



## Keeping Children Safe And Parents Employed

Attorney's non-profit agency oversees network of day-care homes

By DOUGLAS S. MALAN

During her second and third year at Yale Law School in the late 1990s, Kim Rinehart wasn't just thinking about which clerkship or law firm job she would land. She was focused on helping New Haven County residents, especially single mothers, get out of poverty and build sustainable careers.

Rinehart and classmate Jessica Sager realized that child care was an important component of any such effort. "I was most passionate about the idea of moving someone from poverty to a career without having to truly sacrifice their family," said Rinehart, now a litigation partner in the New Haven office of Wiggin and Dana. "I was intrigued about whether this could happen at all."

Rinehart and Sager established All Our Kin, a New Haven-based non-profit organization that helps people open home-based day cares throughout New Haven County. The idea is that single mothers can establish a career while other single parents in their neighborhood and nearby areas can use those day-care services while building their own careers.

And home-based day-care operations often charge less than larger day-care centers, with the difference often exceeding \$100 per week. "In this economy, it's easy to see the importance of helping people who can't afford child care through a center," Rinehart said.

Rinehart continues to serve as a board member for the non-profit organization. Plus, she provides pro bono legal assistance to the people who create day-care businesses with the organization's assistance, particularly when it

comes to answering legal questions about business formation. Sager, meanwhile, is All Our Kin's executive director.

Now in its 11<sup>th</sup> year, All Our Kin includes about 250 home-based providers in its network. There are seven full-time staff members, three part-timers and three independent consultants, all of whom are well-versed in state laws and regulations involved in running a day-care center.

The organization started with a grant from Yale Law School and free space from the New Haven Housing Authority, space that is used by volunteers who train single mothers interested in starting their own businesses.

In the early days of All Our Kin, participants received nine months of training that led to certification as a day-care provider, but Rinehart realized the organization could be doing more for people.

### Expanded Services

So in 2001, she took a one-year leave of absence from Wiggin and Dana to expand All Our Kin's presence and influence. She helped develop a system where child-care experts employed by All Our Kin make visits to day-care facilities for quality control purposes, to provide assistance in developing learning activities, and to offer advice on issues such as how to care for children who vary widely in age.

All Our Kin also began offering small loans to help people start businesses and purchase additional learning materials for children. Educational workshops for the day-care owners also are offered in the evenings and on weekends to fulfill a continuing education component.

Additionally, All Our Kin offers a program



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Attorney Kim Rinehart has enlisted her colleagues at Wiggin and Dana to provide pro bono help to single mothers looking to launch their own day-care businesses.

that explains the often-complicated process to obtain a day-care license in the state. A licensed home-based day care can host up to nine children. "Licensing allows them to serve more kids legally and qualify for state programs that provide subsidies, which increase their annual income," Rinehart said.

All Our Kin operates on foundation grants and individual giving, and Rinehart said the group has been working hard to tell more people about their mission.

The non-profit also has received assistance from Wiggin and Dana. The firm provided office space for the organization



in the early days, and several attorneys—including partner Aaron Bayer and associates Alyssa Cunningham and Anika Singh Lemar—have been active in providing pro bono legal services to day-care owners. This often involves providing information about setting up a business and sharing applicable tax rules and record-keeping strategies.

“We have found people who are really dedicated to us and have helped to expand our presence in the community,” said Rinehart, whose three sons have attended day-

care homes that are part of the All Our Kin network.

And there are new initiatives involving All Our Kin.

One of them comes through an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant. All Our Kin is running a pilot program that places 24 Early Head Start children with 10 in-home care providers in New Haven. Early Head Start serves the neediest children, including homeless, foster care and refugee children.

“This is the only existing project in Con-

necticut in which EHS children are served by family child-care providers and not in centers,” Rinehart said. “It’s a model the federal government is very interested in pursuing further.”

Rinehart said she enjoys her non-profit project because it helps people start a new life and provides options where few previously existed.

“We are at the nexus of job creation and child care,” she said. “There’s no political motive to the organization. It appeals to people of every stripe.” ■