

Preview of PYO’s largest fundraiser of the year: Rise and Shine Breakfast

Partners for Youth Opportunity serves Durham youth aged 14-22

By Celia Farmer
Durham Voice

The nonprofit Partners for Youth Opportunity serves Durham youth impacted by systemic injustice will hold its largest fundraiser of the year on March 5: the Rise and Shine Breakfast.

PYO organizes the annual event to celebrate its accomplishments with attendees and to announce its plans to scale the nonprofit’s impact for the upcoming year to ensure that it can support Durham youth.

“Over the last couple of years, we have used the breakfast as a time to set the vision for the next 12 months,” said Julie Wells, the executive director of PYO. “We report on what we have learned in the past year, then we tell the community, ‘Based on what we saw with the youth, this is what our focus is going to be in the next year.’”

Wells said the community can attend the breakfast from 7-9 a.m. in Bay 7 at the American Tobacco Campus to hear updates on how PYO is partnering with Durham youth to access needed educational, economic and social assets.

Carlton Koonce, PYO’s workforce development director, said a high percentage of the money donated to the nonprofit is given directly to the youth it serves.



PYO staffer Lesly Santos (standing left) and PYO Workforce Development Director Carlton Koonce (seated back) watch as Durham VOICE Teen Editor-in-Chief Khadijah McFadden (front left) gets writing tips from Wells College senior Tasha Graham, who served as the teen editor-in-chief three years ago. (Photo by Jock Lauterer)

about workforce development for youth in Durham.

“We use the breakfast as a homecoming in some way, with all of these businesses and elected officials who have supported us for so long,” said Wells, 47, of Hillsborough.

Koonce said hot coffee and a buffet-style breakfast will be served. This year’s breakfast will be catered by The Angus Barn, which Koonce noted has a unique connection to PYO. Koonce said that the restaurant’s owner visits PYO in the summer to talk to youth about being a business owner and steps students can take to obtain a job in the field.

“Many people come to the breakfast,” said Koonce. “There are elected officials, parents, students, community members, internship supervisors and really anyone who wants to come.”

Koonce said PYO strives to help youth in Durham County aged 14-22 that no one else is focusing on. The nonprofit’s goal is to make youth feel as if they can live a self-determined and sustainable life. This fundraiser allows PYO to support Durham

youth by providing them with tools to live a successful life.

Miracle Harris, 20, of Durham, has been in PYO since she was a teenager. She explained how PYO helped her achieve goals that she did not think she could accomplish by herself.

“I feel like their purpose is to get us on the right track, and they do a great job doing just that,” Harris said.

PYO will continue to expand its impact on Durham youth in the upcoming years. Koonce explained how the nonprofit has grown from serving 20 kids to about 130.

With the help of its generous donors, PYO will continue providing Durham youth with the best opportunities possible, he said.

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— Miracle Harris, a PYO teen

“Something that makes our organization a little different is that about 20% of everything that comes in to us in donations goes directly to students,” said Koonce, 37, of Durham. “This could be for scholarships, internship stipends and really anything they need. The breakfast is when we get the most donations each year.”

Wells said many business leaders and elected officials attend the event to learn

Rise and Shine Breakfast
March 5

- Check in and breakfast begins at 7 a.m.
- Program begins at 7:30 a.m.