

2025 Annual Report

Dakota County Library

A note from the director



DAKOTA
COUNTY
LIBRARY

As I step into the role of Library Director, I'm thankful for the leadership of former Director Margaret Stone and for the talented staff who build services our community trusts and values.

I'm honored to continue this work alongside the incredible library team guided by our mission, values and goals. Dakota County's Strategic Goal of Thriving People calls on us to create access to opportunity, care for vulnerable people, and foster community safety, health and well-being. At the library, we advance this vision through cultivating belonging by creating equitable and joyful experiences.

You will see these goals and values reflected throughout this annual report and the everyday experiences people have at the library. Through our events, books and materials, and services, we celebrate the diversity of people who live in Dakota County and create welcoming spaces and events where people can connect with learning, resources, and one another.

Looking ahead, we remain focused on expanding belonging and opportunity. In the coming year, we will welcome the community back to the renovated Wentworth Library and begin the renovation for the Burnhaven Library.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Reichert Simpson, Library Director

2025 by the numbers

Resources & Expenditures

➤ Staff: 137.13 FTE

➤ Budget: \$17,291,159

➤ Personnel: \$13,479,639

➤ Library Materials: \$2,529,148

➤ Technology, Programs, & Services: \$1,282,372



6 million
Wi-Fi sessions



5.4 million
checkouts



1.17 million
visits to the library website and catalog



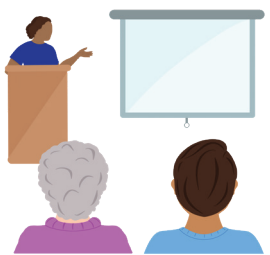
1.56 million
in-person visits



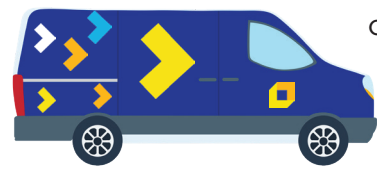
165,927
library card holders used their card in the past two years



150,307
internet computer sessions



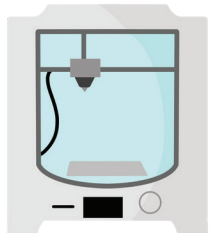
78,698
people attended
2,827
events



46,037
connections made at
763
outreach events



21,267
meeting room reservations



9,270
iLAB
Creative Space reservations



7,238
books given out at Summer Discovery



8,170
Self-Service Hours Customers

2025 highlights

Teen Job Fair 2025

The Teen Job Fair is an annual event held in collaboration with Dakota County Workforce Services/CareerForce, and Dakota County Social Services. On Saturday, April 12th, over 760 teens, young adults, and parents met with 16 local employers to learn about summer employment options and application processes. The Big Ideas mobile learning lab brought virtual reality headsets and equipment simulators to engage and inspire teens to explore careers in the skilled trades. The event reduced barriers to employment as teen job seekers completed applications for job openings onsite. Inver Hills/Dakota County Technical College also provided career pathways and resource information. The event was a huge success.



Stat fact: Out of **760+** attendees and of those who filled out evaluations, **92%** indicated that they **learned about a new job opportunity**.

Library Podcast

The library's podcast (Behind the Covers with hosts Michael and Maureen) launched in January 2025 and published 18 episodes in the first year. The podcast covers a variety of topics including how to use your library better, less well-known library resources and, of course, books. Guest interviews have covered subjects ranging from early literacy skills to community programming to author interviews. Episodes are about 30 minutes in length and come out every 3 weeks.



Free State Park Passes at Two Library Locations

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) collaborated with public libraries across the state in 2025 to offer free seven day state park passes, providing Minnesotans with no cost entry to any Minnesota State Park. As part of this initiative, Dakota County participated by making passes available at two locations: the Inver Glen Library, which offered four passes, and the Kaposia Library, which offered three. These libraries were selected to support the program's goal of increasing access to outdoor recreation for residents living in lower income communities by removing the financial barrier of park entry fees. Passes became available on July 1, 2025, allowing time to test systems ahead of the statewide expansion announcement on July 7, 2025.



2025 highlights

Wentworth Renovation

The Wentworth Library in West St. Paul closed for renovation on April 7, 2025. Renovation work during the closure focused on expanding spaces for meetings and study groups, updating zones dedicated to children and teens, and improving accessibility and building efficiency features. During the renovation, a temporary library location was opened on the 2nd floor of Dakota County's Northern Service Center. Customers were able to pick-up holds, browse new materials, return items and use computers, copiers and printers at the temporary location. Staff from Wentworth continued to provide engaging events for the community throughout the closure by partnering with Dakota County Parks and local organizations to hold library events at parks, coffee shops and other outdoor spaces. The renovated library is expected to re-open late Spring 2026.

Concept Renderings



Project Timeline

- June-July 2024**
Concept Design
- August 2024**
Schematic design
public review and input
- September 2024**
Schematic design approved
- January 2025**
Design work complete
- February 2025**
Bidding for construction project
- April 2025**
Close Wentworth Library for renovation work

Open temporary library at Northern Service Center

Renovation work begins and goes through the rest of the year with an estimated open date of spring 2026

2025 highlights

Artist in Residence: Tomás Araya

The Dakota County Library Adult Services team held a very successful Artist in Residence series with Tomás Araya in fall 2025. Tomás (he/they) is a multimedia artist whose work centers around themes of storytelling, cultural healing, indigenizing practices, and environmental awareness. Tomás offered a series of art events at several library branches throughout Dakota County. The events included drawing pet portraits and Minnesota landscapes, or painting nature and flowers. Some of the sessions were offered in a bilingual (Spanish and English) format and the library targeted the marketing for these sessions with flyers in Spanish and outreach through key community advocates.



The Artist in Residence program was a great opportunity for DCL to reach audiences that have not previously participated in library events, and we look forward to continuing to see these new customers at DCL.



The Artist in Residence series was selected for the Dakota County IDEA Leadership award in recognition of the outstanding efforts of staff who are working to make the county a more inclusive, diverse, accessible and equitable organization.

A few words from participants

“Excellent opportunity to learn new things! Safe, inclusive environment.”

“2nd class from him - so great! Can't wait for Friday's class!”

“Also, thank you for supporting the arts and hiring/granting funding for BIPOC. We need more things like this!”

“Because I'm brand new to MN (only been here a month now), this has been incredibly helpful in that Tomás recognizes the need to massage our passions and encourage our own personal artistic energy...I needed this.”



Stat fact: 146 customers (46% of the total event registrants) registered for the **very first time** at any DCL event.

2025 highlights

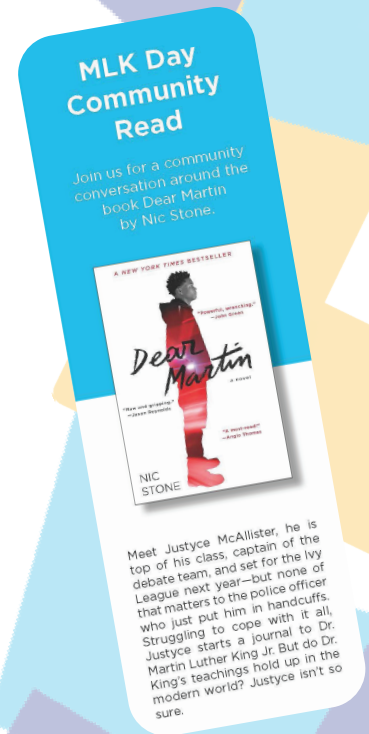
Director Margaret Stone Retires

Margaret Stone retired after nearly a decade as Director of Dakota County Library, and more than 40 years working in public libraries. In her time as director, Margaret led DCL through significant growth including the end of overdue fines, the opening of Kaposia Library as the tenth DCL location, and the introduction of Self-Service Hours. A celebration honoring Margaret and her dedication to innovation, community connection and exceptional service was held in September.



Inaugural Martin Luther King Jr. Day Community Read

Kaposia Library hosted the inaugural Martin Luther King Jr. Day Community Read in partnership with the City of South St. Paul, Clark-Grace Lutheran Church and the local Pastors in Action committee. The goal was to bring teens and adults together for a community conversation about Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and teachings and how they relate to the experiences of living in South St. Paul. The book selected was *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone, which tells the story of a high school student who writes letters to Martin Luther King Jr. while grappling with racial injustice in his community. The event featured impactful speakers from the community followed by lively small group discussions about the book and attendees' own personal stories about racial injustice. Overall, the event brought together people from a variety of ages and backgrounds and provided a welcoming space to share, connect and grow as a community.



Storytime in the Yurt

Dakota County Parks and Dakota County Library collaboratively hosted 13 Storytime in the Yurt events in spring and fall 2025. Storytimes were held inside an accessible yurt at Lebanon Hills Regional Park. Library youth services staff provided interactive storytimes for children ages 2 and older with their caregivers. Storytimes included books, songs, rhymes and activities promoting early literacy skills.



Stat fact: Over the course of the **13** Yurt storytimes a total of **191** people of all ages **attended**.

2025 highlights

Holi and Diwali Celebrations

Working with community member, Rima Chakraborty, the library hosted two events celebrating South Asian community and culture: Holi and Diwali.

Holi celebration, also known as the Festival of Colors, was held at the Heritage Library in the spring. The afternoon was filled with fun and cultural activities including music, dance, rangoli puzzles, holi-themed coloring pages, language, and play. The celebration culminated in a traditional throwing of brightly colored powder, also known as “gulal”. The library received many affirming and positive feedback from the South Asian community as well as other community members attending such an event for the first time. Several commented on the inclusivity of the event.

Diwali celebration, also known as the Festival of Lights, was held at the Galaxie Library in the fall. The event started with a Desi Storytime by community member, Rima Chakraborty. Rima shared books, stories, dance and songs. The storytime was followed by diya decorating, traditional mehndi and Diwali-themed coloring. Participants got their names written in different languages spoken in India.

Attendees had this to say

“With so many things happening in the news, there hasn’t been much to celebrate. Being here today, seeing people smiling, enjoying themselves and engaging with each other was so needed.”

“It was fun to celebrate with all types of people!”

“Very cool event to introduce and celebrate different cultures.”

“Beautiful and engaging event. Everyone had so much fun, especially love the tea and lassi.”

“Such a great program, well done!”

“We would love to see more cultural events like this. Very well organized and fun for kids and adults.”

