



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact: Beth Moritz, Director of Development
314- 450-7685 / bmoritz@covenanthousemo.org

Groundbreaking Study Shows Dire Situation of Homeless Teens in St. Louis Area
Findings Indicate that 47 Percent of Homeless Teens Have Suffered Abuse

Anchorage

Atlanta

Atlantic City

Detroit

Fort Lauderdale

Guatemala

Honduras

Houston

Los Angeles

Mexico

Newark

New Orleans

New York

Nicaragua

Oakland

Orlando

Philadelphia

St. Louis

Washington, D.C.

Toronto

Vancouver

March 20, 2010, St. Louis, Mo. – The 2010 Census will help to form the basis for countless political, social and economic decisions based on population. However, even the Census doesn't illustrate the stories behind the numbers the way that a recent study by the Covenant House Institute and the Columbia University Center for Homelessness Prevention Studies.

"As disturbing as the statistics are, we hope that this study will help open the eyes of St. Louisans to the plight of these teens," said Suzanne Wagener, Executive Director. "These findings can't be ignored. These kids need our help now."

The study was conducted with local teens from Covenant House Missouri over a period of one year between March, 2008 and April, 2009. The findings paint a dire picture of the situation St. Louis area homeless youth face. These youth are at a disadvantage to obtaining an education, finding a job and making a livelihood.

Homelessness and the surrounding events can be extremely traumatic. Most homeless teens have suffered some type of mental health issue. Thirty-three percent of homeless youth surveyed had experienced psychiatric hospitalization.

"This is a groundbreaking study," said Howard Andrews, Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Biostatistics at Columbia. "I have been involved in many projects that can help inform policy in the long term. This study has immediate policy implications. This is a perfect example of how academia and an organization that does great work can collaborate to truly inform homeless policy."

Some of the other staggering findings of the study included:

- **History of Foster Care Placement:** Findings indicate not only that a large number of youth had a history of foster care placement (43%), but also that they were initially placed at an early age (average of 7 years old) and remained in care for a lengthy period of time (average of 8 years).
- **Experience of Violence:** A significant proportion of the youth reported histories of violence with 47% reporting physical abuse, and 31% reporting sexual abuse.
- **Unemployment:** The majority of youth (74%) entered the shelter unemployed. Only 38% had ever completed a job training program.

About the Study:

Covenant House Institute is the research and leadership development arm of Covenant House. The Institute's purpose is to advance research and leadership development in the social service sector working with homeless, runaway and at-risk youth. The Columbia Center for Homelessness Prevention Studies (CHPS) is a multidisciplinary effort to research homelessness and develop ways to prevent chronic homelessness among people with severe mental illness who comprise about 25 percent of homeless adults 18 and older. The Center involves collaborators from the New York State Psychiatric Institute, the Mailman School of Public Health, and many other departments and schools at Columbia University.

About Covenant House Missouri:

Covenant House Missouri was established in 1998. It provides services to homeless, runaway and at-risk youth between the ages of 16-21 with open hearts and open doors. Without a stable home or support system, young people drop out of school and end up totally unprepared for the workplace. Homelessness can lead to poverty, crime and drug abuse. Covenant House Missouri provides hope to homeless teens. For more information about our services, or to donate to Covenant House Missouri, visit www.covenanthousemo.org.

-###-