



Effective Strategies – Equitable Systems – Strong Communities



Thriving Youth Strategy Evaluation Report June 2025

FAMILY LEAGUE
OF BALTIMORE

Family League's Mission

The Family League of Baltimore, founded in 1991, serves as the Local Management Board for Baltimore City. Its mission is to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families through coordinated, data-driven strategies that align public and private resources to meet community needs

The Family League focuses on four priority areas:

- Cradle to Career Education
- Healthy Families
- Economically Secure Families
- Safe and Thriving Families

Thriving Youth Strategy Overview

- Launched in 2021, the Thriving Youth Strategy is a key part of Family League's youth development and public safety work. The Strategy focuses on youth ages 11 to 17 who are at risk of or already involved in the juvenile justice system.
- It seeks to prevent and reduce justice system involvement through early intervention, holistic support, and trauma-informed care.
- The Strategy aligns with Baltimore City's *Comprehensive Violence Prevention Plan* and *Prioritizing Our Youth* initiative, and it supports coordinated, youth-centered, community-driven solutions to promote long-term well-being.

Purpose of the Evaluation

This evaluation, conducted by Community Science in partnership with Family League, aimed to:

- **Assess the impact and effectiveness** of the five-year investment in the Thriving Youth Strategy to inform future funding, program growth, and replication efforts.
- **Share key findings** with local communities, the City of Baltimore, and state agencies, contributing to broader discussions on diversion and mentoring as alternatives to formal justice involvement.
- **Produce evidence-based recommendations** to improve programs, strengthen advocacy, and demonstrate the Strategy's value in supporting youth, families, and communities.

The evaluation focused on multiple outcome areas, including:

- Retention of participants in programs and effective service delivery
- Increased referrals to additional support programs
- Development and completion of youth community support plans
- Reduction of barriers to youth engagement and process
- Decrease in squeegeeing activity
- Maintenance and re-establishment of connections to work and school
- Increased use of restorative justice as an alternative to formal juvenile justice involvement
- High levels of youth satisfaction with program services and engagement opportunities

About the Grantee Organizations

The Thriving Youth Strategy funds four grantee organizations:



Baltimore Brothers

Founded: 2015

Provides violence prevention, workforce development, leadership training, re-entry support, housing stabilization, and trauma-informed care.



MOAAME (Mayor's Office of African American Male Engagement)

Founded: 2018

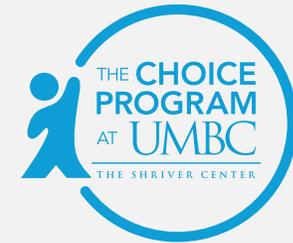
Combines mentorship, economic opportunity, and advocacy to empower Black boys and young men.

NEW VISION YOUTH SERVICES

New Vision Youth Services (NVYS)

Founded: 2005

Uses mentorship, restorative practices, and life skills training to build resilience among high-risk youth.



The Choice Program at UMBC

Founded: 1987

Offers mentoring, job readiness, academic support, and restorative justice alternatives for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

Shift in Programming to Meet Youth Needs

The COVID-19 pandemic deeply impacted the initial rollout of the Thriving Youth Strategy, requiring rapid adaptation. Shutdowns and social distancing disrupted traditional relationship building and limited in-person access to youth.

In response, grantee organizations made significant shifts:

- **Mentorship deepened:** All grantees emphasized mentorship as a key tool not just for engagement but for identity building, purpose, and reducing recidivism. Some hired alumni as peer mentors, creating leadership pathways and stronger youth buy-in.
- **Trauma-informed practices expanded:** Grantees reframed disengagement or resistance as signs of unmet emotional or social needs, integrating mental health support, flexible expectations, and relationship-centered approaches.
- **Prevention focus increased:** Many programs began reaching youth earlier — in schools and communities — to prevent justice system involvement before it began.
- **Investment in staff became critical:** Sustaining these shifts highlighted the need for continued investment in staff development, retention, and growth.

These changes reflect a transition toward more holistic, proactive, and youth-centered engagement models.



Methods

Community Science used a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data:

- **Document review** of grantee materials, reports, and outreach content.
- **16 interviews** with grantee leaders, mentors, staff, and external partners.
- **3 youth focus groups** with 26 participants, primarily Black males ages 11–17.
- **Parent survey** completed by 20 parents and caregivers.
- **Secondary data analysis** of grantee-reported outcomes covering 2021–2025.

This approach captured both measurable outcomes and the lived experiences of youth, families, and staff.

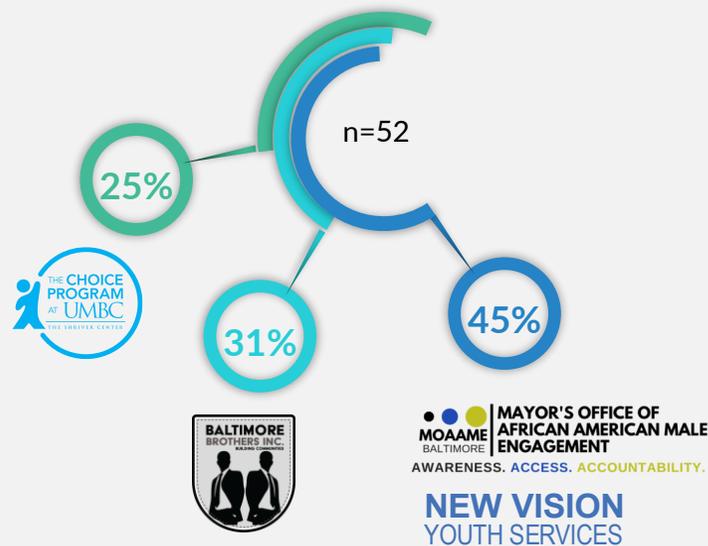


Exhibit 1. Interview and Focus Group Participation by Grantee Organization

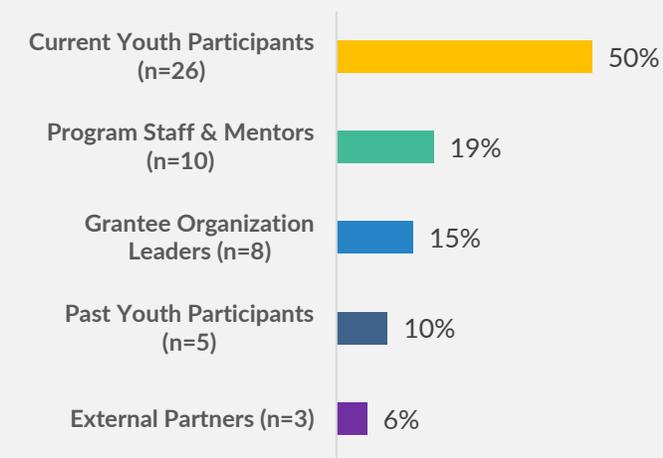


Exhibit 2. Composition of Interviews and Focus Groups n=52

Findings: Three Core Domains

The findings are divided into three main sections that correspond with the evaluation central performance areas. Each section addresses a specific aspect of program performance and outcomes, including:

What and How Much We Do? This section presents data on program reach and includes a quantitative breakdown and highlights trends in participation.

How Well We Do It? This section assesses the effectiveness of program implementation, including community plan development, and details how programs supported youth in regaining connections to school and work, life skills, and alternatives to justice system involvement.

Is Anyone Better Off? This section focuses on outcomes for youth, such as completion of support plans, reduced risky behavior, maintaining school and work engagement, as well as positive change among participants.

What and How Much We Do: Understanding the Reach of the Strategy

Number of New Youth Enrolled and Total Youth Served

From 2021 to 2025, the Thriving Youth Strategy served 1,324 youth across 79 Baltimore schools.

- 93% of participants were Black or African American
- 85% were male
- 42% were ages 15–17

Source of referral to the program was reported for only 67% (N = 1,003) of the sample.

Youth were referred primarily by community organizations (29%), self-referral (11%), Baltimore City Public Schools (10%), and the Department of Juvenile Justice (8%).

Youth who participated in the program over multiple years had lower recidivism rates than those who participated for only one year.

What and How Much We Do: Understanding the Reach of the Strategy

Program Engagement and Youth Retention

Youth stayed engaged when mentors and programs offered:

- **Mentorship Through Connection:** Relatable mentors who built trust through shared experiences.
- **Consistency Builds Safety and Trust:** Mentors who were available beyond formal sessions and checked in regularly.
- **Relationships at the Heart of Retention:** Programs that responded to youth needs with empathy.
- **Peer Influence Fuels Motivation:** Youth were motivated by the success of peers who navigated similar challenges.

“They motivate us to accomplish our goals. When we first join, we make a goal chart. They don’t let us forget about what we said we’d do.” (Youth Participant)

Parent and Caregiver Perspective: Trust, Impact, and Opportunities for Growth

Parents and caregivers reported:

- High satisfaction with their child's growth, responsibility, and motivation.
- Appreciation for positive role models and clear communication from staff.
- A desire for more frequent programming and continued partnership.

Parents credited the programs with providing opportunities their children otherwise wouldn't have had.

How Well We Do It: Understanding Program Effectiveness

Re-engagement in School and Work Through Holistic Support

Grantees helped youth reconnect to school and employment through advocacy, life skills training, and wraparound supports.

- These plans included SMART goals and were adjusted over time with mentor guidance.
- In 2024, over 70% of Baltimore Brothers and NVYS participants created plans; the Choice Program rose from 44% in 2024 to 80% in 2025.

Youth reported that having clear, written goals helped them stay focused and motivated.

“We’ve shifted from fixing everything for youth to guiding them, so they initiate actions themselves. Our goal is to set them up for independence.” (Mentor)

How Well We Do It: Understanding Program Effectiveness

Re-engagement in School and Work Through Holistic Support

Grantees helped youth reconnect to school and employment through advocacy, life skills training, and wraparound supports.

- **MOAAME:** 74% re-engaged in 2024.
- **NVYS:** 54% in 2024.
- **Baltimore Brothers:** 96% in 2023.

Youth valued help with navigating school demands, applying for jobs, and balancing family responsibilities.

How Well We Do It: Understanding Program Effectiveness

Re-engagement in School and Work Through Holistic Support

Youth re-engaged when mentors and programs provided:

- **Life Skills and Workforce Preparation:** Practical skills like resume writing, money management, and interview prep offered alternatives to street work. Mentors gave life coaching and helped youth transition to adulthood.
- **Academic Support and Educational Advocacy:** Support went beyond homework, including tutoring, GED prep, and school coordination. Staff tracked progress and promoted the value of education.
- **Navigating School, Work, and Family Responsibilities:** Programs helped youth balance school, work, caregiving, and basic needs with flexible services like transportation, family support, and emotional care.

“We build self-efficacy by helping youth identify resources, apply for things themselves, and advocate constructively for themselves.” (Grantee Organization Leader)

How Well We Do It: Understanding Program Effectiveness

Restorative Justice and Juvenile Diversion

Grantees provided restorative justice alternatives, such as mediation and court support.

- **Baltimore Brothers and Choice Program:** 100% of youth served by restorative practices in 2023.
- Effectiveness depended on youth readiness and stable environments.

Mentors emphasized patience, outreach, and creating supportive spaces for accountability and healing.

How Well We Do It: Understanding Program Effectiveness

Restorative Justice and Juvenile Diversion

- **Youth Readiness Shapes Program Impact:** Programs were most effective when youth were emotionally prepared to engage. Mentors addressed trauma, instability, and trust through sustained outreach and accountability, not quick fixes.
- **Restorative Practices Foster Accountability:** Mediation circles, apology letters, and mentorship helped youth take responsibility, repair harm, and rebuild relationships. Success came through emotional support, consistent check-ins, and trust-based strategies.

“It’s really about how much you want it. They open the door, and you just have to walk through it.” (Past Youth Participant)

Is Anyone Better Off?

Completion of Community Support Plans

Youth were more likely to complete their plans when mentors provided consistent support and structure.

- **Baltimore Brothers:** 95–100% plan completion (2022–2024)
- **MOAAME:** Up to 79% in 2025
- **NVYS:** 50% in 2025

Mentors helped youth stay accountable through check-ins, encouragement, and guidance.

Is Anyone Better Off?

Completion of Community Support Plans

Youth stayed engaged when mentors and programs offered:

- **Ongoing Support Strengthens Accountability:** Regular check-ins, goal tracking, and steady communication, built trust and encouraged youth to complete their plans. Mentors served as consistent coaches, offering support beyond program hours and helping youth turn requirements into personal motivation and ownership.

“Our mentors always ask us, ‘What is your why?’ That helps us stay focused.” (Youth Participant)

Is Anyone Better Off?

Use of Alternatives to Justice System Processing

Grantees helped youth avoid formal justice involvement through trauma-informed, community-based alternatives.

- **Baltimore Brothers:** Diverted 100% of youth (65 in 2023, 58 in 2024, 23 in 2025).
- **The Choice Program:** Diverted 100% of youth (38 in 2023, 18 in 2024, 17 in 2025).
- **MOAAME:** Diverted 33 youth in 2024 and 124 in 2025.
- **NVYS:** Diverted 100% of youth served (72 in 2024, 21 in 2025).

Youth valued alternatives that reflected care, accountability, and connection to community.

Is Anyone Better Off?

Completion of Community Support Plans

Youth stayed engaged when mentors and programs addressed:

- **Systemic Barriers to Diversion Success:** Challenges like housing instability, lack of transportation, and funding gaps made it harder for youth to succeed in diversion programs. Success depended on stable environments and coordinated, responsive care.
- **Opening Doors to Real Opportunities:** Youth turned to street work for survival, not crime. Programs that offered paid alternatives—like job training, youth employment, and entrepreneurial support—helped youth shift from risk-based strategies to long-term goals.

“The number of youth squeegeeing has dropped significantly because the young people in our program have alternatives, and that is why they are choosing other paths.” (Grantee Organization Leader)

Is Anyone Better Off?

Maintained or Gained Connection to Work or School at Discharge

Grantees helped youth build and sustain connections to school and employment through advocacy, skill-building, and wraparound services.

- **Baltimore Brothers:** 97% maintained or gained connection in 2024.
- **The Choice Program:** 52% in 2024; 50% in 2025.
- **NVYS:** 54% in 2024; 33% in 2025.

Youth emphasized the value of programs that helped them stay on track with school and work while managing life's challenges.

Is Anyone Better Off?

Maintained or Gained Connection to Work or School at Discharge

Youth stayed engaged when mentors and programs offered:

- **Give Us Work That Respect Us:** Youth were more engaged when programs provided paid, skill-building opportunities—like stipends, job placements, and trade school access—that showed respect and led to long-term growth. Partnerships with businesses and communities helped ensure these opportunities aligned with youth goals and created real pathways forward.

“That’s why stipends and job placement are so important. We’re not just trying to keep them busy; we’re trying to set them up for long-term success.” (Grantee Organization Leader)

Lessons Learned

Programs that responded with empathy, flexibility, and practical support had the greatest success in fostering long-term engagement.

- **Mentorship Fuels Purpose and Growth:** Credible mentors help youth build purpose, accountability, and new possibilities.
- **Behavior Reflects Unmet Needs:** Disengagement often signals deeper struggles (e.g., trauma, food insecurity, housing instability).

Recommendations for Family League of Baltimore to Consider

- **Expand Youth Programming:** Youth and grantees called for more youth-led, trauma-informed programs that balance fun and structure, start earlier, and include older youth. They also urged more leadership development, therapy access, and school-based options.
- **Invest in Staff Development and Retention:** Consistent, supported staff are key. Grantees recommended better pay, professional growth, and wellness support to reduce burnout.
- **Strengthen Academic and Career Pathways:** Youth benefited from job training, academic advocacy, and paid opportunities that built stable futures.
- **Addressing Barriers Through Partnerships:** Address systemic barriers through partnerships focused on housing, transportation, and family supports.
- **Secure Long-Term, Flexible Funding:** Sustained, flexible funding is critical to stabilize programs, retain staff, and scale what works.
- **Support Replication and Continuous Learning:** As the model grows, ensure expansion is backed by technical assistance, staffing, and evaluation to maintain quality and impact.

Conclusion

The Thriving Youth Strategy

When programs center trust, relationships, and responsiveness, they make a measurable difference. Grantees served 1,300+ youth across 79 schools, focusing on those at highest risk. The most successful programs created safe, consistent spaces where youth felt seen, respected, and supported.

Youth stayed engaged through mentorship, peer motivation, and family-informed support. Programs addressed deeper struggles, like housing instability and trauma, with empathy and flexibility.

Diversion worked best when paired with real alternatives: job placements, stipends, training, and trade school paths. Success depended on strong youth-adult relationships across different program models, connection over compliance, and building accountability through care.

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Q&A

THANK YOU



Let's do some good work together!

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