Public Libraries of New Zealand

2025

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT

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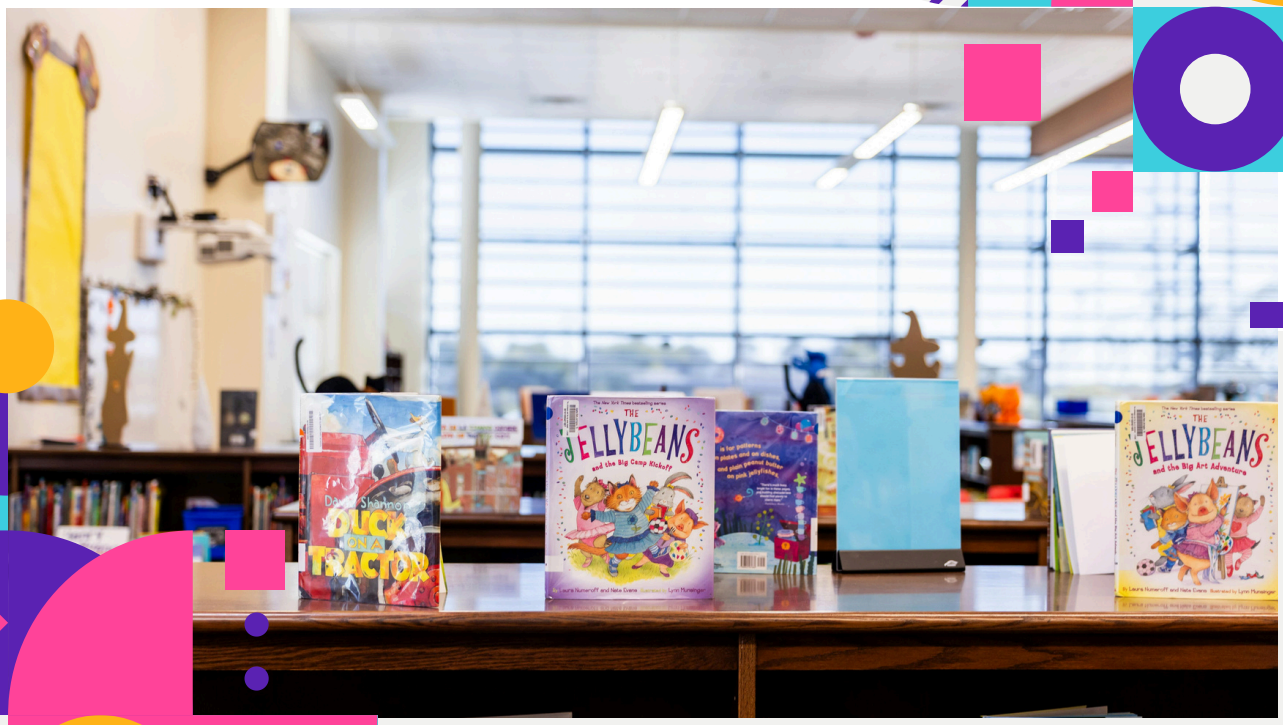


LIBRARIES AND THEIR IMPACT - A STRATEGIC APPROACH

Advocating for Community Impact

Public Libraries of New Zealand (PLNZ) works closely with its members to advocate for public libraries and to support them in communicating the vital role libraries play in enriching their communities. A key part of this advocacy is gathering robust data that demonstrates the tangible value libraries contribute to community wellbeing.

Operating within council organisations, libraries are just one of many services councils provide. This makes it essential for libraries to clearly demonstrate not only the services they offer but, more importantly, the real impact those services have on individuals and communities. Evidence-based reporting strengthens the case for ongoing support and strategic development.

Each year, PLNZ collects quantitative data through the National Data Collection (NDC). This data reflects the service levels of library operations—capturing metrics such as circulation figures, event attendance, and service usage. While this output-focused data is valuable, there is also a growing need to capture the broader outcomes of library services—the changes they make in people's lives.

To support this, PLNZ developed a Strategic Framework—a roadmap for articulating the value of public libraries and guiding future strategy. This framework includes a set of outcome measures designed to evaluate the impacts of library services. By adopting a consistent national set of service outcomes, libraries across New Zealand can report not only on their activities but also on how their services contribute meaningfully to their communities.

This framework laid the foundation for the Community Impact Survey, a project aimed at establishing a consistent set of outcome indicators. These indicators support libraries in evaluating, reporting, and showcasing their community impact.

Understanding the Framework: Outputs vs. Outcomes

- **Service Outputs** refer to measurable activity levels—useful for benchmarking and assessing service delivery. Common public library outputs include the number of books issued, programmes delivered, event attendance, and digital resource usage. These are collected and reported annually through the NDC.

- **Service Outcomes**, on the other hand, capture the **impact** of library services—the ways they contribute to individual growth, social connection, and community wellbeing.

Library Service Outcomes

1. **Improved Knowledge and Skills:** Libraries help individuals and communities build foundational and information literacy.
2. **Increased Resilience:** Libraries play a role in strengthening the ability of individuals and communities to adapt and thrive.
3. **Opportunities for Lifelong Learning:** Libraries support personal development, digital inclusion, creativity, and continuous learning.
4. **Enhanced Self-Esteem and Social Cohesion:** Participation in library activities promotes confidence and connection among community members.
5. **Support for Māori Aspirations:** Libraries recognise and respond to the needs and aspirations of Māori communities.
6. **Reduced Isolation and Loneliness:** Libraries serve as inclusive spaces that help alleviate social isolation.

These six outcomes align with four key areas of community impact: social, economic, cultural, and environmental. The Community Impact Survey evaluates libraries' contributions across these areas, providing clear, evidence-based insights into how libraries benefit the communities they serve.

Demonstrating the Value of Libraries Across Aotearoa

As trusted community hubs, libraries in New Zealand continue to evolve in response to the changing needs of the people they serve. The latest Community Impact Survey provides compelling, evidence-based insights into how our libraries are used and the difference they are making in the lives of New Zealanders—socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally.

Survey Overview

Following the completion of our first Community Impact Survey last year, this report presents findings from our second annual survey, continuing to build a picture of the role and value libraries have within communities over time. Grounded in the Strategic Framework and structured around 12 key impact questions aligned with six national service outcomes, the survey highlights the significant and diverse ways libraries influence both individuals and communities.

Respondent Demographics

A total of 14,089 responses were collected. Of the respondents, over 79% were aged over 40, 75% identified as female, and 22% as male. In terms of ethnicity, 70% identified as New Zealand European, 9% as other European, and 9% as Māori. Regarding library usage, 19.4% reported using the library daily, 29.5% weekly, 16.1% fortnightly, and 22.4% monthly. Overall, 69% had used the library within the past week, and 21% within the past month.

Library Use: A Snapshot of Demand and Diversity

The survey began by asking people how they use their library. As expected, borrowing physical items remains the core service, with the highest reported use (85.5%).

This was followed by using the library space to sit, relax or read (38.6%), and using the public toilets (38.6%) confirming that access to the library as a third space remain central to communities.

However, libraries are now equally recognised as providers of essential digital and community services. For example:

- 32.4% of respondents borrowed digital content
- 28.6% of respondents used printing or scanning services
- 25.2% accessed free Wi-Fi

Libraries are also increasingly operating as access points for other vital services:

- Just over 24% of users engaged with non-traditional community services such as justice of the peace sessions, health support, information centres, or council services.
- Lower use was reported for services like special events, study/work spaces, exhibitions, and creative spaces, indicating either limited availability or niche interest, and providing insight into areas for targeted growth or realignment.

Programmes and Activities in Libraries: Where Communities Connect

Libraries continue to be vibrant hubs for connection, creativity, and learning, reflecting the diverse interests of their communities.

In 2025, the highest interest is in cultural events (18.4%), arts and crafts (16.9%), and author events (16.8%), showing a strong appetite for creativity and storytelling. Programmes for children and families remain essential, with school holiday programmes (12.1%), after-school activities (8.4%), storytime (7.5%), and parent and toddler groups (7.2%) all well supported.

Social connection is also key, with hobby groups (10.3%) and book clubs (9.1%) bringing people together. At the same time, demand for reference services (9.4%) and digital support (7.6%) highlights the library's role in supporting learning and access to information.

While smaller in number, services such as health, career, and community support programmes remain important for inclusion and wellbeing.

Measuring Impact: How Libraries Change Lives

This survey centers around 12 key impact questions, each aligned with the six national service outcomes and organized into four impact areas: Social, Economic, Cultural, and Environmental. Respondents rated each question on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 representing the highest impact. The average of these ratings produces an overall impact score, which serves as a useful benchmark for evaluating library performance.

Social Impact: A Place to Belong and Grow

Libraries continue to excel in nurturing the heart of community life, with 2025 results showing significant growth in personal development and connection. An overwhelming 86.8% of respondents said libraries encouraged their love of reading, maintaining a strong impact score of 4.5 and reinforcing the library's foundational role in fostering lifelong literacy.

- Empowerment: There was a remarkable 22.6% (Impact Score: 3.9) increase in users reporting that the library improved their independence and confidence (rising from 30.7% to 53.3%).
- Literacy: Literacy support saw a healthy gain, with 47.4% (Impact Score: 3.8) of users agreeing the library helped improve their literacy, up from 38.0% in 2024.
- Community & Wellbeing: Feelings of community belonging increased 3% to 72.7% (Impact Score: 4.2), while happiness and wellbeing scores remained consistently high at 85.6%(Impact Score: 4.4).
- Additionally, a third of users continue to feel supported in their parenting journey (Impact Score: 3.9), underscoring the library's role in strengthening families and resilience.

Together, these results demonstrate a clear shift toward deeper, high-value social outcomes particularly in confidence, literacy, and community connection.

Economic Impact: Supporting Lifelong Learning

Libraries remain key contributors to economic wellbeing through education and skills development, with overall impact stable at an average score of 3.6.

- Skill Development: Users reporting gains in computer skills decreased slightly from 20.8% to 18.9%.
- Education: There was a 2.3% dip in users using the library to study or learn.

Despite these modest drops in participation, impact scores remain unchanged, indicating that for those who engage, the benefits are still strong and meaningful. This suggests an opportunity to increase awareness and uptake of digital and learning services, particularly as demand for digital capability continues to grow.

Cultural Impact: Celebrating Identity and Diversity

Libraries continue to serve as important cultural connectors, with overall impact increasing from 3.3 to 3.4.

- Te Reo Māori: Support for learning and using Te Reo Māori saw a significant jump of 4.4%, reaching 23.7% (Impact Score: 3.3).
- Heritage: Users exploring their heritage through library resources increased by 3.3%(Impact Score: 3.4).
- Diversity: There was a slight decrease (-1.7%) in users reporting that the library helped them understand the diversity of culture in New Zealand, though the average impact score for this metric stayed solid at 3.6.

These results highlight both the growing role of libraries in supporting identity and language revitalisation, and the opportunity to further strengthen cultural programming and partnerships.

Environmental Impact: Promoting Conscious Citizenship

Environmental awareness continues to be one of the fastest-growing areas of library impact.

- Mindfulness: The percentage of users who felt the library helped them be more mindful of environmental issues rose significantly by 8.1%, reaching 40.2% (Impact Score: 3.6) in 2025.

This is one of the most consistent upward trends across all measured outcomes, reflected in both user agreement and average impact scores. It highlights the growing role libraries play in sustainability education and in fostering environmentally conscious communities.

Conclusion: Building on a Foundation of Impact

The 2025 results highlight a clear evolution in the value libraries provide. Growth in social impact, particularly in confidence, literacy, and belonging alongside rising environmental awareness, demonstrates a shift toward deeper, more transformative outcomes.

While some traditional economic engagement measures have softened slightly, their impact remains strong for those who use them. At the same time, cultural outcomes continue to strengthen, especially in supporting Te Reo Māori and personal heritage.

These findings reaffirm that libraries are far more than places to borrow books. They are dynamic, adaptive institutions that:

- Strengthen wellbeing and community connection.
- Enable lifelong learning and digital inclusion.
- Support cultural identity and equity.
- Promote environmental responsibility.

As data continues to inform decision-making, the message is clear: libraries are delivering measurable, meaningful impact and with sustained investment, will remain essential to thriving, connected, and resilient communities.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

15-24	25-40	41-65	65+
4.5%	16.4%	38.2%	40.9%

71% NZ EUROPEAN

10% OTHER EUROPEAN

9% NZ MĀORI

4% ASIAN

3% PASIFIKA

2% OTHER

1% AMERICAS

As people identify as multiple ethnicities, the total will be more than 100%

75% FEMALE

22.5% MALE

1.3% PREFER NOT TO SAY

1% NON-BINARY

.2% OTHER

LIBRARY USERS

LIBRARY USE FREQUENCY:

19.4% More than once a week

29.5% Weekly

16.1% Fortnightly

22.4% Monthly

12.6% A few times a year

TOP FACILITIES USED:

85.5% Borrowing physical items

38.6% Space to sit, read, relax

38.6% Toilets

32.4% Borrowing digital content

28.6% Using printers or scanners

28.3% Reading magazines and newspapers

25.2% Wi-Fi

24.7% Special Events

TOP LIBRARY ACTIVITIES:

18.4% Cultural events and activities

16.9% Arts & Craft

16.8% Author events or workshops

12.1% School holiday programmes

10.3% Hobby activities

9.4% Reference services

9.1% Bookclubs

8.4% After School Activities

COMMUNITY IMPACT AREAS

LIBRARIES AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Percentage of survey participants who agreed that the public library has:

86%
Increased my feelings of happiness and wellbeing

87%
Encouraged my love of reading and books

53%
Improved my independence and confidence or increased my self-esteem

47%
Helped improve my literacy

73%
Increased my feelings of belonging to a community

35%
Supported a parent and/or caregiver child relationship

LIBRARIES AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Percentage of survey participants who agreed that the public library has:

26%
Supported me to explore my heritage

24%
Supported my learning and/or use of Te Reo

39%
Helped me understand more about the diversity of culture in New Zealand

LIBRARIES AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Percentage of survey participants who agreed that the public library has:

19%
Enabled me to gain or improve my computer skills

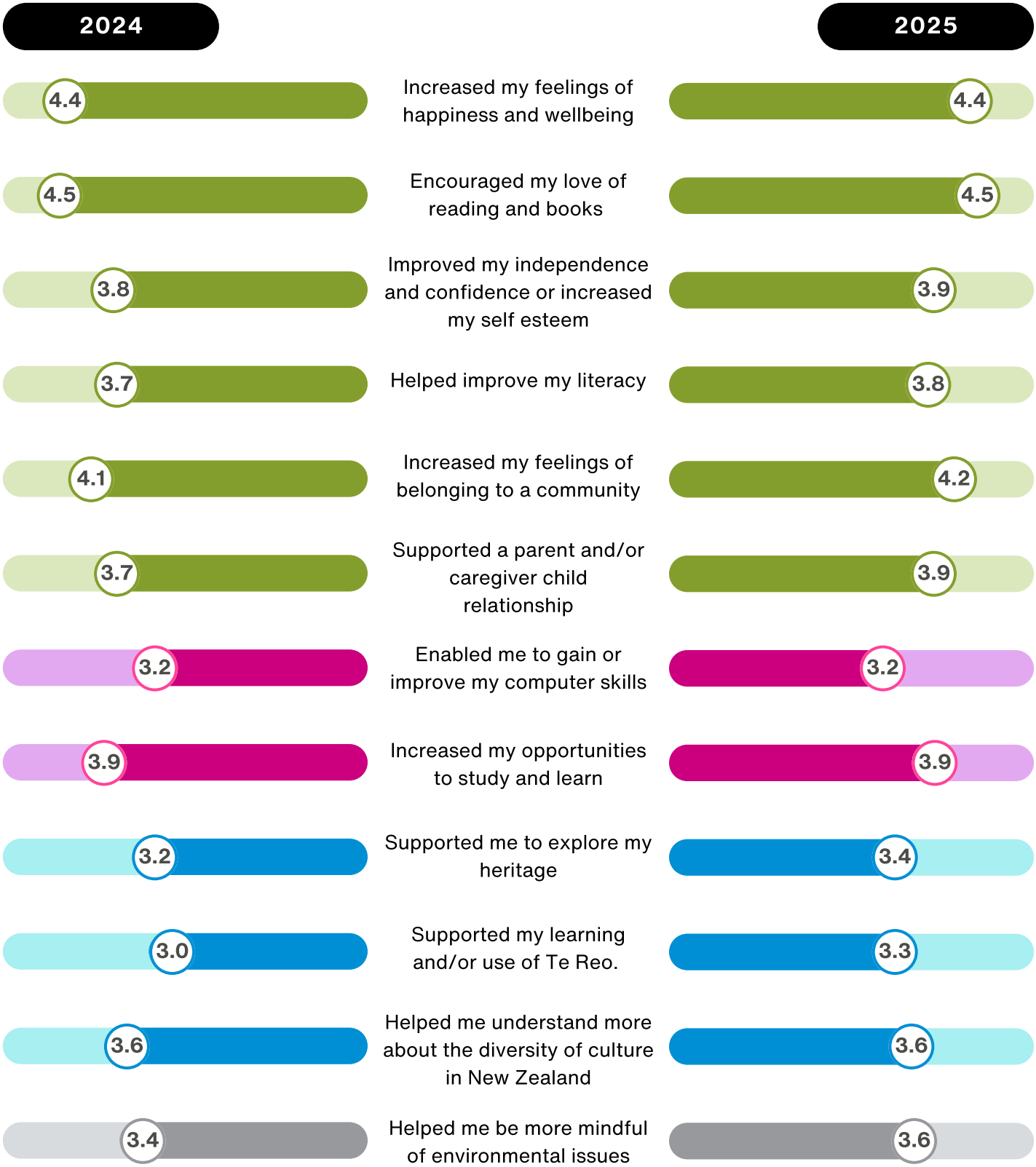
46%
Increased my opportunities to study and learn

LIBRARIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Percentage of survey participants who agreed that the public library has:

40%
Helped me to be more mindful of environmental issues

COMMUNITY IMPACT SCORES | 2025 IMPACT SURVEY



Percentage of survey participants who agreed that the public library has:

2024		2025
84.6%	Increased my feelings of happiness and wellbeing	85.6%
86.9%	Encouraged my love of reading and books	86.8%
30.7%	Improved my independence and confidence or increased my self esteem	53.3%
38%	Helped improve my literacy	47.4%
69.7%	Increased my feelings of belonging to a community	72.7%
33%	Supported a parent and/or caregiver child relationship	34.8%
20.8%	Enabled me to gain or improve my computer skills	18.9%
48.4%	Increased my opportunities to study and learn	46.1%
22.2%	Supported me to explore my heritage	25.5%
19.3%	Supported my learning and/or use of Te Reo	23.7%
40.4%	Helped me understand more about the diversity of culture in New Zealand	38.8%
32%	Helped me be more mindful of environmental issues	40.2%

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