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Covenant House Institute Created to Study Issues of Youth Homelessness Worldwide

*Bruce Henry, longtime leader of Covenant House New York, to head multidisciplinary initiative;
First research initiative planned with Columbia University*

NEW YORK, NY, August 12, 2008 – Covenant House International, one of the world’s largest privately funded agencies serving homeless, runaway and other youth in crisis, today announced the formation of a multi-disciplinary, research-based initiative, the Covenant House Institute (CHI). With a mission to effect profound change in how such youth are served, the Institute will study issues related to this population, provide data critical for policy and funding decisions, and train emerging social-service leaders.

The Institute will collaborate with a range of academic and social-service partners, as well as leverage the vast expertise that resides in the international Covenant House organization gained from more than 35 years working with homeless youth in the U.S., Canada and Latin America.

The Covenant House Institute will be led by Bruce Henry, a nationally recognized expert on youth homelessness, who also played an integral role in its development. To fill his new role, Henry will leave Covenant House New York, where he has served as Executive Director for 22 years.

The Institute will conduct its first research initiative with Columbia University Center for Homelessness Prevention Studies, an official partner to CHI and one of academia’s few interdisciplinary research centers focused on issues related to homelessness.

“This unparalleled initiative allows Covenant House to serve as an even stronger voice for struggling youth around the world, who, despite pasts that many of us find incomprehensible, are still just children,” said Henry. “The Covenant House Institute’s partnerships will give us research that confirms our anecdotal experiences and provides a foundation for change to help

these youths transcend what they've endured and become independent, successful members of society.”

Youth homelessness remains a pressing social and economic issue worldwide, with estimates indicating that homelessness disrupts more than 1.6 million young lives annually in the United States alone.¹ These young people are at high risk of joining the ranks of the world's chronically homeless adults, whose lives of extreme hardship often end in premature death. Over many years of serving homeless youth, Covenant House has found that programs rooted in safe housing, educational and/or vocational training and real job opportunities with a potential for growth help young people turn their lives around.

“The focus, scope and scale of the Covenant House Institute's work will make it a respected, effective advocate for youth in crisis worldwide, and we're pleased to contribute our knowledge as a partner in this forward-looking endeavor,” said Carol Caton, Ph.D., Director of the Columbia University Center for Homelessness Prevention Studies. “The more data CHI can capture and study – on everything from underlying ‘trigger issues’ to program effectiveness, mental health or long-term outcomes – the better we'll be able to assist these young people and keep more of them out these situations in the first place.”

In a related effort, Covenant House International is formalizing an additional research partnership with the Italian Federation of Therapeutic Communities to develop a pilot project educating and training young workers to better assist street youth in Honduras. The initiative will commence at the agency's local site, known as Casa Alianza Honduras, and aims to expand to other Covenant House locations in Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua. It will be led by Jose Manuel Capellin, the Executive Director of Casa Alianza Honduras, who was recently named a “Hero Acting to End Modern-Day Slavery” by the U.S. State Department.

The Covenant House Institute will also work to strengthen management and organizational capacity among local, national and international social-service agencies. To that end, the Institute will implement an agency-wide management training model that will create leadership opportunities for youth and rising staff, and host annual leadership conferences for executives and program managers to foster discussion on critical themes and pressing issues.

¹ National Network for Youth

“The Covenant House Institute is a natural and important extension of our mission to provide youth in crisis with shelter, care and support,” said James White, interim president of Covenant House International. “We hope that by matching our strengths with those of experts in complementary areas, we can broaden and deepen our service to these children, from whom we have learned so much over the years.”

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About Covenant House International

Covenant House International is the largest privately-funded agency in the Americas providing shelter and other services to homeless, runaway and throwaway youth. Incorporated in New York City in 1972, Covenant House International has facilities in 21 cities throughout the United States, Canada, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua. Covenant House International also operates 24-hour crisis hotlines in the United States (Covenant House NINELINE) and Mexico (Acercatel). In addition, Covenant House International and its member sites are leading advocates on behalf of street youth at local, state, national and international levels of government. Covenant House International is a member of the Non-Government Organization (NGO) Board of Directors of UNICEF and has taken on a prominent role in The Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC.)

About Covenant House New York (CHNY)

CHNY is New York City’s largest nonprofit adolescent care agency serving homeless, runaway and at-risk youth between the ages of 18 and 21. With particular expertise in helping some of the most hopeless teens grow into independent, successful and productive adults, CHNY plays a special role in the lives of young people struggling to find their way – and in the city’s larger social services arena.