

Young Visionary's Dream Becomes a Reality

BY JACKIE SCHATELL

In the bustling Terminal A at Newark Airport, where travelers rush to catch flights or wait for delays to pass, a small but significant addition has captured the hearts of many. It's a lending library called "Let's Read Today," where travelers can borrow books for free. It is the brainchild of Livingston fifth-grader Sia Malhotra, who had a dream and made it happen! What started as a simple idea blossomed into a three-year journey of persistence, collaboration, and community support.

Sia's inspiration came during a vacation to Alaska in 2021, where she encountered a library in an airport. Recognizing the potential for such a space to benefit travelers, especially children and those facing financial constraints, she set out to bring this concept to her local airport in New Jersey. Upon her return, she began reaching out to Port Authority of NY and NJ officials, expressing her vision for a library at Newark Airport.

After numerous emails and meetings, Sia's idea gained traction. With the Port Authority's support and Home Depot's generosity in East Hanover, the library became a reality. Home Depot donated materials and built the library according to Sia's design, including space for children's and adult books.

The library, aptly named "Let's Read Today," opened in February of 2024 with an initial collection of 300-400 books. However, through Sia's continued efforts and community donations, the library's collection has grown to over 4,000 books, many of which are stored at Sia's home until they make their way to the library. Private donors, schools, and local libraries have contributed to ensure a diverse and plentiful selection for travelers. While the goal is for travelers to pick up a book at the airport, read it



From left: Sarah McKeon, General Manager, Newark Liberty and Teterboro Airports; Cristina Kiley, General Manager, Talent Acquisition at The Port Authority of New York & New Jersey; and Sia Malhotra.

on the plane and/or during their trip, and then drop it off at the library upon their return home, the library still needs replenishing. Every few weeks, Sia and her parents take a ride to the airport to restock the shelves with books.

The library connects to Sia's Let's Read Today website through its mission of promoting literacy and providing access to books. The website serves as a platform for people to connect with Sia and donate books to the airport library. It also includes information about the library's impact and how others can get involved in promoting literacy in their communities. The website acts as an extension of the physical library, spreading the message of the importance of reading and sharing stories.

The significance of Sia's feat did not go unnoticed – NJ Governor Philip Murphy recently called to congratulate Sia on her achievement, recognizing the library's importance in providing a sense of comfort and escape for travelers, especially during stressful travel times.

Looking ahead, Sia plans to expand the library concept to other terminals at Newark Airport and potentially to other nearby airports. With ongoing support from the community and organizations like Home Depot, Sia's vision of a more literate and connected airport environment is on its way to coming to fruition.



Sia Malhotra at Newark Airport with officials of the Port Authority of NY and NJ in honor of the Let's Read Today Lending Library that she created.