

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION



February 2011

Volume XII, Issue II

In This Issue

Letter From the Editor

Jim Theofelis
Page 2

Juvenile Records Should Not be Sold By the State

Amanda Bevington
Page 2

Thanks to Our Sponsors

Page 2

Support Safe Housing – HB 1128/SB 5245

Terrell Rosetti
Page 3

A Critical Stage in Homeless Youth Development

David Buck
Page 3

The Power of the Arc

Deonate Cruz
Page 3

The Importance of Having a Mentor

Cameron Williams
Page 3

Creative Corner: My Life the Nightmare

Deamon
Page 4

The World is Coming Together

Jasmin
Page 4

Calendar of Events

Page 4

News From The Mockingbird Network

Page 4



It's going to be a rough year for people who depend on state government to help meet their basic needs. Many essential services, including the state Basic Health program, community mental health programs, and the State Food Assistance Program, are missing from the proposed budget and aren't likely to be restored. But these cuts are just the beginning. Even after taking the current cuts into account, the state still faces a budget shortfall of \$5.6 billion for the 2011-2013 biennium. And foster youth, youth aging out, and homeless youth may be most at risk as we head into this legislative session.

Children's Administration, the arm of DSHS that oversees foster care, is preparing to implement Phase I of HB 2106, the 2009 legislation which mandated that CA change the way it contracts with service providers. Specifically, HB 2106 mandates that CA build a mechanism for accountability into CA contracts with service providers: these take the form of financial incentives and penalties when certain targeted performance measures (for example, the number of youth placed with their siblings) are met.

However, just as CA is preparing to make this historic shift, the State is heading into a legislative session where legislators will be desperate to cut anything that they can lay their hands on. The consensus among those close to the budget process seems to be that new revenue (taxes and fees) are going to have a limited impact on the gargantuan deficit, and that the majority of the shortfall will be made up with

Mind the Gap BY IAN GRANT, OLYMPIA BUREAU

cuts. \$323 million was budgeted for Children's Administration as of August 2010, a 6.7 percent cut. The Governor has asked them to cut another 10 percent for the 2011-13 biennium. Of whatever's left, about half will be allocated to future performance based contracts.



Photo from 2010 Youth Advocacy Day

Meanwhile, a victory for youth and alumni in the federal arena, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, may help safeguard housing for youth that age out of care. Fostering Connections provides a federal match for states that spend money to create housing alternatives for foster youth ages 18-21. In other words, they provide a 50% federal match for every dollar the state spends

on housing for alumni. So, Rep. Mary Helen Roberts and Sen. Debbie Regala are sponsoring HB 1128/SB 5245 to allow the state to combine the Foster Care to 21 and IYHP program and allow our state to opt-in to the federal match. The upside is the program will be retained and serve twice as many youth up to the age of 19. The downside is that it is limited to age 19, even though we know outcomes are improved when the program is offered to youth up to the age of 21. But, at least this session, we might have to take what we can get. The alternative may be losing a program we know works, for taxpayers as well as for us.

As the contracting structure changes and the state faces this budget shortfall, older foster youth stand to lose a lot of what they've gained in the last few years. We need your help now more than ever to make sure that safe housing for foster youth is preserved, and that the state budget is not balanced on the backs of foster youth. CA has said that Phase I of the implementation of HB 2106 or Performance Based Contracting will not change "how young people aging out of care will be served by the child welfare system." We have to hold them, and the rest of the state government, accountable to that promise.

For a long time, foster youth in this state have been running the "Red Queen's race." We've had to run faster and faster just to stay in the same place; just to preserve the programs that we currently have. There is nothing to suggest that this year will be any different; in fact, we will have to fight harder than ever, and we will still almost certainly lose some of the things we've gained over the past few years. One thing is certain—we will continue to be relentless in our pursuit of a world-class foster system.

Advocacy Day will Focus on Safe Housing BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER



This year's budget is less than promising for the state of Washington's residents. There are tons of social services that support many people in this state that are on the "chopping block" for the upcoming legislative session. DSHS had to make 6.7% cuts across the board to balance out the budget. Children's Administration (CA) which supervises the child welfare system has had to make cuts to the critical programs serving the youth in the system. Without the support of these programs, youth will be at an even greater disadvantage in this already imperfect system.

Many people have been hurt by the budget climate, but some of the more vulnerable populations include elderly people, disabled people, and of course youth and families in the child welfare system. When it comes to decisions about what programs would lose funding, there are no easy decisions. Safety and health were some of DSHS's top priorities, but programs that keep children, youth and families safe are still in jeopardy.

With the budget in mind, The Mockingbird Network becomes much more important. This year we will be advocating for safe housing for youth aging out of foster care. The many stories of the youth that have benefited from these housing programs don't stress enough the devastation of what would happen if safe housing doesn't get passed this session. With HB 1128/SB 5245, youth will be able to stay in foster care until the age of 19, which isn't nearly enough support, but it's better than being put out on the streets on their 18th birthday.

Another piece of legislation that the Network will be advocating for is increased safety in foster care by allowing unannounced visits to foster homes. Unannounced visits (HB 1697/SB 5393) will make it so that foster parents cannot put on a show when they know that



Photo from 2010 Youth Advocacy Day

social workers or case managers are coming for a home visit. As a parent, I wouldn't leave my child at a daycare that wouldn't allow me to drop by at anytime, so to me, the same idea applies to this bill. This bill will make foster homes safer for youth by ensuring that they are in a safe and appropriate environment.

Retaining street youth programs for youth in care is another agenda item that the Network is prioritizing this legislative session. A lot of the homeless youth in this state are homeless because of running away from foster care. The main programs that support these youth are likely to be cut because of the financial deficit. With this bill we are not asking for additional funds, but simply to keep the money that is already in these programs. If the funds for these programs go away, some of the effects will be more youth that are homeless and engaging in criminal behavior.

Even though our economy is struggling, there are some things that are particularly critical to youth that we still need to get passed this legislative session. Without these crucial programs it will make it even harder for foster and homeless youth in this state to develop into healthy adults, stay off the streets, and be in safe homes. We go into the legislative session knowing the circumstances, but still hoping for the best outcomes. Having as many youth and community partners, at our Youth Advocacy Day, as possible will be a key in making the changes we want to see happen. The more people we have, the greater our chances of being heard will be.

Come join us for our Youth Advocacy Day on Friday, February 18th, 2010 to support youth of the system and make sure our voices are heard. It will be from 9:30am to 3:00pm near the Tivoli Fountain on the north lawn. For information on legislative trainings near you check the community events section. Or for information about the event, please contact Kara Sanders at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org

Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS



Dear Friends,

Washington State joins most other states across the country in trying to balance a budget that is short on revenue—short to the tune of \$5.6 billion dollars. The proposed cuts to balance the budget will place vulnerable children, youth and families at risk. The Mockingbird Society is greatly concerned about the governor's proposed budget and the numerous programs that are reduced or eliminated in the child welfare system. For the past ten years, we have advocated for safe housing for youth under 18, and over 18 for youth aging-out. We have made progress, but now we are perilously close to going backward.

The Chapin Hall Mid-West Study and Washington State Institute for Public Policy study on programs for youth aging out demonstrate statistically -- what you already know in your heart -- youth who have safe housing have much better outcomes than those who end up homeless and street-involved. The Mockingbird Society needs your help!

Please support HB 1128/SB 5245 which extends foster care to 19, allows us to opt-in to the Federal Fostering Connections Act and provide a safe home to youth to age 19. **Please support retaining funding of The HOPE Act.** Created in 1999 by the Washington State Legislature, it protects youth and provides Responsible Living Skills (RLSP) beds that reduce the number of teenagers on the streets. **Please support Street Youth**

Programs. Many of the youth are dependents of the state and end up homeless when they run away from a foster care placement. These programs are currently cut in the proposed budget. **Please Support HB 1697/SB 5393** to help youth feel safer while in care. This best practice should be offered in our state and would allow that at least 10% of children in care receive at least one unannounced monthly visit per year by a DSHS social worker.

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS and ask that they support Safe Housing to 19, Unannounced Visits and oppose cuts to the HOPE ACT/RLSP and Street Youth Programs included in the proposed budget.

Take 5-15 minutes to do your part to ensure we do not balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable teenagers!

DON'T KNOW HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS?

Visit www.leg.wa.gov and click "Find your legislator" on the left hand side. If you don't know who your legislators are, enter your address in the search.

Help us to build a world-class foster care system.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Save The Date!

Youth Advocacy Day

Friday, February 18th, 2011

9:30 am – 3:00 pm

Tivoli Fountain – North Lawn
Olympia, WA

For more information and to RSVP, contact

Kara Sanders, (206) 407-2134
or Kara@mockingbirdsociety.org

The Mockingbird Network

Thank You!

Representative Mike Sells, Representative John McCoy, and Youthnet staff, PCA, Catholic Family and Child Services, YMCA, Sadikifu Akina-James, Apex Foundation, Paul Baron and Paula Wilson, Hillary Behrman and Steve Johnson, Ann Bieri, M. Bender, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Matching Gift Program, Janice and James Borrow, Maurice Classen, Susan Connolly, Karen Cowgill, Bruce Cross, Susan Craighead, Benjamin Danielson, Terry Dijoseph, Susan Elizabeth, Sandi Everlove, Steve and Patty Fleischmann, Linda Foley, Ann Giesel and Malcolm Jollie, Laura Gettleman, Constance Gold, Deanna Grace, Makeba Greene, Jillian Gross, Jo Ann Herbert, Sheri Hill and Tim Quagliaroli, John Holt and Susan Trainor Holt, Sarah Hufbauer, Barbara James, William Jarcho and Susan Traff, Michael Jolson, Biji Keigley, Lyman Legters III, Steffanie Lorig, Carol Lucas, Melanie Lyons, Ron and Lauren Maier, Wendy Marlowe, Donna Mathus, Sarah Morley, Harvey and Hisako Nakaya, Chuck Nordhoff, Katy Obermeier, Mark Perry, Jennifer Redinger, Lance and Cindy Richmond, Representative Mary Helen Roberts, Tracy Robinson, Schultz Family Foundation, The Seattle Foundation, Kenneth Shang, Erin Shea McCann, Diane Ste Marie, Diane Steen, Eric Trupin, Elizabeth Upton and Rayburn Lewis, Judith Wirth, Wyman Youth Trust, and Ann Yzuel.

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.

Juvenile Records Should Not be Sold By the State

BY AMANDA BEVINGTON



If you are reading this and have a juvenile record, then this article is very important for your future. Most youth think that once you are released from the juvenile system, or even if you were arrested and did not go to jail, then those charges are automatically taken off of your criminal history. Well, not exactly. It is more difficult than that. I would advise anyone that has been charged as a juvenile to take charge of your life. You need to realize that your juvenile record could affect your adulthood.

Mike Felton, a law student from the University of Washington, is advocating for legislation that will help youth or adults that have had juvenile offenses overcome their past and move forward with their lives. According to the Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic, Washington is one of only nine states to allow unrestricted access to juvenile records. Companies, such as credit screening agencies, take advantage of this access to resell the information to for-profit clients. This means that data companies are taking a youth's information, profiled in a juvenile record, and reselling it to other agencies. This makes it extremely hard for youth to be able to get access to housing, employment, loans, school, and other opportunities without being turned down due to their past mistakes. Having a juvenile record should not hurt you for the rest of your life. It's time for youth to take advantage of their future and be able to move on from this experience.

The Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic said that the Washington Court system currently allows public access to juvenile record in several ways.

- Public website, offering limited information about individual records
- In-person visits to the courthouse, offering full information about individual records
- Purchase Access
- Subscription service to JIS-Link, offering full information about individual records, or
- Bulk purchase, offering full information about bundles of records

Currently anyone in Washington state is able to get access to your juvenile record and to share that information. The UW law students want to hold companies accountable and make it illegal to distribute private juvenile records to for-profit companies. They know it may take time to change the law, but are hopeful that there are enough caring adults who believe that youth should have a right to a second chance.

If SB 5558 is passed, it will prohibit the sale and distribution of juvenile records to private database companies, limit public access to juvenile records so that youth can have the second chance the law grants them, and create an enforcement mechanism to penalize companies and individuals that disseminate private information about rehabilitated youth.

In my opinion, every youth that has had problems with law is not a bad person, so why should we let companies judge us or deny us access to housing and jobs? Clearly young adults need to provide for themselves, but how can you begin to accomplish that goal if you are haunted by a juvenile record? These kinds of obstacles make young adults want to give up. And, if they continue to do what they know best - on the streets, that leads to being in and out of jail, and not much of a future.

It can take months to have your record sealed. And, even after you have gone through the process, it may take even longer before it is visibly take off of your record. So I advise anyone that has had their juvenile record officially sealed, to keep proof of it, so you can provide evidence if any question comes up.

For more information about SB 5558: Contact

Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic |
University of Washington School of Law
uwlegislativeclinic@gmail.com | 206.685.8450

Submitting Letters

All incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to the *Mockingbird Times* and will be opened by editorial staff. All incoming correspondence to youth under 18 years of age will be opened first by *Mockingbird Times* Editorial Staff.

MEET OUR STAFF

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; **Deputy Director** Ros Ghan; **Mockingbird Family Programs Director** Dr. Wanda Hackett; **Youth Programs Director** Tiffany Washington; **Public Policy Director** Rose Berg; **Development Coordinator** Kylie Palzer; **Development Director** Brian Lawrence; **Finance Director** Beth Vance; **Executive Assistant** Lauren Frederick; **Mockingbird Network Coordinator** Kara Sanders; **Administrative Coordinator** Aine Cowan-Kuist; **Evaluations and Database Coordinator** David Forte; **Administrative Assistant (AA)** Liliana Davies; **Mockingbird Network Program Assistant** Milissa Morgan; **Resource Specialists** Jerry Bobo, Sarah Mahaffy, Graham Parrington, Georgina Ramirez, Tammy Soderberg, Samantha Valle; **Senior Network Representatives** Ian Grant, Terrell Rosetti, Diamonique Walker; **Network Representatives** Amanda Bevington, David Buck, Deonate Cruz, Cameron Williams; **Contributing Writers & Artists** Brandy Baxley, Deamon, Jasmin, Christina Koshney, Garrett Nadeau, Tianna Oliver, Kristina Thomason, Rosie Warren; **Design & Layout** Highdive.com

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**.

Support Safe Housing – HB 1128/SB 5245 BY TERRELL ROSETTI



According to The Chaplin Hall Midwest Study on the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, participants in transitional housing programs have more positive outcomes including: graduating from high school or receiving a GED and attending college. Also they are less likely to become homeless, engage in criminal behavior, or become parents at an early age.

This year, Washington State has a great opportunity to combine the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth Housing Programs, and ensure that we provide safe housing for youth up to the age of 19. The bill known as HB 1128/SB 5245 will serve twice as many youth as are currently served under the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth Housing Program. How? This legislation will allow the state to fund the program with existing resources - no new money - and gain up to a 50% federal match to meet this basic human need - one that many youth rely on. I was able to interview people that have benefited from youth housing options. The people I interviewed came from many different backgrounds. Some of them are currently in the Foster Care to 21 Program and others are in transitional housing programs. All of them have spent a good amount of time in either foster or kinship care.

I asked, "How does this bill directly affect you, Why is safe housing and bills that support safe housing important to you?" The responses were emotional and important. These programs save lives. One youth said, "It gives me a place to stay and keeps me

off the streets and allows me to pursue my goals and dreams." Another youth told me that, "...if you're in a foster home and you turn 18 you are no longer considered a ward of the state, and the kids in his house that are under the age of 18 have priority to beds." Youth who don't get access to these critical programs can end up on the streets.

We need your support to ensure we keep safe housing options for youth both under and over 18. Whether you are a caring adult or youth or alumni of foster care, join on February 18th for Youth Advocacy Day, at the Captiol Campus in Olympia. We will stand up and speak out for proposed legislation that will directly affect youth that are in care, and those who have aged out of care. If you can't make it, you can do something as little as emailing or calling the legislators and letting them know how much we need this bill. The bill that I wrote about is HB 1128/SB 5245, and that is a bill that will need to pass so that youth don't end up on the streets or incarcerated and become another victim of society, so they too can strive without having to worry about a roof over their head when they get out of foster care. . With this bill Washington citizens will continue to save money and improve outcomes by offering youth up to the age of 19 the opportunity to remain in foster care. This program is expected to serve twice as many youth as are currently served under the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth Housing Program. How? This legislation will allow the state to fund the program with existing resources-no new money-and gain up to a 50% federal match to meet this basic human need that many youth rely on.

The Power of the Arc BY DEONATE CRUZ



The Arc of King County is an affiliated chapter of The Arc of Washington and The Arc of the United States. The focus of The Arc is helping the families of individuals who have been diagnosed with having one or more developmental disabilities. Developmental disabilities are conditions that occur prior to the age of 18 and are projected to last through an individual's lifetime. The Arc provides support to the individuals, and the family of the individuals, through the form of direct hands-on services, and provides information and resources beneficial to the youth who has the developmental disability. But, to really understand the "power of the arc" you need to understand the heart of the people who work there. These interviews will help you understand why their work is so important, not only here at home, but as far away as South America.

The first employee that I got the chance to meet was **Khadijah Toms**. Through my interview with Khadijah, I was able to learn a little bit about her and why she became interested in helping people with developmental disabilities. I learned that Khadijah is a mother of multiple children, and one of her children has been diagnosed with having a developmental disability. Naturally as a mother her love compels her to seek out services and resources to help ensure that her child grows up the best way possible. The sad truth though, is that there are very few services geared towards helping children and individuals of color who have been diagnosed with having a developmental disability. So through that "love" she became employed at The Arc. She did so to learn more about these disabilities, and to make a difference, not only for individuals of color who have developmental disabilities, but for all individuals who are in that predicament. Khadijah used to volunteer at a high school working in a self-contained classroom with kids who have been diagnosed with having different disabilities. Her passion for helping individuals with disabilities goes back quite a ways.



Verónica Guzmán, a native of Colombia, has a heart and passion for helping individuals that have developmental disabilities just as big as Khadijah's. As far as working in this field, it's all pretty new to Verónica. Previously she was a student. Her studies included political science and public policy. Though this field was new to Verónica, she had a previous history of working with communities and individuals who were vulnerable and at a disadvantage in life. Much like Khadijah, Verónica's driving passion stems partially from having family members with developmental disabilities. Verónica has 3 cousins who reside in Colombia who are at a disadvantage in life due to their developmental disabilities and lack of support for people with this challenge. Shockingly, one of her cousins just recently turned 35, and has never had the opportunity to work due to her developmental disabilities. Verónica also hit me with the heartbreaking fact that there are few government/public programs in Colombia to help developmentally disabled individuals. After shattering my heart with such sad information, she melted it away by letting me know the very foundation of her dream. She personally chose to enter this field in the hope of gaining the knowledge to be able to help individuals with developmental disabilities, and then later take it back to Colombia to better the lives of her people. With such sweet and heart melting intentions, one can't help but hope for her success.

Imagine a world where people had little or no disadvantages, and everyone was able to work together to achieve 100% efficiency in their daily lives. A world like that seems so out of reach, but even though it does, the good people of the world like Khadijah and Verónica continue to strive towards what can only be seen as a dream right now. So let us continue to offer our support to The Arc and the rest of the good people in the world who strive to make a positive change.

A CRITICAL STAGE IN HOMELESS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT BY DAVID BUCK



As Congress and state legislatures begin their 2011 work, organizations that serve homeless youth across the nation are working hard to ensure that financial support remains for the Run-away and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA) and Education for Homeless Children and Youth Appropriations Act (EHCY). As services in all fields such as foster care, homeless youth support, and education aid are hit hard by hard times, the appropriations act plays a big role in whether or not jobs, and support, will be lost.

As of right now, these two acts, and the programs they create, are the only federal programs targeted exclusively to homeless children and youth. The Appropriations bill, at the nuts and bolts of it, authorizes the government to spend money in specific areas. The Congress decides how much money goes into these programs that serve the homeless youth population. It is impossible to tell right now what will happen, but we can tell from looking at Washington State's economic challenge that things may not end so well.



photo from www.theartofhelpingothers.com/galleries/

In Washington State it is homeless youth who are sitting on the chopping block along with many vulnerable populations. As of right now it appears that Hope Beds will be reduced, and street youth programs such as Rosie's Place, Orion Center and Crosswalk could be eliminated altogether. But as I try to find hard statistics and information on this, I find that this is something that is not being talked about widely. From a personal perspective, as one who is dedicated to fighting for homeless youth issues, it's easy for me to believe that very few people actually care about what holds homeless youth services at the teetering edge of a knife. It also is hard for me to believe that the state can do this since many of the youth who end up in shelters are dependent on the state and have run away from a placement. If things go south for the street youth programs, which is very possible, we will see a rise in homelessness, criminal activity, and worse.

The Importance of Having a Mentor BY CAMERON WILLIAMS

Many youth in and out of foster care struggle with a range of social and academic problems. These problems often occur when a youth lacks a positive role model or has poor communication with their parent or guardian. Well I'm here to tell youth that having a mentor can really work to improve things and work out the struggle.

What is a mentor? To me a mentor is a wise and trusted counselor or teacher who gives younger youth advice on problems in their life. I spoke with **Walter Washington**. He is a mentor at Mentoring Children of Promise and he tutors youth at Treehouse. I also spoke with **Corey Young**, who is a Resource Specialist from YMCA OF Greater Seattle. They both have seen how lives can be changed through the power of a mentor relationship. They both said that mentoring has the potential to improve a youth's self esteem, and give them guidance and personal perspective. They stressed that their job is to give advice, not to discipline the youth.

I also interviewed a youth (who will remain anonymous) and asked him about the importance of mentors. I asked him whether it was better with or without one. He said, "Growing up is a lot harder without a mentor." He went on to say, "Without one (a mentor), I would make stupid mistakes and lacked awareness, and once I got one, I would focus more in school and it was easier to get through school."

In my web research I found the following sites: www.bebigforkids.org/new_page; and

One bright spot is in the US Senate. In December, the Senate budget proposed \$140 million for EHCY and a \$10 Million increase for RHYA. This, in the grand scheme of federal funding, may not sound like a lot, but in fact it will help serve over 800,000 street outreach contacted youth. The first time the bill made its way through the Senate there weren't enough votes for the bill to pass. At that point the Senate and the House passed a temporary stop-gap funding measure, which is essentially where they keep funding programs, and the government, at current levels until March 4th, 2011 giving more time for the Senate to come to an agreement.

Proposals for the Appropriations Act have been changing all the time and a consensus isn't expected for another few weeks. At the writing of this article, the current proposal in the House would return most non-defense discretionary programs such as this, to the same level of funding that the fiscal year of 2008. That represents a 20% cut for programs all around. While that may be a lot for the general budget, for programs like RHYA it would only be a \$3-million cut since RHYA hadn't had much increase in the last two years.

Overall, things won't be figured out for the budget, both on a federal and state level for a little while. Although there is good news on the federal level, the state level holds a lot of lives in the balance here. With a \$5.6 billion dollar deficit someone is going to get hurt and it will probably be foster youth, homeless youth, and the poor. As of right now, it seems that those who will be hurt are those that need the State's help the most.

¹http://www.ctreachinghome.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=615&Itemid=145

²<http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/2421>

³<http://www.naehcy.org/fundingupdate.html>

⁴<http://schoolboardnews.nsba.org/2010/12/education-headlines-congress-approves-stop-gap-funding-measure/>

⁵http://www.naehcy.org/dl/crit_mom.pdf

www.100blackmen.org/home.aspx. Both of these sites talked about empowerment, saying: "A mentor can give you encouragement. A mentor can help you reduce mistakes. A mentor can help you eliminate your weaknesses. And, a mentor can bring out the best in you."

Personally, finding a mentor made all the difference. There have been plenty of times in my life that I made mistakes, and I didn't always have a strong connection with my foster parent or guardian. Sometimes, I would feel like there was nobody I could talk to about my struggles or problems. Many youth feel alone and become depressed because they are not feeling loved or appreciated. They tend to just quit on life or don't communicate with their parent or guardian because they feel as if there's no understanding. But when I finally tried a mentoring program, I realized that mentors aren't there to give you disciplinary actions or negative responses to your problems. It is just the opposite. They don't act like a parent or a coach. They don't try to be an authority figure, and preach about values, but they DO focus on establishing a bond, a feeling of attachment, a sense of equality, and a mutual enjoyment of shared time.

The main reason for my article is to show youth that there are many important reasons on having a mentor in your life and only you can make a difference in your own life, by reaching out to people that want to help you. It's your life; a mentor is just a guide to success!

Creative Corner

My Life the Nightmare By Deamon

It started three o' clock
March 28th I had a good life
Everybody was happy-go

Lucky

But June first
Three o' clock
Rolled around and

My nightmare began

I began to go insane
I thought I was
Going to murder

Somebody

I had to get away
I didn't know how
I just knew I had

too

The World is Coming Together By Jasmin

You're walking down the road
Looking for somewhere to go
Waiting for someone to walk by
And notice you wanting freedom and peace
While wild fires burn and oil in the gulf is
hurting the animals
Homes are gone
Its dark out, not a light in sight.
But wait the world is coming together.

Community Events

Region 1 (Spokane)

January 1st-May 13th: *BeGin!* - Museum of Arts and Culture.
Free Food, drinks and exhibits and music.

January 14th-March 12th: *Jundt/Gonzaga Art Museum show* - Mon-Sat 10am-4pm.

Region 2 (Yakima)

Every Saturday: *Dance Night* - 6-9pm. Southeast Community Center
February 12th: *Legislative Training* - 2-4pm. Casey Family Programs.

Region 3 (Everett)

February 10th: *Youth Advocacy Day Legislative 101 Training* - Youthnet,
3331 Broadway, Everett WA 98201

More info contact: Georgina Ramirez Georgina@mockingbirdsociety.org.

February 24th: *Teen writing workshop* - 5:30-7:30pm. Mount Vernon City Library.

Region 4 (Seattle)

February 9th-10th: *Black History Month Arts and Crafts Fair* - 9am-3pm.

Ground-floor hallway of the main building of Seattle Central Community College campus.

February 14th: *Comedy Of Love - Valentines Show* - 7pm. Market Theater.

Region 5 (Tacoma)

February 9th: *Chapter Meeting* - 3:30-5pm. PCA. Legislative 101 Training.

February 15th: *Hands-on Art Activity* - 12pm. Museum of Glass.

Region 6 (Olympia)

February 1st: *Legislative Advocacy Training* - 5-7:30pm. Community Youth Services.

February 18th: *Youth Advocacy Day* - 9:30am to 3pm.

Washington State Capitol Campus.

"Without safe housing I would be one of the many foster youth who ended up homeless after graduating because they had nowhere to turn."

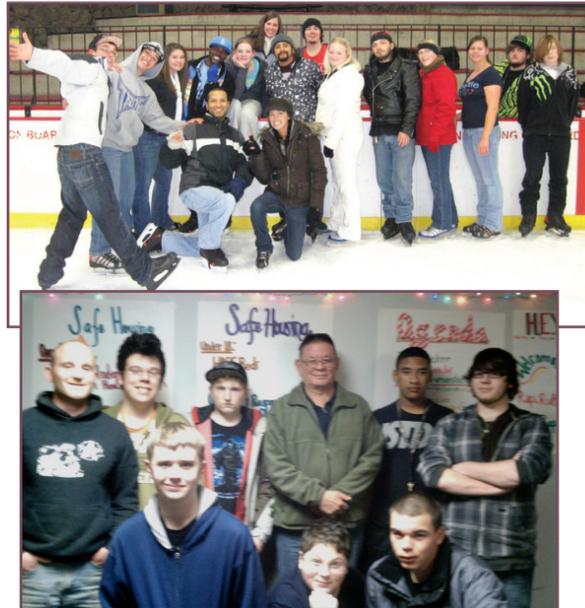
~John Metzger (Region 6, Olympia)

Region 1 (Spokane) UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone) by Kristina Thomason

In December, the Region 1 chapter went down to Riverfront Park and went ice skating! I know for me it was great getting to know everyone more and meet new people! We had 23 people total for our Mockingbird ice skating day! Sarah, Noah, and I are getting ready to go to our January State Leadership Council (formerly SAC) meeting and our next chapter meeting on January 24th. We are getting really excited for Advocacy Day in February; we have been observing kids that show leadership and a strong passion for Mockingbird to come along to help advocate! I've never been to Advocacy Day, so Sarah and Noah filled me in on how cool it is and how we can make change, and I can't wait!!!

Region 2 (Yakima) A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. (Around Community Two Fostering Individual Rights Safely Together) by Brandy Baxley

Happy New Year to all regions! ACTFIRST hopes that your holiday season was awesome and that you're ready to take on 2011! Saturday January 22th Brenda and I will be flying to Seattle to attend the State Leadership Council. We will be getting the Advocacy Day Agenda and learning how to do the Legislative Training for Region 2. Saturday the 29th we are having a chapter meeting and we will discuss what we want to do for Advocacy Day and what was said during the SLC. We will also be getting our 2011 calendar updated.



Region 3 (Everett) H.E.Y.M.A.C. (Hearing Every Youth Make a Change) by Garrett Nadeau

For the month of December region 3 HEYMAC conducted two trainings, Life Advocacy 101 and Know Your Rights. We had a special guest at our chapter meeting **Representative John McCoy**. We built gingerbread houses to give to a local homeless shelter in the Everett area. While Representative John McCoy was here we discussed our concerns about retaining safe housing for youth in care and the Fostering Connections Act to help fund the safe housing programs in the state budget. Over all it was a very productive meeting and we look forward to doing more for the next chapter meeting after the new year! Happy Holidays from Region 3 HEYMAC!

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 4 (Seattle) Region 4 for Change by Christina Koshney, Chapter Leader

It's a new year with a fresh start and room to grow! We started off our meeting with a crazy creative story that our region came up with as an ice breaker. From there it was very productive. Our three committees: Civic Engagement, Individual development, and Systems Change set the stage for the year to come with trainings, community activities, and ideas for 2011. We did a lot of brainstorming and collaborating as we planned. We are preparing for the upcoming Legislative Training on February 7th. Region 4 For Change is looking forward to this year's Youth Advocacy Day, and the opportunities to work with more youth from the surrounding group homes and hub homes. We're always looking to include more youth voices and leaders to bring fresh perspective, feel free to contact our Resource Specialist for more information.



Region 6 (Olympia) T.A.F.F.Y. (Truth and Action For Foster Youth)

by Rosie Warren

Region 6 ("T.A.F.F.Y. - Truth and Action for Foster Youth") has been busy. December began with our holiday party. Then we visited Haven House where we facilitated "Life Advocacy" training. This followed a "Your Rights, Your Life" training there in November. Region 6 also facilitated a "Culture of Foster Care" Training for Community Youth Services Staff. We made homemade lasagna - YUM! -- for a homeless camp called Camp Quixote. Region 6 is looking forward to the State Leadership Council Meeting on the 22nd of January, committee hearings at the capitol, the "Legislative Advocacy Training" on the 1st of February at CYS, and last but not least Youth Advocacy Day on February 18th on Capital Campus in Olympia! See you there!



Region 5 (Tacoma) Cour'ige (Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individualities Gaining Empowerment) by Tianna Oliver

At this month's chapter meeting the main topic was the 2011 Youth Advocacy Day and the programs that are on the chopping block. Our main goal was to effectively inform our members of all the resources and advantages that would be lost if these programs were indeed cut. Splitting them into groups we each read a small section of a one pager of each program and explained to everyone in basic terms what it meant. We then answered questions and further explained what these programs offer for youth, and how even if it doesn't apply to them personally that it's still important to fight for the law because there are other youth and children who are going to need it in the future. The rest of this month is going to be dedicated to getting ready for Youth Advocacy Day, explaining how a bill becomes a law, going over the Legislative agenda, making appointments with Legislators and preparing the youth to testify. Our Legislative training will be February 9th at PCA.