

2019 Survey Results

scf
stark community foundation

STRENGTHENING
STARK
A Call for Economic
TRANSFORMATION

THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS EST.1913
RESEARCH • ANALYSIS • ACTION

THINK**BIG** Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

THINK**BIG** Highlights..... 2

THINK**BIG** People..... 3

THINK**BIG** Conversation..... 7

THINK**BIG** Perceptions of Community..... 8

THINK**BIG** Thoughts about the Future..... 10

THINK**BIG** Action Steps..... 11

THINK**BIG** High School Conversations..... 13

Introduction

THINK**BIG** brought hundreds of Stark County residents together to engage in conversation about the pressing topics in the community. On one day, October 25th 2019, more than 1,000 people gathered with friends, neighbors, family and new acquaintances in high schools, libraries, colleges and universities, restaurants, churches and businesses to discuss a specific topic of their choosing. With 14 topics to choose from, attendees were able to engage in meaningful dialogue about at least one community issue. Following the conversation, attendees were asked to complete a short survey about their experience. There were 757 completed surveys; 490 of them were full surveys from attendees and 267 were a shorter version of the survey completed by high school students.

Based on the survey results, Stark County residents appear to have a guarded optimism about the future of their community. *Hope, potential, promising* and *possible* were all words used to describe Stark County's future alongside *tentative*, *unsteady* and *questionable*. Many expressed concerns about keeping young adults engaged in their community following high school or college graduation and attracting new residents. Employment, job opportunities and wages were on the minds of all residents, including current high school students.

Drug and alcohol addiction worry many of the residents. This was the top ranked concern among all attendees, regardless of conversation topic.

Stark County residents are creative with solutions and are ready to act. THINK**BIG** attendees have a seemingly endless ability to craft innovative solutions to the issues they see facing their communities. The vast majority plan to take some action following the conversation. Every small group came up with ideas related to their topic, identified associated actions and named potential players.

A unique list of players was generated based on conversation topic. In addition, a number of organizations or categories were repeated in nearly all conversations including nonprofits, foundations, social service agencies, colleges and universities, schools, churches, businesses and local government. The residents of Stark County expect all sectors of the community to put ideas into actions in an effort to lead them into a productive, prosperous, engaged and equitable community.

THINK**BIG** Highlights

Over **1,000** people

170 conversations

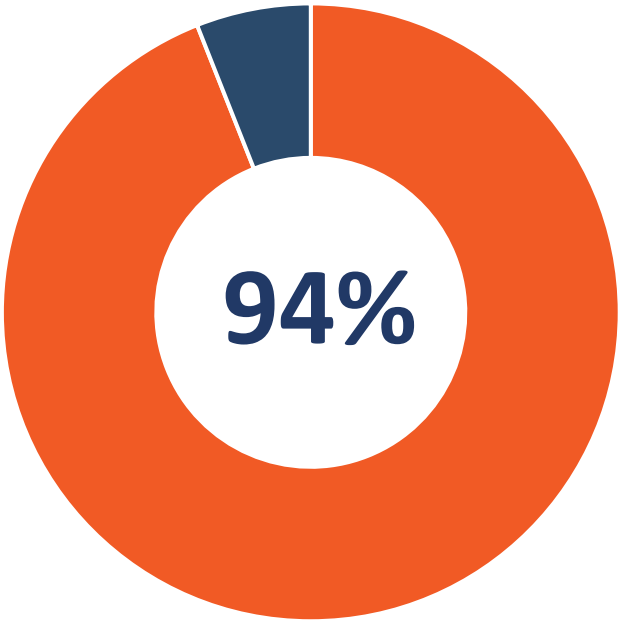
757 surveys

14 topic areas

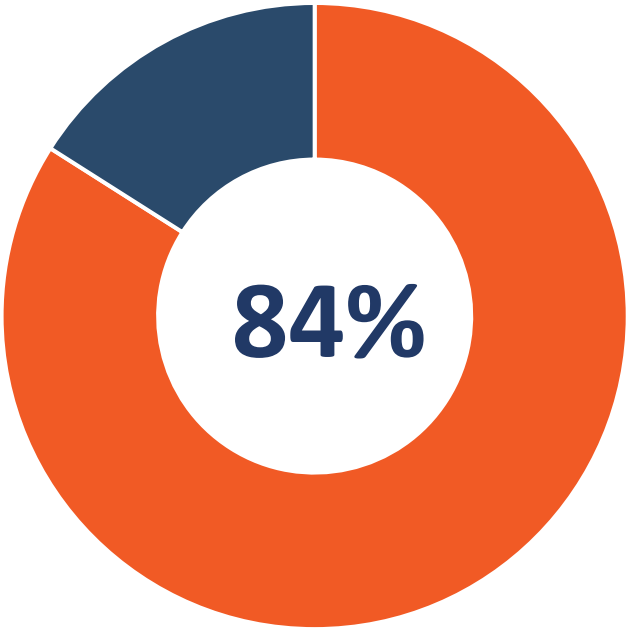
- Arts & Culture
- Childcare
- Community Improvement
- Drugs & Alcohol Addiction
- Education
- Employment & Entrepreneurship
- Entertainment & Recreation
- Environment & Public Space
- Food
- Healthcare & Medicine
- Housing
- Inclusion
- Mental Health
- Transportation

THINK**BIG** *People*

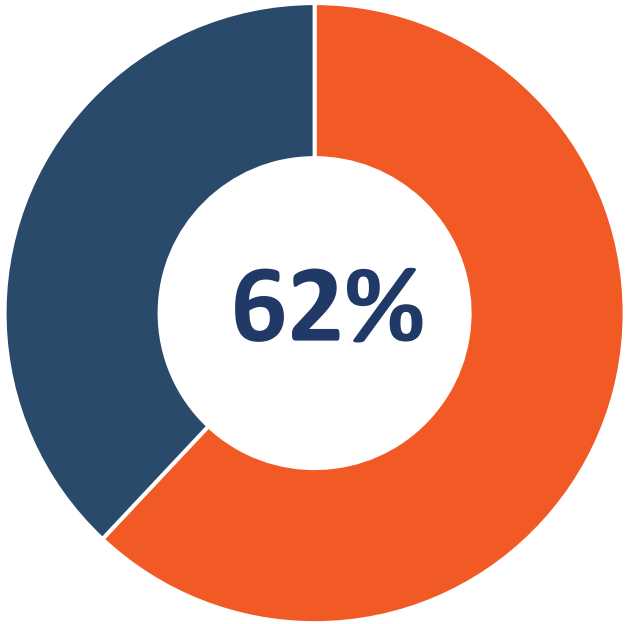
*THINK**BIG** participants are optimistic.*



believe people who live in the community can have an impact on making it better.

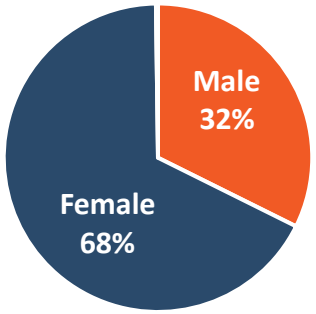


are involved in their communities.



want to help create a positive change in their community.

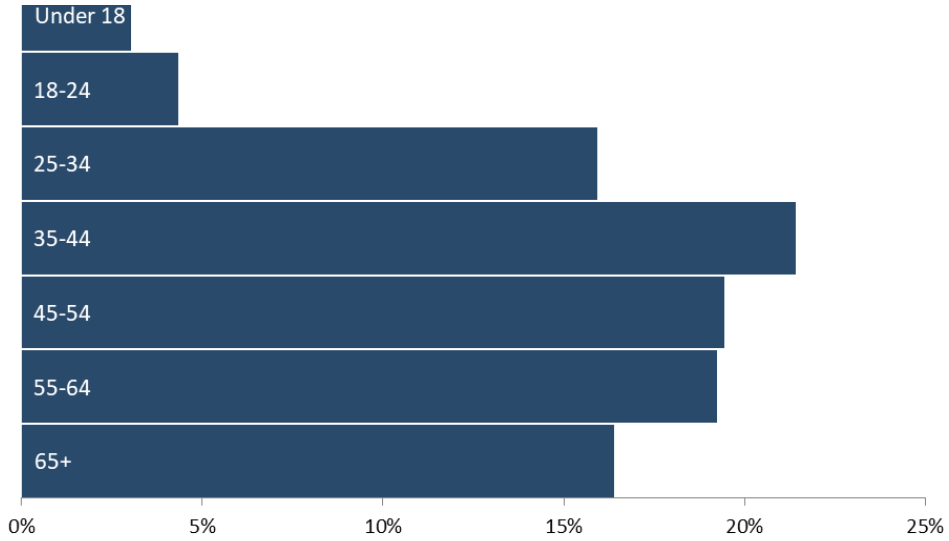
More than 1,000 people participated in THINK**BIG** *conversations in October 2019.*



Over two thirds of THINK**BIG** participants identified their gender as female, one third identified as male and one attendee identified themselves as a gender identity other than male or female. Two out of three participants indicated they did not have children under 18 living in the home.



Age of THINK**BIG** Participants



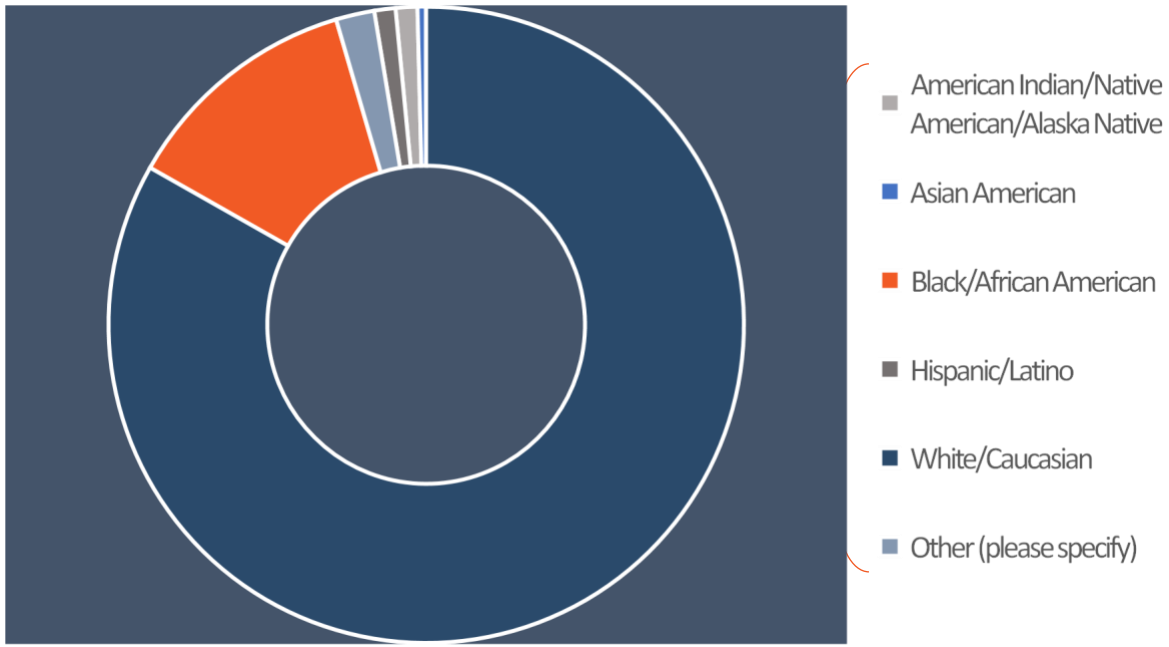
People of all ages gathered for THINK**BIG** conversations.

Most THINK**BIG** participants can be considered middle age, with the most common age group being 35 to 44. Just over 15% of attendees are older than 65.

Many of those who participated in the THINK**BIG** conversations are long-time residents of Stark County. Two thirds of those who participated have lived in Stark County for more than 20 years.

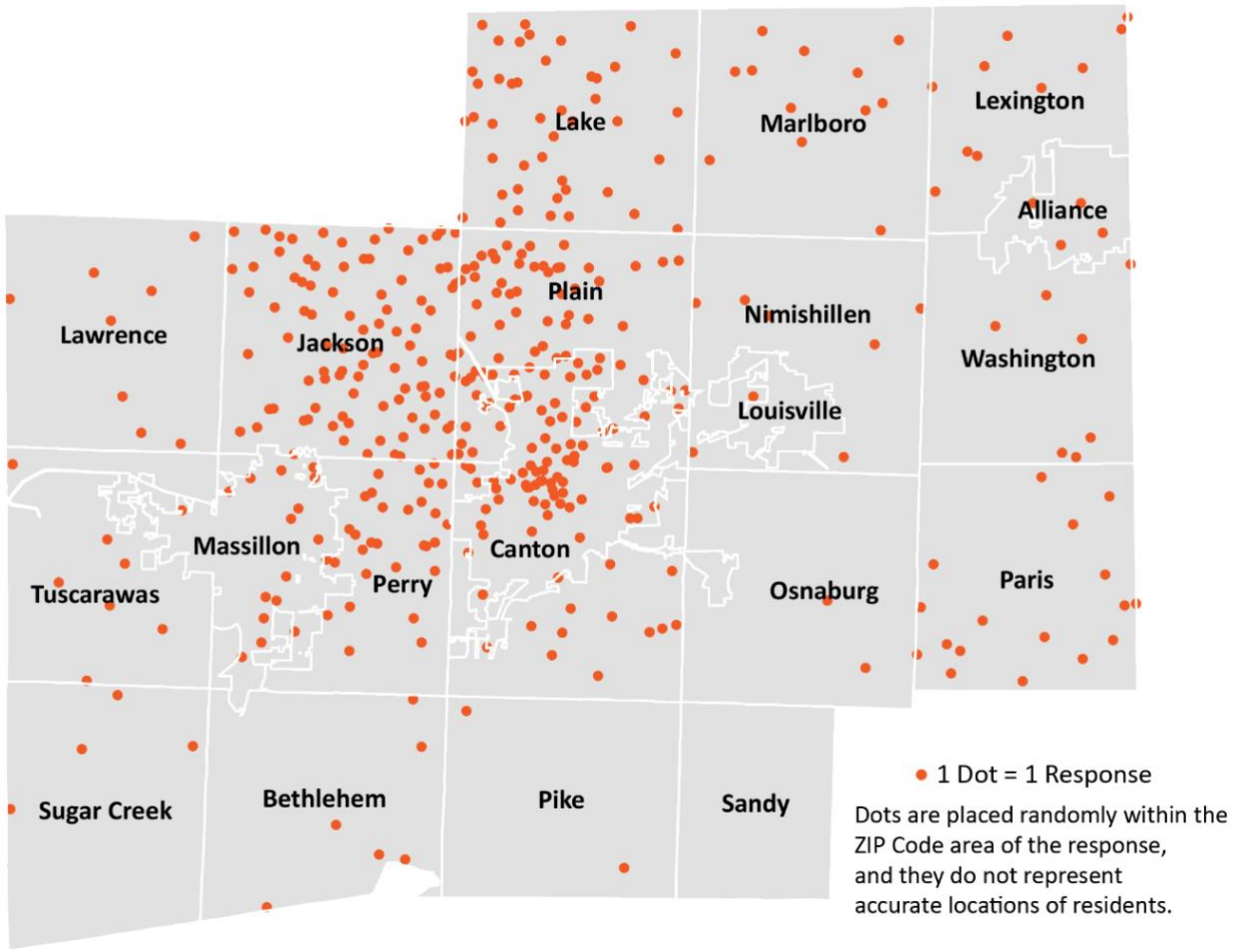
THINK**BIG** participants reflect the diversity of the community.

Over 80% of THINK**BIG** attendees identified as White/Caucasian and 12% indicated their race as Black/African American. Those who selected the Other category described themselves by providing a written response of multiracial, American Indian/White and American Indian/Black.



*People came from every corner of the county to participate in THINK**BIG.***

Where do people who attended THINK**BIG** live?



THINK**BIG** *Conversation*

*THINK**BIG** participants used positive words to describe their conversations.*

98% of those participating in conversations said they felt heard

96% learned about important issues in their community

93% left with a better understanding of how to take action in their community

78% plan to continue the conversation

What one word would you use to describe your conversation?



Each THINK**BIG** conversation had a set topic. The conversation topics with the most participants were Employment & Entrepreneurship, Community Improvement and Inclusion.

THINK**BIG** attendees ranked the top issues in the community that needed to be addressed. Drug & Alcohol Addiction, Employment & Entrepreneurship, Education, Community Improvement, Mental Health and Housing topped the lists of what the community believes needs attention.

THINK**BIG** *Perceptions of Community*

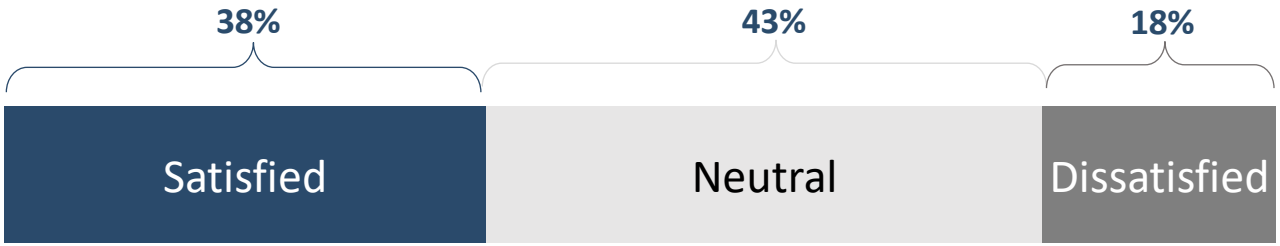
*Those who attended THINK**BIG** see potential in their community.*

What one word would you use to describe Stark County?



4 out of 5 attendees of THINK**BIG** believe that Stark County has a strong sense of community. When asked to give one word to describe their community, the words chosen indicate a sense that Stark County is poised to embark on new initiatives that will bolster the community.

Although more attendees reported being satisfied than dissatisfied with the current state of their community, many are neutral.



Top Five Strengths of the Community

1. The People and Community
2. Collaboration and Partnerships
3. Community Engagement
4. Resources
5. Cost of Living and Higher Education (tie)

The People and Community
When asked to list the strengths of their community, attendees focused on caring people and the tight-knit community as assets.

Collaboration and Partnerships
Collaboration and partnerships among community organizations, public education and higher education were also seen as a strength.

Community Engagement
Many participants lauded the service-oriented nature of residents, their awareness of needs and willingness to address needs.

Resources
Funding, neighborhood associations, specific service organizations and resources in general are seen as valuable aspects of the community.

Cost of Living
Multiple attendees pointed to the cost of living, which is lower than the national average, as a strength of the community.

Higher Education
Colleges and universities located within Stark County bring valuable contributions to the community beyond their institution's four walls.

Top Five Threats to the Community

1. Declining Population
2. Poverty
3. Addiction
4. Workforce Development
5. Bias, Discrimination and Racism

Declining Population
THINK**BIG** participants repeatedly showed concern for a declining population in Stark County, with a particular concern that young families and college educated young adults do not want to stay.

Poverty
Poverty, low wages and resulting low incomes are also seen by many as a threat to the wellness of the community.

Addiction
Addiction to drugs and alcohol worry those in the community who have concerns about the ease of access to substances that can be abused.

Workforce Development
Within the broader category of workforce development, low paying jobs, difficulty finding good employees, shortages in nursing and trade fields and lack of connection between potential employees and employers were identified as threats.

Bias, Discrimination and Racism
Segregation, inequity, social disparity, racism, lack of inclusion and discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation are seen as challenges to Stark County.

Top Five Needs of the Community

1. Housing
2. Transportation
3. Employment
4. Education
5. Communication

Housing
Housing, in all forms, was identified as a need in Stark County. Low cost housing, moderately priced homes, high-end new development, assistance in homebuying, rental mediation, eviction prevention and solutions for homelessness are on the minds of residents.

Transportation
Similarly, transportation came up as a need for employment, those with disabilities, youth and health services. More public transit and more affordable transportation options are needed. Infrastructure related to transportation such as parking and roads also were identified as needs.

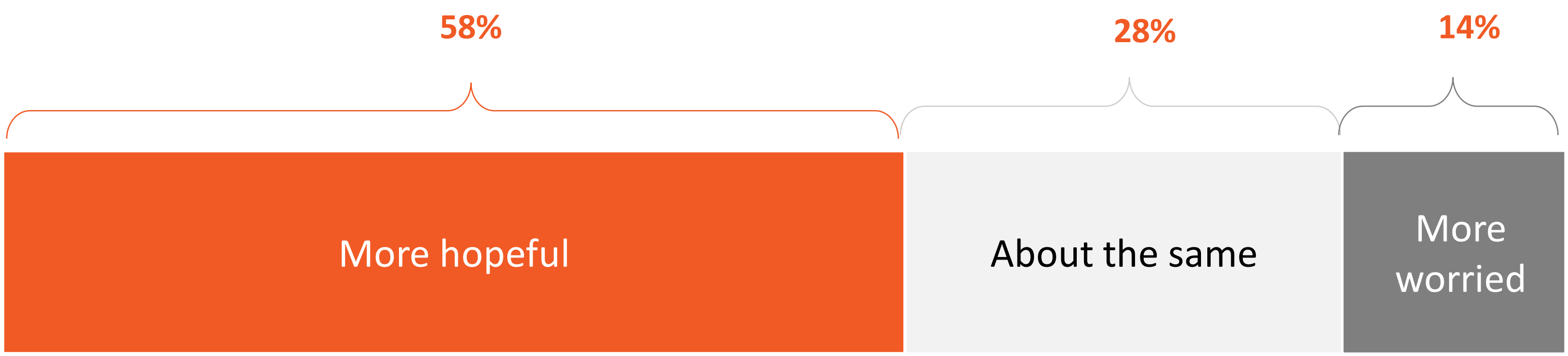
Employment
Higher paying jobs with training and career opportunities are desired by the community.

Education
K-12 and higher education are seen as an area of need within Stark County.

Communication
Residents would like to see more communication and information about their community and feel they are being listened to by decision makers.

THINK**BIG** *Thoughts about the Future*

*The majority of THINK**BIG** participants feel hopeful about what the future holds for the community in the next five years.*



When asked for just one word to describe the future of their community, THINK**BIG** attendees largely chose words that convey a sense of optimism. *Hope*, *bright*, *potential* and *promising* were the most commonly selected words. Other word choices portrayed a sense of uncertainty about where the community is heading. Words like *uncertain*, *iffy*, *concerned* and *struggling* indicate a concern for difficult times ahead for the county. Words chosen like *possible*, *opportunity*, *malleable* and *fragile* indicate some level of optimism paired with a wariness of what the coming years will bring.

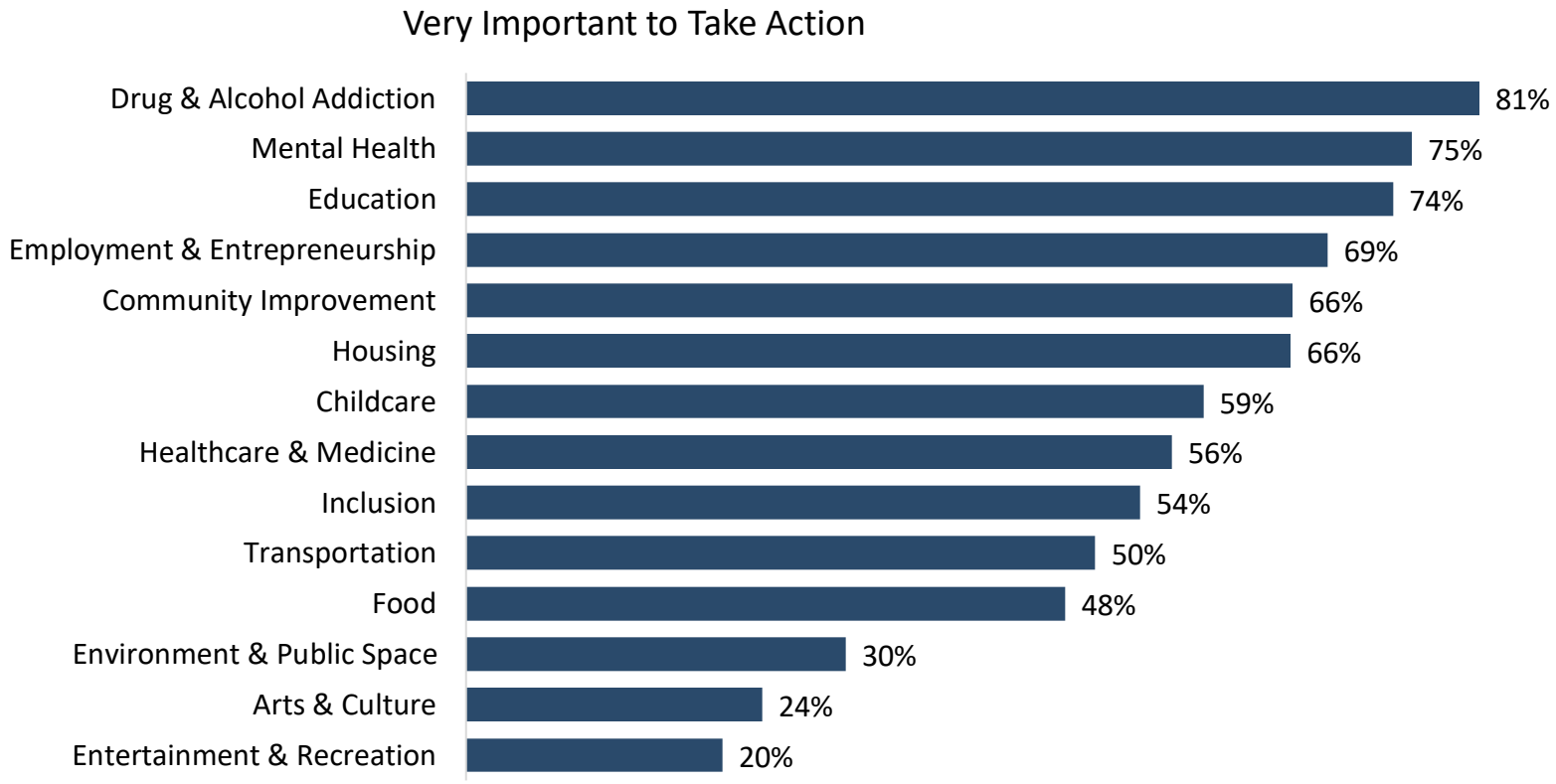
What one word would you use to describe Stark County?



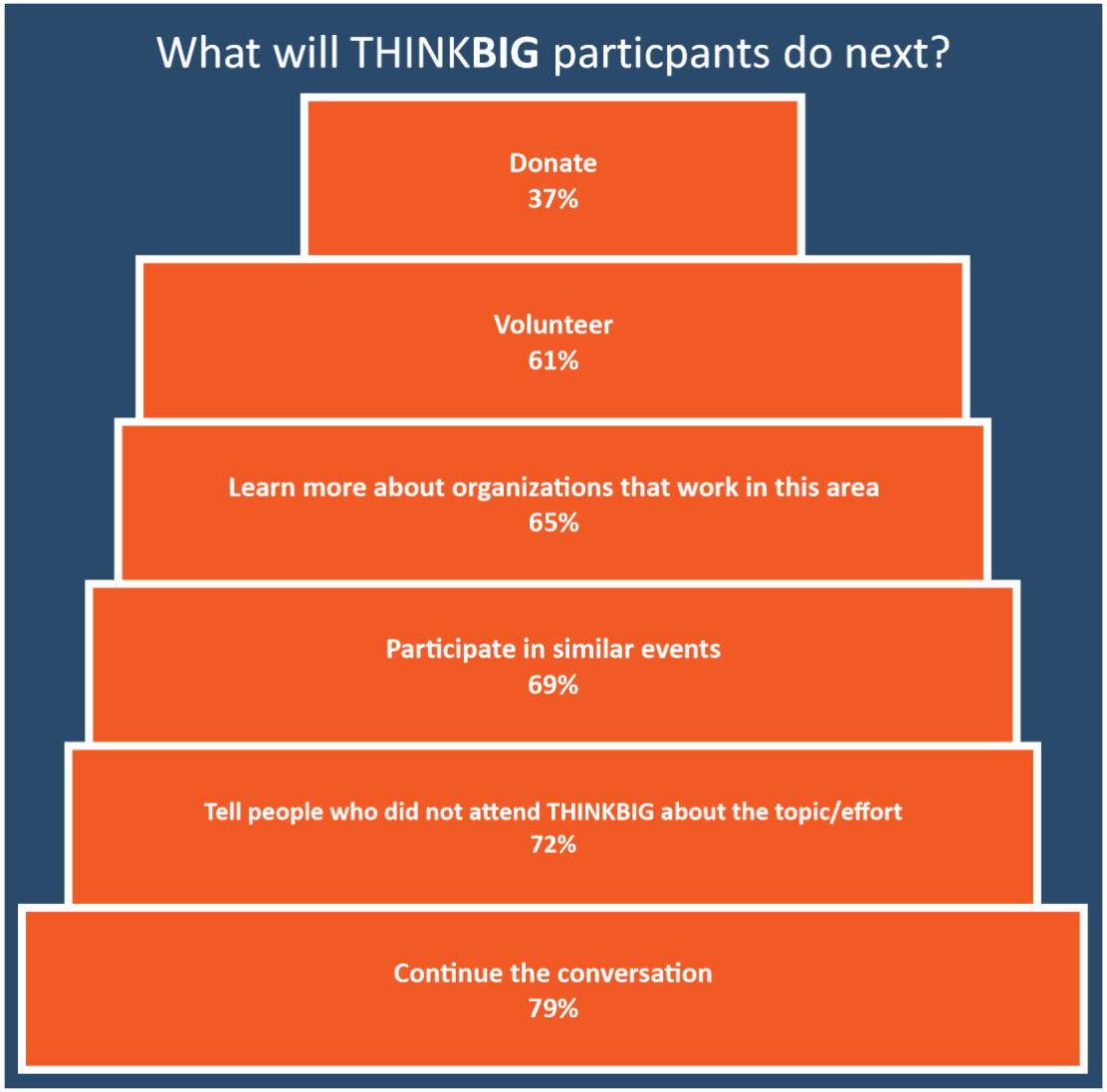
THINK**BIG** *Action Steps*

*THINK**BIG** participants are ready to act.*

Attendees were asked how important, or not, it was for the community to act on each of the conversation topics presented through THINK**BIG**. The topics the attendees deemed the most urgent were Drug & Alcohol Addiction, Mental Health and Education. The community is least concerned with acting on issues related to Entertainment & Recreation, Arts & Culture and Environment & Public Space.



Most of the attendees of THINK**BIG** intend to take some action in the next few months. The most common action is to continue the conversation. Nearly 80% of attendees are planning to do so. Many plan to tell those not in attendance about the topics, ideas and solutions discussed during THINK**BIG** as a way to increase community awareness of important issues. 69% are interested in participating in similar events and a similar number would like to learn more about organizations that work in the topic area they discussed. Many are interested in volunteering, and just over a third of attendees plan to make personal donations as a way to have an impact on the community.



THINK**BIG** *High School Conversations*

*High school THINK**BIG** participants are ready to have a voice in their community*

267 students completed surveys following THINK**BIG** conversations held at their high schools. The two most common topics discussed were Community Improvement and Mental Health. Childcare and Transportation were not the chosen topics of any high school conversations.

Conversation Topic	Number of Students
Mental Health	77
Community Improvement	66
Education	22
Entertainment & Recreation	16
Drug & Alcohol Addiction	15
Inclusion	13
Employment & Entrepreneurship	10
Food	8
Environment & Public Space	5
Arts & Culture	2
Healthcare & Medicine	2
Housing	2
Did not answer	29

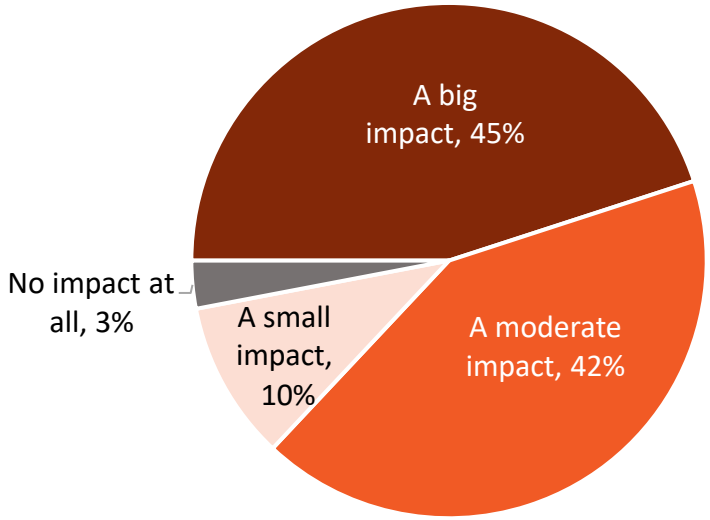
- High school students in Stark County repeatedly suggested that the community needs "***more things for them to do."*** They would like to see more affordable entertainment and recreation options. Many mentioned an interest in seeing additional restaurants, particularly fast food, in their community.
- Another common theme is the idea of "***bringing the community together."*** Students would like to see more cultural, arts or sports-focused events that are targeted to all members of the community.
- A number of students outlined the need for changes in many aspects around the topic of ***mental health.*** One suggestion was to reduce the stress and pressures placed on students to achieve in the classroom and on the athletic field. Other suggestions centered on reducing the stigma of mental illness within the schools, and providing a pathway within the schools for students to explore their mental health needs.
- Stark County high school students would like to see more youth have a voice in community issues, particularly as it relates to ***equity and diversity.*** Students mentioned a need for all school districts to offer the same opportunities to students. They would like to see diversity promoted within educational institutions and incorporated into the curriculum.
- It is no surprise that high school students are ***thinking about their future***. A number of comments placed value on the connections they currently have in the community, and also pointed out that "you can always come back" if you move after graduation.
- Students are also interested in having improved ***job opportunities with good wages*** – presently and in the future – as they are thinking about staying in the community post-graduation.

What one word would you use to describe your conversation?



Students largely felt positive about their experiences participating in the conversations. The most common words students used to describe the conversations they had were *interesting*, *help*, *enlightening*, *productive* and *informal*.

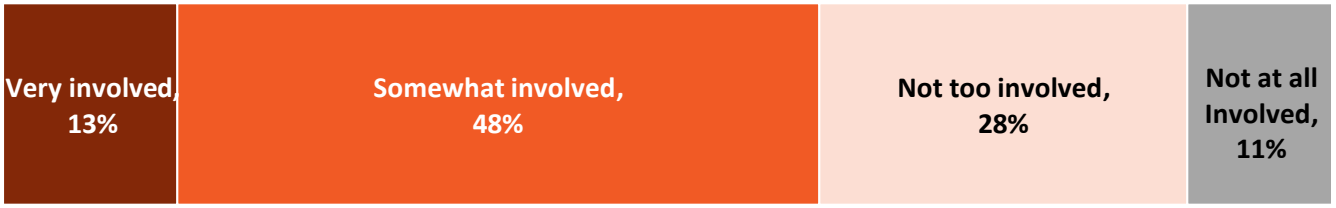
How much impact do you think people who live in the community can have on making Stark County a better place to live?



High school students largely believe that people living in the community can make Stark County a better place to live.

Most students said they were at least somewhat involved in their community.

"How involved are you in community and neighborhood activities where you live?"



When asked to describe Stark County, the most common word used was *boring*. This sentiment was reflected in actionable solutions listed from the conversations. Many have ideas about how to make their community less boring. Commonly listed words also included *connected*, *home*, *close* and *together* indicating students do feel a sense of community with each other and within their community.

What one word would you use to describe Stark County?

