

Mockingbird Times



FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

January 2009

Volume X, Issue I

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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. However, due to a \$5.1 billion dollar deficit 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 horrific. Imagine being homeless at a young age and trying to figure out your next move with no guidance. Or imagine having all your things packed in a trash bag the day of your



The Mockingbird Society staff and supporters always enjoy Advocacy Day.

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 **Notification of Rights** in addition to **Legal Representation for Foster Youth** 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 Summit of 2008**, the youth declared that every foster youth should receive written notification 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



INDEPENDENT YOUTH HOUSING PROGRAM BY RHONDA SMITH

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 because it focuses on foster youth specifically. 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://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 had not finished school and had no support from my caseworker. I wasn't even getting any support before I became of age (18 years old). This was because I was in a different county from my social worker's office. 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 deficit. This deficit, in the context of a national economy that is also in crisis, promises to challenge legislators, advocates, and citizens alike. The first day of session is 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 youth who have turned age 18 and 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 dollar deficit however, both of these 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

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."

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

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 Gelinas; Marie Goines; Constance L. Gold; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Jana Heyd; Pammyla Hubbard; Sadikfu Z Akina James; William Jarcho; Stephanie Garlichs 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 Scurrell; Suzanne Shawger; Dawn and Chuck Smart; Anne St. Germain; James Staples; The Stroum Family Foundation; The Stuart Foundation; Mike and Erin Welch; Wilkerson Family; Lena Williams; Windermere Real Estate, Bellevue East Office; Stuart Yarfitz; Felicia Yearwood; YMCA of Greater Seattle

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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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.

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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), finding a job, and finding 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. I believe it would have helped me finish 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 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 for more information.

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, Saundra 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

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*.



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 benefits to transitioning youth between the 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 automatically placed on the list for this benefit. To check your status for Medicaid to 21, call 1 (800) 547-3109.

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 benefits to transitioning youth between the ages of 18 and 21."

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. For fiscal years 2009 to 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.

This program is very beneficial to transitioning youth. 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; www.apa.org/ppo/issues/pfosterkids.html; www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/immighealthchildren.htm; 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 benefits for foster kids that age out of care. 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 Child Welfare 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. It provides health benefits until they're 21. 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 benefits as youth who are not in the foster care system. Those with parents are usually still covered under their parent's health insurance even if they leave home. Also, there aren't many jobs for 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 benefit from this service. He feels that if 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 financial stressor youth shouldn't have to deal with.

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

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 benefit comes to an end soon, I will be affected greatly. Losing my health care would not help my living in poverty.

Medicaid to 21 is facing funding cuts due to a 5.1 billion dollar deficit. This program needs to be continued for youth who have health problems and have no way of paying the bills. It is important and will effect 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 2005.¹ That same year, over 24,400 young people aged out of care.² Nationally, as little as 38% of foster youth have a high school diploma when leaving care.³ 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.⁴

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. IYHP helped me find everything I needed to survive and live on my own. One of the greatest things about this program is they are directly changing the lives of foster



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

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 who helped me find scholarships to pay for my education. I now have a full ride to my university and will not have to stress meet. I hope that one day I will get to influence someone the way that this program has influenced me. I am eternally in debt 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/FACTS1007.pdf

³ www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/FCEDReport.pdf

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.

Leave Me Unlabeled**JOSEPHINE TOOHEY**

Only I can judge me,
you don't have permission
all you see is that label
You don't know me
I am
Loud, blunt
compassionate
Helpful
Opinionated
but also I am
a foster kid not a statistic
a teenage girl but not pregnant
I am like a book one cover
so many pages
a label cannot explain me
because
I am a story without a title
with a label I lose my identity, my
uniqueness
a label, a judgment takes away everything
that is me
everything that is who I am
please don't take that away from me
take time to listen before you judge
but no matter what I will always be me
it's your loss if you try and label me

I Am**DANIELLE JONES**

I am funny and talented
I wonder how my life will turn out
I hear I hear screaming
I see fighting
I want this all to HAULT!!!
I am scared

I pretend I am Loved
I feel Hatred soaring over me like a
thick (smoggy) cloud
I touch the wall -- it is cold with war
I worry this will never end
I cry when I see people die
I am scared

I understand that this is happening
for a reason but WHY?
I say I am needed to survive but... the
hate comes back
I dream I am not even hear I am
LOVED
There is no Violence, Drugs, abuse or
WAR
I hope that someday this will all end
I AM SCARED

Creative Corner**Hero In the Night****LISA MARIE IOCOLANO**

A broken girl
And teary eyes
A bloody end
With her demise
Feeling the hurt
Watch as it spreads
Slicing her body
Into little shreds
Burn the memories
Grab the knife
For she is done
With this life
BUT THEN HE COMES
Just in time
With a heart full of love
And words of rhyme
Holding her tight
Hand on her heart
He won't let this
Tear her apart

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.

Who I Am?**BETHANY LUMPKIN**

I'm someone with mixed emotions
Someone that's really sad inside
Someone that when they think or talk
about their family I want to cry
I'm someone that's hard on the outside
Someone that's really quiet sometimes
Someone that trust is hard for me to give

Get Published ~ Get Paid!

We are looking for articles, poetry, artwork and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or with homelessness. If you want to be published in the *Mockingbird Times*, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org.

"If you judge people you have no time to love them."

~ Unknown

Region 3 Chapter in Skagit County

Region 3 Chapter in Skagit County
H.E.Y.M.A.C. means Hearing Every Youth Making A Change which is exactly what Region 3 is planning to do. December 11th was the date of H.E.Y.M.A.C.'s first official meeting, and boy, was it a kickoff. Plans were made for individual, community, and system development. As a group, we plan to develop ourselves and strengthen our bonds by throwing a video game party. As for community development, our first act is to volunteer with the local elderly. Finally, on the system level, we plan on getting more involved with foster parent training. Hopes for new members are high, but the bright future for our blossoming group is blinding.

Sassi Jarvela, Youth Leader for Region 3 H.E.Y.M.A.C.

**Region 2 Chapter in Yakima County**

On December 12, Region 2 held their kickoff at the Casey Family Programs Yakima Field Office. About 20 youth attended and we all had a blast. Maria started us off with an icebreaker called two truths and a lie. Then we set up some agreements which were easy to follow. But before any of that began we all enjoyed food from El Porton for dinner, courtesy of Casey Family Programs. To make the event even more exciting, we had a raffle where 10 youth were able to win a \$5.00 gift card to Wal-Mart and I was one of the lucky ones. Tune in next month to see who wins the Sony PlayStation.

Saundra Lea Hunt

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 5 Chapter in Pierce County

Last month we hosted our region's Chapter Kickoff, which was a big success. Several youth were in attendance, as well as some staff from the Pierce County Alliance; our foundation is growing! Melissa Seville, Nick Ruff, and I facilitated a conversation in which we talked about the Mockingbird Network, things we would want to advocate to change in the foster care system, and the upcoming Youth Advocacy Day in Olympia. We also played a pin-the-tail on the donkey game in which one youth was blindfolded and each other person would give them one direction at a time, and the donkey poster was constantly moved. It was a good way to represent the foster care system in the way that the youth were constantly confused and being misled, like many youth in foster care. We also had a wide selection of hearty snacks for the youth to choose from. We are all very excited for our next meeting in January and I look forward to our growing membership.

K. C. Overton, Youth Leader for Region 5

Region 6: Speak Up Chapter in Clark County

So far, Speak Up has been building a strong foundation for the chapter, such as how will our meetings be organized and what positions we want people to do, like having different people lead different community events. We have also been spending our time deciding on our focus which is to educate the public about foster care. With this we are currently determining ways to get the word out to the community and possible future members. We just started making brochures and will possibly have shirts and/or buttons in the future. With a hope for new members, our next month's meeting will be used to get to know each other better for better communication in the future.

Robert Parker, Youth Leader for Region 6 SPEAK UP!

Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County

On December 8th, The Mockingbird Society invited all King County foster youth and alumni to walk down the red carpet into our chapter kick-off. Our new members experienced a variety of excellent food, a chance to have their picture taken with our star backdrop, autograph their own star, and experience hilarious team building icebreakers as well as games. After having everyone sign in, we gave out tickets to the youth for a drawing to win prizes that included MP3 players, gift cards and head phones. Shortly after that, the Youth Lead staff gave a brief explanation of what the Mockingbird Network is and how it works for people who need to be informed. After coming together and creating a list of all the issues we face and playing the "What we have in Common Game," everyone was comfortable enough to discuss the key problems that are affecting youth in our area. For our next meeting, we will sit down and brainstorm to come up with a plan on how to get all our issues solved. There's a solution to every problem and Region 4 is for that change!

Ashlie Lanier, Senior Youth Representative

