




COMMUNIQUE


CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE OF FOSTER & ADOPTIVE FAMILIES




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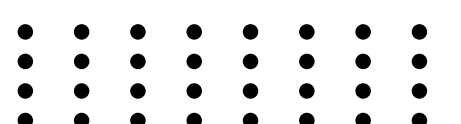


Table of Contents

Page 2 - From the Desk of the Executive Director

Page 3 - Support, Training, Advocacy, Retention, and Recruitment (STARR)

Page 4- Become A Buddy!

Page 5 - Advocacy & Support Services

Page 6- Legislative Updates

Page 7 - CAFAF 2026 Avenue of Dreams

Pages 8 - CAFAF in the Community

Page 9- CAFAF's Talking Teens

Pages 10 - Events

Pages 11- Donations

Pages 12 & 13- Cake4Kids

Page 14- Bikes for Kids

From the Desk of the Executive Director



Spring 2026

Spring is finally here after a very snow-y winter! We hope everyone in your home is looking forward to a beautiful spring.

CAFAF received so much by way of community donations and services these past few months. Krystal Hernandez, our Outreach Coordinator, was on a mission to be sure that more and more members of the general community throughout Connecticut know about the support, training, advocacy, recruitment and retention CAFAF offers. Not everyone can be a foster parent but almost everyone can contribute to the foster and adoptive community in some way(s). 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. Our families are a tight knit community and when they know someone they believe would be a good foster parent, they generally share their experiences. If you know someone that you believe would be a good foster parent, please send them our way.

By the time this issue is posted and e-blasted, we will have celebrated our Avenue of Dreams teen prom-readiness event. And we are working hard on our upcoming annual conference. May 1 and 2, 2026 at Mystic Marriott. Please watch for eblasts!!

We hope that you and your families enjoy what we hope will be a beautiful spring in Connecticut.

Margaret Doherty
Executive Director

2 Spring 2026

Board of Directors

President

Joseph Montalvo

Director

Kally Moquete-Gonzalez

Director

Preston Oliver

Director

Miranda Davis

Are you
interested in
joining our
board of
directors?

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

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

CAFAP 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-Merriden | Work (203) 238-8502 | Cell (860) 882-8226
- Kyle Ohlund | Regional Liaison-Manchester | Work (860) 533-3631 | Cell (860) 882-2940
- VACANT | Regional Liaison-Middletown | Work (860) 638-2138 |
- 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 **CAFAP Buddy**, call the Buddy Coordinator at the number below! (Training and stipend are provided)

✦✦ Do you feel like you need the support from a CAFAP Buddy?

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

Call Brian Candelora,
Peer Network
Coordinator
860-882-2011





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- Sheree Breeden
- Danbury- Dora Poma
- Hartford - Lisa Ortiz
- Meriden- Debra Candelora
- Manchester- Kyle Ohlund
- Middletown
- 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

Legislative Updates

Thank you to our intern, Michael Nohmy, who will receive his Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Central Connecticut State University in just two short months!!! Congratulations Michael!!!

The General Assembly is in year two of its biennial session. This is considered a short session, beginning in February and ending in May. The legislation that we have summarized here is moving, or stalling, or being amended swiftly. For more information about proposed laws impacting children and the work of the Department of Children and Families, please visit www.cga.ct.gov

CAFAF will report back in our Summer issue which legislation passed or failed.

Senate Bill 6: S.B. 6 has many proposed provisions. Quite controversial is a provision about how state departments notify each other if a child is withdrawn from public school on the basis that the child will be “home schooled.” However, another provision is quite popular and provides financial relief for many parents in the form of a Child Tax Credit. A version of the Child Tax Credit almost passed last legislative session and many hope it will be passed this session. It is currently being studied for its fiscal impact. Stay tuned!

Senate Bill 297: S.B. 297 aims to make the court process for juvenile court cases alleging abuse and neglect more streamlined and addresses the specific steps biological parents must satisfactorily take in order to be reunified with their child/children in the care and custody of DCF.

House Bill 5004: H.B. 5004 proposes to make DCF and the child welfare system more transparent and accountable. One proposed provision calls for an independent oversight body regarding DCF, mostly justified by the end of federal court oversight known in Connecticut as the “Juan F. consent decree” which was terminated in March 2022. The proposal also includes increasing eligibility through age 23 for post-secondary education (college, vocational school and job training) for youth in DCF care and custody. It would also make changes to how DCF conducts its investigations of allegations of abuse and neglect. The bill is currently being studied for its fiscal impact. Stay tuned!

CAFAF will report back on these proposals and others impacting children and young people as well as DCF and other state departments that serve children and youth in the Summer Communique.



CAFAF 2026 Avenue of Dreams

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all of the incredible youth, volunteers, and families who joined us for the 2026 Avenue of Dreams. Your energy, kindness, and support are what make this event so special each year.

To our amazing youth — thank you for allowing us to celebrate alongside you. Seeing your confidence shine and your smiles light up the room is exactly why this event exists.

To our dedicated volunteers — we are endlessly grateful for your time, compassion, and commitment.

And to the families and supporters who continue to stand beside these youth — thank you for your trust and encouragement.

We hope everyone who attended had a wonderful day filled with joy, empowerment, and lasting memories.

We are already looking forward to creating more magic together next year!



7 Spring 2026

CAFAF Outside the Office



Khloe was adopted thru foster care. She is a VIP in the eyes of CAFAF! She volunteers at all of our Community events. She is here helping her mom, Deb Candelora, the Meriden Liaison.

They are at a College Fair hoping to recruit some empty nesters to consider fostering.

CAFAF's Talking Teens



Creative moments with some incredibly talented teens as they explored the art of mosaics.

Our youth had the opportunity to express themselves through vibrant colors, unique patterns, and hands-on creativity. From carefully placing each piece to seeing their final designs come together, it was inspiring to watch their ideas turn into beautiful works of art. We are so proud of their creativity, focus, and willingness to try something new!



Events

On Sunday, March 8th the Willimantic Office had a Roller-Skating event at The Skate Inn in Plainfield. We had 11 foster families attend, 42 people total. They all reported having a good time. Many skated, youth & parents while some watched & supported the skaters. They were able to use the provided gift certificates to get some food from the snack bar, and everyone was offered new socks to bring home. A few families were able to make new connections at this event, which is always nice to see. Overall, we had a good time Skating Inn the Spring!



Donations

We are so thankful to Lauralton Hall High School for their thoughtful donation of Valentine's Day Goodie Bags. Acts of kindness like this truly make a difference in our community—thank you for spreading the love!



Thank you to the GFWC of Newington/Wethersfield for their thoughtful donation of duffel bags and hygiene items for our youth!



Joseph Montalvo, Board President of CAFAF, joined by his daughters, helped deliver a diaper donation on behalf of Silent Waters Therapeutic Services LLC—supporting caregivers and children across our community



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!



A huge thank you to everyone who has donated prom attire, accessories, and goodies for our 2026 Avenue of Dreams! Your generosity helps make this event a magical and memorable experience for our youth. We couldn't do it without your support!

11 Spring 2026



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 CAFAF 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



13 Spring 2026

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



Happy Spring from the CAF AF family!