

FY22 ANNUAL REPORT

July 2021-June 2022

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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.



Gaver Farm served as the site for the first in person organization-wide gathering after remote services. Choice staff and AmeriCorps members participated in autumn activities, such as, hayrides and picking pumpkins.

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.

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR



As I reflect on our accomplishments, one theme emerges. This year, Choice renewed our commitment to collaborating with and strengthening communities.

It was an exciting year as our main focus was a full return to in-person services for our youth and families. It also marked the return to offices after 18 months of primarily telework. Just as Choice mentors sought to nurture relationships with youth, the staff and AmeriCorps members immediately recognized the need to nurture relationships with each other. We organized several team building activities to get everyone reacquainted after spending so much time on screens. We gathered for hayrides in Mt. Airy, Trunk or Treat in Cherry Hill, holiday party in Catonsville, and games at Wonderfly in Arbutus.

As we prepared to re-enter our physical offices, we invested nearly \$70,000 in upgrades to our original facility located in South Baltimore's historic neighborhood: Cherry Hill. We also sought to broaden our presence within the University System of Maryland with new offices in UMBC at The Universities at Shady Grove.

I am pleased that we partnered with The Shriver Center's Peacemaker Program to host our first Latinx liaison: Julissa Gomez. She organized Raíces y Recuerdos (Remembering Our Roots), a series of storytelling sessions with several community partners.

I am pleased that we increased our outreach and efforts through the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation campus center. Dr. Kelly Quinn, deputy director, and I spoke at Montgomery College's Critical Race Forum. And, I facilitated a series of community circles with Weave Baltimore, The Social Fabric Project of the Aspen Institute.

Most importantly, I am pleased to have served on the State of Maryland's bipartisan Juvenile Justice Reform Council. Our recommendations were (largely) adopted into law by 2022 Maryland General Assembly. These changes in youth legal policies are expected to improve outcomes for Maryland's young people.

We will continue to create innovative strategies to engage youth and community members. Our strength is in our diversity of thought, creating access to opportunities, social mobility, and economic prosperity. To this end, our goal is to lift every voice.

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Eric Ford

Director, the Choice Program at UMBC

YEAR AT A GLANCE

22,014

youth
engagements
in person &
virtually

8,790

times

engaged the
families of Choice
youth

5,099

times

visited young person in
their home, community
& workplace

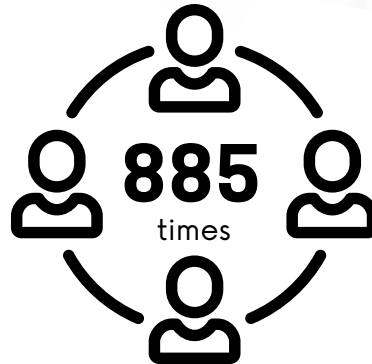
770

young people and their
families served throughout
central Maryland



1,307

hours of community
service completed
by Choice enrolled
youth



885
times

Connected youth
and families with
community-based
resources

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 two college campuses (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

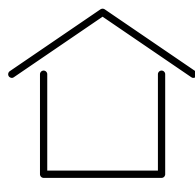
The Choice Program's proposed intervention addresses racial and ethnic disparities in the youth legal system. The current system, a legacy of racial segregation and overpolicing, prevents young people of color from enjoying childhood, growing through adolescence into adulthood.

In FY22,



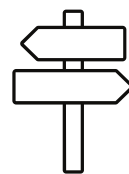
472

young people
and their families
served



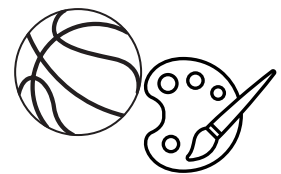
15,812

contacts made
with young
people



77%

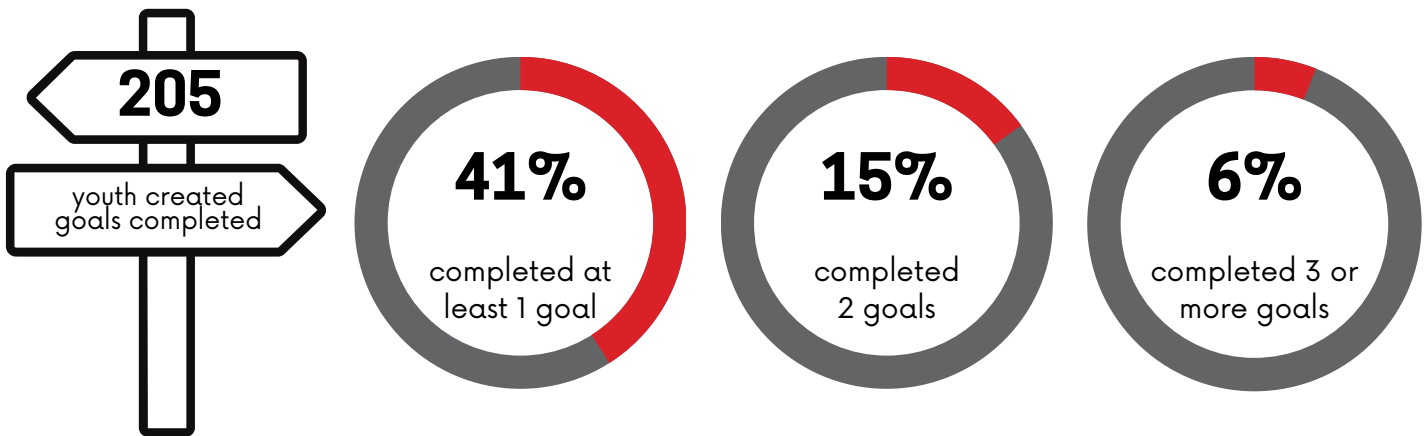
of young people
created service
plan



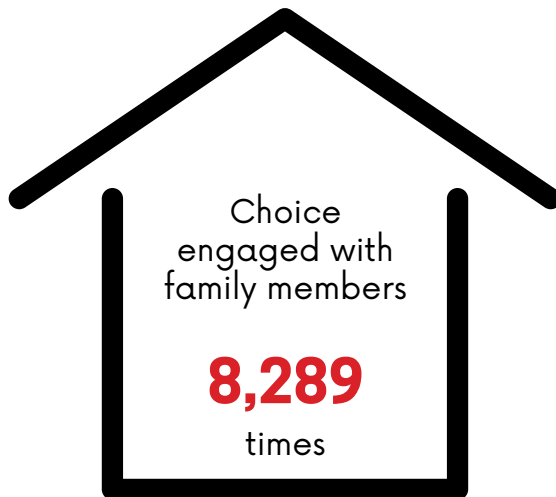
2,515

times youth
attended
enrichment
activities

Supporting goal creation and attainment



Connecting youth and families to resources



Connected youth and families with community-based resources

667 times

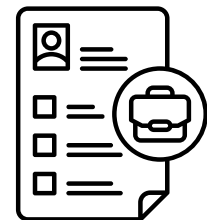
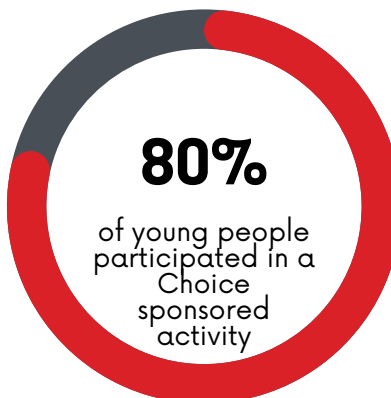
Providing enrichment activities



Choice enrolled youth received a combined total of

1,301

community service hours



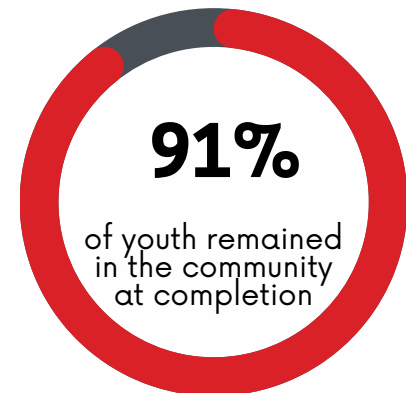
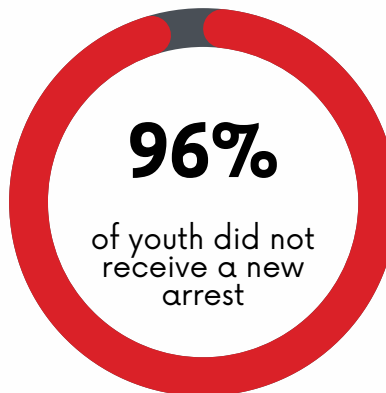
118

IA enrolled youth received job readiness training

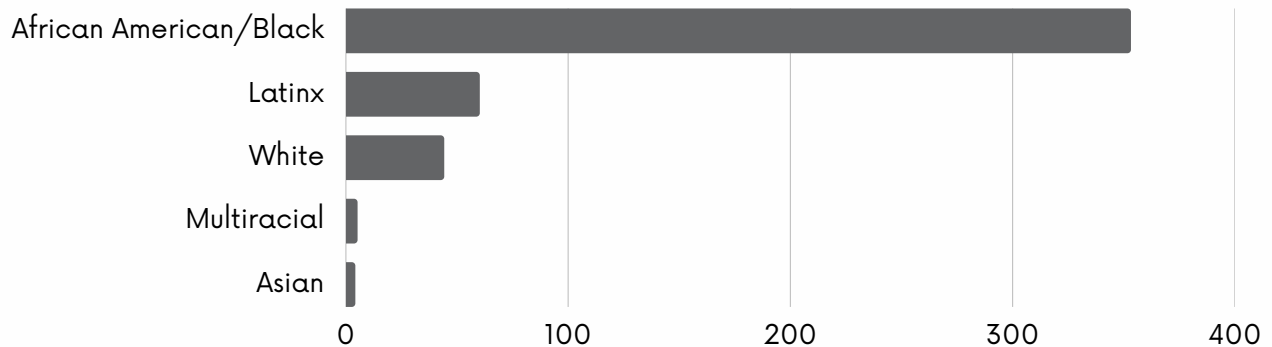
Intensive Advocacy Outcomes and Deliverables

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

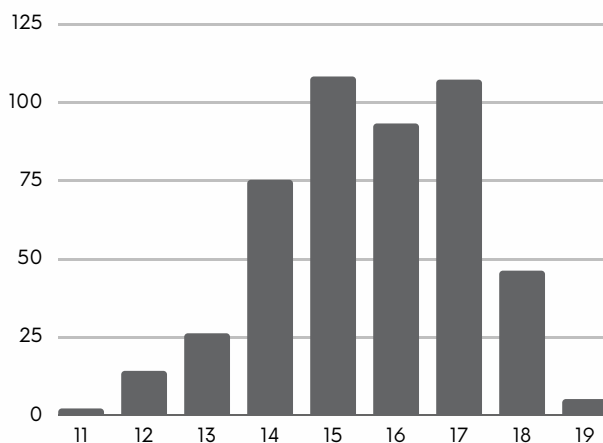
70% of youth will not receive a new charge
 70% of youth will not receive a new arrest
 70% of youth will remain in the community at completion



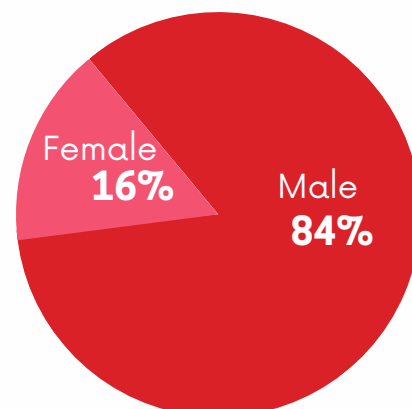
Race/Ethnicity



Age at Enrollment

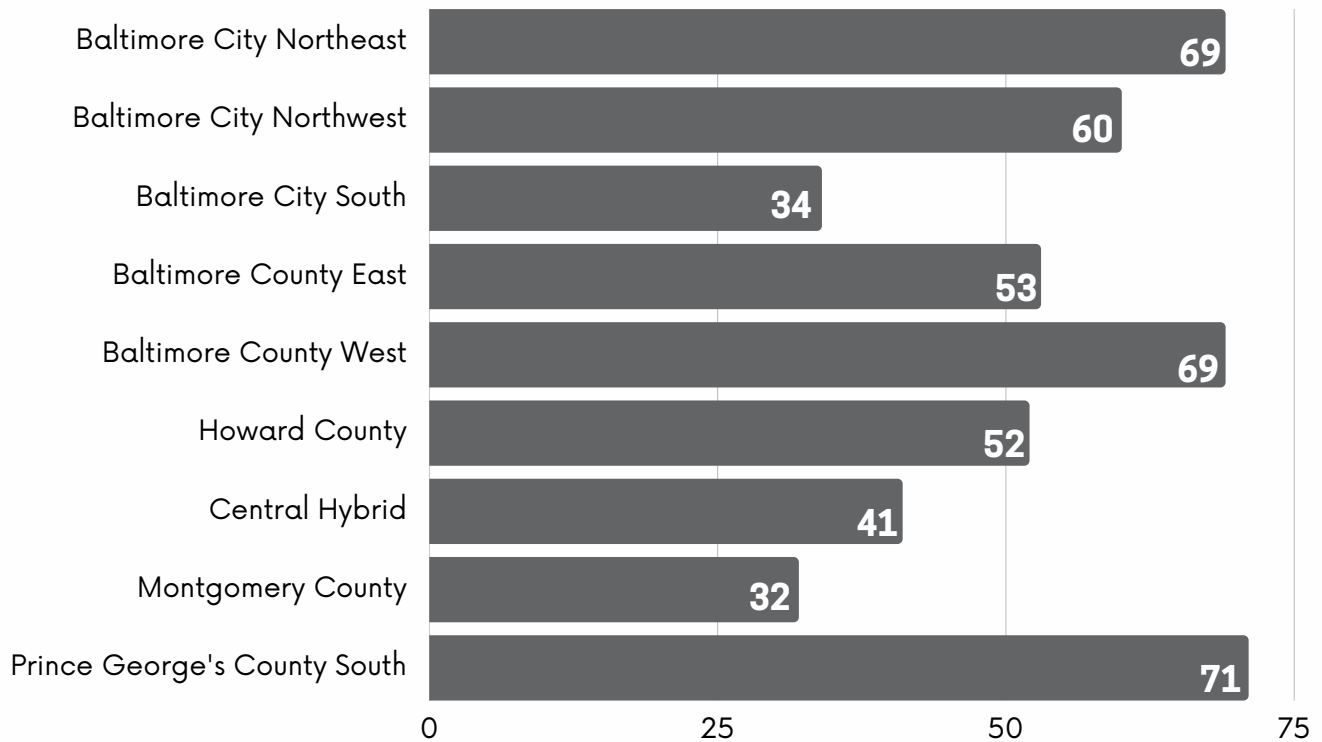


Gender

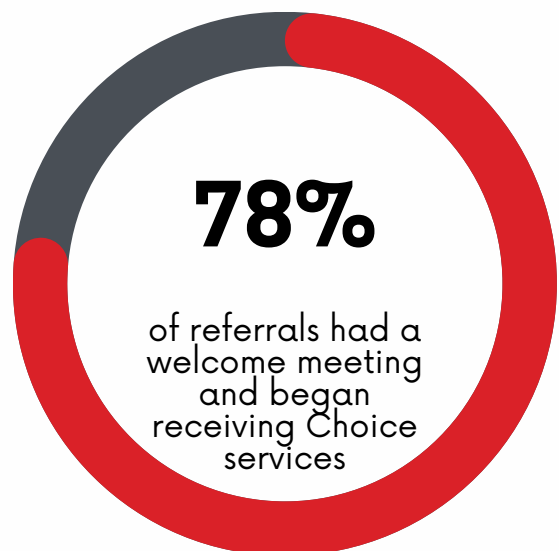
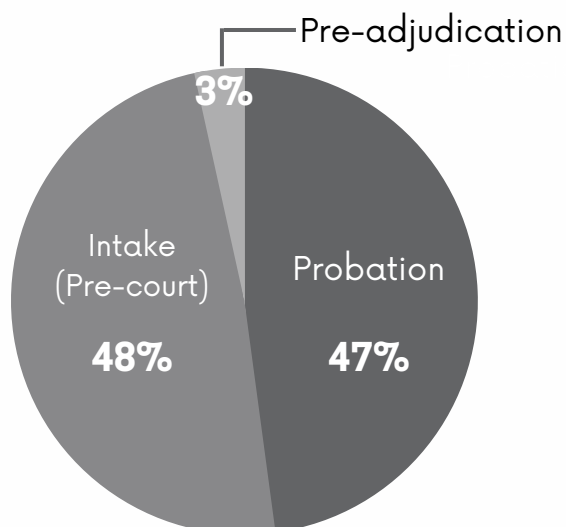


Intensive Advocacy Participant Enrollment

By Team



Referring Agency

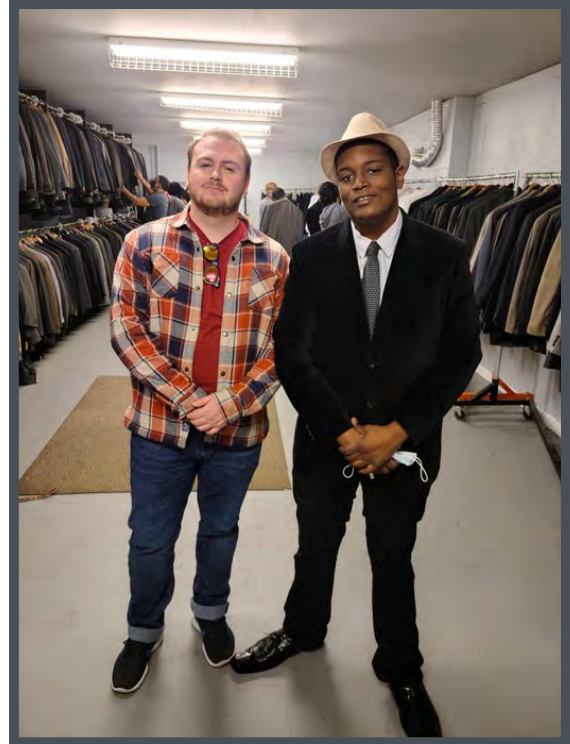


CHOICE JOBS PROGRAM

The Choice Jobs program provided workforce training for young people, ages 10-24. The training consisted of a seven-session curriculum-based job readiness course. The Choice Jobs team also offered our workforce development curriculum in a virtual format and in several Baltimore City high schools. Participants received a \$300 stipend upon completion.

Mentors with Choice Jobs provide services well beyond on-the-job training. For example, as youth prepare for interviews, staff and AmeriCorps members ensure that young people are prepared to look and feel their best.

Right: AmeriCorps Member Dylan Gugerty accompanied Cornell to Sharp Dressed Man, our next door neighbor in Impact Village, to get fitted for an interview suit.



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 FY22,



346

young people
and their families
served



\$120,224

invested in youth and
young adults stipends
and wages



53

employed at social
enterprises and with
external employers

Reopening

For the first time since 2019, all three of Choice's social enterprise locations (Inner Harbor, Oriole Park at Camden Yards, UB Law School) were opened. This allowed us to offer on-the-job training and supported employment once again.



Project Dream

The legalization of cannabis in Maryland provides opportunities for new career pathways in the formal economy. It is imperative that Black and Latinx people are prepared to participate fully in this industry. Recognizing the need to address this important racial justice issue, Choice cultivated a relationship with Project Dream, an affinity group of Maryland Medical Dispensary Association (MDMA). Staff, AmeriCorps members, and young adults toured SunMed Growers, one of the largest medical cannabis cultivation facilities in Maryland.

Career Explorer

Career Explorer summer camp program at Cherry Hill Elementary School (CHEMS) focused on entrepreneurship and financial literacy for middle school students. This camp was provided in person to a small number of middle schoolers and provided age-appropriate content around entrepreneurship, systemic racism in the world of work, and financial literacy.

Choice Jobs is grateful for the support of partners:

- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Baltimore County Government
- Baltimore Gas and Electric
- Baltimore Orioles
- Delaware North
- Department of Juvenile Services
- Family League of Baltimore City
- Food Project
- Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services
- Housing Authority of Baltimore City
- MAG Partners
- Marguerite Casey Foundation
- Starbucks Foundation
- UMBC Training Center

CHOICE EDUCATION PROGRAM

Choice's Education team 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 **Trunk or Treat**. The Choice Education Program also provides support directly in Baltimore City schools such as **Ben Franklin High School**, **Excel Academy at Francis M. Wood**, and **New Era Academy**.

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.



Kyle Pompey, photographer and author of *Perspective: Baltimore* (2017) taught 12 youth how to use 35 mm cameras during workshops organized by Geneen Godsey, education coordinator. Pompey, @niceshotkyle, shared tricks of his trade. After the classes, Amber, one of the participants, set up an Etsy shop to sell her photographs of birds.

Choice Education Program is supported through grants by

- Marguerite Casey Foundation
- Northrop Grumman

Artivate Mosaic

This year marked the 10th anniversary of Artivate's mosaic mural residency. Artivate is an arts education organization located in Montgomery. These projects have become a popular spring break activity.

South African-born multimedia artist Carien Quiroga guided young people in the design and co-creation of a glass tile mosaic. Quiroga has been the guest artist for years. Following suggestions by the Youth Advisory Board, young people and their mentors created a Black Lives Matter panel that will be installed in South Baltimore.



Youth in Action (YIA)



Choice's annual spring Youth in Action commemoration took on new dimensions this year with Raíces y Recuerdos. Julissa Gomez, Choice's Peacemaker Latinx liaison, produced a series of storytelling workshops, a major community-based event, and an art exhibition in a local popsicle shop.

The sessions encouraged people to share their stories without feeling hindered by any language or writing barriers. Several Choice youth along with AmeriCorps members, staff, and 80 local residents enjoyed an afternoon of art, theater, dance, food, and fellowship in East Baltimore.

Gomez built a large network of partners. She fostered relationships with UMBC's Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture, Nuestras Raíces Inc., Salem Baltimore United Methodist Church, Hecho en Baltimore, Comite Latino, Juventud Latina, Inca Pollo, Vargas Bakery, and Vargas Taqueria. She also collaborated with several individuals including: Mariana Orellana, Dr. Thania Muñoz, Tamara Ramos, Emiliano Gomez, Byanca Morales, and Davanye Bowser.

CHOICE PERSONNEL AND STAFFING

The Personnel and Staffing team provided support for staff and AmeriCorps members as we returned to the workplace in person.

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



Choice colleagues continued to build community among each other, but adapted to minimize the likelihood of community spread.

Professional Development

Choice was fortunate to receive discretionary funding to invest up to \$50,000 in professional development and community-building efforts.

AmeriCorps members, staff, and Youth Advisory Board members identified subjects of person interest. They enrolled in courses on such topics as Spanish language instruction for social services, arts education for people who are incarcerated, project management, crisis intervention, lactation consulting, and leadership.

Self-Care Workshops

The personnel and staffing team organized a series of self and community care workshops in addition to the traditional suite of introductory and essential training programs. For example, Divine Alignment Wellness hosted a Realignment and Restoration series, after which every member of the Choice community received a personal self-care kit.

"Thank you for coordinating the Realignment and Restoration training! I did not realize how much I needed those reminders and the space to reflect, meditate, and learn until I was in it. The self-care checklist will be a great tool as I definitely have some things to work on to achieve realignment both personally and professionally."

-an AmeriCorps Member

Strategic Planning

Choice began strategic planning with Signal Fire. Lisa Bleich and Chelsea Steiner led a series of workshops in authentic engagement and deep listening. Through the first phase of the process, Choice identified five priority areas that will serve as the foundation of the second phase.

Five Priority Areas

- Youth and Family Services
- Communication
- Professional Development
- Sustainability/Development
- Choice as Change Agents



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 continued to play a leading role in American Association of Universities and Colleges nationwide initiative: Truth Racial, Healing and Transformation. This year, he trained and mentored representatives from Prince George's Community College, Northern Virginia Community College, and Montgomery College to implement and strengthen their campus initiatives. He co-facilitated four circles in person and virtually.

Additionally, the Aspen Institute's Weave: The Social Fabric Project invited him and other leaders to host a series of healing circles for Baltimore-based activists and civic leaders.




Duane "Shorty" Davis, Kelly Quinn, and Eric Ford at a Weave gathering.
Photo by Adilio Alfaro




POLICY AND ADVOCACY


Kelly Quinn and Eric Ford host monthly public conversations for The Shriver Center and campus communities to discuss advocacy efforts. Choice participated in several coalitions including: Baltimore Coalition for Police Free Schools, Coalition to Reform School Discipline, and Juvenile Justice Reform Council.

We partnered with Wide Angle Youth Media to develop graphics for a social media campaign to convey the organization's legislative priorities.



Disrupt the School To Prison Pipeline

- 
1. Due Process With the Use of Reportable Offenses
 The previous law adversely affected young people who were charged with a crime off of school grounds and then pushed out from school for as long as three months or more.
- 
2. Police Free Schools
 Wellness centers should be staffed with a restorative justice coordinator, community intervention worker and culturally-competent mental health and social workers.
- 
3. Decriminalize Disruptive Behavior
 Students are pulled from classrooms or removed from schools for behaviors that could be mitigated --- even prevented--- with better resources and support.




Embrace Positive Youth Development


Invest in Culturally Responsive, Trauma Informed Wellness Practices
 The goal is to foster healthy development and resiliency among youth who face adverse individual or environmental challenges in their daily lives.


Change The Narrative About Youth From Under Resourced Communities
 Employ strengths-based approaches focused on positive relationships and self-agency. With the proper supports, all youth have the ability to be successful.


Mentor, Hire and Offer Youth Internship Opportunities
 Offer recreational and cultural activities to promote the values of life-long learning, fitness & positive engagement with peers. Explore opportunities in their communities to combine classroom learning with practical experiences.




Reform The Youth Legal System


 **Stop the Automatic Charging of Youth as Adults**
 Sentencing children in adult court doesn't work to reduce recidivism because it fails to provide youth with age-appropriate rehabilitative treatment that will allow them to lead productive lives post-incarceration.

 **Remove Barriers for Diversion**
 Make it easier to divert kids from the court system and directly into positive programming.


 **Close Youth Prisons**
 Create regional, community-based alternatives to incarceration. Ensure every jurisdiction has access to nonresidential, community-based services that employ trauma informed, culturally competent, restorative programming.




Legislative Priorities

 **Disrupt the School to Prison Pipeline**

1. Due process with the use of reportable offenses
2. Police free schools
3. Decriminalize disruptive behavior

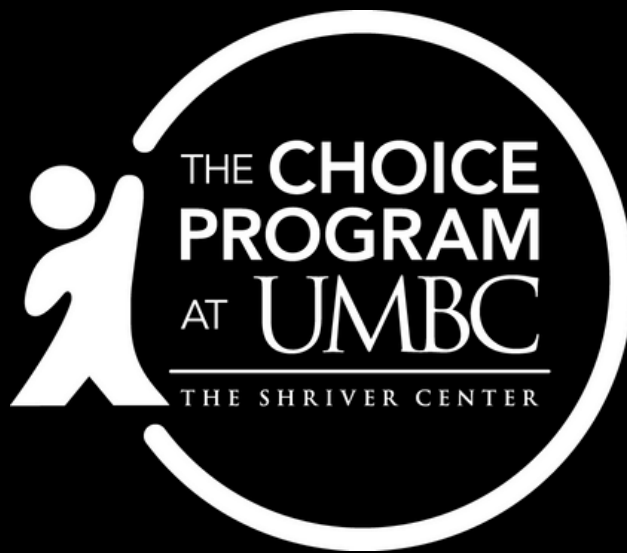
 **Embrace Positive Youth Development**

1. Invest in culturally responsive, trauma informed wellness practices
2. Change the narrative about youth from under resourced communities
3. Mentor, hire and offer youth internship opportunities

 **Reform Youth Legal System**

1. Stop the automatic charging of youth as adults
2. Remove barriers for diversion
3. Close youth prisons

Above: Graphics created by Wide Angle Youth Media



www.choiceprogram.org



choiceprogram@umbc.edu



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