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Donated cars put SC foster youths on road to independence

By SARAH ELLIS

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Chana Green has been helped by On the Road Again, a project of the South Carolina Foster Parent Association which provides donated cars to foster care youth who are at least 18 but not yet 21 years old, actively employed, pursuing a GED or engaged in a post-high school educational program. With adequate transportation, these young people are able to pursue their goals of continuing education and employment, allowing for a more successful transition into adulthood.

TIM DOMINICK — tdominick@thestate.com | [Buy Photo](#)



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Foster care youths between the ages of 18 and 20 are eligible to apply through their case worker for a car through the program. They must be actively employed, pursuing a GED or studying in a post-high school educational program.

To donate a vehicle to the program or to make a donation to help with repairs, contact Brian Marion at (803) 665-9225 or brian@scfpa.com, or Patricia Jackson at (803) 420-1151.

For more information, visit scfpa.com/programs.aspx.

COLUMBIA, SC — Hakim Frazier drives himself to physical therapy appointments. He drives himself to visit his family members and to pick up his sisters from school. Later this month, he'll be driving himself to a job.

Last Thursday, he drove himself to college orientation at South Carolina State University, where in the fall he'll drive himself again to begin school.

Getting from place to place in his 15-year-old, black Toyota Camry is a big deal for 20-year-old Frazier. Like many young adults, his car is his ticket to independence.

But Frazier isn't just like many young adults, and independence means something more to him. When he starts school in the fall, he'll move away from Epworth Children's Home for the first time in two years.

"I love driving. I love being behind the wheel," Frazier said. "I have more ownership in my life now, being able to have a car."

Frazier is one of more than 70 foster youths in South Carolina who have received a free vehicle in the past four years through the On the Road Again program.

"We want young people that are in foster care to be able to enjoy life as a young person who's not in foster care," said Brian Marion, director of the program that is run through the S.C. Foster Parent Association. "That independence piece is what's very important. We want to enable young people to work and get good jobs and get an education if they so desire."

After moving around from group home to group home for most of his life, he said, Frazier moved into Epworth when he was 18 to be closer to his biological family. He applied in January to receive a car from On the Road Again because he wanted to not be reliant on others for transportation, he said.

"I have places to go, being a mature adult now. Getting older, I have things I have to do," he said. "I just wanted to take on more responsibilities on my own, so I thought that having my own car and taking on that responsibility would be a better thing for me."

When Frazier found out in March that he was getting a car, he said he was completely surprised.

"I was really proud of myself for being able to have this opportunity, and I was very thankful," he said. "It was just a really exciting moment."

The cars are donated to the program and come in any condition. They get fixed up by mechanics before they're presented to their recipients, who range in age from 18 to 20 years old. Then they're the total responsibility of the youths who accept them, who must manage their own cars' upkeep, gas and insurance.

"It has matured me a lot," said Frazier, who is saving money to pay for insurance.

The cars are tools for the young men and women who receive them, said Laurie Brandes, director of independent living at Epworth.

"It's not just a toy for them to go jolly-riding with their friends," Brandes said. "These kids, they have to go out into the world to college, to job training with ... so few resources available to them as they approach adulthood. We're trying to give them what they need to transition successfully."

Louis Lynn donated his mother's old Ford Crown Victoria last month at the urging of his friend, Columbia Urban League director J.T. McLawhorn. McLawhorn was part of a Midlands group doing a project for the Riley Diversity Leadership Institute that donated a total of three vehicles to On the Road Again.

Lynn said he considers the donation part of "paying my civic rent."

"This will put it to good use," he said. "And Mom will love that it went to help somebody."

Lynn said he hopes that by helping young people in the community, they'll in turn reach out to help others.

Chana Green wants to do just that.

The proud owner of a 1995 green Toyota Camry since December, the 19-year-old, of Florence County, said she feels "so blessed" by the opportunities On the Road Again has allowed her.

Her boyfriend was the recipient of a car before her, and after getting her driver's license last fall, he encouraged her to apply for a car.

When she got her car in December, "It was like a big Christmas gift," she said.

And now, she said she wants to encourage others in foster care to take responsibility for themselves and reach out for opportunities such as On the Road Again.

Since becoming a car owner, she's able to drive herself to school, where she's studying to become a registered nurse, and to her job at a clothing store.

"Everything has changed," she said.