



DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities



Joette Katz
Commissioner

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Governor

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Federal Grant Supports Partnership Between UConn and DCF To Prepare
Graduates For Family-Centered, Strengths-Based Social Work
\$735,000 Five-Year Grant To Develop 35 MSW Graduates And Enhance Agency Diversity

HARTFORD – The federal Children's Bureau selected the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the University of Connecticut School of Social Work as one of 11 "University Partnership" programs in the nation designed to prepare social workers to help vulnerable children and families.

The "Connecticut Partnership for Child Welfare Excellence," as the program will be called, will receive \$735,000 over a five-year period beginning this federal fiscal year and is designed to ensure that new social workers are ready to implement the Department's new "Strengthening Families" practice model. Strengthening Families calls upon social workers to work collaboratively with families by building upon family strengths to find solutions to challenges that affect their children. The Partnership will result in 35 Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates who are either currently employed at the Department or who will receive priority consideration for employment. The Department will seek students who are currently enrolled or are considering enrollment in the UConn School of Social Work MSW program. Students accepted in the program will have their final year of graduate study paid in full through this grant. During their course of study, the students will be required to intern at the Department.

Due to the diversity of families served by the Department, an important focus of the Partnership will be to support greater diversity at the Department through priority recruitment of male and bilingual staff, especially Spanish-speaking social workers. Currently, 69 percent of Department staff are female, 16.8 percent are Latino, and 28.4 percent are African American. DCF's efforts to increase the diversity and linguistic competency of agency staff are part of the Department's broader Racial Justice focus, an effort to enable DCF to effectively engage and work with families and communities of diversity.

Commissioner Joette Katz said she is proud that the Department's staff has made great strides in implementing the new Strengthening Families Practice Model and that there are now fewer children in care, more children living with relatives and other people they know, fewer children in group settings, and fewer children receiving services out of state. She said, however, the Department needs to continue to develop and support new, skilled employees to advance progress already made and to become more culturally competent.

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"The Department needs to build upon our successes by preparing a new generation of social workers, supervisors and managers." Commissioner Katz said. "Further, because family engagement is so important and because we need to do a better job engaging fathers and paternal relatives, it is also important that we attract more men of color and bilingual staff to work with us."

"The 'Connecticut Partnership for Child Welfare Excellence' is our most recent example of collaboration with state agencies to improve the lives of the people of Connecticut," said University of Connecticut President Susan Herbst. "I am particularly proud of the School of Social Work for its leadership in this effort which promotes cultural competence and continues its long-standing record of public engagement."

It is expected that a number of existing DCF staff will take advantage of the opportunity. Another important component of the program will be to develop curriculum at the UConn School of Social Work that responds to current child welfare workforce needs and the DCF Strengthening Families Practice Model in particular.

"As Co-Principal investigator of this federal grant, I am delighted that our proposal was selected for funding," said Dean Salome Raheim of the University of Connecticut's School of Social Work. "The separate accomplishments of the UConn School of Social Work and DCF, as well as our longstanding partnership, were key factors in garnering this funding. We look forward to working with DCF to implement this program, which will advance child welfare education and practice in the State of Connecticut."

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