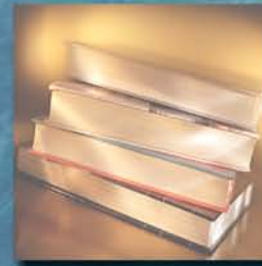


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# 2005 Leadership Fellows Program



CONNECTICUT HEALTH FOUNDATION

## ***The Connecticut Health Foundation's Leadership Fellows Program***

Connecticut, like most states, faces many challenges to applying effective responses to a variety of public health issues. Heart disease, cancer, stroke, HIV/AIDS and unintentional injuries are the leading causes of death in Connecticut. Alcohol and drug misuse, violence of all forms, stress caused by racism and homophobia, and tobacco use, take their toll both economically and in decreased quality of life. Adding to the problem is a growing deficit of resources including lack of access to culturally and linguistically responsive health education, information and quality health services.

Despite these difficulties, Connecticut has many outstanding leaders who are working tirelessly—often without acknowledgement—to improve conditions so that all Connecticut communities can become healthy, safe, and strong. These leaders come from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines including health care, law, education, human services, and public policy. They represent different cultures, communities, ages, and ethnicities and have various degrees of experience, skills, and expertise. All are united in the vision and conviction that Connecticut has the potential to be the healthiest state in the nation.

Leaders know this vision can be achieved if communities come together to develop and implement pragmatic, responsive strategies for improving the health and well-being of their members. This means advocating for inclusive public policies, providing access to quality health care, and supporting on-going responsive public health education.

From Manchester to Danbury, these men and women are making changes in public policies, establishing community-based programs, working to empower neighborhoods to create conditions that improve health, and conducting important public health research. They are local heroes who often work with little or no resources or support, yet they persevere, embodying the ideals of what each of us caring for our communities can become. They are Connecticut's hope for a brighter, healthier, and more prosperous tomorrow.

The Connecticut Health Foundation (CHF) is pleased to honor 21 of our local heroes for their demonstrated dedication, and welcomes them as the inaugural class of the 2005 Leadership Fellows Program.

## **Leadership Fellows Program**

The Connecticut Health Foundation (CHF) sponsors this leadership development program to recognize outstanding women and men who are making significant contributions toward creating a healthy, safe and prosperous Connecticut.

The Leadership Fellows Program is a one-year (October - June) knowledge and skill-building program designed to create leaders, particularly in racial and ethnic communities, who will pursue careers in public policy, public health practice, community advocacy, academia, or any related field. "Fellows" are selected through a competitive process, which consists of submitting an online application and, if invited, participating in a personal interview. Each of the fellows makes a one-year commitment to attend two weekend retreats, monthly seminars, and participate in a project that either demonstrates or replicates a solution to a health issue that affects "vulnerable" communities. Benefits include the following:

- A \$1,500 stipend to aid in each Fellow's personal or professional development;
- A \$500 gift to each nonprofit organization that employs a Fellow (if the Fellow is employed by a for-profit agency, the fellow has the option to donate the gift to a charity in Connecticut);
- An opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills related to leadership and health issues through two weekend retreats; and
- Opportunities to meet with national and local health leaders and policymakers at monthly seminars.

### **Nominations**

Applications for the 2006 Leadership Fellows Program will be available in January on the Connecticut Health Foundation's website at [www.cthealth.org/leadership](http://www.cthealth.org/leadership).

Additional information may be obtained by contacting:

William F. Crimi, Vice President of Program & Evaluation, at 860.224.2200 or [will@cthealth.org](mailto:will@cthealth.org).

## **About the Connecticut Health Foundation**

The Connecticut Health Foundation (CHF), which was established in July of 1999, is the state's largest independent, non-profit grantmaking foundation dedicated to improving the health of the people of Connecticut through systemic change, program innovation, and public policy analysis. Since it was established, CHF has funded almost \$20 million in grants.

After conducting focus groups with ordinary citizens and meeting with state agencies, community leaders, and health care professionals, the Foundation selected three program areas to focus its resources:

- improving access to children's mental health services
- reducing racial and ethnic health disparities
- expanding access to and utilization of oral health services

Aside from directly supporting community-based and institutional grant proposals, CHF fosters discussions about public health issues by convening meetings, conferences, educational briefings, and grantee technical assistance workshops.

The Foundation also invests resources into conducting objective, nonpartisan policy research on issues important to the public health debate such as the state budget spending cap, the state's Medicaid system, and expanding oral health care for publicly-insured children.

In 1999, the Foundation was created when a health maintenance company, ConnectiCare, Inc., converted to a for-profit company. In doing so, they created the Connecticut Health Foundation, giving the equity of the company to the Foundation. In June of 2001, private investors purchased CHF's shares, leaving the Foundation with an initial endowment of \$132 million.

The Foundation's 15-member Board of Directors made a commitment to examine the underlying causes of barriers to health care among the unserved and underserved in Connecticut, by directing 5 percent of its endowment toward grantmaking operations annually.

For more information about CHF, please visit onto [www.cthealth.org](http://www.cthealth.org), or contact Maryland Grier, Public Affairs Officer, at 860.224.2200 or [maryland@cthealth.org](mailto:maryland@cthealth.org).



## ***2005 Leadership Fellows***

**Rose Abréu-Sánchez**  
Milford

**Gina Leean Calder**  
New Haven

**Sunil D'Cunha**  
Trumbull

**Magdaly Font-Díaz**  
Hartford

**Stephenie R. Guess**  
Groton

**Debra J. James**  
Hamden

**Karina Jiménez Lewis**  
West Hartford

**Dorothy Jones**  
Manchester

**Laurie Julian**  
Bloomfield

**Anne S. Klee**  
New Haven

**Elizabeth M.S. Krause**  
West Hartford

**Matthew LeMaster**  
Manchester

**Tung Nguyen**  
West Hartford

**Diann Pertillar**  
Willimantic

**Linda S. Smith**  
Norwalk

**Michael A. Smith**  
Meriden

**Gerardo Sorkin**  
Glastonbury

**Deborah Thomas-Sims**  
Bridgeport

**Jacqueline Torres**  
Windsor

**Richard Torres**  
Monroe

**Kari White**  
New Haven



## **Rose Abréu-Sánchez**

*"I define leadership as the ability to influence people in the choices they make, the way they live and their beliefs."*

As a mother of two children, Rose Abréu-Sánchez knows the importance of being an educated parent who can make informed decisions regarding her children's well-being. Also, being a parent of a special needs child, she understands the necessity of being involved with school and the community. She has worked with several groups to increase parents' awareness of appropriate resources.

"I would like to see parents educated enough to raise their children to be physically and mentally healthy for a brighter future," says Abréu-Sánchez, who is a bilingual family resource coordinator at both the Yale Center for Children with Special Health Care Needs in New Haven and at ReachOUT, Inc., an agency that provides early intervention services for children from birth to three years old.

Abréu-Sánchez, who was born in New York and raised in the Dominican Republic, studied bioanalysis at The Universidad Nacional Pedro Henríquez Ureña in the Dominican Republic. She lives with her husband and two daughters in Milford.



## **Gina Leean Calder**

*"Leadership is about being able to work together with others to develop a plan of action, and to implement that plan to address issues and make change."*

Gina Leean Calder, who earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Yale University, is currently working as an associate at MATRIX Public Health Consultants in New Haven.

Her personal experience, as well as her current position, has helped her to better understand that racial and ethnic health disparities must be tackled in many ways, and that the leadership and involvement of people of color is essential to conquering these wide-ranging health problems. As an African-American woman, she has made it her mission to raise awareness of health disparities and facilitate involvement in health issues.

Currently, Calder is working with two friends to create an organization that offers consulting services to churches and other faith-based organizations. In addition, she is an active member of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and is campaigning for a seat on the New Haven Board of Aldermen.



## Sunil D'Cunha

*"Leaders are custodians. They have service over self-interest, they can change defeat into victory. It is a way of thinking that takes other people into account even when one's own needs are pressing."*

Dr. Sunil D'Cunha, the medical director of StayWell Health Center in Waterbury, considers himself fortunate to have the opportunity to use his leadership positions to provide "service with a smile" as both a medical director and as a board member of Family Services Woodfield. By his own admission, he is working hard to be "a great light for minorities, especially for Asians in America."

D'Cunha sees his role not simply as a physician, but as a social worker, listener, and "conduit" to good health for his patients.

"My future is bright," says D'Cunha, who earned a medical degree at St. John's Medical College in Bangalore, India. "I see myself improving the care of the downtrodden, reducing the burden of disease, improving medical outcomes, and eliminating disparities."





## **Magdaly Font-Díaz**

*"I define a leader as someone who is able to influence, challenge, inspire and provide guidance while motivating others to follow. At the same time, a person who possesses the extraordinary gift of leadership also knows when to be a follower and allow others to lead the way."*

Magdaly Font-Díaz currently works as an assistant site liaison for Making Connections in Hartford, a community-wide effort to connect families to opportunities that will improve their quality of life.

Font-Díaz is passionate in her belief that the only way to begin creating change through unity and advocacy is by bringing people together across racial, ethnic and neighborhood lines to address common issues. Having been born and partially raised in Puerto Rico, Font-Díaz believes it is crucial that voices from all cultures, backgrounds, and languages have a chance to be heard.

Magdaly Font-Díaz is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in human services at Springfield College in Massachusetts and plans to attend law school upon graduation.

Font-Díaz lives in Hartford with her husband and three children.



## **Stephanie R. Guess**

*"Leadership is fearless. It promotes creativity, innovation, and confidence through change and transformation. Leadership guides and motivates others to develop a sense of purpose, take ownership of the 'vision,' and make it a reality."*

Stephanie R. Guess describes herself as "a woman who has a passion for empowering others to take ownership of themselves and their communities." As director of housing supports for Sound Community Services in New London, Guess is an advocate for the homeless and those with diminished access to health care. She believes that housing and health care are inextricably linked and sees the two as basic human rights.

Guess' Christian faith has inspired her to excel in her work and believe in her capabilities. She approaches her roles of wife, mother, and community leader with the same diligence, optimism, and desire for success.

Guess, who studied sociology at the University of Connecticut and plans to continue her education in the field of public administration, hopes that the Leadership Fellows Program will help her develop her skills as an advocate and create "opportunities for empowerment" for the underserved.



## **Debra J. James**

*"Leadership is recognizing there's always an opportunity for learning and sharing. It's embracing an attitude of humility, strengthening your weaknesses, and sharing your strengths."*

One of Debra J. James' greatest passions is her commitment to youth. "I believe the adults owe a great deal to the youth and young children today," she says. "We have failed them miserably. They have been neglected and abused, unwanted, unloved and misguided ...and we see the 'fruit' of that neglect now."

James, a wife and mother, is a community relations specialist at Wallingford-based Community Health Network of Connecticut, and is an ardent promoter of personal outreach to others. Her commitment to young children is evidenced by her involvement with young mothers and their babies through a local health care facility. The New Haven native believes strongly that an overemphasis on self detracts from the quality of one's life.

James, who earned a bachelor's degree in industrial/organizational psychology from Albertus Magnus College, hopes one day to operate a family learning center where the family unit can develop the tools for daily living and an improved quality of life.



## **Karina Jiménez Lewis**

*"I think of leadership as the ability of a person to become a vessel for positive and timely change, and to commit to advocating for those whose voices are not heard. In my book, leadership must encompass dedication to elevate others to their fullest potential and to show the way to self-realization by example."*

Karina Jiménez Lewis, a policy writer at the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), strongly believes that every Connecticut resident should have access to quality health care that includes mental, medical, and oral health services, regardless of level of income or immigration status.

Lewis, who earned a bachelor's degree from Elms College in Chicopee, MA, and a master's degree in social work with a concentration in policy practice from the University of Connecticut School of Social Work, has worked extensively in the child protection field on permanency-related issues; has collaborated on issues of continuum of care for mentally ill children and youth; and has examined the impact of DCF policies on the populations served.

Karina Jiménez Lewis lives in West Hartford with her husband, Chris, and her daughter, Indira.



## Dorothy Jones

*"Strong leadership exists when a person pays attention to both the big picture and the details."*

Dorothy Jones knows what it means to persevere in the face of obstacles. A widow who lost a teenager to illness, Jones is the mother of a teenage daughter and two sons, one of whom is disabled.

Still, somehow she finds the time to be a full-time social work student at St. Joseph College in West Hartford. Jones, the co-chair of East of the River System of Care, a community collaborative to improve the children's mental health system in Manchester and surrounding areas, also earned an associate's degree in social service from Manchester Community College.

As an advocate, Jones has interacted with various agencies and bureaucracies that sometimes have been less than encouraging as she seeks out what she needs. Yet, she refuses to be discouraged. "I continued to knock on doors to get what was needed," says Jones, adding that her resiliency can help to inspire others to do the same.



## Laurie Julian

*"Leadership is the ability to influence and guide or direct change. Effective leadership requires vision. Hence, effective leaders are able to communicate their vision so others can contribute and work together to achieve that vision. Leadership involves motivating others to take action."*

Laurie Julian is the program manager of government affairs at the Connecticut Primary Care Association. She has played an active role in advocating for comprehensive, accessible, and quality health care for underserved and disadvantaged populations.

Before she earned a master's degree in public health from the University of Connecticut Health Center in 2004, Julian was an attorney at CHUBB Specialty Insurance for six years. The native of Seoul, South Korea, also earned a bachelor's degree in legal studies from Quinnipiac University and a law degree from the University of Connecticut.

With her public health and legal training, Julian strives to ensure that local, state, and federal policymakers will be responsive to public health needs by adopting and maintaining important public health policies and programs.



## Anne S. Klee

*"Leadership means providing guidance, direction and clarity in the face of complex and ambiguous situations. Leadership is about being unafraid to become a voice for those without a voice, standing up to those abusing their power when truth and honesty is required, and always fighting tirelessly for what you believe in."*

Anne S. Klee, a psychologist, is the program director at West Haven's Errera Community Care Center of the Veterans Administration Connecticut Healthcare System. The Center works to reintegrate homeless veterans suffering from severe mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders, back into their communities.

Klee, who earned a bachelor's degree in urban studies at Columbia University and a doctorate in clinical health psychology at Yeshiva University in New York, also serves as the clinical director of the Psychosocial Rehabilitation Fellowship Program, which strives to instill the principles of psychosocial rehabilitation in recent mental health studies graduates.

Prior to her work in Connecticut, Klee co-founded the Adolescent Health Alliance in New York City, a nonprofit organization focused on creating and implementing health intervention programs for urban adolescents.



## **Elizabeth M.S. Krause**

*“To effectively lead people involves an orientation toward a collective interest and a dynamic set of qualities, skills, and abilities. Ideally, to meet the leadership challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, leadership is collaborative or shared and cross-cultural.”*

Elizabeth Myung Sook Krause, a program officer at the Connecticut Health Foundation (CHF), is responsible for developing and implementing grantmaking approaches in the areas of health disparities, children’s mental health, and oral health. She also provides technical assistance as well as program planning, management, and evaluation.

Before joining CHF, Krause was a prevention specialist with the Public Health Prevention Service, a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) national training program. The three-year program included rotations with the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, the CDC Foundation, and a two-year field placement with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Krause, who earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Smith College and a master’s degree in public health from Harvard University, also completed two temporary duty assignments with the CDC Global AIDS Program office in Rwanda.





## **Matthew LeMaster**

*"Leadership is the shepherding of ideas, thoughts, and work from a group of people to achieve a common goal."*

Matthew LeMaster's passion is children's mental health care. As a junior at the University of Kentucky, he experienced his first psychiatric rotation at a juvenile detention center. This experience helped him decide his life's work.

LeMaster, who earned a bachelor's degree in nursing at Kentucky and a master's of nursing degree at the University of Washington, works as a psychiatric advance practice registered nurse (APRN) for Community Health Resources in Manchester.

When asked what he'd like to see change, he responded, "My hope for the future is for there to be a fundamental shift in this country so that its citizens view health care as a basic human right."



## Tung Nguyen

*"Leadership is applicable to all facets of our life: a competency that we can learn to expand our perspective, set the context of a goal, understand the dynamic of human behavior and take the initiative to get to where we want to be. Through discovering who we are and our life's work, we develop the self-awareness and confidence required to lead."*

At the age of 14, Tung Nguyen left his family behind in Saigon, Vietnam, and emigrated to the United States. Despite the challenges of learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture, Nguyen earned a bachelor's degree in molecular biology at the University of Connecticut and started a career in medical research at the University of Connecticut Health Center (UCHC).

While working at the Center, Nguyen learned about public health, started taking non-degree courses, and eventually earned a master's degree in public health at UCHC. Prior to graduation, he was offered a position as an epidemiologist with the City of Hartford Department of Health and Human Services, a position he has held since 2001.

Nguyen is excited about what he does and what he has accomplished, yet he sees much more work to be done. "My hope is that, as a developed country, we will recognize who we are and unite, regardless of our skin colors, to provide much-needed leadership and become a strong model in eliminating all disparities."



## **Diann Pertillar**

*"My definition of leadership is the ability to use the gifts that God has given you to help and appreciate others. To me, leadership means 'leading by example.'"*

Diann Pertillar, an eligibility advocacy coordinator for Middletown's Community Health Center, Inc., is an enthusiastic, experienced, and highly capable community leader who believes in the power of partnership in helping to improve the health care system.

"I would like to find a way to use every conversation, meeting, hobby, skill and joy to help others," she says. Pertillar, who earned a human resource management certificate from Post University in Waterbury, also believes that churches should play a larger role in establishing a sense of community, and work with health, social and economic service agencies to improve public well-being.

As an active contributor to her community, Pertillar serves as charter president of the Middlesex Community Lions Club. Both the Lions and the Center have similar missions to help others, and their goals and objectives "mesh" nicely with her own. "Basically," says Pertillar, a proud wife, mother and grandmother, "I would like the opportunity to share my blessings."



## **Linda S. Smith**

*"In short, leadership entails that the individual be a thermostat -- one who sets the temperature or pace and what it is that will take place -- and not a thermometer, one who registers what the masses want and may not necessarily be good for reaching the defined goal."*

Linda S. Smith, who serves as the satellite manager/staff educator for the Bridgeport Community Health Center, is pursuing her passion—health education.

Smith, who earned a bachelor's degree in health education and a master's degree in community health education at Old Dominion University in Virginia, seeks to empower individuals, especially youth, by assisting them not only in gaining knowledge, but also in applying newly acquired information.

By doing so, she bridges the gap between knowledge and wisdom.

As for her ambitions for the community and the world at large, Smith says, "My hopes for the future are many, but the one which prevails overall is my desire that those who are less fortunate and not considered 'desirable' will have a healthy and productive life."



## **Michael A. Smith**

*“Leadership is the ability to identify a course of action that enables others to contribute to a process with the ultimate goal of bringing the organization’s plans to fruition. Without integrity, compassion, and a willingness to work harder than those around you, it is impossible to be an effective leader.”*

As a public health laboratory research specialist for the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH), Michael A. Smith hopes to continue to make positive contributions to the public health of Connecticut’s residents.

Following several years service with the U.S. Army, Smith earned a bachelor’s degree in microbiology from Pennsylvania State University and a doctorate in molecular biology from Yale University.

Through experiences like the Leadership Fellows Program, Michael Smith hopes to gain greater perspective on the problems confronting varied communities. He believes that only through strong leadership will these problems be resolved.

Smith lives in Meriden with his wife, Jennifer, and two children, Zoe and Caleb.



## **Gerardo Sorkin**

*"Leadership is a process that encompasses a clear vision and conviction, a few resources and enough creativity to put these elements together. It also requires the ability to take risks while processing feedback provided by the context."*

The theme of betterment, both on a personal level and on a community level is central to the work of Gerardo Sorkin, director of Behavioral Health Outpatient Services at United Community and Family services in Norwich.

The father of twins notes: "I believe that we are active participants in the creation of our own destiny, and that we can create a healthier world for our children," he says. He also believes strongly in respecting, understanding, and honoring all of our differences so that the world is a place where everyone feels safe and welcomed.

Sorkin, who graduated from Argentina's Universidad Nacional de Cordoba with a bachelor's and master's degrees in psychology and earned a master's degree in social work from Yeshiva University in New York, hopes that the Leadership Fellows Program will help him develop the skills and knowledge base necessary to work more effectively to better the lives of those who are in need.



## **Deborah Thomas-Sims**

*"Leadership is a journey of striving for excellence. Leadership means to me: you have to be a hard worker, faithful to the dream, and a motivator. You need to have the ability to listen, to follow, and to be compassionate."*

A lifelong resident of Bridgeport, Deborah Thomas-Sims has devoted her life to public service. In her professional career, she serves as the executive director of the Charles D. Smith, Jr. Foundation/Education Center and has dedicated her life to improving the quality of life for Bridgeport residents and their families.

Thomas-Sims has developed successful partnerships with the faith-based and business communities. She designed several award winning programs for the Education Center, which received national recognition.

Thomas-Sims, who earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, is currently the vice-chairperson of the Bridgeport Housing Authority and a board member of the Prayer Tabernacle's Love Christian Academy.

Deborah Thomas-Sims lives in Connecticut's largest city, Bridgeport, with her husband, Vaughn Sims, Sr., and their two children, AiMeé and Vaughn.



## Jacqueline Torres

*"The point where you can honestly say you are a true leader is when others can always remember who or where it was when they received their first stepping stone to greatness."*

Jacqueline Torres, statewide project coordinator for the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, is an activist who works on behalf of communities of color especially in relation to public policy, legislation, and advocacy.

As a Latina, she is diligent about ensuring that her community is not shortchanged due to language barriers, cultural beliefs, and diversity issues. She believes strongly in educating and empowering this community about civil rights, human rights, and social justice, to better enable them to protect themselves.

Torres, who earned a bachelor's degree in theology and is pursuing a master's degree in family counseling at the Latin University of Theology of the State of California in Bridgeport, hopes to run for public office so that she can address the needs of racially and ethnically diverse communities.





## Richard Torres

*"Leadership is a human quality that is defined as one's selfless desire to impact other human beings, in a positive, ethical and humble manner."*

South Bronx, New York native Richard Torres realized at a young age that health care in impoverished communities was inadequate in numerous ways. Experiences early in his life molded his professional dreams to provide quality, culturally sensitive healthcare in an urban community.

Torres, who is the chief medical officer at the Bridgeport Community Health Center, arrived in Connecticut in 1986 as a National Health Service Corps Scholar. In addition to serving the health center over the past 19 years, Torres also serves as a clinical assistant professor at the Yale University School of Medicine. He also worked for the City of Bridgeport Health Department and collaborated with the Connecticut Department of Public Health, where he wrote the seminal work, *The State of AIDS in Latinos in Connecticut*.

Torres was a health fellow at Harvard University and earned a bachelor's degree in biology from Fordham University, a medical degree from Boston University and a master's degree in public health from Southern Connecticut State University.



## Kari White

*"Leadership is the guidance offered to a project or movement. It does not dominate a group, but rather provides the group with coherence, voice and strength for action. It is not the workings of a sole individual, but the result of a dynamic process."*

Kari White is a research associate at the Yale University Department of Epidemiology and Public Health. She currently works on a project to reduce the incidence of low birth weight babies and risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases among young minority women.

White works zealously toward improving equity in health care services and health outcomes for minority and underserved populations. Her future plans include working across the domains of medical practice, academic research and community organization to improve the health of immigrant populations.

White earned a master's degree in public health from Tulane University, a master's degree in Latin American Studies from the University of Arizona, and a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of New Mexico.

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