



2024

COMMUNITY IMPACT SURVEY RESULTS

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.

INSIGHTS FROM THE COMMUNITY IMPACT SURVEY

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

Grounded in our Strategic Framework and structured around 12 key impact questions aligned with six national service outcomes, this survey highlights the significant and diverse ways libraries influence both individuals and communities.

Respondent Demographics

A total of 8,648 responses were collected. Of the respondents, over 71% were aged over 40, 75% identified as female, and 22% as male. In terms of ethnicity, 73% identified as New Zealand European, 9% as other European, 6% as Māori, and 5% as both Māori and European. Regarding library usage, 8% reported using the library daily, 32.5% weekly, and 23.7% monthly. Overall, 65% had used the library within the past week, and 23% within the past month.

Library Use: A Snapshot of Demand and Diversity

Our survey began by asking people how they use their library. As expected, borrowing physical items remains the core service, with the highest reported use (**89.6%**). This was followed by borrowing digital content (**32.7%**), and reading magazines and newspapers (**29.4%**)—confirming that access to information and entertainment remains central to the library experience.

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

- **28%** of respondents used printing or scanning services.
- **24%** accessed free Wi-Fi.
- Only **16%** used public computers—suggesting digital equity efforts may be shifting toward mobile and personal device users.

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

- Just over **21%** 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

Interestingly, **43% of respondents** reported not participating in any formal library activities or programmes. This suggests a significant portion of library use is transactional or self-directed—such as borrowing materials or using Wi-Fi and printers—reinforcing the role of libraries as flexible, open-access spaces.

Among those who did participate in programmes, the **top six activities** reflect strong engagement with: Reference and information services, Cultural events, Author talks, Arts & crafts sessions, Storytime, and Hobby-based activities.

These areas represent where libraries are connecting deeply with communities—offering creative, educational, and social opportunities. They also offer direction for future programme development and resource investment.

By contrast, activities with lower engagement (<10%) included after-school programmes, parent/baby groups, digital skills classes, heritage course, writing workshops, CV assistance, financial and business support and emergency preparedness. These may represent either underserved groups or offerings with competing services elsewhere in the community.

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.

INSIGHTS FROM THE COMMUNITY IMPACT SURVEY

Social Impact: A Place to Belong and Grow

Libraries excel in nurturing the heart of community life. An overwhelming **86.9%** of respondents said libraries encouraged their **love of reading**—scoring a remarkable **4.5 out of 5** in impact. This passion for literacy is more than a personal pleasure; it lays the groundwork for lifelong learning and empowerment.

- **84.6%** reported improved **happiness and wellbeing** (Impact Score: 4.4), affirming libraries as sanctuaries of mental and emotional support;
- Nearly **70%** of users felt a **stronger sense of belonging** (Impact Score: 4.1), showing how libraries foster inclusion and connection;
- **38%** said the library helped **improve their literacy** (Impact Score: 3.7);
- and a third felt more **confident or independent** (Impact Score: 3.8), while another third felt supported in their **parenting journey** (3.7), underscoring libraries' role in building resilience and family wellbeing.

Yet the library's influence is not only personal—it's also deeply communal, providing inclusive, free access that reduces social inequities.

Economic Impact: Supporting Lifelong Learning

Libraries are key players in economic wellbeing through education and skills development.

- Almost half, **48%**, of respondents expanded their **study or learning** opportunities through the library (Impact Score: 3.9);
- However, only **20%** reported improvement in **computer skills** (Impact Score: 3.2), pointing to a critical opportunity: enhancing **digital inclusion**. In a world increasingly dependent on technology, libraries are well-placed to close the digital divide.

Cultural Impact: Celebrating Identity and Diversity

Libraries serve as bridges between cultures and across generations.

- **40%** said the library helped them understand New Zealand's **cultural diversity** (Impact Score: 3.6), reflecting libraries' evolving role in fostering intercultural awareness;

- Although a smaller proportion of respondents, **22%**, reported exploring their own heritage (Impact Score: 3.2), and **19%** received support in Te Reo Māori (Impact Score: 3.0), these results point to opportunities for libraries to expand their impact by collaborating with cultural organizations and broadening their collections and programming.

Environmental Impact: Promoting Conscious Citizenship

While less prominent, libraries also influence environmental awareness.

- **32%** of users said libraries helped them become more **mindful of environmental** issues (Impact Score: 3.7), showing potential for libraries to expand their role in environmental education and sustainability.

Conclusion: Building on a Foundation of Impact

These scores serve as valuable benchmarks for tracking progress at both local and national levels, offering clear, measurable evidence that libraries are driving positive outcomes aligned with broader societal and strategic objectives.

The findings affirm what library leaders and patrons have long understood—libraries are not just places to borrow books; they are transformative institutions. They serve as community hubs, gateways to learning, access points for technology, cultural beacons, and inclusive spaces that promote wellbeing, connection, and opportunity.

As impact data continues to be gathered and analysed, it provides decision-makers with the insights needed to plan, prioritise, and invest with intention. The message is clear: with sustained support, libraries will continue to deliver exceptional value to the communities they serve.

Moreover, libraries are not static—they are adaptive, forward-looking institutions equipped to address 21st-century challenges, including digital inclusion, cultural equity, and environmental sustainability.

In a time of rapid social and technological change, libraries remain resilient and relevant—places where the power of impact is not only documented but profoundly experienced.

COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS



15-24
3.9%

25-40
16.8%

41-65
41.2%

65+
38.2%



75%
FEMALE



22%
MALE



1.2%
PREFER NOT
TO SAY



1%
NON-
BINARY



.2%
OTHER

73%
NZ EUROPEAN

9%
OTHER
EUROPEAN



6%
NZ MĀORI

5%
NZ MĀORI &
EUROPEAN

5%
ASIAN

3%
NORTH AMERICAN
& CANADIAN

3%
PASIFIKA

2%
AFRICAN

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

LIBRARY USERS

LIBRARY USE FREQUENCY:

8.1%

Daily

32.5%

Weekly

23.7%

Monthly

13.5%

A few times
a year

TOP FACILITIES USED:

89.6% Borrowing physical
items

32.7% Borrowing digital
content

29.4% Reading magazines
or newspapers

27.9% Using printers or
scanners

24.0% Using wifi

21.5% Other Services (JP,
council, information
centre, etc)

19.5% Special Events

TOP LIBRARY ACTIVITIES:

43.0% Have not used the
library for this
purpose*

24.1% Reference services

18.5% Cultural events and
activities

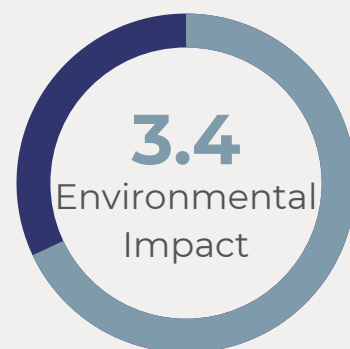
18.2% Author events or
workshops

16.3% Arts and craft

11.8% Storytime Sessions

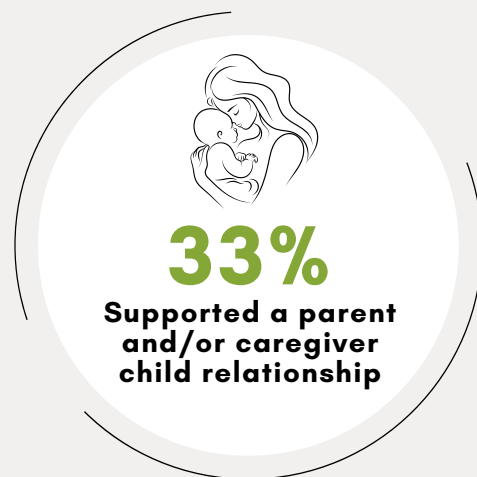
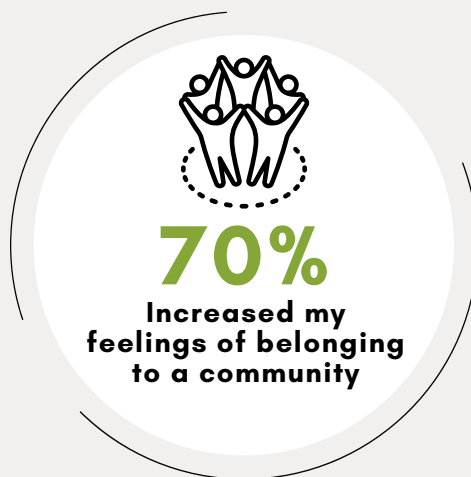
10.2% Hobby Activities

*Survey respondents did not participate in listed
programmes or activities.



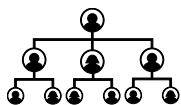
LIBRARIES AND SOCIAL IMPACT

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



LIBRARIES AND CULTURAL IMPACT

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



22%

Supported me to explore my heritage



19%

Supported my learning and/or use of Te Reo

CULTURE

40%

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:



21%

Enabled me to gain or improve my computer skills



48%

Increased my opportunities to study and learn

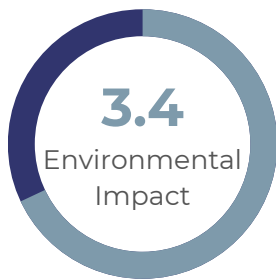
LIBRARIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

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



32%

Helped me to be more mindful of environmental issues



Community Impact Scores



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



Age Range		
333	15-24	3.9%
1449	25-40	16.8%
3565	41-65	41.2%
3301	66+	38.2%
8648	Total	100.0%

Gender		
1911	Male	22.1%
6525	Female	75.5%
85	Non-binary	1.0%
19	A gender not listed here	0.2%
108	Prefer not to respond	1.2%
8648	Total	100.0%

Library Use		
697	Daily	8.1%
2814	Weekly	32.5%
2046	Monthly	23.7%
1165	A few times a year	13.5%
1926	Other	22.3%
8648	Total	100%

Last Used the Library		
5626	Week	65.1%
2008	Month	23.2%
705	6 Months	8.2%
203	Year	2.3%
106	2 years	1.2%
8648	Total	100%

Facilities		
7748	Borrowing physical items such as books, DVDs, Magazines	89.6%
2825	Borrowing digital content	32.7%
2544	Reading magazines and newspapers.	29.4%
2412	Using printers and scanners	27.9%
2078	Using wi-fi	24.0%
1860	Using other services available in the library (e.g. health services, JP, Information Centre, Council services)	21.5%
1688	Special events	19.5%
1404	Using computers	16.2%
1379	Using work or study spaces	15.9%
1182	Visiting art exhibitions	13.7%
1117	Using online resources such as family history databases or learning tools	12.9%
993	Using meeting rooms	11.5%
723	Other	8.4%
711	Using Maker or Creative Spaces	8.2%
Activities		
3721	None of the above	43.0%
2085	Reference services	24.1%
1604	Cultural events and activities	18.5%
1576	Author events or workshop	18.2%
1409	Arts and craft	16.3%
1017	Storytime sessions	11.8%
878	Hobby activities (chess, boardgames, etc)	10.2%
701	After school activities	8.1%
689	Bookclubs	8.0%
679	Parent and baby/toddler groups	7.9%
612	Digital support/classes	7.1%
532	Heritage programmes	6.2%
465	Poetry and creative writing	5.4%
381	Health education	4.4%
346	Te Reo Māori language groups	4.0%
224	Emergency preparedness	2.6%
216	Career advice incl. CV writing	2.5%
160	Neurodivergent groups	1.9%
128	Financial management support	1.5%
125	English language support	1.4%
107	Business management/Support for new businesses	1.2%
97	Immigration support	1.1%

WELLBEINGS & COMMUNITY IMPACTS SURVEY

GENERAL INFORMATION:

*1. Do you use the libraries (in person or virtually) where you live, even if only occasionally?

☐ YES ☐ NO

*2. Please tell us which age range you fall into?

☐ Under 15 ☐ 15-24 ☐ 25-40 ☐ 41-65 ☐ 66+

*3. GENDER: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Non-binary ☐ A Gender not listed

☐ Prefer Not to Respond

*4. What is your ethnicity? [Check all that apply]

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canadian | <input type="checkbox"/> Other European |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese | <input type="checkbox"/> Other Pacific Island |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cook Island Māori | <input type="checkbox"/> Pākehā |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fijian | <input type="checkbox"/> Samoan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indian | <input type="checkbox"/> South African |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Latin American/Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Southeast Asian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern | <input type="checkbox"/> Tokelauan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Niuean | <input type="checkbox"/> Tongan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North American | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NZ European | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> NZ Māori | |

*5. How frequently do you personally use the library (Either in person or virtually)?

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ A few time a year

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

*6. When did you last use the library? Was it in the last...

☐ Week ☐ Fortnight ☐ 6-Months ☐ Year ☐ 2 Years

*7. Which library network do you use?

e.g. Christchurch City Libraries or Hastings District Libraries

Please specify _____

*Responses are required.

WELLBEINGS & COMMUNITY IMPACTS SURVEY

GENERAL INFORMATION CONTINUED:

*8. Thinking about the kinds of facilities available at the library, what do you personally use the library for? (Check all that apply)?

- ☐ Borrowing physical items such as books, DVDs, Magazines
- ☐ Borrowing digital content
- ☐ Reading magazines and newspapers.
- ☐ Using online resources such as family history databases or learning tools
- ☐ Using computers
- ☐ Using wi-fi
- ☐ Using printers and scanners
- ☐ Using Maker or Creative Spaces
- ☐ Using meeting rooms
- ☐ Using work or study spaces
- ☐ Visiting art exhibitions
- ☐ Using other services available in the library
(e.g. health services, JP's, Information Centre, Council services)
- ☐ Special events
- ☐ Other (please specify)

*9. Thinking about the kinds of activities available at the library, do you use any of the following? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reference services | <input type="checkbox"/> Health education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital support/classes | <input type="checkbox"/> Arts and craft |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Te Reo Māori language groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Hobby activities
(chess, boardgames, etc) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English language support | <input type="checkbox"/> Immigration support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Storytime sessions | <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage programmes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Author events or workshop | <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency preparedness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent and baby/toddler groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Career advice incl. CV writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Poetry and creative writing | <input type="checkbox"/> After school activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Neurodivergent groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Book Clubs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural events and activities | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial management support | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Business management
/Support for new businesses | |

WELLBEINGS & COMMUNITY IMPACTS SURVEY

WELLBEING'S OUTCOMES – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Let's think about your use of your local public library. The following is a list of statements related to how you might feel as a result of using the library. Select the best option for each statement.

Using a scale of 1-5 as below:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neither Agree or Disagree

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

please rate the following:

QUESTIONS:

RATING SCALE:

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
		1	2	3	4	5	
The use of the public library has...							
*10.	Increased my feelings of happiness and wellbeing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*11.	Encouraged my love of reading and books.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*12.	Improved my independence and confidence or increased my feelings self esteem.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*13.	Enabled me to gain or improve my computer skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*14.	Supported me to explore my heritage.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*15.	Supported my learning and/or use of Te Reo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*16.	Helped me to be more mindful of environmental issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*17.	Helped me to improve my literacy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*18.	Increased my opportunities to study and learn.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*19.	Increased my feelings of being part of/belonging to a community or place.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*20.	Helped me to understand more about the diversity of culture in New Zealand.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
*21.	Supported a parent and/or caregiver child relationship.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Thank you for taking the time to complete the Wellbeing Outcomes Survey for Public Libraries of New Zealand.