

# Durham attorney serves through law, advocacy and community engagement

By Maddie Marshall

There was a warmth in the room. It could have been from the sun shining through the window or the warmth that came from a smile.

Nisha G. Williams sat at the dining room table helping her 14-year-old son, Louis, with his homework and as she prepared for dinner. Williams began her journey into service because of her son.

Tamir Rice was 12 years old when he was shot by the police while playing with a toy gun in 2014. Seeing Tamir lose his life as a little black boy affected Williams. Louis has always looked more mature than age his age. This inspired Williams to become a more active member of the Durham community.

“Around February I took a two-day workshop with the Racial Equity Institute,” Williams said. “After the course, everyone is like, ‘How do I get involved?’”

“I had a friend to suggest that I join some local boards,” she continued. “I started looking. I found the Juvenile Crime Prevention Council of Durham County.”

The Juvenile Crime Prevention Board of Durham County was the beginning. Williams joined the Durham Workforce Youth Council, Fostering Alternative Drug Enforcement (FADE), Organizing Against Racism and the Durham County School Conduct Task Force. She also became a sister in Theta Nu Xi Multicultural Sorority Inc.

Williams’ community service focuses on helping youth and marginalized people in Durham and the surrounding county. Each of these groups tries to find solutions to the many problems marginalized people face daily.

“Attorney Nisha Williams’ exceptional character evinces itself through her compassion for community, her commitment to advocacy and her dedication to race equity,” said attorney David Hall.

“Her collaborative and individual efforts have resulted in direct reductions of disparate outcomes for communities of color in policing, youth justice and criminal justice,” he added.

Service was not a new concept to Williams. She grew up with her parents as an example. Dr. Irving and Gloria Williams owned a medical practice. Her stepfather was the doctor and her mother was the office manager and nurse. They usually cared

for patients that other medical providers would not. Some Saturdays, the family would open up their medical practice to neighborhood kids to provide a good meal and homework help.

“The way they ran their practice,” Williams said. “They served a lot of the local population of Shelby, N.C., people other doctors would not take. They were not just people’s doctors. They were their confidants and friends.”

Williams’ service has also influenced her career as a self-employed attorney with her own law firm, The Law Office of Nisha G. Williams. She graduated from North Carolina Central University School of Law as the recession was hitting the nation in 2009. It was a difficult time to obtain work, even with an advanced degree.

“There were not a lot of big companies hiring people, and a lot of state jobs had stopped hiring people,” Williams said. “I had to put up my own shingles to make ends meet.”

Williams had always wanted a career that would help people. When she was younger, she thought she wanted to be a social worker. However, her mother suggested she find a more lucrative career that would still allow her to help others. In her youth, she considered becoming a pediatric psychiatrist, but the medical field was not for her.

Large monetary gain was never the purpose for Williams’ interest in law. She only wanted to help. While she attended NCCU’s School of Law, she worked in the domestic violence clinic. That was when she discovered her purpose in law.

“I probably could be making more money if I pursued a different demographic,” Williams said. “Most of my clients are lower-income working-class or working-poor



Durham attorney Nisha G. Williams has brought warmth to her community with her smile and heart for service since graduating from NCCU’s School of Law in 2009. (Photo courtesy of Nine19 Photography)

people of color.

“At the end of the day, I consider them my people and who I want to serve,” she added. “At the end of the day, it is hard to tell people who are struggling ‘You owe me x amount of money.’”

Williams’ heart for service and commitment to social justice haven’t gone unseen by others who have spent time with her.

“When I think of Nisha, I think of the following (African) proverb: ‘If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together,’” said Tiffany Worthen, Williams’ fellow Theta Nu Xi sister. “Nisha is a woman who values community engagement and activism. She cares to elevate those around her to make for a more inclusive world.”