

SHARING  
YOUR STORY

WITH  
JOURNALISTS /  
THE MEDIA



**SPOTLIGHT:**

Child Welfare

Hi! I'm Nebula (they/them) and I was in the B.C. government's "care" in my teens. I've been interviewed a dozen times by journalists: some good experiences, some not-so-good.



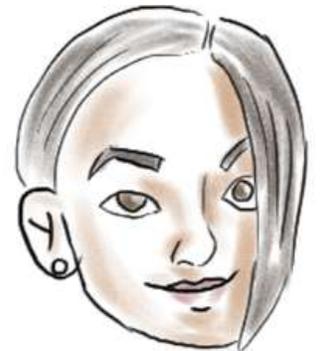
I wrote this guide to share **tips and tricks** for youth in care (YIC) and former youth in care (FYIC) who **want to share their story** with journalists and the media.

A lot of rad folks shared their ideas and experiences with me, including other FYIC, journalists, parents, youth workers, and Elders.

Shout out to the team at Spotlight: Child Welfare who added their thoughts, including:



Tracy and Brielle,  
journalists



Cheyenne and Cheyanne,  
FYIC

**Stories can change lives. My team and I made this guide to help you share your story.**



Some reasons you might want to **share your story**:

- You want people to know what kids and young people in and from care, parents/guardians, or siblings are going through.
- You want others in the same situation to **feel less alone**.
- You want to **raise awareness** about an injustice.
- You want to pressure someone in power to **change the system**.
- You want to **celebrate** a success story.
- You want people to know about an event, a program, a resource, or a group, that helps YIC and/or FYIC.

Good media coverage of our stories can inform child welfare **policy changes**, support youth-led campaigns, **change harmful narratives**, **educate** policymakers and the public, and make people with similar stories **feel less alone**.

# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Jump to the pages you're interested in. Skip whatever isn't relevant to you. And tell us if you have any suggestions for improving this guide!

## **Journalism basics:**

- p. 5 key terms: journalist lingo
- p. 7 rules of journalism
- p. 9 anonymity and confidentiality

## **If you have a story idea:**

- p. 10 how to pitch a story
  - p. 11 outline the story
  - p. 14 find the right journalist
  - p. 15 pitch your story
  - p. 25 editorials & self-publishing

## **If a journalist contacts YOU:**

- p. 16 "can I trust this journalist?"

## **If you're getting interviewed:**

- p. 18 BEFORE the interview
- p. 20 DURING the interview
- p. 23 AFTER the interview
- p. 26 mental health supports
- p. 27 other resources

## **About Spotlight: Child Welfare**

- p. 28 get in touch

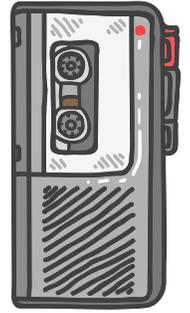




- **Allegedly:** This is used to describe credible claims that aren't yet proven, to avoid publishing anything untrue (or libelous) — which could get a writer or publication in trouble if somebody sues them.
- **Beat:** The topic and type of stories that a specific journalist covers (e.g. women's sports, national politics, climate change, etc.) Some publications might have a specific journalist who covers child welfare.
- **Fact-checking:** Reporters need to verify everything written in the story. They might reach out to people you know to confirm information about you, ask for documentation or photos related to your story or ask you to go over parts of your interview again.
- **Informed consent:** When someone gives permission, e.g. if you consent to a reporter sharing your name, photo, or other personal information in a story. Consent needs to be "informed" — you should be clear on the reporter's process and the potential consequences of going public before you decide to share.
- **Source:** Someone interviewed for a story, or the source of factual information in a story.

→ THAT'S YOU!

## Terms and conditions should be agreed to before sharing info with a reporter.



You can tell a journalist if the info you're sharing is:

- **On the record:** Assume that any conversation you have with a journalist is on the record, meaning they're taking notes or recording the conversation. Journalists do this so they can accurately report and quote you when they write the story. If you're not ready to speak on the record, say so at the very start of your conversation.
- **On background:** Journalists may use the essence of statements and generally describe the source, but they may not use direct quotes. The video and/or audio of these interviews are likely recorded.
- **Not for attribution:** Journalists may quote someone without naming or identifying them. Instead they will describe their connection to the subject in a general way (e.g. says the social worker.)
- **Off the record (OTR):** Journalists may not report this specific information - unless they can confirm the same information with a different source who agrees to go on the record. Since their job is to report information to the public, journalists are reluctant to spend time on OTR interviews.

For more journalism terms: <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2025/journalism-words-reporting-terms-off-the-record/>



# HOW JOURNALISTS WORK

Journalists have some common practices and ethical guidelines that many (but not all) of them follow. Generally, journalists:

- Identify themselves as journalists.
- **Fact-check what you tell them.** They might ask for documentation or other sources that can confirm your story. This might feel like they don't believe you, but fact-checking is an important part of their job.

It can be hard for journalists to confirm facts with care providers and government workers (social workers, health care workers). They are legally required to protect your privacy, even if you invite them to share your info.

If it's not possible to fact-check the story or the reporter doesn't have enough solid sources, **the story might not get published**. Lots of good stories don't get told. Try not to take it personally. **Consider self-publishing** a blog or video, talking on a podcast or radio program, or writing an anonymous **editorial** to a newspaper/magazine (see p. 25).

- **Clearly identify their sources** to their audience. If you want to be **anonymous** or **unnamed** in a story, you need to say why (e.g. fear for your safety or employment). A reporter needs permission from their editor to include anonymous sources in a story, and editors don't always approve these requests. In that case, you could connect the journalist with other people/sources who can confirm your story and speak on the record, using their real name (see p. 9).

- Usually, journalists will publish without letting sources review the story first. **BUT you can ask a journalist to review the story with you over the phone or in person before they publish.** They may say no. Many journalists aren't used to this request, but interviewing someone vulnerable, like a youth in/from "care," is different than interviewing a politician or someone else who's trained to do media interviews. It's totally reasonable to ask them to review the story with you, so you can confirm it's accurate and flag any concerns.
- Avoid unpublishing at all costs. **Journalists will correct factual errors, but they will almost never unpublish a story.** If they spelled something wrong, or got some other fact wrong in their story, they have to correct the story and add a note specifying the error. If a published story has a mistake in it, you can reach out to the reporter or the publication's editors to let them know.

Many journalists are hesitant to interview minors (people under age 18 or 19, depending on your province or territory), since the consent of a parent or guardian is often needed to publish the story. Sharing **photos without your face, anonymous quotes, or art** you made are ways to get around this.

# CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Why might you want to **protect or hide** your identity?

- If there's a **serious social/financial risk** (e.g. you could lose your job, housing, or children) if the story goes public.
  - Anonymity is crucial for **protecting people in vulnerable communities**, like underage youth, undocumented migrants, sex workers, unhoused folks, or people who use substances.
- **Everything posted online is public**, and will likely be there **forever**. If you're worried you'll regret having your name tied to the story, you can decline to do an interview. It is much harder to take back something you said to a journalist.



## How can I protect my privacy?

- You can ask to not use your last name, use a pseudonym (fake name), or use an avatar.
- For a video/audio interview, you can ask to have your voice distorted and your face blurred.
- Ask to read every line about you **before publication**. Confirm they aren't sharing details that reveal your identity.

## Why you might NOT want to be anonymous:

- The story might not get published (see p. 7)
- Personal details, like names and faces, make stories **more relatable**. Sharing them may make people who are in similar situations feel less alone.
- Using your name can give the story **more credibility** (easier for people to trust the reporting).

# HOW TO PITCH A STORY

If you have a story idea that you want a journalist to write about, you will need to “pitch” your story. Here’s how to do that!

STEP 1: OUTLINE THE STORY

STEP 2: FIND THE RIGHT JOURNALIST

STEP 3: PITCH YOUR STORY



## STEP 1: OUTLINE THE STORY

**WHAT happened?** Summarize it in 1-3 sentences.

Use this formula: **This** happened to this person/group **because**... (e.g. Youth are becoming homeless **because** the government doesn't support youth in care enough in the transition to adulthood. Or, Indigenous youth in care in Winnipeg have made a peer support group **because** no such supports existed.)



Imagine what the **headline** might be (e.g. "Youth spending months in hotels amid Ontario's foster home shortage", "B.C. tuition waiver program made education possible for hundreds of young people")



## WHO's involved?

Name all the people involved — the “characters” in the story. (Me, my family members, my social worker, the government, my school, etc.)

---

---

---

Are there specific individuals/organizations that need to be **held to account**?

## WHO needs to hear this story — and why?

(e.g. I want people in Halifax to hear about an injustice in our community. I want to celebrate youth in Iqaluit doing something awesome and inspiring. I want to ask my government to provide financial support for FYIC who are in school.)

---

---

---

## WHEN did this happen and why is it relevant now?

A good story tells people something NEW, or presents info in a NEW WAY. (Is it happening right now? Is something changing or happening in the future?)

---

---

---

If you're sharing something that happened years ago, why is it relevant today?

**TIP:** If your story has a lot of backstory, make a timeline.

## WHERE does your story take place?

**WHY does this story need to be told?** Why should people care? Are you hoping your story will lead to a specific change?

Journalists look for stories that are timely and important, so tell them why people need to hear THIS story NOW.

**Relate it to a larger context.** Is this happening to other people? Is this part of a broader issue, like the homelessness crisis? Does it relate to one of the TRC's calls to action? If similar stories have been published, what will your story add to the conversation?

## STEP 2: FIND THE RIGHT JOURNALIST

Is your story a **local story**? If so, your local paper or radio station might be interested.

Does it have **national relevance**?

Then it's better to reach out to a media outlet like CBC, Global News, the Globe and Mail, or the Toronto Star.

Does your story centre **Indigenous, Black or queer people**? If so, consider reaching out to media serving that specific community (e.g. APTN, IndigiNews, The Resolve, Xtra...)



**Ask a trusted local advocate** — like a youth worker or support worker — to recommend a journalist.

Find someone who has **reported other stories about child welfare**. Google "foster care" or "child welfare" and limit your search to News. Use Advanced Google Search to find stories from a specific region. Once you find a reporter whose work you like, find their email on their news organization's site or search for them on social media.

**Email us at Spotlight: Child Welfare** and ask us to recommend a journalist in your region:

[info@spotlightchildwelfare.com](mailto:info@spotlightchildwelfare.com)

More tips on  
p. 16!

## STEP 3: PITCH YOUR STORY

Email is usually the best way to reach journalists. (It's best to pitch to a specific person. If you send a general email to CBC, you may not get a reply.)

Add passion & personality. People love stories about youth!

Hi \_ [first name of journalist],

I am a \_ [youth in care / former youth in care / family member / foster parent] and I am reaching out to you because \_ [aim for specific and brief. e.g. You cover youth in care issues and I appreciated your reporting on \_].

I'm pitching a story about \_ [summarize in one or two paragraphs. Be clear about why this is significant, urgent or timely].

People need to hear this story because \_ [connect to the broader issue/context]. I want to share because \_ [name the change you're hoping will come as a result of going public]

To support this story, I can provide [documents, photos, audio recordings, connections to other sources or witnesses, etc.]

**Please let me know by [time / date]** if you're interested in working with me to get this story on the record. If I don't hear from you by then, I'll contact another journalist.

[Regards / Best / I look forward to your reply / etc.]

[Your name]

[Your phone number if you'd like]

include any relevant photos/ images

If writing stuff out isn't how your brain works, use voice-to-text.

# "CAN I TRUST THIS JOURNALIST?"

Just like how some social workers are cool and others suck, some journalists are awesome, and some are jerks. Here are things you can look into before you agree to an interview.

Who do they work for? (CBC, CTV, APTN, IndigiNews, etc.)

Is this a reputable news source? Are the stories fact-checked?

What stories have they covered? (Use the news website's search bar or Google to find other things they wrote.)

Is child welfare or YIC/FYIC their usual **beat**? (see p.5)  
Do they mostly write long or short articles?

Do this journalist's stories...

- centre the voices of people who have been in "care"?
- feel fairly and ethically reported?
- include context about the overrepresentation of Indigenous, newcomer and BIPOC families in the system?
- build awareness of unjust child welfare laws, policies and practices?
- hold those in power accountable?
- share recommendations, solutions or ways forward?

Find a story where they talk to someone in a similar situation as you. Do you get a good vibe from the article? Are there any **red flags**?



---

---

---

(they wrote something racist/problematic, or they don't present a balanced perspective in their story, interviewing only people who think one way)

Has the journalist told you in detail what the story you'll be a part of is about?

---

Have they told you the "angle" or tone of the piece? Is it celebratory? Does it focus on hard topics? Is it in response to something political?

---

Inquire about their agenda. Ask them: **Why are you choosing to cover this story?** Who else will you be speaking to for this story?

---

---

You can try to build a little bit of a relationship with the journalist, but they might not have capacity or interest. Most journalists are super busy.

**REMEMBER: Journalists have power**, and sometimes they can abuse that power. You can be harmed by a journalist asking certain questions or publishing certain things.

For more, see "Working Safely with Media" from p. 18-23

# WORKING SAFELY WITH MEDIA

As youth in and from care, we may have experienced unsafe situations and conversations. Sometimes, journalists can be pushy, and ask questions that are none of their business.

Here are **steps you can take before, during and after an interview** to help ensure a safe storytelling experience.

## BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

*(discuss these with the journalist as soon as possible)*

- **Choose an interview location that meets your needs** for comfort, privacy, and safety. If it's in person, meet in a public place – an office, cafe, youth centre, etc. If it's over phone or video call, pick a time and place you won't feel rushed, with good signal and acoustics, and where you feel comfortable.
- **Arrange to bring a support person** to the interview, and let the journalist know you'll be bringing them.
- **Ask what the interview will cover (i.e. which topics)** and if there are specific questions you should prepare to answer. You can ask for questions ahead of time, but they might not send them because journalists are trained to elicit conversational, natural responses, not scripted answers.
- If a live interview seems overwhelming, **ask for accommodations** or alternatives. You can ask to share your story via audio recording, video, a video call, or in writing.

# BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

*(things you can do in the days before the interview)*

KNOW  
YOUR  
RIGHTS

**Read the media organization's standards** (google "CBC journalistic standards and practices") and **our guide** for journalists: [www.spotlightchildwelfare.com/resources](http://www.spotlightchildwelfare.com/resources)

- **Prepare notes** if you're nervous about forgetting something.
- You can **list things you're willing to talk about** (e.g. my experience with trying to access support, mentoring other youth, how many years I spent in care, etc.)
- You can also **list what's off limits** (e.g. my siblings, my abuse, my gender identity, my sexuality, my children — or anything that isn't relevant to the story I'm trying to tell.)
- You can write down questions you think they'll ask you, and **practice** answering them with a friend or out loud by yourself.
- Remember that everyone's storytelling style is different. Don't worry about going off on a rant or a tangent, or saying the "wrong" thing.

## If you're having doubts:

- Ask yourself: What's the best possible outcome of this story being published?
- What's the worst that could happen?
  - Could you live with it if that happened? If you couldn't, cancel the interview.
- Talk to a friend or trusted person about your feelings.

# DURING THE INTERVIEW

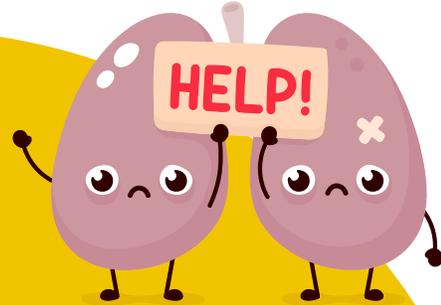
- Use your phone to **record the interview**.
- **Tell the journalist how you'd like to be addressed:** your preferred name, how it's spelled, and your pronouns. Share anything else about your identity that you feel is relevant and important for the public to know.
- **Check in with yourself. How are you feeling?**
  - Are you feeling anxious or calm?
  - Do you have a good/bad feeling about this journalist?
  - Does your **body** need anything?
- Be aware of the journalist.
  - **Are they rushed?**
  - **Are they listening?**

It's okay to be upset or angry.  
You can name it before or during the interview: "I'll try to be respectful, but I'm angry with the system and feeling triggered right now."

You can ask for a break anytime  
(take a moment, a deep breath, a bathroom break, or go outside).

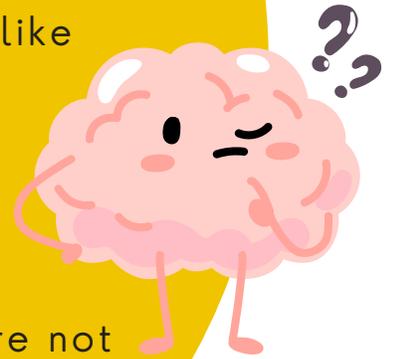
A "**safe space**" is an environment in which a person can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm. It may not be possible to feel totally "safe" during the interview: racism, classism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination are everywhere. It's up to you and the journalist to try to create a safe space, but if the journalist fails to do their part, it's up to you to decide if you can still work with an ignorant or unsafe person to tell your story.

# DURING THE INTERVIEW



## Signs you're triggered / overwhelmed:

- Heart beating fast and hard, breathing fast, or difficulty breathing
- Feeling angry, irritable, anxious, or like you're about to burst into tears
- Feeling like you can't think clearly
- Upset stomach
- Staring into space, feeling like you're not "in" your body, like you've dissociated



# DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Ask the journalist questions about their process:**
  - Why do you want to tell this story?
  - Who else are you interviewing?
  - Where and when will it be published?
  - What is your fact-checking process like?
  - **Before publishing, can you review with me** all parts of the story in which I'm quoted or mentioned so I can flag concerns or inaccuracies? If not, why not?
  - What is your editor's email / phone number?
- **Remember this is YOUR STORY.**
  - You can refuse to answer a question.
  - You can ask them to repeat a question.
  - You can **stop the conversation at ANY time.**
  - You can ask: **"Why do you want to know that?"**
- Be careful what you share – the story can live online forever. It's very difficult to get a story removed.
- **Ask the journalist to send you a link to the piece as soon as it's published or broadcast.**

## Practice saying:

- "I don't want to talk about that."
- "That topic is off the table."
- "That isn't relevant to the story."
- **Silence** is also a valid answer, or you can **ask a question in return.**

# AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **Rest** after the interview. Take care of your body.
- **Call a friend** or someone supportive (or ask them to call you) to reflect on how the interview went, and how you feel.
- You might experience a “**vulnerability hangover**” – feeling exhausted and sad for a day or a few days after sharing a deeply personal story. This is totally normal. **Be kind to yourself.** This feeling will pass.
- **Waiting for the story to come out can be hard.** It's a big deal to share your story with the world.
- Ask a trusted person to be with you **when you read or watch the story**, or arrange to chat with someone right after you read or watch it.
- **Report any errors** in the story to the journalist, and if you feel they behaved irresponsibly or disrespectfully, **report your concerns to their editor.**

Let the Spotlight: Child Welfare team know, too:

[info@spotlightchildwelfare.com](mailto:info@spotlightchildwelfare.com)



# AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- This story impacts you, and it impacts other youth, but **it's just one story. It doesn't define you.**
- Try to **manage your expectations**: It might feel frustrating that the story takes a long time to be published, or disappointing if the story isn't exactly how you imagined it. You might feel rejected: sometimes the story isn't published, or your quotes aren't included, or people in the comments or other people in the story say hurtful things.
- If you have social media, **strangers may reach out to you** to talk about the story. If you don't want this, consider **making your social media accounts private**, or using a fake name or only your first name for the story (see p. 9).



## HOW TO IGNORE THE TROLLS

- **Don't read or engage with the comments.** You can ask the journalist to disable comments on the story before or after publication. If you have control over the platform (e.g. you posted on YouTube, TikTok or Facebook), you can **turn comments off**.
- Don't share anything you can't stand by. (Try not to overshare.)
- These people are strangers; **you don't owe them** anything.

# DOING YOUR OWN THING

Maybe you want to write your story as an editorial, or make a video, blog, or podcast. Here are some resources to get you started.

**An editorial is an article in a newspaper or magazine**, written by an editor or an expert in a specific topic. They express an opinion and try to convince readers of this opinion. (As a YIC or FYIC, **you're an expert** on your life experiences.)

## How to write an editorial:

<https://pressbooks.library.torontomu.ca/scholarlywriting/chapter/editorial-writing/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/100000002691088/how-to-write-an-editorial.html>

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/communications/media-relations/resources-faculty/tips-writing-opinion-editorials>

**A blog is an independent web page** where a person or a group of people tell stories or share information. You can **make your own website** and create content to tell your story, using words, photos, videos, and sound. You can also **use a social media platform** like TikTok, X, Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube to tell your story.

Or, you can **find a content creator** who talks about child welfare, foster care, Indigenous rights, or similar topics as what you'd like to talk about, and ask to collaborate.



# MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

All resources listed here are free!

## Youth mental health support:

- **Kids Help Phone: Call 1-800-668-6868 (toll-free), text CONNECT to 686868, or visit [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)**  
Available 24/7 to Canadians aged 5 to 29 who want confidential and anonymous care from trained responders.

## Indigenous mental health supports:

- **Hope for Wellness Help Line** offers 24/7 mental health counselling and crisis intervention by phone or online chat. **Call toll-free 1-855-242-3310.**
- **The National Indian Residential School Crisis Line** is available to Indian Residential School Survivors and their families 24/7 at **1-866-925-4419 (toll-free).**
- **Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Crisis Line** is available to folks impacted by the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people 24/7 at **1-844-413-6649 (toll-free).**
- **The Métis Crisis Line (1-833-638-4722)** is available 24/7.

## OTHER RESOURCES

- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services/mental-health-get-help.html>

# OTHER RESOURCES

Most large media organizations will publish guidelines or codes of conduct their journalists are expected to follow, such as the CBC's [Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) and The Globe and Mail's [Editorial Code of Conduct](#).

Here are some other helpful resources designed to support journalists and inform best practices:

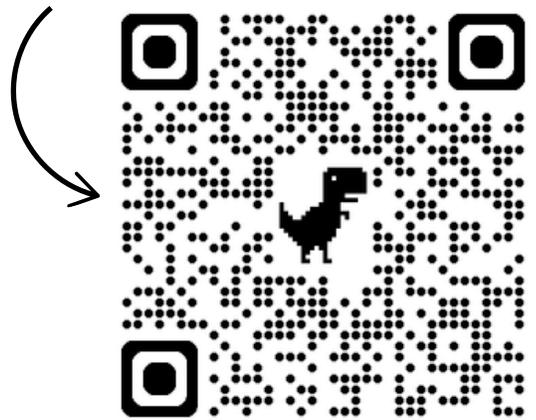
- **The Canadian Association of Journalists' [Ethics Guidelines](#)** (2023)
- **Dart Center Style Guide for Trauma-Informed Journalism**
- **Spotlight: Child Welfare's [Best Practices: child welfare journalism](#)**
- **[Media Toolkit for Journalists and Care-Experienced People](#)** — a guide by a FYIC journalist
- **The Truth in Journalism [Fact-Checking Guide](#)**
- **[Decolonizing Journalism](#)** — a conversational textbook by Anishinaabe journalist Duncan McCue
- **[Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples](#)** by Gregory Younging
- **The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's [Final Report \(Summary\)](#)** and **[94 Calls to Action](#)**

# GET IN TOUCH

- Help us improve this resource!
  - email us: **info@spotlightchildwelfare.com**
  - find us on Instagram **@spotlightchildwelfare**
- Were you recently interviewed for a story about the child “welfare” system? Please fill out **this survey**:

If the QR code isn't working:

<https://forms.gle/PD9gAvtJ7Xrf21YyZ>



**SPOTLIGHT:**

Child Welfare

**Spotlight: Child Welfare** is a collaborative journalism project that brings together youth, families, advocates and journalists.

We aim to improve reporting on the child “welfare” system because we believe in the media’s power to drive social change and help realize more just, equitable systems.

Hosted by The Tyee, this multi-year project is supported by funding from Inspirit Foundation, McConnell Foundation, the Law Foundation of British Columbia and Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation.