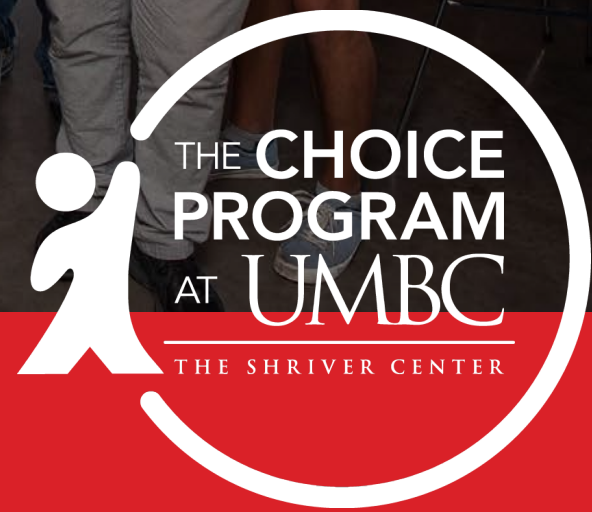


Annual Report FY 2020



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

This year is one that truly challenged us as an organization to be creative, responsive and to lean into our values as we were met with the triple pandemics of Covid-19, a financial crisis and racialized terror. The latter is nothing new of course but when combined with the other two, the impact is exacerbated. Building on our principle of a strengths based approach however, I am extremely proud of the resolve displayed by our youth, AmeriCorps members, and staff. I am also thankful for the guidance, resources and support provided by the Shriver Center and UMBC. The infrastructure and information provided to us allowed us to stay one step ahead in our decision making and provide adequate support to youth and families in central Maryland.

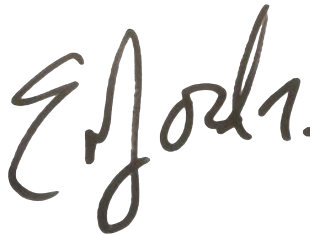
The fiscal year started with us making a significant shift in our relationship with AmeriCorps. After nearly 20 years as a National Direct grantee, we worked with Maryland's Governor's Office of Volunteerism to become a part of their portfolio. This allowed us to work closer with local AmeriCorps programs to solve state challenges and to join a strong supportive community of like minded organizations.

We honed in our systems change approach by assuming representation on three key committees. I was appointed chair of the State Advisory Group - a division of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services. Additionally, I joined the Juvenile Justice Reform Council to take our youth advocacy to the policy level. These two positions are both appointed by Governor Hogan. Lastly, I became a member of the the Purpose Built steering committee which is overseeing the transformation of the historic Cherry Hill community in Baltimore, the neighborhood where The Choice Program began.

Our Flying Fruit social enterprise located at the University of Baltimore was selected through a competitive process to be a field trip site for the Baltimore Homecoming event. Our youth participants and AmeriCorps members were offered the opportunity to share their experiences with Baltimore leaders who are looking to contribute in meaningful ways to Baltimore's vitality. Similarly, we made a concerted effort to engage with the thousands of Choice Program alumni who are in influential positions all over the country.

We held our second annual organizational retreat--it was our first overnight--at Camp Puh'tok in Monkton, MD. Staff and AmeriCorps members took part in team building, learning and planning in a natural environment that allowed us to build community.

An accomplishment we are extremely proud of is the launch of our youth advisory board. Youth were trained and prepared so that they could support us in our decision making. This is what we leaned into in our pandemic response. We were able to provide technology, financial incentives for job readiness training, art activities and crisis support to many youth and families in central Maryland. We did so in a manner that was safe and informed by science. In response to racialized terror, we were able to support our Black staff and AmeriCorps members, affirming our commitment to address white supremacy as articulated through our anti-racism statement.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Ford'.

Eric Ford,

Director, The Choice Program at UMBC

OUR VISION

Strengthening communities through innovative, family-focused strategies that connect youth to opportunities for positive choices.

OUR MISSION

Envisioning communities where youth make choices that strengthen their lives, their families, and their world.

OUR COMMITMENT

To build authentic, supportive, joyful relationships with you.
To listen, to create, to celebrate.
To lift your voice about changes you want in your community.
We believe in you. Your lives matter. #BlackLivesMatter

The Choice Program at UMBC

We believe in the power & potential of all young people. We provide engaging programming, connection to resources & holistic case management to youth in Maryland's communities. Our primary goal is to reduce the number of Black and LatinX young people in the juvenile legal system in Maryland. Our model seeks to dismantle racist structures and, instead, employ strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and self-agency. These guiding principles are essential in addressing racial inequities at an individual and systemic levels.

In this moment, we are being called forth and into action. Amidst a pandemic of racial and police violence, we feel the weight of hundreds of years of white supremacy and, especially, of war on the Black body. Our action and response is this: anti-racism.

Anti-racism is resistance and action. Anti-racism is love. Love for ourselves, for each other, for our children and young people. Anti-racism is recognizing that the violence waged on Black bodies may be in the spotlight today but is not new. Anti-racism is knowing that the reason our hearts are on fire is that our nation fails to honor the lives of people of color as precious.

This is the work we do every day, and now with an even greater urgency. Anti-racism is continuing to create opportunities for young people to engage during this time. We will continue to show up: in connecting through moments of joy, moments of tears, rage and mourning. We will create spaces for art, expression and learning.

OUR WORK: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Choice enjoyed eight months of in person community building with our traditional events, trips and tours, and quiet one-on-one moments. In March, Choice successfully and creatively responded to remote services by taking our lead from young people's interests, needs, abilities, and constraints. The inability to develop face-to-face relationships has been a challenge for our programming which often thrives because of the strength of relationships. Yet, we continued to foster meaningful relationships.



859

young people served



29,383

youth contacts



53

AmeriCorps Members



52,000

hours serving Maryland's youth
and families



Intensive Advocacy/Department of Juvenile Services



656

young people served



25,360

youth contacts



6,108

activities



1,310

service plans completed

We believe that young people thrive when they have access to supportive resources and are able to contribute to and connect with their communities.

Provides critical one-on-one contact, mentoring, and advocacy to young people involved in the juvenile legal system.

Serves primarily Black and Latinx young people ages 8-18 years old in Baltimore City as well as Baltimore, Howard, Montgomery, and Prince George's Counties.

During COVID-19, services have been remote via video conferencing, phone calls, text messages.

Supported by a contract with Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS).

Intensive Advocacy/Department of Juvenile Services



89%

young people participated in at least 1 Choice activity



76%

of participants had at least 1 service plan



1,031

resources brokered



10,219

family contacts



2,195

hours of community service completed



1,883

employment activities



115

youth attended College Night



1,577

school visits

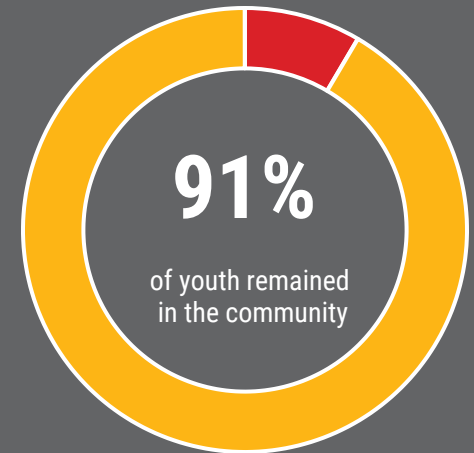
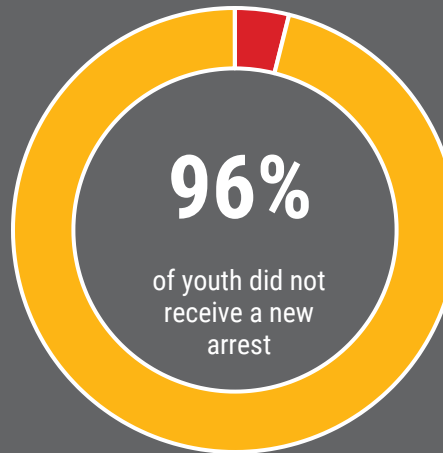
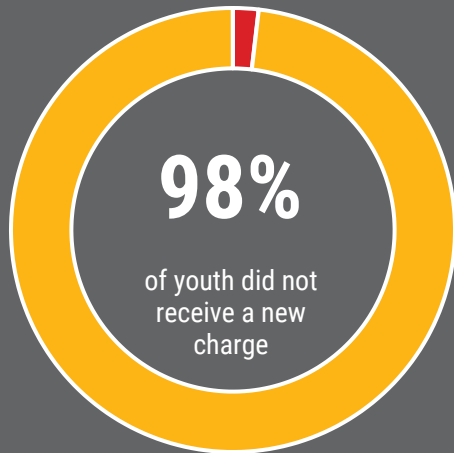
Intensive Advocacy/Department of Juvenile Services

Intensive Advocacy Outcomes & Deliverables

70% of youth will not acquire new charges

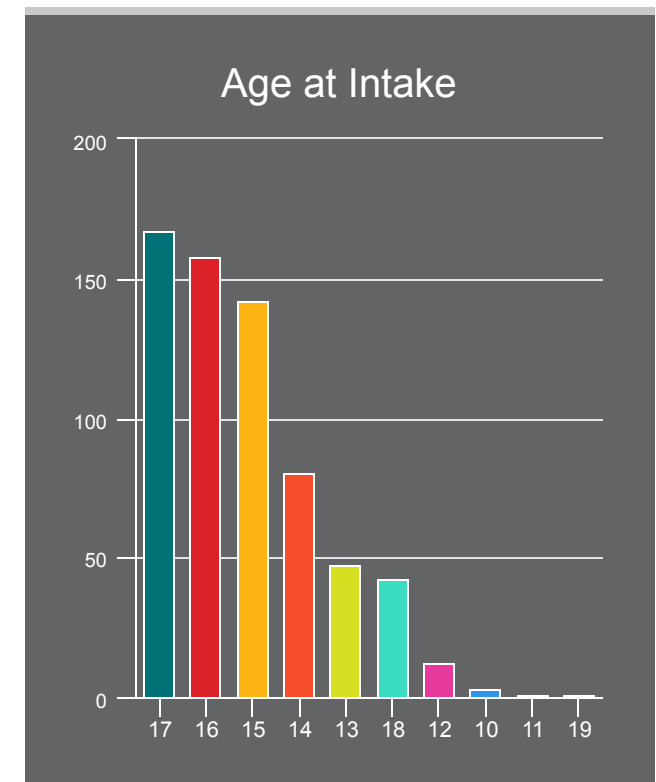
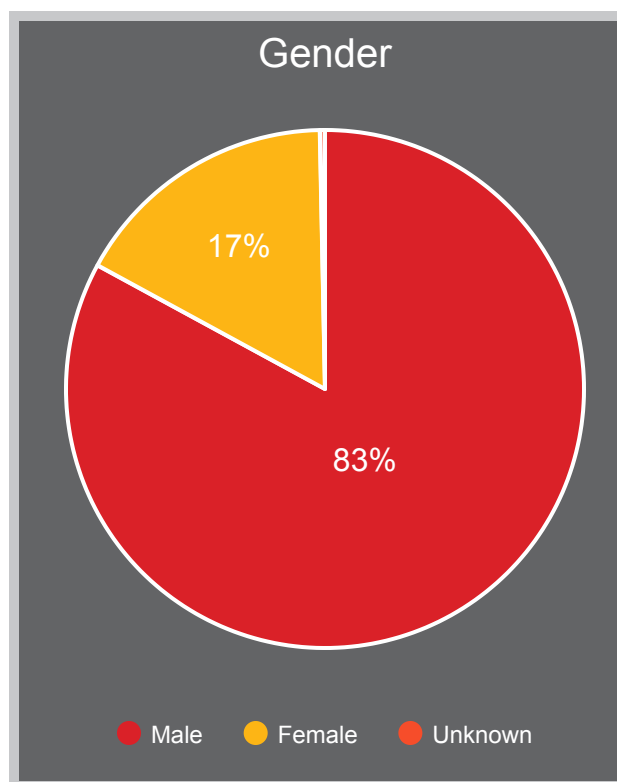
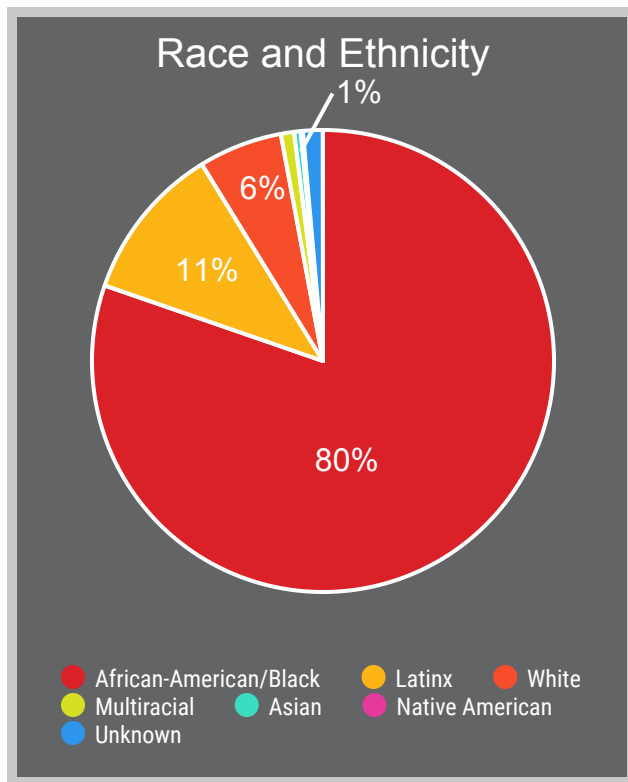
70% of youth will not receive a new arrest

70% of youth will remain in the community at time of program completion



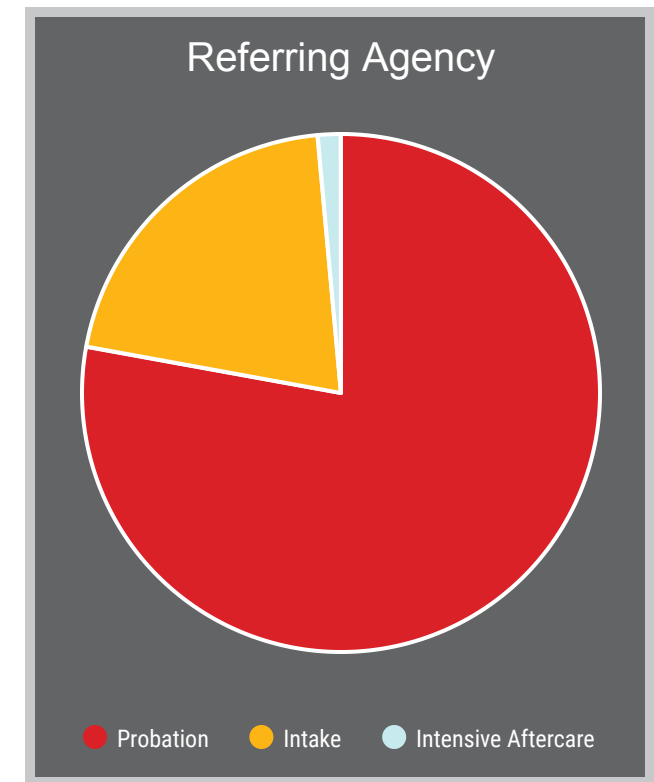
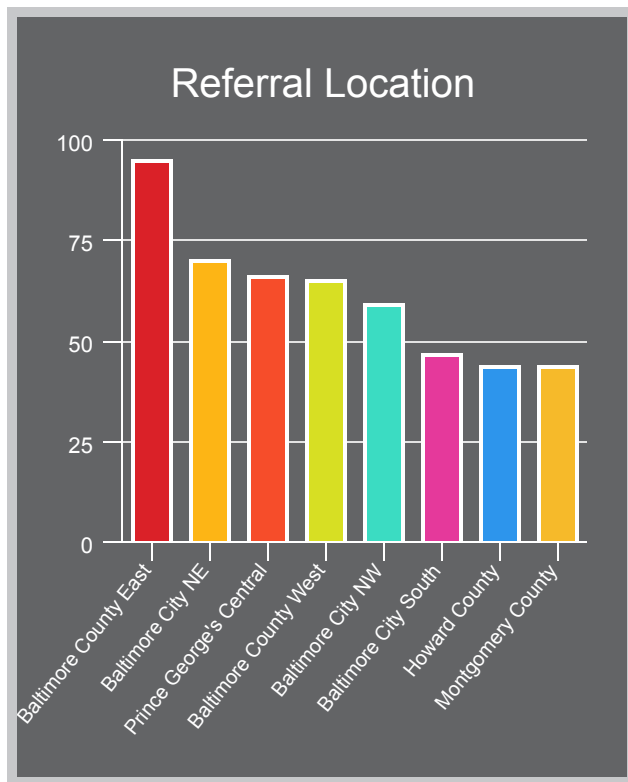
Intensive Advocacy/Department of Juvenile Services

Intensive Advocacy Participant Demographics



Intensive Advocacy/Department of Juvenile Services

Intensive Advocacy Participant Referrals



Choice Jobs



292

young people served



\$109,488

invested in stipends/wages



3,485

cups of coffee served



84

employed at social enterprises

We believe the first job is an essential experience for growth and development of a young person. Through our job training and career development, youth carve a unique pathway to employment success.

Flying Fruit, Choice's social enterprise, trains and employs young people at cafes at The Angelos Law Center at University of Baltimore, a stand at Oriole Park at Camden Yards, and a kiosk in the Inner Harbor.

Supported by grants from Annie E. Casey, Marguerite Casey, Baltimore County government, Starbucks Foundation, Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services.

Choice Jobs



10

job readiness cohorts



115

young people completed entire
jobs readiness curriculum



\$2,350

gift cards from generous donors
for incentives and prizes



70

jobs readiness workshops
conducted

"Choice is a great way for young people to come up and do better in the world.

At FF I think of my time having fun with co-workers and making friends. Every day is a new experience. Choice makes you want to be a better person. It makes you want to grow. There are a lot of great people who work there, lots of great company who help us with interviews and clothing, they even helped me get a suit. They do a lot of great things."

Mentors young people ages 8-24 years old in partnership with Baltimore City Juvenile Justice Center, Four Seasons, Frederick Douglass High School, Patterson High School, Nando's, No Boundaries Coalition, and Starbucks.

Choice is grateful for the leadership and support of the Choice Jobs Board. Members include civic leaders and industry experts, they donate their time. They organize special efforts for youth stipends and participate in youth interview panels.

Choice Education Program



30

young people served



49

workshops hosted



311

visits to college campuses



225+

community members served

We believe that quality education does not always take place in the classroom, and that all young people are capable of building strong college and career pathways that align with their goals.

Provides learning and enrichment opportunities for young people in their schools, on college campuses, and in communities.

Serves primarily young Black people at Ben Franklin High School, the Cherry Hill neighborhoods, and throughout Baltimore City.

Supported by grants from Marguerite Casey and Northrop Grumman.

Choice Education Program



39

college student volunteers



755

volunteer service hours

“Every Thursday as I walk into the student center I feel like I am coming home where I see college students say hello to the Choice kids and knowingly everyone including the kids’ faces light up as the college students welcome their guests into their home away from home.”

Davanye, College Night youth leader

College Nights include campus visits and activities hosted by youth leaders and students from UMBC; Loyola University; and University of Maryland, College Park.

Hosted summer Jam n Slam back to school event for the Cherry Hill Community with over 200 In attendance.

Afterschool programming for the Cherry Hill community, led by a paid community leader and paid youth leaders. There were a total of 9, 2.5 hour sessions



Choice Staffing and Training



200+

training hours administered



94%

AmeriCorps member
retention rate



89%

AmeriCorps recruitment rate



21

Wellness Wednesday
activities

**We believe in
holistic
development, not
only for the
young people
and families
served by our
organization, but
also for our
AmeriCorps
members and
staff.**

Supported by contract
with Maryland
Governor's Office on
Service and
Volunteerism/
AmeriCorps, DJS,
Governor's Office of
Crime Prevention, Youth
and Victim Services and
Baltimore County
government.

Choice Staffing and Training

Members from our anti-racism task team (Change Team) came together to develop and lead the organization through a new training on white supremacy culture.

Our Storytelling and Recruitment team (STAR) released the first issue of the STARgazer in March of 2019. The quarterly STARgazer has been a great opportunity to connect people into Choice's happenings: allowing us to share news with current AmeriCorps members and staff as well as reach and connect with alumni and incoming staff and members

Choice hosted our very first organization-wide overnight retreat for all AmeriCorps members and staff! Collaboratively hosted by a cross-section of Choice AmeriCorps members and staff, this multi-day retreat allowed for team-building to occur while reflecting on the meaning of service and community-engagement.

In October 2019, Choice participated in the second annual Baltimore Homecoming. This special event invites prominent people who were born and raised in Baltimore City to return to "meet the city's next generation of innovators, artists, activists and community leaders; to reawaken and deepen our personal ties to the city

We believe in holistic development, not only for the young people and families served by our organization, but also for our AmeriCorps members and staff.



Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation



40

Choice staff and members participated in healing circle



15

participants in cross institutional healing circle



3

virtual safe spaces for Black identifying members

Eric Ford and Frank Anderson wrote an article, "The Shriver Center at UMBC: A TRHT Model for Service Learning and Community Engagement," for Peer Review: Emerging Trends and Key Debates in Undergraduate Education. The article shares the TRHT model and how it can be applied to different learning environments and community collaborations.

We are committed to dismantling white supremacy by implementing anti-racist practices in our programs, initiatives, and organizational processes.

We are disrupting the historical and present repercussions of racism by:

Working against the impact of systemic inequities and individual prejudices and towards educating ourselves and community stakeholders on combating racial oppression;

Utilizing a meaningful community-engagement framework that is inclusive, person-centered, restorative, and culturally responsible;

Focusing on the human affective and relational work of race equity by creating positive spaces for dialogue, relationship-building, mutual respect, trust, and shared accountability.

Advocacy

Hosted workshops including Know Your Rights and Know Your Rights during COVID

Advocated for young people to be released from detention during the pandemic

We believe in the power of everyday people to influence institutions and affect social change.

Our legislative priorities for FY20 were:

The elimination of fines and fees for youth in the justice system;

School Resource Officer Removal;

Increased funding for trauma informed programs in Baltimore;

Increased funding for service year programs in Maryland.

Served on Maryland's State Advisory Group - a division of the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services
Juvenile Justice Reform Council; Coalition to Reform School Discipline; Healing City Baltimore; Purpose Built Communities

Supported legislation in Maryland General Assembly to establish commission on student behavioral health and mental health treatment

Highlights

Youth Advisory Board

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) forms a bridge between Choice youth and staff and advocates for the future of the organization. Currently the YAB is composed of 6 former or current Choice youth and 3 adult Choice staff that sit in on meetings as guests.

The YAB is important to Choice because it gives youth a chance to forge their own path, develop professional development skills, advocate for themselves and their communities, and help create better standards and practices for Choice services. Currently, our YAB members are attending board meetings, supporting the Choice Jobs team at their jobs training and interviews, participating in Choice task teams, helping with recruitment at college fairs, and engaging in advocacy on the local and state level. With the YAB, youth voice is supported and always given priority. At the crux of the board, there is an understanding that youth and adult partnerships are important because it can help eliminate injustices for system involved youth, will create a path for youth and adults to work together, that youth have the best understanding of priorities of what needs to change, and will challenge the legacy of decades of failing our youth in leadership and development.

Evaluation

In FY20, Choice began work on a formal evaluation. An evaluation task team was formed with Choice staff, UMBC researchers, and external researchers. Violence Prevention Working Group promoted further institution-wide conversations about opportunities for further collaboration. The Choice Program at UMBC will begin a formative evaluation process in FY21. The evaluation will look at current practices and form best practices. Researchers will meet with Choice staff and AmeriCorps members to gather feedback about current practices. These practices will be gathered and compiled into a process map. The process map will lead to Choice's programming being more consistent across teams.

Challenges

COVID-19 pandemic

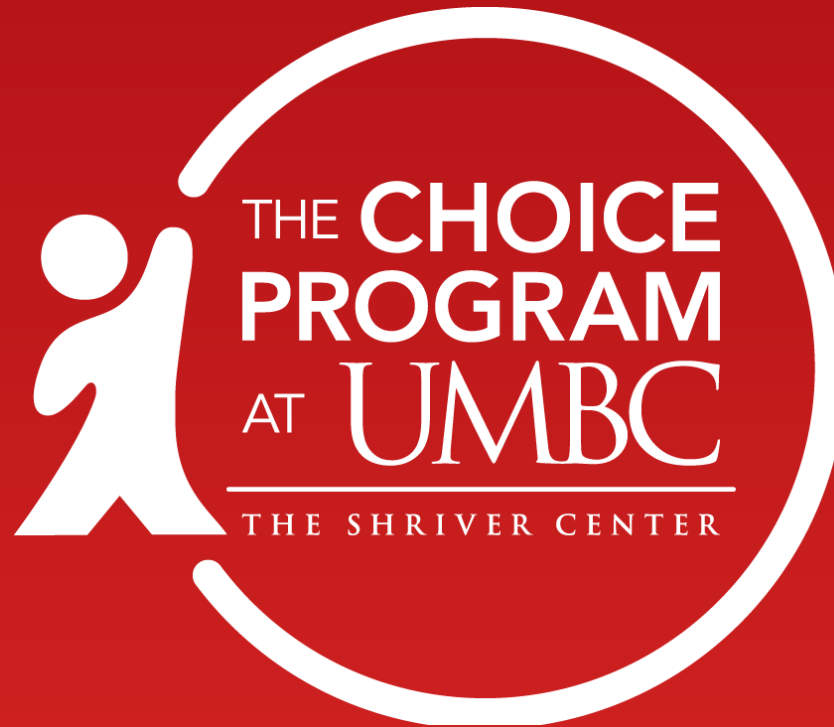
The COVID-19 pandemic and the disproportionate impact it has had on communities of color due to systemic racism has had disastrous consequences for our people: young people, AmeriCorps Members, and staff.

Choice AmeriCorps members have directly addressed basic human needs to mitigate the social determinants of health, barriers, and slow motion trauma of a global health emergency. Through ongoing, sustained safety and wellness checks, AmeriCorps members have fostered a sense of belonging. These efforts include meaningful virtual structured activities e.g. service plans, goal setting, job coaching, and other material and social/emotional assistance.

Budget Cuts

In June, Maryland Department of Juvenile Services abruptly announced major changes that directly and deeply affected our services: a severe reduction in our budget that required the abolishment of our DC Metro Region offices and other positions. (As they explained, the state is struggling with a major economic crisis due to COVID). Through intense lobbying and advocacy, we received word, at the last minute, that our budget had been restored to funding level to FY 20. Black political power, organizing and representations undoubtedly affected this dramatic reversal.

The process diminished our ability to serve young people and damaged relationships within our communities. Since and in the coming months, the organization is committed to working on the harm we have done and experienced, through examining our internal and external communications, relationships, and structures.



www.choiceprogram.org



choiceprogram@umbc.edu



[@choiceserves](https://www.instagram.com/choiceserves)



[@TheChoiceProgram](https://www.facebook.com/TheChoiceProgram)