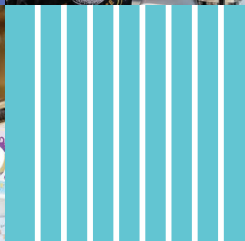
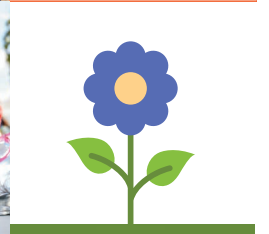
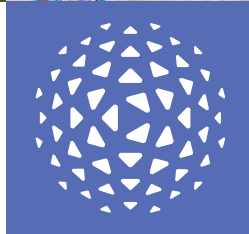
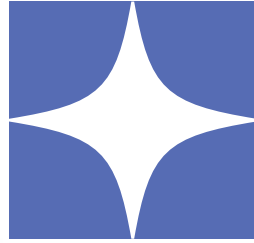


# Open for Exploration

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024



San Mateo  
County  
Libraries

**351**

Square-Mile  
Service Area

**271,407**

People Live in  
Our Service Area

**13**

Community Libraries



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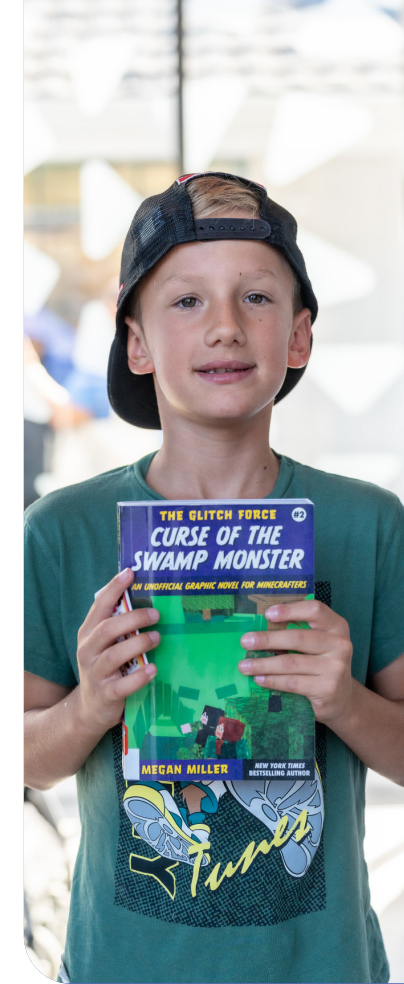
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## Our Mission

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

## Our Vision

San Mateo County Libraries ignite growth through transformative experiences.

## ▶ Director's Message

As we reflect on the past year, I am filled with immense pride for our unwavering commitment to those we serve. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Library Joint Powers Authority. The transformative impact of our programs and services continues to leave a lasting impression on our communities, and it brings me great joy to share with you a few of those inspiring stories featured in our 2023-2024 Annual Report.

In the following pages, we'll celebrate the launch of exciting new projects like our very first Library Outpost and highlight our broad work to engage in meaningful conversations to illuminate and shape our new Strategic Plan. The report also showcases the strong dedication our staff showed during intense storms and the sustained support we're providing for all generations in expanding their skills, connecting them to vital resources, offering enriching experiences and promoting lifelong learning.

It is an honor to work in close collaboration with the Library JPA Governing Board and Operations Committee, and we are endlessly grateful for our generous donors, devoted Friends, Foundation and volunteers, highly committed staff and beloved communities. Thank you for your support and partnership—with it, San Mateo County Libraries continues to thrive.

Informed and inspired by our diverse communities, we are eager to build upon this year's success to design a bold new vision and mission for the future together.

**Anne-Marie Despain**  
Director

### Library Joint Powers Authority Governing Board

**Atherton**  
Rick DeGolia

**East Palo Alto**  
Antonio Lopez

**Millbrae**  
Maurice Goodman

**San Carlos**  
Sara McDowell

**Belmont**  
Julia Mates

**Foster City**  
Art Kiesel

**Pacifica**  
Tygarjas Bigstyck

**Woodside**  
Dick Brown

**Brisbane**  
Karen Cunningham

**Half Moon Bay**  
Deborah Penrose

**Portola Valley**  
Sarah Wernikoff

**San Mateo County**  
Warren Slocum

## ► Year in Numbers

San Mateo County Libraries is a vibrant reflection of the diverse communities we serve. By hosting programs that celebrate and honor a variety of cultures and experiences, community members are driven to visit our libraries and connect with us digitally. We are dedicated to offering a wide array of resources and events that inspire and engage everyone in our community, enriching their lives and fostering a spirit of inclusivity and learning.

Every week, new users sign up for library cards, unlocking access to a world of resources. Increased visitors reinvigorate our libraries and reinforce them as community hubs.

**13,370**  
New Cardholders

---

**239,640**  
Active Cardholders



16% More Library Visitors



4% More Items Circulated



36% More Programs and Events

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



### Community



### Staff



- White, non-Hispanic
- Asian
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- Multiracial
- Black
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Other
- Unspecified

**2.7M**

Website Visits

51% More Website Visits

**4.9M**

WiFi Sessions

14% More WiFi Sessions

**40,630**

Laptop Checkouts

41% More Laptop Checkouts

**9,410**

Hotspot Checkouts

40% More Hotspot Checkouts





# Engaging Connections

## ► Strategic Plan

Hearing from our community members informs and energizes our work. This year, we embarked on a robust strategic planning process to refresh our vision, mission and goals to ensure we have a current and authentic Strategic Plan. Working with local consultants, we connected with the public and key stakeholders by holding interviews and surveying thousands of community members online and in person at our libraries and throughout the county.

Our staff visited food distribution sites, laundromats, schools, grocery stores and housing events to engage community members in meaningful discussions. We grounded our approach in the importance of understanding the people in our service area, prioritizing equitable and inclusive engagement to ensure every voice was heard.

The insights we've gathered will shape our new Strategic Plan, guiding us in meeting community needs more effectively, refining our services and setting ambitious future goals.

**3,500**  
Surveys Completed

**92%**  
Of Respondents Favor San Mateo County Libraries

“

*To me, a library is just a gorgeous example of our collective will to do something together for the community.*





## My Summer Adventure

This summer, we launched My Summer Adventure, a learning initiative featuring artwork by local award-winning author and illustrator Shawn Harris. We partnered with San Mateo County Parks to host outdoor events and inspired community members to join us for a summer of engaging experiences. Our libraries hosted 650 events inviting families and individuals to embrace traditional and innovative learning.

My Summer Adventure journals encouraged participants to design and capture their unique adventures, each entry documenting a summer filled with joy, learning and exploration. To celebrate the pleasure of being outdoors and the inspiration found in our libraries, we gave out limited edition tote bags, pins and library cards with Harris' artwork.

Youth had the chance to win a \$1,000 college scholarship and were also eligible to win an annual County Park Pass, ensuring they can continue their adventures all year long. Through park visits, bike rides and creative maker projects, our communities created an unforgettable summer of adventure.

“

*I can't thank this library enough for transforming my life to educate my son through real experiences.*

## Inspiring Summers

In its ninth year, The Big Lift Inspiring Summers (BLIS) program welcomed a new group of rising kindergartners through third graders to strengthen their literacy skills this summer. Designed to increase reading proficiency by third grade in San Mateo County, the program took place at eight school sites across six districts. Field trips also added extra fun and interactive learning opportunities.

Our library champions led BLIS interns in delivering engaging, evidence-based strategies to promote literacy. Families who participate in BLIS report seeing a difference in their children, including enthusiasm around learning and reading with confidence.

BLIS also provides an important summer job opportunity for youth looking to make a difference in the lives of over 1,000 young students. This year, we hired 130 BLIS interns to help local children learn and gain vital skills.



130

Summer Youth Interns

## Engaging Older Adults

San Mateo County Libraries strives to meet the needs and interests of older adults. We offer a wide range of technology services, including computer access and weekly tech help. These programs have become a favorite among seniors, earning glowing reviews in participant surveys.

Our wellness-centered programs include essential services like meals, as well as music, mindfulness and self-expression through Tai Chi, Qigong, yoga, writing and art. This year, we hosted 550 compelling wellness programs, welcoming over 6,650 attendees.

In collaboration with senior centers, we also offer essential services like the VA Mobile Clinic, social safety net providers and a popular AARP safe driver course. Our libraries offer older adults the simple solace of a routine and provide a place for meaningful social interactions, helping to prevent loneliness and enrich daily life.





# Dynamic Services

## ▶ Diaper Distributions

Families with young children face a high price for diapers—an expensive necessity. For the first time, we were able to offer free diapers to the community at various diaper distribution events inside our libraries.

In partnership with the County of San Mateo and through a generous County Measure K grant, we hosted twelve library events, giving out thousands of diapers to community members.

Families who attended the events also enjoyed getting to know our libraries, receiving library cards, free books and information about local resources.

While picking up the free diaper kits, attendees could also spend fun family time together reading, playing and connecting.

**170,880**  
Diapers Given Out

“

*Free diapers and wipes can make a big difference for families struggling with the high cost of living in the Bay Area.*





## English Language Support

Our libraries are proud to host an abundance of online and in-person English language programs to support learners. With English classes, conversation clubs, book clubs and more, San Mateo County Libraries has reached thousands of determined community members seeking to learn or improve their language skills. Language is a powerful tool to ignite change in a person's life.

Our library champions are honored to walk this journey with English language learners and see the real impact our classes and tutors can have on participants. Our volunteers collectively devoted over 1,600 hours, assisting more than 5,700 attendees of our ESL clubs and classes, online and in person at our libraries.

**1,600**  
Volunteer Hours

**5,700**  
ESL Attendees



*Thank you for making the literacy group feel like family!*

## Stronger Together Pescadero

In a new partnership with La Honda-Pescadero schools, we're engaging young families in early literacy experiences to get children preschool ready. Supported by state grant funding, Stronger Together Pescadero was established to connect and support farmworkers and rural residents with young children.

Together, we're working to overcome inequities that can disconnect and isolate farmworkers and other rural, primarily Spanish-speaking coastal residents. Research shows that early exposure to literacy experiences increases the likelihood of intellectual and emotional success by the time children enter preschool. So far, we've hosted over 100 events with 1,900 attendees.

We've also created an enduring early learning hub in Pescadero, complete with engaging books in Spanish and English as well as educational toys. Several families that have completed our intensive, ten-week early literacy classes have built lasting bonds, continuing to meet long after classes ended.



## Eclipse Events

We find magic in helping connect community members to new experiences. This spring, a second total solar eclipse passed over North America seven years after the last one. San Mateo County residents could view just a partial eclipse, when the moon covered a portion of the sun.

To help our community members safely experience this remarkable event, we provided thousands of free eclipse glasses. We also partnered with NASA to offer interactive talks, and hosted livestream viewing parties to help residents better understand and enjoy this natural phenomenon.

Across the county, our library champions guided community members outside, encouraging them to slip on their glasses and look up to experience this unique event. To champion sustainability and pay it forward, we also collected used solar eclipse glasses to donate to Astronomers Without Borders, which will distribute the glasses to people for future eclipses.

**15,000**  
Eclipse Glasses Given Out



*Thanks to San Mateo County Libraries for the great eclipse glasses! They came in really handy on our roof!*





# Innovative Environments

## ► Library Outpost

This year, we opened a 24/7 Library Outpost at the Pacifica Sanchez Library. A first of its kind for San Mateo County Libraries, this innovative service approach increases access to library materials for Pacifica and nearby coastal communities.

Featuring a lending machine with a curated collection of hundreds of books and media, this new library offering allows community members to browse, check out items, pick up holds and return materials twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Plans are underway for additional Library Outposts to be installed throughout our service area. Open anytime, Library Outposts are just one more way we're showing our commitment to expanding access to library patrons.

**300**  
Library Materials

**180**  
Grand Opening Attendees

“

*I like that I can pick up any holds that come in whenever it's convenient for me. Please extend my thanks to all involved.*





## Millbrae Makerspace

Our new Millbrae Library Makerspace opened this spring. The renovation transformed a former computer lab into a state-of-the-art fabrication and technology hub. The Millbrae Makerspace now provides participants of all ages and abilities opportunities to ignite their imagination and explore new possibilities.

The versatile workspace features Ultimaker 3D printers, a Glowforge Pro laser cutter, laptops, virtual reality equipment, DSLR cameras, coding robots, podcasting and sewing machines.

Makerspaces give our communities a place to gather and unleash their creativity, guided by fellow creators in a supportive, beginner-friendly environment. The makerspace was made possible through a partnership with the City of Millbrae and funding from the Friends of the Millbrae Library.



*Everybody's welcome, and there's always something new to discover.*

**1,080**

Attendees on Opening Day

## East Palo Alto Library Upgrades

We remain committed to designing spaces that are the heart of their community. This winter, we welcomed our community back to East Palo Alto Library, newly transformed with facility upgrades and customer-focused interior improvements.

Patrons can now enjoy the bright and beautiful library space with eye-catching furniture, a fresh coat of paint, updated carpet, improved lighting and a new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

Visitors have been delighted to browse a renewed collection with rejuvenated materials shelved in an updated, spacious new layout. East Palo Alto Library is now an even more inviting place for our community, and we've loved hearing the positive feedback from patrons.



*I love our libraries and all the resources and programs and culture that they instill in us.*

**41,760**

Total Maker, Tech and Art Program Attendees

## Uplifting Offerings

Our libraries stay bustling with frequent, creative and fun offerings for community members to learn, experiment and play. We started 2024 off by hosting workshops on Acrobat, Illustrator, Lightroom, Photoshop and more.

Gem painting, a relaxing activity that merges process-based art with mental wellness, debuted as a popular adult maker program this year, and our fun and sometimes messy art programs delighted library goers of all ages. Karaoke machines and board games for checkout also continue to thrill and delight our communities with endless entertainment.

The imaginative Makermobile, ever on the move, made stops at local farmers markets, schools and community events this year, taking tech to the streets. Sharing these tools and collection items with our community continues to encourage a culture of creativity and connection.





# Library Champions

## ► Community Resource Centers

When serious storms bring the unexpected, our libraries are destinations for support. We provide a place to recharge, access the internet and reach much-needed resources.

This year, we served as community resource centers following severe rain, winds and power outages. In partnership with our member cities, the County Department of Emergency Services, Red Cross and PG&E, we extended evening hours and offered a safe and reliable place for people to stay warm, charge devices and access snacks and water.

Community members were also grateful to receive emergency kits that included a blanket and power bank. Giving residents the time, space and tools they needed empowered them to gather themselves and regroup during the storms.

**40%**  
More Library Visitors

**1,600**  
Emergency  
Kits Provided

“

*Thank you for providing the opportunity to use items I normally would not have access to. I always enjoy going to the library with the very friendly and helpful staff.*





## Nurturing Leaders

Last fall, fourteen talented library champions graduated from our inaugural Leadership, Education and Development program. Over seven months, two cohorts of staff regularly met to dig into the core tenets of leadership, embrace a systemwide perspective, refine their public speaking and hone their writing skills.

Investing in our employees means investing in thoughtful leadership that has a lasting impression. For their capstone project, participants presented their discoveries from the program at our annual Staff Development Day. There, they passed on lessons learned and new insights.

We're excited to see the continued progress of these leaders in our libraries. Since the program, we're thrilled to report that seven of the fourteen cohort members have been promoted.

**21,910**

Customer Care  
Calls Answered

**32%**

Of Our Staff Are Bilingual



## Our Dedicated Team

Our impressive library champions shined bright this year. They took advantage of every opportunity to better our community libraries, providing exceptional customer service to our patrons. We're proud that 32% of staff speak another language, including Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Hindi and Tongan, enabling them to serve and connect with our diverse communities.

Our extraordinary team members are our most valuable resource, and we are committed to continue investing in their professional development. Exceeding expectations, twenty-four highly skilled library champions received promotions this year. We also celebrated some truly remarkable career milestones, with multiple library champions reaching ten, twenty and thirty years with San Mateo County Libraries.

**“** *I am excited to hear about the next cohort opportunity so more staff can participate. This was a successful program.*



## Friends, Foundation and Volunteers

Libraries uplift their communities—and in turn, communities work to uplift their libraries. Between our Friends of the Library organizations, the Foundation for San Mateo County Libraries and over 500 volunteers, there's a village backing the success of our thirteen community libraries.

Through more than \$400,000 in donations, thousands of volunteer hours and an enthusiasm for sharing about all we offer, each of these groups reignites our passion. One year into welcoming back our devoted volunteers, we can feel the immense difference it makes to have these extra hands and hearts supporting our mission.

Our eleven Friends of the Libraries groups and Foundation gave us critical support with major projects and advocated for the freedom to read. We have deep gratitude for every piece of this essential work giving our system the boost it needs to thrive.

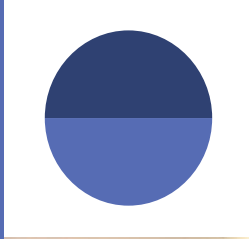
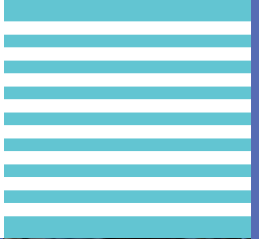
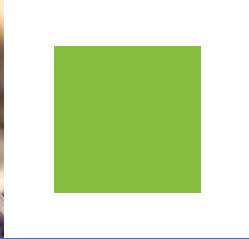
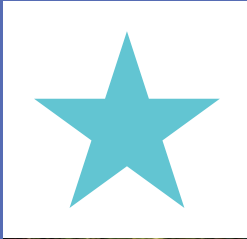
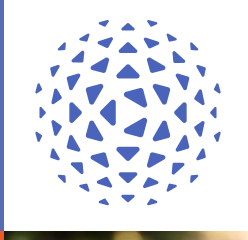
**“** *Libraries build and support the community in multiple ways. A true treasure and resource to have!*

**500**  
Volunteers

**25,680**  
Hours Volunteered



San Mateo  
County  
Libraries



Always open for exploration at [smcl.org](http://smcl.org)