




COMMUNIQUE


CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE OF FOSTER & ADOPTIVE FAMILIES




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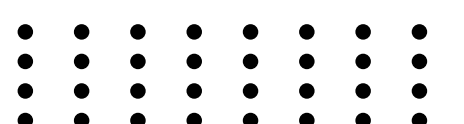


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From the Desk of the Executive Director



Board of Directors

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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!

Summer 2026

Summer is here! For those who enjoy the season, we hope that it is delightful. For those who prefer the Fall, it will be here sooner than some of us would like.

Spring is always busy at CAFAF, as it was this year. Between our Prom Readiness event (Avenue of Dreams) and preparations for our annual conference and all the Foster Care Appreciation events in May, we were at warp speed. We also spent lots of time with our tech consultants as we are building a new family database to better serve foster and adoptive families.

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!

In honor of Foster Care appreciation month in May, our neighbors at WFSB in Rocky Hill interviewed Danny Reyes, a current DCF employee, former foster parent and now adoptive parent. Thank you Danny!! Here is the link, if you missed the broadcast:

https://www.wfsb.com/video/2026/06/01/dcf-employee-adoptive-father-honored-foster-care-work/?fbclid=IwY2xjawSMA5JleHRuA2FibQIxMABicmlkETJLbTNDMHRSWEFiRnFzMlYzc3J0YwZhchBfaWQQMjlyMDM5MTc4ODIwMDg5MgABHsRxbM1uYHZvaRQyV-w2i3E5n5FgpbnzJnpJJhmMxYADqqV18IJyXNvgWA1H_aem_L_B7YIZ3_RY7jKjGIHVfCw

We hope that you and your families enjoy what we hope will be a beautiful and safe summer!

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Margaret Doherty
Executive Director

Support, Training, Advocacy, Recruitment, and Retention (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



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
- 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/>

Legislative Updates

We would again like to thank our intern, Michael Nohmy, who received his Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from Central Connecticut State University in May. Michael was terrific about helping CAFAF track state and federal legislation. Congratulations Michael!!!

For more information about proposed laws impacting children and the work of the Department of Children and Families, please visit www.cga.ct.gov

House Bill 5004: H.B. 5004 passed as amended. This is a large bill and is intended to make DCF and the child welfare system more transparent and accountable and to strengthen relatives and fictive kin arrangements. CAFAF will be working with DCF on plans for implementing the provisions. Some of the provisions do not become law until January 2027 or January 2028. CAFAF will issue a special Legislative Update to provide details. However, here is a snapshot:

- Creation of a new Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee
- Creation of a new “grant program” of up to \$625 for relative or fictive kin during an emergency arrangement for clothing, food, after-school programs, etc for children HOWEVER, these caregivers will be required to keep receipts and to return unspent funds to the department.
- Strengthen internship and mentorship as well as mandated training for worker at DCF.
- Improve DCF’s website and dashboard
- Increased personal security measures and equipment for DCF staff
- Establish an urgent crisis center in Stamford

Senate Bill 6: S.B. 6 died in committee. It was quite controversial in requiring how state departments notify each other if a child is withdrawn from public school on the basis that the child will be “home schooled.” Another provision would have provided a Child Tax Credit.

Senate Bill 297: S.B. 297 died as well. It aimed 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.

Please stay tuned to further updates on changes to state law!



CAFAF 2027 Avenue of Dreams



Avenue of Dreams 2027

March 6, 2027

Albertus Magnus College
New Haven, CT

9am-3:30pm

PROM DRESSES & TUXEDOS
SHOES & ACCESSORIES
PROFESSIONAL HAIR & MAKE-UP

Open to DCF Foster, Adoptive,
Kinship and Special Study youth ages
13-19.

Youth **MUST** be accompanied by an
adult.

Krystal.Hernandez@cafafct.org

860-882-8134

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

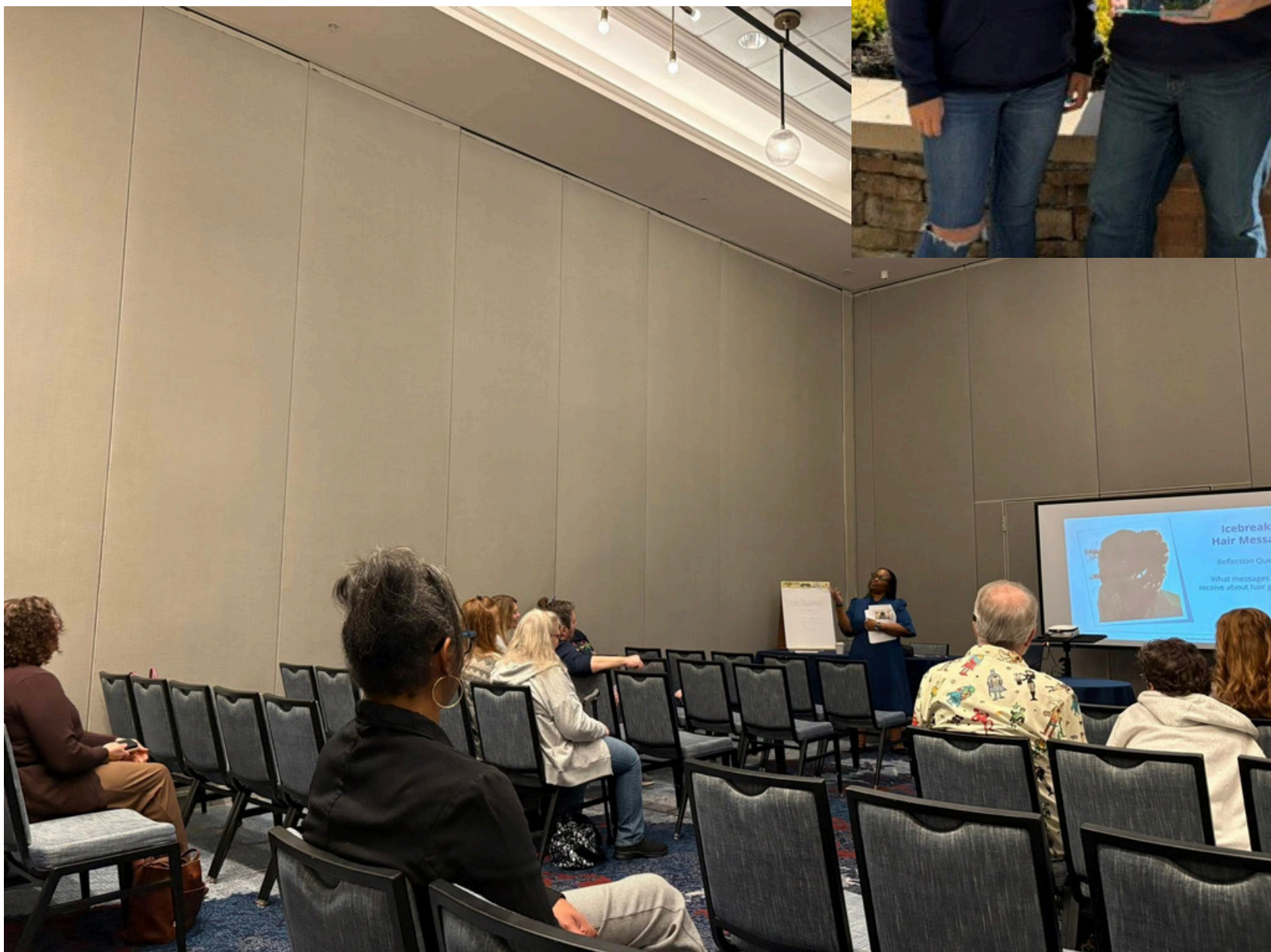
31st Annual CAFAF Conference

CAFAF is incredibly grateful to everyone who attended and supported our CAFAF Conference during the first weekend of May. Your presence, participation, and passion helped make the event such a meaningful and inspiring experience for foster, adoptive, and kinship families, youth, professionals, and community partners from across Connecticut.

Throughout the weekend, attendees connected through powerful conversations, engaging workshops, shared experiences, and valuable resources designed to uplift and strengthen our community. From moments of learning and growth to laughter and encouragement, the conference was a reminder that no one walks this journey alone.

We extend a heartfelt thank you to our speakers, volunteers, sponsors, vendors, and staff who dedicated their time and energy to making this event possible. The support and commitment shown by everyone involved reflects the strength of our mission and the importance of continuing to advocate for children and families impacted by foster care and adoption.

Thank you for helping create a weekend filled with hope, connection, empowerment, and community. We are honored to serve such an amazing network of families and supporters, and we look forward to continuing this work together.



CAFAF in the Community



CAFAF's Hartford Liaison, Lisa Ortiz, Torrington Liaison, Jennifer Bellamy, and Outreach Coordinator, Krystal Hernandez, attended Nonprofit at the Capitol Day to help show Capitol officials the importance of supporting nonprofits and the vital services they provide to communities across the state.

CAFAF's Jennifer Bellamy and Krystal Hernandez proudly attended The Alliance Nonprofit Rally in support of increased funding and advocacy for nonprofits serving our communities



Rain or shine, CAFAF showed up strong! Willimantic Liaison Emily Churchill and Outreach Coordinator Krystal Hernandez hosted a table at the Hartford Athletic soccer game and connected with the community all evening long.

CAFAF hosted a table at the Collaborative Fostering Connections Block Party, co-hosted with The Village and Parkville Market. We enjoyed seeing familiar faces who stopped by to take in the music, connect with community partners and resources, and celebrate May as Foster Care Awareness Month.



CAFAF in the Community



CAFAF attended several conferences to further their education across a range of topics, strengthening their knowledge and expanding their experience to better support the families they serve.



CAFAF liaison Jennifer Bellamy at the Walk our Way Autism Awareness Walk at the Action Wildlife Park in Goshen.

CAFAF liaisons Emily & Sam at Middletown Pride.



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CAFAF's Talking Teens



Talking Teens About Life Skills with Chris Scott of Sun Scholars

We were thrilled to welcome Chris Scott from Sun Scholars to lead one of our recent Talking Teens About Life Skills sessions. Chris shared valuable insights and practical guidance designed to help youth build confidence, develop important life skills, and prepare for future success.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in meaningful discussions about personal growth, decision-making, goal setting, and navigating real-world challenges. Chris's interactive approach encouraged teens to ask questions, share their experiences, and think critically about the skills they can use in their everyday lives.

At CAFAF, we are committed to providing opportunities that empower youth with the tools and knowledge they need to thrive. We are grateful to Chris Scott and Sun Scholars for partnering with us and investing in the future of our young people. Thank you for helping inspire, educate, and support the next generation of leaders!

We look forward to continuing to bring impactful speakers and life-enriching experiences to the youth we serve.

Events



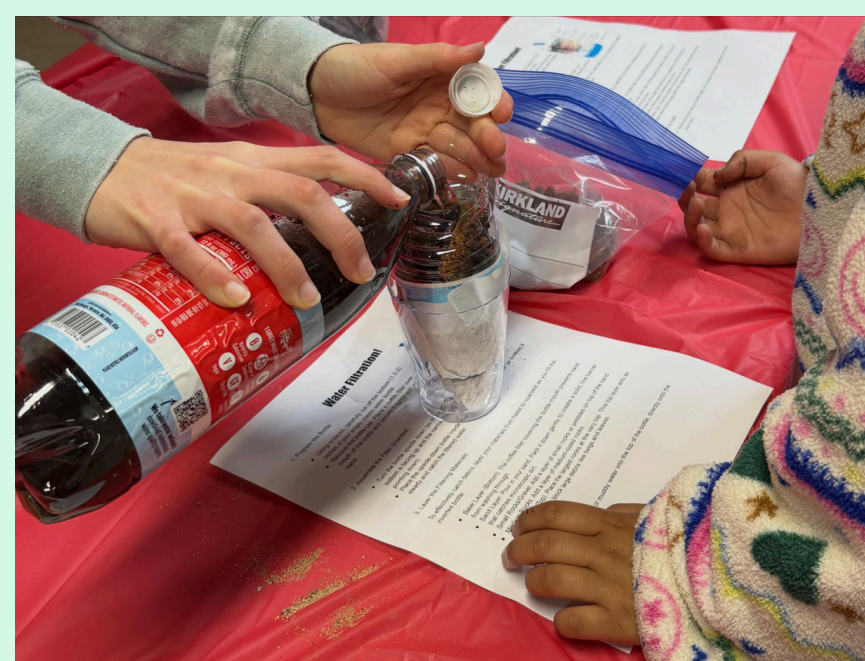
A big thank you to the UConn Engineering Ambassadors for an incredible day at Uconn Storrs. From a behind-the-scenes look at Co-Gen to hands-on activities and a campus tour, our youth explored and learned so much. They left feeling inspired and excited about future STEM opportunities—grateful for such amazing role models!



Despite the rainy weather, some true soccer fanatics came out to cheer on the Hartford Athletic men's team for an exciting night of soccer. Families and youth enjoyed the energy, team spirit, and fun atmosphere as Hartford Athletic brought home a big win. Rain couldn't stop the excitement, and everyone had a great time making memories together while supporting the home team



We are grateful to CCSU for opening their planetarium exclusively for CAFAF for a special evening of exploration and learning about astronomy.



CAFAF was honored to assist two outstanding Girl Scouts from Cheshire Troop 60302 as they continue their journey toward earning their Silver Award. Through engaging, hands-on science experiments, the girls encouraged curiosity, critical thinking, and teamwork while leading STEM activities for youth.



Events



We are grateful to the Wethersfield Art League for partnering with us to host a special caregivers-only evening, offering a peaceful space to relax, connect, and express creativity through painting beautiful works of art.



The Willimantic DCF Office hosted A Day at the Farm, where families enjoyed visiting and feeding a variety of animals, including baby and adult goats, a sheep family, and free-roaming chickens and ducks. Children also had access to coloring activities, stickers, and snack bags. This free event was open to all licensed foster families and kinship families currently in the licensing process.

CAFAF Liaisons and CT Fosters had an amazing time at the Annual Lake Compounce Day! From thrilling rides to sweet treats and unforgettable memories, it was a day filled with laughter, connection, and community.



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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!





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.

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 Summer
from the CAF AF
family!