

Innovating Youth Enrichment During the COVID Crisis

How Summer Camps and Mentorship Programs Can Adapt and Improve During the Coronavirus Pandemic

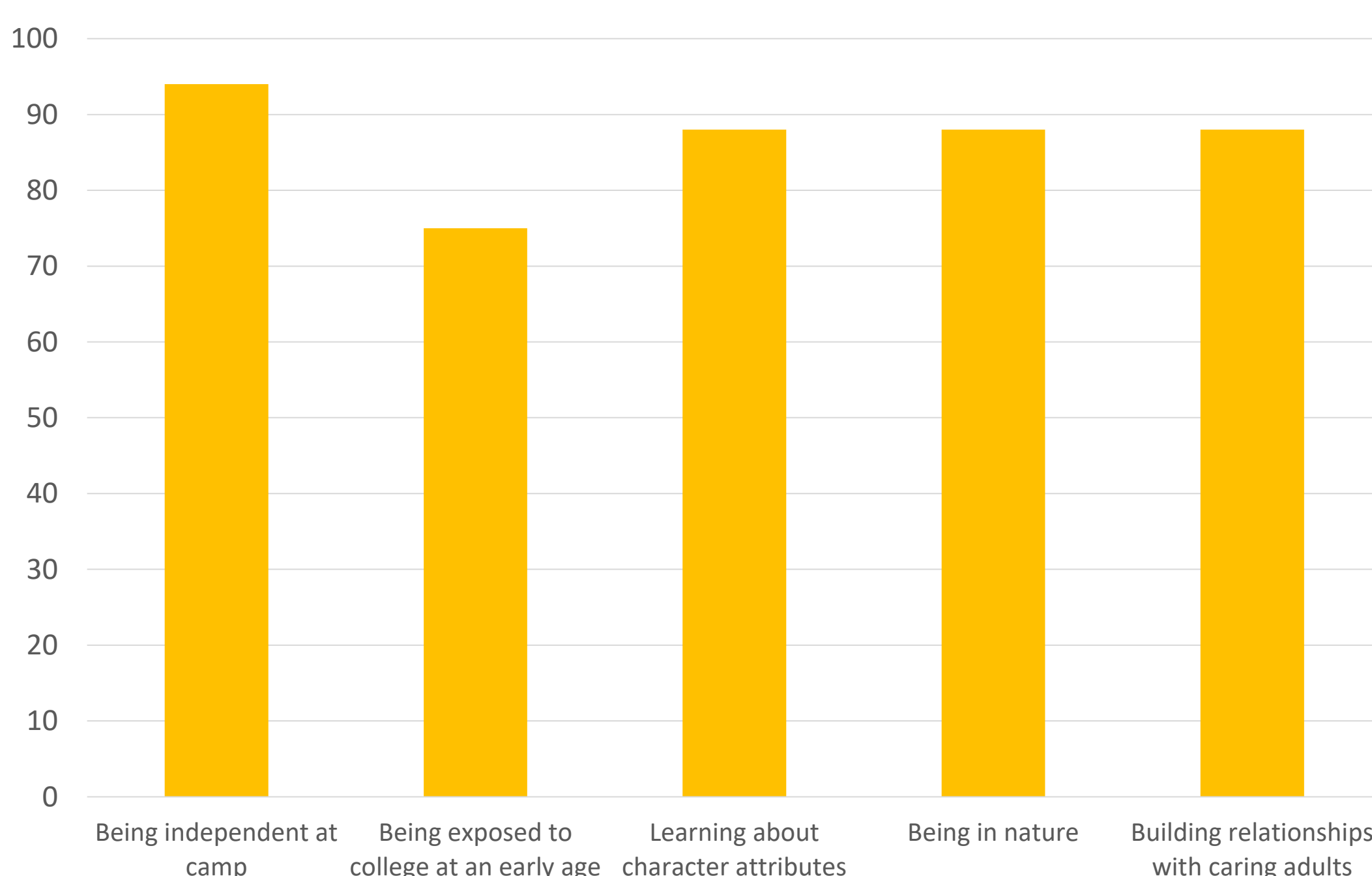
Background

Amidst the coronavirus pandemic, 26 states have prevented overnight summer camps and youth mentorship programs from operating in person due to health and safety concerns. This has created a host of issues for these organizations, including increased difficulty in receiving funding, and fears of lower participation rates in the future. In order to combat this, Fiver's Children Organization, a nonprofit operating out of New York City, has adapted its annual summer camp to transition to a completely virtual platform. It has been incredibly successful so far at engaging participants and creating many of the same benefits that in-person camp sessions show, offering a glimpse into how summer camps and youth enrichment programs across the country can evolve to meet the long-lasting changes that will come from the COVID-19 crisis.

What is Fiver?

Fiver Children's Foundation (Fiver) is a nonprofit dedicated to helping and guiding students from 3rd to 12th grade who come from underserved communities in New York City and Central New York. While they focus on career and college readiness once students reach high school, they also emphasize social and emotional learning and developing beneficial character traits (see graph below) in accordance with positive youth development theory. The year-round events and guidance they offer usually culminate in a two week camp every summer, Camp Fiver. Campers are able to garner independence while learning about the environment, gaining self-confidence, and finding new interests. However, due to NY state health guidelines, Fiver has had to move their camp to a digital platform to ensure students receive the same developmental benefits as before while staying safe.

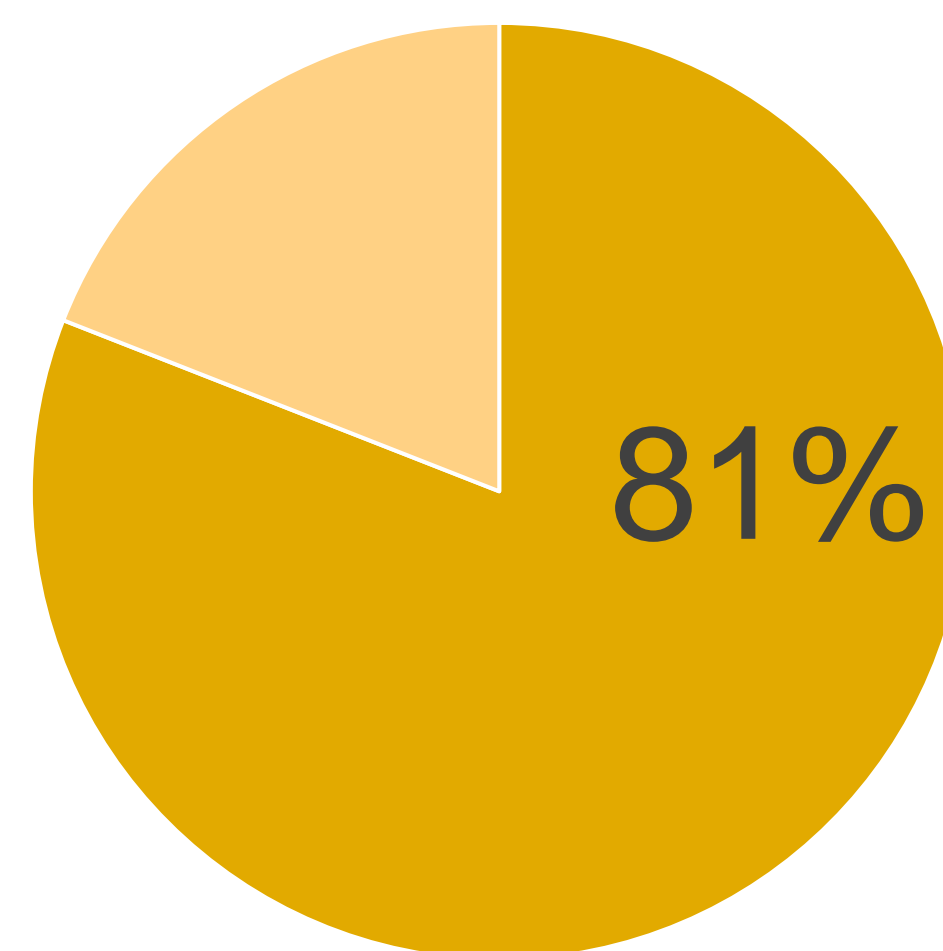
Percentage of Campers Who Rated These Components of Camp Fiver at an 8/10 or Higher



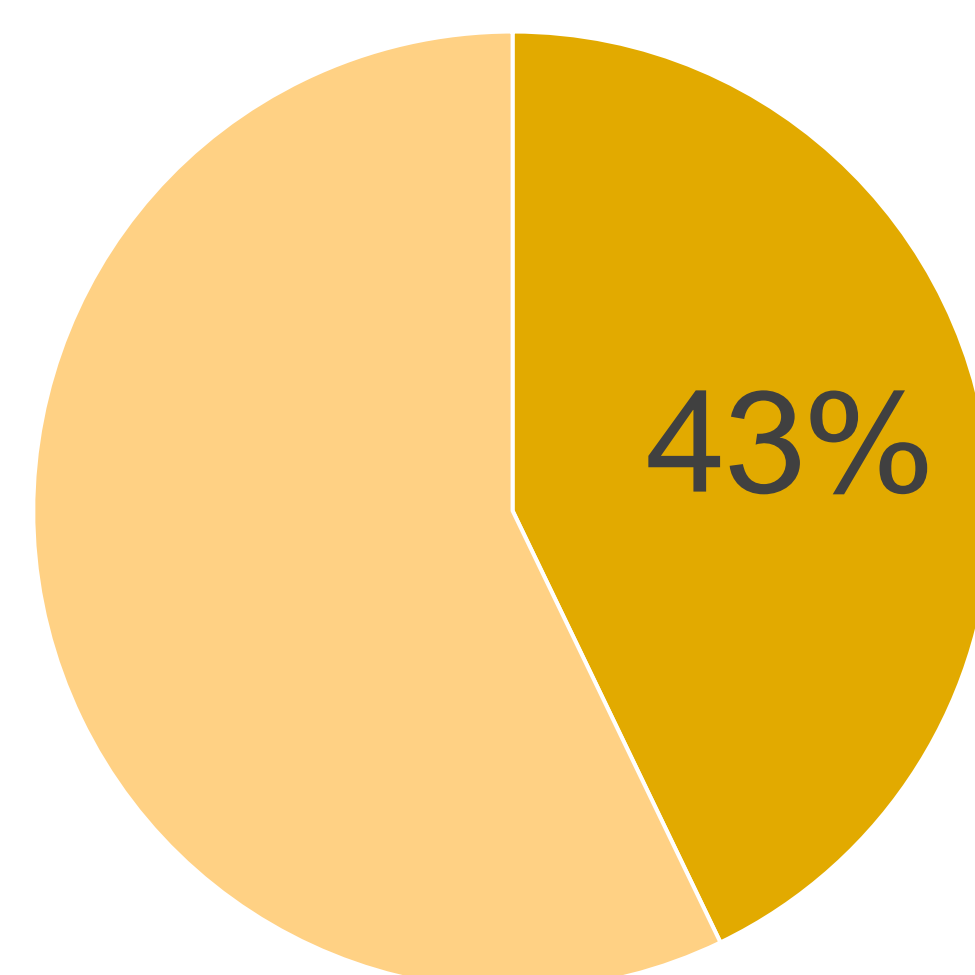
Make Like a Plant and Grow

It goes without saying how impactful COVID-19 has been for families across the country, and the effects on children are only beginning to be known. Now more than ever it is crucial for young people to be able to connect with peers, experience new things, and keep mentally and physically active in a safe way. By adapting to the uncertain times of today, summer camps and youth enrichment programs can be better equipped to handle adversity in the future and improve on their regular programming. With increased access to technology and ability for organizations to reach a large audience at an affordable price, a shift to a partially virtual curriculum could help these programs thrive today and in the future. Such changes may include:

- Offering sessions to reconnect with fellow campers/participants and staff virtually throughout the year
- Hosting virtual classes to learn new skills or try new activities
- Bringing in participants from a wider range to virtual activities
- Hosting camp sessions virtually throughout the year when camps traditionally would not be held, such as winter breaks, long weekends, or single day camps



81% of Camp WiFiver participants said they wanted virtual cabin meetings throughout the year to reconnect with peers



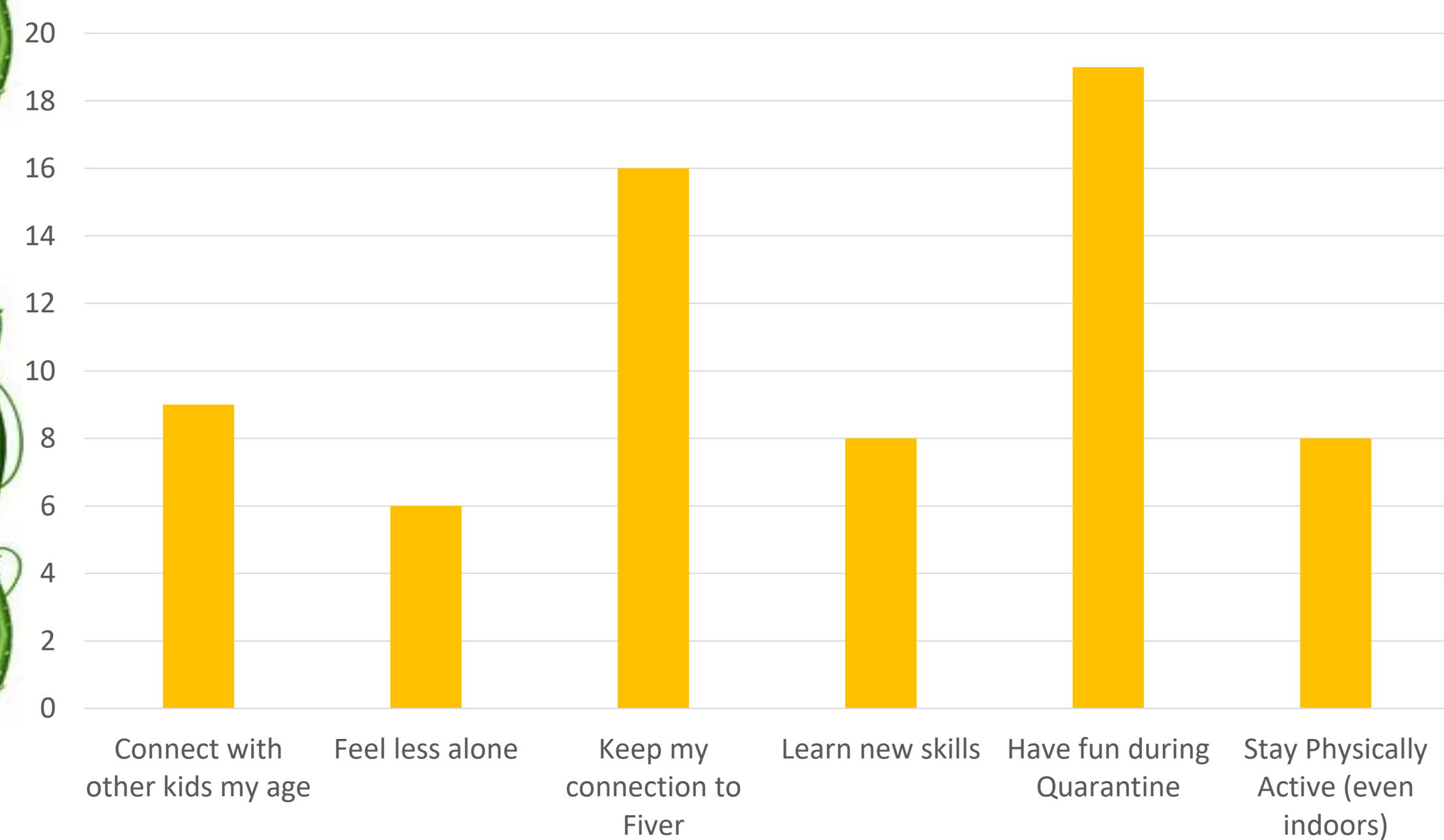
43% of Camp WiFiver participants said they wanted "virtual adventure learning classes" throughout the year

What Works

A few key aspects of Camp WiFiver's virtual sessions have shown to be especially important in creating an effective and enjoyable learning environment. These ideas would be critical to the success of future camps or mentorship programs that want to begin online initiatives and show the advantages of these virtual programs.

- Emphasis on face to face interaction with peers and counselors
- Incentivized participation
- Ample physical activity in the curriculum
- Established relationships between participants and organization
- Consistent sense of identity between in-person and virtual programs

What Participants Say Camp WiFiver Helped Them Do



Anticipated Difficulties

The switch to virtual programming has proven challenging in some areas for this summer, but with time and careful planning these difficulties can be overcome. Some of what can be expected is:

- Not all participants having access to technology at all times
 - ❖ ~3% of Fiver participants did not have access to technology necessary to attend Camp WiFiver and an additional 9% only had access at certain times throughout the day
- Investing in technology to run virtual programming efficiently and solve inevitable technical problems
- Deciding how much content is necessary to maintain engagement
 - Adapting in-person activities to be engaging virtually
 - Retraining staff to operate virtual classes in an effective way

