

A Message from Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly



April is Child Abuse Awareness Month with the 2024 theme "***Building a Hopeful Future, Together,***" placing focus on creating a nurturing and supportive environment for children and families across our communities.

These values were embodied in ***Carlton White***, an employee with DCF for over two decades. "***A giant,***" with an "***infectious smile***" is how he was described while "***always putting others first.***" Carlton saw the potential in everyone, especially the adolescents and young adults on his caseload. Carlton passed away this month leaving a legacy of unconditionally serving others. "***May the Work I've Done Speak for Me,***" was performed at his funeral - a fitting tribute to an incredible person.



Who are the ***April 2024 Employees of the Month*** described as "***Amazing,***" "***Impeccable and Reliable,***" and a "***True professional?***" Read this month's "***Spotlight***" to see who was nominated in your workgroup!



Speaking of honorees, here is a picture of the ***March 2024 Employees of the Month*** with their certificates! Great job!

April is also ***Child Sexual Assault Awareness Month.*** Sexual abuse tends to be one of the most underreported types of child maltreatment yet may result in the most severe outcomes and impacts on children. Read about ***DCF Primary Investigator Richard Days*** and his "***quiet humility***" who was honored by the ***Department of Justice*** for his work protecting potential young victims of sex crimes.



***Children 0-5 years of age remaining safely at home*** is a priority in my Administration. This work requires continual focus, organization, and management of resources. In order to be successful, a ***Statewide Director of Child Safety Practice and Performance*** has been created. This new position, filled by ***Kelly McVey,*** will play a critical role in assessing data on key safety indicators and developing interventions to improve upon our existing practice to keep kids safely at home.

I remain very proud of the work at the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. It was my honor this month to discuss our efforts on a panel entitled, **"Equip the flip to Advance Equity, Health and Well-Being"** at the **American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) Convening**.

Just days later, I facilitated a presentation in a Leadership Touchstones Workshop entitled, **"Effective Leaders are Talent Driven"** at the **Child Welfare League of America Conference** in Washington, DC.



Also, at CWLA, **Interim Deputy Commissioner Dr. Joyce Taylor** and **Bureau Chief of Child Welfare Tina Jefferson** presented a workshop entitled, **"How Building Our Safety Practice Model Has Strengthened Our Work with Mandated Reporters and Beyond."** Connecticut was well represented among our national partners!

**"The Link"** refers to the strong correlation between animal cruelty, child maltreatment, and other forms of interpersonal violence. Read about the strong collaboration amongst the **Department of Children and Families, Department of Agriculture** and state, regional, and municipal **Animal Control Officers (ACO)** to address this epidemic in our society.

Congratulations to **Jackie Ford** who received **Nexstar's 2024 Connecticut Remarkable Woman of the Year Award!** *"I find enjoyment and gratitude for myself by helping other people,"* she stated. Jackie works in the Bureau of External Affairs, developing excellent relationships with members of the community and was the visionary to create **"The Olive Branch Shop."** See her interview here: [Remarkable Woman](#)



Congratulations as well to **Maritza Acosta, Office Director in Meriden**, who received an **Outstanding Leadership Award** for her **"Above and beyond leadership and dedication to the Waterbury community,"** by the **Rivera Memorial Foundation Inc.** Maritza accepted the award with Legislators, local politicians, community leaders representing Law Enforcement and Education, grass roots organizations and private business owners in attendance along with her devoted family.

We are grateful for our partnership with the **University of Connecticut School of Social Work and Dean Laura Curran.**

We recently celebrated the graduation of two students, Ilene Garcia and Narda Portales, from the **DCF/UConn Child Welfare and Protection Track**. This program is designed to prepare UConn BSW Spanish speaking students with specialized knowledge and experience in child welfare and protection services to meet the needs of **Hispanic/Latino families served by DCF**.



The first of its kind "**UConn School of Social Work and Department of Children and Families Research Forum Symposium**" was also held. Special thanks to **Dr. Patricia Carlson** and **Tracy Davis** for an excellent opportunity to discuss research topics of interest and findings from studies already completed as a result of collaborative efforts between DCF and UConn. The best part of the day? The panel discussion with parents and youth with lived expertise! They were outstanding!

The **L.E.A.D. Mentoring Program Reunion** took place at Central Connecticut State University. Past and current program participants were invited to celebrate the **power of mentorship** and consider the future of leadership in our agency. The theme for this event was "**Reuniting the Past, Shaping the Future**". The afternoon featured remarks from the executive team, keynote speaker William Fothergill, and engaging activities aimed at bringing about reflection and planning for the future.



April is also **Safe Havens Awareness Month**. Passed in 2000, the law allows a parent, who does not believe they can care for their newborn, to **voluntarily give up custody of an infant age 30 days or younger** to the staff of an emergency room and remain anonymous. DCF will then place the baby in a pre-approved adoptive home. "**It was the sweetest thing. He was our little Valentine,**" is how one family describes the special Safe Haven boy placed into their home. Read more about the law in this month's "**Spotlight**".



Lastly, **General Counsel Susan Hamilton** and I represented Connecticut at the **Northeast States Judicial and Systems Partners Symposium**. Leaders from various child-serving stakeholders participated in presentations and facilitated discussions to **improve support to children and families across systems**.

A special thanks to each and every one of you for the efforts you put forth every day!



## **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.



## DCF Employee Honored by DOJ for Effort with FBI to Thwart Child Sexual Exploitation; Said He Was Just Doing His Job

Although child welfare professionals work day in and day out to protect and support children and families, too often they do not get the recognition they deserve. Regardless, this work is a calling and those professionals continue to perform their duty with passion and humility.

That humble demeanor and professionalism are apparent when speaking to Richard Days who is going on almost three decades as a DCF employee. He remains modest even when discussing how he was honored by the U.S. Department of Justice for assisting the FBI with a case of child sexual exploitation.

Rich began specializing in sexual abuse cases while posted in the Norwich office. Because of his experience with the more severe cases, the "criticals", Rich went over to the DCF Careline where for the last eight years he has remained as a "primary" working the third shift and responding to all corners of the state between 5:00pm-8:00am.

"My car is my office," said Rich.

During those hours, primaries initiate the investigation and conduct intake on calls to the Careline that come in after 5:00pm and also require immediate same-day action. The primary then hands over the case to the respective DCF Regional Office once they reopen the following morning.



*Rich displays his Office of the U.S. Attorney service coin.*



*Careline supervisors and primary investigators on a group outing at the DCF's Wilderness School.*

"There's nine of us primaries who get sent out on critical same-day responses. We typically respond to hospitals or requests to assist law enforcement."

While primaries usually work with local law enforcement, Rich said it is uncommon but not unheard of to get a call from the FBI. But that's what happened one summer night in 2021. Also atypical was the prominent neighborhood in which Rich found himself when he responded that evening.

An example that child abuse, neglect and maltreatment can occur within a family regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Rich explained, "It happened so fast. The FBI called the Careline and I went out to meet the agents in a parking lot to discuss the game plan. There's always the unknown with how people are going to react when confronted. So a lot of adrenaline happens at first but then when you get out there you fall into your routine and do what you've been trained to do."

On that particular night, in an undercover capacity, an FBI Online Covert Employee was posing as a father of a teen girl and encountered a father who was sharing sexually explicit photographs of his young children. Through the encrypted app, he also disclosed he was grooming them for sexual activity. One of the photographs was a "live photo" suggesting that it was taken moments before being sent. The photograph served as confirmation that a child was in danger which triggered an immediate response from the FBI, DCF and local law enforcement that very same evening.

"Like I said, with this case it was all pretty quick. We had the element of surprise and [the father] didn't have a chance to come up with a story. When I knocked on the door, he just let it out and confessed allowing the FBI to do what they needed to do."

When Rich was notified that, because of his work on this case, he was going to receive special recognition from the U.S. Attorney's Office he said he was "totally surprised and shocked".

"To be honest when I received the email saying I was being awarded, we handle so many cases throughout the years, I had to ask myself 'what case was that?' I had check and see if they got the wrong DCF worker's name."



*(L-R) Lisa Daymonde; Rich Days;  
U.S. Attorney (CT) Vanessa  
Roberts Avery, and former DCF  
Comr. Vannessa Dorantes.*

Rich met with the agent he partnered with that night and thanked him for the nomination. Rich explained to the agent he was surprised because he felt he had not done that much.

The agent then introduced Rich to his team at the FBI telling his colleagues that "this is the guy from DCF" he had told them to call if needed. He made it known that, thanks to Rich's contributions, the situation had worked out better than they could have hoped.

Indeed, when Rich showed up on that family's doorstep, his twenty-eight years of experience had helped stop the sexual exploitation of young children and prevented the chilling possibility of what could have come next - the father further victimizing his children by subjecting them to potential sexual abuse.

Even talking about his award Rich remains a humble guy. He was quick to add that, while he received this award, he is one member of a team - a very dedicated team.

"This could have gone to any one of the primaries who go out and do this work every night and weekends. We have a great group of supervisors and managers who are always there for us."

However, Director of the DCF Careline, Lisa Daymonde, made sure to sing his praises.

"Richard has a quiet humility about him. Never seeking attention or recognition. He's set a high standard for excellence within our team. As he showed with this case, Richard's ability to navigate challenging situations with professionalism and empathy is admirable," said Daymonde.

"The results of his work reflect those collaborative relationships he's built over the years with law enforcement, providers, DCF staff and families. Richard has a deep personal dedication to this job, to DCF and to our department's overall mission of fostering positive outcomes for the children and families we serve."

## "Our little Valentine" - the Safe Havens Act for Newborns



"It was the sweetest thing. He was our little Valentine. And my birthday was the day after, so it was just this sweet little gift," stated Kelly after she and her family welcomed in a little boy placed via the Safe Havens Act - on Valentine's Day!

Passed in 2000, the law allows a parent, who does not believe they can care for their newborn, to voluntarily give up custody of an infant age 30 days or younger to the staff of an emergency room and remain anonymous. DCF will then place the baby in a pre-approved adoptive home.

It offers birth parents in distress an alternative solution to one that may be unsafe or harmful to their infant child.

How effective has the law been?

Since 2001, a total of 57 babies have been brought to hospitals around Connecticut through the Safe Havens Act. "We are asking everyone – our media partners, hospital personnel, and all community members – to help spread the word that this alternative exists, and it saves lives," Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly stated.



"We know it takes a lot of courage for a parent who is struggling to seek help" she further added. "If you are a parent of a newborn and feel like you have nowhere to turn, please know that Safe Havens allows you to seek that help without any stigma attached. No Blame, No Shame and No Questions Asked."



What is Kelly's message for parents of newborns who feel they can no longer care safely for their baby and may consider utilizing the Safe Havens Act?

"I would want them to know that they don't have to go through it by themselves. There are families that want to step up and take in a baby and provide the care they themselves aren't able to give for whatever reason," she replied.

Kelly doesn't know her son's parents because biological parents using the Safe Haven Act can remain anonymous which is a large part of why the law is effective.

"I don't know our son's mom's story, but I know she made a really loving choice to give him up if she didn't feel she was to take care of him at that time. But there are loving homes that do want to support them in that way," Kelly stated.



Kelly said fostering definitely comes with some challenges and sacrifices but it's more than worth it. "I have seen my own girls grow so much in the process and I think it's been the best parenting decision that we've ever made," she said.

Each year, DCF educates the public on an ongoing basis about the existence of the Safe Haven law because every year there emerges a new group of parents who may not have been exposed to earlier messages about the law.



Here is how Connecticut's Safe Havens Act works:

- The law enables a parent to bring an infant 30 days or younger to a hospital emergency room and avoid prosecution for abandonment.
- The law states that parents who do not harm their newborn cannot be criminally charged if they bring their baby to a safe place.
- A nurse will ask the parent for their name and for medical information on the infant and parent. The parent does not have to provide that information.
- DCF will obtain custody and place the baby with a family who is already licensed and intends to adopt the baby. In one instance, a Safe Haven baby was placed into a permanent home of a relative.
- DCF will provide support to the baby's new family while terminating the biological parent's parental rights so that the adoption can become final.
- Connecticut law requires that a child can only be placed by DCF with a person licensed to provide foster or adoptive care.

**Interested in becoming a foster or adoptive parent?** Please contact 1-888-KID-HERO and visit [CT Fosters: Foster Care & Adoption Services](#).

Learn more about Connecticut's [Safe Havens Act for Newborns](#).

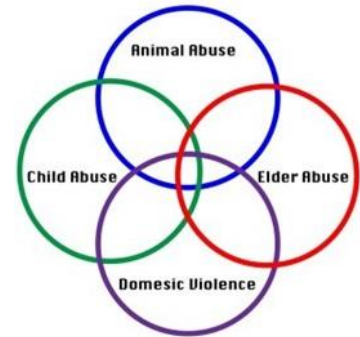
## "The Link" between Animal Cruelty, Child Maltreatment, and other forms of Violence



April is Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Month. Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, Chief Administrator of Behavioral Health and Wellbeing Dr. Nicole Taylor, Commissioner of the Department of Agriculture Bryan Hurlburt, Legislators, and other community partners, recently brought attention to the strong correlation between animal cruelty, child maltreatment and other forms of interpersonal violence – referred to as “The Link.”

Connecticut has taken proactive steps to address "The Link," and passed [a law](#) in 2011 requiring a coordinated agency response involving the Department of Agriculture (DOAG) and Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Expanded in 2014, the law requires DCF staff and state, regional, and municipal Animal Control Officers (ACO) to work together to “cross report” to DOAG when they reasonably suspect that animal cruelty and child abuse and neglect has occurred. Conversely, as part of this law, DOAG is mandated to forward all animal cruelty reports to DCF for assessment and possible commencement of an investigation to determine the safety of children in the home who may have been exposed to animal cruelty.



"Just like our children, animals are extremely vulnerable to abuse and neglect regardless of the community in which they reside. And just like our children, we must do everything we can to protect them from acts of cruelty," said DCF Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly. "That is why for this reason, we are being proactive about increasing staff knowledge, enhancing data collection, and strengthening the cross-reporting partnership with DOAG to address the 'Link' relationship. This includes mandatory training of our frontline staff, so they know exactly what to look for when visiting a home. We are grateful to this administration, our DOAG counterparts and our advocacy partners for their support in working to protect the most vulnerable members of our communities."



**DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE**

“Through our collaborative approach with DCF and other state and municipal partners we are working to increase education and outreach of the connection between child abuse and animal cruelty. The cross-reporting tools have been integral in ensuring the wellbeing of children and animals,” said DOAG Commissioner Bryan P. Hurlburt.

In 2023, DOAG sent DCF more than 90 reports to DCF while, in that same year, DCF sent a total of 60 reports to DOAG. Last year, "The Link" was apparent with 17 percent of reports meeting the standard for an abuse/neglect investigation based on the initial information provided in the written report.

The state has seen demonstrated increases in animal cruelty reports over the past several years due in part to increased education and outreach efforts by both DCF and DOAG. For example, DCF has made cross reporting a part of the agency's in-person and online mandated reporter training. More recently, across its 14 offices, DCF has also more than doubled the number of cross reporting liaisons who are responsible for helping to triage cases between DCF social workers and ACOs as well as provide monthly training and educational support to staff.



Here is the cross-reporting guide for DCF staff: [Cross Reporting Guide for DCF Staff](#)



Additionally, [Paws for Kids](#) is a partnership between DCF and the animal advocacy community to promote child and animal well-being through education, cross reporting efforts, marketing, and establishing Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) for DCF children with trauma.

A partner in these efforts, [Desmond's Army](#) Animal Law Advocates is a group of volunteers committed to impacting animal welfare legislation and raising public awareness regarding the statistical connection between animal abuse and domestic and social violence.

"Animal cruelty is a gateway crime to human violence. Research shows that animal abuse is linked to domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and other crimes against people. When animal crimes are addressed, our communities are safer," said Robin "Zilla" Cannamela, President / Co-Founder of Desmond's Army Animal Law Advocates.

The partnership between DOAG and DCF Careline continues to be strengthened to ensure reports are received immediately allowing DCF to proceed as necessary and DOAG to close the loop with local ACOs. This year, the agencies began collecting more comprehensive data on animal cruelty occurring in open/prior DCF cases to garner a more complete understanding of "The Link" relationship.



"To enhance the safety and well-being of children, animals, other family members and the community, it is incumbent on us all to identify and report cases of abuse as soon as possible," said Lt. Governor Bysiewicz. "I am grateful for the partnership and leadership of the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Agriculture in addressing these horrific offenses with a proactive, collaborative response."



A review of national research shows:

- Animals were harmed in 88% of homes where a child was physically abused.
- 75% of female survivors of domestic violence in one study reported their pets were threatened or intentionally harmed by their partner.
- Children exposed to domestic violence are three times more likely to be cruel to animals.
- 45% of caseworkers working with the elderly encountered animal abuse or neglect co-occurring with elder abuse.

Members of the public can make a reports of animal cruelty directly to the local Animal Control Department in the town where the concerns have been noted or by calling (860) 713-2506 as well as via e-mail at [AGR.AnimalControl@ct.gov](mailto:AGR.AnimalControl@ct.gov). Those wishing to make a report can remain anonymous.

A reasonable suspicion of child maltreatment can be made to the Child Abuse and Neglect Careline by dialing 1-800-842-2288. The Careline is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Callers to the Careline can remain anonymous.