

## PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE



HUNO NUNES

Duarte Paiva (r.) stands with Jorge Toledo in front of the lockers he designed for homeless people in Lisbon to store their treasured possessions.

### **Duarte Paiva** wanted to help the homeless. He started by listening. Then he built lockers to protect their things.

By Margarida Santos Lopes / Contributor

**I**n Arroios, a neighborhood of Lisbon, stands a set of 12 metal lockers. Surrounded by old trees and newly planted bushes, the lockers represent a pilot project designed by Portuguese architect Duarte Paiva as a way to safeguard the possessions of the homeless.

The shining yellow cabinets also serve as a postal address: Letters can be inserted through an outer slot. Inside, each has three shelves and a place to hang clothes.

Among the beneficiaries is Jorge Toledo. He was the first to receive a key to a locker on Oct. 17, 2013, designated by the United Nations as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Until recently in Locker No. 1 he had put only his "main treasures": photos of his two daughters and a document proving that he is a certified electrician. Now he also stores some clothes, a backpack with other garments, a pair of sneakers, and a tool bag.

Like Mr. Toledo, other less fortunate

people use the lockers to store their belongings, which they previously dragged up and down the streets of Lisbon – "the city of seven hills" – in boxes, bags, or supermarket shopping carts.

Now, as winter sets in, they feel protected against robberies and rain.

"The idea is to restore the sense of responsibility of the homeless, reinforce their self-esteem, and reduce the feeling of exclusion and loneliness," explains Mr. Paiva, who in 2007 founded the Associação Conversa Amiga (ACA, or Friendly Talk Association).

The €11,635 (\$15,800) locker project was funded by the Lisbon municipal government. Paiva would like to start similar locker projects all over Portugal and in other European cities – and even bring his idea to America.

In order to obtain and keep using a locker a homeless person has to obey several rules, which include maintaining regular contact with the ACA street team, and promising to help keep the area around the lockers clean and not use them to store illicit substances.

In Arroios, the lockers were placed close

to a church and police station. It was on the stairs of St. George Church that Toledo used to sleep before being offered shelter in an old van. Sliding open a door of the van's cargo area, he proudly shows his mattress with its crumpled sheets.

Toledo was born in Ilha Terceira, one of the nine islands of the Azores archipelago, an autonomous region of Portugal. His late father, of whom he speaks with visible pride ("Thanks to him, I finished secondary school"), was an aircraft maintenance employee at a US air base there.

Toledo's parents eventually rented their house to a US military officer and moved with their four children (two boys and two girls) to the Azores city of Angra do Heroísmo. Coincidentally, Paiva was born there in 1981.

But Paiva and Toledo never met in the Azores. They first encountered each other in Lisbon in 2010. One year later, the architect was awarded a community prize from Do Something (Portugal), a US organization

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