

# >>> HOMETown News <<< HOUSE OF MERCY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

## FROM OUR *new* DIRECTOR

### HONORING THE LOSS OF DOLORES

By Susan O' Neil, LMHC

#### >>> ENSEMBLE

(NOUN) THE WHOLE; ALL THE PARTS TAKEN TOGETHER.

(ADV.) ALL AT ONCE: TOGETHER.

Several months ago, Dolores led our weekly staff and volunteer meeting. This was soon after the "Help, Hope, and Healing: Mental Health Awareness Conference." We were all tired, but excited about how well it turned out and the positive feedback we received from the community. Dolores was particularly tired, but we all understood this had been especially physically challenging for her. After we talked about the conference for a while, everyone quieted down. Dolores looked around at all of us and said, "all the right people have come together here at HOME."

Dolores was our Director, the Conductor. She brought together the "ensemble" that makes up HOME. An ensemble of people all working together to do something meaningful. No one person is more important than the others, each contributing their talent to the whole. Our dear friend and "conductor," Dolores, is gone and sorely missed.

The HOME "ensemble" is still here. Whenever there is a loss of a director/conductor, there is change. This is true for House of Mercy and Encouragement; however, any changes will be to continue Dolores' vision to the best of our ability. All of us here at HOME want Dolores to be proud of how her work continues.

Peace be with you,  
Susan



Pictured here is Susan and her husband, Martin, sporting their HOME t-shirts as they brought food, gas and supplies to Fort Myers after the devastation caused by Hurricane Ian.

- We hosted a Bereavement Group in honor of Dolores for her clients in March and spent time reflecting on the ways she left her mark on each of them.
- Our art teacher, M'rissa, hosted an open art group for the staff to spend time reflecting upon the impact of Dolores' loss for each staff member personally. We spent time creating art, sharing Dolores stories and enjoying sweet treats.
- HOME has just completed a four week self-regulation group with eight participants. It was so successful, we have a waiting list for the next time we host this group!



## GENERAL HAPPENINGS at HOME

# Client STORY <<<

By: Parents of House of Mercy's Client

I want to start my story by saying that our daughter is sweet, loving, compassionate, strong in science and has an amazing imagination. In the 3rd grade, she started experiencing anxiety, low self-esteem and had few friends that were her age. Entering middle school has been particularly challenging and overwhelming for her. In middle school, she became so anxious that she would become ill when asked to share a project she created. It was also difficult for her to answer questions in the class. She struggled to make it through the day and began breaking out in stress hives almost daily at school.

In November 2022, we brought our daughter to House of Mercy and Encouragement for counseling. Our daughter was nervous about meeting with a counselor and was quiet for the first part of the session. Fortunately, she found a connection with the counselor because they both loved cats! The counselor was patient and kind and invited our daughter to move at her own pace. The following sessions focused on drawing pictures and becoming comfortable with the counselor. At first, she would not share her art with the counselor. In a relatively short time, she began allowing the counselor to see her art and eventually allowed a small artwork of hers to be hung in an out of the way place on the wall in the office. She even allowed her dad to share a video of her artwork with many of our friends. We switched to a new school and her counselor helped her navigate situations that made her most anxious.

Step by step, our daughter is beginning to learn to manage some of her anxiety and has not felt ill from it for several weeks. She has also started talking with some of the girls and has a friend she sits with in class. She says that she and her friend like to make each other laugh. Our daughter is making progress and starting to allow the world to see the amazing person she is and that we have always known her to be. We are so grateful to her counselor for working with her and taking the time to understand her while providing the tools to help her navigate her anxiety.

## MEET OUR *new* COUNSELOR

**WINNIE HOLLAND, MPH, MA, LMHC-S**

Winnie Holland has been with the House of Mercy and Encouragement for over a year and she is excited to be able to serve the children and adults of HOME. In addition to individual counseling, Winnie enjoys working with groups (especially children). Prior to coming to HOME, she worked for a community mental health agency in northeast Florida. The program integrated a health model as well as an evidence based mental health program serving seriously mentally ill clients. As a graduate of the University of Florida, USF, and Florida Gulf Coast University, Winnie worked in various counties throughout Florida in public health. She also assisted the Department of Health by providing crisis counseling during disasters until her retirement.



Pictured here is Winnie alongside one of our clients (parent permission granted), who is sporting the superhero cape she made during one of the group sessions that Winnie created and led teaching participants about self-regulation strategies.

We are so blessed to have her joyous spirit with us at House of Mercy; our clients and staff are blessed to know her and benefit from her servant's spirit.

# >> MAY: *Mental Health Awareness Month*

Mental Health Awareness Month was established in 1949 to bring attention to the increasing relevance of mental health in American life. In May, we take this opportunity to remind people of the importance that mental health has in one's overall health, and to celebrate recovery from mental illness. In May we take this opportunity to remind people of the importance that mental health has in everyone's overall health status. The pandemic increased the need for services.

At HOME we have recognized the increased need for services especially for children and young adults because of the social isolation of not attending school, being able to interact with family and friends and disruption of "normal" activities like participating in sports.

This has affected adults as well because of the challenges of working from home, changing jobs, or navigating disruptions of a routine.

The services at HOME were continued throughout the challenging years of the pandemic via telehealth and these services are still available today to assist adults and some teens who are having challenges with schedules and transportation. At HOME we have increased our availability by offering services on select Saturdays with appointments and providing groups for targeted ages on topics of relevance to children. Being aware of the need for services is vital to improve the health status of all adults and children. Mental health is health care and just as important as physical health care.

We encourage you to reach out if you have any concerns or questions regarding the need for behavioral or mental health services.

## Final Tribute to *Our Founder*

In Dolores' testimony to the St. Petersburg Magnificat she said, "'But I find my strength in St. Mother Teresa who said, 'We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.''"

After many years of struggling with cancer, Dolores Mortimer passed away on February 3, 2023. She died in the comfort of her home and surrounded by her loving family. Dolores was born on June 13, 1953 to her parents George and Rosemary. She spent many years in Pennsauken, NJ with her brother Bill and sisters Joyce, Elizabeth, Linda, and Shirley. She married Allen Mortimer on February 5, 1977 and raised three boys Ryan, Tim, and Ken. She was a member of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Dunedin.

### LOOKING AHEAD

- Building Social Skills Group (ages 4 - 7 yrs)

June 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th.

- Coffee with the Counselor: Compassion Fatigue.

August 28th, 6:30 - 8:30 PM. Our Lady of Lourdes, Dunedin

- Coffee with the Counselor: The Journey of Grief.

September 23rd, 10:00 - 11:30 AM. St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church, Trinity.

### UPDATE on coming Newsletters:

In an effort to be more economically and environmentally friendly, this will be our last *printed* newsletter as we will begin sending our quarterly newsletters via e-mail.

If you are not on our e-mail list, please call the front office and ask to be placed on the list to stay connected to HOME by means of our electronic newsletter.



Your support is invaluable to us and allows us to continue our mission of supporting children and families. If you are interested in donating, please head to our website and find the "donations" tab at the top of the page.

Thank you in advance for your support!

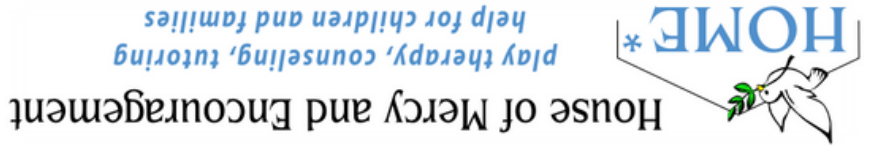
Dolores spent her life in service to her church and her community. She had a long and meaningful career serving children and families. She worked at Light of Christ Church where she started the preschool and the Mothers of Preschoolers, Infants and Toddlers Group. She also worked many years as a Guidance Counselor for the Pinellas County Schools.

In 2005, Dolores' son Tim Mortimer and her nephew and Godson Michael Celidonio were tragically killed in a car accident. As Dolores and her husband Allen grieved, she said that "God put upon my heart to do something in remembrance of the boys to help others". From this, she and Allen started the House of Mercy and Encouragement in 2007. Dolores worked tirelessly to serve the children and families who came to HOME until the end of her life.

All of us who knew and loved Dolores are grateful. We also thank Allen, her sons, and the rest of her family for sharing Dolores with us.



Dolores and her husband, Allen, standing in front of the statue of the Pietà which they so graciously donated to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church following the tragic loss of their son and nephew.



Our vision is to compassionately serve as a resource for those children and families who are affected by mental health, learning, emotional, or behavioral issues. We are a faith-based provider who believes in the God given dignity of every child and family. All families are treated with respect and kindness. HOME is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to helping children and families.

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## Do you or someone you know need therapeutic services?

### Currently a Provider For:

Aetna, BayCare, Cigna, Sunshine Health and Tricare  
If you don't see your insurance, please contact us as we offer a sliding fee scale and may be able to provide a scholarship. Please call for more details.

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