



Employee of the Month Awards!

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

Sandra Mucciacciaro - Careline

The Careline/SIU team is excited to nominate Sandra Mucciacciaro, Special Investigations Unit (SIU) Investigator, for Employee of the Month. Sandra is being recognized by her Program Supervisor, Gloria Campos. Sandra joined the SIU in October 2023, transferring from the Meriden Area Office. Since her arrival, she has quickly immersed herself in the specialized investigations the unit handles. Sandra consistently demonstrates dedication to meeting all policy standards while maintaining a compassionate and respectful approach toward the children and families we serve, always prioritizing their safety. She works tirelessly to gather comprehensive information necessary for thorough assessments, completes investigations promptly, and ensures her documentation is clear and detailed. Sandra collaborates effectively with Ongoing services, Foster Care, Human Resources, Facility Administration and staff, as well as families involved in her cases. The demands of a statewide specialized unit are high, requiring extensive travel and after-hours work, which can be taxing on employees and their families. Despite facing these challenges, Sandra maintains a positive attitude, driven by her commitment to detail and high personal standards. She consistently meets deadlines, keeps documentation current in LINK, and maintains open communication with her supervisor. Sandra has successfully managed challenging cases within the Department, advocating for the needs of children and families while upholding her responsibilities as an investigator with integrity and fairness. Although reserved and structured in her professional demeanor, Sandra's aspiration to pursue stand-up comedy reveals her great sense of humor and her desire to bring joy and laughter to those around her. Congratulations, Sandra, on your outstanding work and dedication!



Pleshaun Bing - Bridgeport Area Office

The Bridgeport Office nominates Social Worker Trainee Pleshaun Bing as this month's Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Jeanette Blackwell. Pleshaun Bing has been employed

with the Department since 09/06/2024. Despite being with the Agency for less than 1 year, she has shown herself to be a true asset to the Department and to the families she works with. Pleshaun has demonstrated strong engagement skills, often able to engage what her peers may call the most difficult clients, through honesty, transparency, compassion and patience. She has received accolades from her supervisor, her unit peers and RRG staff in Region 1 for her work. Pleshaun knows her families, is thoughtful about their needs and provides a level of quality social work not seen often especially for a new trainee, while still maintaining all her other responsibilities and due dates. Pleshaun has provided support to her unit peers and to peers within the office to cover visits and engage families when staff have unexpectedly gone on leave or resigned and work was left unfinished to ensure families cases were closed appropriately, children's safety assessed/ensured, and services were implemented. Pleshaun always presents with a positive attitude and has been a genuine pleasure to work with.

Marthe Guirand - Norwalk Area Office

The Norwalk Area Office proudly nominates Ongoing Services Social Worker Marthe Guirand as Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Jeanette Blackwell. Marthe has been with the Department for less than two years and consistently demonstrates exceptional dedication, empathy, and professionalism toward the children and families on her caseload. Marthe has several challenging families that require time and effort above and beyond the typical day in her role as a social worker. She recently had a child pass away from natural causes and demonstrated deep empathy and caring toward the family while also ensuring the well-being of the other children in home who share similar medical conditions. In one week, she had three other children on her caseload who were experiencing mental health challenges and responded promptly with a strong sense of responsibility to her families without being directed to do so. Furthermore, Marthe maintains a demeanor of calmness and professional grace in high stressful situations or crises. What makes Marthe stand out is her willingness to help and support others during their own crises. She understands what it means to partner with fellow workers and that we can't do this work alone. Through all the hard work that goes with this job, Marthe never complains or lets challenges impact her work performance. And her kindness and compassion do not go unnoticed. Marthe exemplifies knowledge, authenticity, and committed action as a representative of the Department of Children and Families. We are proud to have Marthe as a valued member of the Norwalk Office team.



Tracy Tatsapaugh - Torrington Area Office

The Torrington Area Office is recognizing Program Supervisor Tracy Tatsapaugh as Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Jeanette Blackwell. Tracy has been with the agency for almost 20 years! Many might not know of Tracy as she has spent her entire career in "T-town." Tracy is that worker who likes to hide under the radar and just get the work done! She is conscientious, thorough, thoughtful and focused when it comes to the work. Tracy is also a wealth of knowledge when it comes to our children and families we serve in the Northwest

corner. Tracy's expertise is permanency which shines through in her workgroup. She is laser focused when it comes to permanency outcomes for children. Tracy is dedicated and committed and is an asset to the Torrington office. We congratulate you Tracy for your hard work and dedication to the children and families we serve! Thank you for all you do!

Daniel (Dan) Podzikowski - New Haven Area Office

Yolanda Nieves is nominating Daniel (Dan) Podzikowski for Employee of the Month. Dan has been a Social Worker with the Department for 17 years, with much of his service being with Transitional Support Services/TAY. Dan is known for going above and beyond while exceeding expectations consistently. He builds a strong relationship with his teenagers and young adults while planning and supporting them through their transition from TSS. Dan uses a collaborative approach including providers, family and natural supports with the goal of achieving permanency and identifying people who will remain involved outside of the Department. He is creative in finding resources to support his teenager/young adult's interest and goals and is a strong advocate for them. He has had many young adults who have achieved their goals around education, employment, housing and made a successful transition from DCF services. Dan's strength-based approach has been an asset to serving our more challenging youth. He makes consistent efforts to engage them and provide them with resources that can meet their basic needs. Dan's documentation is excellent, and you will find everything you need to know. Dan has joined different initiatives within the agency using his direct experience to evaluate and influence agency policy. He is well respected by his peers while offering support and guidance.



Travis King - Milford Area Office

It is with great enthusiasm that we are nominating Travis King as Employee of the Month for the Milford Office. Travis has been with our agency since 2015 and is an Ongoing Services Worker. Travis is being nominated by Teresa Fazio-Winters. He is a proud native of New Haven County and is proud as well as invested and has a sincere passion for making a difference in his community both inside and outside of work. He himself was a Hide High School graduate. His work ethics are rooted in empathy, cultural awareness, and an unwavering commitment to helping children and their families thrive. As a Black male Social Worker, Travis is a powerful and positive presence in the lives of the children and families he supports. He consistently goes above and beyond to help families succeed. He has particularly served as a strong champion for fatherhood engagement, involvement, and his gift of encouragement. He is proud of the successes he has been part of with families being preserved and reunified because of the strong presence a father has had that he has assessed, fostered, and empowered. As a result, Travis has been instrumental in promoting long term stability for many children from not only families he has serviced but also his support to coworkers and the families they have serviced. Travis is

known for his intelligence, reliability, and collaborative spirit. He has always set high standards for himself and he himself received his degree from the prestigious George Washington University. His documentation is impeccable, and he is well known for his swift and finely drafted court documents. Being competitive by nature, Travis is already rearing up to excel in CT KIND and to be considered a champion in our newly innovated computer system as well. Travis is known as a support to unit members. Travis is a team player. He also offers an amazing sense of humor that brings a smile to peers faces which offers just the right sauce to promote positive culture within our office which is so needed in the line of work we do at DCF. Just two years ago, Travis was nominated by the foster care community as Social Worker of the Year to be honored at the annual CAFAF conference. He continues to have a good reputation amongst several licensed families and those families have agreed to take pretty difficult children knowing Travis would be at some level connected whether he is directly assigned or helping out a coworker to offer support. Finally, Travis has a strong sense of loyalty. He is still in touch with a youth who has aged out that was under his caseload when he was younger. This is a youth that is a difficult individual to connect with. He had relocated out of state yet in spite of the distance they still have a mentor like relationship. Travis is also very loyal to his local team at the Milford office. We in Milford are proud to have Travis on our team. For all of the above reasons we are nominating Travis to be recognized.

Matt Deary - Norwich Area Office

Matt Deary, Social Work Supervisor, is being nominated for Employee of the Month by Kelly Quazi. Matt has made a profound impact on our transitional age youth (TAY) population and consistently goes above and beyond to advocate for the young people he supervises, ensuring the best possible outcomes for them. A recent example of Matt's incredible work came from a youth he previously worked with, who reached out to express the lasting positive influence Matt and his staff had on their life. Here is a quote from a youth who is now 25 years old. "What never changed was how much y'all showed up for me. You never gave up on me. Whether you realized it or not, you were like parents to me in so many ways. That kind of love sticks with you forever." and " I just wanted to say thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for being there, for loving me, for showing up for me when I felt like I had no one. I love y'all so much and I will forever be grateful." This is just one of many instances that highlight Matt's dedication and effectiveness. Matt is widely regarded as a knowledgeable, supportive, and compassionate supervisor. He is always ready to step in and support his staff during challenging times, whether it's transporting a youth to an MDE appointment, stepping in to cover meetings, or promptly addressing emails. His ability to manage the complexities and challenges that come with working with the TAY population with such poise and professionalism is truly remarkable. Matt's team frequently shares that he is the reason they continue to show up, day after day, even when the work feels overwhelming or frustrating. His leadership, guidance, and unwavering support make him an invaluable member of the Norwich office. We are incredibly fortunate to have him on our team.



Tiwana Dennis - Middletown Area Office

On behalf of Cindy Bowman and Katie Silano, we are delighted to announce Tiwana Dennis as Employee of the Month for the Middletown Office. Since joining the Department over a year ago, Tiwana has been a valuable employee, consistently demonstrating exceptional qualities that have enhanced our team. As a social worker, Tiwana is a joy to supervise, exhibiting impressive growth and a keen desire to learn. Her passion for her work is contagious, inspiring those around her. Tiwana embodies the essential traits necessary to succeed as a social worker and future leader within the Department. She is genuine, empathetic, and deeply committed to the well-being of others. Tiwana consistently displays respect for her clients, peers, and the families she serves. Her comprehensive understanding of her role and her dedication to excellence has yielded positive results on some high risk and complex cases. Tiwana strikes a balance between maintaining healthy boundaries and providing supportive guidance to her families, empowering them to flourish. Her outstanding professionalism, dedication, and work ethic make her an asset to the Department, and we are pleased to recognize her remarkable achievements.

Mariah Mora - Willimantic Area Office

Ongoing Services Social Worker Mariah goes above and beyond working with the children and families on her caseload. She is being nominated for Employee of the Month by Ashley Hill. Mariah has made a lasting impression, especially with two youth that she has connected to, ensuring their safety and assisting with securing the stability that they deserve. Mariah facilitated placement with a pre-adoptive foster placement for a youth that was difficult to place due to her significant needs and ensured a planful transition for the youth to this foster home, including organizing a disclosure meeting, meet and greet with the resource and youth, weekly family therapeutic sessions, pre-placement visits, and planning for school and summer camp, all while allowing the youth to maintain prior familial connections to maintain familiarity and comfort. Despite many barriers, Mariah did not give up and put the youth's needs first. Mariah also secured a home through kin for another adolescent, who initially was hesitant to enter the Department's care but was in an unsafe environment, and due to her age and needs, she required placement. As a result, the adolescent has been thriving in her foster home and demonstrating growth in many areas, such as her mental health and decreased thoughts of self-harm. Mariah provided the adolescent with a safe space to talk, and she incorporated the RRG team throughout the process to ensure the adolescent's needs were met. Also, Mariah had a 0-5 case reviewed at a recent supervisory support/coaching session on 5/19/25 by Kelly McVey and Kimberly Nilson, and she received positive feedback regarding her excellent case practice, documentation, and review of safe sleep practices. Mariah's documentation is often used as examples for other staff, as she demonstrates strong writing skills and case practice. Mariah demonstrates a strong skill set and recently reached her 10 months with the Department. She is an asset to this agency, as well as a wealth of knowledge.



Lisa Zuccaro - Manchester Area Office

Office Director Lisa Zuccaro was nominated anonymously, and this nomination was supported by Maritza Velez. The nomination noted "Lisa has one of the toughest jobs in the office as the Office Director. With all that she is tasked to do and ensuring the job gets done, she also supports and encourages work/life balance. Even if we do not always feel this way, Lisa will be the first to encourage you to take care of yourself first. Lisa brought back the Employee of the Month recognition to honor all of the positive work everyone does. Lisa also supports the Worker Support Group meetings, taking time to read the minutes and the suggestions and concerns from staff. She also follows through with giving feedback and is helping to make changes to make the office an overall better atmosphere for staff. Even with a million other things happening, Lisa is always approachable and willing to take time to have one-on-one conversations with staff. Through all of that, she also bakes the most amazing cookies or brings in amazing donuts any time there is an office event. While in the course of "getting the job done" we may not see it, or we may overlook it, but Lisa does demonstrate her care and support for all of us as workers." Furthermore, Maritza Velez noted to Lisa, "It brings me immense joy to see you honored as Employee of the Month. In my eyes, however, you are the Employee of the day-every single day. You exemplify authentic leadership, and I consider myself profoundly fortunate to have had the privilege of being your manager and working alongside you for a decade thus far. "You reminded me of that the other day" 😊. Your unwavering patience, kindness, and thoughtful demeanor are truly remarkable. You consistently find the silver lining, viewing the glass as half full- a quality that is both inspiring and admirable. Your advocacy for your staff is like no other and they are extremely lucky to have you. I'm grateful and happy you are being recognized today. Thank you for all that you, I see you and notice your hard work EVERY DAY!!! I think we would all agree we are lucky to have Lisa as our Office Director and Leader. Lisa, thank you for all of your support and advocacy 😊



Christina Muniz and William Prestly - New Britain Area Office

Social Worker Christina Muniz and Social Work Supervisor William Prestly are nominated as Employees of the Month by Maritza Velez. They were assigned a difficult case involving a 13-year-old young man named Colby whose mother just passed away. There was no successor guardian named, and Colby had no relationship with his father whose whereabouts were unknown at the time. Christina and Will worked diligently to file an OTC and placed Colby with his close friend's family. Within one week of Colby entering care, Christina located father via the results of the Lexis Nexis! Within days of contact, Colby's father was here to meet him! They were able to begin to build their relationship over their shared love of basketball! Christina and Will showed immense compassion for this family during such a difficult time and through their hard work, Colby will be able to have a relationship with his father and siblings he did not even know existed! We just wanted to acknowledge the amazing work they did with this family.

Nancy Morales - Meriden Area Office

For the month of July, the Meriden Area Office would like to nominate Secretary 2 Nancy Morales as the Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Maritza Velez. After being out of the office for an extended period of time due to battling cancer, Nancy came back to the Meriden Area Office and has been a beacon of light for us all. There once was a concern about Nancy being out and that she would not be returning to the Department. However, at the end of March, Nancy returned and has been nothing short of amazing. She is thoughtful, caring and always willing to help out. Nancy is someone who no matter what the task is will jump in and either complete it herself or lend a hand with whatever is being asked. Nancy has been through a lot over the past few years and her dedication to the Department and to our staff is something that I do not take lightly. Nancy is someone that will always take time to talk with her coworkers and brings a smile to everyone that knows her. As a new Office Director, I am not used to anyone helping me do anything, however Nancy has shown me grace, and it is always there to give me a hand with whatever I need. What I feel best about is that when Nancy does something you know it will be done carefully and done the right way. We are so happy to have Nancy back with us in Meriden and can't imagine the office without her. It has been a long road back for Nancy and the office hopes that this recognition will let her know how valued she is and how much the office is behind her to support her just as she does for our office every day.

Melissa Szczycinski - PRTF (North)

Solnit North's July Employee of the Month is Melissa Szczycinski, Advanced Clinical Social Worker. She is being nominated by Michael Rulnick. Melissa consistently

exemplifies the core values of Solnit through her kindness, compassion, and unwavering dedication to both youth and staff. Her ability to foster meaningful connections is evident in the way she empowers others to feel seen, heard, and supported. Melissa is a strong advocate for the youth, always putting their needs first while maintaining a calm, respectful, and patient approach—even in the most challenging situations. Her open-mindedness and steady presence help create a therapeutic and supportive environment for all. In addition to her clinical role, Melissa has been a longstanding and active contributor to the Health and Wellness Committee, where she continues to provide vital support to staff. Her collaborative spirit and dedication to the well-being of others make her an invaluable team member. Through her grace, resilience, and commitment to growth and healing, Melissa not only strengthens the Solnit community but also inspires those around her every day.

Stupendous

Armando Salvador Jr. - Fiscal Division

It is with great enthusiasm that Armando Salvador, Jr., is nominated for Employee of the Month by the Fiscal Division and Steve Francis. Armando is a Fiscal Administrative Assistant and has a total of 12 years of state service and has worked for DCF for the last 4 years. For the past year, he has been an essential part of the Child Welfare Accounting team, and his impact has been nothing short of outstanding. Armando is not only a knowledgeable and reliable team member, but also a deeply compassionate advocate for the providers and youth we serve. His commitment is evident in everything he does, from regularly coming into the office on his

scheduled telework day, to offering thoughtful suggestions that improve our processes. He is often our go-to resource for insight into the inner workings of the Area Offices, having previously worked in both the Manchester and Hartford Area Offices. He has built strong, trusted relationships with DCF staff and foster parents alike, to the point where providers ask for him by name when calling the CWA mainline. His work ethic is impeccable, and his willingness to go above and beyond is deeply appreciated by all who work with him. Armando brings a warm, upbeat energy to the workplace. He is friendly, funny, and always willing to lend a hand. He embraces constructive feedback, uses it to grow, and is always eager to share knowledge with his colleagues. His spirit of teamwork, professionalism, and compassion make him a truly invaluable member of our team and an outstanding example of DCF's dedication to service and support.

Jamaal Robinson Solnit South

It is with great enthusiasm that the Sachem team honors Jamaal Robinson for Employee of the Month. He is nominated by Taliferrio Gallaher. With 11 years of dedicated service at Solnit, Jamaal has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the core values of our hospital and PRTF. His ability to prioritize safety, foster collaboration among team members, and uphold institutional expectations makes him an invaluable asset to the organization. Jamaal not only meets expectations, but he also continually exceeds them with reliability, professionalism, and heart. One of Jamaal's most distinguishing qualities is his willingness to go above and beyond—both when asked and when simply recognizing a need. Whether it's stepping in to support a colleague, de-escalating a challenging situation, or ensuring the environment remains therapeutic and safe for all, Jamaal leads by example. His proactive approach and calming presence create a ripple effect, uplifting those around him and reinforcing a culture of accountability and care. Sachem is frequently recognized as one of the model units at Solnit, and that reputation is due in large part to Jamaal's leadership, consistency, and deep understanding of our youth and staff needs. His work ethic, integrity, and compassion are not only admirable but inspiring. Jamaal Robinson embodies what it means to be a cornerstone of our community, and he is more than deserving of this recognition.



Mary Elizabeth Satran - Office of Legal Affairs

The Legal Division is pleased to be highlighting Attorney Mary Elizabeth (Mitzi) Satran as the July 2025 Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Charlotte Shea. Attorney Satran has served the Department as a hearing officer in the Administrative Hearings Unit for the past eleven years. She is one of two hearing officers responsible for conducting hearings for the entire Department, including hearings regarding substantiations and central registry, case plans, removals and licensing actions. Known to issue thoughtful, legally sound decisions, Attorney Satran ensures that all parties involved in hearings understand the process to ensure full and meaningful participation by clients. Attorney Satran understands the emotional nature of

hearings in a child protection agency and affords parents every opportunity to present their case and be heard in a neutral setting. Participation in hearings can be exceptionally challenging for DCF clients who are not represented by counsel and Attorney Satran assists hearing participants in navigating the process. Attorney's Satran's decisions thoroughly and concisely delineate the issues in the hearing and clearly provide the basis for her rulings in a manner that can be understood by the parties. In addition to aiding hearing participants, Attorney Satran presents trainings for DCF staff on a regular basis regarding criteria for substantiations and placement on the Central Registry. This training also includes the presentation of a mock hearing which affords staff an additional opportunity to become familiar and comfortable with the hearing process. Attorney Satran assists the Legal Division staff as well as outside attorneys by ensuring an index of substantiation hearing summaries is kept up-to-date and maintained on the Department website. The Legal Division is fortunate to have an attorney as skilled and dedicated as Attorney Satran as part of its team. Thank you, Mitzi, for your continued efforts to guarantee a neutral, impartial process for administrative hearings.

Omar Muhammad - Family and Community Services Division

Nominated by Sarah Gibson, Omar Muhammad, Enhanced Services Coordinator in the Family and Community Services Division, is a beacon of

light in Region 4. A beacon of light, using one definition, is to be a source of inspiration, guidance and positivity. Omar is all these things. Omar has been with DCF for 21 years, and they have all been with Region 4. He started in the Manchester Office and was outposted in the Teen Center in Enfield for 12 of his 16 years there. In 2019, Omar actively sought to fill the newly developed Enhanced

Services Coordinator (ESC) position which he has now held for the past 5.5 years. Of tremendous value to all the positions he's been in, is his innate superpower to connect in genuine, meaningful ways with people. He has an extraordinary ability to build and sustain purposeful and significant relationships both internally, across all divisions and roles, and externally with our partners in the communities that benefit the families we serve. Coupled with his deep-rooted belief that one of our essential obligations as part of the child welfare system is to set families up for success, he strives every day to make sure that our families are getting the right service that will meet their identified needs and result in a positive permanent timely outcome. Omar is a champion for the Enhanced Services Coordination model and loves to educate and support his peers on the benefits of the approach. This includes helping them develop their skills to craft a strong service referral, navigate the automated Universal Referral Form (URF), and communicate with our provider partners about service delivery. He's been very actively involved with the CT-KIND development elements related to service providers and the referral process - volunteering whenever asked - in the hopes of making contributions that will improve the systems that support this aspect of our work. When he's not at work, Omar is a Bonsai artist which requires many of the same traits that make him such a successful member of the DCF team. He is patient, dedicated and pays attention to details. He believes that positive



outcomes are possible even when the road there looks hard. Make sure you ask Omar about his Bonsai sometime; he will love to talk to you about them!

Lucelenia (Lucy) Rivera - Area Office- Clinical and Community Consultation Division

The CCCSD division is happy to nominate our Reg 3 RRG staff member for July Employee of the Month! She is being nominated by Maribel Martinez. Willimantic Mental Health RRG Lucelenia (Lucy) Rivera embodies the helping spirit of the RRG. Lucy consistently seeks ways to increase her clinical knowledge and actively works to improve communication and collaboration across divisions. Lucy recently completed a LAS project to which she devoted considerable research and personal time. Lucy created a detailed proposal to increase clinical support to the Foster Care Division, and her recent presentation to the Commissioner and Executive Team was professional and engaging. As stated by Supervising Clinician Seth Narotsky, "Lucy is hardworking and always strives for professional development. Lucy collaborates well both internally with DCF staff as well as with our providers. She is caring, friendly, and always there to assist others. She is an absolute pleasure to supervise." Program Supervisor Yvette O'Brien stated, "Lucy's continuous support to the Ongoing CPS team and for children in care has been outstanding! She is always available when staff have questions and thinks outside of the box if there are barriers to identifying clinical supports for children/families. Lucy goes above and beyond by attending weekly meetings if necessary to ensure a continuum of services and has a 'child centered' approach during her consults. Lucy is mindful to identify the appropriate modality of treatment for children with a focus on their trauma and services that will increase their coping

skills that lead to their success. Lucy consulted with the CPS team for several years for a child that had multiple disrupted episodes from her pre-adoptive placement, was hospitalized and ultimately placed in a congregate care setting. Lucy attended bi-weekly and weekly meetings with the CPS team and congregate care staff until the child was finally placed in a new pre-adoptive home. Lucy advocated for the child's needs during each meeting to ensure the child's mental health needs were consistently met until her forever home was identified. Thank you for all you do Lucy! We truly appreciate you! Keep up the amazing work!"



Dr. Loise Berkowitz - Central Office- Clinical and Community Consultation Division

The CCCSD is proud to acknowledge Dr. Loise Berkowitz for the July Employee of the Month. She is nominated by Maribel Martinez. Dr. Berkowitz is a Director for Special Projects at the CT Behavioral Health Partnership. The Partnership officially started in January 2006, and she came on board October 2006. Dr. Berkowitz is valuable for her knowledge as a historian in this space. Her memory of those details is remarkable and often she has the documentation to support it.

This work involves collaboration with the Departments of Mental Health and Addiction Services and Social Services. Working as sister agencies is rewarding, but it also requires good negotiation skills. Dr. Berkowitz is the epitome of a team player and will go out of her way to stay late to participate in a meeting or take on additional tasks or assignments. We especially want to recognize her for the research she has been doing related to a new project for the Partnership, the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) planning grant. She takes the initiative to gather information to offer guidance and direction to the team. Thank you, Dr. Berkowitz, for all that you do!