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Employers told to fight gang problem with jobs

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Durham businesses need to give young people jobs to help curb the city's gang problem, officials said Thursday night.

Several job-placement officials said one of the major obstacles they faced this summer was finding employment for the children and young adults in their programs.

Kenneth Lyons, who works with the Durham County Department of Social Services, said the Welfare to Work program is mainly made up of single mothers. But he said the program tries to help other people find jobs, too.

"There's a stigma," Lyons said. "If anyone has any impairment - a mental impairment, a criminal record ... [employers] are afraid to take a chance."

When asked what it would take to stifle a growing gang problem in Durham, Lyons said "more employers willing to take a chance."

About 30 people were at City Hall for the city's fifth gang-awareness forum, which focused on youth employment opportunities.

Dewarren Langley, a junior at Jordan High School, has spent the last two years working with the Duke-Durham Partners for Youth, a program based in Southwest-Central Durham.

At first Langley didn't think the program would benefit him. But he said it took all of two days to realize the program was designed to help him achieve his goals.

Langley has taken what he has learned and tried to help friends not in the program.

"It takes only a second to open a wound, but it takes a long time to heal," he said he has told his friends about bad choices. "And if you open a lot of lot of wounds at one time, you're going to be in a lot of pain."

The final gang forum will be held Oct. 25 at 6 p.m. at City Hall. It will focus on faith in the community.

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