

Mockingbird Times

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Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

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 The Mockingbird Society
Building a world-class foster care system



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System Reform

Diamonique Walker

Gubernatorial Campaign Representatives Meet with Youth

On Saturday September 15th, the Mockingbird Youth Network's participants and advisors gathered for the quarterly State Leadership Council (SLC) meeting with some very exciting guests. For those of you who don't know, the state of Washington is electing a new Governor this year. Rob McKenna, our Republican candidate, is currently the Attorney General of the State of Washington and served on the King County Council for three terms. Our Democratic candidate, Jay Inslee, is a former Congressman from the 1st and 4th Congressional Districts.



System Reform

Amanda Bevington

Policy Directors James Paribello, from Jay Inslee's Campaign and Adam Faber, representing Rob McKenna's campaign each came to meet face-to-face with youth from the Network.

It was truly a meaningful statement to have these important visitors from both campaigns at our SLC meeting with the election right around the corner. This meeting was a great opportunity to give light to our issues and also make community connections that we can follow up with in the 2013 legislative session.

It's no surprise that the Network youth were more than prepared for the discussion with the candidates' Policy Directors. Each

team of youth spent much of Saturday morning coming up with truly serious and thought-provoking questions to ask the representatives. The questions youth articulated included: How will your candidates ensure that youth voice is involved in child welfare decisions? What's your candidates' idea of a world-class foster care system and what is one change he would make to move us closer to it? And, how will your candidate support safe housing for youth and alumni of care in the budget?

I was actually surprised to hear the representatives speak knowledgeably about the Mockingbird Family Model, Independent

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Youth Commit to Reform, Approve 2013 Agenda



Mockingbird youth, staff and advisors join the Policy Directors for both gubernatorial campaigns

The afternoon of Saturday September 15th was full of focus and passion. Mockingbird Youth Network participants were respectful and engaged as we gathered to discuss advocacy and system reform.

Jon Brumbach, Public Policy and Communications Coordinator, talked about a couple of different topics. He gave us an overview of the legislative goals we have had in the past and where we turn our head to in the future. Jon talked about progress Mockingbird has made on the 2011 youth-generated issues. In the area of safe housing, we have passed Extended Foster Care legislation that ensures that if youth in care pursue their education then they can be eligible for housing.

Another important issue youth raised last year was preserving normalcy in the lives of those in care. As a result, Mockingbird advocated for the creation of the Normalcy Workgroup. This workgroup is co-chaired by Rick Butt, from Children's Administration and

Jeannie Kee, alumna of foster care. Normalcy issues include participation in extracurricular sports, overnight events and any other normal activity that youth in care might not have regular access to as wards of the state.

Thirdly, the Pregnant and Parenting Youth Workgroup was created last year due to concerns raised by the Olympia chapter. This group meets regularly and promotes positive resources for teen parents. Overall, Network participants are proud of these substantial accomplishments and the youth who participate in these workgroups.

Then, Jon presented the 2012-13 issues, which are Extended Foster Care, sibling visits, savings accounts for foster youth, overmedication, family connections, and thorough 17.5 meetings. For each topic, Jon explained the current status, the proposed solution and possible legislative and funding needs. This was a good way to get a status report and feedback on advocacy progress.

After the wonderful presentation, each set of chapter leaders discussed their updates and plans for community engagement this fall. During this time, I talked about my experience when Diamonique, Jon, Jim, Laurie Lippold, and I went to Bellevue to speak with Representative Ross Hunter.

The final part of this SLC was very special and unique. In the past, chapter leaders have voted for their top two legislative priorities at this meeting. This year, however, was different. As a group, we decided to endorse all six issues to work on in the 2013 legislative session. This is a new and exciting future for all Network participants. Each chapter did an amazing job researching and presenting their work. Because of this, the Network as a whole committed to pushing the issues forward to build a world-class foster care system.

youth reporters



Diamonique Walker
Sr. Network Representative



Mandy Urwiler
Sr. Network Representative



Amanda Bevington
Network Representative



Deonate Cruz
Network Representative



Samantha McDonald
Network Representative



David Buck
Network Support



“Advocacy isn’t limited to the Capitol Building in Olympia. At The Mockingbird Society we work year-round to ensure that we are constantly moving closer to a world-class foster care system.”
Letter from the Editor



“I saw how much people actually cared and it gave me hope for the future of foster care. All the teens and young adults were so motivated, it increased my own passion.” Stevie story, page 2

our team

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about us

The Mockingbird Society is a leading advocate for foster care reform built on youth-inspired solutions, powerful coalitions and public support for every child’s right to a safe home and a bright future. The *Mockingbird Times* is a key component of our youth development program, the Mockingbird Youth Network. All youth reporters are paid employees, and contributors from across the country receive up to \$25 for published works. The Times is distributed nationally to more than 20,000 through our mailing list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. As a nonprofit organization, we appreciate your private contributions to support our youth and family programs. Donate online, by phone or mail.

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the name

Our name is as unique as we are. The great American masterpiece *To Kill a Mockingbird* provides our inspiration, our moral muscle. The power and promise of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is in reminding each of us of the untapped potential our most vulnerable citizens hold.

Letter from the Editor



Advocacy isn’t limited to the Capitol Building in Olympia. At The Mockingbird Society we work year-round to ensure that we are constantly moving closer

to a world-class foster care system. This includes working with candidates for public office as well. We were pleased to welcome the Policy Directors for both gubernatorial campaigns to our quarterly State Leadership Council meeting this September for a Q&A with our Mockingbird Youth Network Chapter Leaders. While we do not endorse, support or oppose any candidate for public office, we want to take advantage of any opportunity to engage those who seek public office so



Special Contribution
Stevie Atkins

Embracing My Next Stage

After I graduated from high school, I thought about going to college but wasn’t sure what I was supposed to do. The counseling center at Yakima Valley Community College referred me to Catholic Family and Child Services. They helped me fill-out financial aid forms and register for classes. I felt empowered and excited when I completed all of the paperwork I needed to start college.

I didn’t start school until I was 20 years old, but qualified for many scholarships such as Education Training Voucher (ETV), Pell Grant, Student Need Grant, Yakima Nation Higher Education, and many others. With the help of Catholic Family and Child Services and those scholarships, I was able to make a living while going to college. I also was in the Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP). This was critical because they helped me find a safe apartment to live while I was pregnant with my son.

In 2011, I was still working hard on my education at YVCC and managing a healthy, stable life when I was told about Youth Advocacy Day, and about The Mockingbird Society. Youth Advocacy Day was a really strong and uplifting day. I saw how much people actually cared and it gave me hope for the future of foster care. All the teens and young adults were very motivated so motivated, it increased my own passion. I enjoyed going to Advocacy Day and this fueled my desire to be more involved in Mockingbird activities. I filled out an application for the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit and was thrilled to be accepted. When I was told I would be gone for three days I felt a little worried because I would have to leave my son and travel far, but I knew it was for a good cause, so I stayed motivated to go. The first day was overwhelming because there was so much to do but everyone on our team helped each other stay focused on success. The second day, I was more calm and excited to

they are aware of the issues faced by the children, youth and families impacted by the child welfare system.

On October 11th, I hope you will join us in celebrating another full year of advocacy and civic engagement. The Mockingbird Society will hold our 6th Annual Benefit Luncheon at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel. This year’s youth-led program will feature powerful and inspirational stories of perseverance, achievement, and hope. Our team of Youth Network Representatives will be featured prominently, with the role of Master of Ceremonies to be filled by our own Deonate Cruz, while Amanda Bevington will deliver the keynote address. This program will showcase the strength of youth in care, not their struggles. You will see youth empowered by their advocacy, leadership and civic engagement.



Stevie with her son

be working with all the people of Mockingbird; it kept me very enthused for the outcome of this event. The final day, I was nervous because being in front of big crowds is a scary thought, but our region made the best of it and we were very proud by our final effort. After the Summit,

opportunities opened for me and I became a Chapter Leader for Region 1 South (Yakima). Throughout this past year, I helped co-facilitate leadership trainings for the foster youth around our region.

When I started at Mockingbird, I was shy and didn’t speak up as much as I feel comfortable doing now. I know my leadership skills have grown because I’m able to speak more confidently in public. I’m a little sad because I’m about to turn 24 which is the age limit for a Chapter Leader and participant.

Since becoming a Chapter Leader, my life has changed because I was able to meet other foster youth and travel to Seattle to be a part of the State Leadership Council (SLC) meetings. I also earned an awesome opportunity to spend a day with Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson, head of Children’s Administration. The day I had the honor to be introduced to the Assistant Secretary I was a little anxious and nervous, mostly because I didn’t want to mess up and do something wrong. She was a very accepting lady as well as an understanding one; she made me feel very comfortable after the first few minutes of meeting her. I will not forget the day I got to meet with the Assistant Secretary of Children’s Administration because it was such an honor and a privilege.

I have grown a great deal as a result of my involvement with Mockingbird and am committed to staying involved by volunteering as an ally and continuing on as advocate for foster care reform.

If you have not registered for this year’s luncheon, please do so at www.mockingbirdsociety.org, and please encourage your family, friends and colleagues to do the same. If you cannot make it in person, please consider making a contribution on our website. It is only through your support that we will be able to give youth and alumni of care the same opportunities for success that we provide our own children.

Thank you for your unwavering support for children, youth and families.

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Power of One
Deonate Cruz

Join Me on 10/11/12

October 11th is Mockingbird’s 6th annual luncheon. If you feel passionate about changing the child welfare system, want to learn about advocacy, or just want to get involved in a positive cause, I highly recommend attending. Besides that, I, Deonate Cruz, will be your MC throughout the whole event and I pledge to keep things very interesting. Plus we will have an awesome keynote speaker, my fellow Network Representative Amanda Bevington, and some great guest speakers. It will also be a great way to get to know some of the people and resources available to you as well as an awesome way to make a positive difference.

Some of you might think that I am just urging you to get involved because I



Join Deonate Cruz and Amanda Bevington Oct. 11

write for the *Mockingbird Times*, but that is most definitely not the case. Last year was actually my first time attending the Luncheon. I went not knowing exactly what to expect, but what I saw was magnificent. Georgina Ramirez, last year’s keynote speaker, gave a speech so powerful, it was

almost as if you were there going through her experiences with her.

I challenge you to think of a good reason why you shouldn’t attend. This gives you the perfect opportunity to get involved with an organization that is on the forefront of child welfare reform. If you are interested in coming please register at our website, www.mockingbirdsociety.org



"I challenge you to think of why you shouldn't attend. This gives you the perfect opportunity to get involved with an organization that is on the forefront of child welfare reform."
Deonate story, page 2



"Seeing all of the Mockingbird youth on the Capitol steps rallying together for such an important reason was incredibly emotional to watch and I will never forget it."
Sarah story, page 3



Special Contribution
Sarah Mahaffy

Memories Made, Never Forgotten



Representative Andy Billig with Spokane Chapter Members, Sarah Mahaffy and Jim Theofelis

I have had the opportunity to be the Spokane Resource Specialist for the past two years. I have had the honor to build relationships with my youth and the community. As I think about my time at Mockingbird I have had the privilege of working with my amazing group of youth who have made an impact on me in more ways than they will ever know. The relationships and mentoring opportunities I have gained have been the best of my career. Some of my favorite memories about being a Resource Specialist are monthly meetings,

legislator BBQs, baseball, hockey games, ice skating, and RS trainings with Tammy. One memory I will always have in my mind is the last Advocacy Day. Seeing all the youth together in the tent energetic and excited to make a change in our legislature and to give youth a day to make their voice heard was an amazing thing to be a part of. Follow that with being able to go with the youth to meet our local legislators and then watching as they get to personally change the mind of our Spokane legislator and later watching everyone join in excitement as our bill is voted on and then receive a standing ovation is something I feel so lucky to have witnessed. Seeing all of the Mockingbird

youth on the Capitol steps rallying together for such an important reason was incredibly emotional to watch and I will never forget it.

I want to personally thank Alene and Tammy for being a great coworker and ally as well as Kristina, William, Kelsey and Sean for all of their hard work and dedication to Mockingbird. It's been a joy to see how Mockingbird has made a difference in your lives and how you have realized the value of your voice and it has truly been an honor working with you all and I will miss you dearly!

One project I got to do with my youth was to watch them each make a quilt piece where each piece represented one of my youth and their experience in care. Someone put the quilt pieces together and made a beautiful quilt that was auctioned off at a Safety Net fundraiser for \$500. The person who bought it knew that it meant a lot to me and I had a personal attachment to the quilt so they won the bid and presented it to me. I now have a piece of each of my youth that is now hanging on my wall and I will always treasure it!

I have made so many memories with Mockingbird and have grown so much as a professional in the opportunities I have had in my time of working here. I will be sad to leave but I am excited to see how Mockingbird will continue to grow and make a difference in the lives of youth and alumni. Thanks for everything Mockingbird and Spokane youth! It's been a great two year journey and adventure!



Pay It Forward
Mandy Urwiler

Orion Center Helps Youth Earn their GED

The Orion Center GED program in Seattle is a great resource for youth between the ages of 16 and 23 who don't have their High School Diploma and want to earn their GED quickly. The atmosphere is an open and inviting workspace where youth can work independently or with the help of a tutor one-on-one. There are two full time tutors, Zach Selke and Jill Hansen, and several volunteer tutors that come in so that there are always enough tutors to go around to those that need them.

The program runs at the Orion Center 9am-12:30pm Monday through Friday with extra tutoring time for those who need extra help or can't make it during those times. If you show up to the program at 8:30 am, you can have breakfast and you can have lunch at 12:30. You can also get referrals to other services like case management. Services like this, along with providing bus tickets to youth make this program a great option for youth who otherwise wouldn't be able to

attain their GED. This program has been so successful that they graduated 29 young people in 2011 alone!

The first step to getting into the program is coming in on either Tuesday or Thursday at 9am and taking your placement test. From there, Zach or Jill will help you get into the program through a one-on-one orientation. After that, you will take pretests in each subject the GED tests on so that they know where to start you working to be ready to test. If you test with high enough scores, they will give you an official GED pretest, where you need to score 650 or above to go take the real test. If you don't score high, they will give you packets of work to do to help you learn what you need to learn. As you work, the tutors will come around and ask you what they can do to help. If you are confident on your own, they will

let you work on your own. If not, they will find out your learning style and tailor their teaching to your specific needs. Along with

the individual work, there are group discussions and mini-lessons. To enhance students learning experience they even incorporate field trips

to places like the Center for Wooden Boats, the Museum of Flight, and the Museum of History and Industry.

When you pass the pretest, they will pay for you to take your GED test at either Seattle Central Community College or Edmonds Community College. Once you pass all of the tests, there will be a graduation where you can invite all of your friends and family and get to wear a cap and gown. You can also get referrals to post-secondary education help when you graduate including college counseling services and job-training programs. Take advantage of these supportive services to improve your future.



Homeless youth • Off the streets • Preparing for life

upcoming

October 17th

New website launch for The Mockingbird Society! Check in and see how we've changed... for the better.

www.mockingbirdsociety.org



The Mockingbird Society Board of Directors

We are governed by a volunteer Board of Directors who serve and represent the organization in diverse and meaningful ways. This fall we are excited to welcome new Board members and grateful for the leadership and commitment of our continuing members.

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6th Annual Benefit Luncheon

Thursday, October 11, 2012
 Sheraton Seattle Hotel

Registration begins at 11:30 am
 Program from 12:00 - 1:15 pm

October 11

Save the Date



Home

My home once built up so strong
 Crumbles under the weight of
 something wrong
 My walls begin to break
 Taking the blow of mistake after
 mistake
 My foundations start to crumble
 Floors don't hold well after that
 So unstable I can't stand on my own
 My windows are cracking
 And the cold creeps in
 My roof has holes and leaks
 In drips the rain and sun
 Is repair possible, now this has begun?

thank you

Catholic Family and Child Services, Casey Family Programs, Volunteers of America, Alene Alexander, Youthnet, Molly Patterson, Dawna Evans, Valerie Skelton, Bruce W. Gilpin Memorial Foundation, Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, Youth Philanthropy Board from the GTCF, Seattle Bouldering Project, Thomasina Schmitt and the Seattle Symphony, Jerry Adams, Suzanne Akerman, Steve Akerman, Anonymous (2), Baby & Co, Jaime Becker, Rose Berg-Fosnaugh, Bruce W. Gilpin Memorial Foundation, Chayet and Bevington Family, Lisa and Jeff Chorazyczewski, Larry Crim and Judith Mitchell, Cindy Domingo, The Don and Mary Williams Fund of The Greater Tacoma Community Foundation, Shanon Doolittle and Mike van de Merwe, Jonathan Fischer, Roger Freeman, Margaret Garrett, Elizabeth Gaskill, Hickory Gateless and Adrienne Wat, Karen Gnau, Google Matching Gifts Program, Jillian Gross, Lura Harrison, Jo Ann Herbert, John Holt, Jacqueline Jeske, Gabriel Johnson, Natasha Jones, Jason Keeling, Tracey Kipp, Jim and Jennifer Krigbaum, Tyson Lin, Carol Lucas, Lynnea and Kirk Manahan, Linda McClamrock, Zan McColloch-Lussier, Michaela McGonigle, Kirsten Nygaard and Andy Neubauer, Joy O'Dell, Deborah Oswald, Brian Pedersen, Thomas and Mary-Bridget Pehl, Judy Pigott, Amy Poley, Thomas Quesenberry, Georgina Ramirez, Marsha Reagan, RealNetworks Foundation, Patricia Sandoval, Ann Schiffer, Seattle Children's, Marcia Stafford, Loran Timmons, John and Janet Walker, Suzanne Walsh and David Richardson, Dustin Welch, Paul Wirsing and Paola Maranan, Stephen Yim, Kevin Zeck.

We Welcome Your Work

We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be, or have been, published in the *Mockingbird Times* visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org, call us at (206) 407-2134 or email us at mbt@mockingbirdsociety.org.

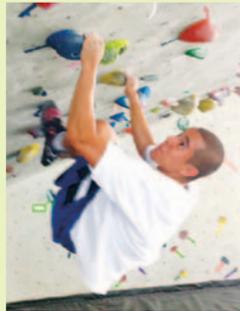
Note: Incoming letters to the editor and correspondence to youth under 18 years should be addressed to the *Mockingbird Times* and will be opened first by adult editorial staff.



Chapter Voice

Seattle Chapter Scaling New Heights *by Samantha McDonald*

Region 2 South (Seattle) — On August 29th in Seattle at the 2100 Building, The Mockingbird Society held a Transitions Training for Seattle youth. There was one facilitator, five co-facilitators and 34 youth in attendance. This training was introduced by the Mockingbird Youth Network in June of this year.



The Seattle Chapter is very optimistic about what they learned. The training is divided up into three key parts: Ending, Neutral Zone and New Beginnings. These three stages left youth with knowledge about the difference between change and transition. Georgina Ramirez described that change was the external factor and transition was

the internal process someone goes through when transitioning.

The Seattle youth went through several simulations to teach them the healthy ways to transition. In Georgina's experience she states, "It's been more than pleasure to facilitate the transitions training to more than hundred foster youth and alumni. Engaging with youth people and watching participants go through the journey of transitions and why they are relevant to their lives was memorable. Once youth were able to understand some of the key concepts they were able to apply it immediately to situations that weren't relevant to care. Whether it was applying the information to their employment, relationships, education or transitioning out of care it was a

rewarding opportunity to see the curriculum come to life."

As a reward for all of Seattle youth's hard work they were offered a great time at the Seattle Bouldering Project facility. Georgina added, "The Seattle Bouldering Project event displayed one of the key learning points from the training, which is the power of rituals and celebrations. This celebratory event provided attendees an opportunity to reconnect with the transitions language. Afterwards, attendees sat down for a moment to reflect on the transitions training. We discussed some of the key points of the training such the difference between transitions and change, the three phases of the transitions process, but most importantly youth shared what the training meant to them and how they think about their lives differently."

Region 1 North (Spokane) *by Kristina Thomason*



This month William Mendoza and I co-facilitated the Educational Advocacy training. Our participants were fully engaged and walked away with key knowledge. William and I, along with a few other members of our Chapter, have been participating in foster parent trainings where we get to sit on a panel for prospective foster parents. They have the chance to ask us questions and we offer advice to help them learn what it's like from our perspective.

Region 2 South (Yakima) *by Brandy Baxley*



ACT FIRSt Co-Facilitated the Educational Training with the youth in Catholic Family and Child Services Independent Living Skills Program. We had about 10 youth and alumni participate in this action packed training. Additionally, we are excited to welcome Jazmin Guinn as new Chapter Leader. It's going to be a great fall!

Chapter Snapshots

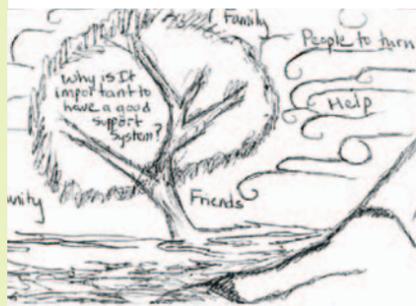


Region 2 North (Everett) *by Jerrica Long*



On September 18th we had a monthly Mockingbird meeting and talked about local advocacy and upcoming changes for our Chapter. We did a few fun icebreakers, which helped new members feel welcome. We enjoyed a spaghetti dinner and planned activities for our October 2nd event at which we will say good-bye to our departing Resource Specialist, Kate. Thank you for everything!

Region 2 South (Olympia) *by Chris Bauer*



For many Chapter members the holidays can be a time of missing family and feeling left out. We want to use the upcoming holidays to underscore the importance of extended family and invite legislators to talk about our systems reform topic on December 6th. We Invite you to join us at Community Youth Services in Olympia from 4pm to 6pm to share with legislators the importance of helping to connect youth in care to extended family and community support.

Region 3 North (Tacoma) *by Zyion Houston*



Hi, I'm Zyion Houston and I'm the new Chapter Leader for Tacoma. I live in Tacoma and attend school at Bates. I am 17 years old and getting ready to age out of foster care. My first event as Chapter Leader was to volunteer at the Foster Parent Association's "Walk Me Home" fundraiser on September 8th. I helped with set up, met lots of great foster parents, and passed out water to the walkers. See you at the next chapter meeting October 10th.

Campaigns, from page 1

Youth Housing Program (IYHP) and Extended Foster Care (Formerly Foster Care to 21). They spoke with enthusiasm about the programs and it seemed hopeful that youth would continuously be able to have access to them.

At Mockingbird we have a central belief in elevating youth voice. It was encouraging that each of our guests expressed interest in keeping youth and alumni at the decision-making table during discussions about the

future of child welfare. In response to a question raised about supporting foster youth in post-secondary education, James Paribello suggested that Washington youth need more support from wraparound services, and teacher training for unique issues that foster youth are facing. Faber agreed that having effective and efficient services is more of a concern than finances in regards to these critical issues. In this context, wraparound services

are those that provided holistic support (education, healthcare, housing, employment) to dependents of the state. We concluded the morning with a highly informative voter registration proposal. This is an important for elections, both locally and nationally. Being a registered and active voter and engaging in our democratic processes is critical for self-advocacy. Make sure you are registered to vote and commit to making your voice heard.