

TRIANGLE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Laura Benson

Executive Director of Durham's Partnership for Children

Feeling compelled by the mission of Durham's Partnership for Children and being attracted to the strong local focus of the organization, Laura Benson has assumed the top spot at the Bull City nonprofit.

Benson, a nonprofit veteran and an ordained minister, says she gets a pastoral feel when she thinks of her upcoming responsibilities as the executive director of DPFC. "I want to increase the advocacy voice on behalf of children," Benson says. "We work to help these kids be ready for school by age 5."

DPFC's mission is to administer the state's Smart Start grant in Durham County. The organization serves young children from birth to age 5 and their families as part of North Carolina's initiative to ensure that all children enter school healthy, both physically and mentally.

Benson, who assumes her post on Feb. 1, will be responsible for the day-to-day operations of DPFC and will manage its 15-person staff. She also will focus a lot of her time on developing relationships with local organizations and the community at large.

Benson says she also will work to diversify funding sources for DPFC and develop more creative programming for the nonprofit.

On the funding side, Benson is looking to broaden the nonprofit's stakeholder base and is setting out to develop more relationships with the local business community and faith-based groups.

DPFC funds approximately 15 programs in addition to its larger programs, including the More at Four Kindergarten, Smart Start, Head Start and Early Head Start programs.

Funding for these programs and other critical aspects of DPFC comes mainly from state government, with additional money coming from private donations and grant funding.

DPFC was founded in 1994 and is governed by a 31-member board that's chaired by Angie Welsh, a senior vice president at The United Way of the Greater Triangle.

BACKGROUND

Benson was born in Chicago and raised in Elmhurst, Ill., a suburb of the Windy City. She attended Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., where she received a bachelor's degree.



Upon graduation, Benson served a brief stint at CROS Urban Ministries, U.S.-2 program in West Palm Beach, Fla., before re-entering academia to pursue a master's of divinity from Union Theological Seminary in New York. After becoming an ordained minister, Benson went on to pastor various United Methodist churches for the next 10 years.

In 1997, Benson joined Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network as its executive director. She remained in that post for about eight years before joining PLM Families Together Inc. as its executive director.

In November 2009, Benson joined Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas, where she served as its executive director. She will remain in that post until the end of January.

GOAL

"I want to continue the great success (DPFC) has had," Benson says. "I also want to continue broadening the stakeholders and increase the advocacy voice."

EDUCATION

Bachelor's degree in English from Wesleyan University; M.Div. from Union Theological Seminary.

PERSONAL

Benson and her husband, Walt Sliva, have a daughter, Kendall.

LAST BOOK READ

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