

A Message from Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly



November is National Adoption Month! On Connecticut Adoption Day, we celebrated 40 children establishing legal permanency, bringing the total number of adoptions this year to almost **350!**

We have put together a first of its kind **Connecticut Adoption Day Collage** in our newsletter to show the many children and families who took part in the day! Take a look!

THANK YOU to the tireless efforts of our **DCF staff** at all levels, the **adoptive families, Office of the Attorney General, community partners, children's Attorneys** and others who collaborated to make this day possible!

A special **THANK YOU** to **Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz** who attended adoption proceedings in New Haven!

And of course, the day was made possible by the **Judicial Branch!** A warm **THANK YOU** to **Chief Administrative Judge of Juvenile Matters Tammy Nguyen-O'Dowd** along with the following Judges who took part in Connecticut Adoption Day:

Bridgeport: **Sharon Skyers**

Hartford: **Carla Nascimento**

Middletown: **Thamar Esperance-Smith**

New Britain: **Eric Daniels**

New Haven: **Bernadette Conway, Tara Knight, Lynn Dawson**

Rockville: **Margaret Murphy**

Torrington: **Matthew LaRock**

Waterbury: **Sara Nadim, John Turner**

Waterford: **Barbara Hoffman**

Willimantic: **Nicole Anker**



The day was beautiful and one that showed the **best of DCF**. I saw firsthand the **strength** of our **Child Welfare** system in Connecticut - **We cannot do this work alone!** Collectively, anything is possible!

In my travels around the state, I met **Kenyatta and Lucas**. Most importantly, the "village" of loved ones who have

poured into these little children and will support them the rest of their

lives.





I saw **Corinna** play with a doll and walk around the courtroom as **Judge LaRock** formalized her adoption while her big brother watched.

With tears in my eyes, I heard **11-year-old Gabriel** address the court. "*I am the star of the show,*" he stated. With great pride, his **adoptive father** looked at him and said, "*You are such an intelligent, kind kid. And thank you for making room in your heart for me as your dad.*"



This month's "*Spotlight on What's Right*" newsletter highlights **Hartford Mayor Arunan Arulampalam and his wife, Liza**, who are adoptive parents. Read how they felt "*called*" to adopt and received so much support during the process they remarked, "*The social workers become like family to you.*" See this **public service announcement** the family made to promote foster care and adoption: [Arulampalam's Adoption Journey.](#)

The family also appeared on the DCF monthly [WFSB Great Day at 9a](#) segment.

Thank You to our media partners from **WTNH, NBC 30, FOX 61, Univision, Hearst CT, CT Mirror, Hartford Courant, New London Day** and the **Waterbury Rep-Am** for covering Adoption Day and supporting DCF!



Watch my interview with **Tom Dudchik** from [WTNH News 8's "Capitol Report"](#). You can fast forward the clip to the 13:35 mark to see my discussion regarding the **target populations for recruitment** and see little **Kenyatta** who made a guest appearance on the show!

Adoption is one form of permanency as **children remaining safely at home is the preferred goal**. This year, we will have **safely reunified over 470 children** with another 225 having guardianship transferred to relatives. Great work!



A shout out one more time to the **October Employees of the Month!** Who has been nominated to receive the **November Award** and described as having "*unwavering commitment, "vital, " and "always approachable.*" Read on.....



Congratulations to **Chief of Staff Karrol-Ann Brown** who was given the **Community Service Award** from **The New Haven Club of the National Association of Negro Business & Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.**

Speaking of employees, I had great visits this month with the staff from the **Milford Office** and met a special little friend. Traveling up I-91, I then spoke with the staff at **Solnit North** combined with the **Wilderness School**. You are all doing **AMAZING** work!



Our DCF family has heavy hearts this holiday season as we suffered the loss of **Gina Mangano** from **Region 3 and the Norwich Office**. Described as *"pouring her heart into her work," "a powerful advocate for families," and "an incredible mentor,"* she has left an impactful **legacy** of serving others.

A **Commissioner's Monthly video** will now be provided to keep you updated on Agency operations. Watch November's again here: [Commissioner's November 2024 Video](#)



Once more this month, the **talents of our staff** were seen across the state - and across the country!

Dr. Stephanie Bozak and our partners from **CSDE and DMHAS** presented a webinar entitled, *"Protecting our youth: a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention."*

Betany Zorba and **Yvette Cortez** along with **Vinny Russo** represented DCF at the **School Based Health Center Conference** while providing valuable resources to community members and professionals.



Michael Williams traveled to Florida to participate in the **"Ending the Need for Group Placements Learning Exchange"** - a collective effort by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs and community partners across the nation to ensure **all children grow up with their families** in a safe, supportive home.



At the **"2024 Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative Convening"** in North Carolina, **Dr. Nicole Taylor, Dr. Linda Dixon, Latosha Johnson, Elizabeth Hazelwood**, young adult partner **Lisa Ramos** and I took part in seminars and panel discussions with colleagues from across the country on how to most effectively meet the needs of young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

One strength of Connecticut's system is the voice of "parents and youth with lived expertise." We are grateful to **Caregiver Advisory Council** members **Marian Russo, Corrina Martin, Kerry Masseau, Sana Cotton and Elizabeth Saez** for traveling to San Diego to participate in the **Quality Parenting Initiative's 2024 National Champions Conference** with the theme, *"Research-Informed Advocacy: Supporting Champions as Change Makers."* **They truly are change makers!** Elizabeth also took part in a panel discussion related to adolescent autonomy and sleep research.

Tina Jefferson, Jeanette Blackwell, Beverly Green, Emily Marin, John Lachack, Daniel Reyes, Kim Tait, Kristine Rivera, and Carleen Chisholm also represented DCF at the conference. But that was not all..... **Sana Cotton and Unashamed Inc**, colleague **Shardae Nicolson**, spoke to a national audience regarding their Summer Training Series where adolescents learned how to own their story, use their story for advocacy and not allow others to exploit their experience.



Parent partners **Myke Halpin, Corrina Martin, and Lena Esposito** represented CT DCF as they traveled to the **"New Hampshire Parent Leaders of New England Retreat"** in Manchester, New Hampshire. You represented us well! A special thanks to National Child Welfare Lived Expert (Integration) and Race Equity and Justice Consultant **Dee Bonnick** for all her ongoing support!

Congratulations to **Corinna** and **Lena** as they received awards for their advocacy work at the **Family Forward Advocacy CT First Annual Advocacy in Action Luncheon!** Congratulations!



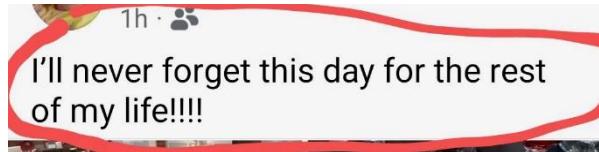
Jackie Ford along with parent partners - **Debbie Franklin** and **Ashley May - Williams** - traveled to Framingham, Massachusetts to jointly present at the "**A View From All Sides**" conference. The theme of the presentation - "**Breaking Stigma, Empowering Families: A Revolutionary Approach to Child Welfare**" - focused the importance of creating initiatives to reducing stigma and empowering families involved with child protective services.



Lastly, DCF hosted a celebration at the Wilderness School for **Kid Governor Cristiano Almedia** and his cabinet members to name the **2024 Connecticut Family Day** Poster Contest winner! Families



were also treated to fun activities by the **Wilderness School** staff!



Thanksgiving is upon us, and I wish for you and your families a time of rest and relaxation!

Thanks for all you do!

Adoption is a Journey



Liza Arulampalam and her husband, Mayor of Hartford, Arunan Arulampalam always knew they wanted a big family. Even before they met, each felt a calling to adopt.

"While we both wanted four kids, although now we have five, I didn't ever feel compelled to have all of the kids biologically," explained Liza.

The couple now have five children, ranging in age, two biological and three adoptive.

The Arulampalam Family

"Adoption is a journey and, in any parenting journey, there are difficult things and there are some really great things. Through some of those tough emotional experiences you build a really strong bond [with your children and others in the adoption community]."

Arunan and Liza said one of the joys one of that parenting journey is watching their children grow and develop their own personalities and talents.

"One of the fun things about building your family through adoption is, as your kids get older, they come out with these talents. For example, our oldest daughter is an extremely fast track runner...a talent that neither of us possess," Liza laughs. "These things happen and you're like 'wow what an amazing surprise' because they clearly did not get that from me."



"It's this joy and gift to see the person they become as you walk alongside them. It's a little bit from you, because our kids do copy and mimic us, but then there's this whole other set of DNA. It's just a really cool thing to discover."

Arunan said people ask him all the time if the couple feels differently towards their biological children versus their adopted children. He said neither he nor Liza feel that way - your children are your children.

"It's such a beautiful thing to see five kids all of whom have completely different DNA and different talents, abilities and skills and all of whom are equally special, equally loved and equally important in our family."

Arunan and Liza fostered and eventually adopted through CT DCF. The CT DCF Foster Care Division offers comprehensive support and training to all licensed caregivers to ensure they are

not alone on this journey. The Arulampalams felt that support throughout the process. They also built a strong relationship with their social workers and the other parents completing the licensing and training.

"We did our training through DCF and felt really well trained and well prepared. The social workers become like family to you," Liza said. "When you first start the process it could feel a little scary."

Liza remembers scrambling to pick up and tidy the house so she would not feel judged by the social workers assigned to her family.



"But as you go into the process you realize your DCF social workers are such good people. They are on your side. They just want what's best for you, for your child, for your child's biological family. And they're not judging you. They're here to help and we felt so cared for throughout the entire process."

Arunan agreed, "We love our social workers from DCF. They made such a huge impact in our lives. We had some of the best, most hard-working folks. We still talk to our social workers and have them on our Christmas card list."



"We have gotten so much support and so much love through DCF. They're just incredible."

From initial orientation to ongoing support, there will be help from DCF every step of the way to ensure that caregivers in training have the resources and assistance they need to provide the best possible care for their foster child.

"The training was incredibly valuable. You go through several weeks of training and build a real community with the parents going through it with you. We're still in a Facebook group with those parents, we still share our joys and our lows together," Arunan said.

"The level of training, and for the real scenarios you're going to face, is phenomenal. You're never prepared for parenthood, but we felt as prepared as we could be to be foster and eventually adoptive parents."

The Arulampalams encouraged others to open their hearts and homes to children in need of permanency and stability.

"[Fostering and adoption] has been an incredible way for us to build our family. It's a joy we hope other get to experience as well."

The Arulampalam family also appeared on the DCF monthly WFSB Great Day at 9a segment to talk about their journey: <https://www.wfsb.com/video/2024/11/25/national-adoption-day/>



While reunification remains DCF's primary goal if a child cannot remain safely at home, over 1,043 youth who have achieved permanency so far this year with adoption being one form of permanency. Since January 2020, the overall number of children in the care and custody of CT DCF has been reduced by approximately 25 percent with over 2,794 children safely being reunified.

As National Adoption Month comes to a close, DCF will have completed nearly 350 adoptions this calendar year in addition to reunifying almost 470 children and facilitating 224 children achieving permanency through a transfer of guardianship. In

the last five years, over 6,500 children have reached permanency which includes 2,794 reunifications, 1,608 transfers of guardianship and 2,123 adoptions.

Ready to become an adoptive or foster parent and make a difference in the life of a child?

Learn more about the process, ask questions, and take the first step toward making that difference by calling 1-888-KID-HERO or visiting ctfosters.com.



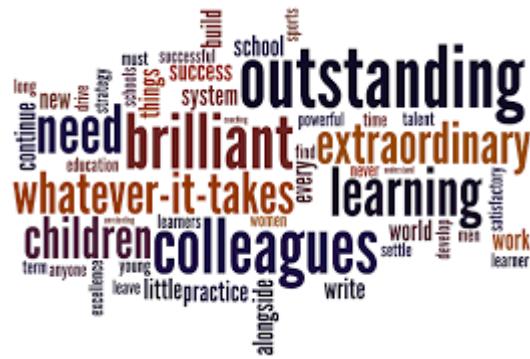


Employee of the Month Awards!

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

Dr. Denise Coley - Transitional Supports and Success

Denise is a Primary Prevention Services Coordinator who serves as an Interagency Liaison within Transitional Supports and Success. She is a valuable member of the Interagency Team, serving as the Central Office expert on youth transitions between DDS and DMHAS. Denise has developed strong relationships with our state agency partners and can always be counted on to brainstorm solutions with our DCF teams. She is reliable and consistent, always offering to help and doing so with a big smile on her face ☺. Denise has a great sense of humor, which can be affectionately attributed to her southern charm. She is a true partner in the work and a thoughtful teammate. Oh, and she has impeccable taste when it comes to football: WHO DAT, GEAUX SAINTS!!



Beata Munoz - PRTF (South)

Solnit South PRTF's November Employee of the Month is Supervising Clinician Beata Munoz. Beata consistently brings outstanding qualities to her role. With 11 years of dedicated service, Beata leads with her heart, embodying positive energy and a kind spirit in everything she does. Her thoughtful and compassionate approach shines through in her interactions with both her team and the youth and families we serve. Beata's collaborative nature and team player attitude exemplifies the work done at Solnit PRTF. Her unwavering commitment to the work we do is evident in her flexibility and dedication to clinical excellence. She is always willing to step in when needed, demonstrating her strong resolve to help others and ensure quality care. Whether supporting her colleagues or advocating for youth and families, Beata shows up with a passion that inspires everyone around her. Her contributions are not only invaluable but also deserving of recognition as Employee of the Month.

Cherina Rhodes - PRTF (North)

Solnit North's November Employee of the month is Cherina Rhodes- Lead Children Service Worker. Cherina demonstrates her skills as a leader by supporting and serving as a mentor to her co-workers and most importantly her dedication and endless commitment to the well-being of our youth. Cherina can engage with the youth during their challenging times to make progress towards their future goals. The activities she planned for the youth using her creative mindset have been remarkable. She is a trusted team player, has a wealth of knowledge with the youth we serve, and a delight to work with.

Catherine Mendyka - Fiscal/Payroll

The Payroll Office, "Employee of the Month" selection is Catherine Mendyka, who is a dedicated 3 Shift Operations Payroll Clerk for Solnit South. Catherine's 16 years of experience with DCF proves to be an asset for the entire Payroll Team. She offers her knowledge, support, and original notes to anyone who asks for assistance. Catherine is knowledgeable, accountable, and reliable. She can always be counted on to cross her "T's" and dot her "I's". She shows empathy and concern going above and beyond to employees in need with challenging payroll or benefit needs. She strives to have good relationships with Human Resources, Solnit South Supervisors and Staffing office to ensure everyone is always paid accurately every pay period. In the past, Catherine has reported to work at 4am on Saturdays when system outages have occurred, known for working Holiday weekends due to shortened payroll cycles, and never takes time off during payroll processing. Catherine was vital to the testing of Kronos prior to going live and continues to troubleshoot and work with the DCF Kronos team for its success. Catherine truly is an asset to the DCF Payroll Team and is highly respected agency wide. She has truly earned her selection as this month's "DCF Employee of the Month".



Erin Walsh and Sarah Plano - Solnit South Hospital

Erin Walsh is the Behavioral Health Unit Supervisor [BHUS] of the Sachem Unit and Sarah Plano is the RN Supervisor of the Sachem unit. Along with their MD counterpart and CSUS, these two phenomenal employees make up the Unit leadership team for their Sachem team. Erin oversees the clinical brilliant therapists who help support and teach our Sachem youth how to navigate their world, both internally and externally. As a multidisciplinary team model, Sarah collaborates with Erin, as the RN Supervisor overseeing the daily clinical operations and nursing care delivery. Together with their teammates, they have coined the phrase " Sachem Strong" which is their motto for excellent care, resilience, and most importantly, hope, which they role model for the youth they care for. Solnit is proud to have excellent leaders such as Erin and Sarah who demonstrate and live the mission and value of not only Solnit Hospital, but DCF. Thank you for your tremendous work and dedication!

Erika Johnson - Education/Unified School District #2

Erika Johnson has been a long-standing champion for the well-being of our students. She not only provides her students with a tremendous view of the world of Science, but she also empowers them to be involved with beautification programs for the campus. Erika gives 110 % to her students and her colleagues. Erika is there to lend a hand to everyone. From Wacky Wednesdays with her students to volunteering on numerous committees, Erika loves teaching and opening her student's eyes to new learning. Erika goes non-stop to provide her students with what they need to succeed in school. She is extremely valuable in all aspects of her work. We are so grateful for her unwavering commitment to improving the lives of our students. Thank you, Erika!!!

Catherine Silas - Office of Legal Affairs

This month, the Legal Division takes great pride in recognizing an "OG" staff member. Principal Attorney Cathy Silas has been with the Department since the creation of the Legal Division, meeting the legal needs of the Manchester Area Office in exemplary style. Attorney Silas has set a high bar in providing legal advice and guidance to area office staff and colleagues. Her work demonstrates the highest level of knowledge, thoroughness and critical analysis as she continues to manage an ever-increasing, and always evolving, workload. Her consults and interactions with staff

demonstrate her commitment to ensuring the safety of children as well as maintaining intact families whenever possible. Attorney Silas regularly participates as

a trainer at the Academy for Workforce Development, ensuring new hires are well-versed in legal issues and court-related duties. Attorney Silas willingly participates in committees, including the post-consent decree committee to maintain the Department's high level of standards in investigations. As a respected member of the Legal Division, Attorney Silas provides state-wide coverage for other offices when her colleagues are not available. All these accomplishments are completed in a professional, approachable demeanor; she provides clear and direct advice in a timely manner, ensuring staff can meet their required timeframes. It is obvious to all who work with her that it is extremely important to Attorney Silas that she provide accurate, reliable and consistent advice and guidance. Attorney Silas is a role model not only for her Legal Division colleagues, but for the entire Department: she is caring, hard-working and dedicated to the mission of the agency!



Edward Valentin - Careline

We are pleased to nominate Edward Valentin as our Employee of the Month. Ed is truly an outstanding Program Supervisor and a key asset to our team. His contributions go far beyond his responsibilities, and he consistently exemplifies leadership, creativity, and a dedication to the well-being of both our team and the families we serve. Ed is an inspiring leader who leads

by example. He fosters a positive and inclusive work environment where everyone feels supported and valued. He is always approachable, listens attentively to others, and consistently provides guidance to help our team succeed. Ed consistently goes above and beyond for everyone, ensuring that all team members have the tools, resources, and support they need to succeed. Whether it's addressing a technical issue or offering strategic advice, Ed's willingness to step in and assist at any given moment has made a huge impact. Ed is our local IT Guru. He is a go-to IT expert from troubleshooting technical issues to implementing systems that help streamline our workflow. His knowledge and quick problem-solving skills have kept our team functioning seamlessly. Additionally, Ed is deeply committed to continuous quality improvement. He actively seeks ways to improve practice and processes and enhance productivity. Above all, Ed is always willing to lend a hand, no matter the challenge. He is supportive, patient, and never hesitates to offer help or share his knowledge with others. His willingness to serve the team in any capacity, whether it's a leadership role or a technical fix, shows his unwavering dedication to our success. He is more than deserving of this recognition, and we are confident he will continue to inspire and lead by example.

Michael Glynn - Bridgeport Area Office

Newly promoted Social Work Supervisor Michael Glynn is nominated for Employee of the Month. Prior to Michael's recent promotion as a Supervisor, Michael had worked over 20 years in the Bridgeport Office as an Ongoing Services social worker, an Intake social worker, and an Adolescent social worker. Michael is highly skilled in case work services for children, youth, and parents, and has conducted high levels of assessments. Michael has also worked closely in the community with law enforcement as a DCF partner, as well as facilitated a multitude of mandated reporter trainings. Over the last six years, Michael had been assigned to the Adolescent Services unit and had developed strong relationships with youths on his caseload, immersed himself in Services Post Majority policy and practice, and helped many of his youth successfully transition from care. Michael is caring, dedicated and a true advocate for the youth and families he has worked with. During the pandemic, Michael volunteered to do in person visits, on his own and others' caseloads, brought youth to appointments as needed, and was a caring adult at a time of great uncertainty. Michael recently traveled to Louisiana with a youth and her baby to try and connect her with family. In addition to that great work, he maintains connections with youth after they have left care, as many of our adolescent staff do. When Michael learned that a former youth was in the hospital for an evaluation, he offered support by going to visit her. Michael's promotion is well deserved, and he will be an asset to Bridgeport's Intake operation as a Supervisor. For his youth, it will be a loss. Knowing Michael, he will maintain those connections and continue to be a source of encouragement and support.



Lisa Austin - Norwalk Area Office

Social worker Lisa Austin has been employed with the Department for almost 17 years. She has managed to travel the world of DCF by working in many capacities. She is currently a Probate social worker. Lisa's work ethic is second to none. She is focused, organized, and is committed to the work. Outside of own responsibilities, Lisa is always willing to lend a hand to her peers. She goes above and beyond to help and accommodate requests for help, especially on weekends. She moves seamlessly, joyfully and without complaining. "No" is not a word often used by her when asked for help by anyone within the office. Lisa is veteran staff and truly an asset to the Norwalk Office and the agency.

Amy Wisniewski - Waterbury Area Office

Amy Wisniewski began working with the Department in 2005. Prior to transferring to the Waterbury Area Office in October 2023, Amy worked in the Meriden and Middletown office. Amy is a very hard worker and does her best to ensure the needs of the families are met. Amy's work is done accurately and submitted in a timely manner. She presents to work with a positive demeanor and builds great rapport and relationships with the families to achieve best possible outcomes. Most recently, Amy had a case where removal was inevitable, however her engagement with the youth and the family made a difference on the family's willingness to engage with the Department and focus on goals to facilitate a successful reunification. Amy dug through the case record to ensure relative resources were located for the youth and avoided utilizing a core foster home.

Amy maximizes on supervision to discuss concerns regarding families in her caseload, follows case directives and timely completes referrals to ensure the families are having the needed services. Amy works well under pressure and consistently maintains a professional demeanor. Amy is an asset to the Department and to the Intake Unit. She is always willing to lend a hand and help her teammates. Amy goes above and beyond on all her cases and deserves to be Employee of the Month.



Marion Brockington-Jones - Torrington Area Office

Marion Brockington-Jones is the Torrington Office's employee of the month. Marion is a Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Social Worker who has worked tirelessly to provide positive outcomes to the adolescents and young adults on her caseload. As a TAY SW, Marion's day is never the same. She is frequently pulled in many directions to assist the youth on her caseload. Marion handles this pressure with a consistent, steady approach and a caring demeanor. She goes above and beyond to be present and to show up for the youth on her caseload, as well as their families. Recently, she was commended for her work with one youth who had a particularly challenging placement situation. Marion showed her dedication, care and attentiveness to this young person, as well as balancing the needs of her other youth. Marion

takes pride in her work, is always willing to help her peers in need and is an asset to the Torrington office.

Megan Johnson - Danbury Area Office

The employee of the month nominee for November is Megan Johnson. Megan is consistently available to help her peers, evidenced by her taking time to assist with various tasks. She serves as a mentor, a coach, and despite her own responsibilities she manages to be available for others. Megan often volunteers to provide shadowing opportunities for new workers, specifically, taking workers into the field to share knowledge and experience. She is patient and thoughtful when interacting with families as she works diligently to build supports and secure resources. She has demonstrated that when faced with challenges and/or barriers she is committed to exploring and exhausting all possible problem-solving options.

Ivan Cruz - New Haven Area Office

I would like to nominate Ivan Cruz for employee of the month for New Haven. Ivan currently works with one of the most vulnerable populations, the young people applying for Special Juvenile Immigrant Status. These are young people who have come to this country and have survived unimaginable circumstances. Many are fleeing violence and crimes of their home country with the goal of being safe, finding opportunity, and a chance at a better life. Many of these young people would have every reason not to trust someone. Despite their circumstances, youth after youth trust Ivan. The youth and their families openly share their stories. They openly discuss the horrors and dangerous conditions they left behind. Ivan has a way of allowing those who should not trust, know they are in the best hands. He ensures the youth and families understand the process and are comfortable walking into a



court. It is a pleasure to work alongside Ivan each day. Ivan was nominated by Social Work Supervisor Llanes and Judge Brandt. I have had the pleasure of supervising SW Ivan Cruz in the capacity of Probate Social Worker for the past 5 years. From the moment Ivan transitioned to the Probate Unit, it was evident he would excel in the work he does for probate. Ivan's work is reflective of his thoroughness in assessments and critical thinking in recommending what's in the best interest of the children and families he serves. Ivan's work extends beyond the cases he touches, he approaches his work with curiosity and ease as he engages the children and families. Ivan uses opportunities to learn and educate himself about the countries many of the children and families immigrate from. Ivan has acquired a wealth of knowledge on immigration policies and practices and its application to the work he does. Ivan is viewed with respect by his fellow unit members, and an anchor to the work we do with the undocumented immigrants (unaccompanied minors). Ivan is sought out by his unit members and other DCF staff to collaborate on the Special Immigrant Juvenile cases. Ivan has served as a mentor for staff who have expressed an interest in learning about his role as a Probate social worker, via shadowing opportunities. Ivan is well respected and regarded by the staff at the New Haven Regional

Children's Probate Court. Ivan's professionalism and engagement with staff, children and families is reflective of his approach in treating the families he serves with respect, kindness, and dignity. Ivan's hard work and excellence as a Probate Social Worker for the New Haven Office is well deserved of recognition and to be spotlighted.

Christine Surel - Milford Area Office

Christine Surel is a dedicated professional that is always willing to extend herself to support the needs of the office always with a smile on her face. She is knowledgeable and resourceful not only in the role and expectations of a unit supervisor, but she also has a wealth of experience as a foster parent and prior CAFAF Liaison. She can support the staff on so many levels due to her vast experience. She is approachable, and trouble shoots on ideas around how to efficiently effectuate communication between CPS and clerical which results in a seamless partnership. She really understands the reason, purpose, and value behind legal work and other clerical duties and does such a nice job sharing that info with others. This quality translates to everyone seeing huge value in their roles, taking pride in their roles, perfecting their roles, and validating how valuable each team member is. Christine has really jumped into her new role as Unit Supervisor and is an asset to the Milford Office.

Jill Amaio - Middletown Area Office

Jill Amaio is nominated for November's Employee of the Month. Jill has over 25 years of state service with the Department, mostly in the Middletown office, with her current experience being in the Investigations Unit. Jill has also done Ongoing and Voluntary Services Work, as well as the Court Liaison for Middletown SCJM for a period of time. She is a fierce advocate for both young children and teenagers and has open, honest and direct dialogue with her assigned parents in order to make an accurate assessment of their needs. She serves as the office liaison to the Middletown school system and has formed good relationships with school leadership as a result. She is knowledgeable and always offers help to her peers. Earlier this month, Jill was assigned an investigation that involved an unimaginable tragedy that included the loss of a young child. Jill used her skills with grace and dignity to offer parents any support needed for their family. Jill also put her own feelings and secondary trauma aside in order to focus on explaining the Department's role and asking pertinent questions related to this accident. Jill is to be commended for her work with this family, as it is a good example of her skill set and her commitment to serving children and families.



Mouangkham Jopson- Norwich Area Office

January 7, 2005, will be Mouang's 20th anniversary at DCF. Mouang has been a social worker in several specialty units over the years, including Medically Complex, Intake, and Permanency. Mouang's calm demeanor is a significant factor in her engagement skills. She is

nicknamed the "Father Whisperer" because she can connect with "challenging" fathers and get them to share much about themselves. She is also a popular name- in a good way 😊- among foster parents in our geographic area, due to her responsiveness, as well as her listening and problem-solving skills. Mouang was part of the Norwich Office's Case Partnering pilot program in the case manager role. In this role, she was able to be a huge support to her case partner in submitting timely referrals, court work, and case plans. She and her case partner were able to reunify a large number of children within 12 months. Mouang has been a school liaison for several years and is a member of the Norwich Office's Racial Justice workgroup & ChildStat Permanency Sub-committee. Mouang is a very hard and diligent worker and produces large quantities of work. She is always willing to lend a hand to a peer in need. Mouang has been conducting mandated reporter trainings in the community for over 10 years. Mouang is also the office's unofficial cupcake lady. She regularly donates her homemade, delicious cupcakes for office events, including cupcakes for adoptive families and court staff on Adoption Day.

James Carone - Willimantic Area Office

Social Work Supervisor James Carone has played a significant role in the planning process for multiple Youth Advisory Board meetings (YAB). He organized and hosted the Region 3 YAB meeting, the Statewide YAB meeting, and is currently planning for the upcoming Commissioner's YAB Meeting in December. He also attended, with his unit, the recent Youth Advisory Board's Wilderness School Day! James has worked very hard to ensure the YAB's success. In addition to the many other responsibilities that he has, he is also the office lead for Racial Justice. All these responsibilities are time consuming. Despite this, James has continued to go above and beyond in all that he does. He is a strong advocate youth, and his leadership is noteworthy and appreciated.



Dale Williams - Hartford Area Office

Dale Williams has been with the Agency for 9 years. Dale has shown dedication to the work in Intake as well as the families that we serve. Over the past month, Dale has been faced with 3 OTC's and has still shown her ability to put her families first. Dale comes to work every day with a positive attitude and works hard to get the work done. In the midst of all her trying times, she often still extends herself to her unit and other co-workers as a support and is a true team player. Dale's positivity and desire to do good work is an asset to our intake team! We are very lucky to have her.

Sophia Elwell - Manchester Area Office

Sophia is amazing and our entire work group appreciates her so much. She is always extremely responsive and supports us all, often with last-minute needs. Sophia takes the lead with legal filings, cleaning up our cabinets and case records, updates Kidpics, at times helps when staff have challenges with office equipment, communicates with the court, and countless other tasks

that support our work. Recently, Sophia helped a Social Worker prepare a hard copy case record for a case being transferred to another office by printing out important documents that were only stored electronically during the pandemic and compiling them perfectly. We also needed a ton of narratives printed out so a Wendy's Wonderful Kids worker could conduct case mining and Sophia's help was so appreciated. Sophia approaches her duties diligently and always cheerfully. We all appreciate her support and positivity! "She is always eager to assist and provides quick and thorough work with a smile! She truly makes our jobs easier and is a pleasure to work with and to be around!"

Courtney Sherwood - New Britain Area Office

Social Worker Courtney Sherwood has been employed at the Department since June 2023 and has been an asset to the New Britain office. Courtney was recently recognized by both Judge Aaron and Judge Daniels for his excellent written court work and presentation in court hearings. He attends all court proceedings prepared and knowledgeable about his cases. Courtney has been asked to testify at a court proceeding without any advance notice and presented the facts of the case with precision! Additionally, Courtney is always willing to help a co-worker and brings positivity to the work he does every day! We are so glad you are a part of our team!

Jessica Boughton - Meriden Area Office

The Meriden office would like to recognize Jessica Boughton as our Employee of the Month. Jessica has been with the Department for 18 years, of which the last 7 years have been as an Intake social worker. Ms. Boughton has established herself as an outstanding social worker and demonstrated her ability to engage families during the most difficult circumstances while maintaining empathy and respect. Ms. Boughton has a great work ethic and has gone above and beyond for not only families, but her unit and peers. She continues to be a strong advocate for children while utilizing a culturally centered lens when assessing safety and wellbeing. The Meriden office is fortunate to have Jessica as one of our own and we thank you for all your dedication and hard work.



Jailene Derisse - Juvenile Justice Education Unit

It is with great pleasure that Jailene Derisse is nominated as our Employee of the Month for November. Jailene consistently goes above and beyond in her role as a Pupil Service Specialist, demonstrating a deep commitment to her students, an impressive level of flexibility, and an unwavering dedication to her work. Jailene is a passionate advocate for her students. She takes the time to understand their individual needs, challenges, and strengths, ensuring that each one feels heard, supported, and empowered to succeed. Her ability to build strong, trusting relationships with her students has made a profound impact, helping them feel valued and motivated in their learning journeys. In addition to her advocacy, Jailene exemplifies flexibility in every aspect of her work. Whether it's adjusting her schedule to meet the needs of her students or taking on new cases, Jailene is always ready to pivot and find the best possible solutions. Her

ability to remain calm and flexible in a dynamic environment is an asset to both her students and the unit. Most importantly, Jailene is deeply committed to the work she does. She approaches each day with a sense of purpose, going the extra mile to ensure her students receive the best services. She comes with experience in Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), which she is able to use when working with the Juvenile Justice population. Thank you, Jailene, for your hard work, unwavering commitment, and the positive impact you have on the students. We are grateful for your contributions and proud to have you with us! Congratulations!

Karen Grayson - Bureau of Strategic Planning

Karen Grayson has been with the Department for more than 30 years and has been dedicated to the safety and well-being of children and families. Karen has held many roles in DCF and is currently a Program Supervisor in the Bureau of Continuous Quality Improvement. Karen has been instrumental in the SQR Process and identifying areas of systemic improvement. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in this role and is empathetic with staff, always acknowledging the gravity of the work. Karen is described by peers and staff as supportive, thoughtful, and kind. Karen is also committed to staff development, she has volunteered to take the lead in projects such as the DCF Mentoring Program, Newsletters and various Learning Forums. She is always willing to step in to help others. Karen is an advocate for the Safe and Sound culture, creating a supportive environment and increasing staff wellness.

Aletha Minnis - Central Office

Aletha Minnis is nominated for Employee of the Month. She is recognized for her for her teamwork not only in the Commissioner's very busy office, but also with CODAT - Central Office Diversity Action

Team. Aletha organizes large events including securing the right venue and menu for various celebrations or meetings. She adds her creative touch to decorating spaces for events and making giveaway baskets. Aletha also shows her kind and generous spirit in her actions which have an impact on her colleagues and to the youth we serve. For example, she has on a few occasions donated needed items to the youth at our Solnit North facility or supported their efforts by purchasing items they make and sell. Aletha assists a number of staff who reach out to her for questions related to KRONOS or travel request packets. She is always willing to help others no matter what. Aletha is a very giving and helpful person.



Seth Narotsky - Area Office - Clinical and Community Consultation and Supports Division

Seth came to the position of Supervising Clinician for Region 3 in 2022 after 28 years with the Department in other roles, the majority of which were at Solnit Hospital. Over the last two years, Seth has proven to be an invaluable asset to the Region, with his wealth of clinical knowledge, connections in the community, proactive approach to the work, and supportive leadership style. Seth has arranged two regional RRG staff retreats and encourages collaboration

and camaraderie across the Region in spite of the physical distance between offices. He also helps manage the RRG workflow by reviewing all requests and checking in with the team on a regular basis. Seth celebrated 30 years with DCF in May and we hope he celebrates all future anniversaries with our team! Words from his direct reports: "Seth is a well-balanced and supportive supervisor who has become the cornerstone of our team. His ability to listen, empathize, and guide with wisdom fosters an environment, where we feel valued and empowered. He strikes the perfect balance between offering constructive feedback and celebrating achievements, that inspire both personal and team cohesion. His fairness and approachability create trust, while his encouragement motivates everyone to perform at their best. He mentors, uplifts and leads by example which provides a positive impact on our team." - "I feel confident going to Seth for supervision because I know he is a competent clinician and has been with the agency for decades. He demonstrates a supportive and validating leadership style. His warm and welcoming demeanor is comforting and consistent. I further enjoy the RRG gatherings that he plans and the comradery he exudes. I am grateful to have a compassionate and skilled colleague." - "Seth has been very supportive, both professionally and personally. He demonstrates true dedication and commitment to our team. I can truly say that he consistently recognizes and celebrates our efforts which have made me feel appreciated and motivated to continue doing this work. I'm very glad to have him on our team as our supervisor!" -

"Seth's experience and knowledge about systems of treatment for severe/persistent mental illness, particularly with adolescents, makes him an invaluable asset for R3 and strong advocate for our most vulnerable youth. He is a supportive and direct leader who empowers his RRG team to feel confident in their work and clinical decision making." - "Seth is an amazing supervisor. He reminds us of all the time to take care of ourselves since you can't pour from an empty cup. He encourages me to attend trainings on topics that I find interesting regarding MH. He allows for autonomy in my work and trusts my clinical judgement. Seth treats us like professionals and is always willing to help whenever needed." - "Seth is readily available to offer support and assistance but gives us the space and autonomy to do our jobs well while keeping morale up."



Malgorzata Szmigiel Foster Care Division

Maggie is a selfless and hard -working person who is 100% dedicated to the families she supports. Those same families over the years have grown to trust that she has their best interest in mind especially when they need her guidance. It can be as simple as how to navigate the DCF System or how to find and utilize their own natural or community supports so they can be better parents to the children in their care. Maggie has also garnered the trust and respect from her CPS colleagues and CPS leaders. She does this by working in a collaborative manner across different teams which leads to the same shared goal of preserving the safety and well-being of our foster children and eventually a finalized permanency for them. Finally, the Foster Care Team is so proud and lucky to have Maggie as a team member because she embraces

positivity even during the most challenging of times. Foster Care Leaders always say the same thing about Maggie and that is when we need her; she is their 100% for us just like she is there for her families.