

## **CARE STORY – The Dream of Independence**

Deshaun is a 17 year old boy who came to Epworth last fall. Ever since he walked through the doors here, he has dreamed of the day he would turn 18. He told everyone on campus that as soon as his birthday came, he would sign himself out of care and go out in the world on his own. He craved independence even if it meant going back to his old neighborhood and sleeping on someone's couch.

Deshaun's desire for independence is common for a child who lacks caring and trusting relationships. Throughout his childhood he experienced disappointment and pain as a result of the actions of the adults around him. His attitude was of little surprise to the Epworth staff. For weeks he continued to tell everyone that when he turned 18 in a few months, he was leaving.

Just after Christmas, Deshaun's familiar refrain of independence disappeared. The cottage staff noticed that he was taking school more seriously. He even started singing in the Gospel choir at church.

One day after school he came into the cottage office and sat down with his case manager. "I don't want to sign out anymore," he said. "I want to finish high school. Then I want to be in the Epworth independent living program, so I can go to trade school. I want to do better for myself." His case manager asked what changed his mind. "The other guys in the cottage helped me see what a good opportunity I have. You care about me. You want to see me be somebody and there's a path to help me get there."

Transformations like Deshaun's are evidence that Epworth is breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect in our communities. Epworth gives students like him a chance at true independence by equipping them to provide for themselves. Epworth provided comprehensive care for Deshaun and surrounded him with a trustworthy environment. Now with the help of his cottage staff and friends, Deshaun is aiming higher. Instead of hitting the streets and staying on couches, he is making plans for a brighter future of true independence.