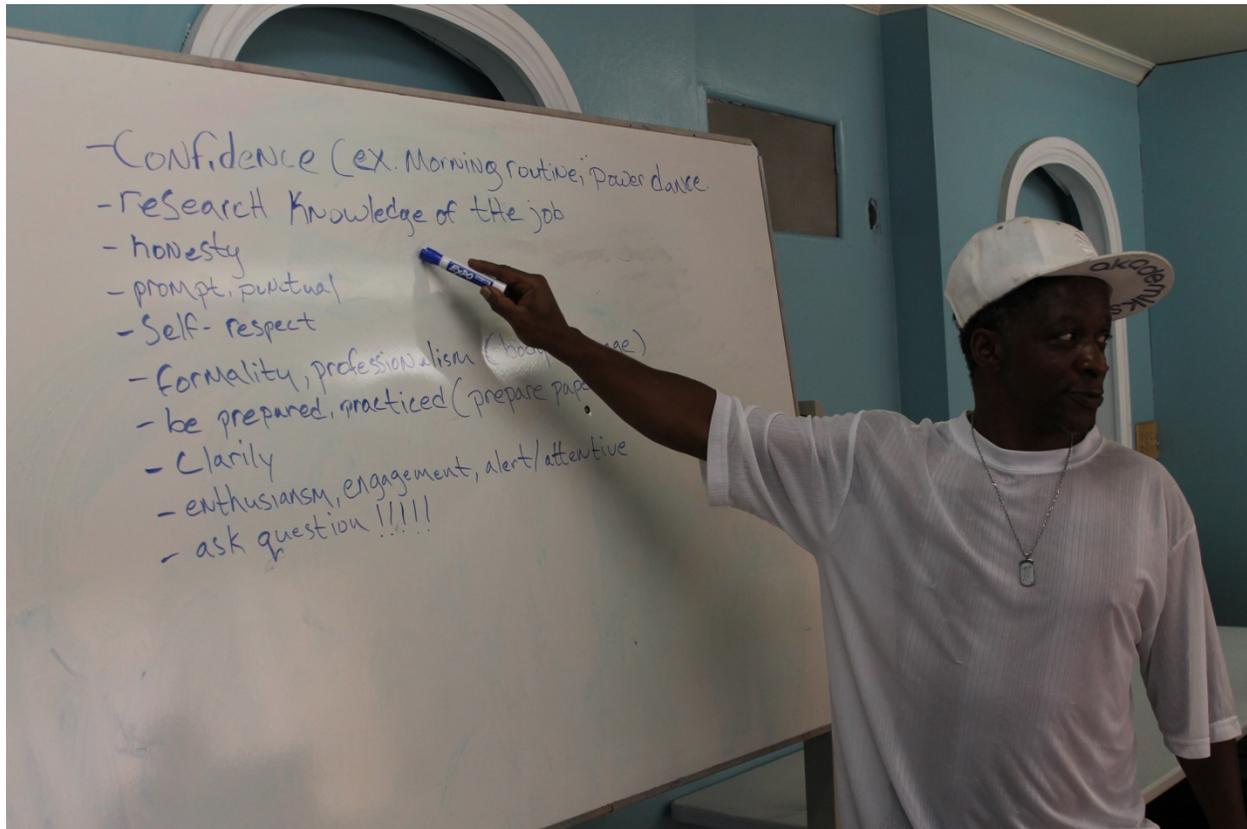


Meet Gary Bradley



Gary Bradley -- CEF-Durham's Opportunity Circles Facilitator, Phoenix House Graduate, and Social Activist:

Gary is a character- he loves to talk and gives great motivational advice. Gary is CEF-Durham's Opportunity Circles Facilitator, and he is adamant about making it an open discussion to give everyone the opportunity to bring what they have to the table. As he facilitates the class, Gary never hesitates to bring in his own life experiences to make the concepts more relevant to everyday life. The summer interns discovered how interesting Gary is as a person- Gary is a never-ending story book!

One Monday before Durham's Beyù Caffè office hours, advocates Stephanie, Zoey, and Jennifer asked Gary if he could tell them his story. He graciously agreed. This is what he shared with us.

From New York to Durham

Gary is a native New Yorker, hailing from Harlem and South Jamaica Queens. About 14 years ago, he visited his American Indian cousins (his father is American Indian) at a reservation in North Carolina, and he dropped by Durham and liked it. He paints it as a place with a much slower pace but still maintains a “city-twang” to it. He moved two years after and has been living in Durham ever since.

He describes his life in New York as troubled, as he retells his life in the projects and being in an environment with violence. In Durham, he received a rude awakening in that made him evaluate the events in his life. He realized he wanted to change his life around, sought help, and eventually ended up at the Phoenix House.

Connection to CEF

At the Phoenix house, Gary recalls how he used to see these kids from Duke University come in every Wednesday through CEF. His first impression towards the advocates was distrustful, as he describes, “why are they coming from Duke to talk to us- why are you all being so nice to us?” He felt confused and needed to know. Eventually, the advocates, especially Will, won his trust, as they showed loyalty through their work with him.

Gary used to cook every time the advocates came to the Phoenix House, and they noticed that he was very good at it. He had a talent for cooking. So, Gary and CEF advocates started applying for restaurants. Gary successfully landed a job as a prep-chef at a Japanese restaurant called *Sake Bomb*. He never went to the culinary school, but he always liked watching cooking shows and found a passion in it. At his new job, he impressed his boss through the skill of skinning the salmon which he learned through watching television.

That same skill landed him a job in Dame’s Chicken and Waffles, where he currently works now. It’s hard work, but he loves working there. He tells us how he has a knack for meeting good people- it’s a magic. With that, he found another knack, one for mentoring. Gary discovered his love for motivational speaking, and feels like his strong point is helping people.

Inspiration for Social Activism

Gary calls himself a social activist. As early as ten years old, Gary witnessed the prejudice and pressure his family faced living as an African American family in New York. Living in a prominent black and white neighborhood

in Queens, his family was met with hostility and rejection. He especially remembers a time where his neighbors burned a cross in front of their house and told them that they didn't belong there. Both of his parents went to school and had government jobs, but they still couldn't be treated with respect and equality. Even at that young age, Gary could sense the difference. The police didn't do anything, and he resented that. That made him fight for things he deserved. He did not just settle for what people say, nor did he suffer in silence from his own deficiency. He took concrete actions to seek out opportunities, to prove that he belongs where he wants to.

Gary doesn't dwell on his past, but he says that his life experiences have given him the desire to be an equal, and for everyone else to be equal. That's where he's at now- striving for equality.

Despite his rough experiences, Gary remembers various beacons of light in his childhood in New York. One of them was John, a fireman who used mentor young teenagers like Gary. Gary reserves fond memories of the fire department, where he would go after an argument and just hang out there. Jon, as one of Gary's main mentors growing up, allowed Gary to see that not all of societal systems were against him. He also motivated Gary to strive and act towards what he wanted.

Gary's goals

Gary describes his inner angst against systems of oppressions, and says "he still got some fight the power in me." He describes that it's not against the government, but against institutions that surround the community that state that they provide opportunities to people, but judge that certain community members are not being active and participates. This is nonsense, he says, because if people in the community don't know of the places that they could receive help, then they can't get it. So Gary, as a social activist, tries to fill in the gap by collecting resources and coming back with CEF to get the information out there. He really likes doing it.

Gary strives to be a counselor, and is considering working for an organization or even starting his own program to mentor others. He wants to use his experience from the Phoenix House to create a similar space. He specifically wants to work for a social house for teenagers ages 17 to 24, which he considers delicate years. He says, "It would be helpful for someone to talk to that age group." Gary loves talking to the youth. Right

now, Gary does what he can by pointing them out to useful resources, but he hopes that he can offer them something more in the future.

Gary says that CEF has given him the opportunity to strive for equality, by the way he is able to give one of his “brothers and sisters and opportunity to step up, to get a job, to get resources for their kids.” He calls the Opportunity Circles his baby, as it is dear to his heart to see people get the opportunity to do something for themselves.

Hobbies and Connections With Others

After learning about Gary’s life story. Stephanie, Zoey, and Jennifer decided to steer the conversation towards a lighter topic- Gary’s favorite hobbies and past times. This is what he shared with them:

“I like to draw, play b-ball, and build model cars and ships. I draw from scratch. We used to build our own cars as kids, and race them. I didn’t draw anything special, just ideas that popped up in my head. I drew a hand coming out of space, making the world. I drew trees, splitting them up and colored it red, white, blue, orange, with stripes, and I put it on an island on a rock. I was feeling some kind of way, and the colors represented all kinds of people living as one, being part of that tree. I don’t know what made me draw it- some days I just get in the mood to do something. One time I drew a leaf, and I had everyone I knew sign it. All my friends from every borough signed it-someone still has it hanging in their house. I don’t know what it meant. I just did it.”

Gary’s advice for CEF

At the end of our conversation, Gary gave a great word of advice to CEF. He appreciates that CEF is driven by a group of young folks who are trying to help other people find resources. He hopes that CEF can find a way to reach out and get more people under the CEF umbrella, and that means getting the word out a little more. Gary mentions that this could be helpful for the organizations and people CEF reaches out to, and to CEF as well.

CEF appreciates what Gary brings to the CEF community. He is creative, and through his creativity he is able to inspire those around him to achieve their sense of self and their goals.

Written by Stephanie and Zoey from CEF-Durham

Many thanks to Gary Bradley for taking the time to share his story