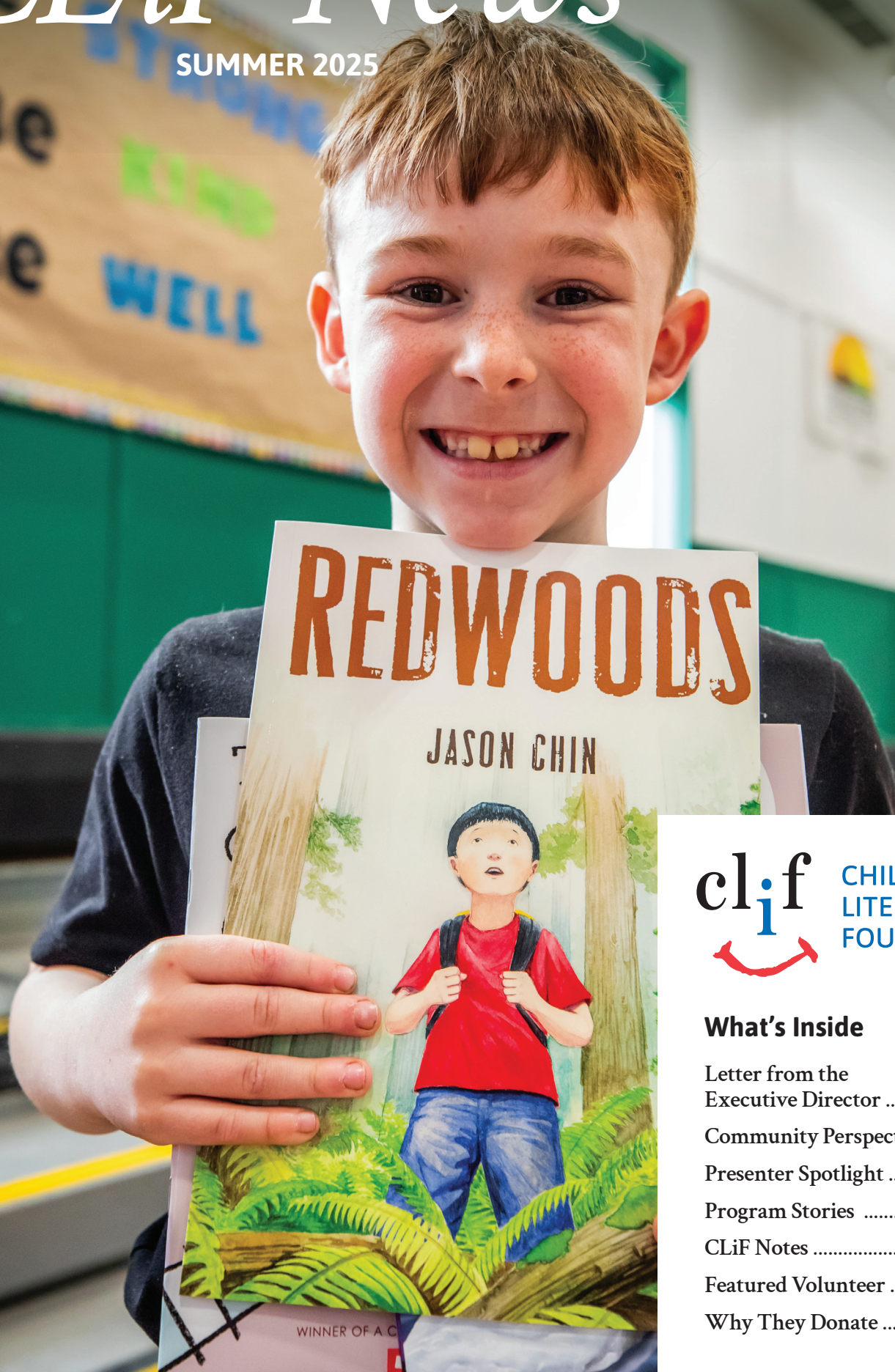


CLiF News

SUMMER 2025



What's Inside

| | |
|--|-----|
| Letter from the Executive Director | 2 |
| Community Perspective..... | 3 |
| Presenter Spotlight | 4 |
| Program Stories | 5 |
| CLiF Notes | 6/7 |
| Featured Volunteer | 7 |
| Why They Donate | 8 |

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**Dear Friends,**

Even—and perhaps especially—in challenging times, the CLiF staff and board are continually buoyed by your steadfast commitment to literacy and to the children we serve. I hope you, in turn, are energized by the powerful impact that comes from supporting local, mission-driven organizations. I remain optimistic that together, we are charting a path toward brighter futures.

We are deeply grateful to the many community partners who participated in our strategic planning process this past winter. Your thoughtful insights into the needs of CLiF children and families provided essential guidance as we set our new goals and strategies. While we look forward to formally releasing the full plan later this summer, we are already shaping our 2025–2026 programming to reflect what we’ve learned.

In the year ahead, we’ll increase literacy support for our earliest readers to help prepare them for kindergarten, and expand opportunities for caregivers to engage in literacy development. We’re also eager to grow our mission-adjacent partnerships to help families access the broad range of resources they need to nourish and nurture their children. More details are coming soon, but know that we are excited about and inspired by CLiF’s path forward.

Whether your summer brings faraway travels or restful moments close to home, I hope it fills you with color, sweetness, and peace. As always, thank you for being part of the CLiF family—and for believing in a more equitable world where all children thrive.

Warmly,

Laura Rice
CLiF Executive Director

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...with this reading
...there is such a wide
...that were suited to his
...even in his reading, he's at an
...though he's only in 6th grade
...to your program, and all the donors
...make that possible. Thank you so much

Thank You

this program continues on indefinitely
of parents and children everywhere
you give and work you do is
valuable. So thank you from the
bottom of my heart for being part of the glue that helps
keep families together!"

Community Perspective

CLiF's Children of Incarcerated Adults (CHiA) program currently partners with five correctional facilities in Vermont and New Hampshire, providing resources and support to help incarcerated men and women stay connected with their children through literacy. In the recent letter excerpted below, an incarcerated father shares how the program has impacted his relationship with his son.

"Let me start by saying 'Thank You.' I have been incarcerated since 2013, so I am very familiar with your program and all you have afforded to us, not only at the prison, but also throughout [Vermont and New Hampshire]! This letter goes out to all of you who make these seminars possible!

My son absolutely loves receiving these books, as well as my nieces and nephews! I started off with the toddler books and have now moved all the way up to young adults. The wide variety that you provide is such a blessing! I truly can't thank you enough, you're all undoubtedly godsend!

The fact that you can take time and money, and come into these facilities and institutes, completely unbiased, opinion free, and humanize us when so many others out there are quick to judge, label and even disregard us! You've

enabled me to be a father who can stay active and relevant in my son's life. I never really knew my father, so being able to read the books I send home with him allows us to make the moments together that are absolutely priceless. Without CLiF, none of this would have been possible, so again, thank you so much!

My son used to struggle with his reading and his pronunciation, but since there is such a wide selection, I was able to find books that were suited to his needs, and now he is excelling in his reading. He's at an 8th/9th grade level, even though he's only in 6th grade! I owe that to your program, and all the donors who make that possible. Thank you so much!

I hope this program continues on indefinitely for the sake of parents and children everywhere! The donations you give and work you do is quite literally invaluable. So thank you from the bottom of my heart for being part of the glue that helps keep families together!"

G.G.

March 27, 2025

ABOVE:
An incarcerated mother reads with her child at a CHiA event;
An excerpt from the letter



Mat Heagerty is a graphic novelist and CLiF presenter who lives with his family in Vermont. He is dyslexic, and specializes in speaking to children about the strengths of learning disabilities. Mat's books include *Lumberjackula*, *Martian Ghost Centaur*, and *Unplugged and Unpopular*. Visit him online at matheagerty.com.

Q: How did you initially connect with CLiF?

A: After a school visit I did in Southern Vermont a wonderful librarian suggested I reach out to CLiF, and I'm so glad I did! I love their mission and am seriously impressed by the quality and amount of books they are getting into kids' hands!

Q: You speak to children about the strengths of learning disabilities - can you share what some of those are?

A: There are so many strengths attached to neurodiversity! While my dyslexia may make reading and writing a slower process, it's gifted me with a greater visual understanding than most folks have. Dyslexics also have heightened creative thinking skills and enhanced empathy; both greatly help with my books. Folks with ADHD have hyperfocus and can be great at multitasking. Autistic folks often have a wonderful attention to detail, and amazing memories for their chosen interests. I could go on forever, but I believe the world is shaped by people who think outside the box, and neurodiverse kids think out of the box very well!

Q: How did your dyslexia impact your own literacy journey?

A: Reading came very, very late for me, and it came with a huge amount of struggle and embarrassment. With the help of some exceptional teachers and my awesome parents I eventually found tools and tricks that work best for me. Graphic novels were the first and biggest tool to help me with my reading. The smaller blocks of texts separated in word balloons, coupled with context clues of the visuals made reading so much more accessible to me.

Q: Could you share a story or interaction that demonstrates what your message means to the kids you speak with?

A: I am so grateful to be welcomed into so many schools across America where I get to see kids who are struggling and really lacking confidence stand a little taller with pride as I talk about how special being neurodiverse is. I have had so many happy-cries in schools with students sharing their experiences. And a massive joy of my life is the emails I receive from parents or teachers after my visits sharing the positive impact my presentations had on their struggling students.

Q: Any tips for parents, caregivers and/or educators of children with dyslexia and other learning disabilities?

A: Keep that confidence up as best you can by exposing them to folk with other differences and differences like their own. And as best you can, lean into their strengths and interests. Reading will come eventually, but a foundation of confidence will make it come faster! Also, I just truly hope for all teachers and parents to have maximum respect and patience for all kids neurodiverse or not.

Q: Any new projects coming up that you would like to share?

A: My next book, *Indoor Kid*, will be out in October from Oni Press. It's drawn by Lisa DuBois-Thompson and is about a kid living in a sports-obsessed town who loves sports, but is awful at them, until he gets some magic sports abilities that he uses to stop some bullies and live out his sports dreams! I said sports a lot there! Sports!



To work at CLiF is to be surrounded by stories—on our shelves and in our communities. Thousands of new books pass through our giveaway library each month, bound for young readers across the region. (Read more about how we choose them on page 6.) Just as meaningful are the stories we hear from partners, presenters, donors, and families about CLiF's impact. We're honored to share a few of those stories with you in these pages.

Worldly Reads



Beaver Meadow School in Concord, NH—a 2024-2025 CLiF Year of the Book school—used CLiF funds to support a schoolwide “Read Around the World” initiative and celebration.

The goal of the project was for each class to learn about different places, traditions, and celebrations by listening to read-alouds from each continent. After “visiting” a continent, the students received a stamp in their passport. At the conclusion of their travels, the students celebrated with a whole school multicultural dance performance.

Brain Food

Sunset Heights Elementary School in Nashua, NH used funds from their Year of the Book grant to help stock a new Inchy Worm Book Vending Machine donated by the Kyle Bedinger Memorial Trust. The unique machine is designed to incentivize reading in a fun and engaging fashion. Students are rewarded for good behavior with special tokens that they can redeem in the machine in exchange for a new book.



Community Literacy Conference 2025



In April, members of the CLiF community—educators, librarians, authors, illustrators, and many others—converged on the Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee, VT for the annual Community Literacy Conference.

As always, the day's agenda was packed with abundant opportunities

to learn, share, and connect through reading and writing. Highlights included a keynote speech by **Kenneth M. Cadow**, school principal and award-winning author of *Gather*.

“Everything about this conference is so well put together,” one kind attendee shared. “Keep doing what you’re doing! I’m already looking forward to attending again next year!”

Higher Ground



There's no question that the town of Johnson, VT loves its library! After decades of discussion about how to solve the historic building's flooding problem, town officials and residents came together this spring to physically move the library—yes, 116-year-old brick building and all!—to a new site outside the flood zone.

The library, a CLiF Summer Readers grantee, now neighbors Johnson Elementary School, a 2025-2026 Year of the Book grantee. CLiF looks forward to working with both sites in the months ahead!

Short and Sweet Stories

CLiF's third annual Two-Sentence Story Contest challenged young writers to tell a “Love” story about something, somewhere or someone they loved. Hundreds of creative entries poured in from across Vermont and New Hampshire, and as usual, it was nearly impossible for the panel of CLiF judges to narrow down the pool to choose the winners. Congratulations to our winners: **Cian**, age 6, **Lulu**, age 7, **Sadie**, age 10, **Willa-Jane**, age 10, **Sylvia**, age 10, **Hunter**, age 11, and **Gaby**, age 12; and to our runners-up, **Bradley**, age 5, and **Austyn**, age 7.



“As the music gets louder, I feel prouder as I move my feet to the beat; I am unstoppable. I love myself: blond hair, blue eyes, and a bright smile that is full of rhythm.”

—By Willa-Jane, age 10



Scan the QR code to read all the winning entries on our website.

CLiF Notes

While CLiF may be best known for our inspiring author visits and popular book giveaways, much more happens behind the scenes. Our work is continuously bolstered by the steady efforts of many—from dedicated volunteers and board members to mission-driven partners who share our commitment to community. We're grateful for every hand that helps turn the page!

FEATURED VOLUNTEER

Kathy Powell is a lifelong literacy enthusiast with a background in publishing and education. Read on to learn what inspires her to volunteer, her fondest CLiF memory, and more!

Q. How long have you volunteered for CLiF?

A: In the spring of 2014, I stickered books for CLiF as a Ben & Jerry's volunteer. A year later, I became a CLiF weekly Thursday volunteer.

Q. What inspires you to volunteer?

A: I love sharing my life-long love of books with children of all ages. CLiF is the perfect venue for getting books to deserving readers in underserved populations.

Q. Favorite thing about volunteering for CLiF?

A: My favorite thing about volunteering at CLiF is toiling away on Thursdays with my compadres Kim (whom I've known since second grade in Montclair, NJ), Cyndi, and Francesca!

Q. Most memorable volunteer moment?

A: Reading a picture book to an attentive pack of CLiF dogs on [CLiF founder] Duncan's front stoop.

Q. What do you do for fun outside of CLiF?

A: I enjoy reading, spending time with my son and family, being a reading mentor, dogs, nature, and helping anyone in need.



Kathy reads to an adoring audience

QUALITY CONTROL



Each year, CLiF gives away over 50,000 new books to children in Vermont and New Hampshire. At every giveaway, the goal is to provide a wide range of high-quality books that represent a diverse spectrum of genres, topics, and characters. Ensuring that our books meet this expectation means consistently monitoring our own shelves, gathering feedback from our partners, staying current on trends, and more. To streamline the process, the CLiF team recently developed a comprehensive rubric and a bi-annual audit system to better inform and calibrate our book orders. For example, data from our initial audit this past winter revealed that to meet our established benchmarks, we needed more non-fiction picture books, and additional early chapter books addressing social and emotional learning topics. We're pleased to have this effective system in place to guide us in making the best choices for the children and communities we serve.

COLLABORATIONS

SNAPSHOTS: If you've ever attended a CLiF event, you've likely witnessed the energy, joy, and connection that fill the room. From the spark in a child's eye as they choose a new book, to the giggles and awe during a storytelling presentation, these moments matter. To better capture the full spirit of our work, CLiF has partnered with husband-and-wife team **Photos by Kintz** to document select events. Many of their photos appear throughout these pages, and we look forward to continued collaboration!

CLOSE TO HOME: In May, CLiF teamed up with **Waterbury Public Library** to host a facilitated discussion of **Ken Cadow's** *Gather*, the 2024 Vermont Reads selection. The conversation explored themes of rural life: resilience, class differences, addiction, housing and food insecurity, a deep relationship to the land, and the power of community. Free books were made available to community members ahead of the event, courtesy of Vermont Humanities. CLiF will also partner with the library for a "Touch-a-Truck" celebration in June, kicking off their summer reading program.

HAPPILY EVER AFTER: CLiF was pleased to provide **Good Beginnings of Central Vermont** with giveaway books for their annual "It Takes a Village" event on May 10. Good Beginnings representative **Mindy Parisi** shared with CLiF: "We decided to have children pick out a book as they entered the gym. It was so well received, and I can not thank you enough for this wonderful donation. It was so heartwarming to see children walking around with their books."

A WOMAN OF FEW WORDS: Author **Vivian Kirkfield** first launched her popular #50PreciousWords writing contest in 2016, challenging aspiring picture book authors to write a story for kids using only 50 words. Several years ago, she launched a companion #50PreciousWords Literacy Initiative, requesting that contest participants consider donating a children's book. She now partners with CLiF and **Toadstool Books** in Keene, NH to collect books for elementary schools served by our programs. Added bonus: Vivian recently joined CLiF's roster of professional presenters, adding her talents to an exceedingly talented pool!

PLAY BALL! Our thanks to the **Vermont Lake Monsters**, the collegiate baseball team based in Burlington, for inviting CLiF to share our work at one of their games this summer. Look for Executive Director **Laura Rice** holding down the table at the Aug. 7 game versus the **Worcester Bravehearts!** The Lake Monsters also generously offered CLiF ten game and meal vouchers, which we are thrilled to be able to share with our partners.

WITH GRATITUDE

CLiF wishes to recognize the outstanding contributions of three outgoing members of our Board of Directors: **Dr. Sandy Kelsey**, **Rick Mills**, and **Posie Taylor**. Each of these individuals has committed significant time, energy and brainpower to the betterment of our organization, and we are extremely grateful for their leadership and generosity of spirit.



Sandy served on the Board for six years, and has left a truly extraordinary legacy with a gift of timber from his New Hampshire land for CLiF's building entry. During his tenure, he generously hosted several intimate dinners, complete with his own wonderful cooking, to spread the word about CLiF's work.

Rick joined the Board in 2019, co-chaired the Governance Committee, and led the Leadership Transition Committee charged with selecting founding Executive Director Duncan McDougall's successor. Highly valued for his wisdom, wit, and balanced executive acumen, Rick has helped to guide CLiF forward as it matures as an organization.



During her six-year tenure on the Board, **Posie** served as Vice Chair, Property Committee Chair, and Development Committee Co-Chair. She also co-chaired the CLiF Building Campaign, where her notable expertise as a nonprofit leader and fundraiser proved invaluable—the campaign ultimately exceeded its goal, eliminating the need for a mortgage on the new building.

While their Board terms may be ending, they remain forever a part of the CLiF community. **From all of us at CLiF: thank you, Sandy, Rick and Posie!**



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COMMUNITY DONATION



**Children's Literacy Foundation
Waterbury, VT**

*Community Bank's Hayden Jones with
members of the CLiF team.*

Why They Donate - Community Bank

Community Bank is a full-service financial institution with a long-standing practice of supporting the communities it serves. In February, CLiF was selected by Community Bank's Waterbury, VT branch to receive a generous grant from the bank's foundation.

"We're investing in the future by supporting the Children's Literacy Foundation in Waterbury Center, VT, helping to enrich and uplift the next generation. From lively celebrations to meaningful contributions, we're committed to making a difference in the places we call home," the bank said in a statement.

Is your workplace looking for a way to give back? CLiF is always happy to answer any questions about giving, and to discuss options.

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