



Mended  
Little  
Hearts

# Heartfelt Cooperation –

by Jodi Lemacks, *National Coordinator, MLH*

## MHI Working with MLH



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ike Mended Hearts members, Mended *Little* Hearts members have been through so much – we must handle the emotional toll of dealing with heart issues, the financial burden of caring for a child with a heart defect, the helplessness of watching a child physically suffer or not be able to keep up with friends and siblings, and the fear of losing a child or the pain of actually losing that

child, among many other things. Because of this, having a parent organization like Mended Hearts is such a blessing. Most MLH leaders, and many members, feel incredibly thankful when supportive and helping hands come from the wonderful MHI chapter presidents, ARDs, RDs and members. It may sound cheesy, but the saying from the movie Jerry McGuire, “You complete me,” often comes to mind when thinking about the relationship between MHI and MLH.

There are many, many examples throughout the nation of how MHI has helped and worked with MLH. Here is a sample of the amazing ways MHI works with MLH.



LEFT: *MLH of Central Virginia's ice cream social*

RIGHT: *Members of Central Virginia's MLH group at the ice cream social*

## Central Virginia

The Central Virginia MLH group was started one day when MHI Chapter 28 (Richmond) members Jerry Grossman and Mary Shreve came to me, a new heart mom, and said, "We would really like you to start a MLH group here, and we will help you." And they were as good as their word. Without their help and guidance, this ninth MLH group would not likely exist today. Jerry and Mary were instrumental in getting us an interview on PBS, on Comcast-on-Demand and in the local paper. They encouraged me to hold regular meetings, even if sometimes there weren't many people who showed up. They invited MLH members to speak at their chapter meetings, and they got MLH invitations to speak at other non-profit meetings that could help our group. When I wanted to give up because I had three boys to take care of, including a heart child, and it was a lot of hard work getting people together and organizing everything, Jerry would say to me, "You're doing just fine." And then he would ask, "What do you need?" This encouragement gave me the energy to keep going and to understand how vital it was to help others.

In addition, MHI has always shared a table with MLH at the Heart Walk (even insisting on a second table for MLH) and included us in health fairs and other events. Mary Shreve, known as "Granmary" to our members, regularly shows up at MLH meetings, supporting MLH with her incredible love for all (especially the kids). She often brings other members of Chapter 28 with her, usually including whoever is the chapter president at the time. Mary always includes a section about MLH in the

Chapter 28 newsletter. They also have helped the Central Virginia group financially. That aid has allowed us to pay our charter fees, purchase a display and hold events for our families.

If that weren't enough, Chapter 28 also includes MLH in their picnics and holiday parties. Santa shows up at the holiday parties and brings gifts for all the MLH girls and boys. In August of this year, MHI and MLH co-hosted an ice cream social that was a huge success. MHI got clowns who did incredible face-painting for all MLH kids, and the ice cream was delicious. MLH and MHI feel like we belong together, and we have such incredible fondness for one another. Christy Davis, current coordinator of the Central Virginia group said, "Mended 'Big' Hearts are like having another family made of grandparents with zippers too. They love our kids, want to help us and understand our children's stories. Thank God for them and their support."

Not only does Chapter 28 help MLH of Central Virginia, but RD Nancy Eggleston is immeasurably helpful to MLH by including our groups in her cluster meeting and requesting the chapters in her area provide some financial support to MLH to help with charter fees so new MLH groups can get started.

## Tulsa, Oklahoma

Mended *Little* Hearts of Tulsa (MLHT) and MHI Chapter 8 also have a great relationship. Joanna Ricketts, lead coordinator of MLHT, said, "MLHT's relationship with Chapter 8 is special in many ways. Our bond is not only about spreading awareness about heart defects and disease, but it is also about forming life-long friendships. Our MLH members have a unique opportunity to spend time with adults who have faced the reality of heart disease while living full and productive lives. This, in turn, gives us hope and a better understanding about the positive outlook for our children's futures."

As in Central Virginia, Chapter 8 and MLHT often interact and join together for events. For example, this summer they had their second annual picnic together. They help each other during health fairs and join in the AHA Heart Walk together each year. If either group needs help with anything, they are there for each other. Last year MLHT hosted a spaghetti dinner and concert fundraiser, which was a lot of hard work, and the Chapter 8 members





LEFT: *MLH of Tulsa*  
 RIGHT: *Max Vanderpool and Mom Susan with Narvelle and Keith Beard*

baked pies and cakes for the dinner, and several members attended the event. Both have members who belong to both groups, and several of the chapter and group members have become very good friends.

Keith Beard, Southwest RD and member of MLHT, said, “The association with MLHT has pumped enthusiasm and vitality into Chapter 8 by exposing us to the youth and enthusiasm of the MLHT group.”

“If it weren’t for Chapter 8, there would be no MLHT,” said founding MLHT coordinator and Chapter 8 member Susan Vanderpool. “Chapter 8 was instrumental in our group forming. They found us a meeting place and made it possible for us to get into our local Children’s Hospital to establish our visiting program. They even connected some of our founding members. We are one great big happy ‘Mended’ family.”

## Dayton, Ohio

In Dayton, Ohio, the relationship between Mended Little Hearts of Dayton (MLHD) and MHI Chapter 61 is like those in Tulsa and Central Virginia – very close. One unique thing in Dayton, however, is that Ron Chalecki, vice president of Chapter 61 and bypass survivor, is the founding group coordinator for MLHD. Chalecki worked for months with the Children’s Hospital, the American Heart Association and parents of children with heart defects to teach them about MLH and help the group get started. MLHD was chartered just last January and now has 39 members, 29 of whom are from heart families – a

great start. Barbara Forman, president of Chapter 61, and Kelli Dixson, the local Executive Director of the American Heart Association, are charter members of MLHD.

“Since we first had the idea for MLHD, Chapter 61 has been involved in the process,” said Chalecki. Like in Tulsa and Central Virginia, Chapter 61 and MLHD work closely together. For example, they have a joint Web site ([www.wrighthearts.org](http://www.wrighthearts.org)) and jointly produce a newsletter and brochure. This fall both groups participated in a health fair in advance of the Dayton Heart Walk, in which they walked together. They also do other health fairs together and hold joint meetings several times a year. This year they are planning a joint Christmas party in December. One wonderful way for MHI and MLH to learn about each other is at MHI cluster meetings. This past October both the chapter and group participated in and presented together at a cluster meeting – great coordination considering MLHD has been chartered for less than a year.

Overall, even though MHI and MLH have many differences, we also have many similarities and those allow us to work together in helpful and supportive ways. Our hearts are joined, and together we are great. ❤️



*Members of MLH Dayton, Ohio*

