

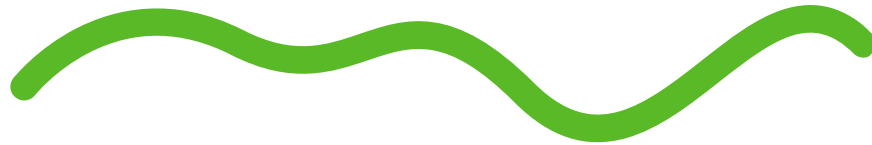
# COMMUNITY IMPACT STORIES



2025



In anticipation of the Kansas Library Association Legislative Day, the Southeast Kansas Library System (SEKLS) asked member libraries to share stories of their impact on their communities. We received several responses and wanted to share them with you. Thank you for your continued support of our libraries, and the meaningful work that they do in Southeast Kansas.



### **Bev Clarkson & Tanner Stout - Pittsburg Public Library**

Izzy works as a Computer Lab Assistant and Weekend Supervisor at the Pittsburg Public Library. We often hear from patrons of the great service she provides in the Computer Lab. One of her many talents are her outstanding resume skills. Having studied and earned her Bachelor's of Arts in English at PSU while also working in the Writing Center for two years, she is equipped with the knowledge to assist anyone who is needing some help beefing up or creating their resume from scratch.

Recently, Izzy assisted a library patron that had just passed his CDL and needed help getting his resume updated for his new career. He wasn't the most computer savvy individual, so he decided to come into the library to get assistance. Izzy bounced back and forth with him over the course of a couple hours helping him get everything in line while also handling the rest of the Computer Lab business. Izzy assisted him with using templates in Microsoft Word, proper layouts, grammar, gathering his relevant experience via conversation, and then putting those applicable skills and experiences into the resume.

This patron returned to the library a week or so later beaming with news he wanted to share--he had received and accepted his first job offer! He informed us that there was no way he would have been able to do it without Izzy's and the Library's help.

Note: In 2024, the Pittsburg Public Library Computer Lab provided 1,684 individual community members with personal technology assistance, just like the patron in this story. In small ways, and sometimes, life-changing ways, we are proud and honored to have an impact on our community.

## Angela Forquer - Chetopa City Library

Our local elementary school no longer employs a full-time librarian, so the students there are missing out on all of the fun that comes with library time. Chetopa City Library has partnered with the school to offer "story time" with the kindergarten and preschool classes. Thankfully the school is only a block from the library, so as long as the weather is nice, the kids walk to the library once a week for a story and a craft or activity. This allows them to see what the library has to offer and to see the fun side of reading in a different environment. Hopefully we will be able to add more grades soon.



## Tammie Benham - SEKLS

In 2021 Southeast Kansas Library System wrote for and secured a grant from the Children's Cabinet and Trust fund to pilot an initiative we called Family Engagement in Public Libraries, or FEPL. Funded through CB-CAP dollars, the model for FEPL uses best practices and research in early childhood education and child development, youth services in library science, and child abuse prevention. Families voluntarily participate in free play-based library programs and socialization opportunities.

The FEPL program is currently being researched to identify and strengthen relationships between families and library workers to help lessen the stigma associated with, and strengthen knowledge and agency around, application for needed family support services. Additional research regarding benefits to families when librarians receive additional education, required for program participation, has also been proposed. After presenting an informational session regarding the FEPL program during the 2024 Governor's Conference for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, agency staff from DCF identified the FEPL model as not only being a strategy for the prevention of child maltreatment but also having potential for family preservation.

Collaboration across disciplines to strengthen families is one way libraries make a difference in Kansas.

## **Diane Cucar - Moline Public Library**

At the Moline Public Library, we've always believed we're more than just books. We're a community hub—a place where stories come to life, not only on the pages of novels but in the lives of the people who walk through our doors. One Saturday morning, we witnessed a story that touched our hearts deeply.

That morning began like many others. The smell of freshly brewed coffee filled the air, and our “Stay and Play” program was ready to welcome families. A hardworking father walked in with his four children, and everything changed. This dad had come in seeking something simple—a cup of coffee. After a long week working in the oil fields, he was looking for a moment of comfort. What he found, however, was so much more.

His kids' excitement was contagious as they spotted the colorful play area. Before long, he was down on the floor with them, helping build block towers and flipping through picture books. It was clear this wasn't just play—it was a chance for him to connect with his kids in ways his demanding schedule rarely allowed.

As he enjoyed his coffee, he learned about the resources available through our program. That day, he connected with our Head Start community partner, which opened the door for his youngest child to access early education services. He also found information about food assistance programs, giving him the tools to better support his family during tough times.

Week after week, this family became familiar faces at the library. Saturday morning visits became a cherished tradition, filled with laughter, learning, and a sense of belonging. Seeing that bond grow is a profound reminder of why we do what we do.

This is just one story of many. We've welcomed individuals who are nearly homeless and struggling to make ends meet, those who lost electricity before winter set in and come here to stay warm and feel safe. We've helped those who are unfamiliar with computers apply for state aid, file for unemployment, and meet application requirements in a town where job opportunities are scarce.

We're also a lifeline for the elderly. Every week, seniors gather here for a much-needed interaction beyond their doctor visits or grocery trips. In the library, laughter, fun, and community thrive, supporting a small rural and poverty-stricken town of 300.

What makes these stories even more remarkable is that our library's operating budget is less than \$25,000 and is run by a single librarian. Despite these incredibly limited resources, the library provides invaluable services and programs to a community in need. The Moline Public Library is more than a building; it's a vital hub of resources, connection, and hope for our community. As we share these stories, we are reminded of the importance of continued support for libraries like ours. We're here to change lives, one cup of coffee, one conversation, and one act of kindness at a time.



## **Janet Reynolds - Linn County Library District #2, La Cygne Library**

One of our long-time volunteers started after losing her husband. Her family sent her to the doctor because they thought she needed medication for depression, and her doctor told her to get involved somewhere. After six months of volunteering with the summer lunch program and the senior lunch and exercise program, she went back to her doctor and he said, "What have you been doing? You are in better shape than you were earlier." She replied, "I volunteer at the library," and she told him all about it. His response was, "I wish more of my seniors would get involved." A few years later, she got very sick and ended up in the hospital. She called her daughter and said, "Would you call the library and tell them not to give my job away? I am coming back!" She did come back, and she is still actively involved and tells people it's what keeps her going.

In the fall of 2023, a lady visited our senior lunch program and activities. She was new to our community, only knew one couple in the room. She was sad and quiet. I learned she had lost her husband and was having a rough time adjusting to his death and her move to our area. She continued to attend and gradually started getting more involved in our programs and smiling. In December 2024, she came up to me and handed me a check. She said, "Use this to help with library programming." When I thanked her, she said "No, thank YOU, you gave me back my life." She now feels that she has purpose, feels like she belongs, and has taken an interest in life again.

We are not just a book repository, we are a vibrant part of the community and we play an active role in the lives of residents of all ages. Cross-generational experiences have been a focus for us and many children do not have grandparents close by, so many of the seniors volunteer to help with programs. We have an older volunteer who shows up at every homeschool event and helps with activities, laughs with them, and makes them feel welcome. It gives her purpose and makes her feel like she is important.

Libraries are so much more than ever before, we are the center of our communities. Often providing services that used to be provided by other organizations. We meet the needs of our citizens from birth to senior citizens. In La Cygne, we partner with other organizations such as Parents as Teachers, Birth to 3, Head Start, the local preschools, home schools, museums, middle and high schools, AARP, K-State Extension, senior centers and local businesses. Working together we can do more to meet our community's needs. We may be the only source for computer and internet access in our economically depressed areas, and with so many using technology for school and work from home, we meet a need. With the availability of Hoopla and the State Library Databases, we can provide a wealth of information for those who cannot get to the library or choose to access from home. Libraries are a powerful tool for every community and we would invite you to visit our library and see just how powerful they are or can be.

## **Jeana Lawrence - Chanute Public Library**

Libraries are more than just about books. They're about community and connection. We serve as a crucial crossroads between our patrons and important community resources. We provide computers and Wi-Fi for job seekers, printing and faxing services for families or individuals sending important health and financial information to state and federal agencies, and provide space for community organizations to host programs that reach more community members and pass along vital information.

We have worked with Kansas Works to provide a space for job seekers to update resumes and apply for jobs; with the Southwind Extension Office to provide a wide range of programs from planning out end of life care, Medicare/Medicaid information, successful gardening and healthy cooking, and children's programming during the summer; with the Department of Children and Families to provide assistance in applying for the LIEAP program; with local community colleges in providing proctoring spaces for exams; with Humanities Kansas to bring in new speakers and presentations with new ideas to explore within the humanities; and with local organizations to provide year-round activities for patrons of all ages, including preschool and toddler story times, all ages kids crafts, adult crafts, and summer reading activities.

Because of support from our local and state governments, we are able to provide most of our services free of charge or for a low charge; all of our programming is free. The most common remark I hear from community members is how many wonderful programs we provide, even more than some libraries in larger, urban areas. Imagine, a rural library being able to provide modern services like what you would find in Kansas City or Wichita!

Over this past year, we hosted 294 events, with 5,400 attendees. This year, we were able to start our first Homebound program, bringing library books and services to those that live in assisted care facilities or who cannot otherwise drive to the library, due to injury or illness. We are able to offer mobile printing from a library patron's mobile device, thanks to a grant from our regional library system, and start our Library of Things collection, which has things like CD players for those who do not have a mobile device to listen to audiobooks so they can still listen to books, to official chess tournament timers and sets. We provide crocheting and knitting needles for our local crafters and stitchers and a yarn and craft exchange, for community members to practice a skill and connect with other crafters, and started our first Seed Library that passes out fruit, vegetable, and flower seeds for our local gardeners to provide their own source of food but also practice mindfulness and connection with nature. We even started a Spice of the Month club recently, which encourages patrons to explore new cuisine and recipes featuring a different spice and its history every month. This is all in addition to our growing toddler story times, preschool story times, all-ages kids crafts, robot and coding programs for upper elementary kids, crafting for young adults, and more during our summer reading program.

This year, we have done a lot. We created community connections between organizations but more than that, we have created a space and opportunities for us to connect with each other. It is becoming more and more evident that as we move past the isolation of COVID-19, people are seeking human connection and a place of belonging. Though we are connected more than ever through social media, the world can still feel like a lonely place, full of uncertainty. However, we have proven, time and time again, that libraries are an essential third space, where community members can gather, talk to one another, and feel welcomed, regardless of background or income. This is an essential service libraries provide and by extension what the state library can provide for us: support so we can continue to bring people together and make our communities stronger and more resilient. Thank you for your support of rural libraries and communities.



### **Kandi Wilson - Chanute Public Library**

I was invited to participate in the “One School, One Book” assembly at Chanute Elementary School. It was wonderful to see 700 students and adults so excited about reading a book. I was excited to promote Chanute Public Library programs and events to the crowd. I was very excited to promote book number two in the series and encourage them to come check it out. The kids are genuinely motivated to read. It's very encouraging to see so much excitement! We try hard to partner with others in our community to promote reading. Activities like this impact our community in such a positive manner. I so appreciated being invited to attend and to promote the library.

## **Lesla Cole - Iola Public Library**

At our library, in our Family Play Place, it is a safe space for littles to play and learn. It is a space for grownups to be immersed in a pretend world with their littles, too. A place where I have seen so many friendships blossom between littles and their grownups. They are able to connect with one another in a comfortable environment. I know that they carry their new friendships outside of the library and meet up for playdates, lunches, etc. Without the Family Play Place, I do not believe these opportunities would occur as much as they do.

We offer the 1000 Books Before Kindergarten program and it is an absolute joy for me to see the light in the littles eyes when they bring in each of their 100 goals. They love to see their photo on my brag wall and know that how close they are getting to reaching their ultimate goal.

I have referred several people that are in search of employment to the area Business Service Representative at Kansas Works. Through Kansas Works, they are able to locate employment and help secure their future. I also have referred patrons that have come in and are chatting about income issues and lack of groceries to the proper connections.

We are not just a library. We are a hub. We help make connections. We help the community. We teach the community.



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