

WRITING HUMAN INTEREST STORIES

Writing human interest stories for the newspaper can be creative and rather exciting to see published. Human interest stories are just what the name implies...articles of interest...about people of interest. News articles are fact-based. Human interest stories are more interest-based. They are a good resource for us to use, as foster parenting is a wonderful human interest topic! They can be written on a variety of topics and are free! Those characteristics make them an easy way to keep our message...*and* the need for more families to begin fostering...in the minds of readers on a fairly regular basis.

In your local paper, there is very likely a section with this type of story featured in it. You can begin there and get a flavor for what the newspaper will print. If you are from a small town, you may be even more fortunate, as they often look for news about people in the town. Some small towns print such things as who came home for the holidays, etc...so you know you have a good chance to submit an article and have it published! Don't forget to collect *all* the papers from the area, for example my town has a paper called "The West End Press" which is about people from my exact part of the town, and distributed only in the west end of the city.

Once you have reviewed each of your area newspapers, you can tear out articles which are human interest stories and develop a file of those to get you going. You can see the writer's name under the title of the article. Make a list of those names and begin to contact them to introduce yourself. Let the writer know that you enjoyed his/her article and would like to know if he/she would consider writing human interest articles periodically for your agency. That would be a chance to tell a little about your agency and gain information for what type of article would be accepted by the newspaper. Make notes about the information you learn below the person's name, address, email and phone. Typically there is a person assigned to write human interest stories, and if you have contacted the wrong person, they can give you the correct information. The reason for gathering all of this is that there will possibly be differing procedures and interests of each newspaper/writer. Once you begin writing human interest stories, you will want to assure that they will be published at the highest success rate possible!

Okay, you have done your homework...gotten names of newspapers and writers, contacted them and learned their preferences. Now you can have some fun writing some creative pieces!

No doubt there are many, many interesting things to write about at your agency or about people you come in contact with. You may want to begin by brainstorming with coworkers about possible topics. Remember that you may have seen something for years that the public (reading the article) would see as entirely new! Human interest stories should be written in easy to understand wording, so avoid using terms that only child welfare folks would know. It is not the same as writing an article for a journal or research article. It can be a little educational, but if laden with technical terms, it won't be of interest to the general reader. Try writing as if you were telling a story verbally, using short sentences and easy to understand words. Make it fun to read.

One category of article you can add to your brainstorming session is seasonal human interest news. For example, at Thanksgiving time, just like clockwork, newspapers will seek out stories about a message of giving thanks. If you write such an article...and submit it in early November...you will have a good shot at getting it published. Using the example above, you could write about a TFC family who is thankful that they have been able to help kids for several years; a former foster child who is thankful to have had a family to grow up in; a TFC child who has been recently adopted; agency staff who are thankful for the families who come forward to become Foster Parents... you get the idea. Newspapers look for seasonal articles of all types...Valentines Day, summer, first snow, school starting...you get the idea. You can begin by making a list of the seasons and seasonal events. Then see if you can tie in your theme with the season, or event that is predicted. This is a way you can create news! If you send these articles early enough at the start of the season or event, the newspaper can choose when to run it...and will be able to fit it in. Sometimes they will use it as “filler” on a day when the stock market doesn’t crash and there are no movie stars making news. They will be glad to have it on those days...and you will be glad too, even if they do use it as “filler.” Anyway, they need articles ready to use since so much of their work is based on writing at the last minute...in order to keep the news up to the minute.

New twists on traditional subjects could be interesting to the newspapers. For example, for Valentine’s Day, instead of running a story about a couple dating and falling in love, the newspaper may choose to run YOUR story. YOUR story could be about a child who found the love of a family, a family who has just finished pre-service training and is planning to take in a child, a family who is fostering a teen and therefore is giving a special kind of love through “teaching,” again...you get the idea. The stories are out there, it is just a matter of looking at them sometimes from a different angle!

You can do this! It is fun, and will help your agency. There are a few things to consider as you begin writing. Keep stories easy to read and not too long. Be sure to gain releases before you submit an article. Pay particular attention to what you write about any child, and be sure you have authorization to write about any child.

You need to know that the article you submit may appear exactly as you have written it! It may be changed, or it may not appear, or it may appear months after submission. Include your name, address, phone and agency on the article. Also include a date that it can appear in the newspaper. If it is okay to appear as soon as they receive it, type “for immediate release” at the top. If you want to submit it in advance of an event...and want them to wait until the event occurs, type “for release on April 1, 2005” for example. The latter example can be used if you have an award dinner or similar event and are listing the people who received awards so that the newspaper will have the information. In that case, you would want them to wait until the day after the awards dinner to print that “Jane Doe received a Foster Parent of the year award.”

Be sure to write the article as if it were to be published just as you submitted it. It would not be a good thing to see your article in print with typos, poor grammar or partial

thoughts... when you assumed they would re-write it before publication. They may not re-write it, you can take that from experience of others who learned the hard way!

Find your newspaper contacts, have fun writing and keep thinking of everyday events which may be of interest to others. Please send articles that are published in your town for posting here... so that others may use your bright ideas as examples!!

Send published articles to: ffa@ffa.org