



# GRIEF UNITES US

OUR 2024-2025 REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Jessie, Age 8  
Valerie's House Child  
at Fort Myers Family  
is Forever Home

## 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



Valerie and Angela

felt isolated after someone they loved had died.

“Valerie's House is a healing place where you don't 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,

It's with a heart full of love and gratitude that I look back on this most recent year of growth and continued healing at Valerie's House.

What began as a small gathering of grieving families nearly a decade ago has grown into a thriving, compassionate community now serving more children and families than ever before. This year, we expanded our programs, reached new communities, and deepened our impact thanks to the unwavering support of people like you.

Every child who walks through our doors is met with love, understanding, and the tools to heal. Your generosity makes that possible. Whether you donated, volunteered, or simply shared the mission, you have played a vital role in helping children navigate the pain of loss and move toward hope and resilience.

To our dedicated staff, board members, volunteers, partners, and supporters, I cannot thank you enough for your belief in what we

do! This is why we have grown and why we will continue to grow with purpose, thus ensuring that no grieving child feels alone.

I invite you to take a moment and read about the hope and healing that have taken place this year through the inspiring stories of Lejla and her daughters, Alexis and Amelia, and Veronica Morley and her daughters, Coral and Caprice.

Thank you for walking with us, year after year, as we continue building a future of healing for thousands of children and families across Southwest Florida.

With my gratitude,



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



Angela Melvin



Angela and Valerie's House Collier County Child Gabby



Angela, Carter and MJ

# MEET OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Angela Melvin**  
 President  
 Valerie's House



**Lana Hollier**  
 Vice-Chair  
 Sanibel Captiva  
 Community Bank



**Kristalyn  
 Loson Atwood**  
 Board Chair  
 Senior Attorney,  
 The Nature Conservancy



**Elisa Bowersox**  
 Treasurer  
 Markham, Norton,  
 Mosteller & Wright, CPA



**Jaime Suanes**  
 Secretary  
 Director, The Brian Rist  
 Family Foundation

**“ We are grateful for our dedicated board members whose support helps us ensure no child in Southwest Florida grieves alone. Their leadership allows us to continue growing and serving more families in need. ”**

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

# MEET OUR BOARD MEMBERS



**Kevin Anderson**  
 Mayor,  
 City of Fort Myers



**Todd Helt**  
 GIS Analyst,  
 City of Punta Gorda



**Jaime Layne**  
 Owner/Operator,  
 Victory Layne Chevrolet



**Mike McMurray**  
 Realtor,  
 Royal Shell Real Estate



**Jeff Miloff**  
 Broker, Miloff Aubuchon  
 Realty Group



**Lisa O'Neil**  
 Vice President of Marketing,  
 Lee Health



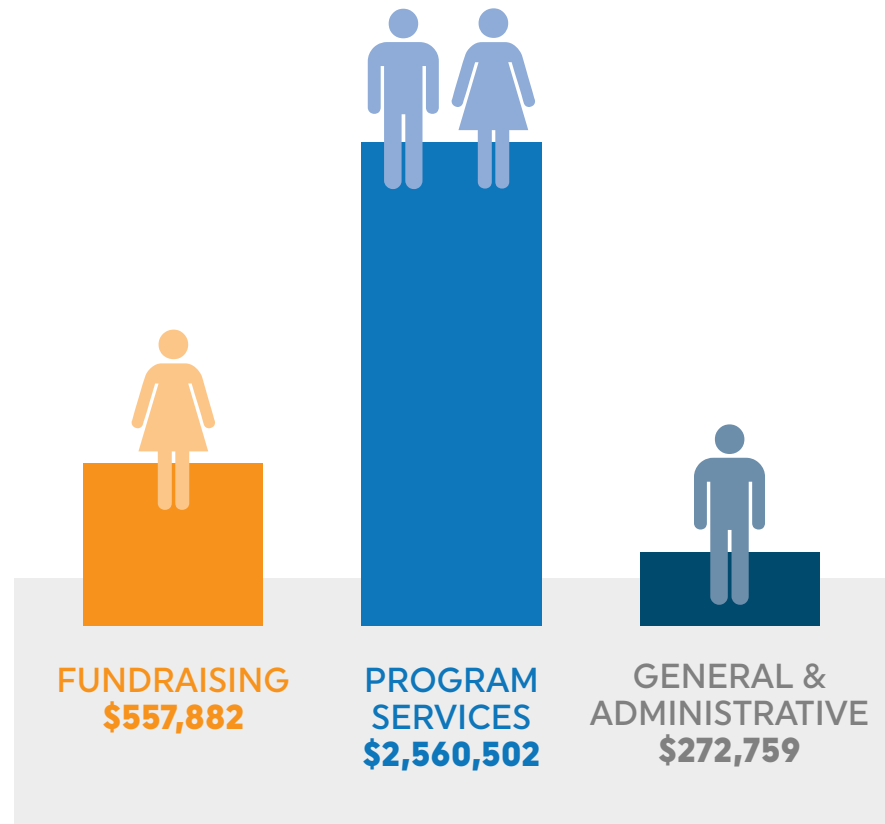
**Aaron White**  
 Financial Consultant, Morgan  
 Stanley Wealth Management



**Ty Roland**  
 Senior Partner, Aloia Roland  
 Attorneys at Law

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

## 2024-2025 Expenses\*



\*Preliminary figures as of 10/20/2025

## 2024-2025 Revenue\*



# 2024-2025 VISIBILITY & REACH



Elizabeth and Ariel at Family is Forever Home

### • Social Media and Web Impact

From September 2024 to September 2025, Valerie's House reached more families and supporters online than ever before. Across Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube, our content was viewed 2.18 million times, including 1.84 million on Facebook alone. We gained more than 3,200 new followers and welcomed 57,000+ visits to [valereshouse.org](http://valereshouse.org)—an increase of 10,000 visits over the previous year.

### • National Impact

In 2024, Valerie's House presented at the National Alliance for Children's Grief Symposium in Kansas City, sharing our work with grief centers from across the country. We also brought home fresh ideas and inspiration—insights we've woven into our programs to better serve kids and families here in Southwest Florida.

### • New Video Series: 4 Questions with Friends

This year we launched 4 Questions with Friends, a short-form video series featuring people who have stood behind Valerie's House and our mission—including some who have been with us since the very beginning. Each episode blends two heartfelt questions about why they support our work with two fun ones—like favorite foods or what they'd pack for a deserted island. It's become a playful way to celebrate our champions and invite more people into our story.

# 2024 NOTABLE NUMBERS

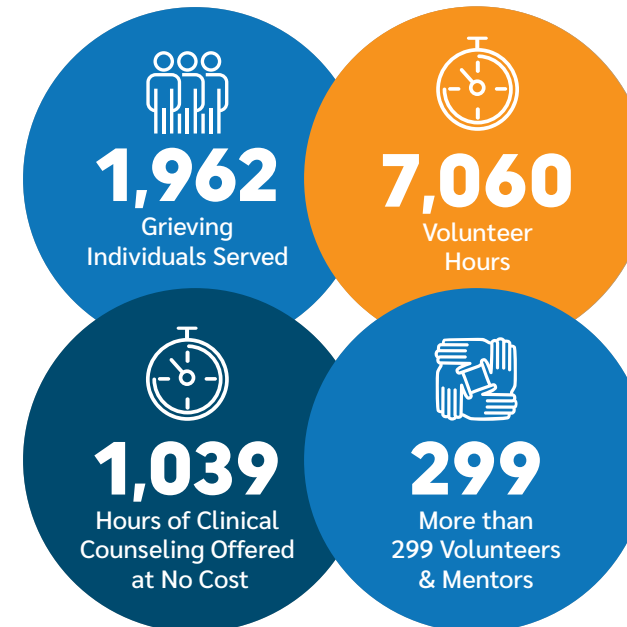
Year	Caregivers	Children	Young Adults	Off-site	Infant & Pregnancy	Total
2016	12	21	N/A	N/A	N/A	33
2017	15	24	N/A	N/A	N/A	39
2018	35	58	N/A	N/A	N/A	93
2019	197	242	N/A	13	N/A	452
2020	350	524	17	49	N/A	940
2021	390	638	18	145	21	1,212
2022	446	715	21	236	15	1,433
2023	532	905	21	240	5	1,703
2024	513	908	30	304	4	1,759

Valerie's House Individuals Served 2016-2024

**7,664**

# 2024-2025 KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(September 1, 2024- August, 31, 2025)



## LEE COUNTY

### Fort Myers Family is Forever Home

The Fort Myers Family is Forever Home continues to be a safe, welcoming space where grieving children and their families come together to heal after the death of a loved one.

In 2025, the Fort Myers home served more than 970 children and caregivers through its compassionate grief support programs. Located on Valerie's House Way, just off Veronica Shoemaker Boulevard, it offers an environment that feels more like a comfortable home rather than a clinic to help children feel safe as they express their emotions.



Fort Myers Family is Forever Home

After a communal dinner each night Monday through Thursday when families bond, a wide range of age-specific peer support groups are provided, including groups for elementary-aged children, teens, young adults, and caregivers. Specialized groups, such as those for children who've lost a parent to suicide or overdose, provide extra layers of support for families facing unique grief journeys.

In 2025, the Fort Myers Home and property underwent several improvements to expand its capacity for healing and comfort. A fence was added around the entire property, creating a safer and more tranquil environment where children can play

and unwind. A new pergola, complete with lights and fans, now shelters the backyard patio, offering protection from sun and rain, while artificial turf has turned the backyard into a cleaner, safer, and more welcoming space for both play and meaningful connections. These enhancements allow families to make the most of the healing atmosphere, both indoors and out, before and after nightly support groups.

If you would like to get involved with Valerie's House to help grieving children and families in Lee County, please contact us at 239.204.5804 or visit our website [www.valereshouse.org](http://www.valereshouse.org) for more information.

LEE COUNTY  
31,054  
BEREAVED CHILDREN

## STORIES OF INSPIRATION — FORT MYERS

### Summer Camp: A Week of Courage and Connection



Valerie's House Children at Summer Camp

At Valerie's House, we know grief doesn't take a summer break. That is why our Fort Myers Family is Forever Home hosted a week-long summer camp filled with healing, laughter, and courage for about 50 grieving kids and teens.

Each day brought connection and joy through art, games, and team-building activities. "It doesn't feel like a grief group," one camper said, "It feels like family." Campers were reminded that even through loss, they are never alone.

Community partners made the week even more special. The Lee County Sheriff's Office offered fingerprinting services and a sweet surprise—ice cream from their truck. Dawn and Jim Mack, the visionaries behind our Butterfly Garden, taught about the life cycle of butterflies—a beautiful

symbol of transformation. And for the first time, campers took a field trip to the IMAG History & Science Center, thanks to a new partnership with the School District of Lee County.

The week ended with a moving Talent Show, where campers sang, danced, and shared their hearts. Each act was met with cheers and applause, a true reflection of love and support.

Summer Camp 2025 reminded us that healing doesn't just happen in quiet moments—it happens in laughter, in friendship, and in the courage to keep showing up for one another. Because at Valerie's House, no child grieves alone.



Summer Camp Water Day



“ I wanted to give up many times but decided I had to keep going. Valerie's House gave me something to look forward to and gave me back some of the family I had lost. ”

**KITTY**

Valerie's House Teen and Scholarship Recipient

“ I try to take everything I've learned through my struggles and help people, inside and outside of Valerie's House. ”

**JUSTIN**

Valerie's House Teen



## GROWING OUR REACH Charlotte and Sarasota Counties



Valerie's House Charlotte County Home

In January of 2024, we opened the doors of our permanent Valerie's House home on East McKenzie Street in Punta Gorda, marking a major milestone in our mission to help grieving children and families in Charlotte and Sarasota Counties. Since our first group night, we have seen both participation and impact grow steadily—proof that this home is more than a building; it's a place where hope and healing take root.

The need remains great, with more than 13,000 bereaved children in our two counties. In just the first half of 2025, our

enrollments doubled from 2024, and group hours increased from 1,560 to 2,412. May alone saw 80 school-aged children supported offsite through schools, where our reach is expanding rapidly.

This year, our partnership with Sarasota County Schools took a significant leap forward thanks to the extraordinary generosity of Impact 100 SRQ, whose \$109,500 grant in 2025 allowed us to grow our team and meet the needs of more grieving children directly in their classrooms. We

now serve over a dozen schools across Charlotte and Sarasota Counties, bringing our peer-support model to students who might not otherwise have access.

In total, over the past five years, Valerie's House has supported more than 500 grieving individuals in Charlotte and Sarasota Counties.

Every story is different, but the message we hear most often remains the same: "I'm not alone with my grief anymore," Charlotte County Caregiver.

With one year down in our Punta Gorda home, and many more to come, we remain committed to helping children heal together, one family at a time.

CHARLOTTE COUNTY  
6,106  
BEREAVED CHILDREN

SARASOTA COUNTY  
6,947  
BEREAVED CHILDREN



Jules at Family Flower Pot Activity in Charlotte County



Charlotte County Group Circle

## STORIES OF INSPIRATION — PUNTA GORDA A Journey from Heartbreak to Healing with Valerie's House

In May of 2024, Lejla and her daughters, Alexis and Amelia, experienced an unimaginable tragedy—the loss of their beloved son and brother in a horrific car accident. The pain was deep, and the road ahead felt impossible to navigate.

The girls began their journey with Valerie's House through one of our school-based groups, where they found the courage to begin expressing the emotions they had kept bottled up. Surrounded by peers who understood their grief, they began to feel safe, seen, and less alone.

When Lejla learned about our community location, she decided to bring the girls to our evening peer support groups. It quickly became a place of refuge and healing for their entire family.

The holidays were especially hard. The weight of their grief felt even heavier during what used to be the happiest time of year. But Valerie's House Holiday Shop brought unexpected light. Lejla was deeply moved by the compassion shown to her family during such a difficult season. It reminded her they weren't walking this road alone.

Since then, they haven't missed a group night.



Alexis, Amelia and Lejla

Alexis and Amelia have found healing and joy again through their friendships and creative expression. And Lejla has found her voice, her community, and a space where her grief is met with compassion.

*"If it wasn't for Valerie's House, I don't know if I would have made it this far."*  
— Lejla, Valerie's House Charlotte Mom

She shared this message with us: "Group nights are something the girls and I look forward to very much. The girls absolutely love it, and it is the ONLY place for me personally to be able to talk about our loss and feel heard and loved. It gives me some peace in knowing that

my girls are in good hands as they navigate life without their brother—and I don't have to worry about missing something that I might not see in the midst of my darkest hour. Thank you for helping them express themselves in a way I'd have no idea how to do or what to do. We've never had to walk this grueling journey before.

If it wasn't for Valerie's House, we'd truly be going through this alone. I don't know how to thank you all enough for what you've done for my girls and me."

At Valerie's House, we are honored to walk alongside families like Lejla's—offering love, support, and hope through even the darkest nights.



Charlotte County Memory Wall

# COLLIER COUNTY

## Naples Home



Group Night at NAMI Collier County Location

Valerie's House is proud to have formed a powerful partnership with NAMI Collier County, made possible through the connection made through the Naples Children Foundation (NCF). Together, we are working to make Collier County a stronger, healthier place for children and families who are grieving.

This partnership has allowed us to grow from the beginning in 2017, when small groups first gathered at The Village School, into a thriving program that now welcomes families into a safe, nurturing space where children feel supported and ready to share their emotions.

Over the last year, we've had the privilege of walking alongside 359 children and caregivers

as they navigate life after loss. For most families this is the hardest thing they have ever had to go through, and together, we help them find hope and healing for the future.

Our reach continues to expand, with school groups being offered in 13 different schools, with 19 groups. These groups allow us to support even more grieving children where they feel comfortable. We've also extended our groups to community partner Youth Haven, a safe haven for neglected children and teens.

This growth is only possible because of the strong partnerships and dedicated community members who believe in our mission. The Collier County program team has played an essential role in building these relationships and ensuring that children and families across Naples receive the care they deserve.

The future in Collier County is bright. Together with NAMI Collier County and our community of supporters, we are creating a place where no child grieves alone.

If you would like to join us in raising awareness and making a difference for grieving families in Collier County, please contact us at 239.204.5804 or [info@valereshouse.org](mailto:info@valereshouse.org).

**COLLIER COUNTY**  
**11,987**  
**BEREAVED CHILDREN**

# STORIES OF INSPIRATION — NAPLES

## Finding His Voice Through Grief

When Dawson shared his graduation photo with his brothers, he wrote, "I did it, Mom." Graduation was a joyful milestone, but also a reminder of the one person missing. His mother wasn't there to cheer him on from the stands, but her love and presence could still be felt in every step he took across the stage.

In early 2025, Dawson stood in front of hundreds of supporters at the Naples Winter Wine Festival and began his speech with, "I stand here before you, and it hasn't even been a year since my mom passed." The room fell silent, and by the end, he had the crowd on their feet in thunderous applause. His honesty and courage moved everyone in attendance—a testament to the power of vulnerability and the strength that can grow from shared stories of grief.



Valerie's House Teen Dawson with His Brothers

Through the support of Valerie's House and his counselor, Susan, Dawson has learned to give his feelings a voice. In peer groups, he found others who understood what it meant to lose someone close, and in that understanding, he began to rebuild his sense of hope and purpose.

Today, Dawson dreams of becoming a financial planner so he can help families find stability and security during difficult times. He continues to give back through his church and within the Valerie's House community, using his experience to show others that healing doesn't mean forgetting—it means moving forward with love still in your heart.

Dawson reminds us that while grief changes everything, it doesn't have to limit what's possible.



Valerie's House Grief Therapist Susan with Dawson



**“ Valerie's House has helped me by showing me I'm not alone, and it has given me a space to express myself in a healthy way. ”**

**CAL**  
Valerie's House Teen

**“ You feel something and it doesn't feel right... but then you come here and someone else is talking about how they feel the exact same way. ”**

**MOLLY**  
Valerie's House Teen Ambassador



# ESCAMBIA COUNTY

## Valerie's House Northwest Florida: A New Chapter

In 2025, an exciting milestone marked the growth of Valerie's House Northwest Florida. Our Pensacola location formally became Valerie's House Northwest Florida, a registered 501(c)(3) affiliate with its own trademarked name. While the structure has evolved, the heart of the work remains the same—ensuring no child grieves alone.

For Crista Brandt, who directs Valerie's House Northwest Florida, the mission is personal. Like our founder and CEO, Angela Melvin, Crista experienced loss at a young age. That experience drives her dedication to giving grieving children a safe, supportive place to heal. Under her leadership, the branch has established a board of directors and continues to strengthen its presence across the region.

The new designation allows Valerie's House Northwest Florida to be more responsive to local needs while staying closely connected to the broader Valerie's House mission. In recent years, Crista and her team have expanded services and deepened partnerships—hosting a remembrance event on Pensacola Beach, partnering with Florida



Valerie's House Northwest Florida

Power & Light and the Pace Center for Girls, and launching a mentor program in collaboration with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwest Florida.

The achievements of Valerie's House Northwest Florida demonstrate the strength of community-driven support and create a blueprint for how our mission can grow in the future. We are proud of the remarkable progress taking place in the Northwest Florida and remain united in the belief that together, we can ensure every grieving child finds hope, healing, and connection.



Pensacola Valerie's House Kids with Chain of Connections Activity



## 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!

## HOW WE SAVE LIVES

### A Variety of Grief Support Services

Valerie's House programs give children ages 5-18 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 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.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. Children and families 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.

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

When children connect with others who have also



Group Participating in Mixed Feelings with Floam Activity 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:

- Children's Peer Groups
- Young Adult Grief Support
- Adult Caregiver Groups
- Infant Loss Group
- Sibling Loss Group
- Spanish-Speaking Groups
- Grandparents Raising Grandchildren After Loss Group
- Life Without Mom Group
- School Groups

## TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT GRIEF

### Words Matter: How to Support a Grieving Child or Family

At Valerie's House, we help grieving families in Southwest Florida find hope and healing through human connection and peer support. We believe that no child should grieve alone, and our programs provide a safe space for children, teens, and caregivers to express their grief, connect with others, and find strength together.

With multiple locations throughout Southwest Florida, we serve families who have experienced the loss of a loved one. Our programs are based on the belief that healing happens together—through shared experiences, engaging activities, and support from those who understand.

When someone is grieving, it's hard to know what to say. The right words can bring comfort, while certain phrases can unintentionally cause hurt.

**“What NOT to Say:”**

**“They're in a better place.”**  
– While meant to be comforting, it can feel dismissive.

**“Everything happens for a reason.”**  
– Grief often doesn't make sense.

**“You should be over it by now.”**  
– Grief doesn't follow a timeline.

**“I know exactly how you feel.”**  
– Every grief journey is unique.

**“Best Things to Say:”**

**“I'm here for you.”**  
– Simple and reassuring.

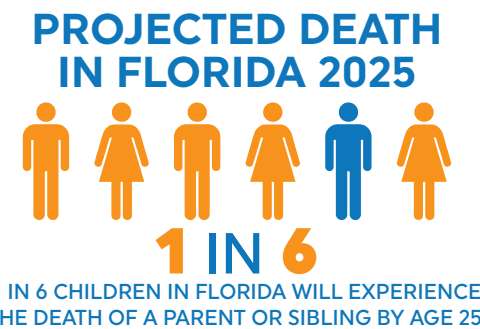
**“It's okay to feel however you're feeling.”**  
– Grief comes in many emotions, and all are valid.

**“Would you like to talk about them?”**  
– Encourages sharing and remembrance.

**“You don't have to go through this alone.”**  
– Reminds them that support is available.

#### How to Help a Grieving Child or Family

- Be present and listen. Sometimes, silence is more comforting than words.
- Check in over time. Grief doesn't end after the funeral.
- Encourage professional support. Valerie's House provides Grief Counseling, Peer Support Groups, and Family Programs to help families heal.



**“ I didn't think I was going to ever make it past 15, and I thought my life was going to be over then. ”**

**KEALEY**  
Valerie's House Teen Ambassador

**“ Grief is universal, whether you're 4 years old or 64. The kids are so much deeper and more thought-provoking than you ever realize. ”**



**MARY BETH**  
Valerie's House Charlotte County Volunteer

# SCHOLARSHIPS

## College Scholarships for Local Grieving Students

Valerie's House has awarded a total of \$90,000 in college scholarships for graduating high school seniors who have come through and found support in the Valerie's House grief support program.

It's the fourth year that Valerie's House has offered scholarships which this year range from \$1,000 to \$2,500 per student. The scholarships are renewable for up to three additional years, depending upon individual achievement. The scholarships are made possible through generous community support and private donations.

Fourteen local students were chosen based on an essay they each wrote about their personal grief story and how their loss shaped them as the person they are and the person they want to become.

"We believe it is important to empower our youth to strive for big things and to know that loss doesn't have to limit their dreams," said Valerie's House Founder and CEO Angela Melvin. "We are very grateful to our donors who have made this scholarship program possible."

The scholarship funds may be used for classes,



Jordan McKee and Angela Melvin  
(Fort Myers High School)  
Attending Fort Myers Technical College

materials, or anything they need during the school year.

"The students, whose families are all a part of the Valerie's House grief support program, are asked to check in with Valerie's House each college semester and tell us something that they worked through that was challenging during the semester, and something great that they believe they might have accomplished," Melvin said.

To donate and help with the Valerie's House Scholarship Fund, visit [www.valereshouse.org/donate](http://www.valereshouse.org/donate).

Valerie's House opened its first location in Fort Myers in January 2016 and has served more than 7,600 children and their families from Lee, Collier, Charlotte and Escambia counties. The organization provides a safe, comfortable place for children to share, grieve and heal together following the death of a close family member.

Valerie's House currently offers peer support groups and other activities at locations in Fort Myers, Naples, Punta Gorda, and Pensacola. Valerie's House is a United Way partner agency and is fully supported by community donations.



Angela Melvin, Alia Mercado-Lues and Bobbie Santiago  
(Ida S. Baker High School)  
Attending Hillsborough Community College

# SCHOLARSHIPS

## This Year's Scholarship Recipients Include:



Brooke Burg  
(Fort Myers High School)  
Attending Florida Gulf Coast University



Emily Calderon  
(Dunbar High School)  
Attending Florida Gulf Coast University



Carter Koehler  
(Cypress Lake High School)  
Attending Florida SouthWestern State College



Kealey Calderon  
(Dunbar High School)  
Attending Florida SouthWestern State College



Molly Flynn  
(Fort Myers High School)  
Attending Florida SouthWestern State College



Haley McKinnon  
(North Fort Myers High School)  
Attending Florida Gulf Coast University



Joseph Aaron Stenza  
(Barron Collier High School)  
Attending Flight School



Emma Schulte  
(Island Coast High School)  
Attending Florida SouthWestern State College



Caleb "Cal" Rimes  
(Gateway High School)  
Attending Fort Myers Technical College



Samira Ali  
(Riverdale High School)  
Attending University of South Florida



Catherine "Kitty" Hughes  
(Hibernian Private School)  
Attending Florida SouthWestern State College



Parker Eyre  
(South Fort Myers High School)  
Attending Florida Gulf Coast University

## A BEAUTIFUL ADDITION: The Butterfly Garden



Valerie's House Kids Planting the Butterfly Garden

This year, the Valerie's House Family is Forever Home welcomed one of its most meaningful new additions—a Butterfly Garden created as a place of peace, beauty, and reflection for the families we serve.

Butterflies have always held a special place in the hearts of our families and supporters. Many see them as symbols of love, transformation, and connection—gentle reminders of loved ones who remain close in spirit.

The idea for the Butterfly Garden came to life thanks to Dawn and Jim Mack, who tend to their own butterfly gardens in their Lee County community. With the help of the Stryker family,

whose child, Griffin, attends Valerie's House, the Macks helped bring this vision to life. Together, they created a vibrant outdoor space where families can sit, reflect, and remember those they love.

Inside our home, the spirit of the butterfly continues in the beautifully designed Butterfly Room, made possible through the generosity of Doug and Gail Markham, longtime supporters who share that same belief in love that lives on.

**You can't do it alone, you need places like Valerie's House.**

—Carl, Valerie's House Father

The Butterfly Garden and Butterfly Room now serve as symbols of hope for every family who visits our Fort Myers Family is Forever Home—living testaments to growth, beauty, and healing.



Valerie's House Child Griffin During Butterfly Release

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT She Came to Heal—and Stayed to Help Others Do the Same

The Morley family was one of the first to walk through the doors of our Collier County location when Valerie's House began serving families there in 2017. After the sudden loss of her husband, Scott, Veronica found herself raising their daughters, Coral and Caprice, while carrying her own grief. Valerie's House became the safe place where they could be open about their pain, connect with others, and realize they weren't alone. "My daughters thought this only happened to them," Veronica remembers. "At Valerie's House, they realized it happens to a lot of kids. That was huge."

For Veronica, group nights were more than support—they were a lifeline. She says it was the only place where she could stop being the "strong mom" and simply be herself. Surrounded



Veronica with her Daughter Coral at Collier Group

by other grieving parents, she could finally speak her truth, whether it was a hard day or a small moment of joy.

As Coral and Caprice grew older and eventually aged out of the program, Veronica wasn't ready to let go. She returned as a volunteer, giving back to the next generation of grieving children in Collier County. "I can never give back what I've received," she says. "But if I can be there for a child who just needs a hug or someone to listen, that makes me happy."

From being one of the first families at our Collier County location to now giving back as a volunteer, the Morleys embody the mission of Valerie's House and the community that has grown with it: finding hope in grief, supporting one another, and ensuring no child has to grieve alone.



Veronica and Other Collier County Volunteers



## LASTING TRIBUTES

Did you know you can create a lasting tribute to a loved one by purchasing a personalized memorial paver? Each engraved paver memorializes your special person and tells a story of love, remembrance, and hope. It's a meaningful way to celebrate their life while helping grieving children and families find comfort and support. Memorial pavers are installed at the Valerie's House Family is Forever Home in Fort Myers and become a permanent part of our healing space. To purchase your memorial paver, visit [valerieshouse.org](http://valerieshouse.org), or email [info@valerieshouse.org](mailto:info@valerieshouse.org).



**“Since joining the peer support groups, both boys have started healing in their own way.”**

**KARINA**  
Valerie's House Naples Mom

## A DECADE OF FAMILY, HOPE, AND CONNECTION Celebrating 10 Years of Valerie's House

On January 11, 2016, Valerie's House opened its doors for the first time—a small bungalow on Avalon Place in downtown Fort Myers, filled with hope, nerves, and the laughter of children who, maybe for the first time, realized they weren't alone in their grief.

Ten years later, more than 7,600 children, caregivers, and families across Southwest and Northwest Florida have found comfort, friendship, and understanding through Valerie's House. What began as one little home has grown into a community that now reaches from our Family is Forever Home in Fort Myers to Naples, Punta Gorda, and Pensacola—and beyond.



Thanks to a generous donation from Carter Outdoor, our special 10-Year Anniversary logo now shines from digital billboards across Lee and Charlotte counties—a reminder of how far we've come, and how many hearts have helped us get here.

As we look ahead to the next decade through our Valerie's House 2030 Plan, we're also taking a moment to look back—to honor five people who have been part of this journey since the beginning: Karen Belcher, Marshall and Nick Mills, Kristalyn Loson Atwood, and Stori McDougall. Their stories remind us what Valerie's House has always been about: community, compassion, and connection.

## A DECADE OF DINNERS: Karen Belcher



*Karen and Other Volunteers Serving Dinner*

When families walk into Valerie's House after a long day, there's usually something warm waiting—often thanks to Karen Belcher.

Karen began volunteering in 2016, just a few months after the very first group night. She started as a group buddy but quickly found her calling in the kitchen. "It just worked," she says. "I love seeing the families, watching the children blossom, and seeing smiles on their faces."

From Avalon Place to Fowler Street to the Family Is Forever Home, Karen has been there through it all—cleaning up after Hurricane Irma, wrapping cookies during COVID, and celebrating when dinner nights returned to the kitchen.

"Sometimes you just start chatting," she says, "and then you see them again, and you remember their story. It becomes a comfort—for them and for me."

Karen's empathy runs deep. "Even though my mom didn't die, it was like I didn't have a mother," she shares. "So I understand those feelings of loss. My father kept us on track—and that's what I hope Valerie's House does for these kids and families."

Ten years later, Karen is still baking, still serving, and still showing up. "I like to bake," she laughs, "but I don't want the baked goods in my house. Valerie's House is the perfect place for them—and for me."

## FROM THE FIRST HAND SQUEEZE: Marshall and Nick Mills

When Marshall and his son, Nick, first walked through the doors of Valerie's House ten years ago, they found something unexpected—a community that could hold both laughter and loss.

"From the very beginning, Valerie's House has been there for my family and me," Marshall says. "Without Angela and everyone at Valerie's House, I don't know where we'd be today."

Over time, they experienced Valerie's House "on both sides of the couch"—first as participants, later as volunteers. "We know our grief is there and it will never go away," Marshall says, "but we're not afraid of it anymore."

He smiles remembering moments that still stand out: Nick singing at the first Soirée at Shangri-La, Jessica's News-Press story about their family, chocolate meditations at the end of sessions, and every group hand squeeze. "Those hand squeezes are absolute gold," he says. "They're good for the soul."

During COVID, Marshall helped restart the Dads



*Nick and Marshall at Family is Forever Home*

Group after an earlier attempt faded. "Persistence paid off," he says. "It's running strong now."

When the Family Is Forever Home opened, Marshall watched Nick and Evan sing at the first Soirée there—a true full-circle moment. Today, he continues to volunteer and plans to rejoin the Dads Group soon. "Words can't capture how much Valerie's House has helped me," he says. "To now be part of helping other families—that means the world."

## FROM DAY ONE: Kristalyn Loson Atwood

When Valerie's House welcomed its first families in January 2016, Kristalyn Loson Atwood was already behind the scenes making it possible. An attorney in Southwest Florida, she helped draft our founding bylaws, guide early agreements, and negotiate the 99-year lease with the City of Fort Myers that cleared the way for the Family is Forever Home.

"I remember the paint was barely dry," Kristalyn says. "Families were trickling in one by one, and then suddenly the house was full—kids laughing, playing, and



sharing their stories. I thought a grief center would feel heavy, but the kids were still kids. That first night, I knew I wanted to stay."

Ten years later, Kristalyn is still here—now serving as Board Chair. "We've grown from a few people around a kitchen table to a statewide movement," she says. "But the heart of it hasn't changed—it's still about making sure children and families know they're not alone."

## FROM GRIEVING TEEN TO GUIDING LIGHT: Stori's Story

When Stori McDougall first came to Valerie's House in 2016, she didn't want to be there. Her mom, Sommer Eva, had died the year before, and at just 13, she was angry and shut down.

"My dad told me we were going to group therapy, and I was so mad," Stori said. "I pulled my hoodie up and sat in the corner. I didn't talk at all."

But by the end of that first night, something changed. "When we got in the car, the first thing I said was, 'Can we come back in two weeks?'"

That moment marked the start of a healing journey that would eventually bring Stori full circle—from a grieving teen to a leader helping others find hope.



*Stori and Angela Melvin*

Five years later, Stori joined Valerie's House as an employee after being invited by Founder and CEO Angela Melvin to help write donor thank-you cards. "It turned into a part-time job," Stori said. "I started helping on group nights and loved it."



*Stori, Young Adult and Activities Coordinator*

Even while studying in Boston, she stayed involved, co-facilitating virtual young adult groups every two weeks. After graduating college, she returned to Fort Myers to join the team full time as Young Adult and Activities Coordinator.

Now, she uses her own story to comfort others who are just starting their grief journey. "I know what it feels like to walk through those doors for the first time," she said. "Being able to help someone feel less alone is the best part of my job."

Stori still keeps her mom close to her heart—even through her love of pet rats, something the two shared. "They make me feel connected to her," she said.

From that quiet 14-year-old in a hoodie to a young woman helping others find hope, Stori's story is proof that no child should grieve alone.

who care deeply enough to keep showing up. Together, we'll continue building what began ten years ago: a home for hope, a place for connection, and a promise that no child will ever grieve alone.

## LOCAL MEDIA SPOTLIGHTS: Sharing Stories of Strength and Hope

Throughout 2024 and 2025, Valerie's House received incredible media coverage that helped share our mission—and the voices of our teens and young adults—with thousands of viewers across Southwest Florida. Each story offered a powerful glimpse into what healing looks like when no child grieves alone.



*Ashley with Gulf Coast News Reporter Britt Leoni*

On Gulf Coast News, Ashley Wong, a Valerie's House teen, shared her journey of loss and healing in a deeply moving Stories to Share segment. After losing her mother, Ashley found purpose through Valerie's House and now writes heartfelt letters of encouragement for younger kids in our program. Her honesty and compassion continue to touch the hearts of families and supporters across our community.

WINK News also shined a light on Molly Flynn, a high school senior who lost her father, a United



*Molly and WINK News' Haley Zarcone*



*Kealey and Emely*

States Air Force veteran, and found strength through Valerie's House. Her interview during our College and Career Fair captured her courage and her message to others: that even in grief, there can be growth, connection, and hope for the future.

And on FOX 4, reporter Miyoshi Price highlighted Carter Koehler and sisters Emely and Kealey Calderon, three of our young adults who shared how their losses inspired them to chase dreams in firefighting, social work, and counseling. The story also celebrated \$37,000 in scholarships awarded to 14 Valerie's House teens and young adults—proof that when a community comes together, love turns loss into opportunity.



*Carter with his Mentor Deputy Chief James Hayden*

These stories reminded us that behind every loss is a story of strength. When our young people share their journeys, they inspire others to reach out, to listen, and to believe that healing is possible.

# THANK YOU

## 2024-2025 Volunteers, Group Facilitators & Mentors

A heartfelt thank you to all our Valerie's House volunteers, mentors, and group facilitators who are making a difference. Your dedication and compassion help ensure no child grieves alone. Below is a list of those who support our mission with their time and care.

Gillian Ainsworth	Joanise DeLeon	Angela Higginbotham	Veronica Morley	Katherine Sidden
Samira Ali	Joshua DeLeon	Lana Hollier	Andrianna Moustakas	Francesca Simonelli
Carol Allen	Cara Denny	William Howard	Jackie Muehling	Jennifer Sistrunk
Graham Anderson	Lina Diaz-Conde	Terrence Howze	Louetta Muller	Nicholas Skoufis
Kevin Anderson	Jimmy DiBernardo	Chrissy Humann	Donald Neal	Cliff Smith
Adrienne Andreae	Avishai Dile	Jill Hunt	Lisa Newland	Patricia Smith
Donna Archibald	Trenton Downey	Christa Huseby	Aman Singh Nemitz	Sean Sorrick
Dawn Ares	Rekha Dunn	Brad Hyde	Nancy Nicotra	Annie Speiser
Lucero Avellaneda	Alana Dutson	Joyce Jandola	Natalie Nims	Bailey Spatz
Shawana Awais	Hannah Dutson	Maya Johnston	David Nitsche	Bettylynn Spatz
Maryclaire Balko	Sydney Dykes	Austin Jordan	Mary Norris	Clarissa Staley
Bridget Barbato	Hayley Edwards	Brian Katz	Mary Beth Novak-	Kayla Stanley
Laura Barber	Brian Elzweig	Cole Kelly	Eckenroad	Jaime Suanez
Claire Barth	David Erdely	Kelsey Kennedy	Dana O'Keefe	Samantha Taylor
Hannah Barrios	Elizabeth Eubanks	Rachel King	Lisa O'Neil	Trevor Tenner
Kenneth Barrios	Kelly Fayer	Colin Kleinmann	Gabriella Oltmann	Nancy Thalheimer
Jackeria Beard	Tim Ferguson	Kari Koehler-Cordisco	Trish Otto	Haley Thalheimer
Celine Bedrosian	Brittany Feroce	Laurie Kraft	Karen Parenteau	Chloe Tharp
Allie Beecher	Abbe Finn	Gina Kurtz	Patricia Parker	Tatiana Tholt
Karen Belcher	Erica Fish	Steve LaDue	Tulsi Patel	Marcelene Thompson
Jada Berry	Gina Franco	Isabell Laws	Savannah Patterson	Sabrina Thompson
Meredith Berry	Katie Franco	Jaime Layne	Stephanie Pearson	Trish Thompson
Elizabeth Beyer	Mackenzie Francois	Justin Layne	Keeley Pendergrass	Jama Thurman
Natasha Bledsoe	Stacy Fuscardo	Dena Le	Genessa Penrod	Mary Tipton
Patricia Boone	Zuri Galvan	Jose Leon	Amuela Pericles	Walter Tipton
Rhonda Boswell	Lynn Ganz	Jena Lewis	Catherine Peterson	Keri Tutterrow
KT Bowers	Jaslene Garneau	Kathie Lewis	Devon Philip	Max Twining
Elisa Bowersox	Lisa Gaus	Taylor Lewis	Evelyn Philistin	Rylee Vandergrift
Kari Bozic	Lori Gian	Kathleen Lindsay	Deedra Phipps	Marc Vega
Cameron Bray	Jennifer Gipfert	Sheridan LoCicero	Colton Phelan	Dawn Valente
Avrey Brooks	Susan Glasser	Jake Lloyd	Cynthia Pledger	Carolyn Vickery
Molly Buck	Lee Goodwin	Mary Love	Arisha Popova	Rachel Wagler
Timothy Buck	Briza Gonzalez	Bob Lowe	Paige Possehl	Corey Waite
Brooke Burg	Justin Grant-Wright	Laree Lowe	Patsy Potter	Elizabeth Walker-Weakley
Samantha Burg	Britt Grass	Kristalyn Loson Atwood	Jessica Purdy	Marshall Walsdorf
Stacy Burgan	Myah Greenberg	Rochelle Lunsford	Rebecca Quinlan	Nicole Watkins
Jeanette Burke	Patti Greenwood	Janet Maconi	Lisette Quintero	Shon Wells
George Buss	Melissa Groff	Tara Marrero	Carol Ramos	Doug Werber
Emely Calderon Villatoro	Patricia Griffin	Ella Mattheis	Marilee Ramos	Samantha Wesoly
Emelly Calimano	Eric Gullekser	Jennifer Mattheis	MaKenzie Ramsey	Aaron White
Doug Callender	Leah Gummere	Kathleen Matthews	Debra Rankl-Peterson	Dianna Whitman
Liam Campbell	Natalie Guerra	Joni Maxwell	Bruce Rathbun	Laureen Wicker
Julianna Cannon	Robert Guziak	Susanne Menke	Emma Rathburn	Border Williams
Ralene Carroll	Nancy Hagman	Betsy McDonald	Renny Razor	Shea Williams
Jennifer Carson	Lauren Harkins	Kevin McDougall	Chelsey Reed	Tynisha Williams
Vanessa Castro	Matthew Harris	Carol McCallum	Janice Ricketson	Amanda Wingett
Ashley Chambers	Sayde Harrington-Moniz	Courtney McGovern	Susan Riddle	Karin Wiseman
Rachel Chambers	Meghan Harrison	Arianna McIntyre	Howard Ripps	Jaime Worley
Chloe Chea	McKenna Harrell	Gail McManus	Diane Rivero	Bob Wren
Nancy Clark	Annette Hartzell	Mike McMurray	Ty Roland	Joseph Yeber
Marianne Click	Nicolle Hawley	Ashley McNamara	Jenessa Ruiz	Morgan York
Kenneth Craft Jr.	Marla Hecht	Chris McNamara	Marlene Sackheim	Tusmo Yusuf
Jessica Cruz	Todd Helt	John Mendes	Marlene Sackheim	Jacqueline Zaragoza
Kalicia Cummings	Claire Helton	Nina Mendes	Stacie Sauers	Rebecca Zucco
Diana Daigle	Chelsey Helveston	Rachael Miller	Patricia Sawyer	Omar Zucco
Lexie DeCicco	Dawn Henderson	Marshall Mills	Susan Schultze	
Debbie DeHays	Katelyn Henderson	Jeff Miloff	Waltraud Scola	
Alexis Dehetre	Ginger Herron	Blake Mitchell	Iris Serrano	

Interested in becoming a group facilitator? Visit [valerieshouse.org](http://valerieshouse.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 donating \$5,000 or more between September 1, 2024 and September 1, 2025. Thank you for being Valerie's Angels!

Aaron and Amber White	Eric Ganz	Michael & Patricia Clayman
Adelene Murdoch	Eugene C. & Florence Armstrong	Michael Riesberg
Aloia, Roland, Lubell and Morgan, PLLC	Family Foundation	Mike and Jan Martin
Angie and Jeremy Guillette	Florida Gulf Coast University Foundation	Military Heritage Museum
Arby's - AES Restaurant Foundation, Inc.	Fred & Louise Goebel Charitable Foundation Fund	Myerlee Pharmacy
Archway Institute For Mental Health	Fred and Elaine Hawkins	Nan T. Kaehler
Arnold Simonsen Family Charitable Foundation	GARM Foundation	Naples Children Foundation, Inc.
Arthrex, Inc.	Gary Griffin	Naples Heritage Cares, Inc.
Austin and Tilia Campbell	Gaye Iorio	Nick and Pam Hackett
B&I Contractors	Gentiva Foundation	Noren Foundation
Barbara Kuncl	Gulf Coast Community Foundation	Patricia W. and Alfred E. Farah Charitable Gift Fund
Belle Bear	Gunterberg Charitable Foundation	Quinton and Beverly McNew Foundation
Beverly Fewster	Hard Rock Heals Foundation	Randy J. Korich
Bill Golden	HCA Florida West Hospital	Realtors of Punta Gorda - Port Charlotte
Bob and Julie Lowe	Hideaway Country Club -	Rebecca Rooney
Bob and Laurie Brlas	Women's Golf Association	Rebecca Tester
Boots Tolles	Impact 100 Pensacola Bay Area	Richard D. Verleger Charitable Foundation
Brett and Nicole Glass	Impact 100 SRQ (Sarasota)	Riesberg Institute
Brian Krivisky	International Paper Foundation	Rist Family Foundation
Calusa Sportsman Foundation, Inc.	Jack Roessner	RLR Investments
Carol B. Phelon Foundation	Jeff and Jacque Miloff	Rod and Angie Gatewood
Champions 4 Children	Jeff and Lisa Steele	Roessner Family Foundation
Charles and Melissa Turner	Jessica Gatewood	Sanibel Captiva Community Bank
Charlotte Harbor Parrothead Club	Jim Doyle Jr.	Scott Fischer
Christen White	John E. and Aliese Price Foundation, Inc	Scott Fischer Charities, Inc.
Christine White	Joseph Goldie	Shadow Wood Charitable Foundation Inc.
Clark Family Foundation, Inc.	Justin and Lauren Robbins	Suncoast Credit Union
Coastal Waste & Recycling, Inc.	Karen J. Glanert Charitable Trust	Suzanne Ballinger-Waylonis
Collier Community Foundation	Kellie and David Urban	The Bear Family Foundation
Commercial Property of Southwest Florida	Ken Gaynor	The Chadbourne-DeMaria Foundation
Constellation Energy Foundation	Kevin Ruane	The Daniel R and Anne M Harper Foundation
Darin McMurray	Korich Family Giving Fund	The George and Mary Jo Sanders Foundation
Dave and Cheryl Copham	Kristina and Clarke O'Keefe	The Mikulsky Hope Matters Foundation
David and Linda Lucas	Larry and Terri Roberts	The Noelke Family Charitable Gift Fund
David and Monique Fry	Lee County Board of County Commissioners	The Red Sox Foundation, Inc.
Dennis Lapidus	Lee County Sheriff's Office	The TJX Foundation, Inc.
DeVoe Subaru of Naples	Lee Health Foundation	The Verrill Foundation
Dirk and Tracey Atherton	Lennar Foundation, Inc.	Tim and Dana O'Keefe
Don Neal	Leslie L. Alexander Foundation	United Way of Charlotte County
Duane & Carolyn Swanson Family Foundation, Inc.	Levi, Ray, and Shoup Foundation	United Way of Lee, Hendry and Glades Counties
Dupre Family Fund	Lewis and Jenn Bear	United Way of West Florida
Edward and Gale McBride Foundation	Margie Mitchell	Victory Layne Chevrolet
Elisa Bowersox	Marjorie and Alan Moore	Wayne Wiles Floor Coverings
Elizabeth K. Galeana Charitable Foundation, Inc.	Mark J. Proctor	West Bay Charitable Foundation
Emily Swanson-Noble	Mary Love	Wild Blue Charitable Neighbors
Entech	MB Meyer Charitable	Wildcat Run Charitable Foundation
Eric & Rebecca Applegren	Melinda Blachly Shaw	



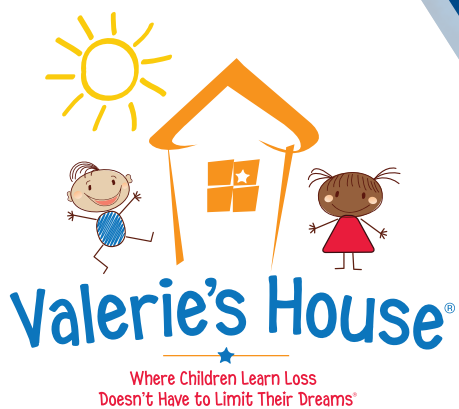
Gege, Mia and Courtney



Family is Forever Home children and teens



Valerie's House children



# Valerie's House, Inc.

**239-204-5804**

Lee County • Collier County  
Charlotte County • Sarasota County

[www.valeriesthouse.org](http://www.valeriesthouse.org)

