



# **Starting A Resource Center Or Teacher Free Store**

## **Part I**

**A manual in three parts that describes the process,  
step by step, of starting a teacher free store in any community.**

**Published by the Kids In Need Foundation**

**The mission of the Kids In Need Foundation is to ensure that every child is prepared to learn and succeed by providing free school supplies nationally to students most in need.**

## **Starting a Resource Center or Teacher Free Store**

### **Part I**

#### **Introduction**

Educators might spend up to \$2,000 a year of their own money to provide supplies for their students and classrooms. A school supplies Resource Center or free store for teachers is a retail store environment with shelves, fixtures, and carts where teachers can shop for free school supplies. Resource Centers give teachers the supplies at no cost.

Teachers from specific schools are invited by the store to shop; the store is not generally open to the public. An invitation is extended based on the district in which the school is located and on the number of children in the school who are enrolled in the federal free and reduced lunch program.

A Resource Center involves occupying a building, employing both paid staff and volunteers, accounting for funds and inventory, and keeping regular, predetermined business hours. This differs from a school supplies giveaway program, which is structured as a once or twice a year event at which school supplies are given away to a predetermined number of children in designated schools, school districts, or service areas. No permanent building or personnel are required for a school supplies giveaway program.

Starting a Resource Center requires dedication, time, and effort. And once it is up and running, you must engage in all the duties that running a business entails.

Of course, operating a Resource Center has its rewards. You receive gratification when you see teachers and students getting the supplies they need. There is great satisfaction in knowing you made a difference in many people's lives. You are rewarded with knowing you helped to improve children's school experiences and their chances for success in the classroom and in life. In addition, you are alleviating the burden teachers often assume of purchasing supplies for their needy students and for their classrooms when school budgets are not adequate.

The Kids In Need Foundation currently supports 24 Resource Centers, 12 of them started by the Foundation and their non profit partners and 12 of them started by individuals or groups located in other cities throughout the U.S. Combined, these comprise the Kids In Need National Network of Resource Centers. To join the National Network, a Resource Center started by an individual or group must be in operation for at least one year, meet other administrative criteria, and contribute a nominal annual fee, which is returned to the Resource Center in donated product. Becoming an affiliate of the National Network is by invitation only after a Center has expressed interest in becoming a member.

During the startup of a new Resource Center and during the first year of operation, the staff of the Kids In Need Foundation is happy to be of assistance with information that may help the operation go more smoothly.

#### **Kids In Need National Network of Resource Centers**

- Purpose: to provide free school supplies to students whose families cannot afford to purchase them and to provide classroom supplies to teachers in under funded schools. Schools in specific school districts that have at least 70% of the student body on the federal free or reduced lunch program qualify for the program.
- The National Network: The Kids In Need National Network consists of 24 Resource Centers. More than 1.5 million children and 100,000 teachers are served.
- Operation: The Resource Centers are operated on a day-to-day basis by their own staffs and volunteers. The Foundation supports the Centers by distributing product donated to or purchased by the Foundation. Support is also offered in the forms of information, strategies, and research provided by the staff of the Foundation, including an annual two-day Summit of Seminars and exchanges of best practices.



## **Initial Steps**

If you are thinking about starting a Resource Center, here are some initial steps you should take:

- **Get general information.** Read Part I of this manual.
- **Talk about it.** Find out what your community thinks about a Resource Center opening in your area. Involving community leaders from the beginning is a key way to rally support. Inquire into who might be willing to help with the Center. Surveys and word of mouth are two effective ways to seek out public opinion. Once people start talking about the Center, they may come up with ideas to help.
- **Choose a school district or schools you will be serving.** The criteria used by the Foundation to determine a school's eligibility for shopping privileges is that at least 70% of the students in that school are on the federal free and reduced lunch program. Talk to the district superintendent to get his/her support. Sometimes districts are able to help with providing a location, since it's going to benefit their schools.
- **Determine how much money is needed.** Start up costs can range anywhere from \$50,000 to \$100,000. Try to estimate your monthly expenses after deciding on a month for your fiscal year-end (Resource Center directors advise a fiscal year-end in June or July, since it is the end of the school year). Explore checking account options for non-

profits in your area. If you decide to pursue the project, open an account as soon as you become a non-profit organization.

- **Find potential supporters.** Have a meeting, inviting men and women from local businesses and nonprofits, to tell them what you want to do. Try to get some high-powered and influential people there. Invite the superintendent, a principal, or a teacher who can talk about the need. Talk about the feasibility of getting donations from your community, both funds and product. Ask that those who are interested in helping, volunteer to be on the organizing committee. It is advisable that the organizing committee include a lawyer, an accountant, a building contractor or architect, a public relations/marketing expert, a fund raising specialist, a school liaison, and a retail expert. It will be the committee members' responsibility to help spread the word and secure the funds, location, product, equipment, and publicity to get the Center going.
- **Think about it again.** Keep in mind that once the Resource Center is open, the process of raising funds, procuring product, stocking shelves, managing staff, recruiting and nurturing volunteers, paying freight charges, maintaining equipment and property, and gaining goodwill in the community is never ending. Are you and your team prepared with the energy, time, and dedication it takes to run a Resource Center?
- **Go through the checklist.** Take your time and go through the checklist below. We advise your most thoughtful and thorough consideration be given to each of the points on this checklist. If one or more of these items presents concerns, you need to rethink your intentions.

## The Checklist

- Inspired, entrepreneurial leadership.** Is the volunteer who is leading this project (you or someone else) dedicated, committed, passionate about the cause, hard working, and energetic? Does the volunteer have the time necessary to take care of the details and to stay with it until it is up and running and beyond? Does this person inspire others to participate?
- Determination of need.** Is this service needed by kids in your community? How many students are enrolled in the free or reduced lunch program? How many schools could you serve initially (we recommend 25-30 the first year), and is there potential for growth?
- Local competition.** Evaluate what other nonprofit organizations your project is going to be competing with for funds, attention, and time donated by volunteers. Is your community willing and able to support another nonprofit organization?
- Location.** The ideal location for a start-up Resource Center is either a warehouse in which you can designate an area for conversion to a store or a storefront that comes with a warehouse of at least 10,000 square feet. The ideal location is safe and secure and is convenient and easy for teachers and volunteers to access, has parking available, and has a loading dock. Does this location exist in your community? Can you get it donated? If not, can you afford to pay rent?

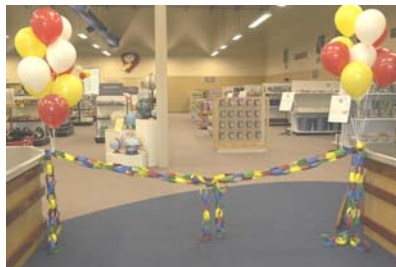
- Financial resources.** Simply put, will you be able to raise \$100,000 to get the Center started? Are those resources available to you from local corporations, businesses, and individuals? Explore grant opportunities for start up programs. And once the Center is up and running, are funds potentially available to keep it operating?
- Product resources.** Donations of school supplies, teaching aides, and other educational product are the lifeblood of a Resource Center. Can you tap into the resources in your community to procure product for the Center?
- Organizing committee/advisory board.** Are there people who are willing to make a commitment to bringing this service to your community? Ideally, your start up committee will include a lawyer, an accountant, a seasoned fundraiser or grant writer, an architect or contractor, a printer/graphic designer, someone with retail experience/warehouse savvy, someone well connected with the media or who has knowledge in public relations, and someone who is an expert in managing volunteers.
- Business plan.** Take the time to construct a sound business plan.
- Timetable.** What is your expected date of opening? Do you have time to do what must be done efficiently?
- Budgets.** Construct a realistic start up budget, and then construct a realistic operating budget so that you have a very good idea of what financial resources you need to secure.
- Think business.** Although you will be a nonprofit organization, a Resource Center is like a retail store in more ways than one. Do you and the people who will be working with you have the ability to think **business** vs. **501 (c)(3)**?

### Visit a Resource Center

You and members of your organizing committee may want to visit an existing Resource Center. That will give you an opportunity to see what the operation looks like and to talk with people who are involved with the day-to-day operation. But every Resource Center is different. Your Resource Center needs to meet the needs of your community, schools, and teachers within the environmental and financial limits of your particular circumstances.



Kids In Need Resource Center  
Cleveland



A Gift For Teaching  
Orlando



Crayons to Computers  
Cincinnati

The Kids In Need Foundation can assist in putting you in contact with a Resource Center in the National Network, if you would like to plan a visit. Please call 937-296-1230 or email [info@kidsinneed.net](mailto:info@kidsinneed.net) for more information.

**If you are ready to learn more about starting a Resource Center, click here.**