

# Bright Lights Book Project

## Bright Lights Book Project 2025 Annual Report

**Mission:** To expand access to books and literacy resources to appreciative readers of all ages.

**Vision:** Envisioning the power of literacy to change lives.

# Introduction

The Core Purpose of the Bright Lights Book Project is to envision literacy to change lives by making books accessible to appreciative readers of all ages. We are a Palmer, Alaska based 501(C)(3) nonprofit. We distribute free books locally and to Alaskan villages.



Executive Director Alys Culhane.

We currently stock 49 bookcases and Little Libraries in Palmer, Wasilla, Sutton, and Eagle River. The bookcases are located in places frequented by the general public and by students. Book recipients include those of all ages, genders, and reading levels, with a focus on children and young adults.

2025 was another big year for the BLBP; we expanded our footprint in the historic Eagle Hotel. We now have more book storage space, which we also use for literacy events and other activities.

We've recently partnered with the Alaska Literacy Program. The ALP now shares some of our space, which allows them to offer GED and ESL services in the Valley.

As the year progresses, we will increase our partnerships with local schools, Alaska villages, and other collaborators.

*Alys Culhane, Executive Director*

# Partnerships

2025 was a big year for the Bright Lights Book Project in terms of partnerships. In the spring we were approached by the Alaska Literacy Program and asked if we would be interested in providing space so that ALP could expand their offerings to the Mat-Su Borough. ALP has been around for 50 years, and they provide adult workforce education by offering ESL and GED classes to immigrants and to non-high school graduates.



Skye is a math tutor for ALP

We also expanded our partnership with Kids Kupboard. Kids Kupboard provides free lunches to children whose families fall below the poverty line and face food insecurity. The BLBP location at the Eagle Hotel in Palmer has been a Kids Kupboard lunch drop off location for nearly two years, and in the summer months, Kids Kupboard and BLBP provide free books and Storytime at Bugge Park in Palmer. Last summer, the BLBP partnered with Kids Kupboard at the Wineck Barn at the Alaska State Fair. And in October, BLBP and KK collaborated on Trick or Treat Street in Palmer – over 600 kids received books and string cheese

The BLBP said yes to this partnership, and we're finding numerous ways to collaborate. For example, ALP digital literacy tutor, Lawrence Giron, is now BLBP's part-time volunteer coordinator.



BLBP had 12 converted newspaper boxes at the State Fair. The box at Brad's Reptile House was a big draw.

# Increased Literacy Efforts



Nacho reading during a story time event

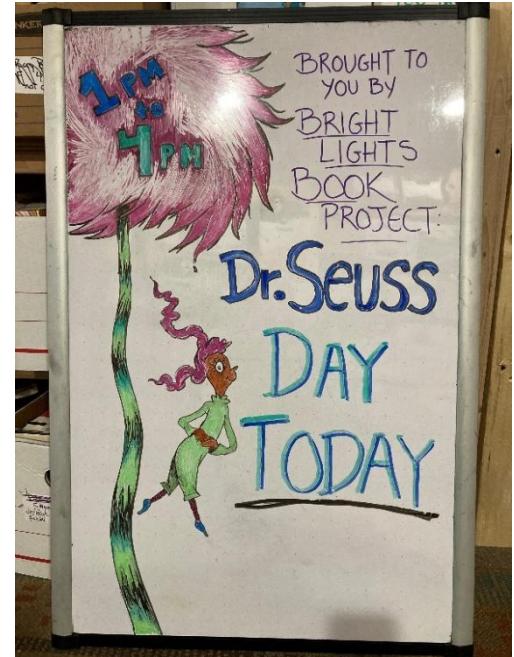
In mid-2023 we moved into the former banquet room of the Eagle Hotel. In 2025, our having larger space enabled us to engage in a wider range of literacy activities.

We've been told by community members that family members and friends are reading more because BLBP books are so

accessible. One teacher told us that a parent said to her that she appreciates the BLBP books because her children were losing or damaging library books, which she had to replace. Last year, we salvaged and distributed over 70,000 books.

## Literacy events held during 2025

- Dr. Seuss Day
- Three elementary school field trips
- Story Time at the Tsunami Warning Center
- Story Time at the Animal Shelter
- Dr. Martin Luther King Celebration
- Storytime in the Wineck Barn and newspaper boxes of books at the Alaska State Fair
- Distributed books at the Colony Days Parade
- Dogs Dogs Dogs: Children read to dogs
- Hall-O-Ween at Mat-Su College
- Reading Rendezvous in Anchorage
- Palmer Arts Council Art Walk
- Literacy in Alaska Awards (CLIA) from the Alaska Center for the Book



# Volunteers

Until 2025, the BLBP was a 100% volunteer run organization. This year, we hired a part-time Volunteer Coordinator. Lawrence Giron (who also works as a digital literacy tutor for ALP) has a BS in Mechanical Engineering and a Master's in Computer Science. Lawrence organizes BLBP volunteers and put our volunteer management system online.



Lawerence and Harry Banks at the Colony Christmas Parade

Volunteers continue to sort, clean, categorize, and distribute books to our BLBP bookcases. Volunteers also work at events and accept donated books on site. BLBP volunteers include seniors, mentally disabled students seeking workplace training, honors students, church groups, and LDS missionaries. Finally, volunteers take care of the of the behind the scenes organizing and administrative work and fundraising.



Pam, Kaylene, and Ignacio clean books.

We have greatly increased the number of volunteers. In 2025 we logged over 12,000 volunteer hours.

# Bookcases in the Community

The Bookcases in the Community Program is our flagship program and is how the Bright Lights Book Project was started. By providing books to the community, the BLBP is especially helping those who may not have ready or affordable access to them.



The Valley Hotel Bookcase was funded by Janet Kincaid



Alys stocking the Wolf Eyecare bookcase. | Elaina and Pam at the new Lekker Bakery bookcase.



Bookcase at the Palmer DMV.

The BLBP distributes books to over 40 public bookcases in private business, government buildings, and schools throughout the Mat-Su Borough. Last year we distributed over 70,000 books.



# Books at Events

BLBP volunteers distributed books at several events during 2025. We were a regular fixture at the Palmer Visitor Center every Friday this past summer. We also attended several annual events such as the MLK Celebration and the Hall-O-Ween night at Mat-Su College, and the Colony Christmas Parade in Palmer. There we passed out books to those who walked through the Koslosky Building on their way to attend the parade. BLBP volunteers also passed out books at Palmer's Colony Days Parade, the Reading Rendezvous, the Science of Reading Symposium, and the Anchorage Association for the Education of Young Children.

In 2024, the BLBP has become a field trip destination for pre-school and elementary school students and their parents. This has continued in 2025; students also attend Storytime and engaged in LEGOs literacy-related activities.



Appreciative readers at the Loussac Library's Reading Rendezvous.



Books don't cause cavities. Kids along the Colony Days Parade route examine BLBP books.

# Books in Schools

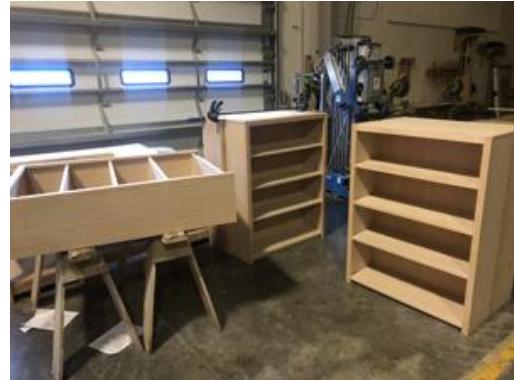
This past year, we again received a grant to purchase lumber for bookcases. Our most recent bookcase grant was from Bishop's Attic II. In previous years, the Matanuska Valley Federal Credit Union and the Palmer Community Foundation also provided us with similar funding.



Some schools have converted newspaper boxes

## Bookcases and/or newspaper box locations

Colony High School  
Teeland Middle School  
Palmer Junior Middle School  
Palmer High School  
Valley Pathways School  
Shaw Elementary  
Career Tech High School  
Sutton Elementary  
Wasilla Middle School  
Butte Elementary  
Sherrod Elementary  
Colony Middle School  
Machetanz Elementary  
Pioneer Peak Elementary  
Wasilla High School



Bookcases built by Career Tech High.

The lumber (oak) we purchase with grant money enables Mat-Su Career and Technical High School shop class students to build community and school bookcases. To date, students have built 22 BLBP bookcases.



Rusty, the former Palmer High School Librarian with one of the first bookcases.

# Books to Villages

Over the past four years, the BLBP has sent books to villages. Shipment costs were paid by Saltchuk, individual donors, and in-kind donations from Northern Air Cargo and other air cargo shippers. The Gottstein Company shipped 26 boxes to 16 villages along with their grocery store cargo.



Kids looking through the six suitcases that Alys and Pam took to the Utqiagvik bookfair.

For the first quarter of 2025, to conclude FY24 Federal funding, Alys traveled to three additional villages, the BLBP books preceding her. In January, Alys travelled to Mountain Village on the Yukon and assisted in setting up a student book fair. In March, Alys traveled to Nome and Elim – the Pams (Huyck and Meekin) accompanied her to Nome, where they did events at two schools and a bakery.



Books at NAC terminal headed to Eek.

In 2024, a Congressionally Directed Spending grant through Senator Murkowski helped us ship approximately 9,706 books to villages and for Alys to travel to four villages and help with book fairs and a library revitalization project at the Old Harbor elementary school. We've applied for a 2026 appropriation.



Pam Meekin in Nome.

# BLBP at the Alaska State Fair

The Bright Lights Book Project placed and stocked 12 converted newspaper boxes with books. Some boxes held children's books, and others were thematic: the Eckert Garden box contained garden books, the bee demo area featured a box with bee and other science books for children and adults.



Making paper airplanes in Wineck Barn.

We had fun sharing the Wineck Barn with Kids

Kupboard staff and volunteers. We held daily Storytime, readings, and other literacy-based activities. Participants read instructions

Box in front of the Wineck Barn

and then made paper airplanes.



Storytime in the Wineck Barn



Pam Huyck at Alaska Train story walk in front of Wineck Barn

# Financials

During 2025, the BLBP received several grants and sponsorships plus numerous small cash donations. We received funding from Saltchuk, which provided funding for our operations, vehicle fuel and maintenance, and insurance; from the Mat-Su Health Foundation for rental for our U-Haul unit and hotel space; from Bishop's Attic II to buy lumber for Career Tech high school student built bookcases; and from the Palmer Lions Club for literacy activities and the Books to Villages Program.



Executive Director Aly with the BLBP delivery vehicle, which was funded by Rasmuson Foundation.

## Looking to the Future

Lawrence Giron is our part-time volunteer coordinator and first BLBP staff member. The BLBP has been an all-volunteer workforce, and as an all-volunteer organization, our finances look quite good. But as we've grown, our need for full-time staffing has become more apparent, and so we must integrate paid staffing into our operation: an Executive Director and Operations Manager are high priorities.

We've been told by consultants during board governance training and separate executive director training that paid staff is essential to the organization's survival. (Board and ED training was provided by the Foraker Group and paid for by the Mat-Su Health Foundation.) As we move into 2025, our focus will be on making the organization more sustainable. Thus, our goal is to hire paid staff.