



# Every Child Deserves a Lifebook

## Why Lifebooks?

- At Lutheran Social Services of Illinois (LSSI), we believe that every child deserves a Lifebook. Lifebooks are essential for children who are not living with their original families, but we believe they are also useful for all children who have experienced loss, trauma or change.
- Children are often left to make sense of the separations, complications and traumas that occur in their lives. Many children are left on their own to understand what has happened to them. No one helps them truly process and find meaning in painful or difficult changes and transitions. The Lifebook is a therapeutic tool that can be used to assist in this process.
- Children in foster care and children who have been adopted are especially vulnerable to having missing information from their life stories. Lifebooks help prevent these children from having periods of their lives that are undocumented with little or no opportunity to retrieve that information later in life.

## The Lifebook Team

- The child is the primary creator of the book. Adults assist children in their creation, but all documentation in the Lifebook is the child's and is from the child's point of view.
- The Lifebook team may include the child, caseworker, therapist, foster/adoptive parent(s) and birth parents(s). Other family members, former foster parents and workers may also be involved.
- Team members have different roles. Some may sit with the child as he/she completes pages; others may provide information or pictures to include in the Lifebook. Still others may research missing information.
- The Lifebook should be filled out by the child. It is OK if the book gets messy or isn't perfect – that's not the point. The point is for the child to express him/herself and experience caring, attention and validation.



It's not a book that you *want* to have. It's like a book that you *have* to have.

-MARKEA BURRELL, FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENT;  
FEATURED IN LSSI'S LIFEBOOK DVD

### What Goes in a Lifebook?

- A well-completed Lifebook includes a chronological history of the child's life, along with information that reflects the child's understanding of the difficulties and changes that have occurred in his or her life.
- The Lifebook also highlights and celebrates the child's strengths, hopes and dreams.
- Here's a list of the things that should be included in a Lifebook:
  - Pictures of the child — baby pictures, birthday pictures, graduation pictures, school pictures, chorus concert pictures, "trips to the zoo" pictures, etc.
  - Pictures of parents, siblings, friends and extended family members
  - Pictures of pets
  - Developmental milestones
  - Birth history, including birth certificate, birth weight and length, hospital name and address
  - Artwork, report cards, school certificates, etc.
  - Information about the child's heritage and culture
  - Pages that explore the child's strengths, likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, fears, worries, questions, etc.
- For children in foster care, also include:
  - Pictures of every foster parent/caregiver and others living in the foster home
  - Child's placement history and explanations of any moves
  - Good-bye letters from foster parents wishing the child success and well-being
  - Explanations about why the child is not living with his/her birth family from the child's point of view
- If the child has been adopted, also include:
  - Child's adoptive story
  - Adoption decree
  - Adoptive family tree
  - Pictures of child and adoptive family members
  - Letters from birth family wishing the child well
  - Child's new birth certificate



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To learn more about LSSI's Lifebook 'My Awesome Life' or  
LSSI's Lifebook training materials, go to [www.LSSI.org](http://www.LSSI.org)  
or email us at [CCS@LSSI.org](mailto:CCS@LSSI.org).