



Mended
Little
Hearts

How Mended *Little* Hearts Has Grown!



At the last Mended Hearts national convention, National Treasurer Dale Briggs burst through the door of the hotel room he was sharing with his wife Sandy. There was something she had to see — and it couldn't wait. "You've got to come see them," Dale told his wife, wowed by the thick crowd bustling with ideas and enthusiasm at the hotel. Remembers Sandy, "There must've been over 100 Mended *Little* Hearts coordinators at the annual leadership training. It was such a neat experience to be part of something so wonderful that has come from sadness and loss."

Every year the convention grows, thanks in part to the moms and dads of kids with congenital heart defects who are involved in Mended *Little* Hearts. They see the value of a national organization that thrives on community successes.

Sandy and Dale and several others were instrumental in starting the very first Mended *Little* Hearts chapter, which began in Fresno, Calif., eight years ago.

"This is a labor of love for us," said Sandy, whose



Sandy and Dale Briggs and several others were instrumental in starting the first Mended *Little Hearts* chapter, which began in Fresno, Calif., eight years ago.

niece Melissa was born with nine heart defects. “Over the years we watched her go through numerous surgeries and saw how difficult it was for the family to see her struggle with heart disease.”

Many years later, Dale’s world collided with Melissa’s. Dale had open-heart surgery, and 16-year-old Melissa did six months later, but unfortunately she didn’t survive. The family was forever changed.

“We felt like we had to do something for families of children with heart defects,” Sandy said. A few years later, she was pitching in with a Heart Walk to help support Mended Hearts — the couple had gotten involved with the organization after Dale’s surgery.

At about the same time, Carlie McCorvey was looking for support and answers.

Carlie’s daughter Makenna was born with multiple heart defects and had her first heart surgery at just 32 hours old. At the Heart Walk, Carlie connected with Sandy, Wafaa Siqueiros and another “heart mom” — and they started talking.

“I called Dale and told him about the meeting of the heart moms,” Sandy said, “and that was the birth of Mended *Little Hearts*.”

But in order for the MLH program to officially get started, someone needed to believe in it who was also

Mended *Little Hearts*: A Short History

- **April 29, 2004:** Mended *Little Heart* was chartered
- **Jan. 1, 2006:** Ten MLH groups were established: Fresno, Calif.; Hollywood, Fla.; Winston-Salem, N.C.; Black Hills, S.D.; Toledo, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; Jacksonville, Fla.; St. Petersburg, Fla.; Richmond, Va.; Anchorage, Alaska
- **April 2007:** First staff person (Jodi Lemacks) hired
- **August 2007:** First leadership training in San Antonio
- **February 2009:** MLH began co-hosting CHD Lobby Day
- **2009:** First board member (Dale Briggs) joined MLH
- **2011:** First executive committee member (Susan Vanderpool) joined MLH
- **Jan. 1, 2012:** 66 groups currently established

part of MHI national leadership—that person was Altonita “Tita” Hutchens, National Vice President of Mended Hearts at that time. Congenital heart defects had a big impact on Tita’s family, and this inspired her to create the foundation and guidelines for the MLH program as a national support program for children with congenital heart defects and their families. Tita’s unwavering belief in the program allowed Mended *Little Hearts* to flourish under the guidance of Mended Hearts.

The Fresno group, thanks to their sweat and tears, was chartered in 2004.

“It was a struggle to get things going, but we knew we needed to do this for families because they go through so much,” Sandy said. “You need that support.” One thing led to another, fueled by their zeal for the cause. “The more we talked about wanting to do this, the more it came about that we were doing it on a national level.”

Sandy recalls the pain of watching Melissa’s parents’ struggle — from the moment they woke up until the time they went to bed. “You want to make sure other families



Mended
Little
Hearts

Coordinators Sandy Briggs, Lisa Pinedo and Wafaa Siqueiros were early organizers of the Fresno group.



Makenna McCorvey was born with multiple heart defects and had her first heart surgery at just 32 hours old. She's pictured here at two days old.



Carlie, Zachariah, Makenna and Caton McCorvey

don't go through that pain and to be able to support them when they do."

Carlie, who later helped start the Visalia, Calif., group, agreed.

"You have all this energy as far as wanting to do something productive versus feeling stuck and sorry and sad and hopeless," Carlie said. "I didn't want to feel isolated. I wanted to learn everything I could about heart defects. Nobody understands what you're going through like heart parents."

Mended *Little* Hearts helps heart parents — and their children — connect.

"Our kids have grown up as friends, and I think that has been the best part," Carlie said. "This has helped educate us, and it has been good for Makenna's self-esteem, to help her not be afraid. It's all because of Mended *Little* Hearts."

Early Growth Continues

Janet Weisman is also motivated by a heart struggle — her son, Jared's. She was key in establishing the Hollywood, Fla., chapter, Mended *Little* Hearts' second, in 2005.

Jared was born with truncus arteriosus, a rare heart defect in which one blood vessel comes out of the right and left ventricles, instead of the normal two (the pulmonary artery and aorta).

Jared had open-heart surgery when he was just three weeks old. An angioplasty soon followed. Then there was another open-heart surgery when he was five.

"We didn't know how to get in touch with anybody who had gone through anything similar," Janet recalled.

The pediatric cardiologist at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital spurred Janet to help start a group—there was already a successful Mended Hearts group locally. "I thought about it half a second and said 'of course.'"

Janet said a small group began meeting with doctors and others in the hospital who, in turn, helped spread the word. "We became a visiting chapter more than anything else."

Janet, who was instrumental in developing the Mended *Little* Hearts accredited visitor training manual, likes being part of a group that can help answer tough questions and provide emotional support.

"Sometimes it's harder to talk to a doctor or a nurse," Janet said. "Caregivers and parents really appreciate having someone who has gone through it. There's a different level of understanding when it's a doctor compared to the parents or a caregiver."

Janet said that Jared, who recently turned 17, is also interested in volunteering. "He'll need one more surgery, because he has the teenage-size heart and he'll need the adult heart."