

NIGHTLIGHTS has a new look!

Breaking Cycles: Chris' Journey to Fatherhood and Stability

"I knew I was going to be a good dad," **Chris** says with a reminiscent grin as he recalls the moment he found out he was going to be a father at just 16 years old. "I was nervous, but kids have always kind of loved me" he continued. Now, at 22, he is a proud father of three and is determined to create the stable, fulfilling life he always envisioned for his family. With the support of The Night Ministry, Chris is pursuing his GED and dreams of continuing his education. Whether in business management, culinary arts, or youth counseling, Chris approaches the future with passion and a belief that his possibilities are endless.

Chris and his four siblings grew up on Chicago's West Side, facing housing instability and periods of homelessness throughout their childhood. About a year ago, Chris found himself at a crossroads—without a stable place to live but with an unrelenting determination. Chris' friend Tavion introduced him to The Night Ministry, and from that moment, Chris' life began to change.

Through The Night Ministry's Pathways Program, which provides long-term housing and intensive life skills coaching, Chris began laying the foundation for a brighter future. He was connected to The Dovetail Project, a program designed to empower young Black and Brown fathers with the skills and support they need to succeed as parents and community members. Reflecting on the program, Chris shares, "It's more like a program for young adults," highlighting the invaluable life skills the program offers such as credit-building education and job training.

Chris' journey has not been without its challenges. From navigating the complexities of young parenthood to coping

with the loss of a close friend, Chris has faced moments of doubt and hardship. He found solace and strength through the support of The Night Ministry staff. "They really care," Chris emphasizes. "They don't have to show up for us, but they do." Chris hopes to give back by working with youth in the future. "I want people to know it gets better and you're really not alone."



Chris and his son share a smile

Chris' story brings attention to an often-overlooked issue: the need for resources and programs for young fathers. Initiatives like The Dovetail Project fill a critical gap by empowering young men to become active, engaged parents and leaders in their communities.

"It's up to us to break the cycle," Chris says. With his determination and the support of The Night Ministry, he is building a life rooted in stability and hope for his children.

Chris' journey is a testament to the power of community and the impact of programs like Pathways and The Dovetail Project. As one of the thousands of young people served by The Night Ministry each year, his story is a powerful reminder of how dedicated resources and compassionate support can transform lives, break generational cycles of instability, and pave the way for brighter futures in Chicago.

Chris' Journey

Chris grows up experiencing housing instability and homelessness

Chris is referred to The Night Ministry

The Night Ministry's Pathways Program provides Chris housing and life skills coaching

Chris is connected to The Dovetail Project, an organization that provides support to young fathers.

Chris enrolls in a GED program and a paid job-training program, which are setting him up for a successful future.

Alumna Reflects Back with Deep Gratitude



Julie and her family with Santa during the holiday season

Homeless and pregnant, **Julie** found herself facing an overwhelming and uncertain future. The situation became even more daunting when her mother, upon learning of Julie's pregnancy, forced her out of the house. During this tumultuous time, Julie confided in her high school English teacher, who, understanding the gravity of her situation, connected her to a social worker at The Night Ministry—a lifeline that would help guide her through this difficult chapter.

"I had support, and a family. I'm always going to be grateful. They gave me a lot of opportunities."

Five years later, she still thinks about what would have happened if she hadn't walked through our doors.

How You Can Help

You can provide relief for our unhoused neighbors during brutal winter conditions with donations of winter supplies.

Here are the items that are needed most:

- Adult Winter Hats
- Hand & Foot Warmers
- Adult Warm Gloves
- Tents
- Adult Size Socks (athletic or winter socks)
- Sleeping Bags

"The Night Ministry doesn't understand how much they helped me. It makes me emotional to talk about. Experiencing homelessness for the first time in my life, I felt ashamed. Little. Everyone made sure I didn't feel that way." Julie said the staff was supportive and understanding from the moment she did her initial intake. She never felt uncomfortable.

Julie finished high school and one semester of college before her son was born. Our staff helped Julie prepare for her very first job at Family Dollar with workforce development programs and mock interviews. The team also helped Julie, and her son moved into more stable housing. During her time at The Night Ministry, she joined staff members Candace Musick and Michelle Thomas at a Runaway Homeless Youth Conference in Florida where she provided a strong personal testimony. It helped her find her voice. Today, her life looks very different.

Julie is married to a supportive husband, and they have a one-year-old daughter together. She currently works at Lawndale Christian Health Center as a Registration Representative with flexible hours that allow her to be present for her children. Julie loves her job, the people, and working in the community. While she plans to finish her education in the future, she remains connected to The Night Ministry, serving as a part-time Resource Coordinator. Julie has also reconciled with her mother.

Candace calls Julie one of the most powerful people she has ever met. "She never backed down from being a fully present mother or pursuing her goals. She has a vision for her life, and it's coming to fruition," says Candace.

Together, we can keep our unhoused neighbors warm!

A financial gift enables us to allocate your support to the areas most needed this winter.

To donate, visit thenightministry.org/gift or return the enclosed envelope.



Scan this QR code
for our Amazon wish list

Visit thenightministry.org/wish-list for more information.

Company Bakeoff

Supports The Night Ministry

The event exceeded its initial fundraising goal of \$2,000, raising a total of \$3,250 to support The Night Ministry's critical programs and services.

This holiday season, **Henricksen and Allsteel**, a commercial furniture dealer and furniture manufacturer, showed their dedication to community support by hosting their **annual Holiday Cookie Bakeoff & Exchange** which benefited The Night Ministry. The event brought festive fun and philanthropy together, collecting donations and in-kind items to support The Night Ministry's mission to provide human connection, housing support, and health care to individuals who are unhoused or experiencing poverty.

This is the second year that The Night Ministry was selected as the charity partner at their fundraising event. The Bake-Off exemplifies Henricksen's strong commitment to giving back. As a company that frequently hosts events benefiting local nonprofits, philanthropy is ingrained in their culture. **“It’s part of who we are as a company,”** shared Jess Weber, Architecture and Design Manager. Henricksen chose The Night Ministry as their charity partner because they recognize the hardships that winter brings to those experiencing homelessness and wanted to support an organization making a meaningful impact.

The event featured 24 bakers from local architecture & design firms, project managers and general contractors, who created an array of delicious and visually stunning cookies. A panel from the renowned Alliance Bakery judged the cookies on taste and presentation, while attendees had the chance to vote for the “People’s



Holiday treats from the annual Bakeoff

Choice” winner by making donations. The Bakeoff brought together approximately 120 attendees, fostering camaraderie and holiday cheer while supporting a vital cause.

In addition to enjoying the sweet treats, attendees were encouraged to contribute physical items for The Night Ministry's clients, such as hygiene supplies, cold-weather gear, gift cards, and transit passes. The event exceeded its initial fundraising goal of \$2,000, raising a total of \$3,250 to support The Night Ministry's critical programs and services.

We are incredibly grateful for Henricksen's generosity and support. Events like this highlight the power of community and the profound impact of partnerships. Thank you, Henricksen, for helping us bring warmth and hope to our neighbors in need this holiday season!

Volunteer With Us!

Volunteers play a vital role in the mission of The Night Ministry and are a friendly face for our clients.

Virtual and in-person volunteer orientations are held each month, to sign up or learn more, please reach out to **Jenny** at jennifer@thenightministry.org.

Heartfelt Welcome to Raeann Olsen-Jackson, VP of Advancement

In September 2024, Ms. Olsen-Jackson joined The Night Ministry, jumping right in with year-end activities and getting to know our spectacular team.

What does your role entail?

I provide fundraising strategy and marketing direction for our multi-faceted agency. I have the pleasure of leading and mentoring a diverse and multi-generational team. My favorite part is meeting with donors and volunteers and belonging to a community that cares.

What has been your career trajectory?

I am a Chicago native who has enjoyed fundraising success in healthcare, education, and social services. From Loyola University Chicago, St. Ignatius College Prep, MUST Ministries (a shelter in Georgia), and La Rabida Children's Hospital, each role increased in scope and responsibilities. For the past 14 years I served as Development Director at Almost Home Kids, where my primary focus included philanthropy from individuals, family foundations, private and corporate foundations, as well as working with major donors.

What drew you to the night ministry?

The longevity and good reputation of The Night Ministry are attractive to me as a fundraiser. The shortage of affordable housing is affecting communities in every neighborhood. I want to be part of the solution to end homelessness.

What is your why?

My "Why" is deeply personal. My first husband battled drug addiction and went to many rehabs. When I walked away from it all, he lived on the streets selling flowers and living under a viaduct. People who live unhoused have a shortened life expectancy. He died young and it was heart breaking. The Night Ministry meets people where they are without judgment.



Raeann Olsen-Jackson

What are your priorities for the Advancement Department?

Building capacity and introducing new technologies will be a focus for my team. We are prioritizing a plan to commemorate our upcoming 50th Anniversary in 2026. By celebrating our donors, volunteers, and community partners we will acknowledge the rich legacy of our past while also embracing new possibilities for the future.

"I place a high value on networking in the community, I love meeting new people and advocating for those who are less fortunate."

Raeann Olsen-Jackson,
Vice President of Advancement

The Night Ministry in the News

The Night Ministry is working diligently to ensure the safety and security of Chicago residents who do not have access to shelter or winterized gear. We also continue to focus on providing life-changing resources and services.



Scan this QR code
to see what
The Night Ministry
has been up to.

Health Outreach Bus Schedule Changes Allow for Greater Program Impact

The Night Ministry is committed to utilizing data to be responsive to clients' needs and improve the impact of our programs. In our latest internal data review, we took a closer look at our three Outreach and Street Medicine (OHM) programs—the Bus, Street Medicine, and CTA. Success metrics indicated that the Street Medicine (SM) and CTA programs had a greater impact on client health and housing outcomes than the Bus program. The three programs provide the same services but serve distinct populations; Bus clients are predominantly housed, with 70% living indoors, while most Street Medicine and CTA clients live outdoors (e.g. in a tent, on a train, etc.)

With this, Street Medicine and CTA clients were being successfully housed and connected to resources at a higher rate than Bus clients. This is because all the housing systems we leverage—including the Chicago Housing Authority—prioritize people that live outdoors, leading to lower rates of success for unstably housed Bus clients.

We saw an analogous trend in the healthcare services we offer. The primary aim of our services is to provide critical medical care to clients who would otherwise not have access to care. Because Street Medicine and CTA clients live outdoors, we are more likely to be their only source of healthcare outside of Emergency Care, and they are more likely to be treated for critical conditions.

To ensure the Bus program has the greatest impact possible, we have shortened our initial bus stops to one hour and have shifted the remainder of the time to focus on encampments.



The Health Outreach Bus connects with those in need in the community

We aim to expand our Bus Program and serve more individuals out in the community, allowing us to increase both our housing placements and the delivery of essential medical services.

We are monitoring this schedule change for the next six months and will analyze the data collected to determine the best long-term solution for clients.

Clients were given several weeks notice of the schedule changed and have been assured that The Night Ministry will continue to serve all neighborhoods it has historically served.



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of Hope.
Donate Today!**

Thank You!

Lighting Up the Night An Evening to benefit The Night Ministry

Join us in celebration and support of our mission to provide human connection, housing support, and health care to members of our community who are unhoused or experiencing poverty.

**Thursday, May 29, 2025
5:30 to 9:00 pm**

**Morgan Manufacturing
401 North Morgan Street,
Chicago, IL 60642**

For information about tickets and sponsorship opportunities, please contact Erica Schoppe at 773 506 6029 or ericas@thenightministry.org.

