

October 2021

Department of Children and Families
SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S RIGHT



A Message from Commissioner Dorantes...



October ushers in many autumnal themes - **Breast Cancer Awareness Month** is one of them.

"*This was not here a few months ago,*" said my Oncologist said as she reviewed my mammography film. This was only a few months into my appointment as

Commissioner. It was at that point I began my journey against Cancer. I am here today as a living testament that early detection saves lives. Listen to more of my story [here](#).



As state employees, we have the benefit of regular reminders through our *Health Enhancement Program*. The pandemic has caused delays in routine screenings & regular check-ups, but our health is too precious to wait. There's never a right time...we have to **make time** to take care of ourselves.

STORIES OF HOPE & RESILIENCE

October is also **Domestic Violence Awareness** month. Read this month's *Spotlight on What's Right* newsletter and the story of Luis. It is one all too familiar to so many of us: a man struggling with coercive control. He is a different person now. Luis, and his entire family, are benefitting from supports designed to include all family members in treatment after an act of violence occurs. Supports and healing are truly only a phone call away.

In this edition, we also hear from Anne, who is as inspirational as her road to sobriety. When the ills of substance use, past traumas including domestic violence, challenges of single parenthood and the pandemic became overwhelming, a team came together on her behalf. Her message to us speaks loudly as to how positive outcomes can be achieved when family engagement and community-based supports all work in concert with one another.

We are in the middle of **Hispanic/Latin (O,A,X) Heritage** month too! "Our diverse mosaic makes up the fabric of our workforce." I made this comment during the Central Office virtual celebration. We are honored to have Monica Rams, Director of Multicultural Affairs, provide us insight into "the greatness that *exists in* and *that is* the Hispanic/Latin American Community."



ESPERANZA: SÍ, SE PUEDE!
HOPE: YES, WE CAN!

Hope for a better tomorrow is truly based in honoring the differences we have and learning from and about **EACH OTHER**.

Commissioner Dorantes

"I Did the Work"



"Just to open that door and see my son sleeping in his bed, you have no idea how that makes me feel," stated "Anne" who expressed sincere gratitude for the many people who lifted her up during one of the most trying times in her life.

Anne is sober. Her inspirational message speaks to the power of the human spirit and how engagement with family systems and public/private partnerships lead to positive outcomes.

Anne is the oldest of five children who at an early age took on primary caretaking responsibilities of her siblings while her mother worked long hours. "I raised my brothers and sisters. My brothers were like my sons," she stated. Anne has lost all of her brothers - one committed suicide and two others were murdered in their community. One brother she referred to as her "best friend."

"I have lot of grief I carry," she stated.

In her young adult years, Anne experienced domestic violence and relationships which turned the opposite of how they started. "I thought he loved me," she stated, recalling a previous partner's affection towards her prior to his coercive control taking over. "You never know what the next individual is thinking," she stated.

Substance use became an issue, yet it was addressed - Anne's way of handling problems - and she gained sobriety.

Fast forward almost 20 years later and different challenges surfaced. The COVID-19 pandemic saw Anne lose her job as a CNA which she held for decades. Her youngest son, "Terrance," was taking part in remote learning which was not conducive to his behavioral health needs and she began associating with a new group of friends. "I don't blame the people, I blame myself," Anne stated. "I had lots of free time."



The substance use started again as a coping mechanism and a way to self-medicate the onset of untreated mental health issues. Life became overwhelming. Her struggles were unable to be hidden any longer from family members, and a referral was made to the Department of Children and Families.

As the home conditions escalated, Terrance became in need of a temporary place to live. Terrance's older brother, "Devon," and his wife agreed to become licensed kinship caregivers and welcomed him into their home. The older brother now caring for the younger brother - family taking care of family.

"My son had my back 100%," Anne stated when speaking how Devon and his family mobilized to assist his own mother and little brother.



Placement was hard on Anne but especially for Terrance. Visits occurred in the local community including restaurants, but they were no substitute for having Terrance home. Anne talked on the phone with him and used Facetime to remain in contact. She is also of the belief that knowing where Terrance was placed, aided in her recovery.

"Thank God for DCF," Anne was quick to emphasize when thinking back on the Agency's involvement.

One of those individuals who came into Anne's life is Department of Children and Families' social worker Brittany Roberts. "She is a great DCF worker," Anne stated. "She made me feel like she was in my corner," and described her as "real" in the manner in which she speaks with you.

During one poignant moment, Anne recalls Brittany encouraging her to stay strong, keeping focus on the future and despite her current struggles, reinforced that she was a good mother. "I cried when I talked to her over the phone," Anne stated.

Anne speaks of her current worker, Janelle Williams, with similar admiration. "She is the same way," Anne stated. "She will uplift and encourage you. I thank God for them."

With a supportive team, family engagement and active participation in a substance use program, sobriety became a reality. "I was ready to stop," she emphasized. Great progress was made. "The women in my wellness program admired me."

Anne's deep faith also came into play. "God gave me the strength to be a good mom," she stated. Her favorite bible passage is Psalm 23 - "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want..."

After a short number of months, Terrance returned home - the family was once again whole. The picture at the top of this story showing Anne and Terrance holding hands says it all.



Anne speaks openly of her road ahead. It is a scripture passage from Isaiah 54:17 - "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper..." which comes to her mind when thinking of her sobriety.

"I am proud of myself, it's a struggle," Anne stated when discussing the reality that maintaining sobriety will require lifelong support.

She now speaks with great pride when thinking of how Devon and her other son, "Tyrese," tell her they are proud of her and the changes she made in her life. "Mom, we are just so proud of you," they say.

What advice would Anne have for other families working with DCF? "Don't always think DCF is bad. Be real with them and they will be real with you. The services are there, it is up to you to use them," Anne stated.

"Never give up, you can do it. I did the work."

"Father Addressing Domestic Violence Gets a Second and Better Chance"

The 38-year-old father needed a second chance to prove that he had overcome the issues that led to two domestic violence incidents and court orders requiring him to leave the home temporarily he shared with his three children and their mother.

But what Luis is getting is not just a second chance -- but a better chance.



That's because in the 10 years between incidents, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has established a much more robust approach to addressing domestic violence through a program called "IPV-FAIR" or Intimate Partner Violence - Family Assessment Intervention Response.

IPV-FAIR is a comprehensive treatment program that provides in-home and community based clinical and case management services to all members of a family involved with DCF and experiencing intimate partner violence. Each family will work with a team of a clinician and "family navigator" (case manager) to address identified needs.

Luis said following the first incident back in 2009, he was provided anger management class with a group of other men in similar situations.

"It was group counseling," he said. "It wasn't individualized." Now, Luis has his own counselor that meets with him each week one on one. He also receives substance use treatment.

"I feel better and more motivated because of the one-on-one individual focus," he said. "The counseling I am getting is so much more detailed and helps me through much more specific scenarios" that prepares him to control both his emotions and behavior.

The first domestic violence incident between Luis and his children's mother was in December 2009. "We got into a heated altercation and it got physical," he said. "I take responsibility. I'm not proud of that moment." Police responded and Luis was arrested.

"We were arguing, and I let my anger get the better of me," he said. "I was out of the house for a while." That meant he was separated from the three children -- two girls and one boy ranging in age from one to three years old at the time -- that he had with the mother.

DCF made the anger management classes available for him. They were helpful to a point, he said. He said the class did help him find coping mechanisms and learn what his triggers were. He was allowed to return to the family home in 2010. There were no more domestic violence incidents, he said, but then the couple separated in 2017. They reconciled in 2019, and Luis returned to the home.

Then in May 2021, Luis came home from a night out and an argument ensued between him and the mother. "I came home drunk and let the alcohol talk for me," he said. "In the heat of the moment, I let my emotions overcome my judgement. I was upset and I let it get to the point where it was a big mistake."

The incident resulted in Police involvement leading to a report to DCF.

This time, however, DCF was able to provide a much more comprehensive response that addresses the needs of everyone in the family, including the mother and children. DCF connected Luis to Family Centered Services of Connecticut, a non-profit organization that offers a program called "Fathers for Change." Read more about the program in the next story!

Luis said the individualized weekly counseling has provided him with coping mechanisms and healthy ways to respond to stress.

In addition, the personalized counseling has also really taught him what impact he is having on his children. "I've learned about how abuse can take many forms and it's not just physical," he said. In addition, the understanding he gained from the individualized counseling has provided insights on the impact of his behaviors on his children.

Importantly, because the second incident involved alcohol, Luis just completed substance use treatment offered through Fathers for Change.



"People are going to argue," Luis said. "It's how you get through it together, so things don't escalate by finding ways to sit down and talk. If you can talk, you get it out of your system, and you move forward."

Luis says he has been sober since that incident.

"I've learned to not let things get the better of me," he said, adding, "Now, I let the words do the talking."

Luis said one big reason that Fathers for Change is effective is its reliance on the father's desire to parent his children as the motivation for change.

"It makes me realize that my children need me to be a role model and a loving father -- someone they can trust and rely on," he said. "The program builds on my desire to be the best person and best father in their eyes. I can be that first phone call when they grow up to be there as their father and role model."

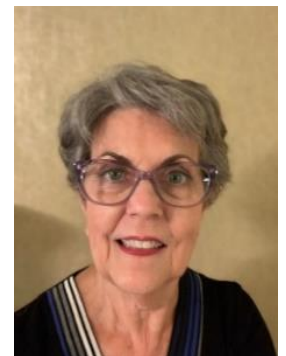
Luis said when he was growing up, he did witness his father hitting his mother. But he does not make excuses.

"Being truthful, taking responsibility and being accountable makes all the difference," he said. "Accept your responsibility, learn from the experience and move forward. At the end of the day, I am the one who did it."

Domestic Violence Program Utilizes Fathers' Desire to Parent as Impetus for Change

Fathers for Change is a domestic violence program that uses fathers' desire to be close with their children to produce change.

"Fathers for Change takes a holistic look at families experiencing intimate partner violence and builds on the fathers' desire to parent his children as the impetus to create change," explained Jacquelyn Farrell, LCSW, the assistant director of Family Centered Services of CT.



Family Centered Services is one of the non-profit organizations offering Fathers for Change and the Intimate Partner Violence – Family Assessment Intervention Response (IPV-FAIR) program that serves the affected mothers and children as well.

"Most men really want to be good fathers for their children and care what their children think of them," affirmed Ms. Farrell. "Fathers for Change uses fatherhood as a motivation for change."



Men in the program are assigned a case manager called a "family navigator" as well as a clinician who meets with them individually on a weekly basis. One of the major components of the clinical counseling is to improve the father's ability to co-parent with the mother, Ms. Farrell pointed out.

“How can you be a better co-parent? You still have a child together, so how can you co-parent in a way that is healthy for the child?” she asked. “The counseling is focused on how you can be a better parent and provide a supportive environment for the child.”

In addition to counseling and the case management, Ms. Farrell said parents get support with basic necessities such as utilities, housing and food. Families also get help with safety planning and going to court if necessary.

“We provide a tremendous amount of support that parents need,” she said of the program that lasts from four to six months.

Family Centered Services has the proof that the program works. Data shows that when parents receive the service, child exposure to conflicts decreases significantly, Ms. Farrell explained. The program also produced significant improvement in the mother’s assessment of the father’s abusive behavior. Finally, she highlighted the program’s outstanding record of engaging fathers, with only one father withdrawing during 2020.

“Classic batterer programs don’t always have long term positive outcomes,” she said.

Celebrating Hispanic/Latin(o,a,x) Heritage Month

By Monica Rams, Director of Multicultural Affairs



To me, this month is a time when the nation gets to see up close and personal the excellence, the brilliance, the pride, the culture, the music, and the joy that I get to experience and live with all year long. A time when the rest of the world gets to see the greatness that *exists in* and *that is* the Hispanic/Latin American Community; and when children and youth can see reflections of themselves more readily.

It’s a time where we can honor and amplify the history and the stories of our Indigenous and African ancestors. During this month, the contributions of Hispanics/Latin Americans are elevated and are viewed as an asset rather than being continuously underrepresented or negatively portrayed in mainstream media.

Hispanics/Latin(o,a,x)'s are not people that can fit in a box. There is beauty in the complexities that exist among us. At times, Hispanics/Latin(o,a,x)'s are silenced and it is during this month where we get to amplify our voices without regard, exude the beauty within our cultures, and radiate the pride that is carried in the depths of our being.

While this beautiful time is one of celebration, it is also a reminder that there are many Hispanics/Latinos currently fighting for freedom and hoping for a better tomorrow. It’s a time of reflection.



I reflect on the history and stories that are known and I receive those that have yet to be learned. I honor the generations that overcame barriers and showed resiliency in order to obtain and offer loved ones a better life. It's a time for me to acknowledge the families that were left behind and/or separated during the journey to a better tomorrow.



It's a time where we can all take pride in our own cultures while honoring the cultural differences that exists. A time where we can elevate the diversity that sets us apart while appreciating the very elements that bring us together and make us stronger.