

THE THREAT

OF STAFFLESS LIBRARIES TO LIBRARY SERVICES AND WORKERS



CUPE

Introduction

Staffless libraries are a growing and alarming trend in communities across the country. A staffless library is a library that is accessible to the public during specified hours with no on-site staff. Staffless library hours may be scheduled for part of the day, such as before and/or after fully staffed hours of operation. In other cases, a library may be open and unstaffed all day.

Different libraries use different terms to refer to staffless libraries, including *self service hours*, *enhanced community access hours*, *extended access service*, *extended hours*, *open library*, and *open+ library*. No matter what term is applied, what's missing in all cases are the highly skilled and professional workers who offer assistance and plan, organize, and deliver libraries' vital public services.

Staffless libraries are an outgrowth of automation, particularly self-service checkout kiosks and Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags. These technologies allow patrons to check materials in and out of the library without staff assistance, transferring the responsibility for tasks normally performed by paid workers to library patrons.

Members of the public who hold a library card must register to access a staffless library. Children cannot access staffless libraries unless they're accompanied by a parent or guardian. Patrons must agree to the library's terms and conditions of use, and to uphold its policies and procedures. Because there are no staff on-duty, the library is monitored remotely via video surveillance and, in some locations, by mobile security guards. If a patron needs help, they must call staff working at another branch to receive assistance over the phone.



Staffless libraries hurt communities and workers

Library CEOs argue that staffless libraries benefit the communities they serve because they increase access to library materials and free-up workers to provide library services in other community-based settings.

Staffless libraries provide patrons the opportunity to borrow and return library materials, and to access public computers, Wi-Fi and space. However, when staff are missing from libraries, so too are the high quality, no-cost library programs and services community members rely on. This impacts children, teens, families, seniors, newcomers, writers, artists, crafters, entrepreneurs, job seekers, and more.

Libraries are the heart of our communities, and many residents would like their local library branch to be open more often. But, all hours of operation should be fully staffed and have an appropriate staff mix and adequate staffing levels. Library workers nurture

social connections, provide assistance, deliver services, and augment patron safety within the library setting. They're vital to the role libraries play in building stronger and healthier communities.

If your employer is planning to implement staffless hours within your library system, here are more reasons that explain why staffless libraries hurt communities and library workers:

No staff assistance

When a library is unstaffed, there are no library workers available to offer answers and advice, to connect patrons to resources and information, to help patrons use technology and computers, and to show patrons how to navigate the library's resources. When staff aren't available to help patrons resolve technical difficulties that could arise when using library equipment, such as photocopiers and computers, they could be left feeling very frustrated. When staff aren't on-site to assist people with disabilities, the library is no longer inclusive because it isn't fully accessible to everyone.

No emergency help

During staffless library hours, there may be no one present in the library to provide immediate assistance to patrons in an emergency, such as placing a call to 911. If a patron experiences an emergency in a part of the library that isn't monitored by the library's security cameras, such as a washroom, the result could be life-threatening.

Patron safety

With no staff on-site to monitor how the library is being used, health and safety issues could arise in areas that aren't monitored by security cameras, such as washrooms. For some patrons, this could make the library an unsafe and, therefore, inaccessible space. Patron-on-patron violence and harassment can occur anytime a library is open. If it occurs when there are no library workers or security staff on-site to mediate the situation to keep everyone safe, the consequences could be significant and traumatic. These are particular concerns for women, children and people who experience marginalization and oppression.

Patron disputes and disruptive behaviour

If patrons engage in unwanted behaviour or become involved in a conflict they're unable to resolve amicably, their behaviour could disrupt the use and enjoyment of the library space by other library users. With no staff available to intervene and enforce the library's code of conduct, a conflict could grow, and patron behaviour could escalate.

Restricted access

Staffless libraries are less welcoming and inclusive spaces. Because patrons must have a library card and pre-register to

access the library when it's unstaffed, the principle that they're equally accessible to everyone when they're open, is lost. These requirements could particularly impact marginalized individuals, such as those who are homeless, as they may not have a library card.

Unreliable access

The doors to staffless libraries are normally locked and patrons must scan their membership card to enter the building. Technical failures could prevent scanners from reading membership cards and allowing patrons to access a branch. If a personal identification number (PIN) is also required, accessibility could be an issue for patrons who can't remember their PIN when there's no staff on-site to let them into the building. These entry requirements could also pose a particular barrier for individuals who have a vision disability.


Unattended children

Children under a certain age may only be able to access a staffless library under the supervision of a parent or guardian. If a child is left unattended by their parent or guardian, this could pose a risk to the child's well-being, and there may be no one present in the library to help them.

Theft and vandalism

Theft and other damage to library property could occur when there are no library workers or security staff on-site to monitor patron behaviour. A membership card and PIN could be stolen or hacked, and a person who behaves inappropriately could hide their identity from security cameras. The costs to a library could be very expensive.

Take action and say NO to staffless libraries!




Libraries need:
Books, computers,
programs, events
and services, staff

CUPE locals are fighting back against the introduction of staffless libraries to protect and promote high-quality library services and jobs.

If your employer is planning to introduce a staffless library, even as a pilot project, here's some strategies your local could employ to push back and say "NO" to staffless libraries in your community.

- Start a letter-writing campaign to your municipality's mayor and councillors, and your Library Board chair and members.
- Participate in community consultations on staffless library pilot projects and service reviews. Speak at public consultation sessions, fill out online surveys, provide a written submission and attend stakeholder roundtables.
- Register to speak against staffless libraries at your Library Board's public meetings.
- Create videos and other social media shareables to inform community members about staffless libraries and to gain their support.
- Hold information pickets at public events and canvass neighbourhoods where staffless libraries could be introduced.
- Launch a public website dedicated to protecting community libraries against the staffless library model.
- Create a network of allies willing to meet with local councillors and speak publicly in defence of quality library services and jobs.
- Collect testimonials from community members who will advocate to protect and improve library services and jobs.
- Organize local actions during municipal elections and demand that candidates commit to protecting your community's library.
- Lobby your municipal government for increased library funding during your community's annual budget season.



Fighting back against staffless libraries at the bargaining table

Steps that locals can take to fight back against the encroachment of staffless libraries can also include bargaining collective agreement language to prevent the adoption of a staffless library model. Contact your CUPE Servicing Representative if you require further information or to talk about including language in your local's bargaining proposals.

XX.01 DEFINITION


A staffless library is a library that is accessible to the public, with the aid of technology, without the presence of staff.

XX.02 PROHIBITIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A STAFFLESS LIBRARY MODEL

The employer agrees to not implement a staffless library model during the term of the collective agreement.

XX.03 NOTICE, CONSULTATION AND DISCLOSURE

The employer will give the union at least three (3) months' written notice if it is considering or planning to implement one or more staffless libraries. The employer will also give the union at least three (3) months' written notice if it is considering or planning to undertake one (1) or more pilot projects to determine the possibility of implementing a staffless library model.



The employer will schedule a meeting with the union within five (5) working days of delivery of written notification to the union as set out in clause XX.02. During the meeting, the employer will disclose to the union the reasons that have led to the decision to consider, plan, or implement a staffless library model.

The employer further agrees to discuss with the union options other than a staffless library model.

At the meeting, the employer agrees to provide to the union all information in its possession regarding the consideration and/or implementation of a staffless library model. Such disclosure shall contain: the nature and degree of change; date or dates on which the employer plans to effect the change; location or locations involved; details of meetings or negotiations with private contractors; information about the contractor(s); length and cost of the contract; and the cost of negotiating, implementing, administering and supervising the contract.

Following receipt of the information, the union may make a submission or provide comments on the employer's plan within forty-five (45) days of delivery of the employer's information. The employer will give due consideration to the union's submission before making a final decision on the implementation of a staffless library model.

XX.04 JOB SECURITY

It is agreed that no current bargaining unit member shall be terminated, placed on layoff, have their hours of work reduced, suffer a reduction in pay, have their recall withheld, or have their classification reduced due to the implementation of a staffless library model. Further, it is not the intent of the employer to use a staffless library model to limit an increase to the bargaining unit through hiring.

XX.05 PROTECTION OF BARGAINING UNIT WORK

In the event the employer implements a staffless library model, the employer agrees that all work necessary for the normal operation and function of one or more staffless libraries will be performed solely by members of the bargaining unit.

Mission NOT impossible: protecting quality library services and jobs



Staffless libraries pose a direct threat to quality library services and jobs at a time when library memberships and the frequency with which patrons are accessing libraries is growing. Through local actions and campaigns, building community support, electing candidates committed to protecting and promoting public libraries, and bargaining strong collective agreement language, the union can fight back and win to support library workers and strengthen library services.