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## **“Relationships First”: Connecticut Foster Dad Recognized for Transforming Care Through Connection**

*Youth Law Center’s Quality Parenting Initiative names Daniel Reyes as one of only six national 2025 Elevate and Celebrate honorees for his leadership in strengthening family bonds and reimagining foster care.*

PLAINVILLE, CT - As child welfare systems nationwide work to better support children and families, Connecticut foster dad and longtime social worker Daniel Reyes is demonstrating what research has consistently shown: children thrive when they experience loving, developmentally attuned parenting and remain connected to the people who matter most.

Today, the Youth Law Center’s Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) named Reyes, Foster Care Program Manager with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), as one of six national recipients of the 2025 Elevate & Celebrate Award, honoring leaders whose work reflects QPI’s child-centered, relationship-driven approach to foster care.

QPI is a national movement committed to ensuring that every child in foster care experiences excellent parenting, strong relationships, and continuity of connection. Decades of child development research affirms that these relational foundations are essential for brain development, emotional regulation, resilience, and long-term well-being. Recent studies on QPI’s implementation show that when foster parents, birth parents, and agency partners work as a team, children experience smoother transitions, safer reunifications, and deeper feelings of security.

Reyes is being recognized for his exceptional efforts to center children’s needs, strengthen family bonds, and transform how Connecticut caregivers, birth parents, and staff work together. As an adoptive father, a nearly 20-year DCF veteran, and one of almost 1,000 QPI Champions nationwide, Reyes brings both lived experience and professional insight into how systems must change to truly serve children.

“Foster care isn’t supposed to be a stack of forms or paperwork; it’s about people supporting people,” Reyes said. “QPI taught us that relationships are the real engine of change. When adults talk, listen, and trust each other, everything gets better for the child.”



Across Connecticut, Reyes has helped shift the culture of first meetings and early engagement, emphasizing child-focused introductions, shared caregiving plans, and transparent communication, approaches shown in research to reduce trauma and strengthen attachment for children entering care.

A cornerstone of his leadership has been advancing comfort calls, a signature QPI practice now recognized nationally as a best first step when a child enters care. Within hours of placement, a foster caregiver and birth parent connect to exchange information, reassure the child, and establish a respectful relationship from the start. Research shows that comfort calls reduce trauma for children, increase birth parent engagement, and strengthen long-term reunification outcomes. QPI has led national efforts to embed comfort calls into policy and practice across multiple states, and Reyes has been a catalyst in ensuring Connecticut implements these trauma-responsive, child-centered reforms. “A comfort call can change everything,” he said. “It turns fear into connection and builds a bridge between adults who both care deeply about the same child.”

Reyes also ensures that directly impacted voices—youth, birth parents, and foster parents—lead the way in reshaping Connecticut’s practice. He regularly brings lived-experience leaders into training rooms to speak honestly with frontline staff about what truly supports or harms families. These conversations, rooted in authentic experience, have become essential drivers of culture change.

He is also helping lead innovative father-engagement pilots, pairing birth fathers with foster fathers to deepen support networks, encourage partnership, and strengthen children’s sense of belonging, an area where research has shown families often receive too little support.

Reyes’s approach mirrors emerging findings on QPI’s effectiveness. A 2024 study on QPI’s stakeholder-driven model concluded: *“By centering the needs of children and their birth families, QPI shifts power away from agency-based professionals toward foster parents to improve outcomes for children... the success of this approach has broad implications for child welfare reform.”*

His commitment to openness and family connection is also deeply personal. As an adoptive father, Reyes has cultivated a meaningful relationship with his daughter’s birth family, ensuring she grows up with a whole and honest understanding of her story. “It was never a secret,” he said. “She didn’t lose anyone, her family just got bigger.”

Looking ahead, Reyes is committed to embedding QPI’s child-centered values into Connecticut’s long-term practice and policy. “Our goal is to make QPI part of



Connecticut's DNA," he said. "Kids deserve a system where relationships always come first."

Reyes will be honored at the national Elevate & Celebrate virtual ceremony on December 18, alongside QPI leaders and Champions from across the country.

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**The Youth Law Center (YLC)** is a non-profit law firm that advocates to transform foster care and juvenile justice systems across the nation so that every child and youth can thrive. YLC leads the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI), a national movement spanning more than 75 sites and nearly 1,000 QPI Champions committed to ensuring that every child in foster care receives excellent parenting and remains connected to the people who love them.