



SUM STORYTELLING SERIES: BALTIMORE

CityWide Youth Development

Baltimore is rich with community leaders that are fighting poverty. Among those, you might call Rasheed Aziz a heavyweight.

Aziz runs CityWide Youth Development, a non-profit that teaches youth how to design and market their first product.

Those teenagers selling frozen sorbet around Baltimore neighborhoods during the summer? They're CityWide kids, and they're the ones who hand-crafted the sweets they're selling.

Or the "Made in Bmore" brand merchandise you see for sale at the Towson Town Center, just north of Baltimore?? CityWide kids made that, too.

About two-fifths of Baltimore residents aged 16 to 19, and one-fourth of residents aged 20 to 24, are unemployed. CityWide's initiatives have given dozens of youth a summer income or their first taste of entrepreneurship.

“ **There's a plethora of small- to medium-sized manufacturers in the city that need talent.** ”

In the long run, says Aziz, it's about social change: connect youth with paying opportunities and it helps keep them busy and away from crime. "If you're selling drugs you're doing it because of money, not because it's fun," says Aziz.

Now the organization is taking its work up a notch by offering apparel manufacturing and business development training for Baltimoreans, young and old, who are struggling to make ends meet.

"Here [in Baltimore] we like clothing, we like style, so the question was 'How can we produce opportunities to create both employment and self-expression?'" says Aziz.

In the 1950s, [about a third](#) of Baltimore metro area residents worked in manufacturing, including textiles and apparels. Today, only about 5 percent of residents are employed by manufacturers.

But apparel manufacturing is seeing something of a comeback in the city. The Urban Manufacturing Alliance's [State of Urban Manufacturing: Baltimore City Snapshot](#) report was heavily dependent on feedback from manufacturers in the city's textile industry. They showed up en masse and comprised the largest group of survey participants by industry.

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The sector has been lifted up by companies like Under Armour, the Baltimore sports apparel manufacturer that took in \$5.2 billion in revenue in 2018. Avalon Industries, Fashions Unlimited, and smaller companies like 16sixteen and Creative King Hat Company are also textile producers who call Baltimore home.

Under Armour recently developed a 35,000-square-foot research hub, called the Lighthouse, at a business center in the Port Covington area. The business center used to be an old garage; now it's a 130,000-square-foot nursery of innovation that hosts the Lighthouse, and a coworking space and incubator called Betamore.

For CityWide's industrial apparel manufacturing class, students spend twelve weeks learning the ins-and-outs of apparel R&D. Many of them go on to

paid internships at the Lighthouse. Since 2017 30 residents aged 18 and up have completed the program, and the majority have gone on to get jobs in the sector.

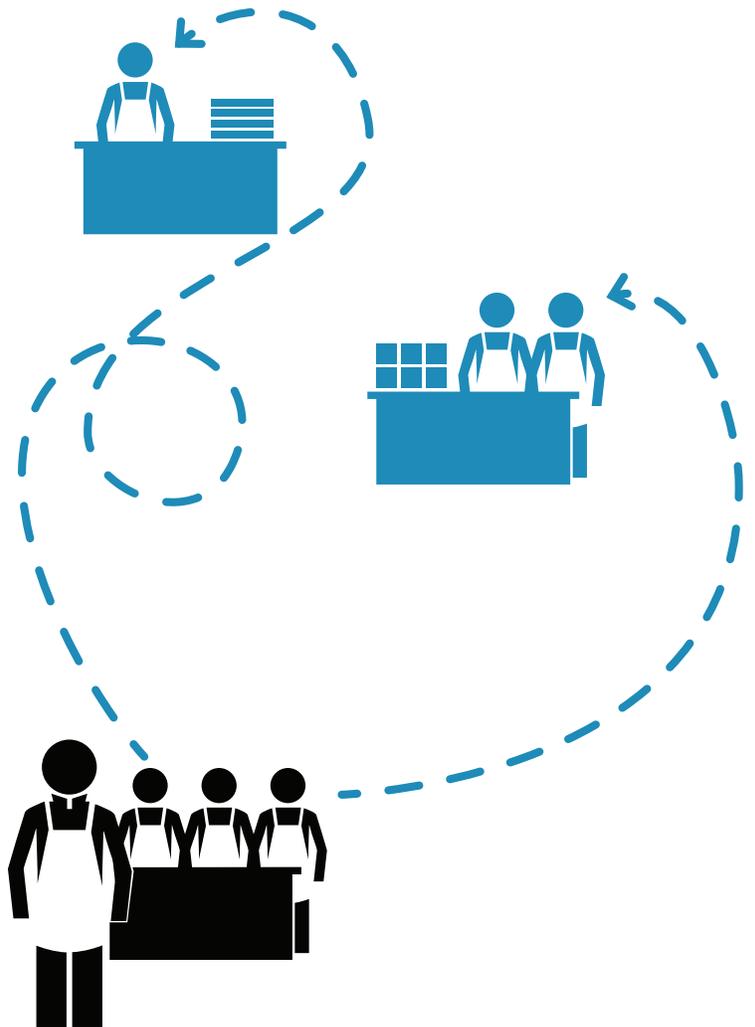
Aziz says what remained of the city’s apparel manufacturing workforce is starting to retire. Now, apparel newcomers are hungry for workers. “There’s a plethora of small- to medium-sized manufacturers in the city that need talent,” he says. “Programs like mine can sustain and create opportunities for this sector, so we’re not so focused on” just a few big employers like Under Armour.

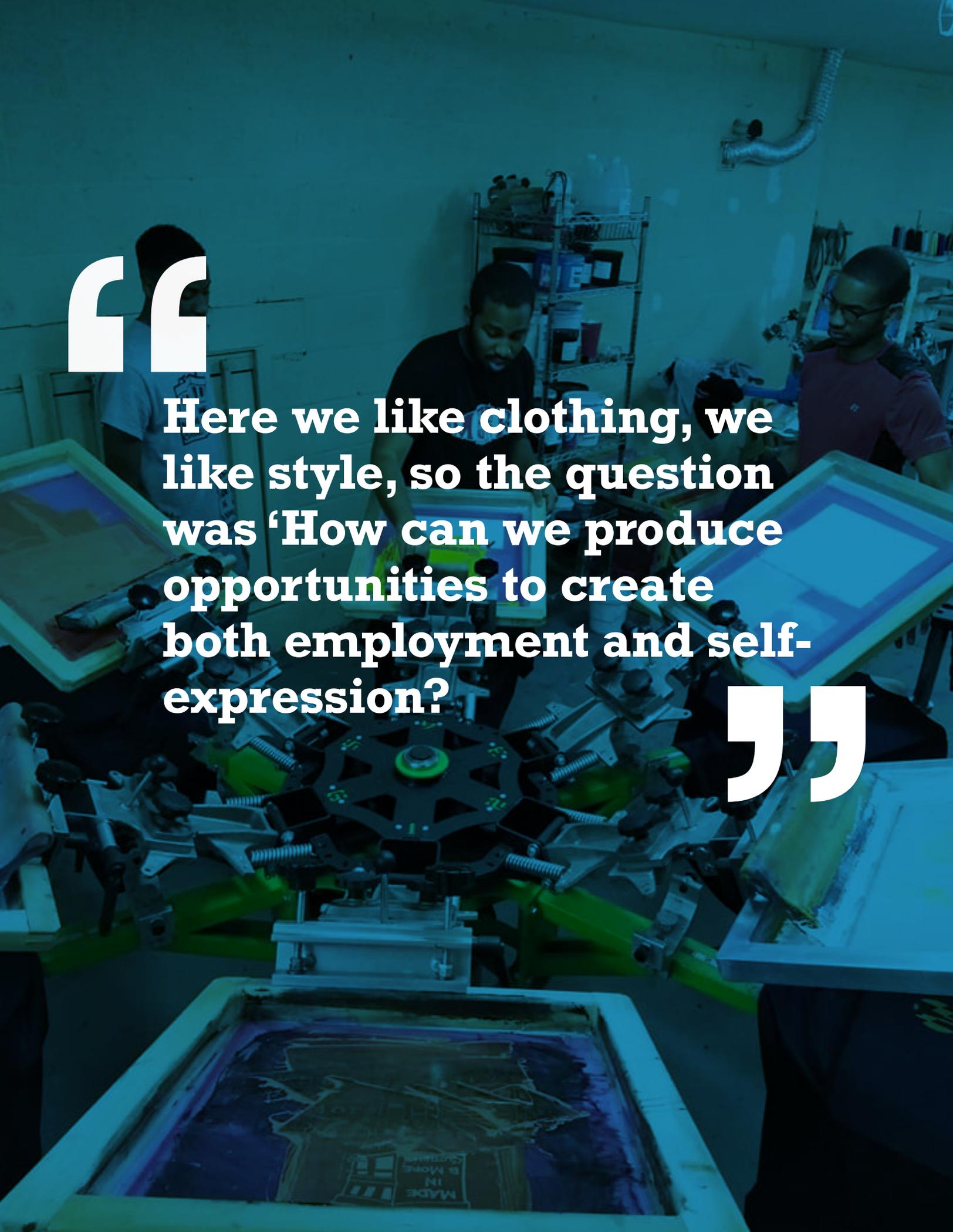
The state of Maryland is helping Aziz along. He was recently awarded \$800,000 in state grants to develop a new, 10,000-square-foot building in West Baltimore called the EMAGE Center—an acronym for Entrepreneurs Making And Growing Enterprises. It’ll have space for eight small businesses to sell their products, acting like a mini-mall for Baltimore-made goods. CityWide’s frozen sorbet program will round out the space with its own cafe.

Aziz says the facility still needs to raise an additional \$800,000 in capital, but he’s confident it’ll be ready in time to open in November 2019.

When it does open, it’ll expand Aziz’s portfolio of programs that churn out social

change you can taste and wear. “People are looking for the opportunity to develop an income and empower themselves,” says Aziz. “That’s what our goal is—to create that type of energy.”





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