



GREATER VICTORIA
PUBLIC LIBRARY

Annual Report

2025



Message from the Board Chair and CEO

We are pleased to share the Greater Victoria Public Library’s 2025 Annual Report.

Public libraries are among the few places where everyone is welcome, regardless of age, income, background, or circumstance. They are where children discover the joy of reading, newcomers find community, students pursue their goals, and neighbours connect. That role guided our work in 2025.

Several key milestones marked the year. The Nellie McClung Express Branch opened in March, ensuring continued library services during the construction of the new branch. The Interlibrary Loan service returned, once again giving patrons access to collections from libraries throughout British Columbia. A new Digital Media Lab opened at the Esquimalt Branch, providing tools for people to preserve photographs, recordings, and personal histories while building digital skills. More than 9,800 children participated in the BC Summer Reading Club, and we marked the 10th anniversary of the Emerging Local Authors Collection, celebrating a decade of showcasing and supporting local writers.

Alongside service delivery, we made progress on key priorities. The Board of Trustees approved a new Strategic Plan for 2025–2027. We continued work on the creation of our new website and advanced planning for the future library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road in partnership with the District of Saanich. We also continued to advocate for sustainable provincial funding for public libraries.

While there were many accomplishments, the past year was not without challenges. Staffing shortages and limited capacity affected service delivery across the system, which added complexity to our day-to-day operations.

This report highlights the many ways your library continues to serve, connect, and strengthen our community. The stories, achievements, and milestones highlighted in these pages reflect the dedication of our staff, the support of our partners and donors, and the ongoing engagement of the people we serve. Their continued use of the library and support of its work helps ensure that GVPL remains a welcoming place for learning, connection, and discovery today and for generations to come.

Thank you for helping make GVPL an important part of our community.



Duncan Cavens, 2026 Board Chair



Maureen Sawa, Chief Executive Officer

2025 Greater Victoria Public Library Board, Appointees by Municipality

Central Saanich

Councillor Gordon Newton

Colwood

Councillor David Grove

Esquimalt

Councillor Duncan Cavens (Vice-Chair)

Highlands

Councillor Karel Roessingh

Langford

Councillor Mark Morley
Rebecca McClure

Metchosin

Councillor Shelly Donaldson

Oak Bay

Councillor Andrew Appleton

Saanich

Councillor Teale Phelps Bondaroff
Krista Boehnert
Ryan Henderson
Rhiannon Stromberg
Nik White

Victoria

Councillor Susan Kim
Shahira Khair (Chair)
Scott Lansdowne
Ramesh Ranjan
Melody Wey

View Royal

Councillor Gery Lemon

Greater Victoria Public Library’s service area is located on the unceded traditional territories of the Songhees and X̱seps̱əm (Esquimalt) Nations, the W̱SÁNEĆ Nations of STÁUTW (Tsawout) and W̱JOŁŁP (Tsartlip), and the SC̱IÁNEW (Beecher Bay) Nation.

Colonization and systemic racism still impact the lives of Indigenous Peoples today. Their historical and cultural relationship with the land and sea continues as they steward these sacred lands as they have since time immemorial.

2025 By the Numbers

In 2025, more people connected with GVPL in more ways than ever. Active cardholders grew to 154,537, an increase of 4.5%, while program offerings expanded to 938 sessions, up 4.3%. Digital engagement continued to accelerate, with e-visits increasing 38.3% and digital circulation rising 8.8%. Public PC sessions grew 5.7%, and the number of holds created increased 2.8%, reflecting strong and sustained demand for GVPL's collections, programs, and services.

21,850+

NEW CARDHOLDERS

154,537

CARDHOLDERS
(AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2025)



2,231,487

VISITS TO GVPL.CA

9,800+

BC SUMMER READING
CLUB PARTICIPANTS

1,820,665

IN-PERSON VISITS

3,390,667

PHYSICAL ITEMS
BORROWED

2,791,966

DIGITAL ITEMS BORROWED

190,597

PUBLIC
COMPUTER LOGINS

Building for Tomorrow

Few projects have shaped GVPL’s recent history as significantly as the redevelopment of the library at 3950 Cedar Hill Road. When the Nellie McClung Branch closed in December 2024, more than 50,000 items were redistributed across our library system. While the behind-the-scenes work was extensive, there was minimal disruption to public services. The Nellie McClung Express Branch opened on March 26, and by mid-morning, patrons were lined up outside the temporary location on Shelbourne Street, eager to pick up holds, browse the collection, and reconnect with library staff. The response underscored the importance of local access to library services and community connection.

In June 2026, the District of Saanich announced the start of construction on the new library.

This \$158.8 million partnership between the District of Saanich, BC Housing, and the Capital Region Housing Corporation will deliver a new 29,000-square-foot library, approximately double the size of the former branch, alongside 210 units of affordable rental housing. Completion is anticipated in 2030. GVPL staff continue to contribute operational expertise and service requirements to inform the design of the future branch.

Beyond this major project, long-term planning advanced in 2025 with the approval of GVPL’s Strategic Plan 2025–2027. The framework establishes five organizational priorities: investing in people and culture, advancing Reconciliation and inclusion, strengthening partnerships, expanding digital access, and demonstrating impact. This roadmap will guide



decision-making and service development over the next three years, ensuring GVPL remains responsive to the evolving needs of our community.

Work also continued on the development of a new website. Development is guided by public input, including a patron survey in April, navigation testing in July, and design testing in November. The new website is scheduled to launch in September 2026 and will improve accessibility and usability, strengthening how community members engage with GVPL online.

Targeted investments across the system also improved the in-person library experience in 2025. New shelving installed at the Saanich Centennial Branch enhanced accessibility and created additional usable floor space, contributing to a more open and welcoming environment. Additionally, children’s areas were refreshed at multiple locations, supported by \$100,000 in provincial funding from the Government of British Columbia and nearly \$25,000 in support from the Friends of the Greater Victoria Public Library, allocated before the group’s dissolution in December 2023.



2025 Board Chair Shahira Khair, Saanich Mayor Dean Murdock, CEO Maureen Sawa, and Vice Chair Councillor Duncan Cavens mark the opening of the Nellie McClung Express Branch.



Digital Services, Collections, and Technology

In 2025, GVPL strengthened its digital services and collections to improve accessibility and support new ways of learning. These efforts reflect an ongoing commitment to meeting community needs while adapting to changing formats, technologies, and patterns of use.

The return of the Interlibrary Loan service in early March restored access to materials from libraries across the province. With the service paused since June 2024, patron access to specialized and hard-to-find resources had been limited. Within weeks of its return, GVPL patrons submitted more than 575 requests, and the library fulfilled more than 270 requests for other systems.

In May, a secure video-based identity verification process was introduced for individuals unable to visit a branch. The service enables staff to confirm identity remotely and issue library cards without requiring an in-person visit.



In September, The Lab: Preserve Your Past opened at the Esquimalt Branch, introducing a new self-serve digitization resource at GVPL. The Lab provides free access to equipment for converting photographs, slides, VHS tapes, and



audio recordings into digital formats. By removing financial and technical barriers, the service enables community members to preserve and reconnect with personal and family histories.

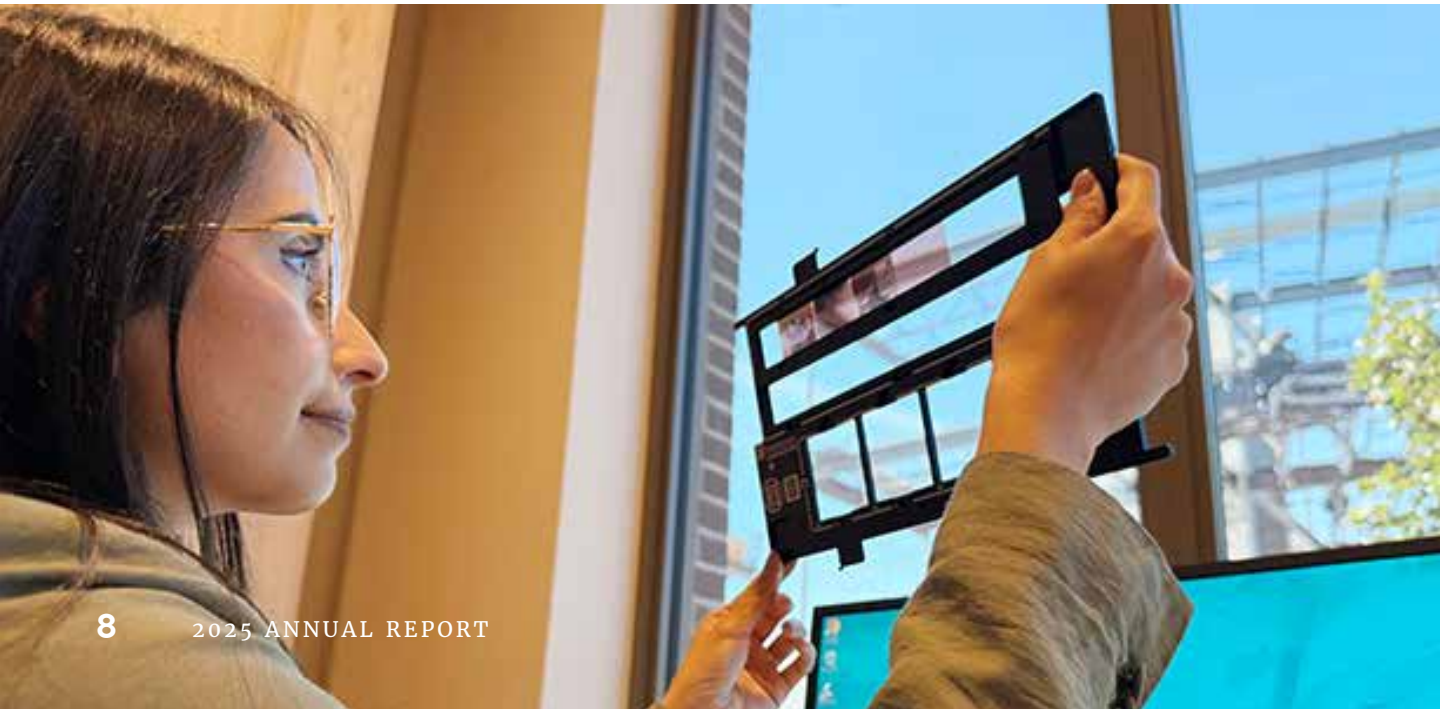
During 2025, the library’s collections continued to evolve in response to changing community needs and reading patterns. Yoto players and read-along books were introduced to the children’s collection in October, placing GVPL among a small number

of public libraries offering Yoto’s screen-free audio format. Demand was immediate and strong: within 24 hours of launch, all Yoto-to-Go kits were checked out or had holds placed on them, and 568 holds were placed on Yoto cards. Read-along books, available in English and French, further support early literacy by strengthening reading fluency and comprehension.

We also expanded our world languages collection. In December, Ukrainian-language materials for adults and children were introduced at the Central Branch. Informed by patron feedback, collaboration with community partners, and 2021 Census data, this addition reflects an ongoing commitment to developing inclusive collections that serve diverse communities. A joint public announcement with the Ukrainian Cultural Centre marked the official launch of the collection.



Investment in digital collections also shifted in 2025, with audiobooks transitioning from Hoopla to OverDrive as part of a broader effort to manage costs and ensure sustainable access. This adjustment reflects ongoing attention to value within GVPL’s digital services portfolio. Over the past three years, GVPL has been among the library systems worldwide that exceeded one million digital checkouts annually through OverDrive, reflecting sustained and growing community engagement with digital lending.



Supporting Equity, Access, and Community Connection

Creating a welcoming library means ensuring people see themselves reflected in collections, programs, services, and partnerships. In 2025, the library recognized Asian Heritage Month, Islamic History Month, Canadian Jewish Heritage Month, National Indigenous History Month, Pride Month, World Refugee Day, and Canadian Multiculturalism Day through curated reading lists, displays, and community profiles. The Indigenous Stories Book Club, delivered in partnership with the University of Victoria and led by Carmen Rodriguez de France, continued to provide space for dialogue on Indigenous literature and perspectives. The program has been offered at GVPL since 2017.



The Indigenous Stories Book Club, led by Carmen Rodriguez de France, explores Indigenous history, culture, and perspectives through the works of Indigenous writers.

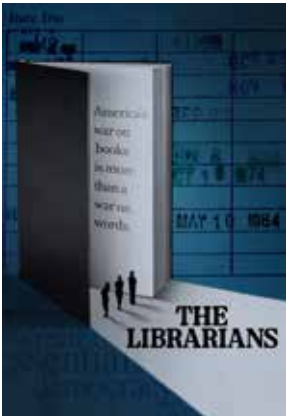
Author Monique Gray Smith visits The Literacy Circle, where she shared her journey to becoming a writer with learner Rose Henry and other participants.



Monthly ID clinics, delivered in partnership with the Community Social Planning Council, helped community members obtain and maintain essential identification documents. Trans ID clinics, delivered by the Pro Bono Students Canada (UVic Chapter), assisted 64 individuals with legal name and gender marker changes during the year.

The Literacy Circle, delivered in partnership with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, provided a welcoming space for Indigenous residential school survivors, multigenerational survivors, Elders, and adults building literacy skills. Staff also connected with newcomer families through programming and outreach with the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society and participated in South Park Elementary School’s Family Literacy Night.

The library also partnered with the BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner to promote the Commissioner’s monthly book club and support engagement with human rights themes.



In November, GVPL participated in a screening of the documentary The Librarians at the University of Victoria’s Cinecenta. The film follows librarians in the United States as they respond to book-banning efforts. Its message aligns

closely with GVPL’s ongoing work to champion access to information and support diverse voices. A GVPL librarian joined the panel discussion following the screening, responding to audience questions about the role libraries play in a healthy democracy.



GVPL’s menstrual equity initiative continued in its third year, providing free period products in all public and staff washrooms across the system.



Courtney Lundrigan (UVic Libraries), GVPL librarian Caitlin, and UVic Associate University Librarian and 2025 Board Chair Shahira Khair (left to right) took part in a panel discussion following the Vancouver Island premiere of The Librarians. Photo: Matthew Huculak, Kula.

Strengthening Connections and Celebrating Community

Libraries are strongest when they reflect the communities they serve. In 2025, GVPL marked milestones, strengthened partnerships, and engaged the community in ways that extended beyond branch spaces.

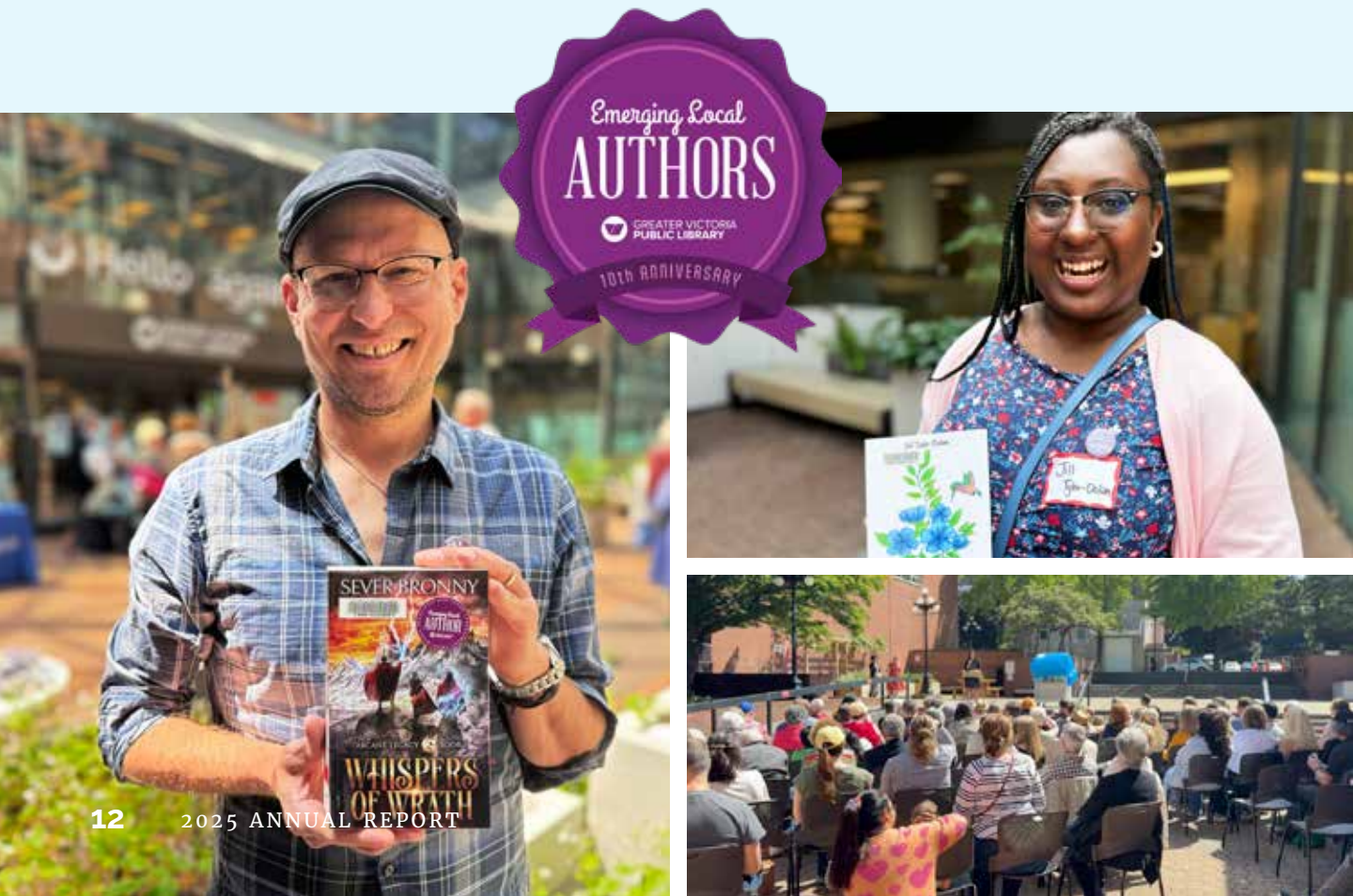
The 10th anniversary of the Emerging Local Authors Collection marked a decade of support for local writing. More than 100 authors and illustrators from the 2025 collection gathered at the Central Branch Courtyard on May 24, along with contributors from previous years. Since 2015, the initiative has featured more than 1,600 titles and over 1,200 local voices, many of them self-published. Sever Bronny, a contributor to all

10 collections, delivered a keynote reflecting on the evolution of emerging writers over the past decade.

Summer programming demonstrated strong engagement across age groups. The 2025 BC Summer Reading Club, themed Colour Your Summer, reached more than 9,880 children, including 1,166 who visited our branches to collect their Reading Records on opening day. StoryWalks and outreach activities extended participation beyond branches, while Read and Write Reviews (RAWR) for teens and the Summer Challenge for adults supported reading and learning.



Librarian Fatima delivers storytime from inside a traditional tipi during National Indigenous Peoples Day celebrations at Royal Roads University.



GVPL contributed to a wide range of civic and cultural initiatives, including National Indigenous Peoples Day at Royal Roads University and Ocean Week at Tillicum Centre in partnership with Ocean Networks Canada and Seaquaria. At the University of Victoria, GVPL engaged approximately 5,000 students at ThunderFest and provided materials in 3,000 student welcome packages.

The Hiroshima–Nagasaki Poster Exhibition at the Central Branch marked the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings and drew more than 75 attendees to the opening event, with participation from civic and academic speakers. The Central Branch also served as a filming location for a music video by Canadian artist bbno\$, highlighting the library as both a community gathering place and a space for creative expression.



Ken Mizokoshi and Dr. Midori Ogasawara, University of Victoria and Victoria Peace Project, prepare the Hiroshima–Nagasaki Poster Exhibition at GVPL's Central Branch.

Building a Safer, Stronger Workplace

Public libraries continue to navigate increasingly complex social dynamics, requiring thoughtful approaches to safety, inclusion, and public access. In 2025, GVPL advanced system-wide investments in safety infrastructure, staff capacity, and operational policy to improve conditions for both staff and the public. This work was supported by strengthened coordination with local policing agencies and system-wide safety planning and training across branches.

At the Central Branch, an automated external defibrillator (AED) was installed, the first such device in the GVPL system, with assessments underway to determine suitability for additional locations. HALO smart sensors were also installed in all public washrooms across the system. These camera-free devices detect vaping, smoking, chemical fumes, abnormal sound levels, and other safety indicators, enabling timely staff response while maintaining patron privacy.

Emergency evacuation training was delivered system-wide, with more than 120 employees completing hands-on, scenario-based sessions aligned with WorkSafeBC requirements. Policy 1.8: Responsibilities of Library Users was fully implemented in 2025, supported by updated interpretation guides and system-wide training focused on consistent application and de-escalation practices.

Staff development continued through the GVPL Learning Hub, supporting onboarding and ongoing professional development across the organization. Workplace civility training reached leaders across the system, reinforcing shared



expectations for respectful workplaces. Progress continued on GVPL's first Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Strategy through staff engagement, surveys, and consultation with external advisors.

GVPL also reintroduced its annual Staff Day in December, bringing employees together for a day of learning, reflection, and connection. The program focused on inclusion, intellectual freedom, and the evolving role of libraries, reinforcing organizational priorities and shared values. The event created space for staff to engage in dialogue, strengthen professional practice, and build connections across branches and departments.

Voices From Our Community

Each year, we hear from the people who make GVPL possible. Their feedback reflects the value of public libraries in everyday life.

We are grateful for the support, encouragement, and engagement we receive across Greater Victoria. Thank you for your continued belief in the role of public libraries to inform, connect, and inspire.

To everyone who shared feedback, contributed resources, or partnered with us in 2025: thank you. Here's a selection of the feedback we received during the year.

"I admire the work of public libraries as a longstanding example of successful sharing of a commonly held pool of resources, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to support your work."-Lyle G.

"My wife and I want the staff at Juan de Fuca to know how wonderful they are. I'm not very good at computers, and I often need to make copies of things. Your staff are some of the nicest people. Any one of them that I approach is always so kind and helpful when I need to make a copy of something. I really hope you can please let them know how much we appreciate them."-Eric P.

"So thankful for the public libraries in my community."-K.R.

"Thank you for ensuring I always have the latest books, magazines, and newspapers to read. Both in print and electronically."-Karen M.

"I love this library." -Adam P.

"The library system here is great! Super friendly staff and options for getting a temporary library card until you can establish residency. I would have given 6 stars if that was an option!"-Daniel D.

"The library has a welcoming atmosphere, helpful staff, and quite a few gems. Staff picks are well worth looking at. It's a great place to educate yourself. Thank you, GVPL Staff!"-Christine O.

"Convenient location, wonderful customer service, wide range of collections, helpful staff, and calm environment."-Elizabeth T.



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