

Recycling from the Heart, for HEART

Casa de Mañana staff teams with residents to support employee assistance fund

As the old saying goes, one person's trash is another person's treasure. Especially when that trash is recycled and used to help people in need.



Casa de Mañana resident Kathy Cormier.

A few years ago, Casa de Mañana Housekeeping Supervisor Juan Martinez and his team noticed an abundance of aluminum cans and plastic bottles filling up trash cans around the community, mostly from staff who would purchase drinks from vending machines in employee break areas.

At the same time, his department was asked by management to come up with an innovative idea as part of "Fresh Ideas," an organization-wide call to all employees to use their creativity and ingenuity to implement a project to better meet residents' or employees' needs.

"We thought it would be so simple to collect the aluminum cans and bottles and start a recycling program within our department," Juan said. One of Juan's colleagues suggested the department use the recycling money collected to purchase coffee and snacks for the department, but Juan saw the bigger picture and a more noble purpose. "I immediately thought of the HEART Fund," he said, "and how the money collected could help many more employees beyond my own department."

In 2014, Casa de Mañana's parent company, Front Porch, established the HEART (Helping Employees At Risk Today) Fund, a special emergency fund administered through the Front Porch Communities Foundation designed to assist Front Porch employees who have experienced an unforeseen financial hardship due to an illness, death in the family or a natural disaster.

Housekeeping employees would collect as many bottles and aluminum cans as possible, which once recycled, translated into modest donations to HEART. But then in 2020, residents got involved and it was a game changer.

Casa Club President Kathy Cormier asked if the residents association could help get the word out about the employee assistance fund Juan's team was supporting. The more Kathy heard about how HEART helped so many employees in need, the more she felt residents could play a role in raising donations.

Kathy's idea was simple ... place recycling bins throughout the community adorned with painted hearts on their sides. Through word of mouth, resident newsletter announcements, club meetings, posters and bulletins, residents and staff were encouraged to contribute their bottles and aluminum cans.

Kathy and Juan estimate that in 2020, cash earned from refundables averaged more than \$100 per month or \$1,400 for the year.

"Residents stepped up for a good cause," Kathy said. "The Casa Club was happy to play a small part in the HEART Fund's success here at Casa."

"Before the residents became involved, the housekeeping team would set a small goal each month for the amount of money we would like to collect," Juan said. "But when we combined forces with residents, the contributions skyrocketed. This is an example of how a simple idea can grow to something great with teamwork."