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At the center of any strong family is a kitchen table. At the table, conversations and debates are held, meals are consumed, juice is spilled.

Jim Piscopo, the founder of Bridging Arizona furniture bank, puts it this way: "It's the place where the family does business."

Since becoming a 501(c)3 non-profit in 2004, Piscopo says Bridging Arizona has given out thousands of kitchen tables and other pieces of furniture to help people in need get down to the business of being a family.

"We've distributed over 250,000 items to families in need," says Piscopo, who started Bridging Arizona with his wife, Donna, as a church ministry in 2003. "We've helped over 60,000 people."



As a grant recipient of *The Arizona Republic's* Season for Sharing annual giving campaign, Piscopo says funding helped Bridging Arizona distribute more than 200 beds to working-poor families across the Valley as well as 1,000 pillows, blankets, sheets and more. Last year's contributions also went toward hiring an employee to help clean, repair and load furniture at the organization's 9,000-square-foot warehouse in Mesa.

Bridging Arizona accepts donations of furniture and household goods and then works with social-service agencies to identify where the pieces should be distributed, most often to domestic-violence shelters, foster-care facilities, group homes and individual families. Two years ago, the organization began offering delivery with its two moving trucks.

The biggest problem the group runs into, Piscopo says, is people donating too-big furniture, like king-size beds or huge entertainment centers. Instead, they need twin-size bed frames and mattresses for children, plus dressers, sofas and kitchen tables.

"We want the stuff that's going to make an impact, where they can get a good night sleep," he says.

Amy Vogelsson, director of community integration and recovery services at Southwest Behavioral and Health Services, says the program has a longstanding relationship with Bridging Arizona. "They've been

really good about meeting our needs” at Southwest Behavioral’s residential treatment centers for individuals with mental illness, she says.

Recently, Vogelson needed a non-cloth, stain-resistant couch to replace a bed bug-infested sofa at a treatment facility. Within a day, she says Bridging Arizona came through with a big, brown “leather-esque” couch, loveseat and ottoman set. “It was beautiful and it was comfy and cozy and it totally warmed up the environment,” she says. “We want our treatment facilities to be homey and not have an institutional feel.”



Devin Barrd (left) and Felipe Jimenez load furniture at the Bridging Arizona Warehouse on Oct. 31, 2015 in Mesa. Bridging Arizona Furniture Bank supplies furniture to people transitioning from shelters and group homes. (Photo: Sean Logan/The Republic)

Bridging Arizona also partnered with Southwest Behavioral and Health Services this spring to renovate and refurbish a residential center in Phoenix’s historic Roosevelt district. Before, the facility’s 16 residents, who live with a variety of mental-health issues such as schizophrenia and severe mood disorders, would rarely gather in the common areas, which were stark and cold.

Now, there are plush couches for chat sessions and a game table where residents can work on puzzles. This interaction is vital to the treatment of mental illness, Vogelson says. “It’s healing to be connected and a part of the community.”

And, of course, Bridging Arizona also provided a kitchen table. “A gorgeous, big, eight-foot dining table, made with heavy-duty wood,” Vogelson says. It’s where the family gathers.