



# Richmond Furniture Scheme

*Your local furniture re-use charity*

---

## **Media Pack**

We've all heard of food poverty and fuel poverty, but what about furniture poverty? Imagine not having a bed for your child to sleep in or being unable to invite someone to your home because you have no chairs . . .

This is the reality for hundreds of thousands of families - up to 400,000<sup>1</sup> children in the UK don't even have a bed to sleep in according to the Buttle charity.

Richmond Furniture Scheme is a dynamic community charity which helps people who need it get good quality furniture at affordable prices. Our work enables people to create a comfortable home they can be proud of.

People leave our warehouse with a decent bed, a dining table for family meals and enough chairs to have friends round. The little things matter too, we supply glass vases, pretty pictures and colourful rugs - all of which turn a bare house into a cosy home.

Our work also has a massive positive impact on the environment, repairing and recycling furniture which probably otherwise would be thrown away. It also provides invaluable volunteering opportunities for the local community.

---

What we do	2
The impact of furniture poverty	3
How we fight furniture poverty	3
Number crunching	4
A personal account	4
Volunteering	5
Quotes & biographies	5

---

<sup>1</sup> Buttle UK 2018 estimate. [buttleuk.org](http://buttleuk.org)

Partners	6
Contact Information	7

## What we do

Richmond Furniture Scheme has been around in one form or another for more than thirty years. We're run by a small core staff and a fabulous army of more than 80 volunteers who upcycle, fix, market, sell and keep the whole show on the road.

Anyone can buy furniture from us in person and our rapidly growing online channel (<https://www.rfsonline.co.uk/shop>). All money raised supports our work fighting to end furniture poverty and promoting reuse. Grants and discounts for people on a very tight budget are provided for residents of Richmond and some residents of Wandsworth.

We have three main aims:

- Providing good quality affordable furniture for people who need it;
- Repairing, reusing and recycling furniture which otherwise may end up in landfill;
- Building a strong community of volunteers and harnessing links with other local groups working to protect the environment and combat poverty and isolation.

# The impact of furniture poverty

Furniture is expensive. The cost of furniture has increased by 42% since 2010, which combined with the cost of living crisis, makes buying essentials like a bed or a sofa beyond the reach of a growing number of families.

As the pressure group End Furniture Poverty has found, such poverty has wide ranging and potentially devastating effects on every aspect of people's lives:

- **Physical health**  
you are unable to get a good night's sleep without a decent bed.
- **Mental health**  
people feel stigma when they cannot afford basic essential furniture.
- **Financial wellbeing**  
trying to replace a broken bed or sofa can lead families into unmanageable debt as they feel forced to take out high credit loans which impact their ability to buy food, fuel or pay their rent.
- **Social wellbeing**  
you are far less likely to invite family, friends, or support workers into your home if you haven't got a chair for them to sit on.
- **Educational attainment**  
students without a desk are three times more likely to be at the bottom academically than at the top<sup>2</sup>.

## How we fight furniture poverty

We collect donations of furniture from around Richmond borough. They are then repaired, cleaned, upholstered and given a smart new paint job if needed. Then everything is sold at affordable prices in our warehouse or through our online shop - prices are kept low with discounts for people on certain benefits, care leavers, students, carers, refugees, NHS workers and those on basic state pension.

People who are in particular need - such those who were homeless or had to flee domestic violence - can apply for a grant so they can come and choose furniture from us for free.

---

<sup>2</sup> Trends in Mathematics and Science Study, also known as TIMSS, an international assessment administered every four years by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement quoted in article The Conversation by David Rutkowski, Indiana University and Dirk Hastedt, Indiana University.

# Number crunching

During the 2022-23 financial year, Richmond Furniture Scheme:

- Supported 413 households in need (158 with grants, 255 self-referred)
- Supplied furniture worth (at discount) £19,932 to customers with grants awarded by partner organisations to RFS customers in need
- Supplied 242 starter kit items to customers with grants
- Completed 1,743 collections and deliveries
- Saved 122 metric tonnes of furniture from landfill
- Benefitted from 108 volunteers who donated 6,165 hours of time
- Found new homes for 239 beds, 379 sofas, 528 tables and 1,127 chairs

UK furniture waste:

- 22 million pieces of furniture are discarded each year in the UK – the majority goes to landfill<sup>3</sup>
- 2.9 million mattresses are scrapped unnecessarily in the UK each year<sup>4</sup>

## A personal account

***This customer lost her home and had to move into temporary accommodation with her young son. She had beds but nothing else to make her new house feel like a home. She got a grant to spend with Richmond Furniture Scheme***

“At first, when you are in that situation you don’t understand that actually furniture makes a difference in your house – once I got the furniture from the scheme it filled my house with some identity. I can have some furniture that really belongs to me. It’s very important and it made me feel worthy.”

She went on to the Richmond Furniture Scheme’s online shop and picked out some shelves, drawers for her son’s room, a dining table and some armchairs: “I was able to choose things which were to my taste and then I could organise everything such as our clothes and belongings.

---

<sup>3</sup><https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/news/22-million-damaged-furniture-items-and-11000-bust-bicycles-thrown-away-each-year>

<sup>4</sup><https://www.nlwa.gov.uk/news/brits-bad-bed-habits-sending-29m-mattresses-year-early-end>

"I am still very attached to my old house because we lived there for years. I am still finding it difficult to let go of the past. But when you are able to organise your belongings with the furniture you can make your place feel like your own - it helps.

"I feel happier having people round to visit my house because now I have somewhere to sit and the table is helpful for my son's studies."

## Volunteering

The volunteers at RFS are the beating heart of the charity. They work in the warehouse looking after customers - some of whom might be feeling stressed and anxious. They learn how to reupholster saggy chairs giving them a bouncy new lease of life and get creative with paint finishes, turning that battered old table from plain old shabby to shabby chic. And in our repair shop (we did it first, BBC!) volunteers will find a way to fix that wonky hinge or cracked table top, saving more items from a one-way ticket to the tip.

*"Before I joined RFS I had pretty much no friends, no social contact and no purpose. All changed now. RFS pretty much changed my life"*

**Richmond Furniture Scheme Volunteer**

## Quotes & biographies

Richmond Furniture Scheme's CEO, Simon Westgarth, joined the charity in 2019, after a long career in business, including retail. He believes that furniture poverty doesn't get the attention it deserves:

*"Furniture poverty is a big problem. We often take somewhere to sit, sleep, store items etc for granted, but when you have little or nothing, it can be a costly mountain to climb to accumulate things that you can call your own.*

*"Furniture reuse provides a viable option for many to access furniture in a free or affordable way and, what's more, you get a choice - you're not just given any old stuff.*

*"I like the fact that not only does our scheme help alleviate poverty where it matters, but it also does it in a sustainable way. At the same time it also provides a fantastic array of opportunities for volunteering and helps foster and strengthen community spirit.*

*“I like to make it as inclusive as possible and we stick by our values of being kind, being bold and being creative.”*

**Richmond Furniture Scheme CEO Simon Westgarth**

---

*“It should be a source of immense shame that we have children sleeping in a bath, on the floor, or sharing beds. As a society, we are failing our children and hampering their futures. And as the cost of living crisis continues to hit, with households across the UK facing double digit inflation, this problem is only going to get worse.”*

**Catherine McKinnell MP during parliamentary debate on bed poverty.**

## Partners

To achieve our charity aims, RFS builds strong relationships with local and national organisations including:

- Richmond Borough Council
- Richmond Parish Lands Charity
- Barnes Fund
- Hampton Fund
- St Margaret’s Church of Scotland
- Inquilab Housing Association
- Richmond Council Local Assistance Scheme
- Richmond Housing Partnership
- SPEAR
- St Christopher’s Fellowship
- The Vineyard Project
- Richmond Housing Partnership
- Wandsworth Borough Council

These are the organisations which help us achieve our core aim of relieving furniture poverty by providing grants to those that need it.

We work with other local and national organisations and charities to protect the environment, build community and assist in sharing skills and knowledge. Not to mention our work experience and mentoring programmes where we partner with local schools, colleges and universities.

These include:

- The Reuse Network
- Shepherd's Star
- Ruils
- GoodGym
- The Hygiene Bank
- Castlenau Community Centre
- Richmond College

## Contact Information

For more information contact:

Simon Westgarth [simon.westgarth@rfsonline.co.uk](mailto:simon.westgarth@rfsonline.co.uk)  
0208 755 4665

Richmond Furniture Scheme  
1a Fortescue Avenue  
Twickenham  
Middlesex  
TW2 5LS

[www.rfsonline.co.uk](http://www.rfsonline.co.uk)  
[admin@rfsonline.co.uk](mailto:admin@rfsonline.co.uk)