

SPECIAL EVENTS

Take a seat for charity ... and change a life

Proceeds from Furniture Bank's fifth annual Chair Affair to help Syrian refugees set up home

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Special to Postmedia Network

If you arrived home after a long day only to find it empty of furniture, how would you react? Dan Kershaw doesn't need to guess.

After 17 years as executive director of Furniture Bank, a registered charity and social enterprise that transfers gently used furniture to those in need, Kershaw sees firsthand the profound emotion that comes from having nothing but four walls to call home. Now he's on a personal mission to make sure everyone is aware.

"We wish that when people wake up in the morning and they are buying something new, downsizing or moving, that when they see something that's still lovely and wonderful, they realize there are tens of thousands of

people right here in the city of Toronto who would desperately love to have those things," says Kershaw. "We're not saying giving to a friend is wrong or placing at curbside is wrong. Those are choices; we just want to be part of that choice."

Kershaw's hope is that Furniture Bank will someday be as well-recognized as the Food Bank.

Gently used household furnishings are picked up by truck for a reasonable fee — just as junk removal companies operate — and donors are provided with a charitable receipt equivalent to the value of goods donated.

Best pieces are put on display in the Furniture Bank show room where clients come to browse, assisted by volunteers. Their selections are delivered for a nominal, subsidized fee, making it

possible to furnish an entire home or apartment for as little as \$200 or less.

Operating a 30,000-square-foot facility in south Etobicoke, with 10 trucks on the road and 42 staff members, Toronto's Furniture Bank collected five million pounds of furniture in 2014, redistributing four million pounds back out into the community. This year, the charity expects to finish just shy of helping 7,000 people to furnish their homes.

But with an estimated 20,000 people in need, there's still work to be done, says Kershaw. Which is why Furniture Bank is holding its fifth annual Chair Affair gala and charity auction of Friday, October 30, at The International Centre.

"We started Chair Affair as a way of engaging consumers and exposing them to the fact

that this is a problem in society, but fortunately one that is actually curable and fixable," he says. "There's certainly more good furniture available than problems exist."

Chair Affair centres around a live auction where attendees bid on original creations from a range of well-known and lesser-known designers who are asked to take old chairs and reimagine them.

Over the past five years, the event has morphed into 'Chair Affair Plus' with sofas, side tables and other pieces also up for auction.

"We let the designers find furniture that really spoke to them," says Kershaw, noting that every dollar raised on event night will go to helping individuals establish new homes. A majority of funds raised will help Syrian refugees in particular, through a new partnership with Lifeline



Furniture Bank will be holding its fifth annual Chair Affair gala and charity auction Friday, Oct. 30 at the International Centre.

Syria which is now a Furniture Bank agency of record.

"When we saw one stat that said 1,000 Syrian refugees are coming to Toronto ... we took it upon ourselves to have that furniture available," says Kershaw.

Tickets for the October 30

event are going fast and Kershaw expects to see attendance double compared to 2014.

For more information about the event, to vote for your favourite chair, or purchase tickets, visit www.furniturebank.org/chairaffair/.



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Celebrity designer Jane Lockhart is among top designers who have taken old chairs, redesigned them and offered them up for auction as a means to raise funds.