

"Best of 2024"



Supporting and empowering families takes the collective efforts of all members of the community. This past year saw us experience significant accomplishments across all Divisions within the Department.

With sincere gratitude for your efforts, we present the "Best of 2024."

- Established the "Employee of the Month" award to honor staff demonstrating excellent performance and unique accomplishments.
- In collaboration with State Department of Education (SDE), Connecticut Education Association (CEA), Legislators, and community partners, changes were made to Connecticut's Mandated Reporter laws allowing for mandated reporters to conduct a "preliminary inquiry" to determine if reasonable cause exists for a report to be made, and immunity to such persons that, in "good faith," do not make a report.
- Established permanency for over 1,100 children including over 500 children reunified, 235 transfers of guardianship and 360 adoptions.
- Connecticut's 988 call network, implemented in partnership with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and United Way, received an award for consistently meeting national standards/benchmarks.
- The Children's Bureau approved Connecticut's 2025 - 2029 Child and Family Services Plan, which emphasizes the ABCD Safety Paradigm, Supervision, Continuous Quality Improvement, and an upcoming Scorecard to stay focused on DCF's 6 Strategic Focus Areas: Prevention, Safety, Permanency, Well-Being, Workforce, and Racial Justice.
- Commissioner Hill-Lilly co-authored a national article entitled, ["The Blame -and - Shame Cycle in Child Welfare Needs to End"](#) that reinforces safety decisions are not solely made by a single individual as they are only one part of a complex system.
- Governor Ned Lamont filmed two public service announcements to promote foster care and adoption.



- Selected as members of the Annie E. Casey Foundation - SOUL Family Framework Partnership Cohort aimed at improving permanency outcomes for older youth in foster care. SOUL Family stands for Support, Opportunity, Unity, and Legal Relationships.

- Established "Prevention" as the 6th Strategic Goal for the Department.

- Caregiver Advisory Council conducted a Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) presentation to Superior Court for Juvenile Matters Judges, Court Services Officers, Assistant Attorney General and DCF Legal Team and issued a Caregiver Legal Matters informational brochure.

- DCF was the recipient of the Adelbrook Community Partner Award.

- Enhanced Mandated Reporter training to include the "Seeking Support is a Sign of Strength" Roadmap video for community partners.

- Commenced the filming of Commissioner monthly videos to provide staff an update on Agency operations.

- The Transitional Supports and Success Division (TSS) held a youth designed skill-building forum named "Building Wings" for young adults in care focused on three areas chosen by young adults--housing, finances, relationships.

- Partnered with the Governor's office to create the first Suicide Prevention Round Table.

- Solnit North and Solnit South Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) achieved accreditation from The Joint Commission (TJC).

- Developed a new training through the Contracts Unit targeted for non-profit community-based providers, especially grassroots and minority owned agencies, who are motivated to partner with DCF in the delivery of services and learning more about the procurement process.

- Partnered with youth to create a training package on serving LGBTQIA+ young adults and trained over 150 staff members along with young leaders.

- Launched a Working Group with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), alongside the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) focused on improving



outcomes for caregivers with substance use disorders and young children and eliminating ingestion injuries.

- Supported legislation that enhances the role of DCF Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) and clarifies what can be shared publicly regarding DCF's involvement with a family.
- Regularly collaborated with Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (CSSD) to discuss critical cases, shared training opportunities, emerging themes and improving overall communication.
- Social Work Supervisor Jeanette Morrison received the 2024 Janet E. Williams Humanitarian Award.
- Community Partner engagement viewed as a strength by the Children's Bureau during the CFSR Listening Sessions.
- Community Outreach Coordinator Jacqueline Ford was nominated for a Fox 61 and United Way "Impact Award," the "Shero" award and the Nestar 2024 "Connecticut Remarkable Woman of the Year" Award.
- The "Ready to Foster" campaign was developed to recruit new foster and adoptive parents. [Ready to Foster.](#)
- Collaborated with Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Commissioner's Office to Initiate Partnerships with State Colleges/Universities to Facilitate a Pathway for LPNs to Complete Educational Requirements to Achieve RN License.
- In partnership with Yale, UCONN, University of Hartford, Connecticut State Community College and others, Solnit Hospital continues to offer Clinical Rotational Experiences for Psychology Doctorate fellows, Psychiatry MD Fellows and Residents, Social Work interns and Nursing professionals from the ASN level to the APRN level.
- Established Post Consent Decree workgroups to provide recommendations leading to more efficient case practice and work responsibilities.
- Urban Community Alliance, in Partnership with DCF, launched the Racial Justice Institute (RJI) statewide pilot to identify and improve the disparities for Black and Brown children in placement found in DCF's care.
- Social Worker and foster parent Elizabeth Saez received the 2024 "Elevate and Celebrate" award for her extraordinary dedication to foster care advocacy given by the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) of the Youth Law Center.



- Created the "This is DCF" training to inform new hires, community members and others a comprehensive view of the vast mandates and activities of the Department well beyond simply the protective services mandate.
- Partnered with young adults and a provider partner to create a social media app that keeps young adults linked with caregivers and loved ones and connects them with essential resources.
- Created the Director of Child Safety Practice and Performance position.
- Finalized legal permanency for 40 children on Connecticut Adoption Day.
- The Legal Division, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office, the Chief Administrative Judge for Juvenile Matters and the Office of the Chief Public Defender, addressed permanency delays, including the implementation of a pilot mediation program in the New Britain and Hartford Juvenile Courts to expedite reunification.
- Began a partnership with Wilderness School alumni who are establishing a 5013c, to form a non-profit entity that will raise funds for scholarships and support school activities.
- Within the Health Management and Oversight Division (HMO), Nurses continued their work on standardization of their Nursing practice across the Department.
- Parents and Youth with Lived Expertise, along with DCF personnel, represented the Department at the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors' Pathways to Partnership New England Regional convenings on an annual basis to learn more about how our system can ensure parents and youth feel more included, heard, and respected.
- Partnered with Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) and Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC) to ensure proper support to those who are affected by Intimate Partner Violence.
- Implemented fast-track beds at the Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs) to provide streamlined access for youth in the state with urgent behavioral health needs.
- Labor Relations Business Partners maintained consistent support of the Department despite significant staffing and personnel challenges - without interruption.
- Received approval of the Annual DCF Affirmative Action Plan.



- Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam and family were featured in the "Spotlight on What's Right" newsletter as an adoptive family and filmed a video promoting foster care and adoption. [The Arulampalam's Adoption Journey](#)
- Racial Justice work was highlighted in the "Dismantling Structural Racism within CT State Government" Report created by the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health/CT General Assembly.
- Launched the Office of Diversity and Equity Newsletter.
- Juvenil Justice Educational Unit (JJEU) conducted 55 transitional meetings this calendar year with students reentering their school communities. These meetings typically include participation from students, parents/guardians, school personnel, probation officers, and community partners to ensure a smooth and supportive transition process.
- Created the Racial Equity Learning Collaborative.
- Child Welfare Bureau onboarded over 200 new Social Workers and Social Work Trainees into the Department.
- Conducted a statewide Safety Practice Audit and enhanced our performance on safety through the ABCD Child Safety Practice Model.
- Established an intentional focus on the 0-5 population, increased our emphasis on supervision, and improved the tracking mechanism for children identified as conditionally safe or unsafe through the In-Home Combination report.
- Reestablished the Community and Court Liaison positions in every Region to improve collaboration with the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) to support youth dually involved with DCF and the Juvenile Justice system.
- Finalized enhancements to the CAPTA/CARA newborn reporting portal to improve ease of use for birthing hospitals submitting notifications.
- Created the youth advisory board on-boarding and training package designed to strengthen youth skills and knowledge base and widen the breadth of youth serving on leadership boards.



- Developed a comprehensive Careline Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and Educational Professionals Investigation Unit (EPIU) Fatherhood Practice Guide and implemented Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) initiatives.

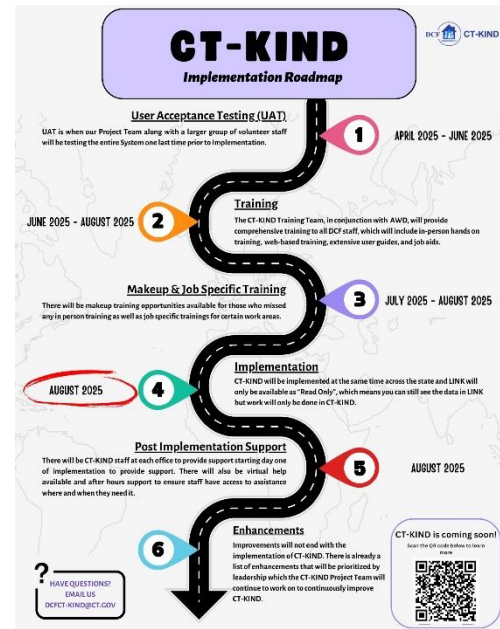


- Gladys Ortiz, an Intake Social Worker in the Norwich Office, was awarded the William Rivera Humanitarian Award.
- Careline personnel co-presented with State Department of Education (CSDE) at a "Talk Tuesday" session on updates to Mandated Reporter laws, abuse/neglect criteria, and prevention strategies.
- With assistance and support from internal divisions, community, and providers, the Foster Care Division (FCD) ensured that every child needing care had a safe and secure setting.
- Created specialized trainings entitled "Cultivating Change through: Context, Consciousness and Community" and "Civility in the Workplace," through the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Diversity and Equity.
- Collaborated with the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to address the emerging needs of children and youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (IDD).
- Continued implementation of the Kinship Navigation Program (C-KIN) staffed with individuals with lived expertise.
- Solnit Hospital was awarded Joint Commission Hospital Reaccreditation for the next three years. Solnit Hospital's referral to admission time in 2024 has decreased by over 55% from 33 days to an average of 15 days.
- Super Region 1 & 5 focused on enhancing external partnerships by increasing the number of Out-Posted Staff.
- Super Region 2 & 3 continued focus on working with the 0-5 Population with an emphasis on safety and risk and creating a sound assessment of safety while supporting families.
- Super Region 4 & 6 continued an intentional focus on Staff Wellness and Retention through the development of worker support groups, matching trainees to peer mentors



and wellness breakfast events sponsored by one of the local churches within our community.

- Continued to participate in the National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS) learning collaborative with a mission to improve child safety and prevent child maltreatment fatalities.
- Research and Evaluation team unit supported the Juvenile Justice Education Unit (JJEU), while working on priority research, evaluation and quality improvement projects such as the DCF Scorecard.
- The Quality Improvement Leadership Team (QuILT) commenced an active and consistent cycle of improvement within our system (Plan Do Study Act Study Act) to ensure that system level changes are meeting the needs of children and families we serve.
- Launched a new Realistic Job Preview Video as part of the Human Resources interview process.
- Began implementation of Naloxone training for all Agency staff.
- Successfully administered and debriefed the Intercultural Development Inventory tool for 2024 Mentoring cohort.
- Completed design work for CT-KIND system including the development of multiple modules with the remaining to be completed in the upcoming year.
- Virtual Academy partnered with the Juvenile Justice Educational Unit (JJEU) to allow students to recover credit throughout their time in secure facilities resulting in 4 different students obtaining credits directly contributing to their graduation during the 2024 year.
- Adopted new foster care pre-licensing curriculum - National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) - based on research and input from experts Including families who have experience with fostering or adoption.
- Human Resources Business Partners processed 418 new hires and 95 promotions.

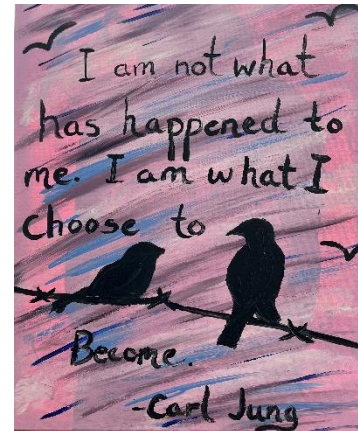


- Worked with Central Department of Administrative Services (DAS), Human Resources and DCF Leadership to Transition Requests for Accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) to the Centralized Statewide ADA Review Unit.
- Bureau of Information Technology (BITS) Business Partners completely replaced the DCF Intranet website with a modern SharePoint based site that better connects staff to online resources with enhanced usability and search functionality.
- Redesigned the DCF Centralized Reporting Portal allowing staff to more easily search for reports and see descriptions in a more helpful way.
- The Torrington office created a Mentoring Program brochure which included topics on Racial Justice, Implicit Bias, and Child Safety.
- Engaged with hundreds of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to design and test CT-KIND to ensure it meets the Agency's expectations.
- Collaborated with the New England States Hotlines and Centralized Intake Divisions to promote child abuse/neglect screening best practices.
- Meriden Office Director Maritza Acosta was named the "Madrina" for the Waterbury Puerto Rican Day Parade, honored by the Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (CALAS) with the "Outstanding Community Advocate Award" and received an award for "Advocacy" from the Rivera Memorial Foundation Inc.
- The Juvenile Justice Education Unit (JJEU) facilitated opportunities for students in Juvenile Justice facilities to participate in vocational training at local technical high schools. Through this program, students can earn industry-recognized certifications, preparing them for future careers.
- DCF Commissioner and Executive Team members met regularly with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to discuss the Agency's Safety Practice and Quality Improvement efforts.
- Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) units established in September 2023 successfully completed over 100 CQI reviews using the CFSR case review instrument and were approved by the Children's Bureau to conduct state-led CFSR reviews to be held between October 2024 and March 2025.



- Enhanced the contract Program Performance Management process resulting in better provider accountability.
- The Manchester Office partnered with the Centralized Transportation Unit (CTU) to create a pilot leading to an easier way for staff to secure transportation services.
- Developed an Out Posting Guide for Area Offices to ensure consistency throughout the state and to enhance our presence within local communities.

- DCF Service Directory has been upgraded to provide information about the DCF contracted and credentialed services, including names of gatekeepers, providers, and information about each program including direct links to 211, Maps, AIM tool, Community based support by Area and DCF contracted service comparison grids.



- Solnit Hospital was selected, by a competitive process, to be an AFFIRM Pro site for the Center of Excellence on LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health Equity. Each selected site has been awarded a certification opportunity paid for by the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- Administered a statewide Safe & Sound Cultural Assessment Survey measuring workplace connectedness, mindful organizing, psychology safety, and racial justice.
- Established the first Wellness Leadership Forum that created an opportunity to gain tips on taking care of ourselves with a renewed focus on our leadership's well-being in order to develop wellness strategies to support our staff at all levels.

- Completed Season 2 of Real Talk: A Podcast on Well-Being, a partnership between the Office of Academy for Workforce Development (AWD) and the Office of Organizational Development.



- Successfully passed all our legislative initiatives in the 2024 session, including critical updates to our mandated reporter laws.
- Maintained excellent response to families, youth, foster/adoptive parents and community members who made inquiries, questions and complaints through the Office of Community Relations (OCR) including resolving constituent cases for state and federal officials with the Government Relations Division.

- Agency was invited to participate in the fourth cohort of the Children's Health Leadership Network (CHLN). Supported by the Casey Foundation, this is a national leadership network and a collaborative effort of multiple agencies including DCF, Department of Social Services (DSS), Court Support Services Division (CSSD) and the Child Health Development Institute, (CHDI).
- Engineering successfully transitioned the Fuel Cell Plant management and oversight at Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS) from a private company to DCF in-house personnel.
- Centralized Transportation Unit (CTU) selected RouteGenie has been selected as their routing and scheduling software provider.
- Established the L.E.A.D. Mentoring Program Reunion to celebrate the power of mentorship.
- Juvenile Justice Educational Unit (JJEU) has led and facilitated professional development sessions for staff at Juvenile Justice facilities across the state. These sessions have focused on best instructional practices, strategies for meeting the needs of special education students, and techniques for supporting English language learners in the classroom.
- DCF Police Department served as the Agency liaison for several Federal and State audits regarding compliance with the use of Criminal Justice Information (CJI) and mandated CJIS security awareness training. DCF was found to be 100% compliant for each audit that was performed.
- Social Worker Jasmine Hawes from the Manchester Office was provided the "Clark Kent Positive Impact Award" created by a father experiencing incarceration.
- Legal Division, in collaboration with our Central Office, Facility and Area Office teams, provided legal support in furtherance of DCF's mission that included providing and streamlining the legal consultation process in the Area Offices and partnering with the Area Office management teams to implement new legislation related to Juvenile Court proceedings.
- Continued to engage with media partners to provide proactive and positive stories about the Department's work and collaborative efforts across Connecticut.
- Health Management and Oversight Division (HMO) Racial Justice Committee began their Change Initiative 2.0 - Commenced the Health Literacy project, a collaboration with the



HMO, other statewide Divisions, Area Offices as well as the Youth Advisory Board, identifying common themes that the youth and young adults face in managing their healthcare.

- Director of Immigration Practice has developed additional trainings and consultation resources related to immigration issues to meet the growing needs of this population.
- Children's Behavioral Health Community Service Division (CBHCCS) continued collaboration across Divisions to enhance Substance Use education and training, with an emphasis on promoting a recovery-oriented approach, paying attention to language, bias and stigma.
- Participated in National Prevention Week a collaboration with multiple state agencies on messaging and events to educate members of the community about what they can do to support themselves and their children.
- Established the DCF Fatherhood Steering Committee, which includes fathers with former involvement with DCF, foster and adoptive fathers and community fathers, to advocate for the inclusion of fathers and father figures in child, youth, and family policies by leveraging their lived experiences to shape effective programs, policies and practices within DCF.
- Launched the Multidimensional Family Treatment and Recovery (MDFTR) program in the Norwich DCF Office as a demonstration of a new treatment program for pregnant persons and caregivers of young children (age 0-6) who have problems connected to substance use.
- Continued implementation of Urgent Crisis Centers and SubAcute Crisis Stabilization Center.
- Partnered with Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to promote work with "Connecting Schools to Care," "Suicide Prevention Awareness" and other trainings.
- Began an online, on-demand interactive training for educators entitled, "DCF Introduction to Child Trafficking in Connecticut for Schools."
- Continued the Executive Fellowship Program (EFP) for Senior Leaders at DCF, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) and now the Department of Social Services (DSS).



- A coordinated effort between Behavioral Health, Child Welfare, Foster Care Division, Systems, Nursing, and the Clinical Regional Resource Group resulted in the development of a response to urgent/emergency placement crisis needs to help streamline communication, coordination and support for children based on their individual/unique needs.
- Continued to conduct real time Critical Incident reviews and more in-depth Special Qualitative Reviews of certain child fatalities and near-fatalities.
- Continuing to engage and include contracted and non-contracted providers involved with a family in the DCF teaming process to ensure coordinated communication and information sharing.
- Engaged with Legislators throughout the year with invitations to key Department activities, providing them DCF materials and improved timeliness of response to constituent questions.
- Remained in frequent contact with leadership from state employee Labor Unions to answer questions and clarify operational procedures for their members throughout the Department.
- Coordinated the Leadership Academy for Social Work Supervisors (LASS), Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM), the Executive Fellowship Program (EFP), and the nationally recognized Mentoring program to develop staff both personally and professionally.
- Staff across multiple Divisions were interviewed by print, radio, and television media regarding their expertise as subject matter experts.
- Administration of the Careline CAPTA/CARA portal received national recognition.
- Celebrated the graduation of two students from the DCF/UConn Child Welfare and Protection Track 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.
- Reinforced cross-reporting protocols with the Department of Agriculture (DOG) which resulted in greater protection of both children and animals within our communities.



- Production continued the DCF "Doors to Hope and Healing" cable access television show, reaching over 60,000 households in New Britain, Avon, Farmington, and surrounding towns.
- Remained a leader across the country for our work with survivors of Child Sex Trafficking and collaboration with Law Enforcement.
- The Olive Branch continued supporting and empowering families by providing gifts and other tangible items throughout the year.
- Held the first of its kind "UConn School of Social Work and Department of Children and Families Research Forum Symposium."
- Strengthened engagement of fathers and promoted more comprehensive assessments of fathers as an integral component of case planning.
- Established Commissioner priorities of enhancing the safety practice and service provision for the 0-5 population and transitional aged youth, deepen local partnerships, enhance the framework for behavioral health and provide supports for staff across divisions.
- "Best Day by Par" event brought together fathers of all kids for a round of golf to celebrate the critical role they play in the life of child.
- Created Announced/Unannounced Visitation Guidance.
- Juvenile Justice Educational Unit (JJEU) implemented the STAR assessment in all Juvenile Justice facilities to evaluate students' reading and math levels. This data allows schools to tailor instruction more effectively to meet the individual needs of the students we serve.
- Solnit Hospital celebrated the many talents of youth with an Annual Talent Show featuring superstar adolescents singing, dancing, playing instruments and even performing magic acts under the mentorship of our Music Therapist and the Rehabilitation Department.
- Developed a Trainee to Intake Training Plan outlining the steps necessary to support a successful transition of staff into Investigations.
- Established a Director of Nursing 1 position to work with the Director of Nursing 2 with a focus on providing increased support to the RRG nurses in the regions.



- Collaborated with media partners across the state and within diverse platforms to promote positive stories enhancing the image of the Agency.