

THE MOCKINGBIRD TIMES

DECEMBER 2025



Cover art by Rocket García, a Mockingbird Advocate in our King County Chapter.

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Let's all be

11-Stars and

Vote Yes for

EFC!



ABOUT THE MOCKINGBIRD TIMES

The Mockingbird Times is a publication aiming to:

- amplify the voices of youth and young adults with lived experience in foster care and/or homelessness;
- change and expand the public perception of young people and the challenges they face;
- and educate communities about foster care, youth homelessness, and advocacy work.

The Mockingbird Times was the first project launched after The Mockingbird Society was founded in 2000 and has since played a key role in our Youth Programs. Not only does the publication provide an opportunity to elevate the voices of our young advocates and the issues they're facing, it also provides a picture of young leaders balancing their roles as powerful, positive change agents in our community with all the joys, challenges, and questions experienced by youth and young adults.

The Times has historically been distributed across the state and nation and has been included as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. All young reporters and contributors (ages 13-26) from across Washington state are compensated for their submissions to The Mockingbird Times.



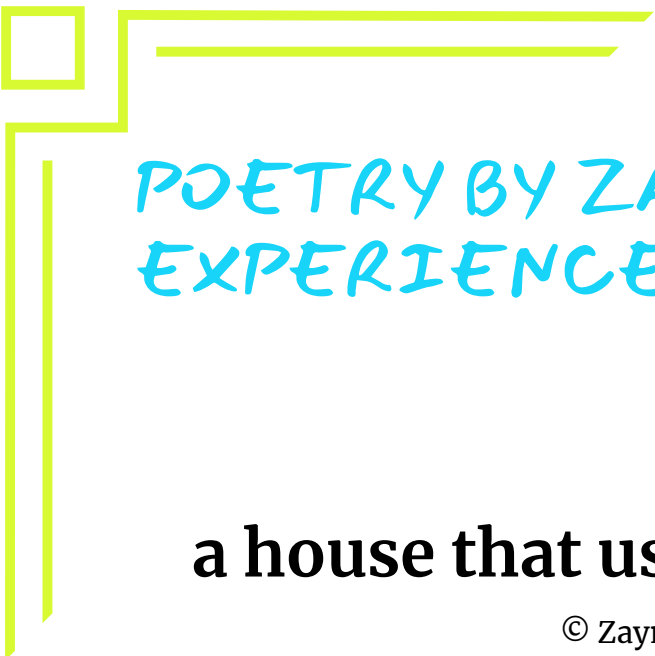
ABOUT THIS ISSUE'S COVER ART

BY ARTIST ROCKET GARCÍA, A KING COUNTY CHAPTER MEMBER



My piece was inspired by the life that I have built with my boyfriend, Jonas and our one-eyed cat, Remi. We have fought through so much hardship together: I had to go no-contact with most of my family, moved states, overcame homelessness and disabilities. Thanks to Jonas's Foster Youth to Independence Voucher and many other resources and community members, we have a safe place to live while finishing college, doing advocacy work, and focusing on our health. Getting a stable place to live is why we were able to start working with Mockingbird too, which has given me a sense of community and deeply meaningful opportunities. In this charcoal and water color drawing, I wanted to capture the energy of my little family and our cozy, safe, rambunctious, expressive home! Too many people, especially BIPOC and queer folks experience homelessness, abuse, and trauma of many forms—because of this, joyful resistance can be the most powerful and healing form of protest. We all deserve a safe, loving home where we can loudly be ourselves! (I am unfortunately a classic upstairs neighbor).



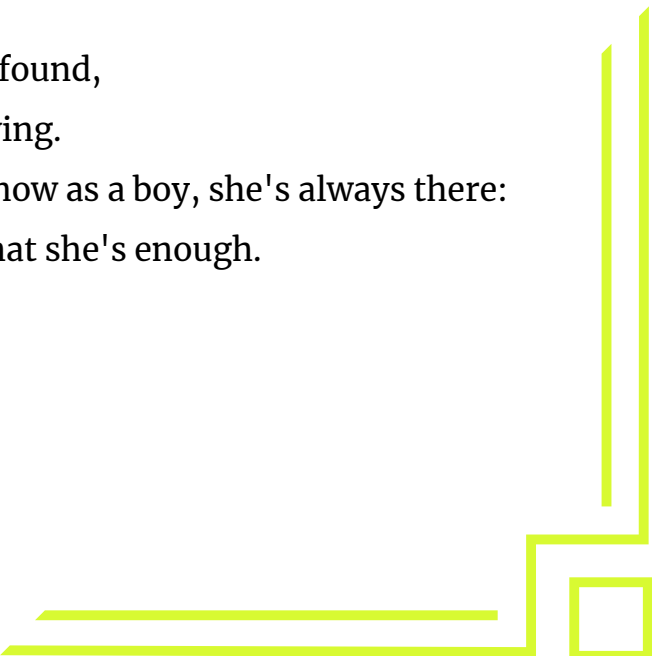


POETRY BY ZAYN, A LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT

a house that used to be home

© Zayn 2025

I thought leaving that house I used to call home
would mean leaving the past behind, but I still feel like her,
the little girl who stayed quiet when CPS came to her house
who would tiptoe around her house
fearing to alert the monster
who sat on the couch watching netflix
I still carry that little girl's fears,
her loneliness with no help to be found,
her need to prove she's worth loving.
and no matter how much I grow now as a boy, she's always there:
waiting for someone to tell her that she's enough.



Magnifying Glass

© Zayn 2025

My life being scrutinized under a microscope,
When they look at me, why do I lose all hope?
Talking like it's a cute, iconic life story,
But don't speak of how much of a burden it is to carry.
Simple words turned into blades of mockery,
Why does my one weakness get displayed in front of a jury?

Lies, deceit, and a smile is all she thinks she needs;
But how is she going to be after I make sure she doesn't succeed?
From my lips spill only the truth, from my eyes; the tears drip in fear,
You think I want to say it, tell them what plagues me all these years?
They jot down every thing I say on that yellow pad paper
as her threats fog my brain like a vapor.

I told someone, everyone, without permission;
The ultimate betrayal, my last act of treason.
I twisted a knife in my family, the blood running down my fingers,
We were never what she tried to display in all those pictures:
Miracle babies adopted and taken in by a savior.

I tend to explain everything traumatizing in metaphors;
I guess it comes from living a life behind a slammed door.
A game, the rules impossible to follow,
I scrambled for the solution, but the results proved hollow.
Pacing in my room, a crease in my brow, a sheen of sweat down my neck,
what if my next move was incorrect?
I later learned those same rules don't apply outside of those four walls.
But it felt like I wasn't just slammed into them, I constantly ran into them all.
How was I supposed to get a decent moral compass back?
But after two years, now I don't fear of being attacked.

ART BY ENDER, A KING COUNTY CHAPTER MEMBER



NO MUZZLE



NOTE FROM THE ARTIST:

“I drew this artwork as a commentary of how the governments have been consistently shutting down advocates and those who help advocates and have been making advocacy out to be a nuisance instead of actually listening to us and supporting progress, but also that we are still fighting for that progress and still are strong and will not give up.”

TO THE MOON



NOTE FROM THE ARTIST:

“I made this piece during a really difficult night, the night time has always been my time to relax and calm down from any days events since I was a kid, so nighttime means a lot to me and brings me a lot of happiness. When I was a kid I sometimes wished I could get lost up in the stars and the wonder they brought me. I wanted to capture the mystical nature and the calmness that the night brings to me in this piece and show how magical it can be to me!”

HOUSING IS MORE THAN A ROOF

BY WEISS, A LIVED EXPERIENCE EXPERT

A press release from HUD (Housing & Urban Development) recently announced a significant investment in public housing, promising a brighter future for millions of low-income families. While this move sounds monumental on the surface, I can't help but reflect on the realities of what housing—or the lack of it—means to people like me. It's not just about walls and a roof; it's about safety, dignity, and the possibility of stability in an unstable world.

I've lived through what they call "temporary solutions." Shelters. Subsidized spaces. Couch surfing with friends who were barely holding on themselves. HUD's announcement brings hope, but hope doesn't fill the silence of an empty apartment or repair the damage caused by years of uncertainty. A house can be built in months, but rebuilding trust in systems that let you fall through the cracks? That takes generations.

HUD talks about equity and access, but will their plans reach people like me? People whose lives don't fit into neat little boxes on funding applications. People who are "too young" for permanent housing programs but are somehow expected to navigate a world built for those with resources and safety nets.

I've watched friends cycle through housing programs, only to end up right back where they started—homeless, hopeless, and blamed for their circumstances. It's not just about offering a place to stay; it's about addressing the systemic issues that create homelessness in the first place: poverty, trauma, and the sheer impossibility of making ends meet in a world where everything costs more than we have.

HUD's press release mentions millions of dollars, but I wonder how much of that money will ever touch the lives of those who need it most. How many more will be left waiting for their turn to feel safe, stable, and seen?

Housing isn't just about survival—it's about living. Until we address the deeper roots of inequity, these announcements will remain just that: promises on paper, waiting to be fulfilled.

So, I ask HUD and all who read this: How will you ensure that we, the ones living this reality, are not just numbers in your reports but voices in your decisions?



“HOUSING ISN'T JUST ABOUT SURVIVAL—IT'S ABOUT LIVING. UNTIL WE ADDRESS THE DEEPER ROOTS OF INEQUITY, THESE ANNOUNCEMENTS WILL REMAIN JUST THAT: PROMISES ON PAPER, WAITING TO BE FULFILLED.”



**Link to HUD Report/
Press Release:**

<https://www.hudexchange.info/news/hud-releases-2024-ahar-report/>

MOCKINGBIRD ART & AUTHOR'S NOTE

BY CHARISSA KEEBAUGH, A TACOMA CHAPTER MEMBER



ARTIST NOTES:

"This piece is inspired by the collaborative work between Mockingbird and our legislative partners at the state capitol. I wanted to create a simple yet meaningful design that celebrates unity and shared commitment to building a better future for young people in foster care. The illustration reflects the unity that comes from working together across systems to make lasting change."

***DISCONNECTED*: A COLLECTION OF THOUGHTS THAT REFUSED TO STAY SILENT**

"*Disconnected* began as a collection of personal thoughts and reflections that refused to stay silent; feelings that were too heavy, too vivid, or too alive to keep to myself. Poetry has always been my way of making sense of how I felt and has been an escape for as long as I can remember.

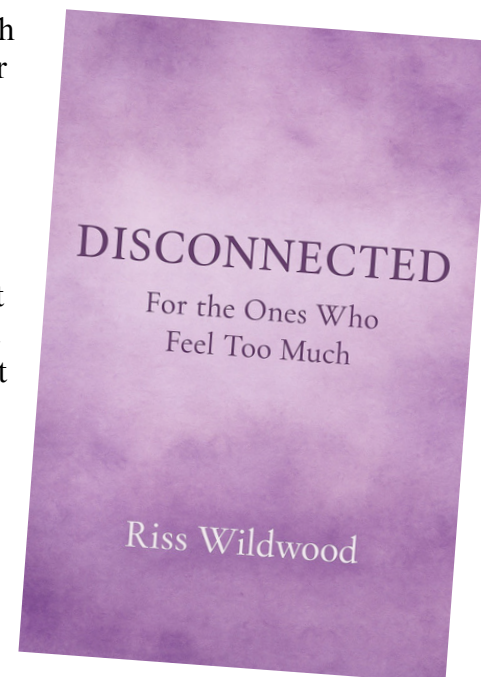
The idea for *Disconnected* truly came to life after spending a weekend with a poet I admired from Instagram. I had the opportunity to meet him after getting one of his poems tattooed on my arm; we spent the weekend talking about life, his writing, and the publishing process. Our conversations helped shape my journey toward becoming an author and publishing my first book.

Disconnected took me two years to write. Not because I wanted to perfect every line, but because I let it unfold naturally. I wrote whatever surfaced in the moment, from shower thoughts to the words that kept me awake at night.

When it came time to publish, I decided to write under a pen name: Riss Wildwood. Riss was a childhood nickname, and Wildwood meaning "uncultivated forest", felt like the perfect reflection of who I am and how I write. My work doesn't try to tame emotion or experience; it grows freely like the uncultivated forests that have always inspired me.

Disconnected is more than just a collection of poems; it's a reflection of moments in my life that I once didn't have the words to express. As an avid reader of poetry, I wanted to create something of my own that could connect with readers in the same way other poets have deeply moved me.

Keep an eye out for my next book, *Reconnected*, a continuation of this journey toward healing, growth, and finding beauty in reconnecting with yourself."





WALK

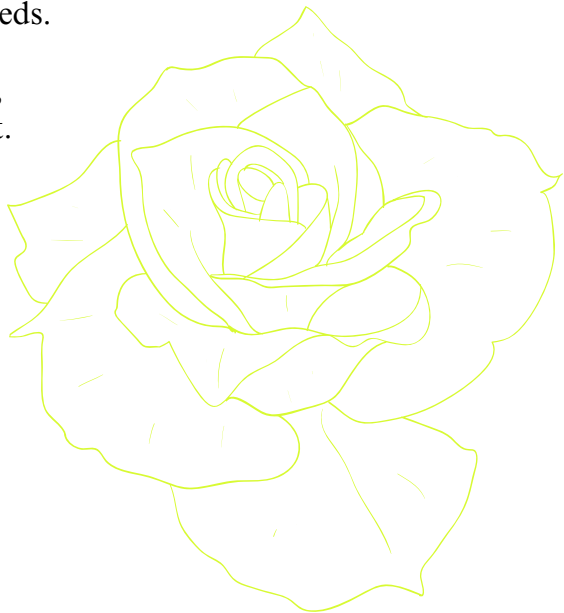
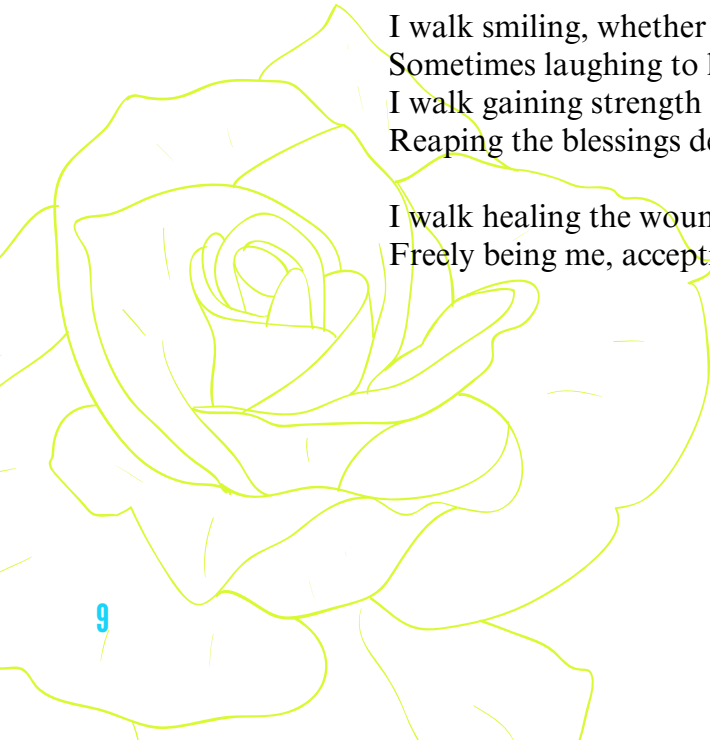
BY KONCRETE ROSE, A YAEH
(YOUTH ADVOCATES ENDING
HOMELESSNESS) CHAPTER
MEMBER

I walk with grace and unwavering faith,
My troubles, doubts, and fears cannot lead me astray.
With confidence, I embrace each day,
Unbothered by chaos and the obstacles in my way.
I walk knowing myself, cherishing every moment,
Loving my imperfections, unfazed by hate's torment.

I walk in my truth, wrapped in freedom and peace,
Growing and learning, living life with ease.
In love with my mind, body, spirit, and soul,
Embracing my purpose as I strive for my goals.

I walk smiling, whether feeling up or down,
Sometimes laughing to hold back tears when no one's around.
I walk gaining strength in my times of need,
Reaping the blessings destined in the fate of my seeds.

I walk healing the wounds of my past and present,
Freely being me, accepting my flaws, truly content.



RAISING AWARENESS AROUND ABUSE

BY MIRA, A CENTRAL CHAPTER MEMBER

The foster care system is something with a great potential force for good. The hope of providing children with safe and loving environments is what drives many of us in the non-profit space to keep doing what we are doing. Unfortunately, there are currently many pitfalls within the system that lead to this ideal oftentimes not being met. A few years ago, my partner, Fabio, and I created a hypothetical system in order to help ensure autonomy and safety for those in foster care; we called this idea the 3-step system.

In no particular order, this system included having steps in place to:

- 1. help foster children identify if they are being mistreated (since oftentimes abuse victims have a hard time identifying abuse later in their lives due to normalization)**
- 2. find quick help to transfer out of foster homes that are mistreating them without fear of repercussion**
- 3. To be involved in the choice of their next placement so that they aren't put somewhere that would be detrimental.**

With these systems in place, we believe that not only will foster kids feel more in power in their own situations, but they will be less likely to be the victim of abusive situations while they are in the care of the state and, hopefully, once they are out of care. This shift in foster care would also likely lead to less homelessness since less kids would run away and because they would be able to focus on higher education or careers in a more meaningful way.

Myself, my partner, as well as the rest of the central chapter and Mockingbird Society as a whole, have advocated for different facets of this system since the summer of 2023, and have had a few steps towards success thus far. Firstly, teaming up with OCLA (the Office of Civil Legal Aid), we were able to take the current legal material given to foster youth about their rights and transform it into something that anyone can understand. This is to ensure that when kids access this vital information, there is no learning barrier that may otherwise be present when reading legal material that can even be difficult for highly educated adults to understand.



To access the Know Your Rights Materials developed by Mira & the Central Chapter in partnership with OCLA, visit: <https://mockingbirdsociety.org/our-work/youth-programs-1/know-your-rights>



Currently, especially after Summit 2025, we have been in touch with many amazing community partners and we actually plan to expand the first check in our system. Instead of creating a curriculum for foster youths to understand what abuse may look like and what resources to reach out to, we are instead advocating to make abuse awareness a mandatory curriculum inside Washington state public schools. There are a few ways that we have explored in order to implement this, with us currently in contact with OSPI (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction) to see how we can change the curriculum from the inside. We also plan to create a coalition of community partners and lived experts to ensure that the curriculum that is implemented is trauma-informed, age appropriate, and, most of all, useful. This training will hopefully encompass all types of relevant abuse such as physical, emotional, sexual, financial, neglect, and domestic abuse.

One of the main things that has been amazing to see over the years is the sheer amount of support we are getting for this project. We have been receiving many messages from people that say how important this work is for them and how much it personally impacts them. I know that my experience and the experience of many of my chapter members growing up would have been greatly impacted by education like this. We would have been ensured that what was happening wasn't normal, wasn't our fault, and that there is help and support out there.

We still need a great amount of community support to make something like this happen. **Please contact yp@mockingbirdsociety.org to learn about how you or someone you know can advocate for a better future for our youth.**

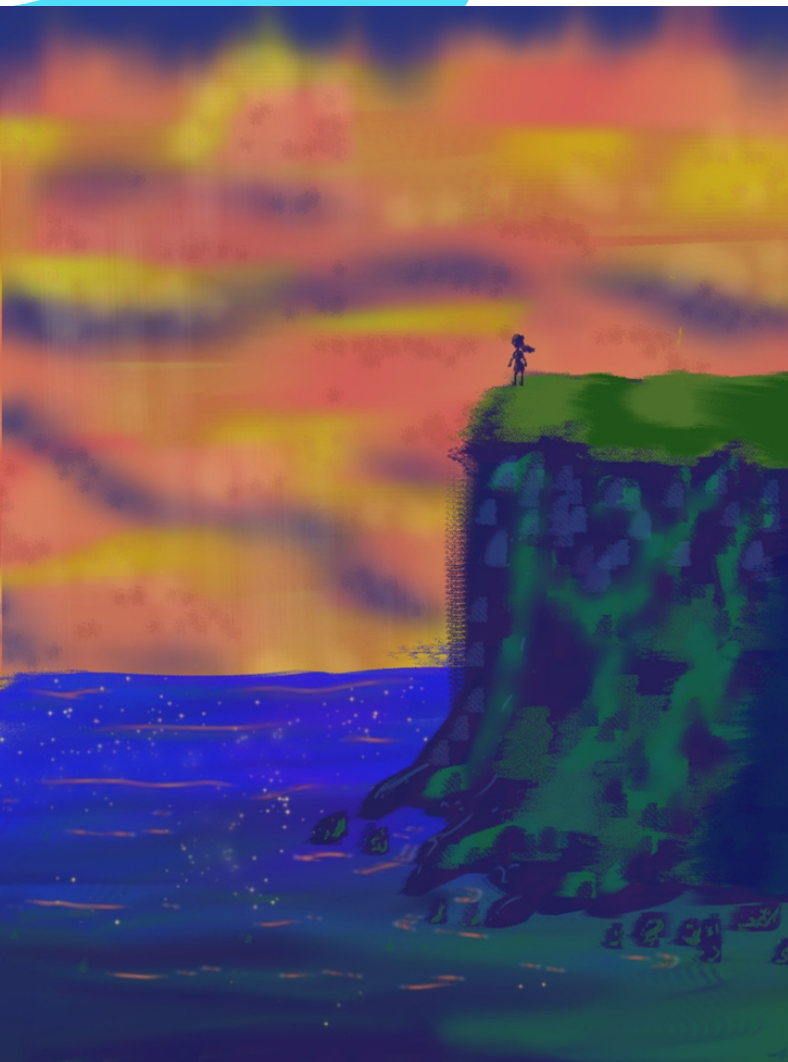
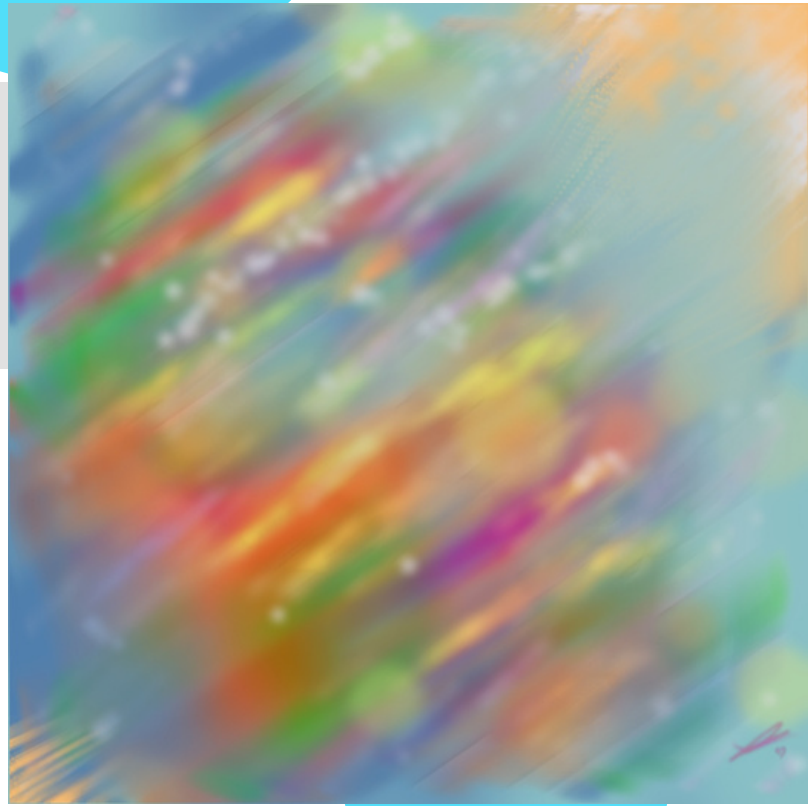


Members of Mockingbird's Central Chapter at the 2025 Youth Leadership Summit, where they presented their advocacy work on Raising Awareness Around Abuse.

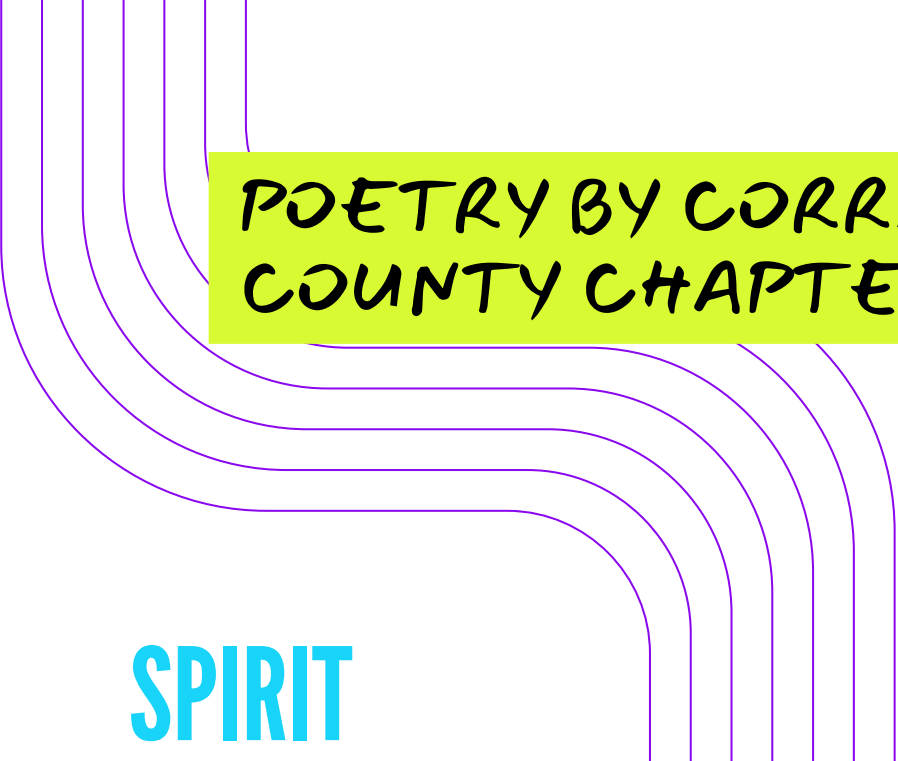


ART BY KRISTEN, A NORTHERN CHAPTER MEMBER

"An ocean wave portraying that in the hard times and darkness there is still beauty. The wave will come and go just like parts of life."



"Freedom on the other side. An art piece that shows after the storm and chaos of everything you CAN be free and live the life you want to live."



POETRY BY CORRINA, A KING COUNTY CHAPTER MEMBER

SPIRIT

In slumber deep, a girl does dream, Of worlds beyond her room's soft gleam.

She opens wide her bedroom door, To find a field, sunlit and pure.

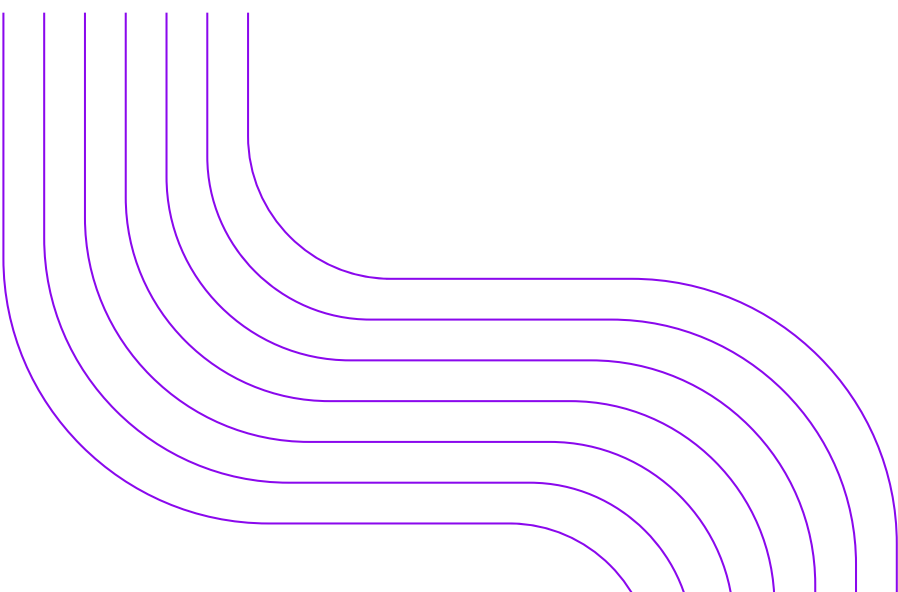
With curious heart, she ventures out, Surrounded by the forest's clout. Among the trees, a spirit bright, A wolf with fur of glowing light.

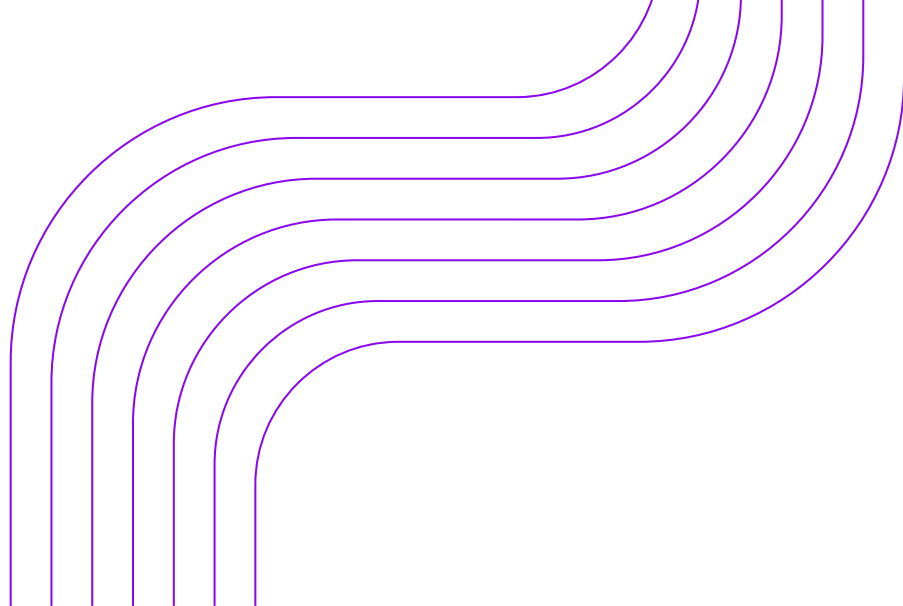
It speaks to her in tones so kind, "Though dark the world, be strong, be kind."

Together in the woods they stray, Where shadows lurk to block their way,

These monsters born of pain and fear, She faces with the wolf so near. With strength and heart, she stands her ground, And peace within her soul is found.

For in the dark, she learns to see, Her courage and her bravery. With Spirit by her side, she knows, Through harshest times, her light still glows.





WHEN ADULTHOOD SETS YOU FREE

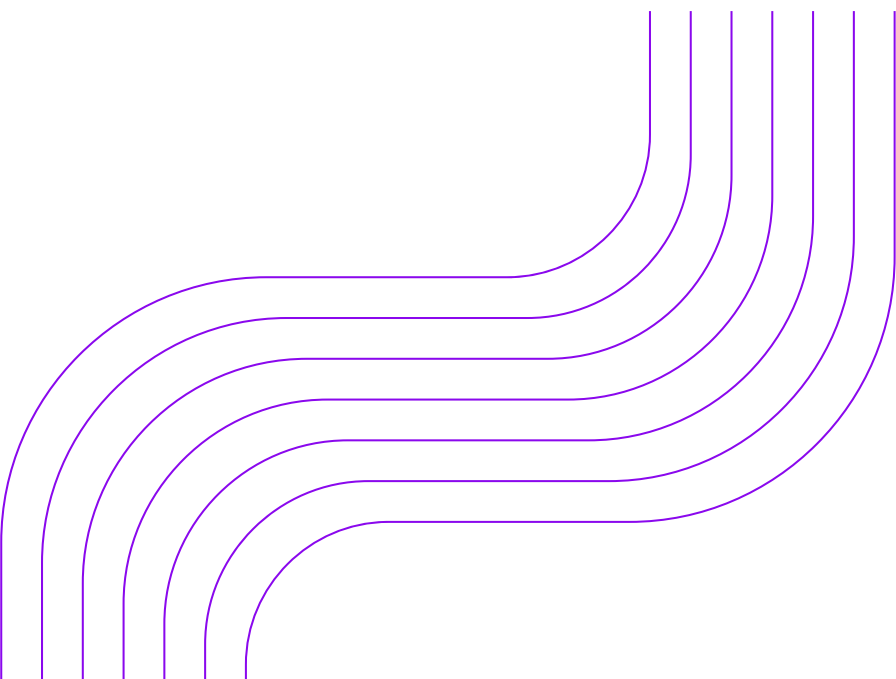
In a cage of iron, cold and tight, A circus tiger endures her plight. Poked and prodded, laughs surround, Her regal roar a muted sound.

But one dark night, beneath the stars, A woman came, with eyes like jars Of emerald light and hair of night, In a flowing dress of purest white.

She whispered soft, "What is your plea?"

The tiger wished, "I long to be free." With a gentle touch, the chains did break, Wings unfurled, her soul awake.

She soared above, the night her own, No longer bound, her spirit flown. In freedom's flight, she found her grace, A majestic beast in the sky's embrace.



FOSTER YOUTH STRUGGLE

BY JONAS, A KING
COUNTY CHAPTER
MEMBER



ARTIST NOTES:

“This poem/song is about my experience in foster care, childhood trauma, & experience of housing instability & constantly moving to different placements.”

I been through many different homes,
Slept in offices
Tighten my esophagus, this office is-
Full of bad vibes, I can feel my stomach sick
again.
Keep this blanket with me then,
Take it to the next place and,
Take a ride, take a plane, find out just where
will I stay,
Feelings that won't go away,
Traumatized with what I say.
I cannot believe this home has crashed and
burned again in time,
Still not old enough to leave the childhood I
lost behind.
Can't catch up with what I learn,
Throwing out the progress turned to ash
because I had to burn,
Tactics during horrors at its lowest point as
you can see,
Feel I can't react without the pain
responding for my being.
I been runnin' from the past,
All the notes that should describe me don't
define my future path,
You can sit and listen but when I speak on a
feel I see,
Images and programming that don't induce
some clarity.
We're screaming for your help!
Everything we said was metaphorical itself,
Social work interrogation was a test against
my head,
Mama told me never repeat any words here
that were said.
Red flags waving in the air that are ignored
until too late,
I pulled out a basket of my clothes for me to
take,
Time to go from all I've known and start
again a brand new slate,
Got no time to just debate,
Every shirt and every plate,
Cuz through every single house I've had a
shirt from long before,
Keep me humble to recall the place it
started cuz there's more,
To a story from a kid who's been through
hell so he will ROAR,
Voice a new perspective, find the reason to
the core.



THE POWER OF ADVOCACY, COMMUNITY, AND RESOURCES: WHY I VALUE MY WORK WITH THE MOCKINGBIRD SOCIETY

BY KONCRETE ROSE, A YAEH
(YOUTH ADVOCATES ENDING
HOMELESSNESS) CHAPTER MEMBER



When I look back on my journey, I see the places where life tried to silence me — the moments of homelessness, the scars of domestic violence, the weight of being young and unseen in systems not designed to protect me. I know what it feels like to be unheard, to be alone, and to wonder if things will ever change.

But I also know the power of advocacy, community, and resources. Those three forces not only transformed my life — they are the foundation of my purpose. Today, through my work with The Mockingbird Society, I get to stand on the other side of my struggles, using my story as a tool for change. This work matters because it builds a bridge between survival and thriving. It proves that with the right support, young people can move from pain to purpose and from brokenness to peace.

ADVOCACY: TURNING EXPERIENCE INTO ACTION

Advocacy is the heartbeat of my journey. For me, it means taking everything I have lived through — the pain, the trauma, the resilience — and turning it into action that helps others.

When I was younger, I often felt invisible in the systems meant to help me. Whether it was housing, schools, or social services, my voice wasn't prioritized. Decisions were made for me, not with me. That's a reality many young people in foster care, homelessness, or marginalized communities face every day: policies and practices that affect our lives, but don't reflect our lived experience.

Advocacy changes that. Advocacy is about standing up and saying: our voices matter. It's about pushing back against harmful narratives and making sure young people are not just at the table, but leading the conversation. Through advocacy, we can hold systems accountable, challenge injustices, and create pathways for real change.



With Mockingbird, advocacy is not abstract. It's concrete, rooted in lived experience. It's youth and young adults like me raising our voices in legislative spaces, policy discussions, and community meetings. It's using our stories to demand better housing options, more supportive services, and stronger protections for vulnerable youth.

Advocacy transforms pain into purpose. It takes the things I once thought were just scars and turns them into stepping stones for systemic change.

COMMUNITY: THE POWER OF BELONGING

If advocacy is the heartbeat, community is the soul. None of us can do this work alone. Healing doesn't happen in isolation, and transformation doesn't happen without connection.

For a long time, I felt like I was on my own. Homelessness can make you feel invisible, like you don't belong anywhere. Domestic violence can isolate you, making you think you have no one to turn to. But the community shatters that illusion. It reminds us that we are never truly alone, and that together, we are stronger.

Through The Mockingbird Society, I've experienced the beauty of community firsthand. I've connected with others who share similar experiences, who understand what it's like to fight through systems and survive trauma. Together, we lift each other up. We share our stories, our struggles, our victories. We remind each other that our lives have meaning and our voices have power.

Community creates belonging. It's the place where you can be fully yourself, where your identity is celebrated instead of questioned, and where your past doesn't define your worth. For me, as a Black, non-gender conforming artist and advocate, that sense of belonging is everything.

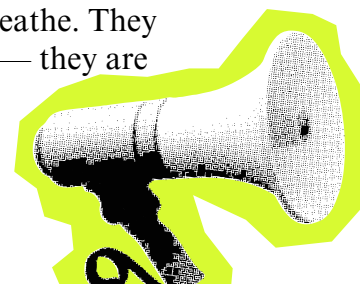
When young people feel community, they feel less afraid to dream. They see possibilities where before there was only survival. And in that shared space, we don't just heal ourselves — we build movements.

RESOURCES: TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION

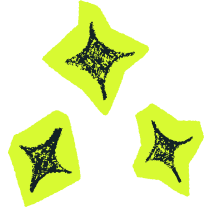
As powerful as advocacy and community are, they need resources to make real change possible. Resources are the bridge between struggle and stability. They are the practical tools that help us not only survive, but thrive.

When I finally connected to supportive housing, everything changed. Housing is more than a roof; it's the foundation for everything else. With stable housing, I could focus on my mental health, my recovery, and my goals. Without it, I was trapped in survival mode, unable to look beyond the next day.

Resources matter. They create access to education, healthcare, safe housing, mentorship, and opportunities to grow. They are financial supports that give people a chance to breathe. They are programs that provide food, therapy, or transportation. These aren't luxuries — they are essentials that give young people the chance to live with dignity.



Through The Mockingbird Society, I've seen how advocacy and community are paired with resources to create change. It's not just about talking — it's about making sure real support systems are in place. Because without resources, words can only go so far.



WHY THIS WORK MATTERS

The work I do with The Mockingbird Society matters because it represents all three pillars: advocacy, community, and resources. It's not just an organization — it's a movement that shows young people their voices matter, their communities are powerful, and their futures are worth investing in.

I value this work because I know firsthand what it means to go without. I know what it feels like to be voiceless, isolated, and resource-less. And I also know what it feels like when those things are restored. It's the difference between despair and hope, between silence and song, between surviving and thriving

TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE

Every time I step into a room to share my story, I remember that my voice carries more than my own experience. It carries the weight of others who are still fighting through the cracks. It carries the possibility of change for those who will come after me.

By advocating for change, I turn my pain into purpose. By connecting with others, I turn my loneliness into community. By using resources wisely, I turn my survival into stability.

That's what this work means to me — and that's why I value it so deeply.

LOOKING FORWARD

The work isn't done. Advocacy is ongoing. Community is constantly being built. Resources must always be expanded. But I believe in what we are creating together.

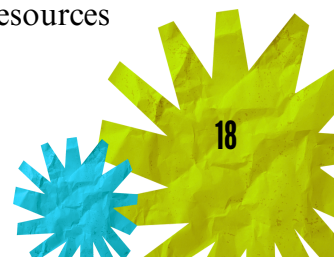
Through The Mockingbird Society, I see a vision where young people aren't just surviving systems — we're reshaping them. Where homelessness and trauma don't silence us — they fuel us. Where every young person has access to the safety, love, and opportunity they deserve.

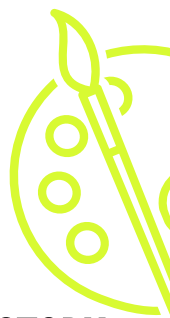
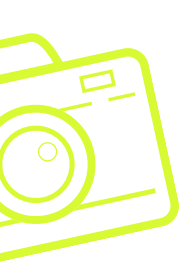
This is why I show up. This is why I speak out. This is why I keep pushing forward. Because advocacy, community, and resources are not just ideas — they are lifelines. And they are the reason I stand here today, not just as a survivor, but as a leader, an artist, and an advocate.

FINAL REFLECTION

I am Koncrete Rose. I grew from cracks no one thought could hold life. I've endured pain, I've carried broken pieces, and I've found peace within them.

The work I do with The Mockingbird Society is not just a job or an opportunity — it's my purpose. It's proof that advocacy changes systems, community heals wounds, and resources build futures.





THE MOCKINGBIRD TIMES

SHARE YOUR WRITING, POETRY & ART | SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE | SHARE YOUR STORY

If you're a lived experience expert and you paint, take photos, sketch, write, or create any other type of art, send in your work to be featured in The Mockingbird Times! Contact your Regional Engagement Coordinator or use the QR code below to contact us/submit your work.



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