

FY21 ANNUAL REPORT

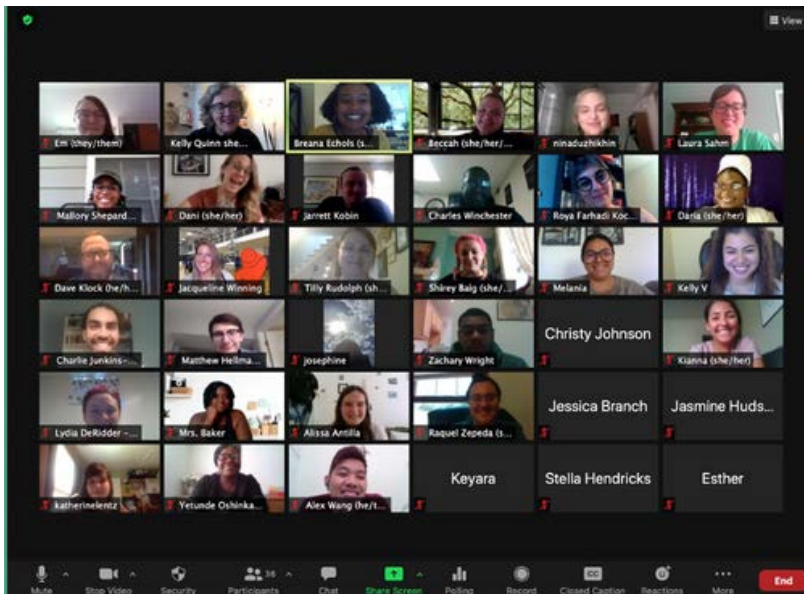
July 2020-June 2021

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ABOUT US

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 youth 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 level.



In FY21, Covid required us to move our work virtual. Nonetheless, we continued with daily meetings like rundowns, weekly team-building events, and periodic organization-wide workshops to stay connected.

Vision

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

Mission

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

“The Choice Program has taught me to believe in myself more. Doesn’t matter how bad things starts off for you in life, you’ll always have the power to change the outcome.”

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

I am extremely proud of how the staff, AmeriCorps members and youth of The Choice Program responded to every challenge that was presented to us this past year. Time and time again we were called upon by community stakeholders to provide testimonials, engage in dialogue and write about our journey toward antiracism. In 2018, our Change Team led the charge by embracing Critical Race Theory as a framework to address race and ethnic disparities in the youth legal system. Despite the recent assaults on its validity, we stood firm on our position. By once again leaning into our core values as an organization **we emerged from a difficult year with clear eyes and a greater sense of purpose**. We continue to be grateful for the ongoing support of UMBC, a predominantly white, public institution committed to equity, inclusion, justice and excellence. Especially our institutional home within The Shriver Center.

We started off the fiscal year with a new local partner to support our work in Baltimore City. We were extremely excited to reignite our partnership with the Family League of Baltimore City to offer resources to young people in an attempt to support them in reaching their self-identified goals.

We are extremely grateful to Robert E. Meyerhoff for his generous support. The funds donated supported the operations of our social enterprise, Flying Fruit Cafe at the University of Baltimore on the 6th floor of the John and Frances Angelos building. Our cafe gives Baltimore youth career readiness training and in many cases, their first job.

In October 2020, Kelly Quinn, deputy director, and I, launched Systems Change, a series of monthly conversations about Choice's advocacy at local, regional, state, and national levels. Learn more about our advocacy efforts later in this booklet.

In what was arguably our largest marketing campaign ever, Radio One, an Urban One Company, featured Choice Jobs in a series of public service announcements alongside The Food Project, a local, youth-serving social enterprise and Wide Angle Youth Media. The campaign--sponsored by I Care--was shot on location at Flying Fruit's kiosk location.

Lastly, our Youth Advisory Board provided us with valuable feedback, participated in staff interviews, attended senior level meetings and served as our guidepost throughout the year. We moved a few steps closer to being a youth-centered organization this year despite the enormous challenges of the pandemic. This is a fundamental way we address white supremacy: uplifting the voices of young people and building their skills to be the next generation of leaders. We learn from their lived experiences and stories through a symbiotic relationship that gives birth to equity. **This is our calling, this our charge.**



Eric Ford

Director, the Choice Program at UMBC



"By once again leaning into our core values as an organization, we emerged from a difficult year with clear eyes and a greater sense of purpose"

YEAR AT A GLANCE



850

young people and
their families
received services



24,455

Youth contacts



39,394

AmeriCorps
service hours

INTENSIVE ADVOCACY/ DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES

Maryland's Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) refers a young person to a team consisting of three AmeriCorps members and one staff service coordinator. Throughout a young person's tenure, Choice meets youth and their families in-person in their homes, schools, and communities and also virtually. Choice supports youth in creating and attaining individualized goals that bolster their personal success. Additionally, Choice provides crisis intervention, legal and educational advocacy, systems navigation, and connections to community-based resources. Choice offers enrichment, athletic, and recreational programming in community-based workshops and events, as well as on three college campuses in Maryland (UMD, UMBC, and Loyola University).

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

71%

of DJS intakes are Black and Latinx youth, though only making up 45% of the state youth population

The Choice Program's proposed intervention addresses racial and ethnic disparities in the youth legal system. The current system, a legacy of racial segregation and overpolicing, prevents young people of color from enjoying childhood, growing through adolescence into adulthood.

In FY21,



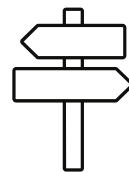
566

young people and their families served



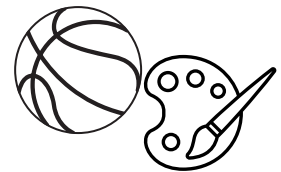
21,938

contacts made with young people



80%

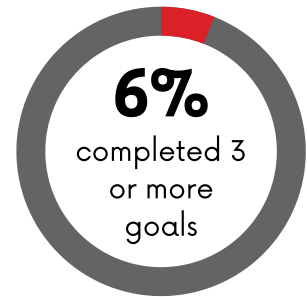
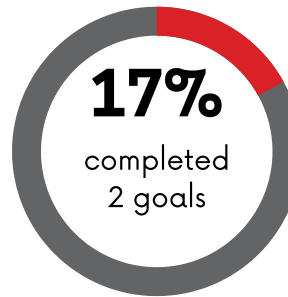
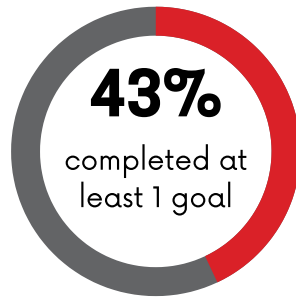
of young people created service plan



3376

enrichment activities attended

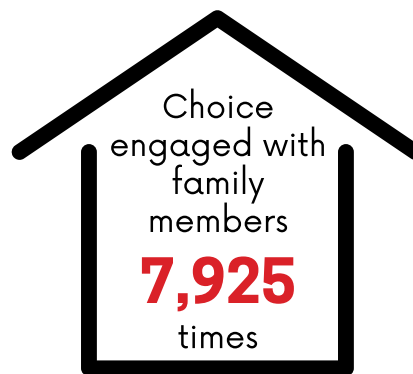
Supporting goal creation and attainment



Connecting youth and families to resources

Connected youth and families with community-based resources
1,538 times

Through partnership with Wider Circle in Silver Spring provided furniture to
23 families

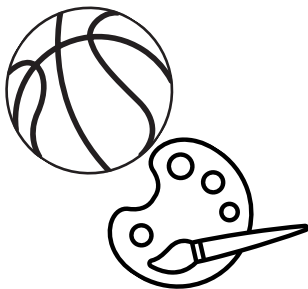


From DIA Choice received
50 computer donations

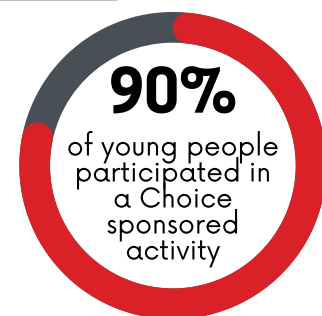
and distributed the donations for use in Choice activities and for school engagement to

13 families

Providing enrichment activities



Choice enrolled youth received a combined total of
2170
community
service hours



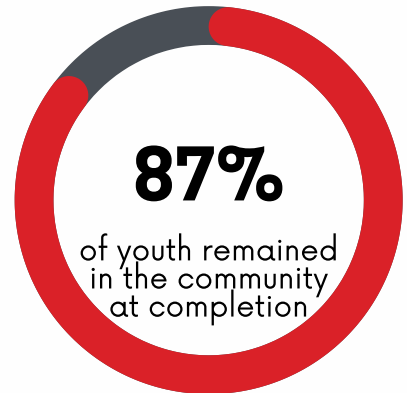
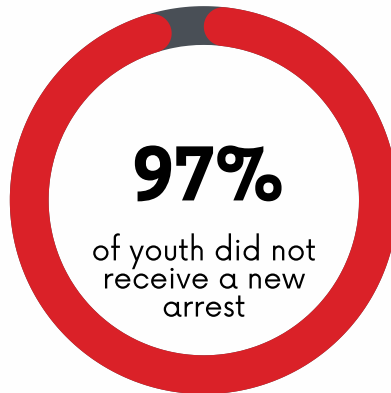
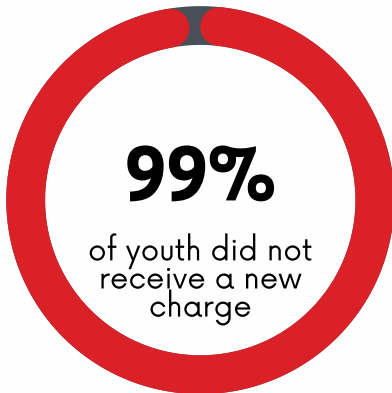
Challenges

"Virtual fatigue" after hours online for school and other out-of-school-time programs set in. As a result, young people were less engaged in remote activities. Youth routinely mentioned that they felt overwhelmed by the demands of schooling and services via FaceTime, Zoom, and GoogleMeet. Participation in enrichment activities declined.

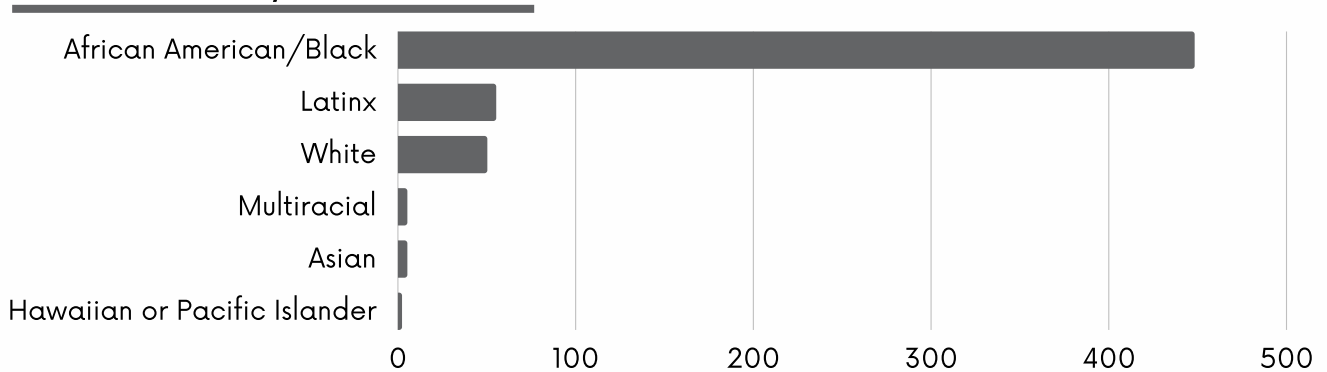
Intensive Advocacy Outcomes and Deliverables

Choice's Intensive Advocacy Program is Supported by a contract with the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS).

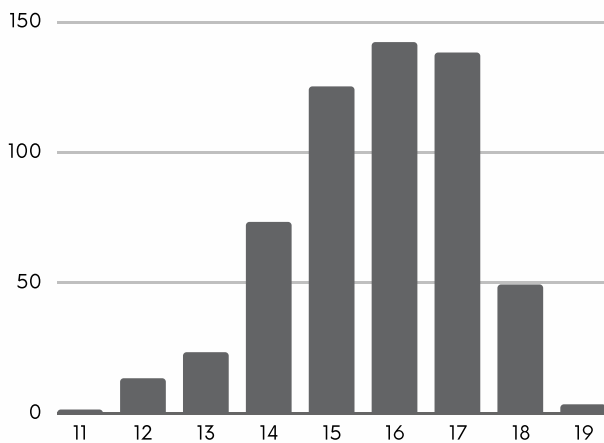
70% of youth will not receive a new charge
70% of youth will not receive a new arrest
70% of youth will remain in the community at completion



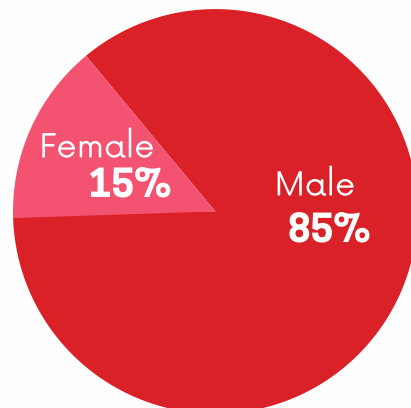
Race/Ethnicity



Age at Intake

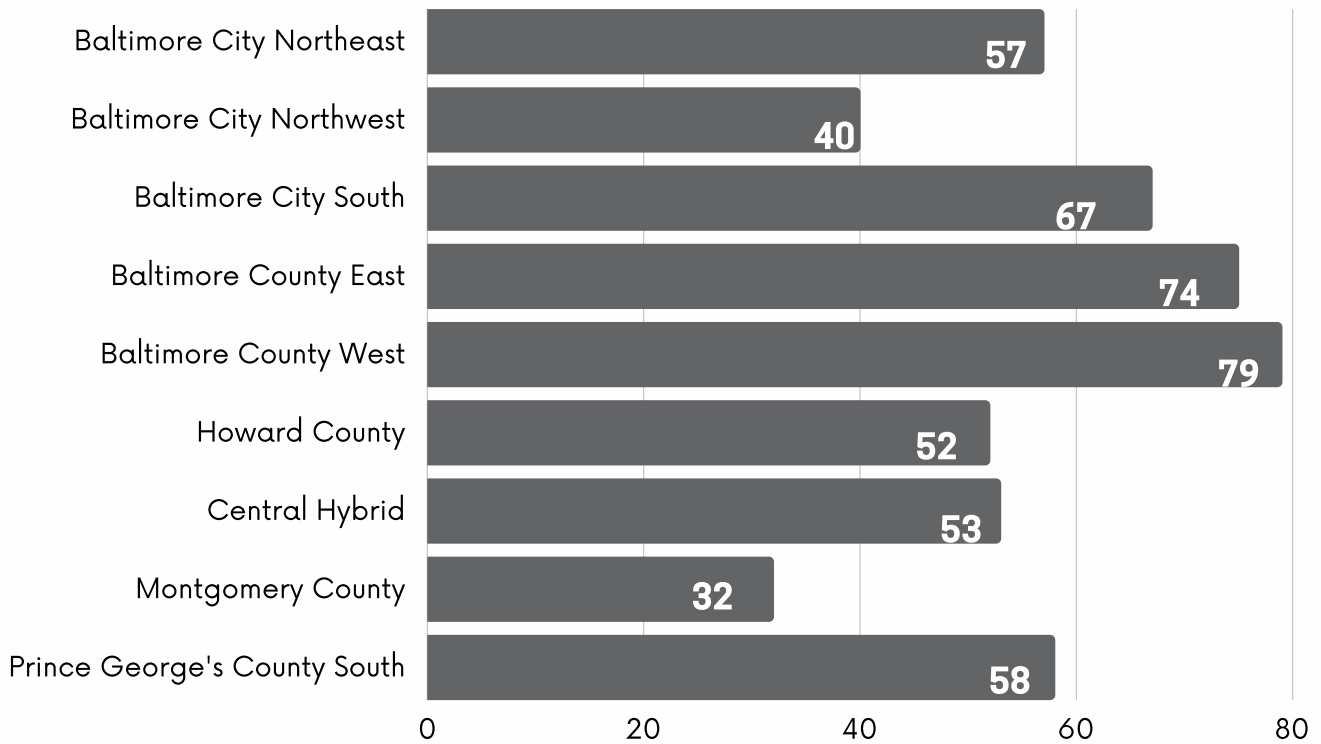


Gender

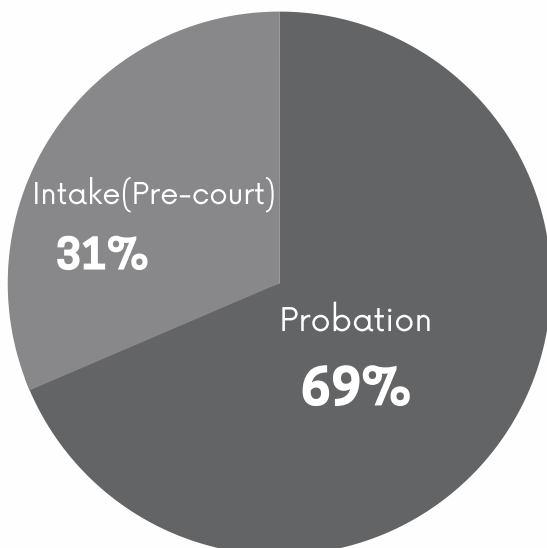


Intensive Advocacy Participant Enrollment

By Team



Referring Agency



CHOICE JOBS PROGRAM

In FY21, the Choice Jobs program provided workforce training for young people, ages 10-24. The training consisted of a six-session curriculum-based job readiness course. The Choice Jobs team also offered our workforce development curriculum in a virtual format in several Baltimore City high schools. Participants received a small stipend upon completion.

Choice Jobs continued to build a network of partners including Art with a Heart and Baltimore Youth Arts. Young people who successfully completed Choice Jobs programs were placed in subsidized externships at these organizations.

Additionally, a partnership with No Boundaries Youth Organizers provided youth in Central West Baltimore with jobs training and ServSafe certification, an important credential for food services and preparation. Choice Jobs' leadership team hosted two competitions of pitch parties for young people to present business plans to Choice staff and local workforce professionals. And Mwacha Degomasi, a Patterson High School student, redesigned the Flying Fruit uniform.

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.

In FY21,



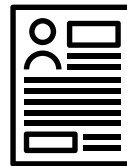
390

young people
and their families
served



\$58,746

invested in youth
stipends for job
readiness



107

resume workshops
hosted



73%

more young people
reached by moving to
online instruction.



"Working with Choice gave me opportunities, these opportunities included being able to find a job, work on my permit, and a whole lot more, one of the factors of working with them is that they always are free and open to help. They even spend time with their workers to have a great connection with them. I highly recommend working with the Choice Program staff and all are very dependable and are always in high spirits no matter what."



Choice Jobs Program is supported by grants from

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Marguerite Casey Foundation
- Baltimore County Government
- Starbucks Foundation
- Family League of Baltimore City
- Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services
- Maryland Department of Juvenile Services

Choice Program at UMBC - Choice Jobs Program

CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

In FY21, Choice's Education Program provided learning and enrichment opportunities for young people in their schools and communities. The education program does this through initiatives such as the Youth Advisory Board (YAB), Youth in Action (YIA), and events such as Jam and Slam. The Choice Education Program also provides support directly in Baltimore City schools such as Ben Franklin High School.

Youth Advisory Board (YAB)

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 six former or current Choice youth and three adult Choice staff that sit in on meetings as guests. In FY21, YAB participated in the hiring processes for staff education coordinators.



“I didn’t think my voice mattered for a long time. I was shy but I had my own opinions about certain topics. I just didn’t think there was a place for me to let them out because I was so young until I heard about YAB. A group uniquely made so youth can have a place to broadcast their voices and make a difference.”

Choice Education Program is supported through grants by

- Marguerite Casey Foundation
- Northrop Grumman



Jam and Slam

Jam and Slam, the annual back-to-school party, took a new shape with physical distancing, contactless drop offs and masks. With public health protocols in place, AmeriCorps Members and staff were able to distribute more than **125** backpacks of school and cleaning supplies and boxes of fresh produce to Choice families and Cherry Hill neighbors.

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.

Finding Freedom through Art

Finding Freedom through Art was the theme for Art Rising, Choice's annual event commemorating the Baltimore Uprising. This year featured youth-led workshops on avatar creation, nail art, music, poetry, trading cards, cooking, and drawing. Montaze Cooper, local motivational speaker, author, and leader, stirred viewers with his keynote address on Instagram Live.



Revolutionary Summer

Alanah Nicole, a Baltimore-based artist, hosted A Whole New World: Cultivating a Radical Imagination for a Revolutionary Summer: five workshops via @ChoiceVoice's Instagram in July 2020.

CHOICE PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

In FY21, the Choice Personnel and Staffing team provided support for our AmeriCorps members and full-time staff. This included a series of community gatherings and professional development events.



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

In FY21,



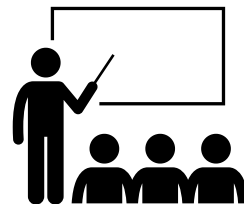
59

AmeriCorps members served communities throughout Maryland



97.2%

AmeriCorps recruitment rate



2692

AmeriCorps training hours conducted

Supported by

- Maryland Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism/ AmeriCorps
- Maryland Department of Juvenile Services
- Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services
- Baltimore County government



Organizational Events

Organizational Values

In September, AmeriCorps Members and staff gathered for peer-facilitated discussions about Choice's organizational values and white supremacy culture. Participants read the work of Tema Okun, Kenneth Jackson, Partners for Collaborative Change, and Dismantling Racism Works.

Fun-Flections

Throughout October, the entire organization participated in a series of virtual team activities and competitions, included a painting activity, group cookbook and costume contest.

Reflections

Reflections, quarterly organization-wide workshops, focused on leadership, community building, and anti-racism. During February's Reflections, an alumni panel spoke about advanced studies and careers in schools, mental health, government, law, and nonprofits. Maryam Abdul-Kareem led June's Reflections. Nia Hampton, Baltimore-based artist and former Choice education coordinator, conducted an exercise in Afro-Futurism. Abdul-Kareem asked us to imagine a post-prison future. Small groups contemplated the concepts of abolition, reparations, justice, community, and care; and shared our collective vision for a world remade. AmeriCorps members and staff watched and contemplated the video: Junauda Petrus Reads Her Poem: Give The Police Departments to the Grandmothers.



TRUTH, RACIAL HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

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.

Eric Ford, Choice's Director, has played a leading role in American Association of Universities and College's nationwide initiative Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation. He represented Choice and the Shriver Center in two university-wide townhalls: Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation (October 2020) and The Three Pandemics: Three Conversations (March 2021). And he shared his autobiographical story during UMBC's Grit X 2021 Talk: Mentee to Mentor

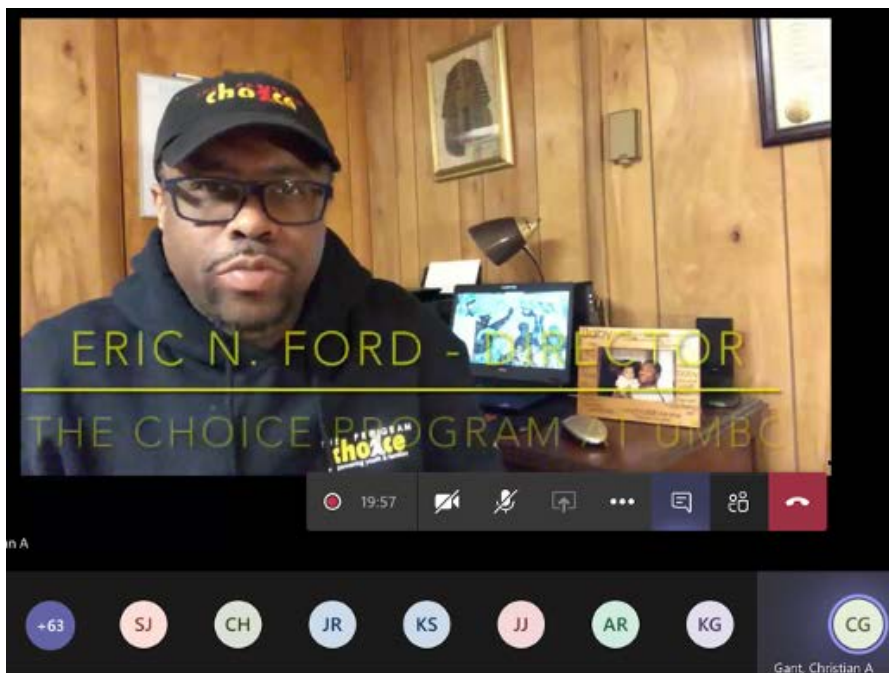


participants in cross-institutional healing circles with senior level staff at UMBC and colleagues at Spelman College.

“I appreciate UMBC's long standing commitment to educational equity to increase educational opportunities for students of all backgrounds that has culminated in UMBC being named one of the first THRT Campus Centers in the country. As your United States Senator, I'm proud to support your efforts to do the necessary work to move our country forward towards a more perfect union that is committed to social justice.”

Senator Ben Cardin to UMBC President Freeman Hrabowski
January 26, 2021

POLICY AND ADVOCACY

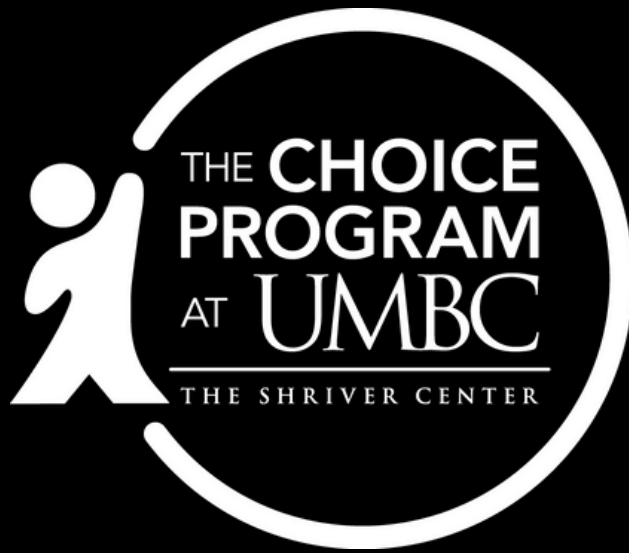


In February, Eric Ford, director, and Imhotep Simba, Choice alumni, testified before Baltimore City Public School's Board of Education about the need to invest in culturally appropriate, trauma-responsive mentoring and mental health programs rather than school police officers.

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

Local media spotlighted Choice and the Department of Juvenile Services efforts to support young people ensnared in the youth legal systems. Coverage included articles in the Baltimore Sun and Afro-American and interviews on WEAA and WYPR public radio programs. Eric Ford and Kelly Quinn launched a series of monthly public conversations to brief Choice, Shriver, and campus colleagues about policy advocacy. Choice participated in a wide array of reform efforts regarding such issues as Baltimore Police Department's policies on youth interactions, police free schools and school discipline; youth detention; and charging children as adults. On campus, Choice leaders served on UMBC's Inclusion Council committees regarding restorative processes, hiring practices, communications, and standardized testing requirements.

Choice staff members and alumni served on several civic boards: Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services' State Advisory Group; Maryland's Juvenile Justice Reform Council; Coalition to Reform School Discipline; Healing City Baltimore; Purpose Built Communities; Baltimore Coalition for Police Free Schools; and South Baltimore Gateway Partnership



www.choiceprogram.org



choiceprogram@umbc.edu



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