



Mended
Little
Hearts

What about the Dads?

by Jon Caswell



Johnnie and Carlie McCorvey and their brood



Jacob and Mike Eason



Mike and Jacob Eason try some cycling

Mothers and children are the major players in Mended Little Hearts; all 19 coordinators at the convention were mothers. But as MLH National Committee Chair Amanda Eason recently pointed out, “The mothers’ work with MLH doesn’t necessarily benefit her family directly. Without the fathers’ support, the mothers couldn’t serve in this way.”

That motivated us to talk to several dads.

Amanda’s husband, Mike Eason, 38, of Jacksonville, Fla., attended the MLH meeting in San Antonio to watch over Jacob, 10, a heart transplant recipient, and Noah, 6, while Amanda worked. Mike is committed to MLH because the Easons didn’t have that support when Jacob had his surgery. “As a law enforcement officer, I had learned to handle difficult situations. There was no scenario I felt I couldn’t control. Then Jacob was born, and I realized that my confidence was a ruse. I tried to have some semblance of control by learning all I could about the human heart and medical procedures, but I quickly realized that I wasn’t in control of anything. The only way to cope with the emotional and physical stress was to put it in God’s hands. Once I did that, I was able to appreciate each day we were given with Jacob in the event that there did not turn out to be many. Amanda and I have not let go of that appreciation for each day or of our faith that God will take care of us and Jacob.”

Johnnie McCorvey, 54, of Visalia, Calif., is a PE teacher and also a whitewater raft guide and outdoors instructor, so he knows a little about venturing into the unknown.

However, the unknown of CHD upended him.

“I was so naïve about Makenna’s condition. I was devastated by the uncertainties. My optimism dissolved and my world came to an abrupt stop. There was no support group to lean on; I was lost. I wish MLH had existed when my daughter was born. It would have been great to spend time with families that had faced our same issues, to have had a shoulder to lean on and resources to use to educate ourselves about her condition.

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After the shock of their son Tucker’s diagnosis nine years ago, Terry and

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Johnnie and Makenna McCorvey

Dixie Varns had to leave their older son Steven with his grandmother and travel 800 miles. Terry, 35, a paint-shop supervisor in Spearfish, S.D., discovered that good things can come of harsh circumstances.

“It brought our family closer together. We got more involved in our community due to different fundraisers held for Tucker. I would not change anything we have learned from this. At the hospital where the surgeries were performed, we got to know other families with similar problems. That helped us get through the tough times. It really makes a difference to be able to talk to others and see children with similar conditions doing well while your child is in the condition they are in. It has given us the opportunity to share our story, vent a little and help people by telling

them what programs are available. We have met several families with children with heart conditions and become friends with them. It has been nice to be involved in a group that does good things.”

Mike Eason could be speaking for all the fathers when he said, “Whether Amanda and I asked for it or not, we have been given a gift. That gift is having been there and being able to share our experience with others. There is certainly a kinship among the families that only comes from firsthand knowledge of what it feels like to have a child in a life-threatening condition. It is a privilege watching that kinship grow into a friendship and then into a lasting relationship. As MLH continues to grow, that may prove to be the most rewarding part of our involvement in MLH.”



Seth Baratz skating



Marty, Kim & Seth Baratz with Oklahoma Governor Brad Henry



Eric, Sophie and Tanya Sanders



Terry and Dixie Varns with sons Tucker (left) and Steven (right)



Terry and Tucker Varns



Sophie Sanders with big sister Haley

CarePages – Helping Meet the Emotional Challenges of Illness

Free & Easy



CarePages is a Web site with free, self-created Web pages that serve as private “communications centers” to connect patients and caregivers with relatives, friends and other supporters. The site brings together everyone who cares about a certain person and makes it easy for them to talk to and comfort each other in a caring community.

Members’ CarePages are virtual meeting places where the page manager (generally a patient’s spouse or parent) can share news, updates and photos, or just vent feelings. CarePages make it much easier to keep family members, relatives and friends apprised of new developments without repetitive phone calls or emails. Each time a manager updates a CarePage, an email is automatically sent to everyone who has visited that page. Privacy is protected as the site is accessed only by invitation of the family hosting the page.

At any time, invitees to a CarePage can send supportive messages, which benefits patients who may be isolated in a hospital room or undergoing difficult medical treatment and/or recovery.

Carepages.com was started by Sharon and Eric Langshur, whose son Matthew had a congenital heart defect. The site now has more than three million members. The site is free and available to anyone. It’s very user-friendly — most people are able to set up their Web pages in less than 10 minutes. To visit or use it, go to www.carepages.com.

Part of caring for a sick family member is keeping friends and family apprised of the patient’s condition. The emotional support of these friends and family members can play a vital role in a person’s recovery. Unfortunately, the bigger the circle of support, the more stressful managing it can become for caregivers, who already have too much to do. This is particularly true if the patient is a child.

Several Mended *Little* Hearts parents have found a solution. CarePages.com is an online community where families can create free Web pages that allow them to maintain contact with interested people. It also lets families experiencing the same disease or condition easily connect with one another.

“CarePages helps us keep in touch with family and friends all over the country without calling each one after every event,” said Tanya Sanders, 31, of Zephyrhills, Florida. She and husband Eric are the parents of Sophie, who was born with a single ventricle and other complications. Although just 20 months old, she’s had three open-heart surgeries.

“We started using it right away in 2005 when Sophie was admitted to the hospital. She was there six months on and off, and I don’t know what we would have done without it. It helped us keep family informed on daily occurrences without having to phone 20 people and go through the same story 20 times. Finding that much time is hard, especially when you want to spend every moment with your child. Connecting with others who have a situation similar to Sophie’s gives us hope.”

Seth Baratz, age 5, was born with transposition of the great arteries and had open-heart surgery when he was eight days old. His parents, Kim and Marty, ages 36 and 52, of Edmond, Oklahoma, didn’t know about CarePages until Seth was 3½ years old.

“I wish I’d known about it when he was born,” said Kim. “Because of everything happening with him, I felt so alone. It would have been nice to talk to others who had faced the same things I was experiencing. I don’t think I would have felt quite so alone. I want to be able to help a new mom who is going through all of those mixed emotions, not knowing what to do or think. I want her to know that she isn’t alone. Right now Seth isn’t having any major problems, so I don’t post as often. I try to post every couple of weeks or month to let people know how he’s doing. I do, however, check other pages and pray for those families.”

Kim also uses it to send out prayer requests. “There is also a hug counter where people can leave Seth hugs and a buddy map that people can be added to,” said Kim. “Seth loves to hear the messages, see how many hugs he has received and where people are from on the map. I have posted lots of pictures so people can see who they are praying for and see how he is doing and growing. We love CarePages.”

CarePages.com helps with the *emotional* challenges everyone faces when someone they love — spouse, sibling or child — has a serious health problem. It is social networking with a purpose — people coming together to support each other during difficult times. ❤️