



## **JUVENILE REGIONAL SERVICES JOB DESCRIPTION: SOCIAL WORKER**

*Juvenile Regional Services, a nonprofit law office that advocates for young people in Louisiana's juvenile justice system, seeks a committed social worker to assess client needs and assist in developing comprehensive client service plans. Social workers collaborate with other members of the JRS team to find and implement meaningful, holistic solutions to the root problems that can drive young people into the juvenile justice system. Strong candidates will have a demonstrated commitment to working with indigent youth and underprivileged communities. Creativity, responsibility, empathy, perseverance, and excellent written and oral communication skills are important qualities for effective social workers in a defense office.*

### ***Organizational Overview***

Juvenile Regional Services (JRS) is a nonprofit, public-interest law office that advocates for young people in the juvenile justice system in New Orleans and throughout Louisiana. In New Orleans, JRS is the juvenile public defender, representing most indigent youth in Orleans Parish Juvenile Court.

JRS practices holistic representation, meeting client needs both in and out of the courtroom. Each JRS client is represented by a team – an attorney, an investigator, a youth advocate, and a social worker. The team works together to help clients succeed in court, at school, and in all other aspects of their lives. Team members represent young people in court; investigate the state's claims, and develop a strong defense; help families navigate the school system to find the right fit for each child; advocate for special education services; connect clients with community-based services like trauma counseling and medication management; and arrange for young people and their families to receive benefits like housing and food stamps. This innovative, wrap-around advocacy changes lives, reduces recidivism, and improves public safety.

JRS believes that every member of the defense team is indispensable, bringing vital skills and viewpoints to the provision of effective advocacy for our clients. JRS offers a work environment that values and develops a positive culture of juvenile defense.

The mission of JRS is to provide high-quality, zealous, holistic, and client-centered advocacy for young people in the juvenile justice system in New Orleans and throughout the state of Louisiana. JRS strives to defend the rights and dignity of youth under the law; to empower youth through advocating for their expressed interests; to reduce the number of youth in confinement; and to promote the juvenile justice system's development and use of effective and

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genuinely rehabilitative programs. The office's vision is to be a model and a resource for high-quality juvenile defense practice in Louisiana.

### ***Responsibilities***

The responsibilities of social workers include:

- *Assessing Client Needs*
  - Interviewing JRS clients and performing assessments to determine client needs, including psychiatric, social, emotional, and educational needs;
  - Through records collection and collateral interviews – including interviews of parents, guardians, and other relevant family members – gathering and analyzing information relevant to assessing client needs;
  - Developing and maintaining competency in assessing and meeting the needs of every JRS client, including clients who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning;
  - Providing crisis mediation as needed.
- *Developing and Implementing Service Plans*
  - Developing social service plans – including sentencing plans that present the court with compelling alternatives to incarceration, and plans for provision of services on release from incarceration – for JRS clients, driven by clients' expressed interests and goals;
  - Becoming and remaining familiar with relevant service providers – including community-based providers of mental health care services, job training, counseling, and housing – and conducting site visits to assess the quality of service providers and their suitability for JRS clients;
  - Becoming and remaining familiar with the range of benefits that may be available to clients and their families, and with the mechanisms for accessing those benefits;
  - Counseling clients and client families on available services and benefits and on overcoming potential barriers to accessing those services and benefits;
  - Making referrals, finding placements, and assisting with logistics and enrollment to help clients and their families access needed services and benefits;
  - Maintaining regular contact with programs providing services to JRS clients, monitoring service quality and client compliance;
  - Evaluating client progress towards service plan goals, and counseling clients to help ensure that goals are met.
- *Consulting and Advising*
  - Advising attorneys and other staff on issues within the expertise of social workers, including family dynamics, adolescent development and psychology, the use of standard social work assessment tools, and available community-based services;
  - Assisting attorneys in working with, or preparing to confront, expert witnesses in fields related to the social worker's area of expertise;
  - Assisting attorneys in understanding mental health records and other materials related to the social worker's area of expertise.
- *Communication, Presentation and Documentation*

- Building and maintaining strong relationships of trust with clients and their families;
- Maintaining regular contact with clients, including regularly visiting clients at home and in custody;
- Testifying in court, as needed, and assisting in the preparation of presentations to judges and other decision-makers;
- Preparing written reports on subjects including client needs and service plans;
- Thoroughly documenting all work and all information gathered.
- *Administrative and Program Responsibilities*
  - Supervising externs, AmeriCorps members, and other non-permanent staff;
  - Collaborating with other JRS staff in strategic planning and implementation, and in realizing the office's mission and vision through refinement of existing projects and new project development;
  - Assisting in project evaluation and assessment;
  - Other projects as directed by JRS' Executive Director.

Social workers must perform all duties in accordance with applicable law, ethical rules, and the performance standards promulgated by JRS and by the Louisiana Public Defender Board.

Social workers are responsible, in accordance with rules promulgated by the Louisiana State Board of Social Work Examiners, for timely obtaining and properly maintaining licensure and/or certification to practice master's level social work.

Social workers' job performance will be evaluated by the office's managing attorney. In each case, social workers work as members of a defense team, take direction from the team's staff attorney, and report their progress to that staff attorney.

Social workers will be provided with ongoing training in areas of importance to their job, including applicable professional, ethical, and legal rules.

### ***Required Qualifications***

- Deep commitment to the defense of indigent youth and to JRS' client-centered ethic, which recognizes that all advocacy must be driven by the expressed interests of clients;
- Excellent interpersonal and interviewing skills, and the ability to develop rapport with a wide range of people;
- Strong analytical ability;
- Excellent written and oral communication skills;
- Thorough understanding of social, psychological, medical, economic, and legal factors that affect adolescent behavior;
- Strong work ethic;
- Creativity and flexibility in solving problems and meeting challenges;
- Graduate-level social work degree from an accredited school of social work;
- Licensure or certification to practice masters-level social work in Louisiana, or eligibility to obtain such certification or licensure in the immediate future;
- Car ownership, or daily use of a car, with a valid driver's license and insurance;

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- Willingness to submit to a background check;
- Applicants must be at least 21 years of age.

### ***Preferred Qualifications***

- Experience working with low-income clients and young people;
- Familiarity with developmental psychology, mental health issues, the New Orleans public schools, and/or the geography, history, and people of New Orleans and Louisiana;
- Understanding of relevant law and of the juvenile justice system.

### ***Salary and Compensation***

The starting salary range for this position is \$42,000 to \$55,000 per year, depending on experience and educational attainment. JRS will assist in obtaining a qualified supervisor for an LMSW in the position who is interested in working towards an LCSW. Vacation, parental leave, sick leave, and health benefits are provided. The position is full-time, and no outside compensated work is permitted. Depending upon case and client needs, social workers can expect to be called upon to work some nights and weekends.

### ***How to Apply***

Applicants must submit: (1) a cover letter; (2) a resume or C.V., including an e-mail address and daytime and evening telephone numbers; (3) a writing sample; and (4) a list of three professional references, including the name, address, telephone number and, if available, e-mail address of each.

The position will remain open until filled with a qualified applicant.

Inquiries and applications should be directed to:

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