Providing professionals and supportive adults with tools to increase knowledge, skill, and social capacity to support youth with experience in foster care.
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The Power of Sharing Your Story

Brittany Bartkowiak, MSW
Hello! Who’s listening?

- Agenda
- Intention

EVERYONE HAS A STORY TO TELL.
Brittany's Blog: Straight Talk by a Scholar from Foster Care

Brittany's Blog chronicles one student's journey from foster care to college to career pipeline. As a Fostering Success Michigan Student Ambassador, Brittany will reflect critically on her experiences, barriers, and victories. The first portion of the blog follows her story through graduation from undergrad. As a graduate student studying social work with a concentration in management of youth and children services, Brittany will analyze the content she learns from a valuable perspective full of first-hand experience in the systems she studies. Brittany will offer suggestions for both students and professionals as they work together to overcome the barriers facing young people who have experienced foster care. This blog is intended for fellow foster care alumni, professionals working with students who have experienced care, and anyone else involved in the movement to support young people in their efforts to succeed.

Readers can contact Brittany at cfs_fsmstories@wmich.edu
Why share your story in the first place?
It’s unique

- Stories are part of our culture
- Two people perceive the same situation differently
- Intersecting identities
- Statistics don’t share stories

“Don’t forget – no one else sees the world the way you do, so no one else can tell the stories that you have to tell.”

~ Charles de Lint
It matters

- Stories bring policy into practice
- To educate, influence, and promote change
- Stories don’t tell, they show
It’s a form of connection

- There are biological benefits to storytelling
- Shame keeps us from sharing our stories
- Empathy is the anecdote to shame
- It can feel good and powerful to share your story
  - ... but be careful
Ways to share your story
Art

Through research

Poetry

Writing a book

Public speaking

In a blog/journal

With a friend

With policymakers
How I Make My Mark

Posted in Brittany's Blog: Straight Talk by a Scholar from Care on May 28, 2015

Meet Sheila, a Student Advisory Board member who is making her mark! She asks.....how will YOU #MakeYourMarkForFosters?
“Writing as writing. Writing as rioting. Writing as righting.

On the best days, all three.”

- Teju Cole

Sharing through writing
Components of a Story

Beginning  Middle  End
Starting a Blog

- Map out your reasons for writing
- Set a vision for the blog
- Look for inspiration
- Write how you sound

Introduction
- Who are you?
- What is this blog about?
“Brittany's Blog chronicles one student's journey from foster care to college to career pipeline. Brittany will reflect critically on her experiences, barriers, and victories.

Brittany will offer suggestions for both students and professionals as they work together to overcome the barriers facing young people who have experienced foster care.

This blog is intended for fellow foster care alumni, professionals working with students who have experienced care, and anyone else involved in the movement to support young people in their efforts to succeed.”
Inspiration

- Read something you enjoy and notice what you like

- Use prompts (see handout)
  - What’s it like to be you?
  - What is a foster care statistic that bothers you?
  - What’s something you wish people knew about individuals who have been in foster care?
  - How is your life different or the same as other people your age?
  - How could your experience in the system have been improved?
Sample Structure

Introduction
• Give audience an expectation of what they’re about to read
• Focus statement

Explain
• Why do you feel this way?
• Is there an experience you’ve had that illustrates why you think the way you do?

Ending
• Remind readers of your main point
• What’s coming up next on the blog?
1. Create a content calendar. If you're blogging once or twice a week, brainstorm and jot down some topics to write about and insert them into a calendar that extends into the next couple of months.

2. Categorize your content.

3. Start crafting a post a week in advance.

4. Think about links and mentions.

5. Set aside time to write.

How to Write a Blog Post in Just 30 Minutes - Entrepreneur
www.entrepreneur.com/article/240372 Entrepreneur

How to Write a Blog: The 12 Dos and Don'ts of Writing a Blog
www.writersdigest.com/.../the-12-dos-and-donts-of-writin... Writer's Digest

How to Write a Blog Post: A Simple Formula + 5 Free Blog …
blog.hubspot.com/.../how-to-write-blog-post-simple-formu... HubSpot, Inc.
Dec 31, 2014 - That way, before you start writing, you know which points you want to cover, and the best order in which to do it. To make things even easier, you can also download and use our free blog post templates, which are pre-organized for five of the most common blog post types. Just fill in the blanks!

How to Write an Awesome Blog Post in Five Steps
Sharing your story: Things to keep in mind
Take control of your story

- Always be truthful
- Choose your outlet wisely
- Decide early on what you are willing and not willing to share; Reevaluate often
- Be prepared for question and assumptions
- Ask for support when you need it
- Remember your reason for sharing
Practice sharing your story without using the words...

- Foster care
- Court ward
- Child welfare
- System
- Adopted
- Parents
- Child abuse
- Child neglect
- Alumni
- Trauma
- Aged out
- Homeless
- Hopeless
Creating Boundaries

- Practice saying your story out loud
  - Pay attention to how you feel
- Claim the language you prefer
- Set your limits
  - For example...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things to share</th>
<th>Things not to share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- I was in foster care in the state of Michigan</td>
<td>- Which group home I was in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The number of placements I was in</td>
<td>- What my relationship with my biological family is like</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When to think twice about sharing your story

- When you don’t want to
- When talking about it will cause more emotional harm than good
- With the sole purpose of captivating your audience
- To heal yourself
- To heal other people
You can’t control what other people think...

But you can give them something to think about.
Asking for feedback

Editing is such an important part of writing, but a tricky one to navigate when talking about personal stories and perspectives

Questions to ask:
- Is the point I’m making clear?
- Is my blog (/story) easy to understand?
- Can you check for basic spelling/grammar?
- What would make it better?
Questions to consider when asked to share your story

- Who
- What
- When
- Why
- How
- Where
Questions to ask

- **What** is the purpose of the event?
- **How** many people will be there?
- **What** is the format of the article/interview/event?
- **How** will my story be shared? (Social media? Email? Etc.)
- **Will** any media be attending the event?
- **How** and **where** will the event be advertised?
- **Am** I expected to participate in a Q & A session?
Tackling intrusive questions

- **Q:** Why were you in foster care?
- **Q:** Are you in therapy?
- **Q:** Do you still talk to your biological parents?
- **Q:** How many foster care placements were you in?
I don’t usually share that information.

I keep that private.

I’d prefer not to answer that.

It’s not a comfortable thing to talk about.

That feels too personal to talk about.

I’d rather talk about it at a different time.

Something I would love to share with you is...

For some people who have experienced foster care...

Why do you ask?
What you need to know about working with the media
Media Training 101

- Assume you’re always on the record
- Your experience is part of a larger story
- It’s not the media’s job to paint a picture you’re proud of – it’s their job to report the truth
- It’s not always easy to retract what you’ve already shared
- “On background”
- First name vs. full name
- It’s OK to decline questions
Importance of Self-Care

- Plan to talk with someone before/after
- Clear your schedule if possible
- Choose social media wisely
- Be proud of yourself!
Thank You!

Please feel free to contact me (really) at brittany.bartkowiak@gmail.com
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