

Mockingbird Times



Recipient 2005 Angels in Adoption Award

Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

December 2005

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Volume V, Issue 13

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

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"It's My Life" in Washington, D.C.

JACOB HARRISON

On November 12th, Jim, Najja, Dietra (all of Mockingbird Society) and Degale (of Treehouse) flew to Baltimore, MD for the annual Casey Family "It's My Life" conference. I had never been anywhere on the East Coast before, so I spent a lot of time on the flight wondering what was ahead. We arrived at about 6 pm that night and I was in shock from seeing such a large number of black people dressed nicely and running things. I just don't see that here in Seattle and it made me wonder why. I got up to my room and decided I needed to recap what I just saw. Eventually, I calmed down and fell asleep.

The next morning, I had the best breakfast in my life. I ate a buffet of fresh smoked salmon, eggs, sausages, hashbrowns and biscuits with gravy. The service at our hotel was terrific. After breakfast, we all settled in the car and headed for Washington D.C. It was roughly an hour from Baltimore. Our first stop was the famous White House, home of a current president (who I won't comment on). It wasn't as big as I thought and my curiosities about security were quickly answered when I saw a whole bunch of men in all black

with guns rise on the roof. I'll never question the safety of the White House again.

Our next stop was the Vietnam Memorial and it was sad to all the people's names on the wall that died. My great grandpa was one of them. Then we visited the Lincoln Memorial, which I had for so long wanted to see. I got to step upon those same steps and see the exact setting that Dr. Martin Luther King gave his infamous "I Have A Dream" speech in. I plan on being there again many more times. We visited the Washington Monument then drove back to the hotel for some sleep. I had a long, serious two days ahead of me.

Monday, I woke up and attended the first workshop on my schedule, "Foster Youth Education". I was upset to see the shocking statistics of high school graduation Blacks are at the bottom of the list with 51%. It gets worse. When it comes to Black kids in foster care, only 31% graduate. I was also shocked when I heard the teacher say she visited Seattle and named Rainier Beach High School as the worst

academic school she'd seen in the country. I was really angry when I left that session. My second class was called "Choose Your Friends Don't Let Them Choose You." That class was the most inspiring class of all. The teacher was an ex-gangbanger and he told the class all the stories about when he was getting into

D.C. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Jacob, Najja, Courtney (Mockingbird Society) and Degale (Treehouse) in front of the White House.

The Fight for Gay Adoption

MISTY LOU
COOK



Something happened to me after I saw the movie "We Are Dad". I had realizations. I had real, unmistakably heartfelt epiphanies that I haven't been able to put into words until right now. I nearly cried, screamed, laughed, shouted and whispered to my neighbor when it hit me that gay people aren't legally able to adopt. Queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, etc.) people, no matter how great, famous, loving, caring, smart or able cannot legally adopt, except in four states: California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont. These four states "explicitly permit joint adoption by lesbian and gay couples." (1) This does not mean there is not hope. As a matter of fact, "in some states joint adoption by lesbian and gay couples is, at least in certain parts of the state, almost routine even though there is no court decision or statute specifically allowing it. For example, Oregon falls into this category." (2)

In the movie and real-life documentary "We Are Dad", two gay white men adopted 4 black and 2 white children, all with AIDS or HIV + from birth. The family was essentially under the state of Florida's microscope, because the two dads were gay and the state of Florida has very strict bans on gay adoption, but the family proved to be strong, loving and healthy, and the two dads built a home for their kids. I was in awe of how close the family was, and how funny their inter-

actions were at some points. Every child had their individuality, and they were respected and loved for who they were. "We Are Dad" was a heart-warming, wonderful and very educational movie that brought new perspective to why queer people should be able to marry and adopt. It proved, without a doubt, that healthy, happy and loving families could and can be raised by queer people.

"We Are Dad" also brought up a lot of emotion for me. I know, from working at the *Mockingbird Times* and from being on and off the streets since I was 14, that there are so many children suffering from neglect in the foster care system and wanting nothing more than a safe, happy, healthy and loving home. Half of the kids I met on the streets were running away from abusive foster families, the other half were either kicked out for being queer, neglected or running away from a variety of abuses as well. I realized that there are so many thousands of safe, happy and healthy queer couples out there who want nothing more than to raise a family, to adopt children, but aren't legally able to. This movie brought new perspective to me, especially in regards to why it's important that queer people be legally allowed to adopt.

Being able to marry, adopt or have children is a civil right, like voting is a civil right. Women and black people in this country couldn't vote for hundreds of years, because they were deemed unequal. These people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they were as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights. There were many courageous people who fought for their rights and they will forever be written into history as heroes of their time, because they followed their heart and did what was right. Rosa Parks, Frederick

Douglass and Harriet Tubman are some of these people. The U.S Constitution, written in 1780, begins with a "Declaration of Rights", and states that "All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential, and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties; that of acquiring, possessing, and protecting property; in fine, that of seeking and obtaining their safety and happiness." (3)

What was the intent of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution? It seems this country's forefathers were writing up guidelines for an ideal utopia; one where people are free to speak their minds and express themselves. An interesting aspect of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution is the time period it was written in ... slavery was still prominent in the late 1700's, and yet they dreamt of "safety and happiness". Perhaps they were ahead of their time and were not ready to put their full theory into practice, and perhaps we're still learning how to turn this utopia, where everyone is equal and has rights, into reality. It makes sense that people fear what they do not understand; the white settlers did not understand the Native American way of living or the black people that they enslaved, but it did not mean that blacks and Native Americans were bad, unequal or "sinful". If we try to understand each other, then we can stop fearing and hurting one another.

The Florida Gay Adoption Ban, which is the most strict adoption ban in the United States, was based on fear. A woman named Anita Bryant led a notoriously homophobic campaign in the late 1970's called "Save Our

ADOPTION CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS



Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays: It seems amazing that another year comes to a close which is always a time for reflection and introspection. Mockingbird Society has experienced a remarkable year of growth and achievements that fill us with pride as well as inspiration to continue our work on behalf of the children, adolescents and families we serve. We are especially proud of the young people who have worked in the Youth LEAD program which includes the *Mockingbird Times*, ASK-Y and our Speakers Panel. We continue to receive feedback from around the country that *Mockingbird Times* is a quality newspaper full of the type of insight and wisdom that can only come from youth. It is very gratifying that many of our youth reporters have moved on to secure employment in the private industry and/or enrolling in higher education programs. ASK-Y and our Speakers Panel have been instrumental toward increasing positive public policy and public awareness

regarding the issues facing children and youth who are homeless or in the foster care system. Youth recognize their own personal growth and confidence through their participation in the public speaking associated with ASK-Y and our Speakers Panel.

The **Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)** is set to expand throughout King County and continues to receive attention from across the nation as a promising practice that stabilizes children in placements, allows siblings to live together, improves educational outcomes and retains and recruits foster/kinship parents. Indeed this has been a remarkable year of growth and achievement for the Mockingbird Society and we are appreciative of your support. **As you decide on the recipient of your holiday giving I hope you will consider the Mockingbird Society. I believe we are deserving of your support and I believe our results demonstrate this is so.** In closing I wish each of you the best of the holiday season and in particular send my heartfelt blessings to the children and youth who find themselves away from their families.

 Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Mockingbird Staff work on gingerbread houses.



Teresa and Jacob getting serious about their creations.



Jim sharing holiday love with Astrid.



Jim and Ros with their house, keeping Astrid's hands away.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents involved in homelessness and foster care. 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 Mockingbird Society are paid between \$7.50 and \$8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to \$25 per published piece. The *Mockingbird Times* has a monthly circulation of 40,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A, 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 2005 The Mockingbird Society.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and support the Mockingbird Society!

Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the *Mockingbird Times*. Enclosed, please find my check made payable to Mockingbird Society in the amount of: \$ _____

Suggested Donations:

\$ 1,000+..... Protector \$500-999.....Caretaker \$250-500.....Organizations \$50+.....Supporter \$25.....Foster Parent

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

EMAIL _____

Please do not include my name on published donor lists.

Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, 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.

Thank You's

Casey Family Program; It's My Life Conference; Children's Alliance; Chris Marsh, Attorney; Patricia Gray; Herbert & Anne Theofelis; Margaret-Ann & Mark LeRoy; Downtown Emergency Service Center; Janis Avery; David Eiffert; Lisa Taylor; Northwest Children's Fund; Valerie Ramisch; Anne McBride; Corine Knudsen; James & Rosemarie Flaherty; Paul G. Allen Family Foundation

Mockingbird Society's 3rd Annual Auction and Fundraiser: We Believe We Can Fly

Thursday, March 30, 2006

6-9 pm

Wine, hor d'oeuvres and dessert

Silent and live auction
Premiere of the Mockingbird Society documentary,
A Place to Sing

At the Broadway Performance Hall
1625 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122

Tickets are \$35 and may be purchased in advance or at the door.

D.C. CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

trouble and how he found a way out. His words of advice were electrifying. I took another class about transforming from adolescents to adults and realized how lucky I am. Most kids out there that are in foster care have it way worse than me. I couldn't believe all the stories I was hearing about kids just getting beat and raped by their foster parents. I felt so terrible and even more so angry. No kid should ever have to go through any of that. Some of the kids I was talking to were telling me how great it felt to get away from home to come to the conference.

Tuesday was the day Najja, Courtney, Dietra and myself presented the Youth LEAD (Leadership Education/Employment Advocacy Development) program here at Mockingbird Society. I read my Permanency article and stole a bunch of hearts apparently. After our presentation, we left for the airport to start the long journey back home. While I thought about how nice it was going to be to get home, I also thought about the kids I met that are going right back home to bad situations with their caretakers. I just wish that everyone could be treated like children instead of useless adults. It did feel good to be home.

Mockingbird Society celebrates the holidays with a gingerbread house making party. Come enjoy the scents of our gingerbread lane!

MEET OUR STAFF

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Youth LEAD Coordinator

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Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 240, Seattle WA 98144

The Importance of Donating

COURTNEY
KONIETZKO



I know that when I was homeless, living on the streets of Seattle, one of the things that sucked the most was sleeping in the snow. I had one thin blanket that I was sharing with another person and it was not enough. I remember it was too cold to stay asleep and the other person and I kept waking up looking at each other in frozen misery. Being cold-to-the-bone is one of the worst things a person can experience and still when I get cold I remember the streets.

Homeless people need blankets, warm clothing, beanies and gloves, hygiene kits with things like travel size tooth-

paste and floss, vouchers to warm places to hang out in or go eat at like movie theatres and fast food restaurants, sweatshirts with hoods are always appreciated, socks and underwear, and those hand warmer things that you take camping where you press the dot and they bring heat for a couple of hours.

When I became older I realized that it was better to give than to receive and didn't want anything quite as much. The greedy side of me still screams hmm, a Tempur-pedic bed would be nice, more shoes, more boots (I am a shoe fiend)! I don't need those things though. It's amazing, the feeling I get from giving. I like watching people's faces light up because they got something they loved.

If you can't give someone a home, give them what they need to survive until they can get a home. Volunteer your time serving a holiday meal or donate the below items.

Drop-in-centers are places where homeless youth can go to get clothes, a warm meal, showers, and other services that move them towards healing and self-sufficiency. These are important places to donate to in the holiday season because they help homeless youth survive on the streets and give them a Christmas they otherwise wouldn't have.

University District Youth Center

4516 15th Ave. N.E. Seattle, WA 98105
(206) 526-2992
Contact Person Rick King x17

Holiday Donation List:

- Gift cards (Safeway, Bartell Drugs, Fred Meyer, University Book Store, Tower Records)
- Pre-paid phone cards
- Battery-operated travel alarm clocks & flashlights
- Hooded sweatshirts
- Bus tokens (Packs of ten \$1.25 tokens)
- Packs of AA batteries.
- Sleeping bags & Backpacks (Dark colors preferred)
- New underwear and white tube socks
- African American hair products
- Journals, notebooks, and day-timers
- Disposable food serving supplies (Plates, bowls, plastic forks/spoons/knives)

The Orion Multi-Service Center

1020 Virginia St Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 622-5555
Contact Person Jaesa Papillon

Holiday Donation List:

- Gift cards (shoe stores, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing places)
- Movie passes
- Bus passes
- Sleeping bags
- Blankets
- Socks and underwear
- Beanies and gloves
- Portable food (peanut butter crackers, fruit cups, etc.)

We are looking for articles, poetry, artwork and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be published in the Times, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org. For more info and to check us out, go to www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

All incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to Mockingbird Editorial Staff and will be opened by Editorial Staff. All incoming correspondence to reporting staff under 18 years of age will be opened first by Mockingbird Editorial Staff.

ADOPTION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Children" (4), which was aimed at repealing a gay rights law in Miami, Florida. Those seeds of fear bloomed into massive quantities of homophobia which eventually led to a ban restricting all queer people from adopting children. The main reason why Bryant said gays shouldn't adopt is because she believed that all gay people were child molesters. Her prejudice and fear of gay people led to a law that prevents gay people from adopting and building families and that Gay Adoption Ban in Florida is still in effect to this day.

Steve and Roger, the two dads from the movie-documentary "We Are Dad", are very affected by Florida's Gay Adoption Ban and are currently in a battle to keep their kids. Frank and Tracy, the two eldest children they raised since infancy, were recently taken away from Steve and Roger by the state of Florida and placed in new "homes". Bert, their third child, is in constant danger of being taken away from his family because queer people still aren't legally allowed to adopt in the state of Florida. Bert commented on this in the documentary, "We Are Dad". He said, with much heartfelt confusion and pain, "It's illegal to adopt kids if you are gay".

Holiday Events In Seattle

COURTNEY KONIETZKO

Meals

New Horizons Holiday Party for homeless youth 22 and under. There will be a hot meal and stockings filled with goodies. Located at 2709 3rd Ave. Seattle, WA 98121 (3rd and Cedar). Takes place on December 13th, 2005, starts at 6:30pm.

Teen Feed Holiday Party for homeless youth age 25 and under, December 14th. Party will take place in the University District, location and time to be determined at a later date. For more information call Laura Pritchard at (206) 632-1635 or talk to other street youth in the district.

Youth Care Orion Multi-Service Center holiday dinner for homeless youth age 19 and under. 2:30-4:30pm, December 25th Christmas Day. Located at 1020 Virginia St. Seattle, WA 98101. (206) 622-5555

Roots Young Adult Shelter Christmas Meal offers a multi-course restaurant-quality, hot meal at 6:30pm, Friday for anyone in need. Will provide extra Christmas food items on F, December 23, 2005. 1415 NE 43rd St. University Temple United Methodist Church Seattle, WA 98105.

Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets Christmas Meal. Provides a family-style holiday meal for eligible parents and youth. Call to register and for the service location, dates and hours. For more information call (206) 726-8500 x1 1814 Summit Ave, Seattle, WA 98122

Parties

Family & Adult Service Center Children's Christmas Party Coordinates a party with food and gifts for individuals who are homeless, ages 18 and younger, and their parents or guardians; 9:30-11:30am, Sa, Dec. 17, 2005. For more info call (206) 441-8405 2013 3rd Ave, Seattle, WA 98121.

Renton Area Youth and Family Services - West Hill Family Enrichment Center Holiday Party. Offers a holiday party for low-income families at 10am, Saturday, Dec. 17, 2005. Party includes music, snacks, photos with Santa, door prizes, etc. For more information call (206) 772-2050 Located at 12704 76th Ave S, Seattle, WA 98178.

Seattle Parks and Recreation - Miller Community Center Holiday Party with Gifts. Hosts a holiday party from 6-8pm, Friday, Dec. 16, 2005, for registered low-income families and youth living in the Capitol Hill, Central District, etc. for more information call (206) 684-4753. Located at 330 19th Ave E, Seattle, WA 98112.

Salvation Army - William Booth Center Christmas Day Dinner. Serves a free Christmas Day dinner to anyone in need from noon-2pm, Sunday, Dec. 25, 2005. There will be holiday music and prize giveaways. For more info call (206) 621-0145. Located at 811 Maynard Ave S, Seattle, WA 98134.

Leona's Story

LEONA

I grew up in the foster care system all of my life. It's been a difficult experience. After I aged out, I was on my own, but luckily I already knew of some resources that have been helping me out, in the past and in the present.

Ever since I aged out, I've been in and out of jail and on and off the streets. I've had a hard time trying to maintain a decent job, as well as housing. I'm always on the move. I don't stay in one place for too long. I'm used to this, because I was constantly moving in foster care, from one home to another. This effected my education, which created gaps. It also got me in the habit of keeping to myself. I still have a hard time opening up to people, and I also have difficulty in communicating with other people like my friends or significant other. I tend to keep a lot of things bottled up, which stresses me

out so much. Not only do I have a hard time accepting new changes, but I tend to be very insecure of myself. I carry myself very well, from what I'm told by most of my friends.

Letting go is another main thing I have had a hard time dealing with. When I say "letting go," what I mean is I don't like separating from my friends or family. I know that if I don't learn to let go of things or to let go of closeness, then it'll just slowly tear me down. So letting go isn't always easy for me, but after letting go, my load or burden seems to be lighter.

I always have a hard time because of what I've been through in the past, but eventually I know things will work out. Hopefully, sharing my experiences with the foster care system will help others.

Steve and Roger have already been plain-tiffs for two years in an ongoing American Civil Liberties Union federal lawsuit challenging Florida's gay adoption ban and are in danger of losing Bert, a child they raised since infancy. Half of the proceeds made from the movie-documentary "We Are Dad" goes to Steve and Roger, and towards their fight to keep their children and be able to legally adopt in the state of Florida.

November was National Adoption Month, so write in and tell us, tell your legislators or your Florida State Governor or whomever what you think about gay adoption and why. Is hate a family value?

Should Steve and Roger be able to keep their children? Is a ban restricting all queer people from adopting children helping or hurting children in the foster care system? Let us know what you think. Letting people know where you stand on gay adoption could save a life, enhance a childhood or just make you feel better.

- (1,2) http://www.lethimstay.com/big-pic_parenting_couples.html
- (3) http://www.pbs.org/georgewashington/classroom/theory1_2.html
- (4) <http://lethimstay.com/lawsuit.html>

Creative Corner

Life

STARCIA AGUE

Hurt, pain and confusion,
Is what I used to feel,
Now that I know Jesus
I feel like I am so alive and real
God has planted a seed in me,
And now I know where my life is heading
and my destiny
Though I still have hardships and
struggles,
All I have to do is hold on to his word and
cuddle,
When I'm having a bad day
God is there to be my best friend and
always has the right thing to say
Growing up I didn't get much love or
affection,
But now god is leading my life and will
not lead me the wrong direction

Chantelle

STARCIA AGUE

Bay girl you mean the world to me,
Even though life is tough right now I
hope you learn that's not the way it has
to be,
I feel like I let you down so much,
I miss your cute little baby touch,
I had no guidance in life growing up,
Look, the same things happening to you
and I have no control which really sucks,
I look at your pictures often,
And wonder if our mothers' heart will
ever soften,
Getting locked up was the best thing that
ever happened to me,
Even though it has been hard for other
people to see
I have done everything in my power to
change my old ways from who I use to be,
Now my goal in life is to succeed,
Please know one day I'm going to be
there,
And you can count on me
Together we're gonna make it just you
and me....

A dead man's Heart

JAMES MILNER

I'm a dead man with a dead heart
Not willing to let the die come, but to go because of someone that once helped me feel
alive and someone who helped someone remember what and who I should stay alive
for
But now a lot of the time I feel everything but emotion of happiness I am a dead man
Or if not I feel dead there's no ending to my sorrow besides the times... I love her
And at that time I don't know if she believes it or even if the feeling is still mutual.
I always seem to feel alone in this world against millions and I know I won't make it
out.
So I pray for his will to happen and want the worst to come
But I want and pray for so much and get nothing this is a dead man talking.

Untitled

Brett Horejsi

This is for all the people who have died
Drunk driving and suicide
This is all the people who wanted attention
Do you still want to cause tension for things you haven't mentioned?
This is for all the people who have died
Old age and genocide
This is for all the people raped and beaten
Worthless pedophiles and not so good cretins
This is for the people gone and dead
Never known and left unsaid
This is for the people died in battle
Shot and slaughtered in the midst of battle
This is for the people this is for the people
This is for the people shown up and battered
Still broken and still shattered
This is for the people gambling their lives away
Lost money their hopes and dreams
This is for the people that braved harsh words
Resorted to knife and struck and struck their veins chords
This is for the people left alone in a storm
All alone by themselves all alone
This is for the people this is for the people
This is for the people feeling oppressed
You're not alone get it off your chest
This is for the people offered a life
But only took the knife
This is for the people still here still empowered
Still lost still a coward
This is for the people who believed in lies
Listened and only to cry
This is for the people watching life through tunnel vision
Still cut their skin with pure precision
This is for the people feeling mixed emotions
Not knowing to care or to give full devotion
This is for the people judged
Too soon too early not given a chance
this is for the people who thought life was a joke
and took life for granted though it was funny
This is for the people this is for the people

Mockingbird Represents on Youth Legislative Youth Advisory Council

JAMICA HENDERSON

This weekend I had the opportunity to participate in the first meeting of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council. It was held in Olympia on December 2nd and 3rd. There are 22 members on this council and I am proud to be one of them. We are a group of young people from all over Washington state who want to see positive changes happen for young people. One of the important things that this group does is read over bills that are already written or if necessary, come up with new ones that we feel would be more beneficial.

Our mission statement is: As the Washington State Legislative Youth Advisory Council we strive to be a voice for youth; examine issues of importance to Washington youth and vocalize concern to legislators and we also promote youth participation in state and municipal governments as well as foster long lasting relationships between state legislators, adults, and young people.

I will keep the Mockingbird readers up-to-date with our next activities. Get ready for a new change and stay tuned for more details regarding our 2006 Advocacy Day!

Don't forget February 2nd is advocacy training, and February 3rd is Youth Advocacy Day! This year we are advocating for HB 2002, which would extend services to age 21 for youth who want to stay in care and go to school.



Jamica with fellow youth legislators at the first legislative weekend.

I Am a 19 Year Old Street Kid

ALICIA MORRIS

I am a 19 year old street kid. I have been homeless on my own in Seattle for 2 years on and off now. Over all I have been homeless for 4 and a half years. My passion in life is writing. I work for UDYC's Zine project in the U-District in Seattle, so I'm excited to get a chance to write for the Mockingbird Times (hopefully they'll accept this piece of writing.)

I was homeless with my twin sister but she has now left for Job Corps, so I am alone for the first time ever. I've never experienced true loneliness until the last 2 months. I had no idea what it was like. It must be so hard for all the people that don't have a twin. I've become so independent in such a short time.

I sleep in the Roots Shelter. From 9pm to 8 am they allow young street kids to sleep there. I don't know what I would do without it. The streets of Seattle are no place to be. Drugs are everywhere. This is a place of drugs, sex and alcohol. Take a good innocent kid, like I used to be, and

put them on the street for 9-12 months, maybe less, and you will see their lives change for the worst.

I love my street family, they are my closest friends on the streets. I would die for them. But the streets will wear you down. I wander the streets through rain, storm and shine. I'm out there with no place to escape the cold. Sometimes I would just go to the park but it sucks when you can really feel yourself getting sick and there is absolutely no warm place to go and you have no choice but to sit there and get sick. Plus medicine is not easy to come by. Yeah, that really sucks.

I have one thing left that I still have from my youth. The most precious possession I have; my virginity. The last of my innocence. I guard it well.

Basically I have reached a dead end in my life. I have my G.E.D. and I always have some random job. I really can't stand being homeless and having no job. Where is the productiveness?! My parents were

not fortunate enough to be able to take care of my sister and I, so off to the streets we went.

I have reached the realization that if I want to have a normal life (not homeless) and if I ever want to be a successful adult then I need to get away from the streets. Away from my friends, whom I love to death, and away from the drugs. It will pull you down once you've gotten off the streets if you continue to have the drugs and homeless people as your surroundings. It just sucks you into this black hole called homelessness.

I never did hardcore drugs, like heroin or cocaine or meth, so my body is not addicted to anything. It doesn't depend on a drug to function normally. But a lot of kids out here are not so fortunate. All it takes is one hit and you can be addicted. For these homeless kids it will be so much harder for them to get off the streets. Their bodies depend on these drugs. They can not even think clearly if they are sober.

But to have a normal life the first step is to get away from the drugs. After that....well, I don't know because I'm not there yet. I'm leaving in one week to Job Corps. I'm.... well to be honest I'm terrified. Homelessness is the only lifestyle I have ever lived. I'm so excited to have a bed to sleep in and to be able to shower easily and to cook and eat the food that you choose, not what is given by teen feeds. These are the things most people take advantage of. But I know there is another way of life out there with no drugs and the drama of homelessness. I will write back to the Mockingbird when I am in Job Corps and explain what it's like and if I made a good decision. Maybe this can be a small project I can do for all the homeless kids out there. I will be a living example if Job Corps is good or not for the street kids. I'll get back to you guys with info. In a little while. Sincerely, Alicia Morris. trixelina@yahoo.com