



Employee of the Month Awards!

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

Tara Fitch - Child Welfare/Foster Care Division

The Careline leadership team is writing to enthusiastically recommend Tara Fitch for the Employee of the Month recognition. Tara has been employed by DCF since 2001 during which time she worked in the Manchester Office and the Careline. During her time with DCF, Tara has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication and skill in the field of Child Protective Services. Tara stands out for many reasons: Tara has an exceptional work ethic and consistently goes above and beyond in her responsibilities. She is well known for her diligence and reliability in completing tasks promptly and with high quality. Tara is known for her compassionate approach in working with children and families in crisis. She prioritizes understanding and empathy, which significantly contributes to building strong relationships and achieving positive changes in family dynamics. Tara is a valued team member who actively collaborates with colleagues. She readily shares her expertise and knowledge, contributing to the professional growth of her peers and enhancing overall team effectiveness. She is always willing to help train new staff coming to the Careline. Tara brings a positive energy to the workplace that is contagious. She actively supports her colleagues, fostering a collaborative and supportive team environment. It is with great pleasure that the Careline leadership team recommends Tara Fitch for the Employee of the Month recognition. Her commitment to making a positive impact in the lives of children and families deserves acknowledgment and celebration.



Donna Blaine - Region 1 & 5

On 4/4/24, Donna accomplished her fourth adoption since the beginning of the year. Donna's commitment to these children, all of whom she had worked with since their entry into care, was remarkable. Donna's joy in being part of the special day in the lives of these children was contagious. For those of us not there in person to celebrate with the family, it really brought to life the occasion to witness it through Donna's eyes. We are very proud of the work she has

done on her cases, and believe she exemplifies the qualities, skills and attributes of Employee of the Month. Congratulations Donna!

Janet Kelly - Region 2 & 3

Janet Kelly has been employed by DCF for the past 17.5 years. She is the epitome of a "team player". Janet will drop everything to assist a coworker in need. She has even offered to take on additional cases to cover when a fellow unit member has been out. Janet has gone far and beyond for her families to ensure they are following through with needed appointments and support services. She will often purchase food and needed items for her families with her own money. When a case is assigned to Janet, she will do everything possible to ensure issues are addressed and children are safe. She is passionate, caring and dedicated to our work and overall, an asset to our agency.



Takima Hurst - Region 4 & 6

Takima was nominated by two different supervisors, including hers, both of whom noted her unwavering professionalism when working with a family who had lost their baby. Despite this tragedy, the family was more than willing to cooperate and very thankful that Takima was gentle yet honest. Also noted was her compassion and tireless efforts in helping and supporting this family through a difficult time.

James George - Health Management and Oversight Division

James is a long-time Health Advocate with DCF. While he is currently assigned to support Region 3, James has covered and assisted every Regional Office in the State at one time or another! He continues to graciously cover other regions as needed and is a devoted team player. No matter how busy he gets, James is thorough and attentive in his work. Praises from area office staff speak highly of his responsiveness, diligent follow through, and willingness to go the extra mile. James' experience and knowledge of the Medicaid and health insurance arenas is highly valued and second to none within the Department! HMO is lucky to have him as part of the team!



Dr. Sharon Davis - Bureau of External Affairs

Dr. Sharon Davis has led the implementation of the State of Connecticut Family First IV-E Prevention Plan. Her keen knowledge of Federal law and requirements, the national perspective on Prevention work and her ability to bring together diverse groups of professionals to impact Connecticut's system is admirable. She is a tireless worker, beginning

her day quite early in an organized fashion to ensure the tasks at hand are accomplished. When asked a question or for an opinion, not only does she know the answer, but she can also support it with clear and updated documentation based on Federal guidance or previous internal meetings. Her emails leave no question unanswered! Dr. Davis is responsible for the first Community Pathways line established in the country to support parents who require in-home substance abuse, mental health or parenting services. Her impact on the children and families in Connecticut will be felt for decades to come!

Jim Funaro - Transitional Supports and Success

Jim is a new team member in the Division of Transitional Supports and Success, bringing with him several years of experience at Careline. He is thorough, meticulous, and very quick to learn new tasks. Jim embraces new challenges. His flexibility, responsiveness and overall excellent customer service are much appreciated as he interacts with internal staff and the public.



Marcia Cherry - PRTF (South)

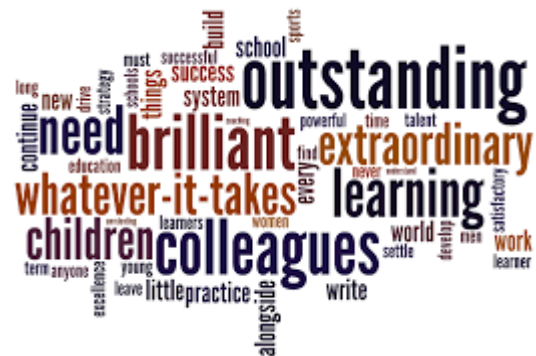
Marcia Cherry has been a beacon of support and guidance at Solnit South PRTF, consistently demonstrating an unwavering dedication to helping both current and new staff members acclimate to the facility's expectations and culture. Her willingness to go above and beyond in assisting others is evident in her proactive approach to mentoring and training. Marcia ensures that every employee feels welcomed and well-prepared, providing thorough explanations of procedures, offering hands-on assistance, and sharing her vast knowledge with patience and kindness. Her approachable nature and positive attitude make her an invaluable resource for staff on campus, fostering a supportive and cohesive work environment. In addition to her exceptional mentorship, Marcia's commitment to the overall well-being of the team is unparalleled. She is always ready to lend a helping hand, whether it's asking if she can help by covering shifts come in to offer training on the weekends when necessary, addressing concerns, or providing emotional support to her colleagues. Marcia's dedication extends beyond her immediate responsibilities, as she continuously seeks ways to improve processes and enhance the efficiency of the Solnit South team. Her contributions have not only made the onboarding process smoother but have also significantly strengthened the sense of community on campus. Marcia Cherry embodies the



qualities of an outstanding employee, making her a deserving nominee for Employee of the Month.

Dr. Vincenza Guariniello - PRTF (North)

As Dr. Vincenza Guariniello is transitioning to South Campus PRTF in the coming days, we would like to recognize her for her fierce passion and advocacy for the wellness of youth. While often soft spoken in group settings, her full voice and presence has made a lasting impact at North. In addition to providing psychological consultation and assessment services, she has made tireless efforts to coordinate programming and care for those on her clinical caseload, provided a supportive supervisory space for students of psychology, and volunteered as the LGBTQIA Liaison in efforts to advance Solnit's identity-affirming knowledge and practices. Dr. V has immeasurably infused her energy, knowledge, and skills into our community and will be deeply missed.



Edwin Ortiz - Solnit South Hospital

Edwin has been with DCF since 2019 and is a valued member of the hospital Manhasset Team! Edwin is a Child Service Worker, CSW, who consistently supports the hospital operations and all the youth throughout the units. Most recently, Edwin volunteered to escort the Joint Commission (TJC) surveyor around his unit during their most recent TJC Survey. The Joint Commission commented on how compassionate, knowledgeable and professional he was while interacting with fellow staff, the survey team and most importantly, the youth. We thank Edwin for his dedication and clinical skillsets, what a true Super star and asset we have in him! Kudos and Many thanks, Edwin!

Sergio Alvarez - Fiscal

Sergio has been working for the Department since 2002, spending his entire career supporting Region 5 operations. Currently Sergio is the longest serving System Program Director in the state. In the role of SPD, Sergio has always been an innovator in advocating, educating, and developing services for the betterment of the children and families we serve. Most recently, Sergio helped develop the DCF Service Directory. The Directory, which is accessed through the DCF Intranet, gives DCF staff access to all DCF contract services, including program descriptions, list of local gatekeepers and central office program leads. It also includes helpful links to 211 and the AIM tool. Sergio also helped to develop, and has overseen, the first ever outposted staff to be embedded in the Waterbury School system. The intent of this initiative was to decrease the number of reports to the Careline from high-reporting schools through



education from a racial justice lens and on-site presence. Under Sergio's leadership, the outcomes of this work have proven its effectiveness. Sergio is a steady hand in the Division of Family and Community Services and is well respected throughout his Region and by his peers (who are in awe of his power point presentation skills).

Skye Garafolo - Behavioral Health Community Services

Skye is a strong advocate for the programs she oversees. She works to collaborate with area offices in identifying ways to appropriately serve our youth while also trying to address concerns brought up by the Specialized Trauma-Informed Treatment Assessment and Reunification (STTAR) Therapeutic Group Homes (TGH) and Residential facilities. She also has been integral in the lifting up and ongoing work related to Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTP). Skye is also part of the workgroup looking at "Ending the need for group care" and is passionate about child and family teaming and restorative justice practices, bringing these to our provider network.



Beatrice Alicea - Juvenile Justice Education Unit

Beatrice is a Pupil Service Specialist for the Juvenile Justice Education Unit. She has made meaningful contributions to the unit that supports the work. When asked to provide mentorship to a new hire, Beatrice jumped right in and supported the new hire and continues to work closely with her mentee. She is a forward thinker and actively engages in ways to further develop the work of the unit. She has a strong sense of collaboration and teamwork for the betterment of all involved. Beatrice is methodical which is evident in her planning of her interactions with the students she services. She has meaningful and purposeful conversations with the students regarding future plans with high school, post-secondary, as well as possible employment interests. She is resourceful and ensures to access as many services/ information as possible for her students. Beatrice uses resources such as personality and career assessment to help guide the conversation and facilitate personal reflection, which captures the students' attention. In building positive relationships with her students, she is able to create achievable goals with them and celebrate successes. She encourages students to advocate for themselves and practices those self-advocacy skills in a positive manner. Beatrice is very respected amongst her colleagues and providers outside of the agency. She communicates with a network of providers to support the needs of her students. We value the work Beatrice has



done as a Pupil Service Specialist and are appreciative of the tenacity and commitment she has demonstrated.

Lindsey Miller - Clinical and Community Consultation and Supports Division

We are happy to nominate Lindsey Miller, Behavioral Health Administrator at Central Office!

Lindsey oversees the full Regional Resource Group team in the Regional Offices and is involved in several DCF committees. Lindsey came to DCF a few years ago from a non-profit organization and is an exceptional leader. She is compassionate, optimistic and extremely organized. Her ability to strengthen the relationships between DCF and the provider community has led to resolving significant case challenges. Lindsey prepared and led large meetings involving internal leadership and provided leadership with the goal of identifying gaps, strengths and ideas to manage the placement crisis issues we frequently face. She facilitated these meetings with confidence. The response was extremely positive, and this has improved partnerships. She then created a document to share with all attendees highlighting themes and ideas. Again, the feedback was very positive. Lindsey is always available to her team to help resolve challenges. Her combination of deep clinical and leadership skills is commendable. Many compliments about Lindsey and her leadership have been received and she is well deserving of this nomination!



Eric Burnell - Bureau of Strategic Planning

Eric Burnell is an asset to the ACR team and our agency. He rose through the ranks at DCF, from Social Worker to his current position as ACR Program Supervisor. Through that rise, Eric has always demonstrated a strong commitment to excellence and a collaborative spirit. In addition to leading his ACR team for Region 4, Eric has also served as mentor to his peers, leader of the ACR advisory council, the point man for the development of the new ACRI and is a member of various committees that are pushing CPS work towards better efficiency with a more positive impact on the families we serve. Eric is a subject matter expert in the truest sense of the word. His hard work and efforts are truly appreciated. His exceptional performance not only drives results but also inspires all of us to strive for excellence. Thank you for your unwavering commitment to success. You are an invaluable team member.



Raenette Riddick - Academy for Workforce Development

Since January 2022, Raenette has been an asset to the Academy for Community Partners, in her role as our Community Provider Trainer. She is very knowledgeable, engaging, and dynamic in her role and her vast work experience here at the Department is infused in each course offerings that she delivers to our Provider Network. What is key to her role is that she serves as the conduit between our Community Providers and our DCF Staff. An enriched relationship has been forged with our Community Providers because of her role. Currently, Raenette does offer the following trainings: ABCD Child Safety Practice Model, Advancing Anti-Racism, CPR, Child and Family Teaming, Dynamic of Kinship Care, Implicit Bias, Infant and Child Development, Mandated Reporter Training to DCF Caregivers, Poverty Is Not Neglect, Quality Parenting Imitative (QPI), Question Persuade Respond (QPR) and Trauma and De-Escalation. These courses are offered quarterly in the Community Provider Catalog. Raenette also Co-Trains the Mandated Reporter Training of the Trainer, as well as the Mandated Reporter Recertification Curriculum for our DCF Staff. Along with these offerings, Raenette also works in collaboration with our community providers as well as our DCF Staff to create requested curriculum, which has all served to be quite successful. Since January 2022, Raenette has trained over 2,000 providers from over 60 agencies, as well as DCF staff. Raenette maintains an excellent working relationship with her co-workers and community providers. She possesses strong leadership skills, and she is truly a committed and dedicated individual with a zest for learning and taking on any challenge that comes her way. Raenette is well deserving of this Employee of the Month recognition. Thank You Raenette for all that you do!



Tony Ventrelli - Education/Unified School District #2

Tony has been working with students for 37 plus years. He started at Altobello in Meriden and then moved over to Albert J. Solnit Center when Altobello closed. He taught English Language Arts and Social Studies. He settled into the role of Social Studies Teacher at Riverview School. Tony has a calm effect on his students. He is passionate about his teaching. He sets high standards for his students in behavior and academics. Tony is always presenting new ideas and fun ways to understand Social Studies, Geography, World History and Civics. He does this with his



Geography game "Guess the State" that he puts up outside his class so all students can get a chance to guess the mystery state. Tony is a role model and mentor to his colleagues. He is always lending a hand when needed. Stop by his room before the students arrive and you will see Tony getting his lessons ready for the day. There is not a lot that will distract him from his teaching of our students. Tony incorporates recent news into his classes and gets the students to reflect and express their thoughts about the current news stories. He is big on incorporating Connecticut news events from the past and showing the students how it has affected the life of people in Connecticut. If you walk by his room on any given day, you will see Tony working hard to help his students meet the requirements to keep them moving towards their eventual High school graduation when they return to their school districts. Tony has the respect of all his peers and continues to go above and beyond for his students. Tony teaches his students daily and he will tell you that he learns just as much from them. Tony will be the first one to say that he doesn't teach for the recognition, he does it for the students.



Jennifer Avenia - Office of Legal Affairs

As Director of Immigration Practice, Jennifer Avenia works tirelessly to help support the children and families we serve who are involved in the immigration system. She welcomes opportunities to educate staff and community members about the myriad challenges faced by undocumented families and she constantly seeks out opportunities to further her own knowledge in this area. The passion and dedication Jennifer demonstrates is inspiring and she is a valued member of the Legal Division.