



## SOMERSET COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM OF NEW JERSEY

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### **Background:**

On May 4, 2020 the Somerset County Library System of New Jersey (SCLSNJ) launched a test pilot for a new initiative, *Hands Free Holds*, at the Bridgewater branch. This service offered customers the opportunity to pick up items they previously placed on hold during the closure due to the COVID-19 public health situation.

### **Summary:**

There were over **5,100 items on the hold shelves** across all 10 branches, with **more than 400 customers** with materials on hold at the Bridgewater branch alone. The goal of this closure service was to offer customers that may not have access to virtual resources obtain physical materials in a manner that was safe and secure. SCLSNJ staff began to reach out to customers with holds at the Bridgewater branch by phone to schedule a 10-minute pickup window. When customers arrived at the building during their scheduled time, the items were outside the front door, checked out, and ready to go.

### **Goals Relative to Strategic Priorities, and Core Services:**

The ultimate goal was to adaptably maintain core library services throughout the county even while the branches remained closed to the public. One of the primary core services is making personalized connections between the community and materials. *Hands Free Holds* did exactly that.

### **Impact:**

Within two weeks staff was able to almost clear the hold shelf **of 400 plus individual holds**. The popularity and customer response prompted the doubling of the amount of pick-ups every 10-minutes, as well as extending the pick-up time/s by one hour. This doubled production and allowed new holds to be filled. The work was constant. Staff then began fielding questions from *Ask a Librarian* as word circulated about what *Hands Free Holds* was accomplishing. Within weeks the service was extended to the Warren, Mary Jacobs and North Plainfield branches. Train-the-Trainer meetings were held to begin implementation with more staff, and more branches were brought online until the *Hands Free Holds* program was operational in nine out of 10 locations. Additionally, almost all patrons would ask if we were accepting returns, and the Bridgewater branch **ultimately accepted over 6,000 items** while not officially opening book returns.

*Hands Free Holds* services granted patrons access to materials that they normally would not be able to easily obtain. At times, staff was able to accommodate special requests. The team was happy to offer tax forms to patrons that were desperate to obtain with the tax deadline looming. One parent asked staff to pull any 20 books for her young children. A senior citizen commented she was continually listening to the same audio books and asked if staff could pull titles on a favorite author. One day staff went to the door to find a patron offering staff a bag of chocolate. Another patron stuck a thank you note to the door illustrated with drawn hearts. One patron had her daughter color a sheet of paper thanking the library for her books that she was able to pick-up and read. **When *Hands Free Holds* ended on July 3, 2020 the Bridgewater branch alone had checked out over 3,600 items.**