



**ANNUAL REPORT
2020**



COURAGE MKE

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

If I am being honest, I thought about using a New Year's MadLib for this opening letter to help describe 2020. Though it may have worked, it just wouldn't have captured the love and support that flowed through our communities throughout the year as we all were the furthest from each other ever.

2020 took us all by surprise. To say we would not have made it through without all of our supporters would be the understatement of the decade. As schools began to close, and we navigated the need to have residents at the house 24/7 basically threw our entire 2020 budget out the window. Our Staff and our Board were amazing working together to help ensure we were operating with fiscal responsibility. The one thing that never lost focus was ensuring that the youth we serve always remained our number one focus.

Now, the challenge of 2021 is staring us in the face and we know what to expect. Our schools remain closed, community organizations continue to struggle and we are all seeking support from our communities. Yet, we all keep forging on. We so grateful to our entire Courage MKE Family. Your continued support is greatly and forever appreciated!

BRAD SCHLAIKOWSKI

Executive Director




LETTER FROM COURAGE MKE'S BOARD

In early 2020, Courage MKE was poised for a successful year of stability and growth. The board of directors for Courage MKE was working to support executive director Brad Schlaikowski in actively realizing our 2020 strategic goals. Many of these plans were halted abruptly by March 2020 as the pandemic became a major issue across the globe. During this time, Courage MKE's operating expenses began to rise sharply while the rate of incoming donations at both the individual and corporate level slowed significantly. We remained optimistic throughout 2020 but were disappointed when our traditional November Gala, our largest annual fundraiser, could only be realized in a greatly reduced virtual format.

Despite the many challenges that hindered our growth in 2020, there were a number of great achievements to be proud of. Significant efforts were placed on providing training to Courage House staff in the areas of diversity, equity & inclusion. This focus has grown to an organization wide DE&I training effort which continues now as we progress into 2021. Another area of pride shines bright as Courage House continues to maintain an impressively high average length of stay for its residents. These averages remain well above the state average! Courage MKE remains committed to building relationships within the community and during these challenging times, we continued to support other local organizations by partnering and sharing resources in various ways including joint fundraising efforts.

The financial hardships recognized during the pandemic bluntly reminded us how significantly Courage MKE relies on community financial support in order to operate successfully. We sincerely want to thank each and every one of you for your continued support of our organization and its mission. It is because of you that we are able to ensure Courage has the ability to achieve the strategic goals that have been outlined for 2021 and beyond.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



"Courage House provided J with the environment he needed to grow and gain insight in order to return home safely and that is something many group homes are not able to do."

-Caitlin, Lead Care Coordinator of a former Courage House resident

Our Mission

Courage MKE fuels a collaborative movement to provide the resources LGBTQ+ youth need to **thrive**.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

From the moment this organization became an idea, we knew that Courage MKE would be a safe place for all staff and residents. Diversity fuels our spirit and our commitment to inclusion across race, gender, orientation, identity, age and experiences will always be our compass to drive us forward and become a leader within our community.

Our Commitment

In support of the current social unrest that has awakened those all over the United States, Courage MKE began reexamining ways that we as an organization can continue to best serve the youth that we serve, including equitable opportunities for the queer youth that we serve. In third quarter of last year we enlisted the services of The Brimful Life, led by Beth Ridley, to assess, evaluate and guide us in ensuring we are holding ourselves accountable throughout our organization.

NAVIGATING THE NEW NORMAL

As we prepared for 2020, no one saw COVID coming. Budgets had already been approved and plans for growing were underway. Everything changed on March 25, 2020 when we were all told to stay home.

Now, with our residents home all day, we needed to pivot and schedule double the amount of our planned daily staff, increase our weekly food orders, plan on increased utilities and ensure we had plenty of activities around. We knew we needed to do everything we can to help our residents feel comfortable, safe and that they had plenty to do. Like many of us adults, monitoring their mental health more frequently than before because it's another top priority.

Our staff had to adjust too. We had so many discussions about what we need to put in place to make sure we all were prepared and feel safe when the inevitable happens and COVID makes its way (and it did!) to our house. Workloads increased meaning the potential for burnout did the same. Communication amongst staff over the past year has been phenomenal.

Staff and residents all began getting tested at least bi-weekly, we had to stop having our volunteers to limit exposure, accepting donations at our front door became impossible. But! That didn't stop us from having fun. We sat down and made lists of places we could go that did not have large crowds of people.

Some of our favorite things to do were hiking/exploring, mini golf, visiting different beaches, and who could resist the temptation of some frozen custard with our new backyard fire pit?

2020 COMMUNITY IMPACT



COURAGE KITS

Through corporate, independent and community collection drives, in one-gallon zip-lock bags, we assemble Courage Kits to hand out to those in-need around Milwaukee.

We accept donations of completed kits or any of the items that can be used to make them. Since we started this program, we have delivered over 35,000 kits throughout our communities.



YOUTH & FAMILIES BLM MARCH

As our future leaders, we felt it important to encourage youth to be involved members of society and take part in shaping their world. On the anniversary of the Stonewall Riots we invited youth and families throughout southeastern Wisconsin for a safe march in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and allowing them to utilize their voices. Youth speakers from around Milwaukee had the opportunity to speak and many organizations came together for families to stick around for additional activities that were based around acceptance and unity. Courage MKE handed out over 1500 books to families focusing on Preschool, Elementary and High School readers to encourage learning to continue following the march.



PARTNERSHIP WITH PUBLIC ALLIES

This fall we welcomed our first Public Ally, Jessica Romo to our team. With all of our resident in virtual learning Jess has been instrumental in working with each resident one on one and in groups to keep them on track with their academics throughout this pandemic. They created an culture of trust and respect and recognized each residents individual learning needs and preferences

Since 1992, Public Allies has helped thousands of underrepresented young leaders serve our country, get on successful pathways to higher education and careers, and bring communities together to work for the common good.

2020 COMMUNITY IMPACT



PROUDLY TOGETHER

As we all began to feel the distance of Wisconsin's #SaferAtHome order, Courage MKE teamed up with One Voice Milwaukee, Videographer Meg Strobel, singers Jen Porter and Tyler Hall and the community at large to create a video of photos showing that we can still be **#ProudlyTogether** to raise money for Diverse & Resilient, Pathfinders, One Voice Milwaukee, Project Q and Courage MKE. The community came together and helped us raise \$14,500 that was divided equally amongst all five organizations.



HOLIDAY HELPERS

For the two years we have been open, we made a commitment to teaching our residents the importance of pay it forward. So many helped open this house and it is important to all of us that our residents understand that **#CommunityHelpsCommunity**. The residents and staff at The Courage House worked to help the community our house is in have a special holiday season. The residents collected wishes for over 130 children and asked the community to help grant their wishes. On December 15th, the team delivered over 700 gifts to families but, more importantly, we made so many new friends.



SCHOLARSHIPS

Every year, at our gala, we award scholarships to high school Juniors and Seniors across the state.

Though it was virtual, this year was no different as we awarded four \$1000 Scholarships.

Since we launched our Jackie Roberts Memorial Scholarship in 2015, we have awarded \$22,500 in scholarships for any form of post high school education to students across the state.

NEW PROGRAM IN 2020

CRISIS STABILIZER PROGRAM

Complex Trauma

Our residents are dealing with complex trauma and often multiple mental health diagnoses. Feelings of isolation, anger, self harm, suicidality, or aggression are common. Our mental health system is overburdened, and calls to police are traumatic for staff and residents.

Under the guidance and leadership of our Program Director, Jean Northway, in August 2020, we launched a Crisis Support Team specific to Courage House, the first of its kind in the state by a group home. Our Crisis Stabilizers have extensive mental health experience from hospitals, residential treatment centers, and assessment centers. They lead therapeutic and rapport building groups several times a month with residents, bringing in art therapy, music therapy, and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy skills. After looking at data of when crises were most likely to occur, we have crisis stabilizers on call from 5pm-midnight each weekday, and also from 9am-midnight on weekends. They respond via phone or text immediately, and be in the house working with our residents within 20 minutes. They are able to deescalate, safety plan, and process concerns with our residents.

Our Crisis Stabilization team is an added layer of support for our residents, and since August 2020 - has prevented at least 14 calls to police or hospitalization. They provide debriefing to staff and residents, improving responses for future crises that occur.

OUR TEAM

Courage MKE Board of Directors

Eric Heinritz - President

Sean Sullivan - Treasurer

Amerin Idell - Secretary

Jill Waxman - Member

Natalie Zaroni - Member

Pablo Navaro - Member

Nick Schlaikowski - Member

Leigh Hayden - Member

Hugo Beam - Member

Jamila Dawn Mitchell - Member

Courage MKE Staff

Jean Northway - Program Director

Jenna Sterr - House Supervisor

Xan Hammel - Resident Care Worker

Tywanda Grey - Resident Care Worker

Quincy Toliver - Resident Care Worker

Emily Wallander - Resident Care Worker

KB Bjerk - Resident Care Worker/Grant Writer

Laura Barajaz - Resident Care Worker

Kyle Caldwell - Resident Care Worker

Elizabeth Kurt - Resident Care Worker/Crisis Stabilizer

Brenna Creamer - Resident Care Worker

Jeff Moulton - Resident Care Worker

Spring Holz Houston - Resident Care Worker

Myoshia Jackson - Resident Care Worker/Crisis Stabilizer

Ronnie Rivera - Resident Care Worker/Crisis Stabilizer


Lea Cornell - Crisis Stabilizer

Niki Drolshagen - Crisis Stabilizer

Brooke Miller - Crisis Stabilizer

Louis Williams - Community Relations & Events Manager

Brad Schlaikowski - Executive Director



20 years ago, I worked at a group home and was afraid of losing my job because of my sexual orientation. I am so proud to work alongside staff who can bring their full selves to work and be role models of amazing, strong, confident, LGBTQ adults. The youth in this house help me grow every single day and I am inspired to see them change the world for the better.

- Jean Northway

Courage House Program Director



MEET OUR STAFF:

MIMI'S EXPERIENCE

"Six years ago, I came out of college expecting to help my community but not knowing in what ways. Some of my stipulations were justice and to help as many LGBTQ+ kids that I can. I was warned by my mother to never become a social worker because of how emotional, passionate, and protective I am over people, especially people that I care about. Naturally, I fell into social work and it's been a passion that I didn't even know existed for me. Throughout the six years that

I have been a social worker, I realized quickly that I love working with families and youth.

However, I hated working for people that were not as passionate as I am or who wanted to continue a never ending cycle because it was beneficial for them. I played many roles in the non-profit and social work worlds, doing anything ranging from engagement, communication, coordination, case management, college coaching, and finally crisis stabilization. For me it felt like the same tired out and drown out stories with no possibilities of getting out. It wasn't until I met one person that told me that I was different than the other providers. It made me want to push to make people's lives different, regardless of if I knew they were going to get anywhere else in the system. Before that time, I did a lot of research on Courage House. Embarrassingly enough, I applied to a position but didn't think that I was qualified to work in such an inspiring, specialized place and this was something that my own insecurities got in the way of. One thing I noticed as a social worker working with different group homes and organizations was that the identifiers that I have in my life were not allowed to exist in a huge space, which is puzzling to me.

"All I needed was a home to feel safe. I needed a place that existed where the youth, as well as the staff, were always respected. This group home isn't just about being LGBTQ+; it benefits these type of children but it's more geared to be like a family."

Every day I was telling youth that it was OK to coexist as Black LGBTQ+ human being when everyone around them told them that that wasn't allowed. For example, there might be places for youth that embrace the culture of being Black, and even accept that this person was LGBTQ+, but wouldn't do things such as respect their boundaries or pronouns, forcing them to feel illegitimate within the community. Over time, this became frustrating for me so finally I found a safe haven: Courage House. All I needed was a home to feel safe. I needed a place that existed where the youth, as well as the staff, were always respected. This group home isn't just about being LGBTQ+; it benefits these type of children but it's more geared to be like a family. They celebrate birthdays together and visit around together. If there is a holiday, celebration or tradition that a youth has, they incorporate that in their everyday life and educate the other youth as well.

Courage House is a place to explore not only your identity, but your way of life – the way you cope with things, the way you present yourself to the world and what it means to be yourself. Courage House easily became a place that I needed to work for and put my expertise towards. Coming from Milwaukee I was told because of many aspects of my identity, I would likely not be as successful as I am today. There are many different things that make me, me. Such as being Black, LGBTQ+, as well as having a physical and learning disability. However, the moment that I walked into Courage House they saw these abilities and wanted nothing more than for me to show the youth that have similar combinations of identities that it is possible to exist and it is possible to cope healthily. Every day that I'm in the house I am reminded the fact that I am emotional and the fact that I am passionate. My protectiveness makes those children feel safe, and the only hope I ever had was to make one person feel that there is a home; Courage just so happens to have all of that embodied in one. This is a safe haven and I am so proud to be a part of it. It is so refreshing to know that in my city where I grew up there is some freedom."

XAN - RESIDENT CARE WORKER



"My name is Xan (they/them/theirs). I have been working for Courage since April of 2019, and have seen Courage go through a lot of changes in the last two years. I have worked with every resident who has ever lived at courage, and I have to say this past year has been the best year yet for the kids and the staff.

This year we implemented more trauma informed care practices, trainings, and policies. This model has been working great for our residents. We also got our own team of on-call crisis workers this year, which has helped the kids and staff immensely. It has been so nice to know that if a resident needs extra help, someone can be there within 15 minutes to provide extra crisis counseling and assistance.

I am so excited for summer to come again so we can do more outdoor activities, since Covid has limited the types of activities we can safely do with the kids. Although this pandemic has been hard, with our residents cooped up with each other for much of the Winter, we have still been able to help them find joy in COVID-safe activities like baking, makeovers, art projects, and board games. They are excited for the return of campfires, bike rides, picnics, hikes, and beach days."

EMILY - RESIDENT CARE WORKER

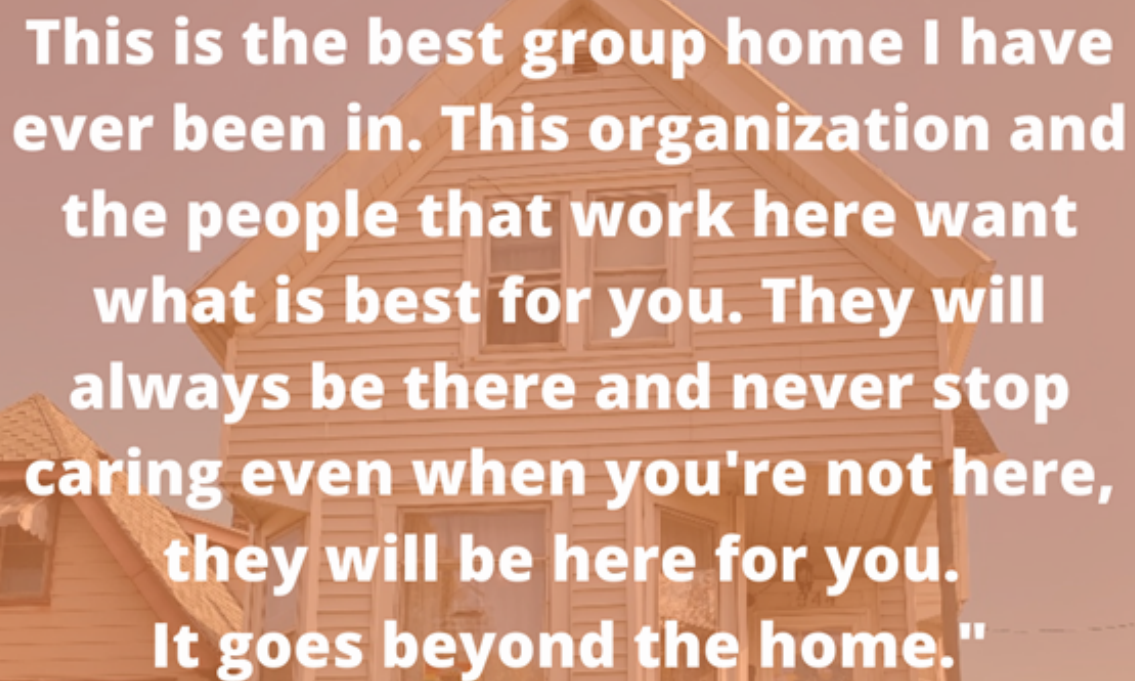
"I started working at Courage House in July, 2020 at an understandably turbulent time. I had worked with teenagers in the past, and was excited to have the opportunity to do so again. I quickly came to realize that Courage House was not just a house, but a home that I was graciously welcomed into. As much as I tried to prepare for the realities of working in a home full of teenagers, I was met with new excitements and challenges each day, each stretching my understanding of relationship and connection in the most wonderful way.



After the first few weeks, I'd formed relationships with each of the residents, each special and unique. I had expected to grow and learn from each resident, but the ways in which my capacity for empathy and involvement in their lives grew were unimaginable. In just the short amount of time I've been at the house, multiple residents have transitioned home, been accepted to college, started a part-time job, learned to ask for what they need, and found incredible friendships with other residents and staff.

As long as I've known it, Courage House has been a place of safety and peace, though not necessarily crisis-free. Each resident struggles with a combination of family stress, the challenges of being queer, mental health, and worry for the future, just as many of us do. The silver lining though is that they are able to navigate these challenges in a safe environment with people who care deeply about them. As challenging as it may be sometimes, my relationships with each resident are some of the greatest joys and privileges of my life.

Upcoming at Courage House are exciting steps in our residents' lives: a high school graduation, transitions into independent living, the end of seventh and ninth grades, and as always, the continuation of growth into healthy, kind, and successful teenagers and adults. Courage House is not isolated from the community it exists in though, and would not be as successful as it is if not for the continued support. If you or your business are interested in supporting Courage House and our residents, head on over to our website <https://www.couragemke.org/get-involved-1> to find different ways to get involved! As the weather gets warmer and school comes to an end for this year, we are always looking for outdoor activities and COVID-safe plans to get the kids out and engaged."



**This is the best group home I have
ever been in. This organization and
the people that work here want
what is best for you. They will
always be there and never stop
caring even when you're not here,
they will be here for you.
It goes beyond the home."**

- Jhone', 17

Courage House Resident

MEET ASAA - COURAGE HOUSE RESIDENT

"Throughout the legacies in my family, I've learned to love and hate my gender.

Yet, I never to backed down on what I believe.

So many times I saw myself in the void, yet I have never fallen in, near or below. I have placed an unapologetic mindset whenever I communicate and defend my gender, as well as the gender of those folks whose life has decided to treat unfairly. That's why I stood my ground, furthermore placed myself in front of the crowd.

Holding that banner, as if my pride depended on it. I stood with a community, and I stood with my family. Not by father, not by blood.

I was willing to sacrifice my image, my safety and my workspace, all for a community that backs me up. Not in any simple surrealistic way, but in a way that brings equity to my life.

My community knows my gender, knows my stance and accepts my way of living. I shall never back away from them. They have the right to defend their honor and safety.

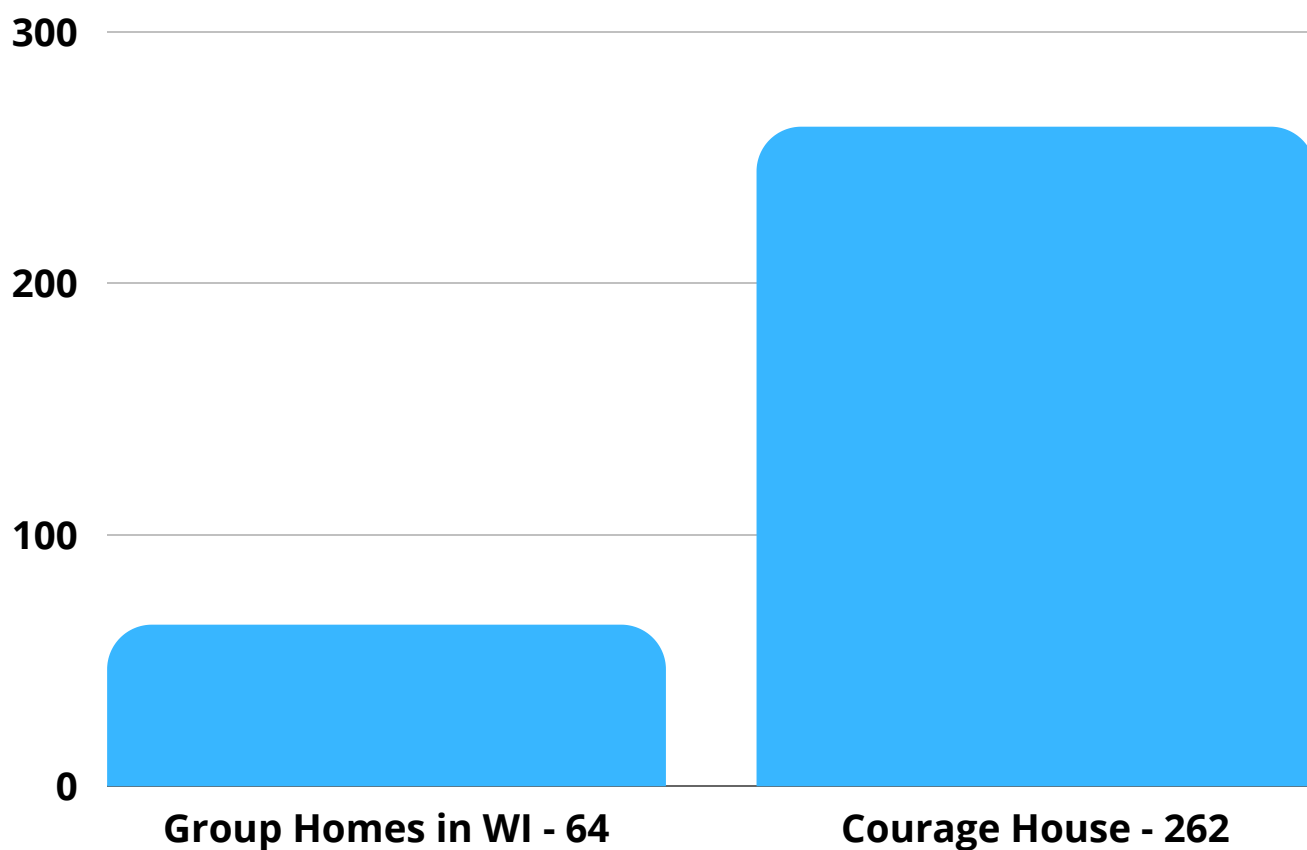
That's when I made a larger impact. In the Courage House I never hid who I was, I never tolerated the disrespect despite of gender or sexuality. I never backed away when a fellow queer saw its image break to bits.

I colored my room as well as I handed as simple as food to the homeless, that were drafted to the streets because of their circumstances.

I continue to stand with a community that came from the ashes, that came from the Stonewall riots. That for the longest times they fought to keep themselves safe. Because they love to live and they love humans just for who they are."

WHO WE SERVE

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY IN DAYS

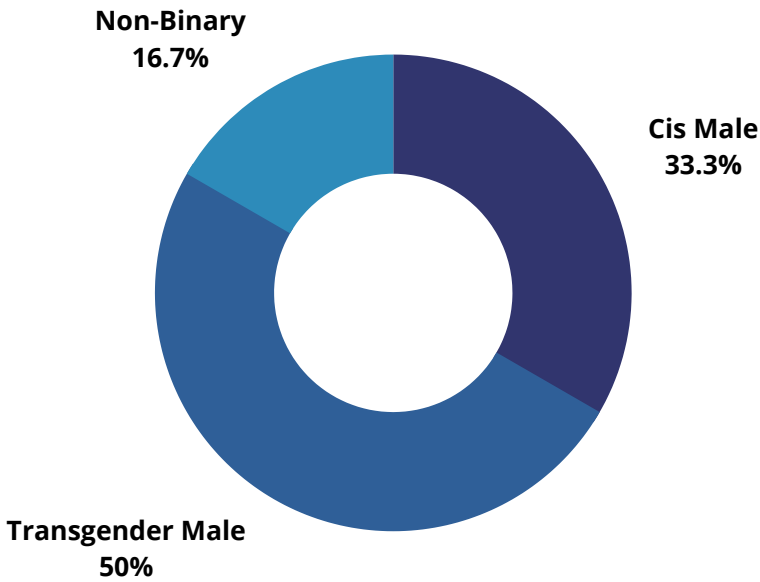


OUR AMAZING TEAM

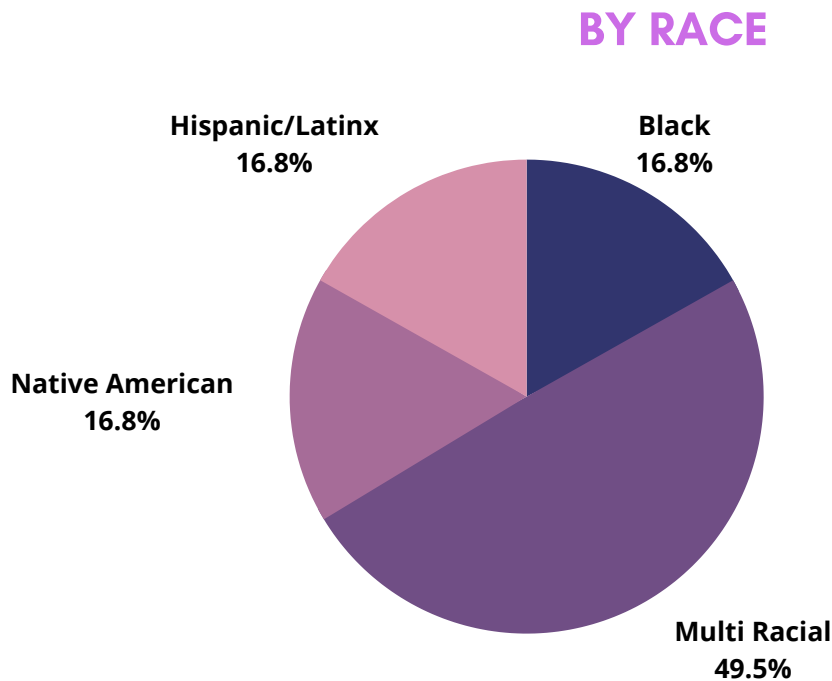
Our amazing staff work day and night to ensure our residents have the support they need for their mental and physical well-being. Nearly all of our staff identify as LGBTQ so our residents see a variety of thriving adult role models.

Our goal at Courage MKE is to reset the expectation of how group homes operate. We use restorative justice practices, creating a sense of community. Our staff plan daily activities at the house and at least two community activities per week providing cultural, educational and, most importantly, FUN things to do!

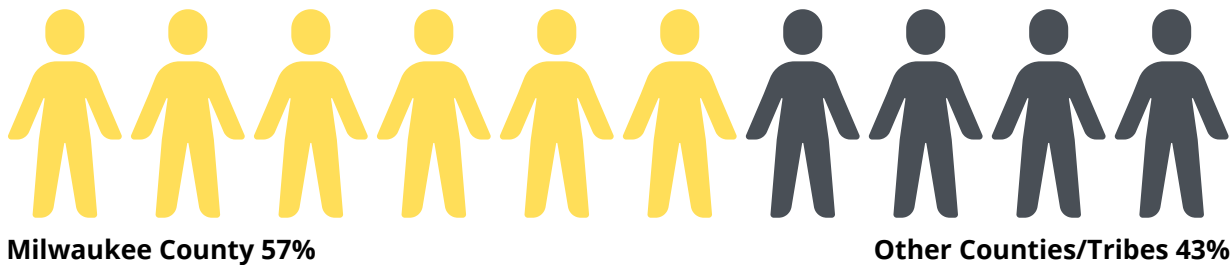
WHO WE SERVE



BY GENDER IDENTITY

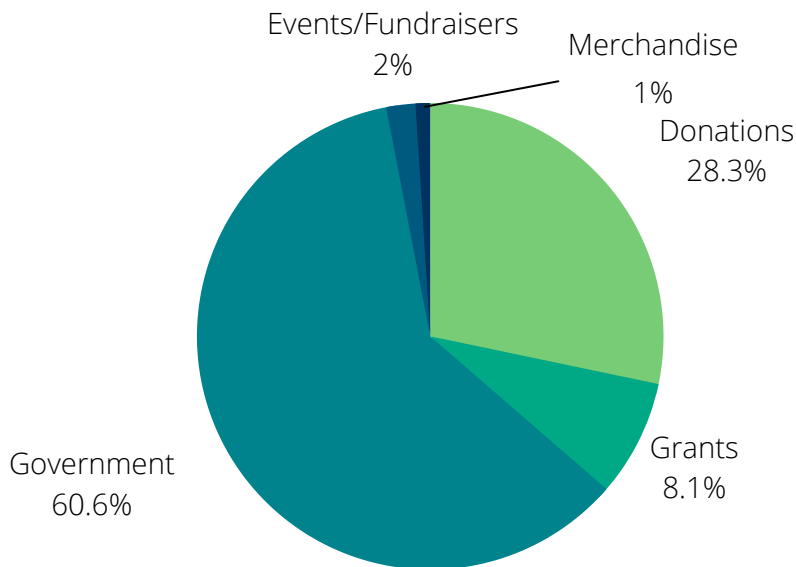


BY RACE



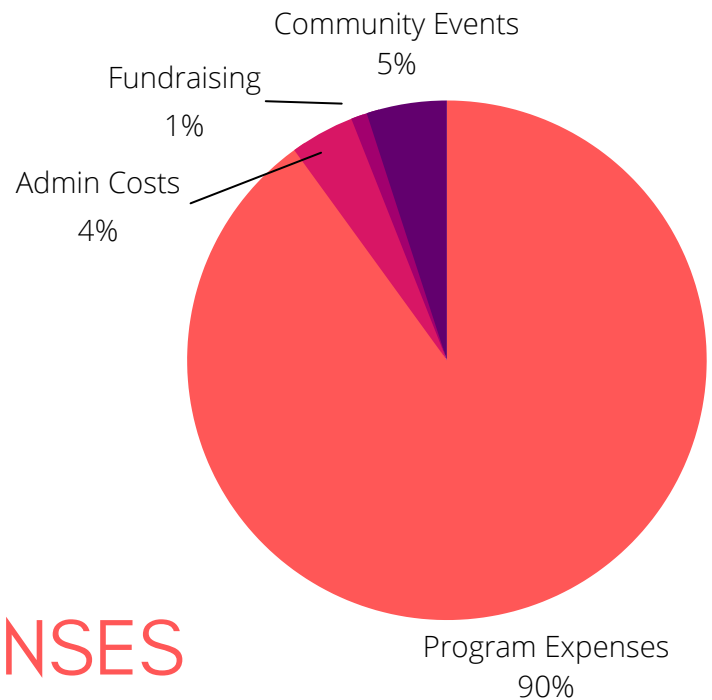
REFERRAL SOURCES

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW



REVENUE

EXPENSES



2020 Total Revenue: \$588,407.30

2020 total expenses: \$611,278.65

Thankfully, we had emergency funds to ensure we were able to continue to serve the community with the unexpected costs due to COVID 19.

THANK YOU TO OUR \$1,000.00 PLUS DONORS

Laura Sommerfeld	American Family Insurance
Wells Fargo	Dreams Foundation
Beer Capitol Distributing	Saber Tooth Studios
Jesse Mendelsohn &	NessAlla LLC
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Eric Brouch	Millwrights & Pile Drivers Local
Kari Hyatt	Union No. 2337
Chris Francis	Northwestern Mutual
Margaret Kellogg	Cranky Al's
Kohl's	Greendale Community Church
Jody Baxter	Double Platinum DJ
Karen Young	Milwaukee Gay Sports Network
Cherek Family	Charter Communications
Arizona Community Fund	Dedicated Computing
4 Brothers Blended Beer Co.	Gregory Arends
The Starr Group	Willis Towers Watson Foundation
Aurora	Jeffrey Hall
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