



# UPDate

## LIGHTING THE WAY HOME for transplant families

Help give families staying at Gift of Life Howie's House  
**HOPE** and a **PATH FORWARD** during their darkest hours.



Kelsey Pabon (left) and her mother Sandra at the hospital

Over a decade ago, past guest and lung transplant recipient, Sandra Pabon, faced a life-altering diagnosis of Lupus. This chronic autoimmune disease causes one's immune system to attack the body's tissues and organs. Over the next few years, the disease began to damage Sandra's lungs, and she was diagnosed with Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis (IPF).

After years of battling her condition, Sandra's doctors suggested the only path to survival—a life-saving lung transplant. In 2016, she joined the waiting list, but her journey was far from over.

Sandra faced a challenging road because of the limited availability of compatible donors. Five long years passed, and it seemed as though her family had accepted the harsh reality that a matching lung might never come.

Then, in March of this year, the phone call that would forever change Sandra's life arrived.

### Keeping families CLOSE

Sandra received the call that a match from an organ donor hero had been found for her, and she received her life-saving lung transplant the next day. There were some complications, however, and Sandra had to remain under sedation for four months in the ICU to minimize the signs of rejection.

It was during this time Sandra's family utilized Gift of Life Howie's House to remain close to her. Sandra's husband, David, made a promise to never leave her side while in the hospital, and the House made keeping that promise possible.

"The House means a lot to him... It allowed him to stay with me and complete the promise that he made to be by my side," says Sandra.

David stayed at the House for over six months while Sandra was in the hospital and recovering. Their children, who had all moved home to help the family, were also able to visit whenever they could. "This program made it possible for my family to stay close to my mom while she continued to fight for her life. It gave us a community to turn to full of people who were going through the same experience we were," says Kelsey, one of Sandra's daughters.

**"The House made it possible to not go through it alone."**



## Her LONG JOURNEY home

Sandra had to undergo intensive physical therapy for many weeks after she came out of sedation. Her family continued to stay at the House during this time.

"The House has been a value to me and my family," says Sandra. "It would have been really scary to not be able to do anything and not have my family there every day making sure I was OK."

Recently, Sandra was able to return home to Pennsylvania and is eagerly looking forward to driving again, taking care of her house, and making up for lost time with loved ones. She emphasizes that she is forever grateful to the House for allowing her family to care for her when she needed them most.

She concludes, "The House made it possible to not go through it alone."



ABOVE: Left to right: David Ryan, Kelsey, Samantha, Kathryn, Sandra, and David Pabon  
LEFT: Sandra and her husband David

## A fighting CHANCE

Four-year-old Nicholas, affectionately known as Nico, has been a fighter from day one. At just eight weeks old, he was diagnosed with Biliary Atresia, a rare liver disease causing severe liver damage and scarring in infants.

Cristina, Nico's mother, and Annette, his grandmother, are from Puerto Rico and were informed that the local hospital couldn't treat Nico's condition. They embarked on a long journey to Philadelphia to seek the best care.

Discovering the House didn't happen immediately for the family. Initially staying with relatives in Pittsburgh, they commuted back and forth for all of Nico's appointments.

After months of waiting, Nico received his life-saving liver transplant at just one year old. It was only after his transplant that Cristina and Annette came to stay at the House and said they instantly felt at home.

## A PLACE to grow

The House provided Nico and his family a place to heal, grow, and connect with other families with similar journeys.

"I was very paranoid, anxious, and depressed, but when we came here and saw all the people who are going through the same process that we are, I was able to feel calmer and more relaxed. We know that we are not alone," Cristina shares.

**"... when we came here and saw all the people who are going through the same process that we are, I was able to feel calmer and more relaxed."**



Annette, Nico and Cristina at Gift of Life Howie's House

Following his discharge from the hospital, the House lit the way for Nico to experience many important firsts. Just two weeks after his transplant, Nico reminded his family of his fighting spirit and took his first steps in the playroom.

Cristina says, "He loves the playroom downstairs, that's where he learned to walk. And we have not stopped him since."

Nico and his outgoing personality can often be heard running around the House, charming both guests and staff. "He made a lot of friends here," Cristina says.

## SUPPORTING their journey

For Nico's family, the House alleviated many of the stresses tied to the transplant journey. From figuring out what to eat for dinner to the added financial pressures, the House allowed them to focus solely on Nico's recovery.

Annette shares, "Having the opportunity to improve your quality of life and stay relaxed is so important, and here you only have to worry about your recovery."

Both Cristina and Annette expressed their gratitude for the people who contribute financially to support the House.

Cristina explains, "When people donate, it makes the journey easier and more comfortable. They don't know but they are changing lives here with donations because there are people here that depend on that support."

Above all, Cristina and Annette are the most grateful for Nico's organ donor for giving him the gift of life, and to all the organ donor heroes that make the miracle of transplant possible.



**YOUR SUPPORT CAN LIGHT THE PATH** and help guide families like Nico's and Sandra's back home.

By making a gift today, you are helping to "Light the Way Home" for the many families staying at the House this holiday season. Every donation, regardless of its size, makes a significant difference in these families' lives, offering them hope and a path forward during their darkest hours.

Your support will help bridge the gap between our low nightly fee of \$40 and the actual cost to provide our services, which is \$175 a night. It will also help keep the promise of never turning away a family who cannot afford the nightly fee.

**A special incentive to make your gift even more meaningful:** For those who donate \$250 or more, your name will be placed on a beautifully crafted paper house, illuminated as a symbol of your support. They will be displayed around Gift of Life Howie's House and serve as a reminder to our guests that there are compassionate individuals helping to ease their journey and "Light the Way Home." Make your gift at [giftoflifehowieshouse.org](http://giftoflifehowieshouse.org) or use the enclosed envelope.

**If you can offer a special gift of \$250 or more, you'll also become a cherished member of the Family Circle.**



# LIGHT THE WAY HOME for Transplant Families THIS GIVING TUESDAY!

Mark your calendar now for **#GivingTuesday, November 28th** and participate in a Matching Gift Challenge to Double Your Impact this Holiday Season.

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT:

A generous contributor has offered to match each gift made on Giving Tuesday, dollar for dollar, up to \$10,000!

On this national day of giving back, Gift of Life Howie's House is launching a matching gift fundraising challenge – an opportunity for caring people like you to put your compassion into action and help reach our fundraising goal of \$10,000 – that will be doubled – to support transplant families!

For some families, even our low \$40 nightly fee is out of reach, that's why every gift during the Giving Tuesday fundraiser benefits our Adopt-A-Family Program, which keep the nightly fees low and helps families who can't pay.

Every \$40 you help raise will be doubled and provides them with nights of safe, peaceful lodging and access to all the other services of the House: home-cooked meals, a fully stocked pantry, transportation to and from appointments, an on-site social work team, and a whole community of caring people.

**This #GivingTuesday, share your passion for Gift of Life Howie's House as you help raise important funds – that will be doubled!**

For questions about the Giving Tuesday Matching Gift Challenge, call us at 267-546-9812.

**This #GivingTuesday, you can help light the way home for families along the transplant journey by helping to reach our fundraising goal of \$10,000 – that will be doubled – for Gift of Life Howie's House!**

## STAFF SPOTLIGHT!

Meet Gift of Life Howie's House new Director of Guest Services, **Chantell Powell-Brinkley!**

Chantell was born and raised in Philadelphia and is no stranger to community work. Following numerous years dedicated to volunteering, advocating, and assisting the homeless community, she embarked on her professional journey in property management at Project Home. There, she passionately contributed to the mission of offering affordable housing to the city's residents.

In her new role at Gift of Life Howie's House as Director of Guest Services, Chantell says she looks forward to addressing guests' needs and delivering outstanding client services. Her dedication to providing safe havens and support to individuals

highlight how aligned her values are with the House's mission to provide a "home away from home" for families. Her passion for service, background in property management, and customer service skills makes her a great asset to the team as she continues to advocate for those in need.

Out of the office, you can find Chantell cooking her favorite barbeque meal and cracking open a new book.



## Caregiver Lifeline Spotlight

by **Mia Moore, MSW**  
Social Worker  
Gift of Life Howie's House

### Financial Stress Throughout the Transplant Process

**During their transplant journey, many patients and caregivers experience financial stress. Chronic illnesses and transplants often provide little time for patients and their families to plan.**

#### Causes of Financial Stress

Stress can often be defined as a state of worry or mental tension resulting from a challenging situation. It can impact your emotional and physical well-being in many ways, such as irritability or fatigue, and can potentially lead to anxiety or depression. With financial stress there is an emphasis on being in a state of worry or having mental or emotional strain because of issues such as budgeting, debt, or upcoming large expenses.

Many situations may arise that can cause financial stress during the transplant journey including reduced work hours or income, unexpected healthcare costs, increased travel or living expenses, lack of savings or unforeseen emergencies.

#### Symptoms of Financial Stress

Symptoms of financial stress may look very similar to some reactions to your everyday stress or worries. However, due to this stress being a result of financial issues your symptoms have a direct impact on your feelings surrounding your finances. Some common symptoms are :

- Feelings of guilt when needing to spend money
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Lack of joy for things that you used to like doing
- Isolating yourself from others or avoiding phone calls
- Hopelessness regarding the future
- Feelings of shame

#### Ways to Manage Financial Stress

- Consult with your hospital social worker to identify transplant-specific financial resources
- Reach out to your bank or loan companies for resources for those experiencing financial issues
- Create a new monthly budget based on your income and new expenses
- Tend to your physical and emotional health like you would for other stressors. Talk about it with close family or friends, reach out to support groups and networks, talk to a counselor

#### Transplant Resources

Transplant costs vary and it is common for patients to use multiple resources to help pay for unexpected costs.

If you have issues obtaining your medications, concerns about medical costs or future coverage, or the cost of medical equipment, reach out to your transplant or dialysis social worker. There may be region-specific or organ-specific grants that you or your loved one may be eligible for.

Fundraising is also a great resource for supporting costs related to lodging, travel, and other medical expenses. The following organizations can aid with getting started:

- Help Hope Live: [helpholive.org](http://helpholive.org) or Phone: 800-642-8399
- Children's Organ Transplantation Association: [cota.org](http://cota.org) or Phone: 800-366-2682 \*Specifically for children and young adults

Stress is a normal part of life and finances are a common stressor for many transplant patients and caregivers. **If you have trouble navigating some of the resources listed above, please email:** [caregiverlifeline@giftoflifehowieshouse.org](mailto:caregiverlifeline@giftoflifehowieshouse.org)

<sup>1</sup>BetterUp, Financial stress: What's money got to do with sanity?, 2021: [betterup.com/blog/financial-stress](http://betterup.com/blog/financial-stress)

<sup>2</sup>Health Direct, Financial stress and your health, 2023: [healthdirect.gov.au/financial-stress](http://healthdirect.gov.au/financial-stress)

*The Caregiver Lifeline Program is supported in part by TD Charitable Foundation. We are thankful for their partnership and generosity.*



## TIME IS RUNNING OUT! YOU'VE GOT A CHANCE TO WIN A RARE 540 HP SHELBY GT500KR – A TRUE COLLECTOR'S CAR!



This 2008 Shelby GT500 King of the Road is a 40th Anniversary limited production upgrade and is loaded with all the GT500KR performance features. It was also signed by Carroll Shelby! Shelby received a heart transplant in 1990, and a kidney transplant in 1996. Enter today to win this exceptional car! All proceeds will benefit Gift of Life Howie's House.

**BONUS! Use promo code NEWSLETTER for 20% more entries. Visit [GiftOfLifeHowiesHouse.org](http://GiftOfLifeHowiesHouse.org) for more information.**

Hosted by Howard Nathan & Dan Sinnott

# KIDNEY OPEN

was a Hole-in-One!



Thank you to all the sponsors, golfers, volunteers and attendees who helped make the Kidney Open a huge success, raising more than \$145,000! The Kidney Open started when Dan Sinnott, President of Sinnott Executive Consulting, was diagnosed with a tumor on his kidney. Yearning to play one last round of golf, he called his friends and organized a golf outing to take place the day before he underwent surgery. His surgery was a success, and with that life-changing experience he developed a profound empathy for hospital patients. A year after his surgery, the same friends who attended his pre-surgery game decided to make their golf outing an annual event.



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# HOUSE HAPPENINGS

Thank you to volunteers and contributors for their commitment to supporting the mission of Gift of Life Howie's House.



#### Taylor Swift Sweepstakes Fundraiser

Congratulations to June Alderfer and her daughter Andria who were the winners of the House's Taylor Swift Sweepstakes Fundraiser. Thank you to the amazing community for helping to raise nearly \$25,000 for the House!



#### No Shower Happy Hour

The 15th Annual No Shower Happy Hour was held on July 8th in memory of Casey Kandel, a Philadelphia Police Officer, who lived a life dedicated to the service of others and saved many lives through organ donation.



#### 3rd Annual Gift of Life Memorial Tournament

On August 12th, family and friends of Allen Proper gathered for the 3rd Annual Gift of Life Memorial Tournament, which raised over \$13,500 for the House! Allen Proper was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident in May of 2020, and it was his wish to become an organ donor.



#### Birthday Wish List Drive

Ryan's Shamrocks stocked the pantry again this year with their annual wish list drive. Caitlin McCloud and her family visit the House every year on her birthday to drop off wish list items they collected in honor of her brother, Ryan, who was an organ donor.



#### Gift of Life Howie's House 12th Birthday Celebration

This year the House celebrated 12 years of serving organ transplant patients and their families. In honor of this special day, the staff hosted an "Under-the-Sea" themed birthday party to commemorate the occasion.



#### Golf Outing in Memory of Paul W. Penkala

On September 16th, Paul J. Penkala and his friends and family hosted their 10th Annual Paul W. Penkala Golf Tournament and raising over \$10,000 for the House! The Penkala family host this event every year in honor of Paul W. Penkala, who saved multiple lives when he became an organ donor.

Save the Date for Gift of Life Howie's House

# Strokes of KINDNESS

## ART CONTEST & FUNDRAISER!

Calling all artists! Now announcing the first ever Strokes of Kindness Art Contest & Fundraiser. You're invited to express your creativity and care by submitting your own masterpiece.

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: February 28, 2024**

**VOTING PERIOD: March 1 – April 30, 2024**

PLEASE JOIN THE HOUSE IN RAISING FUNDS for Gift of Life Howie's House through an art medium of your choice. You will have the chance to see your art displayed online during the voting period. All proceeds will benefit the Adopt-A-Family Program to continue providing transplant families with an affordable home away from home during their transplant journey. Artists who submit pieces are encouraged to request votes from their community to support the fundraiser. \$5 = 1 Vote. The artist with the most votes will win the contest. No limit on votes. The Art Contest winner will receive a \$200 gift card.

**NOT PARTICULARLY CRAFTY? NO PROBLEM!** You can still participate by voting for your favorite pieces during voting period. **For more information and to sign up, please visit [GiftofLifeHowiesHouse.org](https://GiftofLifeHowiesHouse.org)**

# Thank You to our generous partners in supporting transplant families

## Contributions of \$250 or more received between APRIL–AUGUST 2023

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