

UPDate



WHEN TRANSPLANT FAMILIES walk through our doors, they're welcomed home with warmth, kindness, and a community that understands and supports them.

The holiday season brings with it images of family gatherings and treasured traditions. For Chelsea and her mom Nicole, the season has also meant navigating hardships most families never imagine.

Long hospital stays, managing oxygen supply, and constant uncertainty have been part of their lives for the last seven years. Chelsea was diagnosed with a rare lung disease when she was just 16 years old, and her life has not been the same since.

Soon after her diagnosis, Chelsea began using oxygen. Her need grew from 2 liters to 25 liters, and doctors knew she would need a lung transplant to survive. Chelsea received her first life-saving transplant in 2016 at age 24.

But her journey didn't stop there. Within a year, Chelsea caught several infections. "Every infection known to coincide with lung transplants, she caught," says her mom, Nicole. By the second year, Chelsea was back on oxygen. Her illness left her bedridden for two years, and Nicole quit her job to become her full-time caregiver.

Finally, this past spring, Chelsea got the call she had been waiting for, and she received her second life-saving lung transplant.

Finding a HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Before Chelsea's first transplant, Nicole didn't know about Gift of Life Howie's House. She often drove back and forth from their home in New York to be with Chelsea, even sleeping multiple nights at the hospital.

Once they found the House, they gained more than a roof over their heads. They found a community that welcomed them with the support, services, and care they needed.

WINTER 2025

Nicole stayed at the House for almost six months during Chelsea's second recovery, with Chelsea joining her for three months post-transplant. After being intubated and unable to speak for nearly a month, coming back to the House felt like coming home.



"[The House] is such a crucial part of the process, it takes such a weight off of you," explains Nicole. Chelsea adds, "It feels like home here. It's just a wonderful place to be. It takes a load off, mentally and physically."

"Something really beautiful is that my mom cultivated a family here while I was in the hospital, so when I got discharged, I came back to this welcoming committee of people that knew about me and cared," shares Chelsea.

For both mother and daughter, the community at the House became their saving grace. Every meal shared with other families reminded them they weren't alone. Every conversation gave them comfort and warmth, and every experience gave them knowledge to help continue their journey.

LIFESAVING Support

For many families, transplant brings enormous financial, physical, and emotional stress. Nicole left her career as a food and beverage director so she could fully care for Chelsea.

Medical bills, unemployment, and travel costs became overwhelming. Nicole says the affordability and support of the House made all the difference.

"It saved our lives. I would not have been able to maintain anything without [the House], and mentally it would have broken me," emphasizes Nicole.

At the House, families pay only \$40 a night for lodging, meals, transportation, and support services, and no family is ever turned away for inability to pay.

No HOLDING BACK

Even during her sickest days, Chelsea has never let her illness hold her back.

While bedridden for two years, she earned her master's in business administration, wrote a novel, published poetry, and started her own skin and haircare business.

Now post-transplant, she is excited to travel. She says her family gave her the strength to keep going.

"Having something to live for helped me to get through, and for me that's my mother and sister. They sacrificed everything to take care of me. I wanted to get better so I can try to give back to them what they have given me."

Nicole says this experience has shifted her priorities. She hopes to share what she's learned with other transplant families and dreams of starting a nonprofit to raise awareness of transplant resources.



Looking ahead to the holidays, Nicole sees things in a new light: "All the things that used to be important to me are not important anymore. Watching her move on her own and breathe on her own and not struggle is the present this holiday," she explains. "This holiday will be about giving back. That's my mission moving forward."

WHERE HOME AND HEARTMEET

This holiday season, we're celebrating the place where home and heart meet for transplant families like Nicole and Chelsea.

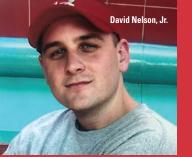
At the House, families find more than a place to stay. They find **WARMTH**. They find **KINDNESS**. They find a **COMMUNITY** that understands.

That feeling of being seen, supported, and safe is what makes a house a home, and your gift keeps that feeling alive for every caregiver, loved one, and transplant patient who walks through our doors.

More families than ever relied on the House in 2024, and your generosity makes it possible to provide a safe, caring place to turn – something we can only do together, with the support of our community. As Nicole shares, "Unless you've gone through it you wouldn't understand, but please take my word for it: the support provided by the House is a financial lifesaver."

Make a tax-deductible contribution today and help us reach our year-end goal of \$150,000. For your convenience, you can use the enclosed envelope or donate online using the QR code here.





A Mother's LEGACY of LOVE

Before Gift of Life Howie's House even opened its doors, long-time volunteer and donor mom, Patty Nelson, was already opening her heart to the mission.

In 2006, Patty's son, David Nelson Jr., became an organ donor hero whose gifts saved five lives. His selfless decision inspired Patty, her family, and her community to dedicate nearly two decades to advocacy and support for *Gift of Life* and the House.

From Grief to Community Impact

After her son's passing, Patty recognized the financial burden families face when losing a loved one. Determined to help, she created the David M. Nelson Jr. Memorial Scholarship Fund, which awards scholarships to students who are children of deceased organ and tissue donors.

Shortly after her first fundraiser, Patty learned about a group called Donors Are Heroes that supported *Gift of Life Donor Program* and its mission of raising awareness for organ donation.

Patty says joining the group transformed her grief journey.

"It was life-changing," she shares. "I could have easily let my son's passing define me for years, but instead I found this amazing group of people who knew what I was facing and helped me move forward." When the plan for the House was beginning to take shape, *Gift of Life* shared the need for guest room sponsorships. Patty was intrigued at the opportunity to make a larger impact, but skeptical of her ability to raise the funds. It was her fellow members of Donors Are Heroes that encouraged



Patty with the family of Dennis "Pez" Hanna, the honoree of the 2022 No Shower Happy Hour



Patty with her daughters (L-R) Kaitlyn, Alison, and Kyle at the 17th Annual No Shower Happy Hou

her to take the leap, and the idea for her first large scale fundraiser was born.

The Start of "No Shower Happy Hour"

To meet the ambitious \$25,000 goal for a room underwriting, Patty and her family launched the No Shower Happy Hour at the restaurant where David once worked in Wildwood, NJ.

The first event in 2008 was an extraordinary success, and in just three years, Patty and her community raised enough to underwrite a guest room.

Over time, the event evolved to honor not only David, but also other donor families and transplant recipients. "Honoring other families brought new people in and raised more awareness," Patty explained. The event quickly grew, attracting hundreds of attendees and raising thousands each year.

One of Patty's favorite memories was the year that legendary Wildwood musician and liver recipient Bobby Rydell attended. While he couldn't perform, the crowd serenaded him with his famous song "Wildwood Days," creating an unforgettable moment.

Beyond the Happy Hour

Patty's passion extends far beyond her signature fundraiser. She has continued to administer scholarships through the David Nelson Jr. Memorial Scholarship Fund, led a DASH team in her son's memory for over 10 years, and dedicated 35 years as an employee of the Philadelphia Public School System, where she also ran a program teaching students the importance of organ donation.

When asked what motivates her, Patty said: "It's not just me – it's the energy of the people around me. That support keeps us going."

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Coming Full Circle

This past June, Patty celebrated her 17th and final No Shower Happy Hour fundraising event. With a generous gift from the Bardaro Family Foundation, this year's event shattered records, raising more than \$100,000 for the House.

Patty likes to say that she doesn't believe in coincidences. "I felt like that was my son putting it all together and saying, 'Okay Mom, you're good now.'"

Today, she is stepping back from fundraising to care for her husband, David Sr. who is living with frontotemporal dementia.

(L-R) Howard Nathan, David Nelson Sr., Bobby Rydell, and Patty Nelson





Still, the impact of her work is ever-lasting. Since its beginning, the No Shower Happy Hour event has raised more than \$330,000 for the House, solidifying David's legacy as one with rippling impact.

Carrying the Legacy Forward

In addition to her late son David, Patty is the proud mother to three daughters and grandmother to eleven. Reflecting on her 17 years of giving, she says: "You just feel uplifted and satisfied to know that you've accomplished this great thing together with people you love, and that you're helping other people. It really is a gift all the way around."

Although Patty is stepping away from her annual fundraiser, she looks forward to becoming a part-time school librarian and hopes to restart her organ donation awareness program for students.

Patty's journey is a powerful reminder of how one act of generosity can grow into a legacy of compassion. Through her dedication, the Nelson family and their community have ensured that hundreds of transplant families have a home filled with care and comfort during their most difficult times.



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

Coping with the Emotional Challenges of Transplant Care

Being a transplant patient or caregiver can bring many emotions, including stress, anxiety, sadness, and more. You might feel like you are on a "roller coaster" with ups and downs that can feel overwhelming.

Mindfulness and meditation can help. They can reduce stress, ease anxiety, and boost your energy. If you are a caregiver, these practices may help lower your risk of burnout. If you are a patient, they can help you develop coping skills to manage the stress of chronic illness.

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment, your thoughts, feelings, or body sensations, without judgment or trying to change them. Meditation helps you calm and focus your mind, often by sitting quietly and noticing your breath. Together, these practices can bring you calm and help you manage stress during the transplant journey.

Practicing Mindfulness

Mindful Breathing Sit comfortably and focus on your breath. Breathe in slowly for three seconds, then out for three seconds, counting each breath in your head to stay present. You can also count each full breath, inhale on "one," exhale on "two," up to ten. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breath.

Mindful Walking As you walk, notice how your body feels with each step, your feet touching the ground, your legs moving, your arms swinging. Then notice your surroundings, including what you see, hear, smell, or feel. Focusing on your senses helps you stay present, which is a key part of mindfulness.

Other Mindfulness or Meditation Resources

You can find free, self-guided meditation apps right on your phone. Insight Timer offers the largest library of guided meditations and music. Smiling Mind, a nonprofit app, is completely free with programs for kids and adults. UCLA Mindful is research-based, beginner-friendly, and includes Spanish meditations. Healthy Minds Program combines short podcaststyle lessons with guided practices to build awareness, connection, and purpose. You can download these apps for free in the Apple App Store or Google Play Store.

Sources: https://www.therapistaid.com/worksheets/what-is-mindfulness

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



Past Guests UPDATE

Our youngest guests grow, heal, and go on to do incredible things.

Here's a look at where their transplant journeys have taken them.



THE WARD FAMILY

Jude, 10, and Lucille, 6, are both thriving after liver transplants in 2017 and 2024 respectively – loving school, sports, and dance - while the family adjusts to life in California.



After 522 days of waiting, Gabriela received her heart in 2024. Now 5, she's riding her bike, swimming, and enjoying life with her big brother.



Justine received a heart and lung transplant in 2012 and 2019. She's embracing family, travel, and music: "With every breathe there is hope!"

Be a **HEART**架**HOUSE** Partner

Help Us Keep the House Running - One Week at a Time



Gift of Life Howie's House is more than a place to stay - it's a lifeline for transplant families navigating one of the most stressful times in their lives. For businesses, supporting this mission is not just an act of generosity, it's a powerful statement of values.

In 2026, your company can join us as a **HEART OF THE HOUSE PARTNER.** With an annual investment of \$4,500, each sponsorship covers one full week of essential operations at the House.

Your sponsorship supports:

- A Fully Stocked Kitchen Guests have access to well-stocked cold storage, pantry staples, and a welcoming community kitchen – giving them the ability to prepare meals that fit their schedules, dietary needs, and cultural preferences. It's a small comfort that makes a big difference.
- Transportation to Appointments Our complimentary shuttle ensures guests get to and from local transplant centers safely and reliably. Your support covers fuel, insurance, maintenance, and peace of mind for families who already have so much on their plate.
- **Utilities and Housekeeping** The lights stay on, the water stays hot, and rooms stay clean – all thanks to you.

Why Partner?

Becoming a Heart of the House Partner positions your company as a champion of compassion, community, and care. It's a way to:

ALIGN YOUR BRAND WITH IMPACT. Show your employees, customers, and stakeholders that your company invests in families during their hardest moments.

ENHANCE VISIBILITY. Sponsors receive prominent recognition, including signage in the guest kitchen and shuttle, listing in our in-room Guest Directory, acknowledgment on our website, and in our Annual Impact Report.

SHARE YOUR COMMITMENT. A digital sponsorship badge lets you showcase your partnership proudly across your own marketing channels.

By sponsoring a week of essential operations, your company sustains the very heart of the House, offering families peace of mind, comfort, and care when they need it most.

Sponsor a week. Sustain a family. Support the Heart of the House.

To learn more about 2026 sponsorship opportunities, contact Katherine Hamilton, Development Director at khamilton@giftoflifehowieshouse.org.

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the 21st Annual Kidney

Open Golf Outing! With unusually cool weather, great friends,

and a shared commitment to transplant families, it was a truly special day. Thanks to the generosity of our sponsors, golfers,

and volunteers, the event raised more than \$138,000 to support

21ST ANNUAL **KIDNEY OPEN Golf Outing**

L-R: Mike Walker, Dr. Richard Hasz, Richard D. Hasz, Jeff Ross, Tim Chermak

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Contributions of \$250 or more received between JANUARY-AUGUST 2025

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The official registration and financial information of Transplant House d/h/a Gift of Life Howie's House may be obtained from PA Dept. of State by calling toll free 1,800 732 0999. Registration does not imply endorsement



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