



San Mateo
County
Libraries

Open for Exploration

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023



Director’s Message

It brings me great joy to share with you our 2022-2023 Annual Report which highlights some of our most inspiring work.

Year after year, we continue to be re-energized and awed by the people we are honored to serve. Every new program we introduce is met with gratitude and celebration. This ongoing exchange and conversation—a cycle of what we offer and the feedback we receive—fosters a deep sense of connection with our communities and inspiration in our work.

In this report, we are excited to share some of the ideas envisioned by our passionate staff and the people and communities who continue to shape the future of San Mateo County Libraries. We’ve launched powerful new services that help patrons thrive, and opened many more opportunities for discovery, creativity and inquiry. All our inclusive offerings, crucial resources and uplifting events play a key role in positively impacting the lives of countless residents.

It continues to be a pleasure to work in partnership with the Library JPA Governing Board and Operations Committee, our generous donors, enterprising Friends and Foundation, devoted volunteers, remarkable staff and diverse community members. Thank you for being a part of another successful year!

ANNE-MARIE DESPAIN,
DIRECTOR OF LIBRARY SERVICES

Our Vision

San Mateo County Libraries ignite growth through transformative experiences.

Our Mission

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

LIBRARY JOINT POWERS AUTHORITY GOVERNING BOARD

Atherton Rick DeGolia	East Palo Alto Antonio López	Millbrae Maurice Goodman	San Carlos Sara McDowell
Belmont Julia Mates	Foster City Patrick Sullivan	Pacifica Tygarjas Bigstyck	Woodside Dick Brown
Brisbane Karen Cunningham	Half Moon Bay Deborah Penrose	Portola Valley Sarah Wernikoff	San Mateo County Warren Slocum

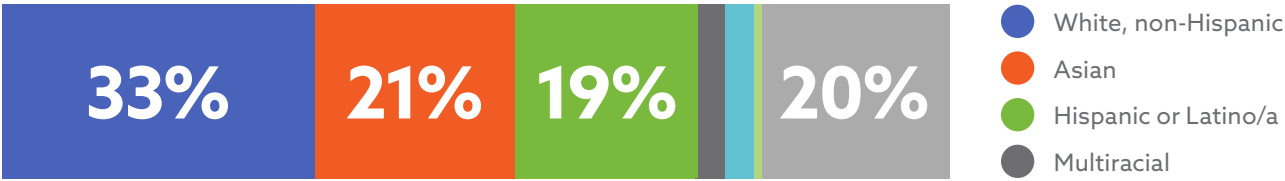
Demographics

Our goal is to reflect our communities by providing valuable time, space and tools they need to feel represented and ready to explore. Our staff’s diversity mirrors the communities we serve, helping us incorporate the wisdom of varied lived experiences to better offer inclusive resources, meaningful services and engaging events. In our service area, the majority of residents have a library card. When they arrive at the library, we meet them with the programs they crave and the languages they speak.

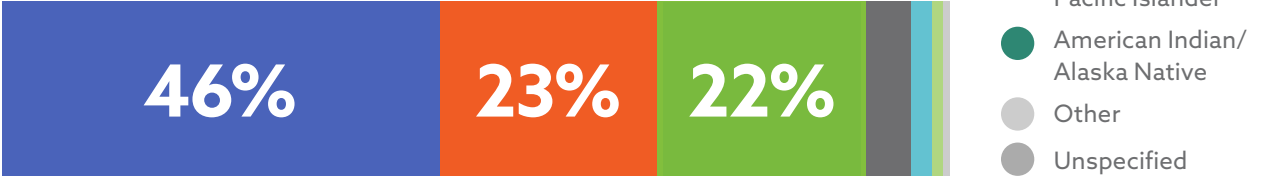
14,890
NEW LIBRARY
CARDHOLDERS



Our Community



Our Employees



33%
OF OUR STAFF
ARE BILINGUAL

“The libraries are more than a place to read or borrow books, they bring the diverse community together. Not to mention the helpful and professional staff. Thankful for everything SMCL has to offer!”



Year in Numbers

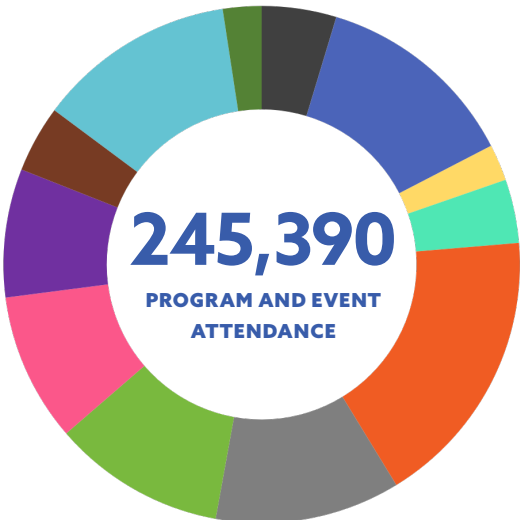
- Atherton
- Belmont
- Brisbane
- East Palo Alto
- Foster City
- Half Moon Bay
- Millbrae
- North Fair Oaks
- Pacifica
- Portola Valley
- San Carlos
- Woodside



56%
MORE VISITORS THIS YEAR



6%
MORE ITEMS CIRCULATED
THIS YEAR



126%
MORE ATTENDEES THIS YEAR



A Year of Growth

Deep connection between our libraries and communities continues to grow. More people are participating in our programs, visiting our locations and checking out our eclectic collection of materials. Increased engagement is a sign that our services are

valued, and we're honored to meet community needs. Our libraries, like our communities, keep evolving. Feedback from the community influences our work and strengthens our resolve to provide enlightening, exciting and essential services.

1.8M
WEBSITE VISITORS

7,520
PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

4.3M
WIRELESS SESSIONS

28,820
LAPTOPS CIRCULATED

775,530
DIGITAL DOWNLOADS

43,120
MEALS SERVED

10,950
HOMEWORK HELP SESSIONS

6,720
HOTSPOT CHECKOUTS

Transformative Experiences

We strive to bring next-level service and visionary experiences to our communities. We do this by anticipating patrons' needs and creating offerings that will resonate for generations to come.

2nd

IN CALIFORNIA STAR
LIBRARY RATINGS

10th

IN NATIONAL STAR
LIBRARY RATINGS



Award-Winning Service

This year, we were proud to be a finalist for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor for libraries that make exceptional contributions to their communities. Our commitment to equity and innovation propelled us to be listed as one of the top 15 libraries in the country and we're incredibly proud of this achievement. And once again, we received the title of 5-Star Library, an accolade which recognizes our dedication and success in serving our communities through transformative experiences. Scoring for this prestigious award factors in library visits, circulation, program attendance and public internet computer use. Our individual libraries have also been honored with distinguished awards. The new Brisbane Library won the American Institute of Architects People's Choice Award, and our new Atherton Library was recognized by the American Institute of Architects and the American Library Association for excellence in architectural design. Everyone at the library takes great pride in being honored for our incredible accomplishments and impactful services.

"Through our innovative, ongoing efforts, we have been able to meet critical community needs and to provide equitable library programs through our award-winning services."





Virtual Book Communities

We're the first library to offer a virtual book club app. With this new service, we're helping usher in excitement about books into the current social media era. Fable is a modern take on book clubs—perfect for those who want to connect socially around reading, at their own pace and on their own time. Patrons can write a post or question at any time or comment on other people's posts. It's as easy as texting or commenting online and with a library card, this otherwise paid app is completely free. We know that people are hungry for opportunities to connect with others through reading, and we're thrilled to provide a space to gather, discuss and bond over shared interests and a good book.

Advancing Period Equity

Physical needs shouldn't keep anyone from using the library. Supplies like pads and tampons are as necessary as toilet paper and soap, yet they're not readily available, accessible or affordable. Studies have shown that one in five teens struggle to afford period supplies. By offering free menstrual products in all our libraries, anyone in need can get these necessary resources and continue using our services. To mark the launch of this service at all libraries, we held a special program with Karen Schneemann and Lily Williams, authors of the graphic novel, *Go with the Flow*. The empowering storyline about friendship and advocating for women's health issues mirrors our own convictions in offering the supplies—to normalize talking about periods and providing equitable access to basic necessities.

36,578
SERVICE HOURS

"Public libraries welcome all, provide a place of refuge, and are a vital component of community building. San Mateo County Libraries is designing spaces, programs and services to fill critical resource gaps in our communities."

— Congresswoman Jackie Speier

7-Day-A-Week Milestone

This March, we celebrated the first anniversary of our expanded 7-day-a-week service. With new increased hours, the libraries enhanced community connections and helped more patrons find vital resources. Expanded evening and weekend hours also provided more in-person opportunities for discovery and support through access to the latest technology, programming and school and job resources that meet many interests. Additional hours are critical in expanding equitable access to people who work multiple jobs, have non-traditional schedules or attend school. Each day, we continue to open our doors to community members in search of resources, discovery and play.



27,000
PERIOD PRODUCTS
DISTRIBUTED

"All San Mateo County Libraries are now offering no-cost period products to any patron who needs them. Access to resources for all our residents is powerful equity work."

Exploring Possibilities

We delight in surprising library users with unforgettable experiences. We are always on the lookout to bring inspiring programs beyond what our patrons could ever imagine.

2,330

MAKER PROGRAMS

37,800

MAKER PROGRAM
ATTENDEES



“To have this Makermobile means we can take state-of-the-art tech and transformative experiences to more people in more places and invite everyone to be curious, to experiment, explore, learn and play.”

— Anne-Marie Despain,
Director of Library
Services

Rolling Out the Makermobile

Our Makermobile hit the road this summer, taking maker activities and tech to new horizons. A zero-emission, custom-built vehicle, the Makermobile delivers high-impact maker programs beyond our libraries. The project came to life thanks to a generous donation from Gilead Sciences and the work of the Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries. The all-electric vehicle is designed to “unfold” at each destination, transforming any location into a bustling pop-up makerspace. Residents who may have never experienced technology like 3D printing and laser cutting can now do so thanks to this initiative. We’re excited to reach more communities with more maker programs, introducing them to new tools and skills they can carry forward.



Power Up Afternoons

Our libraries welcome hundreds of kids after school each day, leading us to create a new program to further empower our youth. Power Up Afternoons offers K-12 students opportunities to connect and grow with after-school experiences. We encourage students to practice their creativity and learn through exploration by experimenting with tech, taking in live performances and hearing from subject matter experts who help them explore new information and ideas. These discovery and learning-filled afternoons have strengthened our connections with local students and families. Power Up Afternoons has reached thousands of people—participants enjoyed 2,242 hours of programming in which creativity and learning were encouraged. By visiting our libraries after school, students have the chance to activate their imaginations and grow.

“Always keeping me and my kids discovering and learning - love the staff picks and effort to have books relevant to a different theme each month.”

97%
OF STUDENTS ENJOYED
THEIR EXPERIENCES

16,880
PARTICIPANTS



Bug Out at the Library

For years, community members have joined us for the release of butterflies at many libraries. We share the joy of witnessing the transformation from caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly. One of our library champions wanted to extend the discovery of bugs year-round and pitched Bug Out at the Library, a program offering live creature displays from tarantulas and praying mantises to pill bugs and ant colonies. Since its launch, this program has inspired bug-themed storytimes and watercolor butterfly classes. We’ve also invited entomologists to teach us about insects and their importance in ecosystems. Having the events and live creatures in our libraries has encouraged positive, bug-filled experiences in which an interest in the natural world is celebrated.



“My kids didn’t want to leave and that is such a testament to what a magical place San Mateo County Libraries is. ”

Exploring the Unexpected

Community members can now uncover the exciting world of cave crawling. In partnership with CaveSim, we parked portable caves at our libraries to give patrons the chance to explore caving. The simulated cave experience offers 60 feet of passage for people of all ages to crawl through. Hundreds of patrons attended these events, strapping on helmets, having fun and learning about the importance of cave preservation. The bravest cavers had the chance to climb up into a 12-foot tower. Equipped with new information about these natural formations, kids and adults alike can continue their cave discovery with library resources.



Responsive Services

We want to provide services that touch all our communities. Everyone should feel our libraries are places where their questions, and many of their needs, can be answered.

29,000

WORLD LANGUAGE
ITEMS ADDED

227,630

WORLD LANGUAGE
ITEMS CIRCULATED



More Books in More Languages

Language is power, and being able to read in your preferred language is invaluable. Whether it's savoring stories you remember from your childhood, reading something in its original language rather than in translation, or experiencing the joy of an idiom that just can't be replicated—we have more opportunities to experience linguistic diversity than ever before. Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Tagalog and Spanish voices are now more represented in our collections. It's part of our commitment to providing equitable access to materials for all, ensuring community members feel seen and supported. This expansion extends to materials of all kinds—eBooks, read-along books for children, eMagazines and newspapers. We also provided giveaway books in Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Hindi and Tongan.

"Books bring me so much joy, so thank you for supplying my need to read."



Mental Health Supports

We’re a welcoming space for all, including those who are unhoused or in need of social support. Mental Health First Aid is an initiative making training available to empower community members to respond and provide initial help and support to someone experiencing a mental health crisis. The training has given our public service staff additional expertise to help someone in need. We have further invested by supporting three of our staff to become certified Mental Health First Aid trainers. These staff are now directly training community members.

In collaboration with several partner agencies, we’re now providing direct service to patrons inside our libraries, or in the case of one neighboring organization, just steps away from our doors. They’re better connecting residents to unemployment assistance, low-income housing eligibility, food assistance and other safety net services. While mental health challenges may be increasing in our communities, so too are our investments in resilience and the expansion of compassionate, community support to meet people where they are.



140

LIBRARY STAFF TRAINED IN
MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

90

SOCIAL SERVICE HOURS
SERVED SINCE MARCH

“We are thrilled that our local libraries will offer Mental Health First Aid trainings to the public. To carry these skills is empowering—for us as individuals and for our community.”

— Sara McDowell,
San Mateo County Libraries
Governing Board Chair

Preserving Precious Memories

Keeping up with storing priceless photos and home videos can be a challenge—especially as old formats become harder to access. We’re driven to help patrons preserve those moments for the future. With our Memory Lab service, we help digitize print photos, VHS tapes, cassettes and other analog formats. Using special equipment designed to convert old formats, we’ve helped community members watch videos they haven’t seen in years and digitally share photos that have been tucked away in print albums. Updating the formats makes the memories easier to access and gives families a free digital backup to their physical mementos. There is a permanent Memory Lab at Atherton Library and a traveling Memory Lab that can visit any of our libraries for scheduled events or special appointments patrons can book online. Future generations will be able to delight in the digital memories created as a result.



“I was very worried to put my tape in the mail for fear it would get lost, and the memories would be gone forever... then I found out that this was a service provided by my local library... I have my VHS tape on a digital file that I can share with my kids.”

28,080

PATRONS ACCESSED
PRINTING

Eliminating Financial Barriers

This year, we introduced free copying—a brand-new, simple service with a significant impact. Equity is a top priority, and we understand that not all patrons have access to printing and copying when they need it most. With this service, patrons will be able to copy and print crucial documents without worrying about the cost. Patrons in need of a copy of their resume for an upcoming job interview or students who need to print a school assignment can do so easily from our public computers or their smartphone. By limiting free copying and printing to 25 copies, we can continue to prioritize sustainability while providing support in situations where a paper copy is essential.

Positive Impacts

We are dedicated to providing services that have a lasting impact. Many of the relationships built in our libraries are years-long, between our community members, volunteers and staff.

390

VOLUNTEERS

17,000

HOURS VOLUNTEERED

"Library staff are a joy to work with. They are always friendly and helpful. They make volunteering (and visiting the library) fun. They are the heart of our libraries, and we are lucky to have you."

Welcoming Back Volunteers

We joyfully welcomed the return of in-person volunteers this year. Enthusiastic volunteers, Friends of the Library and Foundation members have generously devoted thousands of hours of their time. They support our programs, advocate for our libraries and amplify the services we provide. Their hours of service are essential to advancing important equity goals—whether signing up to tutor an adult literacy learner or contributing language skills and supporting staff with bilingual storytime. Volunteers also teach us new information about the people we serve. Our volunteers help us better represent the community and are deeply valued contributors to San Mateo County Libraries.





Big Lift Inspiring Summers

The Big Lift Inspiring Summers program, created to prevent the loss in learning that can happen over summer break, continues to impact the lives of young residents and their families. San Mateo County Libraries hired 128 college interns this summer to engage close to a thousand youth in experiences that were built on the literacy-focused curriculum and STEAM-rich activities signature to the success of the program. Through the generous support of County Measure K funds, the program has shown strong positive academic gains in both literacy and math across participating school districts. For the first time since 2019, we were able to bring back field trips, allowing us to leave campus and venture to museums and County Parks. To further enrich the program for youth, our maker team visited every school site and engaged the children in maker experiences with tech they will be able to continue to use at our libraries. Students learned about 3D printing and got to explore and learn coding with robots, setting them on a journey of discovery.

“During this summer program, I see the excitement in his face every morning. He’s ready for class and comes back happy and excited to share what he learned at school. We loved this program, and I hope it continues so many more children can thrive in kindergarten.”

960

PARTICIPANTS

87%

BIPOC ENROLLMENT

Library Champions

San Mateo County Libraries staff advance and innovate as individuals and in contribution to our system. This year, our staff designed a new program to develop the critical leadership skills needed to advance. LEAD, Leadership, Education and Development, is training 15 of our future leaders. Monthly sessions explore topics on public speaking, professional writing and emotional intelligence, featuring guest speakers providing diverse and varied perspectives. 91% of participants rate LEAD a 5 out of 5. Our library champions are our most important organizational asset. This year, we increased library positions and celebrated the return of local teen interns to our libraries for the first time since 2019. We’re always thrilled to welcome new faces, skills and perspectives to our library family.

“I am so proud of our local libraries ... I have always been a big fan of libraries and the important work they do for our community.”

— Supervisor Warren Slocum, San Mateo County Libraries Governing Board Member



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



San Mateo
County
Libraries