

# Our story



One evening Sister Anne Schenck was invited to the apartment of a family of five for dinner. When she arrived, she found a 'home' furnished with a milk crate used as a table, and a pot which the dinner was cooked and served in. She learnt that her hosts ate and slept on the floor.

On her way back home that evening, she came upon a gently used sofa that had been left out on the curb for disposal. Sister Anne credits that experience for spawning the idea that gave rise to Furniture Bank – an organization that facilitated the transfer of furniture from individuals disposing of gently used items, to homes in need of them.

In her social work in the years that followed, she encountered a dire lack of furnishing options for financially vulnerable individuals, and a growing collection of supporters of her idea. With the help of numerous volunteers, countless hours of pro-bono work and financial donations, small and large, Sister Anne formally incorporated Furniture Bank as a charity in 1998.

Since then, Furniture Bank has evolved to become much more than about a simple transfer of furniture from those who have, to those who don't. The Furniture Bank movement is one of empowerment – of individuals transitioning out of homelessness, of women and children escaping abusive situations, of refugees and newcomers to Canada.

*Tens of thousands of Canadians live without furniture. You can help change that. Call the Furniture Bank to schedule a pick-up of your old furniture, and we'll pass it on to a family in need. Book a pick-up today. Call 416-934-1229 Ext. #2*



**FURNITURE BANK**

YOUR USED FURNITURE WILL CHANGE A LIFE

# About Furniture Bank

## Organization description:

Furniture Bank is a registered charity and social enterprise that offers a furniture removal / pickup service.

We transfer gently used furniture and household goods donated by individuals and corporations to people who have recently transitioned out of homelessness, women and children escaping abusive situations, and refugees & newcomers to Canada.

In the process, we help turn an empty space into a true home.

## Organization facts:

**Founded in:** 1998

**Registered charity number:** 87253 1843 RR0001

**Address:** 25 Connell Court, Unit 1, Toronto, ON M8Z 1E8

**Employees:** 38

**Number of furniture pickup / delivery trucks:** 7

**Warehouse capacity:** 30,000 Sq Ft

**Pickup / delivery service area:** Greater Toronto Area (City of Toronto, Peel region, Halton region, York region)

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## Our impact

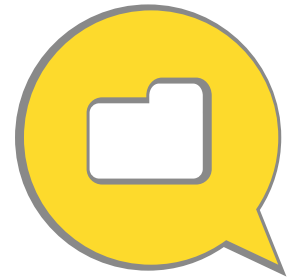
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**5437 Clients Served  
In 2014**



**62,313 Clients Served  
Since 1998**



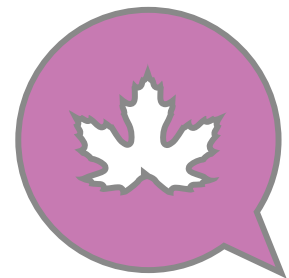
**78 Social Service  
Agency Partners**



**31,714 Furniture  
Items Donated In  
2014**

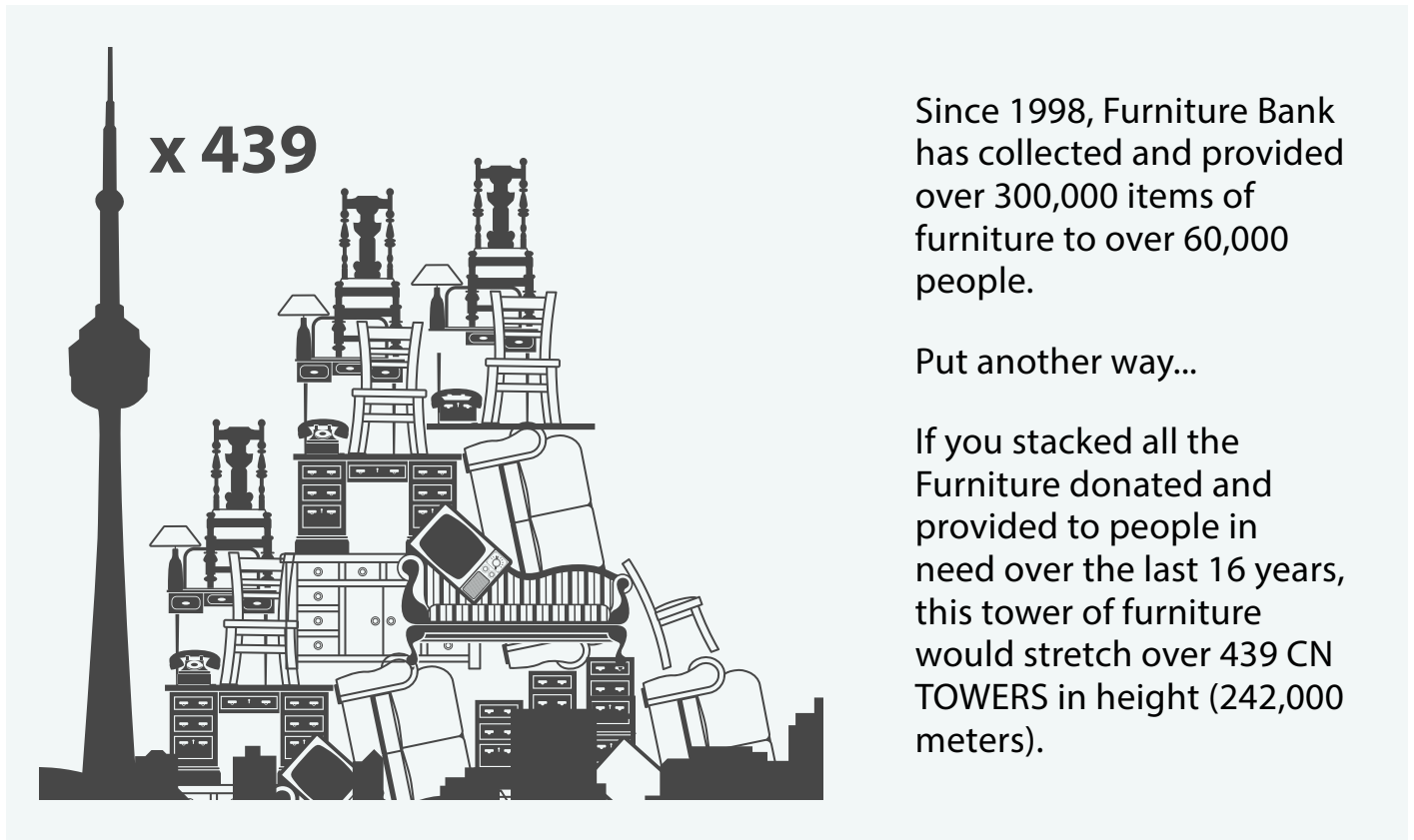


**320,765 Furniture  
Items Recycled Since  
1998**



**11,060 Tonnes of  
Waste Diverted Since  
1998**

# More about us



Since 1998, Furniture Bank has collected and provided over 300,000 items of furniture to over 60,000 people.

Put another way...

If you stacked all the Furniture donated and provided to people in need over the last 16 years, this tower of furniture would stretch over 439 CN TOWERS in height (242,000 meters).

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For our media kit and press resources, please visit our website:  
**[www.furniturebank.org](http://www.furniturebank.org)**

For all media related queries, email:  
**[media@furniturebank.org](mailto:media@furniturebank.org)**

# Tackling homelessness in our community



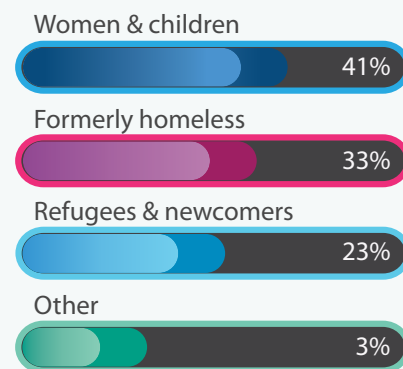
Since its inception, Furniture Bank has been tackling issues surrounding poverty and homelessness by ensuring those who transition out of homelessness are given the best possible chance to succeed in their life off the street.

The clients who are referred to us by social service agencies and shelter organizations are individuals and families who have overcome homelessness or were at risk of homelessness and now have a place to call their own. But crucially, they lack the means to furnish it.

At Furniture Bank, we recognize that 4 walls alone don't make a home. Furniture plays a powerful, albeit silent, role in all our lives. We are all indebted to the use of furniture to live fulfilling lives – just try studying for an exam, resting after a hard day's work, preparing a meal, or raising a family. Without furniture, even mundane tasks are near impossible.

By transferring gently used furniture to our clients, we help them cross the finish line of their transition out of homelessness. We believe that having a furnished home ensures recipients achieve the dignity, security and stability associated with having a place to call home, which in turn has a positive, knock on effect in other areas of their lives. That's the power of a furniture donation.

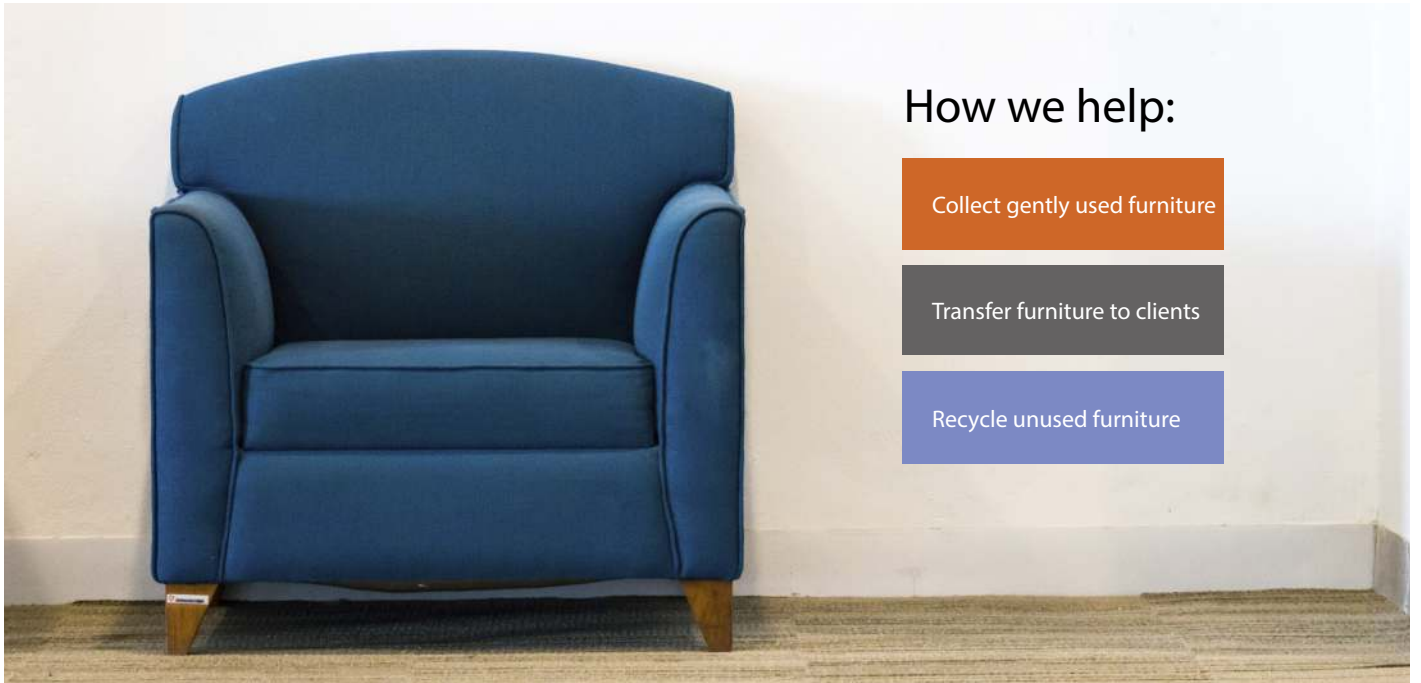
Since 1998, Furniture Bank has supported 62,313 people out of homelessness



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# Our contribution to the environment



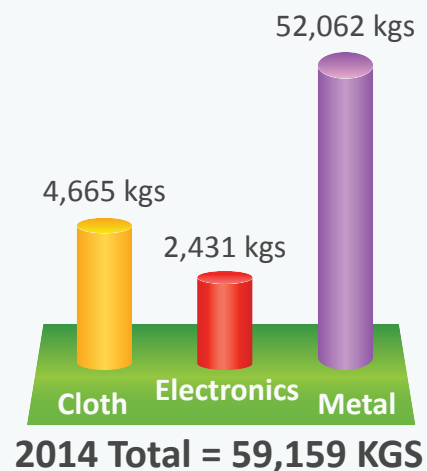
Furniture Bank's commitment to the environment is hard-wired into our DNA: we believe passionately that gently used but unwanted furniture and household items should not be thrown away.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, Canadians produce around 777 kgs of waste per person annually, the majority of which ends up in landfills (8.5 million tonnes per year!).

We do our best to help reduce that number. In 2014, we diverted over 30,000 gently used items of furniture away from landfills and into the homes of individuals transitioning out of homelessness, while we have saved over 300,000 items of furniture from waste disposal since we came into existence in 1998.

Further, when we do receive furniture donations that are not suitable for re-donation to our clients, we do our best to salvage the raw materials through our recycling program. Via partnerships with metal, cloth and electronics recyclers such as the Ontario Electronic Stewardship, we recycled over 4500 kgs of cloth and fabrics, 2000 kgs of electronics and 50,000 kgs of metal last year. In fact, by collecting gently used furniture from donors across the GTA, we have diverted more than 11,000 tonnes of waste from landfill sites.

Furniture Bank's 2014 Recycling Footprint



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# Leg Up Employment Program

Furniture Bank's Leg Up program works with employment agencies and partners to provide work experience, life & skills training and employment opportunities to youth, newcomers to Canada and other individuals facing barriers to employment.

Every year, participants are employed across Furniture Bank's operations, including our furniture warehouse, on our pickup & delivery trucks, in our call centre, or as administrative & IT support, providing Furniture Bank with a valuable source of skills.

As our social enterprise grows, we seek to expand this employment to over 20 participants per year and to engage out-placement corporate partners so that participants are given the opportunity to move on to full time employment.



Some of our partner employment agencies



## Leg Up program participant Tom Bendo shares his experience:



"Before Furniture Bank I had held many jobs, from management positions to general labour, security to dishwashing. Because I could not afford to pursue formal post secondary education after high school, my career options were limited despite having plenty of work experience.

I first came to Furniture Bank as an unemployed volunteer at a crossroads in my life and from there I worked my way to becoming a driver. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity that Furniture Bank has given me by investing in my work ethic rather than my history, and providing me with the tools to develop career skills."

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# Leg Up Impact

The Toronto Enterprise Fund found that participants in employment programs such as Leg Up:

- Earned an average of over \$450 of additional income per month, empowering them to pay bills, save money and identify financial goals beyond daily survival;
- Saw improvements to their health, housing situation, food security, and an overall increase in quality of life;
- Said they had an increased sense of purpose and an enhanced sense of self-worth and belonging;
- Attributed these successes to the unique supports provided by their social enterprises' accommodated work environments.



## Furniture Workshop



Furniture Bank is looking forward to taking the wraps off our new Furniture Workshop program in 2015.

Working with volunteer and paid instructors, the program seeks to train select Leg Up participants in furniture repair, upholstery and woodworking.

Not only will this give participants an opportunity to learn additional skills, it will also allow Furniture Bank to provide a repair service to select damaged items of furniture.

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# How we saved our charity

Coming up with an idea is easy. Implementing it successfully and sustainably is a different matter entirely. Furniture Bank learnt the hard way that an organization is not sustained on ideas and good intentions alone.

Like any charity, when Furniture Bank opened its doors in 1998, we dreamed big. Our ambition was to ensure that no one in the city of Toronto would have to sleep on the floor. That first year we supported 496 clients furnish their homes.

Today, 16 years later, we serve that number of clients in a month. We work with 78 social service partner agencies, accepting clients from across the Greater Toronto Area. In 2014

alone we helped 5,487 individuals, while the total number of clients who have utilized Furniture Bank reached 62,313 at the end of last year. That's 14,000 individuals more than at a full capacity baseball game in the Rogers Centre!

But it wasn't smooth sailing. Starting in 2012, rapid expansion of our organization without a commensurate increase in income saw our operating income dip into the red, and by the end of 2013, the organization faced a shortfall in funds of nearly \$300,000.



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## How we turned it around

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This threat to the very existence of the charity prompted a major rethink by staff, management and at board level, where a conscious decision was made to make 2014 the year that Furniture Bank turned its fortunes around focusing on building a sustainable foundation for future years.

The outcome was a year in which we finished back in the black and on a much surer footing than we've ever been as we enter our 17th year of existence.

We are far from perfect, but bringing these five changes together is at the heart of how and why Furniture Bank turned itself around - from a loss of \$300,000 to a small profit in 2014 that could be re-invested in the charity. We focused on what mattered, our clients. We leveraged our assets, our large social enterprise. We embraced tools and technology to do more. We invested in our people - teaching and training ourselves to become a high performing charity! Looking forward to 2015 we see still more challenges - but we are keen to take them on.

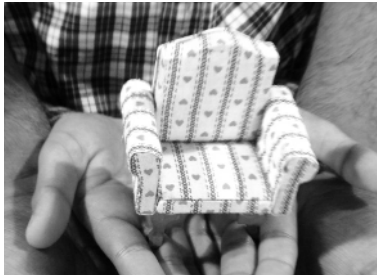
Read about the 5 things we did to get ourselves back on track overleaf.

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### 1. A renewed focus on our clients

The existential threat to the charity forced us to refocus our efforts to serve our main client groups: individuals and families transitioning out of homelessness, women and children escaping abusive situations, and refugees and newcomers to Canada. This focus helped ensure all our programs and services were realigned closely with our charitable mission and that all internal stakeholders were committed to serving our clients to the best of their abilities.



### 2. A renewed focus on our social enterprise

Our furniture pickup service provides a full, fee-based service to remove gently used, unwanted furniture across the GTA and stable source of revenue for the charity. However, the service was losing out in the competitive market place for removal services. We therefore doubled our marketing efforts, focusing on building awareness online through an upgraded website, search engine optimization, content marketing, search engine marketing and social media.



### 3. Embracing technology

Just like our social enterprise marketing efforts, we decided to embrace technology throughout all aspects of the organization. Our goal: to minimize wastage of effort and to speed up activities by automation. We adopted a series of digital and cloud based productivity tools many of which were donated to us by the companies or foundations associated with the products, or by individual / corporate donors, or are free. The result was a much more nimble organization and a much more collaborative team environment.



### 4. Built a high performing leadership team

With a number of changes at Board and Executive level, the new leadership agreed to put organizational health at the heart of priorities. This entailed making Furniture Bank function effectively by building a cohesive team, establishing real clarity among those individuals, communicating that clarity to everyone within Furniture Bank and putting in place just enough structure to reinforce that clarity going forward. We were fortunate to have some support from Executive Coaching for the leadership team to help get us started.



### 5. Improving organizational culture

All stakeholders - the management team, employees, our Leg Up employment program participants, volunteers and board members are given an equal opportunity to share feedback (including anonymously) about the charity and propose alternatives to how it could better serve its mission. We believe passionately that our employees and volunteers are our most valuable resource - giving everyone a voice has resulted in a team that is happy and committed to our cause.

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# Tech at Furniture Bank

Since our inception in 1998, Furniture Bank has strived to make our activities more streamlined to ensure we serve as many clients as possible. We seek to minimize wastage of effort and to speed up activities by automation, because we realize that efficiencies we gain within our organization have a compound effect on the impact we have in the community. We believe passionately that the effective use of technology empowers us to meet our challenges head on. In fact, it is the use of these technologies that helped turn our financially struggling charity into one whose social enterprise generated \$1.15M in 2014, enabling us to extend our social impact.

Part of this drive for efficiency has seen us embrace digital and cloud technologies. We are constantly learning and trying new things. Below and overleaf we showcase our 12 favourite productivity tools currently in operation at Furniture Bank. Many of them have been donated to us by the companies or foundations associated with the products, or by individual / corporate donors, or are free. Where we have made an investment in a certain product, it is because we believe the financial and efficiency gains outweigh the cost outlay.



## Our 12 favourite productivity tools



### 1. Salesforce

In use at Furniture Bank since 2009 and probably the single biggest reason for our success in scaling to date (handling over 500,000 transactions in the last 5 years alone). All contact and organization data is centralized in Salesforce including client, donor, volunteer, furniture pickup, warehouse stock and delivery data.



### 2. Apple iPads

Using the Salesforce1 app on Apple iPads have increased the efficiency of client appointments by allowing the client's choice of furniture to be updated into Salesforce in real time rather than manually.

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### 3. SQUARE

Together with Apple iPhones to assist with navigation and communication, our pickups drivers are equipped with Square readers to enable the efficient processing of credit card payments during furniture pickups.

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### 4. Google Apps for Work

The Google Apps platform powers Furniture Bank's email, cloud storage, and online security and fosters collaboration between employees via Google calendar, Docs and more.

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### 5. WordPress

Our website is built and managed on WordPress software and is at the forefront of our online efforts to increase awareness and reach of our charity and social enterprise.

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### 6. HubSpot

Hubspot powers all our inbound and email marketing automation efforts. We believe passionately in the inbound marketing philosophy and strive to continually attract, convert and delight our social enterprise customer personas.

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### 7. Google Analytics

Google Analytics powers our understanding of what is and what's not working on our website, and helps us continually improve our online efforts to attract more donors and volunteers.

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### 8. Adobe Creative Cloud

Our marketing and promotions creatives are all done in-house with the use of Adobe's suite of creative products. A challenge to master, but we enjoy challenges!

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### 9. Primus

Primus' hosted phone system powers our telecommunications and enables our Call Centre to effectively and efficiently take inbound calls and assist our social enterprise customers and our clients.

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### 10. TINYpulse

We are passionate believers in giving our employees a voice. We use TINYpulse to enable all employees to share feedback anonymously, thereby helping to shape our organizational culture and improve our results.

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### 11. Asana

Ensures our growing team is able to collaborate, plan and track the dozens of projects, partnerships, promotions, events and programs happening simultaneously at Furniture Bank.

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### 12. Survey Monkey

Allows us to regularly collect feedback from clients, donors and volunteers to ensure we serve all our stakeholders as best as we can, stay 'on track' and improve our results year over year.



# Corporate volunteering



Furniture Bank's corporate volunteer program is an innovative initiative that allows companies, from Bay Street corporations to a local coffee shop, to partner with us to give back to their community .

At least once a week a group of corporate volunteers join our team of regular volunteers to become showroom guides for the morning. By helping clients pick out furniture for their homes, volunteers get a taste of what it's like to be in need of furniture.

But that's not the way only way corporate groups get involved. Many choose to offer their services and expertise to help our charity and social enterprise extend its social impact.

Furniture Bank wouldn't be where it is today without our individual and corporate volunteers, who last year numbered over 700, accumulating over 10,000 volunteer hours.

To them we say 'THANK YOU!'

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Some of the companies that have volunteered at Furniture Bank

