

DURHAM

OUTREACH

LISTENING

PROJECT

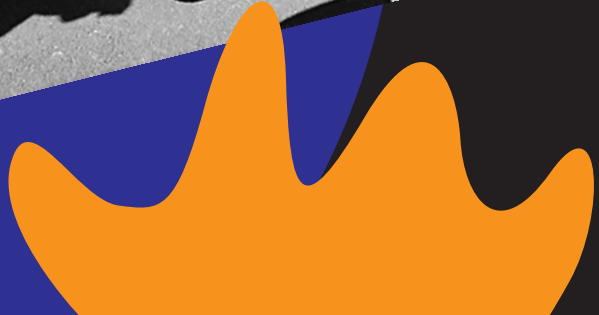




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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The City of Durham Office on Youth (OOY) could not have accomplished the Youth Listening Project (YLP) without the support, cooperation, and labor of the following people and organizations. It is with the deepest gratitude that we acknowledge them. We hope the findings and recommendations honor the collective wisdom shared during the YLP. The listed partners and collaborators allowed us to deeply hear and understand young people in Durham.

Thank you does not suffice for your efforts. This process was richer for having each of you in it.

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 tilde Language Justice Cooperative
 Weaver Street Recreation Center
 WG Pearson Center
 Countless of youth service providers in Durham
 who supported us, believed in us, and got the word
 out about the project to their youth and family
 networks

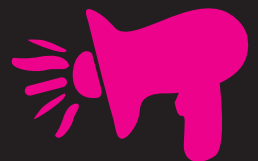
This report was prepared by Aidil Ortiz and Emanuel Brown of Strategies 4 Freedom alongside the staff of the City of Durham OOOY.

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REPORT SUMMARY

In 2019, the City of Durham Office on Youth (OOY) launched the Durham Youth Listening Project (YLP). The OOO wanted to hear from Durham’s young people about their needs and dreams, and about what they think about the resources in their communities. This information would help the OOO understand what mattered most to young people in Durham. It would also help guide the work of the OOO, local government agencies, and other youth serving organizations who are invested in the success of Durham’s young people.

Along with the support of a consultant team, Strategies 4 Freedom, LLC, the OOO carried out several community engagement activities and listening sessions. These activities were planned to hear the perspectives of young people and caregivers throughout Durham. The project prioritized the voices of those who have been pushed to the margins of society and usually do not have a voice in local government. The information collected from the project’s activities was reviewed in detail; and this report was written to summarize the findings. Demographic information was collected from all participants. This helped the team make sure they were hearing the voices that were being prioritized. The YLP team also took steps to remove barriers to participation. These steps included offering: Spanish language interpretation; child care; transportation; and gift cards.

When looking at the information collected throughout Durham, the team saw connections between unwelcome places, safety, and mental health. Durham must address these connections to improve the lives of young people. This is especially true for young people with identities that put them at a higher risk of harm because of the systems that discriminate against them. These young people are threatened by being seen as a threat, even in their own neighborhoods. As neighborhood profiles change to have more white and wealthy residents, longtime Black Durham residents are being pushed out. These changes are called “gentrification”. Gentrification changes the experience many young people have as they walk, bike, play, and live in their own neighborhoods. This is not only an experience in downtown, but all across Durham.

The challenges youth and caregivers shared, and recommendations for how to address them, are summarized on the next few pages. They are organized by the main themes of the YLP, and described later in the report in more detail.



ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CHALLENGES:

Local activities and programs are hard to access for a variety of reasons. Some reasons include the cost of programs, and also not knowing about programs. Young people and families are not able to take advantage of what is available. Young people also feel that there are gaps in programs being offered. High school aged youth feel especially left out of how programs are developed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Key ways to engage young people in local activities and programs include: expanding what is offered; promoting programs better; and lowering the cost of opportunities. Young people should be seen as co-creators of youth programming. Creating cultural events can help youth from a diverse set of backgrounds feel embraced by their community.

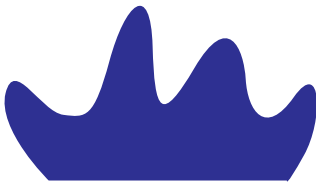
YOUTH LEADERSHIP

CHALLENGES:

There are few leadership opportunities open to young people. There are few opportunities for youth to have decision-making power in the organizations that serve them. For opportunities that do exist, many young people do not know about them. These opportunities are also not within reach for youth who do not have the supports needed to participate. Adults can have harmful biases against young people that affect youth leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Create paid leadership opportunities for young people within the systems that impact their lives. Support youth in accessing and succeeding in these positions. Organizations, schools, government departments and local businesses should create opportunities that embrace youth and share decision-making power.



WELCOMING PLACES FOR YOUTH

CHALLENGES:

The places thought of as the safest in Durham are often the most unwelcoming to young people in a variety of ways. Adult attitudes, stereotypes, and policies negatively impact the ability of young people to play, hang out, and have fun with friends.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Address the policies that discriminate against young people. Create and fund new spaces to satisfy the needs that youth have. Organizations should celebrate young people and create experiences that are youth friendly. Require staff at youth serving organizations to attend training about how to work with and engage young people.

TRANSPORTATION

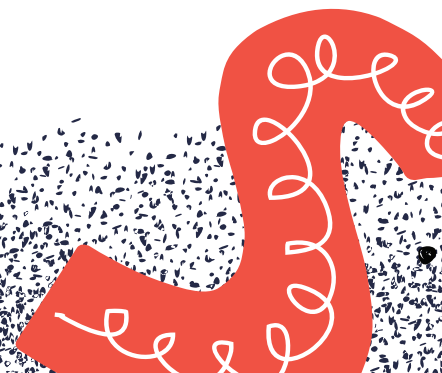


CHALLENGES:

Biking, pedestrian, and public transit offerings do not match the needs of youth in Durham. There are many barriers to using public transit, including concerns about safety while going to and from bus stops, and also while on the bus.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Improve sidewalks, bike lanes, and bus systems for young people so they can safely connect to opportunities that matter to them. Partner with youth to work on solutions to the many transit issues they face.





DIVERSITY

CHALLENGES:

Durham is very diverse. But the identities and experiences of staff at youth serving organizations are not as diverse as youth would like. As a result, there are language and cultural barriers that leave many young people feeling disconnected. Youth worried that there is too much focus on the needs and preferences of white families in Durham.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Organizations that serve youth should hire people who reflect the culture of the community they serve. Staff at youth serving organizations should be trained in how to work with youth from many backgrounds. Organizations and agencies must engage people of different cultures to lead gatherings, programs, and communications about those cultures.

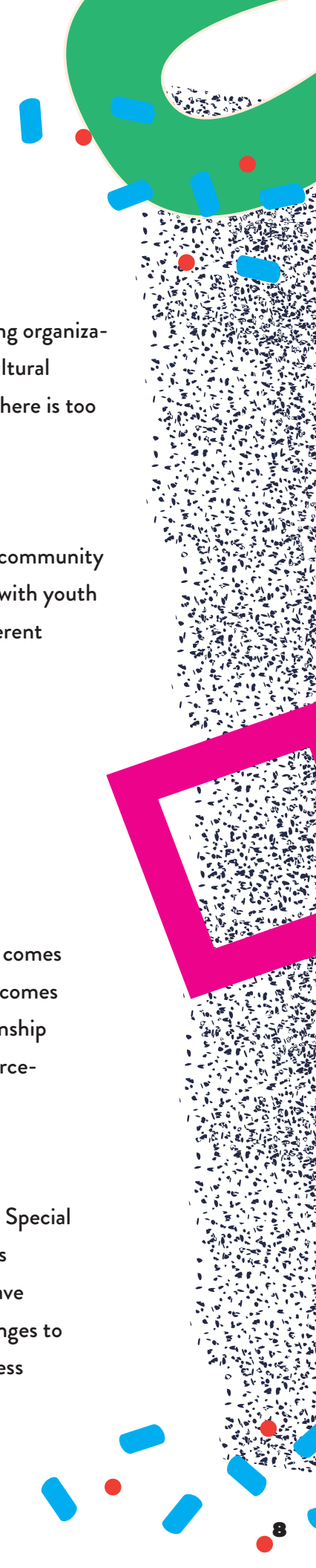
SAFETY

CHALLENGES:

Many young people have a general sense of feeling unsafe in Durham. This sense comes from a lack of welcoming places and from their experiences with violence. It also comes from the discrimination they experience because of their race, gender, and citizenship status. A lack of affordable mental health supports, plus the presence of law enforcement in their lives, harm the wellbeing of young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Greatly improve access to mental health supports and mentors for young people. Special attention should be paid to the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. Mental health providers should be trained to work with youth with diverse backgrounds, and those who have experienced trauma. Other strategies that can increase youth safety include changes to the spaces and structures near transit services. Schools must improve their wellness policies and use more practices that strengthen relationships.





Listening Project Youth Team

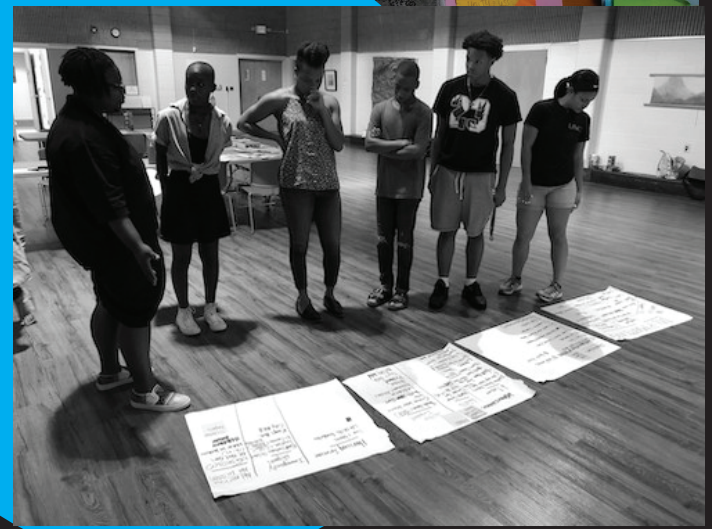
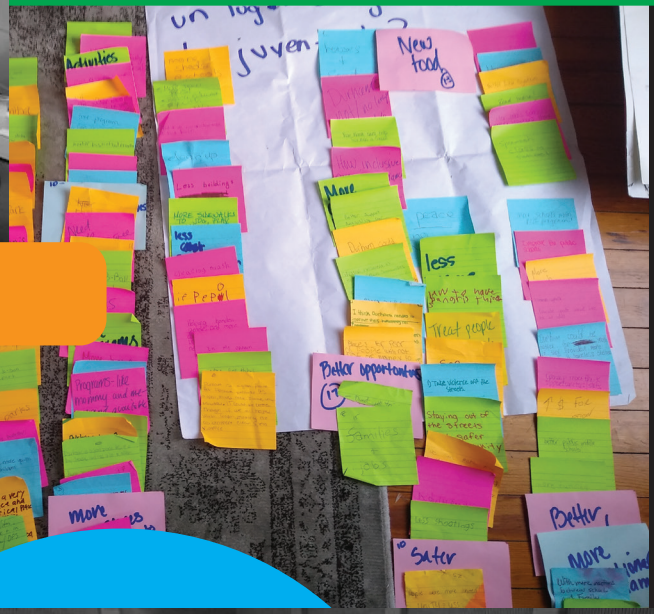


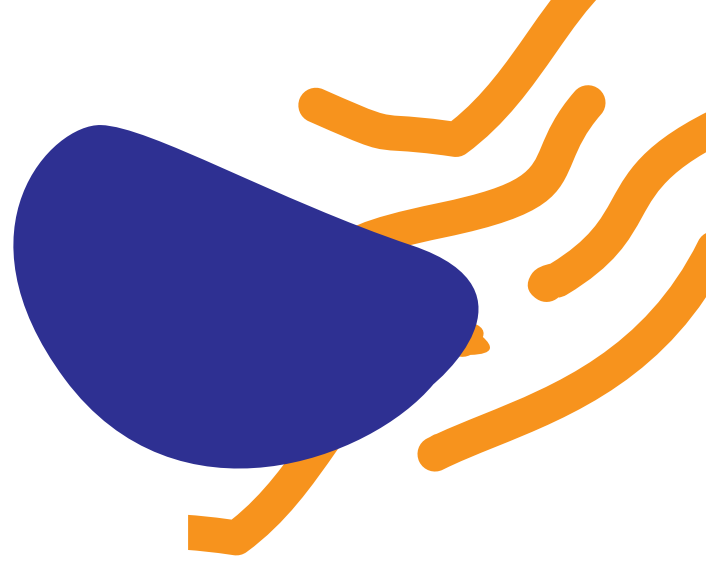
BACKGROUND

The Office on Youth (OOY) is a division in the City Manager's Office at the City of Durham. The OOY believes that youth perspectives and partnership are key to achieving positive outcomes for youth. The office works to create new ways for Durham youth to be decision-makers in local government. The office also works to improve services and programs so they better support all children and youth in Durham ages 5-24 years. The OOY partners with many people to achieve these goals, including: young people and their families; City and County staff; elected officials; and community partners.

In December 2017, the City of Durham and Durham County launched a new effort called the "strategic youth initiative". The initiative is based in the OOY and now guides the work of the office. Soon after the initiative began, the OOY decided it was important to hear directly from Durham's youth and their families about their experiences with youth services and youth leadership. The OOY wanted to launch a Youth Listening Project (YLP) to hear about their needs and dreams before creating any new programs or solutions. The goals of the project were to:

- ◆ Understand how to better engage and communicate with youth and their families
- Understand the barriers for participating in youth services and leadership
- ▼ Find solutions that could guide the work of the OOY, local government agencies, and other youth serving organizations
- ✋ Understand how to hear from youth and families on a regular basis





PROCESS OF THE DURHAM YOUTH LISTENING PROJECT

In early 2019, the OOH searched for a consultant who could support the office in carrying out the listening project. It was important to the office that the project prioritized the voices of young people and caregivers whose voices are often not included or considered in local government projects.

To choose the consultant, the OOH organized a large team. The team included young people and adult staff from City and County departments and community organizations. The team reviewed proposals from several consultants and held interviews. By April 2019, the team made their final decision and chose Strategies 4 Freedom, LLC. The project kicked off in summer of 2019, and went through fall 2020. The project was delayed by several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The YLP had four major phases: **CREATING CAPACITY**; **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**; **SENSE MAKING**; and **REFLECTING BACK**.

In the **CREATING CAPACITY** phase, youth staff were hired by the OOOY. These staff participated in all YLP activities. They were also trained to work alongside adults on a Youth-Adult Board. The board helped design the process and gave advice during the project. Other young people were also hired and trained as Youth Ambassadors. Ambassadors and youth staff participated in community engagement activities. They also promoted events, led listening sessions, analyzed data, and helped write this report. Youth received six trainings to build their capacity to be successful in the project. These trainings built skills and knowledge in: facilitation; the Photovoice method; Durham's history; and equity. A longer kickoff retreat with youth staff helped the team choose key audiences and the best locations for hosting listening sessions.

CHOOSING KEY AUDIENCES: At the kickoff retreat, the YLP team had many conversations about making sure a diverse group of youth from across Durham could participate in the project. The team acknowledged that all youth are not served equally in a world where structural oppression* exists. The team wanted to prioritize young people who have been pushed to the margins of society and often do not have a voice in processes like this one. **They decided to prioritize: 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.**

The team knew that special considerations had to be made to remove barriers for young people with these identities and experiences. To make sure the process of removing barriers was successful, the team asked all participants to complete a demographic form. This form would allow the team to see who participated in the project. It would also help the team understand if there were certain experiences that were more common for youth with certain identities.

* **STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION**

Oppression happens when there is a group of people that has more power and access to resources than another group of people. The group with more power believes they are better than the other group, and uses their power to make policies that benefit themselves. Those policies are usually unfair and harmful to the group with less power. Racism is one form of oppression that is based on race. Other forms of oppression can be based on age, gender, sexuality, income status, and education level, among others.

“Structures” like government, education, the health care system, and law enforcement have been around for a long time. Over time, these structures are influenced by the people with more power who work within them and get to set the rules. Through these set policies and practices, the structures themselves then become oppressive. The structures work together to oppress the people with less power, and benefit the people with more power.

The **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT** phase began with the team attending seven community events across Durham. At these events, the team asked youth what they think Durham is doing well for youth and what they think Durham could do better. Over 600 responses were collected from these events. The themes from these responses helped the YLP team know which issues to explore more deeply in the listening sessions. **These themes, or focus areas, were: Activities and Programs; Youth Leadership; Welcoming Places; Transportation; Diversity; and Safety.** The findings in this report are organized by these focus areas.

To make sure that youth with specific identities would be part of the listening sessions, the Youth-Adult Board recruited listening session hosts. The hosts were community partners that already had connections with youth who hold one or more of the identities listed on page 13. The team paid special attention to choosing welcoming and accessible locations all across Durham. The team also worked with hosts to find the most effective and appropriate ways to promote the sessions.

The team held a total of 13 listening sessions during the Community Engagement phase. Seven of the listening sessions were *closed groups* specifically for youth (ages 13 to 24 years) with the identities listed on page 13. For closed sessions, ambassadors and partner organizations recruited participants directly. Five of the listening sessions were *public* and open to any Durham youth (ages 13 to 24 years) and caregivers of children and youth (ages 5 to 24 years). For this project, a “caregiver” was an adult who has the main responsibility to care for a young person; they could be a biological parent, foster parent, relative, or someone else. One of the public sessions was for Spanish speakers only. Recruitment for public sessions happened through partners, social media, and flyering at locations and events across Durham. The final listening session was for youth-serving providers in Durham who are part of the OOH’s Youth Engagement Network.

During the sessions, youth team members served as facilitators, notetakers, and “greeters”. Greeters welcomed and supported participants at the sessions. A facilitator guide was used to ask questions about each of the focus areas, and there was a group discussion. To reduce barriers to participation, the YLP offered: \$25 gift cards; transportation; food; childcare; breathing breaks; engaging ice breakers; a self-care station; and Spanish language interpretation. Six other listening sessions, plus a planned Photovoice project, did not happen because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next phase of the YLP was **SENSE MAKING**. In this phase, information gathered from all the listening sessions was reviewed during several retreats. The purpose was to find themes in the data and write recommendations related to those themes. The Youth-Adult Board, ambassadors, OOH staff and Strategies 4 Freedom team all participated in these conversations. A data analysis software called Dedoose was used to help organize all the information gathered. The team then wrote a draft report that summarized the findings and listed all the recommendations.

The final phase of the project was **REFLECTING BACK**. In this phase, the team took the draft recommendations back to the community to ask, “Did we hear you right?” The team wanted to have the reflecting back sessions in person. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, three sessions were held virtually in fall 2020. One of these sessions was for Spanish speakers only. The team invited past participants and also recruited new participants directly through YLP partners. Both young people and caregivers were invited. Feedback shared during these sessions was then added to the report before it was finalized.



Youth Team at Durham Teen Center Listening Session

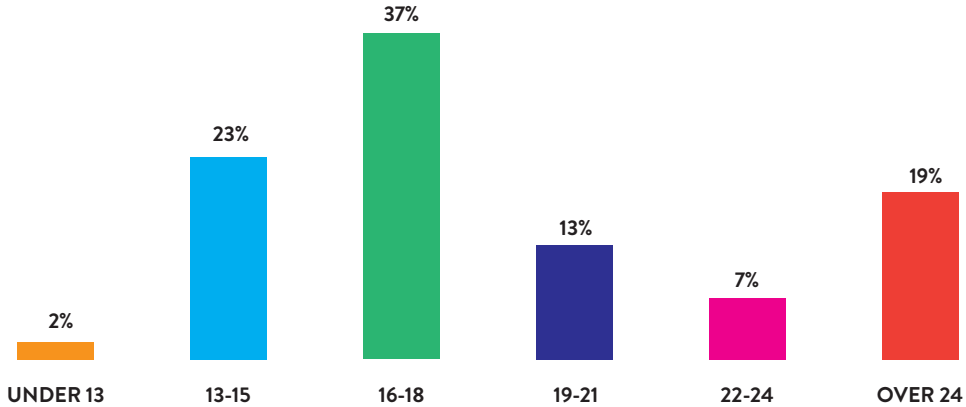
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

There were a total of 171 participants in the 13 listening sessions that happened during the Community Engagement phase of the project. Participants included young people (ages 13-24 years), caregivers of children and youth (ages 5-24 years), and Durham youth service providers. The team aimed to collect a demographic form from every participant. A few people chose not to complete the form. Some who did complete a form chose not to answer all the questions. The form's identity questions were open ended. Participant responses were themed into the following categories by project staff.

WHAT WAS THE AGE OF LISTENING SESSION PARTICIPANTS?

A total of 60% of the demographic form respondents were teenagers, ages 13 to 18 years.

A total of 19% of respondents were caregivers of children and youth (ages 5-24 years) and service providers in Durham.

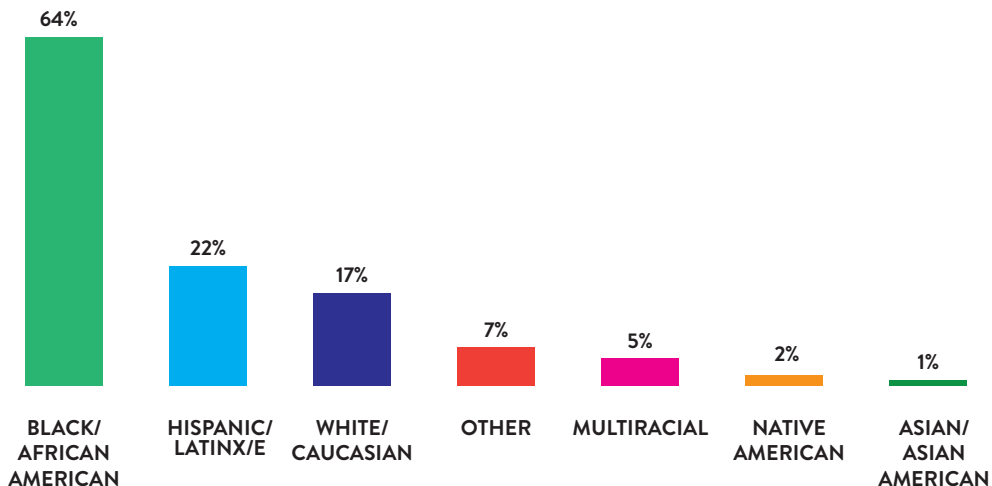


AGE OF DURHAM YOUTH LISTENING PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Note: Total percentages add up to over 100% due to rounding of each value

WHAT WAS THE RACE AND ETHNICITY OF LISTENING SESSION PARTICIPANTS?

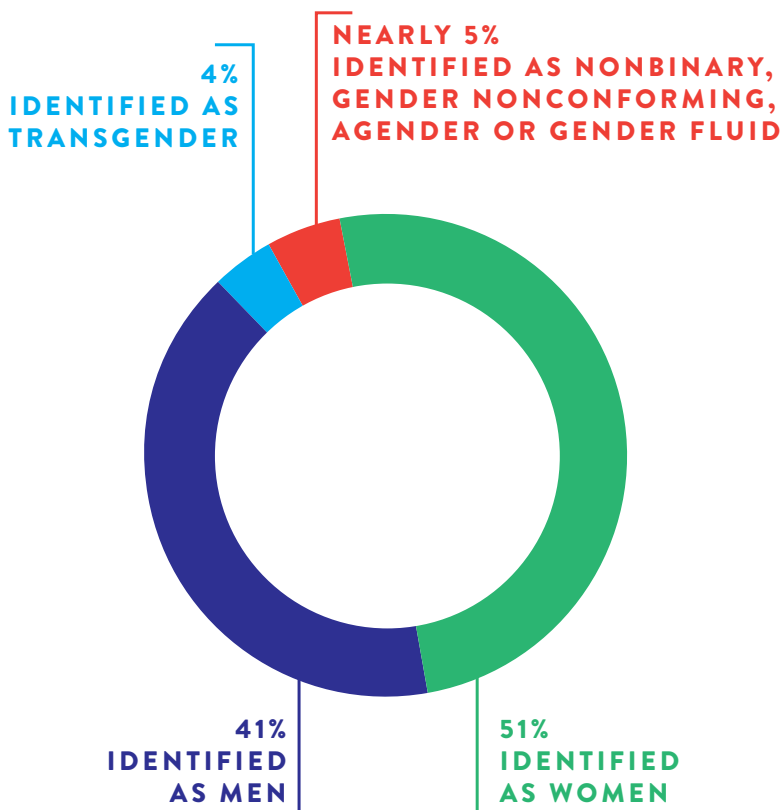
A total of 64% of respondents identified as Black/African American, 22% identified as Hispanic/Latinx/e, and nearly 2% identified as Native American. Some participants listed multiple races and ethnicities.



RACE AND ETHNICITY OF DURHAM YOUTH LISTENING PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

HOW DID PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBE THEIR GENDER?

A total of 51% of respondents identified as women, 41% identified as men, and nearly 4% identified as transgender. Nearly 5% of respondents identified as nonbinary, gender nonconforming, agender or gender fluid.



HOW DID PARTICIPANTS DESCRIBE THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

Nearly 8% of respondents identified as bisexual, and 10% identified as lesbian or gay. A total of 6% identified as pansexual, and nearly 3% identified as queer. About 2% were questioning or listed another sexual orientation, and about 71% identified as heterosexual.

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL OF PARTICIPANTS?

A total of 10% of respondents reported middle school as their highest level of education, and nearly 50% reported high school being their highest level. Nearly 15% of respondents said their highest level of education was a high school diploma or GED. A total of 25% of respondents had some form of post high school education.

OTHER IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS

10% 10% of respondents were not currently in school and not working at least part time

19% 19% were born outside of the United States or had a caregiver who was, and about 14% speak a language other than English at home

47% About 47% rent the home in which they reside, and 13% had experienced unstable housing in the last 12 months

24% 24% reported having a formal or legal interaction with law enforcement or the court system in the last 12 months

37% 37% used public transit in the last three months, with half of those users using public transit every week

21% 21% identified as having some kind of disability, related to physical health, mental health, learning, or another kind

REFLECTING BACK SESSIONS

Three additional listening sessions were held during the Reflecting Back phase, and a total of 40 people participated. Participants included young people (ages 13-24 years) and caregivers of children and youth (ages 5-24 years). In general, the identities and experiences of participants in these sessions were similar to those in the first 13 sessions. Some main differences included:

- A more even distribution of ages, with about half young people and half caregivers
- Significantly more Hispanic/Latinx/e participants (63%), less Black/African American participants (26%), and no Native participants
- More participants who were born outside the United States or had a caregiver who was (34%), and more who spoke a language other than English at home (47%)
- ◆ More participants who identified as lesbian or gay (24%), and more who identified as queer (14%)
- More participants who were not in school and not working (20%)
- ▼ Less participants who used public transit in the last three months (11%)

WHY "LATINX/E"?

Spanish is a gendered language. An "o" is often used as an ending for words that are masculine, and an "a" is used for words that are feminine. For example, Latina is used to refer to a group of women, and Latino is used to refer to a group of men. Also, traditionally, the masculine form is used as a default when speaking generally about a group of people, even if there are people of other genders in the group. Not all people identify with being either a man or a woman; their gender identity is outside of these two choices, also called the gender "binary". In this report, following the lead of many Spanish-speaking LGBTQ+ youth and adults, we use an "x/e" in place of the default masculine "-o" (like, Latinx/e). The "x" is used to replace the "-o" more often in the US, and the "e" is used more often in Spanish-speaking countries; we chose to use both in this report. This change helps make the text more gender-neutral and inclusive of those who do not identify in the gender binary. We know that language evolves, and we are committed to evolving as our work with the community continues. Meanwhile, we will continue to refer to people in the genders and pronouns they use for themselves.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PROJECT REFLECTIONS

Government agencies should seek to serve all people. Young people ages 24 and younger make up over 31% of the population in Durham County according to the NC Department of Commerce.¹ That is almost 100,000 young residents with hopes, dreams, and concerns living in our community. It is important that Durham understand and listen to this part of the community as it builds the present and the future.

This report provides an opportunity to listen to young people and caregivers. It offers strategies that can make Durham a place where young people thrive. There are many reports from multiple agencies and groups in Durham that speak about health, housing, education, and other key issues that impact the lives of young people. Few if any of those reports relied on the voices of young people to better understand challenges and potential solutions.

From the beginning, the project relied on a partnership between young people and adults. Paid positions for youth were created to make sure this partnership was equitable, or fair and just. The YLP's Youth Ambassadors and staff were essential to the design of the project. They were also very invested in the project. They led promotion and engagement efforts, and led the listening sessions themselves. They were partners in finding themes in all the collected stories and information, and also partners in writing this report.

Attempting to understand a group of people in the community in order to better serve them is no easy task. The YLP approach was most informed by equitable community engagement and “targeted universalism”.^{*} The Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society at UC Berkeley has stated that “targeted universalism is an approach that supports the needs of the particular, while reminding us that we are all part of the same social fabric.”² In other words, there is a universal goal that is for everyone; and many different, targeted ways are needed to help people reach that goal based on the different needs they have.

As described earlier, the YLP team used multiple strategies to make sure that young people whose voices are often not heard were prioritized in the project. The project also had opportunities for any young person or caregiver in Durham to participate. The demographics section of this report shows that the strategies used by this project were indeed successful. The project was able to engage 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.

¹ NC Department of Commerce. (2020, October). Durham County Profile (Rep.). Accessed October 30, 2020, from Access NC website: <https://accessnc.nccommerce.com/DemoGraphicsReports/pdfs/countyProfile/NC/37063.pdf>

² Powell, j.a., Menendian, S., & Ake, W. (2019, May). Targeted Universalism Policy & Practice (Rep.). Accessed October 30, 2020, from University of California, Berkeley website: https://belonging.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/targeted_universalism_primer.pdf

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations of this report must be noted. In January 2020, McDougald Terrace residents were displaced due to carbon monoxide concerns. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic began. These events meant that four listening sessions planned in different parts of Durham were cancelled, and efforts to schedule two additional sessions stopped. As a result, some voices are not represented in this report as much as hoped. These voices include Durham's immigrant, Muslim, and public housing communities, and the voices of Native young people.

HOW TO USE THESE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings and recommendations from the YLP are shared on the following pages and are organized by the six key focus areas explored in the listening sessions: Activities and Programs; Youth Leadership; Welcoming Places; Transportation; Diversity; and Safety. Each section includes a summary of findings from conversations with youth, caregivers, and service providers. Also included is a list of the YLP team's top five recommendations for that focus area.

The Durham community is encouraged to use this report as a guide to help improve the quality of life for young people in Durham. The City of Durham, Durham County, local community organizations, and businesses should all find ways to work on the challenges, and act on the recommendations. Young people and their families are encouraged to hold agencies accountable for the work they are doing to address these recommendations.

Many of the findings and recommendations are connected to each other, even though they may be summarized in separate sections. This means the work to respond to them will need to be collaborative. It will need to include many different types of partners to be effective and meaningful for Durham's youth.

* TARGETED UNIVERSALISM IN PRACTICE

The YLP used targeted universalism by focusing on identities and lived experiences that are underrepresented in decision making in Durham. Doing this made sure the solutions created took their needs into consideration first. This does not mean that people with different identities were not considered. There are many other youth whose needs are being better met by the existing programs and services. Any solutions that come from this project will also benefit those young people.

“MOST OF THE TIME THINGS COST MONEY, LIKE TO BE ABLE TO DO AN ACTIVITY YOU HAVE TO PAY X AMOUNT OF MONEY. AND MOST KIDS DON’T REALLY HAVE THAT MUCH MONEY. THEY ARE TOO BUSY PAYING BILLS OR HELPING OUT THEIR PARENTS THAT THEY CAN’T REALLY AFFORD TO HAVE FUN WITH THEIR FRIENDS OR LIKE, HAVE TIME TO THEMSELVES BECAUSE THEY HAVE SO MANY RESPONSIBILITIES ALREADY.”

**YOUTH PARTICIPANT,
NORTH REGIONAL LIBRARY SESSION**



Valencia McQueen, Youth Ambassador

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMS

Durham is a place with a lot of activities and programs. However, for many high school aged youth there is a feeling of being overlooked in what the community offers. While many elementary and middle school students enjoy field days or field trips, many young people reported that these types of opportunities disappear in their high school years. Many youth also shared that they wanted more activities that reflect their culture. They want more opportunities to meet people with different identities, and more opportunities to be artistic.

YLP participants shared many barriers to participating in youth offerings that already exist. Barriers included the price and location of events and programs. This was especially true for participants from low-income families. Young people also shared that for programs that do exist, they often do not know about them. This was a common problem mentioned by youth who feel left out altogether, or do not hear about activities and programs until after they are over. They suggested better promotion of programs directly to them. Young people mentioned Durham Parks and Recreation a few times in their discussion. When asked specifically about the current ways Durham Parks and Recreation advertises their offerings, many YLP participants had not heard of these communications.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▼ Non-profit organizations, local businesses, schools and government agencies should increase programming for young people, especially for high school-aged youth and youth of color. Programming should include a wide range of opportunities, including arts, social events, and field trips.
- ◆ Host an annual festival or event that celebrates young people and is managed by young people for young people.
- ◆ Improve promotion about youth programs and services in Durham so that more young people are aware of what is being offered. Work with young people to find the best ways to promote programs.
- ◆ Youth serving organizations and government agencies should host their own youth listening sessions. This would help them better understand how to improve their programs for young people.
- ◆ Provide more low cost or free programming for youth in Durham to eliminate the cost barrier; young people have less money to spend.

**“I WOULD LOVE TO SEE YOUNG PEOPLE
POSITIONED AT ALL OF OUR
ORGANIZATIONS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES
AND AT OTHER ORGANIZATIONS THAT
ARE NOT REPRESENTED HERE, AND IN
A WAY THAT IS NOT TOKENIZING.
I WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEM
GENUINELY GIVEN SPACE
TO BE THE LEADERS THAT
THEY ALREADY ARE,
EVERYWHERE.”**

**ADULT PARTICIPANT,
SERVICE PROVIDER SESSION**



Vee Corley, Youth Ambassador

YOUTH LEADERSHIP



The Harris Poll conducted a 4-H National Youth Survey on Leadership with 1,501 students (9th through 12th grade) in 2016.³ A total of seventy-six percent (76%) of youth said adult leaders are not focused on what matters most to them. Over half (59%) said adult leaders have weak leadership because they do not follow through on their promises. Creating opportunities for young people to share power in the places and spaces that affect their lives is important. Doing this is key to making sure youth concerns are heard in rooms where decisions are made. In Durham, there are many young people who are leaders and want to be engaged. Leadership opportunities must be created for them, with the understanding that not all youth have the same supports needed to participate. Existing opportunities for youth often do not offer pay, child care, interpretation, transportation, and other supports that can make them more accessible. Many youth participants shared that because of this, high quality leadership opportunities often feel out-of-reach for them.

Another concern is the issue of “adultism”. The Freechild Institute states that adultism is when adult beliefs and actions are valued more than young people’s.⁴ Adultism leads to attitudes and behaviors that favor adults, and discriminate against young people. This bias shows up against young people and their ability to be leaders. It is reinforced by institutions, laws, customs, and beliefs. YLP youth participants felt that adultism is the reason there are not many leadership opportunities for them in youth-serving organizations and other agencies. More generally, they thought it was because of the unwillingness of adults to share decision making power with young people. This lack of partnership with young people leads to programming that is less attractive and relevant to young people. It also leads to programs and policies that are less effective at meeting the needs of young people.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ Youth serving organizations must share their power and partner with young people, especially those who have historically been pushed to the margins and have not had a voice. Organizations can do this by hiring young people as staff and consultants, and offering other supports that allow for their participation.
- ◆ Find and implement ways to have a youth vote in Durham so young people can have a say in local elections and funding decisions.
- ◆ Set aside a student seat on the Durham Public Schools Board of Education that would be won through an election.
- In public speeches, the City Manager, County Manager, and elected officials should dedicate time to talk about issues that affect young people in Durham. Young people should also be invited to present speeches themselves.
- ◆ Expand the ability of the OOO to host and train a core group of ambassadors. The ambassadors can be contracted to government departments as consultants to their projects.

³ Harris Poll. (2016, March 21). National Youth Survey Report (Rep.). Accessed October 30, 2020, from National 4-H Council website: <https://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/National-Youth-Survey-Report-PUBLIC.pdf>

⁴ Free Child Institute. (2020, July 01). Introduction to Adultism. Accessed October 30, 2020, from Free Child website: <https://freechild.org/introduction-to-adultism>

**“THERE’S NOT MANY THINGS
TO DO IN DOWNTOWN. THE
ONLY THING YOU CAN DO IS BE
OUT WITH YOUR FRIENDS, BE
LOUD. THEN EVERYBODY’S
LIKE ‘OH MY GOD THESE
DAMN TEENAGERS AGAIN’.
BUT IT’S LIKE, HAVE MORE
PLACES FOR US TO GO IN
AND ACTUALLY DO
THINGS.”**

**YOUTH PARTICIPANT,
NORTH REGIONAL LIBRARY SESSION**



Kathryn Owusu, Youth Ambassador

WELCOMING PLACES

PLACES

Durham has done a lot of work to attract new residents to the area and to transform the image of our public schools. Downtown Durham has been transformed over the last fifteen years and public school enrollment was up before the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these efforts, many youth participants shared that they do not feel welcome in downtown Durham or in schools. This was especially mentioned by youth of color. Local businesses were not seen as welcoming places because of the signals they give young people that keep them away. These signals include dress codes, the presence of alcohol, treatment by staff, the cost of entry, and age restrictions. Many young people were frustrated that there were few places to go in Durham where they could connect with their friends in casual settings in their free time. Many youth participants also shared that they did not feel welcome at school because of their interactions with the adults there. They shared that teachers, school resource officers, and administrators are not caring or trustworthy.

Several participants said that libraries were a place to hang out, learn, play, be welcome and feel safe. Within Durham Parks and Recreation, very specific facilities were mentioned as places of welcome (i.e., Walltown Park, W.D. Hill, Holton Career and Resource Center, and the Durham Teen Center at Lyon Park). It was their relationship with and trust in staff at these places that made young people feel welcome. No other City or County sponsored programs or spaces were mentioned. Participants shared that when a place is seen as “youth friendly”, it often means that place is “family friendly”. In these cases, a caregiver has to be present. Such places do not usually allow unsupervised high school aged youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Enhance and expand what libraries have to offer as welcoming places for young people in Durham.
- Require that Durham Public Schools teachers and administrators participate in trainings about “adulthood” and about the key concerns of LGBTQ+ youth. Highly recommend these trainings for staff of youth serving organizations. Allow young people to evaluate the effectiveness of these trainings.
- Local businesses in Durham should embrace and celebrate young people and create experiences that are youth friendly.
- Local businesses and organizations should end policies that discriminate against young people. For example, these policies include curfews and policing the way youth dress and the language they use in public places.
- Invest in more places that can be used as teen centers where creative, athletic, social, and academic resources can be offered.

“I LIVE ON NORTH ROXBORO STREET. SOMETIMES IF I WALK TO DOWNTOWN IT’S KINDA DIFFICULT BECAUSE SOME OF THE PORTIONS DON’T HAVE SIDEWALKS. OR IT IS HARD TO GET TO AND I’LL HAVE TO WALK REALLY CLOSE TO CARS AND IT’S KINDA DANGEROUS. THAT, AND BEING A WOMAN. IT SUCKS ‘CAUSE YOU GET PEOPLE BEEPING AT YOU. AND HONESTLY IT’S REALLY FRUSTRATING”

**YOUTH PARTICIPANT,
DURHAM TEEN CENTER SESSION**

“THE CLOSEST BUS STOP FROM OUR HOUSE IS A MILE AWAY. AND HE [GRANDSON] HAS TO WALK ON STREETS WITH NO SIDEWALKS AND STREETS WHERE YOU HAVE CARS GOING 50MPH. SO I FEEL THAT IS VERY DISHEARTENING AS FAR AS WALKING.”

**CAREGIVER PARTICIPANT,
DURHAM TEEN CENTER SESSION**



Aissa Dearing, Youth Ambassador

TRANSPORTATION

For many young people, transportation most often comes from private cars, Uber, Lyft or public transit. However, young people shared that they would like to walk, bike, or use public transit more often to get to places they want and need to go. There were many reasons for why they did not use these options more often. These included violence and sexual harassment on sidewalks, at bus stops, and while riding on buses. Young people also felt that their personal space is not respected by other passengers when riding the bus. Young people had to protect themselves from experiencing these things while getting to and from places. They also disliked their transportation experiences because of the bad condition of sidewalks, and the lack of sidewalks and bike lanes. Many participants said that public transit was not dependable, and also not clean.

GoTriangle started the free Youth GoPass program in 2019. In the first year of the program, about 6,600 teenagers signed up.⁵ In that year, teens in the Triangle used their passes 460,000 times! Youth and caregivers were frustrated that they did not know about the Youth GoPass; and even when they did, they felt there were not enough ways to get one. Young people also shared that the public transit schedule and the hours of operation at places they visit do not match up in a way that works for their lives. This was a very common experience across the sessions. There is much more that young people seemed interested in doing if they could get to those places AND make it back home safely.

⁵ GoTriangle. (2019, September 10). 460,000! That's how many transit trips Youth GoPass holders took in program's first year. Retrieved October 30, 2020, from GoTriangle website: <https://gotriangle.org/news/ygp-year-one>



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◆ Fund physical structures and networks for bus shelters, sidewalks and bicycling paths, especially in the rural parts of Durham County. Make sure these networks connect neighborhoods to places that are important to young people.
- ☾ Explore the possibility of a bus system with routes and times that cater to the needs of young people. Prioritize the needs of those who do not have access to cars.
- Partner with young people to improve tools like GoLive so that the public transit schedules shown are accurate.
- ▼ Partner with young people to create an improved plan to promote and distribute GoPasses, including within school systems.
- ⚙️ Improve the cleanliness, maintenance, and customer service of public transit for a better experience. This should include trainings that help drivers manage conflict on the bus and avoid seeking help from law enforcement.

**“DURHAM IS SPLIT IN
AREAS. YOU GOT
HISPANIC AREAS,
BLACK AND HISPANIC
AREAS, BLACK AREAS,
AND WHITE AREAS.”**

**YOUTH PARTICIPANT,
MOVEMENT OF YOUTH SESSION**



From left to right: Bethann Mwombela, Nori McDuffie, Jaylen Segers, Office on Youth, Youth Staff

DIVERSITY

DIVERSITY

Since the beginning of the YLP, it was clear that community members thought Durham's diversity makes it a great place for young people. Young people and caregivers also felt there are few opportunities to truly connect with people of diverse backgrounds. Diverse backgrounds could mean people with different races, gender identities, income levels, documentation status, and languages spoken.

Many participants wanted more community experiences that celebrated diversity in an authentic, or real, way. They shared that this was different than when diversity is used for something like a promotional brochure. It was also different than creating cultural celebrations that are really planned for and by white people. Culture relates to the traditions, values, experiences, and languages of a group of people.

Young people shared that a true celebration of diversity is when different cultures are embraced at many levels. For example, young people want to see their culture represented and celebrated in classroom lessons, organizations, and community celebrations. Some young people shared that having these opportunities would help them learn how to connect with people with different cultures. They would also help young people feel safe.

Young people also want to see themselves reflected in the staff at the organizations that impact and shape their lives. Participants shared that regardless of who is hired, staff must be trained to understand and serve youth with diverse backgrounds. Participants also shared their worries about Durham's growth and how it impacts diversity. They shared that their neighborhoods are changing because there are many white and wealthy people moving to Durham. They worried that Durham's resources will mostly cater to these new residents. They also shared that the changes are pushing out many Black and Latinx/e families. This trend will eventually lead to having less diversity in Durham.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ▼ Youth serving organizations should review the way they hire new staff. They should make sure their staff's identities and experiences reflect the communities they serve.
- ◆ Staff at youth serving organizations should take trainings about how to work with youth from many backgrounds. Staff should also be trained to support young people who have experienced trauma and discrimination.
- ➔ Durham should have more events to celebrate the different cultures in the community. Some ideas include a Hispanic Culture parade or a Muslim Women's Day. These celebrations should be planned by members of the communities being celebrated.
- ▮ Organizations and government agencies must improve their ability to translate information into other languages, especially Spanish. The translated versions should be shared with the community at the same time as the English versions.
- ◀ Schools should offer classes, programs, and clubs that celebrate and educate about other cultures; these experiences should be created by people from that culture. History classes about diverse cultures should be required; some examples include Latin American and African American history.

**“THE ONLY TIME I
FELT SAFE [WAS]
WHEN I WAS
LITTLE,
LITTLE. BUT
LIKE, PAST
SIX YEARS
OLD, LIKE
NAH...”**

**YOUTH PARTICIPANT
PROJECT BUILD SESSION**

Kevin Meza, Youth Ambassador



SAFETY

Some of the most consistent stories expressed during the YLP were those of young people feeling unsafe. Young people feel an overwhelming need for mental health support to help them survive the experiences they are faced with. They shared that there are not enough mental health resources to address the many pressures they feel. These pressures include violence, bullying, and discrimination, among others. For the mental health resources that are available, young people felt that they are not easy to access and not affordable. They also felt that the mental health providers they have talked to did not have a good understanding of their background and culture. Many participants said there should be more mental health resources in schools so that everyone could have access to them.

Other safety concerns shared by young people included guns, gangs, and violence in schools. Several young people who do not feel safe in Durham mentioned the need to carry weapons. Many of them also felt that they do not have many adults to trust. They shared that they do not feel safe at school. They said this was because of the presence of school resource officers, the threat of school shooters, and the adults they interact with at their schools. Many youth participants said that seeing law enforcement in their schools and communities made them worry about what could happen to them. They worried that they might be pulled into the criminal legal system unfairly. Because of all of these conditions, youth do not feel that government is there to protect them.

Participants also shared that because of Durham's growth, many neighborhoods are changing. For many longtime residents, the changes have made it harder to afford living in Durham. Several participants said they do not feel safe because they have been evicted, or are always concerned about being evicted. Young people also shared concerns and experiences with sexual harassment at bus stops. They brought up concerns about discrimination based on their gender identity, sexual orientation, and citizenship status. LGBTQ+ youth shared that they experience many negative actions against them. These actions impact their sense of belonging, safety, and mental health.

It is important to note that as young people experience these pressures in their lives, they do not feel that there are many safe spaces for them to go.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ◐ Greatly increase and improve the mental health resources available to young people, especially in schools. Resources should be free or affordable, and easy to access. They should also be created with consideration of diverse cultures and backgrounds.
- ◆ Mental health providers should receive ongoing training in topics such as: racial equity; mental health first aid; working with young people with diverse backgrounds and cultures, and those who have experienced trauma and discrimination. More providers should be available in schools.
- ☾ Increase safety in neighborhoods and near public transit stops. Add lighting and emergency alert stations. Support activities led by the community that create more safety.
- ◐ Fund and support mentorship experiences. Experiences should be long term and match youth to mentors with the same identities and experiences, especially for LGBTQ+ youth.
- ▼ Improve practices and policies at schools to create a culture of safety, respect, and acceptance. Practices that promote wellness, such as mindful breathing, check ins, and creative expression should be used. Community-building practices, such as teaching empathy and gathering in groups to talk about problems, should also be used. These practices can create a culture of safety at schools, and prevent bullying, violence, and the need for law enforcement.



CITY OF DURHAM OFFICE ON YOUTH

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FEBRUARY 2021



OFFICE ON YOUTH
City Manager
CITY OF DURHAM

