



## DCF COVID-19 Daily Update Supporting Children, Families and Staff April 28, 2020

### USING TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE YOUTH

Connecticut's COVID-19 response has spawned changes in how we connect with children and families. While some may worry about losing access and reducing engagement, our social workers are proving daily that the changes can actually increase both.

Social worker Liz Burne, a permanency worker in the Torrington office with 11 years experience with the Department, discovered that her state-issued iPhone works wonderfully to engage a young girl in a pre-adoptive home located about as far away as you can be and still be in the state of Connecticut.

"Rebecca," a fourth grader, has lived with her new family in Eastern Connecticut since last summer and will be adopted when juvenile court resumes its full schedule. But with the Department joining the rest of the state in maintaining social distance whenever possible, Ms. Burne decided to start using FaceTime to stay close to Rebecca.

Ms. Burne said video conferencing is becoming common, but that a boring backdrop - maybe consisting of a bookcase or a picture on a wall behind the speaker -- may not be the most effective way to engage a youth. So she got creative.

Ms. Burne took the iPhone mobile and walked to her backyard to show Rebecca her chickens. "We looked in the henhouse for eggs," Ms. Burne said, adding that Rebecca's family has talked about getting chickens at their own home. "I went outside, and we went on an egg hunt." On another occasion, Ms. Burne said she showed Rebecca, who likes to grow vegetables, seedlings being readied for the garden.

The technology further affords Ms. Burne the chance to be this creative because she connects with Rebecca without spending so much time traveling back and forth across the state. "I have time to think through what will engage the child," Ms. Burne said.

The video show and tell goes two ways. Rebecca regularly shows Ms. Burne her intensely pink room, her bike, her crafts, and her pet dachshunds. "Rebecca takes the phone and goes mobile," Ms. Burne said. "It's so valuable because by knowing Rebecca's interests, I'm able to find things that are engaging and entertaining for her."

For example, Ms. Burne said she found she could use Rebecca's love of Harry Potter to engage her in learning cursive writing. "Using FaceTime helped me to sneak in learning along with the things she finds fun," Ms. Burne said. "I can capture her interests and use the technology to draw her into a conversation" that, ironically, may not be possible with an in-person visit.

Ms. Burne said this can help her "find out if there is something the family needs" or other supports which could be offered.

The ultimate result is a better relationship between the worker and the child and better outcomes for the child and family.

"She's resilient, she's fun," Ms. Burne said. "We found things in common along the way."