

ROCK FAMILIES FIRST

Reducing the impact of CPS on Black families in Beloit, WI



*We are the movement.
Our people are amazing, beautiful
full of resilience
full of spirit
and creating change.*

But we need the system to change.



Black parents codesign an actionable plan with Rock County Human Services Department to convert county resources into a community of support

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



ELIMINATE
RACIAL DISPARITY
IN CHILD
PROTECTIVE
SERVICES

REDUCE THE
NUMBER OF
CHILDREN PLACED
OUT OF HOME

ENGAGE WITH
FAMILIES WITH
INCREASED
SATISFACTION

Rock Families First goals

To address project goals, Rock Families First focuses on community response in Beloit, where Black families are overrepresented in the system.

A Community Cultivator hired by Alia leads the effort of engage impacted parents in Beloit (a group now self-described as the “BeeHive”) to co-create ways of addressing the three project goals. The ultimate vision is to promote family stability and wellbeing.

Alia advances Rock Families First by convening and supporting project stakeholders: system leaders, design facilitator, community members, and project funders. **Internal capacity building and community co-design work in Rock County since 2018 has led to an overall decrease in the number of youth in care by 73% and the use of residential care by 34%.**

After two years of system readiness and community mobilizing, a design sprint in October 2022 resulted in the [IDEA BOOK: A New Future for Families -- A call to action for Rock County systems change](#), created in partnership with Black parents in Beloit.

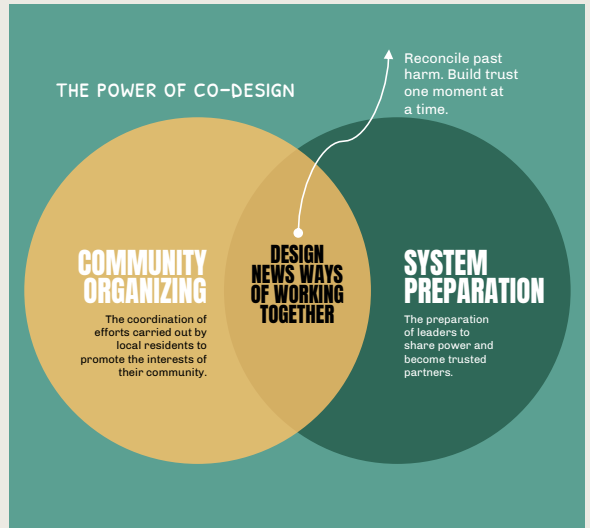
System preparation + community organizing

Rock Families First is a movement powered by trust; therefore trust-building is the project's top priority for all involved. System leaders and workers spend time in preparation, creating readiness to receive (not just hear) the experiences of impacted parents.

The reconciliation and trust-building process was set in motion early on by a powerful apology statement made by the HSD 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 these roles in the past, I want to say I am sorry.”

– **Kate Luster**, Rock County Human Services Director



Feeling seen and supported, parents can speak to their experiences, needs, and desires. This shapes the vision of how to ensure families have access to what they need to succeed.

“As parents we get asked all the time to give our advice or to sit on an advisory board. Usually, we get a gift card and are sent on our way. Co-design was different. Everyone was nervous and really didn't know what to expect. Co-design brought parents negatively impacted by the system together with the system. We were seen. We were heard. There was even an apology for past wrongs. What we said was used to create a plan for a new way! This was something that we never expected. Openness and vulnerability displayed by all allowed room for relationship building and trust. Now we are being engaged as leaders to help the very system that did us wrong.”

– **LaMikka James**, Community Cultivator and Beloit parent

Four Solution Areas of the Beloit “Village of Support”



I D E A B O O K / A new future for Beloit Families

Alia + Rock County + IDEO.org / Nov 2022

What's next?

Codesigned ideas are turning into codesigned action in each of the four solution areas. Collaboration with impacted parents is becoming the Rock Way for planning and taking new actions across the Human Services Department.

Though drawing on deepening wells of trust and collaborating with unique depth, vulnerabilities remain. *What if the director leaves? Or funding runs out? Or trust grows thin? Or plans for divesting resources hit policy roadblocks?*

With much yet to be done, making deep investments in continued trust, building clear structures, raising accountability for equitable practice, and ever-expanding community engagement, success becomes more and more inevitable.

In the end, the strength of the community – represented in the BeeHive! – endures.



Scan to read the complete Idea Book

www.aliainnovations.org
info@aliainnovations.org

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