

Muskie Harris knows first-hand the difference opportunity and choice can make in one's life. Harris was the first African-American male from Central High to attend the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville on a football scholarship. He was a four-year letterman playing running and defensive back. In 1990, Harris won the GOP primary for Lieutenant Governor, as only the second black man ever to be nominated to run for a constitutional office in Arkansas. He lost in the general election to former Arkansas Governor, Jim Guy Tucker, but continued a successful business career after the election.

Those are a few of the examples of great opportunities and good choices, but like most of us, there were bad ones too. Harris found himself in jail, where it looked like his choices would land him in prison. He headed to court with a sack lunch consisting of a bologna sandwich, an orange and a carton of milk with comfort from a scripture about miracles and angels from his first visit to the jail Bible study, just the night before.

Life lessons, work and youth mentoring have all shaped Harris's passion of helping others with opportunity and choice, especially school choice. He sees first-hand that those who participate in school choice have less problems with drug abuse, fewer unexcused absences and suspensions. They also have fewer arrests during high school and after.

In a court room packed with press and plenty of interest, Harris was about to be sentenced to 10 years in prison by one of his best friends from college. Moments before sentencing, his angels appeared—two attorney friends—and asked the judge to let them take responsibility. He was given a suspended sentence and sent to a sober-living facility. It was during that time he came to realize “you can't go to school to guide recovery; you have to have lived it.”

Harris founded Muskie Harris Rehabilitation Services to “help people change their lives.” Through the organization, he serves as court liaison for

six sober living facilities with a total of 487 beds and a 75% success rate. He has helped countless people in the 23 years he has been clean, including the two angels who took responsibility for him in court. Harris is founder of 100 Black Men of Greater Little Rock, where he serves as Chapter President. 100 Black Men's national focus on education, combined with what he sees daily, make Harris a true champion for school choice.

“In my mind, the situation surrounding school choice can be summed up fairly easily—not allowing school choice is not allowing equal access. In my position as President of 100 Black Men of Greater Little Rock and in my work with Muskie Harris Rehabilitation Services, I see kids who need options in education to help change their lives. Whether it be smaller classrooms, access to additional services, a more concentrated area of study, or simply a fresh start—school choice is imperative and should no longer be seen as an option. I firmly support the national charge of educating and empowering youth and personally mentor students as part of my commitment.”

“Research continues to show that choice in education builds stronger communities, improves academic outcomes, empowers families to customize and provided at-risk students with options. A quality education provides young people with the tools they need to become productive adults, which in turn, will ensure the growth and well-being of the great state of Arkansas.”