



www.bergenvolunteers.org/making-it-home

What is Making-It-Home?

Making-It-Home – a program of Bergen Volunteers – works with businesses, residents, government, and nonprofit agencies in Bergen County to bring furniture to formerly homeless, disabled, and low-income families moving from emergency shelters to new but unfurnished apartments.

Who Are Your Clients?

Our clients have experienced a life-changing event which left them without permanent housing. Many are disabled, some are seniors, and some are families. More than half of our clients are veterans. With a number of supports now in place, they are ready to live independently and move from emergency shelters to new, but unfurnished, apartments. But they need basic furniture to help make their empty apartments feel like home.

How Do You Determine Who Gets the Furniture?

Each month, Making-It-Home receives referrals from case managers at local participating agencies who verify low-income clients that qualify for our services. Our primary collaborations are with Bergen County's Housing, Health and Human Services Center, the Bergen County Division of Veteran Services, Advance Housing, Care Plus, HUD-VASH, Catholic Charities, Community Hope, and the Center for Hope and Safety which provides assistance to victims of domestic violence. We typically connect with case managers to discuss the referrals, and also meet with our clients in their new apartments to hear their "wish list" and take the appropriate measurements.

Where Do You Get the Furniture?

We currently pick up new and gently-used furniture in Bergen County only. Furniture is donated by a variety of sources: Bergen County residents who are downsizing, moving, redecorating or cleaning out the home of a loved one; professional organizers or realtors who are assisting their clients; clean-out companies that acquire quality furniture during a service call; movers who obtain unwanted pieces after a move.

What Items Do You Need?

Most of our clients move into small studio or one-bedroom apartments and need basic furniture on which to sit or eat, and storage pieces for clothing. We always need small kitchen tables and chairs, dressers, night tables, small sofas or love seats, club chairs, recliners, end tables, coffee tables, TV stands, and lamps. All pieces must be in excellent condition without tears, stains, or damage.

Do You Take Other Household Items, Mattresses/Beds or Appliances?

No. We are unable to accept housewares, appliances, linens, mattresses, bed frames or headboards or electronics. We have limited storage space and therefore focus on the items most needed by our clients and most difficult for them to obtain.

How Can I Donate Furniture?

The most efficient way to inquire about donating furniture is to send an email to Cynthia at cmassarsky@bergenvolunteers.org. Please include good photos of your items, measurements of any sofas and dining tables, the address where the furniture is located, your phone, and time frame for pick-up. Then we'll be able to determine if the pieces are appropriate for our clients and schedule a pick-up date (Monday-Friday only, no weekends). Please allow sufficient time for pick-up (ideally 2 to 3 weeks). Staff is present at each pick-up and records the information necessary to provide a receipt for tax purposes.

Where Do You Keep Your Donations?

Making-It-Home rents storage space at a discount from Westy Self Storage in Hackensack. We keep items there until they are identified for a particular client.

Who Moves the Furniture?

Volunteers are the sole source of muscle to transport furniture from donors and to our clients. We have strong relationships with various organizations – fire departments in Bergen County who assist us during their “off duty” hours, service clubs, and moving companies who make themselves available when needed. Several clients who have received furniture from us and are physically able to “pay-it-forward” help as well. Other volunteers available during weekdays also lend a hand – a father/son team with a pick-up truck, a retired traffic officer, a college student wanting to “give back” when he doesn’t have classes scheduled, a volunteer firefighter, a person willing to help while looking for a new job. If you are able to lift heavy furniture, please call and we will include you on our list of volunteers!

Why Is Making-It-Home Important?

Making-It-Home provides a critical missing “piece” for low-income individuals, children, and families who are leaving emergency shelters, further enabling them to live in a safe environment that improves their quality of life and ability to achieve greater self-sufficiency and a brighter future. The program ensures that those who are ready to make a fresh start are able to move into their new apartments knowing they will have basic furniture on which to sleep, sit, and eat. This essential ingredient helps complete the picture and “make their house a home.” It provides a safe, healthy and comfortable home environment that encourages people to secure and hold down a job, their children to achieve in school, and individuals and families to thrive. This security reduces the recurrence of homelessness.

Another unique aspect of our model lies in the way we are working together to solve not only the problems related to housing and homelessness, but also environmental concerns about the disposing of unwanted furniture into our landfills. Our constellation of partners includes residents who seek to recycle their unwanted furniture and, most important, give it to people who can truly benefit. In the same fashion, clean out services do their part for the environment by alerting us to furniture they’ve acquired for disposal and volunteering their time to deliver it to our warehouse.

How Did Making-It-Home Get Started?

Making-It-Home began as a small pilot project. In 2014, Making-It-Home founder, Cynthia Massarsky, worked with Rebuilding Together and Bob's Discount Furniture to furnish a living and dining room for a family in Moonachie whose home had been destroyed by Super Storm Sandy. In 2015, she worked with Bergen County's United Way to create and run a town-wide fundraising campaign, which included a one-of-a-kind online gift registry, and to furnish the living areas in six apartments and a community room in Tenafly for people with developmental disabilities. In the spring of 2016, Making-It-Home became an official program of Bergen Volunteers.

Who Leads the Program?

Cynthia Massarsky runs the Making-It-Home program. She has a long history of work at the intersection of the public and private sectors, where she has been at the forefront of the social enterprise, entrepreneurship, and CSR movement for nearly 40 years.

For more information about donating furniture, helping us transport furniture, joining our corporate employee volunteer program, or becoming a Making-It-Home sponsor, please call us at 201.289.8444 or email Cynthia at cmassarsky@bergenvolunteers.org.