



**HIGHWOOD
LIBRARY &
COMMUNITY
CENTER**

EMPOWERING COMMUNITY



TRANSFORMING LIVES

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2025

May '24 to April '25

A LETTER FROM THE

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Dear Friends,

Highwood Library & Community Center is a place where individuals and families come to discover, grow, and connect. While we remain committed to providing access to great materials, educational programs, and lifelong learning opportunities, this year we expanded our work to address some of the most urgent needs in our community.

In response to growing economic pressures, we expanded our Case Management services to include food and toiletry support for those facing financial hardship. Thanks to generous donations from Moraine Township and Roberti Community House, food is now more readily available at the library. Dedicated volunteers from Church of the Redeemer, North Shore Unitarian Church, and Endeavor Health have made it possible to connect families with essential supplies and food staples with care and dignity.

Through our partnership with Lake County, our Digital Navigation Initiative empowers adults to build essential tech skills through one-on-one support. Grant funding made it possible to distribute 40 laptops to workshop graduates, opening new opportunities for work, education, and basic independence. We also collaborated with Lake County Workforce Development, bringing individualized career readiness support directly into the library. Weekly Job Center visits and a new bilingual workforce kiosk provide job seekers with easy access to employment and training resources.

In partnership with the Lake County Clerk's Office, we proudly hosted early voting twice and Election Day once this fiscal year. Over 10,000 individuals came through our doors to cast their votes! This powerful demonstration of civic engagement was made possible with the support of volunteers from the League of Women Voters, North Shore Unitarian Church, Friends of the Highwood Library, and our dedicated Board of Trustees. Seeing so many community members exercise their right to vote reminded us of the vital role libraries play in supporting civic engagement and connecting people to essential resources.

As we reflect on FY25, we celebrate not only what we've accomplished, but also how we've achieved it: through collaboration, compassion, and a shared commitment to community. Thank you to our staff, volunteers, partners, donors, and patrons for making this work possible. Together, we are building a stronger and more connected Highwood.



Laura Ramirez, Executive Director, Highwood Library & Community Center



MISSION AND VISION

Founded in 1976, Highwood Library is an innovative and collaborative anchor of the community, providing educational support, information needs, engaging services, and inspirational collections. The Library offers free multicultural and bilingual programs, services, and resources for residents of all ages and backgrounds in Highwood and throughout Illinois.

Mission

Highwood Library & Community Center is an innovative anchor that enriches, empowers, educates, and embraces the community it serves. We provide engaging services and programming, foster community collaboration, and offer access to traditional library resources.

Vision

To uplift, inform, and grow the community through the library's collections, programs, and engagement strategies.

Values

- Creativity – We use creativity and ingenuity to fulfill and sustain our mission.
- Collaboration – We build partnerships with school districts, government agencies, social services, local businesses, and philanthropic organizations to address community challenges and deliver effective resources, services, and programs.
- Communication – We engage our community through continuous dialogue and adapt to remain a vital resource and trusted community anchor.
- Community – We foster a welcoming and inclusive environment that centers social justice, equity, free access to information, and service to all.

FY25 BY THE N U M B E R S

Adult
Program
Attendees

7,105



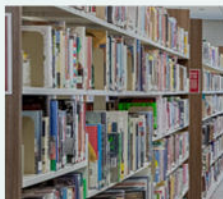
Children's
Program
Attendees

3,360



Teen
Program
Attendees

5,289



Physical
Material
Checkouts

11,404



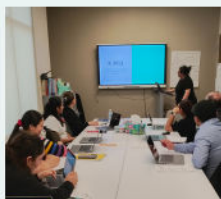
Digital
Material
Checkouts

3,111



Wireless
Sessions

47,394



Computer
Uses

5,546



Minutes
Logged On

342,890



Total
Number of
Visits

51,207



Active
Library Card
Holders

1,609



LIBRARY SERVICES

Welcoming Patrons, Every Day

Whether helping community members sign up for a library card, find a new book, print important documents or navigate online materials, our Our Adult Services team provides personalized support with care and compassion.

A Trusted Site for Civic Engagement

In October and November 2024, HLCC proudly served as an early voting site for the U.S. General Election. 8,433 voters came through our doors, with lines stretching throughout the library on the final day. In March and April 2025, we continued that service by hosting early and election day voting for local municipal races, serving 1,773 voters. Those who came to vote came back to sign up for library cards and volunteer, reinforcing our impact as a community hub.

Workforce Support Comes to HLCC

HLCC partnered with the Job Center of Lake County, whose workforce development staff provided weekly in-person assistance with resume writing, job searches, and interviewing skills at the Library. A dedicated kiosk station displays valuable information from the Workforce Development website in English and Spanish, making it easier for Highwood job seekers to access resources, job searches, and employment training opportunities.

Expanding Access through Interlibrary Loan

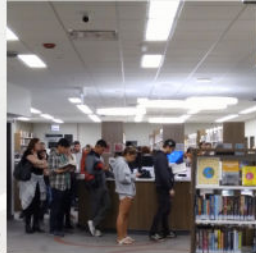
When a book isn't in our collection, we go the extra mile. Through Find More Illinois, HLCC connects patrons with items from libraries across the state. In FY25 alone, HLCC borrowed 386 books and materials via interlibrary loan, ensuring patrons have access to the resources they need.

eBooks, Audiobooks, and More Anytime, Anywhere

Using Hoopla and Boundless, HLCC patrons checked out 3,111 digital items in FY25—a 136% increase from the previous year. Whether reading on a tablet, listening to an audiobook during a commute, or watching movies at home, our digital services make the library accessible 24/7.

Explore More Illinois: Access to Culture and Fun

This fiscal year, Highwood Library cardholders gained access to Explore More Illinois, a statewide platform offering free and discounted passes to museums, gardens, zoos, and other cultural attractions across Illinois. This exciting benefit reflects HLCC's ongoing efforts to open doors to opportunity, learning, and joy.





CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Bilingual Baby & Toddler Storytime

This year, we continued to nurture early literacy through our Bilingual Baby & Toddler Storytime, offering an engaging mix of songs, stories, and movement in English and Spanish. New this year: Baby Rave! Our tiniest patrons danced and lit up the library in a joyful, music-filled sensory experience designed to support development and delight parents and caregivers alike.

Saturdays Are for Families

From Character Book Parties to Sip & Paints and Movie & Craft afternoons, our Saturday family programs have become beloved community staples. These rotating monthly events foster multigenerational literacy and joy, as they bring families together to read, create, and connect, all while building positive associations with the library.

Calm Play Space: Welcoming Every Child

In February 2024, we launched our Calm Play Space, a new initiative designed to ensure that children of all needs and sensitivities can feel safe, included, and engaged in play. Featuring soft lighting, sensory-friendly materials, and a soothing atmosphere, this program embraces all kinds of fun and reinforces our commitment to inclusive programming for every child.

Homework Help

Academic success begins with access, and our Learning Partners Homework Help program provides just that. Students receive personalized after-school support from trained Learning Partners and dedicated volunteers.

This year, when a community partner discontinued local tutoring services, HLCC stepped in to ensure no child was left without academic support. In partnership with HPHS Key Club and SaLT (Service and Learning Together), we increased tutoring and homework help hours to meet the growing need. This program creates a nurturing environment where students feel supported and empowered to thrive, with 98% of regular attendees reporting increased confidence in learning!

TEEN SERVICES

3D Printing: Design, Create, Innovate

Since officially launching in November 2024, our 3D Printing program has quickly become a favorite among tween and teen patrons. Participants completed 157 hours of independent creative projects, with the fiscal year ending in our busiest month yet at 65 hours. Teens have especially enjoyed designing and printing their own to-scale models, fidget toys, and figurines, building both technical skills and confidence through hands-on exploration.

Makerspace Momentum

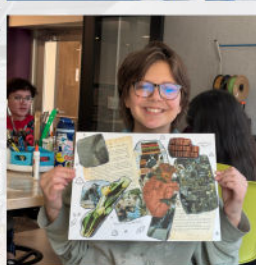
Our Makerspace programs continued to grow in FY25, fueled by targeted outreach at Northwood Middle School and Highland Park High School. We have welcomed over 100 new teens into our Makerspace, leading to a significant increase in overall program attendance. One of the year's standout events was the Clothing Upcycling Workshop, where teens brought in old garments and learned how to repair and repurpose them, combining creativity with sustainability.

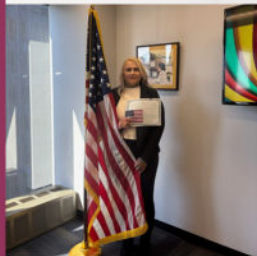
Cooking Club

Our monthly Cooking Club is an engaging STEM-based monthly program dedicated to introducing Highwood tweens and teens to a wide variety of foods. By attending this program, participants are exposed to new and healthy food options that are easy and affordable to recreate at home. Because many Highwood teens are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, this program also aims to address hunger by providing essential life skills in a safe and supportive space.

Self-Care Saturdays

Launched in January 2025, Self-Care Saturdays was created in response to growing fear and uncertainty among teens. The program offers a supportive space where teens can connect with the library's Health Equity team and access important information and resources for themselves and their families. Participants also explore the importance of mental health and self-esteem through creative, hands-on projects such as Self-Love Note Jars and Vision Boards.





ADULT LITERACY SERVICES

Digital Navigators: Bridging the Digital Divide

This fiscal year, Highwood Library partnered with Lake County to greatly expand our Digital Navigation program, providing small group digital education and one-on-one technology support. Highwood residents received step-by-step help with setting up devices, creating email accounts, navigating websites, and improving digital skills. This program plays a critical role in advancing digital equity and inclusion, empowering Highwood residents to fully participate in today's connected world. Since launching in the fall, Highwood Library has helped 827 community members through 1,361 digital navigation sessions, ensuring that every resident has access to the tools and skills needed to thrive in the digital age.

English as a Second Language (ESL) Student Achievements

Our ESL programming assisted over 30 students in increasing their English language fluency, with 87% of regularly attending students improving their English fluency. As a result of classes, students secured new or better jobs, including roles in food service and management. Several participants advanced their education by joining our High School Diploma Preparation Program. The ESL program also played an important role in supporting students preparing for their naturalization interviews, with four becoming U.S. citizens as a result. These outcomes reflect the power of community-based education and the library's commitment to creating pathways to opportunity and inclusion for all.

High School Diploma Preparation Program

Our Adult Literacy team continues to transform lives through the High School Diploma Preparation program. In small group settings, students are provided with academic support in five subject areas. Classes are offered in both English and Spanish to ensure accessibility and support for our diverse community.

Spanish Conversation Circle

Since it launched in October 2024, the Spanish Conversation Circle has provided a safe and supportive space for adult learners to strengthen their Spanish-speaking skills. Through conversation and community connection, participants gain confidence, improve fluency, and build relationships in a welcoming, judgment-free environment.

HEALTH EQUITY SERVICES

Reaching the Community

In FY25, the Health Equity Department supported 5,410 total visits and interactions across a wide ranges of initiatives including community engagement activities, bilingual case management, mental health counseling, support groups, TIERRA, community walks, access to vaccinations, physical health screenings, acute visits, and ongoing health education programs.

Case Management and Resource Navigation

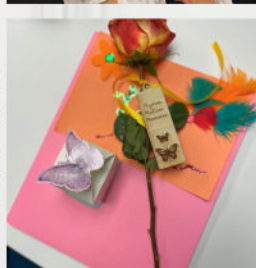
Our bilingual case management services play a vital role in supporting individuals and families on their path to financial and social stability. With the financial support of local partners, our team provided personalized, one-on-one support in English and Spanish, connecting clients to housing, food assistance, healthcare, legal aid, and more. This individualized guidance empowers participants to navigate complex systems with confidence. As a result of this program, 95% of clients reported an increased understanding of how to access essential services, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in helping residents overcome barriers and thrive.

Culturally Sensitive Mental Health Counseling

HLCC continues to expand access to trauma-informed mental health services through individual therapy and support groups. Licensed, bilingual Latine counselors provide care in a culturally responsive and supportive environment. Participants attend weekly or bi-weekly sessions to build coping skills, reduce stress, and develop personalized care plans. This ongoing support is helping community members in their healing journey, with 95% of participants demonstrating a reduction in symptoms related to mental health concerns, such as depression and stress, as a direct result of their engagement in counseling and support groups.

Hands for Highwood: Our Time to Heal

The Library partnered with PreOla Impressions to offer victims of the Highland Park shooting "Hands for Highwood: Our Time to Heal." To address community feelings of hopelessness in stopping gun violence, this program used a strengths-based therapeutic approach to offer community members an opportunity to reframe the horrific experience they experienced. This program fostered an experience of healing, community building and closure for Highland Park shooting survivors and those impacted by gun violence and trauma. Participants expressed feeling "grateful, seen, loved, and supported," reflecting the profound impact of the program.



A CLOSER LOOK AT CASE MANAGEMENT ESSENTIALS

Supporting Families with Compassion and Dignity

Highwood Library & Community Center's Health Equity Department offers bilingual case management services that connect community members to essential resources such as food, housing, healthcare, and financial assistance. In response to rising food insecurity and financial hardship this year, HLCC expanded its services to include hygiene products, toiletries, and basic household necessities. These essentials are offered with dignity and care. This critical work is made possible thanks to generous donations and the ongoing support of volunteers from the North Shore Unitarian Church, Church of the Redeemer, and Endeavor Health. Together, we have eased burdens for families across Highwood by providing direct access to everyday necessities that many of us take for granted.

"Case Management is a lifeline for families navigating difficult challenges."

— Viri Gonzalez, Lead Case Manager, Highwood Library & Community Center

A Story of Impact: "Navigating Systems, Restoring Security"

Jasmine*, a 16-year-old high school student, and her father Juan*, a hardworking single parent, came to the library during a time of significant hardship. Despite Juan's long hours on the job, the family struggled to meet basic needs like food and healthcare. Our Case Management team provided immediate support, helping them apply for Medicaid and SNAP and connecting them to Moraine Township for grocery assistance. Juan's Medicaid application was approved, giving him access to critical medical care for his high blood pressure, a condition that had previously required hospitalization. With this support, Jasmine and Juan now feel a sense of stability. They no longer fear what might happen if they fall ill. This story illustrates the impact of our services in addressing critical needs and providing support to families navigating complex systems.

*Names have been changed to protect identity.

"We don't feel so alone anymore. I can take care of my daughter without being afraid of what will happen if I get sick."

A CLOSER LOOK AT DIGITAL NAVIGATION

Empowering Our Community Through Technology Access

As a designated Digital Navigator site in partnership with Lake County, the Highwood Library & Community Center offers bilingual, one-on-one support to help community members overcome barriers to digital access and literacy. Our trained staff assist individuals, particularly those who are underserved or have limited English proficiency, with essential digital skills such as troubleshooting devices, setting up email accounts, and navigating online services. In addition to daily walk-in support during our 45 hours open each week, HLCC offers small group workshops focused on building digital confidence. Participants learn how to operate laptops and smartphones, create and save documents, use email, and stay safe online. Thanks to grant funding, adults who complete the training series can earn a personal laptop, extending the benefits of digital literacy well beyond the classroom. This work helps residents connect to critical online resources such as healthcare information, educational tools, employment opportunities, and government services. These skills empower participants to fully participate in today's digital world.

A Story of Impact: "Simon's Digital Transformation"

Simon*, one of our digital literacy class students, came to the program with no prior experience, even turning on a laptop was a new challenge. What began as a daunting experience quickly turned into a journey of growth and connection. Through our classes, Simon not only gained technical skills but also found a supportive community among his peers. His most significant milestone came when he created and delivered two presentations using Google Slides, an achievement that once felt out of reach.

His newfound confidence extended beyond the classroom, improving his ability to use phone apps and deepening his relationship with his teenage son. Together, they bonded over daily typing practice using the "Monkey Typing" app and encouraged each other's progress.

Today, Simon is more confident exploring technology and is excited to continue learning. His story is a testament to the power of persistence, community, and the transformative impact of the library's digital navigation program.

*Name has been changed.

"Learning how to use a computer has changed my life. Now I can do things I never thought possible and share them with my son."

BOARD & FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees generally meets at 7:00pm on the fourth Monday of each month. Meetings are open to the public.

Lucy Hospodarsky, President: president@highwoodlibrary.org

Janell Cleland, Vice-President: vicepresident@highwoodlibrary.org

Nora Lored, Treasurer: treasurer@highwoodlibrary.org

Catherine Regalado, Secretary: secretary@highwoodlibrary.org

Bertha Chavez: trustee1@highwoodlibrary.org

Jason Muelver: trustee6@highwoodlibrary.org

Nancy Pastroff: trustee3@highwoodlibrary.org

Paul Martinez: trustee5@highwoodlibrary.org



Friends

The Friends is a 501(c)(3) organization that supports quality library services through fundraising, and volunteering.

Gayle Meyers, President

Kristi Winchester, Vice-President

Marty Rosenthal, Treasurer

Laura Singer, Secretary

Jennifur Condon, Board Member

John Rood, Board Member

Maureen Chertow Miller, Board Member

Vicki Newman, Board Member

Learn about our Friends: www.friendshighwoodlibrary.org

CONTACT INFORMATION

Questions?

Connect with us!



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