

Youth organizations strengthen, support

Playworks Durham, Durham T.R.Y. teach cooperation, leadership to youths



Staff photo by Anna Starnes

Playworks coach William with his W.G. Pearson Elementary students at the Tennis Jamboree.

By Anna Starnes
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Providing youth and children with the power to prevent destructive behavior in themselves and their friends is the goal of many youth organizations in Durham. Playworks Durham and Durham Together for a Resilient Youth (T.R.Y.) work to promote community change by supporting youths.

Playworks Durham

Playworks Durham, at 119 Market St., strives to improve the way children interact by teaching elementary children how to play safely and inclusively at recess. Playworks starts at a young age to build a foundation in children for healthy living by showing them fun ways to increase their physical activity. The program also provides children with a healthy friendship model to prevent bullying.

Executive director Don Fowler said Playworks originated in 1996 at two schools in Berkeley, Calif. and expanded to Durham in 2011. The program operates in schools that have at least 50 percent free or reduced lunch. Nine Durham elementary schools partici-

pated last year, with 15 schools participating next year.

“We are providing a lot of opportunities for the kids in our schools that they wouldn’t normally have,” Fowler said. “With that, they are getting to work with some adults that they really trust and have fun with, and what happens almost immediately when we get there is that the school climate gets better, and the kids feel a little bit safer.”

Playworks sets up a program coordinator for each school, Fowler said. The coordinator organizes games like soccer and basketball that promote teamwork and good sportsmanship. Coordinators and volunteers also introduce unconventional sports like disc golf and tennis. The UNC-Chapel Hill field hockey team is also teaching Playworks students to play field hockey.

The program has been effective when teachers and volunteers jump into the games. The adults show kids that there is no pressure, giving them the confidence to play.

Benefits of facilitated play through Playworks spill over into the classroom, Fowler said. An independent study found that there is 45 percent

less bullying in Playworks’ schools. Teachers surveyed by Playworks said that the program gave them back about 24 hours of instruction because children who effectively exercise at recess are more attentive in class. The program also teaches children conflict resolution skills such as using “rock, paper, scissors” to settle an argument. With these skills, teachers spent less time refereeing conflicts that originate during recess.

Playing works

This year, Playworks Durham will provide 7,500 students with safe, inclusive playtime. On May 11, Playworks Durham will host the Run for Recess 5K. To register for the race or to find more information on how to get involved, visit: <http://www.playworks.org/make-recess-count/play/durham>

Ben Neveras, Playworks program manager, observes program coordinators at the schools. He said that the Junior Coach program, which teaches leadership skills to older children, is an



Staff photo by Anna Starnes

A volunteer Playworks coach, Genevieve, plays basketball with her students at the Emily Krzyzewski center.

effective way to prevent bullying and prepare children for middle school.

“They become your ‘mini-me’ on the playground,” said Neveras. “They are leading games and solving conflicts on their own, which is cool to see.”

Playworks coordinators also extend their lessons outside of school by inviting children to participate in developmental sport leagues in basketball, volleyball and soccer. The leagues focus on building confidence, basic skills and leadership in the students instead of keeping score.

Durham T.R.Y.

Durham Together for a Resilient Youth (T.R.Y.), at 2020 E. Main St., Ste. 10, offers programs for teens and adults that all work to minimize risky behavior such as drinking or drug use. The organization helps build core values such as resilience, honesty and restraint to help youth succeed.

Wanda Boone founded the organization in response to a publication about local gang violence and the accessibility of drugs in schools. As a therapeutic foster parent, she noticed that many foster children had problems with substance abuse and other behavioral problems that could be changed.

The T.R.Y. Bands Against Destructive Decisions group teaches teens aged between 13 and 17 to be leaders in

their community. The leaders create teams of up to 15 people and meet once a month with Boone and other adults.

“In effect, they are creating a circle of people that will have the same values and concerns and be able to help each other as they go forward in life,” Boone said.

ClaVonna Marshall, 15, is a team leader in B.A.D.D. and said she wanted to be a member of the program because it provides teens with a way to help their community.

“The biggest lesson that I have gained from the organization would have to be that it doesn’t matter who you are, or where you come from, you can always make a difference,” Marshall said.

Boone said one of the major lessons the program teaches is for the youth to think about how the decisions they make now can impact their future. Part of thinking about the future requires the youth to promise to stay drug and alcohol free.

“Don’t just do anything because someone asks you to or tells you to but always ask ‘what is this going to mean for my future?’” Boone said. “We stress communication, assertiveness in terms of being vocal enough to express yourself in a meaningful and respectful way.”

The program also identifies the

impact that media plays in their lives. Boone said they demonstrate to the youth that advertising is formulated to make them want a product and that it is important to show restraint. The program also stresses that television shows do not represent real life.

Boone said that the program goes beyond just the monthly meetings and participates in drug-free activities like attending an overnight camp in the summer and holding a dance for its members.

T.R.Y. for success

April is a busy month for T.R.Y. They’re hosting community outreach programs almost every day this month. Topics range from prevention to healing. To view the calendar, visit:

<http://www.durhamtry.org/calendar.asp>

Durham T.R.Y. is also accepting donations. To contribute, visit: <http://www.durhamtry.org/contributions.asp>

Future Value

Durham’s youth organizations help establish good skills and community values. Both of these organizations seek volunteers and donations.