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Let youth have role in city

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On Oct. 28, three teens escaped from the Durham Youth Center on Broad Street.

Using a makeshift knife, one youth overpowered a detention counselor and got keys to the other youths' rooms before the trio left on foot.

Considered dangerous, the three were recaptured the following evening, prompting county officials to consider accelerating construction of a new \$5 million youth home.

"It's not a huge project," County Commissioner Ellen Reckhow told The Herald-Sun. "It's manageable in terms of cost and size. It's at least worth exploring."

Although the escape of the three juveniles raised concern throughout Durham, county officials are not responding with the correct solution. Rather than sinking \$5 million into a new facility to house misguided youth, city, county and school officials should jointly seek input from youth.

In mid-September, the Durham City Council voted 7-0 to approve the creation of a Durham Youth Commission, which would serve as an advisory board of youth to assist local government officials including the county commissioners and board of education. Although this commission has been approved by city officials, it has yet to receive hearings from county and school officials.

The aforementioned statement by Commissioner Reckhow is valid, but a new youth home will not solve nor address the issues concerning this city's youth.

Throughout the 2002 midterm elections, jobs were a constant issue of debate and a major concern of residents. While jobs are critical to adults, they are a necessity of youth.

Durham currently lacks an environment that provides positive youth development or encourages individuality.

More money is not needed for the detention of youth because such an approach is not the solution.

It would be far less difficult for city, county and school officials to actively seek the involvement and participation of youth in developing fitting solutions to the urgent needs of youth.

Youth would value and appreciate the Durham community more if they felt they had a stake in the community, a sense of ownership.

Commissioner Reckhow was correct in her statement because involving youth and providing them with the necessary tools they need to succeed is not a huge project; it's an undeveloped project.

City and county officials need to jointly work with school officials to create meaningful programs that will address the present issues challenging youth. The only way those programs will successfully guide and develop youth is allowing youth to participate in the program development.

Youth must be given more and should be allowed to discuss how officials can contribute to decrease gang involvement and provide youth with greater opportunities.

Creating meaningful work opportunities and programs that last throughout the school year and discussing ways to make Durham more youth friendly and oriented is "manageable in terms of cost and size."

As Commissioner Reckhow stated, "It's at least worth exploring."

Exploring the possible partnership between those in positions of power and the youth of Durham is worth exploring just as creating jobs and more meaningful programs for youth should be worth exploring.

As Helen Keller once said, "Alone we can do little but together we can do much."

Let's pull together and create solutions rather than alternatives that fail.

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