





courage+

2024 Annual Report



+ community
+ individuality
+ love
+ you

Our aim is to give LGBTQ+ youth a sense of community centered around care, safety and acceptance – while bringing about real systemic change.

-  Advocacy & Awareness
-  Housing & Resources
-  Give-back Programs
-  Youth Programs

And you make it possible.




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-  414-240-2882



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Courage+ Family,

As we think about all of the wonderful things accomplished in 2024, we are so proud of the unexpected ride it has been. Throughout the year, we showed what it means to be courageous and saw so many individuals teach us new meanings of courage.

Last year brought extraordinary milestones with record-breaking donations and a remarkable turnout at our gala yet again! We expanded our team and our footprint, which will allow us to touch so many more lives throughout the country, rather than just the city of Milwaukee. For this expansion, we have made an announcement for a name change to Courage+ to allow us to have a broader scope and definition to serve all.

At the end of last year, we all received news that a new administration would be attacking our children, communities and livelihoods. We have come so far, but it shows how fast we can get pushed back. We are standing strong and making our voices loud for all to hear. We are not going anywhere and we will show them that. However, now more than ever, your support is critical! Whenever you donate, volunteer or fundraise for us, you create immediate and long-lasting change for our children, residents and communities we serve.

Thank you to all who have joined the fight. We have a long way to go. But together, we can achieve so much more! We look forward to a challenging, yet rewarding, 2025 with you all.

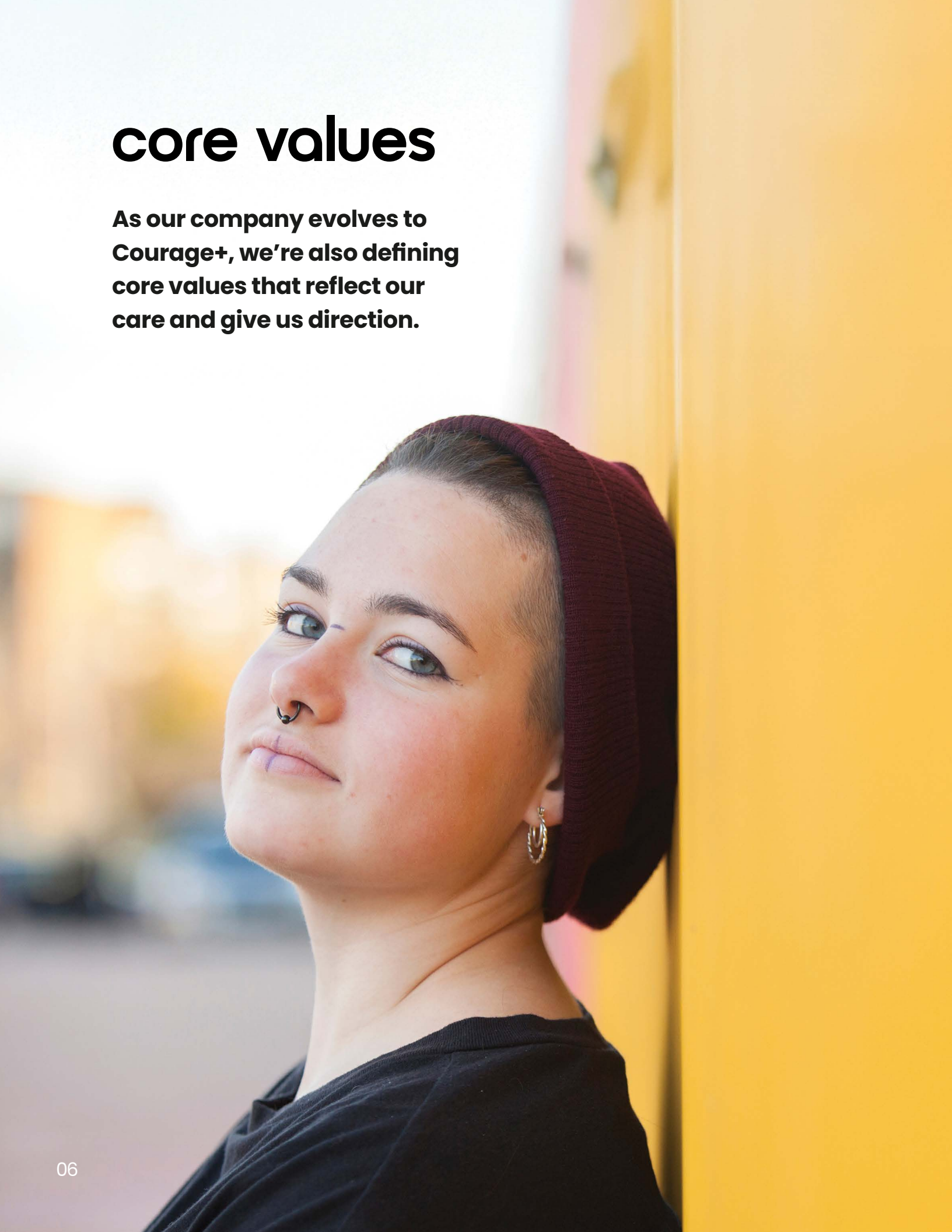
Best,

Trevor Bennett and Brad Schlaikowski
Courage+ Board President and Executive Director



core values

As our company evolves to Courage+, we're also defining core values that reflect our care and give us direction.



ADVOCACY

We actively work to amplify the voices of LGBTQ+ youth, challenge injustice and influence policies and systems to create a more equitable and affirming world. Through both individual and systemic advocacy, we stand with youth to ensure their rights, needs and dignity are recognized and respected.

COLLABORATION

We build intentional partnerships with other families, organizations and communities to create holistic systems of care and change.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

We believe in repairing harm through accountability, dialogue and shared community wellness. Restorative justice practices focus on relationships – recognizing that when harm occurs, it affects people and communities, not just rules. We create spaces where youth and staff can reflect, listen and take responsibility in ways that foster understanding, rebuild trust and strengthen connection. Rather than punishment, we prioritize transformation, growth and the restoration of dignity for everyone involved.

INCLUSION

We intentionally create spaces where all identities, backgrounds and experiences are welcomed, respected and celebrated. We recognize that true inclusion goes beyond representation – it means ensuring everyone feels a deep sense of belonging, value and voice in every aspect of our work.

TRAUMA-INFORMED & HEALING-CENTERED

We recognize that trauma affects individuals, communities and systems – and that healing is a collective, holistic process. Our approach honors and respects each person's strengths, stories and cultural identities, creating spaces rooted in safety, trust and empowerment. We shift the focus from "What's wrong with you?" to "What's happened to you?" and, ultimately, to "What's possible for you?" – centering on healing, connection and hope as essential parts of growth.

board & staff

These dedicated folks consistently poured their hearts into our organization and programs in 2024.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Trevor Bennett
President

Brandon Herr
Vice President

Ashley Krueger-Rook
Treasurer

Cristin Bock
Secretary

Will Anderson
Member

Steve Davis
Member

Jamila Dawn Mitchell
Member

Erin Fay
Member

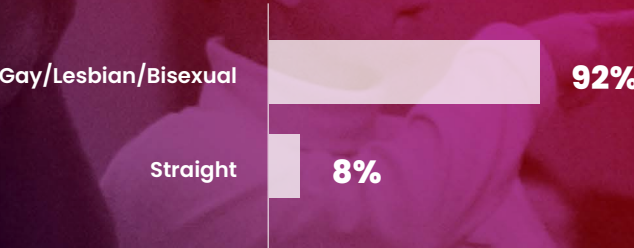
Robin Matchett-Schmidt
Member

Pablo Navarro
Member

Katherine Quinn
Member

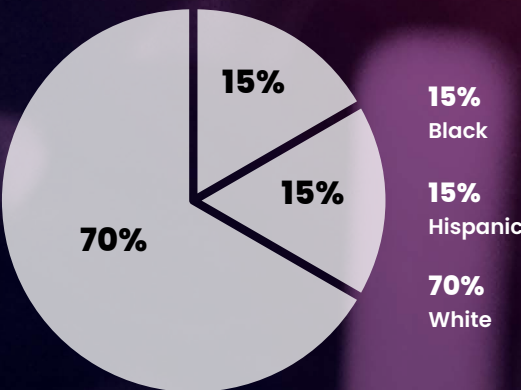
Jaci Ruben
Member

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ORIENTATION BREAKDOWN



8% OF OUR BOARD IDENTIFIES AS TRANSGENDER

BOARD OF DIRECTORS RACE BREAKDOWN



“

As someone who has worked many years in the social services field, it has been a breath of fresh air to work for an organization that is so committed to trauma-informed care and social justice. **This agency is life-changing for so many people that it is truly immeasurable. I’m so proud to be a part of the movement Courage+ has created, and I can’t wait to continue to learn and grow with our residents, staff and community!”**

Holly Waeltz, Crisis Stabilizer



**COURAGE+
STAFF**

Brad Schlaikowski
Executive Director

Brenna Creamer
Housing Director

Alisha Hart
Director of Programming

Ronnie Rivera
Crisis Stabilizer Manager

Tywanda Gray
Resident Care Worker

Quincy Toliver
Resident Care Worker
& Crisis Stabilizer

Cynthia Curry
Resident Care Worker

Fayomi Agbongbon
Courage House Supervisor

Jim Scholtz
Crisis Stabilizer

Alex Martinez
Resident Care Worker

Shardé Jennings
Crisis Stabilizer &
+YOU facilitator

Pagia Foxx
C2 Apartments Supervisor

John Schild
Resident Advocate

Neil Keats
Resident Advocate

Richard Brasfield
Resident Advocate & Vibes
& Visibiity Coordinator

Sevyn Lockett
Resident Advocate

Jay Roby
Resident Advocate

Penny Willis
Resident Advocate

Barry Dallas
Resident Care Worker

Christopher Logan
Director of Fund
Development

Keturah Hayes-Jinor
Resident Care Worker

Lu Clark
Resident Care Worker

Rob Thomas
Director of Salon Services

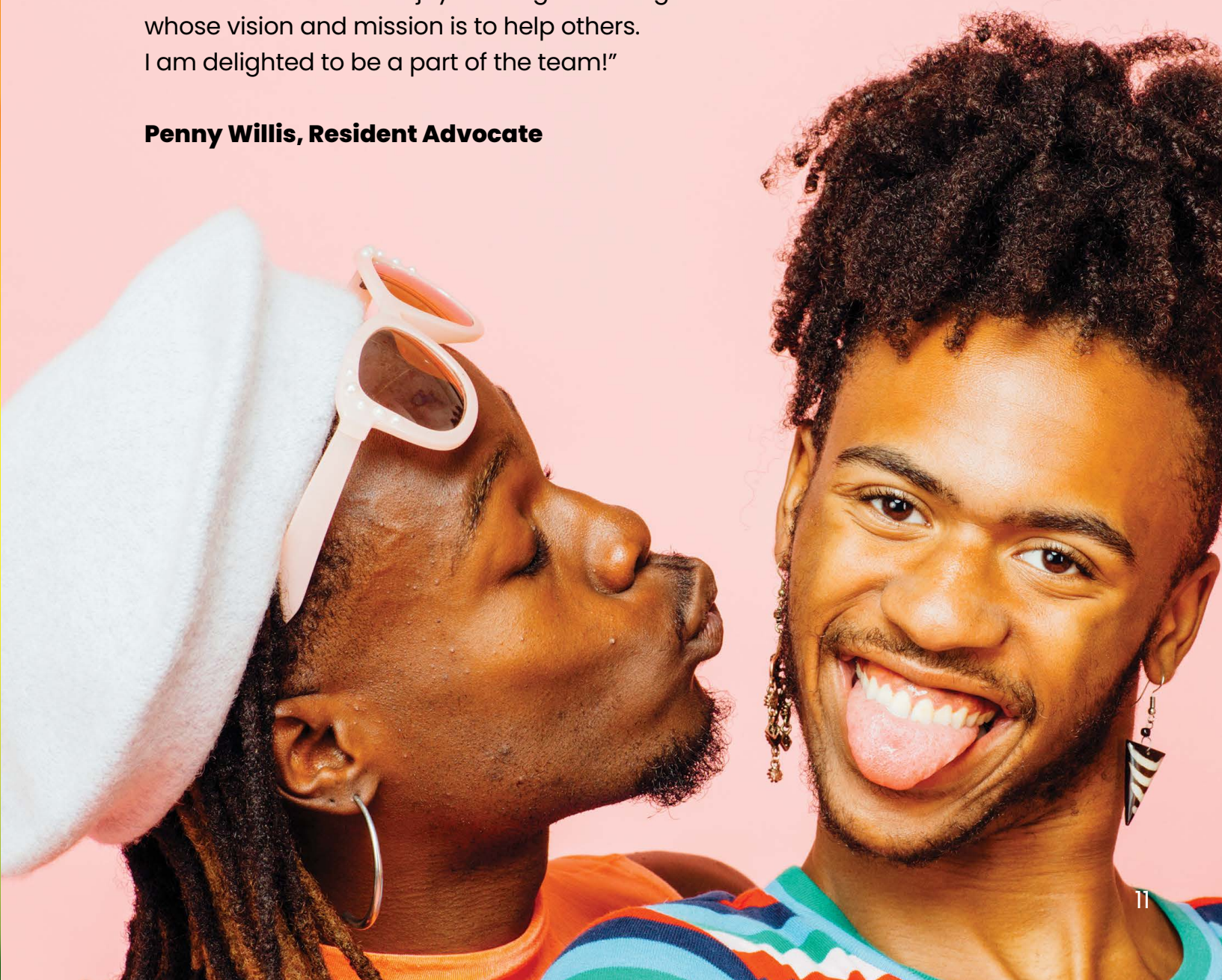
Gaby Chaparro
Resident Care Worker

Hazel Cicero
Operations & Impact
Specialist

“

C2 Apartments is a transitional program geared for LGBTQ+ individuals ages 18 to 24. This program provides young adults residency, a safe haven and many additional resources, including for community involvement. **Staff are available 24 hours a day to assist with any questions, issues or concerns that may arise.** Working at C2 Apartments has been a positive experience. I have a great rapport with the residents and staff. The staff is very welcoming, which encourages open communication among staff and residents. **Courage+ is an organization that fosters collaboration, has a diverse culture, in conjunction with having an all-inclusive work environment.** I enjoy working for an organization whose vision and mission is to help others. I am delighted to be a part of the team!”

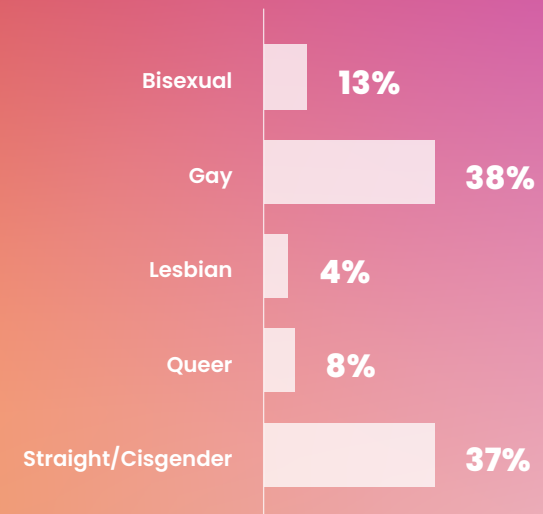
Penny Willis, Resident Advocate



proud of our diverse board & staff

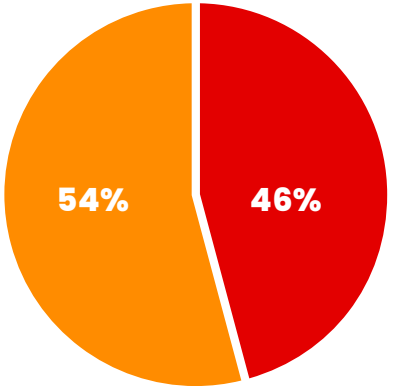
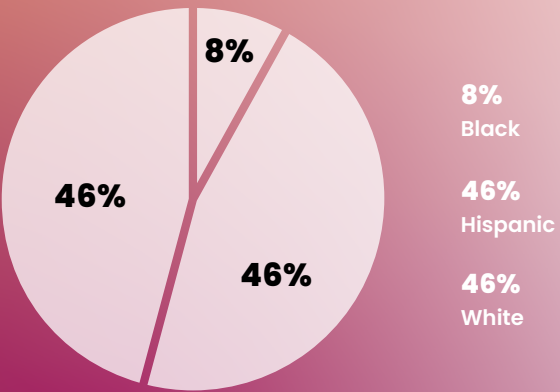


STAFF ORIENTATION BREAKDOWN



21% OF STAFF IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER

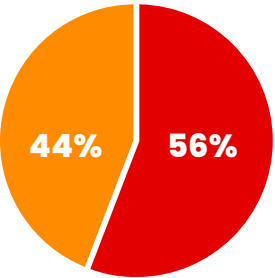
STAFF RACE BREAKDOWN



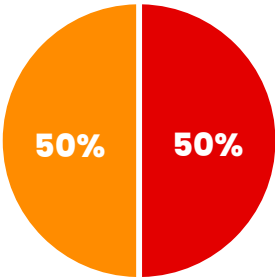
24 total staff

Full Time
Part Time

staff by location



9 COURAGE HOUSE



9 C2 APARTMENTS

3 STAFF AT OFFICE

1 MULTISITE STAFF

4 CRISIS STABILIZERS

2024 financials

As we continue to grow, so does our impact, donations and expenses. And as new programs start up, we're seeing some extra initial investment.

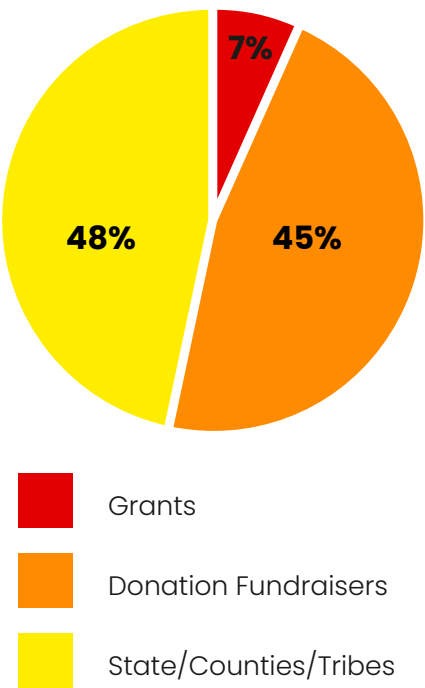
Overall, 2024 was a tremendous success and laid a strong foundation for continued growth in 2025.

Donation Reach

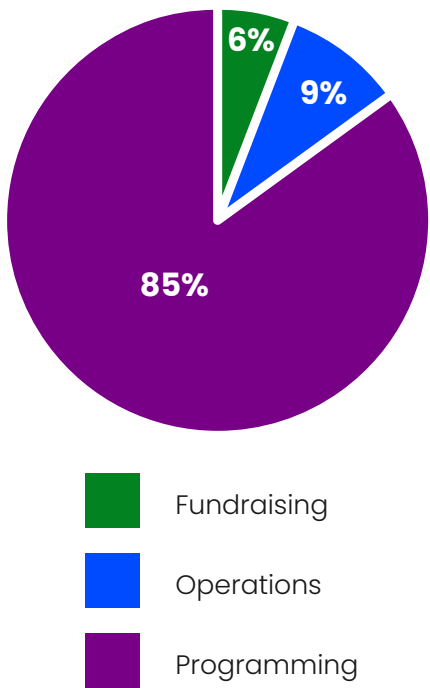
California	9	Massachusetts	1	Pennsylvania	2
Connecticut	4	Michigan	2	South Carolina	1
D.C.	1	Minnesota	7	Tennessee	2
Delaware	1	Missouri	3	Texas	2
Florida	1	Nebraska	1	Virgina	1
Illinois	30	New York	3	Washington	1
Indiana	1	North Carolina	1	Wisconsin	566
Iowa	1	Ohio	3	Canada	2
Kentucky	1	Oregon	2	United Kingdom	2

We opened the C2 Apartments in 2024 knowing our expenses might exceed our income in the first year. We prepared for this and intentionally set aside funds to ensure financial stability during this critical launch phase.

INCOME TOTAL
\$1,163,046.24
24% increase from 2023



EXPENSES TOTAL
\$1,226,547.75
Only 2% increase from 2023



MORE THAN
88.7%

of every dollar is allocated for queer youth programming

awards & certifications

Although receiving accolades is never our main goal, we appreciate recognition and awards that help Courage+ expand and support more LGBTQ+ youth.

**YMCA of Metropolitan Milwaukee's
2024 Social Justice Award**

**Shepherd Express Best of Milwaukee's
2024 LGBTQ Advocate**

Candid Platinum Status

Rated Top Great Nonprofits

**2024 National Comprehensive Accreditation
Manual for Behavioral Health Care and Human
Services from The Joint Commission**



“

Courage+ is a remarkable organization committed to offering safe, supportive housing and services for displaced LGBTQ+ youth. We strive to create an environment where young people can heal, grow and flourish – providing not just a home but also access to education, mental health resources and life skills training. At Courage+, we believe that building safe, affirming communities for youth begins with educating the members of those communities. That’s why we are passionate about offering accessible educational opportunities to other nonprofits, organizations and schools through our +YOU programming. This initiative ensures that our youth are part of communities that truly understand and support their unique needs. Every day, I am fortunate to work alongside a team that wholeheartedly believes in our mission and is deeply dedicated to the youth we serve. At Courage+, I witness firsthand how our work empowers entire communities to stand up for youth, providing them with opportunities that will shape their futures – and, ultimately, our own.

Alisha Hart, Director of Programming



2024 program recap



+YOU

inclusivity + education + community + you

+YOU is a Courage+ community-focused initiative offering a variety of programs for nonprofits, organizations, businesses, allies and anyone eager to learn. From a one-hour LGBTQ+ crash course to a comprehensive six-week allyship training, we believe education is the foundation for lasting change.

We offer customizable classes for both youth and adults that are designed to meet any specific needs. Additionally +YOU offers a Knowledge and Wellness group for adults with LGBTQ+ youth in their lives. The eight-session closed group provides a confidential, safe and accountable space to ask questions and learn ways to support the LGBTQ+ youth in their lives. It's a place to share stories, concerns and successes and to process the array of emotions that one may feel when learning that a youth in their life is part of the LGBTQ+ community. Groups are run by a licensed counselor, and although they are not therapeutic in nature, they are kept to fidelity with alignment to Evidence Based Practices to ensure high standards and a positive experience for participants.

Over the past year, +YOU has reached a wide range of participants from diverse backgrounds, fostering understanding and empathy across various sectors of the community. Our programs have provided organizations and individuals with the tools to create safer, more-inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ people. As +YOU continues to grow and evolve, we remain committed to expanding our reach and improving our programs to better serve those who seek to be allies, advocates and supportive community members. Our goal for the upcoming year is to enhance our training offerings, further engage with local businesses and organizations and build additional support groups for those looking to deepen their understanding of LGBTQ+ issues.

We thank all those who have participated in our programs and supported us in our mission to create a more inclusive world for the LGBTQ+ community. We are excited for what the future holds and look forward to continuing this important work with your help.

Here are some testimonials from those who have benefited from this programming:

Community Smiles Dental



"Marshall said a safe space is exactly what Courage+ staff provided for the dental office employees, encouraging questions they might be afraid to ask, assuring them that 'everything is on the table,' and that they were not there to make people with good intentions feel bad for their questions, but to help us understand the challenges LGBTQ+ people might be dealing with coming into care, and help us communicate."

CEO



"THANK YOU for giving our team the tools to feel comfortable and confident in a situation they may have not known how to lead otherwise."

Clinic Manager



"On behalf of the entire CSD team, I also wanted to thank you both so much for your incredible presentation yesterday. The space you created was open and safe, which is exactly what we needed. Our team has expressed how much value they found in the content you provided and how valuable the time to reflect and discuss was. We are so thankful to have you both as a resource as we need it. Thank you for the work you do daily. You are giving so much hope to those who need it most."

Clinic Manager

United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay



"The sessions have been well-attended, with between 20 and 30 people showing up to learn from Courage+ and attendees often staying past the sessions' end times."

Erin Aeschbacher



"A lot of times, people aren't ready to leave when they have to pick up their kids from choir; it's like, 'My kids can wait!' ... They're not lectures. They're just good discussions with lots of dialogue in a good safe space."

Erin Aeschbacher

C2 Apartments now open

space + stability + independence + you

On March 15, 2024, we cut the ribbon to our C2 Apartments. On April 5, 2024, we wrapped up a weeklong training for our initial Resident Advocate team by having advocates write a card to themselves that they received back on our one-year anniversary (April 1, 2025).

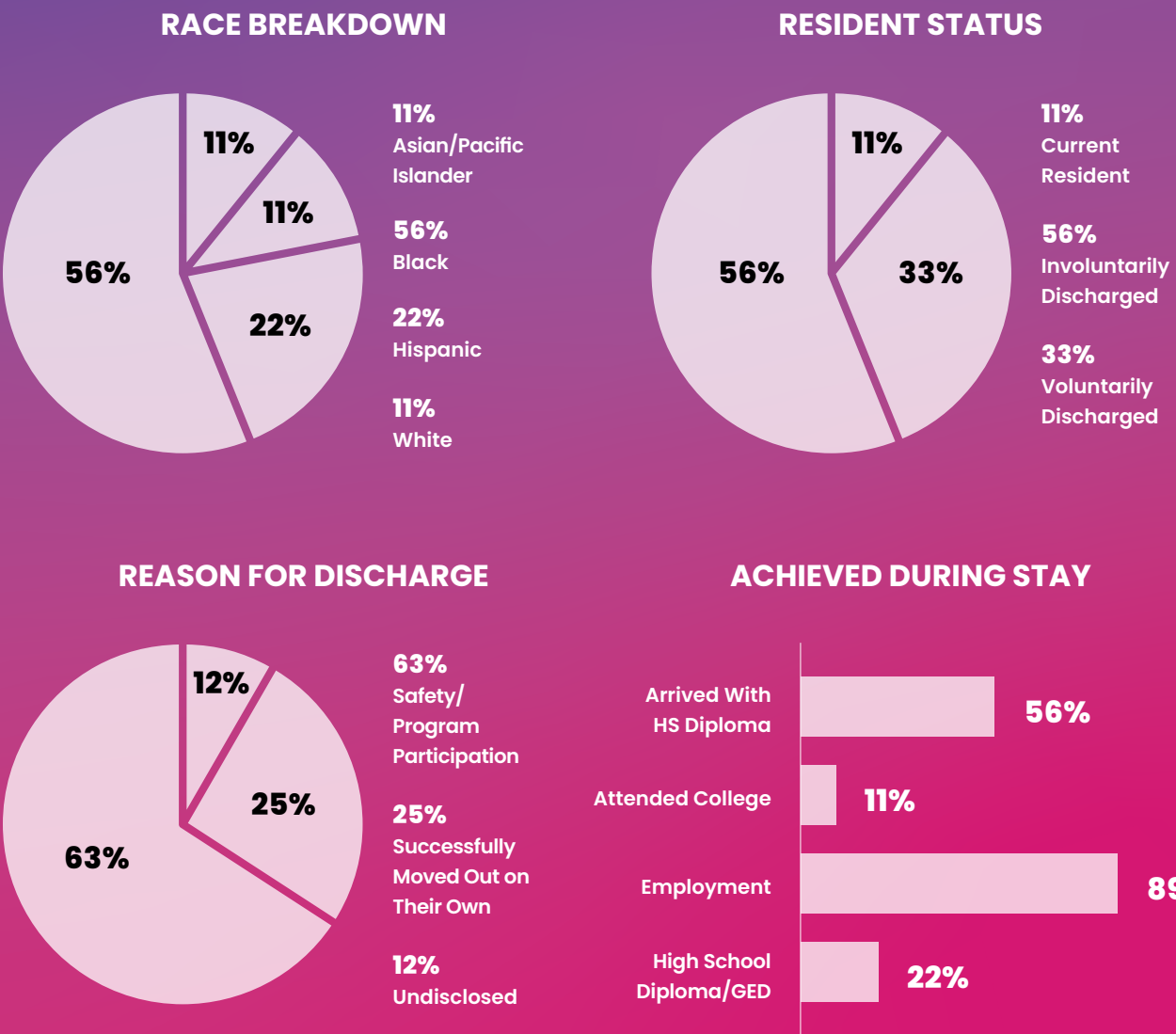
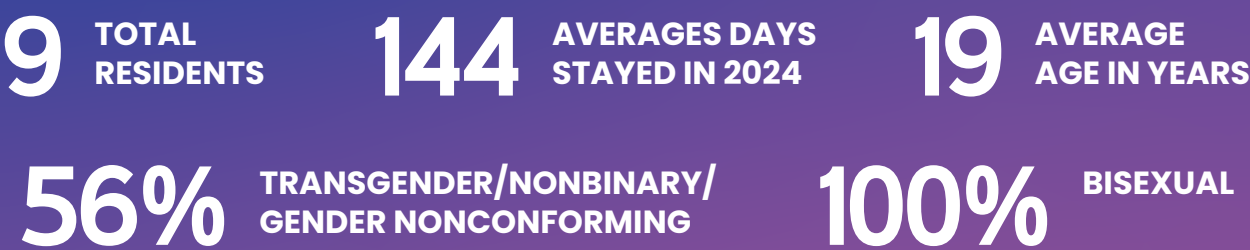
On April 10, 2024, we welcomed our first resident. Since then, we have served 11 unhoused young adults, with five of them discharged to secured housing.

2024 was packed with a lot of firsts for C2. We saw one resident off to his first day of college. One resident secured a GED. Several residents started first-time full-time jobs. We helped four of them navigate registering and voting in their first presidential election. And there was so much personal growth. We watched residents bloom in the authenticity of their gender expression, we watched residents repair severed relationships with their biological family and parents, we watched them advocate for themselves and their housemates, and — most important — we watched them create the bond and security of community and friendship among themselves.

In June 2024, we hosted our first Friends and Family day at the apartments, where all of our residents and staff came together with a few of their family members for a backyard barbecue. It was a beautiful day jam-packed with food, games, laughter, love and community.

We celebrated holidays, birthdays and an absolutely magical Christmas together. It was the first traditional Christmas morning for more than one of our residents. The residents even helped prepare a special birthday breakfast for one for our resident advocates on a sleepy Sunday morning.

C2 residents



Courage House

space + protection + belonging + you

Now in MKE + Serving Many Other Locations

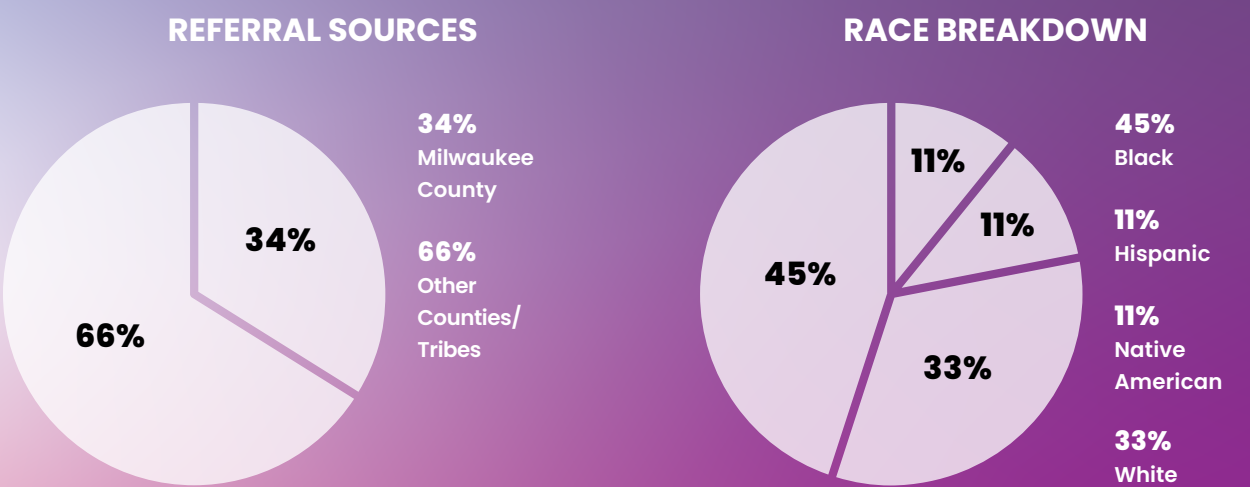
In 2024, we served nine residents from three different counties throughout Wisconsin. The average length of stay for these residents is 241 days, being 4x to 5x longer than the average length of stay for youth in out-of-home congregant care.

In October of 2024, we helped navigate the aging-out process for one of our longest-residing youth into adult services. That youth lived in the Courage House for 935 days.

While Courage+ strived to expand a new, additional housing facility in 2024, Courage House was a true testament to the pillar that our resident care workers and leaders laid the foundation for by remaining a steady safe, inclusive and empowering environment for our underage youth. Our staff members courageously powered through securing much needed mental health services for residents and expanded their knowledge and continuing education with training around nutrition and the correlations between physical and mental health. They connected our youth with community resources that are furthering to help them reach their personal goals and providing social, emotional and behavioral skills such as Your Move and Achieve MKE.

We made so many lifelong memories with our youth, including giving one of them their first ever birthday party. Countless family dinners, movie nights, bonfires fashion shows were filled with an endless amount of love, laughter and banter.

courage house data



crisis stabilizer program

- + This is our team of individuals able to provide crisis intervention and prevention support to residents.
- + Crisis stabilizers specialize in de-escalation, mental health consulting, relationship building, resource navigation and therapeutic activities.
- + Crisis stabilizers provide coaching and supports to staff around strategies to support residents with mental health and crisis.

We created our Crisis Stabilizer Program in 2020 to better support LGBTQ+ youth – one of the most vulnerable populations in the foster care system. LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately more likely to age out of care without permanency, be labeled as runaways, experience multiple placements and face higher risks of justice system involvement. In fact, over 90% of youth with five or more placements end up in the carceral system. For the average young person coming to Courage+, we are their fifth placement. Every youth who avoids incarceration has defied the odds, and that success is largely due to the unwavering love, support, and resources we provide – including our Crisis Stabilizer Program.

The Courage House remains the only group home in Wisconsin to have its own in-house crisis stabilizers, a service that is rare anywhere in this field. This program has directly reduced police involvement, hospitalizations and harm – saving Milwaukee over \$145,000 in police calls while ensuring our youth receive trauma-informed care in a safe and affirming environment. Our trained crisis stabilizers are available to both residents and staff, reinforcing our commitment to true, restorative support.

Crises Response

Eighteen crises were responded to by our team in 2024 across Courage House and C2 Apartments. These included:

- + Threats to Staff
- + Self-harm
- + Police Involvement
- + Mental Health



Staffing

We started 2024 with four crisis stabilizers and ended the year with five crisis stabilizers – all representing diverse backgrounds around age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and language. They also cover a broad range of specialties:

- + Motivational Interviewing
- + Special Education
- + Case Management
- + Residential Health Care



Restorative Practices

Restorative practice is a transdisciplinary field of study that examines how to strengthen relationships between individuals and improve social connections within communities. Restorative practices are used in conflict resolution – creating dialogue, bridging gaps across divided groups, and building cultures in which all members have a voice, work more effectively together and become more innovative.

Crisis stabilizers began training to be certified in restorative practices in fall 2024 and ended training in spring 2025.

what's
coming
in 2025

courage+

courage connect

affirmation + resources + safety + you

Lifesaving Resources at Their Fingertips

LGBTQ+ youth across Wisconsin are facing resurging challenges – hostility, rejection and a lack of safe spaces. Too many have told us they don't know where to turn for support. That's unacceptable.

Courage Connect is an app that ensures no young person is left searching in the dark. With a simple ZIP code entry, they receive an instant, anonymous message listing the nearest LGBTQ+ resources – safely, discreetly and when they need it most. In a time when LGBTQ+ youth are under attack, we refuse to let them stand alone. Every young person deserves access to safety, affirmation and community. Courage Connect is here to make sure they can find it.

junior advisory board

leadership + advocacy + community + you

Empowering LGBTQ+ Youth to Lead the Way

The Junior Advisory Board will be made up of seven passionate youth leaders (ages 15 to 20) from across Wisconsin, each bringing unique perspectives and lived experiences to the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. Meeting virtually once a month, board members will identify pressing needs, develop programs and lead initiatives that directly impact LGBTQ+ youth. From planning to execution to evaluation, they won't just have a seat at the table – they'll drive the movement forward.

As advocates, project leaders and community representatives, these young change-makers will shape the future of LGBTQ+ support across the state. Their voices matter. Their leadership will make a difference.

courage+ salon

empowerment + inclusion + style + you

Beauty Rooted in Acceptance and Care

The Courage+ Salon difference lies in our unwavering commitment to creating an accountable, safe space – where every person who walks through our salon doors is met with acceptance, admiration and respect.

Our salon offers a welcoming atmosphere, staffed by top-tier professionals who are not only masters of their craft but also deeply trained in trauma-informed care. Every team member is certified in PsychoHairapy, ensuring that we provide a salon experience rooted in understanding, healing and empowerment.

Our mission is to serve LGBTQ+ youth, young people in and out of home care, and allies who seek an inclusive and affirming salon experience. We are more than just a salon; we are a chosen family – a safe haven for the most vulnerable members of our community.

We believe that feeling safe in a salon is essential to a positive experience. A great haircut is important, but feeling comfortable, respected and heard throughout the entire process is what truly matters. At Courage+ Salon, we recognize that everyone has a story – and we are here to listen, support and celebrate each one.

Our goal is simple: to ensure that every guest and every staff member knows they belong, their voice matters and they are valued – always.

expanding +YOU

Bringing Support to Rural Communities

LGBTQ+ youth in rural Wisconsin face significant disparities – from isolation to a lack of safe spaces and affirming resources. +YOU is stepping up to change that. This expansion will bring +YOU programming to five rural communities across Wisconsin, increasing the number of supportive adults who provide trusted, affirming spaces for LGBTQ+ youth and their families. Our approach is strategic and data-driven, with three key goals:

- Assess the Needs** – Through statewide surveys and focus groups, we will gather critical data on the mental health, social challenges and support needs of rural LGBTQ+ youth.
- Expand +YOU** – We will train leaders in five rural sites to implement +YOU, reaching 180 adults annually with our proven train-the-trainer model and direct facilitation from Courage+ staff.
- Measure the Impact** – We will rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of +YOU to refine and enhance the program, ensuring it remains a powerful tool for creating lasting, affirming change in rural communities.

With +YOU, we are not just addressing disparities – we are building a network of empowered adults who can change lives and ensure LGBTQ+ youth in every corner of Wisconsin feel safe, seen and supported.

Creating an Eight-Week Journey to Empowerment

The +YOU eight-week Knowledge and Wellness group is designed specifically for LGBTQ+ youth, providing a safe, affirming space to learn, grow and connect. Participants will explore identity, self-care, mental health and wellness, gaining practical tools to navigate their unique experiences. Led by expert facilitators, this program fosters empowerment, education and belonging, ensuring every young person feels seen, heard and supported.

Every LGBTQ+ youth deserves a community that uplifts them – and a space where they can thrive.





investment & beyond life giving

There are so many ways to
donate to Courage+

What other ways can people or companies donate to Courage+?

Beyond Cash Giving – Courage+ accepts donations beyond cash! Whether you want to donate stocks or mutual funds that you already own, donate by using a qualified charitable distribution from your individual retirement account (IRA), or make an in-kind gift of supplies that we need, we are here to help. Email or call us anytime to be connected to our donation investment experts!

Beyond Life Giving – By including Courage+ in your estate planning, or as a beneficiary on your IRA or life insurance, you can leave a legacy that lives on forever. Not only that but also, with the proper planning, you can do it in a manner that eliminates the possibility of ever having to pay any tax on those funds.

What is the benefit of donating stocks or mutual funds?

Potential IRS Deductions – Also known as “donating appreciated Securities,” donating securities allows you to donate your investments that went up in value without paying tax on that gain. For example, if you bought Apple, Inc., when it was \$50 per share and it is now worth \$200 per share, your gift of one share would now be valued at \$200 for charitable donation (and IRS deduction) purposes.

Is there a minimum required for investment donation?

Although you can make a gift of any size by using this method, our experience is that it works best for gifts of \$250 or more. Your financial adviser or certified public accountant can work with you on how to best structure this gift to maximize your donation wishes and income tax benefits.

I’m ready – how do I donate?

Email the Courage+ team at info@courageplus.org, and we will schedule a time to talk. We will provide you with details and instructions to share with your financial adviser or your investment custodian. The process is very simple, and we are happy to help.

we are now Courage+

community + individuality + love + you

MKE will always be at the heart of who we are – but to open more doors and provide more support, we needed to change our name.

Not losing our original DNA, the plus is a rally cry – a promise to expand and an invitation to join us.

It also empowers us to offer not only safe and inclusive housing but also trauma-informed care, education and reliable data-supported thought leadership to the LGBTQ+ community.

And we hope it empowers you to join us and keep supporting us.



courage+