

## **I WILL SHARE STORIES OF CHILDREN USING POSITIVE STRENGTH-BASED LANGUAGE**

Welcome to week three of our OverExposed Campaign Resource hub. In this video, we will explore our third pledge:

Sharing stories of children and young people using positive and strength based language

Language is powerful, complex, context-specific and ever evolving. In the context we work in, we often find ourselves in a position where we are responsible for the story of someone else, often a child or young person, who is part of our programmes or advocacy work, or experiencing the challenges our organisation is set up to tackle.

The way we talk about an issue, or a person, and the way we refer to them significantly influences the images, attitudes and narrative we create. This is particularly important for someone who may not understand or know about the issue or person we are trying to discuss.

The pull to communicate succinctly and to a variety of audiences often results in an intentional, often reductive, oversimplification of issues and contexts that we know are complex and nuanced.

We use emotive language to elicit the desired emotional response from the consumer; be it anger or sadness or pity - with little to no reflection about the emotional response of the person or situation we are talking about. Have we thought about how the people we are talking about really want to be presented to the world?

Chance for Childhood have reflected on the language we use, and decided on the following principles:

- We Support People, Not Beneficiaries.
- We Don't Use Labels.
- We Don't Define A Child By Their Situation.
- We Believe That Every Child Has The Right To Be Heard.
- We Don't View The Communities We Work With As 'Other'

Perhaps a good place to start on your journey to positive language is to create your own set of principles?

How can we advocate for young people as the experts in their lives, as active agents of change and as rights-holders who deserve a say in how their story is told, whilst on a different page of our website we fall back into emphasising their victimhood for donations? How can we be dedicated to the decolonisation of the development

sector when still perpetuating the white saviour narrative and portray whole communities as 'helpless' or 'hopeless'?

Using positive and strength-based language is part of a commitment to the responsible and rights-based portrayal of children and young people and the communities they live in.

It is an active lean into the complexity of the contexts we work in and centred around respect for the dignity of children and young people. This is not about allowing children to input into a vision; but centring the visions, voices and actual lived experience of children in the first place. It is about presenting children as rounded individuals with full lives to share, not just as a 1-dimensional caricature of their current or past trauma. Even with positive strength-based language in place, organisations have already proved that we can still go further.

We must consider how we ensure there are safe spaces are created for children and young people to not only play an active part in the creation of stories but to tell us the way they want their stories shared. After all they are their stories. How do we ensure that what they want the world to know about them and their lives is shared? And how do we make this work, even if it doesn't fit into the narrative that we have created in our comms strategy?