

Fostering Matters

MOBILIZING LOVE, UNIFYING FAMILIES



MAY 2024

May is National Foster Care Awareness Month!

A Message from the Governor



“Parenting is undoubtedly one of the toughest jobs in society. There is no manual to guide us through every step. Yet, amid these challenges, you all stand out as rays of light, offering love, support, and stability to children when they need it most.

You are not just caregivers; you are mentors, co-parents, and advocates for children in need. Your role in their lives is immeasurable, shaping their present and future in profound ways.”

- Governor Ned Lamont

A Message from the Commissioner



To Our Fostering Community,

On any given day, an estimated 130 children enter the foster care system for various reasons, seeking safety, understanding, and compassion. And every day, caregivers like you are called upon to help. This bi-monthly newsletter is designed for YOU - the caregivers that step up for children during the most uncertain times in their lives.

We believe in the power of communication and community, and we hope that you find this newsletter informing and valuable. Thank you for all that you do. Your compassion, dedication, and love are truly changing lives and making a lasting impact.

With heartfelt gratitude,
Jodi Hill-Lilly
Commissioner, CT DCF

May marks National Foster Care Awareness Month, and what better way to celebrate than with the inaugural issue of this new CT Fosters newsletter, Fostering Matters.

This newsletter is a platform for you to share your thoughts, suggestions, and stories. Let us know what you want to see in the next issue because your feedback is what drives us forward.

Placement Crisis

We call you every day, sometimes even more than once a day, to see if you are able to help with the placement of a child or children.

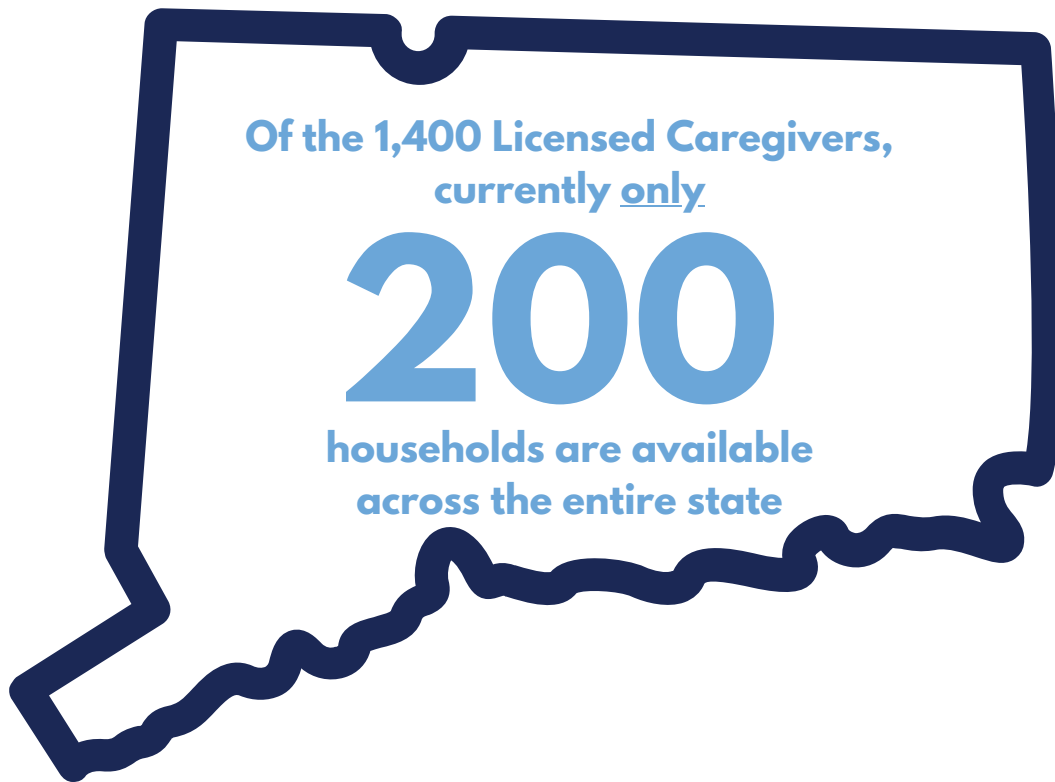
We do this because we are in crisis. We need more families.

2,585

children aged 0-18 are
currently in care

131

children enter care
every month



Who are the Children?

Children in need of a licensed caregiver are diverse in age, race, background, religion and gender. But there are specific groups with more pronounced care requirements:

- Children with Complex Medical Needs (such as tracheostomy care, gastrostomy tube, or non-ambulatory, etc.)
- Children with significant developmental or intellectual needs (such as autism, etc.)
- Adolescents (such as teens vulnerable to sex trafficking, multiple changes in care, etc.)
- Large sibling groups

QPI-CT is built on the belief that excellent parenting with strong, positive relationships is the best intervention we can offer children to enable them to heal as they grow up to become adults.

Creating a system that ensures excellent parenting requires the support and involvement of birth families, relative caregivers, foster families, young people, and others in the CT foster care system.

Join Us for a Town Hall!

A Town Hall is an open forum for Licensed Caregivers to raise concerns, obtain information and offer feedback with the goal of improving the relationship and ultimately the quality of care for children.

In attendance are the Area Office CPS Leadership and the Foster Care Division. Town Halls are scheduled quarterly in each region, some virtual and others are in person.

Themes from the recent Town Halls include:

- Area office and case decision inconsistencies
- Attorney representation
- Payments and childcare
- Collaboration, responsiveness, and meaningful partnerships
- Board and care reimbursement rates

Upcoming Town Hall Dates:

Region 6	Tuesday, May 21
Region 4	Thursday, June 6
Region 1	Thursday, July 11

Quality Parenting Outreach (QPO) Findings

In December 2023, a pulse was issued to caregivers about transitions. A little over 12% of you responded, with 44% of responders having a child entrusted to care less than 6 months; 39% entrusted to care 6 months to 2 years; 44% children reunified; and 22% transitioned to Kin.

QPO: What We Found:

- 37% were notified of a change within 7-30 days
- 24% were notified within 7 days
- 20% were notified the same day (less than 6 months in care)

The Department followed the Caregiver survey with a staff survey. Other Next Steps Include:

- Present QPI Presentation to the Juvenile Court judges and public defenders and other legal partners to creating awareness of QPI approach
- Recommend potential tools to support improved transitions
- Explore establishing a grief and loss service
- Review icebreaker and comfort call practice



“Let’s improve the system so children don’t spend their adulthood healing from their childhood.”

– Jennifer Rodriguez,
Executive Director, Youth Law Center and
former child in care.

Voices of Change: QPI Featured Story



Justin & Jeremy's Story

Justin Anderson and Jeremy Santana were licensed in October of 2022, and in March of 2023 they welcomed Vivian (or "Vivie" for short) into their family and home. Although initial QPI calls with Vivian's mother were difficult, they understood the emotional dynamics of the situation. The challenges did not stop them from connecting with Vivie's mom. Ultimately, they adopted Vivie in December 2023.

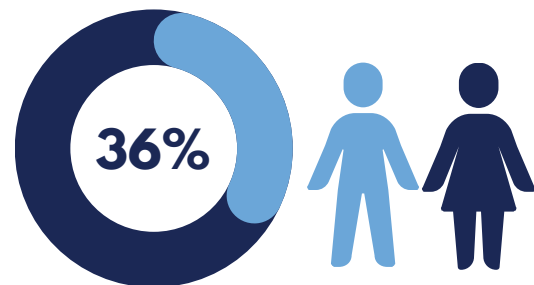
In July of 2023, Justin and Jeremy welcomed siblings Amyre and Amani. Not only did they form a strong relationship with their mother who is incarcerated, but also with their extended family. They are now on the path to an open adoption. They have made it a point to keep the children connected to their family of origin and are an example of love and preserving relationships.

"We have adopted [the family], too. And they are all welcome to be a part of everyone's lives."
– Justin Anderson

By the Numbers



Average Number of children that enter care for the first time every month



Percentage of children in care are Latino

175 licenses issued from January- March 2024

from that number, the following were:

28
Core Parents

5
FFT Parent

11
Interstate Parent

141
Kinship Parent

3
Pre-Adopt Parent

About the Council

Established in October 2022 as a result of a recommendation from the QPI Champions, the Caregiver Advisory Council consists of caregivers who are licensed, retired, post permanency (adoption or guardianship), adults formerly in care, QPI champions and FCD.

The Council is dedicated to holding and monitoring DCF's accountability to ensure that all procedures, policies and practices support families coming into care, in-care and existing care with healthier, thriving children and family relationships.

Under the leadership of Debra Candelora and Corrinna Martin, the Council has accomplished many milestones, including:

- Informed policy
- Developed guides for caregivers on QPI, legal and other caregiver topics
- Co-created the QPI Superior Court for Juvenile Matters presentation
- Submitted updates to the Foster Parent Bill of Rights (pending)

The council is focused on improving the management of a child's transition from placement.

Meet Debra Candelora, Co-Chair



"I have a few more years ahead of me as a child advocate and I plan to see changes for the better before I retire. I am excited to be a Co-chair for this Statewide Advisory Council. I look forward to working alongside each one of you. I look forward to thinking outside the box with you to make change for the betterment of every child we meet."

Debra shows up with a passion that is rooted in life experiences as a Foster and Adoptive mother. Her role as CAFAF Liaison drives her to be a voice for caregivers. Deb is a strong advocate for QPI, and was applying QPI principles well before she even knew what the work was. QPI is the responsibility of all who are involved in making decisions for what is best practices for a child. She is a firm believer in long-lasting connections and will do whatever it takes to build those relationships.

Meet Corrinna Martin, Co-Chair



"I have dedicated my life to advocating that victims not only have a voice, but also have equal rights. Ensuring that victims, their families, friends and communities are able to gain or regain a happy, peaceful, safe and productive quality of life is my calling."

Corrinna is the mother of four beautiful and talented young women, and the grandmother of five (gorgeous and even smarter!) grandchildren. She is the President & Founder of a small non-profit based in West Haven, Connecticut, Mothers of Victim's Equality, Inc. (M.O.V.E.) In 2013, after the murder and dismemberment of her daughter Alyssiah, Corrinna thrust herself into the fight for awareness and activism. Tragedy struck again in 2017 with the murders of her daughter Chaquinequea, and her grandbaby My'Jaeaha. Since founding M.O.V.E., Corrinna has worked tirelessly to educate, empower and engage individuals, families and communities in an effort to end all forms of domestic violence.

Recruitment

CT TRAIN App

We are making registering for pre-licensing classes easier! Thanks to a partnership with the CT DPH, we are working to streamline procedures with a web-based platform, CT TRAIN.

The CT TRAIN app is an existing online program that enables professionals to register and complete required training for various professions.

We have begun using this app for online registration, training, certification, and document system.

Since centralization of recruitment and licensing for foster and pre-adoptive licensing, the average number of inquiries received reported by CAFAF is 949 per year (2022-2023).

- 70% of individuals entering the process towards licensing, withdrew or were withdrawn
- 210 licenses were issued
- 424 were closed. The majority closed because permanency was achieved.

While these numbers reflect a net loss of almost 50% of the available caregivers, we are proud that children are achieving permanency!

Partners

FCD continues to collaborate with [CAFAF](#), [My People's Clinical Services](#) and [Anne C. Courtney Foundation](#) to recruit, train and license individuals. We partner with Faith Based Organizations, [Family Life Lifters](#) and [Helping Our People Excel](#) to implement the Queen Esther Recruitment and Retention program.

We are looking to expand the partnership with more organizations such as Fostering Hope, Urban Alliance, Fostering Family Help, The Forgotten Initiative and Cornerstone Church. This also extends to the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan Tribal Nations.

Our statewide recruiters canvas the state looking for opportunities to create awareness of the need in hopes of increasing the pool of available licensed families.

Recently, our recruiters attended the 2nd Annual LEARN Disability Summit, a meeting with the Town of New Fairfield Selectman, and plan to attend the Middletown Pride Fest in June.



We need your help!

We're asking all licensed caregivers to refer a friend or family member.

If the referred friend or family becomes licensed, the licensed caregiver making the referral will receive a \$500.00 finder's fee.

In Memoriam

We would like to take a moment to recognize the members of our caregiver families that we have recently lost.

Region 2

Ms. Laurena Dais

Region 3

Ms. Grayson
Peter Caturano
Sandra Donahue

Region 6

Michael Frechette



Spotlight: Robbie Harrison



Robbie Harrison, beloved and devoted foster parent, passed away on April 13, 2024. With more than 90 placements and dozens of respites over the last quarter century, Ms. Harrison embodied what it meant to be a caregiver.

Ms. Harrison was a well-known and longstanding foster parent for Region 4. She had dedicated the last 27 years to providing love, patience and understanding to some of our most vulnerable youths, especially our teenagers. Ms. Harrison was a regular at Foster Parent support groups and DCF outings. She was ahead of her time and advocated for biological connections long before QPI was implemented.

She was a voice, protector, and staunch advocate for every youth placed in her home. She was a woman with a heart of gold, who seldom said "no" to a placement no matter the age, gender, or challenges the youth had faced.

Spotlight: Marilyn Rodriguez



Marilyn Rodriguez, a loving and dedicated foster mother, passed away on May 17, 2024. Along with her husband and two adult daughters, Marilyn provided a nurturing and welcoming home to 25 teenagers.

Marilyn's unwavering positivity and warm smile never faltered, even in the face of challenges. She often said, "These teenagers need love," and she embodied this belief in every action. Her home was a haven where every teenager felt cherished and cared for, always ensuring they were well-fed and clothed.

Marilyn's dedication extended beyond her home; she worked closely with in-home and community providers to meet the diverse needs of the teenagers in her care.

Her willingness to collaborate with biological parents and her strong relationships with many of them highlighted her commitment to the well-being of her foster children. Despite juggling two jobs, she never hesitated to welcome even the most challenging teenagers, including those with medical conditions, into her home. If you called Marilyn to take in a teenager, her answer was always an immediate and clear "yes".

Marilyn's impact on Region 6 was so profound that even those who never met her felt they knew her, as her name frequently appeared in emails and conversations. Social workers consistently described her as kind, loving, and always willing to help. Marilyn's boundless generosity and compassion have left a mark on Region 6. Her absence is deeply felt, and her legacy of love and kindness will continue to inspire all who knew her.

Father's Corner

CT Fosters Fathers

Representation is important! The Department is establishing a Statewide Fatherhood Advisory Board aimed at fostering collaboration between DCF staff, community stakeholders, and fathers with lived experiences, including fathers who are licensed as caregivers.

We need your voice and insight into the challenges and opportunities facing fathers within our communities. Your input can help inform policy and practice changes and creation.

Please consider becoming a member of the Fatherhood Advisory Board.



Important Policy Updates

Post Licensing Requirement

Licensed caregivers (individuals named on the license) must complete post licensing training within the 2-year licensing renewal period.

This includes:

- CPR certification
- 2 trauma related trainings
- 2 crisis intervention related trainings
- 7 elective trainings

The training selected is based on the continued skill development of the licensed caregiver and the needs of the children entrusted to their care. The training can include, but is not limited to, classes, conferences, symposiums, literature review, online courses, or other types of training.



What's Happening: Agency Updates and News

New Kinship Licensing Standards

The U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF) permits child welfare agencies to establish licensing or approval standards for relatives and kin. This regulation promotes equity for all children in family foster homes, preventing them from being placed in a group or institutional setting. It also eliminates stringent requirements that lack a clear connection to safety. The Department is scheduled to introduce new standards in 2024.

For more info, click [here](#),

New Child in Care Arrest Protocol

Our Agency is responsible for ensuring the safety, permanency and well-being of the children entrusted to its care. Therefore, effective January 1, 2024, a new protocol has been implemented, requiring licensed caregivers to notify the Department when a child in their care has been arrested.

This notification will assist us in collecting real-time data, including the location and reason for the arrest. Such information will be utilized in ongoing efforts to improve the quality of services provided to children in foster care, safeguard their well-being, and mitigate the foster care-to-prison pipeline.

Leadership Change in FFT-FC Program

Nicole McKelvey-Walsh has announced her resignation as Clinical Manager and Director of the Functional Family Therapy Foster Care (FFT-FC) program. Effective 4/18/24, the Therapeutic Foster Care program will transfer to the Child Welfare Bureau's Foster Care Division led by Statewide Director Natalia Liriano, who will provide interim leadership support until a replacement is on board.

Medically Complex Children in Care

Approximately 200 children are classified as Medically Complex. There are four classification levels based on the needs of the child which ranges from chronic health conditions that are under good control (level 1) to chronic health conditions that require a mechanical or special technological intervention to maintain or sustain life (level 4). Training requirements for caregivers are mandatory.

If you have any questions regarding the classification level of a child in your care or the associated requirements, please reach out to your assigned Foster Care Division social worker.



Upcoming Events

Region	Date	Time	Event
Region 5	Friday, May 17	6:00 pm	Appreciation Dinner Chucks by Barbarie, 20 Segar St., Danbury
Statewide	Saturday, May 18	All Day	Lake Compounce 185 Enterprise Dr., Bristol
Region 6	Tuesday, May 21	6:00 pm	Region 6 Town Hall Meeting
Region 6	Thursday, May 30	5:00 pm	Foster Parent Apprecation Dinner Aqua Turf Club, 556 Mulberry St., Plantsville
Region 1	Saturday, June 1	6:00 pm	Foster Appreciation Event Vazzano's Four Seasons Banquets 337 Kenyon St., Stratford
Statewide	Thursday, June 6	8:30 am	Best Dad by Par The Vue, 310 W. Shepard Ave., Hamden (Rain Date, 6/13/24)
Region 4	Wednesday, June 12	6:00 pm	Region 4 Town Hall Meeting
Region 2	Tuesday, June 18	6:00 pm	Caregiver Appreciation Dinner Grassy Hill Country Club, 441 Clark Lane, Orange
Region 4	Saturday, June 29	5:00 pm	Foster Care Banquet at the Bushnell Center for Performing Arts 166 Capitol Ave., Hartford
Region 1	Thursday, July 11	6:30 pm	Region 1 Town Hall Meeting
Region 4	Saturday, July 13	4:30 pm	Yard Goats Family Fun Day 1214 Main Street, Hartford (Game starts at 6:00 pm)
Region 3	Saturday, July 27	9:00 am	Family Day at the Beach Camp Harkness 301 Great Neck Road, Waterford