

IMPACT HEALTH

The Power of Choice

Creating Health through Autonomy, Dignity, and Possibility

Introductions



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Impact Health

Overview

Impact Health leads North Carolina's **Healthy Opportunities Pilot** (HOP) implementation in Western North Carolina (WNC).

HOP is a nation-leading Medicaid 1115 program that delivered more than **406,000 HRSN services** to almost **14,000 clients** in WNC over 3 years.

HOP was paused in 2025 due to North Carolina's failure to pass a state budget. However, funding for HOP has been included in the budget passed in July and is expected to restart before the end of 2026.

Impact Health

Overview

In 2025, Impact Health launched the **Impact Primary Care Network (IPCN)**, a physician-led clinically integrated network that provides quality care management services to support the whole-person health of 50,000 Medicaid members across WNC.

In 2026, Impact Health was selected as the Region 1 NC ROOTS Hub Lead, overseeing implementation of **North Carolina's Rural Health Transformation Program** (NCRHTP) in WNC.

Impacting Excellence

In 2024, Impact Health began providing support to other states and agencies working to build and scale HRSN programs. Today, our work includes:

- Advising states on HRSN implementation and infrastructure
- Convening HRSN leaders through the **National Coalition for Whole-Person Health**
- Developing practical tools, training, and technology for HRSN programs
- Applying lessons from HOP to emerging models like Food is Medicine

The Human Infrastructure Series is part of our commitment to ensure HRSN programs are person-centered, impactful, and sustainable.

From Connection to Choice

In the Power of Connection webinar, we explored how strong HRSN programs build agency, belonging, and hope.

- **Agency** (my voice matters)
- **Belonging** (I am not alone)
- **Hope** (a different future is possible)

Today, we're going to zoom in on agency. One of the most practical ways programs communicate "my voice matters" is by providing meaningful choice.

The Power of Choice

Meaningful client choice is one way that programs turn agency from a value into a practice that can be intentionally designed, replicated, and scaled.

It communicates:

- I care about what matters to you
- I am committed to meeting your needs
- You and your preferences matter
- You have a voice in what happens next

Choice vs. Meaningful Choice

Choice is the opportunity to select from available options.

Meaningful choice is the ability to make an informed selection from realistic, relevant options that reflect what matters to the client and that they can actually use.

Meaningful choice **does not mean** unlimited choice. Programs operate within real constraints, including staffing, funding, eligibility, geography, and capacity. The challenge is creating opportunities for meaningful agency within those realities.

Meaningful Choice

Meaningful choice IS NOT:

- Unlimited options
- “Whatever you want” regardless of safety, eligibility, or feasibility
- A menu of services that aren’t realistic for a client’s life
- A decision made without enough information
- A promise the program cannot actually fulfill

Meaningful choice IS:

- Relevant options that reflect a client’s goals, circumstances, and preferences
- Clear information about what is possible—and what is not
- Transparent guardrails that protect safety, quality, and accountability
- Agency to make an informed decision
- Real capacity to act on that decision

Choice in HRSN Programs

Great HRSN programs:

- Provide meaningful choice in **service delivery**
- Enable meaningful choice **through service**
- Build opportunities for meaningful choice **at scale**



Service Delivery

Client Choice

Service Delivery

Meaningful choice begins before a service is delivered and continues through the everyday decisions that determine whether the service actually fits into someone's life.

Choice does **not** require eliminating standards.

Good programs standardize what must be consistent and preserve flexibility where individual preferences matter.

Before the Service:

- How would you like to complete the consent and intake forms?
- What's your preferred language?
- When and how should we contact you?
- What information can we leave in a voicemail or message?
- Who, if anyone, would you like involved?
- What are your goals right now, and how can we help get you there?

During the Service:

- Pickup or delivery?
- Can you get there—or should we help with transportation?
- What time works best?
- Which foods do you love (or want to avoid)?
- Which option works best for your family?
- Is this still working for you?
- Is there anything else we can do to support you?

Choice in Service Delivery

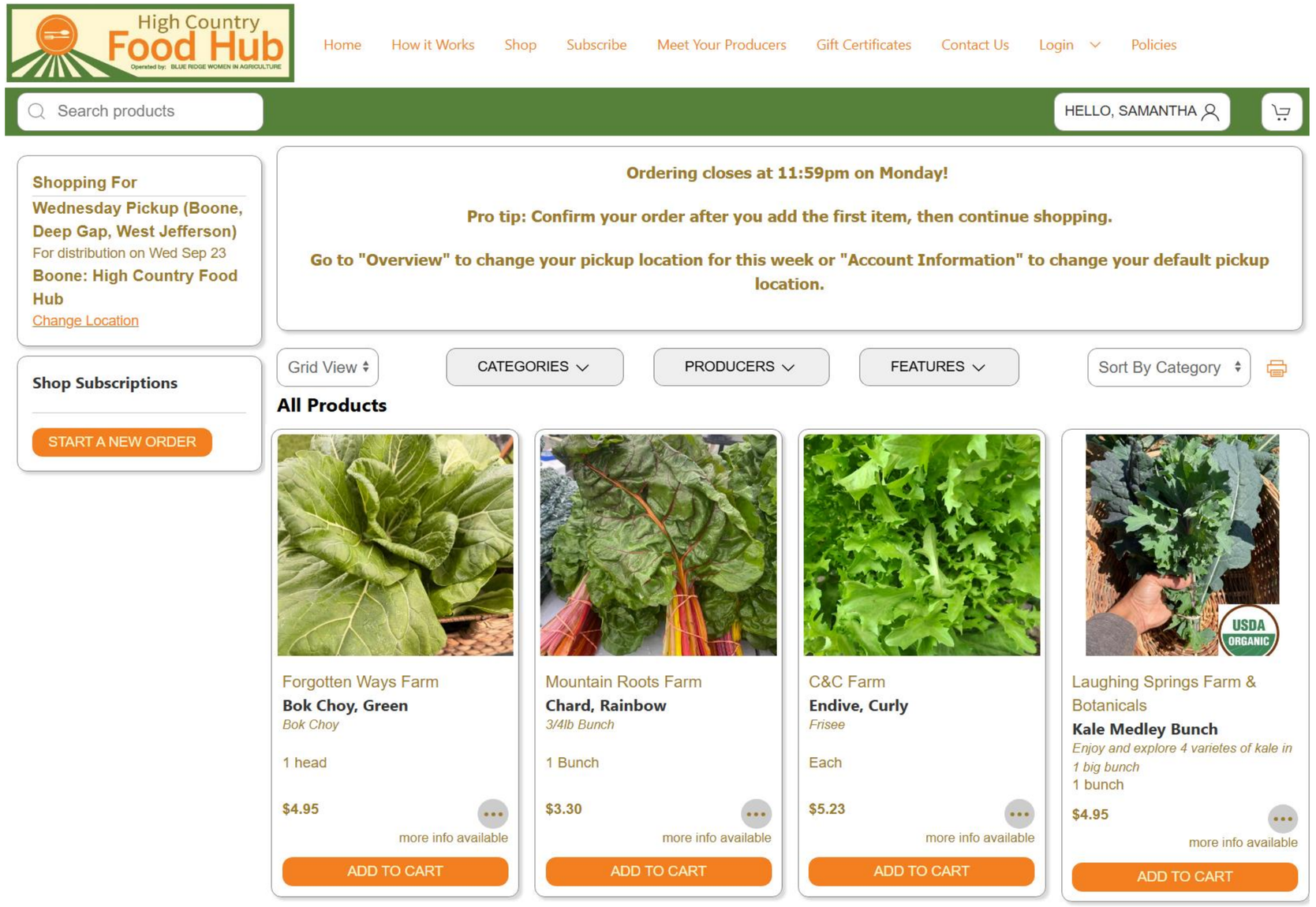
Sam Springs
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Boone, NC (Watauga County)







Service Model: BRWIA



Service Model: BRWIA

For this section, **check all the boxes for the foods you'd like** in your healthy food box, and we'll do our best to accommodate you. Occasionally, we may have to include a substitute if your preferred items aren't available.

Greens



☐ Kale



☐ Collards





Choice in Service Delivery

BRWIA Takeaways

- Build choice into the operating model
- Use guardrails without removing agency
- Design around what people can realistically access
- Be realistic about the actual costs and human infrastructure required to deliver choice at scale

Choice was not layered onto the program; it was embedded in the way BRWIA structured its marketplace, financing, delivery system, and staffing model.



Enabled Through Service

Client Choice

Enabled Through Service

Sometimes meaningful choice is about creating an option that **did not exist** before.

That requires **seeing the whole person within the context of their life**: their goals, relationships, responsibilities, barriers, safety, and the possibilities they are working to create.

Choice Can Start With:

- What are you trying to make possible right now?
- What is getting in the way?
- What options do you currently have?
- What would need to change for another option to become possible?
- How does this need fit into everything else happening in your life?

Choice Enabled Through Service

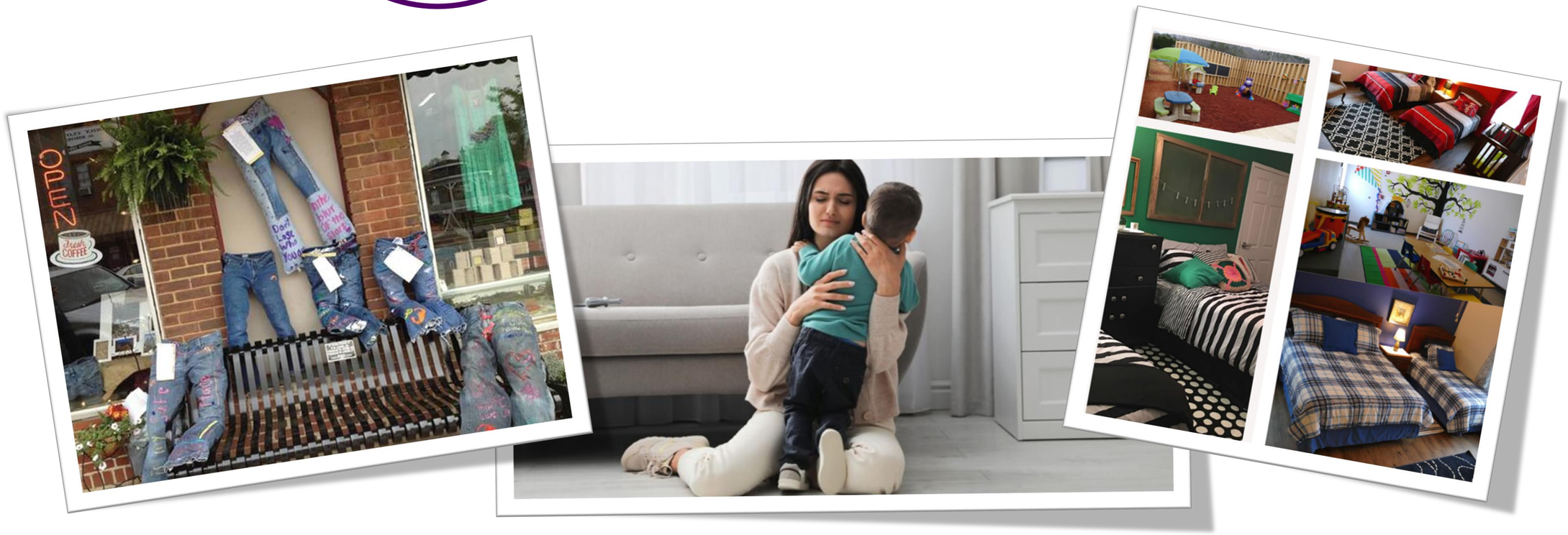
Because of a service, someone may gain the ability to:

- **move independently** (to work, school)
- **remain safely where they choose**
- **access an opportunity** that was previously out of reach (housing, employment, stability, connection)

Sometimes, what a client says they want is the doorway to what they truly need. When we respond only to the presenting request, or to the problem as we define it, we risk overlooking the context that shapes what kind of support will actually make a difference.

Choice Enabled Through Service

Jennifer Turner-Lynn, MSW
Assistant Director
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Franklin, NC (Macon County)

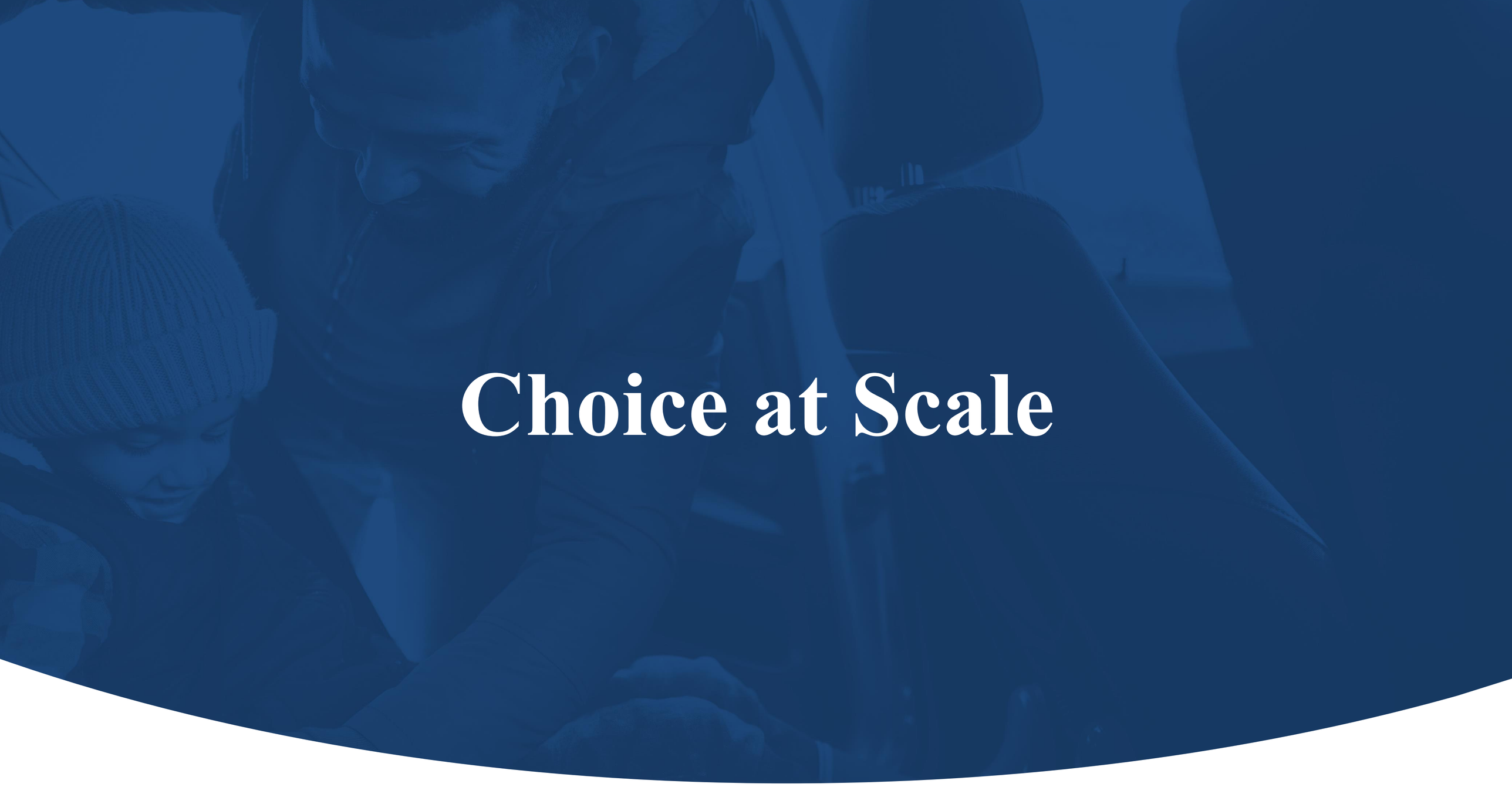


Choice Enabled Through Service

REACH of Macon County Takeaways

- See the person, not just the presenting need
- Start with what the person is trying to make possible
- Small barriers can eliminate entire choices
- The right support may be indirect
- Success is not just completing a service: it is expanding the person's real range of options afterward

Sometimes the most important choice is **the one the service makes possible.**



Choice at Scale

Client Choice

Choice at Scale

At a small scale, meaningful choice can happen through ongoing, individualized conversations.

At a larger scale, programs need to preserve agency while also managing **volume, staffing, geography, technology, consistency, and accountability.**

At scale, choice cannot depend entirely on individual staff relationships. It must be **designed into the system** itself.

The Challenge Becomes:

- What should be standardized so the program can operate efficiently?
- Where does flexibility matter most to participants?
- What systems can help people make choices independently?
- When is added complexity worth preserving a meaningful preference?

Choice at Scale

Laura Paige "LP" Penkert, MS, MPH
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Choice at Scale

MANNA Foodbank Takeaways

- At a small scale, relationships can carry choice. At a larger scale, systems must carry more of it
- Standardize what should be consistent
- Build choice into the infrastructure
- Preserve flexibility where it matters most
- Efficiency is not always the only goal
- Investing upfront can create greater autonomy later

At scale, meaningful choice needs to be designed into the system, not recreated manually for every participant.



Conclusion

The Power of Choice

Meaningful choice can show up in different ways:

- **Before and during service delivery:** Give people meaningful ways to shape how support fits into their lives.
- **Enabled by the service:** Remove barriers and create options that did not exist before.
- **At scale:** Build choice into the systems, workflows, and infrastructure—not just individual relationships.

Across all three, **choice does not mean unlimited options**. It means **preserving clients' access to meaningful options** within real constraints.

Where in your program could people have more meaningful influence over what happens next?



Q&A

Next Webinar

From Policy to Plate: Understanding Food Is Medicine

October 20, 12:00 to 1:00 PM ET on Zoom

Presented by the NC Food is Medicine Coalition & Impact Health

Food access is foundational to health, but “food access” and “food is medicine” are not interchangeable.

Food is Medicine programs require active collaboration between healthcare and community partners, along with a clear, evidence-based pathway through which food-based interventions are expected to improve health or healthcare outcomes.

Feedback Survey

Please take 5 minutes to share your thoughts

https://ihorg.jotform.com/form/power-of-choice-webinar-survery



Thank you!