

**Families are the Solution**  
Co-designing with Parents Changes Everything

Rock County Human Services | Alia  
April 25, 2024

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**We have tried to reform & transform the system**

... but something has been missing

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**The people closest to the problem, are closest to the solution.**

--Glenn E. Martin

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**The power of co-design**

**SYSTEM PREPARATION**  
The preparation of leaders to share power and become trusted partners.

**DESIGN NEWS WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER**

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZING**  
The coordination of efforts carried out by local residents to promote the interests of their community.

Reconcile past harm. Build trust one moment at a time.

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**What is co-design?**

- It is the pioneering of a **new way of working** — using Human Centered Design as a base, we **design new ways of work with families**, with an **equity-driven** approach.
- We are designing new ways of work where families have **real influence** on how services and interventions are designed and delivered.
- This is not an easy task. While families have often been asked to provide input, there is not a sustainable structure in place that creates meaningful pathways to influence structural change.

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**Preparing for Co-design**  
Systems side


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**Setting the Stage**

Vision for the Future

Workforce Wellbeing

Healthy Culture



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**Implementing a Staffing Strategy**




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**Shifting Mindsets**

- Trainings and workshops**
  - Impacts of out-of-home care
  - History and implications of systemic bias
  - Origins of mandated reporting tied to historical racism
- Deep dives to process**
- Expect discomfort**
- Data inquiry**
- Sharing data transparently about disparities**
- Paying attention to non-alignment of values and taking action**



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**Leadership Fortitude**

Rock County officials sued for 'defamatory' statements

Parents seek probe into turnover, leadership in Rock County's foster care system

Rock County Human Services chief disputes foster parent complaints, Gazette report

Rock County Human Services staffers field questions over child welfare administration



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**Preparing for Co-design**  
Community side



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Acknowledging  
Harm Done



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## Example of Reconciliation: Apology & Commitment to Action

**From Katherine Luster, Rock County Human Services Director...**

*I want to acknowledge that in our work through Child Protective Services we have failed at times to live up to our mission which means that we have failed you, your families and your children. On behalf of the Human Services Department and our current staff and behalf of those who served in those roles in the past, I want to say, I am sorry.*

- Our mission statement says that we build upon strengths, and for the examples where instead of building upon strengths we highlighted deficits and problems, I want to say, I am sorry.*
- Our mission statement says that we promote independence by providing quality services. For the times in which we failed to set families up for successful independence because we did not ensure that quality services were available, and from punitive parents for not progressing quickly enough, I am sorry. For times when we failed to listen to what you said you needed and instead made them based on our determination of what was best for you, I am sorry.*
- Our mission says that we demonstrate respect for the Dignity of all people served. For the times where instead of demonstrating a respect for your dignity actions were taken that were more of an assault on the Dignity of families and on the bonds between parents and children, I'm sorry. For the examples in which respect for dignity was overruled by personal and systemic biases toward Black families, I am sorry.*

*I acknowledge the harm done to you, your children and your families by practices that have not consistently served to keep families strong and connected.*

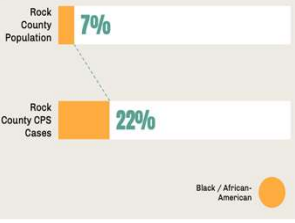
*I can't go back and undo the past, but I am here tonight making a commitment to use my role and influence in whatever way I can to help us do better. And in that spirit I invite you to hold me and the HSD accountable to make positive changes, hold us accountable to consistently meet our mission.*



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## The Data Behind Our Focus and Our Why


This project intentionally focused on Black parents and their experiences of the Rock County Child Protective Services (CPS) system. Data from the county shows that Black families are overrepresented in CPS investigations and family separations. While Black folks make up 7% of the Rock County population, they represent 22% of all CPS cases. The system's reach and harm disproportionately affects Black communities; as such, it was pertinent that this project centered and elevated their concerns from the outset. Prioritizing the needs and elevating the experiences of Black parents in Beloit — those most impacted by the system — is the most direct and equitable way to ensure all families feel seen, supported, and valued.



Rock County Population: 7%  
Rock County CPS Cases: 22%

Black / African-American


GUIDEBOOK / A new future for Beloit Families




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## Community Cultivator Role

A lived expert role is based on harnessing **who they are in life** — not what they've learned from a profession. When there is discomfort, it hits at the core.



Organizations need to understand this and set up the role in a way that illuminates the unique contribution of the individual while minimizing the places where would be sharp edges deeply felt.



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## Parent Engagement

**Rock Solid Community Equity Project**

**LOOKING FOR CHANGEMAKERS IN BELOIT!**

**Do you want to help create a future where all families can stay safely together?**

**Join this co-design initiative!**

Rock County Human Services is changing how it works with families. We are looking to partner with Black parents in Beloit to design new ways to support families safely together outside of the current child protective system.


**WE ARE SEEKING BLACK PARENTS IN BELOIT WHO:**

- Have had previous contact with Child Protective Services
- Have experience accessing or needing support for their families
- Have experienced mental health, substance use or basic needs challenges

**ABOUT THE CO-DESIGNER ROLE**

- Short term (about 10 weeks from Aug. - Oct 2023)
- Part time (average) 1-4 hours per week
- Expected participation Oct 10th - 21st (up to 10 hours)
- Up to \$1000 honorarium
- Virtual and in-person meetings
- Opportunity to learn new design skills
- Work with parents and Rock County staff

- See parents as valuable assets in creating change. Resource them accordingly!
- Cultivator connections and relationships are on the line. Move carefully!
- Bring parents in as their whole selves and ask the system to adapt. Not the other way around!



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## Co-designing with Parents





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## A NEW FUTURE FOR BELOIT FAMILIES

A call to action for Rock County systems change, created in partnership with Black parents in Beloit

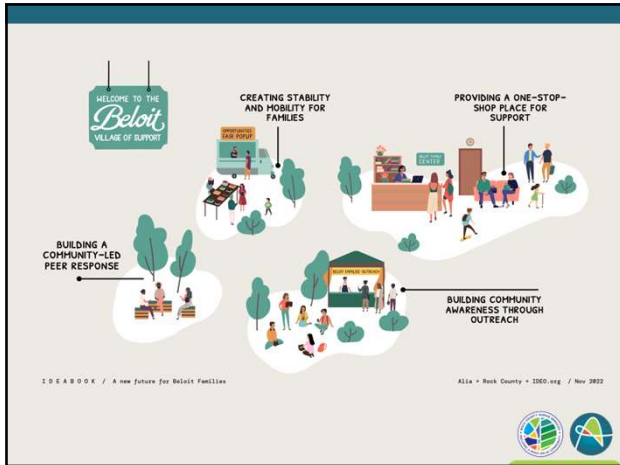
A project in collaboration with



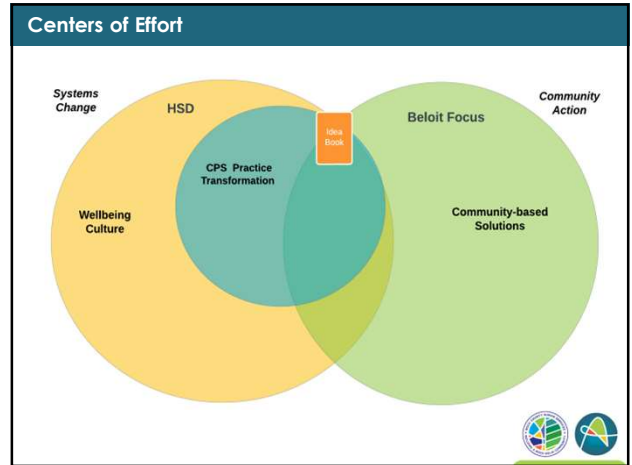
POWERED BY FAMILIES OF BELOIT



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73% drop in foster care placements

34% drop in residential placements

ROCK COUNTY HUMAN SERVICES  
BUILDING A ROCK SOLID COMMUNITY

IDEO.ORG

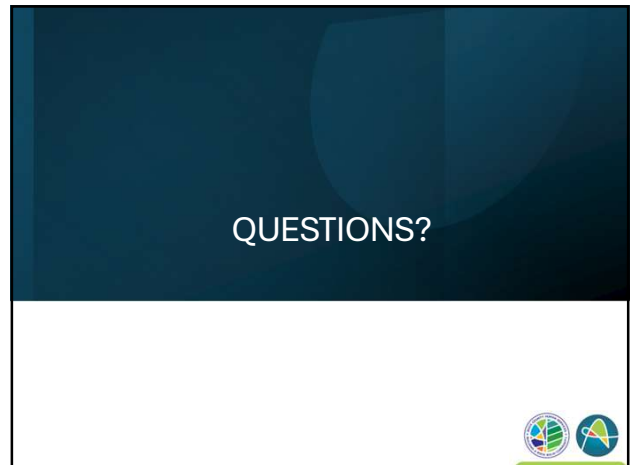
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Creating new solutions **WITH** families to reach our big vision

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**Stay in touch!**



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