



## NEWTOWN-SANDY HOOK COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, INC.

P.O. BOX 194 | NEWTOWN, CT 06470 | NSHCF.ORG

### **Report on Public Input March 2014**

Below is a report of findings by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Distribution Committee of the Sandy Hook School Support Fund from solicitation of public input into the current unmet needs in the community as it relates to the tragedy on 12/14/12.

The Committee thought it may be helpful to first provide some history and context to help the community better understand the mission of the Foundation and the charge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Distribution Committee of the Sandy Hook School Support Fund.

### **Background**

#### **History & Formation**

Immediately following the tragedy on 12/14, the **Sandy Hook School Support Fund (SHSSF)** was created by United Way of Western CT (UWWC) and the Newtown Savings Bank (NSB). The Fund was established to receive primarily undesignated financial donations, with the intent that the money raised would support families impacted by the tragedy, first responders, teachers, and the broader Newtown community in both the short and long-term.

The **Newtown-Sandy Hook Community Foundation, Inc.** was formed in late February 2013 at the request of the UWWC and the NSB to receive the Sandy Hook School Support Fund (SHSS) dollars in totality and develop a locally controlled and separate organization to be responsible for how the monies ultimately would be distributed. A Transition Team of community members created the organizational documents for the Foundation after consulting with national experts and conducting research on what other communities faced following mass tragedies. The Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

#### **Mission & Structure**

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. The Foundation kept three important lessons learned from other mass tragedies in mind when developing its structure and mission. These included reserving funds for long-term, unforeseen needs, keeping local control over the distributions, and infusing the process with public input.

Distribution Committees are used to make disbursement recommendations to the Board of Directors of the Foundation. The 1<sup>st</sup> Distribution Committee was allocated \$7.7 million to distribute to those most directly impacted by the tragedy. This process was completed in August 2013. The remaining funds, \$4.46 million as of December 31, 2013, will be used to support both the short and long-term unmet needs of the community as it relates to the tragedy. A second Distribution Committee was named in November 2013 and is, as was the 1<sup>st</sup> Distribution Committee and all future Distribution

Committees, responsible for **soliciting public input** as to the unmet needs that exist, prioritizing needs, and making recommendations for distribution. One noteworthy point that has been the subject of questions is that any grants to individuals moving forward are required to be on a needs basis and cannot include distributions to entire groups or ‘classes’ of individuals per IRS regulations governing non-profit organizations.

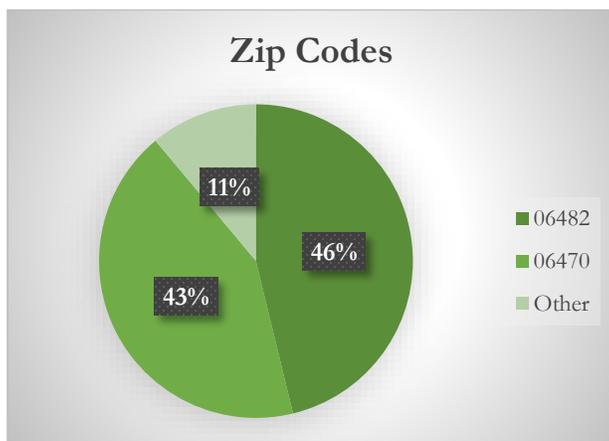
The 2<sup>nd</sup> Distribution Committee is made up of eleven Sandy Hook/Newtown residents who represent perspectives from many different impacted groups including victims, surviving children, surviving teachers, first responders, as well as members of the community at large and a representative from the faith community. Committee members are *Addie Sandler, Bob Schmidt, Chris McDonnell (Chair), Connie Sullivan, Gavin Arneith, Jennifer Clark, Joeline Wruck (Vice Chair), Kevin Cragin, Dr. Rob Bazuro, Rev. Rob Morris, Scott Ruszczyk.*

The intention of the Foundation is to keep the Fund viable as a resource to the community for the next 14 years and to work in collaboration with other organizations and funds to avoid duplication and fill gaps in funding and services. For further information about the Foundation, its history, or present status please visit our website at [www.nshcf.org](http://www.nshcf.org) or contact Executive Director, Jennifer Barahona at 203-460-0687 or [info@nshcf.org](mailto:info@nshcf.org).

## Methodology

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Distribution Committee itself is the first source of public input. Responsibilities of committee members include soliciting input from constituency groups they represent and bringing known concerns and unmet needs to the attention of the committee. The first charge of the committee was to solicit further input from the community.

- An anonymous on-line survey was released to the public on December 16, 2013 and remained open until January 31, 2014. Distribution was made through the Newtown Public Schools (Superintendent’s office), the Town of Newtown (First Selectman’s office), and the Newtown Bee (December 20<sup>th</sup> & January 17<sup>th</sup>). As of the writing of this report the survey has 1,633 responses. Responses by zip codes are indicated below.



The following represents the populations that participated in the survey. *\*Note – respondents were able to select up to three categories in which they identified themselves (i.e. parent as well as a teacher).* An additional write-

in response option was included and the majority of those identified themselves as friends and neighbors of children or adults who did not survive as well as those who were survivors.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Number</b>
A. Administrator or Public Official	33
B. Concerned member of the Newtown/Sandy Hook community	793
C. Employee or employer of a business in Sandy Hook or Newtown	114
D. Faith Community (clergy)	9
E. Family member of a child or adult lost on 12/14	29
F. Fire (Newtown or other responding community)	29
G. Mental Health or other community service provider	47
H. Newtown Volunteer Ambulance Corps	19
I. Other responding professional on 12/14 (medical, crisis responder)	19
J. Parent of a child enrolled (present or not) at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14	259
K. Parent of a child enrolled in another Newtown schools (public or private)	953
L. Parent of a child who is not currently enrolled in a Newtown school (too young, already graduated, etc.)	238
M. Police (Newtown PD, State or other)	25
N. Spouse, parent or child of an adult witness/survivor (teacher, emergency responder)	38
O. Teacher or staff member employed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14	49
P. Teacher or staff member in another Newtown school on 12/14	226
Q. Young adult (age 18-25)	17

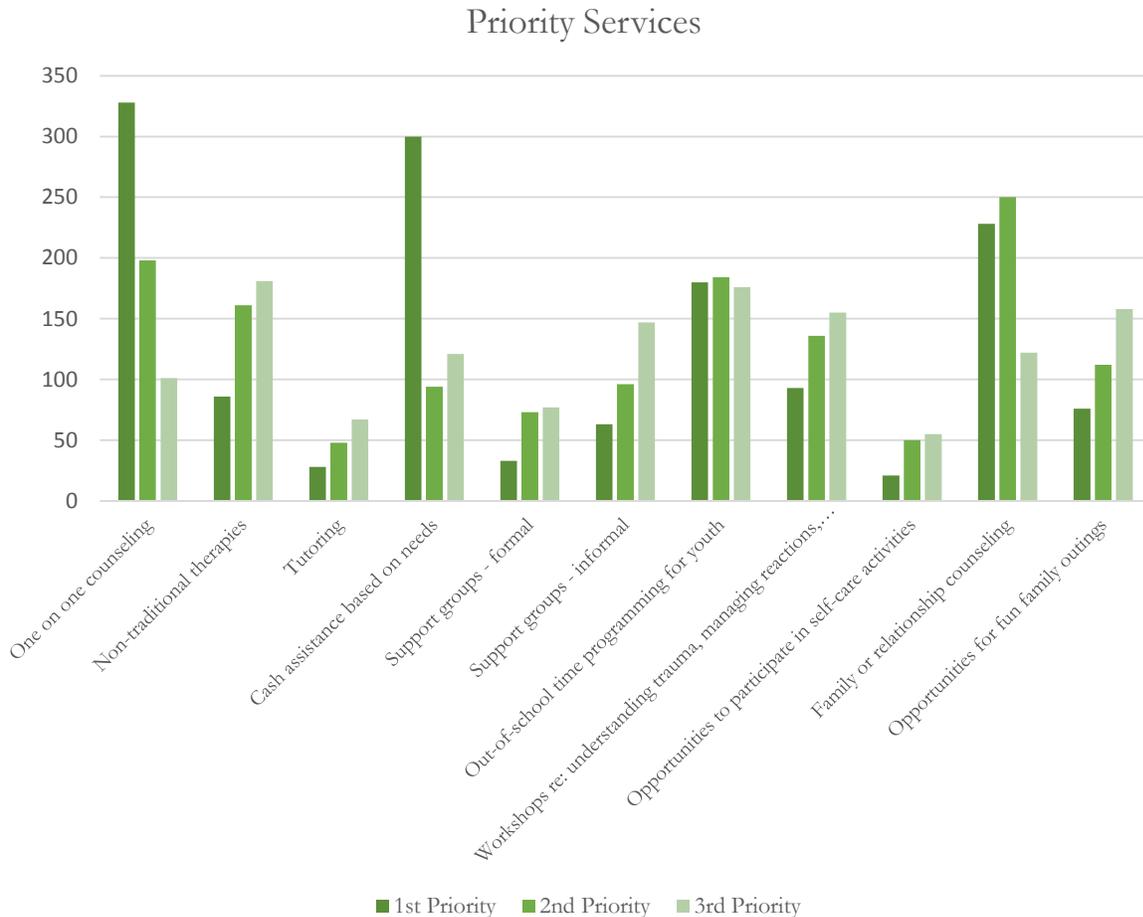
- In addition to the survey, the Executive Director and/or members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Distribution Committee held one-on-one meetings with individuals or groups to further understand the needs of the community. These included meetings and correspondences with the Connecticut State Police, the Newtown Ambulance Corps, leadership at Sandy Hook Elementary School, families of surviving children from the school that were not in the two classrooms, and many service providers and funders throughout the community. The results of those conversations are included in the narrative findings under each question below.

**It is important to note that the solicitation of input into the needs of the community is a continual process that will be part of the charge of the Foundation and all Distribution Committees on an on-going basis. The Foundation understands that needs will change over time and is committed to maintaining an active dialogue with the community as to the unmet needs as they present themselves over the years to come.**

## Key Findings

The survey focused on three main questions: understanding what services had been or would be most helpful; understanding what barriers may exist to accessing support services; and understanding what impact the tragedy has had on the well-being of individuals.

**Question 1** – 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? (Respondents were asked to select top 3 areas in order to attempt to prioritize)



There were numerous (369) written ‘other responses’. Many reiterated the importance of one of the priority services listed. This was especially true for the importance of short and long term mental health support as well as preventative mental health services to promote a culture of kindness and caring as well as early detection of mental health issues. The need for more programming for youth was another area frequently mentioned in the comments. This included the need for other positive opportunities for young people who are not interested in sports or arts. Other themes that arose from those responses were:

- **Access to more mind/body activities** (outdoor activities, yoga, wellness programs) that promote ‘centering’ and healing

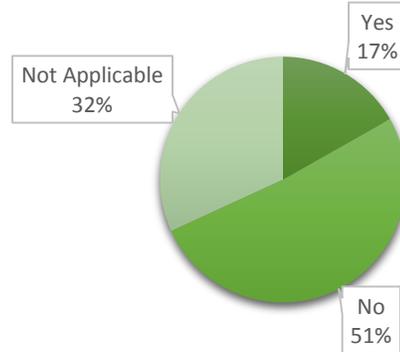
- **Additional assistance and support to the victims and witnesses**
- **Additional school security measures**
- **Extra support and assistance to teachers and staff at Sandy Hook Elementary School** including professional development and training in recognizing and managing mental health issues that arise in school
- **Funds and other assistance for first responders (Police, Fire, Ambulance)**
- **Funds to purchase and tear down the Lanza home** and turn the property into a park or nature preserve
- **Opportunities and programs that bring the entire community together**
- **Reserving funds for long term needs**
- **Scholarships for college for students present at the school and siblings of victims**
- **Workshops, seminars, trainings, retreats, etc.** focusing on helping understand trauma, managing reactions, learning healthy coping strategies, learning from others who have been through similar traumas

Summary feedback from individual and small group meetings throughout the community included the following themes:

- Siblings, parents, children and other family members of the children and adults killed have mental health and wellness needs that are life long and significant in terms of financial expense.
- Children who survived in the two impacted classrooms have mental health needs that are significant in terms of the financial expense.
- There remain some 'stigma' barriers with Police, Fire, and Ambulance Corps members who may be reluctant to receive mental health assistance or don't want to have anything on record that indicates they have sought treatment. There is confusion and lack of clear communication about resources available to assist individuals.
- There are grave concerns for the well-being of several of the 213 responding officers from the CT State Police who assisted on scene and/or throughout the investigation. The State Police Union has identified the need for Post Crisis Incident Seminars (PCIS) to support the recovery of officers who remain traumatized. The PCIS model is an evidence based model used throughout the country to assist officers.
- Many of the families of children who were in the school feel like they have been forgotten as survivors/witnesses. Many children who were in classrooms in the immediate vicinity were deeply traumatized. These families, along with the victims and surviving children, are struggling with significant family disruption, increased expenses and decreased income for some who needed to take time from work to be with their children.
- Parents and community members are concerned about those who have yet to receive any professional support or assistance and don't necessarily recognize their own trauma, anger, anxiety, etc. and how it impacts their children, family members, and the rest of the community.

**Question 2** - *Have you experienced any barriers to accessing the help or support you or a family member has needed?*

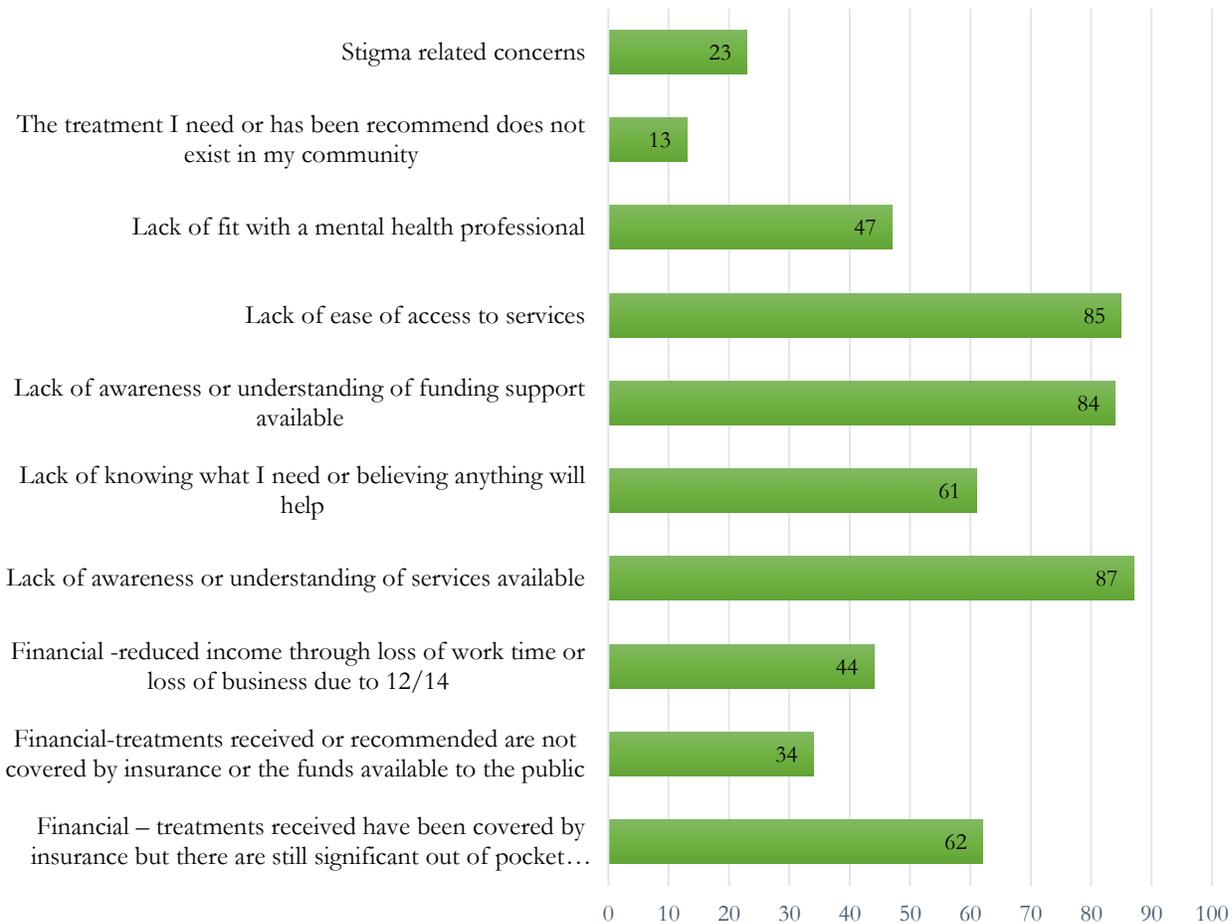
### Barriers to Accessing Services?



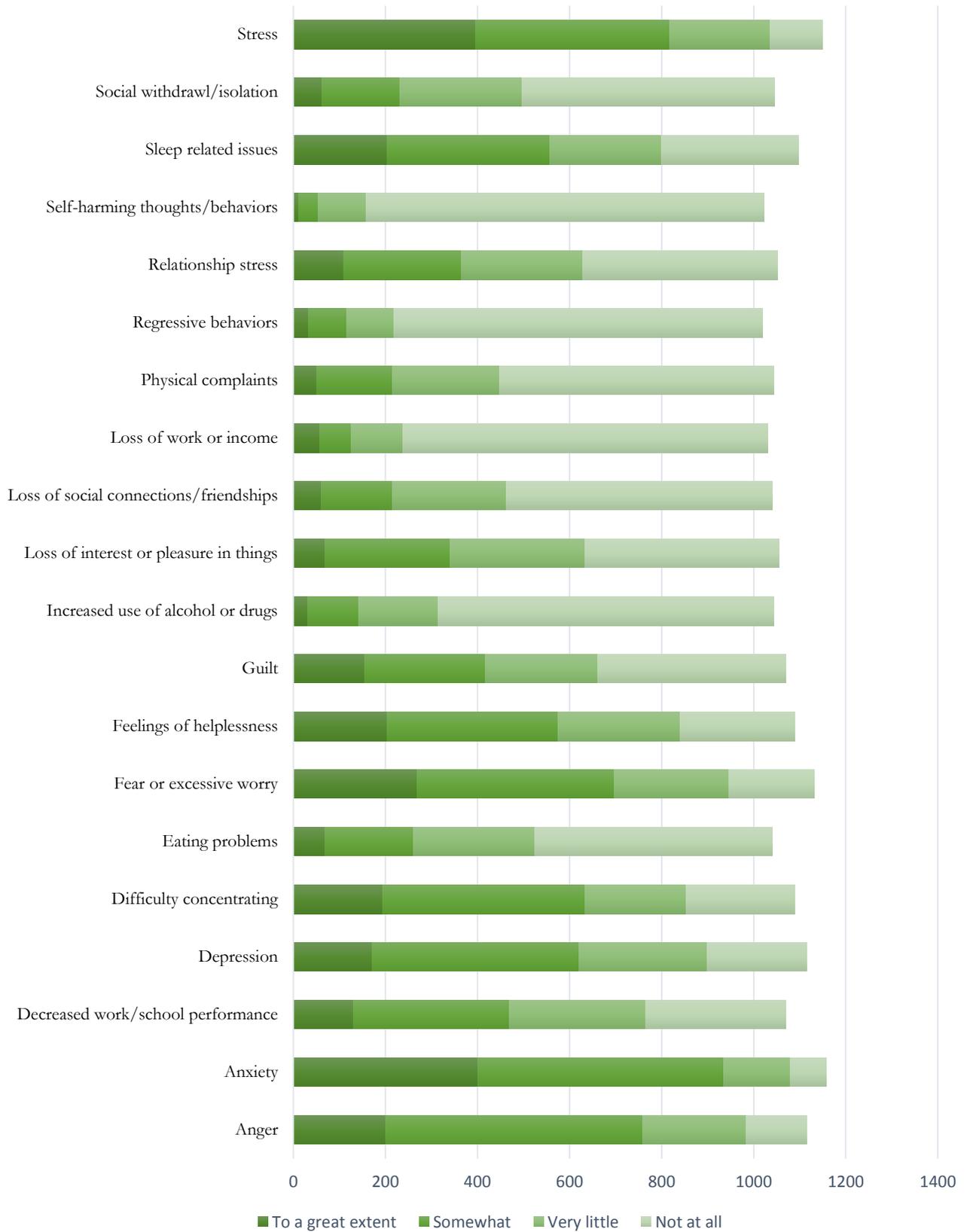
- Groups experiencing the highest % of barriers included:
  - Families of children or adults who did not survive
  - Newtown Ambulance Corps
  - Parents of children enrolled at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14/12
  - Spouses, parents or children of adult witnesses/survivors (i.e. teachers, emergency responders)
  - Teachers or other staff members employed at Sandy Hook Elementary School on 12/14/12

**Question 3** - If you answered yes to the previous question, please help us understand what barriers you have experienced in getting the assistance you or another family member has needed (respondents were asked to check all that applied).

**Of the 17% (254 responses) who indicated they had barriers to accessing support the following were identified**



**Question 4** - 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.



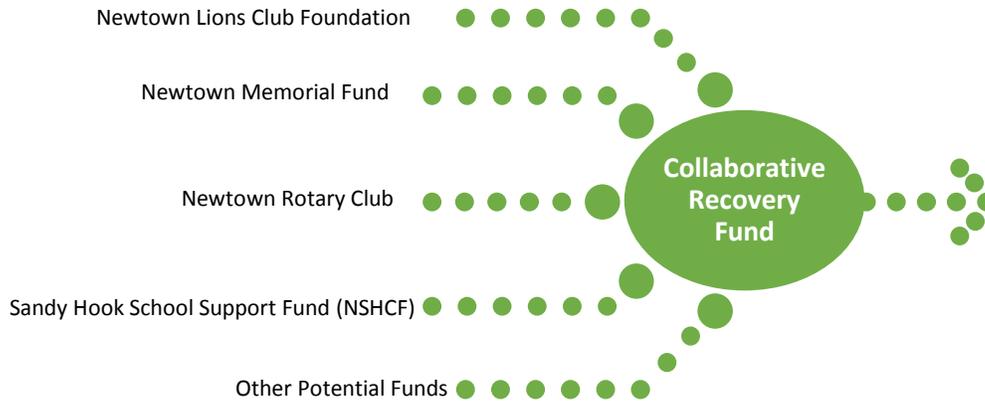
## Next Steps & Recommendations

A key component to the charge of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Distribution Committee (the “Committee”) is to prioritize the **unmet** needs in the community. In doing this the Foundation has had multiple meetings and discussions to better understand the mission and resources of other funds throughout the community. The Committee concurred with the findings from the survey that indicated there was a lack of awareness about all the resources available and a need for centralizing this information. The Foundation therefore worked in partnership with the Town of Newtown to assist in the development of a community recovery plan that included the recent posting of multiple positions to assist in these efforts.

It is important to recognize that this process is a lengthy one and ever evolving. We found that needs that were identified one day were picked up the next by one group or another or already existed but were just not easily identified. In an effort to foster further collaboration and effective communication, the Foundation will spearhead an effort to map out short and long term mental health and financial assistance needs with some of the other major funders for these same efforts. At the time of this writing this includes the Newtown Lions Foundation, Newtown Rotary Club, Newtown Memorial Fund, the United Way, and Walnut Hill Community Church (Sandy Hook Restoration Fund). This will not only help provide more clarity around resources available but will help avoid duplication, highlight unmet needs, and make planning for the future more data informed.

Based on research and review of existing needs and resources as well as the data collected from the public input process, the Committee recommends funding for the initial distribution in 2014 as follows;

- **\$75,000 towards the support of out of pocket mental health costs related to the tragedy.** The Foundation will tap into a partnership initially created between the Newtown Rotary and the United Way of Western CT, and later joined by the Newtown Memorial Fund and Newtown Lions Club Foundation, to join efforts and continue to discuss ways of maximizing efficiency in support of out of pocket mental health costs associated with the tragedy. The Sandy Hook School Support Fund will join those other funds in pooling **only their resources dedicated to out of pocket mental health costs** to create a Collaborative Recovery Fund that will be managed by the Foundation. Using the current process of intake through the CT Office of Victims Services (OVS), the Foundation will take over the role that the United Way of Western CT has been providing with back office support of reimbursement to providers of out of pocket costs. To ensure a seamless transition it is expected that this process will occur over the next one to two months. Other groups who also wish to support out of pocket mental health costs are invited to participate in this partnership. Representatives from each contributing fund will make up a distribution committee and will be charged with monitoring the spend down of the dollars and making any necessary adjustments along the way in order to continue to maximize efficiency so that dollars remain available for the longest possible time.



- **\$75,000 towards support of a ‘Financial Needs Fund’** that will help alleviate stress or crisis among individual and families throughout the community who have been impacted by the tragedy. It is expected that grants will be made to programs already in existence who have the capacity and expertise to work with individuals to determine unmet needs and utilize the funds as a bridge for families where needed. It is expected that funds will be used to support the health and wellness of individuals in their trauma recovery that falls outside the scope of traditional ‘mental health’ treatment that will already be supported through the Collaborative Recovery Fund.
- **\$10,000 to support efforts to bring community wide programming to Newtown.** This will address multiple areas of identified needs that include on-going education about trauma, ability to connect with others within the community and other communities who have experience similar tragedies, and an opportunity to come together as a community. Again, the Foundation is working in collaboration with other organizations around town to work on joint programming and avoid any duplication with existing efforts.
- **\$40,000 to support the expansion of public education and training** that will help those that come into contact with adults and young people (i.e. community members, parents, school personnel, clergy, medical professionals) to identify, understand and respond to signs of trauma, mental health concerns and/or address barriers that keep those who need mental health services from accessing them. Funds will also be used **to develop, strengthen or expand therapeutic programs/interventions that assist with the recovery** from those impacted by the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Examples include programming in non-traditional therapies in order to provide comfort and relief from symptoms of trauma. These funds will be issued through a RFP (request for proposals) process.

It is expected that a second distribution of funds will be given again in the fall after examination of needs at that time and monitoring of the efforts outlined above. Outside of funding, the Committee believes the Foundation can and should play a larger role in the community in organizing, potentially consolidating, and communicating resources available to the community. The Committee feels the funding recommendations outlined above help support this larger goal.