

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA ANALYSIS

PREPARED FOR SOUTHBOROUGH YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES  
MAY 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

■ Introduction	3
• Executive Summary	
■ Survey Results	
• Mental Health and Substance Abuse Awareness	8
• Family Struggles and Issues Needing Support	13
• SYFS and Other Sources of Help	22
• Effects of Covid-19	29
• Profile of SYFS Client Respondents	34
• Verbatims	40
■ Focus Group and Interview Results	
• Executive Summary	42
• Results	45
• Interview Participants	52



# INTRODUCTION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# SOUTHBOROUGH YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES (SYFS) CONDUCTED A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AS PART OF ITS 2021 STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

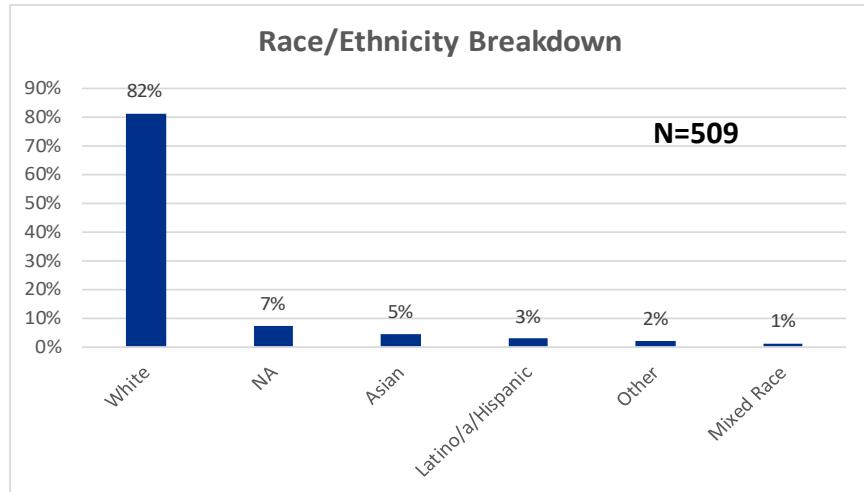
- **An on-line survey was shared via email links, social media, and a QR code**
  - The survey was translated into Portuguese and Spanish, shared through the ELL department
  - High school volunteers shared the QR code at the transfer station
  - Due to Covid, hard copy and in-person surveys were not available
- **Response rate was high – 510 total responses**
  - This response rate is significant, given the population of Southborough
    - 503 English responses (491 complete or partial responses)
    - 5 Portuguese responses (4 complete responses)
    - 2 Spanish responses (2 complete responses)
  - Estimated margin of error is  $\pm$  4 points
- When the data is cut into smaller sub-groups, the results are not as significant but suggest issues or trends that should be investigated further. Subgroups include: men, seniors ages 60-75 and 75+, People of Color, residents who speak a language other than English at home, and SYFS clients
- **In addition to the survey, focus groups and interviews were held via Zoom and phone to collect qualitative data**
  - See focus group and interview summary for more detail



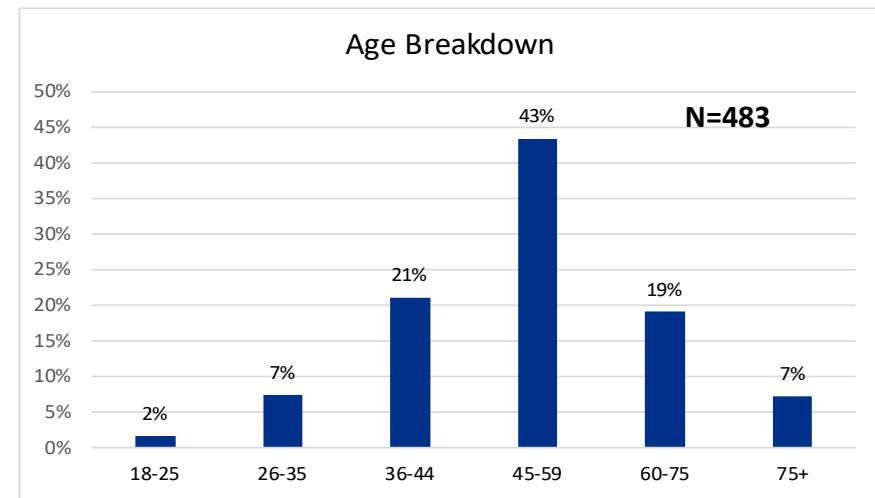
# DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

## ▪ Of the 510 total responses:

- 86% are residents, 7% are town employees, 5% are both
- 91% of respondents are over 35 years old
- 82% are White, and 71% are female
- 23% speak a language other than English at home, at least sometimes
- Only 1% of these utilize translation or interpretation services



Other: Black, African-American, Brazilian, Middle Eastern, Native American, American



- 46% have at least one child in public school, 16% have a child in college, and 7% have a child in private school
- 32% have at least one middle school child and 24% have an 18-25 year old living at home part or full-time
- 16% are currently caring for aging parents

# SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS (1 OF 2)

- **Respondents are more confident about mental health than substance abuse**
  - Respondents are more confident they could recognize mental illness and access mental health support than they are about substance abuse symptoms and support
    - Subgroups are less confident than the general population, particularly about recognizing and seeking help for substance abuse
- **In the past year, the top three issues that families have grappled with are “balancing life in general” (68%), parenting struggles (48%), and mental health (40%). They said these same issues need the most support in Southborough.**
  - “Struggle balancing life” is a less threatening way of expressing nascent mental health issues
  - People of Color ranked financial instability a slightly greater concern than mental health and felt strongly that services were needed, especially for help balancing life
  - A higher percentage of women than men thought services were needed
- **When they needed help, 87% did not approach SYFS. 36% of these said they did not know about SYFS and 21% said they thought they were ineligible for services.**
- **Top SYFS service priorities are mental health counseling, mental health referrals, and financial support**
  - People are most aware that SYFS offers short-term mental health counseling, community mental health programs, and financial support (47-45%). They are least aware of substance abuse prevention services (39%).



## SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS (2 OF 2)

- **Respondents in sub-groups, particularly People of Color, bilingual respondents, and men are less aware of SYFS services than the general population is**
- **During Covid, worry and anxiety has increased for a majority of respondents (55%)**
  - Mood, sleeping habits and eating/appetite have declined for 41- 31% overall
  - Similar rates apply for People of Color, but eating/appetite (36%), financial worries (33%) and family conflicts (24%) have also declined. These are higher rates than the general population.
- **Parents also reported that their child or children's worry and anxiety increased (44%) and their mood worsened (37%) during Covid**
  - People of Color noted that 38% of their children expressed increased worry or anxiety, 28% saw eating/appetite decline, and 23% that their mood declined
- **SYFS clients are confident about how to recognize the symptoms of mental illness and substance abuse and how to access services**
  - 80% know how to recognize mental illness and 90% know how to get mental health support
- **SYFS clients are struggling with multiple issues at higher rates than the overall public**
  - Top issues are parenting struggles and balancing life (68%), mental health (60%), and financial instability (43%)
  - Three quarters of SYFS clients report their own sleeping habits (77%) and general worry (71%) got worse during Covid. These rates are 16-37 points higher than overall respondents.
  - 68% noticed increasing worry and anxiety in their children and 66% saw mood changes. These rates are 24-29 points higher than the rates reported by overall respondents.



# **SURVEY RESULTS**

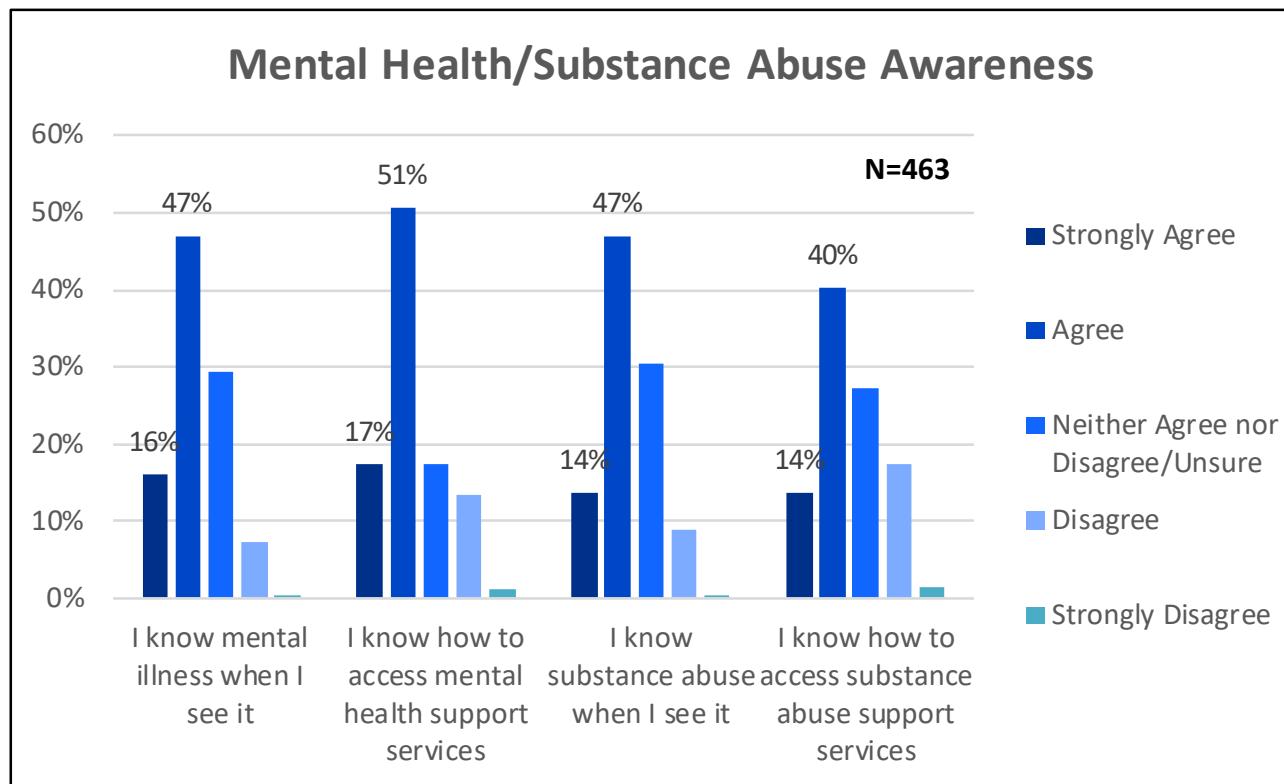
**MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE AWARENESS**



**SOUTHBOROUGH YOUTH  
AND FAMILY SERVICES**  
STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY BY SUPPORTING ITS FAMILIES

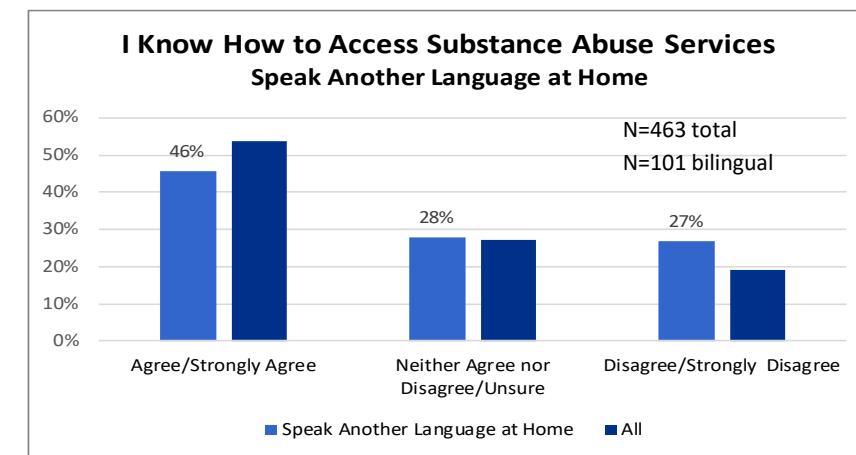
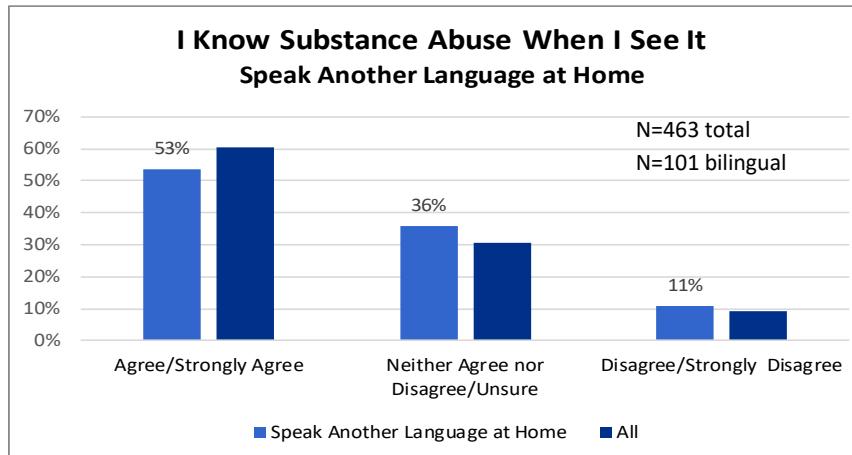
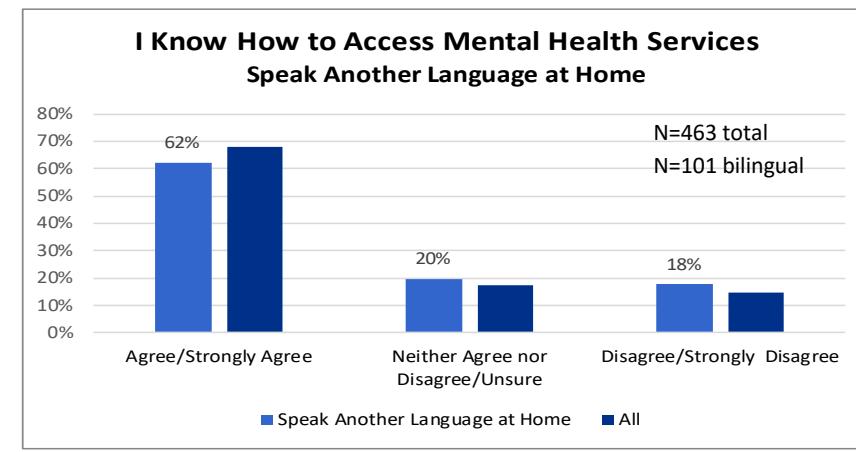
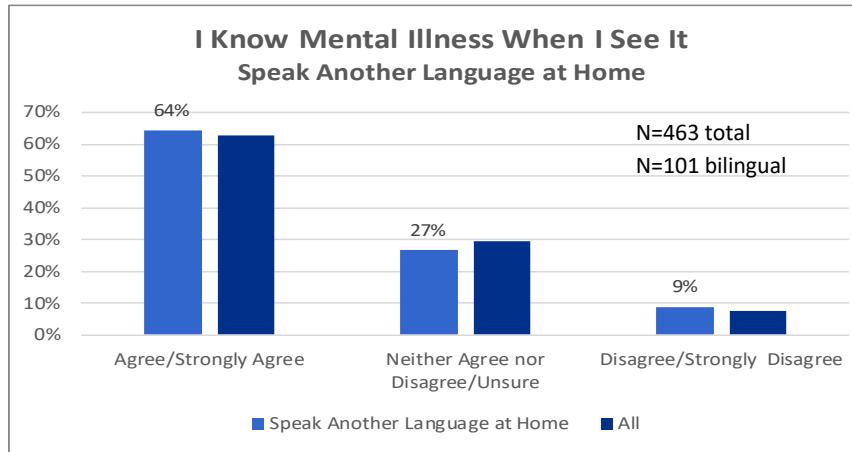
# RESPONDENTS KNOW MORE ABOUT ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES THAN SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

- A majority of respondents either agree or strongly agree that they know how to recognize mental illness (63%) and substance abuse (61%)
- Residents are the most confident about how to access mental health support services (68%)
- They are least confident about how to access substance abuse support services (54%)



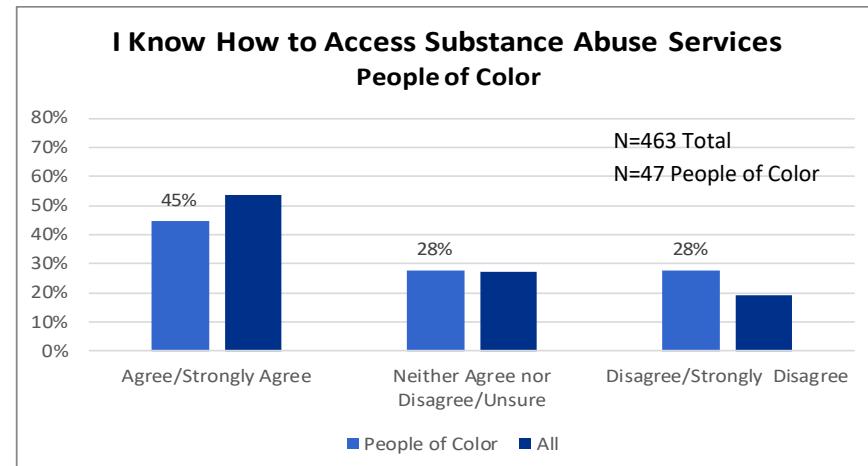
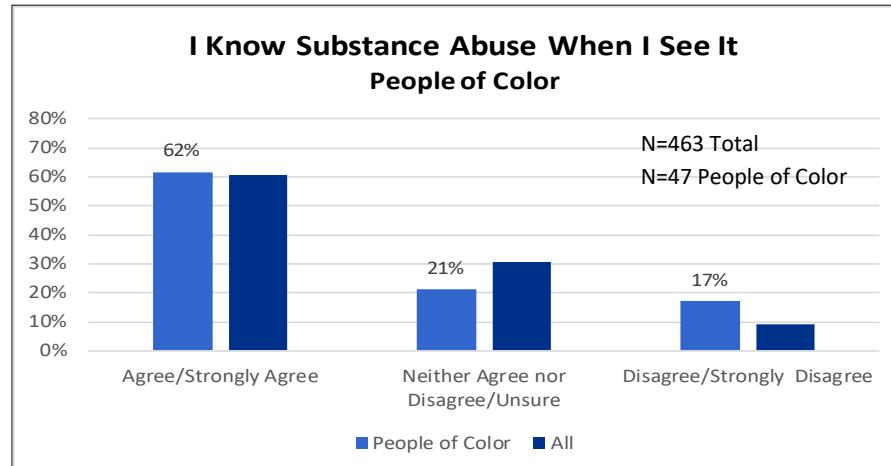
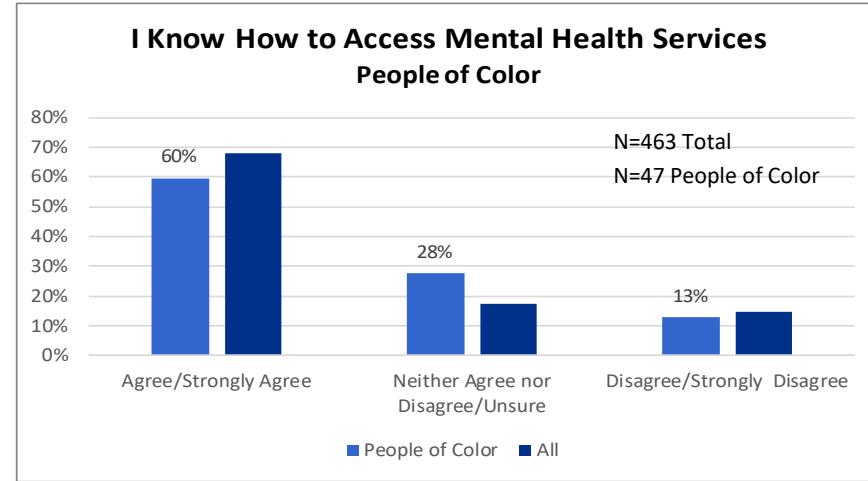
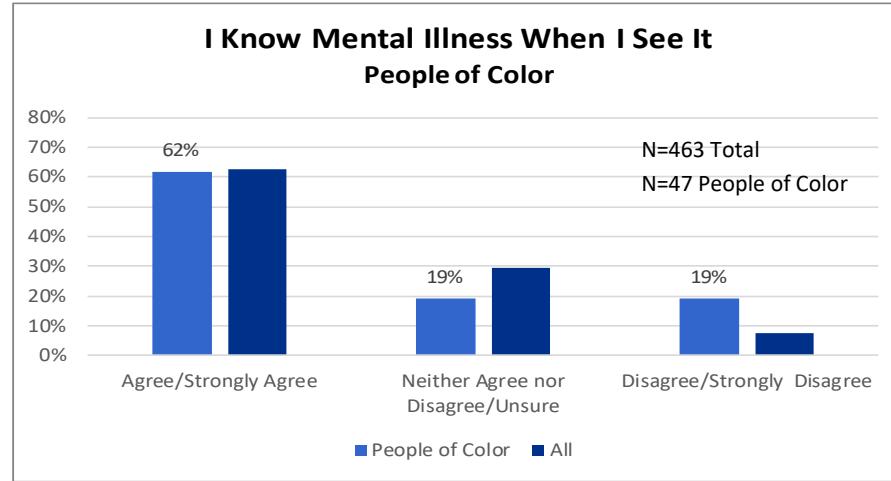
# BILINGUAL RESPONDENTS ARE AS CONFIDENT AS ALL RESPONDENTS IN RECOGNIZING MENTAL ILLNESS BUT LESS CONFIDENT ON OTHER MEASURES

- Just over 50% of bilingual respondents agree that they know how to recognize substance abuse and less than 50% know how to access substance abuse services
- They are also less confident about accessing mental health services



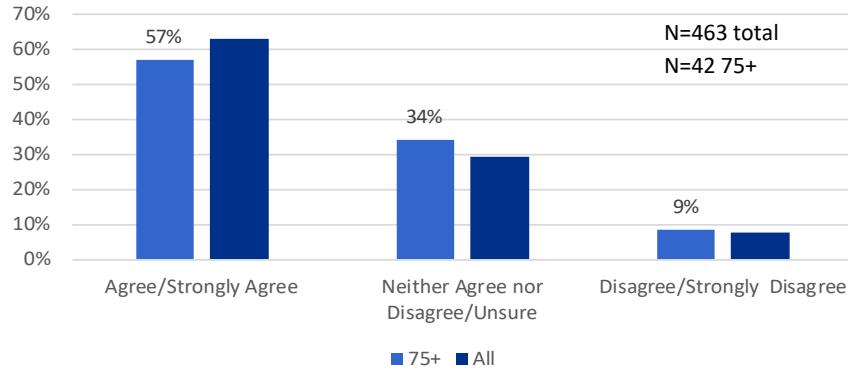
# PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE EQUALLY CONFIDENT IN RECOGNIZING MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE BUT LESS CONFIDENT ON ACCESSING SERVICES

- 45% of respondents of color agree that they know how to access substance abuse services

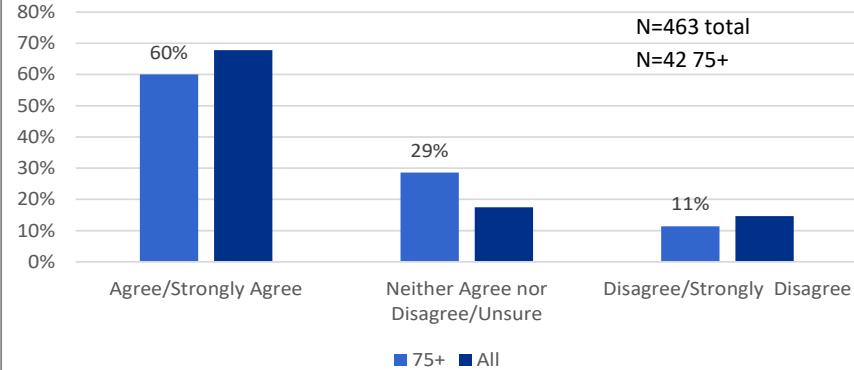


# RESIDENTS AGE 75+ APPEAR LESS CONFIDENT, MORE UNSURE ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND RECOGNIZING SUBSTANCE ABUSE

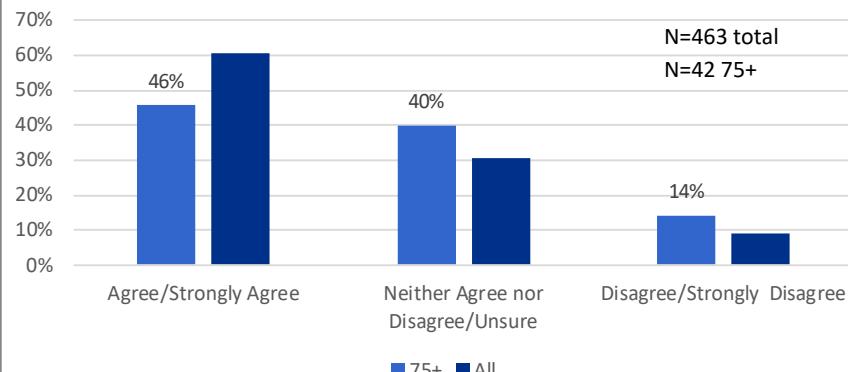
## I Know Mental Illness When I See It Seniors 75+



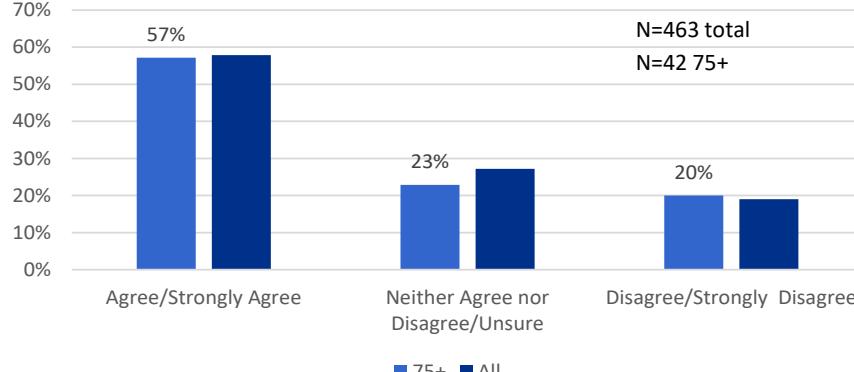
## I Know How to Access Mental Health Services Seniors 75+



## I Know Substance Abuse When I See It Seniors 75+



## I Know How to Access Substance Abuse Services Seniors 75+



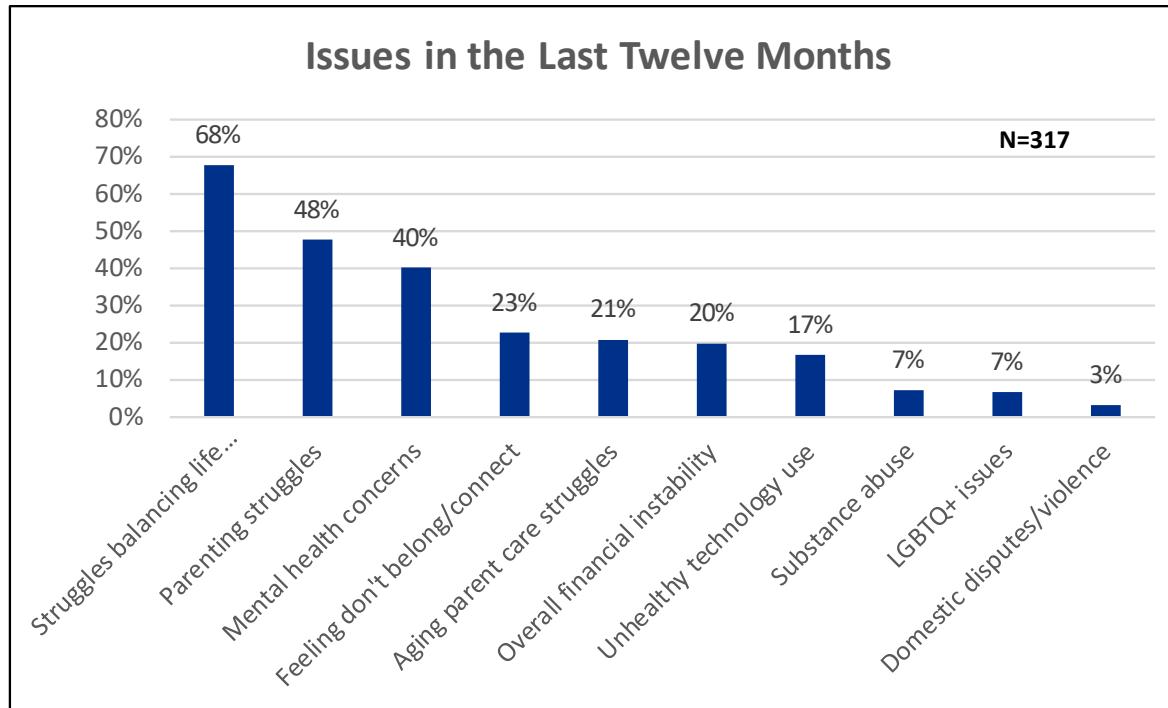
# SURVEY RESULTS

## FAMILY STRUGGLES AND ISSUES NEEDING SUPPORT



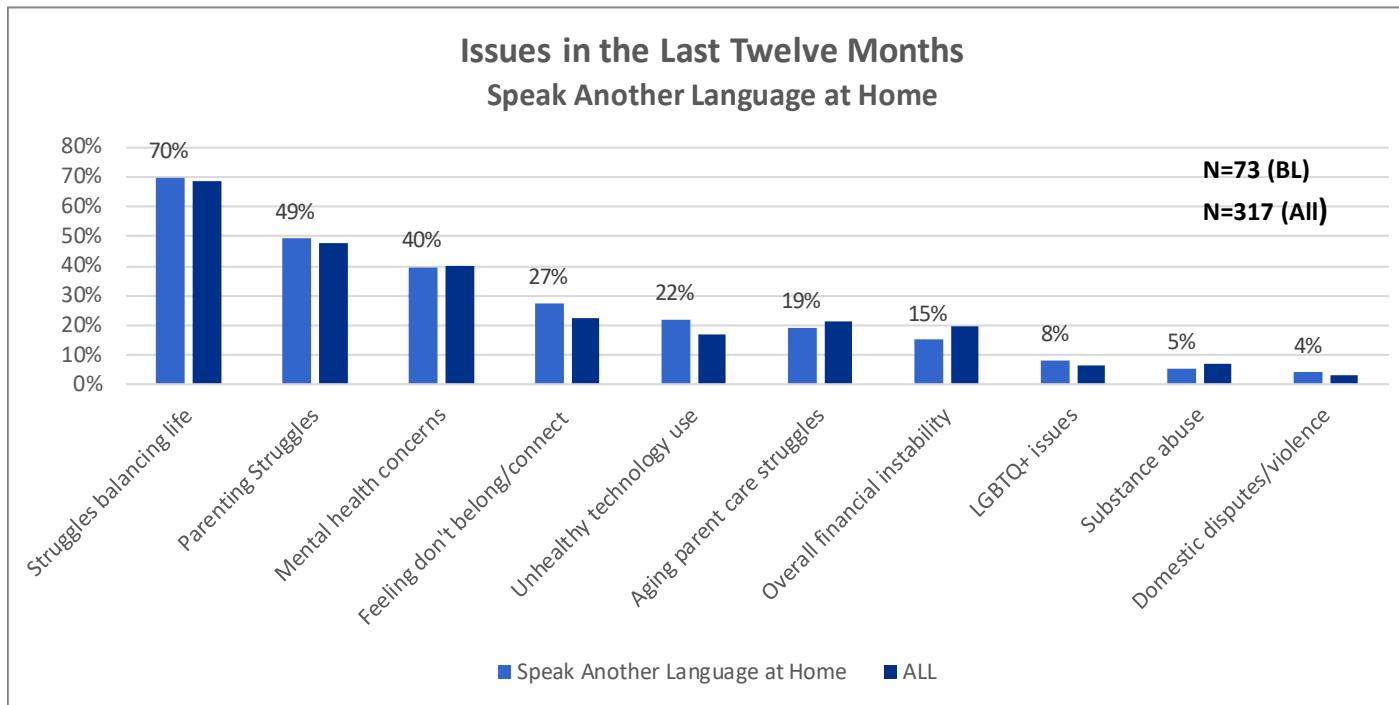
# IN THE LAST YEAR, 68% OF ALL RESPONDENTS SAY THEY AND/OR THEIR FAMILIES HAVE STRUGGLED WITH BALANCING LIFE IN GENERAL

- “Balancing Life in General” includes school, work, family, relationships, self-care
- 48% reported having parenting struggles
- 40% of all respondents have had mental health concerns, but seniors ages 60-75+ chose mental health as their #1 challenge
- 23% reported feeling that they don’t belong in or can’t connect with the Southborough community



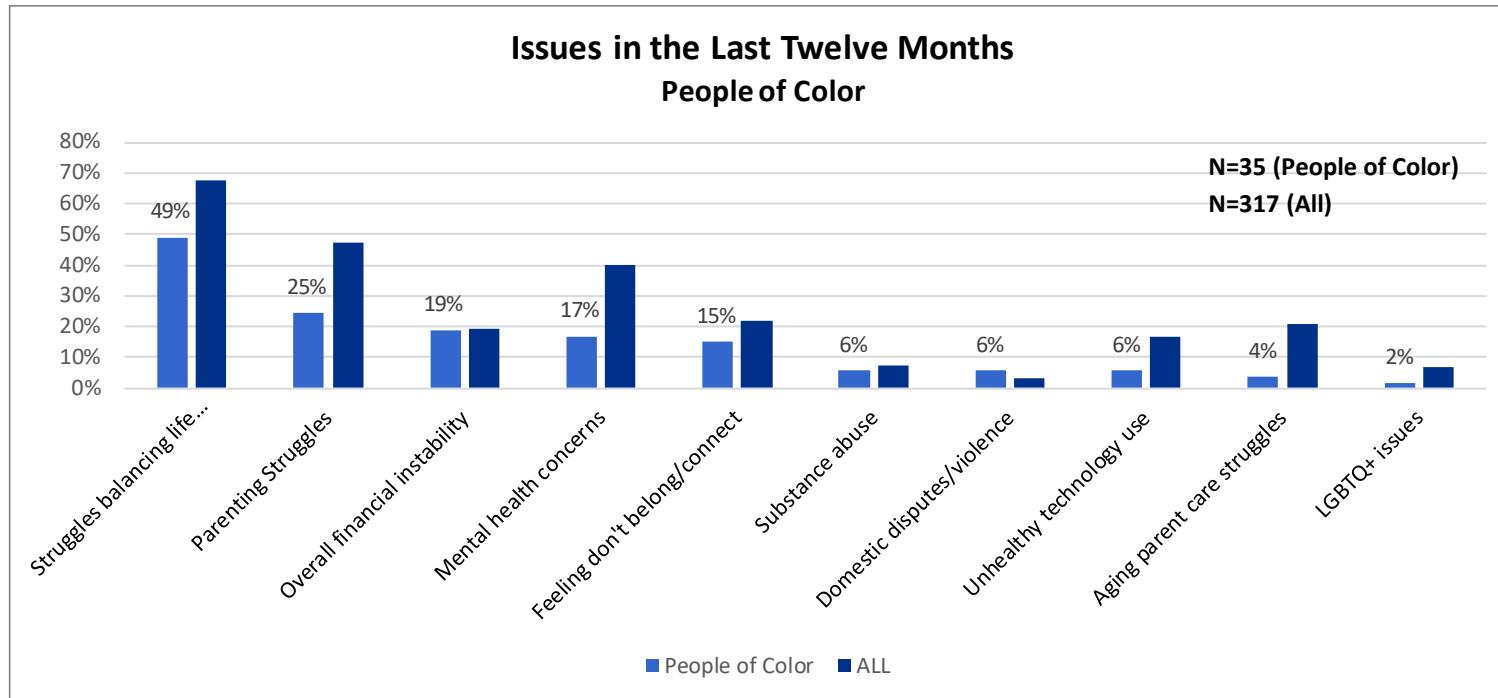
# BILINGUAL RESPONDENTS STRUGGLED WITH THE SAME TOP THREE ISSUES: BALANCING LIFE, PARENTING, AND MENTAL HEALTH

- “Balancing Life in General” includes school, work, family, relationships, self-care
- 49% reported having parenting struggles and 40% noted mental health concerns
- 27% reported feeling that they don’t belong in or can’t connect with the Southborough community and 22% cited unhealthy technology use. These rates are 4 points and 5 points higher than the general population, respectively.



# PEOPLE OF COLOR RANKED THE LAST YEAR SIMILARLY BUT FINANCIAL INSTABILITY SLIGHTLY OUTRANKED MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS

- 49% reported struggles balancing life and 25% reported parenting struggles
- 19% cited financial instability (top 3), which didn't make it to the top 5 among all respondents
- 15% reported feeling that they don't belong in or can't connect with the Southborough community

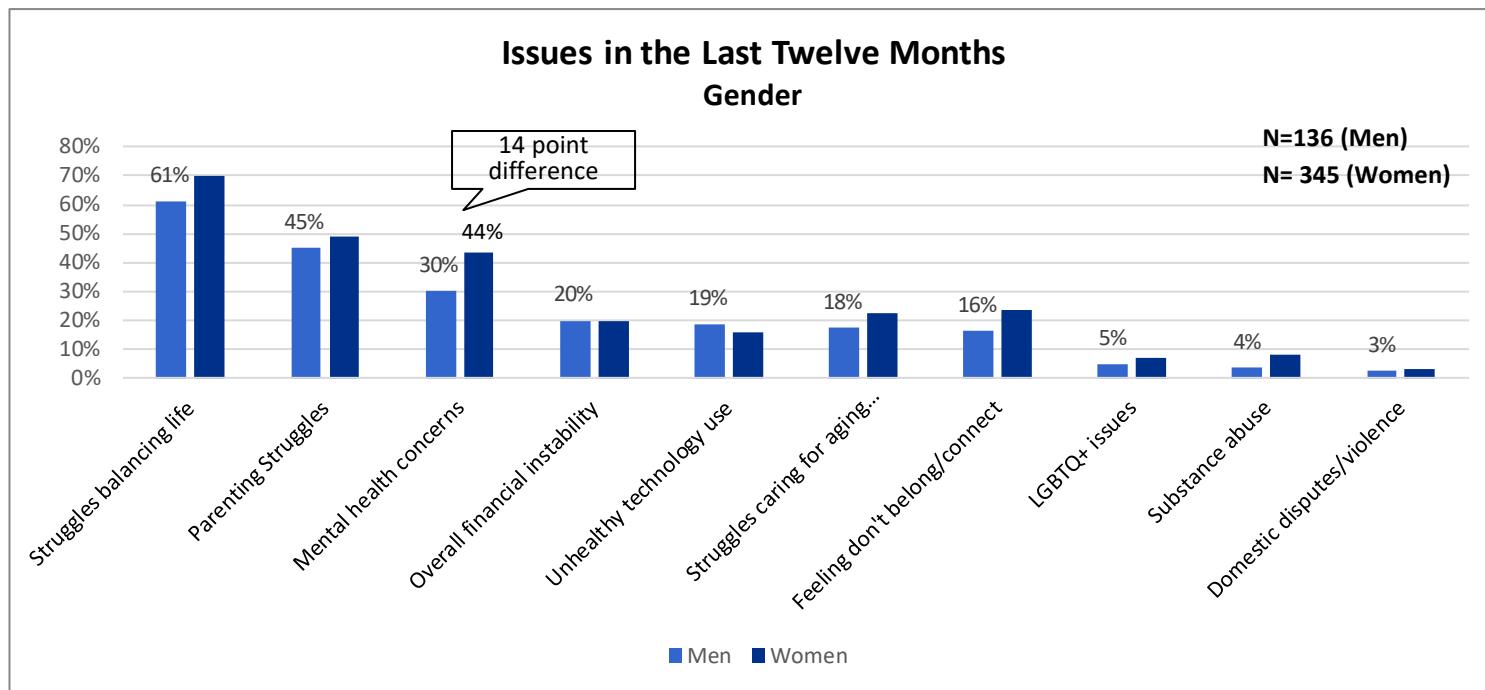


Note: People of Color include Asian, Latino/a, Mixed Race, Black, African-American, Brazilian, Middle Eastern, Native American



# MEN RANKED THE LAST YEAR SIMILARLY TO WOMEN, WITH STRUGGLES BALANCING LIFE AS THE MAIN ISSUE

- The biggest difference between men and women is reported mental health concerns (30% vs. 44%)
- Slightly more men than women reported unhealthy technology use (19% vs. 16%)
- Fewer men than women reported struggles caring for aging parents (18% vs. 22%) and feeling that they don't belong in this community (16% vs. 24%)

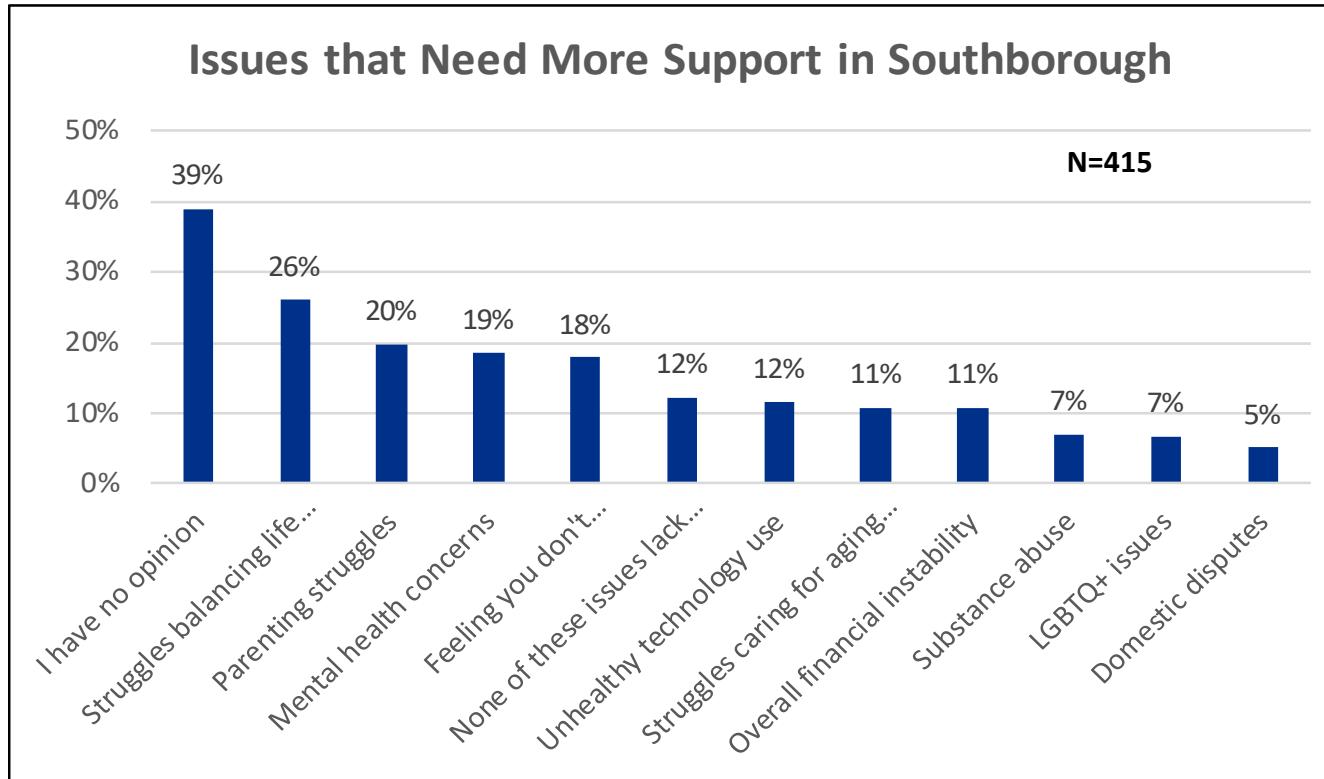


Note: Other gender respondents not shown due to insufficient data



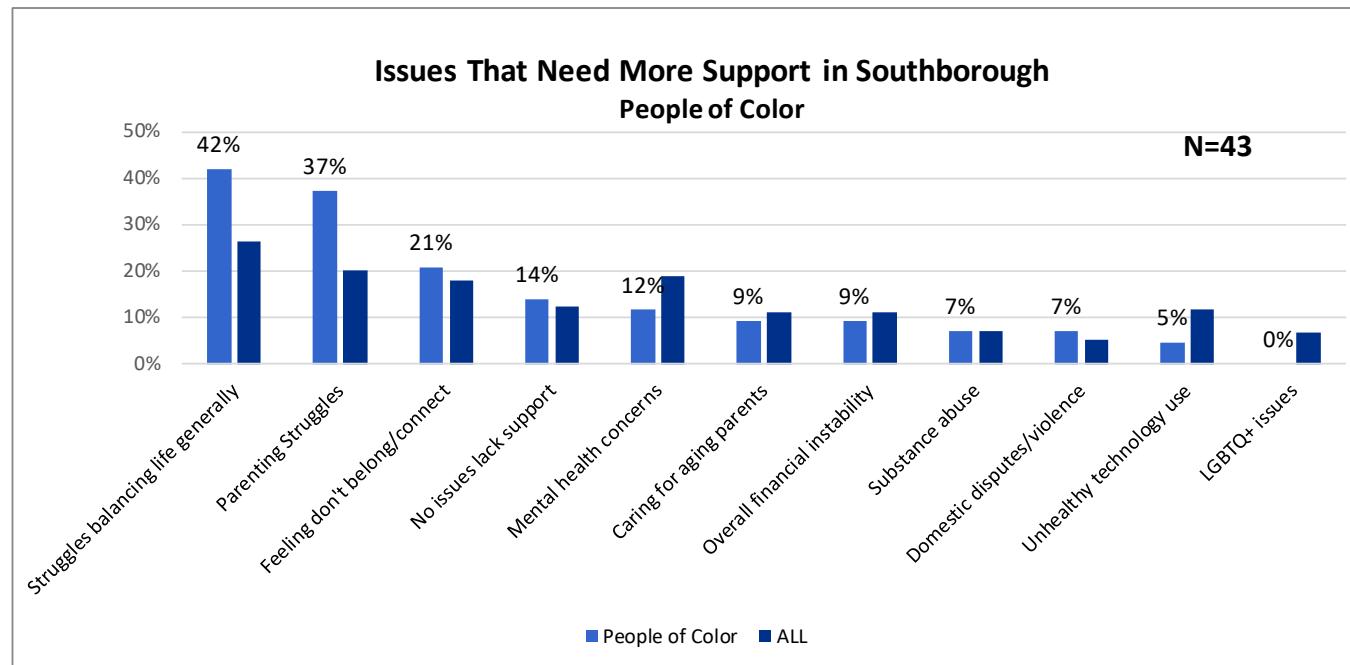
# THE ISSUES MOST COMMONLY FACED BY FAMILIES ALSO RANKED AS MOST NEEDING SUPPORT IN SOUTHBOROUGH

- Again, struggles balancing life, parenting struggles, and mental health concerns topped the list
- Unhealthy technology use has moved up to #5 service priority (was #7 issue in the last year)
- A full 39% had no opinion on this question and 12% said they don't think any issues lack support



# PEOPLE OF COLOR HAD STRONG OPINIONS ABOUT ISSUES THAT NEED SUPPORT, WITH 42% CITING STRUGGLES BALANCING LIFE GENERALLY

- 37% wanted help with parenting struggles
- Feeling they don't belong/connect in the community has climbed to third place for People of Color from fifth place for all respondents
- Unhealthy technology use moved down the list as a service priority compared to all respondents
- 14% said they don't think any issues lack support while none said "I have no opinion"

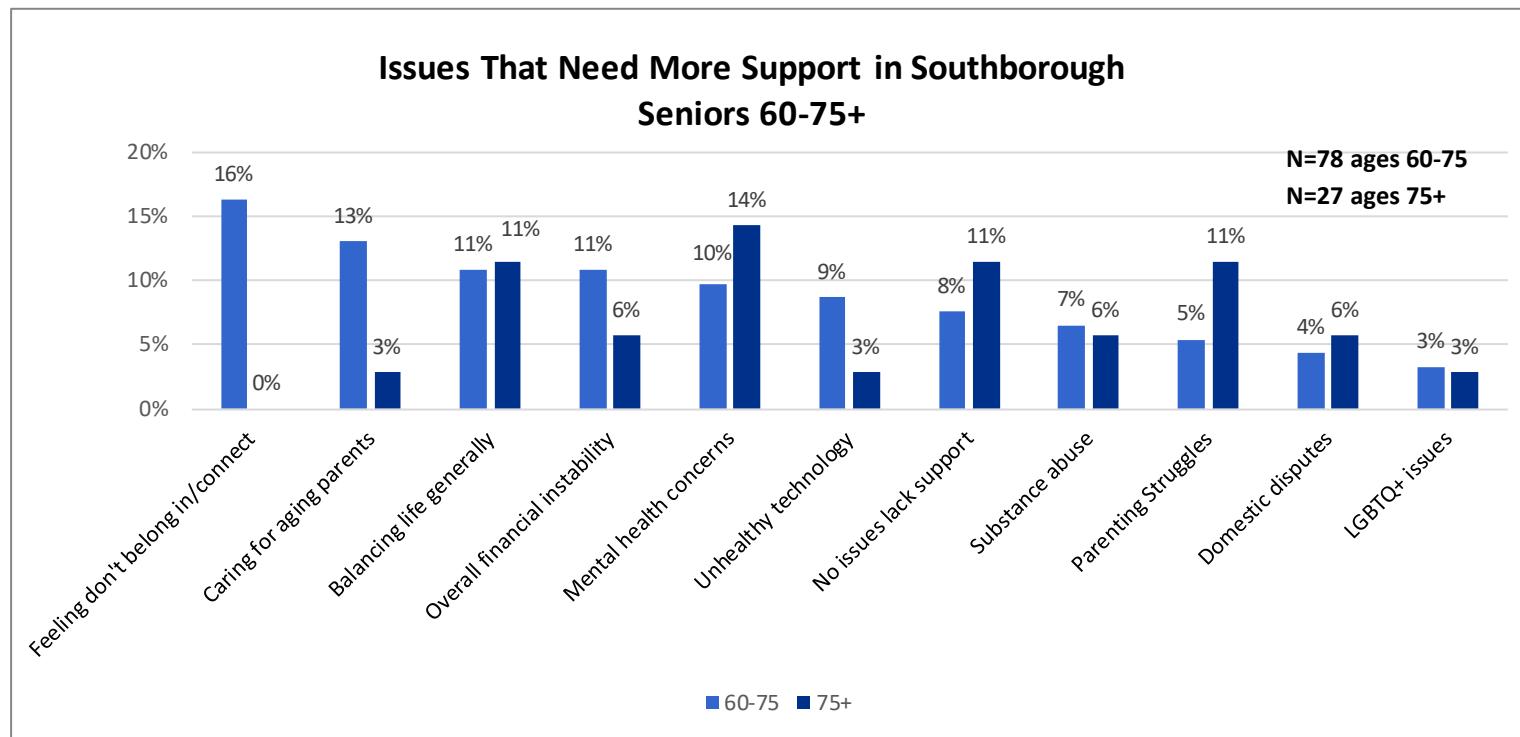


Note: People of Color include Asian, Latino/a, Mixed Race, Black, African-American, Brazilian, Middle Eastern, Native American



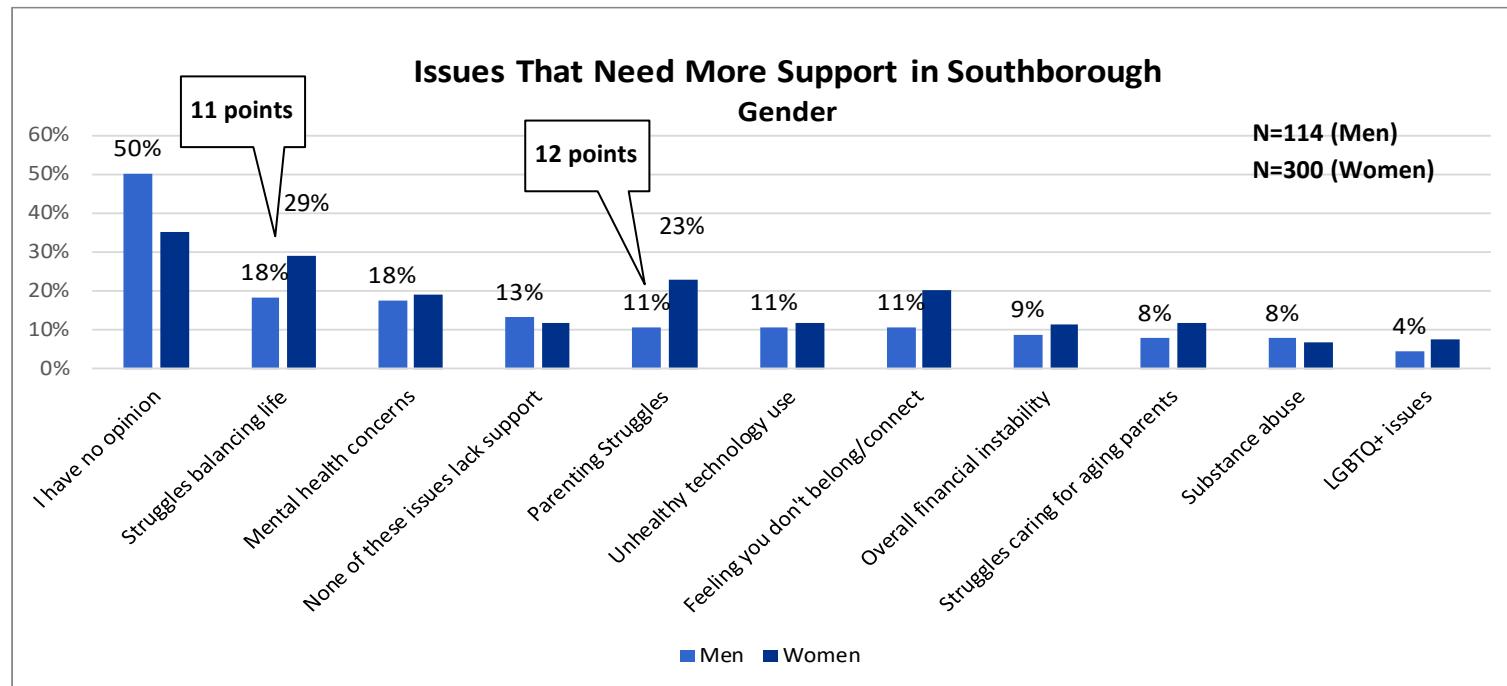
# SENIORS' TOP 3 SERVICE PRIORITIES VARY By AGE. AGES 60-75 FEEL DISCONNECTED AND NEED HELP CARING FOR AGING PARENTS.

- Seniors who are older than 75 want more mental health support, help balancing life, and help with parenting struggles
- Note that these percentages are relatively low compared to other sub-groups. 19% said no issues lack support and 17% didn't answer this question.



# MEN AND WOMEN CHOSE THE SAME PRIORITIES BUT MORE WOMEN FELT SERVICES WERE NEEDED

- 18% of men reported struggles balancing life and mental health concerns
- The biggest gap between male and female rankings is in balancing life (11 percentage points) and parenting struggles (12 percentage points)
- A full 50% of men and 35% of women had no opinion and the same percentage (13% vs. 12%) said none of these issues lack support



Note: Other gender respondents not shown due to insufficient data



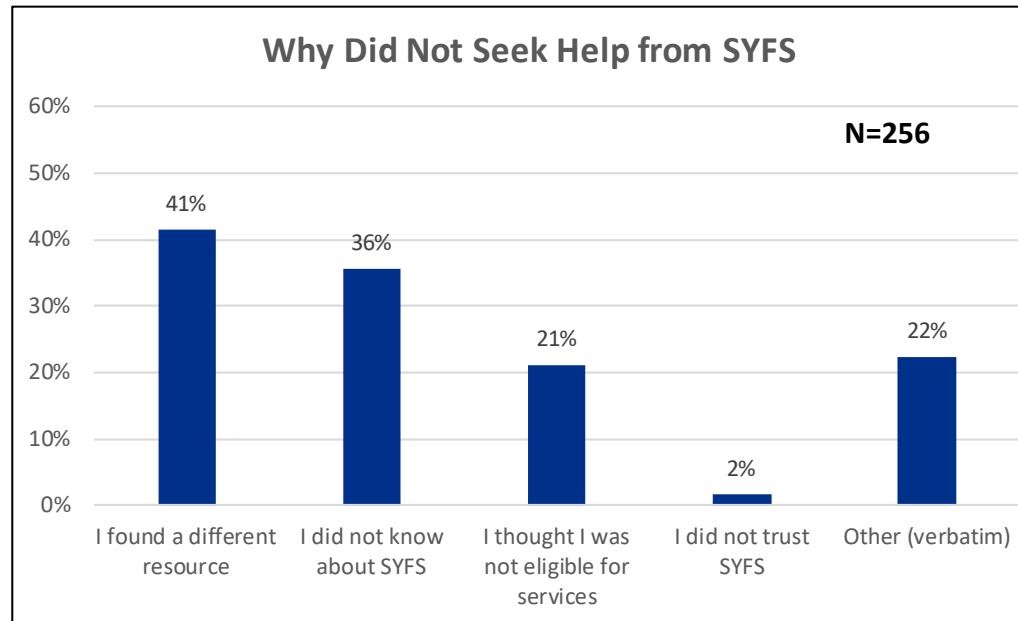
# SURVEY RESULTS

## SYFS AND OTHER SOURCES OF HELP



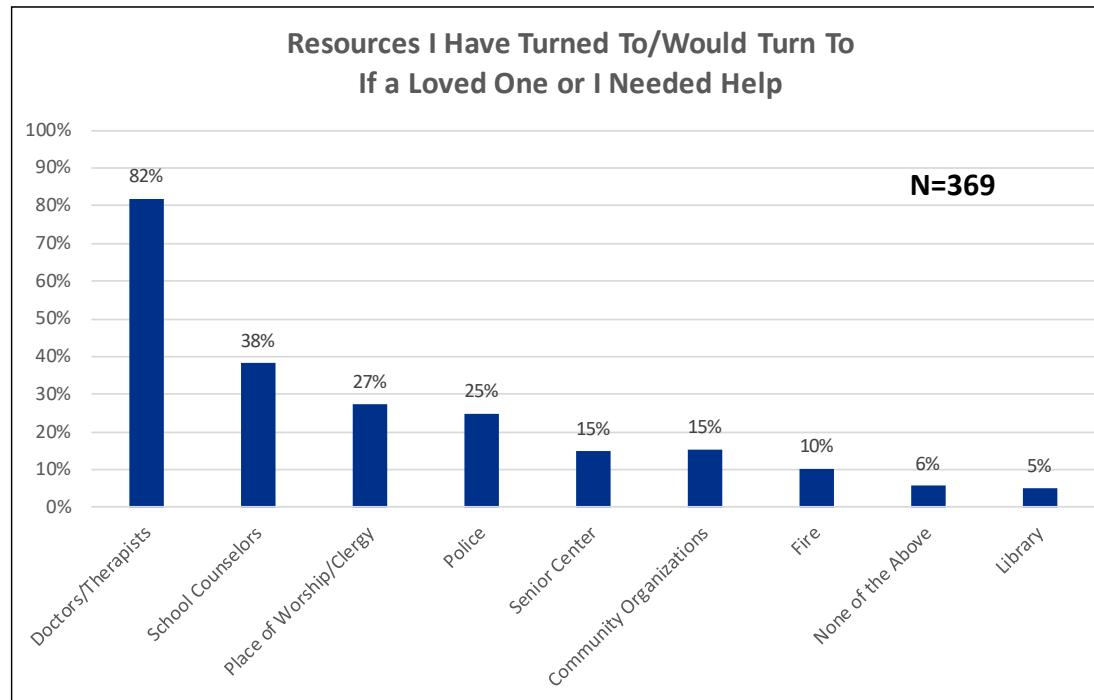
# 87% DID NOT APPROACH SYFS WHEN THEY NEEDED HELP. WHEN ASKED WHY, 36% SAID THEY DID NOT KNOW ABOUT SYFS

- 21% of respondents thought they were ineligible for SYFS services
- Another quarter chose “Other” and wrote various explanations
  - *It is good to learn that SYFS addresses these issues in the community. I didn't realize it.*
  - *Reluctant to expose internal issues to a public body. Don't believe/trust your privacy/confidentiality processes*
  - *I thought SYFS was for specific families/those with significant financial issues or other such issues*
  - *The town should only provide emergency intervention and referrals!*



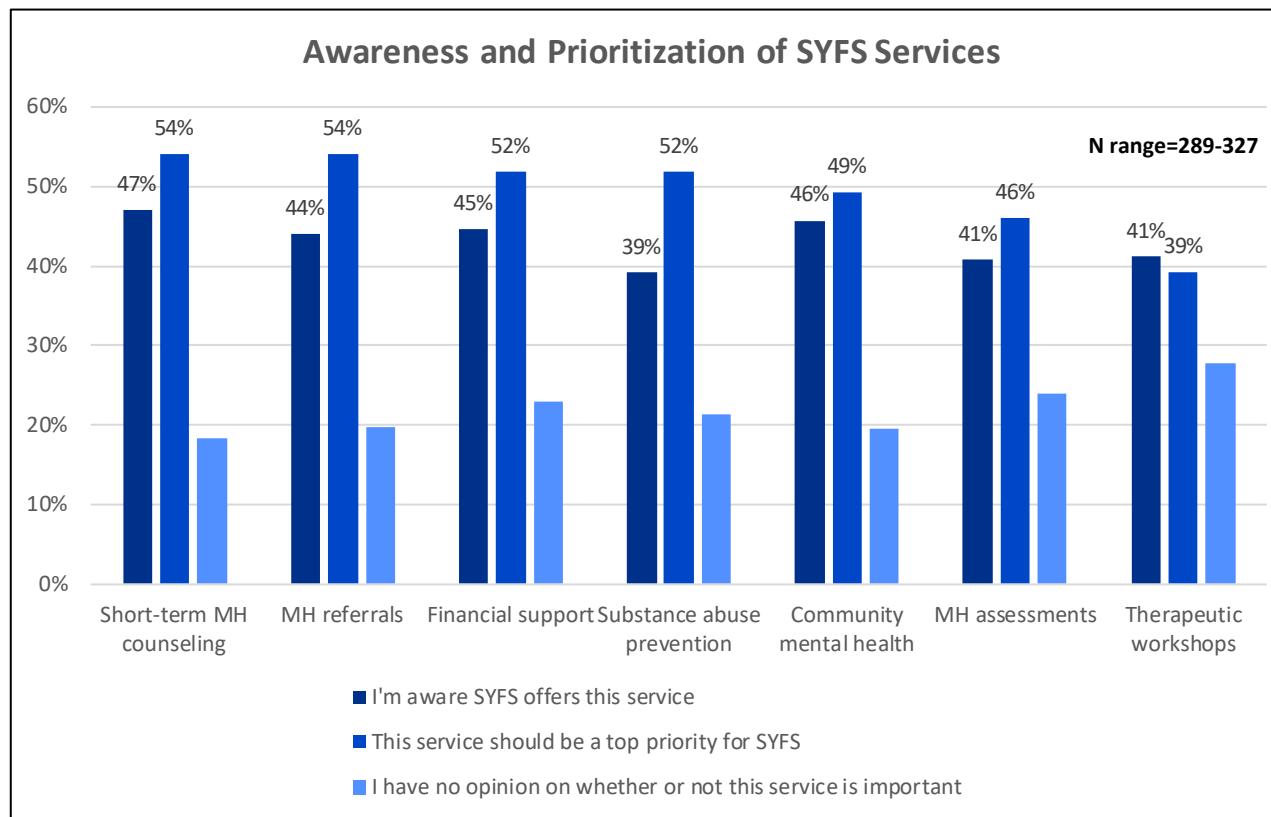
# MOST RESPONDENTS (82%) TURN TO PRIVATE DOCTORS OR THERAPISTS WHEN THEY NEED HELP

- School counselors are called next, but fewer than 40% would contact them
- A quarter would contact clergy or police, which emphasizes the value of coordination with SYFS
  - Among seniors (75+), 58% would contact their clergy and 46% would call the Senior Center
  - Among SYFS clients, 74% would contact their school counselors. Is this because counselors referred them to SYFS?
- **6% chose “none of the above” but comments were not available for this question**



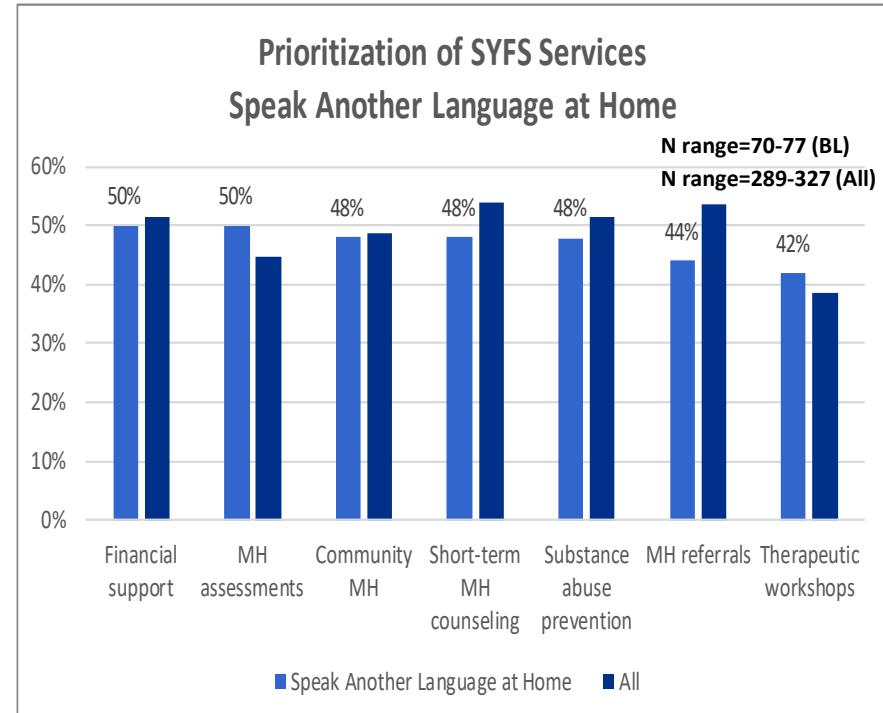
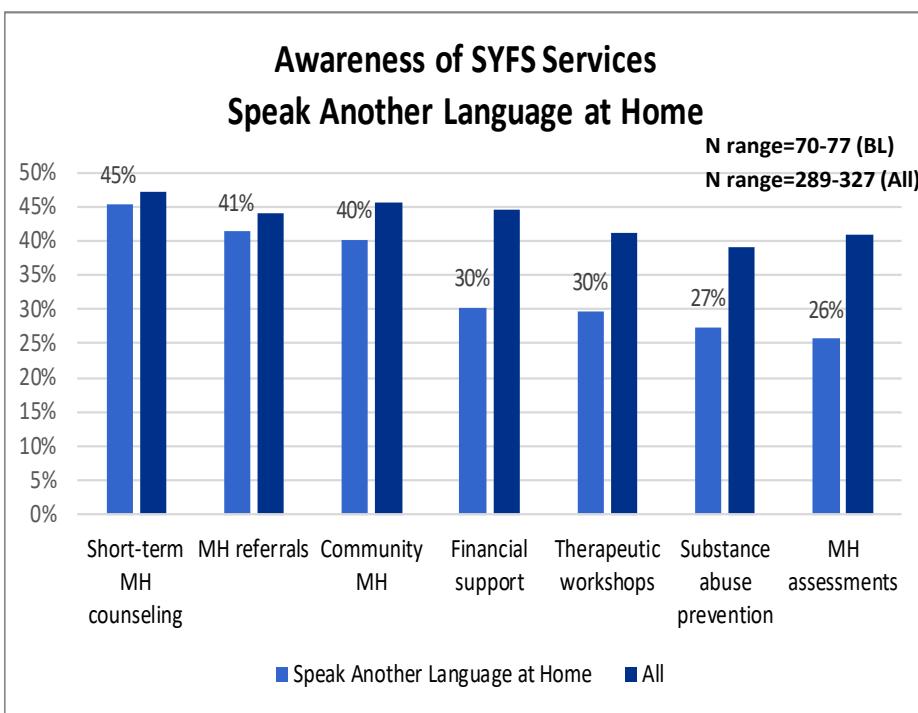
# TOP SERVICE PRIORITIES ARE MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING, MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER REFERRALS, AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- People are most aware that SYFS offers short-term mental health counseling, community mental health programs, and financial support (47-45%). They are least aware of substance abuse prevention services (39%).
- Therapeutic workshops are the lowest priority but are also not as well known as other services



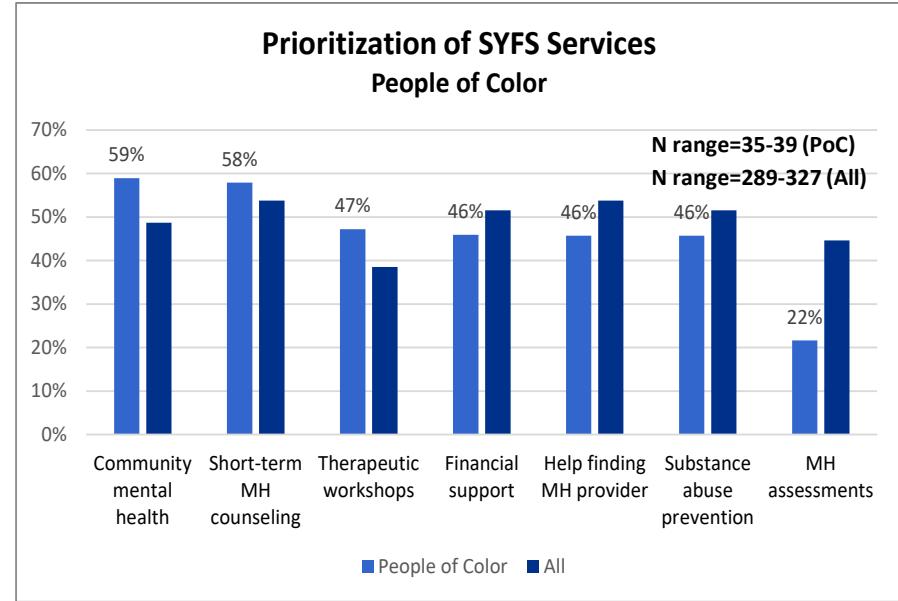
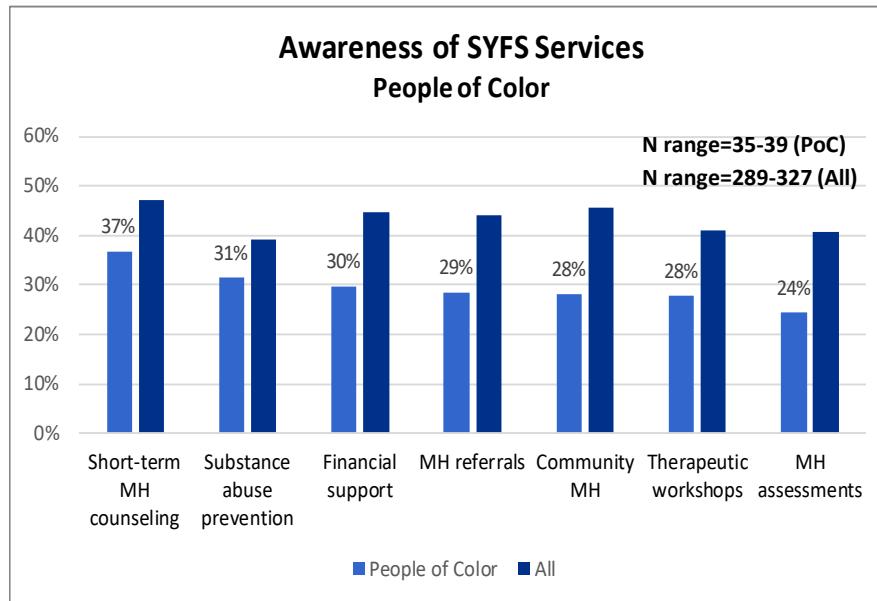
# BILINGUAL RESPONDENTS ARE LESS AWARE OF ALL SERVICES THAN ARE OVERALL RESPONDENTS

- Bilingual respondents are most aware of mental health counseling and least aware of assessments
- Bilingual respondents prioritize their top 5 programs almost equally (2 points is insignificant)
  - Therapeutic workshops are the lowest priority



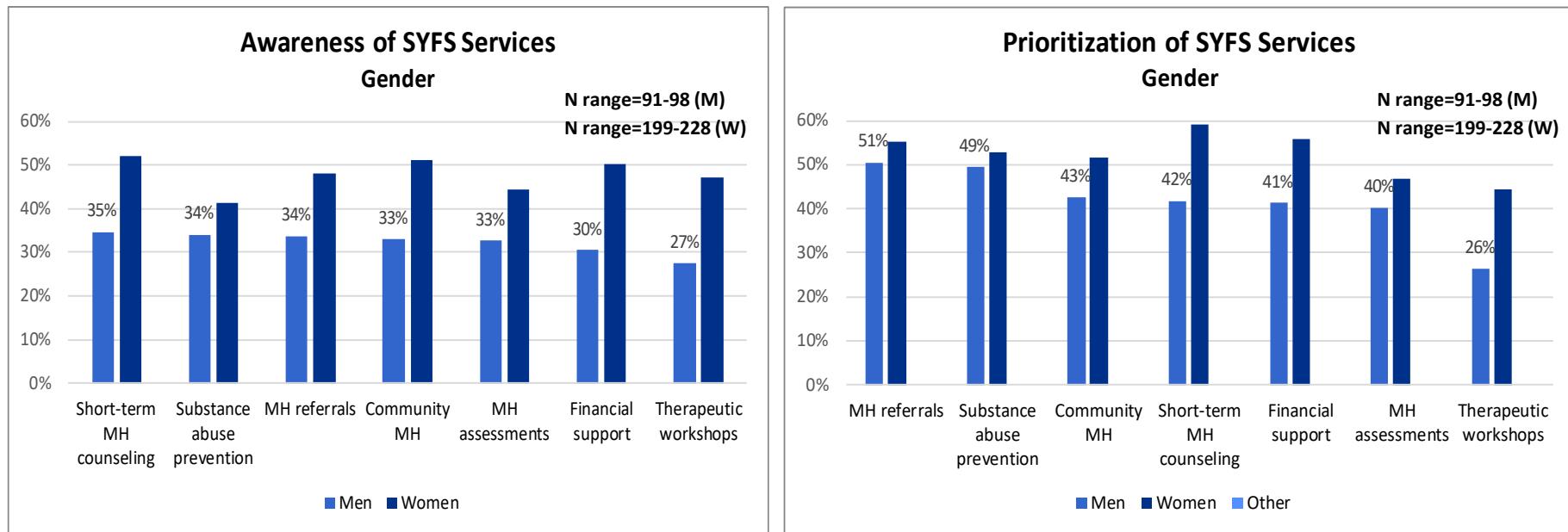
# PEOPLE OF COLOR ARE ALSO LESS AWARE OF ALL SYFS SERVICES COMPARED TO THE GENERAL POPULATION

- Top priorities are Community Mental Health, Counseling, and Therapeutic Workshops
- Mental health assessments are the lowest priority but are also the least well known of all services



# MEN ARE LESS AWARE OF SYFS SERVICES THAN ARE WOMEN. THEY PRIORITIZE REFERRALS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION SERVICES.

- Community mental health and short-term mental health counseling are the next priorities
  - Therapeutic workshops are the lowest priority but are also least well known
- One person who identified as non-binary was aware of all the services but did not choose any priorities



Note: Other gender respondents not shown due to insufficient data



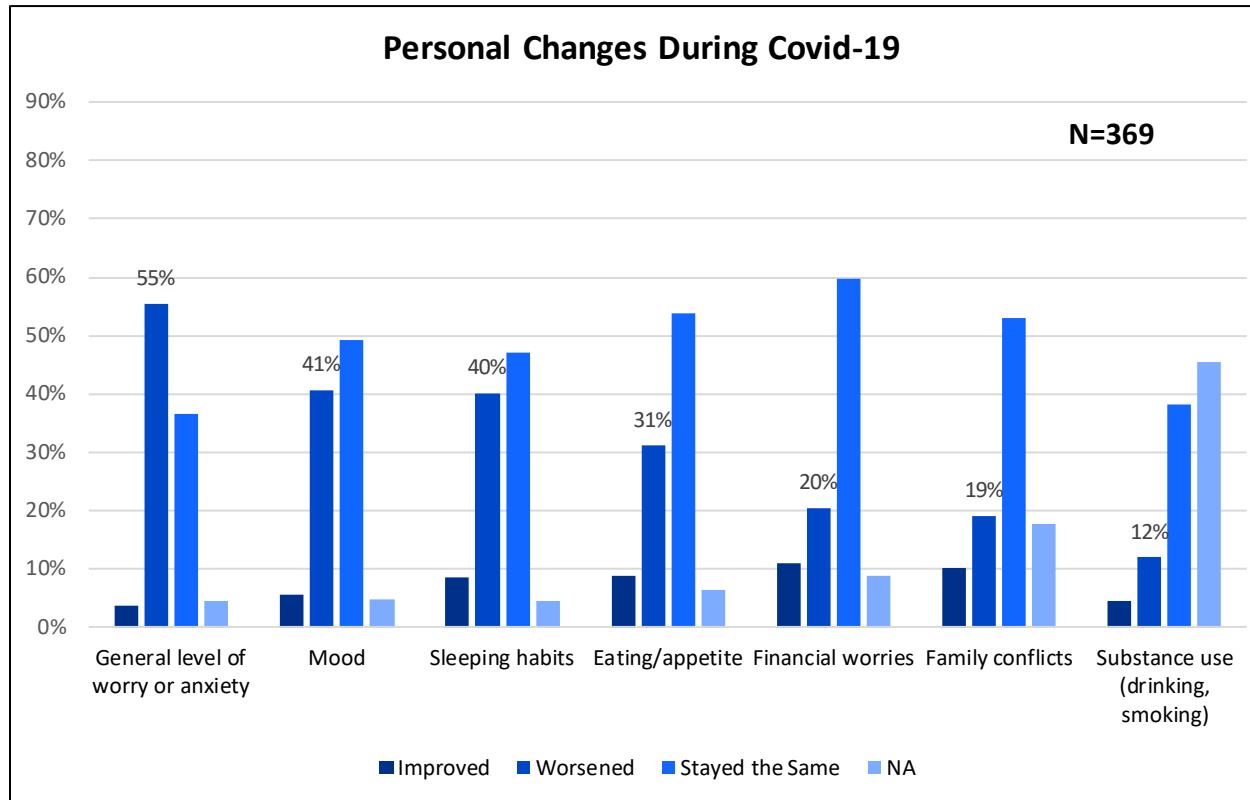
# SURVEY RESULTS

## EFFECTS OF COVID-19



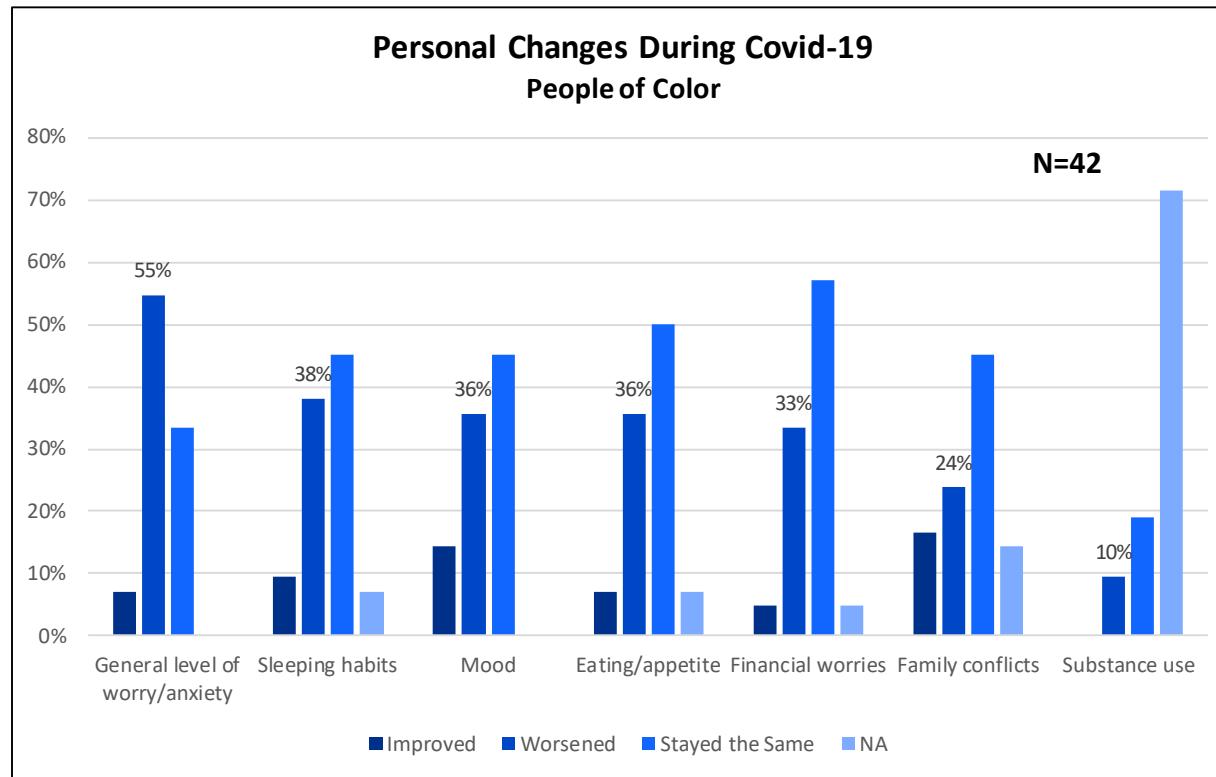
# A MAJORITY (55%) REPORTED THEIR OWN WORRY OR ANXIETY HAS INCREASED DURING COVID

- Mood, sleeping habits and eating/appetite have also worsened for 41- 31%
- Financial worries and family conflicts have improved for 11% and 10% of respondents
- Depending on where they started, it could be good or bad news that financial worries and family conflicts have stayed the same for more than 50% of respondents



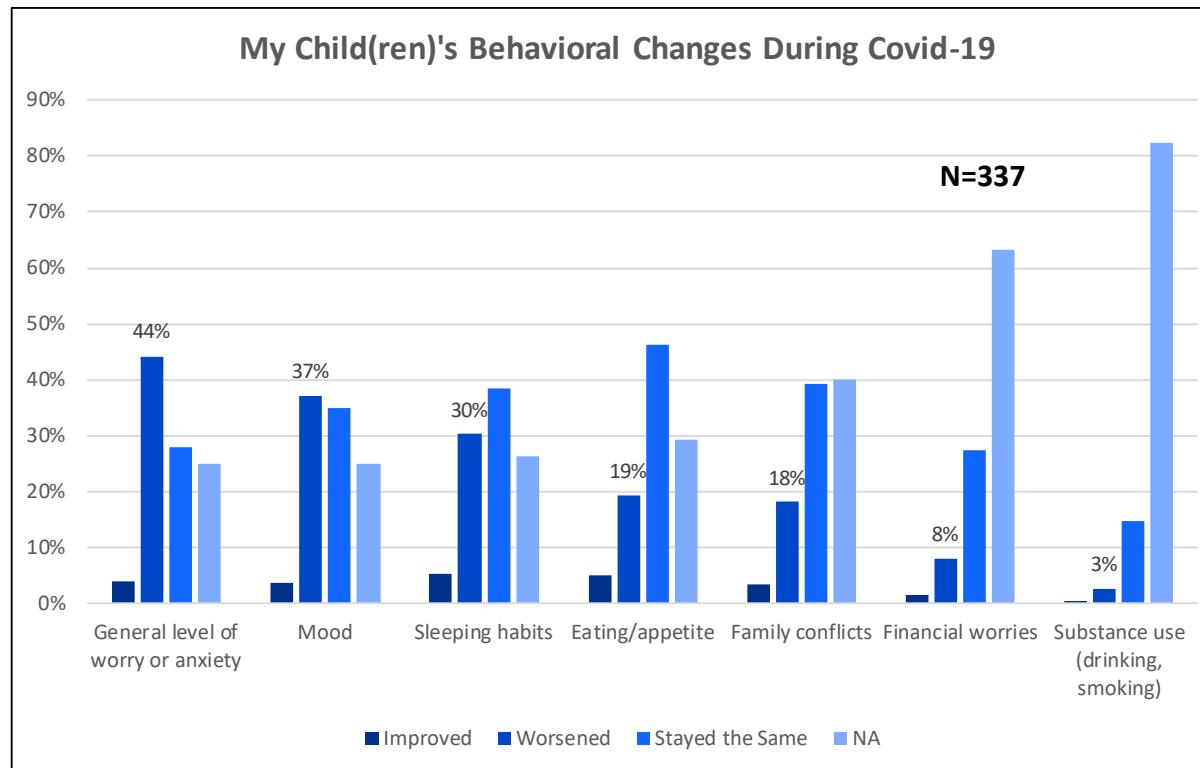
# SIMILARLY, 55% OF PEOPLE OF COLOR REPORTED THEIR OWN WORRY OR ANXIETY HAS INCREASED DURING COVID

- Sleeping habits and mood have also worsened at similar rates to all respondents (38% and 36%)
- Eating/appetite, financial worries and family conflicts have worsened for 36%, 33% and 24% of respondents. These are higher rates than the rates among the general population.
- Depending on where they started, it could be good or bad news that eating/appetite and financial worries have stayed the same for 50% or more respondents



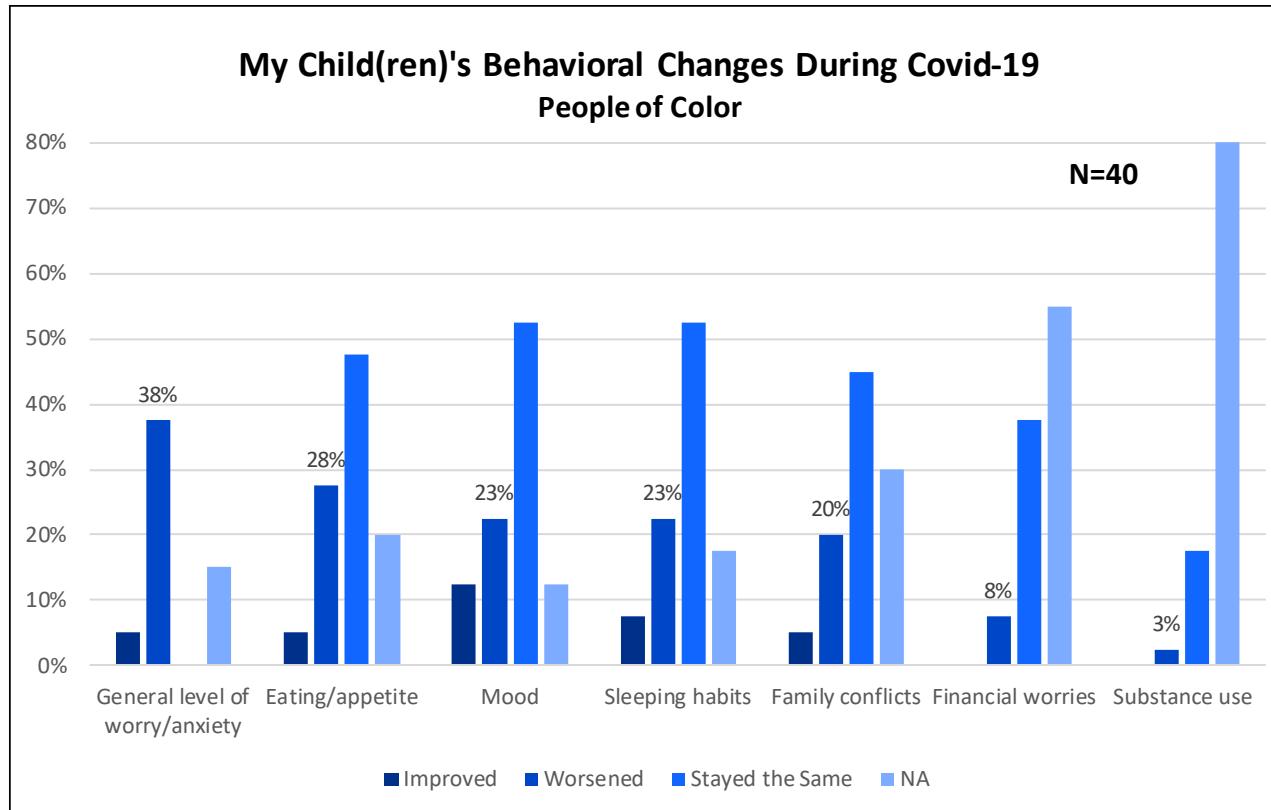
# WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN, THE RESPONSES WERE THE SAME, WITH INCREASING WORRY AND ANXIETY CITED BY 44%

- 37% reported that their child or children's mood worsened
- Sleeping habits and eating/appetite worsened for 30-19% but improved for 5% of families
- Depending on where they started, staying the same could be good news
- Nine parents (3%) reported their child's substance use got worse



# 38% PEOPLE OF COLOR NOTICED INCREASING WORRY AND ANXIETY IN THEIR CHILDREN

- 28% reported that their child(ren)'s eating/appetites worsened and 23% that their mood worsened
- Eating/appetite, mood and sleeping habits stayed the same for 48-53% of families. Depending on where they started, staying the same could be good or bad news



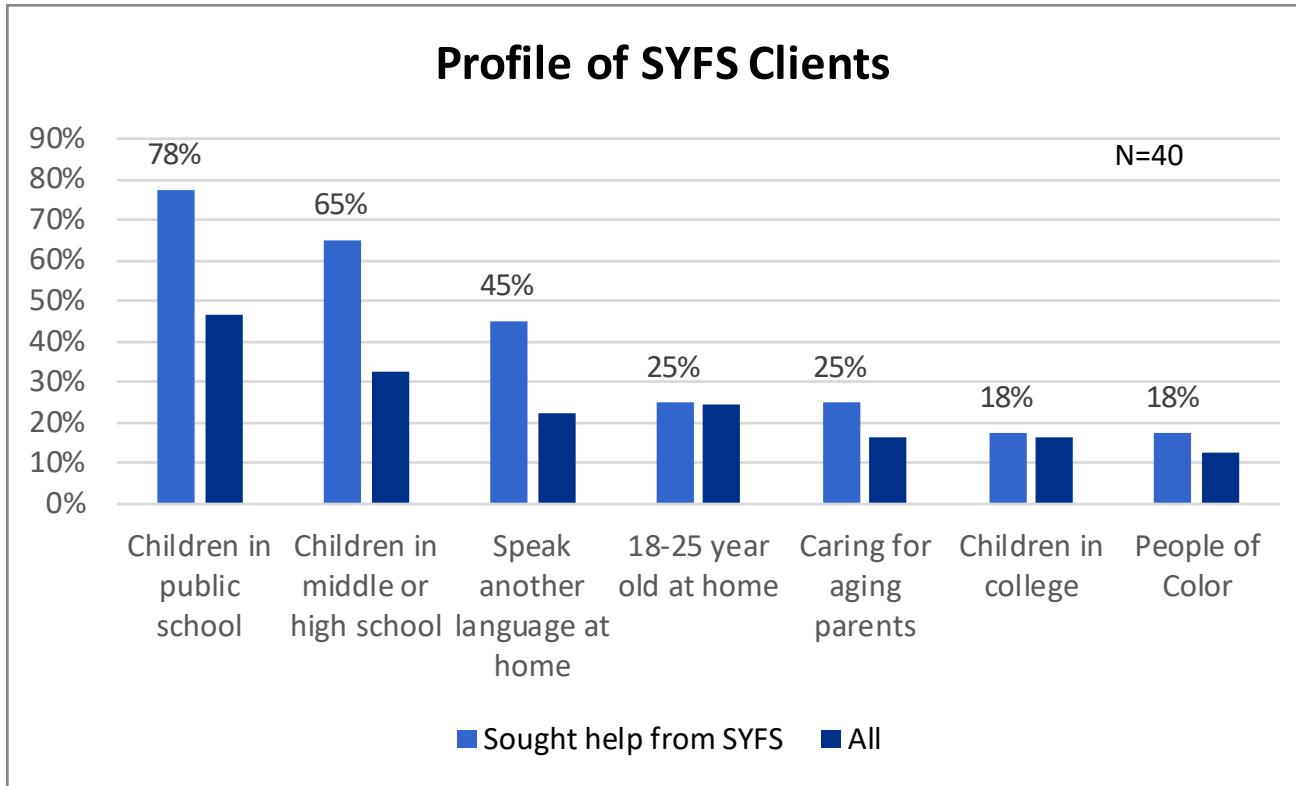
# SURVEY RESULTS

## PROFILE OF SYFS CLIENT RESPONDENTS



# MOST SYFS CLIENTS HAVE CHILDREN IN PUBLIC SCHOOL. NEARLY HALF SPEAK ANOTHER LANGUAGE AT HOME.

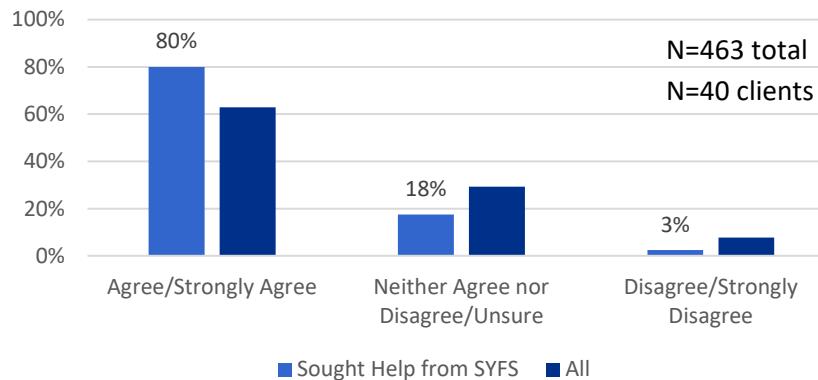
- A quarter have a young adult at home and/or are caring for aging parents
- 18% are People of Color



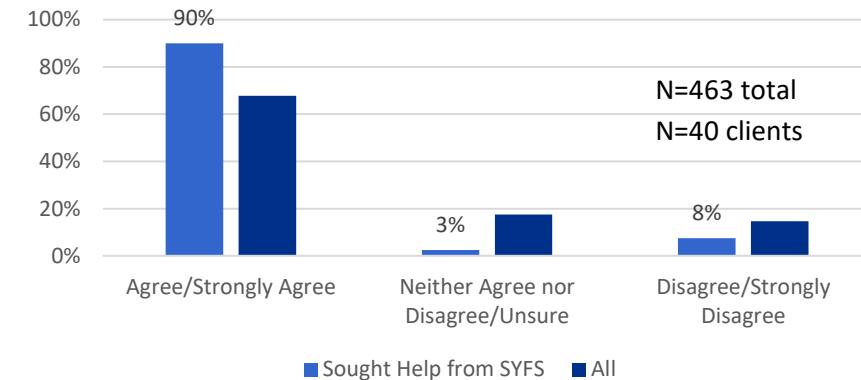
# SYFS CLIENTS ARE MUCH CLEARER ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SYMPTOMS AND SERVICES THAN THE GENERAL POPULATION IS

- 80% say they recognize mental illness and nearly 90% know how to access mental health services

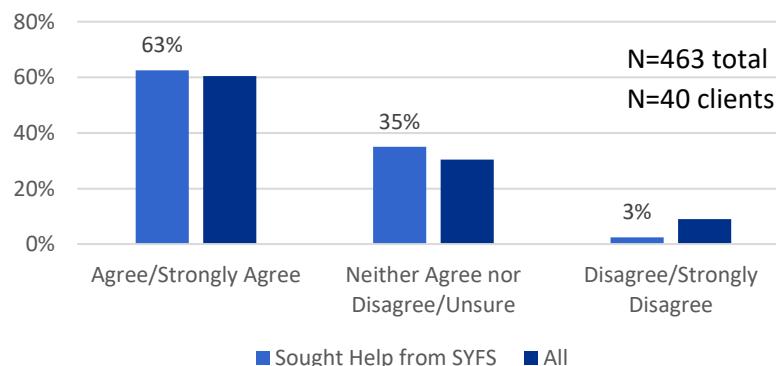
## I Know Mental Illness When I See It Sought Help from SYFS



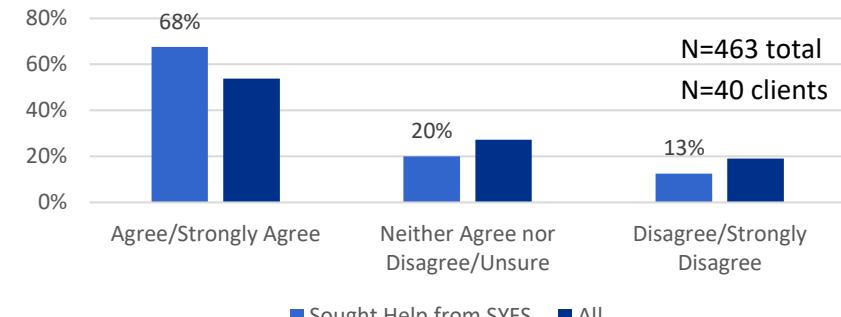
## I Know How to Access Mental Health Services Sought Help from SYFS



## I Know Substance Abuse When I See It Sought Help from SYFS

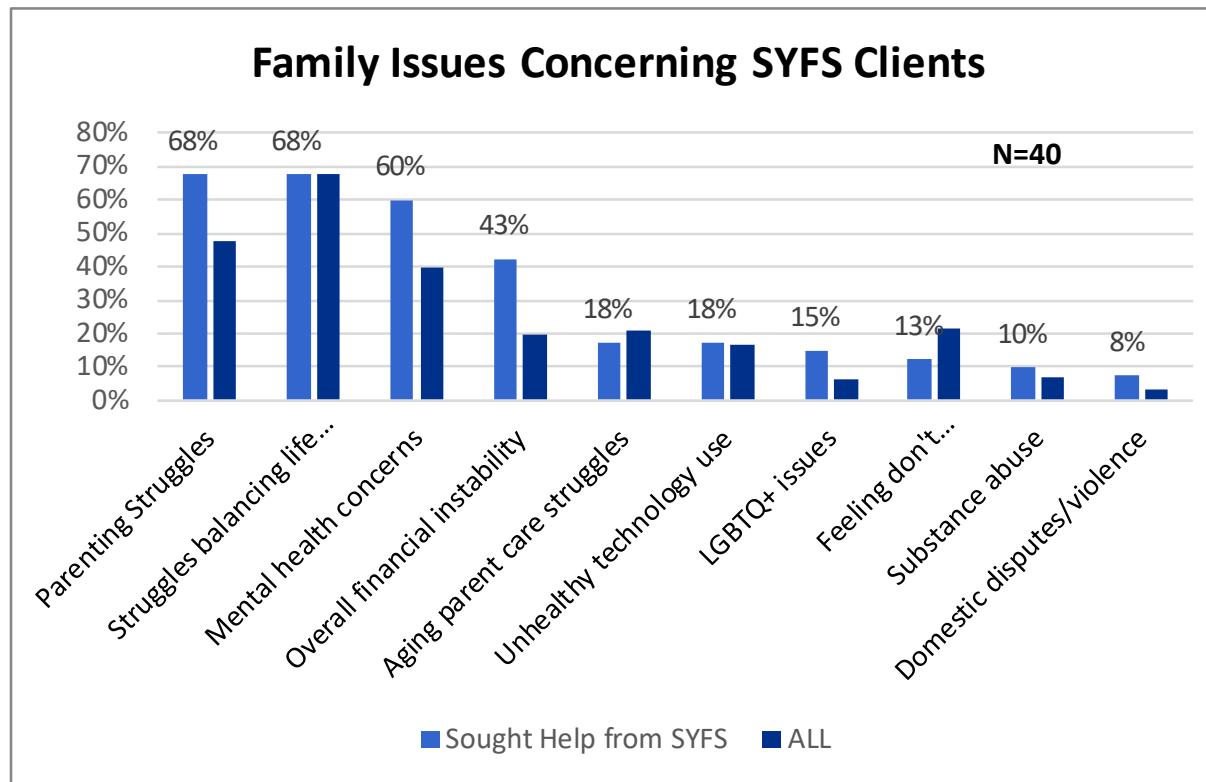


## I Know How to Access Substance Abuse Services Sought Help from SYFS



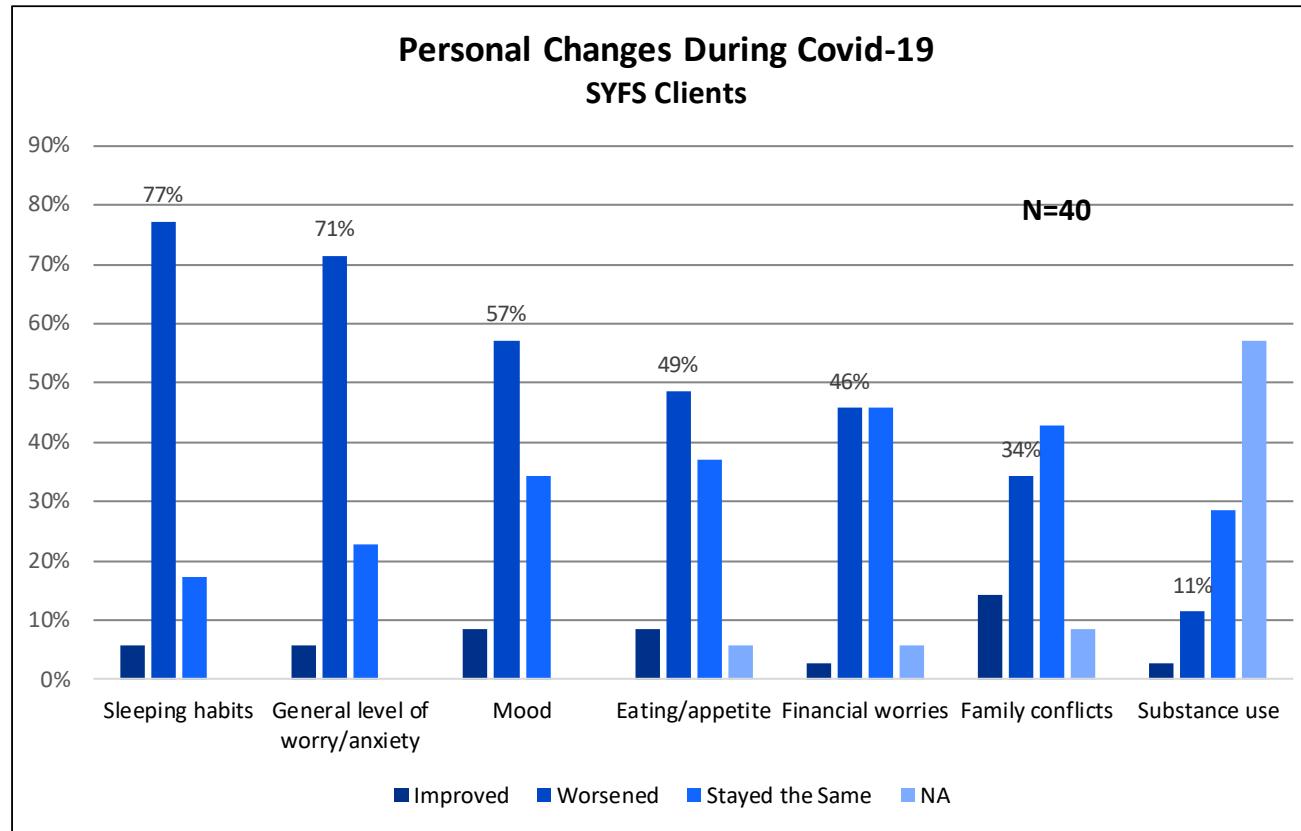
# 68% OF CLIENTS CITE BOTH PARENTING AND BALANCING LIFE AS THEIR TOP STRUGGLES. MENTAL HEALTH IS ALSO HIGH AT 60%.

- Financial instability comes in fourth at 43%
- These rates are higher than the general population, in which 68% also struggled balancing life, but parent struggles peaked at 48%, and mental health at 40%. Financial worries came in sixth at 20% (see p.12).
- The mix of mental health, family, and financial struggles may drive people to seek SYFS services



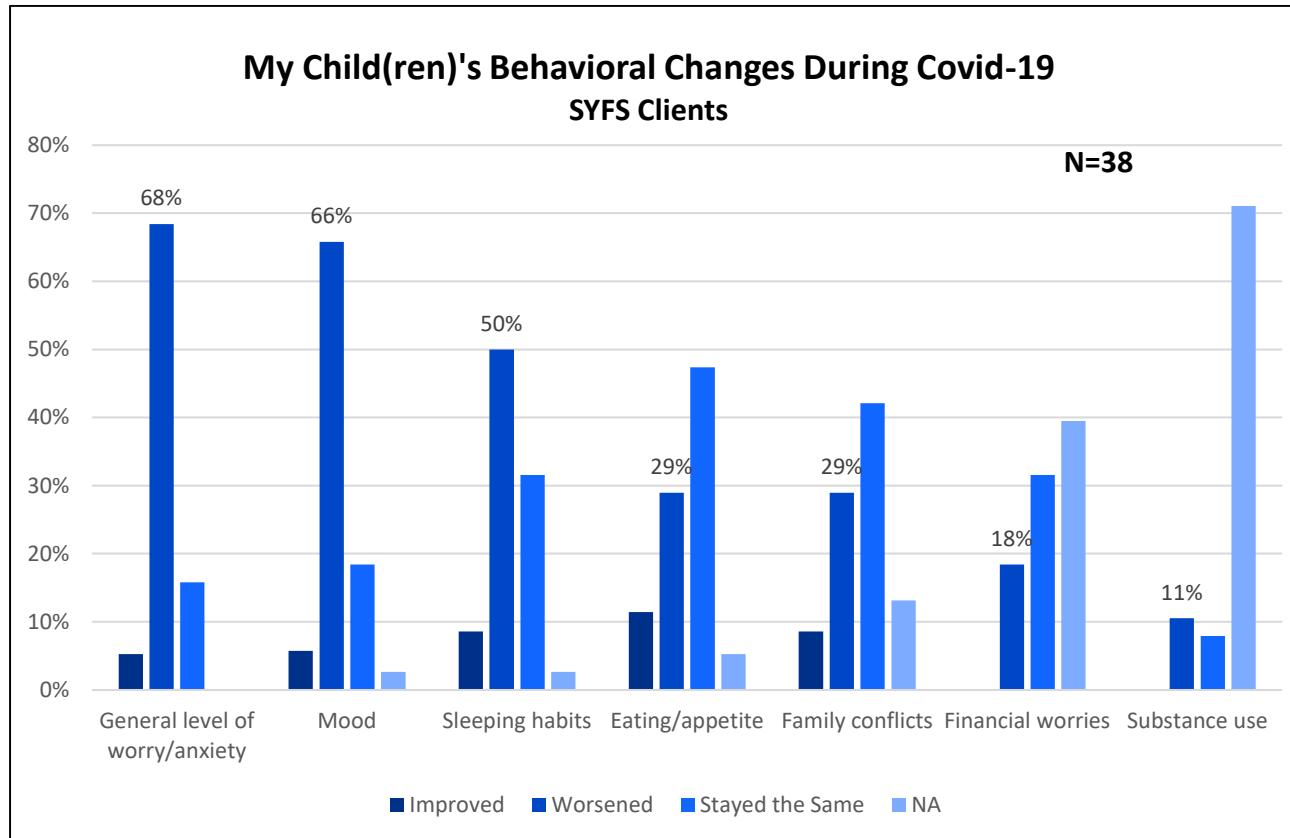
# NEARLY THREE QUARTERS OF SYFS CLIENTS REPORT THEIR OWN SLEEPING HABITS AND GENERAL WORRY GOT WORSE DURING COVID

- These rates are significantly higher than in the general population, where the worst change (worry and anxiety) topped out at 55% of respondents
- Family conflicts improved the most, but only for 14% of clients



# 68% OF CLIENTS NOTICED INCREASING WORRY AND ANXIETY IN THEIR CHILDREN AND 66% SAW MOOD CHANGES, A COMPARATIVELY HIGH RATE

- 50% reported that their child(ren)'s sleeping habits declined and 29% said that eating habits and family conflicts worsened
- 18% reported their children having financial worries and 11% reported their child's substance abuse worsening – both higher percentages than reported by all respondents or People of Color



# SURVEY RESULTS

## VERBATIMS



# MANY RESPONDENTS SHARED ADDITIONAL COMMENTS WITH SYFS

- *Reentry for kids back to school will be hard. I don't think school is prepared for that and they will push it back to parents. Parents are going to need support in this and need folks like you all at SYFS to recognize this....*
- *I would have utilized services for substance abuse for my son a few years ago. At that time it was really difficult to find help.*
- *It might be good to differentiate what SYFS offers seniors vs when the Senior Center is the appropriate dept/venue for them. Sometimes I don't know which to refer people to.*
- *For me, this agency is an inappropriate item to be funded by residents, to the extent you are funded that way.*
- *Uncertainty about school and the future of Massachusetts with COVID-19 has caused a lot of anxiety in our household.*
- *Not really highlighted in the survey but more emphasis on domestic abuse support seems appropriate. I also believe that the schools do NOT focus enough on problems between students... bullying, especially.*
- *We've been very isolated and alone during this pandemic. Our whole support system has collapsed and it's been a very rough year.*
- *I wish SYFS would redefine what "needy" is during the pandemic and consider the value of trying to help keep non-corporate/non-physician and single heads of household in town. I am a hardworking head of household with deep community involvement, but there is no room for me.*
- *I have 2 daughters ages 13 and 17. This time of pandemic has been catastrophic for us, very out of control. But thanks to the help of this institution I have been able to sustain the feeding of my daughters and some basic necessities for their return to school. Thanks.*



# FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



# FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS GARNERED QUALITATIVE DATA

- **FOCUS GROUPS – 7 groups were held over Zoom and facilitated by staff and planning committee members**
  - Mothers of young children
  - Mothers of young adults
  - Parents of middle and high school students
  - Algonquin High School students
  - Residents ages 65+
  - LGBTQ+ students (Trottier and Algonquin)
  - Diversity and inclusion (BIPOC residents)
- **INTERVIEWS – 21 key community stakeholders were interviewed over Zoom by staff and planning committee members**
  - Focus group and interview questions were the same and garnered qualitative information
  - A complete list of interview participants may be found beginning on p. 52



# SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

- **Covid has amplified existing issues by placing more strain on families, pushing some families into crisis**
  - Financial instability, behavioral and mental health crises, loneliness, disconnection, a “stunning” increase in mental health issues in kids
  - Kids and parents anxious about going back to school and work, interacting with people again
  - Parents worried about their children’s life skill and academic development
- **SYFS should increase both community outreach and prevention**
  - Some participants were unclear on the scope of services and most felt that SYFS could be much more visible by attending community events, holding community and school-based workshops/trainings, and working more closely with school, town departments, and other community groups
  - Prevention services were highlighted as important for both mental health and substance use as well as destigmatizing seeking help
- **It can be difficult to be different in Southborough for multiple reasons: race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, learning disabilities, gender/sexuality, no children in schools**
  - The town can feel exclusive, highly competitive, and judgmental of differences. Residents feel a lot of pressure to “keep up with the Joneses” and appear “perfect.”
  - Building a sense of community was the top suggestion on how to make the town more caring, including more events and gathering spaces that are free and open to the public, more affordable housing, and more appreciation of diversity

# FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW RESULTS

## RESULTS



# FOCUS GROUP RESULTS (1 OF 3)

## ■ Covid's Effect on the Family

- Isolation, lack of socialization, routines are totally upside down, significant mental health issues, people getting down on themselves, not getting out is making it much worse
- Siblings are together more and frustrated with each other, while only children have felt so isolated
- Kids and parents are anxious about going back to school and work every day, interacting with people again
- Parents are worried about life skill development - too much social media, too much constant information, deficits in conflict resolution and communication skills. "Covid is distorting everything."
- The loss of connection during Covid is bringing a new sense of appreciation for in-person connections

## ■ Mental Health Concerns

- Stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, eating disorders, suicide rates, PTSD, post-partum depression, wanting to feel like the community values you early on
- Stigma around accessing mental health services, people hide their challenges and hesitate to seek professional help. When try, mental health services are difficult to access for all ages, long wait lists.
- Parents are not aware how much their kids are struggling. Many kids are at a breaking point and not getting help because no one knows. They feel like they have to be perfect. Social anxiety is much worse since Covid.

## ■ Substance Abuse Concerns

- Drinking, marijuana use, edibles more popular, vaping has decreased but has been a big problem at Algonquin. Substance use seems to have gone down inside school or at least much less visible. Substance use is social, but use may be increasing in isolation.
- Harder for people to go out and get supported – not convenient to go to appointment without childcare
- Substance use is one poor coping strategy among many – unhealthy eating, virtual issues, YouTube/gaming addictions, lack of exercise can be just as harmful



# FOCUS GROUP RESULTS (2 OF 3)

## ▪ **What It's Like to be Different in Southborough – (only youth responded)**

- It can feel very isolating. It has taught many LGBTQ+ youth to be confident in who they are because it does not matter what anyone thinks. It is much more difficult when family isn't accepting. You learn quickly to stick to your own group (friends in the LGBT community and ally friends) and don't mingle with a lot of people.
- This community is so small if you don't feel like you fit in, you feel different, feel down on yourself, feel like you don't belong. If you feel isolated, you don't share/participate because you don't feel like others can relate to you or you to them.
- A lot of people feel the grass is greener for others, feeling this way is not helpful. Many undertones of racism, not overt but definitely there and insensitive, is a blind spot. Majority of students are white but learning one-sided history in class...is a shame since Algonquin is associated with a Native American tribe. Racism often comes out through humor, don't believe it is intended to be offensive or don't realize it's offensive, privilege creates that blind spot. Racism is normalized, haven't wanted to stand up for myself because I don't want to be seen/stand out.

## ▪ **How Southborough Could be More Welcoming**

- Be open to all and not "invitation only," organize multicultural fair, encourage affordable housing and be open to diversity, teach students histories of other cultures from an earlier age, be mindful of the language we use, can be offensive and harmful without even realizing it
- Call and email people before they contact you to see how they are doing, ask the families that you work with often to be ambassadors and contact others in need ("like contact tracing"), connect with the community under happy and positive circumstances (like at summer concerts - be visible, a lot of people are not on the internet), connect with people who are not in need to decrease stigma
- More visibility in schools and more education for families, teachers and youth, specifically education on understanding all genders and sexualities. Provide open and advertised meetings and trainings for everyone. Having more LGBTQ+ representation.



# FOCUS GROUP RESULTS (3 OF 3)

## ■ Other Local Resources

- Doctors, YFS (less stigma than going to the doctor), group counseling, churches (although most LGBTQ teens are not out at church), schools, library, fire, senior center, police, friends
- Don't feel guidance counselors are super helpful because they are too busy and there aren't enough of them; mental health is stigmatized at school so it is hard to genuinely connect with a guidance counselor. In an emergency we can count on the police. Many people are hesitant to look for help, are scared, or lack trust.

## ■ SYFS Collaboration – Current and Potential

- Existing collaboration - Conversation between NSPAC (504 & IEPs), parents, YFS, schools, school physician to define and close gap between all groups
- Police and Fire – continue with school program, public education, build on DARE program
- Integrate what we do in the schools more, create positive associations/relationships within the schools and the community, do more advertising in the schools, reach families with young children
- Stay connected to other town departments that serve residents, ads targeting specific populations and in town buildings, provide volunteer opportunities
- Go to 10<sup>th</sup> grade health classes to meet students and talk to them about how and where to reach out and what to look for/take care of your mental health. Raise awareness with HS students so they can build relationships directly with SFYS, share more information, and increase comfort with utilizing the services.

## ■ How Improve Access to SYFS

- Get information directly to the youth. If kids knew they could access help, they would reach out on their own.
- Share testimonials on our website for people we have helped. A personal connection is very important. Students worry that what they say to a support person in school could be held against them.
- Create comprehensive listing of all resources and what they mean - need to market this better
- Look to regional group options and utilizing more volunteers



# INTERVIEW RESULTS (1 OF 3)

## ■ Purpose of SYFS

- Most interviewees could describe at least some aspects of SYFS' purpose, but few knew the full gamut of services offered. A town employee thought it was just for families with financial need until he started working with SYFS.

## ■ Recommendations for SYFS

- The biggest themes, as in the focus groups, were outreach and prevention. Participants thought SYFS should be more pro-active about both of these challenges.
- Increase knowledge and ability to leverage external programs and services so can increase support for residents. Don't try to do everything within the department.
- Need a confidential system for linking Police and Fire calls with SFYS mental health support and referrals
- Offer more prevention and education, incl. social/emotional wellness, anti-bullying, anti-racism topics, kindness and community building programs. Support needed for parents, seniors, singles, teens.
- Work even more closely with the schools, including expanding on health curriculum/proactive programs with school nurses/PE teachers, improving connections and awareness around SYFS and external programs, offer more clinical support in schools

## ■ Biggest community stressors

- Pandemic has amplified existing issues: financial, behavioral and mental health, loneliness, disconnection
- Academic pressure and anxiety among kids. Fast-paced, achievement lifestyle. People are proud and private and hide the pressure well.
- Pressure to "keep up with the Joneses" – it's hard for families without the means to feel they fit in. Also hard for those of different races, sexual orientations, or those with learning disabilities.
- Transportation is very difficult without a car



# INTERVIEW RESULTS (2 OF 3)

## ■ Covid's Effect on the Family

- Schools have lost their connections with kids, being another set of eyes on their mental health. From that, [clinicians are seeing] a stunning increase in mental health needs in kids. Many kids were on the edge before the pandemic--had the potential to suffer from anxiety, depression, eating disorders, etc.--but the pandemic has been the stressor that pushed them over the edge.
- Has hit some families extremely hard leading to food insecurity, housing insecurity, job losses, health concerns, etc.
- A lot of pressure on the family unit, work/life imbalance, concern about students' education (or lack thereof)
- A special challenge for town employees, taking care of residents as well as their own families

## ■ Mental Health Concerns

- Low morale, anxiety, sadness and depression, anger, loneliness, feeling trapped and loss of control
- Stigma against admitting one needs help and getting it

## ■ Substance Abuse Concerns

- Increasing alcohol and marijuana use, leading to increasing calls to Fire Department
- A LOT of drinking at the high school and "more drugs than we know about or acknowledge." The two towns blame each other. There are a number of stories of kids using in their homes under their parents' watch, parents having "supervised" drinking parties. One of these parties led to an ER visit for alcohol overdose.
- School system treats vaping as a disciplinary action rather than an addiction
- There have been deaths in town related to opioids



# INTERVIEW RESULTS (3 OF 3)

## ■ What It's Like to Be Different in Southborough

- Can be hard here for people who have many kinds of differences: race, ethnicity, gender, income status, adults without children, seniors. It is hard to connect to the community if you don't have kids in the schools.
- It's hard to live here if you're different, you "feel like an outcast." Everyone is expected to do well here, and there's an impression that everyone is fine.
- Equity is a major conversation in the schools. There are members in our community who do not feel part of our school system, this is evidenced in conversations about George Floyd and the Asian American population.
- There is a divide amongst parents who are following the rules related to the pandemic and those who are not. This is the first scenario where activities/actions taken outside of the home may have a direct impact on others within the school system.
- Exclusion happens when people are not invited to certain social gatherings and often because they don't fit a certain socio-economic profile. When a person is invited, there is a lot of competition. There is lots of talk within the community about being inclusive but in actuality it is a judgmental environment for many.

## ■ How Southborough Could Be More Caring

- Building a sense of community was the #1 theme. Find ways to bring people together more often for fun and for things like thoughtful discussions.
- Community events and meeting places that are free and open to the public, small community events
- Welcoming kits for new homeowners, cultural celebrations
- Education on implicit bias, diversity hiring plan for town



# STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (1 OF 2)

Name	Title	Organization
1. Steve Achilles	Fire Chief	Town of Southborough
2. Micah Adams	Director	Family Success Partnership
3. Marie Alan	Director, Student Support Services	Southborough School Dept.
4. Lisa Braccio	Selectman	Town of Southborough
5. Leslie Chamberlin	Nurse	Board of Health/Senior Center
6. Kathy Cook	Founder	Friends of the Southborough YC
7. Tim Davis	Director of Recreation	Town of Southborough
8. Kevin Fruwirth	School Resource Officer	Algonquin Regional HS
9. Vanessa Hale	Assistant Town Administrator	Town of Southborough
10. Gretchen Hartnett	Co-Director	Southborough Village Preschool
11. Kim Ivers	Assistant Director/Children's Librarian	Southborough Library

# STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS (2 OF 2)

Name	Title	Organization
12. Pam Lefrancois	Director	Senior Center
13. Greg Martineau	Superintendent	Northborough/Southborough School Department
14. Safdar Medina	Physician, Resident	Southborough School Dept.
15. Ken Paulhus	Chief of Police	Town of Southborough
16. Mark Purple	Town Administrator	Town of Southborough
17. Leah Selleck	Senior Library Assistant	Southborough Library
18. Marianna Sorenson	Library Associate	Southborough Library
19. Sam Stivers	Selectman	Town of Southborough
20. Lynne Trombley	Executive Director	Northborough/Southborough Housing Authority
21. Young adult	Resident, 19 years	NA

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