

Mockingbird Times

  Follow us online

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

INSIDE
 **The Mockingbird Society**
 Building a world-class foster care system



 **System Reform**
 Diamonique Walker explains why foster youth should be their own educational advocates. **page 1**

 **Power of One**
 Amanda Bevington shares her story of dropping out and returning to high school. **page 1**

 **Pay it Forward**
 Tianna Oliver describes the powerful work of the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation. **page 1**

 **Special Contribution**
 Mi'queko Johnson details the experience of a facilitator for Culture of Foster Care training. **page 1**

 **Pay it Forward**
 Samantha McDonald and Deonate Cruz's report from the Leaders for Change Conference. **page 3**

 **System Reform**
 Amanda Bevington discusses a productive meeting with Rep. Ross Hunter. **page 3**

 **Art in Action**
Hoping for the Best by Kristina Thomason. **page 4**

 **Chapter Voice**
 Eden Francis Hottman-Nance reflects on strong momentum in the Everett Chapter. **page 4**

youth reporters

 **Diamonique Walker**
 Sr. Network Representative

 **David Buck**
 Sr. Network Representative

 **Amanda Bevington**
 Network Representative

 **Deonate Cruz**
 Network Representative

 **Samantha McDonald**
 Network Representative

 **Mandy Urwiler**
 Network Representative

 **System Reform**
 Diamonique Walker

Educational Advocacy Helps Youth

This year, Treehouse and the Mockingbird Youth Network collaborated to create the Educational Advocacy training targeting youth in high school or pursuing a General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.). In the training, facilitators lead youth through a series of exercises and activities that are designed to help youth think about their goals and aspirations as well as obstacles they might face during their educational endeavors. Youth are also given a variety of tools to use to help them advocate and navigate through those



obstacles. With this training youth are given a reference guide (A Youth Guide to School and Success) that offers specific information to help youth advocate for themselves from high school through college.

As the Mockingbird Youth Network digs even deeper and really hones in on system reform we find more ways to contribute and take part in making a change. Being a participant of the Educational Advocacy training may not seem like system reform, but it actually is. We are trying to fill in the gap so that youth won't have to rely solely on others to be successful on their educational paths. One of the training's objectives is to get youth involved with their future and become

less dependent on the system as a whole. As an advocacy organization, we can't stress enough how youth can be their own best advocates, given the right tools and coaching.

In the Educational Advocacy training there are some powerful and shocking statistics regarding youth in care and their educational success rates including: Only 44% of foster youth graduate, compared to the rate of 73% for the general population in Washington state.¹ A mere 10% of foster care alumni go to college or vocational school, and of them, only 3% actually complete those programs by age 25.² With outcomes like these, youth need to advocate for themselves to find the support systems, resources and stability to change these statistics.

Training, on page 4

 **Power of One**
 Amanda Bevington

Education is the Key

Sometimes I wonder if youth understand the importance of their secondary education. Finishing high school and attending college are fundamental steps towards living a successful and independent adult life. Whether it's a four year college, a community college, vocational or trade school, youth should pursue the highest level of training available in their professional field or area of interest. If you do not have an education then it is extremely hard to provide for yourself and family. The more education you have, the more money you will be able to earn.

I wish I had listened to people when I was younger about how much I need education to survive in this world, but regrettably, I didn't. I was hard headed and needed to learn from my own mistakes. I ended up dropping out of high school at the end of 10th grade and tried to pursue my G.E.D. Unfortunately, I didn't realize how hard the tests were and how long it would take me to even pass all five of them. At the time I was also working part-time at a fast food restaurant and homeless. This was not the life that I wanted to live, so by the 12th grade I dedicated myself to studying one-on-one with a teacher to earn enough credits to get my high school diploma. Earning my diploma under these circumstances made me feel incredibly proud and accomplished.

After high school I had no idea what I wanted to do. I was still homeless and I was dealing with a series of personal crises. I tried different community colleges and vocational schools, but never could quite find my passion. By the time I was 22 I

realized what I wanted to do and go to school for: a Master of Social Work degree. Specifically, I want to work with children and youth that have behavioral problems. Even though it took me a long time to figure out, I know now I want to become successful in life, earn enough money to support myself, and enjoy my career every day.

Education is hard but it does pay off. There are many programs that help youth succeed in school. S.E.A. (Seattle Education Access), Treehouse and College Success Foundation are just a few resources available. I would advise you not to wait until the last minute to continue your education. The longer you

Education, on page 4

Resources for Continuing Your Education

Treehouse for Kids
 2100 24th Ave S # 200, Seattle 98144
 (206) 767-7000

Volunteers of America — Spokane
 525 W. Second Ave., Spokane 99201
 (509) 624-2378

College Success Foundation
 1605 NW Sammamish Rd #200
 Issaquah 98027
 (425) 416-2000

Casey Family Programs — Yakima
 404 North Third Street, Yakima 98901
 (509) 457-8197

Independent & Transitional Living Services
www.independence.wa.gov/education

 **Pay it Forward**
 Tianna Oliver

Youth Against Violence, Literally

The Youth Philanthropy Board of the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation was formed about two years ago as part of the Youth Against Violence Initiative. It has been using the experiences of youth to help reduce violence involving youth in our communities, as well as to find alternatives for youth who are in violent situations. Board members are given valuable life skills in business and the non-profit world, tools to become philanthropic and community leaders and many other skills that can help them further in life.

The board of about 12 youth age 15-24 was originally thought of after the tragic death of a young teenage boy. He was killed near one of Tacoma's teen clubs, which was designed and funded to reduce youth violence by giving them a safe hang out spot they could go to on the weekends with their friends. The community was outraged by the proceedings and declared that Downtown Tacoma was not a safe place for young adults. World Vision, a program spearheading youth against violence alternatives came up with the idea of having a board of youth who could give their opinions, thoughts, and concerns about the issues surrounding youth and violence and their thoughts on how to fix these issues from their perspective. Thus the Youth Philanthropy Board was born.

Violence, on page 4



"Children and youth in foster care deserve better and it is our collective responsibility as a community to ensure they have the same opportunity to succeed as their peers outside of the system." *Letter from the Editor*



"Telling our stories and listening to each other speak impacted all of us. I felt stronger and wiser." *Miq'ueko Johnson story*

our team

Senior Management

Jim Theofelis, *Executive Director*
 Ros Ghan, *Deputy Director*
 Fredrick Kingston, *Youth Programs Director*
 Brian Lawrence, *Development Director*
 Beth Vance, *Finance Director*

Staff

Jon Brumbach, *Public Policy & Communications Coordinator*
 Bailey Buckingham, *Mockingbird Network Program Assistant*
 Diana Clark, *Human Resources Manager*
 Aine Cowan-Kuist, *Administrative Coordinator*
 David Forte, *Evaluations and Database Coordinator*
 Lauren Frederick, *Executive Assistant*
 Amber Carrigan, *Development Coordinator*
 Virginia Philbrook, *Receptionist*
 Georgina Ramirez, *Youth Development Specialist*

Resource Specialists:

Sarah Mahaffy, *Spokane*
 Tammy Soderberg, *Yakima*
 Kate Storms, *Everett*
 Selona Willett, *Tacoma & Olympia*

Senior Network Representatives:

David Buck
 Diamonique Walker
 Network Representatives:
 Amanda Bevington
 Samantha McDonald
 Mandy Urwiler
 Deonate Cruz

Contributing Writers & Artists:

Tianna Oliver, Miq'ueko Johnson, Kristina Thomason, Eden Francis Hottman-Nance
 Photography: Jerry Davis
 Design: Poetica Design & Highdive.com

Letter from the Editor



With the first day of school around the corner for thousands of children and youth, I cannot help but think about the many youth in care who will be entering

classrooms at high schools, colleges and vocational schools across the state thanks to their own strength and dedication. I am proud of the fact that Washington state now rewards their perseverance by guaranteeing that youth pursuing their education will be able to maintain safe housing until age 21 through the Extended Foster Care program. Safe housing too often means the difference between a successful transition and a struggle for survival for youth aging out, and The Mockingbird Society will continue to fight to ensure that ALL youth in care have access to safe housing until age 21.

While the Extended Foster Care program has

opened doors for many youth, there are still too many obstacles keeping youth in care from achieving academic success. Articles in this issue of the *Mockingbird Times* feature statistics showing an unacceptable high school graduation rate gap between youth in foster care and their peers, while college attendance rates are in the single digits for alumni of care. Children and youth in foster care deserve better and it is our collective responsibility as a community to ensure they have the same opportunity to succeed as their peers outside of the system. I look forward to working with our elected leaders in Olympia to ensure that educational achievement for foster youth does not fall through the cracks.

On Thursday, October 11th, we will hold our 6th Annual Benefit Luncheon at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel. I invite you to join us in celebrating our accomplishments,

our impact, and our powerful youth who inspire change for thousands of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. The Mockingbird Society is an independent voice for sound public policy and practices, meaning we do not accept state funding for our advocacy work. We depend on supporters like you to build a strong community of champions, working together to build a world-class foster care system. Please register for our Benefit Luncheon online at our website: www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

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

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

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



Special Contribution
Miq'ueko Johnson

Olympia Youth Facilitate Powerful Culture of Foster Care Training



Co-Facilitators and Olympia leaders Miq'ueko, Gerald, Talisa and Nicole.

When I arrived at the Red Lion in Olympia, WA on August 3rd for the Reasonable Efforts Symposium, I felt a little nervous. But I was determined to send a message about the Culture of Foster Care. Five weeks of preparation came down to this one day; people will hear our stories about our lives in and out of the foster care system. While I practiced with my co-facilitators, Gerald, Talisa and Nicole, I felt nervous about advocating in front of so many people. My fellow chapter members, however, kept me motivated and on track. When we stepped into the large conference hall in front of about 90 people, I knew it was game time. The audience was not smiling at first but we sure were. Most people had no idea that they were about to go through a mini version of the foster care experience.

I began our training with an ice breaker

activity, a modified version of "Pin the Tail on the Donkey." It was fun interacting with the audience and seeing them engage with each other. Through this activity I think they all learned what it feels like to grab for something only to have it not be there. We were demonstrating the importance of having a caring advocate that gives you good direction, information and guidance.

Telling our stories and listening to each other speak impacted all of us. I felt stronger and wiser. It felt good to have their attention and seeing them on the edge of their seats listening to us and participating. The feedback I received at the end of the training was my favorite part. Many told me they knew some of this, but they had not gotten to see it in depth before, not through our eyes. One CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) administrator told me she really liked what I had to say and asked me to

become a CASA for foster youth. I would like to speak to youth in foster care to help them realize the things I did not know or understand when I was in foster care.

Across the mountains in Yakima, another group of young people with The Mockingbird Society were also hard at work preparing for their Culture of Foster Care training at the Reasonable Efforts Symposium in the Tri-cities area on August 17th. Yazmin Guinn, Roxxy Holden and Daniel Martinez shared with us their experience of giving the training to about 75 people. They also received positive feedback on their stories and the facilitation of the training activities. Daniel shared as a facilitator, "The most impactful part for me was the Removal from Home activity. The looks that the participants got when they had to give up their stuff showed they understood what it's like to have no control over your own belongings." Yazmin reflected, "What motivates me is I hear all these stories about kids constantly getting bounced around in the foster care system and I feel like if people hear my story, it'll give them hope. I want to make a difference in the lives of youth like myself. What I'll take away from the experience of presenting the Culture of Foster Care training is that even a few youth like us can make a difference when given the chance."

On behalf of Gerald, Talia, Nicole, Yazmin, Roxxy, Daniel and I, thank you to the planners of the Reasonable Efforts Symposiums for giving us the chance to make that difference.

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.

The Mockingbird Society
 2100 24th Ave S, Ste 240
 Seattle, WA 98144
www.mockingbirdsociety.org
 206.323.5437 (KIDS)
information@mockingbirdsociety.org

No part of the *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without written permission. All contents copyright ©2009, The Mockingbird Society.

the name

The 1962 American classic **To Kill A Mockingbird** by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, teaches them 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." We work to bring the same commitment to our most vulnerable children, youth and families. Join us!



"Only 44% of foster youth graduate, compared to the rate of 73% for the general population in Washington state." *Diamonique story, front page*



"Even though it took me a long time to figure out, I know now I want to become successful in life, earn enough money to support myself, and enjoy my career every day." *Amanda story, front page*



Pay It Forward
Samantha McDonald & Deonate Cruz

Mockingbird Engages in National Reform



Four national teams presented on topics they felt strongly were in need of reform. The Mockingbird Society's Deonate Cruz is represented here with two youth from Oregon and one from Nebraska.



Samantha McDonald from The Mockingbird Society is joined by youth from H.E.R.O.S. of Massachusetts and Project Everlast from Nebraska.



Youth worked on a collaborative puzzle activity. The catch? No team had all the puzzle pieces that they needed. They practiced persuasive advocacy by going around the room and convincing other teams to exchange pieces.

Leaders for Change Conference Hosted by National Foster Youth Action Network

August 3rd – 7th, 2012

California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California



Participants navigated a challenge course during a team building exercise. This team was guided by Samantha McDonald in a wheelchair; each person had to depend on the person in front of them.

Participants:

- Nebraska Project Everlast
- Oregon Foster Youth Connection
- California Youth Connection
- Foster Youth Connection of Indiana
- H.E.R.O.S. of Massachusetts
- Washington Mockingbird Youth Network

Key Issues:

- Group Home Accountability
- Using Social Media to Raise Awareness
- Sibling Involvement in Dependency Hearings
- Support Systems for LGBTQ
- Foster Parent Accountability
- Mental Health Accountability



Participants from Nebraska, Washington, California, Oregon, Massachusetts and Indiana have lunch with representatives from California Youth Connection (CYC).



Mockingbird Network Representatives met with Philip Bailey of the Earth, Wind and Fire band. Along with participants from the National Foster Care Network, they discussed strategies to form powerful connections using social media.



System Reform
Amanda Bevington

Youth Meet with Representative Ross Hunter



From left: Amanda Bevington, Representative Ross Hunter, Diamonique Walker, Jim Theofelis and Jon Brumbach

On August 1st a team of Mockingbird staff went to Bellevue to meet with Representative Ross Hunter of the 48th Legislative District. I was joined by Senior Network Representative Diamonique Walker, Public Policy and Communications Coordinator Jon Brumbach, Executive Director Jim Theofelis, and Director of Public Policy for Partners for Our Children Laurie Lippold. At the meeting, we talked about the six different proposals

that the Mockingbird participants presented at the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit in June. We were able to listen to Representative Hunter's feedback and suggestions regarding each of these critical issues. Thank you Representative Hunter for your active support and passion for making the foster care and child welfare system a better and safer place for Washington's youth.

upcoming

SEATTLE/KING COUNTY COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS ANNUAL YOUTH SUMMIT

September 10th
Yesler Community Center,
917 E Yesler Way, Seattle

September 11th
Seattle City Hall, 600 4th Ave,
Seattle

For more information contact
Melissa King at melissak@
friendsofyouth.org



Hoping for the Best

Time to start over
 Time to rekindle the relationships
 you've been denied
 Wondering if they will like the
 person you have become
 The last thing you want is to be a
 waste of time
 Trying to remember the last memory
 you had before being taken
 This isn't going to be easy
 what if the past gets brought up
 the past i made myself forget
 the fear of the unknown
 the fear of rejection
 the fear of being unwanted
 maybe it'll be a good thing
 maybe they will like me
 maybe it'll be like nothing ever
 happened
 maybe....

thank you

Alene Alexander, Scott Lewis, Casey Family Programs, Catholic Family and Child Services, Greater Tacoma Area Foundations Youth Philanthropy Board, Youthnet, Allison Land, Sara Rylaarsdam, Paula Carvalho-Johnson, Mercato Ristorante, Reasonable Efforts Symposium in Olympia and Pasco, Snohomish County CASA/VGAL Program, Suzanne Akerman, Anonymous, Anonymous, Anonymous, Rose Berg-Fosnaugh, Jon and Bobbe Bridge, Carey & Lillevik, PLLC, Larry Crim and Judi Mitchell, Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, Roger Freeman, Jillian Gross, Jo Ann Herbert, Gabriel Johnson, Carol Lucas, Patricia Lynch & Frances Ford, James Maki, Microsoft Matching Gifts Program, Pacific Continental Bank, Amy Poley, Cecelia Porto, Janice Prager, Marsha Reagan, Seattle Children's, Dae Shogren, Nicole Steinbok, David Steinecker, United Way of King County, Dustin Welch, Paul Wirsing and Paola Maranan

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.

Training, from page 1

Through the Network we promote activities that encourage youth to be active and productive citizens that are not only advocating on behalf of themselves but their peers as well.

The next Educational Advocacy training will be held September 8th at the Spokane Volunteers of America. For more information email Sarah Mahaffy at sarah@mockingbirdsociety.org

¹Burley, M. (2010). High School Graduation and Dropout Trends for Washington State foster Youth (2005-2009). Olympia, WA: Washington State Institute for Public Policy
²Casey Family Programs foster care Alumni Study



Chapter Voice

Everett Chapter Committed to Local Advocacy by Eden Francis Hottman-Nance

Region 2 North (Everett) — H.E.Y.M.A.C. has renewed motivation and commitment after the Summit! At our chapter meeting in July we had a great Educational Advocacy training facilitated by our Resource Specialist, Kate Storms. During the training youth were asked to explain their educational goals and work through different scenarios in which they had to advocate for themselves academically.

Our August meeting started off with a game of Dixit, the game was used to demonstrate how a comment can be taken an infinite number of ways depending on the perception of the individual who hears it, which was a wonderful way to show how having so many perspectives in our chapter gives us the capacity for great understanding when we use our minds collectively. Later, we



evaluated our experiences at the Summit, identifying our strengths and challenges. We also made Venn diagrams listing things that we are good at doing, things that we enjoy doing and things that our community needs from us. In the intersecting middle of the diagram we illustrated how those skills crossed over. We realized that we have the ability and drive to valuably contribute to our foster care community. When the individual diagrams were finished, one was made showing our

collective skills and how they can benefit the foster youth, youth in kinship care and homeless youth in our community. We signed our names to this group diagram as a commitment to be passionate advocates.

Overall, we have had some great team building experiences in the last few months; we have also gained several new members! Looking back on all H.E.Y.M.A.C. has accomplished since the beginning of 2012, I think I can safely say that we are teeming with excitement for what opportunities for change and growth the upcoming months will bring.

Region 1 North (Spokane)
by Guillermo Mendoza



On August 14th our chapter met with three of our Representatives from the Washington State Legislature: Representatives Andy Bilig, John Ahern and Timm Ormsby. Senator Michael Baumgartner's Legislative Assistant also joined us. We had a barbeque at Manitio Park and had a good turnout of about 30 people! We also had a goodbye party for our amazing outgoing Resource Specialist, Sarah Mahaffy.

Region 2 South (Yakima)
by Brandy Baxley

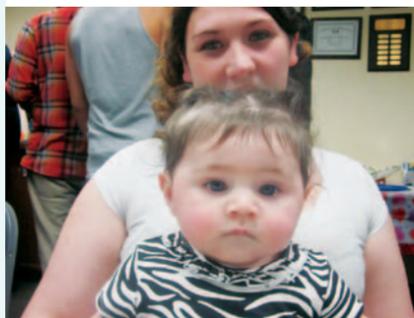


ACT FIRST had eight youth volunteers at the local Union Gospel Mission this month. We also had three members of our Leadership Team facilitate the Culture of Foster Care Training in Tri-Cities to approximately 70 service providers who attended the Reasonable Efforts Symposium. It has been a very successful and busy month for our chapter. Thank you to all of our great leaders!

Chapter Snapshots



Region 2 South (Olympia)
by Chris Bauer



The Olympia Chapter is always looking for new opportunities. This explains the excitement for the Transitions Training that was held in Olympia on August 23rd. Having the training locally allowed many young people to learn how to deal with changes and new situations. The training gives us more tools to tackle any challenge life throws at us.

Region 2 South (Seattle)



The Seattle Chapter is preparing representatives to participate in the Statewide Leadership Council meeting that will be held at Mockingbird headquarters on Saturday, September 15th. Participants are eagerly anticipating the hire of a new Resource Specialist this fall. The Chapter has shown great strength and flexibility in 2012 and looks forward to welcoming new participants and leaders in the months ahead. If you live in the King County area and are interested in participating in upcoming meetings and events, please email Mockingbird's Director of Youth Programs, Fred Kingston at fred@mockingbirdsociety.org.

Region 3 North (Tacoma)
by Tianna Oliver



At the August chapter meeting we discussed ways to move our Summit policy issue, protecting sibling visits, forward in the community. One solution we discussed is having youth talk to the new groups of foster parents during their training. We are also interested educating judges on this issue so that young people can be empowered in court to speak out about sibling visits.

Education, from page 1

wait, the harder it is to earn that degree. Remember that you should always start early and set goals to prepare yourself for college.

If I could do it over I would have stayed in high school and listened to my teachers and school counselors. Let's stop foster youth from becoming statistics and increase the college rates within the members of our community.

Violence, on page 4

On August 20th I had the opportunity to talk to three members of the board, Imari Romero, Vigo Beninger,

Kenya Adams, and the Community Initiative Coordinator, Holy Chea. They all equally expressed how important being a part of the board is to them. The feeling of empowerment they get every time they get to express their own thoughts on an issue, and how people are actually listening to them because their opinion matters. They talked about how all these people of different walks of life, different religions, and ethnicities come together for one cause and really showcase how our communities are as a whole is really impactful.

Most of all they expressed how they want even more youth to become involved in the board

and how it's an easy process for someone who cares and really wants to make a difference to apply to be on the board. You're not required to be an outstanding leader in your community or have great leadership skills. You just need to have the willingness to participate and the ability to commit and go to all of the meetings and trainings. Simply go to the website of www.gtcf.org and browse to the Youth Philanthropy Board tab and there you will find all of the information you will need to apply.