

A photograph of a cozy library interior. In the foreground, an elderly man with glasses and a beard sits on a sofa, reading a book. Behind him, an elderly woman sits in a blue armchair, also reading. In the center, a man sits on a sofa, reading. To his right, a young woman sits on a sofa, reading. On the far right, a young man sits on a sofa, reading. The room is filled with tall wooden bookshelves packed with books. Large windows on the left let in natural light. Three large, white, dome-shaped pendant lamps hang from the ceiling. A small wooden table with a potted plant sits in the center. A floor lamp with a beige shade is on the right.

HYGGE • EDITION 2026

AN ASPIRATIONAL REPORT FOR THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIANSHIP

Hygge, Lifelong Learning & the Empowering Library

The public library as a space of learning, empowerment, and safety.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A warm blueprint for the public library

Public libraries remain among our most consequential civic institutions — free access to knowledge, technology, connection, and trusted human support.

This report treats *hygge* not as décor but as a philosophy of service: organizing space, relationships, and practice around warmth, trust, dignity, and shared well-being.

THE RECOMMENDATION

Build a Hygge Learning Commons — a flexible, welcoming, trauma-informed library uniting cozy design with participatory learning, digital literacy, resource navigation, and low-barrier connection.



The library as civic learning infrastructure

Libraries are no longer passive repositories. Today they are learning platforms, civic commons, technology access points, and social infrastructure that help people navigate complex informational, economic, and social life.

The IFLA report describes lifelong learning as an ongoing, *life-wide* process across many environments — not only formal education (Häggström, 2004).

“Lifelong learning is life-wide — not confined to the classroom.”

Häggström, 2004

LIFELONG LEARNING

Both educational and relational

Agyekum's (2022) study of public libraries in Hamilton, Ontario found that libraries support lifelong learning by creating inclusive spaces where people acquire skills, build relationships, and experience personal accomplishment.

Every interaction becomes part of a wider ecosystem of empowerment:

- **A résumé workshop**
- **Learning telehealth tech**
- **A conversation circle**
- **A safe place to read**



A MODEL TO BUILD ON

The Hyperlinked Library

Michael Stephens describes the hyperlinked library as transparent, participatory, playful, user-centered, and human — grounded in core library values (Stephens, 2011, 2026).

Transparent

Participatory

Playful

User-centered

Human

Hygge extends this framework — asking how participatory, user-centered service can also feel emotionally safe, hospitable, and restorative.



A SERVICE PHILOSOPHY

Hygge is a philosophy, not a décor scheme

NOT JUST AN AESTHETIC

Candles, warm lighting, and Scandinavian décor — a lifestyle trend often commodified in Anglophone culture (Breunig & Kallestrup, 2020; Levisen, 2012).

BUT AN ETHIC OF HOSPITALITY

A way of organizing space, relationships, and practice around the conditions that let people feel welcome, safe, and capable of learning — warmth, simplicity, trust, mutual care, and shared well-being.



Three dimensions of a hygge library



Spatial

Who feels invited to enter?

Comfort, clarity, sensory ease, and places for both solitude and connection.



Relational

Who feels safe enough to stay?

Interactions shaped by dignity, patience, privacy, and nonjudgmental support.



Civic

Who is supported to act?

A free public refuge to learn, recover, connect with resources, and build agency.

THE EVIDENCE

Why coziness and belonging matter

Gorantonaki & Uzzell (2018): library coziness combines aesthetic attraction, functional and emotional comfort, control, safety, warmth, and support for both private and social learning.

Poljak et al. (2023): spatial design shapes users' sense of safety, well-being, and ownership.

These map directly onto library goals:

More dwell time

Less anxiety

Independent learning

Community participation



THE PROPOSAL

Introducing the Hygge Learning Commons

A library-wide service and space model — flexible, welcoming, and trauma-informed — that unites comfortable design with participatory learning, digital literacy, community resource navigation, and low-barrier connection.

Not one redesigned room, but a hyperlinked service ecosystem connecting patrons, staff, partners, technology, and space (Stephens, 2011, 2026).



THE MODEL

Five core components

1

Comfortable learning zones

Flexible seating, warm lighting, quiet corners, and clear sightlines.

2

Low-barrier learning programs

Digital & financial literacy, civic and health info, careers, languages, local history.

3

Empowering reference service

Dignity, patience, and privacy — skill-building over one-off transactions.

4

Community resource navigation

Housing, emergency prep, mental-health referrals, legal and social services.

5

Belonging through participation

User displays, storytelling, peer circles, and intergenerational programs.



Seven steps to build it

1

Audit needs & comfort

Surveys, staff listening sessions, walkthroughs, accessibility reviews.

2

Map services to hygge

Sort programs and spaces by the spatial, relational, and civic dimensions.

3

Pilot a welcoming zone

Redesign one visible area to prove comfort and safety can coexist.

4

Train relational hospitality

Trauma-informed service, privacy, cultural humility, de-escalation.

5

Build civic partnerships

Adult education, housing, health, workforce, and cultural groups.

6

Create modular programs

Short, recurring, drop-in workshops patrons can enter at any point.

7

Assess, adapt & scale

Use quantitative and qualitative evidence, then expand what works.

Benefits — and cautions

BENEFITS

- Integrates space, service, and mission into one experience.
- Makes the library emotionally accessible, not only physically (Mubofu & Mambo, 2021).
- Builds community as social infrastructure — everyday care and connection (Audunson et al., 2019; Rivano Eckerdal et al., 2024).
- Patrons ask more, attend more, try new tech, and return.

CAUTIONS

- Comfort must be equitable — not tuned to dominant or able-bodied tastes.
- “Safety” must never justify over-policing patrons with complex needs.
- Staff need training and support for real emotional labor.
- Measure both numbers and felt outcomes — belonging, confidence, safety.

What it needs to thrive

- **Public investment**

Stable funding for staffing, maintenance, accessible technology, inclusive programming, and partnerships.

- **Free & universal access**

Protect one of the few places people can gather, learn, rest, and get help without paying or proving productivity.

- **Care-based civic values**

Equity, pluralism, privacy, intellectual freedom, and public service rooted in care.

ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

Measuring access, learning & safety

QUANTITATIVE MEASURES

Program attendance

Repeat participation

Card registrations

Computer & Wi-Fi use

Resource referrals

QUALITATIVE MEASURES

Comfort & belonging surveys

Staff observations

Short reflective interviews

Because lifelong learning produces gradual, personal outcomes, qualitative evidence is essential — not supplemental.



IN CLOSING

A PLACE TO LEARN, BELONG, AND ACT

Making democratic values visible

The library offers access without consumption, expertise without intimidation, and community without compulsion. Spatially it invites comfort; relationally it centers dignity; civically it is a free public refuge. By adopting hygge as an ethic of hospitality, safety, and empowerment, libraries strengthen their role as a lifelong learning commons and a source of public well-being.

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