

Child Information Gateway Podcast  
Episode 83: Authentically and Respectfully Engaging  
Lived Experience in Story Telling

KEY:

FS: Female Speaker  
TO: Tom Oates  
JD: Jeremiah Donier  
DR: Dakota Roundtree-Swain  
KR: Keri Richmond  
AG: Alex Gaither  
MM: Marcella Middleton  
HC: Huyanna Clearwater  
MG: Michaela Guthrie

00:00:00 [Music Introduction]

00:00:02 FS: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

00:00:31 TO: Hi everyone and welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, I'm Tom Oates. For the next couple of episodes we're going to share some of the really valuable and insightful sessions from the child welfare virtual expo. And if you're not familiar with the virtual expo, for the past few years, the Child Welfare Capacity Building Center for States has hosted and facilitated the all day, all virtual event to support public child welfare agencies in addressing emerging trends, to hear directly from experts, and to share perspectives and resources to help advance how we improve practice.

00:01:09 Now, the 2022 virtual expo focused on supporting the child welfare field with methods and strategies for engaging people with lived experience. As agencies

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update policies and procedures, expand how they approach being family-centered, bringing aboard those who have first-hand experience within the child welfare system can add the needed perspective to understand the impacts those policies, procedures, and interactions have on the children and families being served. But I want folks to recognize that while lived experience is a description, it's not a tool you just plug-in or use when you feel it's necessary. We're talking about engaging in listening and learning from people, from their lives, their trauma, their perspectives, and their values.

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Now oftentimes, sharing stories is an effective way to share the perspectives and impacts. So, it's a method many agencies leverage to incorporate lived experience. So we're sharing a session from the virtual expo called Listen, Engage, and Reflect: How to Authentically and Respectfully Engage Individuals with Lived Experience in Storytelling Practices. Now, there's a pretty robust panel including Jeremiah Donier, Dakota Roundtree-Swain, Michaela Guthrie from the Capacity Building Center for States; and also Keri Richmond with the American Academy of Pediatrics and Unbelievably Resilient; along with Alex Gaither and Marcella Middleton from SaySo - which stands for Strong Able Youth Speaking Out - out of North Carolina; and Huyanna Clearwater, she's a Division X targeted technical assistance project member.

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So, this entire group came together to discuss the benefits and potential challenges of engaging those with lived experience in telling their stories. Through building on pre-established empathy lenses and teaching, strategic sharing and trauma-informed approaches, the panel shares new actionable ways to engage in authentic, non exploitative storytelling in all those endeavors with those that you work with, with lived experience. Jeremiah Donier gets us started. So it's right here - Listen, Engage, and Reflect: How to Authentically and Respectfully Engage Individuals with Lived Experience in Storytelling Practice - and it's right here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

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00:03:43 JD: Alright, so we'll begin by talking about potential challenges and considerations for authentic engagement. And part of that is understanding to think twice before re-sharing stories without permission and guidance from the person with lived expertise. And be sure not to tell your colleagues that we have lived experience unless you'd have our permission. And, permission once is not a blanket statement. Nothing for us without us. Resharing stories with lived, from a lived expert with other people, without us there devalues and diminishes what we bring to the table and reduces the impact we can have on change. And do you want to say something about that, Dakota?

00:04:29 DR: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks, Jeremiah. I think that we sort of discount storytelling to some extent. I think that's very much a westernized view. Storytelling is by no means useless, it's actually been foundational for many Native American tribes, many cultures throughout the entire world. Storytelling is really the way that we pass down our culture and our history. So, when we think about storytelling, let's not think of it as just some wishy-washy thing. But instead, really understanding that there's so many cultural vantage points that you really have to understand. And we're lucky that we have so many people with that expertise who are willing to give their time to actually help you understand those lenses. Keri, did you want to talk about anything on that?

00:05:17 KR: Yeah, I would just emphasize the importance of including lived experience when we're thinking about how are we changing systems and how are we bringing solutions that the perspectives of those of us who have interacted with the systems first-hand are crucial to be able to actually understand the problem and then create solutions that are responsive and impactful for that population. And we really are the experts of our experience. So, for too long there have been pitfalls in storytelling because people are telling our stories for us and they're not coming to

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us with listening ears. And we see this in the media. We see really lazy storytelling where the media will talk about us in a way that really adds to the stigmas and stereotypes of who we are and does not show the nuances of our experiences.

00:06:13 And then we see this in Hollywood where there is lazy screenwriting, where you will often have these stories that are repeated of someone who was in foster care being a villain or being shown in a traumatic light and not being shown for overcoming that trauma and the triumph that's on the other side, and again, just leads to more stigmas and stereotypes. So, I'm really excited we're having this conversation today where we can talk about the different power dynamics that have played out for too long in these interactions and how we can really shift the power and how organizations and the media and Hollywood, how we can all come into allyship together to really have authentic storytelling that is respectful to those of us who have lived that experience. So, I think Alex, that you have some good insights on that piece.

00:07:11 AG: Yes, I wanted to emphasize the distinction between lived experience and expertise because I think in storytelling, a lot of the time, it, experts forget that those, that those with lived experience or those who are, I like to say the phrase of those who are closest to the ground and experiencing what is happening. So, I think it shouldn't be contorted that lived experience isn't the expertise of the youth who would be experiencing this situation. And I'll pass it to Miss Marcella because she has some good insight.

00:07:53 MM: Yeah. Thank you, Alex, and I just wanted to say, Keri, that I really appreciate you bringing up the Hollywood aspect as well because I think so many times in the world, we just silo everything and everything really impacts everything in so many different ways. And a lot of people consume media, consume what's, what's being played out in movies and music and all of these things. And that impacts the

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way that people engage with people who actually have the experience. Not just, oh, well, you know, I've written this movie or I've done, you know, whatever it is that they're, they're sharing through media in regards to people with lived expertise, it doesn't really match up with what we're experiencing. So, the reaction and the action that people take towards us is not in alignment with what we really need. It's more so in alignment with what they've been fed. And so I think that's really important to bring that up. And I really appreciate you bringing that up.

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And I love, too, Alex that you were saying like we lived expertise and how there's a parallel between what we've seen in professionals who navigate this space, right? And who have historically navigated this space right? Now, they're bringing us into this space or have been bringing us in this space. And so, there are those power dynamics. There is a way that they've handled it that doesn't necessarily articulate, or really, what I want to say is that it doesn't really highlight our stories. So, we're the best to be able to tell it, we need to be there and people need to lead with, with that and not with what they think. So, I just, I love everything that's being shared here because it's so important. And I think with, with that, as well, like, people have to be really careful and gentle around storytelling. Not to discourage people to engage in it, but just to be really careful that you're not, you know, like Jeremiah said, taking people's stories and shape-shifting or telling them to your co-workers because we all played the game of telephone when we were younger, right. And as soon as you tell somebody something, they tell somebody else and it gets to the end and it's totally different than what it was originally meant to be. And I think that's to be highlighted for sure.

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KR: If I could just add one thing that I didn't mention and also the potential pitfalls and what we're seeing in the advocacy spaces where people are invited to come to Capitol Hill, are invited to come to the White House and tell their story, is that

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often there's this pre-drafted agenda where the advocates or these members of Congress, these elected officials are saying, hey, we want you to come tell this piece of your story because it advances our agenda and how tokenizing that is to those of us who have lived experience and how harmful it is in really creating solutions that work and that are focused on individuals who have lived experience. So, I just wanted to raise that as another issue in this whole space and how just again, emphasizing what you were saying Marcella about we have to be intentional and that's why this conversation today is so crucial.

00:11:01

DR: I just want to echo what Keri and Marcella said, especially around what Marcella said around those silos and what you were saying, Keri about can you share this very specific part of your experience? I think we need to look at our lives as intersect, in intersectional lenses because we're in foster care, we were, we probably have some other parts that are intersectionality oppressed that we really come to our identity or maybe things that are tailwinds, as well. And so we're really like, people. We're humans that are whole individuals that you have to think intersectionally about us because, yeah, I'm an expert on the foster care experience, but I'm also an expert in being genderqueer. So, it really just is very important to consider the whole dynamic and the whole person instead of just utilizing our stories for your gain.

00:11:53

MM: Do you all want to start talking about youth, like compensation and sharing our stories and how it's important like we don't want people to take our stories and add their own personal value onto them, but really take our guidance around how to value our own stories and the way that we're sharing. I think there's so many do's and don'ts when we think about engaging with people that are sharing their stories. And I think it's so perfect to lean in and take our guidance around what, how do you value it, how do you value it? And I think one way to do that is to always be cognizant of how you're compensating. Like a pizza party and a gift card is not okay to compensate.

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Because a lot of times what happens is people will take our stories and make whole programs and initiatives off of what we're sharing. And get million-dollar grants and all this money while we're getting like a gift card, you know, and a pizza or a bus pass. And that's not okay, it's really exploitative.

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And more than that, it just continues like a lot of the gap inequity around us getting jobs because we could be, very well be at a position at your job sharing a continuation of what we're sharing in our stories and our experiences, you know, to keep the wheel going around shifting and bettering and changing these systems that serve young people and people with lived expertise and everybody in between. Like, it's important for us to be in these roles, to be able to continue to roll that ball and partner with people. So, I think we have to really do a big job of shifting the way that we introduced lived experience and people sharing their stories to this space in a way that's more valuing to the people who have the experience. Because not only me just sitting here sharing my story like I'm reliving what I went through. And I'm sharing that for the greater good of other people that may be experiencing what I've experienced. So, just increasing that value and again, allowing us to take the lead on what that looks like.

00:14:08

JD: So, I definitely want to build upon that and really think twice about assuming the time that lived experience people have as being free. Especially when it comes to young youth, young adults, young parents, people newly out of services. They have transportation, childcare needs, other things that they really struggle with to get to the table or have a seat there. So, reconsider just those one-off compensation or things that you may want to give them because that then maybe impacts their benefits. Also consider what other sustainable solutions you can provide people with lived expertise to develop their skills to become professionals in the field. I volunteered for many years, but I also started

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working as professional, going to professional trainings. And it took a long time for people to realize that I had an added value because I was trying to wear a professional hat, but people just saw me as the lived experience person. And I said, you know, I also have these skills I can bring and be a member of your team and train new people that are coming in with their lived experience so they can begin sharing their stories and give them opportunities. And so, I moved on to other things and those people came in and continued training more people. So, I'm just saying lived experience, you need to build that capacity. So, I'll turn it over to Dakota, thank you.

00:15:35 DR: That was so, so insightful, Jeremiah. And we want to be very solution-based. And so when we say like, don't just give a gift card and never talk to that person again. What we're saying is definitely pay them, first of all. Regardless, they, their time is valuable. Our time is valuable and it should be compensated. But where that comes in is about our value, as well as being compensated. But the real issue of the gift card or the transportation, a lot of the time - especially working with younger youth - and it can be almost coercive in the sense that they don't need those things. And so, they may not actually have a real great option for them to actually say no. And that's very unethical. And so then you're using them when they just really need this childcare or whatever incentive you're giving them. And I think, Keri, you wanted to add something, as well.

00:16:37 KR: Yeah, love everything that you said, Dakota. And it's not just that it's our time that we're giving. It also has taken us a certain point to be able to share our stories from a healed place, from a value-add place. Just as any other expert practices, their skill, sharpens their skill, invests in their skill - that's what we have done as individuals with lived experience to be able to enter into these spaces where we want to contribute to the solutions. And so, recognize that, honor and respect that and compensate

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us just as you would another expert who's coming in on your team as a consultant.

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MM: And I will just say on top of that - in your grant-making, that's where you need to be putting that in there. Like don't wait till you get money and then try to figure out, how do we pay these young people? Well, we only got this much left to pay them, like start at the top. If you're applying for grants and things like that, that's the perfect place to say. Let me think thoroughly on how to pay these young people. And again, we're giving you these ideas, but still, this is a fountain. This is not just a one deal, like all of us have so much to offer on a continual basis that I think it's important that if you feel you're taking information, you get excited, you get back to your team and you're like, look, I think we should do this - bring us into that conversation and we can support and guide you so you are not hitting these barriers and hitting these wall, you know, as you are embarking on this information. But I do want to make sure that other folks like Micheala, Alex, and Huyanna are able to engage as well because you all have so much to offer to this conversation.

00:18:22

MG: Thank you, Marcella. I appreciate that. I just, I'm loving the conversation. I, every time someone says, I'm like, yeah, yeah, that's great. I think you also got a lot to like, value. And it just made me think about how all of our stories - like those of us on this call - are different. And we bring our own perspectives and our own value and how child placing agencies and child welfare agencies, who, whomever can really benefit from storytelling from a variety of different voices and not only utilizing stories, and we've spoken to this a little bit, that benefit you and your agency in terms of financially benefit you or how you might be perceived in the community. If we want to be authentically engaged and wanting to grow in our agency and growing in the way that we serve people. We have a variety of stories at the table. And, if that means like, hey, this is something that was not done well for me or my family,

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that's something that you should know and something that you should value. And so, just really appreciate all their perspectives here. And I want to definitely give time to other people before we wrap up this part.

00:19:35

DR: I think that it's really important when we work in this work - we do this work because we care. If you're here for two days for this wonderful, amazing webinar, your care, you definitely care. And so it's really hard when you enter a situation with a young person and they're telling their story and they have issues with this, this and this. When we're sharing our stories, unless we're asking for help, if we don't, we're not asking for help, please don't try to solve or save, specifically save or fix what is not asked to be, while also being cognizant that young people may not ask for help. So, what you can do instead are ask questions like, what would make life a little easier or what would make your situation all better? Or if you're talking to a teen that doesn't particularly like you and you want to seem cool, be like, how would I make this suck less? And that's really every day you have to go into it. But when it comes to our stories, we're not asking for your help or your sympathy. We are trying to make change. And that is what we are doing every single day and why we're putting our souls on the line, why we're doing this work.

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And, I also wanted to mention back towards the intersectionality piece that even though you may know our whole stories and you may know and understand all our intersectional points, when you're discussing one topic does not mean that you get ownership over the other parts of our experience. Since we've given you the ability to say, yeah, Dakota is uses they/them pronouns and is genderqueer - that does not mean that I gave you permission to talk about my Native American identity, for instance. So, really being cognizant of what is shared with you, and if you were told you can share that thing, only sharing that things. And I think Jeremiah definitely wants to add in and Huyanna and Keri, everyone's got some amazing

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ideas. Jeremiah, do you want to take a stab at it first?

00:21:27

JD: Yes, thank you. So, I want to tell people that are listening in to really respect the process for the person with lived experience, to, as they learn to strategically share their story. I say it's about grieving and growing. Because when you're first new to this, you're kind of feeling raw. You feel a lot of the trauma and hurt that you felt as you went through things. And it's really important to demonstrate empathy, empathy and kindly give them a chance to grow into their expertise. They need to be able to express how they felt and the anger they feel. They're not angry at you, but they need to be able to work through that. And as they become practiced and more polished, those things start to heal. And it's a healing process to be able to share. And often, I've seen people with lived experience go on and guide other peers through stuff. And it helps heal them more. And it helps heal their peers, their peers. And like I said earlier, those people kinda move on. They become program managers, stakeholders that work on policy changes. They work with, they become human service professionals. Anyway, what they do is they open the door for the inclusion of different perspectives and different cultural values because we care. Like Daktoa said, because we, someone demonstrated a little empathy to us like you can, it gives us a chance to heal people that are in the system now and look to the future of how we can heal people in the future, as well. We realize that, hey, the way we, where we're at now, we're not gonna go back. We're always going to be focusing on how we can build the capacity of both professionals and lived experience peers working together for the betterment of everybody.

00:23:16

HC: Yeah. I just wanted to add about re-sharing stories that you've heard. No matter where you are in the country, it may seem like we live in a big country, a big state. That is absolutely irrelevant. I've had situations where I gave a panel discussion on one side of the country and in another side, I had

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family and friends message me and say, hey, I was out to dinner and I heard this. And they knew exactly who it was. They knew the story. They know my story, they know my family. And honestly it really hurt them because they were part of that story too. And they felt like they were being talked about. So, it's not just the stories we share as our stories, there's other people involved in these stories. And so, sharing these stories outside of that space is not okay. There's no need to share stories outside that space. What you've learned in that space, you can take with you, but there's no need to reshare any part of our stories. Like Dakota said, whether it's our gender identities, whether it's we belong to one group or another - none of that is relevant at all.

00:24:33

KR: Such good points from everyone so far. We hope that this information is not just being thrown at you, but that you're really listening and absorbing it and going to walk away taking new strategies and tactics in your own work. So with that being said, with that first half, we want to shift to some positive approaches. So, how can we use an empathy mindset to authentically engage individuals with lived experience? So, one thing that is crucial to really thinking about this work in a partnered way and an allyship way is to ensure that individuals with lived experience are being engaged from the start of the process. So, the second that you get a grant in the door, the second that you have brainstormed a project, you should be thinking about how you're infusing lived experience to draft the agendas, to draft the plans. Do not build a box and ask us to step into it, ask us to build with you. I think Alex also has some good examples to share on this point.

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AG: I'll share an example from my personal experience to really hit this idea home. So, I worked, I was on a panel one at one point and they presented this framework that was, it had four different sections as to how, how adults or experts could work with youth with lived experience. And it provided - there's two that I would like to focus on - and it was

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consultation and collaboration. The consultation section was, it focused on experts or adults leading, leading the project all the way. And then the collaboration focused on a true partnership. And I think that to speak to Keri's point is that it should be a focus on that second one, the collaboration aspect, whenever you're working with youth with lived experience or anyone with lived experience. But that's all I had to share for that point. I'll, I think Jeremiah has a good point that he'd like to bring up.

00:26:43

JD: Thank you, Alex. I think you touched on that quite a bit. I just want to say, you know, I had the privilege of showing up with my white skin and understand what that means. And I want to let other people know that, you know, if you wear white skin like I do, don't be afraid of being a partner, a co-conspirator, a collaborator. That means not sitting on the sidelines and being a cheerleading ally, that means you're working with us to help the system move intentionally away from racial disparities and other, other things like disproportionality. So, you're actually working with people that are impacted by bias, by all the things that they've struggled with all their lives. Just listen and learn. They're not blaming you for the challenges that they face, but they're asking you to work with them to address them so they don't have to continue facing them. Their children don't have to continue struggling with them. So, we can help change it for the better of everybody that's involved in this. And I'm going to go ahead and pass it over to another panelist here.

00:27:50

HC: I wanted to touch a little bit on when discussing or when setting up panels, that it's very important to remind both parties - so, not just the panelists, but the audience, as well - that we don't know everybody's stories, we don't know everybody's situation. So being mindful of what we share and how important it is that we don't trigger not only the panelists, but also the audience. We want everybody to feel safe and comfortable in learning and growing together. And so, that key reminder in the beginning

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and sometimes in the middle of the panel as well is definitely a safe way to go so that everybody feels comfortable.

00:28:38 MG: I want to add to that, I think it's really important to when you're engaging with someone who is telling their story, to ask them how they want to share their story. And it might be in a panel form, as we discussed making them feel comfortable when they're doing that, but maybe they're more comfortable in a live session to just share from the heart. Some people that might not be the most comfortable for them, maybe sharing their story in a written form if they are able to draft it out before and read it straight from there. Or in that panel, like we noted, making them comfortable letting them have those prepared questions ahead of time so that they can share what they feel is best and how to best answer those questions.

00:29:24 And that also kinda made me think about something we talked about earlier, too, around not re-sharing people's stories for a variety of reasons and we've talked about that, but I think one that hits home for me personally is how much different my perspective is on my story from what it was ten years ago. So something that I may have felt about my story or child welfare in general was not, is not how I feel now. Now working in the systems, knowing how it works, knowing that, the disparities that exist, my story has changed. So, that's just another reason not to reshare someone's story without permission because it may have changed in some ways. But, Keri, I think that you had a lot to offer here to you.

00:30:11 KR: Yeah. I love everything you just said, Michaela, and I think it speaks to how critically important it is that we are addressing storytelling with people who have lived expertise from a relational perspective rather than a transactional perspective. When you approach it from a relational perspective, you can pause and think about, is this person okay, sharing what they're sharing. You can have conversations that are grounded in trust and that are

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likely to avoid things like tokenization and being thrown onto a stage where you feel emotionally vulnerable and not that your experience is really being honored. And so, I think that is an important way to look at how you're doing this work. And then just wanted to add a point about how important it is to recognize, not only through compensation, what storytellers are adding the value there, but also through credit. So, if you are having any written publication, making sure that we are listed as co-authors and that the value add is recognized in more, in a further away. And I think Marcella also had some thoughts here, so I'll pass it over to her.

00:31:25

MM: Thank you so much, Keri. Yeah, I love all that was mentioned. Another addition that I think would help you all partner with people that are sharing their stories is making sure that you have a good facilitator. I cannot tell you how many times I've been on a panel or at some event sharing my story and someone in the audience said something that was inappropriate in regards to my story. And I didn't have a facilitator that was able to navigate it in a way that made me feel like I was protected. I think that it's important to have a good facilitator. And not only just for our benefits as people who are sharing our experiences, but also for the audience. A good person that can, s good facilitator that can read the audience and shift, you know, the panel if needed. And I say that and I want to make sure that I'm also adding on there - don't shut a panelist down or someone that is sharing something that may be making the audience feel disgruntled, but just being able to transition after that person shares in a way that helps people sit with what shared. Because we're not all sharing pieces of our stories that are all rainbows and unicorns. Like a lot of the stuff that we're sharing is trauma, it was traumatic and are hard things to hear, but they're very necessary things to hear to get the needle moving on system change. So I think just having someone who is a really, really good facilitator to navigate both the audience and the panel, and to support the larger goal. And also make sure that the panelists feel

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comfortable and confident in the space that they're  
in is good.

00:33:11 KR: I think just to speak to what you just said,  
Marcella, people don't necessarily recognize that the  
second that we're up on stage, people feel like they  
have absolute complete right to ask us any single  
thing ever. It's very strange. We start to be like  
the example of what a foster youth person, lived  
experience person looks like. And it can get really  
uncomfortable. And sometimes people ask really messed  
up questions that I won't reiterate, but they have.  
And I think when it comes to that facilitator, like I  
know when I facilitate if someone asks an  
inappropriate question in the audience, I'm going to  
say, hey, actually that's probably not appropriate  
right now. We can talk about that later. And that's  
why we really need that. So, we're actually going to  
start talking about the actual ideas around what is  
strategic sharing and what is trauma informed  
engagement. Because we've been using those words and  
we really want to make sure that when you leave here,  
you know exactly what those are. So, we have our  
lovely Jeremiah starting to spin off and then I'll  
pick it off at the end. Whenever you're ready,  
Jeremiah.

00:34:20 JD: Thank you. So one thing I want to say is do give  
people with lived experience opportunities to be  
authentic in how they feel or how they felt, welcome  
that authentic feeling. As a dad, sometimes you'll  
see me getting upset or angry about something - oh,  
he's the angry dad. No. I'm expressing how I feel and  
sometimes my strongest emotion comes out as anger,  
but maybe I have a lot of fear that's behind that or  
something that I'm sad about that I'm not really able  
to articulate without sharing with you, without  
working through some of that trauma that I  
experienced. And so, you want to give space for that  
person to really share how they're feeling. It's not,  
they're not personally attacking you. And that's,  
that's an important thing to understand. It's also  
important to understand that, understand that people  
that live in trauma often are quick to anger because

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they are being defensive and help them unpack that by stepping alongside them and say, here, I'm here for you. I want to listen to you. I want to respect where you're at and help you move into a safer place because this is a safe place for you to share and be vulnerable. And I'm going to pass it over to Marcella.

00:35:33

MM: Yeah, I think one of the pieces that are important in the strategic sharing are prepping with the person with lived experience, you know, so that they feel comfortable and confident thinking through what they want to share or discuss. And in that prep, you're being really clear about what the goal of what you've invited them to is so that they can figure out what do I want to share from my story? What, what do I want to convey to the audience, too, so that people understand how to help people like me, or even people that aren't like me but in similar situation. I think preps are important and also a debrief, like even if they don't debrief with you, encouraging a debrief because I didn't always want to debrief with the person that asked me, like, I would rather go talk to my mom and say, girl, can you believe that this person asked me this or oh, it felt so good to get this off my chest finally. Just encouraging like there's a space for us to debrief about what happened. But there's also, I encourage you that if you don't want to debrief here in this space that I'm allotting for you, I just encourage that to debrief somewhere where you feel safe and you feel heard like just processing what you just went through. Because like many of us have mentioned, it's taxing to do this sometimes. And if it's not taxing it still emotionally, there's energy being taken from us as we're doing this. It's not necessarily always negative, but just the fact that you may have a realization of something that you went through as you were sharing it, you may need space to just process that. So, I think that it's really important to prep and debrief when you're working with people with lived expertise and you're inviting them to spaces where they're gonna be sharing.

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00:37:18 KR: I think those are all such great points, Jeremiah and Marcella. It's so important that we understand the difference between sharing and strategic sharing. So, I'll provide an example from my own life. When I was 19, I was asked to be part of a regional board to work on policy stuff and I was a wee baby and I was just excited to be like put there at the table. I was just like, I'm here, that's the best thing I could possibly be. And it took two years and another alum who is older than me to say, hey, you know, you should've been paid for your work and your time. And that was the first time in which I realized that I was valuable in this situation, too. And it wasn't just me giving and giving and giving to make sure that other foster kids that are currently in the system don't have to go through the things I went through. But that I can also make sure that it's empowering and that it's emancipatory for myself. And I think that's really the difference between just sharing and strategic sharing and strategic sharing, just like you said, Marcella, really starts with a prep period of what makes you feel a little icky when you talk about it. Okay, let's avoid that.

00:38:27 Doing body checks and scans because sometimes we don't even know that something's really traumatizing or triggering for us until we're in that moment and that's not okay because then you're on a stage in front of 300 people trying not to cry about adoption. That's an actual situation I was in at one point. And so, when you don't feel adequately prepared, you don't feel psychological safety, you're not going to do as well. And then that debrief. That debrief is so, so, so, so important because it reminds people that they're worthwhile, that people actually care about following up with them. But again, even if it's going to be influencing policy, anything, like anything at all, if we don't see it, you didn't authentically engage us. When the final product is there. We are, our names if we are - it depends confidentiality wise - but if we're coauthors, we are coauthors on that, we're seeing throughout the entire process. You cannot just get to us once or twice. That is not authentic engagement. That is trying to

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seem like you're authentically engaging to meet some sort of standard.

00:39:31

So with that, I will go into our last little spiel before our last section question. And I really am just so grateful for everyone here today, sharing and strategically sharing. We had a lot of prep here. Luckily, we're able to be able to do that and know how to advocate for ourselves for that. So, we really need to remind people to remind foster youth that they have the ability to advocate for their needs. So, I did say that sharing can feel just empowering and vulnerable and strategic sharing when it's thought through and it's led by people with lived expertise can feel like, so emancipatory and like an outward expression of strengths. It's like you are fighting against a system that maybe didn't do well for you and that can be so life-giving, if done well. But people should not leave feeling like having given away part of their soul when they leave these situations, never to be recovered. It really, it's so upsetting when you don't know what happened with your story after it was shared. And so, when it comes to our stories and our trauma and how much there is so much to do with our stories, I like to think of them as similar to immortal cells. I promise this will make sense. So when - people are familiar with Henrietta Lacks - so, Henrietta Lacks had some genetic material taken from her without her consent. It was then used for over 20 years without her knowledge or her family's knowledge. That lead to things like the actual COVID-19 vaccine, which is amazing. And yet it was still incredibly unethical. So, her family found out and they developed a board. And you had to go to her family to ask if could use her genetic material. That's the difference. Because I don't care how much good, I don't care if one time sharing my story, you're gonna, you think you're going to change this entire system by sharing it. It's still unethical because you didn't ask me for my permission. So, with that really harrowing comparison, I think that we need to understand that even if you think sharing our stories without our consent could lead to amazing things, please don't do

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it without asking. People with lived expertise have immortal stories and that does not mean that they are up for grabs. Ask us, involve us, keep us in part of the process and trust our experiences. I promise you, it'll even make more of a difference not sharing our story by yourself.

00:42:15

TO: So on this episode's web page - just go to [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) and search podcast, you'll find this episodes webpage there and we'll have links to the entire virtual expo and all the recorded sessions. Now, coming up next on the Information Gateway Podcast, we will share another session surrounding how agencies engage folks with lived experience to thrive. This, this is a really informative conversation on how to approach and how to work with and the organizational impacts of reaching out and working with those with lived experience. That'll be coming up on a future episode. So, be on the lookout for that. And of course, you can find the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast on Apple podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher, and SoundCloud. My thanks to the entire team from the Child Welfare Virtual Expo. And to Jeremiah Donier, Dakota Roundtree-Swain, Michaela Guthrie, Keri Richmond, Alex Gaither, Marcella Middleton, Huyanna Clearwater. And of course, my thanks to you for joining us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. I'm Tom Oates, have a great day.

00:43:25

FS: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.

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