

'You Matter': Going the Extra Mile for Youth in Care



Ongoing Services Social Worker, Chris Jackle, at the Employee of the Month ceremony in July.

As students across the state gear up for a new school year, it's not just youth who deserve recognition—it is also the adults who walk beside them, pushing, encouraging, and showing up when it matters most. Ongoing Services Social Worker Chris Jackle, an Employee of the Month in July, was not just cheering from afar for the youth and young adults on his caseload. He made it a priority to attend nearly every graduation in person, even on his own time.

"Being there is everything," Chris says. "A lot of our kids never had someone in the audience at their elementary school concert, or cheering them on at a track meet. Just being present says, 'You matter.'"

Chris is not new to the work. With over 20 years in the agency, he has held nearly every social work role imaginable—from investigations to adolescent services. For him, being a social worker is about relationships, teamwork, and presence. Chris credits his team in the Hartford office for sharing the load and helping youth succeed—especially when handling the complex web of overlapping needs that adolescents often present.

"We all know each other's cases," he says. "If I can't be there, someone else from the team will be. That's the beauty of our unit. It's not just a name on a screen—it's a kid. It's a life."

"I've seen it through all the lenses," he says. "It helps navigate the world of DCF, especially when it gets to adolescent services, because you really understand what these young men and women have gone through."

That perspective has helped shape Chris into the worker he is today—present, invested, and relentlessly committed to outcomes. This past year alone, Chris celebrated five youth reaching graduation milestones: four received their high school diplomas, and one earned a Bachelor's Degree in Forensic Science/Criminal Justice.

One especially powerful example comes from a young woman, "R", who had fourteen different placements over the course of the school year. School was a struggle; she often acted out and felt completely defeated. But Chris refused to let her slip through the cracks.



He attended countless PPTs and school meetings, spent quality time with her, and advocated for recovered credits so she could transition from junior to senior year—and graduate on time. Today, the youth is preparing to attend CT State Community College, with hopes to pursue a nursing degree.



Another young adult, "M", came to Chris with little support and a heavy past. After migrating from Jamaica and being abandoned by her mother, M faced mental health struggles and educational challenges. To add to all of that, her father is serving a life sentence. She was a special education student with few people to lean on—but Chris became her constant.

"She had nobody, and I became her person," he says. "Every visit, I brought her favorite Jamaican food because that was the comfort of home for her. It seems like a small thing, but it meant the world to her."

That kind of attentiveness, Chris says, is non-negotiable. He explained, "If you don't take the time to really learn who these kids are, you're just another social worker to them. That's a disservice. These are human beings. You have to show up. You have to care."

As a father of three boys under ten and a youth sports coach outside of work, Chris brings that same team mentality into his practice. "I just put the ball on the tee," he says. "They're the ones who hit it out of the park."

Looking ahead to the new school year, Chris' hope is simple, yet profound:

"I want my kids to push themselves. Not to be complacent. If they fall, they learn. If they fail, they grow. My role is to make sure they know we're here if they need us. That's how they succeed."

Here's to another school year of showing up, lifting up, and helping our youth reach what's possible.