

Ministry aids families with furniture

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Photo Caption: Larry Cook (left) and Don Frye of the Barnabas Network carry a donated dryer from a Greensboro home.

The Barnabas Network

Anyone wanting to donate items or a delivery truck should call the group at 370-4002. Financial donations should be mailed to The Barnabas Network, P.O. Box 2666, Greensboro NC, 27402. For more information, call or visit www.thebarnabasnetwork.org.

Carolyn Hubbard is knee-deep in packing boxes when the guys from the Barnabas Network arrive to pick up the white Whirlpool washer and dryer that won't go into the new house with her.

"I figure a washer and dryer is something everybody needs — and they work," Hubbard said of giving the set to the nonprofit furniture ministry. The Barnabas Network will pass them on to a family it has determined as needy and also provide Hubbard with a tax write-off.

Before workers Don Frye and Larry Cook finish loading the appliances into their truck, Hubbard remembers the microwave she will no longer need.

"I haven't had time to clean it out," she said, embarrassed about a spill by her daughter. Frye doesn't hesitate.

"That's OK," Frye told her. "We have volunteers who will take care of that. We'd like to thank you ... for even thinking of us. God bless you."

This interaction — even the formal thank you — will play out again this day as Frye and Cook crisscross the county picking up items that people no longer need that could benefit families recovering from homelessness or a major setback.

The ministry's emphasis is helping people such as Chantae Little, 37, a single mother and grandmother in High Point who lost her job as a nurse's assistant and battled homelessness with her family.

“I didn’t have nothing,” said Little, who heard about the nonprofit from her caseworker.

The men from the ministry unloaded a truckload of “gently used” furniture into her new apartment, including a new Broyhill dining room set. Little’s mother watched.

“This is really making this a home for her,” Florence McQueen said.

The furniture ministry began when a mutual friend brought together Darnell Brame, who had been collecting and giving away furniture in his garage, and Tim Patterson, the priest at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, whose church also was helping families with necessities. Hurricane Katrina and the families making their way to Greensboro became the catalyst for the merger of the two efforts.

Brame is now the nonprofit’s director of operations.

Their work out of a nondescript warehouse on East Market Street is fueled by donations of cash and furniture — although it has other needs, too. Operating with a single truck, for example, means the group can’t simultaneously schedule deliveries and pickups.

Still, the fruits of the work are many. The group’s “No Child Left on the Floor” campaign, supported by businesses, individuals and charitable groups, has provided hundreds of new mattresses and frames annually to families — through referrals only from Guilford County Schools and social service agencies.

Perhaps because of the economy, the number of calls for help is climbing.

“It does something to you when you pull up to a home and from the faces you know that maybe you are keeping a child from sleeping on the floor,” Cook said.

While it needs more donations, the organization won’t take items that are falling apart.

“We’ll ask the donor, if you were going to a yard sale or Goodwill, would you buy that or put it in your house?” said Frye, who with the other movers will go into a property owner’s attic or basement to get the furniture.

Approved families select their furniture at the warehouse.

“They will pick between the red couch and the brown couch ... the sets of dining room furniture and between one floor lamp and another,” Brame said. “It’s what they want and not what we want to give them. There is dignity in that.”

Frye and Cook’s early morning bounty includes a dining room table with six chairs and a hutch.

“It looks like it came out of a showroom floor,” Frye said. “The wife wanted another one.”

Earlier, the truck stopped at Greensboro College for items students left behind.

“Our goal is to keep this out of the landfill,” said Matt Long, the college’s director of residential life, as he loaded fashionable lights and fans into the truck.

Items go to the Barnabas warehouse, where volunteers with specialities in upholstering, furniture repair, staining and cleaning prepare the furniture to return to the community.

“We always point out the flaws, and they do have their flaws, but it’s still very good furniture,” Brame said of his desire not to see people with the least means resort to high-interest credit for basic items they need. “And, if it keeps them off the rent-to-own scam, that’s going to help them in the long run.”