

# Program that helps homeless youth is struggling

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HIGH POINT - Representatives of a High Point nonprofit that serves homeless youth say their organization is in danger of shutting down because it's running out of money.

I Am Now, which operates a transition house for former foster children as well as other outreach initiatives, is facing the possibility it might not make it through the end of the month, according to founder Travis Burrell, who is making a plea to the community for monetary donations. The organization serves about 30 youths, many of whom have no place to live because they've aged out of foster care and have no family.

"We've got all these folks depending on us, and we've got \$500 in the bank, and it's just not realistic for us to continue to operate like that," Burrell said. "If we close and these young people go back to the same situation they were in, I just can't take that very easily."

Since it started three years ago, I Am Now has received a grant from the High Point Community Foundation and some other donations. It also recently got a \$20,000 grant from Guilford County which was to be awarded as reimbursement after the organization spent money first, Burrell said, adding that they haven't had enough cash on hand to do so. The group rents property on Ferndale Boulevard for its Crossroads house, where seven 18- to 23-year-old men stay.

"It's a 12- to 18-month program, where we'll take them in and provide structure, guidance, mentoring, counseling. Our ultimate goal here is for them to become self-sufficient. We've had great success," said program director David Moore. "If we can't keep the doors open, then they'll be out on the streets, and we don't want that to happen."

Nine of the 11 young people who have been in the program have earned their high school diplomas in the last year and are pursuing college, Moore said.

"We've certainly been able to save some lives and get some success stories out of our program, but we just haven't had a real working budget. We've always been on a shoestring budget," said Burrell, a former foster child. "We're providing a service that is such a big need. No one else is addressing this population in Guilford County or for that matter in the state. I think we're kind of the best kept secret. I feel like not too many people know about us."

The organization has ongoing expenses it has to meet, such as paying its staff of four, as well as utilities and rent for Crossroads house. Burrell said he's hopeful the community will respond with donations.

"High Point has been very supportive - the traditional folks that give," he said. "But we haven't been able to gravitate to the community as a whole. I want to be here in High Point, but if I can't get the support I need, I may have to try to go somewhere else, and that's not what I want to do."

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