Effective Photolisting: Best Practices for Developing Strengths-Based Narratives

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Mary Boo
Manager, AdoptUSKids Family Support Team

Tracy Serdjenian
Director, AdoptUSKids Capacity-Building and Engagement Team
About AdoptUSKids

Our mission:

• Raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system

• Assist states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop, and support foster and adoptive families
Introductions

• What’s the number one thing you want to get out of today’s session?
Goals for this workshop

• Share a strengths-based paradigm of public child-specific recruitment with a strong focus on protecting children and teens waiting to be adopted

• Explain the difference between a public and private narrative
Goals for this workshop

• Provide tips for engaging children and youth in the process

• Explore how recruiters, caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, and managers can make changes to ensure strengths-based narratives for children and teens
The paradigm

- Strengths-based, positive, and descriptive approach
- Highest priority is safety, privacy, and dignity; next is to encourage prospective parents
- Goal is to share information at different stages in the process
Walk in youth’s shoes

- Public narratives are easily accessible to the youth, their peers, birth family members, predators—to anyone
- What do we want shared publicly about ourselves; how do we control what’s public and what’s shared with a smaller network?
- Shouldn’t we do the same for children in care?
# Continuum of Disclosure

## People Generally Interested in Adoption (The Public)

**What’s shared:** Positive, strengths-based information such as children’s talents, dreams, hobbies, and interests  

**What’s NOT shared:** Challenges or disabilities; private or personal information  

**How:** Photolisting websites, Heart Galleries, flyers, TV/radio, newspapers, social media  

**Goal:** Interest families and help them feel a connection to the child, so they move forward in learning more about adoption

## Prospective Adopters Who Have an Approved Home Study and Have Been Through Training

**What’s shared:** A child’s level of functioning in various areas (physical, cognitive, emotional, etc.), general and factual information about disabilities, behaviors, educational and intellectual functioning  

**What’s NOT shared:** Details on disabilities or challenges; placement or abuse history; birth family information  

**How:** Private profiles on photolisting websites, email or printed documents available only to trained/home-studied families who have signed confidentiality agreements  

**Goal:** Allow families to begin to consider if their family might be a good fit for this child, so they submit a home study

## Prospective Adopters Who are Moving Toward Placement of a Child and Whom Workers Think Are a Good Match for a Child

**What’s shared:** All diagnosis and treatment information, details about ongoing care needs; birth family, placement, and abuse history  

**How:** Conversations between child’s worker and family’s worker, then conversations between the professionals and the prospective adopters  

**Goal:** Enable prospective adopters and professionals to determine if the family is able to meet the child’s needs and can move forward with adoption
What to include in a public profile

• Preferred first name
• Positive personality traits
• Strengths
• Hobbies, interests, and pastimes
• What they like about school
• What makes them laugh
• Things that are important to them
What not to include

• Identifying information
• Information about abuse, neglect, maltreatment
• Placement information
• Medical information
• Behavioral challenges
What not to include

- Potentially painful or embarrassing information
- Fears or anxieties
- Things that limit potential families
- Intellectual ability or education challenges
- Sexual orientation or gender identity
- Status as legally free or not legally free
What to consider carefully in a public profile

- A general statement about long-term or ongoing needs
- Discussion of appearance
- The young person’s expressed preferences on types of families
Discussion

• Are there other things you don’t include or consider carefully?
• Are there any of the items we listed you think are in the wrong category?
Engaging children and teens

• Gather information. Ask questions.

• Be clear that it is a choice. Teens should be given the opportunity to help develop their profile but never forced to do so.

• Transparency is critical. Be very clear about how and where the materials will be used.

• Create more compelling profiles using video and audio files in addition to photos and narratives.
Engaging children and teens

- Include the child or teen’s art, writing, or photography.
- Include quotes from the child or teen.
- Have them review their narrative and give feedback.
- Let them know their profile can be updated when they have new information they want to include.
Gathering information from the child or youth

• Make sure the person gathering information has a good relationship with the child and knows potential triggers.

• Engage in conversation while doing a fun activity of the child’s choosing to help conversation flow more easily and naturally.

• Let the child lead.

• Observe first; then ask follow up questions.
Questions to ask a child or teen

• What are you really good at? What would you like to become really good at?
• What are you most proud of? What is one thing you work very hard to do?
• What do you like learning about (in school or out of school)?
• What would you like to do or be when you grow up? Do you know anyone who has this job already?
• What are some things you think you might to do with an adoptive family?
• What is your dream day like?
Crafting compelling narratives

- Include details, quotes, and stories
- Use positive adjectives
- Vary templates and sentence structure
Sample strengths-based public narrative:

Aaron picks Florida as the one place on Earth he’d most like to visit. But forget about Mickey and all those other attractions. He just wants to see the frothy blue ocean and bury his toes in warm white sand on a seaside beach. Indeed, Aaron loves life’s simple pleasures. For instance, he enjoys playing outside and likes swimming and being in the water. In addition, he likes to play basketball. When he’s indoors, Aaron enjoys watching television and movies, especially the animated film *Wall-E*. Like the ocean he wants to visit, blue is Aaron’s favorite color. At supper, Aaron would savor some pizza and afterward he’d help clear the table and perhaps get ready to play Sorry, his favorite game. His simple pleasures carry over to Christmas, too, which he enjoys celebrating by helping to decorate the house. And the most important things Aaron wants people to know about him are that he’s nice, kind, and has a great personality.
Sample strengths-based public narrative:

Meet Lexi! If you want every day to start with a smile, there’s no doubt Lexi will bring one to your face. She greets everyone with a big grin and has been described as one of the happiest children you’ll ever meet. The rewards of her love and smiles will be endless. A very social girl, Lexi loves to interact with children and adults. Lexi loves to be talked to! She amuses herself by playing with toys (her favorites have music and lights). Watching TV and animated movies are also fun for Lexi. Lexi likes going to school and on outings, especially going to church with her foster family. If you could be Lexi’s adoptive family, please don’t miss out on another minute without this wonderful girl! Lexi is a child who will enrich your life forever.
Photos

• Be positive and of good quality
• Be updated regularly
• Not reveal location information or other private information
• Not feature weapons, revealing clothing, etc.
Private profiles

- Private profiles allow you to share more information with people who have an approved home study to help prospective parents decide if they want to learn more
- Private profiles can be online or in print
- AdoptUSKids has private online profiles for registered, home-studied families
Private profile – what to include

- Functioning or disability level
- Ongoing long-term medical needs
- General factual statements made by medical professionals
- Specific disabilities that relate to school, education, or intellectual ability
- Special education status or individual education plan
Private profile – what to include

- Performance in school
- Support needs
- Information about the type of family being sought and the skills parents should have
- A child or youth’s expressed desire on family type
Private profile – what to include

- That a youth is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender if the youth wants the information in the private narrative
- Adoption assistance eligibility
- Status as legally free or not
Private profile – what not to include

- Identifying information
- Abuse and neglect history; placement history
- Information about sexualized, self-harming, or similar behaviors
- Information about criminal behavior or juvenile justice history
- Negative statements about the child
Sample strengths-based private narrative:

Joshua is a great kid who has made a lot of progress in the last year. He is diagnosed with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). At school, he has an individual education plan to address how FASD has affected his cognitive ability (he has some learning delays) and what strategies will help him do better. He’s doing well in a specialized, small classroom where he gets the extra attention he needs to succeed. He loves going to school and his grades are good. At home, Joshua is a good listener, although he sometimes gets a bit frustrated when he doesn’t understand what is expected of him. He does really well when his foster parents are able to take the time to explain what he doesn’t understand or to give him instructions step by step. His future family should be willing to learn about how FASD affects a child and to learn parenting techniques that work for children who have this disorder. Joshua sees a therapist who is using Theraplay techniques to help him address some of his past trauma. He’s made great progress at expressing his feelings and is beginning to grieve the losses he has experienced. His future family should be committed to helping him continue on this healing journey.
Exercise

• Has been in care for 10 years; was neglected due to his mother’s addiction
• Loves math and science
• Doesn’t get in fights or argue with his foster family
• Has 3.0 GPA; does well in almost all of his classes
• Is a bit overweight but is becoming more active; likes to play volleyball and soccer
Exercise

- When he’s sad has cut himself a few times, but not recently
- Needs extra help at school with reading class; has an IEP and had a reading tutor for several years
- Wants brothers and sisters
- Doesn’t like vegetables much, but will try them
- Needs parents who are patient and can help him learn to love himself
System changes to support strengths-based child-specific recruitment

- Overall philosophy
- Policies and procedures
- Staffing
- Training
- Contracting
Policies and procedures

- Children who can or will have public recruitment
- Content of public narratives or descriptions
- Process for development and review
Staffing

- Designate one or a few writers
- Identify one or more editors
- Have the adoption specialist or recruiter create narratives
- Ask caseworkers to draft narratives
Discussion

• Who develops narratives in your jurisdiction?
• How do they get information about children and teens?
• Can you envision a process where writers or editors help if caseworkers are doing the narratives?
Training

- Have a training plan
- Considerations in conducting training
- Content for training
- Follow up in supervision or team meetings
Contracting

- Talk about values and philosophy
- Have a plan in place for how the public agency and private agency work together
- Develop specific contract language
System changes to support an effective response system

- Philosophy
- Policies and procedures
- Staffing
- Contracting
Discussion

• What can you implement now or soon?
• What could you consider implementing over the longer term?
Questions
Recorded webinars

- Effective Photolisting and Public Recruitment: Best Practices for Developing Strengths-Based Narratives
  
  GoToTraining (registration required): [https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/1411947043084570626](https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/1411947043084570626)

- Developing Strengths-Based Narratives for Public Recruitment: Strategies for Leaders and Managers
  
  GoToTraining (registration required): [https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/4291928637284273665](https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/4291928637284273665)
Resources

- *Creating Effective Narratives for Children Waiting to Be Adopted*

- *Creating Strengths-Based Profiles for Children and Youth Waiting to Be Adopted: A Guide for Leaders and Managers*

- Comprehensive narrative-writing checklist

- AdoptUSKids website: writing children’s narratives
  https://www.adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/writing-childrens-narratives
AdoptUSKIds photolisting tool

Public narrative (required)

Seen by everyone, including the child. Open narrative-writing guidelines (new tab).

Highlight children’s talents, skills, interests, aspirations, and positive personality traits here.

Ghosted instructions for the types of information to include.

Must be between 400 and 6,500 characters. Current character count: 0

Check my narrative  Check spelling

Characters are counted as you type or copy/paste in the text box. If the character count is less than 400, message will be in red. Once 400 minimum is reached, message will turn black.

Button will check the narrative for privacy & safety keywords. Confirmation messaging is dependent on whether or not keywords are found in the narrative.
Nikolai has been diagnosed with **post-traumatic stress disorder**. He has been participating in therapy for two years, and is experiencing far fewer symptoms of stress. Being active has really helped him manage the symptoms of **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder**. He will occasionally get a little distracted in school; if you let him know, he is able to refocus. While he has several close friends, Nikolai can be a bit overwhelmed by huge gatherings or parties. He’d prefer to hang out with just a couple of people he knows well.

When asked about what his dream day might be like, Nikolai replied, “I’d start with my favorite breakfast of bacon and hash browns, with a side of blueberries. I can never get enough blueberries! Next I would meet my friends, Jack and Antoine at the park, where...”

**Must be between 400 and 6,500 characters. Current character count: 3727**

**Please consider revising your public narrative.**

The highlighted words may reveal negative, private, or location information about a child. Please consider revising or moving information to the optional private sections.

Questions? Contact us: support@adoptuskids.org or 800-901-6911.
Contact information

Mary Boo
AdoptUSKids Family Support Team Manager
maryboo@nacac.org
651-644-3036 x19

Tracy Serdjenian
AdoptUSKids Director of Capacity Building and Engagement
tserdjenian@adoptex.org
Opportunities

• Minority Professional Leadership Development program: adoptuskids.org/mpld

• For support with writing narratives or to explore capacity-building services: consultation@adoptuskids.org

• For technical support with using the AdoptUSKids site: 800-901-6911

• Sign up to get news and updates from AdoptUSKids: https://adoptuskids.org/newsletter-sign-up