

A Message from Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly



The month of September has several important themes which connect to our work. Read this month's **"Spotlight on What's Right"** newsletter to learn about them and the great work of our staff across Connecticut and the country!

September is **Kinship Care Awareness Month** - drawing attention to the importance of having children placed with **individuals and families they know** - to lessen the trauma associated with being separated from their parents. Nationally, Connecticut remains a leader with successfully having children placed with **relatives, friends, teachers, neighbors** and others with whom they have a **"familial"** relationship until permanency is established.

Read in this month's **"Spotlight"** about **Victoria**, a kinship provider who agreed to care for **5 of her nieces and nephews!** She speaks about the importance of keeping siblings together, family bonds and making it all work as **"commitment, love, patience and a whole lotta formula and pampers"** come into play.



Suicide Awareness is also a critical theme throughout September. With **Governor Lamont**, I took part in a roundtable discussion with my colleagues from **sister state Agencies and private providers**. We discussed the prevalence of suicide in our communities, **lifting the stigma** of asking for support and placing emphasis on the programs Connecticut has to offer including www.WeAreCT.org

Hispanic/Latine Heritage Month is also celebrated from 9/15/24-10/15/24. This year's theme is **"Pioneers of Change: Shaping the future together through Innovation, Resilience, and Unity."** This month-long celebration offers an opportunity to recognize the backgrounds, traditions, and accomplishments of individuals from various Hispanic cultures including those from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Central and South America and the diaspora.



Congratulations to **Meriden Office Director Maritza Acosta** who was named the **"Madrina"** for the Waterbury Puerto Rican Day Parade.

"**Madrina**" translates to "**Godmother**" and refers to a prominent woman chosen to be an honorary figurehead for the parade representing the community, and its values, often, a **Puerto Rican public figure** with significant contributions to the culture and community.

September is also **National Recovery Month**. It is believed over 21 million Americans are in recovery from a substance use disorder. One support Connecticut has to offer is the **24/7 Substance Use Services Access Line at 1-800-563-4086**. Operated by **Wheeler and funded by Connecticut's Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)**, staff utilize a recovery-oriented approach to ask screening questions, and provide callers with education, support, hope and tangible assistance, including transportation, for those individuals having difficulty living with substance use issues.



National Child Welfare Workforce Development Month is also a theme of September. The **Mentoring program, Leadership Academy for Social Work Supervisors (LASS), Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM), and the Executive Fellowship Program (EFP)**, are supports our Agency offers to empower staff - personally and professionally - to become future leaders.



The **Wilderness School** recently had a graduation for youth and their families who participated in activities and expeditions this year! Job well done! Complete with **games, team building and a lot of food**, participants shared stories and reconnected.

At the event, I was able to speak with a number of youths who expressed how **transformational** the experience at the Wilderness School has been for them and their **eagerness to return next year**. One young person stated they discovered their **"love for gardening"** while on the trail and another believed **"that I found my true self"** in their interactions with staff and the challenges they were able to overcome. **Powerful words!**

"You belong among wildflowers," - lyrics sung by Tom Petty - are tattooed on the right hand of **Erin Laffond**. She is completing her third Spring to Fall season at the Wilderness School. Read about her **unique journey**, to serve these youth, her connections to wildflowers and her simple message to the youth - **"I'm just asking you to breathe and be you."**





Shout out one more time to the **August Employees of the Month!** Who has been nominated to receive the **September Award?** Read on.....

Our staff have been representing DCF around Connecticut and the country!

Thank you to our partners at **Adelbrook** for presenting DCF with the **Adelbrook Community Partner Award!** At a beautiful luncheon, **Dr. Nicole Taylor** accepted the award on behalf of the Agency.



Dr. Frank Gregory and Dr. Stephanie Bozak represented the Department at the **State Department of Education Back to School Meeting** at the Connecticut Convention Center. In attendance were **Directors of Special Education** who received information about Emergency Mobile Crisis Intervention Services, Suicide Prevention and many others.



CT DCF was represented well in Washington, DC as **Rodney Moore and Elizabeth Hazelwood** presented as part of the **Minority Professional Leadership Development Program** through **AdoptUSKids!**

Well done and you made us proud!



At an **Overdose Awareness Day** event through the **Litchfield County Opiate Task Force**, **Alison Karimi and Kris Robles** represented the Department and provided information on key resources our Agency has to offer.



Senator Richard Blumenthal has been a strong advocate to protect children and youth from online predators. This month, a press conference announcing his new Federal legislation took place with **Dr. Nicole Taylor** presenting data and other facts regarding the prevalence of **Child Sex**

Trafficking in Connecticut.



As our month was coming to an end, I spoke with 38 youth leaders during a **West Hartford Youth Recovery Event**. The audience heard about prevention, recovery, and empowering and valuing the youth voice and involvement in this work. ***"We can't be about them without them,"*** was one of my key messages.



A huge shout out to **Solnit Hospital** on recently receiving **Joint Commission Accreditation** which followed the **Solnit North and South PRTFs** receiving accreditation this past May!

Showtime! A couple of weeks ago, my **first video** was provided to all staff - get ready for one each month. Please watch the video here: [Commissioner's September 2024 Video](#)



Our work is humbling especially when we lose a member of our DCF family. With great sadness, we inform you of the loss of **Sheila Garlington, a DCF Employee in the Waterbury Office**. Her warm and compassionate spirit towards the children on her caseload made it easy for them to develop a respectful relationship with her as most affectionately referred to her as **"Grandma."**

National Child Welfare Worker Appreciation Week is also celebrated this month. Our work is complex and challenges us emotionally and physically as we serve some of the most vulnerable and oppressed populations in our communities. The stressors today's children and families experience are becoming more intense and require more of us.

Thanks to each and every one of you for your tireless efforts.

I appreciate you!

