

Commissioner's January Message



Happy New Year! We are providing the first *"Spotlight on What's Right"* newsletter for 2025!

"The time is always right to do what is right." As we celebrated the life and legacy of **Martin Luther King Jr.** this month, his words continue to resonate throughout our communities. It takes the **collective efforts** - of all of us - **to serve our children and families.**



"Staying the course" is also a theme which I will repeat throughout the year. We will continue to **rise to the occasion** as we serve our children and families in the best way possible. We are **built for these moments** and by staying together and supporting one another, **anything is possible.**



January is **Human Trafficking Awareness Month.** Connecticut remains proud in our work to both educate the public and respond to reports of **child sex trafficking.** In 2024, over **200 consults** were completed by **DCF's Human Anti-trafficking Response Team (HART).**

We thank the **Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz** and the **Division of Criminal Justice** for hosting a press conference that included **Dr. Nicole Taylor** speaking about the prevalence of this form of maltreatment in our state.



Thank you as well to **Representative Robin Comey** for including DCF in a **child sex trafficking forum** at the Branford Library. **Ken Mysogland** spoke and also appeared on the [WFSB Great Day at 9a](#) segment to discuss this very sensitive epidemic in our society.



Did you see the camels on Park Street in Hartford? This month we also celebrated **"Día de Los Reyes Magos"** or **Three Kings Day** complete with a parade moving right by Central Office.

We look forward to a **fantastic 2025** which builds upon our **successes in 2024!** One more time, here are our **major accomplishments** one last time: [Best of 2024](#)



The **primary goals moving forward** will continue to focus on three critical areas:

- **Safety of Children 0-5 years of age**
- **Supports for Transitional Aged Youth (TAY)**
- **Placement Crisis**

Take a few moments to read about **Elizabeth Saez** - a DCF worker and foster parent - who has cared for over **129+ children** and counting! She was the 2024 **"Elevate and Celebrate"** honoree for her extraordinary dedication to foster care advocacy given by the **Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) of the Youth Law Center**. *"Come here because you want to help families, not just kids,"* Elizabeth stated.



Mekhi not too long ago found himself at **Manson Youth Correctional** after falling in with a bad crowd. ***"I Kept Pushing Through"*** is his story of resilience. *"I changed a lot, I've grown. Not everybody who has made bad decisions should have that used against them because everybody*

deserves a chance," Mekhi tells us. While working with **DCF's Juvenile Justice Educational Unit**, he now continues to attend Gateway Community College with aspirations of **owning his own business**. Read his inspirational story!

Tours anyone? This month I again toured the state to visit and talk with staff from **Manchester, Solnit South Hospital, Centralized Transportation Unit, New Britain, Danbury, Waterbury** and the **Central Office Divisions**. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR THOUGHTS, COMMENTS AND CELEBRATIONS!**



And here it comes For the first time we have a **DCF Jingle** performed and recorded by the **Waterbury staff!** Quite impressive: [Waterbury Jingle](#)

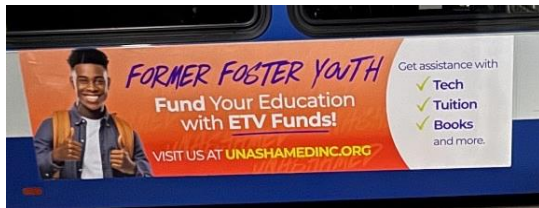


A shout out one more time to the **December Employees of the Month!** Who has been nominated to receive the **January Award?** Read on to see who is described as *"a ray of sunshine in the office", "a friend personally and professionally", "valuable asset."*

Connecticut's own **Dee Bonnick** is a **National Child Welfare Lived Expert and Race Equity and Justice Consultant** who has impacted thousands of families in her work. Dee was presented with a **2025 Casey Excellence for Children Family and Alumni Award** in the category of Birth Parent! You will hear more about Dee in a future "Spotlight" edition and in the meantime, learn more about her here: [Dee Bonnick](#).



Have you met **Zion Caines** with his electric smile and personality? You will soon as he recently appeared on the **"DCF Doors to Hope and Healing"** Cable television show. He is a **Transitional Aged Youth (TAY)** doing simply fabulous things in the community. You can find the show here: [DCF Cable TV](#)



Speaking of youth, **Unashamed Inc.** is administering **Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)** to help with costs related to student's success in the post-secondary education/vocation programs.

Eligible participants include former foster youth who:

- Spent time in foster care at or after the age of 14
- Left foster care through adoption or transfer of guardianship at age 16 or older
- Are currently between the ages of 16 and 26 AND are enrolled in a post-secondary education program or another institute of higher learning

Learn more about ETV funds by visiting: [UnashamedInc.](https://unashamedinc.org)

Congratulations as well to **Social Work Supervisor Rodney Moore** who was appointed to the **National Adoption Association (NAA) Board of Directors**. He will assist in supporting their mission to create meaningful changes in the adoption and child welfare community.



[WeAreCT.gov](https://wearect.gov) is a **joint initiative** between **DMHAS and DCF** to more easily connect all residents to the state's extensive network of resources for **prevention, mental health and substance use recovery**. Miranda Creative designed the site which has received awards from Graphic Design USA for Health + Wellness Design and American Graphic Design Award. Awesome!



A **Commissioner's Monthly Video** will now be provided to keep you updated on **Agency operations**. This month, we highlight some great work in our **24/7 Solnit Facilities**. The Solnit **PRTFs** achieved **accreditation** from the **Joint Commission** in May 2024 with the **Solnit South Children's Hospital** achieving a **three-year reaccreditation**! Here are some of their major accomplishments:

Solnit North PRTF

- **89% of youth successfully discharged** at the end of the treatment episode with **72%** discharged to a **home setting**
- From 1/1/23-11/15/24, **133 youth were served** on campus
- **Goal** is to **increase occupancy by 15%** in 2025

Solnit South PRTF

- **Opened the Lakota Unit** in February, 2024
- In 2024, **served 55 youth for 5,383 bed days** which is an increase of 1,166 bed days than in 2023
- **Goal** is to **increase occupancy by 15%** in 2025

Solnit South Children's Hospital

- **Increased capacity and admissions** admitting 81 youth from CT EDs, inpatient units, PRTFs and court.
- **62 youth** who were **not able to stabilize** in CT community units, were **admitted to Solnit hospital** for treatment and stabilization.
- **Wait time** for admission **decreased by over 50%** to only 15 days.
- **Hospital Nursing vacancies decreased by over 85%** in 2024; Overall, **Hospital staffing vacancies dramatically decreased by 74%**.



Fantastic work everyone!

Watch **January's** again here: [Commissioner's January 2025 Video](#)

Stay warm and thanks for all you do!