



The Impact of Ramah Programs for Children, Teens, and Young Adults with Disabilities

A Strategic Planning Survey of Special Needs Education Professionals,
Ramah Special Needs Staff, Staff Alumni and Parents

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Major Findings

- Ramah special needs programs enjoy a stellar reputation among the professionals, parents, and staff alumni who responded to the strategic planning survey
 - Over 90% of all groups surveyed would strongly recommend sending a child to a Ramah special needs program
 - Ninety percent of parents who are familiar with other camps regard Ramah as providing better programming in comparison to other camp programs
 - Three-quarters of professionals regard Ramah as a pioneer in the field and as continuing to set industry standards
 - Parents hold Ramah staff in high esteem
 - Three-quarters cite the expertise of Ramah staff as the reason they send their child to a Ramah special needs program
 - Ninety-seven percent describe counselors as hardworking, 95% as loving, and 83% as selfless
- Jewish education for children with disabilities is a struggle. Seventy-nine percent state: "Due to my child's disability/special needs, it is difficult gaining access to a meaningful Jewish experience"; Twenty-two percent of parents surveyed could not have sent their child to a special needs program without financial assistance
- Staff and camper alumni who had contact with a Ramah special needs program report major impact on their personal and professional lives
- Social integration issues are regarded as the area of greatest strategic importance by professionals, parents, and staff alumni for Ramah's future success

Background

Since the establishment of the first Tikvah program in 1970, Ramah camps have served as leaders in the Jewish community for providing both a Jewish camping and Jewish educational experience for children with a wide variety of special needs.

Tikvah, Breira B’Ramah, and Camp Yofi now comprise Ramah’s network of 14 programs for children, teens, and young adults with disabilities. These programs provide opportunities to participants to connect and participate in activities with typically developing children and teens throughout the camp community. The programs at Ramah camps are diverse. Across the Ramah camping system, special needs programs serve different populations of children and different age groups. Camps offer programs to serve campers with various levels of cognitive delay as well as campers with autism spectrum disorders, including Asperger’s Syndrome. Several Ramah camps also offer vocational education (voc-ed) programs that are designed to maximize independent living and job skills. In addition, three Ramah camps offer family camps for families with children with special needs.



Research Goals

The National Ramah Commission commissioned this research project with the goal of documenting the nature of the impact of Ramah special needs programming in terms of:

1. The field of special needs education, with a focus on the contribution of the Tikvah model;
2. The impact of Ramah special needs programs on the personal and professional lives of staff alumni, and the impact of Ramah special needs programs on typically developing campers who came into intensive contact with them; and
3. Parents' observations of the impact of participation on their children with special needs.

In addition to documenting the nature and extent of the impact of Ramah’s special needs programs, the research also sought formative feedback for further improving these programs.

Methodology

An Internet-based survey was e-mailed to three populations:

1. National Ramah assembled a contact list of 142 people who are professionals in the field of Jewish special needs education and have knowledge of Ramah's special needs programs. Of these, 53 responded (37%) with 37 (26%) completing the entire survey.
2. Five hundred and seventy six (576) parents of children with special needs who have attended Ramah programs received a survey invitation, 170 of whom (30%) responded, and 147 (26%) completed the entire survey.
3. Seven hundred and forty nine (749) staff and staff alumni of Ramah special needs programs received the survey invitation, 228 (30%) of whom responded, and 152 (20%) completed the entire survey.

The three survey populations are not distinct. While the above mentioned lists were de-duplicated so no one individual received more than one survey invitation, there are in fact professionals and staff alumni who are parents, and parents who are professionals and staff. In order to group respondents as either a professional, parent or staff alumni for the purpose of the analysis, the survey results reported on below use the respondents' self-identification provided at the beginning of the survey.

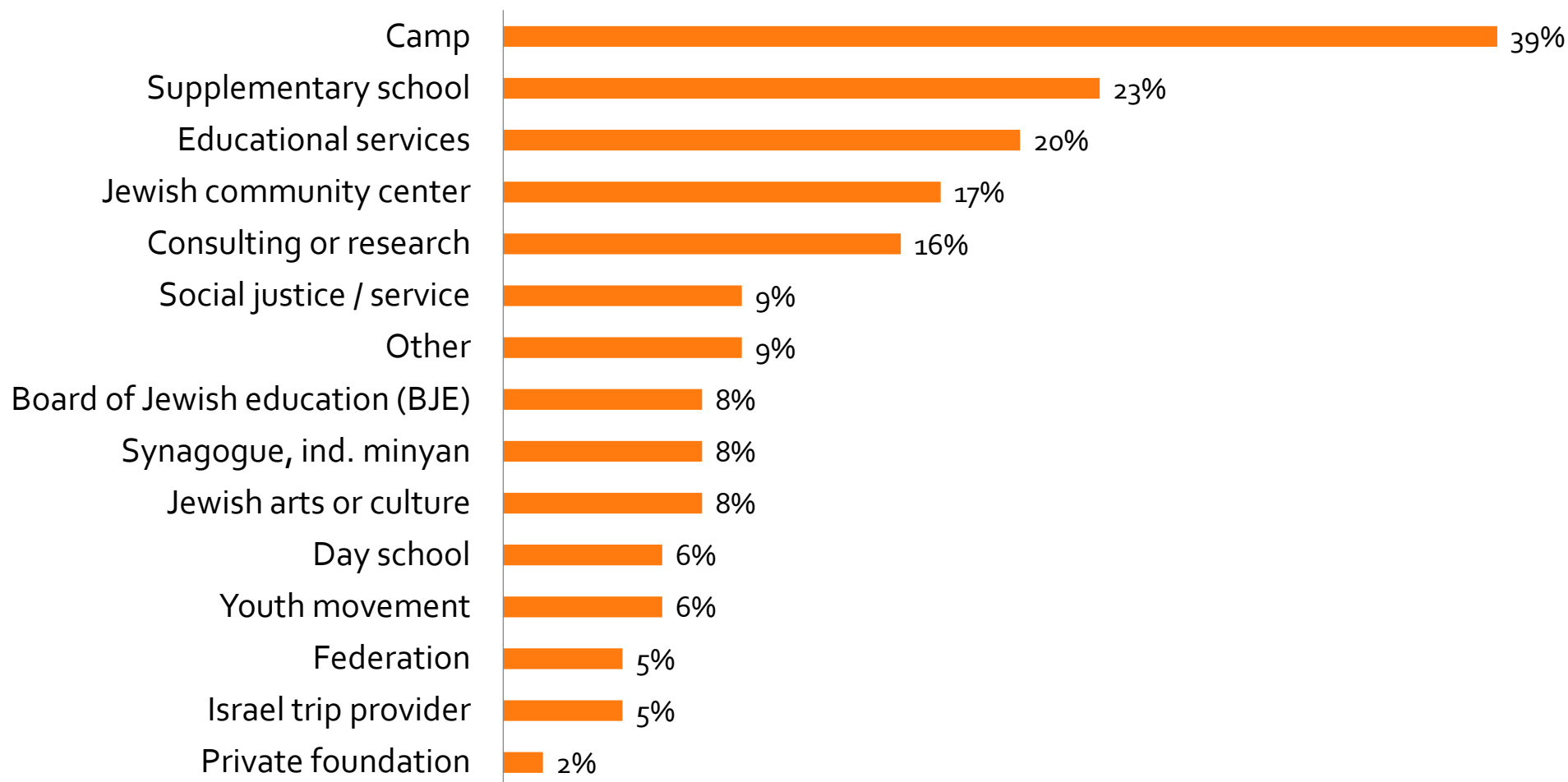


Ramah Outdoor Adventure

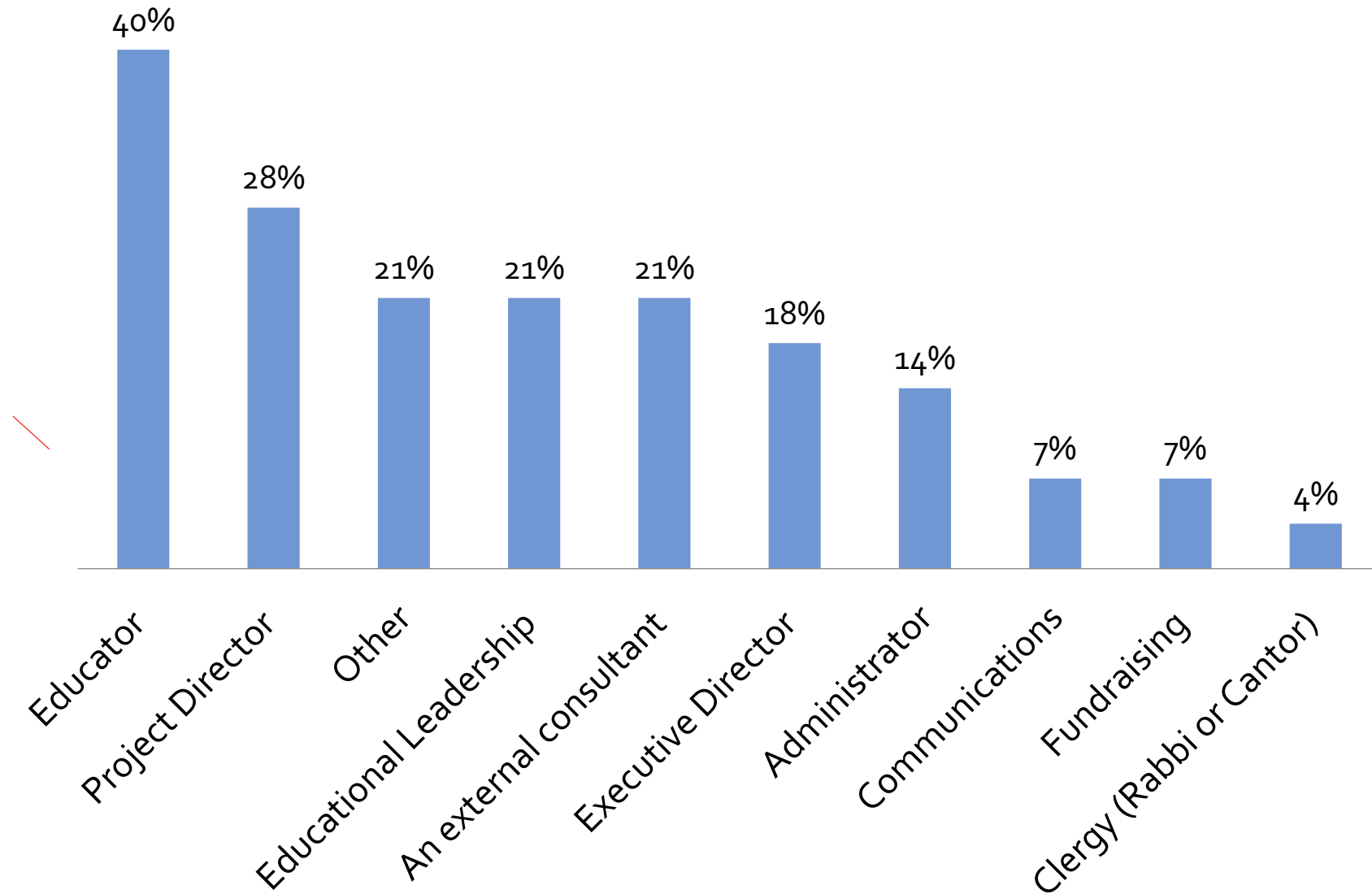
Who Responded to the Survey?

Professionals in the Field of Special Needs Programming

- 87 respondents who are professionals that currently work in the area of education and programming for children with disabilities completed the survey, 64 of whom work for a Jewish organization, broken down as follows:

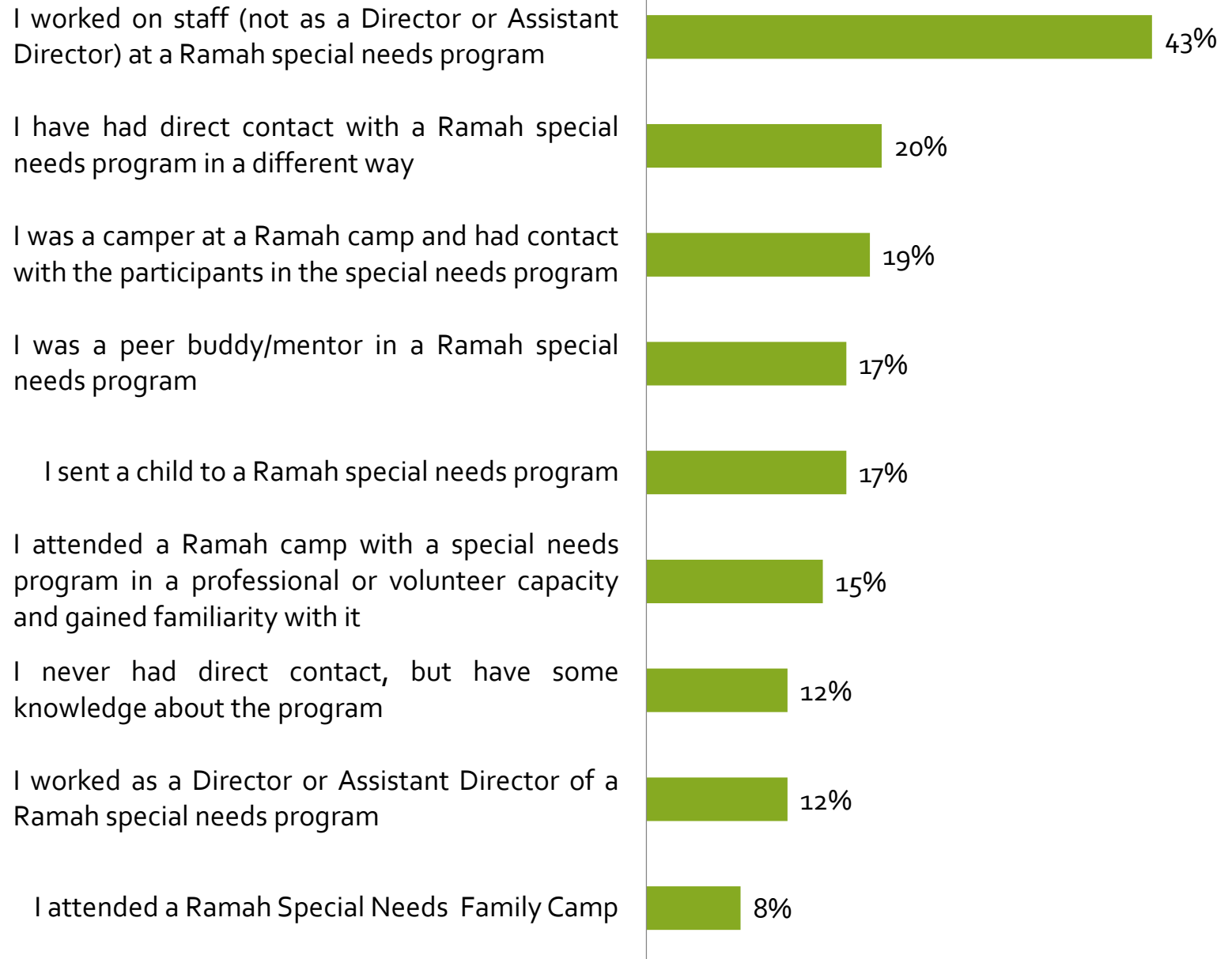


The professionals occupy a variety of professional positions



* A respondent could choose more than one professional position

The professionals' prior exposure to Ramah special needs programs ranges from working as a staff member, attending camp as a camper, or sending one's child to a Ramah camp.



*Respondents could choose more than one option.

Parents of Campers with Special Needs

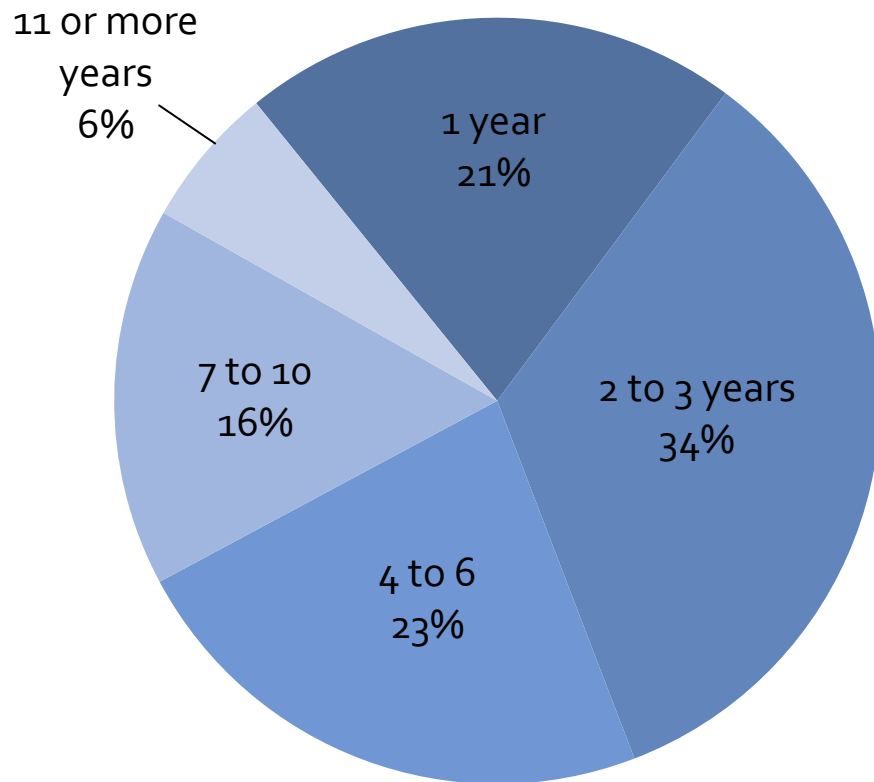
Seventy-four percent reported sending a child to a Ramah special needs program and 33% attended a Ramah special needs family camp.

The following are the camps shown by percentage of respondents to the survey:

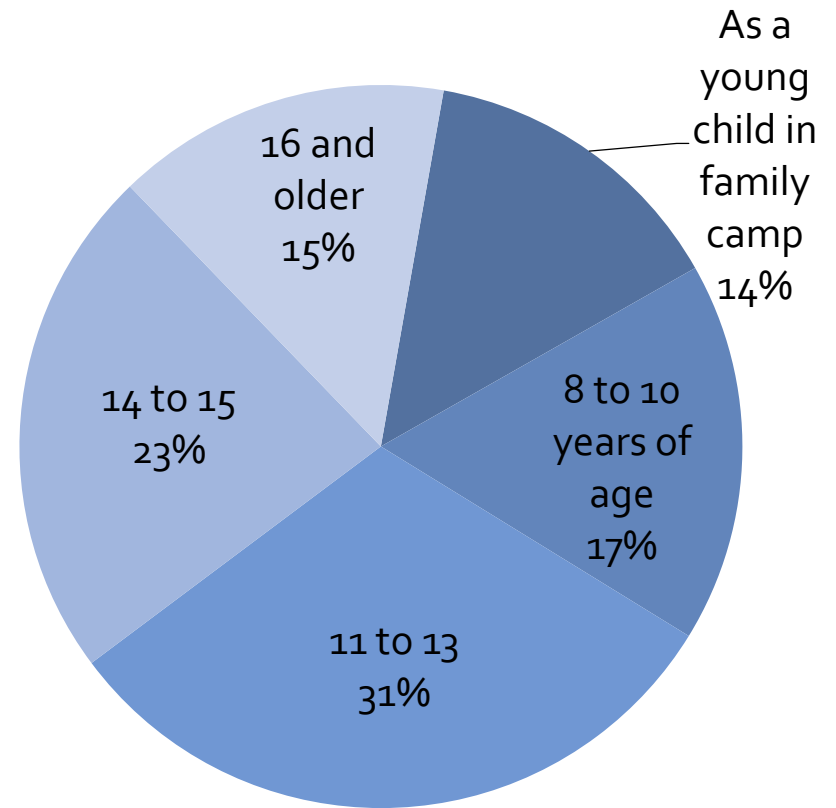
Berkshires: Breira B'Ramah in-cabin inclusion program	5%	New England: In-cabin inclusion program	4%
California: Tikvah camper program (Amitzim edah)	18%	New England: Tochnit Avodah voc-ed program	12%
California: Ezra voc-ed program	6%	New England: Post-Voc-Ed program	6%
California: Camp Ohr Lanu family camp	4%	Poconos: Keshet program	1%
Canada: Tikvah camper program (Tikvah edah)	9%	Poconos: Tikvah Family Camp	5%
Canada: Voc-ed program	2%	Ramah Outdoors: Tikvah camper program (Tikvah edah)	5%
Chicago-area day camp: program partnership with Keshet	1%	Wisconsin: Tikvah camper program (Tikvah edah)	15%
Darom: Camp Yofi family camp	21%	Wisconsin: Atzmayim voc-ed program	6%
New England: Tikvah camper program (Amitzim edah)	18%		

Seventy-five percent of the parents sent a child to a Ramah special needs program in the summer of 2013, with an additional 13% having last sent a child in summers 2011 or 2012. The remaining parents sent a child between the summers of 2000 and 2010.

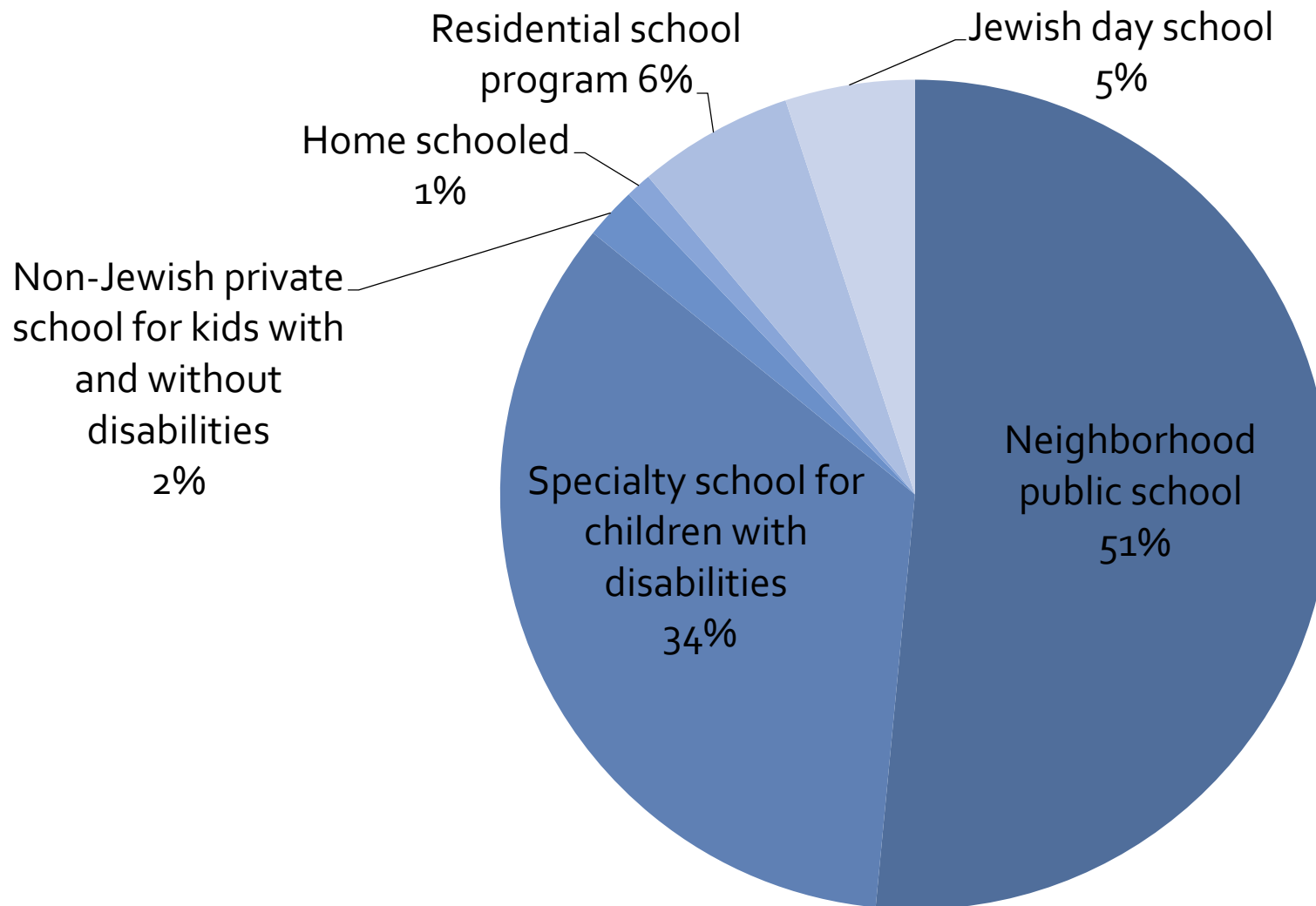
For how many years has your child attended a Ramah special needs program?



At what age did your child first start attending a Ramah special needs program?



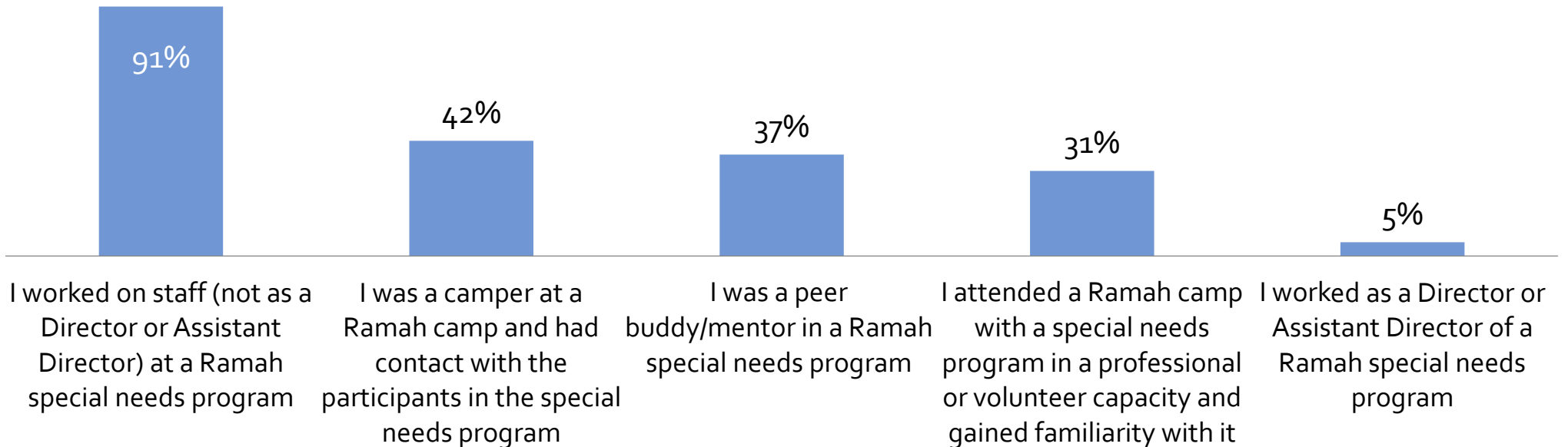
About half of parents report that their child with special needs' current or last schooling (for high school) was a neighborhood public school, with 1/3 attending a specialty school for children with disabilities.



Ramah Staff / Staff Alumni / Camper Alumni

In which Ramah special needs program(s) did you work and/or have substantial contact as a member of staff or as a camper?

Berkshires: Breira B’Ramah in-cabin inclusion	6%	New England: In-cabin inclusion program	22%
California: Tikvah camper program (Amitzim edah)	10%	New England: Tochnit Avodah voc-ed program	14%
California: Ezra voc-ed program	8%	New England: Post-Voc-Ed program	9%
California: Camp Ohr Lanu family camp	7%	Poconos: Keshet program	1%
Canada: Tikvah camper program (Tikvah edah)	6%	Poconos: Tikvah Family Camp	10%
Canada: Voc-ed program	2%	Ramah Outdoors: Tikvah camper (Tikvah edah)	4%
Darom: Camp Yofi family camp	25%	Wisconsin: Tikvah camper program (Tikvah edah)	13%
New England: Tikvah camper program (Amitzim edah)	24%	Wisconsin: Atzmayim voc-ed program	9%
		Ramah Seminar	1%

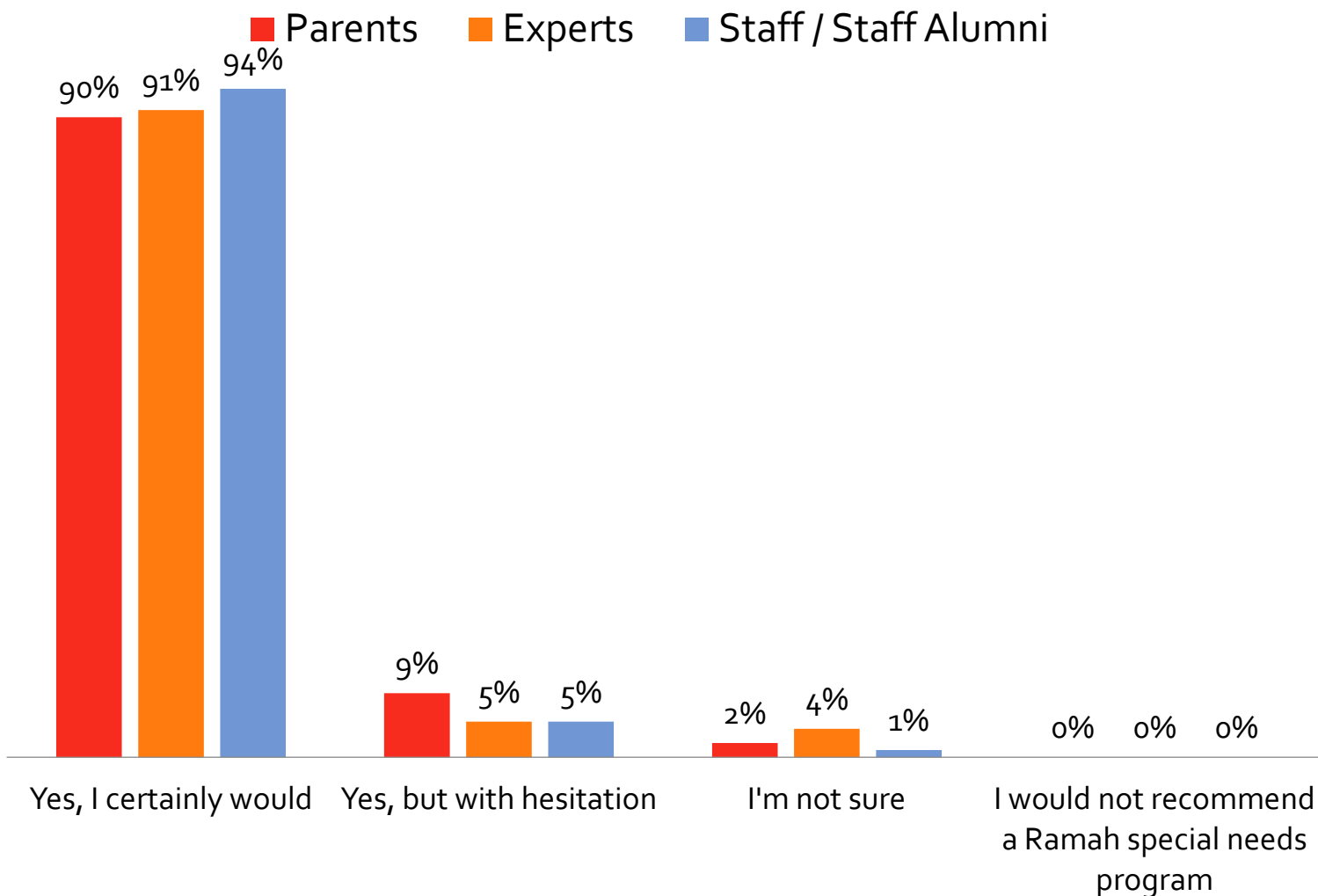




Overall Reputation

Survey respondents are overwhelmingly enthusiastic, with 90% or more of each group stating that they would recommend Ramah special needs programs without hesitation.

If someone asked you to recommend a Ramah special needs program for his or her children, would you do so?



For the small minority who express hesitation to recommend, the reason in most cases stems from the need to find a program suitable for a particular disability. For example:

"This question is worded in an odd manner. Hesitation is not appropriate, it implies reservations. If the question were "Yes, if appropriate"... This takes into account a host of unquantifiable elements including who is asking, relationship to the child, knowledge of their disability, knowledge of all the Tikvah options, etc.... and is more accurate than "I'm not sure" or "It depends"."

Among the parents who are familiar with other camps, approximately 90% regard Ramah as providing better levels of special needs programming in terms of day-to-day organization, educational programming, and staff training.

Parents: In your estimation, how does your Ramah special needs program compare to other camps in terms of the following?

	Is markedly better	Is somewhat better	Is the same as others	Is worse	I am not familiar with another camp	Total Responses
Day-to-day organization	42%	11%	13%	1%	33%	146
Educational program	45%	16%	7%	0%	33%	147
Training of staff	43%	12%	12%	1%	33%	146

Approximately 3/4 of professionals surveyed regard Ramah as a pioneer for the field and as continuing to set industry standards.

Professionals: Based on your knowledge of Ramah's special needs programs, do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

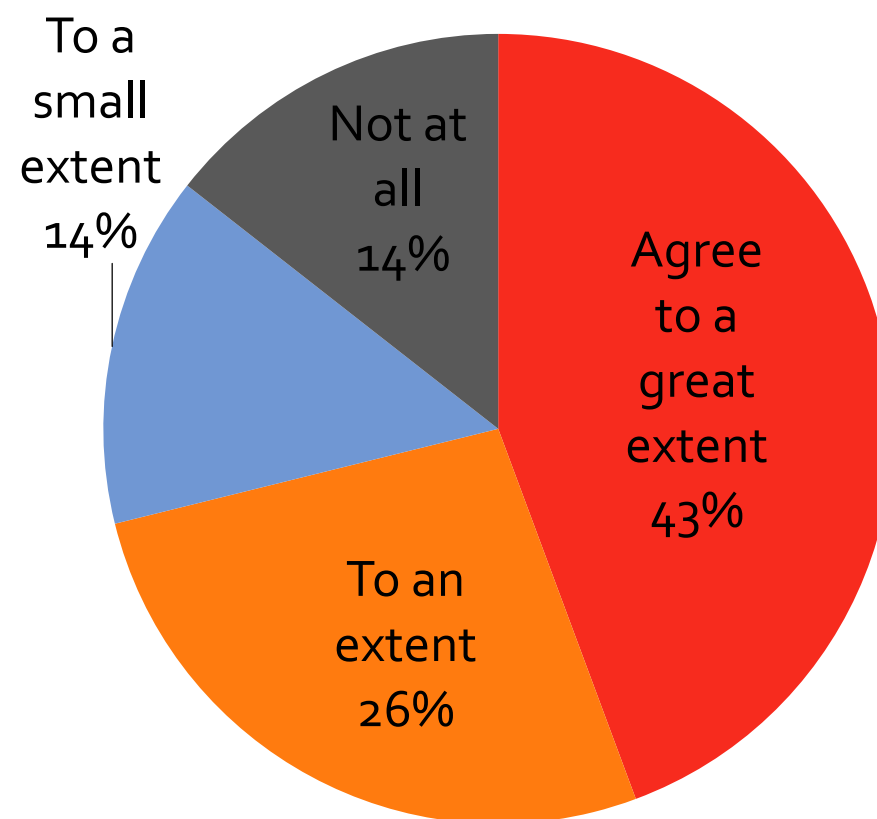
	Agree
Ramah's special needs programs have served as pioneering programs for the field of education for children with disabilities/special needs	71%
Ramah's special needs programs continue to contribute to setting industry standards	79%

"I believe that the way the program involves the children with special needs with the rest of the camp is absolutely incredible and life-changing for everyone. I think Ramah sets an amazing standard for the necessity of integration. Additionally, the amount of programming and thought that goes into every program makes it an educational experience as well as a social fun one for the kids."

Difficulty Accessing Jewish Education

- Seventy-nine percent state that "due to my child's disability/special needs, it is difficult gaining access to a meaningful Jewish experience of the type offered by Ramah," to "an extent" or "a great extent."
- Thirty-two percent report that their child has been turned away from another Jewish program or institution because of his/her disability

Due to my child's disability/special needs, it is difficult gaining access to a meaningful Jewish experience of the type offered by Ramah



When asked if their child has ever participated in a Jewish day school, supplementary school program or youth movement, between 24% and 73% answer affirmatively.

Of those that have not sent their child to one of these Jewish institutions, between 47% and 62% answer that their child's disability was a factor in not sending him/her.

Has your child ever participated in any of the following?

	Yes
A Jewish day school	24%
A supplementary/after-school Jewish education program	73%
A Jewish youth movement	42%

Was your child's disability a factor in not sending him/her to one of the following?

	Yes
A Jewish day school	47%
A supplementary/after-school Jewish education program	44%
A Jewish youth movement	62%

Impact and Strategic Planning

Respondents' answers about areas in which Ramah should invest in the future, as well as the impact of camp on campers with special needs, divide into four areas:

1. Social integration of campers with special needs within the larger camp
2. The general educational environment
3. Educational strategies for building skills and ability among campers with special needs
4. The Jewish experience at camp

Social Integration Is a Top Priority

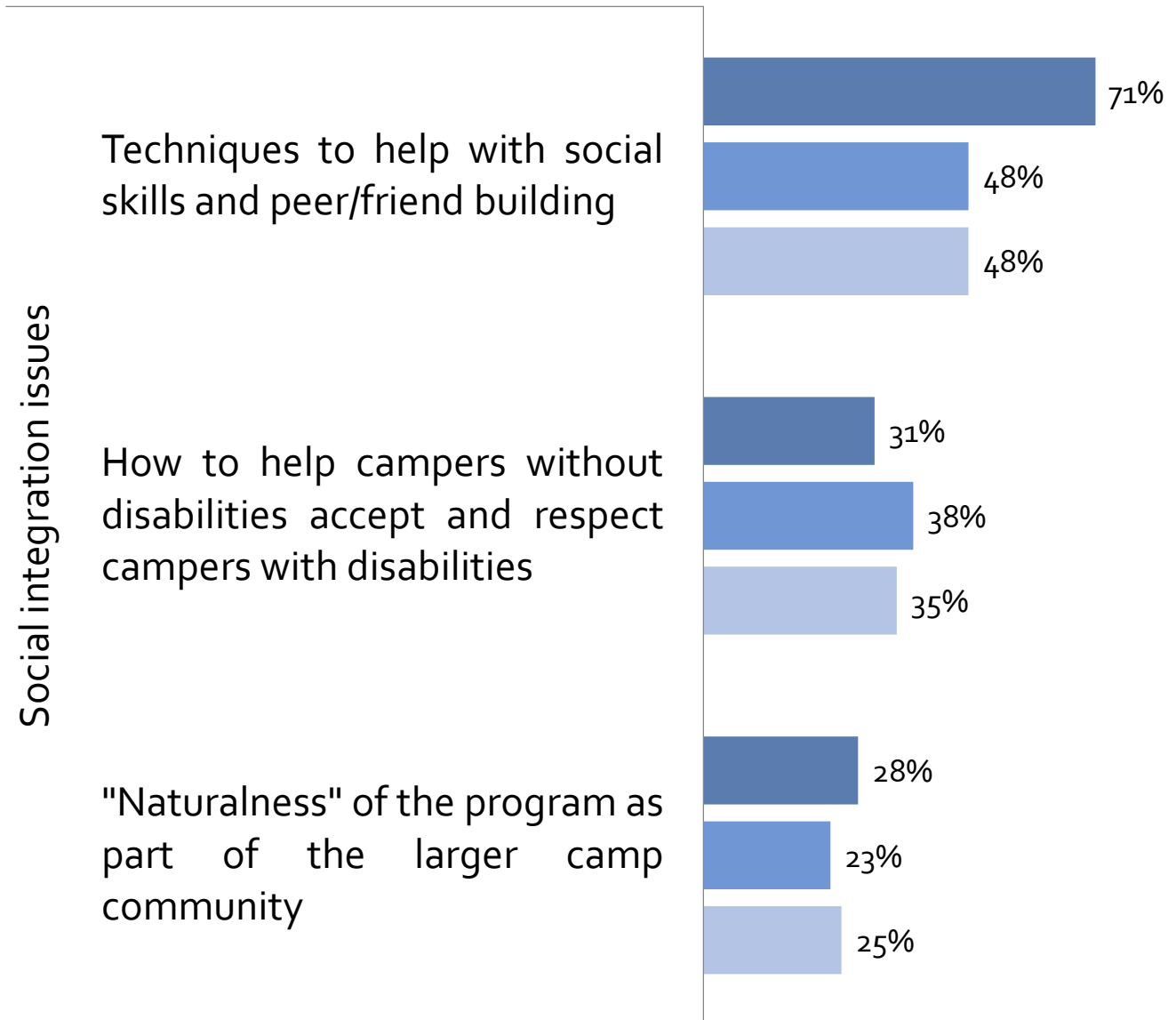
- Issues touching on the social integration of campers with special needs into the wider camp environment are most cited as the highest priority for future investment by Ramah.
- Social inclusion also constitutes a strong motivation for parents to send their children to a Ramah camp and is an area of which parents would like to see more.

Parents, professionals, and staff alumni are all most likely to cite issues related to social integration of campers with special needs among the top three areas for Ramah to invest in the future.

- ▶ The leading priority area for all three groups is the issue of techniques to help with social skills.
- ▶ Parents in particular focus on this issue, with 71% stating that they regard it as a top-three area.

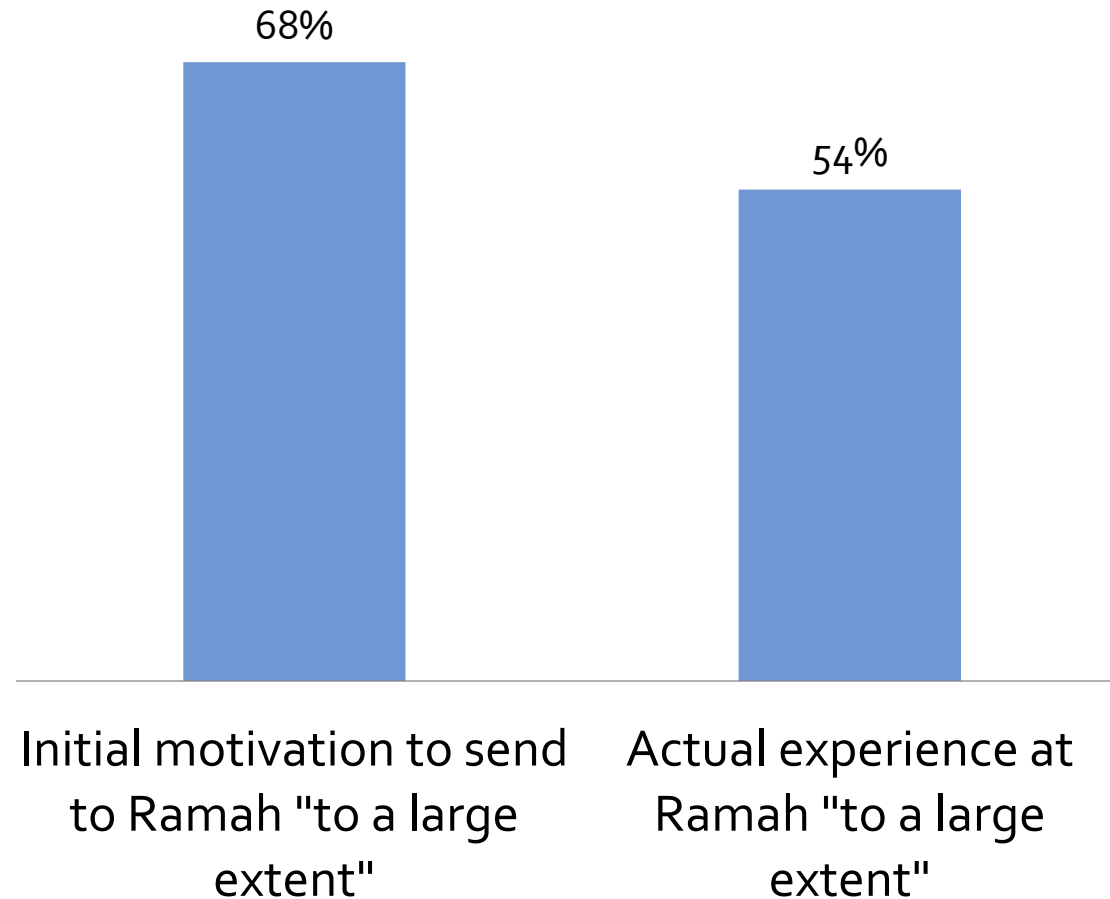
From your perspective, if you were to focus Ramah's investment in special needs in three areas, where would you focus?

■ Parents (n=152) ■ Experts (n=84) ■ Staff/Staff Alumni (n=159)



I wanted my child to feel included in a broader community of peers

- ▶ Sixty-eight percent of parents state that social inclusion served as a strong initial motivation to send their child to Ramah.
- ▶ A smaller majority of parents (54%) state that that their child experienced social inclusion "to a great extent."



Example of the satisfied majority in the area of social inclusion

"Being included in a broader community of peers has been a very important part of attending Camp Ramah for my son. He makes friends with his cabin mates in Tikvah but he also is free to make friendships with campers in Magshimim and elsewhere and he connects during the school year with many of them on Facebook and keeps in touch. The Jewish experience is also important but he does have lots of great Jewish experience at home and in our synagogue as well."

Example of those who want more in the area of social inclusion

"I think the atmosphere in general though seems accepting and warm. In the years he was in Amitzim and then Voc/Ed he did not mention connecting with any typical campers, at school he always made a connection with typical students who visited his classroom, he would talk about them frequently. This didn't seem to happen at camp for some reason. Although he made a number of good friends within the special needs division. "

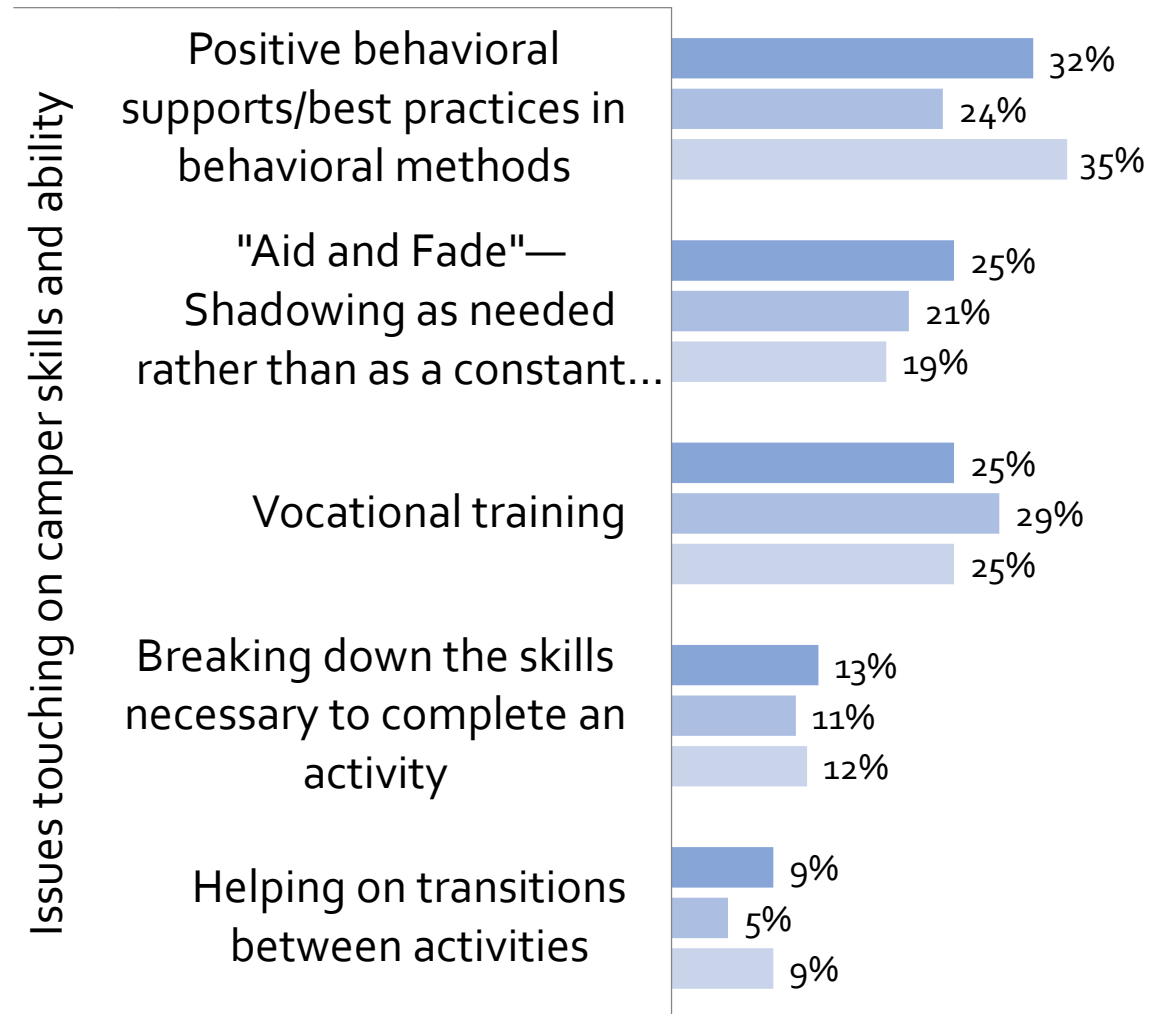
Building Campers' Skills and Confidence Is a Second Priority Area

- A third of the respondents cite "building campers' skills and confidence" as a high priority area for Ramah
- Parents cite diverse examples of impact for their children in this area

Parents, professionals and staff alumni feel that Ramah should invest in practices that focus on strengthening the skills and abilities of the campers with special needs. However, just 1/4 to 1/3 cite some aspects of this area as a high priority, in comparison to the large majority who focused on social inclusion.

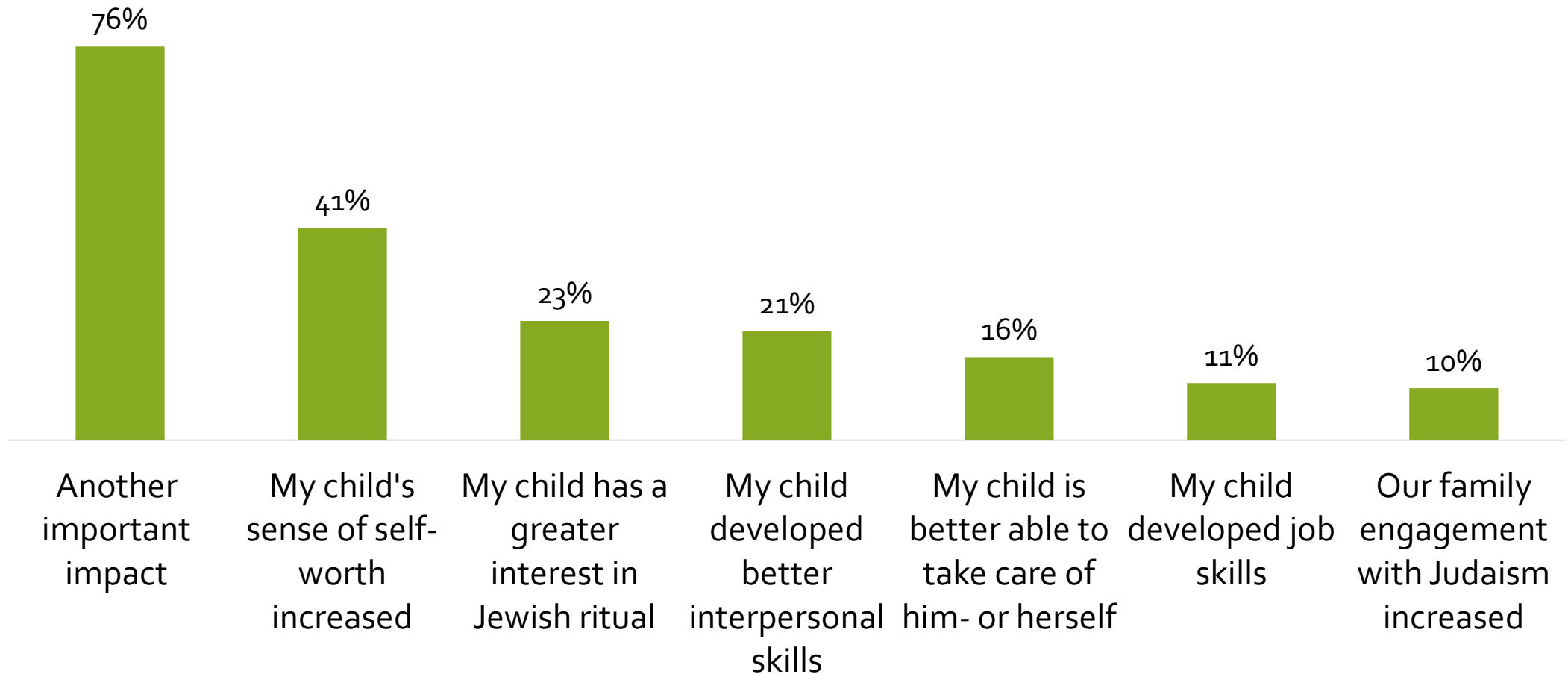
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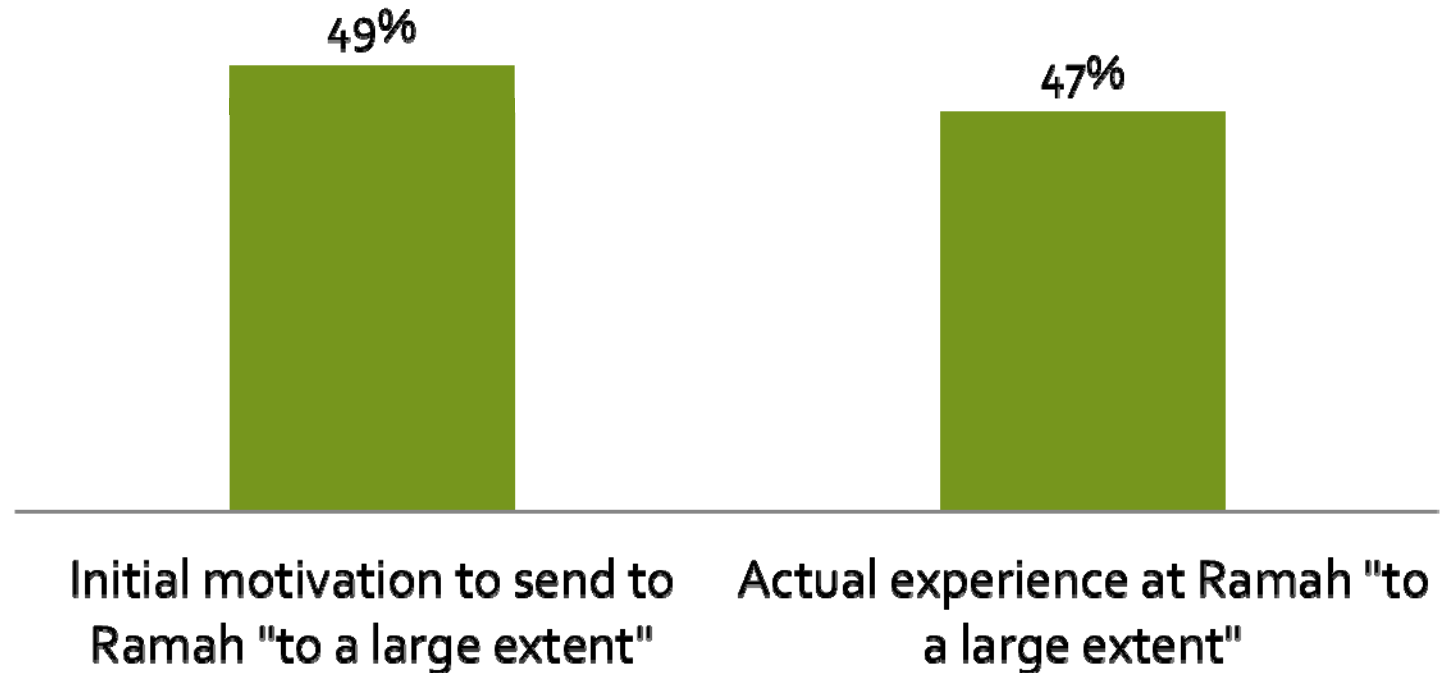
When parents cite the growth their children experience, they refer to a wide scope of impact, with the leading area being growth of self-worth.

As a result of attending a Ramah special needs program, my child experienced the following to "a great extent."



About half of the parents cite improvement in their child's skill level as a strong initial motivation to send their child to camp. A similar number state that their child's personal skills improved as a result of camp.

I wanted the experience at Ramah to help my child to function at a higher level



"My child has grown so much in terms of getting over her anxieties. She loves music, dancing and singing, but she has always stayed away or outside the action because fear/anxiety with the noise and crowd. She stands outside the room and watches from the window. Each year she gets stronger and stronger at camp. She's out there in the middle of everyone now dancing and singing--being herself."

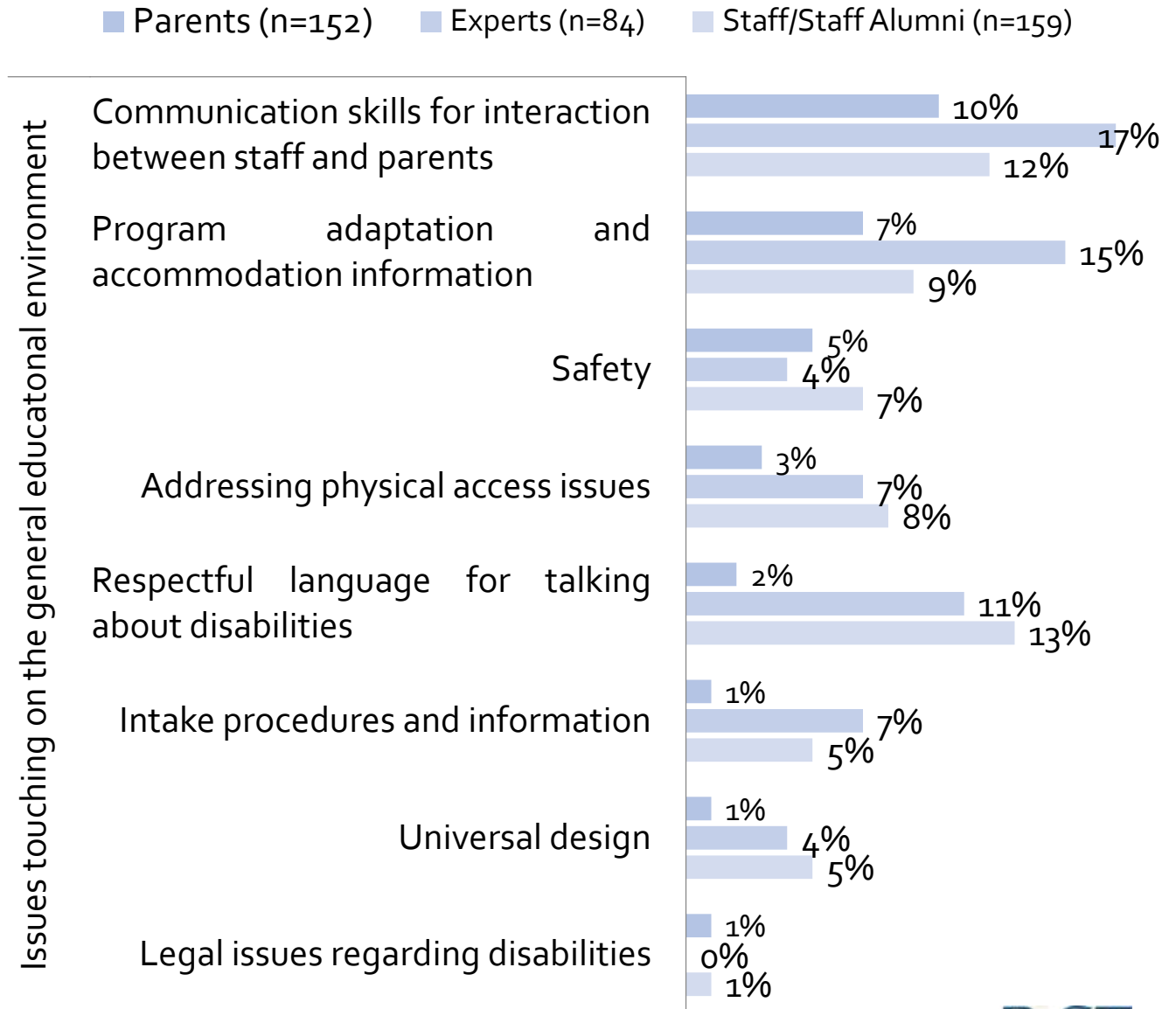
Educational Environment Is Regarded as Central, But Not as an Area for Future Investment

Most do not regard educational environment as a high priority for future investment, largely because they are satisfied with the current situation.

Relatively small numbers of parents, professionals, and staff alumni place issues touching on educational environment as among the top three areas for Ramah's strategic investment.

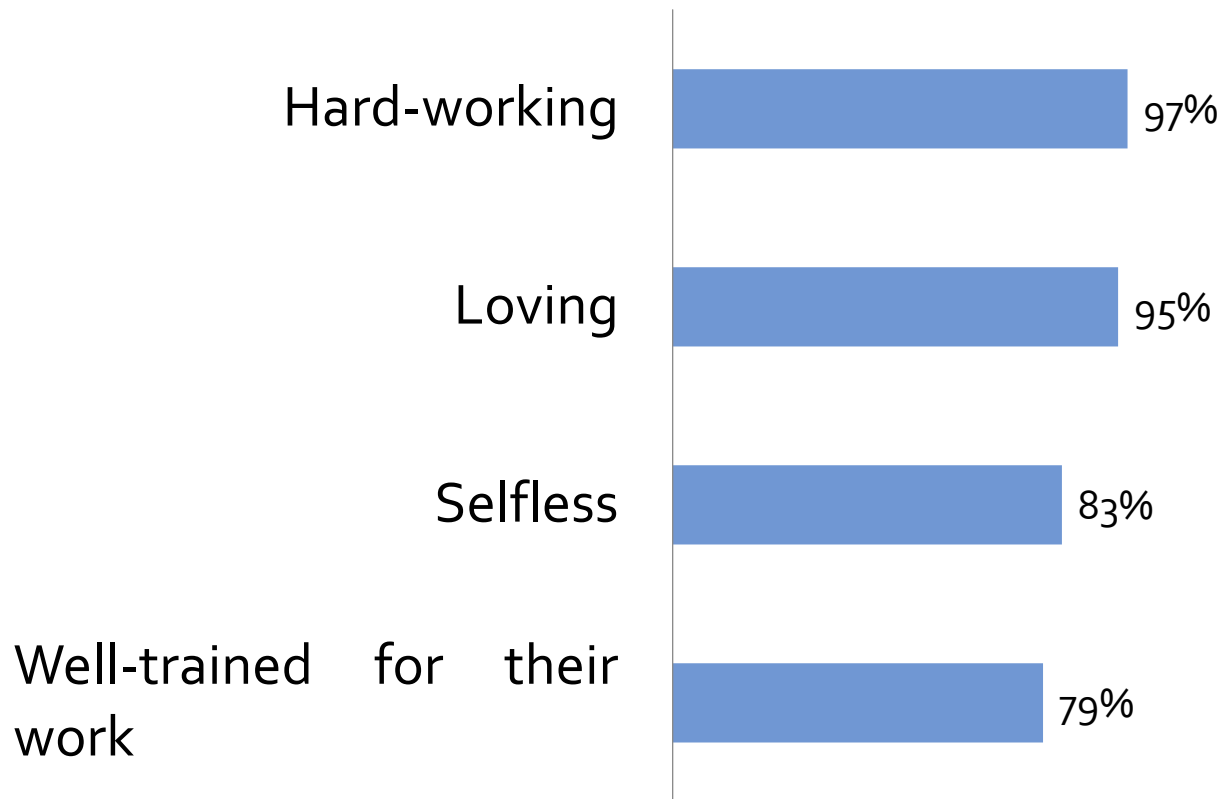
The data on the next two pages suggests that for the majority, the lack of focus on educational environment is a result of their satisfaction with the current situation.

From your perspective, if you were to focus Ramah's investment in special needs in three areas, where would you focus?



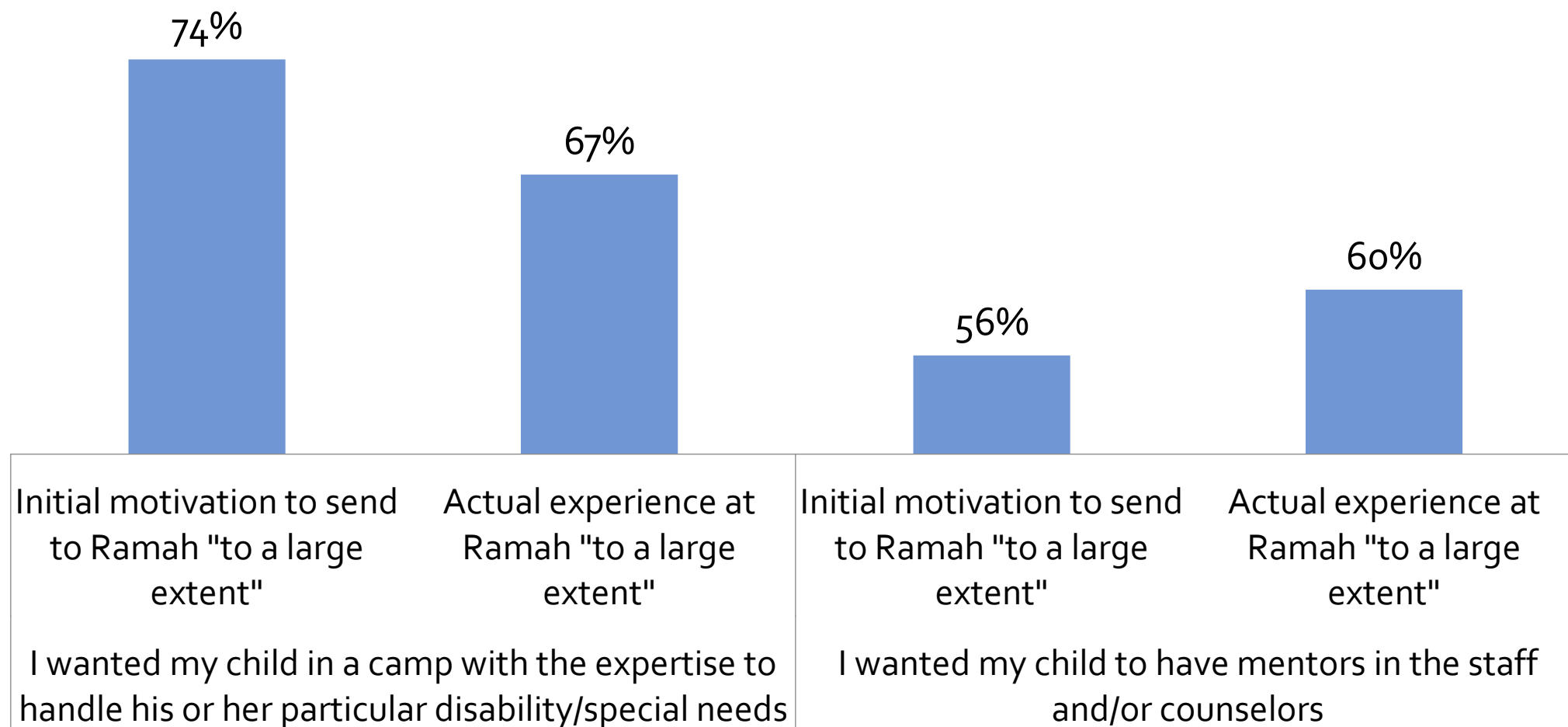
Parents hold Ramah special needs counselors in high esteem

I agree that the following descriptions of the counselors in my Ramah's special needs program are appropriate



"I really thought the counselors were fantastic! They were great with my child and they were the sweetest group of kids. Really can't say enough good things about the counselors when we were there!"

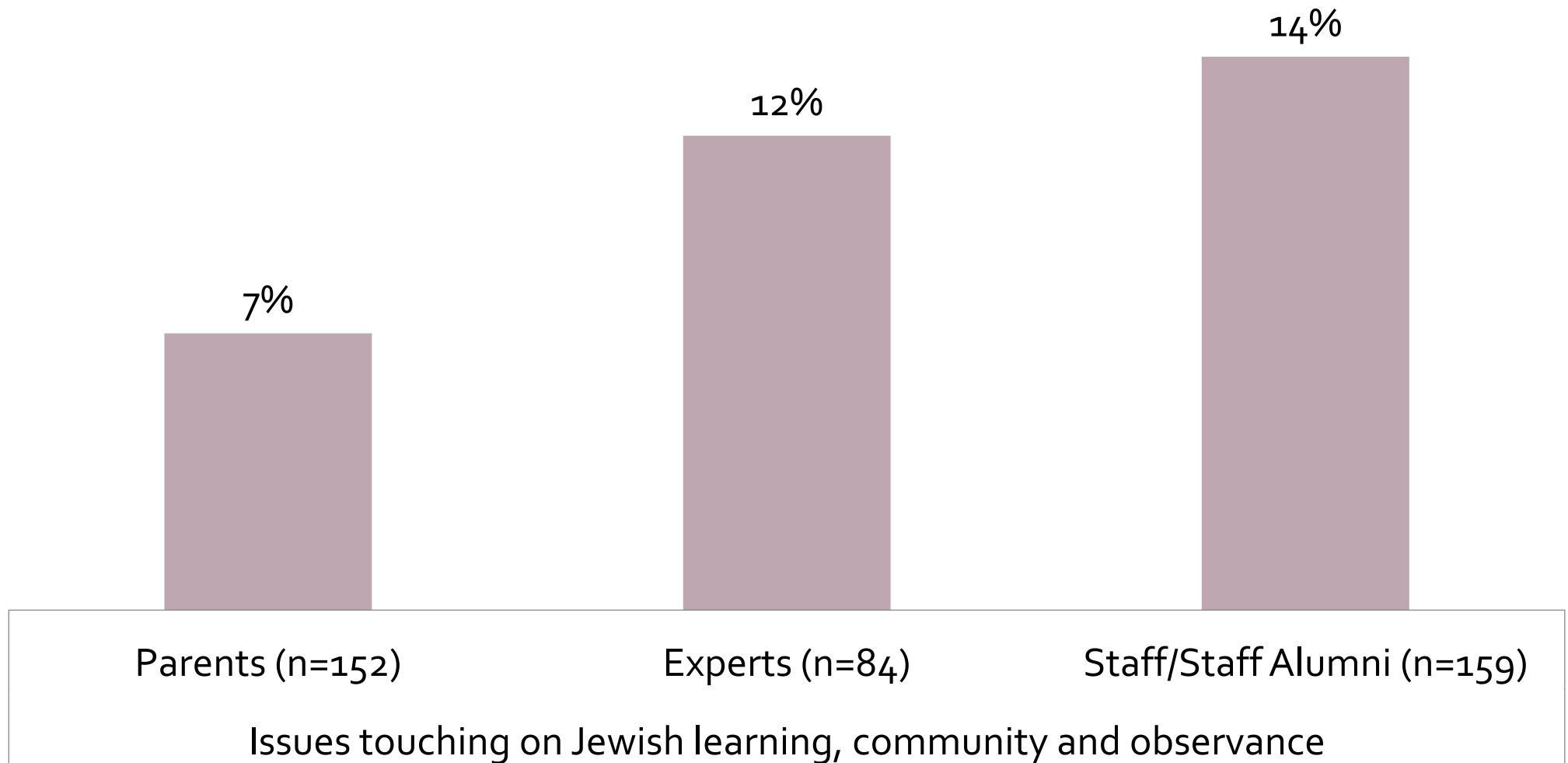
Three-quarters of parents cite the expertise of Ramah staff as the reason they send their child to a Ramah camp, and most of them report such an experience "to a large extent."



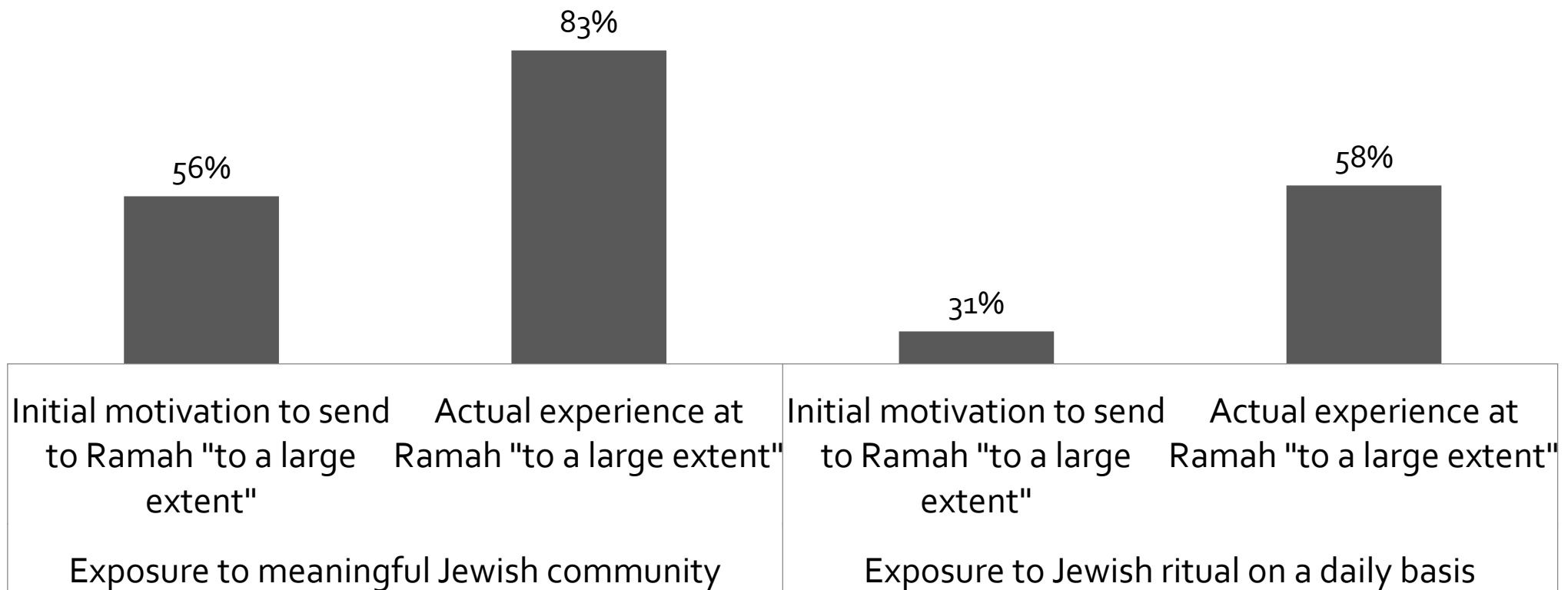
The Jewish Experience:
Few regard it as high priority for
future investment, but most report it
as a central experience for their
children at camp.

Few place Jewish issues as a top priority for future investment.

From your perspective, if you were to focus Ramah's investment in special needs in three areas, where would you focus?



Inverse to the lack of priority placed on future investment for the Jewish experience in the special needs programs, almost all parents report their children receiving a meaningful Jewish experience "to a large extent." For 56% of parents, the Jewish experience is an important reason to send their child to camp.



"My daughter had a wonderful and meaningful experience. She still remembers the prayers at services. We still meet counselors that worked with her and they mean a lot to her. Everything about the social, religious and skill building parts of the camp offered her an unbelievable opportunity."

"Ramah Tikvah went way above meeting our expectations. Thanks. The most important thing to me was to have my child involved with other children that are Jewish and to be in the fresh air and have some ritualistic framework in her life."

We are religious, so I did not feel like we needed to come to Camp Ramah in order to expose our kids to a meaningful Jewish experience, but Camp Yofi allowed our family to have our first family vacation. In the past, any vacation opportunities that could accommodate Kashrut and Shabbat were impossible because we could not manage our kids' special needs (all three of our boys have PDD)..."

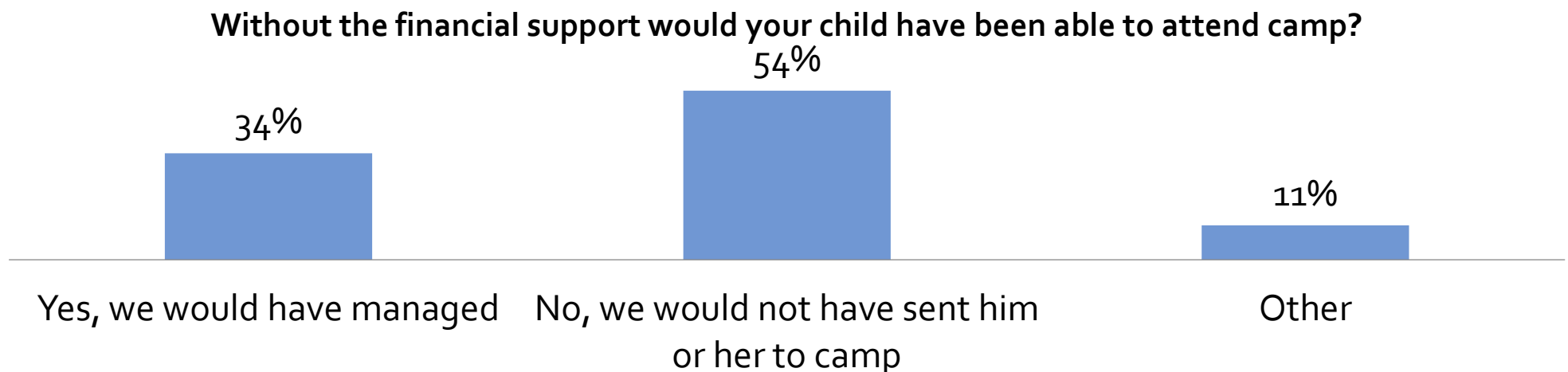
Financial Support

- Of the parents who responded to the survey, 40% received some form of financial support either from Ramah or from another source.

		I received financial support from Ramah	
		Yes	No
I received financial support from another source	Yes	20%	14%
	No	5%	60%

Number of parent respondents = 132

- Of those who received financial support, just over half (54%) state they would not have been able to send their child without it.

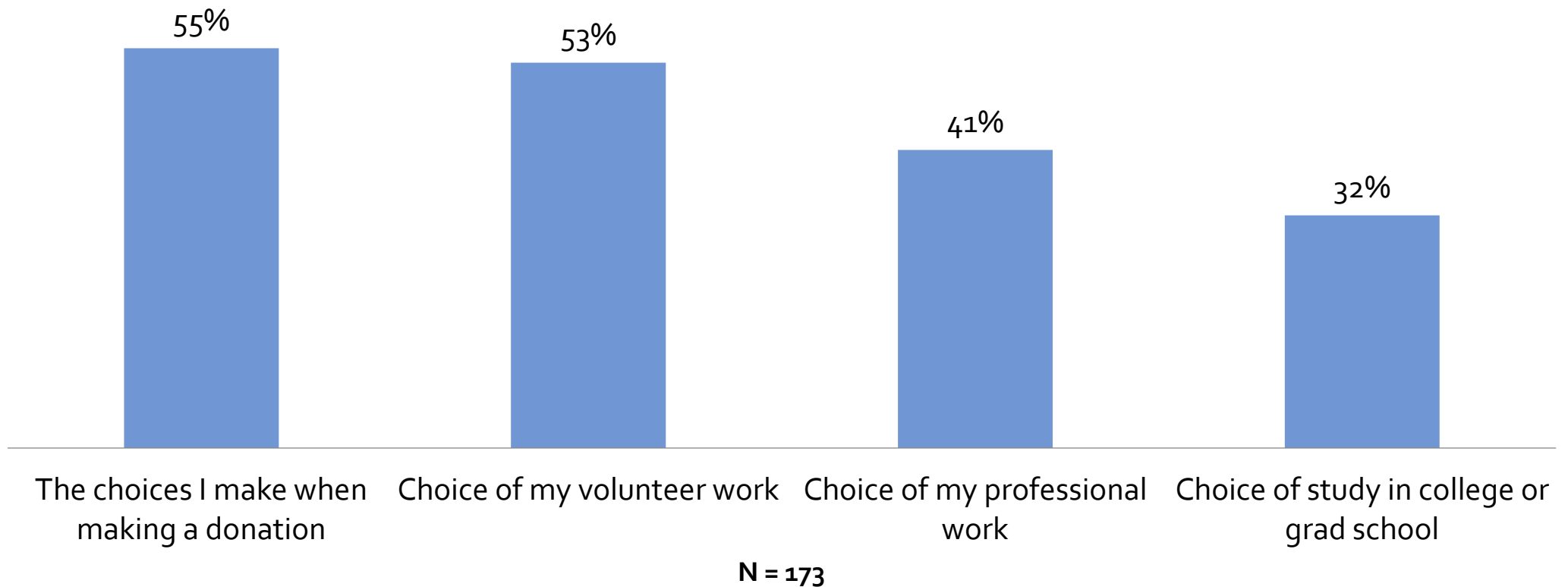


Impact on Staff

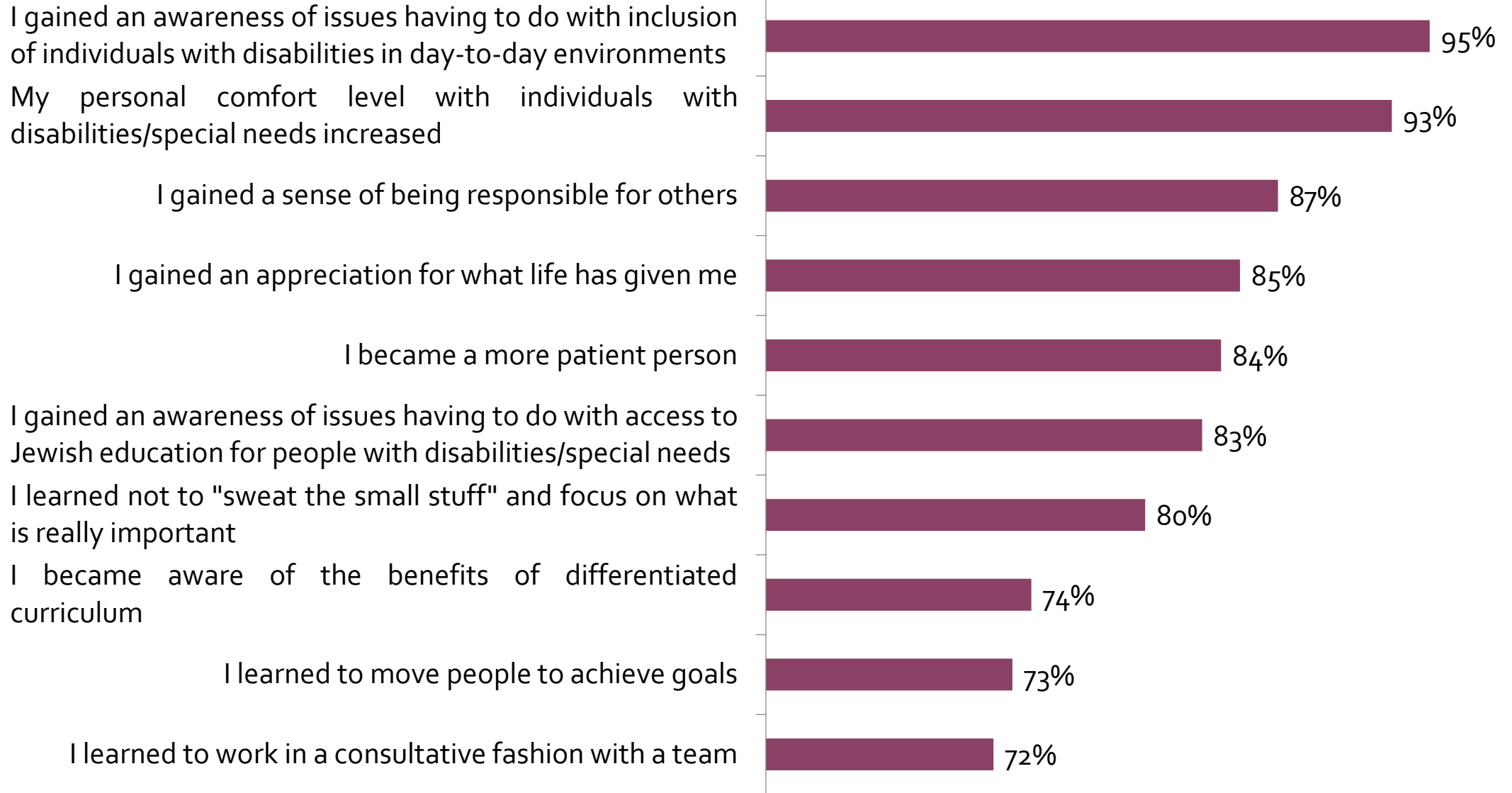


Staff and camper alumni who had contact with a Ramah special needs program report major impact on their lives.

Has your experience at a Ramah special needs program influenced your choices in any of the following areas?



As a result of your contact with a Ramah special needs program would you agree that any of the following are still relevant for you today?



% answering "Yes" N = 176

"Thanks to my experience with the special needs program, my ability to recognize other people for their strengths, and not just for their weaknesses is much more developed. When you're working with a camper with special needs, not only does your patience have to rise, but your stress and intolerance for their supposed "weakness" initially rise too. However, as the summer goes on, you begin to realize that beyond the visible cues and often difficult moments in working with somebody with special needs, there is a deep and elaborate human being with skills and desires far beyond what you expect. In the work environment, especially if it is volunteer work, people's true skills may be overshadowed by their visual weaknesses, however my work with special needs kids has given me the patience to wait for those skills to show."