

Raleigh Summer Youth Employment Program (RSYEP)

ANNUAL REPORT
SEPT 2025 - AUG 2026

Work. Learn. Grow.

Rebekah Dixon, Youth Employment Program Manager

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Executive Summary
Future in Progress...Loading

The 2025 to 2026 Raleigh Summer Youth Employment Program marked 43 years of connecting Raleigh youth with meaningful opportunities to work, learn, and grow. Guided by the theme **Future in Progress... Loading**, the year celebrated young people as they explored career interests, discovered new strengths, and took important steps toward their futures.

Throughout the summer, participants gained hands on experience with City departments, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and virtual programs. They explored multiple career pathways while developing communication, teamwork, leadership, financial, and professional skills. With support from career coaches and supervisors, youth learned how to navigate professional environments, respond to feedback, solve problems, and recognize the value of their contributions.

New and expanded partnerships created even more opportunities for youth to connect classroom learning with real world experience. Partners opened their worksites, shared industry knowledge, supported career exploration, and helped participants build networks that can continue beyond the summer. These collaborations also strengthened programming in financial education, mental health, technology, research, and community engagement.

RSYEP extended its reach beyond summer employment by offering public job readiness training and hosting the first Youth and Family Mental Health Summit. These opportunities brought youth, families, professionals, and community partners together to share resources, strengthen skills, and address topics that influence success at home, in school, and in the workplace.

The progress made this year was possible because of the young people who showed up ready to learn, the families who encouraged them, and the partners who invested their time, knowledge, and trust. Together, they demonstrated that the future is not simply something youth are waiting for. It is already taking shape through every experience, connection, and opportunity.

The future is in progress, and Raleigh's youth are helping lead the way.

Raleigh Summer Youth Employment Program Team

2025-2026



Rebekah Dixon,
Youth Employment Program Manager



Sharmayne McLean
Health Care Pathway Career Coach



Zoe Brannon,
RSYEP Program Administrator



Monica Pugh,
Business and Finance Career Coach



Melonie Carlton,
Entreprenurship Career Coach



Vanta Rogers,
Sports and Entertainment Marketing Career Coach



Hollis "Jay" Creecy,
Community Pathway Career Coach



Joshua Wright,
Community Pathway Career Coach (through May 2025)



Davena Embree
Community Pathway Career Coach

RSYEP Impact Snapshot

Recruitment and Hiring Demographics

180 youth successfully completed RSYEP in 2026. Recruitment began with a strong presence in local schools. The Program Manager and career coaches attended 19 Wake County high school job fairs, connecting directly with students and introducing them to the opportunities available through RSYEP.

Applicants could choose between virtual and in-person interviews. The virtual interview option, offered through SparkHire, remained open for the full six-week application period and allowed youth to record responses to eight questions. RSYEP also hosted three in person interview sessions with support from career coaches and volunteers from the Foster Grandparent Program and Raleigh Police Department. An additional session for youth in the Kentwood community brought interviews directly to their neighborhood.





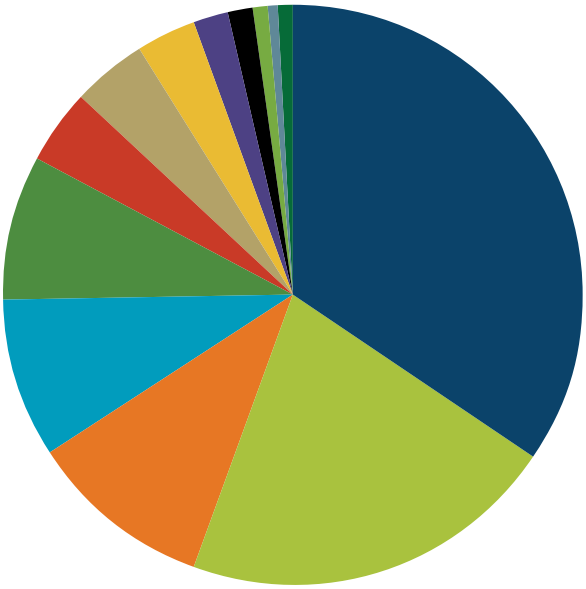


RSYEP Reach & Results

More than
38,000
hours worked

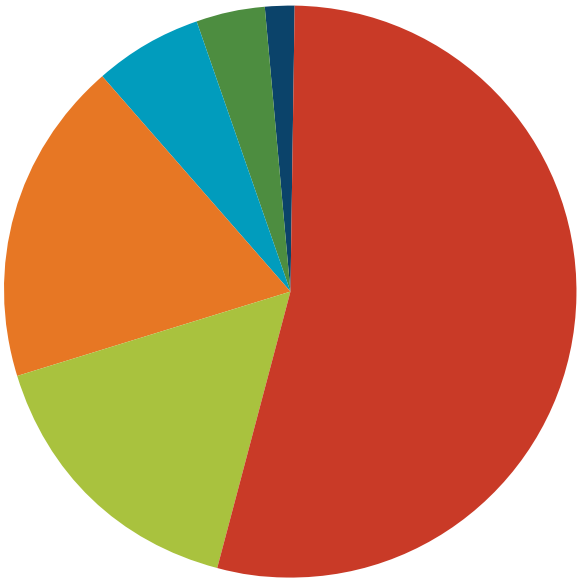
More than
$52,000
pledged for savings

More than
$370,000
in wages earned



Participants by Zip Code

- **34.7%** 27610
- **21.1%** 27616
- **10.2%** 27606
- **8.8%** 27613
- **8.2%** 27604
- **4.1%** 27603
- **4.1%** 27615
- **3.4%** 27614
- **2.0%** 27612
- **1.4%** 27607
- **0.7%** 27608
- **0.7%** 27609
- **0.7%** 27617



Participants by High School

- **54.1%** Raleigh Public High Schools (WCPSS)
- **16.2%** Surrounding Area Public Schools (WCPSS)
- **18.2%** Raleigh Early College/Leadership High Schools
- **6.1%** Raleigh Private/Charter High Schools
- **4.1%** Surrounding Area Private/Charter High Schools
- **1.4%** Miscellaneous

Raleigh Public High Schools

Athens Drive High School
Broughton High School
Enloe High School
Leesville Road High School
Mary Phillips High School
Millbrook High School
Sanderson High School
Southeast Raleigh High School
Wakefield High School

Surrounding Area Public High Schools

Apex Friendship High School
Garner Magnet High School
Knightdale High School
Middle Creek High School
Rolesville High School
South Garner High School
Wake Forest High School
Willow Spring High School

Raleigh Early College/ Leadership High Schools

North Wake College and Career Academy
Vernon Malone College and Career Academy
Wake Early College of Health and Sciences
Wake STEM Early College High School
Wake Young Men's Leadership Academy
Wake Young Women's Leadership Academy

Raleigh Private/ Charter High Schools

Cardinal Gibbons High School
Longleaf School of the Arts
North Raleigh Christian Academy
Trinity Academy
Wake Preparatory Academy

Surrounding Areas Private/ Charter High Schools

Cary Academy
Franklin Academy
Raleigh Charter High School
Thales Academy (Rolesville)

Miscellaneous

Home School-White Hawk Academy
Coast to Mountains Preparatory Virtual Academy

The Summer Lineup
Where Experience Meets Opportunity

RSYEP youth did more than report to a worksite. They stepped into new environments, explored careers, built professional relationships, and discovered what they were capable of accomplishing.

During the application process, participants selected three career pathways based on their interests and future goals. These choices helped connect each young person with a City department, community organization, business, or virtual program where they could gain meaningful experience.

Career pathways included:

- Administrative Services
- Business and Finance
- Business and Technology
- Child Development
- Education
- Entrepreneurship
- Healthcare, including Public Health and Mental Health
- Law
- Marketing
- Recreation Programming
- Social Media and Website Management
- Skilled Trades

Through in person, hybrid, and virtual placements, participants gained practical experience, strengthened transferable skills, and began building networks that can support their next steps.

The organizations featured below did more than provide worksites. They welcomed young people, shared their knowledge, and created spaces where the future could begin taking shape.

Career pathways. Real experiences. Futures in progress.





The On-Site Lineup

Our in person worksites gave youth the opportunity to step into real professional environments across a variety of career pathways. From City departments to community organizations and local businesses, each site offered hands-on experience, supportive guidance, and a closer look at what it takes to succeed in the workplace.

City of Raleigh Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (27 Community Centers & Parks Maintenance)

Raleigh Police Department (Community IMPACT and Engagement-Youth and Family Services Unit)

City of Raleigh Human Resources

Wanda's Little Hands

ILeadKids Camp

The Alice Aycock Poe Center

Communities in Schools Wake County

Pathforge Learning

Garner Road Community Center

Participant Takeaways:

"Through this program I have learned that I love working with people and with a team! Also, that I am capable of great things as long as I'm willing to plan out the steps it takes to get there!"

The Hybrid Lineup

At The Collaborative, a statewide nonprofit dedicated to providing North Carolinians with access to quality financial education and asset-building tools, RSYEP youth gained hands-on experience as social media and technology specialists. Participants created engaging content across platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn, developed posting schedules, designed graphics, and produced short-form videos. They also tracked engagement metrics, responded to audience interactions, and contributed to team meetings, gaining practical skills in digital marketing, content creation, and technology management while supporting The Collaborative's mission to advance financial literacy across the state.

The Remote Worksite Lineup

Virtual placements connected youth with organizations doing meaningful work in mental health, community wellness, the arts, and digital engagement. From researching emotional and cognitive wellness for older adults to creating social media content and supporting mental health initiatives, participants completed real projects that strengthened their communication, research, creativity, and technology skills while contributing to the missions of their host organizations.

The Digital Creators Lineup

RSYEP celebrated its sixth year of virtual work-based learning, continuing to give youth a flexible way to gain meaningful career experience. Participants worked in teams across four career pathways to identify community needs and turn their ideas into original app concepts. Along the way, they strengthened their research, technology, collaboration, and presentation skills before sharing their final projects with City of Raleigh staff, families, and community members. The experience challenged youth to think creatively, solve real problems, and see themselves as the digital creators of what comes next.

Participants focused on one of the following challenges:

- Business and Finance:
  Design Challenge: Money Matters-Design an app that helps teens and families solve a financial challenge and achieve their financial goals. Your app should provide an innovative solution that empowers users to make informed financial decisions and build a stronger financial future.
- Entrepreneurship:
  Design Challenge: From Idea to Impact-Create a business plan and pitch your idea as if you were preparing to launch your business.
- Healthcare:
  Design Challenge: Healthcare Innovation Challenge-Design an app that helps Raleigh teens manage their physical, emotional, and social health while teaching self-advocacy and informed decision-making in school, at home, or at the doctor's office.
- Sports & Entertainment Marketing (SE&M):
  Design Challenge: Bring It to Raleigh - Create a marketing campaign to bring a sports, entertainment, or cultural event to Raleigh.



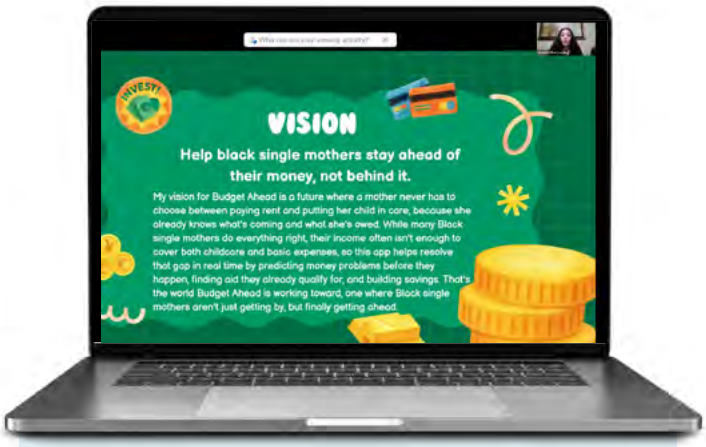
Thursdays with the Pros

Each Thursday, virtual participants connected with professionals working in fields related to their career pathways. These conversations gave youth an inside look at different careers, space to ask questions, and practical guidance from people with real industry experience. By the end of the summer, 89.2 percent of participants reported feeling more confident in professional environments and working as part of a team.

1. Business and Finance

Industry Thursday Guests:

- **Angel Ceron Hernandez,** Business Banking Relationship Manager, Bank of America
- **India Prather,** North Carolina Lending Market Leader, Bank of America
- **Jason Phelps,** Assistant Vice President, Business Banking Relationship Manager, Bank of America
- **Wes Clark,** Director in our Global Infrastructure and Sustainable Finance Group, Bank of America
- **Alex Welsh,** Senior Vice President and Credit Officer, Bank of America
- **Hovest Bud,** Commercial Support Specialist, Bank of America
- **Matt Antonucci,** Senior Vice President, Business Banking Market Executive, Bank of America
- **Chris Barcella,** Vice President, Merchant Sales Officer, Bank of America
- **Nick Sowell,** Credit Officer, Bank of America
- **Axel Gonzalez,** Vice President, Senior Banking Relationship Manager, Bank of America
- **Katherine Hurley,** Global Commercial Banking Senior Relationship Manager, Bank of America
- **Guadalupe Lawrence,** Mortgage Loan Coordinator, Bank of America



Participant Takeaways:

"My top takeaway was about how feedback is a gift. Feedback is there to help you grow and when someone gives me feedback, I should be grateful that they care enough to help me grow."

"Once you find your train of thought and gather ideas, the work becomes very light and easy to do. I've also learned to not fear talking to large crowds, as I will be doing for the rest of my life, both personally and professionally."

2. Entrepreneurship

Industry Thursday Guests:

- **Brittany Baker,** Village Kiddie Learning
- **Marquetta Dickens,** Freedom Organization & Freedom Development Enterprise
- **Keymia Sharpe,** Key2MIA
- **Crystal McClean,** Money Box Academy
- **Shediah Ector,** Reclamation FARMacy
- **Sabrina Little,** Sabrina Little PR



Participant Takeaways:

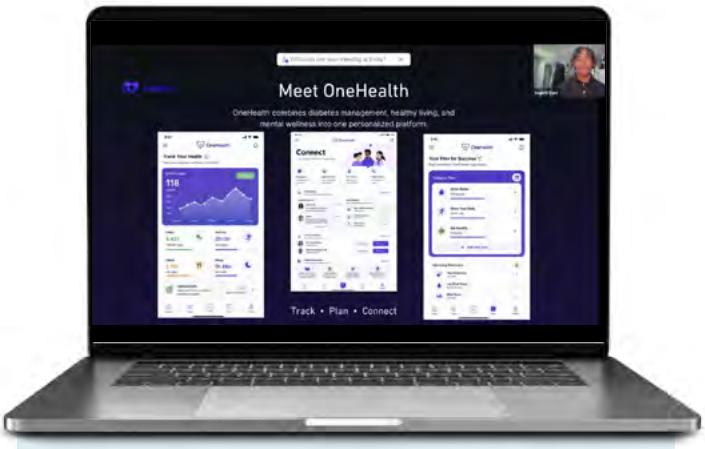
"A big take away is even though my business may seem odd to other i still can stand out and be unique."

"My biggest takeaway this week is that solving a problem starts with understanding what people need. I also learned that I enjoy coming up with ideas that can help others."

3. Healthcare

Industry Thursday Guests:

- **Haminant Oladipo,** Clinical Nurse Informaticist, Vizient Inc.
- **Dr. Portia Johnson,** CPS
- **Dr. Shawnte Elbert,** Elbert Innovative Solutions, LLC.
- **Dr. Charles Rogers,** Rogers Solutions Group
- **Aminah Zoabi,** Atrium Health, Nurse Practitioner



Participant Takeaways:

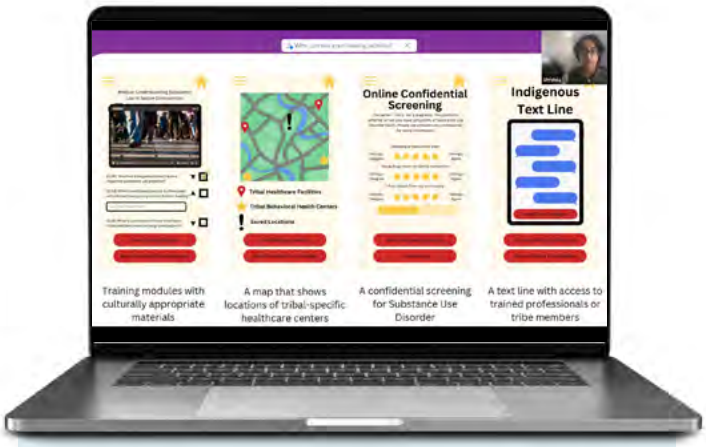
"My top takeaway for the week has been that setbacks aren't always negative. This was a good reminder that someone's path isn't always linear and that roadblocks aren't always the end of the world."

"I enjoyed my industry session because it taught me that there are very fulfilling careers in healthcare other than being a doctor."

4. Sports and Entertainment Marketing

Industry Thursday Guests:

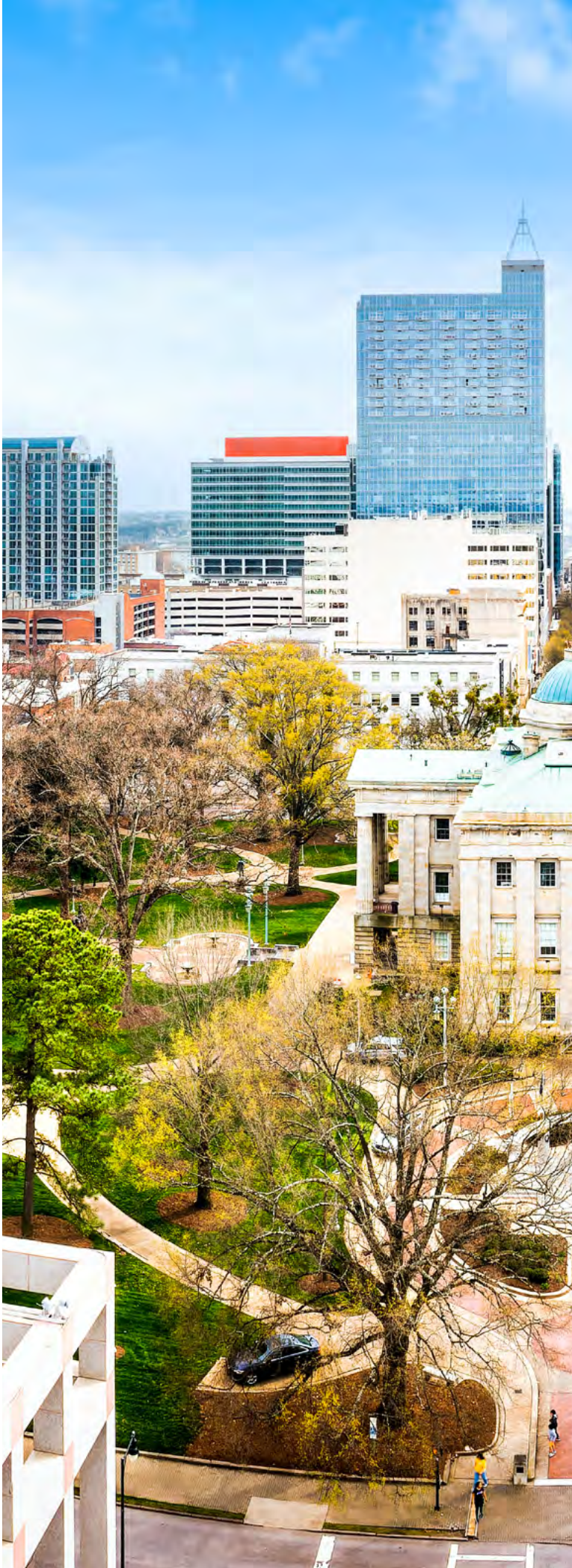
- **Cato Catalado,** Senior Creative Director, Carolina Hurricanes
- **Rochelle Mann,** Brand Director, Mann Made Productions & Full Court Women (NFL, NBA, & WNBA)
- **Ryan Holbrook,** Tournaments and Facility Events Director, North Carolina FC Youth
- **Joshua Wright,** Mental Health & Performance Psychology Fellow (Athletics), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- **Ayanna Chatman,** Inside Sales Representative, Brooklyn Sports & Entertainment



Participant Takeaways:

"I'm really grateful for the chance to figure out my future goals without feeling overwhelmed. I'm proud of myself for seeing how my creativity and interest in health tech can lead to a career in law, and it feels great to have a real plan set up."

"This experience showed me how innovation can make a real difference."



Skills Loading: Learning Beyond the Worksite

The learning did not stop at the worksite. Throughout the summer, RSYEP youth participated in professional development experiences that strengthened the skills, confidence, and knowledge needed for life and work. Sessions explored mental health, financial education, career readiness, communication, and professional growth through interactive workshops, meaningful conversations, and Lunch and Learns led by community and industry professionals. The experiences featured below gave participants new tools, fresh perspectives, and greater confidence to take their next steps.

Your Mind Matters

Mental Health & Emotional Well-Being

- **Building Self-care Sessions**
  (Weekly on Mondays)
  Facilitated by Step Up Ministry Raleigh
- **The Courage to Be Yourself**
  Facilitated by Kierra Bennett, Lighthouse Therapy and Consulting
- **Identity vs Image: Who Are You and Who You Present**
  Facilitated by Gene Hoskins, Peace of Mind Psychological Services, PLLC
- **The Power of Your Voice**
  Facilitated by Joshua Wright
- **Situationships, Talking Stages, & Boundaries**
  Facilitated by Dr. Shanita Brown, Transformative Counseling and Consulting, PLLC
- **Situationships 2.0**
  Facilitated by Dr. Shanita Brown, Transformative Counseling and Consulting, PLLC
- **Choosing Your Circle, Choose Your Future**
  Facilitated by Tamiya Dortch, LCSW-A
- **Expectation vs Reality: When Life Doesn't Match Your Plan**
  Facilitated by Otis Maben
- **Rewriting the Story: Goal Setting After Setbacks**
  Facilitated by Rhonda Bradley
- **Real vs Highlight Reel: Social Media & Self Worth**
  Facilitated by Gene Hoskins, Peace of Mind Psychological Services, PLLC

Money Moves

Financial Education & Money Management

- **Finance Forward**
  (Weekly on Tuesday)
  Facilitated by Coastal Credit Union
- **Future Finance Ready Series: Focus on Budgeting & Saving**
  (Weekly on Wednesdays)
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coaches
  Curriculum Provided by: Economic Awareness Council
- **Budgeting**
  Facilitated by Arthur Olunwa, Tuskie Capital
- **Getting Started with Investing**
  Facilitated by Ijeoma Daramola, Economic Awareness Council
- **What is Credit?**
  Facilitated by Susan Simon, Working Credit

Career Ready

Professional Skills & Workplace Preparation

- **Sync Mode: Working Together**
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach
- **AI Assist: Research Mode**
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach
- **Research Mode: Activated**
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach
- **College and Career Readiness Workshops** (Bi-weekly)
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach
- **System Upgrade: From Student to Professional**
  Facilitated by Chanel Ratliff, Ratliff Business Consulting
- **AI as Your Career Companion**
  Facilitated by Chelsea C. Williams, Reimagine Talent
- **Old School vs New School: Navigating Multigenerational Workspaces**
  Facilitated by Gene Hoskins, Peace of Mind Psychological Services, PLLC
- **Crucial Conversations**
  Facilitated by Jennifer Cordova, City of Raleigh Learning & Development (Human Resources)
- **Professional Headshots**
  Facilitated by Anaia Brewster, Brewster Creative Co.
- **Building Your Professional Blueprint** (Resume & LinkedIn)
  Facilitated by Aisha Chavis, The I.V. Framework
- **Start Up Mode: First Impressions Loading**
  Facilitated by Joseph Hairston, Courtside Consulting
- **Level Up Mode: Mastering Professional Presence**
  Facilitated by Chanel Ratliff, Ratliff Business Consulting
- **Access Granted: Earning Trust Early**
  Facilitated by Joshua Wright
- **Start Your Career Strong**
  Facilitated by Mariah Jay, Reimagine Talent Co.
- **Communication**
  Facilitated by Youth Work Connect
- **Task Accepted: Following Through Every Time**
  Facilitated by Rhonda Bradley
- **Own The Room**
  Facilitated by Rebecca Obounou, OE Consulting
- **Connect the Dots**
  Facilitated by Lori Krzeszewski, Alight and Design
- **Building Your Personal Brand**
  Facilitated by Youth Work Connect
- **Connect & Elevate: Owning the Room with Confidence**
  Facilitated by Toney Octavius Jefferys, This Guy Facilitation & Consulting Services
- **Own It: Practice Pitches & Feedback**
  Facilitated by Rebecca Obounou, OE Consulting
- **Edit.Create.Repeat**
  Facilitated by Anaia Brewster, Brewster Creative Co
- **Navigating the College Foundation Portal**
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach
- **College Application Week Training**
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach
- **How to Complete FAFSA**
  Facilitated by RSYEP Career Coach

Leadership in Action

Leadership Development & Inspiring Conversations

- **Your Journey Can Start Anywhere** (Life Story)
  Facilitated by Wake County Commissioner Shinica Thomas
- **Teen Table Talk: Your City, Your Voice**
  Facilitated by Community Engagement Department, Organizational Development (City of Raleigh)

Lunch, Learn & Level Up

Lunch and Learns gave youth direct access to professionals from businesses, public agencies, and community organizations. Through honest conversations, interactive activities, and career exploration, participants gained an inside look at workplace expectations, leadership, professional journeys, and the many paths available to them.

- **Lunch with Coastal Credit Union**
  Facilitated by William Fisher
- **Lunch with Lawyers**
  Facilitated by Meghan Knight, Campbell School of Law, Judge Ashleigh Parker, and Judge Damion McCullers
- **Lunch with Accenture**
  Facilitated by Caitlin Barbier
- **Lunch with Raleigh Police Department**
  Facilitated by April Morris-Adams, Chief Rico Boyce, and numerous units within Raleigh Police Department









The Leaders Who Stepped Forward

Who They Are

These participants chose to take their RSYEP experience further by serving as Ambassadors. Throughout the year, they represented the program, supported their peers, participated in service, and showed what youth leadership looks like in action.







RSYEP Ambassadors

- Sincere Belvin
- Sanaii Bunn (Communications Co-Chair)
- Jalen Chambliss
- Bryson Ezefili
- Tamory Hall
- Gabbrielle Haynes-Bryant
- Britton Jackson (Communications Co-Chair)
- Desmond Jones
- Coreion Levy (Secretary)
- Anthony Marshall-Gamble (Board Chair)
- Chloe Mears
- Aniyah Pone
- Jordan Pugh
- Kingston Rhodes
- Pratit Saha
- Eli Song
- Alyssa Thompson
- Miyako Wade
- Phoebe Wakama (Historian)
- Isley White

Advisors:
Monica Pugh and Vanta Rogers



The Alumni Building What Comes Next

The inaugural Alumni Alliance created a new way for former participants to remain connected to RSYEP. Its members helped shape this growing initiative while continuing to build relationships, serve the community, and prepare for their next academic and professional steps.

RSYEP Alumni Alliance

- Janah Afifi
- Meta Drammeh
- Hannia Guerrero-Felipe
- Syniqua Mullings
- Arushi Nayyar
- Chanise Primus
- Erica Rice
- Kaiya Thompson

Advisors:
Zoe Brannon and Joshua Wright



2025-2026 Highlights

Alumni Alliance member spoke at an event for the Town of Apex

Alumni Alliance members assisted with Interviews for Summer 2026

Volunteered with Note in the Pocket

Host/Hostesses at the Foster Grandparent Program Annual Banquet

Ambassador and Alumni Alliance Teambuilding with Paint 4 Wellness

Ambassador spoke on a panel with Ms. Rebekah at the Bank On Quarterly meeting

Ambassador was on the planning committee and panelist for "Wisdomteethinger Presents...Good Job) hosted by Dr. D-Nice Beaugelin

Ambassadors and Alumni Alliance participated in an Etiquette Class with Dr. Toya Corbett

Supported the following events:

- Pink Out (Courtney T. Johnson Community Center)
- Coats Cause We Care (Courtney T. Johnson Community Center)
- Toy Drive (Courtney T. Johnson Community Center)
- Easter Egg Hunt (Courtney T. Johnson Community Center)
- Ushers at Pre-K Celebration (Wanda's Little Hands)

Participated in leadership development at Carowinds Youth Leadership Day

End-of-year project: Participants developed an innovative idea to enhance RSYEP and presented their proposal to Ms. Rebekah.

Recognized by City of Raleigh's City Council






Work. Learn. Serve. in Action

Small Essentials. Meaningful Support.



RSYEP youth turned service into action by collecting and donating more than 250 new pairs of socks and underwear to Note in the Pocket. These essential items will help support children and youth across the community with clothing they need to feel comfortable, confident, and prepared.

The initiative reminded participants that meaningful service does not always require a grand gesture. Sometimes, meeting a simple but often overlooked need can make a lasting difference. Through Work. Learn. Serve., RSYEP youth demonstrated that career development also includes learning how to contribute, care for others, and strengthen the community around them.



RSYEP Signature Moments

RSYEP Signature Moments highlights the experiences that brought the 2025–2026 program year to life. Sweater Weather created space for connection, while Skill Up prepared youth for the workplace. Mind Wise centered youth and family mental health, and Shark Tank gave young entrepreneurs a platform to pitch bold ideas. During the summer, Professional Development Day strengthened career skills, and the Sneaker Ball Staff Mixer brought the RSYEP team together for connection, celebration, and fun. The year came full circle at the Finale Celebration, where youth, families, partners, and staff gathered to recognize accomplishments and celebrate a successful summer. Together, these moments reflect the energy, creativity, growth, and community that define the RSYEP experience.

Sweater Weather, Better Together

In December, RSYEP Ambassadors and Alumni Alliance members reimagined the annual vision board party as Sweater Weather: Better Together, an intergenerational celebration with the Foster Grandparent Program. Guests enjoyed brunch, danced, shared plenty of laughs during the ugly sweater contest, and created vision boards reflecting their goals for the year ahead. The experience brought generations together for connection, creativity, and meaningful conversation while reminding everyone that big dreams are even better when shared.









Skill Up: Job Readiness Training

Skill Up: Job Readiness Edition brought a new opportunity to Raleigh teens. For the first time, RSYEP opened a training to high school students ages 15–18 across the community, reaching beyond youth enrolled in the summer program. Held in partnership with Coastal Credit Union at its headquarters, the event featured workshops on interview skills, looking the part, and selling yourself. Students practiced making a strong first impression and left with skills they could put to work in their next interview.







Mind Wise: Youth and Family Mental Health Summit

On March 21, 2026, RSYEP launched the inaugural Mind Wise Youth and Family Mental Health Summit at the NCSU McKimmon Center. The summit brought youth, parents, caregivers, educators, mental health professionals, and community partners together for a day centered on honest conversations, practical support, and stronger family connections.

The day opened with two powerful personal stories. Phoebe Wakama spoke candidly about her own mental health journey, offering a youth perspective grounded in courage, self-awareness, and hope. Nikita Warren, a parent and mental health advocate, shared how the loss of her son to suicide deepened her commitment to helping families recognize concerns, seek support, and speak openly about mental health. Their willingness to share set the tone for a day where participants could feel seen, supported, and less alone.



Youth Pathway

The Youth Pathway created a supportive space for teens to explore stress, identity, confidence, relationships, and emotional wellbeing.

My Mental Health, My Voice

Facilitator: Kierra Bennett, LCSW-A

Youth explored how relationships, school pressure, identity, and social media can affect their emotional wellbeing. Participants strengthened their self-awareness, practiced healthy coping strategies, and learned how to use their voices to advocate for their mental health.

Reset Room: Stress Hacks for Life

Youth rotated through two hands on stations that introduced practical strategies for managing stress, strengthening confidence, and restoring emotional balance.

Confidence Station: See. Speak. Believe.

Facilitators:
Melonie Carlton and Vanta Rogers

Participants created personalized confidence frames and affirmation cards using strength words and positive statements that encouraged confidence and self-worth.



Yoga Station: Pause. Breathe. Reset.

Facilitator: Malikia Robertson

Through gentle movement, stretching, and intentional breathing, youth practiced techniques for reducing stress, grounding themselves, and restoring calm.

Care Circle Pathway

The Care Circle Pathway equipped parents and caregivers with practical tools to advocate for their children, understand emotional responses, and strengthen communication at home.

Behind the School Doors: What Parents Need to Know

Facilitator: Joshua Wright

Panelists: Rhonda Bradley, Michele Douglass, Otis Maben, and Commissioner Tara Waters

Parents and caregivers joined school and community leaders for a practical conversation about navigating school systems, addressing bullying, documenting concerns, preparing for meetings, and communicating effectively with educators.





Behind the Reactions: What Drives Us and How to Take the Wheel

Facilitator: Tamiya Dortch, LCSW-A

Participants examined how stress and past experiences can influence everyday reactions. The session offered tools for recognizing emotional triggers, responding with greater intention, reducing conflict, and strengthening family relationships.

Where the Pathways Met The Crossroads Conversation

Facilitator: Gene Hoskins, LPA

Youth and caregivers participated in guided discussions focused on strengthening communication and understanding across generations. Conversations explored communication challenges from both the youth and caregiver perspectives, emphasizing the importance of active listening, mutual respect, and creating safe spaces for open dialogue. Both groups were equipped with practical strategies and effective communication tools to navigate difficult conversations, express their needs, and strengthen relationships. Participants were encouraged to apply these skills at home to foster healthier, more meaningful communication and stronger family connections.

Community Support in One Place

The Mind Wise Resource Hall brought 15 community vendors together, giving youth and families direct access to mental health services, family support, advocacy, coaching, education, and wellness resources. Participants could ask questions, explore available services, and connect with organizations prepared to support them beyond the summit.

Organizations represented in the Resource Hall included:

- Advocacy & Consulting Solutions
- Catholic Charities Counseling Program
- Darkness RISING Project
- Dixon Social Interactive Services, Inc.
- Empower You Coaching, LLC
- Heal-thy Self, PLLC
- Ignite the Star Within Coaching LLC
- MindMattrz
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)
- NC Department of Public Instruction Office of School Nutrition
- Raleigh Police Department Community Impact and Engagement Division, Youth Services Unit
- SAFEchild
- Students Supporting Students
- Turning Leaf Therapy Services
- Vine Counseling & Associates PLLC

With Gratitude to Our Sponsors

The inaugural Mind Wise Summit was made possible through the support of NAMI, Dixon Social Interactive Services, Inc., and the Raleigh Police Department. Their partnership helped RSYEP create an accessible and welcoming experience where difficult topics could be discussed with care and families could leave with practical tools, valuable connections, and renewed hope.

Mind Wise marked an important expansion of RSYEP's commitment to the whole young person. The summit reinforced that preparing youth for the future also means supporting their mental health, strengthening the people who care for them, and creating spaces where families can grow together.





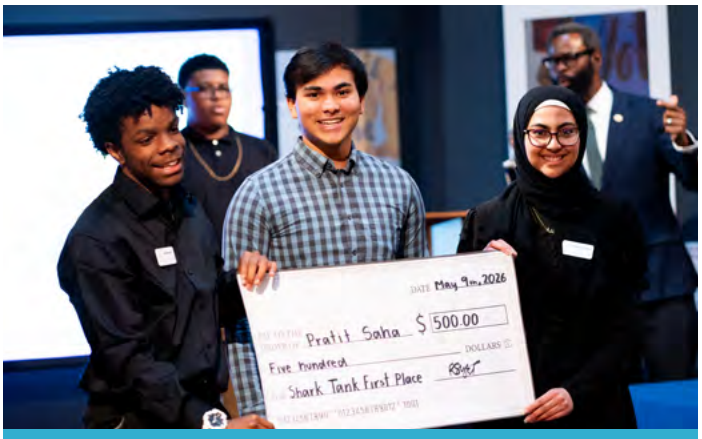
Shark Tank:
RSYEP Edition - Volume 2

For Volume 2, RSYEP participants stepped into the world of entrepreneurship by transforming original ideas into business concepts ready for the stage. Before presenting, youth completed a three-part boot camp focused on business proposal development, branding and marketing, and presentation and pitch skills. With coaching, preparation, and multiple opportunities to refine their ideas, participants developed stronger business plans and learned how to communicate their vision with confidence. The experience concluded with youth pitching before a panel of judges and a live audience, demonstrating creativity, problem solving, professionalism, and the courage to bring a bold idea to life.

Participants and Business Ideas Pitched:

Bryson Ezefili, LessHigh

Pratit Saha, WoundWatcher



Winner:

Pratit Saha — awarded a cash prize, and their business name was officially trademarked by Parker Poe

Judges:

- **Professor Lisa Chang,** NC State University
- **William Fisher,** Coastal Credit Union
- **Jorge Gao,** City of Raleigh
- **James Montague,** F7 International Development
- **Sertrice Shipley,** Plan to Action

Boot Camp Workshops & Mentors:

- **Business Proposal and Development** Facilitated by Crystal McClean, Money Box Academy
- **Brand and Marketing** Facilitated by Adriane Clark, The Clark Agency
- **Presentation and Pitch** Facilitated by Joseph Hairston, Courtside Consulting

Event Sponsors:

We would like to thank our generous sponsors for making this experience possible: Coastal Credit Union, Parker Poe, and Reimagine Talent Co. and all who supported the Shark Tank Challenge. Your contributions helped provide an unforgettable opportunity for our youth employees.

Next Level Loading: Professional Development Day

Professional Development Day took on a new summit style format in 2026, giving RSYEP youth a full day of interactive learning, career preparation, and honest conversation. Participants rotated through four workshops designed to help them navigate today's workplace with greater confidence, stronger communication skills, and a clearer understanding of how to prepare for what comes next.



Workshop Experiences

AI as Your Career Companion

(Chelsea C. Williams. Reimagine Talent Co.)

Youth explored how artificial intelligence can support career research, skill development, resume preparation, and professional growth when used responsibly.

Crucial Conversations

(Jennifer Cordova, City of Raleigh)

Participants learned how to communicate effectively, navigate difficult conversations, and handle workplace challenges with confidence and professionalism.

Old School vs. New School: Navigating Multigenerational Workspaces

(Gene Hoskins, Peace of Mind Psychological Services)

Youth examined how different generations approach communication, expectations, feedback, and teamwork. The session gave participants practical tools for working successfully with colleagues of all ages.

Level Up Your Professional Presence

(Aisha Chavis, The I.V. Framework/ Brewster Creative Co.)

Participants strengthened their professional brand through resume development, LinkedIn preparation, and professional headshots, leaving with tools they could immediately use in their job and college searches.

RSYEP Live: Real Talk Panel

The day concluded with RSYEP Live, a candid conversation featuring former RSYEP participants NaKima Clark, Rolonda Hernandez, and Carmen Myles, moderated by Zoe Brannon. Panelists reflected on their experiences in the program, shared lessons from their career journeys, and offered honest advice about growth, persistence, and making the most of every opportunity.

Next Level Loading gave youth more than information. It gave them space to practice, ask questions, connect with professionals, and hear from former participants who once stood where they stood. By the end of the day, youth left with new tools, stronger confidence, and a better sense of how to take ownership of their next move.

Sneaker Ball Staff Mixer

Sneakers were the dress code. Connection was the goal.

The Sneaker Ball brought the entire RSYEP team and career coaches together for a night of laughter, creativity, and getting to know one another beyond their day-to-day roles. Staff customized DIY trucker hats, journals, tumblers, and shirts with Sassy Dame Designs, enjoyed music by DJ Rheub, captured memorable moments in the Capital Smilez 360 booth, and brought their competitive energy to a variety of games.

More than a staff gathering, the evening gave the team time to relax, recharge, and strengthen the relationships that carried them through a busy summer. The team understood the assignment, showed up in style, and enjoyed a well-deserved night of good vibes and great company.









A Finale Worth Celebrating

The 2026 Finale Celebration brought youth, families, supervisors, host employers, City leaders, program staff, and community partners together to celebrate eight weeks of work, learning, and growth. It was a joyful close to the summer and an opportunity to recognize the young people and partners who helped make the year extraordinary.

Guests received a warm welcome from Tarkisha Poole of Coastal Credit Union, followed by an inspiring Lead and Inspire keynote address from Dr. Robert P. Taylor, Superintendent of Wake County Public Schools. His message encouraged participants to recognize their potential, build on their experiences, and move confidently toward what comes next.

The celebration was filled with opportunities to connect and have fun, including a photo booth, flower bar, game truck, canvas painting, and slushies. These experiences created a festive atmosphere where participants could celebrate their accomplishments and enjoy one final afternoon together.

Honoring the RSYEP Golden Girlies

The Finale also recognized the RSYEP Golden Girlies, our dedicated volunteers from the Foster Grandparent Program. Throughout the year, they supported interview sessions, encouraged participants, assisted with special events, and brought warmth, wisdom, and positive energy wherever they served. Their consistent presence and genuine care made them a treasured part of the RSYEP family.

- Beverly Sullivan
- Jaqueline Walton
- Ernestine Watkins
- Sharon Collins-Sanders
- Yvette Daniel-Cheston
- Judy Ellis



Celebrating Excellence

The Finale honored achievement across RSYEP through the Growth Unlocked Award, Ambassador of the Year, Alumni Alliance Member of the Year, Host Employer of the Year, and Outstanding Youth Employee Award. Each recognition represented an important part of the RSYEP story, including personal growth, leadership, continued service, supportive worksites, and excellence on the job.

Host Employers of the Year

Introduced in 2026, the Host Employer of the Year Award gave participants the opportunity to nominate worksites that created welcoming, supportive, and meaningful summer employment experiences.

- Lake Lynn Community Center
- Raleigh Police Department Community IMPACT and Engagement, Youth and Family Services Unit

Growth Unlocked Award

The Growth Unlocked Award recognized participants who demonstrated meaningful progress throughout the summer. These youth embraced feedback, strengthened their workplace skills, and showed a commitment to becoming better each day.

- Entrepreneurship: Jo Slootweg
- Sports and Entertainment Marketing: Jadin Carter
- Healthcare: Aiyana Thorpe
- Business and Finance: Matthew Dutch
- Community Pathway: Samantha Larbi
- Community Pathway: Jamari Brim
- Community Pathway: Jada Bailey





Ambassadors of the Year

These Ambassadors consistently demonstrated leadership, service, dependability, and a commitment to representing RSYEP with excellence.

- Aniyah Pone
- Kingston Rhodes



Alumni Alliance Members of the Year

These Alumni Alliance members remained actively involved, gave back through service, and helped create a stronger path for the participants following behind them.

- Hannia Guerrero-Felipe
- Erica Rice







Outstanding Youth Employees

Each Outstanding Youth Employee was nominated by a supervisor who witnessed their work ethic, professionalism, leadership, growth, and contributions firsthand.

- Chukwuemeka "Chuk" Akwitti
- Tyree Anderson
- Grace Bagley
- Carmen Brame
- Simier Davis
- Benjamin Graham Olshansky
- Hope Hall
- Marlana Kennedy
- Sydney King
- Erica Lofton
- Kessler Lowry
- Anthony Marshall-Gamble
- Aliyah Mitchell
- Sofia Moreno
- Maila Obe
- Melia Ragan
- Khloe Ratliff
- Kingston Rhodes
- Pratit Saha
- Mariam Sarge
- Travis Simmons Jr.
- Eli Song

The Finale was more than the end of the summer. It celebrated how far participants had come, honored the people who supported their journey, and reminded everyone that their futures were still in progress.

RSYEP in Their Words

Perspectives from Participants, Families, and Host Employers

The RSYEP experience looks different depending on where you stand. Participants experienced new responsibilities, relationships, and opportunities. Families watched their young people grow in confidence and independence. Host employers saw youth contribute, develop professional skills, and become valuable members of their teams.

Together, their voices provide a fuller picture of what worked, what youth gained, and where RSYEP can continue growing.









Each question below was based on the rating scale 1-5.
(1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree).
Below is the average rating for each question.

Participants Said (What youth experienced and learned):

1. **I learned something that you can share with others?** **4.55**
2. **I feel more confident in my ability to work independently and with others?** **4.60**
3. **I will use the skills I gained through RSYEP in school, future jobs, or my career.** **4.55**
4. **I am more confident in my ability to apply the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in my role, school, workplace, or community.** **4.52**
5. **I have a better understanding of careers and future opportunities available to me.** **4.36**
6. **I felt welcomed, respected, and supported during my RSYEP experience.** **4.55**
7. **Please indicate your agreement to the following statement with 10 being the highest level of agreement**: I would recommend this program to a friend. **9.12**
8. **Which professional skills do you feel you improved the most (choose out of 12 options)?** Top 9: Communication, Teamwork, Problem Solving, Adaptability, Public Speaking, Time Management, Critical Thinking, Professional Etiquette, and Leadership

Participant Take Aways:

- "I discovered that I enjoy tackling problems that I am currently facing and have no easy solution to. That's why I made my app something that I would really like a solution to right now since I am going to college next year and I'd like an app that helps me save.
- "I learned that I love to lead, and working with others to solve a problem is something I truly enjoy because It challenges you but in a productive way."
- "Through this program I have learned that I love working with people and with a team! Also, that I am capable of great things as long as I'm willing to plan out the steps it takes to get there!"





Families Noticed (The growth parents and caregivers saw at home):

(1-Very Unsatisfied 2-Unsatisfied 3-Neutral 4-Satisfied 5-Very Satisfied)

1. **How satisfied are you with your child's overall experience in the RSYEP?** **4.76**
2. **How satisfied were you with the communication and updates from RSYEP staff throughout the program** **4.71**
3. **Growth & Development**
   As a result of participating in RSYEP, how much do you agree with the following statements?

Demonstrated increased confidence.
Significant Improvement..... **64.7%**
Some Improvement **17.6%**
No Change..... **14.7%**
Not Sure **2.9%**

Improved their communication skills.
Significant Improvement..... **55.9%**
Some Improvement **32.4%**
No Change..... **5.9%**
Not Sure **5.9%**

Became more responsible and accountable.
Significant Improvement..... **58.8%**
Some Improvement **29.4%**
No Change..... **11.8%**
Not Sure **0%**

Developed stronger workplace professionalism.
Significant Improvement..... **64.7%**
Some Improvement **17.6%**
No Change..... **14.7%**
Not Sure **2.9%**

Improved their ability to work with others.
Significant Improvement..... **58.8%**
Some Improvement **26.5%**
No Change..... **11.8%**
Not Sure **2.9%**

Became more aware of future career opportunities.
Significant Improvement..... **61.8%**
Some Improvement **14.7%**
No Change..... **8.8%**
Not Sure **14.7%**

Showed greater independence.
Significant Improvement..... **64.7%**
Some Improvement **23.5%**
No Change..... **8.8%**
Not Sure **2.9%**

Was more motivated to achieve future educational or career goals
Significant Improvement..... **64.7%**
Some Improvement **20.6%**
No Change..... **11.8%**
Not Sure **2.9%**





4. **Future Readiness**
   RSYEP helped my child develop skills that will benefit them in school, work, and life.

Strongly Agree 70%
Agree 15%
Neither Agree nor Disagree 6%
Disagree 0%
Strongly Disagree 9%

Parent Takeaways:

- "RSYEP was very impactful in helping my son learn effective communication, increased confidence in pursuing his future goals and teamwork. He understands the importance of time management, collaboration and being a problem solver."
- "She has some understanding of how to be independent. She is excited for college and I am extremely happy she was given this opportunity."
- "RSYEP has impacted my child to be more independent and motivated to work. He has learned how to navigate his finances, complete forms pertaining to employment and was very eager to go to work everyday. He has expressed interest to apply again for RSYEP. This experience gave him insight on what to expect in the future."







Host Employers Observed (What supervisors saw in the workplace)

1. **Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience as a host employer this summer?**(1-Very Unsatisfied 2-Unsatisfied 3-Neutral 4-Satisfied 5-Very Satisfied) **4.57**
2. **How well did your youth employee(s) meet expectations for their role?** (1-Did not meet expectations, 2-Partially Met Expectations, 3-Met Expectations 4-Exceeded Expectations) **3.29**
3. **How prepared was your youth employee(s) in the following areas?**

Professionalism (Attire, punctuality, workplace behavior)

Very Prepared	**50%**
Prepared	**42.9%**
Neutral	**7.1%**
Unprepared	**0%**
Very Unprepared	**0%**

Communication Skills

Very Prepared	**28.6%**
Prepared	**57.1%**
Neutral	**14.3%**
Unprepared	**0%**
Very Unprepared	**0%**

Task Completion and Reliability

Very Prepared	**42.9%**
Prepared	**42.9%**
Neutral	**14.3%**
Unprepared	**0%**
Very Unprepared	**0%**

Teamwork and Collaboration

Very Prepared	**42.9%**
Prepared	**50%**
Neutral	**7.1%**
Unprepared	**0%**
Very Unprepared	**0%**





Partnership That Opened Doors

In 2026, RSYEP celebrated the second year of its partnership with the Economic Awareness Council, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preparing students and families for the financial and economic decisions they face today and in the future. The organization places particular emphasis on meeting the needs of youth and families with limited resources.

Raleigh was selected to offer the Council's Future Finance Ready curriculum, giving RSYEP participants access to financial education designed to strengthen money management skills, build financial confidence, and prepare them to make informed decisions about saving, banking, and their future goals.

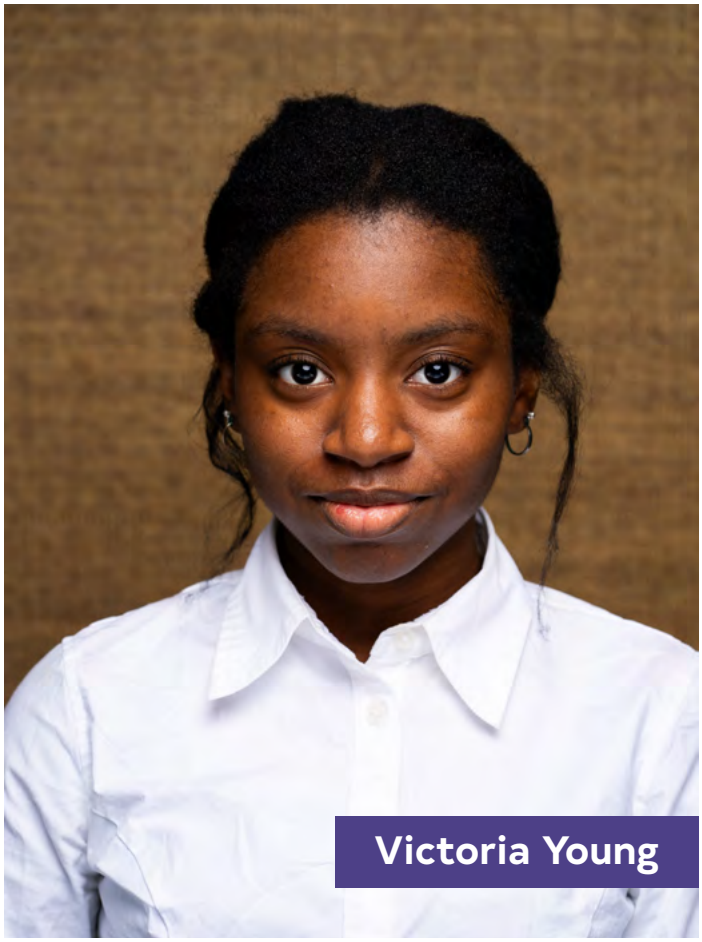
The partnership also created scholarship opportunities for participating youth. For the second consecutive year, an RSYEP participant received a $500 scholarship, demonstrating how financial education can lead to tangible support for a young person's next steps.

Economic Awareness Council Scholarship Recipients

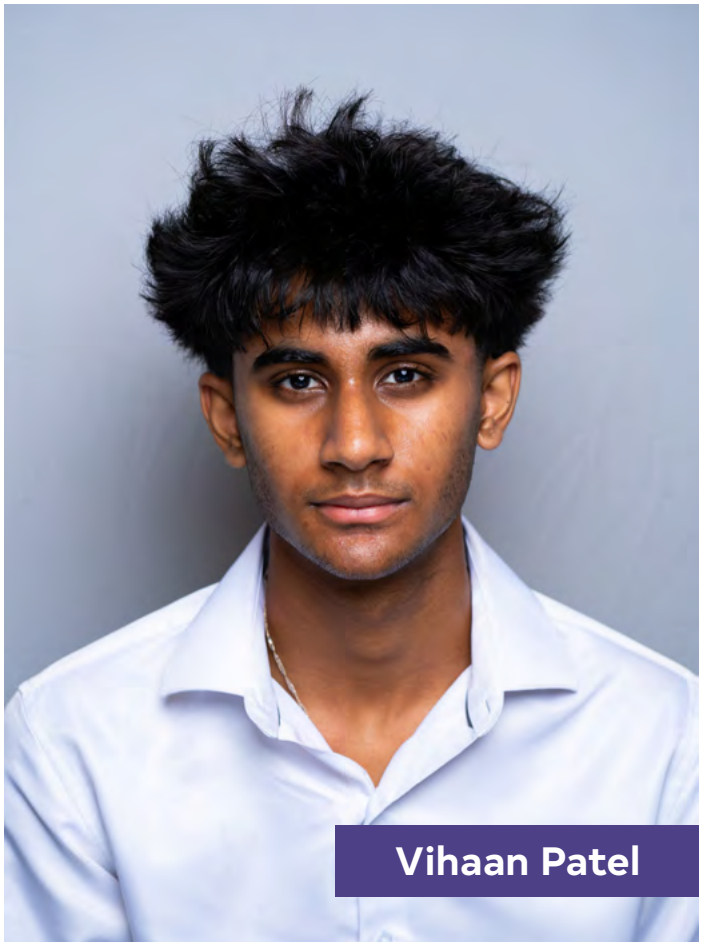
- 2025: Victoria Young
- 2026: Vihaan Patel

Through the Future Finance Ready curriculum and continued scholarship support, the Economic Awareness Council has helped RSYEP turn financial learning into meaningful opportunities for youth.

ECONOMIC AWARENESS COUNCIL



Victoria Young



Vihaan Patel

Thank You!

Friends of Raleigh Summer Youth Employment Program

RSYEP is deeply grateful for the incredible support of our community partners, sponsors, and friends. Their dedication, resources, and mentorship help make the program a transformative experience for young people each summer. This page honors organizations and individuals whose generosity and commitment inspire, empower, and create lasting opportunities for our participants..

Academy Bus

Accenture

Align and Design Consulting

America Saves for Young Workers

Bank of America

Bank On North Carolina

Be a Blessing Foundation

Brewster Creative Co.

Campbell School of Law

Capital Smilez Photo Booth

City Manager's Office (City of Raleigh)

Coastal Credit Union

College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC)

Communities in School (Wake County)

Courtside Consulting

Darkness Rising

Dixon Social Interactive Services, Inc.

DJ Club Rheub

DJ Lil D

Dr. Shanita Brown, Transformative Counseling & Consulting, PLLC

Economic Awareness Council

Embassy Suites at Crabtree

Empower App (One Absolute)

Expressions in Rhythm Studio

Foster Grandparent Program (City of Raleigh)

Garner Road Community Center

GoRaleigh

Human Resources (City of Raleigh)

iLeadKids Camp

Joshua Wright

Judge Ashleigh Parker

Judge Damion McCullers

Jus-Touring, LLC

Human Resources Learning & Development (City of Raleigh)

Lighthouse Therapy and Consulting

Money Box Academy

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

NC State McKimmon Center

OE Consulting

Otis Maben

Paint 4 Wellness

Parker Poe Adams & Bernstein, LLP

Peace of Mind Psychological Services, PLLC

Poe Center

Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources (City of Raleigh)

Raleigh Police Department

Ratliff Business Consulting

Reimagine Talent Co.

Rhonda Bradley

Roll On Up Gaming

S&K Funnel Cakes

Sassy Dame Designs

Southeast Raleigh YMCA

Step Up Ministry of Wake County

Tamiya Dortch

Tastes by Troy Catering

The Collaborative

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The I.V. Framework

The Red Petal Vault

Third Point, LLC

Tuskie Capital

Wake County Bar Association

Wake County Public Schools

Wanda's Little Hands

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