



The Ci3 Spotlight highlights a staff member from our interdisciplinary team of researchers, designers, storytellers, and policy experts.

Name: Ailea Stites

Title/Role at Ci3: Community Engagement Lead

What is your role with Ci3?

I lead community engagement efforts across the Center, in particular our Youth Advisory Council, and provide design and operational support on our other projects as needed.

What is your favorite part about the work you do with Ci3?

I love the people: the staff at Ci3, the communities we partner with, and most especially the young people we engage in our work. The relationships I've built in the past few years have truly shaped my personal growth, and I'm so excited that I get to continue to work at the intersection of academic research, health justice, and creative expression.

What inspires you to do this work?

Everything I do is driven by curiosity: why? and how?

Why are things this way? How did we get here? How can I make them better?

Ci3 is a group of people who are asking these same questions, and seeking answers in a way that empowers individuals rather than blaming them for systems beyond their control. My colleagues' expertise and curiosity continually inspires me to ask deeper questions, and to envision better answers.



Given the current societal climate, how do you think Ci3's work can have an impact on marginalized youth?

I see our work having an impact on a couple of levels. First, the interpersonal: we work intentionally with the communities we serve in order to ensure that our projects reflect their lived experiences, and that the community directly benefits from participation as a result. Next: at the structural level, our research addresses systemic barriers and social determinants of health that marginalize young people and prohibit them from having agency over their bodies and futures.

What is your favorite quote (or who is your favorite role model) and why?

Is it too cheesy to say my grandmother? If so, too bad — my grandmother, parents, and siblings were, and remain, my first community, and primary role models. My grandmother's example shows me what a lifetime of compassionate and intentional community-building looks like — we often say that as a first-grade teacher, she taught half of Kansas City how to read! My parents and siblings both inspire me to follow her example and keep me humble at the same time. (And actually, Nonnie keeps me humble, too — nobody can check you like your grandma :D). I feel very fortunate to have a loving, supportive family.



This Ain't It is a digital zine created by the 2019-20 Youth Advisory Council that tells the unique experiences and perspectives of several young people during Spring 2020.

What are you proudest of both professional and personally?

I am proud anytime I see growth happen — the *aha!* moment that tells me that something I said or did made an impact. In my personal life I am part of M.A.D.D. Rhythms, a Bronzeville-based tap dance nonprofit where we use the tools of the cypher to teach social and emotional learning. We work hard to provide a safe and supportive space for our community's youth to develop their own modes of expression, and seeing the ways young dancers grow and learn is such a joy. In my role as community engagement lead for Ci3, I see myself as the connection point between our work and the lived experiences of the people we serve, particularly our Youth Advisory Council. When I can make a real

contribution — whether that's changing an aspect of our research, or writing a recommendation letter for a council member — based on the work the Council and I have done together as a community, that's when I'm proudest.