

Valarie Traynham

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Wellness News

Dear Friends,

The pandemic has been a difficult journey for many, particularly for those who are coping with cancer. Faced with the uncertainty of illness, cancer survivors and their families experience challenges and distress beyond what most can imagine. Because of you and your support of Wellness House, though, these same individuals have access to nearly 500 online programs each month. Programs that are designed to reduce the devastating effects of isolation, empower someone to feel stronger, or help a family navigate cancer together. And because everything we do has been available online, people have made more than 47,500 visits from 32 different states in the past year.

Throughout the twists and turns of an unpredictable year, a constant thread of hope has bound us together. We've seen the transformative effects of generosity as the light of this hope moves from one person to another. In the story on page 4 of this newsletter, Valarie Traynham shares how the experience of receiving support from Wellness House provided her with a new direction to help others. "Throughout this whole process, I have found my purpose. I know what I'm supposed to be doing now, and it's so rewarding to be able to help people along." Valarie's story embodies the synchronicity of giving and receiving—they are one and the same.

The name of our fall fundraiser, Under One Sky, taking place on October 15, speaks to our mutual commitment as a community to both give and receive. A special thank you to the Luminaries lighting the way for this year's event: Angie and Wes Breton; Stephanie and Freddie Brzozowski; Lauren and Matthew Houder; Debbie and Jim Hultquist; Jenna and Ken Julian; Briana and Peter Murray; Lori and Clay Naccarato; and Beth Sharp. We are deeply grateful to you as we share one sky and celebrate the healing and hope that brings us closer to our vision that all people affected by cancer thrive.



Lisa K. Kolavennu, MA, LCPC
Executive Director



Lauren Staniar Haarlow
Board Chair

"The purpose of life is not to be happy. It's to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well." - Ralph Waldo Emerson



Walk for Wellness House...

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE!



We were thrilled to come together in a different way this year for our Walk for Wellness House on May 2, 2021! More than 1900 community members and donors like you participated in the event to raise awareness for Wellness House, and together **you raised over \$527,000!** Whether participating in the one-mile staggered walk on the streets and park land surrounding Wellness House in Hinsdale, at one of the local Forest Preserves, or from your own favorite walking spot, your participation in the Walk honored the unbreakable spirit of community that Wellness House continues to provide. We were deeply inspired by the messages of love, gratitude, and remembrance that adorned the Inspiration House sponsored by Creber Construction, as well as our Dedication Wall, both online and in-person, serving as a tangible reminder of how meaningful the Walk is for our community. **Many thanks to YOU - our extraordinary Walk participants, sponsors, donors and volunteers!**

Walk 
for **Wellness**
House for LIVING
with CANCER
Sunday • May 2 • 2021



Join us *Under One Sky*

Wellness House is bringing its annual fall fundraiser to the western suburbs! As a change of pace, this year's event will be on **Friday, October 15**, and will occur "Under One Sky" at three suburban locations: Butterfield Country Club, Chicago Highlands Club and Hinsdale Golf Club. Led by eight Luminaries with a profound history of supporting Wellness House, guests at all locations will enjoy cocktails and seated dinner, wine auction, mission moment and live auction, before dancing the night away. While the attire is cocktail, the event will be elegant, refined and reminiscent of the Wellness House Ball that traditionally takes place in October.

Every day at Wellness House, online and in-person programs connect people affected by cancer wherever they may be located. Under One Sky speaks to the connection program participants have maintained throughout the pandemic as well as the three

locations that will be connected throughout the evening on October 15, 2021. The event signifies a shared commitment to help people affected by cancer thrive – all Under One Sky for Wellness House.

"A very special thank you to all the wonderful Luminaries: **Angie & Wes Breton, Stephanie & Freddie Brzozowski, Lauren & Matt Houder, Debbie & Jim Hultquist, Jenna & Ken Julian, Briana & Peter Murray, Lori & Clay Naccarato, and Beth Sharp.** The Luminaries leading Under One Sky for Wellness House are members of our Board of Directors that have demonstrated a deep commitment to the mission and success of Wellness House. They were selected for their ability to inspire and influence others to join them in their support of Wellness House" said Lisa Kolavennu, Executive Director. **To purchase tickets or make a donation, visit wellnesshouse.org/ball-2021.**



Finding a Purpose

For **Valarie Traynham**, every birthday is a big deal. For her, it's not only a celebration of life, but another year in which she has beaten cancer. In 2015, just months shy of her 43rd birthday, Valarie received the most shocking news of her life. She was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma, a cancer that has a 3-5 years survival rate. "When I turned 48, I was very excited to reach the milestone of five years survival," says Valarie, who successfully surpassed the five year mark last year. "I wanted to shout 'Yes! I'm still here!'"

Her journey began in early 2011 when Valarie's job brought her to Illinois. She worked in the financial field as a district supervisor but never quite envisioned herself here. Looking back, Valarie realizes it was meant to be. "I didn't choose Illinois," she says. "I think Illinois chose me."

At the end of 2014, life was good for Valarie. She was enjoying her job, working hard towards online certifications in Human Resources, and adjusting to her new life in Aurora when she came down with a bout of the flu that she just couldn't shake. She went to her primary care physician who found concerning issues through her bloodwork.

She was directed to a hematologist/oncologist where she received a diagnosis of Multiple Myeloma, a cancer of the bone marrow. **"I joke with my friends about this," she explains incredulously. "I told them that I was just going to the doctor for a prescription for an iron supplement and I came back with a cancer diagnosis."**

She quickly began treatment in March of 2015 and continued to work until October of that same year. She eventually took a leave of absence because it was too rigorous to do both. **Along with her chemotherapy treatments, Valarie attended several cancer support groups including many at Wellness House.**

In the early part of 2016, she received a bone marrow transplant with the hopes of returning to some normalcy as soon as she felt well enough to do so. "My doctor

wanted to continue active treatment to try to get rid of as much of the cancer as possible. There's no way to cut it out of the body so the doctors just wanted to deepen the response. I ended up doing another twelve months of chemotherapy which was rough," says Valarie. "I asked myself, 'Am I even going to live to see my 50th birthday? What will the future hold for me? Where is the good in all of this?'"

Away from family and feeling scared, Valarie turned to friends for help. The women referred her to Wellness House. **"I started going to Wellness House's Myeloma Support Group in 2017. That's really how I started with the classes there," says Valarie, who regularly enjoys in person classes at the Hinsdale location as well as virtual classes online.** She appreciated the support from people who knew what she was going through so she started her own support group towards the end of 2017. She says, "Myeloma is a little different from other cancers so I really needed support from people who could relate."

When Valarie finished her active portion of the chemotherapy treatment, she decided to restart her online certification courses and become a patient advocate. "I felt drawn in that direction and I want to advocate for those who aren't able to advocate for themselves," says Valarie.

Unexpectedly, however, in early 2019, Valarie received more shocking news - she was diagnosed with breast cancer after a routine mammogram. "That threw me

for a loop; I wasn't expecting that," she says. In early 2019, she had a single mastectomy and began chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer. All the while, she continued her chemotherapy for Multiple Myeloma.

At Wellness House, Valarie has found many beneficial and supportive programs. She has participated in numerous nutrition and exercise classes, won a fitness challenge, and made lifelong friendships along the way.

She still meets every other Monday with friends she's made through the Wellness House classes. She really appreciates the connections she's made.

"Wellness House is a great place to learn," says Valarie, who touts the benefits of self-care, fitness challenges, Reiki, and sound healing classes. "Had I not been exposed to the classes at Wellness House, my eyes wouldn't have been opened to all the resources out there [for cancer patients]," says Valarie.

Reflecting back on her whole journey, Valarie said she wouldn't change a thing. The most important thing Valarie has learned is how to have empathy for others. Valarie was offered a part-time position at HealthTree Foundation as a mentor and myeloma coach. "In February, I started

leading the African American Multiple Myeloma Chapter," says Valarie. "It brings me such joy. **Throughout this whole process of volunteering and being involved in many myeloma organizations, I have found my purpose. I know what I'm supposed to be doing now and it's so rewarding to be able to help people along.**"

As for her 50th birthday next year, the details remain to be seen but it's sure to be a wonderful event. Says Valarie with a laugh, "I plan to have a big shebang for my 50th birthday because I will celebrate how blessed I am."

Giving Back to Wellness House

Looking for a meaningful way to give back to Wellness House? Create your own Peer to Peer Fundraising Campaign! Contact Liza Larsen in our Development office at llarsen@wellnesshouse.org and she can help you create a personalized fundraising page to commemorate an important event in your life, like a birthday, wedding, graduation or special achievement. Jason Trout is fundraising for Wellness House as he trains and participates in the Chicago Marathon on October 10, 2021, in appreciation for the services provided to his family after his wife Darci's cancer diagnosis.



Check out Jason's fundraising page at <https://justgiving.com/campaign/JasonTrout>

Volunteers are Vital to Wellness House

We couldn't do what we do without volunteers! They make it possible for Wellness House participants to enjoy outstanding support during their cancer journey.

Front Desk Volunteer:

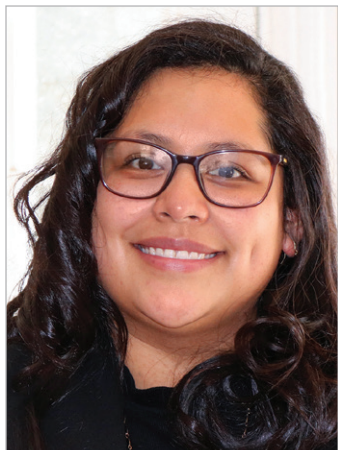
You will be our participants' first point of contact—the face and voice that launches our relationships with new participants and maintains a positive connection with our existing participants.

Online Program Attendant Volunteer:

As a Volunteer Program Attendant, you will be opening our online programs and making sure participants are checked in for accurate attendance.



Breaking Down Barriers - language barriers no longer prevent patients from enjoying programs



Meet Our Experts – Thelma Razo

There are so many worries that come with having cancer. For some, a language barrier is one of them. Thanks to people like **Thelma Razo**, *Wellness House's Bilingual Oncology Support and Family Counselor*, language barriers no longer prevent cancer patients and caregivers from enjoying the numerous educational programs and counseling opportunities offered at Wellness House.

Thelma joined Wellness House in 2021 and runs many Latinx programs. Because Spanish is a very gender specific language, either referring to Latinos (male) or Latinas (female), Thelma includes the entire Spanish-speaking population with gender neutral Spanish programs referred to as Latinx.

Thelma, who earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from Aurora University and is certified in Illinois, began many Latinx programs for Waterford Cancer Research Center in Aurora before coming to Wellness House. Initially in her career, Thelma worked with patients who had either chronic kidney disease or cancer, but decided that continuing to work with cancer patients was her calling. "I was aware of Wellness House because Waterford was based on the Wellness House model," says Thelma, "I was seeking a position in something similar because I really enjoy working with cancer patients."

According to Thelma, cancer is a unique experience and facing an unknown future is traumatic. There is a lot of grief that needs to be processed and it's not always discussed in a productive way. Because of that, Thelma is drawn to helping individuals who are experiencing fear, grief and uncertainty. She specifically enjoys working with the Latinx population. "As a first generation Latina, I know how difficult it is to get resources," she says.

Given that there are both insurance and financial concerns for many in the Latinx population, seeking therapy elsewhere often poses a challenge so the programs Thelma runs at Wellness House are extremely beneficial. Thanks to the generous donors, Wellness House programs are offered at no cost to participants. "In Illinois, there aren't a lot of cancer support programs for Spanish-speaking individuals," says Thelma, "I have participants who haven't had anyone to talk to so these programs are wonderful for them."

A cancer diagnoses intensifies everything else going on in patients' lives. Thelma finds it a privilege to help them navigate difficulties and engage in daily activities while continuing treatment.

"In Illinois, there aren't a lot of cancer support programs for Spanish-speaking individuals," says Thelma, "I have participants who haven't had anyone to talk to so these programs are wonderful for them."

- **Thelma Razo**, *Bilingual Oncology Support and Family Counselor*

Thelma's professional highlights

- Earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from Aurora University
- Certified in Illinois
- Expertise in multicultural community cancer support

Coming Together for In-Person and Virtual Events



Hot Topics in Breast Cancer

During the week of Saturday, June 19 – Tuesday, June 29, we held our annual Hot Topics in Breast Cancer! Over 100 participants attended five different online sessions throughout the week, facilitated by the top oncologists, surgeons, and healthcare professionals in the Chicagoland area. Programs covered a wide variety of topics on breast cancer treatment and research, including updates in the treatment of metastatic breast cancer, hormonal therapy for breast cancer, and advocating for yourself as a breast cancer patient. A special thanks to Pfizer for sponsoring this event!

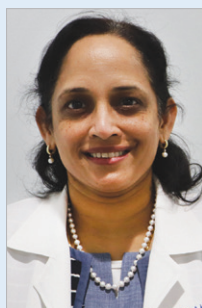
Coming Back Together Again

Starting in late May, we began a phased approach for returning to in-person programs at our main location in Hinsdale. We started with offering in-person individual appointments, and in the summer, we began offering limited group programs in person as well. Health and safety are top priorities for us, so we have maintained our extra screening and safety measures, like mandatory masks, temperature checks at the door, and deep cleaning of the house. Over the next six months, we will gradually and safely increase the number of programs offered in person. After more than a year of online programs, we are excited to have participants back at Wellness House!



Kids Kamp

After last year's virtual Kids Kamp, this year we were delighted to welcome the kids back into Wellness House for a fun week of games and activities! During the mornings of Monday, July 12 – Friday, July 16, Wellness House greeted an enthusiastic group of masked children excited to be together in person again. They did lots of creative and energetic activities, like sand painting, beading and even built their own hand-held rockets. The kids were thrilled to finally be back at the house, and we were overjoyed to see them all again!



Dr. Srilata Gundala - Partner Highlight

We're excited to highlight one of our valued oncology healthcare provider partners, Dr. Srilata Gundala, founder of **Hope and Healing Cancer Services** located in Hinsdale. Dr. Gundala has partnered with Wellness House for several years and works with us to provide whole-person care to her patients. Wellness House provides printed Welcome Guides for new patients and also connects with prospective participants through a new partner website portal specifically for Dr. Gundala's office.

"Part of the idea behind integrative therapies is that they are meant to treat the 'whole person,' and not just the physical ailments. I encourage all of my patients to tell me about more than just their physical symptoms. To bring a holistic treatment approach to my patients, it's important that I also know their emotional and psychological needs. Sometimes the change is a new prescription and sometimes it may be adding yoga, massage, acupuncture, or a different diet to complement the cancer care," says Dr. Srilata Gundala.

Wellness House | Main Location
The Kay & Mike Birck Home of Hope
131 North County Line Road
Hinsdale, Illinois 60521

Tax-Friendly Way to Handle Your RMD

If you want a tax break and want to help a non-profit, this may be a good move.

PROVIDED BY DAVID BLAYDES WITH FINANCIAL LIFE PLANNERS



David Blaydes and his team may be reached at info@rpiplan.com or 630.778.8100. www.rpiplan.com

Have you ever wanted to make a major charitable gift? Would you like a significant federal tax break in acknowledgment of that gift? If so, an IRA charitable rollover may be a good financial step.

If you are age 70½ or older and have one or more traditional IRAs, you may want to explore the potential of this tax provision. In the language of federal tax law, it is called a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) – a direct transfer of up to \$100,000 from the IRA to a qualified charity. ^{1,2}

An IRA charitable rollover may help you lower your adjusted gross income. That may be a goal in your tax strategy, especially if your AGI is large enough to position you for increased Medicare premiums, greater taxation of your Social Security benefits, or exposure to the 3.8% investment income tax and the 0.9% Medicare surtax. ²

The gifted amount counts toward your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD), making this a perfect strategy when the RMD is not needed to support your lifestyle. ^{1,2}

How does it work? Logistically speaking, an IRA charitable rollover is a trustee-to-trustee transfer: *the IRA owner does not take possession of the money as the gift is arranged.* Rather, the custodian or trustee overseeing the IRA writes a check for the amount of the gift payable to the charity. It is a direct transfer of funds, not a withdrawal. ²

An IRA owner must be age 70½ or older to do this, and he or she must be the original owner of the IRA (an inherited IRA may not be used).

In case you are wondering, you can contribute more than your IRA RMD amount for a particular year through an IRA charitable rollover, as long as the gifted amount does not exceed \$100,000. If you pledge a donation to a qualified charity or non-profit, an IRA charitable rollover can be used to satisfy your pledge.

David Blaydes & his team may be reached at info@rpiplan.com or 630-778-8100. www.rpiplan.com

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Citations.

- 1 - marketwatch.com/story/ira-charitable-rollover-provision-made-permanent-2015-12-25
- 2 - forbes.com/sites/jamiehopkins/2016/01/20/why-retirees-need-to-stop-writing-checks-to-charities/

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