

## **Valerie's House**

### **Supporting Grieving Children in Our School System**

The mission of Valerie's House is to help children and families work through the loss of a loved one together and go on to live fulfilling lives. The grief support program provides a supportive space where children connect with peers and learn the tools to heal from their loss. In Sarasota County, an estimated 10,500 children will experience such a loss before age 25, putting them at risk of homelessness, addiction, incarceration, or suicide if their grief goes unresolved. Facing isolation and academic challenges, they struggle to navigate environments that may not understand their profound grief.

With the goal that no child should grieve alone, the ***Supporting Grieving Children in Our School System*** initiative will bring Valerie's House's in-school, peer-to-peer, grief support to as many as 30 Sarasota County schools. The total initiative budget of \$144,000 includes \$34,500 which is already committed. The Impact100 SRQ grant will fund 85%, or \$93,500 of a new, full-time group program coordinator's salary. Remaining funds will cover existing staff support, program supplies, technology, marketing and travel.

The new coordinator, dedicated to the Sarasota County schools, will expand the program from 6 to 30 schools, reaching an additional 200 students and their families over two years, and provide resources for all Sarasota County teachers. Valerie's House's 8-week program includes art, music and play therapy for groups of 6-8 students in grades K-12, along with school staff training and direct response to sudden losses, like the death of a student or teacher. Valerie's House also offers free resources and workshops for families.

Program success is measured by improvements reported in outcome evaluations of children, with a target of at least 75% showing improvement in emotional expression and self-regulation skills. Ultimately, the program's success is seen when children feel they are not alone, re-engage in school life and demonstrate better focus in the classroom.

To sustain this initiative, Valerie's House will incorporate the recurring costs into its operating budget, relying on a committed Board of Directors and a history of financial stability.

Valerie's House aims for a fully integrated partnership with Sarasota County schools, ensuring that every student grieving the loss of a loved one has access to a supportive network of teachers, counselors, principals, fellow students and Valerie's House staff. With the new program coordinator in place, and the necessary resources secured, Valerie's House will deliver high-quality, impactful services to more grieving Sarasota children, fostering resilience and building a supportive community around them.