



NEWS RELEASE

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New leadership for Durham's Partnership for Children

Durham's Partnership for Children welcomes Laura J.S. Benson as Executive Director

Durham, NC – With the start of a new year, Durham's Partnership for Children, a Smart Start Initiative, welcomes fresh leadership. The Partnership is pleased to announce that Laura J.S. Benson, an experienced non-profit leader, will join the organization as Executive Director beginning February 1, 2011. Benson, who resides in Durham County, 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, Board Chair 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 transitions to the Partnership from her role as Executive Director of Lutheran Family Services in the Carolinas (LFS Carolinas), where she served since 2009 leading and managing licensed, accredited programs including children and adult mental health services, transitional and permanent supportive housing, refugee and immigration services, and prison inmate counseling. During this time, Benson 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.

Prior to her work with LFS Carolinas, Benson served as Executive Director of PLM Families Together, Inc. in Wake County with a focus on fiscal management, resource development, and grant compliance. Benson also has nine years of experience as Executive Director of Durham Interfaith Hospitality Network leading the faith-based shelter program that provides quality care for homeless families. Benson has a history rooted in the faith community. She obtained her Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary in New York where she was awarded the Hanson Prize for excellence in relating philosophy, theology, and ethics to problems in contemporary society. After becoming a member of the Ordained Clergy in The United Methodist Church, Benson served as pastor for a decade. She is currently affiliated with Congregations for Social Justice, Eno River Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, and Calvary United Methodist Church.

Donating her time to organizations across the community, 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."

About Durham's Partnership for Children - Making young children a priority.

Founded in 1994 and first funded in 1995 to administer the Smart Start grant in Durham County, the Partnership works as an independent, local nonprofit that serves young children birth to age 5 and their families under North Carolina's nationally recognized initiative to ensure all children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. For more than 15 years, the Partnership has helped working parents pay for child care, improve the quality of child care and provided health and family support services to thousands of Durham County families with young children. The Partnership works to achieve its mission *To mobilize and unify the Durham community to create and support innovative and successful approaches to serving the needs of children birth to age 5 and their families*, by working with funded partners, groups and organizations in Durham County to support and coordinate efforts impacting young children and their families. The Partnership also administers the More at Four Pre-Kindergarten Program in Durham County serving more than 400 children and the new Early Head Start Grant serving Durham infants and toddlers. For more information about the Partnership, visit www.dpfc.net or call 919-403-6960, ext. 219.