



YMCA of Northern Alberta

**Wildfire Lessons Learned:
What We Heard Report**

December 23, 2016



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Introduction

Introduction

Background

The Horse River wildfire of May 2016 was an unprecedented disaster for the community of Fort McMurray and the surrounding region, and the process of recovery is still ongoing. The YMCA of Northern Alberta was deeply affected by the disaster, as its Wood Buffalo staff were evacuated with the rest of the municipality in early May, and did not return home until early June. The first YMCA facilities were reopened in July and others followed throughout the summer, but the YMCA of Wood Buffalo has not yet returned to its full pre-fire operational capacity.

The YMCA Wood Buffalo managers and staff were affected by the wildfire in many different ways. The extended evacuation and the uncertainty of when – or even if – they would return to work made planning difficult. Most had to be temporarily laid off while operations were shut down. Some did not return to Fort McMurray, and among those who did return, many did not return to the same job they had left, as teams were re-organized and operations restructured within the available facilities.

Purpose

During the response and in the early days of recovery, decisions had to be made for which there was no precedent or policy manual. Six months after the fire, as recovery efforts had progressed and operations stabilized, the YMCA of Northern Alberta hired KPMG to conduct a series of engagement activities – two in-person sessions and an online survey – to allow leaders, managers and staff to reflect on their experiences and share their thoughts in a spirit of learning and improving.

This document presents the ‘What We Heard’ findings from the engagement activities.



*Westwood Family YMCA, May 3, 2.00pm
Source: Jim Weller, Regional VP, YMCA of Northern Alberta*

Introduction

Terminology

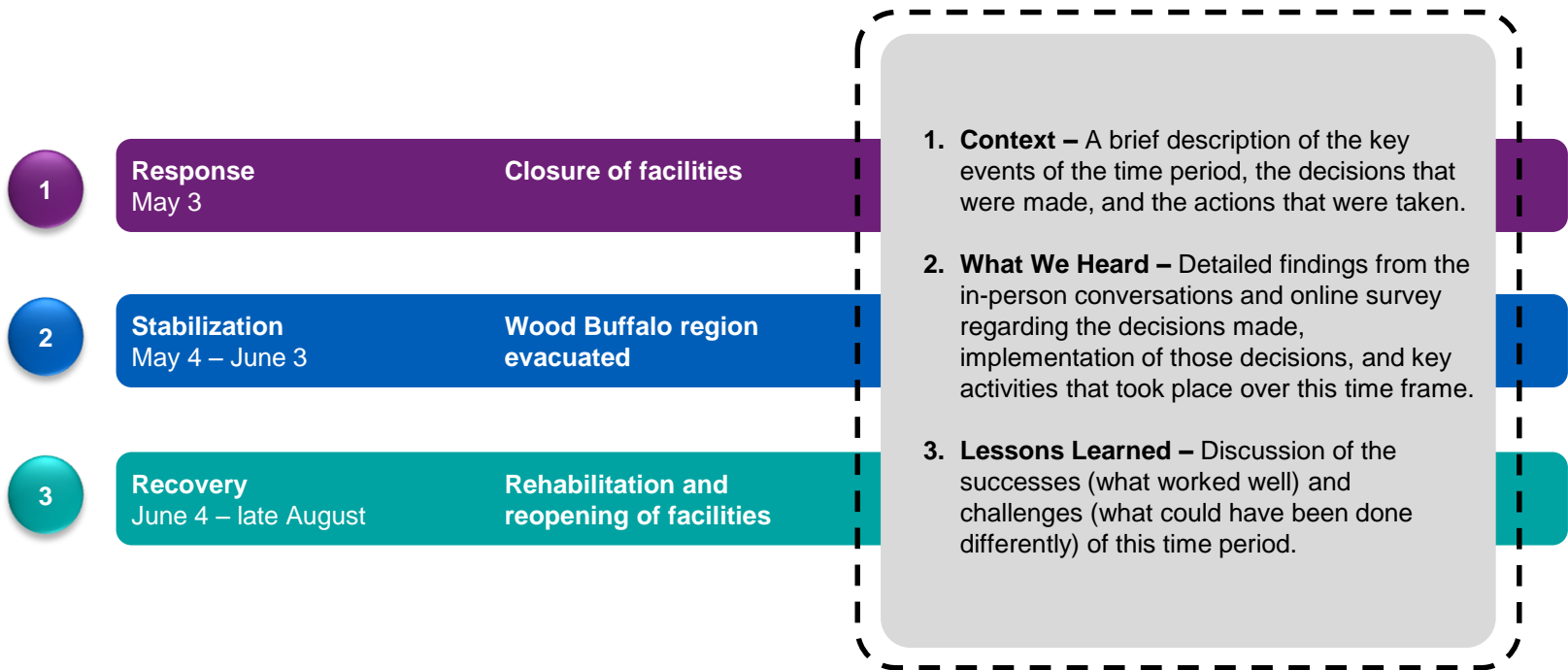
For the purposes of this report, the following terms are used to describe the key YMCA stakeholders:

- **Leaders / Leadership** refers to the Executive Management and Senior Management Teams of the YMCA of Northern Alberta, most of whom are based in Edmonton.
- **Managers / Management** refers to program and facilities managers, directors and supervisors based in the Wood Buffalo region.
- **Staff** refers to all non-management employees based in the Wood Buffalo region.
- **Families** refers to the parents, caregivers and other family members of children who utilize YMCA childcare services.
- **Members** refers to individuals with memberships to the YMCA's fitness facilities.
- **Clients** refers to people receiving services offered by the YMCA.



Introduction

The key findings from the engagement activities that were conducted are presented in the sections that follow. They are organized by key timeframe – Response, Stabilization and Recovery – and each section includes the following information:





Findings - Response Period

May 3, 2016

Response - Context

The Response time period refers to May 3, the day the YMCA closed its facilities and Fort McMurray was evacuated, as well as the days leading up to May 3.

On Saturday, May 1, the wildfire within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo forced a local state of emergency and the evacuation of three communities in Fort McMurray. This evacuation order was lifted on Sunday, as the winds shifted and the fire moved away from the city. However, smoke remained throughout the region and inside many buildings, including several of the YMCA's facilities.

Throughout the weekend, YMCA leaders and managers met by teleconference to discuss the situation, but at this time, their concern was more for evacuated YMCA families, members and staff than for the organization itself. Staff were concerned about the proximity of the fire, and many began to consider the possibility of a larger scale evacuation. Parents of children in the YMCA's childcare program and YMCA fitness facility members expressed concern as to whether programs might be suspended if the evacuation was expanded, and some started to plan for that possibility.

By Monday, May 3, the winds had shifted away from Fort McMurray and the air was clearer. Morning programs continued as usual, but leaders, managers and staff continued to monitor the threat. Around 12:00 pm, the wind shifted again and the fire jumped the Athabasca River, and the air again became smoky. Several emergency conference calls were held between Wood Buffalo-based managers and Edmonton-based leaders, during which they discussed the growing likelihood of closing facilities. Logistical issues around communicating with staff and parents of children in childcare were discussed, with the Edmonton-based team being tasked to support this.

Around 2:00 pm, the flames were visible, and evacuation orders were reinstated in some communities. YMCA leaders and managers made the decision to close all YMCA Wood Buffalo facilities, and enacted the plan to contact staff and families. By 4:00 pm, all children had been reunited with their families, and staff had closed all facilities. Around 6:00 pm, Fort McMurray was ordered to evacuate.



Fort McMurray evacuation, May 3, 2016
Source: macleans.ca

Response - What We Heard



Preparedness

- **Varying levels of preparedness** – There were variations in the degree to which leaders, managers and staff felt prepared to execute their responsibilities prior to and during the closure. In many cases, this was due to the unique scale of the emergency. Several leaders, managers and staff indicated that they had not received the right information before the decision to close the facilities in Wood Buffalo was made, and many did not feel adequately prepared to execute their roles and responsibilities.
- **Challenges for leaders and managers** – Leaders and managers reviewed their emergency protocols and used them to prepare for the closure, but realized that they were under-equipped to respond to the full closure of all facilities. Key challenges were the lack of availability of local resources to contact all childcare parents and outdated contact information for some staff.
- **Challenges for staff** – Staff also reviewed their emergency protocols but many indicated a lack of clarity on when these protocols should take effect; i.e. when the decision to close would be made and who would make that decision.

Response - What We Heard



Decision making

- **Decision to close** – The most critical decision made by YMCA leaders during the Response time period was the closure of all YMCA Wood Buffalo facilities. The decision was not taken lightly, as leaders needed to balance the risk of shutting down prematurely (and appearing unduly cautious) with the risk of shutting down too late (and compromising the safety of children, clients, members and staff).
- **Timing of decision** – In retrospect, the closure decision was made at the right time. It was made before school boards closed the schools and before the wider evacuation order was made, which helped parents reunite with their children before the worst traffic jams occurred. However, some staff felt that the decision ought to have been made earlier at certain locations due to the environmental conditions being experienced (i.e., smoke in the buildings, fire visible at some locations).
- **Local autonomy** – There was uncertainty around the level of autonomy for local managers to influence the timing of the decision to close their individual facilities. Some indicated that the threat was clear but they could not close their facilities or shut down their programs because they required approval from Edmonton to do so.
- **Staff support of decisions** – Staff were equally balanced between those who supported the decisions made by leaders and managers during this period and those who did not.
- **Edmonton-Wood Buffalo collaboration** – Communication and coordination efforts between Edmonton and Wood Buffalo was consistent to ensure decisions were made at the right time. Conference calls among leaders and managers started on May 1 and continued throughout the crisis(a total of 26 calls over a few days). The geographic separation between decision-makers in Edmonton and Fort McMurray both helped and hindered decision making. Because leaders in Edmonton were not living the experience directly, they were able to provide a level of calm leadership. However, they were also unaware of all the real-time conditions at the various facilities and the lived experiences of managers and staff.
- **Reliability of information** – One of the challenges to decision-making was the amount of unreliable information being broadcast through news channels. YMCA leadership needed to sift through the conflicting reports of conditions in various locations to ensure they made decisions based on factual information.

Response - What We Heard



Decision implementation

- **Childcare considerations** – Once the decision to close the facilities was made, the priority for managers and staff was to reunite children with their parents. Childcare managers and staff worked hard to reach all the parents, but they relied on the assistance of Edmonton-based YMCA staff to reach them all, using the online database. In the interim, childcare staff stayed with the children, entertaining them and keeping them calm. Within two hours, all of the 200+ children had been safely returned to their families, at which point the staff conducted final sweeps of their buildings and locked the doors.
- **Communicating with staff** – After the closure and during the evacuation of the region, most managers contacted their team members to ensure they had a place to go and means to get there. However, this was not done consistently, as the YMCA did not have current contact information for all staff. As a result, communication from leaders and managers did not reach all staff at the same time or by the same means.
- **Role clarity** – Managers and staff were unclear on their responsibilities once it became clear that they were in an emergency situation and they needed to close their facilities. Many indicated that they did not have sufficient information about their roles and responsibilities during the closure, while others indicated that their emergency preparations had not prepared them adequately.
- **Edmonton-Wood Buffalo collaboration** – Throughout the Response, there was significant coordination between Edmonton-based leaders and Wood Buffalo managers. Leaders expressed high respect to the Wood Buffalo team for maintaining their composure, remaining professional, supporting their staff, and caring for the facilities during the closure. For their part, managers expressed appreciation to leaders for their support throughout the crisis.
- **Personal matters** – Because of their professional responsibilities during the closure, many managers and staff did not have time to collect personal belongings or tend to personal matters before they were forced to evacuate the region.

Response - Lessons Learned

The following factors contributed to the success of Response efforts:

Prioritizing the safety of children

By working together, YMCA leaders, managers and staff in Fort McMurray and Edmonton were able to contact parents to ensure the safe return of all the children in childcare programs. Up to date information for families and parents was crucial to this effort, and the support received from Edmonton was appreciated. Childcare staff played a key role in caring for the children throughout the emergency, setting aside their personal concerns about the fire to ensure the children's safety and wellbeing.

Timeliness of decision to close

The timely decision to close allowed actions to happen quickly. All YMCA facilities were shut down within two hours of making the decision to close. The cooperation and coordination of staff to ensure children were reunited with their parents was central to this success.

Edmonton-Wood Buffalo collaboration

Establishing regular conference calls allowed Edmonton-based leaders and Wood Buffalo managers to maintain open communication channels, remain apprised of the developments on the ground in the Wood Buffalo region, and make decisions effectively as a team.

Response - Lessons Learned

The following factors limited the success of Response efforts:

Outdated staff contact information

YMCA did not have current contact information on file for all staff, which complicated communications efforts. Emergency preparedness needs to include a process for actively maintaining up-to-date contact information for all staff.

Lack of clarity on emergency decision-making authority

Some managers waited longer than they felt was safe to close facilities because they had not received authorization to do so. Greater clarity on emergency decision making authority would have permitted them to close and evacuate earlier.

Insufficient emergency preparations

Approximately a quarter of staff indicated that they did not feel adequately prepared or did not have the information they needed to respond to the emergency properly. Some suggested a number of emergency protocols that could have improved their level of preparedness. These include:

- Clearer protocols for all staff roles in an emergency, including responsibilities related to facility closures, care of children, and communication with staff
- Having emergency access to buses for transportation of children, members, clients, and/or staff
- Maintaining emergency supplies on site (e.g., diapers, food for children, water, personal effects for staff)
- Having an out of town muster point.



Findings - Stabilization Period

May 4 - June 3, 2016

Stabilization - Context

The Stabilization time period refers to the period when Fort McMurray was evacuated, from May 4 until YMCA leaders were allowed to re-enter Fort McMurray on June 3.

By May 4, most of Fort McMurray's residents had evacuated, and all YMCA staff were safe and accounted for. They found shelter with friends or in reception centres that were set up in nearby Anzac, Gregoire Lake Estates, and the Fort McMurray First Nation, but as the fire grew, these communities were soon evacuated as well. Others settled in Edmonton or Calgary, or outside the province, and within a week, most evacuees had found stable temporary housing. They then stood by, waiting to learn when they would be permitted to return home. Some knew that their home had been destroyed, but most did not know what state their home would be in when they returned.

When it became apparent that re-entry would not be happening soon, YMCA leaders discussed their business continuity plan with their insurance provider. In the absence of income from childcare and fitness membership fees, and with no indication of when their operations would resume, leaders were concerned about how the organization could carry its \$450,000 monthly payroll. The insurance provider did not indicate that their business continuity coverage would include this, so leaders made the decision to implement a mass temporary layoff of all staff.

They issued the notification to staff shortly after the evacuation, explaining the justification and offering support through the process of claiming Employment Insurance. However, the loss of their jobs after the trauma of the evacuation came as a shock for most staff.

Throughout this period, leaders received support from other YMCAs in Canada, both in terms of advice in managing business continuity and in financial assistance to support the recovery.



Evacuation Reception Centre, Lac La Biche

Source: ctvnews.ca

Stabilization – What We Heard



Decision making

- **Decision to refund childcare and membership fees** – Leaders and managers decided to refund the regular monthly fees paid by families and members as of May 1. Implementing this decision quickly, in order to give families and members access to much needed cash, required extensive and close communication with the banks. Staff indicated that families and members greatly appreciated this gesture. However, this decision severely diminished the organization’s income and its ability to maintain its monthly staff payroll.
- **Decision to issue temporary layoff** – The temporary layoff of all staff was one of the most difficult decisions that leaders made. They needed to balance the financial sustainability of the organization against the morale of their teams and the organization’s ability to resume operations when that time came, as they risked losing some staff. In the end, 37 staff members did not return after the layoff, requiring the restructuring of teams and the extended closure of one of Wood Buffalo’s nine childcare centres. To offset the impact of the layoff, leaders decided to maintain staff health benefit coverage, which was appreciated by staff.
- **Decision to launch fundraising campaign** – In the early days after the evacuation, numerous people offered donations to the YMCA, but leaders directed them to the Red Cross. However, leaders knew they would soon need dedicated funds to support their recovery effort. They consulted with YMCA colleagues in Toronto, and in mid-May, they launched their own public fundraising campaign to help rebuild and re-establish services in the community.
- **Staff support of decisions** – Staff were equally balanced between those who supported the decisions made by leaders and managers during this period and those who did not.
- **Insurance coverage** – Leaders and managers were hindered in their ability to make timely decisions by the lack of clarity from the YMCA’s insurance provider as to the level of coverage it would provide, both for business continuity and for facility reclamation. Due to the scale of the wildfire claims, insurance companies made slow, cautious decisions. As a result, claimant organizations like the YMCA lacked clarity on how to proceed.
- **Edmonton-Wood Buffalo collaboration** – Leaders and managers continued to make critical decisions collaboratively throughout the stabilization period. However, some sensitive decisions, such as the temporary layoff of staff, were consciously made by the Edmonton-based leaders on their own.

Stabilization – What We Heard

Decision implementation

- **Housing assistance** – Edmonton-based leaders worked hard to ensure managers and staff had a place to stay upon evacuation, but this was not done in a coordinated way across the organization. As a result, some managers and staff were not offered this type of assistance by the YMCA.
- **Implementing the temporary layoff** – The Human Resources (HR) team based in Edmonton issued the layoff notification by email within a couple of days of the evacuation. Although the notice was consciously issued early, in order for staff to receive Employment Insurance (EI) payments as soon as possible, many staff and managers indicated that the timing of this was too soon. They were still in shock and grappling to find a place to stay following their evacuation from Fort McMurray. Despite the effort to explain the rationale and be compassionate, the email was received as impersonal and poorly timed, and left staff feeling unsupported by their employer.
- **Supporting the EI claim process** – The HR team was available to assist staff through the EI claim process, providing required documentation and answering their questions. Staff were divided as to the quality of this support. While some staff indicated that they received updates and information regarding claiming EI when they needed it, many also indicated that they received misinformation about their employment status and the EI claim process.
- **Anticipated return to work** – Many managers reported confusion among frontline staff regarding their employment status and whether their role would be changed when they eventually returned to work. While some staff reported receiving mixed communications about whether they would have a position to return to and when that might happen, the majority indicated that they received appropriate updates and information regarding their return to work when they needed it .
- **Communication between managers and staff** – Despite the layoff, staff relied on their managers for communication and support during this timeframe. This was considered a more natural source of information than that provided by HR.

Stabilization – What We Heard



Staff Support

- **Staff luncheon**– In mid-May, the YMCA of Northern Alberta hosted a luncheon in Edmonton for the displaced Wood Buffalo staff. Its purpose was to support staff and celebrate the success of the evacuation, to discuss the layoff and provide assistance with the EI process, and allow leadership to understand staff capacity. Staff expressed that many people were not emotionally ready for the luncheon, and that feelings of bitterness from the closure and layoff prevented some from attending.
- **Varied support from leadership and management** – Staff reported receiving varying levels of support depending on which team they were a part of (i.e., community housing, childcare, facilities). While some managers checked in with staff as to how they were coping with the evacuation and provided information about their job and return to work, others did not feel prepared to provide such support as they felt uninformed. About one-quarter of staff reported having the opportunity to discuss their concerns about their employment status / pay / benefits with YMCA management.
- **Staff recognition** – Staff and managers indicated that staff efforts during the closure and evacuation largely went unrecognized. Many people went above and beyond ‘the call of duty’ during the crisis, and staff feel that their actions should be recognized and celebrated.

Stabilization – Lessons Learned

The following factors contributed to the success of Stabilization efforts:

Refunding childcare and membership fees

Leadership's decision to reimburse and suspend future childcare and membership fees was greatly appreciated by families and members. This decision reflected well on the YMCA in the community. It was a timely decision that was executed promptly and was appreciated by many.

Timing of decision to launch fundraising campaign

Fundraising activities were appropriately timed to ensure the YMCA did not appear to be indelicate, but also ensured they were able to garner necessary support from the community.

Management expressing empathy

The individual efforts of managers to provide emotional support to their staff was greatly appreciated, and made staff feel valued and appreciated through this highly stressful experience.

Stabilization – Lessons Learned

The following factors limited the success of Stabilization efforts:

Messaging regarding the layoff

The language, timing, and choice of medium (email) of the layoff notification was poorly received by employees. Some did not understand that the layoff was temporary or why it was necessary. In the end, this affected some people's sense of belonging to the organization and their commitment to the recovery effort.

Inconsistent efforts to support staff

Several of the efforts undertaken to support staff did not achieve their desired outcomes, including the following:

- The staff luncheon was well-intentioned, but the timing and its celebratory nature lacked sensitivity to the personal struggles that staff were still experiencing.
- Some leaders and managers had more capacity than others to express their concern for the personal wellbeing of staff, their recognition of staff efforts during the closure, and their struggles throughout the evacuation.
- While Edmonton-based leadership assisted staff to find housing, this was not done in a coordinated way across the organization, meaning not all staff were provided the same assistance.
- Numerous staff experienced frustrations in their interactions with the HR team, either because they received inconsistent or inaccurate information, or because of communication difficulties arising from the HR team being removed from the lived experience of the staff.



Findings - Recovery Period

June 4 - late August

Recovery- Context

The Recovery time period refers to the re-entry to Fort McMurray from June 4 through late August, as the YMCA rehabilitated and reopened its facilities.

On June 1, residents began a phased re-entry process, organized by community. Prior to this, a set of essential services was set up, including the hospital, grocery stores, banks and gas stations. Wood Buffalo staff returned to their homes for the first time in a month and started to assess the damage – but some had lost their homes altogether.

On June 3 – two days later than anticipated – YMCA leaders were allowed to officially re-enter the city to assess the damage to YMCA facilities, but they were not permitted to re-enter the buildings unless accompanied by the insurance adjustors. They surveyed all the buildings to determine the amount of smoke damage and the restoration work that would be required before they were re-opened.

As Fort McMurray's largest provider of childcare, the YMCA set their priority on getting childcare facilities cleaned and operational as soon as possible, as childcare would be needed before the region's workforce could get back to work. This required extensive and laborious coordination with the insurance provider, the reclamation companies, building owners, and partners such as school boards in co-located facilities.

The work of restoring the buildings and resuming programming was enormous, and required staff. Leaders asked staff to indicate their availability to return to work, and began re-hiring them as they came available. Some returned to work closely resembling their former position, while many were asked to take on hands-on restoration work, such as cleaning walls and toys that had not been properly cleaned by the reclamation companies. The restoration process was different at each site, and often felt chaotic and rushed. Staff had to take initiative in their new roles and quickly become comfortable with ambiguity.

In early July, summer day camps for children aged 6 to 12 began, and the first childcare programs were opened. Throughout the summer, additional programs resumed, as one by one the facilities were restored and re-opened. By September, all programs except childcare in one facility were operational.



*Billboard in Fort McMurray
Source: ctvnews.ca*

Recovery – What We Heard



Restoration of facilities

- **Sequencing of facility reopening** – Once the Wood Buffalo facilities had been assessed, leadership determined the sequence in which they would be restored according to the programs offered, level of damage, and the estimated amount of work required. It was more manageable to focus work on 2 to 3 facilities at a time rather than all of them simultaneously.
- **Coordination of professional reclamation work** – Restoring each Wood Buffalo facility required coordination with different restoration and construction companies, co-located tenants, and building owners, which added additional complexity and caused delays. Reclamation companies operated under differing standards and assessment protocols, and these needed to be reconciled.
- **Coordination of staff reclamation work** – While the YMCA’s insurance coverage included cleaning by professional reclamation companies, in many cases this work was not completed to standards required for re-certification. This required that walls, floors, furniture, equipment and toys be cleaned again properly. Staff were called upon to do much of this work or to oversee the work done by reclamation companies. Coordination of staff efforts was not optimal; some staff were asked to do considerable restoration work while others were looking for ways to help. Many indicated that they did not receive sufficient information about key activities expected of them to assist in the re-opening of facilities.
- **Health and safety concerns** – Cleaning and restoration work was often done in dusty, smoky, and poorly ventilated facilities, and some staff felt their health and safety were at risk. They indicated that they were unable to discuss their health and safety concerns through appropriate channels. Furthermore, staff were concerned that childcare facilities might no longer be safe for children, despite the reclamation work. They wanted reassurance from external authorities that air quality, surfaces, furniture and toys would all be safe, and while safety certifications were received in Edmonton, the staff did not see them directly.

Recovery – What We Heard



HR management

- **Staff recall** – Despite what staff indicated as their availability to return to work, some were asked to return before they were ready. Some struggled to attend to their homes and personal matters, and others were unable to secure childcare. Some staff were given flexibility on their return dates, while others felt that if they did not return as requested, they would lose their job. However, most staff indicated that they received the information they needed about when and where to return to work.
- **Resource management** – Some managers reported being understaffed, and relied heavily on their teams to put in long hours to meet the deadlines for re-opening. Others reported having more staff available than they could use. Some staff were redeployed elsewhere, for example, lifeguards assisted with the summer day camps until the aquatics facilities were restored. However, not all available staff had the necessary skill sets to assist in the required tasks, and managers lacked the means to coordinate resourcing across the organization.
- **Role clarity** – Changes in programming and services required some staff positions to be changed. Some staff expressed a lack of clarity about their new responsibilities upon their return, while others reported receiving sufficient information about any changes to their role / responsibilities upon returning to work.
- **New hire training support** – Due to staff departures, some facilities needed to hire and train new staff. With the pressure to open, some Wood Buffalo managers requested help from Edmonton to provide additional support while they trained staff, but did not receive it.
- **Overtime pay** – Staff worked long hours, and some may not have been paid for all their time.

Recovery – What We Heard



Staff Support

- **Frontline service challenges** – Frontline staff experienced unique challenges in returning to work. The entire region, including YMCA staff, were experiencing varying degrees of stress, and as a result, frontline staff bore the brunt of parent and member emotions. Staff were unprepared to deal with the aggression and frustration of parents desperate for childcare and members expecting services. Nor were they prepared for the gratitude expressed by parents and members for whom the YMCA represented ‘normal’ life as they knew it before the fire. Managers reported numerous instances of frontline staff feeling overwhelmed by these encounters and breaking down.
- **Team restructuring** – Programming and service changes required some staff to join new teams in different facilities, working with new coworkers, clients and / or children. This made their return especially difficult, as it required another set of changes to their routine and a further break from their life before the fire.
- **Mental wellness resources** – Throughout the recovery efforts, Employee Assistance Program supports through Shepell and Alberta Health Services were available to staff. However, these services were not consistently described or promoted across the organization. Some managers reported that these supports were well used and appreciated by their teams, while some staff said that they had not used these services at all, either because they did not understand their purpose or thought that they did not require them.
- **Deadline pressures** – With the pressure to reopen childcare services as soon as possible, staff felt that they had to work long hours, often in difficult environmental conditions. Managers found they had to walk a fine line between protecting their teams from burnout while meeting the intense community demand for childcare services.
- **Recovery fatigue** – Despite managers’ efforts to recover the ‘fun way of working’ that their teams enjoyed before the fire, they reported that staff morale dropped as the recovery work went on. Some staff indicated feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the task at hand while feeling ill-equipped to accomplish it. They described themselves as ‘the broken helping the broken’, and expressed a desire to have an external resource who had not experienced the evacuation to help make decisions and lead the day-to-day recovery processes.

Recovery – What We Heard



Community

- **Meeting the need for childcare** – The community of Wood Buffalo relied heavily on the YMCA, as the largest childcare provider in the region, to enable the larger scale recovery work that was needed. The YMCA recognized this need in the early days of re-entry, and leaders, managers and staff did their utmost to fill it as quickly as possible.
- **YMCA as a community leader**– YMCA leaders made the decision to offer free access to day camps, out of school care programs, and fitness facilities. Leaders considered this decision important to the revitalization of the region, and community members expressed their appreciation. Parents and members appreciated this gesture for the feeling of continuity and life returning to normal that it afforded them and their children. Individuals who had not previously used YMCA services saw the organization as a community leader who stepped up to help in a time of crisis.
- **Telling the YMCA story** – There are many stories of the role the YMCA as an organization – and individual staff members – played in the recovery efforts of the community that should be told. Leaders are aware that the YMCA has done a lot of good for the community, and recognize the need to celebrate the successes of the organization, as well as the staff. Leaders and managers would like the opportunity for staff to share their stories, to allow them to be woven into the larger narrative of the wildfire recovery.

Recovery - Lessons Learned

The following factors contributed to the success of Recovery efforts:

Free access to childcare and facilities

The offer of free access to the YMCA facilities to the community, as well as the free day camps over the summer, was well received and appreciated, and established the YMCA as a leader in the regional recovery efforts.

Professionalism and dedication of YMCA staff

Leaders recognize that throughout this difficult time, Wood Buffalo staff maintained their professionalism and provided high quality customer service to children, families, members, and clients. Staff were able to adapt to changing circumstances and go above and beyond their typical responsibilities to support their patrons. They also supported the recovery of the region as a whole by working so hard to restore services as quickly as they did, which speaks to their dedication to the community in which they live.

Recovery – Lessons Learned

The following factors limited the success of Recovery efforts:

Delay in re-entry

YMCA services were not recognized as “essential services”, so the organization was not able to begin recovery work as soon as leaders wanted. This caused the recovery work to be unnecessarily rushed in order to meet demand.

Complexity of restoration work

The number of groups involved in the restoration activities (i.e., insurance and reclamation companies, building owners, co-located tenants) made decision-making slower and more laborious than anticipated. Restoration planning under-estimated the amount of effort needed to engage all of the stakeholders involved.

Inconsistency in staff support

While managers and staff were tasked with much of the recovery work, efforts to support them to do this were not always sufficient. For example:

- Some staff were recalled back to work before they had attended to their homes and personal affairs.
- Managers and staff worked long hours, and some were not paid for all their time.
- Some staff were recalled without work to go back to, which resulted in the loss of their EI benefits, and no income.
- Some staff felt their health and wellness was secondary to the reopening of facilities on time, which made them feel unappreciated.
- Frontline staff were unprepared for emotional responses from families and members.



Appendix A - Survey Results

Appendix A – Survey Results

Phase 1 – Response: The period from May 3 to the closure of the YMCA facilities

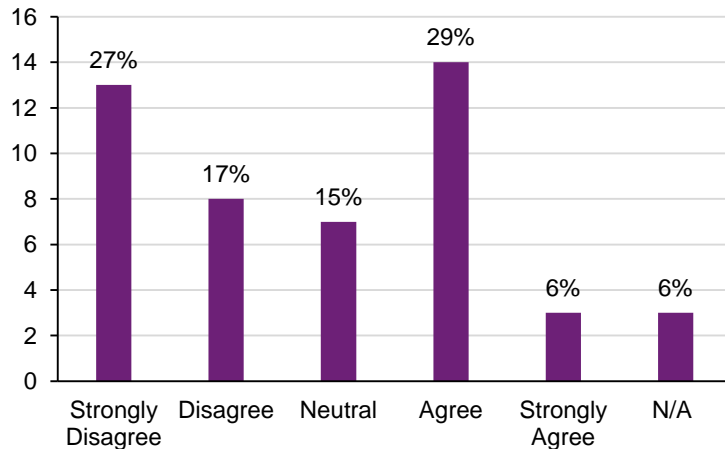
As you review / reflect on the questions below, please consider the communications provided to you on May 3rd.

For each of the statements below, please select your level of agreement.

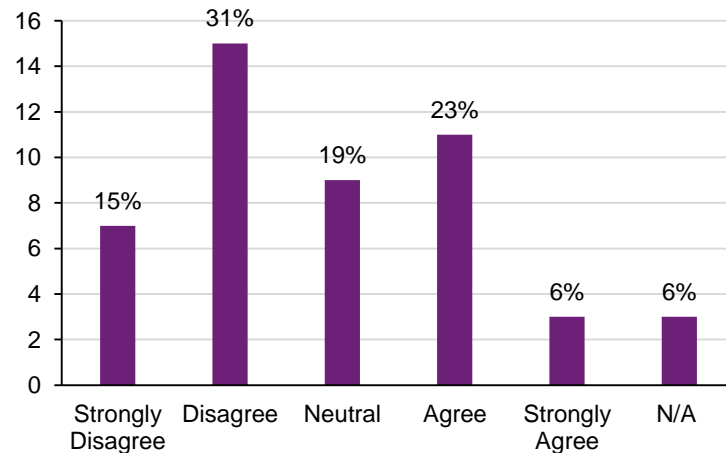
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 1, 48 completed responses were submitted.

1.1 I received the right information when I needed it before the decision to close the YMCA's facilities in Fort McMurray was made



1.2 I received sufficient information about my role / responsibilities during the closure of the YMCA's facilities in Fort McMurray



Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 1 – Response: The period from May 3 to the closure of the YMCA facilities

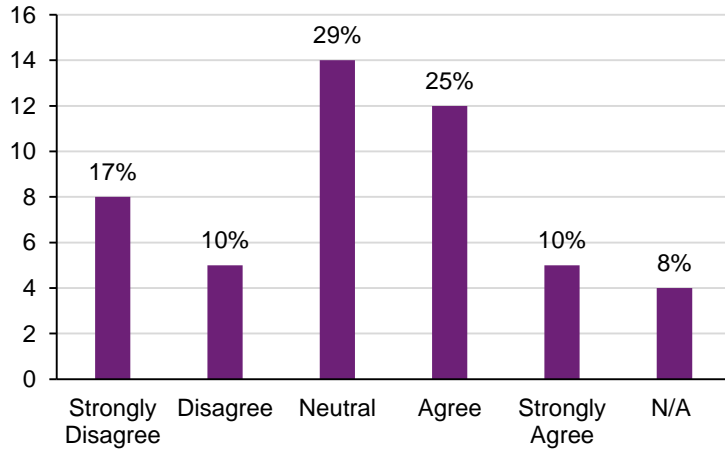
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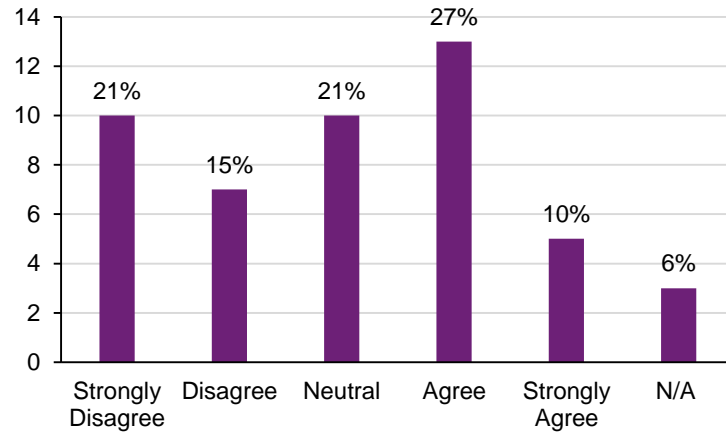
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 1, 48 completed responses were submitted.

1.3 I felt prepared to execute my role / responsibilities during the closure



1.4 Overall, I agree with the decisions that were made by YMCA leadership and management during this phase



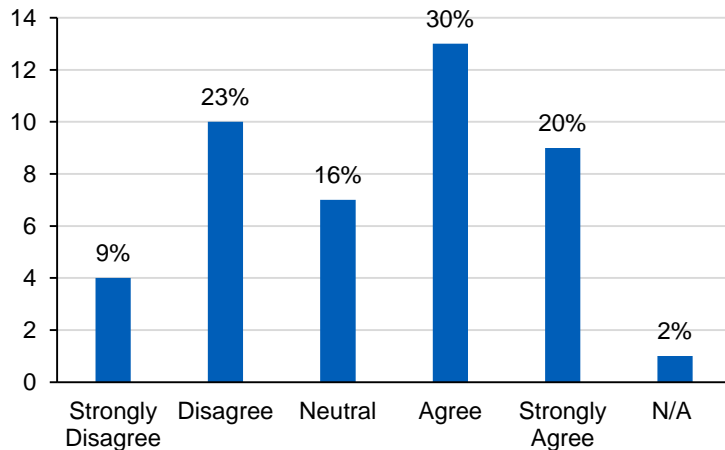
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 2 – Stabilization: The period from May 4 to June 3, when Fort McMurray was evacuated

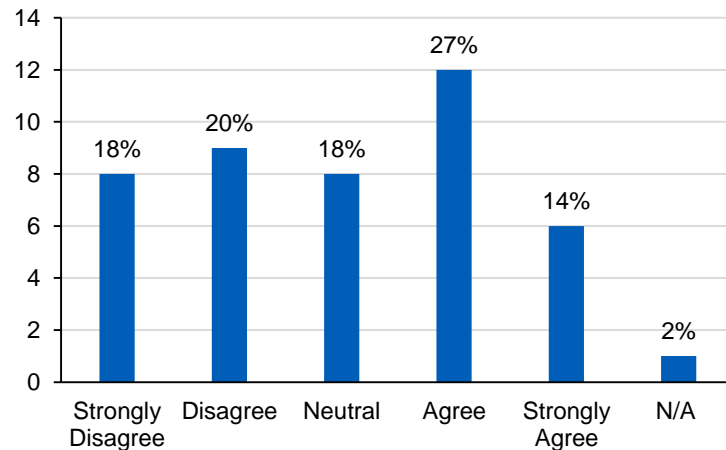
As you reflect on the time when you were displaced from the Wood Buffalo community, please consider each of the following statements and indicate your level of agreement.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 2, 44 completed responses were submitted.

2.1 I received updates and information regarding my employment status and temporary layoff when I needed it



2.2 I received updates and information regarding my salary / pay when I needed it



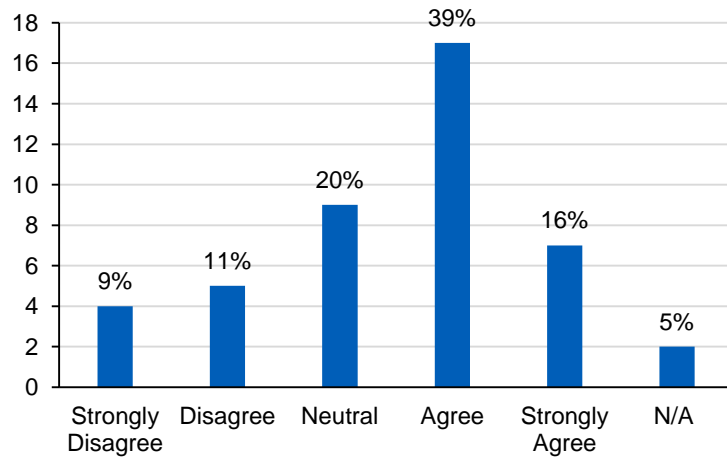
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 2 – Stabilization: The period from May 4 to June 3, when Fort McMurray was evacuated

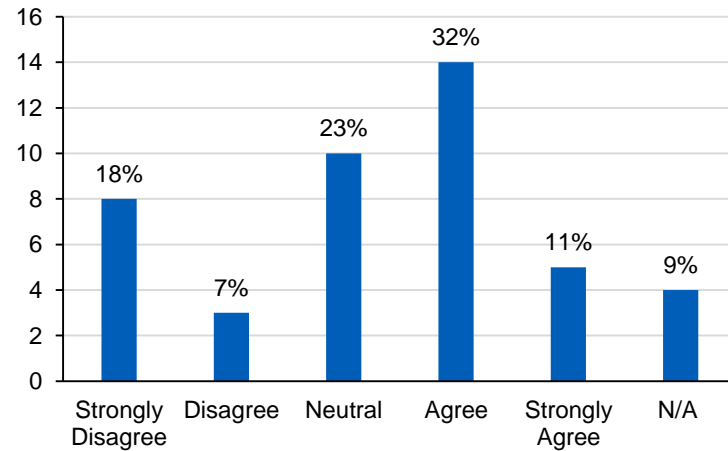
As you reflect on the time when you were displaced from the Wood Buffalo community, please consider each of the following statements and indicate your level of agreement.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 2, 44 completed responses were submitted.

2.3 I received updates and information regarding claiming Employment Insurance when I needed it



2.4 I received updates and information regarding my benefits when I needed it



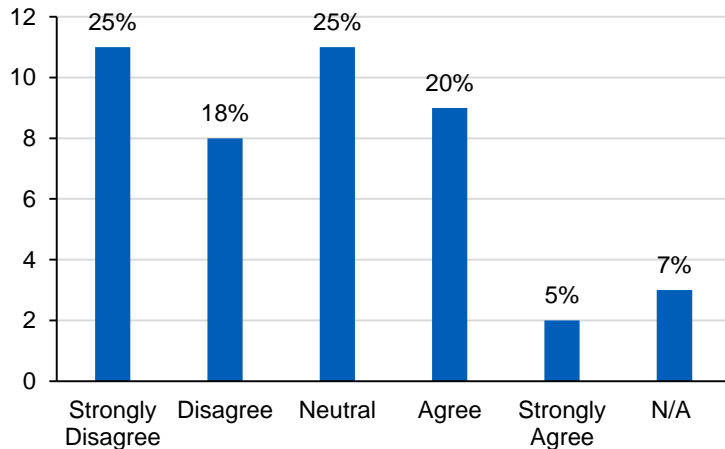
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 2 – Stabilization: The period from May 4 to June 3, when Fort McMurray was evacuated

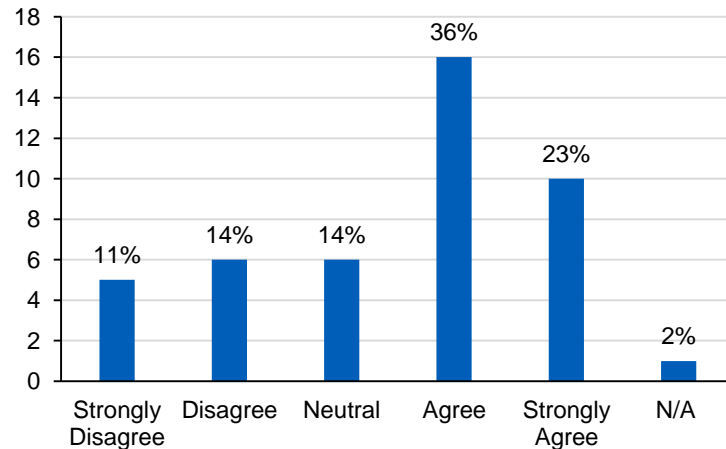
As you reflect on the time when you were displaced from the Wood Buffalo community, please consider each of the following statements and indicate your level of agreement.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 2, 44 completed responses were submitted.

2.5 I had the opportunity to discuss my concerns about my employment status / pay / benefits with YMCA management



2.6 I received updates and information regarding my return to work when I needed it



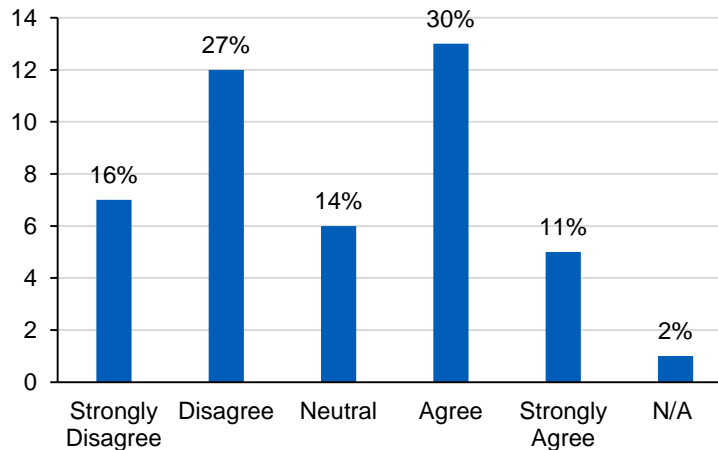
Appendix A – Survey Results

Phase 2 – Stabilization: The period from May 4 to June 3, when Fort McMurray was evacuated

As you reflect on the time when you were displaced from the Wood Buffalo community, please consider each of the following statements and indicate your level of agreement.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 2, 44 completed responses were submitted.

2.7 Overall, I agree with the decisions that were made by YMCA leadership and management during this phase



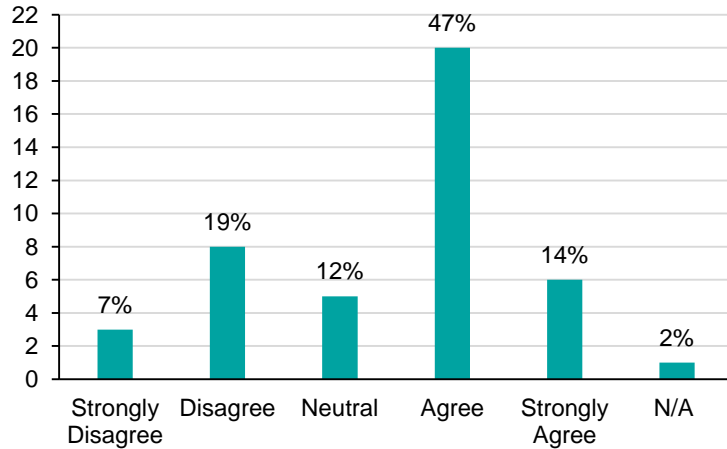
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 3 – Recovery: The period from June 4 to mid-August, when the YMCA was preparing to reopen facilities

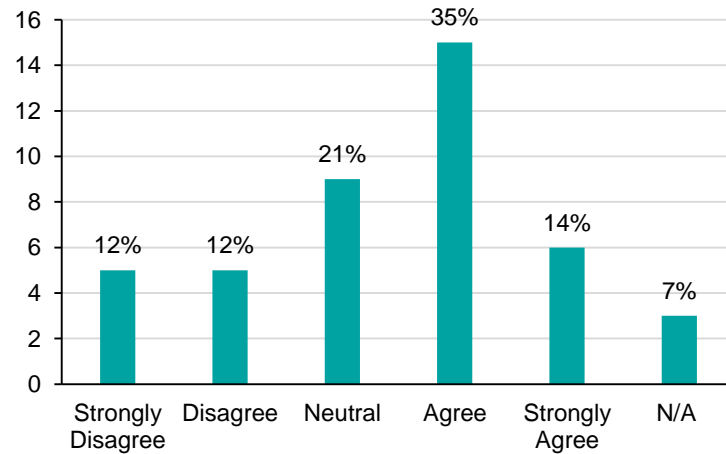
Once allowed to re-enter Fort McMurray, please consider the key activities that took place as the YMCA prepared to reopen facilities. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 3, 43 completed responses were submitted.

3.1 Once allowed to return to Fort McMurray, I received information when I needed it about when and where I was to return to work at the YMCA



3.2 I received updated information regarding my employment status and temporary layoff when I needed it



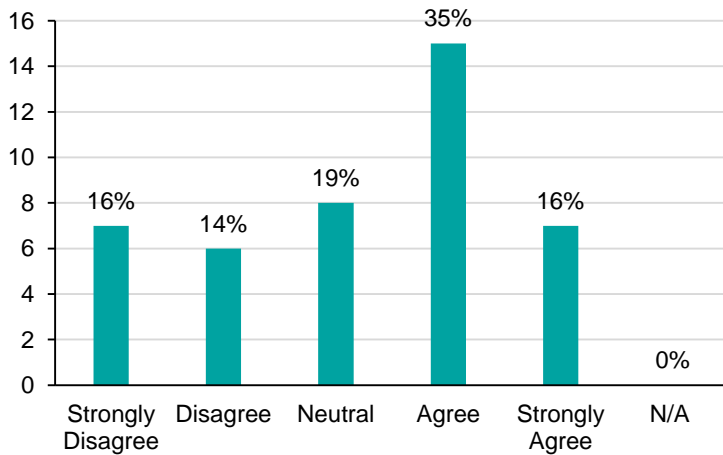
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 3 – Recovery: The period from June 4 to mid-August, when the YMCA was preparing to reopen facilities

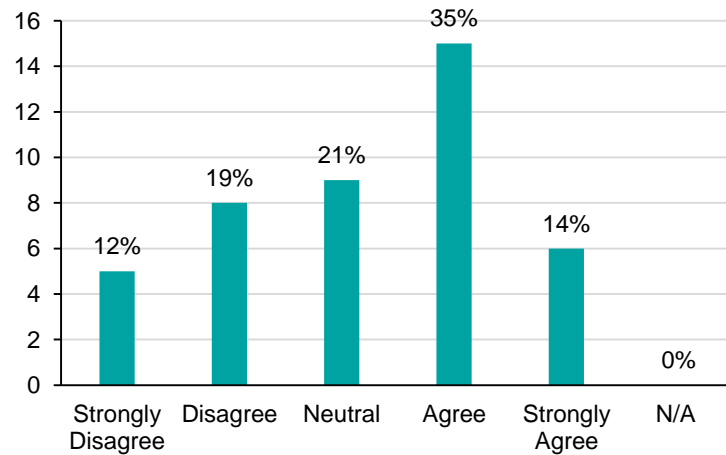
Once allowed to re-enter Fort McMurray, please consider the key activities that took place as the YMCA prepared to reopen facilities. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 3, 43 completed responses were submitted.

3.3 I received sufficient information about the key activities / action expected of me to assist in re-opening the facilities



3.4 I understood how I could actively participate in the YMCA's recovery efforts



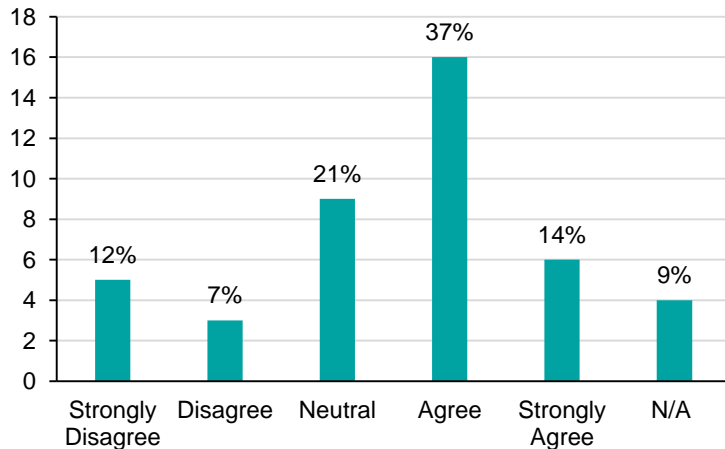
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 3 – Recovery: The period from June 4 to mid-August, when the YMCA was preparing to reopen facilities

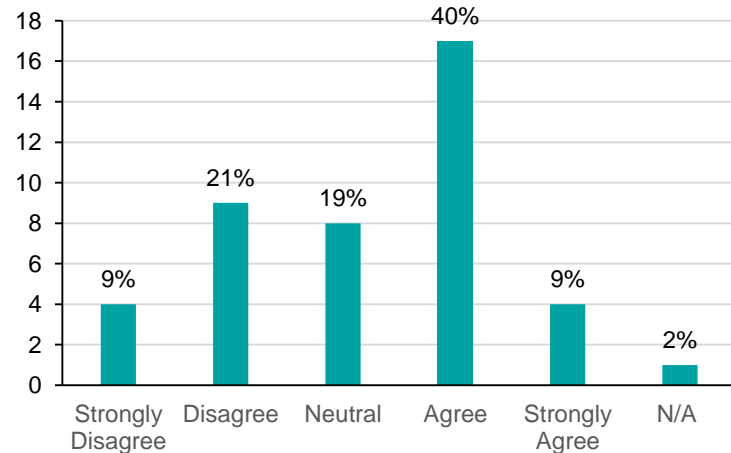
Once allowed to re-enter Fort McMurray, please consider the key activities that took place as the YMCA prepared to reopen facilities. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 3, 43 completed responses were submitted.

3.5 I was able to actively participate in the YMCA's recovery efforts



3.6 I was provided the support / resources necessary to contribute to the YMCA's recovery efforts



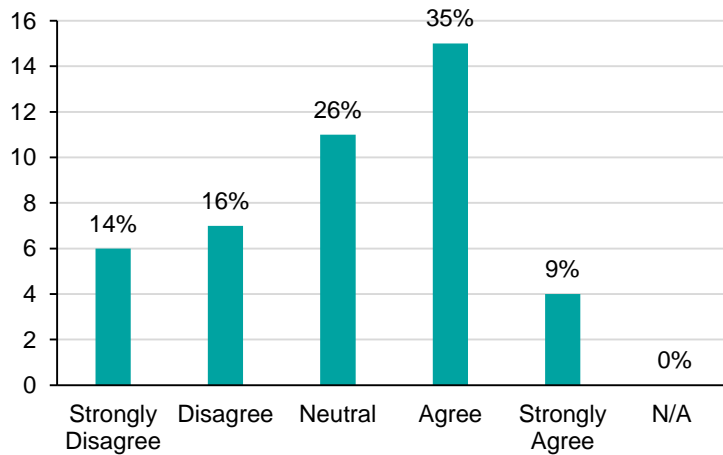
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 3 – Recovery: The period from June 4 to mid-August, when the YMCA was preparing to reopen facilities

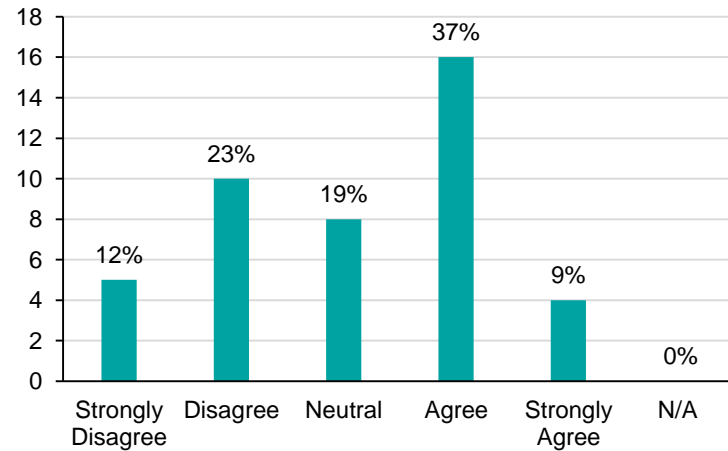
Once allowed to re-enter Fort McMurray, please consider the key activities that took place as the YMCA prepared to reopen facilities. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 3, 43 completed responses were submitted.

3.7 I was able to easily access necessary information about my job throughout this phase



3.8 Overall, I agree with the decisions that were made by YMCA leadership and management during this phase



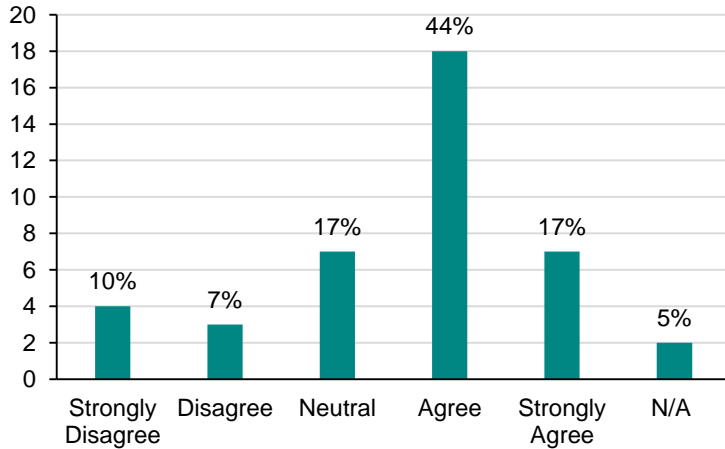
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 4 – Resumption of operations: The period from July 29 to August 31, the phased-in reopening of YMCA facilities.

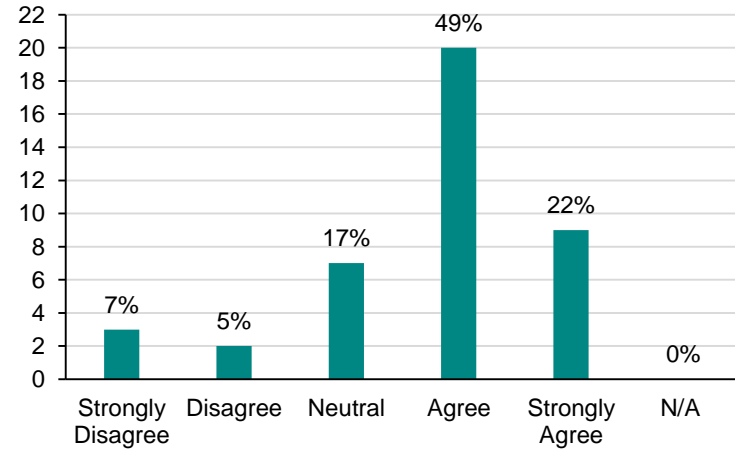
As the YMCA’s facilities began to be re-opened and you returned to your usual work, consider the communication provided and decisions made by YMCA leadership. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 4, 41 completed responses were submitted.

4.1 I received sufficient information about any changes to my role / responsibilities upon returning to work at the YMCA



4.2 I was able to discuss my role / responsibilities with my manager or appropriate YMCA leadership representative



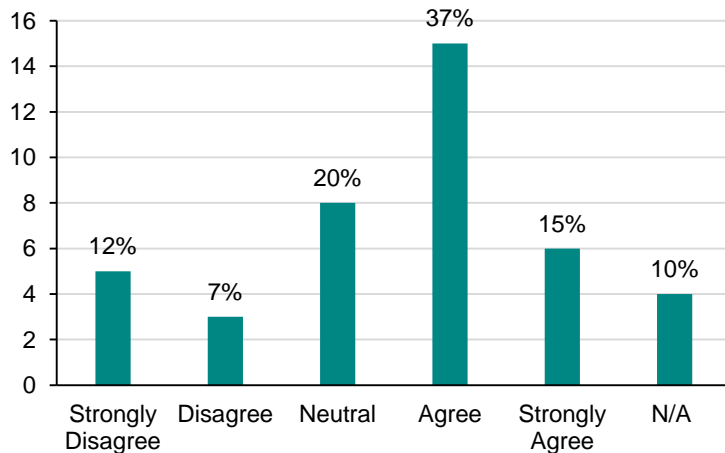
Appendix A - Survey Results

Phase 4 – Resumption of operations: The period from July 29 to August 31, the phased-in reopening of YMCA facilities.

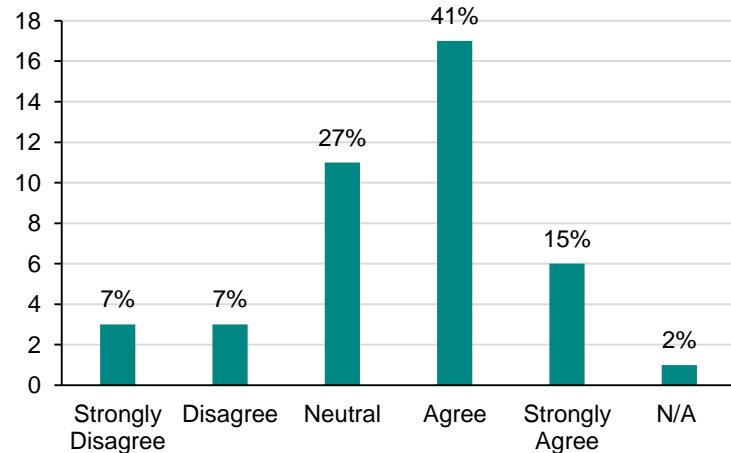
As the YMCA's facilities began to be re-opened and you returned to your usual work, consider the communication provided and decisions made by YMCA leadership. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 4, 41 completed responses were submitted.

4.3 I was satisfied with any changes to my role / responsibilities



4.4 I was able to easily access necessary information about my job throughout this phase



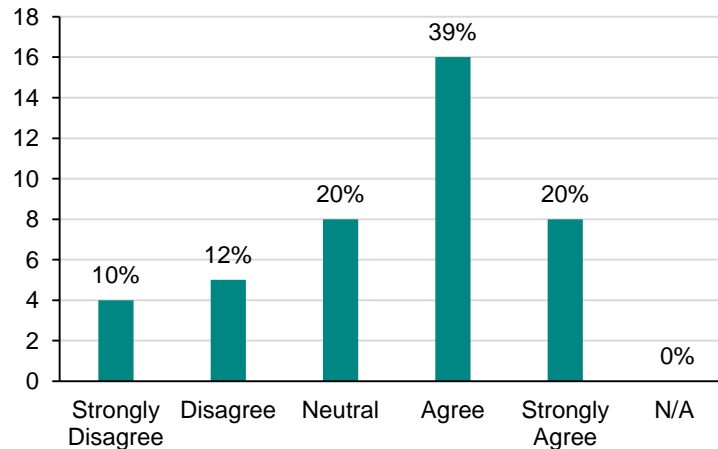
Appendix A – Survey Results

Phase 4 – Resumption of operations: The period from July 29 to August 31, the phased-in reopening of YMCA facilities.

As the YMCA's facilities began to be re-opened and you returned to your usual work, consider the communication provided and decisions made by YMCA leadership. Please select your level of agreement with each of the statements below.
(Strongly Disagree ; Disagree ; Neutral ; Agree ; Strongly Agree ; Not applicable)

For each question in Phase 4, 41 completed responses were submitted.

4.5 Overall, I agree with the decisions that were made by YMCA leadership and management during this phase





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