Hearts to Homes

Two Yonkers women who came up with an idea for young adults aging out of foster care started with a question: Who helps them set up their first apartment?

"When they're out, they're done," said Mary Theresa McCombe, one of the creators of Hearts to Homes, an apartment-registry program run by Cardinal McCloskey Community Services in Valhalla. "It started with mothers like me who have helped their kids set up an apartment.

Last year, McCombe and her collaborator, Kim Cahill, also of Yonkers, compiled a list of items that young adults in the agency's foster program would need for their new apartments and created a gift registry. Their idea is akin to throwing a baby or bridal shower.

Then they began promoting the registry on social media on behalf of four young adults reaching the age when they'd have to leave the foster-care system. The results surprised the

"You don't have to donate $1,100 and buy all the furniture. You can donate $6.99 for a can opener. A wash cloth costs $3.99. You don't have to have a lot of money to make a difference."

MARY THERESA MCCOMBE
ONE OF THE CREATORS OF HEARTS TO HOMES
Aikens said that not knowing who gave her all her apartment’s furnishings was no less meaningful to her.

"I always say thank them. They don’t know who I am. They don’t know what I do with this stuff. They give hope. They help children," Aikens said. "That showed me that people really care about other people."

Using social media to raise money isn’t a new idea. Some charitable causes use crowdfunding sites like DonorsChoose.org or GoFundMe.com to set up a page that is then promoted on social media like Facebook and Twitter.

Still, Finnerty called McCambo and Cahill’s idea innovative in the way that it helped CMCS’s clients.

"This is a great example of what one person can do with a great idea," Finnerty said of the lesson her staff got from Hearts to Homes. "A virtual shower seems so simple, but nobody thought of it."

Twitter: @ErnieJourno