

ENERGY EFFICIENT Buildings, Empty Flat Clearances, Recycling help your tenants and organisation and save the planet at the same time

by Paul Smith, Chief Executive, Furniture Re-use Network

Climate change seems to be the top of many people's agenda. You may be nervously looking out of your window wondering if your office is about to be engulfed by rising water levels, or melted by rising temperatures. Much of the focus in housing has been on energy-efficient homes and the recycling of building materials. There is another way to help the environment, which also allows you to help tenants in greatest need.

The re-use of items is more environmentally friendly than recycling and there are over 350 organisations across the UK rescuing restoring and repairing household items and making them available to people on low incomes.

Helping your tenants with furniture

According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, eight million people in this country have difficulty affording white goods and furniture. These people are likely to be strongly represented in housing association properties. Add to this those seeking their first home and refugees and asylum seekers then a large number of people supported by members of the FBHO are likely to be seeking good quality low cost beds, cookers, washing machines, fridges and the other goods that turn a flat or house into a home.



Re-use charities in Britain currently make two million items of furniture and electrical goods available to people on low incomes. Some organisations also provide 'starter packs' of bedding, cutlery, crockery, curtains and other items for homeless people and hostel residents moving into their first home.



Housing associations are accepted as legitimate referral agencies by all these bodies.

As these organisations become more effective at obtaining items from members of the public, retailers and other businesses (we have just arranged the collection of over 3,000 beds from Centerparcs in Wiltshire and a deal with 300 Homebase stores to take end-of-line goods), the problem they have is finding people to help.

In the autumn of this year new legislation relating to electrical items should provide organisations with an influx of white goods. All items are fully tested for safety and operation before being made available and re-use organisations are subject to the same laws on selling items as any other retailer.

As the national body, the Furniture Re-use Network, FRN, is keen to ensure that more people in need are helped by our members. We have a national helpline 0845 602 8003 where we can match people to projects in their area. This number can be used by housing officers and others to find out which services are available in any area in the UK. A summary list of projects by area can also be found on our website www.frn.org.uk by clicking on "donate furniture" and following the map.

Furniture Projects can help you

There are increasing examples of furniture projects working closely with housing associations, indeed we are aware of nine projects actually based within housing associations as a tenant service. The cost of waste disposal is increasing dramatically as the Government tries to reduce the use of landfill.

Landlords can contract with projects to undertake clearances of empty properties with items that are re-usable being taken by the projects for their own organisation or passed to charity shops. Many organisations have all the required waste licences, vehicles and facilities. ■

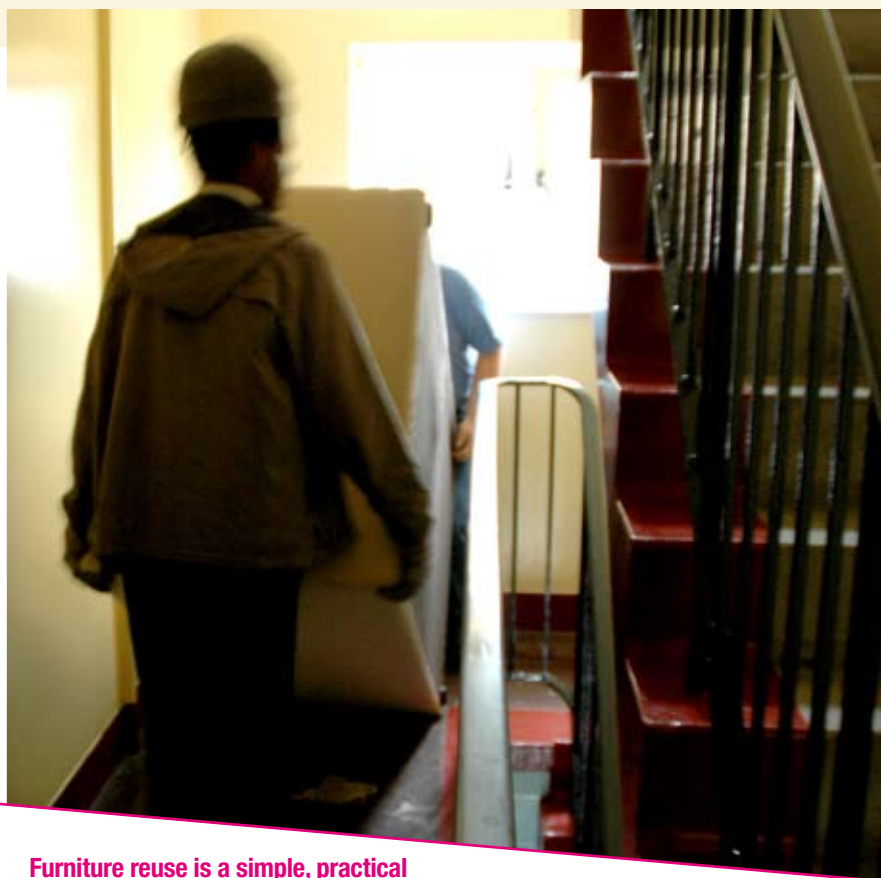
- To establish your own operation, please call FRN (National number): 0117 954 3570, or FRN (London number): 020 7324 4705



USED FURNITURE

Social housing could acquaint tenants with the availability of some good bargains as this helps in reducing debt

by Vicky Kington



Furniture reuse is a simple, practical solution to households in need of furniture. It is sold at a fraction of the cost of new items by a number of projects and reduces the risk of low-income tenants getting mired in debt. It is also an aid to community regeneration through volunteering and training opportunities at the projects.

The **London Furniture Reuse Network (London FRN)**, is a charitable organisation working to increase awareness of its reusable domestic furniture service, by delivering a series of workshops and presentations at team meetings to key social housing staff. It is a charitable organisation working to increase awareness of its reusable domestic furniture service, by delivering a series of workshops and presentations at team meetings to key social housing staff.

It represents and supports 15 furniture reuse projects in London. Like the social housing sector, London FRN is driven by the pressing need to improve living conditions for London's socially marginalized communities.

London FRN Regional Development Officer, Nicola Durrant, said: "We estimate that about half of the current service users of the furniture projects are from BME communities. However, we cannot overlook the possibility that our message is still not reaching people moving into London with no knowledge of where to get help.

"Our aim is to raise awareness of the benefits of reuse to ensure that all people living in unacceptable conditions know how to access the furniture reuse service. We are making progress to build strategic partnerships with the social housing sector in London in order to expand regeneration initiatives and increase the supply of affordable furniture to people living in hardship"

The sector has developed promotional material in collaboration with the housing associations for tenants' packs and written articles for tenants' newsletters. A training day organised for East Homes Housing Association at **Homestore**, a furniture project in Newham, gave key members of staff a direct insight into how the referral

process works... 82 per cent agreed that the event was of value to them.

The initiative includes developing links with refugee and community organisations through **HACT and the London Refugee Housing Network**. We want to work increasingly with BME housing associations in order to promote the benefits of furniture reuse.

For information on workshops run by the LFRN, please contact **Nicola Durrant**, Regional Development Officer on 020 7324 4707 or email Nicola@lcrn.org.uk ■

HOMESTORE help low-income families by providing donated furniture to east London residents. A Quaker social action project, it receives donations of furniture and delivers good quality household goods to families who could otherwise not afford it. Over the last 18 years, Homestore has worked in seven London boroughs, saved east Londoners on benefits over £1.5 million. Over 5,500 people each year benefit from the Homestore service and in December and January 2005, Homestore collected 530 items from 226 kind households.

Sue, a Homestore customer bringing up two children on benefits, said: "I've not been in the position before to get new furniture or even look for second-hand furniture so this is really a first experience for me and it's so really nice now to be building my home up for my two children. It's really wonderful to be able to tell other people who could benefit..."

Homestore provides a free collection service to those donating furniture, and pick up donated items within seven days.

Jim Carling, Homestore's project manager, comments: "... By donating to Homestore you get social as well as environmental benefits from furniture reuse. Donations of furniture are important to enable people to furnish their properties without getting into debt and reduce the amount of reusable items ending up in landfill."

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