

A space for self-expression

Blackspace offers WokeShops for Durham youth in art and science.

By Avery Rodriguez
Durham Voice

Blackspace, a makerspace and youth center, combines art, activism and computer science in a space for young artists in the Durham area to express themselves.

Pierce Freelon opened the first Blackspace workshop in 2014 in Chapel Hill. With it, he said, he hoped to provide a free, Afro-centric workshop to help disadvantaged youth in the area develop skills in social entrepreneurship and creative media.

Freelon has since brought the program to Durham and opened a second location on West Main Street, where he hopes to have a similar effect.

“I think it’s important to have spaces for kids to be creative and collaborate and interact with each other and work on projects together, and that’s what I want Blackspace to be,” Freelon said.

Blackspace offers WokeShops centered on different skills. Thursday nights are dedicated to writing and studying slam poetry. Other WokeShops include building narratives on a digital platform.

The organization has also held hackathons and worked with virtual reality technologies and holds poetry slams and fundraisers to empower voices in the Durham area.

“Every month we do a poetry slam and the winners of those slams are eligible to go to Brave New Voices, which is the biggest youth poetry competition in the world,” Freelon said. “So each of our slams is also a fundraiser for this event.”

Blackspace’s presence in the community has provided young, local artists like Kyri Douglas a place to find their voices and gain important skills.

“It’s a space for feedback,” said Douglas, who attends Blackspace to develop his poetry. “The people at Blackspace are like



Pierce Freelon, a Durham native and graduate of UNC-Chapel Hill, opened the Blackspace youth center in Durham in fall 2016. (Photo by Avery Rodriguez.)

family to me.”

Freelon said he hopes to continue contributing to and empowering the surrounding community, in part through 3-D printing workshops.

He also hopes to provide more international experiences for his participants.

“I want Blackspace to be a passport for Durham youth of African descent to come

and engage the world,” he said.

Because the makerspace provides resources to the community free of charge, it relies heavily on volunteering and donations to function.

Those interested in supporting the makerspace can attend Blackspace-sponsored benefit nights or donate to the organization through PayPal.