

Youth Experiencing Homelessness

A collaborative design sprint with Star House



In May 2020, we sought to better understand how COVID closures across the city were impacting youth experiencing homelessness and what we might do to better support them.



THE PROBLEM

Pre-Covid-19, we understood that youth experiencing homelessness would spend time inside libraries, fast food restaurants and other public spaces to access wifi and get a reprieve from the streets.

With the closures of public spaces and the insides of restaurants, youth were struggling to meet these needs.

THE APPROACH

We partnered with Star House, to help us understand what young people experiencing homelessness were going through during COVID. We brought together a design team led by Heather Tsavaris that included designers Tania Anaissie, Chris Rudd, Susie Wise and Mark Lomax. In addition, we hired three young people who had all previously experienced homelessness as part of our team, Clarke, Harley and Sabrina.

After framing the challenge, we spent a week executing a Design Sprint that consisted of interviewing multiple young people who were guests at Star House to understand their experience. We then worked during the week to create and test solutions that might improve their experience.

Star House:

A social service agency that operates Central Ohio's only drop-in center for youth, ages 14-24, who are experiencing homelessness.

THE IMPACT

At the end of the week, we realized:

- Even amidst COVID shutdowns, young people still needed safe places just to rest, recharge and get access to basic amenities.
- Young people were struggling with what to do with their belongings while they searched for jobs or were at work.

These two insights lead us to develop two ideas for further testing:



1 The first was a Chill-in station, a mobile rest site for young people, that was further piloted by Star House (pictured on cover of report).

2 The other idea was a safe and dignified place to store belongings, modeled after the Bins in LA, that was piloted by Goodwill Industries and Veritas Church. Both pilot projects were supported by the City of Columbus.

The Columbus Foundation
1234 East Broad Street
Columbus, Ohio 43205-1453

614/251-4000

contactus@columbusfoundation.org

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