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Mentor group hits milestone Designed to aid teenagers, Partners for Youth achieves independent nonprofit status

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DeWarren Langley's plans to become mayor of Durham, governor of North Carolina and then president of the United States have not changed.

"It's just a matter of time before it plays out," he said. "I truly love Durham, my state and my nation. Those are the three best ways to contribute back to a place that offers so much opportunity."

Langley, a rising sophomore at Hampton University, learned to aim high through Partners For Youth, a Bull City organization that celebrated its six-year anniversary and new status as an independent nonprofit group July 1.

Partners For Youth was developed jointly by Duke University and the Southwest Central Durham Coalition in response to the community's interest in providing teens with summer jobs and more guidance.

The program enrolls 25 students each year. The students join when they are 14 to 16 and renew their commitment each year until they finish their first year of college, said program director Leigh Bordley.

"We retain 85 to 95 percent of the students," Bordley said. "We're proud of that."

Each student is matched with a team of mentors that includes an adult from the community, a Duke student tutor, an employer and a teacher at their school. The network of mentors supports the students through their time in the program.

"It's not for everybody," Bordley said. "It's a long-term commitment."

Bordley said moving out from under the auspices of Duke's Office of Community Affairs and becoming a nonprofit will make it easier for the program to raise money.

"People just assume that we have lots of money because we've been with Duke from the beginning," she said. "Duke has not funded the work but helped facilitate the program."

However, Partners For Youth still plans to rely on Duke tutors, she said.

The program is based out of the Lyon Park Community Family Life and Recreation Center, at 1313 Halley St. in Durham's West End. Langley was on hand to celebrate the program's nonprofit status July 1, when he officially graduated from it.

"It was a great opportunity to reflect on my five years in the program," he said. "A lot of students credit the program for motivating them to improve their grades and go to college."

Langley, who is interning this summer in Raleigh for the N.C. Utilities Commission, said he got the civic bug after a 1999 trip to Washington, D.C., where he and other students presented papers on homelessness to U.S. Sen. John Edwards, D-N.C., at the Capitol.

"I found my passion in life: civic involvement," Langley said. "Throughout the remainder of my involvement with Partners For Youth, I focused on contributing to the community, academic excellence and helping out others."

Langley also had words of praise for Bordley, who has run the program since its inception.

"She's truly a dedicated, loving, kind and passionate person," he said. "The time she's given to each of us and the program is remarkable She's not a seasonal person. You meet her and you know you have a friend for life."

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