

January 29, 2019

Dear YMCA of Medicine Hat Board members, CEO Sharon Hayward, Before & After School Program Manager Donovan Hoggan and, MHPSD Superintendent Mark Davidson and MHPSD Board of Trustees:

I believe that you are all in the roles you hold because you want to make a difference. A difference in our community, a difference in our kids, a difference in our families. I can tell you that you have made a significant difference to the lives of the families who use or might use the before and after school care programs run by the YMCA embedded in our local schools – but not for the better.

When the program was privatized and the contract sent out for tender, I expected to see changes to the program. I also fully understand the needs of a business to at least make ends meet. I have no problems paying a reasonable price for the services of a well thought out program that delivers educational and physical wellness care for my child while I am unable because I work outside of the home.

Here is what I DO have a problem with:

- 1) The reasons the YMCA has given for the hefty and sudden rise in fees AND change in fee structure for the YMCA Before & After Care are invalid.
  - a. The increase to minimum wage rates have been scheduled for long before you developed and issued a bid on the care contract – this was not an unknown, foisted upon you without any opportunity to plan accordingly. It absolutely should have been taken into account in your business case and proposal.
  - b. Your issues of low enrollment will surely increase due to these changes. Any amount of research, planning or consultation with other communities where the YMCA has implemented similar programs WOULD have indicated that a flat rate system is a much more stable business plan. HOWEVER, that decision really needed to be made before you submitted a bid to the school board using a variable rate structure and entering into contracts with families at the start of the school year.
- 2) The communication and timelines of the aforementioned changes were poorly conceived and executed.
  - a. In any business contract a standard timeframe for changing significant terms sits at 30 days. If I were to try to cancel my internet, or gym membership, or daycare provider they would require a minimum of 30 days. 10 days from email to new fee structure is unreasonable.
  - b. The roll out of communications had too little notice and too many errors. Between families at several schools I understand that the emails either included the wrong registration attachment, or no registration attachment at all. And at one school in particular, they were never provided the form, the form was completed for the parents based on prior usage patterns without the parent's input. This was not professionally implemented.

- 3) From my understanding, there was no consideration for kindergarten kids who CANNOT attend school any more than half time – usually less than half time. I have been assured that my son will not arrive one day on the hourly option to find out there is “no availability”, but when revisions to this program are made I hope you consider the full variety of students at the schools. (Note: even a 50% discount on the levels for the time he is usually in attendance would still result in an increase for us of \$40-60 per month, giving you increased revenue with less of a gauge for time he is not scheduled to be at school.)
- 4) The constant push of what the YMCA perceives to be a benefit (child membership) is in actuality a thinly veiled sales technique, and we see through it. My child cannot attend your facility without me paying to accompany him. Please stop pushing this as a huge and unique benefit of your services. Even having the MASSIVE banner ad embedded into the signature line of the email telling families that their fees were going to increase should have been removed/reconsidered. This should have been a sales communication.
- 5) The point about the “families who qualify for the Government of Alberta child care subsidy should not be impacted by these changes” absolutely showcases that the new fee structure was developed to maximize easy money from the government, rather than having it based on the actual costs and requirements to run the program. I am happy that those families who require the subsidy to help cover costs in order to run their lives won’t be more out of pocket due to this change, but my family, and many others, will be.
  - a. To be clear on this point, and how I came to my conclusion, I will use fill-in values as I don’t have specific numbers to go by. Let’s say a family on subsidy’s current costs were \$140, and the family paid \$40 and the government covered \$100. The new fee structure could see those monthly costs at up to \$420. If you are saying that the subsidized family will not pay more, they are still paying, say, \$40, then the government is covering the full cost of your increase at, say, \$380. This indicates to me that, by design, the YMCA is looking to gather the most funding possible through the subsidy, which costs me twice: firstly as a parent who doesn’t quite qualify for the subsidy, and also as a taxpayer who covers those subsidized fees. Even if the cost for the family on subsidy was \$100 with the government covering \$40, if that family’s regular costs don’t increase the full brunt of the new fees still remains with the government at \$320.
- 6) To the school board, if you did not enter into this contract with any protection clauses for families who are already financially stretched to their very max, I hold you accountable as well. Four months into a new program it seems as though many elements you would have ranked in evaluating the bids to assign this contract to the YMCA are set to change. I wonder how any other bids you received for the contract would stack up against the current program? If you pull no weight with this third party service provider who runs their business on your property, then I hope you at the very least learn how to properly vet service providers in the future and write contracts that protect your families as well as your own business concerns and reputation.

The values listed on the YMCA website include to Do the Right Thing, to Put People First, to Keep Our Promises, and to Lead by Example.

I implore the YMCA to Do the Right Thing by reconsidering their hasty and predatory changes to fee structure. Keep your Promise to our families by Putting People First. Please, now is the time to Lead by Example and re-evaluate the proposed changes, and halt or significantly delay the effective date of your new fee structure.