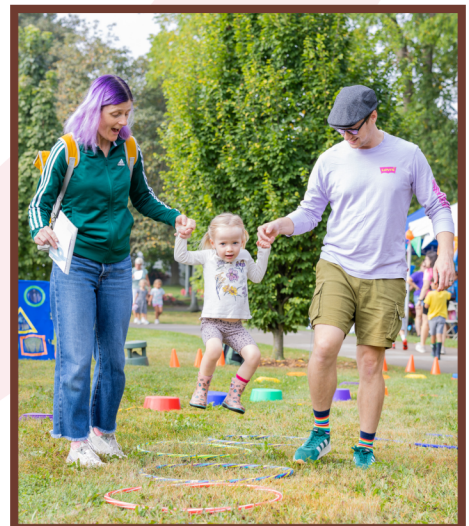
Telling Tales Community Program Advisors include: Early Years School Program Advisor – Natalie Cristante, Early Years Co-Lead at Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSB); Amanda Ottolino, Indigenous Education and Student Success Special Assignment Teacher (HWCDSB); School Program Advisor – Colleen Court, HWCDSB K-12 Program Consultant; EarlyON Program Advisor – Marion Trent-Kratz, Supervisor of Children’s and Community Services and Early Years Systems; Francophone Program Advisors – Popina Muanga, Artistic and Community Projects Manager at Centre Francophone Hamilton, and Celine Grandbois, Centre de Santé Communautaire; and Indigenous Program Advisor – Brooke Lavalley, Indigenous Service Organization Representative and Cultural Safety Facilitator.

Major funders of the Festival include Access Storage, Cogeco, Dan Lawrie International Sculpture Collection/Lawrie Insurance, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board, I Read Canadian, Scholastic Canada, Silent Voice, our founding partner TD Bank, and Undivided Productions.

Government & Foundation partners support the Festival and year-round programs: Ontario Arts Council, the Government of Ontario, the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund a program of the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, administered by the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund Corporation, Canada Council of the Arts, the Government of Canada, The City of Hamilton, EarlyON Child and Family Centre, City of Burlington, The Dougher Community Fund and The Edith H. Turner Foundation Fund at Hamilton Community Foundation, The Rotary Children’s Fund, Turkstra Family Foundation, and Leacross Foundation.

Major In-Kind Partners include BLR Certified Professional Accountants, Impressive Printing, ChangeMakers (Public Relations) and Hamilton Video & Sound.

Major Media partners include Energy 95.3, Y108 Hamilton Rock, Cable 14, YourTV Halton, Milton, and Niagara, Canadian Children’s Book Centre (National), Burlington Today, Royal Botanical Gardens, CHCH, Metrolinx (GTHA-transit), Active Parents (Hamilton, Burlington and Oakville), *The Hamilton Spectator* and *Quill and Quire* (National).



LETTERS OF SUPPORT:

As an organization that directly serves our community, we are proud of the strong connections and ongoing support we have received from local government and aligned organizations. Please see our **letters of support** from the following partners and supporters:

- Ministry of Canadian Heritage
- Hamilton Verse
- Silent Voice
- Burlington Public Library
- Hamilton Public Library
- The City of Hamilton
- Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
- Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
- Burlington MPP Natalie Pierre
- Arts for All



"...holy moly did the gang at Telling Tales rise to the challenge! They offered the same amazing list of creators, and pulled it together in a unique and satisfying package — best kids festival in Canada, if not the world."

Kevin Sylvester, CBC Broadcaster, bestselling Children's author and illustrator. 2020.



FUTURE FUNDING:

Our Festival funding comes through a variety of sources: sponsorships, government grants, foundation grants, corporate donations, annual giving, advertising, and exhibitor fees. Our Festival does not rely on an entrance fee and all our programming is always free. Since incorporating as a charity, we have carefully built a reserve fund and in 2023, established a legacy fund held in trust at Hamilton Community Foundation. Telling Tales weathered the pandemic, coming through it with a new livestreamed school series and enough funding to slowly build back our in-person programming.

Our success through these difficulties leaves us confident in our ability to adjust to changes in funding, costs, and community needs.



BUDGET AND FINANCIAL REFERENCES:

2025 Telling Tales (TT) Program Budget

2024-2025 Telling Tales (TT) Board of Directors

2024 Telling Tales (TT) YE Audited Financial Statement

