

The Problem

Foster parents Brad and Nick Schlaikowski saw an unmet need for safe, affirming LGBTQ+ care for children when they became foster parents in 2014. They saw firsthand kids being rejected by homeless shelters, as well as their own families, because of their LGBTQ+ identity. "We welcomed a number of LGBTQ+ girls who had endured troubling abuse in the places they were in before coming to us," Brad said.

The Solution

Courage House, located in Milwaukee, opened in 2019 as Wisconsin's leading licensed group home for displaced LGBTQ+ youth. Youth at Courage House receive a stable and affirming living environment, clear expectations in a supportive structure, daily care from trained and compassionate staff, and intentional programming that fosters growth, coping skills, and independence. Having a sense of "home" is paramount. "I want our kids to feel at home at Courage House," Brad said.

The program is rooted in restorative justice. "If someone breaks a rule, we do a restorative circle," Brad said. "We also emphasize giving back, and all our kids do community service projects."



Courage House residents attending an outing (left) and at the house (below).



The organization expanded the ages served when it opened C2 Apartments in 2024. This housing serves people ages 18-24 transitioning into adulthood. C2 is certified as independent living and has six apartments that include common space and individual bedrooms. Described by Brad as a "program that has an apartment," residents agree to tiered milestones. These include getting a driver's license, getting a job and insurance, and establishing a checking and savings account where 20 percent of what they make goes into the savings account and stays there. Everyone has a daily chore and a bigger weekly chore. Residents are also supported to navigate relationships with their family.

The Results

Courage House has cared for 62 kids since opening with an average stay of 189 days. The kids experience adults who accept them and whom they can trust, and they leave with resources they never knew about.

C2 has served 16 young people since 2024 with an average age of 19 and an average stay of 263 days. There is always a wait list.

According to their 2025 Annual Report, Courage+ is the first program in Wisconsin to develop and utilize its own in-house crisis stabilization team. Since its launch, the program has saved the city and county of Milwaukee thousands of dollars in police calls while ensuring the kids receive trauma-informed care in a safe and affirming environment.

Courage+ learned through strategic planning that hair care was a big need among LGBTQ+ people and opened a salon in 2026. Trained in PsychoHairapy, Courage+ Salon's stylist Rob is equipped to integrate mental health awareness into his work. The salon also provides services for foster-involved youth and families where the child's culture may be different from the foster parents and individuals who have experienced trauma or have sensory needs.

Courage+ also is committed to education. Through +YOU, Courage+ provides educational programs to organizations ranging from a one-hour LGBTQ+ introductory course to a comprehensive six-week allyship training.