

SUMMER 2025

COMMUNIQUE

CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE OF FOSTER & ADOPTIVE FAMILIES



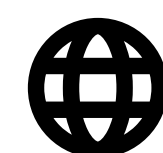
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<https://cafafct.org/>



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Communiqué is published in both English and Spanish language four times a year by the Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families, Inc.

CAFAF is a non-profit organization devoted to the strengthening of foster, adoptive and relative care families through support, training, advocacy, recruitment and retention with the aim of nurturing child safety, well being and stability in partnership with child welfare professionals and the community.

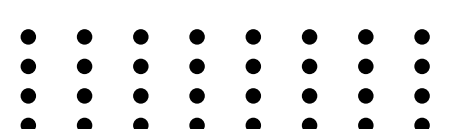


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From the Desk of the Executive Director



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Director

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Director

Miranda Davis

Are you
interested in
joining our
board of
directors?

Visit [this link](#) to
learn more!

Summer 2025

Happy Summer! Schools out!

CAFAF continues to celebrate our 30th birthday throughout the year. And one of the birthday gifts that we've given ourselves and the families that we serve is our new website. <https://cafafct.org/>

We also gave ourselves a 30th birthday party in connection with our annual conference May 2-3 at Mystic Marriott, as you will see on page 6. Thank you to all who attended the conference and those that were able to stay to celebrate as well as all the award winners! Award winners include foster and adoptive families, DCF staff and community partners. All award winners work each day to support the children and youth that they care so deeply for.

We've begun planning for our 2026 prom-readiness event known as Avenue of Dreams. We will be back at Mystic Marriott on March 14, 2026. Please mark your calendars.

We are also searching for options for our 31st annual conference. Our goal is to find a venue for Friday May 1st and Saturday May 2nd, 2026. If anyone reading this issue has ideas for us, please reach out to one of the CAFAF staff or board members.

We hope that you and your families have fun this Summer! For fun things to do, both inside and outside, see further in this issue.

Margaret Doherty
Executive Director

Support, Training, Advocacy, Retention, and Recruitment (STARR)

CAFAF Staff

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- Debbie Candelora | Regional Liaison-Merriden | Work (203) 238-8502 | Cell (860) 882-8226
- Kyle Ohlund | Regional Liaison-Manchester | Work (860) 533-3631 | Cell (860) 882-2940
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- Wendy Sander | Peer Network/Helpline Coordinator | Work (860) 258-3400 | Cell (860) 882-9944

BECOME A BUDDY!

Are you an experinced foster parent?

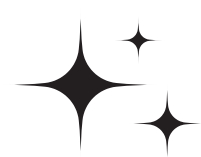
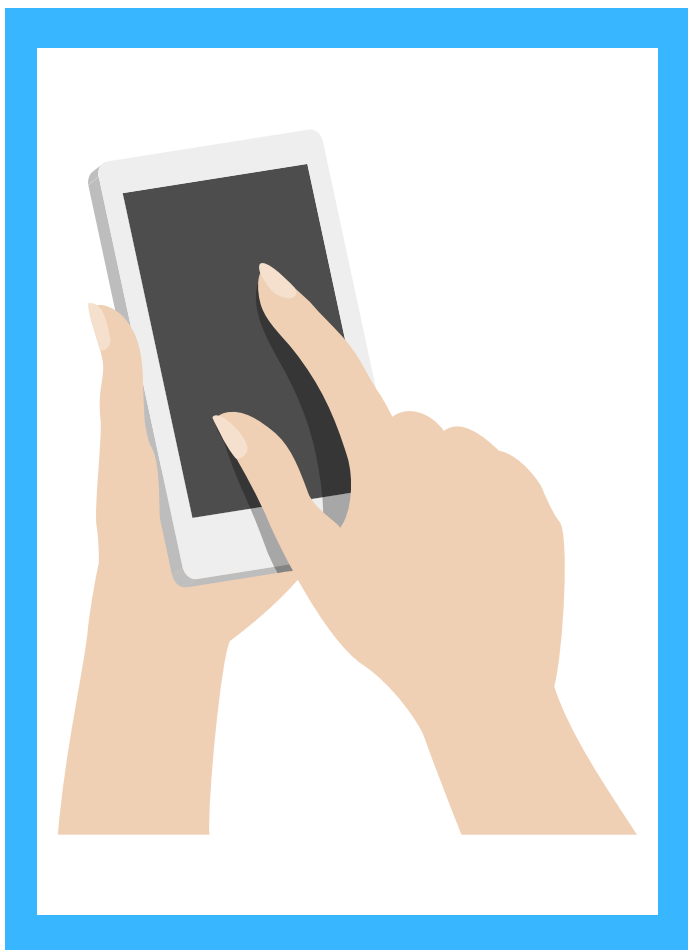


When you were newly-licensed, do you remember all the questions you had when your first foster child came into your home?

Do you remember wondering what resources were available to you?

Do you remember thinking “If I only had another foster parent to talk to who has shared the same experinces as me?”

If you remember all these times, then you might enjoy supporting newly licensed foster parents.



To learn more about becoming a **CAFAF Buddy**, call the Buddy Coordinator at the number below! (Training and stipend are provided)



Do you feel like you need the support from a CAFAF Buddy?

You can call the Buddy Coordinator at the number below to ask about getting a CAFAF Buddy assigned to you for support.

Call Wendy Sander, Buddy
Coordinator
(860) 258-3400





CAFAF Liaisons with
Program Director Diane
Orlando

ADVOCACY & SUPPORT SERVICES

Do you know who your CAFAF liaison is?

Our CAFAF liaisons are
located in each of the
DCF offices around the
state of CT

You can find their contact information
on our website:

<https://cafafct.org/about-us/board-staff/>

- Bridgeport
- Danbury
- Hartford
- Meriden
- Manchester
- Middletown
- Milford
- New Britain
- New Haven
- Norwalk
- Norwich
- Torrington
- Waterbury
- Willimantic

CAFAF Annual Conference



30 years of Excellence

This year marked a powerful milestone—our 30th annual conference—and what a profound journey it has been. Three decades of standing beside families, empowering them, educating them, and holding space for healing, growth, and unwavering love.

As we gathered for this special event, we were reminded of the immense strength that defines the foster and adoptive community. Every conversation, every shared story, every tear and every laugh echoed the same truth: we are here for each other. This conference wasn't just about workshops or speakers—it was about connection. It was about honoring the courage of parents who open their homes and hearts, and the children who teach us what resilience truly looks like.

After the final session closed, we came together to celebrate—not just an anniversary, but the thousands of lives that have been touched by our resiliency. The room pulsed with joy and reflection. Music played, laughter rose, and memories flowed as freely as the hugs and handshakes exchanged. We celebrated the strength of our past and the hope for our future.

We are deeply grateful for every family who has walked this path with us. Whether you've attended one event or been with us for all thirty, you are a vital thread in this beautiful tapestry. To the families who have opened their homes, who have stayed up late with worried hearts, who have advocated, nurtured, and loved—thank you. You are the embodiment of the mission we carry.

At CAFAF, our purpose has always been clear: to strengthen foster, adoptive, and kinship families, and to promote the well-being of children in their care. This mission lives and breathes in every story you've shared, every challenge you've overcome, and every child who now knows what it means to be safe, seen, and loved.

As we look to the next thirty years, we do so with full hearts. This isn't just our anniversary—it's a celebration of you. Of the love you give, the change you inspire, and the community we continue to build, together. Here's to family. Here's to healing. Here's to home.

With gratitude and hope,
The CAFAF Team



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CAFAF's NEW WEBSITE

CAFAF IS PROUD TO ANNOUNCE OUR
NEW WEBSITE!



Making a difference where it matters.

The Connecticut Alliance of Foster & Adoptive Families provides services and partnerships to strengthen Connecticut's foster, adoptive, and kinship care families.



VISIT OUR NEW SITE AT <https://cafafct.org/>

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Legislative Update 2025

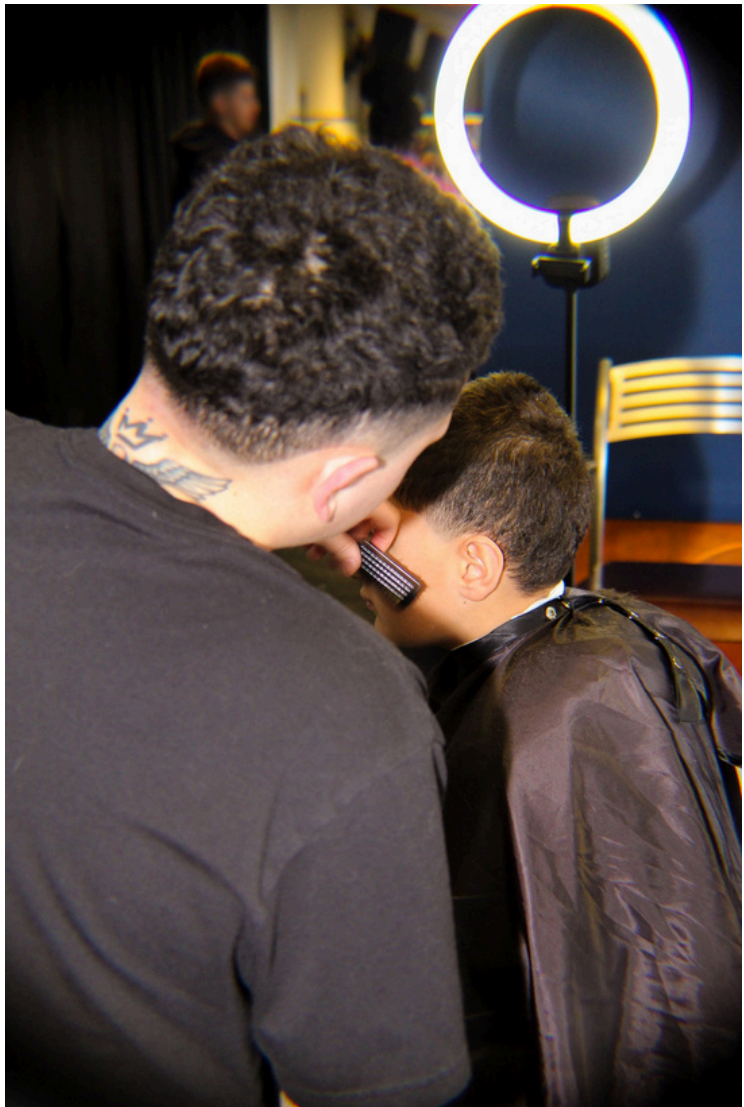
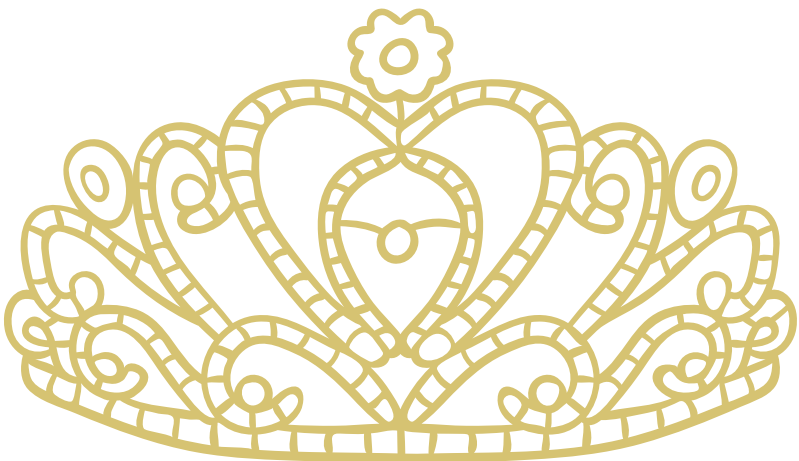
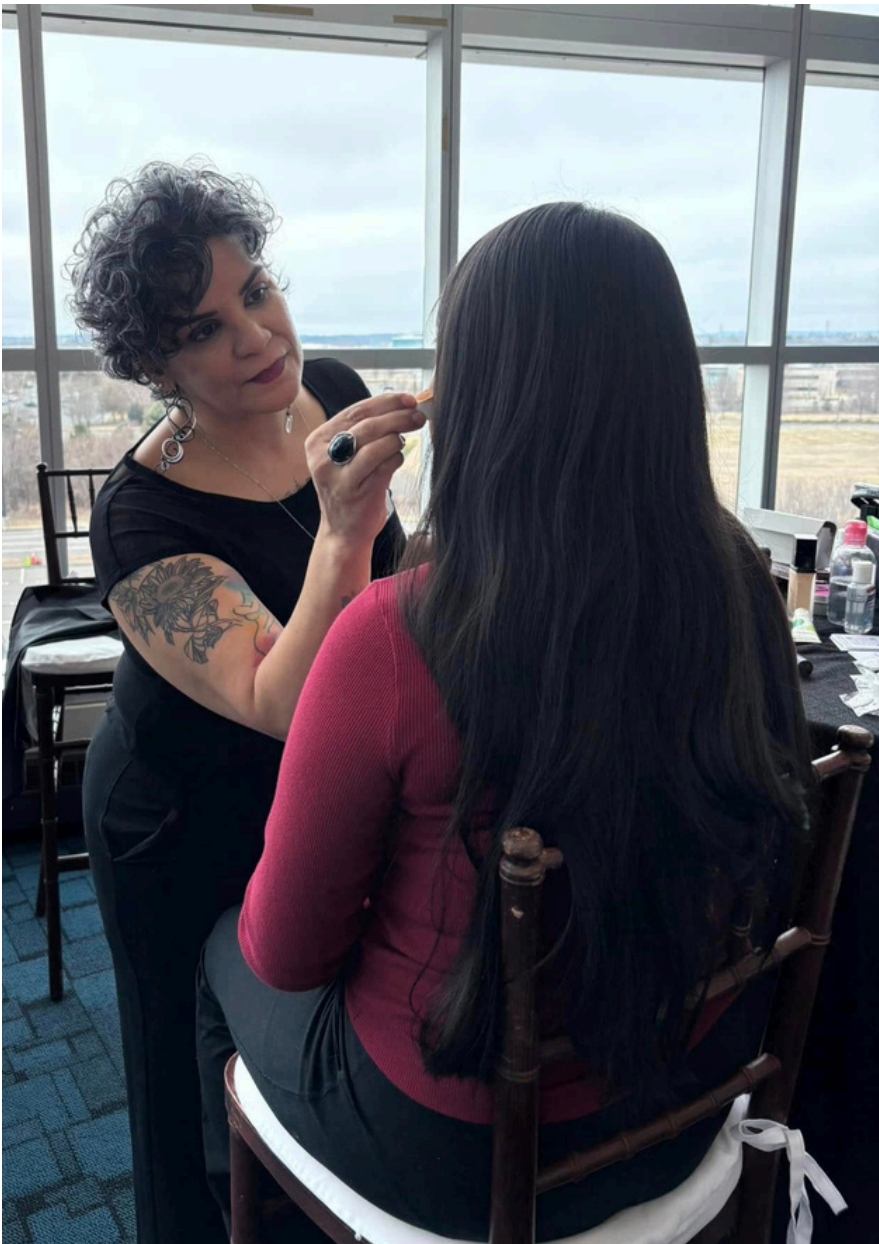
June 3rd was the end of the 2025 legislative session in Connecticut. The Legislature passed many bills, some of which have been signed by Governor Lamont and some of which are still being considered by the Governor.

The Legislature passed several items that CAFAF has been closely watching. They are:

- The 2 year budget for fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027. The budget includes an increase for community non-profits, like CAFAF, that serves people in Connecticut in many kinds of ways. Many of these services, if not for community nonprofits, would never be delivered to those that need them or would be provided at a much higher cost by government employees.
- Passed H.B. 7043: An Act Concerning Foster Care Maintenance Payments. We are delighted to report that Governor Lamont signed this bill into law. The bill requires that foster care reimbursement rates be studied, including comparing the rates to neighboring jurisdictions and the feasibility and recommendations to the Legislature of increasing the rates. CAFAF will report back any information that CAFAF learns about this study. However, all foster parents are encouraged to contact your elected officials and ask how you can participate.
- Passed S.B. 1311: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Department of Children and Families. At press time, this bill has yet to be signed into law by Governor Lamont. However, this bill was offered and authored by DCF staff and makes 6 recommendations about improving 6 areas of current state statues. Those areas include: background checks for adults if an emergency removal of children is needed; improving the way older children who left DCF care can seek to return to state care if they request to return; improved cooperation with the Department of Developmental Disabilities; changing the definition of a “child care facility” in very limited circumstances; requirement of DCF to create a foster parent bill of rights to change current DCF policy; and make improvements to the Interstate Compact when children are moving across state lines while under the legal guardianship of DCF. Two footnotes here: CT already has a foster parent “Bill of Privileges” which was written and backed by CAFAF in 2016, and was known originally a “Bill of Rights” and came from DCF policy. The other is that almost all states across the country are working jointly to improve the Interstate Compact. This involves states changing their own state laws to improve nationally how states work together to make it easier and safer for children to go out of state to loved ones, if they cannot stay safely at home.
- S.B. 1350: An Act Concerning Equitable Compensation for State-Contracted NonProfit Human Service Providers. This bill would require the state to index nonprofit funding in the state budget to inflation annually. The Governor has not yet signed this bill as we “go to press.”



CAFAF 2025 Avenue of Dreams



CAFAF Outside the Office

CAFAF Norwich Liaison
Deanna at the Family Fun
Night for TVCCA



CAFAF Outreach Coordinator Krystal Hernandez and
Wethersfield Chamber of Commerce Executive
Director Ivana Marrero spoke on Fox61 News about
the duffel Bag Project that Wethersfield Chamber is
holding and donating to CAFAF.



CAFAF Outreach Coordinator Krystal
Hernandez (left) attended Hartford
Job Corp Center's recent Community
Resources Meeting



Some of the CAFAF Staff attended the
ATTACH - 37th Annual Childhood
Trauma and Attachment Conference in
Nashville, TN .



On Wednesday, May 28th, Harding High School hosted a career fair for students. During the event, CAFAF Liaisons Sheree Breeden and Leslie Reyes had the opportunity to raise awareness about the foster care system. While some students were already familiar with the concept, others gained new insights into the challenges and support available for children in care.

We also introduced the roles of the Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families (CAFAF) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) as vital support systems for youth in foster care. Overall, the event was a success, and we look forward to the opportunity to participate again in the near future.

In the Community



CAFAF Staff Wendy Sander, Jennifer Bellamy, Lisa Ortiz, and Krystal Hernandez attended The Alliance Nonprofit Rally at The Capital Day. They ran into CAFAF Board Member Kally Moquete-Gonzalez while attending.



A big thank you to our CAFAF Liaisons who attended Lake Compounce! We hope all of our families had an amazing time enjoying the rides and making memories together.



CAFAF Liaisons Sam Heltke and Emily Churchill at Middletown Pride.



CAFAF Liaison Deanna Martinez at Youthtopia Carnival family fun day.

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In the Community



Milford Liaison, Marian Russo, & New Haven Liaison, Samantha Heltke, attended the Aces Resource Fair in New Haven on May 29th 2025. Recruiting and spreading the word regarding DCF's special study license was the topic of discussion with many teachers and administrative staff who attended the event.



On June 12th 2025, CAFAF Liaisons helped DCF staff host their annual Best Dad's by Par golf event, celebrating birth, foster & adoptive fathers alike. Commissioner Jodi Hill thanked the fathers for all they do to keep children safe and loved. Office directors, program managers and many others joined in on the event meant to give the fathers self care time to renew and refresh their minds and spirits. CAFAF Liaisons & DCF staff greeted every father at the event with a smile, a care package & a Happy Father's Day!

A Journey of Love and Resilience: Emilio Vargas Shares His Story



Our Waterbury Liaison Emilio Vargas presented his upcoming manuscript *Creciendo a la Par / Growing Up Together*, which will be available in both English and Spanish.

During his presentation, Emilio shared heartfelt and powerful moments from his journey as an adoptive father, highlighting both the challenges and the deep joys he and his family have experienced. The audience witnessed not only a moving personal story, but a collective invitation to view the foster care system through the lens of compassion, openness, and hope.

The manuscript is set to be published this fall.



2025 FOSTER PARENT CELEBRATION!

May is Foster Parent Appreciation Month and we want to celebrate ALL of our amazing foster parents. Please join us for a special event to honor all of our foster parents. We will have presentations, special giveaways, raffles, lunch and more.

**May 22, 2025
9:30AM to 1PM
UMass Center
Tower Square, 1500 Main Street
Suite 260, Springfield, MA**

**Growing Up Together:
A Foster Parent Journey**

In this moving and unforgettable presentation, Emilio J. Vargas opens his heart and shares his personal journey through foster care and adoption. With vivid real-life stories, lessons born of experience, and emotional truths, Emilio inspires families to embrace both the challenges and triumphs of fostering.

Participants will walk away feeling uplifted, empowered, and more connected, carrying a renewed determination to create lasting change in the lives of children and families.

Our Speaker:

Emilio J. Vargas
Author of *Creciendo a la Par / Growing Up Together*

Emilio J. Vargas is a dynamic radio personality, comedy voice-over artist, and passionate speaker, with a vibrant broadcasting career spanning Puerto Rico and the United States. Beyond the microphone, Emilio is a proud adoptive father and a tireless advocate for foster and adoptive families. Through his unforgettable voice and inspiring life journey, Emilio empowers families to believe in resilience, cultivate compassion, and harness the transformative force of community.

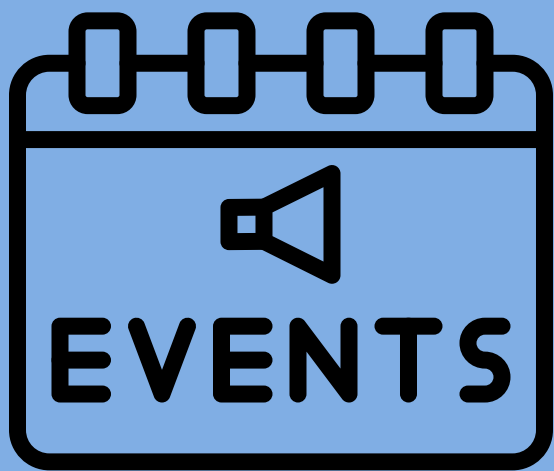
HELIIX
human services

CAFAF Events



CAFAF, The Village, and Parkville Market co-hosted the Fostering Growth Block Party in honor of National Foster Care Awareness Month.

Dudleytown Brewing Co., Nathan & Woodlyne Sczygiel held a Touch-A-Truck diaper drive for CAFAF!



Donations

Thank you to high school student Derek who donated stuffed animals, books, and blankets!



United Church of Christ Woodmont donated Easter Baskets for over 10 years in a row to the Milford DCF office for their youth!



Thank you to Girl Scouts Troop 63341 for their prom drives being held for Avenue of Dreams 2026!



Some of the bags and items from the Wethersfield Chamber of Commerce drive!

Commencement



Brandon Candelora is Graduating High School and headed to CCSU to major in Physical Education and minor in Sports Management. He is very thankful for the Children's Hope Fund who helped him and his family along his journey as he chased his dream. He will be playing baseball as a D1 left handed pitcher.

Summer Activities

What's on Your Kiddo's Summer Bucket List?

Pirate adventures? Ice cream road trips? Treehouse hideouts? Luckily, Connecticut is bursting with sun-sational things to do—plenty of them free or budget-friendly!

Check out the links below for a treasure trove of summer fun ideas your family will love!



<https://www.visitconnecticut.com/state/family-activities/>

<https://ctvisit.com/articles/ct-kids>

<https://mommypoppins.com/connecticut>





They bake cakes for the following events:

- Birthdays
- Graduations
- Adoptions
- Academic Awards
- Biological Parent Reunifications

Cake4Kids provides free cakes, cupcakes, cookies, bars, and brownies for foster children ages 1-24



IMPORTANT

Please note that desserts are **ONLY** delivered to the CAFAF office. It is up to the guardian to arrange pickup.

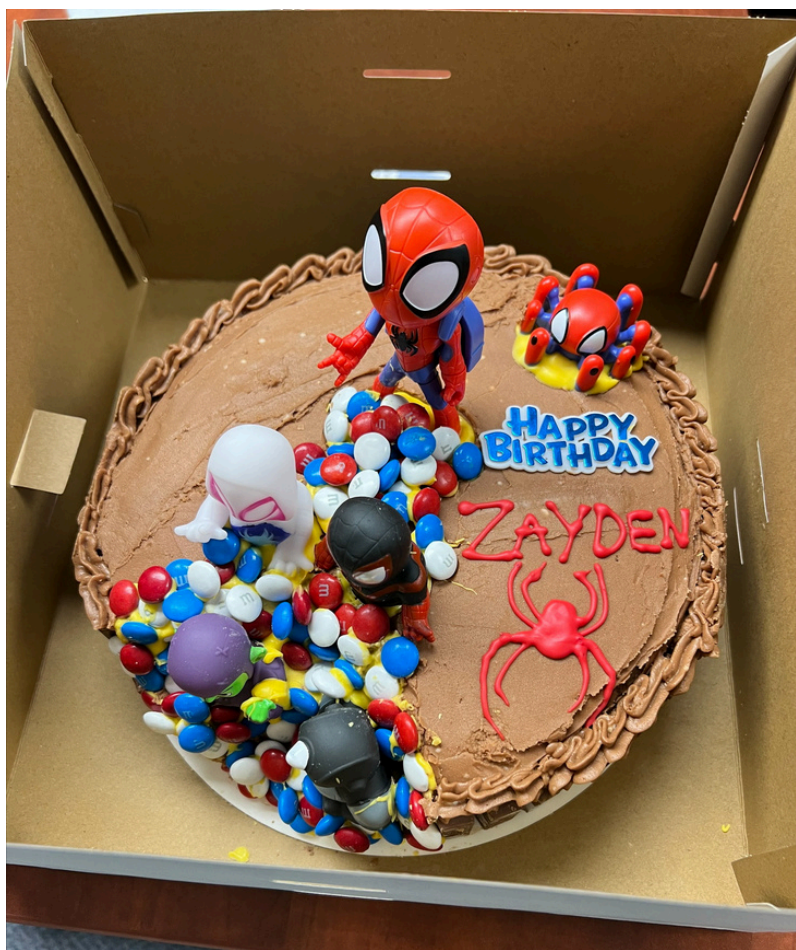
To request an order form, please contact Krystal Hernandez at:



krystal.hernandez@cafafct.org



CAFAF would like to give a huge shout out to Cake4Kids! Cake4Kids has been providing amazing cakes for our foster and adoptive families. Here is a sample of cakes they have made.



bikes for Kids

Located in Essex, CT

Learn more at
www.bikesforkidsct.org

They repair donated
bikes to later give these
bikes away with a helmet
for children



The Connecticut Alliance of Foster
and Adoptive Families thanks the
Department of Children and Families
for its suppporting and funding!



Happy Summer from
the CAFAF family!