

Kaitlin Coyle



In the small, rural area of Uniontown, Alabama, Choosing to Help Others In our Community Excel (C.H.O.I.C.E.) serves as a resource-based organization that improves quality of life, self-sufficiency, and employability for Uniontown residents. This organization's purpose and importance lies in the history of the South. Uniontown is in the historically, poverty-stricken Black Belt region of Alabama which spans the Southeastern part of the US. The region is named for its rich, black soil—often coveted for plantations—and its reputation as a former slave state. Before and

long after the Civil War, the region's Black community was consistently disenfranchised. Today, these community members are forced to stay in the area because their economic status prevents them from moving elsewhere.

Through collaborative partnerships, C.H.O.I.C.E. strives to solve the long-lasting problems facing the Uniontown community. The organization provides access to programs, activities, and services in six focus areas: workforce development, mentoring, education, cultural arts, health and wellness, and athletics and recreation. Emefa Butler, founder and director of C.H.O.I.C.E., began the organization by emphasizing two areas in Uniontown's community: youth and education.

Poverty in regions such as Uniontown often reaches at or above 50%. As a result, these rural areas are underdeveloped and have few resources for their struggling citizens, especially youth, who cannot access internet, computers, or school supplies to further their education. Because of these circumstances, C.H.O.I.C.E. partnered with several organizations to bring three education-based programs to Uniontown: the Literacy Initiative Program, the Educate Through College Program, and the Youth Advisory Committee.

C.H.O.I.C.E.'s Literacy Initiative Program partners with Alabama Partnership for Children to bring Dolly Parton's Imagination Library to Uniontown. The Imagination Library program was designed by Dolly Parton in 1996 in Sevierville, Tennessee, Parton's hometown. The program's mission is to inspire a love of reading in youth; to accomplish this, they provide free books to children in need. Since its creation, the program has quickly expanded, reaching international heights in 2006. C.H.O.I.C.E. and Alabama Partnership for Children provide these books to children in Uniontown, ages zero to five, through their Literacy Initiative Program.



The Educate Through College Program and Youth Advisory Committee are two programs created by C.H.O.I.C.E. Educate Through College assists first-year college students by pairing them with designated mentors. College can be daunting for students coming from rural, heavily impoverished areas and without encouragement, many drop out. By pairing these young adults with mentors, they can be helped and encouraged to succeed in their higher education dreams.

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The Youth Advisory Committee is another mentorship program, comprised of ninth to twelfth grade Uniontown students with a desire to give back to their community. The committee plans and hosts an event often focused on community pride, time and money management, character, and/or leadership skills. After students finish their term, they can apply for a \$1,000 scholarship to kickstart their future in higher education.

Commented [KC1]: Query for the original writer and/or SME: I attempted to find this information on the C.H.O.I.C.E. website; however, I was unable to. Here, when you say "students" will receive scholarships, are you referring to the 9-12 grade students who serve as mentors, or the mentees (students that are being mentored)?

This needs to be clarified