

THE CITY OF DURHAM OFFICE ON YOUTH HIGHLIGHTS OF 2020

As of December 2020



Pictured: Listening
Project Youth Team

REFLECTING ON 2020

As 2020 comes to a close and 2021 rolls in, the Office on Youth reflects on the year that was.

Needless to say, with all that happened in 2020, it was hard to catch our breaths. Carbon monoxide poisoning displacing Durham Housing Authority residents; malware attacks on both the City and Durham County networks; and the COVID-19 pandemic wrapping it all in a bow. The first three months of 2020 were a whirlwind, and it never seemed to get easier.

Like many of you, we had a hard time adjusting to our new reality. We thought of 2020 as a year of laying down a foundation for radically shifting youth engagement in Durham. But with rising new needs and old ones intensifying, we had to make decisions about what to prioritize. Yet, much like the rest of the 919 community, we rallied, we regrouped, and most importantly we took care of each other.

So here it is, our top five highlights of 2020, and what's to come in 2021.

OUR TOP FIVE OF 2020

#1. We completed the Durham Youth Listening Project.

In late 2019, we launched a Youth Listening Project. We set out to understand **what was** and **wasn't** working about Durham's youth services and programs. We started with broad outreach at community events to hear what young people thought. We then dug deeper into those responses through listening sessions.

The sessions focused on 6 topic areas we heard a lot about during our outreach: **Activities and Programs; Youth Leadership; Welcoming Places; Transportation; Diversity; and Safety.**

In January 2020, we hit the ground running. In partnership with our youth ambassadors, community partners, and consultants (Strategies4Freedom), **we hosted 13 youth listening sessions** in just under 7 weeks!

Unfortunately, because of the pandemic we had to cancel 6 other planned sessions.

The project centered the voices of youth of color; LGBTQ+ youth; immigrant/migrant youth; youth who are not working and not in school; and youth who have experienced economic hardships, houselessness, and interactions with law enforcement.



- We spoke with young people, their caregivers, and people who work with and support youth. And each session was led by a **youth-adult team**.
- We considered barriers to participation and offered: \$25 gift cards; transportation; meals; childcare; breathing breaks; engaging ice breakers; a self-care station; and Spanish language interpretation.
- In May, we began our sense-making phase. We looked at everything we heard, and organized the information into common ideas and themes. We also wrote a report with recommendations based on the results.
- In October, **we hosted 3 "reflecting back" sessions**. We shared our draft recommendations with the community, and asked, "did we get this right?", before finalizing them.
- In total, **we heard from hundreds** of young people, caregivers and people who work with and support youth.



In 2021, we'll share the final report widely. We'll also launch a grant program to fund community initiatives focused on listening project recommendations. And we'll pursue some new directions in our office based on what we heard during the project!

Sign up for updates:
durhamnc.gov/youthspeak

OUR TOP FIVE OF 2020



Durham's Youth Commission and Elected Officials – Annual Retreat, Dec. 2019

#2. We connected young people to resources.

One thing we keep hearing from young people is that they don't know about the resources available to them and their families in Durham. In the past, we've relied mainly on our trusted network of youth service providers to share resources with the young people they serve. When the pandemic came to our community, the need to connect young people to resources grew exponentially. This was an opportunity for us to begin building our own network of young people – which has long been a priority for us. In 2020 we launched some new virtual offerings, and in 2021 we hope to continue growing our youth network!

We launched the
Youth Opportunities in
Durham (YODurham) Text line!

YODurham Text is a one-way text line that allows us to send resources directly to the phones of young people under 25 years old. Texts cover lots of topics, including mental health and mindfulness, food and employment assistance, and online events and activities. We send out texts a few times a week in English and Spanish.

After a very successful pilot year, we'll be ramping up promotion in 2021. There are now over 140 members, and we hope to see this number continue to grow.

Young people under 25 who want to join can go to DurhamNC.gov/YODurhamText or text "yodurham" to (919) 213-0691

- The **Durham Network of Care** (DNOC) is an online inventory of resources that is managed by Durham County. We worked with the DNOC to make resources on their "Youth Services" page easier to find by organizing them in new categories. The project is almost complete, and we'll promote the new page widely once it is. This site is mostly used by service providers, and they'll be able to share resources they find with young people they support.
- After a successful year on Twitter, we joined the cool kids and launched our official **Office On Youth Instagram Page**. With our steady growing following, the page allows us to boost resources directly to young people.



Follow us at @YouthSpeakDURM

OUR TOP FIVE OF 2020

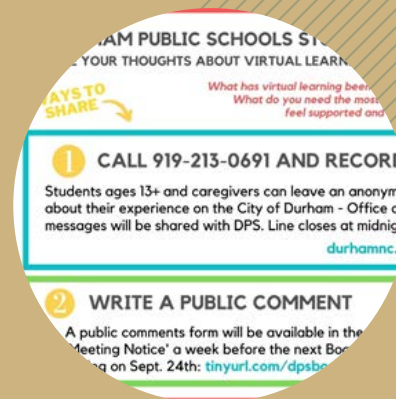
#3. We amplified the needs and experiences of young people.

We spent a good part of the year partnering with young people to make sure their voices were being considered in decisions that affect them. Together, we created **new spaces and structures** for youth leadership and voice. We lent our support through offering platforms, funding, and connections to adult decision makers.

- The **Seen in Quarantine Challenge** asked young people in Durham how they wanted to connect to each other during this time of physical distancing. In collaboration with our youth finalists, we held **2 virtual events** for young people to connect, learn and have fun! Between the two events we engaged over 60 young people.
- In an effort to lift up student and family perspectives about virtual learning, we set up an **anonymous voice message line**. Durham Public Schools (DPS) students and caregivers were invited to leave a message about their experiences. We received over 20 messages, typed them into transcripts, and shared them with DPS administrators and the Board of Education.
- We supported youth organizers from the **Durham Youth Climate Justice Initiative** in hosting a conversation with young people about school safety. Over 40 young people joined the virtual summit, and we provided \$25 gift cards to participants.
- We supported the launch of **Sawubona Zine**. An effort led by a group of 9 young people who wanted to create a space that is **inclusive, liberating, and uplifting** to the masses of young people who want to speak truth to power through their art. The zine will be available in 2021!



SEEN IN QUARANTINE CHALLENGE



VIRTUAL LEARNING MESSAGE LINE



YOUTH SUMMIT ON SCHOOL SAFETY



SAWUBONA ZINE

OUR TOP FIVE OF 2020

#4. We supported City and County departments in creating new decision making positions for young people.



2019-2020 Durham Youth Commission Members (pre-COVID-19)

A core value in our office is that authentic youth engagement is key to creating sustainable and thriving communities. We believe that young people should have a voice in the decisions that affect them and their communities. So this year, we amped up our consultation and partnership with City and County departments to support them in creating opportunities for young people to share power and decision making.

In 2020, we **connected and supported 20 young people** in leadership positions throughout various departments and organizations. Almost all of them have been youth of color. We worked with **7 City and County departments and 2 community partners** to do this work!



Promotion & Recruitment

Creating Welcoming Spaces

Offering Continuous Support

We advised departments on the best ways to recruit young people. We also helped promote opportunities through our own networks and on social media.

We prepared adults to work with youth. We helped them think through how to create systems that share power with young people. We advised on how to create welcoming spaces that allow young people to be their whole selves.

We offered continuous support to young people working within these adult structures. We made sure they felt equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to make informed decisions and be successful in their roles.

OUR TOP FIVE OF 2020

#5. We took care of each other.

Our most important accomplishment this year was being able to support and care for each other! It became vital to the success of our work that we shifted to a practice of taking care of ourselves, taking time off, and prioritizing joy.

We were really fortunate to work with our Strategies4Freedom consultants, who emphasized mindfulness practices, rest, and self-care during the Listening Project. When that contract ended, we continued to use those tools to create a nurturing office environment that could support us during all the pressures and challenges we each faced this year.

"What are you doing this week to take care of yourself?"



Office on Youth Team

- **We checked in often.** We made time during our meetings to understand what each of us was bringing into the space and what each person needed from the team, *before* jumping into business. Even if that meant we had less time for business.
- We encouraged self care and **reminded each other to take time to rest.** We used frequent breaks during virtual meetings, and took time off to recharge.
- **We listened.** None of us were untouched by the pandemic and the weight of this year. And many times, the only thing we could offer each other was solidarity and a caring ear.

"What's something that made you laugh this week?"

- **We centered JOY!** We asked reflective questions at our weekly check ins, we laughed, shared our favorite music, and started a practice of ending our meetings in dance breaks!



2020 was a lot of things. A LOT. And as a team and a community we made it through, and we're glad it's over. We wish you and your family a healthy, joyful 2021!

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Connect with us on:

durhamnc.gov/OfficeOnYouth

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