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National Safe Place and Southwest Airlines Announce 2009 'HEROES for Youth' Award Recipient

LOUISVILLE, Ky., Dec. 22 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- National Safe Place and Southwest Airlines announce Rachel Lloyd, founder and executive director of Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) as the 2009 *HEROES for Youth* award recipient. Southwest Airlines sponsors the *HEROES for Youth* award, established by National Safe Place to recognize individuals who have made an extraordinary contribution nationally to the services provided to at-risk youth.

Lloyd had been sexually exploited as a teenager. She came to the U.S. in 1997 as a missionary to work with adult women in correctional facilities and on the streets. She observed the overwhelming need for services for young women at risk of sexual exploitation who were being ignored by traditional social service agencies. It became clear to her that specialized services were essential for this population.

Lloyd's efforts to transform public perception of sexually exploited youth has included being instrumental in the successful passing of the NY Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children Act and co-producing the Showtime documentary, *Very Young Girls*. Through these efforts, thousands of individuals learned that trafficking and commercial exploitation of girls did not only occur in countries other than the U.S.

Having seen and experienced atrocious abuse fueled Lloyd's ability to make a powerful difference. Lloyd has dedicated her life to empowering the lives of young women. She provides a nurturing and non-judgmental environment that allows each girl an opportunity to receive the necessary support and services to treat the trauma and violence she has experienced. Over the past ten years, Lloyd has been at the forefront of the movement to end the commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of girls and young women. For many, Lloyd is the only pillar of stability they have known, instilling in them a sense of worth.

GEMS has grown to a nationally recognized and acclaimed organization and now are one of the largest providers of services to commercially sexually exploited and domestically trafficked youth in the U.S.

National Safe Place based the *HEROES for Youth* award on the following criteria:

H Hear the voices of at-risk youth

E Engage in the discussion

R Respond to the call

O Observe the need for change and take action

E Educate and encourage key stakeholders to make a positive difference

S Significantly change the lives of at-risk youth for the better

Each year an estimated 2 million youth run away. Most young people do not run away to experience additional freedoms but rather are running away from a problem that they cannot solve, according to Department of Justice statistics from 2006. A Department of Justice study from 2002 indicates that 21 percent of runaway youth had been either physically or sexually abused within their homes within the year prior to their leaving.

Safe Place was created as a community collaboration that provides easy access to help for young people in dangerous, threatening or vulnerable situations. There are over 17,000 designated businesses and community buildings displaying the Safe Place sign nationwide.

Since 1983, more than 240,000 youth have accessed help at a Safe Place site or contacted their local youth shelter after learning about Safe Place at a school presentation. Safe Place often offers the first step to help and safety for youth who have been abused, neglected or experienced serious family situations.

Each year the U.S. Senate designates the third week of March as National Safe Place Week, recognizing the thousands of businesses, schools, fire departments, law enforcement and volunteers who work to keep communities safer for young people.

About National Safe Place

National Safe Place, headquartered in Louisville, Ky., provides training and technical assistance for youth service agencies and businesses interested in developing a Safe Place program. Safe Places provide access to immediate help and safety for all young people in crisis. A public-private network of more than 17,000 sites across the country extends the doors of local youth shelters by displaying the Safe Place sign. Business partners and community locations that appeal to youth – such as fast food restaurants, convenience stores, fire stations, public buses and libraries – connect kids looking for help with the youth service agency. In 2008, 8,042 youth received immediate help at a Safe Place site. Another 8,499 youth contacted a Safe Place site or shelter for help after learning about the program through school and community education. The Safe Place program was created by the YMCA of Greater Louisville in 1983. For additional information, visit www.nationalsafeplace.org.

About Southwest Airlines

Southwest Airlines' Share the Spirit program embodies the culture of positive impact in the communities it serves – demonstrated through Southwest's charitable giving, Employee volunteerism, and community relations programs. Southwest Airlines is one of the most honored airlines in the world, consistently appearing on the FORTUNE Magazine's "Most Admired Companies" list. After 38 years of service, Southwest Airlines, the nation's leading low-fare carrier, continues to stand above other airlines – offering a reliable product with exemplary Customer Service. Southwest Airlines (NYSE: LUV) currently serves 68 cities in 35 states. Based in Dallas, Southwest currently operates more than 3,300 flights a day and has more than 35,000 Employees systemwide who work hard each and every day to provide

excellent Customer service and make a difference in the community. To learn more about Southwest's community involvement, visit www.southwest.com/cares.

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