

Turning junk into treasure

You might not want that old sofa, but it could be a lifesaver for someone else, so think before you chuck

The saying ‘One person’s rubbish is another person’s treasure’ certainly rings true in Lewisham. Growing numbers of green-minded people are cutting down on landfill and saving money by passing on items they no longer need to people who will make good use of them.

You’ve probably heard of the website Freecycle, which started in America and now has 4,299 groups worldwide. The idea is that people join their nearest Freecycle group online – there is one for Lewisham – and ‘post’ a message to other members whenever they have a specific item to offer or request. Other Freecyclers reply and, if the item is still up for grabs, they arrange to either collect it or send a self-addressed envelope for it to be posted. Everything advertised on the site is free. With many people struggling to afford to furnish their new home or prepare for a new baby, Freecycle can be a real lifesaver.

All kinds of items are offered by Freecycle members, including TVs, laptops and household furniture as well as more unusual things like

concert tickets, a braille typewriter and even an organic coconut. Unusual requests for items are often posted on the website, including requests for specific yellow Ikea kitchen chairs, apple tree twigs to feed a hamster, earth to fill a garden pond and a book-binding press. These things were all subsequently donated by other Freecyclers.

Sean Withers has found Freecycle invaluable. Following a motorcycle accident 20 years ago, Sean was left unable to go back to full-time work and he ended up living in a homeless hostel and at times on the streets. Luckily, Sean has since been



Sean Withers with just some of the items he’s acquired through Freecycle

able to move into a housing association flat and, thanks to Freecycle and the help of neighbours



WHERE TO DONATE UNWANTED ITEMS

Freecycle is a website where you can donate or request unwanted goods. To join the Lewisham branch, visit www.freecycle.org.

DAGE furniture collects furniture to sell in its shops, which support the DAGE pensioners’ group. It has two shops at 71 Deptford High Street, SE8 and 311 Evelyn Street, SE8
☎ 020 8691 8823

Lee Oasis is a voluntary group based in Lewisham that helps local homeless, low-income and disadvantaged people. It collects unwanted items and delivers them for free to people who need them.
☎ 020 8857 0043
www.leeoasis.org.uk

Respond is a charity that sells on donated furnishings and reconditioned white goods at affordable prices to social groups. It also offers discounts and low APR loans in partnership with Lewisham Plus Credit Union.
☎ 020 8316 1099
www.respondbank.co.uk

Morph collects unwanted furniture (for £5) and sells it through its stores in Camberwell and Hackney. It offers a special privilege card for low-income families and individuals, which gives discounted prices (usually 25 per cent). Profits go to Morph’s charity arm, Pecan.
☎ 020 7737 7475
www.morph.org.uk

Emmaus is a nationwide group that offers homeless people work, a home, and a supportive environment to help rebuild their lives. Its shops accept unwanted furniture, household goods, books, CDs and china and will collect larger items for free. The nearest branch is in Plumstead.
☎ 020 8854 3426
www.emmaus.org.uk

Charity shops
There are lots of charity shops in Lewisham that accept good quality items. To find out where your nearest charity shops are and what they accept, visit the Association of Charity Shops website www.charityshops.org.uk

Charity shops
Charity shops tend to take in all sorts of items, from good-quality clothes to CDs and books, and some will accept furniture too. There are also a growing number of initiatives in South East London that sell second-hand items to fundraise for charity or directly pass the donated items on to vulnerable people who need them.
The Deptford Action Group for the Elderly (DAGE), for example, boosts its funding through its two second-hand furniture stores in Deptford and New Cross. The money goes

towards DAGE’s ‘Las Vegas’ pensioners’ pop-in centre located behind the furniture shop in Deptford. This provides a host of activities, including creative writing and music performances as well as practical advice on pensions and health care from visiting services.
If you are clearing out your home, consider whether anyone else could use the items before you throw them away. See above for details of other local organisations that accept unwanted goods and use them for good causes.