

# AFFIRM Caregiver Cuyahoga County, OH & Allegheny County, PA 2018 to 2021

AFFIRM Caregiver is a group-based intervention for parents/caregivers comprised of seven sessions. It is intended to increase the affirmative caregiving skills and better equip them to provide care to LGBTQ+ youth.

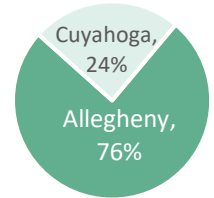
Between 2018 and 2021, Allegheny County Office of Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) and Cuyahoga County Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) implemented AFFIRM Caregiver with resource parents. Allegheny County sought to have all resource parents in their Families for Teens program complete AFFIRM. Cuyahoga County sought to enroll resource parents who were interested in joining their PRIDE Network to be a potential affirming placement for LGBTQ+ youth.

As part of the AFFIRM evaluation, participants were asked to complete surveys before, after, and three months after the program. Measures were summed and averaged to create the aggregate scores summarized here.

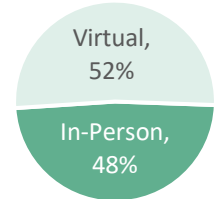
## Program Implementation

- 287 caregivers registered for AFFIRM.
- 219 caregivers started AFFIRM and 192 completed AFFIRM. 166 caregivers completed pretest and posttest surveys; 60 also completed a three-month follow-up survey.
- Allegheny had a larger number of caregivers participate than Cuyahoga County.
- AFFIRM switched to a virtual format in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. Approximately half of caregivers took part virtually while the other half took part in person.

## County (n=219)



## Setting of AFFIRM (n=219)

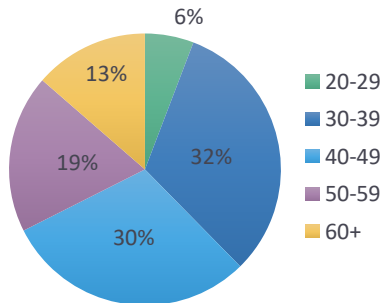


## Participant Characteristics

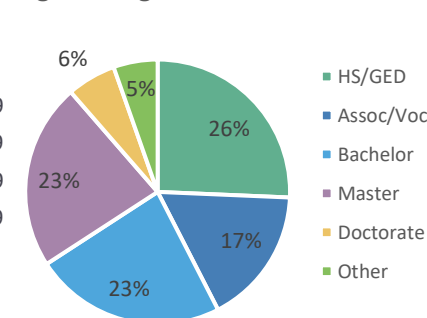
The majority of participating caregivers were foster parents (92.1%) with the remaining parents being kinship caregivers or another type of caregiver. Two-thirds (65.2%) of caregivers had experience caring for teenagers. Nearly one-third (30.9%) had previously cared for an LGB+ youth while 12.4% had previously cared for a transgender youth. 93% of participants indicated they were not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin. The average age for participating caregivers was 44.6 (*SD*=11). Figures below detail more caregiver demographics, at pretest.

## Participant Characteristics

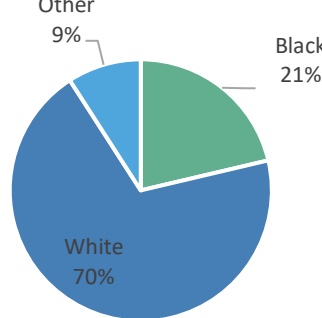
### Age Category



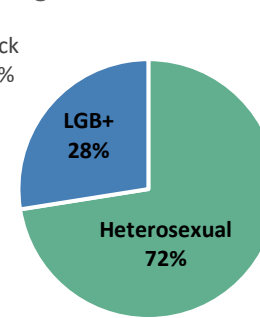
### Highest Degree Achieved



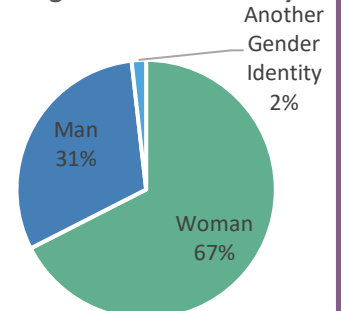
### Race



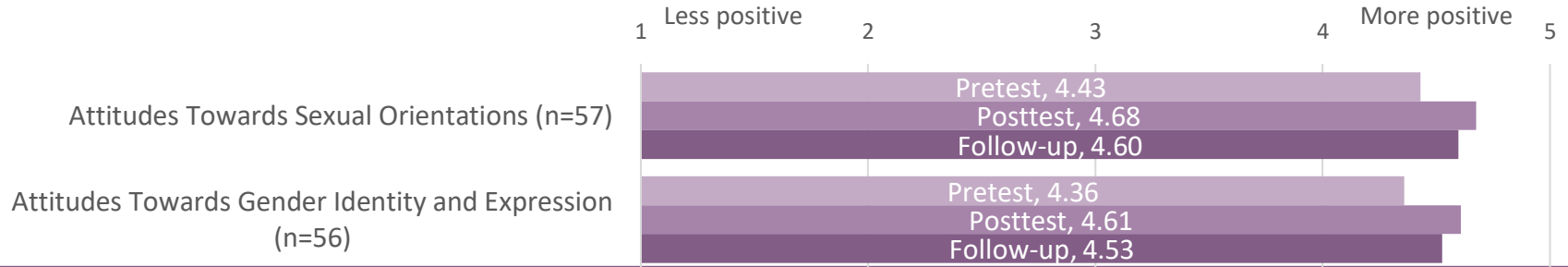
### Caregiver Sexual Orientation



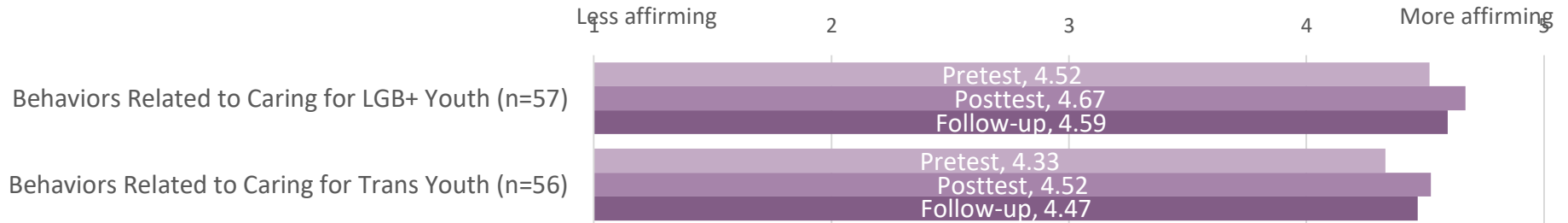
### Caregiver Gender Identity



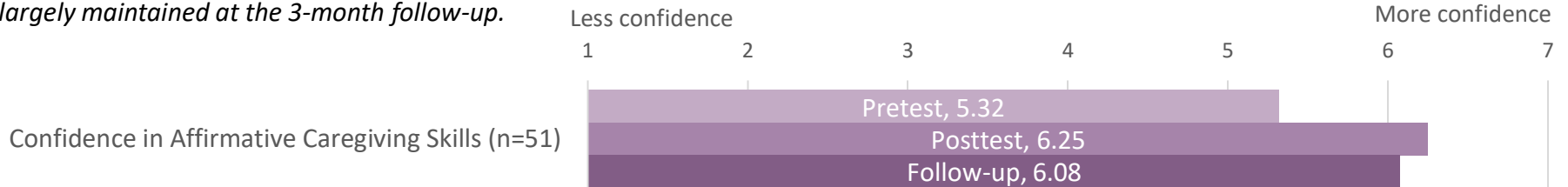
**Attitudes:** The Affirmative Caregiving Survey asks caregivers a series of 6 questions for sexual orientation and 7 for gender identity regarding their attitudes towards LGBTQ+ populations. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes. Findings indicate a significant increase from pretest to posttest and this increase was largely maintained at the 3-month follow-up.



**Behaviors:** The Affirmative Caregiving Survey asks caregivers a series of 14 questions to assess behavior related to caring for LGBTQ+ children/youth. Higher scores indicate more affirming behaviors. Findings indicate a significant increase from pretest to posttest and this increase was largely maintained at the 3-month follow-up for caring for Trans youth but, while non-significant, declined to midway between the pretest and posttest scores for LGB+ youth.



**Caregiver Confidence:** A series of 20 questions is used to assess a caregiver's confidence in their abilities related to caring for LGBTQ children/youth. Higher scores indicate more confidence. There was a significant increase from pretest to posttest and this increase was largely maintained at the 3-month follow-up.



## Caregiver Feedback

At posttest, caregivers were also asked to provide open-ended responses to questions regarding experiences with AFFIRM

Aspects of the series that were most helpful	Aspects of the series that were least helpful
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Conversations with facilitators and fellow classmates</i></li><li>• <i>Discussion, personal stories</i></li><li>• <i>Education and engagement</i></li><li>• <i>Education and resources</i></li><li>• <i>Facilitators; Personal Experiences</i></li><li>• <i>I was given respect for my thoughts. The group was very supportive of each other. The resources will be useful</i></li><li>• <i>Learning differences in LGBT</i></li><li>• <i>Open discussions among facilitators and foster caregivers about experiences and attitudes.</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Assumptions at each stage that we needed to work through negative attitudes about youth with diverse SOGIE</i></li><li>• <i>Group activities.</i></li><li>• <i>Listening</i></li><li>• <i>Rigid curriculum that could not be moved past when it doesn't meet the needs</i></li><li>• <i>Time restraints</i></li></ul>

## Summary

A summary of findings from the surveys suggests that caregivers made gains from pretest to posttest, and those gains were retained at the 3-month follow-up. This finding suggests the utility of the AFFIRM series as well as the likelihood that changes to caregiving practices involving attitudes, behaviors, and confidence in caregiving for LGBTQ+ children/youth were learned and maintained. Additional findings can be found at, *Austin, A., Craig, S., Matarese, M., Greeno, E., Weeks, A., Betsinger, A. (2021). Preliminary effectiveness of an LGBTQ+ affirmative parenting intervention with foster parents. Children and Youth Services Review, 127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2021.106107>.*

## 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.

