

Empowering Caribbean Children Through Literacy

TURNING PAGES, TRANSFORMING FUTURES

A Biannual Report 2022-2024 Academic Years







A Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

As we reflect on the past two years, I am filled with deep pride and immense gratitude for all have achieved together. These years have been transformative for Hands Across the Sea, marked meaningful collaboration, remarkable growth, and significant progress in our mission to raise literacy levels children in the Eastern Caribbean.

One of our proudest milestones has been the formal launch of the Early Pages Programme. Grounded the belief that early literacy is key to shaping futures to shaping futures, this initiative already making an indelible impact. The surge in parent participation and community engagement has extraordinary, demonstrating the power of collective action to drive lasting change. This is not just a win for organization—it is a shared triumph for the entire community as we strengthen the foundation for children's education.

Another exciting development is the progress we've made toward creating curated libraries for students with special needs. This vision, long awaited, is now becoming a reality. These libraries are tailored to nurture every child's unique learning journey, ensuring all students have access to the tools they need to reach their full potential.

Hands Across the Sea has also embraced its role as a key regional education partner. I have had the privilege of collaborating with the Ministry of Education, the regional commission, and international development partners to ensure children's literacy remains central in shaping curricula and policies. These partnerships driven meaningful progress and kept the needs of children at the heart of educational decision-making.

Our accomplishments reflect the strength of our partnerships and the generosity of our supporters. Your belief in our mission empowers us to dream bigger and achieve more. Few moments compare to the joy of a child discovering a new world through reading. These donations are treasures to the children we serve, and I am deeply grateful for the trust and generosity of our community.

Looking to the future, I am filled with hope and anticipation. With your continued support, we are poised to expand our initiatives, deepen our impact, and remain steadfast in our commitment to ensuring every child has the tools to read, learn, and thrive. Together, we are shaping brighter futures for children and communities across the region.

Thank you for your trust, partnership, and unwavering belief in the transformative power of literacy. With heartfelt gratitude,

Amarela Sherlys Amanda Sherlip Executive Director



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Empowering Leadership The Student Librarian Program



In the Eastern Caribbean, the Student
Librarian program designed by Hands
is transforming young students into
leaders. This initiative goes beyond
managing libraries, fostering responsibility,
leadership, and a love for learning. Through
partnerships with schools in Saint Kitts &
Nevis, Antigua & Barbuda, Dominica, Saint
Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines,
and Grenada, more than 1,300 students have
been trained as librarians, inspiring their
peers and strengthening a culture of reading.





Empowering Young Male Readers at Richfond Combined in St. Lucia



Richfond Combined in St. Lucia—a school with a predominantly male student body—has long celebrated the athletic and extracurricular achievements of its boys. With district championships in football and cricket for three consecutive years and a reigning primary school chess champion, the students excel in sports and competitive pursuits. However, in recent years, academic performance lagged, with male students underperforming the national average, particularly in Expressive Writing, Reading Comprehension, and Problem Solving. Recognizing that reading proficiency is the cornerstone of all learning, the school sought innovative ways to inspire its young male readers.

With a commitment to fostering a love of reading, the school staff conducted surveys to better understand the boys' reading attitudes and interests. From this feedback, they partnered with Hands Across the Sea and Peace Corps Volunteers to build a library collection filled with high-interest

genres for the boys, such as sports, adventure, and mystery. Excitement ran high when the new books arrived, providing a tailored reading experience that immediately engaged the boys.

The school also initiated the Hands Across the Sea Student Librarian programme. With training workshops led by Peace Corps Volunteers, boys took on the role of school librarians, an experience that gave them a new sense of purpose and leadership. This initiative sparked unplanned, organic interactions between students of different ages, particularly boys in Grades 2 and 4, fostering mentorship and a community around reading.

The impact of this initiative has been profound. All but one student in the programme showed improvement, with one boy advancing two reading levels. Two students achieved top grades in their District End-of-Term exams in both General Paper and Mathematics.

Richfond Combined's success with the Student Librarian programme even led to a request from Hands Across the Sea to feature these boys as a success story in a Peace Corps documentary.

Richfond Combined is just one example of how putting the right books in boys' hands and giving them the opportunity to lead can inspire them to rise to the challenge—demonstrating that, with the right support, our students can achieve excellence both on and off the field.



"Reading educates me about the world and [the Student Library program] teaches me life skills, such as how to solve problems. Reading makes me happy."

- Jervanie Mondesir Grade 3, Vieux Primary School, Saint Lucia

"By joining the student librarian program, [children] become little student principals of the school, developing leadership skills and encouraging other children to use the library properly..."

- Sheila Serville, Literacy Link, St. Lucia



Lending Without Shelves

Goodwill Secondary shares space with the Dominica Grammar School, which is currently under construction and consequently doesn't have a library. To ensure that the students still had access to books, the library team worked with the student librarians to enter all the book titles into a Google Classroom file. Students can check out the list and request to borrow the books that interest them, which are retrieved by the student librarians. The students also promote their preferred books to their classmates to encourage lending. "The student librarians have confessed a favourite perk of the job is gett ing to read the new books before the other students," says Mrs. Josette Morancie, Principal of Wotten Waven. "This allows them to be great 'salespeople' as they are better able to recommend titles to the borrowers."



Expanding Access to Inclusive Learning

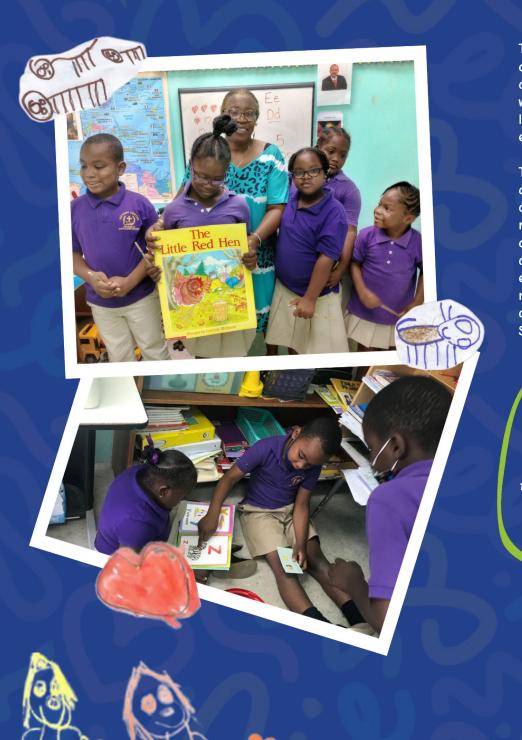
In 2023, Hands Across the Sea launched the breakthrough SEN (Special Education Needs) Library initiative, piloting the program in four schools. The positive feedback and success of this initial effort allowed us to expand the program significantly. By the end of the year, SEN collections had been introduced in an additional 14 schools, bringing the total to 18 schools across Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent, Antigua, Dominica, and Saint Lucia.

These SEN collections have become vital resources, complementing ongoing national and regional efforts to enhance special needs and inclusive learning. Both the Ministries of Education and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) are driving initiatives through PEARL (Program for Educational Advancement and Relevant Learning), which include leadership training and support to better equip schools to serve students with special needs and learning disabilities.

Like all children, children with disabilities have ambitions and dreams for their futures. Like all children, they need quality education to develop their skills and realize their full potential.

- UNICEF





The SEN libraries are designed to serve students ages 5-18, offering resources that cater to a wide range of learning challenges. In secondary schools, these collections often overlap with Remedial Reading Sets, which feature High/Low (high interest, low level) readers and decodable texts, specifically developed to engage older students who struggle with reading.

The form of SEN collections varies from school to school. In some cases, the resources are housed in a school's main library, while in others, they may be found in resource centers or dedicated special needs classrooms. These flexible implementations ensure that each collection is tailored to meet the specific needs of the students and educators it serves, further advancing the goal of inclusive education throughout the Eastern Caribbean. In addition to making these collections available, Hands also provided ministries and the regional commission (OECS) with open access to this vital SEN resource.

As teachers and parents, we must acknowledge the gifts children with autism share with the world. Books where children can interact with words, symbols, familiar images, and characters can their love of literacy.

- Eleanor Philip, Literacy Link, Saint Kitts



Peace Corps Volunteers Move Literacy Forward

In the Eastern Caribbean, the US Peace Corps' primary focus is to work with partners on increasing literacy levels. This focus has, for many years, been the foundation of a rich partnership shared between the Peace Corps, the Ministry of Education, and Hands

Across the Sea. As such, Hands libraries remain the designated placement for all US Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) who serve in Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint

Vincent and the Grenadines.

During the pandemic, the PCVs were evacuated from their posts, leaving a gap that was felt by all. Their role as library leaders and literacy advocates had been crucial to understaffed schools, and the sudden loss of these teams of volunteer staff meant that many libraries went unmanaged or underserved. During that time, Hands continued their work with the US Peace Corps, although in a different capacity. In Saint Vincent, Hands launched a disaster response program to provide for those impacted by the volcanic eruption of La Soufriere. The (now retired) country director of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) came on as a full implementation and operation partner sharing in resources, knowledge, and personnel. In Saint Vincent, Saint Lucia, and Dominica, Hands worked with the PCV country managers to assess the impact of the loss of volunteers during COVID and to plan ahead for the redeployment where resources and training were concerned.

After more than two years of their deeply felt absence, the US Peace Corps redeployed their volunteers to the Eastern Caribbean in May 2022. The return of the beloved PCVs to the region was met with great joy and welcoming, and Hands Across the Sea was once again ready to spring into action with renewed partnership.

Hands' partnership with the PCVs comes in many forms, and these past two years have been particularly rewarding. As the new PCVs entered their schools, many were met with new boxes of children's books. Literacy Links make visits to schools where PCVs are working to implement and sustain the Hands Across the Sea *Caribbean Literacy and School Support* (CLASS) Program. All PCVs have access to the Hands Across the











Sea Library Manual for Primary Schools, a vital Best Practice resource that sets the standard for the region in child-friendly libraries and literacy programs.

In addition to providing great new books, mentorship, and frameworks, Hands Across the Sea's role in the region has grown to also include providing training and leadership support for the PCVs in helping to achieve our mutual goals.

Training in the region has many faces and is always unique to the operating country. While training in SVG has occurred through the inclusion of PCVs in national and regional leadership trainings (see p. 13), leadership development in Dominica has taken a more localized approach. The past two consecutive years, Hands was invited by Dominica Peace Corps Country Manager Lancashia Joseph-John to attend and lead sessions for three workshops, as well as during summer school programs and orientations. These trainings sensitized volunteers to Hands' ongoing programs, led locally by the Hands Dominica Team Lize Bardouille and Giselle Laurent. Trainings covered teaching techniques around the use of books to build literacy, Read-Aloud and round table reading, and approaches to helping students who need special attention to remediate reading gaps.

And of course, true to our roots, Hands continues to work with the US PCVs on the fundamental goal of increasing access to new children's books as a pathway toward increasing literacy. This year and in 2025, Hands looks forward to working with Sharmon Jules, Program Manager for the US Peace Corps in Saint Lucia, to distribute a windfall of more than 1,400 new, donated books into the schools to provide additional resources to Peace Corps Volunteers who are dedicated to building literacy programming in their stationed libraries. This endeavor will help to achieve the shared goal Hands Across the Sea and the US Peace Corps have to raise children's literacy and increase access to education resources for underserved children in the region.

"The new books...revitalized our library. When libraries keep the same books for a long time without adding in new stories, children will re-read the same books, and their interest in reading can diminish...we are very grateful to Hands Across the Sea, and we look forward to receiving more books in the future."

-Peace Corps volunteer Tajah McCray



"...The books [from Hands Across the Sea] are age-appropriate, culturally specific, even representative of the students...We see great results and continue to get very positive feedback."

> -Lancashia Joseph-John, Programming and Training Manager-Dominica

Leading Early Learning and Literacy in the Caribbean



This year marked remarkable growth for the *Early Pages Programme (EPP)* across the Eastern Caribbean, expanding its presence to 76 preschools in Grenada, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, and Nevis, with exciting plans to launch in seven more preschools in Antigua in the 2024-25 school year,

bringing the total to 83 preschools. The program is building a solid foundation for early learning and gaining enthusiastic support from educators, parents, and ministries alike. In Grenada, for example, the Ministry of Education is so encouraged by EPP's success under the local leadership Literacy Links Gloria Bonaparte and Bernadette

John, that they plan to integrate it into the national curriculum, ensuring that all children across the country benefit from robust early learning. Kindergarten teachers are thrilled to see children who participated in EPP entering primary school engaged, alert, and ready to learn—proving that these early learning experiences are indeed life-changing.

In addition to Grenada's efforts, other countries have embraced unique ways to enhance EPP's impact. In Nevis, supervisors who have received training from Literacy Link Palsy Wilkin are eager to expand this opportunity to teachers, while a "Granddad's Programme" invites grandparents to read to children, strengthening community bonds and fostering a love for reading. Dominica's pilot program, which involved EPP in 13 public schools and 1 private schools, has provided invaluable feedback to refine the program's curriculum and delivery, underscoring the program's dedication to continuous improvement.

EPP's influence extended beyond the classroom when our Executive Director Amanda Sherlip was asked to attend and present the Early Pages Programme to literacy leaders at the 8th Annual Meeting of Early Childhood Leaders hosted in Barbados this October in partnership with the



Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Leaders from 12 Caribbean nations—even ones where the EPP is not yet available—were inspired by the EPP model, its evolution, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation process. The presentations and distribution of the curriculum itself to each conference participant sparked excitement and optimism, with leaders eager to explore how they might bring EPP to their communities. The Sandals Foundation helped fund the trip, sponsored the EPP Manual, and served as the lead partner in scaling the program throughout Grenada.

- No. 11

Visiting the vibrant schools utilizing the EPP showcased the inspiring learning environments created with support—classrooms alive with arts, crafts, and literacy projects that transform stories into shared learning experiences. Looking ahead, we are optimistic about the expansion of EPP into St. Vincent and additional preschools across the region. There remains much to be done, but with each new milestone, the EPP reaffirms its commitment to igniting early learning and literacy across the Caribbean. With continued support, Hands Across the Sea is poised to lead and inspire the next generation of eager learners and thriving communities.

In addition to Sandals, The Beverly Foundation, Four Seasons Homeowners Foundation Nevis, Six Senses Resort, and Mill Reef Fund have all been instrumental in EPP's growth and reach across the Eastern Caribbean. We would not have the current success of this training without them and YOU.

"It's incredibly rewarding to see children excited about reading and discovering new worlds through books as well as helping them develop early literacy skills and sparking their imaginations [because of the Early Pages Programme]."

- Kavin Jones, Teacher in Charge, Telescope Preschool, Grenada



Camp Read-A-Lot Advances Literacy Skills

Camp Read-a-Lot, sponsored by the Mill Reef Fund, welcomed kids for summer literacy programming in June 2024 held across 8 schools, each serving as a hub for children from surrounding areas. School principals and other leadership invited kids who were identified with the greatest literacy need. A total of 524 students attended the 2024 program.

With the theme of "Around the World in 15 Days," the three-week camp focused on sites from across the globe. This theme provided the backdrop for fun and creative activities that sparked the students' interest and enthusiasm and reached all personalities and learning styles, from auditory to visual. Again this year, Hands Across the Sea Literacy Links Vernest Mack and Hyacinth Gonsalves-Barriero provided invaluable leadership support across all facilities and organized library areas with curated books that fit the camp theme to keep students interested in books.

Throughout the camp, the program facilitators stayed engaged with the help of encouragement from Karen Brown Francis, Director of Library Services, who provided daily messages that set the tone for each day's activities.

This year's Camp Read-a-Lot students were primarily boys from multiple schools, which enhanced the diversity of interactions and learning experiences. After opening assemblies where the kids chanted the Camp Read-a-Lot song, campers enjoyed literacy-building activities in small groups. They also enjoyed using Mill Reef Fund-sponsored Lexia literacy software technology, which makes spelling lessons and reading fun. At the end of the camp, parents expressed their gratitude for the annual camp that gave their kids the chance to grow in their reading abilities over their vacation.

2024 marked the fourth summer literacy program in Antigua and Barbuda, and the third Camp Read-a-Lot.



"We need to create opportunities for our children to want to read by providing books that they'll want to open again and again."

- Mary-Anna Antoice, Literacy Link, Saint Lucia

Small Group Learning to Advance Literacy Practices

Coordinator to participate in these sessions.



Each year, primary schools in St. Vincent and the Grenadines face the ongoing challenge of staffing their libraries, as there is no formal paid position for librarians at this level. To address this gap, individuals from the Youth Employment Service (YES) and the Supportive Education and Training (SET) programs are typically assigned to manage the libraries. However, these positions are contracted for only one year, resulting in the need to train a new group of library staff annually. This one-on-one training process is both time-consuming and resourceintensive.

In response to this challenge, and following discussions with the Chief Education Officer and with the support of the Mustigue Charitable Foundation, four zonal workshop were organized to provide essential training for the incoming cohort of library workers. These workshops were led by Literacy Links Yvette Pompey and Enna Bullock, in partnership with a representative from the National Public Library. Each school was invited to send its designated YES/SET intern or Peace Corps volunteer along with the Literacy

The primary objective of the workshops was to clarify role of the school librarian and to equip participants with strategies the training will strengthen the connection between the library and the classroom, ultimately

to collaborate effectively with literacy teachers. We're hopeful that this 'hub' approach to enhancing students' literacy skills, fostering creativity, and encouraging critical thinking.



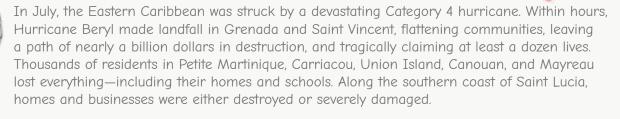
"I like that the workshop catered to the librarians in making them knowledgeable about ideas they can employ to facilitate maximum use of the library."

- Lystra Huggins, Qualified Assistant Teacher, Pamelus Burke Government





Hurricane Relief Through Library Materials



In the face of this overwhelming tragedy, Hands Across the Sea responded swiftly with targeted disaster relief. Working alongside UNICEF and the Ministries of Education for Grenada and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Hands committed to ensuring continued access to childhood education amid the crisis. Within weeks of the hurricane, a shipment of 3,112 new books was prepared to support the children of Petit Martinique and Carriacou, where entire schools and communities were lost. For Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Hands Across the Sea donated 3,368 books for children in Union Island, Mayreau, and Canouan, along with a vital shipment of nearly 25,000 school supplies to help meet the demands of schools and libraries stretched to their limits.

The logistical effort was extensive and impactful. With the help of the AIT Worldwide Logistics team out of the Boston Terminal, Hands meticulously sorted and packed five pallets of relief materials destined for Grenada and Saint Vincent. Through a partnership with Tropical Shipping, Hands ensured proper oversight and coordination to transport these supplies, working closely with the Ministries of Education to deliver them directly where they are needed most. In total, Hands Across the Sea provided 6,480 new books and 24,491 units of library and school supplies, bringing vital educational resources to areas hardest hit by Hurricane Beryl.

While recovery across the Eastern Caribbean will take time, Hands Across the Sea remains committed to helping communities rebuild and ensuring that children have the tools and opportunities they need to continue learning, even in the face of such adversity. The relief effort demonstrates the organization's steadfast dedication to supporting literacy and education in the Caribbean, especially in times of crisis.

Financial Report

Hands Across the Sea continues to be recognized for its accountability and responsibility. Our focus is on transformative programmatic delivery and a healthy organizational model. We hold a Guidestar Platinum Seal of Transparency and undergo an a full independent audit each fiscal year. Our NGO is lean, and that means your gift goes far. It costs Hands Across the Sea an average of \$38 to provide one child with a year of literacy intervention.

For our Audited Financial Statements and IRS Form 990s, visit:



Use of Funds (2023)

Program Expenses 89%

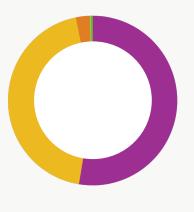
Administrative Expenses 6.5%

Fundraising Expenses 4.5%

https://handsacrossthesea.org/about/

"With the use of critical acquired skills, students are able to tell/retell/create a story, sequence events, follow given instructions, listen, speak, draw, distinguish pictures from texts and knows that they carry meaning, speak using increasing length and complexity, express thoughts and emotions, recognise and differentiate sounds in the environment, in letters and words while knowing that words can generally be built using those sounds and segmented thereafter. In the process of acquiring these multitude of skills, students are gaining competence in alphabetic knowledge, use of vocabulary, comprehension, positive attitude and interest in READING and of course 'WRITING'. To witness students arrive to Pre-School with basic prerequisite knowledge and bloom into endless possibilities is truly satisfying. Thank you Hands/- Early Pages Programme!!"

- Garissa Walker, Teacher In Charge/ Classroom Teacher (4+ students), La-Digue Pre-Primary School, Grenada



Sources of Income (2023)

Foundations and Corporations 52.6%

Individuals 44.2%

Donated Services 2.7%

Religious 0.1%

Non-cash contributions 0.4%





2023-24 School Year



22,359 NEW, WORLD-CLASS CHILDREN'S BOOKS DONATED



64,200 PRE-K, PRIMARY, AND SECONDARY, AND SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS REACHED



334 LIBRARIES FOR PRE-K, PRIMARY, SECONDARY, AND SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOLS STOCKED



46 NEW PRESCHOOL LIBRARY PROGRAMS LAUNCHED

Lifetime Impact

1/ove soot

New Hands Stats

"We have seen an increase in our parents' and students' interest in the books that we have...It is our hope that this would increase the interest in the books, as well as motivate the children to continue taking them home."

- Winette Hobson, St. John's Preschool Supervisor, St. Kitts and Nevis





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children's books









custom libraries for students with disabilities and special needs

Thank you for your partnership!

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\$25,000+

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International Bank
Mill Reef Fund
Mustique Charitable Foundation
Sandals Foundation
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\$500-\$999

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