



## Our Mission

The mission of the Furniture Bank of Central Ohio (FBCO) is to reduce the impact of poverty by providing furniture to central Ohio individuals and families struggling with severe life challenges.

The Furniture Bank is a unique and collaborative organization that connects individuals, businesses, social service agencies, and faith-based organizations to people struggling with poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, unemployment, and other severe life crises. We both collect and build furniture, then work with over 75 social service agencies and other nonprofits to distribute furniture to client families.

## Our Leadership Staff

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## Our History

The Furniture Bank of Central Ohio was established in 1998 as Material Assistance Providers to help furnish the homes of people emerging from homelessness. We now provide approximately 40,000+ pieces of furniture to about 3,500+ central Ohio families and individuals struggling with poverty, homelessness domestic violence, or another life crisis in our core Furniture for Families program. We collaborate with 75+ social service agencies and faith-based partners who screen and refer families in need. More than 8,000 furniture donors, 2,000 generous financial donors, and 2,000 volunteers, who contribute over 25,000 hours in service each year, help us to fulfill our mission to turn empty houses into homes for central Ohio families.

After a successful capital campaign in 2006, we moved into our current facility in Franklinton. Over the years, we've added delivery services for clients, added a "Health Risk-Free Warranty" to address bed bug concerns, and started building furniture for families in-house with the help of donated plywood from Sauder Woodworking. In recent years, we have built up two social enterprises, our Furniture with a Heart thrift stores, and our Downsize with a Heart downsizing services, to generate revenue for the Furniture Bank. Since our inception and thanks to these improvements, we have served more than 75,000 families- 210,000+ people- in our 25 years of service. As the need in our community grows, we are determined to serve an increased 6,000 families and their children every year as we embark on our Furnish Our Community Plan.

As the need for stable shelter among our community grows, we know we must see dramatic strategic change within our organization in order to address it. The Furnish Our Community Plan, which launched in 2021 and

consists of 3 major capital components, will increase our internal capacity and carry out our strategic goal to serve an increased 6,000 central Ohio families in need over the next several years.

## **Community Need**

Our organization serves numerous families across Central Ohio who are grappling with homelessness, eviction, compromised child safety, domestic violence, emergency relocation, unemployment, physical or mental disabilities, job loss, natural disasters, and other crises. The explicit community need our program fulfills is the absence of essential furniture for our neighbors in need. The Furniture for Families program has served nearly 80,000 clients and 215,000 individuals since 1998. Annually, we provide over 40,000 pieces of essential furniture to more than 3,500 Central Ohio families. The sheer number of households served is indicative of the volume of people in our community who are in need of our services. While the rates of furniture poverty have not been heavily studied, we do know that almost 75% of expenses for households living below the poverty line go towards food, transportation, housing costs, and utilities, leaving little room to purchase furniture.

At the Furniture Bank, we have collected aggregate data showing that of our low-poverty target audience, nearly 100% live at or below the federal poverty line, with 90% earning less than \$18,000 per year, and is disproportionately represented by people of color. More than 70% of our clients are minorities and a third are single-parent households. In Franklin County, the overall poverty rate is about 47% higher than the national average. More so, the portion of clients in our four highest-served neighborhoods living below the poverty level is above 40% - about 250% higher than the national average.

In mid-2023, the Columbus Dispatch published an article that illustrates the intensifying need present in our community that state- and federal-sponsored social programs are unable to reach. It states, "As Columbus experiences a population and development boom, not all residents are rising together." It goes on to say that homelessness has increased 20%, food banks are experiencing unprecedented need, while "research shows that when cities get bigger, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" (King, 2023). Our organization also saw increased demand throughout 2023, serving over 7% more clients than the year prior. It is abundantly evident that strengthening and sustaining our service ability within these high-poverty areas is critical.

A recent survey of our referring caseworkers expressed the top three reasons for seeking out assistance: transitioning from homelessness, mental health issues, and kinship care and safety. The world population review states that 10.23% of individuals in Columbus over the age of 25 have not graduated high school, a rate much higher than that of the entire state. According to the Ohio Department of Health, those who do not complete their secondary education are more likely to be jailed, experience teen pregnancy, and earn less. This data shows the substantial amount of Columbus families facing residential instability who may be living inside sparsely furnished temporary housing. These conditions have a direct effect on a family's daily life.

Having essential furniture and housewares has countless benefits. Struggling families are able to prepare nutritious meals, which can lead to lower rates of disability and chronic illness, and children are able to rest in a proper bed, leading to a decreased risk of mental and physical disability, behavioral problems including poor impulse control and aggression, and classroom barriers such as impaired memory, slowed processing, and diminished creativity. This is particularly evident in school achievement data, especially in primary school aged children. Ensuring families have safe, appropriate furniture also reduces infant mortality rates, which are disproportionately high in Columbus, especially among people of color - the majority of our client base.

Many studies have shown that when families receive essential furniture, it can strengthen residential stability, educational success, post-secondary readiness, relationship building, and goal achievement (Nubani et al., 2022). More broadly, we assert (as does extensive research) that a comfortable, functional home - or the lack of one -

can have considerable consequences in nearly every aspect of a person's life. Our program has direct implications on the ability of our children and families to do more than just survive. Something as simple as having a table for family dinner or a couch to bond with loved ones can have a profound effect on a child's quality of life.

While there are organizations and programs in Central Ohio addressing the needs of low-income families, there are gaps and limitations in service among them. Our organization is uniquely qualified to address these gaps and provide comprehensive support due to our expertise in procuring and distributing essential furniture, as well as the trust we've garnered in our community over our quarter-century in operation. More than a third of Franklin County families are unable to afford basic needs \*\*such as a safe and fully furnished home (United Way of Central Ohio, 2022). Additionally, as we welcome an increasing number of immigrants to Central Ohio, we anticipate an increase in demand from referral partners including CRIS and US Together. In 2023, we proudly served nearly 300 immigrant or refugee families.

## **Programs and Services**

At the heart of our Furniture for Families program lies the express purpose of providing tangible aid to families in need. We know that the wellbeing of a community relies on collaborative efforts, and for over 26 years the program has been successful in bringing our neighbors together for the betterment of our area. Our service model is largely dependent on the generosity of our more fortunate community members, and we recognize that to sustain this effort, the program's success must be built upon a cooperative community framework. This structure allows all program participants to meet a need, whether it be donating or receiving furniture; in this way, the program functions similarly to a mutual aid organizational framework, providing direct, immediate benefits from one client (donor) to another (recipient).

The Furniture for Families program serves as a steppingstone towards stability for families experiencing severe life crises by enhancing safe and affordable housing. Obtaining furniture can not only increase residential stability, but also positive outcomes on mental and physical health, childhood development, school achievement, and overall wellbeing. We provide families with hand-selected furniture, which is then delivered to them the same day, allowing them an immediate sense of relief and comfort. We currently serve about 23 families in need with 300 pieces of furniture daily. Families typically select between 5- 20 items, which would cost more than \$2,500 - \$3,500 to purchase secondhand including delivery of items. This is an unrealistic expense for many of those we serve, as about 95% of households earn less than \$24,000 a year.

In 2023, we served 3,738 local families with an average of 12.5 furniture pieces each, with support from individual donors, corporations, foundations and our social enterprises, we are on track to serve over 3,700 families in 2024. These funds will offset the cost of collection, construction, storage, delivery, and operational expenses, with the average cost of providing furniture to a family being approximately \$750. Partner organizations will also contribute to this cost, matching the grant funding to transform the homes of 100 local families.

Recent improvements to the program include a staff-selection model for families unable to visit the showroom, allowing us to efficiently serve more families and provide a convenient option. We will continue to implement our custom-built technology to enhance operations and track donor and client services. Additionally, our president and CEO, Phil Washburn, brings expertise in affordable housing and social enterprises to further strengthen our impact.

Monitoring key metrics ensures effective and efficient service delivery, with weekly and monthly reports shared among staff and leadership. We track indicators such as appointments, collection rates, delivery rates, and

fulfillment rates to maintain high standards. By doing so, we promptly address any service shortfalls and ensure families in need receive the support they require.

### **Safe Sleep Initiative**

Since 2019, central Ohio's infant mortality rate has not seen a notable decrease, remaining close to 7% and as one of the highest in the country. According to Central Ohio Hospital Council, Franklin County's infant mortality rate was 7.8 per 1,000 infants as of April 2021, which exceeds the goal rate of 6.0 set by Healthy People 2020. Of those affected, African American infants suffer at a greater rate, as they "are 2.7 times more likely to die than white infants," (Central Ohio Hospital Council).

According to the Ohio Department of Health, sleep related deaths account for an average of 15% of all infant deaths in Ohio (about three infant deaths each week). Although select organizations in central Ohio focus on deterring sleep related infant deaths, the Furniture Bank stands as a uniquely effective way to address the problem. As the largest furniture bank in our community, we can help reduce sleep related deaths in central Ohio by efficiently providing families and infants in poverty with approved safe sleep furniture.

Our Safe Sleep Program distributes safe sleep kits to infants and their families, giving them the tools necessary to implement best practices for reducing sleep-related infant and child deaths. Specifically, the initiative will provide (1) a Graco Pack n' Play mobile crib, (2) a safe sleep blanket, (3) an approved safe sleep pacifier, and (4) educational materials focused on safe sleep and injury prevention to local families and babies in need.

Best practices recommend placing babies in a crib to sleep alone and on their backs with no blankets, toys, or stuffed animals in the crib, which our kits facilitate and encourage. In addition, pacifier use has shown to reduce the chance of sudden infant death syndrome by 90%. As a partner agency of the national nonprofit Cribs for Kids, our safe sleep initiative began in 2015. Since then, we have distributed approximately 475 safe sleep kits to vulnerable babies and their families in central Ohio.

Beneficiaries of the Safe Sleep Program are identified once they connect to the Furniture Bank through one of 75 partnered referral agencies, including Franklin County Children Services, Homeless Families Foundation, National Youth Advocate Program, and more.

Most of the families and children connecting to the Furniture Bank are living in poverty and experiencing a severe life crisis such as homelessness, unemployment, or health challenges. Families are accepted from all over central Ohio but generally come from high poverty areas in the city, which also correspond to areas of high rates of infant mortality and sleep-related deaths. In fact, nearly 80% of the families we connect with reside in 4 low-income Columbus neighborhoods: Franklinton/Hilltop, Linden, Southside and the Near East side. Additionally, 70% of our clients are minorities, and 33% are single parents.

### **Clients We Serve**

On average, Furniture for Families serves low-income families facing crises such as homelessness, domestic violence, child safety and security, emergency relocation/immigration, unemployment, disability, and natural disasters. Nearly 80% of these families reside in four high-poverty Columbus neighborhoods: Franklinton/Hilltop, Linden, Southside and the Near East side. Additionally, 70% of our clients are minorities, and 33% are single parents. With an average 95% of client families earning less than \$24,000 per year, an expense of a furnished, safe home is out of reach. Furniture for Families helps close this critical gap for families in need and allows them to use such strained resources on other essential expenses such as mortgage/rent, food, medicine, and education.

The families we work with are referred to the Furniture Bank through a social service agency, church or other partner. They are experiencing a severe life crisis such as homelessness, loss of employment, domestic violence and mental health issues which have left them with few material possessions. Furniture and household items are often inaccessible to families and the Furniture Bank provides a bridge alleviating the impact of poverty on families. Families receive between five and twenty pieces of furniture based on their individual needs, with an average of 12.5 items per family.

## **Impact/Outcomes**

In 2024, we estimate the Furniture for Families program will serve 3,700+ local families with an average of 12.5 pieces of furniture each. Funding we receive will be used to collect, build, store and deliver furniture and household goods, which includes our operating expenses of driver wages, gas, and maintenance for our trucks as well as facility expenses. On average, it costs approximately \$650-\$750 to provide a family with furniture. Together, the Furniture Bank and our 75+ partner organizations share in this cost, and your grant funding will be matched with partner funding to cover the cost to serve and transform the homes of local families in need.

Families receiving furniture are given the tools and basic comforts essential to everyday life which contributes to greater residential stability and can help achieve positive outcomes for mental health, childhood development, school achievement and chronic health issues. Families have beds to sleep in, a kitchen table to share a family meal and a comfortable couch where they can sit and relax with friends. They save time, money and resources by visiting our one stop shop warehouse and having furniture delivered the same day. This allows families and the agencies that serve them to focus on other needs and problems such as employment, mental health and education.

Furniture contributes to greater residential stability by giving families basic comforts and tools essential to everyday life. By obtaining furniture for their homes, residential stability improves, which can increase positive outcomes for mental health, childhood development, school achievement and chronic health issues. After visiting the Furniture Bank of Central Ohio, the impact of poverty often is reduced because families have beds to sleep in, a kitchen table to share.

Our Furniture for Families program provides basic tools necessary to function in society. Families receive about \$2,500 - \$3,500 in value in furniture and delivery services. This cost is often out of reach for the families we serve. Families have furnished homes after visiting the Furniture Bank of Central Ohio. Simply having a better night's sleep in a comfortable bed, individuals and families can experience positive impacts in judgement, mood, attention, focus as well as health problems like obesity and high blood pressure. We close the gap for families by allowing time and resources to be utilized in addressing underlying issues that contribute to crisis situations.

## **Collaboration**

The Furniture Bank is a uniquely collaborative community-centered organization that proudly serves our community alongside nearly 8,000 furniture donors, 1,100 financial donors, 1,300 volunteers, dozens of referral agencies, and a breadth of corporate partnerships. Our collaborative model allows families and the agencies that serve them to focus on other acute needs such as securing employment, mental health services, and educational services, with a fully furnished home delivered the same day they visit the Furniture Bank. We operate as a centralized material assistance provider for central Ohio social service organizations by providing an efficient service delivery through consolidating the collection, storage, and distribution processes. Our referring agencies also share in the cost to provide furniture for families.

Our corporate and community volunteers contribute an average of 20,000 hours of service each year, and we are fortunate to receive guidance, expertise, and support from corporate and community leaders. Several local leaders serve as members of our Board of Directors and participate in Furniture Bank committees. The dedication and support of our volunteers and community leaders significantly enhance our ability to fulfill our mission and provide essential furniture to families in need. We actively seek out and welcome new partnerships with local corporations and organizations that align with our vision of ensuring all Central Ohio families have furnished homes. By forging these alliances, we aim to bolster family unity, enhance quality of life, and foster a stronger community.

## **Sustainability**

The Furniture Bank of Central Ohio's furniture provision program has a 25-year track record of turning empty houses into homes of hope through the simple yet powerful act of furniture provision. Starting as a one-man operation, we now utilize four sites and a fleet of 10+ trucks and have served nearly 75,000 local families with more than 1,000,000 furniture pieces. Through it all, the Furniture Bank has maintained its strong commitment to families and children impacted by poverty and other severe crises such as homelessness and child safety and security.

Building and maintaining a stable and diverse funding base is a major priority for the Furniture Bank. Generally, our mission and programs are funded through three main sources: 1) earned income from referrals; 2) fundraising income; and 3) earned income from our social enterprise operations. Our referral agencies share in the cost to serve a family by helping to offset delivery fees. We also seek funding through special events, individual donors, corporations and foundations. Finally, our social enterprise operations, Furniture with a Heart thrift stores and Downsize with a Heart, generate a significant and stable amount of revenue for our programs, with the thrift stores generating hundreds of thousands of dollars in surplus to support our mission. This diversification allows our programs to operate sustainably.

Our furniture inventory is strong and supported by numerous sources, including individual donors, corporate donors, commercial cleanouts, as well as our own furniture wood shop. This ensures our Furniture for Families program is always able to provide essential furniture and stability to vulnerable families.

### **Social Enterprises**

**Furniture with a Heart** is the first of two social enterprises we have launched in recent years help create a sustainable funding base for the Furniture Bank. A surplus of nearly \$400,000 was realized from sales at the thrift stores last year, which was invested right back into the mission of the Furniture Bank to serve families in need.

Our second social enterprise, **Downsize with a Heart**, a downsizing service, is also generating a significant amount of additional revenue, as well as donated furniture to support our furniture provision programs.

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