



Foster Care Diversion Annual Report FY18

FY 18 Final Program Summary (July 1, 2017-June 30, 2018)

Program Overview

The Choice Program at UMBC is a community-based, family-centered service delivery program of The Shriver Center at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). Utilizing a strength-based approach, The Choice Program provides intensive supervision, comprehensive case management with advocacy services, and round-the-clock crisis intervention to youth aged 13-17 in danger of being removed from their homes and placed in foster care. The Choice Foster Care Diversion Program was developed to address the trend of an increasing number of 15-year-olds entering the DSS/Foster Care system. Youth entering the system of care at this age have a high likelihood of remaining in the system through their 21st birthday. During the time that the teens are removed from their homes, families may receive inadequate support services to remedy the problems that led to the initial placement.

The overall goal of Choice's Foster Care Diversion program is to partner with the Baltimore City Department of Social Services to reduce the number of youth ages 13-17 entering foster care; and strengthen youth and family ties to the community.

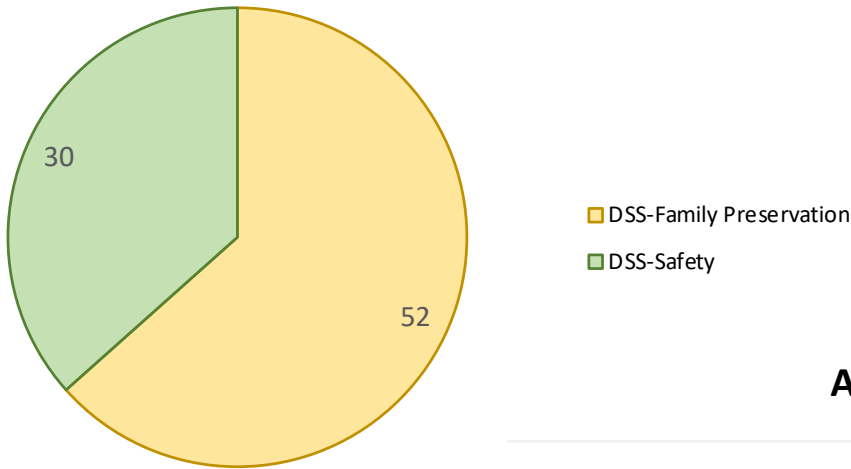
The components of Choice case management services include:

- ❖ Daily contact with youth and families, with a step-down plan as youth nears program completion
- ❖ Informal individual and family counseling
- ❖ 24/7 crisis intervention
- ❖ Parental support
- ❖ Educational assistance and advocacy
- ❖ Referrals to external resources, including mental health, health care, or other community agencies
- ❖ Employment readiness training
- ❖ Legal advocacy
- ❖ Recreational, cultural, and service learning opportunities
- ❖ Family-based activities

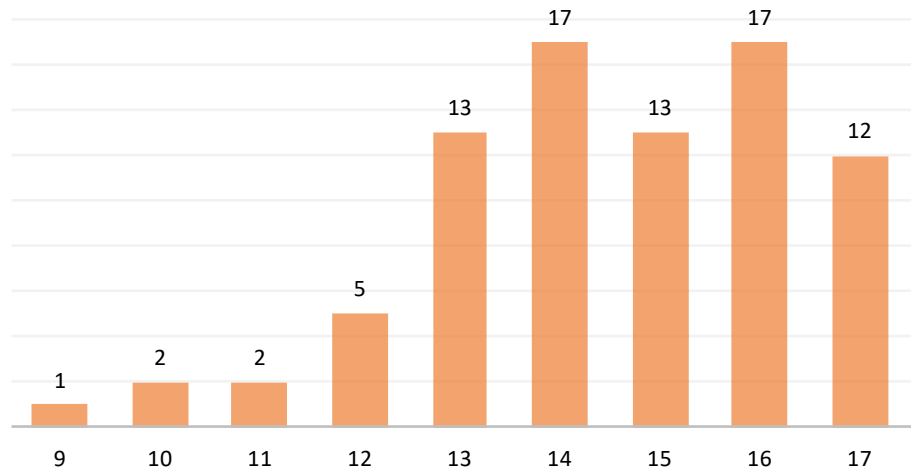
Program Demographics

During FY18, Choice Program teams served a total of 82 youth who were referred directly from Family Preservation and Safety units of Baltimore City's Department of Social Services. Youth's ages ranged from as young as 9 years old to 17 years old. The majority of referred youth were African American (91%). The Choice Program teams served both male (44%) and female (56%) clients.

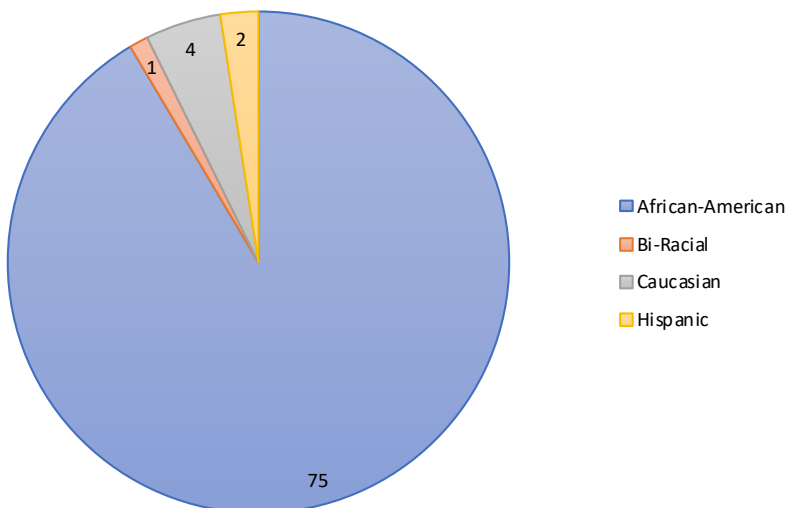
Referral Source



Age at Intake



Race/Ethnicity



Program Highlights

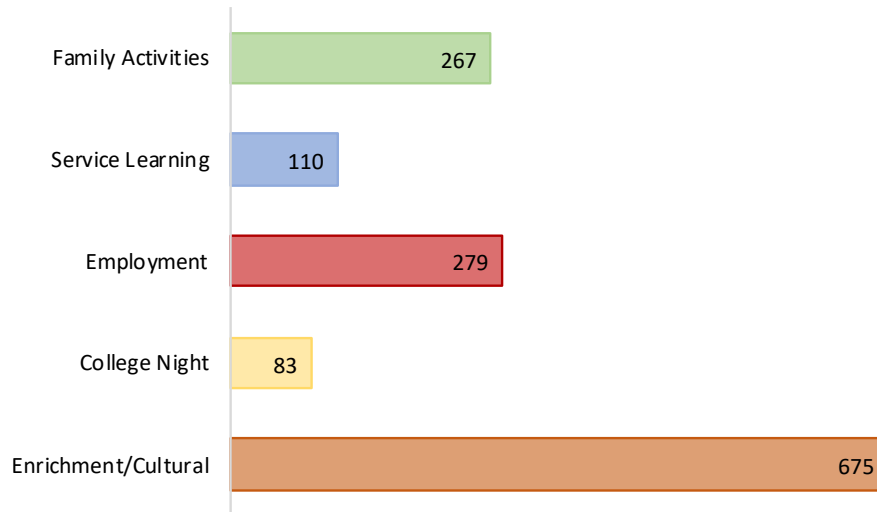
The Choice Program partnership with Baltimore City DSS offices is positive, meaningful, and strong. Choice Program staff attend case manager meetings and meetings with supervisors, regularly receiving positive feedback on program services and outcomes.

Choice AmeriCorps members often focus on informal counseling and mediation. While not clinical therapists, Fellows listen, offer feedback and ideas, and strive to create safe places for disagreements to be resolved peacefully. It is common for Fellows to receive phone calls from parents or youth and subsequently intervene in a disagreement or take a youth briefly out of the home so they can cool down and reflect on their situation. Choice fellows visit their families nightly, often acting as intermediaries between families and case managers, relaying pertinent information and concerns. Choice Fellows conduct needs assessments and connect families with community resources such as therapy, vocational training, substance abuse treatment, and educational organizations prior to program completion to ensure continued success in the home. During the last fiscal year, Choice Fellows and staff conducted 7,945 visits, resulting in 4,876 face-to-face contacts with youth and 4,272 face-to-face contacts with family members.

Type of Visit	# of Visits	# of Youth Contacts
Home Visit	5,933	3,594
Community Visit	707	522
Employment Visit	292	312
School Visit	1,013	448
Total	7,945	4,876

DSS youth and families positively engaged in the program, through a variety of recreational, cultural, service learning, and family-based activities. Choice Fellows also engaged families in 267 family-based activities during the fiscal year. Additionally, 27 DSS youth were referred to the Choice Jobs Program, where they receive job training, employment skills development, and paid on-the-job training opportunities through the Flying Fruit social enterprise sites in Baltimore City.

Annual Activities



Youth on the Choice Program’s DSS Intensive Advocacy teams played an active role in creating, developing, and participating in innovative out-of-school time enrichment through art, education, and self-advocacy during FY18. With support of Choice Program staff and AmeriCorps Members, some of these enrichment programs included:

Youth in Action (YIA), a youth-led movement supported by the Marguerite Casey Foundation, provided 58 days of out-of-school-time arts and education workshops for Choice Program youth in FY18. Programming included: field trips to museums, cultural sites, businesses and industry leaders; health workshops focused on cooking, yoga and meditation, and art therapy; workshops with local artists in photography, step, drumming, public art, poetry, music, candle making, singing, guitar, and digital media; as well as participation in local events such as the Baltimore Cease Fire, Kwanzaa celebrations, and two YIA-led culminating events. The YIA Fall Culminating Event was hosted in partnership with the Charm City Fringe Festival and the Bloomberg School of Public Health, and was held in the Bromo Seltzer Arts District in Baltimore City. The event brought together over 200 Choice Program youth, families, staff, AmeriCorps members, and community partners to celebrate our youth’s work in art and activism over the summer and fall, to host a youth-led showcase, and to energize everyone for continuing the YIA movement into the winter and spring. In the spring, YIA hosted its 3rd annual ArtRising, another opportunity to bring the Choice Program community together through art and activism. The event saw a crowd of over 300 individuals,

who came to the Motor House in Baltimore City to both remember the youth uprisings of 2015, and to celebrate our youth voices through art, music, and positive advocacy. The event included a sold out photography show, with photos by youth artists, local food and music vendors, as well as a number of community art stations.

Service Learning Opportunities continued in FY18 for Choice Program youth and included ongoing weekly activities at the Weinberg Center and My Sister's Place, serving food to the homeless population in Baltimore, as well as a number of individual service activities between youth and their mentors who would join local nonprofit and community organization service days throughout the year. The Choice Program DSS Teams and staff played a key role in continuing the efforts at the Adopt-A-Lot, a vacant lot in the Johnston Square Community that Choice Program youth are turning into a small park. Through Baltimore Housing's Adopt-a-Lot program and a partnership with Civic Works, Choice continues to renew what once was an abandoned, overgrown lot into a useable green space for the community. In FY18, the lot has provided community service days for youth and mentors to help maintain the lot, to prepare it for a community festival, and to design a mural that will be installed in FY19.

Spring Break Opportunities, in partnership with Artivate, provided youth from the Choice Program DSS teams the chance to meet each day at a site school, Excel Academy, and work on a 20 square foot mosaic to be hung in the school's main lobby. Youth worked on the project from its initial design, to laying the tiles, to its completion. They will be invited back to the school this fall for an unveiling ceremony. While this activity included youth from across Choice's programming areas, DSS youth held the most consistent participation and were actively involved in the project's success each day.

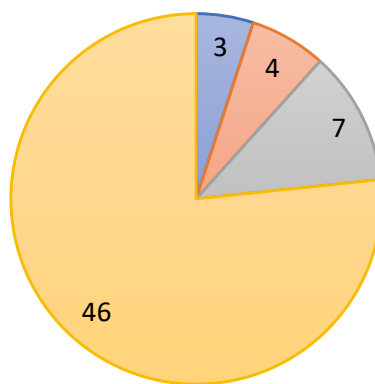
Summer Basketball camp and Jam-and Slam, were two key programming opportunities that Choice continued to provide over the summer of FY18. Summer basketball took place each Tuesday throughout for all Choice Program youth, and created an opportunity for them to participate in stretching, drills, and organized scrimmages. The camp culminated in a championship game held at the Under Armour House in East Baltimore. The Choice Program also planned a summer back to school event, Jam and Slam, along for youth in Baltimore City. During this event, community youth and Choice participants were able to collect back to school supplies, receive haircuts, get their nails polished and participate in field games. Choice handed out 253 backpacks, provided 25 haircuts and provided nail care to 30 youth across all program areas.

With support from Association of American Colleges & Universities, the Choice Program led the launch of UMBC’s Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Campus Center (TRHT) in FY 18. The goal of TRHT is to provide opportunities that bridge the divide between college campuses and communities, and to provide resources and experiences that help the breakdown racial hierarchies and injustices our youth and students face. Through the initiative, Choice Program DSS youth participated in experiences with WombWork Productions, a theater company in Baltimore City that uses performance to promote racial healing. They also participated in a number of workshops with a youth media organization, Wide Angle Media, where they create a media package that defines how they want to be represented and talked about by adults and in the media. The media package includes a video and brochure that youth designed and created. In FY19, Choice Program youth will continue to work with the TRHT initiative by participating in experiences in the community, and on UMBC’s campus.

Program Outcomes

The contract between Choice and Baltimore City DSS has stated goals of 60 youth being served, with 75% of youth remaining in the home. Eighty-two (82) youth participated in the Foster Care Diversion Program in FY18, with sixty completing. Of the sixty (60) youth who completed the program during the year, no youth was placed outside of their family of origin at the end of their tenure in the program, with three youth being AWOL (5%). A total of 22 youth remained active in the program at the end of FY17, and continued to receive services in FY18.

Dismissal Reasons



- AWOL/Runaway
- DSS Terminated Services
- Parents/Youth Terminated Services
- Successful Completion

Youth Success Stories

Tyaih (tenure 11/29/2017 - 5/29/2018) was referred to the Choice program following a physical abuse allegation was made against her mother, which resulted in Tyaih staying with her father temporarily. Upon returning to her mother's house, Tyaih and her mother were often challenged to see each other's perspectives, and argued regularly about house rules and Tyaih's relationships with friends. Tyaih was still grieving after having miscarried a pregnancy and did not feel she could be honest with her mother. As a result, Tyaih ran away from home and dropped out of her EMT program at school. The Choice team worked closely with the DSS case manager to get Tyaih and her mom enrolled in individual and family therapy to further support coping and family cohesion. Additionally, the Choice team was able to facilitate a restorative family circle with Tyaih and her mom which presented an opportunity for them to express their concerns and make a plan for more clear rules and supportive communication moving forward. Tyaih was engaged with The Choice Program and attended community service activities to fulfill her graduation requirements. She often offered words of wisdom to other young women. Tyaih participated in the Choice Jobs Program and, early on, she was identified as a leader and worked both at the Flying Fruit Inner Harbor and Camden Yards locations. When Tyaih completed the program, she had attended Senior Prom and was set to graduate high school with plans to attend community college in the fall.

Belinda (tenure 2/7/18-8/6/18) was referred to The Choice Program following a history of running away from home. Upon entering The Choice Program, Belinda shared that she had a distant relationship with her mother, whom she had met only 2 years before, upon arriving to the United States after being raised by her grandparents in Guatemala. The Choice Program encouraged more effective communication strategies between Belinda and her mother as well as facilitating several family mediations. There was a time during Belinda's tenure, that their relationship showed a drastic improvement in the way Belinda and her mother interacted and communicated. The Choice Program also supported Belinda's mother in providing her citizenship resources, after she expressed interest in wanting Belinda to become a U.S. citizen. During Belinda's tenure with The Choice Program, Belinda expressed an interest in improving her English, doing well in school, and looking into future careers she would be interested in, including the military. The Choice Program assisted Belinda in obtaining resources to be successful academically, such as an English Thesaurus and other reading materials. The Choice Program frequently assisted Belinda with homework and school projects too. During Belinda's tenure with The Choice Program, she had the opportunity to explore and foster her artistic side, by going on several recreational and cultural activities; some of these included The Choice Program's Art Studio, where youth worked with an art therapist to create different pieces of art as a form of catharsis, and several museums. Towards the end of her tenure, The Choice Program

supported Belinda in her interest in gaining employment by helping her create a resume and learn interview etiquette through mock interviews. Belinda also had the opportunity to go through The Choice Program's Job Readiness training for 6 weeks. The Choice Program then supported Belinda with applying and interviewing with the Choice-sponsored Flying Fruit Cafe, located in the University of Baltimore Law School, where she was offered employment, continuing to work past her tenure with The Choice Program's DSS Intensive Advocacy Program. Belinda finished her tenure being passed on to the 8th grade with exceptional grades and looking forward to beginning her employment with the Flying Fruit Cafe.

Program Challenges

In previous fiscal years, one of the primary challenges faced by Choice members was the lack of background information on the youth and family at the time of referral, including the Maryland Family Risk Assessment (MFRA). Over FY18, Choice staff continued to receive copies of the MFRA more frequently, leading to a more complete picture of the youth and family situation. Although the MFRA is not always provided at time of referral, this demonstrates a marked improvement from previous years.

Another challenge, especially in the second half of FY18, The Choice Program experienced low referral numbers leading to empty caseloads. Choice staff made numerous attempts to attend All Staff or Unit meetings but were largely unsuccessful due to lack of communication from DSS.

Similarly to previous fiscal years, in FY17, nine cases were terminated by parents and/or youth who no longer wished to participate in the program. Many of the cases that were terminated by parents or youth were due to unrealistic expectations of what the Choice Program services would entail. Choice staff continue to work closely with DSS Case Managers to establish expectations for program participation, to ensure that youth and families who are referred will enter the program with a clear understanding of program services.

In FY18, in response to the previous challenge of no longer being co-located with case managers, Choice Program staff worked with DSS Program Managers to gain access to cubicle space in the Calvert St DSS building. In the very beginning on FY19, Choice staff began utilizing this space in hopes of making The Choice Program more accessible for CMs to refer families to the program and also with the aim to strengthen the partnership that has been established with DSS. Results have yet

to be seen as it's only been a couple weeks. Additionally, Choice Program staff made great improvements in connecting with case managers on a consistent basis, typically weekly. Building relationships and maintaining consistent communication with DSS Case Managers and Supervisors remains critical in delivering high quality services to youth and their families in Baltimore so this will remain a priority in FY19.