

# IMPACT REPORT 2024



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# 2024 REFLECTION

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## A Message from Our Director

*Dear Families and Friends of The REAL Program,*

*As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with immense gratitude for the incredible community that surrounds and supports The REAL Program. It is because of your dedication, whether as a volunteer, donor, partner, or advocate, that we have been able to make meaningful strides in promoting literacy and education in our community.*

*This year, we celebrated many milestones together: From distributing over 350,000 books through our REAL Little Free Library Campaign to adding 2 more initiatives. We opened our long-awaited preschool called Starting Small at The REAL Program and, like our library and books initiative, we started our Digital Literacy campaign to provide people with more access to the internet, technology and education. We have seen lives transformed.*

*Your generosity and unwavering commitment to our mission inspire us every day. Together, we are creating a ripple effect of hope and possibility in the lives of so many. As we look to the future, I am excited about the opportunities ahead and confident that, with your continued support, we will accomplish even more. Thank you for believing in the power of education and for being an integral part of The REAL Program family. We couldn't do this without you.*

*With gratitude,  
Jan Lewis Plourde, M.Ed.  
Executive Director,  
The REAL Program*



# THE REAL PROGRAM OVERVIEW

## VISION

A world where every child, family, and community has the literacy skills and resources to thrive, with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## MISSION

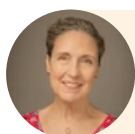
The mission of The REAL Program, Inc. is to improve and strengthen literacy, starting in Lynn, MA, as a model for success. By providing access to books, educational programs, and vital resources, we empower children, families, and communities to build brighter futures through literacy.

# THE REAL PROGRAM BOARD

The REAL Program Board of Directors is tasked with advancing the organization's mission to strengthen and improve literacy in Lynn, Massachusetts and beyond. It is through their collective expertise in education, community engagement, and leadership that has grown the organization to where it is today.

## Executive Director and Board Member

*Jan Plourde, M.Ed.*



## President of the Board

*Sue Plourde*

## Board Vice President

*Walter Stone, Ed.D*

## Director

*Mary Barthalemes*

## Director

*Betsy Brown*

## Director

*Susan Cronin*

## Director

*Raisa Ferreras*

## Director

*Angel Garcia*

## Director

*Kate Greehan*

## Director

*Gerda Pasquarello*

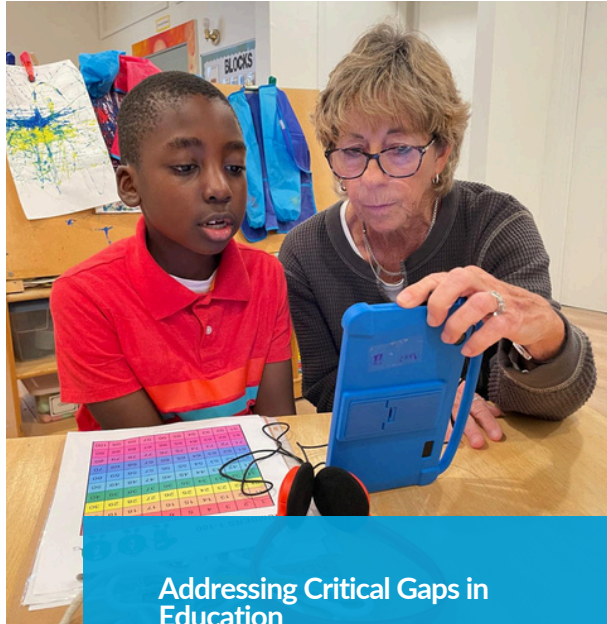
## Director

*Rachel Shwartz*

## Director

*Brian Strothman*

# ADDRESSING THE LITERACY CRISIS



## Addressing Critical Gaps in Education

The REAL Program is tackling key challenges in education by addressing literacy and early learning needs.

### Literacy

- In Lynn, MA, nearly 25% of children test below proficiency levels in reading by Grade 3, a critical predictor of success later in life.

### Early Childhood Education

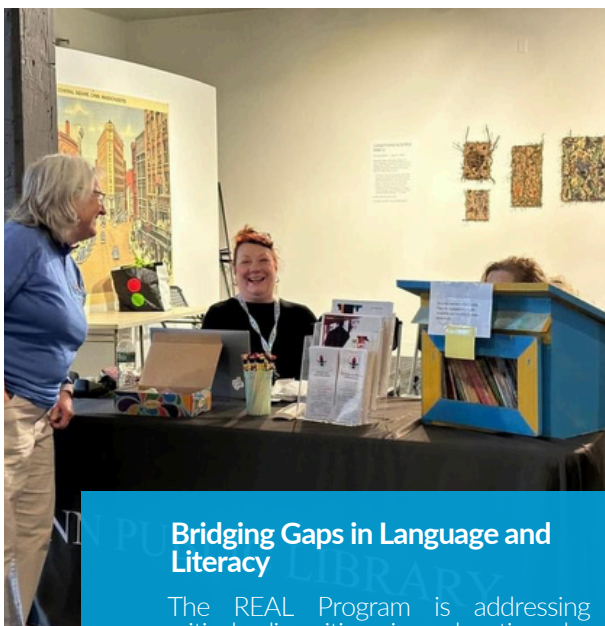
- “Research shows that children who attend high-quality preschools are 20% more likely to graduate high school,” according to NIEER.

Children Below Reading Proficiency in Lynn

25%

Higher Graduation Rates

20%



## Bridging Gaps in Language and Literacy

The REAL Program is addressing critical disparities in education by expanding access to books and English language skills.

### English as a Second Language (ESL)

- Adults proficient in English earn an average of \$20,000 more annually compared to non-proficient speakers (source: Brookings Institute).

### Access to Books

- Children in low-income families have an average of 1 book for every 300 children (source: The Literacy Project).

Immigrant Population

30%

Books for every 300 Children

1

# 2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

This year marked a turning point for The REAL Program, as we took bold steps to address educational gaps and expand our reach.

With a focus on creating lasting change, we continued to build on our successes, extending the impact of literacy and education across the community.



## MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT: EXPANDING ACCESS TO BOOKS

Over the past 11 years, thanks to the remarkable dedication of our volunteers and supporters, our REAL Little Free Libraries® Campaign and Before Home program have distributed over 350,000 books. This incredible milestone underscores our unwavering commitment to advancing literacy and inspiring a love for reading among children and families in Lynn and beyond.



## STARTING SMALL: NURTURING EARLY LEARNERS

In 2024, we opened Starting Small, our licensed preschool inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy. Led by Preschool Director Tammie Galland and Lead Teacher Autumn Kane, this program creates a dynamic environment where children can explore, grow, and cultivate a lifelong passion for learning. This initiative demonstrates our deep commitment to fostering lifelong learning and empowering children to achieve their full potential, laying a strong foundation for future success.



## EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH DIGITAL ACCESS

Recognizing the growing importance of digital literacy, we are expanding our Digital Literacy Program. By leveraging tools like Khan Academy, we are equipping our community with essential skills and resources to thrive in an increasingly connected world.

# BEFORE HOME

**250+**  
**MEALS**

Served to participants  
and families

**31,888+**  
**BOOKS**  
**DISTRIBUTED**

through Before Home  
and Little Free Libraries®  
Campaign

**50+**

Daily Participants

Our Before Home program provides mentorship, tutoring, homework assistance, snacks, and meals, ensuring each child is supported in their learning journey. By addressing both academic and personal needs, we uphold our mission to create equitable opportunities for every child to thrive and reach their fullest potential.





## DIGITAL LITERACY PROGRAM

In a rapidly evolving digital world, we recognize the vital role of digital literacy in shaping opportunities for success. Our Digital Literacy Program takes a comprehensive approach, combining essential infrastructure like internet access, integrated instructional support, and innovative tools to create a cohesive solution.

By addressing the diverse needs of our community, we are bridging the digital divide and empowering individuals to thrive in today's connected society.

### 2024 Student Achievements

**15.6K+**

Learning Minutes  
on Khan Academy

**64+**

Skills Worked On

**40+**

Children With  
Daily Access To  
New Tools And  
Resources

# REAL LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES® CAMPAIGN

In 2024, our REAL Little Free Libraries® Campaign reached new heights with the new REAL Little Free Libraries® Campaign Partner Program. This offering has energized community partners, sparking exciting opportunities for expansion and collaboration. Over the years and by working with organizations and community leaders, we've broadened access to books and inspired a love of reading for individuals and families. It is through this program, we are not only placing libraries but also cultivating meaningful connections and encouraging a culture of learning and curiosity throughout the region.



**10K+**

BOOKS DISTRIBUTED THROUGH  
LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES IN 2024

**40**

LIBRARIES 25 IN LYNN, 15 IN  
SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES



## AN ONGOING EFFORT TO SPREAD LITERACY

We remain dedicated to building, maintaining, and caring for these libraries, ensuring they continue to be a source of inspiration and knowledge for everyone.

Together, we are creating stronger, more connected communities through literacy!

# ESL Classes for Adults

+3

number of language backgrounds that were in our program this year

52

Weeks of Support

Our ESL Classes for Adults is built around creating a supportive community where language learning naturally emerges, guided by our skilled ESL instructors. Through meaningful connections and engaging, hands-on activities, participants are empowered to build confidence and develop their English skills in a nurturing and dynamic environment.

***"This brings me a lot of Joy" - I really enjoy working with "my ladies" as I like to say given our all female attendance thus far. Beyond the heartwarming joy, this program also helps me to connect the children I teach at the Brickett School and broader cultural context community".***

**Sarah Oakley (Sewing Teacher in the ESL Program)**

# STARTING SMALL

Fall 2024 marked the launch of Starting Small, REAL's licensed preschool that stands out for its dedication to nurturing creativity, critical thinking, and a love for learning through a Reggio Emilia-inspired approach. This child-centered philosophy emphasizes exploration, self-expression, and hands-on activities, enabling children to learn at their own pace while engaging deeply with the world around them.

Complementing this enriching curriculum, professional development plays a vital role in supporting the Reggio-inspired literacy framework. The team recently visited the Reggio-based Advent School in Boston's Back Bay, a Preschool to Grade 6 institution established in 1961 with advocacy and social justice at its core.

Drawing inspiration from this model, Starting Small remains focused on advocacy and meaningful action, guided by the belief in a better world and the transformative power of education.



## SPOTS AVAILABLE FOR STARTING SMALL

We're excited to share that spots are still available for this transformative program. Join us in giving your child a strong foundation for their educational journey, where their unique potential will be nurtured and supported every step of the way.





# REALSTREAM SUMMER LEARNING!

This summer, REALSTREAM offered an engaging and dynamic experience, seamlessly integrating Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STREAM). Students participated in a variety of activities, interactive workshops, and creative sessions that provide lifelong inspiration for learning. Enriching field trips - from Boston Public Garden to the Statehouse - enriches the program and their lives for a lifetime.

Hosted at North Shore Community Baptist Church in Beverly, the program benefited from a vibrant setting featuring open green spaces, a full-court gym, and close proximity to the Beverly Farms branch of the Beverly Public Library. This ideal environment encouraged students to learn, play, and grow, fostering a love of knowledge and exploration throughout the summer and for a lifetime.

## REALSTREAM in 2024

### Fieldtrips

- Salem State University
- Boston Public Garden
- Montserrat College of Art

### Our Attendees

- 36 Students
- 14 Interns
- 4 Mentors

### Supporters

- Interns from over 10 institutions
- Lunch provided by:
  - Prides Crossing Deli and Pizzeria
  - Punta Cana Restaurant
  - Fantasy Island

# REAL's 1<sup>ST</sup> Annual Golf Tournament

**REAL's 1st Annual Golf Tournament**, held on May 20th at Kernwood Country Club, brought together our community of supporters for a great day of Golf and opportunities for community leaders to take a swing for literacy. With enthusiastic participation and an incredible atmosphere the day showcased the strength of community coming together for a meaningful cause.



"Our foursome had lots of fun! Kudos to you, your board, the committee and all the volunteers for a fantastic event."  
**Nancy Freehling**

## Great News!

We are excited to announce that in June 2025, we will host the **REAL's 2nd Annual Golf Tournament!**

Stay tuned for more details about this upcoming event.



# REAL BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who attended and supported the inaugural REAL Breakfast of Champions. This special event celebrated and honored education leaders and advocates, including **Dr. Laura Luna**, **Mary Klug**, and **Senator Brendan Crighton**, whose impactful work has and continues to transform our community. Their dedication and relentless efforts are shaping the future of education, and we are proud to have highlighted their invaluable contributions.

3

Leaders Honored This Year

- Laura Luna
- Mary Klug
- Brendan Crighton

\$7.5K+

In in-kind  
Donations

25+

Supporters and  
Local Business  
Who Made This  
Happen



# OUR SUPPORTERS

This year has been filled with incredible successes, thanks to the amazing efforts of our community. Whether through donating, volunteering, sharing our posts on social media, participating in person, or spreading the word about our efforts, your contributions have demonstrated the power of a proven community-driven model.

Together, we've achieved more than ever before, allowing us to expand the services and offerings that make a meaningful impact in so many lives. We're incredibly thankful for your support and look forward to sharing some exciting news in the months ahead with the supporters who make it all possible!

We want to give special recognition to the incredible businesses, institutions, and individuals listed below, whose generous support has been a HUGE part of this year's success. Their contributions have been pivotal to the positive changes we've achieved in our community, helping us expand our efforts and make an even greater impact. We're honored to have these entities as partners in our mission!

**Breckinridge**  
CAPITAL ADVISORS  
*Joel & Mary Abramson*

**NORTH SHORE**  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
*Northest Emergency Associates: Dr. Don Pasquarello*

**Shapiro Legal Group** PLLC

**Long's**  
JEWELERS

**METRO**  
CREDIT UNION

**leo** inc.  
Leading through Empowering Opportunities

**NSLBA**

**SUN 'N AIR**  
GOLF CENTER

**OMNI** PARKER HOUSE

**Kernwood Country Club** 1914

**SeaCare**

**FLOOR DECOR &**

**George's**  
Roast Beef, Seafood and Pizza

**Braccia's Four66**  
Pub & Grille

**La Messy Baker**

**EXECUTIVE**  
AUTO DETAIL™

**Hirsch**  
LANDSCAPE SERVICES  
• 781-581-LAWN •

**FOSTER**  
COUNTRY CLUB

**girls inc.**

**TEMKIN**  
FINANCIAL GROUP, LLC  
Plan · Protect · Prosper

**ASHTON THOMAS**  
PRIVATE WEALTH

**BASS ROCKS GOLF CLUB**

**LIONS INTERNATIONAL**

**SalemFive**

**Sean Whitelavich**



# BEING A REAL SUPPORTER

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**CRYSTAL  
FERNANDEZ**

Intern at REALSTREAM, 2024

"Working at REAL has been one of the most incredible experiences I've ever had. Over the past few weeks, I've learned so much and grown both personally and professionally. What makes this experience even more special is my deep personal connection with the program. Growing up, I was a part of the REAL program myself, where I developed my reading skills and formed lasting bonds. Returning as an intern feels like coming home. It's both nostalgic and amazing to be able to pay it forward and help kids who are now walking in the same shoes I once wore."

"For me, collecting donated books for REAL is an easy yet an incredibly impactful way to make a difference in the life and future of a child.

When I hear that more books are needed, that books are disappearing from the Little Free Libraries, it actually makes me so happy to know that clearly there is a need that is being filled and that children who are hungry to read are getting their fill. As a former Lynn public schools educator for 36 years, it gives me great satisfaction to see families, enjoying the benefits of the little libraries throughout the city."



**KIM  
STAPLES**

Volunteer at The REAL Program

# FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

## INCOME STATEMENTS

2024 was a year of significant growth as we expanded and created new programs and initiatives, including our Starting Small preschool, Digital Literacy Program, and Little Free Libraries Campaign®.

Looking ahead to 2025, we are focused on sustaining and building upon this growth through dedicated marketing and outreach efforts. These efforts will help us continue delivering impactful programs and ensure that even more children and families benefit from our mission to foster literacy, education, and community engagement.

### RESOURCES RECEIVED

Grants, cash donations, fundraising events, crowdfunding campaigns, and contributions from The REAL Program board and supporters.

**\$ 202,650.00**

### STARTING 2024

Remaining Funds and Contributions.

**\$ 352.85**

### ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE

**\$ 83,500**

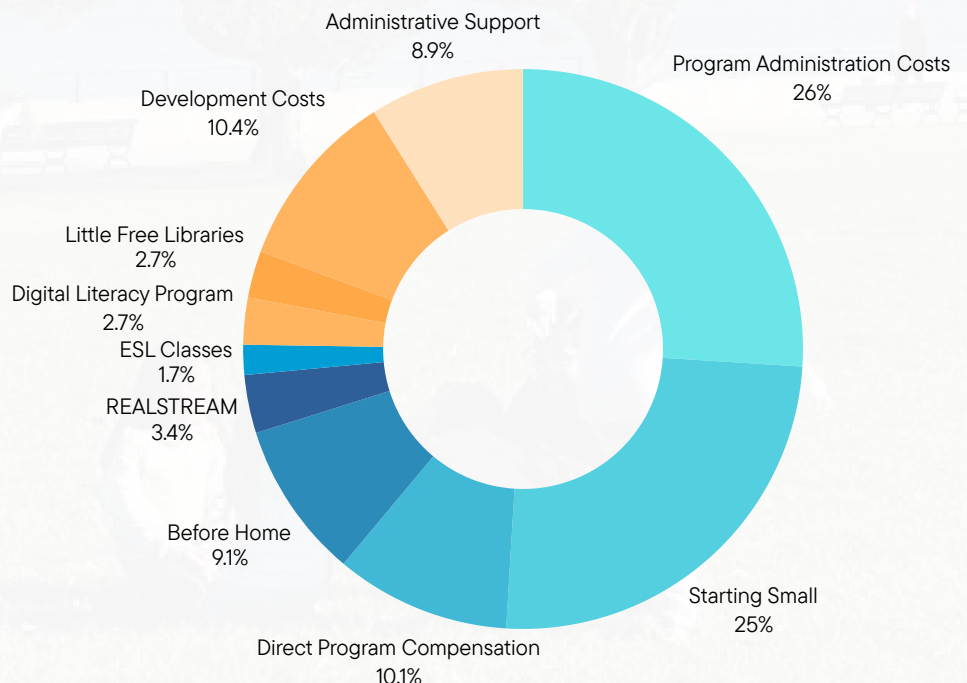
### BALANCE

Received + Receivables - Expenses

**\$ 10,286.31**

### RESOURCES INVESTED

**\$ 275,863.69**



# OUR 2025

As we look ahead to 2025, we are dedicated to expanding the services and opportunities we provide by building on the strong foundation and successes of 2024. Each new initiative aligns with our mission to address literacy and education while strengthening the infrastructure and resources available to our community. These goals are focused, actionable, and designed to amplify the impact we have on children, families, and the community as a whole.



## **17 ATLANTIC ST.**

Expanding our services begins with securing a permanent foundation. Purchasing the facility at 17 Atlantic Street will not only provide affordable housing for three families but also solidify The REAL Program's long-term presence in Lynn.



## **ESL CERTIFICATE PROGRAM LAUNCH FOR 2025**

To address the growing demand for language education in our community, we will launch an ESL certificate program. By doing so, we strengthen our ability to meet the needs of individuals and families while supporting broader community growth.



## **PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND LAB SCHOOL FOR NSCC STUDENTS**

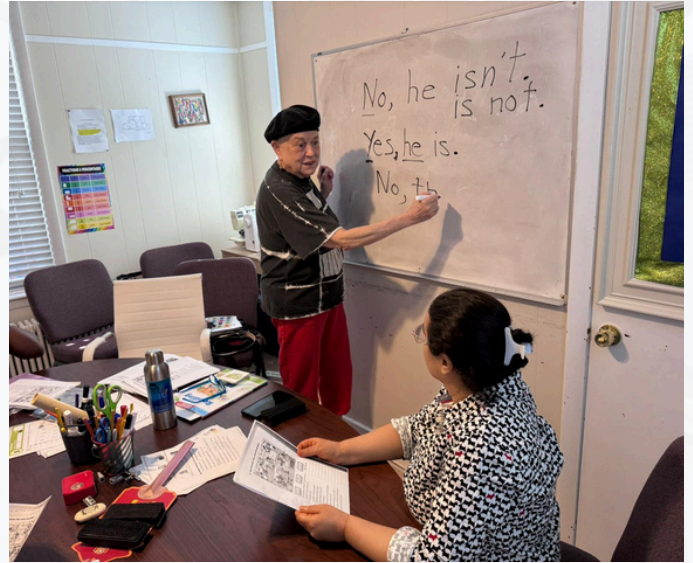
Our preschool program and launching its lab school component for North Shore Community College (NSCC) students represents a dual investment in early childhood education and workforce development.



## **ACQUIRING AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE FOR REAL LITTLE FREE LIBRARIES**

Acquiring an electric vehicle will enable us to expand and maintain the REAL Little Free Libraries® more efficiently, and underscores our commitment to sustainable and impactful operations.

# THANK YOU!





*“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. Together, we have made a difference, and together, we will continue to build a future full of opportunity and hope for all.”*

**Mahatma Gandhi**



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