

## NEWS RELEASE



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### **Literacy program developed by Laurier PhD student earns major grant**

WATERLOO – The *Get Ready for School* program, created by Iuliana Baciú during her PhD at Laurier and delivered in the last year by Strong Start to Reading, is about to expand thanks to a five-year grant of \$389,368 from the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation.

*Get Ready for School*, which helps bridge the literacy gap before children start junior kindergarten, will expand from its current two pilot sites to four sites in 2012 and 15 sites by 2016. Delivered through community centres, it runs for 22 weeks between January and June.

Baciú, an instructor in Laurier's Psychology Department, developed the program in 2005 and ran it until 2010, when she partnered with Strong Start, who now manages the program. Baciú remains involved in analyzing the results of this now community-delivered program, which so far have been very promising. Testing to date suggests some of the children have quadrupled their vocabulary while many have significantly improved their phonological awareness.

"Parents and teachers are very excited about the changes they see in the children, who not only improved their pre-academic skills, but are more confident learners in the classroom," said Baciú. "The impact is at the individual level, the family level and the community level."

The program has been shown to have great benefit for children whose first language isn't English or who are disadvantaged for socio-economic reasons. It combines early literacy development with classroom learning behaviour and routines, which are necessary to ensure a positive and confident entry into school.

"There is amazing growth in the children over the course of the *Get Ready for School* program," said Mabelle Denison, executive director of Strong Start. "We are very excited to bring this program to the community and are extremely grateful for the generous support of the Hallman Foundation."

The location of the two new sites has yet to be determined. Funding for the first four years of the program were provided by Laurier and from research grants by Alexandra Gottardo, an associate professor of Psychology at Laurier and Baciú's master's and PhD advisor. Currently, the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation has provided funding for the program's two-year pilot at Popcorn House in Cambridge. The pilot site of Kingsdale Community Centre has been funded by the United Way of Kitchener Waterloo and Area and The Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation over the same period.

"I am very proud of the work the foundation has done pro-actively and responsively to support early child literacy in our community," said Hulene Montgomery, executive director of the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. "It has been exciting to watch this program evolve from a PhD research thesis study to the high-impact, high-integrity program it is today."