



Valerie's House NEWSLETTER

FALL 2024

OUR VISION IS THAT NO CHILD WILL GRIEVE ALONE

What's Inside...



PAGE 2

A MESSAGE FROM FOUNDER,
ANGELA MELVIN



PAGE 4

VALERIE'S HOUSE
NEW HEART MEMORIAL



PAGE 7

HEALING THROUGH ART

THANK YOU!

- Valerie's House Kids



★ Save the Date ★

Upcoming Events at Valerie's House

Fort Myers Family is Forever Home

- Young Adult & Teen Financial Skills Workshop – October 10th
- Grandparents Luncheon – October 18th
- Prince and Princess Party – October 30th
- Young Adult & Teen Life Skills Workshop – November 4th
- National Children's Grief Awareness Open House – November 8th
- Sunset Soiree Fundraiser – November 21st
- Family Holiday Party – December 14th

Valerie's House Charlotte County

- Haunting on Harvey Street – October 31st
- Families can stop by our tent for some sweet treats
- Florida International Air Show – November 2nd & 3rd
- VHCC will be in the Family Aviation Experience tent (games, arts and crafts, face painting, and more)
- Sunset Soiree Harbor Style – November 16th
- Family Holiday Party – December 7th

Valerie's House Naples

- Naples Holiday Party – December 7th

Exciting News: In-Person Young Adult Support Group Returns!

We're thrilled to announce that our Young Adult Support Group is returning to in-person meetings starting in January at the Fort Myers Family is Forever Home! While our online group has continued to grow, we're excited to add an in-person component once a month. Don't worry—the virtual group will remain on the first and third Monday of each month. Stay tuned for more details, and for inquiries, please contact Stori at 239-691-2057 or stori@valeriedhouse.org.

Help Us Grow by Leaving a Google Review

At Valerie's House, we are working hard to grow our presence online and connect with new families who may need our support. One way you can help us reach more families is by leaving an honest Google review. Your reviews could make a difference in helping new families feel more comfortable giving Valerie's House a chance. If you've already left us a positive review, thank you so much! Your kind words mean the world to us and help spread the message that no child should grieve alone.

Valerie's House, Inc.

FORT MYERS • NAPLES • PUNTA GORDA

239-204-5804

www.valeriedhouse.org



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

A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER Angela Melvin

Dear Valerie's House Families,

As we approach the next few months together, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the journey we are all on. At Valerie's House, we understand that grief doesn't follow a set timeline, and every family's path is unique. Please know that you are not alone—we are here with you, walking alongside you, offering love, support, and a space to heal.

This fall, we are honored to share the powerful stories of families just like yours. In October, we will unveil our **Heart Memorial**, a special tribute designed by a Valerie's House family for all families as a reminder that our loved ones may no longer be with us, their memory lives on in our hearts and in the community we've built together.

We've also been blessed with moments of connection, like when our teens went fishing with **Captain James Marko** at the **Calusa Sportsman Foundation Inshore Benefit**. It was more than just a day on the water—it was a chance for these young people to feel supported and understood by a community that cares deeply for them.



Angela Melvin

As always, none of what we do would be possible without the generosity of our donors and partners, like **Lennar Homes**, whose recent donation will help us continue offering services to grieving families at our **Fort Myers Family is Forever Home**.

We have many opportunities coming up to gather and support each other, from peer support groups to special events like the **Grandparents Luncheon** and **Children's Grief Awareness Day Open House**. I encourage you to take part in whatever feels right for your family, knowing that Valerie's House is here for you, every step of the way.

Thank you for trusting us with your grief and your healing. It is a privilege to serve your family.

With love and care,

Angela Melvin
Founder and CEO, Valerie's House

UPCOMING VALERIE'S HOUSE SUPPORT GROUP ACTIVITIES:



★
October 1st-14th
Story Beads

October 15th-28th
Build your grief
with Legos

November 5th-13th
Wind Chimes
Family Activity

November 14th-27th
Sticks and Stones

December 3rd-11th
Affirmation Jar
★



VALERIE'S HOUSE CHARLOTTE COUNTY: A Family Tradition of Giving Back

At Valerie's House, volunteers like Omar and Rebecca Zucco are the heart of the organization. Both father and daughter serve as group facilitators at the Charlotte County campus, supporting grieving children and caregivers.



Omar and Rebecca Zucco

Omar, who also sits on the advisory board, has a personal connection to the mission. He lost his brother when he was 16 years old, and his brother was 21 at the time. "I didn't have a Valerie's House growing up. Seeing kids here now who understand they're not alone, I like seeing that," he shared.

Rebecca, a third-grade teacher by day, helps lead the "middles" group in the evenings. After losing a close friend, she realized, "I hadn't processed my grief. Now, I can help these kids talk through their feelings, and it's healing for me, too."

For the Zuccos, volunteering is a healing process. "It's cathartic to help others while also helping ourselves," Omar explained. Rebecca added, "I love seeing the kids heal—that's what keeps me coming back every week."

Their shared dedication to Valerie's House is a beautiful example of how community and giving back help both volunteers and families heal together.

GRIEVE LOVE HEAL: The Return of Our Valerie's House Podcast

We're excited to announce that Grieve Love Heal, the podcast by Valerie's House, is back! Each month, we'll dive deeper into stories that reflect our mission—showcasing how grief, love, and healing intersect in powerful ways within our community.

In our latest episode, released for Overdose Awareness Month, we highlight incredible stories that connect to the heart of our work:

- **Al Kinkle**, founder of Kimmie's Recovery Zone, shares how he transformed the heartbreak of losing his daughter into a mission of hope.
- **Ava Johnson**, 14, bravely talks about finding her mother after an overdose and how Valerie's House became her support system.
- **Fort Myers Police Chief Jason Fields** discusses the impact of the drug epidemic on families and the community.

We can't wait to share more stories with you every month, highlighting the resilience and strength in our community. You can listen on all your favorite podcast platforms or

directly on our website at <https://valereshouse.org/grieve-love-heal>. Be sure to follow or subscribe so you never miss an episode.

For more information, visit valereshouse.org and follow us on social media. Let's continue to grieve, love, and heal together.

◀ Angela and Fort Myers Police Chief Jason Fields



Kathy, Bobbie, Heidi, Al, Heather, and Stori

TEENS FISH WITH CAPTAIN JAMES MARKO at Calusa Sportsman Foundation Benefit

Valerie's House was honored to be one of the beneficiaries of the 2024 Calusa Sportsman Foundation Inshore Benefit, a weekend filled with unforgettable



Captain James Marko, Cal, Nick, and Peyton

moments. A highlight was when several of our teens, Peyton, Nick, and Cal, had the chance to fish with world-renowned Captain James Marko, known for his expertise and ESPN show.

This special fishing trip was generously gifted to our teens by Kellie Urban and Rita Keltner, who purchased the package during the fundraiser. The teens spent the day reeling in snook after snook, learning from Captain James, and making memories that will last a lifetime.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Calusa Sportsman Foundation, Captain James Marko, and the generous donors who made this day possible. Your support helps Valerie's House continue its mission of providing grief support to children and families, reminding our teens they are part of a caring community.

For more stories about how Valerie's House is making a difference, visit our website at valereshouse.org.

VALERIE'S HOUSE TO UNVEIL Heart Memorial Honoring Loved Ones Lost

In October 2024, Valerie's House will unveil a new Heart Memorial at the Fort Myers Family is Forever Home. This unique memorial, designed by Marcy Turner, serves as a powerful tribute to those we've lost and offers grieving families a way to honor their loved ones.

Marcy Turner, who lost her daughter Madison in 2015, was inspired to create something meaningful from her pain. Along with her younger daughter Freya, Marcy became part of the Valerie's House family, where she found a supportive community to help her navigate the grief process. Madison, known for her vibrant personality and dream of working at Disney World, is at the heart of this new memorial.

The Heart Memorial is inspired by the love lock bridges found in Paris, symbolizing the connection between families and their lost loved ones. Families visiting Valerie's House will have the opportunity to pick a lock, write their loved one's name on it, and place the lock on the memorial. Custom locks with a loved one's name can also be ordered for a more personal touch. Once the lock is in place, the key is placed in the center heart,

which serves as a lock box, ensuring the memory is held close forever.

This heart sculpture, prominently displayed at the Fort Myers Family is Forever Home, represents more than just remembrance—it stands for love, healing, and community.



Madison



Angela and Marcy in front of the new Heart Memorial

LENNAR'S GENEROSITY HELPS VALERIE'S HOUSE Continue Its Mission

On Friday, August 30th, Lennar Homes presented Valerie's House with a \$50,000 donation, continuing its incredible support for grieving families in Southwest Florida. Lennar has been a major partner in making our Family is Forever Fort Myers Home a reality, and its contribution is helping us expand our programs and services.

Angela Melvin, Founder and CEO of Valerie's House, shared her gratitude, saying, "This home belongs to the families and the community. Because of Lennar's generosity, it will be here forever."

Lennar's support ensures families have a place to heal together. Darin McMurray, Lennar's Regional VP, reflected, "We had great partners who worked with us, including the City of Fort Myers, which donated the land. This partnership is about more than just business—it's about giving back to the community."

This \$50,000 donation, along with future support from Lennar, will help sustain the free services Valerie's House offers to grieving children and families. As Angela Melvin explained, "This keeps us going. It supports our curriculum, supplies, and the work of our clinical and program teams."

Darin, who lost his father at a young age, added, "I was lucky to have support, but many kids today don't. Valerie's House is special because it provides that support



Steve Gabor from Lennar, David Meyers from Lennar, Angela Melvin, and Darin McMurray from Lennar

here in Southwest Florida." Lennar's commitment goes beyond financial contributions. Steve Gabor from Lennar expressed how deeply the mission of Valerie's House resonates with their team, reinforcing their dedication to making a real difference in the community.

As Darin McMurray summed up, "It's not just about the bottom line—it's about doing the right thing, and Valerie's House makes that easy for us."

Valerie's House continues to thrive, thanks to supporters like Lennar, ensuring no child grieves alone.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO Get Help After Losing Someone?

The truth is, it's different for everyone.

When the McKee family lost Jason, a beloved husband and father, they knew about Valerie's House but felt it was too soon for them to join. That's OK—when you're ready, we're here.

Denise McKee shared the moment she knew it was time: "Now I'm in an all-moms group. And I remember leaving the first meeting of that group and kind of taking an exhale. When you're going through grief, those are really great moments because you're always feeling like you're holding your breath. I just remember going (breathes out)... And I remember thinking, 'Oh my goodness, these are people who are having the same thoughts on a daily basis, moment to moment, that I'm having.'"

That connection is waiting for you when you're ready to



Denise and Jessica McKee

join Valerie's House. We're also proud to have awarded Denise's daughter, Jessica, a scholarship as she begins her studies at Santa Fe College in Gainesville.

For more about our programs, visit valereshouse.org.

FORT MYERS GROUP NIGHT FALL 2024 CALENDAR

Look for your group night below. Please email Laree at Laree@ValeriesHouse.org with any questions.

OCTOBER

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

DECEMBER

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

★	No Group
	Monday FM (2nd & 4th)
	Tuesday FM (1st & 3rd)
	Tuesday FM (2nd & 4th)
	Wednesday FM (1st & 3rd)
	Wednesday FM (2nd & 4th)
	Thursday FM (1st & 3rd)

HEALING THROUGH ART IN COLLIER COUNTY: A Powerful Collaboration Brings Children's Grief to Life

We're grateful for the partnership between United Arts Collier (UAC), the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples, and Valerie's House, which has resulted in a touching display of artwork created by the children of Valerie's House. Each piece is a personal expression of their journey through grief.



Lily from Valerie's House

UAC teaching artist Tiani Rosado guided the children, aged 5 to 18, with prompts like, "What is a fond memory you have with your person?" and "What gives you hope for the future?" Tiani shared, "I loved working with these students. Children who have been through something so tough gave me inspiration to look at life on the bright side."

Sisters Lily and Ivy, who lost their father, Michael, each created art to honor him. Lily said, "I was drawing the ocean because sometimes I would go to the beach with my mom and dad, and we would watch the sunset." Ivy added, "He would always do handprints...he would put his and my mom's, then me, then my middle sister, then my little sister."

Sarah Andrus, former Collier County Director for Valerie's House, explained, "A paintbrush in a child's hand can open the door to conversations about their memories and hopes."

The exhibit at the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples will be up through the end of 2024. We encourage you to visit and experience this moving display while it lasts.

COLLIER COUNTY GROUP NIGHT FALL 2024 CALENDAR

Look for your group night below. Please email Mary at Mary@ValeriesHouse.org with any questions.

OCTOBER

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	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.	Wed.	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	★ Thanksgiving	29	30

DECEMBER

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

★	No Group
	Wednesday NA (1st & 3rd)
	Thursday NA (1st & 3rd)
	Thursday NA (2nd & 4th)

PUNTA GORDA GROUP NIGHT FALL 2024 CALENDAR

Look for your group night below. Please email Tara at Tara@ValeriesHouse.org with any questions.

OCTOBER

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	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.	Wed.	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	★ Thanksgiving	29	30

DECEMBER

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

★	No Group
	Tuesday PG (1st & 3rd)
	Tuesday PG (2nd & 4th)
	Thursday PG7 (1st & 3rd)