

Teens to benefit from nonprofit merger

Partners for Youth and YO:Durham will merge this summer, pooling mentoring resources.

By Holly West
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Durham teens will now have greater access to mentoring and summer job programs thanks to two area nonprofits that are joining forces.

Partners for Youth, a mentoring and summer job program for middle and high school students, will join YO:Durham, an organization that focuses on helping teens prepare for their careers, to form one organization.

According to Eric Olson-Getty, the internship and mentor coordinator for YO:Durham, the merger will be complete on July 1, and the new organization will be called Partners for Youth Opportunity. He said the two programs realized they could better serve the community as one group.

“We recognized there were a lot of similarities in our mission and program design,” he said. “There are a lot of duplicated services around the city and a need for collaboration.”

Julie Wells, executive director of Partners for Youth, said she realized the same thing when she started working in the city in 2011.

“I noticed two things: how many nonprofits existed within the context of Durham and how limited the money was,” she said.

According to Wells, Partners for Youth and YO:Durham serve about 25 kids each. She said becoming one organization will allow them to pool their resources and serve a larger number of students. They hope to eventually work with 65 to 75 kids throughout Durham County.

Trina Aiken, a senior at Durham School of the Arts, joined the Partners for Youth program three years ago after hearing an intercom announcement at school about free tutoring and summer jobs.

“It was my first year in high school, and I already knew it was going to be hard,” Aiken said. “I didn’t want to do



Partners for Youth tutor Asraiel Harewood (left) and program participant Kieara Chambers work together at an afternoon tutoring session. (Photo courtesy of Julie Wells)

it by myself.”

Through the program, she has gotten a job each year at the Durham Arts Council’s summer camp, which has allowed her to save money to help pay for college.

Aiken said she is looking forward to the organizations merging.

“I’m excited about it because this way we’ll be able to help more students and we will be able to do more,” she said.

The two groups have already been collaborating on their mentoring programs, which connect teens with members of the community who can give them advice about school, college and jobs.

“We try to get our mentors and mentees together whenever we can,” Olson-Getty said.

He said more joint programming will start in early summer.

While they do have a lot in common, the two organizations have had some

structural differences to work out.

YO:Durham is a one-year program that begins in June and ends the following May. The program accepts a new group of teens each year.

Partners for Youth is a multi-year program that follows kids from eighth grade through their first year of college.

The new combined organization will follow the multi-year structure, Olson-Getty said.

“Partners for Youth found that to be highly impactful,” he said. “When you start working with kids at an early age, there’s more of an opportunity to make an impact on their life.”

Wells said that while the merger will allow the organizations to run more efficiently and increase the number of kids they work with, neither group will make money off of the deal.

“When businesses merge, there’s usually going to be a financial gain from that,” she said. “When nonprofits merge, they aren’t going to be able to do that. The reason people go into nonprofit mergers is really to do things more efficiently and increase the number of people they serve.”

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-Eric Olson-Getty