

A Message from Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly



Thank you for an **AMAZING** first year of serving as your Commissioner! As a Social Worker Trainee 36 years ago, I never would have imagined my journey would bring me here.

We have accomplished so much so quickly. Please read the "**Best of 2024**" in our Spotlight on What's Right newsletter to see many of **OUR successes!**

While it takes a "**Village**" to raise a child, it also takes a "**Village**" to support our

Agency.

A special **THANK YOU** to **Governor Ned Lamont**, our sister **State Agencies, Legislators, Contracted Providers, Community Partners, Advocates, Media Colleagues, Statewide and Regional Advisory Councils** and of course - **Parents and Youth with Lived Expertise** - for partnering with us!



It truly takes our collective efforts to **support and empower** Connecticut's families.



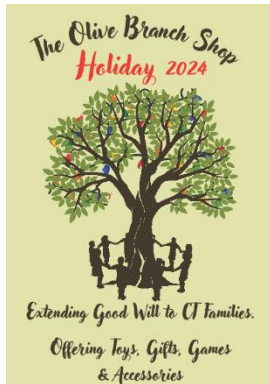
The Holiday Season is now upon us. Whether it's the **Celebration of Lights (Hanukkah)**, **Celebration of Christ's birth (Christmas)**, the annual Celebration of **African American life (Kwanzaa)**, or a celebration extended through to the 12th Day of **Christmas El Día de los Reyes (Three Kings Day)**, other observances, or no celebration at all, let's hope the season brings peace **love and joy** to us all!

Did you know the **Winter Solstice** marks the first day of winter and the shortest day of the year?

"**Home for the Holidays**" is a theme of this month. We should be proud that over **1,100 children** will be home with their permanent families this year. That includes over **500 children reunified, 235 transfers of guardianship and 360 adoptions.**



The permanency numbers do not tell the whole story as thousands of children were able to **remain safely at home** and were never separated from their parents as the collaborative work between **DCF and our community partners** made this possible for children across Connecticut.



Families were aided again this year by "shopping" at **The Olive Branch in South Glastonbury**. It is open to families year-round who are receiving in-home services from DCF and youth in group home and independent living settings. By using the **unique approach** of having **families pick out gifts themselves for** their children, it makes the holidays even more meaningful.

The **generosity of our DCF staff** was seen as approximately **100 coats for men, women and children** were donated to the **Academy for Workforce Development Wellness Coat Drive**. This was the 3rd successful drive with all items being donated to [Button Up Connecticut](#).

A couple of **Santas and Mrs. Claus** were present during many of the **Foster Care Division** holiday parties. Can you guess who is behind the beards?



Our **licensed caregivers** are **incredible** people who each day welcome not just our children - but also their parents - into their families. **Thank you!**



Lots of miles were put on the State vehicle again this month as the listening tours brought me to the **Bridgeport, Torrington and New Haven Offices**. It was both great seeing you and hearing your ideas to move our work forward.....and to see those "**Brag Sheets**."

Thank you to our **Careline, Solnit South Hospital and our Solnit South and Solnit North PRTFs** who will be working non-stop during the Holidays! You are there **24/7 and 365** days a year! This work could not be done without you!



A shout out one more time to the **November Employees of the Month!** Who has been nominated to receive the **December Award?** Read on.....



Speaking of incredible employees, foster parents and people, congratulations to **Elizabeth Saez** who is the **2024 "Elevate and Celebrate"** honoree for her extraordinary dedication to foster care advocacy given by the **Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) of the Youth Law Center**. She was one of six people nationwide to be recognized for her outstanding contributions to

improving Child Welfare services. Elizabeth has **fostered more than 100 children**, with **focus on teens aged 12 to 17 years**. Congratulations!

Maria Rosa Kelley is a **Transitional Aged Youth (TAY)** who once again is advocating for change. Now a graduate student at the University of Connecticut, she took part in the **Foster Youth Internship Program**, a group of eight former foster youth who have completed congressional internships. **Read her proposal** to improve the lives of siblings placed in multiple states: [Assessing Interstate Sibling Connections | The Imprint](#)



Governor Lamont and I visited the **Wadsworth Atheneum** with a number of Connecticut's youth. They loved it and how special it was for them to freely interact with the **leader of our state** in such a personable way while discussing with me their **hopes and dreams** about their future. I thank the Governor for his continued support of our Agency!

Watch the **Governor's Foster Care PSA** here: [Foster Care](#)

"Vision and Leadership - Rising to the Occasion" was the title of my presentation at the Southwest Community Health Center's **Third Annual Human Rights Summit**. I was honored to speak about my career journey, the essential "ingredients" to success and the realities we all face while **leading organizations**.

Dr. Nicole Taylor was with the **Governor** while visiting the **Family Bridge** program at Bridgeport Hospital. Family Bridge is a free service for families with **new babies** in Connecticut to ease their transition from hospital to home. [Family Bridge](#) offers at-home visits from **Registered Nurses** and certified **Community Health Workers**.



Congratulations to **Carelon Behavioral Health** who celebrated the **10-Year Anniversary of**



ACCESS Mental Health for Youth!

The program offers free, **timely consultation to PCPs** seeking assistance in treating youth with **behavioral health** concerns under the age of 22 years, regardless of insurance. Learn more about the



program here: [ACCESS Mental Health](#)



Thank you to the **Department of Corrections** for donating hundreds of toys and other gifts for our families in the New Britain Office! Your **partnership** is so greatly appreciated!

A **Commissioner's Monthly Video** will now be provided to keep you updated on Agency operations. Watch **December's** again here: [Commissioners December 2024 Video](#)



While we celebrate this holiday season, for some, this will be an especially difficult time. We will forever hold close our **DCF family members** that we lost this year - **Carlton White, Sheila Garlington, Gina Mangano and David Holley**. May our thoughts remain with their families and to all families who are grieving a loss this holiday season.

My wish for all of you this year is one filled with much **happiness**, a **work/life balance** which allows you to enjoy and experience **life to its fullest**, and **feelings of great satisfaction** in the work you do each day.

Happy Holidays everyone!