

Providing Basic Household Furnishings

Most people don't plan on going to jail or prison. It happens suddenly with no opportunity to tie up financial affairs or secure personal belongings. Family and friends struggle to manage whatever is left behind. In most cases, the prisoner's possessions are given away, sold to pay bills, or simply abandoned.

Coming out of prison, the ex-prisoner is faced with the task of starting over with nothing. Only now, he or she also has no job and no money. Although reentry ministry volunteers may help the ex-prisoner find housing, there will also be a huge need for basic household furnishings.

Helping an ex-prisoner set up house is an ideal short-term ministry project for Sunday School classes, men's and women's groups, or anyone with the gift of compassionate service. The goal is to show the love of Christ by collecting donated household furnishings, then providing these items to ex-prisoners and their families as needs arise.

How to Get Started:

1. Talk with your pastor and/or church leadership about how you would like to help ex-prisoners who need basic household furnishings.
2. With approval from your church, select a core group of volunteers who have a vision for this ministry.
3. Research how other churches and nonprofit organizations operate similar ministries.
4. Look carefully at the potential assets you have for starting this ministry (number of volunteers, trucks to move furniture, space for storage, etc.)
5. Work together to set general operational guidelines, such as the types of donated furnishings that will be accepted, who will be eligible to receive assistance, how much assistance will be provided, what days/times to be open or if help is by appointment only, etc.
6. Evaluate available space for operating this ministry and determine what fix-ups might be necessary.
7. Gather equipment such as furniture dollies, tools, large plastic bins for storing soft goods such as bed linens, tables, chairs, a computer, etc.
8. Set up a system for collecting furniture and household goods. This could be anything from putting a big box in the church foyer for collecting dishes and cookware to scheduling volunteers with trucks to pick up donated furniture.
9. As all the donations come in, set up an inventory system to maintain an ongoing count of what items are currently available for distribution.
10. Enlist additional volunteers who will carry out the ongoing operations, making sure they understand and will follow the established procedures for distributing household goods.



Most furniture ministries start out with a small storage area and the goal of helping only a few families. Some grow to be extremely large with a whole warehouse of furniture and an outreach to hundreds of

people. There is truly no limit to the impact a household furnishings ministries can have in alleviating pain and despair.

Reading how some larger furniture ministries operate will provide more ideas on how to get started. Here are two ministries with very helpful websites:

- Barnabas Furniture Ministry (www.thebarnabasnetwork.org) in Greensboro, NC
- Church of the Resurrection Furnishings Ministry (www.cor.org/index.php?id=8625) in Leawood, KS

Contact your local Prison Fellowship staff at 800-251-7411 for help assessing the need for a household furnishings ministry in your community and to connect with other churches and organizations that may assist.

