# Spreading HOPE

## HEALTHY OUTCOMES FROM POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

**Begin Again with HOPE**
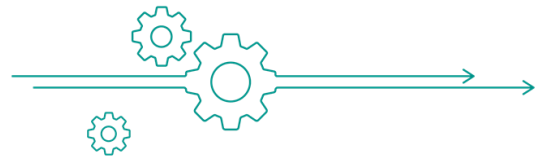*Corey Best*

### The First Annual HOPE Summit
*April 9, 2021, Afternoon Breakouts*

1. Begin Again with HOPE PowerPoint
2. Begin Again with HOPE handout

For more on HOPE, visit
https://positiveexperience.org/

# *Dear Leaders,

A resource of starting points for leaders in child welfare to bring family and community voice and power to the system.

ALIA + IDEO

# Thank you

This collaboration was led by the immense generosity, wisdom, and insight brought to our team by this stellar group of individuals —both lived experience advocates and local leaders. This work is the product of hours of conversation, feedback, and co -design with this team.



FRANCINE FENDERSON
ALABAMA

FRANCESCA LARUE
CALIFORNIA

TERA O'CONNOR
WISCONSIN

SHROUNDA SELIVANOFF
WASHINGTON

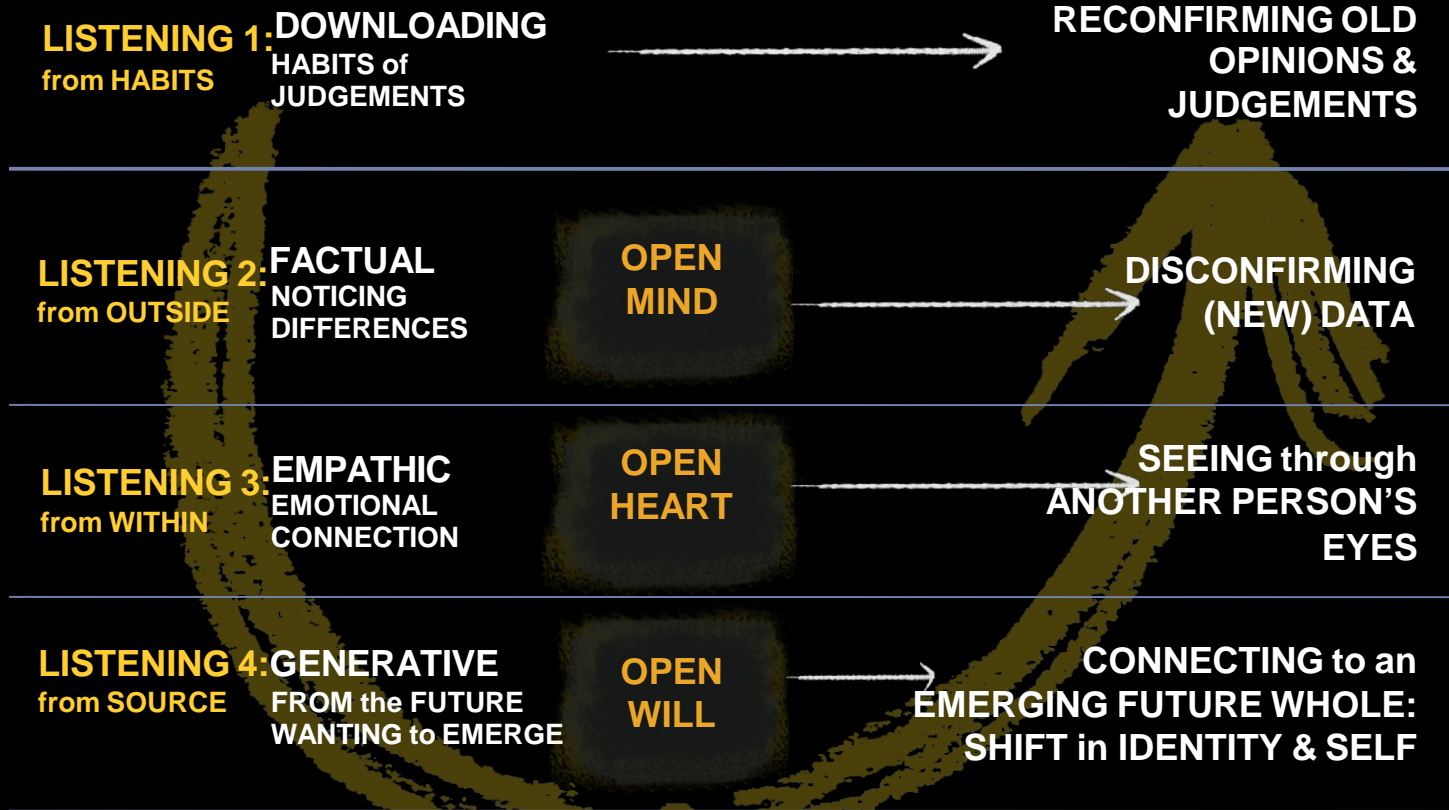SHENANDOAH CHEFALO
MICHIGAN

MARGARET MUNNS
WISCONSIN

COREY BEST
FLORIDA

LEXIE GRUBER
WASHINGTON D.C.

# Levels of Listening

**LISTENING 1:** **DOWNLOADING**
from HABITS    HABITS of JUDGEMENTS     →     **RECONFIRMING OLD OPINIONS & JUDGEMENTS**

**LISTENING 2:** **FACTUAL**
from OUTSIDE    NOTICING DIFFERENCES    **OPEN MIND** →  **DISCONFIRMING (NEW) DATA**

**LISTENING 3:** **EMPATHIC**
from WITHIN    EMOTIONAL CONNECTION    **OPEN HEART** → **SEEING through ANOTHER PERSON'S EYES**

**LISTENING 4:** **GENERATIVE**
from SOURCE    FROM the FUTURE WANTING to EMERGE    **OPEN WILL** →  **CONNECTING to an EMERGING FUTURE WHOLE: SHIFT in IDENTITY & SELF**

# Downloading
Past patterns

# Performing
By operating from the whole

## Suspending
### Seeing
Looking at it openly

## Open mind

## Embodying
### Prototyping
Linking head, heart and hand

## Redirecting
### Leren aanvoelen
From the 'field'

## Open hart

## Enacting
### Crystallizing
Vision and intention

## Letting go

## Open will

## Letting come

# Presencing
Connecting to the source
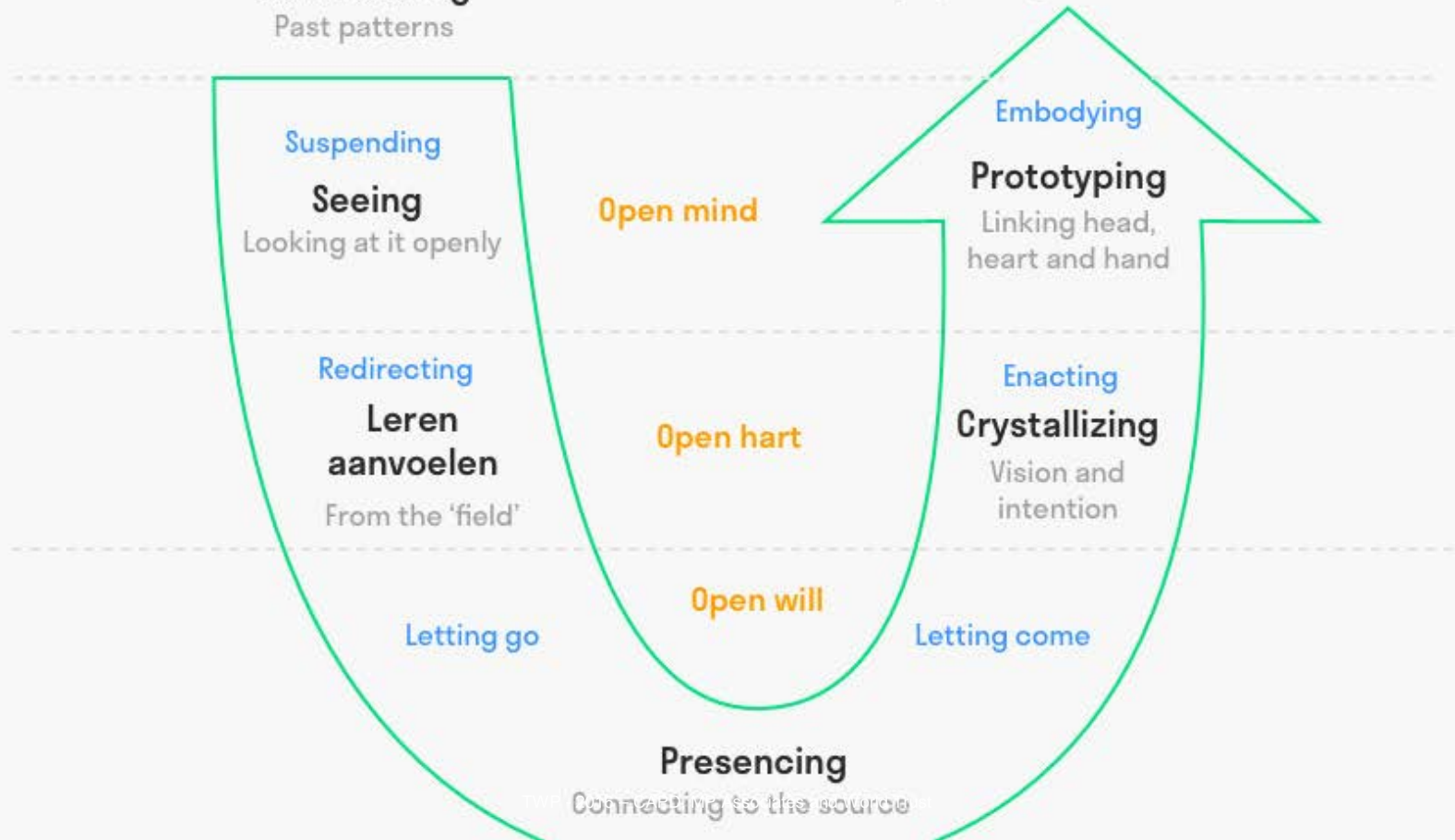
# A History of Race and Racism in the United States

Expanding a
New Nation

The Jim
Crow Era

1607-1776

1863-1877

1964-present

1776-1863

1877-1963

Race in the
Colonies

Reconstruction

Civil Rights:
Successes &
Setbacks
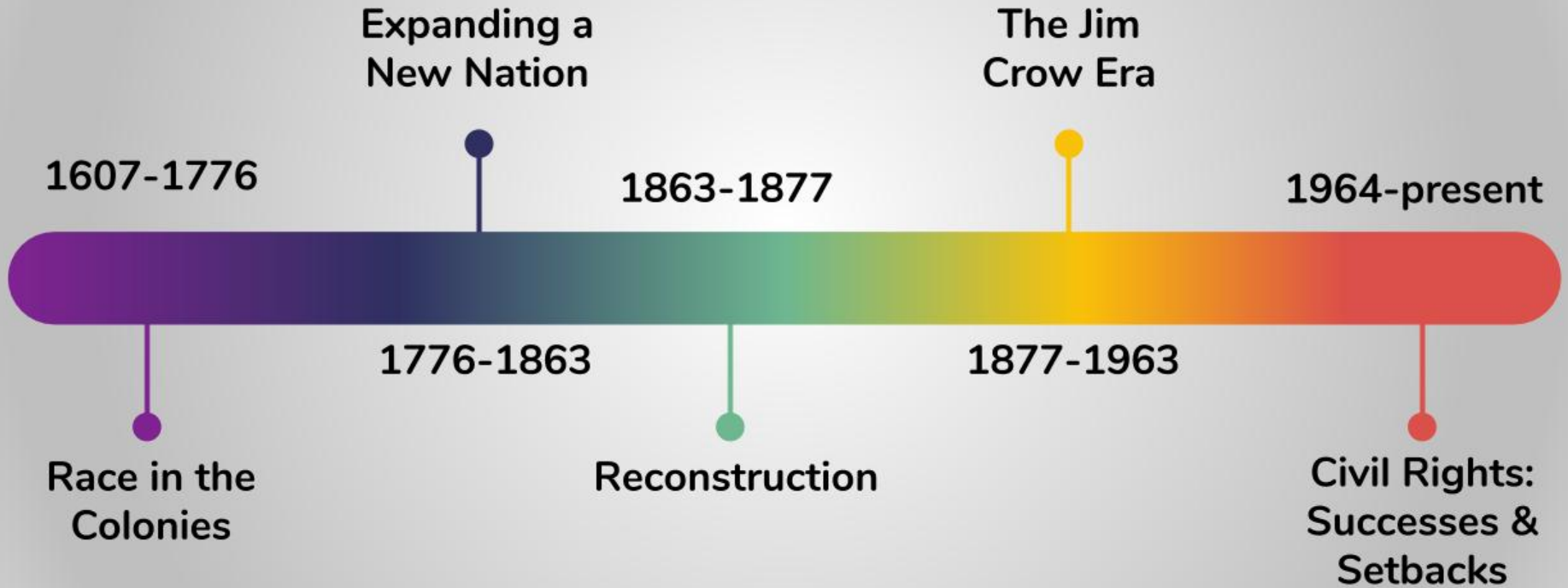
HISTORY

INTERNAL

EXTERNAL

Bias

Privilege

Internalized Racism

POWER AND ECONOMICS

Interpersonal

Institutional

Structural

CULTURE          IDENTITY
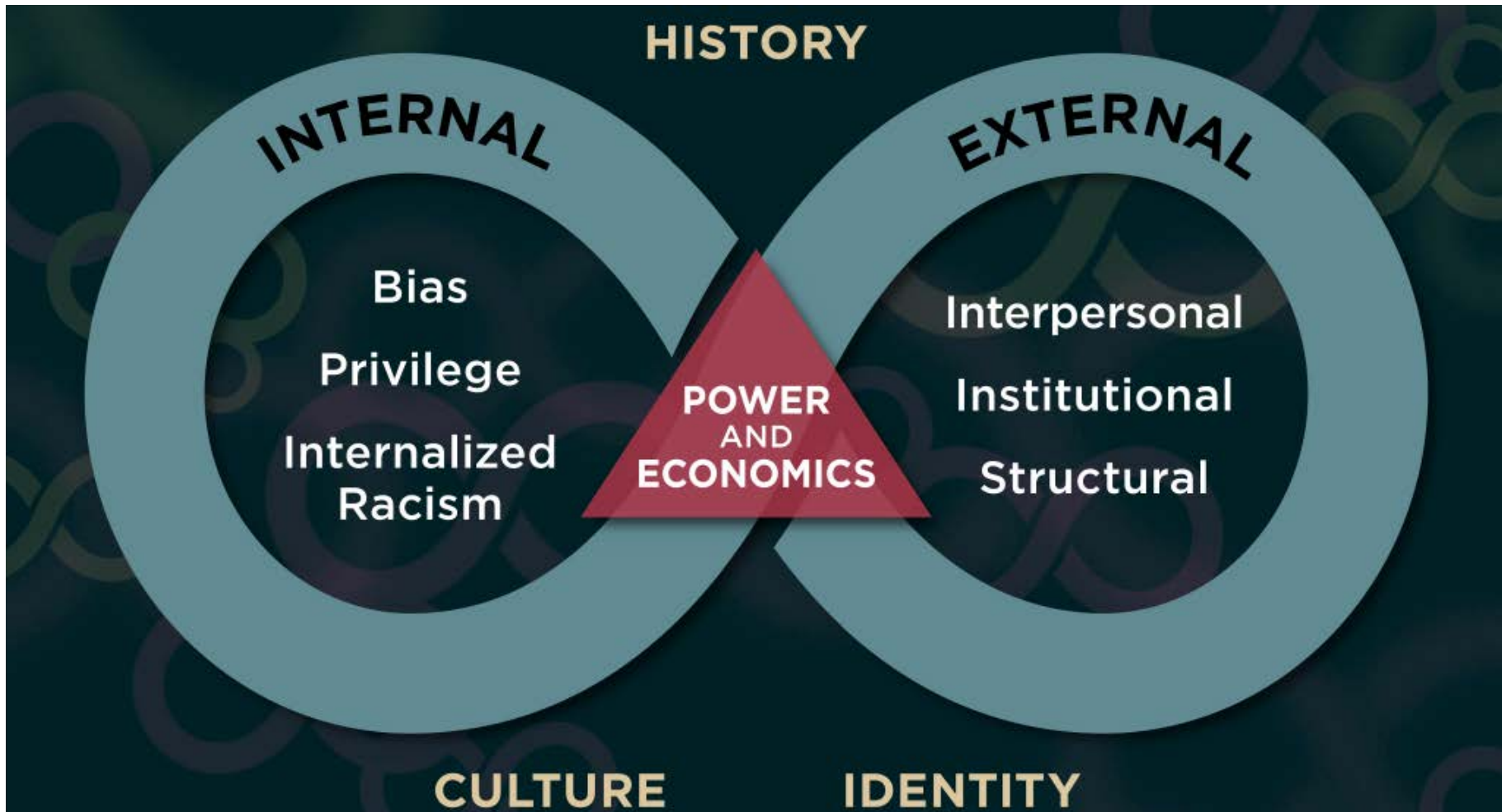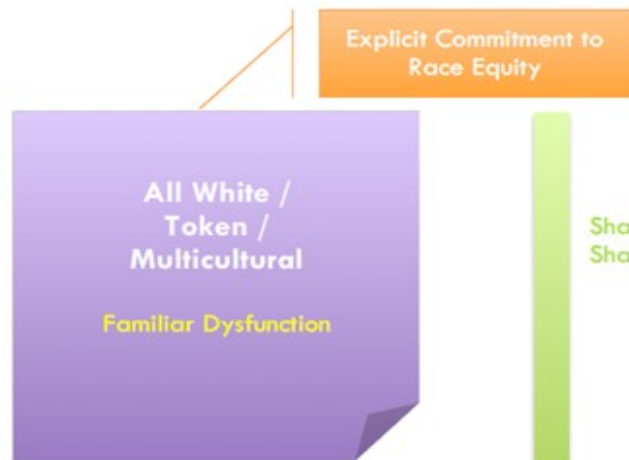
**PREDICTABLE PHASES OF EQUITY WORK**

Explicit Commitment to Race Equity

All White / Token / Multicultural

Familiar Dysfunction

Shared Language
Shared Framework

Culture Shift Begins

Unfamiliar Dysfunction

Not Knowing

Frustration / Fear
High Desire for Clarity
and Quick Fix

Relational Trust

Explicit Equity Goals Clarified

Cultural / Institutional / Personal

Equity Practice

Appreciation for Complexity
Ongoing Learning and Reflection

# Framing for this document (Sketch)

Child welfare agencies cannot meaningfully collaborate with families because they don't trust the system. Trust is a relationship challenge, not a process challenge. Task lists do not solve a relationship challenges.

There could be this-isn't-for-everyone "caution" or "warning." In order for this to work for you, you must already believe that, for example, (the best?) solutions lie with those closest to the challenge, that you know that you could not and should not do this alone, that you recognize your staff are the healers, etc., some kind of before you get started list of questions or prerequisites.

How might we share in the burden and the pain? (Of the trauma we've caused and of white supremacy culture marginalizing people groups)
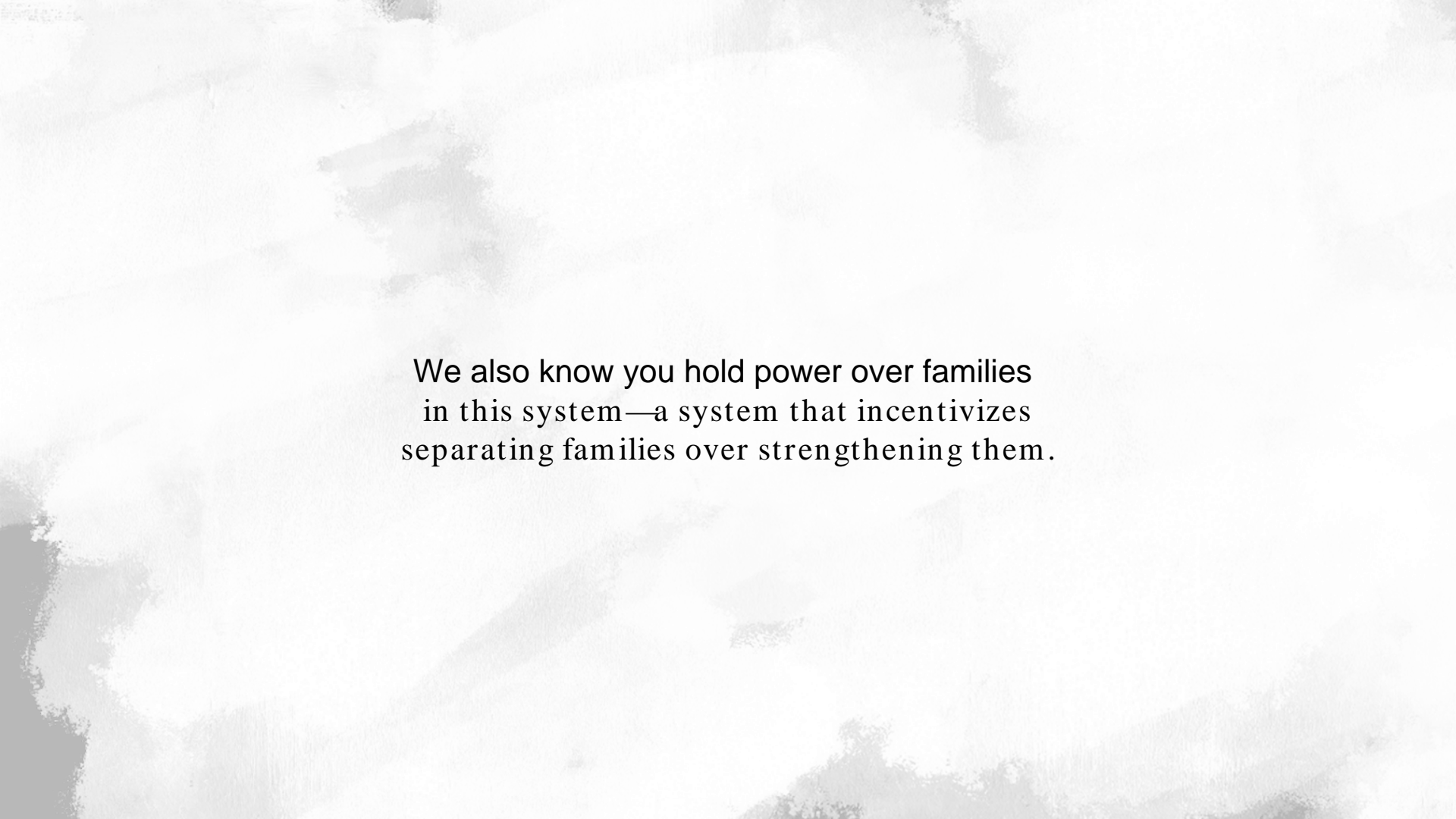
## Our Vision : The Future is Us

A morning breeze from an open balcony
The relief of sitting down after standing for a long time
It feels like visiting the sweet, old school nurse
Deep conversation with someone who gets you
Saturday pancakes and no schedule, unhurried
Going to a friend's house to share what is happening in my life
A priceless moment
A child lovingly looking at their parents
Belonging, warm honey, my community
A meal so full of flavor you must ask "what did you put in this"
Awe.
Healing, truth, the golden time of day
Every person met with a loving prospect of unlimited possibilities

Dear Leaders,
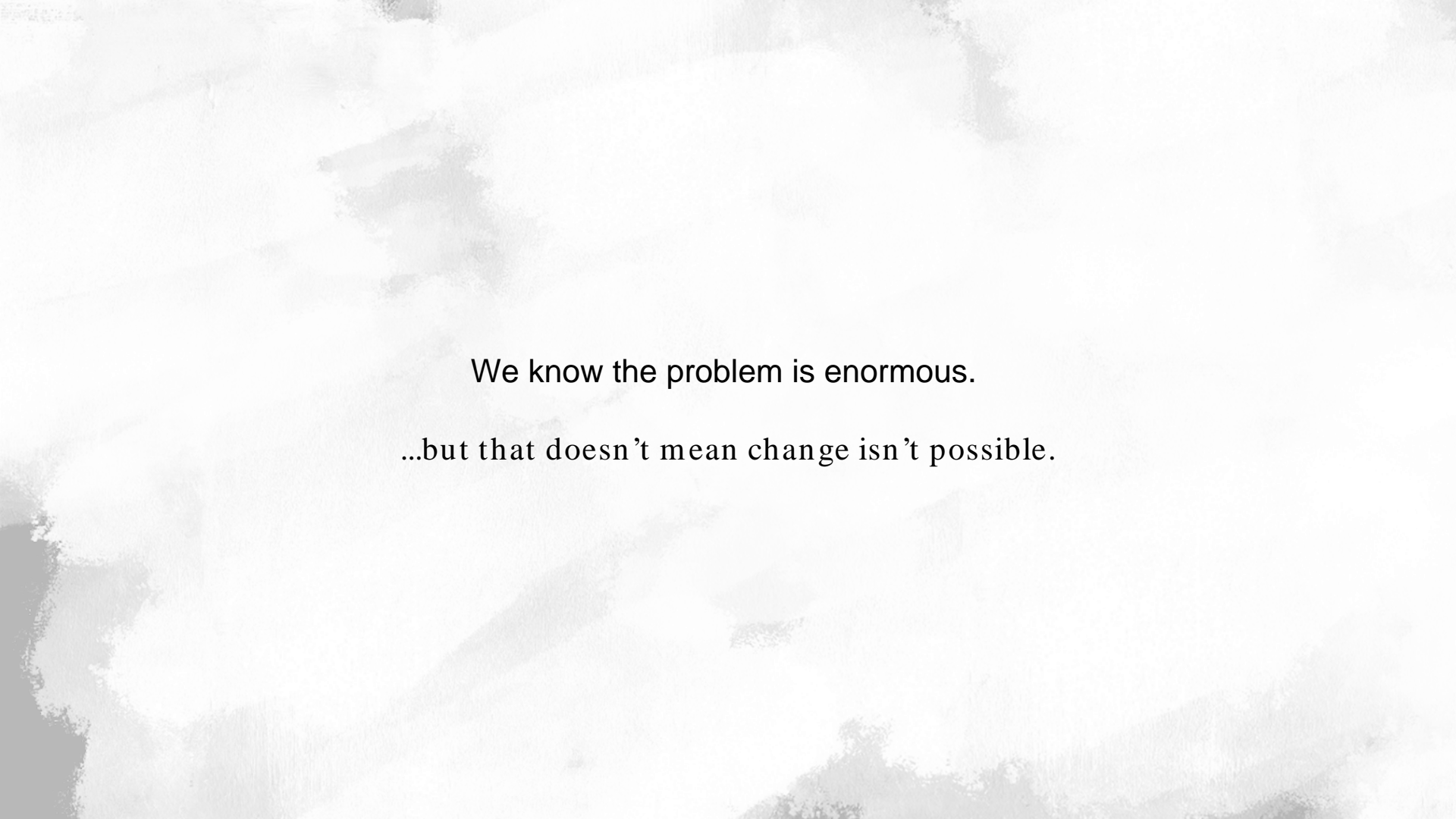
We're so glad you're here.

We know you share our
intention of working closely
with families, and designing
<u>with</u> them.

We also know you hold power over families
in this system—a system that incentivizes
separating families over strengthening them.

This dynamic makes it difficult to build
relationships with families that are respectful,
transparent, and non-tokenizing.

Building these relationships requires
resources, a shared foundation of trust, and
new ways of thinking that butt up against the
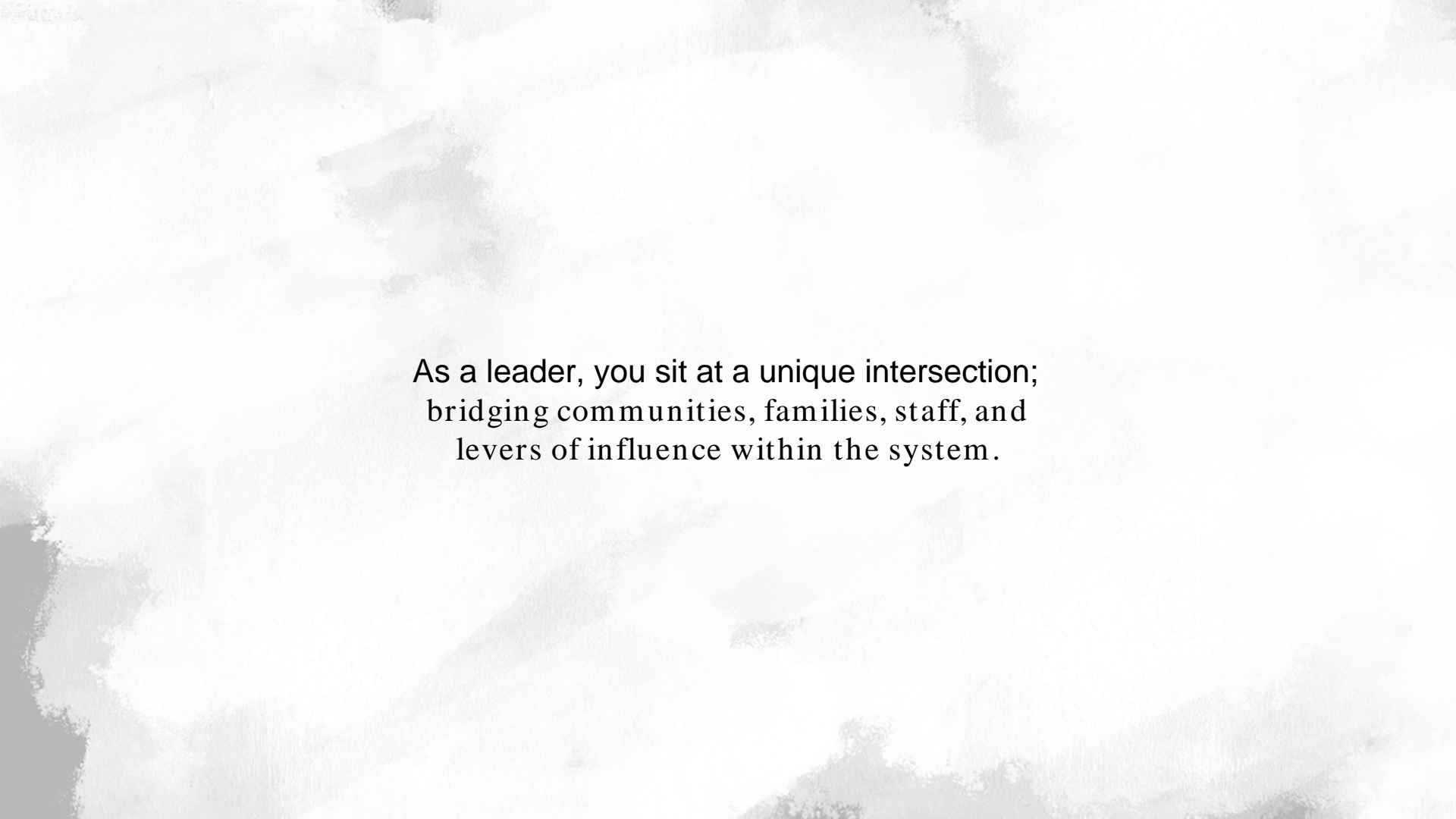very purpose of this system's inception.

We know the problem is enormous.

...but that doesn't mean change isn't possible.
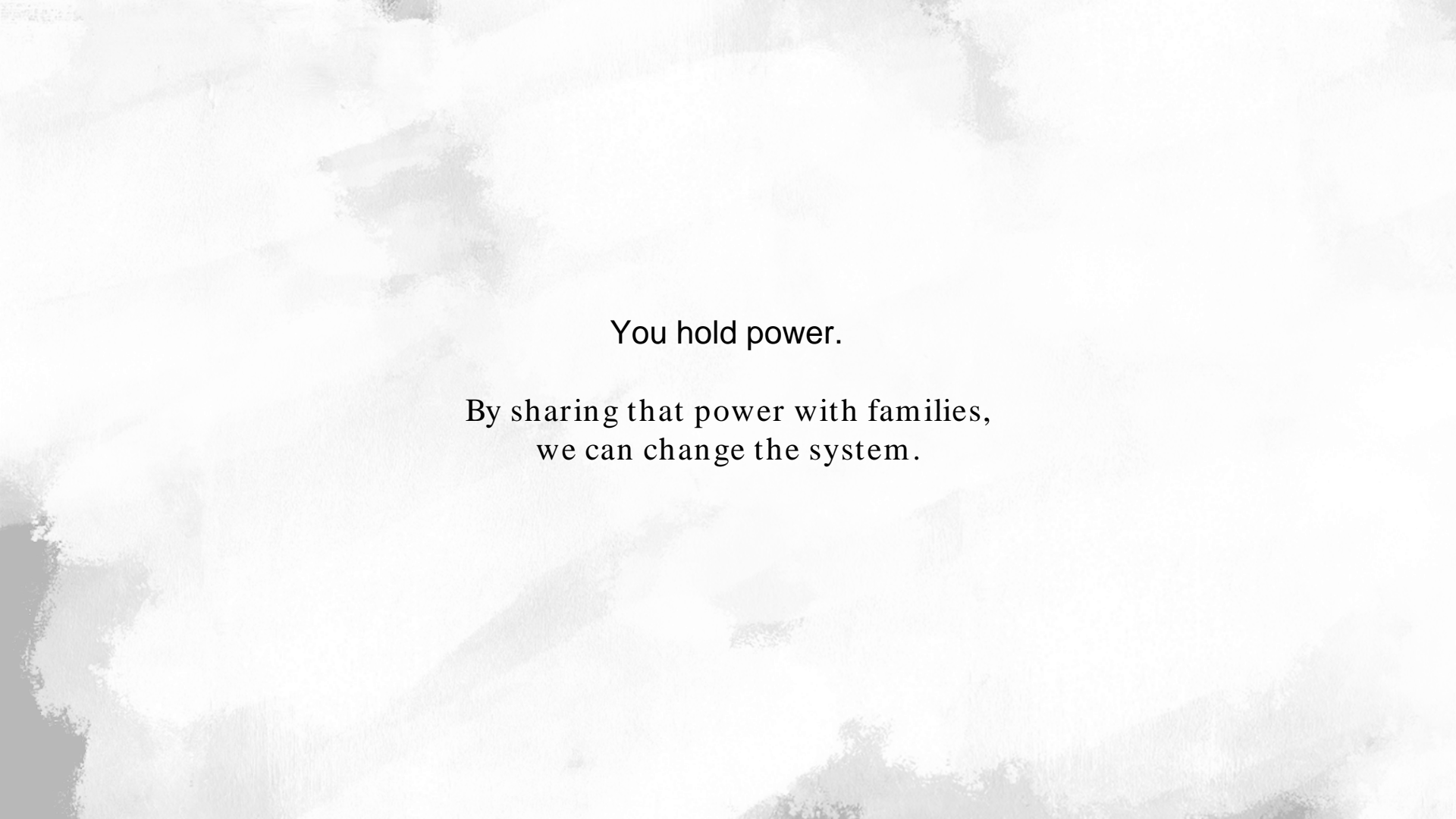
"Like all systems, systems of oppression, inequality, and inequity are by design. Therefore, they can be redesigned."

Antionette Carroll

As a leader, you sit at a unique intersection;
bridging communities, families, staff, and
levers of influence within the system.

You hold power.

By sharing that power with families,
we can change the system.

We recognize change can't happen overnight…

but we do know change start with small steps.

As a leader it's not about having the answers.

It's having the courage to bring people together to
move towards the discovery of what's possible
and believing a different future is possible.

Our communities depend on it.
Our families depend on it.
Our children depend on it.

The most important thing is to  <u>begin</u>.

# Where do we begin?

Shifting systems begins with shifting the _mindsets_ and _behaviors_ of the people working within the system. To authentically engage, build trusted relationships, and design with families, these five _principles_ should guide this shift.

CONTEXT

COMPASSION

CHANGE

CONSISTENCY

COLLABORATION

# Anatomy of content (What this is) (Sitemap)

| Principles | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Focus Areas

Current State
Where are we now?

Future State
Where do we want to go?

Starting Point
How do we get started?
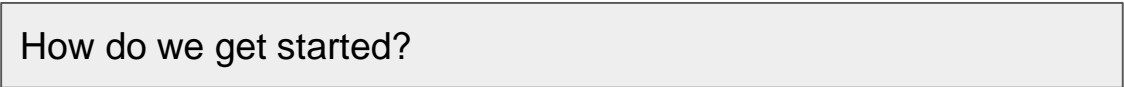
You can go through these one by one, you can pick just one principle that resonates the most with you and go deep in that area, or you can pick a focus area and jump straight to the worksheets.

CONTEXT

"We must be aware of child welfare's history of what we've done to Black and Brown families."

"We're asking individuals to be included to be in a space that has already been designed for predominantly white leaders and institutions."

"We tell the story, and make them [families] the problem… *'We are saving children from bad people'* This is the narrative. "

"It's hard to be in relationship with people when you think they're a threat… anytime a relationship starts from a place of threat… your kids are the carrot."

# CONTEXT

This work does not exist in isolation. Contextual leadership reckons with the histories of harm and trauma perpetuated by the system while simultaneously building toward reimagined futures.

*Dear Leaders,*
Are you actively making a commitment to offer    truth & reconciliation  ?

# CONTEXT

**Truth and reconciliation** requires leaning into this work from a place of humility and acknowledgement of harm done. It means reflecting on your role in the system, and using that as a starting point for change.

## As leaders we begin by...

Identifying and deepening our understanding of interpersonal, institutional, and cultural biases that currently exist in the system

Resourcing our organization with anti-racism resources and learning opportunities specific to the child welfare space

Beginning meetings with communities with an **apology** for the harm perpetuated by the system

COMPASSION

"We can have the best laid plans. If you are not well, it is tough to execute."

"No one is taking care of themselves [...] and then the families mimic that. It becomes really entangled. You can't tell the difference between parents and the staff. They begin to mimic each other so much."

"[Community organizations said] 'We always come to you. No one comes to us... We have never been given a voice'"

"If you don't have staff that's well, you won't' have families or communities that are well."

# COMPASSION

Compassion leads with putting people first. Compassionate leaders model trauma-informed and healing-informed behaviors with themselves and their staff, and treat children and their parents with the dignity and respect that every family deserves.

*Dear Leaders,*
Are you actively making a commitment to prioritize psychological safety and wellbeing ?

# COMPASSION

**Prioritizing psychological safety and wellbeing** means iterating on engagement internally and externally to support the human and emotional needs of yourself, your staff, and the families you engage.

## As leaders we begin by...

FOCUS AREA 1

Expanding learning opportunities for trauma - informed and healing - informed practices with families

FOCUS AREA 2

Supporting staff and families on their psychological safety and wellbeing

FOCUS AREA 3

Modeling asset - based language, rather than deficit - based language when referring to families

CHANGE

"We can only take people to as far as we've come"

"I walked in knowing that I had to say sorry and apologize for the many years of how we [the department] had shown up in a bad way. The community needed to hear me say it and then see me prove it."

"If you think you are right you are already wrong."

"You need to be willing to do the work and not just collect your paycheck"

"If its not part of your discussion to even consider your own role in causing harm… then that's a problem."

# CHANGE

Systems change begins with the change embodied by individuals. Change-oriented leaders reflect on the power they hold as individuals and the areas they need to grow to nurture their teams and their community.

*Dear Leaders,*

Are you actively making a commitment to  growth & self - transformation  ?

# CHANGE

**Growth & self -transformation** embraces that you are on a journey, and this work will require personal and professional development in ways you may not have anticipated.

## As leaders we begin by...

FOCUS AREA 1

Receiving feedback on our leadership growth areas directly from people impacted by the system

FOCUS AREA 2

Vulnerably reflecting on how we are minimizing violence and harm in the system or playing a role in perpetuating it

FOCUS AREA 3

Analyzing existing data from the families we serve to improve design of future engagements

# How do we begin?

# Understanding your role and the power you have
Some resources that exist to help you:

- Liberatory Design Guide : Notic[e]
- ECCD All that power activity



## What to NOTICE

- **Identity:** Who am I/we? Who are our users?
- **Power:** How are we respectively situated (relative to opportunity, institutional power)?
- **Context:** What is our situation, our equity challenges?
- **Partnership:** Given the above, how can we create a partnership that is liberating for all in the process?
- **Intention:** ... So that what we design generates increased equity

# How to begin?
Change starts with asking ourselves the right questions.

✱ Reflect on the current state
- Work with our community (*staff and/or families* ) to take stock of where we are
  How are we doing in regards to the previously mentioned focus areas? • How are we currently modeling these mindsets and behaviors?

✱ Design a future vision
- Work with our community to vision where we are headed
  How will we interact differently with families? • What should the experience feel like? • What values will drive the impact we hope to create?

✱ Co-create a starting point
- Work with our community to identify a tangible first step
  How will we see this through? • Who must be involved? • How are we holding ourselves accountable?

Work with our community to take stock of where we are

To Build HOPE with Communities and Families!

What actions are we currently taking to prioritize this?

What might need to change in order to make this a priority?

What must we keep doing?

What must we stop doing?

What's our biggest roadblock?
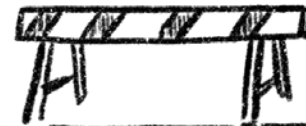
# B) Design a future vision

Work with our community to vision where we are headed

[insert focus area here]  *e.g. Reflecting with staff and families on their psychological safety and wellbeing*

It feels _____

It sounds _____

It smells _____

It tastes _____

It looks _____

We commit to _____

In the future, families and staff will describe this as _____ , _____ , and _____ .

This will strengthen our organization by _____ _____ .

and strengthen families by _____ _____ .

# C) Co-create a starting point

Work with our community to identify a tangible first step

[insert focus area here]   *e.g. Reflecting with staff and families on their psychological safety and wellbeing*

What is a small first step we will take to get there?

How will we know if we're making progress?

Who needs to make this their priority?

How are we held accountable to this?
Who is holding us accountable?

When are our next two touchpoints?

*What Parents Say About...*

# Building a 21st Century Community-Based Approach to Strengthening Families

> ❝
> *It takes strong families to make a community of hope.*
>
> Jeremiah Donier, Parent and Family Consultant, Washington
> ❞

**CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND Alliance™**

**Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)**

Children's Trust Fund Alliance was formerly known as the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds. The Alliance is partnering with Casey Family Programs to support the BPNN.

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## Introduction

The Birth Parent National Network (BPNN) and the Casey Family Programs Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC) are the authors of this issue brief. As members of the BPAC and BPNN, we are dedicated parent advocates. We share our lived experiences and perspectives with national, state and community leaders to transform the child welfare system and to raise awareness about the need for increased prevention strategies and resources for families before serious problems occur. In developing this publication and in other areas of our work, we benefit from the support of the Children's Trust Fund Alliance (formerly known as the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds) and Casey Family Programs.

In this issue brief, we are focusing on strategies that can significantly improve the child welfare system as it currently relates to families and activities that promote earlier and more preventative supports for families. We hope it will be read and that our recommendations will be implemented by national, state and community leaders, service providers and other key stakeholders. We see that the best outcomes occur when parents are viewed as strong partners who can make important contributions to the work with their own and other families. We encourage you to ask yourself and your colleagues the following questions and to consider your own and your organization's approach in relating to parents:

- How do you currently view and authentically partner with parents?
- Are you considering our strengths and what we have to offer or are you intent on rescuing us and fixing our problems?
- How does your system draw on parental strengths and possible contributions?
- Does your organization have an anti-racist agenda and standards of practice?
- What has your organization done to dismantle racism?

Anti-racism is an active process of identifying and challenging racism, by changing systems, organizational structures, policies and practices and attitudes, to redistribute power in an equitable manner (*Key Equity Terms & Concepts: A Glossary for Shared Understanding*, Center for the Study of Social Policy, September 2019). Undoing racism relates to moving beyond addressing the symptoms of racism and undoing the causes of racism so as to create a more just and equitable society (*www.pisab.org/about-us*).

" *Consider a family in a car accident versus a family living in a car. Both are in crisis. Why are they treated differently? Be a kind responder, not just a concerned reporter.*

Jeremiah Donier, Parent and Family Consultant, Washington "

Currently, many of us and other parents are working with systems leaders and policymakers to consider creation of a 21st century child welfare system where child protection services partners with community-based prevention strategies to help ensure that all families have access to needed resources and supports. One vision being discussed for a 21st Century child welfare system is that it will be transformed into a family well-being system that prevents child harm by working in partnership with children, families, communities and agencies, to assure all families have the capacity to care for their children, and all children thrive in safe, stable and nurturing families and environments (*Building a 21st Century Child Welfare System*, March Convening Issue Brief, Casey Family Programs, 4/15/19 and *What Is a Population-Based Approach to Child Welfare*, Transforming Child Welfare Systems Issue Brief, Casey Family Programs, updated 10/2019). Federal and state policy, including the Family First Prevention Services Act and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, will be important tools to leverage as systems are transformed. We believe that to ensure success, this system would need to use a public health approach. This helps expand the focus beyond individual behavior and considers relationships and communities and the society in which families live.

We believe this is timely and important work and hope it will guide how communities, public and private agencies and parents will work together to support families. In this issue brief, we share our perspectives on:

① Suggested ways that service providers, local leaders and stakeholders can begin to partner with parents and view them with a strengths-based lens.

② Recommendations for how parents, service providers, communities and local leaders can work together to build and implement a 21st century child welfare/child well-being system that includes community-based prevention programs and resources.

③ The importance of access to resources and supports to ensure well-being for ALL children and families using a socio-ecological and public health approach.

① **Suggested ways that service providers, local leaders and stakeholders can begin to partner with parents and view them with a strengths-based lens.**

We strongly value the importance of meaningful and authentic partnerships between parents and service providers, local leaders and stakeholders. These partnerships require genuine commitment from all of us and a belief that we as parents have strengths based on our life experiences. It is important that every relationship begins with identifying our strengths and helping us build on those strengths to create the kind of homes we want to provide for our children.

We hope that in the future, it will be common practice for leaders, service providers, child welfare workers and other stakeholders to respond to families' requests and needs in a way that builds trust and strengthens the capacity of parents. As parents, we want to feel comfortable calling a service provider and being able to ask questions when needed. For example, one of us might have a question relating to our child's limited use of words and wonder whether this is typical of the child's developmental stage or something we should worry about? We are asking for help in fulfilling our role as providers and caretakers for our children. We are not asking for you to fix our problems but to help us identify what is best for our family. We want YOU to help US help our children in the best way possible.

If you are a service provider, a child welfare worker, a systems leader or a mid-level supervisor we need for you to ensure there is a safe space that allows us to give you relevant personal information without fear that this information will later be used against us. We want to know that what is written about us in reports and notes is not a weapon but a tool to better serve us. We also want front-line workers, supervisors and administrators to have the supports you need to help us deal with our sometimes very complex life situations. We need your help in creating a system that is compassionate and helps families access services and supports

whenever needed. We need to know you are a team player, not only with your colleagues but with us and our families as well. We may not always agree and sometimes our roles of learner and supporter may be reversed.

Our hope is that families are, ultimately, connected to appropriate resources through the prevention system and that we are able to prevent families from becoming involved with the child welfare system. Please be the person who gives us real hope, not because you have all the answers but because you help us believe in ourselves. We challenge you to join with those who already focus their work on building relationships with families, being dependable and identifying strengths. As a service provider, always ask yourself, how have I worked in partnership with this family and supported them to reach their full potential? As a leader, ask yourself how have I partnered with family members to be sure our policies and practices reflect what will be most successful in my community or state. We, as parents need to be supported and guided in our journeys to address challenges that led us to reach out for support. Later, we want opportunities to use our life experiences to give back to the communities and agencies that helped us grow and change.

We are working to expand the recognition that supportive communities can help build strong families willing and able to ask for help. We must join together to change public perceptions regarding families. We are recommending that systems create opportunities for parents to work in partnership with community service providers, systems leaders (including child welfare leaders) and other key stakeholders to promote a culture shift where asking for help is normalized and seen as a strength. We have seen how powerful it is when parents and service providers work with community, state and national leaders to build a public perspective that values families and the importance of supporting their growth, including extended family, friends and other supportive individuals. When we all work together, we can change public attitudes and build support for this approach.

❷ **Recommendations for how parents, service providers, communities and local leaders can work together to build and implement a 21st century child welfare/ child well-being system that includes community-based prevention programs and resources.**

Building supportive communities requires strong leadership, clear direction and the involvement of committed stakeholders. It is imperative we as parents are included as meaningful partners throughout this process. We are recommending that leaders collaborate with us and other parents to develop a plan to build and sustain the capacity of our communities and systems in providing needed resources. We encourage a particular emphasis on building linkages between child protection systems and prevention programs and strategies. We believe an inclusive community effort will help ensure that all necessary resources are available to meet the needs of families as early as possible. This will require cross systems collaborations, open communication, innovative funding strategies and a willingness to work with us and other parents to think outside the box.

This new system, using a public health approach, includes strategies for individual work with parents, supports for staff in systems and agencies, practices in systems and communities and broader societal changes as described below:

### *Strategies for individual work with parents/caregivers*

- Trusting, authentic relationships with families
- Judgment free prevention services and supports (e.g. without bias, non-punitive, etc.)
- Safe space where we can share and ask for help
- Timelines and plans that are individualized and based on family needs and rates of progress

> *As parents the hardest thing in the world to face is not being able to meet the needs of our children and having to ask for help. We go back and forth in our thinking – should I pick up the phone and ask for help? Will you judge me for asking? Are you going to call child protective services? All we want to do is provide for our children.*
>
> Kimberly Mays, Parent and Social Services Worker, Washington State Office of Public Defense

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- Access to services and other resources when we most need them, with little or no wait times or other barriers
- Reflective listening where we are feeling heard and supported
- Help in identifying family strengths and building protective factors to support long-term well-being

## Supports for staff in systems or agencies

- Training and easy access for staff to learn about the community-based prevention system, including such services as in-home based services, substance abuse prevention and treatment, mental health services, family resource centers and peer support programs
- Training and supports for staff related to engaging with parents in meaningful partnerships in all areas
- Training and supports for staff in helping parents build protective factors and to identify and build on strengths in a culturally respectful approach

## Practices in systems and communities

- Policies and practices that promote racially and culturally equitable communities
- Information-sharing across agencies and systems while maintaining confidentiality
- Inclusion of parents in decision-making bodies that address policies and practices
- Opportunities for parents with lived experiences to work as staff alongside peers and/or professionals.
- A structural framework for recruiting, screening, supporting and partnering with parents in formal ways related to planning, implementation, oversight and evaluation of programs and other strategies
- A strong network of community-based prevention supports available to families based on needs and interests

- Policies and leadership practices that will support new ways of working with families and with parents as partners in all areas
- A continuous quality improvement (CQI) process that ensures leaders and staff engage with parents to assess how service delivery and other agency activities can be improved
- A cross-systems approach where parents, communities and public and private agencies are communicating and working together
- Strong linkages between the child protection system and community-based prevention and family strengthening agencies and programs
- A view of parents as experts who are integral and critical to the system rather than resources just for vetting and feedback on policies, practices, documents, etc.

## Broader societal changes

- Stable or increased funding for effective racially equitable supports and services that will ensure more families' needs are met to keep them safe and strong
- Ongoing research to identify best approaches to minimize and eliminate bias-driven practices
- Deepen knowledge of race, racism and race equity and how historical conditions promote disparity in all systems
- Embrace difference

This way of work requires incorporating intentional processes to ensure racial awareness and equity are present in every aspect of prevention and other systems that provide supports and services to families of color. This includes, but is not limited to: leadership development, workforce training and cross collaborations. This would support communities in developing strengths-based preventative approaches that are racially and culturally humble while successfully partnering with families. An effective 21st century system ensures that the services available meet the cultural needs of families in every community.

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## Defining the Five Protective Factors

*Families are supported to build:*

### Parental Resilience

The ability to recover from difficult life experiences, and often to be strengthened by and even transformed by those experiences.

### Social Connections

The ability and opportunity to develop positive relationships that lessen stress and isolation and help to build a supportive network.

### Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development

The ability to exercise effective parenting strategies to guide and know what to expect as children develop in multiple domains (physical, cognitive, language and social and emotional).

### Concrete Support in Times of Need

Access to supports and services that reduces stress and helps to make families stronger.

### Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Family and child interactions that help children develop the ability to communicate clearly, recognize and regulate their emotions and establish and maintain relationships.

*ctfalliance.org/protective-factors*

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❸ **The importance of access to resources and supports to ensure well-being for ALL children and families using a socio-ecological and public health approach.**

As parents, we know children benefit from strong families and safe communities where their needs are met. Many children are growing up with these supports, but there are many who aren't. Any parent can have difficulties meeting their children's needs. All families can benefit from having strong protective factors. In our BPAC and BPNN work, we focus on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors framework – a research-informed, strengths-based approach that promotes the well-being of all families by helping them identify and build their strengths through these five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social and Emotional Competence of Children

When we are unable to provide for our child's concrete basic needs (e.g., food, clothing, housing, medical care, education, etc.) or their social and emotional needs, it is critical that the community and the broader society help fill these gaps. Often, when we have the security of having our concrete basic needs met, we can better focus on issues like higher education, employment and other important areas in our lives. For some of us, we are able to hold jobs because we receive support for child care costs and/ or because we had support with transportation or other needs.

We recommend that all families have access to resources in our communities to help us be strong and stable. We know that investing in families and communities today will help us achieve better outcomes, including long-term cost savings and other benefits. For example, when we reduce the number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), we save funds spent on health care

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> *As a young parent, I struggled with drug addiction and often arranged for my children to stay with relatives or friends. The child welfare system became involved in my family when I got into legal trouble. I had to go to court and faced the possibility of a 30-year prison sentence. Despite all of this, my social worker believed in me and saw some strengths that I did not see in myself. He came to my court hearing and advocated for a lesser sentence for me, pointing out that it would be more beneficial for me to continue with substance abuse treatment instead of going to prison. I believe his support led the judge to give me a second chance. My social worker made a big difference in my life – he gave me the hope to move forward. Today, I am strongly committed to being a good parent, and am helping to raise my grandchildren. I work with other parents to give them hope and help them recognize their own strengths – just like my social worker did for me. I hope that everyone who works with families will stand beside parents in hard times to help them overcome the rough spots and move forward with their support.*

Toni Miner, Parent, Family Support Partner, Facilitator for Circle of Parents, Colorado

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costs in later life (About Adverse Childhood Experiences, *cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/aboutace.html*).

We reviewed research-based recommendations from leading national organizations, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) *Essentials for Childhood*, which is intended to help guide community activities that will support safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for children and families (*Essentials for Childhood: Creating Safe, Stable and Nurturing Environments for All Children*, *cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/essentials-for-childhood-framework508.pdf*). We believe that this and other strengths-based approaches will lead to the healthy and positive development of children and families. Families are the heart of communities and we as parents help guide and nurture our children to help them reach their full potential. It is important that national, state, community leaders, service providers and other stakeholders understand that positive outcomes are achieved through access to community-based resources within supportive environments.

The successful public health approach to creating positive change requires addressing issues at all levels of the social ecology – individuals, relationships, communities, and the broader society. We, as parents raising our children, are also members of our communities and we are impacted by the policies and practices of our states and the federal government. We are supported daily by our personal relationships with others and those in our community. These reflect the four components that make up the social-ecological framework. One example of using the socio-ecological framework (see definition on page 2) to achieve positive changes for families and communities is found in the Alliance's work in understanding how to build healthy communities and prevent child neglect. The Alliance reviewed the literature, conducted original research with many experts through key informant interviews and created multiple written resources, including a comprehensive theory of change. We reviewed the Alliance's theory of change on page 7, and made some additions and adaptations.

Across the top of the chart (in orange) on page 7, there are the four outcomes that reflect the four components of the social-ecological model: a humanitarian society, supportive and healthy communities, strong and stable families and safe and healthy children. In each area, we and the Alliance included indicators or strategies of what it takes to achieve these four positive outcomes at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels. We found that the Alliance's research-based strategies reflect many of our own life experiences and the positive outcomes listed align with our own hopes for our families and others.

As diverse parents in the BPAC and the BPNN, we have had the opportunity to hear from other parents about how their families are impacted by the kinds of resources and supports available in their communities. While our stories might be different, one thing is the same – we all love and want what is best for our children. We also realize the importance of relationships and the value of partnerships. We believe that everyone has a role in supporting families and creating safe and supportive environments for them and their children.

## Conclusion

Implementation of this new approach will be most successful when we and other parents are equal partners and involved in all decision-making relating to planning, development, implementation and evaluation of programs and strategies across the service continuum. To achieve an effective 21st century system, we need to lift up the work that incorporates this approach, and where needed, to shift our thinking and explore how we can best partner with each other in a respectful and authentic manner. We and other parents are important contributors to the growth of healthy communities and bring valuable information, resources, experiences and solutions. We are ready to partner with service providers, national, state and local leaders and systems to create supportive communities that include a comprehensive prevention approach.

# Creating Positive Changes for Families Using the Socio-Ecological Model

**GOAL**

## Building Healthy Families and Communities

**OUTCOMES**

| Humanitarian Society | → | Supportive and Healthy Communities | → | Strong and Stable Families | → | Safe and Healthy Children |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**PRECONDITIONS/ INDICATORS**

### SOCIETY

**Federal laws and public policies that**
- Redress child and family poverty
- Meet children's basic needs
- Increase supports of family policies (paid family leave, earned income credit, affordable health insurance that includes medical, dental, vision and mental health services)
- Support father involvement
- Develop partnerships with families
- Respect culturally diverse practices
- Promote universal approaches that target very young children and families
- Encourage comprehensive, integrative approaches

**Public will and social norms that**
- Encourage giving of ourselves to benefit those less fortunate
- Eliminate stigma associated with needing and asking for help
- Expect formal and informal leaders to "walk the talk"

**Federal and state financing that**
- Invest in cost-effective prevention efforts (child care vouchers, public health nurses, affordable housing and home loans)
- Fund strategies/programs that collectively meet the multi-dimensional needs of families
- Prioritize research funding (including neuroscience)

### COMMUNITY (Neighborhood)

**Strategies and methods that build and sustain**
- Available/accessible/affordable/quality
  - Food (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], Women, Infants, and Children [WIC], food banks, soup kitchens and places with free meals)
  - Housing (affordable housing and home loans, crisis shelters, for example, prevention of domestic violence)
  - Education (parenting classes, public libraries, public schools, community centers, clubs and after-school programs for children and youth, in-school counseling supports, public school special needs education, scholarships and sliding scale programs for parents and children)
  - Child care (universal child care, playgrounds/play areas/play centers, crisis and respite child care for family emergencies, child care information and referrals)
  - Transportation (public transportation, reduced fares, public transit vouchers)
  - Health care (low cost medical clinics, behavioral health treatment, free prevention-based health screenings, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous support groups)
  - Job opportunities (Job Employment Services, Job Development Services)
  - Social supports (mentors for young/new parents, peer support groups [birth, foster, kinship parents separate or together], Circle of Parents, parent allies/partners, family resource centers, faith-based community supports)
- Safe, stable and nurturing environment
- Parent participation in local endeavors
- Community culture of collaboration
- Concrete supports in times of need (referrals to housing, utility bills, medical care or medical equipment assistance, thrift stores, clothing banks and clothing vouchers, food banks, family resource centers)
- Linkages to quality services when needed
- Culturally specific services and supports
- Research-based services selection to enhance child and family well-being

### FAMILY (Relationships)

**Strategies and methods that build and sustain**
- Strong families
- Healthy partner relationship
- Nurturing and attachment
- Fathers' involvement
- Social connections (extended family, friends, neighbors, faith-based community supports)
- Family's ability to provide basic needs for children
- Parents as key decision-makers in their own families

### INDIVIDUAL (Parent/Caregiver)

**Strategies and methods that build and sustain**
- Physical, emotional and economic well-being
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Parental resilience
- Social and emotional competence of children
- Parent's ability to obtain assistance if needed
- Peer support groups
- Parenting classes
- Crisis and respite care

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## About the Birth Parent Advisory Committee (BPAC)

The **Birth Parent Advisory Committee** (BPAC) is a select group of parents from across the country that have a range of expertise and personal experiences within the child welfare system. They serve as strategic partners with Casey Family Programs and the Alliance. The BPAC members serve in a variety of leadership roles such as parent mentors, policy advocates, grassroots organizers and organizational administrators. They utilize their advocacy skills to ensure that the voices of parents are heard in the development of policies and practices that affect families.

## About the Birth Parent National Network (BPNN)

The **Birth Parent National Network** (BPNN), is a national platform for birth parents to work in partnership with organizations and policymakers to share their life experiences and make recommendations to improve policies and practices that impact children and families. The goal of the BPNN is to strengthen and support families and improve outcomes for families at risk or involved with the child welfare system. Our growing network includes hundreds of parent and organizational members. If you wish to make a difference locally, in your state or at the national level, join the BPNN. To learn more about this dynamic national network visit the BPNN website:

*ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn*

To join the BPNN, submit your membership application to:
*ctfalliance.org/partnering-with-parents/bpnn*

For questions, please email us at *info@ctfalliance.org*



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