

College of Criminology and Criminal Justice Crime Victim Research and Policy Institute

Stars of HOPE Program Impact Study 2018

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GRA.TheHopeShop.

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Purpose

The purpose of the Stars of HOPE Impact Study was to determine the influence of the program’s community, school, corporate, family, and service projects on participants and recipients. This evaluation assesses the impact on individuals that have participated in, received, and/or witnessed Stars of HOPE in various settings in response to and following both natural and human-caused tragedies.

Overview of Stars of HOPE



Stars of HOPE is a unique disaster relief and community arts program started by the New York Says Thank You Foundation in 2007. Stars of HOPE aims to transform the physical and emotional landscapes of communities devastated by acts of nature or acts of violence by empowering individuals impacted by tragedy to create colorful art and messages of hope and healing on one-foot wooden stars. These Stars of HOPE are displayed in public places in communities worldwide in the immediate and long-term aftermath of tragedy serving as beacons of hope and compassion for all to see. The

Stars are also created by communities impacted by past disasters to “pay it forward” to others who later suffer similar tragedy.

Stars of HOPE has reached people in communities impacted by catastrophic acts of nature, such as the tornados in Greensburg, Kansas (2007), Joplin, Missouri (2011), and Albany, Georgia (2017); the Japan tsunami (2011); the flooding in Minot, North Dakota (2011); the wildfires in Sonoma County (2017); and the Texas hurricanes (2008, 2017). Stars of HOPE have also been sent to help communities impacted by horrific acts of violence, such as the terror attacks in San Bernardino, California (2015), Orlando, Florida (2016), and Manchester, England (2017); as well as the shootings in Las Vegas (2017), Parkland, Florida (2018), and Sutherland Springs, Texas (2017). Since 2007, over 80,000 hand-painted Stars of HOPE have reached disaster survivors in over 200 communities and 26 countries.

Methodology

A total of 62 adults who have participated in, received, and/or witnessed Stars of HOPE in various settings participated in an online survey about its impacts. These individuals were invited to participate in the survey via email between June and July 2018. Their names and contact information were provided by the New York Says Thank You Foundation. The survey was administered through Qualtrics, a secure online survey tool, and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. All responses were anonymous and confidential, meaning that no names or contact information were recorded in the data, and participants’ names and email addresses were destroyed upon completion of the survey. The online survey and consent procedures were reviewed and approved by Florida State University’s Institutional Review Board (Human Subjects Committee).

After the initial invitation, two follow-up reminders were sent to participants who had not yet opened or completed the survey. The survey response rate was 62%.

Overview of Survey Participants

Participants were involved in Stars of HOPE in a variety of ways. In total, 50% ($n = 31$) had received a Star of HOPE, 69% ($n = 43$) had created a Star of HOPE, and 71% ($n = 44$) had seen a Star of HOPE on display in the community.

The participants were 65% female and 35% male; 84% white; and 54% were between 45 and 64 years of age. The majority (63%) reported being married or in a domestic partnership, and most had high levels of educational attainment. All participants had achieved at least a high school or equivalency degree, and 57% reported having a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree. More detailed demographic information of the sample can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants $N = 62$.

	%
Gender	
Female	65%
Male	35%
Race/Ethnicity	
White	84%
Latino/a	11%
Asian	5%
Age	
25-34 years	13%
35-44 years	23%
45-54 years	24%
55-64 years	30%
65-74 years	10%
Marital Status	
Single, never married	19%
Married or domestic partnership	63%
Widowed	11%
Divorced	7%
Highest Level of Education	
High school degree or equivalent	13%
Some college, no degree	19%
Associate degree	11%
Bachelor’s degree	34%
Master’s degree	23%
Employment Status	
Employed full time	56%
Employed part time	19%
Unemployed	3%
Retired	15%
Unable to work	7%

“It provided all members of the community young and old [the opportunity] to come together to do something uplifting, creating unity and hope, whether they were directly affected or not.”

Findings

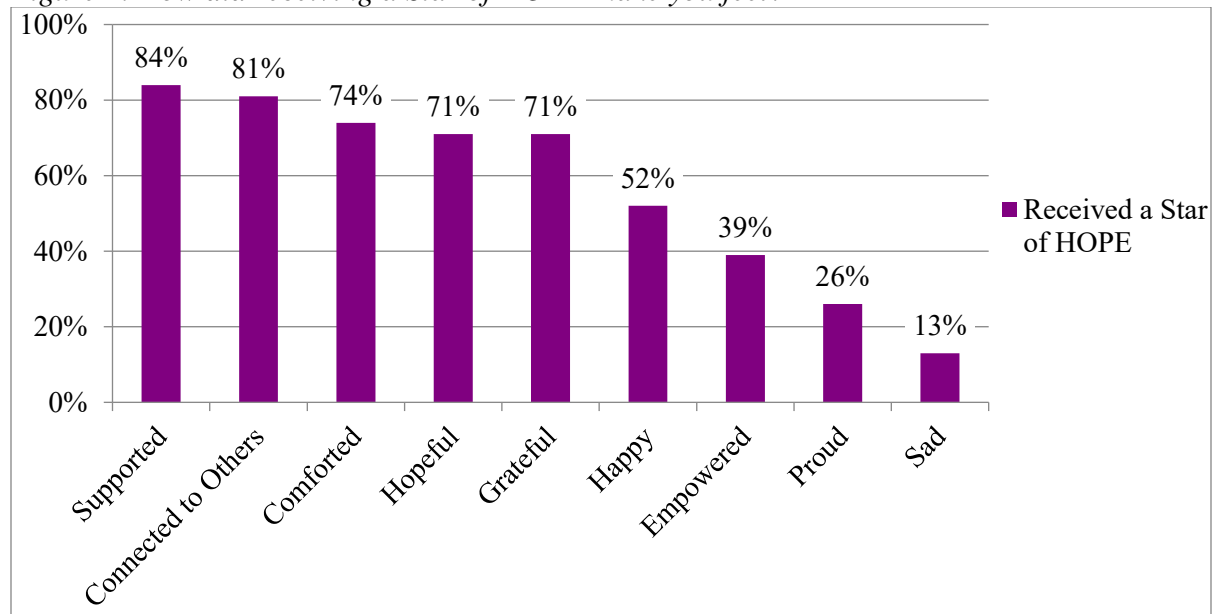
Impact of Receiving a Star of HOPE

Half of participants (50%) had received a Star of HOPE. These individuals were survivors of the 2015 San Bernardino Attack (35%), the 2017 Northern California Wild Fires (26%), the 2007 Greensburg Tornado (23%), and the 2016 Pulse Nightclub Shooting (6%).

All participants who received a Star of HOPE were directly impacted by a tragedy. They reported that as a result of the tragedy, they lost someone close to them (45%), their property was damaged (48%), they were emotionally impacted (58%), and/or they were physically injured (6%). Many participants reported being primary victims of the tragedy for which they received the Star of HOPE (58%), several were secondary victims (i.e., someone close to them was directly affected by the tragedy; 29%), and others were witnesses or members of the community where the tragedy occurred (13%).

Overall, participants felt positively about receiving a Star of HOPE. Receiving a Star of HOPE made the majority of survivors feel supported (84%), connected to others (81%), comforted (74%), hopeful (71%), and grateful (71%). Some reported that receiving a Star of HOPE made them feel happy (52%), empowered (39%), and proud (26%). A few participants indicated feelings of sadness (13%), but these same individuals also reported feeling comforted, supported, hopeful, and connected to others upon receiving their Star of HOPE. A summary of responses is provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1. How did receiving a Star of HOPE make you feel?





“There is so much support when we needed it most.”

“The Stars made us feel supported, not alone.”

“When I saw and read the first Star I cried, actually sobbed...knowing someone took the time to show their support. A small gesture made a HUGE impact!”

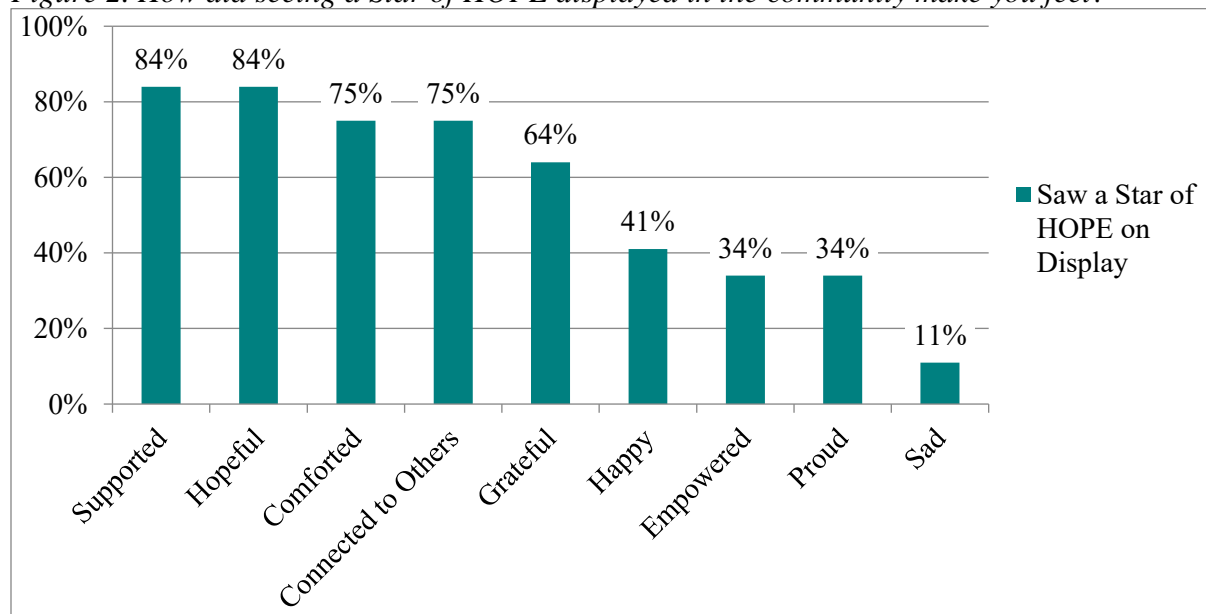
Impact of Seeing a Star of HOPE Displayed in the Community

A large portion of participants (71%) had seen at least one Star of HOPE on display in the community. Participants saw stars displayed for the 2017 Northern California Wild Fires (41%), the 2015 San Bernardino Attack (25%), the 2007 Greensburg Tornado (27%), the 2017 Las Vegas Massacre (7%), and the 2016 Pulse Nightclub Shooting (5%).

Several participants were primary victims of the tragedy for which they saw the Star of HOPE displayed (43%). Others were secondary victims (i.e., someone close to them was directly affected by the tragedy; 34%) or members of the affected community (23%). Many participants who reported seeing a Star of HOPE were personally impacted by the tragedy for which it was displayed. They reported that, as a result of the tragedy, they lost someone close to them (34%), their property was damaged (34%), they were emotionally impacted (89%), and/or they were physically injured (5%). Only one participant reported seeing a Star of HOPE on display for a tragedy for which he or she was not personally affected by.

Overall, participants felt positively about seeing a Star of HOPE on display in the community. Seeing a Star of HOPE made the majority of participants feel supported (84%), hopeful (84%), comforted (75%), connected to others (75%), and grateful (64%). Some reported that seeing a Star of HOPE made them feel happy (41%), empowered (34%), and proud (34%). A total of five participants indicated feelings of sadness upon seeing a Star of HOPE on display (11%), but feelings of sadness co-occurred with feelings of support, comfort, hope, happiness, gratefulness, and connectedness to others. A summary of responses can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 2. How did seeing a Star of HOPE displayed in the community make you feel?



“[The Stars] bring communities together and give words of hope.”

“They [have] a surprise factor because I’ve never heard of them until the stars started popping up around my community and then I found one hanging in my yard.”

“Community is larger than those directly affected.”



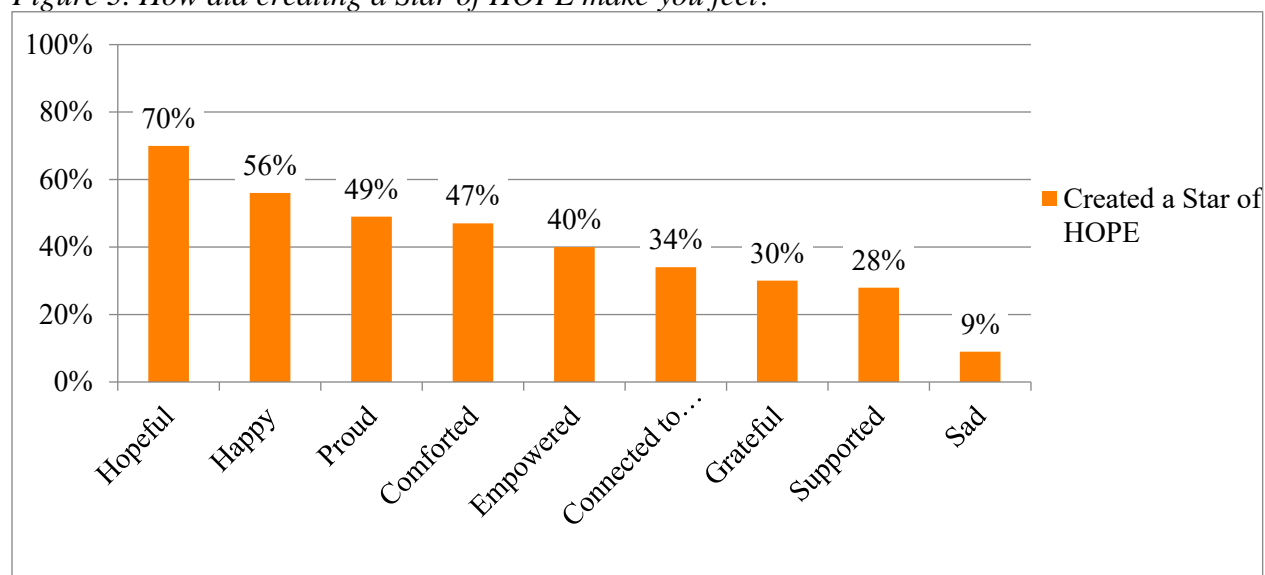
starsofhopeusa.org

Impact of Creating a Star of HOPE

Over two-thirds of participants (69%) created Stars of HOPE for victims of tragedy. Many participants created Stars of HOPE for multiple different tragedies, including the 2017 Northern California Wild Fires (21%), the 2007 Greensburg Tornado (21%), the 2016 Pulse Nightclub Shooting (19%), the 2015 San Bernardino Attack (14%), the 2017 Las Vegas Massacre (14%), 2017 Hurricane Harvey (9%), the 2017 Manchester Arena Bombing (7%), the 2011 Souris River Flood (2%), the 2009 Mena Tornado (2%), the 2017 Texas Church Shooting (2%), the 2017 North Park Elementary School Shooting (2%), the 2017 Tornado in Albany, Georgia (2%), the 2011 Joplin Tornado (2%), the 2011 Japan Tsunami (2%), and the 2018 Stoneman Douglas High School Shooting (2%).

The participants who created Stars of HOPE were concerned citizens (41%), community members (35%), secondary victims (15%), and primary victims (9%) of the tragedies for which the stars were created. Approximately half of the individuals who created Stars of HOPE were survivors of tragedies, and had also been the recipients of a Star of HOPE. Participants reported that they created Stars of HOPE because they “felt for those who were hurting,” that they were “paying it forward,” that “it was sad to see what the community was going through” and that they “just wanted to help.”

Figure 3. How did creating a Star of HOPE make you feel?



Creating Stars of HOPE was a positive experience. Participants most commonly reported that creating stars made them feel hopeful (70%), happy (56%), and proud (49%). Several individuals also noted that they felt comforted (47%), empowered (40%), connected to others (34%), grateful (30%), and supported (28%) by creating Stars of HOPE. A few participants reported that creating the stars made them feel sad (9%), but these same individuals also noted that doing so made them feel happy, hopeful, and empowered (see Figure 3).

STARS OF HOPE PROGRAM IMPACT STUDY



“Love, compassion, engagement, artistic expression.”

“The healing and calm from art therapy”

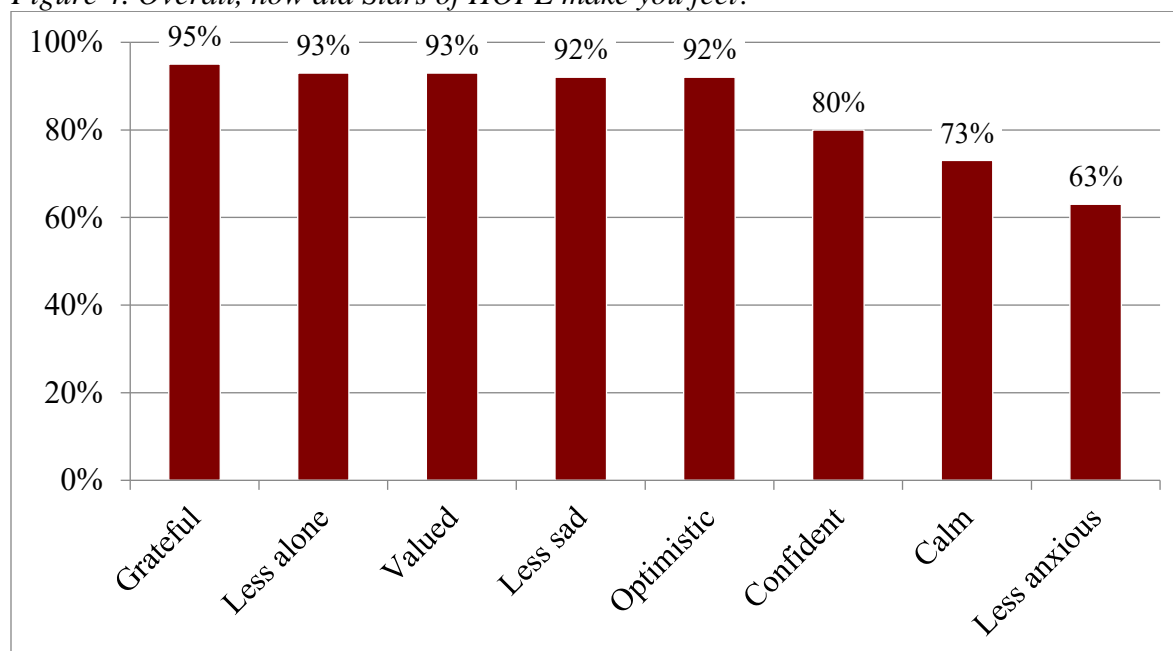


Overall Impact of Stars of HOPE

To determine how Stars of HOPE impacted people more broadly, all participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: (1) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel grateful,” (2) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel less alone,” (3) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel valued,” (4) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel less sad,” (5) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel more optimistic about the future,” (6) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel confident,” (7) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel calm,” and (8) “Stars of HOPE helped me feel less anxious.” Participants indicated their agreement to each of these items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The vast majority of participants either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with each of these statements. Indeed, nearly all participants either agreed or strongly agreed that Stars of HOPE helped them feel grateful (95%), less alone (93%), valued (93%), less sad (92%), more optimistic about the future (92%), confident (80%), calm (73%), and less anxious (63%). A summary of these responses is provided in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Overall, how did Stars of HOPE make you feel?



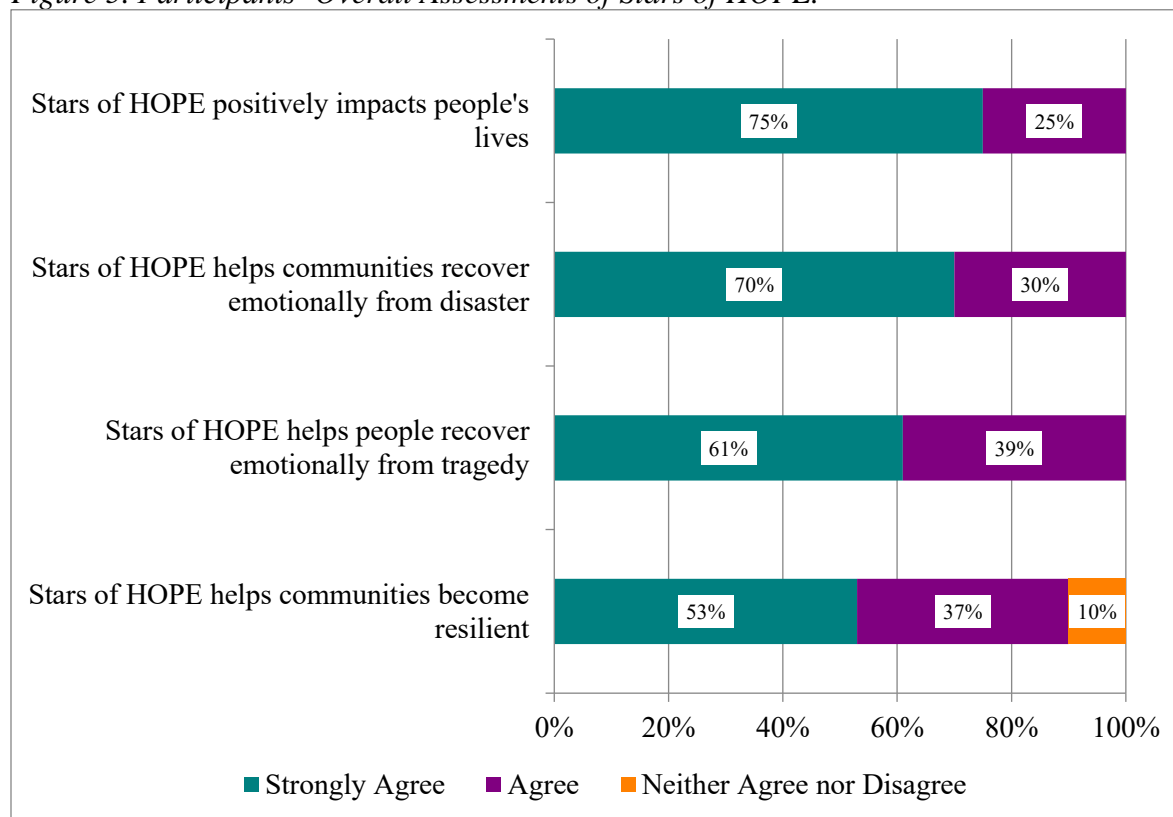
“The surprise that there are people out there that do not know you but want to support you, very powerful!”

Participant Assessments of Stars of HOPE

Participants were also asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following four statements: (1) “Stars of HOPE positively impacts people’s lives”; (2) “Stars of HOPE helps communities recover emotionally from disaster”; (3) “Stars of HOPE helps people recover emotionally from tragedy”; and (4) “Stars of HOPE helps communities become resilient.” Agreement to each statement was indicated on a scale of 1-5, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

None of the participants “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” with any of the statements presented. All participants (100%) either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that Stars of HOPE positively impacts people’s lives, helps communities recover emotionally from disaster, and helps people recover emotionally from tragedy. Nearly all participants (90%) also agreed that Stars of HOPE helps communities become resilient. An overview of responses is provided in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Participants’ Overall Assessments of Stars of HOPE.



“Seeing them [the stars] truly brings hope and togetherness.”

In Their Own Words: What Works

“People helping people find a bright spot in the midst of darkness...”

As part of the survey, participants were asked to describe, in their own words, what is best about the Stars of HOPE program. Overwhelmingly, people remarked about the value of connecting to others and how that helped them feel less alone.

“Stars of Hope help individuals feel connected to not only their community but the rest of the country.”

“They connect communities so we can remember we aren’t alone when bad things happen [and that] people care.”

“It brings people together and gives them a voice.”

“Feeling connected to others who care during a challenging time.”

“Not only the visual comfort but [being] connected to people who encouraged, supported and listened, especially to the pain of the experience and journey.”



Participants remarked about how meaningful it was for survivors of different tragedies to be able to share their support with each other.

“Stars of Hope allows you to pay it forward and share hope and light with communities outside your own.”

“Stars of Hope was of HUGE importance to (sic) the survivors from one disaster being empowered and given strength and opportunity to heal within by being able to reciprocate and pay it forward by sending stars to another disaster area.”

The Stars of Hope offered renewed feelings of hope knowing that others care.



“When I saw and read the first Star I cried, actually sobbed...knowing someone took the time to show their support. A small gesture made a HUGE impact!”

“Helps to express that those around the people who suffered care.”

“When it feels like there is nothing else that you can do to support your community...creating and seeing Stars of

Hope brings light. I felt empowered to create and hang the stars as an individual and as a community. Seeing them truly brings hope and togetherness. I LOVE THIS program!!”

There were also several comments about the accessibility of creating the stars and that anyone of any age, gender, culture can make a star.

“It teaches even the smallest child to have empathy for others and to give back even in the midst of your own tragedy.”

“Anyone can make a star.”

“SOH allows you to do something concrete to help, all ages can participate- empowering children as well as adults.”

“In Their Own Words: Suggestions for Improvements

“It’s hard to improve the love this program brings.”

Lastly, participants were asked to provide suggestions in their own words for how the Stars of HOPE program could be improved. Overall, participants were pleased with the program as it is structured. Suggestions for improvements include marketing of the program so that more are aware of its purpose and value. In addition, a concerted public relations campaign could generate more volunteers and revenue, which was indicated as a need. It was also mentioned that continued connection with the communities that have received the stars would be appreciated, such as through a newsletter or email updates.

“I’d love ... to bring attention [to Stars of Hope] so every community gets involved. I think you are all doing a wonderful act of kindness that changes lives.”

The survey further suggested that the cost of shipping and purchasing stars could be somewhat prohibitive. Recommendations include corporate sponsorship and/or fundraisers to mitigate some of the expense.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the response to the Stars of HOPE program was extremely positive. Moving forward, a larger international survey of Stars of HOPE participants and volunteers is needed to gain a deeper understanding of how the program impacts people’s lives and communities. Specifically, an intensive look at how the program influences participants’ resilience, coping, grief and levels of depression. Although Stars of HOPE have reached disaster survivors in over 200 communities and 26 countries, all participants in the current survey were U.S.-based, and people of color were underrepresented. Still, the evidence presented here clearly shows that Stars of HOPE has a meaningful and positive impact on individuals affected by tragedy.



“A simple act of kindness that was Priceless!”