

## **Homeless youth program needs help to stay open**

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HIGH POINT – A program known for helping homeless youth get back on their feet is in desperate need of some help of its own.

I Am Now Inc. is a transition house for foster youth after they age out of the system, but the founder says without immediate financial help, they'll have to close by the end of the month.

The program has helped people like Dwayne Wakefield, who like his peers headed to college after aging out of foster care.

"I felt like I was just kicked out, just pushed into college without too much help or organization skills," Wakefield said.

And without that support, his first year of college didn't go so well. But he eventually found the help and support he needed at I Am Now.

"Having somebody here in this program who's been through things closely similar or almost similar to what I've been through – if they've been through it, then I can do it," Wakefield said.

But to keep helping these kids, the program's executive director says the program needs money.

"Right now this week, I'm coming out of my back pocket to take care of the weekly expenses simply because we have no money and so things have to continue to go on," Founder and Executive Director Travis Burrell said. "I can't do it by myself, I need the support of the community and I need the community to get involved with the community's kids."

The nonprofit serves about 30 youth. Of those, seven call the house their home. Burrell said if this program goes under, the kids will have no place to go but to the streets.

"And with them becoming homeless again, then we'll have to pay later." Burrell said. "We're going to have to support them, through the welfare system, we'll have to support them through incarceration and prison and we'll have to support them through chronically homeless situations."

The teenagers he and his volunteers help said the program is too important to let slip away.

"You want to be successful in life and this is the place to start to start getting your life together," Jonte Monk, a mentored teen, said.

Officials estimate there are at least 180 homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 23 in Guilford County.