

Valerie's House Family Newsletter

A Message From Our Founder & CEO

Dear Families,

As we move into the last few months of 2021, we are reminded of how fast this year is again flying by us. When 2020 ended, we thought for sure the worst was behind us with regards to the pandemic. Unfortunately, as the numbers began to climb again over this past summer, we realized quickly that the pandemic was and is going to continue to impact us as a community, as individuals and as an organization. We know some of you reading this have been impacted personally as a family by the virus, and that your loss is a direct result of the pandemic. We want you to know that we are here for you, as we are for all of our grieving families, and will not let you walk through your grief alone. You have found a family of supporters here at Valerie's House who care about you and your children.

We are moving forward and are now back to in person groups safely as of October 1. Being in person together is essential to our mission at Valerie's House, which is to help families work through the loss of a loved together and go on to live fulfilling lives. We know at the heart of everything is that your children need to be with others like them also grieving, forming friendships and bonds. As your child's caregiver, you need support too.

I hope by now you have made a friend or connection to someone you can trust here at Valerie's House, either another family member, a staff member, or a volunteer, and you know that you can come to us with anything you need as you move your family forward. If you haven't made that connection yet, I promise you will soon as you join our groups and learn more about us and how we can help you. Please know you can contact me personally any time. As someone who experienced the loss of my mother at the age of 10, I will always be faithfully dedicated to your child and all other children grieving.

Your Friend and Advocate,



Angela Melvin | Founder and CEO of Valerie's House
angela@valereshouse.org



Angela and Camryn



VH Birthday Celebrations!

October Birthdays

Albert V.	CJ A.	Olivia Z.
Alexis D.	Edison B.	Oraia P.
Ashlyn R.	Elizabeth B.	Preston P.
Ava W.	Ephriam S.	Samantha G.
Brentley M.	Joseph J.	Samantha S.
Brianna W.	Joseph B.	Samuel S.
Bryan N.	Joslynn R.	Skylar H.
Camryn W.	Justice R.	Sydney N.
Caprice M.	Kiesha N.	Thomas S.
Chase D.	Mackenzie F.	Tucker S.
Christian M.	Naomi G.	

November Birthdays

Adriana R.	Georgia K.	Lily R.
Angiana N.	Jason B.	Linsi C.
Carter K.	Jaxon M.	Nadia B.
Charlie B.	Jaxson A.	Noah F.
Coleton C.	Julian L.	Raiden P.
Cuinn D.	Juniel M.	Roger G.
Emely B.	Katie P.	Samantha C.
Emma N.	Kesia G.	Skylar M.
	Kinzley L.	

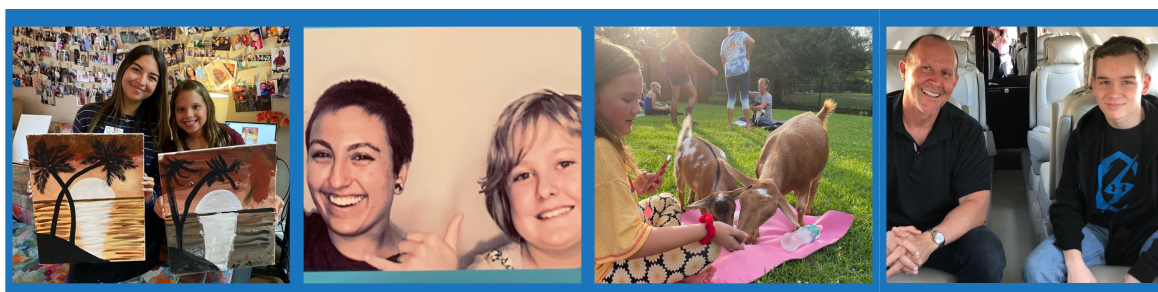
December Birthdays

Aaliyah G.	Danny P.	Julieana P.
Allison S.	Feleix B.	Logan P.
Azariah G.	Gabriel V.	Madison H.
Bentlee M.	Greyson P.	Megan M.
Carson S.	Isabella W.	Micah A.
Carter H.	Isabelle F.	Nathaniel R.
Cheyenne B.	Jackson H.	Riley S.
Chloe P.	Jadah H.	Skye B.
Christopher G.	Javier R.	Sophia W.
Conrad P.		Victoria W.

Val's PALs Mentor Program

Some of our grieving children are missing a role model due to their loss. Val's PALs, which stands for Positive Adult Leader, fills that void for them. Our Val's PALs mentors are caring adults who invest their time and energy to nurture and positively impact a young person.

If your child is interested in getting a mentor, you have any questions, or would like to learn more about the program please contact Volunteer and Mentor Coordinator Staci at staci@valereshouse.org.



CHOCOLATE MEDITATION

CLOSING:

- *Pass out a candy to each person*



1. Close your eyes and sit quietly.
2. Think of your special person and keep them in your mind.
3. As you open the candy, listen to the sound of the wrapper. Bring the candy to your nose and smell its sweet scent. When you are ready, place the candy on your tongue but don't bite into it. Instead, let it slowly melt.
4. Begin thinking of sweet memories of your special person. Allow your tongue and the roof of your mouth to taste the candy. Let these sweet memories fill your mind as you think of your special person.
(Give this a minute or two)
5. Begin now to let your memories fade away ...*(pause)*... but remember that your special person is always in your heart when you need to come back to them.
6. When the candy is gone, you may open your eyes but still stay quiet.
7. *Once everyone has opened their eyes, end with a big inhale and exhale.*

Family Spotlight

Ashley, Azariah, Evan, Ethan & Alinah

On March 16, 2019 the Gayles family had a huge party planned for their son Ethan who turned seven that day. Eric, Ashley's husband and the children's father, went to the gym that morning and never returned. After calling him and the gym for an hour with no response Ashley drove to the gym to find out that Eric had drowned.

"Our world changed forever because he was just that, OUR world," Ashley said. "I had to sit my children down on what was anticipated to be a fun, fabulous celebration and tell them that he died."

Azariah, Evan, Ethan, and Alinah lost their father and Ashley lost her husband after 18 years together (12 years married).

In January of 2021 the family started to come to Valerie's House. After a really hard holiday season Ashley realized that they needed to find a safe space to grieve so that they could let go and learn to live. Not just forgetting Eric. but rather live with all of the memories.

"The key is to deal with it and heal. Valerie's House gave us a place to let go of the trauma, the hurt, the pain. Which then gave us the space at home to heal and progress ahead. Sometimes it was together and sometimes in solitude. No matter what we had the support of our Valerie's House family to help us deal with it all at anytime," Ashley said. "We learned its ok to live on, and that it didn't mean he would be forgotten. The Valerie's House family help with giving us lots of love, compassion, patience, educational information, a nonjudgemental and confidential environment to express our feelings, and freedom to be."

When the family isn't at Valerie's House they enjoy dinner time together. It's where they can openly communicate, laugh, and bond. They also love to travel and explore new places together as a family.



Volunteer Spotlight: Carol Geiger



Carol first saw an article in the Sun Newspaper announcing the five year anniversary of Valerie's House. The article peaked her interest since her dad had died in a tragic accident when she was fifteen years old. She decided to go online and look up Valerie's House to find out more information about the non-profit. Around the same time her friend posted on Facebook about becoming involved with VH, so she reached out to her and she suggested that Carol join the VH Charlotte County Advisory Committee. So she did.

Carol volunteers on the 1st and 3rd Mondays in Punta Gorda for group nights. She is also on the VHCCAC which meets once a month in Punta Gorda. Although both are currently meeting via Zoom. Carol also participates in table events for Valerie's House.

"I really enjoy the table events and sharing Valerie's House vision and mission to our local community," Carol said.

"Since the beginning of the year I have probably been involved in at least 10 table events in North Port, Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda. More table events to come this year," Carol said.

Carol has a personal connection with grief from a very young age when her father died and there was no place like Valerie's House for her to turn to.

"The saying, we grieved in silence, is how I truly felt as a teenager who woke up one day and my dad died," Carol said. "I wished there was a VH to help us with our grieving as children and as a family." Carol loves being able to work with the Valerie's House families, especially the children.

Calusa Sportsman Foundation Fishing Tournament



We are truly grateful for the generosity of our community and all who have either sponsored or participated in our inaugural Calusa Sportsman Foundation Fishing Tournament to benefit Valerie's House. The Calusa Sportsman Foundation presented VH with a check for \$120,000.00 for our forever home. We are honored and thankful for the huge success and dedication that was put into making this event so memorable. We are already looking forward to next year!



Some of the VH Team at the Inshore Benefit



Valerie's House got presented with a \$120,000 check!



Fishermen entering in for a chance to win some amazing raffles

What We Believe About Grief

- Each person has the capacity to heal
- Grief is individual
- Grief is personal
- There is no timeline for grieving
- Grief comes in waves
- You don't get over, you learn to live with it

Teens Giving Back

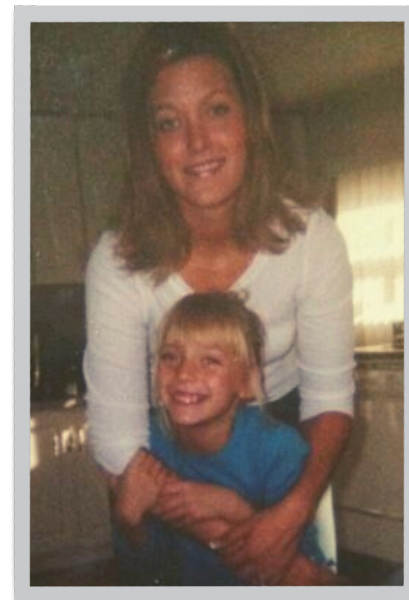
Taylor Returns to Lead Group Night

Taylor was seventeen years old and in her senior year of high school when her mother died by suicide. Between college applications and balancing a social life, she became overwhelmed when grief came into the mix. Taylor was introduced to Valerie's House in January 2017, three months after the death of her mother. She was hesitant to talk about her loss; however, she was relieved to find other teens just like her.

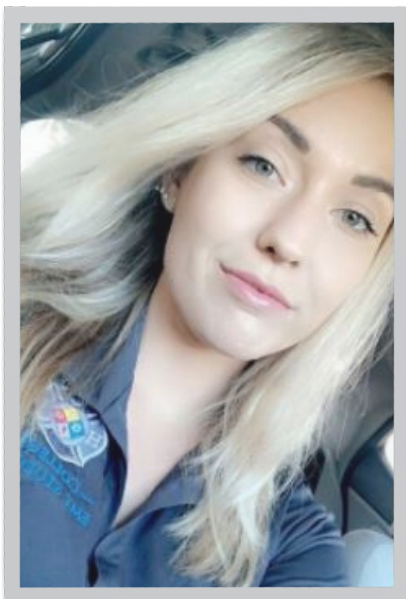
"Talking about my mom's death forced me to acknowledge that she was gone," Taylor said. "At home, I didn't have a strong support system since everyone was grieving in different ways. At Valerie's House, I not only gained a support system but a family."

She also said that attending group nights allowed her to learn skills to cope with her grief. Her feelings towards the loss of her mother developed and evolved after each meeting.

"For a while, I felt that what she did was selfish, and I couldn't understand why," Taylor said. "I also felt ashamed and guilty. I was embarrassed that I no longer had a mom and the manner in which I lost her. I felt that it was my fault. I didn't want to talk to anyone about my grief until I found Valerie's House."



Taylor and her mom



Taylor now

Since graduating from high school in 2017, Taylor has accomplished things she said wouldn't have been possible without the support from Valerie's House. She graduated from Florida Atlantic University in three years with a Bachelor's Degree in Health Science, became a licensed EMT, and enrolled in an accelerated nursing program at Nova Southeastern University to obtain her Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

Taylor has now returned to Valerie's House as a volunteer and is working directly with our children in the grief groups. She has taken a personal tragedy and transformed it to provide healing for others.

"I feel that Valerie's House has helped me to become a confident, successful young woman," Taylor said. "It helped me understand my grief and has taught me how to use my story to empower others. It made me feel normal again."

Taylor connects with our kids because she has lived their current reality. She was afraid to tell her story in the beginning, like many of the children on their first night. Taylor helps them find their voice and walks them through their grief journey.

"In a way, I feel closer to my mom now," Taylor said. "Although we never get over a loss, we can learn to live with it."

October-December Group Night Calendar

October						
Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

November						
Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	★ 25	26	27
28	29	30				

★	Holiday (No Group)
	Sunday Naples (1st & 3rd)
	Monday PG (1st & 3rd)
	Monday FM (2nd & 4th)
	Tuesday FM (1st and 3rd)
	Tuesday Sibling FM (2nd & 4th)
	Tuesday PC (2nd and 4th)
	Wednesday Naples (1st & 3rd)
	Wednesday FM (1st and 3rd)
	Wednesday FM (2nd and 4th)
	Wednesday Sibling Naples (2nd and 4th)
	Thursday FM (1st and 3rd)
	Thursday Naples (2nd and 4th)

December						
Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Weds.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Join our Valerie's House Private Family FB Page facebook.com/groups/valereshousefamilies

Upcoming Volunteer Training

Do you know someone who wants to volunteer with Valerie's House? Have them contact Staci@valereshouse.org to sign up for training!

Location: Valerie's House - Fort Myers (1762 Fowler Street Fort Myers, FL 33901)

Date and Time: Saturday, Oct. 23rd from 9-5p.m. and Sunday, Oct. 24th from 12-5p.m.

Young Adult Grief Support Group

Did you know Valerie's House provides group support services to young adults, 18-29 years old, who've suffered a significant loss? Our Young Adult group meets for one hour virtually on the first and third Monday of the month at 6:00p.m. and starting October 14th we also meet on the second and fourth Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

If you have any questions or would like to enroll in the Young Adult group, please email Delaney Abroe at delaney@valereshouse.org.

If you have any questions about group night schedules, thoughts or just need to talk, please reach out to our Program Team at 239-204-5804, or email Delaney Abroe directly at delaney@valereshouse.org and she will make sure a member of the Valerie's House team responds to you immediately.

For a complete list of Valerie's House programs, visit Valereshouse.org