

First suit: More than just threads

MICHAEL SOLENDER

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Chris Williams' big idea about boosting the confidence of disadvantaged young men was born from experience.

Williams, 28, is launching My 1st Suit, a nonprofit organization whose mission is to create awareness of self-esteem challenges facing young men ages 18-26. By providing new suits and a character development program, Williams, a senior business analyst with Bank of America, hopes to give area youth the same boost in self-esteem and confidence he received from a similar experience.

Raised in Florida by a single mother in a lower-income neighborhood, Williams said drugs and crime were prevalent and he did not have many positive male role models. After high school, Williams moved to Atlanta, where he found a mentor. Both men subsequently moved to Charlotte, where Williams began attending UNC Charlotte.

"Three years ago, I was running errands with my mentor and we were at his tailor picking up a suit," said Williams, a north Charlotte resident.

"He told me he wanted to buy me a new suit. I was taken aback, I didn't own a suit, nor had I ever had anything custom made for me. ... When I got the suit and laid it on my bed, I had a wave of such positive emotion and confidence for my outlook, I knew then that this was a feeling I wanted to share with others."

Williams started planning My 1st Suit three years ago. He wants to target young men from low-income families and first-generation college kids. He hopes they will experience the benefit of a custom suit and a character development program over four consecutive weekends.

Williams is looking to launch this spring with 10 young

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men. He has lined up more than half a dozen tailors who have committed to supporting the program. He is also in conversation with several area colleges and universities that have expressed interest in partnering with My 1st Suit. David K. Washington is co-owner of the uptown custom clothier, DW Designs. He is sponsoring one young man.

"We all have a responsibility for our future," Washington said.

Williams hopes to have a second session in the fall. Eligibility criteria and the application process can be seen at www.my1stsuit.com under the "Exposure" tab.

Michael J. Solender is a local freelance writer. Reach him with story ideas at michaelj.solender@gmail.com.



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