



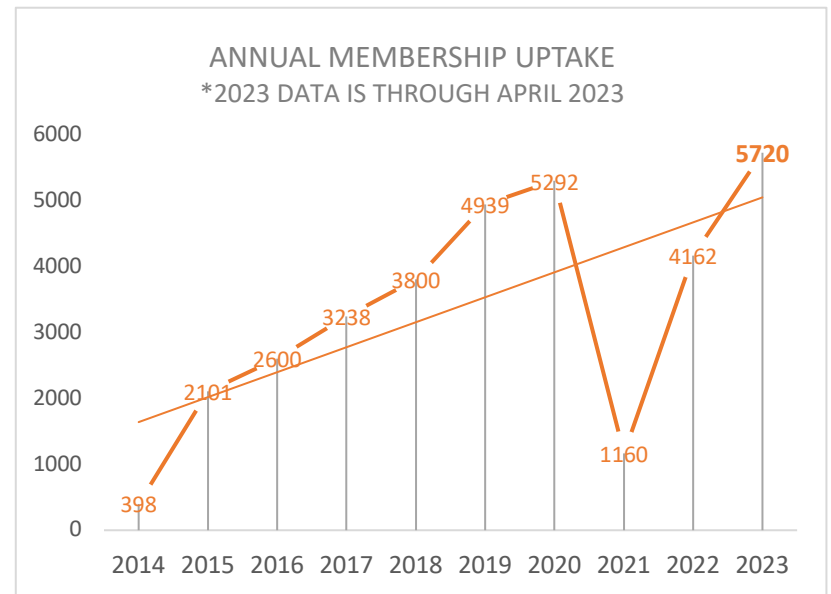
## The 2022-2023 Calgary Flames Foundation Grade 6 YMCA Membership & Alumni Program Evaluation Executive Summary

This document presents a summary of key findings from the annual evaluation of the Calgary Flames Grade 6 YMCA Membership Program. Data was gathered through a survey of Grade 6 Members (N=474) and Program Alumni (N=194), a series of youth focus groups with Grade 6 Members (N=3) and Alumni (N=2), Grade 6 and Alumni parent interviews (N=15), and YMCA staff interviews. The evaluation found that the Grade 6 YMCA Membership provides an important opportunity for youth to get more active, reduce screen time, build social connections, gain confidence, build independence, and improve their overall sense of wellbeing. It is therefore considered an impactful response to the social isolation, increased sedentary behaviors, and mental-emotional stress youth experienced during the pandemic.

### **The Grade 6 Program reached a record membership rate in 2022-2023**

- 5,720 unique members, as of late April 2023.
  - 39.8% market share of Grade 6 students<sup>1</sup>.
  - 62.6% registered before December 2022.
  - 85.6% were not YMCA membership holders in the year prior.

<sup>1</sup> White Whale Analytics



*"Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge, and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life."*

- The International Physical Literacy Association (2014)

- 40.3% of youth self-reported using their membership once per week or more

*“Actually I really go so much, like everyday.” - Grade 6 Youth*

## I. PROGRAM IMPACTS

*Access and use of the YMCA membership increased rates of physical activity for youth*

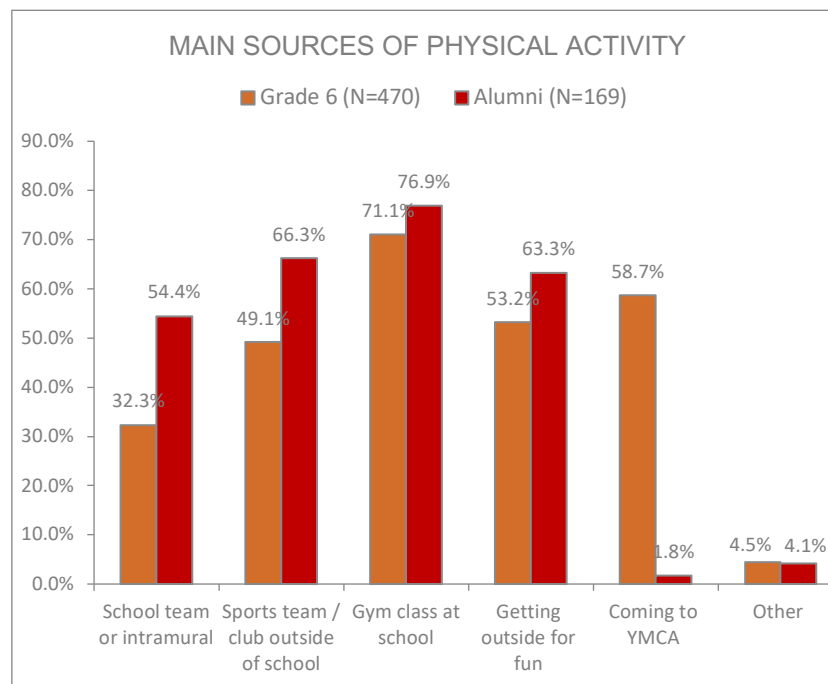
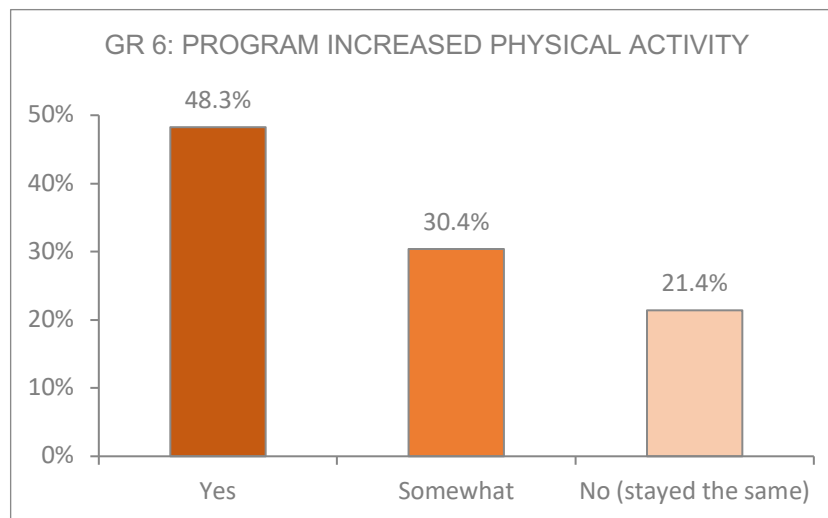
- 78.6% of Grade 6 Members identified that they were more active since joining the Grade 6 Membership Program.
  - The more often a youth visited the YMCA the more likely they were to report increased physical activity.

*“He is more active now than before, it was a result of the program”- Grade 6 Parent*

- Grade 6 members also reported increased motivation to be active, facilitated by finding new activities that they could enjoy, improved skills, increased confidence, and making friends to be active with.

*“This membership has helped me do the sports I love to.” - Grade 6 Member*

- Grade 6 Members reported visiting the YMCA as their second most common source of physical activity, as compared to only 4.8% of Alumni.
- Parents discussed that the membership was especially beneficial in the winter months when children cannot play outside as easily.



*"[Without the program] I probably would be playing video games all day" - Grade 6 Member*

**Members also increased confidence, gained independence, and strengthened social connections.**

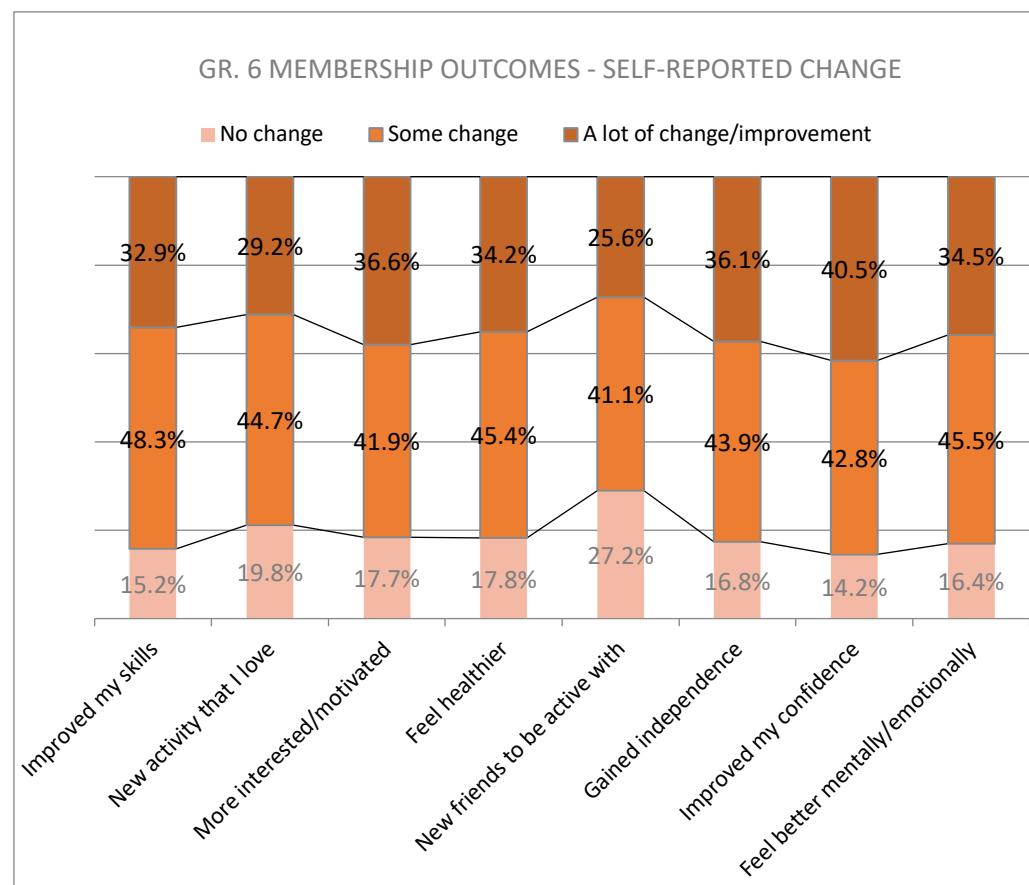
- Increased confidence was the top ranked outcome area among Grade 6 survey respondents.
  - Several parents and program supervisors observed that children “come out of their shell” in the program and make new friends.

*"I'm brave now" – Grade 6 Member*

- Youth and their parents also spoke about increased confidence to develop physical activity skills through sports and games in a low-pressure environment.

*"Playing sports here, you can just play for fun. Instead of for marks in gym class or competing on a school team where you have to play good" - Alumni Youth*

- Nearly all youth focus groups participants reported making new friends through the Grade 6 Membership Program, which was also a key motivator for participation.
  - The opportunity to make friends and socially connect with peers added greatly to the sense of fun and enjoyment youth experience with physical activity.



*"It is amazing, she made different friends." - Grade 6 Parent*  
*"Social skills, absolutely been improved." - Grade 6 Parent*  
*"I get to see friends that I don't usually hangout with." - Grade 6 Member*

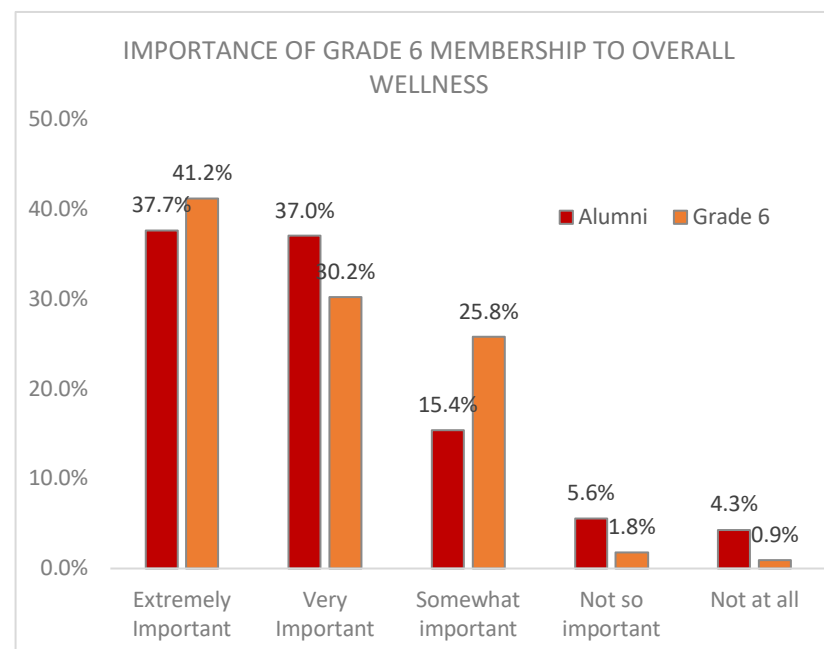
- The opportunity to practice independence in a safe environment is a motivator and an outcome for youth
  - Parents felt comfortable that the YMCA was a safe space for their children to be active and spend time with their friends.  
*"Independence, he is more independent." - Grade 6 Parent*  
*"I did go alone a few times; it is scary, but I did it." – Grade 6 Member*  
*"I learnt to take the transit bus." – Grade 6 Member*

- Youth engaged in the Alumni Program reported gaining public speaking skills and other community leadership skills.

*The opportunity to increase activity, have fun and make friends had benefits to both physical and emotional wellness.*

- Feeling better emotionally and mentally was a top ranked membership outcome as reported by Grade 6 survey respondents.  
*"It can help cleanse the mind & relieve stress." – Grade 6 Member*
- 72.4% of Grade 6 Members consider the program very or extremely important to their overall wellness.

*"The Grade 6 YMCA Membership literally **changed my lifestyle.** After attending many Grade 6 creative nights, I feel more confident that I can create something and I can be an artist. Also, sports wasn't my thing before, but after attending many Grade 6 sports classes, I started enjoying sports more. I have joined soccer class in YMCA this month, and started playing volleyball. Also, the Grade 6 Membership introduced me to the gym, and now I am comfortable going to gym regularly as well!" – Grade 6 Member*



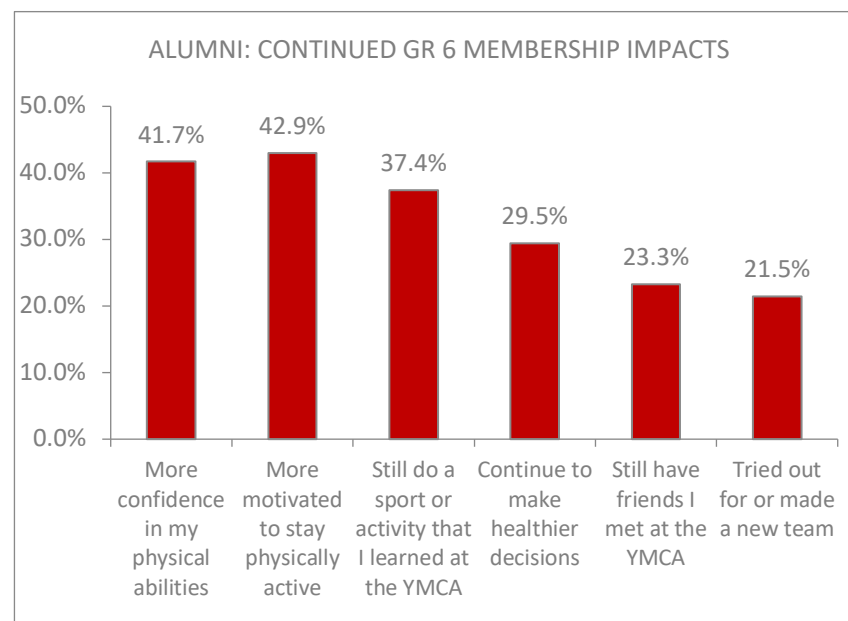
*“It changed me for the better” – Grade 6 Member*

29.5% of Alumni reported they continue to make healthier decisions thanks to their Grade 6 Membership.

*“It helped build habits and become a place where I was comfortable and confident to go; a place I belong.” – Program Alumni (Gr10)*

### **Alumni report lasting impacts of the Grade 6 Membership**

- 42.9% of Alumni reported they are still motivated to stay physically active because of their Grade 6 Membership.
  - 37.4% still do an activity or sport learned in the program and
  - 41.7% have more confidence in their physical abilities.
  - 21.5% tried out for or made a new team.



*“When we started to do YMCA she wasn't even interested in badminton. She got more interested in sports. If she didn't go to the YMCA she wouldn't be playing badminton. Now she is on the badminton team ” - Alumni Parent*

- 76.6% of Alumni survey respondents said they have visited the YMCA at least once this year, with 33.1% reporting they had a YMCA membership and 37.7% that they dropped in or registered in a program at the YMCA.

*“I had a membership until a few months ago. Now I go to YMCA as drop-in” - Program Alumni*

- Many of the social connections developed in Grade 6 are lasting.
  - 23.3% of Alumni survey respondents reported that they still have friends they met at the YMCA.

*“It's a good social community outside of school and sports” - Alumni Youth*

## II. PROGRAM STRENGTHS

*"I proud of walking to YMCA with my membership card." – Grade 6 youth*

**Free access to YMCA facilities and Grade 6 programming:** cost is a primary barrier to physical. Several qualitative comments referenced financial hardship and that a membership would not otherwise be a possibility for their family.

*"Money is very tight for our family and we can't afford any expensive memberships." - Grade 6 youth*

**Critical timing:** Grade 6 is a well-timed opportunity for the membership. It aligns with a shift into adolescence, when youth have a greater desire for independence, face new social-emotional challenges, and trend toward more sedentary behaviours and higher usage of technology.

**Fun, social programming:** Fun and opportunities to socialize are main motivators for physical activity. YMCA's approach to programming and events for Grade 6 Members and Alumni strongly emphasizes these elements.

**Access to diverse activities:** One of the main strengths of the program mentioned by youth and parents is the numerous games, activities, and sports that youth are exposed to through the YMCA membership and Grade 6 Member programming. Youth had the opportunity to try new activities that they otherwise would not have been exposed to, which was a major motivator and source of enjoyment for youth.

*"This program opens their eyes to possibility" - Parent Alumni*

*"Do it because there's a variety of sports you can try; we go to all the sports. It's really fun and a way to get out of the house" - Grade 6 Youth*

**Connection to program leaders:** Supervisors mentor and build positive relationships with the youth, which encourages them to continue attending the activities offered in the program. Parents spoke about how program leaders take time to get to know the youth and design the program according to their child's interests and skill levels.

**Alumni opportunities:** Alumni programs are well-adapted to the changing needs and interest of youth as they move through adolescence, in particular attention to leadership opportunities. Youth appreciated Alumni programming as an opportunity to

maintain social connections they developed in Grade 6 and as an opportunity to build their leadership skills as they look forward to future employment and volunteer opportunities.

**YMCA facilitates whole-family engagement.** Going to the YMCA is a way for families to spend time together or engage in physical activity

- 72.2% of members reported they had introduced a friend to the YMCA, 22.8% a sibling, and 30% a parent.

*"[A benefit is] spending time with my family." – Grade 6 Member*

*"The Program is amazing and a very important part of staying active. The program gives many opportunities to participate and in sports and activities they wouldn't be able to otherwise. Keeping things affordable and accessible is key. We are very fortunate to have this program and wonderful program directors." – Alumni parent*

### III. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

**Continue to offer the Grade 6 Membership and prepare for increased program engagement.**

- Participants, parents, Alumni, and program staff strongly recommend the Grade 6 Membership Program continues.
  - *96.3% of Current Grade 6 Members said 'yes' it is important to continue the program.*
- The program is on pace to grow in terms of both membership uptake and rates of participation, therefore continued attention to increased capacity for Grade 6 activities and other registered programs, as well as expanding Grade 6 programming to all YMCA sites will be beneficial.

**Raise awareness of opportunities for alumni**

- Awareness of the Alumni Program remains low with 42.3% of respondents reporting they were not aware of the Alumni program and only 13.7% having attended an Alumni Program event or activity.
  - This may in part be an outcome of the pandemic, as much of 2020 and part of 2021 was marked by facility closures and limited possibilities for Grade 6 engagement.

**Continue to create affordable pathways to stay connected to the YMCA beyond the Grade 6 year.**

- Most Grade 6 members (86.2%) would like to continue their YMCA membership after finishing the Grade 6 Program; however, 27.9% indicated that it is unlikely or very unlikely they would have a membership again if it wasn't free.
  - Families see the value of continuing their connection to the YMCA and would be interested in membership discounts, program discounts, free drop-in nights, and free friend passes to maintain the increased levels of physical activity gained in Grade 6.

