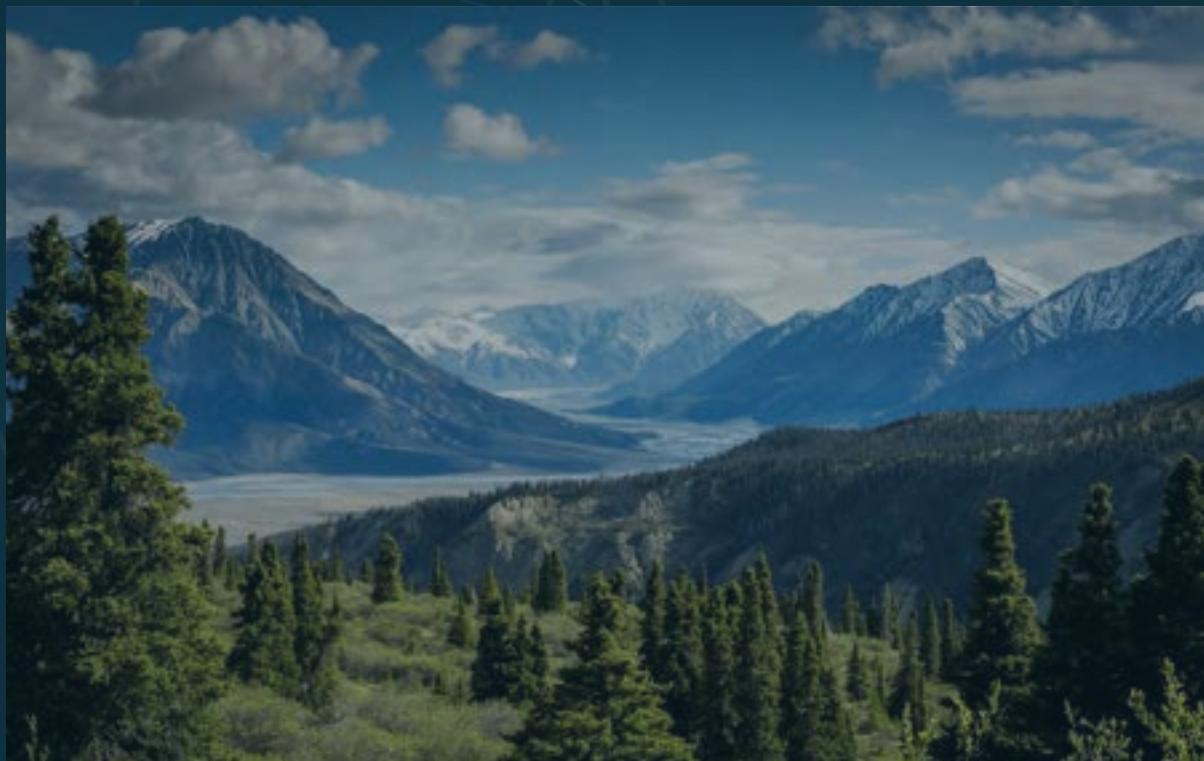




GLOBAL TRUE NORTH

*Year End 2025*

# Renaissance Magazine



Modernizing health & human services with a human-centered approach grounded in the Science of Hope.

VOL. 1 — ISSUE 1

DECEMBER 2025

PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATION



## BRAND OVERVIEW

# Driving Real Change Across Health & Human Services

*"To design, advocate for, and implement solutions that modernize systems while honoring dignity and improving outcomes for individuals and families."*

Global True North is a Public Benefit Corporation and transformation agency focused on a single, vital mission: modernizing the systems that support our nation's most vulnerable. We believe that by fostering innovative, human-centered strategies, we can create pathways for success that are accessible, responsive, and grounded in the Science of Hope.

**01****IMPACT DRIVEN**

As a Public Benefit Corporation, every initiative supports our goal of societal and environmental impact, prioritizing real outcomes over transactional outputs.

**02****EXPERT LEADERSHIP**

Our partners have served in periods of deep transformation. We are former HHS leaders invested in creating a better future through experience and empathy.

**03****SYSTEM MODERNIZATION**

Emphasis on comprehensive support structures: Strategy, delivery model transformation, culture, Human-Centered Design, and responsible AI/tech visioning.

## WHAT GUIDES US

**Human-Centered Design****Culture Modernization****Community Partnership****Outcomes-Driven Execution****Responsible Tech Visioning****Anchored in Science of Hope**



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2025 REFLECTION

# Editor's Letter

PUBLISHED BY GLOBAL TRUE NORTH

The turning of a year has always invited reflection.

For as long as I can remember, I've marked that moment with a letter, a post, or some other form of communication—something that takes stock of where we've been, what we've learned, and where we hope to go next. Those year-end reflections usually follow a familiar rhythm: progress made, goals ahead, and occasionally a few predictions about what the coming year might hold.

This year felt different.

Not because reflection felt less necessary, but because the pace and depth of change made a single letter feel insufficient. Across Health and Human Services the scale of technology modernization underway, the seriousness of cultural and workforce transformation required, and the stakes for children and families all suggest we are entering something more than another incremental chapter. We are standing at the edge of deep transformation, and the usual formats no longer seemed to fit the moment.

So instead of starting with a blank page, I did something asked my go-to AI tool to look back with me, to analyze conversations, projects, and questions that shaped this past year. I wanted to understand the patterns beneath the activity. The recurring ideas. The narratives that kept resurfacing whether we were talking about technology, leadership, culture, or outcomes.

What came back was not a list of accomplishments. It was a set of themes: persistent questions and convictions that have quietly guided the work all year long.

That is how this magazine came to be.

Rather than compressing a complex year into a single letter or a letter or a series of social posts, this felt like a moment to slow down and give each idea the space it deserved. A magazine format allowed for essays instead of soundbites, for soundbites, for narrative instead of summary, and for reflection that is meant to be read thoughtfully rather than skimmed.

***"If previous years were about describing where we were headed, this year is about naming where we already are. At the dawn of a renaissance."***

## The Editor

GLOBAL TRUE NORTH

This volume is a collection of works mined from a year's worth of conversations, meetings, projects and strategies that make up the grounding data. Each article was written as a collaboration between human authors and artificial intelligence. Shortcomings abound as the narratives are intended to build conversation not necessarily to answer questions.

Each piece in this issue represents one of those recurring threads.

It begins with *Leading With Love*, an anchor essay that reframes success away from transactional outputs and toward real outcomes for children and families. It continues with *Virtual Automated Pathways*, exploring how technology—grounded in hope, goals, and momentum—can scaffold lives rather than manage need. *Inside the System* brings those ideas to life through Zoe and Marianna, whose experiences reveal the space between policy and lived reality. *Rebuilding Government* examines how the way we buy and build technology shapes trust long before systems ever reach the public.

At the center of the issue is *The Dawn of a Renaissance*, a reflection on why this moment in Health and Human Services feels fundamentally different. For the first time in a long while, three forces are aligning at once: battle-tested leaders ready for real change, a maturing body of knowledge about trauma, hope, prevention, and the drivers of outcomes, and a technology revolution capable of supporting, not undermining, human systems. Individually, each of these has mattered before. Together, they mark an inflection point.

From there, the issue moves into *Child Welfare Reimagined*, applying these ideas to one of the most consequential systems we steward, and *KNOWN*, which explores culture as the operating system of human services, shaped by a Saturday morning conversation in early 2023 with a small group of HHS leaders who all named the same truth: systems cannot work well if people are not known inside them.

The issue closes with *The River*, a reminder that meaningful change rarely arrives through force or speed, but through persistence, alignment, and time.

This magazine is not a declaration of arrival. It is a record of orientation. It captures how the work has been taking shape beneath the surface and why the coming years will demand patience, discipline, and clarity of purpose more than bold promises.

I hope these essays invite the same reflection they required to write—and that they help frame not just what comes next, but how we choose to move into it.

2025 Year-End Reflection  
Reflection

## SECTION I

# Leading With Love

From transactional outputs to real outcomes

***“Love asks a harder question than compliance ever will: Did this help?”***

In public systems, we have become very counting things. We count applications cases closed, days to determination, and compliance with policy, statute, and track performance through dashboards and measuring activity with increasing precision.

And yet, despite all this counting, we often fail to answer the question that actually matters: Are children safer? Are families more stable? Are lives meaningfully better because the system intervened?

When that question goes unanswered, or worse, when the answer is unclear despite impressive operational performance, the failure is not technical. It is moral.

## THE COMFORT OF NEUTRAL SYSTEMS

Modern public systems take pride in neutrality. Neutral rules, neutral processes, neutral metrics. The language of efficiency and objectivity creates the appearance of fairness and control. It allows leaders to say with confidence, “The system did what it was designed to do.” But neutrality is not the same as care, and process integrity is not the same as human progress.

A system can be procedurally sound and still leave children unsafe and families no closer to stability than when they began. It can meet every statutory requirement and still fail to change the trajectory of a life. When systems are designed primarily to manage transactions such as forms submitted, determinations made, and cases closed, they slowly drift away from the outcomes they were meant to serve. The work becomes about movement through the system rather than movement in life.

## LEADING WITH LOVE

*Continued from previous page*

### OUTPUTS ARE NOT OUTCOMES

This distinction sits at the heart of nearly every failure in human services. Completing an application is not stability. Closing a case is not safety. Determining eligibility is not wellbeing. Meeting a metric is not the same as changing a child's life trajectory.

Outputs describe what the system did, while outcomes describe what happened to people. When those two diverge—when the system celebrates activity while families experience stagnation or harm—we have confused motion for progress.

The reason this happens is not difficult to understand. Outputs are easier to measure, easier to report, and easier to defend. Outcomes are slower, messier, and often inconvenient to administrative timelines and political cycles. Over time, systems naturally optimize for what can be counted rather than what truly counts. What begins as accountability quietly becomes distortion.

### LOVE AS A LEADERSHIP DISCIPLINE

To talk about love in public systems can make people uncomfortable. It can sound soft, unprofessional, or imprecise. But love, in this context, is not sentimentality. It is responsibility. Love asks a harder question: Did this help?

Leading with love means refusing to hide behind process when outcomes are poor. It means caring not just that the system functioned, but that it functioned for someone. Love demands outcomes. It insists that leaders remain oriented toward whether children are safer, whether families are more stable, and whether interventions created forward movement rather than simply resolving a transaction.

### TRUST IS BUILT ON LIVED RESULTS

Public trust is built not through dashboards or performance reports, but through lived experience. Families trust systems when they feel momentum, when each interaction builds on the last, when the path forward is clearer rather than more fragmented. They lose trust when the system declares success while their lives remain unchanged.

Trust grows when systems deliver continuity, clarity, and outcomes that matter in daily life. When systems focus primarily on transactional success, trust erodes quietly. People comply, but they do not believe. They participate, but they do not feel seen.

### THE MORAL COST OF TRANSACTIONAL SUCCESS

The most dangerous systems are not the ones that fail loudly, loudly, but the ones that succeed administratively while failing while failing humanly. A system can process every case on time on time and still produce churn. It can meet every requirement requirement and still destabilize families. It can close cases cases efficiently and still leave children at risk.

These failures rarely trigger alarms because, on paper, everything worked. Yet the moral cost accumulates—in in workforce exhaustion, in public disengagement, and in in outcomes that quietly worsen despite impressive operational performance.

### DESIGNING FOR OUTCOMES INSTEAD

Designing for outcomes requires a fundamentally different orientation. It means prioritizing stability over churn, continuity over episodic service, and long-term wellbeing over short term closure. It means measuring what changes in a family's life, not just what moves through the system.

This does not mean abandoning accountability. It means redefining it. True accountability asks whether the system made things better, not merely whether it followed the rules.

### THE COURAGE TO CHOOSE OUTCOMES OVER OPTICS

Choosing outcomes over outputs requires courage. It means resisting pressure to optimize solely for reports and audits. It means acknowledging that some of the most meaningful progress will not fit neatly into quarterly metrics. It means standing firm when the right thing for children and families is slower, more relational, and less immediately visible. Leadership has always required a willingness to absorb discomfort on behalf of others.

Leading with love does not lower the bar. It raises it. It insists that systems be judged not only by how well they operate, but by whether lives are genuinely improved. It treats children and families not as cases to be resolved, but as people whose futures matter. A system that leads with love does not ask, "Did we do our job?" It asks, "Did this help someone move forward?"

**SECTION II**

# Virtual Automated Pathways

## Scaffolding lives through hope, not managing need

**“What people need is not another portal. They need a path.”**

Most public systems were not designed to help people move forward in life. They were designed to answer questions. Are you eligible. Are you compliant. Did you submit the right form at the right time. Over time, we have mistaken the ability to answer these questions for progress itself. We built portals, workflows, and eligibility engines that are highly effective at processing information, yet remarkably poor at supporting human momentum. The result is a landscape of disconnected interactions that manage need in isolated moments but rarely support forward movement over time.

Portals are built for institutions, not for lives. They assume clarity where there is confusion, stability where there is disruption, and persistence where exhaustion is often the dominant condition. Each interaction resets context, requiring people to restate their story again and again as if nothing that came before mattered. Individually, each transaction may function exactly as designed. Taken together, however, the journey is fractured.

When systems treat each interaction as isolated, they unintentionally create churn. People fall off not because they are unwilling, but because continuity requires cognitive, emotional, and logistical energy that many simply do not have. The system rarely recognizes this as failure. It records a closed case and moves on.

A pathway is fundamentally different from a transaction. A transaction asks what someone needs right now. A pathway asks where someone is trying to go and how progress toward that goal can be supported over time. This distinction matters because human progress does not happen in isolated steps. It happens through continuity, reinforcement, and the belief that movement is possible.

Virtual Automated Pathways are built on a simple but powerful foundation: the Science of Hope. In this framework, hope is not an emotion. It is a structure. It is composed of having a clear sense of goals, understanding the pathways that can lead toward those goals, and possessing the willpower to continue even when obstacles arise. Most public systems unintentionally undermine all three. Goals are obscured behind program rules. Pathways are fragmented across agencies and requirements. Willpower is steadily drained through complexity, repetition, and uncertainty. Virtual Automated Pathways exist to restore what systems have quietly eroded.

Automation is often framed as replacement, replacing workers, judgment, or human interaction. That framing misses the deeper opportunity. The most powerful automation does not replace people. It holds the structure so people can move safely. Like scaffolding, it is temporary, supportive, and largely invisible. It exists to make progress possible without becoming the point itself.

One of the most limiting features of traditional public systems is that they they operate in isolation, program by program, eligibility by eligibility, rule by rule. Lives do not work that way. Families pursuing stability, stability, health, or long-term security rarely rely on a single source of support. Progress often requires a braided set of resources, some public, some public, some private, some community based, and some informal.

Virtual Automated Pathways are designed to recognize and support this reality. Instead of treating public benefits as the entirety of support, pathways intentionally braid public programs, private sector services, employer benefits, and philanthropic or community resources. All of these are aligned around the actual goals of the family rather than the administrative boundaries of institutions.

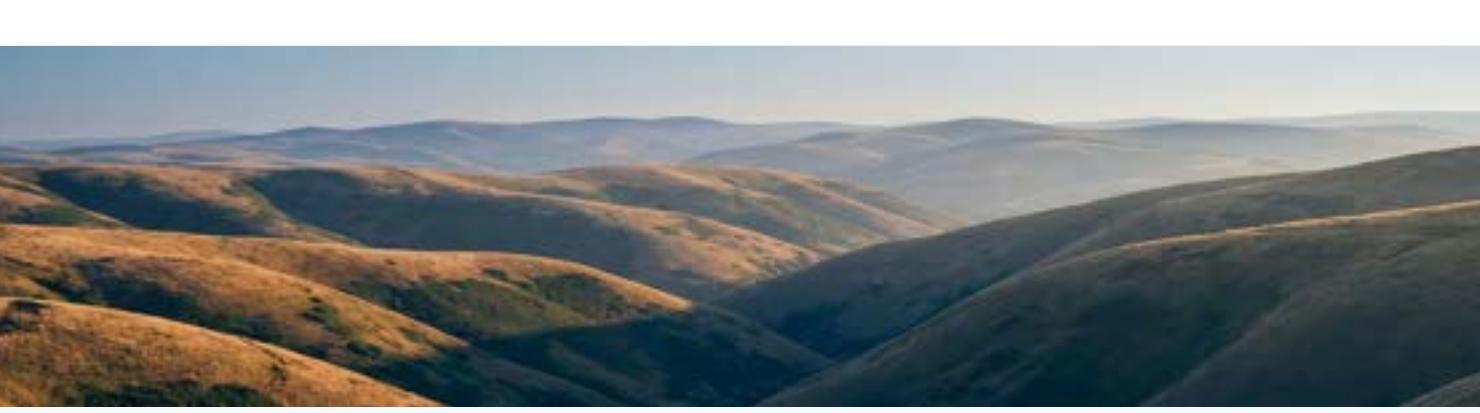
This approach is grounded in a simple understanding of human progression. Before families can pursue long term growth such as education, career advancement, or future planning, they must first have stability. Basic needs must be met before higher aspirations become realistic. Virtual Automated Pathways support this progression by aligning resources around stages of need, beginning with stabilization and security, moving toward safety and predictability, then belonging and support, and eventually opportunity and growth. Pathways do not force people to jump ahead. They recognize where someone is and help them move forward step by step.

This alignment turns abstract programs into practical support. It transforms systems from gatekeepers into guides.

The most meaningful technology does not announce itself. It does not demand attention or require people to learn how the system thinks. It does not ask families to become experts in policy. Instead, it quietly ensures that goals are clear, steps are understandable, support is coordinated, and progress feels possible. When Virtual Automated Pathways work, people rarely talk about the technology at all. They talk about the experience. They say they knew what they were working toward. They say they did not feel lost. They say they did not have to start over. Those are signals of hope restored.

Perhaps the greatest gift of this approach is not efficiency, but capacity. Capacity returned to families who no longer spend their limited energy navigating complexity. Capacity returned to workers who no longer compensate for system fragmentation. Capacity returned to leaders who can focus on outcomes instead of constant repair. When pathways carry structure, humans can carry care.

Success in this model is not measured by how many transactions were completed. It is measured by continuity and progress. Did people stay engaged longer. Did goals remain visible through setbacks. Did pathways adapt rather than collapse. Did families experience real forward movement. These questions are harder to answer, but they are the only ones that matter if the goal is lasting change.



### SECTION III

## Inside the System

### Zoe, Marianna, and the space between policy and life

*Public systems are often described in diagrams. Boxes and arrows, intake points, processes that flow cleanly and predictably on paper. These suggest order and control, a sense that complexity can be managed if it is carefully enough. But systems are not experienced in diagrams. They are moments, often small and fragile, by people who carry far more into the than the system ever sees.*

*Zoe and Marianna live in the space between policy and life. They have never met, yet they are bound to one another by the same system. Both depend on it, and both are constrained by it in different ways.*

#### ZOE

Zoe did not come into public service to process paperwork. She came to help. She believes deeply in the purpose of the work and sees her role not as transactional, but relational. She understands that families rarely encounter the system at their best moments, and she wants to meet them with dignity, patience, and clarity.

But Zoe's days are not shaped by intention. They are shaped by volume. Her screen fills with alerts, deadlines, compliance requirements, and fragmented systems that do not speak to one another. Each case is broken into tasks. Each task is tracked. Each interaction is bound by time. Zoe is evaluated on whether steps were completed, not on whether lives moved forward.

Much of her energy is spent compensating for gaps the system leaves behind. She explains rules she did not write. She collects information the system already has but cannot find. She apologizes for delays she cannot control. Zoe knows what families need. What she lacks is the capacity and the tools to deliver that help consistently.

Zoe is not burned out because she does not care. She is burned out because she cares deeply in a system that cannot hold that care.

#### MARIANNA

Marianna experiences the system very differently. She does not encounter it as a collection of programs. She experiences it as interruption. Her life is already full already full with work schedules, childcare responsibilities, transportation constraints, constraints, and the constant arithmetic of making limited resources stretch. When she reaches out for help, it is not out of curiosity. It is out of necessity.

Each interaction with the system requires Marianna to pause her life and step into its logic. She must remember passwords, decipher notices, and respond within timelines that do not account for emergencies, fatigue, or disruption. Every time the system resets, she resets with it. She is asked the same questions again and again, as if nothing before counted. When progress stalls, there is rarely explanation. There is silence, a letter, or a status change that means little without context.

Marianna does not disengage because she is unwilling. She disengages because persistence requires energy she no longer has. When the system closes her case, it calls that resolution. Marianna experiences it as abandonment.

**When systems succeed at that, policy becomes real. And hope stops being a theory.**

#### THE SPACE BETWEEN THEM

Zoe and Marianna are often portrayed as being on opposite sides of the system. In reality, they are trapped inside the same design. Zoe wants to help, but she is constrained by fragmentation and volume. Marianna wants to move forward, but she is constrained by complexity and repetition. Neither is the problem.

The space between them, made up of policies, platforms, metrics, and structures, is where friction accumulates. It is in this space that hope is quietly lost.

#### WHEN SYSTEMS DRAIN WILLPOWER

Every interaction with a system either builds or drains willpower. For Marianna, repeated restarts and unclear next steps slowly erode her belief that progress is possible. For Zoe, the inability to see long term outcomes erodes her belief that the work is making a difference. The system unintentionally drains both. It treats effort as infinite, assumes clarity where there is none, and mistakes compliance for care. Over time, both adapt not by thriving, but by surviving.

#### WHAT BETTER DESIGN WOULD CHANGE

A system designed for continuity would change the experience for both of them. Zoe would no longer spend her days compensating for disconnection. The system would preserve context, anticipate needs, and reduce unnecessary repetition. Her time could shift from navigation to judgment, from explanation to support. Marianna would no longer have to re-enter her life at every step. Goals would be clear. Progress would feel cumulative. Support from public programs, private resources, and community networks would align around where she is trying to go, not simply what program she last touched.

Neither would need to work harder. The system would work better.

#### HOPE IS NOT ABSTRACT

Hope is often discussed as if it lives entirely inside people. In reality, systems play a powerful role in shaping it. When goals are unclear, hope fades. When pathways are fragmented, hope collapses. When effort does not lead to progress, hope begins to feel irrational. Zoe and Marianna do not need motivation speeches. They need systems that make forward movement believable.

#### DESIGNING FOR THE PEOPLE WHO STAY

The quiet tragedy of many public systems is not who they fail loudly, but who they exhaust slowly. Zoe stays longer than she should, carrying emotional weight the system does not recognize. Marianna tries again more times than the system deserves. Designing for outcomes means honoring those who stay. It means building systems that support Zoe's humanity and Marianna's persistence, not by demanding more from them, but by asking more of the structures that sit between them.

#### THE MEASURE THAT MATTERS

A system should ultimately be judged by what it makes possible in the relationship between Zoe and Marianna. Does it allow trust to form? Does it preserve dignity under pressure? Does it create continuity instead of constant resets? Does it help both leave the interaction more whole than when they entered?



## SECTION IV

# Rebuilding Government

## How we buy, build, and trust technology

*When public systems fail people, the instinct is often to blame execution. The technology was poorly implemented. The vendor overpromised. The timeline was unrealistic. The workforce resisted change. Sometimes these explanations are accurate. More often, however, failure is built in much earlier, long before a line of code is written or a system ever goes live. The root of the problem usually begins with how government buys.*

### PROCUREMENT AS THE FIRST DESIGN DECISION

Procurement is not a technical step that sits downstream from design. It is the first design decision. The way government purchases technology determines what gets built, how adaptable it will be, and whether it can respond to real world complexity once it meets lived experience. Procurement choices shape behavior long before users ever touch a system.

Traditional procurement is optimized for certainty. It demands detailed requirements at the outset, fixed scopes, and long timelines. It assumes the problem is already fully understood and that the solution can be specified in advance. But human systems do not behave that way. Needs evolve. Policy changes. Context shifts. Families do not move through life according to flowcharts. When procurement locks systems into rigid assumptions, adaptability becomes impossible and workarounds become inevitable.

By the time technology reaches people like Zoe and Marianna, it is already constrained by decisions made years earlier, often in rooms far removed from lived experience. The system is asked to serve complexity with tools designed for predictability.

### THE MYTH OF RISK AVOIDANCE

Traditional procurement often claims to minimize risk. In practice, it tends to concentrate it. Large, monolithic contracts place enormous bets on untested assumptions. Once those bets are made, change becomes expensive. Course correction becomes politically and financially difficult. By the time problems are visible, the system is often too big to fail and too rigid to fix.

The irony is that the very mechanisms intended to protect public dollars frequently produce the most fragile outcomes. True risk reduction does not come from pretending certainty exists. It comes from from learning early and adjusting often.

### CO-CREATION IS NOT A WORKSHOP

Co creation has become a popular term in response to these failures, but it is often misunderstood. Too frequently, it is reduced to a workshop, a design sprint, or a listening session conducted after major decisions have already been made. That is not co creation. Real co creation is a posture. It is a commitment to building alongside the people who will use and live with the system, not just at the beginning, but throughout its life.

This posture requires procurement models that allow iteration, learning, and adjustment without penalty. It requires trust between public agencies and partners. It also requires humility, including the willingness to admit that understanding deepens over time. When co creation is real, systems are shaped by feedback rather than defended against it.

**Not because government worked harder.  
But because it worked differently.**

### INCREMENTAL BUILDS, REAL ACCOUNTABILITY

One of the most damaging assumptions in public technology is that systems must be fully formed before they are valuable. Incremental building challenges that belief. Instead of delivering everything at once, systems are built in usable pieces. Each piece is tested against reality. Each iteration reveals what works and what does not. Accountability becomes continuous rather than deferred.

This approach does not lower standards. It raises them. Progress is visible. Failure is smaller and earlier. Success is measured by whether the system improves life, not whether it met a static specification. For people like Zoe and Marianna, incremental systems mean fewer cliff edges and fewer all or nothing moments.

### TRANSPARENCY AS TRUST INFRASTRUCTURE

Trust is often discussed as a cultural issue, but it is also structural. Opaque systems, whether technical, contractual, or operational, create distance between decision makers and lived experience. When progress and problems are hidden, trust erodes quietly. Transparency changes that dynamic.

When states, partners, and stakeholders can see what is being built, how it is performing, and where it is struggling, trust becomes possible. Problems become shared challenges rather than reputational threats. Transparency does not eliminate risk. It distributes it more honestly.

### TECHNOLOGY AS A PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY

Public systems do not exist to demonstrate technical sophistication. They exist to support real lives. That responsibility does not end when a contract is signed. It extends through design, implementation, maintenance, and evolution. It requires partners who understand that success is not delivery, but durability.

Rebuilding government technology is not about faster tools or newer platforms. It is about aligning incentives with outcomes, structures with humanity, and decisions with lived reality.

### CHOOSING PARTNERS, NOT JUST VENDORS

The difference between a vendor and a partner is accountability. Vendors deliver what is asked. Partners stay when reality complicates the plan. Rebuilding government requires partners willing to share responsibility for outcomes, not just outputs. It requires partners who understand that trust is earned slowly and lost quickly. It requires partners who design for people like Zoe and Marianna, not just for procurement documents.

This kind of partnership is harder to procure, but far easier to live with.

### WHAT REBUILDING REALLY MEANS

Rebuilding government is not a rejection of rigor or accountability. It is a recommitment to purpose. It means acknowledging that how we buy shapes what we build and how people experience it. It means designing systems that can learn, adapt, and improve without starting over. It means treating trust as infrastructure rather than a byproduct.

When government gets this right, technology becomes quieter. Systems become more humane. People experience progress not as a promise, but as something tangible.



## SECTION V

# The Dawn of a Renaissance

## Why leadership, knowledge, and technology are finally aligned in HHS

*Renaissance is an overused word. It is often applied to moments that are simply new, louder, or faster than what came before. In that sense, it becomes shorthand for novelty rather than meaning. A true renaissance, however, is not defined by what is new. It is defined by convergence, by forces that have been developing independently over time finally coming together in a way that makes genuine transformation possible.*

*That is where Health and Human Services finds itself now.*

*What is emerging is not a single reform, a breakthrough policy, or a technological leap on its own. It is a moment shaped by three powerful elements aligning at once. Each of these elements has mattered before in isolation. Together, they signal something fundamentally different. This is the dawn of a renaissance.*

### BATTLE-TESTED LEADERS

For decades, leadership in Health and Human Services has been shaped by crisis. Leaders learned to manage scarcity, respond to emergencies, and hold systems together under extraordinary pressure. They navigated lawsuits, federal oversight, workforce shortages, political scrutiny, and deep public distrust, often simultaneously, while trying to protect children, families, and communities. This experience has left a mark, and that matters.

What distinguishes this moment is not the arrival of untested optimism, but the presence of leaders who have endured. These are leaders who understand the cost of poorly designed systems because they have lived with the consequences. They know that cosmetic reform is insufficient because they have watched it fail repeatedly. They are not chasing novelty for its own sake. They are seeking coherence.

This generation of leaders brings a rare combination of realism and resolve. There is a willingness to change systems not because transformation is fashionable, but because maintaining the status quo is no longer defensible. A renaissance requires this kind of leadership, leadership that is grounded, credible, and unwilling to confuse survival with success.

### A MATURING BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

At the same time, the field itself has grown wiser. There is now a deep and expanding body of knowledge about what actually shapes outcomes for children and families. Understanding has moved beyond narrow measures of program effectiveness toward a more integrated view of human experience.

We have learned about the lasting impact of trauma and chronic stress. We better understand the role of hope, belief, and agency in sustaining effort over time. We see more clearly how social, economic, and environmental conditions shape outcomes, and why prevention is often more powerful than late stage intervention. We have come to recognize the importance of continuity, relationship, and stability as foundational rather than supplemental.

**That is how renaissances begin. Not with a breakthrough, but with alignment. And that alignment is finally within reach.**

This knowledge did not appear suddenly. It has been building quietly for years through research, practice, and lived experience. What makes this moment different is that it is no longer peripheral. It is increasingly central to how leaders think about success. The questions themselves have changed. The focus is no longer only on whether the system acted, but on whether it helped. Not simply on whether rules were followed, but on whether life improved.

This shift provides both a moral and intellectual foundation for transformation. It gives leaders the language and evidence needed to move beyond transactional outputs and toward real outcomes. A renaissance requires not just energy or ambition, but understanding. That understanding now exists.

### A TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

Finally, technology has reached a turning point. For years, technology promised transformation but delivered complexity. Systems were digitized without being humanized. Processes were automated without being integrated. The result was often faster fragmentation rather than meaningful improvement. Instead of reducing burden, technology frequently added to it.

That dynamic is beginning to change. Advances in data integration, automation, and artificial intelligence now make it possible to build systems that preserve context, support continuity, and reduce cognitive burden. Technology can finally serve as infrastructure for coordination rather than as a barrier to it.

This does not mean technology is the answer. It means technology is no longer the constraint. When used with discipline and humility, it can scaffold progress rather than enforce compliance. It can support human judgment rather than replace it. It can help systems adapt to people, rather than forcing people to adapt to systems.

This technological shift does not drive the renaissance on its own. Without it, the other two elements would remain constrained by outdated tools and architectures. A renaissance requires new instruments. Those instruments now exist.

### WHY THE CONVERGENCE MATTERS

Each of these elements, leadership, knowledge, and technology, has appeared before in isolation. What makes this moment different is that they are present together. Leaders are ready to change. Understanding has matured to guide that change. Technology can now support it without undermining humanity.

This convergence creates a narrow but meaningful window. A renaissance is not guaranteed. It can still be rushed, diluted, or redirected toward convenience rather than purpose. But the conditions are present in a way they have not been before.

The dawn of a renaissance is not a declaration of victory. It is an invitation. It invites leaders to act with courage rather than caution alone. It invites systems to measure what matters rather than what is easy. It invites technology to serve quietly and faithfully.

Most of all, it invites a return to purpose. Health and Human Services exists to help people move forward in life. When leadership, knowledge, and technology align around that truth, renewal becomes possible. Not overnight. Not without resistance. But with intention, patience, and resolve.



## SECTION VI

# Child Welfare Reimagined

## From compliance systems to platforms of care

*Child welfare systems were never meant to feel the way they do today. They were created to protect children, strengthen families, and intervene when safety was genuinely at risk. They were intended to be instruments of care in moments of crisis, places where support could stabilize lives at their most vulnerable points. And yet, for many families and workers, child welfare has come to feel synonymous with surveillance, fear, and procedural exhaustion. This is not because the mission changed. It is because the systems designed to support that mission slowly lost their way.*

### WHEN PROTECTION BECOMES ADMINISTRATION

Over time, child welfare systems became defined less by outcomes for children and more by adherence to process. Documentation expanded. Reporting requirements multiplied. Technology hardened around compliance needs rather than human ones. Success came to mean that the right boxes were checked and the right timelines were met, not that the right outcomes were achieved.

The system could appear busy and rigorous while quietly drifting away from its purpose. Children experience disruption without continuity. Families experience intervention without clarity. Workers experience responsibility without support. The system functions, but care begins to feel secondary.

### THE ORIGINAL PROMISE

At its core, child welfare was always meant to be relational. Safety is not produced by paperwork, and stability is not achieved through timelines alone. Healing does not happen in isolation. Children do best when systems strengthen families, preserve meaningful connections, and intervene proportionally and thoughtfully. Prevention matters. Continuity matters. Time matters. The tragedy is not that this truth was forgotten, but that systems were never built to support it at scale.

### TECHNOLOGY AS A BRIDGE, NOT A DESTINATION

Much of the recent conversation about child welfare modernization has focused on technology. New platforms, new systems, and new acronyms dominate the discussion. Technology does matter, but it is not the point. Modernization that simply digitizes old processes risks reinforcing the very dynamics that created today's challenges. Faster documentation does not produce better outcomes. Better dashboards dashboards do not automatically produce safer children.

Technology must function as a bridge back to purpose, not as a destination in itself. When designed well, technology can reduce duplication and administrative burden. It can preserve family context across time and placements. It can support professional judgment rather than replace it. It can surface patterns that allow earlier and more preventive action. When designed poorly, it becomes another layer of distance between people and care.

### FROM CASE MANAGEMENT TO CARE CONTINUITY

One of the most damaging features of traditional child welfare systems is fragmentation. Cases open and close. Workers change. Placements shift. Context is lost. For a child, this feels like instability layered on instability. Each transition erodes continuity and trust.

A reimagined child welfare system prioritizes continuity, not just of records, but of understanding. It treats a child's story as cumulative rather than episodic. It recognizes that safety, wellbeing, and permanency are not separate objectives but intertwined outcomes that must be pursued together. This requires systems that carry memory, not just data.

### PREVENTION AS DESIGN, NOT ADD-ON

Prevention is often discussed as a programmatic goal, something added alongside core operations when funding allows. But prevention is not a program. It is a design choice. Systems oriented toward prevention intervene earlier, when supports can still stabilize families. They recognize stressors before they escalate into harm. They coordinate across services rather than waiting for thresholds to be crossed.

This approach reduces the need for intrusive intervention not by lowering standards, but by strengthening supports upstream. A system built around prevention looks less reactive and more humane, not because risk is ignored, but because it is addressed sooner and more holistically.

### SUPPORTING THE WORKFORCE THAT CARRIES THE WORK

Child welfare workers carry this work under extraordinary pressure. They are asked to make high stakes decisions, often with incomplete information, limited time, and systems that demand more documentation than discernment. They absorb emotional weight that is rarely acknowledged by performance metrics.

A reimagined system does not ask workers to be superhuman. It gives them tools that reduce administrative drag, information that supports judgment, space to build relationships, and feedback loops that allow them to see whether their work actually mattered. When workers can see outcomes rather than just activity, the work becomes sustainable again.

### MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Child welfare has never lacked metrics. It has lacked the right ones. Timeliness matters, and compliance matters, but these are means rather than ends. The ultimate measure of a child welfare system is whether children experience greater safety, stability, and connection, and whether families emerge stronger rather than fractured by intervention.

Reimagining child welfare means aligning measurement with mission. It means asking not only whether the system acted, but whether life improved.

### A PLATFORM FOR CARE

At its best, a modern child welfare system becomes a platform for care rather than control. It coordinates support across time and agencies. It preserves context rather than resetting it. It enables prevention rather than waiting for failure. It centers children without isolating families. This is not idealism. It is design discipline. And it is now possible in ways it has not been before.

### WHY THIS MOMENT IS DIFFERENT

The conditions described in the broader renaissance are present here as well. Leaders understand the cost of systems that drifted from purpose. Knowledge about trauma, prevention, and family stability is deeper than ever. Technology can finally support continuity instead of fragmentation.

*Child welfare does not need another reform cycle. It needs systems worthy of the responsibility they carry.*

*Reimagining child welfare is not about abandoning accountability. It is about restoring care. And when systems once again feel like care to children, families, and workers alike, modernization will have meant something real.*



## SECTION VII

# KNOWN

## *When culture changes the space between Zoe and Marianna*

Every system has a culture, whether it is named or not. Culture shapes how rules are interpreted under pressure, how discretion is exercised when guidance is incomplete, and how people are treated when time is short and the stakes are high. In Health and Human Services, culture functions as the operating system beneath the visible work. It quietly governs interactions, especially the ones that matter most. Zoe and Marianna experience this reality every day.

### WHEN CULTURE IS UNDEFINED

In many systems, Zoe works inside a culture shaped primarily by by volume and compliance. Her success is measured by tasks tasks completed, timelines met, and documentation finalized. There is finalized. There is little space for judgment, reflection, or relationship. relationship. The work moves quickly, but not always meaningfully. meaningfully.

Marianna experiences this same culture as distance. She receives receives notices without explanation and is asked to repeat her story her story as if nothing before counted. Each interaction feels disconnected from the last. Zoe wants to help, but the system pulls system pulls her attention elsewhere, toward alerts, deadlines, and deadlines, and required steps. Care becomes collateral damage, not damage, not because anyone intends it, but because culture makes it makes it inevitable.

### THE ORIGIN OF KNOWN

KNOWN did not emerge from a branding exercise or a strategic memo. It emerged early in 2023 during a Saturday morning workshop with a dozen Health and Human Services secretaries, directors, and commissioners. These were leaders who had spent years inside the pressure of public systems. There was no formal agenda, only honest conversation.

What surfaced was strikingly consistent. Despite differences in state, role, and system, these leaders described the same tension. Systems designed to serve people had become places where both those served and those serving felt unseen. Out of that conversation came a shared conviction that proved difficult to ignore. If systems are going to work, people must be known inside them.

KNOWN became the language for that conviction and the framework to hold it.

### THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF KNOWN

At its core, KNOWN is built on four reinforcing elements that describe how culture shows up in daily practice. A KNOWN culture is human centered, meaning the person is seen before the process, especially under pressure. It is outcomes focused, orienting work toward real change in people's lives rather than simply completed steps. It is relationship driven, treating trust and continuity as essential infrastructure rather than optional extras. And it is trauma aware and hope centered, recognizing both what people carry into the system and what sustains their effort over time.

These elements were not theoretical. They reflected how leaders wished their systems actually behaved, particularly in moments when rules ran out and judgment mattered most.

### WHEN ZOE IS KNOWN

When Zoe works in a culture built on KNOWN, her role changes in meaningful ways. She is trusted to exercise judgment rather than simply execute tasks. She is supported by systems that preserve context rather than fragment it. She is encouraged to build continuity rather than rush closure. Her work is no longer reduced to throughput alone. Outcomes matter. Relationships matter. The system no longer asks her to endlessly compensate for its gaps.

Zoe is no longer carrying the system by herself. The system is carrying her.

### WHEN MARIANNA IS KNOWN

Marianna feels the difference immediately. She is no longer treated as treated as a reset. Her goals are visible, and her progress is cumulative. Zoe can explain not only what is happening, but why it is why it is happening and what comes next. When setbacks occur, the occur, the system adapts instead of disengaging. Support does not does not disappear at the first sign of friction.

Hope becomes reasonable again.

### CULTURE IS NOT SOFT

A KNOWN culture is not soft, and it does not lower standards. It redefines them. Accountability expands to include whether forward movement occurred, whether trust was preserved, and whether effort led to something meaningful. Performance is measured not just by activity, but by impact.

Zoe can see the difference her work makes. Marianna can feel it. Burnout recedes because effort reconnects to purpose.

### WHY KNOWN MATTERS NOW

The broader renaissance underway in Health and Human Services depends on culture. Technology can preserve context, but culture determines how it is used. Knowledge can inform better practice, but culture determines whether it is applied. Leadership can call for change, but culture determines whether that change lasts.

KNOWN aligns intention with experience. It ensures that when Zoe meets Marianna, the space between them is not filled with friction, but with support.

*That is what it means for a system to truly know the people inside it.*



## SECTION VIII

# Faith, Patience & Leadership

## Inner work for outer systems

*This topic is deeply personal, and its inclusion here comes not from intention to persuade but from my AI tool's reflection back to me that faith, patience, and the inner work of leadership surfaced repeatedly across our conversations this year—threads that could not be ignored in any honest summary of the year past—offered humbly, without judgment, and with a request for grace on a matter that is both private and formative.*

The work described throughout this magazine asks a great deal of those who lead it. It asks leaders to choose outcomes over optics, to stay close to complexity without simplifying it away, and to remain accountable for systems that touch people at their most vulnerable moments. It asks them to hold tension without rushing to resolution and to continue showing up when progress is slow, criticism is loud, and certainty is unavailable.

What is less often acknowledged is that this kind of leadership requires more than skill or expertise. It requires formation. Systems can only be transformed as far as the people leading them are able to endure. To endure.

Public leadership is rarely episodic. It is cumulative. Most leaders do not fail because of a single decision or moment of misjudgment. They falter because the work becomes heavier than the inner resources they have to carry it. Over time, urgency begins to replace discernment, reaction replaces reflection, and endurance gives way to exhaustion. Staying in the work requires what can only be described as a long obedience, a sustained commitment to purpose that extends beyond political cycles, news cycles, and the constant pressure to perform decisiveness.

This kind of obedience is not dramatic. It is quiet and repetitive. It often goes unseen. Yet it is the difference between leadership that burns brightly for a season and leadership that slowly shapes systems over time.

For many leaders, faith plays a role in sustaining that endurance, though it is rarely visible and often misunderstood. In public life, faith is frequently treated as something to be explained, displayed, or clarified. The faith that sustains leadership over the long arc, however, is usually practiced in private, without audience or affirmation. It is less about certainty and more about alignment.

Prayer, in this sense, is not about emotional reassurance or clarity on demand. It is an act of orientation. It places the leader back into right relationship with purpose, limits, and responsibility. Prayer without performance steadies leaders not by providing answers, but by reminding them that they are not the center of the work. That humility becomes a source of strength rather than weakness.

***That quiet faithfulness is what allows the work, unfinished, imperfect, and deeply human, to continue.***

Patience emerges from this same interior grounding. In systems under pressure, patience is often mistaken for delay or indecision. In reality, reality, patience is discernment over impulse. It is the discipline of waiting long enough to understand what the moment is actually asking, rather than responding to the loudest demand. Many of the most most damaging decisions in public systems are made in the name of urgency, urgency, when leaders feel compelled to act quickly to demonstrate control rather than to produce lasting outcomes.

Patience resists that pull. It creates space for alignment, learning, and coherence. In this way, patience becomes a strategic advantage. It protects leaders from overcorrecting, from mistaking movement for progress, and from sacrificing long term integrity for short term relief.

Faith, practiced quietly, becomes an anchor in this work. Anchors do not draw attention to themselves. They simply hold. For leaders navigating complexity, this anchoring provides orientation without rigidity. It allows conviction without arrogance and resolve without domination. It reminds leaders that their authority is borrowed, their insight is partial, and their responsibility is real.

Perhaps the most honest challenge of leadership is weariness. Not the visible fatigue of long days or heavy calendars, but the deeper weariness that comes from carrying unresolved tension year after year. From caring deeply while knowing outcomes are never guaranteed. From absorbing criticism while remaining accountable. Leading without growing weary does not mean ignoring limits. It means tending to them.

It means building rhythms that restore rather than extract. It means allowing silence, reflection, and trusted community to do their quiet work. It means remembering that endurance is not a personality trait, but a practice, one that must be renewed regularly.

Leaders who endure are not harder or more driven. They are more grounded.

All system change has an outer dimension, policy, technology, structure. Beneath that is the work that determines whether change holds, the inner life of the people leading it. Faith, patience, and humility do not replace competence. They sustain it. They allow leaders to remain present without becoming reactive, committed without becoming brittle, and hopeful without becoming naive.

This inner work does not guarantee success. But without it, even the best designed systems eventually drift. The work ahead is long, and the pressure will not ease simply because intentions are good. What carries leaders through is not certainty about outcomes, but faithfulness to direction.



## CLOSING REFLECTION

# The River

Most meaningful change does not arrive all at once. It accumulates slowly, through small decisions made consistently and work that rarely feels dramatic while it is happening. Progress often unfolds quietly, shaped by patience and restraint rather than urgency or spectacle. The work reflected in this year follows that pattern.

Public systems are often drawn to the idea of the breakthrough, the moment when a new policy, a new technology, or a new leader signals that transformation has finally arrived. Those moments matter, but they are rarely where real change takes hold. The deeper work happens between announcements. It happens when leaders choose outcomes over optics, when systems stop forcing people to start over, when workers are given space to exercise judgment rather than simply comply. These shifts seldom make headlines, yet they shape lived experience more than any single reform.

A river does not carve a canyon through force. It does so through persistence. Drop by drop, season by season, always moving forward even when progress is imperceptible. The river does not argue with the rock; it works with time. This is what systems change looks like when it is done with integrity—not sudden overhaul, but steady reorientation; not spectacle, but discipline; not perfection, but continuity.

Much of what changed this year will not show up neatly in reports or dashboards. It appears instead in moments that are easy to overlook: when a family experienced clarity instead of confusion, when a worker felt supported instead of alone, when a leader chose patience over panic, when technology stepped out of the way rather than demanding attention. These moments rarely announce themselves, but they are where trust begins.

Like water moving beneath the surface, some of the most important work remains unseen. Culture shifts before systems do. Understanding matures before policy follows. Relationships deepen before outcomes stabilize. This kind of work rarely moves in straight lines. It requires returning to first principles again and again, especially when pressure pushes toward shortcuts. It requires remembering why the system exists in the first place.

The close of a year naturally invites reflection, but invites restraint. Not everything that matters resolved before the calendar turns. Some work is meaningful if it is allowed to continue unfinished. ahead is not acceleration for its own sake, but alignment between purpose and practice, between leadership and lived experience, between what systems count and what people carry. When alignment holds, progress compounds.

A river does not know where the canyon ends. It only knows to keep moving. In the same way, the work of building humane systems does not require certainty about the destination. It requires commitment to direction: continuing to choose outcomes over transactions, continuing to design systems that support hope rather than drain it, continuing to center people, both those served and those serving.

This is not fast work. But it is faithful work. And over time, it shapes something lasting.



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