



# OGI: One Great Idea

Ideas that Matter from the YMCA World Urban Network (WUN)

Every YMCA has them - ideas that matter. Practical and innovative ways in which YMCAs are making a difference in the lives of a young person, a community, a country. **One Great Idea** is a new initiative from the YMCA World Urban Network (WUN) designed to reveal great ideas with WUN members, who in turn are invited to share them widely within their networks. Our objective is simple: shine a light on solutions that work.

*This month, we are pleased to spotlight Nick Parkinson and the innovative work of the YMCA of Northern Alberta, Canada:*



*What is your current position?*  
President & CEO, since 2013

*What brought you to the YMCA?*  
I started my YMCA career 37 years ago, first working for the YMCA of Northern Alberta, followed by 7 years in Calgary. After a little time working outside the Y, I returned to Northern Alberta in 2011, assuming my current role in 2013.

*Your post-secondary education?*  
B.A. in Physical Education from the University of Alberta in 1987.

*How many people are served by your Y?*  
Approximately 120,000 children, youth, and families from over 150 program locations are served annually by 1,300 employees and 350 volunteers.

*What is your idea of a perfect day?*  
Early morning workout at 5:30 AM, followed by a coffee with members and staff. Lunch with a donor or a presentation to a stakeholder group to share the incredible impact the Y is having every day. Wrap things up with a wonderful dinner and evening at home with the family.

## ONE GREAT IDEA – March 2024

### YMCA of Northern Alberta, Canada

#### 1. **What is your idea?**

Create a Leadership Development program that is tailored to YMCA leaders that focuses on developing strong leaders who have the skills, knowledge, and drive to ignite the potential of all YMCA staff, volunteers, members, and communities. This program is designed to meet the needs of YMCA leaders by focusing on delivering actionable learnings that inspire leaders to approach leadership with intention and commitment.

#### 2. **What opportunity or problem does your idea address?**

Leadership Development is key to the ongoing success of YMCA associations. Good leaders have been identified as having a positive impact on staff retention, staff mental health and wellness, and innovation and growth.

#### 3. **Why was this idea important to your Y?**

This program was driven by the voices of leaders across Northern Alberta who consistently asked for training that focused on Leadership Development and extended beyond a “one-and-done” approach. The program supports our 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, specifically our strategic goal to Ignite the Talent and Potential of our People.

#### 4. **How did you get started?**

The pandemic had a significant impact on our YMCA entry and mid-management-level staff. Many staff members were new to the YMCA and new to their positions, resulting in a need to train and develop them to “lead and manage the Y way.” In June 2022, Y Alberta dedicated funding to contract a Leadership Development (LD) Manager to build a program designed to help prepare supervisors/managers for their roles. The LD Manager met with senior leaders from the 4 Alberta YMCAs and discussed the leadership needs of their staff. In late 2022, this conversation was extended to mid-level leaders who provided crucial insight into the needs of their peers, supervisors, and senior leaders. **The Leading the Y Way: Level One** program was delivered throughout Alberta and based on the positive response and changed behaviours of leaders. **Leading the Y Way: Level Two** was created to continue providing leaders with development opportunities. Throughout the process, ongoing conversations with leaders about their needs and the needs of their teams have shaped decision-making, program development, and evaluation.

#### 5. **Where does funding come from?**

The LD Manager position was funded by Y Alberta reserves. Each local association pays for training costs, including travel, accommodation, and materials.

*Do you have a role model?*

I have been fortunate to work with and for some amazing YMCA leaders... Each have inspired me and have made me who I am today.

*What's the trait you most dislike in others?*

Lack of empathy, closed-mindedness.

*Who would be your dream companion over lunch?*

Nelson Mandela

*What's your best quality?*

Loyalty and commitment

*What do you most treasure?*

My wife Jodi of 34 years and our amazing daughter Sydney, 24 years.

*What is your greatest success?*

Apart from my incredible family... Finding a life purpose and a desire to make a difference at the YMCA, leading in times of crisis e.g. Wood Buffalo Wildfire, Pandemic, etc.

*What are you currently reading?*

*The Power of Moments* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

*What would someone be surprised to learn about you?*

I was born in Liverpool, England and immigrated to Canada in 1968

*What is your greatest fear?*

Becoming ineffective and stale, dated, and obsolete. Failure and letting people down.

*What is your personal motto?*

"Make a positive difference every day."

**6. How did you get buy-in on the idea (whether it be staff, board, members, community, etc.)?**

Everyone quickly accepted the idea. First, the National Board of Directors welcomed the design and implementation. Then, YMCA staff fully embraced the opportunity, many of whom had never had a chance to participate in this type of process. The program was developed for leaders based on their identified needs. This created a supportive environment, as leaders saw their voices reflected in the program's design and delivery. Because the program is action-orientated, senior leaders have seen changes in next-level leaders, which has led to ongoing support from senior leaders.

**7. How does the idea work?**

This program prioritizes flexibility so that associations can use it in a meaningful and impactful way. Using a modular approach, each training is designed to stand alone or as part of a larger series. All the workshops focus on creating shared language, leadership approaches, and leadership skills. **Leading the Y Way: Level One** includes Emotional Intelligence, Everyday Coaching, and Leading for Results. **Leading the Y Way: Level Two** includes Leading Effective Teams, Managing Change, and Crucial Conversations.

**8. How do you, or how do you plan to, measure effectiveness?**

Evaluations are regularly reviewed to identify areas for improvement or additional training needs. Key indicators include the number of unique leaders trained, the overall workshop score, and participant identification of actionable learnings. A key measure of success is associations' self-reporting regarding the long-term impact of the training on changing leadership behaviour. Long-term we hope to evaluate changes in staff retention and staff engagement scores, by looking at scores prior to the introduction of the training and then scores post-introduction of the training.

**9. What have you learned from the process thus far?**

Adopting an iterative approach encourages adaptations and changes to the program based on evaluations and feedback. Through the development process, we learned that a flexible, modular approach is key to the program's success. Finally, we learned the importance of having dedicated staff resources with previous operational experience and a high level of trainer/facilitator experience.

**10. Where can YMCA colleagues get more information?**

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## SAVE THE DATE!

### **WUN 2024 Conference in Bogotá Colombia: Monday, November 4 – Saturday, November 9**

Plan to join your YMCA colleagues from across the globe as the WUN gathers in Bogotá, Colombia, this coming November (4-9 November 2024). Our conference will be held at the Marriott Bogotá, and will focus on adaptation in response to the growing complexity associated with YMCA leadership. Our 2024 program will include Bogotá YMCA engagement, cultural opportunities, and a Spouse/Partners Program. Expect your registration package by May.