

# Access to Birmingham Library Services

**When and how the people of Birmingham need and use libraries**



December 2024

# What should library users expect?

## *Libraries are more than just buildings*

*“A library is a growing organism”*

*SR Ranganathan India 1892-1972.  
Major library figure whose “Five Laws of Library Science” still influence library thinking today*

### **DCMS guidance:**

- *Comprehensive **and** efficient*
- *for **everyone** who lives, works and studies in the area*
- *encourage **both adults and children** to make full use of the library service*
- *lend books and other printed material free of charge for those who live, work or study in the area*

- **Public libraries contribute to the formation of human capital, mental and physical wellbeing, social inclusivity and community cohesion**
- **Library use is positively associated with subjective wellbeing**, with library users having higher life satisfaction, happiness and sense of purpose in life
- **Being a regular library user is associated with a 1.4% increase in the likelihood of good general health**, valued at a medical-cost saving associated with library engagement at £1.32 per person per year. The NHS cost savings across the library-using English population is £27.5 million per year
- **Libraries play a key role in providing books for children**: where library usage has increased for an individual, the most common reason was ‘I wanted to encourage my child to read books’, (20% of people) followed by ‘I like to read/wish to read more’ (18%)
- **72% of people in England think that libraries are an essential or very important service to the community**. A further 22% regarding them as fairly important
- **Satisfaction with the library service is high among library users**. Of those who visited a library in 2017/18, 95% were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with their visit

*More data and full details at*

*<https://readingagency.org.uk/our-work/our-research/library-facts/>*

# How and when do children & families use their library?

*Book borrowing may be weekly or monthly.*

Many children, young people, and families need and want access multiple times (M). In a good library much use is mixed and recurrent

**Children** (M. Saturday. Early evenings) Reading for fun. Out of school creative activities. Play together. Internet access. Learning to go online safely

**School class visits** (Weekdays. Mostly morning) Joining and library use. How to find and evaluate books and information, in print and online. Storytelling aloud in groups

**Parent/Grandparent/Carer & toddler** (M. Weekdays. Mostly morning) Choosing and reading books. Play. Parents' information in print and online. Referral to helping agencies

**Home educating families** (M. Weekdays) Local (many use LoB). Learning environment. Tailored secondary educ. / GCSE homework collection. Books and ephemeral material. Computer and internet access. WiFi. Funded online resources. Learning activities. Education and curriculum info. Careers info. Trained staff support. Safeguarding

**School students / Homework** (M. Weekday evenings) Local. Study space for solo study or group work. Tailored secondary educ. / GCSE homework collection. Books and ephemeral material. Computer and internet access. Funded online resources. Trained staff support

# How and when do adults use their library?

*Book borrowing may be weekly or monthly.*

Many adults need and want library access multiple times (M). In a good library much use is mixed and recurrent

**Young adults** (M. Weekday evenings. Saturday) “Own” space. Reading groups. Internet access. Making/meeting friends. Socialising

**Student / Researcher** (M. Evenings. Saturday) Local. Study space. Access to print and online resources. International resources for research. Staff expertise and support. Interlending (i.e. print books from British and other libraries)

**Homeworkers/entrepreneurs** (M. Evenings. Saturday) Local. Open and free workspace / working environment. WiFi. Online business info and resources. Staff expertise and support

**Older people** (M. Weekdays. Mostly morning). Book and other activity groups. Chewing the fat. Tea and coffee

**Combating Loneliness** (M. Weekdays. Mostly morning) Seeking company. Join social groups. information referral to help

**Sanctuary and shelter** (M. Most days) Internet access. Wifi. Friendship groups; reassurance with peers. Social, cultural activities. Citizenship test practice. Books in home languages. Support as Birmingham, City of Sanctuary

# How do library services work?

*Library services are organised by the community librarian, often in partnership.*

Many users need and want access multiple times. In a good library much use is mixed and recurrent

**1. Family / community activities.** Day or evening. Arts and crafts. Creative writing. Family history. Local studies

**2. Reading groups.** Usually monthly. Day or evening. Adults or young adults

**3. Homework clubs.** At least 2/week. 4-6pm. Term time. Dedicated resources and web content linked to curriculum. Trained staff support.

**4. Author events.** Key to reading offer. Stand alone or part of a literature festival or linked to a programme e.g. Black History Month. (Can reduce cost if writer is already touring a new publication)

**5. Hosting information / advice sessions.** Various. Weekly. Usually daytime. Specialists on finance/benefits, housing, health/wellbeing, job seeking

**6. Classes / courses / lifelong learning.** Given by agencies like Adult Education, WEA and U3A

**7. Physical and mental health.** A place of respite at a time of your choosing. Be with others or be alone. No one will ask who you are or why you're there. Ask or look for information. Find out where to go for help and support

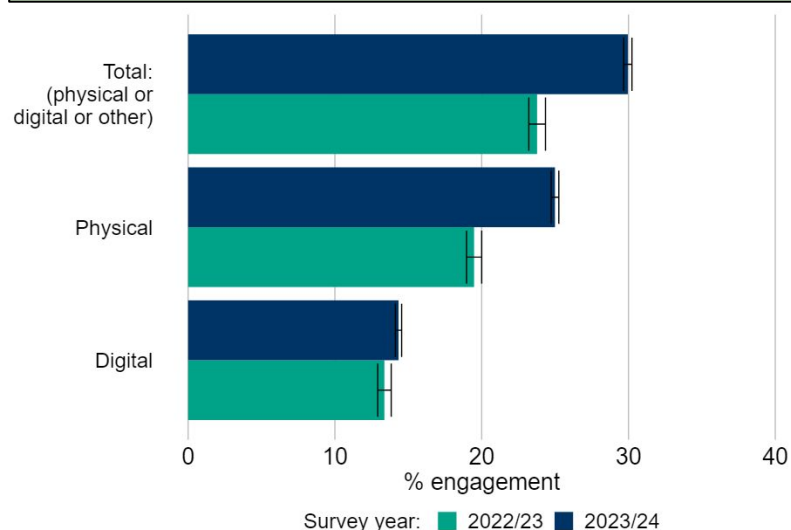
**8. Digital inclusion.** Use computers for free. Don't be afraid to ask for help from staff; that's common. Possibly classes or where to find them. Courses that are themselves online. Access to services online – benefits, housing, immigration / citizenship tests. Help with home educating kids

**9. Wellbeing.** Books, websites and literature on healthy eating, healthy lifestyles. Talks and classes

**10. Print literacy.** Responding to low education attainment, low literacy level, dyslexia. Reader support. Quick Reads (adult fiction written at an accessible literacy level)

# Libraries are engaging

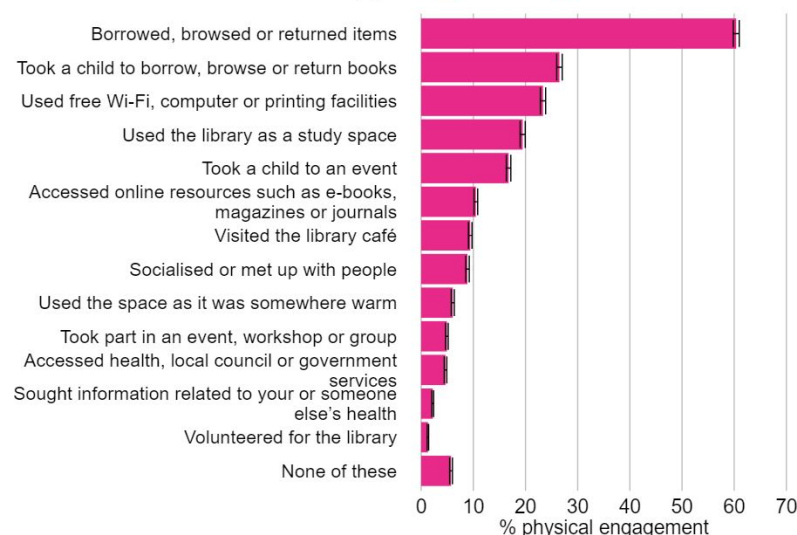
30% of adults in England engaged with libraries at least once in the last 12 months, a 6 percentage point increase from 2022/23 (24%).



25% of adults engaged exclusively physically, whilst 9% engaged both physically and digitally. Only 5% engaged exclusively digitally

## The most popular activities to do whilst physically engaging with libraries:

- 'Browsing, borrowing, and returning reading and media materials' (60%)
- 'Took a child to borrow, browse or return books' (27%)
- 'Used free Wi-Fi, computer or printing facilities' (23%)
- 'Used the library as a study space' (19%)



More facts and detail in the DCMS Participation survey 2023-2024 (England)

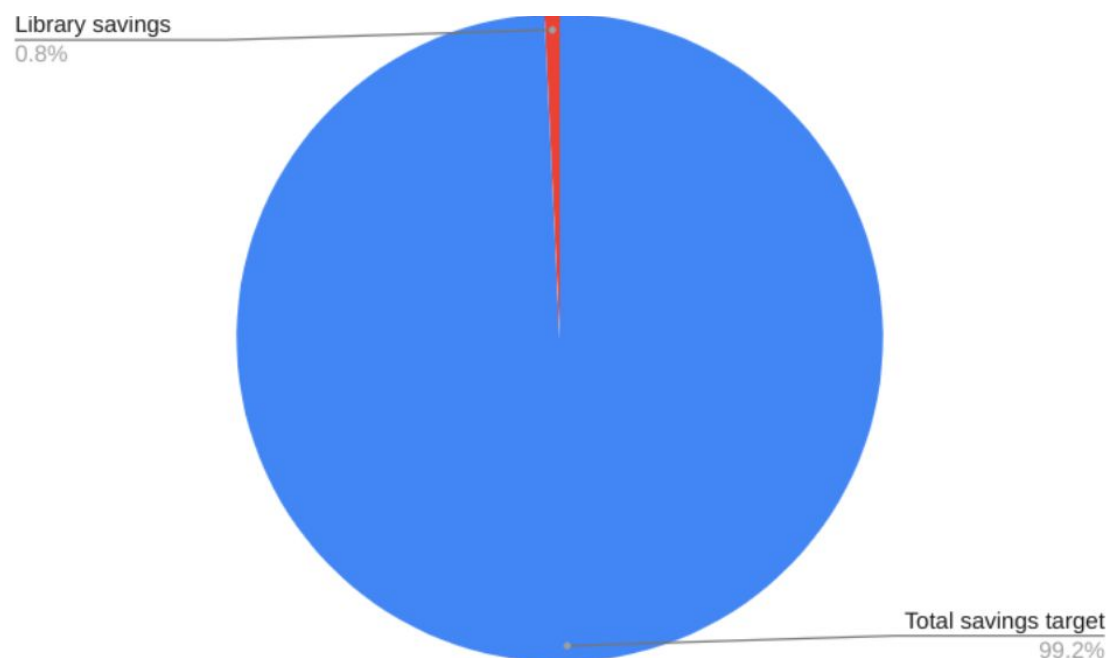
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-survey-2023-24-annual-publication/main-report-for-the-participation-survey-may-2023-to-march-2024#Headline-findings-lib>



# Impact of cuts

Proposed 40% library service cuts will have a massive impact across the whole city.

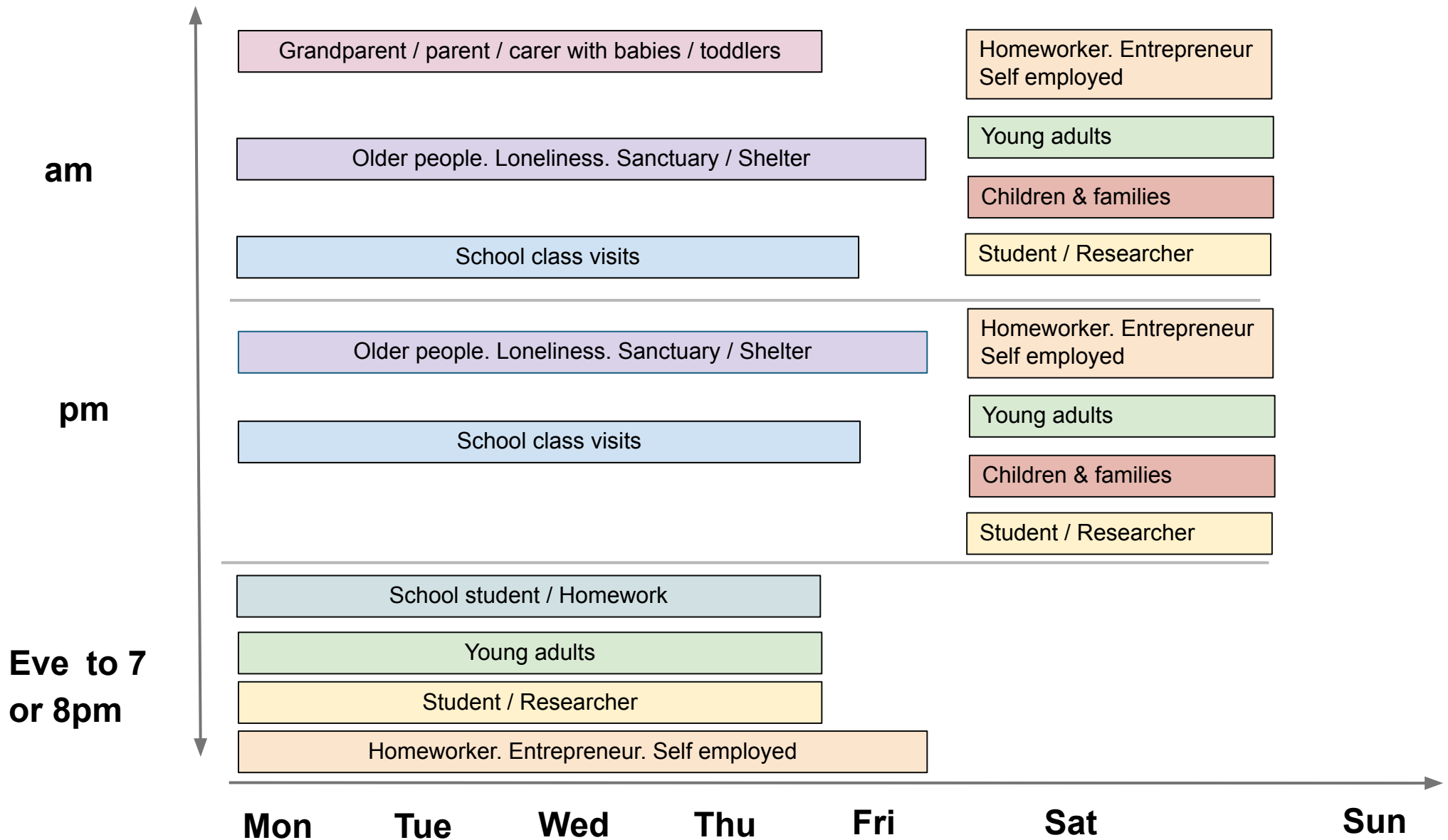
Yet these cuts represent less than 1% of the overall savings target.



**Proposed library cuts make up less than 1% of savings target but will have a disproportionately negative effect:**

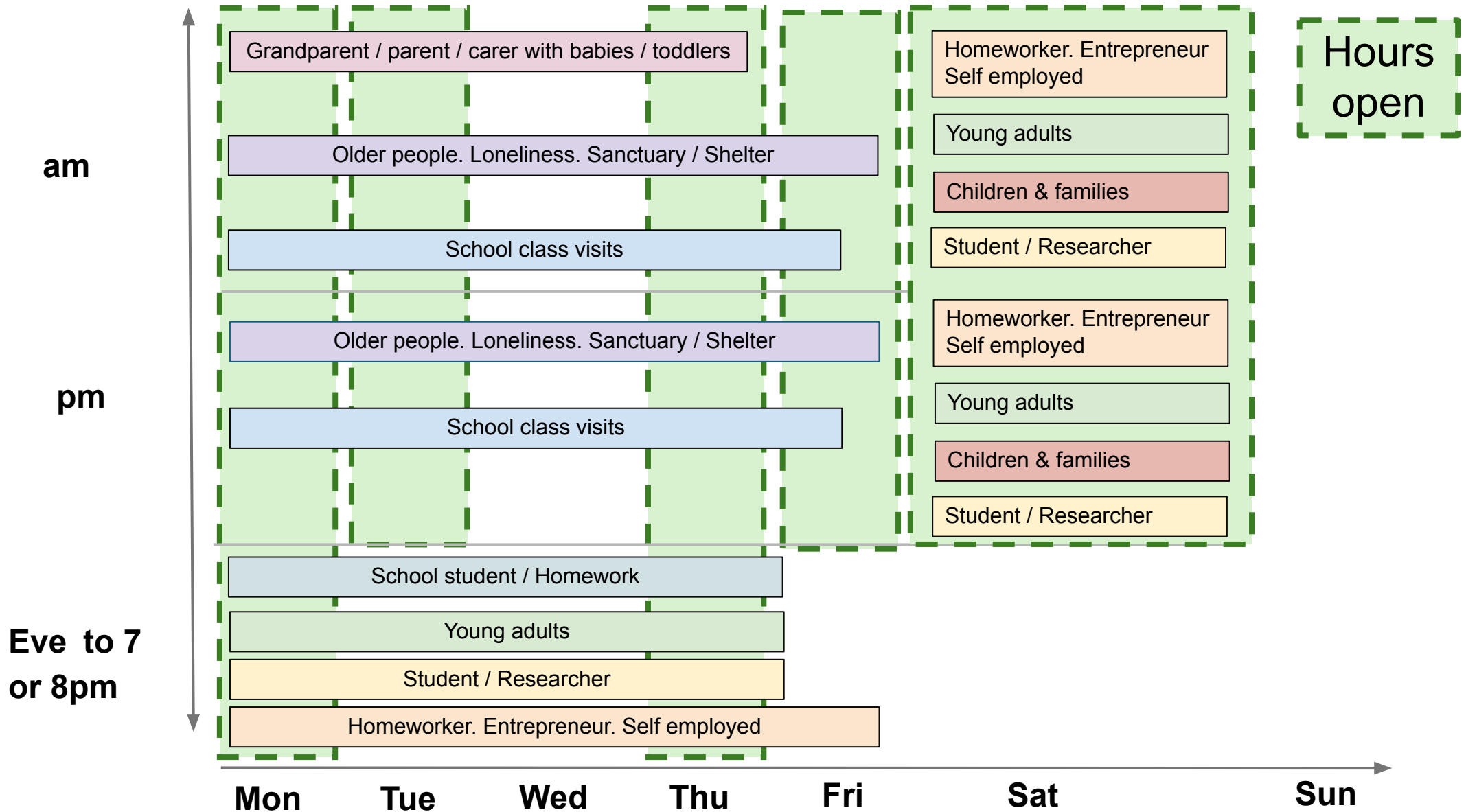
- Loss of local libraries
- Reduced hours
- Staff cut by 1/3
- Loss of long-term benefits to children and vulnerable adults
- Disaffected voters

# Times of the day and week when people most need and use libraries



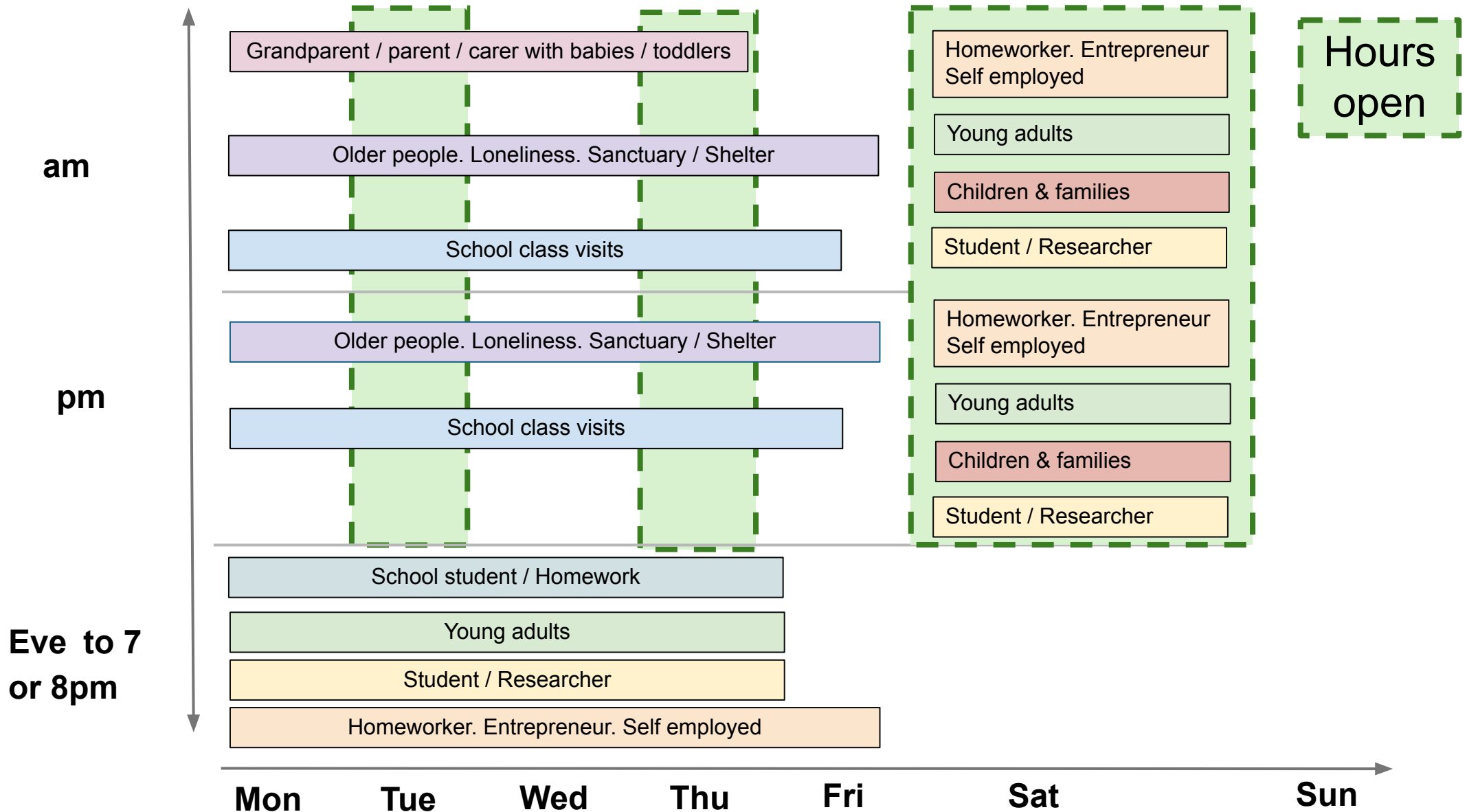


# When people most need and use libraries mapped onto opening hours of a medium sized library 10-15 years ago

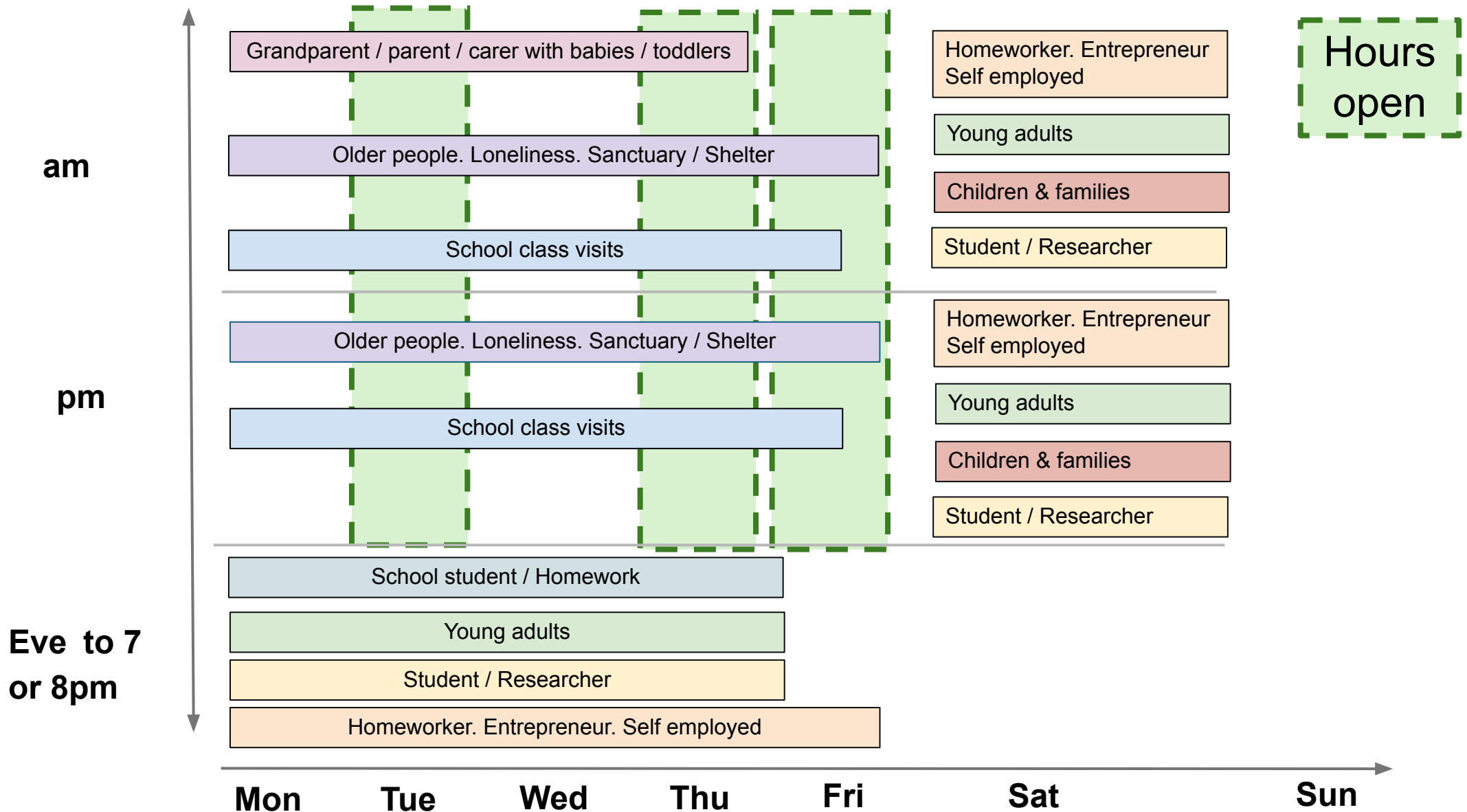


# Proposed option:

## 21 hours / 3 days, office hours, Saturday open

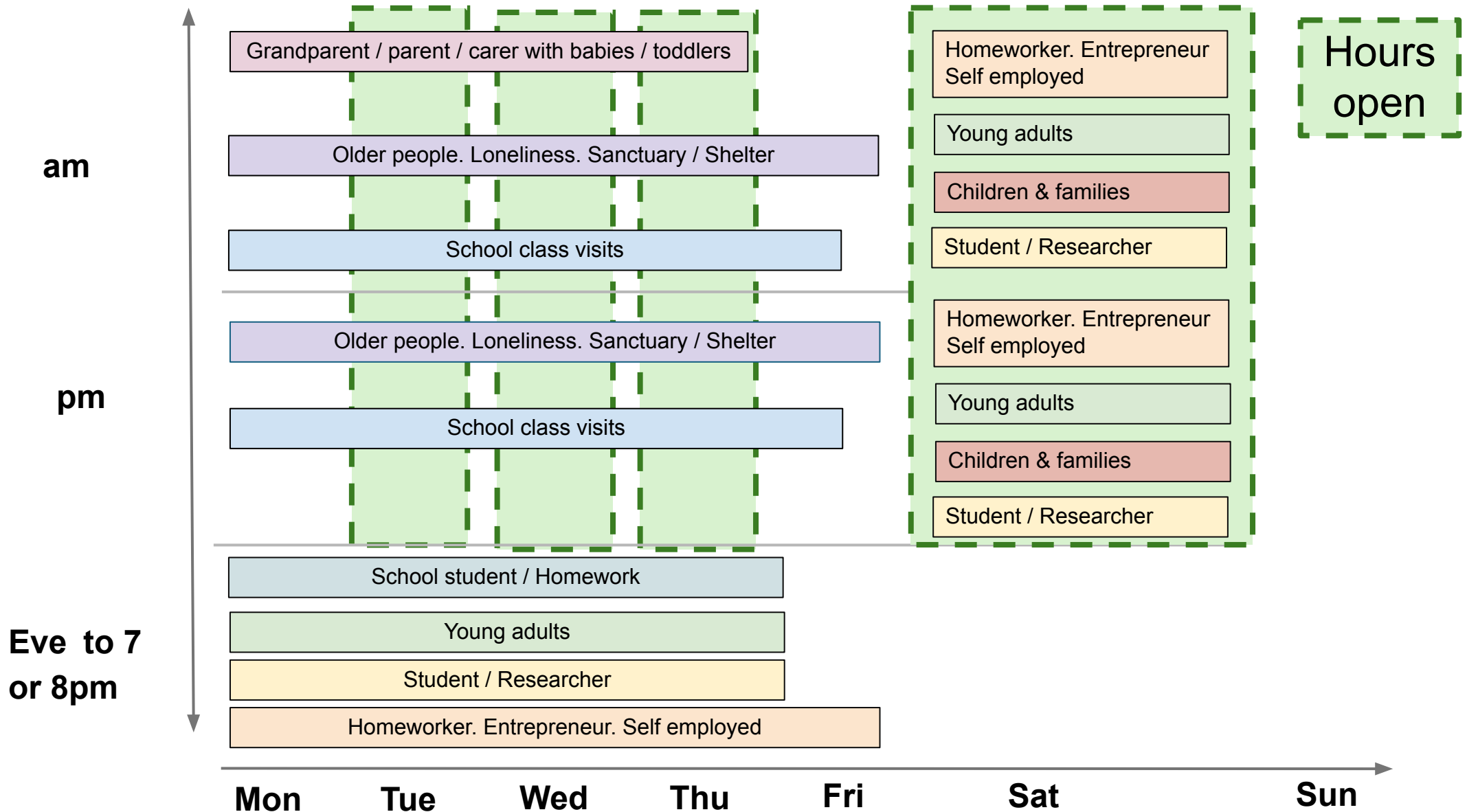


# Proposed option: 21 hours / 3 days, office hours, Saturday closed



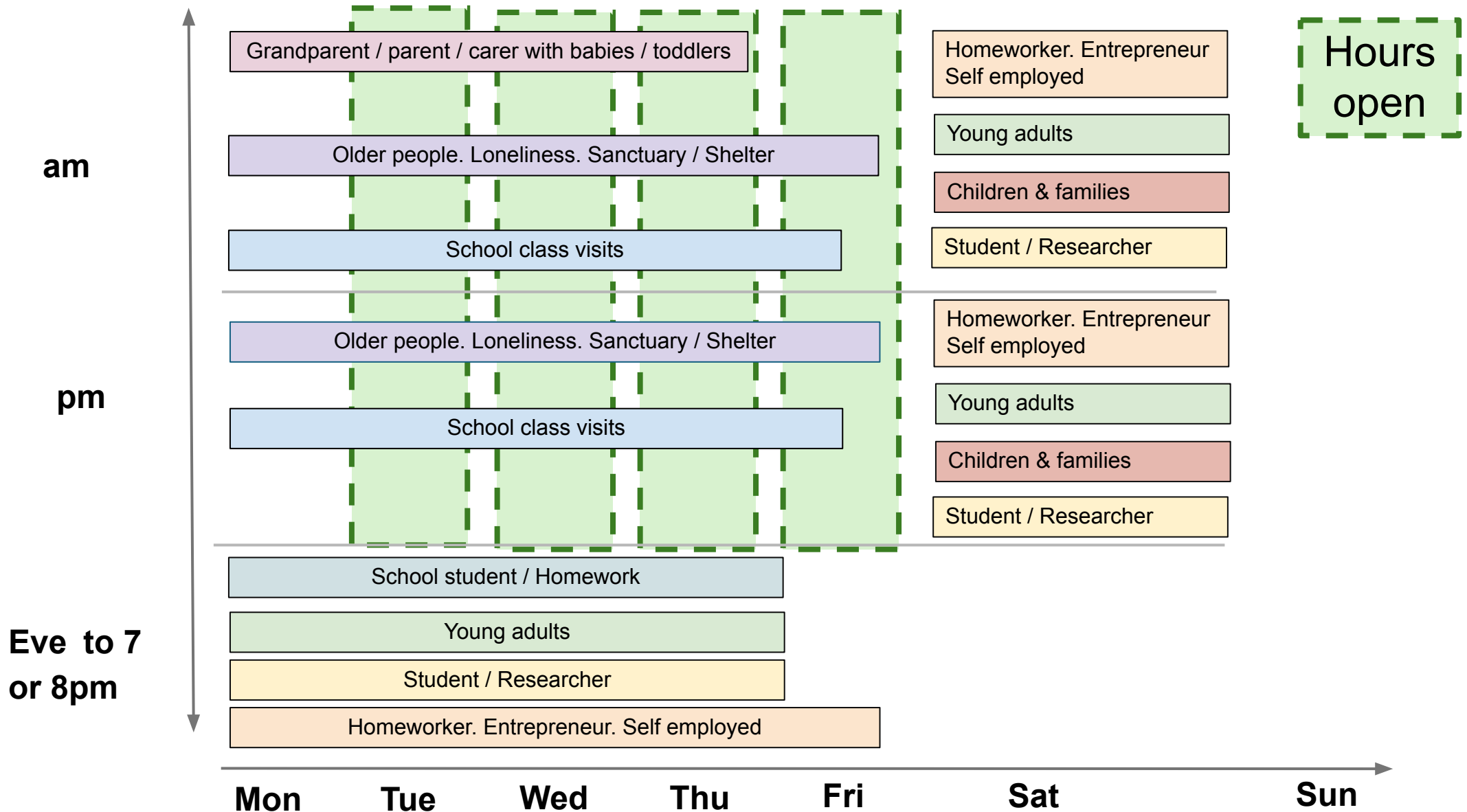
# Proposed option:

## 28 hours / 4 days, office hours, Saturday open



# Proposed option:

## 28 hours / 4 days, office hours, Saturday closed



# More than just a building...

## THEN...

**When public libraries first introduced computers in libraries (2001/2) the Adult Education service ran classes for people new to computers, including a group of older residents at Shard End Library. Learners completing the course were given a certificate.**

At Shard End Library, one older lady was lit up:

**"This is the first certificate I've ever received. I'm going to hang it on the wall and show my grandchildren"**

## AND NOW...

**"I need libraries to survive. I am a pensioner on benefits and have no computer of my own... If there are no public computers, then no income, I wouldn't get my rent paid, and I'd be homeless."**

*—Ankaret, Birmingham 2024*

**"As a child I had fond memories of walking to my local library with my friends on the weekend. It was during these formative years that I gained my love of reading, and it's something that I've taken with me into adulthood."**

*—Lorretta Jones, Birmingham 2024*

**"Libraries are so IMPORTANT—I spent hours in my local library reading/lending books as a child because my parents could not afford to buy books. A trip to the library with my daughter was also essential when I was on a low income. The library is a lifeline for education and connection."**

*—Victoria Wilson, Birmingham 2024*

**"The library is more than the bricks that make it—it's more than the sum of its parts. It is a safe, warm, welcoming, and free place to go. The city is defunding almost every cultural space, but we cannot rebuild these things once they are lost."**

*—Alis Oldfield, Birmingham 2024*

**"The library is amazing—for children, old people, everyone—for mental health and community, for reading, computer access, and activities."**

*—Sarah Kippax, Birmingham 2024*

**"This library and others maintain history and, more importantly, truth—offering free educational resources. It helps build communities. We cannot afford to lose this wonderful institution."**

*—Nuala Lenehan, Birmingham 2024*

**"Our library is at the heart of our family. It teaches little ones the joy of books and provides valuable resources for children's education (not accessible in schools). For adults, we find knowledge and books to read for sheer pleasure. In a world moving faster and faster, a good book is a life saver."**

*—Stephanie Fisher, Birmingham 2024*

**"This library was where my son socialised and learnt English when we moved to this country, and it was invaluable for our family! Many books borrowed for the children at the time and such an asset to this area."**

*—Sabrina Dussol, Birmingham 2024*

**"As a secondary school teacher, my pupils would tell me that they went to the library after school each day. Libraries are about people rather than profit, but they are overlooked."**

*—Kate Spencer-Bennett, Birmingham 2024*

**"The trained librarians are able to find any books we want quickly and answer questions professionally and evaluate our needs. They have also offered to order books for us from other libraries so we can access them too."**

*—Jaska, Birmingham 2024*