



Project Return, Inc.

124 North Compo Road
Westport, CT 06880

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Inside Project Return

The past six months at Project Return have been a time of change and loss, especially difficult as the girls in our care have life experiences that have left them without the predictable knowledge that, no matter what, they have their home and family. They've lost that. For them, nothing is predictable. Our role is to create a place of trust and safety in which each girl can rediscover peace, predictability and a new sort of family so they can move on into the world.

Our girls come from backgrounds where change, whether involving family, foster placements and/or school, has been a constant. It is not uncommon for them to have serious doubts about where they will be tomorrow, whether what people say is what they mean, about how safe it is to believe. When attachments are broken, trust is the vital issue that must be addressed and rediscovered.

This summer we lost one of our staff. The tragic death of Katie Fontneau brought the house together, much as any family, to mourn her loss. Death is extraordinarily hard to comprehend and accept under normal circumstances, so the staff had the challenging task of supporting the girls as the PR community worked tirelessly to process this difficult event. The girls saw staff draw strength and support from one another while turning to the clinical team to process their grief. This model of nurturing and sharing allowed the girls to see us cope and move forward while honoring Katie's life, a life that left an indelible mark.

We are happy to report that the girls are back in school and forging ahead with their lives. Although we have experienced change and loss, we have learned a lot about ourselves and developed stronger and more supportive relationships within our entire community.



Birdhouse Auction

Birdhouse auction co-chairs Bridget Nelis and Anna Sekaran are planning another exciting event this year. Some 150 artists will be donating their creations in support of Project Return, a home for troubled teens, which has served Fairfield County for 25 years. If you would like to create a birdhouse for the silent auction, contact Renee Gold at Birdhouse Central at 203-226-0096 or renee@projectreturnct.org. If you would like to become a sponsor of this unique event, contact Mimi Haley at 203-222-8129. To view all sponsorship and donation opportunities visit our website at www.projectreturnct.org. Watch for the colorful birds around town in the spring. Tickets can be purchased online on our website.

Gathering for Our Girls



S. Basler, director; N. Douglas; M. Alger; C. Russell-Walling and L. Klaris, president.

A Gathering for Our Girls event was an outstanding success, thanks to the generosity and hospitality of Project Return community volunteer Molly Alger. Friends of Molly from near and far contributed nearly \$7,500 in support of Project Return programs and services. The luncheon held at Molly's home provided the setting for introducing new friends to PR. On October 5 Diane Zeidman played host to Neighbors and Newcomers of Westport at a festive luncheon at her home. Our thanks to both Molly and Diane for raising awareness and supporting our mission.

Welcome Aboard



Lorin Klaris

New president **Lorin Klaris**, an active volunteer for PR, has hosted the Birdhouse Stroll, chaired the auction, mentored a girl, founded and organized an annual shopping event at Lillian August and has been on the board for six years. A freelance photographer for more than 20 years, she began her career assisting top portrait photographers in New York. She now photographs people and places for editorials in magazines and for corporate

reports, book jackets and ads. She manages the jewelry department at Lillian August and its online art website.

Faith H. Taylor: Active in the community, Faith is a fund raising consultant with EarthPlace in Westport. Previously, she worked with the Unitarian Church and has served as secretary of the Westport Board of Education, co-president of the Westport PTA Council and as a trustee of the Westport Public Library.

Naomi Kydes: Naomi, a mother of two, works full time for Gilwood Company, Ltd., a fabric supplier in China. She is the manager of sales, trends and concepts in the U.S. office. Naomi is the first PR graduate to serve on our board and hopes to "give back to the home that gave me so much."

Evelyn Graham joins our Advisory Board. Ev is Executive Vice President for Corporate Development at Worldwide Clinical Trials, a privately held provider of drug development services to the pharmaceutical industry. Prior to that, she was the CEO and a member of the Board of TorreyPines Therapeutics, Inc. She holds a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Delaware and has a master's degree in business from UConn.

Totney Benson: Totney, a past president, has served on the board and advisory board of PR. Credited with having started the birdhouse auction, the "Birdhouse Lady" was recently voted chairperson of the Advisory Board.

Staff News

Kelli Reardon came to PR in 2007 while studying at Fairfield University. Following her job as support staff, Kelli was promoted to Resident Manager. She started her MSW at New York University this fall. Kelli replaces Meghan Skelton who is now a social worker for Weston High School and Middle School.

We also hired **Christina Napolitano** this fall as a Resident Manager. She graduated from New York University's School of Social Work in May 2010. Christina came to us as an intern in September 2008 and continued to work part time last year during her last year of graduate school.

Katherine King was hired as a member of our support staff and is working 30 hours a week. She has a MSW from Fordham School of Social Work. She has extensive experience and has worked at Kids in Crisis and Juvenile Probation for the State of Connecticut.

Visit Our New Website

Be sure to check out our newly designed website www.projectreturnct.org. Learn about our mission, services and important resources available to parents and teens. Visitors can also benefit from extensive information in the field of adolescent care and development.

Alumnae Corner

During the Thanksgiving season I find myself reflecting on some of the changes at Project Return over my 16-year tenure. So many of our troubled teens have grown into lovely, successful young women. Many have graduated from college or are now back in school. Quite a few are married with children of their own. They report that the skills they learned at PR have helped them be better mothers. Others have fulfilling careers as teachers, businesswomen and social workers.

I'm delighted that one of our alums, Naomi Kydes, has joined our Board of Directors. A PR girl in 1994-96, she is married with two children and works in the fashion industry. She has great insight and clarity about the work we do. It is a joy to have her on the board.

I am thankful that technology has allowed us to reconnect with more than 40 alumnae through Facebook. And the Westport Housing Authority has made it possible for us to maintain a transitional- living home for girls who have outgrown PR but still need guidance and support.

Finally, I am thankful to the Westport community whose continuing support helps us provide emotional and financial assistance to so many of our alumnae.

Renee Gold

Coordinator of Aftercare and Education

In Loving Memory

Project Return lost a vital, beautiful and talented member of our staff with the tragic death of Katie Fontneau, 23, in July. Katie brought the girls -- and staff -- her special talent for caring, learning and sharing, along with her enthusiasm for life. She was a young woman whose empathetic connection with people was way beyond her years. She always tried to be the best that she could be. We were lucky to know her, even if for too short a time.



Twelve years ago Dora Walsh showed up at PR asking what she could do to help. She adopted us and became "Grandma" to each of the girls. Dora arrived each holiday, birthday and at the beginning of school bringing something special for the girls to remind them that someone really cared. She was dearly loved and her death in July was a sad day for everyone. Generations of residents will remember her quiet, loving, generous spirit.



*Project Return Newsletter co-editors:
Patricia Scanlan, Susan Sheinbaum*