BRAVE SPACE PROGRAM

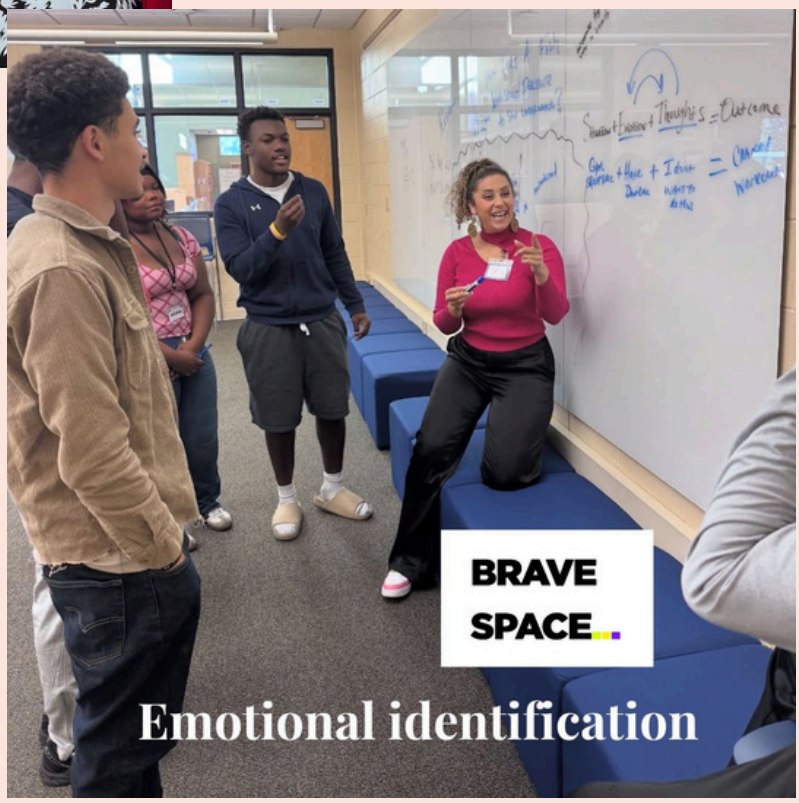
Increasing access to mental health services with an innovative approach using Poetry











MISSION

Brave Space is a registered 501(c)(3), EIN:88-4084764, dedicated to improving the lives of individuals struggling with mental health challenges, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm by creating spaces that foster vulnerability, connection, and honest conversation. We desire to empower students to take ownership of their lives and develop healthy ways to understand and express their emotions. Through evidence-based practices, we equip students, families, and community leaders to heal emotional and relational wounds. We help students move from reaction to response cultivating resilience, self-awareness, and a sense of empowerment that extends beyond the classroom. An innovative approach to mental health.

HISTORY

According to the CDC, suicide was the second leading cause of death in 2021 among individuals ages 10-14 and 20-34. Brave Space was founded in response to the growing mental health crisis affecting Michigan's youth, following the tragic loss of an 18-year old student personally known to founder Alexis Rosado.

Launched in 2021 through private funding, Brave Space began working with students through a youth ministry program, using poetry and writing techniques to help them identify and express their emotions in healthy ways. In 2022, Brave Space became a registered 501(c)(3) organization and expanded its services into public schools. That same year, an advisory council of teachers, psychotherapists, counselors, and dialogue facilitators joined to integrate evidence-based practices into the Brave Space curriculum.

In 2022, Brave Space received the Health Equity Council Mini Grant to extend its work into Ingham County Schools. In 2023, the organization partnered with Escape Ministries in Ottawa County to bring *Became Brave* curriculum to high school students. In 2025, Brace Space expanded working with I Am Academy at Harbor Lights Middle School and West Ottawa High School. In 2025, Brave Space received grants from the Community Foundation Holland/Zeeland, and from Women of Color Give. These grants allowed Brave Space programming to expand it's services to the Juvenile Correction Facility, West Ottawa School District, Out on the Lakeshore, Children's Advocacy Center and more organization,

Today, Brave Space continues its mission to equip students with tools to manage their emotions, build resilience, and prevent harm to themselves or others. While also empowering them to overcome any obstacle that comes their way, and reach their full potential.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Brave Space is a 10-week mental health and leadership program that integrates evidence-based practices, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), restorative practices, and expressive arts therapy, with creative expression and dialogue. The program helps students identify, process, and regulate emotions while fostering self-awareness, resilience, and leadership skills.

INNOVATION & EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICES

Brave Space combines research-supported interventions with creative, culturally responsive methods. By pairing CBT and restorative practices with art-making and guided dialogue, Brave Space creates a safe, affirming environment where students can explore vulnerability, identity, and resilience.

PREVENTATIVE INTERVENTION

Brave Space operates as a preventive intervention, addressing emotional and relational challenges before crises escalate. Cohort activities, journaling, and mentorship cultivate self-regulation and coping skills that help students navigate stress, anxiety, and social challenges. The Brave Space Guided Journals reinforce this prevention work by equipping trusted adults with tools to support students during moments of crisis or emotional distress.

ADDRESSING INEQUITIES

Brave Space explicitly addresses inequities by providing:

- Accessible, culturally responsive programming for middle and high school students
- Mentorship and dialogue that validates lived experiences and counters stigma

PARTNERSHIPS & COHORTS

Brave Space typically partners with organization who work with students directly.
We do a cohort of 12 students and each cohort engages in weekly activities that include:

- Poetry, writing prompts, and art projects to explore identity and emotion
- Small group dialogue and reflection exercises
- Journaling for emotional processing and goal-setting
- Weekly mentorship with trained Dialogue Facilitators

At the conclusion of each program, students present a creative final project reflecting on the prompt: “Who am I when I think of myself as a resilient leader?” During this final project we incentivize students attendance by getting them gym shoes to paint as apart of this final project.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- Improved emotional intelligence and emotional regulation
- Strengthened leadership identity and resilience skills
- Increased peer connection and relational awareness
- Enhanced coping strategies for stress, anxiety, and conflict
- Positive behavioral changes: including reduced aggression, self-harm behaviors, and reactivity in challenging situations
- New identity statements
- Dialogue facilitation skills
- Emotional and relational responses are less reactive and more responsive
- Overall improvement in attitude and demeanor
- An increase in student overall happiness
- Decrease in fights and aggressive behavior
- Increased direction in life and next steps

A LOOK AT THE CURRICULUM

Example of a customized curriculm

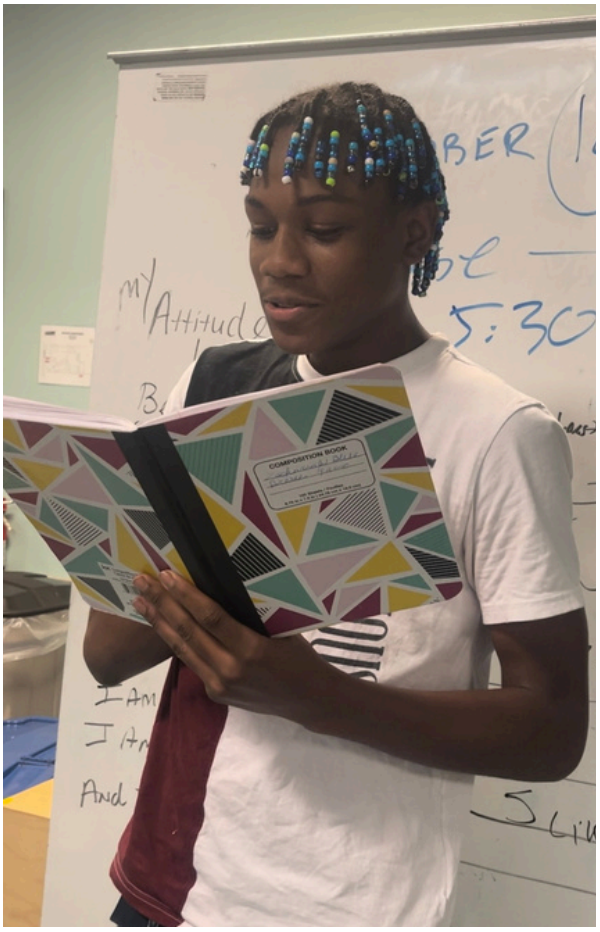
1. Stories & Icebreakers: Get to know each other & Ground Rules (Stories & Expectations)
2. Redefinition Poetry Piece
3. Emotional Identification: Navigating through Anger
4. Life is a Boxing Match: Resilience Training
5. Respond vs React
6. New Identity Poetry Piece
7. New Identity : Painting Activity
8. New Identity: Continue Painting Activity
9. Final Presentations “I Am Poetry Pieces”

Example of lesson plan & prompts:

Situation + Feelings + Thoughts = Solution

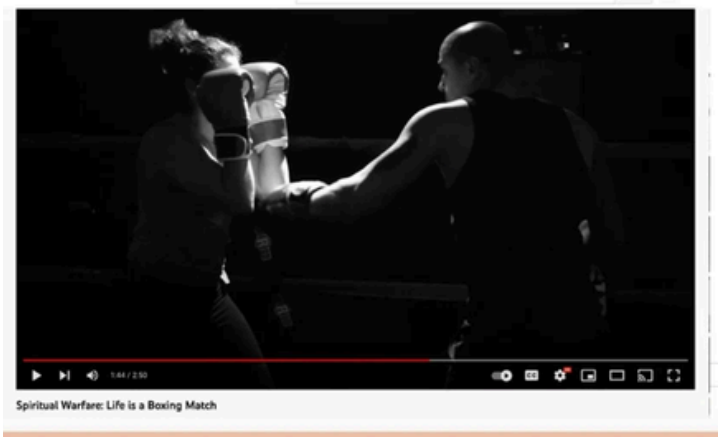
- Situation: sometimes can’t be controlled
- Feelings: involuntary reaction, not always controllable
- Thoughts: controllable portion
- We may not be able to control a situation, an emotion, or a person but we DO get to control our **thoughts** and ask different questions. This allows us to change the way we **SEE a situation. And how WE want to change our thoughts.**

A student sharing his “I Am” poetry piece



Award winning poetry videos:

Cinematic Poetry Piece “LIFE IS A BOXING MATCH” *Play poetry video*
Poetry piece available on YouTube if you’d like to see it again titled “Life is a boxing Match”



EVALUATION

Students will have an intake form assessing a starting point for emotional intelligence, resilience and overall relational, emotional and mental wellness. At the end of the program students will take a survey again to see what they have learned. The goal is to measure if there is an increase in emotional awareness, direction, identity, resilience and overall relational emotional and mental wellness. We will explore this with pre and post surveys measuring their confidence in identifying emotions communication, ect. Below are examples of one portion of the post surveys.

