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**The Help Group Salutes 38 Families Featured in Dr. Barbara Firestone's New Book
*Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge***

Sherman Oaks, CA (October 29, 2007) On Sunday afternoon, October 28th more than 150 guests attended a special reception at The Help Group's Sherman Oaks Campus to salute the 38 families featured in ***Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge***, by **Dr. Barbara Firestone, President & CEO of The Help Group and Vice Chair, California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism.**

In *Autism Heroes*, Dr. Firestone provides a compelling and sensitive account of the experiences of families from different walks of life confronting the challenges of autism spectrum disorders. With empathy and expertise gained from her three decades of leadership of The Help Group and commitment to children with special needs, Dr. Firestone engages the families in powerful and deeply affecting conversations about their lives set against the backdrop of her insightful essays about dignity, hope, opportunity and love, which are so fundamentally important in their lives. Through its words and images, this book offers a lifeline of support, insight, encouragement and hope.

Dr. Firestone paid tribute to the families for sharing their experiences so openly and honestly—speaking of their challenges, their triumphs and their hopes. She spoke to them saying, “We thank you for the gifts that you have given to the community of parents through this book that is truly your book—*Autism Heroes*. You are meeting the challenge, you are providing a lifeline of help and support to other families and you are charting the course.” She spoke compellingly about the fact that we are no longer living in the dark ages of autism. “When we look back at this time, we will refer to it as the beginning of the age of awareness, the age of hope and the age of opportunity.”

In his remarks, **Gary H. Carmona, Chairman of the Board of The Help Group** acknowledged the families for their courage and candor and congratulated Dr. Firestone, saying, “It is a privilege to observe someone with such a commitment and who has the passion—when you read the book you’ll understand. We are very proud to have Dr. Firestone at the helm of our organization. Her commitment is evident in all that she does to bring hope to children and families living with autism.”

Speaking on behalf of the City of Los Angeles, long-standing friend to children with special needs and their families, and to The Help Group, **Wendy Greuel, Councilwoman 2nd District and President Pro Tem of the Los Angeles City Council** remarked, “Dr. Firestone’s book is going to be so helpful to families and individuals who sometimes feel that they are all alone—the only family going through these things and the only family who feels that there is no one there to help them. Those who share their stories are the heroes among us. It is an honor to present this resolution, declaring today, “Autism Heroes Day in Los Angeles.”

A true champion for children, who has been committed to The Help Group’s mission for more than two decades, **Congressman Howard L. Berman, 28th District, California,**

presented a joint 'Congressional Certificate of Recognition' to each family on behalf of himself, **Congressman Henry Waxman, 30th District California** and **Congressman Brad Sherman, 27th District, California**. He acknowledged the importance of Dr. Firestone's benchmark book, saying, "I can't think of anything more valuable and important for families confronting the challenges than to hear from the families who have chosen to be a part of this new book. It was my honor to endorse this book."

This special event included an invocation by The Help Group's Village Glen recorder ensemble and a heartwarming performance by The Help Group Children's Choir. During the program a video clip of **Gary and Teddi Cole**, one of the families interviewed for the book was shown. They spoke of the challenges they confronted, the importance of access to quality information, and the importance of speaking openly about autism to reduce the stigma. The Coles are active autism advocates, wrote one of the book's forewords, and Gary is **The Help Group National Celebrity Spokesperson**. Gary is starring in the upcoming HBO series, "12 Miles of Bad Road" with Lily Tomlin and Mary Kay Place.

Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge is scheduled to be released on November 15, and will be in bookstores everywhere. Dr. Firestone will be appearing at book signing events throughout the United States. For more information about **Autism Heroes: Portraits of Families Meeting the Challenge**, please visit www.autismheroes.org

Additional photos available upon request

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ABOUT THE HELP GROUP

Founded in 1975, The Help Group serves children with a wide range of special needs and is the largest and most comprehensive nonprofit of its kind in the United States. Recognized as a leader in the field of autism, it offers extensive special education, therapy and assessment services. The Help Group educates over 750 students on a daily basis in its four innovative autism day schools. Through its public awareness and outreach programs, graduate and postgraduate professional training, parent education programs and efforts at the state and national levels, The Help Group touches the lives of children with special needs across the United States and in other parts of the world. For more information about The Help Group, please call 818-779-5212 or visit www.thehelpgroup.org.