



Report of Findings from the Community Survey March 2015

The mission of the Foundation is to devote itself to furthering and supporting operations and activities which address the short-term and long-term unmet needs of individuals and the Newtown community arising from the tragic events at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012.

This report has been prepared and released by the Distribution Committee of the Sandy Hook School Support Fund based on solicitation of public input into the current community needs in the as it relates to the tragedy on 12/14/12.

The Distribution Committee is comprised of nine Sandy Hook/Newtown residents who represent perspectives from many different impacted groups including victims, surviving children, surviving teachers, first responders, as well as members of the community at large and a representative from the faith community. It is the ongoing responsibility of the Distribution Committee to solicit public input in order to better understand the needs and gaps that exist in the community as well as the strengths so that they can be built upon for long-term sustainable recovery.

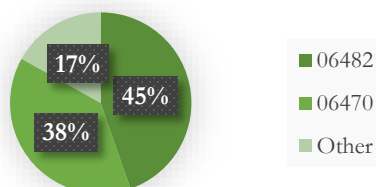
For background on the history and formation of the Newtown-Sandy Hook Community Foundation, Inc. and the Sandy Hook School Support Fund or information about funds spent to date please visit www.nshcf.org.

Methodology

An anonymous on-line survey was released to the public on January 22, 2015 and remained open until February 13, 2015. The survey was disseminated through the Newtown Public Schools (Superintendent's office), the Town of Newtown (First Selectman's office), the Newtown Bee (December 20th & January 17th), and the internal distribution lists of the Foundation. The survey generated 999 responses compared to the 1,633 from the first survey conducted at the same time last year. 35% of those who responded indicated that they had taken the same survey last year and the remaining 65% were equally divided between those who had not taken the survey and those who didn't remember if they had taken it or not. It is understood by the Distribution Committee that this survey represents only a small percentage of the overall community. Input is continuously sought through on-going dialogue with community groups and individuals.

- Responses by zip codes are indicated below.

Zip Codes



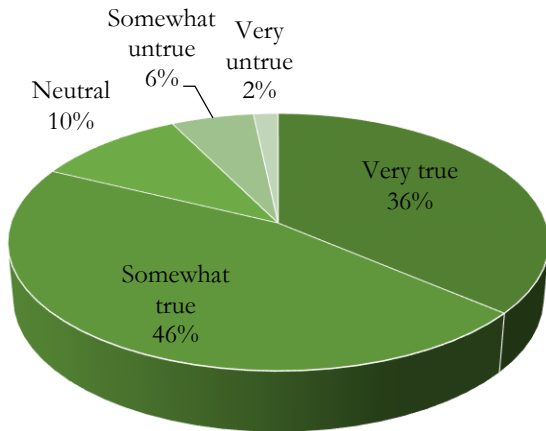
Key Findings

The survey focused on better understanding the strengths of the community, what has been helpful in the 12/14 recovery, what barriers or challenges remain, and what impact the tragedy continues to have on various segments of the community. Participants were also polled to determine their preferred method of receiving information. That information will be used internally by the Foundation to assist in the development of a communications plan and will be shared with other groups in the community who are also eager to increase outreach to the community about services and events.

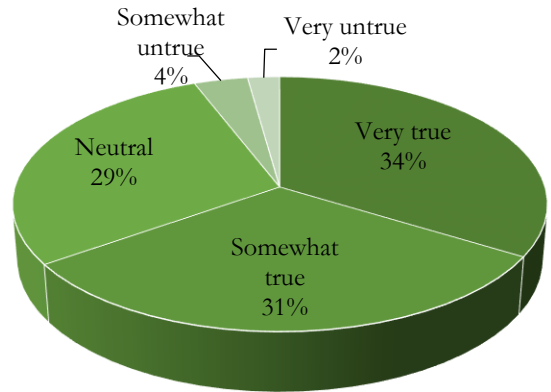
Data from the survey is presented in the following pages using charts and visual graphics to depict the results in order to help the reader get an overall sense of the responses. A summary of findings and analysis can be found at the end of the report.

Survey Respondents <i>Note – respondents were able to select up to three categories in which they identified themselves (i.e. parent as well as a teacher or clergy as well as concerned member of the community, etc.).</i>	Response Percent	Response Count
Administrator or Public Official	2.6%	23
Concerned member of the Newtown/Sandy Hook community	52.1%	462
Employee or Employer of a business in Sandy Hook or Newtown	9.5%	84
Faith Community (clergy)	1.0%	9
Family member of a child or adult lost on 12/14	1.7%	15
Fire (Newtown or other responding community)	1.1%	10
Mental Health or other Community Service Provider	5.3%	47
Newtown Volunteer Ambulance Corps	0.3%	3
Other (please specify)	86	86
Other responding professional on 12/14 (medical, crisis responder)	0.9%	8
Parent of a child enrolled (present or not) at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14	19.2%	170
Parent of a child enrolled in another Newtown schools (public or private)	52.5%	465
Parent of a child who is not currently enrolled in a Newtown school (i.e. too young, already graduated, enrolled in a school out of district/in another community, etc.)	18.4%	163
Police (Newtown PD, State, or other responding community)	1.0%	9
Spouse, parent, or child of an adult witness/survivor (teacher, emergency responder)	4.5%	40
Teacher or staff member employed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14 (present or not)	3.8%	34
Teacher or staff member in another Newtown school (public or private) on 12/14	13.5%	120
Young adult (age 18-25)	1.1%	10
answered question		886
skipped question		113

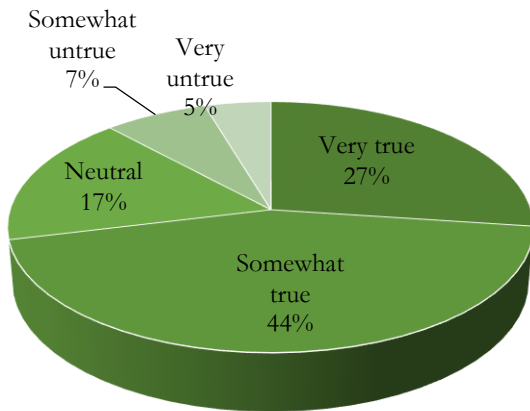
I feel the Newtown/Sandy Hook community is moving forward in a positive direction in its recovery from the 12/14 tragedy.



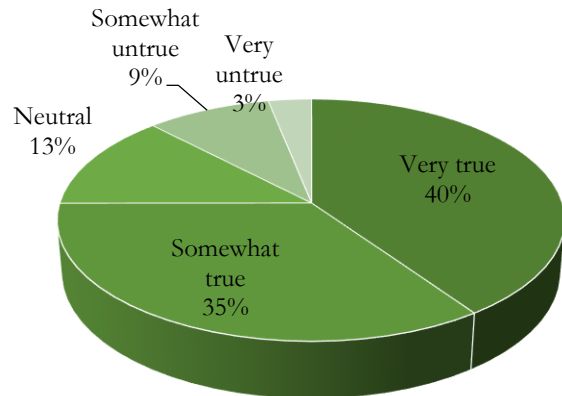
I feel there should be community forums or public meetings to discuss concerns and community wide development strategies.



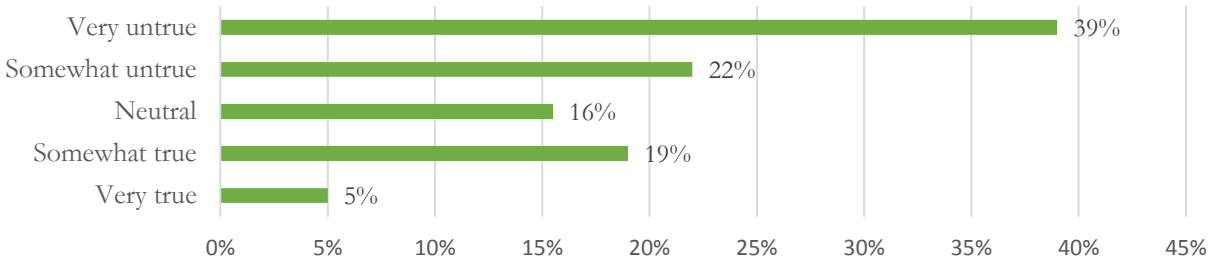
I feel this community has become stronger in the wake of the tragedy.



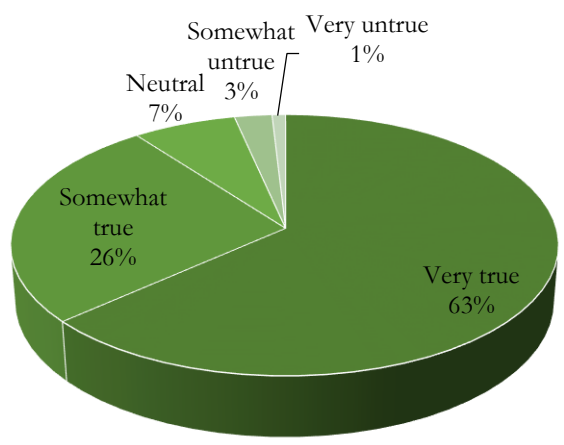
I have an optimistic outlook about the future for myself and my family in this community



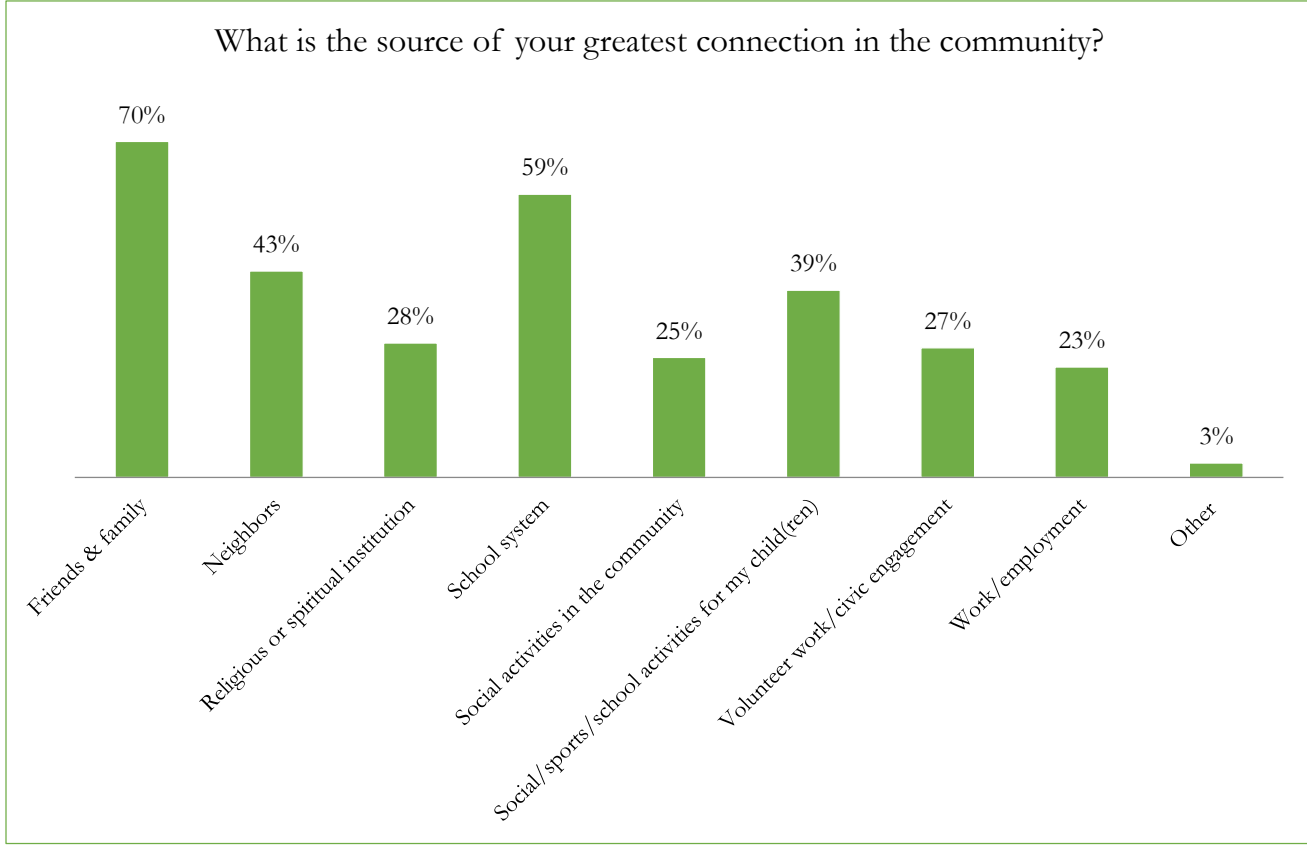
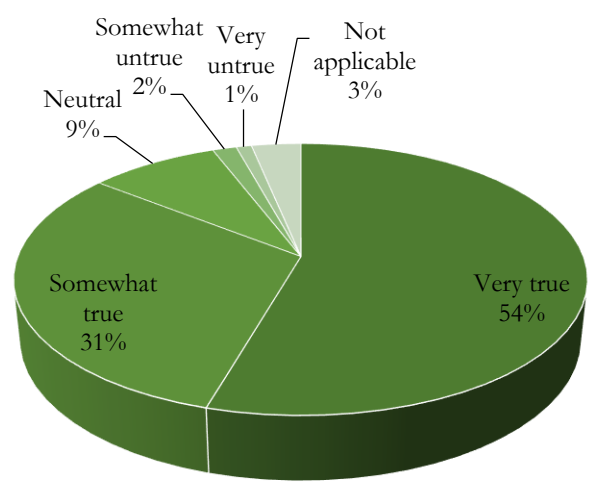
I am reluctant to discuss or deal with the 12/14 tragedy



I feel connected to the Newtown/Sandy Hook community.

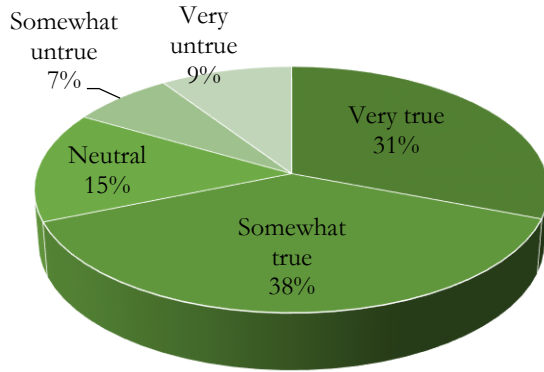


I feel more connected to my community when I participate in some volunteer, service or social activity.



Community Participation & Involvement

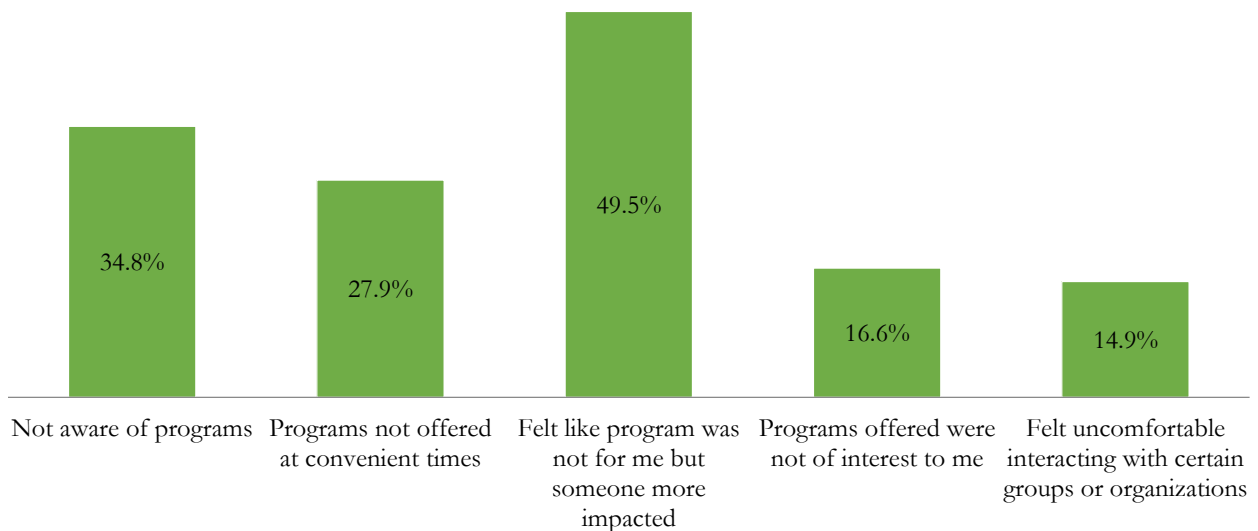
I have participated in community events and/or activities over the past year.



209 individuals wrote in narrative comments about events that resonated the most with them. Events or groups that were repeatedly mentioned included;

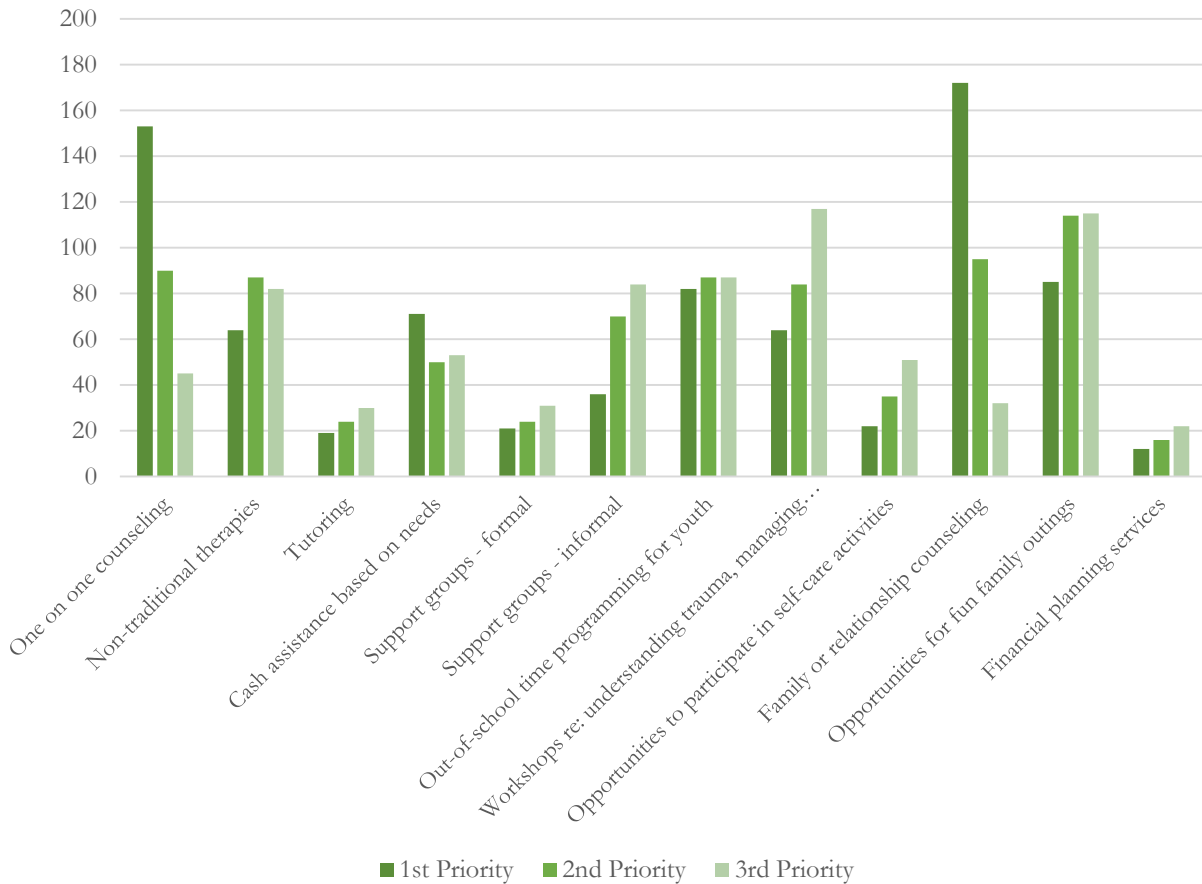
- Art festival & other cultural events
- Ben's Bells
- Ben's Lighthouse
- Christmas Tree Lightings
- Events & activities at the Resiliency Center of Newtown (RCN)
- Labor Day Parade
- May 2014 Community Connections event held at Walnut Hill Community Church
- Miscellaneous community events such as free movie nights, activities at NYA, festivals, parades, fundraisers and memorial events.
- Runs/5ks

If there are activities that you have not participated in please help us understand why



Themes from the 89 narrative comments included; scheduling difficulties, lack of awareness of activities/events, desire to 'move on' or have non-tragedy related events, lack of trust and transparency with leaders, and concerns over 'political' or pre-determined 'agendas.'

Which of the following services, if any, would you/your family benefit from OR which do you believe would be most important to support through designation of funds?



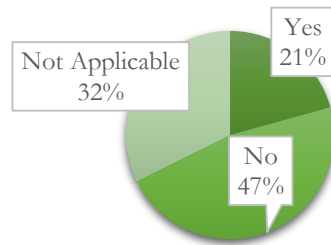
Are there services, programs, or funds (or gaps in those areas) that you would like to see available for a specific purpose that aren't listed in the previous question?

This narrative question generated 137 responses that were very diverse. Broad themes that emerged, listed in no particular order, included;

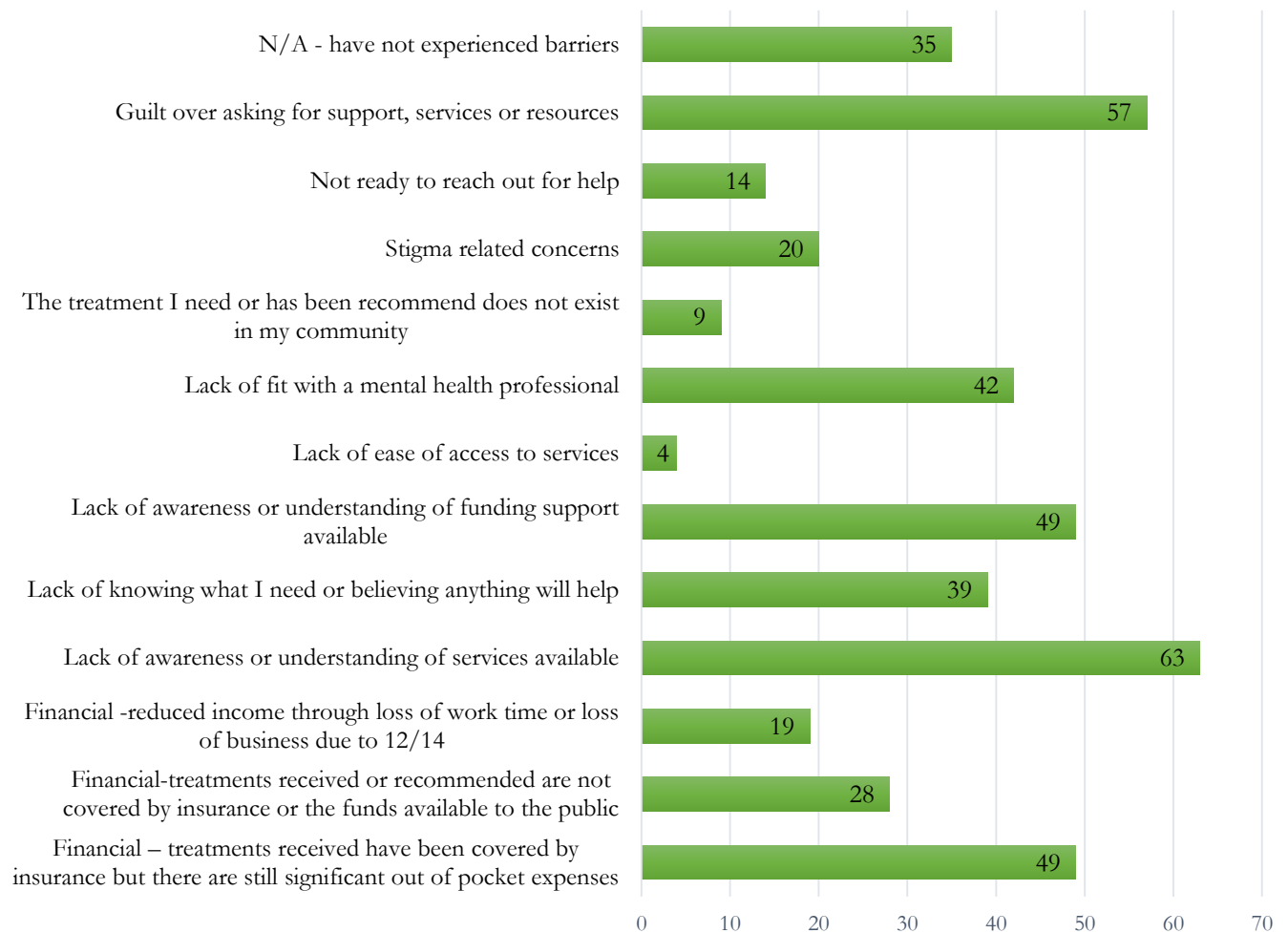
- Increased & streamlined communication about resources, events, and information on managing trauma reactions and on-going expectations.
- Programs to foster empathy, connection, sensitivity, and understanding among young people on grief and trauma reactions and how to respond appropriately.
- Support for the new School Based Health Center.
- Workshops for adults/parents and young people on recognizing signs of PTSD/trauma, coping strategies and information on non-traditional therapies.
- Support for teachers in managing classroom behaviors as well as their own self-care.
- Support groups for various cohorts to come together (i.e. teachers, parents of children in the school, 1st responders).

Barriers to Accessing Support

Have you experienced any barriers to accessing the help or support you or a family member has needed?



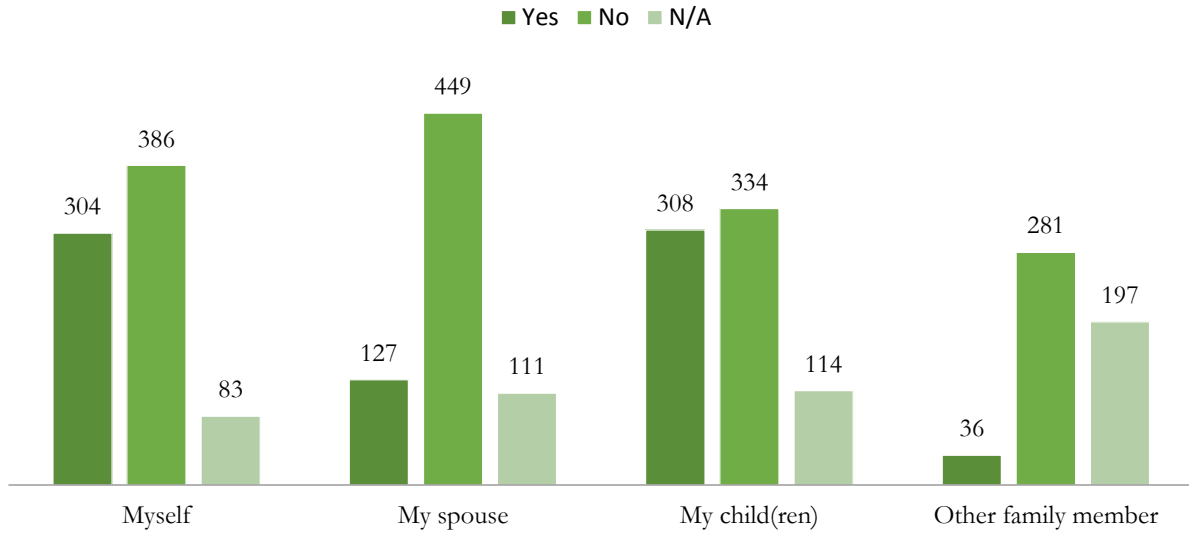
Reported barriers to accessing services or support



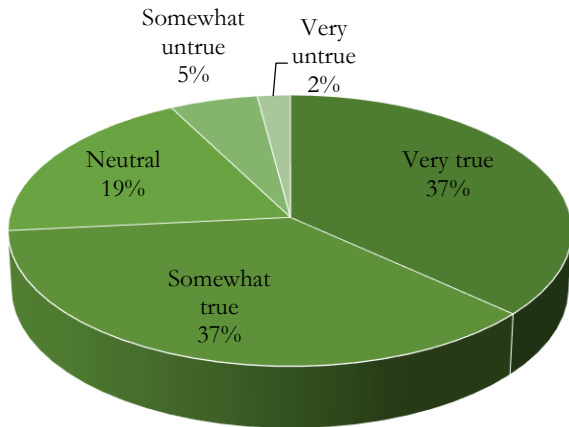
The group reporting the most guilt and those lacking awareness of resources were parents who have children enrolled in other Newtown schools, followed closely by 'concerned members of the community,' and then parents of students enrolled at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Mental Health & Wellness Services

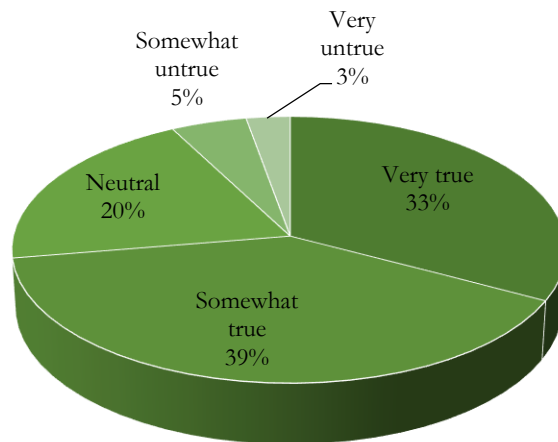
Have you or a member of your family received mental health and/or wellness support for symptoms related to the 12/14 tragedy?



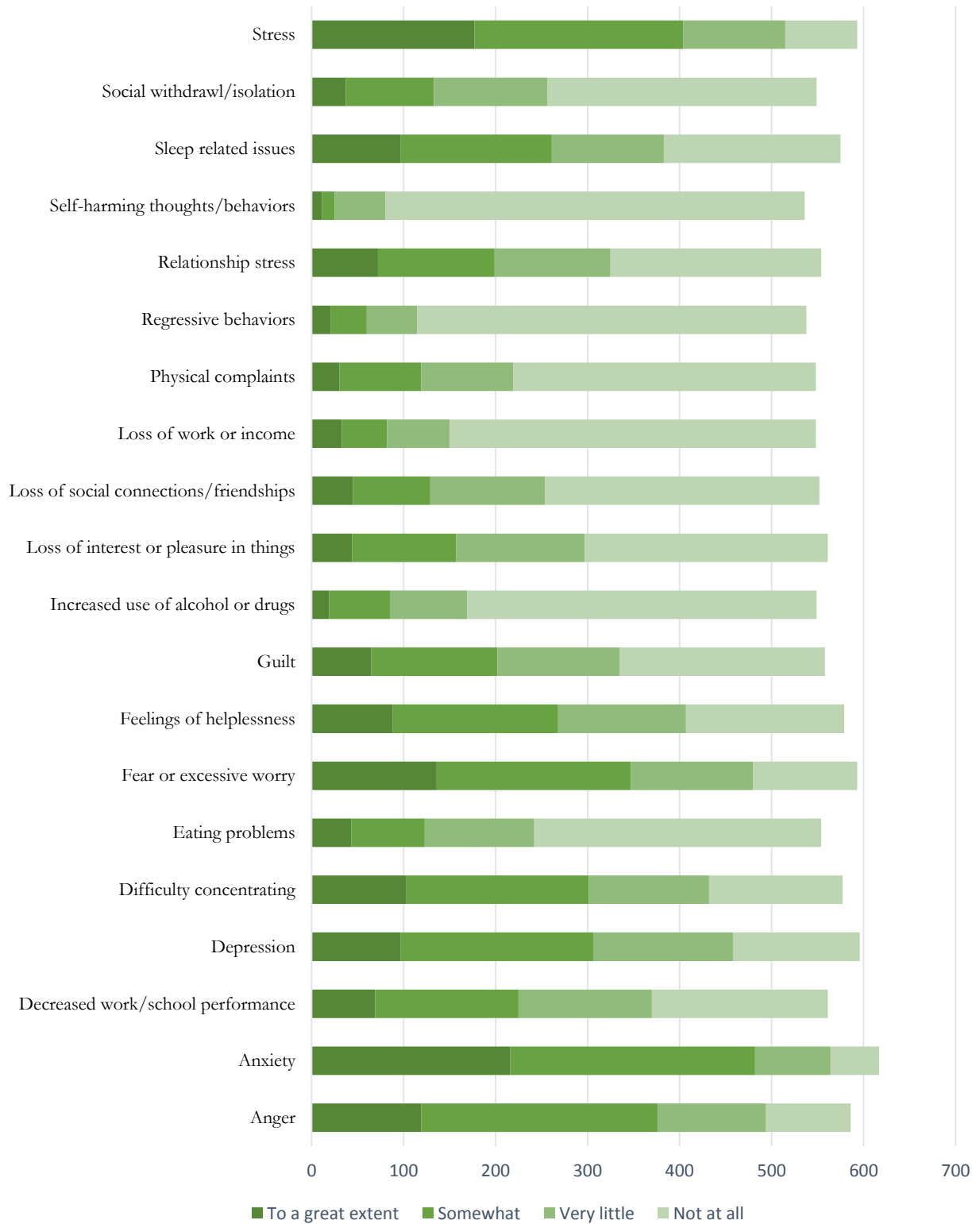
I feel my mental health & wellness treatment has been effective
(of those who sought treatment)



I feel the mental health & wellness treatment for my child(ren) has been effective
(of those who sought treatment)



The events of 12/14 have impacted people in many ways. Please rate the degree to which you or a member of your family have experienced the following needs/concerns that are due specifically to the 12/14 tragedy.



Conclusion & Recommendations

Many areas of this survey had encouraging results. The majority of respondents reported feeling like the community is strong, moving in a positive direction, and that there are opportunities to connect and participate in volunteer activities. There also remains a good deal of stress, anxiety, fear, worry, and anger that is directly related to 12/14. The majority of those that have sought help for related issues report that treatment has been effective.

One noteworthy pattern that emerged was that those who are predominantly outside of Sandy Hook Elementary School have persistent feelings of guilt, reluctance to discuss how the tragedy has impacted them, and lack awareness of services available in the community to assist. In addition, the theme of many of the narrative comments, not otherwise reported here, focused on the fracturing that has occurred among some individuals and groups. Central to this theme was the idea that a 'hierarchy of impact' has led to a competition for grief and resources. This has created, as the data in this report confirms, a great deal of suffering in silence or guilt by individuals who don't feel as if they should be struggling or have a right to reach out for help because they weren't as directly impacted as someone else.

It is important to note that this experience is not uncommon among communities that have suffered similar levels of trauma. In fact, the Foundation took the lead on organizing a Community Connection event in May 2014 to discuss these very issues. Dr. Kevin Becker, an international consultant to communities experiencing psychological trauma and crisis, presented a keynote address at the event on community response to tragedies. Dr. Becker generously allowed his remarks to be recorded in order to be shared throughout the community. We urge every community member to take time listen to Dr. Becker address the issue of fracturing and how our community can become stronger and more resilient by focusing on our collective shared experiences and similarities rather than our unique differences. Dr. Becker's speech can be found on-line at <https://vimeo.com/97246759>.

Research on resilience and recovery from trauma emphasizes the critical importance of strong, supportive relationships that connect people to one another. While individual treatment may be one important component, "the most traumatic aspects of all disasters involve the shattering of human connections" (Dr. Bruce Perry). Survey results indicate a desire to return to the same cohesiveness experienced by the community immediately following the tragedy. In order to do that we recommend the following be embraced in both philosophy and action by all members and leaders of the community;

- Acknowledgment that while we have a great many strengths in this community we have also suffered a devastating tragedy that will require everyone at every level to focus on 4 important C's – compassion, communication, coordination, and collaboration.
- Recognition that research shows that perceived threat can be more important than even actual physical threat in terms of long term psychological impact. Therefore we must encourage all members of the community who are struggling to stop suffering in silence and seek help. In order for this to happen we must also then be willing to hear each other's stories and experiences and find a place of common experience and understanding with the knowledge that, as Dr. Becker states, "it's the shared experiences, not the differences, that are the key factors in creating a lasting impact for each and every trauma survivor."
- A collective understanding that the community at large has been impacted and the stronger the community is the better able it will be to support the victims and others who are

struggling the most and who will need the most long-term care.

- Tolerance and acceptance of the different ways in which people continue to recover without judgement. By understanding that there is not a one size fits all solution and supporting one another in whatever way each individual and family finds most helpful will be key in reducing stigma and shame. It is particularly important for the community to recognize and honor the families who lost loved ones in a caring and supportive way with the understanding that they have complicated grief layered on top of the trauma experienced by the entire community.

The Distribution Committee will use the information in this survey along with continued research into best practices to make the best decisions possible while always upholding donor intent and being compliant with IRS regulations governing non-profit organizations.

To date the Distribution Committee has been focused on using the resources of the Sandy Hook School Support Fund to assist individuals and the community as a whole based on continuous public input and the research explained in the conclusion of this report. That has included the following;

- **Individual Mental Health & Wellness** – providing direct financial support to meet as many individual mental health & wellness needs and requests as possible within the limitations set forth by the IRS. This supports the notion that there are a variety of things that aid in recovery and what works for one person does not work for others.
- **Grants Program** – providing grants into the community to support work such as mental health first aid trainings of Newtown teachers, expanding access to alternative trauma treatment such as EFT/Tapping, and opportunities to build compassionate and caring *connections* throughout the community.
- **Community Events** – supporting and sponsoring events in the community that provide opportunities to learn, share, and *connect* with one another.

We appreciate your participation in this important survey and ask that you continue to provide feedback through both formal and informal opportunities so that we can be as responsive as possible to the needs that exist in our community. Committee members, as well as executive director Jennifer Barahona, are available to meet with individuals and small groups on an on-going basis to solicit additional feedback. If interested please contact Ms. Barahona at 203-460-0687 or jbarahona@nshcf.org to arrange a time to meet.

Respectfully,

Members of the Sandy Hook School Support Fund Distribution Committee

Addie Sandler
Bob Schmidt (vice chair)
Cindy Mattioli

Connie Sullivan
Jennifer Clark
Joeline Wruck (chair)

Kevin Cragin
Dr. Robert Bazuro
Rev. Rob Morris