Pioneer Library System

FY 25/26 Annual Impact Report

Library Influencers: The Faces Behind the Data



From the Executive Director

Traditionally, libraries are well-known for data and information gathering, organization, and retrieval, but it's the people who breathe life into these numbers. This year, Pioneer Library System's numbers tell a strong story; but it's the data and stories that work together to show the full impact of the library.

When we talk about influencing progress in Oklahoma, it's easy to think about big projects: renovations, legislation, technology, or community-wide programs. But progress can also begin with something much smaller: A person walking through our doors. A child discovering that they love to read. Someone finding a resource they didn't know existed. A parent finding support. A person realizing, maybe for the first time, "There's a place in my community where I belong."

This year's impact report reflects those stories behind the data.

Each of these featured PLS customers is an influencer in the truest sense. Their library experiences changed lives, and they were touched so deeply that they agreed to share their stories with you. They carry the library's impact with them, creating influence with their families, neighbors, and communities. Every child who starts kindergarten ready to learn, every small business that grows, and every neighbor who feels less alone moves our state forward. We are proud to play a part in that progress.

Thank you to our staff, who make these moments possible, and to our Board of Trustees, partners, community, and you, dear customer, for believing in the power of your library. I hope these stories inspire you as they inspire us.

Lisa Wells

Lisa Wells,
Executive Director



From the Board of Trustees Chair

As I reflect on Pioneer Library System's influence on Oklahoma this year, I think of Leland Melvin, the featured author of PLS's Spark a Change community-wide reading initiative, who toured all three counties to deliver his keynote. The former astronaut and NFL player spoke with more than 400 people from all walks of life about pivoting careers and achieving their dreams. He influenced so many individuals, and when he finished his library tour, he shared on his social media account that "Pioneer Library System should be the model for the country. Thanks for inviting me to be a part of your vibrant library community."

Leland's visit reminded us that progress begins with people who believe in learning and curiosity, and the library gives them a place to start. You will meet some of those people in the pages that follow. They are customers who became friends, creators, leaders, job seekers, and neighbors, and they are the faces behind the library's data.

As Trustees, we not only get to hear about the library's numbers and statistics, but also customer stories that show what those numbers truly mean. When a toddler learns to love Story Time, when a small business owner finds tools she could not afford on her own, and when someone leaving prison finds a community waiting for him, the public library is working as it should. In a state that faces real challenges in literacy, health, and opportunity, PLS is helping lead the way toward a stronger Oklahoma.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to the PLS staff for their care and creativity, and to the communities we serve for trusting us with your stories. We invite you to experience what Leland did, become part of our library community, and share your library story with us.

Deborah Humphrey

Deborah Humphrey,
PLS Board of Trustees Chair

"I was excited to participate in the Pioneer Library System Spark a Change Program and saw the incredible impact watching kids build, create, and be inspired by the excitement of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM). These future explorers used the hands-on experiential activities to bring STEAM to life every day, a powerful prelude to amazing possibilities."
- Leland Melvin

Watch Rebecca's Story



"The combination of listening to stories, dancing to music, singing, and playing instruments followed by bubbles and free play is the perfect combination for toddlers. I love learning tips on different ways to help my son read and develop language. The Growing Like a Read spiral-bound book is invaluable!"
- Rebecca

"Bubbles!": Growing Family & Community

When Rebecca and her family moved to Oklahoma earlier this year, she was looking for a community and resources to help her toddler learn and grow. At the library, she found both.

Rebecca, her husband, and their 20-month-old were used to attending Story Times at their previous library and wanted to continue this routine in their new hometown of Norman. She looked up the closest library to her and discovered Pioneer Library System.

"I was blown away with all of the programs offered across all age groups," said Rebecca. "I thought we would try a few of the programs at Norman and Moore libraries to find where we would attend weekly. We loved them all!"

Rebecca and her family quickly became routine library visitors. "We attend either Family Story Time or Rhythm Babies each day during the week. I am so impressed with the care, investment, and hard work each librarian has dedicated to these programs."

Across PLS, library programs are designed for families to prepare their children for success in school, from Story Times and Rhythm Babies to Kick-Start Kindergarten and Early Explorers. Our programs provide time for connection and advancing early childhood development skills that are critical to each child's success. At a time when only 27% of Oklahoma third graders read at or above grade level, the library's research-based programs teach critical skills and build a foundation for strong readers to make an impact statewide.

Beyond events, PLS's globally recognized Growing Like a Read early literacy service provides the tools needed to enhance childhood development at home. The service develops six pre-reading skills in children from birth to age five that are critical to success in kindergarten and beyond: phonological awareness, letter knowledge, narrative skills, vocabulary, print awareness, and print motivation. This year, thanks to a grant from the Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness, PLS distributed an additional 8,200 early literacy kits to families visiting

libraries, community events, and childcare centers in PLS's service area. This service, coupled with reading to children 20 minutes per day, plus library events provide a blueprint for kindergarten readiness.

An avid user of the library's early literacy services, Rebecca also connected with other families from Rhythm Babies and Story Time, sharing tips and tricks for their babies. "I've made wonderful friends already, and it's just a really safe, welcoming, warm community that we've found," Rebecca said.

Community can be found at any PLS branch, and families can take early literacy resources with them on-the-go with PLS's YouTube channel. A Growing Like a Read playlist in both English and Spanish enables family engagement anytime, anywhere, and the library's newest web series, Tiny Tips for Growing Readers, provides easy and accessible literacy tips.

"In four short weeks, I've seen huge growth in my son's social and language development," Rebecca said. "He is more comfortable around other kids. We'll sing songs at home we learned from the PLS programs that day, he'll do hand motions, and his vocabulary has grown."

"Every morning I ask him, 'Do you want to go to Story Time today?' He gets a huge smile on his face and his response is 'Bubbles!'"

Families like Rebecca's that attend early literacy programs at PLS are gaining skills in physical development, school readiness, caregiver engagement, math and science, language and literacy development and more – all while having fun. These small moments of learning add up to a statewide impact.

"We love how they were hands-on, educational, engaging, and tailored for all ages - toddlers and adults," Rebecca said. "We love it. Thank you for helping my son grow and develop, and for all of the amazing programs PLS offers both children and adults! I am so grateful and appreciative for the investment you have made in our community."

2,397
Early Literacy Programs

82,100
Early Literacy Program Attendance

SUMMER LEARNING CHALLENGE

20,012,702
Minutes Logged

54%
Personal Goal Completion



In Memoriam
Dolly Parton
1946 - 2026

In 2022, PLS became the first library system in Oklahoma to partner with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. Today, PLS honors Dolly Parton's incredible legacy and dedication to early literacy by continuing to offer this incredible program that builds at-home libraries and reading skills for children.

14,624
Children Served in Partnership with DPIL

500,000
DPIL Books Delivered by the End of 2026

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library Oklahoma

Pioneer Library System

Preserving Tradition with a Modern Twist

A great idea shouldn't be limited by access to the tools needed to bring it to life. Through Pioneer Library System's Maker Labs, entrepreneurs, artists, and creators access technology and expertise that might otherwise be out of reach.

For Jennifer, a member of Caddo Nation of Oklahoma and a traditional beadwork artist, the library's resources helped transform her cultural designs into award-winning creations, expand her small business, and share her heritage in new ways.

Jennifer is an Indian Arts and Crafts Board Approved Native Artisan and the owner of Oklahoma Thirty-Nine, a small business that sells tribal designs, earrings, and beadwork. Her products marry the traditional arts with a modern twist. "My products promote my heritage and culture, and a lot of people aren't connected to their culture," said Jennifer. "I take cultural designs and put a modern twist on them to help connect with the people of today; I try to give them something to connect them back to their culture. It perpetuates our culture and shows people that we're still here."

Jennifer has been working out of her home studio for approximately 10 years and discovered her library's Maker Lab after looking into purchasing a laser engraver. "It wasn't feasible for my small business," Jennifer said. "When I saw that the library potentially had a laser that I could use, I thought, you know, let me go up there and see what they have and see if I can make it work for my business."

With the help of library staff and equipment, Jennifer went from a beginner on the laser engraver to an award-winning designer: One of her pieces created at the library, an acrylic necklace engraved with a traditional Caddo shell design, won second place at the Red Earth Festival. Her winning piece featured

Watch Jennifer's Story



"I recommend other businesses give the library a try. There are people there that can help, and they shouldn't be intimidated."
- Jennifer

an old southeastern Native design that is hundreds of years old. Recreated with digital software and laser cut into an acrylic piece at the Moore Public Library's Maker Lab, her design took something old and made it modern.

Now, she is a routine Maker Lab user. "That was a hard transition, but with the assistance of staff there, I have actually learned how to use it better. Now I rarely need assistance." There are times where Jennifer does need some from library staff for more detailed work, but library staff are always available to help her build on skills she has already mastered. "I learned beadwork from my grandparents and my family members," Jennifer said. "Growing up, they lived in rural Caddo County. They would sit around the table, do beadwork, have large looms where they would create large projects like belts, medallions, and regalia. I grew up watching that as a kid and it inspired me to do what I do." With the use of the library's Maker Lab, Jennifer has taken those foundational traditional skills and expanded to add a new income stream to her business.

The concept of balancing tradition with innovation is one that PLS embraces. PLS's pioneering spirit builds upon traditional workforce development efforts by equipping customers with the skills and knowledge needed to not only become gainfully employed, but to also advance and thrive in modern society. Maker Labs help address the critical need to align the talent pipeline with the growing and diversifying economy of Oklahoma by supporting the continuing skills development of all ages across the library's service area.

Maker Labs enable business owners to find upward mobility and for young teens to spark curiosity through STEAM, but they can also be used for fun. "My daughter [recently] got married, and I was able to make a lot of her party favors and personalized decorations to put on the tables at the reception," said Jennifer. "It's very convenient to have a resource like the library where you can run over and use the Maker Labs there."

"I have a lot of friends that have seen my new products that I'm coming out with. They're interested and ask how are you doing this, who is doing this for you? I say, I'm doing it myself, with the library! And I've sent them over to different libraries, they're able to find someone, give them their vision, and they're able to help them fulfill that vision."

Jennifer's story illustrates what becomes possible when creativity meets access to the right tools and resources. By reducing barriers to technology and providing expert guidance, PLS enables people to turn their creativity into tangible products, new income opportunities, and growing businesses – strengthening the local economy while connecting more people with the resources they need to succeed.

1,083
STEAM Programs

21,041
STEAM Program Attendance



Jennifer's award-winning Caddo shell design was laser engraved with the help of Moore Public Library's Maker Lab.

From Reader to Leader

Brixton was only in sixth grade when he decided to tackle a new challenge of reading every title on the Sequoyah book list.

Once he set his mind to it, he accomplished his goal of finishing the 15-book master list months ahead of schedule. When PLS learned of this achievement, library staff worked to recognize his dedication and perseverance. At a special gathering with his peers, librarians, school administrators, and even his local state representative, Brixton was presented with a Proclamation by the State of Oklahoma and celebrated for his achievement. "It doesn't matter how long a book is, or how long something is going to take," Brixton said at the time. "It's worth it."

In Oklahoma, almost three quarters of third-graders read below grade level. To set students like Brixton up for success, literacy begins from birth. Developing literacy skills in the first five years of a child's life provides a strong foundation for success, but it doesn't end there. For Brixton, an elementary school teacher's class library got him started in on the Magic Treehouse series, and his mom encouraged him to continue that series. "They are starting to understand it is not 'just reading!,'" Brixton's mom, Brinlee, said.

It was because of PLS's connection to the people they serve that staff learned of Brixton's reading challenge success. Librarians are deeply embedded in each of their communities and provide year-round outreach to schools, day care facilities, senior centers, fairs, and more. Staff attend hundreds of outreach events each year, connecting with people they would not be able to reach within the library walls.

While Oklahoma faces literacy challenges, there is also a clear love of reading embedded in PLS's communities.

Last year alone, PLS customers circulated nearly 2 million titles, and one of the main reasons customers visit the library is for reading for pleasure and entertainment, and library staff are happy to help customers find their next book.



Watch Brixton's Story

"My heart always goes back to reading. I love reading before bed, before school, reading in school - I used to get in trouble for reading too much at school! But every time I face a challenge, I can go back and read and go into my own world within a book and be at home."
- Brixton

"PLS librarians have helped a bunch with recommendations," Brixton said. Now a junior in high school, he remains a voracious reader. "In junior high, I read a lot of great horror, dystopia, and apocalyptic books from my middle school library," he said. The public library provided even more options, and at librarians' recommendations he is finishing up the Mistborn trilogy by Brandon Sanderson, loves Stephen King, and is about to start the Red Rising Saga.

"This [reading challenge] showed him that something he starts, he can finish," said Brinlee. "It might look hard, but he makes it through and he knows if he perseveres, he'll be able to do it."

Brixton has proven this to be true. He served as Student Council President all through junior high. In high school, he is an Executive Student Council member, serving as Freshman Class President, Secretary, and now Treasurer, all while continuing to read and visit the public library for new titles. He served as a library aide in eighth grade, helping other classmates find and check out books, and continued to read. He was one of only four sophomores selected to join the Youth Leadership Exchange, a program historically offered to only junior and senior classes.

Brixton's reading is also helping shape his future. "I wanted to study psychology actually because of a Sequoyah book I read called 'The Great Adventures of Coyote Sunrise,'" Brixton shared. "It was one of the books that sparked my love for psychology and psychiatry, wondering why people do the things they do."

Brixton's achievements have inspired others around him. His nine-year-old brother Brady is following in his footsteps, challenging himself to read beyond the Accelerated Reader requirements at his school. Brady's interest lies in aviation, and while Brixton doesn't share the same reading tastes, he is a champion for his little brother's passion. "He's learning more about planes than I could ever know, and that's awesome," he said. "The school librarians have helped Brady find everything he needs. Seeing him read just makes me so happy, because I know the younger generation is reading."

Brixton encourages everyone around him to embrace reading, even if they are hesitant. "Even if you don't like reading right now, that doesn't mean you can't like reading in the future. I think everyone should read and come to the library because there's a book for you."

His final advice for others? "Reading is beneficial for everyone. Go read!"

The statistics that follow reflect our communities' love of reading and visiting the library in person and online.

2,001,443
Total Circulation

898,447
Visits

346,781
Cardholders

5,052
Total Programs

131,162
Total Program Attendance

762,479
Website Views

273,622
Website Users

87.4
Net Promoter Score

Net Promoter Scores are survey metrics based on a customer's likelihood to recommend a company, product, or service to a friend. A score of 70 or above is considered excellent.

The Sequoyah list is a yearly reading program for students grades 6-12 in Oklahoma coordinated by the Oklahoma Library Association. This book list and award in Oklahoma honors the Native American leader Sequoyah, the leader who created the Cherokee syllabary, preserving his people's language and culture. Each year, students in Oklahoma who read or listen to at least three books from the official master list can vote for the winner.

Making the Match

At the end of a PLS career fair, as booths were being packed up, one employer representative stayed put. "I always try to stay until the very end of the career fair because you never know who's going to walk in the door," the employer said. "You never know who that last person is going to be, and what kind of impact they may make on my life or vice versa."

That day, the last person was Stephanie.

Stephanie was a single mother of three who spent 20 years as a bartender. "I've never not had two or three jobs at the same time," she said. At the career fair, she found a chance to try something new. The employer representative captured her information, pointed her to the job listings online, and encouraged her to apply.

A couple of days later, Stephanie reached out. She applied, worked through the conditions of hire, and got the job.

Stories like Stephanie's are why PLS invests in Upward Mobility services. Through career fairs, resume drop-in sessions, and public computers, PLS connects job seekers with employers and gives people the tools to take the next step.

Behind every one of the numbers below is someone like Stephanie. She had no prior experience in the field, and a move like this would have felt out of reach on her own. For Stephanie, the PLS career fair was life changing.

85,760
Tablet, Laptop, & Computer Use

40,847
Wi-Fi Sessions

290,857
Online Resource Sessions

2,427
Schedule a Librarian Appointments

127
Upward Mobility Programs

1,770
Upward Mobility Program Attendance

100
Drop In Resume Sessions



Watch Stephanie's Story

"This kind of thing would have been very intimidating for me, but you have to start somewhere, and this is my somewhere to start."
- Stephanie

Watch Eddie's Story



Living Life Beyond the Orange

Not all PLS customers walk through a library door. For some, the library has to come to them.

More than 20,000 Oklahomans are in jail or prison, and a significant portion of those are incarcerated in the PLS service area. To help improve their lives while incarcerated and set them up for successful reentry after release, PLS staff bring library services into carceral facilities.

Eddie was one of those customers behind bars. While incarcerated, Eddie took part in a PLS book discussion led by staff member Maureen.

"What has impacted me the most is how one librarian decided to take a book kit into an institution and share the joy of reading with men who had forfeited their freedom for varied offenses," Eddie said.

Now, Eddie is out of prison and starting a new life, and he is still loving libraries and singing the praises of book club. "While I was incarcerated, I often dreamed about the day when I might be able to use my life and experiences to give something back," Eddie said. "I did not necessarily imagine that the opportunity would come through Pioneer Library System, but their work reaches far beyond books, buildings, barbed wire, steel, and concrete. Sometimes their work reaches a person who is quietly preparing for a future he cannot yet see."

Incarcerated individuals participate in PLS book discussions and read along with Spark a Change titles. They also contribute their minutes of reading and learning to the library's Summer Learning Challenge each year, logging more than 3 million minutes over the past five summers. Each minute they logged helped PLS meet our community goal, leading to the distribution of more than ten thousand books to children through partnerships with local health departments and Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

Now that he is successfully re-integrating into society, Eddie wrote us to share the impact library programming had on his life. When trying to capture Eddie's story, PLS recognized no one could quite capture the impact the library has had on this life than Eddie himself. We asked Eddie if he would be willing to share the impact of being a part of a prison book club has had on his life, and the next day he wrote to us:

Early this morning, I awakened with the word "impact" ringing in my spirit. I immediately began to see the process of what it takes for a book to come into the material world. A seed must be planted in the soil. It must undergo the process of growth as it weathers various conditions in its proper climate. Next, the seed grows into a tree. The tree is cut down where it goes through the process of becoming paper.

Meanwhile, an author, researcher, developer, or influencer is struck with an unshakeable desire to put down their thoughts on paper. You can see the various components necessary to formulate a book into real time in order to impact a life.

While this is true, what has impacted me the most is how one librarian decided to take a book kit into an institution and share the joy of reading with men who had forfeited their freedom for varied offenses.

For years, I sat at the table across from [PLS staff member] Maureen, and eventually next to her—as a protector, but more importantly, as an equal. Not as a novelty. Not as a project to undertake to appease some religious obligation. No. We sat month after month sharing laughter, tears, and hard conversations about the prospects of life outside of prison.

This is impact beyond a book club. This is an impact that has superseded the limitations of barbed wire, steel, and concrete jungles. This has been a friendship that has transcended any book ever written or words ever spoken. This is impact fleshed out over time. To call this a book club would be blasphemous. This, I have discovered, is family.

Long live libraries!

Bookishly Yours,
Eddie

"I want to convey to the entire Pioneer Library System team that you are changing lives—one word, page, book, and conversation at a time. If you ever wonder if you are truly making a difference, please know that you are. I am a living witness to the truth that he who gives a book saves a soul and redirects a generation over time."
- Eddie



Watch Sandi's Story



"Through the meditation classes, I've been able to connect with people, sort of like-minded and like-spirited people, that have helped me learn how to open up and connect."
- Sandi

The Healing Effect of Libraries

Sandi has always been an introvert, and for much of her life she kept to herself. When her vision began to fail and she could no longer spend time in her beloved garden, her world got smaller. Sandi expanded her world through discovering health events at her local PLS branch.

For Sandi, the meditation class has been "beneficial for my mental health, my physical health, and my spiritual health. I don't feel so closed-in and alone now," she said.

Sandi's story reflects a bigger one. For years, Oklahoma has faced health challenges. The Commonwealth Fund's 2025 State Health System Scorecard ranked Oklahoma 49th for access to care. America's Health Rankings from the United Health Foundation placed the state 47th in the nation in 2024. Things are beginning to improve, though - in 2025, Oklahoma rose to 45th in the nation, and PLS is playing a role in moving the needle.

Information is part of the barrier. According to the Oklahoma Department of Libraries, nearly 9 out of 10 adults have difficulty using everyday health information. That is why PLS works to build the health literacy and advocacy skills people need to manage their own health.

Loneliness is linked to poor health, as well. According to a survey conducted by the American Psychological Association in November 2025, nearly 7 in 10 adults in the US said they needed more emotional support than they received, an increase from 65% in 2024. Our nation is struggling with division and loneliness, and the public library can be that connector for our communities.

From collaborative meeting spaces to gather with others to scheduled events, each PLS library provides space to connect. Behind every number below is someone like Sandi, who found a way out of isolation.

756
Health Programs

10,000
Health Program Attendance

8,740
Public Meetings

162,904
Public Meeting Attendance

Financials

REVENUES

Property Taxes	$ 27,403,067
Collection on Fees and Copy Services	$ 237,312
Gifts and Grants	$ 266,050
State Revenue	$ 118,099
Other Contracts	$ 97,409
Other Financing Sources	$ 6,522
In-Kind Donations	$ 899,901
Interest	$ 37,443
Total Revenues	$ 29,065,803

EXPENDITURES

Personnel Services	$ 14,957,213
Materials	$ 4,526,708
General and Administrative	$ 3,548,587
Technology and Automation	$ 1,870,041
System Services	$ 1,376,513
Total Expenditures	$ 26,279,062

NET CHANGE IN FUND BALANCE $ 2,786,741


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