

# Mockingbird Times



FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

April 2009

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## A System Without Child Rights

BY CHRISTINA KOSHNEY



When I think of the child welfare and foster care systems, I think of an old broken record that's been skipping for far too long. Both from my personal experience of the foster care system and from hearing stories from current and previous foster youth, I hear the same stories only with different scenes and characters. The same issues that have been brought up and noticed in the past are the same issues that we are currently fighting for today.

A lot of these issues were brought to Youth Advocacy Day on February 13, 2009 that been issues since at least 1990 when the Juvenile court act—Dependency and Termination of Parent-Child Relationship went into effect (this is the main piece of legislation in Washington that discusses the rights of the parties in the dependency court system).<sup>1</sup> These long time issues include

a lack of a voice in the system which can be equated to lack of legal representation, and a lack of stable and safe housing. In the state of Washington the lack of clearly defining the rights of the child including a right to legal representation is a problem that has been ignored in the legislation. The Revised Code of Washington (RCW), Washington State's compilation of laws, chapter 13.34 is the Juvenile Court Act—Dependency and Termination of Parent-Child Relationship. This is a chapter with several sub sections that discuss

the rights that the parent has in a dependency hearing, how to use these rights, and who to contact to obtain information and ask questions.<sup>2</sup> It also informs the parent of their legal right to an attorney that will be appointed to them if they are unable to attain a lawyer by outside means. The only section where there is any mention of any actual rights that a child has is in the beginning of the chapter, section 13.34.020, where an overview is given which states:

*The legislature declares that the family unit is a fundamental resource of American life and should be nurtured... the family unit should remain intact unless a child's right to conditions of basic nurture, health, or safety is jeopardized... the rights and safety of the child should prevail... The right of a child to basic nurturing includes the right to a safe, stable, and permanent home and a speedy resolution of any proceeding under this chapter.*

Basically, a child has a general right to be nurtured, healthy and safe including stable housing and a "speedy" (which is undefined) completion of the court proceedings in dependency court. While necessary, this is the full extent of the rights of children in dependency court and are too general. For these rights to be useful and followed through with, it would be logical that a child would also have the right to lawyer. However, Washington State is, "the only state where a court can legally deny these children

CHILD RIGHTS CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



## Kinship Care Keeps Family Bonds

BY ASHLIE LANIER

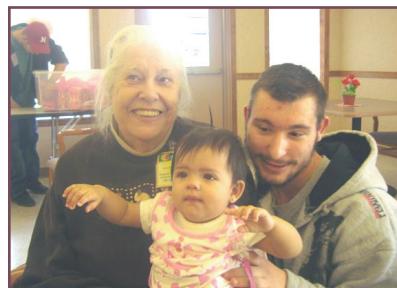


Family can be defined as any group of persons closely related by blood; such as parents, children, uncles, aunts, and cousins; as well as a group of people who are generally not blood relations but who share common attitudes, interests, or goals and, frequently, live together. This is the goal of kinship care: to keep families together.

Kinship care was designed to be an alternative to foster care. If caseworkers take the initiative to place children with their families, they can keep family bonds intact. The connection to family, relatives, and friends are important aspects in a growing child's life. With kinship care, a child would have the opportunity to live with people he or she already knows, trusts, and have established loyal relationships with.

The bonds that youth have with family and friends are vital aspects in the outcome of the youth's life. Sibling connection starts at a young age and children can remember people from very early in their lives. So, if you are taken out of your home around that age and separated from your siblings, people that you have already grown to love and trust, then it will have an affect on your life.

One kinship care alumnus youth that I spoke with was taken out of his home at the



age of eight years old, separated from his two sisters and five brothers, and placed in a foster home. He stayed in that foster home for approximately six months. He refers to those months as the most depressing time of his life. One day he received a random visit from his case worker who told him to gather all his stuff because he was going to his grandmother's house. When he got there, his siblings were there waiting for him. Five years later, he, along with his siblings, moved back in with his mother into their own apartment. Now 21 years old, he remembers this day as if it were yesterday. He states, "I could never imagine being without my brothers and sisters. That experience made us grow and become closer at that young of an age."

When growing up without a mother or father, you have a lot of unanswered questions. Who were my parents? Why didn't they want me? What type of people are they? These are questions that only your family can answer. I read a heart felt story of an alumnus of kinship care who had these same questions growing up. She expressed how her biological family was able to explain to her why she wasn't with her parents and answer all the questions she had. In foster care, you have those same questions but they usually remain unanswered. She also

KINSHIP CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## Permanency in Foster Care

BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER

Permanency in foster care is when a youth is put in a placement that he or she is expected to stay in for the remainder of his or her childhood years. Having a permanency plan, whether or not the youth will return home before the age of 18, is important to the goal of permanency. Having child welfare professionals give the support needed for this to occur, which doesn't always happen, is another step needed. For the permanency to be truly effective, it is also very important for the birth parent(s), relatives, or adoptive parent(s) or guardian(s) to participate in the process.

Not achieving permanency while in foster care is a risk for many youth. Being moved around to different placements can be traumatizing. Never having been in an absolute permanent placement by the time a youth ages out of care at age 18 also has negative effects. Each youth placed in care should have a permanency plan that his or her family helped develop which says where the youth should be permanently, whether it be back with their parents, a relative, an adoptive family, a guardian, or another permanent option.

The **Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)** helps with permanency in foster care. It creates a safe place for visits with birth parents, relatives, and adoptive parents to support transitions to a permanent placement. Places such as the Hub Home or the current placement of the child are typical places for these visits. The MFM also provides support from the Constellation community even after the youth goes home, whether reunification, adoption, or something else. During the steps of permanency planning, the parent or relative can get extra support and guidance from the Hub Home parent if needed. Even after the youth is permanently placed, he or she and the parent or guardian are welcome to participate in Constellation events and get community support if they need it for a period of time.

**Sue Lewis**, an MFM Hub Home parent, supported one child's permanency. In this particular situation, a four-month-old baby was placed in Sue's care after being in the hospital since birth at only 24 gestational weeks. The mother of this child was there every step of the way, knowing what was going on through the whole process with her child. Sue and the mother and even the mother's family spent time getting to know Sue and the child to prepare the baby to live with the mother once the circumstances were right. The mother visited her baby every day (except when she was ill for fear of getting the baby sick) which shows that she was really committed to the plan of her child coming home to her. With all her hard work for drug treatment and learning to parent her child, she got to bring the baby home a couple of months early. The child has now been living with the birth mother for eight months and is expected to be with her permanently.

Permanency is important because it provides a sense of stability in the youth's life. Without a permanent and stable family, youth may not have a constant support in their life. A permanent family can provide support and encouragement for a child to be successful; including finishing school, going to college, or getting a job; versus being in foster care and not ever knowing what stability really is.



## Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS

First and foremost I want to send a hearty "shout out" to the youth and alumni of foster care in Washington State who have worked so hard during this legislative session. It has been remarkable to watch young people from all corners of the state come to Olympia and advocate on critical proposed legislation. Examples of this critical legislation are HB 1961 Fostering Connections to Success and HB 1492 The Independent Youth Housing Program. Both of these provide critical housing for youth being discharged from Washington's foster care system. As many of you know, the statistics paint a very grim picture of what life is like for the 18 year-old that is discharged from foster care directly to the streets. The poor outcomes these youth face include homelessness, early parenting, increased chemical addiction and/or mental health problems and, of course, reliance on public assistance. Imagine being a child that was removed from your birth family and separated from your family, school, and community; endured being placed in multiple different foster homes and who knows what else during adolescence and yet still managed to earn a high school diploma or GED. As a reward for this incredible "against all odds" accomplishment, you find out that you have become immediately ineligible for foster care: you just lost your housing.

We now have great research to confirm what Grandma has known all along: those young people who receive safe housing and support are more likely to enter college, secure gainful employment, delay early parenting and rely less on public assistance. In fact, a recent cost-benefit analysis demonstrated that for every one

### Thank You!

Stephen Akerman, In Memory of Esther Akerman; Anonymous; Virginia Blayney; Patricia Bodzioch; Jennifer Brady; Patti Carroll on behalf of Island County Youth in Care; Karen Cowgill; Bruce Cross and Perkins Coie; Shaniqua Dickson; Cherokee Frazier; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Daliah Hampton; Jada Jones-Savage; Kelly Kemp; Corine Knudsen; Naja Morris; Karen Pillar; Sarah Rafton; Vanitha S. Raman; Katoyce Rolax; James Samuels, FedEx Kinko's; Loran Timmons; TOPS School; Laura Truitt, Lazerquick; Union Gospel Mission; James Ybarra

dollar invested in housing for youth exiting foster care, there is a \$2.40 return. During a hearing before the Senate Human Services and Corrections Committee, one young woman reported having had 52 different foster homes and identified the Independent Youth Housing Program as the most stable permanency she has ever experienced. Nearly all of the young people who testified as residents of these two housing programs reported having endured multiple placements while in foster care. They are currently engaged in employment and/or higher education and, if these programs close June 30<sup>th</sup>, they will be homeless for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. The legislature is in the final stage of this year's session which is scheduled to conclude on April 26<sup>th</sup>. They are now focusing on their main piece of work: the 2009-2011 state budget. I urge you to contact your legislators and encourage them to support HB 1961 Fostering Connections to Success and HB 1492 The Independent Youth Housing Program. If you need assistance to find your legislator, visit [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov) or call 1-800-562-6000. I will close this month's commentary the same way I began: thanking the youth, alumni, and allies who have worked so hard this legislative session as young leaders and advocates in the effort to build a world-class foster care system. Thank-you!

Jim Theofelis

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## 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.

## CHILD RIGHTS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

an advocate in court.<sup>3</sup> Again this doesn't make much sense when every other party has a lawyer.

**Karen Pillar**, a youth advocacy lawyer who has worked in the dependency courts in the state of Pennsylvania (where every child regardless of age has the right to and is appointed an attorney in the dependency courts), is currently a working attorney at **TeamChild**, a non-profit youth advocacy firm that specifically focuses on youth who are involved in juvenile court. Sometimes those juvenile clients are also dealing with ongoing issues in the dependency courts that are affecting their criminal juvenile cases. Karen explained the dependency courts as a lopsided three-legged stool where you have the parents, the state, and the child who represents the short leg. Everyone except the child in this system has mandated legal representation in the court process.

This lack of representation is why Washington State was given an F grade, 31 points out of 100, by **First Star** in their most recent report.<sup>4</sup> First Star is a national organization that seeks to protect children and their rights within the Child Welfare System. The grades given to all 50 states and Washington DC were based on the legal representation and implementation mandated by each state. Washington State specifically was given such a low grade due to a lack of mandatory client directed counsel for foster youth which means the child speaks directly to the lawyer who then directly brings the issues of the client to the courts.

In Washington State, a child does not have the right to a lawyer and, even when

they do obtain an attorney, that person is not required to be present at all court proceedings. Washington State further does not require any special training of dependency lawyers as they would of a criminal lawyer. Considering the lack of child-centered legislation on the dependency courts, it is not hard to see why this F grade was well deserved and is clear evidence of how the Juvenile Court Act is in need of further revision.

On Youth Advocacy Day, it was inspiring to see so many people active in the fight to promote change in the foster care system. However, until the fundamental rights of children are established and clearly stated in our Washington State constitution and laws, we cannot fundamentally consider this system one that is about the child's best interest. Legislation needs to clearly reflect the child's best interest by equally providing for and explaining the rights and how to use these rights in the dependency courts just as is done for the parents.

<sup>1, 2</sup> [apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=13.34.020](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=13.34.020)

<sup>3</sup> [seattlepi.nwsource.com/opinion/315379\\_focuscourt13.html](http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/opinion/315379_focuscourt13.html)

<sup>4</sup> [www.firststar.org/research/documents/FIRSTSTARReportCard07.pdf](http://www.firststar.org/research/documents/FIRSTSTARReportCard07.pdf)

## KINSHIP, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

explained that her experience in kinship care caused less confusion and pain.<sup>1</sup>

In many cases, youth are placed in foster care because relatives are not able to financially take care of them. Seeing as though we are in a recession, I think it is very important for relatives to know that there is help for them. I don't want money to be a reason for children to be separated from their parents and lost in the child welfare system. There are two types of government financial assistance while a child is placed in the home of a relative. The first one is **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** and there are also foster care payments if the relative becomes licensed as a foster parent. Other assistance and support for relatives include medical care for the youth, clothing vouchers, transportation costs, child specific care plans, respite care, and child care services. For more information about these resources visit [www.dshs.wa.gov](http://www.dshs.wa.gov).

<sup>1</sup> [transition.fosterclub.com](http://transition.fosterclub.com)

## 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!

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**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 over 25,000 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 ©2009, The Mockingbird Society.

## Disproportionality and Child Welfare BY JERRY BOBO



Child welfare is in bad standing for children of color in the foster care system. The **Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)** provides a great deal of services to those needing a stable living environment while in care. CWLA has a vision that every child will grow up safely with a loving family which will lead to the people of the nation stepping up and realizing this vision.

To understand the importance of the CWLA and its vision, we need to look at some telling statistics. It is reported that some 800,000 children will be in the foster care system at any one time. In 2005, out of the 3.3 million reports of abuse and neglect, almost 900,000 were substantiated. To make matters worse, approximately 40% of those children did not receive follow up services. There is also a large number of youth that are leaving foster care. More than 24,000 youth leave foster care because they age out of the system which often leads to homelessness. This is a problem for all youth in care, but a bigger problem for youth of color.<sup>1</sup>

Children of color (African American, Latino/Hispanic, and Native/Indigenous American) in the child welfare system often experience unequal treatment in services received.<sup>2</sup> Overrepresentation is linked to juvenile justice, social class, and many economic factors.<sup>3</sup> Many problems are interconnected to make up a bigger, continuous problem that isn't being solved. Ensuring the needs of every child are met is only fair and then all youth would be served



appropriately. It is the job of the community, the child welfare system, and government branches to protect and provide help regardless of color, cultural, or racial identity. It is important to reflect the strength of family for families of color both above and below the poverty level.

23 percent of African American children live below the poverty level compared to 6% of white children.<sup>4</sup> In addition, single parent families occur at a higher rate in African American families than white families which is an issue as well since single parent families only have one wage-earner.<sup>5</sup>

Families living in poverty often don't have access to services to support a family, prevent incidents, avoid neglect, and help with the stresses of parenting to make sure the children are not removed from their homes. This gives African American children a greater chance of being placed in out of home care and, with every decision point in the child welfare process, the disproportionality grows.

The welfare system is supposed to be able to help every child and family with services that prevent these types of problems. It will hopefully only get better from here, since progress has already been made and more is underway, but it will take the help of the community, alumni of care, and the support of other organizations to help bring these reoccurring problems to an end.

<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> [waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/110/cwlafr.pdf](http://waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/110/cwlafr.pdf)

<sup>4, 5</sup> [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/trends.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/trends.htm)

## Meet the Staff: Christina Koshney



My name is Christina Koshney. I am 19 years old and reside in Seattle. I am currently a senior at Seattle University, where I am majoring in psychology. After I graduate I plan on applying to law school so I can play a bigger role in advocacy, particularly youth advocacy. Whenever I have a little spare time I like to spend time with my family and friends, listen to music, spend time outside, and dance.

My experience of the foster care system includes a smaller portion of my life, starting at 17. Previous to becoming an official ward of the state, one of my sisters, now 18 years of age, and I had lived with different relatives off and on; kind of like kinship care, without the legal part to it. It wasn't until my other younger sister, who is now three years old, was born that my family and I became a part of the foster care system. My sister was 9 months old when her case began and it is still currently pending in the dependency courts. This process has been very frustrating, to say the least, for my family and me, and has allowed me to see very clearly how the child welfare system is not working.

The child welfare system is a system that is catered to adults and their schedules instead of the child and what is truly best for them. While it is mandatory that every parent whose rights are pending must have a lawyer, not every child has that same right to legal representation in the dependency courts. In the case of my three year-old sister, who is suppose to speak for her? Who is suppose to care enough to check on her and see what's in her best interest? For young children like

my sister, there is supposed to be a CASA who is a civilian volunteer and knows little of this complex system. This is all from my experience thus far but I have heard far too many similar stories that relay this same message: that kids in this system are pushed to the side while adult agendas are attended to.

This is similar to the Juvenile court system, another system that I have experienced, where kids are being represented by lawyers that barely know their names, let alone what their goals or interests are (pertaining to their particular case and future). These are two pivotal systems in our society that deal with our most vulnerable population, the youth. Youth rights not only need to be better established, but known as well.

If there is one thing I could suggest in bettering these systems, it would be for the adults and professionals in these systems to take the time and actually listen. It has been my experience that a lot of youth in these systems know exactly what they need to better their situation, but no one wants to listen or has the time to do so (which to me is equivalent to not wanting to listen).

My passion for change in the child welfare and juvenile court systems makes The Mockingbird Society (MBS) a good place for me to share my passion and help institute a positive change. MBS also allows me the opportunity to share the story of my younger sisters and me to connect to others and to be heard. More than anything, it is my two younger sisters who inspire me to make a difference, and, in making a difference for them, I also want the same change and opportunity for all youth.

## Fund-raising for Foster Care BY LEONA BILL



Every year there are different fund-raising activities for foster care held by numerous organizations. Not only do businesses and non-profit organizations do fund-raising but, two years ago, a high school's athletic department did a March "Mad Dash" to raise funds for the **Foster Care Support Foundation**. It is rare that children and youth from a school recognize foster care because normally youth in care are seen in a negative light. However, foster children are great people and want to accomplish great things just like other people do. **The Foster Care Network** is working on a project that will help better the lives of foster children and help out foster parents as well. They are trying to raise funds for a recreation center where children would be able to hang out, play games, and have access to computers as well as a concession stand.

It is amazing how there is fund-raising for foster care but yet there still is not enough money to provide for foster children's needs. People can send in ideas for fund-raising to help out youth in foster care at [transitionfosterclub.com](http://transitionfosterclub.com). Not much money is given to foster parents when taking care of foster children and when it comes to needing clothes and school supplies, the state only gives so much support.

Last year, five former Washington State governors raised money for foster children primarily through the **Governors' Cup Golf Tournament** which takes place every September in Seattle. On May 19,

they gathered to hear student success stories and award 35 young men and women four year Governors' Scholarships. This is one of the examples where not necessarily all the money needed was raised. One recipient of the scholarship attending Seattle University said, "It doesn't cover the full amount for the four years but that is what was intended... but it may be different with other colleges because different colleges have different fees for classes."

If enough money was raised through fund-raising, more programs could be created to help out children and youth in foster care. There is much that children in kinship or foster care would love to receive on Christmas morning. Programs such as **Treehouse's** and **97.3 KIRO FM's holiday giving** help bring smiles and children's wishes come true on Christmas morning. There are numerous places and organizations that fund-raise to help those affected by foster care. As an alumnus of care I would like to give a great big, "Thank You," for all the time and effort given by those who participate in fund-raising that helps out youth in the foster care system. Without this help, we as foster children wouldn't be able to have all the things that are needed in life, including the chance to attend college, which I know will be the next step in my life.

For more information about the Governor's scholarship, visit [www.collegesuccess-foundation.org/gs/index.htm](http://www.collegesuccess-foundation.org/gs/index.htm). For more information about Treehouse and their services, including their Christmas gift program, visit [www.treehouseforkids.org](http://www.treehouseforkids.org).

## Slings and Arrows BY IAN GRANT



**Slings and Arrows** is a series of articles examining the challenges faced by foster youth and alumni in school written by **Melody Newburn** whom I interviewed this month. Ms. Newburn is the Education Coordinator for the **YMCA Independent Living Program**. It's no secret that foster youth have a harder time in school than most other students. In fact, the problem is much greater than many would suspect: foster youth have, on average, a 38% chance of graduating from high school (compared to 75% for the general population).<sup>1</sup> Ms. Newburn believes that the biggest problem facing foster youth is the lack of placement stability: foster youth move around a lot. You lose 4 to 6 months of educational achievement every time you switch schools.<sup>2</sup> If you move more than once or twice in your high school career, it's very hard to recover.

Part of the problem, according to Ms. Newburn, is that the schools don't know what to do about foster youth, a relatively small group in a very large and complex educational system, and teachers aren't necessarily getting training on how best to help the population succeed. There have been improvements recently as educational advocates have been dispatched to school districts across the state to help educate teachers and school administrators. But, like any big system-wide change, it's going to take time. Right now, in general, foster youth are still more or less on their own as far as school is concerned.

It doesn't have to be this way. One of the most important things you, as a foster student, can do is learn how to talk to teachers to get the help you need. When

adults fail to advocate for you, often the best thing you can do is advocate for yourself. Talk to your teachers and your school counselor. Connect with **Treehouse**, **The Mockingbird Society**, or the **YMCA**. There are advocates out there, both in and out of school, and they can help you explore your options and achieve your goals.

Sometimes, you just don't know what you need help with. A lot of people don't get the help they need simply because they don't know which questions to ask. You have to determine what resources you need to be able to stay in school—things like childcare, transportation, and money. There are lots of options for your future, but there are people that are willing to

help you figure it out. If you wish to keep your personal circumstances private, sometimes you can get the help you need just by telling your teachers that you moved a couple times. You don't have to tell them why; it's your information, your life, and you're in control of it.

The most successful foster students are on top of their education, the students that keep track of the details of their life rather than hoping that somebody else will do it. They know what they need to do to graduate, make a list of what kind of help they need, and are strategic about making sure that they get what they need. It's entirely possible to beat these odds, but you have to work harder than other students. It's unfair, but it's true. School can be hard, but it is something that will get easier. Once you get a couple of people in your court, a lot more doors open. If you ask for help, keep track of your progress, and work hard at it, you can succeed.

<sup>1, 2</sup> [www.k12.wa.us/cisl/improvingoutcomes/index.htm](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/improvingoutcomes/index.htm)

**Escaping These Tears**

ASHLEY PORTER

These Tears I hold Upside eat me with also my pride, I want to let go this Pain that drips down my face. Why does love hurt so Much,k' is it true that it is just fake? My Heart cries out for you so do these tears. Take my fear away. I don't like to Fuss about Random things. But as for taken. I have been crying for years. I have no more left to give except my heart. My thoughts in my head make it all fall apart. Please understand these words I send to you. Help c me fall in love so deeply within you. I can't escape from what holds me down. Make these escaping tears never drown. All these fears I hold Up inside of me. Take them Please I am surrendering.

**FOSTER YOUTH AND ALUMNI LEADERSHIP SUMMIT: ONE VOICE UNITED FOR CHANGE***June 27th and 28th 2009 in Seattle*

Current and former foster youth ages 14 to 24 and their supporters will gather to discuss issues of concern to youth in care. For more information or to fill out an application visit at [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org).

**Creative Corner****Love**

STEPHANY COOPER

Love is a fantasy in a perfect world, only because it's not easy to find, something so close to our hearts, it has to cause emotional distress break downs, warm tears touch us with unwanted sorrows, I will never know how for some it's at first sight, It's unreal, Just doesn't seem right, maybe even in a way unnatural, I wish I could just find my perfect one.

**Please Listen**

KRISTEL CUMMINGS

When I ask you to listen and you start giving me advice, You have not done what I asked. When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, You are trampling on my feelings. When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as it may seem. Listen! All I ask is that you listen. Don't talk or do—just hear me.

**Community Events****Region 2**

April 18<sup>th</sup>: "Knowing Your Rights" Training, 2-4 PM, Yakima Casey Family Programs.

April 20<sup>th</sup>: "Youth Practicing Self-Advocacy with their Health Care Providers," 4-6pm, Yakima Casey Family Programs. More info for both: Tammy Soderberg (509) 457-8197.

**Region 3**

April 15<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>: Improvised Theater Classes, 4:30-5:30 PM, Burlington Public Library, free. More info: (425) 328-0790.

**Region 4**

April 18<sup>th</sup>: Independent Living Conference. More info: Henry Jenkins, 206-749-7581.

**Region 6**

April 18<sup>th</sup>: Earth Day Celebration, 9 AM - 1 PM. More info: StreamTeam@clarkpud.com.

April 26<sup>th</sup>: Pajama Bowl for Foster Kids fundraiser, 11 AM. More info: aaron@revolutionpr.com.

*"Courage is resistance to fear, master of fear—NOT absence of fear."*

~ Mark Twain

**Region 2: A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. CHAPTER IN YAKIMA COUNTY BY TAYLOR JUDD**

Region 2 finally came up with a name: A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. which stands for "Around Community Two Fostering Individual Rights Safely Together". In this month's meeting we discussed the different outreaches we wanted the Yakima City Council to be aware of. Some of our ideas were: **The Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit**, letting the community know that we are available to do volunteer work, and to break the stereotypes of foster youth. We also discussed community service projects we would like to do.

We decided to volunteer to serve lunch at the **Union Gospel Mission** in Yakima but we were turned down because they had booked too many volunteers. At first, we were discouraged but we talked about it and asked the supervisor if there was anything else we could do. After much thought, he told us we could return to clean up. This shows that with determination and a positive attitude you can accomplish your goals. We believe that two of the keys for success in advocacy are determination and a positive attitude. After lunch at Costco, we came back and cleaned up after the lunch crowd. We would like to thank the Union Gospel Mission of Yakima for allowing us to help serve the community. A special thanks to **Cherokee (Ally)** who supported us in our advocacy.

**Region 3: Hey Mac CHAPTER IN SKAGIT COUNTY BY JOSEPHINE TOOHEY**

Region 3 has a wonderful group of people who are great at getting involved in decisions and sharing their stories, which has made a tremendous difference within the atmosphere of our group. We are open and welcome new people with open arms. Our region's first involvement in the community was at a retirement home



in Mount Vernon where we played Pictionary. It was a small group but a lot of fun. We believe that they really appreciated the company and we left feeling good about ourselves because we left them with a smile. I sat by a 92 year-old woman who, every single time I drew something on the board, always got it right. It was as if she could read my mind. We also had our first video game party, which included Rockband and Guitar Hero! I strongly believe that Region 3 and all of The Mockingbird Society made a huge difference in persuading legislators to understand and vote for the issues that we as foster kids face on a daily basis. I am really excited to see what next month brings!

**News From****The Mockingbird Network****Your Needs, Your Voice****Region 4: For Change CHAPTER IN KING COUNTY BY YOLANDA KILGORE**

The chapter meeting started off with a great and interactive icebreaker which helped the previous and new participants in the chapter become more engaged with one another, by conversing to figure out which pop icon or political figure they were. During the chapter meeting we elected the chapter leaders for both the year-long and quarterly positions which were filled by **Jerry Bobo** and **Yolanda Kilgore**. As the year-long chapter leader I feel very excited to be able to lead the meeting and speak up for us. I believe being a chapter leader will help me grow as a leader and as a person in the community. Jerry, as the quarterly chapter leader, is very excited for the possibilities and change that Region Four is making and says he is thankful for the opportunity to work alongside such a great leader. While going through the meeting agenda, we debriefed about this year's Youth Advocacy Day and discussed the legislative agenda. We also discussed this year's upcoming Leadership Summit and watched the video from last year which helped our four new members see what goes on and how wonderful and valuable the experience can be. As the meeting progressed, we started creating a chapter outline for our chapter meetings. Monday April 13<sup>th</sup> will be our next chapter meeting at **Casey Family Programs**. We will be voting on the chapter ideas from the previous meeting. I hope to see you all there!

**Region 6: Speak Up CHAPTER IN CLARK COUNTY**

Members of SPEAK UP! attended a Town Hall meeting earlier this month and had an opportunity to speak with legislators from the 49<sup>th</sup> District. We presented each of them with a thank you card, pictures of our group, and The Mockingbird Society's (MBS) legislative agenda. We were very excited to see **Senator Craig Pridemore** wearing an MBS mockingbird pin at the meeting and that the legislators remembered us from Youth Advocacy Day. The youth received firsthand experience on how community meetings are run and the power of democracy.

We have been brainstorming recruitment ideas and have some great options for fun events to recruit foster youth wanting to improve and practice their advocating skills. Next month we are hosting a **Treehouse Educational Advocacy Workshop** on April 7<sup>th</sup> and hope to see foster youth, CASA workers, and care providers alike. To complete a month of advocacy, SPEAK UP! members will also be presenting **Your Rights Training** and **Life Advocacy 101**. Come hear how you can advance your skills on how to advocate for yourself! So tell your friends and RSVP to **Heather Jones** at [heather@mockingbirdsociety.com](mailto:heather@mockingbirdsociety.com).