



San Mateo
County
Libraries

Open for Exploration

Annual Report 2019-2020





Director's Message



2nd
In California
Star Library Ratings

11th
In National
Star Library Ratings

It is with great pride that I present to you our 2019-2020 Annual Report. This year was full of remarkable accomplishments and meaningful impact.

Despite our challenges this year, San Mateo County Libraries proved to be an organization full of innovative thinkers who are steadfast in their dedication to breaking down barriers and serving those most in need.

As you'll read in this report, our mission of strengthening our community by creating an inclusive sense of place and environment for learning empowered us to adapt and expand our services despite hardship. Not only did we launch incredible new initiatives, but we were able to successfully reorganize our operations in response to the pandemic, and achieve exciting transformational change. Our library champions jumped into action quickly to offer much beloved programs and classes virtually, support new needs like distance learning, and reinvent traditional library services in creative ways, such as contactless curbside service.

Our accomplishments wouldn't be possible without the support of our Governing Board and Operations Committee, incredible Friends of the Library groups and Foundation, and our phenomenal team of staff and volunteers. I hope you enjoy our heartwarming, inspiring stories of discovery and innovation.

ANNE-MARIE DESPAIN
DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY SERVICES

San Mateo County Libraries Joint Powers Authority Governing Board

Atherton
Rick DeGolia
Belmont
Charles Stone
Brisbane
Karen Cunningham
East Palo Alto
Regina Wallace-Jones

Foster City
Sam Hindi
Half Moon Bay
Adam Eisen
Millbrae
Reuben Holober
Pacifica
Mike O'Neill

Portola Valley
Maryann Derwin
San Carlos
Sara McDowell
Woodside
Dick Brown
San Mateo County
Carole Groom

Positive Impact

Our vast library programs and services create a dynamic environment for ingenuity, collaboration and transformative experiences.



"San Mateo County Libraries are innovative, strive to serve all members of the community, and are beautiful spaces to be in. I especially like the no-fee model, as in my mind it only punishes those that need libraries the most. Thank you for this most welcome change!" LIBRARY PATRON



Impact by the Numbers

97%

OF PATRONS RATED THE
LIBRARY FAVORABLY

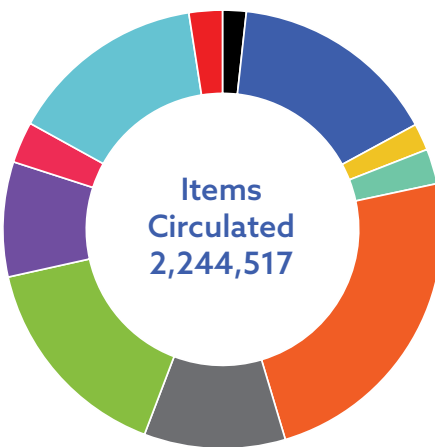
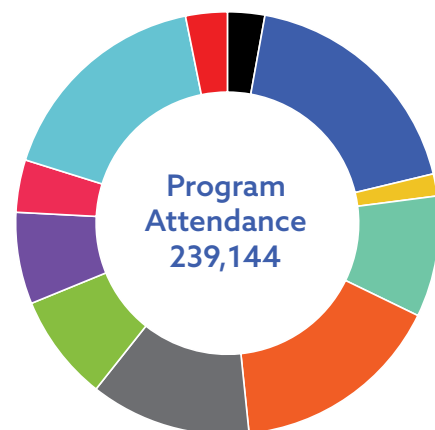
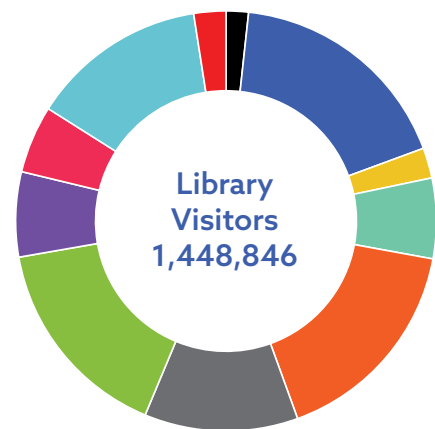
87%

OF PATRONS TRUST THE LIBRARY
AS AN ORGANIZATION

81%

FEEL LIBRARY SERVICES IMPROVE
THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE

Year in Numbers



- Atherton
- Belmont
- Brisbane
- East Palo Alto
- Foster City
- Half Moon Bay
- Millbrae
- Pacifica
- Portola Valley
- San Carlos
- Woodside

70%
POPULATION WITH
LIBRARY CARD

285,263
SERVICE
POPULATION

8,396
TOTAL EVENTS AND
PROGRAMS

2.0M
WEBSITE
VISITORS

929,781
DIGITAL
DOWNLOADS

35%
INCREASE IN
DIGITAL DOWNLOADS

3.0M
WIRELESS
SESSIONS

174,791
PUBLIC
COMPUTER USERS

11,019
LAPTOP AND WI-FI
HOTSPOT CHECKOUTS



Amplifying Voices

We are dedicated to creating an inclusive sense of place and a safe environment for learning.



The unique diversity and rich cultural background of our staff and those we serve inspire and drive our services. Together we are stronger and that is why we work to build inclusive programs and resource collections that bridge cultures and strengthen our community. From second language courses to cultural festivals, our libraries are making an impact across multiple generations.

Public interest in our cultural programming continues to grow. This year, thousands participated in our cultural celebrations and programs observing Latinx, Diwali, Native American Heritage Month, Lunar New Year, Black History Month, Holi and more.

"I consider the library the most important building in any city. Some need churches, most love restaurants, but without a library we would be uninformed and never grow." LIBRARY PATRON

"I love my library because it's colorful, spacious and welcoming! All the librarians are friendly and extremely helpful - they know their stuff!" LIBRARY PATRON

585

BILINGUAL
PROGRAMS

29%

OF OUR STAFF
ARE BILINGUAL

The Human Library



“Part of my healing process has been to continually share and talk openly with family and friends, and this event allowed us to do the same with strangers. It was a powerful experience for all of us.”

SHAUN DIAZ, HUMAN LIBRARY

The Human Library is a worldwide movement for positive social change where “books” are real people with a unique lived experience to share. At these events, readers can check out human books for an open-ended conversation. Shaun Diaz, a volunteer participant shared his story, “The View From Here: Wheelchair Life Uncensored” at our event in hopes of connecting and sharing his life journey with a stranger. During conversations, a simple opening question of, “How are you?” could

powerfully transition to, “Is society understanding and accessible for wheel-chair bound people?”

Through one-on-one conversations, community members were able to deepen their understanding, challenge bias, and strengthen their human connections to people like Shaun and more than a dozen others, including a survivor of addiction, an activist on the U.S.-Mexico border, a person who is transgender and a veteran of the military.



“In a time of profound polarization in America, the more we can connect with those who we perceive as different and truly listen to each other and accept our differences, the healthier, happier and more united we will be as a people.”

MARYANN MOISE DERWIN, LIBRARY
JPA GOVERNING BOARD MEMBER

Disability Awareness

We focused our efforts on educating children about disabilities and encouraging acceptance, compassion and inclusion with the introduction of new Disability Awareness Storytime Backpacks for checkout. These kits include books featuring diverse, positive representations of people with disabilities, as well as games and activities to foster empathy.

Our staff continued to make our libraries more inclusive through creative community events and conversations.

An art exhibit, Changemakers, debuted in five of our libraries featuring Bay Area disability pride with the artistic contributions of those with disabilities.

“My son Michael and I LOVE LOVE LOVE ‘All Abilities Club’ the last Friday of each month!”

LIBRARY PATRON



Literacy Learning

Libraries aren’t just places to read stories, they are places to *make* stories. The story of two coastsides couples—Berta and Juan Pablo, and Peggy and Kenny—is one of friendship and community.

Spanish-speakers Berta and Juan Pablo needed to improve their English speaking, reading and writing for work. Language barriers made tasks like seeing a doctor or going to the DMV a source of stress.

Eventually, they were connected to Peggy and Kenny through our adult literacy program, which connects those who want to improve their ability to speak, write and read English with volunteer tutors.

Meeting once a week for two years at Half Moon Bay Library, Berta and Juan Pablo have begun mastering literacy skills in a second language, forged a friendship with their volunteer tutors and made a stronger connection to their community.

“Sometimes I learn a new word at our lesson and hear the word for the first time later at work. When that happens, I am very happy because I understand more of what they told me.” JUAN PABLO, LITERACY LEARNER

Exploring Possibilities

Creating opportunities for exploration is at the heart of our mission, whether it's a child picking out their first picture book or a senior learning a new computer skill.



"This was such an inspiring campaign made possible by a unique and exciting partnership. In collaboration with CuriOdyssey, we were able to bring a transformative experience to our communities."

KATIE WOODS, LIBRARY COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER



Library Card Campaign

San Mateo County Libraries had a hoot celebrating National Library Card Sign-Up Month with CuriOdyssey by creating limited-edition animal library cards. The colorful new cards depicted some of the zoo's most popular animals — Faora the Great Gray Owl, Frankie the Bobcat, Gunner the River Otter and Wolfgang the Blue-tongued Skink.

The popular cards doubled as a free ticket to CuriOdyssey, allowing patrons the ability to explore animals, science and more, free of charge. As an extra bonus, zookeepers also brought the fun right to us with "Zookeeper

in the Library" programs, where they shared animals and interesting facts to a captive audience inside our libraries. During this campaign, our libraries had a 65% increase in new patron registration. The animals featured on our library cards were so popular, we created an online quiz to help library patrons decide which animal best matched their personality.

9,898
CURIODYSSEY
CARDS ISSUED

Book-A-Bike



A staff idea turned into an exciting new library service this year with the addition of Book-A-Bike, a winning Pitch-It proposal. The initiative launched in January, making a fleet of four bicycles available for free, same-day checkout at Belmont Library. The bikes were available on a first-come, first-served basis to patrons 18-years-and-older with a library card.

Accessories include a helmet, a basket for cargo, bike light, bike lock, and first aid kit. One family drove from San Francisco to check out the bikes so they could ride them to Twin Pines Park. Even Congresswoman Jackie Speier read about the initiative and wrote a letter to our team congratulating us on this innovative service.

"Congratulations on putting such a wonderful idea into practice this year. We all need to do our part to reduce our carbon footprint and level the socioeconomic playing-field, and free bike lending is one small step in that movement forward." CONGRESSWOMAN JACKIE SPEIER

Everyone is a Maker

1,457
MAKER
ACTIVITIES

From our wonderful tinkers, to those sewing away, to cooking and coding, a maker is anyone with a desire to create, innovate, and learn along the way.

We believe everyone in our community should have access to new technologies and exposure to the art of invention. Our library champions have continued to inspire people of all ages to make new things and learn how things work by trying.

From vast programming to our online resources and blogs, we inspire everyone to spark their maker imagination!

"I am 60 years old and this is my first time using a 3D printer. I never thought that I would be able to learn a new technology. This was an amazing experience, thank you." LIBRARY PATRON



Igniting Growth

Our libraries continually ignite a passion for learning and growth in our patrons, staff, and communities.



Love Your Libraries

Our "We Love Our Libraries" campaign encouraged library love and celebrated the impact and growth our spaces, programs, and collections can facilitate. Throughout the month of February, visitors had the opportunity to write their library a love letter. Our note boxes were filled to the brim with stories of gratitude and personal impacts the library had on our community members.

"Everything you provide is at the heart of a thriving, vibrant, informed, critical thinking, creative community! Much love!"

LIBRARY PATRON



214
LIBRARY LOVE
LETTERS RECEIVED

"I love all the wonderful family programming the San Mateo County Libraries offer. It makes it easy to show my daughter how fun it is to read and learn!"

LIBRARY PATRON

Library Champions



"It is always so meaningful to receive cheers for the work I have done. It's such a blessing to work for an organization that allows for positive feedback on a weekly basis. This keeps me fueled to want to deliver meaningful services to our wonderful community and county!"

LIBRARY EMPLOYEE

99%

OF STAFF FEEL THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THE LIBRARY'S SUCCESS

Our incredible library staff drive our libraries to be the heartbeat of our communities. Through their innovation and desire to help others, we provide unmatched services to our patrons. In a recent survey, 93% of staff feel valued and appreciated for their work, which explains why 46% of our workforce has been with the libraries for a decade or more, and 65% of our open positions this year have been filled by promotions.

585
DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

18,624
VOLUNTEER HOURS OF SERVICE

This year, hundreds of volunteers brightened our spaces and programs and gave their time generously to make a difference. From bilingual storytime to homework help and special events, library volunteers enjoy their varied assignments and many have shared their talents with San Mateo County Libraries for over two decades. We value our wonderful family of volunteers, they advance our work and impact our communities in so many meaningful ways.

San Mateo County Libraries is fortunate to have the continued support of our Friends of the Library organizations who advocate and provide direct support for our local community libraries. The Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries also played an important role this year for our systemwide programs and activities that the library system could not otherwise afford through its annual operating budget.

Transformative Spaces

ATHERTON

Incredible progress has been made on our beautiful new Atherton Library. The 11,000 square-foot project is on track for a fall 2021 completion and will offer expanded spaces for learning, connection and collaboration. The project features a new digital lab, makerspace, history room, and café. Situated amongst Atherton's heritage oak and redwood trees and part of the new Town Center, the new Library and renovated Town Hall will encourage community connections and transformative experiences and offer a rich legacy for years.



BRISBANE

Excitement builds on Visitacion Avenue, where our new Brisbane Library is nearing completion. A contemporary destination, the library is located in the heart of the City's commercial district and will serve as a celebration of place, community and inspiration. Warm and inviting spaces with movable furnishings will showcase dedicated areas for children and teens, makers and crafters, historians and collaborators. A community room that can be a part of the library during regular hours or serve

the City during off hours will connect with outdoor patios to provide larger gathering spaces. The LEED building will also reflect the community's desire for sustainability, with elements like native, low-water plants that support the native butterfly habitat, and a cistern to collect and store rainwater to support the building. The new library, designed as the community's living room, will be completed in late 2020 and begin supporting visitors' quest for knowledge, discovery and inspiration soon.

Unwavering Commitment

During a year where positive impact was needed the most, our libraries were creative, resourceful, and dedicated to those we serve.



"San Mateo County Libraries' COVID-19 response was creative and forthcoming in a way that demonstrated imaginative, flexible, patron-centered movement to virtual programming and service within the confines of health safety for staff and the public!" LIBRARY PATRON



Our libraries strengthen our community by creating an inclusive sense of place. But what happens when *place* is no longer possible? For our staff, the answer was simple: innovate, adapt and overcome.

This year, life changed for all of us when the coronavirus swept through the world and country. As soon as we made the difficult decision to close our doors, we immediately pivoted to new ways of offering services and supporting those in need.

Through virtual programming, digital collections, new eResources, meal programs and Curbside Pickup, our dedication to the communities we serve never waned. Through thick and thin, San Mateo County Libraries is still here for you.

87%

OF PATRONS ARE PLEASED WITH OUR
RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC

Virtual Events



In the flurry of uncertainty and stay-at-home orders, staff across our libraries worked together to envision a line-up of engaging virtual programs for patrons of all ages so we could continue to connect and engage our communities.

Between March and June, we expanded to nearly 25 virtual events per week, with favorites like bilingual storytime, music playtime, open lab

and drawing lessons. Adult programs include live language learning, yoga, book talks and so much more. Our virtual programs team was able to produce over 300 virtual experiences in the first few months since launching this new innovative service. We look forward to continuing this effort as we find new ways to grow and ignite our communities.

10,198

STORYTIME VIRTUAL
PROGRAM VIEWS

5,188

BILINGUAL VIRTUAL
PROGRAM VIEWS

4,362

MAKER VIRTUAL
PROGRAM VIEWS

Curbside Pickup

In June, we eagerly launched Curbside Pickup and put library materials back in the hands of our patrons. The safe, contactless service is available at all 12 of our community libraries. Curbside Pickup is as successful as it is popular, with thousands of families eager to read while safely staying home.

11,875

ITEMS PICKED UP
THE FIRST MONTH

62%

OF PATRONS SAY
THEY VALUE CURBSIDE

Wi-Fi Hotspots

In keeping with our dedication to closing the digital divide, especially during library closures, we procured hundreds of additional Wi-Fi hotspots to provide Internet connectivity to local residents, schools and community members. We also worked to provide laptop and hotspot combos to those in our communities that needed a way to stay connected. This was a vital service to help combat social isolation and help with distance learning.



763

WI-FI HOTSPOTS DISTRIBUTED
DURING SHELTER IN PLACE

"I really appreciate the loan of the combo for such a generous duration. Thank you for helping to make isolating at home less stressful with a way to connect with friends, medical help, lectures, entertainment, fitness classes, etc."

LIBRARY PATRON

Summer Learning Challenge

With community schools and libraries closed, there was record demand for our free Summer Learning Challenge books. Using our Curbside Pickup service, we distributed 70,866 free books to local children, teens and families.

The libraries also collaborated with local schools, programs, and partners to share an additional 12,043 books throughout our communities.

Our free book distribution and virtual encouragement to participate in the Summer Learning Challenge helped area youth fight summer learning loss during challenging times.

82,909
FREE BOOKS
DISTRIBUTED

STEAM Camp

Our Virtual STEAM Camp made its debut this summer, encouraging science, technology, engineering, art and math with more than 100 online programs in 11 weeks. Our virtual campers from preschool to third grade built bridges and forts, crafted chemical reactions and 3D models, and explored shapes and symmetry.

Additionally, summer learners celebrated every Friday with Summer Learning Showcase performances from local performers like Circus of Smiles, Happy Birds, Cascada de Flores and more.

3,672
TOTAL STEAM CAMP
VIDEO VIEWS

"My kids quickly read through their first bag of summer learning books! Thank you so much for offering this to our kids on the coast!" LIBRARY PATRON



Inspiring Summers



"Up until the end of third grade, children are learning to read. Beginning in fourth grade, most children are reading to learn. This is a key benchmark because students not reading at grade level will fall further behind without interventions such as Inspiring Summers."

SUPERVISOR CAROLE GROOM, SAN MATEO COUNTY LIBRARIES GOVERNING BOARD MEMBER

The Big Lift Inspiring Summers continues to expand and ignite personal growth for youth across the county. Due to the pandemic, this year's camp featured a different twist for 605 young learners, but still offered a transformative experience of summer learning, exploring and fun. Rising kindergarten through third grade students attended a shorter, half-day program, where they were placed in small classroom sizes of 12.

Our engaging STEAM curriculum was reimaged so families could do them together from home. We provided over 850 students with a STEAM kit, including materials and instructions in English and Spanish. Each student received a Comprehension Box to assist with guided family reading and a set of books to build their home libraries.



The Big Lift's partnership includes the County of San Mateo, San Mateo County Office of Education, and Silicon Valley Community Foundation. It is primarily funded through Measure K. This year, additional funding was provided by the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency and a grant through the California State Library.

Supporting our Communities



COVID-19 presented our community with a shared challenge: a shortage of the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that keeps medical professionals safe. Fueled by calls from our patrons and an eagerness to help, we put our values—and our 17 3D printers—into action. In a matter of weeks, we organized a team of staff members that printed, cut, and assembled ear savers and face shields.

But we didn't stop there. One of our patrons reached out to the library to inquire about her nephew who is deaf. Her family communicates by using sign language and lip reading. As you can imagine, this is difficult to do with a mask. The

patron heard about our 3D efforts, and we were happy to print nine face shields for each family member for free and deliver them to the patron through our Curbside Pickup program.

"Libraries' innovation in using their printers to create this critical resource is phenomenal and a testament to its ongoing commitment to serve the residents of our county. The response to COVID-19 is bringing out the innovative spirit in many and I am so proud of our library staff." COUNTY MANAGER MIKE CALLAGY

300
EAR SAVERS
PRINTED

600
FACE SHIELDS
PRINTED



"Librarians are my government employee heroes of the shutdown. Such creative thinking." LIBRARY PATRON

Throughout this health crisis our dedicated library staff have gone above and beyond to help our communities. Many of our staff were called to support the County's Emergency Operations Center by signing up for voluntary rotational assignments to assist in outreach and gathering information. We also teamed up with the County to coordinate a Food Availability Taskforce. This taskforce brought together and organized preexisting resources and partnerships to help address and support those looking for food assistance within our communities.

To combat social isolation, our staff found creative ways to maintain our vital community connections. When we were forced to close our library doors, our staff jumped into action by sharing cheerful pictures on social media with personal messages, updates, reading recommendations and homemade signs to lift spirits.





San Mateo
County
Libraries

MISSION

San Mateo County Libraries strengthen our community by creating an inclusive sense of place and environment for learning.

VISION

San Mateo County Libraries ignite growth through transformative experiences.

Always open for exploration at **smcl.org**