

Furniture Poverty: A Challenge Behind Closed Doors

Posted by [CanadaHelps](#)

This post was provided by Furniture Bank, as part of our refugee series, [Leaving Home: A Series Exploring the International Refugee Crisis](#). The multi-part blog series features stories from those on the ground, as well as the response from charities and Canadians across the country.



Photos courtesy of Fred Lum from The Globe and Mail

Furniture poverty describes the crippling condition, or the inability to afford basic items of furniture that meet a dignified standard of living. It is often a silent issue because its prevalence is hidden behind the front door, but the situation is faced by a growing number of low income households in communities across Canada, including newcomers and refugees. Because furniture deprivation exists behind closed doors, no one sees or hears about it.

Furniture is Silent in its Power

We understand the role that food, clothing and shelter play in our lives, but we often take furniture for granted until we don't have access to it. Let's be clear. Furniture Bank believes a house is not a home without furniture and the dignity and warmth it provides. We believe it's even more difficult to settle in a new country without the security and stability furniture brings us.

Imagine:

- doing homework without a desk and chair;
- resting after a day's work without a bed to sleep on;
- preparing a meal without the use of kitchen utensils;

At the very least, one's quality of life is severely affected; at worst, it becomes a contributing factor to social exclusion, as well as physical and mental distress.



Photos courtesy of Fred Lum from The Globe and Mail

“Before we were isolated and anxious because it was very difficult here, but now they are more comfortable,” said Waleed Alghdyan, a Syrian refugee describing through an interpreter how he felt receiving furniture to furnish his family’s home in an interview with [CBC News Nova Scotia](#). “It’s like a 180-degree shift.”

Economics of a Furnished Home

Furniture poverty, in the majority of cases, affects those in various forms of displacement, including refugees. A severely limited income and living allowances when first arriving in Canada forces refugee families to sacrifice household furniture in order to meet other financial needs like food, rent and utility bills, and education needs.

On average, it costs between \$1,600 and \$3,000 to furnish a home with used furniture. Comparing this to the monthly living allowance of a government-sponsored refugee family of \$1,350, it is easy to see why furniture is a lower priority, and often not an option, for refugees.

The psychological, physical, and financial benefits of furniture can be leading factors in ensuring refugees are less likely to re-experience displacement and succeed in their new lives in Canada. For refugees, including the current influx of Syrian newcomer families to Canada, the security and stability that comes with an established home plays a key role in the resettlement process and success of new beginnings.

This Problem is Solvable

In 2016, the [Toronto Environmental Alliance’s Zero Waste Toronto: A Vision for Our City](#) report accounted for 6 percent of all waste sent to GTA landfills are reusable, and this number could be reduced to 4 percent if we sent all gently used goods to organizations like Furniture Bank instead of the landfill, citing Furniture Bank as one of the leading waste diversion organizations in the GTA. This stat, owing in no small part to the trend to remodel and update the look and feel of our homes, proves there is an ample supply of used furniture that can alleviate – and in time eradicate – furniture poverty in our communities.

Furniture Poverty Alleviation is a Movement

We would like to think of this as the growth of the furniture poverty alleviation movement, one that will: no longer think of gently-used furniture as waste, no longer disregard the impact of furniture in our lives, believe in giving those coming out of displacement the dignity of a furnished home.

Everyone deserves the comfort, dignity and security of a furnished home.



To learn more about The Furniture Bank, or to make a donation to end furniture poverty, please visit their [Charity Profile Page >>>](#)