



### **Employee of the Month Awards!**

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

#### **Susan Narotsky - Careline**

It is with great enthusiasm that we recognize Social Worker Susan Narotsky as Employee of the Month, following a glowing recommendation from Careline Social Work Supervisor Karen Cutts. Susan has continuously demonstrated excellence in her role as a Social Work Screener at the Careline. Her dedication, expertise, and unwavering commitment make a meaningful impact on both our team and the families we serve. Beyond her daily responsibilities, Susan volunteers her time and expertise to CT KIND, championing positive change by contributing to the development of a new case management system for the Department. Her hard work and meticulous attention to detail are reflected in her impressive monthly stats. Whenever assistance is needed, Susan steps in without hesitation, completing tasks with efficiency and dedication. Her guidance and support for callers are reliable and effective, reinforcing the trust we place in her abilities. Susan's professionalism, positive attitude, and willingness to support her colleagues have fostered a collaborative and uplifting work environment. Her years of experience and consistent efforts set a high standard for our entire team, inspiring those around her. Her dedication does not go unnoticed, and we are truly fortunate to have her as part of our team.



#### **Camila Cortes - Danbury Area Office**

Camila Cortes has consistently demonstrated exceptional dedication and professionalism in her role as an Intake Social Worker. She is being nominated by Jeanette Blackwell. She is a dedicated and positive addition to the Danbury Intake team. Camila is a strong advocate not only for the families that she works with, but for all individuals. Camila's compassion for others does not go unnoticed. Her unwavering advocacy for children's rights and well-being has made a profound impact in the community, ensuring that vulnerable youth receive the support and protection they deserve. She is passionate and presents positive support. Camila is always willing to lend a helping hand to peers and offer support during difficult times. The ability to take charge and lead others are qualities Camila displays daily. Camila works hard and dedicates her time to achieve the best possible outcomes for her cases all while maintaining a calm demeanor. Most

of all, Camila is kind to all- to her families, to her peers, and to all staff. Camila's ability to bring joy and positivity, while getting the work done, is unmatched.

### **Veronica Fas - Waterbury Area Office**

Waterbury's Employee of the Month is Intake Social Worker-Veronica Fas. Veronica was nominated by her supervisor Emily Kulikauskas. Veronica started out as an intern at DCF before being hired in 2002. Veronica has been in Ongoing Services, Permanency and Intake. For the last seventeen years, Veronica has been in Intake where she has continued to demonstrate an exceptional level of professionalism and effectiveness to continue to do this work and support the agency's mission. Veronica utilizes a strength based, client driven and client centered approach, with a focus on safety, while helping our families improve family functioning. For over eleven years, Veronica maintained a specialty caseload involving fatalities, Exceptional Circumstance events, High Risk Newborns and various Investigations. Veronica has filed Cotermious Petitions on numerous occasions and sought legal risk placements for Permanency planning while at the Intake level and her original Permanency background assisted in her success. Veronica has a passion in the area of Intimate Partner Violence and has been dedicated to sharpening her skills in this domain. Veronica was an active participant in the Advance Training Services on the Impact of Intimate Partner Violence on Victims on two separate occasions. These topics included: trauma informed care, strangulation, brain injury, child exposure to Intimate Partner Violence, Intimate Partner Violence with Mental Health and Sexual Abuse. Veronica was a member of the IPV-FAIR panel for the agency. She has been a dependable employee and has had assignments directly involving our higher profile and Exceptional Circumstances cases surrounding Intimate Partner Violence situations. As a result of her complex experience, Veronica has a strong ability to function effectively under intense pressure and circumstances and renders prompt factual and well thought out assessments. Over the last several months Intake has been adjusting to fluctuations in staffing which contributed to higher Intake caseloads. Veronica has adapted successfully to this higher demand and has ensured safety of children and timely completion of all Investigation cases during this time. She engages families with respect and compassion. Through it all, she has always maintained a professional demeanor and is highly regarded by her peers. Veronica remains a highly valued employee whose length of service and dedication to families are appreciated and respected.



### **Carl Hoyt - Torrington Area Office**

Carl Hoyt has been a Social Work Case Aide with the Department since August of 1995, which is 30 years! He is being nominated by Jeanette Blackwell. Carl's compassion comes across immediately when he is with a family. He has a very calming influence on the children. There have been countless times he has been viewed walking with the children (sometimes 3 or more) and his gentle demeanor comes across right away; even when the children are not at their best. Carl is the same way with the families he serves. He builds a solid trusting relationship with them from day one. Carl has a great working relationship with all staff; he shines when working

with our Trainees and processing scenarios with them. Carl is a strong advocate for his families, and they trust him. Carl is reliable and caring. Carl's mantra is "Family First" not only in his own life but with our DCF families. Now, in addition to his Social Work Case Aide responsibilities, Carl is also in charge of keeping our vehicles maintained. This is a process that many take for granted. We are very appreciative of Carl and his help with Fleet. It may seem like a little thing though it is huge to workers who are running day in and day out. Thank you, Carl, for everything you do. This recognition is well deserved and long overdue.

### **Chris Traylor - New Haven Area Office**

Ongoing Services Social Worker Chris Traylor is being nominated for Employee of the Month. for the past 4 years Supervisor Melissa Sansone and has seen immense growth in him as a Social Worker and nominated him for this award. His calmness, patience and composure while dealing with difficult clients and daily stressors has been amazing to witness. Chris is an excellent "Team Player" and is always willing to assist his fellow coworkers with their case needs. He has had a challenging case load with numerous removals. Chris is always respectful and kind to coworkers, service providers and clients. He has developed positive relationships with children and adolescents on his caseload. Chris has gone far and beyond to ensure children's needs are met and to preserve foster care placements.

### **Michele Fratta - Milford Area Office**

Michele has been employed with the Department for 20 years and has been working as an Intake Social Worker for the last 16 years. She is being nominated by Jennifer Carey-Walker. Michele brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to her role as an Intake Social Worker in the Milford Office. Michele's recent caseload has been extremely challenging with several cases that have included parents with significant mental health issues. These cases are challenging to determine if the parent's reality is detrimental to their children. Michele received incessant phone calls and emails all hours of the day and night from clients while they were in the midst of a mental health crisis. In one of these cases, Michele worked tirelessly to not only locate a Mother and ensure the safety of the children but also searched hotels in various cities and made multiple calls to Police Departments for welfare checks. The outcome was mother was found and hospitalized for about a month to stabilize. Michele had excellent family and fatherhood engagement in these cases to draw on family supports to assist the Mothers and in one of the cases, the Department was able to vest in a Father custody of his child, while mother was in her mental health crisis. During this timeframe (what we like to call March Madness) Michele demonstrated an unwavering effort to ensure that all her daily work responsibilities were handled, in addition to supporting her clients in distress. Her great sense of humor also assisted both her and I in getting through this period of time. There were very high stress levels with a lot of delirious laughter. This month more than ever, we believe that Michele's efforts should be commended. She is an overall excellent worker, a joy to supervise, and an overall asset to the agency.



### **Haley Flax - Norwich Area Office**

Investigations Social Worker Haley Flax is being nominated for Employee of the Month by Sabrina DeOliviera. Haley has been an Intake Social Worker for a year and a half and has excelled in her role. Despite Intake not being her first choice, she does the job without complaints on a daily basis. Haley connects with her clients on a level that makes them comfortable and willing to engage with the Department. She is empathetic, yet direct which is one of her most redeeming qualities. Aside from always being one step ahead in her work, she is the first to offer a helping hand and assist newer workers learn the ins and outs of the job. As her supervisor, Haley is one of my "go to" people. Need help with a removal, ask Haley. Need help getting organized, ask Haley. Need help covering visits or getting more information, ask Haley. She never turns down a challenge and always gets to the bottom of things, which makes her such a phenomenal Investigator. Haley is the co-chair for the Wellness Team and is always coming up with activities to support our staff. She is always prepared, always approachable and always smiling despite the difficulty of this job. Haley has recently been involved in some difficult and unsafe situations that many face while doing this work. She handled herself professionally and with poise and came to work the next day ready to take on the next case. Most importantly, she is a Social Worker at heart and has no idea how big of an impact she had made on the lives of the families she's worked with children she has helped. The Norwich DCF office is a better place for having Haley on our team!



### **Shavonna Jenkins - Middletown Area Office**

We wanted to recognize the work of Social Worker Trainee, Shavonna Jenkins. She is being nominated by Cindy Bowman. Shavonna has been with the Department for a year as of 6/14/2025. She has grown into her role during this past year and has displayed strong skills with her engagement of families. We want to specifically recognize her in the work that she did with a 16-year-old youth that was not even on her caseload. She assisted her coworker in the coverage due to the complexities of the case. Without hesitation, she took the initiative to engage the youth and her supports. The family and youth were seeking her out with questions about the case. When the youth needed to go to the emergency department as she was struggling with her mental health and human trafficking concerns, Shavonna was there to transition her to a hospital and provide her support. Shavonna has displayed teamwork abilities that are crucial in the work that we do every day. We cannot do this job alone. Shavonna understands the importance of helping others when needed and jumps right in. Due to the compassion and work ethics she brings to the job every day, her peers also do not hesitate in assisting her when needed. She continues to show positive signs of professional growth as a Social Worker when it pertains to written work, collaborating with providers and building working relationships with children and families. It is a pleasure to have Shavonna in our workgroup, and we are lucky to have her, as she is an asset.

### **Lissette Soto - Willimantic Area Office**

Lissette Soto, Ongoing Services Social Worker, was Nominated by Rosiris Espejo who received much positive praise about her work. Emily Casey from Natchaug Hospital shared: "I'm not sure if there is a way to give a shout out at DCF but I just wanted to pass on that Lissette Soto was amazing to work with. Her care and commitment with our mutual client, who just left Natchaug earlier this week meant so much to our team and I know it meant a lot to the client too. In 111 days, Lissette was his only visitor, and he looked forward to every meeting with her and her kindness and dedication did not go unnoticed." Lissette also received accolades from some of the panel attorneys as they felt she made their job easier due to her engagement skills with clients and as a result they are less resistant to working with the Department. Lastly, Lissette was noted to be a very compassionate Social Worker that goes the extra mile to assist and help parents and children on her caseload. Many of Lissette's clients advocate for their case to remain open at case closure to continue to receive her support. Lissette advocates for children and family on her caseload to receive equal treatment and support despite their social, educational or immigration status. Lissette is also a huge support to her peers. Lissette is a veteran worker and is always available to assist and guide her coworkers and remind them of trainings and meetings. Lissette was nominated and received "The William Rivera Humanitarian Award" for her extraordinary work with a group of undocumented youths on caseload. We are so fortunate to work with Lissette!



### **Christopher Jackle - Hartford Area Office**

Ongoing Services Social Worker Chris Jackle is nominated as Employee of the Month. He is being nominated by Maritza Velez. Chris is deserving of this accolade and spotlight, as Chris has done extraordinary work with the youth/young adults on his caseload and has helped guide them towards achieving successful outcomes. Chris has had 5 young adults graduate this year, 1 young adult graduating from college, and 4 successfully achieving their high school diploma. Chris made it a point to attend their graduations, even on his own time, just to show his support, and his youth were ecstatic he was there. For one particular youth, "R," schooling was especially difficult. During this school year, she had fourteen different placements and felt so defeated, often acting out behaviorally. Chris empowered this youth, attended countless PPTs, school meetings, and spent hours of quality time with her. He assisted her with advocating for recovered credits to go from a junior to a senior this year and helped her make it possible to be able to graduate on time! She is planning on studying at Capital Community College and then transfer to a four-year school to earn a nursing degree. Additionally, Social Worker Jackle has been a pillar of support to his young adult, "M", who graduated from Mitchell College with a Bachelor's Degree in Forensic Science/Criminal Justice in May 2025, at age 23. "M" was a special education student who struggled with her own mental health issues after migrating here from Jamaica and being abandoned by her mother, while her father was serving 50 yrs in prison for murder. "M" had minimal supports and saw Social Worker Jackle as her main support. His advocacy and dependability allowed "M" to develop trusting relationships, and she has now developed a large support system who will continue to follow/support her as she establishes her roots on her

own. Important to note is that Chris made it a point to bring "M" her favorite Jamaican food each visit, as she often craved that and had difficulty finding restaurants near her college that supported her cultural needs. This small gesture meant a lot to "M", and this is a true testament of who Chris is as a worker, always going above and beyond to serve his youth.

### **Dr. Shahila Edwards-Grey - Manchester Area Office**

Dr. Shahila Edwards-Grey, Investigations Social Worker, is being nominated for Employee of the Month by Maritza Velez. While Shai has been a leader within the office and the Region in the area of Racial Justice, serving as a co-lead for the RJ-CQI; she regularly puts that framework into practice in her own casework. Shai approaches her cases using a Racial Justice lens- not only identifying areas of inequity and systemic bias - but taking steps to address such issues during her work with families. Shai was recently assigned to a case in which she recognized early on concerns of discrimination and unfair treatment of an undocumented family, which had significant implications to their lives and functioning. On its surface, this case involved concerns of family violence; underneath, there was so much more to this family's story. Shai quickly sought the support from Jennifer Avenia, Director of Immigration Practice, to assist in navigating the challenges and pursuing a rightful outcome for the family. Ms. Avenia shared the following about Shai upon their collaboration: "Dr. Shahila Edwards-Grey, Ph.D., and I recently worked on a complex case involving a large extended family from Honduras. Some of the family members had to leave their home in East Hartford because of an alleged episode of violence that caused issues that came to the attention of law enforcement and the public schools. Dr. Edwards-Grey quickly addressed the complex interrelationship between the immigration legal matters and the criminal justice system and with Educational Consultant Maria Pastorelli got the 17-year-old reinstated in high school after what I view as an illegal attempt to exclude him from the East Hartford Public Schools. During the home visit with the entire extended family in their new home in Meriden I observed Dr. Edwards-Grey undertaking a thorough assessment of several individuals. She did this with immense compassion for the current unfortunate situation, as well as the family's plight as undocumented people working very hard to keep their family together. It was such an impressive display of excellent social work skills and values in action.' Amidst these uncertain times in our country, it is ever so important that such vulnerable families are treated with dignity, respect and compassion. Shai's efforts exemplify just that and serve as an excellent example of racial justice in action. And for that, she deserves recognition as Employee of the Month."



### **Nicolas (Nick) Milslagle - New Britain Area Office**

Nicolas (Nick) Milslagle is an Ongoing Services Social Worker and was nominated by his Social Work Supervisor, Kimberly Koeppen. Nick began working with a family with four children as an In-Home case. Unfortunately, their mother passed away in January 2024 due to kidney failure. Nick was able to work with the Fathers of the two older children, and they came and picked up

their Daughters and brought them home with them to Florida and Puerto Rico. The youngest two children did not have a close relationship with their Father and there were significant concerns of SU and IPV with him. The youngest two children entered foster care and shortly after were placed in a legal risk home in East Lyme. The children have flourished in this home and Nick has worked diligently to make sure that all of their needs were being met- including going through the tedious process of obtaining passports for them in order for the children to travel with the foster parents to Portugal- before this the children had never been out the New England area. The children are involved in community activities such as soccer, gymnastics, and swim lessons and have made lots of friends at their new school. Their foster parents are very good at helping the children to remember their mom and always make a safe place for them to talk about her- which is also something Nick has worked with them on. The court granted the TPR on their father this week and Nick will begin processing their adoption!! Nick truly has done amazing work on this case from his time with the family as an in-home case to continuing to support the children and biological family after the children entered care. These children are lucky to have Nick as their Social Worker!!

### **Michelle Nunez - Meriden Area Office**

The Meriden Area Office would like to nominate Michelle Nunez for employee of the month. Michelle is a dedicated professional with 25 years of experience in DCF and has dedicated 15 of those years to Foster Care. She is being nominated by Maritza Velez. Her unwavering commitment to her work is evident in her extensive knowledge of Foster Care, steadfast support for all foster parents, collaborative efforts with CPS workers and community providers, and her proactive assistance to her unit members. Michelle consistently takes the initiative to ensure everyone is well, included, and heard. Michelle is such an important part of the success of Meriden as she has done such a wonderful job of bringing foster parents and DCF staff together to understand and meet the needs of our most vulnerable children. Beyond her work, Michelle actively participates in the Wellness Committee and has been instrumental in event planning for the Meriden office. Michelle is the type of person that every office dreams of having. She always finds the positives in people and is always making people smile and laugh. As she does with her families, she always wants to make sure everyone is doing alright and will help whenever she can. The Meriden Office just had an amazing Wellness Event that Michelle worked so hard to help put together. Without her dedication to the staff, the event would've never happened. She is an integral part of the Meriden Office and her commitment to all, and this work cannot go unnoticed. The Office wanted to acknowledge Michelle for always caring and taking care of others.



### **Jane Lohmann - Wilderness School**

Jane Lohmann, Field Program Supervisor, is nominated by Aaron Wiebe for Employee of the Month. Jane came back to the Wilderness School after decades away from the program. She

brings a playful charismatic warmth, a professional background in youth work and research, an ethical mindset, and a desire to help make the world a better place one interaction at a time. In a little over a year, she has revamped our enrollment system to make it easier for Social Workers and referring agents. Jane brings a deeply personal touch to every conversation she has with a family, youth, or Social Worker. She believes people can grow and change and Jane is a true artist at building connections and supporting people in taking the next steps. And she has a great sense of humor. We are grateful to have you aboard Jane! Congratulations.

### **Wendy Wellington - PRTF (South)**

Solnit South PRTF's June Employee of the Month is Office Assistant Wendy Wellington. She is being nominated by Michael Rulnick. Wendy is the pleasant face we see each morning when we walk into the Silvermine building. She is a genuinely kind and uplifting presence every day, always checking in and offering thoughtful compliments, even noticing and appreciating others' clothing. Her positivity is consistent and not limited to just one person. She creates a welcoming atmosphere in the office and always has encouraging words, especially for those who might be having a tough day. She's patient and helpful with tasks like using the printer or fax machine, often offering to take care of it herself. It's clear she values the work of the Administration and is eager to support in any way she can. Most importantly, she truly cares about the kids and pays close attention to the emotional climate around her. Her warmth and attentiveness make her someone you're always happy to see. Wendy is an important part of our team, from answering phones and routing calls to the chart audits to help ensure we comply with Joint Commission and DPH standards to reach our goal of 100%. She is a team player and a true asset and contributing member to the Solnit team.



### **Naikyia Manick - PRTF (North)**

Solnit North's June Employee of the Month is Advanced Clinical Social Worker Naikyia Manick. She is being nominated by Michael Rulnick. Naikyia consistently goes above and beyond to ensure that every youth she engages with feels valued, heard, and supported. She is a strong advocate for young people, skillfully balancing her commitment to their wellbeing with the maintenance of professional boundaries. Beyond her clinical work, Naikyia is an active and supportive member of the community. Whether serving as the Team Manager during kickball games or going the extra mile to connect with youth, her presence is always felt. Remarkably, she manages all of this while pursuing her Doctoral degree in Social Work—a testament to her dedication and passion for the field. Naikyia exemplifies advocacy, leadership, and heart—both on and off campus. Her Oak Cottage family is incredibly proud of her and deeply grateful for everything she contributes to our community.

### **Sherri Duncan - Fiscal Division**

It is with great pride that DCF Fiscal Business Office recognizes Sherrie Duncan, Fiscal Administrative Officer, as Employee of the Month. She is nominated by Gerald Mallison. In the short period of time working at DCF, Sherrie never hesitates to go above and beyond, always

volunteering to assist colleagues with their needs both at the Central Office and the Solnits. Her ability to manage her large workload of responsibilities is nothing short of remarkable. (Including - Purchasing for 8 Area Offices and the Wilderness School, supervising & training an FAA, reserving client needed hotels, and acting as the assistant P-Card Coordinator). Sherrie volunteered to be assistant P-Card Coordinator when the new contract rolled over with a different bank in April 2025. She has been an incredible asset to her Supervisor and Unit by navigating the new bank's website and the many hiccups, in the beginning of the roll out. Without Sherrie, we are not sure the Business Office could have managed the early problems and all the e-mails the unit received from the many employees who needed changes to be made to their cards (most of which were needed immediately). We can't thank her enough for all her assistance. Sherrie consistently delivers exceptional results while maintaining a level of professionalism and dedication that sets a standard of excellence. Her work ethic, efficiency, and attention to detail ensure that every task is completed with precision and care. Beyond her impressive skills, Sherrie is a true team player and always willing to support her colleagues. She exemplifies the value of hard work, resilience and commitment that makes the Business Office stronger. Sherrie is truly an unsung hero and has even shown great leadership qualities in the DCF Fiscal Business Office. For these reasons and more, Sherrie is selected as DCF Fiscal Business Office "Employee of the Month" for June! Thank you!

### **Martha Fiocco - Office of Legal Affairs**

Martha Fiocco is an integral part of the Legal Division, and we are excited to celebrate her as Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Jasana Levy. Prior to joining the Legal Division, Martha was an Office Supervisor in the



Waterbury Office where she supervised approximately 14 Office Assistants. As the Paralegal Specialist assigned to the New Haven Office, Martha completes internal reviews and records requests from Clients and Attorneys. She also ensures the Department is prepared for and represented at Administrative Hearings. Despite the pace and volume of work in the Legal Division, Martha consistently approaches every task with a smile and regardless of who she is interacting with, Martha is respectful and patient. In addition, Martha is an active member of the Legal Division Wellness Committee and the New Haven Safety & Wellness Committee. She also often volunteers to participate in the mock trial presentation at DRS training. Thanks for all you do, Martha!

### **Lucy Coccozza - Engineering Division**

Safety Program Office Lucy Coccozza has been with the Engineering Division since 2002. She is being nominated by John DiPilla. Over the years, she has been involved in a variety of safety and security practices that include safety matters at the Offices such as inspections, fire drills, alarm and camera systems, and threat assessment assistance. Lucy has worked closely with several Office Assistants to ensure that all compliance requirements are being met while providing guidance to various inquiries. In addition, Lucy has assisted in coordinating and organizing newly leased properties, including project design, and working closely with property owners,

vendors, IT and other Agency personnel. Lucy has served as the liaison for the contracted guard company and addresses security needs as necessary. Other duties include proxy access, Everbridge System oversight, continuity planning in relocations and WEB EOC (Emergency Operations Center) data portal to name a few. Lucy's years of experience and knowledge have provided the Engineering Division years of service that has benefited the Agency.

### **Velissa Mendoza - Area Office- Clinical and Community Consultation Division**

We are excited to nominate another RRG with exceptional skills and deep advocacy for our families, kids and staff. The Region 1: Norwalk RRG Team would like to nominate Substance Use RRG Velissa Mendoza for Employee of the Month. She is being nominated by Maribel Martinez. In her work, Velissa exemplifies- passionate, respectful, tireless, ethical, informative, supportive, grateful, mentor, resourceful, caring, advocate, positive and funny. Velissa is truly the full package; she is clinically sound and addresses the work ethically with compassion and empathy. She is skilled at conceptualizing and documenting her clinical assessments and is unofficially the local ABCD Paradigm Queen! She demonstrates professionalism and is always willing to support the needs of her peers, staff and the families we serve. She is a team player with a great personality and makes herself available despite juggling multiple demands, always with a smile on her face. Velissa consistently is available and willing to support newer staff in understanding substance misuse and all that it entails. The RRG are also especially grateful for her presence in Joint Consults given her expertise and collaboration to enhance efficiency and positive outcomes. She is a stabilizing force within the RRG and it's an absolute pleasure to have her on our team.

