

ANNUAL REPORT

fiscal year 2023





From the Director & Board President

Fiscal year 2023 was full of amazing things both big and small for the Cedar Rapids Public Library. In a single year we encompassed what it means to be a library in our era: resiliency, flexibility, big dreams, and interactions each day that made a difference to staff and patrons.

We started the fiscal year with some unexpected drama. At the end of July 2022, a fire broke out in a light fixture in the Commons of the Downtown Library. Closing the Downtown location for just over a month was a surprise. But as is the way of the library, we continued to provide service while working on plans for our next big dream: a new Westside Library.

Knowing our lease on our Ladd rental facility would expire soon, the Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation began a feasibility study for a capital campaign and secured land at the corner of Wiley Boulevard SW and 20th Avenue SW.

In October 2022, the Linn County Board of Supervisors allocated \$4 million and the City of Cedar Rapids allocated \$6 million in funding to the Westside Library Project. OPN was hired as the architect, and the library began the community input process. Design plans are ongoing, and we anticipate groundbreaking in FY25.

And then in November we learned we were awarded the fourth annual Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize.

Developed in partnership between the Gerald M. Kline Family Foundation and *Library Journal*, this award recognizes the power that comes from the library teaming up with our community and building partnerships with local organizations. The award came with a \$250,000 prize and a feature on the cover of *Library Journal*.

When summer came we rolled out our most robust Summer Dare schedule since before the COVID-19 pandemic. Our buildings were bustling with musicians, circus performers, and even live animals. Our story times were so full we had to add additional times! We visited area parks, serving more patrons than ever in the Mobile Technology Lab's third summer.

Throughout this year's Annual Report, you'll read highlights of just a few of the partnerships that garnered us national recognition with the Jerry Kline Community Impact Prize. You'll also read stories of the seemingly everyday interactions our staff have daily with our patrons – stories that highlight how our impact is felt not just in the big picture, but in the personal moments that change lives. You'll read about how we continue to advance our strategic plan, which focuses on the priorities of Literacy, Access, and Inclusion.

Looking back on our year shows us how much we have done together as a community. In the moment it might not seem like much, but when we put it all together to report on our year, FY23 is another great read from the Cedar Rapids Public Library!

We are proud to be a part of your story.

Dara and Clint



Dara

Dara Schmidt
Director
Cedar Rapids Public Library



Clint

Clint Twedt-Ball
President, Board of Trustees
Cedar Rapids Public Library

Cedar Rapids Public Library Board of Trustees FY2023

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OUR MISSION

We connect people to information, experiences, and services that enhance their quality of life so our community can learn, enjoy and thrive.



OUR VISION

We are a beacon of literacy to all who seek knowledge and understanding.

We are compassionate navigators to the information, resources, and entertainment you seek.

We are your library.



Reaching Readers Where They Are

Patron Services Specialist Michele Prostine runs the Books By Mail program for the library which delivers books, audiobooks, and movies to homebound patron's homes. She spends time on the phone with patrons, listening to their interests and which books they liked or didn't like, and uses those conversations to carefully select books to send to patrons.

"I love Michele, she does a great job. She writes me little notes to go with the books," Books by Mail patron Barbara Whitmer, 91, said. "We have great phone calls."

This summer, she and other Books by Mail patrons participated in the library's Summer Dare. Library staff designed a modified reading challenge that could be completed without leaving home or needing to get online.

Fifteen patrons completed the program, reading a total of 151,997 minutes. Michele worked with them, registering them for the program and helping them record their minutes. It was her idea to create a specialized version of the Summer Dare for Books by Mail.

"It just hit me. Summer Dare is for the whole community. They're part of our community, so why not reach out and provide this for them?" Michele said. "It's about our whole community. Not only is everyone welcome in our doors, we'll reach out to those who have barriers to getting to our library."

Barbara has macular degeneration. Legally blind, she stopped driving when she was 80. She uses a reading machine, a device that magnifies images and text, to read mail and write birthday cards. However, for reading, she relies on audio books. She also enjoys getting movies from the library.

"It's about our whole community. Not only is everyone welcome in our doors, we'll reach out to those who have barriers to getting to our library."

She keeps her mind active – one of her secrets to a long and happy life – by spending an hour after lunch each day listening to an audiobook from the library while playing solitaire. The card game helps keep her from falling asleep, she said.

Listening to books also has a health benefit. She has struggled with high blood pressure. She takes blood pressure readings at home, and her doctor recommended she start taking it after an hour of listening to a book.

Sure enough, it worked – after listening to a book, her blood pressure is almost always where it should be.

"It doesn't work so well if it's an exciting book," she laughed. "I like all kinds of books. I used to get a lot of suspense, and then I went to biographies, but there aren't so many of those as audiobooks. Now I'm enjoying historical fiction."

Michele said her regular conversations with patrons like Barbara are her favorite part of her job.

"Just getting to interact with all the patrons and offering this amazing service that makes them feel independent and part of the library community – it fills my cup," she said. "Outreach is at the heart of a lot of people here."

Our Books By Mail program is for patrons who are not able to visit the library because of a temporary or permanent disability. Anyone interested in participating can find more information at CRLibrary.org or by calling the library at (319) 261-7323.

LITERACY
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"We had an older patron come in needing help setting up his payroll account for work. He was very stressed out and needed lots of help with the computer and his flash drive.

"I sat with him and helped him navigate the website and transfer the pay stubs he needed to his flash drive. We also did a fair amount of printing. He was extremely thankful for the help, and after speaking with him for a while, he shared that he had been in an accident years ago and lost his short-term memory.

"He went on to say he has taken several basic computer classes, but he always forgets what he learns. He had been dreading coming in, knowing it would not be easy for him. I was happy to know I was able to alleviate his stress and help him complete the task!"

- Melissa Mitchell, Patron Services Specialist



Left: Books by Mail patron Barbara Whitmer demonstrates her reading machine, a device that magnifies images and text. Right: Barbara shares family photos at her home.



Patron Steve Springer and Public Service Librarian Rebecca at the Downtown Library.

Connecting Resources & Patrons

For Public Service Librarian Rebecca Vernon, taking the time to answer reference questions is just part of her job – but a rewarding part.

“It’s a pretty good feeling when you can find the answer someone’s been looking for,” she said.

So when a patron, Steve Springer, brought in a particularly tricky question, she was happy to help.

He was looking for help translating pamphlets he’d picked up in South Korea while stationed near the Demilitarized Zone in the U.S. Army in the 1960s.

Once he got home, he put them away and didn’t think about them for nearly 50 years. But in 2022, he pulled them out and decided to see if he could learn more about the documents he had kept all those years.

So he reached out to the library – always a good starting place when tackling a research project. Rebecca contacted many different organizations as she tried to help but kept hitting dead ends. But she didn’t give up, eventually submitting a reference request to the Library of Congress. Elli Kim, the Korea Reference Librarian at the Asian Reading Room at the Library of Congress, wrote back.

LITERACY ACCESS INCLUSION

Not only was she able to summarize the documents, she said they were important, and something the Library of Congress would be interested in preserving in their collection. The papers were propaganda pamphlets, some produced by South Korea to be sent into North Korea, some produced by the North to be sent South.

Steve ended up donating the papers to the Library of Congress, along with other materials he had kept from his Army service, including photographs, film, and his own biography, which will be included in the Library of Congress Veterans History Project.

“It started as a such a small thing, and it really expanded. This is kind of like true friendship. It was such a great experience.” Elli said. “This really shows how local public libraries and the Library of Congress can have a great collaboration together. We discovered historically important documents, and now we can bring this material to the Library of Congress, and researchers across the country can access this information.”

Steve was impressed with Rebecca’s efforts.

“I thought, ‘What perseverance! What kind of a person does that for someone?’” Steve said. “People tend to think all librarians do is straighten books, and that’s not true. The experience was very positive, and I felt good about how it ended up.”

Steve said he was gratified to know his papers, kept so long in storage, could be part of something bigger.

“I’m glad it found a home where it can live on,” he said. “I was really happy to do something with them that might mean something to somebody, someday.”

Rebecca agreed.

“It was pretty neat to have them say these documents are important, and we are interested in them,” she said. “It can be rare that things that are important to us are also important to a library or museum.”



“After how much work and dedication we have put into the teen area of the library, I love to talk about how our regular teens are becoming power users – committed, dedicated, interested, involved.

“I was in the Union when one of our regular teens came in and shared he had just returned from a Westside library information session at Ladd. He took the time to go over because he is excited about the new location and wanted to be able to offer input. ... He shared the information with the other teens in the Union and encouraged them to attend the next one. It was really cool to see how excited they are and how much they want to be a part of it.

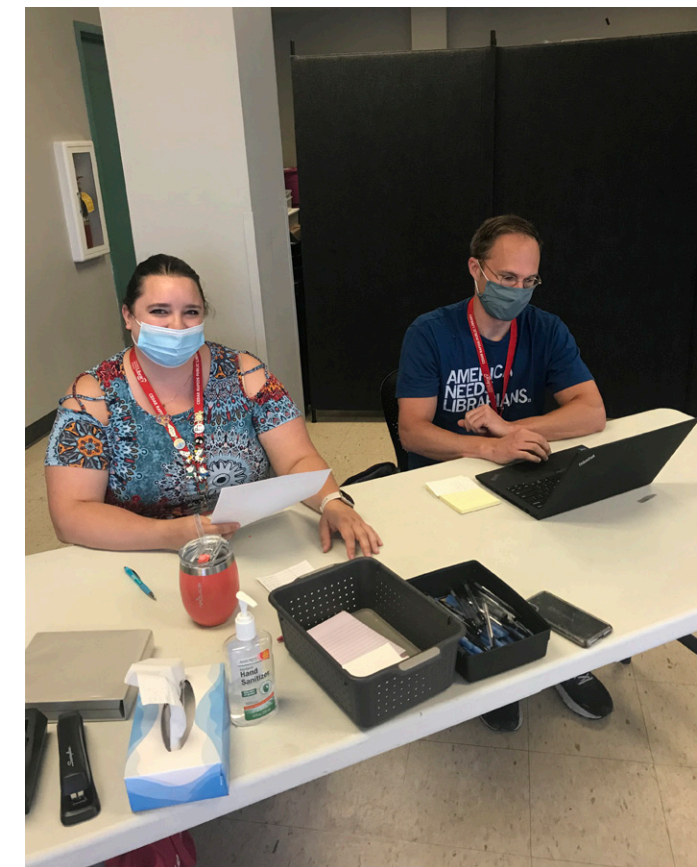
“That same week, we also had a long-time Union user decide to make the jump to volunteering. He is now 14 and old enough to volunteer. A staff member later shared that he called in to make a formal inquiry and sounded so professional on the phone. We gave him an opportunity to come up and see what the volunteer desk looks like. It was a fun moment for everyone.

“Finally, we helped a teen fill out a job application and did some brainstorming with him about his talents and skills so he would have that information ready for his interview. His father has passed away and he lives with his mom, who is having health issues. He is trying to get ready for the possibility she will end up in an assisted living situation and he will be on his own. He told us that his New Year’s resolution was to become more self-sufficient, and getting a job is step in that direction. We are so proud of him.”

– Lisa Miles, Patron Services Specialist



Staff set up a pop-up computer and cooling center in partnership with Waypoint while the Downtown Library was closed.



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After Fire, Partnership Makes Access Possible

When the Downtown Library temporarily closed after a fire in a light fixture on July 27, 2022, library staff quickly sprang into action to find ways to continue serving the community.

The flames were quickly extinguished, with no injuries and few library materials destroyed. However, smoke spread throughout the building, meaning extensive cleaning had to be undertaken. A professional team from SERVPRO wiped down all 125,000 items in the collection that were in the building when the fire broke out, as well as every surface and piece of equipment in the building.

After going through floods, an ongoing pandemic, and the derecho, library staff have learned how to respond to disaster: by pivoting and finding ways to continue serving the community even in the most challenging times.

Instead of closing completely, staff acted on lessons learned over the last several years. Within days, staff had partnered with Waypoint to open a pop-up computer and cooling center downtown. That center served an average of 100 people a week during the month it was open.

"We recognized the vital role the library plays in our community, and having access to both computers and a cool place to escape the summer heat is an integral part of that role," Library Director Dara Schmidt said. "We are grateful for a community partner like Waypoint stepping up to help us fill the gap in services."

Soon after that, the Downtown Library lobby opened for holds pickup and a small browsing collection. Meanwhile, other staff normally based Downtown moved to support staff at Ladd Library as they dealt with an influx of patrons, computer usage, and book returns.

"We knew our patrons needed us, and even as we were in the midst of cleanup and recovery, we were determined to continue serving our community," Schmidt said.

The building was closed for just over a month, reopening Sept. 1. It briefly closed again for final cleaning work Sept. 28-30.

Finding a way to serve the community despite challenges to access is a key component of our strategic plan. Thanks to community partnerships and flexible and talented staff, we were able to continue providing critical access.

"A patron had some questions about how to print documents at the library. I provided assistance, and we were able to very quickly get all her documents printed. While doing so, she expressed how grateful she was to have access to such a service.

"She stated the only printer she usually has access to is owned by her parents, and unfortunately working with them is a great stressor. She explained she is in recovery, and her situation is challenging enough that stressors like that can actually trigger a relapse, putting her in an extremely difficult position. She said knowing she can come and get her important documents printed at the library without having to confront such stressors is a great relief and allows her to continue prioritizing her own mental health and well-being."

- Maria Jose Eyzaguirre, Patron Services Specialist



Taking the Library to the Community

The library's mission is to connect people to information, experiences, and services that enhance their quality of life so our community can learn, enjoy, and thrive.

Sometimes, that means taking the library out of the building, meeting people where they are instead of waiting for them to come to us.

Outreach to children and teens happened with the Mobile Technology Lab at the parks all summer, with middle school STEAM camps, programming with the Juvenile Detention Center, and at outreach to preschools, elementary schools, and community organizations like Jane Boyd. But the library also strove to reach adults.

Ericka Blake, 40, had never been a library user before. Now, she has a library card and regularly visits both the Downtown and Ladd Libraries, where she goes for job search assistance at the Opportunity Center. Community Engagement Librarian Meredith Crawford also helped her research therapy options for her daughter during an outreach session while she was a resident at the Area Substance Abuse Council's Heart of Iowa

"It kind of changed my life knowing there are people out there who really do care and will help you get on your feet," she said.

The library began partnering with the Area Substance Abuse Council's Heart of Iowa program in June 2022 to provide weekly computer, internet, and information access. The program supports pregnant women and mothers in substance abuse recovery. Their children can live with them at the facility while they complete treatment and get back on their feet.

Left: Community Engagement Librarian Meredith Crawford and Event Specialist Kami Zbanek Hil meet with residents at the Area Substance Abuse Council's Heart of Iowa program. Right: Programming Specialist Olivia Stoner presents early literacy skills to a YPN parenting class.

Once a week, Community Engagement Librarian Meredith Crawford and Event Specialist Kami Zbanek Hill bring laptops, a mobile printer, and other resources to the center. Opportunity Center Program Coordinator Erin Maeder also visits ASAC's main campus twice a month.

They do plenty of resume help, but they also make library cards, give the residents a chance to check their email, help them research doctors and daycares, and apply for benefits or other assistance. One week they helped a woman file for custody of her children.

"As a librarian, it really hits on meeting people where they're at in the community and being able to extend our services beyond the barriers of our building," Crawford said.

The library also partnered with Cedar Rapids nonprofit YPN this year.

On a warm March evening, dozens of parents and young children gathered in classrooms on Kirkwood Community College's campus for evening parenting classes, hosted by



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Cedar Rapids nonprofit YPN. Staff from the library were there, explaining how to use songs, stories, and games to encourage early literacy and help young children get ready for kindergarten.

These techniques and skills can make a big difference for children's developing brains, said Literacy Coordinator Elizabeth Yusko, who coordinates Reading into Success, the local campaign for Grade Level Reading.

"A lot of people do not understand the simple things you can do daily that are going to help your child in the end," she said.

The sessions were translated into Spanish and French, and sessions have also been held with translators for recently arrived Afghani families. On another night, families took tours of the library.

Amy Grunewaldt is the Director of Early Childhood Iowa in Linn County and of the Linn County Decat Board, which allocates state funds, including a grant for the partnership.

"YPN already has groups of families that are at-risk and wanting to find skill sets and resources for their kids," Grunewaldt said. "Bringing together the library and YPN – in my opinion, it was just a perfect match. I want this to be the start of something larger, of starting to work with these organizations ... There is just a lot of potential here."

She said no organization can take on the challenges of addressing something as big as early literacy and childhood success alone.

"We can start doing things differently than we have before," she said. "We want to change the narrative."

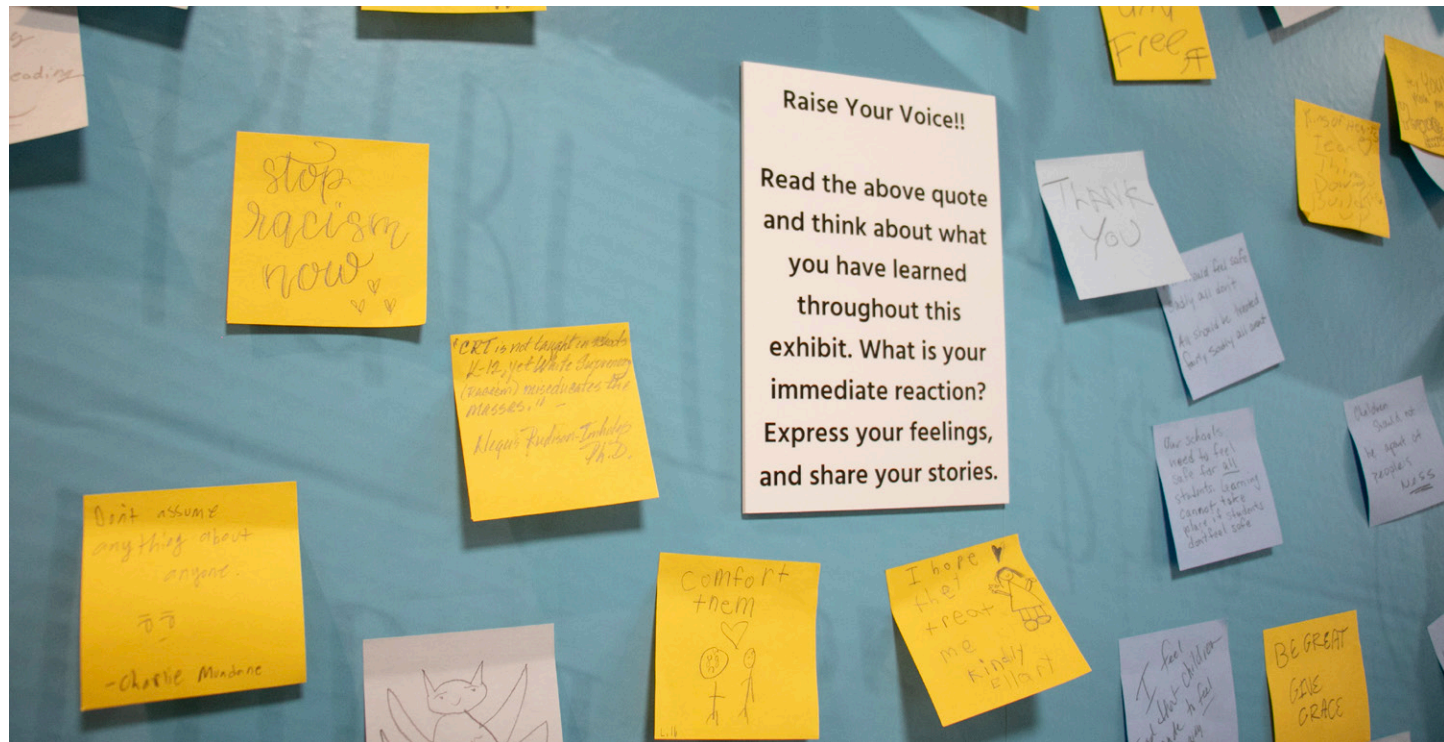
Partnering with community organizations, taking library services out into the community, and finding ways to connect patrons with valuable library resources is all part of the Cedar Rapids Public Library strategic plan.



"A patron came in to get a library card. I handed the patron their new card, and they asked how much they owed. I told them it was free, which put a smile on their face. They asked about ebooks, and I showed them our resources. They stated they would download the apps once they had a little more cash on hand. I told them the apps are free to use with their library card; this put a huge smile on their face. We downloaded some apps on their phone and even checked out a couple audiobooks. As the patron was packing up, they stated that they could not believe what they were leaving with and that it was all free."

– Michele Prostone, Patron Services Specialist





Welcoming Partners into the Library

Just as taking the library into the community with partners has helped meet our strategic goals of Literacy, Access, and Inclusion, we also welcome community partners into our buildings.

The library has partnered with the African American Museum of Iowa for years to host programs, from story times to community discussions, so with the museum's building inaccessible this year as a flood control wall and renovation are completed, working together to keep the museum's exhibit's accessible was a natural fit.

The Downtown Library's third floor gallery space became home to the museum's yearlong exhibit, "Suspended: Systemic Oppression in Our Schools," which was open from October 2022 through September 2023. Admission to the gallery was free and available during regular library hours.

The museum held the exhibit's opening reception at the library, as well as facilitated discussions throughout the year. They also held other events and meetings at the library, including their 30th anniversary party, a day-long event that utilized spaces throughout the building.

"We are very familiar with the challenges of continuing to operate while flood recovery and renovation work are ongoing, something not just the library but people across Cedar Rapids have experienced in recent years. But we team up and find a way to continue serving our community," Library Director Dara Schmidt said. "We're so glad we could provide access to this exhibit even as the museum's building was closed, and we're grateful for the expertise and resources the museum has shared during programs at the library."

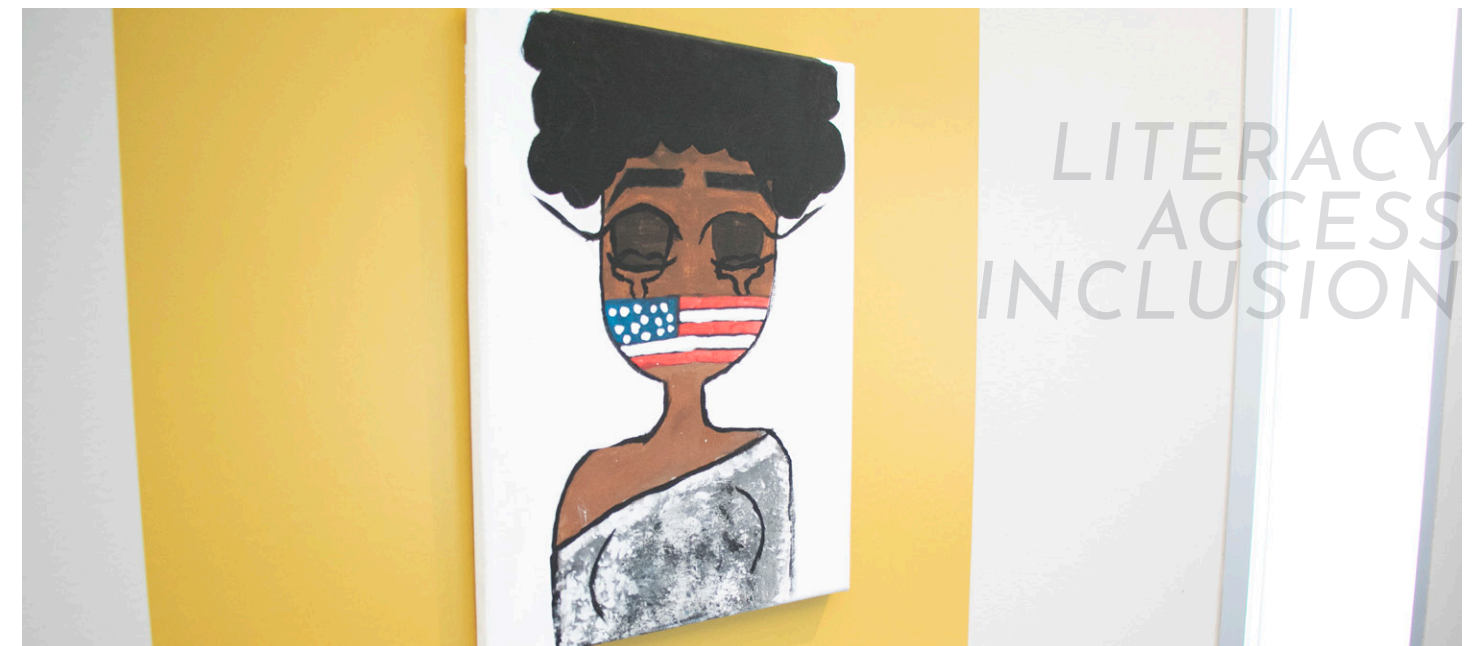
The exhibit examined the role public schools play in funneling students into the prison system. Elements of the criminal justice system have entered public schools around the country, resulting in zero tolerance policies and student policing that disproportionately affect children of color. "Suspended" aimed to help visitors learn more and explore ways to dismantle systems that feed the school to prison pipeline.

Along with being on display at the library, the museum produced pop-up versions of the exhibit, which continue to travel to locations around the state.

"The African American Museum of Iowa has always enjoyed collaborating with the Cedar Rapids Public Library, but the past year has certainly shown us what a true community partnership can look like where everyone wins! Installing 'Suspended' at the library enabled the African American Museum of Iowa to continue sharing its educational content, while providing access to the entire community," said African American Museum of Iowa Executive Director LaNisha Cassell.

"From our self-guided exhibit tours to regular and thought-provoking facilitated discussions and programs throughout the exhibit run, the library has been a people connector and a partner the museum will always count on."

Providing space for traveling exhibits and partnership opportunities such as this one is a part of the vision of the art galleries in our libraries. Learn more about our exhibits and public art at CRLibrary.org/art-on-exhibit.



"Suspended: Systemic Oppression in Our Schools" was displayed in the Downtown Library's third floor gallery space for a year.

"A woman approached the desk and thanked us for all we do. She told us she's on a fixed income, and while she has housing, she is unable to keep it as warm as she'd like to be comfortable. She's very glad she has a place to come where she can hang out and be warm."

- Jessica Duffy, Patron Services Specialist





Above: Max Stancel volunteered at the library through Kirkwood Community College's Workplace Learning Connection. Right: Maria Jose Eyzaguirre started as an AmeriCorps VISTA before becoming a full-time staff member.

From Volunteers to Pursuing Library Careers

Patron Services Specialist Maria Jose Eyzaguirre never dreamed she wanted a career as a librarian – until she started serving at the library.

She was working at TransAmerica in customer care when she saw an AmeriCorps VISTA position on Indeed.

"The description focused on promoting literacy to the community," she said. "Books have always been a very positive refuge, a source of education, a source of creativity. I have a huge passion for books and literacy and reading."

Her VISTA role started in 2018 just as the library's Summer Dare reading program was kicking off.

"I got to see up-close the impact the library can have," she said. "I just kind of fell in love with the whole thing."

She ended up staying for two years as a VISTA. The end of that period was during the COVID-19 pandemic shift to virtual services. When her VISTA service ended, she got a job at the library, first as a shelver before moving into Public Service. Now she is a Patron Services Specialist.

"I fell in love with the library world so completely, I knew this is what I wanted to do," she said.

This fall, she started an online Master of Library and Information Sciences program through the University of Iowa and is on her way to becoming a librarian.

"I went from being someone with a cursory interest to someone who really, truly believes in the value of public libraries," she said.

Volunteer Coordinator Jessica Link said many organizations have partnered with the library on placing volunteers, including Goodwill, PrairieWood Transition Center, Foundation 2, The Arc, AmeriCorps, Kirkwood Community College, Coe College, and Mount Mercy University. Individuals also volunteer. Some are looking for a way to give back or engage with the community. And some, like Maria Jose, use the position as a stepping-stone into a library career.

"We've been fortunate to work with a variety of individuals over the years who come to us in a variety of ways – high school, just as volunteers, VISTAs, adults who are considering changing their careers," she said. "They love the environment and the mission and the impact it makes in our community and just want to see if it's a good fit for them."

Others, like Max Stancel, explore library work as volunteers through work study programs. Max was a senior in high school, dual enrolled at Kirkwood Community College, where he completed an internship at the library last spring through Workplace Learning Connection. Workplace Learning Connections provides career exploration opportunities for teens. For Max, interning at the library was the perfect fit, since he is interested in studying library science.

"I fell in love with the library world so completely, I knew this is what I wanted to do,"

"I like it because I get to be around books. I'm a very avid reader," he said. "I believe in the power of a library. You can learn a lot by just coming here and reading. I've always gravitated toward libraries. So this is pretty fun for me."

He spent afternoons twice a week shelving books, cleaning shelves, pulling damaged books, and working in the sorter room.

"It's really fun working here. It's very fulfilling. If you like anything to do with a library, I think you would enjoy working here," he said.

Not only do volunteers help enrich the library with their service, our volunteer program is an entry to exploring the world of library science – another way we are able to reduce barriers and commit to access and inclusion.



"I make library cards. Every single day, I am one of the many staff who open up the endless possibilities of the library by welcoming individuals from everywhere with a little plastic card. I have my own little script memorized, listing the benefits and opportunities that come along with having this little plastic card. Giving someone a library card is like handing over a key to an amazing world where you can choose your own experience, without boundaries. Sometimes that little card leaves my desk and goes into tiny hands, eager to check out *Curious George* books, and sometime that card goes into the icy hands of a person who has no gloves, no place to stay, but is hoping for a chance to use a computer to search for a job. No matter the reason, everyone can get a library card.



"One day, a large group of boys and girls came into the library for their first visit and to get library cards. I was able to work with the group of girls, who stayed close to each other, whispering, and looking around at all there is to see ... One by one, I would ask the girls to step forward and choose a color of card, and they would watch as I put in the information. Most of them didn't know their birthday, and so one of the girls stepped forward to try to help translate. Phrama, at her young age, relayed as much information as she could get, and we made 11 cards, one for each girl. Phrama told me to make her card last, after everyone else had their own.

"We were able to visit with the leader of the group, who works at Catherine McAuley Center. She told us these girls were refugees who had fled from Afghanistan with their families. They had only been here about three weeks, and Catherine McAuley Center was working to get them settled with their families into homes, jobs, and registered for school. These are children who have been forced from their homes, away from grandparents, friends, and relatives. Forced, under threat of death or persecution, away from everything they have ever known, to escape with their lives and little else, to a country they know little about, into a culture that is vastly different. There is such incredible irony in the stories of these beautiful young girls, fleeing a country where girls are not allowed to go to school, who must be covered from head to toe when they are out, who are not allowed to read, forced to submit to such terror. Yet they were walking into our library, where this beautiful light and thousands of books surround them, where they can choose any book they want, check it out, and then take it home to read. The magnitude of what that means brings me to tears.

"Every single one of these girls checked out their own book from the library. Every single girl left with her own library card, with her name on it, and the freedom to use it."

– Tricia Semple, Patron Services Specialist

OUR LIBRARY IN 2023 BY THE NUMBERS



Database Uses
247,606



In-House Circulation
20,094



Physical Materials
Circulated
449,815



Digital Materials
Circulated
194,591

Total Circulation
912,106



Website Users
170,175

Connections
to Wifi
125,618

Public Computer
Sessions
52,501



Volunteers
201

Volunteer
Hours
4,035

Volunteer
Value
\$82,108

Visits
381,552



Program
Attendees
32,982

Meeting
Room Users
36,441

Total Programs
1,055



REVENUE*

Intergovernmental Grants \$428,964
Charges for Services \$302,920
Other Misc Revenue \$80,538
City of Cedar Rapids \$6,605,562

Total Revenue \$7,417,984

EXPENSES*

Personnel Services \$5,408,553
Discretionary Expenses \$898,570
Fleet and Facilities \$1,025,883
Non-Discretionary Expenses \$84,978

Total Expenditures \$7,417,984

*General fund only

Our Supporting Organizations Make the Above and Beyond Possible

Cedar Rapids Public Library Foundation

Books & Materials
Senior Book Clubs
Dolly Parton's Imagination Library
Summer Dare

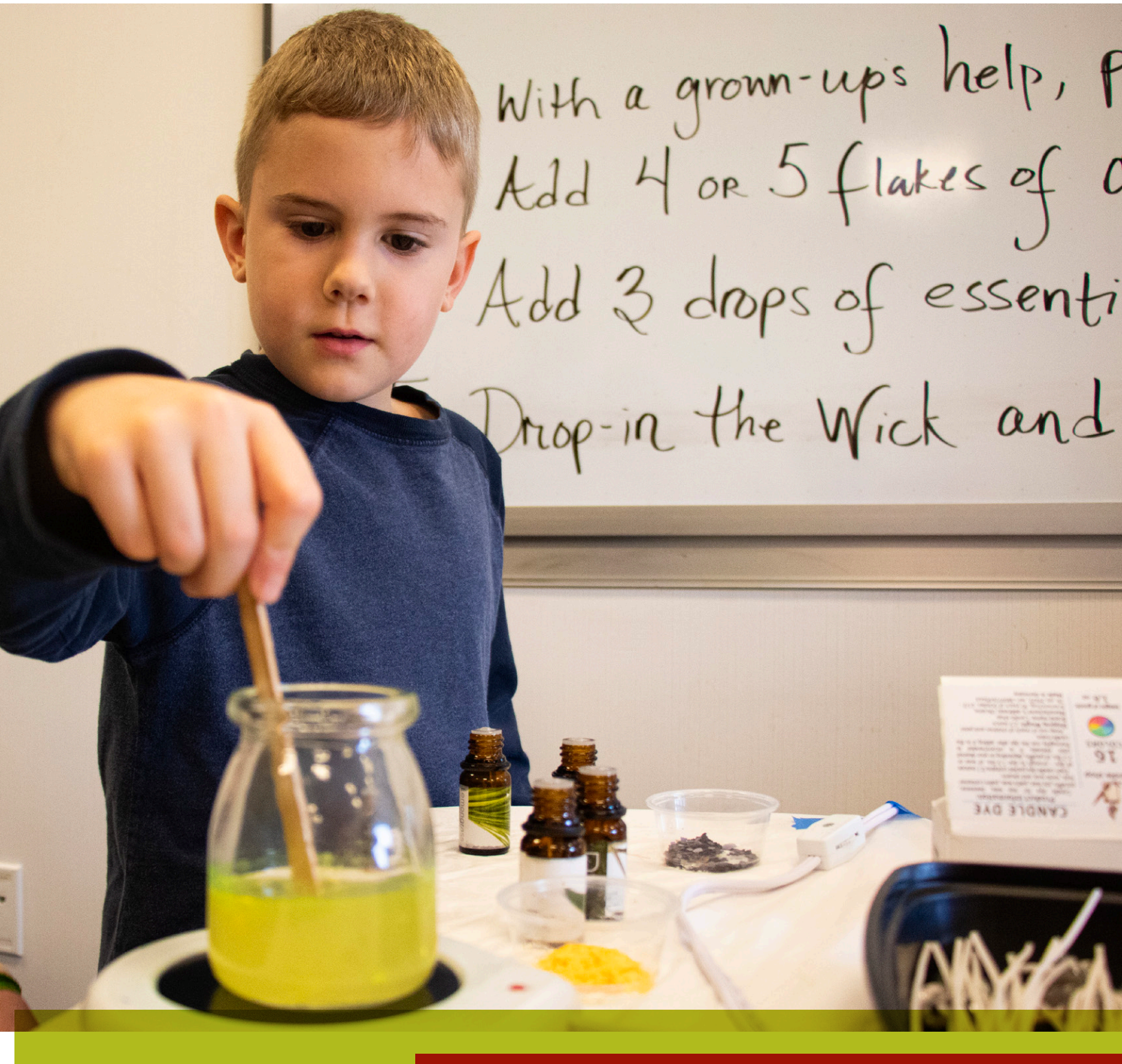
Mobile Tech Lab
Preschool Outreach
Staff Appreciation
Library Furniture

Friends of the Library

Summer Dare

\$378,859 total

\$25,000 total



With a grown-up's help,
Add 4 or 5 flakes of
Add 3 drops of essential
Drop-in the Wick and

