



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**COMMUNITY SERVICE AND FUNDRAISING EFFORTS BY GIRLS, FOR GIRLS**  
*Budding Female Philanthropists Making a Positive Difference in the  
Lives of Girls in Miami-Dade County Who Age Out of Foster Care*

**MIAMI** (March 27, 2006) – A young woman’s Bat Mitzvah philanthropy project that engaged a community and raised more than \$1,500. A rock concert benefit organized by an all-girl teen group that raised more than \$30,000. A Girl Scout Gold Award project that raised the funds necessary to create essential hurricane safety and supply kits. These are examples of innovative community projects and fundraising efforts created by young women in our community to benefit Casa Valentina, a new project to provide housing and support services to girls who age out of the foster care system when they turn 18.

“We have received extraordinary support for Casa Valentina from individuals, groups and companies all around Miami, but we never expected to receive so many contributions from teenagers,” said Sharon Langer, Casa Valentina executive committee chair. “Because of the similarity in age and understanding of everyday teenage challenges, I think these young women feel a strong connection to the foster girls we are helping. Their commitment to making a difference and the sophistication of their efforts are inspiring.”

Several teen community projects and fundraising efforts that benefit Casa Valentina include:

- **Casa Valentina’s Youngest Visionary**

For her Bat Mitzvah, 13 year-old Islamorada resident Stellar Levy gave a portion of her gift money to Casa Valentina. She also delivered speeches to her congregation and community to raise awareness of the challenges facing girls who age out of foster care and to raise additional money for the cause. She even made “Casa Valentina” bracelets to distribute to her family and friends. According to Stellar’s parents, community service was a requirement for her Bat Mitzvah project, but her own donation and fundraising efforts for Casa Valentina were separate and came from a personal desire to help foster girls.

“I felt that I wanted my Bat Mitzvah to be shared with teenagers whom I knew were having a harder time growing up,” said Stellar about her fundraising project for Casa Valentina. “This cause is so important to me and I am glad I was able to help and make a difference.”

Stellar raised more than \$1,500 for Casa Valentina and became Casa Valentina’s youngest Visionary. This collective of first-funders of Casa Valentina, known as Visionaries, has been a driving force in getting the Casa Valentina project off the ground. As a member of this prominent group of more than 170 women, including some of Miami’s leading business and community leaders, Stellar’s name will be engraved on a group plaque at the first Casa Valentina Home.

- **Concert for a Cause**

The National Coalition of Jewish Women (NCJW) Teens, a group made up of about 60 teenage girls from the 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade from all over Miami, hosted a rock concert at the Miami Beach Jewish Community Center on March 26 to raise money for Casa Valentina. Hundreds of community supporters attended the afternoon concert, which featured several local bands, and NCJW Teens raised more than \$30,000 for Casa Valentina through ticket sales and sponsorships.

NCJW Teens does advocacy and community service projects to make a difference in the community, and they chose Casa Valentina as their beneficiary because they wanted to help girls in need. Their sizeable donation makes them Casa Valentina's youngest Cornerstone building sponsors and will give them significant name recognition one of Casa Valentina's homes for girls.

- **Going for the Gold**

For her Girl Scouts Gold Award Project, Anais Rodriguez wanted to fulfill a need in her community, create long-lasting change, and develop something that could become an ongoing program. She did all of that and more when she decided to focus on the needs of young women who age out of foster at age 18 and are forced to survive on their own for the first time in their lives.

Understanding that hurricane preparedness is not just a good idea for South Floridians, but also a matter of personal safety, Anais initiated a letter writing campaign and collected more than \$800 in contributions to create five comprehensive hurricane supply kits for the girls who participate in Casa Valentina's program. Each kit includes a cooler, battery operated television, radio and fan, can opener, first aid kit, extra supply of batteries, CD-ROM with hurricane safety tips and more.

"Anais considered an important service for our girls that we hadn't even thought of ourselves," said Langer. "We are thrilled to offer this important resource and we hope to continue Anais' good work by creating a hurricane supply kit for every girl who participates in the Casa Valentina program."

- **Working It for Charity**

Twenty Little Working Girls (TLWG) is a nonprofit community service organization made up of about 100 high school aged girls from all around Miami. TLWG members participate in community service events every month that benefit many local organizations and projects, including Casa Valentina. In 2005, TLWG volunteered their time to Casa Valentina's benefit production of *The Vagina Monologues*. They also planned a fundraiser, which raised more than \$2,000 for the effort. Another fundraising initiative for Casa Valentina is planned for 2006.

Casa Valentina's awareness-raising and fundraising efforts, including community projects and fundraisers from girls in our community, have introduced thousands of people to the cause and raised the funds necessary to establish a first-of-its-kind transitional residential program that will provide former foster girls in Miami-Dade County with supportive housing as they transition from foster care to independent living. Prospective housing sites are being researched for development in 2006, and Casa Valentina's goal is to provide about a dozen girls with a place to live and the support services that are vital to their success by the end of this year.

Casa Valentina was created to address the immense challenges faced by girls in Miami-Dade County who age out of foster care at 18 without the life skills, financial stability and support they need to survive on their own. Facing life alone on the streets, these young women are at risk of experiencing prostitution, incarceration, violence, sexual abuse, homelessness or worse. Casa Valentina's mission is to provide former foster girls in Miami-Dade County with a safe, affordable place to live and the support services they need to become successful, independent adults. To learn more about Casa Valentina and to get involved, visit [www.casavalentina.org](http://www.casavalentina.org).

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