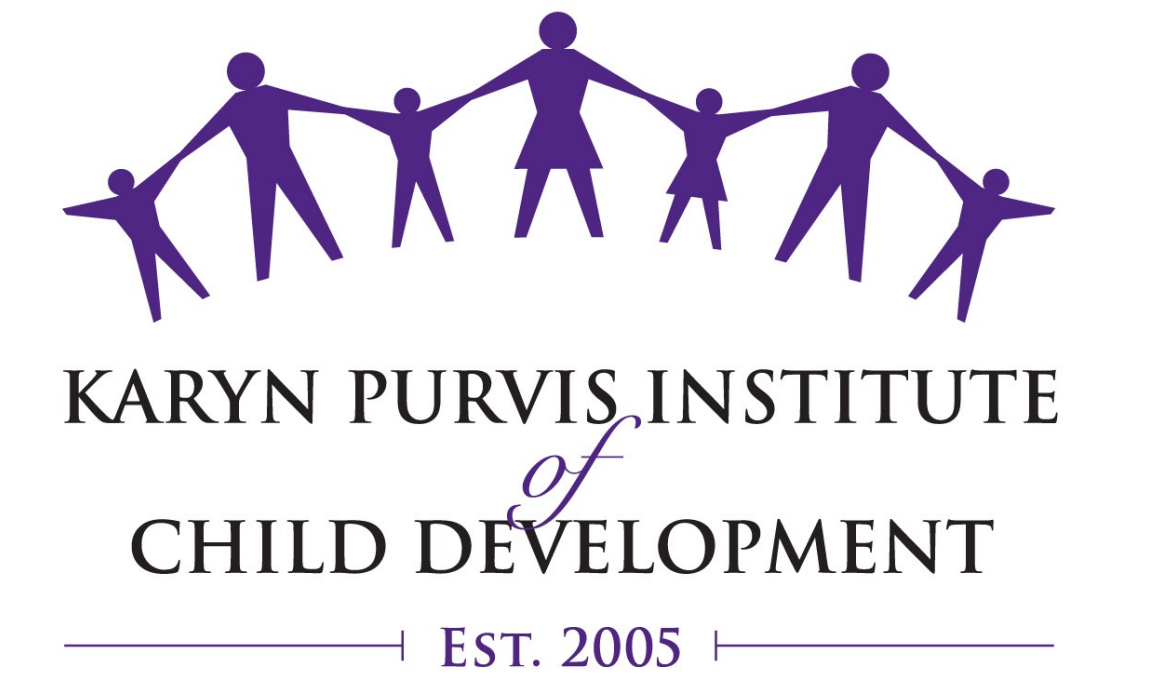




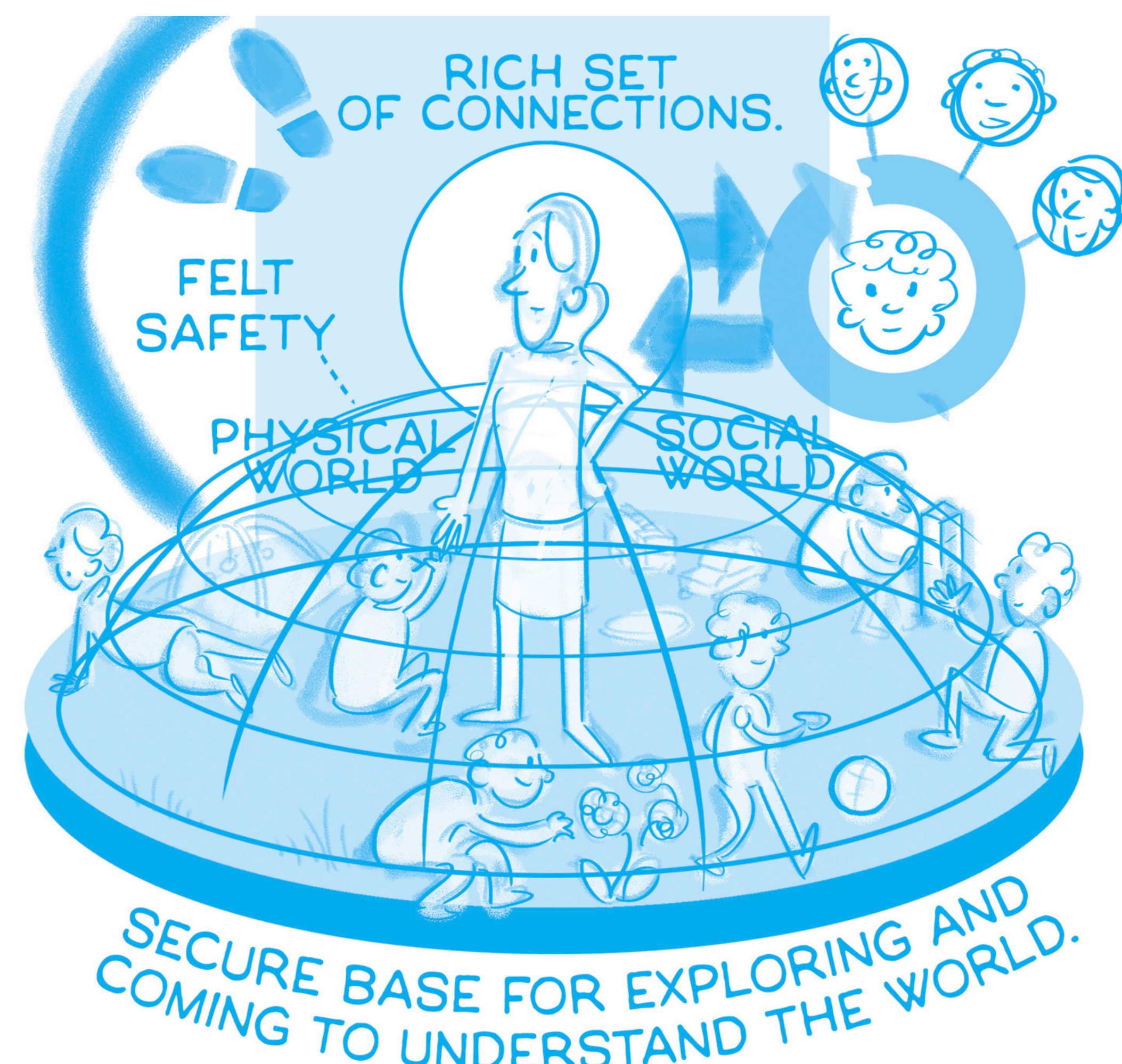
# Group Home Care and Felt-Safety

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## Abstract

Felt-safety is the emotional and physical components of safety and fills the gap between knowing you are safe and feeling you are safe. Felt-safety is a critical aspect of development because it allows an individual to move from their lower functioning automatic brain to higher level centers capable of reasoning and learning. Youth who are in foster care, particularly youth in residential care settings, experience frequent change and many new environments. We investigated whether felt-safety levels could be increased in a local group home through "Life Skill" lessons. We used "Life Skill" lessons to help build the relational connections among residents and between residents and staff. Before undergoing "Life Skill" lessons participants took an online written assessment which measured: felt-safety using The Neuroception of Psychological Safety Scale (NPSS), attachment using The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR), and psychological wellbeing using the Psychological-Wellbeing Scale (PWB). Our hypothesis was to see increases in felt-safety and gain evidence for best practices in increasing safety levels among youth in highly volatile environments. A second hypothesis was to see an increase in psychological wellbeing in connection to felt-safety. A Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test was used to determine significance between Time 1 and Time 2. Interestingly, there was found to be a significant decrease in felt-safety levels and the difference in psychological wellbeing was insignificant. Overall, this research helped quantify levels of felt-safety and wellbeing amongst youth in residential care.



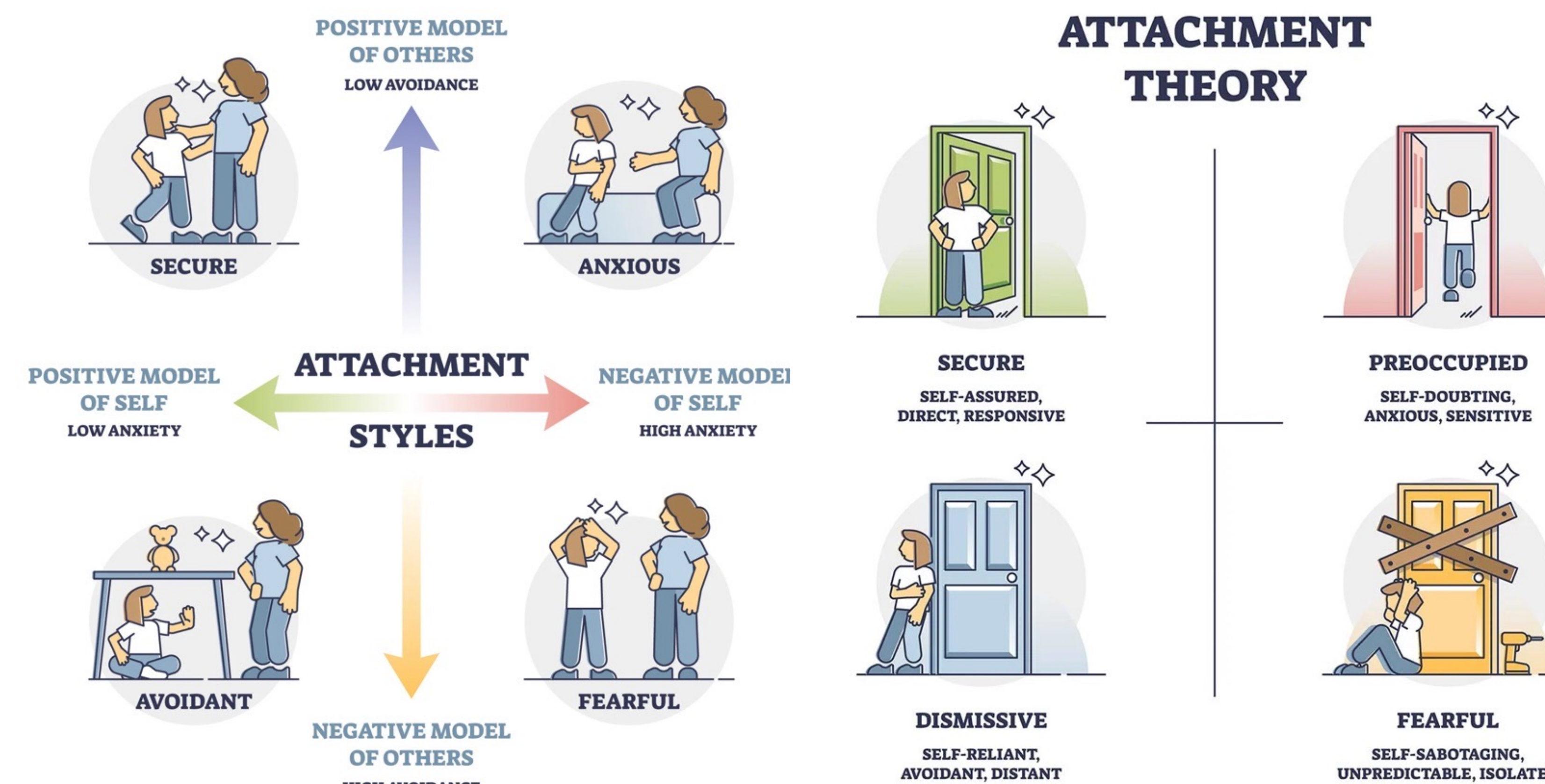
## Introduction

Building felt-safety is critical to fostering an environment in which people can move beyond a fear response and towards higher level thinking. Felt-safety is as simple as it sounds as it fills the gap between a child being safe and feeling safe (Purvis, 2013). To bolster felt-safety interventions need to target physiological, ecological, and relational needs.

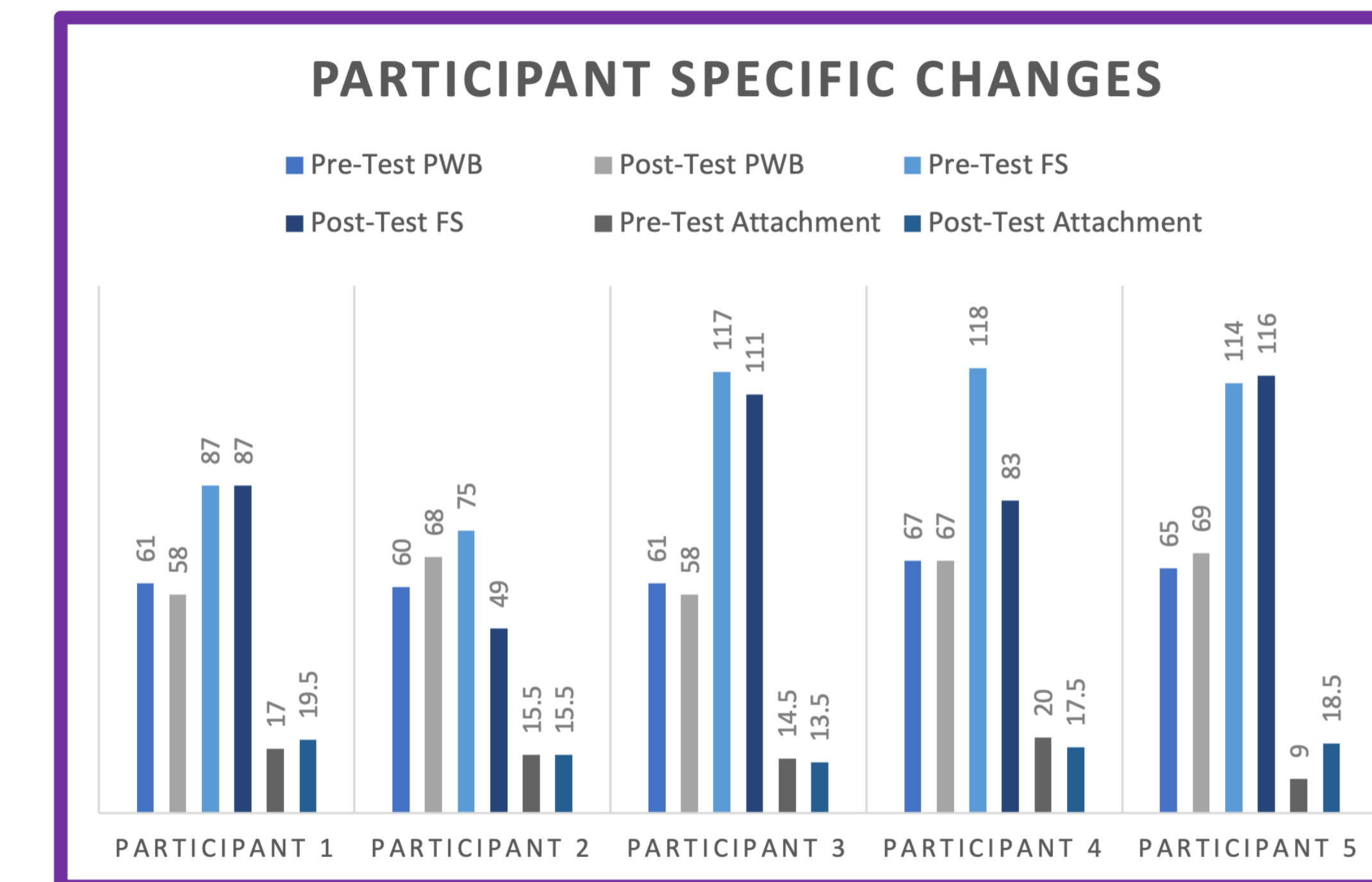
A hypothesis of this study was the increase in levels of psychological wellbeing. Psychological wellbeing goes beyond the absence of experiences such as anxiety, anger, and fear and hopes to reach overall security (Adler, 2017). It is assumed that as felt-safety increases one would also increase in wellbeing because of the increased focus on thriving rather than surviving.

Youth in residential care facilities have experienced increased instability and as a result have increased problems across the development of behavior, social-emotional skills, and cognition (Crawley, 2021). Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) is an evidence-based practice that has been used to target environmental and connection needs for all youth, but particularly youth who have experienced developmental trauma. A practice of TBRI is using Nurture Groups. For this study, the "Life Skill" group intervention was modeled around Nurture Groups but included personalized activities and questions to better meet the participants' developmental stages.

"Life Skills" groups included activities to make residents feel safe with themselves, others, and through life transitions. In increasing felt-safety the hope would be that residents feel increasingly comfortable in their environment and will begin to "focus" on higher level tasks such as bettering themselves and forming social relationships.



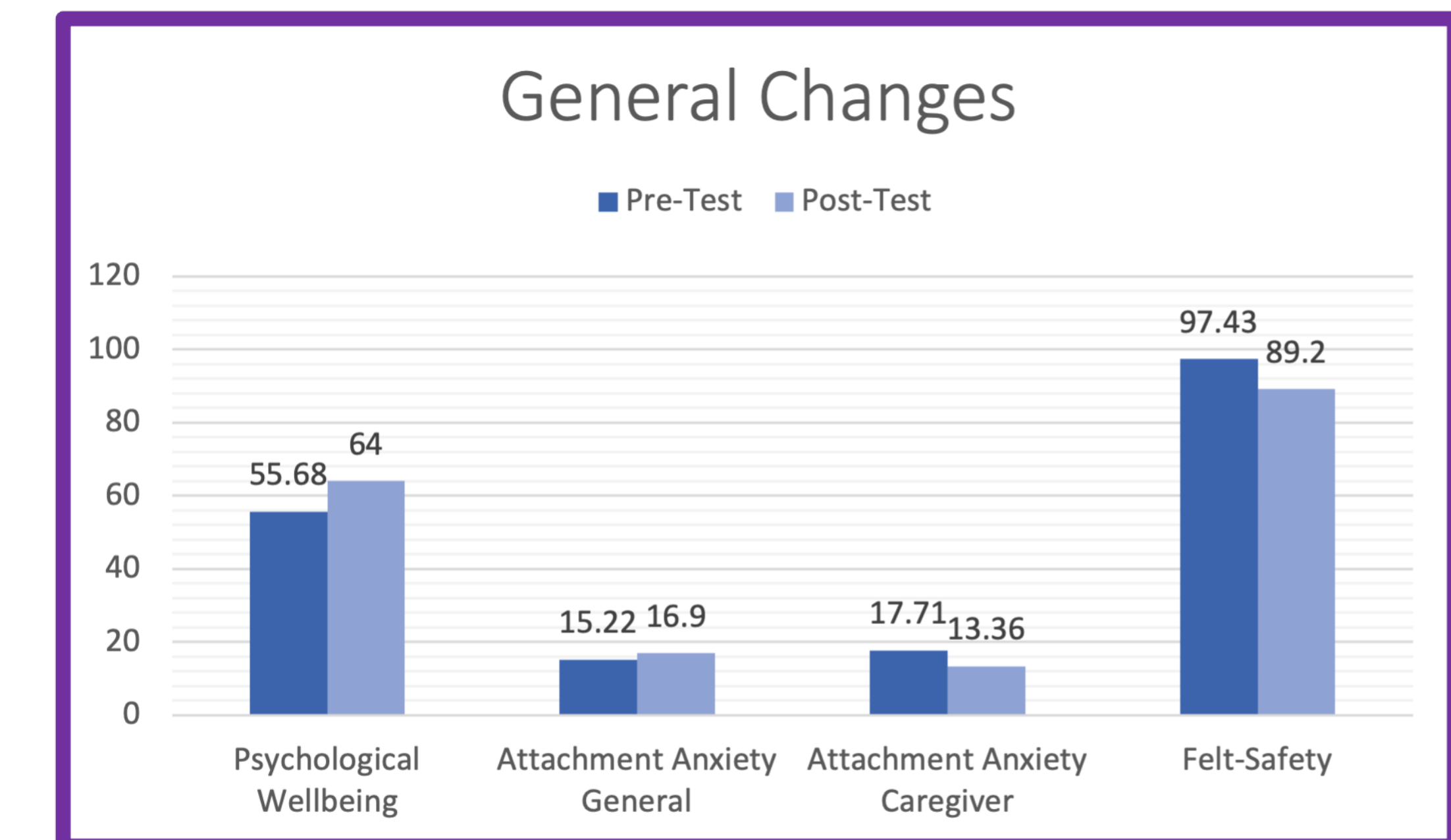
## Results



This chart shows the participant specific changes across the three measures. Looking at participant specific scores allowed me to see changes not indicated by overall results.

PWB range = 18-126, inverse relationship  
Attachment Anxiety range = 7-63, direct relationship  
Felt-Safety range =29-145, direct relationship

A Wilcoxon Rank Sum test was used instead, which is the non-parametric equivalent of a t-test. When the null hypothesis is labeled as "fail to reject" that indicates no significant relationship between T1 to T2. If it is labeled as "reject" then a significant relationship was found.



Variable	W-critical	W-stat	Null Hypothesis
PWB Composite	2	3	Fail to reject
Avoidance- General	2	3	Fail to reject
Anxiety- General	2	0	Reject
Avoidance- CG	2	1	Reject
Anxiety- CG	2	5	Fail to reject
Avoidance- BF	2	0	Reject
NPSS Composite	2	1	Reject

## Methods

Participants were foster youth (under 18) currently living in a local residential care facility. Participants attended 5 of the 6 planned "Life Skill" lessons aimed at feeling safe with others, feeling safe with themselves, and feeling safe to undergo life transitions. Participation was essential in "Life Skill" lessons and participants were challenged along the way to speak their feelings and complete the activities. Before participating in the scheduled lessons participants completed the pre-measure assessment. A post-measure assessment was completed after the 6 weeks, to look at the change in levels after intervention.

Measures:

- Neuroception of Psychological Safety Scale (NPSS) = felt-safety
- The Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWB) = psychological wellbeing
- The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR) = attachment bond

Participants:

- 7 total
- Age: 10-18y (M= 15.1 years)
- Gender: Female (6 Participants) (86%), Third gender/ non-binary (1 Participant) (14%)
- Length in care: Range 13-74 months, Average 47.71 months
- Length in group home: Range 4-31 months, Average 14.14 months

## Future Direction

Through this study I was able to assess felt-safety levels, a relatively new variable within the research world. Additionally, I used other pre-validated measures to examine how attachment and psychological well being change in connection to felt-safety. I am happy with this first attempt but see the need for growth.

Future Direction

- A better measure that more accurately quantifies felt-safety and reflects fluctuation.
- A larger sample size to more accurately see trends and be able to infer generalizability.
- An intervention that works to target specific stressful relationships.

## References

Adler, A., Unanue, W., Osin, E., Ricard, M., Alkire, S., & Seligman, M. (2017). Psychological wellbeing. *Happiness*, 118.  
Crawley, R. D., Rázuri, E. B., Lee, C., & Mercado, S. (2021). Lessons from the field: implementing a Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) pilot program in a child welfare system. *Journal of Public Child Welfare*, 15(3), 275-298. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1080/15548732.2020.1717714>  
Purvis, K. P., Cross, D. R., Dansereau, D. F., Parris, S. R. (2013). Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI): A Systemic Approach to Complex Developmental Trauma. *Child & Youth Services*, 34(4), 360-386, DOI: 10.1080/0145935X.2013.859906

## Discussion

Felt-Safety was the primary object of concern in my research. Unfortunately, the intervention did not help to improve felt-safety. There are many reasons why this is possible centering around the volatility of safety or simply inadequate lesson topics. However, in viewing the data there was a major decrease in participant 2's felt-safety score, particularly in the subscales of body sensations and social engagement. Participant 2 is about to turn 18 and feels as though her placement is being threatened. Adults around her try to assure her that is not the case, but it doesn't take away the feelings associated with having to transition out of a known environment. Additionally, she feels as though adults are not listening to her, the connective aspect of felt-safety is also ruptured. Participant 2 is an amazing person with aspirations to become a lawyer or judge. Although not reflected by her scores she is taking steps to practice self-care and is working on leaning on those around her for support.

As a caregiver and part time researcher I am very proud of the growth in which the participants underwent. In our last "life skill" lesson they shared encouragement with one another. Although it took us 20 minutes to get around the circle they practiced giving and receiving care. Through that circle the girls moved beyond assumptions and towards real bonds, two things which wouldn't have happened in week 1. Growth is not linear and often not measured in the statistics.