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# Promoting Physical Activity in Local Communities: Understanding Health, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Needs in Winooski, VT

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# Promoting Physical Activity in Local Communities:

## Understanding Health, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Needs in Winooski, VT

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### Introduction

Since the Winooski YMCA opened in March 2008, enrollment has been much lower than expected, with only 200 members enrolled by September 2008. One goal of the YMCA is to promote the health of the community by increasing involvement in physical activity in Winooski. Regular exercise is associated with enhanced health and decreased risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, as well as many cancers. In order to promote physical activity in the Winooski community, the YMCA set a goal to increase their enrollment to 500 members by December 2008.



### Objective

- The membership rates at the Winooski YMCA have been low since its opening in March 2008.
- By interviewing local Winooski residents, we hope to assess how the YMCA can better meet the recreational and fitness needs of the community.
- The results of the survey will help to form recommendations for how the YMCA can improve membership and participation rates in Winooski.

### Methods

Distribution of the survey to the residents of Winooski was accomplished using three methods:

1. A door to door community survey
2. An online survey utilizing surveymonkey.com via Winooski Front Porch Forum
3. Dissemination of information about the YMCA to parents of children in grades two and five in the Winooski school system



We distributed information and free guest passes to the Winooski YMCA to those who participated in the survey as well as to those who declined to respond, hoping to increase community awareness of the services offered at the YMCA.

### Recommendations

Our data indicated several target areas to improve membership at the YMCA. They include:

#### Childcare:

Offer no-cost childcare, especially during the evening hours.

#### Activities:

Offer a wide variety of activities, including yoga, dance, group fitness classes, cooking, swimming, and personal fitness consultation.

#### Cost perception:

Raise awareness regarding the sliding fee scale offered, so families with a limited income may join.

#### Safety:

Explore the neighborhood safety issues, especially those related to children unaccompanied by adults.

Furthermore, our data indicates that the vast majority of those surveyed were aware that there was a YMCA in Winooski, and many had already visited the facilities at the YMCA. This finding indicates that advertising efforts have successfully raised awareness of the YMCA. It could be beneficial to use the same marketing strategies to advertise the cost of membership so individuals and families of all income levels feel encouraged to join.



Since initiation of the project, membership at the Winooski YMCA has increased by 80%.

### Results and Conclusions

How do members of the Winooski community spend their time in the afternoon and evenings? The purpose of this question was to determine if there was adequate need for more enticing programs at the YMCA. We discovered that 42% of community members spend their afternoons playing videogames, watching TV, or playing on the computer.

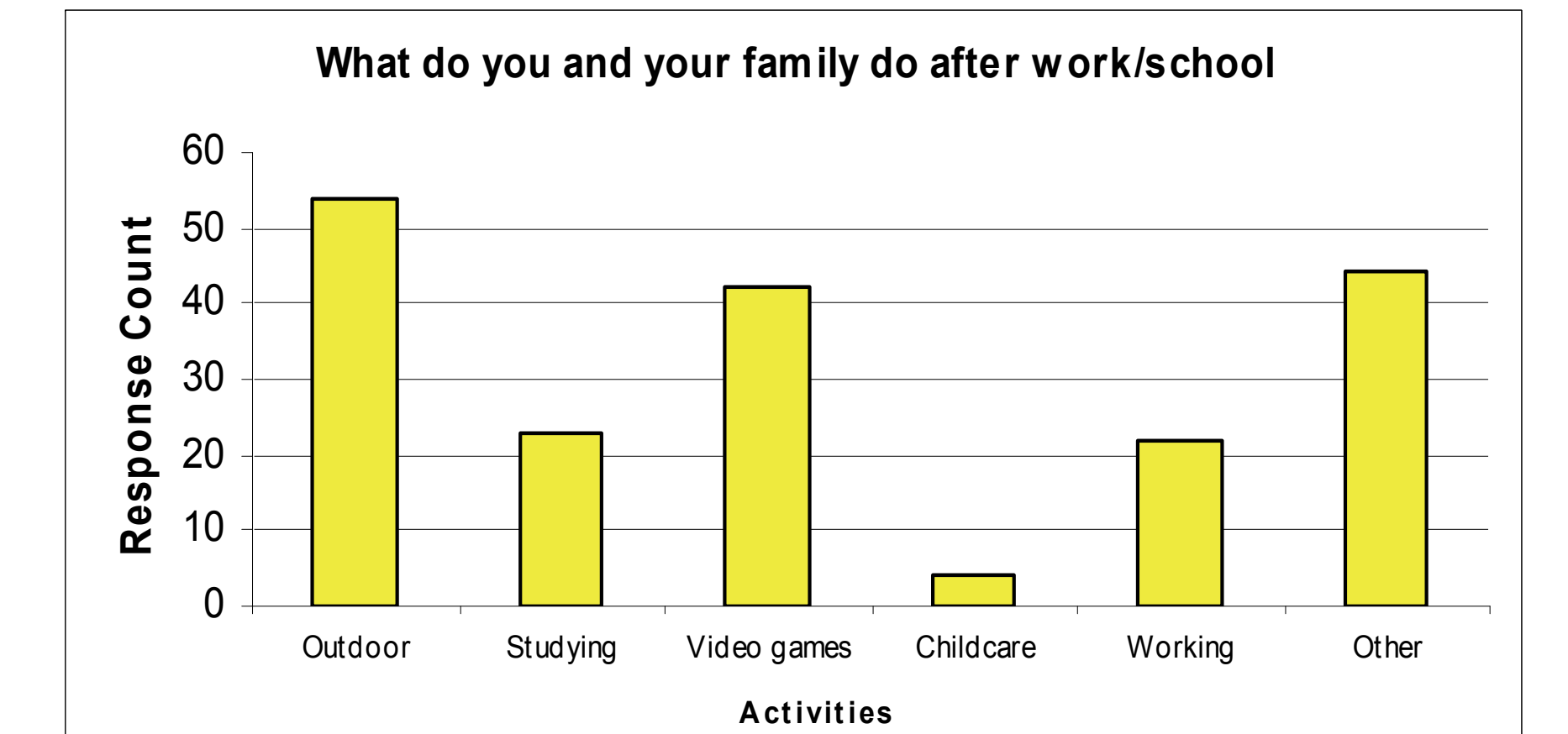


Figure 1: Highest ranking afterschool/work activities of members of the Winooski community.

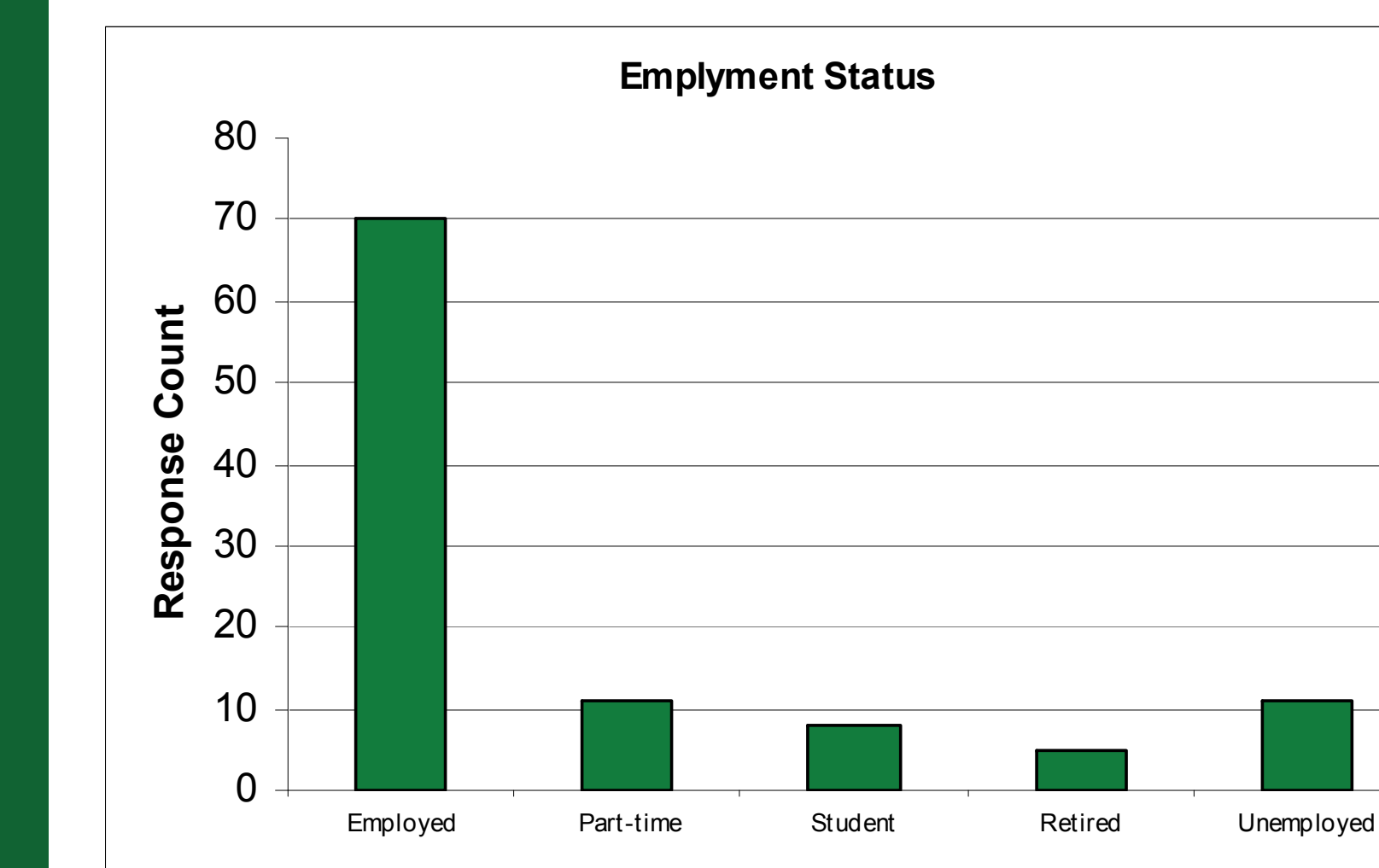


Figure 2: Employment status of Winooski residents who completed the YMCA survey.

Of those who completed the survey, 89% were either employed full time, employed part time, students, or retired. 11% of those surveyed were unemployed. Individuals in the community indicated that cost was the number one barrier to YMCA use.

For those who indicated they had not been to the YMCA or were not aware there was one in Winooski, 50% noted cost as a factor in preventing them from utilizing the facilities. Of those who responded to the question, 41% also indicated that lack of time was an impediment, while only 17% identified child care as a barrier.

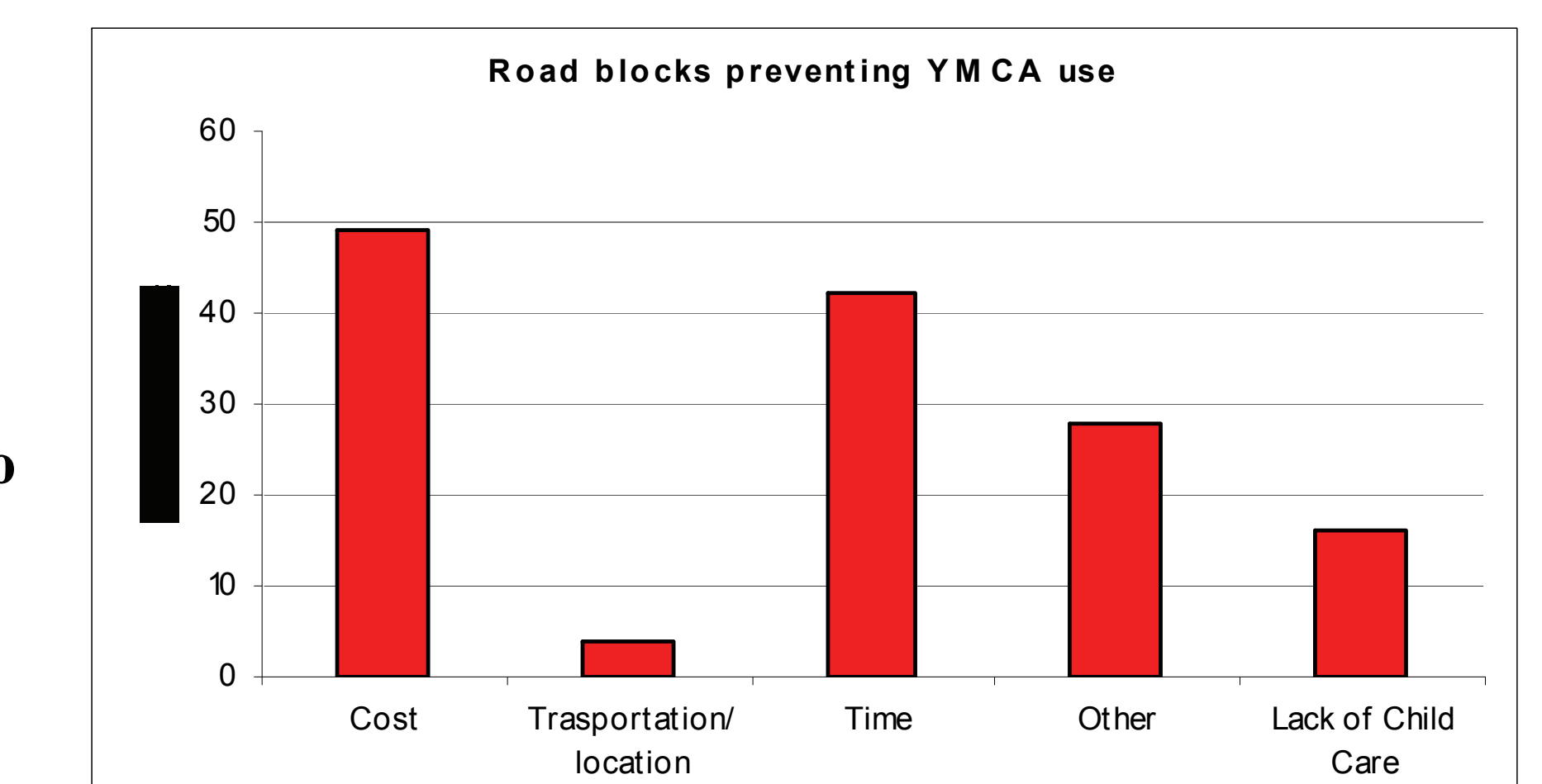


Figure 3: Road Blocks preventing members of the Winooski community from utilizing the YMCA.

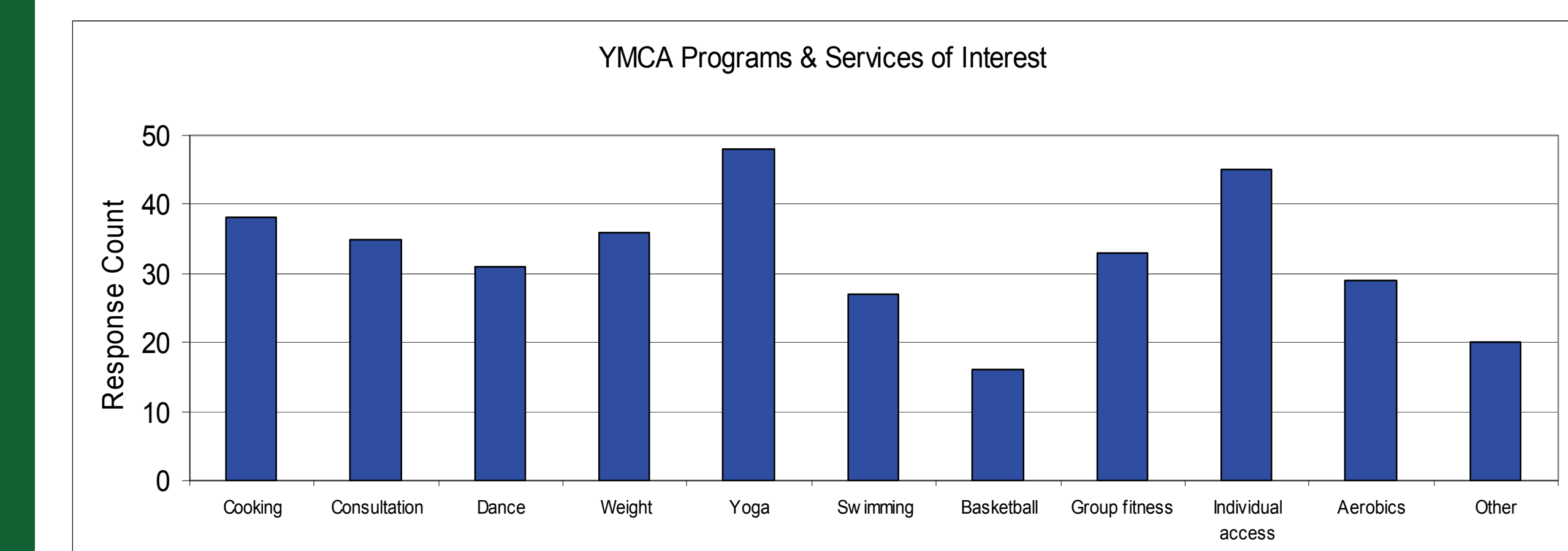


Figure 4: Programs and/or services members of the Winooski community are interested in seeing implemented at the YMCA.

Community members interested in visiting the YMCA or who currently hold a membership indicated interest in a wide variety of programs.

### References

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