



®

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

2025



A Letter from the **Executive Director**

Dear Friends,

As a South Carolina native, I know firsthand the beauty and strength that live within South Carolina's people. Our state is rich yet complex, not only because of its natural beauty or deep history, but because of the stories, creativity, and culture that each of our neighbors bring into our communities. It's the spirit of connection with one another that inspires me every day at Richland Library.

I stepped into this role already filled with gratitude and excitement for what we've accomplished together, and even more, for what's ahead. Every day, I see the joy that libraries bring to people's lives: a child discovering the magic of reading, a student finding the perfect study space, an entrepreneur launching their next big idea, or a neighbor finding belonging through community conversations. These moments remind me that libraries are living, breathing parts of our shared community story.

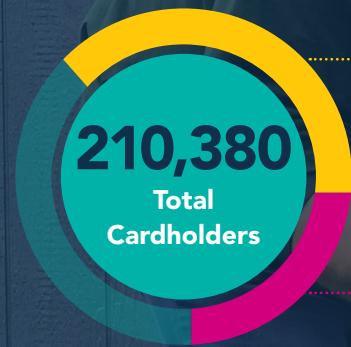
As we look forward, I'm committed to ensuring that Richland Library continues to be a place of joy, creativity, and connection. Together, we'll keep curating experiences that reflect the best of who we are, celebrating our differences, advancing our goals, nurturing our dreams, and making sure that everyone feels welcome here.

Thank you for being part of this incredible community and for helping us write the next chapter of Richland Library's story as we fuel lifelong learners with curiosity, belonging, and **joy**.

With joyful gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tamara King". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "K" and "G".

Tamara King, *Executive Director*



94,439
Active Cardholders

30,315
New Cardholders

PROGRAMMING

89,691
Total Attendees

4,852 Events and Programs



1,207,652
Visits Systemwide

2,166,464
Total Circulation



446,515
Database Uses



347,416
Collection Checkouts



300,725
Computer Sessions

628,281
Items in Physical Collection



148,226
Wi-Fi Users/Sessions

Points of Pride Awards and Milestones

From national recognitions to hometown honors, these achievements highlight the strength of our services, the dedication of our staff, and the trust of our community. Together, they tell the story of Richland Library leading with innovation, inclusion, and community-centered excellence. We are proud to celebrate a collection of awards and milestones that reflect our commitment to literacy, accessibility, creativity, and connection across Richland County.

- Best of Columbia 2025 Winner: Best Use of Public Funds
- Best of Columbia 2025 Runner-up: Best Art Gallery
- Finalist OnCon 2025 Top 100 DEI Team Award
- Business & Careers Department Recognizes 15 Years of Service
- Kids In Print Celebrates 30th Edition of Youth Literacy Magazine
- Education Studio Named Library of Congress Literacy Award Winner
- All Library Locations Become KultureCity Sensory Inclusive® Certified

WE'RE GROWING! *(service expansion)*

- ▶ The Seed Library is now available at **12** locations.
- ▶ The Market at Richland Library is now available at Richland Library **Main** and **Sandhills** (seasonally).
- ▶ The Library of Things is now available at **11** locations.
(Available at ALL locations Summer 2026.)

The **joy** of Reading Fely

Celebrating Storytelling through Community Connection

In March 2025, Richland Library and the Richland Library Friends and Foundation hosted the inaugural **Read Freely Fest**, transforming Richland Library Main into a vibrant, three-day celebration of books, creativity, and community. The festival welcomed **3,500 attendees**, drawing readers, families, and art enthusiasts from across the Midlands and beyond. With **49 featured authors**, **37 indie authors**, and **10 performing artists**, the event delivered an immersive literary experience that exceeded expectations for a first-year festival.

Across multiple stages and spaces, festival attendees enjoyed captivating talks from acclaimed headliners including Brendan Slocumb, the late DéLana Dameron, Mike Curato, and Patti Callahan Henry, while the festival's Indie Author Alley amplified local voices and provided independent writers a dedicated platform to connect with readers.

Beyond the literary lineup, the festival embraced Columbia's creative spirit with live music, art demonstrations, food trucks, and hands-on activities for all ages. The weekend launched with **Overdue**, an after-hours event curated for creatives.

Exhibitors at Read Freely Fest buzzed with energy, featuring more than 30 exhibitors, including bookseller All Good Books, unique bookish merchandise, and handcrafted goods.



READFREELYFEST.COM



Read Freely Fest not only reached its projected attendance of over 2,000, it surpassed it, establishing itself as one of Columbia's most exciting new cultural events. The festival proved to be a meaningful reminder of what happens when stories, creativity, and community come together, and it set the foundation for the festival to grow in the years to come.



BIGGEST IMPROVEMENT IN COLUMBIA THIS YEAR
(runner-up)

BEST ANNUAL EVENT OR FESTIVAL
(honorable mention)

Thank you to our generous 2025 sponsors!

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BEST SELLER SPONSORS



LITERARY SPONSORS



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The **joy** of Learning

Literacy and Lifelong Learning

Richland Library empowers readers and encourages learning at every age. Initiatives like the Education Studio and Literacy SC have helped new young and adult readers discover the joy of books.

Education Studio

The Education Studio, a 2025 recipient of the Library of Congress Literacy Awards, specializes in providing a carefully curated collection of books, materials, and programming designed to help emerging and struggling readers, including children with dyslexia, learn to read. Our reading specialists recently launched a YouTube series aimed to provide resources and techniques to support caregivers helping their children learn to read, a resource already viewed over 2,000 times.

The Education Studio is supported in part by the Bagwell Revocable Living Trust in Memory of Marianne and Ed Bagwell, the Dorothy D. Smith Charitable Foundation, TD Charitable Foundation, and Academy of Columbia.



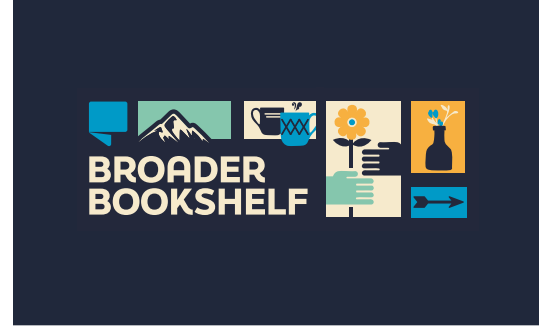
Click to watch.

DID YOU KNOW...

Richland Library recently launched the Interactive Learning Space for Babies and Toddlers in the Children's Room at Richland Library Main? The mural features the artwork of renowned children's author Anita Lobel and uses modular panels to build early literacy skills.

The Interactive Learning Space for Babies and Toddlers is generously funded by the C. David Warren Fund of the Richland Library Friends and Foundation.





Summer Learning Challenge

From songs and storytelling at Pigskin Poets to author talks and dinosaur explorations, there was something for everyone to discover during the Summer Learning Challenge! More than **6,000** individuals helped combat the summer slide by completing the program and submitting their trackers to earn prizes.



Empowering Neighbors

Richland Library's partnership with Literacy SC restores dignity, confidence, and hope through individual and group literacy support. Instructors help adult learners overcome barriers and gain skills to read, write, and confidently navigate everyday systems such as job applications, medical information, transit, and essential documents.



Broader Bookshelf

The 2025 Broader Bookshelf Challenge, which encourages readers to broaden their horizons and explore new authors, genres and ideas through guided prompts, was completed by **479** community members. Richland Library held author events throughout the year to help customers complete the challenge, including readings with Brendan Slocumb, Elizabeth Rusch, Silvia Moreno-Garcia, and C.J. Box. You can learn more about the 2026 Broader Bookshelf prompts and participate in this year's challenge on the Richland Library website at: RichlandLibrary.com/BroaderBookshelf.

Broader Bookshelf is funded through The Central Carolina Community Foundation and the Richland Library Friends and Foundation.



Brendan Slocumb



Elizabeth Rusch



C.J. Box



Silvia Moreno-Garcia

The **joy** of Service

Expanding Access, Inclusion and Connection through Service

At Richland Library, service means meeting people where they are with the tools to help them get where they need to go. Over the past year, the library has deepened its commitment to community well-being through initiatives designed to promote access, inclusion, and dignity for all.



Nurturing Through Nourishment

In September 2025, Richland Library launched Eat Fresh Freely, a community fridge initiative, in its Eastover, North Main, Northeast, and St. Andrews locations. Eat Fresh Freely gives free, fresh produce to library visitors with no questions asked. Fueled by the joy of giving, the fridges provide an unexpected delight for some and ease the weight of food insecurity for others.

Eat Fresh Freely is sponsored by the Bagwell Revocable Living Trust in Memory of Marianne and Ed Bagwell and the Richland Library Friends and Foundation.

Produce Partner: Toms Creek Family Farms

Building Inclusive Spaces

In partnership with ABLE South Carolina, Richland Library is expanding and enhancing accessibility through accessibility audits, staff training, and inclusive policies. As a KultureCity Certified Sensory Inclusive Organization, all locations are equipped to support individuals with sensory sensitivities through thoughtful design, sensory kits, and specialized staff education.

Building Inclusive Spaces is made possible with grants from the SC State Library and the Lipscomb Family Foundation.



Calm & Connect

Launched in 2025, Calm & Connect offers a dedicated sensory-friendly programming experience prioritizing adults with disabilities and sensory sensitivities. This stigma-free space invites customers to browse, read, craft, relax, or engage with one another at their own pace and comfort level.

Holding Space for Our Neighbors

The Social Work Center at Richland Library Main

continues to respond to the most pressing needs of our vulnerable neighbors through partnerships, direct support, and compassionate, collaborative, trauma informed service provision. The areas of greatest need include:

- Communication (phones, mail, and reliable contact methods)
- Identification & vital records (birth certificates, IDs, passports)
- SNAP access and support
- Transportation
- Shelter and pathways to sustainable housing

The Social Work Center is funded in part by United Way of the Midlands.

Community Outreach at Richland Library responded to a growing need for connection and joy with creativity and compassion. From supporting families facing SNAP delays to surprising communities with moments of celebration, their work centered on direct, indelible impact. Staff brought literacy and creativity beyond library walls by sharing books in neighborhood barbershops, delivering personalized reading materials through the Books to You program, and facilitating an art group at Camille Graham Correctional Institution that fosters self-expression, reflection, and healing. Through thoughtful investments and authentic relationships, Community Outreach helped turn everyday moments into opportunities for learning, belonging, and hope.

Community Outreach is sponsored in part by the Richland Library Friends and Foundation, Aflac, Walmart, Sam's Club, Dominion Energy, Sylvamo, Dabo's All In Team Foundation.

SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH AT GLANCE

SOCIAL WORK

4,220 unique cases served

1,869 applications completed (SNAP, IDs, housing, etc.)

3,006 new clients FY2025

55 attendees at first-ever birth certificate clinic

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

27,707 books distributed

24,211 neighbors served

424 events and programs

207 community sites visited

DID YOU KNOW...

In partnership with the City of Columbia Parks and Recreation, Community Outreach infused books with play, for hands on learning at local parks, through Splash Pad Storytime. Becoming a heavily attended, community favorite program, Splash Pad Storytime helped families experience community spaces in ways they hadn't before.





The **joy** of Collaboration

Workforce Development, Partnerships, and Residencies

For 15 years, Business & Careers Center has been dedicated to reducing barriers, expanding opportunities, and empowering individuals to achieve their goals. From résumé building and business launches, to strategic partnerships and innovative programming, the department serves as a catalyst for workforce development and entrepreneurship in the Midlands.

Since launching in 2010 as “The Job Center,” the Business & Careers Center at Richland Library has offered a spectrum of services designed to remove barriers for job seekers and aspiring entrepreneurs, serving over **18,000 job seekers** in its first two years. In 2015, the Dress to Impress program was introduced, meeting the immediate need for interview-ready attire for customers in need. The team later responded to a major barrier customers faced,

lack of reliable childcare, by establishing the Family Career Studio, a dedicated space where adults can work toward career and education goals while caring for their children.

The Business and Careers Center supports customers at every stage of their journey. From Career Online High School, awarding high school diplomas to adult learners, to job readiness and career coaching, to workshops and panels for entrepreneurs, it continues to be a cornerstone for young adults, job seekers, small-business owners, veterans, and community members navigating new opportunities.

As one community partner shared, the library is *“a valuable resource for our small businesses and for anyone who simply needs assistance.”*



Donna Tavis
Spring 2025



Tom Ledbetter
Summer 2025



Allen Brown
Fall 2025

◀ **2025
Entrepreneurs-
in-Residence**

Presented by Wells Fargo

The joy of Creativity

Art, Creativity, Innovation, and Culture

We celebrate the stories and insights expressed through art. Richland Library programs and resources equip creatives, whether children, teens, or adults, to create, share and discover.

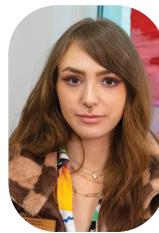
Kids in Print Celebrates 30th Anniversary

Kids in Print, Richland Library's annual literary magazine showcasing the artwork and writing of young (ages 6-18) Midlands creatives, celebrated its 30th anniversary in vibrant style. For the first time, the magazine was produced in color. More than 300 pieces including art, photography, poetry, stories, plays, and essays were submitted, with **76 young creators** selected for this special edition.

For three decades, Kids in Print has given children and teens the joy of seeing their work in print and helped nurture Richland County's flourishing creative community. Former contributor Jada Broome, now an art vendor at Richland Library's Market, credits Kids in Print as inspiration to keep creating, noting that it helped her build confidence, connect with other artists, and engage with the community.

Art at the Library

Artists-in-Residence Brittany Watkins and LaToya Thompson have offered workshops and one-on-one mentorship in their respective artforms of journalistic photography and storytelling-based quilting.



Brittany Watkins | A distinguished multidisciplinary artist, gallery director, and educator, engaged the community through immersive workshops and innovative programming during her residency.



LaToya Thompson | Fiber artist LaToya Thompson explored ancestry, resilience, and community through storytelling quilts in Joy of the Stitched Soul.

Art Gallery by the Numbers

10 Art Exhibitions
(40% increase since 2024)

Featuring **1,869** regional artists with **11** first-timers.

Attracting **1,242** gallery attendees and **340** program attendees



DID YOU KNOW...

Richland Library is home to studio spaces where customers may tinker, experiment and create with specialized tools and resources.

- Makerspace
- Fiberwork Studio
- Production Stage
- Post-Production Lab
- Fabrication Studio

Financial Report

Our Numbers



▼ REVENUE

\$34,504,665
County Appropriation

\$1,041,303
State Aid Funding

\$1,971,321
Grants, Donations &
Other Revenue

\$37,517,289
TOTAL

EXPENDITURES ▼

\$24,649,047
Personnel

\$6,224,313
Operations

\$3,237,125
Materials

\$3,368,500
Capital Expenditures

\$37,478,985
TOTAL



The **joy** of Giving

The Richland Library Friends and Foundation is the philanthropic arm of Richland Library, providing targeted support in four key areas: Literacy, Workforce Development, Innovative Programming, and Social Services and Inclusion.

Ways to Support:

- While gifts of any amount are welcome and needed, the **Richland Library Literary Circle** is made up of donors who make an annual gift of \$500 or more.
- Those wishing to leave a lasting impact through a bequest can do so through the **Richland Library Legacy Society**.
- The **Richland Library Innovators** is our group of dedicated monthly donors who prefer an easy, convenient method of giving, starting at only \$10 per month.
- The quarterly **Richland Library Friends and Foundation Book Sales** offer gently used books, CDs and DVDs donated by the community that raise funds for library programming.
- **Volunteers** help strengthen public support for the library, assisting in providing a higher level of service to our customers, and finding personal satisfaction through their contributions.

Community Volunteering by the Numbers

8,438 hours of community volunteer service in library locations in FY2025

511 community volunteers served at 10 Richland Library locations

\$280,854 value of community volunteer time

To learn more about philanthropic opportunities, visit RichlandLibrary.com/give

Donations may be mailed to:
Richland Library Friends and Foundation
1431 Assembly Street, Columbia, SC 29201

FY 2025 Gifts | By Annual Giving Level

\$25,000+

Power:Ed
Richland County
Government

\$10,000 - \$24,999

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Fund of Central Carolina
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Aflac
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of John Baker
Central Carolina
Community
Foundation's Midlands
Gives Day Fund
JoAnne V. Day
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Charitable Foundation
Estate of Katherine
Dunn Finley
Nelson Mullins Riley &
Scarborough LLP
The Nord Family
Foundation
Palmetto Citizens
Federal Credit Union

Sisters of Charity
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Carolina
South Carolina ETV and
South Carolina Public
Radio

South Carolina
Humanities
TD Charitable
Foundation
United Way of the
Midlands
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\$2,500 - \$4,999

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Group Inc.
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Cynthia Cox and
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Nancy Cassity Dunlap
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Lisa Eichhorn
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 Sneed from her family
 and friends

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Dr. Rohit Verma

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 White through Central
 Carolina Community
 Foundation's Midlands
 Gives Day Fund

Mrs. Synithia Williams

Ms. Isvara M. Wilson

In memory of Louise
 McLaurin Womble from
 her Family and Friends

For more information, contact
Tina Gills, CFRE
Director of Philanthropy
803 929.3424

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