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Lieutenant Governor, DCF Secretary celebrate nine awardees for their leadership and service to families

Putting Families First Awards presented during Family Strengthening Month

MADISON – The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) honored nine individuals and teams today at the 2025 Secretary's Putting Families First Awards. The awards were presented during a celebration at the Pyle Center as part of Wisconsin's proclaimed month-long recognition of [Family Strengthening Month](#).

DCF Secretary-designee Jeff Pertl and Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez presented the awards, highlighting the impactful work being done across the child welfare system.

"Wisconsin succeeds when the families within it do. I was honored to join all the wonderful award recipients who have done so much to better the lives of not just our young people, but also mothers, fathers, and families," said Lt. Gov. Rodriguez. "I want to thank these awardees for their tireless work and recognize the many organizations, providers, and individuals who join them in bettering the lives of children and families across our great state."

Recipients of the award were selected because of their efforts to transform Wisconsin's child welfare system to be more family-focused, collaborative, and in-home.

"Stability, connectedness, and belonging are essential for families to grow and thrive. Together, parents, professionals and community partners have worked diligently to serve even more families in-home with programs and services needed for success," said DCF Secretary Jeff Pertl. "These efforts deserve to be celebrated because when families thrive, so do our communities. I am proud to honor such caring and compassionate individuals."

This year's recipients include leadership, adapting and implementing Family First initiatives, and having a proven record of ensuring the well-being of children and families. This year's recipients include:

Parents with Lived Experience: Natasha Broxton, Samantha Copus, and Alyssa Hake all received recognition for serving as a support to other families who are serving as a vital support to other families navigating the child welfare system or involved in the child welfare system. The honorees were also recognized for their passion in sharing information and encouraging system change.

Community Partners: Teresa Baier and Anjali Patel, Community Collaboration and Navigation Network of Walworth County, and Crystal McClain received recognition for their strong collaboration with their local child welfare agency and other community partners to keep families safely together and in their homes. Their efforts in supporting and advocating for youth, families, and child welfare system change were also celebrated.

Child Welfare Professionals: Valerie Blackdeer and Sadie Garvin, Lexi Rachner, and Haleigh Thomas all received recognition for their passion for innovative approaches to reducing barriers to keep families together and keeping them connected to their communities and culture.

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