

INFORMATION BRIEF: Public Libraries and the Self-Service Model

Background information: What is the Self-Service Model?

There has been recent interest and concern in the library community and in the media about libraries implementing extended open hours by offering 'self-service' in the library space when staff is not present. In this service model, library users using their library card will have access to the physical space of a library, and will be able to perform certain functions such as using the space for reading or research, and returning, selecting and checking out books, but will not have access to library staff during these times. During these extended hours, the premises are monitored with security cameras and/or security personnel.

The most well known example of this is found in Denmark, where library systems began offering a self-service option in extended hours, and with no staff in the libraries during these times. Key considerations for libraries embarking on this concept have included the safety of people using the library during these times, and ensuring that extended hours do not replace or erode the scheduling of staffed hours.

Libraries providing a self-service model during extended open hours intend to expand community access to self-service functions, with no reduction in regularly staffed library hours. This is done in response to library users wishing to have more time to access the physical space.

The context: Moving forward with the Self-Service Model

The Ontario Library Association recognizes that the development and provision of exemplary library services are dependent on the leadership and expertise of staff and governance. Quite simply, it is not possible to develop relevant and responsive library services without staff. Libraries have continued to be relevant to communities because the people who work in them continually seek ways to be innovative, to try new approaches, and to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Any library that trials a self-service model is encouraged to continue to promote the valuable role of skilled library staff in developing and providing responsive and innovative library services. While libraries are one of the most active, well-used, and busy services of a community, in the age of the Internet and Google, when people question the relevancy of libraries, we must be vigilant in demonstrating and articulating our value.

Resources – Denmark is the country that has most thoroughly piloted, explored, and implemented Self Service Hours: [Open Libraries in Denmark](#): Scandinavian Library Quarterly.

Innovative public library services – staff-less or staff-intensive?: Library Management; 2014, Vol. 35 Issue 6/7, p469-480, 12p (abstract is available on WilsonWeb to OLA members, using [member login](#))