

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

October 2008

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The Power in the Youth Vote BY JULIAN BARRINGTON



How critical is the youth vote? That's a question youth should be thinking about right now. The youth vote is imperative in terms of its effects and the impact. Voting is more than casting a ballot: it's letting your voice be heard. It lets lawmakers and those who guide and regulate your life know what your beliefs, morals and values. With that vote, you have a say-so at the highest levels of the decision making process, and impact issues that you face on an everyday basis.

Issues such as access to health care, education, and affordable housing all play critical roles in the everyday lives of youth in care. As a means of being an agent of change it is important to note that voting at the local level is just as important as voting for national positions. The local level is where all the effective and direct change comes into place; where your mayor, state-representatives, senators and government agencies make decisions. In addition, it is equally important to stay informed about positions. Doing this requires social and political awareness of what each candidate stands for and that requires regular research such as staying up on the news. By doing this, you can pick and choose which candidate you believe measures up on the issues.

"The power of the vote" is a true saying, meaning youth have the power to impact issues concerning them. For instance, if you

want health care to be more affordable, start by looking into each of the candidates' position to see which candidates' beliefs coincide with yours. Organizations like the **Washington Bus** focus directly on getting youth politically involved to vote.

Recently, I caught up with one of the Washington Bus youth representatives, **Sunni**, who spoke on the significance of the youth vote saying, "The youth vote is perhaps the most critical vote in all elections, because everything that happens today, which includes political activity, will affect their future." He also spoke on behalf of the correlations between the existing issues confronting youth today and how they can impact those issues. "If we look at some of the issues of today like health care, education, and housing issues that youth should be concerned with, it is almost imperative that youth decided on who they think will fight for them as president."

This election, the economic and financial crisis that we are currently facing is one of the most important issues as we're going to vote. For youth, the best way to effectively and powerfully use their voice in this election and every election is to get out there and vote. For more information about how to register to vote, visit www.secstate.wa.gov/elections/register.aspx or www.register-vote.com. By doing this, we can prevent **William E. Simon's** observation from happening: "Bad politicians are sent to Washington by good people who don't vote."

Foster Child Survey Released BY GEORGINA RAMIREZ



Foster care is filled with hardships but youth voices refused to be ignored. Youth and alumni of care lent their voices and experiences to one of the most unprecedented surveys conducted in the State of Washington. Instead of collecting data from child welfare professionals and social workers, the state went directly to the source and asked youth about their needs.

Washington State University's **Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC)** conducted a survey that included 11,200 calls to foster youth who were in care during the year 2007. The survey was conducted to assess the need of youth in care to create a foster care system that improves the lives of youth versus putting them at a disadvantage. Youth were questioned about issues relating to mental health, placement stability, education, experience with the system and caseworkers, and goals/preparation for the future.

As a result, 706 youth completed or partially completed the 100+ question phone survey. Some of the results were positive while other demonstrated the improvements that need to be made to our local foster care system. When youth were asked about their experiences with the system, 88 percent responded that the system had treated them well or somewhat well. When questioned

about educational aspirations, 71 percent of the participants hoped to achieve an AA or higher. However, of these, half had minimal resources to make that dream a reality. When asked about their social workers, only 44 percent of the youth had monthly visitation and 43 percent were dissatisfied with the quality of support. The primary reasons for dissatisfaction were that the social worker didn't follow through or didn't listen or communicate with the youth. To view all of the results of the survey, visit www.braampanel.org.

According to the **National Center for Youth Law**, by the end of 2010 Washington State is required to reduce the number of children experiencing three or more placements by 50 percent and recruit 50 percent more foster parents. They are also required to reduce the number of students who change schools because of relocation, increase the number of foster youth receiving high school diplomas by 30 percent and reduce the number of runaways by 30 percent. Finally, the state is to reduce the disproportionately negative outcome for youth of color.

This survey was conducted to gauge the experiences around the issues that the state is being mandated to address to reduce the amount of trauma and negative outcomes experienced by youth in care. It was initiated by the Braam vs. the State of



The Braam Oversight Panel was created in 2004 to oversee a settlement agreement regarding Washington State's foster care system. The settlement agreement was reached after a six-year period of litigation. The named plaintiff, Jessica Braam, is an adult who lived in 34 foster homes by the time the suit was filed in 1998.

SURVEY, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Do You Know Who You Are Voting For?

BY SHAYNA HARRIS



As a person who generally prefers Democrats to Republicans I found it hard to pick which candidate I would pick this 2008 election year. We have two candidates that are both very strong and capable of cleaning up the mess left for the future president. While **John McCain** is a Republican, he has some Democratic traits as well and **Barack Obama** has some traditionally Republican traits. They both are anti-politician, they are also environment protectors and see the importance of eliminating pollution. However, that's just about all they have in common.

McCain supports the Iraq war and Obama would like the war to end by the end of 2009. McCain has opposed **Dick Cheney's** 2005 energy bill. Obama voted for Cheney's 2005 energy bill. The 2005 Energy Bill, written in secret by Vice President Cheney and the energy lobby, **Thomas Friedman** referred to as "the sum of all lobbies." **U.S. PIRG** noted that the bill's "heavy tilt toward big oil companies reflects the influence of Exxon Mobil and other oil companies on policy-makers in Washington, DC."¹

The Washington Post editorialized that the bill was a "piñata of perks for energy industries." Indeed, the bill contained \$6 billion in subsidies to the oil and gas industry and \$12 billion to the nuclear power industry.²

However, Obama blasted the bill in the 2007 Democratic Debate saying, "...Look at how Dick Cheney did his energy policy. He met with environmental groups once, he met with renewable energy folks once, and then he met with oil and gas companies forty times, and that's how they put together our energy policy. We've got to put the national interest ahead of the special interest, and that's what I'll do when I'm President of the United States."³

Obama supports the law that requires 25% of U.S. energy to come from renewable sources while McCain opposed a similar bill. Obama also supported the 2007 energy bill while McCain opposed. Regarding economic policies, because Obama is proposing tax increases to support social policies he has become unfavorable in some people's eyes. McCain has proposed tax cuts which appeals to many people who feel a heavy tax burden.

If you look at past presidents who have had similar opportunities to clean up the economy you will see they have failed. The great Depression started on October 29, 1929, a year after presidential nominee **Herbert Hoover** said he would keep the Federal Budget balanced by cutting taxes and expanding public works spending. He became President in 1929 the same year as the depression. So who is the better candidate Barack Obama or John McCain? You have to decide for yourself but the best course of action is to investigate the candidates' opinions on the issues. Researching this article has giving me the knowledge I need to help make a decision I think I feel confident in making.

So do your homework as the election is still going on so you can decide: Who are you voting for?

¹ uspig.org/uspignewsroom.asp?id2=18502

² www.hillaryclinton.com/news/release/view/?id=6873

³ Democratic Presidential Debate, 7/23/07

Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS



First and foremost, I want to thank all of you who attended our Annual Luncheon on October 1st. What a great event as we treated nearly **600 attendees** to a wonderful presentation about The Mockingbird Society. I am so appreciative of the work from the staff and volunteers who produced this year's event. We raised \$180,000 to support our programs and for that we are very appreciative.

It was very exciting to share all of the amazing work we have going on at Mockingbird including the expansion of the **Mockingbird Family Model** into newly developed applications of preventing more children and youth from entering the foster care system. For example, we expect to launch a model that serves unlicensed kinship caregivers (relatives raising relatives). We believe that grandparents and other relatives do their families and our community a service by stepping in and caring for their young relatives who are at risk of entering the foster care system. Our goal is to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by providing these relatives with the support they need.

We also shared the development of the

Mockingbird Network, which is the state-wide expansion of our **Youth LEAD** program. As a result of this expansion, each region of Washington State will have a local Mockingbird Chapter that is linked to the *Mockingbird Times*, our **Youth Speaker's Panel** and our Advocacy Agenda. **Again, I want to thank all those who attended our luncheon and took the time to learn about and support our programs.** Donations are still being accepted and can be sent to our main office.

Election Day is November 4th! I also want to take this opportunity to encourage each of you to vote in the upcoming election. How you vote is completely up to you but each of us must exercise our civic responsibility, first ensuring that we are registered and secondly taking the time to vote. I can't think of a better way to role model civic engagement for the children and youth in your life than to have them watch you take the time to get educated on the issues and then make your voice heard by voting.

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Meet the Staff: Joyce Camacho-Cruz



My name is Joyce Camacho-Cruz and I'm almost 18 years old. Currently, I live in Seattle in an independent living program and attend **Orion Center** to complete my GED (General Educational Development). In my spare time I like to go for walks, read, and write poetry. It's my passion to put my thoughts on paper and express myself freely. I'm glad to work with *Mockingbird Times* who published one of my very first poems. Working with them to expand my horizons as a writer is truly a blessing.

My experience with the foster care system started when I was 8 years old and I have been in and out of the system and lived in at least 12 homes ever since. A couple, who were one of my previous guardians, provide me with great support and they are still there for me: I can give them a call and talk about what's going on and they know just what to say. They helped me comprehend who I am inside and out. During the short time I lived with them, they showed great persistence; they never gave up on me. They told me I can be anything I wanted. Regardless of our differences and the struggles we have gone through, we still have a strong bond.

They have impacted my life greatly.

With the experience being constantly on the move, I didn't really spend much time in school. I've learned to adapt to what I know and expand my outlook and know that this is the route I want to take. I want to accomplish something in life, to reach out to those who don't have a way to advocate for themselves and may not see many opportunities.

Music is another way to help me feel at ease. I like different genres depending on my mood including metal, soul, classical, and some rap artists. Some of my favorite artists are Social Distortion, Slipknot, Keb'Mo', Ray Wylie Hubbard, and Beethoven.

One thing I would like to see changed about the foster care system is reducing unstable placements with children being moved from home to home. It's an emotional strain that causes unnecessary stress for the youth. There should be effective communication on the child's development and people should seek what's affecting the youth instead of just brushing them aside. Children should at least get to know the foster parents before being placed in a home so they won't feel like a total stranger.

SURVEY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Washington lawsuit which was initiated by the thousands of youth who were living unstable and potentially harmful lives due to the fact they were being transferred from placement to placement.

It is hard and very difficult for children to watch their parents conduct themselves in a reckless manner and make decisions that impact the value of the children's lives. It can leave youth feeling isolated, devalued, and lost. Without the proper attention, help, or guidance, the success of a youth is almost uncertain. So it is nice to see the state making an effort to change.

WELCOME!

Congratulations to our own **Leona Bill** on the birth of her 6 pound, 4 ounce, baby daughter **Francesca Audrey Bill Evans** on September 30, 2008. Both baby and mother are doing well. Welcome Francesca!

GOODBYE!

We bid a fond farewell to **Samuel Martin, Marie Goines, and Juan Ramirez**. We wish them luck in their future endeavors.

The Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD Program Presents LIFE ADVOCACY 101

Learn how to be your OWN best advocate in all areas of your life. Participate in activities that will give you the skills you need to "make things happen" for your personal success!

Receive your own personal Life Advocacy 101 TOOL!

Contact us to today to schedule your FREE Life Advocacy 101 Training for your group or organization! Open to all youth and young adults ages 14 to 23.

Contact Georgina at georgina@mockingbirdsociety.org or Kara at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org for more information and details.

The Mockingbird Society: 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.

THANK YOU!

BRUCE CROSS, PERKINS COIE LLP; WILLIAM GLABERSON, THE NEW YORK TIMES; NAOMI ISHISAKA; CHRIS MARSH, ATTORNEY; SEATTLE PUBLIC UTILITIES; SEATTLE NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP; CASEY TRUPIN, COLUMBIA LEGAL SERVICES

MEET OUR STAFF

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; **Operations Director** Ros Ghan; **Mockingbird Family Programs Director** Dr. Wanda Hackett; **Youth Programs Director** Tiffany Washington; **Development Director** Madelaine Thompson; **Executive Assistant** Lauren Frederick; **Development/Communications** Darcie Gray; **Youth LEAD Coordinator**; Kara Sanders; **Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator** Amy Converse; **Administrative Coordinator** Diana Clark; **Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant** Milissa Morgan; **MFM Administrative Assistant** Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson; **Development Assistant** Alicia LeVezu; **Resource Specialists** Eva Ervin, Heather Jones, Georgina Ramirez, Nicholas Ruff, Tammy Soderberg; **Senior Youth Representatives** Samuel Martin, Georgina Ramirez; **Youth Representatives** Julian Barrington, Leona Bill, Joyce Camacho-Cruz, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker; **Contributing Writers & Artists** Mykal Alonzo, Emma M. Cummings, Thomas Darden, Katiee Harmon, Shayna Harris, Alexa Hawkins, Henry Sheppard, Tammy Soderberg; **Volunteers** Chrissie Jackson; **Editing and Layout** Kelly Hawkins

Support The Mockingbird Society!

We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the *Mockingbird Times*. Please join us today!

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

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

Please do not include my name on published donor lists (check box).

My gift to help children, youth and families in the foster care system through collaboration, innovation and advocacy is (check box):

\$1,000 +Protector

\$500 - \$999Champion

\$250 - \$499Advocate

\$50 - \$249Supporter

\$25 - \$149Contributor

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Please mail this completed form and your check to The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Avenue S, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

ABOUT US: *The Mockingbird Society* is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative 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 your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation. *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 *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 50,000 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 ©2008, *The Mockingbird Society*.

Creative Corner

Life in the System

TAMMY SODERBERG

"You must have done something wrong to be in foster care!"

My crime: I was not strong enough to mend my broken family to keep us from being ripped apart. Just as shredded paper gets tossed to and fro So did my family.

Too young to fully understand why But old enough to feel the pain. Not articulate enough to let out the suffering.

Years went by without a sound,
All the while something foul was brewing inside.
Flares of rage induced by alcohol would blaze.
Not wanting sympathy but not knowing how to ask for comfort
Was my demise for years.
Anger, fear, alcohol, and codependency was my life.

WAIT.....
Who am I?
I am the statistic.
I AM MY FATHER.
"Give in" echoes inside me.

A still small voice: "I can do better, I AM BETTER"
Life went by and slowly I learned how to use my voice.
How to be honest with myself and others
No longer ashamed for being human,
For stumbling occasionally.
I AM NOT A FAILURE
BUT A SUCCESS!
A working woman who is learning as she goes.

Stabatha With Her Destiny

MYKAL "HAUNTED" ALONZO

I've been so in love,
That the sad goes away,
I've been so happy,
That time went around me,
I've been with her in our days,
That wasn't that long ago,
I've been in a car,
That was hers,
I've been behind a wheel,
That was mine,
I've been away from her,
That is why I write,
I've been lost without her,
That is why I write,
I've been lost without her,
That's why I look,
I've been trying to forget,
That's hard,
I've been going crazy,
That way is better,
I've been like a zombie,
That is numb,
I've been writing,
That's soothing,
I've been so close that keeps the flame burning,
I've been haunted,
That's it, I've been,
That!

Once in Love

KATIEE HARMON

I was once in love,
with such an amazing boy.
Our hands fit together like a glove,
but he played with my heart like a toy.
He's apparently moved on,
while I'm stuck in the past.
I'm always thinking of the memories,
wishing we could have made it last.
He made me so happy,
he was my reason to smile
I wish I could tell him the truth,
how I'm still in love with him.
I'll never forget the good times we had,
he'll always be the one I love.
So I was once in love,
with such an amazing boy.

Choice, Establishment

THOMAS DARDEN

In motion you find a constant;
Upon Establishment
The apparent can always
Be constant

If you can choose a
Content
Then success is a possibility;
In hard work if you
Hypothesize:
You can critically make the algebraic
expression
Of establishment

Cold as Ice

EMMA M. CUMMINGS

Cold as ice
Hands frozen
Frost breath
Skin pink with loss of color
Warmth of fires
Now only in my memories
Happiness a friend
Long forgotten
Sadness an enemy
In disguise
What once was
Now is gone
Winter is a time for new beginnings
But only for those who survive.

Accept

ALEXA HAWKINS

You are on my mind 24/7
Am I on yours?
I left you so long ago.
You told me that I would see you again.
But here I am writing this.
I miss you so much
But I guess you're done.
You promised to write to me even though you can't see me.
But I have yet to get a letter
You are the one who's been Holding me back from loving someone else
And now there is someone who won't give up on me and I won't give up on her so I guess I have to accept that you aren't a part of me anymore!

Always vote for principle, though you may vote alone, and you may cherish the sweetest reflection that your vote is never lost.

~John Quincy Adams

SEAFARERS INTERNATIONAL UNION (SIU) APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM BY HENRY SHEPPARD



As a former youth in the foster care system, I know firsthand that there are many challenges involved in transitioning from life in foster care to life on your own. I also know how quickly these challenges must be met so that you have a place to go and a means to support yourself once you are out of the foster care system. In my experience, as an apprentice of the Seafarers International Union (SIU), the apprenticeship program offered through the Paul Hall Center (PHC) can meet the immediate needs of

training, employment, and housing, as well as providing a great opportunity to save money for future goals.

In a short time, I have visited ports in Africa, Madagascar, Asia, Hawaii, and Europe. With that said, I feel it is also important to mention that a career at sea may not be right for everyone. Both the training at PHC and life onboard a ship requires a lot of commitment and a

strong personal work ethic. This is an industry

that will require you to spend months at a time away from home for training and while working in order to maintain benefits and seniority within the structure of the union.

If you feel that you have the motivation necessary to complete the apprenticeship program then you may find a career at sea to be greatly rewarding. The PHC offers a high school equivalency course for those who did not finish high school, as many foster youth unfortunately do not. Upon successful completion of a standard GED (General Educational Development) testing regimen, you will be granted a high school diploma



Henry Sheppard in the Seafarers International Union Apprenticeship Program through the Paul Hall Center.

from the State of Maryland. While enrolled in the Apprentice Program at PHC, you are earning college credits towards a degree in Nautical Science or Marine Engineering while you obtain the required skills to work aboard an SIU contracted vessel.

There is also great potential for saving money for a future goal, be it going to school, investing or buying a home. Even though salaries at the entry level are comparable to entry level jobs you might find at home, the potential for saving is great due to the fact that room and board are free both while training at PHC and working on a ship. As you continue upgrading to higher level jobs on the ship, your potential for both earning and saving money can grow exponentially in just a few years. The only limitation you have is your own desires. For more information visit www.seafarers.org/phc.

Congratulations Claire!

Congratulations to Claire Baron, our summer intern from **Teens in Public Service!** Claire was awarded the **Joe Brotherton Interdisciplinary Award in Law, Business, the Arts and Public Service.** This award is given to an intern who demonstrates a strong interest in community and a passion for learning. Thank you Claire for your great work with us. The Mockingbird Society wishes you the best in your future endeavors.

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit

ONE UNITED VOICE FOR CHANGE

October 25 & 26, 2008

Current and former foster youth ages 14 to 24 and their supporters will:

- Discuss the stigma related to growing up in foster care.
- Learn to use their voice effectively.
- Establish local youth and alumni action groups to address issues important to them.
- Identify pressing issues to discuss with state policy makers.

Apply on-line at
www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

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

