

# FINAL REPORT

QTIPOC YOUTH RITES  
OF PASSAGE  
PROGRAM

BRIDGING THE GAP  
ENTERPRISES LLC

The QTIPOC (Queer, Trans, Indigenous People of Color) Youth Rites of Passage program was a transformative, affirming, and healing-centered initiative serving three cohorts of youth across the age ranges of 7–11, 12–17, and 18–26. The purpose of the program was to provide marginalized youth with tools to navigate and cope with negative experiences and dual discrimination due to their intersecting identities through positive actions, community building, and resilience training.

Each cohort participated in 10 hours of cooperative learning, focusing on the themes of self-care, identity affirmation, and emotional resilience. These sessions were designed to be developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive.

## PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION BY COHORT

<b>Cohort 1: Ages 7-11</b> This group participated in three consecutive days of four-hour sessions.	
<b>Day 1: Identity &amp; Belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Youth began with a read-aloud and discussion of a children's book on <i>Bayard Rustin</i>, highlighting his courage as a gay Black civil rights leader.</li><li>• Discussions around being treated differently due to identity were followed by a planting activity, where youth wrote about what they need to thrive and placed those letters into the soil of their own plants, symbolizing self-nourishment.</li></ul>
<b>Day 2: Resilience &amp; Sensory Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Journaling focused on moments when students had to demonstrate resilience.</li><li>• A candle-making activity explored the power of scent in emotional regulation, with students creating personalized candles using calming scents like ocean breeze and lavender.</li></ul>
<b>Day 3: Mindfulness &amp; Inner Energy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The cohort participated in a sound-bowl meditation session, learning how to use mindfulness to manage energy and maintain emotional balance. Despite initial unfamiliarity, students remained focused for over 20 minutes.</li></ul>

### Cohorts 2 & 3: Ages 12–17 and 18–26

Older cohorts followed a similar format but engaged in deeper dialogue around identity, intersectionality, and systems of oppression.

- Rustin’s life served as a foundation for discussions on resistance, legacy, and visibility within QTIPOC communities.
- All activities (planting, journaling, candle-making, and meditation) were connected to broader concepts of community healing, systemic resilience, and long-term self-care.

### Program Strengths

<b>Strategic Timing for Youth Cohorts (Ages 7–17)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hosting the program during spring break was a significant strength. Without the fatigue or pressure of school, youth arrived energized and fully present.</li><li>• Attendance and participation levels were notably high, with families expressing appreciation for meaningful programming during a school break.</li></ul>
<b>Holistic, Identity-Affirming Curriculum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Activities intentionally blended storytelling, nature, art, and mindfulness—creating multiple pathways for self-expression and healing.</li><li>• Centering Bayard Rustin’s story gave participants a powerful historical mirror, reinforcing visibility and pride in QTIPOC identities.</li></ul>
<b>Emotional Safety and Community Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The environment cultivated by facilitators allowed youth to feel safe, seen, and validated.</li><li>• Participants consistently reported feeling more connected to their identities and more equipped with tools to handle stress and adversity.</li></ul>

Program Barriers	
<b>Time Commitment for Emerging Adults (Ages 18–26)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite stipends being offered, scheduling proved to be a significant challenge for participants in the oldest cohort.</li> <li>• Many had work, school, caregiving, or other adult responsibilities, making it difficult to commit to the full 10-hour, in-person requirement.</li> <li>• Because asynchronous participation was not an option, some interested participants were unable to attend or complete the program, limiting reach within this age group.</li> <li>• Future iterations may benefit from modular scheduling (e.g., weekend intensives or evening sessions) to better accommodate adult responsibilities while maintaining program integrity.</li> </ul>
<b>Initial Adjustment to Mindfulness Practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While ultimately successful, meditation and open emotional sharing required more scaffolding for some participants unfamiliar with these practices.</li> <li>• Additional time was spent on trust-building and normalization of vulnerability, particularly in the older groups, underscoring the need for trauma-informed facilitation and ongoing support.</li> </ul>

The QTIPOC Youth Rites of Passage program created a nurturing, empowering space for youth to explore identity, build resilience, and develop lifelong self-care tools. By combining cultural storytelling, hands-on learning, and mindfulness, the program responded to the distinct needs of Queer, Trans, Indigenous youth of color and gave them concrete skills for managing adversity. While time posed a challenge for the adult cohort, the program's strengths—particularly its thoughtful structure, timing for school-aged youth, and affirming content—demonstrate the power and necessity of healing-centered engagement. Future programming will build on this success by adapting delivery formats for greater flexibility without compromising depth or community connection.

## CURRICULUM HIGHLIGHTS FOR LGBTQIA+

Ages 7–11 Cohort	
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Discussion of Bayard Rustin (Children's Book):</b> Students were introduced to the life and legacy of Bayard Rustin, a Black gay civil rights leader. The story facilitated age-appropriate conversations around feeling different, being treated unfairly, and belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. Students shared their thoughts on identity, race, and acceptance, and discussed ways they sometimes feel "different" from others.</li><li>• <b>Activity:</b> Plant Identification and Plotting: Youth explored soil, growth, and nourishment. They then wrote down the emotional and environmental things they need to thrive, placed those notes into the soil, and planted a seed—symbolizing their personal growth.</li></ul>
Day 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Journal Writing &amp; Resilience:</b> A guided writing session introduced the concept of resilience. Students reflected on challenges and how they overcame them. The journal writing activity allowed the youth a chance to journal about how they see themselves as it pertains to their Identity-race and sexual orientation. Many of them talked about feeling different at times and influenced their behavior.</li></ul>

### Ages 12–17 & 18–26 Cohorts

- The older cohorts followed the same three-day format with deeper, age-appropriate discussions and self-reflection. During the Bayard Rustin discussion:
- The 12–17 group explored what it means to live authentically in a world that may not fully accept them. Many students shared that they are not out to their families, and the sessions offered them rare opportunities to talk openly in a safe space.
- The 18–26 group, all of whom identified as "out," engaged in rich conversations about community accountability, systemic oppression, and navigating the world as QTIPOC individuals. They also reflected on Bayard Rustin's leadership and legacy in light of their own identities. One stated, "his resilience is motivating me to keep going."

## SUMMARY OF PRE- AND POST-TEST RESULTS

### OVERVIEW

Participants across all three age cohorts (7–11, 12–18, 18–26) completed a 10-question assessment measuring their understanding of key social-emotional concepts such as resilience, self-care, identity pride, and empathy. The assessments were administered at the end of the 10-hour cooperative learning experience.

Ages 7–11: Early Learners' Growth	
Key Insight	Younger participants (ages 7–11) initially showed limited understanding of abstract concepts like resilience, community support, and emotional regulation. During pre-tests, responses tended to hover around the mid-range (average ~3 on a 5-point scale), and several students expressed confusion about terminology like “resilience” and “belonging.”
Post-Test Outcome	<p>By the end of the program, there was a dramatic increase in comprehension and articulation of these concepts. The post-test average rose to 4.8–5.0 across nearly all statements. This growth was reflected not only in their answers but also in group discussions and their ability to apply concepts during activities like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Writing their needs and planting them symbolically</li><li>• Reflecting on emotional triggers during candle-making</li></ul> <p>Meditating and naming the impact of sound on mood and energy</p>
Chart Summary	The chart for this age group shows a consistent upward shift across all 10 items, indicating increased self-awareness, emotional literacy, and empathy.

## Ages 12–17: Adolescents' Deepening Awareness

<b>Key Insight</b>	This age group entered the program with a slightly better conceptual baseline than the youngest group, averaging around 3.0–3.2 per question. Participants were able to identify moments when they'd needed resilience but often lacked language to fully describe how they coped.
<b>Post-Test Outcome</b>	Post-assessment results jumped to an average of 4.6–5.0, showing strong improvement in their ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use creative expression (writing/art) for emotional processing</li><li>• Recognize their own value and uniqueness</li><li>• Listen actively and empathetically to peers</li><li>• Understand the impact of environment and community on well-being</li></ul>
<b>Chart Summary</b>	The bar graph for this group shows high overall growth with slightly greater variation across individual statements, suggesting the content resonated differently depending on personal experiences.

## Ages 18-26: Adolescents' Deepening Awareness

<b>Key Insight</b>	Young adults generally started with more life experience but also greater variability in emotional development due to past traumas, stressors, or marginalization. Pre-test averages ranged between 2.8 and 3.4.
<b>Post-Test Outcome</b>	Despite challenges with scheduling and attendance, participants who completed the full 10 hours demonstrated strong growth. Post-assessment scores averaged 4.5–4.9, showing a notable increase in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confidence in identity</li><li>• Understanding the power of community care</li><li>• Valuing differences and fostering inclusion</li><li>• Ability to name internal/external factors that impact well-being</li></ul>
<b>Chart Summary</b>	This group showed the most variability between individual statements—some scoring higher on identity and community questions, others on emotional regulation—indicating diverse areas of growth.

## RECRUITMENT STRATEGY & OUTCOMES

The recruitment process for the QTIPOC Youth Rites of Passage program was designed with intentionality and community-centered outreach. Our goal was to ensure that youth participants not only identified within the QTIPOC community, but also felt seen, safe, and supported from the very start of the program.

### TARGETED OUTREACH IN COMPTON AND WATTS

Given that our host resource center is located in the heart of Compton, we prioritized outreach to elementary and middle schools within Compton and neighboring Watts. Our strategy focused on schools already demonstrating inclusive values and affirming practices.

One elementary school was particularly instrumental in successful recruitment efforts for the 7–11 age group. Known for its celebration of Pride Month and active promotion of inclusivity, this school was both willing and enthusiastic about helping us identify potential participants. With the support of faculty and administrators, we were able to connect with families who were open to affirming their children's QTIPOC identities

#### Ages 7–11 & Ages 12–17

We initially anticipated challenges in recruiting younger participants, particularly around parental consent and acknowledgment of their child's identity. However, to our surprise, these cohorts filled up quickly. The 7–11 and 12–17 groups each reached full capacity with 10 participants in each.

We attribute this success to:

- Strong school partnerships
- Trust built within the local community
- Clear messaging about the program's focus on emotional wellness, resilience, and empowerment

## Ages 18–26: A Different Challenge

Our approach to the **18–26 TAY (Transitional Age Youth)** cohort relied on **traditional community-based recruitment**, including:

- Outreach through the **City of Compton’s social media pages**
- Partnerships with **local LGBTQIA+ service organizations**
- Announcements shared through networks that support TAY, particularly QTPOC youth

While we anticipated this age group would be **eager to participate**—given their independence and lack of need for parental consent—we faced unexpected challenges. Many were hesitant to commit due to the **10-hour time requirement**, and the **\$200 stipend**, while helpful, wasn’t a sufficient incentive for all.

Ultimately, we found that:

- **Unemployed** youth
- **College students** with flexible schedules were the most likely to participate.

Despite outreach efforts, the **18–26 cohort enrolled a total of 6 participants**. This outcome underscored that time availability and perceived value were as important as identity alignment in recruiting this age group.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RECRUITMENT

- Increase stipend amounts to make participation more feasible and appealing for older youth who may be working or managing other life responsibilities.
- Offer flexible options, such as evening sessions or virtual components, to reduce barriers to entry for the 18–26 age group.
- Continue cultivating strong relationships with inclusive schools and community partners who can identify and support younger QTPOC youth in a safe and affirming way.

Our experience showed that thoughtful, culturally aware recruitment paired with trusted community networks can make a meaningful difference in engaging QTPOC youth at all developmental stages.

## CONCLUSION

Across all cohorts, the QTPOC Youth Rites of Passage Program significantly increased participants' understanding of resilience and self-care. The youngest participants, despite struggling with initial comprehension, made remarkable strides by the end. The charts visually affirm this growth, with every age group showing a consistent upward trend from pre- to post-assessment.

## FEEDBACK & REFLECTIONS

The QTIPOC Youth Rites of Passage program received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both youth participants and their families. The sessions created a space of acceptance, emotional exploration, and empowerment that left a lasting impression on everyone involved.

### YOUTH REFLECTIONS

Across all three cohorts, youth reported an increased sense of self-awareness, emotional resilience, and community connection. Many expressed appreciation for being in a space where their identities were affirmed and their voices heard. Below are a few direct quotes that reflect their experiences:



*“This is the most peace I’ve had in my life...”* – IM

*“I feel confident that I can regulate my feelings.”* – LM

*“I’m happy to know people feel what I am going through.”* – CF, Age 19

These statements illustrate the transformative nature of the program and its ability to meet youth where they are—emotionally, socially, and developmentally.

### An Unexpected but Welcome Outcome: Parental Feedback

While the primary focus was youth-centered healing and empowerment, an unexpected yet powerful outcome was the positive feedback received from parents and caregivers.

One notable example involved a youth from the 12–17 age group, a Black gay male student who had been referred to the program due to challenges with emotional regulation and difficulties at school. Throughout the sessions, he demonstrated remarkable growth—building friendships, participating openly, and embracing the tools shared for self-expression and resilience. After the program, his parent reported a noticeable change at home: their child appeared calmer, more grounded, and able to regulate his emotions more effectively. The parent expressed deep gratitude to staff, stating that the program gave their son tools to navigate life with confidence and emotional stability, even in the face of discrimination.

Other parents echoed similar sentiments, expressing thankfulness that their children had access to:

- A judgment-free space to be themselves
- Affirming adults who respected their identities
- Coping strategies and emotional skills that could be practiced beyond the program

This collective feedback reaffirms the need for intentional, culturally responsive, identity-affirming spaces for QTIPOC youth—and highlights the impact such programming can have not only on participants, but on their families and support systems as well.

## EVALUATION

While no formal evaluation instruments (e.g., surveys, exit interviews) were completed by participants or parents at the conclusion of the QTIPOC Youth Rites of Passage program, the informal feedback we received offered valuable insight into both the strengths and areas for growth within the program.

The feedback from youth participants and their families—often shared through conversations, emails, and post-session reflections—served as an informal evaluation tool that helped us assess the program’s impact and identify future improvements.

### Areas of Strength

- The creation of safe, inclusive spaces that allowed youth to feel affirmed and seen.
- The development of coping tools related to self-care and emotional regulation.
- Strong community-building activities, especially among younger cohorts.
- Appreciation from families for providing nonjudgmental, affirming programming that helped youth feel at peace and better understood.

### Areas for Improvement

- Recruitment challenges for the 18–26 age group emerged as a key area of concern. While younger cohorts reached full capacity quickly, we experienced lower enrollment for TAY (Transitional Age Youth), despite assuming they would be the easiest to recruit.
- Time commitment, scheduling conflicts, and the perceived value of the stipend were all barriers to engagement for older participants.

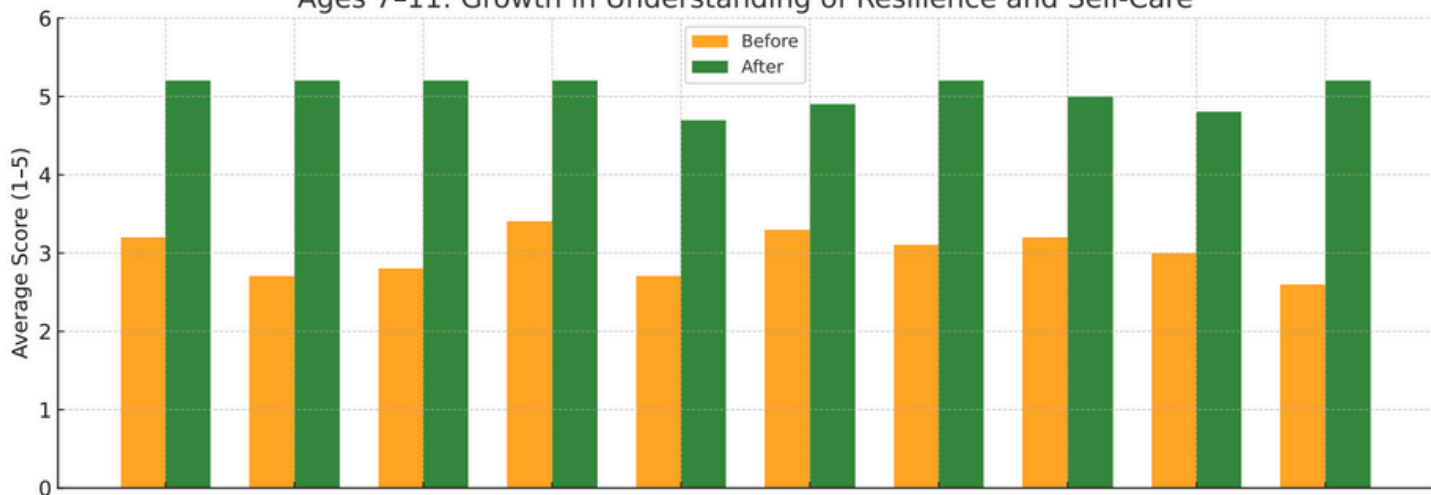
These areas of improvement directly informed the recommendations outlined in this report, particularly around:

- Adjusting recruitment strategies for older youth
- Increasing stipends or scheduling flexibility
- Exploring virtual or hybrid options for future programming

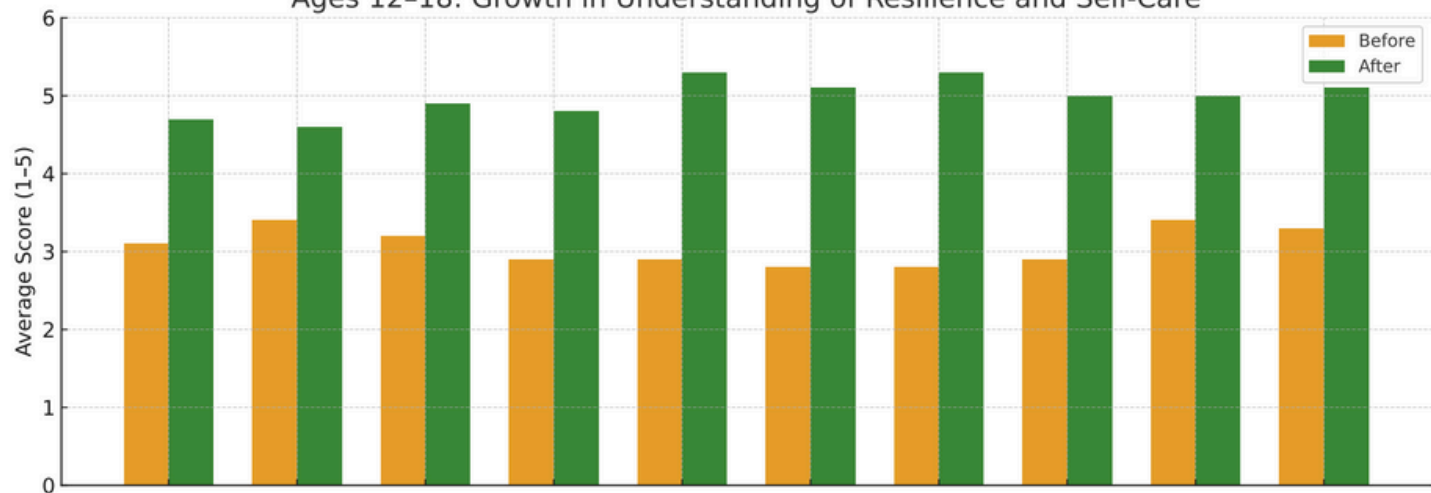
In future iterations, we recommend incorporating a formal evaluation component—such as pre/post surveys for parents or short participant exit interviews—to better capture the full scope of program outcomes and experiences.

# CHART SUMMARY PER AGE GROUP

## Ages 7-11: Growth in Understanding of Resilience and Self-Care



## Ages 12-18: Growth in Understanding of Resilience and Self-Care



## Ages 18-26: Growth in Understanding of Resilience and Self-Care

