

HART SHINING STAR AWARDS

The HART shining star awards is a new initiative to honor the exceptional work being done by DCF staff, HART Committee Members, and community providers in CT whose focus is on eradicating human trafficking as well as empowering victims of this crime. These awards will be announced quarterly in the Newsletter. Our recipients this quarter are:

LEADERSHIP AWARD

Melanie Kmetz

DCF HART Liaison/Program Manager

Melanie Kmetz has been employed by the Department of Children and Families for over 23 years. She began her DCF career in the Bridgeport Area Office Intake Unit, where she specialized in the investigation of Child Sexual Abuse. Melanie worked closely with law enforcement and the States Attorney to ensure that those who committed crimes against children were justly convicted. She realized early in her career that her advocacy for childhood victims of sexual abuse was a passion and not just part of the job she was hired to do.

After 10 years as an Investigation social worker, she began working as a supervisor for the DCF Careline. Amongst other duties, her role required critical assessment regarding the safety of high risk and runaway youth, both afterhours and on the weekend. It became clear to Melanie while working at the Careline that this population was in danger and underserved. When she returned to the Bridgeport office, she offered to represent region 1 and to assist with the development of the HART team.

For many years, Melanie has focused on supports and services for victims of Domestic Minor Sex trafficking (DMST). Melanie established a Region 1 Human Anti Trafficking Response Team, designed to identify and respond youth who are at risk or involved in Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking. The HART team, with Melanie's leadership has been instrumental in spreading awareness and education within the Department, families we work with, community providers, schools and within the foster/resource care system regarding Human Trafficking. The team assists with safety



“Melanie's leadership skills, organization and ability to work collaboratively with the community has been a tremendous asset to the Department of Children and Families and meeting the needs of the vulnerable youth in our community. We appreciate Melanie's passion for this work, and we agree she deserves to be acknowledged for her years of advocacy on behalf of the children in Region 1.”

*Kenneth Cabral, M.Ed.
Regional Administrator
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