

Programs and Services for Older Adults

San Mateo County Libraries' older adults are as diverse as the rest of the population. They differ by age, education, life experience, health status, geographic location, and income. Libraries are an important place for community members at any age and we strive to design programs, services and collections that are inclusive and reflect the diversity of needs and interests of different age groups. Three key focus areas we want to highlight are technology, partnerships, and wellness.

Technology

We offer a robust menu of technology assistance to provide choice and offer customized experiences.

- **Memory Lab Support:** Staff help preserve memories and convert recordings and photos to allow them to be widely shared and accessible. Lost history finds expression when Super 8 recordings can suddenly be shared over text with grandchildren.
- **Fix-It Clinics:** At these events, older adults are often both the teachers and the participants. Fixers with decades of experience, often retired, make the world a little more sustainable by showing their peers and younger adults how to repair cameras, appliances, and small machines.
- **1:1 Tech Tutors:** Appointments are scheduled with staff, who work individually with community members to teach how to use ebooks, resolve challenges with using smartphones, and troubleshooting problems with apps.
- **VR Programming:** These offer opportunities to travel the world, experience empathy, and build strength.
- **Weekly Drop-In Tech Help:** This is a standing opportunity for residents to receive support without needing to make an appointment.
- **Hotspots and combos –** Patrons use this service to stay connected with family. A significant service during the pandemic, hotspots and combos continue to see consistent use.
- **Older adult laptops and assistive technology workstations:** Available at each location, these popular features offer alternatives to common features including typing on the keyboard and seeing and reading on computer screens. Customized laptops offer larger font, closed captioning, and helpful widgets.

Partnerships

We cultivate relationships with senior centers and related organizations to bring services out (traveling to the library can be a barrier) and welcome groups to our library. In addition, we partner with multiple agencies to host events on high interest topics.

- Senior Centers: Many of our libraries conduct regularly scheduled visits to local senior centers. Services provided include senior book clubs, onsite e-resource support, reading materials delivery and pop-up libraries. Groups have also visited our libraries for programs such as a monthly speaker and luncheon series on topics relevant to older adults.
- VA Mobile Clinic & County Veterans Service Office: Staff provide consultations, referrals, and assistance in navigating the VA system.
- Social Safety Net Providers at the Library: Case workers assist with Medi-Cal, CalFresh, emergency food referrals, shelter referrals, rental assistance, utility assistance, unemployment, State Disability, Paid Family Leave, and general forms.
- Financial Literacy: Topics include how to protect retirement accounts from excessive taxes, how to avoid scams and identify theft targeted towards older adults, and how to recognize elder abuse.
- AARP Driver Safe Course– Intended for adults 50 and older, the course covers defensive driving and driving challenges that arise with aging.

Wellness

We define health broadly and recognize that protective power of a strong body, a challenged mind, and the feeling of belonging.

- Meals Services: Older adults enjoy free meal provision in East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks, and Half Moon Bay.
- Movement and Mindfulness: We offer a variety of mind-body connection experiences that include Tai Chi, yoga, meditation, and Qigong—these promote flexibility and mobility while reducing tension and strain.
- Artistic Expression: All our libraries host regular art classes tailored to seniors, such as brush painting, gem painting, calligraphy, watercolor, and pencil drawing.
- Live Music: The healing power of jazz and other musical styles is a shared experience highly attended by older adults.
- Written Word: Creative writing classes, author talks, and book clubs are popular and provide important social interaction.

Aging can be accompanied by challenges. Loneliness is an epidemic, a public health crisis, and painful and isolating on an individual basis. In all our services and programs, we seek to build connections—not just to the world of ideas, but between people. Whether we can assist older adults in making new friends, provide the simple solace of a routine with other people, or provide casual social interactions that can be sustaining—we seek to enhance quality of life. Older adults are a vibrant and growing demographic in San Mateo County, and we continue to evaluate our services in alignment with feedback, age friendly city efforts in many of our communities, and national trends.