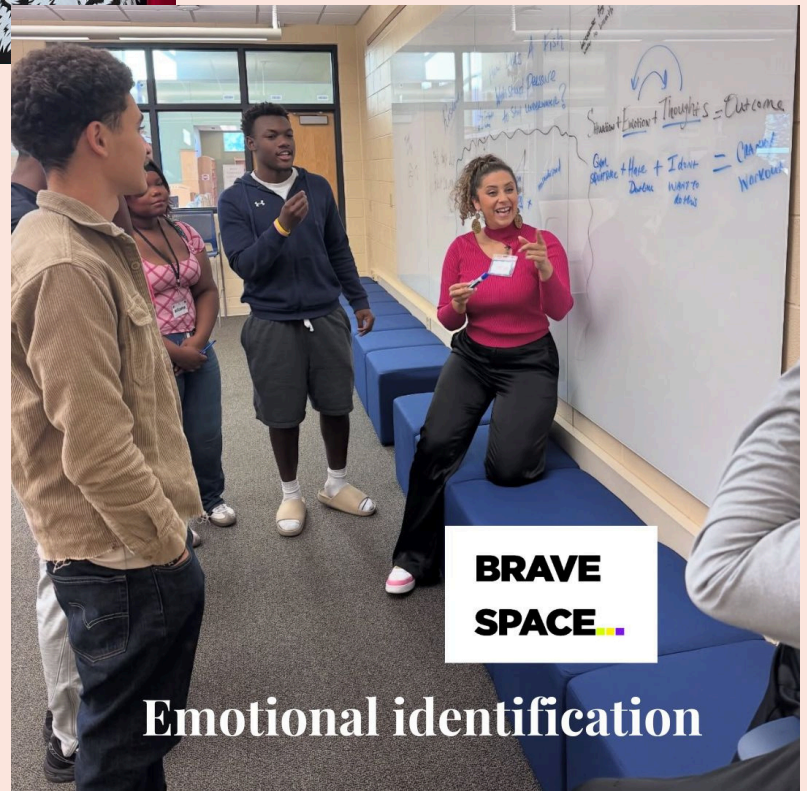


BRAVE SPACE PROGRAM

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, Brave 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 its 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 6-12 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 behavior and happiness
- Decrease in fights and aggressive behavior
- Decrease in marks of self harming or self mutilation

Example of a customized curriculum

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

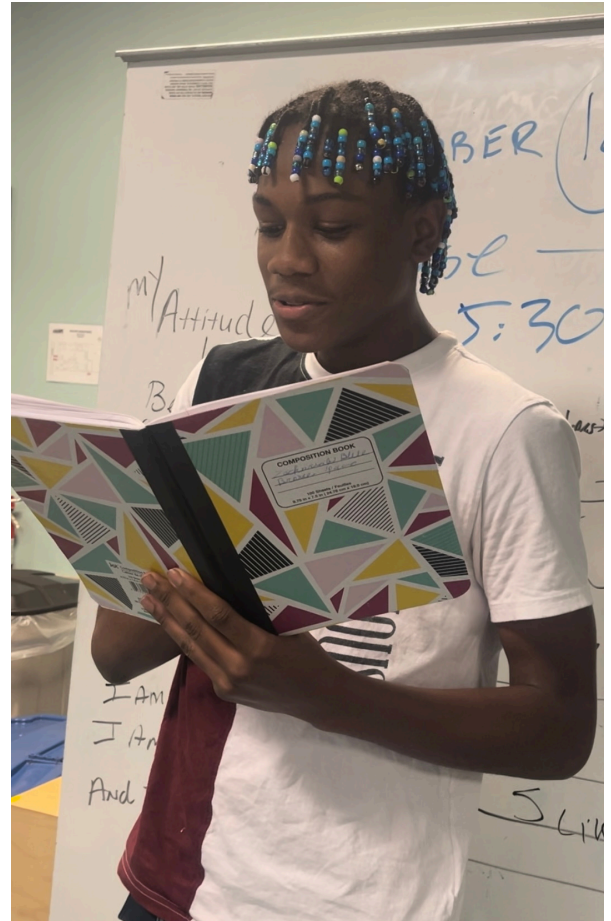
9. Final Presentations “I Am Poetry Pieces”

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

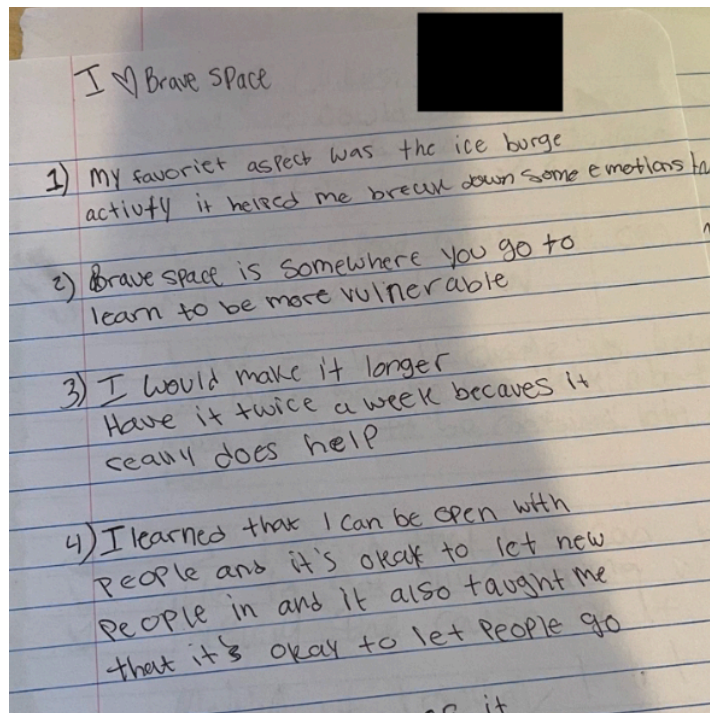
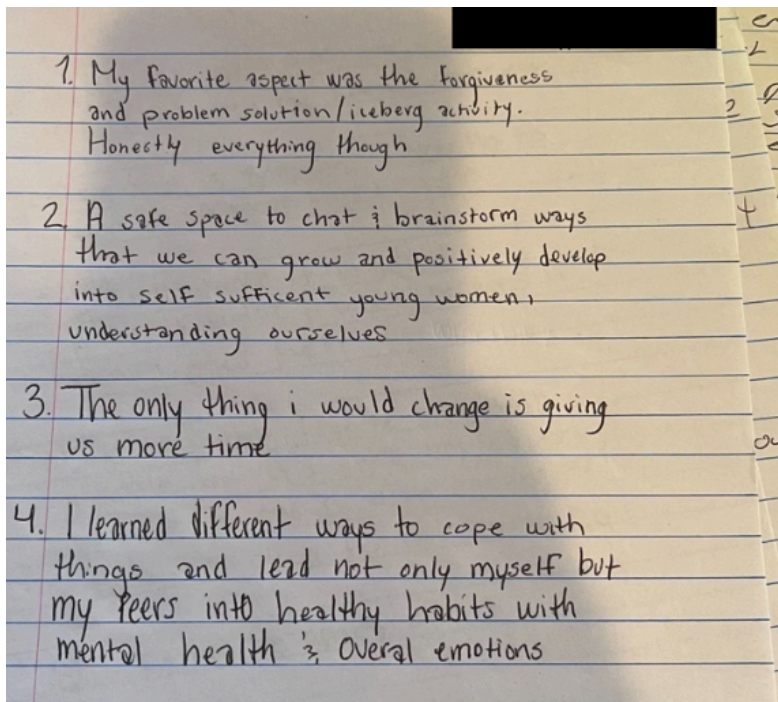


Award winning poetry videos:

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"



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.



WHY THIS MATTERS

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS FOR TEENS

According to the CDC, 1 in 5 high school students (20%) reported seriously considering suicide in 2023. Among LGBTQ+ youth, that number more than doubles – 41% reported having serious thoughts of suicide. While Ottawa County’s rates are slightly lower than national averages, they remain deeply concerning. According to the 2025 Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey 14.9% of high school students reported seriously considering suicide, and among LGBTQ+ students, 1 in 3 (33%) reported suicidal thoughts.

Mental health continues to impact students, 26.7% of Ottawa County high school students said they stopped doing some of their usual activities during the past 12 months because they felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row.

These numbers show that not only are suicidal thought plaguing our student, many young people are struggling with prolonged sadness, hopelessness, and disengagement from daily life, warning signs that often precede more serious mental health crises. The Ottawa County Youth Assessment Survey from 2025, indicates that first-time experiences with drugs, pornography, and cigarettes are getting younger, occurring between ages 12-14 on average. Underscoring that intervention must begin at the middle school level to prevent patterns of self-medication and despair from taking root.

Through Brave Space, students gain a safe environment to process their experiences, build resilience, and connect with supportive adults and peers. By partnering with local schools and youth-serving organizations, Brave Space seeks to intervene early—before hopelessness turns into crisis—through prevention, connection, and belonging.

PROGRAM COSTS

Below is the typical costs of a cohort of 12 students for 10 weeks, with the final workshop consisting of a celebratory party & final project. Costs continue to rise for our materials, books, snacks, art supplies and more. For example, our final project includes students receiving a pair of gym shoes to paint. Shoes have increased from an average of \$65 per shoe to approximately \$90 per shoe, this is about a 38.5% percent increase.

| Base Cohort Budget | Single Session | # of Sessions | Total Cost |
|--------------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Printed Student Print Material | \$120 | 1.00 | \$120 |
| Journals | \$600 | 1.00 | \$600 |
| Supplies per sessions | \$120 | 9.00 | \$1,080 |
| Facilitators | \$300 | 9.00 | \$2,700 |
| Final Workshop | | | \$1,500 |
| Administrative (FTE) | | | \$1,000 |
| Total | | | \$7,000 |

WHAT WE NEED?

This year, Brave Space (EIN: 88-4084764) is expanding its programming to serve incarcerated youth. We've been invited by a local Juvenile Detention Center leadership team to facilitate within their space, an opportunity we're deeply grateful for and committed to stewarding well.

To sustain our growth and launch this new initiative, we are working to raise \$250,000. This investment will allow us not only to meet immediate needs, but to build toward offering this programming year-round in 2027.

These funds will support two critical areas:

- Expanding our administrative capacity and covering rising material costs, which have nearly doubled as our programs grow.
- Launching and sustaining consistent programming for incarcerated youth

Your support would directly fund:

- Weekly teaching and facilitation by a trained professional at the facility
- Guided journals for reflection and personal development
- A final creative project where youth express who they aspire to become in the future, through painting and poetry storytelling.

This work helps young people build self-awareness, process their experiences, and develop a stronger sense of identity and possibility for their future.

Would you consider supporting this effort through a one-time gift or monthly contribution?

- One-time giving: <https://buy.stripe.com/00gg2Je178GGdryfZ0>
- Monthly partnership: <https://buy.stripe.com/6oE3fXbSZ6yydry14e>

We would also welcome the opportunity to connect, share more about this initiative, and explore ways to collaborate. If there are others in your network who may align with this work, we would truly appreciate any introductions.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and commitment to supporting young people. All contributions are tax deductible.

REFERENCES

AJ Westendorp

Connections Director

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AJ helped host Brave Space at Escape, where we worked with a group of students in 2023. Since then, our collaboration has continued through programs like “Hero in Me” and other ongoing initiatives.

Taylor Dolan

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Mental Health Assistant at Holland Hospital

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LIGHTHOUSE
ACADEMY



Taylor is an educator who has participated in Brave Space sessions and can offer valuable insight into the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) approach.

Carla Brooks

Operations Director

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Carla has worked alongside Alexis Rosado, the founder of Brave Space, for several years. Alexis has been part of this organization’s team for eight years and, over the past two years, has worked closely with a dedicated cohort of students.