

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!

Agency.

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

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.



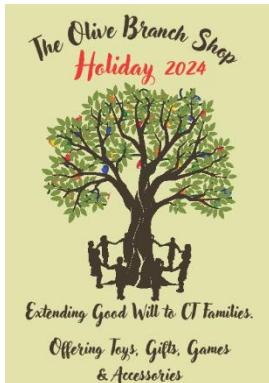
The Holiday Season is now upon us. Whether it's the **Celebration of Lights (Hanukkah)**, **Celebration of Christ's birth (Christmas)**, the annual **Celebration of African American life (Kwanzaa)**, or a celebration extended through to the 12th Day of **Christmas El Día de los Reyes (Three Kings Day)**, 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!

"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.
- Juvenile 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.

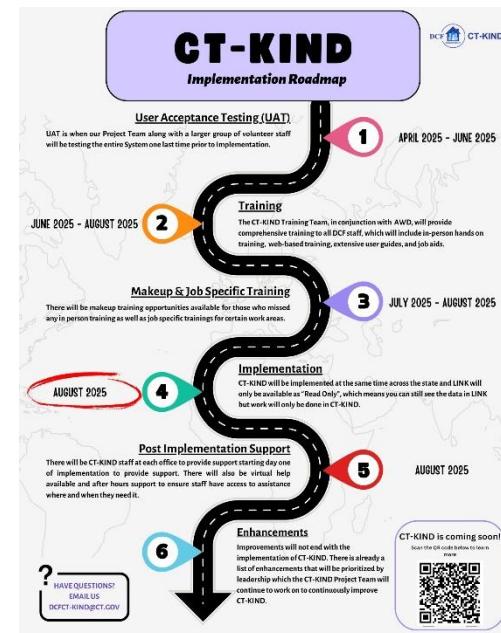


- Developed a comprehensive Careline Special Investigations Unit (SIU) and Educational Professionals Investigation Unit (EPIU) Fatherhood Practice Guide and implemented Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) initiatives.
- Gladys Ortiz, an Intake Social Worker in the Norwich Office, was awarded the William 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.

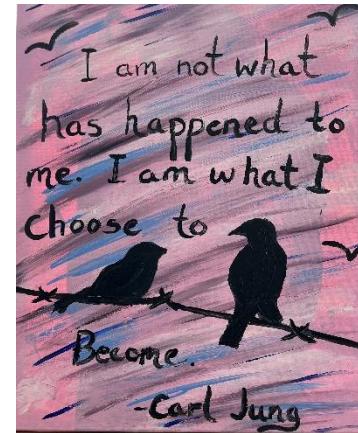
- Continued to participate in the National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS) learning collaborative with a mission to improve child safety and prevent child maltreatment fatalities.
- Research and Evaluation team unit supported the Juvenile Justice Education Unit (JJEU), while working on priority research, 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.



Employee of the Month Awards!

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

Rocco Carbone - Careline

We are excited to recognize Rocco Carbone, Social Worker at the Careline as our Employee of the Month! Rocco consistently demonstrates a strong work ethic, making a significant impact on our team and the families we serve. He is always ready to take the lead, offering support to his colleagues and fostering a positive, collaborative environment. He has actively participated as a champion, a subject matter expert (SME) and tester in the development of CT-KIND. Rocco's dedication to producing high-quality work is evident in everything he does. His attention to detail ensures that he consistently delivers detailed reports. Additionally, his positivity and willingness to lend a hand make him the epitome of a team player. Rocco regularly steps up to assist others and continuously works to improve practices within the Careline. Rocco, we deeply appreciate your commitment to teamwork, hard work, and your unwavering support. Your efforts make a significant difference at Careline, and we are grateful for all your contributions!

Kinshasa Alston - Bridgeport Area Office

It is with pleasure that Kinshasa "Kinsha" Alston, Social Worker, is nominated as employee of the month. Kinsha is a long-time employee of DCF. Kinsha is always a staunch advocate for her families. She is always very detailed and ensures that her work is timely, and accurate. She works extremely well with our external partners and has a stellar reputation in the community. She is always willing to lend a helping hand to her co-workers and answers the call of duty every day without fail. Kinsha recently received an accolade from one of our most trusted child abuse doctors at Yale New Haven Hospital, Dr. Andrea Asnes, outlining Kinsha's dedication to her role in child welfare. Dr. Asnes worked with Kinsha on a suspected medical neglect investigation and Dr. Asnes was so impressed with Kinsha's steadfast commitment to family advocacy, her attention to detail, and the energy she brings to her work. Dr. Asnes outlined that this was a family challenged with poverty and by the fact that both parents were young, have recently arrived in the US, and are undocumented, Kinsha went out of her way to gather every medical detail for the child involved, and in doing so, learned that both parents had tried to do the right thing and that the healthcare system had let them down. Instead of substantiating the medical neglect that was



alleged, Kinsha is now championing the needs of the family. Kinsha embodies the very best values of DCF and truly puts families first.

Brenin White - Norwalk Area Office

The Norwalk Office is thrilled to recognize Brenin White, Investigator Social Worker, as our Employee of the Month. For the past 15 years, Brenin White has been an integral part of our team, embodying dedication and passion in everything he does. His heart is truly in his work, and it shows through his unwavering commitment to excellence and his drive to go above and beyond every day. But it's not just his hard work that sets him apart—it's the way he cares about his coworkers. Brenin fosters a sense of camaraderie and support, making those around him feel valued and appreciated. Brenin chose the field of social work to help children and families and connect with others who shared similar goals. Brenin provides a supportive environment for new and seasoned staff which provides a strong sense of belonging and fosters meaningful work relationships. His infectious personality and positive attitude bring joy to the workplace, creating an environment where everyone feels uplifted. We are incredibly grateful to have someone like Brenin on our team. Congratulations on this well-deserved recognition and thank you for 15 amazing years of service!

Saverio Mancini - Waterbury Area Office

We would like to recognize Saverio Mancini, Social Worker, as Employee of the Month. To us, Saverio is the Employee of the Year. He is an excellent Adolescent worker who will go above and beyond the call of what is being asked of him, for his youth. Saverio is the voice for the youth on his caseload and will speak on their behalf- ALWAYS. He knows what is in their best interest and will step in even at times when the youth might be going through a difficult period becoming their anchor by standing alongside them. Saverio never gives up on his youth and encourages the youth to do the same. Despite the ups and downs and the high demands on workers, Saverio has risen to the top to make sure that all the needs of his youth are met. He has been able to develop long lasting relationships with his youth and they TRUST him, which gives our youth a brighter perspective of the DCF system. He is a mentor to new social workers within the office. Helping, guiding, and encouraging them, when needed. He is also a big part of the SUN Scholars Program and this past August 2024; he dedicated his time and chaperoned a trip to Peru with his youth and other adolescents throughout the state. Saverio gained an amazing and humbling experience being in Peru as well as support his youth and others, while there. The Beauty, Diversity and Resourcefulness of the Peruvian people left a lasting impression and was truly an inspirational experience both will never forget. Saverio is a champion and will always access risk and safety without judgement.



Irving Amaral - Danbury Area Office

Irving Amaral is a Social Worker Trainee who began his employment with the Department on 7/12/24. He acclimated well to agency needs and expectations, as he eventually inherited cases with multiple tasks and assignments, most of which were past due. Irving efficiently addressed the outstanding tasks in a timely time manner, which heavily contributed to children achieving timely permanency. Irving is a quick learner and is receptive to constructive criticism with a desire to learn. His documentation is clear, detailed, and concise. He is a strong advocate for the children and families on his case load, evidenced by his relentless advocacy. He is efficient, dependable, and seemingly maintains continuity of a positive attitude. Irving has worked tirelessly to provide the children and families on his case load with quality services and ensures that families receive the most appropriate services to meet their individual needs. During his time with the agency, Irving has established and maintained positive relationships with his families and providers. He demonstrates a strong passion for CPS and appears genuinely vested regarding his work with children and families served by the Department.

Evelyn Maldonado - Torrington Area Office

Evelyn Maldonado, Social Work Case Aide is nominated at Employee of the Month. She has been with the agency for 29+ years and has no plans of slowing down. Evelyn consistently demonstrates dedication, professionalism, and unwavering commitment to DCF and the family's we serve. Evelyn is always available to help or assist a worker whenever in need. Evelyn is a tireless worker who does not bat an eye when asked to take on overtime after working a long day to help staff. Evelyn has demonstrated she is a true team player. We all can learn from Evelyn, not only from her work performance but also by her caring demeanor. Evelyn has outstanding critical thinking skills and can creatively work through challenges with ease. Evelyn's positive attitude and work ethic make her a vital part of the team. She continues to inspire us with her passion and love for this work. Evelyn is the lead (Santa's helper) for the toy drives in our area. She has elevated the toy drive to new levels ensuring our children receive gifts on Christmas day! Evelyn is that employee who goes above and beyond to help the office and the community we serve. We are thankful for having Evelyn and truly appreciate her kindness and support she provides to the Torrington office.



Tameka Saunders - New Haven Area Office

Tameka Saunders is an Investigations Social Worker in intake. Being a front-line worker takes courage, bravery to speak out and be consistent in order to meet the needs of families. She is resourceful, kind and understands how together we work better. Ms. Saunders took the lead in uplifting intake by introducing a snack cart and ensuring that investigators have opportunities to mix in this telework community. Ms. Saunders is diligent and getting her cases done, timely, and has been an advocate in the community and ensuring children and families' needs are met. Ms. Saunders is an example of what a DCF worker should be.

Tera Rucker and Tarvares Lloyd - Milford Area Office

Social Work Supervisor Tera Rucker and Social Worker Tarvares Lloyd as the Milford Office employees of the month for their teamwork on an extraordinarily challenging case. Tarvares and Tera have been diligently working as a team to ensure the needs of sibling group of 3 children who came into care on 11/6/24. Two of the girls, ages 6 and 12 are nonverbal, autistic, and have required daily transportation to and from their foster homes and daily childcare in the Milford DCF Office. Tera and Tarvares have also had to open the office on weekends and holidays to provide childcare to the girls and as well as go to the foster homes to assist the foster parents to provide care for the girls. They have both worked 6-7 days per week since the day the girls were removed and have either transported or provided childcare for them every day since then. When the children came into care, we knew very little information about them and Tarvares and Tera have had to quickly understand the children's likes, dislikes, and needs and respond with patience and understanding as the children struggled to adjust to their surroundings and people. Knowing the girls do best with consistency, Tarvares and Tera have continued to be involved in the daily childcare of the girls instead of passing the work off to other staff take to their place. They have embraced the ongoing challenges with a smile on their face, maintained a positive attitude and continued to show up every day to keep doing the work. There have been days when the workday started as early as 6 am and did not end until late into the evening, and they were both here in the office until the placement was secured and the children were placed. In addition to the work on this case, they were also managing the rest of SW Lloyd's caseload and SWS Rucker was managing her other responsibilities for her unit and her role as a Union Steward. The collaboration to ensure the safety and well-being of the children, included not only the CPS Team, but our Office Director and many other staff across the state. Without the advocacy and support the children would have been placed in a hospital setting and not had the opportunity to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with a family. My team have adopted my Motto "Teamwork makes the Dream Work" and I am proud and honored to have them be a part of Denise's Diamonds and recognize them for all their hard work and caring spirits.



Mallory Ducharme - Norwich Area Office

Mallory Ducharme, Social Worker, is nominated for employee of the month. Mallory has been employed with the Department for approximately seven years. During that time, Mallory has consistently gone above and beyond in the Norwich office. She is always quick to help her coworkers, whether that be through explaining how to complete something or helping with a case matter. Mallory is always the first worker to offer shadowing experience or giving helpful advice to trainees. She offers herself as a mentor to the newer staff, listening to their concerns and walking them through new experiences. In addition to mentoring trainees, she also consistently supervises an intern, a few who subsequently were hired by the Department. While providing hands-on learning experiences to trainees and interns, Mallory

consistently meets the demands of her caseload, timely and efficiently. She is an advocate for the families that she works with, as well as her coworkers.

Sarah Rygiel - Middletown Area Office

Sarah Rygiel, Social Worker, is being nominated for Employee of the Month on the great work she did on her S. L. case. Sarah became involved due to IPV with the parents and a safety plan was put in place. Father was communicative with Sarah throughout but then was arrested for this IPV incident. Sarah continued to engage him in services and a CRM. We then received an EC regarding one of the children receiving a head injury. Sarah continues to work this case with both parents and obtained information from the daycare as to what occurred. She actively remained involved, making visits to see the family as well as engaging with father who remained out of the home. Sarah has engaged with father and ensured that he is involved in services to be a part of his children's lives. He is involved in services and cooperating. Mother is now involved with VOCA and seeing a therapist. Both the parents appear to be on the right track in ensuring that they are involved with services and able to meet the needs of their children. Sarah always puts safety of children first. She is remarkable in engaging with families initially at our investigation ensuring that they are aware of our involvement and that they know child safety is first. She has built a lot of trust with parents who are cautious when involved with DCF is involved. She is a tremendous Social Worker, and I am happy to have her on my team.

Katie Roger - Willimantic Area Office

Katie Roger, Social Worker, is being chosen for Employee of Month due to her dedication to her families and her strong work ethic. She has managed several complex matters on her caseload with professionalism and consistent follow through. Katie is a strong advocate for her families, and she identifies their strengths as well as areas of need. Katie collaborates with peers, and offers and accepts assistance, to benefit the team. Katie is also an active member of the Diversity Action Team. She assisted with making the Pioneers of Change celebration for Hispanic Heritage month a huge success! Katie ensures that the entire office is made aware of upcoming DAT events. Her enthusiasm to keep everyone informed is noteworthy! Katie is personable, caring and a pleasure to work with! Thank you, Katie for all your hard work and contributions to our office!!



Amanda Orsi - Hartford Area Office

Amanda Orsi, Social Worker, is being nominated for Employee of the Month in recognition of her exceptional contributions to the FBR/BSF specialty unit. Amanda joined the team in 2021 and has quickly become an invaluable member. I had the privilege of supervising Amanda starting in 2022, and throughout this time, she has consistently demonstrated outstanding dedication and skill. Amanda has an excellent understanding of the unique needs of the families we serve and consistently works to meet those needs in a compassionate and effective manner. Her particular interest in working with families affected by substance misuse is especially noteworthy, as this aligns with her prior experience in the field before joining DCF. This focus has greatly benefited our unit and the families we support. In addition to her expertise in

substance misuse, Amanda has shown remarkable resilience in handling challenging cases, particularly those involving difficult parents. Amanda has one case in particular in which she has received numerous threats from the parents related to a termination of parental rights. Amanda has remained steadfast in her support of the CIP youth's desire to secure a permanency plan that ensures the youth's physical and psychological safety. Further, it should be noted that even when managing cases with significant nuances/complexities, Amanda approaches her work with children and families with professionalism, patience, and a commitment to achieving the best outcomes for the families that we service. Her ability to balance compassion with professionalism makes her an exceptional asset to our team, and I wholeheartedly recommend her for Employee of the Month.

Emily Diaz - Manchester Area Office

Emily Diaz, Social Worker, is being nominated as Employee of the Month for December. September and October were extremely busy and difficult months for Emily. Emily had multiple removals and one specific removal of three youth that are only Spanish speaking, and we had no relative placements for. This created night to night placement crossing the entire state for these children. Emily's perseverance and dedication to this work was seen everyday as she grew more and more exhausted. Despite this she continued to ensure that the kids got to school and had what they needed to be safe. She spent time speaking to each kid checking in and make sure that they were feeling ok. This was no easy task as there were what seemed to be endless nights waiting on placements till 8 or 9pm, having to keep the office open late as there were no placements identified, and the children were hungry and exhausted. Emily has kept her positive attitude, smile, and even laughter alive during this time. She was able to also have a team of peers assisting her with the numerous transports and placements. Her work on other cases seemed to be piling up with no letting up on crisis in sight. I am nominating Emily for employee of the month as her positive attitude and commitment to the families we serve goes above and beyond. At times, she has been so overwhelmed that I am sure she has felt that perhaps returning to DCF (after previously leaving) was not worth it. Although she still is digging out and recovering from this removal, she stays strong, works hard, and stays committed to ensuring that all her families are well.



Susan Brock - New Britain Area Office

Sue Brock, Social Work Supervisor, has been a valued member of the New Britain office for the past 12 years. Over those years, Sue has been instrumental in the overall functioning of the office. She regularly makes herself available to ensure that the team has what is needed to get the job done. In addition, she goes above and beyond in planning with our community partners to secure gifts and placements packets for the children and families we serve. One of the ISW recently shared this about Sue: Sue has always been a help to me, no matter the question or

problem. I am not even sure half of the things I ask of her are her actual job. Despite being pulled in a million directions on any given day, she finds the answer promptly.

Lorraine Perez - Meriden Area Office

The Meriden Office proudly nominates Social Worker Lorraine Perez for the Employee of the Month award. Lorraine has been a social worker for the Dept. for the last 17 years and for the last 8 years, she has been an adolescent social worker. We would like to recognize her exceptional efforts to support young adults significantly improving their well-being and achieving their personal goals. We appreciate Lorraine's tireless dedication, particularly when she took the initiative to represent the Meriden office as a Youth Coordinator for the Youth Advisory Board encouraging the youth to engage and participate. Recently, Lorraine ensured that one of her youths could attend the Governor's Holiday Party giving him a unique experience he truly enjoyed. Lorraine, thank you for your unwavering commitment to supporting our young adults every day and collaborating with community providers to help them meet their full potential. We are lucky to have you.

Pauline Rankins - PRTF (South)

Children Services Worker Pauline Rankins is Solnit South PRTF's December Employee of the Month. Pauline is a dedicated and passionate individual who has been nominated for EOM due to her unwavering commitment to the youth we serve and her active involvement in the community. Despite working third shift, she consistently finds time to give back and support those in need. She is a consistent team member who is client and community focused. Pauline's selfless spirit shines through in her leadership of the annual Adopt-A-Family initiative during the holiday season. Each year, she brings her coworkers together to help families in need by ensuring their children experience the joy of a memorable Christmas. By asking if anyone knows of a family struggling during the holidays, Pauline creates an opportunity for others to give back and pay it forward, encouraging a cycle of kindness and generosity. In addition to her holiday efforts, Pauline continues to make a lasting impact throughout the year, especially when it comes to creating special memories for youth. Through Operation Prom Time, she gathers gently used prom dresses, shoes, and accessories for young people in the Hartford area, ensuring they can experience the magic of prom without the financial burden. Her community-oriented mindset and ability to rally others to support these causes demonstrate her exceptional leadership and compassion. Pauline embodies the spirit of teamwork on campus and is truly an inspiration to all, using her time and resources to make a tangible difference in the lives of others.



Jodi Oakes - Fiscal

It is with great pride that the DCF Fiscal Business Office recognizes Jodi Oakes (Fiscal Administrative Officer) as Employee of the Month. In a short period of time, working at DCF, Jodi's has amazed Fiscal Supervisors and Managers by what she has accomplished. Her ability to manage her large workload of responsibilities, is nothing short of remarkable. (Including - Travel for Region 3 and 5, Tuition Reimbursement for the entire DCF, Union Funded Travel, Client Hotels, etc.) Jodi has even volunteered to help out in the DCF Payroll Office when staffing was short, due to vacancies. Jodi consistently delivers exceptional results while maintaining a level of professionalism and dedication that sets a standard of excellence. Her work ethic, efficiency, and attention to detail ensure that every task is completed with precision and care. Beyond her impressive skills, Jodi is a true team player who uplifts those around her with her positive attitude and willingness to support her colleagues. She exemplifies the value of hard work, resilience and commitment that make the BO stronger. Jodi is truly an unsung hero and has even shown great leadership qualities in the DCF Fiscal Business Office. For these reasons and more, Jodi is selected as DCF Fiscal Business Office "Employee of the Month" for December!

Yvette Cortez - Behavioral Health Family and Community Services Division

Program Supervisor Yvette Cortez is being recognized by the Behavioral Health Community Services Division for her contributions to further our state's Children's Mental Health system. Recently, Yvette has taken a leading role in enhancing postvention responses following the untimely deaths of youth by suicide. Throughout this initiative, she has identified areas for improvement and implementing effective solutions while collaborating with key stakeholders. Yvette has worked diligently to strengthen the connection between the Regional Suicide Advisory Boards, Regional School Safety Coordinators, and Mobile Crisis Teams, ensuring a coordinated and effective postvention response. Additionally, she has partnered with Mobile Crisis to raise awareness of their services across Connecticut, ensuring that families are informed and supported. Yvette has also worked closely with the Mobile Crisis Performance Improvement Center to analyze data and address any disparities, taking targeted steps to improve outcomes. Her has been integral in assessing program processes, gathering stakeholder feedback, and introducing innovative strategies which has the potential to make a significant impact. Beyond her work with Mobile Crisis, Yvette also supports the Behavioral Health Community Services Division by collaborating with DMHAS on the Mental Health Block Grant submission, which includes the allocation plan, annual data, and bi-annual application. Yvette's continuous improvements have streamlined the process and enhanced critical components of the Mental Health Block Grant submission process, which supports many behavioral health initiatives for children across Connecticut.

I'm Speechless!

Nachi Bhatt - Education/Unified School District #2

Nachi Bhatt, Educational Consultant, has continuously served as USD#2's most valuable education consultant for many years. All who have worked with Nachi know very well his depth

of knowledge, meticulous attention to detail, and ability to maintain the highest standard of excellence in all aspects of the work. As a trusted, vital contributor to the continued operation and growth of USD#2's regional division, Nachi has been instrumental with the on-boarding of new personnel to ensure the professional effectiveness and strength of the education consultant in all areas of work throughout the regions. As an adjunct trainer for the Academy of Workforce Development, Nachi provides the "education" portion of the pre-service training for new workers. Nachi supports the agency on both the state and national levels. He is annually appointed to the statewide Special Education Advisory Council and serves on the nationwide Foster Care and Education Division's Child Welfare Education Network. Nachi is an invaluable asset to the agency and USD#2, we are forever grateful and appreciative to have Nachi's expertise champion the betterment of our students and families in CT. Thank you Nachi---you are the best!!!

Patricia Thompson - Office of Legal Affairs

Principal Attorney Patricia Thompson is a founding member of the Legal Division and has worked in multiple area offices, always providing high quality legal advice and guidance. With her many years with the Department, she brings a wealth of experience and insight to every legal consult. Pat is meticulous in all aspects of her work, while actively seeking out and participating in opportunities to enrich her robust knowledge of child welfare law. She frequently shares resources with her legal division colleagues, ensuring others remain current with recent legal developments. Pat is a mentor to newer colleagues and a support and advocate for the area office social work team. An essential part of the Hartford Area Office legal team, Pat manages a high volume of cases with a dedicated "legal lens" focused on how the Department can best serve children and families. Pat, we appreciate you! Keep up the great work!



Kelly Pellegrino - Centralized Transportation Unit

Kelly Pellegrino is an Office Assistant with The Central Transportation Unit. Since joining the CTU in March of 2022, Kelly has proven herself to be integral part of our office staff. She is dependable, knowledgeable, personable, and a pleasure to work with. Although working in the CTU Dispatch Office can be daunting and not for the faint of heart, Kelly accepts the challenge daily. She has strong computer skills and the ability to multi-task. These skills allow her to processes the numerous transportation requests that come into our office, assist with scheduling, respond to countless emails and phone calls, assist our drivers, keep our log books up to date, and manually collect and process all of our data (which is a full-time job in itself). Despite having all of these responsibilities, Kelly comes to work every day with a smile on her face and a "whatever it takes" attitude, while never seeking recognition for everything that she accomplishes.....Thank you Kelly, for your dedication to our unit and the clients that we serve!!

Laray Johnson - PRTF (North)

Solnit North is pleased to nominate Children Services Worker Laray Johnson for Employee of the Month. Laray's leadership, compassion, and unwavering positivity make him an ideal candidate for this recognition. Throughout his time working, staff have been consistently impressed by his leadership, dedication, and commitment to his work, his colleagues, and the youth we serve. Laray has a natural ability to connect with others. His youth-driven mindset allows him to inspire and mentor with ease, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. Whether it's taking lead in a crisis or assisting a coworker, he approaches every situation with a calm demeanor and remarkable patience, ensuring that everyone feels heard and valued. What stands out most about Laray is his genuine passion for the work we do. He doesn't just get through the shift— he enjoys the process and approaches every challenge with enthusiasm. His grounded and down-to-earth nature makes him approachable, and he's always willing to lend a hand when needed, making him a truly wonderful coworker to have.