

# Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

January 2009

Volume X, Issue 1

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## 2009 Mockingbird Legislative Agenda BY ASHLIE LANIER

On February 13th, ASK-Y (Advocates for System Kids and Youth, pronounced "Ask why") and **The Mockingbird Society** (MBS) will sponsor Advocacy Day. This day is for Foster and Homeless youth and Alumni to express to Legislatures what they would like to see changed within the child welfare system. Last year, 120 to 150 trained and informed youth were able to speak to Washington State Representatives and hear feedback about key issues in the system. This year our main focus is housing and health care. We are asking for **Foster Care to 21 (HB 2002)** along with the **Independent Youth Housing Program (HB 1992)** to be continually funded and become a policy so that it cannot be eliminated.

As you may have read already, The Foster Care to 21 program was a major bill advocated for by MBS. This program has been temporarily funded for the last three years and a majority of the youth in care who were informed about the program took full advantage of the opportunity.

in Washington State, this program faces being discarded along with The Independent Youth Housing Program. Both of these bills are extremely important to youth in care. For many youth, life before these bills existed was with no guidance. Or imagine having all your things packed in a trash bag the day of your

18th birthday. These are real life experiences foster/homeless youth go through every day. The question we have to ask ourselves is, "Through our actions, are we giving our youth the skills and opportunities to succeed rather than just survive?" These programs are important: they should be policies not just temporary programs.

We are also asking for a **Best Rights in addition to Legal Representation** in order to have balance in the court room and make sure the youth's voices are heard in their dependency hearings. Yes, it is true that many youth have a Court Appointed Special Representative (CASA) or Guardian Ad Litem but many do not have one, nor an attorney and go to court alone or, if they cannot make it to court, their voices are unheard.

At the **Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership**, the youth declared that every foster youth should have a list of their rights when they turn 12 years of age. Most youth are not informed of their rights until it's too late and their living situation is not what they would have chosen. This wouldn't need funding. It would just need to be a mandate for the youth's case worker to give the youth a list of their rights and have them sign a paper saying that it was given to them. This honestly is a very simple task that is vital to the youth's best interest.

AGENDA, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



The Mockingbird Society staff and supporters always enjoy Advocacy Day.



## INDEPENDENT YOUTH HOUSING PROGRAM BY RHONDA SMITH

The Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP) offers unique and empowering services to youth transitioning out of foster care. However, without the support from the community and lawmakers, funding may soon run out.

Recently, the Youth LEAD staff from The Mockingbird Society took a trip to **Pierce County Alliance** in Tacoma. Region I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to interview the staff and a participant from IYHP.

IYHP is a housing program for foster youth located in Pierce County. It was designed to prevent homelessness for foster youth who have aged out of care. This program provides case management and staff to help youth work toward becoming independent. IYHP and two other programs out of Yakima and Olympia are associated with House Bill 1922, sponsored by **Representative Jamie Pedersen**. This bill is supposed to help foster youth get help with housing by providing housing stipends for former foster youth. The bill was signed by **Governor Christine Gregoire** and created three independent youth housing programs for youth who were a dependent of the state and who have aged out of care or who were a dependent of the state between

the ages of 18 and 24.

This program was designed to offset the disadvantages former foster youth face in obtaining safe and affordable housing. Unfortunately, these programs only have funding until June of 2009. This is not a good thing. Personally, I love the idea of this program. As a youth who aged out of care, I had no independent living skills and I was forced to live with my birth family, who I was only introduced to months before aging out and even though at that was not what I wanted to do. The only transitional housing programs I found in King County were homeless-based (at least one does exist but did not hear about it). I feel like IYHP is a blessing for foster youth who have aged out because this program has helped a handful of youth who felt like they would not make it. It has helped them have faith in themselves.

It would be unfortunate if this program ended because the funding dissolved. Therefore, we all need to raise awareness of the importance of this program. I am asking for everyone's help to support this bill. You can go to your local representatives and thank

IYHP, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



## Foster Care to 21

BY LEONA BILL

The Foster care to 21 program was created by a Washington State Legislature bill that The Mockingbird Society had a great role in passing. It allows foster youth to continue to remain in care until they are 21 or have completed school. As of now it is a temporary program that the legislature authorized for 3 years. If I had this option I'd take it. Youth should look into applying for this program because 2009 might be the last year that youth will be able to have an opportunity to be in the program.

The Foster Care to 21 program has been going on since 2006 as a result of the aforementioned bill sponsored by **Representative Dickerson**, HB 2002. This bill allowed 50 youth per year in 2006, 2007 and 2008 (for a total of 150 available slots) to stay in foster or group care so they could participate in or complete a post high school academic or job training program and to receive necessary support and transitional services, like case management by Children's Administration, and referrals to community resources as appropriate.

While participating in the Foster Care to 21 program youth receive necessary support and transition services up to age 21. However, the Foster Care to 21 program is a three year pilot program. This means that the Foster Care to 21 program's end date is June 30, 2009. The only way that this program may continue past this date is if the legislators extend the time that youth can enter the program and continue to fund it.

**Jim Pritchard**, Program Manager for Children's Administration, said, "Those youth who are already in the Foster Care to 21 program and those that began the program before December 31, 2008 can continue in the Program until they reach 21 years of age." This will also depend on the legislature's continued funding for this program and if youth meet the eligibility criteria, including maintaining a 2.0 grade point average. Children's Administration will still be holding on to applications that are turned in after December 31, 2008. These applications may or may not be funded depending on the outcome of this legislative session.

There are certain criteria that the youth and case worker need to follow. The criteria as well as information about the application for this program can be found at [independence.wa.gov/programs/fc21.asp](http://independence.wa.gov/programs/fc21.asp). Although the program is running for a short period of time, I believe that it would be a lot of help to a lot of youth in the future. I know this from experience because I didn't have the opportunity that this program offers.

After I had aged out of Foster Care, I had no placement and was living on the streets. I wasn't even getting any support before I became of age (18 years old). This was because I was in a difficult situation. My social worker was in Snohomish County, but yet they placed me in King County. My social worker also didn't think I'd make it far in life.

Either way, I had to try and get support from the resources that I found here in Seattle. I started working with places like interagency

FOSTER CARE TO 21, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2





### Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS

Happy New Year! With each New Year come hopes and dreams for peace and prosperity. This New Year also marks the beginning of a new legislative session in Washington State as lawmakers face a whopping \$5.1 billion dollar budget deficit. In this transitional economy that is also in crisis, promises to challenge legislators, advocates, and the public are high. The session begins on January 12th and the last day is scheduled for April 26th.

Over the past several legislative sessions, The Mockingbird Society, other community organizations, and advocates have made great strides toward improving the quality and quantity of services for youth in foster care, particularly those older youth who are "aging out" of the system. I

ask you to think of an eighteen-year-old that you know and consider if this same youngster is ready to truly be "on their own." The answer is almost always "Of course not" and we do not even expect that of most eighteen-year-olds in our society.

Under the excellent leadership of several legislators in both the Washington State Senate and House, our state has recently implemented two housing programs specifically for foster youth who have earned their high school diploma or GED (General Educational Development). Counselors, teachers, and foster

parents no longer have to "advise" youth to delay earning their GED or high school diploma in order to retain their eligibility in foster care. As a result of the \$5.1 billion budget deficit, programs are at risk to be cut, returning us to a time when kids in foster care are "transitioned" out of care, often directly to the streets. This is unacceptable for us as a community even during bleak economic times.

I encourage you to sign up for our Advocacy Alerts so that you can participate in our advocacy efforts during the 2009 legislative session. It's critical that private citizens join this effort to ensure your legislator and our governor know that foster kids have support from the broader community. If you want to receive our legislative updates please contact us at [lauren@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:lauren@mockingbirdsociety.org) with your contact information. Also, we invite you to join us on February 13th in Olympia for our annual Youth Advocacy Day. Providing safe, appropriate housing for youth leaving the foster care system is a major priority for The Mockingbird Society and a major component to building a world-class foster care system in Washington State.

**"It's critical that private citizens join this effort to ensure your legislator and our governor know that foster kids have support from the broader community."**

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Jim Theofelis

[jim@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:jim@mockingbirdsociety.org)

### FOSTER CARE TO 21, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

schools and drop-in centers that I found to try to complete everything I needed to, like obtaining my GED (General Educational Development) a stable home. I had no idea what I was doing. I have been struggling ever since I aged out of care and I am still trying to get my life together. If I had had the opportunity to apply for the Foster Care to 21 program before I aged out, I would have done so with school and get started on college.

I encourage youth to look into this program and apply. It should be noted that the Foster Care to 21 program is for youth wanting to go to college or enter a job training program. The Foster Care to 21 program is only for those youth who have already completed their GED or obtained their high school diploma. (Youth under 21 who have not completed either

of these may remain in care as long as they are working on them without applying for this program.)

It will also help those who look forward to attending college. I strongly encourage foster care youth to apply for the Foster Care to 21 program. I know that this program will be a lot of help. If I had had this opportunity, I would have taken it. I encourage youth to send in their thoughts about this program to The Mockingbird Society. You can email your input to [kara@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:kara@mockingbirdsociety.org) or send your thoughts by mail to the address listed on page two. If you do send your response by mail, please address the envelope: Response to article.

Thank you to **Representative Mary Lou Dickerson** who sponsored the program and **Representative Jim Pritchard** for answering all my questions.

### The Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD Program Presents

#### LIFE ADVOCACY 101

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

#### Receive your own personal Life Advocacy 101 TOOL!

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

Contact Kara at [kara@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:kara@mockingbirdsociety.org) for more information.

### THANK YOU!

David Allen; Kim Ambrose; Anonymous; E.H. Baker; Claire Baron; Bender; Anne Boyer; Brim-Donahoe & Associates; Lynne and David Chelimer; Clyde Hill Elementary School; Joseph Connor; Jill Cooley, Starbucks; Germaine Covington; Pamela Crone; Mary Donaldson; Donors to the University Village Tree of Winter Wishes; Barry Eben; David Eiffert; Katherine Elias; Employees of General Dynamics Corporation; Dwayne and Patricia Evans; James and Rosemarie Flaherty; Rick and Vi Franz; Sarah Thompson and Richard Gelinias; Marie Goines; Constance L. Gold; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Jana Heyd; Pammyla Hubbard; Sadikifu Z Akina James; William Jarcho; Stephanie Garlich and Jeffrey Ried; Sharlyne Jones; Biji Keigley; KC and Vicki Koss; Kathy Lambert; Lynn Lambie; Ron and Lauren Maier; Mark Marshall; Alma McClain-Williams; Patricia McDonald; Mrs. Sally J. McKinney; Vickie Morley, Claire's; Harvey and Hisako Nakaya; Elizabeth Nucci; Picket Fence Real Estate; Stella L. Pitts; Andy Reynolds; Lucinda and Lance Richmond; Kelly Rickenbach; Mario and Audrey Rodriguez; Juana Royster; Mark Scurrall; Suzanne Shawger; Dawn and Chuck Smart; Anne St. Germain; James Staples; The Stroum Family Foundation; The Stuart Foundation; Mike and Erin Welch; Wilkerson; Yearwood; YMCA of Greater Seattle

### The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the

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.

### MEET OUR STAFF

**Executive Director** Jim Theofelis; **Operations Director** Ros Ghan; **Mockingbird Family Programs Director** Dr. Wanda Hackett; **Youth Programs Director** Tiffany Washington; **Development Director** Madelaine Thompson; **Executive Assistant** Lauren Frederick; **Development/Communications** Darcie Gray; **Youth LEAD Coordinator**; Kara Sanders; **Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator** Amy Converse; **Administrative Coordinator** Diana Clark; **Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant** Milissa Morgan; **MFM Administrative Assistant** Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson; **Development Assistant** Alicia LeVezu; **Resource Specialists** Eva Ervin, Heather Jones, Georgina Ramirez, Nicholas Ruff, Tammy Soderberg; **Senior Youth Representatives** Leona Bill, Georgina Ramirez; **Youth Representatives** Jerry Bobo, Joyce Camacho-Cruz, Ashlie Lanier, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker; **Contributing Writers & Artists** Stephany Cooper, Sandra Lea Hunt, LisaMarie Iocolano, Sassi Jarvela, Danielle Jones, Bethany Lumpkin, Jessica McLean, K. C. Overton, Robert Parker, Ashleigh Rowland, Josephine Toohey; **Volunteers** Chrissie Jackson; **Editing and Layout** Kelly Hawkins

### Support The Mockingbird Society!

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

**ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society** is a non-profit organization that provides support and advocacy for youth in 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 for more information. The *Mockingbird Times* is a monthly publication 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**.





Medicaid to 21 Program BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER

Youth that age out of care when they are 18 have a lot of responsibilities thrown at them all at once. Housing, transportation, and employment are enough to worry about and, on top of that, health care is very costly and would just be another thing to juggle in the transition into adulthood. The Medicaid to 21 program was designed to cover health care costs to help youth as they transition out of care.

Washington State's Medicaid to 21 is a program that extends foster care ages of 18 and 21. The program is available even if they are not in foster care or out of home placement: the only criterion is that the youth must turn 18 while in care. Youth don't even have to apply: youth who are in care at the age of 18 have their names auto-

We at The Mockingbird Society called the number to see how easy it really was. It turns out that it's as simple as it says it is. There is no paperwork needed in this

Washington State's Medicaid to 21 is a program that extends foster care ages of 18 and 21. The program is available even if they are not in foster care or out of home placement: the only criterion is that the youth must turn 18 while in care. Youth don't even have to apply: youth who are in care at the age of 18 have their names auto-

process. You simply give your name and the person will check to see if you are enrolled or not.

Currently, there is a total of 80 youth enrolled in Medicaid to 21, however the number changes daily as youth enter and leave the program. In 2011, the cost of the program is estimated to be \$2.9 million.

Approximately half of that is federal and the other half is state. Governor Gregoire's new budget proposal suggests that the number of recipients of Medicaid will be reduced dramatically, but it has not been settled yet.

If it gets reduced, some of those 80 youth currently in the program won't be able to receive this form of aid anymore. This would be very tragic.

For further information, visit the following Web sites: [housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/roberts/20070405\\_1201senate-passage.asp](http://housedemocrats.wa.gov/members/roberts/20070405_1201senate-passage.asp); [www.apa.org/ppo/issues/pfosterkids.html](http://www.apa.org/ppo/issues/pfosterkids.html); [www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/immighealthchildren.htm](http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/immighealthchildren.htm); [www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/2007-08/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1201.pdf](http://www.leg.wa.gov/pub/billinfo/2007-08/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1201.pdf).

IYHP Gave Me Back My Life BY ASHLEIGH ROWLAND

My name is Ashleigh Rowland, and I am writing this as an advocate for the Independent Youth Housing Program. I have been in this program since December 2007. I have been working with the Pierce County Alliance since December 2006. This program was such a blessing for me. I was 6 months pregnant and did not know where I was going to live. I was accepted into this program and it was the best thing that could have happened.

I have been in foster care since 1996. My father killed my mother when I was only 2 years old. My siblings and I moved in with our grandmother where I lived until I was 16. I aged out of foster care at 18 and did not receive any transitional services from the foster care agency.

On my own, I found out about Pierce County Alliance and the Transitional Living Program that they offered. I was accepted into that program in December 2006. I was a youth advocate and spoke

in Olympia for a bill to extend health care for youth aged 18 to 21. This bill was passed and, if it were not for Pierce County Alliance, I would have never had the opportunity to do something so amazing.

The Independent Youth Housing Program is a wonderful program for kids like me who cannot afford to be on their own. I have gained valuable life skills that I probably would not have otherwise. I am a single mother and this program did not just help me, it also helped my baby. If it were not for this program I don't know where I would have lived with my baby.

I am asking that you extend this program for other kids that also need this great start at life. This is an excellent program and it is worth putting the money and time into to make more of our youth successful. Thank you for listening to what I have to say. I hope you have a wonderful day.

IYHP, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

them for passing this bill, and encourage them to vote in favor of it in the future. Katie Henry, a participant of this program, says it has helped her a lot. She has had the opportunity to go to school and get a better job and has done that and is currently trying to further her education. To have someone as a backup and help with furniture and everything else is a blessing. She would not have been able to enroll in school or work enough hours to support

herself without this program. She has obtained her AA degree now. That is just one example of how this program has helped a young person believe. We need to make this happen for the young adult who had no faith because of all the things this person has been through. If we can get more funding for this bill, that young adult will believe and will be on the road to success just like Katie and many other participants of this program.

AGENDA, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In order for us to make sure our voices are heard down in Olympia, we now have Tera Bianchi, a part-time contract lobbyist here at MBS. Her job is to advocate for the legislative agenda that was approved by MBS, ASK-Y & the Mockingbird Network State Advisory Committee. Her job as a lobbyist includes meeting with legislators and attending work sessions, hearings, etc. during the legislative session. She represents MBS at various coalition/work group meetings like the 7th Joint Advocacy Coalition and ASK-Y.

It is important for MBS to have a consistent presence in Olympia so our state leaders and policy makers know what issues are impacting the youth and families involved with the state foster care system. Being present gives voice to these issues. Tera Bianchi is a member of various groups and committees including The Mockingbird Society, MBS's networks, coalition partners such as ASK-Y & CWAC, youth advocates across the state, and our legislative champions, giving consistent and constant voice to why these issues matter.



Medicaid to 21 Stories BY JOYCE CAMACHO-CRUZ

Medicaid to 21 is for youth who age out of foster care. There are various reasons why this is a huge help for youth. Diamonique Walker describes in her article about this how this program works. Here I will describe why it is important for us to keep Medicaid to 21.

Foster youth ages 18 to 21 don't have the same health insurance as youth who are under 21 that have health insurance available. Without Medicaid to 21, these foster youth will end up with huge bills if they have a medical emergency.

Jerry Bobo didn't know anything about this program until recently when he started working at The Mockingbird Society. He is older than 21 now and never got to this program is going to come to a closure that it's not fair for youth who are just exiting care. Paying for health care is an extra deal with.

Medicaid to 21 is facing funding cuts due to a 5.1 billion dollar program needs to be continued for youth who have health problems and have no way of paying the bills.

My sister Lelani, is a mother who is making a difference in her life by creating a healthy environment for my niece. As she transitioned out of care, Medicaid to 21 created a safety net for her to fall on. It gave her a way to get help when she needed it. She utilized her resources and understood how they worked.

I recently aged out of the foster care system because I have medical problems that need to be addressed and, if I didn't have this option, the medical fees would be very expensive and I would have no way of paying for my health care. I was lucky to hear about this resource through my social worker since many

social workers don't know about the program and some don't tell the youth they are working with even if they do. If this program was affected greatly. Losing my health care would not help my living in poverty.

Medicaid to 21 is facing funding cuts that it is important and will affect foster youth across this state.

Heroes BY JESSICA McLEAN

Labeled just another statistic with just a trash bag as all you have to show for yourself is how many youth leave foster care. Almost 800,000 children in the United States were served by foster care in 2005. That same year, over 24,400 young people aged out of care. Nationally, as little as 38% of foster youth have a high school diploma when leaving care. Studies also show that only about half of former foster youth who intend to go on to college are actually able to do so and only 3% will eventually graduate from college.



IYHP provides housing, case management, and financial assistance to youth aging out of care.

I, too, was just a girl with a trash bag but a place of heroes, also known as the Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP) was there. Not only did this program show me that I was not just a trash bag girl or another statistic, but it gave me my life back. I was able to survive and live on my own. One of the greatest things about this program is they are directly changing the lives of foster

children, including mine. On the inside, I started to feel like I meant something to the world. It was almost like they had become my air. By helping me with housing and bills they also allowed me to focus on school.

I am now attending Western Washington University. One of the main reasons that I am even getting the chance to enjoy this opportunity is because of IYHP scholarships to pay for my education. I now have a full ride to my university and will not have to stress

about making ends meet. I hope that one day I can give back to IYHP. Sometimes I feel like I owe them my life because they gave it back to me.

1, 2, 4 www.casey.org/NR/rdonlyres/89F2787D-AA68-45D5-B5CC-557B20BB426F/590/fc-FACTS1007.pdf 3 k k k k k g d d k U l c j # d l U y # 798 F y d c h d X Z

Community Events

Region 2

January 7th: NAACP Health Disparity Conference, 6-9 PM, South East Community Center; January 19th: Martin Luther King March; January 20: President Obama's Inauguration at Casey Family Programs; Every Saturday: DJ dancing, 9 PM-1 AM, South East Community Center,

Region 3

3rd Friday of every month: Foster Parent Support Group, 6-9 PM, Bethel Assembly of God Church, Sedro Wooley, potluck dinner.

Region 5

January 21st: Volunteering with My Sister's Pantry, 5-7 PM, First United Methodist Church, 621 Tacoma Ave. Dinner is provided for all volunteers. www.mysisterspantry.org Every Thursday: Independent Living Skills Life Group, 3-5 PM, Pierce County Alliance. Various activities. Contact Nick at 253 502-5494 for weekly schedules or more information.

