

A Message from Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly



We have had a busy month with much to celebrate and acknowledge! May is **Foster Care Appreciation Month** with the theme of "**Engaging Youth. Building Supports. Strengthening Opportunities.**" As children remaining safely at home is our primary goal, we recognize the valuable role our foster parents play in supporting children and their families to achieve permanency.

"CT Fosters" is the brand of the **Foster Care Division** signifying that we bring resources together – and like all great community leaders - we find, organize, empower, and prepare resources that are already out there to unify families.

Thank you to the **Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF)** for another successful annual conference! It was so great to meet our **AMAZING** foster and adoptive parents!

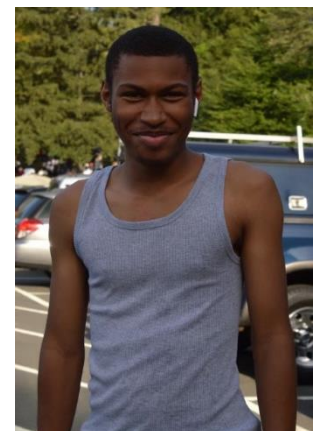
A must read in this month's "**Spotlight**" is the story of **TJ Mikalski** and his family's journey to adopt and foster adolescents! "**You never stop thinking about wanting to belong to a family,**" he stated. TJ is also a community partner with **The Village for Families and Children**. Watch **WFSB's "Great Day@9a"** show as TJ discusses the critical needs of teenagers, dispels some myths about them identifies the positive outcomes when a teen is placed into the right family at the right time. See the clip here: [WFSB](#)



"They give us life," is the story of how **Jim Strein and Terry Brettman** became foster parents and the impact the children they have cared for had on their lives. Who would have thought of becoming foster parents while retired? They did! Read more in this month's newsletter as to why they are described as **"fierce advocates."**

All of us balance the demands of daily life in an ever evolving and complex world. May is also **Mental Health Awareness Month** with this year's theme **"Where to Start: Mental Health in a Changing World."** Seeking support is a sign of strength and all of us should be empowered to reach out for assistance as needed.

In this month's "**Spotlight,**" hear from **Neil**, now a young adult leader, and a new member of the **Statewide Advisory Council (SAC)**. Neil uses his experiences in the behavioral health system to advocate for and empower young people as he continues to **lift the negative stigma** associated with seeking support.



Deer Oaks is the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for Connecticut State Employees. They offer an array of supports for not just employees - but for the entire family. Deer Oaks EAP Services can be contacted at **1-888-993-7650** or Email: eap@deeroaks.com and their website is: www.deeroakseap.com

CT DCF values diversity as we also celebrate **Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (AANHPI)** Month. "**Advancing Leaders Through Innovation,**" is this year's theme which honors the visionaries and trailblazers who have shaped history and continue to influence our collective future through innovation, resilience, and a pioneering spirit.

Happy Mother's Day to our Mothers, Mother figures and all those who play a Maternal role in the life of a child. You are part of the "Village" to ensure our children are successful, thrive and have the best opportunities in life!

Speaking of mothers who are also DCF employees, **Maritza Acosta** and **Jackie Ford** received awards this past month.

Maritza was honored by the **Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (CALAS)** with the **Outstanding Community Advocate Award!**



The "**Shero**" award was given to **Jackie Ford** for her continued advocacy and dedication to the children and families across Connecticut via her work at The **Olive Branch Shop**. She also received a generous donation for this work from **the Connecticut State Association of Emblem Clubs**.

Congratulations once again to the **April Employees of the month** who came to Central Office and received their signed certificates! A job well done!

DCF staff represented our Agency across Connecticut this month!

Behavioral Health Program Director Christa Rider appeared on **WTIC 1080 AM** radio with Brian Shactman to discuss child sex trafficking.



Kris Robles, Ines Eaton and Alison Karimi from the **Clinical and Community Consultation and Support Division** discussed supports for Connecticut's families at the **National Prevention Week** event at the Connecticut Science Center.



Chief of External Affairs Ken Mysogland provided opening remarks at the **Children's Community Programs** Therapeutic Foster Care banquet featuring **Alec Ingold**, starting fullback for **the Miami Dolphins** as the keynote speaker.

Our **CT-KIND system** was recently highlighted in **StateTech** which is a national trade journal focused on technology in state government: [State and Local Agencies Improve Child Services Intake and Outreach Communications | StateTech Magazine](#)



Congratulations to all of our youth and employees who graduated! I was honored to provide the keynote address at the **University of Connecticut School of Social Work Commencement Ceremony!**

Chief Administrator of Governmental Affairs and Policy Vinny Russo and **Legislative Program Director Mike Carone**, can finally get some sleep as the 2024 legislative session ended! Watch for a write-up of new legislation impacting DCF.

Thank you once again for all you do for Connecticut's children and families!