

Joseph

Joseph (name has been changed) is 22 years old, and has been homeless since leaving his foster home at 19. He occasionally stays at St. Columba's, a shelter in West Philadelphia, and spends a lot of his time at the Youth Health Empowerment Project in Center City, a drop in center for young adults. He sings in Suburban Station to make some money to supplement his disability and food stamps. Joseph has schizophrenia, major depression, and epilepsy. He finds it very challenging to interact with his peers due to his diagnoses, homelessness, and lack of education.

Joseph has difficulty connecting with his friends and social workers because he changes his phone number frequently. He has several phones, and uses them until he runs out of text messages, and then begins using another one. One of them is a free government issued phone, and several others are inexpensive pay-as-you-go plans. He also loses phones frequently. His belongings are often stolen in the shelter, and he loses his things often when sleeping on the street. His seizures and resulting confusion and memory loss also contribute to his frequently lost phones.

Phones can be expensive, and it can be difficult to replace them so frequently. Joseph continues to replace them though, because it is important for him to maintain his social network. He can find inexpensive used phones from "guys I know", especially in and around Suburban Station. Joseph says that sometimes "I have stuff people want. So we do a trade.", and states that he stole a phone "only once. But it was a good one and the guy locked me out." He states "last week my social worker tried to call me, but the voice mail was in Spanish. So she knew it wasn't legit. I heard it for that."

Cell phones are a status symbol, even in the homeless community. More expensive phones can represent the level of skill required to obtain it, but Joseph says that the most important thing is having a way to keep in touch with his supports. "I don't have a home, you know? I don't have much. But I have people. If I can't talk to them, then what do I have?"