



GRIEF UNITES US

OUR 2022-2023 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

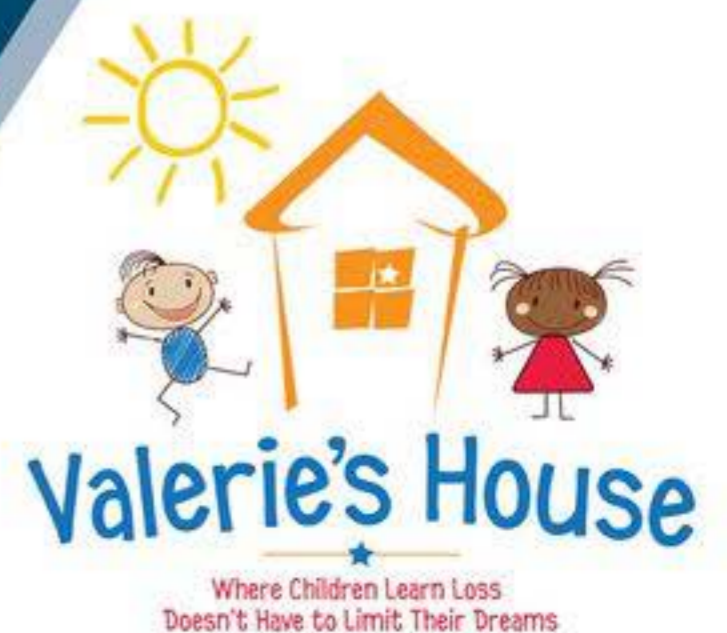
*Oraia & Emiko,
Ages 10*

Valerie's House Littles

*Taking Photos of What
Grief Looks Like to Them*

Valerie's House, Inc.

OUR VISION IS THAT NO
CHILD WILL GRIEVE ALONE.



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OUR VISION

Is That No Child Will Grieve Alone.

Our mission is to help children and families work through the loss of a loved one together and go on to live fulfilling lives.

THE STORY OF VALERIE'S HOUSE

Valerie's House opened its doors in 2016, but it was a concept a long time in the making.

When Angela Melvin was 10 years old, her mother, Valerie, died in a car accident in Fort Myers. The year was 1987, and Valerie was 31 years old, working as a nurse at Cape Coral Hospital. She left behind a loving husband and two children, including Angela and her younger sister Lisa.

After Angela graduated from Estero High School, she started college at The University of Florida and became a journalist. She lived in various regions of the county as a reporter before returning to Fort Myers in 2013. When she returned to her hometown, she searched for an opportunity where she could volunteer with grieving children like she once was. She quickly realized there were very few resources in the community where children could talk about their loss and heal together.

This inspired Angela to begin researching what was available for grieving children across the county. She visited various grief centers to learn how to help children who felt isolated after someone they loved had died.



Valerie and Angela

“
**Valerie's House
is a healing place
where you don't
have grieve alone.**

— Angela Melvin
Founder and CEO

”

She began to share her story with friends, business owners, and other leaders within the Southwest Florida community. With the help of volunteers and funders, Angela's vision for a place to help grieving children connect and heal came to fruition.

Valerie's House is the first organization in the region focused on supporting grieving children and families on an ongoing basis after a loss. Valerie's House provides free, open-ended peer grief-support groups for children to heal after a significant loss in their life. It is not a formal clinical counseling center. Valerie's House is a community where individuals come together, share, and mentor each other through their grief.

With locations in Fort Myers, Naples, Charlotte County, and Pensacola, Valerie's House is a special place where children connect with one another and learn tools to heal after they have experienced the death of someone they love. At Valerie's House, children learn that loss doesn't have to limit their dreams.



Valerie Melvin and Her Family

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

Angela Melvin

Dear Friends,

As I reflect on this past year, I am filled with an immense sense of appreciation for all that we have accomplished. It's extraordinary to see how far we have come together.

Since Valerie's House opened its doors in 2016, we have reached more than 3,000 grieving children and opened locations in Naples, Charlotte County, and Pensacola. We are also excited to announce the opening of the new Lee County Family is Forever Home in Fort Myers.

This amazing growth is a testament to everyone who has been there for us throughout it all. Despite the many challenges we have faced, we have continued to adapt and stay committed to our mission to help children and families work through the loss of a loved one together and go on to live fulfilling lives.

Whether you volunteered your time, donated to Valerie's House, provided guidance, or raised



Angela with Hayley and Carter

your voice to spread the word, you have played an integral role in our journey. All the milestones we have reached have been possible because of your unwavering support.

Thank you for being a part of Valerie's House. Together, we are shaping a better world for our families, our community, and the children who feel alone after their loss. As we look ahead to the coming year, our dedication to our vision that No Child Grieves Alone is stronger than ever.

Please enjoy reading about the development in each location, hearing about some of our families, and seeing just a little bit of what has been made possible by each and every one of you.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Melvin".

Angela Melvin
Founder and CEO
Valerie's House
Angela@ValeriesHouse.org



Angela and Hannah

MEET OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Angela Melvin
President
Valerie's House



Lana Hollier
Vice-Chair
Sanibel Captiva
Community Bank



Mike McMurray
Chair
Royal Shell Real Estate



Victoria Rodriguez
Treasurer
Markham, Norton, Mosteller,
Wright & Company, P.A.



Jaime Suarez
Secretary
The Rist Family
Foundation

“ It is an honor to have these leaders on our board representing Valerie's House. Their passion and dedication to our mission is something that is truly remarkable. We couldn't do what we do without them. ”

– Angela Melvin, Founder and CEO, Valerie's House

MEET OUR BOARD MEMBERS



Elisa Bowersox
Markham, Norton, Mosteller
& Wright Company, P.A.



David Fry
Bay Street Yard



Todd Helt
City of Punta Gorda



Jaime Layne
Victory Layne Chevrolet



Kristalyn Losen
The Nature Conservancy



Jeff Miloff
Miloff Aubuchon Realty Group



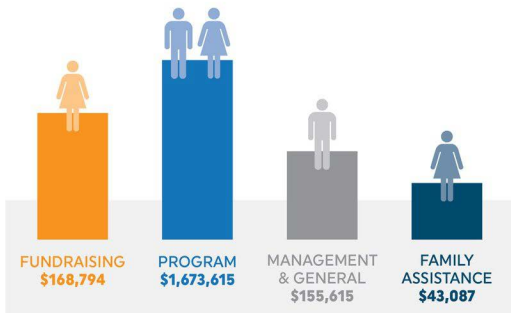
Lisa O'Neil
Lee Health



Scott Shotwell
The Northern Trust Company

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

2022 EXPENSES



2022 REVENUE



THE VALERIE'S HOUSE SCHOLARSHIP FOR GRIEVING CHILDREN

Valerie's House is proud to award six Valerie's House teenagers a college and/or trade school scholarship of \$2,500 a year for four years as they pursue their dreams.



Angela Melvin
and Jacob Jordan



Bailey
Spotz



Jason Bishop
and Angela Melvin

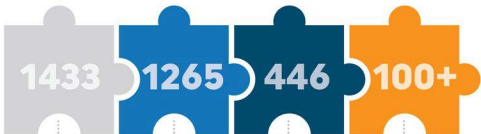


Kaitlyn McCormack,
Sam Mejia, Kendall Sulmasy

2022-2023 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Construction on the Valerie's House Lee County Forever Home has been completed
- Permanent locations in both Pensacola and Charlotte County have been secured
- \$153,260 raised to support Valerie's House families impacted by Hurricane Ian
- 8,000 Facebook followers reached
- Recognized nationally as a guest on the Live with Kelly Ripa and Ryan Seacrest Show on ABC
- Valerie's House leaders presented to more than 300 grief centers around the country at the National Alliance for Children's Grief Symposium in Pittsburgh

2022 NOTABLE NUMBERS



1,433 Grieving
Individuals Served

1,265 Hours of
Clinical Counseling
Offered at No Cost

446
Families Served

More than
100 Volunteers

GRIEF IN OUR REGION

Projected Death in Florida 2023



1 IN 6

1 IN 6 CHILDREN IN FLORIDA
WILL EXPERIENCE THE DEATH OF A
PARENT OR SIBLING BY AGE 25.

20,250

BEREAVED
CHILDREN IN
LEE
COUNTY

7,710

BEREAVED
CHILDREN IN
COLLIER
COUNTY

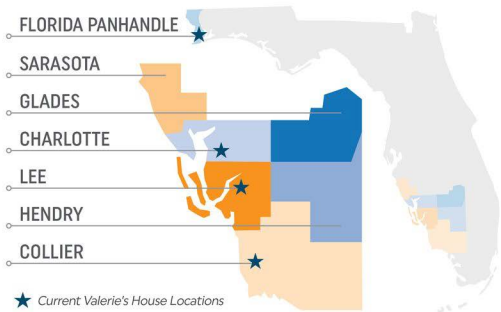
4,240

BEREAVED
CHILDREN IN
CHARLOTTE
COUNTY

17,160

BEREAVED
CHILDREN IN
ESCAMBIA
COUNTY

SERVING FAMILIES IN SEVEN COUNTIES



Data on the numbers of children grieving before adulthood are taken from the Childhood Bereavement Estimation Model (CBEM). More information can be found here <https://judishouse.org/research-tools/cbem/>

LEE COUNTY Fort Myers Home

More than 20,000 children in Lee County are projected to lose a sibling or parent before the age of 25 this year, making Valerie's House a crucial service for Fort Myers and the surrounding area. Valerie's House Lee County continues to grow exponentially every year with children and families coming through the doors and finding support.

Grief Support groups for both children and adults are hosted Monday through Thursday in Fort Myers, and families come twice a month to partake in grief-related discussions while participating in an activity about their emotions.

Valerie's House serves dinner every group night to help bring families closer together before the start of group. During dinner time, the children have the option to shoot hoops and play outside after they finish their meal.

When group begins, the children are separated according to their age to connect with peers who are also grieving the loss of someone significant in their lives. While the kids are meeting in groups, their caregivers gather to meet for their own group as well.



Three Valerie's House Teens

Valerie's House is also involved in the Lee County education system, hosting peer grief-support groups in 11 local schools.

“
**Valerie's
House helped
me find hope for
the future again.**

— Valerie's House
Teen

”

Valerie's House is designed to support families by giving them the freedom and space to talk about their grief.

The continued growth in Fort Myers has resulted in Valerie's House hiring several new staff members. These team members embody the mission of Valerie's House and are dedicated to helping support the children and families who walk through the doors.



Valerie's House Kids

COLLIER COUNTY

Naples Home



Valerie's House Group Night Room

Valerie's House Collier County began in 2017, hosting groups out of The Village School before renting its own home in 2019. Valerie's House Naples is now located on Myrtle Terrace near Waterside Shops.

Since opening our doors in Collier County, more than 500 children and adults have received grief support at Valerie's House Naples.

More than 90% of these children reported being able and willing to express their feelings about grief, being able to talk about the person they lost, and feeling hopeful for their future again.

Valerie's House Naples fosters a welcoming environment as soon as families walk through the front doors. A large mural featuring the Valerie's House logo is prominently painted along the entrance wall.

Thanks to local interior designers, each room in the house has a theme that creates an inviting atmosphere where children feel comfortable sharing their emotions.

Similar to the Fort Myers home, there is also a memory wall, a teddy bear library, and a photo of Valerie Melvin, who the house is named after.

Valerie's House Collier County has grown exponentially over the past six years. The program has expanded into seven local schools and added a new Immokalee family group night. Valerie's House Naples also offers grief groups at Youth Haven, a healing place for



Valerie's House in Naples

neglected children and teens in Southwest Florida.

With the growth of the Naples chapter, the team has welcomed Mary Cross to oversee the program services and school groups full-time.

“
**Valerie's
House has truly
been a blessing
for me.**

— Valerie's House
Child

”

Valerie's House Collier County Director Sarah Andrus was also selected to participate in the Leadership Collier Class of 2023-2024. This is a huge accomplishment and one that will help spread the mission and vision of Valerie's House.

Valerie's House Collier County is excited to continue expanding. If you are interested in helping raise awareness of Valerie's House in Naples, please contact Director Sarah Andrus at 334-524-3366 or Sarah.Andrus@ValeriesHouse.org.



Valerie's House Teen Jason

CHARLOTTE & SARASOTA COUNTIES

Punta Gorda Home

Valerie's House expanded its services into Charlotte County in August of 2019 to support children grieving the loss of a parent or sibling in the northern region of Southwest Florida.

There are more than 15,000 bereaved children in Charlotte and Sarasota Counties combined, and Valerie's House strives to reach as many of those children as possible.

That's why Valerie's House is excited to announce our permanent Charlotte County home located on East McKenzie Street in Punta Gorda. This location allows Valerie's House to help even more children struggling to cope after the loss of a loved one.

Valerie's House purchased the home in downtown Punta Gorda in September 2023 and grief support groups began at the new house in January 2024.

Over the last four years, Valerie's House has helped more than 500 grieving individuals in Charlotte County and Sarasota Counties

Families come to Valerie's House group nights to process their grief in a healthy way. The children and their caregivers meet in separate groups to talk about their special person who died.



Charlotte County Home in Punta Gorda

If children are unable to attend group nights at the house, Valerie's House brings services directly to them through the local education system. Valerie's House is partnering with more than a dozen schools in both the Charlotte County and Sarasota County school system.

If you are interested in getting involved with Valerie's House in either Charlotte County or Sarasota County during this exciting time, please contact Valerie's House at 239-841-0382 or visit www.valeriahouse.org/charlotte-county-programs.

***I'm not
alone with
my grief
anymore.***

— Charlotte County
Caregiver



Valerie's House Kids



Charlotte County Teen

ESCAMBIA COUNTY Pensacola Home

In 2021, Valerie's House broadened its scope beyond Southwest Florida and opened a location to help grieving children in the panhandle.

Northwest Florida Director, Crista Brandt, spearheaded this development and similar to our founder, Angela Melvin, also lost her mother as a child. When she discovered Valerie's House, Crista decided to take action and bring Valerie's House to the Panhandle.

Valerie's House Pensacola is excited to have a home of its own, thanks to a generous donation from the Chadbourne Foundation. Peer grief support groups are held at our home off Gadsden Street in downtown Pensacola, where more than 150 children and families come through the doors every month for healing.



Valerie's House Pensacola

“
**Valerie's House
has been a
life saver for
my family.**

– Valerie's House
Caregiver



Pensacola Director, Crista Holds a Photo of Her Mother

The Valerie's House team in Pensacola continues to expand, with the onboarding of Escambia County Program Manager Jennifer Elzweig, the formation of an advisory board committee, and the several volunteers who help staff group nights.

“
**I cannot even
fathom where
we would be if it
were not for
Valerie's House.**

– Valerie's House
Parent



Pensacola Grief Group

A DREAM COME TRUE

Lee County Family is Forever Home

In the Valerie's House Family is Forever Home, grieving families will always have a place to call their own. A vision more than 4 years in the making, the Lee County Forever Home was completed in December 2023.

With the help of Lennar Homes and many other contractors and businesses, along with the city of Fort Myers donating more than an acre of land for the house to be built, the 7,000+ square foot home gives Valerie's House the much-needed space to expand its services.

Specialized rooms for art, music, a memory garden, and even a special room with punching bags for children to work out their emotions are all part of the plans.

A team of talented interior designers, including Lisa Davenport of LDD Interiors, Luanza Maitland with Norris Furniture & Interiors, Jolene Hardy of Jolene Designs & Mickey Dickson Marzucco of Ecru & Ebony Design, have also volunteered their expertise for this project.



Valerie's House Forever Home

Valerie's House is profoundly grateful for the community's ongoing support and belief in the mission. Thank you for making this vision a reality.

There are several rooms still waiting to be sponsored in the Forever Home. If you would like to be a part of creating this home for our community, please reach out to Angela Melvin at 239-478-6734 or Angela@ValeriesHouse.org.

Thank you to the donors who have given \$10,000 or more to Valerie's House Forever Home

Al and Patricia Fiorini
 Andrew and Cathy DeSalvo
 Angelo and Linda DePardo
 Angie and Jeremy Guillette
 Barraco and Associates, Inc.
 Beverly and Tom Fewster
 Bob and Julie Lowe
 Bob and Susan Shearman
 Boots Tolles
 Brooke and Pat Denson
 California Closets
 Calusa Sportsman
 Foundation, Inc.
 CFS Roofing Services
 Christina Schwinn
 Clark Family Foundation, Inc.
 Clive Daniels
 Creighton Construction
 & Development
 Dan and Helen Gerner
 Dave and Cheryl Copham
 David and Linda Lucas

David and Monique Fry
 Debora McEwen
 Dirk and Tracey Atherton
 Duane & Carolyn Swanson
 Family Foundation, Inc.
 Elizabeth K. Galeana
 Charitable Foundation, Inc.
 Fred and Elaine Hawkins
 Gayle Rosemann
 & Paul McElwee
 HONC Industries
 Huseby Family Foundation
 Iguana Mia
 International Design Source
 Joe and JoAnn Catti
 John and Ellen Sheppard
 Family Children's Fund
 Jordan Ashley Gutheim
 Foundation
 Juniper Landscaping
 Justin and Lauren Robbins

Karen J. Glanert
 Charitable Trust
 Keith Wilson
 Kellie and David Urban
 Kelly Fayer
 Law Offices of Fergeson
 Skipper, P.A.
 Lee Memorial Health Systems
 Lennar Corporation
 Lisa and Chris 'Tip' O'Neil
 Melvin Manker
 Mike and Annie McMurray
 Nils Richter and
 Traci Wellington
 Norman Love Confections
 Norris Furniture
 Patricia W. and Alfred E. Farah
 Charitable Gift Fund
 Phil Payne
 Richard and Vicki Pitbladdo
 RLR Investments
 Robin and Michael Collier

Sanibel Captiva
 Community Bank
 Scott Fischer Charities, Inc.
 Sherwin-Williams
 South Florida Architecture, Inc.
 Stahlman England
 Susan and Phillip Bennett
 The Rist Family Foundation
 The Verrill Foundation
 The William S. & Ann Atherton
 Foundation
 Tomahawk Construction
 Tricircle Pavers
 Unto the Least of These
 Christian Fund
 Victoria Rodriguez
 Victory Layne Chevrolet
 VITAS Healthcare
 Wayne Wiles Floor Coverings
 Wildcat Run
 Charitable Foundation

HOW WE SAVE LIVES

A Variety of Grief-Support Services

Valerie's House programs give children ages 3-18 and their caregivers a safe place to heal after their loss.

Valerie's House offers peer grief-support groups for families after the death of a loved one. All services through Valerie's House are free for families in need of support.

Groups meet at various locations twice a month from approximately 6:00p.m. to 8:00p.m. Families are served dinner, and children have the opportunity for some playtime before group starts. When it's time to begin, the children are separated into groups according to their age and type of loss.

All groups begin with a check-in. Participants take turns introducing themselves, the person who died, and how they are feeling on a scale from one to ten. Then, the children review a few group rules before getting started.

Each group night centers around a grief-related activity. Valerie's House utilizes various techniques to help families explore their grief.

Younger children often use play to express their feelings, which is encouraged in groups.

Adolescents and teenagers can connect on a deeper level and may bond over the different life changes since the loss of their loved ones.



Group Night at Valerie's House in Fort Myers

When children connect with others who have also experienced a significant loss, it helps remind them that they are not alone.

Valerie's House also provides additional services at no cost to families, including individual counseling, a mentor program, and more.

Grief-Support Groups Include:

- Littles, Middles, and Teens Groups
- Spanish-Speaking Groups
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Groups
- Sibling Loss Groups
- Young Adult Groups



“ I've made so many friends
at Valerie's House.
I'm not alone anymore. ”

KINZLEY

AGE 9, LOSS OF MOTHER

◀ Kinzley attends group night at Valerie's House

TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT GRIEF

When a loved one dies, children feel and show their grief in different ways. How kids cope with loss depends on things like their age, how close they felt to the person who died, and the support they receive.

Here are some things you can do to help a child who has lost a loved one:

- **When talking about death, use simple, clear words.**

Valerie's House recommends that a parent or guardian tell the child about the loss in a private setting. Using concrete language is important.

- **Make children feel safe and secure.**

Find a setting that is quiet and even a setting they are familiar with, such as a park or outside on your patio. Use words that let them know they are going to be okay, and that you are going to get through this together as a family.

- **Listen and comfort.**

Every child reacts differently to learning that a loved one has died. Some kids cry, while others ask questions. Some seem to not react at all. That's all okay. Stay with the child to offer hugs and reassurance. Answer the child's questions and just be together for a few minutes.

- **Tell the child what to expect.**

If the death of a loved one means changes in the child's life, head off any worries or fears by explaining what will happen.

- **Help the child remember the person.**

In the days and weeks ahead, encourage the child to draw pictures or write down favorite stories of their loved one. Don't avoid mentioning the person who died. Recalling and sharing happy memories helps heal grief and activate positive feelings.

- **Give the child time to heal from the loss.**

Grief is a process that happens over time. Be sure to have ongoing conversations to see how the child is feeling. Healing doesn't mean forgetting about the loved one who has died. It means remembering the person with love, and letting loving memories stir good feelings that support us as we go on to enjoy life.



LISTEN TO CANDID CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GRIEF



In-person support groups may not work for everyone. The Valerie's House Grieve Love Heal podcast is a great resource for anyone looking to understand how to better help those who are grieving.

Valerie's House invites listeners to tune in for open conversations about grief & loss and the impact it has on our lives.

Listen and subscribe to Grieve Love Heal on ValeriesHouse.org, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and other major podcast platforms.

HURRICANE IAN

Facing the Storm

Hurricane Ian was a devastating natural disaster that left a profound impact on the Southwest Florida community. Valerie's House witnessed this impact firsthand.

Hurricane Ian was both a test of resilience and a demonstration of the community's unwavering support.

Within 48 hours after Hurricane Ian, Valerie's House opened its doors and served as a safe haven for those affected by the storm. Valerie's House served food and helped find habitable spaces for displaced families. Valerie's House also handed out generators and raised more than \$150,000 for families impacted by the storm.

Children and their caregivers were more vulnerable than ever during this difficult time.

The response from supporters was nothing short of remarkable. Donors, volunteers, and community members rallied to provide immediate assistance for those impacted by Hurricane Ian. The dedication of Valerie's House staff and their commitment to the children and families they serve remained unwavering, even in the face of adversity.

As the community came together to rebuild and recover from Hurricane Ian, Valerie's House emerged as a symbol of resilience and hope.

Hurricane Ian's impact on our community also highlighted the need for mental health



Two Valerie's House Girls after Hurricane Ian



Cadi, Joseph, Ryan, Samuel and Alexis with chalk art



Valerie's House family after Hurricane Ian

support in the schools. The Lee County Schools Superintendent asked Valerie's House to come in train more than 200 educators and school counselors on how to run grief and trauma groups in their schools after Hurricane Ian. As a result, hundreds of children who were displaced from their homes were cared for in the school setting under the Valerie's House model.

Grieving children and families were not only dealing with the loss of loved ones but also the trauma of a natural disaster. Valerie's House adapted its programs to address these unique challenges, providing additional resources and counseling to help families navigate the emotional aftermath of the hurricane.

The hurricane strengthened the bonds within the community and highlighted the importance of organizations like Valerie's House in providing crucial support during times of crisis.

Thank you to everyone who helped Valerie's House get through this time.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Thank You to Incredible Community Partners and Sponsors

Valerie's House is grateful for more than 100 community partners and organizations that make Southwest Florida a safe space for grieving children. Coming together fosters a sense of unity and strength that helps Valerie's House better serve families. Whether it's bringing a therapy dog to group night, sponsoring a dinner, inviting Valerie's House into a school or business, or partnering with Valerie's House in some way, your involvement makes a significant difference for everyone. Thank you!



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

John Mendes

After losing his mother as a young teen, John Mendes struggled to process the complex emotions associated with his grief. The years following her death were difficult and isolating, but he persevered thanks to the support he received from his father.

John, a New Jersey native, moved to Fort Myers a few years ago and began looking for ways to get involved in the new community. He learned about Valerie's House through his daughter in 2021 and figured it would be the perfect place to volunteer his time.

"The one-on-one interaction with the children is the most rewarding part of the volunteer experience," John said. "Volunteering allows me to give back and help children through a difficult time in their lives. It's not only satisfying, but it's also fun."

John's been a consistent volunteer on Tuesday night's Sibling Loss Group with children ages 8 to 12 for the past two years. He leads this group with his daughter, Nina, who is the Communications Coordinator for Valerie's House.

His own experience of losing his mother as an adolescent helps him relate to the children in his group.

"Grief is very personal, and we all grieve in our own way," John said. "As someone who has had a loss, I can relate to many of our children and believe this helps to build a trusting and safe environment where the kids feel comfortable sharing their grief."



Photo of John in Group

John also said that volunteering has helped him process his own grief. He's learned to open up about the loss of his mother and openly share his feelings.

As a volunteer, John likes to educate others about Valerie's House and inspire them to get involved in many different ways. He is breaking down the stigma behind grief and giving others a glimpse of the beacon of hope that is Valerie's House.

"Many people believe grief counseling is filled with sadness," John said. "While there are certainly sad stories and tears are shed, many of our sessions are filled with laughter and happy memories our children share about the people they have lost. Our group activities are designed to help our children express and channel their emotions and energy into something that is productive and meaningful."

Valerie's House thanks John for his dedication and for being a strong role model that our children can look up to.



“My experiences as a volunteer have taught me how to cope with my emotions. Many of us were taught to compartmentalize our grief and to get on with life. Volunteering has been both an educational and therapeutic experience for me.”

JOHN MENDES

VALERIE'S HOUSE VOLUNTEER

STORIES OF INSPIRATION

Kari and Carter - Fort Myers



Kari and Carter

Kari and Carter know what it's like to lose someone they love. This mother-son duo is using their personal experience with loss to transform the lives of other grieving families at Valerie's House.

"Valerie's House welcomed us with open arms," Kari said. "They were there for us during those dark days. They gave us a safe space to grieve and share our loss. Most importantly, they reminded us that we were not alone."

When Kari was only eleven years old, her father died of a massive heart attack at the age of 36. She felt isolated, like no one understood what she was going through. Kari grieved in silence with no place to go to talk about her feelings.

Then, in 2021, Kari learned that her son's father had died just days into his recent deployment with the U.S. Army.

Carter was 15 years old at the time and was devastated by the news of his father's death. He said coming to Valerie's House has helped him process his grief journey.

"Valerie's House has taught me that it's okay to express my feelings," Carter said. "I used to stay to myself, but now I have friends who have gone through similar things that I'm able to talk with."

Carter has also learned positive coping skills like

journaling and listening to music since coming to group night.

In the few years that Carter has been with Valerie's House, he has become a teen ambassador for the organization. He takes new group members under his wing and makes sure that they feel like their voice is being heard.

Kari is also very active within the Valerie's House community as a volunteer and mentor.

"Grieving children need to know they aren't alone," Kari said. "They need a safe environment to express themselves and speak freely about their special person and the feelings surrounding their death."

In their spare time, Kari and Carter love to travel. Carter also enjoys fishing, hunting, and spending time outside in nature.

Kari said Carter has become much more comfortable expressing his feelings about his grief since attending Valerie's House.



Carter and His Dad

"The support of the incredible professionals at Valerie's House has made such an impact on Carter,"

Kari said. "Everyone genuinely cares about him. Instead of Carter being held back by the sadness and grief, his future is bright because of the wonderful people that continue to care for and support him."

Kari and Carter see a bright future ahead for themselves.

Carter sees himself attending the University of Florida to honor his father, who was a Gators fan. Kari wants to see Carter fulfill this dream and said Valerie's House has given him the tools to achieve anything he sets his mind to.

"Valerie's House has provided us with a safe place to share our thoughts and feelings," Kari said. "Carter has made incredible friends with the other teens that get it. They laugh, cry, empathize, and sympathize with each other. They make it okay to feel their feelings in that safe space."

STORIES OF INSPIRATION

Kaitlyn McCormack - Naples

Valerie's House Naples Teen, Kaitlyn, became a published writer in *The Naples Daily News* the summer before her freshman year of college. She courageously shared her experience of navigating difficult emotions and finding Valerie's House after her father's death in 2022. This is Kaitlyn's story:

"I'm sure anyone who loses a loved one realizes that life keeps going, even if we are not ready for it. Some cope with this truth better than others. I lost my father the day before my 17th birthday. I can't say that I coped well, but I know that the reality of his death hit me so intensely that I was left stunned.

I remember the day the first signs of my dad's cancer showed. He had been coughing for months and had pain in his throat, but he put off going to the doctor with a long list of excuses and self-diagnoses as to why it would eventually pass. I remember one specific day, I called my dad and learned that he was in the hospital because he wasn't feeling well. He wouldn't give me any other information. I was angry. He had been perfectly fine a few hours earlier.

I didn't know my life would soon be changing forever. I went from a normal Junior at Barron Collier High School to a teenage girl with a dad dying from cancer. I grieved for him even though he was still alive as I watched the man who raised me slip away from me with each day that passed. Anyone who knew my dad knew he always had a joke to crack, and he loved to play his guitar. Toward the end of his life, there were no more jokes made or melodies played. He wasn't himself anymore. His sickness made him unrecognizable. I try not to remember him that way.

In March of that year, the day before my 17th birthday, my father died. I was holding his hand when he passed away in the living room. I didn't know I could cry so much in one day.

Now that it has been a little over a year, things



Kaitlyn and Her Dad

from that time feel more in perspective. Living it felt exceptionally fast but very slow at the same time. I don't remember much from my junior year. I realize now that was probably because of stress. To avoid getting overwhelmed, I tried not to feel much at all, and I spent most of my time alone. After he died, my mom and I found a community of others grieving at Valerie's House in Naples. I rarely miss a group night. I learned it is important to spend time with people that I love, do things I enjoy, and work hard for what I want. I don't have to feel guilty about it because that is not what my dad would want for me.

Every day, I wish my dad was still alive. I miss him more than I would be able to articulate with words. His death will never make my life easier, and it

is going to affect all the biggest events of my life. This realization hit me the night of my high school graduation when I broke down in tears because he wasn't there to see me. I can only imagine how proud he would be.

Even though I am sad he can't see my achievements, I'm not going to stop working towards them. I think about how happy he would be to see me now. I miss my dad every day, but I continue to move forward for him."



Kaitlyn McCormack

STORIES OF INSPIRATION

Beverly and Gilnelys - Punta Gorda

After three months of fighting Covid-19 in the intensive care unit, Beverly's husband of twenty-one years lost his battle in September 2021. Gilberto was sixty-one years old and the father of three children. He was a man of faith and known for his love of the gospel.

Beverly attends group night at Valerie's House Punta Gorda with her daughter, Gilnelys, who is twelve years old. The two are working on processing their grief and healing together after their loss.

"I compare my journey with a rollercoaster," Beverly said. "All the ups and downs in our emotions is something not easy to handle alone. But, when you have a support group that you can identify with, it's easier when you know people that are just like you. It becomes your safe place."



Gilberto and Gilnelys

She discovered Valerie's House while at the cemetery where Gilberto is buried. A representative gave her the information and highlighted the benefits of being a part of a peer grief-support group.

Beverly said Gilnelys struggled with sadness and anger after the death of her father. However, since coming to group nights at Valerie's House, she now expresses her emotions in a healthy way and has hope for her future.

"It was amazing to feel connected with her again," Beverly said. "Every time we go to Valerie's House, our emotions get better."

The Lopez family likes to do various activities together, including watching movies and going bowling. Their favorite meal to share is pizza.

In the future, Beverly hopes to see her children achieving their goals and helping others.

STORIES OF INSPIRATION

Lina Chadbourne - Pensacola

Valerie's House was founded three months after the passing of my son Chad, who left behind three precious children: Annabelle, Holden and Henry, who were all hurting so deeply as a result of the loss of their father.

My three grandchildren returned to school to be among friends and classmates who didn't know what to say or how to act around them. Not only bereaved, but now felt singled out, sad and alone despite being surrounded by classmates.

When Annabelle, Holden and Henry attended their first Valerie's House meeting they were immediately comforted in knowing they were not alone in their grief.

My grandchildren found kinship and deep understanding among other children that were experiencing these same feelings of unease. They formed new friendships in a safe caring space, they



Chadbourne Family

felt safe to cry amongst their new friends, and they opened up to discuss the loss of their father. They shared how they have been feeling and also what other feelings have surfaced since the loss of their father.

Annabelle, Holden and Henry have learned that it's ok to grieve on their own personal timelines. They have learned that there is no expiration date on grieving. They have had the opportunity to express themselves freely and openly amongst loving, caring volunteers and friends, and have begun the healing process through the thoughtful, caring arms of Valerie's House.

Valerie's House has helped them feel accepted, heard, seen and understood. Valerie's House has given them support, tools to deal with their unbearable grief, and also a network of peers dealing with the same indescribable losses.

THANK YOU

For Helping Grieving Children and Families

Valerie's House group facilitators are the people who work directly with our grieving children, teens, and adults to provide support as they work through their grief. Facilitators listen, encourage, and engage children and teens in their peer-support groups. They are compassionate, understanding, and supportive volunteers who remind the kids that they are not alone in their grief. Valerie's House provides the training; they provide the love. Thank you, group facilitators!



Valerie's House Staff

2022 Group Facilitators

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 Adriane Hartman
 Adrienne Reitman
 Alanna Morey
 Alexis Dehetre
 Amberly Leverich
 Amy Strom
 Andrea Barrios
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 Ann Perlow
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*Interested in becoming a group facilitator? Visit valereshouse.org and see the **Get Involved** tab.*

THANK YOU VALERIE'S ANGELS

Valerie's House is grateful to the community for its support of grieving families in Southwest Florida and beyond. Below is a list of individuals and organizations who donated \$5,000 or more between September 1, 2022, to September 1, 2023. Thank you for being Valerie's Angels!

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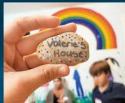
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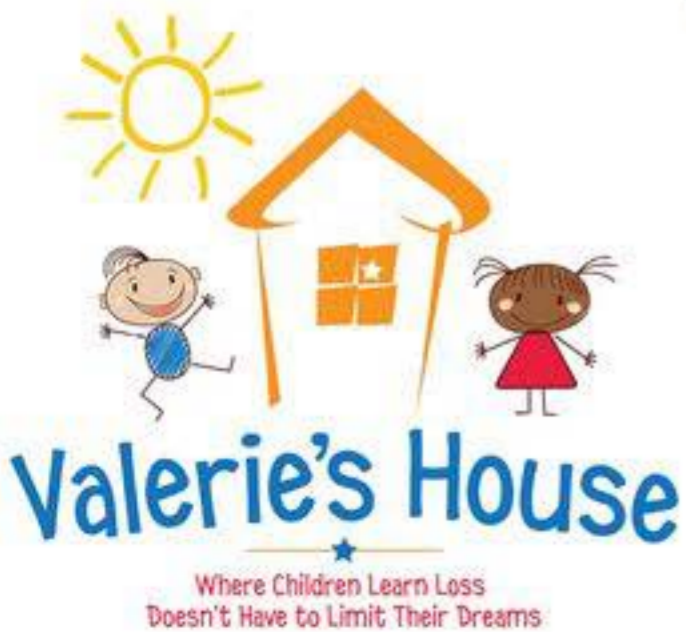
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