



THE CRISIS OF

# aging out of foster care

by Wanda Kidd, CBFNC Collegiate Engagement Coordinator



Ministering to the least amongst us takes many shapes and forms and it is often people we do not even think about. One of these populations includes the young people who are aging out of foster care. At age 18 they are considered adults and in many cases are emancipated to begin their lives on their own. Those teenagers are some of the most at-risk people you will ever meet. They come from situations that were unstable, often abusive, with very little support system in place to help them move to adulthood.

In North Carolina, there are over 10,000 children in foster care. Last year, close to 500 of them aged out of the foster care system. Here are some of the statistics that will follow them.

- 20% of foster care youth will become instantly homeless upon aging out.
- Less than 3% of teenagers who age out of foster care achieve higher education.
- 72% of girls who age out will become pregnant before the age of twenty-one.
- 24% of older youth who age out of foster care are affected by PTSD.
- Only 50% of older youth in foster care will have employment by the age of 24.
- Only 57% of foster care students will graduate from high school, compared to 85% of the general population.

North Carolina offers some services that provide safety nets to help with this transition. However, for a youth to qualify for these services they must be actively seeking graduation from high school, be able to attend college through a grant program (which only covers partial expenses), or have needs and disabilities that prevent them from living on their own. These transitions are complicated for a student in a stable family, so imagine how complicated it is to attain these goals without a support system.

Home Base at Western Carolina University is one attempt to address these systemic issues. The building that previously housed the Baptist Campus Ministry was sitting vacant. The Assistant Vice Dean of Student Success approached the Baptist Children's Homes of NC with an idea. He wondered if WCU and the BCH could partner to provide a place where their students who had aged out of foster care or other emancipated students could have the support to thrive while in this high-stress time of life. It was quickly adopted as an excellent idea for all the people involved and it came together very quickly.

Dr. Jim Dean is the director of Home Base. His job is to provide resources and community for these at risk young adults. At their place on campus, they have a food pantry, clothing closet, emergency housing, a computer lab, and a place for them to hang out in a building that was decorated, by their request, to look like a home.

It is the great hope of CBFNC that the CBFNC family continue to look for ways to see our mission with college students and young adults as much more than just mission trips and Bible studies. We believe that we are called to be the presence of Christ wherever the least amongst us needs a word of grace and an advocate for peace and justice. This is just one way that one of our partners, the Baptist Children's Homes of NC, is carrying out that mission. Continue to pray that we will have eyes to see and ears to hear the voices of those around us who are calling out and then be moved to action.

**How can you help? Here are some suggestions from Jim Dean:** Visa, grocery store, gas station, and Walmart gift cards go a long way. It is a simple way for people to donate and it's easy for me to distribute to students. These gifts help students pay for travel expenses like gas and meals, which enables them to spend school breaks with family members. Another wishlist item is a 15-passenger van to take students on trips during school breaks. Donate: Home Base, PO Box 2133, Cullowhee, NC 28723