

From my desk to yours – a moment of inspiration

October 2020

I want to share with you some thoughts from some leadership training we had recently here at the state office. It was a conference called Live2Lead, and one of the speakers was Kat Cole, the former CEO of Cinnabon corporation. And she shared a story about a team that she took to East Africa on a volunteer trip to meet with a village chief and see what her team could do to help the Chief. So, she went to the Chief and asked what were their top 4 priorities, and the Chief just started laughing at her. And she thought, “what’s the problem, why are you laughing?” The Chief explained to her, you’re asking us about schooling, and about hygiene, and about all these things you want to teach us, our number one priority is water. He went on to explain to her if we don’t have water, what you teach us about hygiene won’t mean anything. If we don’t have water, our children won’t come to school, so you won’t need to build any schools. If we don’t have good, clean running water, drinking water, all these businesses you want to help us form, they won’t be of any use to us without clean water. That made me think about something that I want us to consider as the Department of Human Services, and the question is, “What’s our Water?” There are a lot of things that could be “our water.” There are a lot of things that could be water for the clients that we serve. For example, if you’re a single mom and you’re heading back into the workplace, then childcare is probably your water because if you don’t have childcare, you can’t go back into the workforce, you have to care for your children, you have to make provisions for your children. If you’re a single mom, like my mom was when I was growing up, and you’ve got 3 or 4 hungry boys in the house, those hungry boys like to eat, for that mom, her water is probably our SNAP benefits. The story is different for many of our clients, but what we need to be doing as an agency is thinking about “What is the one thing we can do best for our clients to help to begin to get them out of crisis and help them begin to be successful.