



Putting

Families First

First Lady and DCF Secretary Recognize Notable Families and Youth

First Lady Kathy Evers and Department of Children and Families (DCF) Secretary Emilie Amundson honored six outstanding families and two foster youth during the 2022 Governor's Foster Care Award ceremony on May 24, 2022, in the Assembly Chamber of the State Capitol.

Danielle Calhoun of Tomah, Akilah Adams of Milwaukee, Dale and Sena Gavin of Rice Lake, Mike and Mindy Mahr of Stanley, Jody and Les Muck of Fremont, and Axel and Erica Segovia of Kenosha were recognized with a 2022 Foster Parent Award for their inspiring efforts in providing care and guidance to children who need a temporary, loving home.

"For those times when children cannot remain at home, foster parents, relatives, and family friends play a critical role in not only keeping children safe, but also providing care, love and connection," said DCF Secretary Amundson. "These individuals are some of our communities' greatest unsung heroes, and we can never thank them enough for the important role they play in strengthening Wisconsin families and communities."

Also recognized was Haily Howard from Mauston and Alec Spillers from Stanley who received a 2022 Foster Youth Award for overcoming challenges, boosting grades, and building positive and lasting relationships within their communities.

To learn more about becoming a foster parent or Wisconsin's Kinship Care and Subsidized Guardianship programs, visit <http://www.dcf.wisconsin.gov> or follow @WisDCF on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

June is Pride Month

Pride Month is celebrated annually in June to bring awareness to equal justice and equal opportunity for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) Americans. In June of 1969, patrons and supporters of the Stonewall Inn in New York City staged an uprising to resist the police harassment and persecution to which LGBT



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Americans were commonly subjected. This uprising marks the beginning of a movement to outlaw discriminatory laws and practices against LGBT Americans.

Today, celebrations include pride parades, picnics, parties, workshops, symposia and concerts, and LGBT Pride Month events attract millions of participants around the world. Memorials are held during this month for those members of the community who have been lost to hate crimes or HIV/AIDS. The purpose of the commemorative month is to recognize the impact that LGBTQ individuals have had on history locally, nationally, and internationally.

Federal and local policies and practices are increasingly acknowledging and focusing on LGBTQ youth and numerous national advocacy and other organizations are also giving greater attention to LGBTQ youth in their work. Encouraging greater acceptance and support for all youth, including those who are or are perceived to be LGBTQ, will make communities, schools, and other settings safer, better places for all youth.

Check out the links below for additional resources:

- DCF has released an Issue Brief titled [Working with LGBTQ+ Youth and Families in Child Welfare](#). This document outlines background information supporting the call to action, as well as definitions and resources – many of which offer free training opportunities that may be of benefit to you and your agency. Perhaps most importantly, this document identifies initial action steps necessary to better support the LGBTQ+ children, youth, and families whom we serve in the child welfare system and to enact best practice.
- With these 17 LGBTQ+ Wisconsin Pride events happening in the next few months, no matter where you're visiting in Wisconsin, there's a chance to celebrate. Join LGBTQ+ and ally communities at events across the state during Pride month and beyond! <https://www.travelwisconsin.com/article/events/lgbtq-pride-events-in-wisconsin>
- The White House is holding an [LGBT Pride Month Champions of Change Video Challenge](#) to explore the stories of unsung heroes and local leaders who are leading our march towards a more perfect union. In early June, you will have a chance to weigh in and help identify finalists that will be featured as Champions of Change at an event at the White House!



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- Take a look at [resources](#) from the Administration on Children and Families' National Clearinghouse on Youth and Families. These resources are geared at helping youth-serving organizations understand and more effectively support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning young people: [Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth With Open Arms](#).
- Pride events occur throughout the month. [Find a LGBT Pride event in your area](#).
- Check out the [It Gets Better Project](#). Take the pledge to speak up against hate and intolerance whenever and wherever you see it. Watch videos from folks who know "It gets better," or submit a video of your own.

Agency Spotlight: Wood County

This month, DCF's Angi Krueger connected with Stephanie Wanserski, Wood County Youth Justice Supervisor & Treasure Hunter, to talk about how they Put Families First.

A few years ago, Wood County Human Services adopted a new agency motto: "We Believe All Kids Are Capable of Success, No Exceptions!"

In fact, when you email a child welfare professional in Wood County, you may notice this motto in their email signature.

Stephanie Wanserski, Youth Justice Supervisor & Treasure Hunter, described this motto as a cultural and belief framework that has shaped how Wood County approaches working with children and families. This strengths-based approach encourages looking at children and families through a lens of hope and a belief in what can change, instead of a lens of risk.

What does it mean to be a Treasure Hunter? "It's looking for all of the treasures in children and families. People are more likely to be successful if people believe in them," reported Stephanie.

This philosophy has translated to exciting ways to support children and families. One way is that the agency identified a major need for youth and families, specifically youth in crisis. Historically, there was a concern that youth were often criminalized for their mental health behaviors, which made the problem worse.



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To address this unmet need, and work to support strength-based services, the agency approached the Wood County Board with a proposal to fund a program called Youth Extended Services, also known as YES, which would provide 24/7 in-home support to families in crisis. The proposal included multiple positions to provide skill-building in-home to support families in real time. The agency also partnered with local mental health and CCS partners. This program model will focus on serving families in home and helping build on the family's treasures, with the goal for families to live and thrive safely together.

The purpose of the program is that "instead of sending children somewhere else to be 'fixed', we really needed our whole community to wrap around youth and families and keep our kids here," Stephanie explained.

By clearly identifying the needs, developing a targeted proposal, and leading with real stories from the community, the agency received funding and has already filled three of the new positions and has made two additional job offers. The agency hopes to roll out the YES team in July.

Special thanks for Wood County for providing this month's inspiration. If your agency would like to share information on how you're Putting Families First, please connect with DCF at FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.

Safety Planning Revisions Workgroup Update

The new danger threat language for the June 2022 eWiSACWIS release went into effect on June 11, 2022. By now child welfare professionals should have had a chance to review the [information memo](#) and the language changes in [Safety Intervention Standards](#), as well as see those changes reflected in eWiSACWIS. As indicated in the May newsletter, a short video overview of the June 2022 changes has been posted to the [Safety Revisions website](#). This June 2022 update is the first part of the safety assessment and planning revisions process that is focused on attending to bias in the language we use with families, additional changes will focus on how to improve the work we do with families to keep children safely in their homes.



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As the Safety Revisions work continues, there will be additional information provided in this newsletter and other venues regarding the progress of the work being done, what to expect for additional changes, as well as opportunities for stakeholder involvement.

Check the [Safety Revisions website](#) frequently for additional information and email DCFMBBSWBCWPP@wisconsin.gov with specific questions or concerns.

Lived Experience Update

Lived Experience work continues to grow at DCF. The team is working to amplify the voices of families with lived child welfare experience. Collaborating with families will help DCF shift the overall system to better serve children and families. Currently, the lived experience team is actively partnering with leaders to:

- Building equity and reducing barriers to care.
- Empowering individuals who demonstrate resiliency in their journey.
- Demonstrating that hope and recovery are possible for all families.
- Building compassion in professional stakeholders by really hearing the stories of lived experience.

The voices of lived experience stakeholders are vital in shifting the child welfare system to serve more children and families in home.

There are a variety of ways to be involved in lived experience at DCF! Parents that may be interested in joining this group may complete this [form](#). This group is made up of parents with lived child welfare experience and meets monthly. For more event information, please follow the [Lived Experience web page](#).

What Does Putting Families First Mean to You?

We're continuing to share what folks are saying about Putting Families First. Thank you for your submittals.

"Putting families first means recognizing the love that all parents have for their children, honoring the unique culture of each family, and acknowledging the parenting style of each caregiver. As child welfare professionals, putting families first requires us to continuously reflect on our own backgrounds and values, while examining our personal



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biases that impact the way we assess and analyze child, parent and family circumstances.” --- Julie Ahnen, CPS Manager at Dane County Human Services

Spring Town Hall Update

For those that were not able to make the zoom spring town hall meeting, the recorded version is now [available here](#). A PDF of the presentation is also available to review [here](#). Questions about the town hall or presentation can be sent to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov.

Join our Mailing List

Are you interested in receiving monthly Families First updates? Click [here](#) to join our mailing list. A confirmation email will be sent to you, so be sure to check your email after you sign up! Any questions can be sent to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov

Trivia

How Wisconsin are you? The first response back to the family first email inbox will win a high-five mention in the next newsletter and have the chance to submit a themed question for our trivia section next month!

Q: What is the largest inland lake in Wisconsin?

High-five! The first correct response to the family first inbox was received from Marc Seidl of Brown County Health and Human Services Department. He guessed Lake Winnebago, and he is correct. Marc says, “I’ve lived in Wisconsin my entire life, and I do a fair amount of fishing and water sports, but never on Lake Winnebago! Something that I might need to change this summer!”

Thanks for participating. Here is the new trivia question.

Q: What is the longest State Trunk Highway (STH) in Wisconsin? Hint: it runs north-south across western Wisconsin.

Your best guess can be sent to FamilyFirst@wisconsin.gov