



# Exceptional Changes for Healthier Habits in Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

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## Introduction

- Individuals with disabilities make up almost one fourth of the United States population yet, individuals with disabilities are marginalized by experiencing increased risk of poorer health and inadequate access to resources (World Health Organization, 2021). There is an increased prevalence of obesity which is associated with a variety of risk factors that can decrease the overall health and well-being of an individual (Agha & Agha, 2017). These risk factors and the prevalence of obesity are even greater in people with disabilities (CDC, 2022).
- This program was developed for and implemented at The Exceptional Foundation (EF) in Homewood, AL. EF is a nonprofit organization that offers day programs that provide social and recreational services to adults with intellectual disabilities.
- At the time this program was developed and implemented, EF included designated time for exercise and sports in their daily activities schedule to promote healthy habits however a gap was identified for promoting healthy habits around eating and drinking.
- The purpose of this project is to develop a program that increases the knowledge and confidence in adults with intellectual disabilities to promote healthy habits.
- The development of this program was influenced by Small Changes, Healthy Habits, a pilot program that focused on promoting healthy habits through small behavioral changes (Adhikari & Gollub, 2021).

## Methods

- Recruitment: Flyers and word of mouth.
- Inclusion criteria: All EF participants were given the opportunity to join the program as long as they attended EF on Tuesdays, the day sessions were completed.
- Evaluation design: Pre/post survey administered via one-on-one interviews that included visuals to aid in understanding.
- Surveys measured food and beverage intake, eating habits, use of nutrition labels, and knowledge of healthy habits and options.
- Participants attended 4 sessions
  - Session 1: Developing Healthy Habits Through Small Changes
  - Session 2: Healthy Food Choices and Meal Preparation
  - Session 3: Guide to Grocery Stores and Nutrition Labels Pt. 1
  - Session 4: Nutrition Labels Pt.2 and Increasing Water Intakes

## Results

- 19 participants completed the pre-survey and 17 participants completed the post-survey
- 21% attended all 4 sessions, 26% attended 3 sessions, 37% attended 2 sessions, and 16% attending 1 session.
- Post-surveys indicated improvements in food intake, beverage intake, eating habits, and utilizing nutrition labels.
- Participants showed improvements in knowledge and 94% reported the program was beneficial and 88% reported they would participate again.

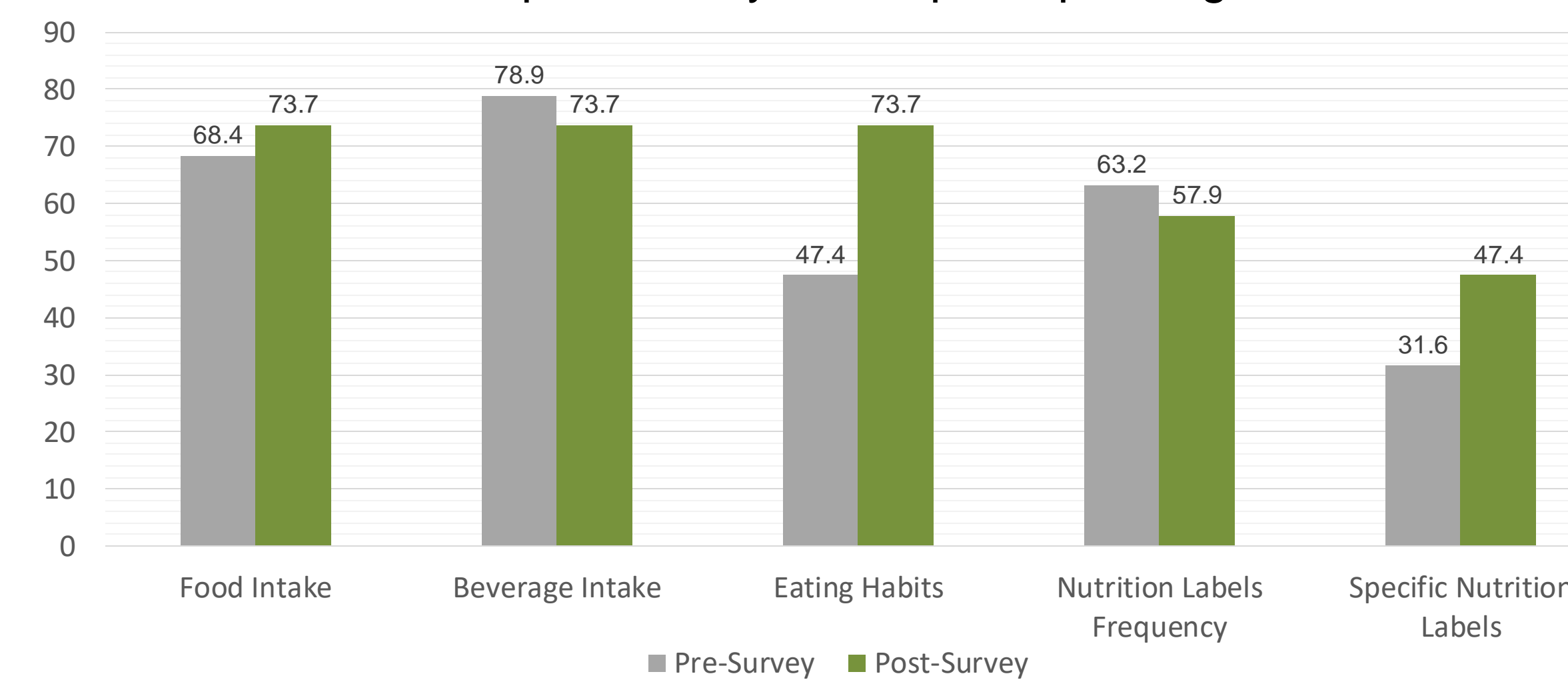


Figure 1: Changes in habits between pre and post survey responses

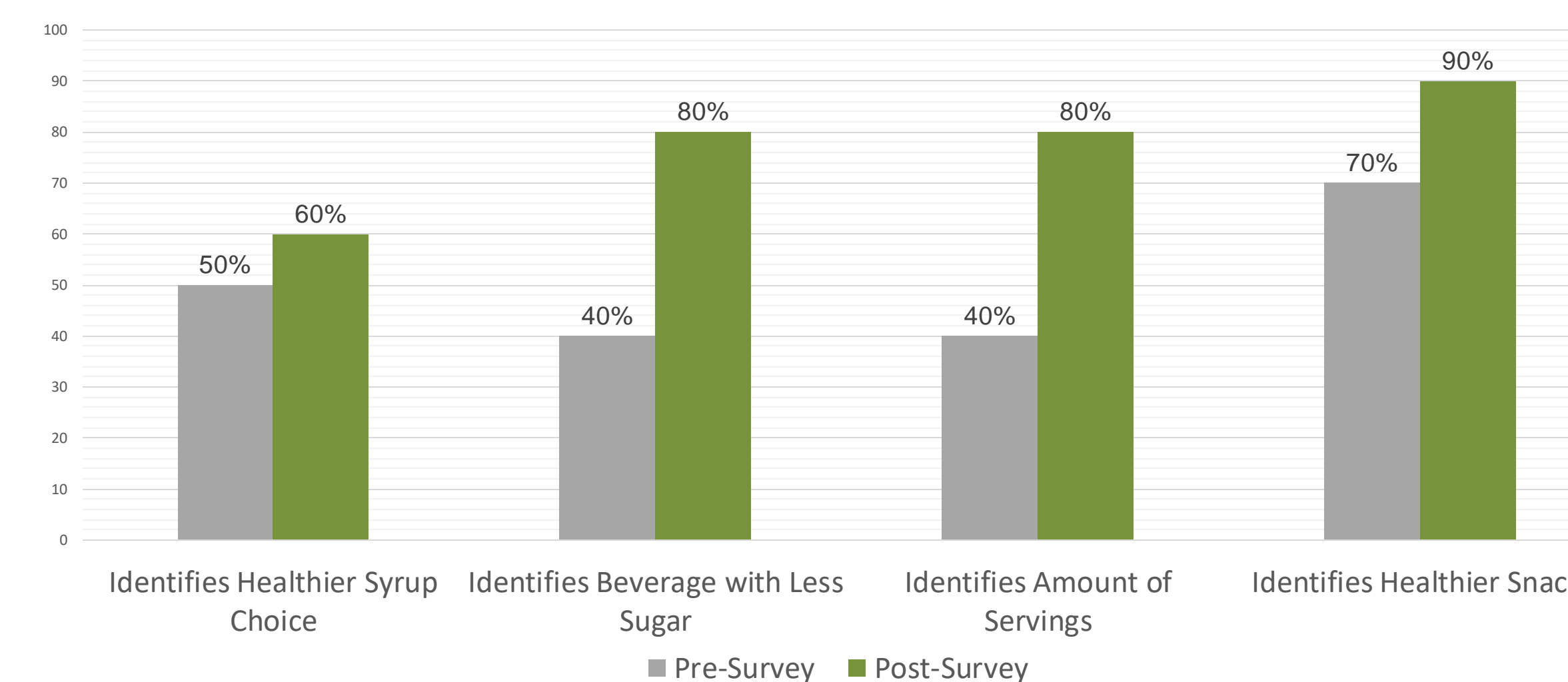


Figure 2: Changes in knowledge between pre and post survey responses

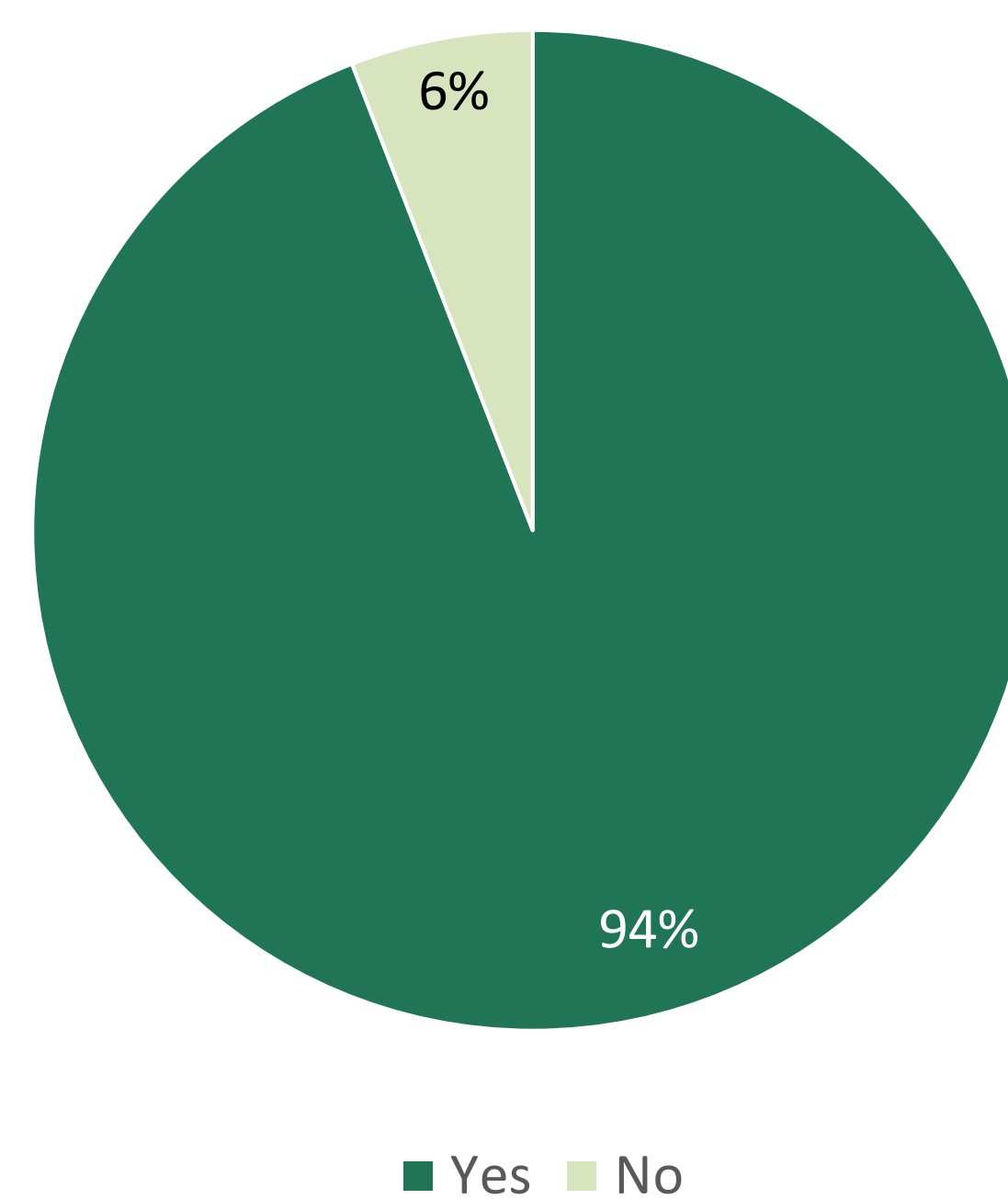


Figure 3: Percentage of participants reporting perceived benefit from the program

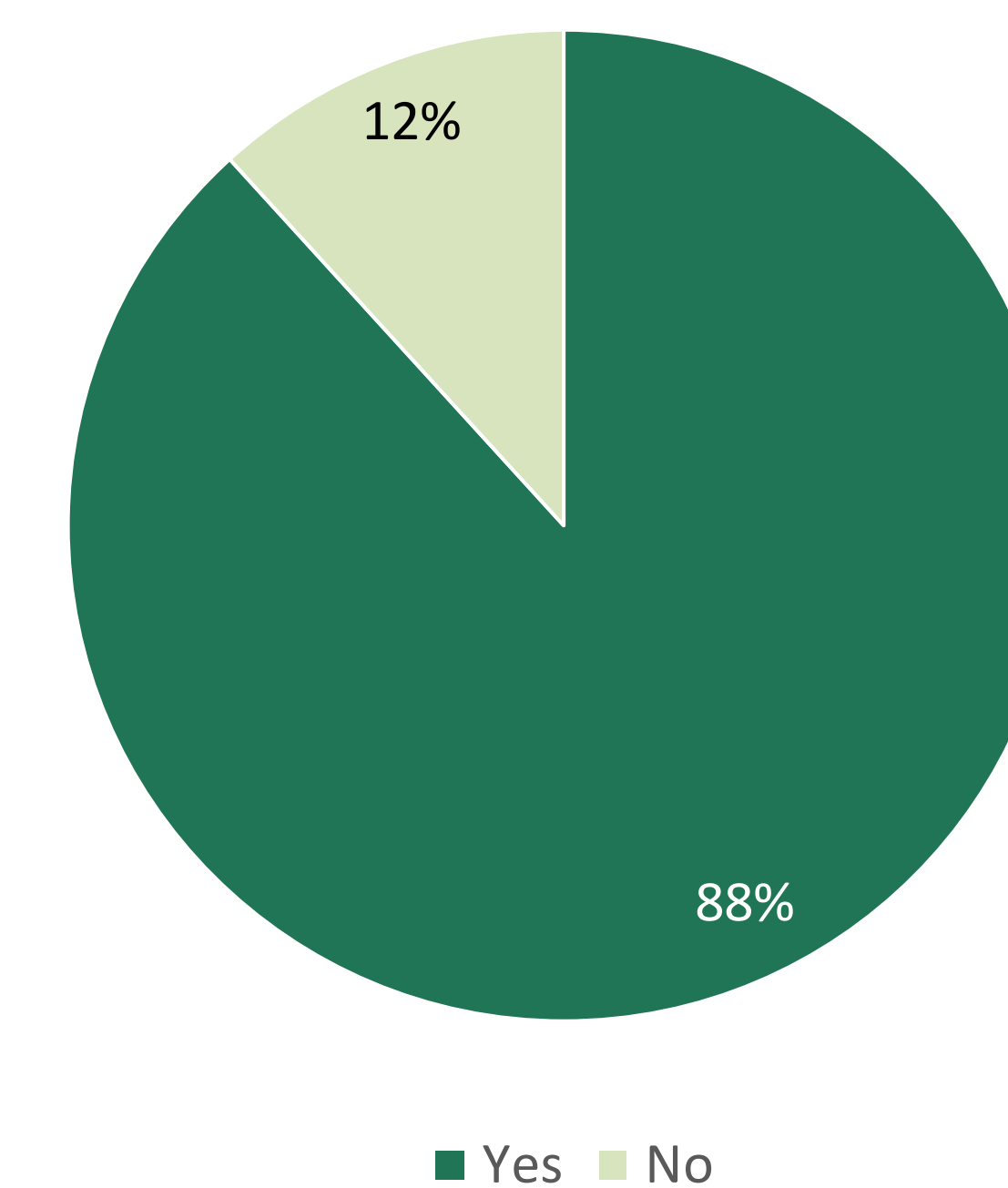


Figure 4: Percentage of participants reporting willingness to participate in program again

## Lessons Learned

The development and implementation of this program was successful due to the immense support and guidance from the leadership team and staff at EF. The staff, who are primarily with participants throughout the day, provided insight and feedback on the deliverables to maximize the success of each lesson. There were several key lessons learned throughout this project that could be improved upon to increase success for the future of this program. The key lessons to be improved upon are as follows:

- The EF has events and fieldtrips scheduled throughout the week that affect participant attendance which could be improved by planning sessions sooner and in collaboration with the Adult Activities Manager.
- The sessions that were shorter in duration were most successful likely due to increased focus throughout that time. Increasing the program duration to 6 weeks or completing 2 sessions per week may benefit the participants by decreasing that amount of information provided each session.
- Participants responded positively when provided with physical handouts during certain sessions and may benefit from more hands-on items to assist with each session. For example, participants may benefit from reading nutrition labels on used cereal boxes and snack containers compared to viewing them on a presentation screen.
- Participants were pulled from their groups to participate in the program however the program may be improved by implementing it as an activity in their weekly schedule. This would allow for increased involvement from participants and EF staff.

## References

Adhikari, P., & Gollub, E. (2021). Evaluation of the small changes, healthy habits pilot program: its influence on healthy eating and physical activity behaviors of adults in Louisiana. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, 11(1), 251-262.

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## Acknowledgement & Contact information

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