

Department of Children and Families
SPOTLIGHT ON WHAT'S RIGHT



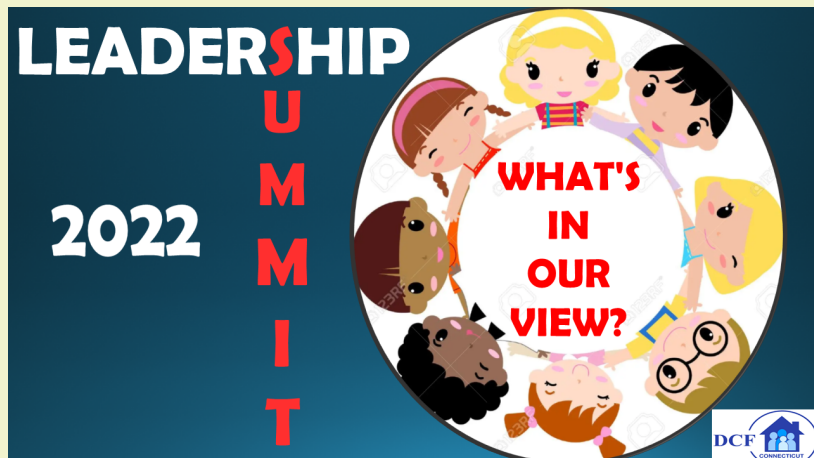
A Message from Commissioner Norantes...

With sincere gratitude, I express to you appreciation for all you have done for the children and families we serve. From the everyday little things to the complex decisions that sometimes require our collective input---I am proud of the work I and others see from DCF. My thanks extends to how we have shown up for each other as we enter the 22nd month of this pandemic.



We have welcomed new staff-- learning the work of the Department in an entirely different way than most of us (...*I wonder what it's like to only know new coworkers from the eyes up or through a computer monitor???*). We've also begun our good-byes to members of our workforce who have reach the conclusion of their state service, taking with them institutional knowledge gleaned over the years. **THANK YOU** for everything you have contributed to this space we occupy with purpose to improve circumstances for those we serve.

As we turn the page on another calendar year-- with DCF and the world evolving to a



'new normal', I recently asked the leaders of this Dept to look inward and refocus their own sphere of influence over our ever-changing landscape. During our first Leadership Summit of 2022, we looked forward --- seeing the fruits of all of what we have accomplished together during unprecedented times.

During the Summit, we were further inspired by [Aysha Schomburg, JD](#) Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau Administration on Children Youth and Families. Her keynote included the status of child welfare as a whole across the country and her vision as she refines her strategic plan. *"All of you are valiant and resilient,"* Commissioner Schomburg stated. So true. Her words could not be more relevant to my feelings towards you as I enter my 4th year as your Commissioner. She further affirmed Connecticut DCF as a leader in equity and racial justice work -- often called upon to share the journey we have been on.



Leaders from across the state had the privilege of sharing some of the 'early wins' of our work towards equitable outcomes. Special thanks to our Racial Justice leads for their contribution to the success of the Summit. Stay tuned for more about the information shared in the coming months from your respective leaders.

"Take a loving approach to the work."

This past year we continued to be challenged. As we dealt with sadness and loss, focus remains on our mission critical work. It is in those efforts, serving families *"teetering on the edge of existence, that we see hope and the power of the human spirit. The journey has not always been easy, but necessary,"* I said that same day.

"Take a loving approach to the work," is how Commissioner Schomburg described the foundational element our core values. Connecticut embodies this, serving as agents of change and making a lifelong impact on the families and stakeholders we interact with.

This month's *Spotlight on What's Right* newsletter highlights **the Best of 2021!** See the accomplishments, innovation and resilience across each Division within our Department and the extensive collaboration with our community partners.



You will also read the story of a landlord, Angelique Croasdale, who established a life-long relationship with a tenant. That led to a kinship placement and a virtual adoption hearing with an entire classroom watching remotely! "I felt a powerful need to care for her," describing her journey towards their forever family.

January is also **National Human Trafficking Prevention Month**. During 2021, we received reports on **241** children and youth identified as victims. Read some of the fantastic work our Agency has done this past year to protect such vulnerable children and youth in our communities.



2022 came roaring in with the Omicron surge. We are challenged by the impact to our staffing coverage; I assure you we are working hard to alleviate that stress where possible. Through it all, we are still standing -- **TOGETHER**.

The Best of 2021

The year 2021 was met with many challenges. At the same time, the extraordinary efforts of staff across the state, our community partners and the children and families we serve, have resulted in significant accomplishments!

Please read here for some of our highlights....

- Balanced the mission critical work of the Agency with the health and safety of our workforce and the children and families we serve.
- Established permanency for over 1,500 children which includes more than 570 children being reunified, 445 Transfers of Guardianship and over 500 adoptions.
- Submitted the State of Connecticut's Family First Prevention Plan to the Children's Bureau with the input of over 400 unique individuals.
- Achieved pre-certification of Juan F. Consent Decree outcome measures pertaining to Needs Met and In-Home Visitation.
- Reduced the number of children in care by 19.3% since the beginning of the Dorantes Administration.
- Increased the percentage of children placed with kinship families to 44%.

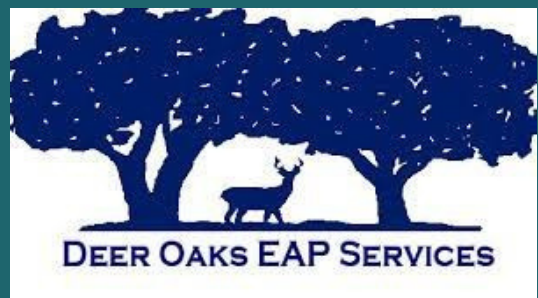




- Collaborated and shared best practices in our work with the Governor's Office, sister state agencies, child welfare jurisdictions across the country, community partners and families with lived expertise.
- Engaged in regular communication with key legislators,

Juvenile Court Administration, Attorney General's Office, Public Defenders Office, and Office of the Child Advocate to provide Department updates and resolve issues brought to their attention.

- Continued implementation of the Department's anti-racist framework leading to becoming a racially just organization.
- Trained and presented the Implicit Bias and Anti-Racist framework to all IFP/RTFT providers in the state.
- Engaged with Legislators throughout the year with invitations to key Department activities, providing them DCF materials and responding to constituent questions.
- Commissioner Dorantes served as Co-Chair of Connecticut's Alcohol and Drug Policy Council.
- Provided written guidance and video recorded messages to all staff, including community partners, clarifying new procedures within the Department and updates on planning efforts.
- Reinforced with employees the importance establishing a healthy work/life balance and the utilization of internal supports including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Continued Implementation of Children's Behavioral Health Plan and created the structures for innovative programming, with community partners, in response to an increase in the behavioral health needs of children.
- Monitored services to vulnerable populations such as children with specialized needs and children and families in disproportionately impacted communities.
- Enhanced contact tracing processes guided by DCF Medical Director of all COVID-19 positive diagnosis for caregivers, youth and DCF staff.
- Commissioner Dorantes served as Co-Chair of the Governor's Council on Women and Girls Health and Safety Subcommittee.
- Creatively provided treatment to youth with complex needs in our Solnit North and Solnit South Facilities while mitigating virus transmission.



- Regularly updated the COVID-19 website which has resulted in over 50,000 unique individuals accessing supports for children and families.
- Produced DCF News highlighting positive efforts of the workforce and information regarding supports available for children, families, and staff.
- Published a *Spotlight on What's Right* monthly newsletter highlighting the collaborative work of the Department and community partners leading to successful outcomes for families.
- Received approval of the Department's Affirmative Action Plan.
- Remained in consistent contact with leadership from 8 different state employee labor unions to answer questions and clarify operational procedures for staff throughout the department.
- Conducted consistent videoconferencing with the Children's League of Connecticut (CLOC).
- Established meeting cadence with the Non-Profit Alliance to ensure consistency of information and problem solving.
- Conducted virtual listening tours with the DCF Area Offices and Facilities.
- Held a "Virtual Adoption Day" where over 45 children achieved formal permanency.



- Coordinated the Leadership Academy for Social Work Supervisors, Leadership Academy for Middle Managers, and the Mentoring program to develop staff in preparation for succession planning.
- Established the first ever Executive Fellowship Program for Senior Leaders.
- Updated Careline script resulting in an increase in mandated reporters reporting their race leading to a better

understanding of structural and institutional racism in the child welfare system.

- Implemented Restorative Justice practices in STAR programs.
- Established guidelines to increase the engagement of grass roots, minority-led community providers to the DCF service array.
- Included Attorney General's Office in particularly complex cases including Critical Incident Case Conferences.
- Established framework to conduct Virtual Administrative Hearings.
- Opened the DCF "Olive Branch" Toy Shop where families came to pick out holiday gifts for their own children.

- Created a Public Service Announcement regarding Safe Storage of substances intended for adult use.
- Implemented the ChildStat process in each Regional Office leading to enhanced knowledge of data, trends and case practices leading to successful outcomes.



- Conducted over 3,000 Quality Case Reviews and 11,000 Administrative Case Reviews.
- Piloted Family Support Liaisons in three Waterbury schools.
- Expanded the Juvenile Court Transformation Zone.
- Commenced the automated Background Check process at the Careline.
- Created ABCD Child Safety Practice Model and began implementing it internally and externally
- Created the frameworks and designs for the Caregiver Practice Model and Kinship Navigator
- Selected as a "Trailblazer" in a national initiative led by AECF and CSF regarding Congregate Care work.
- Increased capacity of Child Abuse Pediatricians to provide expertise and consultation to Department staff.
- Actively participated in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Children and Family Learning Cohort leading to sharing our best-case practices with other states across the country.



"I Felt a Powerful Need to Care for Her."

Angelique Croasdale, an employee for the City of Hartford and a landlord, was drawn to help a young tenant who lived in one of her apartments 25 years ago.

"She was a tenant for over 20 years, and I got to know most of her kids," said Ms. Croasdale, who lived in the same building along with her sister. "She was young when I first got to know her, and there was some domestic violence. We looked out for her."



When the mother was pregnant with her youngest child seven years ago, she asked Ms. Croasdale and her sister what to name the baby. Ms. Croasdale said she was drawn to help. "The friendship formed out of the concern we had," she remembered. "I used to help with teaching her kids their ABCs and colors - that sort of thing."

After years as a tenant, mother left for Florida with her two now-adult daughters. There, she gave birth to Padma. Due to unexpected family circumstances, the family came back to Connecticut and moved in with Ms. Croasdale's sister. Meanwhile Ms. Croasdale agreed to have then-two-year-old Padma sleep overnight in her apartment.

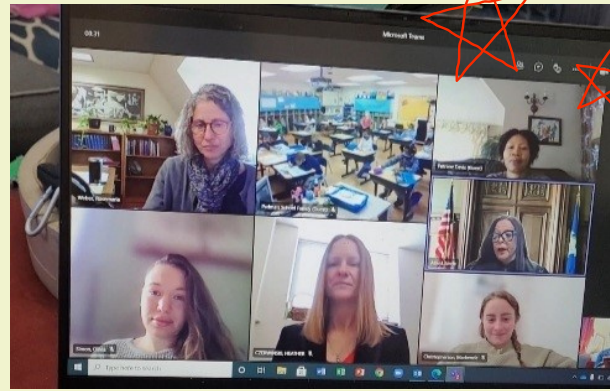
The Department of Children and Families became involved. With conditions in the family escalating, Ms. Croasdale said the investigator asked mom who could care for then-three-year-old Padma, and mom said it was Ms. Croasdale.



"Padma was so fragile - she wasn't walking or talking, she wasn't feeding herself," Ms. Croasdale said. "I felt a powerful need to care for her."

DCF placed Padma in care, and Ms. Croasdale was licensed as a "special study" foster parent, meaning the parent already knew the child and the child had a "familial" relationship with the caregiver. The placement became permanent.

Ms. Croasdale legally adopted Padma in a virtual court proceeding. One of the highlights of the proceeding was that Padma's second grade class from the Laurel Elementary School in Bloomfield participated virtually and was beamed onto the screen for Padma to see. In turn, the class was able to see Padma, Ms. Croasdale, and the Judge who conducted the proceeding.



Ms. Croasdale said the class participation meant so much to Padma. "Padma felt like her classmates cared and wanted to experience the moment with her," Ms. Croasdale said. "Padma was elated, and when she went to school later that day, the school had an ice cream social for her."

Padma's DCF social worker, Heather Czerwinski, said the school's support of Padma began long before the adoption. Ms. Czerwinski said Padma required some extra supports. "This school did whatever it could to keep her experience at school as normal as possible," Ms. Czerwinski said, giving special credit to the school social worker. "Everybody at the school really cares about her."

Ms. Czerwinski said at the adoption proceeding, the whole class cried out in unison: "Congratulations Padma!"

Ms. Czerwinski, who works in the DCF Hartford office, said, "I've been doing adoptions at least 15 years, and it's the first time I've seen that type of caring or that kind of a close-knit group. This is Padma's village that is wrapped around her."

Both Ms. Croasdale and Ms. Czerwinski said Padma has made tremendous strides. "Through Angelique's nurturing and the school, I've seen this growth in Padma," said Ms. Czerwinski. "She was so shy and now she has friends!"

Ms. Croasdale said Padma's growth has been remarkable. "It's day and night - this little girl is so phenomenal," she said. "It's as if something went off." Ms. Croasdale points out with pride that Padma is getting an award at school for academic progress.

Ms. Croasdale remembers being in the car with Padma during the days leading up to the adoption when Padma turned to Ms. Croasdale and thanked her for "becoming my permanent mommy." That left Ms. Croasdale overwhelmed with emotion. "Looking at her growth, when she calls me mommy, my heart takes an extra flip," Ms. Croasdale said.





January is Human Trafficking Prevention Month

Month

January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month. Globally, and right here in Connecticut, a time to increase awareness about the significant risks our children face on a daily basis.

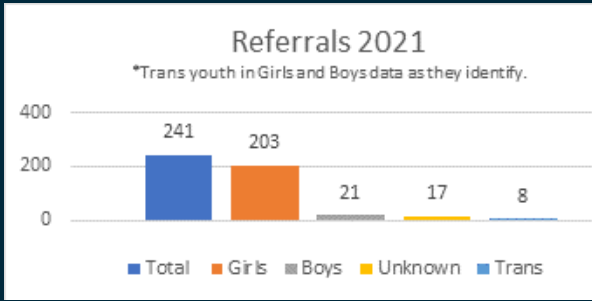
The definition of sex trafficking has changed over the years. Sex trafficking is defined as when a person exchanges *anything of value* with a minor or third person as compensation for a minor having engaged in sexual conduct with another person. Or, when a person exchanges or agrees to exchange *anything of value* with a minor or a third person pursuant to an understanding that in return, the minor will engage in sexual conduct with that person. The definition also includes when a person solicits or requests to engage in sexual conduct with a minor, or any other person that they reasonably believe to be a minor, in return for *anything of value*.

Trafficking of children occurs in each of our communities and the families all around us. It does not discriminate according to gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Literally all children are subject to victimization.

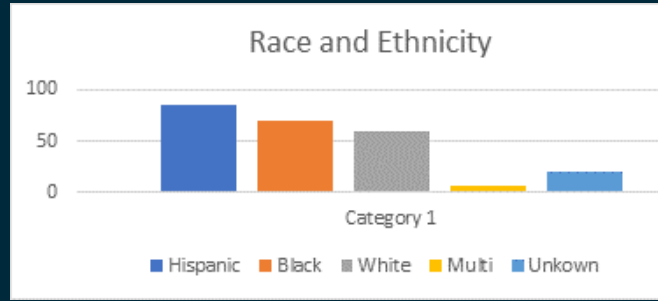
In Connecticut, children are targeted right in their own homes by way of the internet, social media, online platforms, and a variety of apps. While online tools have enhanced learning and communication with loved ones, they have also served as an entry for traffickers. Here, children are groomed, manipulated into sharing their personal information, encouraged to share explicit images or even to arrange an in-person meeting outside the safety of their own homes.



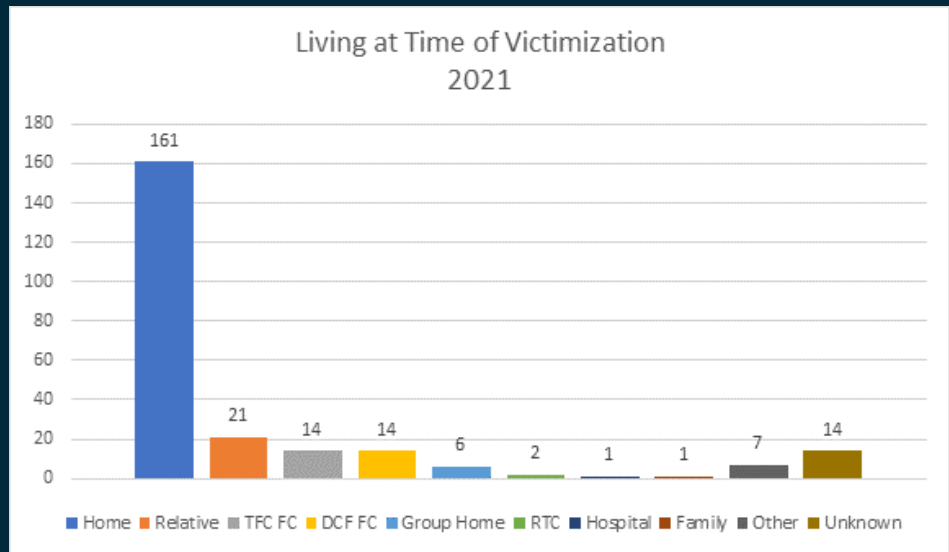
The Department received 241 reports of trafficking in 2021:



Children of color remain the most at-risk:



Living placement at the time of identification shows that 161 out of the total of 241 youth are actually living at home when they are subjected to trafficking:



This month, the Department put forth several trainings to educate professionals and members of the public about the signs of trafficking:

- **My Life My Choice Curricula Facilitator Training** - A prevention education program where DCF will train service providers, case workers, schoolteachers, etc. willing to provide prevention education to girls ages 12 and older. DCF is funding the training with a request that those certified provide 2-groups per year.
- **Introduction into Human Trafficking for EMS Providers** - DCF staff will conduct training with Emergency Medical Services staff on the signs of sex trafficking and will develop a train the trainer model for EMS staff who then wish to train others.

Connecticut has been a leader across the country in the manner in which we have collaborated with Federal, state, and municipal law enforcement agencies to support victims and hold traffickers accountable.

We must remain diligent in our efforts!

Below are several resources. Events, trainings, and educational opportunities continue to be added this month. If you would like to receive information from the Human Anti-Trafficking Response Team (HART) distribution list, please email **DCFHART@ct.gov**.

Many resources are available for parents. They are also relevant for educators, and some are even being implemented in our schools.

- [Shared Hope Internet Safety Series](#) by Shared Hope International
- [App Guide for Parents \(English\)](#)
- [App Guide for Parents \(Español\)](#)
- Internet Safety Materials for Families: [Internet Safety Concepts](#)
- [DMST Parents Sex Trafficking Brochure](#)

Children have told us they wished they had training on human trafficking before they became victims. Resources for child victims:

- Office for Victims of Crime: [Child Victims and Witnesses Support Materials](#)
- Youth Awareness of Human Trafficking presentations are held quarterly, with the next one occurring on [February 23rd](#). Please see information here: [Youth Awareness Info Session](#)

The department has knowledgeable and passionate HART Leads and Liaisons in every region and office to support possible cases of child trafficking (See link below).

Please also feel free to contact Tammy Sneed at any time for assistance via e-mail at **Tammy.Sneed@ct.gov**.

- Available Training: HT Training Descriptions, email **DCFHART@ct.gov** to request a training
- [DCF Human Anti-trafficking Response Team \(HART\) Page](#)
- [Leads and Liaisons](#)

