

FALL 2026

COMMUNIQUE

CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE OF FOSTER & ADOPTIVE FAMILIES



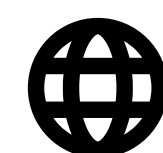
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<https://cafafct.org/>



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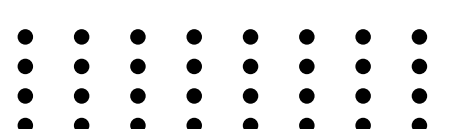


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From the Desk of the Executive Director



Fall 2026

Happy Fall! Happy Back to School! It seems like Summer just flew right by but we hope that you and your loved ones had some time for outdoors adventures.

With help of so many community sponsors and volunteers, we enjoyed one of the best CAFAF events I've ever attended with our Back-to-School backpack event at Elm Ridge Park in Rocky Hill. The children and their grownups all seemed to have a great time. No one was hurt on the jungle-gym, the food was great provided by Frankie's of Waterbury, ice cream was delicious from Tall Man's in Cromwell and I didn't see anyone scrolling on their cellphones! So many people came together to make it a great day. CAFAF staff and board thank all who assisted.

Just a reminder, the Connecticut General Assembly convenes January 6 through June 9, 2027. On the federal level we are watching three pieces of legislation directly impacting foster care. One would expand access and services to other youth. Another would encourage states to extend foster care beyond age 18 and the other would ask states to develop data-driven recruitment plan for increasing the number of foster parents at event.

Connecticut continues to need adults willing to become foster parents. CAFAF's Kid HERO line at (888) 543-4376 or on our website can inform anyone interested in learning more about what the children need. We also know that current and former foster parents are our best source of in-person recruiters. And, currently licensed families, don't forget.... If you recommend a new foster care provider who successfully completes the licensing process, you will receive a \$500 finders fee!

We are currently looking for locations for our annual prom readiness event known as Avenue of Dreams in March 2027. Please stay tuned. We did land on a location for our May 2027 annual conference on April 30-May 1, 2027. We will be at the Simsbury Inn in Simsbury, CT. Please mark your calendars!

We hope that you and your families enjoy what we hope will be beautiful and safe Fall with lots of time outdoors!

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Margaret Doherty
Executive Director

Board of Directors

President

Joseph Montalvo

Director

Preston Oliver

Director

Miranda Davis

Are you
interested in
joining our
board of
directors?

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

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

CAFAF Staff

- Margaret Doherty | Executive Director | Office (860) 258-3400
- Astrid Turmeque | Executive Administrative Assistant | Office (860) 258-3400 | Cell (860) 822-9191

Intake, Outreach, & Training

- Vanessa Williamson | Program Director | Office (860) 258-3400
- Rochelle Callender | Training Program Coordinator | (860) 882-9708
- Krystal Hernandez | Outreach Coordinator | (860) 882-8134
- Jennifer Rivera | Retention Specialist | (860) 882-9063
- Ebony Mitchell | Kid Hero Program Assistant | (860) 882-9718
- Amarylis Rodriguez | Kid Hero Program Assistant | (860) 882-2976

Advocacy & Support Services

- Diane Orlando | Program Director | Office (860) 258-3400
- Sheree Breeden | Regional Liaison-Bridgeport | Work (203) 384-5602 | Cell (860) 882-9923
- Dora Poma | Regional Liaison-Danbury | Work (203) 207-5270 | Cell (860) 882-8470
- Lisa Ortiz | Regional Liaison-Harford | Work (860) 418-8209 | Cell (860) 882-9031
- Debbie Candelora | Regional Liaison-Meriden | Work (203) 238-8502 | Cell (860) 882-8226
- Kyle Ohlund | Regional Liaison-Manchester | Work (860) 533-3631 | Cell (860) 882-2940
- Abigail Martin | Regional Liaison-Middletown | Work (860) 638-2138 | Cell (860) 882-9944
- Marian Russo | Regional Liaison-Milford | Work (203) 786-0681 | Cell (860) 882-9075
- Sheyla Ortiz-Caraballo | Regional Liaison-New Britain | Work (860) 832-5466 | Cell (860) 882-3103
- Samantha Heltke | Regional Liaison-New Haven | Work (203) 306-5325 | Cell (860) 882-2511
- Leslie Reyes | Regional Liaison-Norwalk | Work (860) 899-1419 | Cell (860) 882-2164
- Deanna Martinez | Regional Liaison-Norwich | Work (860) 885-2418 | Cell (860) 882-9202
- Jennifer Bellamy | Regional Liaison-Torrington | Work (860) 496-5767 | Cell (860) 882-7814
- Emilio Vargas | Regional Liaison-Waterbury | Work (203) 759-7009 | Cell (860) 882-2412
- Emily Churchill | Regional Liaison-Willimantic | Work (860) 450-2052 | Cell (860) 882-7107
- Brian Candelora | Peer Network/Helpline Coordinator | Work (860) 258-3400 | Cell (860) 882-2011

BECOME A BUDDY!

Are you an experinced foster parent?

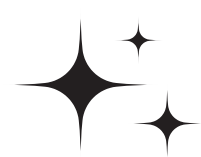
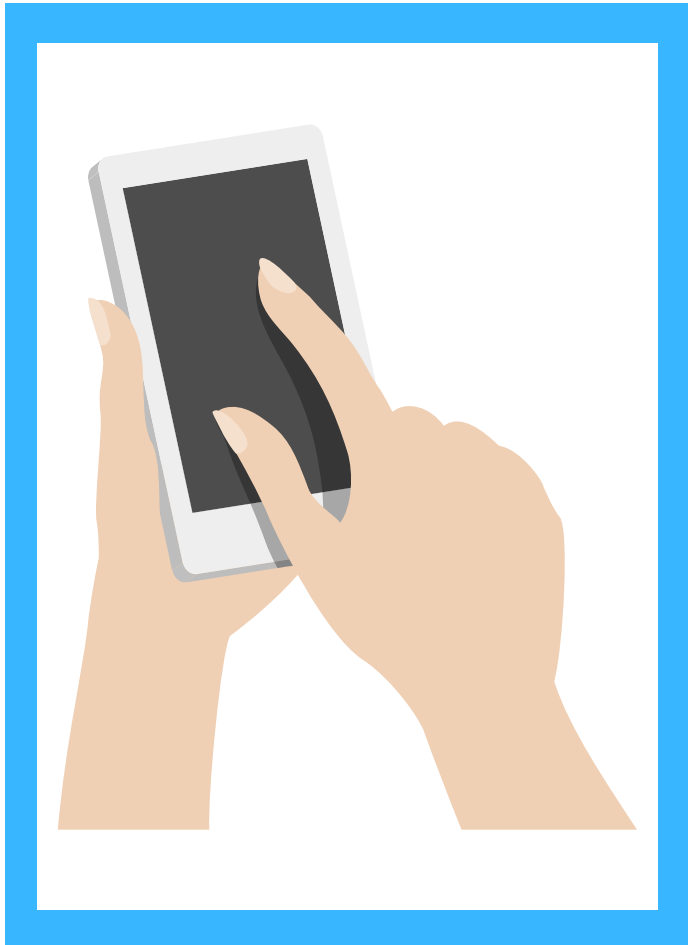


When you were newly-licensed, do you remember all the questions you had when your first foster child came into your home?

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 Brian Candelora,
Peer Network
Coordinator
860-882-2011



Parent Encouragement Program

Thank you for the care you provide Connecticut's children! The need for more foster families remains great for the 3,000 children entrusted to caregivers like you.



Please consider sharing with others of the need in your community by informing your friends and neighbors about the opportunity to foster! New families can help by providing licensed respite care, short-term stays for children placed from DCF Careline, or traditional fostering.

Fostershares!



You can raise awareness one to one or more formally via an abbreviated open house in-person at your local community meeting space, virtually, or even in your home. CAFAF liaisons are actively seeking licensed caregivers interested in facilitating this discussion also known as “**Fostershares**”.

Please know- if your friends decide to go forward and **become licensed** through DCF you will receive a **\$500.00 finder's fee (aka PEP or Parents Encouragement Program)** for your recruitment efforts.

When they call Kid Hero to start the process, **they must mention your name**, so your referral is documented on their initial paperwork (016) or on their foster care application.

**Foster families recruiting more foster parents
is our best way to increase our resources!**

Thank you for all you do!

Please contact your local Foster Care Support Worker or CAFAF Liaison today!





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- Sheree Breeden
- Danbury- Dora Poma
- Hartford - Lisa Ortiz
- Meriden- Debra Candelora
- Manchester- Kyle Ohlund
- Middletown - Abigail Martin
- Milford - Marian Russo
- New Britain- Sheyla Ortiz-Caraballo
- New Haven- Samantha Heltke
- Norwalk- Leslie Reyes
- Norwich- Deanna Martinez
- Torrington- Jennifer Bellamy
- Waterbury- Emilio Vargas
- Willimantic- Emily Churchill

STATEWIDE CAFAF SUPPORT GROUPS

It's All Relative!

(Relative Caregivers)

RSVP: Jennifer.Bellamy@ct.gov

Fatherhood Discussion

RSVP: Kyle.Ohlund@ct.gov

LGBTQIA+ Caregivers

RSVP: Samantha.Heltke@ct.gov / 860-882-2511

Emily.Churchill@ct.gov / 860-882-7107

Adoption Connections

RSVP: Debra.Candelora@ct.gov / 860-882-8226

Precious Hands

(Complex Medical Needs)

RSVP: Emilio.Vargas@ct.gov

Español Grupo de Apoyo

RSVP: Emilio.Vargas@ct.gov

**Support Groups are subject to change.
Please RSVP for most updated information
or visit our website for more details**

<https://cafafct.org/calendar/>

WELCOME BABY ORTIZ



It's a girl

A Sweet New Addition to the CAFAF Family!

CAFAF is excited to celebrate the newest little addition to our family! Our Hartford Liaison, Lisa Ortiz, welcomed a beautiful baby girl in late July. To celebrate this exciting new chapter, the CAFAF team surprised her with a baby shower filled with love, laughter, and lots of sweet treats. We are happy to share that both Mom and baby are doing wonderfully! Please join us in sending our warmest congratulations and best wishes to their growing family.

CAFAF 2027 Avenue of Dreams



Avenue of Dreams sign-ups will become available in early 2027—stay tuned for updates.

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32nd Annual CAFAF Conference

From *Trauma*

to

Triumph

The Foster Care Journey

PAIN

FEAR

REJECTION

ABANDONMENT

LONELINESS

HOPELESSNESS

HEALING

LOVE

STABILITY

SUPPORT

BELONGING

HOPE

FUTURE

April 30th

through

May 1st, 2027

THE SIMSBURY INN

Simsbury, Connecticut

Save the Date

A JOURNEY OF HOPE • A FUTURE OF POSSIBILITIES • TOGETHER, WE RISE

CAFAF, CCA, and Uconn Health Fall Conference



Building Resilience Through Connections

TOOLS FOR REPAIR, DE-ESCALATION, AND SCHOOL SUCCESS



REPAIR

Build trust.
Heal relationships.



DE-ESCALATION

Stay calm.
Choose connection.



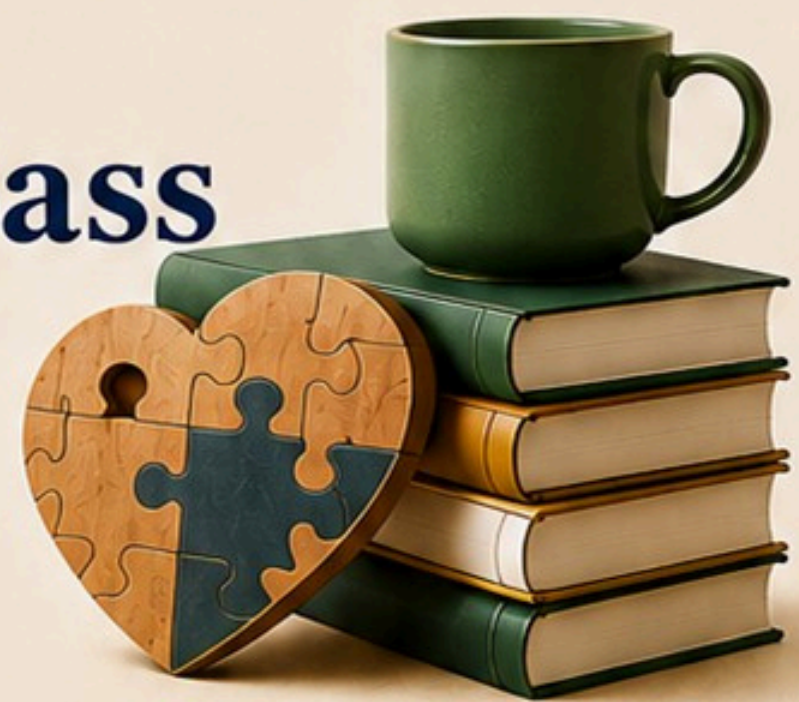
SCHOOL SUCCESS

Support growth.
Inspire potential.



with presenter
Dr. Gwen Bass

Empowering educators, families,
and communities to build stronger
connections and brighter futures.



CAFAF
CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE OF
FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES
Adoption Assistance Program

PARTNERING WITH

DCF
CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



**UConn
HEALTH**
ADOPTION ASSISTANCE
PROGRAM

*Save
the Date!*



NOVEMBER 6TH, 2026



BACK NINE TAVERN



AT STANLEY GOLF COURSE

NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT



Stronger Together. Brighter Futures.



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CAFAF in the Community



CAFAF had a table at a few cities across the state for National Night Out.

CAFAF was proud to represent our organization and serve as a sponsor of the KIDSAFE CT Jerry Bundy Car Show! It was a wonderful day of community, connection, and fun, and we were grateful for the opportunity to come together with fellow community partners while supporting such an important cause.

Thank you to KIDSAFE CT for including CAFAF and for all you do to support children and families in our community!



CAFAF Liaisons Abby Martin, Emilio Vargas, and Jennifer Bellamy were out in the community at the Waterbury Police Activity League (PAL) Community Field Day! It was a great opportunity to connect with families, meet community partners, and enjoy a fun-filled day together. We're always grateful for opportunities to build connections and strengthen our support for children and families across Connecticut.



Norwich Liaison Deanna Martinez at the Norwichtown Meetinghouse Rocks Fair!

CAFAF in the Community



CAFAF Liaison Dora
Poma at the Torrington
Latin Festival!



Emily, Willimantic CAFAF Liaison attended Open
House at the Thompson Elementary School
sharing information & goodies with parents and
answered questions about becoming a foster
parent.



Emily, Willimantic
CAFAF Liaison had a
recruitment table at
the Coventry Farmers
Market

CAFAF Back to School

We are so incredibly thankful for everyone who came out to our Back-to-School event (and Mother Nature for holding off on the rain)!!

We wish all of our families a safe and happy school year! A big thank you to all of our volunteers and vendors!



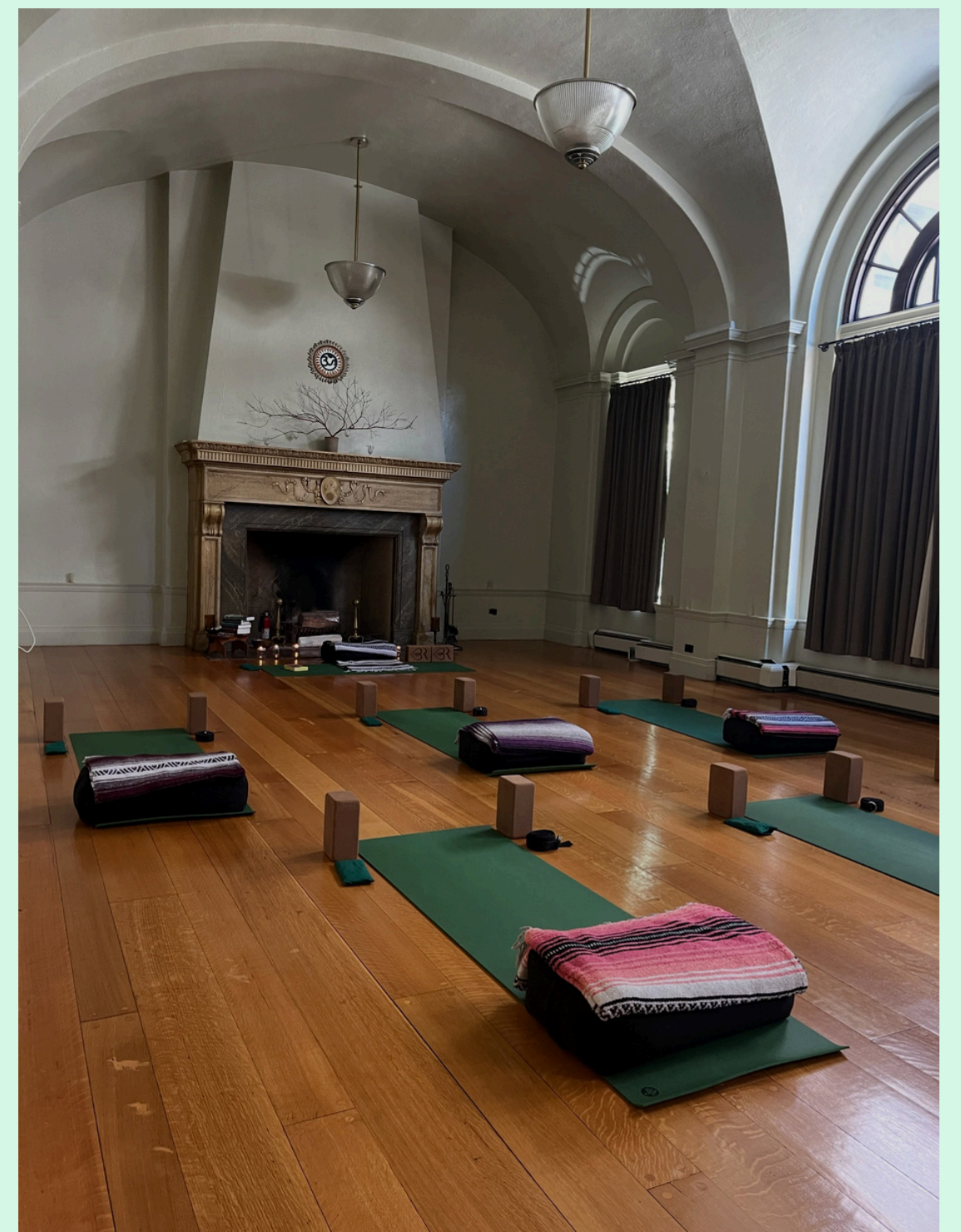
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Events



A big thank you to our friends at Meigs Point Nature Center, NCLI, and the Friends of Machimoodus & Sunrise State Parks for helping make this such a fun and educational experience for our families. We loved getting up close, learning more about these incredible animals, and making wonderful memories together!

Thank you to all the caregivers who joined us at The Breathing Room for a relaxing and much needed break
A special thanks to Katie Salisbury who hosted the yoga session for us!



CAFAF 1st Annual Pride event was held in Middletown on 8/16. Members of the LGBTQ Caregiver Statewide Group & their families attended to visit in-person, enjoy lunch & dessert, play in the splash pad and enjoy each other's company. We had coloring, fidgets, bubbles and more! We look forward to holding the Pride event again next year

Events



Region 3 Families had the opportunity to attend a CT Sun basketball game at Mohegan Sun on Saturday, 8/15 vs the New York Liberty



Region 4 families had a wonderful time at the High Meadow event! Families came together to enjoy a fun-filled day outdoors, make memories, and connect with one another. It was a great opportunity for families to spend quality time together while enjoying everything High Meadow had to offer.



Willimantic, Middletown, and Norwich DCF offices partnered with CAFAF to host a fun-filled day at Camp Harkness! Foster families enjoyed a great day spent at the beach, playground, and a picnic lunch.



Region 3 families enjoyed a fun-filled day at the ballpark with the Norwich Sea Unicorns! Families came together to cheer on the team, enjoy the game, and spend quality time together. Pictured is CAFAF Norwich Liaison Deanna Martinez.



Region 2 Liaisons, Sam Heltke & Marian Russo, cohosted a back to school event for region 2 licensed families. The liaisons purchased and stuffed 150 back to school backpacks with school supplies from school grades preK to college!

Families enjoyed a pizza truck, Rita's ice, face painting, balloon magic and a friendly game of wiffle ball in addition to receiving the bags.

Donations

We are deeply grateful to Ticket to Dream for their generous and ongoing support. Their contributions make a meaningful difference in helping us provide enriching experiences and opportunities for our community. Thank you for being such an incredible partner in making dreams come true!



Thank you to Miss Dallas' Shop in Milford, CT for their donation of back to school items!

Thank you to these amazing Cheshire Girl Scouts and their leaders for the donation of back to school items!



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Donations



Thank you to Central
Connecticut State University
Center for Community
Engagement & Social Research
for their donation of hygiene
products!



Milford CAFAF Liaison, Marian
Russo, received 15 backpacks
stuffed with school supplies from
Woodmont Church of Christ in
Milford CT.



Thank you to Amanda for her
incredible donation of sewn
blankets



They bake cakes for the following events:

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

IMPORTANT

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

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



Thank you to our bakers and those who deliver those goodies to our Rocky Hill office.

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 support and funding!



Happy Fall from the
CAFAF family!