Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride Foundation
2024 Community Needs Assessment

About the Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride Foundation

Founded in 2019, Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride began as a 501(c)(4) founded by Sue Knause, DeLane Lewis, Bonny Knudsen, Wini Roche, Paula Whitacre, Yvonne Matthews, and Sabra Kurth. This dedicated group of LGBTQIA+ people and allies had a vision of bringing a pride festival to Harford County. On a shoestring budget and a tight timeline, they orchestrated our region's first-ever pride festival at Havre de Grace's Concord Point Lighthouse Park in June of 2019.

In 2024, again under the leadership of DeLane Lewis, the group founded The Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride Foundation, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. The Foundation's mission will continue to provide unwavering support for the Harford and Cecil County LGBTQIA+ community, primarily focusing on fundraising, education, and advocacy.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Mission: Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride provides unwavering advocacy and support for queer (LGBTQIA+) people, communities, and their families in Cecil and Harford counties.

Vision: The Upper Chesapeake region is a safe and enriching place for queer (LGBTQIA+) people to live and work.

Values:
- *Boldness*: We are fearless in our role of amplifying the voices of queer and other historically excluded people.
- *Collaboration*: We believe in the power of collective action, cooperation, and shared efforts to advance LGBTQIA+ issues.
- *Equity and Inclusion*: We are committed to fostering a culture in which everyone can contribute and thrive.
- *Kindness*: We strive to approach all people and situations with kindness and cultural humility.
- *Respect*: We hold a deep appreciation for the abilities, qualities, and achievements of queer people and communities.
- *Social Justice*: We address and eradicate barriers to social justice, particularly those that impact queer people.
- *Tenaciousness*: We are persistent, unwavering advocates for queer rights.

Research Team

Dr. Kurt Doan is a higher education professional with over 29 years of experience working at colleges and universities around the country. He currently serves as

President of the Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride Foundation and is a member of the Maryland Governor's Commission on LGBTQIA+ Affairs. He became involved in LGBTQIA+ advocacy while attending Penn State University. As a graduate student at the University of Arizona, he served as President of the LGB Graduate Student Alliance and was involved with Safe Zone—a program aimed at improving the campus climate for LGBTQIA+ people. In Arizona, he served as a trained crisis intervention specialist for the Wingspan Domestic Violence Project—a social service program that works to address and end violence in the lives of LGBTQIA+ individuals. Kurt completed a doctorate in higher education leadership and innovation at Wilmington University in May 2021; his dissertation focused on the data invisibility of LGBTQIA+ community college students.

Zach Runge is a higher education professional with extensive experience working in colleges and universities across Maryland. As a student at both Towson University and Arizona State University, Zach was involved in a number of LGBTQIA+-focused clubs and organizations, including the Queer Student Union and BeYouASU. Zach has worked on a variety of research projects focused on the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ and completed a capstone project exploring how non-governmental organizations promote LGBTQIA+ rights within Latin America. Additionally, Zach is an active recovery ally and has produced a variety of training sessions and workshops focused on supporting individuals in recovery or who are impacted by substance use.

About the Community Needs Assessment

In June of 2024 (during Pride Month), the Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride Foundation launched its first-ever community needs assessment to better understand the composition of the local LGBTQIA+ community and its most pressing needs. The anonymous 20-question survey included demographic questions to help us understand the makeup of our community, and questions to help us better understand the quality of life experienced by queer people in the region. We intend to use the survey data to offer our community better services and social events and shape our long-term strategic plan.

The survey was largely distributed online via the UCBPride Foundation's social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram) and via the Foundation's email distribution platform. Foundation leadership also shared the survey via their own social media and personal networks in the hopes of garnering more responses. Finally, QR code links were shared during social events and at the annual Pride Festival in the hopes of encouraging additional responses.

The survey remained open until Saturday, October 12, 2024–one week after our annual Pride Festival. Our initial goal was to collect 300 responses. Ultimately, our survey yielded 202 responses.

Refining the Data

After closely reviewing the data, the researchers determined that some respondents did not meet the survey criteria. Because the community needs assessment was designed to explore the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community, we removed 25 respondents who identified as both heterosexual and cisgender, or who did not include sufficient sexual orientation or gender identity data. And because the survey was designed to understand the lived experiences of queer people in Harford and Cecil counties, 14 people were removed who lived outside of the focus area. In total, 39 of the 202 respondents were removed. The researchers reviewed the qualitative responses of those 39 respondents; some of their answers are noted later in the findings report as they sometimes touch on the experiences of allies in our community.

In total, the refined data set included 163 respondents. Their responses provided rich insights into the queer population in our region and their lived experiences. This report is designed to highlight those experiences.
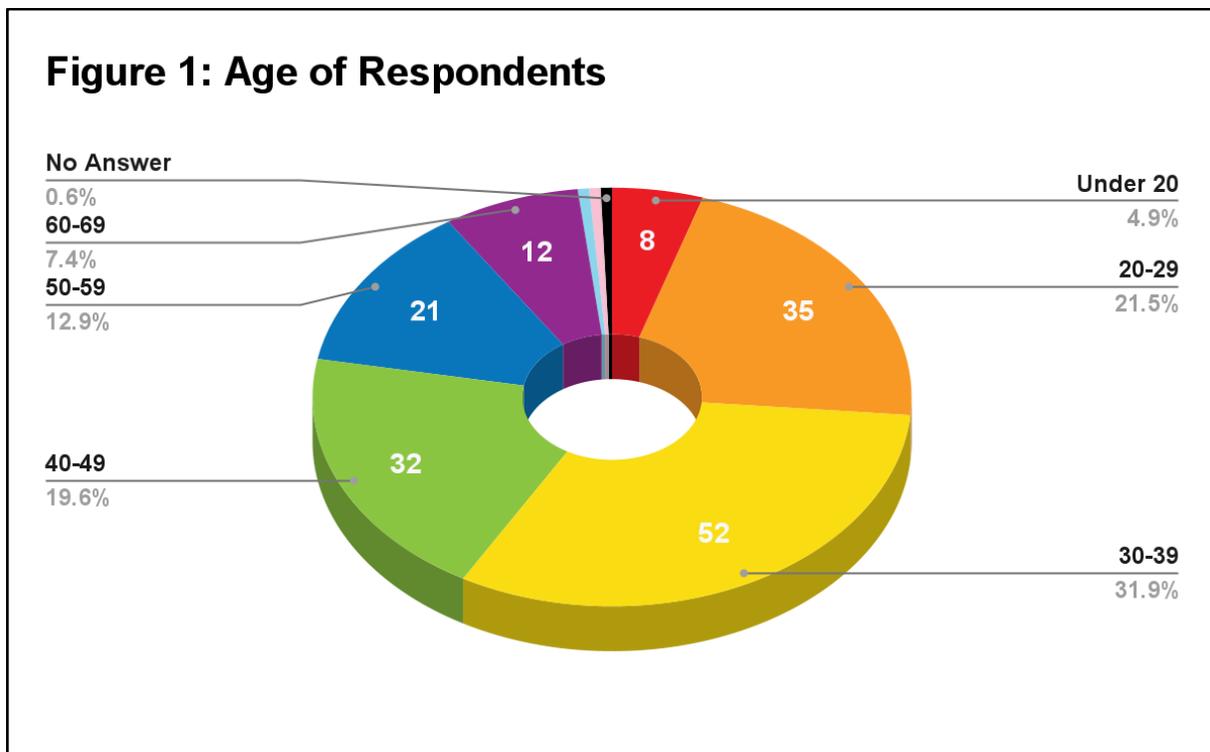
Demographic Information

A primary objective of the Community Needs Assessment was to understand the composition of the community that we serve. The Movement Advancement Project (MAP) notes that 2.9 million to 3.8 million LGBTQIA+ people (15-20%) of the total U.S. LGBTQIA+ population live in rural areas of the United States. MAP also estimates that between 3% and 5% of adults in rural communities identify as queer, and that approximately 10% of rural youth identify as LGBTQIA+. The 2020 U.S. Census Bureau reported the combined adult populations of Cecil and Harford counties to be approximately 380,000; conservatively speaking, this means that as many as 11,400 LGBTQIA+ adults may live in our region. The U.S. Census Bureau also reported the combined youth population (ages 15-19) in Cecil and Harford counties to be approximately 23,000, meaning that as many as 2,300 queer youth may live in our service area. In total, as many as 13,700 LGBTQIA+ people may live in Harford and Cecil counties.

Beyond these estimates, little is known about the composition of the LGBTQIA+ community in our two counties. Before this year, a formal community needs assessment had not been conducted. The following section examines the ages, gender identities, sexual orientations, races, ethnicities, and relationship statuses of respondents. In

addition, we sought to understand whether there were areas where LGBTQIA+ people were more likely to live.

Age

Survey respondents represented a diverse range of ages from 14 to 80. The average age of our respondents was 38.4 years old; the most common age reported was 39 years old. Figure 1 aggregates ages, with the largest populations being in their thirties (31.9%), twenties (21.5%), and forties (19.6%). Five respondents (3.1%) reported being under 18. In the LGBTQIA+ community, the term "elder queers" refers to people aged 50 and over; when aggregated, this group represents 21.5% ($n = 35$) of our respondents.

Figure 1: Age of Respondents

No Answer 0.6%
60-69 7.4%
50-59 12.9%
40-49 19.6%
Under 20 4.9%
20-29 21.5%
30-39 31.9%

The low response rate for the teen community may reflect how the survey was distributed. Although well-advertised on social media, the Foundation uses Facebook and Instagram. Some of the qualitative feedback from participants indicated that we should use communication and social media platforms that younger adults use (e.g., TikTok). Future surveys of this kind might consider using social media platforms more popular with younger people such as TikTok and Snapchat.

Where We Live

The majority of respondents (82.5%) reported living in Harford County, while the remaining 17.5% lived in Cecil County. Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents

by zip code, with those in green representing zip codes with higher numbers of respondents and those highlighted in red representing fewer respondents. Dark gray areas represent zip codes with no respondents.

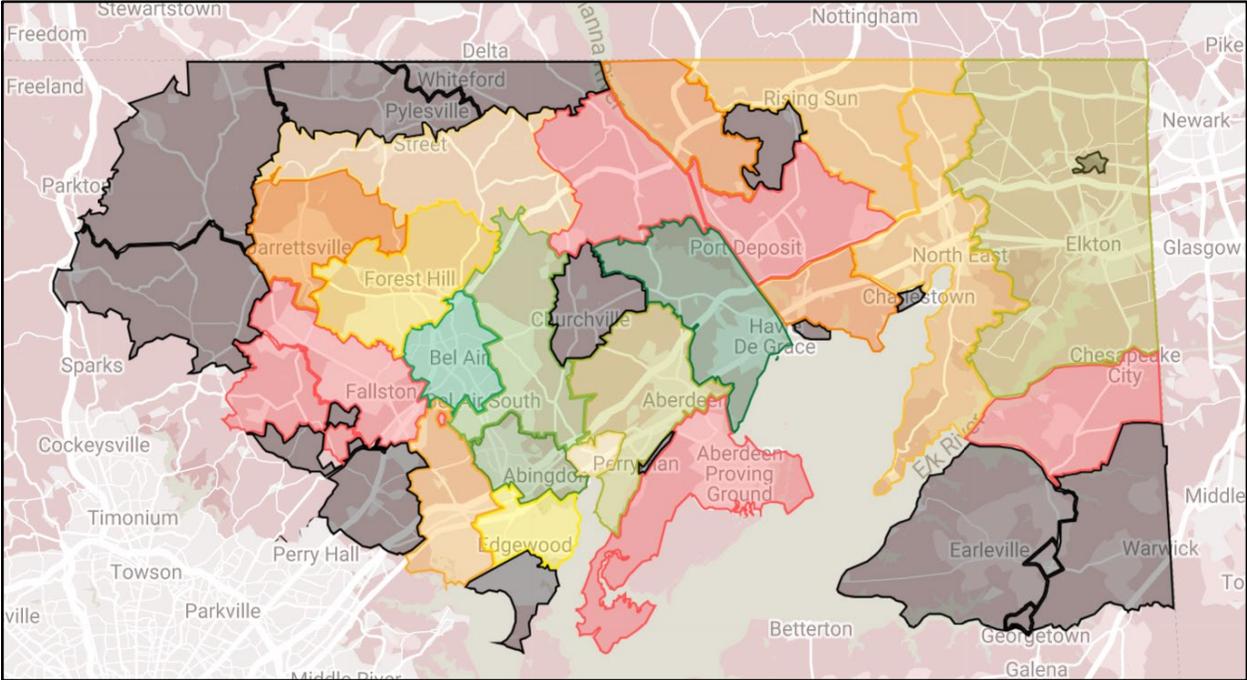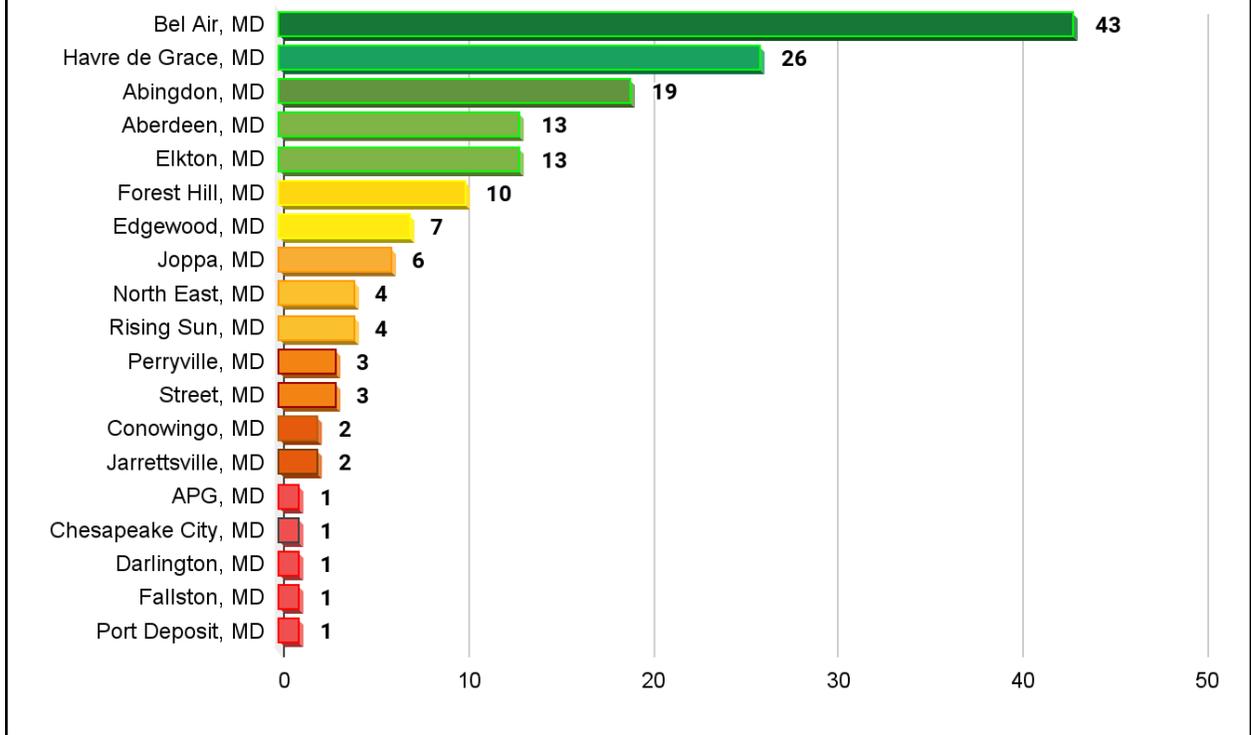**Figure 2:** Respondents by Zip Code

Figure 3: Respondent Locations

Location	Count
Bel Air, MD	43
Havre de Grace, MD	26
Abingdon, MD	19
Aberdeen, MD	13
Elkton, MD	13
Forest Hill, MD	10
Edgewood, MD	7
Joppa, MD	6
North East, MD	4
Rising Sun, MD	4
Perryville, MD	3
Street, MD	3
Conowingo, MD	2
Jarrettsville, MD	2
APG, MD	1
Chesapeake City, MD	1
Darlington, MD	1
Fallston, MD	1
Port Deposit, MD	1

There are two key takeaways from the geographical descriptive statistics. First, the higher response rate in Harford County may be indicative of the survey distribution methods. We relied heavily on Facebook and Instagram to distribute our surveys. As of November 20, 2024, our Facebook audience statistics indicate that seven of our top ten follower locations were in Harford County, two are in Baltimore County, and only one in Cecil County. Our Instagram audience statistics were similar in that seven of our top ten follower locations were in Harford County, two are in Baltimore County, and only one in Cecil County.

It is also the case that respondents–regardless of county–tended to reside in areas with higher population densities (e.g., suburban areas). This includes areas like Bel Air, Abingdon, Elkton, and Havre de Grace. Conversely, areas of those counties with lower population densities (e.g., rural areas) had fewer or no survey responses. This includes areas such as Pylesville, Darlington, and Rising Sun.

Gender Identity

Over 71% of respondents (n = 127) identified as cisgender. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines cisgender as a person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Of those respondents, 46% (n = 75)

identified as women, and 25.8% (*n* = 42) identified as men. Figure 4 highlights the distribution of respondents' gender identities.
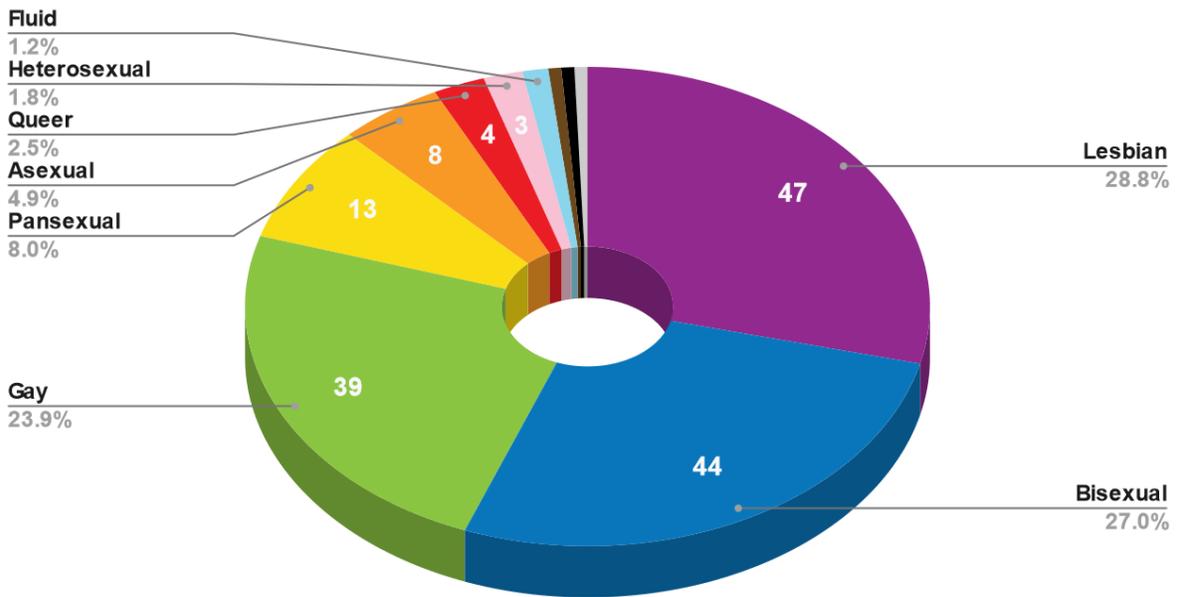
Collectively, 27% of respondents (*n* = 44) identified as trans and gender nonconforming (TGNC). Over 10% of all respondents (*n* = 17) identified as non-binary. People who identified as genderqueer (*n* = 4, 4.9%), trans man (*n* = 4, 4.9%), and trans woman (3.7%) were also significantly represented.

Figure 4: Gender Identity
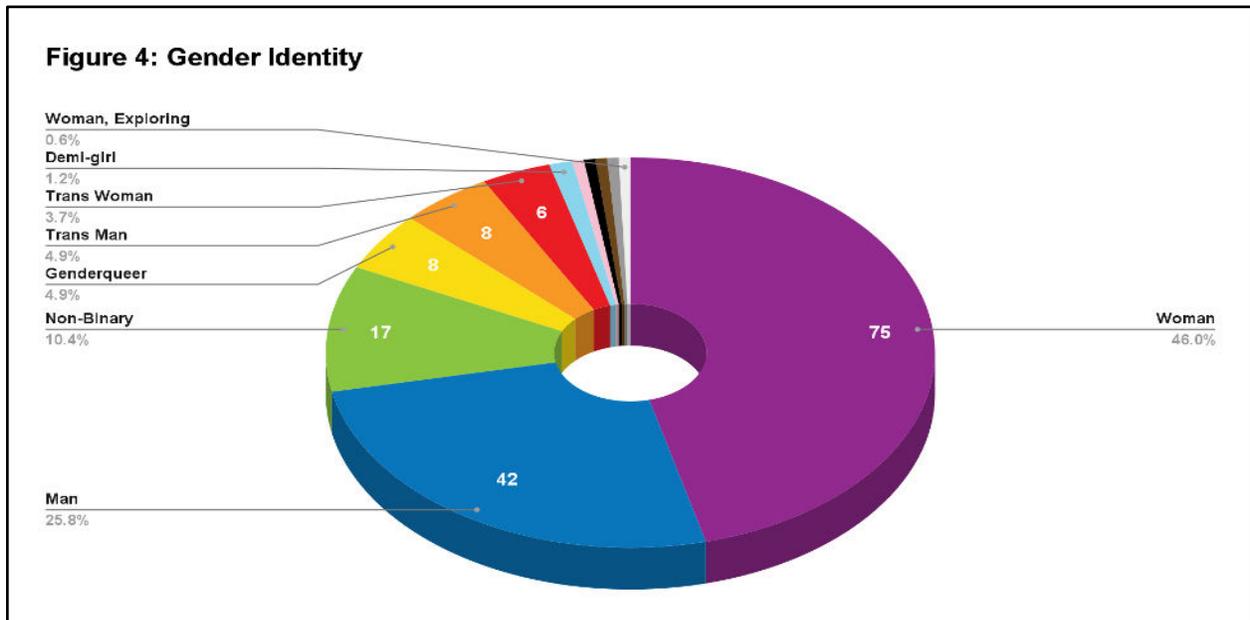
Sexual Orientation

Figure 5 outlines the sexual orientation of respondents. Over 28% (*n* = 47) identified as Lesbian, 27% (*n* = 44) as Bisexual, and nearly 24% (*n* = 29) as Gay. It is important to note the presence of three heterosexual respondents (1.8%) in this survey, all of whom identified as being transgender individuals who were in heterosexual relationships.

Figure 5: Sexual Orientation

- Fluid 1.2%
- Heterosexual 1.8%
- Queer 2.5%
- Asexual 4.9%
- Pansexual 8.0% (13)
- Gay 23.9% (39)
- Lesbian 28.8% (47)
- Bisexual 27.0% (44)
- (8, 4, 3)

Race & Ethnicity

Figures 6 and 7 highlight the racial and ethnic identities of our survey respondents. Most respondents (*n* = 149, 91.4%) identified as White and not Hispanic/Spanish/Latinx (*n* = 150, 93.8%). Notably, this is inconsistent with the overall composition of Harford County (76.6%) and Cecil County (86.1%) as noted by the U.S. Census Bureau (2023).
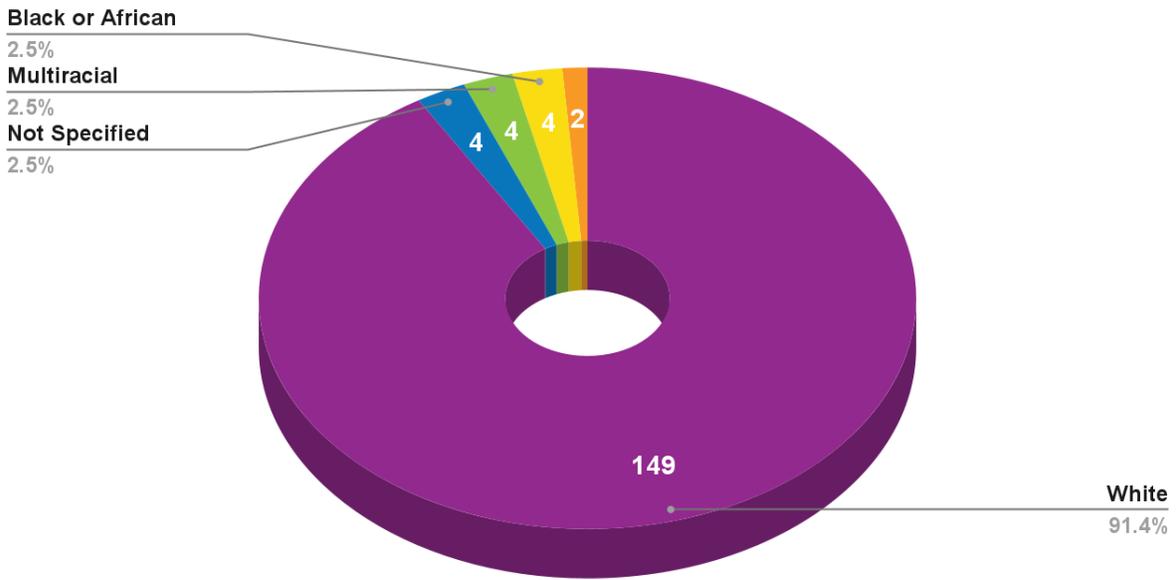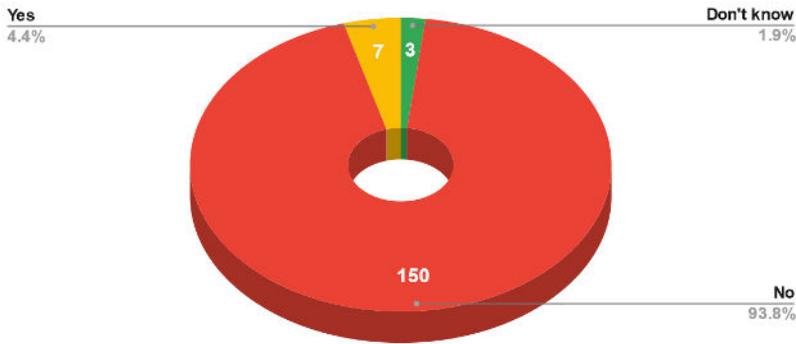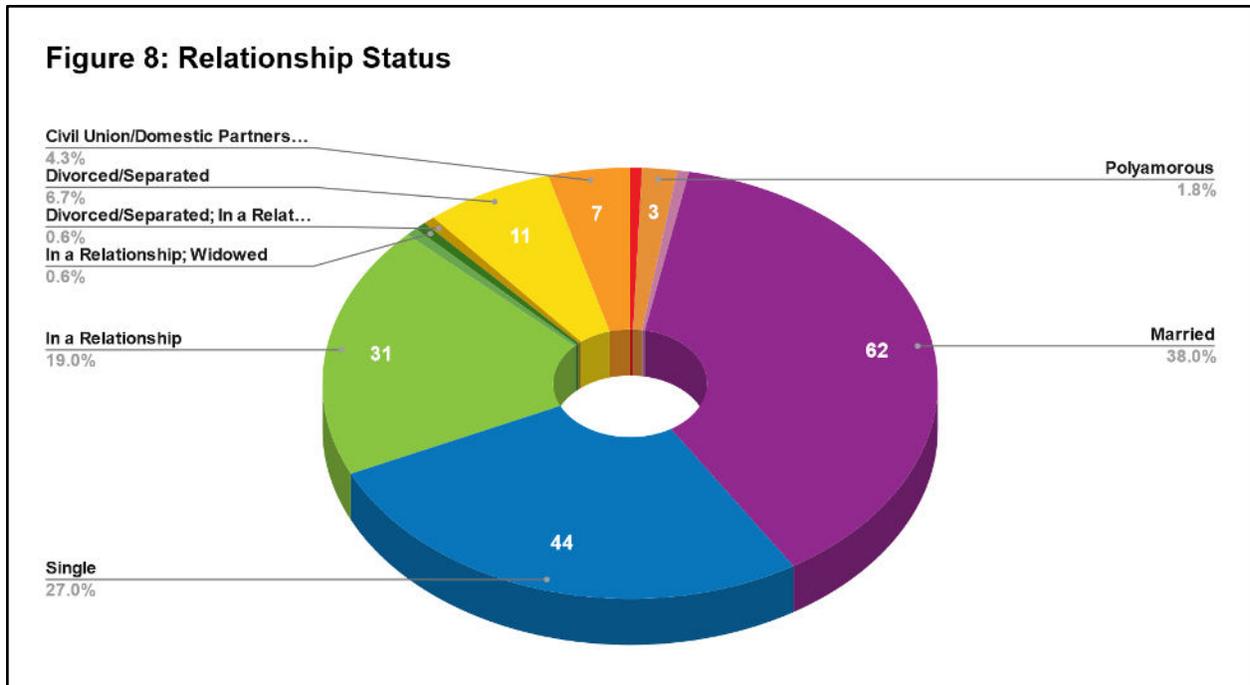
Figure 6: Racial Identity

Black or African
2.5%

Multiracial
2.5%

Not Specified
2.5%

4 4 4 2

149

White
91.4%

Figure 7: Spanish, Hispanic, or Latinx Identity

Yes
4.4%

Don't know
1.9%

7 3

150

No
93.8%

Relationship Status

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (*n* = 108) reported being in a relationship of some kind. Of this group, 62 (38%) reported being married and 7 (4.3%) reported being in a civil union or domestic partnership. Another 34 respondents (20.9%) reported being "in a relationship," with one respondent adding they had been divorced, another widowed, and another that their relationship was ethically non-monogamous. Four respondents (2.5%) reported being in polyamorous relationships.
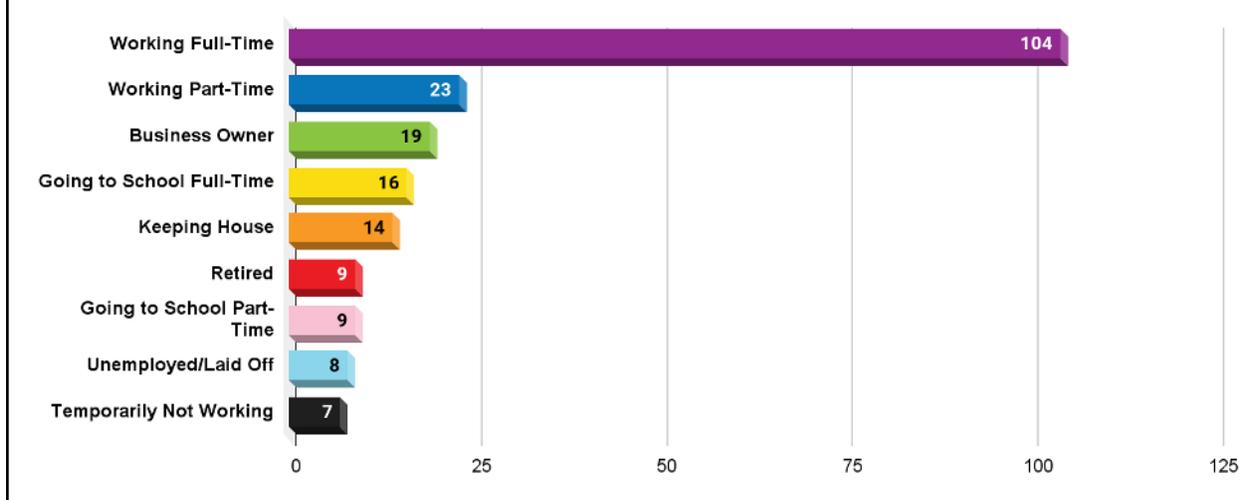
Figure 8: Relationship Status

Civil Union/Domestic Partners…
4.3%
Divorced/Separated
6.7%
Divorced/Separated; In a Relat…
0.6%
In a Relationship; Widowed
0.6%
In a Relationship
19.0%
Single
27.0%
Polyamorous
1.8%
Married
38.0%

Approximately one-third of respondents reported being single, with 27% (*n* = 44) explicitly listing their status as "Single" and 11 respondents (6.7%) stating they were divorced or separated.

Employment Status

Figure 9 provides a graphic overview of the reported employment statuses of survey participants. Respondents had the opportunity to select more than one answer to this question. A majority of individuals (*n* = 104) reported working full-time, indicating a strong emphasis on what people typically think of as traditional employment (e.g., a full-time, regular work schedule with an employer, as defined by the Department of Labor [n.d.]) within this population. Twenty-three respondents (14%) reported working part-time; notably, only eight of those respondents were exclusively working part-time, while the majority worked part-time in conjunction with another employment status (e.g., going to school). Nearly 12% of survey respondents (*n* = 19) indicated that they owned a business.

Figure 9: Employment Status

| Employment Status	Count
Working Full-Time	104
Working Part-Time	23
Business Owner	19
Going to School Full-Time	16
Keeping House	14
Retired	9
Going to School Part-Time	9
Unemployed/Laid Off	8
Temporarily Not Working	7

Of the 163 respondents, 25 (15%) stated that they were going to school either full-time or part-time. In relation to the intersection of age and education, five respondents reported being an age traditionally associated with high school, while another 17 reported being an age associated with traditional college-going ages (18-22). This indicates that at least some of our population may be non-traditional students pursuing advanced degrees.

Of respondents who were not working, 4.9% (*n* = 8) reported being unemployed or laid off. This is closely reflective of the national unemployment rate, which averaged 4.16% during the time the survey was distributed. Notably, another 4% (*n* = 7) indicated that they were temporarily not working (vs. unemployed). Our survey did not offer opportunities for respondents to provide context, but the term, "temporarily not working" could include a temporary layoff (voluntary or involuntary), sabbatical, medical leave due to illness or injury, or family-related leave (e.g., maternity, paternity, or caring for a relative). Nine people (5.5%) noted that they were retired, which is similarly reflective of the age distribution of our respondents.

Housing Arrangements

We asked participants to tell us about their housing and living arrangements. Respondents had the opportunity to select multiple options (e.g., "renter" and "living with partner/spouse"); some participants selected only one option to describe their living arrangements while others selected multiple options.

Figure 10: Living Situation
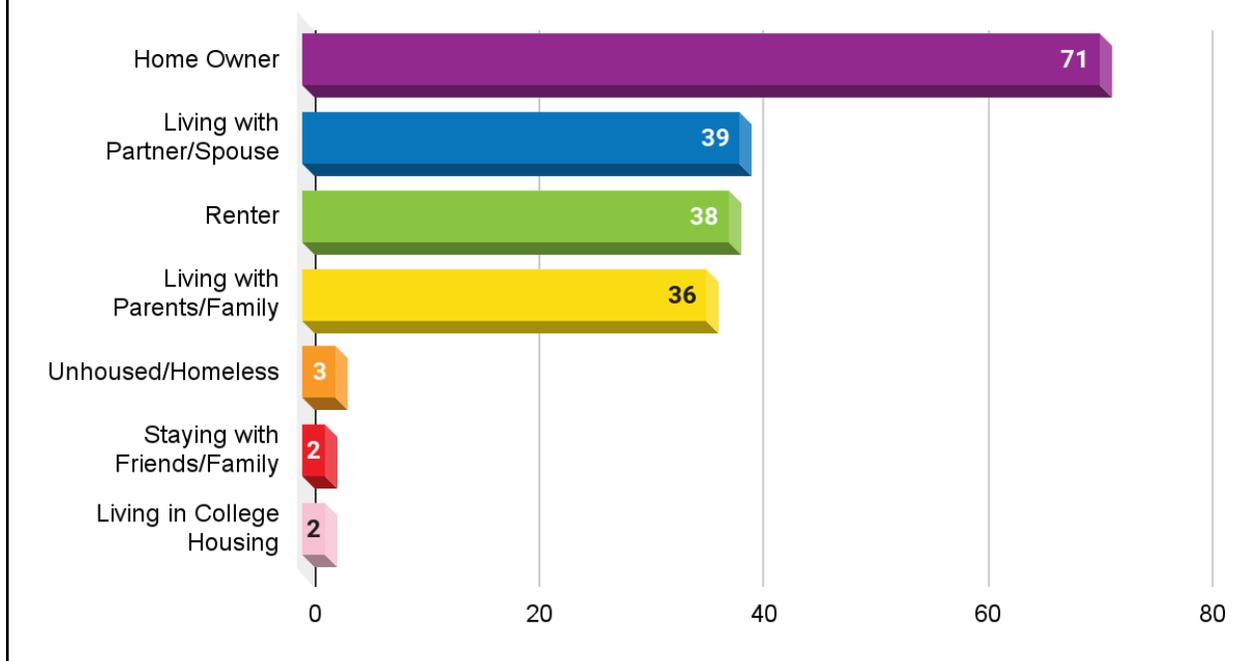
Approximately 44% of participants (*n* = 71) noted that they were homeowners. Owning a home can provide stability and financial security, but it can also be a burden in terms of maintenance and property taxes. About 23% of participants (*n* = 38) stated they were renting. Two participants shared that they were living in college housing, and two others noted that they were staying with friends or family. Three of our participants listed that they were unhoused or homeless.

Participants also shared whether they were living with other people. Nearly 24% of participants (*n* = 39) stated they lived with a partner or spouse, while about 22% (*n* = 36) said they were living with parents or family.

Lived Experiences

The Community Needs Assessment included questions designed to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people living in our region. These questions asked about participants' overall happiness, their health quality, how accepting their workplace was for queer people, job security, housing security, availability of reliable transportation, and access to food. We also asked what would improve their lives, and what role UCBPride could play in making our region a place where LGBTQIA+ people thrive. The following sections explore their responses to these topics.

Overall Happiness

Figure 11 highlights the overall happiness of respondents. Most respondents (*n* = 134, 82.2%) reported being happy, with 12.9% (*n* = 21) noting that they were very happy. Approximately 18% (*n* = 29) expressed some level of unhappiness; 16% (n = 26) stated that they were "not too happy," and approximately 2% (*n* = 3) described themselves as "very unhappy."

Figure 11: Overall Happiness

Very Unhappy
1.8%

Not Too Happy
16.0%

Very Happy
12.9%

3

26

21

113

Pretty Happy
69.3%
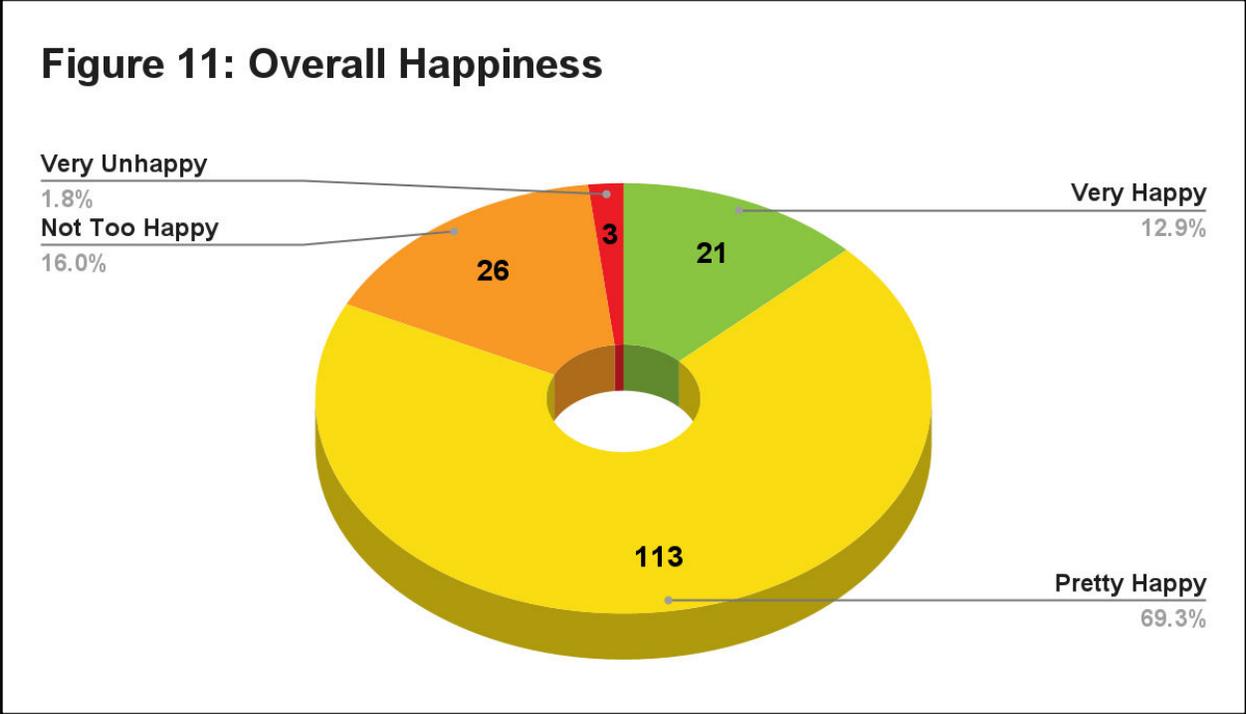
Further examination of the "not too happy" respondents showed a variety of potentially contributing factors that were experienced at higher rates than those who reported being happy, including being single (12), Living with parents or family they grew up with (12), being in "poor" (4) or "fair" (12) health, working for employers they noted were "not too accepting," (6), experiencing housing insecurity (6), experiencing job insecurity (10), and experiencing transportation insecurity (5). Additionally, 30.8% of respondents (n = 8) identified as being trans or gender non-conforming.

Further examination of the "very unhappy" respondents showed a variety of potentially contributing factors that were experienced at higher rates than those who reported being happy, including divorce (2), temporarily not working (2), being unhoused/homeless (1), "fair" health (3), experiencing housing insecurity (3), experiencing food insecurity (2), experiencing job insecurity (2), and experiencing transportation insecurity (1).

For those respondents who noted that they were "very happy," there did not seem to be any specific contributing factor. The age distribution of this group is diverse, with respondents primarily in their late 20s to early 50s. A majority identify as women (52.4%), followed by men (33.3%), and a smaller representation of non-binary and trans individuals. The most common sexual orientation among this group is lesbian (52.4%), followed by gay (23.8%), with pansexual and bisexual orientations also represented; this is reflective of the overall population sample. A significant portion of "very happy" respondents are working full-time (61.9%), with some being business owners or retired. Many are married (47.6%) or single (23.8%), indicating a mix of stable and independent lifestyles. The majority rate their health as good (71.4%), with smaller groups reporting fair or excellent health. In short, the findings suggest that happiness among respondents is associated with stable employment, positive health perceptions, and supportive relationship statuses.

Overall Health

Figure 12 examines the overall health reported by respondents. Nearly two-thirds of respondents ($n = 107$) reported being either in excellent health ($n = 16$, 9.8%) or good health ($n = 91$, 55.8%). It is notable that over one-third of respondents reported their health as being either fair or poor. In other responses, participants shared their thoughts about healthcare concerns, which largely centered around healthcare access and being able to find providers who would understand their needs as an LGBTQIA+ person. This included mental health, physical health, and wellness in general. The concept of queer-affirming healthcare is perhaps best captured by the following response:

> "One of the biggest challenges we've had is within the healthcare setting. Sometimes health professionals are aware of pronoun usage, sometimes they're not. Sometimes they will assume I'm in a straight relationship, sometimes not. Oftentimes, even if the provider is wonderful, the front desk staff are judgmental or assuming."

Figure 12: Overall Health

Don't know
0.6%

Poor
4.3%

Fair
29.4%

7

16

48

91

Excellent
9.8%

Good
55.8%
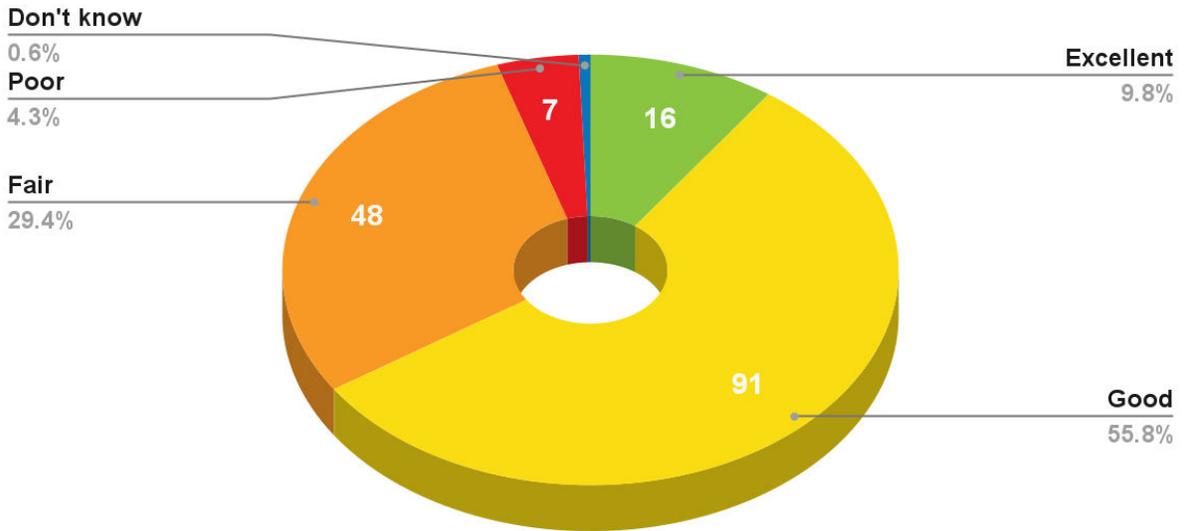
Workplace Acceptance

Figure 13 highlights feelings of workplace acceptance reported by survey respondents. The majority of (52.9%) believed their workplace to be very accepting in regards to LGBTQIA+ people. Of the remaining respondents, 37.5% categorized their workplace as only somewhat accepting, while just over 6% described their place of work as not too accepting. Nearly 3% of respondents noted that their workplace was not accepting at all.

Figure 13: Workplace Acceptance

Not Accepting At All
2.9%

Not Too Accepting
6.6%

4

9

Very Accepting
52.9%

72

51

Somewhat Accepting
37.5%
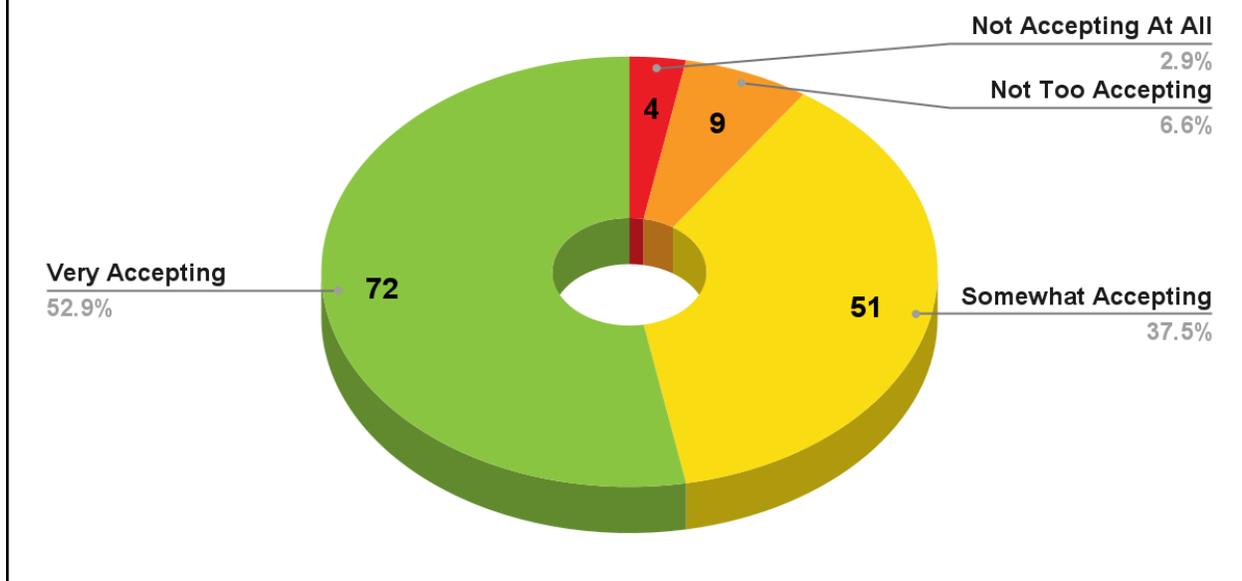
Accepting workplaces are crucial for LGBTQIA+ individuals as they foster a sense of belonging, reduce discrimination, and improve mental and physical health. When employees feel safe to be their authentic selves, they experience increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, and improved productivity. Research has shown that LGBTQIA+ employees in inclusive workplaces report higher job satisfaction and lower rates of depression and anxiety (Badgett et al., 2013). Additionally, inclusive workplaces attract top talent and lead to higher innovation and better business performance. An opportunity exists in our region to improve workplace conditions for LGBTQIA+ employees.

Job Insecurity

Sverke et al. (2002) defined job insecurity as feelings of uncertainty about the future of a job that are typically involuntary (e.g., being fired). As outlined in Figure 14, about a quarter of survey respondents indicated feelings of job insecurity in the past year. Although no participants specifically noted direct discrimination in the workplace related to an LGBTQIA+ identity, it is important to revisit the fact that nearly half of respondents believed their workplace was only somewhat accepting, not too accepting, or not accepting at all. It is possible that working in a less inclusive workplace may leave some LGBTQIA+ people feeling uncertain about their future employment with the organization.

Figure 14: Experienced Job Insecurity

Yes
25.8%

42

121

No
74.2%
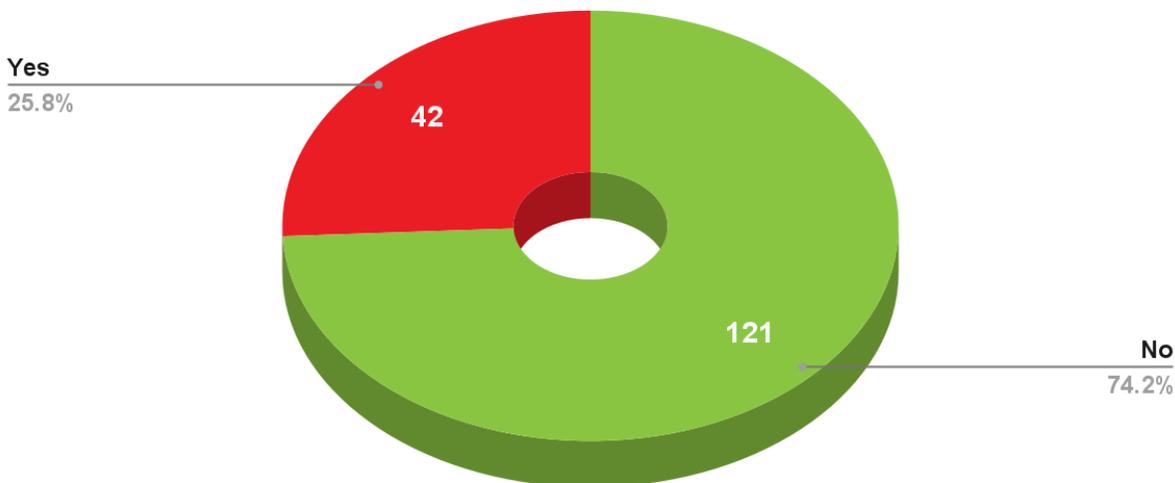
Housing Insecurity

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (n.d.) defines housing insecurity as, "a significant lapse of one or more elements of secure housing, including affordability, stable occupancy, and safety and decency." This umbrella term represents a spectrum of issues that can range from homelessness, to anxiety related to missing mortgage payments. It also speaks to the availability of safe housing options. As outlined in Figure 15, twenty-one respondents (12.9%) shared that they had experienced some form of housing insecurity in the past year.

Respondents who reported experiencing housing insecurity were very likely to have experienced one or more other forms of socioeconomic insecurity. Fifty-two percent reported also experiencing job insecurity, while nearly 43% reported experiencing food insecurity. Notably, 80% of respondents who experienced housing insecurity reported that their health was either fair ($n = 14$) or poor ($n = 2$). Forty-three percent also reported lower levels of happiness.

Figure 15: Experienced Housing Insecurity

Declined to Answer
0.6%
Yes
12.9%

21

141

No
86.5%
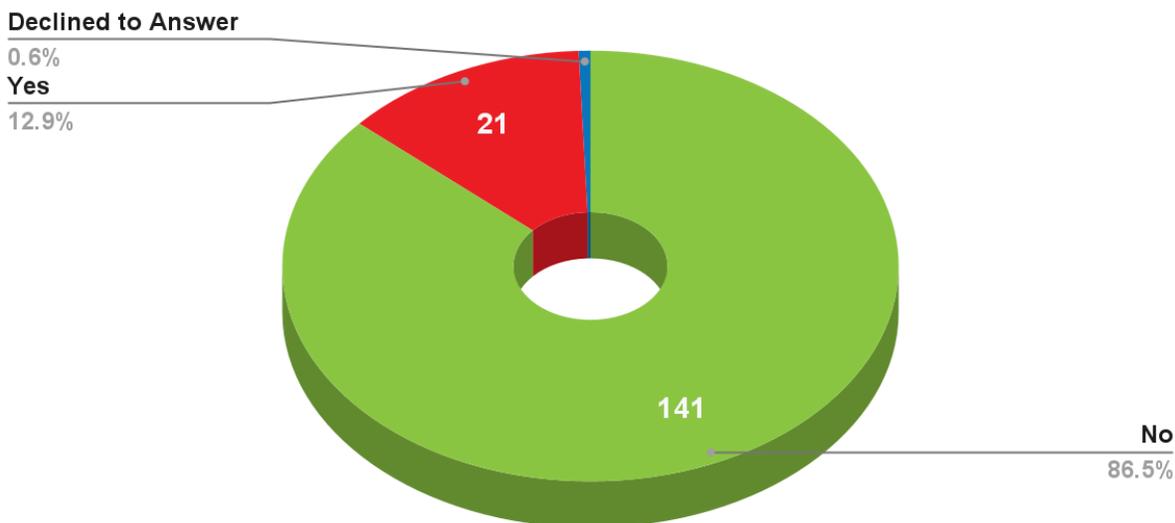
Food Insecurity

Food insecurity speaks to a lack of consistent access to adequate food for an active and healthy life. Nearly 12% of respondents (*n* = 19) reported experiencing food insecurity in the past year. Access to affordable and nutritious food is essential for overall health and well-being. Food insecurity can lead to a range of negative health outcomes, such as malnutrition, chronic diseases, and weakened immune systems. Additionally, it can exacerbate existing mental health conditions and contribute to social isolation. In the context of this survey, the issue of nutritional security may also help to explain why nearly one third of respondents reported that their overall health was either fair or poor. In fact, over half of the respondents who reported being in poor health had experienced food insecurity in the past year.

For our survey participants, food insecurity was also more likely to be tied to other forms of insecurity. Forty-seven percent of respondents who experienced food insecurity also reported housing insecurity. Similarly, 63% of food-insecure respondents also noted experiencing job insecurity. Finally, 37% of people who noted food insecurity also reported experiencing transportation insecurity. This is not to say that food insecurity causes other issues, but that a strong correlation exists between food insecurity and other forms of socioeconomic security.

Figure 16: Experienced Food Insecurity

Yes
11.7%

19

144

No
88.3%
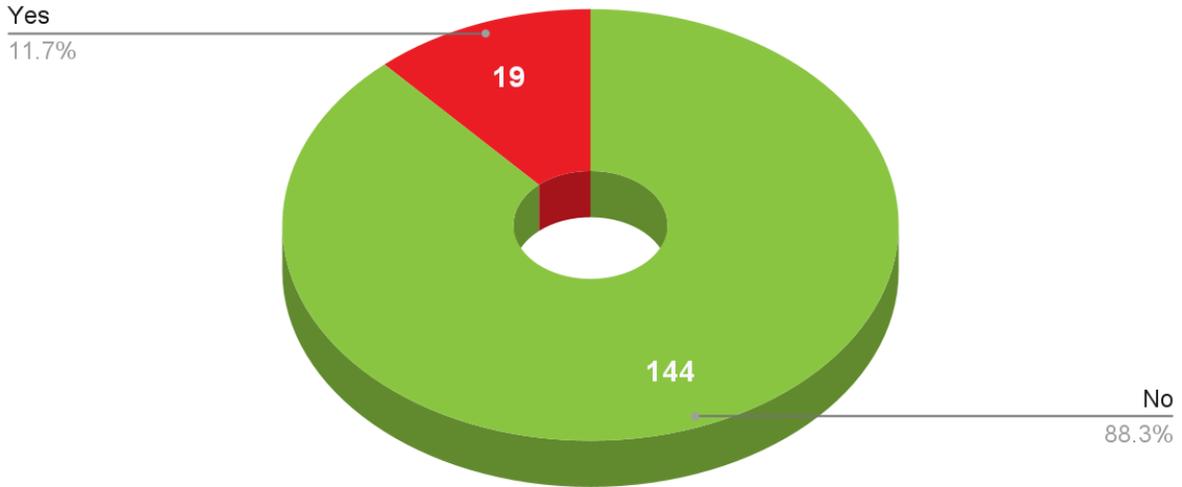
Transportation Insecurity

Transportation insecurity, defined as the inability to move from place to place in a safe or timely manner due to a lack of resources, was reported by just over 12% of respondents (*n* = 20). This lack of reliable transportation can significantly impact an individual's ability to access essential services, employment opportunities, healthcare, and social support networks.

Secure access to transportation is crucial for economic mobility, social inclusion, and overall well-being. When individuals are unable to reliably access transportation, they may face challenges such as job loss, missed medical appointments, and limited access to education and community resources. Notably, 65% of our survey respondents who experienced transportation issues also reported job insecurity, half reported being in "fair" health, and 30% reported lower levels of happiness.

Figure 17: Experienced Transportation Insecurity

Yes
12.3%

20

143

No
87.7%
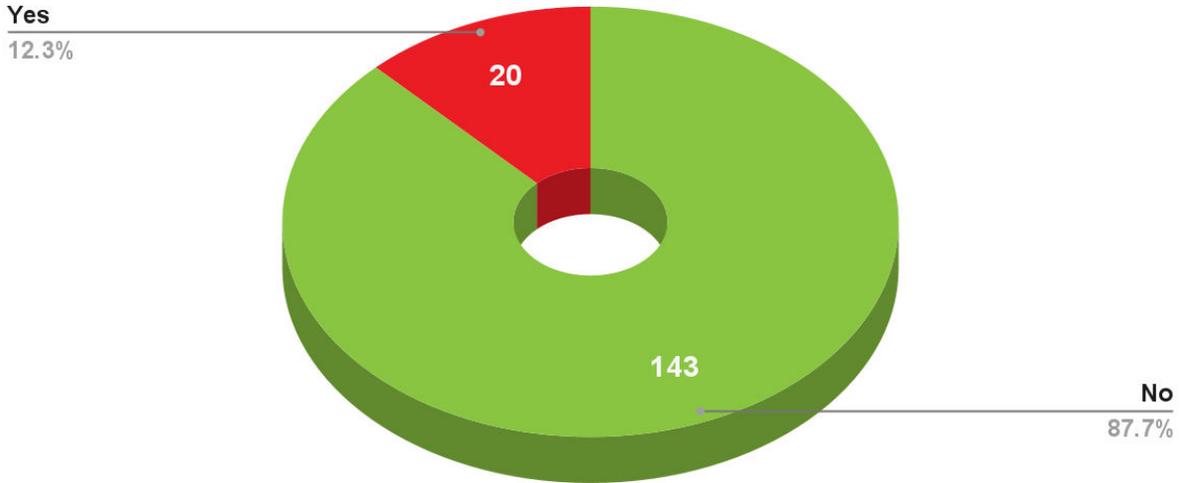
Information Sources

We asked participants what sources they use when seeking information and news. Respondents had the opportunity to select more than one option. Table 18 provides insights into the primary sources of information and news for the LGBTQIA+ community in our region.

Figure 18: Where do you find useful sources of information about the LGBTQIA+ community?

Radio 0.9%
House of Worship 2.0%
TV 2.6%
Schools 3.5%
Colleges/Universities 3.5%
Family 4.0%
LGBTQIA+ Media 5.9%
LGBTQIA+ Community Centers 6.4%
LGBTQIA+ Networking Organizat... 7.9%
Email/Distribution List 9.2%

Social Media/Internet 23.6% — 129
LGBTQIA+ Organizations 17.2% — 94
Friends/Partners 12.6% — 69

Values shown in pie: 14, 11, 5, 19, 19, 22, 32, 35, 43, 50, 69, 94, 129
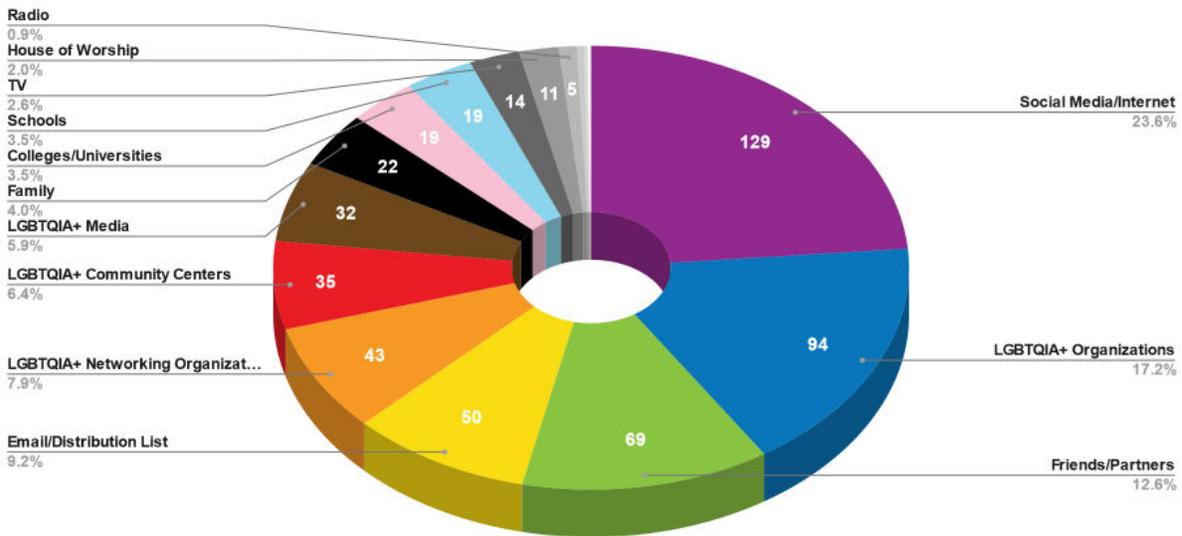
Social media and the internet emerge as the most popular sources, with nearly 80% of respondents citing this. The Foundation largely uses Facebook and Instagram to share information; at the time of this report, they also had infrequently-used X/Twitter and TikTok accounts and a recently created BlueSky account.

Community-based organizations also emerged as strong sources of information. Fifty-eight percent (*n* = 94) of participants looked to LGBTQIA+ organizations for information, while 26% (*n* = 42) specifically listed queer networking groups as a source. Just over 21% of participants (*n* = 35) stated that they looked to LGBTQIA+ community centers for information. About 7% of respondents (*n* = 11) said they received information from their house of worship.

Personal networks also played an important role in information sharing, highlighting the importance of social connections within the community. Just over 42% of participants (*n* = 69) listed friends and partners as trusted sources of information, while just over 13% of participants (*n* = 22) listed family.
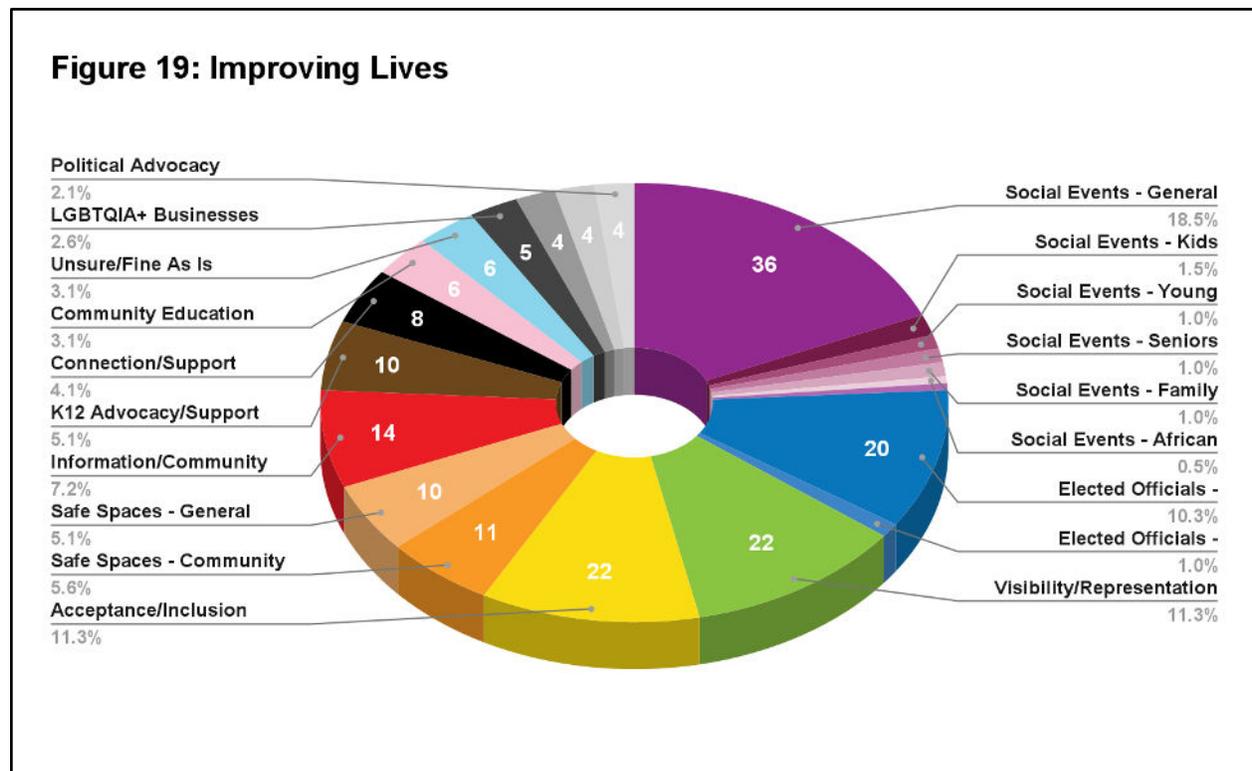
Overall, traditional media sources like TV and radio were less utilized by respondents. However, nearly 20% of participants (*n* = 32) cited LGBTQIA+ media as a trusted content source.

Improving the Lives of LGBTQIA+ People in Harford & Cecil Counties

In the closing section of our survey, we asked qualitative, open-ended questions designed to elicit feedback about what would improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ people in our region, and specific actions the UCBPride Foundation could take to help queer people.

What Would Make Harford/Cecil a Better Place to Live?

First, we asked, "From your perspective, what would make Harford/Cecil a better place to live as an LGBTQIA+ person?" Of the 165 participants, 128 (77.6%) answered the question. The researchers coded the responses to arrive at key themes, outlined in Figure 18. While some respondents touched on only one theme, many respondents noted more than one. In total, we coded 195 responses in 14 key areas.

Figure 19: Improving Lives

Political Advocacy 2.1%
LGBTQIA+ Businesses 2.6%
Unsure/Fine As Is 3.1%
Community Education 3.1%
Connection/Support 4.1%
K12 Advocacy/Support 5.1%
Information/Community 7.2%
Safe Spaces - General 5.1%
Safe Spaces - Community 5.6%
Acceptance/Inclusion 11.3%

Social Events - General 18.5%
Social Events - Kids 1.5%
Social Events - Young 1.0%
Social Events - Seniors 1.0%
Social Events - Family 1.0%
Social Events - African 0.5%
Elected Officials - 10.3%
Elected Officials - 1.0%
Visibility/Representation 11.3%

The importance of **social events** was mentioned 47 times. While the majority of people (*n* = 36) mentioned the importance of social activities in a general sense, some respondents offered more specific feedback. Three people asked for more social activities for kids (under the age of 18) while two people requested more social activities for young adults (age 18 to 21). Two respondents requested more family-focused social options–either for queer parents with kids or for families with queer kids. Two people noted a need for social programs for queer elders (age 50+). One person requested

LGBTQIA+ events for African American people. One person expressed the importance of planning social activities that were easy to get to using public transportation.

Elected officials were mentioned by 22 people. Most often, people expressed the need for elected officials who were more supportive of LGBTQIA+ people. One respondent shared, "Having government officials who are not anti-LGBTQIA+ and who recognize, accept, and affirm our family." Two people hoped to see more LGBTQIA+ people elected to public office.

Visibility and representation emerged as key themes in the needs assessment, with 22 participants highlighting their importance. Research consistently demonstrates that visibility and representation are crucial for LGBTQIA+ individuals' well-being and sense of belonging. When queer people see themselves reflected in media, art, and community spaces, it affirms their identities, reduces feelings of isolation, and boosts self-esteem (Cruz, 2024; Trevor Project, 2022). Positive representation can also challenge harmful stereotypes and promote understanding and acceptance within broader society.

For example, studies have shown that LGBTQIA+ youth who feel supported by their families and communities have lower rates of mental health struggles and suicide attempts (Trevor Project, 2022). Visibility and representation play a significant role in fostering such supportive environments. Additionally, increased visibility can lead to greater social acceptance and reduced discrimination, ultimately improving the overall quality of life for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

Acceptance and inclusion were also mentioned by 22 people. Acceptance and inclusion are fundamental to the well-being of LGBTQIA+ people. A supportive and inclusive environment can have a significant and positive impact on the mental health, physical health, and overall quality of life of queer people (Trevor Project, 2022).

Research has shown that discrimination and stigma can have severe consequences for LGBTQIA+ individuals. This can include mental health issues, physical health problems, social isolation, and even economic hardship in areas where employers are less accepting. In contrast, acceptance and inclusion can lead to improved mental and physical health, stronger social connections, and better economic outcomes for queer people.

The idea of **safe spaces** was noted by 21 people. About half of the respondents (10) generally hoped for more safe spaces in our region for LGBTQIA+ people to gather. One respondent noted that they wanted, "more inclusive, affirming, and supportive

places and spaces for LGBTQ+ people." Eleven people specifically noted that they would like to see an LGBTQIA+ community center in our area. One person noted, "I live in Havre de Grace, and there's no general community building for activities and gatherings, other than the public library. A community center would allow for meetings of groups (like the queer community)."

Safe spaces such as LGBTQIA+ community centers and online communities play a crucial role in providing resources and fostering a sense of belonging. These spaces can offer:

- Mental health support: Access to therapists and counselors who understand the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals.
- Educational resources: Information on LGBTQ+ issues, health, and legal rights.
- Social opportunities: Events and activities that promote social interaction and community building.
- Advocacy: Support for LGBTQ+ rights and policies at the local and national levels.

By providing these essential services, community centers in rural areas can help queer individuals in rural areas thrive and reach their full potential.

The importance of **information and community resources** was mentioned by 14 people. Participants recommended having a physical or virtual local in which LGBTQIA+ resources were co-located. Several respondents specifically noted the importance of resources for trans people and queer youth, citing the difficulty of finding such resources in a rural community.

Advocacy and support in local school systems was mentioned by 10 people. Advocacy and support were seen as crucial components of creating a more inclusive environment. This involves advocating for policies that protect LGBTQIA+ rights, supporting LGBTQIA+ youth, and providing mental health and other support services.

Eight people mentioned the need for **connection and support.** LGBTQIA+ people living in rural areas often face unique challenges stemming from isolation and potential stigma. Connection and support are essential to their well-being and can significantly mitigate these challenges.

By nature, rural areas tend to be less populated, which can lead to feelings of isolation for LGBTQIA+ people. This isolation can be exacerbated by the lack of visible LGBTQIA+ communities and the fear of discrimination or rejection. Research has shown that social isolation and loneliness can negatively impact mental health, leading

to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and substance abuse (Novotney, 2019), and the U.S. Surgeon General (2023) specifically noted that LGBTQIA+ people and those living in rural areas are particularly at risk for social disconnection. Connection with other LGBTQIA+ people provides a sense of belonging and validation. It offers opportunities to share experiences, find support, and challenge feelings of isolation. Studies have demonstrated that strong social connections can reduce stress, enhance resilience, and improve overall well-being.

Community education was recommended by six people. This includes educating the broader community about LGBTQIA+ issues, challenging stereotypes, and promoting understanding and acceptance. Studies have shown that inclusive education, which incorporates LGBTQIA+ topics and perspectives, can significantly improve attitudes towards the community. Exposing the broader community to diverse perspectives and accurate information about queer people increases the chances that they will develop empathy, challenge stereotypes, and support LGBTQIA+ rights. For example, a study by GLSEN (2021) found that schools with LGBTQ-inclusive curricula had lower rates of bullying and harassment of LGBTQ students.

Furthermore, community education can empower LGBTQIA+ people by providing them with information about their rights, resources, and support networks. This can lead to increased self-confidence, resilience, and a stronger sense of community.

Five respondents said that it would be nice to see more **LGBTQIA+ businesses** in the Upper Chesapeake Bay region. The majority of respondents indicated that they wanted to support LGBTQIA+ business owners and allies who owned businesses. Still others saw queer-owned businesses as potential safe spaces. Notably, 19% of respondents indicated that they owned a business, reinforcing an idea echoed by respondents that perhaps there is a deficit in visibility and a need to co-locate information about community resources such as queer-owned businesses.

Four respondents mentioned the importance of **Ally advocacy**, which is a critical component of creating a more just and equitable society for LGBTQIA+ people. Allies are people who are not LGBTQIA+ but support queer rights, play a vital role in amplifying marginalized voices, challenging harmful stereotypes, and advocating for policy changes.

One of the most significant contributions of ally advocacy is creating more inclusive and supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ individuals. Allies can help by speaking against discrimination, prejudice, and misinformation (NSLS, 2024). This can be particularly important in rural areas, where LGBTQIA+ individuals may face additional challenges

due to social isolation and limited access to resources and support networks. Research shows that ally advocacy can positively impact the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals. A study by the Trevor Project found that LGBTQ+ youth who had supportive adults in their lives were less likely to experience depression and suicide ideation. Allies can provide emotional support, offer guidance, and help to connect LGBTQIA+ individuals with resources and services.

Additionally, ally advocacy can play a crucial role in driving social change. By using their privilege and influence, heterosexual and cisgender allies can advocate for policies that protect the rights of LGBTQIA+ individuals, such as anti-discrimination laws and equal marriage rights. They can also support LGBTQIA+ organizations and initiatives, and educate others about LGBTQIA+ issues. In rural areas like the Upper Chesapeake region, ally advocacy can be particularly impactful. Rural communities often have strong social networks and a shared sense of identity. By building relationships with community members, allies can help to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals. They can also advocate for LGBTQIA+ inclusion in local policies and programs, such as education and healthcare.A study by the University of Minnesota Extension found that rural LGBTQIA+ individuals often rely on informal support networks, such as friends, family, and community members, for support (Steinberg, 2020). Allies can play a crucial role in these networks by providing understanding, empathy, and advocacy.

Healthcare access and resources were mentioned as important by four people. This included access to mental health services and traditional healthcare. Addressing disparities in healthcare access and ensuring that LGBTQIA+ individuals receive culturally competent care was seen as essential. This area may be particularly important when considering the significant number of respondents who categorized their health as only fair or poor.
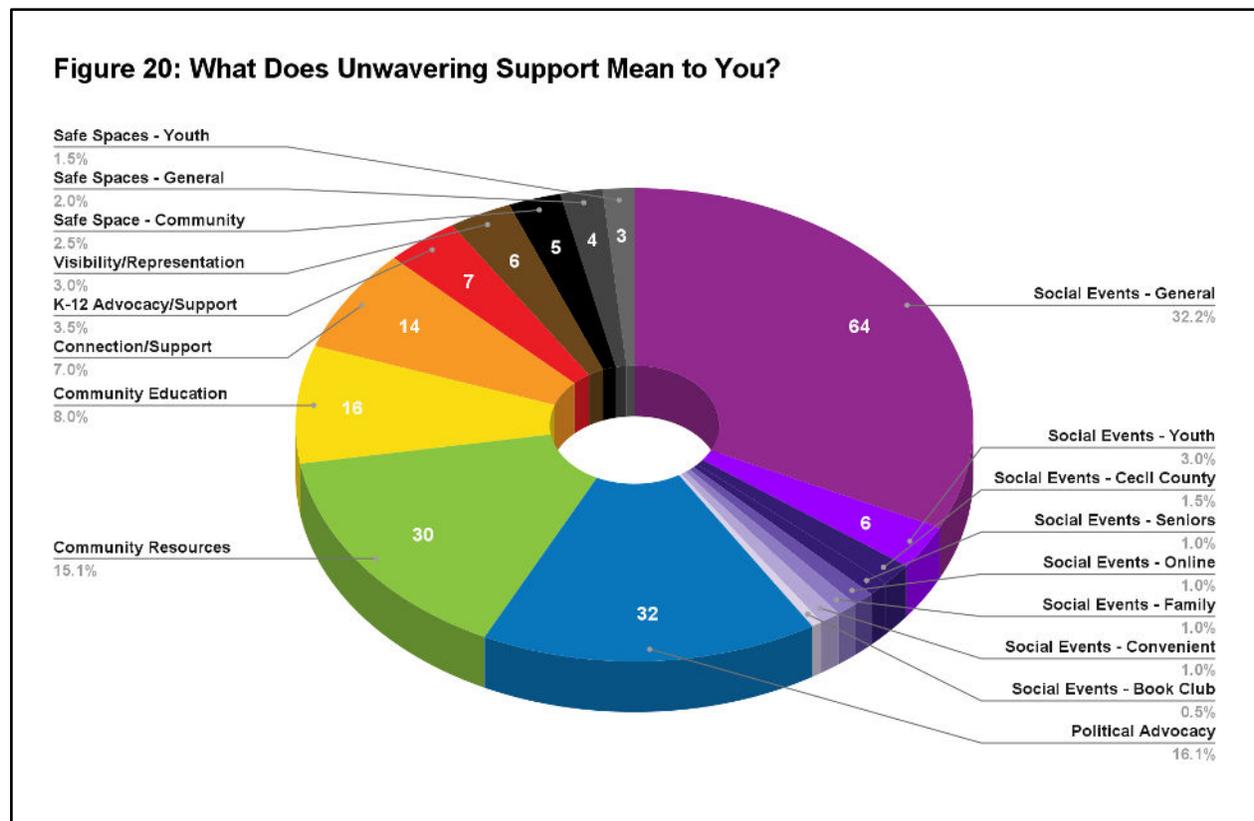
Four respondents mentioned **Political advocacy** in their responses. Political advocacy can play a crucial role in driving policy-related changes that benefit the LGBTQIA+ community. This typically includes issues related to workplace non-discrimination, healthcare equity, education equity, family law and child custody rights, and data privacy and security. Maryland offers relatively robust protections for LGBTQIA+ people, but advocacy is still needed locally; advocacy at the county level can be a powerful tool for driving positive change for members of our LGBTQIA+ community. Locally, concerned citizens can engage with elected officials by attending county council meetings or by writing letters to elected officials encouraging them to support LGBTQIA+ rights. Coalition building can also lead to positive changes for LGBTQIA+ people. It is also important for LGBTQIA+ people and allies to stay informed by tracking

proposed legislation and regulations that could impact the LGBTQIA+ community. When necessary, testifying at public hearings and organizing grassroots campaigns can help steer elected officials to more inclusive policies that benefit LGBTQIA+ people.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that some people (*n* = 6) believed that our region was fine just as it is, or could not think of any ways in which it could be improved.

What Does Unwavering Support for Our Community Mean to You?

The second question asked in this section of the survey was, "The mission of the UCBPride Foundation is to provide unwavering support for our community members. What would that mean for you right now? (e.g., providing more social events, advocacy work, or resources)." Of the 165 participants, 121 (73.3%) answered this question. The researchers coded the responses to arrive at key themes, outlined in Figure 20. Similar to responses to the question about making Harford/Cecil Counties better, some people touched on only one theme while many respondents noted more than one. In total we coded 212 responses in 14 key areas.

Figure 20: What Does Unwavering Support Mean to You?

Safe Spaces - Youth 1.5%
Safe Spaces - General 2.0%
Safe Space - Community 2.5%
Visibility/Representation 3.0%
K-12 Advocacy/Support 3.5%
Connection/Support 7.0%
Community Education 8.0%
Community Resources 15.1%
Social Events - General 32.2%
Social Events - Youth 3.0%
Social Events - Cecil County 1.5%
Social Events - Seniors 1.0%
Social Events - Online 1.0%
Social Events - Family 1.0%
Social Events - Convenient 1.0%
Social Events - Book Club 0.5%
Political Advocacy 16.1%

Echoing the information provided from the question about making Harford and Cecil counties better places to live, respondents indicated a strong desire for **social events**. Most people noted social activities more broadly (*n* = 64) while some gave specific

types and target audiences. Notably, there is a desire for more events geared towards LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults. Three respondents wanted social events located in or more accessible to people living in Cecil County while two noted a need for social programs for elder queers. Two respondents also spoke to the need for online social events or interactions to create connection opportunities for those with social anxiety or health concerns. One respondent specifically requested a queer-focused book club.

Political advocacy was addressed by 31 respondents. Many respondents simply stated they would like to see more advocacy; however, some noted specific focus areas such as legal protections for LGTBQIA+ youth in education, sports, and other areas. Tied to this idea of political advocacy is the theme of **collaboration** that emerged in 3 responses. For example, as part of advocacy efforts, these respondents mentioned partnering with groups like [Trans Maryland](#) and [SAGE](#). Partnering with other nonprofit or community organizations can help organize community members around important movements or causes, and raise awareness about key political issues.

Thirty respondents also spoke to **information and community resources** being crucial in offering unwavering support. Similar to findings from the first open-ended question, some people specifically noted the importance of resources for trans people and queer youth, especially in a rural community.

Sixteen people noted the need for increased **community education**. As mentioned in the previous section, providing opportunities for the broader community to engage with LGBTQIA+ issues can challenge stereotypes, address stigma, and empower LGBQTIA+ individuals. It is important to note that some respondents commented on the need for education within the LGBTQIA+ community itself. This is perhaps best captured by the following response:

> *"I would like more information on the intersex and trans population. Just because I'm in this group of LGBTQIA+ does not mean I'm the expert on the other letters, or even my letter. I think we all need more knowledge to better help one another."*

Fourteen respondents mentioned **connection and support**. Considering the rural characteristics of Harford and Cecil counties, it is imperative for LGBTQIA+ people to have a strong sense of belonging. Working to increase the connection opportunities available to folks in these areas can also help to combat some impacts of social isolation and loneliness addressed earlier.

The need for **safe spaces** appeared in 12 responses. Five of these specifically mentioned an LGBTQIA+ community center, while four referred to safe spaces more generally. An additional three respondents spoke to safe spaces for youth–one person specifically noted a desire for, "More opportunities for sheltering the younger generation." As highlighted in the previous section, safe spaces such as LGBTQIA+ community centers play a crucial role in providing resources and fostering a sense of belonging.

Seven participants mentioned **K-12 advocacy and support** in response to this question. Some specific measures discussed included increased policies and protections for LGBTQIA+ youth within the education system and recreational sports, training and resources for school teachers, staff, and Board of Directors, and attending school board meetings, town halls, etc. to speak about issues facing LGBTQIA+ youth currently in Harford and Cecil education systems.

Visibility and representation continued to be a key theme within the needs assessment, with six respondents noting this within their answers. People shared ideas such as seeing LGBTQIA+ individuals "out and proud" and having an overall greater public presence in our larger community. As previously mentioned, research shows that a strong sense of visibility and representation contribute to LGBTQIA+ individuals' well-being and sense of belonging.

Three responses specifically noted a desire for more **volunteer opportunities**. Volunteering can benefit both the individual and the organization they partner with. As highlighted by Seattle Pride (2021), volunteering with an LGBTQIA+ organization allows individuals to foster a stronger sense of community and collaborate with new people. Additionally, nonprofits often rely on volunteers to accomplish their mission, so volunteering can be a direct way to support the LGBTQIA+ community and share new perspectives with the organization.

Communication emerged within three responses. These participants specifically focused on ensuring UCBPride Foundation's events are promoted in various modalities and have easily-recognizable signage or instructions for how to meet up with the group during socials in public. Two of the respondents noted a desire for UCBPride to promote events outside of social media, namely Facebook, and one of these suggested the idea of an emailed newsletter to enhance awareness of events and communicate about the work UCBPride Foundation is doing.

Queer elders appeared in one response that also touched upon themes of safe spaces, political advocacy, and collaboration with other organizations. This person directly stated:

> *"...More attention to LGBTQ senior issues. Many of us are only the first or second generation after Stonewall, and we are getting older. Bringing these issues to the forefront and maybe setting up workshops with SAGE..."*

One respondent discussed **LGBTQIA+ businesses**, specifically speaking to a desire for a directory of queer-owned or queer-supporting businesses. As discussed in earlier sections, 19% of respondents to this assessment noted that they own a business. These factors combined indicate a need for more visibility and awareness of queer-owned and queer-supporting businesses within Harford and Cecil counties.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback provided by survey respondents, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of life for the LGBTQIA+ community in Harford and Cecil Counties. These include recommendations related to community building and support, education and awareness, advocacy and policy, healthcare and mental health, and recommendations for our allies.

Community Building and Support

The idea of **safe spaces** was a recurring theme in this survey. Notably, many respondents believed it was important for the UCBPride Foundation to establish a **dedicated LGBTQIA+ community center**. This physical space would serve as a hub for social gatherings, support groups, educational programs, and resources. In addition, many survey participants said it would be helpful to maintain a list of businesses and spaces that were safe in Harford and Cecil Counties. Establishing a network of safe spaces and having a visible symbol to denote such spaces may help to foster a sense of community and safety in the Upper Chesapeake Bay region.

The importance of **social events and activities** was underscored by many of the survey respondents. Despite the fact that we offered nearly 30 social events in 2024, many respondents seemed unaware of our events, or noted that the Foundation's current ways of communicating events might not be reaching interested people. In 2025, the UCBPride Foundation should research alternative ways to connect with local LGBTQIA+ people to share upcoming events. In addition, some participants encouraged UCBPride to consider hosting population-specific events, such as trans and gender non-conforming socials, young adult events, or opportunities that cater to queer

elders. Respondents also offered suggestions for movie nights, potlucks, and cultural celebrations to foster community connections.

Some participants shared the idea of creating **online platforms** for members of the LGBTQIA+ community to connect and share resources. Many who suggested this noted the lack of a community resource center and the challenges associated with connecting in rural communities. The UCBPride Foundation should explore the idea of developing an online community platform as a potential virtual queer space.

Several respondents noted the importance of **supporting local LGBTQIA+ businesses** and also wanted to know which local businesses were queer-friendly. Notably, 19 respondents indicated that they owned businesses. At present, the UCBPride Foundation does not track queer-owned businesses; the group should consider identifying and actively promoting local queer and queer-friendly businesses.

Education and Awareness

While it was heartening to see that over 50% of respondents believed their employers were very accepting of LGBTQIA+ people, it is important to acknowledge that 3% of participants felt their workplace was not accepting at all, 6% felt their employer was not too accepting, and over 37% believed their employer was only somewhat accepting. **Providing LGBTQIA+ diversity and inclusion training** for local businesses could have a positive and lasting impact on workplace environments for LGBTQIA+ people. Offering such training for public-serving businesses and organizations, such as healthcare providers, schools, and K-12 educational entities, could also positively impact the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people who access these services. Harford Community College has established a Safe Zone program that might easily fulfill this community education gap.

Participants also noted the importance of **advocacy and education in K-12 settings**. Responses included advocacy for queer youth in public schools, namely speaking out against anti-LGBTQIA+ policies and practices at school board meetings. Others noted the importance of pushing back against book bans and striving to incorporate LGBTQIA+ history, culture, and current events into school curricula. Given the recent re-establishment of a PFLAG chapter, these recommendations may assist in developing a priority roadmap for that group in 2025.

The UCBPride Foundation might also consider organizing **community workshops and panel discussions** to educate the broader community about LGBTQIA+ issues and challenges. Such events can serve several purposes, such as providing allies an opportunity to gather, educate business owners about the issues facing LGBTQIA+

issues, helping healthcare providers understand the needs of our community, and even serving as an opportunity for queer people to gather, commune, and share their lived experiences.

Advocacy and Policy

Based on survey responses, **elected officials** played an important role in how queer locals perceived the regional climate for LGBTQIA+ people. The general sentiment being that the Christian Nationalist beliefs of some elected officials negatively impacted the climate for LGBTQIA+ living in our region. Twelve percent (n = 20) of respondents wished for elected officials who were more supportive of LGBTQIA+ people. This seemed especially true for our elected school board officials. One respondent noted, "Harford county needs to seriously depoliticize gender, sex, orientation, and reframe approaches to equality as human rights." Another respondent shared a similar sentiment about elected officials on our public school board: "[they] are creating a hostile environment for our students--particularly LGBTQIA+ students. I'd like to see some more moderate candidates who are focused on improving schools for all students vs. pushing their conservative agenda."

Although UCBPride's 501(c)(3) status prevents us from engaging in direct political activity, our organization could work with other groups to advance more progressive elected officials in Harford and Cecil counties.

Healthcare and Mental Health

The UCBPride Foundation frequently receives requests for resources related to healthcare–from mental health services to gender-affirming care. The Foundation should consider maintaining a list of trusted **LGBTQIA+-affirming healthcare and mental health providers** on their website so that people have regular access.

Several participants noted that their local healthcare providers and their frontline staff may benefit from **inclusiveness and sensitivity training** to improve the healthcare experience for queer people in the region. The Foundation's Community Education Committee might consider partnering with a Safe Zone training provider to facilitate sessions focused on creating safe spaces in healthcare settings.

Communication

Based on the narrative feedback from respondents, the UCBPride Foundation should examine its communication strategies. Given that a significant percentage

of participants look to LGBTQIA+ sources for news and information, UCBPride has an opportunity to use its platforms to share resources, information, and news with our community. The Foundation should consider folding this type of content into the communication plan. The Foundation could also use this type of information sharing as an opportunity to provide community education.

Feedback from participants also highlights a need to examine more current social media platforms. Some participants noted that they either spent little time on legacy social media platforms like Facebook or simply did not have an account. In doing so, the Foundation may be inadvertently excluding younger community members and should explore using communication channels used by Millennials and Gen Z, and also be mindful of the potential needs of Gen Alpha community members who may begin seeking resources and information in the next several years.

Protecting Against Religious Trauma

A small percentage (2%) of participants shared how prior religious trauma had negatively impacted their experience at the Pride Festival. One person stated having PTSD from prior experiences with churches. UCBPride had received similar feedback via our pride festival feedback form. Some of the feedback from the needs assessment included:

> _"I feel that too many churches are involved in the groups and events in the area…I know having them be accepting of our people is a step in the right direction [but] I also don't want to be surrounded by them when just wanting to support the LGBTQ community."_

> _"While progress and change is good, the amount of churches that seem to be getting more associated with Pride and other LGBTQ groups is becoming a barrier for many individuals due to life long trauma from the churches. I know of at least a few people locally who now plan to avoid Pride this year due to the amount of churches with a booth there last October. It can be triggering of deep, painful hurt that they feel is being overlooked by UCBPride. 30 years ago most, if not all, of the very same churches with a booth either outright fought against us, turned us out, or at best ignored us and remained silent as others harmed us. I am grateful to see change,_

but a little more sensitivity on this very painful issue might be appreciated."

The festival planning committee might consider adjusting their approach to religious organizations for next year's event. This might include colocating religious groups to a certain area so that those who have experienced religious-based trauma can avoid that area. The committee might also consider drafting a statement about why religious organizations are included, and the vetting process used to select vendors.

Allies

Allyship in rural communities is crucial for LGBTQIA+ individuals, who often face unique challenges due to social isolation and limited access to resources and support networks. Allies can play a significant role in creating more inclusive and supportive environments.

Heterosexual and cisgender allies can use their voices to **speak out and advocate for change**. In Harford and Cecil counties, this can include activities like attending school board meetings to advocate for LGBTQIA+-inclusive policies, challenging anti-trans rhetoric, and speaking out against book bans. This can also include letter writing to candidates or sending a letter to the editor. Allies can also engage in online activism by sharing positive LGBTQIA+ content, supporting LGBTQIA+ organizations like UCBPride, and challenging harmful stereotypes in their social circles..

Allies can also help by **building relationships** with and **providing support** for LGBTQIA+ people. On a personal level, simply checking in with LGBTQIA+ friends, family, and co-workers to offer support and listen to their concerns can have a significant, positive impact. Allies can wear visible LGBTQIA+ pride symbols and use inclusive language to demonstrate that they are a safe person for LGBTQIA+ people.

Allies can also **educate themselves and others** by staying up-to-date on LGBTQIA+ issues and current events. They can read books, articles, and watch documentaries to expand their knowledge and understanding of issues facing the community. Cisgender and heterosexual allies can correct misinformation and challenge harmful stereotypes when they encounter them. Allies can also encourage friends, family, and coworkers to be visible allies who support LGBTQIA+ rights.

And, we would be remiss if we did not recommend **supporting local LGBTQIA+ groups** by volunteering, showing support, and making charitable gifts. Aside from The Upper Chesapeake Bay Pride Foundation (501c3), our region now has an active

PFLAG group focused on supporting LGBTQIA+ youth. The Harford County Health Department also sponsors Free to Be, a community-based LGBTQ+ program that offers monthly get-togethers in a welcoming atmosphere where teens (ages 12-17) can find support, guidance, and a sense of community. The Cecil County LGBTQ+ Alliance offers periodical social opportunities. The LGBTQ Social Club–Harford County offers frequent social gatherings for queer people and allies. And Together We Will (501c4) is focused on supporting and electing progressive candidates for local offices. Collectively, these groups are working every week to improve the lives of LGBTQIA+ people in the Upper Chesapeake region.

Additional Insights from Ally Responses

As noted at the beginning of this assessment, 39 respondents were removed either because they identified as both heterosexual and cisgender, did not include sufficient sexual orientation or gender identity data, and/or reported zip codes outside of Harford and Cecil Counties. While these were removed from the general needs assessment of the area's LGBTQIA+ community, some of the qualitative data provided in these responses are worth noting. The researchers decided to keep those who listed zip codes outside of the counties removed from this section; however, the information provided below is directly from parents and allies who want to better support LGBTQIA+ individuals living in our region. In total, 22 responses were reviewed and coded for key themes.

A prominent theme that emerged in this group's answers to our open-ended questions was **advocacy and education in K-12 settings.** One response specifically spoke of wanting to see the "LGBTQIA+ community embraced more by public schools, public libraries, and other tax supported organizations". Other answers echoed this sentiment, highlighting desires for more acceptance in Harford County Public Schools and resources for LGBTQIA+ students.

Another recurring theme for these respondents related to **opportunities and events for allies**. One respondent specifically stated that there is a need for "...louder allies with privilege. More resources for Allies - spaces for us to do what we've been informed needs doing…". This statement encapsulates many of the ally responses; they want to be doing more to support LGBTQIA+ individuals within Harford and Cecil Counties through events and advocacy. Moving forward, UCBPride could explore expanding connections with allies, both people and organizations, to help foster a greater sense of acceptance and belonging in the larger community.

Overall, the information gleaned from these removed responses helps to show how allies can better support and be supported by UCBPride. Responses from parents of

LGBTQIA+-identifying teens or young children spoke to a desire for support groups, social events, and an overall better sense of community among themselves and their children. Other responses from allies show a readiness and willingness to do the work and help create space for LGBTQIA+ identities and voices to be visible, authentic, and respected by the larger community.

<u>*How to Cite This Report*</u>
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