

# 2023 Camps Survey

CAMP



PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO

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For access to the raw data used to write this survey, please contact [pro@prontario.org](mailto:pro@prontario.org).

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Parks and Recreation Ontario thanks all interview and survey participants. Our work at PRO would not be possible without your support. In addition, PRO thanks the organizations that supported with the distribution of this survey.

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# Introduction

Camps are an invaluable community service. For many families, safe, affordable camps allow parents to participate fully in the workforce and provide a vital lifeline to community. Since the pandemic, recreation providers across the province have faced staffing and resource shortages that have affected service provision. While the reasons for this are diverse and complex, there are a few key factors that had significant impact on the supply of labour.

1. Working in a public facing job during the pandemic meant increased personal risk.
2. Public health mandates such as enhanced sanitation and masking made working conditions more difficult.
3. Counsellor-in-training positions are a key part of the camp labour pipeline. These positions are filled by youth that have often attended the camp they are working at. Capacity limits and lower ratios resulted in a smaller pool of potential candidates, making it harder to staff these positions.
4. Jobs in the camps sector are increasingly seen as low paying, high responsibility positions particularly compared to alternative jobs popular among youth.

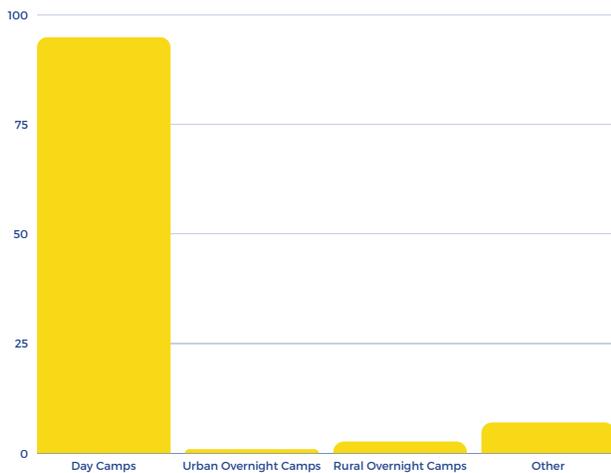
Ultimately, the impact of this can be seen in the report below. Increased waitlists, fewer staff, and a decreased ability to accommodate participants with specialized needs will undoubtedly have knock-on effects for the broader economic and social well-being of communities.

In the summer of 2022, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) released the Camps Survey to gather data related to issues of staff recruitment and retention. This survey asked respondents a series of questions on staffing and service provision from 2019 and 2022 to capture pre- and post-pandemic program data. PRO will use this information alongside qualitative data collected via interviews to advocate for support for the camps sector specifically.

# Demographics

The 123 respondents to this survey included organizations from the public, non-profit, and private sectors representing day and overnight camps in Ontario. The survey was supplemented by interviews conducted with a subset of respondents.

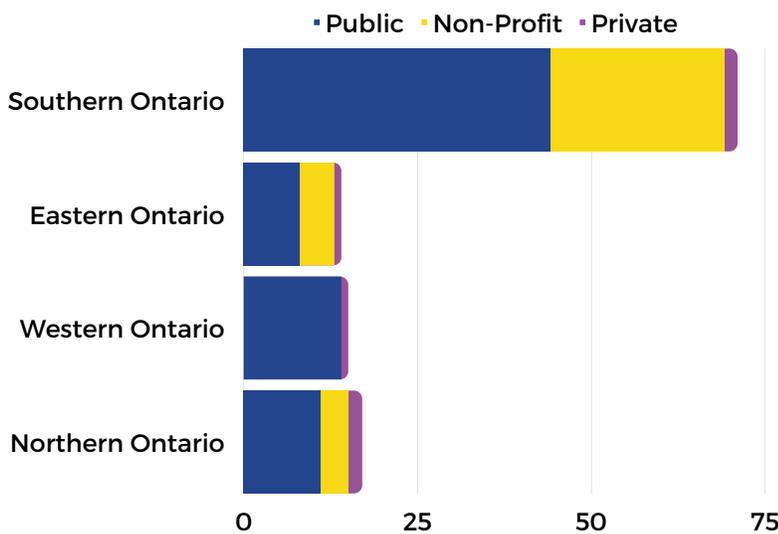
**Chart 1: Respondents by Type of Camp**



As visualized in Chart 1, the large majority of survey respondents represented day camps. Overall, 65% of respondents represented the public sector, 39% represented non-profit providers and 5% represented private camp providers. The respondents came from across the province with a majority from southern Ontario. 61% were from southern Ontario, 12% from Eastern Ontario, 13% from Western Ontario, and 15% of Northern Ontario.

The raw data can also be sorted to determine the number of respondents from each sector by geographical designation.

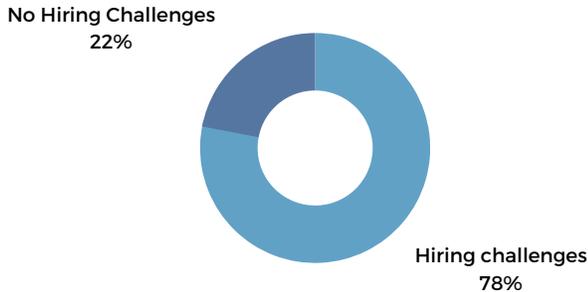
**Chart 2: Respondents by Sector and Geography**



All public sector respondents offer day camps, 99.95% of non-profit respondents offer day camps while 0.05% offer overnight camps as well, and finally 63% of private sector respondents offer day camps while 37% offer rural overnight camps.

# Staffing

Chart 3: Hiring Challenges

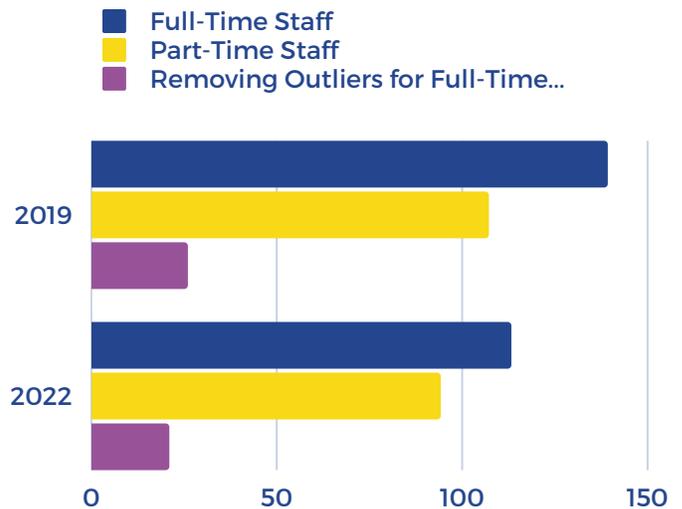


78% of respondents indicated that they have faced hiring challenges in the last three years. In comments, a majority of respondents indicated that the application pool was smaller than expected and that once hired, staff members were more likely to miss work than in previous years,

necessitating backfill positions to run camps smoothly. This was felt more deeply in public sector respondents. 84% of public sector camps reported having challenges hiring staff versus 69% of non-profits and 63% of private sector organizations.

Most respondents represent small to mid-sized communities and organizations, but there are larger outliers that significantly affect the average number of full-time staff. Chart 4 depicts both the overall average and the adjusted average of full-time staff. This shows a 19% and 12% decrease in staff numbers respectively. Adjusting for large outliers, the majority of respondents employed an average of 26 full time staff in 2019 and 21 in 2022 which demonstrates the same percentage decrease (19%).

Chart 4: Average Number of Staff



“The pool of applicants that we’ve had has dramatically decreased since 2019...even before that, we were around 60 applicants every year and it went down to I think... In 2019, we had 45 and in 2021/2022 we didn’t even have enough at the end of our deadline. So we extended the deadline and then just kept that recruitment process going right up until a couple of weeks before camp started.”

**Colleen Gillis, Recreation Supervisor, Kincardine**

# Staffing

Respondents made clear through the survey and interviews that for the most part, recruitment and long-term retention has been a challenge for the sector. Overall, there was an 860% increase in unfilled staff positions between 2019 and 2022. Private sector respondents were hardest hit, reporting a 1600% increase, then public sector respondents with a 993% increase and finally a 429% increase in this number for non-profit camp providers. This had a significant impact on service delivery and participant numbers as reflected in the next part of this report.

Chart 5: Average Number of Unfilled Positions

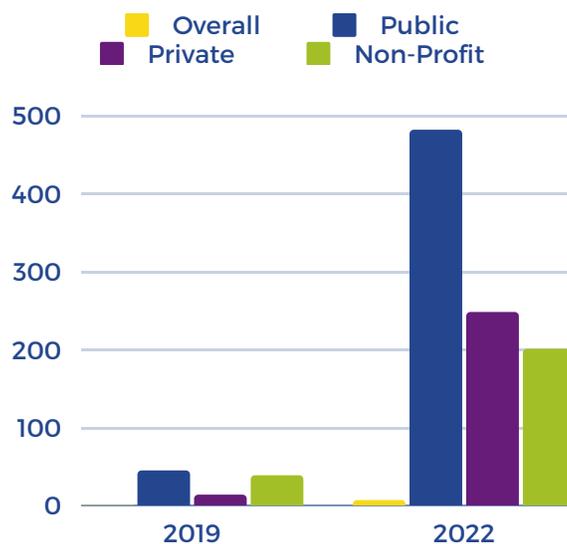
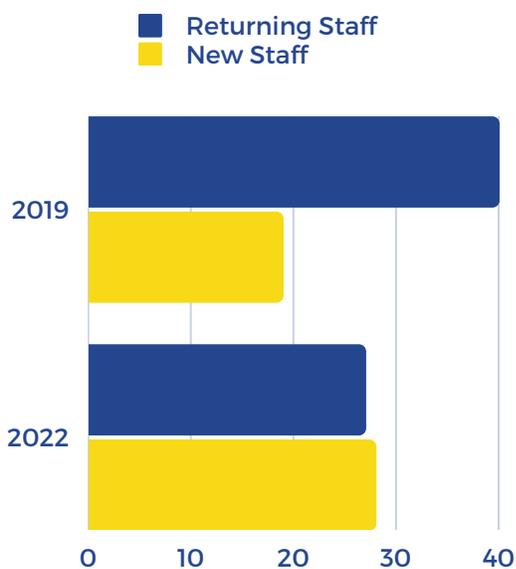


Chart 6: Average Number of New and Returning Staff



Staff retention in the camps sector plays a significant role in organizational operations. New staff means more resources spent on training and orientation, which can be onerous particularly for smaller organizations. Long-term staff retention in the camps sector has always been challenging due to staff "aging out" of being counsellors. However, this problem became more acute after the pandemic. On average, in 2019, respondents reported hiring 40 returning staff and 19 new staff, resulting in a ratio of 2:1. In 2022, the number of returning staff was almost equal to the number of new staff, with an average of 27 returning staff and 28 new staff".

# Service Provision

Staffing shortages in the sector had a significant impact on service provision. Through commentary in the survey and subsequent interviews, many camp providers identified that there was growing demand for camp services.

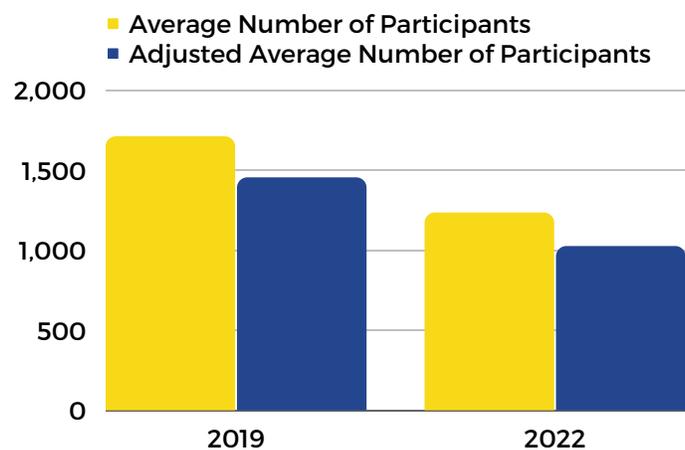
Chart 7: Waitlist Length



The average waitlist for participants grew from 137 to 210. In raw numbers, this represented a 53% increase in the size of waitlists. By removing the largest outliers to adjust for the average organizational size of respondents, this percentage increase grows to 171%.

At the same time, the average number of camp participants decreased as organizations were able to offer fewer spaces for their programs. Respondents reported a 16% decrease in average number of participants overall and a 29% decrease in this number adjusted for large outliers.

Chart 8: Average Number of Participants



“Our camps started in 2015, and we would take a max of 40 Campers per day and we rarely hit those numbers leading into 2019. But in 2022 though it just kind of exploded and we’re selling out every single day.”

**Dan Maksenuk, Recreation Supervisor, Niagara on the Lake**

# Service Provision

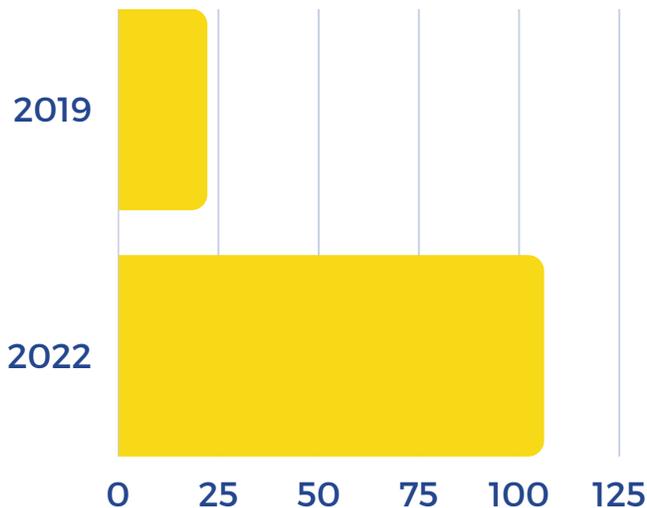
While 89% of respondents reported offering inclusive or integrated programming depending on the need and resources available, many faced significant challenges in delivering these services.

"Inclusive programming was planned, but often not properly executed because of the need for more staff. Like said above, many adaptations were being realized in the moment so we often fell short in our inclusive programming."

We always try to work with families but in some cases we are not equipped for their needs or have the space to accommodate their needs.

Do not have staffing resources however did our best to accommodate everyone that we could.

Chart 8: Average Number of Participants with Specialized Needs Unaccommodated



While 89% of respondents reported offering inclusive or integrated programming depending on the need and resources available, many faced significant challenges in delivering these services. In 2019, respondents reported having an average of 22 prospective participants that they were unable to accommodate due to resource or staffing shortages. This number increased to 106 in 2022, representing a 380% increase.

"Beamsville is the hub of the community and where the majority of our residents live. We also are experiencing significant growth in this area and the demand for camps in Beamsville has exploded. We anticipate the growth and the demand for camps to continue to increase."

**Lori Laird, Recreation and Events Coordinator, Town of Lincoln**

# Recommendations

Camp programs are an integral part of Ontario's childcare continuum and are vital to the social and economic health of the province.

The pandemic had a deep impact on staffing and service provision in the camps sector as evidenced by the responses to this survey. Increased personal risk and greater responsibility coupled with the relatively low level of compensation compared to similar positions has resulted in a smaller pool of eligible candidates to staff camp jobs. Capacity limits and cohorts also reduced the number of overall participants, which affected the counsellor-in-training to full-time camp counsellor pipeline. In future, the implementation of Bill 23, the More Homes Built Faster Act along with a growing population in many communities promises to place additional financial pressure on municipalities, making program delivery more challenging.

Proposed solutions should be multi-faceted and take into account the diversity of contributing issues. This includes:

- Funding opportunities for summer camp providers to meet the needs of the communities they serve;
- Youth employment programs to subsidize the cost of staff for summer camp providers; and
- Dedicated funding for infrastructure and staffing to create or expand integrated summer programs to better serve children and youth with specialized needs.



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