

## Journey Ahead Evaluation<sup>1</sup>

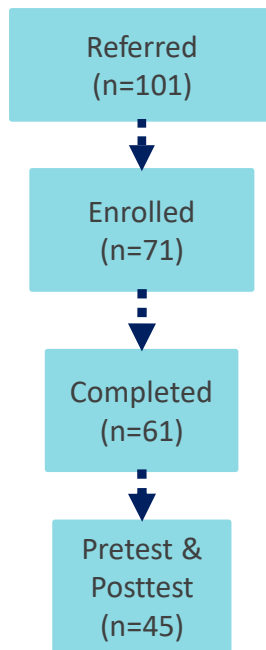
Journey Ahead is a program created for and by LGBTQ+ young people in care between the ages of 13 and 21. Implemented by the Ruth Ellis Center and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services between 2019 and 2021, goals for the program included:

- Equipping young people with knowledge and skills to manage change through cognitive behavioral coping;
- Nurturing a positive sense of self;
- Reducing isolation; and
- Helping young people learn about and apply language for their intersectional identities, including those related to sexual orientation, gender identity, race/ethnicity, class, ability, citizenship, and religion.

Between February and December 2019, in-person cohorts were held, with participants coming from Wayne, Oakland, and Macomb counties. The program was adapted for a virtual format in 2020, and participation was expanded to the eligible youth throughout Michigan.



- A total of eleven cohorts – 3 in-person and 8 virtual – were held between February 2019 and September 2021.
- 101 youth were referred to Journey Ahead and 71 (71%) enrolled. Among the 71 young people who started the program, 61 (86%) completed it. 74% (n=45) of those who completed the program also completed both a pretest and a posttest. Results presented in this report are limited to these 45 youth.

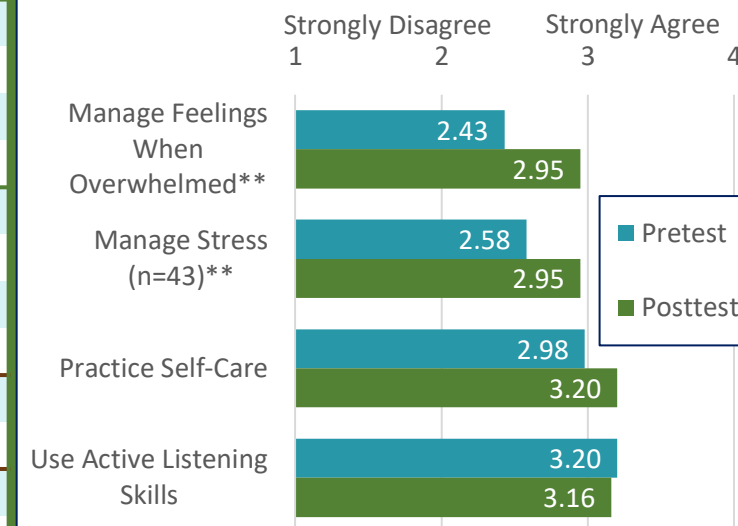


## Participants

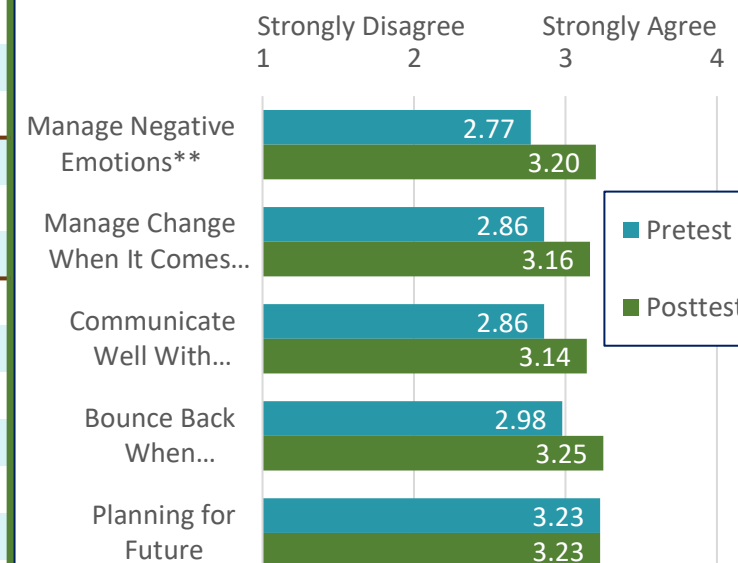
		n (%)
<b>Current Residence (n=42)</b>	Residential	20 (48%)
	Foster Home	7 (17%)
	Home of Parents/ Relatives	9 (21%)
	Another Location	6 (14%)
<b>Race (n=42)</b>	Black/African American	15 (36%)
	Multiracial	15 (36%)
	White	11 (26%)
	Another Race	1 (2%)
<b>Hispanic (n=42)</b>	Yes	5 (12%)
	No	37 (88%)
<b>Gender (n=41)</b>	Boy/Man	16 (39%)
	Genderfluid	1 (2%)
	Girl/Woman	16 (39%)
	Nonbinary	2 (5%)
	Questioning	1 (2%)
	Another Gender Identity	5 (12%)
<b>Identifies as transgender (n=42)</b>	Yes	21 (50%)
	No	18 (43%)
	Questioning	3 (7%)
<b>Sexual Orientation (n=42)</b>	Bisexual	11 (26%)
	Gay	1 (2%)
	Lesbian	2 (5%)
	Pansexual	5 (11%)
	Queer	3 (7%)
	Questioning	2 (5%)
	Heterosexual/Straight	9 (21%)
	Another Sexual Orientation	9 (21%)

## Skills and Abilities

### Confidence in ability to... (n=44)

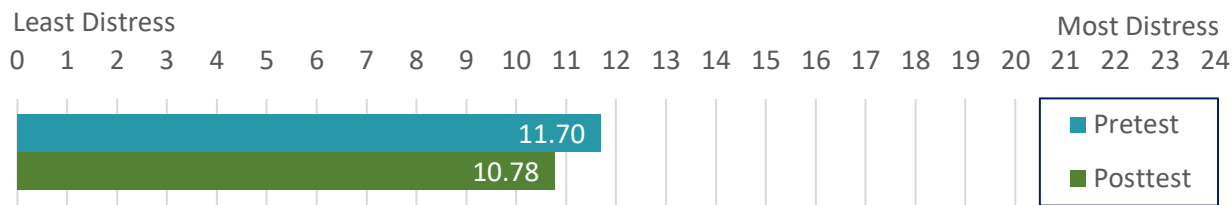


### Perceived Skills (n=44)

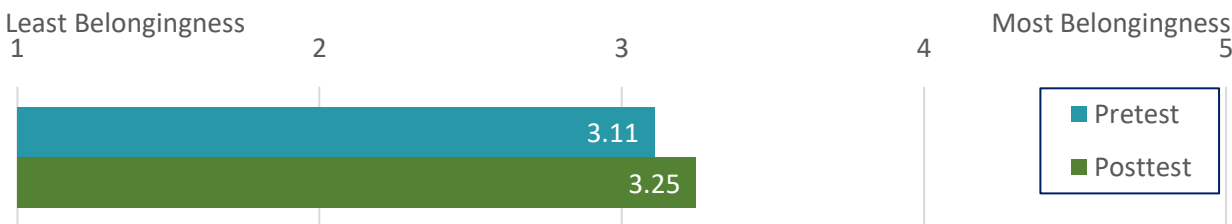


\*Significant at p<0.05, \*\*Significant at p<0.01

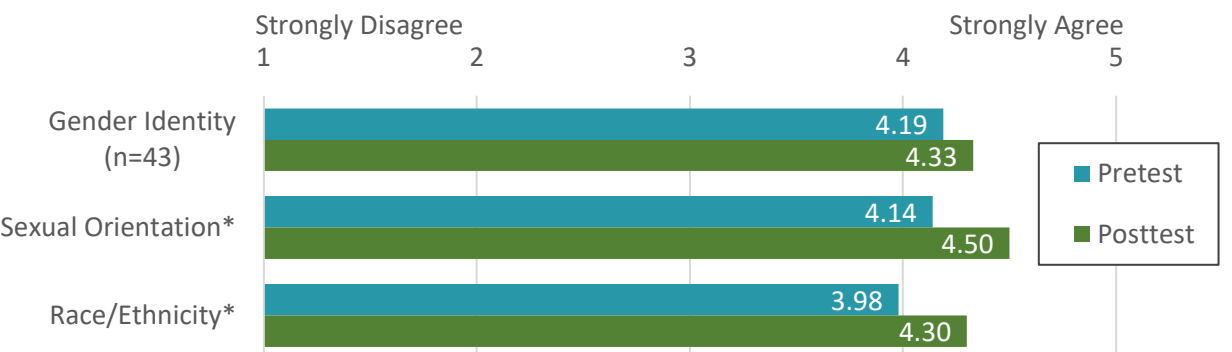
### Psychological Distress – Total Score (n=40)



### General Belongingness – Average Score (n=40)



### Extent to Which Youth Feel Positively about Their Identities (n=44)



\*Significant at p<0.05

*I feel as I have gained a sense of community in a time where I would have otherwise been left feeling isolated.*

*I feel like I gained more coping skills to opening up to people. I have also gained the ability to trust others instead of just pushing them away.*

### Connectedness to the LGBTQ+ Community



\*Significant at p<0.05, \*\*Significant at p<0.01

### Summary of Findings

- Compared to their baseline levels, young people who completed Journey Ahead reported that they had more skills related to managing feelings, coping with change and adversity, and communicating with others.
- There was no statistically significant change in general feelings of belongingness nor in psychological distress, although both scores improved on average.
- Young people were more likely to report liking their sexual orientation, gender identity, and racial/ethnic identities after the program.
- Participants were more likely to report feeling visible in, included in, and supported by the LGBTQ+ community after the program.
- Higher proportions of youth reported being aware of and confident they could overcome systems of oppression after the program.
- When asked what they gained from the program, young people highlighted an increased sense of connectedness, community, and support.
- Participants reported positive experiences in the program and with the facilitators.
- Participants reported being interested in most or all activities, though about one-third were sometimes uncertain of how to do an activity or the purpose behind an activity.

<sup>1</sup>For more information, please find the full report, *Journey Ahead: Evaluation Final Report, 2019-2021* on the [National SOGIE Center](https://www.nationalsoגיעcenter.org/) website.

## History of the QIC-LGBTQ2S

The National Quality Improvement Center on Tailored Services, Placement Stability, and Permanency for LGBTQ2S Children and Youth in Foster Care (QIC-LGBTQ2S) was a program lead by The Institute for Innovation and Implementation, at the University of Maryland School of Social Work (The Institute). The project was funded by The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau to improve permanency, stability, and wellbeing for youth in foster care who identified as LGBTQ+.

Over the course of 5 years, the QIC-LGBTQ2S partnered with four child welfare agencies as Local Implementation Sites in: Allegheny County, PA; Michigan Tri-County, Cuyahoga County, OH; and Prince George's County, MD. Together, the sites, program purveyors, and the Institute developed, implemented, and evaluated several best practices and programs for LGBTQ+ youth and their families. The result of the five-year effort was the development and refinement of 9 manualized and evidence-informed interventions that can now be replicated in similar settings. In addition to developing these programs, sites also engaged in several initiatives to create affirming child welfare policies and SOGIE data collection projects.

## Funding Statement

This project was funded by the National Quality Improvement Center on Tailored Services, Placement Stability and Permanency for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Two-Spirit Children and Youth in Foster Care (QIC-LGBTQ2S) at the Institute for Innovation and Implementation, University of Maryland Baltimore School of Social Work. The QIC-LGBTQ2S is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau under grant #90CW1145. The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

