

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

July 2008

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

Volume IX, Issue 7

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The Capitol Hill Homeless Summit BY GEORGINA RAMIREZ

The Capitol Hill homeless community brought their voice, life experience, and dedication to initiate change to the Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets (PSKS) Capitol Hill Homeless Summit. PSKS is a non-profit organization for Seattle's homeless community. PSKS is a wide range of resources that prepares its participants for transitions from the street to homes. They help their clients with programs that focus on case management, substance intervention, employment, and education.

At the summit I met Blue who has been an active participant of PSKS and gave me some background information on the culture of the Capitol Hill Homeless Summit. Some of the things that Blue liked to be on the street but was a resource they needed. Blue is a 26-year-old male of European descent, and some Native Americans. Some factors that contributed to the youth being homeless were family problems and substance abuse. Finally, most youth were between the ages of 17 and 27 and above. Trends when it came to the gender ratio were there were three times the number of males than females and they were primarily of European descent. Some of the factors that contributed to adults becoming homeless included having health problems,

having a criminal background, and unemployment. Most of the adults were squatting or living in cars.

The panel spoke about the barriers that impede the progress of the homeless community. Individual barriers such as addictions, bad credit, pets, lack of storage, budgeting, and personal choice. The second level is systemic barriers like lifestyle creating criminal records that block future resources, needing medical assistance, inability to meet program criteria due to lifestyle or age restrictions. After hearing the panelists speak about all of the barriers they face on a consistent basis, it is evident that there is a need for more resources that will assist the community in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Elaine Simons, Executive Director & Co-founder of PSKS states "The Capitol Hill Homeless Summit was a great success. We now have some action steps that we hope to implement change. The panelists did a great job of representing and former homeless community. I am so proud of Mama Sara, Raven, Cassidy and Jaelyn for their participation in this summit."



GYB: My F.Y.U.M. BY SAMUEL MARTIN

Perseverance is a word that many people use but so few become comfortable with. I wouldn't call myself an expert, but looking back on these past four years, I see it has taken a huge amount of perseverance to get through. Honestly, I didn't know how hard it was to graduate. I have completed a monumental task: I have graduated high school. One of my friends made the comment, "It's always something with you, but not this time." I had a hard time telling people publicly that I had failed classes and that I might not graduate or go to college. I hope my honesty has helped people understand some of the struggles that are real with youth. I don't really believe it when people say, "If I can do it, you can do it." Every situation is different. I do hope my experience has inspired you to go out and make the best out of your situation because you can make it.

Back in the fall I was very inspired and that burned strong. I had gotten back into football, Running Start, and going to school. But as that quarter progressed, I eventually stopped going to class, doing work, and trying to get back into school. I did go back to football and became a varsity starter. That was the only thing I really had going for me then. It ended up that I got the worst grades I had gotten all during

high school. I got two F's and it was one of the worst feelings I have ever experienced.

Then, in January, I had a fresh start. I had that same motivation and hope. Football was over so I didn't have as much physical exhaustion. I talked about the New Year and how I hoped that I wouldn't be one of those people who lose their New Year's motivation quickly. Of course, I did eventually but I talked about stuff I was very excited for, like graduation, prom, college, and the rest of my life. Unfortunately, life wasn't easy. The worst of it all was trying to deal with the death of my best friend.

As the year continued, it got a little more confusing and a bit more irritating. I began to feel like I was in a cycle. I had the mentors and coaching to get me to exactly where I needed to be. I went to school and did okay, although still not performing at the level I would have liked. Around April, I made the decision that I did not want to go to participate in Running Start anymore. I knew it was not the smartest thing I could have done but it got to the point where it was too inconvenient. So, I was back at Rainier Beach High School once again. At the end of the third quarter I found out that I needed an extra year of science and a year of French. It was one of the most inconvenient things that has ever happened to me. So I took an accelerated semester of Chemistry and Physics. As time went on I

got that credit.

Along the way I received a huge amount of support from people who actually care about me. My whole life I wondered why I didn't have the support that I wanted from my family. One of my mentors made a point of telling me that this kind of support means more because the people who support me outside of my family do it because they want to, not because they are obligated. It is a sad but realistic fate of youth in care, even kinship care, that they are often dealing with family that doesn't really care about them or aren't there for them. This, in my opinion, is the most upsetting thing about care in general: we all need love and care. There is a theory called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which is a triangle of the things that everyone needs to survive. Food and shelter are at the bottom but there is much more above it, such as safety, love, and self-esteem. If you don't get any more than the basics, you're not going to grow and become healthy.

5 years later I ended up a graduating with Honors and will be attending the University of Washington. It is almost too good to be true. I am proud of my accomplishments after this difficult journey. I made good decisions, and try to do it to. I tried to make fantastic decisions and work that way. It's about your ability to deal with roadblocks that makes you successful in this world. I know it takes awhile to get there but remember: control what you can and accept what you can't. In my opinion, the key to success.

"In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins, not through strength but by perseverance."
-H. Jackson Brown



Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS

I begin this monthly message by saying how much I appreciate being able to simply STAND UP! In mid-May I ruptured my Achilles tendon, which resulted in my having surgery the day after my 52nd birthday. Now, some of the youth I serve may point out that at 52 I'm lucky to be able to do anything including...

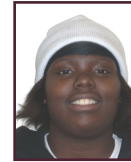
Ug k Ug fYa bXX 1 gi \ck Wjh cal it is to have health insurance which allowed me to navigate the health care system without undue barriers. Up until last week, my main mode of transportation has been crutches and wheel chair, although not necessarily at the same time. The wheel chair experience is not for the

faint of heart. People are mostly nice and friendly whether motivated by compassion or guilt. Nearly everyone was respectful and even helpful. At the risk of sounding condescending, I have so much more empathy and respect for folks who must rely on a wheel chair full time. Despite patting ourselves on our collective backs, this...

Throughout this entire experience I was haunted by the thought of a child or teen-ager in need of extra support. I send a special thank you to the very heavy and large restroom door. I found myself in the humbling position of asking strangers to assist me in opening the restroom door—quickly!

Jim Theofelis jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Signature of Jim Theofelis



On the Good Side BY RHONDA SMITH

Most young people, when asked about their experience in the foster care system, say it was awful and it was the worst experience that they have ever had. I do agree that there is a lot of stuff that happens that is not right, that no child should have to go through. But I also believe that there are some good things that happen, such as the people who have stayed in the child's life from...

I'm not going to say that the foster care system is top notch and needs no changing because the system is all messed up. Some of the foster parents really don't care and are very hurtful but not all of them are like that and not all workers have such booked case load that they cant see their clients. Although in my experience in foster care, the cons outweighed the pros by a lot, I'm tired of only hearing about the negative. I moved around a lot that's for sure. But I had a great support system.

I had a wonderful social worker who I had for about 6 years. I had the same Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for a long time until she got pregnant when I got a replacement who was also great. I had monthly visits with my social worker used to take me out to eat, buy me magazines, and even when I didn't want her to be. I still talk to her and I'm thankful for the providers that helped me out even when I didn't think it was the best for me.

Since I have been working at The Mockingbird Society (MBS), I have heard a whole bunch of stories about foster kids. This was surprising to me because I didn't ever have those problems. I was always at my dependency court hearings and I always had my visits whether I was locked in...

the other people who have been there for the youth. Its not all bad in the system. I know there are some terrible foster homes out there and there are bad workers. But I don't think we should give the good workers credit for the bad things that did youth wrong. I want to let people know there are great people out there who

really care about foster youth. Even though the system needs a lot of improvements on a little bit of everything, I feel we should not put the blame on the system. They have a lot of responsibilities. I am not trying to make excuses for the social workers who don't communicate with their clients. It is possible to do it perfectly. My point is, I'm tired of hearing about the bad things about the system. We need to show the providers who do work hard every day for the foster youth some love.

"I just feel we should give thanks to the social workers and GAL workers and all the other people who have been there for the youth. Its not all bad in the system."

SAVE THE DATE Join The Mockingbird Society for our Second Annual Benefit Luncheon. Wednesday, October 1, 2008 • The Westin, Seattle We believe we can fly 2008 BENEFIT LUNCHEON | THE MOCKINGBIRD SOCIETY

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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing support and resources for foster youth and their families. We believe we can fly. Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to providing support and resources for foster youth and their families. We believe we can fly.

MEET OUR STAFF Executive Director Jim Theofelis Operations Manager Ros Ghan Mockingbird Family Programs Director Dr. Wanda Hackett Youth LEAD Director Tiffany Washington Development Director Madelaine Thompson Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick Public Relations/Fund Development Darcie Gray Youth LEAD Coordinator Kara Sanders Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator Marie Goines Administrative Coordinator Diana Clark Administrative Assistant Juan Ramirez Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant Milissa Morgan MFM Administrative Assistant Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson Development Assistant Alicia LeVeau Resource Specialist Georgina Ramirez Senior Youth Representatives Samuel Martin, Georgina Ramirez Youth Representatives Leona Bill, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker Contributing Writers & Artists T. S. Berry, Emma Cummings, Stephen Phan, Anthony Vanatta Volunteers Chrissie Jackson Editing and Layout Kelly Hawkins



China's Earthquake and Me BY LEONA BILL

As I continue to go about my life, thoughts of thankfulness are always running through my mind. Thankful that I'm inside every night, thankful that I'm able to eat, and, most of all, thankful that I'm not sleeping outside like I've had to do in the past.

On Monday May 12, 2008 at 2:28 PM local time, a 7.9 magnitude earth quake struck China. The Quake was on a level the region sees once every 50 to 100 years. In Mianyang the day after the quake, all buildings were deserted and dark after the government had ordered people out of the buildings because of fear of more aftershocks.

By Tuesday May 20th, Vice Minister for Civil Affairs Jiang Li said 5 million people were left homeless and the government was setting up temporary housing for victims. A kind of tent city was created. Nearly 280,000 tents were shipped to the area, 700,000 more had been ordered and the factories were working overtime to create more.

year-old orthopedic surgeon from Guangdong Province, said the medical staff sees about 1,000 patients a day. The clinic is staffed by eight physicians and six nurses, all volunteers with China's Red Cross. The clinic runs from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

In conditions similar to the disaster relief camps, here in Seattle the homeless are kind of set to a certain schedule if they want to see a doctor or a dentist. Dinner times are always set and provided by volunteers because of lots of random mischief. It's really frustrating when the drop-in's get shut down, especially for those who didn't have anything to do with any of the vandalism.

that I've been able to take care of myself while feeds are getting closed for a night or two. However, I feel bad but yet at the same time I have to put this guard up when I don't, then I'll end up giving too much and end up putting myself in a bad situation. For example, one of the nights the feed was shut down I headed to Safeway to pick up some bagels and cream cheese to kind of hold my stomach for a little bit.

I live day by day and constantly have they ask for my food or to come stay with me at a hotel. I hate living like I do, but at the same time I'm grateful for what I have and for what I work for, because all it's a natural disaster in China, to change things from good to bad or from bad to worse. I have sympathy for those who had homes and are now living in poverty because of this quake and I'm thankful to still be able to make one phone call to my baby brother.

After I read an article about the quake, I started thinking and became more grateful for what's provided to me, even if it's very little. It also opened my eyes to be more grateful when I at least have a blanket provided to me by one of the drop-in centers here in Seattle when I may need it.

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Meet the Staff: Kara Sanders & Stevie Glaberson BY LEONA BILL

The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is currently going through some positive changes and is growing. As a result, we have gained some great staff. In the next few issues I will gladly be introducing six new staff. In this issue I'll be introducing Stevie Glaberson and Kara Sanders.

Stevie Glaberson is The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Administrative Assistant. Stevie started working with MBS in 2007 from a trip around the world.

SG: I admired the commitment that MBS has, to the model becoming evidence-based, the goals MBS set and the way MBS goes about achieving them.



Going Green BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER

Going green used to be it is so much more than that. Here are some simple everyday things that you can change to live a greener life and make a greener planet. Going green is important because our earth is extremely polluted. Every little thing helps and if we all do something green it will impact our planet in a positive way.

Water is the most precious resource. No resources are misused, abused, wasted, and misunderstood like water. To help conserve water, make sure you don't have leaks in appliances such as faucets and toilets. If you have a sink that is leaking get a wrench and tighten the washers. A dripping faucet can waste up to 20 gallons of water per day.

Electricity is getting more expensive as well as being environmentally unhealthy. Most of the energy used in America is generated from coal. A simple way to save electricity is by turning lights, appliances, and electronic devices off when they are not needed. The last person out of a room should always turn off the light. Even in an electric current so make sure your computers and other devices are completely powered down.

Cars are one of the most great and destructive inventions of our time. They are a wonderful invention and at the same time

a threat to human kind. In the U.S., 20% of green house gas emissions come from cars and SUVs. To lighten your ecological footprint, as far as cars and transportation are concerned, you can do a number of things. For one, there are now hybrids, which give off cleaner emissions and save a lot of money on gas. However, if that is not your Miles Per Gallon (MPG) possible. Also, getting regular tune ups on your car is important. Burn less gas, pollute less, and prevent car trouble. Keep the air in your tires pumped up as well.

Cleaning products we use can be worse than the germs but there are natural and non-toxic alternatives. There are many that are biodegradable, non-toxic, and made from renewable resources, unlike most cleaning products that are petroleum based. You can save money by making cleaning products from home. Vinegar and baking soda are two simple things. Mix either of the two with some warm water and you got yourself an all-purpose cleaner. Homemade things tend to be green, so if that's your choice, instead of buying your air-fresheners in the store, try boiling cinnamon, cloves, or any of your favorite herbs.

To learn more about going green visit the following sites: kkk 'h'YU' n'f'Yb'Wa #c|b|!|f'Yb# kkk 'f'Yi [|Y'Wa #c|f'Yb'd'd kkk 'h'Y'f'Yb| i |X'Wa #f'Y'Wg# fb ~ZMg|b|h'g|U'f'Wk Y'Zi bX'U'h'Y'U'Y'g|g|

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic 'H?' '5' Mockingbird 'Vm< U'd'f'@'Y'g'h'Y'bg|f'U' tion for our name, The Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, his kids that it's a sin to kill a mockingbird because "...Mockingbirds don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for you."

Z'f'i g'i' K \U|h|Zk Y'W'U'X'U'b'cf| U|n|U|cbzU 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 and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit

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If you have any questions, email: leadershipsummit@mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-838-6660.



