



# Success Starts Here

## 2024 **Impact** Report

# Letter From the Executive Director

To our HeartSmiles Family,

As we reflect on 2024, which I named “The Year of Sustainability,” I want to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for your unwavering support and commitment to our mission. 2024 has been both challenging and rewarding, focusing on consistent growth while laying a strong foundation for our future. Your belief in our work has been instrumental in helping us disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, dismantle poverty at the family level, and uplift youth from underprivileged communities in Baltimore.

As we approach 2025, we are filled with excitement and anticipation as it marks our 10th year of service as an organization. When I started this journey, I had no idea how I would survive the first 10 days, let alone the first 10 years. Being in this space has challenged me in ways I could have never imagined, from my leadership to my faith. As we stand on year 10, we are proud to announce the launch of the first HeartSmiles Youth Success Center, a space dedicated to fostering growth, learning, and opportunity for our Heartbeats and other young people who want to be successful. Additionally, we are thrilled to introduce Heartbeat Café, a carry-out restaurant that serves delicious meals while preparing young people for careers in the culinary arts.

It is my belief that as you take a deep look at our past year, you will agree that HeartSmiles has become the model for youth success and leadership in a world that has often overlooked the potential of our youth to lead and shape their own lives and futures.


Thank you for being an essential part of our journey and of our village. This work is not possible without you and I’m looking forward to continuing what we started until we have effectively ended the generational cycle of poverty in Baltimore’s Black Butterfly.

With deep appreciation,



Joni Holifield  
Founder & Executive Director, HeartSmiles



Follow **Ms. Joni’s Jewels**   
and **Focused Friday** on  
Instagram for daily and  
weekly youth leadership  
messages and sessions

[@heartsmilesmd](https://www.instagram.com/heartsmilesmd)



Artwork and shoes created by Heartbeat, Jima Chester







Photography by Heartbeat, Breyanna Dabney

# Table of Contents

- 03** Executive Summary
- 05** HeartBeats Around the World
- 07** Programs At a Glance
- 09** HeartSmiles Continuum of Care
- 11** A Message to our Supporters

# Executive Summary



HeartSmiles was founded in 2015 by Joni Holifield with a vision to create a brighter future for Baltimore City’s youth by addressing systemic barriers and empowering young people to realize their full potential. Rooted in the values of leadership, mentorship, and community support, HeartSmiles began as a grassroots initiative to provide safe spaces for youth to grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Over the years, it has evolved into a trusted organization known for fostering confidence, leadership, and entrepreneurial spirit among the city’s most vulnerable populations.

**1.5K**  
YOUTH SERVED

**2K**  
PROGRAM HOURS

**20.5K**  
MEALS SERVED

In 2024, HeartSmiles made significant strides, impacting over 1,500 youth through mentorship, career advancement, and leadership programs tailored to their unique needs. From serving 20,500 meals during its programming and community impact events to empowering participants and youth leaders in our **peer to peer programming** and **earn to learn** opportunities, HeartSmiles has fostered resilience and personal growth. With expanded programming, strengthened community partnerships, and measurable increases in youth confidence, leadership, and career path development, HeartSmiles continues to transform lives and inspire a new generation of leaders in Baltimore City.



Photography by Heartbeat, Breyanna Dabney

**Mission**  
To help youth reach their version of success by putting them at the intersection of access and opportunity

- Values**
- Confidence
  - Humility
  - Accountability
  - Integrity

**Promise**  
We promise that any young person who wants to grow both personally and professionally, **WILL.**



In addition to its direct programming, HeartSmiles extended its reach through impactful community initiatives designed to uplift and unite Baltimore City. By providing essential resources such as coats for elementary and middle school students, school supply bags, and feminine care kits for students and shelters, HeartSmiles addressed critical needs while fostering dignity and opportunity. Community cleanups and back-to-school events brought families together, promoting engagement with HeartSmiles programs and reinforcing a shared sense of pride and collaboration. Thoughtful gestures like baking and delivering pies to homeless shelters underscored the organization’s commitment to compassion and care. These efforts demonstrate HeartSmiles’ holistic approach to empowerment, ensuring that both youth and the broader community benefit from its mission to inspire growth, leadership, and resilience.



1,400 coats donated to students at Matthew Henson, Fort Worthington, and Collington Square Elementary and Middle Schools



250 pies baked and 500 school supply and feminine hygiene kits created to give to those in need



275 families received ingredients through 11 virtual cooking sessions, allowing them to prepare meals at home and strengthen community bonds.

# Achievements



## Opening of the First Youth Success Center in Baltimore, MD

In 2024, HeartSmiles proudly opened the Youth Success Center—a vibrant space where Baltimore’s youth can grow, lead, and unlock their full potential through mentorship, leadership training, and real opportunities to thrive.



## HeartSmiles Awarded the Shirley Nathan Pulliam Award

HeartSmiles proudly received the prestigious Shirley Nathan-Pulliam Health Equity Champion Award in recognition of its transformative impact on Baltimore’s youth and commitment to advancing equity and empowerment.

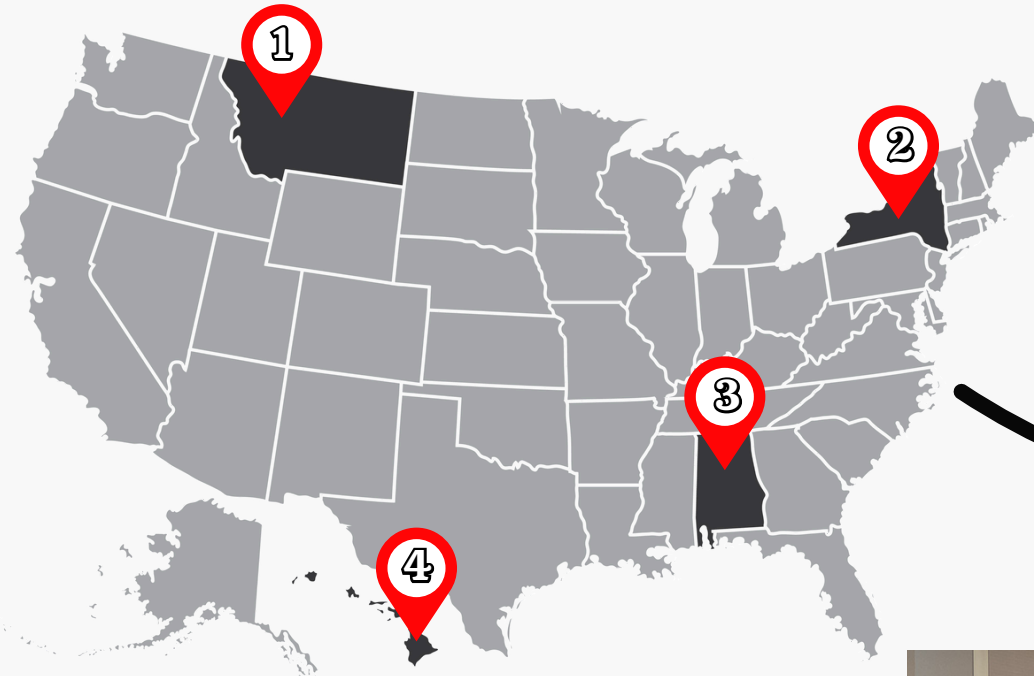


## Opening of HeartBeat Cafe, 2420 E Monument St

In 2024, Heartbeat Café opened its doors as a vibrant community hub and culinary training program, empowering Baltimore’s youth with skills for successful careers in the culinary arts.

# HeartBeats Around the World

In 2024, HeartSmiles expanded its impact and presence far beyond Baltimore City, showcasing its commitment to learning, collaboration, and leadership development on a global scale.



1

## Emigrant, MT

HeartSmiles joined nonprofit leaders at One Mind's West Creek Ranch retreat, addressing mental health challenges and advancing sustainable, impactful practices.

2

## New York, NY

HeartSmiles' annual Bloomberg trip connected youth to careers, mentorships, and community impact through pies and backpack donations.

3

## Montgomery, AL

HeartSmiles proudly participated in the BCYF Learning Lab's Our Story, Our Power Opening Plenary, exploring justice movements' history at Montgomery's Legacy Sites.

4

## Honolulu, HI

HeartSmiles Heartbeats showcased their leadership on a global stage, co-presenting at the IVAT Hawaii Summit on youth mental health and collaboration.





# Phuket, Thailand



In November, HeartSmiles achieved a global milestone at the **25th Nursing Network on Violence Against Women International Conference** and the **NOVA Impact Conference** in Phuket, Thailand. Focused on the theme "Promoting Health Equity to End Gender-Based Violence: Innovations in Research, Practice, & Advocacy," the conference brought together global leaders, practitioners, and advocates to address critical issues in advancing health equity. At the NOVA Impact Conference, HeartSmiles was honored with the **Best Impact Project Award**, recognizing our work as a replicable model for youth empowerment worldwide. This prestigious recognition validated our innovative practices and commitment to creating equitable, youth-centered solutions, reinforcing HeartSmiles' leadership on the international stage.



## Heartbeats at Home



Heartbeats Tayonna "Tayybandz" Jackson and Sydney Johnson presented their research findings on the EXCEL Project at Coppin University.



HeartSmiles worked alongside the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Center of Adolescent Health to create the E.N.G.A.G.E Toolkit, a guide for creating and sustaining a Youth Advisory Board.



BeYOU, a youth talent and performance business founded by Heartbeat Tayonna "Tayybandz" Jackson, performed at the EICAC Conference held at Coppin University.

# Programs At A Glance

## Youth Served



## Program Hours



## Meals Provided



## Amount Paid to Youth Leaders

In 2024, HeartSmiles made a significant impact in Baltimore by distributing \$732,000 to youth leaders. This investment not only provided financial support but also empowered young individuals to take active roles in their communities. Given that the median household income in Baltimore is approximately \$59,623, this substantial allocation underscores HeartSmiles' commitment to fostering economic growth and leadership among the city's youth.

## Transportation Provided



Providing 5,500 rides to and from HeartSmiles programs at a cost of \$126,000 eliminates one of the biggest barriers for Baltimore's youth—access to opportunity. By ensuring reliable, free transportation, HeartSmiles empowers young people to participate fully in skill-building and leadership activities without the stress of logistical challenges. This investment in mobility fosters equity, builds trust within the community, and opens doors for youth to grow and succeed both personally and professionally.



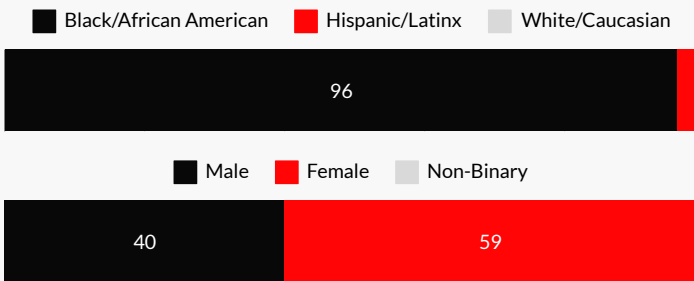
**98%**

of participants say they would recommend our programs to a friend



## HEARTSMILES IS DEDICATED TO SERVING A DIVERSE AND VIBRANT COMMUNITY OF YOUTH...

with 96% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 1% White participants, reflecting the rich cultural fabric of Baltimore. Our programs are inclusive and welcoming to all, with a participant base that includes 40% male, 59% female, and individuals who identify as nonbinary. We strive to create a supportive environment where every young person feels valued and empowered to succeed.



*\*Percentages are based on available data, as some participants may not have specified their demographic information.*



## Focused Friday

Virtual weekly youth programming

**2,450 Accounts Reached**  
**8,291 Comments**

Every Friday evening, HeartSmiles connects with youth through our Focused Friday Instagram sessions, creating a powerful virtual space for inspiration, learning, and connection. In 2024, these sessions reached over 2,450 accounts, with 924 actively engaging and generating an incredible 8,291 comments—a testament to the impact and relevance of this program. Focused Friday empowers young people to share their voices, gain valuable insights, and build a sense of community, proving that virtual programming continues to be a transformative tool for youth engagement and growth.



# ACCESS

*Accountability, Confidence, Communication, Economic Self-Sufficiency, Skills Training, and Success*

In partnership with the University of Maryland and EMBRACE, HeartSmiles provided 54 participants—many overcoming significant challenges and varied life circumstances—with 16 weeks of comprehensive programming in a supportive and empowering environment. This transformative experience not only helped participants build critical life and career skills but also sparked remarkable success stories: one participant launched their own business, while three others began training to become facilitators, embodying HeartSmiles' mission of fostering leadership and creating opportunities for growth.



*Participants are encouraged to step out of their comfort zones and build skills through activities like ice skating, snowboarding, and competitive games. Participant faces intentionally blurred to respect privacy.*



*Guided by the mentorship of ACCESS Youth Leaders, this participant successfully launched their own graphic t-shirt business. Participant faces intentionally blurred to respect privacy.*

# HeartSmiles Continuum of Care

Peer-to-peer and near-peer education, a cornerstone of HeartSmiles' programming, empowers youth to learn from mentors who are close in age or share similar lived experiences. This model fosters relatable and meaningful connections, enabling mentors to address the unique challenges and aspirations of their peers with authenticity and understanding. By placing youth in leadership roles, HeartSmiles not only equips mentors with valuable skills but also creates a supportive environment where participants feel seen, heard, and inspired to grow. This approach strengthens trust and communication, making learning more accessible and impactful for all involved.

In Baltimore, where systemic inequities often limit opportunities for young people, peer-to-peer education plays a transformative role. It bridges gaps in traditional education systems by providing relatable role models and fostering a sense of community and collaboration. For many youth, seeing someone like themselves succeed and lead opens doors to possibilities they may not have imagined. This model's ripple effect extends beyond individual growth, creating a culture of shared success and mutual empowerment that strengthens neighborhoods and builds pathways to a brighter future for Baltimore's youth.

Building on the foundation of peer-to-peer education, HeartSmiles' continuum of care extends to leadership and career exposure, ensuring participants are equipped for long-term success. Heartbeats actively take on leadership roles by presenting at national conferences, leading seminars, and facilitating trainings, further honing their skills and confidence. These experiences not only position them as role models within their communities but also provide invaluable career exposure, networking opportunities, and professional development. This comprehensive approach empowers Baltimore's youth to thrive as leaders, innovators, and changemakers, setting the stage for a future of limitless possibilities.

**OUR MISSION IS TO HELP YOUTH REACH THEIR VERSION OF SUCCESS BY PUTTING THEM AT THE INTERSECTION OF ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY AND WE MEAN IT.**



## HeartSmiles Programs

- ACCESS
- EMAPS
- EYLP
- Healing Youth Alliance
- Little Leaders
- Restoration Gardens
- Streets 2 Success
- Summer Success
- Take on a Trade:
  - Barbering
  - Culinary
  - Learn 2 DJ
- The Granny Project
- Year Round
- Y Schools



When asked for **one word** to describe our programs, participants responded with...



**YEAR ROUND PARTICIPANT**

I appreciate the youth program for its holistic approach to personal development, which seamlessly blends academic support, extracurricular activities, and life skills training. It creates a nurturing environment where young people can explore their interests, develop new skills, and build meaningful relationships. The program's emphasis on mentorship and community service also fosters a sense of responsibility and civic engagement. Overall, it provides a well-rounded experience that helps participants grow both personally and academically, preparing them for future success.

**SUMMER SUCCESS PARTICIPANT**

I found the program incredibly valuable. It gave me profound insights into my mental health and personal growth and greatly contributed to my clarity about my future path.

**SUMMER SUCCESS PARTICIPANT**

Everyone came together to make such an amazing summer about leadership and how important it is to be respectful of others.

**HEALING YOUTH ALLIANCE PARTICIPANT**

This program has helped me better understand myself and my mental health and I am grateful for that.

# Thank You

To our incredible HeartSmiles Village,

Your unwavering support has made all the difference in 2024, "The Year of Sustainability." Every milestone we've achieved, every life we've touched, and every barrier we've broken would not have been possible without your belief in our mission. From disrupting cycles of poverty to empowering Baltimore's youth to lead, you have been the driving force behind our success.

As we celebrate this past year and look ahead to our 10th anniversary, we are filled with gratitude for every partner, supporter, and champion who has walked alongside us. Together, we've built more than a nonprofit—we've built a movement for change, opportunity, and hope.

Thank you for standing with us, investing in our vision, and being a vital part of our journey. Together, we are changing lives and shaping a brighter future for Baltimore's youth and families. Here's to the next chapter of progress, purpose, and impact!

With gratitude,  
The HeartSmiles Team

Abell Foundation  
American Rescue Plan Act  
Annie E Casey Foundation  
Baltimore Children and Youth Fund  
Baltimore City Council and The Mayors Office  
Baltimore City Health Department  
Baltimore City Public Schools  
Baltimore Summer Funding Collaborative  
Baltimore's Promise  
B-CIITY  
Berries By Quicha  
Black Mental Health Alliance  
Blanket Fort Foundation  
Blaq Equity Baltimore  
Bloomberg Philanthropies  
CASA  
EMBRACE  
Family League of Baltimore  
France Merrick Foundation  
Fund For Educational Excellence  
Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses  
Goldman Sachs: One Million Black Women  
Healing Youth Alliance  
Healthy Teen Network  
Hip-Hop Public Health  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Johns Hopkins School of Nursing  
Keys Empowers  
Living Classrooms  
Maryland Department of Health  
Matthew A. Henson  
Mayors Office of Children and Family Success  
Mayors Office of Employment Development  
MDC Global  
Mrs. Yolanda Mack  
Mr. Tony White  
Patterson Park Charter School  
RCano Events  
Restoration Gardens II  
Rileys Way Foundation  
RND Associates Global  
Share Our Strength INC  
State of Maryland  
The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation  
The Y of Central Maryland  
Trident Builders  
Tyson  
University of Maryland Baltimore  
Urban Alliance  
Youth As Resources  
YouthWorks





# SUCCESS STARTS HERE





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# Support a Heartbeat

**DONATE** ❤️



**[bit.ly/HSDonate25](https://bit.ly/HSDonate25)**

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Your donation can transform the lives of Baltimore's youth by providing access to life-changing programs, mentorship, and opportunities to lead. Every dollar helps us disrupt cycles of poverty, empower young leaders, and build stronger communities. Together, we can create pathways to success and a brighter future for all.

## Stay Connected!



**Website**

**[heartsmilesmd.com](https://heartsmilesmd.com)**



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**Facebook**

**[@heartsmilesmd](https://www.facebook.com/heartsmilesmd)**



**Looking to share opportunities or resources? Use our contact form to connect directly with our Fund Development Director and make an impact together!**

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