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## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Greetings,

Thank you to everyone that read the first edition of our Newsletter and signed up for [the distribution list](#). We are thrilled with the response that we have received. The second edition continues to highlight the great work happening in our community and promoting the economic equity and well-being of Durham County.

In the fall edition, we welcome our newest team member, Brandi Minor, who will feature our partnerships with Durham workforce development nonprofits; this edition will spotlight Life Skills Foundation. Sabria Futrell will share about the Innovate Durham program that supports local entrepreneurs, as well as featuring program participant, Digital Brilliance Hour, in the Small Business Spotlight. Matt Filter will highlight the

Business Recruitment Annual Report; and I will share some of the early successes that we are seeing in the BULLS Life Sciences Academies.

Thank you for checking out our second edition. We hope you enjoy it and that we will see you again.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Andrew Miracle'.

**Andrew Miracle**  
Director of Economic Development  
Durham County



From L to R: Matt Filter, Sabria Futrell, Brandi Minor, Andrew Miracle



## Hiring & Training Durham Residents to Fill Recruited Jobs

The BULLS Academies are a community partnership that connects Durham residents (18-25 years old) seeking economic mobility to industry certification and employment. To ensure that students are properly equipped for the coursework at Durham Tech, BULLS offers success coaching, engagement resources, and financial support. Durham County has been instrumental to the program by providing seed funding starting in 2021 and committed support through 2025. Current graduates can work at recruited companies offering Biopharma Manufacturing roles after completion of the coursework.

To learn more about the program and current cohort opportunities, please visit: [www.madeindurham.org/bulls-academy](http://www.madeindurham.org/bulls-academy)

### BULLS IMPACT THROUGH COHORT 8

**73%**

GRADUATION RATE  
\*87% over the last 3 cohorts

**90%+**

STUDENTS OF  
COLOR

EMPLOYMENT

**31**

CURRENTLY EMPLOYED  
IN LIFE SCIENCES

CONTINUING EDUCATION

**10**

STUDENTS CONTINUING  
EDUCATION AT DURHAM TECH  
POST-CERTIFICATE



### Tell us about your business?

Digital Brilliance Hour (DBH) excels in STEEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Entrepreneurship, Arts and Mathematics) education, equipping black and brown youth with skills in software development and music production for STEM careers. Our workshops bridge educational gaps, targeting students, families, and educators to enhance life trajectories in underrepresented communities.

### What are your hours of operation?

Virtual: 3:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. Mon – Thurs

### When did your business open?

We started our program in 2017 and became a business in 2021!

**Address:** 711 Keystone Park Dr. Unit 52,  
Morrisville, Durham County, NC 27560

**Phone Number:** (984) 206-3812



### What type of products or services you offer?

DBH offers STEEAM workshops, curriculum licensing, and mentorship, empowering underrepresented youth with practical skills and support.

### What makes your business unique?

Digital Brilliance Hour (DBH) uniquely blends STEEAM with creativity and practical skills in culturally relevant programs. DBH emphasizes hands-on learning, professional mentorship, and community-based approaches. With flexible online and in-person options, it ensures that STEEAM education is inclusive and impactful for underrepresented youth.



**Kevin Epps**, founder of DBH in 2017, turned his challenges into community upliftment. Growing up in a low-income area, Kevin's passion for science and math led him to a successful career at Cisco Systems and into music and game development. With over 12 years teaching these skills, he created DBH

to merge technology and arts education, empowering youth and building confidence through learning.

# Innovate Durham

Innovate Durham was first launched in 2017. Since then, 24 companies have partnered with City and County departments to pilot their products and services through the program, with an addition of five new companies participating this year. Innovate Durham is a program that allows the County and City to collaborate with creative, passionate, and pioneering entrepreneurs and businesses to test new products, programs, and services. The 16-week pilot period pairs these businesses with County and City departments to share ideas, gather data, iterate, and refine products that improve our services and the lives of our residents.

This year Durham County had the pleasure of working with both Laughing Monitos and SKLLD. Upon the successful completion from the program, both companies were awarded paid service contracts from Durham County. SKLLD and Laughing Monitos will work with the Child Care Services Association to provide teaching and coaching that help children aged 0-4 develop critical speech and language skills.



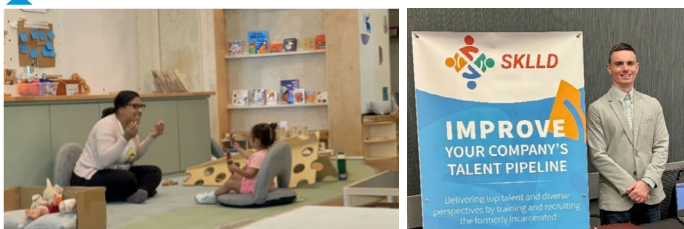
**Laughing Monitos**



Laughing Monitos offers speech and language developmental programs for children 0–4 years old. Designed with precision and care, their comprehensive approach to fostering communication skills delivers measurable results. Through a blend of structured activities, playful exercises, and one-on-one guidance, they empower children to unlock their linguistic potential. From enhancing vocabulary to refining articulation, their expert team employs evidence-based strategies to address each child's unique needs. With Laughing Monitos, one can trust in a proven path to language proficiency and lifelong success. Through this pilot study, Laughing Monitos will offer playgroups and webinars for parents to become familiar with the speech and language developmental milestones of children 0–4 years of age. To learn more about Laughing Monitos, please [click here](#).

SKLLD helps companies tap into an underutilized pipeline of talented job seekers by connecting justice-impacted individuals to innovative resources. They partner with stakeholders at every level to support returning citizens as they are released, bridge the skills gap with leading training providers, and transition to life-changing careers in high demand industries. Through advocacy, upskilling, and recruiting, SKLLD's unique services power the success of both clients and candidates.

SKLLD focuses on job training and placement for justice-impacted individuals. Specifically, they are piloting multimedia Smart Resumes that allow job seekers and their references to tell their stories and better connect with employers before their actual interview. Their goal is to offer this tool to justice-impacted job seekers, veterans, and anyone else with a nontraditional path to employment. To learn more about SKLLD please [click here](#).





# CERTIFY & SUCCEED PROGRAM

The Economic Development Department and [Infinity Bridges](#) have launched a new “Certify & Succeed” program to help eligible minority- and women-owned businesses better compete for government contracts. The program offers free technical assistance and coaching for those interested in obtaining Minority Women Business Enterprise (MWBE) and Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) certifications and credentials.

In 2016, Durham County’s Board of Commissioners approved a [MWBE Ordinance](#) establishing an aspirational goal of 25%. Based on the results of the [2015 Disparity Study](#), the County aims for 25% of their external spending and contracting to be awarded to MWBE businesses. The “Certify & Succeed” program helps the County move closer to achieving that goal by better positioning local minority-and women-owned businesses for competitive bid opportunities. MWBE and HUB certifications can also help Durham County’s businesses better compete for other municipal, county, state, and federal contracts as well.

The “Certify & Succeed” program will help eligible businesses:

- Register for the State of North Carolina’s E-Vendor Portal;
- Register for Durham County’s eBid System;
- Submit applications to the State of North Carolina to obtain a Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Certification, Statewide Uniform Certification (SWUC), and/or Small Business Enterprise (SBE) Certification; and



- Develop a comprehensive capabilities statement for government contracting.

“Infinity Bridges is thrilled to partner with Durham County to support local businesses in achieving their certifications,” said La-Tasha Best-Gaddy, Chief Strategist at Infinity Bridges. “This collaboration will empower enterprises to reach new heights and contribute to the economic growth of our community.”

Eligible Durham County minority- and women- business owners are strongly encouraged to take advantage of this unique opportunity to pursue certification by registering here. One-on-one session scheduling starts now and is available through June 2025 at the Durham County Main Library (300 N. Roxboro St. Durham, NC 27701) on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and the East Regional Library (211 Lick Creek Lane Durham, NC 27703) on Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Appointments are required.

To view the Kick Off event please [click here](#).

*\*Video credit: Give It To The People*

For further details about the Certify & Succeed Program, please contact Sabria Futrell, Durham County Economic Development Coordinator, at [sfutrell@dconc.gov](mailto:sfutrell@dconc.gov).



## UPCOMING PROGRAMS 2025-26

# The Time is Now, Visit and Sign Up!



Learn More

Join us for exciting programs in 2025 that aim to move you and your business forward. These programs are free to attend. Use the code above to sign up and receive more information regarding dates and registration.

## PROGRAMS



### Early Stage Accelerator:

Propel Your Business to the Next Level

Are you ready to take your business to new heights? The Early Stage Accelerator, facilitated by Knox Street Studios (KSS), is designed to nurture small, diverse cohorts of 5-7 businesses and entrepreneurs, equipping them with the tools and skills needed for the next phase of their journey.



### Support to Scale Incubator:

Empowering Businesses for Growth

Ready to take your business to the next level? The Support to Scale Incubator is your gateway to growth, designed specifically for business owners 4-8 years into their journey. With two focused cohorts—Commercial Real Estate and Venture Capital—this program is all about turning your ambitions into reality.



Knox St. Studios is proud to partner with Durham County to host these programs. For more information please scan the code above or get in touch via web or email.

KNOXSTSTUDIOS.ORG. | INFO@KNOXSTSTUDIOS.ORG

# FREE SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

CONNECTING DURHAM'S  
SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS  
TO A NETWORK OF EXPERTS!



## LEARN TO EARN!

Our innovative program rewards entrepreneurs for engaging in valuable learning and networking. You can earn credits to put towards vital services and products needed to launch and grow your business!

## WE'LL GUIDE YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY AS YOU:



### DREAM

Refine your business plan and strategy

### CONNECT

Prioritize your needs and connect to the right resources



### GROW

Develop the skills you need to successfully run your business



### YOU'LL RECEIVE

- ✓ Counseling
- ✓ Networking
- ✓ FREE Services & Products



### FINANCE

Find the type of capital you need and apply for funding

### NETWORK

Meet other small business owners and resource providers







**3RD  
THU**



**JOIN US**

## **FREE Networking & Small Business Workshops!**

Third Thursday is a monthly opportunity to connect, learn, and grow with fellow entrepreneurs in the heart of our community.



Third Thursday of each month  
5:30PM - 8:00PM



NC Mutual Building  
411 West Chapel Hill Street  
Durham, NC 27701

**RSVP at**

[bit.ly/E3D3rdThursdays](https://bit.ly/E3D3rdThursdays)

or scan the QR code!



## **MEET OTHER SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS AND RESOURCE PARTNERS**

### **Networking Opportunities**

Connect with other local business owners and build valuable relationships.

### **Expert Knowledge**

Gain insights and advice from industry experts to help your business thrive.

### **Free Resources**

Access tools and resources tailored to support your business journey.



[www.e3durham.org](http://www.e3durham.org)



# Life Skills Foundation

## Can you share a brief history of your organization?

Established as the Carolina Outreach Foundation in 2008, the original organization aimed to assist individuals and families confronting financial and mental health difficulties by offering various opportunities, including recreation, vocational internships, academic support, and independent living skills. In 2014, the organization underwent a transformation, officially rebranding as LIFE Skills Foundation, with a renewed focus on empowering young adults transitioning from foster care to adulthood through our Independent Living Program, wraparound supports, and community-based partnerships.

## What is your mission?

Our mission is to empower transition-age youth to live stable, self-directed lives by providing them with housing and wraparound support services.

The transition to adulthood can be a challenging experience for anyone, regardless of personal background, socioeconomic status, gender, identity, or race. It is certainly more challenging for youth who do not have the economic, familial or social supports that can assist them to overcome the many challenges on their journey to self-sufficiency and independence. LIFE Skills Foundation aims to provide a safety net and support network for transition-age youth in Durham, NC, that do not have “someone” to turn to for help.

Central to LIFE Skills’ approach is the idea that each transition-age youth we work with has the fundamental right to a life of happiness, full of possibility and free from oppression.



### Life Skills Foundation *(continued)*

#### **What programs and services do you provide?**

We provide the missing supports and services transition-age youth need as they gain the skills to be self-sufficient. LIFE Skills provides assistance in the following domains: housing, employment, education, health and wellness, financial literacy, communication, and building a support network.

What this looks like in practice is supporting young people with finding housing, mental health care, independent living skills classes and wraparound services such as taking them to the doctor, helping them shop and budget, making sure they get to school, helping them open a bank account, encouraging them to graduate and challenging them to plan and save for the future.

#### **What is the most rewarding aspect of the work you do?**

The most rewarding part of the work we do at LIFE Skills Foundation is getting to see the young people we work with grow into their confidence, transform their lives and independently thrive.

#### **What would make the greatest difference in helping your organization grow?**

We have been very fortunate to cultivate relationships with a multitude of organizations, partners, donors, and supporters throughout our 10 years of our work in Durham. This year, we celebrate our 10th anniversary and would benefit most from increased resources and support, including additional funding for programs and services, expanded partnerships with other community-based organizations, and increased awareness and understanding within the broader community about the challenges faced by youth transitioning out of foster care.

#### **What is the best way to learn more about your organization?**

More information can be found on our website, [www.lifeskillsfound.org](http://www.lifeskillsfound.org), and on our social media accounts: [www.facebook.com/lifeskillsfound](https://www.facebook.com/lifeskillsfound) and [www.instagram.com/lifeskillsfound](https://www.instagram.com/lifeskillsfound).



# Our first Annual Impact Report has Launched!

Durham County Economic Development released our inaugural report earlier this month highlighting the status and impact of our business recruitment program. This twelve page report, found at [www.DCO-ED.com](http://www.DCO-ED.com), shares out the work we are doing in this program and provides metrics, programmatic reporting, and other helpful information for the community.

For some background, in 2020, the Durham County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved an incentive policy that sought to better align our business recruitment program with the County's broader strategic priorities. With the guidance and continued support of the County's Management team, the policy leverages public investments to generate new property tax revenue and foster the creation of quality jobs (prioritizing-entry-level), while also seeking to deliver broader benefits to the community. As a result, the policy promotes and achieves contracting with Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs), internships and apprenticeships, critical partnerships with Durham Public Schools and Durham Tech, living wages, and more. We take pride in the Durham County business recruitment model and showing what successful economic development can be.

As you will see in the report, and also in the infographics below, the program is demonstrating early results - but our commitment to creating an inclusive and thriving community calls for continuous effort. We will keep working towards that goal, and hope you'll join us in that effort.



## Key Facts & Figures from the 2023 Impact Report



The County's business recruitment program currently supports a projected

**\$2.9 BILLION**

in private investment and

**6,000 JOBS**

in Durham County.



For a very small public investment, this program generates significant private investment. This private investment provides taxes that can support social services, infrastructure, education, small businesses, and more.

For projects recruited under the Durham County Incentive Policy, for every **\$1.00** that the County has invested, the County has received

**\$633.12**

in private taxable investment.



Nearly **half** of the announced new jobs created are **entry-level positions** that exceed living wage standards, offer great benefits, and provide career advancement in a meaningful field.



In 2021, approximately

**\$72 MILLION**

was spent by portfolio companies at minority and women owned businesses (MWBE). Nearly two-thirds of that spending was with minority businesses.