

Choose to Change: Your Mind, Your Game

An innovative approach to violence prevention jointly delivered by
Children's Home & Aid and Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

About Choose to Change

Choose to Change (C2C) is a community-based intervention that aims to help youth stabilize and thrive in their school and communities. Started in 2015 by Children's Home & Aid and Youth Advocates Programs (YAP), Inc., C2C offers youth a unique program combining individualized advocate-wraparound services, including intensive mentoring, with group-based, trauma-informed therapy. Through this combination of supports youth gain a better understanding of how past traumas and chronic stressors can impact their thinking, behavior and their overall emotion response. Over the course of six-months, YAP advocates meet youth individually for at least eight hours a week, building strong interpersonal bonds and offering wraparound and mentoring services that focus on addressing each young person's specific needs along with the needs of their families. In addition to this, Children's Home & Aid coaches lead youth through 12-16 sessions of group trauma-informed cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) called SPARCS (Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress), which encourages them to challenge unhelpful thinking patterns and build better problem-solving and communication skills. The result is youth with a returned sense of hope, enthusiasm and resiliency.

"The Choose to Change program played an important part in making sure I was kept on a path that guided me towards making the right decisions. Without it, I'm not sure where I'd be today."

- Malik Hicks, C2C Alum

At the core of the C2C model is the combination of intensive wraparound services and advocacy, trauma-informed group therapy, as well as the programs ability to uniquely serve youth who are disengaged or in the process of disengaging from school. The key components of the C2C model include:

- **Relentless Engagement** – Advocates do not give up on participants, especially those who are difficult to engage.
- **Applied Learning** – Advocates attend group therapy and help youth identify context where CBT skills can apply



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- **Decision-Making** – Participants learn tools to disrupt negative thoughts, resolve conflict and build self-efficacy.
- **Strong Relationships** – C2C staff bring lived experiences and compassion in order to build life-long relationships.

Generating Rigorous Evidence

Since its launch in 2015 in the greater Englewood communities, C2C has served over a thousand youth across the South and West Sides of Chicago. From the beginning C2C has partnered with the University of Chicago Crime Lab and Education Lab to rigorously evaluate the program’s impact through a randomized control trial (RCT). The mid-study results suggested that C2C leads to a sustained reduction in violence involvement and increases participants’ attachment to school.



Expansion

The City of Chicago and Chicago Public Schools are committed to ensuring the C2C program continues to expand and empower Chicago’s youth. Through a private-public partnership CPS has committed to providing youth across the city with high quality programming and is seeking to enroll 600 new youth into C2C services this year.

In addition to this, Children’s Home & Aid and Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. are seeking to expand the number of local providers capable of delivering C2C-informed programming. To do so, they will begin training new partners in how to deliver a C2C-informed program.



For more information about Choose to Change, please visit www.choosetochangechicago.org

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