



## **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

and social work staff to assist and advise on a number of topics, including internal reviews, administrative hearings, diligent searches, and ICWA notices. Despite the large volume of work in an often-stressful environment, Joe always interacts with others, inside and outside the Department, in a professional manner and with courtesy, kindness, respect, and patience. Joe recently gave a presentation to his peers on preparing a worker for a substantiation hearing. Joe was well prepared, displayed extensive knowledge of applicable state laws and Department policy, and provided a thoughtful and thorough Power Point presentation. Joe, thank you for your hard work and dedication to the Department.

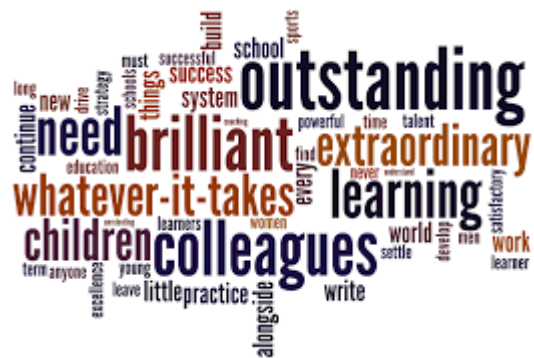


### **Maria Genca - Child Welfare/Foster Care Division**

Maria has a wealth of experience at DCF and within the Interstate Compact Office. Maria's knowledge of ICPC articles and regulations for all types of cases including private adoption, residential, parent study and therapeutic is an asset to the regions. Frequently consulting, her goal is to support regional staff as best possible to support safe and timely placement. She has been an active member of CT Council on Adoption, which promotes ethical, effective adoption practices in Connecticut and worked with them towards updating the law on identified adoption, submitted testimony for such in order to provide protections for biological parents, adoptive parents and children. Maria presented in-person at the national AAICPC Conference in May for the Compliance Committee she co-chairs and is also a member of the training committee for the conference. Her input on the updates to ICPC practice, policy, forms and CT KIND Design work has been invaluable.

### **Dave Spagnoletti - Region 1 & 5**

Since the agency created the Court Liaison position, Mr. Spagnoletti has prevented countless bench OTCs through his engagement with families and collaboration with the court systems. Mr. Spagnoletti's strong advocacy for youth allows him to be an effective advocate for youth staying with family and his efforts reflect true permanency work. Mr. Spagnoletti can be seen working hard with every division of the agency to bring about the best outcome for adolescents. His professionalism, engagement skills, and compassion for the work we do is evident in his work both internally and externally. Mr. Spagnoletti has served as a mentor amongst his peers and the newest workforce; he has shared his knowledge of the work and that of the Juvenile Justice System. Mr. Spagnoletti has built trust amongst agencies and has nurtured a strong collaborative between the Department, Juvenile Probation, the Public Defenders, Court appointed council, and most importantly the youth and their families. His work holds true to the Department's mission of children remaining safely at home by actuating change. His permanency efforts begin the moment he



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 IPVS 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.