

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

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Educational Advocacy Program BY JERRY BOBO



The **Treehouse Educational Advocacy** program (TEA) began serving King County youth in 2001 and expanded its service to the whole State of Washington in 2006 through a contract with Children's Administration. TEA is a program that is designed to improve academic outcomes, increase school stability, and protect the educational rights of students living in foster care by providing advocacy services to youth, social workers, and caregivers. Last year in the State of Washington, a total of 2,574 children and youth received Treehouse's advocacy services. However, this statewide program is dependant on public funding and their budget will be one of many programs considered for elimination during the 2009-2011 budget process. If TEA is eliminated, offers more than just school help, they also help youth think about life after high school, build resumes, and get them ready for the real world.

Marquice, a youth that is involved in TEA, has nothing but good things to say about the program. Marquice says, "This program helps me stay focused in my daily tasks in school. My advocate is at my school all the time making sure that I get the help that I need." If young people with advocates can alter their thoughts on school and work harder at their education, why not continue the funding? The more support youth have while in school the more they can relax. Marquice says, "My advocate was creative at helping me solve my problems with school. She and my parents [foster parents] were making sure that the promise of help was met by the school. My advocate and my parents are very supportive when it comes to my life." At the age of 17,

Marquice is starting to grow up and see what support is and what it feels like.

Knowing that they are not the only ones looking out for the future of youth in the foster care system and whether or not they receive all the educational support they are eligible for. Marquice's foster parents say, "This program brings great opportunities for all kids in the community, especially on advocating for the children/youth to stay focused in school without any suspension."

Independence and education is very important in today's society. You need to be educated properly for great independence and parents appreciate that. Marquice's foster parents say, "The reason we looked for a program like this for Marquice was mostly educational reasons. But the help he gets from his advocate is showing him how to be more independent." A positive outlook on any current situation is better than hoping for a new situation. Marquice's foster parents also state, "This program is great for all children/youth to participate in."

This is a very important program that has helped Marquice and many youth like him stay out of trouble, off the streets, and in school. Marquice says, "I had many disciplinary removals from school—a total of 47 days last term compared to one day this term." This is an accomplishment that he would not be able to do alone. However, this program is at risk of closing due to loss of funding unless people like you speak up and let your voice be heard. For more information about Educational Advocacy services and other Treehouse programs you can contact **Executive Director Janis Avery** at janis@treehouseforkids.org.

The Importance of Sibling Connections BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER



Sibling connections in foster care can be affected in many ways. For example, siblings could be moved into different homes because of age, number, or gender. "When my brothers and I got taken away from our home, we were unable to be placed together. I was placed in a home with teenage girls while they were somewhere with kids under the ages of ten. Even though I wasn't placed with them, at least my little brothers got to be together, but I would probably have been more comfortable being with them. Knowing that they were okay and emotionally stable would have made me feel better about not being at home," says one foster youth. When you're used to talking and interacting with your siblings every day, being separated unwillingly can cause stress.

Broken sibling connections create risks for youth in care. In the most recent issue of *Represent*, a magazine focusing on the voices of youth in care, an article called *Torn Apart* talks about this issue. The anonymous author tells about being separated from their siblings. "I just wanted to be back with my siblings. I'd been in the ambulance would have to come and take me to the hospital." A youth misbehaving because they miss their siblings isn't uncommon in foster care. Behavioral issues just lead to moving to different homes and more instability which does not promote healthy development. Keeping siblings together can help.

The **Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)** can help to prevent the loss of sibling connections. The MFM is a group of 6-10 licensed foster families that live close together and are connected to a Hub home. This entire unit is called a Constellation. MFM usually keeps youth with siblings in the same home and, if they cannot do that, they try to keep them in the same Constellation. Having a Hub home where support is provided, youth with siblings can have sleepovers and spend time with their siblings as often as possible with this family oriented approach. In addition, siblings also have the opportunity to see each other whenever there are Hub home events within the Constellation. MFM also reduces the risk of youth running away by placing youth with family.

Even if siblings aren't in a placement together, it is still very important for them to be allowed to see each other. Keeping sibling connections is critical because, in some cases, it may be the only way youth can know about their background and biological family. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to maintain a connection with both of my sisters. My older sister does everything for me and will do anything for me. I don't know what I would do without her now. She has helped so much the past two years I've lived with her. Even though we don't always get along, I couldn't imagine being separated from my little sister.

SIBLINGS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FOSTER YOUTH AND GREEN CARDS

BY GEORGINA RAMIREZ



Many youth in care already have insecurities about revealing they are involved in the foster care system, but can you imagine being an undocumented immigrant in foster care? As a youth, how would you know if you are undocumented, or know who to inform without risk of deportation? Children who are entering the foster care system as undocumented immigrants are frequently transitioning out of the system without their green cards or visas, even though they may be eligible for one. This places limitations on many things average citizens takes for granted like access to employment, or any transaction that requires a Social Security Number. A worker who is highly concerned about youth not being educated on the process to become documented immigrants.

The question that caregivers, service providers, and even I have is who is missing this important step in the process of youth being transitioned to becoming dependents of the state. All the professionals who come in contact with youth in care, whose responsibility is it to make sure that youth who are undocumented immigrants get the appropriate paperwork done in a timely matter?

Who may be undocumented, I spoke with **Diana E. Moller**, Staff Attorney from the **Northwest Immigrant Rights Project**. This organization assists low-income immigrants and refugees. It assists youth through the **Immigrant Child Advocacy Project** in which they help youth who have suffered abuse, abandonment, or neglect and are dependents of the state. Youth in care may be able to qualify for **Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)**. This is an immigrant visa that helps youth obtain a green card. Having a green card means that the youth is a lawful permanent resident of the United States and can apply for U.S. citizenship. SIJS residents can access resources to support their education, and the ability to rent a home. These are things that undocumented youth are unable to do.

However, there are stipulations to going through this process and each person is evaluated on a case by case basis. According to the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project that the youth must be under the age of 21, unmarried, and a dependent of the state. In addition, she placed a great emphasis on the fact that youth who are undocumented should respect the law. Any youth should respect the law but if you are undocumented, the moment you commit a crime you may become ineligible to obtain a green card. Since some crimes are more serious than others, even if you have been in trouble with the law before, it is still important to ask if you qualify for this program.

According to the **Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law Unaccompanied Minors Project**, there are some requirements to obtain a green card. The youth must be a "dependent of the state and eligible for long term foster care, adoption or guardianship due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment." This pro-

GREEN CARDS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS

Once again, the youth and alumni have produced an amazing issue of the Mockingbird Times giving voice, insight, and wisdom to the issues facing children, youth, and families involved in the foster and kinship care system.

We are certainly seeing that in Washington to hit as much as six billion dollars. The Washington legislative session is in full swing and the mantra in Olympia is "if it costs money it probably ain't going to happen."

I believe this responsibility does not end at the arbitrary age of 18 and that included in this is the responsibility to provide safe housing beyond age 18.

I believe this responsibility does not end at the arbitrary age of 18 and that included in this is the responsibility to provide safe housing beyond age 18. As a result of some great leadership by legislators, youth and alumni of foster care, and The Mockingbird Society, Washington State recently implemented the Foster Care to 21 program that authorizes young people to remain in foster care while attending college or a voc-tech program.

dent housing models for youth who are not able to remain with their foster parents.

Grandma knew all along: if you send 18 year old kids out the door with no resources or support, they don't do so well. Due to the survival-based lifestyle they will be forced to lead, society can expect them to be dependent upon public assistance and they will experience increased mental and physical health problems, early parenting, and homelessness.

Visit our Web site www.mockingbirdsociety.org and get informed about our legislative agenda, which includes safe housing for youth exiting foster care.

What can you do to help, you ask? Visit our Web site www.mockingbirdsociety.org and get informed about our legislative agenda, which includes safe housing for youth exiting foster care.

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Jim Theofelis jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

GREEN CARDS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cess can take a long time and, if you are unable to acquire your visa or green card before you are emancipated or transition out of care, you may be denied.

I would recommend speaking with a legal professional from Northwest Immigrant

Rights Project or Volunteer Advocates for Immigrant Justice. Both organizations assist low income immigrants and refugees to maintain dignity, defend their human rights, and obtain legal status.

For more information visit kkk "Uk-nfgrfw" Xfb"cf [#]hY] Yg# 6!-a a []FUjcb# ja a []FUjcb"Ja z kkk "fVcf [#]gd'dz cf kkk "ja a []fubHW" Xfb"cf [#G=G

Meet the Staff: Liliana Davies

The Mockingbird Society (MBS) would like to welcome Liliana Davies, our new Administrative Assistant. She has been with MBS for a month and a half.

my favorites. I've been a member at the YMCA in the University District for 10 years.

Welcome to MBS Liliana. We look forward to continue working with you!

MBT: What attracted you to MBS? LD: The mission. MBT: What do you enjoy about working for MBS? LD: I like the welcoming, the environment and the fact that everyone works together with the same beliefs and goals. MBT: What was your position before you joined MBS? LD: 5b 5Xa]b]gfUj Y5 g]g]Lbh%]b Di f-chasing. MBT: What is your favorite hobby? LD: Exercising. Lifting weights is one of

SIBLINGS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

have both of my sisters in my life, one for me to learn from and the other for me to teach. For me, it's a really big motivation. Without both of them I can't imagine how my life would be. The impact of siblings on a youth can be immeasurable and no youth in care should unwillingly be without their siblings.

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic Hc ?] ' 5 A cW ingbird 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.

Support The Mockingbird Society!

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For appropriate recognition, please write in the space above how you would like to be listed.

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My gift to help children, youth and families in foster care is (check box): Payment Options: Check (payable to The Mockingbird Society) Credit card: ~ Visa ~ MasterCard ~ AMEX Signature: D'YUgY'WU] Ya mVWX]hWFX ~ One time ~ Monthly ~ Quarterly My employer will match my gift. 7ca dUbn]B Ua Y. fD'YUgY'YbVcgY'nci f'a UHW]b] []Zz'fa 'L

So that we may recognize you for your gift, please write how you would like to be listed:

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THANK YOU!

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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society]gU) \$%&# LbcbdfcUhWf dcfU]cb Xj Ycd]b]]bbc-j Uj Ya cX'gZf]a d'fj]b] h'Yci hWa YgcZ'g]f WfYzK \]YUj cW]b] k]h XW]g]cb a U'YfgZf' g]h]a fYZ'fa "5" Wb]f]V H]cbUFYHU XX W]VYr'h YZ "Yh]Y h]b]c]Z]h Y'Uk "D'YUgY'Wbg 'h nai f]U Uj]g'f]Y] U]X]b] 'nai f'g]W]W]U]g]i U]cb "H'YA cW]b] V]X]f]Ja Yg]Ua cbh' mb]k'g- d]Uf'k f]h]b] UbX'dfcX W]V]m]i h k \c'U Y] d]f]YbW]b Z]g]f' W]YU]X'f'ca Yg]b]Yg"5" nai h Ya d'cn]Yg'cZ]The Mockingbird Society are paid between \$9.50 and \$12 an hour. Addi- h]cbU'n]nai h Z'ca U]m]g]h YW]i b]f]ng Va]hU]H]W]g]Z]f]h]k cf z]UbX'dcYf]m]UbXUFYWa d]bg]h]X i d'hc' & d'f' di V]g] X'd]W] H'YA cW]b] V]f]X]f]Ja Yg'Ug]Ua cbh' m]W]U]h]cb'cZj Y' & zSS' Wd]Yg]V]b] X]g]f]V h]X]U]m]g]g]k]g]b]h]c]b]G]H]Y]UbX'h]YI G5z]h]fci [\ Udf]j U]h]X]g]f]V]h]cb]g]i and as an insert in Real Change zUG]U]h]Y]U]g]X]Wa a i b]]mb]k'g]d]Uf' "Mi h]b]c]j Ya Yb]]g] h]Y_ Yr]t' h'Yd]]cg'd'n]z] U] Yz]UbX]g] W]g]cZ]The Mockingbird Society UbX'U]g]g] Wz]nai h' U]Y]b]c]j X]b]U']g]d]m]g]cZ]f] U]b]n]h]cbU' X]j Ycda Yb]UbX]W]g]cb]a U.]b] "8 cbU]h]cb]g]c' The Mockingbird Society a Un]V]HU]XX W]V]YU]XUFY] f]U]m]U]dd]f]W]U]h]X" B'c dUf]cZ]h'YA cW] ingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. 5" Wb]h]b]g]W]h]i]]h]Y' &SS- zThe Mockingbird Society.

Barriers To Connection BY ASHLIE LANIER



There are many barriers that prevent foster parents and youth from connecting. It seems as though foster parents are being trained not to get attached to the youth that come into their homes and foster youth are being taught not to connect with their foster parents.

I interviewed a current foster mother who went through the foster parent and adoptive training. She says, "Although I was told not to become attached to my placement child, I show all the children that have ever come into my home love and appreciation. I also make sure they know that I am not trying to be their mother, I'm just an addition to their new support system. I think it is wrong for people to not get to know the child or inform them what's going on during this transition of their life no matter how many children come and stay or leave their family.

I also interviewed a foster youth who informed me that his hostility towards the system came from his previous foster parents. He says, "When I lived there it was like I was undetectable. They barely got to know me and did not inform me that in two years I would leave. I was young and wondering when my mother was coming back. Foster parents are usually only temporary but there just might have been that one chance where they could have had a chance to adopt me. I was there almost

three years and I have nothing to say positive about them or the foster care system." This foster family's failure to inform him why he was there, who they were to him now, and comfort him in their home, is his personal cause of hostility towards the system and, I'm sure, that of many others.

Looking at the systemic issues, the foster care system is not made for personal well-being. In and out of their life when they're in the system, whereas adults get to choose what relationships they want to be involved in. All develop trust issues by the age of one and a half years old. So when you are part of the system at that age and don't have a solid relationship with someone you trust, and you're going from home to home, of course there's going to be some hostility towards the system.

It goes the same way for foster parents. Those who have been foster parents a long time frequently have had many youth placed in their homes, often for very short periods of time. With youth coming in and going out of their lives, it is a psychological barrier that the youth will soon be leaving sooner or later so why get to know them? This prevents the foster parents from connecting with the youth.

This issue is not always the case between foster parents and their placement youth but it is for many. I think foster parents should start informing the youth of what is going on in this transitional period of their lives. Yes, it is true that a child that is placed in a home may be moved again, however the job of the foster parent is to be the temporary parent. It is much like babysitting: the child knows you are only there for a short amount of time but you are there to take care of them while the parents are unable to do so.

Streetchild: An Unpaved Passage BY JERRY BOBO



Justin Reed Early entered into this world in September 1969, into what appeared to be a picture perfect family. He had loving parents, two brothers, and a family dog. Like many families, everything looked better from the outside. Justin states "My dad was a drunk and very abusive." At the young age of 10, Justin became a homeless youth.

Other homeless youth became his new family and they automatically started looking out for little Justin as if he were their own little brother. They showed him the ins and outs of the rough streets of Seattle.

"I learned how to survive on my own. I saw a lot of shady things that no one should ever witness, but it was those types of situations that I excelled in that helped me deal with real life," Justin recalls. Even with all the situations he survived, he couldn't escape from getting involved in drugs.

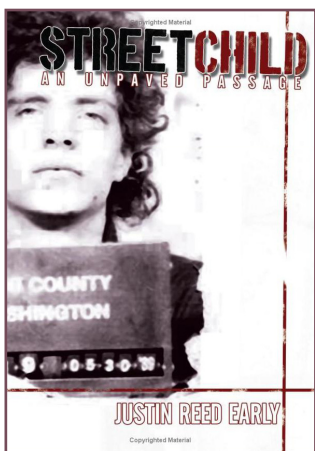
That mistake started to control his life. Justin says, "A given day on the streets hustling was the way to get money but the money I got from hustling went directly towards drugs. They were more important than food to me. That's how I would deal with the pain." This was a continuous mistake for 13 years. Wanting to stop, Justin

found help. The place was in San Francisco at a facility called the Walden House. The help they needed to put a stop to living wrongfully and get a second chance at life. The Walden House was something different for Justin. In order for the program to be successful, all rules needed to be followed. He needed to let go of the past and every negative part of it, no matter how painful it was going to be, and take responsibility for his own life.

While staying at the facility, schooling became available, job opportunities arose, caring people showed him how to be a man, and his past life became exactly that: the past. Walden House gave Justin the help and resources he needed to continue his life after the streets.

There are many treatment centers in the State of Washington that provide similar resources as Walden

House. However, with our economy the way it is, stories of recovery will be fewer if programs like Walden House are cut. A way for people to help is by making sure that state legislatures know how important these types of programs are. Everybody deserves a second chance at life no matter how much time it takes. Support is all one person can do. To purchase the book by Justin Reed Early visit www.streetchild.org



Native Children in the System BY LEONA BILL



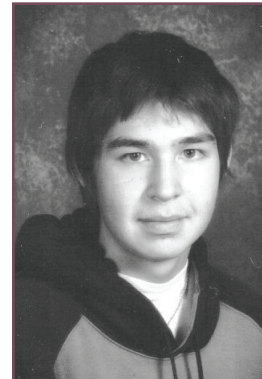
Native American have it different than other foster youth. These differences sometimes cause unnecessary pain. I experienced these pains and so that have been in the foster care system. When I was in foster care, I had two different caseworkers: my state worker and tribal case worker. It was confusing, family, group home staff, and foster parents to get a response from either worker. It would take days for a call back. It got to the point where the group home staff would not leave messages anymore because our caseworkers would not answer.

These communication issues caused state and tribal caseworkers to become confused which affected my life. For example, when I or my caregivers had a question about placements or clothing, my caseworkers kept telling us to ask the other caseworker so I would get bounced back and forth between them. They decided that the tribal worker was the one who would handle my siblings and my case. The tribe determined that my sisters and I were bad examples, and therefore, since we were about to turn 18, they decided to no longer help us. We were thus left to our own devices. Many other youth in my situation have had similar or worse experiences.

One died while in the foster care system. One was just a toddler about 20 months old and the other boy was only 15 years old. The teenager, Robley Carr, kept moving from one home to the next. He and his siblings were even placed in a home where they were horribly abused. Child Protective Services kept removing his foster dad throughout the time the boy

stayed there however he was not removed from the home. In 2003, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) was found negligent in his case and settled by paying a \$5 million judgment. Yet Robley still was placed in another abusive home where he eventually passed away from taking some of his foster dad's methadone pills that were left out on the table.

The other child, Devon Miller, was just an infant and was also placed in a home that was not safe. Devon's caregivers were his family who had a criminal history. Devon was beaten to death while in this placement with his relatives. It's sad to say that people ignored these terrible situations. With Devon's case, there was miscommunication between the caseworkers and the Yakima Nation Tribal Court. In Robley's case, he was not being heard despite a large drug abuse, lack of food and



Robley Carr

clothing, the electricity being shut off, and been avoided.

These children's incidents have changed how things are between the Tribes and the State. Steps are being taken to make sure no other kids will experience any neglect or such tragedies. In Yakima, DSHS looked over all their cases and have had to move some kids out of their current situations and placed them in other foster homes. Background checks were run again as well as home visits.

All my experiences that I have been through have created the person I am today. I want to thank all the staff that helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it shouldn't happen again. Miscommunication can cause a lot more than we think!

Message from Julio Carranza, President of MBS Board of Directors and an Alumnus of Foster Care

Message from Julio Carranza, President of MBS Board of Directors and an Alumnus of Foster Care

Our country recently witnessed an historical election of a symbolic leader championing unity, hope and change. In a much more humble election, our Board of Directors of The Mockingbird Society to help steward the organization forward into its next chapter of development and growth. From orphan to advocate, I'm lucky enough to have been selected to this role and take on the challenges MBS faces in this tough economic time.

Like so many of the youth MBS serves, I share a personal background of overcoming abuse and neglect. As an infant, I was adopted out of Aguascalientes, Mexico from a destitute woman who survived by making tortillas. Sadly, my Mexican violent and abusive leading me to hospitalization and placement under the state's care in California and again in Idaho. By the age of 12, I was permanently placed in foster care, by the age of 14 my adoptive parents terminated their parental rights, and at the age of 18, I aged out of care with no family and a dubious future.

My childhood was very real but certainly not the worse that happens to children throughout this state or the U.S. Yet I was drawn to MBS because it has a real way of touching the lives of children who

are in, or who carry the effects of, being placed in foster care. For me, I was reached through an issue of the Mockingbird Times while I was in law school. As I read it, I experienced of suffering abuse or growing up alone in foster care. The Mockingbird Society provided a beacon of light during to continue shining that light for our most vulnerable children to ensure that my experience will never be repeated in another child's life.

Everything, that so many of our foster children have the dream, the courage and will to succeed despite the barriers and circumstances they have endured or will have to overcome in pursuing a promising future. They just need our help, like every child does. Under my watch, MBS will continue to support Jim Theofelis and MBS staff in empowering foster children throughout this state with its innovative Youth Lead programs and the Mockingbird Network, maintaining moral accountability with the Mockingbird Family Model, and expanding public advocacy efforts for foster care reform. We have a solemn obligation under the laws of Washington and a higher authority to these children. We hope you will support MBS in our efforts to raise our most vulnerable children in a world class foster care system.

