For Immediate Release
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Volunteers Join Forces for Extreme Playground Makeover During 2008 NFL/United Way Hometown Huddle

(Kansas City, MO)---Volunteers were hoping for a beautiful sunny day to build a new playground at Operation Breakthrough…but it rained overnight leaving a field full of water and mud. But just like football, you don't cancel the game because of a little rain or mud; you stick with the ground game and rely on teamwork to get the job done.

Nearly 200 volunteers followed their game plan, converting an unused portion of a parking lot, into a colorful, safe new playground for the children at Operation Breakthrough during this year's NFL/United Way Hometown Huddle. Before volunteers could start building the playground, organizers had to use pumps to drain away the water that had accumulated from overnight rains and spread around straw to combat the mud. The good news was that it didn't rain anymore and everything was so well organized that volunteers finished the job in 5½ hours, half-an-hour earlier than expected.

The playground project was a community effort involving Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, KaBOOM!, the Kansas City Chiefs, Chiefs linebacker Derrick Johnson's King of the Field Foundation and United Way. It was the third year in a row the various community partners have joined forces to build a playground at a United Way agency as part of the NFL/United Way Hometown Huddle.

On most days, Operation Breakthrough cares for more than 650 children, the overwhelming majority of whom come from low-income, single parent homes and from area homeless shelters. Like most youngsters, they look forward to going outside to play on the playground. But their time outside has been limited because of the large number of children and the limited size of their playground. Older and younger children had to take turns, going outside in shifts due to the limited space. Today's playground makeover nearly doubled the size of the existing playground and provided new playground equipment, that is better suited for school aged children

As the volunteers worked, teachers brought the children outside to see the bright, colorful "Chiefs Fitness Zone" going up piece-by-piece. Many of the children had trouble containing their enthusiasm, oohing and ahhing at the new swings, the climbing wall, the yellow plastic slides.

Chiefs linebacker Derrick Johnson picked up a rake and helped volunteers spread woodchips and bolt the playground equipment into place. He also took time to sign autographs and pose for pictures with dozens of volunteers. The children of Operation Breakthrough cut the ribbon to dedicate the playground when it was finished.

The Hometown Huddle is a collaborative effort between the NFL and United Way, designed to positively impact local communities. In addition to helping build three playgrounds, over the years Chiefs players have spent time reading to and playing games with children at various United Way agencies, as part of their involvement in the Hometown Huddle.

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