

Couch potatoes you can bank on

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A Toronto charity is keeping used furniture out of the landfill. They will pick up lightly used furniture and give it away to families in need.

Perry Davidson sat on a well-worn couch in a warehouse that may either be Toronto's best-kept secret or a sign of the economic times.

He runs the Furniture Bank, a charity that collects and distributes gently used furniture for people who need help in tough times.

The charity serves mostly abused women and children trying to start out on their own, as well as refugees and the homeless.

This week, the Gamboa family from Thorncliff Park will receive furniture from the partnership, as will the Perez family, a mother and father with three children between the ages of 3 and 12.

Today and tomorrow, the bank is teaming up with junk removal company 1-800-RID-OF-IT to pick up unwanted furniture for free to be handed out to needy families.

"The demand in Toronto is a constant issue for us," Davidson, a former college teacher, said yesterday.

"There are more people in need of furniture than ever before," he said.

Davidson said the charity helped 1,500 families last year, but expects to see more than 2,000 families this year.

"It's increased quite significantly," he said.

Picking up and disposing of used furniture usually costs money for those wanting to get rid of it, and sometimes the items will end up in a dump site.

But today and tomorrow the furniture will be picked up for free, and instead of going in the garbage it will be delivered to three families chosen by the Furniture Bank.

"What we don't believe in is charging families in need for the furniture," said Sean Lockhart, resource development manager for the Furniture Bank.

Usually, it charges a fee to those donating the items and then delivers at no charge to those who need the furniture.

Rick Crawford, owner of Toronto's 1-800-RID-OF-IT, said his company usually tries to bring furniture to charities like Furniture Bank or Value Village to avoid having to pay to dispose of it.

"Normally there are a couple of options," Crawford said.

"If there wasn't a Value Village, we could take it to a transfer station," he said, adding that 70% of household goods they pick up are donated to families who could otherwise not afford the essential items.