

Training **MATTERS**



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- NC Division of Social Services
- NC Association of County Directors of Social Services
- Center for Family and Community Engagement at NC State University
- Independent Living Resources, Inc.
- NC Child Welfare Education Collaborative
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work (Jordan Institute for Families)
- UNC-Chapel Hill School of Medicine

We Want to Hear from You!

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This issue of *Training Matters* was produced by John McMahon of the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

Lifebooks: A Great Way to Support Child Well-Being

Because of the benefits they bring to children, birth parents, foster and adoptive parents, and child welfare professionals, lifebooks are widely recognized as best practice in child welfare services. For this reason, requirements related to lifebooks appear in several places in North Carolina's child welfare policies and administrative rules (see box below).

Yet many of those familiar with child welfare practice in our state believe that lifebooks are under valued and under used by public and private agencies.

"Sometimes people see lifebooks as fluff, a luxury," says the NC Division of Social Services' Ginger Caldwell. "Whereas in reality they are essential—a 'must-have' for children's well-being."

Lifebooks

In the most basic terms, a lifebook is "a developmentally appropriate record and collection of mementos that document a child's life events

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— Ginger Caldwell, lifebooks course instructor, NC Division of Social Services



and various caregivers and homes" (Harden, 2004).

First introduced to the field of child welfare in the 1960s, lifebooks have helped children in foster care and adoptive placements "retain connections to their past and integrate those experiences with their present circumstances in a healthy, constructive manner" (USDHHS, 2013).

Because they're such a good way to support children as they negotiate the multiple transitions and family ties that

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NC Requirements Related to Lifebooks

Before they can be licensed in North Carolina, foster parents must receive training in how to prepare lifebooks.

"Training Requirements" in NC Administrative Code (10A NCAC 70E .1117)

Early in the work with the family, the social worker should begin building the child's lifebook by taking and procuring photographs of the child, birth family, and foster placement. Children will continue to need physical documentation of their histories throughout placement.

"Preparing the child for placement" in NC Family Support and Child Welfare Policy Manual, Chapter IV, Section 1201, V. Out-of-Home Placement Services



The record shall contain annual pictures of the child. . . . All additional pictures of the child can be maintained in the record or lifebook so that they are available to the child, his/her family or his/her adoptive family after resolution of the case.

"Annual Pictures of Child" in NC Family Support and Child Welfare Policy Manual, Chap. IV, Section 1201, X. Record Keeping & Documentation

Lifebooks

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they experience, the use of lifebooks spread significantly in the 1980s (Holody & Maher, 1996).

Today lifebooks are more relevant than ever. We now realize how important it is for us to help children understand and make new meaning of their traumatic history and current experiences (NCTSN, 2008). We can help them do this by encouraging them to share their life stories, acknowledging their feelings, and reminding them that the bad things that have happened to them are not their fault. Lifebooks are a great way to accomplish all these things.

NC's One-Day Course

To help child welfare professionals bring the full benefits of lifebooks to the children and families they serve, in 2013 the Division of Social Services began offering a revised version of the course *Lifebooks: Motivating the Memory Keepers*. Ginger Caldwell, who teaches the course with Donna Foster, says the response from participants has been very positive. Caldwell says the experiences people share in class have reinforced for her the tremendous value that lifebooks have for children and for workers.

Key takeaways for lifebook work Caldwell would like to pass on include:

- **Don't forget birth histories/stories.** Many people start lifebooks from the point of placement, but you really need to go back in time, too, Caldwell says. "Policy requires us to have birth certificates in the record for every child in foster care, but often that's what's missing from lifebooks."
In addition to official records, be sure to include birth-related stories. Children really want to know the answers to questions such as: Where was I born? Where did I live when I was first born? On what day of the week was I born?
- **Lifebooks are a team effort.** "Everybody who's in contact with the child and family can play a role," Caldwell says. "I mean *everyone!*"

For example, at removal a CPS worker can ask the child or parent "What pictures would you like to take with you?" It's a way for us to make it clear to the parent that

COURSE PROFILE

Lifebooks: Motivating the Memory Keepers

This one-day training, which introduces lifebooks as a therapeutic tool for meeting the well-being needs of children in foster care, teaches child welfare staff to educate, motivate, and support all members of the child's team as they work together to create and maintain the child's lifebook. Examples of lifebook formats, materials used in lifebook preparation, organization tips, and innovative lifebook design methods are addressed. In addition, participants create a lifebook page and make plans for continuing the creation of lifebooks for children in foster care and/or adoptive placements. Participants also receive guidelines for sharing this course content with other child welfare staff and resource parents.



Audience: Open to child welfare social workers and supervisors from licensed public and private child-placing agencies in North Carolina. *Motivating the Memory Keepers* is particularly recommended for child welfare staff who work with children in foster care and for certified MAPP-GPS Leaders and staff who conduct pre-service training for foster parents.

Instructors: Ginger Caldwell and Donna Foster

Upcoming 2013 Offerings: July 22 in Fayetteville and October 21 in Greensboro. To register, log in to www.ncswLearn.org.

we value their connection to their child and want to maintain it.

Or, Caldwell says, "A foster care worker may be the one to take a photo of the parent and child. That photo may be a very important—or the *only*—photo of the parent and child together."

By participating in the lifebook process, we all have a chance to contribute to the child's well-being.

- **You have many options!** In addition to the traditional hardcopy/scrapbooking approach, there are numerous excellent digital options for making lifebooks. When choosing a medium, engaging the child is key: pick the format they will be most comfortable with.
- **Support from leaders matters.** Support from agency leaders can be verbal—for example, making sure the whole agency understands how important lifebook work is. Support should also be material. For example, staff may need access to a color printer or to software for creating lifebooks. It's usually a small investment, and the impact on children's lives can be huge.
- **Take the course!** To learn how, see the box above.

References for works cited in this issue can be found at www.trainingmatters-nc.org/tm_v14n3/tm_v14n3.htm

Lifebook Resources

Two of the many resources available for creating lifebooks are . . .

The Child's Own Story: Life Story Work with Traumatized Children by Richard Rose and Terry Philpot (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005). Strategies for conducting life story work and applying it to therapy for children affected by trauma. Available from: www.jkp.com.

Making History: A Social Worker's Guide to Lifebooks by Joann Harrison, Elaine Campbell, Penny Chumbley (2010). A guide to making a record of the places children have lived, the people they've met, and the feelings they have experienced. Available from: <http://1.usa.gov/XUfB11>.

Source: Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov)