Writing it Right –
Maggie’s Advice for Writing Child Profiles

By Maggie Cotton

Maggie Cotton, Communications Coordinator for the Northwest Adoption Exchange, Washington Adoption Resource Exchange and Oregon Adoption Resource Exchange, has composed thousands of child profiles over the last twenty years.

GOAL: To present a child’s strengths and challenges in truthful, objective, and yet positive ways that allow prospective adoptive parents, and their adoption workers, to evaluate whether or not they could be an adoptive resource.

To meet HIPPA standards, remember the following Do’s and Don’ts:

Do’s:

- Do use generic information and factual behavioral descriptions. For example:
  - Sally is struggling with symptoms of past trauma (e.g., including anxiety, hyper-vigilance, difficulty sleeping).
  - Jimmy has symptoms characteristic of attention difficulties and high energy, including impulsiveness.
  - Juanita has symptoms characteristic of prenatal exposure to alcohol (e.g., difficulty grasping cause and effect and learning from experience).
  - Darren has symptoms characteristic of high functioning autism.

- Do state in positive ways what a child is working on. For example:
  - Tia is working on (or making progress in) strengthening her boundaries and learning personal safety skills.
  - Frank is making gains in increasing his ability to focus, and striving to curb his energy and impulsive behavior.
  - Cheyanne is making progress academically with extra supports in reading and math -- reading is now one of her favorite things to do, even at home.

Don’ts:

- Do not use diagnostic specifics such as: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects, ADHD, Asperger’s Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy, etc.

- Do not name specific medications. Instead, be general: "Medication therapy is a component of Sam’s current treatment program."

- Do not give specifics about the birth family.
There are often four to six parts to a child's profile, depending upon how much information is available, or applicable, for a child’s case. The following six parts are merely suggestions that can be used as a guide.

- **Part I** features a child's strengths, talents, hobbies, likes, etc.- anything that enhances the description and presentation of the child. *(A child's cultural, religious, or racial heritage could also be included here if it is of particular significance, and/or included later in another section if preferred.)*

- **Part II** gives a brief overview of the child's legal status, when he came into care, where he's living, what his special needs are and what therapeutic supports are in place, etc.

- **Part III** may talk about the child's school program and academic successes, including what supports may be in place to help her in the classroom academically and behaviorally.

- **Part IV** usually discusses transition needs, such as the benefits of the adoptive parents engaging with the child in counseling during the transition into her adoptive home.

- **Part V** may present the significant relationships that the child has currently, and those that he will want his adoptive folks to help him maintain after he is successfully adopted.

- **Part VI** talks about what the child's caseworker is looking for in a family. Some of that information may also be interspersed in the above sections of the profile. Perhaps include a general summary sentence, depending upon the child's circumstances.

  For example: "It would be very helpful for Jenna’s adoptive parents to have a good grasp of how early neglect and abuse amidst parental substance abuse and domestic violence can impact a child's sense of well being and safety, and his/her emotional and behavioral development."

**Cultural Consideration**
If a child is Hispanic or African American and it is culturally appropriate, consider including an acknowledgement of the child’s cultural needs.

For example:

"Anton’s adoptive parents need to take pride in his Hispanic (or African American) heritage and provide regular opportunities for Anton to participate in the Hispanic (or the African American) community."

**Most important?** Write a profile that a child herself could read and feel good about.*

*Note: This does not mean a caseworker should show the profile to the child.