

Organization: *'r kids, Inc.* (aka *'r kids Family Center*)

Address: 45 Dixwell Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut 06511

Website: www.rkidsct.org

and <http://givegreater.guidestar.org/NonprofitProfile.aspx?OrgId=1054038>

Direct Supervisor: Randi Rubin Rodriguez, Co-Founder and Executive Director

Phone Number: 203-865-5437

Email Address: Randi@rkidsct.org

Placement Dates: May 30, 2017 through August 11, 2017

'r kids is willing to be flexible within these parameters. However, we would like the student to commit to an uninterrupted length of internship; i.e. begin later, end later, if needed.

Hours of Program: 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with possible evening or weekend as necessary to attend special event or meeting relative to need. Will be given advance notice and effort made to coordinate student's availability with meeting schedule.

Organization Description:

'r kids enjoys a unique niche in New Haven's nonprofit community: permanency for children. Now in its 17th year, *'r kids* remains committed to promoting permanency, safety and stability for children made vulnerable by trauma, abuse and neglect, family and community violence by providing strength based, nurturing services to biological, kinship, foster and adoptive families.

Last year *'r kids* served 54 bio families including 148 children, 50 foster/kin families and 20 high risk, intact families and their 30 children, not receiving out-of-home service (in home prevention program) as well as 9 youth in foster care and their foster families.

'r kids family reunification rate is now 94 %, which continues to significantly outpace the national (51%) and state (52%) reunification rates that include court mandated returns after short holds. In contrast, children referred to *'r kids* are often already out-of-home for a significant period, providing even greater potency to our strong reunification results. That *'r kids* approach is truly impactful, however, is best illustrated by the 31% reunification rate that DCF itself achieves with those comparable families that DCF services in-house.

We are DCF's *only* Reunification and Therapeutic Family Time provider for New Haven; we provide the entire continuum of permanency for vulnerable children, from prevention, education for elementary students in DCF care, assessment, reunification, therapeutic visitation and all adoption options and post-adoption supports and trainings.

'r kids builds resiliency in children, already burdened by socioeconomic disadvantages (94% of families served have income below \$30,000) and provides parents under or at risk of DCF scrutiny with sorely needed wrap-around services.

The *'r kids* tag line embodies its mission. *With each child, the world begins anew (Midrash).*

Project Summary: *This internship with 'r kids Family Center will provide us with the creative support to develop materials, both printed and digital, to further promote the needs of children/families involved with the foster care/adoption community. This project will enhance our presentations; thereby strengthening our ability to tell the 'r kids story.*

PROJECT: Although *'r kids* has served the greater New Haven community for over 17 years, its existence and mission is not known by many in the area. The Yale Fellows Intern will help to remedy this situation. The Intern will learn about our exceptional permanency programs and our agency during the 2017 summer and will work at providing us collateral materials that may include informational printed brochures and web content. *'r kids* will be able to utilize these brochures at meetings, conferences, fairs, meetings with donors and friend-raisers, and at its headquarters on Dixwell Avenue. We currently are seeking contributions for both *'r kids* programs and for expansion of our facilities. This work project will insure we have brochures that tell our story in an artistically pleasing and readable presentation.

Why is this project important for our fundraising efforts? *'r kids* recognized the value added when a nonprofit has a vested stake as a property owner in the community it serves. *'r kids* intentionally constructed its 4,500 square foot Family Center at the entry to the Dixwell corridor¹ on land remediated with an EPA grant. Calling *'r kids* a “*blessing*,” one neighbor noted: “*Your development of two drug- infested, abandoned lots spurred others in the triangle to upgrade and develop their properties.*” Neighbor to neighbor relationships and enhancing the community both matter to *'r kids* Family Center. However, we are now at capacity.

'r kids has long recognized the extraordinary gap that exists for youth committed to the Department of Children and Families, a divide they are too often unable to overcome alone to pursue postsecondary education successfully as the life altering accomplishment it is. From experience, we know that students in foster care are especially at risk for school failure, as evidenced by poor grades and high rates of absenteeism and disciplinary referrals; students in foster care are too often older for their grade level.² *'r kids* added a Youth Prevention program

¹ The City of New Haven is one of the poorest cities in the country. 26.9 % of city’s population of 129,779 fall below the poverty line. 1 in 5 children under 18 live in poverty, close to 3 times the state average. Poverty is concentrated in a few neighborhoods, including Dixwell, which has a higher rate of cost burdened households than New Haven itself, with 60% paying more than 30% for housing and 31% paying more than 50% of income for housing.

² A recent review of state standardized test results by Connecticut Voices for Children, however, reveals that 10th grade youth committed to state care are far less likely to receive a proficient score or above in the four core subject areas (Reading, Writing, Math and Science) than their peers, a test-score difference that is evident as early as third grade, the first grade in which students are tested statewide. Feder, K., Kramer, T. and

last year, targeted specifically for elementary aged youth in foster or kinship care. To ensure that postsecondary education is an attainable goal for youth in foster and kinship care, **'r kids** has developed a therapeutic/educational program specifically targeted to these children's unique needs, but we cannot actively seek funding to bring this needed program to scale until we have added the necessary space.

Our current facility does not meet the growing service needs of the children and families we see and those in the community at large we now seek to serve. The DCF federal court monitor again in April 2015 noted that the need for additional mental health services for those involved with DCF remains acute in New Haven; educational enhancement programming has not kept pace with the legislature's "Raise the Grade" focus for students in foster care. Moreover, children living in New Haven neighborhoods defined by poverty, community violence and a massive achievement gap do not have sufficient access to mental health resources and educational supports to enhance their capacity for maximum self-actualization. As part of our planned expansion into mental health and educational supports, **'r kids** and our collaborating co-tenants will not simply continue to work with those children and families referred by DCF. Our planned substantive expansion will proactively reach out to serve all New Haven families and children made vulnerable by poverty, racial segregation, community violence and trauma.

Mental health services and expanded youth-centric programming have very specific space needs that exceed the current capacity of our facility. Exemplifying visionary leadership, the single-story Family Center was constructed with the structural integrity to support additional stories. This provides **'r kids** with the opportunity to enlarge our facility at reduced cost and with maximum efficiency, thereby allowing for expanded programs to serve the growing demands of the community. Having satisfied our state bond obligation in 2005, **'r kids** is embarking on this venture; having demonstrated financial, managerial, and program solvency, affording us the luxury of a fully debt-free facility.

The Work:

Working with our executive team, the Fellow will assist in creating different brochures for **'r kids**. From the graphic design to the content, the Fellow will develop these materials. The Fellow will have an orientation into the **'r kids** mission, goals and work in order to better represent our organization in these brochures and on our web site. The Fellow will be expected to contribute with a creative, thoughtful eye to highlighting this *small but mighty* nonprofit that serves a unique population – children in foster or kinship care – that too often is invisible.

It is vital to experience firsthand the work that **'r kids** does, day in and day out, to reunify families and ensure that children in foster and kinship care achieve the permanency, safety and stability necessary to develop into emotionally healthy and productive adults. The fellowship intern will be expected to help plan, attend and provide interactive support at our annual Lighthouse event for foster and kinship families to celebrate each other and the summer.

Specific Skills/Experience Required for Project:

Seeking a creative person with graphic design and/or art background; Excellent computer skills with experience using desktop publishing software; Exceptional written and verbal communication skills and be able to work both independently and with our team. This is a great summer position for someone who wants to use their creative abilities to help an award-winning New Haven nonprofit.

Prior Yale PPSF Fellows at 'r kids:

Last summer, 2016, our Yale Presidential Fellow researched and developed a PTO policy and procedure for our employee manual, which was approved by the Board of Directors and implemented. She developed a long list of potential grants, interviewed staff to learn and write our families' stories and enhanced our organizational relationship with the Afro-American Cultural Center at Yale.

In 2013, another PPSF painstakingly coded randomly selected family case files to begin the process of identifying the key factors that contribute to our demonstrably higher reunification rates. Recognizing that there is a National knowledge gap, **'r kids** has been undertaking a rigorous examination into the factors associated with successful reunification. Because **'r kids** works exclusively with lengthy out of home placements, identifying key factors to the demonstrably higher reunification that **'r kids** achieves has particular significance for the delivery of child welfare services for *all* children

Although we did not have a PPSF intern in the other summers, we did host a Yale Couture Fellow the summer of 2014 and a Yale Divinity student's yearlong internship in 2015-16.