

Jimmy Wayne walks the talk to help homeless young adults

By Nancy Wilson, Contributing Writer

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Photo by KRISTIN BARLOWE/VALORY MUSIC

Country music has always hung its 10-gallon cowboy hat on songs that tell stories about real life. Whether it's "Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off" (and it can, or so I've heard) or "You Belong With Me," artists pride themselves on singing about everyday events.

If there's anyone in country music who knows of what he sings, it's Jimmy Wayne.

The Kings Mountain, N.C., native endured a childhood filled with a mother in prison and a stepfather who sold drugs, which led to Jimmy dropping out of high school and forcing him to live on the streets. A chance meeting with an elderly couple, Bea and Russell Costner, led to odd jobs and eventually a foster relationship.

He credits the Costners with turning his life around: "I believe with all my heart that God was working through them." He says, "My responsibility in the past, when I was sleeping outside every night, was just to survive. My responsibility now is to stay real, stay grounded and just tell the truth."

That being said, Jimmy wanted to bring awareness and funding to the plight of homeless young adults. On New Year's Day, he began his "Meet Me Halfway" campaign, a solo walk halfway across America from Nashville to Phoenix, on behalf of the homeless. Jimmy has been keeping pace at 25-miles per day along I-70, hoping to reach his destination of HomeBase Youth Services, based in Phoenix, by March.

Jimmy's story appears in this week's edition of Country Weekly Magazine. He explained that many young adults are left homeless after they "age out" of the foster care or juvenile justice systems at age 18, because they "simply do not have the necessary life skills to live independently."

Jimmy's fans have been joining him on his journey, offering support and snacks along the way. He's been sharing his experiences on his Web site, www.jimmywayne.com, and on Twitter (@jimmywayne), posting "loneliness has consumed me ... keep praying."

Homeless youth are an issue we face right here in the Miami Valley, says St. Vincent de Paul of Dayton's director of development and marketing, Lisa Glandon. "At the St. Vincent de Paul Hotel Gateway, we are seeing 60-80 children each night, which is a 56 percent increase from just a year ago. A tutor from Dayton Public School and students from the St. Vincent de Paul Wright State Conference provide afterschool tutoring and mentoring."

Jimmy's hoping to raise more national awareness, "The more people we can get involved, the better." If you would like to answer Jimmy Wayne's call by donating or volunteering, St. Vincent de Paul would welcome your support. Contact the shelter agency at (937) 222-5555 or visit www.stvincentdayton.org.

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