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H.E.R.O. for Children, Inc. expands programming for children affected by AIDS with the acquisition of Camp High Five

Atlanta, GA, January 29, 2010 - Hearts Everywhere Reaching Out (H.E.R.O.) for Children, Inc. is pleased to announce the acquisition of Camp High Five, a non-profit program in Georgia that provides a week-long, residential, summer camp opportunity for children infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS- at no cost to their families. Camp High Five is the only program of its kind in the state, and serves primarily African-American youths between the ages of 6 and 16 who come from low income families. In partnership with Camp Twin Lakes (established to offer camping experiences to medically fragile children), the program provides a wide range of recreational activities to these children- most of which they may not otherwise have the occasion to take advantage of, including horseback riding, rock wall climbing, fishing, nature walks and archery. Additionally, Camp High Five offers forums that address the specific needs of this population, including AIDS education sessions and an "HIV Ceremony," during which the children are able to acknowledge and process the losses they have suffered as a result of this disease.

Camp High Five was founded in 2000 by Bonnie Minter, a Nurse Practitioner then working at Grady Hospital's Infectious Disease Program (IDP). Ms. Minter explains that she initiated the program because "children affected by AIDS have few arenas where they can receive support from other children with similar life experiences. The topic of AIDS is still taboo in many families; these children are taught to be quiet about it in order to avoid being ostracized and ridiculed. Camp High Five provides them with a unique, intimate, and safe environment in which they can openly discuss issues regarding living with HIV and AIDS." What began as a weekend event in August of 2001 that served 33 children who received medical services at the Grady IDP clinic has grown into to an annual, week-long program with 65-75 children from across the state (including Macon, Augusta, Athens, and Albany) and beyond. The Camp is staffed exclusively by dedicated volunteers, including social workers, nurses and physicians who provide specialized medical and mental health care to these children around the clock. Camp High Five boasts a plethora of 'success stories,' as it has had significant, positive impacts in the lives of its participants. For example, one child who was perinatally (at birth) infected, but diagnosed at the age of 14, had a very difficult time complying with his medication regimen the year before he attended Camp High Five. After Camp, where he was able to meet and interact with other children living with HIV and AIDS, he began taking his medication consistently and has remained undetectable (viral load at a very low level) for the past six years. Another child was able to say "goodbye" to his father (who had been diagnosed with AIDS and subsequently passed away) at the HIV Ceremony; he was unable to attend his father's funeral due to family conflicts.

H.E.R.O. for Children, Inc. has maintained a solid partnership with Grady's IDP clinic since its founding in 2003. As a result, H.E.R.O. and Camp High Five share many of the same clients, who have been able to build and maintain lasting friendships through participation in both programs. "Witnessing these children re-unite each year at H.E.R.O. events is profound," states Donna Drakes, Executive Director of H.E.R.O. for Children, Inc. "We are excited to bring Camp High Five into our portfolio of programs, as it gives H.E.R.O. another vehicle by which to meet the needs of these deserving children."

"Camp High Five transitioning to H.E.R.O. is a natural progression, as H.E.R.O. already provides an array of quality of life services for children affected by AIDS," says Ms. Minter. In addition, H.E.R.O. will facilitate the program's growth. Camp High Five has integrated children from New York and South Carolina in the past, and has received numerous requests from clinics and organizations serving children affected by AIDS in Florida and Alabama. Unfortunately, it has not had the capacity to accommodate many young people living outside of Georgia. H.E.R.O. will endeavor to expand Camp High Five within the next few years so that it can reach more children infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS in the Southeast.

Over 10,000 children have been diagnosed with AIDS since the epidemic began in the 1980s. Many more are living with a sibling or parent who is infected with HIV or AIDS. Presently, Georgia ranks 6th in the nation in the number of children living with AIDS. "Though medical advancements in preventing the perinatal transmission of HIV are extremely promising, the need for interventions such as Camp High Five remains evident. We are honored to have been selected as the organization to take this amazing program to the next level," says Ms. Drakes.

About H.E.R.O. for Children, Inc.

H.E.R.O. for Children, Inc.'s mission is to improve the quality of life for children infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS through enriching programs, unforgettable experiences, and connections with the community. H.E.R.O. was founded in 2003 by two University of Georgia graduates (Ryan Gembala and Garrett Gravesen) who had separate, but similar experiences working with children infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS in Africa and Brazil. Though the children's basic needs (i.e. food, housing, and medical attention) were being addressed, no 'quality of life' (QOL) care services were being provided. Research 'back home' revealed that only 12 of the 500 HIV/AIDS service organizations here in Georgia offered support to children, and none specifically addressed their QOL needs. As a result, H.E.R.O. for Children, Inc. was created. H.E.R.O. defines quality of life as the degree to which an individual enjoys physical, social, and emotional well-being, and sees him/herself as being able to experience future success and fulfillment. Under this umbrella, we offer emotional support through mentoring relationships, life skills training and development, reading enrichment, and expanded life exposure through a wide variety of opportunities and experiences (including "unforgettable," one-day, recreational events and a Holiday of HERO's program- via which children receive presents during the holiday season). H.E.R.O. is presently developing health education, college preparation, and employment readiness programs that meet the special needs of our clientele. For more information please visit:

www.heroforchildren.org.