



# FOSTERING SUCCESS MICHIGAN WEBINAR SERIES

Providing professionals and supportive adults with tools to increase knowledge, skill, and social capacity to support youth with experience in foster care.



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
**Center for Fostering Success**



# FOSTERING SUCCESS MICHIGAN WEBINAR SERIES

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY  
Center for Fostering Success



# FOSTERING SUCCESS MICHIGAN WEBINAR SERIES



Brittany Bartkowiak, MSW



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# The Power of Sharing Your Story

Brittany Bartkowiak, MSW



# Hello! Who's listening?


- Agenda
- Intention





# My story

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**Brittany Bartkowiak**  
FSM Student Ambassador


**Brittany Bartkowiak speaking at FSM's 3rd Annual Summit**  
from Center for Fostering Success (FSM) (uploaded 11/11/2013)

Brittany Bartkowiak the FSM Student Ambassador, and a recent graduate of Eastern Michigan University, shares her journey through foster care and through higher education. Purely inspirational, dynamic, and engaging, wonderful job speaking to the support she has had along her way.



**YOUTH NEWSLETTER**  
January 2014

Page 1 - The Glass Ceiling Effect in Foster Care  
Page 2 - 2013 CFS Leadership Retreat  
Page 3 - Fostering Michigan Success  
Page 4 - Adoption and You  
Page 5 - Featured Child Artwork



## The Glass Ceiling Effect in Foster Care

BY BRITTANY BARTKOWIAK, FORMER FOSTER CHILD AND CURRENT FOSTERING MICHIGAN SUCCESS STUDENT AMBASSADOR

*"The world is yours. You can do anything you set your mind to. The possibilities are endless."*

Many children hear similar phrases from their biological parents as they're growing up. Many of us had childhood fantasies of being astronauts or artists, and parents typically tend to support these visions - regardless of how unrealistic they might be. Youth from foster care often must hear the words

or negative experience. Each foster youth is just as unique as youth raised by their biological parents. Not all youth from foster care are troubled, and not all have been abused. Despite their experiences, and perhaps especially so, foster youth are certainly entitled to having the same dreams and reaching the same goals as youth who haven't been in the system.

I will be graduating in April of this upcoming year from Eastern Michigan University and continuing on to graduate school. When I was going through the foster care system, I never thought I'd attend college. This wasn't because I didn't want to, or think I was capable, but

that actually encourage our success.

I want to stop hearing that people are surprised by my accomplishments and the accomplishments of other youth in care. There shouldn't be a glass ceiling of expectations for youth in the system; we should be supported and expected to shatter it. After surviving my childhood, I feel I can survive anything. Strength is built, and I certainly wasn't going to stop being strong once I left foster care. If you are a youth in or from care, I hope you feel the same way. My guess is that you've had to fight at some point in your life, and I hope you keep fighting. If there was ever anyone (including yourself) who told

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## Brittany's Blog: Straight Talk by a Scholar from Foster Care

Brittany's Blog chronicles one student's journey from foster care to college to career pipeline. As a Fostering Success Michigan Student Ambassador, Brittany will reflect critically on her experiences, barriers, and victories. The first portion of the blog follows her story through graduation from undergrad. As a graduate student studying social work with a concentration in management of youth and children services, Brittany will analyze the content she learns from a valuable perspective full of first-hand experience in the systems she studies. Brittany will offer suggestions for both students and professionals as they work together to overcome the barriers facing young people who have experienced foster care. This blog is intended for fellow foster care alumni, professionals working with students who have experienced care, and anyone else involved in the movement to support young people in their efforts to succeed. Readers can contact Brittany at [cfs\\_fsmstories@wmich.edu](mailto:cfs_fsmstories@wmich.edu)

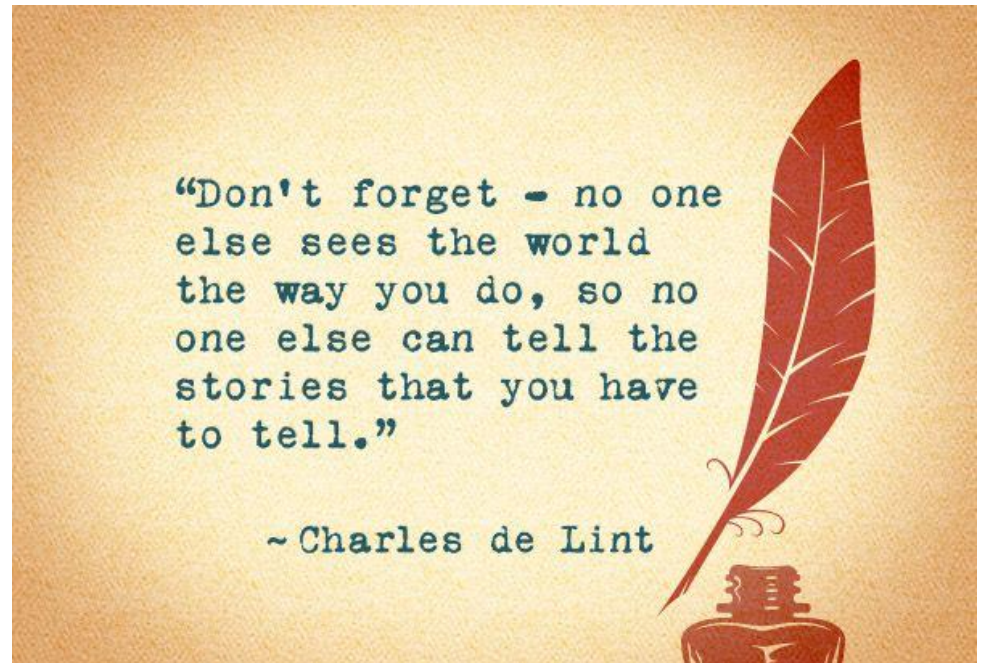


+ Why share your story in the first place?



# + It's unique

- Stories are part of our culture
- Two people perceive the same situation differently
- Intersecting identities
- Statistics don't share stories







# It matters



- Stories bring policy into practice
- To educate, influence, and promote change
- Stories don't tell, they show





# It's a form of connection



- There are biological benefits to storytelling
- Shame keeps us from sharing our stories
- Empathy is the anecdote to shame
- It can feel good and powerful to share your story
  - ... but be careful





Ways to share your story



Art

Through  
research

Writing  
a book

Poetry

Theater

Media

Public  
speaking

In a  
blog/  
journal

With a friend

With  
policymakers



Become Inspired, Read the #FosterClubLeader Blogs



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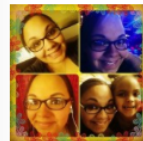
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Remember Me  
Part 2  
by Nathanael Matanick  
376,161 views



ReMoved  
by Nathanael Matanick  
2,470,626 views



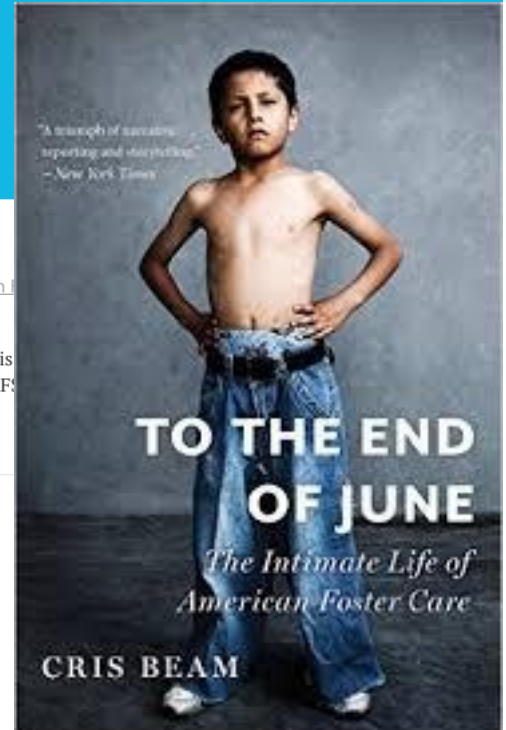
## How I Make My Mark

Posted in [Brittany's Blog: Straight Talk by a Scholar from Foster Care](#) on May 28, 2015

Meet Sheila, a Student Advisory Board member who is making her mark! She asks.....how will YOU #MakeYourMark?



## Stories



“Writing as writing. Writing as rioting. Writing as righting.

On the best days, all three.”

- Teju Cole

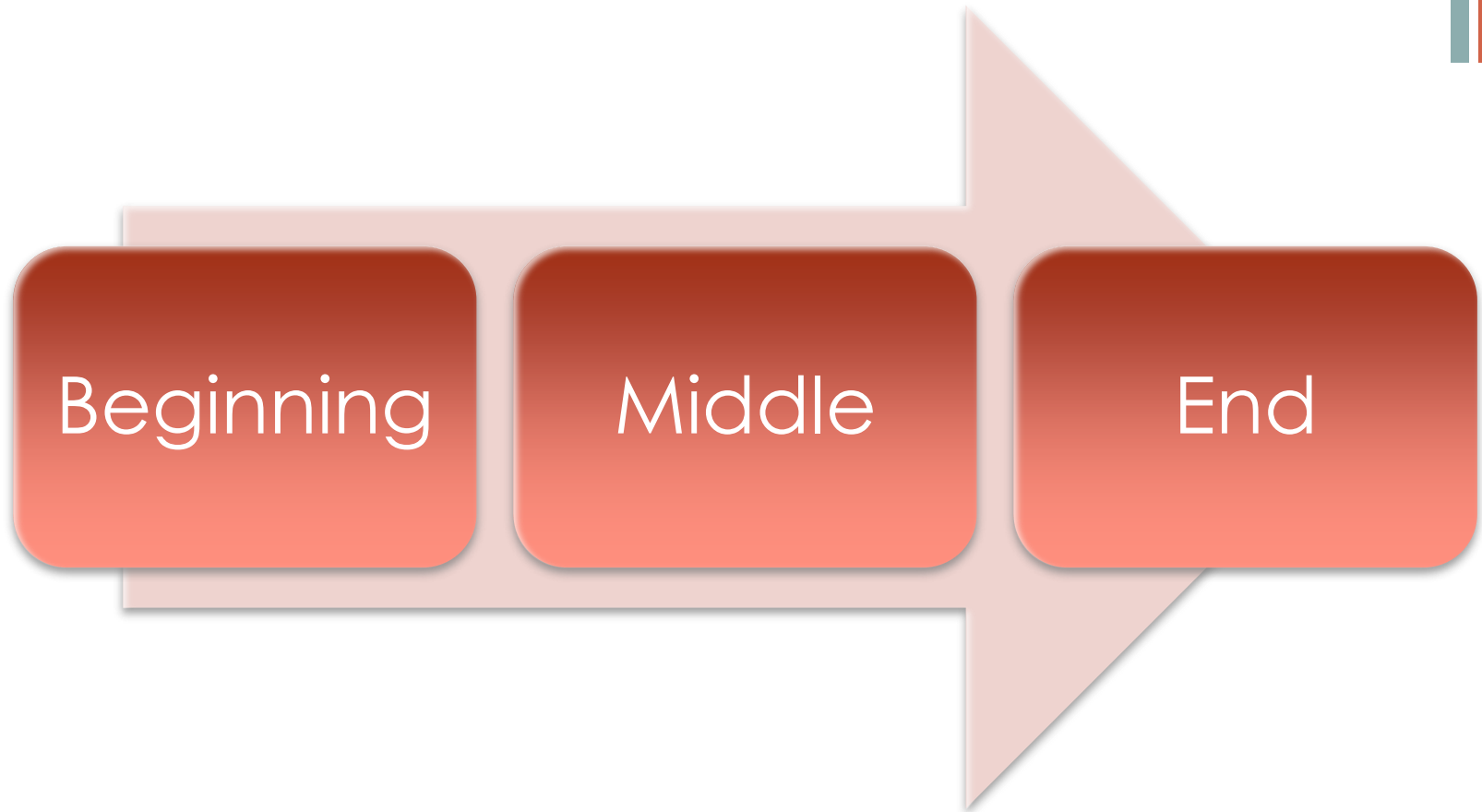
+

Sharing through writing





# Components of a Story




- [illegible]

“Brittany's Blog chronicles **one student's journey** from foster care to college to career pipeline. Brittany will reflect critically on her experiences, barriers, and victories.

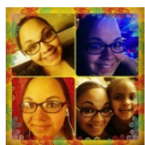
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Meet Sheila, a Student Advisory Board member who is making her mark! She asks.....how will YOU #MakeYourMarkFSM?

#### Categories

- [Brittany's Blog: Straight Talk by a Scholar from Foster Care](#)
- [FSM Student Spotlight](#)
- [2013 Leadership Retreat](#)
- [Student Stories](#)



# Inspiration



- Read something you enjoy and notice what you like
- Use prompts (see handout)
  - What's it like to be you?
  - What is a foster care statistic that bothers you?
  - What's something you wish people knew about individuals who have been in foster care?
  - How is your life different or the same as other people your age?
  - How could your experience in the system have been improved?



# Sample Structure



## Introduction

- Give audience an expectation of what they're about to read
- Focus statement

## Explain

- Why do you feel this way?
- Is there an experience you've had that illustrates why you think the way you do?

## Ending

- Remind readers of your main point
- What's coming up next on the blog?

About 575,000,000 results (0.35 seconds)

1. Create a content calendar. If you're blogging once or twice a week, brainstorm and jot down some topics to write about and insert them into a calendar that extends into the next couple of months. ...
2. Categorize your content. ...
3. Start crafting a post a week in advance. ...
4. Think about links and mentions. ...
5. Set aside time to write.

### How to Write a Blog Post in Just 30 Minutes - Entrepreneur

[www.entrepreneur.com/article/240372](http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/240372) Entrepreneur ▾

*Feedback*

### How to Write a Blog: The 12 Dos and Don'ts of Writing a Blog

[www.writersdigest.com/.../the-12-dos-and-donts-of-writin...](http://www.writersdigest.com/.../the-12-dos-and-donts-of-writin...) ▾ Writer's Digest ▾

Mar 15, 2012 - When Writing a **Blog** Do ... Find your focus. Be relatable, be yourself. Use links within your posts. Include images. Respond to **blog** comments. Post to Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Anywhere Else You Can. Set Unrealistic Goals. Limit your word count.

### How to Write a Blog Post: A Simple Formula + 5 Free Blog ...

[blog.hubspot.com/.../how-to-write-blog-post-simple-formu...](http://blog.hubspot.com/.../how-to-write-blog-post-simple-formu...) ▾ HubSpot, Inc. ▾

Dec 31, 2014 - That way, before you start writing, you know which points you want to cover, and the best order in which to do it. To make things even easier, you can also download and use our free **blog** post templates, which are pre-organized for five of the most common **blog** post types. Just fill in the blanks!

[5 Free Blog Post Templates - How to Write an Introduction - Productivity Tools and ...](#)

### How to Write an Awesome Blog Post in Five Steps





+ Sharing your story:  
Things to keep in mind



# Take control of your story



- Always be truthful
- Choose your outlet wisely
- Decide early on what you are willing and not willing to share; Reevaluate often
- Be prepared for question and assumptions
- Ask for support when you need it
- Remember your reason for sharing



# Practice sharing your story without using the words...



- Foster care
- Court ward
- Child welfare
- System
- Adopted
- Parents
- Child abuse
- Child neglect
- Alumni
- Trauma
- Aged out
- Homeless
- Hopeless

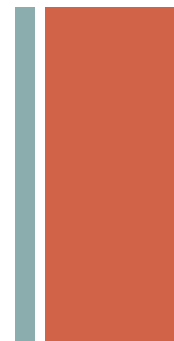
# + Creating Boundaries

- Practice saying your story out loud
  - Pay attention to how you feel
- Claim the language you prefer
- Set your limits
  - For example...

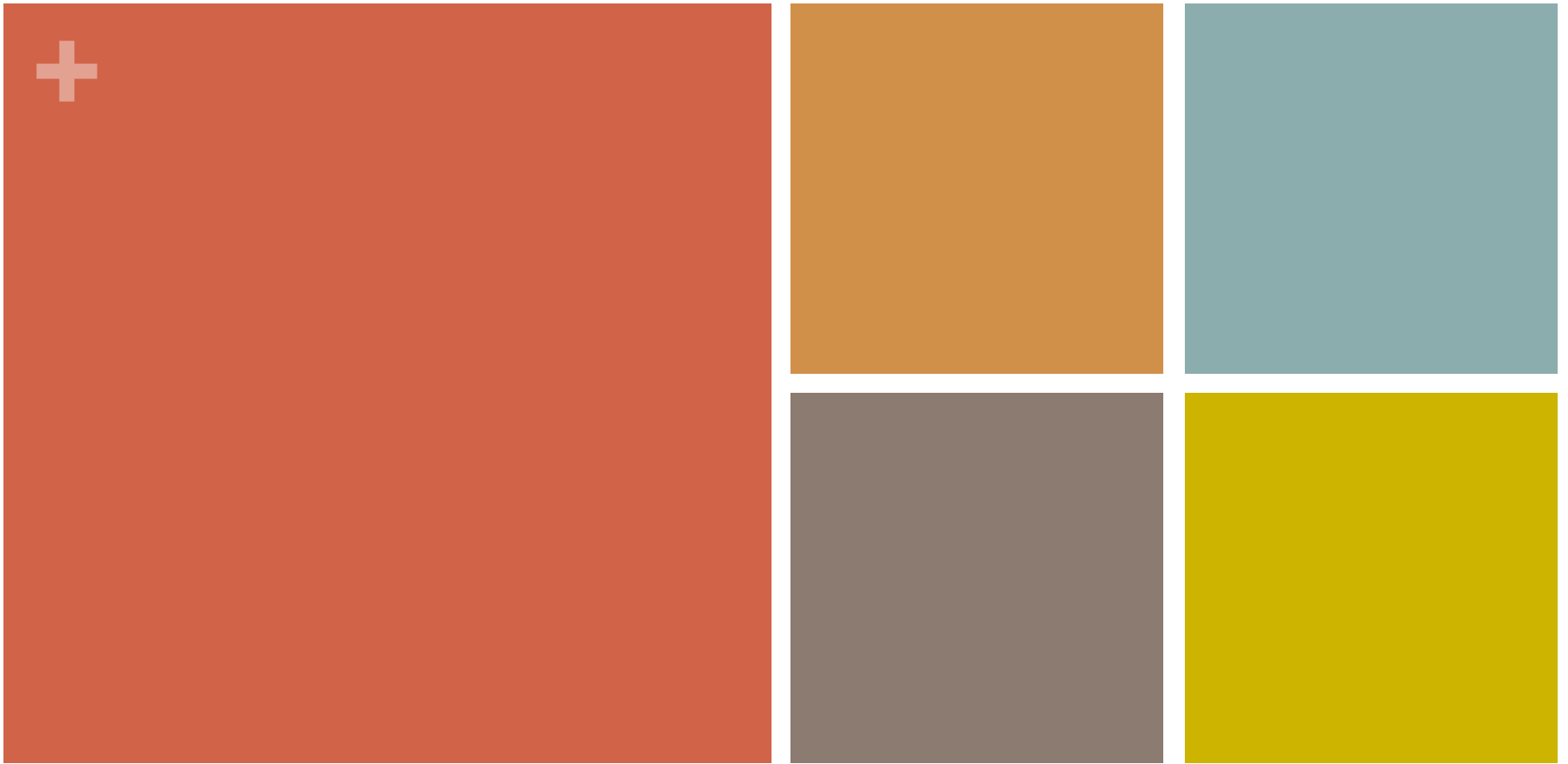
Things to share	Things not to share
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- I was in foster care in the state of Michigan</li><li>- The number of placements I was in</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Which group home I was in</li><li>- What my relationship with my biological family is like</li></ul>



# When to think twice about sharing your story



- When you don't want to
- When talking about it will cause more emotional harm than good
- With the sole purpose of captivating your audience
- To heal yourself
- To heal other people



You can't control what other people think...

But you can give them something to think about.



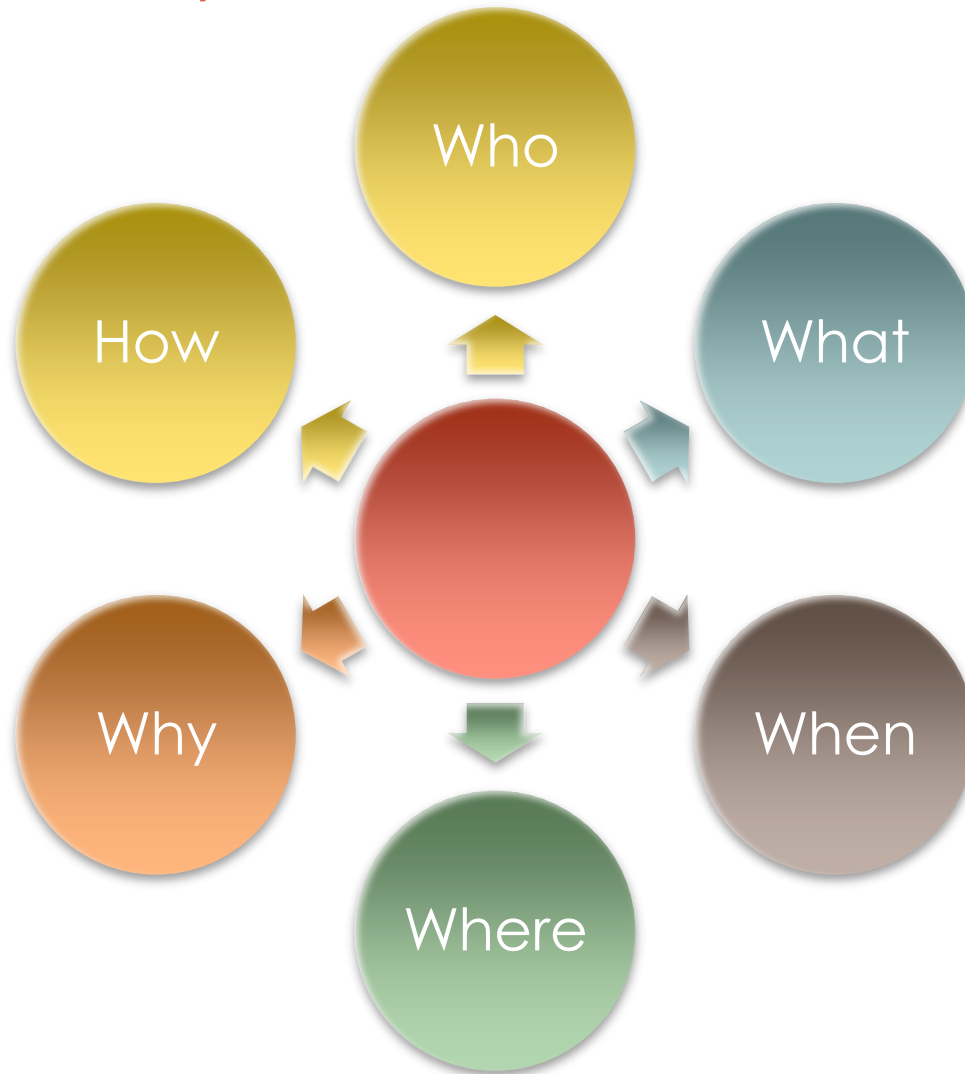
# + Asking for feedback

- Editing is such an important part of writing, but a tricky one to navigate when talking about personal stories and perspectives
- Questions to ask:
  - Is the point I'm making clear?
  - Is my blog (/story) easy to understand?
  - Can you check for basic spelling/grammar?
  - What would make it better?





Questions to consider when asked to share your story





# Questions to ask



- **What** is the purpose of the event?
- **How** many people will be there?
- **What** is the format of the article/interview/event?
- **How** will my story be shared? (Social media? E-mail? Etc.)
- **Will** any media be attending the event?
- **How** and **where** will the event be advertised?
- **Am** I expected to participate in a Q & A session?








# + Tackling intrusive questions

- Q: Why were you in foster care?
- Q: Are you in therapy?
- Q: Do you still talk to your biological parents?
- Q: How many foster care placements were you in?









I don't usually  
share that  
information.

I keep that  
private.

I'd prefer not to  
answer that.

It's not a  
comfortable  
thing to talk  
about.

That feels too  
personal to talk  
about.

I'd rather talk  
about it at a  
different time.

Something I  
*would* love to  
share with you  
is...

For some people  
who have  
experienced  
foster care...

Why do you ask?



What you need to know  
about working with the media

# + Media Training 101

- Assume you're always on the record
- Your experience is part of a larger story
- It's not the media's job to paint a picture you're proud of – it's their job to report the truth
- It's not always easy to retract what you've already shared
- “On background”
- First name vs. full name
- It's OK to decline questions



# + Importance of Self-Care

- Plan to talk with someone before/after
- Clear your schedule if possible
- Choose social media wisely
- Be proud of yourself!





# Thank You!

Please feel free to contact me (really) at  
[brittany.bartkowiak@gmail.com](mailto:brittany.bartkowiak@gmail.com)



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For more information:

<http://groups.google.com/group/fostering-success-michigan>

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[www.fosteringuccessmichigan.com](http://www.fosteringuccessmichigan.com)

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***Karie.j.ward@wmich.edu***



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