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PLUGGED IN - NANCY PUFFER

Nancy Puffer writes the Around Tempe column

Charity eases transition out of homelessness - Around Tempe for 12/24/11

Just over a year ago Robin Manelis and her friends Alice Vietze and Jeanie Ghan started a new Tempe charity called Furnishing Hope, a non-profit born out of a desire to help people transitioning out of homelessness with donated [furniture](#) and household items. Since then, their vision for positive change has blossomed and the three have been busier than ever.

"Furnishing Hope was incorporated as a nonprofit Nov 16, 2010. We became a 501c (3) organization and an Arizona working poor tax credit qualifying organization in January 2011. To date we've helped to furnish 113 places," explained Manelis.

Besides providing furniture and household items, Furnishing Hope also delivers food donated by Target seven days a week to people in need with their mobile food pantry and provides limited assistance with things like bus passes, phone cards and other items.

Browsing through their website, page after page of compelling photos and accounts of people settling into their new homes with donated beds, [linens](#), cookware and sofas provides just a small snapshot of what they do each week.

"We've accomplished so much more than we ever dreamed possible. We receive so much support from the community in terms of donations and we have a great team of volunteers. The recipients we help are always very thankful," said Manelis.

Among those recipients is Carl Rogers, who found himself homeless in 2006. With help from a handful of local support programs, he was eventually able to get into Tempe's Permanent Supportive Housing Program, designed to help transition chronically homeless individuals into 35 rental units around the city. In supporting that program as a part of Urban Outreach, Manelis saw the need for donated furnishings; without it, Rogers felt the program would fall short.

"Basically they were just going to pay our rents (and) stick us in an empty [apartment](#)," said Rogers, "But Robin said people aren't going to stay there in their house if they don't have any furniture to sit on. So she took the initiative and did a lot of that, and it was a good thing for her to do," Rogers said.

He still uses most of the donated items he received when he first moved in.

"It was nice, I could see how it was benefitting a lot of people who didn't have anything," he said.

Manelis quickly discovered the need didn't stop there.

"The idea of Furnishing Hope came from the work we did moving in the individuals in the housing pilot. We saw that there was a need for what we were doing. There are four individuals that are in the supportive housing program that volunteer regularly with Furnishing Hope," she said.

Rogers is one of those volunteers.

Doug Entrican is another client who thrived with the help and donations he received from Furnishing Hope.

"I was homeless for like 15 years. I was a drug addict. I was basically killing myself," said Entrican. "About four years ago I decided I'd had enough. I spent about a year trying to get in transition, get myself clean. And then I spent a year at IHHELP (Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program) and that's where I met Robin at. Robin just kind of started being my friend and helping me with things."

But both Entrican and Manelis eventually left IHHELP.

"At that time, Robin rented me a motel room and she said she had faith in me. She said I should go down and volunteer for Urban Outreach, so I did that for a month, and then they decided that the program runs much better

with me so they hired me; she seemed to know they would. I've been working there ever since for the last two years. I just recently started working at the church-synagogue where Robin goes to temple at. She also got me that job," said Entrican.

Looking back on his homeless days, Entrican now says "that bridge has been burned" and he's grateful not just for the furniture he received from Manelis and her team, but for the friendship.

"That's part of this thing that's fun for me is every single week, every single recipient is different," said Manelis, "And it's fun. We're doing the fun part, because when people come to us, they've just got an apartment. What are we doing? We're giving them furniture. So it's all fun for us, they're all happy when they come to the storage units."

Furnishing Hope now has three storage units to store donations. Once clients have applied, been interviewed and approved, they walk through the units and pick out their furnishings to be delivered by volunteers.

"One of them is set up with shelves and we have sheets on the [shelves](#) and dishes. We get things that are donated and I have volunteers that will take the sheets home and wash them and fold them neatly with bows and label everything. It's so amazing," said Manelis, who has no paid staff but relies on about ten regular volunteers. All of their funding currently comes from private donors.

As for the future, Manelis said calls are increasing as word gets out about her charity and the specific niche they fill. And while she says she cannot guarantee her clients' success, she can offer them hope and help for a fresh start.

"Out of the hundred and something people we've moved in, are they probably still housed? I'm sure not all of them. We hope. We wish them the best. And at least that's one worry that they won't have," she said.

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