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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Kids Hope United embraces new approach to child abuse prevention**

**CHICAGO (April 30, 2008)**—Kids Hope United has adopted the Strengthening Families Initiative (SFI), a new approach developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy that works to prevent child abuse by innovatively combining child welfare and child development to strengthen at-risk families prior to child abuse and neglect occurring.

“This initiative is right in line with our mission of protecting children and strengthening families—something this organization has been doing for more than 100 years,” said Executive Director Mark McHugh.

Kids Hope United is implementing the SFI approach in its foster care program as well as six child development centers in Elgin, Waukegan and Chicago.

“It will combine the areas of child welfare and early education in order to allow child welfare workers and teachers alike to help strengthen family support systems at home so that they do not reach the point where their children must be taken away from them,” McHugh explained. “SFI training will also teach child welfare workers and teachers to be vigilant when it comes to warning signs that may indicate children are being victimized by abuse.”

The initiative also includes Parent Cafes, which will allow parents to come together in a non-threatening environment and not only network, but also share their stories and meet people who may be struggling with similar obstacles.

“This approach is really about being proactive rather than reactive when it comes to child abuse and neglect,” said Beth Lakier, senior vice president. “The goal is for child welfare professionals to focus on preventing child abuse and reduce the need for intervention after abuse has occurred.”



SFI focuses on building protection for children within their homes and communities, rather than focusing exclusively on risks and deficits. It also uses early childhood education programs to build evidence-based protective factors for children and their families.

SFI protective factors, or attributes, serve as buffers to help parents who might otherwise be at risk for abuse and neglect to find resources, supports and coping strategies to deal with stress. The protective factors include parental resilience; an array of social connections; adequate knowledge of parenting and child development; healthy social and emotional development of children; and concrete support in times of need, including access to necessary services such as mental health.

Convened by the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services, Strengthening Families Illinois is a collaboration among more than 30 agencies, organizations and individuals working with young children and their families across the state.

Kids Hope United serves more than 5,000 children and families across northern Illinois.

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**About Kids Hope United**

Kids Hope United is a private human service organization dedicated to protecting children and strengthening families. Kids Hope United offers a diverse array of prevention, intervention and community-based programs. Kids Hope United also specializes in child welfare system management, reform, consultation and training. With principal offices in Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri and Florida, Kids Hope United serves more than 15,000 children and their families across the country each year. For more information, visit [www.kidshopeunited.org](http://www.kidshopeunited.org).

