



Richland Library

Responding to Crisis



75% of respondents feel that the library has done a good job keeping them informed about our services and response to the pandemic.

– Survey, October 2020

With Public Libraries in South Carolina boasting more than 14,500,000 visits annually, it's not surprising that communities would turn to their local libraries during a time of crisis. Trusted for unbiased and unfettered information, libraries are partners in a strong network of civic, educational and entrepreneurial support that makes our state more resilient in every county—including Richland County.



OVERVIEW: Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, Richland Library's staff and customers have been finding innovative ways to utilize the library's collections and resources. From curbside pickup to outdoor Wi-Fi access; personalized recommendation services; career coaching and social service hotlines; and weekly online programming, we've been able to continue to offer opportunities to help both current and new customers learn, create and share while also bridging the digital divide in Richland County.



Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement During a Crisis

Making it Count

To help overcome language barriers and misinformation, library staff donned masks and visited neighborhoods in Northeast Richland County to talk directly to members of the Latino/as community about the Census, and the importance of completing it.

“For the last few weeks, I’ve been going from mobile park to mobile park every Thursday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. with my mask on to talk about the Census. On my third Thursday, I received a bag of banana peppers, questions about library services, and most importantly their trust.”

– **Mayte Valesco Nicolas**, Richland Library Hispanic and Latino Services Coordinator



Volunteering to Work the Polls

During the 2020 general election, **22 Richland Library staff members** volunteered to work as poll managers in Richland County. Dedicating personal time for training, exams and 14 hour shifts, staff members found an innovative way to continue serving customers where our community needed us most during this time.

“One of the most awesome parts of Election Day was celebrating the first-time voters as well as observing a 97-year-old come in to vote. It really hit home that it takes all of us—ages 18 to 100—to share our voices to make our democracy work at its best.”

– **Kate B.**, Richland Library Main

Students & Families

Meeting Students and Families Where They Are

Going Digital

In an effort to reach caregivers and educators when and where they needed us most, the library quickly transitioned popular events like Family Storytime online to free, social media platforms. With **more than 3,200 people** tuning in to our first virtual storytime, we expanded our online offerings to include Summer Learning Challenge programs as well as events with noted authors and illustrators like Mac Barnett reaching more than **152,000 viewers last year**. We also **tutored 70 struggling readers** through Mano a Mano, Lexia, and Reading Academy, and rolled out virtual classroom visits in the fall.

Doing the Most Good

By supporting the work of community partners like The Salvation Army, the library was able to **provide Wi-Fi hotspots, children and youth publications, and more than 100 books** to help keep K–8 grade students engaged with their schooling at their Doing The Most Good Student Academy, which offers a facilitated learning environment for low-income families who need it the most.





Workforce Development

Filling the Void

Pivoting with Job Seekers

With the COVID-19 outbreak resulting in sweeping changes for employees across our community, our team quickly identified the coming need and while the library was serving customers digitally from March–June 2020, focused on training more than 30 staff members as certified Career Coaches. This has allowed us to pivot and meet our community’s demand for personalized, one-on-one services for job seekers across the Midlands—offering **more than 250 Career Coaching sessions** from July–December.

Creating A Sense of Community

Entrepreneurs and small business owners are working through COVID-19 with creativity. More than 1,600 entrepreneurs and local business owners have connected in our Entrepreneurs & Small Business Facebook group—allowing them to bounce ideas off of each other, ask questions, vent and find the trusted tools and resources they need to keep their businesses running during these uncertain times.



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Fighting for Equality



Lighting the Spark

On Thursday, August 27, 2020 two Black Lives Matter-inspired banners by local artists Dogon Krigga and Ija Charles were installed at Richland Library Main. The 20 x 30-foot public art pieces are on display outside of the building in the library’s Plaza and along Washington Street. A diverse committee of community members and library staff selected the pieces, thanks to help from One Columbia for the Arts, which assisted with commissioning the banners.

“We asked these artists to visually interpret the ‘Black Lives Matter’ sentiment, and the committee selected these amazing pieces to provoke thought, inspire joy and bring hope for the future. It is important, during this time in our community and our country, to show that Richland Library and our community affirms the lives of our Black friends, artists, neighbors and colleagues.”

– **Melanie Huggins**, Richland Library Executive Director

Talking About Race

To inspire honest conversations, staff created a curated list of resources about Race, Equity and Inclusion to help customers really get to know themselves, their neighbors, and our community. Paired with our virtual Let’s Talk Race programs, our Padlet social sharing platform and numerous events with guests like Ibram X. Kendi and Chef Michael Twitty, the library was able to continue offering meaningful momentum in the fight for social justice. 🗣️