



Mended
Little
Hearts

Little Hearts Hold **BIG** Hopes

by Lawrence W. Hood, Jr.

In August 2004, Mended Hearts began advancing its mission of inspiring hope in patients and their families in a new way. That month Mended Hearts chartered its first Mended *Little* Hearts group at Joe DiMaggio Children's Hospital in Hollywood, Fla. In the past year and a half, the program has expanded to reach from coast to coast and continues to grow.

Incorporating Mended *Little* Hearts into the organization has required re-examining our core values. Mended Hearts has built its reputation on visiting patients, but how do you visit patients who in many cases are less than a year old? To provide the types of support these heart patients need, Mended Hearts needed to change its procedures. With the assistance of then Vice President Tita Hutchens, Mended Hearts created a pediatric support group task force to look at how Mended Hearts' core values could be translated to a pediatric care situation.

What came out of that task force was the Mended *Little* Hearts program. Like Mended Hearts itself, Mended *Little* Hearts is still a peer-to-peer program, but it's primarily a parent/caregiver-to-parent/caregiver program. And like everything Mended Hearts does, it provides the gift of hope to heart patients and their families.

Just like everything Mended Hearts does, Mended *Little* Hearts provides the gift of hope to heart patients and their families.

Mended *Little* Hearts has a three-prong purpose, which each group fulfills in its own way.

- Offer support to family members and/or other caregivers of children with congenital heart defects (CHD) and heart disorders.
- Offer educational/health resources relating to CHD and heart diseases.
- Raise awareness in the community about children and CHD, and heart diseases and contributing factors.

Offering Support

Supporting families with children affected by congenital heart defects means more than just providing information. In the world of Mended *Little* Hearts, support includes providing ways for families to come together and share their hopes for the future.

This is something that The Tinman Club of Western North Carolina knows well. This past spring, the group, which is coordinated by Kari Crawford, held a family picnic for its members and supporters to come together and start building lifelong friendships. The highlight of the event was when each child, with or without heart disease, received a gift from the group's namesake, the Tinman.

The decision of what to call their local support group was easy for member Robin Sessoms. "When we learned that our son Franklin did not have a right ventricle, it was difficult to explain to Leann, his two-year-old sister, what was happening. Surprisingly, she took it in stride and said, 'Oh mommy! Him need a heart like the Tinman.'"



Leann and Franklin Sessoms and Alan "The Tinman" Taylor

Offering Education

Carlie McCorvey, Mended *Little* Hearts of Central California, knows all too well what a parent or caregiver of a child with heart problems needs. Makenna, her middle child, was born with complex congenital heart defects. One of Carlie's goals as a Mended *Little* Hearts coordinator is to share some of the information, tips and tricks that she learned along the way.

To do that, her group hosted a "Mother's Nights Out" in which they created "care binders" for parents their group contacts. The binders include a page of resources available (online, local and state/federal assistance programs), informational guides and booklets on CHD, plastic card holders and a brochure about their group.

The binder includes tabs to make it easy to keep things organized. Carlie said, "I know from experience how important it is to stay organized. While it may not always be easy, it is vitally important."

Raising Awareness

Even though Mended *Little* Hearts of Jacksonville, Fla., was only formed in February 2005, they have taken great "rides" in raising awareness of CHD and heart diseases.

Co-coordinators Amanda Eason and Angela Livesay have a unique bond: Each has a child, Jacob, 8, and Blake, 2, respectively, born with the same heart condition. The two women had met during Angela's pregnancy, and fate brought them together again when Amanda decided to create a Mended *Little* Hearts group in Jacksonville.

During the past few months, they have been busy raising awareness and money for research. Last fall, the group sponsored the *Beach to the Creek Charity Motorcycle Ride*. At this event 85 motorcycles and 120 people followed a 110-mile course from the coast to Swimming Pen Creek in Fleming Island, Fla. Thanks to the support of A Little Mark Inc., Florida Heli-Jet, Whitey's Fish Camp, Wolfson's Children's Hospital and many others, Mended *Little* Hearts of Jacksonville raised over \$12,000.

Offering support and educational resources and raising awareness of congenital heart defects and heart diseases will be handled differently in each Mended *Little* Hearts group. But they are all doing the most important thing possible... providing hope to the families of the littlest heart patients of all.

Altonita "Tita" Hutchens Memorial Fund

The Board of Directors recently approved this fund to acknowledge the contributions and significant influence of long-time local, regional and national Mended Hearts leader Tita Hutchens, who passed away last April.

Tita was instrumental in founding and developing the Mended *Little* Hearts program. Her unwavering belief in the program turned a personal passion into a reality – a reality that today includes groups in all parts of the country.

Contributions to the fund are dedicated to covering Mended *Little* Hearts operating expenses. Tax-deductible contributions may be made by check or money order to

The Mended Hearts, Inc.
Attn: Tita Hutchens Memorial Fund
7272 Greenville Ave.
Dallas, TX 75231-4596

Or you may use your credit card to contribute online at www.mendedhearts.org. ❤️

