**Dr. John Lyons Video Transcript Part 1**

It’s a pleasure to be here. I’m happy to be here. I’m excited about the possibilities. Also, I live in Chicago and Ottawa, Canada, so I’m happy to have one last day of winter. You might actually think it’s cold here. I was talking to my wife this morning and it was 15 below in our garage, so it is not cold here. So anyway, I’m happy to be here.

I don’t know if you know this that Texas is actually the cradle of the CANS. The very first implementation of this approach was actually in Fort Bend County. I should have known at the time the importance of information management to support this kind of stuff cause it didn’t really go anywhere but when I walked in I noticed they had their information management strategy set up. They had this tall gray cylinder that said CANS only. So, it didn’t really work out. Anyway, I’m happy to be here.

You, on the other hand, let me see if I understand your circumstances. I imagine there’s some folks here who might be enthusiastic and there might be some folks here who might be a little bit anxious about what this means. And there’s probably a whole lot of folks who might be somewhat skeptical about the whole thing. How many people are really excited about adding to the paperwork burden of the system, right? So, where do I get off…how can I ask you to become committed to supporting…I mean, look at that thing…that's big, it’s a lot of information. How can I ask you to become committed to supporting this kind of work? Well, maybe it’s something different than that. Maybe it’s an opportunity. Maybe it’s my responsibility to open your minds to the possibility that this might be something different than paperwork. You have choices in life. The choices you make define you. The choices you make as a person define you as a person. The choices you make as a professional define you as a professional. I promise you, you have choices when it comes to the CANS.

You have at least three choices: You can view it as a form. What's that? That’s something you have to fill out because somebody told you to fill it out. In Texas, even the Legislature has told you to fill it out. So you already know it starts as a form. Here’s what we know, and we know this: If it stays as a form, it’s a waste of your time. You don’t need any more forms. I’m quite confident that you have plenty of forms. Here’s your second choice: You can view it as a tool. What’s that? That’s something that helps you work smarter rather than harder. We know the CANS can be a tool because quite literally tens of thousands of people have figured out how to use it to help them be a little bit more effective with the children and families that they serve.

So, one of the reasons why I moved to Chapin Hall from the University of Ottawa is that I now work with a group of people who are committed to the same thing, which is a way more fun thing to do. So, one of my colleagues, Fred Wulczyn, did an analysis of the implementation of the CANS in child welfare in Tennessee. And you know what he found? He found that being effective is less work than being ineffective. Working smarter is actually easier than working harder. And that’s particularly true in child welfare because it’s the mistakes we make through poor early choices that end up the major efforts that come down stream. So, one of the things I’d like to accomplish this morning is to show you some of the ways you might want to think about supporting the use of this approach as a tool helping people be more effective.

The third choice, it's actually a framework. It’s designed to be the work. So you see this thing, right? It’s big; it’s a lot of information. But ask yourself the following question: After reviewing carefully, ask yourself the following question: What’s on here that we don’t need to know if we’re doing our job? What's on there…what’s in the CANS that you don’t need to know if you’re doing your job working with a child or a family? I think what you’ll discover is actually there’s nothing on there. There’s nothing on the CANS, the Texas version of the CANS, that you really shouldn’t know if you're going to be effective serving our children and families cause that’s how it’s designed. You had a great process here in Texas of bringing together child welfare and mental health and other system partners to agree on what’s the minimum understanding for our kids. What do we need to make sure we know if we are going to be effective in serving our kids because that’s how the CANS is designed?

In an information culture, and we do in fact live in an information culture, there is no longer any excuse for the work and the documentational work to be two separate things. No excuse. Many, many, many industries have figured that out. It’s time for us to figure that out. I mean some people have gone so far as to identify paperwork and documentation as the most traumatic aspect of working in the public system. We can fix that. We can fix that by working together to make sure that…Would you all agree that if we’re going to be successful helping children and families we need to understand them? Would everybody agree information is good? Right. So, we just have to make sure documentation actually has information in it as opposed to it’s just documentation that exists for documentation purposes. So that’s how this is designed. That’s where I kind of like to start. What is the framework? What is this, the concept? The concept has a name; it’s called TCOM, and it comes from three basic concepts, but let me talk a little bit about implementation.

You choose the success, or lack thereof, the implementation of this program. Because really it’s about leadership, so if leadership supports it, it tends to work. If leadership doesn’t support it, it’s a much harder struggle. So, that’s kind of what you need to do. In order to do that, we’ll talk a bit more about that later on. But it’s really about creating a system where communication is valued, where information is used and is created in a timely fashion to support good key decisions. That’s the basic concept of good implementation.

Child welfare, the meaning of that is that this is a well-being approach. You know, the pillars of outcomes in child welfare are safety, permanency and well-being. There’s increasing evidence that those are arbitrary distinctions that actually have no real meaning because, in fact, you cannot have safety and permanence without well-being in a meaningful way. That would be locking a young person in the attic. Safe and permanent, where’s the well-being, right? You have to have all three; they all three go together and they are inseparable if you’re going to have an effective system.

We know a lot. We know a lot about how to raise kids. We know a lot about how to educate children. We know a lot about how to address behavioral emotional developmental medical challenges with kids. We know a lot.

And number three: Despite the fact that we’ve got a lot of really good people who care and we know a lot about what should be happening in the lives of our children, it’s really not the case that we’ve been able to create systems that consistently work on behalf of our kids. My guess is you don’t have to think back very far in your job to identify circumstances where things happened to young people that probably shouldn’t happened. So why is that? Why is it despite the best efforts of good people who care who have access to an enormous amount of good information…what makes it so difficult for us to create consistently effective systems?

I think there’s three things that together, and I mean that sincerely, together we have to figure out how to overcome. First, we’ve been managing the wrong business. No business is ever successful when it manages the wrong business. Go to any business school in Texas and ask any faculty member, Hey, I have this business and it’s supposed to be doing this but the way I want to manage it is by having us do that. Is that going to work? They are going to tell you, Ah, no. The only way a business works is to understand what that business is supposed to do and make sure the business is doing what it is, in fact, is intended to do. That’s how you manage a business. That’s true of any business. Second, because of how we’ve chosen to manage the business, although we have expertise in the system, it’s not always in the room with our children and families. Third, it’s complicated. So, let's walk through those three things one at a time.

Now, some people are uncomfortable talking about the child-serving system as a business. Here’ the deal: How many people here get a paycheck? If you get a paycheck…For those of you who don’t get paid, which is a significant number of people, bless you in your efforts, right? That’s an even greater service. Anyway, so if you get paid, you’re in a business. My question to you is what’s your business? There’s actually only five kinds of businesses. You have to be one of these; which are you? Gilmore and Pine are a couple economists they’ve ordered the kinds of businesses in terms of how difficult it is to manage. So, the easiest kind of business to manage are commodities.

So the Texas economy is driven by commodities, right? Crude oil, fruits and vegetables, minerals, those are all commodities. We’re not in a commodities business. Every now and then some of our kids get treated as commodities – that’s a really bad thing. Sometimes that happens with disadvantage populations that they get treated as commodities but our kids don’t exist so that we’re fully employed. We’re actually employed to serve our children and families. We’re not in the commodities business. You can take a commodity and produce something that’s more readily accessible. So, I stayed at the Embassy Suites on I-35 last night; I got up this morning and had Corn Flakes for breakfast. Corn is the commodity, corn flakes is the product. I thought about the Fruit Loops. I could not identify the commodity so I decided to stick with the Corn Flakes. So, we’re not in the product business.

Services. We talk about what we do as services. We organize and finance what we do as services. We manage and supervise what we do as services. My guess there’s not a single person in this room who has spent a single day of your professional life without using the word services in a full sentence. But are we really a service industry? Let me define for you what a service is and you tell me whether you are actually participating in a service industry. A service is when you hire somebody to apply a product for you.

So if I spill on this jacket and I’m not competent to clean it, I will happily hire a dry cleaner to do that for me. That’s a service. Are you like a dry cleaner? Are you like a butcher? Butcher is a service, right? So, if you eat meat, some of you might but I expect most of you don’t, have livestock in the backyard. Let’s have chicken tonight, would you go kill it? You’d probably hire someone to do that for you. That’s a service. Are you like a restaurant? You know, our system is organized as if providers are restaurants, right? Think about how a restaurant works. You’ve got your space; you fill that space with tables and the job of restaurant management is to fill those caseloads…uh…tables. And if you can get a waitlist…people stand out in front of the restaurant, you can actually use that to leverage and invest in other restaurants. Is our business spending time…Did you go to school so you could spend time with people? Is our business spending 45 minutes to an hour with children? Is our business having two visits a week? Is our business having an assessment done in the first 45 days? Is that actually our business? I don’t think so. I think it’s something different.

Now, the next kind of businesses are called experiences. That’s where you are purchasing a memory. So I was legally employed at the University of Ottawa. I’m married to a Canadian so I have immigration status in Canada. I’m what’s called a landed immigrant there. So I don’t know if you know anything about Canadian immigration but I’m forced by statute to mention hockey in every public appearance. So, I guess the closest here is that if we went to a Stars game. What are you purchasing if you go to a University of Texas football game? You are purchasing an experience, right? A memory. You load up your family and fly them to Disneyland. What are you purchasing? You’re purchasing an experience. The Disney Corporation is probably the best known company for selling experiences. Although I was down in Orlando last year and I did notice that there some parents who were purchasing the wrong experience, that are taking their kids when they are 3 or 4 is purchasing a pain in your butt. You just need to wait until your kids are 9, 10, 11, 12. They’ll remember everything at 12 but don’t remember a thing at 3. Is that our business? So as long as our parents are satisfied and the kids think we’re cool? I think our responsibilities go a little bit higher than that.

The final and the most challenging kind of business to manage are businesses in which the purpose of the business is to help people change their lives in some important way. Those are called transformational offerings. My guess is that’s why you went to school. My guess is that’s why you took your job because you got involved because you want to help people change their lives in some important way. That means we’re in a transformational offering. Our business is not spending time with people; our business is actually helping people change their life in some important way. Now you knew that, right? So, what’s the big deal? Here’s our challenge: You can’t manage what you don’t measure. You can’t do it. You can pretend to do it; you can delude yourself into thinking your doing it but you actually can’t manage what you don’t measure. So, if you’re not measuring the transformational impact of your work, you actually can’t manage it. You can’t measure what you can’t define.

So, child welfare has done a good job of measuring and managing safety and permanence but they really haven’t gotten to well-being. And you can’t actually manage it if you don’t measure it. So, here’s our first challenge: Can we learn how to manage the business of personal change, because it’s fundamentally different than managing the business of spending time with people. Now, if we had more time, I’d drill down exactly what those implications are. They are significant. There’s many of them and they are fairly profound. But here’s one that introduces the second major challenge that we have to figure out how to overcome, and that’s the fact that if you conceptualize the business of spending time with people as a service industry, then if you’re a system manager what would be the most rational thing to do?

So you have responsibility as a system manager, you run the system and you have to make sure people are spending time with people. But you have limited resources. How do you do that? Well, here’s what you do and it’s a purely rational choice. You try to spend as much time with as many people as possible. And how you do that? You make sure the person spending time with people is actually the lowest-paid person in the system. Every single public service system, that’s how it works. In fact, I’ve been in many places where the effort is to make sure you suppress salaries of direct care people because otherwise they become very difficult to spend time with as many people as possible. That’s rational from a service system perspective but it creates a bit of a problem because usually least pay means least experienced.

So are you familiar with the 10 thousand hour rule? So, 10 thousand hours, that’s the Malcolm Gladwell rule. He wrote a bunch of books; one of them is called Outliers and he talks about the 10 thousand hour rule. You can’t be an expert on anything until you spend 10 thousand hours, he says, in deep practice. So, like I grew up in Speedway, Indiana. I live in Chicago and Ottawa, Canada, so my main…most of my time I spend in Ottawa. So, anybody here been to Ottawa? I already told you it’s cold. It’s a very pretty city; it’s worth seeing. It’s sort of like Austin with winter. It’s a little bit like that. It’s a capital; it has all the trappings of a capital city, a university, anyway. But it’s cold. So, if you live in the cold, what do you do with cold? You embrace the cold, right? You’re stuck with it you might as well learn to love it. So, the big party in Ottawa is actually called Winterlude and it’s in the middle of winter and it’s outside. Go figure, right? So, what happens is the canal freezes over and becomes the world’s largest skating rink. It’s beautiful actually. That’s where the party is. Now I grew up in Speedway, Indiana, and I don’t have the slightest idea how to ice skate. I couldn’t just get on that canal and do a triple axle. I’d break my neck. So I looked for a full-bodied air bag. They don’t make them so instead I got a sled. The only way I could join the party was to have a sled holding me up while I tried to figure out how to keep my ankles sturdy on ice skates.

If I want to learn to ice skate it would take me hours. If I wanted to be an expert ice skater in 10,000 hours, it’s not going to happen. I simply don’t care. 10,000 hours translates into 6.25 years of full-time employment. But that’s if you’re spending 100 percent of your time working with children and families. Most of us in direct care spend about half of our time, which means it’s going to take about 13 years of full-time employment before you achieve that level of expertise. Go back to your agencies. Look at your direct-care staff. Find what percentage actually spend that amount of time. If you’re like most places, it’s about 10 percent. Those folks, by the way, are the real angels. Those are the folks who are committed to the mission, right? So, what’s that mean? That means we’ve got to figure out some way to support people without expertise to do a job that’s actually quite difficult. So, how do we do that? So, now for some reason in our field we’ve been talking about translating research into practice. Just so you know, no other field talks like that. No other field, when I talk about translating the findings of science into practice, talks about translating research into practice. They all talk about engineering.

If you want to take knowledge and put it practice, you use the principles of engineering. So, now this isn’t a perfect metaphor but it isn’t a bad one. How many people here have ridden in a commercial airliner in the last four years or so? So, did you know the pilot didn’t fly the plane? Pilots don’t fly planes any more. Some of the little ones, of course, but not the big ones. Why not? Why don’t pilots fly planes any more? What on earth is going on here? Why on earth? What happened? The plane flies itself, right? Why would we let a plane fly itself? Because it’s actually safer and more effective, more efficient. If you don’t believe me, look at the data.

A recent example is a flight coming into San Francisco, the Asiana Airline, when they took off, the auto pilot came in too slow and crashed the plane. The tipping point was a flight out of Buffalo where this relatively unlicensed pilot didn’t know how to set the wing flaps and the snow storm through the plane into the ground. Before that, there was a flight to the Dominican Republic when they overcorrected for wind turbulence and took the plane right into New York City. You know what we learned? The collective wisdom of how to fly a plane is actually greater than the individual wisdom of any given pilot. Together, we know more about how to fly a plane than any given pilot. Do pilots like auto pilot? Not so much, right? It’s boring, right? They’re just sitting there. They push a button for take off, they push a button for landing, they push a button for cruising, right? They do a lot of communication and they’re sitting there basically waiting for something bad to happen. Generally speaking, they don’t want anything bad happening more than you do, right?

So, why didn’t the pilots union step up and say, hey, you are destroying the quality of our work environment by forcing us to use this boring auto pilot? Well, it’s not about them, is it? It’s actually about the primary outcome of the airline industry, which is safely moving people from point A to point B. Are you familiar with Captain Sullenberger? He’s a hero, right? He’s that guy, if you don’t know, he’s that guy he and his crew are taking off from La Guardia, they run into to a flock of Canadian geese. Some people call that the Canadian Air Force; that’s not the Canadian Air Force. They took out both engines and it brought the plane down. He successfully landed that big plane on the Hudson River and saved 147 lives. How did he do that? That’s amazing. He’s a hero. He and his crew.

If you want to know, there’s actually a great simulation with the actual cock pit recordings that you can find like everything on YouTube. It’s actually…I guarantee you it will give you chill bumps. So, basically what happened is the captain made a decision we’re not going to be able to land. If you listen to the cockpit to ground recording, the ground doesn’t get it. They’re still looking for a land…a runway to put him on. So, he says…he made the decision…as soon as he makes the decision, the communication goes silent because what happens at that point there’s actually a protocol to how to land a plane on the water. The moment that he made that decision he and his crew implemented that protocoal to a T, including the flight attendants chanting crash, crash, crash, which is a mind intervention to keep people focused so that they’re not freaking out when the plane goes down and they’re ready to get off as soon as it stops moving.

The collective wisdom of how to land a plane on water is greater than the individual wisdom of Captain Sullenberger, and he is a hero because he did his homework. Now is there anything from that story that might have relevance to us? Do you think the collective wisdom of how to work with children and families might actually be greater than the individual wisdom of any one person in the system, that together we probably know more than any one person? Is there some way to take that collective wisdom and engineer it into the room with our children and families to support people who are earnestly seeking to develop their expertise a little bit faster?

And then the final challenge, which makes what you do more difficult than what a pilot does is it’s complicated. I would argue that the child service system is the most complicated system in the world. And child welfare is the most complicated system, sub system, within the larger system. What makes something complicated? Well, isn’t it that there are so many adults involved and there’s so many people involved in the lives of our children? And don’t even all of those people see things a little bit differently? So, a parent and a foster parent see things differently. A foster parent and a caseworker see things differently. A caseworker and an outpatient mental health therapist see things differently. An outpatient mental health therapist actually sees things differently than a hospital-based mental health therapist. What’s that about? Who actually sees things differently than a residential-based mental health therapist. Who sees things differently than the probation officer, a probation officer sees things differently than a teacher. A teacher sees things different than a parent. I helped raise four kids. I guarantee you they sometimes saw things different than me. I was right, maybe not.

So, what happens when you have all these different people who all see things a little bit differently. What happens? Well, don’t you have to disagree? In fact, aren’t you morally obligated to disagree? Aren’t honest people, honestly representing different perspectives, aren’t you actually morally obligated to disagree. I guarantee you if you were at work, what is today Tuesday, if you were at work yesterday, you were morally obligated to disagree with somebody. Chances are your pretty much morally obligated to disagree with people every hour you work. This is why the state and providers disagree. You have to disagree. You have different responsibilities. That’s why advocates have to disagree. You have different responsibilities. A teacher might say, hey, it’s my job to teach these 30 kids. John is causing trouble. Get Johnny out of here so I can actually teach those other 29 kids. That’s a completely legitimate perspective. Johnny’s parents, Johnny’s therapist, Johnny’s caseworker might say, wait a minute, it’s in Johnny’s best interest if he can stay in that classroom. And that’s a completely legitimate perspective.

Honest people, honestly representing different perspectives, have to disagree. It’s not a problem; it’s actually a reality of a complicated system. So what does that mean in terms of how we might choose to think about supporting effective practice in child welfare? I think it means the essence of our work is getting everybody on the same page. Getting everybody on the same page. How do you do that? That’s conflict resolution. That’s dispute management. Do we know anything…is there any collective wisdom on dispute management that might help us think about how we could make that happen in our system? There’s a lot, right?

Human beings have tens of thousands of years of experience managing conflict. Do we have any lawyers in the room? Any lawyers? Alright. So, there’s a famous quote…Why do lawyers exist, right? The existential question: Why do lawyers exist? There’s a famous Shakespearean quote, sometimes seen as anti-lawyer quote. “First you kill all the lawyers.” That quote actually if you look at it in the play it actually is not anti-lawyer at all. It’s actually answering a question, and the question is: How do you create a totalitarian state? First, you kill all the lawyers. Because in a totalitarian state, the state resolves all conflict – usually in favor of the state. In our culture, citizens actually participate in the resolution of conflict, and lawyers represent citizens in that process. So we know a lot about resolving disputes. We know a lot. But if you distill it down to its simplest concepts, there’s two fundamental principles, two things that have to happen if you’re going to have any hope of resolving disputes.

First, you have to have a shared vision. You cannot resolve disputes without a shared vision. That’s why we have laws. So civil societies have to have laws because the only way you have a civil society is to have a shared vision. So all laws are is the shared vision for the expectation of each others’ behaviors. That’s why they exist, to create a shared vision that allows us to resolve disputes using that shared vision. So, do we have a shared vision in child welfare in Texas? I think we do. Now, my experience is the further you get away from the work, the less likely it is to play itself out but I think it’s absolutely there. So…how many people here work directly with children? Alright…so my guess is that, I don’t know you…those of you in the back I can’t even see you, which I’m sure is why you chose to be back there. But anyway, I’m willing to be that everybody in this room, just raise your hands, that you do everything in your power to make your work about the children and families you serve. That’s my experience with people who work in our field is the people who do direct care, they do their best. My guess also is that you sometimes find other people in the system getting in your way. If it weren’t for the damn Medicaid rules I could…that kinds of stuff, right? If it weren’t for the school, I could do… right?

How many people work in a supervisory level? Alright. How many people are not going to raise your hands no matter how many questions I ask? I did a talk in Pittsburgh 600 people in the audience and I wanted to make a point about how difficult change was. I said, hey, how many people here consider themselves to be human beings, and only about 60 percent of the audience raised their hands. Be careful traveling in Pittsburgh. Here's another effect of the service system. In a service system, supervision has slowly and steadily devolved into a compliance activity. So, if you look at time and motion studies of supervisors, the majority of time is spent on stuff like managing vacation coverage, making sure people know how to do the paperwork, making sure documentation is audit proof. What were the businesses? The business is helping people change their lives in some important way. So, in a transformational system, supervision is actually the most important layer of the system because that's your teachers. Those are the people who are responsible for helping people be as effective as possible. Not only meeting all the compliance standards, but are you being effective in your work with children and families. It's a fundamentally different way of thinking about what the business is.

OK, anybody here run a program? OK, if you run a program, you've got a very interesting conflict. So the conflict, there's a bunch of conflicts, but one of the most interesting conflicts for program managers is the conflict between uniform and individuality. Cause what do you do if you run a program? Well you get your funding, you get your staff. What is the first thing you do? Well, my guess is you represent a whole lot of different places but I bet you everybody in this room had the same first day of work experience. So, everybody think back to their first day of work, wherever it is you work. I imagine it was something like this: You showed up, you met somebody that handed you a notebook, maybe a three-ring binder. You probably had to sign something to say that your received it. You may have had to sign something that said you had read it, right? Policies and procedures. What kind of program would it be without policies and procedures? But doesn't that make it about the program? Policies and procedures make it about following the program. So I'll give you an example. We were doing an implementation training…for an agency in northern Wisconsin, and you know, the CANS is free, right, the CANS is free. Nobody's ever paid a penny for the CANS. Nobody will ever pay a penny for the CANS. The concept of the CANS is that you don't have enough money to serve all the children and families out there. Why should you waste it on infrastructure? Can't we learn how to share infrastructure and reduce the cost to the administration and free up more dollars to help people change their lives because that's what our business actually is, right? But it's not easy, it's not easy to do this, the training.

You were seeking clarity. The answer to your question, from my perspective, is yes. That’s clarity, right? Yes, in fact, do the…web-based training, it works; the issue is no training is action learning, right? Training is just fixin to get ready to learn. That’s all it is, so it is a way to learn it but not how you actually learn it. It prepares you to learn. You have to actually use it to learn it. That’s true of live, that’s true of online, that’s true of everything. Alright, so, anyway, so, it’s hard to do this well. It takes a few years actually before you begin to use it well because we have to overcome all the different barriers that have led us to believe that documentation as a CYA activity and not a way of communicating about the people we serve so you have to break through all those old bad habits before it starts to work for you. But it’s possible, it's doable.

But anyway, I want to talk about challenges. So, the head of the residential care of this large agency said, you know, John, my staff, they just don’t see the value of the CANS. I said, that’s interesting. Why is that? She said, well, we run a program here, and in our program everybody gets the same thing, so staff find it distracting to pay any attention to individual differences because it don’t matter. If it’s Tuesday at 2:30, you get anger management therapy. It does really matter if you have anger management needs or not. So why should we waste our time? Good idea? It would actually be brilliant if we were doing bypass surgery. Bypass surgery is fully engineered. If you follow the clinical protocol, you get good results. Bypass surgery has become a routine miracle. It’s not any different than a root canal at this point. It is highly effective. By the way, do the surgeons who do bypass surgery, were they happy when the clinical protocols came out? I’m old enough true remember. They actually…this is intrusion on our clinical practice. But they all do it now. Why do they do it now? Because it’s a heck of a lot more fun to be successful than do whatever it is you think you want to do. Effective is less work and it’s way happier. But that’s something that’s easy to say and hard to get to.

So, the problem is we’re not doing bypass surgery. The reason why bypass surgery can be fully engineered is the patient population is extremely homogenous, relatively healthy adults with one more clogged arteries. If you follow the clinical protocol, you get good results. We can’t do bypass surgery. You will never fully engineer child welfare. You can’t because you can’t actually engineer a relationship. So you might notice how the CANS is structured. You actually can’t engineer a relationship. You can engineer information that comes out of a relationship but you can’t engineer a relationship because it’s too diverse. You take 10 kids who are survivors of sexual abuse, you have 10 different stories. You have 10 parents with substance abuse problems, you have 10 different stories. You have 10 kids who are ADHD, you have 10 different stories, right?

The diversity of the children we serve is far too great to ever be able to fully engineer that aspect of the work. So you need a model that allows you to adjust because if you don’t adjust and do different things for different people, you end up using what I call a generic model of fairness, which is in fact the moral justification for programs. We’re fair, we treat everybody the same. That’s the generic model of fairness. So, for instance, in child welfare, it’s not uncommon for everybody to get parent training. What if they don’t need parent training, right? In fact, what we now know is if you give parent training to people who don’t need it, not only do you insult them, but you damage the relationship and the ability to get them to do other things is limited because you’ve already asked them to do something that makes no sense.

So, matching what you do, what people need, you have to have a model. Otherwise, you’re not going to be effective. So, I’ll give you an example. My parents raised four kids. How many people here have kids? Just so you know, my parents were married, unfortunately my mother passed this year. Before she passed, she and my father were married for 64 years. That’s a long time. They raised four kids. Just so you know, it wasn’t until their 49th year of marriage that all four of their kids was independent from them. It is a commitment. That, by the way, has implications for child welfare because sometimes we believe we’re done when they turn 18 but not really. But they are good people, my parents are good people. They had a number of significant values they wanted to live by. One of those values is they wanted to treat their four children fairly. But they used the generic model of fairness. In other words, they tried to treat all four of us the same. I’ll tell you as one of the kids, sometimes it got weird. I’ll give you an example.

My brother got his Ph.D. and my parents decided to give him golf clubs. A couple years later, I got my Ph.D. and you know what my folks got me? Golf clubs. They asked me if I play golf and, no, I don’t play golf. So sometimes giving everybody the same thing doesn’t make any sense. But we do it because that’s how programs work and we guarantee our ineffectiveness. We guarantee it. So you have to have a model that allows you to treat different people differently and still perceive it as fair.

Now let’s move one last step away from the people we serve. Let’s move up to the system level. So how do most systems in the U.S. make most of their decisions? Who gets the money, right? Allocation of resources, and based on what do people make decisions on who gets the money? The activities of professionals, right? Patterns of historical utilization. Why? What happened? Remember what the business is. The business is helping people change their life in some important way. What happened that we’ve ended up with a system that’s about the allocation of dollars based on the activities of professionals? You can’t manage what you don’t measure. You can’t do it. What do we measure really, really, really well? Dollars, right? I guarantee you there are people in prison in Texas for failing to measure dollars with reliability and validity. What’s the next best thing we measure? Activity of professionals.

I guarantee you those who are in direct care you spend a bit of your time filling out forms on how you spend your time. So what information do policy makers have when they are making their choices? They have information they trust about dollars. They have information they trust about the activities of professionals. What’s missing? Where are the kids? How on earth, how on earth can you possibly expect somebody at the state level to make decisions exactly like those of you who work directly with children and families do based on the best interest of children and families if they have no information about them? It’s not possible. It’s actually impossible.

So if you want a system in which no matter where you sit you can come back to the basic fundamental choice, let’s try to make our choices informed by the best interest of the people we serve. The only way that’s possible is if the people who need it the least – people who do direct care – take it upon themselves to create and communicate the shared vision so it’s available at every table, whether that’s a table that’s a child-family team, whether that’s supervision, whether that’s program management, whether that’s system management, let’s create a system where no matter where you sit, you can come back and make your decisions informed by the best interests of children and families. That’s what the CANS is and that’s all it is. All it is is a common-language strategy so we can get around the same page, we can always try to make our choices informed by our kids and families. That’s all it is.