

CLiF News

WINTER 2025



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Dear Friends,

CLiF enters this new year with fresh energy and a sustained commitment to creating literacy experiences that support success in life and learning for under-resourced children in New Hampshire and Vermont. We welcome the opportunity to face new challenges, explore solutions, discover possibilities, and embrace growth.

To help guide CLiF’s path forward over the next several years, we are in the midst of an extensive strategic planning process. With insights from our partners and industry experts, we are working to create a plan that ensures CLiF’s work remains closely aligned with the needs of today’s children and families. *(Read more about this process on page 6.)*

We’ve also renewed our focus on partnerships that amplify shared missions to support community members. This fall, we collaborated on projects with Dismas of VT and NH Hunger Solutions. More recently, we provided resources to the emergency family shelter in Waterbury. We continue seeking collaborative opportunities to maximize impact. *(Read more about these partnerships on page 5.)*

Finally, a recent exciting development: We’re delighted to announce that Kenneth M. Cadow, National Book Award finalist and acclaimed author of *Gather*, will be the keynote speaker at our annual Community Literacy Conference on Friday, April 4, at the Lake Morey Resort. Ken, who also serves as co-principal at Oxbow Union High School in Bradford, VT, will share his insights on the profound influence of community connections. We hope you’ll save the date and join us!

May 2025 bring you both adventure and contentment—two things always waiting in a good book.

With gratitude,

Laura Rice
CLiF Executive Director

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Community Perspective

My first experience with the CLiF Year of the Book grant came when I was the librarian at Canaan Schools during the 2017-2018 school year. Having witnessed the power of the grant to truly bring literacy to the forefront, I knew how much students at Charleston Elementary School would benefit from the program, and was thrilled when we were selected.

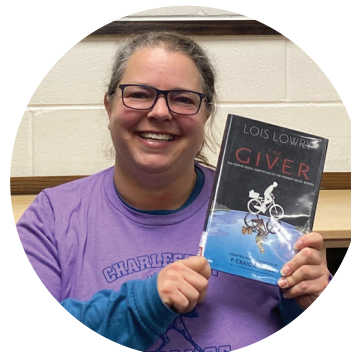
Charleston is a special place, where we work hard to provide the best support and social, emotional and educational opportunities for our students. Our decision-making process begins with asking: "What's best for the kids?" and moves forward from there. Our greatest need is for all of our students to see themselves as learners--to feel they have the capacity for growth, and for us to have the ability to motivate, inspire and build student skills. The Year of the Book is helping us increase student engagement with reading and writing, while building a stronger culture of literacy within our community.

A highlight of the program so far was our spectacular school-wide Robot Parade, inspired by the Melissa Sweet book *Balloons Over Broadway*. The students worked together to blend elements of technology, music, design and literacy into an impressive and memorable parade, featuring floats based on Red Clover Book Award nominees, handmade puppets, musical performances, and, of course, robots! This fun and collaborative opportunity brought

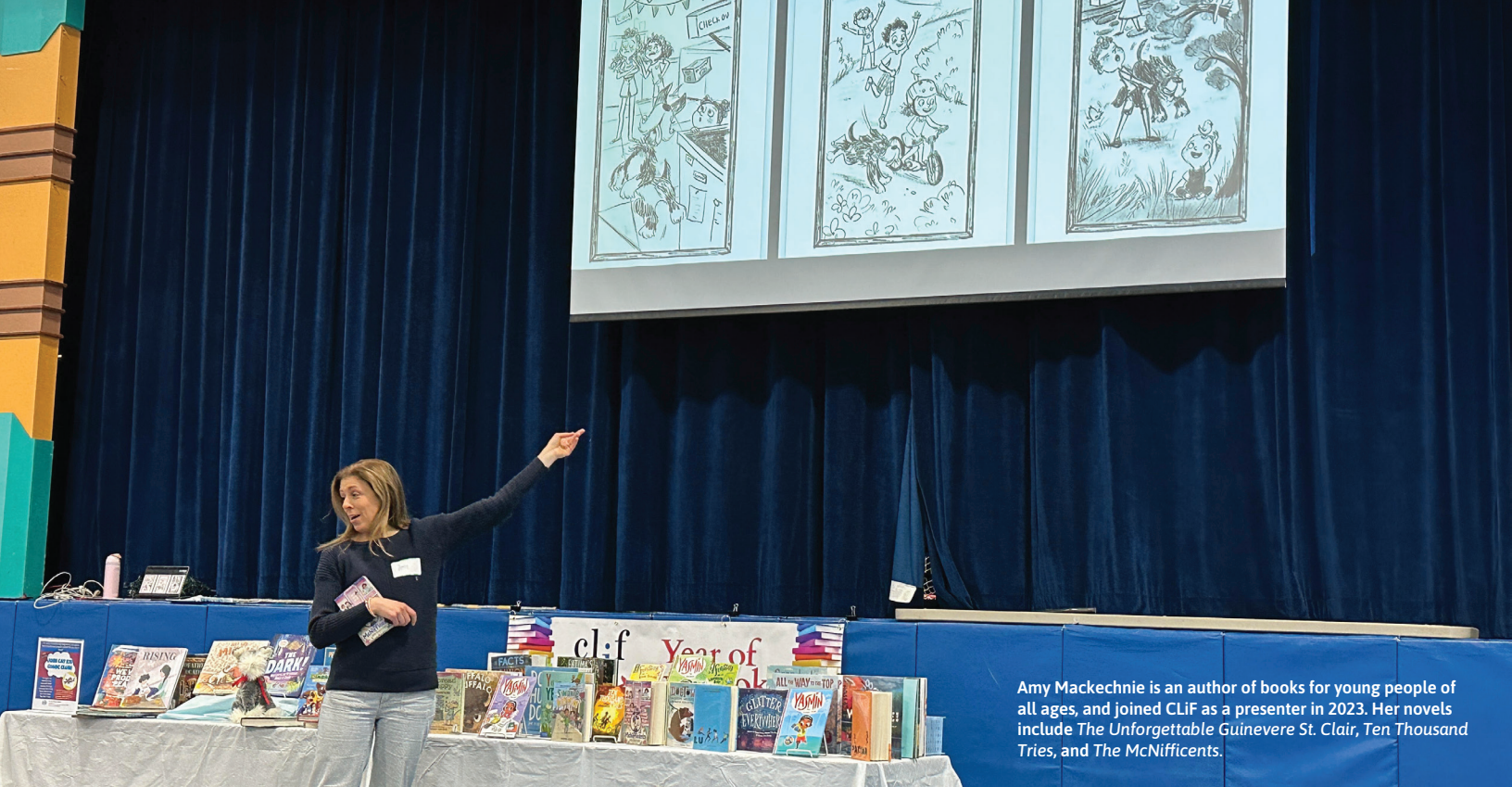
literacy to life for our students, while also helping them develop valuable skills such as teamwork, perseverance and problem solving.

Before parting for the long winter break, our school held a festive community read-aloud celebration, where guest readers visited classrooms to share a favorite picture book or two. Students also enjoyed cookie decorating and a CLiF book giveaway. I loved that we were able to send each child home with two brand-new books to enjoy during their time away from school.

Still ahead in our Year of the Book, we would like to find ways to use literacy to strengthen community ties, celebrate Poetry Month and look at creating a story walk on our nature trail. Having the ability to create these new experiences and opportunities for our students is a beautiful thing.



Teresa Bolton is the Library Media Specialist at Charleston Elementary School (preK-8), a 2024-2025 CLiF Year of the Book school.



Amy Mackechnie is an author of books for young people of all ages, and joined CLiF as a presenter in 2023. Her novels include *The Unforgettable Guinevere St. Clair*, *Ten Thousand Tries*, and *The McNiffcents*.

Each of CLiF’s seven grant programs promotes essential literacy skills for life and learning. Our presenter roster features over 50 professional authors, illustrators, graphic novelists, poets, and storytellers whose visits inspire young audiences and awaken imaginations to new possibilities. At CLiF events, children might experience a poetry slam, cartooning, zine-making, interpretive dance, puppet-building, or countless other creative expressions of reading and writing that bring literacy to life—and make it fun.

Meet Amy Mackechnie

CLIF PRESENTER SPOTLIGHT

Q: How did you initially connect with CLiF?

A: A friend of mine told me about this amazing literacy organization that connected books with kids - I immediately knew I wanted to get involved.

Q: Can you give us a little background on your love of reading and writing?

A: I started first grade as one of the slowest readers in my class. But that year, thanks to my mother (who reads more books than anyone I know) and my teachers, I became a fast reader and lover of books, never without an ever-growing stack on my bedside table. And although I was a science major in college, I also loved to write. It’s been such a delight to see how science has made its way into many of my stories.

Q: How do books help kids become more resilient?

A: A number of years ago I read an article in the *New York Times* called “The Stories That Bind Us,” by Bruce Feiler. The premise was that children who know their family’s stories, especially those about challenges their relatives faced, show greater ability to handle tough times in their own lives.

But you don’t have to be related to someone to be changed by their story. Books and fictional characters also have the power to show you a way through the harder stuff in life..

Q: Where do you find inspiration for your writing?

A: It almost always comes from a real life situation. I am most drawn to messy and lovable family relationships - usually with a great quest thrown in.

Q: What do you love most about working with kids?

A: Kids are so funny - and they love stories! I always leave a school or library event happier than before. Seeing and feeling the excitement and empathy they have - the imagination, creativity and intelligence - is inspiring. It reminds me of the expression “Magic is hard work, unseen.” It’s hard work to write, travel, and present, but at the end of a visit with kids, that’s what it feels like - MAGIC.

Q: Any forthcoming new projects or books to share?

A: Yes! I’m pitching a boarding school mystery to my editor in January! Fingers crossed...

A Dismas House resident displays the books she selected.

Dismas of Vermont

As an expansion of our long-running Children of Incarcerated Adults program, CLiF is proud to partner with Dismas of Vermont, an organization that provides support and housing to people transitioning out of incarceration. At Dismas housing locations, former inmates live alongside volunteers in a supportive, family-style environment. Each weeknight, they gather for a sitdown dinner that is central to the Dismas goal of building community. During visits to two Dismas locations this fall, CLiF founder Duncan McDougall joined residents for the evening meal to share stories and literacy resources, and to host a book giveaway where they could select new books for the children in their lives. The visits were meaningful to all in attendance, and we look forward to future events.



New Hampshire Hunger Solutions

CLiF recently partnered with NH Hunger Solutions for the School Breakfast Challenge, an initiative aimed at boosting school breakfast participation across New Hampshire. Currently, the state ranks 47th out of 50 in breakfast participation, despite strong evidence linking school breakfast consumption to better behavior, health, and academic performance among students. To help address this issue, NH Hunger Solutions organizes special events in participating school districts throughout the year. As part of this effort, CLiF joined forces with the organization for “Books and Breakfast,” an event that combines a nutritious morning meal with engaging storytelling and a free book giveaway, encouraging both healthy habits and a love of reading.

Inclusive Arts Vermont

CLiF’s Literacy Enrichment Grant is designed to infuse literacy with fun through experiential and/or project-based learning opportunities. A recent grant recipient is Inclusive Arts Vermont’s Start with the Arts (SWTA) program, an early literacy program for children aged 0-5 years. CLiF funds will compensate visits from SWTA Teaching Artists, who work with children on incorporating social and emotional learning skills into arts-based literacy projects.

Rural Library Visit

Author Terry Farish recently visited the Gilmanton School in Gilmanton Iron Works, NH, thanks to the 2024-2025 CLiF Rural Library grant received by the Gilmanton Year-Round Library. Public librarians Harmony Anderson and Megan Greenbaum, along with school librarian Jolene Wernig, worked together to bring Terry to the school on Dec. 4 to see students in grades K-6. In addition to sharing how she became a writer, Terry also invited kids to help her tell scenes of a story. According to Jolene, “The students had a lot of fun, and quite a few even went straight to the library when school was dismissed. I think [Terry] definitely inspired students to read and write!” The librarians also used the opportunity to introduce the new library books purchased by CLiF for their children’s collections as an exciting part of the Rural Library grant (\$2000 worth of new books for the public library; \$500 for the elementary school library).



Author Terry Farish gives a CLiF Rural Library presentation at Gilmanton School

Please save the date for CLiF’s annual Community Literacy Conference



We invite librarians, teachers, school staff, administrators, out-of-school time providers, early educators, informal educators, mentors, supporters, and other friends of CLiF to join us. Certificates of professional development will be provided upon request after completion of the conference. This conference will be offered at low cost with full scholarships available. **All are welcome!**

Featuring keynote speaker **Kenneth M. Cadow, National Book Award Finalist and author of *Gather***

**Friday, April 4, 2025
Lake Morey Resort, Fairlee, VT**



Scan the QR code for more information and to register

CLiF Looks Ahead

As we explore what's next for CLiF, the future is bright. Our dedicated strategic planning committee is currently amassing valuable insights that will guide CLiF's decision-making process over the next few years. Hear from our resident teen volunteer, Francesca, on what she appreciates most about working for CLiF, and meet a few of the generous organizations and individuals that recently chose us as their community partner.

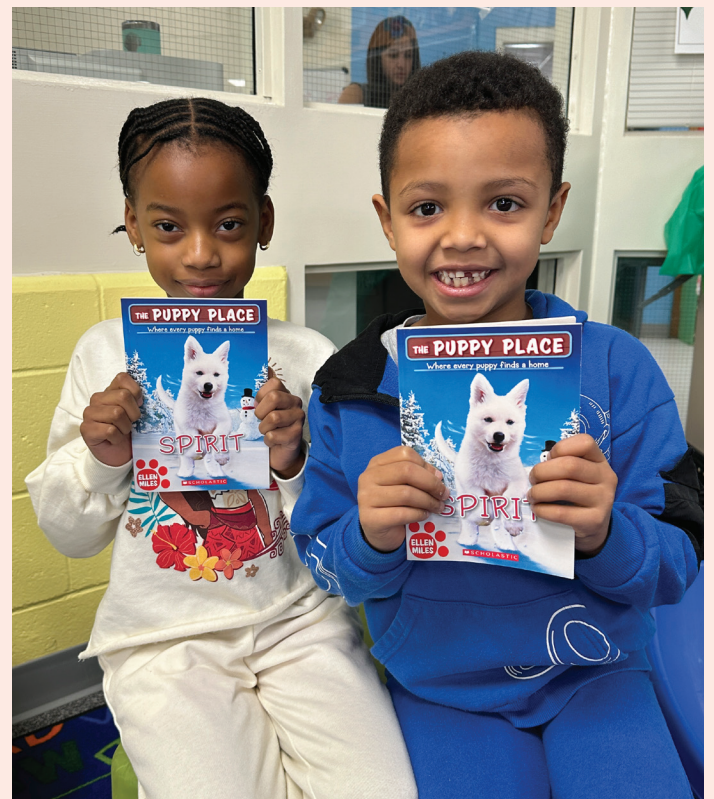


The data we are collecting explores critical areas such as high-need age groups, effective engagement strategies, the role of technology, gaps in current services, social-emotional needs of students, neurodivergent learners, caregiver involvement, and impact measurement. This multi-faceted approach ensures that our planning discussions this winter and spring will be broadly informed, data-driven, and focused on creating meaningful impact.

We are immensely grateful to the individuals and organizations who have already contributed valuable insights and perspectives to this process. As always, CLiF remains deeply committed to supporting under-resourced children through literacy opportunities and experiences that promote engagement with reading and writing. We look forward to sharing our plans with you soon!

CLiF has embarked upon a bold strategic planning initiative to inform our programming and funding priorities over the next three years. By gaining a better understanding of the evolving needs of our community partners throughout New Hampshire and Vermont, we will ensure that our work continues to deliver the greatest benefits to the children we serve.

To lead this initiative, we've partnered with Health Resources in Action, a Boston-based consulting firm with extensive expertise in the nonprofit sector. A dedicated committee composed of board and staff members is collaborating with Health Resources in Action's team to create a comprehensive and inclusive process. Together, we've developed tools to collect diverse insights, including a board and staff survey; a wide-reaching community partner survey; interviews with literacy experts; and focus groups with key community partner cohorts.





Our youngest and newest volunteer, 15-year-old **Francesca Nocito** works with our Thursday morning crew. She has grown to love her volunteer group for the tasks they accomplish together, and “the camaraderie and opportunity to engage with my community, which is especially rewarding as a homeschooler.”

Francesca originally connected with CLiF to volunteer as part of a class requirement, but stayed on as a regular volunteer because “the work CLiF does is immensely important.” She says she loves the sense of community, being part of a group working together for a great cause, and, most importantly to her, helping kids gain access to literature.

“It’s a joy to come in every week to collaborate, catch up, and make a difference.”

When she’s not packing up books for CLiF, Francesca spends most of her time on schoolwork—not something she voluntarily does for fun! She also enjoys “biking (any and all kinds), creating digital art, and wrenching on vintage motorcycles with my dad. Oh, and reading—when I can manage to find a good book!”



CLiF was honored to be selected by **Northern Stage**, a professional theater company in White River Junction, VT, as the community partner for their holiday production of Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*. Before each show and at intermission, theatergoers of all ages were invited to visit “Belle’s Book Nook,” a cozy lounge in the lobby, to flip through books donated by CLiF. Theatergoers were also encouraged to bring a brand-new book to donate to “Belle’s Book Drive.” In all, the drive collected 295 books to be distributed to young readers served by CLiF. Our thanks to Northern Stage for this special collaboration!



We are grateful to **Oliver Wyman** (Boston office) for raising funds and hosting a corporate book drive to benefit CLiF. The drive brought in a total of 106 books through physical donations and virtual acquisitions on Bookshop.org. The independent bookseller partner for the drive was All She Wrote in Somerville, MA.



And special thanks to CLiF board member **Zach Haggerty** for hosting his 5th annual “Book It for CLiF” fun run on Saturday, Oct. 26, in Stowe, VT, and to all who donated in support! A small, but mighty pack of runners turned out for the event, which raised over \$5,000 in support of the CLiF Year of the Book program at Bakersfield Elementary School in Bakersfield, VT. Congratulations to Dave Lachtrupp of Gristmill Builders (coincidentally Zach’s father-in-law!) who was randomly selected as the winner of the grand prize: a CLiF tote bag filled with Vermont delicacies.



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Michele Gravelle, a longtime CLIF supporter and former board member.

WHY SHE DONATES

“Reading has always been a big part of my life and when my son was little, reading picture books to him and taking him to the library were activities that we both treasured and enjoyed. Now, it gives me great pleasure to help make these activities available to other children. Knowing that the funds I donate go directly to the programs that provide books and opportunities for kids to experience the wonder that reading can bring gives me an enormous amount of joy. Seeing the excited smiles on the children’s faces when they receive their books is, to me, what life is all about!”

CLIF’s work is sustained through the generosity of our donors. We are always happy to answer any questions about giving, and to discuss options.

Please contact Laura Rice: laura@clifonline.org, 802-244-0146.