

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION



July 2010

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GUZ?m? YnHcd]ULh&\$%\$ Gi a Jh BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER



HY 88%\$: cgm' Mti h' and Leadership Summit was a great success. It featured Mockingbird Network youth, from across the state, who presented key issues to

the Washington State Commission on Foster Care. The Commission included a distinguished group of community leaders, co-chaired by former Supreme Court Justice Bobbie Bridge: ci bXYf of the Center for Children and Youth Justice and Denise Revels-Robinson, Assistant Secretary of Children's Administration. Justice Bridge said "The



Mockingbird Network youth at the Leadership Summit



Chapter members from Region 2 (Yakima) presenting to The Commission

Leadership Summit gets better every year." It is the one opportunity for the Commission to hear Zca nai h' Ufgh' Ubx'

Region 1 stated that there is an issue with homeless youth and older youth not having an avenue into the foster care system and receive the care that h' YnbYX' H' U' h' gzh YrifYwa a YbXXh.Uih' Y (Child in Need of Services) CHINS petition be revised so that older and homeless youth get the services and care they need.

Region 2 made a recommendation that foster parents have routine drug testing. Stating that drug use around children is bchU[ccX]bU' YbWcb h' Yf' i dV]b[]b' and leads to irresponsible and sometimes dangerous scenarios.

Regions 3 and 4 presented on the fact that all youth under the State's care do not have adequate transportation to their dependency hearings as well as recom- a YbX]b[' nai h' [Yidfcdf' bch]UWhjcb' for their dependency hearings. Amend RCW13.34.070 or HB 2735, section 4 (6) to include a mandate requiring the state to notify dependent youth directly of all dependency hearings.

Region 5 presented to the committee to raise the standards, as far as requirements for potential future parents. In addition, they felt prospective foster parents should pay for the required testing on the grounds that if they are truly sincere they will

SAFETY, 2010 SUMMIT, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

The 2010 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit BY JERRY BOBO



June 24th and 25th marked the UZh nYU Zcf h' Y: cgm' Mti h' and Alumni Leadership Summit. The importance of the Summit is to bring all six Mockingbird Network chapters together,

so youth leaders can present issues to the Washington State Commission on 7\] XfYb]b : cgm' Care. The commission board consists of legislators, attorneys, judges, members of DSHS/ Children Administration, and alumni of foster care. The Leadership Summit, its network youth, and the Mockingbird Society have successfully passed legislation for the past several years, and this year is shaping up to be no different.

H' YUfgh' XUngh' UfH' X' Yf' n' z' Vi h' jk U' g' U' z' b' and full of activities. To kick it off, we had a teambuilding activity, where the group was split into teams who had to work together to

accomplish one goal: get to know one another better. In the afternoon, the main focus of the day was three workshops: 1) Community Engagement, 2) Individual Development, and 3) System Reform. All the workshops were [YUfYX' h' c' \ Yd' i' gk]h' _ Yn]gg' Yg' z' Vi]' X' W' b' U' dence and improve our presentation skills.



Chapter members from Region 5 (Tacoma) presenting to The Commission

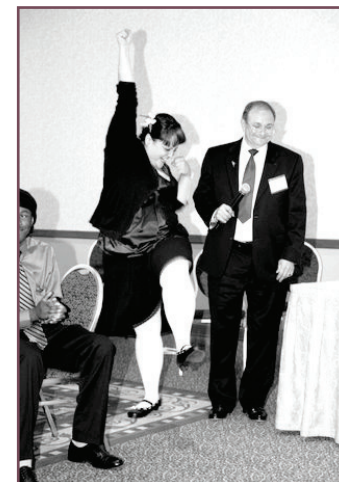
At the Community Engagement workshop we talked about the importance of being involved with our community, and how the community really makes up the people who support us. We also talked about how giving the youth a voice is more powerful, and it helps if youth begin by volunteering at the local level. We saw three different Ua' WdgcZdYcd Yk \ c' \ U' Y' YdYX' h' Yf' community grow in a positive way. We discussed the clips, and why giving back is important and how it helps us grow. The Individual Development workshop provided

2010 LEADERSHIP SUMMIT, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Power of Listening

BY SAM EVANS (REGION 6-OLYMPIA)

Sam Evans, shown here a second or two after she learned that she was the winner of our essay contest, will be spending a day with Secretary Susan Dreyfus, Secretary for the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. Her essay, reprinted below, speaks to her charisma, her dedication, and her passion for youth involvement. Josie Davis, our second-place winner, is also featured in this issue.



Sam Evans named essay contest winner. She will spend the day with Sec. Dreyfus.

There are several reasons that I want to attend the Youth Leadership Summit. (The main reason being that this is the year that I am able to attend this event). I am excited to have the chance to be a part of something so amazing that helps so many young people. I feel that attending the Summit is the perfect opportunity for me to grow not only professionally, but also personally. I feel that one of my biggest weaknesses is my fear of public speaking and being overly self-critical when it comes to public speaking. I am a bit of a perfectionist. And, when I get nervous I start to stumble and then get i dghVWM gy=a YggYxi dZbX=UbX]hYU' m' UfX' to recover from that. Even though others reassure me that I did a good job, I am still hard on myself. This opportunity allows me to break out of my shell, be open to the idea that I am a good public speaker, and to inspire others with similar problems when it comes to addressing a crowd.

If I had the chance to go up to a legislator and tell them anything it would be that the biggest thing that anybody can do to better the foster care system is listening. Listening to voices of the youth in care; hear their stories about where the foster care system has taken them. Listening to the social workers and taking their ideas to improve their working conditions so that they can more effectively serve the youth. There are many youth in the system that have not had a horrible experience, like mine. In my opinion it would be more effective to see what is working and expand on that instead of over glamorizing the negative. Yes, the foster care system is not perfect and it may never be. But why can't we, as concerned citizens and former ZgYf nai h' zk \ c' \ U' YUfgh' UbxY dYf]YbWk]h' gng' h' U' k' g' \] [\] [h' k' \ U' h' c' f' g' WffYbhm]b' the system and build on that? It's just like a parenting. In order to encourage my son to do better, I focus on what he is doing well and not focus on only the bad. We are talking about changing the states "parenting style" with its foster youth. Why not take a productive approach?

LISTENING, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS



8YUf: f]YbXg
 K ck °HAY&S: cgm'Mci h
 and Alumni Leadership Summit demonstrates, once again, that by bringing youth and alumni together; providing them with hYg_j`gUbXWbUXbWlc`YUXUbXdfyg ent their ideas; and most important by listening; true change can take place. Thank you to our distinguished group of spon-g'fg/7Uym: Ua]'miDfc[fUa g'hYK Ua-]b[hcb'GUH'7ca a]gg]cb'cb': cgm'7UFY the Center for Youth Justice; and the Department of Social & Health Services.

Each Mockingbird Network Chapter brought forward one proposed policy. One thing is clear: youth want to feel safe in their homes; and some experiences have led youth to conclude foster parents need more support – whether it is family counseling services or respite care – youth can see the 'burn out factor' in some foster parents, and they are asking for help. Region 1 is seeking a new Child In Need of Services or CHINS policy that would allow

homeless youth to opt-in to the foster care system. This is based on data that shows the connection between poverty, homelessness and vulnerable populations entering the system!

Another highlight was our 2010 Leadership Essay contest. Youth submitted essays on the power of the leadership and the Summit to change lives. The winning writer Samantha Evans from Olympia will spend the day with DSHS Secretary Susan Dreyfus. She touched on the power of listening and the 'good parenting' to support children who rely on the state as parent. A heartfelt thank you from all of us at the Mockingbird Society. Thanks to our community it was a great success.

Jim Theofelis
 jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

P.S. Save the Date: The 2010 Annual Luncheon is slated for October 6th at the Seattle Sheraton. Circle your calendar and join us for a special event that I promise will inspire!

7cbg/fj]b[FYgc fWgUbX <cbcf]b[Mti f'DFYZ/fYbWg'

In an effort to increase awareness of the *Mockingbird Times*, and the voice of its contributing writers—youth and alumni of care, we plan to begin publishing a more robust online edition in 2010. This also will allow us to conserve resources and reduce costs. So, watch for regular updates on our progress. We'll be checking in with you, our loyal readers, in the near future to learn more about your preferences.

Thank you for your support.

Gi Va]h]b[@YHfvg

All incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to the *Mockingbird Times* and will be opened by editorial staff. All incoming correspondence to youth under 18 years of age will YV cdYbYX Úfgh VniMockingbird Times Editorial Staff.

HAY A cW]b[V]fX'GcV]Ymi
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.

5 @cc_ 'UHFYi b]UW]cb'

BY IAN GRANT



Not all foster care stories end badly. In fact, roughly 61% of the youth that exit foster care in Washington State go back to their families. National FYi b]UW]cb' K YZ k\]W took place June 13-19, was launched this year to celebrate the families that come back together after care.

One of the fundamental principles upon which child welfare in Washington is founded is the notion that a child is best raised in a healthy, intact family. So, whenever possible, the State hopes to reunify parents who have followed through with their court-ordered intervention plan with their children. Many people don't realize that foster care is designed to be temporary; it's supposed to be an emergency alternative to an unsafe home, not a long term placement. Most FYi b]UW]cbg happen within a year of a child entering care.

"One of the fundamental principles upon which child welfare in Washington is founded is the notion that a child is best raised in a healthy, intact family. So, whenever possible, the State hopes to reunify parents who have followed through with their court-ordered intervention plan with their children."

parents have to have complied with any UbXU`Wi fhcfXYfXfYei]fYa Yblg": cgm' youth are entitled to a lawyer during this process. The lawyer, youth, and parents work together to establish that returning home would be in the best interest of the foster youth. Unfortunately, the petition is not an option if a youth has already been adopted or entered into a legal guardianship.

h]g\UFX'lc`UbX'XU]cb'k\U\UddYbg'lc` nei h`UZF'fYi b]UW]cb'"CbY&SS%gi Xnz entitled "Children Who Return Home : fca` : cgm'7UFY`5`*!MU' Dfcg]Ym] Y Study of Behavioral Health Outcomes in Adolescence," is sobering. According to their research, "reuni- ÚX' nei h` g'ck YX more self-destructive behavior, substance use... received a ticket or have been arrested, to have dropped out of school, and to have received lower grades." It concluded that "youth who reunify with their biological families after placement in foster care have more negative outcomes than youth who do not reunify."

This all speaks to the importance of working with the family to make sure that it is a safe and healthy one where children can h'f]j Y'K Ua]b[hcb'GUH'XcYgXc UfYi b]U- cation assessment to determine that a particular family is safe before a child is reuni- ÚYX'UbXk cf_gk]h`h YZa]'nitc WYU]U transition and safety plan. Unfortunately, they also cut funding for parental visits by \$1.3 million, and family intervention by \$287,000. The effect of these decisions on the number and success of reunited families remains to be seen. We need more data cb'k\U\UddYbg'UZF'fYi b]UW]cb']b'cf- der to have a good approach to reunite broken families. It's not an easy or a quick process, but we owe it to the youth and families affected by the foster care system to ask them if our approach is working.

Of course, those children were removed Zf UfYUg'b"5 bXbchYj YmfYi b]UW]cb']g' successful. According to a US Department of Health and Human Services report to Congress, roughly 16% of them end with the child reentering foster care within a year. And, the parents have to be willing h'c'k cf_`h'fci [\`k\U]g'Uj YfmX]ZU`h and complex process. One interesting fact Zca`U`-`g]i XnYb]hYX]DUfYbU`j]gh]b[UbXZ'gm'WYfYi b]UW]cb]i k Ugh UZ youth who had regular visits with their mother while in care were roughly ten h]a Yga cfY`_Ymitc VYfYi b]UW]cb']h`h Y]f' birth family.

In particular, foster youth have the right under certain conditions such as three years in care; terminated parental rights; and no permanent placement plan secured, to petition the courts to reinstate their birth parents' parental rights. The

Thank you for Listening!

"If I could go up to a Legislator and tell them anything --- it would be the biggest thing anybody can do to better the foster care system is listening."

A heartfelt thank you to our generous sponsors:

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Center for Children & Youth Justice
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services/
Children's Administration
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Care

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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society]gU) S%MM EbcdfcU]Wf dcfU]cb Xf Ycd]b[]bbc- vative 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 nei f HU Uj]gcf fY U]X]b[nei f g]Y]UWU]gh U]cb"HAY A cW]b[V]fX]f]a Yg]gUa cbh`nbYk g paper 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 over 25,000 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 ©2009, **The Mockingbird Society**.

From Shy to Strong BY JOSIE DAVIS (REGION 1-SPOKANE)



DFY Jci g' : cgyf' Mti h' UbX Alumni Leadership Summits have impacted my life dramatically. I use to be a shy girl because of how I was raised. I grew up in a foster home and was emotionally abused by my former foster mom. I was quiet and actually believed I was disliked by everyone because my foster mom treated me differently from everyone else. She also told me that I was different and not normal. Going to the Summit helped me to realize a lot about myself. I determined what I wanted to do for a career. I also realized I have a "family" of fellow youth and alumni of care to stand up for. Aging out of foster care and going to the Summit made me realize that people think I am beautiful inside and out. I am not different from anyone else.

I have always had a passion to help people and going to the Summit helped give me the skills to become a leader, have my own voice and help others by advocating. By listening to the stories of others, I learned that I was not the only one who had suffered from abuse. The more stories I heard from foster youth, the more I wanted to take a stand for them or with them. Now, I look at them as my family, and families take care of each other. Now I go to the G a a Jhlc HU YUgUbxk Jh' a nZLa J'ntc U' \h and advocate for foster youth who struggle in foster homes or who may be suffering from abuse. I am an alumni, but I look at myself as a big sister with responsibilities. And, every time I go to the Summit I learn something new.

"I have always had a passion to help people and going to the Summit helped give me the skills to become a leader."

Dc'Jwra U' yfgbYXlc' bck 'a cfYUci hZgYf' parents. My experience has taught me that foster parents get burnt out after so many years of working as a foster parent. So I would make a suggestion to policy makers that foster parents should be required to get an evaluation on their a YbU UbXya chcbU' \YU' Y' YfnUj YnYfg' My former foster parent was my guardian for twelve years of my life. One day after a tragic UYzg Ylc' Xa Yh Uhg YXpbnWYUci ha Y and kicked me out. Because of this experience, I believe foster parents should be required to get an evaluation or go to counseling.

2010 LEADERSHIP SUMMIT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a better understanding of how to present in front of large groups. Members of the staff preformed two different skits, the wrong way to handle a presentation and the right way. We then broke into teams, \UXh'a Jbi h'g'lc' dJWU'cdJWUbXU' i fY out how to present it to the entire group. The good thing about this activity was that we all had the chance to give and receive feedback from the entire group. We learned the importance of knowing the audience, being self aware, looking sharp, keeping a timely presentation, and keeping it short. All these tips moved us to the next level.

System reform is something the Network is passionate about. During this workshop, each chapter represented a different corner of the state. And, each chapter had the chance to craft its message in a powerful way, and present its key issue to opinion leaders and child welfare experts. This exercise gave us candid feedback, helped us hone the presentation and taught us the importance of stakeholder buy-in. All these workshops were important and helped us youth grow as individuals.

Leadership to me is taking the initiative to do something and to be pro-active. As a leader I have responsibilities and I am a mentor. I am responsible for setting a good example for my peers. Helping my peers is equally important to me. As a leader, being a good listener is important, because everyone has a voice and a story. It also is my responsibility to try to encourage, and work together. I also look at myself as a mentor. In other words, I like to mentor my peers into becoming leaders as well. Being a leader helps a person grow into a strong-k J' YZwobUXbzj\bxYdYbXbhj\bxj Jxi U UbX that's what I want my peers - my family to have and more.

LISTENING, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

What is leadership to me? A leader is someone who steps up and is an example to those around them no matter what the situation. Some of the qualities that make me a better leader are my openness to new things, my perseverance, my resilience and my spirit. I am from the mindset that you can't have an cdJcb'cb'g'a Yh Jb' 'k Jh'ci hUbxJb' 'ci hUg' much about it as you can. How can you be ef-ZWj YU' \hJb' 'UVUhyk Jh'ci hUa a i bJhcbZ You can't; it is setting yourself up for failure. An example would be that when I am in meetings as a youth voice, before hand I like to talk with other youth to gain perspective on things that I have not been through or may not know as much as they do, so I can be as effective as possible.

My life has never been easy, even before entering the foster care system in my life I had been knocked down so hard so many times, but each time I came back with a renewed spirit and drive. I think about this every time someone tells me that I cannot do something because of my position in life and it makes me need to prove them wrong. I have always considered myself to be a free spirit and have used it to my advantage. My personality is such a melting pot of awesomeness that I have no problem relating with others and really getting along with anybody. The fact that I have also had the opportunity to have some very powerful women in my life to show me what good leadership looks like, and how to be a leader and peer without overstepping your boundaries and still being respected, has given me strength.

Tony Shellman was our guest dinner speaker. He wrapped up all three workshops by explaining how to use all these skills within our daily lives. He gave a very inspiring life story that uplifted every youth. It was a great way to close ci hci f' UfghXU'lc' Yh Yf' "8 Umik c'k Ug' entirely dedicated to preparing each group presentation for the Commission cb'7' \J' XfYb Jb' : cgyf' 7UFY' -hJbW YX' speaking tips, practice in front of the entire group with feedback, and more practice. It became totally clear, that to be effective, practice and preparation are as important as the issues themselves.

The Foster Youth and Leadership Summit just keeps getting better. Each year new youth and alumni attend, and some return. If we didn't have the Leadership Summit, when would the Commission on Children in Foster Care hear our problems? Would we be successful in our mission if we didn't have the Summit? I can't imagine our futures without it. We are making positive change. And, its change that is needed based on the real life experiences of youth and alumni of foster care and kinship care.

Homeless Youth Count in Spokane BY DAVID BUCK



Every year more youth leave home for the streets. How many is not certain; they are a critically understudied population. One gh XnVnDcffiUbXGUM bJj Yf-ghm' Jj YgU'U' i fYcZ%' a J' 'cb' homeless youth in the nation. A little over a million of them are between 15 and 17 years old.

Homeless youth need a safe place to live. Life on the streets is very painful and sometimes deadly. Homeless youth are highly overlooked by people ranging from service providers to legislators, and for that matter, the foster care system. And when families fall apart, older youth often have no place to go but the streets. The Mockingbird Network (Region 1 - Spokane, Washington) hopes to change that by reforming the Washington State Child in Need of Services (CHINS) petition to be better suited to help older runaway youth.

The CHINS petition itself is a temporary request for services where the court will decide whether or not a youth receives services. This can include housing, food vouchers, educational U' g'fj J'gZwi bgy'Jb' 'UbXch Yfg' 'a ghU- ing a CHINS petition is not enough, the policy, and ultimately the judge decide on whether they are provided And, as of right now there is no legal policy on how to handle homeless nei h U'Jb' U7< -B GdYHJcb"

Region 1 heard about a youth who was looking to get into foster care and who had been denied more than once. Region 1 investigated further and decided to bring the idea of reforming the Washington State CHINS petition lc h YA cWJb' VJfXCcVmmg'S%' cgyf' Mti h' and Alumni Leadership Summit. The hope is that community leaders and Legislators will see the wisdom of supporting homeless youth and back a change in the policy.

SAFETY, 2010 SUMMIT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

do so. They recommended to the Committee that the requirements for becoming a foster parent be increased involving the following: A national criminal background check, a psychological evaluation, situational testing involving situations foster parents typically witness, lie detector testing, and the age requirement be changed from 21 to 25.

Many youth in Region 6 who have been in or are in family foster care have stated that they do not have spending money to engage in typical youth developmental issues and recommended that it be required by law that allowances be given to youth in family foster care, in amounts and frequencies that are appropriate for age and ability.

One of the most powerful moments was after Region 4 presented the issue of being out-UYcZ' YfJb' g'UbXU'bg'lc'fYXlc' \ YfJb' gZ Representative Mary Helen Roberts (D-21st District) asked if youth who had not been to their dependency hearings could stand up. It was a shock to see that more than half of the participants had never been to their dependency hearing. And, it clearly showed how important the Leadership Summit really is, because in that moment dozens of youth put a face on that one issue.

Being a part of the Leadership Summit means

The problem is there is no way for homeless youth to really enter foster care. When a child typically enters care it usually involves an in-j YgJ' U'cb' Vm'7DG' UbX U XdYbXbWm' \UF- ing with a judge. These cases tend to focus on younger children, and there is minimal assistance for older youth. But every family is different, and what the child welfare system still hasn't prepared for is the outcomes that leave



Chapter members from Region 1 (Spokane) presenting to The Commission

an older youth on the streets and the parents or guardians have decided to exclude that youth from their 'JZ'K \YfYc' 7DG' and dependency hearings come into play by that point?

Runaway youth and homeless youth are a vastly understudied population. They should be as supported by the child welfare system, as foster youth. A wise man once said "the success of a nation is dependent on those who depend on the nation." In other words, our nation's success depends on how we treat our poor and neglected populations. And when a population like homeless youth is ignored; what does that say about our community or our child welfare system? Homeless youth have to rely on homeless youth drop-in centers which are bcbdfcU'icf' UbJnU'cbgX'dYbXb'ch'c' d'f'j UY' donors. And, given that policy that the police a i ghY' bch'UYX' k \Yb' U'ina' h' 'lg' U'icbY' cZ these resource centers or shelters, most youth continue to run.

GnifY' JgJb' 'h Y7< -B GdYHJcb'z'cf' UbXJb' 'U better system of getting runaway youth and homeless youth the care they need to have any kind of life at all, we can get many youth off the streets and with a higher chance of success at life.

- Resources:
1http://www.youthnoise.com/page.php?page_id=6145
2http://www.childtrends.databank.org/?q=node/340
3DcffiUbXgUY' i Bj YfJgh'gh' XmiJh'X'U' G'fcb- ger Youth and Stronger Communities"

putting a face on an issue, letting youth share their experiences and input, and standing up to make a change. And that's what advocacy is.

Thank You!
Mike Monk, Lura Harrison, Debbie S J D'Yfcz' @nbbUY' K J'gcbz' < YU' Yf' Riley, Diane Taylor, Corina Hester, Sara Mack, Alex Okerman, Erin Shea, Casey Trupin, Laurie Lippold, Bryan Bissell, Samantha Casne, Rick Butt, Tia Durham, Dan Hagen, April Dickinson, Mary Soderlind, Dae Shogren, Dartagnan Caliman, Tony Shellman, City of Seattle Combined Charities, Maria Doctolero, King County Employee Giving, Margaret-Ann Leroy, James Maki, Merrill Lynch & Co. Matching Gifts, Microsoft Giving Campaign, Network for ; ccXz' CbY' Ua J'mi: ci bXU'cbz' A UhU Opavska, Jean Roberts, Joan Sharp, H'ca Ug' J' " ; JXXYbg' >' " : ci bXU'cbz' K JbXYfa YfY: ci bXU'cbz'K JbXYfa YfY Real Estate/Capitol Hill, Inc., Yancy Wright

