One is a nonprofit social services organization in the Midwest. The other is a state human services agency in the Southwest. Though separated by more than a thousand miles, they share a commitment to human-centered design.

In fact, it was groundbreaking work by Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI) that sparked the New Mexico Human Services Department (HSD) to embrace the approach. Tim Sheehan of LSSI shares some of the results achieved and Sean Pearson explains how the New Mexico HSD is working to reimagine how it engages with vulnerable individuals and families.

Dispatches from the Care Journey

In a typical year, LSSI supports some 70,000 of the state’s most vulnerable residents through programs for children and seniors, as well as individuals with mental illness and developmental disabilities and those who were formerly incarcerated. In 2015, LSSI collaborated with Fjord, Accenture Interactive’s design and innovation group, on a service design project aimed at reshaping how case-workers engage with the people LSSI serves. The result of that work—the Whole Person Care Journey—provided a game-changing model for coordinating care within LSSI and across its network of 190 partner organizations.

Since 2016, the Whole Person Care Journey model has taken root within the organization, says Tim Sheehan, vice president of Home and Community Services. The model has
had an impact on culture and mindset as well as specific business processes related to the care of individuals with mental health and substance abuse issues. For example, the Whole Person Care Journey has become the organizing principle for how LSSI trains staff and how it bills for services. The model also was pivotal to the selection and implementation of Simply Connect as LSSI’s private Health Information Exchange.

“When you think about a care journey, you create a network and systems of care,” Sheehan says. “Inside of that, you want the ability for individuals to share their information with family, staff, and medical providers.”

LSSI is currently running two extended pilots using Simply Connect to support behavioral health services, and Sheehan says they continue to explore ways the technology can improve the care journey. So far, one of the most valuable features of Simply Connect is the ability to send timely alerts to everyone in a person’s care coordination circle when the individual fails to fill a prescription.

Beyond the technology, Sheehan said the Whole Person Care Journey informs program design and contracting, providing consistency as the organization engages with new partners. It’s also serving as a foundation for innovation, as evidenced by a new approach to supporting individuals in crisis.

“We looked at how a person in crisis moves from the community to the ER, into a unit and from the unit back to the community,” he explains. “Working with managed care companies, we identified a system where people would go to a crisis bed rather than being admitted as an inpatient, and we were able to show how that saves money.”

It is an innovation that would not have been possible without the care journey, which Sheehan says serves as a foundation for what LSSI does and how people flow through the system. That makes it invaluable as a reference and a tool.

Another important result of LSSI’s human-centered design work: higher staff engagement and morale. Sheehan says this model has provided a meaningful way to engage with staff. They recognize that the model and supporting technology were designed to address their needs—and to empower them to spend less time on paperwork and more time making a difference in people’s lives.

“Morale goes up the more we engage them and the more they see we’re thinking about solutions for them,” Sheehan notes. “And that’s important because we want to keep our staff. If they feel connected, they stay.”

In fact, as he reflects on LSSI’s four years of experience with human-centered design, he’s most proud of how the work with Fjord translated
back to the culture: “We started with a genuine, open dialogue and discussion that led to a solution we could do something with. It has proven to be incredibly useful.”

His advice to others contemplating a shift to human-centered design is simple: “You have to jump in, and once you jump in, make sure that all levels of your staff are involved. From your CEO to direct-line staff, everyone has a role, and the more you can diversify your participation, the better.”

**Spreading Success**

It’s been a couple of years since Sean Pearson, Chief Information Officer in the New Mexico Human Services Department, heard LSSI give a presentation about its experiences with human-centered design. Pearson still remembers how much of it resonated with him.

“Putting the person at the center and looking at ways to align programs and services around an individual to provide better support is exactly what we’re doing here in New Mexico,” Pearson says. “LSSI’s talk also resonated because they were so successful. They didn’t lead with technology—they first spent the time to understand the care journey through the design thinking process.”

Each year, New Mexico HSD administers services to more than 950,000 individuals and plays a critical role in the lives of many residents. Yet its access and entry points to connect clients and customers with the human services they need are often disjointed and unintuitive.

“Right now, Medicaid recipients may have three different websites or portals that they have to interact with. It becomes very confusing to do something as simple as updating an address,” Pearson explains.

That is where human-centered design is helping change the game by strengthening understanding of culture, context, and people’s needs. Working with Accenture and Fjord, HSD is on the path to offering a human-centered experience with unified access to services across HSD’s four divisions.

Over the course of the design thinking engagement, the team traveled to five cities in New Mexico to conduct field research, including shadowing sessions and in-depth interviews with clients and customers, as well as field-office and call-center staff.

“By listening to direct input from clients and customers, we were able to discover key insights that would ultimately guide us to designing a unified web portal,” Pearson says.

One of the most interesting aspects of the work was that rather than using traditional demographic segmentation, they categorized citizens and clients by their mindsets (see sidebar “Why Mindsets Matter”). In fact, through the ethnographic research, the team identified four core mindsets (see chart below).

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**Why Mindset Matters**

A person’s age, ZIP code, and household income can be useful information. But to truly engage with someone, you need to know their mindset—their state of beliefs, attitudes, needs, motivators, and detractors that steer their decisions through a system, process, or journey.

Mindsets shape an individual’s expectations and intent within each phase of their journey. And mindsets are fluid based on circumstance—so it’s likely a person can shift from one mindset to another over time.

By understanding mindsets, human services agencies and nonprofits can create systems that provide the right level of support and guidance at key moments, which, in turn, will boost individuals’ confidence in themselves and in self-service. These insights help human services agencies design systems that enable current human behavior allowing citizens a greater chance to succeed. Designing around mindsets also builds services that are intuitive and deliver greater impact.

Once the mindsets were defined, Pearson said it was an “aha” moment for HSD: “We were asking, ‘Why didn’t we think of that before?’”

As HSD continues to implement the agency’s HHS 2020 vision, Pearson has become a champion of human-centered design: “Our agency is about supporting...”

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**Mindsets Identified by New Mexico HSD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindset Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>X-Axis</th>
<th>Y-Axis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proactive/Temporary</td>
<td>“I am going through a rough patch and I will overcome this”</td>
<td>How long does the person intend to depend on services?</td>
<td>Level of Dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive/Perpetual</td>
<td>“I need to get everything I can from my benefits”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive/Temporary</td>
<td>“I don’t want to have to deal with this system”</td>
<td>How action-oriented are individuals in the support services process?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive/Perpetual</td>
<td>“My benefits are a constant in my life”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Linda Pulik is a Senior Design Director at Fjord—Design and Innovation from Accenture Interactive.

Danielle Snyder is a Service Design Director at Fjord—Design and Innovation from Accenture Interactive.
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people, and so we have to put the human in front of everything we do,” he says. He notes that it is easy for staff to focus on technology but not think about the impact that technology has on the people they serve in the state.

“Changing culture or mindsets within state government is like turning a cruise ship—it takes a lot of perseverance. But I’m optimistic about how human-centered design will help us get there,” Pearson explains. “I’ve seen how the process created real change among the stakeholders involved in our initial work with Fjord and Accenture.”

As that change takes hold throughout HSD, the hope is that human-centered design will be “contagious.” Indeed, Pearson aims for a future in which human-centered design is embedded in everything HSD does—from how it serves the public to how it supports internal operations. Along the way, LSSI will no doubt continue to serve as an inspiration to others, sparking more investment in design thinking as a way of solving some of society’s most complex challenges.

“We’re interested in continuing to build,” Sheehan concludes. “The Whole Person Care Journey has been extremely useful, and just as there’s a journey for clients, we’re on our own journey. We’re thinking about how we’re going to challenge ourselves next.”