

Consistency, Resilience and Discipline On and Off the Court



Max Ford, Rehabilitation Therapist at Solnit North, with Commissioner Hill-Lilly at the March 2025 DCF Employee of the Month ceremony.

Win or lose, Max Ford — a rehabilitation therapist and boys' basketball coach at Solnit North — always reminds his players to hold their heads high and shake hands with the opposing team following a game. This season, the Solnit North Wolfpack boys' basketball team experienced more winning than losing.

Beyond the scoreboard, participation in a normative activity like basketball gave the youth a sense of purpose, accountability, and structure. The team's established requirements for participation served as a motivational incentive, encouraging the players to meet expectations both on and off the court.

"I think they got a sense of what real work ethic is, a sense of what it takes to actually challenge yourself. Getting better overall and building teamwork skills. How much you have to

[use your mind] while you're competing. Just interacting with each other socially, problem solving or times that we were down in games and then we came back," Max said.

Playing six games in its first season, the team went 4-2. Making this winning record more remarkable is the fact that many of the youth had never participated in organized sports. Moreover, the program had been dormant for five years before Max got to campus. With the resurrection of the Solnit North basketball program, the youth got to experience the camaraderie and pride that comes with being part of a team.

"I think they did a great job of being consistent with the practices. Using it as a main motivating factor to improve. A lot of them had not been on team previously, so it was a great first experience for them," Max explained.

After college, Max began working at DCF provider, The Village for Families and Children, as a case manager. Looking for a change of pace, he then moved to Florida and began working in parks and recreation. Wanting to be closer to family, Max decided to move back to Connecticut. He knew he wanted to get back into social work.

"I was in the social work field, I used to be a case manager. I moved down to Miami and got into parks and recreation. It was a similar field, but a little bit different. As I was looking to move back home, I wanted to get back into a field where I could still do recreation and sport, but also

has this social work dynamic as well. So this job as a rehab therapist was kind of perfect for me at the moment and it's gone pretty well."

Max is an alumnus of Springfield College where he played football. A couple of college classmates told Max about an opening for a Rehabilitation Therapist at Solnit North. He remembers seeing the job posting and thinking "this is everything that I feel like I'm good at."

Max is relatively new at Solnit North but has already made a huge impact. He won Employee of the Month in March 2025.

His supervisor said he is a standout staff member. She said, in his daily work, he brings a deep understanding of the therapeutic value of teamwork and participation in sports. For that reason, she approached Max to let him know that pre-pandemic Solnit North had a basketball program. Given his background in athletics and recreation, Max's supervisor asked if he would be interested in starting up the program again.

While the youth at Solnit North attend classes on-site, the facility is not a traditional school setting. As a result, the Wolfpack basketball team was not part of an interscholastic athletic conference and initially had no other schools to compete against. Undeterred, Max and his colleagues got to work seeking out potential opponents, determined to provide the team with meaningful opportunities for competition.

"We had a connection - one of our staff that was here the last time the basketball team was going gave me the contact of a person who was active in this area. I reached out to him and we coordinated a few games."

They were able to identify two opponents - a school based in East Windsor and a high school-age recreation basketball team.

"I think the skill level was kind of perfect for our group as far as where we started and then where we ended up. It worked out."

Max also kept statistics to document the players' development. He said, on paper, those stats not only demonstrated the players' growth on the court but also their discipline and commitment to being members of the team.





"I have some stats that we put together just to show improvement over the season. Not just points per game or things like that, but things that we felt were relevant [to rehabilitation therapy]."

"Like, we started the season October 25th, 2024 and ended on March 27th, 2025. We had 33 total practices. The kids did a great job of being consistent with the practices using it as another motivating factor. We were able to get 17 youth playing time."

Max said many of the youth transformed over the season and he saw their self-confidence grow as a result.

"There was one kid but he earned the team captain spot. In my opinion, it was because of his consistency. He was there from day one. I don't think he missed a single practice." Max said this youth was a natural leader. His time on the court helped him hone this skill.

"This youth [the team captain] was the one providing encouragement to the others. One of the things that I respect most about specific athletes are the ones who don't make [preventable] mistakes."

"Watching him, you can see from where he was at the start of the season, his skills, like his handle and his shot, just increase. Then, most importantly, we watched his confidence increase. By the last couple of games, he was just playing extremely well."

The same applied to the team as a whole. Max said by season's end "it was just organized basketball."

Max's supervisors say the countless hours and dedication he put into the campus' basketball program has greatly improved the youth's morale and respect for each other. Their ability to work as a team is night and day from when they first arrived at Solnit North.

Through his leadership, the youth now take pride in their role on the team, and the lessons they are learning extend well beyond the basketball court. Most importantly, he challenges each of the 17 youth on the Wolfpack's roster to reach their full potential.

"At the core of it for most of them, it was just the chance to get that opportunity. With this population that we're working with, that's not always the case. Giving them an opportunity to



work towards something that they actually like to do, I think naturally that provided some motivation and needed structure for them."

"For them, you can really compare this experience to life because everything's not always going to go your way. The kids were able to overcome adversity during a lot of those games. I just saw, overall, team camaraderie was very good. I think everybody on campus was appreciative of what we were able to do and just the fact we were able to have a successful season."