



Landon Pearson Resource Centre
for the Study of Childhood
and Children's Rights

Shaking the Movers IV: Child Rights and the Media

CRC Articles 13, 16, 17, 34, and 36



Final Report

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Background Information



On May 28 and 29, 2010, the Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights conducted a two-day workshop with children and youth, the fifth in its annual series and the fourth installment in its "Shaking the Movers" initiative. The workshop was conducted in partnership with the Centre for Initiatives in Children, Youth and Community at Carleton University, and supported by the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Laidlaw Foundation, and the Collaborative Centre for Aboriginal Public Health at the University of Northern British Columbia.

The Landon Pearson Resource Centre's workshops are designed to expand national understanding of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by magnifying the voices of those most affected by it. Entitled "Child Rights and the Media," this year's workshop had two overarching objectives:

- To provide an opportunity for children and youth to exercise their right to take part in discussion and to share their perspectives about issues affecting them, with the assurance that their voices would be heard and listened to.
- To provide an opportunity for children and youth from across Canada and from a variety of backgrounds to prepare comments and recommendations for governments, academics, civil society, and particularly for stakeholders in the media.

The five articles from the CRC that framed the workshop are:

Article 13: Child's right to freedom of expression

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

(a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or

(b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

Article 16: Child's right to privacy

1. No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.

2. The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 17: Child's access to appropriate information

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

To this end, States Parties shall:

(a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;

(b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;

(c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;

(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.

Article 34: Sexual exploitation of children

States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall in particular take all appropriate national, bilateral and multilateral measures to prevent:

(a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity;

(b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices;

(c) The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Article 36: Protection from other forms of exploitation

States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child's welfare.

Considering the tremendous scope of these articles, and the multiplicity of issues arising from them, the workshop encouraged the young people to focus on four themes:

- | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|
| Day 1 | The right to be informed |
| | The right to be protected |
| Day 2 | Socializing in cyberspace |
| | Media awareness and education |

The following report highlights the discussions that took place around the four thematic areas addressed by the children and young people who attended the two day workshop. It provides their perspectives in their own words, and brings forward recommendations that reflect their wisdom, their insight, and their lived realities as consumers of, and contributors to, the media.

Workshop Overview

The workshop's 42 participants ranged from 11 to 25 years of age and represented a variety of cultural groups, including Aboriginal youth. Young people came to the workshop from rural and urban communities in Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. Participants were divided into five groups of 8-9 people, and remained in these smaller groups to discuss each of the four themes. The participants' discussion was directed by two youth facilitators and recorded by a notetaker, who was also a young person; all three remained with the same group for the duration of the workshop. After each small group discussion, groups returned to the plenary with a summary of their ideas and the key messages that they felt were most pertinent. Accompanying adults, and others committed to hearing what young people had to say, met separately to discuss the same themes to prepare them for the young people's presentations in plenary.



The workshop began with a welcome from the Honourable Landon Pearson, director of the Centre, who briefly introduced the thematic discussion topics in the context of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children. Mrs. Pearson addressed the plenary after each thematic session, and led the adults at the workshop in asking the young people questions raised by their presentations.

Each session was introduced by an invited speaker. For the first session on the right to information, Scott Hannant, News Director of CJOH/CTV News Ottawa, talked about the importance his newsroom places on covering stories from a child and family perspective. He compared information to water: both flow freely in our society, and we consider both of them to be our right. Mr. Hannant described his visits to countries where information is scarce, and therefore a precious resource, adding that information is power, whether we use it or produce it. Mr. Hannant reminded the workshop participants that with rights come responsibilities: every time they send a text or post a comment, they become publishers of information, and that information can have far-reaching consequences.

The second session on the right to protection began with a presentation from Constable Mike Villeneuve and Sergeant Maureen Bryden, detectives with the Ottawa Police Services' High Tech Crime Unit. They spoke of the difficulty in policing a domain that grows as fast as the Internet does. They shared tips for social media safety, such as never using your full name online, acquainting yourself with privacy settings, and avoiding installing unnecessary programs or applications. They cautioned participants that any information they post on the Web is no longer under their control, referring to sites like archive.org that trawl the Internet and store everything they find. They emphasized the importance of parents discussing Internet safety with their children and establishing basic rules for surfing the Web.

To introduce the third session on socializing in cyberspace, Chelsea Sutcliffe, a graduate of the human rights program at Carleton University, recounted her personal experience with cyberbullying. When she was a victim, cyberbullying was a new phenomenon, but it is now more common than physical bullying, partly because it is easier: bullies can hide behind a computer screen and say what they are not comfortable saying in person. Chelsea added that the number of witnesses and bystanders is much greater online, although this does not make them more likely to report the bullying. Chelsea also gave some advice for victims of cyberbullying: report it to someone right away, such as a trusted adult or older peer; print the screen or save the texts so that you have evidence; and never respond to the bully.

For the fourth session on media awareness and education, Samira Ahmed, law student at the University of Ottawa, talked about what motivated her to start For Youth By Youth News (FYBY News). From her involvement with Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa, an organization that builds youth capacity and celebrates youth achievement, Samira had helped to form the Ottawa Youth Commission, which asks youth about issues that affect them and brings their comments to the municipal government. One concern that she often heard from young people was that they had no way of connecting to people outside of their school and no sources of youth-friendly information. Samira founded FYBY News to address topics relevant to youth: any young person can make a video, post it on the FYBY News website, and broadcast their message to the world. Samira noted that the education system is not evolving fast enough to keep up with newer, more engaging ways of acquiring and sharing information.

On the evening of the first day, participants were taken on a tour of Parliament Hill, where they saw the House of Commons, the Senate, and the Library of Parliament, and took a trip up the Peace Tower.



In the afternoon of the second day, participants were asked to pick a media personality and share what makes him or her so significant for them. Here are some of the names that came up:

Angelina Jolie...Terry Fox...Andy Samberg...Craig Kielberger...Bob Dylan
Adam Lambert...Ellen DeGeneres...Barack Obama...Noam Chomsky...Steven Colbert
Jon Stewart...Rosie O'Donnell...Heath Ledger...Nelson Mandela...Stephen Lewis
Ward Churchill...K'Naan...Tina Fey...Madonna
women on covers of fashion magazines
freelance journalists in areas of conflict and danger
the conductor of the YouTube orchestra...Tommy Douglas
Romeo Dallaire...the Balloon Boy and his family...Carrie Underwood
Canadian Olympic athletes...George Strombouloupoulos...Lady Gaga...Donald Sutherland
the Art Attack guy...Bill Nye the Science Guy
David Suzuki...Rick Mercer...Bono...Heidi Montag...Superman...Tom Hanks

SESSION 1

The right to be informed



Discussion Questions:

- What kind of information do you look for in the media? Where do you go to look for information?
- What kind of information is not available to you in the media? Do you know of or use a source of information that is youth-friendly? What would be the most effective way to communicate to youth through the media?
- Advertising is a major source of information in the media. What products do you notice being geared towards young people? How do advertisements affect you? Do they work?
- The media tends to focus on negative events. How does this affect the way you view your world? If you were putting together a newscast, how would you organize it and what stories would you include?

The first session of the workshop focused on the basic right to information and the ways in which this right is affected by commercial and news media. The young people spoke of their reliance on electronic media, and of the need for print media to compete with other sources of information. They shared criteria for determining the reliability of information, such as who produces it or what form it takes. The young people were particularly skeptical of advertisers, listing the techniques they use to manipulate the public. The participants noted a lack of youth-friendly media, especially when it comes to newscasts. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

What we are looking for...

- Entertainment
- Research for school
- Social networking
- Weather
- Current events/news
- Sports
- Trends
- Health and fitness
- Gossip: whether we intend to or not (on Facebook, Twitter)
- Information relevant to social, family, or professional life via texts, e-mail, phone calls, face-to-face, pages
- Escape: looking for a new world

Where we go to find it...

"We get information from a whole load of places whether we want to or not, intentionally or incidentally, anything we hear, see, pops up on website, shows up on Facebook. Anything that is communication is information."

- Participants identified movies, TV, and YouTube (or other video sites, like Vevo) as the main sources of entertainment
- For research, youth turn to Google (often the first links that come up), Wikipedia, books, school, libraries, news on TV, newspapers, magazines, and word of mouth or conventional wisdom. The young people also identified Facebook and blogs as key sources of information.

"We get our news from TMZ more than from news on TV. In our group discussion, we came up with a whole list of sources, but one thing that never appeared as a source was print media."

"Our generation does not rely on the news, we rely on social media."

- The young people stated that, regardless of the kind of information they are looking for, their first stop is the Internet. They no longer use books or libraries as often, and if they do, it is mostly for school.

*"If you want to tell parents, put it in the newspapers.
If you want to tell me, put it on Facebook and I will check it out."*

"If you can get an appealing or fun aspect, gear a newscast towards youth, make it fun. It's a business and it's a competition: print media needs to adapt to the changes but it needs to compete with other sources like Twitter or Facebook."

"We find other ways to do the same thing: we don't use the telegraph any more but we do communicate across the ocean. I don't know if there is a way of saving it [print media] from going the ways of the telegraph, maybe give it a wider range and a local focus."

*Social media has become the local news network:
friends send you events, petitions, and that is one way of staying informed.
Electronic media is different from print media but it can serve the same needs."*

Who affects our access to information...

- Us and our computers
- Computer manufacturers
- School boards
- Teachers
- Parents
- Government (TV, websites)
- Corporations (Google, Microsoft)
- Social networking sites (Facebook, Skype, Twitter)

What sources we trust...

- The youth noted that the form the information takes affects its reliability.

"I would trust in printed newspaper more than in a website, there are certain types of media that I would trust more. I am doubtful of information on the Internet, even though I use it."

"Radio advertising is more trustworthy: they can't use flashy visual stuff like they use everywhere else, they have to be quick and tell you the important stuff."

- The young people said that trusting a source depends on how easy it is to access: the harder you have to work to get to the information, the more reliable it seems.

"Trusting a site depends on the means of getting that information. If you trust the papers, how hard is it to get the papers? If you have the computer, you can get any information you want."

- Participants agreed that you have to consider who is presenting the information and what they have invested in it.

"People we rely on for information are people we will never meet."

"It is easier to trust a source when you know they're not paying to put it out there. BP is not paying people to write about the oil crisis. You can't trust an ad that someone has paid for, they're paying to have something sold to you."

- To determine the reliability of information online, participants advised comparing different sources for consistency, looking up the authors of the material, and keeping a critical state of mind.

*"If you read something on a website, go to another website.
If the same thing keeps appearing, it's probably true."*

*"Find the name of the person who wrote it.
Google their name, see what their history on the Internet is."*

*"Whenever you come across information you have to be critical of it,
you can't trust any of it."*

- Participants suggested making a “nutrition guide” for TV and the Internet. Foods have nutrition guides and health checks, so the same could be done for websites, to identify which ones are good and bad for youth.
- The young people pointed out that trust is ultimately a matter of personal choice.

“If you’re not sure, but if you like what you read, you can choose to believe that it’s true. That’s the power of social media, it’s based on likes and dislikes.”

What information we need...

“Anything we want to know is what we need to find.”

- Accessible information: The young people thought it important to remember that not everyone has access to electricity, a computer, or an internet connection. Living in poverty or an abusive household prevents easy access to the Internet and other media outlets.
- Trustworthy information: The young people felt that there are too many one-sided views and little to no room to question them. They wanted opportunities to get a set of diverse perspectives on issues, not just one or two.
- Basic health information, including sexual health and health rights: Participants stated that basic health information usually comes from parents, teachers, or health class, but never from the media.

“Sex is a choice and there should be good media to provide information for an informed choice.”

The youth identified a need for safe ways to find information on health and recommended creating a diagnostic website especially for young people.

“Go on the site, type in the symptoms, and it’ll tell you how dangerous it is and should you go see a doctor.”

- International happenings
- Political truth
- Aboriginal issues
- Children’s rights
- Justice: The young people said that they need a better understanding of juvenile justice and the legal consequences of their actions.
- Information about different cultures and religions
- Information about careers and how to pursue them

“Career building is important. If you want to be a doctor, you can’t find that on Google.”

- Information to help youth get involved in the community

“Give us information on how we can get involved, give us information on what’s going on, to go out and make change. Even in school announcements, they could say something: ‘you have the chance to go here and do this.’”

- Youth-friendly information: The participants frequently noted that there is no source of information that is specifically geared towards youth and that takes their need to be informed into account.
- An information filter: The youth stated that the correct information is out there, but that there is so much incorrect information that it is hard to find what you need. They added that young people are easily influenced, yet they have not been educated about how to analyze or evaluate information, or how to pick out reliable information. Participants noted that there is a reliance on technology from a young age, but no education on how to interact with this technology.

“Information about accessing good information is not well-known and MUST BE. EDUCATION is the KEY!!!”

“A lot of youth don’t know how to filter what’s relevant and what’s not relevant. We don’t know how to figure out what is good information.”

“As you grow up, you’re told over and over, like a broken record, ‘Don’t believe everything you read, or see, or hear.’ We need to learn how to decide.”

- An information framework: As several young people explained, youth have too much information, but too few tools to apply it to living in the real world.

“We are living in a sea of information, so education needs to be geared towards ideas and concepts. We can get knowledge anywhere now, but to learn that ‘this is right’ or ‘this is right,’ that’s what we need right now.”

“We focus on academics but not on basic principles of being out in the world. It’s the issue of us as youth not being able to filter what we should and should not be following.”

How best to reach youth...

- Internet
- Personal devices
- TV

“Get information to youth through teachers. In a lesson, take 20 minutes to tell them about the issue, tell them about events like this one, to raise awareness.”

“I feel odd about that [government trying to reach out to young people through technology]. Government should be professional people and not go on Facebook.”

Advertising as a source of information...

“We’re so used to it that we don’t notice it.”

“It has a large subconscious effect.

We were talking about the Coke truck following the Olympic torch or the Coke on the American Idol judges’ desk: it doesn’t make you want to go buy it right now, but it makes it look cool.”

- Participants distinguished between two kinds of advertising, commercial and non-commercial. Commercial ads try to sell something, like a product or a lifestyle. They have a subliminal effect on us, like where we go shopping or how we think. Non-commercial ads sell services, ideas or initiatives, usually from political organizations and NGOs.
- The youth discussed how advertisers target specific products at specific age groups, and modify their advertising techniques to suit their audience.

“As it gets later, commercials appeal to an older audience: they switch from toys to beer and vodka commercials. They match the ads to the TV show.”

“We know it’s geared towards us because we are in the ads.”

“They target all ages in one advertisement. If they want to sell a car, they use a child to sell it: it appeals to other kids and to their parents.”

- The youth noted that advertisements hit them from a very young age, and that advertisers are targeting younger and younger children.

“More and more products that would be better for an older age group are targeted to children. I see clothing for 7-year-old girls that I would like to see on myself.”

- Participants identified celebrity endorsement as a common advertising strategy, but one that they do not find convincing.

*“I know that celebrity doesn’t use the product, they just get paid to sell it.
Ever since I learned that, I don’t pay attention to it anymore.
It’s a form of advertising for the celebrity, to make their name bigger.”*

“Since I know they’re paid for what they do, I know it’s a lie. I don’t want to do that for my body.”

*“I think it’s wrong for celebrities to endorse causes.
Why should celebrities influence your support of a cause?”*

- Participants spoke of music (especially rap lyrics) and music videos as a powerful medium for influencing young people, pointing to stars, like Miley Cyrus, who market themselves successfully to a younger audience.
- The young people noted that advertising shapes our culture with its emphasis on the value of money, spending, consumerism, and body image.

“In a society where information comes directly from advertising, we become obsessed with the material world. The more advanced we become, the less we become aware of helping others.”

- The youth drew attention to the double standards of many companies, like Dove or L’Oreal, that seem to promote a positive message, but sell products that contradict that message.

*“In order to sell the product they have to make you feel you need it
and that there’s something wrong with you.”*

Once again, participants said that there must be some method of teaching youth about how to properly evaluate those messages.

Advertising techniques...

- Sexual ads: sex sells, especially with youth
- Bandwagon effect: once one person does it, everybody wants to join in
- Peer pressure
- “It” factor/must-have item
- Product placement: in movies, music videos
- Promises: get this and it’ll make your problems go away
- Brainwashing
- Greenwashing
- Statistics
- Manipulation: only show the good side to the product, put the truth in fine print at the bottom
- Relate it to being happy, fit, beautiful
- Celebrity endorsement
- Appeal to authority: pay doctors to talk about the product, get experts that sound good but are not necessarily knowledgeable about the subject, use words like “recommended”
- Humour: get viewers to laugh so that they like and remember the ad

Products geared towards youth...

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Certain clothing brands and stores | • Anti-smoking ads |
| • Toys | • School |
| • Electronics | • Cellphones |
| • Sweets | • Mainstream concerts |
| • Camps | • Fast food |
| • Theme parks | • Soft drinks |
| • Birth control pills | • Certain artists |
| • Acne medication | • Music |
| • Weight loss pills | • Technology (connected to lifestyle) |

How the media presents the news...

- Too much negative, not enough positive: This was a major concern for the workshop participants, who said that persistent negative coverage generates uncertainty, mistrust, and fear of the world we live in. They argued that the media focuses on problems partly because it is human nature to be interested in stories with conflict (e.g. a story plot always has conflict). The young people also thought that the news has to be able to compete with other, more sensational sources of information, like ads.

“News is streaming through the same sources that ads are coming through, and news has to compete with that, so they try to make the news more dramatic. A lot of news engines come from an angle, and if we’re not aware of the angle, it impacts our right to be informed.”

- Manipulation of information: The young people said that the average person’s limited knowledge allows the media to govern how we perceive the world. They felt that the news does not always stick to the facts, and often presents a skewed perspective. The youth referred to negative images of certain people (like Muslims) and regions (like Africa), which perpetuate racism and stereotypes and only cause more problems in society. Participants

also noted that by choosing to focus on conflict and shocking topics, the media generates fear, and that fear can be used as a form of control.

*“The knowledge we receive is always limited. This allows the media to control our perception of the world and govern society by the information they choose to give us.
Make youth aware that this manipulation exists.”*

- The participants added that when the media presents the news properly—in a fact-based, impartial, comprehensive way—it allows youth to develop balanced, realistic opinions.

What to change...

- More news on Canada
- More local news
- More youth-accessible news

“We want youth-friendly reporting, like an after-school timeslot for the news. The standard time for news is 6 pm and 11 pm. For most youth, 6 is dinner time and 11 is when you’re supposed to be sleeping. Put the news after school, when more kids are flipping on the TV.”

- More recognition of youth and their achievements in local and international news

*“Media never come to the youth.
We need to be able to go to them to give them the information they need to know.”*

- More coverage of different cultures and lifestyles
- More educational content
- More education on how to approach and influence the media
- Less advertisement
- More positive information: The young people called on news media to offer hope in bad situations, and to show some good news stories. They said that seeing someone else succeed makes you believe that you can make a difference too, and that you can do something influential in the world.

“It’s not big unless it’s bad, so you don’t see a lot of success stories.”

*“Media should have a positive spin on the news,
with media trying to help the people, not just say what is happening.”*

SESSION 2

The right to be protected



Discussion Questions:

- Do you have safety concerns when you are on the Internet? Why or why not?
- Do you feel that your privacy is protected on the Internet? What do you know about your privacy rights on the Internet? Is your privacy important to you in an online setting? How could your privacy better be protected?
- Have you or someone you know come across inappropriate material online? Should it be controlled? Why or why not? If you think it should be controlled, how would you do it?
- How is violence portrayed in the media? Is there such a thing as too much violence? Why or why not?

During the second session, workshop participants explored their rights to security and privacy in the public domain of the media. They stated that risk is a fact of the electronic age, and that education is their best defense. Despite feeling ill-equipped to protect their information, workshop participants had many ideas for safeguarding themselves online, such as establishing a relationship in person before pursuing it in cyberspace. They recognized that inappropriate and violent content is inescapable, and that although media sources are responsible for their content, it is the individual who chooses what to watch. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

Our experience of privacy online...

*"We often don't know what will be done with our information.
We're not computer experts, we don't have that kind of knowledge."*

- Information does not get deleted.
- There is hacking into passwords, accounts, and Webcams.
- There is identity theft, especially when shopping online.
- Companies share customer information with each other.
- Internet cookies from a website go on your computer and track everything you do online.
- Participants mentioned finding their profiles or pictures on Google.
- The young people stated that they do not read long privacy settings.

*"The idea of community has shifted so that it includes the media.
We need a safe space within this new community that we have created."*

We want to be educated about privacy...

- Share true stories: The young people expressed an interest in learning from people, particularly fellow youth, who have had personal experiences with privacy online. The participants wanted to hear from both victims and perpetrators of invasion of privacy. They suggested that this be done through presentations in schools.

*"We need real life examples from people that did have this happen to them,
to get the message that you can all have it done to you, be careful what's out there."*

*"Have stories that relate to us, have somebody come in that was a victim of cyberbullying
and talk about their experiences. Bring true stories into the presentation, so that we can relate.
Bring someone in our age."*

"We want to be educated about the topic in a way we can relate to."

- Use pop culture: The young people mentioned music and well-respected celebrities as good resources for teaching about Internet privacy.
- Be direct: Participants felt that there should be privacy information available on a website when you first enter it.

*"We think that the privacy policies should be stricter,
and have more detail on what you're accepting or denying."*

They were particularly concerned about websites, like Facebook, that seem to care about privacy, but do not actively protect it.

"Is Facebook really protecting our privacy? Is someone just going to take all of our information?"

"There is a false sense of protection on Facebook."

"It's really interesting how people can put up photos of you and you can untag yourself, but you can't remove the photo. Why should it not come off Facebook completely? If you're uncomfortable with it, I think it trumps the other people's joy in it."

"You can report a picture that you're in, and if Facebook deems that it's inappropriate, they will take it off. It should be that if you deem it inappropriate, you have the right to take it off."

- Make privacy policies and settings youth-friendly: Social networking sites should make privacy statements shorter and more understandable, perhaps providing a brief summary of the settings with the option of reading the full document. The youth suggested creating a video on privacy settings, with no mute option, that would play when you created your account.

"Safety policies are too long. Shorten them so that I can read them."

"Give privacy policies in youth-friendly language, we don't want a page of tiny writing."

Ways to protect yourself...

- Secure your profile: Participants recommended double-checking profile settings and creating limited profiles, so that less information is available to people you do not know.

"We try our best, but I don't think any of us are protected at all. There's such a big chain of information, you've got to make sure that you know what you're putting out."

- Check up on friends: The young people advised only interacting with people you know, and asking your friends in person if they had added or talked to you online. The youth also pointed out that your friends may share your information with other people, which is another issue to discuss with them.
- Report inappropriate content: The young people stressed how important it is to notify site administrators when people post inappropriate pictures or comments.
- Limit personal information: Any content placed on the Internet becomes public property and you should share information about yourself with this in mind.

"Don't put your home address or phone number, that's for people you meet physically."

"If you don't feel comfortable putting something online, it's better not to do it, because you don't know who will see it."

"Make sure that what you put on you know is public. Only put up what you would be comfortable being Googled."

"Be aware of your risks in putting up pictures, think how easy it is to do a search on Google. Once it's there, it's there forever. Ask yourself, 'What's the consequence of doing this?'"

- Accept personal responsibility: Participants repeatedly stated that it is up to the individual to safeguard his/her information.

"Everyone has a responsibility to protect their privacy."

"When I finished university, I realized that I am going into the working world and that I need to clean up the last four years of my life. Every four or five months, take a reality check, look through your pictures."

"It's your job to keep your information safe."

- Technology awareness: The participants noted that even seemingly trivial aspects of technology, like applications, can have consequences for your privacy.

"If you lost your iPhone and someone finds it, they press the Facebook app and they have access to your information."

- Education: As with many of the issues raised in the workshop, participants identified education as key to informing youth of the risks of the Internet.

"There is no real solution for the hazards of the web, and no solid way for website makers to solve this problem. We have to protect ourselves with education, learn the simple things we need to know to protect the information we put online."

"We have to accept that our privacy will never be fully protected, we have to accept that risk and prevent it through education."

Inappropriate online content...

- Emotional response to inappropriate websites:

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------|
| ○ Disturbed | ○ Grossed out |
| ○ Disgusted | ○ Confused |
| ○ Distraught | ○ Frustrated |
| ○ Sad | ○ Mad |
| ○ "Oh, another one" | ○ Overwhelmed |

"It's disturbing that some people are so uneducated that they do that."

- Individual responsibility: Although it is up to individual companies (like Facebook or YouTube) to clean up their sites, it is your job to be aware and to filter what you find.

"There are racist YouTube channels, racist Facebook groups, it's not hard for you to watch some of the videos put on. We've all encountered inappropriate content, voluntarily or involuntarily. You have to choose whether you want to be exposed to that or not."

- Stricter control to access: Although the youth were against having adults control their access to the Internet, they did recognize the need for programs or accounts that prevent people, especially younger children, from seeing certain websites.
- Create awareness: The participants recommended engaging young people in dialogue about defining and identifying "inappropriate" material.

"It's having conversations around what's appropriate or realistic. If you run into a big bad porn site, maybe talking to someone with more familiarity with what's shown is a good way to negotiate understanding, someone who can tell you 'This is inappropriate and here's why.'"

- Involve parents: The young people felt that parents need to discuss these issues with their children and be a part of their online lives. One way for parents to do that is to be friends with their children on social networking sites.
- Censorship: The participants recognized that regulating inappropriate content is complicated by individual freedom and the right of the individual to express his/her voice.

*“Controlling information would be undesirable.
Who decides what gets controlled? Where do we draw the line?”*

“There is conflict that arises with free speech: is free speech of the individual more important than freedom of the society as a whole?”

Violence in the media...

- Violence is everywhere: The young people mentioned violence in music, TV shows, movies, and the news. They saw it most in video games, particularly war games.

“Video games are big with young people. Even though they have mature ratings, there are 6- and 7-year-olds playing these games and parents don’t do anything about it. Why is it appealing? Does it desensitize them?”

Participants added that violence from people’s personal lives also ends up in the media: through sites like YouTube, someone can post a fight from school on the Internet.

“Being aware and getting those sites to control their content is one way of limiting the trail of violence in the media.”

- Violence is unrealistic: The young people discussed how TV programs and movies do not show the consequences of violent acts, such as the emotional consequences to the victim’s family, or the legal consequences to the perpetrator.
- Protection: Participants suggested having more warnings and giving all TV owners the option of blocking certain channels or programs. They mentioned that ratings do not prevent children from seeing extremely violent shows or movies, and that even something rated “R” is easily available to someone under 18.
- Distinguish between fantasy and reality: The media influences people’s choices, and for that reason, participants emphasized that someone, whether a parent or a teacher, needs to explain to children what’s real and what’s not real from a young age.

“When you’re in grade 6, 7, and 8, you’re discovering who you are going to be, and it affects you more. We can tell the difference between reality and entertainment, but maybe younger kids don’t get it.”

“I’m mature enough to understand that what’s happening onscreen will not be reflected in my personal life. Parents need to have that discussion with their kids, about what’s a game and what’s real.”

“It’s knowing the difference between fantasy and reality: nobody actually wants to be in the middle of a firefight. Violence is a part of life, in news, movies, music, but it’s just a part of it. You have to clarify that message, that it’s one part of a whole lot of other things.”

- Violence and human nature: Participants pointed out that violence is a part of human society, and that the image of a person killing someone with a crowd supporting them has appeared throughout history.

"We're fairly desensitized. If there's an hour of positive, fluffy news stories, we get bored. We need to be stimulated all the time."

*"Violence is there because people want it to be there.
When you see a violent commercial, you don't care because you're used to it.
Halo II and Halo III wouldn't have come out if people didn't want it."*

Five things you need to know about young people...

- We're not stupid, we're savvy, and we know what we're doing!
- We want to hear about common mistakes.
- We WANT to be educated!
- We want our rights to be respected and we want to be engaged in the conversation.
- We want to hear about the positive side of the media and how it benefits us.

SESSION 3

Socializing in cyberspace



Discussion Questions:

- What do you or people you know use social media for? How often do you use it? How important are social media in your life?
- What do you see as the benefits of social media? What do you see as the disadvantages of social media?
- How do social media affect your relationships with your peers? With older people?
- If you had to give a crash course in social media, what would be the dos and don'ts of socializing online?

On the morning of the second day, youth addressed the impact of social media on their lives and relationships. They described how social media expands networks and facilitates communication, but how it also excludes others and complicates relationships. The young people stated that friendships on social networking sites are not reflective of friendships in the real world, which are more meaningful. They added that if adults are concerned about social media, they should explore it for themselves, and then share their thoughts with young people, not impose restrictions on them. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

The role of social media in our lives...

- School: communicating with study groups
- Work: asking people to take your shifts
- Social planning: organizing get-togethers for the weekend
- Connecting: meeting new people and communicating with people who live far away
- Networking: pursuing personal interests and causes

"It's an everyday interaction, a part of our routine, a part of life."

Benefits...

- Convenient, quick and easy
- Makes ordinary social planning simpler
- Helps you reconnect with people and form new friendships
- Keeps you connected with people you don't have time to talk to otherwise, people who live far away, or people you don't feel comfortable calling on the phone. Facebook is especially useful for keeping in touch with extended family.
- International: You can connect with people around the world.
- Great advertising tool: Enables you to spread information about initiatives or events you are organizing, and gives you the opportunity to get friends/contacts engaged in what you are doing.

"One post on Facebook is more effective than 100 posters in a school."

- Keeps you informed about your school and community
- Provides access to online tutors and study groups

"Some schools are using online tools to engage students, like chat rooms."

- Improves your typing skills
- Allows you to improve your relationship with yourself

"On your profile, you feel more comfortable to be yourself."

- Gives you an outlet for your creativity: Participants spoke of posting art, poetry, and music on social networking sites for family and close friends to see. Participants also mentioned posting their work online to receive comments and constructive criticism from the Internet community at large.

*"The whole idea of art is to be heard and to be recognized by the audience.
Through exposure on the Internet, the whole world is your audience."*

"It takes a visionary to say 'I believe in social media and I'm going to do something that nobody has done before.' It takes people with faith in social media to see that there's something more to it than 'sup' and 'BRB.'"

Benefits that are also drawbacks...

- Social media makes it easier to talk about certain issues that you have trouble discussing in person. However, social media also makes it easier to say hurtful things that you would never say in person.

"Facebook makes it easier to apologize, but also easier to offend."

- Social media allows you to be who you want to be instead of who you are.

"It's like the Sims, but real life."

"You can create whoever you want to be on Facebook, it doesn't have to be real."

The young people thought it was both a good and a bad thing that people present themselves differently online. Although you can experiment with identities and build confidence, participants also saw it as "false advertising" that misleads others and creates anonymity.

*"They can hide behind a screen and be anonymous, they don't have to say who they are.
It's kind of like a shield."*

- Social media allows you to express yourself ("I feel this way today"). This is good for people who are depressed, because then they can work through their problems or at least send out the message that they need help. On the other hand, constantly sharing personal experiences seems egotistical, and your thoughts may not mean anything to the other people in your network.

"You can talk about yourself a lot, and there's a certain narcissism in that."

- In terms of environmental impact, social media saves paper, although it uses a lot of energy.
- Social media often leads to "slacktivism" rather than activism: many Facebook users join groups and support causes, but do not always become actively involved. Participants discussed how to get young people to turn virtual commitment into real action.

*"Give them easy steps of how to get involved, on places that are easily accessible.
It has to give stuff you can do online and then take it one step further into the real world.
Give them the platform to take that step."*

*"There has to be an influence of some sort attached to it,
a person we look up to or look to for guidance."*

"Take us all being here, for example: we all have our ideas, but we wouldn't be having this discussion if someone from our schools or community groups hadn't brought us into it."

Drawbacks...

- Conversations over social media can cause misunderstandings: there is no tone of voice when someone is typing something to you, so it is easy to take what they say the wrong way.

"Instant messaging isn't meant for 'real' communication, its origins are in programming labs. Emoticons were created to compensate for lack of emotions in texting and messaging, but they're a poor comparison."

- On social media, conversations are less complex and less meaningful.

"Facebook and MSN conversations are a waste of time. They generally start with "sup?" and go downhill from there."

- Social skills deteriorate because people chat online instead of going out and meeting people in the real world.
- People neglect physical exercise because they sit at computers all day on social networks.
- Social media sites are extremely time-consuming and addictive.

"You go on just to check your account and you end up changing everything and adding a whole bunch of stuff."

"You write on someone's wall, and then the next minute you're checking on everyone's wall."

"Youth in general spend at least an hour a day on a computer, but there are people who spend virtually all their time, all day, on it. It's a time usage issue. It's an addiction."

"People need to realize it's a waste of time and maybe they'll use it less."

- Social media is exclusive: People who do not have Facebook cannot stay informed about what is happening socially.

"It's a change in technology, and people who don't have access to it are being left behind. You can't hear about an event on Facebook because you aren't on Facebook. It's empowering for those who are on it, and limiting for those who aren't on it."

"If you're not on Facebook, you're not in the loop."

- Spending too much time on social media sites negatively affects schooling.
- The overuse of acronyms and short forms degrades your ability to write properly.
- Gossip is spread easily on social media sites and cyberbullying is always a factor.

"It's a part of our culture: we accept that people say mean things about one another, we notice the things around us that are negative. As long as the Internet exists, cyberbullying will exist"

How social media affects relationships...

- Social media leads to an increasing number of social contacts, but a lower quality of relationships. You can have multiple conversations with multiple people at the same time, but you devote less attention to each individual person. The youth stated that their "in person" relationships are far more important and meaningful than their online ones.

"Facebook enables you to connect with people over long distances, but with people who you are close to, you connect with them about things that are irrelevant, that don't matter."

Participants concluded that although social media oversimplifies relationships, it allows us to maintain many of them.

"It's changed our lives a lot. Before, we had physical access to family and friends, but after social media you have access to anyone in the world."

- Friendship on social media sites is not the same as friendship in real life. The young people noted that they only interact with a fraction of their Facebook friends on a regular basis. It is common for someone hosting a party to invite many Facebook friends and have only a few of them show up.

"A friend on Facebook should be called a contact, not a friend."

"We always specify that we're friends on Facebook, not just friends."

"On Facebook, you can unfriend people. In real life you can't just unfriend someone."

- A relationship that works well online does not always work out in the real world. Some people feel more comfortable interacting through a computer and cannot make the transition to face-to-face communication. The youth also pointed out that social media sites reveal almost too much about others, so that there is less to discover about them in person.

"You can talk all the time on Facebook or MSN with someone, but when you meet this person, you don't get along because it's a different kind of communication."

"Social media takes away the intrigue and mystery of new relationships."

- The time that young people spend on social media sites can distance them from their family and cause a lack of trust between parents and teenagers. It also causes tensions within the family when young people neglect homework and chores because they are busy online.

"Relationships in homes are going to decrease due to computers, because we spend so much time on the computer. But that's the way forward, that's the way the world is going."

"Parents nag about texting a lot: when you're at home and you're talking to your parents and you start texting someone, that can negatively affect your relationship. But it works both ways: if your mom or dad have a Blackberry and are constantly texting about work, that can affect your relationship as well."

The young people added that social media can bring families together, especially when children move away for university.

"Since I've moved away from home, my relationship with my mom has gotten even closer."

If parents are concerned about what their children are doing with social media, it is up to them to play a more active role in their kids' lives.

"Spend some more time with your children. One of the reasons they're socializing vastly with so many people is that they want attention: 'I'm doing this to let people know, so that they like and

comment.' They want to exist in the world and to be known, in order to feel some sort of love. If that can be satisfied within the family, they won't need to shout to the world that 'I'm doing this.'"

Educating youth about social media...

- Education for young people needs to come from someone they can take seriously: either their peers or older people who have experience with social media.

"Messages are always more powerful when they come from peers."

"Education should come from adults who have been through social media. You need understanding from an older person who has used it, it's a good place to get perspective."

- Participants felt that social media awareness should be taught in school, since that is where children spend most of their time. However, knowing how fast technology changes, they suggested that it be taught through presentations rather than through a curriculum.

"We need organizations that go around schools and inform youth about it. For government to legislate and enact a curriculum, it takes much longer than technology develops: if they start that today, by the time it gets to schools it won't be Facebook anymore, it will be something else. Teach students as it comes out."

- The youth emphasized that they are their own best resources. They value the knowledge that adults have to offer, but only when it is shared with them, not imposed upon them.

"There are lots of programs out there, but the main thing is, the young person has to find out for themselves. We have a pretty good sense of how to be safe, we know what can happen and how to deal with situations. Just make sure we're informed."

"Don't tell them what to do, give them the tools to discover it themselves. If you tell someone not to do something, they want to do it."

"Don't set certain boundaries to not go outside of, because they will."

"The Internet poses risks and dangers, and education is the best way to be protected. The approach is essential, and it should be taken sensitively: if you are shoving rules and restrictions down people's throats, they're going to be rebellious. The only way to safeguard them is to engage people. [...] Don't use the word 'don't' so much."

The dos and don'ts of social media...

Don't...

- Do what you would not do in person
- Go looking for trouble
- Add people you don't know

"Add friends, don't add people you met in Starbucks in line for five minutes."

"If your parents tell you 'Don't talk to strangers' in real life, why would you do that on the Internet?"

- Post pictures of people who do not want them posted
- Share information about others
- Join groups about racism, pornography, etc.
- Cyberbully
- Provoke or take revenge on someone who is cyberbullying you
- Over-inform and publish every detail of your life
- Be afraid to report things that are wrong

Do...

- Treat people how you would want to be treated
- Be selective with your personal information
- Understand the privacy policy on the website and adjust your privacy settings
- Have a strong password that you update every so often
- Keep in mind that anyone can read what you put out
- Post pictures of things you want people to know about and talk about

“If you post pictures, post ones that you would be okay with yourself being in.”

- Use your voice to inspire people and to influence your community in a positive way
- Join Facebook groups that help you get involved with things you are passionate about

*“There’s a lot of good on social media too. Encourage that, follow things that are worthy causes.
It’s wasteful if you’re using it for pointless creeping.”*

*“Cultivate your online presence to help you become a better person,
but don’t use it as a major time waster.”*

- Have fun
- Be nice
- Be sensitive
- Be safe
- Be critical
- Know your risks
- Know your rights
- Keep it in moderation: balance time spent online with time in the real world

“Social networking should assist reality instead of becoming reality.”

SESSION 4

Media awareness and education



Discussion Questions:

- How are relationships (e.g. sexual, friendship, parent-child) presented in the media? Does this influence how you form relationships?
- How are youth portrayed in the media? Is it a fair representation? What, if anything, needs to change about the way youth are presented in the media?
- Are you taught how to deal with the information presented in the media? What is important for young people to know about dealing with the media?
- Do you know enough about various forms of media to feel in control when accessing or sharing information? Do you feel empowered by your use of the media? Why or why not?

For the final session of the workshop, children and young people discussed how they and their relationships are portrayed in the media, and how to raise media awareness among youth. Although the media increasingly promotes diversity in relationships, it also upholds certain stereotypes, especially when it comes to young people. The workshop participants emphasized that the key to youth engagement with the media, and with society, is education: they need to learn how to think critically and how to think for themselves. Most importantly, they need to feel respected by adults. The following section highlights the youth participants' ideas and perspectives, using their own words.

How the media presents relationships...

- Although certain relationships are still underrepresented in the media (e.g. same-sex parents, foster kids), the youth saw, overall, a greater acceptance of various relationships (e.g. inter-racial, homosexual, divorce, single parents). This could be influenced by our reliance on social networking and dating sites to find relationships: social media has brought people together from different backgrounds and different parts of the world.

"Media's used for dating more often than it was, so we can make more diverse and widespread relationships. There is a wider acceptance of non-traditional relationships through the media."

- The media sets standards for what "the perfect date" or "the perfect relationship" should look like. The youth thought that media pushes people to get a boyfriend or girlfriend, so that you feel like you are "missing out" if you do not.

"The media is obsessed with labels."

"Media sets the benchmark for when things should happen."

"They can make you think that dating at 11 or 12 is normal, and if you aren't, you're behind."

- Advertisers show "idealistic" relationships, with good looking people and happy couples, to get you to buy what they are selling.

"The media is unrealistic, but that's what we want. It is our fault for at least half of it."

- Media, especially "reality" TV, takes personalities and stereotypes to the extreme because that is what appeals to viewers.

"The shows depend on personality types.

It's not the average person because it's not what people want to see."

"Media only uses extremes because people want to see it."

"Real life is anti-climactic, and that doesn't work on TV"

One group of participants compared two TV shows, Glee and Jersey Shore, to illustrate the difference between realistic and unrealistic relationships in the media. Glee celebrates diversity and encourages viewers to be open-minded. One of the characters is gay and the show documents how his father comes around and accepts his son for who he is. Glee explores many interpersonal issues, like popularity and bullying, and its overall message is one of acceptance and tolerance. Shows like Jersey Shore are supposed to be "reality," but you cannot relate to the characters because they are so artificial.

"How many people's lives are that exciting?"

"How realistic is it that people go and party every night? What do you learn about relationships?"

The young people stated that their ideal TV show character is not perfect, not always pretty and popular, but a normal kid who is flawed and complicated.

- School relationships on TV are often stereotypical: there are lots of cliques, friendships are dramatic and overdone, everyone is dating, and everyone has a cell phone. On the other hand, teacher-student relations are usually positive, with teachers portrayed as cool and supportive.
- Media has changed the etiquette and dynamics of dating. The media creates expectations for dating through advertisements and consumer culture: if you cannot afford to take someone on an acceptable date, then you do not measure up. It is also no longer taboo for a girl to ask a guy out.
- Media, especially music videos, upholds certain sexual and gender roles: women are supposed to look beautiful, while men are encouraged to be hyper masculine.

“Women are often objectified, which influences girls to put themselves out a certain way. Guys can assume a dominant role because of the things they see in the media.”

- Happiness is the be all, end all of relationships in the media. There is a lack of trust and commitment and a lot of emphasis on the “new” and “exciting.” Break-ups are frequent and there are no real depictions of conflict resolution.

“Media doesn’t teach young people how to solve their problems, rather to bail when they exist.”

- Relationships are over-sexualized in the media, and this over-exposure and desensitization to sex takes away the intimacy of sexual relationships. It also leads teenagers to expect sexual activity in a relationship, and to see sex as the sign of a successful relationship.

“You see it so often it’s no longer important anyway.”

The young people noted that when the media portrays sexual activity among teenagers, it normalizes it. However, they also pointed out that the media is reflecting reality: you cannot ignore what is going on just because it is considered inappropriate.

“So much sex on TV can be too much, but it’s also education because it’s showing the reality.”

Other youth argued that sexual pressure has always been there, and the media is only reinforcing forms of relationships that have been passed down through the generations.

“The media is the solution to solve this problem and change the attitudes of young people that they’re getting from older people.”

How youth are presented in the media...

“As youth we’re portrayed in a stereotypical way.”

- Participants felt that youth are not accurately portrayed in the media, and that the media should be more positive in relation to young people. They said that youth are presented as:
 - Lazy
 - Average
 - Ignorant
 - Rebellious
 - Dramatic
 - Inconsiderate

- Irresponsible/unreliable
- Naïve
- Incapable
- Confused
- Looking for trouble
- Argumentative

"We're not given a chance in the eyes of most media producers."

- Young people are consistently described as apathetic and disinterested, particularly when it comes to politics. Participants pointed out that by presenting youth as disinterested in politics, the media contributes to youth actually being disinterested in politics. They added that youth are not engaged in the political system because they do not have a say in the political system. The participants noted that in order for youth to get involved in political and social issues, they need to learn independent and critical thinking, which schools are not teaching.

"Youth are often portrayed as a group that needs to be served, not one that contributes."

- Participants saw little to no coverage of youth issues on the news, perhaps because of a lack of respect towards young people. They felt that the media is condescending towards youth and lowers people's expectations of them.

*"A lot of youth are politically involved, like all of us here today,
but there are no youth issues or involvement included on the news."*

"They think that we're clueless, and because we're not adults it won't really matter much to us."

*"We're not always given opportunities
because we haven't had the life experience of other generations."*

- Participants spoke of the media's preference for young people who have talent and stand out. They felt that in order to be newsworthy, they have to be "adultworthy."

*"They prefer smart kids, inspirational and accomplished kids.
They want the big thing that everyone will notice."*

Media education...

- The young people wanted to learn about issues that have worldly significance, and to have them presented in context, with opinions from "the other side." They felt that it is important to know about these issues because "history teaches us for the future."

*"Current events don't have a permanent fixture in the curriculum
unless you have a teacher doing it."*

*"We want a balanced perspective. We turn on the news and we see a certain perspective
about a conflict we know nothing about, with no balance on the issue."*

- The young people wanted to spread information through alternative methods. Participants liked the "for youth by youth" (FYBY) model, which would bring young people together to tackle an issue through writing, videos, or public speaking.

- The young people wanted to understand how the media affects them and how they can influence the media. Participants highlighted the importance of showcasing youth involvement in the community through the media.

“Youth aren’t given the publicity they need for the initiatives they are working on.”

“Youth are not told, if they want to put out information, what kind of media to use.”

- There should be education on the rights of the child, so that young people can learn about their right to be involved and portrayed fairly in the media.
- A good education should provide youth with critical thinking skills and the opportunity to think for themselves. Children should be taught how to deal with media messages critically in grade school; since they are being targeted by the media at a younger age, they should learn to protect themselves at a younger age. It is up to parents, schools, clubs, and the media itself to educate youth.

“Youth attend university where they are bombarded by controversial issues, and they don’t have the skills to map it out and find their place.”

“There should be mandatory courses in media, tie it into media and civics. In university you learn about credible sources, they should bring that to high school.”

Crash course in the media...

- Be open to different sources.
- Understand that not everything is true.
- Be aware of the role of emotions.
- Media affects everyone differently.
- Media is not reality.
- Always question media!

The last word...

- When you know what you are doing, media can be extremely productive and empowering. It provides you with information to form opinions and an avenue to express them. Networking sites, in particular, make youth feel empowered because they give everyone a voice, no matter what their age.

“Media can be used for such great opportunities. I learned English through media: I first learned it through watching Pokémon, then Spongebob and The Simpsons.”

“Social media empowers us because we know we will be heard on it. We can’t do this with traditional media outlets.”

- We need more education about how to go about using the media, in the form of media classes and hands-on learning. Children should be taught about the media starting in grade school.

“Media empowers us if we use it well, but we’re not being educated on how to use it well.”

- Education is only a facilitator and the individual still needs to be vigilant.

*“Media critical thinking may be good for some,
but most people don’t have the interest or ability to question what they see.”*

“Thinking critically makes you sharp, I think we should question the media.”

- We are OK with the media, but there is so much of it that we have no choice but to question everything.

“We have a dependent relationship with the media.”

*“I feel we have trust issues with our media. There will always be distrust with the media,
because we know that powers lie.”*

- We need to be respected and included and informed.

Next Steps



The Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights has undertaken the responsibility to disseminate this report, which captures the perspectives of young people, to networks of experts, academics, researchers, educators, government, and civil society, in the hope that it will stimulate discussion and open dialogue, so that the young participants' recommendations and contributions will be fully recognized, valued and incorporated into the practices and policies of Canadian society.

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