



Dear Colleagues,

Last year at this time, as we were preparing for the 4th annual Stewards of Change conference, the economy had just crashed and the future looked extremely bleak. We were shocked by how quickly the bottom had fallen out. Few people had anticipated the speed or magnitude of the decline, and even fewer had a proven roadmap to deal with the complexity of the situation. In retrospect, the signs were everywhere – but we had simply overlooked or ignored them.

Despite the uncertainty and fear, 75 courageous leaders gathered in New Haven last January to grapple with the challenge of reinventing human services – all the more poignant given the prevailing circumstances. But it was even more momentous, thanks to the timing of the inauguration of our nation's first African American president coupled with the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. Amid this powerfully unique and emotional environment – and despite the hardships and hurdles, human services professionals from all across the country came together to share their knowledge and experience and create a new vision for the future of human services. Attendees of the 2009 SOC conference – which I've come to think of as the HS Satellite Inauguration Celebration – were filled with optimism and the promise of renewal. The work we accomplished was grounded in the belief that collectively we have the capacity to become better stewards of public resources and change our customers' lives – and, perhaps, the world.

Now, as our nation slowly emerges from economic ruin, hope remains alive. We know we are not past the crisis nor free from the harm a weak economy is having on an already tattered social services safety net. While there has been some economic improvement, the lagging impact of declining state revenues coupled with increased demand for services will put additional stress on providers nationwide for several years to come. But we must not become complacent – if we experience a double-dip recession, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) fails to ignite the economy or another national disaster hits, the impact on human services will compound the challenge to serve more people more effectively and efficiently.

Rahm Emanuel's now immortalized quip that "a crisis is too valuable to waste" will continue to ring true for human services well into the future. The status quo is no longer tenable; we must adapt to the reality of increasingly constrained state and local budgets by redoubling our efforts to innovate and change. The critical question is what do we do next – and how can we use this historic moment to encourage bold thinking, decision making and fundamental transformation in an uncertain future. The convergence of factors – including the new administration's progressive social agenda, growing demand for efficient and compassionate services, an unprecedented infusion of investment in health care and the overall drive to improve interoperability – provides unique opportunities for human services to leverage the "rising tide" of health care to plan, build and implement more effective and efficient systems. However, this will require thinking differently and operating outside the comfort zone of unilateral silos and categorical programs.

Bridging silos – and creating interoperable service systems – has been discussed and sought after for many years, and it is encouraging to see a growing number of cross-program and cross-system initiatives. Still, there is little evidence of systemic planning, coordination or generally accepted standards for interoperability. It is imperative that we act now to take advantage of the unique circumstances to build awareness, create coalitions and develop new approaches to do business differently.



The focus of SOC's 2010 conference will be on examining interoperability efforts that reach across the continuum of care, from field level through federal level as well as across human services, health and education. One intended outcome is to form a collaborative work group to coordinate and advocate for interoperability across the continuum. We will invest time to draft and graphically illustrate the core values of a national interoperability collaborative. The work to be accomplished here will augment the collective thinking of hundreds of leaders that has emerged from SOC conferences over the past four years and is embodied in SOC's Human Services 2.0 conceptual architecture. Ideally this knowledge base will serve as a foundation to accelerate the teaching, learning, communicating and advocating needed to spread interoperability across the nation.

I look forward to seeing you in New Haven. Travel safely.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Stein", written in a cursive style.

Daniel Stein, Managing Partner

Stewards of Change, Inc.