



Mended  
Little  
Hearts

# 3rd MLH's Convention

by Jodi Lemacks, *National Program Coordinator*



This year was Mended Little Hearts' third year to participate in the annual convention. MLH group leaders (coordinators) came to Orlando on June 5 to start their leadership training and it continued until Sunday, June 7. Fifty coordinators attended, representing a majority of the 43 groups. The training was a huge success as all the coordinators learned a lot, shared ideas and had fun, too.

On Friday, MLH leaders worked on team-building, then received a history lesson about MHI from Frank and Bobbi Cecco of New Jersey. After that, Sandy Briggs of Fresno, California outlined the history of MLH. The leaders then attended a dinner at Universal Studios that evening. There they were joined for dessert by the Executive Committee, Executive Director Tim Elsner and Field Services Director Steve Vanderpoel. Some group leaders then went out to City Walk at Universal. For many this was a rare night out, as they are typically dealing with their children with heart defects.

Saturday was a full day for the leaders as they worked on leadership issues and had many roundtable discussions about best practices. The lunch speaker, Dr. Dadlani of All Children's in St. Petersburg, Florida, discussed ways they could develop good relations with hospitals. Lunch was generously sponsored by MLH of Jacksonville. That evening, MLH members, attired in tie-dye, attended the opening dinner for MHI's 57th Annual Convention. Kim Baratz of Oklahoma City got choked up with emotion as she spoke about what MHI means to her and her son Seth. My son Jacob Lemacks, age 13, spoke about having a brother with a heart defect and how MLH has helped our family. He also entertained the audience with his dry humor.

On Sunday, the coordinators worked on strategic planning with Susan Vanderpool, the new National Committee Chair. This was particularly useful, as many groups are growing rapidly but have limited resources. In addition there was an outstanding visitor training by Lexie Fussell. At lunch the group was joined by speakers Karin and Brad Coulter of Saving Little Hearts, who provide excellent care packages for many MLH groups.

## A Rookie's Convention Experience

by Patoya Henderson, Coordinator  
MLH of Jacksonville, Florida

I attended my first MLH convention this year in Orlando. I was a little nervous at first, since I had never met the other coordinators. I had only seen names that came across the Yahoo group email.

When I first checked in at the hotel, I really didn't know where to go. But then a friendly woman looking for MLH members told me where I should be and hugged me as if she had known me for years. I felt so much better and knew at that point this convention was going to be a blast.

"I felt as though I had already known these new and friendly faces."

- Patoya Henderson

When I arrived in the conference room, other coordinators were already there. When National Coordinator Jodi Lemacks announced me, I was instantly welcomed by everyone. I felt as though I had already known these new and friendly faces. Everyone I came in contact with was simply amazing.

I learned so much from the breakout sessions at the convention. I learned new fund-raising ideas and how to approach new members. I am all about hospital visiting. I also learned that no matter what defect or heart condition people have, everyone is important and we should welcome everyone to our group. Lastly I learned that if you haven't seen or heard from a member in awhile, simply call them and let them know you missed them and check to see how things are going.

I will never forget this convention; I'm still talking about my experience. My husband and kids felt the same love I felt. It was truly a blessing to share my experience of having a child with a heart defect with so many wonderful people. I look forward to attending the next convention and many more to come.



MLH parents and children adorned in tie dye shirts at the opening dinner for the 57th Annual Convention

## Continuing to Learn

by Amy Basken, Coordinator  
MLH of Wisconsin

Our MLH leadership convention was the place to be this year. As an organization, we pride ourselves on the support and education MLH offers its members through our groups across the country. During the convention, it is very evident that MLH also provides this same support and education for our leadership. This year I attended my third convention, and like every other year, I left inspired and motivated to do more. The convention really helps me understand that our little chapter in Madison, Wisconsin is actually part of a much bigger, powerful entity.

Connecting with the other leaders is my favorite part. There is a special bond among people who have similar experiences and are striving for the same goal. Friendships develop that will last throughout the year.

The training and exchange of ideas is a huge component as well. From leadership training to development of best practices, I leave with my head swimming and notebook full of ideas to implement. For example, this year, as National Advocacy Chairperson, I helped lead an advocacy training session. I was able to work with our group leaders to help them understand what we are advocating for and how they can get involved. In one short session, I was able to accomplish what would have taken countless hours to coordinate through conference calls and email.

“The convention helps me understand that our chapter is actually part of a much bigger, powerful entity.”  
- Amy Basken

No less important is the uniting of members of MLH and MHI. The wisdom of the MHI membership is inspiring. It gives our members hope to hear the stories of those with heart defects who have lived well beyond life expectancy. MHI provides MLH with emotional support and encouragement as well. This was exemplified during the dinner the two groups shared, when the laughter and the tears broke down the barriers that can exist between generations.

## A Very Good Convention

by Susan Vanderpool  
MLH National Committee Chair

The MLH convention was a huge success again this year. We had so many coordinators gathered, and we did some great team-building and bonding. As a result, it will be even easier for the leaders to ask for support they need from other leaders. This is one of the greatest aspects of coming together — we really get a chance to get to know each other and share ideas and experiences. I learn so much from the other leaders at the convention that I return to Tulsa fired up and ready to do more great things to help our parents deal with having a CHD child and to help our children.

I would like to thank Amy Basken, Len Schendel, Alexia Fussell and Dale and Sandy Briggs for the great sessions and knowledge that they provided. I was honored to present Jodi Lemacks, our National Coordinator, with an award of appreciation for all of her hard work and dedication to MLH.

The speaker at Saturday evening’s dinner, Meagan Johnson, was great. I think it shows that MHI and MLH are moving towards working together better and supporting each other. It’s very exciting.

We have some amazing people leading our groups, and they have great ideas for our future. I think this year is going to be the biggest year of growth for MLH so far, and we need to make sure that we keep the quality at the high level that it always has been. We have wonderful leaders in place to help us do just that! I am honored to work with each and every one of our coordinators, and it was such a thrill to get to meet so many of them face-to-face. ❤️