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## **Directions for Mental Health Raises Record Dollars in 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Benefiting Children Exposed to Violence**

**May 7, 2008, Clearwater, FL-** Directions for Mental Health Inc., a private non-profit mental health organization in Clearwater, celebrated 25 years of service to the Pinellas County community with its Heal the Hurt Gala, raising almost triple the previous year's proceeds.

"Thanks to our sponsors and supporters, Directions surpassed its goal of raising enough money to get the \$50,000 endowment started with matching funds from the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay," said R. Thomas Riggs, President & CEO of the organization. "This is pretty incredible for a one-night, once a year event!"

Directions for Mental Health offers state-of-the-art clinical services for adults and children coping with mental illness, along with prevention programs for children. The organization's Board of Directors targeted the endowment for programs for children exposed to violence. Directions is one of the only organizations in Florida serving as a member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. By partnering with leading experts from across the country, Directions' staff provides expertise to improve treatment and systems of care for children and youths who have been victims of violence, witnesses to violence or suffered a traumatic loss.

It is estimated that as many as 10 million children per year may witness or be victims of violence in their homes. This exposure has a devastating impact on children's development, affecting emotional growth, cognitive development, physical health and school performance. Children exposed to violence have been significantly linked with increased depression, anxiety, anger, and alcohol and drug abuse, and with decreased academic achievement.

Without the intervention from Directions, children exposed to violence have an increased risk of becoming violent themselves. These children are twice as likely than their peers to be placed in the juvenile justice system and commit crimes at a younger age.

"The endowment will allow us to make a difference in the lives of many of our community's children, despite budget cuts," said Riggs.

To make a contribution to Directions, interested businesses and individuals can contact Kay Guenther at (727) 524-4464, ext. 1700 or via email [kay.guenther@directionsmh.org](mailto:kay.guenther@directionsmh.org).

## **About Directions for Mental Health, Inc.**

Directions for Mental Health, Inc., established in 1982, is a non-profit organization committed to helping heal the hurt in the lives of thousands of Pinellas County residents suffering from—or at risk of—mental illness. With nationally accredited programs, Directions sets the standard for best practices in mental health treatment, while making mental health care affordable and accessible to individuals and families, and building a safer, healthier community. Serving more than 8,000 people per year, Directions is dedicated to developing innovative programs that change lives, while reducing crime, homelessness, drug abuse and child abuse.

For questions about mental illness and programs, visit Directions for Mental Health's website at [www.HealTheHurt.org](http://www.HealTheHurt.org) or call (727) 524-4464 extension 1700.

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