

# One System. Many Experiences.

Why perspective matters in child welfare.

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# What We'll Explore Together

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## Diverse Perspectives

Understand how youth, families, and professionals experience the child welfare system differently.

2

## Defining Success

Analyze how policies and data shape outcomes and accountability for children and families.

3

## Strengthening Advocacy

Empower CASA volunteers to foster connection, belonging, and lasting relationships.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/5GEq7tejh3s?si=plmv51sh5TJqHzG8>

# How the Public Sees Child Welfare

Media coverage of child welfare is infrequent and often reactive, leading to a distorted public understanding of the system's true reality.

## The Reality

Unlike constant coverage in other systems (criminal justice, health care, education), child welfare coverage is sporadic.

## The Narrative

It's not constant headline coverage. It spikes around tragedy or failure. Coverage is often case -specific, not system -wide. So the narrative becomes:

- "The system failed this child."
- "Warning signs were missed."
- "Why didn't someone act?"

# Broken.

# One Word, Many Meanings



Too many removals ↔  
Not enough removals



Too much surveillance  
↔ Not enough  
accountability



Too slow to act ↔ Too  
reactive



Too much intervention  
↔ Not enough support

Opposite experiences. Same word.

# It Depends Where You Sit

Every perspective is a vital part of the same system, shaped by their unique vantage point.

## Biological Families

Prioritize support and reunification pathways.

## Foster Parents

Require better preparation and clear communication.

## Young People

Navigate the impact of systemic instability.

## CASA Volunteers

Observe instability before formal reporting catches up.

## Caseworkers

Manage the burden of competing high -stakes demands.

## Judges

Render critical decisions from a specific vantage point.

## System Leaders

Maintain the overview of the entire complex ecosystem.



# Different Truths

Reunification



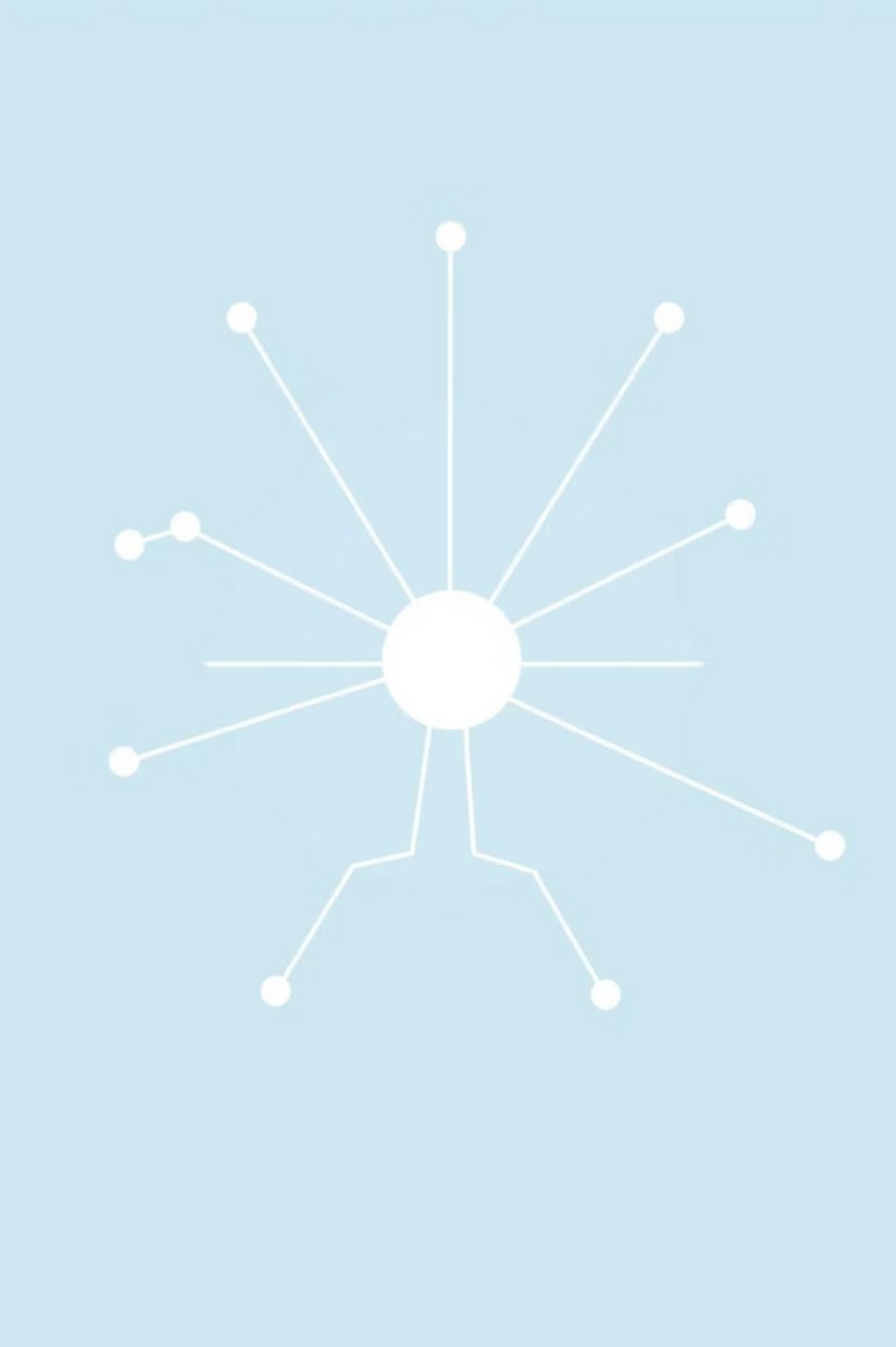
Adoption

Guardianship

Protection

Prevention

All rooted in real experience. All rooted in real concern for children.  
Even when they point in different directions.



# Not a Math Problem. A Tension Problem.

These are not equations to be solved, but fundamental tensions that define the landscape of child welfare. Each represents a genuine, ongoing struggle between competing priorities.

## **Safety vs. Autonomy**

Protecting the child versus respecting family privacy and self-determination.

## **Speed vs. Due Process**

The urgency to act quickly versus the necessity of thorough legal and investigative rigour.

## **Reunification vs. Permanency Timelines**

Giving families time to heal versus the developmental need for stable, predictable outcomes.

## **Support vs. Surveillance**

Providing resources and help versus the invasive monitoring of family life.



# Where Accountability Fails

We measure activity. We do not always measure what matters.

## What We Measure

- Activity
- Compliance
- Documentation
- Placement

## What Matters

- Impact
- Healing
- Safety/permanency/well - being
- Connection/belonging

# What CASA Sees First



Instability



Confusion



Inconsistency



Exhaustion

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# Proximity reveals truth.

CASA volunteers see what others miss because they are close to the situation.

# The System Does Not Lack

While the system is rich in resources, it often struggles to find a unified path forward. Here is the contrast between our abundance and our gaps.

## The System HAS

Passion • Data • Ideas

## The System LACKS

Shared clarity

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## Critical Questions for Alignment

What are we trying to protect?

What harm are we trying to reduce?

Where is disagreement real — and not going away?

# Repair Starts with Honesty

## Name the tradeoffs

Acknowledge what is being sacrificed to move forward.

## Name the tension

Surface the friction rather than burying it under the surface.

## Stop pretending

Stop pretending alignment exists where it doesn't.

# Community Is the First Repair

📄 Proximity builds accountability.



# Technology Is the Amplifier

Technology serves as a tool to enhance human connection, not replace it. By acting as a force multiplier for our interactions, it ensures we remain more present and informed in the work that matters most.



## Earlier Visibility

Proactively identifying instability before it impacts the community.



## Pattern Recognition

Connecting insights across cases to understand the broader narrative.



## Real-time Feedback

Providing immediate clarity to decision makers in the field.



## Better - Informed Decisions

Empowering teams to act with confidence and human empathy.



Technology should support relationships. Not replace them.



# When Used Well

When aligned, these three pillars create a robust framework for protection and empowerment.

## Community

Restores dignity to those we serve.

## Technology

Improves timing of critical interventions.

## Accountability

Protects children through shared commitment.

# Advocacy That Supports real outcomes, what matters!

Every child deserves lasting connections — not just placements.



## Help children maintain family relationships

Actively help children maintain and nurture vital family relationships.



## Build on strengths — not just assess risk

Shift the focus from purely assessing risk to actively building on child and family strengths.



## Center belonging, not just safety

Prioritize a child's sense of belonging as the core of every safety decision.



## Use every tool available to reduce isolation

Leverage every available resource and tool to prevent social isolation.

# Tennessee CASA

You stand in the tension.

You see what others miss.

You carry proximity into the courtroom.

Your presence often becomes the most consistent adult connection in a child's case.

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*From Memphis to Mountain City.*



# If We're Still Saying "Broken" in 10 Years...

We are standing at a critical choice point. How we choose to navigate the next decade will define the future of our impact.

## The Path of Inheritance

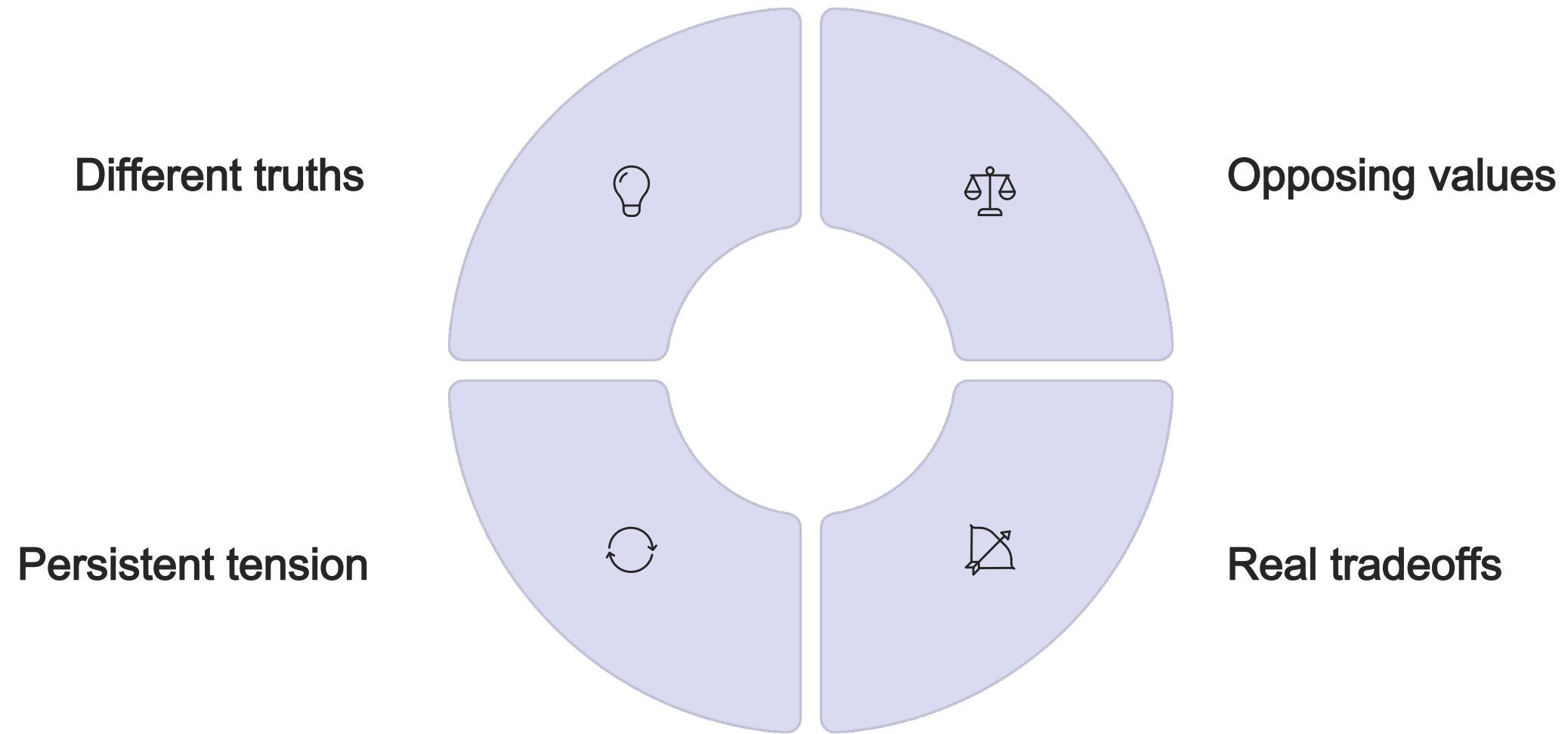
Simply inheriting hard problems leads to stagnation. We risk repeating history if we settle for superficial solutions.

## The Path of Tension

Choosing to hold the tension requires courage and persistence. It is the harder, transformative work that creates lasting, human-centered change.

# The Work Ahead

This is the commitment we must carry forward. Together, we choose to navigate these realities:



That is the work.

# Questions?

"What are we willing to be accountable for — even when it is uncomfortable?"

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