

# Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

August 2008

Building a world class foster care system through collaboration, innovation and advocacy.

Volume IX, Issue 8

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## The Mockingbird Society Celebrates Seven Great Years BY SAMUEL MARTIN

The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is celebrating its seven year anniversary. Today I want to talk a little bit about legacy. There is a legacy that we are creating at this organization. As a football player, I make just about everything in my life relate to football. I feel honored to write this article because previous anniversary articles were written by hall of fame youth. I look back at those youth and the work they have put into this organization. Youth like **Jamica Henderson**, **Misty Lou Cook**, and **Princess Hollins**, who have led by experience, who have taught me everything, and have molded me to become who I am. The youth who came through this organization in the past have worked hard. They paved the way for what is next to come. They set records, made standards and played with extreme heart. It warms my heart and makes me so proud to be where they were, trying to raise the bar one more time. Also, knowing that one day there is going to be a youth who sits in this same seat as me and reads my articles makes me proud. So if you used to work here and still read the *Mockingbird Times*, thank you. The newspaper has covered just about everything we have done. I am here to let you know what comes next.

**Executive Director Jim Theofelis** has been a pioneer in the non-profit world. He has done something very creative and innovative and as I start off this article I want to thank him

from a professional sense, as well as a personal sense. Jim is one of the most compassionate people I know and has been an awesome support. Thanks again Jim. Jim has helped renovate the entire foster care system with the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) which is in the process of expansion. He had a vision and part of it was "building a world class foster care system." The rest of the mission was "serving our neighborhood youth."

We have begun creating what is called **The**



The Mockingbird Society Executive Director Jim Theofelis poses with the Youth LEAD department.

**Youth LEAD Network which will be statewide chapters allowing youth to improve personally, in the community, and on a legislative level.** This is really giving the youth power and voice in where they live and go to school. MBS has really changed the world and

allowed others to go along on the journey. This is all very exciting, but at the same time we are changing greatly as an organization. We have doubled in staff as well as there being lots of program development. This year could potentially be our biggest year as an organization.

The way MBS started was with Jim, three youth and a \$50,000 donation. We now have over 15 staff members and a 2.4 million dollar budget. Something like that doesn't happen overnight. We have doubled production of the paper since 2003. It comes from hard work and dedicated people.

I had an opportunity to interview Jim and ask him few questions. I was curious to know how he felt about the growth and what he thought was really good about it. "Creative Stress" he said. I asked what he meant by that and he explained that we are definitely proud of where we are but there is still work to do. We are in a great spot but we can't take it easy yet, there is a lot going on and there is plenty left to get done. Being that it is the 7th year anniversary I asked Jim where he would want to be in the next 7 years. "On a beach in Mexico," he laughs. He then said that he

ANNIVERSARY, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## Financial Protection for Youth in Care BY GEORGINA RAMIREZ

Would you give your social security number to a stranger? This is a day to day reality for many youth in care because, with every placement, a new person may have access to your identification. In an age where an estimated 9 million Americans are victims of identity theft, one must ask what can be done to decrease the financial vulnerability of youth in care.

The state of California took a legislative approach to this situation and has implemented AB 2985, a bill that protects youth in care from identity theft by requiring county welfare departments to request credit checks for foster youth who are 16 or older and provide referrals to credit counseling organizations if the credit check discloses any negative information. I, personally, think this bill is a great idea; it provides a solution to two problems at one time: It's a solution for the lack of awareness that youth may have about credit and it initiates awareness at a young age. If there is a problem, youth will have time to address any issues before transitioning out of care.

Given that credit is such a tool of power in our society, it is puzzling that many people, especially youth in care, are not educated on the topic. While many Independent Living (IL) providers discuss credit with their participants, it is a subject that is only briefly touched upon in reference to independent housing skills, which is not enough education on such a complex subject. In addition, one of the flaws that plague the system when it comes to service providers is the inadequate timing of receiving certain services. Realistically, the system has some good resources but, unless you have good communication with your social worker, it can be difficult to find out about resources that are available.

When foster care alumna and the **Mock-**

**ingbird Family Model Coordinator Marie Goines** transitioned out of care, she was expecting to accept independence with open arms by finding an apartment and living on her own. However, her quest for independence was halted when she found out she had been a victim of identity theft. In the process of trying to move into an apartment, she found out that her credit report claimed that she had defaulted on utilities, leased property, and damaged the leased property. Despite the fact that these debts had been accrued when Marie was a child, she was still forced to pay the debts in full. This challenge impeded Marie's transitioning process but, thankfully, she had communication with her biological family and could reside with her mother until she was able to move.

Not only was Marie's experience a financial burden but it was an emotional encounter as well. Some emotions associated with this

**"The easiest way to find out if someone has stolen your identity is to get a copy of your credit report."**

event were frustration, defeat, deception, and a sense of hopelessness about transitioning out of care. Marie felt as if she would always be a step behind due to being unprepared. There is an old saying that every problem is an opportunity in disguise. In Marie's case, this was her opportunity for growth. It provided her with a gift that she did not have before this situation. The experience has made her wiser, she has learned to protect herself and not to rely on the fact that someone else will do it for her, and she now tries to keep her personal information as safe as she keeps herself. She

also has a greater sense of ownership of her personal information which she didn't have before. Lastly, Marie wants people to know that even though this is a tough situation to find yourself in, it doesn't ruin your life and you can get back on track.

One may be asking what if this happens to me, how will I know, and what can I do? The easiest way to find out if someone has stolen your identity is to get a copy of your credit report. You can get a free copy of your credit report at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com). This is the only Web site that will provide you with a report and score for free. If you get your report and you see charges you did not make or accounts that you know you did not open then you may need to go to an agency that has certified credit counselors.

A credit counselor can teach you how to read your report and assist you with the removal of inaccurate information. There are multiple organizations that have credit counselors. I recommend that if you see a credit counselor, you go to a nonprofit organization. Nonprofit credit counselors will assist you without bias and should not charge for their services, although they may ask for a very small donation to offset their costs.

Seattle has multiple nonprofit agencies that provide credit counseling such as **Clearpoint Financial Solutions** ([www.clearpointfinancialsolutions.org](http://www.clearpointfinancialsolutions.org)), **Solid Ground** ([www.solid-ground.org](http://www.solid-ground.org)), **El Centro de la Raza** ([www.elcentrodelaraza.org](http://www.elcentrodelaraza.org)), and the **Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle** ([www.urbanleague.org](http://www.urbanleague.org)), just to name a few. Check out their Web sites for more information on their credit services. If you want more information on identity theft, go to the **Federal Trade Commission** Web site [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov). **It's your future: take a proactive approach and look out for yourself; you'll be glad you did.**



**Letter From the Editor** BY JIM THEOFELIS

It is with great pride that we at The Mockingbird Society (MBS) celebrate our seventh anniversary. It was August 2001 that three youth created the first issue of the *Mockingbird Times* and we distributed approximately 6,000 copies mainly throughout Seattle. This current issue has a circulation of nearly 60,000 copies distributed to every state in the nation—still celebrating and elevating the voice of our most marginalized youth.

Over these past seven years, The Mockingbird Society has grown to become a leader in training, employing and empowering young people to be leaders in the social justice movement to build a world class child welfare system. Youth from across Washington, joining with The Mockingbird Society and our many community partners, have taken the lead in advocating for and succeeding in the passage of critical legislation that has dramatically improved the resources and programs available to youth exiting foster care.

Our other major program is the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) which began as one small pilot and continues to

be replicated throughout Washington and in several jurisdictions across the nation. We are working with community partners to further develop The MFM as a prevention model keeping more families together and hopefully fewer children removed from their home. We are proud of our seven year history and it's important and fun to reflect upon the past. However, we remain steadfast in our commitment and pledge to double our efforts to achieve our mission.

Finally, I have been so blessed with regards to The Mockingbird Society that the people to thank are endless. I certainly thank our volunteers, donors, and community partners without whom we could not do what we do. **But I conclude this message by thanking my family at home and co-workers and youth at MBS. I am surrounded by the best examples of humanity, integrity and brilliance and for that I'm most grateful.**

Jim Theofelis

[jim@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:jim@mockingbirdsociety.org)



**Meet the Staff: Julian Barrington**

My name is Julian Barrington. I am 15 years old and was born and raised in the great city of Seattle. Currently I am attending the wonderful Franklin High school where I'll be a sophomore this upcoming year. During my free time I like to read, participate in political local events, and, most favorite of all, I like writing about issues impacting youth at both national and worldwide scales.

In the past, I've won writing contests, participated in youth conferences, and done speeches all over the city in an effort to disseminate social awareness. I have a profound passion for speaking into the hearts of those lost and who find themselves in a state of complacency. Honestly, I didn't even know I was in kinship care until I was once asked to do an article on the subject. Now I fully understand what it means to be in the system since I have spent 15 years in kinship care. Health care, the economy, voting, the housing crisis, unemployment, and the war in Iraq are just a few of the many important issues affecting this world. Many of these issues, like health care, housing and unemploy-

ment, directly impact those in foster and kinship care.

If I could change one thing about the foster/homeless system I would advocate for those in kinship care regarding the health care crisis. Through extensive research I've found the big issue with those in Kinship Care is the access to health care: the statistics of those in kinship care in comparison to those who are not are staggering in terms of the social and physical needs. I feel morally obligated to create common solutions to common problems. Seeing immoral behavior and absurd policies made by policy makers, I believe we must hold those at the decision making level accountable to ensure lives of decency for everyone by alleviating the problems and pushing the solutions.

This leads to the reason I feel working for Mockingbird's Youth Programs will help fulfill my passions for youth. This job will give me the opportunity to effectively advocate for not only myself but for those less fortunate. I will be able to do so by effectively using my voice, speaking for what I believe is morally right.

**ANNIVERSARY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

wanted to see the Mockingbird Family Model available to almost every foster home in the state, as well as more prevention to keep families together and have fewer kids in foster care.

He also anticipates seeing the Youth LEAD Network flourish. In general he wants The Mockingbird Society to be a statewide and national leader in child welfare reform. The most powerful question I asked him was what the best thing about the great growth is. He said, "Despite several major accomplishments such as HB 2002 and the MFM, the number one thing is the involvement of young people, caregivers, and alumni in implementing our work." Hearing that was a very powerful thing, once again it goes back to creating a legacy.

Looking at 2001 and looking at where we are as an organization today, you can see the growth; this organization has done some very important things for youth. There have been several bills that we have gotten passed as an organization: for example, Health care until 21, Foster Care until 21, Sealing of Criminal Justice Records, and several others. The Mockingbird Family Model was designed to be a

different and better way of delivering foster care. It is better, stronger, and bigger than ever now. There are MFM constellations in Washington D.C., Kentucky, and throughout Washington State. There are inquiries or planned implementations in Alaska, Oregon, California, Arizona, Virginia, and New York. The organization is on track to having 16 new constellations implemented by early next year, something truly world class.

I have gained a great deal from this organization. I have learned how to really advocate for myself as well as to truly gain a sense of how to articulate what I am passionate about. What I have to say is really important. My voice is heard, something that most youth miss out on, but now I get to help create something that will give that voice to our youth.

So where are we now? The door to something huge has been opened. My entire life I wanted nothing more than to go down in history for doing something great. I dreamt of an everlasting legacy. Being here, I am creating that for myself. But it is not just about me, it is about being a part of something bigger. We still have a lot to do but we are getting there. Every day we

are one step close to making a world class foster care system. In my opinion, that is a true legacy. I would just like to thank the staff who have been here to see this as well. This is truly something great. Happy Anniversary!

**THANK YOU!**

MARIJANE ASHBY; CLAIR BARON; ANNETTE BLAYNEY; CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS; RHONDA CHONG; JUDGE PATRICIA CLARK; LYMAN LEGTERS; STELLA PITTS; JAN SEWELL; ALAYNE SULKIN; TEENS IN PUBLIC SERVICE; TREEHOUSE; WINDERMERE FOUNDATION; ZEEK'S PIZZA

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**ABOUT US:** *The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of foster care, while advocating with decision makers for system reform. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between \$9.50 and \$12 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, and poetry and are compensated up to \$25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 50,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright ©2008, The Mockingbird Society.*

**MEET OUR STAFF**

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## Foster Kids Get Famous BY LEONA BILL

Who knew that famous actors **Eddie Murphy** and **Tracey Morrow (Ice-T)** once lived in foster care?

Eddie Murphy wasn't just an actor but a comedian as well. Eddie's parents divorced when he was 3 years old. When he was 8, his father passed away. His family financially struggled and his mother was hospitalized. At this point, Eddie and his brother Charles were sent to foster care. Eddie and Charles only stayed in foster care for a year. When Eddie was nine, his mother remarried and their family was together again. Eddie credits his experience in foster care, with helping him develop a sense of humor and making him realize how important it is to find something to laugh about in every situation.<sup>1</sup>

Tracey Morrow (Ice-T) also wasn't just an actor but a musician and movie director. Ice-T was in kinship care at first then in foster care.

When Ice-T was with his relatives, they didn't hide their feelings that he was a burden to them. Ice-T was then sent to a foster home in South Central Los Angeles. He grew up in LA where he eventually aged out of care. Ice-T became an increasingly visible public figure. He lectured in prisons, high schools and colleges as a spokesman for American youth.<sup>2</sup>

Both Eddie Murphy and Tracey Morrow now have families and still have a good im-



Rap artist and actor Ice-T lived in kinship and foster care most of his youth.

act on people. I feel that their story will inspire other foster youth and former foster youth to make positive choices. Eddie Murphy avoids alcohol, tobacco and drugs. This is an encouragement for me. I used to smoke cigarettes a lot and I use to drink every once in a while but ever since I was a little girl, I knew how much alcohol impacted peoples lives and how much it impacted mine. My mistake was that I let drinking affect my life even though I knew what it could do. By the time I was of drinking age, I had noticed how much I didn't really want alcohol in my life. I'm proud to state that I've been sober for quiet some time and that I don't smoke cigarettes anymore.

Finding out that Ice-T and Eddie Murphy lived in foster care and reading their stories has encouraged me to remain sober. Their story also has encouraged me to keep pushing myself especially when I feel like giving up. Writing this article has helped me realize I can still accomplish great things if I just keep pushing myself when I need to and not give up on things in life.

(You can find a list of additional famous people with who have experience living in foster care along with their stories at [www.fyi3.com/funstuff/fam\\_fosterKids](http://www.fyi3.com/funstuff/fam_fosterKids).)

<sup>1</sup> [www.fyi3.com/funstuff/fam%5FfosterKids/eddieMurphy.cfm](http://www.fyi3.com/funstuff/fam%5FfosterKids/eddieMurphy.cfm)  
<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fyi3.com/funstuff/fam%5FfosterKids/iceT.cfm>



## Meet the Staff: Milissa and Diana BY LEONA BILL

As The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is expanding, we are proud to welcome **Milissa Morgan** and **Diana Clark** to the team. Milissa is the Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant and Diana is the MBS Administrative Coordinator.

**MT: What attracted you to Mockingbird?**

**MM:** To be able to continue work with at risk and underserved youth.

**MT: What do you enjoy about working for MBS?**

**MM:** Over all, working with youth staff and being a part of the expansion program.

**MT: What was your position before you joined MBS?**

**MM:** I was the program coordinator for the Burton Chill Program (A learn-to-snowboard Program for homeless youth

and youth in care).

**MT: What is your favorite hobby?**

**MM:** Anything that is outdoors! [Surfing and snow boarding are two big ones.]

**MT: What attracted you to MBS?**

**DC:** The mission and the Mockingbird Family Model.

**MT: What do you enjoy about working for MBS?**

**DC:** I enjoy my coworkers. It is a really nice environment.

**MT: What was your position before you joined MBS?**

**DC:** System Support Coordinator for Safeco Information Technology.

**MT: What is your favorite hobby?**

**DC:** Riding my bike with my dog.

Welcome, Melissa and Diana!

## Child Abuse on the Rise BY SHAKIRA FELDER

A commercial advertisement generated by the Ad Council for the nonprofit organization Childhelp is sure to leave a chilling impression. The ad begins with a woman awaiting an elevator. When it stops to pick her up, she walks on briskly to find herself accompanying a parent and child who greet her. The small boy looks up at her smiling and she flashes a gentle smile in return. The elevator finally comes to a halt. As the doors slide open, the father says, "Have a good night." Then, as the father and son begin walking down the darkened hallway, the words "Child Abuser" display

boldly across the man's back. She watches in complete shock as the doors begin closing in on her and the little boy glances back at her once more. A narrator then concludes, "If only child abuse were this easy to recognize..."

But it isn't. The numbers of children dying at the hands of their loved ones are increasing at alarming rates each year. Every day, child abuse results in the death of four children and three quarters of these victims are under the age of four.<sup>1</sup> Child abuse comes in all forms and is not always noticeable. "The signs weren't there because I wasn't around them a lot," **Shaun D.**, a mother of five says, as she recalls the playmates of her children. "When I see kids minding their parents, I don't think kids are being abused. I wasn't around them enough to know all of the details. I learned about them much later." According to Shaun, the father of the four children Shaun's kids were playing with was convicted when signs of abuse were reported by faculty at the children's elementary school.

When Shaun found out about the abuse, she was in complete shock. "I didn't fully know the father of the children... He was so particular about those kids with every little thing they did, 'don't do this and don't do that.' [But] I never would have thought that he was beating them. I thought he was just doing what dads do." Shaun says that had she been around the children more frequently maybe she would have picked up on signs of abuse, but things appeared to be pretty normal whenever the children were dropped off to play at her home.

"Child Abuse is a touchy subject. There's a lot surrounding [child abuse] but everyone is affected by it regardless... Some parents get frustrated and take it out on their kids, but... child abuse is not okay. It's dysfunctional," says Shaun.

Having obtained certification as a parenting instructor through a program called Strengthening Multi-Ethnic Families and Communities through the vision and direction of founder **Dr. Marilyn L. Steele**, Shaun also focused on effective black parenting. She has taught a variety of parenting courses within her community. She notes that adults ought to seek out different ways of becoming better parents. Here is her list of prevention and intervention factors for lessening large amounts of child abuse cases:

- **Make time for you by doing something for yourself once in a while to relieve any stress that comes with the responsibilities of being a parent.**
- **Take a parenting course to learn the proper education of parenting.**
- **Understand the values of self management skills including self control, anger management, and behavioral management. Skills such as these produce non-violent, peaceful atmospheres.**

At one point or another, people will find themselves in similar predicaments and are often plagued with fear. In situations like these, many will ignore their instincts. The phrase, mind your own business has been a general rule used as a code of ethics throughout various communities around the world. While maintaining silence may seem like an effective method of keeping the peace, many people fail to realize how

**"While maintaining silence may seem like an effective method of keeping the peace, many people fail to realize how detrimental the attitude of not wanting to get involved can be."**

detrimental the attitude of not wanting to get involved can be. We're all guilty of turning a blind eye to potentially harmful situations which can jeopardize the livelihood of ourselves as well as others by failing to make a judgement call when it is most needed.

Abuse isn't something that just happens. It's a cycle that's going to take the participation of absolutely EVERYONE to prevent what they can. Shaun advises more people to get involved by taking initiative and seeking out information. Just a few people can still make a difference. Silence is ignorance. Take action against child abuse. Speaking up just might save a life or two.

To report any suspected child abuse or neglect in **Washington State contact Child Protective Services at 1-866-ENDHARM. Nationally contact ChildHelp National Child Abuse hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.**

To learn more about child abuse visit any one of these helpful Web sites:

[www.childhelp.org](http://www.childhelp.org)  
[www.childhaven.org](http://www.childhaven.org)  
[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childabuse.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/childabuse.html)

<sup>1</sup> [www.cdc.gov/mmwr](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr)

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If you have any questions, email: [leadershipsummit@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:leadershipsummit@mockingbirdsociety.org)



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## Lolita

KATHRINA ESTOQUE

Lolita  
 8 year old mestiza princess  
 Thick long black waves  
 Shapes exquisite face  
 With defined dimensions  
 She holds her head up high  
 See Lolita  
 The few who walk the streets  
 Of Philippines. Cuba. NYC. Nicaragua  
 Frames the few memories  
 Of being born into adulthood  
 No time for childhood  
 She sits at the edge of the concrete  
 sidewalk  
 As mother's white pearls  
 Hang below pink  
 Shirt  
 And the illuminance of the sun  
 Reflects off her light brown pupils  
 She stares at her hands  
 As it gives birth to memories  
 Where her palms were used to cradle  
 The world. The universe.  
 See Lolita was unlike any other.  
 Instead of playing Barbie dolls and  
 dressing up in My Little Princess dresses  
 She owns hands that were used to make  
 them  
 And her guitar and pen  
 Became the source of peace and freedom  
 She sang freedom songs  
 At the corner store near her barrio after  
 Working the 7 to 5  
 Her compassion strength knowledge and  
 vision  
 Surpasses those after her as she is the  
 product  
 Of a childhood tainted.  
 See Lolita  
 Was living in a war.  
 A war being fought in her barrios.  
 Gang violence and retaliation became the  
 source of protection and authority for  
 some.

And Prostitution became an outlet for  
 future college tuition  
 in order to gain higher education  
 By products of exploitation and violence  
 perpetuated by world trade organizations  
 Lolita was living in a war.  
 Where she remembered seeing missiles  
 land  
 And Patriotic flags bombarded TV screens  
 As 8 year old Lolita questions when will  
 they be free  
 See Lolita was living in a war.  
 Where starving children like herself  
 Didn't mind the portion size of food  
 scraps that were left behind on streets  
 The little she had left she gave to birds  
 that flew next to her on the pavement  
 When she kept on singing her freedom  
 song  
 See Lolita was unlike any other  
 Her palms were used to cradle the world.  
 The universe.  
 And her hands were used to strum and  
 write  
 As the story of her experience with WAR  
 becomes a voice for others.  
 Her name is Lolita. Princess. Queen.  
 Mestiza.

## Let Live Let Me Die

JACOB JOHNSON

I could love if I hated it, but I can't say I did  
 And I could hurt if you'd let me, but I don't  
 think you will  
 So you coddle Me infection, I don't care the  
 intention, you force me to love  
 Like I've forced you to sleep  
 But I could end it all faster than you think  
 And you can tell all the ridden I'm guilty  
 And you can tell all the hidden they can hide  
 Just stop telling yourself in your pride  
 Let live let me die!

## In My Metropolitan Setting

THOMAS DARDEN

In my setting  
 My metropolitan setting  
 The setting with  
 The constant sound of action  
 I observe

I observe the movement  
 I note, differences  
 May it be  
 Color of meter

In my setting  
 The center of the city,  
 The connection to the  
 Suburbs,  
 The theater to the zoo,  
 The convention center  
 Of attractions,  
 I note  
 May it be meter or color  
 Tint or sound

The memorization of  
 The setting allows  
 Me to always consider  
 The metropolitan setting

## Big Bump

ALEXA HAWKINS

I'm just waiting 4 me 2 wake up  
 open my eyes and maybe this will all  
 be just a dream  
 I don't really care  
 I don't really mind  
 I'm just waiting 2 get out of this life  
 cuz it seems like every single path  
 that I take  
 always has a big bump  
 in the middle of the road

## The Shadows Of My Shady Past

ASHLEY ABBOTT

The longer I stay here,  
 The crazier I get,  
 The more I talk,  
 The more I cry,  
 The less people care,  
 Because I'm out of their way,  
 Out of their sight,  
 Out of their mind,  
 The more I build walls around me  
 not letting anyone in  
 I'm losing my fate,  
 The only wish I have is to belong,  
 To have somewhere that I can go to  
 and be loved,  
 Home for me is hate and sorrow,  
 The streets full of pain and fear,  
 All I have is me and the shadows of  
 my shady past.



Poetry Within A Butterfly  
 STEVEN PHAN

*Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow.*

~Ronald. E. Osborn



Do you know what its like to live in over 50 foster placements, moved to three different counties, and being forced to leave friends and the only people you consider family? During my time in the foster care system, I spent a lot of time in the dependency court room. So when I was asked to speak on the panel for **Casey Family Programs** about the impact of the courts on foster care and youth, I was honored to be a part of their effort to improve the system.

Casey Family Programs is an organization that specifically works to "Provide and improve and ultimately to prevent the need for foster care." Even though I am no longer in the system, I really want it to be a lot better than it was when I was in it. For me to know there are not just one or two people but a whole organization world-

## Speaking at Casey Family Programs BY RHONDA SMITH

wide improving the system one step at a time really puts a smile on my face.

On July 16, 2008, I participated in a panel for Casey Family Programs. My part was to talk about my experiences with the court system while in foster care. I really enjoyed myself but I was a little bit shy talking or even looking at the audience. I shared some personal things that I really don't like to think about anymore. I loved it and the other panel members were very supportive trying to make me feel comfortable.

I was asked some hard questions. One of these questions was, "What were some of your experiences interacting with the family court system?" My answer was that **I was put in foster care shortly after birth and at three years old I got adopted. I went back into foster care when I turned eleven years old because my adopted par-**

**ents terminated their rights. Between the ages of 11 and 18, I was in over 50 placements.** I had a ton of support from my social worker and Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). They were always at my court hearings and visited me monthly.

What I didn't like about dependency court was the three hour wait to have a five minute conversation with the judge. I also didn't like the fact that over the previous six-month period they almost always seemed to bring up all the negatives that had happened. I had an attorney but I only met with him about four times and I personally think he wasn't a big help at all. I was asked more questions that I could not

really respond to because I really couldn't understand them or they just really didn't apply to me.

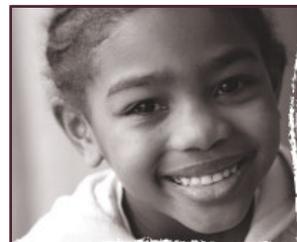
My point in this article is to let you all know that there are people out there who are trying to make the foster care system better. I felt honored to be on the panel because I learned a lot of new things. I also met some wonderful people both those who were on the panel as well as some Casey Family staff. I personally want to thank Casey Family Programs for all they are doing for the foster care system and also a special thanks to **Judge Patricia Clark** and **Marvin Charles**.

## The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, **The Mockingbird Society**. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Miss Maudie in teaching his kids that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird because "...Mockingbirds don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don't do one thing but sing their hearts out

for us."

What if we created an organization, a community, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment that Atticus had for mockingbirds? Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.



## SAVE THE DATE

Join The Mockingbird Society for our  
 Second Annual Benefit Luncheon.  
 Wednesday, October 1, 2008 • The Westin, Seattle

To be a table captain, reserve a seat, or sponsor this event, please contact Darcie Gray, [darcie@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:darcie@mockingbirdsociety.org) or 206.323.KIDS (5437).

**We believe we can fly**

2008 BENEFIT LUNCHEON | THE MOCKINGBIRD SOCIETY