

SERVICES TO COUNTIES + ORGANIZATIONS

POWER OF STORY

Person-centered histories for foster youth + adoptees

As a Minnesota-based nonprofit and licensed child-placing agency, Power of Story completes Lifebooks and Social Medical Histories, strengthening Minnesota fosters, adoptees and their families by bringing these necessary, healing, therapeutic, and valuable items to life.

Power of Story also provides life history specific resources and workshops nationwide.

We envision a world in which everyone has the same person-centered access to their own personal history, stories, and medical information.

We provide person-centered support for fostered youth and adoptees by advocating for their access to information, the training of parents and professionals, hands-on support for young people, and the completion of Lifebooks and Social Medical Histories.

We Believe:

- In-depth, truthful stories are essential to wholehearted lives.
- In prioritizing excellence and spending time gaining knowledge.
- Everyone has built-in worth and deserves respect and understanding.
- We need each other to see clearly.
- Everyone deserves access to their history, no matter what.



Social and Medical Histories

A Social Medical History (SMH) includes non-identifiable information, placement locations and dates, addresses of schools, diagnoses, doctors, therapists, information about the youth themselves, their birth family, and reasons for placement.

It is required for all Minnesota foster youth who are in care over six months.

Work with us to:

- Comply with MN statute 260C.212 Subd. 15., that requires SMH's begin no later than the child's permanency progress review hearing or six months after the child's placement in foster care.
- Receive electronic, updateable and strength-based, Social Medical Histories, using the MN DHS approved SMH format – DHS-6754A-ENG PDF.
- Provide full disclosure to pre-adoptive parents, helpful information for birth parents upon reunification, provide a summary document for the court, that is also shared with the youth after age 14.

Lifebooks

Lifebooks are photo and narrative-based books geared toward children's developmental age, with the aim of helping them understand their story in an age-appropriate way, a Lifebook has impact from birth – adulthood.

In MN, A Lifebook is not required, but is HIGHLY recommended for every youth in out of home placement, as evidenced by the inclusion of Lifebooks as an activity that supports permanent connections as part of the STAY (Successful Transition to Adulthood for Youth) program.

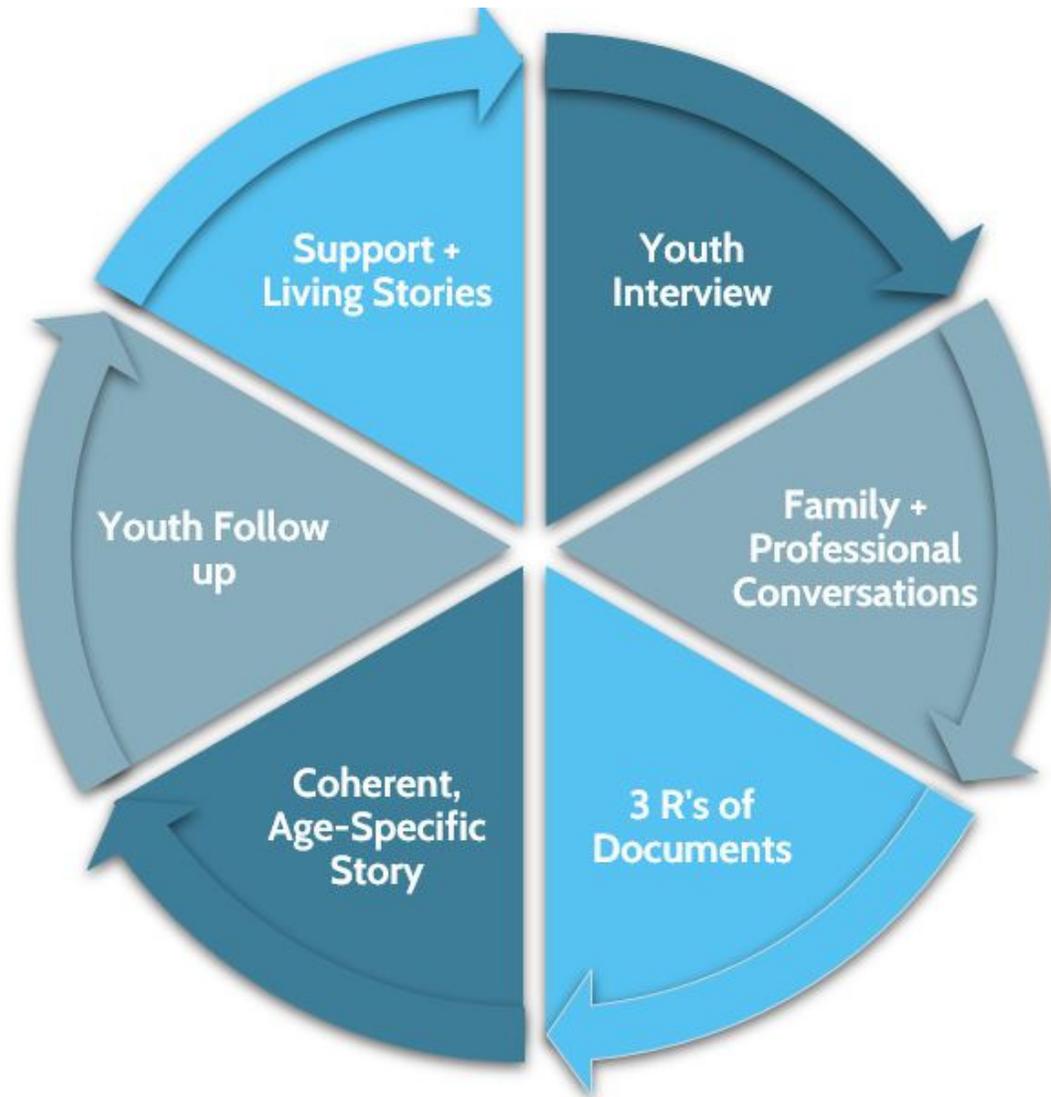
Work with us to:

- Receive one physical 3 ring binder based book, with an age appropriate, coherent narrative and photos, for the child to have and an electronic version to remain in the county file.
- Provide a child with an overarching narrative of his/her life history prior to and while in foster care.
- Provide youth childhood and family photos.
- Provide positive and nuanced information about the birth family.
- Provide a timeline for past placements and school experiences.



Our Specialized and Research-Driven Model

We know that no written history can replace the lived experiences of growing up with daily access to those who know your stories + medical information, but we answer as many questions and fill as many gaps as possible for foster youth and adoptees through nuanced and person-centered Social Medical Histories and Lifebooks.



In a 2022 survey, a foster alumni shared, “We need to know certain things (health records of the family for instance) and we want to know others (what actually happened, reasons, etc.)... it is our story, and are entitled to have it.”

The immediate health and safety of young people is imperative, but so is capturing the essence of their story long term.

As former foster youth Adam Starks puts it, “We need to know our story to succeed in the future. It’s extremely difficult to wander through life without knowing your past. That void haunts and revisits you in unexpected ways if left unchecked.”

Workshops

Bring the research, impact and power of story, directly to youth, parents, adoption and child protection staff.

Child Welfare Staff Workshop: Capturing the Essence of Youths' Stories

This live 2-hour training is where best practice, research, and good social work come together in this interactive and data-driven Lifestory work training for permanency and child protection staff. Workers will be equipped to be a part of a young person's healing through Lifebook and Social Medical Histories. We will hear from youth, discuss the legal requirements and review the research around the importance of this work.

We will also discuss many practical tips, including how to stretch budgets and find time to complete this work, review some hands-on tools you can use with young people, talk about how to include youth in the process and get birth, foster, and adoptive parent buy-in. Lastly, we will view an example of a Lifebook and Social Medical History.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Workshop: Practical Tips to Preserve Kid's History

This 2-hour training provides the extra knowledge, tools, and tips necessary for foster and adoptive parents to be empowered to help children understand their history, even the most delicate parts.

Children who are not living with their birth family, often have holes in their history, but we know kids do better when they can understand where they came from and why they are not with their first family, even if that separation is temporary.

Foster and adoptive parents are an important bridge between a child's past and future and this training will help strengthen that connection.

Power of Story stands ready to partner with counties and organizations to strengthen Minnesota youth and families by championing and capturing the strength of foster and adoptive youth's stories, history and medical information.

Alisa Matheson

Founder and Executive Director

alisa@powerofstory.us

<https://powerofstory.us/>



MN County + Organization FAQs

Is training available?

Yes, you can share the Power of Story with your parents, child protection, GALs, lawyers, permanency and adoption staff. We continually find that when they fully understand the power of what they know, they become sensational partners in this work.

[Workshop Information](#)

How do I send a referral?

After a worker has spoken with their supervisor, they can complete the online referral. Once it is submitted, the referring worker will get an email confirmation and can schedule a referral meeting to meet with their Story Specialist.

[Refer a Youth Now](#)

What are the qualifications of those who will complete Lifebooks and Social Medical Histories?

All our Story Specialists have completed a background check, a minimum of a two-year degree, prior experience in the world of adoption, foster care, trauma therapy and/or narrative therapy and are committed to continued growth and excellence. They also have reviewed current research in the areas of life history and related fields and have received specialized training in completing life history work with young people.

Is Power of Story able to do this work across Minnesota?

Yes, we are licensed by the MN DHS as a Child Caring-Placing Agency License # 1112248, are a MN Nonprofit, EIN 87-3175299, have filed MN Certificate of Incorporation. Our 501c (3) is pending, so we are currently under fiscal sponsorship with Connections to Independence, but are fully prepared to get to work.

What if I only want to refer a few children or young people?

That is totally fine! We would welcome the chance to work with them.

What happens at a referral meeting?

During this meeting, the referring worker will get an introduction to your Story Specialist and a summary of our model and processes. They will also share contact information for birth

family members, current and past placements, documents, and information needed to complete Lifebook and/or Social Medical History. They will also sign any releases of information needed.

How will Power of Story involve the worker?

After the Lifebook or Social Medical History is completed, it will be shared with the referring worker electronically before meeting with the youth a second time, for any edits, additions, or changes. At that time, the Story Specialist will also discuss how to get it to the young person, based on the youth's desires and the specific situation/concerns/etc.

Can we decide what to share or not share with the youth?

Yes, we will respect the wishes of the referring worker, however, as huge believers in the healing power of information, we will advocate for a **full plan** to be put in place to share all information if it is felt that ALL shouldn't be shared at this time.

How will Power of Story involve the youth?

We **meet twice** with each youth **over 6 years** of age. Hopefully in person, but virtual meetings are an option also.

During the **first meeting**, the Story Specialist will show them a sample Lifebook and/or Social Medical History, answer questions about the process, and share that they will meet with them once more after the book/document is done. The Story Specialist will then ask them what they are curious about, have questions about, things they don't want to know more about right now, and what their current understanding of their life history is.

During the **second meeting**, the Story Specialist will share much of what was found, but most like there will be some questions that can't be answered, and some things that need to be talked about with someone else (their worker, a therapist, etc.).

What are your key messages to youth?

- The past influences the future, but if we know all our history, the good and the bad, **we can heal.**
- ALL of a person's history is important and **worth exploring.**
- It is OK for young people to love and be loved by more than one family.
- It is **normal** to have mixed feelings and questions about the past and future.
- No one's story is **ALL trauma.**
- There is **always** hope for a happy ending (*the story is not over yet*).

Does my county need a separate contract before we can send referrals?

No, you would not. We can work with youth across the state of Minnesota, without more contracts or MOUs, because we have signed a **host/lead** county contract and Rule 4 licensure. Our work together, services expectations, and rates would be set by the **host/lead** county contract. However, your county or organization may need to do an internal process for the purchase of services.

Can I see the host/lead county contract and 2022-2023 rates?

Yes, a rate sheet and copy of the **host/lead** county contract are available upon [request](#). Rates are a flat rate, per referred service.

Can I see examples of your Lifebooks and Social Medical Histories?

Yes, you can view the following videos or [contact us](#) to see one in person or ask more questions.

- [Example Lifebook for Foster Youth and Adoptees by Power of Story](#)
- [Example MN Social and Medical History](#)