FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 2, 2005

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Homeless New Orleans Youth Receive National Grant
Will Research Police Treatment of the Homeless

A team of New Orleans homeless youth received funding through a competitive national grant competition to investigate police treatment of the homeless. The youth researchers are affiliated with Covenant House, a residential shelter for youth between the ages of 16-21 who are homeless or in transition.

In particular, the team will investigate the experiences of homeless youth with public officials, including police officers. The team will interview fifty of their peers to gain detailed information about encounters – good or bad - with public officials. The youth researchers will also meet and interview public officials themselves, including members of the police force and representatives from the City Council and the Mayor’s Office.

Matthew Cardinale, a graduate student in Public Administration at the University of New Orleans, is mentoring the team through the research process. According to Cardinale, “Police treatment of the homeless has been an ongoing issue in our community. Local media has covered the City Council's recent "Crackdown on Vagrancy" as arrest rates of the homeless have skyrocketed. The National Coalition for the Homeless even listed New Orleans as one of the meanest cities for homeless people in recent years. Homeless youth are tired of sitting on the sidelines of this debate, and want to lead the process of documenting first-hand what is happening.”

The research team will conduct interviews during the months of July and August this summer. Their efforts will culminate in a report to be publicly released at a press conference this fall. Cardinale expects their findings will impact the ways city officials and community members view the issue of policing vagrancy: “The youth on our team will be able to make a definite contribution to what is known about police treatment of homeless youth. Currently, there is no systematic data on the types of encounters homeless youth have with police and how these experiences affect them. This group is breaking new ground and will help local officials to develop informed, sensitive policies.”

The Covenant House Youth Research Team received a grant of $10,000 through a competition administered by CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), a national research center focused on the civic and political participation of young Americans. Close to 300 proposals were submitted to CIRCLE from research teams operating all over the country. Only ten projects were selected to receive funding.

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Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie Corporation of New York, and housed at the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy, CIRCLE (www.civicyouth.org) is a premier source of impartial, nonpartisan, and comprehensive data, research, and analysis on the civic engagement of young people.