



# ANNUAL REPORT

2022

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# Our Mission

Courage MKE is a collaborative movement to provide housing, resources, and services needed for displaced and homeless LGBTQ+ youth in Milwaukee to thrive.



To our Beloved Courage MKE Family,

If I had to summarize 2022 in one word, I would use **growth**. It's no secret that when we started this organization, we had no experience in the nonprofit sector. Since its inception in 2015, we have operated with the mindset that LGBTQ youth are at the forefront of every decision we make. Some said we would fail, others told us that if we work from our hearts we could not go wrong. During my 2018 opening remarks at our gala, I shared that folx had begun comparing us to The Little Engine That Could. That night I promised our Courage Family in attendance that not only could we, but that we are, can and will! Looking back at 2022, I feel that we can proudly say that we have done the work, held ourselves accountable, listened, learned and grew.

We grew internally by over 25% by taking on more incredible volunteers and staff. We grew in how we operate by becoming Metro Milwaukee's first group home to receive the Qualified Residential Treatment Program certification because we do everything with a trauma informed mindset and practice. We gained 30% more corporate and community partners and our annual revenue increased by almost 10%. This year, we were proudly able to become more competitive with our rates of pay to ensure we support our dedicated staff. We were also able to offer a healthcare stipend to our full-time employees. They come to work, day in and day out, as their most authentic selves, not knowing what that day will bring. They work hard to set an example for our youth and to cultivate a sense of family and home.





I am honored to be a part of this community, this family. I am honored to have your trust and support. As we enter into the next chapter with the newly purchased C2 Apartments I have to be honest with you, now is the time we need you the most. As we prepare to serve LGBTQ+ young adults that are aging out of the foster care system or those who are already homeless, there is one major fact staring us in the face. There simply isn't enough funding. If we apply for HUD funds, we will be competing for dollars with two amazing organizations doing incredible work. We all want to see change within the system and unfortunately, it's a weight we will continue to carry because we want these young adults who entered that system through no fault of their own to be successful, happy and healthy.

My ask for 2023 is that you help us continue to grow by sharing our mission with everyone you meet. 53% of our annual revenue comes from our generous donors. It's because of YOU that we are able to take our residents on outings and adventures and show them that we can make new memories as a chosen family. Without your support, our residents would have the same experience in our group home as all the rest. It is because of you that our residents stay, on average, more than four times longer with us than all other group homes. As we expand our programming, we must continue to grow our Courage Family who I define by the famous Ghandi quote, "Be the change you want to see in the world." We are the luckiest organization in the world to know you're here.

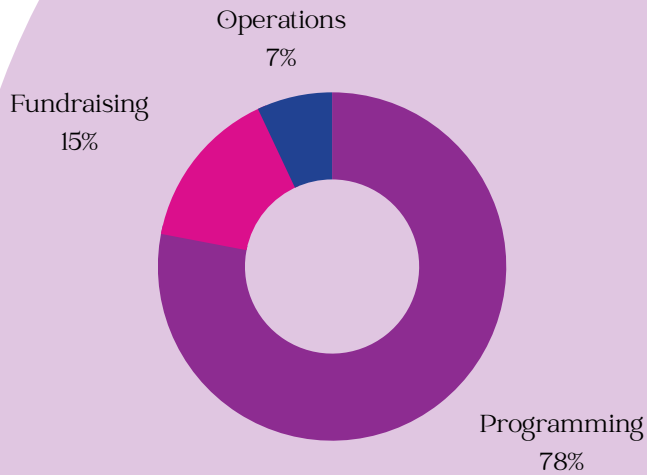
With the utmost gratitude,

Brad Schlaikowski,  
Executive Director

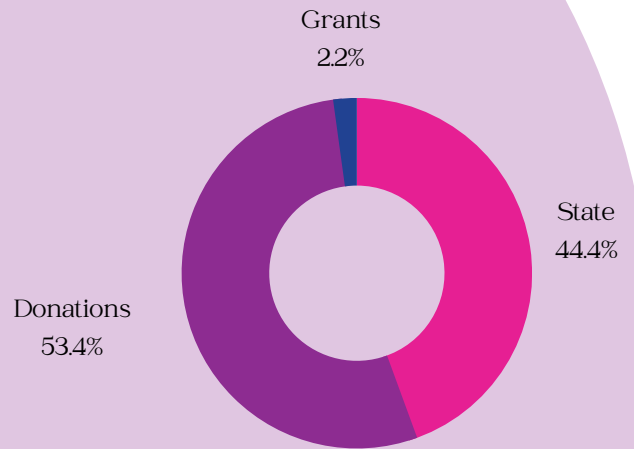


# Financials

## Expenses

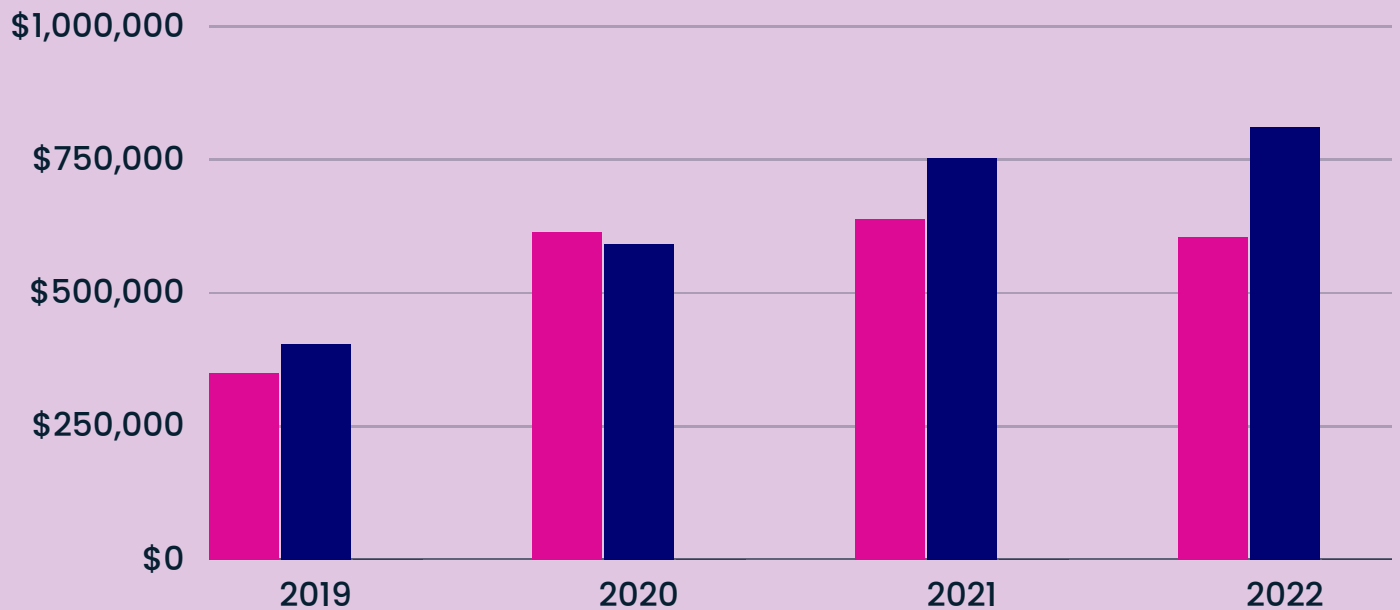


## Revenue



Expenses

Revenue



2022 Revenue: \$807,709.00

2022 Expenses: \$602,316.00



# From our Board of Directors

Greetings Courage family!

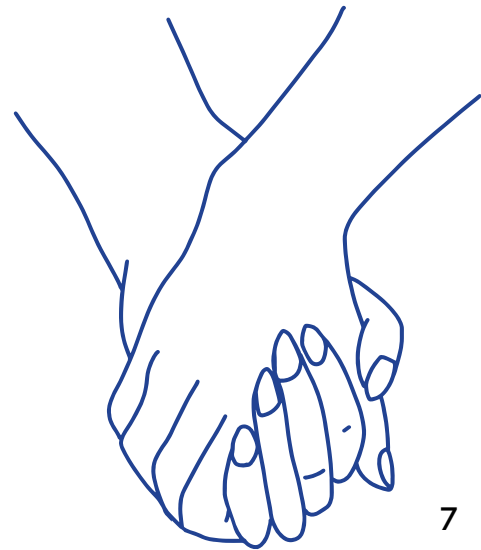
Wow! 2022 was a year. As we navigated to a new normal following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, rebuilding and resiliency became the theme of 2022. And boy, did we live up to this theme. 2022 saw record donations, record numbers at our annual Gala, new partnerships from area businesses and organizations, and the purchase of our second property: the C2 Apartments, which will allow us to expand our reach to those aging out of the foster care system. In a time where we saw unprecedented attacks against the LGBTQ+ community, especially against our Trans/Non-Binary family, our community stood with us to ensure that every LGBTQ+ youth we serve has a place to call home and a feeling of belonging. And we are just getting started. Since the beginning, Courage MKE has been an outlet to displaced and homeless LGBTQ+ youth, ensuring they have a place to call home. We are mindful that every contribution received represents the love, acceptance, and belonging of an individual to lift up and strengthen the LGBTQ+ community and Metro Milwaukee as a whole.

While the needs and the incredible potential of our residents have never been greater, every day we see the impact of our contributors' generosity and investments. The lasting impactful change we want to see will take time. That is why Courage MKE's board and staff invest for the long term. We can do this because of the incredible faith and foresight of our contributors who have made permanent commitments to Metro Milwaukee. Their legacies will continue changing futures for generations to come. To all our donors, nonprofit partners, advisors, volunteers, and others who have let us reap the benefits of their generosity, and on behalf of our dedicated and talented Board of Directors and Staff, I offer my sincere gratitude.

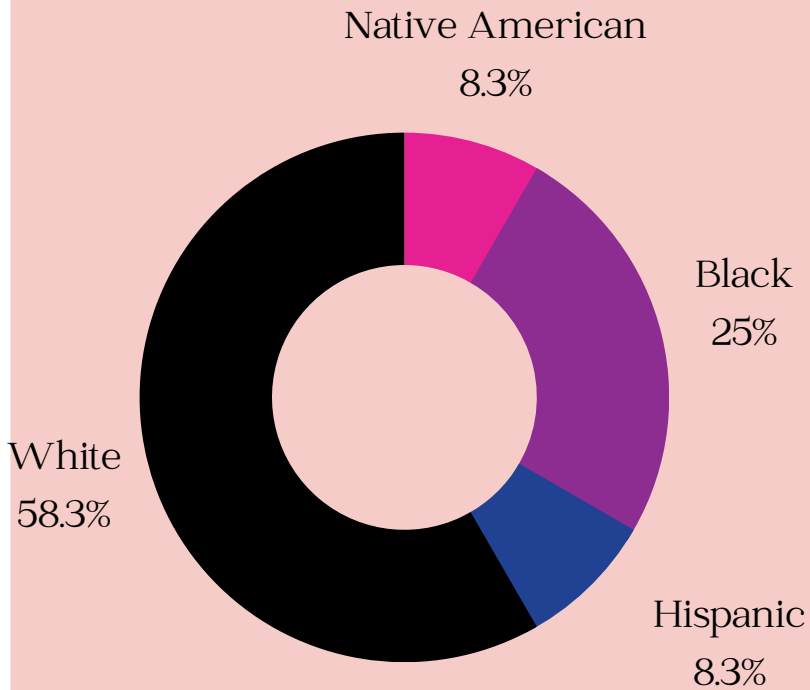
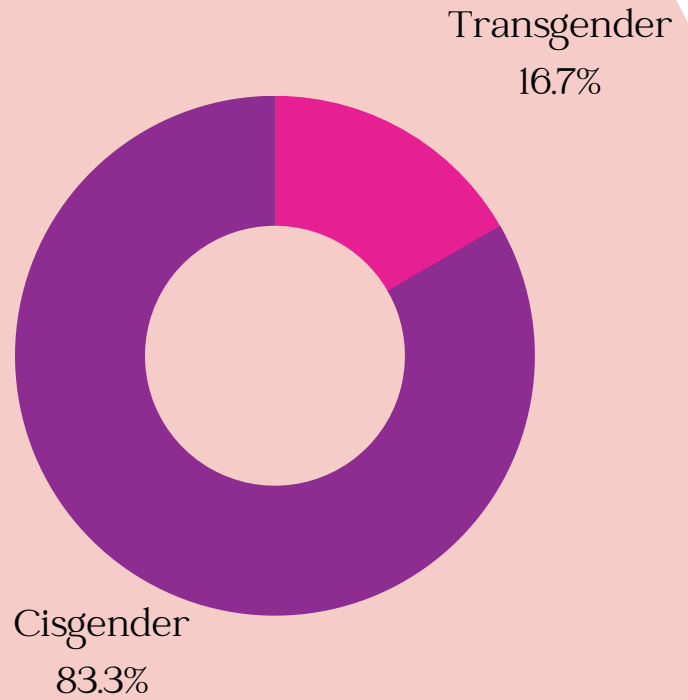
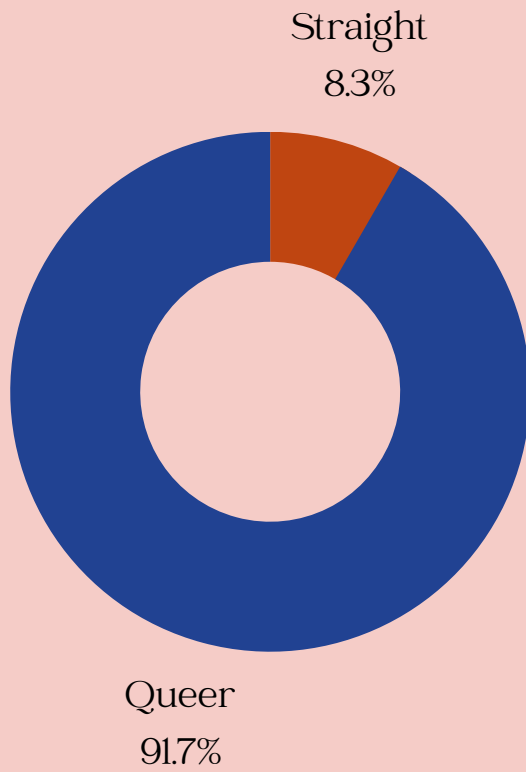
Thank you for inspiring us, motivating us, and for joining us in building an inclusive Milwaukee together.

Courageously,

Daniel D. Terrio,  
Board President

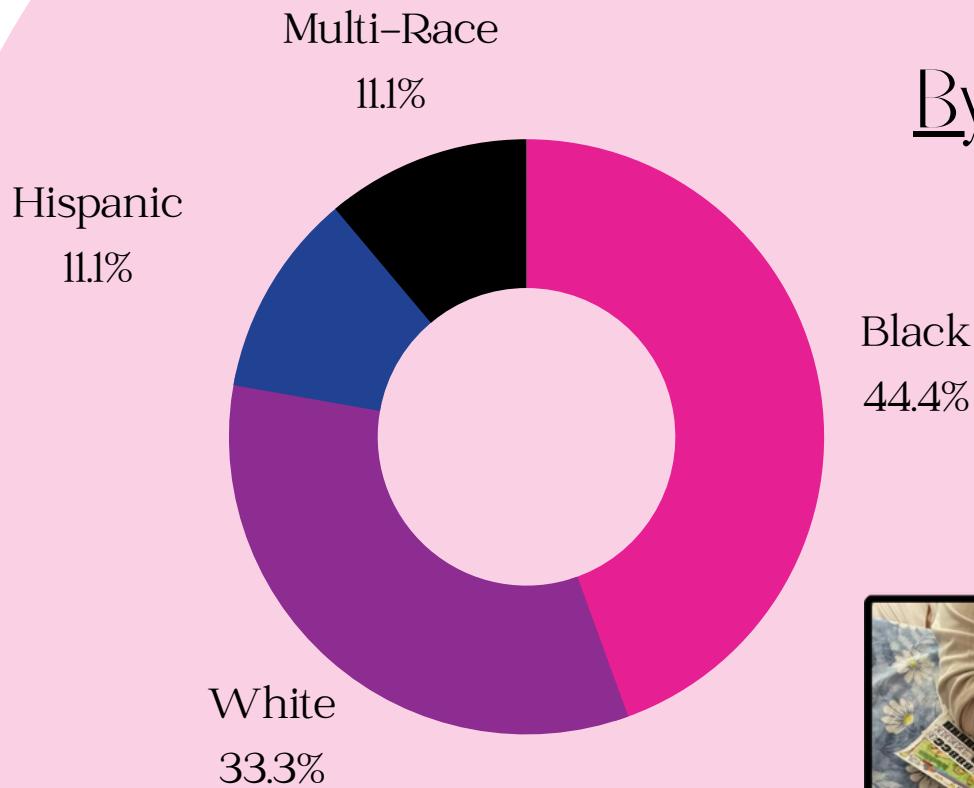


# Board of Director Demographics

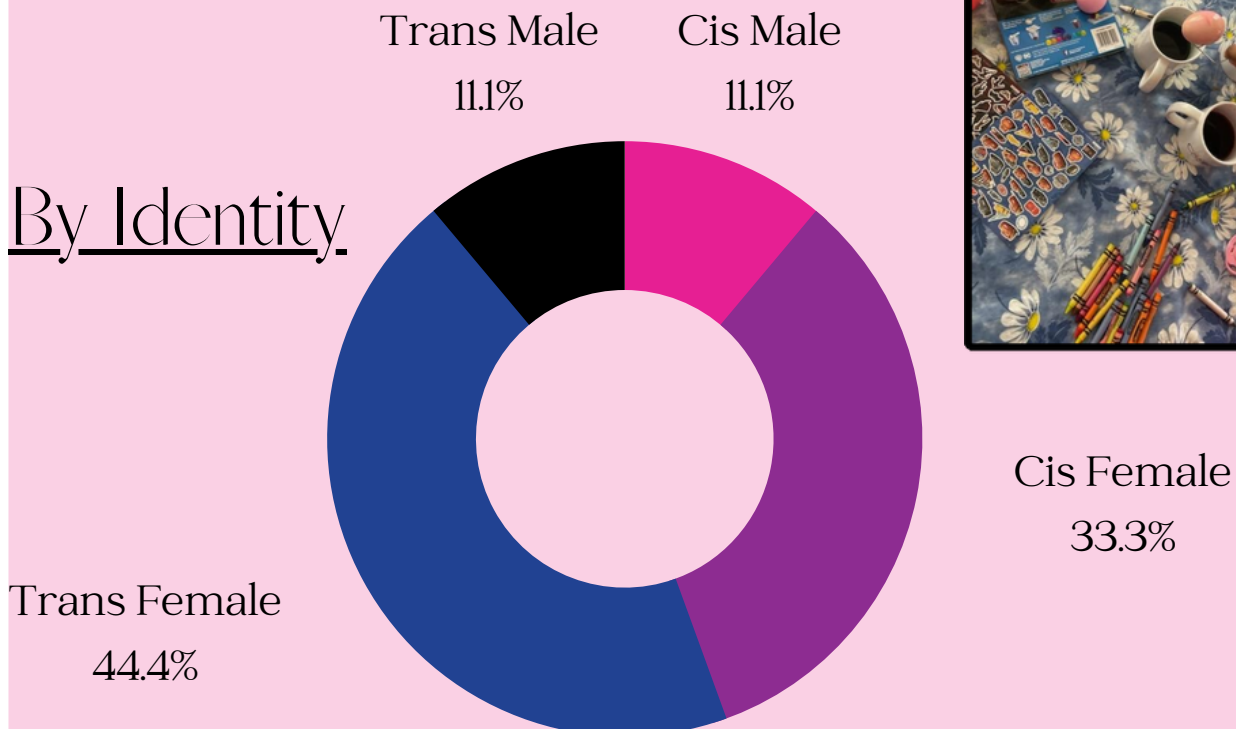


# Who we serve

## By Race



## By Identity





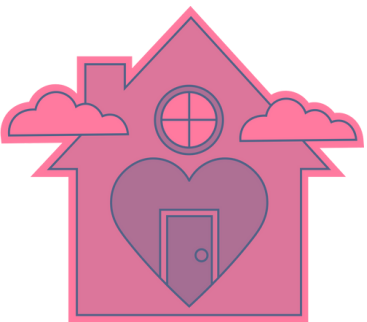
# A Message from our Program Director -----

2022–We all came out of our pandemic silos and were hungry for new connection. Our goal at the beginning of the year was to grow deeper, and that we have. We have spent time on staff development, and gotten to know our residents better. Our staff wanted to learn more about each other, about responding to residents with neurodiversity, using restorative practices, HIV education and advocacy, and we had trainers from the community to increase confidence in all these areas.

One of the highlights of my year that helped us to reflect and grow was meeting with other providers from around the country and the world at the Ali Forney Center’s conference. We felt solidarity and gained new tools for advocating WITH youth in their own lives. And FOR the humanity of all people. In touring their innovative programs, we met with some of the staff who are supporting their young adults 24/7. We are better prepared to work with our local government to obtain ongoing funding for C2 apartments to create a revolutionary community here in Milwaukee.

I loved taking all the residents on a weekend vacation in Green Bay. We were able to give our staff the weekend off while making memories together. We will all remember sliding down waterslides, riding the Zippin Pippin and bumper cars, and eating so much ice cream and popcorn together. Seeing a former resident come stay with us for the weekend and watching how much they have continued to grow made me proud of all the tools our staff have given that young adult.

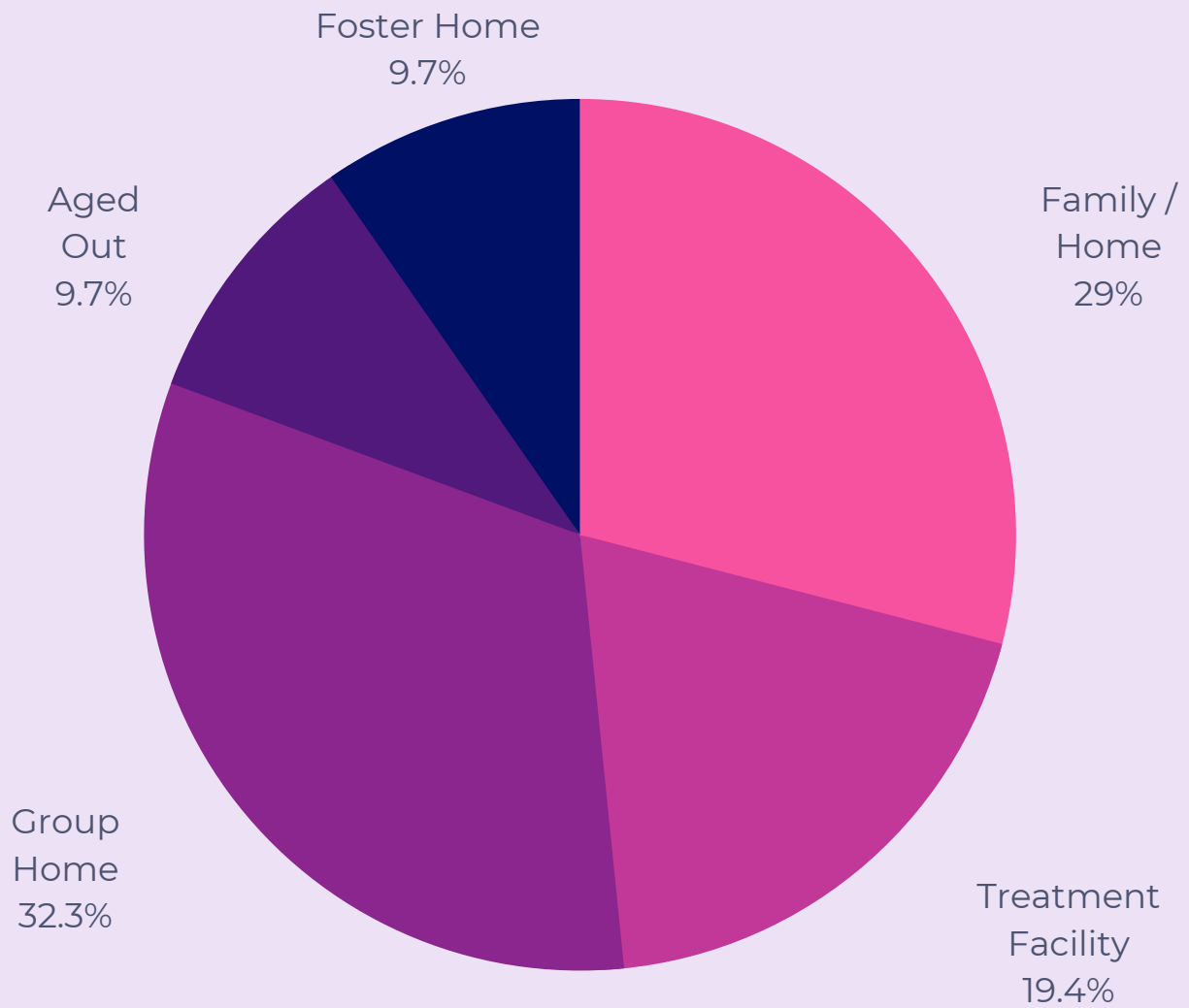
Some of my hardest moments this year have been hearing that despite all our advocacy, there was no more mental health support available for a youth. Or that a young person would turn 18 and their family would not be able to support them. These moments have shown me how strong our team is and how big their hearts are. And how much we need to work with other community organizations to strengthen ties for our youth. This year, we are excited to grow our connections with other organizations doing great work in order to improve Milwaukee for LGBTQ+ young people.



Jean Northway,  
Program Director



# Resident Placements After Courage House

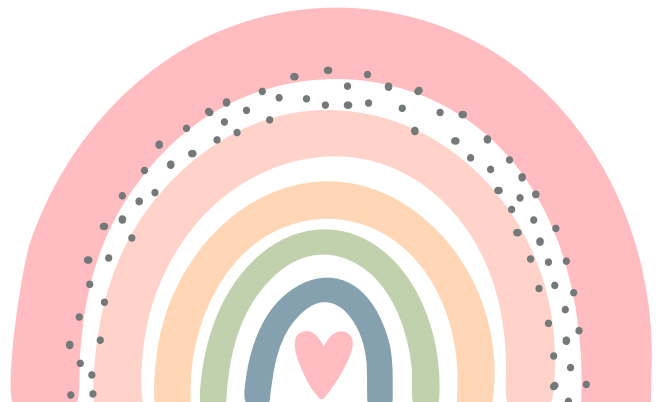


# Meet our House Managers

The term family dispenses a different meaning when you are so far from your own. For those of you that don't know me personally, my bio-family lives across the country in Alabama. It's just me and my two daughters here in Milwaukee. You will hear us use the word family often when we talk about Courage MKE, and within that family, we do not just mean our residents and staff, we mean YOU. All of you. Our community is our foundation, our family. And from someone who doesn't have family nearby, it proves true time and time again. I never have to worry about spending a holiday alone. I never have to question if someone will show up for me. I never have to wonder if I will be supported, heard or seen.

This type of family support empowers me to be able to do the same for our kids at The Courage House. Within the past 6 months we have reunified four youth with their bio-families. Two of which went back to live in their parents' home. Unfortunately this is not often the case with most of the youth we serve. However, while they are with us, we bestow those family values within our everyday lives. Even from the outside, your presence in the house is felt. With every donation, every opportunity for celebration, every milestone these kids conquer, every day in every way we feel our family's support. They never have to question if they'll spend another holiday alone. They never have to question if we will show up for them. They never have to question if they will be supported, or seen, or heard. This is the trickle effect that flows down from you, to our board of directors, to our leadership team, to our resident care workers and crisis stabilizers, and to our youth. We have had so many exciting changes over the course of the past 4 years and everyday I look forward to what is coming next. What an honor and privilege it is to be a part of this family.

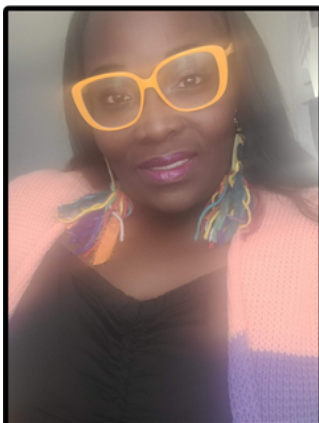
Brenna Creamer, House Manager



When I was in middle school, I signed up for this program called BIIB SIIS. It was like a sorority and fraternity for middle schoolers in select Milwaukee Public Schools. The program met after school and it taught us how to work together, how to set and accomplish goals. BIIB SIIS taught us how to problem solve, and a lot about conflict resolution. It reminded us that we were not our past experiences, and that our futures were bright! It was where I began to learn about confidence. We practiced speeches about confidence, and learned to recite "Keep Going", by Edgar Guest. I was the biggest girl, tallest girl, and the tail dog of our line. My line name was Courageous Heart.

I find that interesting. Here I am, 20 years later living in the city that raised me. Working directly with Milwaukee youth in out of home care; directly with those who enter into the Courage House looking for many of the life skills, support, encouragement, and lessons I am skilled to provide. This is me giving back to my community in the best way I know how; through the youth. I'm happy to be a part of the Courage Initiative and I know that each day of my work makes a difference. It's not easy. Teenagers face so many challenges. Many times, they've lived full adult lives in 15 fast paced years and they need a chance to learn, relearn, and trust the good that can come from having nurturing adults to care for and guide them. The children we serve are often 15 going on 30. Now, you tell me, what 30 year old likes to be told what to do?! Facing those challenges, traumas, and more, there is no predictable day at Courage. What is predictable is my confidence in knowing that I am a part of a team that also wants to remind each and every youth that they are not their past experiences and their future is just as bright!

## Brittney Qualls, House Manager



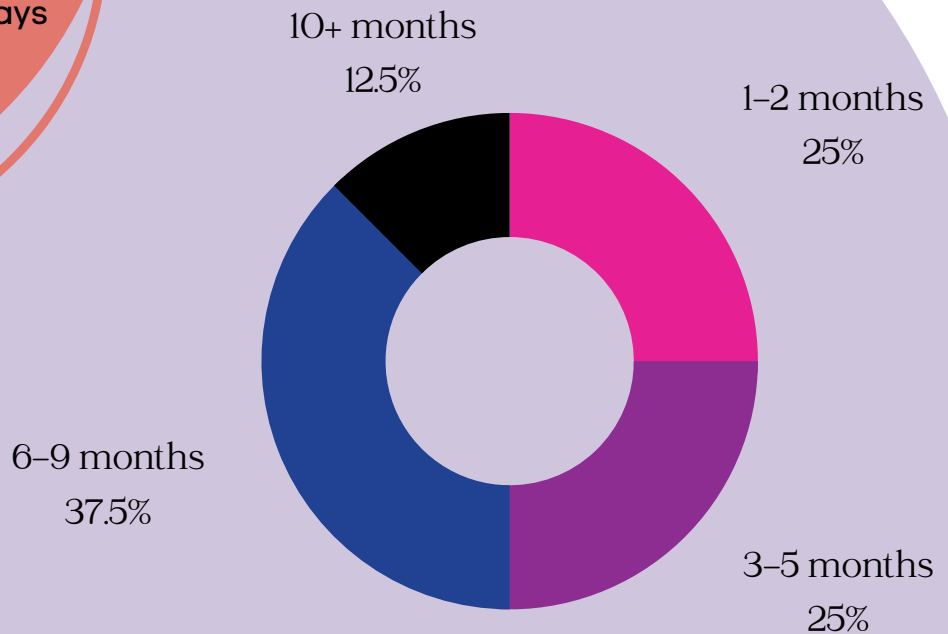
# Residents

2022 Resident average  
length of stay:

The Courage House: **157 days**

Wisconsin Group Homes: 36 days

## Length of Stay



## Referral Source

Other Counties/Tribes  
47.1%

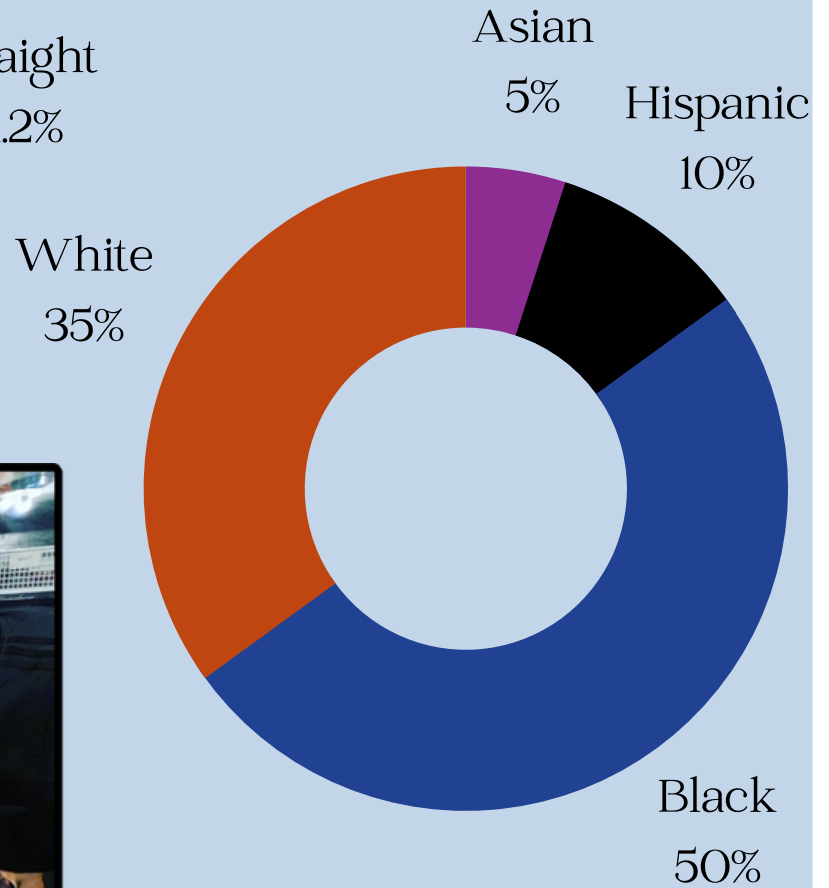
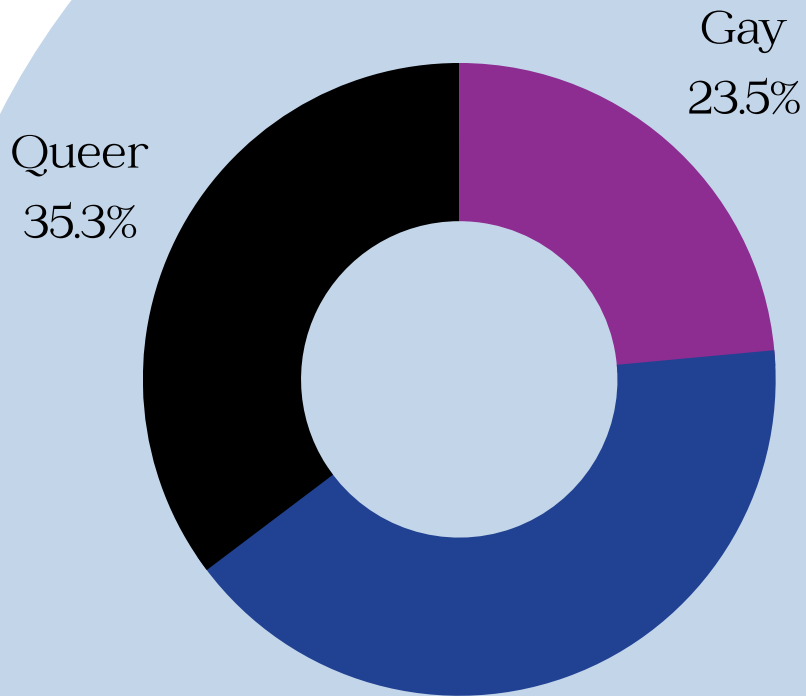


Milwaukee County  
52.9%





# Staff Demographics



# MEET RESIDENT "T"!

Meet our current longest residing youth "T". She is a brilliant and artistic young lady that is 17 years old and has been with us since April of 2022. She came to us from a 2 year stay in an out of state residential treatment institution. In those 2 years they were mentally, emotionally, & verbally abused by the staff there and allowed to be bullied by peers and staff alike. They were being excessively medicated and not properly provided for as a neurodivergent adolescent. They were teased by staff and residents for being transgender. In the past year we have worked diligently with psychiatric medical providers, the Gender Clinic at Children's Hospital, therapists, her school, and state affiliated agencies to get her the proper care so that she can thrive in the loving home environment that she deserves.

We have provided our staff with trauma informed care resources and trainings to learn how to meet the needs of her and all of our youth where they are at in order to help them reach their goals.



She finished out this previous school year excelling in her academic studies and achieving great strides in adapting to peer interaction and social engagement. We find such great joy in the small victory of hearing her refer to the Courage House as "home", even in just passing conversations. She will say things like, "When we get home," or "When we are at home."

She went from constantly being overwhelmed and fearful to being trusting, comfortable, and capable of expressing her needs in a space where she knows she is loved, considered, and seen for who she is. We are so incredibly proud of our team for the work they put forth with all of our residents. This happens to be just one of our successes. But I would say this is one of our greatest successes.



All art work seen was created by "T" during her summer job with Bloom in 2022.



# Our Team

## Resident Care Workers

Tywanda Gray

Jinx Romo

Fayomi Agbongbon

Beau Wright

Nia Ligon

Cynthia Curry

Brett Lipshutz

Amanda Flessas

Connie Crockett

## Crisis Stabilizers

Ronnie Rivera

Quincy Toliver

Dezirae Grant

Christine Sierzputowski

Brad Schlaikowski, Executive Director

Jean Northway, Program Director

Brenna Creamer, House Manager

Brittany Qualls, House Manager

Marissa Bray, Operations Manager

## Board of Directors

Dan Terrio, President

Robin Matchett-Schmidt, VP

Trevor Bennett, Treasurer

KB Bjerk, Secretary

Erin Fay

Jaci Ruben

Lynne Dixon-Speller

Broderick Pearson

Jamila Dawn Mitchell

Pablo Navarro

Will Anderson

Cristin Bock



"This has honestly been my favorite job I've had and I'm BEYOND grateful for this opportunity. I mean it with every fiber when I say how grateful I am to work in an environment like this one. Even my sleep got better after starting with Courage because I felt safe. Meaningful work does a soul good, and I am grateful that Courage MKE participated as a partner for Public Allies and allowed me to be the Resident Care Educational Liaison Ally for the 2020-21 school year when COVID was still new. It's amazing how healing it is to work in an environment where your identity/lifestyle is not combatted but instead accepted and even serves as a guide for the residents that come to Courage House."



Jinx,  
Resident Care Worker



# 2022 Gala



There are no words powerful enough to describe our 2022 Courage MKE Gala. We are so proud that eight months later people are still coming up to us at events to tell us how impactful the gala was for them. It encompasses all the very best parts of our organization and community, but more importantly it's extremely important to how we remain. We raised \$180,000.00 and 580 people attended the event.

Of course we could not have put this event on without the help of our extremely generous volunteers and sponsors, a very big thanks to each of you!

## Save the date!

**November 3, 2023 - Annual Gala Theme: Ohana**

**Where: The Historic Mitchell Park Domes**

**Cocktail hour starts at 5:30**

**Plated dinner and program starts at 7:00pm**

**Entertainment to follow**

**Ticket/Table sales available starting in August**





# OUR COMMUNITY IMPACT

## Courage Kits

It has always been important to us that our residents understand the importance of giving back to the community. Our residents help assemble and distribute Kits to schools, shelters and individuals throughout Southeast Wisconsin. Since we started this program, we have provided over 30,000 Courage Kits throughout the metro Milwaukee area.

These kits include travel size:

Deodorant - Shampoo - Toothpaste - Toothbrush - Chapstick - Socks - Glove - Gum/Breath Mints - Granola Bars - Band Aids - Menstrual Products - Hand Sanitizer - Hats - Handwarmers



If you'd like to hold a drive to collect and/or assemble these items, please [contact us](#) to arrange a collection drive

## Courage Gives Back Holiday Toy Drive

All of us at Courage MKE are so grateful for what this community has done for us and our residents. At The Courage House, we aim to teach the importance of giving back to the community. Our residents and staff have held a community rummage sale to buy books for a school, cleaned up our neighborhood on multiple days throughout the year, collected and organized items for those at the southern border awaiting entry in the U.S. and collected daily essentials for the LGBTQ+ community that is working to rebuild following tragic earthquakes. Most recently, we held our third annual Holiday Helpers campaign by collecting gifts for 143 children in our neighborhood.



## Riverkeepers



Giving back to our community instills a sense of self worth and connectedness. For our residents, it is important that they be giving back to the community that has given us so much. With the help of community partners, and individual volunteers, we have lead 4 River Clean-Ups, and several neighborhood clean-ups. Seeing the piles of garbage at the end of the day is a tangible visualization of the difference one group can make.

## GSA Grants

We continue to offer \$300.00 grants to any high school GSA or equivalent to ensure schools across Wisconsin have the funding to provide this resource to their students sure their continuation. GSA members create a business plan to show how their grant will better their school communities.

## Scholarships

Courage MKE believes that everyone should have access to post high school education whether through a trade school, certificate program or four-year university. Since 2015, we have provided over \$27,000 in scholarships for post high school education.



The Jackie Roberts Memorial Scholarship is awarded to high school juniors and seniors who are members of their school's Gay Straight Alliance (or equivalent) and is to be applied toward their post high school education. The scholarship is paid directly to the university, college, or trade school into which the recipient has been accepted.

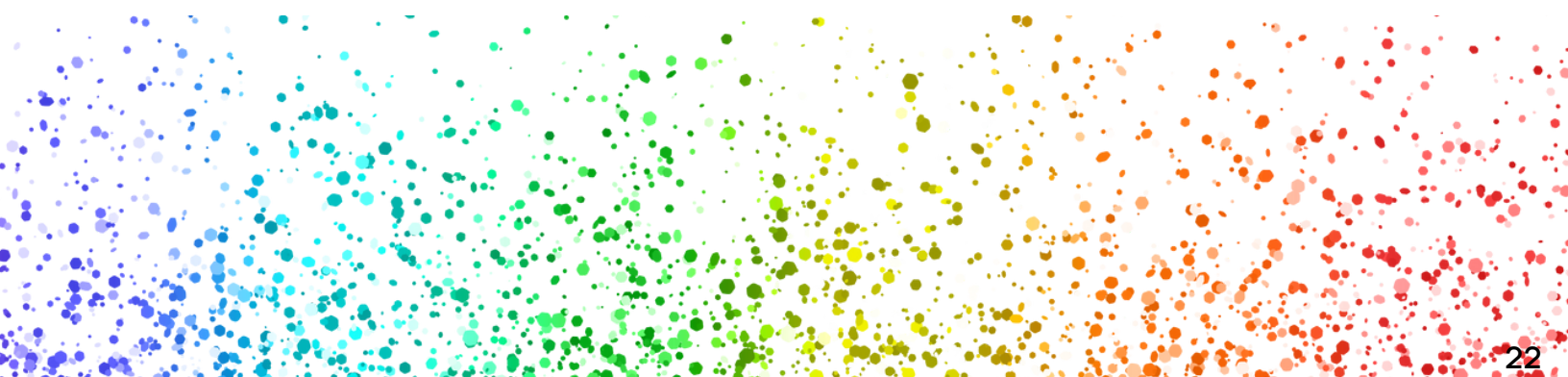
# Looking Ahead...

In early 2023 we finalized the purchase of a second property minutes from our current group home on Milwaukee's southside. The building will be dedicated to 18-24 year old LGBTQ young adults who are either homeless or aging out of the foster care system. In the last few years we've learned that despite the success our youth have while they're at Courage House, they need continued resources and support when they turn 18. We will have 6-7 residents at this location who will be required to work or attend school while living at the C2 Apartments. We will take a percentage of their check and save it for them while they stay with us so they have funds when they begin living on their own.

We will cultivate the same feeling of family for our young adults as we help them navigate the world for the first time with their fullest autonomy. We will offer resources, support, and mentoring while they learn important life skills and build healthy relationships with other residents. Survival is no longer enough, we will help them thrive and if they choose, become the next generations queer leaders. If we're lucky in life we can point to a handful of people and say they made an impact big enough to help us become who we are.

In 2023 we will create new programming in coordination with other Milwaukee organizations to create safe, fun, accepting spaces for ALL of our LGBTQ youth and Allies. We will be extending our reach further through new staff, volunteers, community partnerships, education and events.

Our Courage Family continues to grow which has allowed us to do the same. We have big dreams of radically changing the experiences of Wisconsin's LGBTQ youth, and we do so first by changing our interactions to embody kindness, love, patience and generosity. Thank you for being those things too; that's what it means to be Courage Family.





To our donors, volunteers, community partners, sponsors, staff, and board:

With so many incredible organizations doing important work it can be hard to know where to put your time, energy and money when it comes to charitable giving. But you choose us, you choose LGBTQ youth, and perhaps for some, you're choosing the version of yourself that needed a home like ours when you were a child. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your dedication, hours of hard work, and donations. Thank you for thinking of us, sharing our message, and choosing to be a role model for our youth by being loving, generous, and kind. There's still so much we've yet to do so join us in 2023 as we march onward, courageously.

