



## THE CALGARY FLAMES FOUNDATION GRADE 6 YMCA MEMBERSHIP & ALUMNI PROGRAM EVALUATION FOR THE 2023-2024 COHORT Executive Summary

This document presents a summary of key findings from the evaluation of the Calgary Flames Grade 6 Membership Program for the year 2023-2024.

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### FEEDBACK ABOUT THE PROGRAM

*"I LOVE THIS PROGRAM SO MUCH!!! All staff and volunteers have been so nice and welcoming! Please keep this program going!!"* – Grade 6 Youth

*"Just thank you for giving me a chance to experience the YMCA."* – Grade 6 Youth

*"It opened a lot more new opportunities for me, to try new sports, meet new people and bunch of new opportunities."* – Alumni Youth

*"I would like The Flames Grade 6 YMCA program to be continued. This program helps kids get away from technology and become more active physically and mentally. You can build friendships and develop your skills with other people. I would like to express my appreciation to the Calgary Flames Foundation for sponsoring this program and building strong communities."* – Grade 6 Parent

*"I don't think it could have happened at a better time."* – Alumni Parent

## Executive Summary

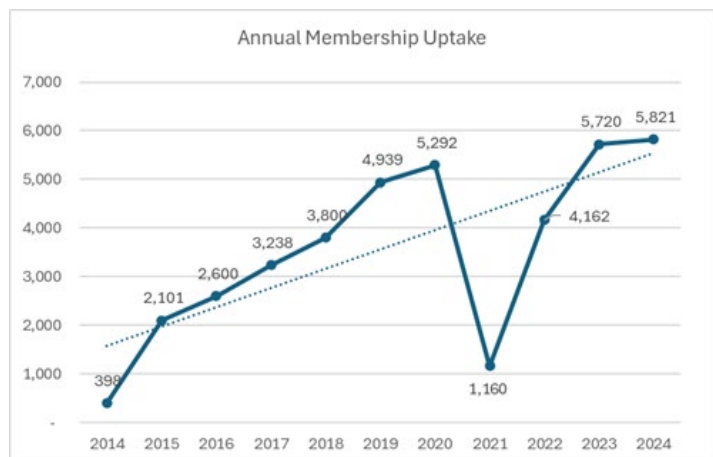
This evaluation focused on understanding program outcomes for current grade 6 members and the longer-term impacts of the program for Alumni. Additionally, as the YMCA membership program completed its 10th year of programming, this year's evaluation aimed at identifying consistent impacts observed annually, as well as any unique outcomes that may be evident in the current year.

The evaluation was informed by a mixed methods design. Evaluation data was gathered through a survey of Grade 6 members (n=251) and Program alumni (n=244); and a series of discussion with Grade 6 members (n=16), Alumni (n=31) and YMCA staff (n=4). Parents of current Grade 6 members (n=8) and Alumni (n=4) were also interviewed.

Now on its 10th year, the Grade 6 YMCA membership continues to provide an important opportunity for youth to improve their physical literacy which, in the process, brings about multiple and cumulative long-term benefits. While a primary motivation may be to increase physical activity, the membership also enabled youths to build social connections, have places to hang out in supervised settings, develop personal, leadership and life skills, and improve their overall sense of wellbeing.

As of March 31, 2024, Grade 6 YMCA membership reached its highest number at 5,821 members.

- 1,363% increase from 2014
- 38.7% of all Grade 6 students in Calgary
- 85% joined by December 2023
- 78% had no prior membership
- 42% self-reported using their membership at least once a week
- 65.2% self-reported using their membership for sports



## Program Impacts

1. The membership program increased physical literacy among Grade 6 youth.

- 81.2% of Grade 6 members reported modest to significant improvements in physical activity
- 79.% reported being more active than they were before
- 75.8% were more motivated to be active because of their membership in the Grade 6 program
- The program allowed the youth to try different activities without significant monetary investment

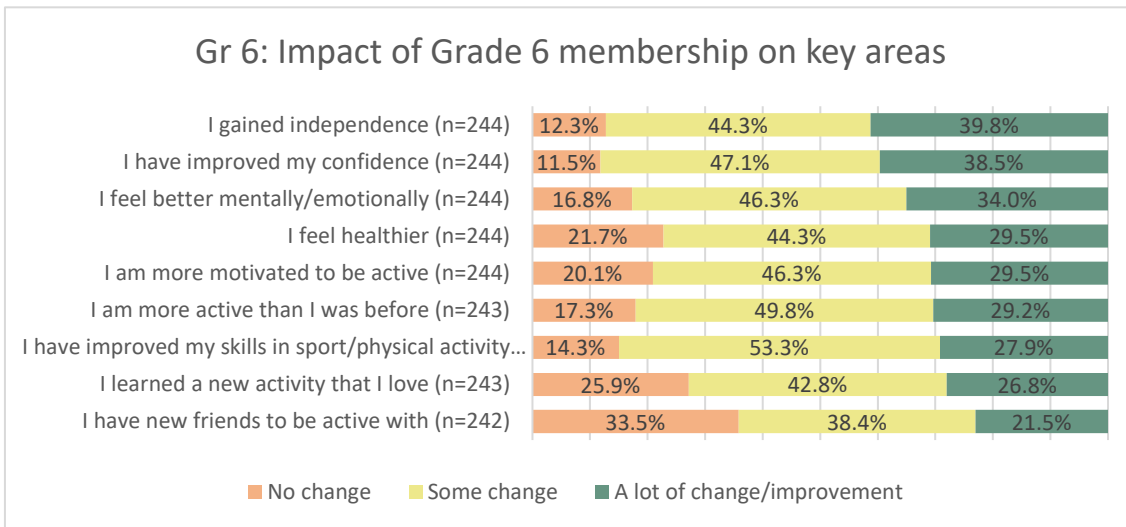
### HOW DID THE YMCA MEMBERSHIP HELP YOU?

*“I probably wouldn't have done as many programs as I did without the free membership.” – Grade 6 Youth*

*“Being more active improves my mental health and makes me be more mobile.” – Alumni Youth*

*“I like the new experiences that we have with the leadership. All the experiences that you gain will be helpful in the future because it will go to your resume and will help you in getting jobs or in volunteering in the Y.” – Alumni Youth*

- Improvement in personal and social skills were highly rated outcome areas for Grade 6 members.
- Members and alumni recognized that being active improves their mental health, helps with their self-esteem and makes them well-rounded physically and mentally.
- YMCA membership made a lot of difference with developing new friendships with whom Grade 6 members could be active with.
- Leadership programs helped Alumni youth build experiences that could be utilized in life.
- YMCA facilities provided youth with an accessible and sought after place to be themselves as well as spend time with other youth - whether acquaintances or closer friends.
- The positive impacts of the membership extended to their siblings, other family members and relatives.



## Program Strengths

- The program had elements that successfully increase rates of physical activity and levels of physical literacy for Grade 6 youth; cater to changing tastes in activities by offering more diverse ways of being social and active, as opposed to focusing solely on structured sports; and address two key barriers to physical activity: accessibility and finances.
- Free access to facilities removed a significant barrier to activity. Additionally, the free passes to bring friends are vital to fostering regular and enjoyable experiences.
- The Grade 6 Membership Program is a well-timed intervention to encourage regular physical and social activity
- The intentionality of branching out to different areas of interests, some of which are outside of the scope of traditional sport and activity programming, was highlighted as a strength of the program.
- It provided access to diverse activities and ways of engaging
- The program fostered soft and hard skills (e.g. life skills, personal development skills, leadership skills and social skills) through current member and alumni programming.
- It facilitated connections to diverse groups of people.

*“Grade 6 is the time where you have to start to think about what you should be doing.” – Grade 6 Youth*

*“She loves the creative nights, Friday’s she has half days at school and they go to the Y swimming.” – Grade 6 Parent*

*“I learned a lot of things I don’t learn in school like financial literacy and learning random life skills.” – Alumni Youth*

## Future opportunities

1. Continue to offer the Grade 6 program and adjust its programming to accommodate growth in uptake and engagement by:
  - Increasing the frequency of high-demand programs to minimize turn-aways.
  - Offering expanded hours and weekend programming to accommodate more youths whose engagement are limited by their school's or parent's work schedules.
  - Increasing outdoor programs especially in the summer to partly address space limitations inside the facility.
2. Increase the diversity in program offerings to ensure that the Grade 6 program reaches all youth groups including those who have specific intersecting needs such as neurodivergent individuals and newcomers who may benefit from the program the most.
3. Employ targeted communication strategies to inform potential members about the registration process and timelines, details about the programs (what are offered, which are free, schedules, what is creative night, etc), how drop-in session works, Alumni programs, any discounts for family, etc.
4. Increase awareness about the program's connection with Flames.
5. Capitalize on the Grade 6 and Alumni programs to build healthy habits by teaching youth about food/nutrition and routinizing these into programming.
6. Build on the momentum created by the Leadership and Volunteering Programs to engage Grade 6 and Alumni members.
7. Continue to create affordable pathways to stay connected to the YMCA beyond the Grade 6 year to further build upon the skills and the habits that they have gained from the program maximizing its long-term impact.

*"The activities offered aren't ones that I can participate in (due to neurodiversity, most of the games are too active, competitive, loud, etc) and the easier ones (swimming, climbing wall) are the ones that get filled up quickly." – Grade 6 Youth*

*"Have leadership more because it can teach you how to be a better leader, especially if you need to be a captain of a sports team or a project. It can help you now and in the future." – Grade 6 Youth*

*"I would have liked to do more grade 6 activities, but we never knew when the registration for those activities occurred. When we asked at the front desk we never got information either. An info packet or emails about how to register for programs like grade 6 badminton, wibit party, basketball, etc would have made the membership more valuable." – Alumni Youth*

*"Mention that the Flames sponsors the program, youth might be more interested as many people don't know that it is sponsored by the flames." – Alumni Youth*