



CHICAGO YOUTH STORAGE INITIATIVE

FINAL REPORT

OUR STORY

When we started the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative (CYSI) in 2015, there were fewer than 40 storage units at homeless youth service programs citywide, despite there being an estimated 12,186 young people experiencing homelessness in Chicago on a nightly basis, struggling to find safe places for themselves and their belongings. Over the past three years, CYSI has funded the purchase and installation of 755 storage units for programs serving youth across the city.

What became the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative began when, following the Windy City Times 2014 Chicago Summit on LGBT Homelessness, Windy City Times Publisher and Co-founder Tracy Baim met with Marianne Philbin and Heather Parish of the Pierce Family Foundation to further discuss the need for and importance of storage for young people experiencing homelessness. There was no existing entity or project addressing this, and Marianne and Heather felt that if Pierce took the lead, other funders could be encouraged to support a joint strategy to tackle this issue.

With insight and encouragement from Tracy, the Pierce Family Foundation put together a plan and began talking to potential partners. This group was quickly joined by Debbie Reznick from the Polk Bros. Foundation and Becky Knight from the Knight Family Foundation as lead donors and strategists.

Our first step was to find a coordinator to staff and organize this unusual venture, and we were lucky to be able to hire Lara Brooks who stewarded the vision of Chicago Youth Storage Initiative in its first years, ensuring young people's voices led every step of the way, and helping us reach out to other funders and grantee partners. The Night Ministry served as our initial fiscal sponsor while we conducted a needs assessment, and then later, Crossroads Fund took on that role and became a key partner. When Lara moved out of Chicago in 2017, Megan Wickman joined the CYSI team as Project Coordinator, providing leadership that kept the project creative, responsive and on track, enabling CYSI to expand the number of grantee sites and gather feedback and data from our partners.

We are particularly grateful to the Steering Committee that generously gave its time, wisdom and financial support over the last three years, and to Marianne Philbin for providing day-to-day oversight throughout the Initiative.

Steering Committee

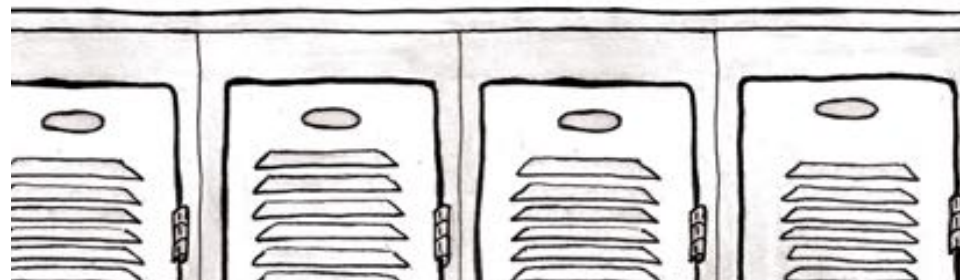
Tracy Baim, Pride Action Tank, Windy City Times
Marianne Philbin, Heather Parish, Pierce Family Foundation
Becky Knight, Knight Family Foundation
Debbie Reznick, Polk Bros. Foundation
Jeanne Kracher, Crossroads Fund
Michael Mock, MassMutual of Illinois, Financial Advisory Services
Mignon Stewart, Prince Charitable Trusts
Julie Owens, Owens Family Foundation
Megan Wickman, CYSI Project Coordinator

We are also grateful for the additional support of the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; the Alphawood Foundation; the Alvin H. Baum Family Fund; David Krumlauf and Laura Jansen from the Pierce Family Foundation, and Denis Pierce, whose early enthusiasm for the program enabled Pierce staff to make CYSI a part of their ongoing work.

Thank you to our many collaborators and advocates who provided guidance, resources, and expertise throughout this project and to our grantee partners for going on this

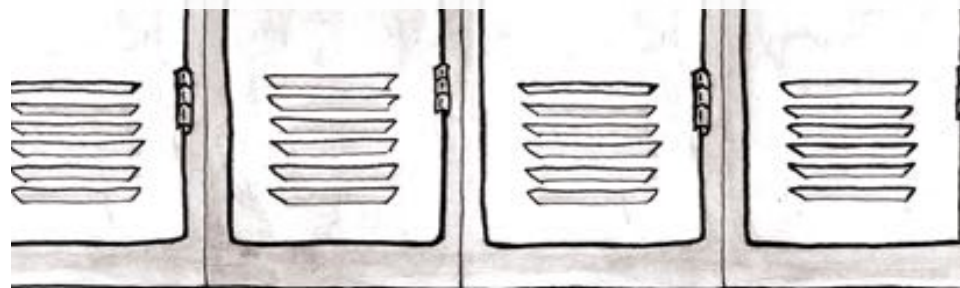
adventure with us. Thank you for helping shape the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative's objectives to best meet the needs of the youth in your programs. The success and impact of the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative is the result of a coordinated response to the voices of young people experiencing homelessness. When funding communities champion innovative projects spurred by youth voice and action, the possibilities are endless.

Our hope is that this project inspires action in other communities to centralize youth feedback in changing systems that oppress and harm individuals, families and communities impacted by housing instability and homelessness. The Chicago Youth Storage Initiative has done just that.



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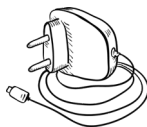
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HISTORY + BACKGROUND

Far from being a trivial issue, youth experiencing homelessness have identified solving storage problems as one of the most important ways to alleviate their day-to-day suffering. For young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability, access to safe and secure storage options for personal belongings- such as clothing, school books, keepsakes, medication and legal documents- is a daily, often hourly, stressor. In the absence of stable housing, these possessions- including those necessary for housing, employment, and educational opportunities- are in constant danger of being lost, stolen, discarded or damaged. Young people regularly make decisions between finding shelter for themselves or for their belongings and when left with unreliable or infrequent options, young people hide their personal belongings in alleys, dumpsters, yards, under porches, in abandoned buildings, and bushes. The loss of items, which is often an inevitable result of this type of high-risk storage, can come with long-term, enduring consequences.

CYSI is the first coordinated model of its kind in the United States, designed to support precariously housed young people in meeting their need for storage of personal belongings. CYSI originated in response to the Windy City Times 2014 Chicago Summit on LGBT Youth Homelessness where a shared concern and need for storage of personal belongings surfaced in strategy sessions about housing, policy, healthcare, legal issues, and access to basic needs. As a first task, CYSI partnered with Youth Empowerment Performance Project (YEPP) to complete a comprehensive needs assessment, which included conducting in-depth focus groups with young people and youth homeless service providers throughout Chicago, interviewing community stakeholders, and researching existing storage models being utilized in the United States and Canada. Armed with the findings from the comprehensive needs assessment and feasibility study, CYSI sought to improve the lives of young people experiencing homelessness through the provision of physical and virtual storage options that serve a wide range of experiences and needs.



OUR OBJECTIVES

- ★ Identify geographically diverse partners with existing capacity to undertake or expand small-scale storage programs
- ★ Pilot some preliminary partnerships beyond traditional youth homeless service providers to include high schools and colleges
- ★ Pilot a digital storage project to train participants and providers in storing and organizing documents online
- ★ Prioritize daily and emergency shelter storage in addition to long-term storage as a violence prevention and wellness strategy
- ★ Create storage programs that allow for low-threshold access and privacy
- ★ Ensure storage programs are within close proximity to supportive services such as showers, phones and computers, food, counseling and medical care
- ★ Create a toolkit for stakeholders interested in implementing storage programs which would include equipment recommendations, program templates, operations tips, and important considerations

OUR IMPACT

Chicago Youth Storage Initiative tripled its expected implementation of storage units in youth-serving programs across the Chicagoland area. While the initial goal was to install 250 units, by the end of 2018 CYSI will have funded the purchase and installation of 755 units and supported 16 agencies in launching storage-related programs and services across 22 program sites.

- ★ **755 storage units**
- ★ **22 storage sites**
- ★ **1,095 unduplicated users**
- ★ **12,015 nights** of secure storage
- ★ Storage units **accessed 31,453 times**
- ★ **CYSI Storage Toolkit created and made available** for organizations and collaboratives interested in creating storage programs for young people and other populations experiencing housing instability and homelessness



Key Observations

- ★ **Violence prevention** and preventing the loss or theft of personal belongings are closely connected.
- ★ It is of the utmost importance to **create storage programs within organizations** that are run by staff members who young people know and can trust with their belongings.
- ★ Constantly worrying over managing one's belongings impacts **mental health, productivity and goal completion**.
- ★ Storage options are critical to addressing **stigma and safety issues** young people encounter when carrying all their belongings on them as they go about their days.
- ★ **A lack of storage means taking steps back**, even when you are trying to move forward.
- ★ Storage programs are an effective resource that agencies can use to **reach young people who are otherwise disconnected** from services. Youth who initially visit a program site to store their belongings can begin to explore other resources and meet with service providers related to other needs such as employment, health and housing.



Results

DECREASED STIGMA

- ★ Youth report that when they do not have to carry all of their belongings with them throughout their day, they are better able to access important spaces and resources—such as libraries, restrooms, public transit, and other spaces—because the amount of negative attention and stigma that they experience decreases.

IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS

- ★ Program staff report that by being able to provide low-threshold storage to participants, they are better able to build relationships with youth who would otherwise be disconnected from programs. This subsequently allows program staff to more effectively connect participants to other important resources.

INCREASED SAFETY

- ★ Youth report that being able to securely store their belongings while participating in programming at drop-in and residential programs increases their sense of safety due to the decreased risk of theft and violence in program spaces.

INCREASED STABILITY

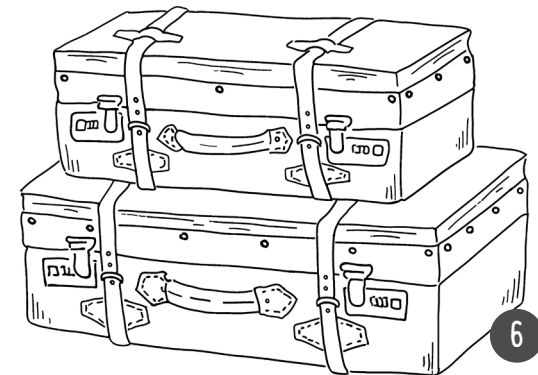
- ★ Youth report that being able to more reliably access important items they need, such as medication, school work and personal documents, improves their stability and wellness.

IMPROVED WELLNESS

- ★ Youth report improvement in chronic pain and other physical ailments that are the consequences of toting heavy bags with them across the city while they try to access services and complete goals.

ONGOING COLLABORATION

- ★ Conversations between CYSI, youth, schools and service providers that led to the implementation of 755 storage units in Chicago have also sparked ongoing collaboration among youth-serving organizations to improve their collective responsiveness and resource quality, as well as to improve the ease with which youth can access and navigate systems of support.



WHAT WE LEARNED:

CHALLENGES IN STORAGE

SPACE LIMITATIONS

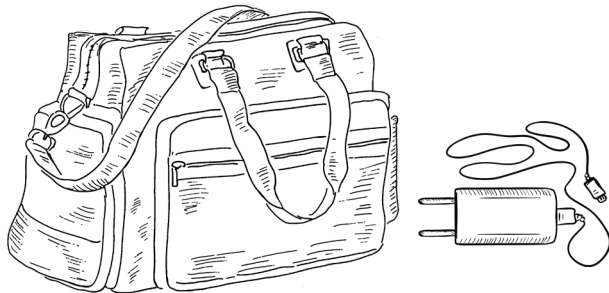
Working with existing organizations and program sites to implement storage units requires working with existing physical environments, which are often inflexible and do not have enough available space to install storage units

- ★ Programs usually have to choose either to install fewer units of large storage (leaving them unable to meet the storage needs of all program participants) or more units of small storage (resulting in units insufficient in size to store the entirety of a person's belongings and requiring the participant to find alternative storage for some items or discard them).
- ★ CYSI grantee partners that see high participation rates in their programs still do not have sufficient storage to meet the needs of young people. Some storage sites have managed this by creating waitlist procedures; other grantees have reduced the amount of time youth can utilize storage units to a couple of months so that more participants have access to them. Neither of these creative strategies is ideal and young people are still forced to utilize higher risk storage solutions such as dumpsters, abandoned buildings and public places.

STAFFING LIMITATIONS + OTHER CAPACITY ISSUES

This Chicago Youth Storage Initiative did not fund long-term staffing at grantee storage sites. With already overextended program staff, teachers and administrators, some interested agencies were unable to identify capacity to oversee the additional service of storage at their program sites, while others had to work within the restrictions of their limited hours of operation. When young people cannot regularly and reliably access a program space they are reticent to keep their belongings there for fear they won't be able to access those belongings when needed.

- ★ Due to some organizations' staffing and other capacity limitations, individual storage programs are limited to their host-site program hours of operation. Sometimes these hours of operation are prohibitive, being limited to just a few hours three days a week. These limited hours of operation can conflict with young people's school and work schedules, rendering those storage sites inaccessible to them.
- ★ Unanticipated temporary site closings and under-participation in programming due to limited staffing, facility issues and other challenges has impeded consistent utilization at some of CYSI's grantee sites.

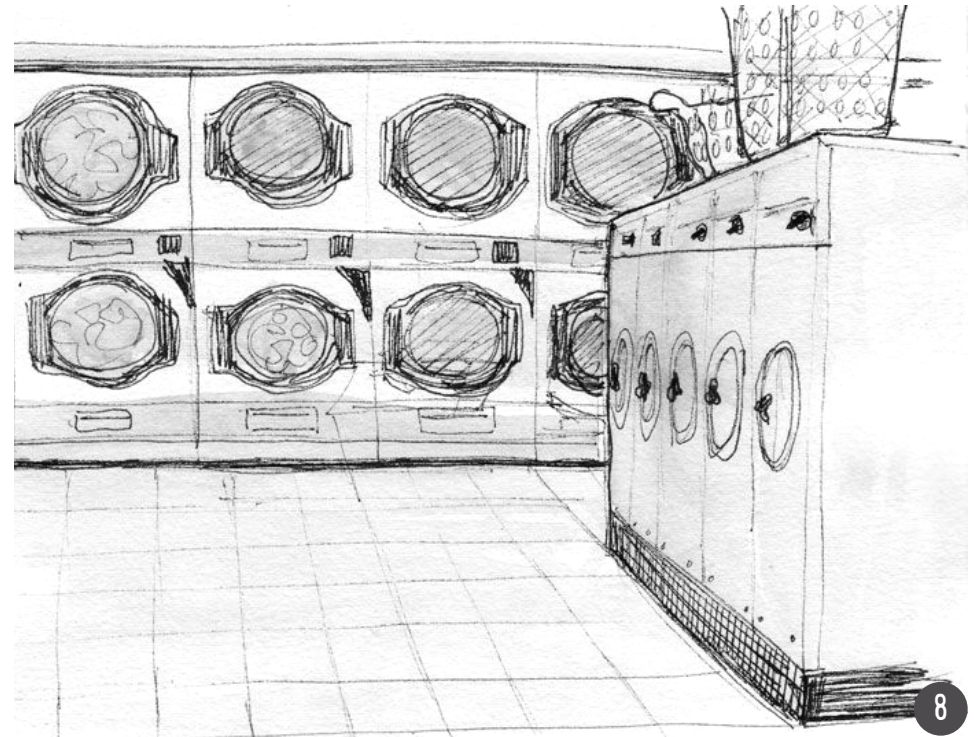


EQUIPMENT WEAR & TEAR

- ★ CYSI grantee partners that have been operating their storage and laundry programs for over a year are already seeing a need to repair and replace equipment due to the constant use and stress.
- ★ If programs are not able to budget for regular maintenance and repair of laundry and storage equipment, the sustainability of these programs becomes a challenge.

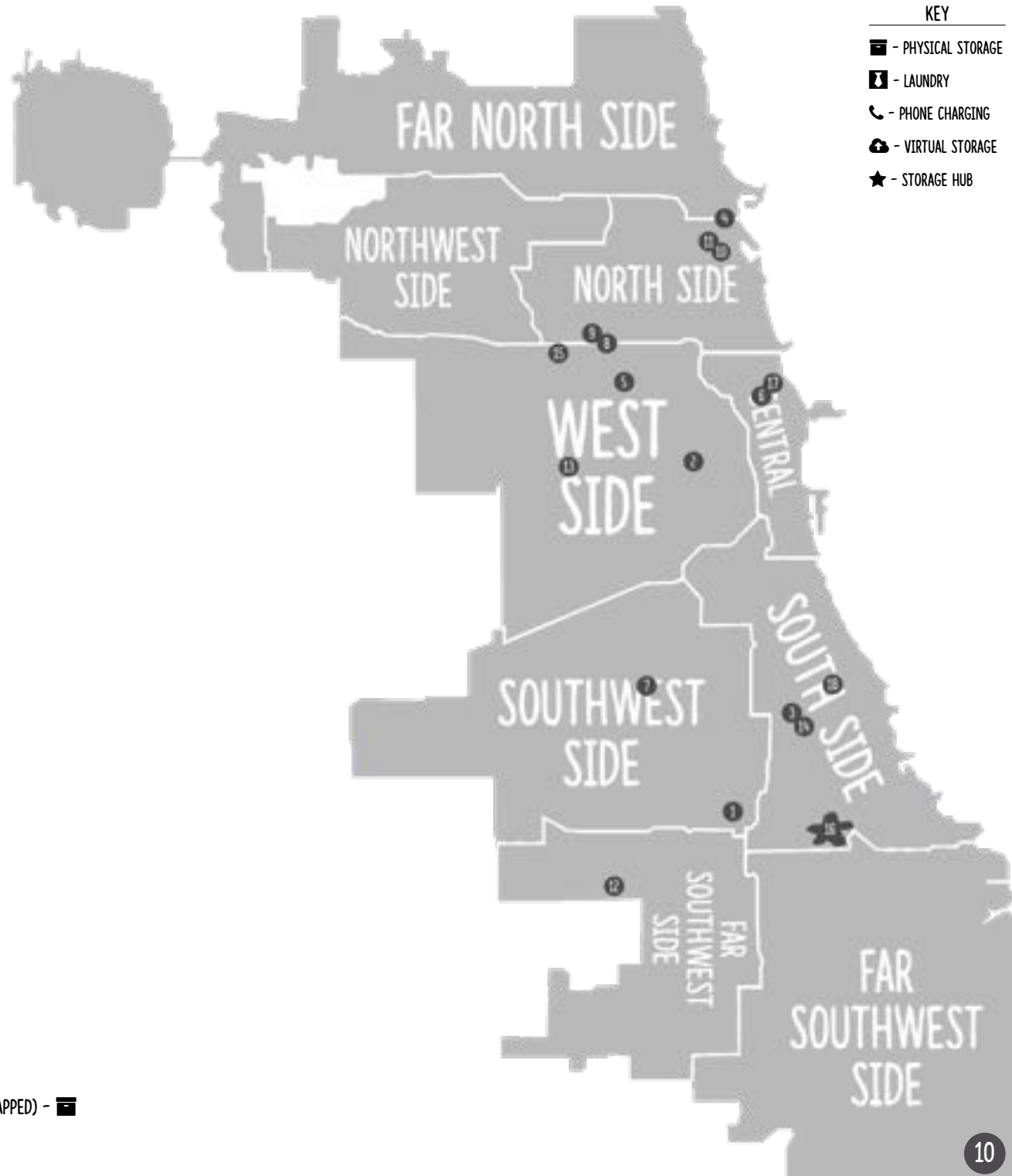
COST

- ★ The relatively inexpensive nature of this intervention is illustrated by the total cost of the initiative, which was \$424,000 over a three-year period. These funds were used to establish programs and install equipment at 22 sites as well as to hire a project manager to oversee storage implementation, provide program support and to collect data and feedback.
- ★ Storage programs typically were integrated into existing services at agencies serving young people, with staff already on-site, minimizing the project's personnel costs. Costs apart from staffing generally ranged from \$96/unit (for standard 1' x 5' metal lockers) to \$394/unit (for high quality, custom storage units). Secure phone charging units were costlier at about \$417/unit. Storage program grantees also received around a thousand dollars for miscellaneous needs including maintenance and repair, which sustained each grantee throughout the duration of the project.
- ★ Overall, the significance of both meeting the needs of young people and improving the safety of program spaces by installing storage at as little as \$1,500 is a testament to the feasibility of creative interventions in youth homeless services.



OUR STORAGE GRANTEES

1. UNITY PARENTING AND COUNSELING, UJIMA EMERGENCY SHELTER - 🏠
★★ 65 UNITS ★★
2. MERCY HOME FOR BOYS & GIRLS - 🏠 🚰
★★ 7 UNITS ★★
3. TEEN LIVING PROGRAMS - 🏠 ☁️
★★ 24 UNITS ★★
4. BROADWAY YOUTH CENTER - 🏠 📞
★★ 30 UNITS ★★
5. PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL CENTER, EL RESCATE - 🏠
★★ 30 UNITS ★★
6. COVENANT HOUSE - 🏠
★★ 60 UNITS ★★
7. LA CASA NORTE, DROP-IN + EMERGENCY SHELTER - 🏠 ☁️
★★ 42 UNITS ★★
8. LA CASA NORTE, EMERGENCY SHELTER - 🏠
★★ 15 UNITS ★★
9. LA CASA NORTE, DROP-IN CENTER - 🏠 ☁️
★★ 12 UNITS ★★
10. CENTER ON HALSTED - 📞
★★ 8 UNITS ★★
11. THE NIGHT MINISTRY, EMERGENCY SHELTER - 📞
★★ 21 UNITS ★★
12. PATHWAYS IN EDUCATION - 🏠 🚰
★★ 8 UNITS ★★
13. ASSOCIATION HOUSE HIGH SCHOOL - 🏠 🚰
★★ 20 UNITS ★★
14. BRAVE SPACE ALLIANCE - 🏠 🚰
★★ 50 UNITS ★★
15. LA CASA NORTE, PIERCE HOUSE - 🏠
★★ 40 UNITS ★★
16. LYTE COLLECTIVE - ★ 🏠 📞 ☁️
★★ 200+ UNITS ★★
17. LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO, ARRUPPE COLLEGE - 🏠
★★ 20 UNITS ★★
18. LUV INSTITUTE - 🏠
★★ 37 UNITS ★★
19. NORTHWEST COMPASS INC. - 🏠 (NOT MAPPED)
★★ 30 UNITS ★★
20. THE NIGHT MINISTRY, PHOENIX HALL (NOT MAPPED) - 🏠
★★ 8 UNITS ★★
21. THE NIGHT MINISTRY, OPEN DOOR SHELTER (NOT MAPPED) - 📞
★★ 16 UNITS ★★
22. THE NIGHT MINISTRY, RESPONSE-ABILITY PREGNANT + PARENTING PROGRAM (NOT MAPPED) - 🏠
★★ 12 UNITS ★★



STORAGE TYPES

Each program site had unique needs related to their service models and space limitations. CYSI worked to ensure that equipment provided to each program balanced the needs of young people, staff and agency resources and sustainability.

☎ SECURE PHONE STORAGE

Secure phone and other device charging stations installed were large standing or wall mounted units with several individual charging bays (usually between 8-16) that can be accessed individually utilizing a keypad. With multiple charging cords and a bay size of around 18" x 4" x 13", participants can securely charge their phones and other tablets and can also securely store smaller important belongings such as wallets and keys.

🗄 LOCKERS

Traditional lockers for daytime, overnight and long-term storage were popular at most program sites because they take up relatively little space. Most lockers are two-tiered 12" x 15" x 36" units. These storage units easily fit a backpack, another small bag, various books and other personal documents that need to be accessed regularly.

🗄 LARGE STORAGE BINS

A few of our grantees were able to install large storage bins, which participants use mostly for long-term storage. These large storage units were 25, 35, and 45-gallon industrial bins, staked on low shelving units in order to accommodate their heaviness. Programs utilize these large storage units with participants who need to store more belongings long-term, such as household goods, seasonal clothes and keepsakes.

🧺 LAUNDRY

Our school grantees installed washer and dryer units at the request of program participants who needed to wash school uniforms and didn't otherwise have reliable access to laundry. We always paired laundry with physical storage options so students and other youth participants could reliably keep their belongings clean and safe.

☁ VIRTUAL STORAGE

Our virtual storage pilot programs were supplied with tablets, computers and digital scanners as well as financial support for improve wifi capabilities in program spaces. All youth who participated in virtual storage training were given smart phones.

🗄 DAYTIME, OVERNIGHT + LONG-TERM STORAGE

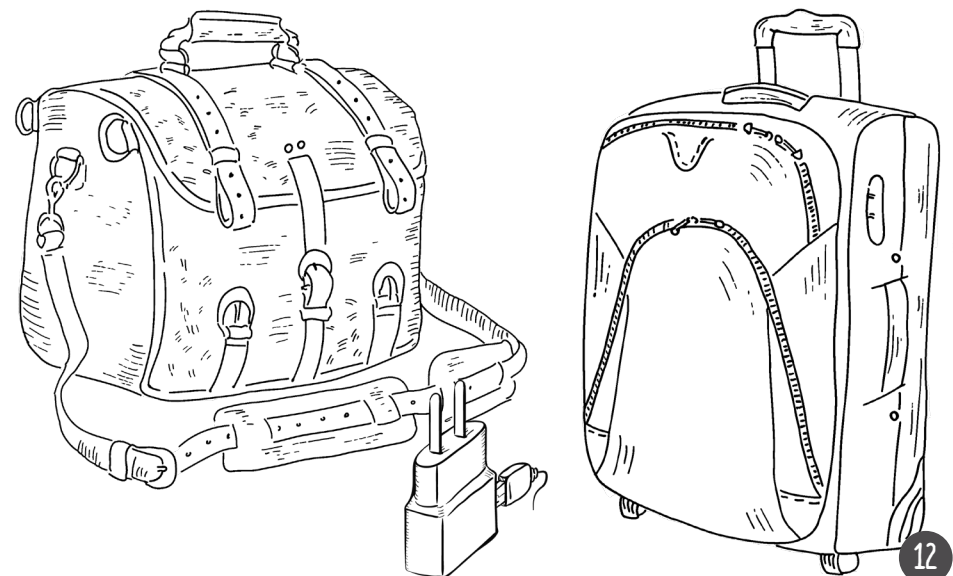
Lockers and bins of a variety of sizes for daily and long-term storage at drop-in centers, emergency shelters and other residential programs:

- ★ Allows participants to meaningfully engage in supportive programs such as counseling, medical services, tutoring and recreation.
- ★ Increases participants' sense of personal safety at program sites.
- ★ Decreases incidents of conflict due to theft, which impacts relationships and wellness for youth and staff.
- ★ Allows for improved quality of sleep and mental and physical wellness.
- ★ Utilizes existing staff capacity and trusting relationships at youth programs.

🗄 STORAGE + 🧺 LAUNDRY IN SCHOOLS

Young people who are enrolled in school experience particular challenges and stigma of having to show up for class carrying all their belongings. Secure storage options at school provide alternative storage solutions meaning that students don't have to either tote their belongings with them to school daily or risk storing them in precarious place, such as an abandoned building. Through conversations with youth and service providers, it became apparent that laundry was an important resource closely linked to storage. If a young person can't keep their clothes or school uniform clean, having the secure storage doesn't completely eliminate the barrier to coming to school. Having storage coupled with laundry in schools allows for students to:

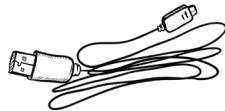
- ★ Receive basic needs services within a trusted and comfortable environment rather than having to access unfamiliar youth homeless systems.
- ★ Not have to choose between staying with their belongings or going to school.
- ★ Not feel stigmatized for showing up to school with all their belongings.



VIRTUAL STORAGE

CYSI collaborated with Google to create a virtual storage training curriculum in order to equip young people with tools to store important documents, records and keepsakes online. Virtual storage curriculum content included an introduction to Google accounts, online safety, device privacy, document recovery, document organization and sorting, backing up and digital communication etiquette. Results to date are the following:

- ★ CYSI and Google trained youth and staff from 8 organizations across the city.
- ★ Virtual storage training models were piloted at two organizations and included scanning events, workshops and skills assessments that were incorporated into life-skills curriculum.
- ★ Youth and staff report significantly reduced time spent re-creating and obtaining important documents such as resumes, letters of recommendation, transcripts and medical records.
- ★ Virtual storage training programs provide interesting opportunities for skill sharing and leadership development.
- ★ Developing knowledge/skills in scheduling, calendar and drive platforms often aligns well with employment skill requirements.
- ★ Virtual storage education and access provides a new, low-barrier entry point into programs for youth currently disconnected from services.



SECURE PHONE CHARGING

Smart phones are often young people's lifelines. Young people need to have their phones reliably accessible and charged so they can have real-time information about potential housing opportunities, transit schedules and maps, calendars and planning, talk support from allies for problem solving and coping, and other countless uses that we all rely on our phones for daily.

When young people have access to secure charging, they don't have to choose between monitoring their phone while it charges and accomplishing other important tasks throughout their day.



OUR FUTURE

To ensure the legacy of this project, Chicago Youth Storage Initiative is proud to partner with LYTE Collective, an organization that provides young people in situations of poverty and homelessness with safe space, critical resources, and holistic support. As part of LYTE Collective's commitment to serving as CYSI's successor organization, LYTE Collective team members will continue to share storage expertise and provide existing and interested storage programs with technical assistance and program development support.

The LYTE Lounge, located in Greater Grand Crossing, will serve as Chicago's largest storage hub for young people, providing over 200 units of diverse storage, including:

- ★ secure phone charging
- ★ mail and document storage
- ★ scanning and virtual storage
- ★ daily storage
- ★ large scale bins for long-term storage

Additionally, at the LYTE Lounge young people will be able to access an important array of supportive services such as medical care, education support, basic needs services including food, showers and laundry, and connection to legal resources and housing.

 **AT THE LYTE LOUNGE, YOUTH WILL BE ABLE TO ACCESS STORAGE IN A RESOURCE-RICH ENVIRONMENT THAT PROVIDES THEM WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND OPPORTUNITIES THE NEED TO LIVE THE FUTURES THEY DESERVE.** 
- DR. CASEY HOLTSCHNEIDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

If you are interested in creating a storage program at your agency contact info@lytecollective.org

CYSI has also created a digital toolkit that organizations and collaboratives can use to develop storage programs tailored to the needs in their own communities.





CHECK OUT THESE CYSI RESOURCES!

NEEDS ASSESSMENT + RECOMMENDATIONS

<http://www.windycitymediagroup.com/pdf/CYSI-Report-Digital-05-15-15.pdf>

FINAL REPORT + TOOLKIT

www.lytecollective.org/lyte-lounge/