Junior Leadership Durham, Inc. (JLD) is a community-wide program in Durham, North Carolina. It is designed to shape the future of Durham high school sophomores with an in-depth knowledge of the Durham community, promote teamwork, and assist with developing their leadership skills and fostering self-confidence and personal growth -- recognizing that the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow.Program objectives are to: develop leadership skills; increase volunteerism; promote communication between high school students; educate students on the responsibilities of City and County Government and the services both provide its citizens; and expose youth to various careers within City and County governments.

The program began when Robin Odom, a former 1999 graduate of the Leadership Durham Program sponsored by the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce, introduced a similar program for Durham teens in developing youth leadership. In 2001 the idea of JLD became a project for persons participating in the Leadership Durham Program and in 2003 Junior Leadership Durham emerged into a 501c3 nonprofit program. Since the date of its conception, JLD has partnered with the 4-H Club and is now called Junior Leadership Durham 4-H.

In order to participate in Junior Leadership Durham 4-H (JLD 4-H), a student must be a resident of Durham County and currently enrolled as a 9th grader in a Durham public, private, chartered, or home school; interested in the program, have leadership potential, the ability to be a team player, and interested in meeting new people; and have both parent and school permission to participate. Students are to submit their completed application along with 2 letters of recommendation by the specified deadline date for the upcoming school year to Junior Leadership Durham, Inc. An interview process is conducted and those chosen are notified in early July. Students will attend one session per month over a 7 month period and removed from school for up to 5 days to participate in special program projects. Session topics include: education, government to include Junior Leadership Durham 4-H Day, judicial/health, human needs/diversity, media, and economic development.

The City of Durham became a partner of JLD 4H in 2003. One day out of the school year, approximately 25-30 high school sophomores are given an opportunity to shadow Durham City and County employees.

As part of their program criteria, students take part in a shadowing experience with Durham City and County Governments. Following the Durham public school’s traditional school calendar, representatives from Durham City Government, Durham County Government, and Junior Leadership Durham 4-H (JLD 4-H) meet to select a date on which students will shadow a Durham City or County employee. The coordinator of JLD 4H shares topics students have met and discussed that affects them as citizens of Durham. Based on the topic, various departments within both governments are selected and employee volunteers are requested.

Durham City and County Governments have partnered and alternate hosting Junior Leadership Durham 4-H Day. Members of Durham City Council and The Board of County Commissioners are invited to participate. During the opening session Durham City and County Managers greet students. An overview of both governments to include the governing bodies (Durham City Council and Durham County Board of Commissioners) and the responsibilities of both are provided. Students also have an opportunity to ask questions.

Approximately 25-30 students from Durham public, private, chartered, or home school participate in Junior Leadership Durham 4-H each school year. City and County departments that are able to provide information based on students’ concern are contacted and asked to participate; departmental volunteers are identified. During their shadowing experience, students will learn responsibilities of the department they visit, what services that department provides to its citizens, that department’s mission statement, and how that statement ties into their overall vision for both the City and County Governments. The student shadows that representative for approximately four (4) hours. The shadowing experience often gives the student hands-on experience performing the many tasks associated with that representative’s job responsibilities to include attending scheduled staff meetings and going into the community to investigate a citizen’s concern.

After their shadowing experience, students gather to share their shadowing experiences with their JLD 4-H coordinators and peers during a lunch/work session. Elected officials (Members of Durham City Council, Durham County Board of Commissioners, and the Mayor of Durham) are often present to greet students, take part in student dialogue, share new ideas, and offer guidance as it relates to their topic of concern. As part of their afternoon agenda, students take part in a Mock Durham City Council /County Board of Commissioner Meeting whereas students assumed the roles of Durham County Commissioners and City Council Members, Durham City and County Manages, Durham City and County Attorneys, departmental representatives, and citizens. A topic of concern in the past involved whether or not the Durham City and County should have a teen center. This discussion contributed to the first Teen Center in Durham.

Students gain a greater understanding of the responsibilities and what services both Durham City and County Governments provide its citizens, who to contact with their governmental concerns, and what procedures are in place to address those concerns. This is information students can share with representatives of Junior Leadership Durham 4H, their peers, parents, teachers, and other citizens of Durham

The cost to implement the program for the Durham City and County is very minimal; the cost of lunch for approximately 30 students and 5 program coordinators may range from $280 to $300 per year. Using supplies on hand for any printing, the use of City owned conference rooms to meet, and hosting the program every 2 years instead of each year has proven to be a substantial savings. One risk to the program may be that of budget constraints.

City and County governments are strongly committed to the success of this program. Representatives from the Durham County Public Affairs Office and the City of Durham Human Resources Department work hand in hand with representatives from Junior Leadership Durham 4-H each year to make this an enjoyable, informative, rewarding shadowing experience for students. It gives the youth of Durham an opportunity to be heard and let them know that they do have a voice in government. A former 2010 participate from Southern High School, was featured in the Durham Herald Sun as one of Duke University’s Durham Students of the week. The student described her participation in JLD 4-H as “*an experience that was truly life-changing*