



Department of Children and Families *Spotlight On What's Right*



A MESSAGE FROM COMMISSIONER HAMILTON



This is our first newsletter of 2026! I hope each and everyone of you had a restful and enjoyable holiday season and okay – one last time – Happy New Year! Winter has arrived!

"Snowmageddon" brought 12-21 inches of snow across our state with conditions we have not seen in a decade. For those of us with sore backs, arms and legs, of course we wish we have purchased that snowblower ...

Special thanks to the leadership and employees in our 24/7 facilities – the Child Abuse and Neglect Careline, Solnit North and Solnit South PRTFs and Solnit South Hospital – for their great work! No matter what the elements, these operations remain open and serving the most vulnerable children and families in our communities. We are grateful for you!



In January, we celebrate the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. A visionary leader of equality, he played a key role in the American Civil Rights movement from the 1950's until his death. At the age of 35 years of age, he was the youngest person ever to win the Nobel Peace Prize – turning over the award money to further advance the civil rights cause. Dr. King's legacy has impacted all of us. Perhaps he is most known for his "I Have a Dream" speech. The text

can be found here: [I Have a Dream](#) or via YouTube: [I Have a Dream](#)

This month we also celebrated "Dia de Los Reyes Magos" or Three Kings Day complete with a parade, including camels, moving right by Central Office.



January is also Human Trafficking Awareness Month. Child Sex Trafficking is an epidemic in our society. Connecticut remains proud in our work to both educate the public and respond to reports of child sex trafficking. In 2025, over 230 consults were completed by DCF's Human Anti-trafficking Response Team (HART).

Thanks to the leadership of Director of Human Trafficking and Gender Responsive Services, Mirella Beltran, events have taken place across Connecticut including a weekly quiz for staff! I hope everyone learned something...I know I did!



In the first event, I provided remarks at a press conference led by Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz along with Chief State's Attorney Patrick J. Griffin, Deputy Chief State's Attorney Lisa D'Angelo, Assistant State's Attorney for Judicial District of Hartford Alexandra Arroyo, and Executive Director of the Connecticut Children's Alliance Krystal Rich to draw attention to the prevalence of trafficking and the collaborative efforts amongst professionals to hold those

responsible accountable and coordinate support for survivors.

Thank you to our partners at the Department of Motor Vehicles, Connecticut State Police, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and Homeland Security, for partnering especially during the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance's national five-day Human Trafficking Awareness initiative. At a weigh station in Union, Connecticut truckers received information on trafficking and who to contact to report a suspicion.

Watch the video clip prepared by DCF's Visual Media Designer Liz Calvi: [Human Trafficking Education Event](#)

Here is coverage from our media partners across the state:



[NBC - DCF Talks about how you can protect your kids from human trafficking](#)

[WTNH - Officials asking truckers to help spot human trafficking in Connecticut](#)

[WFSB - Agencies educate trucker drivers on spotting human trafficking at rest stops](#)

[FOX - State Police seek truck drivers' help to identify, report human trafficking activity](#)

[Hartford Courant - Most CT human trafficking victims are girls some more at risk. Authorities share what to watch for.](#)



We have all accomplished so much over the past 12 months! Please take some time to read the "Best of 2025" to understand some of our major successes across Divisions. We have a lot to be proud of!



Congratulations once again to the December

Employees of the Month! We are now moving to quarterly nominations and celebrations so keep in mind those staff around you that deserve to be recognized! Nominations can be submitted again in March!

Speaking of employees, please read in this month's "Spotlight" about Lydia Jubrey, Supervising Chef for Solnit North. "Some of these boys come in and you can see they've just checked out," she said. "Some of them aren't going home [any time soon]. So, when they come here, I want them to know you're safe, you're welcome, and you're going to eat." She stated. "I just want to make people happy. If you love what you're doing, and you want people to love it too, you'll succeed." Read more about her in the story entitled, *"Three Meals a Day, and So Much More: Lydia Jubrey's Recipe for Serving Stability and Compassion at Solnit North."*



The Legislative session is about to begin! That means long days and late nights for Chief of Government Relations and Policy Vinny Russo and Legislative Program Director Mike Carone! Stay tuned for more information on the session, bills of interest to DCF and other related matters.

Would you do anything for a family? If so, you are "ready to foster." Have you ever considered becoming a foster or adoptive parent? Do you know anyone you think would provide a loving and caring home while they partner with the child's birth family? It takes all of us to support - and recruit - families! Please contact 1-888-KIDHERO or visit CtFosters.com for more information! A phone call could change a child's life - and yours!



Stay safe and warm everyone!

"THREE MEALS A DAY, AND SO MUCH MORE: LYDIA JUBREY'S RECIPE FOR SERVING STABILITY AND COMPASSION AT SOLNIT NORTH"



Lydia Jubrey, Supervising Chef for Solnit North & November 2025 Employee of the Month.

Recently recognized as Employee of the Month for her outstanding commitment to both staff and youth, Jubrey has built far more than a kitchen. She has created a space where consistency, respect, dignity, and human connection go hand in hand.

"Some of the boys come in and you can see they've just checked out," she said. "Some of them aren't going home [any time soon]. So, when they come here, I want them to know: you're safe, you're welcome, and you're going to eat."

"I just want to make people happy. If you love what you're doing, and you want people to love it too, you'll succeed."

Since her promotion several years ago, she has committed to preparing delicious, nutritious meals daily from scratch while fully meeting, and often exceeding, USDA Child Nutrition Requirements.

"Everything we do here is homemade," Jubrey said. "We don't use frozen stuff. We just don't. The kids deserve better than that."

During lunchtime at DCF's Solnit North Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility, the scene says as much about the leadership of the kitchen as it does about the food. As trays are handed across the counter, each exchange comes with a "please," a "thank you," and a fist bump for each of the young men cycling through the lunch counter. The youth line up eagerly, clearly fond of the woman greeting them one by one: Lydia Jubrey, Supervising Chef for Solnit North.



Lydia and DCF Interim Commissioner Hamilton at Employee of the Month.



Her leadership style is shaped in part by her own background. Jubrey began cooking at a young age, inspired by her grandmother and mother. She later honed her skills in the U.S. Army, where she served as a chef, and discipline and teamwork were non-negotiable. That experience left a lasting impression on how she leads today.

"We have to work as a team for this place to run. I might not have everything I want that week, but we'll make it work," she said.

That team-centered mindset extends directly to the staff she supervises. As a leader, Jubrey is described as both fair and firm. She holds staff accountable through daily informal check-ins, while empowering them by involving them in decision-making. The result is a work environment that is supportive, motivated, and deeply mission driven - one that her team takes pride in which is apparent as they prepare that day's lunch.

Jubrey identifies with the young men at Solnit North. Having experienced major losses in her own family, including the death of her mother one year ago, she understands the instability, grief, and the feeling of being overlooked that the residents themselves may be feeling. Those experiences - loss, caregiving, and navigating crisis - inform how Jubrey shows up for both staff and youth today.

Both in her kitchen and around the North campus, Jubrey channels that understanding into compassion paired with structure. The cafeteria, she says, is a privilege which comes with expectations of mutual respect.

She explained, "I tell the boys, when you come into my house, I don't want you to disrespect my [staff]. My guys don't disrespect you. We treat you like family, and I expect the same in return."

Jubrey also understands the powerful role nutrition plays in youth behavior and mood. At Solnit North, Meals are crafted not just to nourish bodies, but to support emotional regulation and well-being.





Jubrey tells new hires, "If you're only here for a paycheck, you're in the wrong kitchen. This is about passion. These kids need to know you care. You have to care."

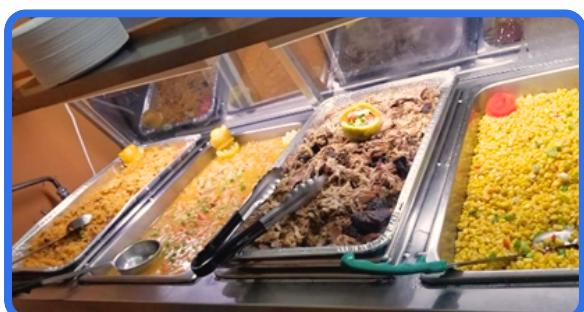
That approach resonates. When challenges arise, Jubrey addresses them calmly and directly, modeling accountability and respect. Youth respond not out of fear, but because they feel valued.

"I don't have to be mean or belittle them for them to listen to me. I think that's what they like. I talk to them."

Her staff affectionately call her "Momma Bear," a nickname that

reflects both her warmth and her strength. Under her leadership, the kitchen is a place where standards are high, compassion is constant, and everyone - staff and youth alike - feels seen.

Each day, Jubrey stands at the cafeteria door, greeting every young man as he comes in to get his food tray.



She asks, "How you doing today? Everything all right?" It's a simple gesture, but one that carries weight for youth who may be far from home, family, or familiarity.

"I have a passion for pleasing people. Food brings everybody together. When you're eating, everybody's just one."

At Solnit North, that philosophy is served three times a day along with a healthy meal, a kind word, and usually, a fist bump.



"BEST OF 2025"

This past year saw us experience significant accomplishments across all Divisions within the Department and with our community partners!

Here is the "Best of 2025" for your review:

- Susan I. Hamilton MSW, JD was appointed by Governor Lamont as Interim Commissioner.
- Tina Jefferson was named Deputy Commissioner of Child Protective Services and Stacey Gerber was named Deputy Commissioner of Administration.
- Hired Samaris Rose as the first of its kind Parent with Lived Expertise Consultant serving on the Executive Team.
- Continued the "Employee of the Month" award to honor staff demonstrating excellent performance and unique accomplishments.
- The DCF website was modernized and a new DCF logo was created along with enhanced Agency branding materials.
- "This is DCF" training was developed to educate and inform internal staff and community partners of the broad scope of DCF's responsibilities and mandates.
- Opened Intensive Transitional Treatment Center (ITCC) in partnership with Waterford Country School. The program for females is open and serving clients with the program for males to be open soon.
- BITS along with the CT-KIND team and a vendor replaced the legacy system LINK with CT-KIND, a Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). We know we have more work to do and appreciate all those who contributed to this point in the development and implementation of the system.
- With the support of Reunification and Therapeutic Family Time (RTFT), 89% of families referred were reunified with their children.
- Finalized the Skin and Hair Policy and Practice Guide.
- Deputy Commissioner Tina Jefferson spoke at the QPI National Virtual Conference. "Holding the Vision Together: Centering Youth, Families and Community in Leadership," was the theme focusing on effective leadership strategies that support excellent parenting by our licensed caregivers.
- In collaboration with DSS, DHMAS and other state partners, Connecticut received federal CMS approval of a state plan to increase access to a broader continuum of treatment services for youth with significant substance use difficulties. The plan includes Medicaid reimbursement and enhanced rates for adolescent residential substance use disorder (SUD) treatment and provides investment in recovery peer supports for adolescents.



session 4: Holding the Vision Together: Centering Youth, Families, and Community in Leadership

Join us for a dynamic closing session, where we will hear from child welfare leaders across QPI sites about how they have explored effective leadership strategies that support excellent parenting. Scan the QR code to learn more and register now!

 Tina Jefferson, LMSW Connecticut	 David Swanson Hollinger California	 Esther Jacobo, Esq. Miami, Florida	 Catherine Huerto, MSW Fresno, California
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- Successfully completed the SFY 2024 CT General State Statue 17a-6e Report on Racial Justice Data, Activities and Strategies.
 - Lisa Bowen-Connor APRN was recognized as an "outstanding MDT member" at the Pinwheels for Prevention event hosted at the University of New Haven.
 - BITS team has successfully replaced the complex MicroMain system with a streamlined Facilities Work Order System, simplifying work order management for Solnit North and South facilities. This upgrade improved efficiency, enhanced visibility into requests, and introduced real-time status updates and preventive maintenance scheduling.
 - The Bureau of Continuous Quality Improvement, in partnership with external and internal partners successfully completed our state-led Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) case reviews, then convened over 200 staff, providers, advocates and people with lived experience to help develop our Program Improvement Plan (PIP) and submitted our draft for federal review and approval.
 - The Administrative Case Review Division celebrated the 1-year anniversary of the statewide rollout of the ACRI tool in Mindshare. The new tool has allowed refinement of the data collection to include enhanced data points around invitation and participation, barriers to services, as well as racial justice.
 - Careline demonstrated strong leadership, collaboration, and resilience during the preparation and implementation of the CT Kind system. Staff at all levels showed exceptional commitment by learning the system in advance, working on site during the transition, and supporting one another with patience and shared expertise to ensure timely, high-quality reporting despite long hours and system challenges.
 - The Olive Branch continued supporting and empowering families by providing gifts and other tangible items throughout the year.
 - Solnit Hospital put on another awesome Annual Talent Show featuring superstar adolescents singing, dancing, and playing instruments under the mentorship of the Music Therapist and the Rehabilitation Department.
 - Outreach Coordinator Jackie Ford published a short story in the newest edition of "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Miracles, Angels, and Messages from Heaven." Read it here: - [Double Play - Chicken Soup for the Soul](#)
 - Developed work reduction strategies to address themes identified by staff through Town Halls discussions with the Commissioner and Executive Team.
 - Central Office Congregate Care nurses worked on strengthening DCF's relationships with the supervising nurses in our congregate care settings. This included establishing regular cadence of meetings to provide department updates, training and ways to partner with DCF on medical care issues with children residing in the congregate care settings.



- Social Workers Lorraine Perez from Meriden, Deana Spero from Milford and Morgan Bell from Waterbury promoted the work of DCF via social media posts created by our partners at the Department of Administrative Services.
- Established a Short-Term Stabilization Rate approval process for caregivers of youth with complex needs.
- The updated Foster Care policy was approved as was the Case Plan Policy.
- Program Director of Early Childhood and Family Support Programs Ines Eaton was awarded the 2025 CT 359 "Giving Bear Award," presented to a person whose efforts and dedication to assisting young children and their families has led to change and improvement.
- A Frontline Wellness Response was developed to support staff who have experienced difficult situations at work covering a wide range of circumstances.
- Safety Practice Supervisory Coaching Sessions continued with Regional Office personnel.
- The Missing from Care policy and practice guidance was finalized.
- The Foster Care Division held three Weekend for a Lifetime events resulting in 102 prospective foster parents being trained and 38 being fully licensed so far.
- The Health Advocates resolved over \$117,000 in outstanding medical bills and responded to over 550 inquiries/consults.
- Interim Commissioner Hamilton received the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) Beacon of Services award for her prior role in the Agency as General Counsel. This award honors an "attorney whose leadership advances legal and policy practice, fosters innovation, and strengthens collaboration across human services."
- Launched the Health and Wellness Committee at Solnit South that sponsors activities to recognize and engage staff including Candy Grams, Kudos cards, donuts, coffee and tea for staff appreciation, Book club and coming soon.... the first chili cook off.
- Guidance for Services Post Majority youth waivers was established.
- The Department of Children and Families Police Department successfully achieved Tier II Accreditation for Connecticut Law Enforcement Agencies. The accreditation process for Tier II consisted of compliance as it relates to Professional Standards addressing legal requirements, management, and operations. Compliance is met by addressing an array of standards around these practices.
- AdoptUSKids Professional Leadership Program Kick-off cohort 8 took place.
- Increased collaboration with National Center Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to improve guidance for youth missing from care in collaboration with the CCCSD Division and Human Trafficking Director was established.
- Human Resources processed 295 new hires & 62 promotions in calendar year 2025.
- Updated facility licensing statutes to permit a young adult with an individual education plan to remain at a facility until the young adult graduates high school or until the end of the school year when the student reaches age 22.



- Established a Foster Parent Bill of Rights.
- At Solnit South PRTF, 83% of youth had a planned discharge upon conclusion of their treatment episode with 71% discharged to a home setting.
- Dr. Nicole Taylor and Dr. Stephanie Bozak took part in the City of Hartford African American Parade and Juneteenth Celebration. Along with Orlando Edwards from The Village for Children and Families, they promoted the Urgent Crisis Centers now available to families of children who are experiencing a behavioral health crisis but do not require an emergency department level of care.
- Solnit Hospital celebrated another Joint Commission Hospital reaccreditation and DPH licensure in 2025 meeting all regulatory and federal guidelines
- In 2025, Legal completed approximately 5356 Records Requests, 1191 Internal Reviews including 250 Barrier/Emergency Placement Reviews and 243 Background Check Reviews, and 110 Administrative Hearings, 3358 legal consults and approximately 2572 legal document reviews (OTCs, TPRs, Neglect Petitions, and Co-Terms).
- At the Academy for Workforce Development, the Fiscal return on training in 2025 for DCF staff and providers showed a Gross Total - \$7,411,701 with \$5,558,776 returned to General fund.
- Celebrations occurred honoring Black History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month.
- The Centralized Transportation Unit collaborated with The Olive Branch to collect and distribute large quantities of donated prom gowns, which are offered to DCF clients free of charge along with hundreds of gifts during the holiday season.
- The Youth Advisory Board and TSS held the "Planting Seeds: Dig In, Grow Up, Branch Out Youth Summit" at Central CT State University. A full day of meaningful activities to enhance skill development, emotional intelligence, and youth engagement.
- Successfully passed the Department's 2025 legislative agenda that included updated existing emergency placement and foster care statutes to streamline the placement and licensing process for kin. Legislation also established a court process for former youth in care return to the Department as a services post-majority case.
- BITS has implemented RouteGenie, a GPS-enabled scheduling, routing, and dispatching software solution to modernize DCF's Central Transportation Unit operations. This system automates fleet scheduling, provides real-time vehicle tracking, optimizes routes, and enhances communication between social workers, drivers, and clients, improving efficiency, safety, and response times statewide.



- The Engineering Department, as part of the Governor's green initiative, designed a major project to make the Education/Recreation building at Solnit North both more comfortable and energy efficient. Also, new LED lighting was installed, along with water saving plumbing fixtures. A large project also saw the removal of the over 30-year-old chillers that powered the building's air conditioning system. During the first quarter of 2026, the installation of the new chillers will keep the building cool while reducing energy consumption.

- At the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) annual meeting in Washington DC, Dr. Stephanie Bozak and Dr. Nicole Taylor attended along with Dr. Frank Gregory who took part in a panel discussion regarding Transformation Transfer Initiative awards/grants that have funded several projects in CT over the years. The title of the discussion was "*Celebrating TTI: 18 Years of Making a Difference.*"



- Implemented legislation that enhanced the role of DCF Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) and clarifies what can be shared publicly regarding DCF's involvement with a family.
- Regularly collaborated with Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (CSSD) to discuss critical cases, shared training opportunities, emerging themes and improving overall communication.
- Approval of the 2024-2025 Agency Affirmative Action Plan was granted.
- Adopted the new Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children.
- FFT-Foster Care (FFT-FC) continues to support youth and families in achieving placement stability and permanency through community-based therapeutic services. Child placing agencies served a total of 577 unique cases. Of these, 270 (46.8%) were closed, and 307 (53.2%) remain active.
- Children's Services Consultant Shaneka Hernandez received the 2025 Janet E. Williams Humanitarian Award.



- Connecticut behavioral health crisis service system, including Mobile Crisis and Urgent Crisis Centers, were highlighted at statewide and national forums as a model of crisis care.
- Careline also strengthened workforce development through the successful implementation of the Careline Shadowing Experience for the Mentoring Program, while continuing its educational partnership with CCMC by hosting residents during their SCAN rotations to shadow and learn about the Careline.
- During the first quarter of 2025, the CTU staff worked with the Fiscal department to have Naloxone stations set up at every DCF location statewide.
- Danny Reyes received the 2025 "Elevate and Celebrate" award for his extraordinary dedication to foster care advocacy given by the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) of the Youth Law Center.



- New Courses were offered at the Academy for Workforce Development including Navigating Child Welfare Staff through Grief & Loss, Introduction to Motivational Interviewing for Child Welfare, Effective Case Note and Business Writing Series, Sexual Abuse and Minimal Facts Training
- Executed a contract with Wheeler which will offer specialized consultation to the RRG staff, training, and providing a landscape analysis for youth with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- The SIU/EPIU team effectively managed a high and complex workload, maintaining over 85% compliance with Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) standards despite staffing vacancies and the transition to CT Kind. Social workers consistently met response-time requirements, ensured comprehensive documentation, implemented safety planning, and maintained strong supervisory oversight. Professional and collaborative relationships with Area Office staff and key partner agencies remained strong, supporting effective coordination, timely decision-making, and positive outcomes for children and families.
- Through our Care Coordination provider network and in collaboration with CSDE, developed and delivered behavioral health resource kits, providing information about behavioral health supports and services, to over 800 schools throughout Connecticut.
- Continued an intentional focus on the 0-5 population, increased our emphasis on supervision, and improved the tracking mechanism for children identified as conditionally safe or unsafe through the In-Home Combination report.
- Clinical Behavioral Health Managers Kristen Oliver and Melissa Milardo presented the role of the Regional Resource Groups at a Connecticut Bar Association Child Welfare and Juvenile Law Section meeting. Important information to discuss!
- Reestablished the Community and Court Liaison positions in every Region to improve collaboration with the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) to support youth dually involved with DCF and the Juvenile Justice system.
- Successfully launched the Fatherhood Practice Guide.
- Created the youth advisory board on-boarding and training package designed to strengthen youth skills and knowledge base and widen the breadth of youth serving on leadership boards.
- Stephen Heredia was awarded the 2025 William Rivera Humanitarian Award.
- The IFP (Intensive Family Preservation) programs continue to accept and work with families with high complexity of needs, achieving a completion rate of 72%.
- With assistance and support from internal divisions, community, and providers, the Foster Care Division (FCD) ensured that every child needing care had a safe and secure setting.



- SOUL Family Learning Partner Kick Off took place to improve permanency options for older youth.
- Expanded the LGBTQ+ work in TSS to include four additional live LGBTQ+ trainings for DCF staff, the creation of 10 tip sheets and overall guidance.
- Continued to participate in the National Partnership for Child Safety (NPCS) learning collaborative with a mission to improve child safety and prevent child maltreatment fatalities.
- A partnership between DCF and Liberty Bank to provide bank accounts without a cosigner or legal guardian for our youth 14-17 was established called Starter Access to Money Management (SAMM) Youth Banking Accounts.
- As Solnit South, the Engineering Department facilitated the replacement of 101,000 square feet of roofing along with the installation of additional insulation and a new aluminum soffit and facia. This gives the building a much more resilient roofing system that should keep the building warmer and dry for the next thirty years.
- The Quality Improvement Leadership Team (QuILT) commenced an active and consistent cycle of improvement within our system (Plan Do Study Act) to ensure that system level changes meet the needs of children and families we serve.
- Adopted new foster care pre-licensing curriculum - National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) - based on research and input from experts including families who have experience with fostering or adoption.
- Celebrated several adolescents at Solnit hospital as they successfully completed their treatment and long-awaited discharge into the community.
- Continued to engage with media partners to provide proactive and positive stories about the Department's work and collaborative efforts across Connecticut.
- DCF Commissioner and Executive Team members met regularly with the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to discuss the Agency's Safety Practice and Quality Improvement efforts.
- Completed Season 3 of Real Talk: A Podcast on Well-Being, a partnership between the Office of Academy for Workforce Development (AWD) and the Office of Organizational Development.
- The 2nd Annual Fatherhood Next Level Conference took place, which is a collaboration between DCF, CCSU, and CWCSEO, bringing together fathers, staff, community leaders, and advocates to elevate parenting, purpose, and leadership.
- The Legal Division facilitated division-wide professional development trainings and collaborated on workgroups to support and improve the Division's legal work such as Legal's Racial Justice Change Initiative, Legal Racial Justice Workgroup, Legal Wellness, and CT-KIND/Legal Workgroup.



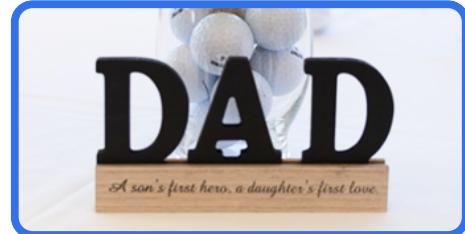
- Maintained excellent response to families, youth, foster/adoptive parents and community members who made inquiries, questions and complaints through the Office of Community Relations (OCR) including resolving constituent cases for state and federal officials with the Government Relations Division.
- The Foster Care Division continued to prioritize kin as the preferred placement option resulting in same day placement approvals and coordinating tangible and concrete supports for kinship families.
- BITS team has designed and implemented Fleet Scheduler, a vehicle reservation solution that enables users to create, modify, review, and cancel bookings while improving visibility into vehicle usage and availability. Fleet Scheduler allows administrators to manage reservations and vehicles and research driver activity by time. The system reduces paper-based processes through digital records, automated user setup, and email notifications.
- Director of Immigration Practice has developed additional training and consultation resources related to immigration issues to meet the growing needs of this high-risk population.
- Established the DCF Fatherhood Steering Committee, which includes fathers with former involvement with DCF, foster and adoptive fathers and community fathers, to advocate for the inclusion of fathers and father figures in child, youth, and family policies by leveraging their lived experiences to shape effective programs, policies and practices within DCF.



- Real-time Critical Incident reviews were conducted including more in-depth Special Qualitative Reviews of certain child fatalities and near-fatalities.
- Engaged with Legislators throughout the year with invitations to key Department activities, providing them DCF materials and improved timeliness of response to constituent questions.
- Continued implementation of Urgent Crisis Centers and SubAcute Crisis Stabilization Center.
- Remained in frequent contact with leadership from state employee Labor Unions to answer questions and clarify operational procedures for their members throughout the Department.
- Coordinated the Leadership Academy for Social Work Supervisors (LASS), Leadership Academy for Middle Managers (LAMM), the Executive Fellowship Program (EFP), and the nationally recognized Mentoring program to develop staff both personally and professionally.
- Staff across multiple Divisions were interviewed by print, radio, and television media regarding their expertise as subject matter experts.
- BITS migrated over 5000 desktops (VDI, Desktops & Laptops) from Windows 10 to Windows 11 with minimal impact on users. The updates were strategically deployed overnight to 2-3 offices at a time, ensuring smooth transitions and minimal disruption, with a few remaining updates to be completed soon.



- Reinforced cross-reporting protocols with the Department of Agriculture (DOG) which resulted in greater protection of both children and animals within our communities.
- "Best Day by Par" event brought together fathers of all kids for a round of golf to celebrate the critical role they play in the life of child.
- Production continued on the DCF "Doors to Hope and Healing" cable access television show, reaching over 60,000 households in New Britain, Avon, Farmington, and surrounding towns.
- Remained a leader across the country for our work with survivors of Child Sex Trafficking and collaboration with Law Enforcement.
- The Juvenile Justice Education Unit continued to deliver impactful services for justice-involved students across Connecticut. Collaboration was strengthened with local school districts by presenting their work to ensure a shared understanding of their role in supporting youth reentry into their home schools and communities.
- Jailene Derisse, MSW, from the Juvenile Justice Education Unit at DCF served on a panel entitled, "Careers in Juvenile Justice Through the Lens of Education and Human Services" hosted by Charter Oak State University.
- Strengthened engagement of fathers and promoted more comprehensive assessments of fathers as an integral component of case planning.
- Established permanency for approximately 1,200 children this year that include reunification, transfer of guardianship or adoption.
- The agency submitted its first ongoing request to DataLinkCT (formerly P20WIN) for administrative data from several other agencies matched to youth served by our Juvenile Justice Education Unit (JJEU) to evaluate their academic and employment outcomes.
- Finalized legal permanency for 44 children on Connecticut Adoption Day.
- Continued collaboration with the Annie E. Casey Foundation - SOUL Family Framework Partnership Cohort aimed at improving permanency outcomes for older youth in foster care. SOUL Family stands for Support, Opportunity, Unity, and Legal Relationships.
- HMO Division finalized the contracts for MDE clinics strengthening the relationships with statewide clinic partners to identify unmet care needs for children in DCF care.
- Implemented Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT) and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) as part of the Agency's Families First Prevention Plan.
- Received funding through the Connecticut Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee to enable MST and MDFT providers to deliver treatment modules tailored to the needs of youth and families for whom opioid use is a focus of treatment.
- Contracted for the development and implementation of a training curriculum for clinical supervisors in OPCC and EDT programs that focuses on how to better equip and support their staff in engaging and serving diverse clients.



- Program Manager Lisette Cobb from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Dr. Stephanie Bozak from the Office of Behavioral Health and Community Services graduated from the DHMAS Champions for Diversity and Health Equity Program offered by the Office of Multicultural Health Equity (OMHE). This 10-month long program is designed to help participants prioritize health equity and other topics more effectively and to embed it in their work, regardless of the location of the regional agency they represent.
- "Supporting Families Impacted by Substance Use and the Evolution of CAPTA" was the title of a national presentation given by Chief Administrator of Behavioral Health and Wellness Dr. Nicole Taylor, and Commissioner Nancy Navarretta from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).
- Held a first of its kind statewide forum between DCF staff and CSSD Probation and Parole staff to enhance our collaborative efforts.
- Human Resources partnered with DCF leadership to administer an extensive DCF reorganization that was effective in August 2025.
- A total of 107 CORE families were licensed along with hundreds of kinship families.
- Director of Fatherhood Services Anthony Gay attended the 25th Anniversary of the New England Fathering Conference bringing our innovative Fatherhood work to jurisdictions across the country.
- A DCF Honor Guard and Pinning Ceremony were developed to honor a member of the DCF family who has left us. Thank you to Melanie Mercado, Yvette O'Brien and Karina Klemm for this beautiful idea and for the successful implementation.
- Streamlined the process for determination of a medically complex level child. As a result, RRG and CO medically complex nurses worked in collaboration with the child's medical provider in identification of medical care needs leading to level of care needs being approved. This provides standardization of the process and ensures continuity across the Agency with medically complex levels.
- The Academy for Workforce Development supported 46 interns from MSW, BSW, MPA, and MPP programs across the state.
- Behavioral Health Clinical Manager Christa Rider presented DCF's collaborative work towards protecting survivors of child sex trafficking at the 2025 Federal Preparedness Workshop hosted by the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation and presented by the National Indian Gaming Commission. Topics included Human Trafficking, the Opioid epidemic, Active Assailant and Best Practices in Emergency Management
- Watch as Solnit North Art Teach Anna Gawel speaks about her inspiring work on the [WFSB Great Day at 9a segment.](#)



- For 16 young women from Solnit South, a "Special Night" was provided to them complete with a beautiful dress, hair and makeup done by professionals and.....a walk down the red carpet! A fantastic night celebrated with the youth, their families and our DCF staff. Thanks to all who made this magical night possible!
- Superintendent of the Albert J. Solnit PRTFs Mike Rulnick graduated from the Aspiring Leaders cohort. Aspiring Leaders is a 10-session training that provides opportunities for managers from various state agencies to interface with one another and hear from a variety of subject matter experts from different walks of life within state government.
- DCF Director of Interagency Navigation William Seals and Children's Services Consultant Ivy Erazo graduated from The Tow Youth Justice Institute (TYJI) cohort. The Institute was created to build the capacity of present and future leaders as agents of change.
- Members of DCF Behavioral Health leadership attended the 2025 "Training Institutes: Building a World Where Young People Thrive," hosted by the UConn School of Social Work Innovations Institute. Dr. Frank Gregory from the DCF Behavioral Health Division joined presenters from CHDI and Case Western Reserve University for a session on "Workforce Development Policy," highlighting lessons learned in Connecticut and Ohio's behavioral health systems. DCF Program Lead Yvette Cortez from the Behavioral Health Division co-presented "Quality Improvement and Consultation: Evidence Based Practices and Crisis Services" with CHDI's Mobile Crisis PIC team, highlighting how data can drive better outcomes in crisis response.
- The Wilderness School celebrated the success of its students from their summer of expeditions. One 20-Day student said, "I felt like I did something really crazy; like I faced my biggest fear...I think this was really good for me. I was quiet but I came out all the way on this trip."
- Dr. Maritza Acosta, Director of the Office of Community Relations, delivered the keynote address for the Class of 2025 graduates at Waterbury's Crosby Early College High School graduation recognition ceremony. Her keynote, titled "Walking in Your Purpose," encouraged graduates to embrace their unique strengths and lead with authenticity.
- Connecticut continues to be an opportunity state where equitable support for all children and families is at the forefront of our efforts.
- Program Supervisor Jenny Vesco who co-authored an article entitled, "Economic Insecurity and Families Involved with Child Welfare: The Pivotal Role of Local Community Support" with our partners from the University of Connecticut and Wheeler Clinic. This work can be found in the textbook, "Child Neglect, Inequity, and Poverty: Practice Innovations, Concrete Resources and Justice" published by the Child Welfare League of America. Read the article here: [CWLA Publication Community Outreach](#)



- A Realistic Job Preview Video was created by the Academy for Workforce Development and included in the Human Resources interview process.
- At the CAFAF conference, Suzanne Hollister, Nurse Consultant and Amy Sherzai, Clinical Nurse Coordinator, along with Allison Bombard, Health Advocate Supervisor, promoted the need for medically complex foster homes.
- Through rehabilitation therapy, the Solnit North Wolfpack basketball team is hosting games versus community opponents. Community events for youth and staff include ping pong tournament, pickleball tournament, talent show, and cornhole Tournament.
- Implemented Naloxone training for all Agency staff and now have Naloxone in each office and facility to be administered in case of emergency.
- Parent with Lived Expertise Consultant Samaris Rose was named as a recipient of the 2025 Soul of Philanthropy Award by Fairfield County Community Foundation. Described as a "fierce and compassionate community advocate with a heart rooted in service and justice. Youth are at the center of her heart, inspiring her tireless efforts to build spaces of belonging, healing, and hope." Awesome job Samaris!
- Norwalk Office Director Yolanda Chapman Smith received the Saint Joseph Parenting Center Catherine A. Klie Award for "Making a Difference in Child Abuse Prevention."
- For those children who cannot safely remain at home, Kinship care remains the priority placement. We are proud that approximately 48% of children who initially enter care are now placed with kin with approximately 50% of children overall placed with individuals with whom they have a familial relationship.
- Ongoing collaboration with the DOC to expand out to additional male facilities to engage more incarcerated fathers, created more family-friends visiting spaces, increased professional visitation by including foster parents and contracted providers. DOC donated over 1,000 holiday gifts to DCF families.
- To expand students' exposure to future opportunities, the Juvenile Justice Educational Unit (JJEU) introduced virtual reality technology within juvenile justice facilities, allowing students to explore a range of career pathways in an engaging and innovative way. Credit recovery opportunities were continued, enabling students to earn missed credits and remain on track for graduation. In addition, partnership occurred with the State Surrogate Parent Program to enhance continuity of educational support, particularly for students with special education needs, ensuring advocacy and stability throughout their educational journey.



- Parents and Youth with Lived Expertise, along with DCF personnel, represented the Department at the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors' Pathways to Partnership New England Regional convenings on an annual basis to learn more about how the system can ensure parents and youth feel more included, heard, and respected.
 - The Waterbury Office was honored by Kuhn, a Connecticut based nonprofit that helps people with disabilities find employment. This year in a vote, participants and staff selected Waterbury DCF as "Employer of the Year" for their Group Supported Employment program.
 - Satisfaction surveys at Solnit North indicate 92% of youth and 91.4% of parents/guardians reported believing the facility helped them "quite a bit" or "a great deal."
 - Foster care Division began working with the National Center for Diligent Recruitment to review all aspects of the inquiry to licensure "pipeline" in order to determine efficiencies to decrease the time it takes to complete the licensing process.
 - We are proud to recognize Dr. Maritza Acosta, Dr. Danielle Davis, Dr. Susan Carillo-Cunningham and Dr. Ingrid Aarons for earning their advanced degrees!
 - The Child Abuse and Neglect Careline received over 95,000 calls that includes over 60,000 new reports of child maltreatment.



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