



Voices of Lived Experience in Child Welfare

A DIGITAL STORY LIBRARY



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Storytelling can change the way we think, the way we feel, and the way we act. The stories in this collection tell the real-life struggles of families, children, and youth in the child welfare system and show how relationships and resources support healing, well-being, and positive development. Browse through the stories to curate a collection that best suits your needs. Find a stories relevant to the changes you want to see that will help strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Don't just cherry pick for "success" stories. Sometimes the stories of those who've struggled will give a clearer picture of the system and highlight what needs to change.

Advocate

Use stories to advocate for the policy and resources needed to strengthen and support families, children, and youth and prevent abuse and neglect. To encourage collaboration, child welfare agencies can share stories with legislative bodies and system partners like courts, providers of public and mental health, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence support, financial assistance, housing assistance, and parent education providers.

Use stories to:

- ◆ Open meetings to engage your audience
- ◆ Combine with data and trends to show how they reflect a larger population
- ◆ Close a presentation to bring the statistics back to a human scale
- ◆ Feature in state and local campaigns to enhance your message

Discussion and reflection questions:

- ◆ How did the story change perceptions you had before viewing the video?
- ◆ What moved you and why?
- ◆ What contributed to the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children in care?
- ◆ What did the agency or community do to support this?
- ◆ What can you replicate in your community?

Train

Add stories to your training materials to help develop a skilled child welfare workforce and enhance parenting classes and resource parent training. Show stories that model good practice and encourage supportive relationships.

The storytellers are people whose lives have been affected by the child welfare system: parents, kinship caregivers, resource parents, adoptive parents, youth and young adults, service providers, community partners, legal partners, mentors, agency leaders, frontline staff, and supervisors.

Share their stories to build understanding and connections between people as you advocate, inspire, support, recruit, train, and coach individuals and teams.

Use stories to:

- ◆ Kickoff a meeting or training as an icebreaker to engage participants
- ◆ Model positive behaviors and supportive relationships
- ◆ Encourage people that they can achieve goals
- ◆ Bust negative myths with stories of children with difficult behaviors being raised in families and resource parents working with parents to reunify families

Discussion and reflection questions:

- ◆ What did you learn from the story?
- ◆ What was something that surprised you? Why?
- ◆ What kind of resources and support did the storyteller need?
- ◆ What was challenging or difficult for you to hear or to address?
- ◆ What can you change or improve?

Inspire

Show stories to inspire agency staff and collaborative partners to build a better child well-being system. Storytelling is a powerful way to connect real-life scenarios to important practice issues and raise awareness about how the child welfare system can support youth and families.

Use stories to:

- ◆ Open collaborative meetings to show that change is possible
- ◆ Challenge the group to identify gaps in the system that need improvement
- ◆ Anchor discussions of larger populations, data, and trends
- ◆ Encourage people to make positive changes
- ◆ Inspire improvements in your own practice

Discussion and reflection questions:

- ◆ What was an “aha moment”? Why?
- ◆ What was something that inspired you?
- ◆ What resources and support did the storyteller need?
- ◆ What could you replicate?
- ◆ What would you like to change or improve in your own practice?

Support

Share stories with support groups for kinship caregivers, peer parents, and resource parents to give people encouragement, build community, and spark ideas how they can support each other and advocate for support from the agency and community.

Use stories to:

- ◆ Kickoff a meeting as an icebreaker
- ◆ Build connections between peers
- ◆ Encourage people that they can achieve goals
- ◆ Identify ways to advocate for support
- ◆ Reflect on caregiver resource and support needs

Discussion and reflection questions:

- ◆ Did the storyteller get the resources and support they needed?
- ◆ What was healing for the family?
- ◆ What was something that inspired you?
- ◆ What was something that surprised you? Why?
- ◆ What improvements could you advocate for in your community?
- ◆ As a caregiver, what support and resources do you need?

Recruit

Combine these stories with additional strategies and tools to recruit and retain kinship and foster parents. Include them with realistic job preview tools when hiring and onboarding new agency staff.

Use stories to:

- ◆ Expand ideas of who can be a resource parent or kinship caretaker
- ◆ Show children with difficult behaviors living in families
- ◆ Encourage people that they can strengthen families through supportive relationships
- ◆ Illustrate best practices
- ◆ Set realistic role expectations

Discussion and reflection questions:

- ◆ What was something that surprised you? Why?
- ◆ What experiences did you identify with?
- ◆ How might this story relate to your work?
- ◆ What was difficult for you to hear?
- ◆ What was something that encouraged you?
- ◆ What would you like to know before you commit to a new role?

Coach

Listen to stories together when coaching staff, peer parents, and resource parents to motivate them, reinforce best practices, help them transfer training into practice, and build skills.

Use stories to:

- ◆ Open conversations about challenges
- ◆ Relate training to practical application
- ◆ Encourage people that they can strengthen families through supportive relationships
- ◆ Model best practices

Discussion and reflection questions:

- ◆ What were some of the challenges the storyteller faced that you could relate to?
- ◆ What supportive behaviors and resources helped?
- ◆ How was your training reflected in this story?
- ◆ How might this story relate to your work?
- ◆ What was something that motivates you?
- ◆ What would you like to try, change, or improve in your practice?

Additional Resources:

[It's All Relative: Supporting Kinship Care Discussion Guides and Video Series](#)

[Understanding the Story: Family Mosaic Discussion Guide and Video Series](#)

[Menu for Youth Engagement Discussion Guide, Tips, and Video Series](#)

[Agencies & Courts: Putting Families Front and Center Videos and Discussion Guide](#)

[Perspectives on Normalcy Videos and Discussion Questions](#)

[Empowering Caretakers, Strengthening Families Discussion Guide and Video Series \(on caplearn\)](#)

[Using Webinars as Learning Tools: Three Key Steps](#)

This product was created by the Capacity Building Center for States under Contract No. HHSP2332015000711, funded by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Users may freely print and distribute this material crediting the Capacity Building Center for States.

Suggested citation: Capacity Building Center for States. (2022). *Voices of lived experience in child welfare: A digital story library discussion guide*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

