



**Speech by David Mackintosh, Chair of the Board of Trustees,
at the University of Northampton on Monday 14th April 2008**

I've been asked to come along here today to talk about KidsAid - a new children's charity which helps children who have been bereaved, traumatised or abused here in Northamptonshire.

The charity was set up in October last year and the last six months have been an exciting time in setting up the charity. Firstly by bringing an experienced group of trustees and therapists together to agree to make the charity a reality and then completing the endless forms which culminated in The Charity Commission granting us charitable status in December 2007. We officially launched in January 2008 and have now begun to help children and families rebuild their lives.

Our aim is to help children who have been traumatised in some way through bereavement, abuse or some other distress to set their lives back on track and to stop them becoming the problems of the future. Early intervention is increasingly recognised by a number of charities and organisations as the way forward for helping get children back on track.

Children want security and stability. Modern life is difficult enough for the best of us but the pressures on family life are growing. As families break-down and reform in all different guises, the pressures on parents and children are greater than ever so organisations like KidsAid are in ever greater need to provide support to families and to help children overcome their trauma in their own way.

We currently use Play Therapy to help traumatised children but we are going to expand to other forms of therapy in the future - art, drama, music, etc. Play Therapy is an established and recognised method of helping children who have experienced emotional, sexual or physical abuse and neglect. This trauma can manifest itself in many ways, through emotional withdrawal, disruptive behaviour, aggression, vandalism, drug and alcohol abuse, and self harm, all of which may eventually lead to violence and crime or adult mental health issues.

The Play Therapy service used by KidsAid means that a child is seen for an initial six week assessment, then following this, in consultation with the referrer we decide whether a non-directive or a task focussed approach is appropriate. This is reviewed on a six-weekly basis.

Depending on the individual case, we offer individual Play Therapy, group work, sibling work and child and parent group work. The benefits to the child include building their self-esteem, improving their family life and relationships with other

children and improving their likelihood to attain something within the education system. The long-term social benefits include reducing crime and vandalism, reducing drug and alcohol abuse and highlighting any mental health issues.

Each of the trustees had their own reason for getting involved in the charity. My mother died when I was eight and I know that children are not equipped with the same skills to express themselves as an adult or perhaps given the chance and wanted to help give children the same chance I had to get their lives back on track.

Children cannot communicate in the same way as adults but the world of play - or drama or art - is a safe world which allows them to re-live traumatic memories in a safe environment. If an adult, for example, is involved in an accident on the way to work then they feel the need to phone or text everyone they know!

Children have the same desire when they suffer trauma but they express it in different ways. Bad behaviour or mood swings can be a traumatised child's way of expressing trauma which is often blamed on naughtiness without the real trauma being treated. Some children just need to be given a chance.

I was lucky. As a child I attended a bereavement therapy group here in Northampton and was given the chance to express myself. At its time the group was groundbreaking and won awards for the videos which were produced by bereaved children to help other children in similar situations around the country.

I believe that you watched these videos earlier which I helped to produce when I was a child. If you have any questions about the group, the videos or anything else then I'm happy to answer any questions at the end.

At KidsAid we are ambitious for the future and want to grow so we have lots of opportunities for anyone who wants to get involved and volunteer. We need help with fundraising as well as volunteers to help with our admin and paperwork. In the near future we also want to offer clinical volunteer schemes for students interested in becoming Therapists.

In conclusion, KidsAid is an exciting new charity here in Northampton and we would welcome anyone who wants to volunteer in some way. If you want to know more about us then please visit our website at www.kidsaid.org.uk