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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: August 14, 2007
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Media Release

NYC children's nonprofit to take part in National Long-term Mentoring Study

NEW YORK, NY – Friends of the Children New York will participate in a longitudinal study funded by The National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD). The National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) has awarded \$2.91M over the next five years to the non-profit Oregon Social Learning Center (OSLC) to fund a national study of the Friends of the Children youth mentoring program which will include Friends of the Children New York. Additional funds to support the costs of delivering the program during the course of the study are being sought through private funding sources. The study, called the Friends of the Children Longitudinal Randomized Controlled Trial, will be conducted in collaboration with the National Office of Friends of the Children, as well as Friends of the Children chapters located in the inner city areas of Portland, Seattle/King County and Boston, as well as New York City.

Principal investigator for the study will be Dr. J. Mark Eddy, a Research Scientist and Licensed Psychologist who received his doctorate from the Department of Psychology at the University of Oregon and has worked at OSLC since 1987. Project Coordinators for the study will be Ms. Danita Herrera at OSLC, and Ms. Catherine Beckett at the National Office of Friends of the Children. Other senior scientists on the research team will be Dr. Charles Martinez, Jr. of the University of Oregon and OSLC; Dr. Jean Grossman of Public/Private Ventures and Princeton University; and Dr. Mike Stoolmiller of Marquette, Michigan.

Friends of the Children (FOTC) is an established, long-term (12 year) mentoring program for children considered high risk for conduct disorder and delinquency, academic failure and high school dropout, and teen parenthood. The program was developed in Portland and is currently delivered through independent non-profit FOTC chapters throughout the United States. Children eligible for the program are identified through intensive screenings conducted by FOTC during kindergarten or first grade. Mentors, called “Friends”, are full-time, paid, trained, and supervised employees. Friends work with no more than eight children at a time and receive extensive training and supervision to help youth reach their short and long-term goals.

Data on outcomes for youth participating in FOTC over the past 15 years are promising. With the support of their Friends, youth in the program have excelled in the face of countless barriers and challenges. Of the nearly 300 youth currently served by FOTC's Portland chapter, 96% of the youth regularly attend school, 92% of the youth are not involved in the juvenile justice system, 99% of the youth avoid early parenting, and 80% of the youth have achieved a high school diploma or GED and 40% of the graduates have attended some post secondary education. Results for the seven year old New York chapter are equally encouraging with a school attendance rate of 95%, a promotion rate of 94% and a juvenile justice involvement rate of 0%.

In the study, 256 kindergarten aged participants and their parents will be recruited through collaborating public schools in each of the four participating cities. Participants will be randomly assigned to receive a mentor through FOTC or a to a no-intervention control group, and then will be followed for three years. Data will be collected on social, educational, and developmental milestones. By comparing the results of the two groups over time, the study will be able to determine the immediate impacts that Friends of the Children has on the lives of extremely at-risk youth.

Friends of the Children New York, FOTC National Office and OSLC are thrilled to be a part of this study that will generate a wealth of new data on intensive, long-term mentoring programs. The study is one outcome of a decade-long collaboration among FOTC, the Philadelphia-based non-profit Public/Private Ventures, and OSLC that was supported by a variety of funders, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Friends of the Children New York's top funders include the Pinkerton Foundation, Robin Hood Foundation, the Theodore and Vada Stanley Foundation and the Carl Marks Foundation. Positive results from the study could revolutionize how funds are used in the future to support mentoring efforts for society's most at-risk children. In addition, information collected from the study will further assist in enhancing the program to have an even greater impact.

Dr. Orin Bolstad, clinical psychologist and Board member of Friends of the Children National, states, "I consider the NICHD funding to be a most welcome endorsement. It reflects a sense of confidence in the Friends of the Children model, enough so to provide grant funding to examine the effectiveness of the program over the long-term against a randomly assigned control group. This gives us an opportunity to examine scientifically the positive results we experience anecdotally on a daily basis. If successful, the results of this landmark study will promote our model to a new level nationally, allowing us to serve many more at-risk children."

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The national network of Friends of the Children reaches more than 600 children and teens across the United States through seven chapters: Boston, Massachusetts; Cincinnati, Ohio; Klamath Falls, Oregon; New York, New York; Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; and Seattle/King County, Washington. For more information about Friends of the Children New York, please visit www.friendsofthechildrenny.org.