

Mockingbird Times

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



May 2005

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation

Volume V, Issue 5

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

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Youth Advocacy Day: The Survey Results Are In

MOCKINGBIRD STAFF

IN FEBRUARY 2005, A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 100 YOUTH AND SERVICE PROVIDERS GATHERED IN OLYMPIA, Washington to advocate for youth in the homelessness, juvenile justice and foster care systems. Youth Advocacy Day, organized by Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y), included youth from the Mockingbird Society and other agencies around the state. Throughout the day, youth met with legislators, Governor Christine Gregoire, and advocates for the rights of children and youth. At the end of the day, youth and service providers completed surveys about their experience. The results from those surveys are now in.

Youth reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with the day. When surveyed, 91% of youth felt they made a difference. One youth stated that, "by being present and being seen, I felt like I made a difference." Other youth reported that talking to legislators and "open[ing] doorways in legislators' heads" demonstrated the youths' impact. Primarily because they felt they had made a difference, all youth surveyed would recommend Youth Advocacy Day to others.

Youth and service providers listed many favorite aspects of Youth Advocacy Day. Meeting legislators topped the list; one youth loved meeting Representative Ed Murray: "I really enjoyed hearing that man!" Youth and service providers also enjoyed hearing stories of everyone's experiences, spending the day with like-minded people, and learning about advocacy issues.

Youth had many other positive things to say about Youth Advocacy Day, as well. One youth said, "speaking up does have an impact!" Another commented that "it was so empowering to see people fighting for equal rights today and it felt so good to be a part of that."

ASK-Y is already planning for Youth Advocacy Day 2006. The results from this survey will help make the day even more effective and positive for all involved. If you would like information on how to get involved with ASK-Y and/or Youth Advocacy Day, please visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

YOUTH REFLECT ON ADVOCACY DAY

- "[I feel I made a difference because I] expressed thoughts, feelings and beliefs and opened doorways in legislators' heads."
- "Of course [I would recommend Youth Advocacy Day to others]! This day was so inspiring and makes you feel like you really matter."
- "Thank you for caring about homeless youth. There are too many individuals out there in society who walk through life with blinders on, barely acknowledging our existence. It is people like you who make it possible to succeed."
- "I'm so glad I came."
- "[I felt prepared to talk to my legislators because] they're just like me."
- "[I felt I made a difference] because legislators actually listened to us."
- "Just by being here I made a difference."
- "I loved hearing from all the Reps and being able to question them."
- "It was really interesting to see how our government works, while advocating for what we believed in."
- "Advocacy is the most effective way to reach our legislators!"
- "[My favorite part is] the energy that everyone puts into advocating for the issues. It's very exciting to see so many people wanting to make a difference."
- "I really enjoyed learning what exactly youth advocacy was about and why it's so important."
- "I liked hearing about this year's advocacy topics, since I didn't know about them at all and it was very interesting."
- "I have never experienced homelessness or the foster care system, but it was so empowering to see people fighting for equal rights today and it felt so good to be a part of that."

David Pelzer's *A Child Called It* Recalls Horrors Of Child Abuse

ECHO SPEED



I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ DAVID PELZER'S *A CHILD CALLED IT* and meet the author himself at an event in Seattle. Pelzer's memoir gave me chills and a strong sense of sympathy for Pelzer, whose childhood was highlighted in this dreadful, and very true tale of abuse. I had so many questions to ask Pelzer while reading this book: questions about his childhood and how it affects him now, questions about his father, questions about his mother. This story is definitely worth the read, not only for the important content but because it's very quick and easy to read. I was able to knock it out in only a couple of hours.

What's strange about *A Child Called It* is that it opens with a happy ending but by the time you get to the end it leaves you with no sense of happiness. It ends abruptly...no closing, no anything (of course there are the sequels). Pelzer reminisces on many childhood stories, and at the end it's almost as if he ran out of horrible stories so he just stopped writing when he finished his last one. I am used to books that close with happy endings...or at least an ending period. However, at the beginning of the book Pelzer puts in a bit about being rescued from his life with his family, so you understand that somehow he survived long enough to be saved.

Pelzer's life as a child was filled with cruel and unusual torture. Something went terribly wrong in his mother's head and she cruelly focused her frustrations on his small little frame. Whenever something went wrong in her life she abused little David. Whenever she was

bored she abused little David. Whenever she was drunk (which was every night) she abused little David. Now, we've all heard abuse stories and maybe even experienced it first hand. It's unfair to say one's abuse story is more significant than another's; abuse is abuse and being traumatized is — well you get the picture. Pelzer's story, however, is very unusual and bizarre. Why you ask? Because his mother was very unusual and bizarre...and unfortunately for David she had a very creative imagination. Here's a short list of some of the things she did: dislocated his arm while beating him; stabbed him with a knife while drunk; forced him to eat spoonfuls of ammonia; forced him to eat food he had vomited up; because she was starving him, she made him vomit everyday after school just in case he had eaten there; tried to make him eat fresh baby poop from his brother's diaper; made him stick his hand over a burning flame; on their kitchen stove; had him clean the bathroom while breathing a toxic gas that was produced from the bucket of bleach and ammonia she locked in there with him (an idea she got from a newspaper).



Echo Speed with author David Pelzer, May 2005

That's not all...his mother was a woman with serious mental issues. His father—his "hero" felt sorry for little David, but always just stood by and watched as if he could do nothing to stop it. Also, the reaction of his teachers and others is unbelievable. It took them seemingly forever to figure out why David was covered in bruises, famished, and stealing food from other kids. Little David was so brainwashed and afraid of his mother that he wasn't going to say anything. Even the social worker who visited him ignored his skinny body and bruised limbs when he said that it was nothing (hint: don't ask a kid if he's being abused while he's sitting next to his abuser).

PELZER CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS



Life at the Mockingbird Society has been a little like getting a drink from a fire hydrant. It's all good and exactly what we want, but there is also a lot of it coming very fast. First, let me remind you that **May is National Foster Care Month**. I encourage you to give thanks to the 174,000 licensed kinship and non-relative caregivers across the nation. **Governor Christine Gregoire** has joined other states in celebrating National Foster Care Month on behalf of the 6,000 licensed foster parents across Washington who contribute every day to the lives of children and adolescents. As noted, the Mockingbird Society has been very busy this past month and the forecast looks like more of the same. We are in the process of moving from the third floor to the second floor in the amazing 2100 Building in Seattle. This will allow us to double our space, including a new facility for the *Mockingbird Times*, ASK-Y and our Youth Speakers' Panel. Additionally, the documentary that youth have been creating is close to completion and we are all excited to see the final product. We continue to be immensely appreciative to the good folks from **Wild Geese Productions** for all of their support and help in leading this project.

The **Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project** continues to demonstrate quality results through our collaboration with **UJIMA Community Services** with plans to replicate the Mockingbird Model in five new sites for 2006. This remarkable opportunity is due to a private

philanthropist's generosity and commitment. The Mockingbird Society youth and staff were again active during the **Washington legislative session** which recently concluded. The children and adolescents in out-of-home care benefited from some very good advocacy and a lot of hard work from several individuals and organizations who deserve recognition: **Representative Kagi, Representative Dickerson, Representative Pettigrew as well as Senator Regale, Senator Hargrove and Senator Stevens**. Additionally, the good folks at the **Children's Alliance** as well as **Laurie Lippold from Children's Home Society and Casey Trupin from Columbia Legal Services did amazing work on behalf of children, adolescents and youth**. Of special note is the **passage of SB 5583**, sponsored by Senator Regale, which mandates that Washington's Child Protective Service train CPS workers in adolescent development, track the number of adolescent referrals received, and the disposition of such referrals. Many of us have been concerned about undeniable trends in which adolescent referrals are de-prioritized based on the age of the adolescent rather than on the risk of harm. Mockingbird sponsors the **Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y)** coalition, which worked very hard on advocating for SB 5583. This bill will be signed into law by the Governor on Monday May 9th.

Finally, we at Mockingbird want to welcome **Ros Ghan** as the new Operations Manager. Ros comes with a remarkable set of skills and commitment to the children, youth and families we serve. As you can see a lot is going on at Mockingbird, but then again it takes a lot to build a world class foster care system.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

PELZER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

I had the recent pleasure of meeting the famous David Pelzer at a local event. Pelzer seemed very wrapped up in himself. He did not appear very interested in talking to a youth reporter. The only question of mine he answered was the one question he kept badgering me to ask him (this question was, "How did you get through?" which he already made crystal clear his books). When I finally asked the question, Pelzer became this lively actor: animated with a well-practiced song and dance. I asked if he'd ever let me interview him and laughingly he said no...because he turns down interviews with reporters who are "much more famous and important." I can't be sure, but I think that he meant I wasn't good enough to talk to him if I wasn't Barbara Walters. He also mentioned how lucky I was and that "now I can tell people I talked to the famous David Pelzer."

Yes...how lucky I am indeed. For all the horrors this man dealt with as a little boy, I'm sure he probably deserves more than others to be rich and famous. It's just so sad to see someone who made it through so much be consumed by his own fame and ego that easily. Though Mr. Pelzer is a busy man, I assumed he of all people would take a little time to chat with a young girl and former foster kid anxious to speak to the author of a captivating book about hardship. One other thing I learned while listening to David was that because he was rescued into the "system," he has no stomach for anyone with a single complaint about the foster care system. I didn't make the mistake of mentioning any of the many things that unfortunately go wrong inside the "system," though I was shocked to see he was oblivious to certain realities about state care. So the lesson here is that people are not what you expect. The book is worth the read, however. Enjoy!

Letter to the Editor

Hi Shannon,

We heard about the Mockingbird Society from Nicole Ayala at AMARA Parenting and Adoption Services. We adopted our son, Camron, through AMARA. Camron was in foster care system for several years before we were lucky enough to meet him at the Kids Fest event.

Camron loves poetry and loves to write. The one I've attached here is very special, so special his teacher made sure I got a copy right away. Camron is 8 1/2 and a wonderful little boy! He is going to be working with Nicole at AMARA to help give back to kids in the foster system.

Regards,
Cheryl Pomp King

Where I'm From

by Camron

I am from my pillows that I like to relax on
 I am from the puffy bushes that I like to relax on.
 I am from my neighbors who are sweet as can be.
 I am from my mom and dad who say if something is bad or good.
 I am from the trip to Hawaii that took a very long time.
 I am from the tall leafy branches that hang over my front window.
 I am from the first day of school.
 I am from the juicy hamburgers that I like to eat.
 I am from the yummy chicken noodle soup that my mom makes.
 I am from the soundless night.
 I am from the spirits in the graveyard.
 I am from the nicknames and conversations that go about my house.
 I am from my mailbox always having letters for me.
 I am from my naughty cat and my crazy dogs.
 I am from the dark soundless universe.
 I am from my mom's belly.
 I am from everywhere.

Aging Out

AGING OUT, a new 90-minute documentary by Roger Weisberg and Vanessa Roth, chronicles the struggles of three young adults who must learn to fend for themselves after being discharged from the foster care system. **AGING OUT** premieres during National Foster Care Awareness Month on Thursday, May 26 (2005) from 10 to 11:30 p.m. ET/PT on PBS (check local listings).

Thank You's

Leslie and Jen from Sanctuary Arts, CASA, Seattle PI, Amy from Aradia Health Center, Bruce Cross & Perkins Coie, LLP, Joe Kahn

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 and 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*. 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 *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents © 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

- Please bill me for the amount indicated.
- My employer will match my gift; enclosed is my matching gift form.
- I am interested in receiving information on the advantages of planned giving.

NAME _____ PHONE _____
 ADDRESS _____ EMAIL _____
 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Please do not include my name on published donor lists.

Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 350, Seattle WA 98144

MEET OUR STAFF

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MISTY LOU COOK



SO, YOU'RE YOUNG, FRUSTRATED AND NEED AN OUTLET TO EXPRESS YOURSELF. You've tried all sorts of instruments, but that tuba from 7th grade just isn't letting out all of that angst that's been building since forever. You wanna play the guitar, but you're on a budget. Luckily for you, there's an article about how to get everything you need to get started rocking your socks off for under \$200. This article has everything you want and need to know: where to get cheap guitars, what you'll need to get started, the only guitar book you'll ever need, the best sites for free and readable guitar tabs, etc., etc., etc.

First of all, you'll need a guitar. The best places to go are used guitar shops. Steer clear of sketchy pawn shops or uptight corporate shops if at all possible. The place you want to find is a nice, independent New and Used Guitar Shop, preferably run by musicians who genuinely want to help you get started on your road to rockin' and rollin'. These people are nice and sincere, not sketchy or constantly asking if you want to buy the priciest item in the whole store. Ask about deals and tell them the budget that you're working with. My first electric guitar cost \$100 for both the guitar and the amp. I got it at Smash Your Guitar, a nice, independent shop


in Bellingham, WA, my hometown. Be sure to try the guitar before you take it home, you want to make sure that you enjoy the guitar's unique sound before you purchase it. Don't be afraid to look around and check out various guitar shops so you get the best sound for your dollar! Buy the guitar that calls out to you and the one that's in your price range - it should feel and sound right in your heart and soul.

While you're at the guitar shop, you'll want to buy a guitar tuner. You'll use the same tuner for both electric and acoustic guitars, and tune them in the same way. These generally cost around \$20 and I've had the same one for 2 years, with no need for battery replacements. Once you have your guitar and guitar tuner, you're well on your way to Rock 'N Roll High School. The only book you'll need to study in Rock 'N Roll High School is by Terry Burrows. Burrows wrote a book for the Keep-It-Simple-Series (K-I-S-S) in 2000, entitled "K-I-S-S Guide to Playing the Guitar," that is jam-packed with everything: how to string and tune your guitar, how to play different chords, scales and keys, how to play blues, country and rock, even how to record yourself and find handy Internet sites for further details on everything (from scales to home-recording)! The full U.S price of this book is \$20 and this is the last item you need to purchase - the mp3's and music, the songs and tablature you can get from the internet; the practice, practice, practice, is all absolutely free. You can most likely find this book for a fraction of the price at a discount book store like Half Price Books, Sam's Club or some other used/discount book store that is in your region. I got

this book from a friend and he got it for \$8. Your friends are your best resource.

You'll need a computer for free music/mp3's and tablature. Your friend, your cool aunt, your friend of a friend, your mom, your dad, your foster-sister, your homeless youth drop-in center, your work or your school buddy most likely has a computer and a printer that you can borrow for an hour or two. First, what tablature is and what it's all about. Tablature is an easy way to distribute, write and read music. It is written on six lines that represent the six strings on a standard guitar, either acoustic or electric. The numbers written on the lines represent the fret numbers where you will be placing your fingers. The frets of a guitar are the different sections on the guitar neck, usually divided by metal bars, where you place your fingers to create chords, tones and rockin' sounds.

The best Guitar Tab Websites that I have found are www.guitaretab.com, which features over 40,000 different guitar tabs, and www.mxtabs.net, which, as of April 5, 2005, had 155,161 tabs, including drum, bass and guitar tabs. You can search for your own favorite tablature sites at www.TabFind.com or just enter "Free Tablature" into www.google.com. Tablature is a great method to teach yourself guitar, and this article is all about do-it-yourself guitar!!

Now that you have the tools, go out there and show 'em what you got, and, after all, it's like Ani DiFranco once said, "every tool is a weapon - if you hold it right." 

Benefit For Art Center a Smashing Success

COURTNEY KONIETZKO




THE SANCTUARY ARTS CENTER HAS BEEN AROUND AS AN ALTERNATIVE resource for homeless young people in Seattle to express themselves since 1999. It is a unique place because it is a non-profit art center in a church where homeless youth up to age 21 can come and create work using various media like stained glass, paint, charcoal, and beads. I used to go to the Sanctuary Arts Center when I was living on the streets of the University District and it was a great experience for me. I am glad they are still going strong and able to be there as a positive resource and creative outlet for street-involved youth.

The recent Sanctuary Arts Center benefit, held to raise funds for this program, was a smashing success. Not to sound like Austin Powers, but yeah baby yeah! They raised a total of \$4,000 for the Art Center and an additional \$2100 was raised for the youth artists whose work was displayed at the benefit.

I was stoked to get to see Captain Smartypants for the first time performing at this benefit. I plan on attending their performance on June 4th at the Nordstrom Recital Hall. Captain Smartypants is a group of incredibly talented individuals, and a sub-division of

the Seattle Men's Chorus, who can sing better than anything I've heard on American Idol! There is emotion and fluidity behind their voices, their faces are expressive while they sing, and they are proud to be queer. They sing silly songs about "straight guys looking at the floor" and "songs that were never meant to be covered" like a harmonic rendition of Sir Mix A Lot's *Baby Got Back*. I think I'm a hard one to make laugh but Captain Smartypants and Jet City Improv had me rolling in my seat. Jet City Improv is a group of performers who take suggestions from the audience and act them out while the Improv guy in the corner makes sound effects that somehow manage to match up perfectly with the movements of each performer on stage. They are extremely talented and I hope to see more of them in the future.

It was a dual event: entertainment provided by Jet City Improv and Captain Smartypants and an art show of amazing work by street-involved youth. Two pieces I really liked are going to be available to be seen on the Mockingbird website. These two vibrant nature pieces are by the artist Rat. I liked them because of their brilliant colors, the blues and yellows, and the mellow feeling emanating from them.

Sanctuary Art Center is a safe place to express yourself in a world of chaos. Every single piece sold as far as I could tell and the crowd was very enthusiastic about bidding on them. Art is a positive outlet and the center really is a 'Sanctuary' in a world where it's not always safe to express yourself in words. 



Collage by street-involved youth.



Outside the Peanut Gallery Sanctuary Arts show.

Poetry Corner

My Day and How I Spend It

JAY-SON FOREMAN

When I wake up I wipe the crust from my eyes
Thinking how the day is going to go
Fast or slow

It's 8:30am so I got to get my clothes on and go
With my CD player on bumping my 2pac keep
your head up song

I look off the bus and something goes wrong
A black kid hits another black kid same old drama
Not going to school living on the streets when they
should be home with dad and mom

My mom was the only mother I had but no pops
Life is hard for a kid, selling drugs and getting
harassed by the cops

I never wanted that so that's why I make the best
of myself so no one can bring me down

I got better stuff to do than post up in the town
My clothes are matching I look real nice

Everything that I have cost a price
So why do I have to settle for less
Clothes don't make the person

The personality makes you who you are
I'm myself no one else

Work is stressful bosses on my back
It's the only job I can find until I can get some
money stacked

School, work, everything that you go through I
feel the same way

So sometimes I just get on my knees and pray
That's my only way of relieving stress

This life is only for a short period of time so make
the best of it

Before it's too late

I'm doing the best I can

Owning a business is my plan

So when I snap back into reality I'm on my way to
the coffee house

Lonely room, been like this for a while need a
spouse

I'm not writing rhymes I'm telling feelings
I want to be successful so everybody can
remember me

I got no more else to say, if I don't talk to you
tomorrow it was nice telling you about my day.

Mockingbird would like to recognize the work of John Stout, Executive Director of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program for Children in Foster Care, who passed away recently. We want to offer our condolences to his family and to the CASA program. He will truly be missed.

Abortion: Facing A Tough Decision

JAMICA HENDERSON



FACING TEEN PREGNANCY IS DIFFICULT. It's hard especially when you don't know if you should get an abortion or keep the child. A pregnancy is one thing that women can't get rid of easily. It's not like a cold where we just take a couple of aspirin and go about the day. It's a part of life that we can never forget. A cold or flu comes again and again, but sometimes you don't get that second time to become a parent. You might feel trapped especially when you don't feel ready to have a child or you don't think you can care for or afford it. I interviewed two people who have faced this decision and want to share their experiences with you.

Alicia's Story

"Alicia" is a young lady who has experienced the choice of getting an abortion or keeping the child. When Alicia found out that she was pregnant, the first thing that she thought about was getting an abortion. The reason she wanted to get the abortion was because she could not afford to raise a child and she was still in school. She didn't think she was ready to become a mother. She had a few relationship problems with the father, but he wanted to keep the child. Here is what Alicia had to say:

Did you want to get an abortion? Yes and No.

Why were you going to get an abortion? I wanted to get one because I wasn't working. I was going to school but it was hard because I was pregnant and I could not afford it.

What made you change your mind? I changed my mind because while being pregnant I wanted to keep her but then I did not. So by the time I came up with the final decision it was too late to get an abortion and I figure by that time I could make it.

How did you feel when you did not get the abortion? I felt good. I looked forward to it, especially after I found out it was a girl. I felt relaxed about the pregnancy. Just now I was worried about the labor pains.

Who or what encouraged you to keep the child? Cortez (the baby's father), Jamica (the God mom), the father's mother, and my friend Kamaria. Some family members did not want me to keep the baby. Some thought I was not ready and did not see me as a mother, did not think I was capable of taking care of a child.

What do you think would have happened if you got an abortion? I would have regretted it for a while. I probably would have felt sad and depressed. I would have felt like a murderer taking an innocent child's life. It would be a part of me I could and would never forget.

By not getting an abortion, do you feel that you made the right decision for you, the baby, or both? For both. Corliea is well taken care of. She's got everything she needs. She's a blessed child. I made the right decision because having her has motivated me not only for myself but the both of us.

Did you ever think about having the child and giving it up for adoption? No, because after going through nine months of pregnancy I would want to keep the child and raise him or her.

What did you learn from the situation? If you could give the next person some advice, what would you say? I learned that even though I'm happy with my daughter and love her to death, you should really think about the decision before it gets too late. From this situation I also learned how to sacrifice because when you have a child is it not all about you anymore. My advice would be following your heart, if you really believe in yourself that you can handle all the responsibility of being a parent go for it. You also learn, while raising the child, ways to become a better parent. If it comes down to getting an abortion just think about what's good for baby. Because that's who you're really concerned about if you narrow it down. An abortion might sound bad and be bad but could be the best thing at the time.

Brenda's Story


"Brenda" is a young woman from Aradia Women's Health Center who agreed to answer my questions about her decision to have an abortion. Here is what "Brenda" had to say:

Why did you choose to get an abortion? It was just not the right time for me to become a parent. I had just returned from abroad, was unemployed and staying on my friend's couch. My partner was still overseas where he lived and it would not have been possible for him to come to the US so I would have been a single mom.

What are some reasons you struggled with in making your decision? It really wasn't a struggle for me. I felt like my choice was very clear. All of the circumstances of my life and my own thoughts and feelings were pointing towards abortion as my most practical option.

How did you feel after the abortion? Relieved—like my life had been on hold and I was free to move forward again.

What did you learn from the situation? That women in Washington state have a lot of support...financial support to help them pay if you are low income like I was. I had great access to doctors and information...

What kind of advice would you give the next person who wants to get an abortion? So many women have no access to information, doctors or anything else or they live in a conservative area and face a lot of judgment. My advice is to think about what is best for you and don't let anyone else tell you what you should do. No one can force you to have an abortion if you don't want one. But don't let anyone keep you from it if you decide you need one. Nobody knows what's best for you as much as you do. Trust yourself and your choice even if no one in your life is on your side. There are people and places that can help you. 

For info on what to do if in this situation, check out www.aradia.org, www.yppo.com, www.adopting.org, www.plannedparenthood.org, www.teenage-pregnancy.net

Congratulations Advocates!

Bill 5583 was passed by Washington State's legislature this May. This bill mandates that DSHS provide adequate training to CPS workers and that CPS track the number and disposition of all referrals related to adolescents. Mockingbird and other advocates have been concerned about adolescents being de-prioritized in the past and referrals not being adequately investigated. This bill will prioritize the needs of adolescents who are facing neglect and abuse in Washington State.

May is Foster Care Month!

Recognizing the commitment foster parents make to ensure a better life for abused and neglected children, Gov. Christine Gregoire has proclaimed May as Foster Care Month in Washington. On any given day in the state, about 6,000 licensed foster parents are providing safety and security to about 8,000 children whose parents are unable care for them. Gov. Gregoire will speak May 17 at a State Capitol ceremony recognizing the work done by foster parents.

What Makes a Good Foster Home

LARISHICA ASHER



IN THIS NEWS REPORT I WILL BE TALKING ABOUT THE DIFFERENCES between functional and dysfunctional foster homes. A dysfunctional foster home is one where the kids are not cared for and loved. The house might be dirty, there might be too many kids, the parents might never be around and there might even be abuse and neglect happening in the home. There are many reports of neglect and abuse in foster homes. Sexual abuse in foster homes is about 12.5% and neglect is about 55.9% (www.casey.org/mediacenter/mediak/factsheet.com).

One of the dysfunctional homes that I lived in was really dirty. I got sick from the smell and all of the dirt that was in the home. I caught an infection and the foster parent would not take me to the doctor so that I could get checked out to see what I had. When I moved I finally got taken to the doctor and my infection started to heal slowly but I still have a scar. I always thought that you were supposed to get taken care of in foster care, that the state puts you with people who can take

care of you. You think they are moving you somewhere safe but they really are not.

A functional foster home is one where the family takes care of you. The home is clean and the foster parent takes care of you when you are sick. Some very great functional foster homes are organized and make time for the child to be in the home and activities for the children to do so that they don't get bored sitting in the house. And they also have to go to school. The foster parent treats you to things when you do well in school like your parents would do if you were to live with them. So a functional foster home is like a regular home with kids who live with their parents still. I have been in some functional foster homes while I have been in the foster care system. But I really like the foster home that I am in right now. I like it because the foster mom cares for me and she shows me new things. One of the things she does to show me that she cares is to let me know what I can and can't do. She is helping me get my driver's license and soon will be helping me find another job so that I can get a car and pay for the insurance of the car. I have also experienced a lot of new things while I have been in this foster home. Some of the new things that I have done are flying to Florida, and riding a motor scooter. I will soon be taking my Driver's Ed class. I am also going to Las Vegas.

Right now I am hoping that my little sister can come and live with me in this foster home. But it seems like

the foster care system does not want the little girl to come and live with me even though she wants to and so does her mother. It doesn't seem like they are doing anything to help her move in with me. When she does come to live with me she can be free just like I am and happy from here on out.

I interviewed two of my co-workers about their opinions on functional and dysfunctional foster homes. Here is what they had to say:

Jamica Henderson has never been in a dysfunctional foster home. She was first placed in a foster home when she was 14 years old. She has never been moved from the foster home she is in and she is there till this day. She is now 18 years old. Her opinion on what a dysfunctional foster home is when a child is not getting enough attention from the parents. And the parents of the foster home are very careless.

Ashley Grant says that when she first moved to her home it was dysfunctional home at first. She realized that she couldn't do anything about it. So she came to the conclusion that she had to age out of the foster care system. Her opinion of a dysfunctional foster home is when no one can get along and there is constant bickering, arguing, and lots of verbal violence. She entered in the foster care system when she was 14 years old also. And she has also been in the same foster home and has never been moved not one time and she is now 18 years old. 