

## 'A child is not supposed to die': Jacksonville-area volunteer helps grieving mothers after infant death

Beth Reese Cravey

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Jeanette Hall of Nocatee has four grandchildren and a fifth on the way.

And then there is Olivia, the grandchild who died two years ago, but whose birthday is celebrated every year. She lives on in her grandmother's heart.

"When a parent or grandparent passes, you have memories of events from his or her life which can bring a smile to your face even when you're crying," she said. "The loss of a baby from the mother's womb for no apparent reason leaves you constantly wondering what the memories would be like. It is a heartbreaking feeling that I have not experienced any other time in my life. The loss of Olivia will always be with me and my family."

But Halle, 55, has since found a way to, if not ease the pain, use it for good.

She is a volunteer support coordinator for [The Finley Project](#), a statewide movement that helps mothers heal after losing an infant. The free seven-part program provides a range of support, from helping with funeral arrangements, groceries and housecleaning to massage therapy, professional counseling and regular contact with a volunteer support coordinator.

Each mother is assigned her own support coordinator to "help her through the holistic program daily, monthly and yearly for up to five years," according to the project website.

As a support coordinator, Halle provides one-on-one support and serves as a sounding board for mothers by offering sympathy and understanding.

"I have worked with some moms who just want to scream or yell and some who need a shoulder to cry on," she said. "Oftentimes these mothers just want to talk to someone other than family or their partner — someone who has an idea of what they're feeling. It's important for anyone to work through the grief of losing someone, but it is even more so for a mom grieving the loss of an infant."

The professional therapy provided as part of the program is critical, Halle said, but "it is equally important for them to have someone to contact day or night, and you cannot always do this with a therapist."

The Finley Project was founded by Noelle Moore, 40, of Maitland, who is also executive director. Her daughter, Finley Elizabeth Oblander, died 22 days after her birth in 2013.

"A child is not supposed to die ... Losing a child is the most unnatural thing on this earth," she said. "When Finley took her last breath at the hospital, I remember walking down the NICU hallway, down the elevator of the large hospital, thinking 'who helps me now?'"

"I was devastated and ... I needed someone to show me how to deal with the terribly dark and overwhelming feelings," Moore said. "I saw a gap between the hospital and home and knew someone needed to step in that gap for mothers like myself — to show mothers how to take steps forward and which direction to head next."

"The memory of your child never ever goes away," she said. "Time only makes it different but never erases the fact that the very person that was once yours is no longer with you. Everything reminds you of them."

Halle first encountered The Finley Project at a 5K walk in Orlando organized by Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, a nonprofit that provides "remembrance photography" to parents suffering the loss of a baby. Moore's organization had a booth at the event.

"This was the first time I met Noelle. She was so nice and heartwarming, and after further conversation and learning more about the organization, I asked if they needed volunteers," Halle said.

She said she knew this was a chance to help other mothers by sharing their stories.

"As I meet and talk with mothers, it helps me express my grief and help them with theirs," Halle said. "Moms need to know there is an end to the nightmare and as time goes on the pain is manageable and it is ok to celebrate the birth."

With some of them, Halle has built lasting relationships.

"A few mothers have stayed in touch and some have even been able to get pregnant again and have their baby," Halle said. "I love being able to see them happy."

*Beth Reese Cravey: (904) 359-4109*

## **THE FINLEY PROJECT**

To volunteer, donate or get more information, contact the nonprofit at 941 W. Morse Blvd., Suite 100, Winter Park, FL 32789, email [noelle.moore@thefinleyproject.org](mailto:noelle.moore@thefinleyproject.org) or go to [thefinleyproject.org](http://thefinleyproject.org).