**NSPCC Child House Opening**

**3rd October 2018**

Thank you.

Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

It is a privilege to be here this evening and to have been invited to say a few words about my childhood experiences of sexual abuse; and to place these traumatic events and the consequences to my mental and emotional health in the context of this remarkable facility.

My hope is that my words will underline how hugely important the services offered in this house will be as a catalyst for the profound healing in the lives of the many 1000s of traumatised children, and their families, who will walk through these doors in the next few years.

For the record, I am a survivor of child sexual abuse; It took me many years to admit that to myself let alone anyone else. Like almost all survivors, I was too ashamed, scared, too traumatised to tell anyone what had happened...not my parents, friends or family.

To put it simply – the abuse crippled me for many years – I avoided all physical, emotional and sexual intimacy for most of my adult life, such was the trauma of the abuse.

When I was eight years old, I was targeted by a group of paedophiles who threatened, coerced and forced me to endure an 18-months or so period of horrific sexual abuse.

They made me feel that I was entirely responsible for what happened. They behaved as if they were entitled to do what they were doing; it was their right; they convinced my that it was ALL my fault.

The menace, the unrelenting pressure, the fear and shame I felt, the threats to my life…. were far worse that the actual physical sexual abuse that took place.

**Puberty**

As soon it had finished, I buried the memories so deep inside of me I could barely remember anything – until, aged 12, my reaching puberty triggered off relentless and savage flashbacks.

There was suddenly a deep, visceral feeling of horror inside which was overwhelming.

On the surface, at the beginning, everything looked fine; I could flick a switch in my mind and ‘act’ so no one knew what was really going on. But I was scared of being attacked by strangers and even men I knew; I began to withdraw within myself; I became very anxious, depressed and often paranoid about other people’s intentions.

**Getting drunk**

For a while getting drunk was (at least for me) the obvious answer. I started drinking in my mid teens and whilst I hated the taste, the effect throughout my body was sensational.

It felt like a chemical reaction surging through me, and I felt ALIVE in a way that I never had before.

These feelings of euphoria didn’t last but getting to oblivion was the only way to drown the horrific feelings and savage, obsessive thoughts of self hatred.

I was very fortunate to hit rock bottom aged 20 years and in March 1993 I went to my first AA meeting. Thanks to AA, I haven’t had a drink since.

This was the turning point in my life, and out of desperation I asked for help.

**Supporting survivors of abuse**

Supporting survivors of child sexual abuse is a hugely complex issue, but here’s the good news - when done well it can be a hugely positive, life transforming experience.

I’ve witnessed this healing in many other survivors, as well as in myself.

The conscious decision to ‘go back in’ and re-live the memories takes enormous courage. Life feels so savage and overtly threatening when one goes back in.

I needed to know deep down inside of myself that I really wasn’t responsible for the abuse. It took until my late 30s to fully accept this. This is one of the challenges of living with long term suppressed memories and complex PTSD.

**It also underlines, for me, the huge importance of early intervention which is what this amazing facility offers.**

**My personal experience, and that of supporting other survivors, is that those of us who disclose our abuse in adulthood are far more likely to have more challenging emotional and psychological problems.**

**The trauma of child sexual abuse has poisoned so many other areas of our lives over a longer period of time.**

**Summing up**

**I know, without any doubt, I would have greatly benefited from the services that will soon be delivered in this remarkable house.**

Please do not underestimate the enormity of what you have achieved here. This facility will save many lives. One of the children who was abused with me also became an alcoholic, but despite trying desperately he couldn’t stop drinking. He drank himself to death in his late 30s.

We all know the epidemic of child sexual abuse across the country and the huge need for these services nationwide. My sincere hope is that this facility will be the first of several.

**Closing**

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Morgan Stanley - through their charity partnership with NSPCC - who have funded this therapy suite of rooms, so children are able to get the mental health support they need.

And thank you to the NSPCC for inviting me to speak here this evening.

Finally, I would like thank everyone here this evening for your crucial roles in creating this fabulous facility. Thank you.