

"I Love What I Do"

Maiya Pierre Lighting the Way for Youth and Families at Solnit South



Maiya and Commr. Hill-Lilly at the Employee of the Month ceremony.

For the people who are fortunate to know her, those she serves and serves with, Kaemaii “Maiya” Pierre is a light in their lives. Maiya, a Clinical Social Worker Associate at Solnit South, is the embodiment of empathy, expertise, and joy in the workplace. A recent DCF Employee of the Month, she was celebrated not only for her clinical skill but for the warmth and humanity she brings into every interaction with her team and, most importantly, with the youth and families who walk through the doors of the PRTF.

"I love what I do. I love working with the kids on the unit and their families. Just seeing the progress that they make and being able to support them in finding their voice so that they can tell their story and let us know what they need."

"A lot of our kids, they shut down because they don't think that anyone's going to pay attention to them because they're kids. I try to let them know that their voice is important no matter what."

Maiya pursued social work because she always knew she wanted to empower young people and help them attain a brighter future. The entirety of the Solnit South PRTF population are adolescent females which is the demographic Maiya has worked with most of her career.

"It takes a special person to work with adolescent girls. You have to have a passion for what you do. You have to be able to understand where they're coming from, being able to meet them where they are."

Maiya worked at the Manchester DCF office for a year before going to a community provider. She decided to return to the state after realizing her heart was in guiding youth and families towards positive change. She was thrilled to see an opening at Solnit South that would allow her to engage in full-time clinical work.

"I was excited when DCF offered me the position. [Solnit South] was the first time I've worked on a team where there's so much collaboration and respect. Everybody is willing to hear each other's point of view, even if they don't agree. But everyone's view is respected."

"I just appreciate the whole team. Having the support of the staff, I ask them their thoughts on the kids because they spend the most time with the kids. I always say [my team], they're my greatest teachers. I get a lot of information about what's going on with the unit and use that to support the girls in strengthening their coping skills, help them share their emotions."

She said being able to do what she loves, and having a great team around her, inspire her to show up to work every day radiating good vibes.

"Everyone tells me I have positive energy. I try to maintain that every day even if I'm not in the best space. I want to show up for the kids because a lot of people in their lives [up to that point] didn't show up for them. I want to be able to let them know that you can have a bad day and still show up."

Maiya said many youth arrive at the PRTF carrying a negative connotation regarding therapy. She is understanding and spends the first week connecting with the girls and getting to know them as individuals outside of clinical treatment.

"You just have to remember that, a lot of times, we're not starting or meeting in the most positive of places. They're not happy to be at the PRTF so I kind of meet them where they're at and let them know that this is a safe space."

"At first, I might not even bring up 'therapy.' Just ask, 'Are you ready to talk, do you want to chat?'"

While her clinical skills are exceptional, it is Maiya's gift for making the young women she works with feel seen, supported, and uplifted.

"So, if they're struggling, to get them back to baseline, I take them [outside the PRTF] for fun stuff, we go for ice cream and other incentives. It's all about figuring out what they enjoy and being present with them. I think that's how you connect on another level."

She said she is always looking for ways to connect with the youth, whether cracking a joke, sharing a laugh, or dancing through a moment of joy. Maiya tries to make a personal connection right away asking about their favorite music, makeup, hair and various hobbies.

In addition to meeting people "where they're at" in individual or family sessions, what makes Maiya's approach so effective is balancing moments of levity with therapeutic insight.



"The girls love to dance—they love to show me the new moves, which is always funny," Maiya said with a chuckle. "We'll color together, or they'll teach me new card games. I've learned how to play Palace and Bananagrams just by spending time with them. Every time they see me, they're like, 'Do you want to play Bananagrams?' and I'll say yes, even if I lose every time."

Maiya believes that building strong rapport with a youth starts by connecting with them outside of traditional therapy spaces. Her approach is both intuitive and intentional.

"I find some girls like to go swimming, so I'll talk to them about how I love the beach. I use a lot of humor, tell a lot of jokes. They all they think I'm corny but that's OK. We'll sit together, maybe over lunch, and then they slowly start to let their guard down bit by bit."

From the beginning of a treatment episode, Maiya establishes a rapport with some of the most guarded youth and families.



"The same things I do with the girls, I find a way to connect with their families. Talking to them about what they would like to achieve in family therapy, some goals they want to work towards, what they want their child to work on. We'll try to come to a collaboration so that both [parent and child] feel like they have input into what's going on."

That means Maiya does not shy away from hard conversations, "talking about the elephant in the room," but she does so with a balance of empathy and accountability to foster healing and growth not resentment. She said she likes to keep it real as a therapist and, at this point in her career, nothing really shocks her.

"I'm not afraid to talk about the tough issues. From the start, putting it all out on the table and saying 'you know, at some point we're going to need to talk about this.' Just pushing the family a little bit but more times it's the child that doesn't really want to talk. But always helping the parent to see it from their child's point of view, creating that dialect."

Maiya recounted a saying common in her line of work, "Two things can be true at once. Mom feels this way but you feel that way. How can we move forward from that?"

Maiya's work is a powerful reminder of what compassionate, human-centered care looks like in action. By the end, she has helped transform that connection into a trusting, collaborative relationship. Her impact is lasting—families and youth often reach out to her even after discharge to share updates and gratitude.

"Families will reach out by e-mail just to let me know how the youth is doing. One of the most wonderful things I remember is one of my first clients that I had at Solnit. Her and I were very connected to each other and I had a great relationship with her mom. This was [the youth's] first time being focused on her treatment and it took us a long time to get her there."

Maiya emphasized how collaborative the family was throughout treatment. The mother stayed engaged with the team throughout, sought support, and took any and all feedback to heart. She would come back to family sessions prepared and let Maiya and her team know how suggestions from previous sessions worked out.

"One of the things mom told me was how the young lady reflects on what I said to her in therapy - 'focus on your health and remember to use your coping skills to keep shining bright. Don't let anyone take your light.'



"Or the young lady would ask her mom, she'll say you know 'what would Maiya say or think about this?' Maiya would say, 'Pick my head up. I can get through this—even through the dark times,' and I was really proud to hear that."

Maiya said the growth made by that youth reflected the incredible clinical work that went into her "not just from me, but from the whole team." That became even more evident when the youth was discharged.

"Mom told the entire clinical staff how well her daughter was doing and shared that it was the first time in a long time that she had her daughter back. Hearing that meant so much to all of us."

Maiya makes it a point to share that kind of feedback with her colleagues. "Sometimes the work is really hard. The day-to-day can be heavy. So when families reach out, I always share it with the team. It's important to remember the impact we're having, even after they leave."

Even external partners recognize the exceptional work of Maiya and her colleagues. In a recent team meeting, one DCF provider shared, "Thank you Maiya, for all that you've done, I've never seen a turnaround like this."

Maiya said that, while some days at the PRTF are really tough, being nominated for Employee of the Month shows that her team recognizes the passion and energy she puts into her work.

"It shows that people see the effort that I try to bring into my day-to-day and, working here, you have to know that some days are going to be really hard. I rely on my team but I think just having them see that I'm really trying my best to help the clients become the best versions of themselves - that means the most."



Maiya's work reminds us all that the strongest connections often start with simple acts of presence, patience, and kindness. Maiya's advice for those aspiring to enter the field of clinical social work?

"Don't take anything personally and always meet the client where they're at. [And ask yourself], what do you hope people remember most about working with you? Whether that's a colleague, a youth or a family member? For me, it's that I always show up for them no matter what."