



Background & Relevance

The Columbus Urban League (CUL) is a community-based, non-profit advocacy organization founded in 1918. CUL is an affiliate of the National Urban League and is one of the largest and most prestigious community-based organizations in Central Ohio. We pride ourselves on being Central Ohio's oldest and most effective family advocate. Fighting for equity and justice for over a century, the organization has emerged as a respected, relevant, and effective force in overcoming poverty and achieving economic mobility.

Our coaches and experts come from and uniquely understand the urban community, which enables them to design and deliver culturally relevant and resonant content. Every year, we connect with thousands of people experiencing crisis after crisis as they try to navigate their way through and out of poverty. With integrity, innovative solutions, and a collaborative network of community partners, CUL helps them move from survival to thriving.

CUL relies on a holistic service array of best-practice interventions focused on three core lines of service—economic mobility, social mobility, and career services. Across the service lines, CUL has a 27~ program/initiative portfolio where any family member can achieve transformative outcomes such as entrepreneurship, housing stability, restorative justice resources, reentry, workforce development, and youth development. These programmatic interventions help remove barriers, improve community connections, stabilize the family, and empower the individual to adopt new strategies, skills, and habits. We serve 18,000+ people annually with over 160,000 engagements and interactions in all our programs.

Empirically, we serve primarily Black residents of Columbus, who are “five times more likely to live in high-poverty neighborhoods than whites” (Fredrich). Most participants reside in areas of concentrated poverty, namely Franklinton, Hilltop, Linden, Weinland Park, and Southeastern parts of Columbus. These zip codes represent some of the lowest incomes in Columbus, the highest percentages of Black residents, and where “poverty affects all stages of life” (Rosenberg).

While most of our clients are low- and low-middle-income, we also partner with middle- and middle-high-income residents to offer resources that build small businesses, increase homeownership, and other services that contribute to generational wealth-building for our community.

Social Mobility Enrichment & Initiatives

Social Mobility is an area of Impact of the Columbus Urban League in Columbus, Ohio. The mission of social mobility is to provide programs and services empowering youth and families to achieve optimum potential. We aim to help youth and families achieve their goals with equity and access.

Through the services provided, we can support our clients starting at the early age of head start and throughout adulthood. Ultimately, we are helping our youth and families thrive in the underserved communities in Franklin County by providing a network of resources.

Our social mobility goal is to provide a lifelong impact in the lives of youth and families by offering multifaceted programs that create resilient individuals, families, and communities.

Strive Toward Empowerment and Potential (STEP) Initiative

STEP is a resource for youths and their parents. It supports education enrichment, health and wellness, public speaking and job-skill development, conflict resolution, and personal and family development education to promote healthy adolescent, familial, and communal relationships and reduce justice involvement.

Columbus Urban League seeks to create familial and community environments where our children can build lives, they are happy in, proud of, and full of possibility.

- Program Impact
 - **70 %** of participants graduated since the pilot year.
 - **226** total youth engaged.
 - **113** Parents connected in programming.
 - **80%** of total youth are engaged in programming.

In partnership with the City of Columbus & Franklin County Municipal Courts, we provide STEP classes and resources to families with children on the cusp of entering the justice system. The families joining the STEP program receive a Family Coach from CUL, who helps identify holistic resources for the parents. This provides equitable skills to foster healthy relationships between the parent and the child to deter all parties from further involvement with the court system.

The Columbus Urban League is well known for the countless resources aimed at providing families with pathways towards success, utilizing these resources and getting to the root cause or social determinants of health (Finance, Education, Health, or Safety) in hopes of eliminating the time parents are away from their children:

- A peer mentoring model with trained professionals who cultivate a pro-social community.
- An evidence-based curriculum and immersive experiences are used to identify and change maladaptive thinking and behavior patterns.
- Access to CUL's community resource network to remove barriers to basic needs (I.e., housing, food, clothing, physical/mental health care, etc.)
- Access to CUL's Career Services and Financial Services to create opportunities to earn an honest, living wage and develop habits supporting stable employment and economic change.
- An evidence-based curriculum is used to restore relationships between co-parents and children.

The STEP program, spanning eight weeks, served as a dynamic platform for youth engagement and empowerment. During this period, we implemented various activities and initiatives to foster personal growth, community involvement, and a sense of responsibility among our participants.

Key Initiative Components During Cohort

Guest Speakers: Throughout the eight-week duration, we had the privilege of hosting three guest speakers. Their insights and expertise enriched the program experience, offering valuable perspectives on various life and career paths.

Experiential Learning Opportunities: A central component of our program was introducing our youth to new experiences and opportunities. An unforgettable highlight was our visit to Top Golf, providing them with a novel sporting experience that encouraged camaraderie and skill-building.

Community Vision Boards: To inspire creativity and goal setting, we facilitated the creation of Community Vision Boards. This exercise encouraged participants to envision their future contributions to the community and set tangible goals.

Community Engagement: An essential aspect of our program involved giving back to the community. Our participants volunteered at a local food pantry and actively participated in community clean-up initiatives, instilling a sense of civic responsibility.

Addressing Real-World Challenges

Our ability to adapt programming to address real-world challenges faced by our participants was a significant achievement during this cohort. We recognized that many of our youth were directly impacted by incidents within their community. Creating a safe and open dialogue space allowed them to express their emotions and brainstorm solutions to prevent similar occurrences.

Decision-making and teamwork were key themes throughout the cohort. We designed healthy competition games and activities to help participants develop decision-making skills and foster teamwork to achieve common goals.

Safety and Positive Environment

We take immense pride in maintaining a safe and positive environment throughout the program. There were no acts of violence or disruptions during our sessions or program activities, a testament to the trusting relationships and supportive atmosphere we cultivated.

STEP Success Stories

Triandous Kelly, a distinguished senior at Linden McKinney STEAM Academy, adeptly navigated academic and anger management challenges as the eldest among four siblings. Through the transformative mentorship of the S.T.E.P program, he not only demonstrated significant academic improvement but also honed essential life skills. Now poised for graduation, Triandous has seamlessly transitioned into a role as a student assistant coach for the middle school basketball team, exemplifying not only his personal growth but also his commitment to giving back. His narrative stands as a poignant testimony to the profound impact of mentorship and unwavering determination in surmounting obstacles.

Markwan Ayers, formerly ensnared in the throes of anger issues and disengagement from academia, now stands as a testament to the transformative power of the S.T.E.P program. In a remarkably short span of a year, Markwan not only conquered his anger issues but is also charting a course toward high school graduation. Becoming a captain on the basketball team, Markwan's journey illuminates not only his individual growth and leadership prowess but also underscores the instrumental role of the S.T.E.P program in steering him towards triumph. His narrative is an inspiring testament to resilience and transformation.

AJohnnie Sims, confronted with the dual challenges of sickle cell disease and anger management struggles, found solace and guidance in the S.T.E.P Program. Paired with a mentor, AJohnnie embarked on a journey of acceptance and positive expression, transforming from a youth grappling with his condition to a revered leader among his peers. His odyssey serves as a compelling illustration of the potency of mentorship, resilience, and self-discovery—showcasing that with steadfast support, one can transmute obstacles into wellsprings of strength, inspiring others along the way.

Joshua Martin's trajectory through our program emerges as a formidable example of the profound impact our organization wields on the lives of justice-involved youth. Commencing his journey with academic struggles, a challenging demeanor, and a history of criminal behavior, Joshua's evolution was nothing short of remarkable under the dedicated guidance of our mentors. Despite initial setbacks, Joshua's newfound motivation propelled him to make informed decisions and elevate his academic standing. His success story is a testament to the transformative potential embedded within our program and underscores the imperative of investing in the latent potential of our youth.

In the eloquent words of Josh's mother, LaMara Jameson, "This program has been heaven-sent for my son. DJ and Ralph brought forth a side of my son that I didn't know existed. He's more confident in who he is and has set obtainable goals for himself that will pave the way for continued success. My son would likely be in dire straits if not for this program."

STEP Pipeline –

Robust Referral System with Columbus City Schools

- STEP has established a strong referral pipeline with Columbus City Schools, which did not exist when the program first started. This has likely expanded the number of participants joining through the public school system.

Charter School Referral Pipeline

- Another significant source of participants has been developed through referrals from charter schools. Participants on the cusp of entering the justice system sometime must have an alternative to the public school system. Charter Schools offer that alternative making them a pivotal asset to the STEP pipeline.

Juvenile Court System Referrals

- STEP have received some participant referrals from the juvenile court system, this relationship is still being fully developed as a robust referral pipeline.
- STEP has the full support of Lead Juvenile Judge Lasheyl N. Stroud, who has provided letters endorsing the program, indicating potential for further expansion of this referral source.

Community Referrals

- The majority of your participants across the eight cohorts so far have joined through community referrals, highlighting the program's successful outreach and partnerships in the local community.

STEP Data Report -

Notes	S.T.E.P Numbers Report	Number
	Total Number of youths Signed Up	226
	Total Number of youths Graduated	159
	# of Columbus City Schools	29
	# of Other Schools	51
	# of Students on probation	13
Notes	These were the number of students that were on probation while attending our 8-week program.	
	# of Court Referrals	2
Notes	There have only been 2 court referrals since the program's inception. Those 2 referrals came from Judge Stroud.	
	# of Girls	84
	# of Boys	133
	# Grade Levels	8