

# BLACKWATER REGIONAL LIBRARY BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Franklin Branch

Wednesday

April 15, 2026

Board of Trustees Meeting—3:00 pm

Ben Neal's Farewell Reception—4:00 pm

**Budget & Finance Committee** *will not* meet



**Blackwater Regional Library  
Franklin Branch**

**280 N. College Dr.  
Franklin, Virginia 23851**



Franklin, Isle of Wight, Southampton, Surry, and Sussex  
[www.blackwaterlib.org](http://www.blackwaterlib.org)

Please notify Amy at 757-653-0298 x 304 if you are unable to attend or need directions.

# Board Packet Contents

## April 15, 2026

- Agenda – April 2026
- Minutes – March 2026
- Library Director's Report
- Library Bills
- Monthly Statistics Report – March 2026
- Staffing Report

**Blackwater Regional Library  
Board Meeting  
April 15, 2026**

**Agenda**

Franklin Branch

Call to Order

Adoption of Agenda – April 2026

Approval of Minutes – March 2026

Public Comment

Correspondence

Director's Report

Committee Reports

- Budget and Finance
- Personnel and Policy
- Search Committee

Review of Approval of Accounts Payable and File for Annual Audit

Unfinished Business

New Business

Board Member Comments/Announcements

Announcement of Next Meeting

- May 20, 2026

Adjournment

**BLACKWATER REGIONAL LIBRARY  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING MINUTES  
March 18, 2026**

**Present**

MeChelle Blunt – Southampton County  
Ora Briggs – Sussex County  
Sylvia Claggett – Isle of Wight County  
Deborah Dawson – Surry County  
Charlene Herrala – Isle of Wight County  
Pam Lease – City of Franklin  
Margie McClenny – Southampton County  
Karen Richardson – Sussex County  
Judge Alfreda Talton-Harris – City of Franklin  
Ben Neal – Library Director  
Bonnie Lauver – Assistant Library Director  
Debbie Carter – Budget & Finance Manager

**Remote (via Zoom)**

Johanna Wiggins – Isle of Wight County

**Absent**

Kathy Lippard – Isle of Wight County  
Kisha Watford – Southampton County

Chair, Deborah Dawson called the meeting of the Blackwater Regional Library Board of Trustees to order at 3:07 p.m. at the Franklin Branch.

**Agenda**

Ms. Herrala moved, and Ms. Briggs seconded that the agenda be approved as amended. The vote was unanimous.

**Consideration of Remote Meeting Participation Requests**

Trustee Wiggins requested to attend this meeting remotely. Mr. Neal read the Motion to Permit Board Member to Participate Remotely, filled in the required information, and Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Dawson

Nays: none

**Minutes**

Ms. Harris moved, and Ms. Lease seconded the minutes be approved as presented. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

**Public Comment**

None

**Correspondence**

Letter from Isle of Wight County Schools Superintendent, Dr. Theo Cramer, expressing gratitude for school supply donations.

**Library Director's Report**

BRL's first Winter Reading Program with Beanstack was very successful with about 150 participants of all ages. Over 6,800 children's books circulated as part of the program.

Mr. Neal briefed the Isle of Wight County School Board on plans for the new Windsor Library and received overall positive reactions. Initial renderings for the library building should be available in the next few weeks.

A state budget compromise was not reached, so it could be April – May before state aid is finalized.

## **Committee Reports**

*Budget & Finance* – Mr. Neal – At the February Budget and Finance meeting, the committee directed staff to investigate CD options at financial institutions that BRL already does business with and to make a recommendation. Upon staff research, staff is recommending investing \$100,000 of the current reserve fund in CDs with Carr Investment Group at the best available rates when the motion is approved. Budget and Finance came to a consensus to recommend this option as well. Ms. Herrala moved that the recommendation be accepted. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Dawson

Nays: none

Abstentions: Wiggins

*Personnel & Policy* – will go into closed session under New Business.

*Long Range Planning* – Ms. Blunt moved that the 2026-2031 draft of BRL's Strategic Plan be accepted as presented. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

## **Accounts Payable**

Ms. Briggs moved, and Ms. Herrala seconded that the accounts payable be filed for the Annual Audit. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

## **Unfinished Business**

*None*

## **New Business**

*Closed Session* – Ms. Briggs moved, and Ms. Herrala seconded that the Board go into closed session at 3:31 p.m. for the purpose of discussing personnel matters, under Section 2.1-344 A.1 of the Code of Virginia. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

The Board reconvened at 3:36 p.m. with a roll call vote to certify closed session.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Ms. Richardson moved, and Ms. Briggs seconded that the Board accept, with regret, the Library Director's resignation, effective April 15, 2026. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

Ms. McClenny moved, and Ms. Briggs seconded that Bonnie Lauer be appointed Interim Director, effective April 16, 2026, at an annualized salary of \$74,000. If Interim status lasts more than six months, the Board shall reconsider the interim salary at a higher rate. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

*Nominating Committee* – Ms. Dawson appointed the following Trustees to the Nominating Committee: Pam Lease, Chair; Johanna Wiggins, and MeChelle Blunt. The committee will present a slate of officers for fiscal year 2026-2027 at the May Board meeting. The Board will vote on officers at the June Board meeting.

*Search Committee* – Ms. Dawson appointed the following Trustees to the Director Search Committee: Deborah Dawson, Chair; Charlene Herrala, Judge Harris, Karen Richardson, MeChelle Blunt. Ms. Dawson will email the group with an initial meeting date.

**Board Member Comments/Announcements**

Ms. Blunt – The Links, Incorporated (Suffolk VA Chapter) will hold a Black Family Wellness Expo at the Workforce Development Center on March 21, 2026.

Ms. Claggett – expressed appreciation for Mr. Neal’s time and accomplishments while with BRL

Ms. Dawson – Surry Middle School hosted a One Book, One School event showcasing the Jennifer Torres book, Stef Soto, Taco Queen. BRL staff attended. Many good comments about BRL and the Library of Things.

**Announcement of Next Meeting**

The next Blackwater Regional Library Board of Trustees meeting will be on April 15, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. at the Franklin Branch.

**Adjournment**

Ms. Briggs moved, and Ms. Claggett seconded the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Carter conducted a roll call vote.

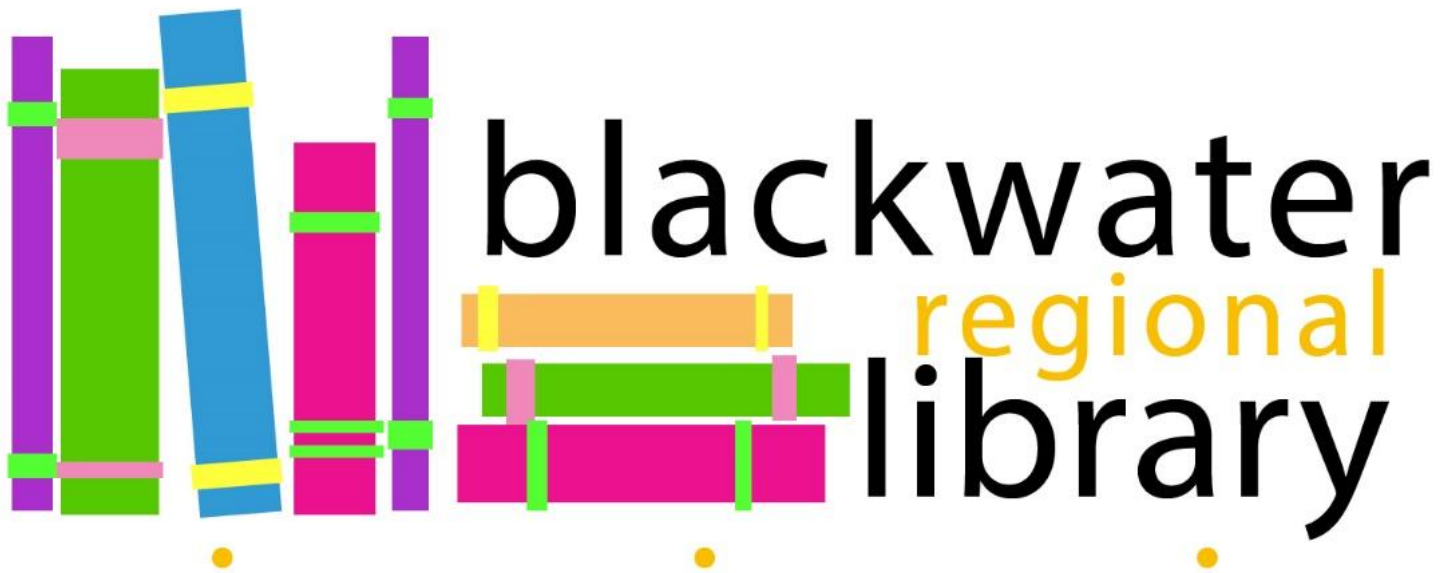
Ayes: Blunt, Briggs, Claggett, Herrala, Lease, McClenny, Richardson, Talton-Harris, Wiggins, Dawson

Nays: none

The meeting was adjourned at 3:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie Carter for  
Ora Briggs, Secretary



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# Director's Report

## March 2025

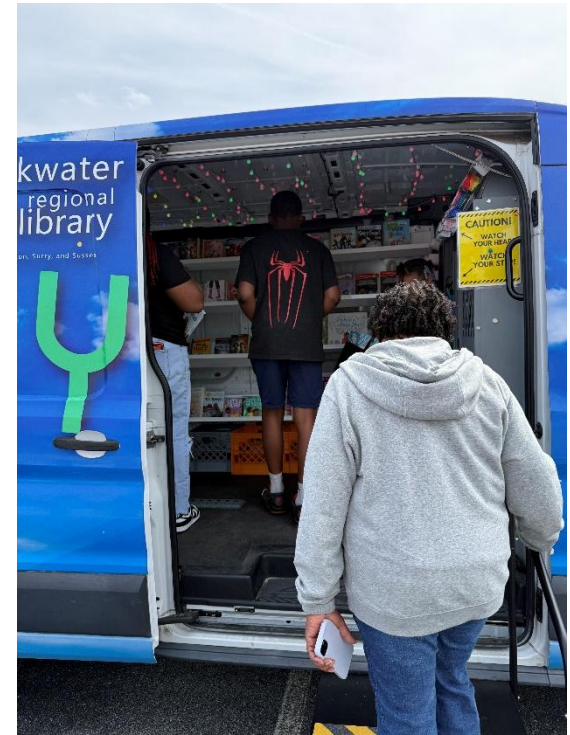
# Community Impact



Spring Fling event at S.P. Morton



Surry Sheriff Department's Spring Fair



L.I.N.K.S. Black Wellness Expo in Franklin

18 Outreach Programs and Activities in the Community in March reaching over 1000 people

# City of Franklin

- Franklin branch hosted local author Doug York for a well-attended author event about his work and how he went from the Navy to author & teacher
- Popular programming for all ages, including Craftsy for Adults, Pokemon Club and more
- Several outreach events out in the community including partnering with Suffolk L.I.N.K.S., Franklin Parks & Rec, and Spring Fling at S.P. Morton



# Isle of Wight County

- Carrollton branch hosted local author Ron Peterson, Jr. for a packed event discussing his work and true crime topics
- Smithfield branch hosted a variety of programs, including launching their DIY Homesteading series with a class on sour dough bread-making
- Windsor library staff connected with families with Carrsville Elementary's STEAM Family Night Out, in addition to many well-attended programs at the branch

Between Outreach and In-House programming, 50 programs reaching over 1000 members of the community were delivered in IOW County in March



# Southampton County

- BRL Staff brought Story Times to six classes at The Children's Center to celebrate Read Across America Week
- Popular programs for all ages including Craftsy for Adults and Pokemon club continue to thrive
- Our PAWS to Read literacy program continues to be popular with families



# Surry County

- Programs like Storytime were a lot of fun for young learners
- In Claremont, patrons built birdhouses for the monthly Craftsy program
- The library was at the Sheriff's Spring Fair event, giving out free books, library swag, and more.
- Staff presented at the "One School, One Book" event at Luther P. Jackson Middle School and showed off new offerings like the Library of Things and shared information on library resources



# Sussex County

- Both locations hosted a special Easter-themed Story Trails in March
- Waverly Branch, with partners Horizon Healthcare and Waverly UMC, hosted a special visit by the Easter Bunny, as well as crafts, games, and free books for the 150+ families attending
- For adults, book clubs and the adult Craftsy event continued to foster learning and social connection



# Blackwater Regional Library

## Library Bills

March 2026

DATE	TRANSACTION TYPE	MEMO/DESCRIPTION	NUM	AMOUNT
<b>AFLAC</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		517629 3.31.2026	(809.51)
03/31/2026	Bill		517629	809.51
<b>Amazon Capital Services</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11849	(1,073.78)
03/31/2026	Bill		1614-4JRL-QCRV	617.70
03/31/2026	Bill		1NLH-6H74-VD9F	456.08
<b>Anthem Blue Cross/Blue Shield</b>				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		13430240	(9,280.00)
03/18/2026	Bill		000928466F	9,280.00
<b>Cengage Learning, Inc.</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11850	(32.79)
03/31/2026	Bill		999102551955	32.79
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		7105018938341970230	(115.01)
03/18/2026	Bill		999102467813	21.44
03/18/2026	Bill		999102485655	32.79
03/18/2026	Bill		999102474246	60.78
<b>Dataprise LLC</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11851	(24,308.50)
03/31/2026	Bill		DP-82186	20,436.00
03/31/2026	Bill		CW81146	3,872.50
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		2102016538348470640	(7,262.28)
03/18/2026	Bill		MSP77624	6,241.78
03/18/2026	Bill		MSP77611	1,020.50
<b>Demco, Inc.</b>				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		9105016038344167220	(419.89)
03/18/2026	Bill		7773585	419.89
<b>Document Systems, Inc.</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11852	(2,286.49)
03/31/2026	Bill		151962	2,286.49
<b>Dominion Energy Virginia</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		4878259916	(1,376.68)
03/31/2026	Bill		3233130008 3.31.2026	1,376.68
<b>EBSCO</b>				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11853	(20,201.00)

# Blackwater Regional Library

## Library Bills

March 2026

DATE	TRANSACTION TYPE	MEMO/DESCRIPTION	NUM	AMOUNT
03/31/2026	Bill		91011043082	20,201.00
Ingram Library Services				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		0033261803	(3,782.82)
03/18/2026	Bill		20AZ032 3.18.2026	3,782.82
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		0034261803	(1,187.16)
03/18/2026	Bill		20BB962 3.18.2026	1,187.16
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		0036260304	(402.54)
03/31/2026	Bill		20BB962 3.31.2026	402.54
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		0040260304	(6,602.23)
03/31/2026	Bill		20AZ032 3.31.2026	6,602.23
Kelly Clasen				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11842	(350.00)
03/18/2026	Bill		RL Craftsy April	350.00
Library Furniture International, LLC				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		5103019738341269900	(15,342.44)
03/18/2026	Bill		2026-1078-Bal	15,342.44
MidAmerica Books				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11843	(305.40)
03/18/2026	Bill		0087586	305.40
Midwest Tape				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11855	(1,997.23)
03/31/2026	Bill		508563995	1,997.23
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		4108012438340866980	(507.89)
03/18/2026	Bill		508530223	507.89
Overdrive, Inc				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		m1j3ba0k	(8,555.43)
03/18/2026	Bill		03100CO26079499	8,555.43
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		41ehzbt9	(550.97)
03/31/2026	Bill		03100DA26094243	293.99
03/31/2026	Bill		03100DA26087360	136.99
03/31/2026	Bill		03100DA26110267	119.99
Petersburg Alarm Company				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11856	(165.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		218855	165.00

Petty Cash

# Blackwater Regional Library

## Library Bills

March 2026

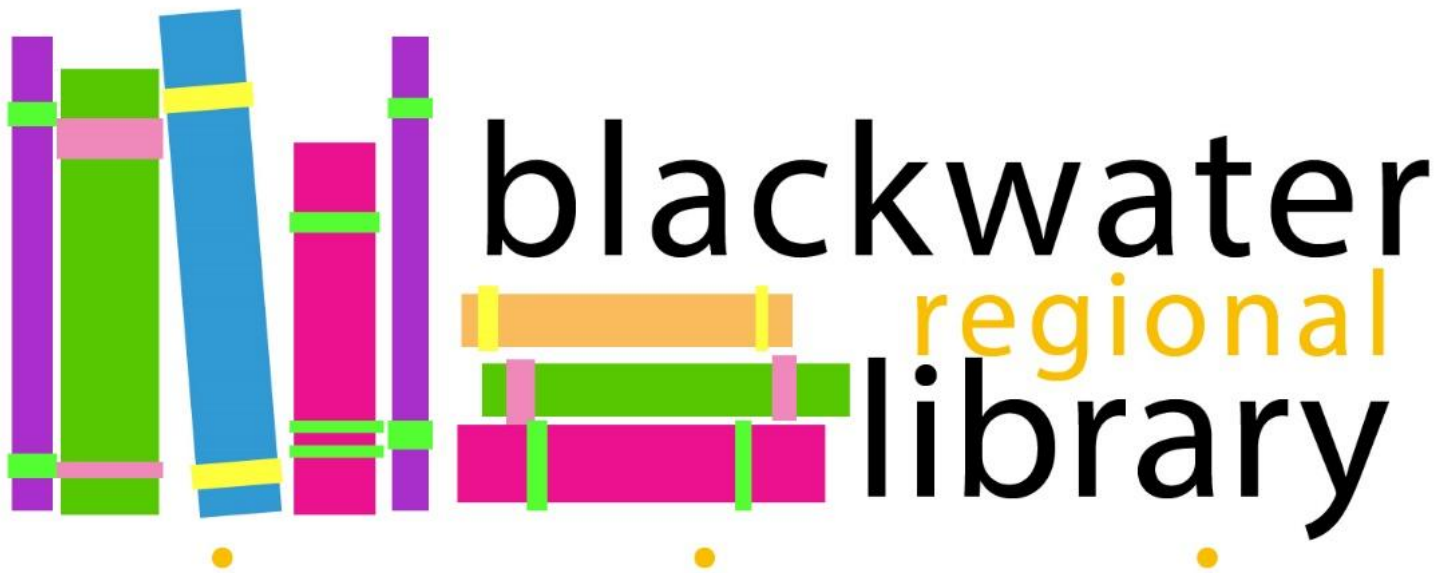
DATE	TRANSACTION TYPE	MEMO/DESCRIPTION	NUM	AMOUNT
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11857	(235.50)
03/31/2026	Bill		March 2026 petty cash	235.50
Quadient Postage				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		BH3812535394	(560.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		8140 0461 3.22.2026	560.00
Queen B's Cleaning Service				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11858	(1,096.50)
03/31/2026	Bill		2016	1,096.50
Sentara Health Plans				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11859	(18,286.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		11136941	18,286.00
Smithfield News				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11860	(33.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		317996 4.1.2026	33.00
Southampton County				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		44610	(65.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		Acct 46 3.16.2026	65.00
Southampton County (1)				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11844	(251.38)
03/18/2026	Bill		2026-02 February gas	251.38
Spectrum Enterprise				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		O1029828944	(28.54)
03/18/2026	Bill		089740301030126	28.54
The Teeny Tiny Farm				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11861	(200.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		CA 6.15.2026 retainer	200.00
Total Business Solutions				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11845	(499.90)
03/18/2026	Bill		5890383-0	499.90
TowneBank/Card Services				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		C1EDA85716	(11,200.12)
03/18/2026	Bill		6457 0001 3.18.2026	11,200.12

# Blackwater Regional Library

## Library Bills

March 2026

DATE	TRANSACTION TYPE	MEMO/DESCRIPTION	NUM	AMOUNT
Unique Management Services, Inc.				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		5103014938342072560	(267.95)
03/18/2026	Bill		6151850	267.95
Verizon Wireless				
03/18/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		4660999028	(2,840.90)
03/18/2026	Bill		6138083053	2,840.90
Wells Fargo Advisors				
03/31/2026	Bill Payment (Check)		11862	(100,000.00)
03/31/2026	Bill		WF CD 3.18.2026	100,000.00

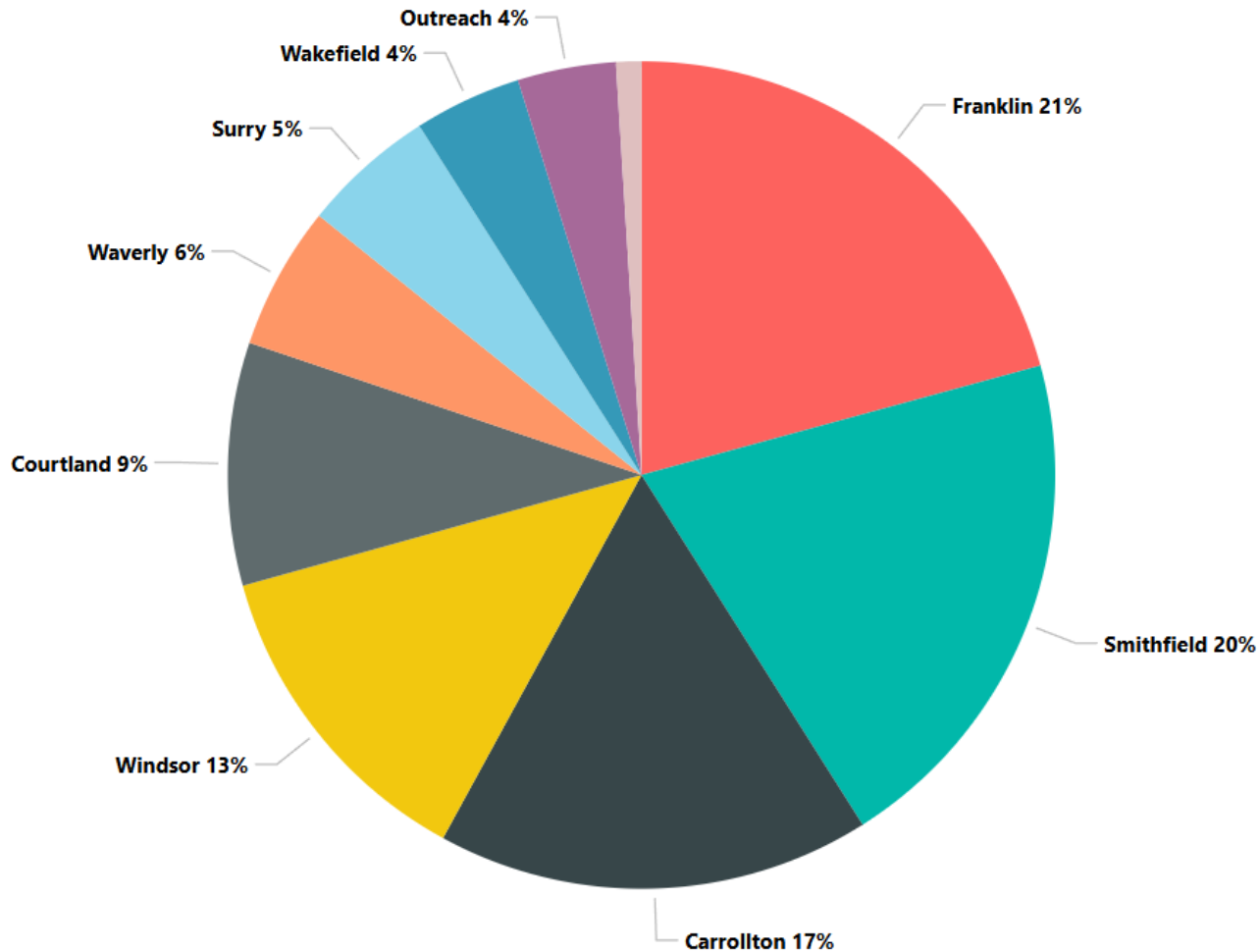


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# March 2026

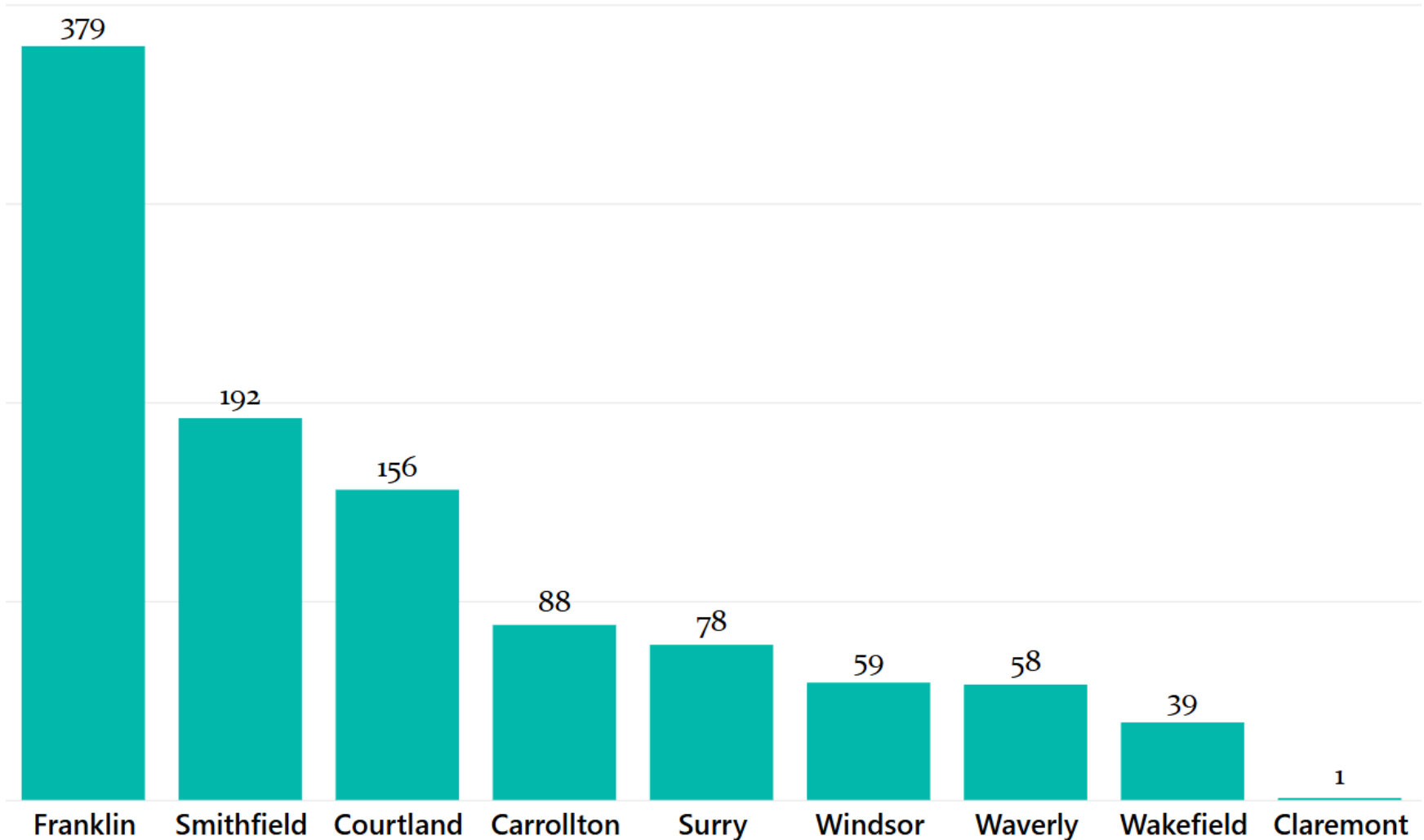
# Statistics

# Monthly Report: Patron Count

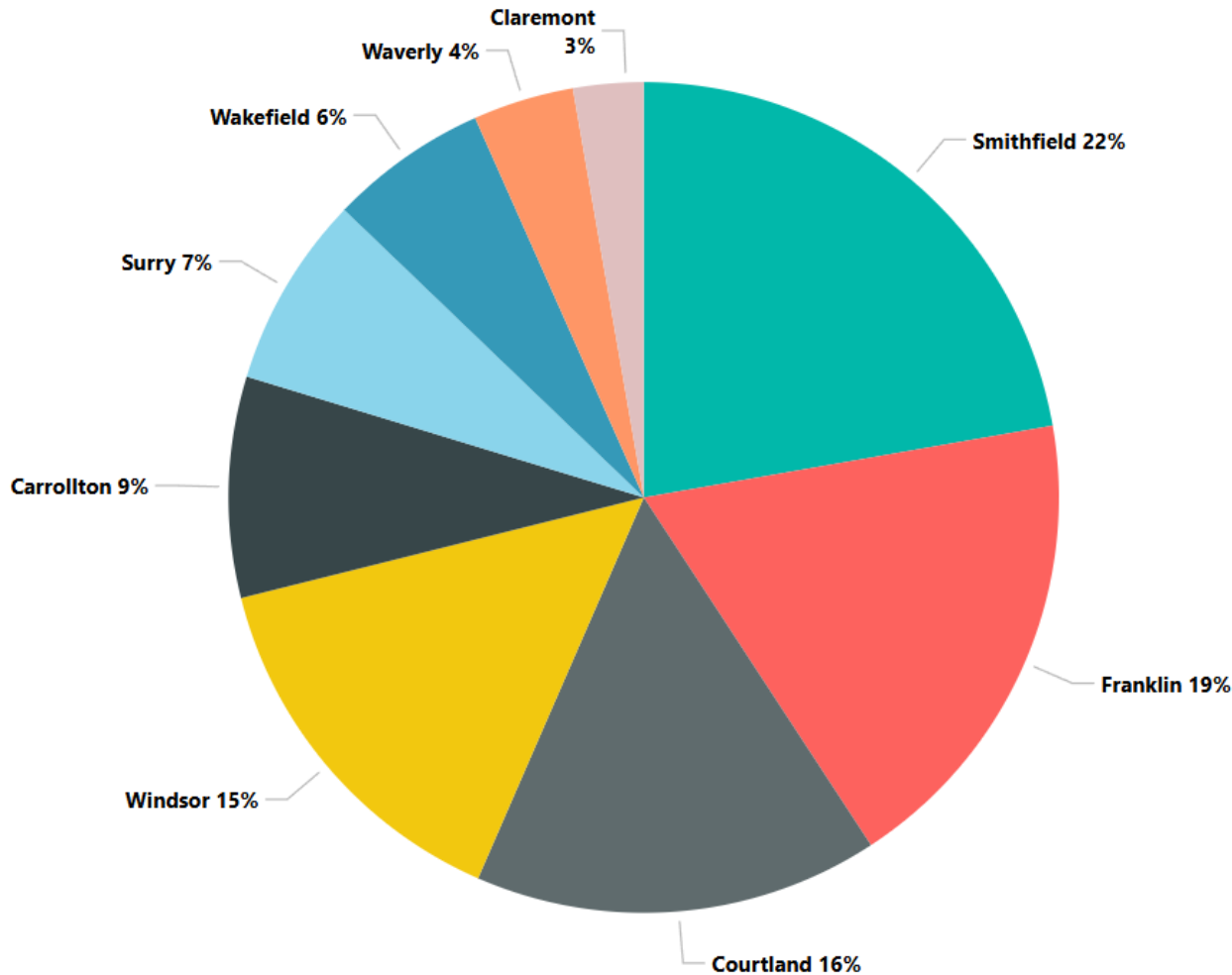


Branch	Patron Count
Carrollton	2590
Claremont	151
Courtland	1451
Franklin	3171
Outreach	587
Smithfield	3102
Surry	795
Wakefield	641
Waverly	857
Windsor	1946
<b>Total</b>	<b>15291</b>

# Monthly Report: In-House Internet

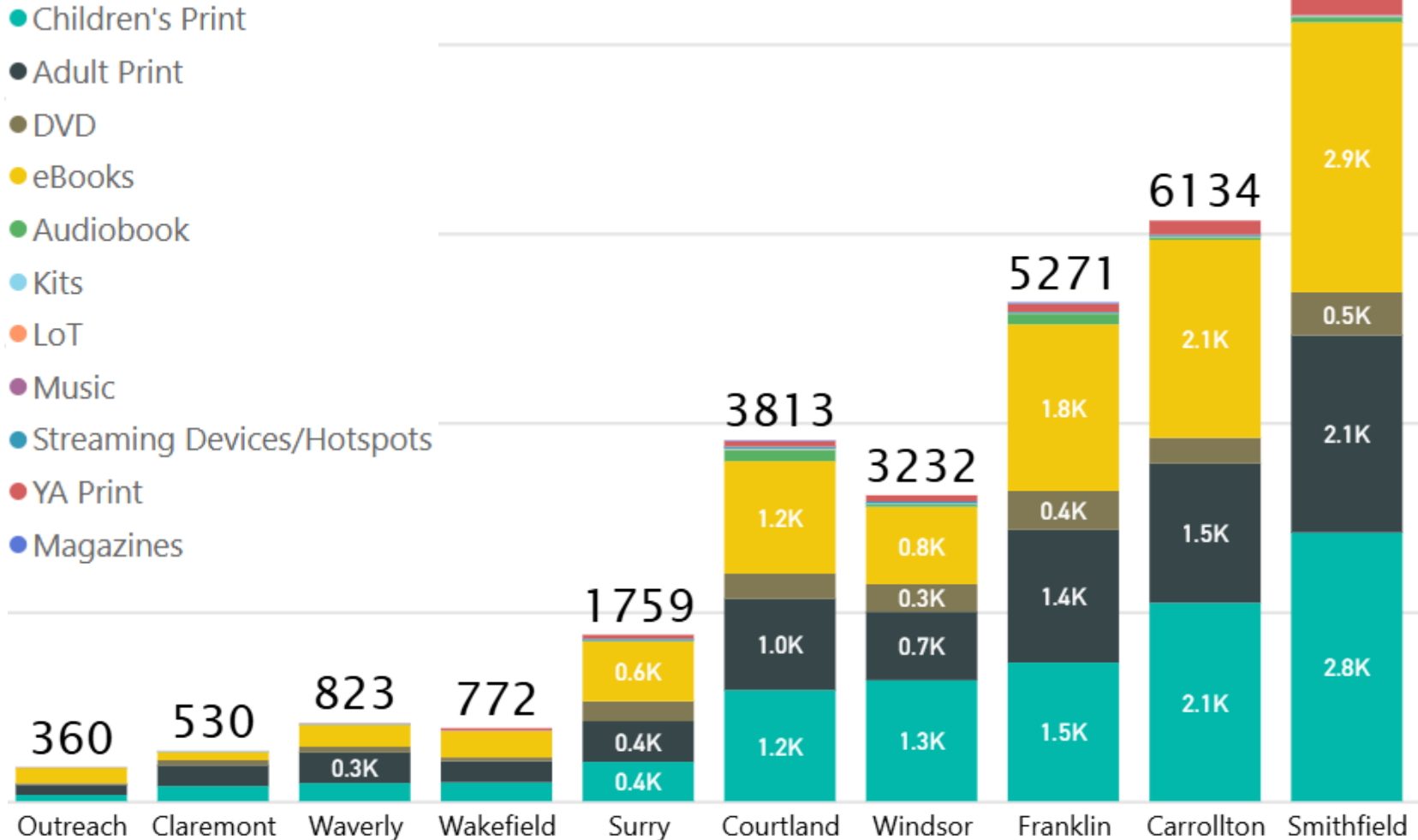


# Monthly Report: WiFi Use



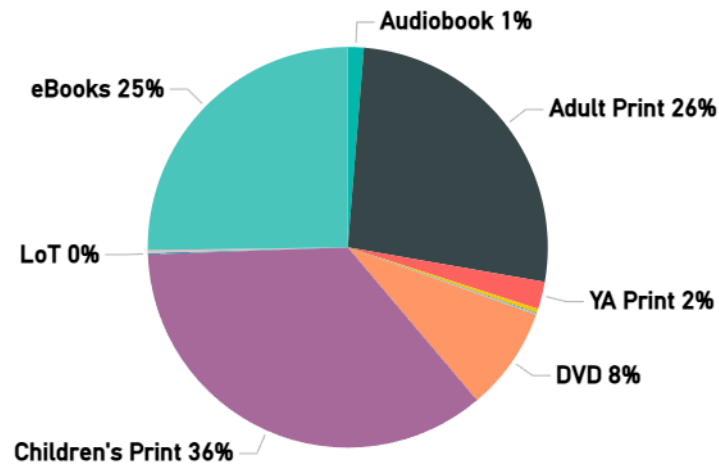
Branch	Wireless Internet Usage
Carrollton	138
Claremont	44
Courtland	253
Franklin	298
Smithfield	357
Surry	120
Wakefield	99
Waverly	63
Windsor	234
<b>Total</b>	<b>1606</b>

# Circulation Report: By Branch



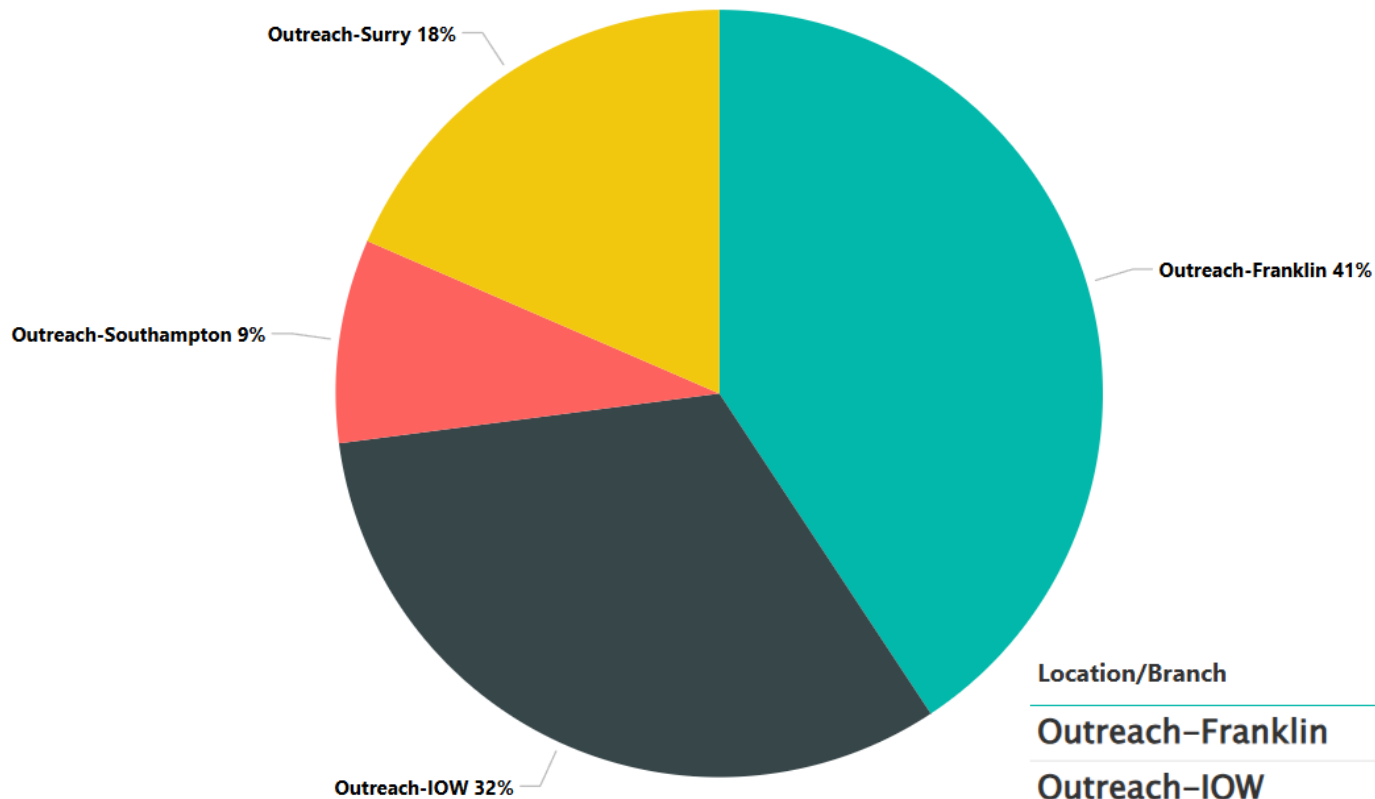
# Circulation Report: Type by Branch

Location	Adult Print	Children's Print	DVD	Audiobook	Kits	YA Print	Music	LoT	Magazines	eBooks	Streaming Devices/Hotspots
Carrollton	35857	56608	9422	1571	123	4396	12	168	12	41712	346
Claremont	6323	1911	2245	23	11	177	0	18	139	1574	49
Courtland	25702	30003	8870	2690	39	1531	2	181	55	21282	638
Franklin	35130	42695	12666	3061	74	2926	21	82	440	34902	308
Outreach	3351	2208	398	168	7	115	0	14	0	1785	33
Smithfield	52683	81421	13134	1421	60	4297	130	197	1066	55537	257
Surry	12487	14264	6495	77	104	695	15	94	43	12178	508
Wakefield	7110	6253	1573	129	65	509	0	21	13	5193	30
Waverly	9534	11008	3535	174	145	457	0	50	2	4487	188
Windsor	18186	31226	6750	728	320	2113	1	36	49	17976	328
<b>Total</b>	<b>206363</b>	<b>277597</b>	<b>65088</b>	<b>10042</b>	<b>948</b>	<b>17216</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>861</b>	<b>1819</b>	<b>196626</b>	<b>2685</b>





# Outreach Report: Programs



Location/Branch	Outreach Programs	Attendance
Outreach-Franklin	7	427
Outreach-IOW	6	338
Outreach-Southampton	3	90
Outreach-Surry	2	194
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1049</b>

# STAFFING AND WORKSHOP REPORT

## **Staffing Update April 2026 Blackwater Regional Library**

### **New Hires**

- Jennifer Corl – Senior Library Assistant, Sussex branches
- Loretta Bruning – Senior Library Assistant, Windsor branch

### **Promotions**

### **Transfers**

- Holly Fowler, Senior Library Assistant to Substitute Library Assistant

### **Separations**

- Ben Neal – Library Director

### **Vacancies**

- Library Director
- Senior Library Assistant – Courtland branch
- Library Assistant – Sussex branches

## STAFFING AND WORKSHOP REPORT

### Training Sessions – March 2026

**Isle of Wight County** staff completed a total of 3 trainings

**Central office** staff completed a total of 1 training

**3/3/2026 – FY2027 TLC Virtual Regional Meeting** - This was the annual regional meeting for our health insurance provider. Presenters gave an overview of things to do in the upcoming renewal/open enrollment process. Vendor representatives shared information on individual insurance products, changes in current coverage, and available online resources.

**3/25/2026 – Getting Started with Kanopy** - Though I have Kanopy downloaded on my own devices, this webinar was beneficial as I now feel more confident when helping patrons. Kanopy can be enjoyed on any device and can also be accessed through Libby. The key takeaways I learned were:

1. You can filter by ticket requirements (great option as patrons only have 10 tickets per month through Blackwater).
2. No tickets needed for Kanopy Kids and parental controls are in place such as a pin number is needed to exit out of Kanopy Kids.
3. Libraries can show Kanopy titles in house by turning on the “public performance” tab when filtering titles to make sure rights are available.
4. There is a “share” option on Kanopy which allows you to share a film or playlists with other Kanopy users.

**3/30/2026 – Active Shooter** - The U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s active shooter webinar provides a comprehensive overview of how individuals and organizations can prepare for, respond to, and recover from an active shooter incident. The training emphasizes that these events are unpredictable and evolve quickly, making preparedness essential. Viewers are guided through key concepts such as recognizing behavioral indicators, understanding common patterns of active shooter events, and developing an Emergency Action Plan tailored to their environment. The webinar also highlights the importance of communication protocols, coordination with first responders, and incorporating incident-management principles into organizational planning. Run, Hide, or Fight.

The video also explains how to assist law enforcement once they arrive and provides scenario-based examples to help viewers visualize effective decision-making under stress. Together, these resources aim to expand public awareness, strengthen preparedness, and equip both private citizens and critical-infrastructure partners with actionable steps to mitigate risk.

## STAFFING AND WORKSHOP REPORT

**3/30/2026 – Extreme Customer Service, Every Time** - The “Extreme Customer Service, Every Time” webinar, presented by Gretchen Caserotti of the Meridian Library District, focuses on transforming everyday patron interactions into exceptional, memorable experiences. Ms. Caserotti emphasizes that true customer service goes far beyond polite gestures—it requires intentional engagement, clear communication, and a willingness to exceed expectations at every touchpoint. Drawing on the internationally recognized service model of the Darien Library, she offers practical, actionable strategies that libraries of any size can implement, including rethinking restrictive policies, empowering frontline staff, and consistently evaluating whether procedures genuinely benefit the community. The session encourages libraries to shift their mindset from protecting rules to prioritizing people, creating an environment where patrons feel welcomed, understood, and valued. Ms. Caserotti Noted several notable businesses such as Amazon/Zappos, Ritz Carlton, Restaurants and other businesses that focus on the customer service model as well.