

# How having space — even small enough to hold a cellphone — is helping Chicago's homeless

 [chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-life-cell-phone-lockers-homeless-0801-story.html](http://chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-life-cell-phone-lockers-homeless-0801-story.html)

Alison Bowen

□

When he wakes up in the morning, David Williams doesn't reach for his phone. He knows where it is — safely stowed in a black metal locker on a nearby wall.

Williams is one of hundreds of homeless young adults who spend the night at The Crib, part of The Night Ministry, a nonprofit that provides housing and health care to homeless Chicagoans. Last summer, The Crib installed small lockers where people can charge their cellphones overnight — and lock them up.

It's a huge change, Williams said. His phone is fully charged when he wakes, and there's less concern about it getting stolen.

"I don't really worry about it too much," he said. "Ever since (the lockers) have been here, they've been really helping out." The genial 22-year-old likes locker No. 3. He says he uses it whenever it's free.

Paid Post [Learn more](#)

[Presentation is everything, on the road and at the table](#)

Michelle Alegria interviews S.K.Y. owner and chef Stephen Gillanders and learns what empowers his success.

[Sponsored Content by](#)

A few years ago, before the lockers were available, some people would wake to find their phones gone. Fights broke out; people worried about losing other personal belongings while they were asleep.

Now, with 22 small metal lockers, fewer thefts happen at the shelter. And people like Williams have fully charged phones to call friends throughout the day and search for jobs. Williams says he enjoys restaurant work. He previously worked as a food runner, and he likes the fast pace and social atmosphere.

"I like the fact that you're not sitting in one spot — you're moving around," he said. "You get smiles, you get laughter." Plus, he added, you get to eat.

Ashley Bosco, a Crib employee, said the lockers have made a big difference in the lives of those who sleep on the multipurpose room floor.

"It's a blessing," said Bosco of the lockers. "We want you to feel like you're calm, you're safe. No one's going to bother you." The Crib, which is LGBTQ-friendly, hosts young adults ages 18



to 24. It provided 6,827 shelter bed nights for 227 people last year.

Across the city, hundreds of storage options are available for homeless young people, who stow clothes, medication and books for school, or keepsakes and legal documents. These lockers, and the phone-charging lockers at The Crib, were funded by the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative, which began in 2015. At that time, according to the group, fewer than 40 storage units were available at programs for homeless youths in Chicago, and it estimated about 12,200 young people did not have a place to sleep on a nightly basis.

The group has since funded and installed 755 storage units at 22 sites across the city, including the West Loop, Logan Square and Back of the Yards. The units have been accessed more than 31,000 times.

Burke Patton, a spokesperson for the Night Ministry, said a grant from the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative allowed the organization to purchase charger lockers for its Interim Housing Program in West Town, as well as padlocks for wardrobes for Lakeview's Response-Ability Pregnant and Parenting Program, which houses pregnant and parenting young women and their children.

For Williams, who said he first began looking for a place to sleep that wasn't the street at age 18, having a charged phone is one step toward stability. He can wake up, knowing it's fully charged. Should he need it for a phone interview, it's there. And it's one less thing to worry about.

"I just want to be stable in all the right places," he said.

He added, "We just need more of those. They get used every day."

[abowen@chicagotribune.com](mailto:abowen@chicagotribune.com)

Twitter [@byalisonbowen](https://twitter.com/byalisonbowen)

**[Silver Fork teaches culinary skills, confidence »](#)**

**[Chicago's new public health liaison to LGBTQ community focusing on quality of lives »](#)**

**[Homeless rates for LGBT teens are alarming, but parents can make a difference »](#)**

Summer's scorching heat ain't got nothing' on these incredible pools. From the world's largest infinity rooftop pool in Singapore to California's Hearst Castle, we've rounded up a few beautiful basins worth diving into.

Hot colors, cool patterns: New wave looks, artful lighting and everything else you need to remake your place. Looking for more inspiration? Check out our full [2018 Home Ideas Guide](#).

(Lisa Skolnik)