



MAY we all give a huge round of applause in recognition of **Foster Care Appreciation Month!**

Parents who foster play a critical role in stabilizing the world around children in care during some of the most difficult times in their lives. Opening their hearts and homes to support children and their families is truly a calling.



Connecticut is fortunate to have approximately **93%** of children in our care and custody placed **with families**, with almost **50%** of children under the age of 18 years living **with kin**.

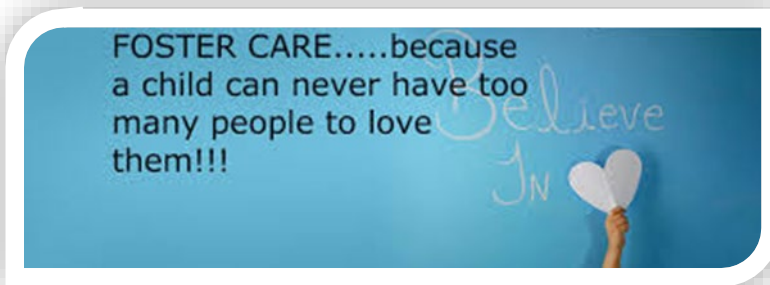
CT Fosters is our new logo and branding message. Distancing the past belief that children need "saving" from parents, we partner with caregivers in the shared mission of mobilizing people and resources in order to **unify** families.

CT Fosters Belonging

CT Fosters Hope

CT Fosters Love

In this month's **Spotlight on What's Right**, read the story of Chris and Carolyn Scott who



become kinship foster

parents when 17-year-old

Kayla was placed with

them..... on their

wedding day! "I felt like I

was part of the family,"

Kayla stated as she

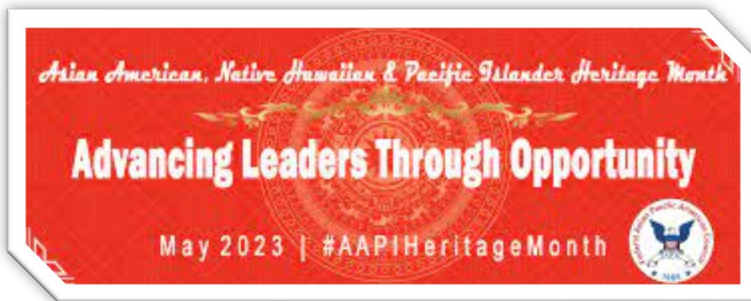
remembers looking at all the

new people in her life.

"Today I am called to love her deeply and to support her family in whatever way I can," is how Kelly Towart and her family embrace a little girl in their care. Read the story of Kelly's family which is a true testament to how our foster families engage with and support birth families towards reunification. Click here to see more of this amazing story => [WFSB - Amazing Moms](#)



MAY is also a reminder to tune-in to our mental health and wellness. Seeking support is a sign of strength year-round! Due to the continued support of Governor Lamont and the Connecticut Legislature, DCF has contracted several additional service types to support families during trying times. This newsletter highlights some of these innovations being implemented across our state.



At CT DCF, we celebrate our diversity-- MAY is also Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI) month.

Did you know that the AANHPI population represents over 30 countries that speak over 100 different languages? In 2020,

Asian Americans made up 6.5% of the U.S. population estimated at 24 million. Pacific Islanders make up 1.6 million or 0.5% of the U.S. population. Read the WH proclamation in recognition of the pride of this heritage - [White House Proclamation](#)

Carrying our theme of **BELONGING**, here is a link to learn how to inspire, support, and approach diversity, equity and inclusion with children and youth: [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for Youth](#)

Last, but far from least ---To our youth and staff who have earned high school and post-secondary degrees this month..... **Congratulations! YOU DID IT!**

Also making space for a HUGE debt of gratitude to the **14th Dean of the UCONN School of Social Work Dr Nina Rovinelli-Heller** as she steps down from the helm but will remain active in the SSW community. Excerpt from her most recent message to the UCONN SSW Alumni community, Dr Heller writes:

"... we have developed and maintained very robust collaborations with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, the Office of Early Childhood, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Public Health – each has a research component and a workforce development program. At our Commencement on May 6, one of our most distinguished alumni and long-term partners, DCF Commissioner Vannessa Dorantes, offered an inspiring message to graduates. [I hope you will take some time to watch the recording.](#)"



May you all be proud of the **work** you do,
the **person** you are and
the **difference** you make...

A Wedding Day Kinship Placement



Chris and Carolyn Scott became kinship foster parents on their wedding day!

Yes, they did and here is their story.....

Chris has a passion for working with adolescents and young adults. In 2019, he was a part-time employee at The Bridge group home while developing his non-profit organization, Sun Scholars Inc.

He first met an adolescent named Kayla during an intake at the program and questioned why she was not in a foster home given the way she interacted with others and her abilities. Chris saw a lot more potential in Kayla than he believed others did.

"There was no reason why she needed to be here," Chris remembers thinking to himself. "She got the short end of the stick."

Kayla remembers her early interactions with Chris with equal admiration. "I was excited when he came on the shift," Kayla stated. "Chris always told us we could do anything we can put our minds to."

Chris would talk to the residents about his background and would interact with them as they cooked and took part in other activities.

"Wow, I want to be just like him," Kayla remembers thinking.

After employment at the agency ended, Chris and Carolyn maintained contact with Kayla who eventually was placed into a foster home. They tutored her ahead of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), would talk on the phone and kept the lines of communication open.

Kayla's foster home placement "was not the right fit" according to her. "I felt misplaced and did not belong." As the possibility of Kayla returning to a previous foster home or group home became evident, Chris and Carolyn were made aware of the predicament and contemplated how they could further support her.



Chris himself grew up in foster care, was adopted and experienced placement disruption. He could relate to what Kayla was going through.

"No way was this how someone should spend Senior year in high school," Chris recalls thinking about Kayla having uncertainty about her future.

Chris sought the advice of a trusted friend, Lisa Driscoll, who helped him explore all options.

"You can always come live with me and Carolyn," he told Kayla.

"I was a bit nervous at first," Carolyn recalls when she initially thought about opening their home. "Chris lives this," she stated in reference to Chris' background and his daily work. "How do we manage each other? What would be the impact on our relationship?" were thoughts that entered her mind.

"We were definitely all in because we wanted to help Kayla."

The couple eventually decided to open their home.



"I'm on board," Kayla remembers Chris telling her. "I was excited and like now I will be with a family."

The night before Chris and Carolyn's wedding, Kayla moved in her belongings.

On their wedding day, the couple officially welcomed 17-year-old Kayla into their home. "I felt like I was part of a family," Kayla stated. "This was a great start."

For the next year, Kayla, Carolyn, and Chris made a great team with Kayla feeling like she could "be myself" around them.

It is understood that initially upon placement, Kayla was somewhat guarded. "You let us know what you are comfortable with," Chris recalls telling her and empowering her to take the lead. "You can achieve greatness in your youth."

Kayla had the support of her kinship family, past foster home, and her birth family to reach her fullest potential. Chris and Carolyn met Kayla's birth parents and relatives.

"We were always there as a protective factor," stated Chris as he remembers the many milestone events such as the Homecoming dance and Prom that Kayla and the family experienced together. They were present on awards night when Kayla received scholarships for track as she was the "fastest girl" in New Britain High School while also playing basketball, soccer, and tennis.



Kayla's overall goal is to live independently. As the next natural step in her progression, Kayla moved from the kinship home after a year and is now receiving support from Lisa Inc. as she resides in a supervised studio apartment with 24/7 staff support. Within the next year, she hopes to have her own apartment.

Chris and Carolyn are right there supporting her.



Kayla recently finished her freshmen year at UCONN in Hartford where she is a Sociology Major with a Minor in Biology. She aspires to become either an FBI agent or Lawyer. This summer she will spend three weeks studying abroad in Spain.

Kayla works two jobs, enjoys hip hop music and dance, bought her own car, and paid off her credit card.

She has a clear message for others about the youth involved with the Department. "We are not who we are on paper or what people say about us," she emphatically stated.

"See them for who they are."

Her message directly to other youth in care is also quite clear. "Utilize DCF until you are out," she articulated.



What is next for Chris and Carolyn?

Carolyn is a mechanical engineer working in the aerospace and defense industry. Chris has fully developed his non-profit and is the Executive Director and Founder of Sun Scholars Inc. He also recently completed graduate school at Harvard University with a master's in liberal arts in Government Extension Studies.

Of course, they just saw Taylor Swift in concert!

The couple would like to adopt a child in a couple of years.

What would they say about their kinship experience?

"Despite all of the nervousness and trepidation, this was probably the most rewarding thing I have done," Carolyn stated. "It was very rewarding to see Kayla grow into the person she is and celebrate her accomplishments with her."

"It was a joy to play a part in her journey," stated Chris. "Her independence has grown tremendously," he further added.

"We found her, and she found us."



“She has brought out the very best in all of us”



A church trip to a Guatemala orphanage inspired Kelly Towart, then sixteen years old, to be a foster parent. She recalls feeling helpless because many children would never experience the love of a family, and she desperately wanted to help.

When Kelly returned home, she shared her concerns with her parents, but after careful consideration, they could not adopt. However, Kelly remained inspired as she pursued her career goals and had opportunities to work in crisis care with foster teens.

After marriage and conceiving two daughters, Kelly and her husband decided to become licensed resources and were asked to care for Makayla, who is now eight months old.

With the goal of reunification, Kelly understands that she and her family will one day experience a tremendous loss, but she fully believes that Makayla belongs with her biological family, and Kelly is invested in supporting the reunification plan. “I believe that I’m not only fostering this baby, but it’s also my responsibility to foster her parents, too,” she said.

Kelly has reached out to Makayla’s mother and father with the hope of building a relationship that will further support Makayla’s return home. She wants them to do this together. Kelly feels part of her “why” in fostering is the unexpected relationship she has

formed with Makayla's mom and the influence she has upon her. She reflected on a recent conversation when Makayla's mom said, "*If only I had met you sooner, my life could have been so different.*"

Kelly said it is her faith that has led her to want to mentor and support the baby's parents.

Kelly is also determined to help change the trajectory of public opinion on foster care and how biological parents are seen. As a Social Media Influencer and with a Master's Degree in Counseling, Kelly has the platform to reach people through her blog and is helping to change the negativity surrounding birth parents and their trajectory in this journey through placement.

Kelly said that fostering has been a family experience, and opening their home to Makayla has been the best parenting decision in her life. "It's a beautiful thing for us all to go through this together," she said, adding, "We are not alone with all these really big feelings."

Despite loving and letting go, the Towarts believe that co-parenting Makayla with her bio family is the right thing to do. "This is hard in the way that I want my children to experience hard things," explaining this will be a very difficult goodbye but, nevertheless, a lesson in selflessness.



“I genuinely love Makayla as much as I love my girls,” she said. Kelly explained that Makayla had brought so much joy into their lives, “She has brought out the very best in all of us,” she added.

When asked if she plans to continue fostering, after a pause and a deep breath, Kelly said, “I can absolutely do this again,” adding, but until then, I won’t take one single moment with Makayla for granted.”

**The baby’s name was changed to protect the privacy of the family.*

Seeking Support is a Sign of Strength!



Seeking support is a sign of strength! This message needs to be reinforced not just during Mental Health Awareness Month - but all year.

Due to the great support of Governor Lamont and the Connecticut Legislature, DCF has contracted several additional service types to support families during trying

times.

Here are some and the way to access them:

Expansion of 24/7 Mobile Crisis- Now at all hours of the day, including weekends and overnights, mobile crisis clinicians are "mobile" and able to respond in-person to families across the state whenever needed.

- This program can be accessed by dialing 211 with additional information at www.mobilecrisisempst.org



Urgent Crisis Centers - UCCs will be opening and available around the state in Waterbury, Hartford, New London, and New Haven. They are aimed at diverting children from unnecessary visits to an emergency department while they're experiencing a behavior health crisis. UCCs provide intensive assessment, stabilization, and ongoing connection to care for youth who do not require hospital level of care.

- More information will be provided when these programs are fully operational.



Expansion of Access Mental Health for Pediatricians -

Access Mental Health is real time behavioral health consultation between a child's pediatrician and psychiatrist. Now if medication is prescribed, and the Pediatrician and Psychiatrist agree that follow-up is

necessary, the family will be connected to at least three therapy sessions, at no cost to them, as a bridge to ongoing care.

- Pediatricians can access this program at www.accessmhct.com

Intensive Transition Care Management - Peer support staff assist families with connecting to services in their respective community when their child is in the emergency department, psychiatric facility, or psychiatric residential treatment facility. It includes in-home follow-up support for up to 12 weeks following discharge.

- Families can access this support while their child is placed in one of the above-mentioned settings.

Urban Trauma Initiative - A network of clinical treatment providers is being developed in Hartford, New Haven, Waterbury, and Bridgeport to provide interventions that focus on the impact of intergenerational racial trauma on young people (i.e., experiencing disproportionate levels of exposure to violence, poverty, unstable housing, etc.) especially in communities of color.

- Organizations and clinicians interested in learning more can access: www.maysaakbar.com



Respite for Non-DCF Families - Through a referral to Care Coordination, families of children with complex needs can access respite services. Funds can be allocated towards in-home or out-of-home supports according to program limits and guidelines.

- Respite can be accessed by connecting to www.connectingtocarect.org

As a reminder, www.infoline.org and www.connectingtocarect.org are great resources for families to access supports across the state.

Congratulations to our Graduates!



From as far away as Florida and Virginia to right here in Connecticut, 34 of our transitional aged youth have graduated from post-secondary educational programs!

We are so proud of the future graphic designers, phlebotomists, mechanical engineers, electricians, nurses, barbers, medical assistants, social workers and all the others who will soon be serving our communities.

To the DCF staff, foster families and community partners who have supported these adolescents and young adults on their educational journey - Thank you and Congratulations to you as well!



Here is a list of the institutions attended and degrees earned this year:

PSE Institution

Major

University of Virginia	Mechanical Engineering
Iona College	History
University of Connecticut	Law, Social Justice, and Family
Florida Atlantic University	Social Work
Southern CT State University	Communications and Health Care Services
Eastern CT State University	Communications/Media Studies
Johnson and Wales	Computer Science
Manchester Community College	Graphic Design
Tunxis Community College	Machinery
Lincoln Technical Institute	Medical Assistant/Pipe Welding/HVAC
Porter and Chester Institute	Practical Nursing/HVAC/Automotive/Electrical and Low Voltage
The Academy of Medical Training	Certified Nursing Aid/Phlebotomy
The Art Spot	Tattoo
Academy DiCapelli	Aesthetician
Major League Barbering Academy	Barbering

Harborview School of Phlebotomy Phlebotomy

Bravado Cosmetology Hair Styling

Training Direct Certified Nursing Aid