

A Message from Commissioner Hill-Lilly



Father's Day, Reunification Month and PRIDE Month are all highlights of June!

Happy Father's Day again to our **Fathers, Stepfathers, Foster and Adoptive Fathers and Father figures!** We recognize the unique influence a Father has on his children and will continue to lift and empower the Fatherhood voice and include Fathers in all aspects of our work. These efforts have included hiring a **Fatherhood**



Coordinator and establishing best practices across the Agency, so **Fathers are equal partners** in parenting.



The **"Best Dad by Par"** event again was a huge success! Hosted by **DCF's Foster Care Division**, in collaboration with the **Statewide Fatherhood Engagement Leadership Team**, Fathers of all kinds came together for a round of golf and celebrate the critical role they play in the life of a child. Thank you, **Governor Lamont**, for attending!

"I wanted to give my daughter the best life possible," stated **John James**. Three days before Father's Day - and his birthday - John was reunited with his daughter, Madison. Read about his journey and the message he has in this month's **"Spotlight"** for other Fathers involved with DCF.



June is also **Reunification month**. Since the beginning of the year, over 230 children have been safely reunited with their families. Critical to reunification is the role foster parents play in supporting not just the child, but also the birth parents as they partner to establish life-long relationships while working towards permanency.



James Clifford and his wife have been foster parents since 2021 and embraced fostering with open hearts. Read in this newsletter how they have cared for children birth to five years old, and even provided respite and emergency temporary care for children up to eleven years of age. *"Until I am too tired or too old, I will be here, fostering,"* James stated. Watch James here on the **WFSB GreatDay@9A** segment: [James Clifford WFSB](#)

Thank you to the **Foster Care Division** for putting on fabulous appreciation events over the past two months! We value our foster and adoptive families who "answer the call" to support the children and families we serve! **We cannot say THANK YOU enough!**



Building future leaders is one strength of our Agency. This month, we graduated 8 DCF leaders from the

Executive Fellowship Program.

Congratulations to **Jeanette Blackwell, Olga Coleman-Williams, Linda Dixon, Maribel**

Martinez, Lenisa Mathew, Matthew Pelowski, Heidi Pugliese and Nieka Thompson on this wonderful accomplishment! Congratulations are also in order for **Nicole Cossette and Kristen Dudanowicz** from the **Office of Early Childhood** as well as **Fatmata Williams** from the **Department of Social Services** who are also **Executive Fellowship graduates!**

Mentoring relationships lasts for a lifetime! **"Planting the Seeds for Growth"** was the theme of this month's Academy for Workforce Development **L.E.A.D. 2024 Mentoring Program Graduation**. Mentors presented their innovative projects to improve aspects of our case practice along with hearing a keynote address from **Dr. Natasha Wright, LCSW** and a few jokes along the way. One fast fact.....two Mentees have already been promoted! Great job everyone!



Thank you to **President and CEO Dr. Sabrina Trocchi from Wheeler Clinic** and **City of Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam** for the opportunity to speak a press conference announcing the successes of the **Hartford Emergency Assistance Response Team (HEARTeam)**. This unique program provides mental health responders to help Public Safety Departments in response to 911 calls. Learn more here: [HEARTeam](#)

Thank you as well to our partners at **Child Health and Development Institute (CHDI)** for asking me to provide opening remarks at the **2024 Evidence-Based Practice Conference: "Cultivating Connections and Equity in Connecticut's Behavioral Health System."** The event brought together over 460 behavioral health providers, school professionals, state agency staff, and others working with CHDI to strengthen children's behavioral health EBPs across our state.



Congratulations again to the **May 2024 Employees of the Month**..... Who has been nominated to receive the **June award**? Is it **YOU**? Read on.....

June is **PRIDE month**. Read about the **Stonewall Uprising**. Initially referred to as "a riot," the brave actions of a small group were actually protests in the community that served to both draw attention to the injustices brought against the **LGBTQIA+** community and launched the gay right's movement.



The **CT Department of Children and Families** is committed to consistent, safe, and affirming care, support, and services for **LGBTQIA+** children, young adults, parents, caregivers, and foster parents working with the Department. Please see our enhanced **website** with supports and resources for children and families: [LGBTQIA+ website](#)

Juneteenth, a Celebration of Freedom and a Day of Reflection, was held this month. In our state, this was the second year Juneteenth was legally recognized as a paid state holiday. Known by many names such as "**Second Independence Day**", "**Jubilee Day**", "**Freedom Day**", and "**Black Independence Day**", the day commemorates the date that news of the **Emancipation Proclamation** (and their subsequent freedom from slavery) reached enslaved people in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865. This was three years after President Abraham Lincoln had issued the proclamation.



Thanks for all you do - each and every day!

A Birthday Gift on Father's Day: "I wanted to give my daughter the best life possible."



June is National Family Reunification Month. It is also when families celebrate Fathers' Day which, this year, happened to fall on the same Sunday as John James' birthday.

While the Enfield resident could not have anticipated the timing, John received a gift in the form of reunification, or rather "unification", with his seven-year-old daughter Madison days before Father's Day.

"Unification" because, adding to the strange but happy coincidence, was the fact that John had not even been aware that he was a father until the past year. On top of that, several months prior, the possibility of having Madison live with him was not a guarantee. That changed with a letter from DCF and a long road of exhaustive prep work by John to prepare his life and his home for Madison.

"Once the DNA test came back DCF asked me what I wanted to do. I knew nothing about being a father, but I wanted to give my daughter the best life possible," he recalled.

A professional barber, John said, "I was just in a good spot in life to do that. I just knew I had to step up and do everything I could to protect and be there for my daughter."

Working with two social workers - Amanda Parsons and then Krystal Failey - John demonstrated every step of the way that he was ready to be a dad to his little girl. DCF social worker Krystal said John was exemplary in his willingness to partner with the Department to have his daughter in his life.



An "amazing team player," he remained communicative throughout and went above and beyond to do everything that was asked of him. Asked how she would describe John's commitment to the process, Krystal repeatedly said "motivated, extremely motivated."

Historically, child welfare efforts have focused on mothers as the gatekeepers while the vital role fathers play in a child's life can often be overlooked. However, studies show that children with involved fathers or positive male role models are more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit empathy, and avoid high-risk behaviors. For that reason, Connecticut DCF has created an Office of Fatherhood Services to ensure better engagement of fathers as capable caregivers - equal to that of mothers.

From the start, John felt that as a dad he was on equal footing with his DCF social workers. Reflecting on his own experience, John believes that regardless of whether the reunifying parent is a mom or a dad, achieving a successful reunification is up to the individual.

"I grew up without a father, so I knew how important a father figure is to providing that stability and love in my daughter's life," said John. "There's a lot of stigma around DCF like they're out to get people. But if you're a father who's doing what he's supposed to be doing then you have as many rights as the mother. It's in your hands, nobody's stopping you. They're there to help. Krystal was always unbiased and provided advice and guidance."

John and his wife do not have any biological children of their own. When they received the news of Madison it came as a shock for both of them. Of his wife, John said, "she's my rock" and has been amazingly understanding about the whole thing.

Amanda Parsons, the DCF worker who began the process with John, had him and his wife attend parenting classes, individual and couples counseling, and began supervised visits one day each weekend.

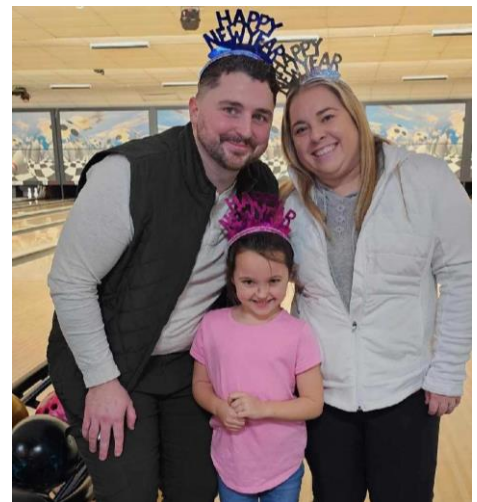
"John was the most motivated father I've worked with in my eight years with DCF. I have encountered fathers who verbalized their interest in becoming involved in their children's life but sometimes things don't work out [for various reasons]," said Krystal. "We wanted John to remain an active participant and he did. John remained very patient and flexible the whole time."

The couple demonstrated their readiness and, when Krystal came onboard, those visits increased to two days each weekend. After a long road of DCF requests, John was reunified with Madison at the end of the school year.

"As soon as he found out [to the day of reunification], he provided the Department with whatever we asked of him. We recommended he attend marriage counseling with his wife to process this major change, and he immediately got into therapy with his wife."

Krystal said communication between a parent, or parents and their DCF-assigned worker is key. Also, the key is good communication between the parent being reunified and their child's biological or psychological family also referred to as their kinship network.

Research has shown that maintaining those relationships leads to a larger support system for the child and better life outcomes all around. However, at first, communication between John and Madison's kin family was admittedly shaky. John said Amanda and Krystal's guidance during that time and the role they both played as mediators was crucial to repairing that relationship.



John, Madison and John's wife at an outing to the bowling alley.

When John went to pick up his daughter, he and Madison's kinship provider talked it out and agreed to leave the past in the past.

"When we spoke, I told her let's start building some trust so my daughter can have a healthy relationship with the family she had known for 7 years. My goal was never to remove anyone from Madison's life but to add more [loving adults] to her life."

The relationship has now done a 180-degree turn compared to those early days. Madison often visits with her half sibling who is being fostered by another relative. John said his own mom, Madison's biological paternal grandmother, has been a huge help. From Day 1, John's mother was excited and ready to love the grandchild she was not aware she had until recently. In that short time, she had already built a strong bond with Madison as well as Madison's kinship network. That change in temperature was a relief for John.



Krystal Failey, Mr. John James, and Teresa Jenkins (DCF) pose together at the CT Fosters' Best Dad by Par event where John was awarded for his hard work and successful reunification with his daughter.

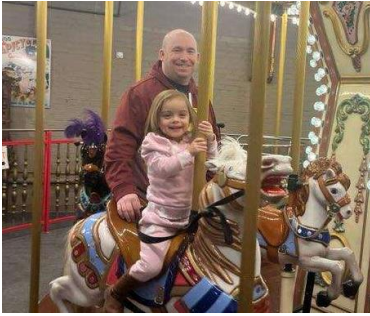
"Madison's psychological family was very welcoming of my mom when she brought Madison to see all her cousins. I felt like this was a step in the right direction of that [improved] relationship with that side of the family. A step in the right direction towards starting to build that trust we had talked about."

Looking back on the beginning of the almost two yearlong-process, John said he knew he wanted to be a great dad to Madison, including gaining custody of her. He stayed committed to the process, his DCF workers and began manifesting that dream into a reality.

John remembers looking around the home he and his wife own and saying, "We're going to turn that guest room into a pink castle-themed room for her with a princess bed and a pullout underneath just in case she wants to do sleepovers. As soon as I found out there was a likelihood Madison could come live with us I just kind of manifested it."

"It's a crazy story but I stayed positive no matter what. It was a hard process but a really fun process. It was so worth it. The hard work definitely paid off."

"Until I am too tired or too old, I will be here, fostering."



"Until I am too tired or too old, I will be here, fostering."

These are the words that drive James Clifford, a man whose journey as a foster father has touched the lives of many.

Born and raised in Connecticut, James, known as Jim, now resides in North Haven with his wife and their adopted daughter, Natalie, who is three years old. As the Chief of Prosthetics at the Veterans Hospital in West Haven, Jim's professional life is dedicated to care and support, a commitment that seamlessly extends into his personal life.

Jim and his wife have been licensed foster parents since 2021, a journey sparked by their struggles with infertility. Initially, fostering was a path to adoption, but along the way, the couple developed deep respect and pride for the birth families they encountered.

The Clifford's have an open adoption agreement with Natalie's birth parents, sending "pictures of the week" photographs through email. Their dedication to the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) reflects their commitment; they actively assist with transportation for visits between a foster child and the child's birth family, preparing for reunification.



Jim explained that rooting for the family's success and hoping the parents would reunify didn't change his hope of one day adopting, but it changed how he experienced fostering.



The Clifford's have embraced fostering with open hearts, caring for children from birth to five years old, and even providing respite and emergency temporary care for children up to eleven. Jim recalls a particularly memorable experience when their support social worker, Lori McClain, informed them they had been chosen through the permanency planning team process for a little girl who needed a permanent home. After hearing the details, Jim knew he needed to discuss it with his wife. However, when Lori revealed the little girl's name was Natalie, Jim immediately said yes. Having already provided respite and foster care to Natalie, the decision was effortless—they already loved her.

“When the Clifford’s accept a child into their home, they ensure that all of the child's physical, emotional, and medical needs are met,” explained Lori, adding, “They like to take the children to their appointments and have been able to partner with biological and extended family members. Jim is a hands-on father and works with his wife managing appointments, visitations, daycare pickups, and drop-offs. He always answers his phone, even when he knows it might be for assistance with another placement.”

Jim's passion for fostering was also influenced by a high school friend who was a child in foster care. Conversations with his friend's foster father left a lasting impression, teaching him that love and commitment, not genetics, bond a family. This wisdom has guided Jim and his wife through their fostering journey.



Support from their extended family has been invaluable, with every child welcomed with love and acceptance. Jim hopes that his role as a foster father will change the narrative for children who have never had a positive male role model and for mothers who have had traumatic experiences with men. He believes his impact on the children and their mothers can alter how men are perceived. Jim often reflects on how simple gestures and interest in hands-on parenting can leave an indelible mark on a child's life, fostering a sense of security and belonging.

One of the significant challenges Jim has faced is that not all birth parents are open to forming a relationship with him and his wife. He has learned to be patient and let the parents determine the relationship's nature and pace. Despite this, his most rewarding experience involved an emergency placement of a non-verbal 2.5-year-old boy. Within a week, the child began to speak a few words, a testament to the love, patience, and teaching Jim and his wife provided.



Moments like these reaffirm Jim's belief in the transformative power of a stable and loving environment.

Participating in the "Best Dad by Par" golf tournament was a highlight for Jim. It was an opportunity to meet other foster fathers and staff members dedicated to caring for children. The networking and shared experiences reinforced foster fathers' unique and vital role. For Jim, it was more than just a tournament; it was a celebration of the often-unspoken bond between foster dads who strive to make a difference. Jim hopes that the media coverage of this event will send a powerful

message to fathers who have considered fostering but didn't know if they could do it, showing them the profound impact they can have on children's lives.

Jim recently appeared on the WFSB "Great Day at 9a" show to discuss what foster parenting is like and to encourage others - especially men - to consider becoming licensed.



Currently, Jim and his wife are fostering two babies. One is on the path to reunification with their mother, while the other will soon have parental rights terminated, leading to adoption. Support from their support worker, Lori McClain, has been crucial throughout their journey. Jim describes Lori as available, staunchly supportive, and a wonderful advocate. Her guidance has helped them navigate the complexities of the foster care system, ensuring that they can provide the best possible care for the children.

Jim and his wife also appreciate the resources and support provided by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF). They encourage anyone considering fostering to take the next step, emphasizing the profound impact it can have. Jim often shares his story with prospective foster parents, hoping to inspire them to make a difference in the lives of children in need.



As Jim's interview was coming to a close, he eagerly shared that he and his wife are preparing for a respite visit at the end of the week for a family of five siblings, ages 4 to 15. He sounded excited and ready, embracing the challenge with enthusiasm and purpose. Jim's eagerness to welcome this sibling group into their home reflects his unwavering commitment to offering support and stability to children who need them, no matter the circumstances.

"Until I am too tired or too old, I will be here, fostering," Jim repeats, his dedication unwavering.

Through their love and commitment, the Clifford's continue to provide a safe and nurturing environment for every child who enters their home, leaving a lasting legacy of hope and compassion. For Jim, fostering is not just about providing temporary

care; it's about offering a beacon of stability and love, a chance for every child to experience the warmth and security of a family.

In every laugh, every tear, and every milestone, Jim finds the strength to keep going, knowing that each moment spent fostering is a step towards a brighter future for the children they cherish.



Employee of the Month Awards!

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

Daniel Ross - Transitional Supports and Success

Transitional Supports and Success (TSS) is excited to nominate Daniel "Dan" Ross for Employee of the Month. Dan has been an employee with DCF for over 33 years. He started his career at what we now call "Solnit North" and transitioned to social work while moving up in leadership during his career journey. Presently, Dan oversees the Department of Labor Memorandum of Understanding for the Year-Round Employment Program (previously known as Summer Youth Employment), the work of Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP), Community Housing Employment Enrichment Resource (CHEER) program, the Transitional Support for Emerging Adults (TSEA) and credentialed case management programming. This important work aids in preparing youth for successful transition from DCF. In addition to these, Dan worked with youth, agency and community collaborators on the development of the redesign of the former Work to Learn Program now known as "The Launch." Dan works to ensure the bridge between adolescent and transitional age youth practice and services occurs with our area office staff and providers. He has been described as "available, accessible and resourceful" by those in partnership. Dan is willing to extend himself to others in support of the work with transitional age youth. This is why TSS has chosen to select him for this opportunity.



Katelyn Everett - PRTF (South)

Nurse Katelyn's nomination for Employee of the Month for June at Solnit South PRTF is a reflection of her outstanding commitment to her role and the well-being of the youth in the Kiwani unit. Katelyn's infectious positivity and genuine care for others shine through in all aspects of her work. Her consistent presence and warm demeanor create a sense of stability and comfort for both her colleagues and the youth under her care. Katelyn's approachability and willingness to lend a helping hand make her an invaluable asset to the team, with her colleagues frequently seeking her out for support and collaboration. Beyond her affable nature, Katelyn's exceptional skills in handling crisis situations with grace and composure demonstrate her resilience and professionalism. Even in the face of challenging circumstances, Katelyn remains steadfast, providing reassurance and support to those around her. Her ability to

maintain a calm and composed demeanor under pressure inspires confidence and trust in her colleagues and the youth alike. Katelyn's dedication to going above and beyond for the well-being of others exemplifies the qualities of a true team player and deserving recipient of the Employee of the Month recognition.

Sonia Ramos - PRTF (North)

The Solnit North Employee of the Month is Sonia Ramos. Sonia is technically an Administrative Assistant, but her functions are global for both Solnit PRTFs. She is stationed at the North campus, but she does a lot for both PRTFs and has spent considerable time at the South campus helping with Youth Art Day on 9/1/23, helping to coordinate our Barrins & Associates consultation, then our Joint Commission survey. She was on the South campus on Tuesday June 18th helping with our Superintendent of the Day (Supt of the Day-deliberate humor 😊) exercise where our youth Superintendent and his Executive Team of two peers ran the campus for the day, with myself and South PRTF managers supporting the Superintendent and Executive Team members during in-person and virtual meetings with campus leaders including Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly. For both Superintendent of the Day exercises (Solnit North 11/14/23; Solnit South 6/18/24) Sonia played a large role in coordinating both exercises, purchasing clothing for the kids, making badges, and ordering desk plates for the Superintendent. Sonia also co-planned, with our former Director of Nursing, Solnit North's Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration. If it's for the kids, Sonia is first in line to help. She has coordinated fundraisers to build North's Trustees account, acted as a translator in her first week on the job when we needed someone who speaks Spanish to communicate with a parent. She worked with Human Resources to sort out position control numbers and she created the organizational charts we use today. We could say much more but it would take up the entire newsletter! To sum it up, Sonia is one of the most hardworking and dedicated people we've ever worked with, and she's also one of the kindest people you'd ever meet. She is true blue!



Dr. Bhagya Reddy - Solnit South Hospital

Dr. Bhagya Reddy is the Associate Medical Director/Psychiatrist at Albert J. Solnit Children's Hospital and just one of the stellar Child/Adolescent Board-Certified Psychiatrists we are so incredibly fortunate to have on our Solnit Hospital Team. Dr. Reddy, a Yale trained Psychiatrist, and member of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, oversees the clinical care and treatment on our Acadia unit, and has been with the hospital for well over 15 years. With over 32 years' experience, Dr. Reddy's gentle demeanor, astute clinical mind and precise ability to target diagnosis, medication management, and treatment is evident in the outstanding care and stabilization she provides to all her patients and families. A role model, health care advocate and steady, illuminating spirit, we are thankful for all of the healing she brings forth in



our patients, families and all of us! For her unwavering support and dedication to our adolescents, Solnit hospital and all Solnit South, we thank her for her true integrity and brilliance.

Michelle Caronna - Fiscal

Michelle embodies the transformational work that the entire Child Welfare Accounting (CWA) team has completed over the last year. While the Unit as a whole has become a cohesive team that has consistently demonstrated their support of DCF's critical work with children and families, Michelle specifically joined the CWA team and immediately plunged into the DCF mission. She played a significant role in developing the Expectant Youth Buying Guide, which provides the first ever catalogue of resources, pre-approved by CWA, for pregnant and parenting youth to buy from, while simultaneously assisting the CHAP/CHEER programs through the creation of the first ever payment calculator to streamline processes and payment timeliness. Michelle, with her no wrong door attitude, is the perfect example of the creativity and commitment of CWA in their approach to leveraging fiscal resources to support social workers and the children and families we serve.



Danielle Perez - Academy for Workforce Development

Danielle Perez has been a tremendous help within the Academy. She lends her supportive services to two of the larger programs within the division; Pre-Service, and the Mentoring program. She is a team player, resourceful and creative. Danielle exhibits these characteristics on a daily basis. She is extremely helpful to all who call upon her for assistance. If Danielle doesn't know the answer or is not aware of the process, she takes the initiative to find out. Thank you, Danielle!



Chantel Thomas - Education/Unified School

District #2

Chantel is the consummate professional. She is consistently reliable, trustworthy, and knowledgeable in all aspects of her work. She is an exceptional worker with great worth to our school district and agency. Chantel is instrumental in supporting students, families, and our workforce with the school choice and magnet lottery process on an annual basis. Chantel produces timely educational data reports to support the decision-making process for improving student outcomes. Chantel optimizes the use of all available resources to successfully handle multiple projects at the same time. Chantel is a most valuable professional who demonstrates diversified skills throughout the USD#2 operation. Thank you, Chantel!!!

Joseph Zebzda - Office of Legal Affairs

Joseph Zebzda has been with the Legal Division since 1995. Over the course of his career, Joe has demonstrated what it truly means to be support staff. Joe makes himself available to peers

meets the youth and families. Mr. Spagnoletti holds family team meetings at the court with family supports and court officials. He is able to communicate effectively with the families and meets them where they are and has been acknowledged by the Assistant Attorney General, Office of Probation and Panel Attorneys for his ongoing advocacy and uplifting children staying with their families. Mr. Spagnoletti will provide professional youth and client support behind the scenes before and after the court proceedings by ensuring families and adolescents stay connected in the community and ensuring families are offered adequate services. Mr. Spagnoletti helps with all after-hour events with set up. He plays a major role in facilitating the YAB meeting, transporting and encouraging participation with all youth he meets. He helps during our holiday toy drives to ensure gifts are delivered to the office and the families in a timely manner. Mr. Spagnoletti always makes himself available to support and adds positively to any office function. Mr. Spagnoletti provides daily support to his peers and the families we serve. He greets everyone with a smile and asks how he can be of help if staff are in need. Mr. Spagnoletti is always first to volunteer to assist with early morning transports to ensure the children are getting to school and will work late to assist in providing supervised visitation for families in need of after-hour visits. Mr. Spagnoletti is the lead for our office's Wellness Team and is an active participant with office initiatives including the FELT and YAB despite his responsibilities as a worker. He places the equal hard work and dedication into the office morale and wellbeing of his peers.



Kathi Orlando - Region 2 & 3

Kathi Orlando has been and continues to be an integral part of the growth and confidence of Investigators by the manner in which she believes in them and supports them. She has extensive knowledge and experience in Intake, which makes her a great teacher/supervisor. Kathi provides support and helps workers navigate high caseloads, prioritizing and assisting with tasks wherever she can. When cases and expectations become unmanageable and stressful, Kathi allows space for workers to be heard and processes these situations on a daily basis. This quality makes for a positive, trusting work relationship that is truly appreciated. Kathi should be recognized for all her hard work and being an incredible leader within the Department. Kathi continues to be an example of a great leader. She goes above and beyond and sets a great example to follow. She has been very supportive of others as a leader and continues to offer her assistance when needed. Kathi gives great direction and her knowledge about CPS related issues is very admirable. We appreciate having her support and her direction when needed most. No matter what the request, Kathi is always quick to say "yes". Kathi often takes Careline on call days and weeks for other staff who sign up and then become unavailable, or for staff who are overwhelmed and need a break from the work. She has an incredible work ethic and goes above and beyond in her role. Congratulations Kathi!!!



Nicole Walker - Region 4 & 6

Nicole was nominated by her supervisor as well as a peer for how she handled a very devastating event in which she found a mom on her caseload deceased. She handled the situation with professionalism throughout; didn't skip a beat in addressing her own needs while continuing to work on her cases and providing exemplary service to the families she serves. In addition, Nicole was available to assist in any situation when another worker needed help even after this event. She demonstrated a true spirit of teamwork. Nicole's peer stated, "Her ability to persevere through the challenges she faces and the passion she has to work with the families she represents is incredible. She is really resilient."



Maureen LeClerc - Health Management and Oversight Division

This month the division received many emails from employees requesting we nominate Maureen LeClerc for Employee of the Month. This demonstrates the impact Maureen has on all her colleagues and how much they want her to know why they appreciate her, and they want to see her efforts recognized. Instead of one paragraph - we decided to send in the quotes that were sent to us and why they felt Maureen was so deserving of this nomination "Maureen is a skilled nurse who consistently advocates for the children and families she serves in her region. She has a strong working relationship with social work teams, foster parents, her peers, and community medical and service providers."

"Maureen has a strong knowledge of community services, and an understanding of what services may be most beneficial to help families. She is quick to be able to offer creative solutions to some of the most difficult cases." "She is always available for peer consultation and orients and supports new nurses in the region through shadowing and mentorship." "Maureen is a wealth of knowledge. She is an excellent advocate for the children with medically complex needs in her Region, and it was my pleasure to work with her during Virginia's absence. We are very lucky to have her in our division."

"Region 6 Nurse Supervisor was out on an extended leave, and I covered as the supervisor. Maureen stepped right up to provide leadership and guidance and was incredibly helpful, taking on more responsibilities in assisting throughout the entire region. Maureen completed many consults, while also continuing to mentor the new nurse in the New Britain office." "Maureen is an active member of several committees within her office and the Health Management and Oversight Division. These include Racial Justice, Health and Wellness, Safety, and Nursing Practice Standards. She brings the concepts of those committees to her daily work to provide the most thoughtful consideration to families." "She is always easily accessible for those who need her support or assistance. I am honored to work with such a skilled nurse". HMO Division



leadership agree wholeheartedly with the sentiments from her colleagues and in nominating Maureen for Employee of the Month. You are much appreciated and a vital member of our HMO family!! Thank you for all that you do!

Liz Calvi - Bureau of External Affairs

We are so grateful for Liz Calvi! With her cooperative and engaging personality, all Divisions across the Agency have benefitted from her expertise - despite only being with the Department for a short time. When called upon to post on social media, design PowerPoints, enhance the website, quickly put together the newsletter and countless other activities, she completes each task with a high level of professional commitment and dedication. Liz is always willing to answer the most basic of questions and leaves you feeling heard and respected. While her work is often behind the scenes, Liz is so deserving to be recognized as the Employee of the Month, upfront and center, so all can see what an incredible asset she is to all of us! Thank you, Liz!



Keri Lloyd - Behavioral Health Community Services

Keri Lloyd has been working in state service since 2013. She began working for DCF as a RRG consultant and then transitioned for a short period to DSS providing work under the SUD 1115 waiver demonstration. She has since begun working for the Behavioral Health and Wellness division in 2023 under the lens of the SUD 1115 waiver demonstration. Keri demonstrates a level of skill, knowledge and intellect surrounding the intersection of substance use and child welfare that amazes us every day. She has great leadership and advocacy around addressing barriers and gaps in the state surrounding substance use for youth and their parents. The way she uses her words is captivating and causes you to listen intently to what she has to say. Keri is goal oriented, organized, efficient and is able to have futuristic thinking. She exemplifies what social work is all about and we are grateful to be on this ride alongside her as a leader.



Carolyn Martin - Government Relations and Policy

Carolyn has been a tremendous support to the Policy Unit. As the sole Administrative Assistant for the group, she has taken on organizing the unit's work product and scheduling several meetings with other divisions. She developed a tracking system to manage on-going policy work as well as archiving old policies for future reference. Carolyn regularly connects with division leads to review drafts and captures their feedback. Her willingness to help out is very much appreciated by the whole team. And her birthday is in June - so Happy Birthday!

Tina Mitchell - Juvenile Justice Education Unit

It is with great pleasure to nominate Tina Mitchell to represent the Juvenile Justice Education Unit as our employee of the month. It is without reservation that we can say that she is an exceptional and invaluable addition to our department. Tina is a dynamic and innovative educational leader. She demonstrates strong management and interpersonal skills and knowledge of pedagogy for implementation of curriculum and assessments that support student learning. As her supervisor, I have the opportunity to observe Tina as she provides quality leadership and support to school leaders at each facility. All would be impressed with her accomplishments and commitment to improving the academic achievements of the students as well as the climate and culture of each school. Tina is VERY persistent in her use of data with an unwavering focus on student achievement and social development. Tina is purposeful and strategic in her ability to partner and engage all stakeholders in creating a culture of achievement for all students. She has a strong understanding for effective leadership and meets demanding objectives at a high level and can formulate practical action plans without hesitation. Tina has found new alternatives for old problems, and she leads by example.



Caitlin Rustic and Jenette Arabasz - Clinical and Community Consultation and Supports Division

Caitlin Rustic and Jenette Arabasz --the Region 3 dynamic IPV duo. They are covering for a colleague on leave, in March had far above the number of consults of other regions, and still offered to cover for other regions. Caitlin created an IPV resource guide and is working on one for HART. They're both also closely involved in HART and wellness teams for their respective offices. Caitlin is also providing statewide training on fatherhood engagement and IPV, in collaboration with Anthony Gay, and she already provided this presentation to region 3. She's also working to bring NCMEC training to the region and state.

Melissa Testa - Bureau of Strategic Planning

Melissa Testa is a Children Services Consultant in the Data Reporting and Evaluation Unit. Her primary role in recent years has been to collect and analyze Critical Incident reports and provide that information collaboratively with other departments to inform practice improvements. However, the past two years she has also been assigned to support compilation of the federal Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) and related Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Statewide Self-Assessment. This report provides an exhaustive set of updates on all the projects, initiatives and services paid for by a number of federal grants, as well as reporting on progress made across the state's child welfare system to improve Safety, Permanency and Well-being outcomes for children and



families. To say that Ms. Testa hit the ground running is an understatement. She effectively and graciously worked with numerous managers, directors and members of the executive team to ensure that the information required for this report (which is literally hundreds of pages long) was submitted with exceptional attention to detail and in a timely, accurate and organized manner. Although this effort may have been daunting at times, Ms. Testa maintained a positive attitude and was always available to assist staff members with their own assignments for the report. This was not only witnessed by her chain of command but also echoed by many of the stakeholders involved. She has demonstrated that she is a tremendous leader and was instrumental with this demanding endeavor.

The Stonewall Uprising - Inspiring Change



In the 1960s, hostility towards those who did not conform to broadly accepted norms was rampant. This was evident in the treatment to those who lived openly as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQIA+) person.

Perhaps surprising today, these sentiments were especially harsh in New York City. Laws provided you could be arrested for wearing less than three articles of clothing that -- according to convention - matched your sex assigned at birth.

It was illegal to serve alcoholic beverages to homosexuals. Unable to legally marry who they truly loved; homosexuals also had to live out their romantic lives secretly. Sometimes even entering heterosexual marriages to avoid social stigma.

Blackmail was not uncommon.

Fueled by this social context, in 1969, police raids of gay bars in Manhattan followed a standard path of behavior. Officers would enter the building, threatening, and beating staff and clientele. The bar patrons would then leave the building to line up in the street so police could arrest them.



On June 28, 1969, NYC police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay club located in Greenwich Village in Manhattan. After the police, acting without respect for human dignity, roughly forced employees and patrons out of the bar, the community took action.

What followed was the Stonewall Uprising - protests in the community that served to both draw attention to these injustices and launched the gay rights movement. At first, they were referred to as a "riot."



Two leading participants in the Stonewall Uprising were Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson, both transgender women of color. A memorial to this brave pair is being built in Greenwich Village, the first monument to transgender activists in the world. This memorial is part of a national park dedicated to the memory of the Stonewall Uprising.

The first Pride march took place in New York City on June 28, 1970, on the one-year anniversary of that horrible scene in Greenwich Village. They marched from the Stonewall Inn to Central Park in what was then referred to as "Christopher Street Liberation Day," or America's first gay pride parade.

The parade's official chant was: "Say it loud, gay is proud."

In 2016, then President Barack Obama designated the Stonewall Inn, Christopher Park and the surrounding streets and sidewalks as a national monument in recognition of the area's contribution to gay rights.

Now over 50 years later, events occur across the country, and the world, on or about this date to celebrate Gay Pride and the rights and respect all people should experience.