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### **A Tribute to MEDPAK from Alison Closs, formerly a professor in inclusive education at Edinburgh University and then a consultant evaluator for Save the Children.**

When I first came to Albania in 2003 as a Consultant for Save the Children to carry out a survey and write a Report on the position of children with disabilities and their families in Albania, I was told that I would find that, in general, their position was not at all good, and sometimes really dreadful. However, I was also told by my colleagues on the survey – Esti Ikonimi of Save the Children and Professor Virxhil Nano - that I would also meet many wonderful children, families and Albanian local and national non-governmental organisations. I am happy to say that this did indeed turn out to be the case.

Foremost among these amazing and active organisations and families was MEDPAK in Librazhd and the Koka family, especially Zela Koka, her husband Nazmi and others from the Librazhd community who worked so very hard to improve the lives of children and adults with disabilities. Above all, they really struggled to ensure that children and adults with disabilities should be regarded and treated as citizens of equal worth to all other Albanian citizens. I found MEDPAK inspirational and recognised how the enthusiasm, commitment and example of the Kokas and others involved with MEDPAK had inspired so many other families and organisations in their community and across Albania.

When I returned to Albania in 1997, again as a Save the Children Consultant, I found that, despite difficulties in ensuring funding for their projects and core services caused by the poor economic situation in Albania and worldwide, MEDPAK continued to provide the services that were so badly needed. It gives me enormous pleasure to pay tribute to MEDPAK on its 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Organisations like MEDPAK will perhaps always be needed to support people with disabilities and their families, to ensure their rights, to provide services and to remind all the other Albanian citizens of their duty to respect these rights. So, I am proud to be a friend of MEDPAK and wish that it will go on flourishing for as long as it is needed.