

STORAGE MATTERS

BY ELYSE M. AGNELLO, AIA, PRINCIPAL, DAAM | DESIGNERS ARCHITECTS ARTISTS MAKERS



PHOTO PROVIDED BY DAAM | DESIGNERS ARCHITECTS ARTISTS MAKERS

DESIGNED AS AN ADAPTIVE REUSE SITUATED IN A FORMER CHURCH MEETING HOUSE AND NURSERY SCHOOL, THE LYTE LOUNGE, LIKE MANY CHICAGO YOUTH STORAGE INITIATIVE SITES, FACES SPATIAL LIMITATIONS RELATED TO EXISTING CONDITIONS AND DISPROPORTIONATE SPACE-TO-PARTICIPATION RATES.

In today's world, there is no shortage of political, social or economic challenges; humanitarian crises, natural disasters, global economic crashes, affordable housing shortages, homelessness — all around us, the needs are great, and the opportunities to enact change and do good are plentiful. Architects have the capacity to positively impact human experience and help address contemporary challenges by using our analytical and design skills to collaborate across disciplines to create places that serve needs.

I recently had the privilege of working on a project that did just that. The experience has been both personally gratifying and professionally enlightening.

Founded in 2015, the Chicago Youth Storage Initiative (CYSI) is committed to inspiring action in communities impacted by housing instability and homelessness through the development of safe and secure storage spaces for young people. These spaces provide those in need with a fundamental amenity that many of us take for granted — a place to store our birth certificates, our medications, our books and clothes. By the end of 2018, CYSI will have funded the purchase and installation of 755 storage units at 22 different youth-serving nonprofits and schools in Chicago. While implementing this program, CYSI found that obstacles related to spatial planning, financial resources and user experience were an ongoing challenge — one that is ripe with opportunity for architects.

Over the past year, I have worked with my team at DAAM Projects and the leadership of The LYTE Collective on the design of the LYTE Lounge, CYSI's Chicago Storage Hub,

which will provide more than 200 units of storage at the new facility in Greater Grand Crossing. Designed as an adaptive reuse situated in a former church meeting house and nursery school, the LYTE Lounge, like many CYSI sites, faces spatial limitations related to existing conditions and disproportionate space-to-participation rates. Working collaboratively from the onset on both the Lounge's unique storage program and its subsequent integration into the overall design, enabled us to design a building that meets project-specific objectives by providing low-threshold access

to storage, private and safe circulation routes to storage areas, and a comfortable domestic aesthetic experience opposed to an institutional one to generally decrease the stigma of experiencing homelessness.

We are no longer in a moment where there is any question as to the necessity of social practice. Social responsibility is central to the architectural discourse. The questions of today are: what problems should be tackled, and how can we best solve them. Efforts by our professional community to democratize good design and build a more compassionate

city through pro bono services, tactical urbanism, ethical redevelopments and placemaking initiatives are proven methods of addressing contemporary needs through architectural design and thinking. Doing this work requires that we look outside of ourselves and beyond the architectural community. It entails that we actively participate in civic conversations, that we mine our social and professional networks to discover needs, and that we take the time to seek out critical challenges. Now is the time to find your *what* and quickly get to work on the *how*. **CA**

WE ARE NO LONGER IN A MOMENT WHERE THERE IS ANY QUESTION AS TO THE NECESSITY OF SOCIAL PRACTICE. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IS CENTRAL TO THE ARCHITECTURAL DISCOURSE.