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FULTON COUNTY UNION CITY

Nonprofit program boosts teen graduate rates

Individualized support is key to greater learning.

By H.M. Cauley
For the AJC

Having a 100% graduation rate is an achievement few high school programs can brag about. Along with the usual struggles, many teens face obstacles that keep them from reaching that milestone. It's even more challenging when students are part of a residential program due to family issues or the state's intervention.

Christian City Children's Village in Union City has been one of those residential programs since 1965. Youngsters who arrive at the seven-cottage community are often one or two grades behind, having put studies aside to survive. In this safe environment, they're given an array of services, from tutoring to therapy, that gets them on track. Those services have made significant inroads: Since 2015, the Village has had a 100% graduation rate for students who remain in the program. "We've had kids stay for 30 days, through three or four years; it just depends on their situation," said Destini Alexander, Christian City's director of residential services. "We



Graduates of the class of 2023 and residents of Christian City, in Union City, have been part of the nonprofit's youth program that has had a 100% high school graduate rate since 2015. COURTESY

have youth who have fallen behind, and some who are on track, and we transition them to a public school or private school."

About 80% of the youths attend private schools in the area; others attend public schools, often the same ones where they were enrolled

before arriving at the Village. The community's house parents are responsible for getting students to their destinations each school day.

"The program is unique to each individual child, and we try to meet them where they are," said Director of Communications Hala Hess

White. "We pay for the students to attend the private schools, which do collaborate with us and understand that our kids come from a different place than many others. We try to find the school and the curriculum that will suit the child." This year, the Village had

eight high school grads who are examples of what supporting teens in their education journey can do, said White.

"Part of the ethic here is to love the kids who come into our care and to commit to their education," she noted. "It opens up the possibilities

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of the world. Even though many students come to us with difficulties, we teach them that within each one of them is enormous possibility - maybe even things they never dreamed of."

That's the story of resident Cornell Travick, 17, who attended Central Christian School in Sharpsburg while living in the Village.

"I came here a year and a half ago because I needed a better place to live," he said. "I didn't expect it to go this well. I had the great opportunity to get an education, and now I'm going to Shorter University to study drama and theater. I've become a better person, and I have Christian City to thank for a lot of things."

Information about Christian City is online at christiancity.org.

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