



Michael Leach
Chief External Engagement Officer, Think of Us
Washington, D.C.

Michael Leach is a respected child welfare leader who previously served as State Director of the South Carolina Department of Social Services, overseeing a broad portfolio that included child welfare, economic assistance, early care and education, child support, and adult protective services.

Under his leadership, South Carolina achieved one of the most significant child welfare transformations in the nation. The number of children in foster care decreased from 6,000 to 3,000, timely permanency outcomes improved, and the use of congregate care was substantially reduced. Mike also expanded foster care to age 21, giving young people greater support as they transitioned into adulthood.

He championed the growth of kinship care, increasing the percentage of children placed with relatives from 3% to 29% through landmark legislation that expanded resources and permanency options for families. He also strengthened the agency's workforce, achieving a turnover rate below 10% while fostering a culture centered on safety, stability, and strong leadership. Before leading South Carolina DSS, Mike held several key roles at the Tennessee Department of Children's Services, including Deputy Commissioner, Director of Continuous Quality Improvement, Director of Independent Living, and Director of Systems Integration.

Mike holds a Master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy from Trevecca Nazarene University. He is the recipient of multiple national and state honors, including the 2024 APHSA Excellence Award for Outstanding State Member, as well as recognitions from CASA and Youth Villages. He has trained internationally on the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) framework and other evidence-based child welfare interventions, and he has been acknowledged in multiple publications focused on systems reform and leadership.

Driven by the belief that sustainable change happens when systems work better, leaders grow stronger, and teams feel supported to deliver for children and families, Mike continues to advance efforts that improve outcomes and strengthen communities.