



A Place Where Everyone Belongs 2025 Annual Report

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A Place Where Everyone Belongs

There are many ways to measure a library's impact. We can count visits, track attendance, and report circulation. But the true measure of Innisfil ideaLAB & Library is found in moments that matter.

It's in a preschooler confidently singing along at storytime for the first time.
It's in a newcomer who says, "This is where I feel hopeful."
It's in teens gathering in a space that feels safe and welcoming.
It's in a senior mastering new technology with patience and support.

In 2025, the Library continued to grow as a place where people feel seen, supported, and inspired. Across branches, parks, schools, and neighbourhoods, we worked to ensure that access, belonging, and opportunity were not privileges, but shared community experiences.

Our work this year continued to be guided by five strategic pillars:

Speak Up for Diversity & Inclusion

We deepened our commitment to equity by amplifying diverse voices, fostering dialogue, and creating spaces where everyone feels welcomed and respected.

Open Up Opportunities to Strengthen Connections & Engage with Our Community

We expanded our reach beyond Library walls, meeting residents where they gather and strengthening partnerships across Innisfil.

Build Up Our Reputation as a Trusted Community Asset

We reinforced the Library's role as essential civic infrastructure, providing reliable services and responding to evolving community needs.

Raise Up the Library's Identity as an Innovative Hub

We embraced creative technologies and new service models to improve access and inspire exploration.

Light Up Pathways to Personal & Professional Growth

We supported learning at every stage of life, helping residents build skills, confidence, and connection.

The following stories highlight how our priorities have taken shape in a meaningful way. They demonstrate how the Library is not just a building, but a valuable community asset.

Rooted in Respect

Truth and Reconciliation in Action

This year, we planted a Remembering Garden at the Lakeshore Branch. This Indigenous medicine garden is a living space for learning, reflection, and connection. Rooted in Indigenous knowledge and developed in partnership with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, the garden offered a place for learning, conversation and shared teachings.

Four plants – tobacco, cedar, sage, and sweetgrass, along with native pollinator plants, were chosen for the garden for their significance across many Indigenous Nations. Recognizing that Indigenous Nations and cultures are diverse, with distinct languages, traditions, and teachings, the garden reflects shared elements, such as the Four Sacred Medicines.

The garden was made possible with support from the TD Friends of the Environment Fund. Founding garden partner, Tanya Gluvakov of Roots and Raven, led a respectful harvesting session in the fall. Tobacco seed pods were harvested for future plantings, and sweet grass bundles were donated to the Barrie Native Friendship Centre and other community members in need of traditional plants.

Through the series, Walking Together, Kelly Lavallee explored the traditional Indigenous teachings of the Four Directions – East, South, West, and North. Kelly is an Anishinaabe-Métis Knowledge Keeper from the Deer Clan, and founder of Memengwaa Healing and Sitting Turtle Healing and Consulting. Each session invited participants to explore Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices through storytelling, hands-on learning, and guided reflection.

Truth and reconciliation are ongoing commitments. In 2025, the Library continued to honour that responsibility by creating opportunities for education, dialogue, and meaningful connection.



Uplifting Voices and Celebrating Identity

We created opportunities in our programs and partnerships where residents could see themselves reflected and learn from one another.

Pride programming, including a Pride Book Chat, Drag Storytime, and a special appearance from Drag Personas at Teen Nights, welcomed community members of all ages into conversations about the importance of inclusivity and acceptance. For allies and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, seeing themselves represented in programs helps them find a safe and affirming space.

Radiant Roots, delivered by Making Change Simcoe County, brought community members together in a joyful celebration of Black Culture during Black History Month. The event highlighted some of our local Black authors, artists, and vendors, and featured a Pan-African fashion show where vendors and members of Making Change showcased their talents on the main stage.

Last fall, UPLift Black offered weekly drop-in services at the Lakeshore Branch, providing mentorship, business coaching, wellness activities, and MediaLAB training. Following the loss of their space in Barrie, this partnership offered continuity and visibility while aligning with the Library's commitment to inclusive, community-led programming.



Literacy-based programs such as Book Clubs, Book Chats, and Storytimes also sparked meaningful conversations about identity and equity. For example, a *Black History Month Book Club* facilitated by Roxann Whittingham explored Desmond Cole's *The Skin We're In*, creating space for thoughtful discussion about racism in Ontario. Participants described the Library as a comfortable place for open exchange with engaging and thoughtful conversation.



Beyond programs and events, the Library's displays and collections reflect the diversity of the community it serves. When people see their identities, histories, and experiences represented in public spaces, it strengthens belonging and shows them that their stories matter.



Supporting Newcomers and Building Belonging

As Innisfil continues to grow and diversify, the Library remains a trusted and accessible first stop for newcomers. Through programs and partnerships, the Library helps reduce isolation, increase confidence, and foster belonging.

Language Learning as Lifeline

English as a Second Language (ESL) classes provided structured, small-group instruction. ESL classes move at a pace designed for individuals who are just beginning to build vocabulary and sentence structure. Participants developed practical language skills to help them navigate their everyday life.

The French Conversation Circle strengthened the community's bilingual identity. This program provided French dialogue practice for adults so they could better engage with their children's schools, and improve their conversation skills.

Demand for language learning and newcomer supports continues to rise. While the Library remains committed to this work, capacity constraints have limited the consistency of some services. These programs are not supplementary, they are foundational to helping new residents integrate, participate, and thrive.

Access to Resources and Community Connections

The Library expanded its juvenile multilingual collections, adding both Ukrainian and Russian materials. This addition is a reflection of growing community needs. Currently, the Library offers children's materials in French and Spanish along with multilingual digital resources such as PressReader, Cantook, and Lote4Kids. Research shows that building strong literacy skills in a child's first language creates a foundation for learning additional languages. By fostering a love of reading from an early age, especially in a language that feels familiar, we help set children up for lifelong learning and success.

During Simcoe County's Week of Welcome, the Lakeshore Branch hosted community partners from the Town of Innisfil, Simcoe County, CFS Spark'd program, and the Innisfil Indian Association. The event connected newcomers with local supports and services at the Library.

I come every week because this is where I feel seen, supported, and hopeful for my future in Canada. If the library didn't offer it, I would have nowhere to go.



Out in the Community in New Ways

In 2025, *ideaLAB on the Go* expanded the Library beyond our walls.

This summer, the *ideaLAB on the Go* van hit the road, bringing books, technology, creativity, and connection directly into neighbourhoods. From large events like the Innisfil Farmer's Market and the EarlyOn Picnic, to the Citizen Police Academy at Sandycove Acres and Lefroy Family Fun Day, to local parks and beaches, residents explored Yoto Players, Ozobots, and browsed curated collections. They learned about programs, upcoming events, and also signed up for library cards. Families discovered new ways to engage with the Library, some for the first time. *ideaLAB on the Go* visited 16 different locations on a regular schedule throughout the summer months.

ideaLAB on the Go reinforces a simple but powerful idea: the Library goes where the community gathers.



Your library is the most community focused I've ever seen. There's always something going on, I've seen the music circle, so many kids programs, computer classes, and so much more. It's amazing!



Introducing the Sandycape Holds Locker

The Library extended services to Sandycape Acres with the installation of a new Library Holds Locker. The Locker allows residents to conveniently pick up and return materials closer to home, removing barriers related to transportation while adapting to community needs. The secure Locker opens with a library card or the mobile app and features a Browse & Borrow collection. The Library Holds Locker is a pilot project that will be evaluated to assess its impact and potential for expansion. Through this service, the Library has built a new partnership and has strengthened our connection with the Sandycape Acres community.

After using the Sandycape Holds Locker and attending workshops we organized to support health literacy for seniors, a resident told staff that "the Library seems to be involved in a lot of things lately, and it is so good."



Holds Locker at a glance:

Holds Fulfilled: **135**

Browse & Borrow Items
Checked Out: **47**

Items Returned
at Locker: **173**



All residents should be using this. It's so easy and convenient. Thank you library for allowing this service in Sandycape.

From Homelessness and Grief to Stability and Hope

When Alina, a newcomer and single mother of two, first walked into the library, she was overwhelmed by grief after losing her spouse and was on the verge of homelessness. With no extended family in Canada and limited income, she did not know where to turn.

Library staff immediately connected Alina to the S.H.I.F.T Outreach Program, which helped prevent her family from becoming homeless. At the same time, CONTACT Affordable Housing supported her in securing safe, long-term housing close to her childrens' school.

Through the library, Alina connected with Hospice Simcoe for grief and bereavement support, helping her process her loss and rebuild emotional resilience. Financial stability followed with support from Ontario Works, which provided temporary financial assistance while she got back on her feet.

As a newcomer, Alina also accessed YMCA Immigrant and Settlement Services, which helped her navigate the education system, healthcare, and community resources. She attended the ESL Classes at the library, dramatically improving her confidence and ability to communicate.

Today, Alina is housed, emotionally supported, financially stable, and actively planning her future. She described the library as "the place that saved my family when everything was falling apart."



The Library is the place that saved my family when everything was falling apart.



Supporting Wellbeing: Social Services at the Library

For many residents, the Library is the first point of contact when life feels uncertain. We have continued to strengthen our role as a key access point for social service supports. By providing services within a trusted community space, we help remove barriers and create an environment where people feel comfortable seeking help. Through partnerships with community agencies and the Human Services Navigator program, the Library connects individuals to meaningful support while fostering understanding, accessibility, and care.

Human Services Navigator Partnership

The Human Services Navigator, delivered in partnership with the County of Simcoe and CFS Counselling + Wellbeing, has continued to offer support to residents. The Navigator provided 458 client interactions, supporting 131 unique individuals, with 326 repeat visits. The high rate of repeat engagement reflects sustained, relationship-based support, and ongoing case management needs.

People came forward with concerns around financial instability, housing challenges, stress, employment, and family or relationship needs. Mental health concerns often connected to housing and financial pressures were also common.

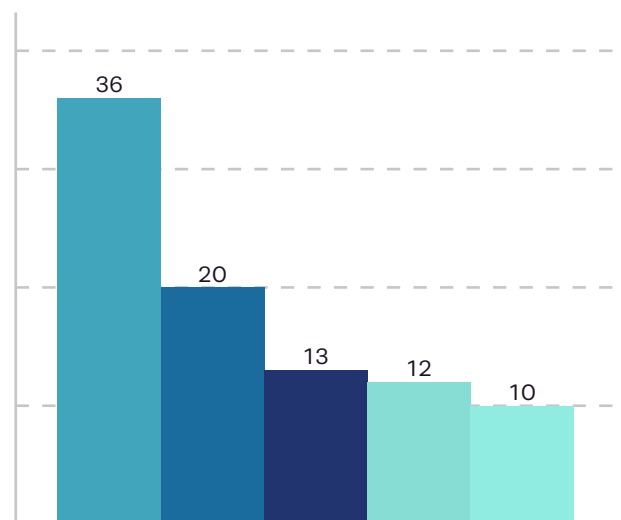
Most common concerns facing clients of the Navigator service

A Hub for Coordinated Support

Relationship-building between the Library, the Navigator, and social service agencies without a permanent presence in Innisfil continued to grow. This collaboration has reduced the need for residents to travel, ensuring they can access services close to home. Working closely with partner agencies, the Navigator provides a timely and coordinated approach to care. Stronger connections between the Navigator and service providers improve communication, support advocacy on behalf of clients, and strengthen community partnerships. The Library has become a hub for integrated social service delivery in Innisfil, helping to fill a long-standing gap in the community.

Library Social Service Partners:

- Agilec
- Alzheimer Society of Simcoe County
- CFS Newcomer Counselling & Services
- CFS YouthCALL
- CONTACT Community Services
- Georgian College, Newcomer Employment Services
- Hospice Simcoe
- John Howard Society
- My Sister's Place
- Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program caseworkers
- S.H.I.F.T Support and Hope for Individuals and Families Today
- YMCA settlement and newcomer services



- Financial Instability
- Housing Insecurity
- Stress
- Employment & Vocational Issues
- Family and Relationship Challenges

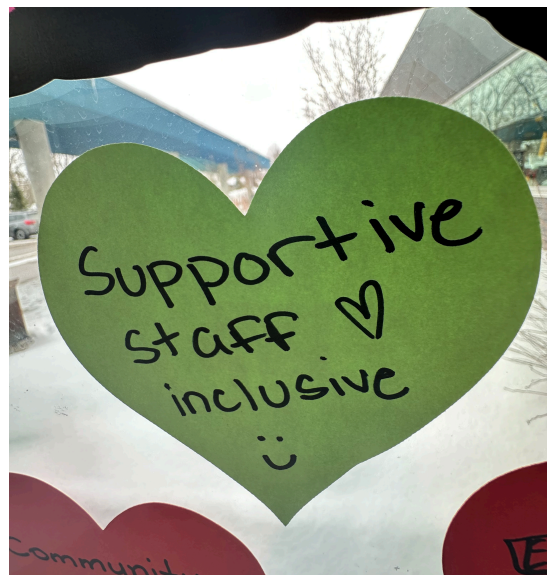
Rodger's Way Home

*"I had no hope. Now I have hope.
It's only been a year but I've
turned my life around."*

Rodger was a familiar face at the Library, spending a good part of his day at the Lakeshore Branch, reading the newspaper, using a computer and talking with staff. Rodger was also unhoused in Innisfil. Staff often provided assistance to Rodger where possible, connecting him first with S.H.I.F.T and then with CONTACT Community Services within the Library. Because of these connections, he became the first resident in a new transitional housing project in Collingwood, and thanks to the success of that placement, he has now moved into stable housing. In recognition of his journey, the project has been renamed "Rodger's Way Home."

"I found my way home, through them," said Rodger in an interview with Innisfil Today. "I had no hope. Now I have hope. It's only been a year but I've turned my life around."

This is a powerful example of how our relationships with our customers, with service partners, and with the County's Housing Navigator program, can change lives and strengthen our community.



A Space for Dialogue: Supporting Democracy

Through partnerships with the Town of Innisfil and the Electoral Engagement Advisory Committee, the Library offered programs that helped residents learn about local government, explore leadership opportunities ahead of the 2026 municipal elections, and take part in open conversations about inclusion and representation of diverse voices in leadership.

We offered new programs to support growing interest in civic learning. Interactive sessions like **Game Changers** connected past social movements to today's challenges, and partner-led programs like **Lessons from Allandale Station Park** shared lessons from community organizing. The family-focused **Love Lettering Project** invited residents to share what they love about their community, helping build civic pride from an early age. The Library also supported democratic participation by serving as a polling station during the federal election. Together, these efforts strengthen the Library as a trusted place for information, conversation, and participation.



Community Resilience: The Library in Times of Crisis

In late March, a severe ice storm impacted Innisfil and surrounding communities, resulting in prolonged power outages and significant disruption. During this period, the Library demonstrated its role as an essential community hub.

Once power was restored, the Stroud and Lakeshore Branches reopened as warming and charging centres. With schools closed and conditions unsafe, residents relied on the Library for heat, internet access, and a comfortable space. Staff offered informal activities for children while adults accessed connectivity and recharged devices.

The response reinforced the Library's importance during emergencies, and community feedback reflected strong appreciation for access to warmth, connection, and support.



*Thank you for
being open.
You have been
so kind.*

*I've been
without power
for days, I'm so
glad you
opened so we
can recharge
our phones*

*Finally! Some
warmth!*

*I'm so glad you
have WI-FI!*



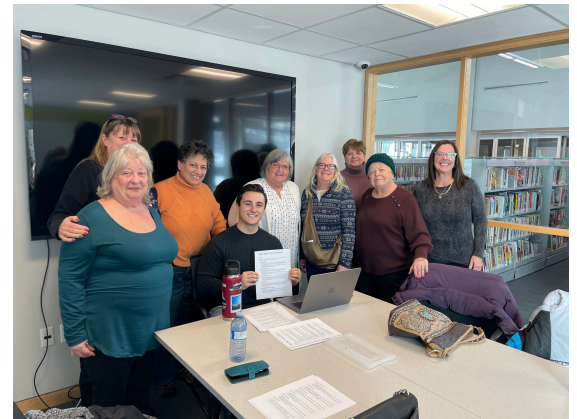
Hacking Confidence: Digital Literacy Through Makerspaces

The Library strengthens digital literacy skills across all ages through a hands-on, project-based makerspace model that builds technical skills and confidence. In 2025 over 5,300 people attended over 1,000 *Tinkershops*, *Computer Classes*, and *Tech Talks*.

Our digital literacy programs combine entry-level support with creative, skill-building experiences. *Tech Help*, *Tech Talks*, and *Computer Classes* teach basic digital literacy skills, *MakeIT* Programs and *Tinkershops* introduce participants to tools like laser cutters, vinyl cutters, sublimation printers, design software, and digital media production.

Rather than focusing only on digital troubleshooting, the makerspace model positions learners as creators. Participants design photo books, engrave keepsakes, create custom items, experiment with podcasting, and explore virtual reality. These projects build key digital literacy skills such as file management, digital design, and online safety, turning digital learning into practical, confidence-building outcomes.

By connecting skill-building with meaningful outcomes, the Library transforms digital learning from an abstract concept into a tangible, confidence-building experience.



In 2025, we introduced a new HackLAB space at the Stroud Branch. This dedicated area created expanded programming opportunities, including *Seniors MakeIT* and *Tech Help*, delivered in a more intimate environment that supports smaller groups and hands-on learning.



1110 Tinkershops & Computer Classes



5374 Program Attendees



The presentation of the program, and how the staff explains the step by step approach. The patience of the staff member who encourages us. Then the end product which makes the time worthwhile



Community Events and Shared Experiences

Throughout the year, the Library served as both host and partner in a wide range of community events, cultural celebrations, and creative initiatives.

By opening our doors to diverse voices, local artists, community organizations, and residents of all ages, the Library helps fill an important gap, providing accessible opportunities to support artistic culture and expression that strengthen the fabric of Innisfil. Throughout the year the Library was the venue for key community events:

- ComicFEST
- Fall Author Series
- Fresh Air Flicks
- Innisfil Arts, Culture and Heritage Council Art Show and Sale
- MakerFEST
- Making Change's Radiant Roots Black Cultural Expo
- Innisfil Seed Library's Seedy Saturday
- Rotary Club of Innisfil's Annual Simcoe County Gingerbread House Contest



Stories That Bring Us Together: Author Visits in 2025

One of the most powerful ways a library builds connection is by bringing stories to life through the people who create them. In 2025, we welcomed a remarkable group of Canadian authors whose voices sparked conversation, inspired young writers, and invited readers into deeper reflection.



Drew Hayden Taylor

Drew Hayden Taylor, reading from his soon-to-be-adapted thriller, *Cold*, offered commentary grounded in Indigenous storytelling, humour, and lived experience. His visit encouraged reflection on identity, reconciliation, and the power of narrative to challenge and connect. Drew's visit was so inspiring to one high school teacher in attendance that she purchased a classroom book set of *Motorcycles and Sweetgrass* for her students.



Lindsay Zier-Vogel and Teri Vlassopoulos

An inspiring evening featuring authors Lindsay Zier-Vogel and Teri Vlassopoulos. Lindsay shared insights into *Fun Times Brigade*, while Teri read from *Living Expenses*, both explored themes of motherhood, creativity, and the pressures of life. The authors discussed their writing journeys and inspirations, engaging the audience with thoughtful questions and lively conversation.



Heather Marshall

Heather Marshall shared historical insight and emotional depth, drawing readers into conversations about resilience, memory, and untold stories. Heather's books have been book club favourites, and our readers enjoyed hearing more about her research methods, character development, and insights into her stories. This virtual talk had in-library watch parties, creating a variety of ways for participants to access and engage with Heather.

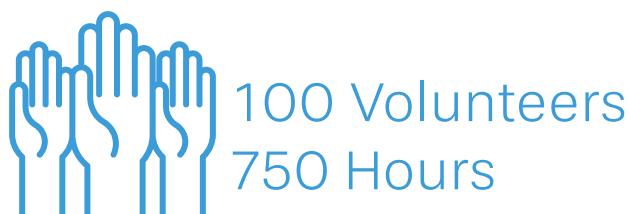


Terry Fallis

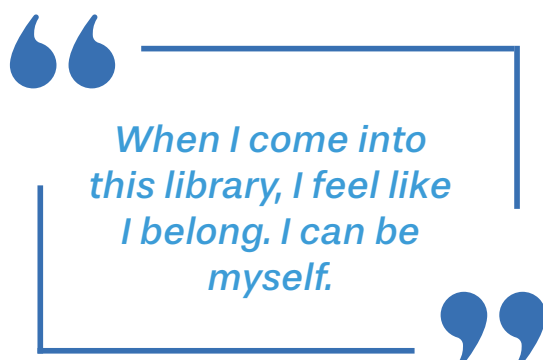
National best-seller Terry Fallis captivated audiences with an in-depth, behind the scenes look at the inspiration behind his latest book, *The Marionette*. The capacity crowd was made up of long-time readers and new visitors to the Library.

Youth Leadership and Volunteerism

We are building strong leaders at the Library. 100 teen volunteers spent over 750 hours supporting younger children during programs, helping with creative projects, and assisting at events. There were almost 400 volunteer opportunities for teens to help complete their 40 hours of volunteer work. Teen volunteers gained confidence, responsibility, and real-world experience.



The Building Safer Communities-funded *Teen Nights* continued to offer a safe environment for youth to connect socially and creatively. The program provided an important space just for teens with 2318 attendees at the Lakeshore Branch Teen Nights throughout the year.



Through Teen engagement we heard a common goal: employment. The Library hosted a *Youth Job Fair* that welcomed over 300 teens. Employers were able to connect directly with youth, collecting resumes, answering questions, and offering interviews. Leading up to the fair, our *Gotta Get a Job* program offered resume building and interview preparation. Participants reported securing interviews (and jobs!) after attending the fair.

With the unique ability to bring together young people with the opportunities and skills to build their own futures, teens increasingly see the Library as a place where they make a difference.



Volunteer Highlight: Reading Buddies

Over the course of the year, 198 teen volunteers supported 286 children aged 7 to 10 in Reading Buddies where teens work one-on-one with students to build reading skills.

Early Years and Early Literacy

Learning begins at birth, and in 2025, the Library continued to nurture the youngest members of our community through research-informed early literacy programming.

Storytimes, Baby Bookworms, preschool programs, and family literacy initiatives are developed on the principles of *Every Child Ready to Read*. These programs build foundational literacy skills. Songs, rhymes, repetition, movement, and shared reading support early brain development and language acquisition. Research from organizations such as the Canadian Paediatric Society and the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University consistently reinforces what libraries have long understood: regular shared reading and caregiver interaction are among the strongest predictors of early language development, school readiness, and long-term academic success.

Caregivers consistently shared that these programs offer more than education; they provide connection. Parents and grandparents build confidence in supporting learning at home, gain practical strategies for literacy development, and form relationships with other families. Over 13,000 participants attended a program with an early literacy focus this year.

In 2025, the Library expanded its drop-in storytime offerings to include additional evening programs. Unregistered early literacy programming continues to meet the needs of families seeking flexibility, and evening storytime has proven particularly valuable for working parents.

Evening programming has attracted a broader cross-section of families, including increased participation from culturally diverse households and greater attendance by fathers. Several parents noted that evening storytime is the only time compatible with their work schedules and family routines. These sessions have become fun, family outings where families spend quality time together while building early literacy skills.

The Library's children's spaces remain vibrant hubs of activity, where songs, stories, and play lay the groundwork for lifelong learning. Early literacy programming does more than prepare children for school. It builds confidence, strengthens caregiver-child relationships, and fosters a sense of belonging that supports healthy development.



Lifelong Literacy

While early literacy remains a critical component of library programming, the skills we build extend across all ages. We know that for some kids, reading can feel like a chore, but the right book can ignite curiosity and unlock the imagination.

Some children struggle to read independently, and Library staff will tell you that all reading is good reading. Our collection is diverse and offers many options for early and hesitant readers including Board Books, Picture Books, Graphic Novels, Decodables, Talking Books and Yoto Cards – where kids can enjoy listening to stories and talking about them afterwards.

The Library offers a diverse range of literacy-based programs for all ages.

149 kids participated in *Early Readers Book Club* helps young children discover picture book authors they love and build early literacy skills through interactive storytelling and activities designed for emergent readers.

“You always have such great programs, I'm very excited about all the variety for this summer”

The *Short Story Contest*, in its 24th year, received 124 entries from Innisfil students in grades three through twelve. The contest offers students an opportunity to further develop literacy skills and build confidence through creative writing. We toured eight elementary schools in Innisfil over three days with guest judge, Lindsay Zier-Vogel. Lindsay shared her passion for writing with over 2000 students.

275 people participated in *Book Clubs* and *Book Chats* for adults and teens. These programs encourage reading engagement, increase circulation, broaden our understanding of unique perspectives, and provide opportunities for discussions about books and authors.



TD Summer Reading Club
Participants **510**
Books Read: **6442**

The more students read in the summer, the less their literacy skills decline, and the better prepared they are to head back to class in September.

Looking Ahead

The stories shared throughout this report offer just a glimpse of how the Library continues to grow alongside the community it serves. Each program, partnership, and conversation helps strengthen a place where curiosity is encouraged, voices are valued, and people feel they belong.

In the year ahead, we look forward to building on that momentum. In 2026, we will welcome the return of beloved community events including the third edition of ComicFEST and the 12th annual MakerFEST. We are also excited to reopen the Children's Area following construction, creating an improved space designed to better serve our growing community and support early learning and discovery. Digitally, we are updating and expanding the infrastructure for the online historical archive, Our Stories Innisfil.

We will continue to expand programs and deepen partnerships with social service organizations, creating more opportunities for residents to access learning, resources, and community support. We will also continue investing in staff training and professional development to ensure our team is equipped to meet the evolving needs of the community.

As we head into an election year, the Library will continue its longstanding role in supporting the democratic process by providing access to reliable information, civic resources, and welcoming spaces for community engagement.

At Innisfil ideaLAB & Library, we remain committed to evolving with our community, strengthening partnerships, and creating opportunities for learning, belonging, and connection for everyone who calls Innisfil home.



LIBRARY AT A GLANCE

2,977

**Programs for
all Ages**



46,644

**Program
Attendees**

Visits to Library 171,148

Customer Questions Answered 59,847

New Library Members 2,880

Physical Items Borrowed 187,026

Digital Items Borrowed 105,873

Holds Fulfilled 19,627