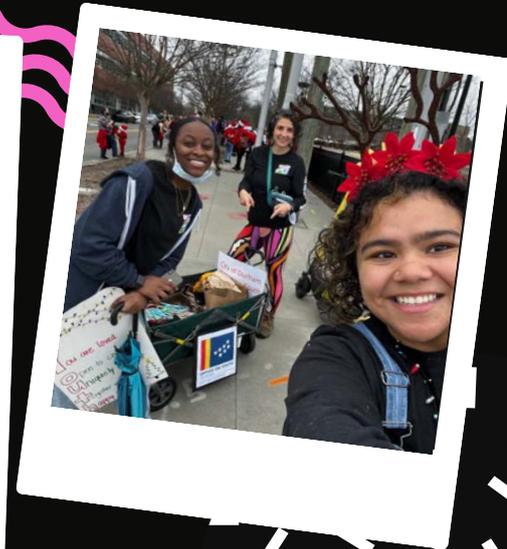


HIGHLIGHTS OF 2021

January 2022



REFLECTING ON 2021

Wow, we can't believe 2021 has come to an end. It seems like just yesterday we were reflecting on 2020, and it's already that time of year again.

Like many others, 2021 was a **year of response** for the Office on Youth, as we had to constantly adjust and change the way we do things. And even in the midst of an ongoing pandemic, our community came together. School communities prepared classrooms for in-person learning, community agencies set up hundreds of vaccination events and distributed masks and other safety gear, and our incredible re-imagined Main Library was finally opened to the public. We started to rebuild on the foundation that once was, while embracing the ongoing challenges and new ways of doing things.

As we continue to refortify this foundation in 2022, **we share with you our top 5 highlights of 2021.**

#1 We released the Youth Listening Project Report and put it into action!

As some of you may know, we launched the Durham Youth Listening Project (YLP) back in 2019. The purpose of the project was to hear from Durham's young people about their needs and dreams, and what they thought about the resources in our communities. We asked them how we could make Durham a better place for young people.

Despite project delays due to Covid-19, we kept the train rolling and finally released the long awaited **Youth Listening Project Report** in February 2021!! Throughout the project we prioritized 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, homelessness, and interactions with law enforcement.



Since the report launch, we have been on a “road tour”, presenting and discussing what we did, what we heard, and what our response should be moving forward.

The report has opened up opportunities for us to find new ways to push the recommendations forward. We partnered with the Durham Public Schools (DPS) Foundation, Student U, Village of Wisdom, and DPS to compile a shared list of priorities around social-emotional wellbeing and family engagement in schools – check out the **“Onward” report** for a blueprint of promising practices @ bullcityschools.org/onward! We also launched two new programs in response to what we heard during the YLP: the **Changed by Youth Ambassador Program** and **Durham Youth Leadership Fund**, which we’ll discuss in our next highlights!

We had over 800 touchpoints with young people, caregivers, and service providers. The report is organized into themes that young people told us were important to them and highlights key findings and 30 recommendations!

Check out the report!
durhamnc.gov/youthspeak

▲ #2 Here come the Changed by Youth Ambassadors!

During our Youth Listening Project (YLP), young people told us they wanted more opportunities to be leaders and decision makers in local government. In response, we officially launched the new **Changed by Youth (CBY) Ambassador Program** in fall 2021!

Before the CBY there was the DYC. The DYC, also known as the Durham Youth Commission, was established in 2005 in response to advocacy efforts of young people in Durham. The commission engaged in service-learning projects and leadership opportunities. While holding close to some core pieces of the DYC, we also wanted to uplift what we heard from young people, City and County departments and community partners during the YLP. We stepped into a new chapter with the restructure of the DYC into the CBY program!

In a paid fellowship model, our **11 CBY ambassadors** are supported to be part of planning and decision making processes within City and County departments; and to ultimately influence programs and policies in Durham.

They also engage other young people in local government, connect them to resources, and advocate for issues that matter to young people in Durham.

What's to come:

We'll continue to meet with the ambassadors throughout the year and will be engaging in trainings, conversations, projects, and other opportunities to be responsive to the needs of our Durham community. We're so excited to see what 2022 has to offer for the Changed by Youth Ambassadors!



Ambassadors create shared commitments and values for their work together



Prepping to march in the Durham Holiday Parade

#3 Making dreams come true through the 2021-2022 Durham Youth Leadership Fund.



Kickoff meeting with the incredible DYLF grantees

*With funding support from the Durham County Nonprofit Funding Program and the City of Durham, we launched the **Durham Youth Leadership Fund (DYLF)** in Spring 2021 to help advance the priorities of the Youth Listening Project (YLP).*

The DYLF was set up to award grants to young people and community groups. To create the new program, we pulled together an amazing **youth-adult grant-making team**. The team included young people ages 16-24 years, DPS teachers, community organizers and leaders, and City and County staff. Accessibility and language interpretation for applicants was a huge consideration for our team, especially thinking about applicants who historically haven't had access to programs like this. After discussing YLP recommendations and current challenges, the team decided that grants would fund:

- Community-based projects that support the same identities and experiences as the YLP, plus a few more

- Community-based projects working to:

- Create decision making opportunities for young people

- Create welcoming and supportive spaces for young people and their families

- Provide COVID relief

14

14 community projects were funded for a total of **\$146,000**, with about half of the projects being led or co-led by a young person!

Get to know the grantees:
bit.ly/DYLFgrantees

What's to come:

With support from our team, grantees will be working together as a cohort. We'll gather a few times over the grant year for connecting, sharing strategies and progress, and relationship building. We can't wait to keep on dreaming with the DYLF grantees in 2022! Connect with us on Instagram to see what grantees are up to.

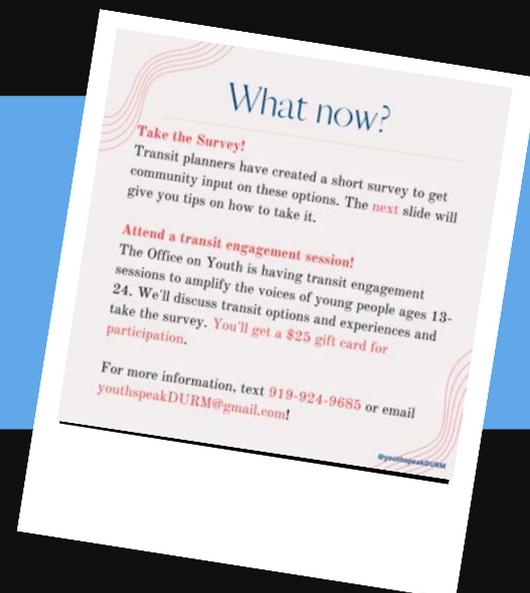
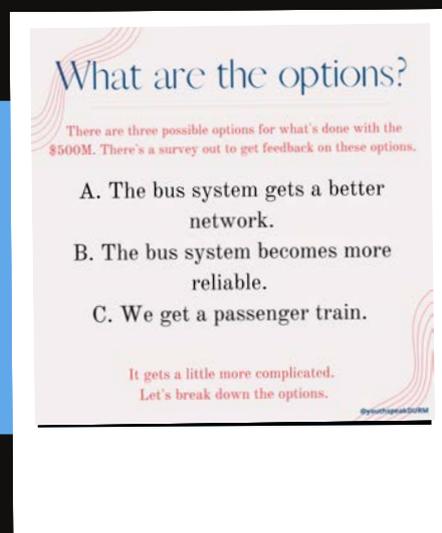
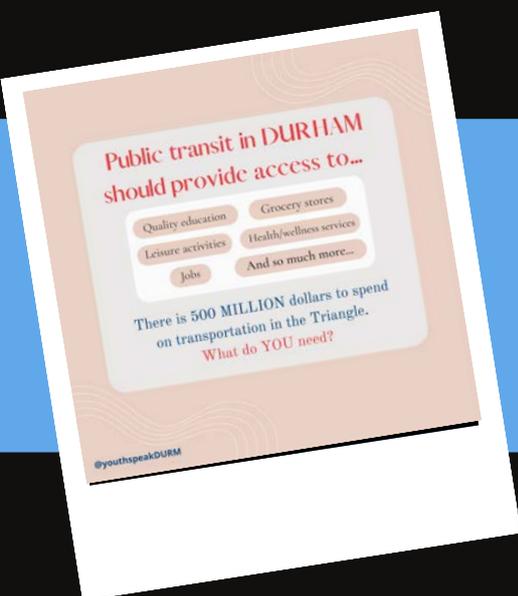
@YouthSpeakDURM



#4 Engaging young people in Durham's Transit Plan.

In fall 2021, our team had another opportunity to put into action what we heard during the YLP; and this time it was around **Durham County's Transit Plan**.

In summer 2021, Durham's Transit Plan team launched a transit survey seeking thoughts from the community on how to spend \$500 million dollars to improve transit in Durham. During the YLP we heard so much from young people around their transportation hopes and needs, and wanted to make sure young people had a voice in this process.



So, with the leadership and guidance of Bethlehem Ferede, a youth consultant, we held **Transit Plan engagement sessions** with young people to share more about the transit options and give them a chance to take the survey. Bethlehem designed the engagement guides and created key materials to break down the very complex concepts. We worked with community partners to host 4 sessions, engaging over 30 young people. Almost all the participants wanted to stay connected to future transit engagement opportunities!

We combined the results from these sessions with those from other listening sessions, such as the YLP and Durham Youth Climate Justice Initiative/Transit Equity Campaign sessions. We also analyzed the Transit Survey youth responses. We then shared a summary of our findings with the Transit Plan team to help guide policy decisions. A total of 700 young people were represented in that summary. We'll continue to engage young people in the upcoming steps of the Transit Plan process. More about the Transit Plan:

EngageDurham.com

◆ #5 Creating spaces for youth leadership in Durham.

An ongoing belief within our office is that young people's voices are important, and they deserve to be a part of the decisions that affect them and their communities. During 2021 we partnered up with young people to connect and support them in new leadership roles and opportunities in Durham. We also partnered with adults to create welcoming and supportive spaces for youth leadership.

20

Throughout 2021 we connected and supported close to **20 young people** to decision making and leadership roles within City and County departments. We were able to do all this by extending our time, support, and resources to make sure each young person was heard and felt comfortable stepping into those roles!

Some projects include the Comprehensive Plan engagement and Policy Working Groups; Transit Plan engagement; Participatory Budgeting youth delegates; the Durham Youth Leadership Fund grant making team, and more. Our Changed By Youth ambassadors will help us meet a growing demand for youth engagement in local government, and we expect to create many more new opportunities in 2022!

Final Reflections

Last year was a year for us to pace ourselves and be still in the moment, while having a view of what's ahead. We prioritized centering each other and building relationships. We made sure to leave plenty of time for checking in with one another and for rest. We saw the humanity in people, and most of all we kept pushing.

*2021 has shown us that our work sets the foundation for the kind of change we talk about when we imagine freedom for young people. With 2021 behind us and looking forward to 2022, we're manifesting that the year brings **all of us** lots of **abundance, joy, and gratitude!***

The work of 2021 was vital in laying a strong foundation to build on in 2022. Thank you all for continuing to support us and our work, and we hope your 2022 is an opportunity to keep building as well.

*Much Love,
The Office on Youth Team*

