

New teen center will aim to keep local youth off streets

By Candice Craig
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Fourteen-year-old Amiya Wilds was walking around outside of her neighborhood on Liberty Street with a couple of her friends, wishing there was something to do since the after-school program she attended in her neighborhood was stopped.

“There’s not many kids out here,” Wilds said. “Everyone’s either moved or is locked up now. We’re bored.”

Wilds and her friends complained about having only two options when they come home from school — staying in the house all-day or hanging out on the street.

According to Durham County’s juvenile crime and delinquency four-year study, the crime rate in the county for children between the ages of 10-17 for serious crimes — which include “serious property or weapons offenses as well as A1 misdemeanors and assaults” — almost doubled between 2011-14. The county often had higher levels of serious crimes in comparison to statewide averages.

Carlos Rawlinson, youth and family education specialist for Durham Housing Authority, said this is why he started setting up a teen center for local youth.

The goal of the center, according to its proposal, is to “effectively provide a safe and secure place for the youth to attend within the community to interact with other youth in positive activities.”

The teen center will be placed in the Liberty Street Community Center. Liberty Street is one of 15 communities under DHA. Eight of these communities offer community centers as a part of DHA’s education and youth services.

The center will be aimed mostly at children between the ages of 12-18, but the center will also be open to youth of all ages.

Rawlinson has plans of getting things that will entertain the children in the center such as: gaming systems, computers, laptops, TVs, a pool and a pingpong table.



Carlos Rawlinson plans to bring a teen center to the Liberty Street area in central Durham to help local at-risk youth. (Staff photo by Candice Craig)

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Carlos Rawlinson, youth and family education specialist, DHA.

“With the teen center, I want to not just make it a recreational center, but I want to do things like parenting classes when the youth are in school and GED classes for some teens who dropped out of school,” Rawlinson said. “If kids are getting in trouble in school, let’s use the teen center as a place for students to go when they are suspended. It’ll be like a second chance and I’ll make sure that the students are doing everything they need to do while they’re suspended so they won’t be far behind when they get back.”

Life-skills classes and clubs, like a boxing club, will be held in the center and used to keep kids motivated to stay

in school.

Rawlinson said he received a lot of help starting the teen center from his older brother, Cory Rawlinson, employment development specialist and youth minister.

The teen center will be a place for both the interests and needs of the youth, Rawlinson said. It will also connect youth to positive peers and adults.

Youth participate in their communities because gang violence makes it dangerous for them to travel to other areas for programs. Rawlinson said he wanted to make a teen center that was accessible to youth around the Liberty Street area.

“There’s problems that come with kids being out on the street,” Rawlinson said. “When school is out, kids are looking for things to do and places to go, but we really don’t have that many places for our teens to go anymore. That’s why you see a lot more gang violence and such. There’s a lot more teens trying to find something to do and getting in a lot more trouble.”