

A Message from Commissioner Hill-Lilly



October is **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**. We are seeing an escalation of violent acts in our communities and are called upon to raise awareness of the supports available for families.

CT Safe Connecticut is a 24/7/365, free and confidential information and resource line for anyone impacted by domestic violence. Contact can be made by calling **1-888-774-2900** or visiting CTSafeConnect.org to call, chat, text or email for assistance.



Watch as **Alison Karimi, Program Supervisor for the Office of Intimate Partner Violence and Substance Abuse and Recovery**, talks with our partners at **WFSB** about the signs of Domestic Violence: [Great Day at 9a](#)

Fathers for Change (F4C), is a psychotherapy intervention with a dual focus on domestic violence and child maltreatment. Read about this program in this month's "Spotlight" and the impact it has on men by **emphasizing and building on their roles as fathers**.

October honors those impacted by Domestic Violence with a national day of action - "**Wear Purple Day**" - and a **Purple Flag Raising** ceremony at the Capitol.



October is also **National Breast Cancer Awareness Month**. The 2024 theme is "**No-one should face breast cancer alone.**" Early detection saves lives!

The **Connecticut Department of Public Health's [Early Detection and Prevention Program](#)** provides breast cancer screenings at locations throughout the state for patients who have low income and who have no or limited health insurance. Anyone who needs **assistance**

obtaining a mammogram can find resources available online at ct.gov/dph/screening or they can call (860) 509-7804.



Child welfare professionals across the country care deeply about the families they serve. Every day, they make decisions that have a tremendous impact on families, children and their future. Please take some time to read a national article I wrote, "[The Blame-and-Shame Cycle in Child Welfare Needs to End](#)" which reinforces **safety decisions are not solely made by a single individual** as they are only one part of a complex system.

Shout out one more time to the **September Employees of the Month!** Who has been nominated to receive the **October Award?** Who is described as a "*team player,*" "*amazing,*" and "*fierce advocate?*" Read on.....





The relationship between fathers and their daughters is unique. Read **"A Father's Bond"** and hear the reunification story of Joe who is now spending the holidays with his daughters after he overcame years of substance abuse and incarceration. **"This is the best day of my life,"** his daughter exclaimed as they attended a recent WWE event.

The dedication of our staff is immeasurable. **Gabe Oliva Rapoport** is a **DCF Wilderness School Instructor** who has co- led an impressive 20 expeditions, including three extensive 20-day trips and four 14-day trips. His story, **"Into the Woods,"** tell us about his **transformative journey** to arrive as the school and how he is now giving back to those around him!



Congratulations to **Gladys Ortiz**, an **Intake Social Worker in the Norwich Office**. Described as maintaining the *"highest level of integrity and respect with her interactions with her colleagues, providers, children, and families,"* she was awarded the **William Rivera Humanitarian Award** at the Hispanic/Latino Heritage Month Celebration.

Community Outreach Coordinator Jacqueline Ford was nominated for a **FOX61 and United Way "Impact Award,"** recognizing and honoring individuals, groups and organizations who make a significant contribution to health care, housing, financial empowerment and/or the education sector in Connecticut.



Were you seen at the **"Trunk or Treat"** event at **The Olive Branch**? A great night of fun for DCF involved families and youth!

Earlier this month, I was the Keynote Speaker at the **Minority Professionals Leadership Development conference** in Washington, DC. *"Planting Seeds, Growing Leaders, Transforming Systems,"* was the theme as I attend with **Director of Multicultural Affairs Monica Rams** and **Program Supervisor John Lachack**.



Connecticut was represented well in Chicago for the **National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS) Conference**. Along with **Deputy Commissioner Dr. Joyce Taylor**, **Director of Communications Peter Yazbak**, **Bureau Chief of Continuous Quality Improvement Rose Wieworka**, and **Director of Organizational Development Lenisa Mathew**, we



presented and discussed Connecticut's Safe and Sound Culture, supporting staff and the complex work we perform each day.

Thank you to **Social Work Supervisor Winston Taylor** in the Norwich Office for the opportunity to provide opening remarks as the **14th Annual Community Prison Awareness and Prevention Gathering** with this year's theme *"Building and Strengthening Leadership to Serve Our Community."*



Why was our media partner, **Amber Diaz**, from **NBC 30** interviewing **Behavioral Health Program Director Christa Rider**? Stay tuned for more information and when the discussion will air.

Lastly, **Kris Robles Behavioral Health Program Manager** attended the unveiling of 'RiseUp for Arts' newest public art piece, **The Able Table**, a picnic table designed with accessibility in mind.



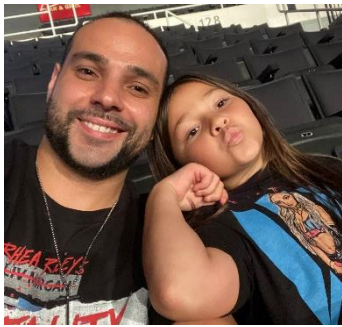
A special **THANK YOU** to our **24/7/operations - Careline, Solnit North and South PRTFs and Solnit South Hospital** - who are always open - **365 days a year**. They work nights, weekends, holidays, and when offices are closed to due inclement weather and other adverse conditions to support our children and families!

We are grateful for you!

Another busy month has gone by and once again, I would like to reinforce to all of you to be mindful of work/life balance!

Thanks for all you do!

Father's Bond: A Reunification Story



As Joe sat beside his 8-year-old daughter at a recent WWE event, her eyes sparkled with excitement. In a moment that melted his heart, his daughter, an ardent wrestling fan, turned to him and exclaimed, "This is the best day of my life!"

For Joe, that moment was a reminder of how far he had come. Sharing this passion with her not only deepened their bond but highlighted the importance of being present in her life.

That moment with his daughter was more than just a simple outing; it was a powerful reflection of Joe's journey and growth. It was a day they will both cherish forever. After battling addiction with substance misuse, his reunification with his daughters in August marked a turning point for him. Being there for them, seeing them happy, reaffirms his commitment to staying sober.

"It was her first big event. She was the happiest little girl. Those little moments like that, this is her best day because 'dad you took me here.' Seeing the look on her face and those little moments is what it's all about."

Joe took the steps he needed to live a sober life. He did intensive in-patient treatment, more than was required by the court, and said he also learned how to cope with stress in healthy ways.

Joe is close to both of his daughters. He said the strong, loving and consistent relationships he has built with them are the motivation that drives him forward. This month, October, is his eighteenth month of sobriety.

Joe refers to his daughters as his "queens" and that is how he treats them. His daughters can go to him for anything, but especially his fourteen-year-old, which fills him with pride. With his older daughter, he's instilling the benefits of a good work ethic now.

"Our bond is so close and so strong that she can confide in me basically anything. She started going to the gym because I go to the gym a lot. That's what I want to rub off on them, I want them to get into that lifestyle of let's work hard now and play later. Just always trying to build them up."

Joe detailed a reunification that was painstakingly rigorous at first. The process became much smoother, he recalls, when he began to acknowledge that he had a problem and stopped blaming others. He admits it took time to get there but he eventually felt seen, heard and



Joe and his 14-year-old daughter goofing around.

respected by his DCF-assigned social workers. In turn, he started seeing the DCF workers he interfaced with as partners instead of adversaries.



Joe and the girls getting some dinner.

"At first I wasn't a big fan of DCF. I felt like the victim, like they weren't listening to me. It was January of this year when I got really involved and my perspective changed. I said [to myself] I'm the one who made these decisions, I'm sick of being the victim and I'm owning everything."

Over time, Joe just accepted everything he needed to do to achieve reunification with his daughters - the drug screenings, the classes, the court appearances - and it just came to be his lifestyle.

Joe realized, "[DCF] wanted to make sure 'he's doing well enough to care for himself so that he can care for his daughters'. It led to a great relationship. I put in the work and they saw that."

"Once I said 'I'm doing this to better myself, DCF isn't the enemy', the grass has been greener on the other side."

Lily Julian, Joe's DCF caseworker, agreed and said Joe's cooperation and commitment was one of the reasons his girls were placed in his care and custody sooner than the timeframe typical for reunifications.

"He's someone we could really partner with which is why the girls were reunified so quickly. To see him follow through and do everything he needed to do was great, it's what we all love to see."

Lily said she has a lot of experience working with people in various stages of recovery, "When I worked with Joe, I could tell he was 'there'. He was absolutely in recovery, there was no denial. Not only did he take accountability, but he knew himself so well that he knew what his triggers were and what he needed to avoid."

"He knows what's really important to him right now which is his girls and healing the brokenness that happened in their lives the past couple of years."



Joe with his daughters pre-reunification. Social worker Lily Julian took the photo during a supervised visit.

Lily said the focus on positive "fatherhood culture" in her office and across the department played a role too. That work includes having fathers at the table as involved and capable caregivers from the start when DCF becomes involved with a family.

"It's really about engaging the fathers from the get-go and keeping that engagement going. All of the things that Joe did, his cooperation, led to our assessment of saying 'this dad is really appropriate, the girls want to live with him. Let's send them home.'"

The girls' daily presence in Joe's life is a reminder of how different life could have been and a realization that he got what he had always hoped for: a father-daughter bond that he never wants to sacrifice.

"The bond my kids and I have is incredible. They run to me for anything, sometimes just for a hug. They just have so much love in their hearts. I love that. I hope there's other parents, especially fathers, out there who get to experience the same bond."

"I'm excited for the future and excited for the kids. I can't wait to keep building our relationships and I'm excited for that journey."

Into the Woods: DCF Program Preparing Youth for Life Beyond the Wilderness



Gabe Oliva Rapoport is a DCF Wilderness School Instructor who has co-lead an impressive 20 expeditions, including three extensive 20-day trips and four 14-day trips. His dedication to outdoor education and youth development is apparent to everyone who knows him. Colleagues and students alike regard him as a role model, highlighting his passion and ability to motivate others to push their limits.

His own transformative journey began at seventeen when he participated in a diversionary Outward Bound program not affiliated with the Wilderness School. Initially hesitant about spending weeks in nature, he found his stride and was inspired by one particular instructor who he looked to as a role model. Gabe's curiosity about turning this fledgling passion into a career sparked from a conversation he had with that instructor and realized this could be an actual job prospect.

"It was 28 days and I was not excited at all but actually ended up liking it a lot. I remember asking one of my instructors, 'this is a job, you get paid to do this?' At the time I didn't see any normal job that was exciting or interesting to me. But I thought 'this is cool, I would do this as a job,'" Gabe remembered.

Over the years, Gabe prepared for his current role by undertaking solo trips and attending an Outdoor Leadership program at Greenfield Community College in 2018. It was during a jobs fair at this program that he met Aaron Wiebe, the Wilderness School director. The program's philosophy aligned perfectly with Gabe's own beliefs as an outdoor instructor, emphasizing positive youth development—a concept that deeply resonates with him. That is encapsulated in a philosophy, or mantra, often echoed by Wiebe and his team.

"This isn't about quote en quote 'fixing young people' which is one of the misguided things people assume when they picture programs like this. Actually it's about giving young people tools and helping them draw on the tools they already have to be successful and empowered."

While slightly more than half of the youth going on expeditions are referred to DCF for prevention, intervention, and transition supports, the Wilderness School is a place for all young people in Connecticut to try something new, find and develop their strengths, and build elemental skills that will help them in their lives. That is what Gabe likes so much about it - the accessibility for everyone to explore new experiences in a welcoming, supportive environment.

"I got to know the program and it seemed like a really good fit. I loved that it was a really accessible experience which was rare for a program like this. Somewhere students could come, don't have to pay money and we outfit them. I felt passionate about working for a program that was that available to all young people and families."

Gabe also values the collaborative spirit at the Wilderness School. The strong sense of community not only enhances the experience for the staff but also for the youth they serve, making the Wilderness School a truly special place for growth and connection.



The leadership and his fellow instructors are people he wants to be around and who he enjoys working with, "The team here is what sets this place apart for me."

"When you spend 20 days with a person you get to know them really well. Also, being outside renders everyone vulnerable and not distracted by technology everyone is in a state of being really connected to the people around you. I find myself bonding with my students and co-workers in this really unique way."

The DCF Wilderness School stands out as one of the few state-administered programs of its kind in the country, providing impactful, year-round outdoor excursions for young people aged 13 to 21. With programs ranging from 1-day to 20-day experiences, the immersive experience encourages personal growth, resilience, and teamwork, equipping participants with tools they can apply to their everyday lives.

When he started at the Wilderness School, Gabe said he had a good grasp on the technical aspect of the job - the "hard skills" so to speak like tying a knot or paddling a canoe. He remembers an onboarding that focused on the "soft skills", such as conflict resolution.



"This job opens a whole new world into what we call soft skills. Interpersonal skills, communications, de-escalation, intervention and just understanding that youth behavior is all about meeting needs. Learning what's at the root of it, why are they acting this way? That's been the biggest difference from my first expedition compared to more recent ones - it's my ability to better communicate not just with students but with coworkers as well."

Gabe's love for the outdoors and his desire to support young people in their own journeys make a lasting impact on all who have the opportunity to go out on an expedition with him. Fifteen-year-old Alex participated in three Wilderness School expeditions, two led by Gabe and a third led by a trio of other instructors, said he had been on hikes but had "never really been in the woods."

Alex ended up enjoying the experience so much that he came back the next year. During the second expedition, a fourteen-day trip to Maine, he said he and his peers learned a lot about

themselves through each other. Alex remembers pushing his own limits beyond what he was capable of achieving.

On his third expedition, the most recent trip led by Gabe, Alex remembers fondly but it started out a little rocky. On that expedition, a longer 20-day trip, he said he was a little nervous and remembers it being loud. The first night he barely slept at all. The next morning, Gabe could see in Alex's eyes that something was wrong and offered him some words of comfort. Things started to turn around from that point.

"It was just a great trip. We spent the entire time having really well thought out conversations about ourselves, things we do in life, what we feel we can better and what we do well."



During a group activity called shout out to the stars, the youth engaged in some personal reflection. They were asked who, right now, would you want to know that you are on this expedition? What person had a profound impact on your life, and who you want to thank for getting you this far in the expedition?

"There was a few of us who thought deeply about it. Some said it was this teacher or that person. Gabe told us, for him, it was his expedition leader when he went on that [Outward Bound program] when he was seventeen."

Alex said that spoke volumes to him and the other youth. The fact that Gabe opened up to them like and showed some vulnerability.

"It showed us that experience got him to where he was. It was like us seeing Gabe's own role model made us think more of him. That was a lot of respect [for Gabe to share that] with us."

Asked his impression of Gabe following those two expeditions, Alex said, "I think he's an amazing role model in the sense that he's experienced a lot of things we're experiencing. He's taken that and made such a positive life out of it. It showed us that you can make the best of your situation and become a great person."



Alex also said that expedition taught him a lot about himself and his capacity as a human being.

"[On the expeditions], I realized your body will not fail you if you keep pushing. Your limits as a human being are really high and Gabe inspired us to keep going, move forward. And we did it."

Alex said he has taken those life lessons and applied it to his school life where he is attending a private secondary school on scholarship and taking all AP courses. He said it is hard, it feels like being in college, but those expeditions

with Gabe taught him to find joy in moments that were completely uncomfortable. The reward is coming out on the other side a stronger person.

Seeing youth, over the course of an expedition, discover their strengths, embrace challenges and realize their potential is what it is all about for Gabe. Helping to facilitate their confidence and the "soft skills" they take with them beyond "the wilderness."

Gabe admits the job has its challenges too, "Sometimes being an instructor is hard. It's not an easy job but I wouldn't want to do anything else."

Although Gabe has also grown a lot from his first days as an outdoor instructor, he said one thing has remained a constant.

"What's been consistent is that I've been so lucky to be able to share some real special moments with my crews - seeing the kids grow and flourish and experience new things is special. It's been really amazing to see students come so far.

"They come back, get older, get wiser, they're like completely different people. That's probably one of my favorite things."





Employee of the Month Awards!

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

Paul Gressly - Foster Care Division

Paul Gressly has been in the Foster Care Division since 2017, and he has single-handedly managed the post-adopt college program for approximately 11 years now. He is no stranger to fostering, having grown up with parents who provided foster care for many years. His experience led him to pursue the social work field. In addition to the college program, he was also reviewing every single subsidized adoption packet within the State, up until the year 2020, when some packets were disseminated out for review, and then the rest were dispersed recently in 2024. Paul has worked very hard to make sure that the adoption subsidy packets were always complete and on time. He has gone beyond his scope to help each person who reached out to him with questions, or if they needed assistance to complete their subsidy packet with precision. He is also a student of ongoing professional development and has been an active member of CT Council on Adoption. Paul has managed a very high caseload for the post-adopt college population which continues to grow. To say that Paul has gone above and beyond to help his college students is minuscule, when looking at the actual work conducted, as it has gone way beyond his regular schedule. Paul is very meticulous, conscientious and produces high quality work and has been patient, efficient and effective when working with college youth, families, and community stakeholders. Paul is always more than willing to help his students, parents, colleagues at any time of the day or night as he doesn't want families to feel any more stressed than need be. We routinely receive commendations from parents and students who respect his work ethic and commitment. His collaborative efforts are stunning as has established great relationships with internal colleagues and external community providers. He handles every college situation in an effective and timely manner. He truly cares about every student in the post-adopt college program and has put his all into his work to make sure that every single youth receives guidance, help and support along their college journey. Paul's actions have been consistent with the agency's mission. He has been an invaluable asset to the post-adopt college program, and the Agency as a whole. We are very fortunate to have him!

EXCELLENT



Terry Watkins - Careline

The Careline Management team is excited to nominate Careline Supervisor Terry Watkins for Employee of the Month. Terry has dedicated an impressive 30 years to DCF, including 18 years in Manchester and has been a part of our Careline team since 2015. Her contributions to our team are nothing short of exceptional, and this recognition is long overdue. Terry has been instrumental in various initiatives, notably the creation and ongoing updates of our screening manual, which has become a vital resource for our work. She plays a crucial role in training our staff, ensuring they are well-prepared and supported in their roles. Terry's "Tips of the Day" emails play a key role in keeping everyone informed and aware of policies and Careline procedures, enhancing staff learning and bringing significant value to our Careline operations. Terry is incredibly supportive of her staff, always ready to lend a hand and advocate for their needs, and her unwavering dedication is deeply appreciated by everyone she works with. Terry skillfully guides her staff in assessing our cases with critical thinking, recognizing the children and families that need our involvement and support. She is dependable, professional, and a true team player, treating everyone with kindness and respect while demonstrating a deep sense of care for our work, the children, and their families. When additional coverage is needed, Terry always volunteers to work extra after-hour shifts. She has done it all, and we appreciate her every day. Currently, she works 1st shift but has also previously worked 3rd shift, where she supervised primaries and handled after-hour responses. Terry's commitment to excellence and her dedication to supporting our Careline team make her an outstanding candidate for Employee of the Month. Thank you, Terry, we at the Careline appreciate you.

The logo for SPEECHLESS, with the word in a bold, blue, sans-serif font.

Alexandra Jennett - Bridgeport Area Office

We like to nominate Administrative Assistant, Alexandra Jennett, as employee of the month. Alexandra shows grace and humility with whomever she comes across and interacts with. Alexandra provides unwavering daily support to Office Director, Chrichton Stewart, as well as countless number of supports to the entire Bridgeport Office and staff. Alexandra exudes a profound level of approach in bringing a stable structure to the Bridgeport Office around tasks associated with regular Officewide communications, staffing trainings, calendar agendas, etc. Alexandra does her work efficiently and is an important glue that keeps the Bridgeport Office afloat. The Bridgeport Office is proud to have Alexandra and is appreciative of her commitment to the office.

Evelyn Ayala - Norwalk Area Office

I am honored to recommend Evelyn Ayala, who has been an exemplary office assistant in the Norwalk office. With over 30 years of state experience, Evelyn consistently demonstrates that she is both efficient and reliable. Within her role as an office assistant, Evelyn ensures that provider invoices are properly processed in the link. In any moment, Evelyn can be seen zooming around the office searching for a Social Worker or Supervisor to make sure all of her payments are entered accurately and timely. Her unwavering dedication and tireless

commitment to her role, makes her a vital part of the office. Recently, Evelyn noticed a need in our visiting room and took the initiative to clean, paint a chalk wall and obtain baby furniture to ensure we are meeting the needs of our families. Her meticulous attention to detail, exceptional organizational skills, and proactive approach makes her an asset to the Norwalk staff.

Jessica Slauson - Waterbury Area Office

The Waterbury office is pleased to nominate Jessica Slauson for employee of the month. Jessica began her employment with the Department on 11-13-17, all in treatment units. Jessica has a great work ethic and a great attendance record. She is independent but is also a team player, is excellent at documentation and is efficient in her work. We often receive compliments from DCF staff, providers and AAG's for her prompt and detailed information on her cases. She was recently recognized and commended by our AAGs for her dedication on a 7-children TPR case that the AAG described as being the most complex case she has experienced in her 20-year DCF history due to the large volume of providers and moving parts. The effort put forth by Jessica cannot be overstated. Jessica is very reliable and always meets her visitation for home visits. Jessica has a good understanding of people and is able to utilize her engagement skills to gain a solid understanding of the strengths and risk factors present on all cases assigned to her. Jessica dedicates her free time to being assigned as a mentor to our new trainees as well as being an active F.E.L.T member. Jessica is an asset to the Department, and we are thankful to have her part of the Waterbury family.

Lineth Santos - Danbury Area Office

The Danbury Office is nominating Lineth Santos investigative SWS. She is an advocate for Racial equity and co-leads our office Racial Justice initiative. She is someone who is thoughtful about her approach to the work, always working to help coach and guide her staff. She has worked to provide resources and education to our trainees and seasoned staff alike. In addition to her work with Racial Justice Lineth is an active member of our Wellness committee and works to ensure that staff have opportunities to participate in activities to build camaraderie and place for staff to come together.



Tara Tebo - Torrington Area Office

Tara has been selected for employee of the month. Tara has been at DCF since 2019. She started as an Office Assistant and was promoted to Secretary 2 in April 2024. Tara was multi-tasking in her new position along with training new OA's coming into the office. Tara is a wealth of knowledge when it comes to legal work and background checks, as well as many of office tasks. She is always willing to help her co-workers in any capacity and go above and beyond, always with a smile on her face. Tara is considered the "mom" of the office. She is compassionate, caring, and willing to help and support the office whenever needed. She adapted to her new role with ease and is an asset to the Torrington office.

Kelley Wood - New Haven Area Office

Kelley Wood has recently returned to the agency in September 2024. Kelley has always demonstrated an excellent work ethic and gone above and beyond for her team, the office and for the families that she works with. She has such a passion for working with children and families and especially for her caseload of high-risk newborns. Recently on 9/27/24, Kelley was assisting her peer in the unit by attempting an unannounced home visit to the home of a MGM on a case in effort to locate a mother and her baby. When Kelley arrived at the home of MGM, she found the front door opened ajar. Kelley knocked and called out for MGM and MGM faintly responded and told her to come inside. Kelley observed that MGM had labored breathing and was slumped over. MGM reported that she overdosed on sleeping pills. Kelley immediately and without hesitation, contacted emergency services to quickly respond to the home. MGM was administered Narcan, and she responded to the Narcan. MGM was subsequently transported to the hospital. The assigned SW on the case met with MGM a few days later to check on her wellbeing. MGM asked the SW to please thank Kelley, as Kelley's home visit and quick response to contact emergency services saved her life. We are very proud of Kelley and are fortunate to have her back as a SW in the New Haven Office. Keep up the great work, Kelley!

Hemnauth (Vinnie) Arjune - Milford Area Office

We would like to nominate Hemnauth (Vinnie) Arjune, Intake Social Worker from the Milford Area Office for employee of the month. Vinnie has been employed by DCF for 19 years and most of his time has been in Intake. Vinnie has been assigned several fatality investigations in recent years and he most recently received a fatality case that involved an infant drowning. One of Vinnie's greatest strengths is family engagement. The sensitivity and compassion Vinnie has for families who have experienced the tremendous loss of a child speaks to what an incredible human being he is. Vinnie provided comfort to the grieving mother through the investigation process while at the same time assisting her in making funeral arrangements. Vinnie carefully and expertly balanced completing the Department's investigation while supporting the family during their grief, including supporting the parent responsible for the child's passing. Fatality case situations are extremely difficult, yet each time Vinnie has been assigned to one of these cases, his compassion and respect for the family during their most difficult time has made a lasting impact on them which they will never forget. The care Vinnie shows to all the families he works with and also to his coworkers during their difficult times is very much valued and appreciated by the Milford staff!



Dina Kelly - Norwich Area Office

Dina Kelly is an exemplary leader and team member. She recently assisted a Social Worker with placing a youth at Solnit North from the Waterford STTAR, as the unit was stretched thin. She was making efforts prior to doing this placement in trying to find biological parents/relatives for the youth for over a year. She went on Facebook, reached out to MA CPS, did a LexisNexis, asked FPs (continuously), reached out to our FCD. While assisting the SW with the placement,

youth commented that he did not know if he is Black to which SW responded that he is Haitian, and the youth seemed surprised. When Dina heard this, she returned to the office and reached out to the youth's attorney and GAL for assistance, as she felt he needed to know all about his history. The GAL sent a letter to MA CPS, which really got things moving in the right direction. The social worker ultimately contacted Dina and provided the information we were looking for. Dina contacted the youth's mother, and she confirmed that she is in fact the youth's mom and wants to meet him! Mom has since met youth and wants to do whatever it takes to reunify. Youth was adopted in MA, mom said she thought she was doing the right thing by having him adopted, as she was in an abusive relationship. This is only one of many things Dina has done. She remains in the trenches with the workers and supervisors to ensure timely permanency. She is a strong advocate for each worker. She is honest and straightforward with how she deals with issues be it on a case, with an employee, with the fiscal department, executive team, etc. Everyone in her management set talks about how supported they feel by her. She is the reason why employees continue to work for the Department. She has been a hard worker for the Department since the first day she started at DCF, no matter which facet of DCF she has worked. She always has a smile on her face, she is so very welcoming to new staff, always finds strengths in every worker. An overall asset to the agency. She is co-chair of the Norwich racial justice team. She has gone out to the local schools to get officials on board with our racial justice initiatives, such as taking a critical look at reports being made by the schools. She is consistent working on initiatives that improve our work. She is always willing to have difficult conversations and is always transparent.



Traniece McKnight - Middletown Area Office

Traniece is a seasoned permanency social worker within the Middletown office who has been with the Department for just over 20 years. She is everyone's favorite social worker! She is extremely reliable and conscientious, and she strives hard each day working toward permanency for her kids. Her dedication and hard work are evident with the many reunification/guardianship transfers and adoptions she has had over the years. Traniece is always on the run going above and beyond in ensuring all her kids needs are met along with their caregivers. She is a true partner in the work and ALWAYS has a smile, kind word to offer, and a positive attitude. She puts any judgement aside with families and has a quiet, but firm/direct approach which really reaches people. She takes great pride in her work and is outstanding in fatherhood engagement. She had an amazing reunification outcome on a case recently involving a father and his young son. Against all odds, this father overcame his past and after a long legal battle, he was able to reunify successfully. Traniece was one of his biggest supporters and advocates which he clearly recognized. It is a common occurrence to get positive feedback from stakeholders, foster parents, parents, etc., on Traniece's professionalism, kindness, and support. She is a true team player and is always there to help out. Her work and dedication should be celebrated and recognized.

Patrick Placido - Willimantic Area Office

Recently, an AAG shared the following regarding Patrick's work with a family with chronic and complex needs- and who is involved on both sides of the juvenile court: "I wanted to take a moment to recognize Patrick Placido for his amazing efforts [on one of his] cases. We had a detention review – the third one we have attended in the last three weeks for the youth. In the span of about 3 weeks, Patrick was able to work with a very reluctant and reactive father and got an entire DDS application completed for youth, just before his impending 18th birthday. There was nothing but praise for Patrick in court – from the judge, the prosecutor, public defender, and probation. Not only did Patrick get the DDS application done, but he also got an expedited referral into MDFT. Patrick was able to communicate with the court and all parties in a confident, composed manner. All the praise is very well deserved." Accomplishing the above in expeditious timeframes required attention to detail, follow up and follow through with RRG, multiple providers, AAG and SWS; all of which he accomplished seamlessly. This is fantastic work noting that Patrick has been with the Department for only 9 months and prior to joining DCF had no knowledge of the court systems and executing CPS work within them. Additionally, Patrick routinely assists his peers when needed and truly takes a person-centered approach to Child Protection work both with his clients and with providers. As noted above by AAG, this father's reluctance and reactivity has been a barrier to prior interventions with DCF. Patrick has been patient, clear, supportive and most of all - kind, which has made a big difference!



ShaMia Henderson - Hartford Area Office

ShaMia has been with the Department for many years and has served as SW, ISW, Supervisor, Intake Supervisor, and ACR facilitator. She recently transitioned from the role of an ACR facilitator to supervise an Ongoing Services unit. During her transition, she has been proactive meeting with her peers as well as her new staff. Has established clear systems, expectations and trust with her staff. ShaMia has been diligent in getting to know her staff and cases assigned to her unit. ShaMia can provide clear directions and deadlines without losing the ability of importance of supporting her team. ShaMia takes great pride in her work, and it shows. She is a trusted team player, has a wealth of knowledge, and a delight to work with.

Orisha Crooms - Manchester Area Office

Orisha Crooms is being nominated (by several people including her supervisor, manager, and a Careline PS) for her hard work on several cases. Orisha has demonstrated outstanding engagement skills, assessment skills, and compassion, and has been an advocate for the children on her caseload. On 09/04/2024, during a home visit, Orisha trusted her "gut instinct" that something was not right and communicated this promptly to her supervisor. As a result of Orisha's work with the family throughout the assessment, the child was safe. After the child entered the Department's care, Orisha continued her efforts to keep her parents in the loop, despite their lack of communication and inconsistent whereabouts, as she knew this

meant a lot to the child. Orisha was also patient and understanding with the child's foster parents as they navigated their first placement. Orisha truly exemplifies the remarkable work we all do as social workers. The Careline PS noted the following regarding Orisha's response to an on-call case alert, ""Her empathy, dedication, and skill in connecting with the family were truly remarkable. Orisha's ability to engage the children and their caregivers was key to making progress in this challenging case. She was amazing, and her efforts have made a significant impact. We at the Careline appreciate all that Orisha did to support this family. The Hartford area office was appreciative along with upper-level management.

Jovannie Vincenty-Medina - New Britain Area Office

Social Worker Jovanni Vincenty-Medina has been with DCF for 2 ½ years. As a social worker, he is very compassionate towards his clients and spends a lot of time building relationships with families. He is also the first person to offer support to his peers in times of need. In August 2024, Jovanni successfully completed the Army/State of CT Officer Candidate School (OCS) for the Army National Guard while also working as a trainee here at DCF. Completing OCS is a very grueling and challenging process in itself but doing so while also subsequently learning at our own training academy, managing a caseload and transitioning from trainee to social worker is a huge feat and accomplishment. 2nd Lieutenant Vicenty-Medina now has the task and privilege to continue serving the state in various capacities with DCF and the CT Army National Guard.

Alyson Perez - Meriden Area Office

Alyson Perez is being nominated for Employee of the Month for her unwavering consistency and dedication to her work, regardless of case complexities. She treats every investigation as she would with a same day response with urgency, responding to families as quickly as possible. Alyson consistently makes timely referrals, and her assessments are thorough, well-organized, and of the highest quality. She approaches even the most challenging tasks without complaint and is someone her peers and the office leadership can always rely on. Alyson's commitment to excellence and her positive attitude makes her an invaluable asset to the office, truly deserving of this recognition.



Kentavis Brice - Health Management and Oversight Division

It is with great pleasure that HMO Division nominate Kentavis Brice as this month's Employee of the Month. Kentavis has been with the division since 2021 and was hired as the Statewide Multidisciplinary Evaluation (MDE) Coordinator. Kentavis may have been new to DCF and the DCF MDE however, he quickly stepped into the role providing leadership, structure and consistency with the MDE process as well as bringing a wealth of knowledge working with the child welfare population. He has established invaluable relationships with both our regional staff and our outside MDE providers and has enhanced their ability to work together for the common goal of improving the health and wellbeing for the children we serve. In addition, Kentavis is an active member of our HMO Racial Justice committee providing insight and compassion to every project the committee works on. Most recently collaborating with other

HMO Racial Justice committee members on the new Health Literacy project. His work with the adolescent population in previous roles has been invaluable to the project. Kentavis is also a highly self-directed person. If there is a skill or topic that he wants to learn about he takes it upon himself to seek out how and where to obtain the knowledge. He is currently participating in the Lead Mentoring Program through the Academy of Workforce and Development. I know we will see more great things from Kentavis in the future! Lastly, Kentavis is also simply a joy to work with. He has a great sense of humor and always willing to help anyone in our division and regularly recognizes others for their contributions to the team. We are truly lucky to have him in our division.

Beth King - Transitional Supports and Success

Beth came to the Wilderness School in 2023 as a full-time supervisor however, she worked from 2017 through 2019 as a Wilderness School Seasonal Instructor and Course Director. She has brought her knowledge of experiential/outdoor education, along with a background in social work to program. She has been an excellent fit for our program. She works with a steady consistency and is always willing to extend her support as our program needs rise. Importantly, Beth makes excellent judgements and always strives to do high quality work with excellent results. She is fun, creative, and always willing to learn. Recently, Beth has been working to expand our regional course area by exploring the natural resources of the state in order to do courses closer to the communities of the groups served by Wilderness School. Additionally, Beth administers short courses and shorter expeditions for the program. Congratulations Beth well deserved.



Laurie Pierson - PRTF (South)

Laurie Pierson is highly deserving of the Employee of the Month nomination at Solnit PRTF due to her dedication and years of service, both at the Hospital and PRTF units. As a compassionate patient advocate, Laurie has built strong, trusting relationships with the youth, helping them feel supported and heard. Her calm demeanor consistently contributes to creating a peaceful and stable environment within the unit. Laurie's sharp clinical assessment skills have been invaluable, especially when working with medically complex youth, ensuring they receive the best care and treatment possible. During staffing shortages, Laurie remained a reliable constant on second shift, going above and beyond to maintain continuity of care and support for both the staff and youth. Her dedication, compassion, and clinical expertise make her an outstanding candidate for this recognition.

Jennifer White - PRTF (North)

Jennifer White has been nominated for employee of the month based on the following: 1. Excellence in Patient Care: Jennifer consistently provides exceptional care to psychiatric patients, offering a compassionate and calming presence in challenging situations. Her ability to de-escalate crises while maintaining patient dignity stands out. She goes above and beyond to ensure each patient feels heard and understood. 2. Teamwork and Support: Jennifer is a

collaborative team player, always willing to assist her colleagues. She actively supports newer staff members by offering guidance and sharing her expertise, fostering a positive work environment.3. Professionalism and Dedication: Jennifer demonstrates unwavering professionalism and empathy, even when faced with high-stress scenarios. Her dedication to patient well-being is evident in every shift, making her an indispensable part of the team. Jennifer's commitment to holistic patient care and her leadership within the team make her highly deserving of this recognition. Written by: Albert J. Solnit North PRTF's Director of Nursing.

Catherine Santiago - Fiscal

Catherine Santiago, Associate Fiscal Administrative Officer, is a valuable asset to Fiscal Services. She has stepped into a position and had the responsibility to bring State Single Audit in compliance. She has been steadfast in her approach and dedicated in addressing the backlog of the work. She is always upbeat and willing to help her co-workers and contract support unit.

Chelsea Powell - Juvenile Justice Education Unit

Sometimes the term 'hitting the ground running' can be overused or not accurate. However, when thinking about the work of Chelsea Powell, Pupil Service Specialist for the JJEU, the term genuinely applies. Chelsea has certainly hit the ground running in her work serving the students and families in the Juvenile Justice system. Chelsea brings a wealth of experience and expertise understanding to the barriers and challenges many of our students face. She pairs that knowledge with a calm poise and easy connect ability to her students as well as her partners and colleagues. What's great about Chelsea isn't just that she fulfills the tasks of her job so well, it's that she looks at things with an eye towards innovation and improvement. So, while she helps her students and families to have better opportunities in their life, she cares about the unit and those she works alongside with too. That's why when Chelsea brings forward new ideas or new strategies or solutions, they are always received so well. Her commitment and credibility as a professional and someone who always produces high quality work is a daily reminder of why the JJEU is fortunate to have her in their unit. Chelsea has hit the ground running and there's no sign of her stopping or slowing down. Thank you, Chelsea, for your great work!



Dr. Stephney Springer - Central Office Clinical and Community Consultation and Supports Division

Dr. Springer's unwavering dedication to advancing Connecticut's children's behavioral health system is truly remarkable. She has been instrumental in addressing the critical issue of children languishing in emergency rooms while awaiting behavioral health services. Her tireless efforts ensure that these vulnerable children and families receive timely care, alleviating their immediate crises and paving the way for their long-term well-being. A key aspect of Dr. Springer's success is her exceptional ability to collaborate with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) and the Department of Social Services (DSS). Through

these partnerships, she supports youth and their families with Medicaid/HUSKY Health, ensuring they have access to comprehensive and continuous behavioral health services. Her work with DMHAS and DSS has strengthened the safety net for children and adolescents in need, making a tangible difference in their lives. Additionally, Dr. Springer has excelled in her role as a fair and supportive leader in managing the CT BHP contract. She provides invaluable support and mentoring to Carelon Behavioral Health staff, helping them navigate the complexities of the healthcare system and encouraging a collaborative and inclusive work environment. Her ability to balance the demands of contract management while fostering professional growth among her colleagues speaks volumes about her leadership skills and commitment to excellence. In recognition of her outstanding contributions, relentless advocacy, and her pivotal role in enhancing the behavioral health system for children and youth, I wholeheartedly recommend Dr. Stephney Springer for the Employee of the Month award at DCF. She exemplifies the highest standards of commitment, fairness, and excellence that this honor represents. Ann Hogan (Sr. Government Relations Officer-Yale New Haven Health). In my role at Yale New Haven Health, I have had the pleasure of working with Dr. Stephney Springer for many years. Stephney is a consummate professional with a calm (and calming) demeanor that has yielded a strong partnership where we effectively work together on behalf of the children and families we serve. I rely heavily on Stephney's knowledge of both the Agency and the state's behavioral health system, and I am never disappointed! Christa Rider (Reg 1:

Behavioral Health Clinical Manager): I would like to nominate Dr. Springer for Employee of the Month. Dr. Springer is very compassionate, reliable, knowledgeable, and an exceptional leader, who is a huge asset to our team and agency. Her unwavering dedication and support to



Connecticut's most vulnerable children and families is second to none. She consistently will spend the time to understand a child/family's needs and many times goes out of her way to support coming up with a viable solution. Dr. Springer's holistic view of children and families and their intersectionality with systems is respected, especially through her lens of racial justice, trauma and other social determinates of health. Similarly, Dr. Springer is equally as supportive to her colleagues. She is committed to investing in her staff and their continued growth and professional development. She continues to be a mentor to many, whether that be colleagues watching her from afar or working directly with her. Dr. Springer will go out of her way to check in on you as a person. I personally have the upmost respect for her and feel privileged to be able to learn from her or consult with her on cases.

Gina Mangano - Area Office Clinical and Community Consultation and Supports Division

We are pleased to nominate Gina for Employee of the Month in a gesture that we hope honors all the work that she has done on behalf of the Department and the children and families we serve. Gina Mangano, Norwich Intimate Partner Violence Specialist, has been a dedicated DCF employee for the past 27 years, and most notably one of the original Intimate Partner Violence Specialists in the state. Gina is retiring at the end of October, which was a difficult decision for

her, as she is described by her supervisor, Lori Blinderman, as pouring her heart into her work. Lori also described Gina as being a powerful advocate for families and being closely connected to the community. Gina has been one of the original members of the Steering Committee for the Justice Center opening in Waterford. The Justice Center will serve families from the region in a holistic center for clinical, case management, legal, housing, and parenting services for all members of families impacted by violence. Gina's colleagues, IPVS Caitlin Rustic and Jenette Arabasz, describe Gina as "a fierce advocate for the families. Caitlin Rustic: "Her insight and knowledge around IPV embodies the true meaning of advocacy. When coming into this position, Gina went above and beyond to make sure that we were set up with everything we could need. She also took the time to introduce us to community providers to ensure that a strong working relationship continued throughout the Region. Gina was a support for us, whether we needed to process a case or by encouraging us to develop our own advocacy skills. We are very thankful to Gina. " Jenette Arabasz: "Gina is an incredible mentor and advocate in the field of IPV. Her dedication and clarity in documentation not only reflect her commitment to the work but also set a high standard for others. Only knowing Gina for a year now, she is an inspiring person that I wish I had met sooner. When I first began my work as IPVS, she was kind, welcoming and ensured that I had all the information to succeed in this position including documentation, connections with providers/the communities we serve. Gina is an employee to admire and very deserving of employee of the month."

Sarah Gibson - Family and Community Services Division

It is with great pleasure I nominate Sarah Gibson Employee of the Month for the Family & Community Services Division. Sarah has shared her various talents with the department for over 23 years. In that time, she has been a principal attorney in Region 2, Foster care in Region 4, CO Lead for Congregate Care and Foster Care, Director the Office

of Children Youth in Placement and for the past 5 years as the Region 4 Systems Program Director. Sarah's expansive experiences makes her one of our strongest SPDs. In her current role Sarah supports the Region 4 Regional Advisory Board and the Racial & Ethnic Disparities (RED) Reduction Project, while also supporting all the services in Region 4. Sarah's recent impact has been her outstanding work in responding to the CFRS Service Array section and support in the continued development of the Service Advisory Outcome Committee (SOAC). Sarah is a quiet but powerful behind the scenes player who moves the work forward with humble passion.

A large, stylized graphic of the word "STUPENDOUS!" in a bold, orange, bubbly font with a black outline and a slight shadow effect, giving it a 3D appearance.

Miriam Migliacci - Education/Unified School District #2

Unified School District #2 is pleased to nominate Miriam Migliacci for Employee of the Month at Solnit North. Miriam transitioned seamlessly from her role as an ELA teacher to a Pupil Service Specialist, demonstrating remarkable adaptability. She has quickly acquired extensive knowledge and skills, positioning herself to train other PSS staff effectively. Miriam takes her responsibilities very seriously and is deeply committed to ensuring that every student on her caseload is well-represented and fully prepared for their educational journey. Her dedication and impact on our students are truly commendable.

Heidi Jaskiewicz - Office of Legal Affairs

This month, the Legal Division wishes to recognize Norwich paralegal Heidi Jaskiewicz as employee of the month. Heidi is a beloved member of the Norwich area office and the Legal Division. She is a support and mentor to both new and seasoned staff and is always willing to assist her colleagues. She is the Division expert on Indian Child Welfare Act notices and provides both support and training on ICWA matters as well as attending quarterly meetings with our tribal partners. In the words of her supervisor, "Heidi is truly the glue that keeps the Norwich office together." As noted by Office Director Dave Silva, " Heidi is an integral part of the Norwich office. She is very hands on with all of our legal needs and tries her best to get answers to any questions that are asked of her. The Norwich office and community is extremely fortunate to have Heidi." Heidi not only juggles the various responsibilities of her position, but also finds time to work on planning staff outings and organizing an annual holiday gift drive to ensure that our DCF involved families have a wonderful holiday experience. Heidi, you are a valued member of the Legal Division and the Department, and we appreciate you! Thank you and keep up the great work!



Elaine Jackson - Solnit South Hospital

No one will be surprised at our choice to nominate Elaine Jackson for Employee of the Month. She is known throughout Solnit South as a "go to" person who has answers to questions no one else can provide. However, what is truly extraordinary about Elaine is her unending and tireless dedication to the success of Solnit and to the youth we serve. In her role as Medical Records Specialist 2, she co-chairs the Medical Records Committee and keeps us all in line to ensure the medical records chart documentation is completed on time, per procedure and that it meets Joint Commission standards. This is just a piece of the 'work' aspect of her role here, but Elaine does so much more for Solnit. She reaches out to community organizations, finding people who will make special blankets for every youth admitted to Solnit so that each youth has something of their own to snuggle with when they go to bed each night. In addition, every year Elaine seeks holiday donations from the community and coordinates everything related to making wishes come true for the youth at Solnit. On her own time, she speaks at Churches and other community organizations to tell them about the kids at Solnit; she sets up our on-campus workshop for our "elves" and drives all over the state picking up donations that come in each year so that all the kids at Solnit have presents to open. All of this is above and way beyond what she was hired to do. Nominating her for Employee of the Month is just a small way that we can say a very big THANK YOU to Elaine Jackson.

HELPING KIDS BY HELPING THEIR DADS: FATHERS FOR CHANGE, A FATHER-FOCUSED INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. As we are experiencing an escalation of violent acts in our communities, collaborative work is being done between the Department of Children and Families, Yale University, and the University of Connecticut Health Center to assess and address the underlying issues associated with family violence.

One program is Fathers for Change (F4C), a psychotherapy intervention with a dual focus on domestic violence and child maltreatment. It engages men by emphasizing and building on their roles as fathers.

Read the article below about F4C, initial outcomes, current research underway and how to refer fathers to this support.

HELPING KIDS BY HELPING THEIR DADS: FATHERS FOR CHANGE, A FATHER-FOCUSED INTERVENTION TO ADDRESS FAMILY VIOLENCE

By Damion J. Grasso, PhD



About 70% of children continue to have contact with their father after police or state intervention for father inflicted family violence. This is true regardless of whether anything has been done to help the father change his behavior. Unfortunately, in much of the United States, child welfare services focus on mothers and often do not expect or help fathers to become better fathers and coparents. This places an unfair burden on mothers and is a bias toward fathers who

are not always offered services the way maltreating or struggling mothers are provided treatment opportunities, even if their use of violence led to the family's involvement with child protective services. Even when services are offered to these fathers, they typically occur in a vacuum, with fathers, mothers, and children receiving services separately in a siloed system that largely ignores the family dynamic and the father-child relationship. Fortunately, Connecticut has made great strides in shifting the paradigm to engage fathers in change – for their benefit and the benefit of their families.

Domestic Violence – the *Gateway Adversity*

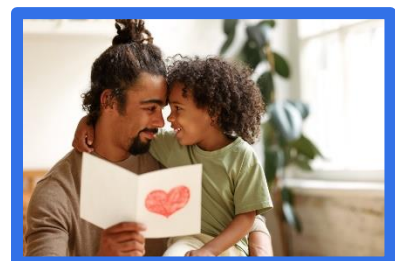
Children's exposure to domestic violence (DV) is prevalent, with about 1 in 6 children impacted in the United States (Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, & Omrod, 2011). Most of these children also experience direct forms of child maltreatment, including emotional and physical abuse and

neglect (Grasso et al., 2016). Some have described young children's exposure to DV as a *gateway* adversity to other forms of adversity and trauma across the lifespan (Dierkhising et al., 2019; Grasso et al., 2016). Together, DV and co-occurring forms of child maltreatment can wreak havoc on children, with significant immediate and long-term consequences on physical and psychological health that can emerge early and cascade across development into adulthood (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2019; Grasso et al., 2016; Stover et al., 2019).

Not surprisingly, DV is especially common among children referred to child protective services – and this impact is greater than often realized. In a study conducted by the Connecticut Children's Injury Prevention Center, 44% of child maltreatment reports had documented DV exposure indicated in their child maltreatment codes whereas researchers found evidence of DV exposure in 78% of cases when conducting a comprehensive review of narrative documentation maintained in DCF records (Grasso et al., 2021). This is important given that the same study found that more severe DV, as quantified using a validated coding scheme, was significantly associated with (a) number of substantiated allegation types, (b) poly-victimization and poly-deprivation (number of documented threat- and neglect-based adversity types, respectively), and critically, (c) having a new allegation of abuse or neglect within 12 months of the study's index allegation (Grasso et al., 2021; O'Dea et al., 2020).

What is Fathers for Change (F4C)

Fathers for Change (F4C; Stover, 2023) is a psychotherapy intervention with a dual focus on DV and child maltreatment. It engages men by emphasizing and building on their roles as fathers. It involves both individual and family work, when appropriate, and utilizes a family systems frame to examine and address multigenerational patterns and experiences that perpetuate and maintain family violence. Additional sessions focus on improving fathers' (a) understanding of their own emotions, triggers, thoughts, and behaviors, (b) perception of their partners' and children's intentions and behaviors, and (c) capacity to regulate and manage stress reactions. Following individually focused topics, F4C allows for optional conjoint coparent and child participation in sessions focused on healing relationships. Father-child sessions focus on reparations that benefit children, including the father taking responsibility for his violence, making an apology, and sharing what he is learning to change his behaviors. Therapists work closely with the father to help him to do this. These sessions focus on rebuilding the father-child relationship through co-regulation activities, play, and discussion.



Is there evidence that F4C works?

F4C is supported by several lines of work including three small randomized clinical trials (Stover, 2013; 2015; Stover, Carlson, Patel, 2017; Stover, McMahon, & Moore, 2019). Completion rates across these studies ranged from 67 to 80%, which is impressive relative to other family violence interventions. Studies provide evidence that F4C is superior (compared to traditional

interventions) in reducing rates of DV post-treatment and at a 3-month follow-up. There is also evidence that F4C improves father-child interactions, with coded recordings showing that men who received F4C were less intrusive and more harmonious with their children during play. In addition, F4C is associated with greater improvements in fathers' substance misuse and negative mood symptoms, coparents' negative mood symptoms, and importantly, children's self-reported posttraumatic stress symptoms.

There is also positive data from the DCF Intimate Partner Violence - Family Assessment Intervention Response (IPV-FAIR), which is co-facilitated by the Connecticut Children's Injury Prevention Center. In IPV-FAIR, fathers who are appropriate for F4C can be referred to one of several community providers across the state who are trained to deliver the model. In a sample of 204 families who received F4C, coparents reported significant reductions in IPV and children's exposure to conflict, with medium to large effects (Stover et al., 2020). Fathers also reported

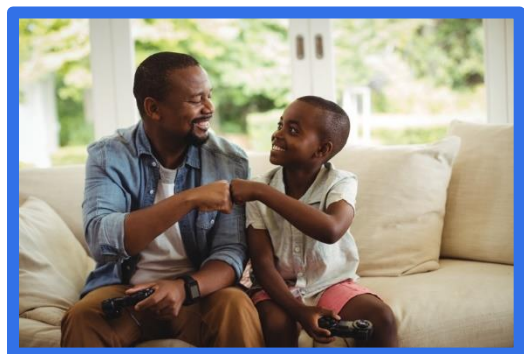


improvements in their emotion regulation, parenting skills, and anger and hostility. In a recent study, Dr. Rebecca Beebe and colleagues applied a statistical algorithm to compare families who received F4C as part of IPV-FAIR to a matched control sample of fathers implicated in IPV but who did not receive the model (Beebe et al., 2023). Administrative data were extracted from DCF electronic records. Compared to fathers receiving F4C, control fathers were 2.4 times more

likely to be named in a new maltreatment allegation during a 12-month follow-up period, suggesting that F4C may provide an effective approach for reducing recidivism risk.

The Yale-UConn Health Randomized Controlled Trial comparing F4C to the Duluth Model Intervention.

F4C has a growing research-base and has already been embraced by Connecticut DCF and its community partners. Nonetheless, a Stage II efficacy randomized controlled trial (RCT) of F4C is necessary to bring it to the next level and disseminate it beyond Connecticut so that more families can benefit from this novel approach. Fortunately, Dr Carla Stover from the Yale Child Study Center and Dr. Damion Grasso from the University of Connecticut School of Medicine have received a competitive grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) to carry out a large-scale, dual-site RCT of 260 families over the course of 4 years. The study will compare F4C to the Duluth Model Domestic



Violence Intervention, which is the current standard and most commonly delivered IPV intervention. The study will not only provide the best available data on the model's efficacy but will answer new research questions about the impact of the intervention on

children's outcomes. Multiple sources and methods will be used to examine whether F4C is superior to Duluth in reducing family violence, DCF recidivism, and mental health outcomes for

fathers, children, and coparents. It will also take a closer look at *how* the treatment works by testing whether hypothesized therapeutic targets (i.e., reflective functioning, emotion regulation) are driving treatment outcomes. This will be accomplished through weekly data collection and observational coding of therapy sessions.

How to refer fathers to the Yale-UConn Study

Both the Yale and UConn sites currently have immediate openings available. Fathers are eligible for the study if they: (1) have used violence with a coparent or partner over the past 18 months; (2) have a biological child between the ages of 3 months and 12 years; (3) have or expect to have some ongoing contact with that child; (4) can complete research assessments in English; (5) have not used extreme violence, such as use of a firearm or violence that led to a coparent being admitted to the hospital; (6) are not currently incarcerated; (7) are not in active withdrawal from alcohol or substance use or have untreated serious psychiatric illness; and (8) have not already received Fathers for Change. With permission, coparents are also invited to participate in the study as informants on research assessments. Additionally, with permission, children 7 years or older are invited to participate on research assessments. Assessments can happen virtually and all participants receive monetary compensation for completing research assessments. Therapy involves 18 weekly sessions that occur in person at either in New Haven (Yale) or West Hartford (UConn Health). Virtual sessions are available in circumstances in which transportation is a significant barrier to treatment.

Referrals can be sent to either site by visiting <https://h.uconn.edu/F4Cstudy>, downloading a referral form and sending to either Dr. Stover (carla.stover@yale.edu) for New Haven area referrals or Dr. Grasso (dgrasso@uchc.edu) for Hartford area referrals.

Case Illustration

Izaya is a 9-year-old boy and only child of Sandra and Victor, a 27-year-old father recently referred to the Fathers for Change program. Both Sandra and Victor describe themselves as having hot tempers. Arguments are frequent and both can instigate physical aggression; however, Victor tends to cause more damage and more harm. Often, substance use exacerbates these conflicts. Izaya is often present during these conflicts.



Both Sandra and Victor grew up in the foster care system and have histories of exposure to family violence. They met young and had Izaya shortly thereafter. In his short life, Izaya had already been named a victim in three substantiated child maltreatment allegations involving parental substance use and IPV – his most recent when he attempted to intervene in the conflict and consequently was thrown into a table where he hit his head and needed urgent care. After DCF opened the case, Victor left to live with his mother until he and Sandra could work things out.

Victor was weary about F4C but agreed to commit. The program began with a comprehensive intake assessment. Victor surprised himself in how forthcoming he was with the therapist about personal matters, including sharing about his trauma history and a time when he was sexually assaulted as a child. One of the assessments indicated posttraumatic stress from these experiences. Victor found himself leaving these early sessions with a renewed sense of purpose and a true desire to be a better father to Izaya and coparent to Sandra. With the therapist's help, Victor developed a written Change Plan.

In one of his early sessions, Izaya joined Victor for a recorded play assessment. Izaya was seemingly nervous at first, but soon warmed up to his dad. It was a chance for the therapist to observe Victor's strengths and growth opportunities, which were later reviewed and discussed with Victor as they worked towards reducing overriding or intrusive behaviors and improving father-child reciprocity.

Sessions soon focused on exploring triggers for Victor's aggression and use of substances. Triggers included reminders of Victor's past trauma and maltreatment. Victor began to understand his aggressive behavior as a product of his body's stress response and the interaction of stress-related thoughts, emotions, and physiological reactions. The therapist helped Victor to learn and implement strategies to identify and manage these reactions in healthy ways, including controlled breathing, guided imagery, and mindfulness principles.

Over time, the focus shifted to coparenting skills with the goal of increasing positive interactions with Sandra. This involved conjoint sessions with Sandra where they both practiced active listening and showed appreciation by giving compliments and "catching each other doing something they appreciate." They also worked on strategies for solving problems and managing stressful family situations. Through this work, Victor and Sandra developed a Healthy Relationships Contract. They also discussed and gained a better understanding of unique and common goals for Izaya so that they could be a united front.

Sessions moved to focusing on restorative parenting. Some of these were individual sessions and others included Sandra. The therapist worked with them on increasing awareness of their own and Izaya's emotions, naming emotions, and finding solutions for emotional distress. The therapist also explored Victor and Sandra's own experiences growing up as children and how these may have influenced how they interact and parent Izaya. Both conveyed wanting to be better parents and to provide a healthier caregiving environment for Izaya than they had experienced.

An important part of the therapy involved Victor working with the therapist to make amends with Izaya. This involved reviewing prior family violence, discussing Izaya's reactions to the conflict, and preparing for the father-child conjoint session. The therapist explained that the goal of this session was to talk to Izaya about Victor's past behavior, acknowledge that the behavior was wrong, make a sincere apology, and describe the work he is doing in therapy to change his behavior. The session went very well. Victor was nervous about the session. It helped that he had developed a written apology with the therapist ahead of time so that he could

remain focused on his message. Both Izaya and Victor got emotional during the session and Izaya had an opportunity to share with Victor how he has been feeling about the conflict. During the last part of the session, Victor and Izaya played a game and enjoyed each other's company.

A few weeks before his final session, Victor moved back home with Sandra and Izaya. This enabled Victor to start to implement all that he had learned in therapy. Victor's desire to be a better father to Izaya had sealed his commitment to the program and early gains led to bigger gains as he completed the treatment phases. Sandra reported that she and Victor were applying the coparenting skills they learned. At the end of the treatment, the therapist praised Victor for all his hard work and discussed next steps, including a referral to continue to work on his substance use, as well as specific treatment to address posttraumatic stress symptoms from childhood trauma.

CONTRIBUTORS

Damion Grasso, Ph.D., University of Connecticut School of Medicine
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