



## **April Employee of the Month Awards!**

*Congratulations to the following staff who have been nominated within their respective Divisions to receive the April Employee of the Month Award!*

### **Kim Somaroo-Rodriguez - Transitional Supports and Success**

Kim is a Program Supervisor over Housing/Homelessness within Transitional Supports and Success. She is the DCF expert when it comes to servicing our unhoused population. Kim has strong community relationships with our partners, including but not limited to the CT Department of Housing and The Connection, Inc. Kim has been instrumental in the development and implementation of the START program, which provides emergency housing and support for young adults who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. When there is a housing emergency within DCF, staff know to reach out to Kim and she can perform miracles via her knowledge of START, Supportive Housing for Families, and the various federal FYI and FUP housing vouchers. DCF is very fortunate to have such a strong support for our families.

Thank you, Kim!



### **Dr. Nicolas Luzino - PRTF (South)**

Dr. Nicolas Luzino is a child psychiatrist, and we call him "Dr. Nic." This nomination will come as no surprise to those who have had the privilege of working alongside him. Since joining the team, Dr. Luzino has exemplified qualities that are not only admirable but essential in a clinical setting. His serene demeanor and empathetic approach towards the youth under his care create an atmosphere of trust and understanding. His willingness to engage in peer supervision and collaborative problem-solving underscores his dedication to both personal and professional growth, fostering a supportive environment for his colleagues. Dr. Luzino's impact extends beyond his interpersonal skills, as his profound knowledge and expertise serve as invaluable resources for his team. As Employee of the Month, Dr. Nic Luzino embodies the qualities of compassion, consistency, and expertise that define excellence in his role, setting a standard of excellence for his peers to aspire to.

### **Gillian Ellis - PRTF (North)**

Gillian Ellis is Director of Residential Care. She was promoted recently to a position that requires an individual to be on their game. Gillian hit the ground running and hasn't looked back. She is doing an exceptional job and is a great asset to the Solnit North Team and the youth we serve. Gillian has been an employee with the Department of Children and Families since 2006, where she came in as a Children Service Worker. In 2023, Gillian was promoted to the Director of Residential Care position. She has done an outstanding job in her new role, and she epitomizes the spirit of teamwork and dedication. Her ability to multitask is second to none, and she is known for rolling up her sleeves and finding a way. She is amazing and Solnit North is incredibly fortunate to have her on the team.



### **Kenny Demoranville - Engineering & Plant Facilities**

Kenny's diverse skill set, positive attitude, and flexibility are invaluable assets to our team. Kenny has taken a leadership role in maintaining the grounds for Solnit South and CJTS, as well as fleet maintenance for Solnit South. He has voluntarily assumed on-call duties for CJTS to maintain and repair life safety systems, so we can continue to utilize that very valuable space, while concurrently volunteering to work with our Building Construction Specialist to add a level of support to our area offices that was missing from the system. Kenny is the first one to help a coworker when needed and always puts facilities and the youths we serve first. He sets an example as a team player, is respected by everyone he works with and always has a smile on his face and a kind word to share.

### **Maureen Auger - Academy for Workforce Development**

Maureen Auger is a dedicated and dynamic member of the Academy training team. She shares her training wisdom and experience freely as she supports and coaches new trainers in their onboarding process. She is always willing to get involved in new projects and support ongoing programs and efforts. Ms. Auger has been instrumental in developing and implementing a new Data Training for Social Work Supervisors, aimed at strengthening participants' understanding and use of data in everyday practice. In partnership with the Office of Strategic Planning, Ms. Auger has brought this training to area office leadership in recent months. The training has yielded positive feedback and requests for further learning opportunities. The Academy is grateful for Ms. Auger's contributions in advancing the work of the division.



### **Krista Santagata - Solnit South Hospital**

For the past five years, Krista Santagata has been a dedicated Registered Nurse for the State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families. She came to DCF in 2019 from CVH due to her desire to provide care to adolescents and children. Beginning her DCF career at Albert J Solnit Center, she has held various positions as a Staff nurse, a Supervising nurse and most

recently, was promoted to the Director of Nursing 1 for the Albert J Solnit Hospital. A recent graduate of the LAS program, she has demonstrated the mission and values of DCF, not only towards the youth we are caring for in the hospital, but also towards fellow colleagues and staff. As Solnit hospital seeks to develop staff, Krista has stepped into her DN1 position having clinical knowledge and trusting relationships, to support new Solnit hospital initiatives. Focusing on workforce stabilization and retention, Krista has assisted with hiring multiple Registered Nurses, LPNs, CSWs and Nurse Consultants, supporting the newly implemented Team Model of Care. Her support of the milieu, and multidisciplinary team is evident in her solution focused approach to supporting employees, clinical care, and operations. I look forward to Kristas continued development as a leader at Solnit Hospital and DCF.



### **Rosetta Weir- Education/Unified School District #2**

Rosetta has been a most valuable professional for Unified School District #2 as a multitasker within the varying units of our education division. The Mission Statement of USD2 recognizes that each child is an individual; that all children are creative; that all children need to succeed. She excels in all tasks that support the teaching and learning of all our students. Rosetta's work is impeccable and reliable- ensuring that we meet all accountability items and timelines. She demonstrates a systematic approach in carrying out complex projects with impressive results. Rosetta is very dependable and conscientious in meeting all responsibilities for the betterment of our students. Thank You Rosetta!!!

### **Jacki Reynolds - Office of Legal Affairs**

The Legal Division is pleased to nominate Willimantic paralegal Jacki "Jack" Reynolds this month. Jack is known throughout her office, and the Division, for her exceptional analytical skills, her high-quality work, and her willingness to help others. She has gone above and beyond when it comes to onboarding new paralegals--she always volunteers her time to have new staff shadow her and she has created templates, checklists, and workflows to streamline her own efficiency which have become the gold standard in training newer staff. Jack is a consummate professional and has proven herself to be a natural leader among her peers and colleagues.



### **Kimberly Tait - Child Welfare/Foster Care Division**

The Foster Care Division (FCD) wanted to take a moment to really highlight the work Kim has done over the past few months, especially with stepping in while covering for a peer who was out for a period of time. It is clear Kim has a passion for the work and continues to advocate for the families in the FCD. Kim has shown such strength in her ability to train new staff to help them understand their role of being a support worker. Kim continues to support and navigate the needs of our families through retention events while building a relationship with community providers. Kim's energy, passion and commitment has

paved the way to create new opportunities for support and recruitment of new resources/families within the region. Lastly, I appreciate Kim's out of the box thinking that continues to push the work forward through the lens of QPI.

### **Christina Gomez – Region 1 & 5**

Christina Gomez, Billing Office Assistant in Danbury, brings tremendous skill and ability to her role. The office is fortunate to have her on the team and in the role of office assistant. Christina is a self-starter and approaches her duties with a strong work ethic, leadership, and attention to detail. She has shown an extraordinary effort with the newly rolled-out Care 4 Kids/OEC daycare transition process. Christina streamlined the process for the entire office, making the transition for the team as smooth and efficient as possible. The daycare transition to C4Ks has been a huge undertaking and with Christina's extreme organization, dedication, and hard work in the Danbury office has been able to be 100 % successful and recognized as an example to others. Christina is efficient, structured, and focused on continuously learning and developing best practices to manage routine activities and complex tasks. Christina is a true professional and is always willing to go above and beyond for the team. Her efforts set a high standard for all, and her continued commitment is a true inspiration to our team.



### **Robin Brisson – Region 2 & 3**

Robin comes to work every day with a smile on her face and ready to work. She is a team player to the core, always offering to help others. She is often heard saying "I love my job" and she means it. She is passionate about the children she works with, and she is a fierce protector and advocate for their needs. She is a great support to the foster parents she works with and is always there when they need advice or someone to hear them out. Robin is a detective when it comes to her assessments, and she leaves no stone unturned. Her communication with parents and their attorneys is outstanding, and the families she works with always know exactly what they need to do and how to do it. She is a sympathetic listener, but equally expects accountability. Her work is thorough, comprehensive, and her legal work has received many compliments from the court. She is a pleasure to work with and I can't think of someone more deserving of appreciation and recognition for her exemplary work.



### **Shanna Hargrove - Region 4 & 6**

Shanna is being nominated for her unbelievable work on a daily basis. Shanna comes to work every day with a positive attitude and is always striving to perform her best. Her assessments are strong, and her writing is phenomenal. The biggest reason for nominating Shanna is how she treats the people that she works with. She is always so respectful to the families that she engages with and makes them feel supported. She is able

to partner with the families on her caseload to achieve the best outcomes for the family and the children in the home. Shanna is a supportive coworker and always willing to help out. Her calm demeanor is an asset in the workplace and out in the community. We are lucky to have her as part of the New Britain Intake team and our community is lucky to have her as she is such a strong advocate for those most in need.

### **Lynette Baisden - Health Management and Oversight Division**

The HMO Division has undergone significant changes over the last several months. Lynette is highly organized, always positive, and always willing to assist in any way she can to ease the many transitions and help us coordinate many competing priorities. Although Lynette has only been with the division for a few years - it feels like she has been part of our HMO family for much longer. We very much appreciate all that she does for us in the division. Thank you Lynette!



### **Jackie Ford - Bureau of External Affairs**

Jackie Ford continues to enhance the positive image of the Department with her unwavering commitment to the children and families we serve. She was recently named the Nexstar's 2024 Connecticut Remarkable Woman of the Year for her work in the community and especially for creating The Olive Branch Shop to help families by offering free items that may alleviate a burden or stressor in their lives. Jackie accepts these honors in her typical humble and grateful demeanor. Those who have the pleasure of working with Jackie recognize immediately the sincerity in which she serves others as she embodies the true values of the Department. As a result of her unique ability to engage with others, families across Connecticut benefited throughout the year.

### **ALICE Demeo - Behavioral Health**

Alice has consistently undertaken review of the programs she oversees and made efforts towards not only improving the program outcomes, but data collection and streamlining the processes to ensure DCF gets the data needed for program evaluation, but that it does not cause excess burden on program staff. She's built great relationships with her provider teams and has been forward thinking about how to continue to improve programs and outcomes for our youth. All of us in Behavioral Health appreciate Alice's efforts and the impact she has on children and families! Thank you Alice!



### **Carey Picard - Government Relations and Policy**

Carey Picard has really done a great job taking on a number of policies that affect several aspects of the agency. Her legal background has been helpful in editing and recommending changes to drafts, making them less ambiguous and in line with other existing policies. The

Department's practice continues to evolve leading to constant review and changes being required to our entire policy manual across all Divisions. Carey's work ethic and dedication will be a great asset during these processes. We very much appreciate Carey!

### **John Tarka - Juvenile Justice Education Unit**

Employees of the month, being what they are, often do not distinguish good candidates from outstanding candidates. John Tarka clearly falls into the latter category. As the assistant superintendent for the Juvenile Justice Education Unit Tarka provides leadership and supervision for the educational program to increase the instructional capacity of teachers and improving achievement of students. Tarka provided direct leadership in program development and improvement, as well as in professional staff development. Tarka is a hard-working person who devotes 100% to the completion of his responsibilities. His ability to research his findings and make logical deductions becomes fruitful for the schools he serves, Tarka is instrumental in improving teacher's instructional practice by creating an action plan that will make a positive effect. Tarka also works with school leaders to maximize their instructional capacity to support teachers in the classroom. Tarka can focus energy with tremendous determination until the job gets done. Tarka has a great sense of humor, and sensitivity to the needs of others, and he is a cooperative spirit that many find inspiring. The ability to lead others is a quality Tarka displays in everything he does. He is an action-based individual who can get fellow staff members involved in any activity. He is a skillful organizer who functions well in difficult situations.

### **Treena Mazzotta - Bureau of Strategic Planning**

Treena Mazzotta has left a longstanding impact on the Bureau of Strategic Planning. Her impeccable work ethic along with clear and focused efforts have enhanced the Agency's QA/QI framework, use of data, and direction and momentum allowing the CT-KIND development and implementation to move forward along with countless other initiatives. The Agency's efforts to protect children and provide families support across Divisions have been aided by her keen knowledge of data, systems and tracking of key performance indicators. We have all benefitted from her expertise in multiple areas! We are grateful for you Treena!

### **Megan Bracone - Clinical and Community Consultation an Supports Division**

We would like to nominate Megan Bracone for her collaborative efforts with providers and regional staff related to the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Megan has partnered with OEC to co-lead the Statewide HeadStart Collaborative (4/26/24). The planning was evident in the large turnout, having a great speaker and relevant presentation, and allowing for time for the regional collaboratives to meet and strengthen their partnerships. Her work and relationships with this network are strong and thoughtful. The theme of this quarterly meeting was Collaboration, and it is clear she has strong collaborations already established.

