

# **Longtime nonprofits veteran Benson to lead area's Partnership for Children**

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DURHAM -- Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative, announced Friday that Laura Benson, an experienced non-profit leader, will join the organization as executive director beginning Feb. 1.

A Durham County resident, Benson, brings more than 13 years of leadership experience to the Partnership and its mission to serve the needs of children birth to five years of age and their families.

"We are honored to have a visionary among us," said Angie Welsh, chairwoman of the Partnership's board of directors. "Laura brings with her extensive leadership skills, a steady focus on the well-being of children, and a commitment to transforming the lives of families in our community."

Benson had been executive director of Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas since 2009. She also served as founding co-facilitator for Project CATCH (Community Action Targeting Children who are Homeless) in conjunction with the Young Child Mental Health Collaborative.

Earlier Benson served as executive director of PLM Families Together, Inc. in Wake County and executive director of Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network.

Benson has served as a Methodist pastor and is now affiliated with Congregations for Social Justice, Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, and Calvary United Methodist Church.

Benson is an active participant with the Executive Service Corps of the Triangle, United Way of the Greater Triangle, and the Council to End Homelessness in Durham. She is a Triangle Business Journal's Women in Business Award winner, as well as a recipient of the Durham Chamber of Commerce's Professional Women's Network Woman of Inspiration Award.

"The Partnership is eager to welcome Laura to help us build upon 15 years of collaborative work in Durham," Welsh said. "She is someone who understands the struggles that our young children face and she will be an inspirational leader as we continue to work toward long-term change and growth in the early childhood system."