



# Niagara Furniture Bank's Impact on Clients

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# 1 Summary

## ABOUT NIAGARA FURNITURE BANK

Niagara Furniture Bank collects gently used home furnishing in order to provide individuals and families in Niagara Region with the beds, tables, chairs and other furnishings that turn “shelters” into “homes”.

Niagara Furniture Bank uses a social enterprise model; picking-up used furniture from individuals and businesses for a fee and being paid by Ontario Works to provide furniture to clients in need.

Niagara Furniture Bank serves over 500 individuals/families per year.



To learn more visit: [niagarafurniturebank.com](http://niagarafurniturebank.com)

## LOCAL POVERTY REDUCTION FUND EVALUATION



In 2018, Niagara Furniture Bank obtained a Local Poverty Reduction Fund Grant to measure its impact on housing stability and poverty reduction. The goal was to contribute to the body of evidence of what works to reduce poverty and to support the spread of the Furniture Bank model.

To lead the evaluation, Niagara Furniture Bank hired a Credential Evaluator: Paul Bakker of Social Impact Squared.

## WHAT CLIENTS SAID

- From July 2018 to Oct. 2019, a Social Impact Squared Associate completed follow-up phone surveys with 118 clients between 1 and 3 months after they received their furniture from Niagara Furniture Bank.
- The follow-up surveys explored how obtaining adequate furnishings from the Niagara Furniture Bank impacted clients' various assets.
- What clients said is summarized on the next page. They reported gaining many assets that can assist with staying housed and achieving sustainable livelihoods.

## CONNECTIONS



***"I didn't have much furniture. So, I would feel embarrassed, so I would not want to have people over and not want to socialize with people, which again would change my mood and negatively affect me."***

68% of clients reported that they would not or maybe would not be able to comfortably spend time with family or friends without the items they received.

Some clients also said:

- Their children would not be able to live with them without the furniture.
- They would not have left their previous negative domestic relationships if they were unable to obtain furniture.
- Their kitchen table helped them have dinner together.

## BASIC NEEDS



Many clients reported an increased ability to purchase other basic need items like food because they did not have to spend money on furniture.

As noted below, the furniture also helped some clients get or maintain a job, which increases income and their ability to meet their basic needs.

***"I definitely saved a couple hundred bucks, I was able to pay a bill instead of buying a kitchen table and so I was able to stay ahead on my bills."***

***"Harder struggle to get what I need to get, because I would not have been able to afford as much food with having to buy furniture on my own."***

## HEALTH



31% of clients said they received a bed from Niagara Furniture Bank. Of those clients:

- 75% reported that the bed resulted in them being less tired.
- 86% reported that the bed resulted in them sleeping better.

Clients also noted being in less pain.

Many clients reported being less stressed, anxious, or worried because of having the furniture, and some also said they felt less depressed/more happy.

***"I would have been so grumpy from lack of sleep so I probably would have taken it out on the kids, things like that. Just be grumpy all day and it's not their fault."***

***Previously, "my daughter was crying in pain from her back and having to go to school and work."***

***"I have anxiety and depression so if I did not have any furniture it would have enhanced it and especially if my daughter did not have anything."***

## SENSE OF SELF



Some clients also reported that receiving the furniture improved their self-worth

***"When you are trying to make a home, the furniture is what makes the home and allows you to feel good about yourself and feeling that you actually have something that looks decent."***

## SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY



During the previous month:

- 25% of clients were looking for a job.
- 18% worked a job.
- 14% attended school/training.

About a third of those clients said the items they received helped them do those activities.

42% of clients reported that they would not be able to comfortably complete desk-work such as homework, paying bills, filling out forms, or using a computer without the items they received.

***"It definitely made my mental health better, and allowed me to have a better night's rest, and allowed me to have more energy, which allowed me to get to work and perform well at work."***

***"Lack of sleep and stress would have kept me from work without the furniture."***

***"I wasn't really going to school because I wasn't doing my homework and getting the desk and stuff really helped motivate me to do that."***

## 2 About Niagara Furniture Bank

This report reviews the interim results of the evaluation of Niagara Furniture Banks' impact on their clients' housing stability.

Niagara Furniture Bank (NFB) uses a social enterprise approach to improve clients' housing quality and stability. NFB collects gently used furniture from private homes and businesses for a fee, and then delivers the furnishings to individuals who can access housing but cannot afford to furnish their homes.

Niagara Furniture Bank operates throughout the Niagara Region. They primarily serve Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients, with a minority of clients coming from referrals from other agencies or from a few walk-ins. NFB's clients are setting up a new home, are in need of new furniture, but do not have the resources to purchase items on their own.

NFB serves over 500 individuals/clients per year.

## 3 Evaluation Methods

This report presents NFB's clients' descriptions of the ways NFB impacts their assets (i.e. basic needs, mental health, employment income, social connections, etc.), which can assist with them staying housed. To obtain clients' descriptions, we completed follow-up surveys with 118 clients.

The following outlines the survey process in more detail:

- After the NFB Administrator phoned clients to schedule their furniture delivery, the Administrator asked clients if they were willing to take part in the evaluation. Clients were informed that taking part in the evaluation included **completing a survey at the end of the phone call, sharing their referral data with the evaluation team, and then completing a follow-up phone survey with the evaluation team.** Sometimes, the NFB administrator called a client back at a later date to complete the initial survey.
- While testing the initial survey with clients, we found that many of NFB's clients had very low English skills and were not able to accurately understand and answer the closed-ended quantitative survey questions. The survey was redesigned to make it easier to answer, but some clients still have trouble with even basic English. Unfortunately, the evaluation did not budget for translators. In order to ensure the accuracy of the quantitative survey results, the evaluation excludes the majority of NFB clients that did not have the English skills required for the survey.<sup>1</sup> In total, **from May 25, 2018 to Aug. 21, 2019**, the NFB administrator provided the evaluation team with both **referral application data and completed initial surveys for 225 clients.**
- The evaluation team attempted to complete the follow-up phone surveys with clients starting one month after their furniture was delivered. Initial attempts to contact clients

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<sup>1</sup> One client used a family member as a translator to complete the initial and follow-up surveys.

were done by phone. When clients could not be contacted by phone, the evaluation team also attempted to contact clients by mail or email (for clients that provided that information). Most often it took multiple tries before successfully connecting with clients, resulting in the follow-up surveys being **completed between one and three months after their furniture was delivered**. In total, the evaluation team completed **118 follow-up surveys, which is 52% of the clients that agreed to take part in the evaluation**.

- The initial and follow-up surveys are available upon request.

## 4 Strengths and Limitations

As noted, the survey data excludes the majority of NFB clients that were unable to understand basic English. Also, referral data for three clients that completed the intake surveys could not be found in NFB's database. We choose to not include those clients' intake or follow-up surveys. We do not know if the clients not included in the follow-up sample would report greater or fewer impacts of receiving furniture from NFB.

The evaluation team reviewed the data received from NFB and found errors. Most of the errors were resolved by reviewing the data in NFB's database. However, we found inconsistencies with the number of furniture items reported in NFB's database and what clients reported in their follow-up surveys. Given the inconsistencies, we are unable to examine client outcomes by the amount and/or type of furniture items received. Some other inconsistencies and errors were observed with things like clients' age, gender, and number of people in the household, but those errors occurred about five percent of the time or less, which means those errors will not meaningfully or significantly affect results.

It seems that **clients that completed the follow-up surveys reasonably represent typical NFB clients with basic or better English skills**. We found no significant differences between clients that did or did not complete the follow-up surveys based on the following characteristics:

- Age
- Sex
- Number of children or youth in their households
- Number of adults or seniors in their households
- Whether they immigrated to Canada in the last five years
- Ethnicity
- Housing situation before transitioning and needing furniture.
- How satisfied clients were with their new housing situations.



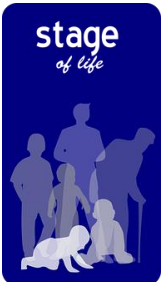












**The client follow-up survey results present a reasonably accurate description of what NFB clients believe to be the benefits of receiving furniture from NFB.** Of course, those beliefs are unlikely to be 100% accurate. In order to assess the impacts of receiving the furniture, clients need to imagine what their lives would be like if they did not use NFB. That can be difficult to do, and clients may imagine that things would be different than

what they really would have been. While we cannot assume that clients' assessments to be 100% accurate, they do align with approaches like Housing First, whose effectiveness is well documented and supported by ample evidence (Woodhall-Melnik & Dunn, 2016).

## 5 Findings

### 5.1 Clients Served

The following client characteristics are for the 225 clients that provided both referral forms and completed initial surveys.

 52% female	 48% male
 Range from 20 to 66 years old, with an average age of 39	 Average household size is 2. 83% had just 1 adult. 40% had children
 71% identified with North American, European, or White backgrounds.	 About 31% immigrated in the last 5 years. <sup>2</sup>
 29% identified with non-white backgrounds. That percentage does not include clients whose English skills did not enable them to complete the intake survey.	
<div>     </div> <b>Housing transition paths:</b> 36% went from renting to renting. <div>     </div> 23% went from shelters to renting.	

<sup>2</sup> 7.6% missing data.

21% went from staying with friends or family without paying rent to renting.

12% went from transitional housing to renting.

8% experienced other transitions

## 5.2 Service Quality

### NFB Helps Meet Most Clients' Needs

The majority of clients were grateful for the items and seemed to be happy with the quality of both the furniture and the service. On the follow-up survey, **71% of clients reported that the furniture in their current housing situation met their needs.** Some clients reported receiving all of the items they asked for and with high quality, *“everything is amazing that I received - really top notch stuff!”* and *“The service was really good and I got all of the items that I wanted and I would recommend this to other people.”* When asked for additional feedback, many clients reiterated how grateful they were for the furniture:

*“I am just very grateful for the furniture bank. They are a great asset to the community - it’s a great place for people who throw away their furniture to give it to the less fortunate, it’s a great organization in my opinion.”*

Other clients said, *“I appreciate you providing me with furniture, it was hard times and I didn't have any money. So, now I feel like my life is going in a straight line,”* and *“I'm really pleased with the service, and thankful that you guys were able to help me. I am a newcomer to the country and so this really helped me. I am over the moon.”* A few clients also commented on the quality of the staff at the Niagara Furniture Bank: *“it was amazing. The gentlemen were polite and courteous. It can be scary opening door to strangers, but it was very smooth and comfortable,”* and *“it was a really nice service. The gentlemen who dropped off the furniture were very kind. They made a transition that was very difficult for me very pleasant.”*

Of clients that completed a follow-up survey and received a bed for themselves (36):

- 72% said the bed was comfortable.
- 22% said the bed was sort of comfortable.

### Quality Issues

A little more than a third of clients expressed some level of dissatisfaction with NFB products or services. In order of frequency, their comments related to:

#### **Quality of Furniture Received**

The most common negative feedback received from clients was about the quality of the furniture, whether it be too old, unclean, or just unusable. For example:

- *“I will say that I unfortunately was not able to use the mattress that I was provided because my landlord would not let me bring it into my building because it was so old.”*
- Another client explained that they *“still don't have a proper kitchen table. The furniture bank one was too large for the space. I asked for a small table. I received a couch but it was broken. Burn holes too. Better than before, but don't know what kind of stuff they get there. I wouldn't pay to get the same couch I just got.”*

Clients also reflected on how receiving poor quality furniture can affect their wellbeing. For example, one client said *“make sure the furniture you are giving is decent. I don't think anyone would want the items I sent back. It seemed to be bed bug infested. I think that can make someone feel worse about themselves and their home.”*

Since receiving this feedback from the client surveys, NFB reports that they are working to ensure they provide only quality items clients will be happy to have.

### **Not Receiving Desired Items**

Many clients complained about not receiving the items they had requested, typically these complaints were about the type or quantity of items. For example, *“...we did not receive the items we asked for. We only received one couch, and we asked for many more items, so we are very disappointed,”* and *“I only received a small amount of items that I had on my list.”*

Clients often contextualized their complaints with being grateful for the items they did receive:

*Well, I was very grateful for the couch and coffee table and kitchen table. However, there were items on the list that I did not receive because the third-party agency that made the request neglected to put them in, and some items through sorting within the warehouse, such as bed sheets, I did not get them. Instead, I got a bag of 25 pillowcases, but I could not give them away because they were stained.*

Since receiving this feedback, NFB has established a performance target of being able to supply at least 85% of the items that clients request at part of their referral, and are working on developing data processing and reporting systems to help them track their performance in this area.

### **Curb-Side Delivery**

Another common negative feedback that clients provided related to curb-side delivery. Many clients noted living in neighbourhoods where it is not safe to leave furniture outside, as one client explained, *“people who use the NFB services probably don't live in a nice area. They live in a ghetto, and if they just leave it in the parking lot, its not going to be there when you get home.”* Some other clients noted being single and not being physically able to move the items into their homes themselves and not being able to find free help or afford to pay for help. For example:

*“The only downfall I had was not having the gentleman bring the furniture inside. The curb-side drop off is absolutely crazy. When I got my bedroom,*

*couch, and chair delivered, I was here by myself, and it was so heavy, and it started to rain that day, and so I had to eventually get rid of the couch and the chair as it was soaked. I am a single mom so that was very inconvenient for me, I just moved from Toronto and did not have any friends to help me, it was very inconvenient.”*

Another client explained, *“the only thing that might have helped a bit better was that they could only bring the furniture curb-side and I had a hard time finding anyone to help, and because of my health, I could not do it on my own. So, if they could have helped that would have been great.”* Additionally:

*“Something I don't like about that is they leave things curb-side and don't bring it inside, and that cost me a lot of money. \$60. My last \$60 that I had. I think they should complete the job and be able to bring it inside. Especially when it is snowing and the furniture is sitting out there. That makes me sad.”*

Since receiving this feedback, NFB has began bringing furniture into people’s homes when they are physically unable to do it themselves.

### **Lack of Client Engagement in Furniture Selection**

Many of the clients that reported poor quality of furniture or not receiving their desired items suggested that they should be more involved in the furniture selection process. For example:

*“we received a sofa that was really unusable and somehow I am thinking if it can be done differently, like going to the bank and selecting the furniture that works best for you because they just deliver it to you, and you can't return it, and so it could have been more helpful if it had been done differently.”*

Improving communication between the NFB and their clients could potentially improve their service, *“one of the dressers I received for my daughter's room fell apart when she opened it and it almost injured her. It would be nice to have a phone call if they don't have the stuff you asked for instead of just not showing up with half of the stuff.”* Another client stated, *“you should be able to return it if you don't like the furniture because they refused it.”*

### **Satisfaction with Furniture by Client Characteristics**

We also looked at if certain types of clients were more likely to report that their current furniture met their needs. Table 1 shows that larger households, females, newer immigrants, and those that were previously living in situations where they were unlikely to own furniture were less likely to report that their furniture met their needs. However, none of those differences were statistically significant; that is, there is a reasonable chance that the differences are a result of random measurement or sampling error. However, all of the differences are in the direction that we would expect. NFB may want to conduct their own quick follow-up calls and continue to track client satisfaction by client characteristics.

**Table 1: Whether Furniture Meets Clients' Needs at Follow-up by Client Characteristics**

Domain	Categories	% that Report that Furniture Meets their Needs	% Chance there is Actually no Real Difference <sup>3</sup>
Gender	Male (N = 53)	76%	30%
	Female (N = 63)	67%	
# of Adults in Household	1 (N = 96)	72%	54%
	More than 1 (N = 20)	65%	
Kids in Household	No (N = 73)	75%	15%
	Yes (N = 43)	63%	
Immigrated in Last 5 Years	No (N = 78)	74%	18%
	Yes (N = 34)	62%	
Housing Situation Before Making a Transition	Owned home, renting, staying at a transitional housing unit (N = 61)	75%	21%
	Staying with friends or family, staying at a shelter, staying in place not meant for regular housing (N = 54)	65%	

## 5.3 Impact on Sustainable Livelihood Assets

The theory of how NFB supports housing stability fits with Housing First<sup>4</sup> and Sustainable Livelihoods<sup>5</sup> models. Providing adequate housing, which includes adequate furnishings, better enables individuals to address other asset gaps and challenges and move closer to being able to sustain or build their assets, including housing. Further, building certain assets helps people with building other assets. For example, a client explained how receiving furniture saved them time which enabled them to focus at work and have consistent income to cover their basic needs: *“just the fact that I would have had to spend my time looking for furniture and now that I don't have to it is pretty easy to go to work.”* Similarly, a client described how receiving furniture *“also allowed me to have company over which is good for anyone's mental health.”* Another client stated, *“I think having the furniture bank helps people get back on their feet again and helps people have a better outlook on life. It makes your future look brighter because it gives you the helping hand that you need.”* That sense of hope can help in their efforts to build many other assets and work towards achieving a sustainable livelihood.

**Clients' follow-up survey responses support that providing good quality furnishings to those that can access housing but not furnishings helps them in a number of asset areas.** Figure 1 on the next page provides a high-level summary of the various ways the NFB helps clients improve their assets.

<sup>3</sup> Assuming random error; using Chi-squared test. None of the differences are significant at the 0.05 level.

<sup>4</sup> Gaetz, S., Scott, F. & Gulliver, T. (2013) “Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness.” Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press.

<sup>5</sup>Tamarack. “The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework.”

<http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/sustainable-livelihoods-framework>

Figure 1: NFB Impact Asset Map

# NIAGARA FURNITURE BANK

## ASSET MAP

### CONNECTIONS

Maintaining and improving social connections.

According to clients, having furniture helps by:

- Allowing them to comfortably spend time with family and friends
- Making visitation with their children possible
- Providing places for them to cook and eat together
- Decreasing the strain on their personal relationships



### MONEY & BASIC NEEDS

Healthy eating habits and organization of their home.

According to clients, having furniture helps by:



- Allowing them to comfortably prepare and eat meals
- Saving them money so they can purchase food or healthier food options
- Allowing them to keep their possessions/home clean and organized
- Providing income from increased ability to work

### HEALTH

Improving sleep and mental health.

According to clients, having furniture helps by:

- Improving the quality of their sleep
- Preventing stress, worry, anxiety, and depression
- Reducing physical pain
- Providing opportunities for happiness



### SENSE OF SELF



According to a few clients, having furniture helps by increasing their sense of confidence and improving their overall mood.

### SKILLS & EMPLOYABILITY

Improved ability to obtain or maintain a job or go to school.

According to clients, having furniture helps by:

- Having a place to study or complete desk work
- Improving sleep
- Improving ability to focus



### 5.3.1 Connections



Approximately half of the follow-up survey clients confirmed that receiving furnishings from NFB helped them develop and maintain social connections because they are better able to host guests. 48% of NFB clients reported that they would not and 20% reported that they maybe would not be able to comfortably spend time with family or friends without the items from the furniture bank.

In addition to their ability to host people, a couple of clients reported that receiving furniture from NFB prevented them from having to ask their family for additional funds or for furniture items, which would put a strain on those relationships.

Example client comments include:

- *“Yes, it is different because I can invite my niece and my sister over, and we have a chance to share together, because we now have the furniture to allow us to sit together.”*
- *“Absolutely, having furniture allows me to have people over. We have a kitchen table to sit at, and chat, and share a meal, and a couch to watch TV together now.”*
- *“Yes probably, I would not have been able to invite my mother over for coffee, and my sister, and her baby, cause now I have a couch.”*
- *“Yes definitely, well, for example, I didn't have much furniture, so I would feel embarrassed, so I would not want to have people over and not want to socialize with people, which again would change my mood and negatively affect me. So, it definitely has changed aspects of my daily living.”*
- *“Yes, I would have had to ask them for stuff, which would have been uncomfortable.”*
- *“Yes, it would be different. My interactions would be about trying to get furniture from my friends and family.”*

Having furniture and maintaining housing also allowed clients to gain custody of their children and remove themselves from negative social connections. Example client comments include:

- *“If I didn't have anything, I would not have my place. They would have sent me back to transitional housing, and I would not have had my kids.”*
- *“In a good way, now I don't have to worry about it, and it also helped me get custody of my daughter, because I had the things that I needed to have her live with me.”*
- *“I would have lost the place because they would have taken my kids away from me, because the place would not have been suitable for kids.”*
- *“Relocated due to a domestic. Wouldn't have been able to do it if wasn't for furniture bank.”*

Due to pots, pans, and kitchen tables, as well as other kitchen items that NFB supplied, clients are able to cook and eat together with their family and friends. 44% of NFB clients reported that

they would not and 14% reported that they maybe would not be able to comfortably prepare and eat meals without the items from the furniture bank. Example client comments include:

- *“I also would not have been able to cook because they gave me pots and pans and a microwave, without the help from the furniture bank I would be screwed.”*
- *“I would be ordering take out food all of the time, because I would not have anything to cook on or eat from.”*
- *“Maybe yes, now I can use my plates and I have a cooker that I can cook in, and if I did not receive these items, it would not have been easy to cook for me and my kids, and its nice to be able to cook them healthy foods.”*
- *“We would not have been able to eat around the kitchen table together, because we received a kitchen table from the bank.”*
- *“Yes, because we got a dining room table, so now it is much easier to all sit, and talk, and eat dinner together instead of sitting all over the place.”*



### 5.3.2 Money & Basic Needs

We believed that if clients did not use NFB, the pressure of needing to spend more money on furniture may have resulted in clients buying less clothes, internet access, phone access, heating, electricity, etc. or even not paying the next months' rent. Many clients did report that without NFB they would have less money, because they would have had to buy their own furniture items.

The follow-up survey asked if the food they ate would be different if they did not get items from the furniture bank, and 40% said it would be different. Often, those clients said that if they had to purchase their own furniture, they would not have had enough money to buy food. Some clients said:

- *“Probably [wouldn't have been able to] stay in my apartment to be honest.”*
- *“I definitely saved a couple hundred bucks. I was able to pay a bill instead of buying a kitchen table, and so I was able to stay ahead on my bills.”*
- *“If I had to put out money for the necessary furniture, I would not have had money, and I would have had to go to community care and hope for the best, so I would not have been able to pay for food.”*
- *“Well I would have probably had to buy furniture which would have taken money from that and not towards food.”*
- *“Harder struggle to get what I need to get, because I would not have been able to afford as much food with having to buy furniture on my own.”*

Those clients also often reported that the items they gained helped them buy and prepare healthier food options. Some of them said:

- *“Definitely, well, right now we are actually just buying a lot of protein and vegetables, and I think we would have had to buy like “cup of noodles” if we did not get donations.”*
- *“It would have been different, I would be ordering take out food all of the time because I would not have anything to cook on or eat from.”*
- *“Yes, I was able to put money towards food that I would have had to put towards furniture, so I was able to afford better quality food that was more healthy.”*
- *“Now I can use my plates, and I have a cooker that I can cook in, and if I did not receive these items, it would not have been easy to cook for me and my kids, and its nice to be able to cook them healthy foods.”*

In addition to money and food, a few clients noted that the furniture helped them keep their possessions/home clean and organized. For example:

- *“I got a dresser and stuff like that, and it was hard to keep my room clean without it, and that was taking a toll on my mental health.”*
- *“It affected me because it allowed me to get cleaned up and organized, and my daughter also had to go to school during the summer season, so with them bringing her a bed and desk she was able to get her things together. The last apartment was 6 months of hell, so being able to get out of there and have furniture it definitely made a big difference, because I would still be picking up little things at a time, because I would not have afforded getting all the things at once so getting it all at once was very helpful.”*

As will be presented below, clients also reported that receiving the furniture helped them get or maintain a job. That income can help them continuously meet their other basic needs.

### 5.3.3 Health



One of the main ways we expected NFB would affect clients’ health is by providing a comfortable bed, which would improve clients’ sleep compared to if they had to sleep on a couch, floor, or some other uncomfortable alternative. 31% of the clients that completed the follow-up survey received a bed for themselves. Of those clients:

- 50% said they would have been sleeping on the floor if they did not receive the bed.
- 25% said they would have been sleeping on a mattress on the floor if they did not receive the bed.

- 17% said they would have been sleeping on a couch if they did not receive the bed.
- 75% report that the bed resulted in them being less tired.
- 86% report that the bed resulted in them sleeping better.

Example comments include:

- *“We would still be sleeping on the floor with the \$15 air mattresses and a chair.”*
- *“Sleep for my daughter because she did receive a bed, if we had not received that we would not have been able to do that comfortably.”*
- *“Yes, I would not have been sleeping as good, probably would have been achy all over. I have arthritis in my hip, and I think having the proper furniture actually helped a lot.”*
- *“Yes, I would be a lot more agitated, because the floors are not comfortable, and that is where I would have had to sleep. So, I probably would not have slept much.”*
- *“Definitely, because I would have been so grumpy from lack of sleep. So, I probably would have taken it out on the kids, things like that. Just be grumpy all day and it’s not their fault.”*
- *“Yes, it would, I wouldn’t hardly get any sleep and I would be mental because I would not know what to do, and I would not leave my apartment to interact with anyone because of being stressed.”*

We also expected NFB clients to be less stressed because they are better able to meet their basic needs and furnish their homes. Not only did many clients report being less stressed, anxious, or worried because of having the furniture, some also said they felt less depressed and some others reported that obtaining their NFB items made them happy. Some comments include:

- *“That was something that had me kind of worried in the past [not being able to afford furniture]. So, I would say, yes, it did affect my mental health and helped when I got furniture.”*
- *“Well ya, it would put more stress on me as the only provider for my children to obtain that stuff. So, I would have been really stressed. Not only that I think it affects the children, they want to see a home look like a home, dressers, couches, and stuff, so I think it would have affected them as well.”*
- *“Yes, my mental health and physical health because I have epilepsy because the stress causes seizures, so not being as stressed has helped with that. My mental health has been less stressed.”*
- *“Yes, I would be depressed and trying to make ends meet so this helped make things calm and easy going.”*
- *“Yes, because I have anxiety and depression, so if I did not have any furniture, it would have enhanced it, and especially if my daughter did not have anything, this would have really stressed me out and made things worse.”*

- *“Yes, absolutely! Without furniture it is definitely a reminder that you are living in a low SES situation, which adds stress and makes you feel like you can't turn to anyone. It also adds to your anxiety when you don't have furniture and you don't want to have anyone over.”*
- *“I used to be worried, and now I feel happy that I have a place to sleep and share moments with my wife, things we could not do in the past.”*
- *“Made me more happier, because I have a place that is furnished, and makes me happier that I can have people over and I'm not embarrassed to have a place where I just have to sit on the floor.”*

Some NFB clients also reported that they are in less pain due to having comfortable places to sit or lay down. Some of the clients said:

- *“Sure, my health is not doing well already, so the way I'm feeling, it would have been a lot worse without the great bed they gave me. Its hard to know if it is making a big difference on my overall health, but I think it is.”*
- *“Physical health yes. More of like not being able to sit down somewhere, the ground is kind of rough and I am in my last trimester, about to give birth so my back pain is really bad and that would have affected me not wanting to stay in this house.”*
- *“It made it better... for my physical and mental health. I am able to move around, and when I am tired, I can just go to sleep.”*
- *“Both. My back was killing me from sleeping on the floor and nothing to sit on. My daughter was crying in pain from her back and having to go to school and work.”*

#### 5.3.4 Sense of Self



In addition to the outcomes we expected, several clients reported that receiving furniture from the NFB helped them feel good about themselves, increased their sense of confidence, and improved their mood. They said:

- *“Sure, how I feel would be different, especially mentally. The furniture I received gave me more confidence.”*
- *“Yes, at my age, we don't feel like we should be starting over again. So, emotionally and mentally, it just felt like a nice transition to still feel like I'm living in good means. It was good for my self-esteem and my emotional state.”*
- *“Definitely! Because when you are trying to make a home, the furniture is what makes the home and allows you to feel good about yourself and feeling that you actually have something that looks decent.”*
- *“I would be a little bit more touchy, miserable, because I would have to spend that extra money on furniture for myself, my son, and our company.”*

### 5.3.5 Skills & Employability



We believed that NFB clients would be more likely to get a job, enrol in school, or perform better at school or their jobs if they:

- Have places to study or do things like use computers.
- Are eating and sleeping better.
- Have improved mental health.

Clients did say their furniture items helped them get/maintain a job or go to/perform well at school, but none of the clients felt their improved ability to do so related to improved eating habits. Related to school, 14% of NFB clients had attended school or training in the last month. Of these clients, 35% said the furniture improved their ability to attend school. The most common explanation for how the furniture made a difference was having a comfortable place to study:

- *“Yes, I think so, I would not have been able to study well without a place to sit.”*
- *“I’d say so yeah, well I wasn’t really going to school because I wasn’t doing my homework and getting the desk and stuff really helped motivate me to do that.”*

42% of follow-up survey clients reported that they would not be able to comfortably complete deskwork such as homework, paying bills, filling out forms, or using a computer without the items from the furniture bank, and 20% reported that they would maybe not be able to comfortably do those things.

Regarding employment, 25% of follow-up survey clients had been looking for a job in the last month and 18% had worked at a job in the last month. Of these clients, 39% said having the furniture helped them get or maintain a job. The two most common explanations for how the furniture made a difference were improving their sleep and improving their ability to focus:

- *“Yes, I probably would have been too tired to go to work without the bed.”*
- *“Probably yes, lack of sleep and stress would have kept me from work without the furniture.”*
- *“Definitely, because you wouldn’t be sleeping, and if I had to get up at 6am, I would have really struggled and had a bad day. I was having a really bad 2 weeks before the furniture came because I wasn’t getting any sleep.”*
- *“Yes, it definitely made my mental health better and allowed me to have a better night’s rest and allow me to have more energy, which allowed me to get to work and perform well at work.”*
- *“Somewhat. I just think that when you are under stress or hardship like that it’s hard to concentrate on getting a job or being focused to keep it. So, I don’t think it would have physically stopped me, but mentally it would have set me back.”*

## 5.4 Self-Reported Impact on Maintaining Housing

The vast majority (91%) of the follow-up survey clients were living in the same living situations that they were in when they received their furniture. Just under half (**45%**) of the **clients that were renting said their ability or desire to stay in their current place would have been lower if they did not receive their items from NFB**. For example, one client said, *“yes, I think it would have been different. Well, I came from living on the street, and I've never been homeless before, and if I did not have the furniture, I don't know if I would have been able to stay here, and I might have ended up on the streets again.”* Another said:

*“It was quality as well as aesthetically really nice things. It makes that much of a difference when you receive good quality items compared to having to settle and possibly not get everything that I needed to get. They gave me everything that I needed, and made my living space really happy, and made me want to stay here.”*

Other clients noted they would have stayed in their homes regardless, but it would have been more awkward or uncomfortable. For instance, one client said, *“the desire to stay would have been the same, but the comfort is different. It has made me more likely to want to stay.”* Lastly, some clients noted that they would have had to find or buy the furniture elsewhere, which would have made it financially difficult for them to remain in their place. For instance, one of the clients said they *“would not have been able to stay [at my place] because it would be empty and I would not have been able to afford any of those items on my own. I probably would have had to just find a room somewhere instead.”* Another client explained, *“It would have been harder, because I would have to spend all of the money I get on ODSP to buy furniture and that would hurt.”* As revealed, many clients confirmed that a lack of furniture could contribute to housing instability.

Regardless of whether clients reported a difference in their ability or desire to remain in their place, the majority of clients reported an increase in comfort levels and the opportunity to finally relax. For instance, clients expressed: *“It would have been different, you made me feel a lot more comfortable here than I would have had I not received any furniture,”* and, *“it made my life much more comfortable; much more pleasurable. It makes a difference having somewhere comfortable to sit.”*

We found a relationship between housing satisfaction and clients' feelings of whether their furniture meets their needs. 92% of clients that were very satisfied with their housing situation felt their furniture met their needs, compared to 63% of clients that were just satisfied with their housing situation, and compared to 52% of those that were not satisfied. Some of the clients that were dissatisfied with their housing situation said the reasons for their dissatisfaction had to do with things like landlord issues that are unrelated to their furniture. So, the relationship suggests that having proper furniture can help clients feel even more satisfied with their housing, but other issues can result in clients being dissatisfied with their housing.

## Almost All Clients that Were Very Satisfied with Their Housing Situation Said their Furniture Met Their Needs

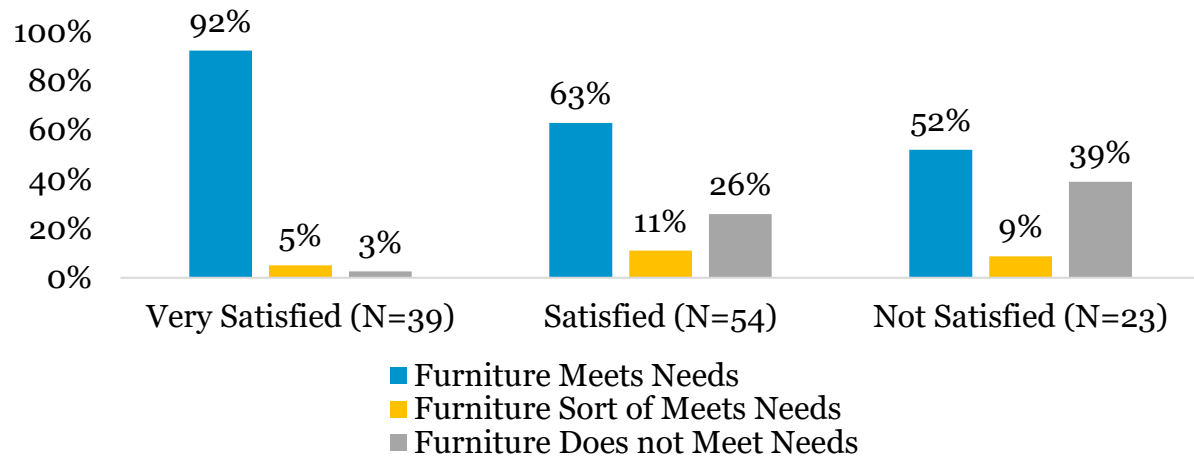


Figure 2: Clients' Housing Satisfaction by Whether their Furniture Meets Their Needs<sup>6</sup>

## 6 Conclusion

Clients confirm that the items they received from NFB positively impacted many assets areas (social connections, healthy food, quality sleep, mental and physical health, self-worth, and engagement in employment or education), and many clients confirm that their ability or desire to stay in their new homes would be lower if they did not receive the furnishings from NFB. Having furniture that meets their needs also relates to satisfaction with current housing situations. Those findings strongly support that NFB's services meaningfully contributes to housing stability.

## 7 Recommendations

**Provide greater client choice.** Increasing clients' ability to choose their furnishings could increase NFB's impact. Not having choice can reduce clients' sense of agency and self-worth. For instance, one client described how she felt sad that social assistance now only offers used furniture that clients do not select:

*"My perspective changed about the system a bit. I know they switched from giving funds to low SES individuals to buy your own furniture to receiving used furniture, but for people who are on long-term assistance this must be sad to receive such old furniture that we don't know where it has been."*

Providing choice can also support housing stability. Martins, Ornelas, and Silva (2016) found that as part of a Housing First program for clients with mental health issues, clients that felt they had more choice with their support services tended to be more satisfied with their housing.

<sup>6</sup> Significant gamma at the 0.01 level.

If NFB clients had greater choice, they would likely be more satisfied with their furniture and their housing situations.

Currently, NFB staff get clients' input on their preferences for their furniture items (i.e. colour, size, etc.). In addition, staff could send clients some pictures of options so that clients could assess acceptability and select the options that they most prefer.

**Increase reach.** This report's findings support that furniture bank services support a variety of assets that are helpful in transitioning to a new house and in maintaining housing. Serving more clients would increase NFB's impact. In collaboration with their partners, NFB should continue to examine if there are clients in the Niagara Region that could use NFB's services but are not currently being reached by NFB. If so, they should examine and test out ways to increase NFB's ability to reach and serve those additional clients. NFB can also look into expanding into areas without a furniture bank, and they have already conducted an assessment of the potential to open a location in Hamilton.

## 8 References

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