



**Rotary Club of West Ottawa  
Family & Community Service Award  
of Rotary International<sup>1</sup>**

**Conferred on Twice Upon a Time — Il était deux fois, Ottawa,  
June 30, 2015**

*(The following text was read at the awards presentation ceremony)*

Older generations are worried that kids today may be losing their ability to communicate. Exploding technological trends are often making their parents less available. Reading, writing and speaking have become less important than one's ability to master computers of all kinds.

*Twice Upon a Time* are doing their part to combat that trend. They want every child who visits their outlets to own a book and potentially get hooked on reading. They are different than a library. No membership, no ID required, you don't have to speak English. Just "come on in," and take a book.

*Twice Upon a Time* was founded by Alexandra Yarrow and Kris Banarjee in May, 2014. The organization is a volunteer-run non-profit whose mission is to facilitate book ownership among low-income families in Ottawa. Their broader objective is to support the development of early literacy skills.

They collect new and gently used books for kids up to age 12 and distribute them via partnerships with community agencies. They currently operate pop-up free bookstores at the Overbrook Community Centre, the Taggart Family YM-YWCA, Confederation Court Community House, and the Boys and Girls Club. Volunteers read aloud to the children and help them choose a book to take home. They have also distributed books through Heartwood House, the Children's Aid Society, Habitat for Humanity and the Vanier Early Years Centre.

Children and families can visit their free bookstores as often as they like. Each person (adults and children) who visits their free bookstore can take home one book per visit. Since May of last year, they have given away over 1,700 books to kids. In 2014, *Twice Upon a Time* received an *Awesome Ottawa Award*, and in 2015, they were awarded the Suzanne Pinel Family Literacy Day Book Purchase Award.

Why free books? Simple; many Ottawa children can't read with fluency. Consider these facts: The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth has found that a high percentage of children in the neighbourhoods near Heartwood House, where *Twice Upon a Time* operates, are at risk due to socio-economic and health factors correlated with school success. The percentage in Vanier is 41%; Overbrook: 58%; and Cyrville: 36%. The Ottawa average is 25%.

Statistics Canada reports that every 1 percent increase in the nation's literacy rate translates into a 2.5 percent increase in our gross domestic product. Clearly, literacy has a profound impact on the welfare of both individuals and the nation. A close relationship with books is crucial in this relationship. In middle-income neighbourhoods, the ratio of books per child is 13 to 1. In low-income neighbourhoods, the ratio is 1 age-appropriate book for every 300 children.

The Rotary Club of West Ottawa wishes to recognize the accomplishments that *Twice Upon a Time/ Il était deux fois* has made in such a short period of time. The organization is making a very significant difference in the lives of so many people, one book at a time.

Alexandra Yarrow please come forward to accept the Rotary International Family and Community Services Award.

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Family and Community Service Award of Rotary International is bestowed by the Rotary Club of West Ottawa on individuals or organizations that have provided outstanding service to families, neighbourhoods or local communities in the National Capital Region, or have made a significant contribution to the work of the Rotary Club of West Ottawa.*