

# Caring People bring single moms to Christ

BY RANDALL MURPHREE

“You’re worthless, Mary!\* You’re no good at all!”

She’d heard it so many times she believed it, so Mary’s eyes were downcast most of the time. She and her young daughter both bore deep emotional scars from a verbally abusive ex-husband. Fortunately, she did have one solid rock in her life – her father. But when she was at her lowest, he passed away.

Self respect? Dead. Her solid rock? Dead. Hope? Dead.

Then a friend asked, “Mary, why don’t you come with me to my care group?”

I have no other hope, she thought, so why not? And at her friend’s Caring People care group, Mary discovered that Jesus loves her no matter what, that she could live a life full of love, peace and joy. She now knows her sins are forgiven and Jesus will never leave her.

Today, she says, “I feel so at home here. We’re a family and I thank Jesus every day for sisters!”

## A time for tears

The Caring People, a 501(c)3 non-profit, was incorporated in 1997, the vision of JoDee Herschend, in Branson, Missouri. JoDee’s husband, Pete, and his brother, Jack, are at the helm of Herschend Family Entertainment, a Branson-based corporation that operates some 20 family friendly entertainment venues including Silver Dollar City, a Branson theme park.

“I was actually awakened in the night,” JoDee Herschend remembers, “with the Lord speaking to my heart to start a company to create an awareness of and desire to meet Jesus.” As she shared her vision with Pete, they prayed about what direction a ministry should take. They soon settled on a ministry to single mothers.

She was stunned at what her research revealed. One-third of U.S. households are headed by single moms, Herschend says. In that demographic, she saw an endless field for ministry.

“I didn’t know that 95% of single moms

are outside the walls of the church,” she says. “What we discovered was that single moms feel judged and rejected by the church and by Christians. And because of that, they don’t want anything to do with us. When I read that research, I just sat and cried.”

But there wasn’t much time for tears. JoDee Herschend is a doer, so she set about organizing the ministry for which God had given her a vision.

## A time to minister

Today, Herschend looks back with a laugh at her 1990s naivete: “What I had hoped in the beginning was that I could place newspaper ads which single moms would see, and then, in the quietness of their own homes, give their lives to Jesus.”

However, that approach didn’t seem to have much impact. So she realized that she must implement a more proactive approach, an approach that would not only minister to single moms, but identify and enlist volunteers in the church to help deliver that ministry.

If Caring People would reach single moms, the ministry would have to go where they are to deliver unconditional love and unconditional acceptance. To do that, Herschend soon discovered that it takes about five caring women volunteers to lead a group of 20 single mothers.

“The Lord showed me that the church is like a walled city, but He wants us to go into the streets,” she says.” The church is

### The Caring People

**Vision:** Serve single moms and introduce them to Christ

**Need:** Godly volunteers, care group leaders

**Training:** May 1, Springfield, Missouri  
August 28, Branson, Missouri  
Others to be announced

**More information:**

[www.thecaringpeople.org](http://www.thecaringpeople.org)  
417-334-0131



supposed to be a staging ground. He also showed me that there are thousands in churches who are ready to be called into ministry in the fields.”


There are 24 care groups – 3 in Branson, 11 in the greater Springfield area and 10 in El Salvador, where a volunteer started the ministry after hearing Herschend speak in the States.

At Caring People’s headquarters in Branson, there are only three paid staff, assisted by a number of volunteers. Herschend maintains close oversight of the groups as they organize and begin ministry. She sees her responsibility as one not only to protect the integrity of the Caring People brand, but also to make sure that each care group does, indeed, fulfill its mission to have maximum impact for Christ.

Recognizing that Caring People addresses a universal need, Herschend would like to replicate this model across the nation, wherever God opens the doors for them. To start a care group, she emphasizes that a church or community needs a strong prayer team. Caring People provides training. (See sidebar.)

“We have to find women leaders who love and know Jesus and who have a desire for His Word,” she says.

She confesses that they continue to find better ways to accomplish their goals, but the vision is unchanging: “Our vision, as always, is to create an awareness and a desire among our single moms to know Jesus.”

Mary is one dramatic picture of that vision come to life. 

\*Name is changed to protect her privacy.