

Mockingbird Times

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Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

INSIDE



The Mockingbird Society
Building a world-class foster care system

INTRODUCING THE NEW MOCKINGBIRD TIMES!
Look inside for the same powerful youth voice in an exciting new layout!

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writers

 **David Buck**
Sr. Network Representative

 **Samantha McDonald**
Network Representative

 **Jim Theofelis**
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 **Mandy Urwiler**
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 **Diamonique Walker**
Sr. Network Representative

 **System Reform**
Mandy Urwiler

More Cuts On Horizon for Washington Youth

On January 9th the legislature will meet in Olympia for the 2012 legislative session. This will be following the three week special session last month where they were only able to address about one-quarter of the \$2 billion budget deficit. Because Washington State is required by law to have a balanced budget every year, a deficit is not acceptable. The Governor's proposed budget, if approved, would cause dramatic changes in state services. Over \$53 million in cuts would apply to Children's Administration (CA) alone. These cuts would affect programs that have a direct impact on the lives of vulnerable youth.

Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) is one of the programs slated to be eliminated. FRS is a voluntary program aimed at keeping families intact and ultimately preventing out-of-home placement by providing family counseling, conflict resolution methods, and other services to prevent further conflict. This service is accessed by approximately 525 families each year. If this program is eliminated, a large percentage of those families will be at risk of ending up with out-of-home placements.

Another cut would attempt to reduce the length of stay in foster care for the 200 most difficult to place foster children. This safe reduction to length of stay will be achieved through permanency roundtables and other approaches. According to Casey Family Programs, "A permanency roundtable (PRT) is an intervention designed to facilitate the permanency planning process by identifying realistic solutions to permanency obstacles for youth."

The Foster Care Assessment Program (FCAP), also could be eliminated in favor of potentially less effective methods.



The latest budget deficit is putting many critical child welfare programs at risk.

FCAP is a comprehensive assessment to find and address barriers impacting permanency for children who do not have a permanent placement identified.

Street youth programs are again proposed to be cut, threatening outreach programs and drop-in centers that run on state dollars alone, including Rosie's Place in Olympia. If this cut goes through, Rosie's Place and other drop-in centers that provide services to street youth such as laundry, showers, case management, food, and a safe environment to find community may have to shut down. There will be fewer places for many of these youth to turn to in order to access services and survive on the streets. According to the

More Cuts on page 4

 **System Reform**
Samantha McDonald

Mockingbird Youth Seek to Protect Safe Housing Programs

On February 10th 2012, Youth Advocacy Day will take place in Olympia. Youth Advocacy Day is an annual event that takes place at the state capitol that gives youth a chance to speak out in a professional manner. This year's advocacy agenda is safe housing for youth transitioning out of care. Because of the struggling economy, it's going to be a fight to keep the services that the state already provides. Consequently, the Mockingbird Youth Network will be fighting to protect and maintain the programs currently funded and caring for youth.

Washington's safe housing programs can be split into two categories: entitlements supported by the federal *Fostering Connections Act* (FCA), which includes the Extended Foster Care program, and the state only funded programs which include the Independent Youth Housing (IYHP) and Foster Care to 21 programs. The difference between these categories is that entitlements require the state to serve any youth that qualifies for the program, while programs funded only by the state can be limited to a specific number of spots. These programs help ensure youth transitioning out of care have access to the housing necessary to thrive.

Passed in 2008, FCA is one of the most significant child welfare reforms in the last decade. Among these reforms is the ability for states to receive a 50% funding match for extending foster care to age 21. Washington state's first buy-in to FCA is allowing youth over the age of 18 pursuing a high school diploma or GED the opportunity to continue to remain in care until age 21.

The Foster Care to 21 Program allows those exiting foster care to remain in care to attend college, vocational or other post-secondary institutions. IYHP provides housing assistance for alumni of care ages 18 to 23 who are looking to live on their own while they pursue employment or educational opportunities. Both of these programs are funded only by the state and are limited to a specific number of spots.

The Mockingbird Youth Network will be fighting for safe housing because it is necessary in order to eliminate youth homelessness. Keeping these programs will in the long run be cost effective, decreasing the number of youth who age out into homelessness and encouraging youth to pursue their education. On February 10th the youth who need the state's help the most will be at Youth Advocacy Day to have their voices heard. Please come join us!

The Mockingbird Society's 2012 Legislative Priorities:

Protect, maintain and expand critical services!

Protect Adolescent Services

- Responsible Living Skills Program
- Street Youth Programs
- Family Reconciliation Services

Maintain Child Welfare Funding

- Child Placing Agencies
- Office of Family & Children's Ombudsman

Expand Safe Housing

- Pass HB 2048/SB 5952 (Homeless housing surcharge)
- Implement the federal Fostering Connections Act

Call to Action!

Call the legislative hotline:
1.800.562.6000

Urge your legislators to help Washington's children, youth and families by supporting these priorities!

For more information, visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org/advocacy



“What started with three street dependent youth and me producing the first *Mockingbird Times* now reaches over 20,000 people across the country.” [Letter from the Editor](#)



“The system is throwing fish at kids without teaching them how to fish. With this program we are hoping to teach those kids how to fish.” [Level Ground story](#)



“As a young father and husband I had to relearn my views of family. Overcoming the concept of “temporary” was one of the most difficult hurdles of my life.” [Dashawn story](#)



Selona Willett is named as Resource Specialist for both Olympia and Tacoma. [Read her story on back page](#)

our team

Senior Management

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Ros Ghan, *Deputy Director*
Tiffany Washington, *Youth Programs Director*
Brian Lawrence, *Development Director*
Beth Vance, *Finance Director*

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Kylie Palzer, *Development Coordinator*
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about us

The Mockingbird Society is a leading advocate for foster care reform built on youth-inspired solutions, powerful coalitions and public support for every children’s right to a safe home and a bright future. The *Mockingbird Times* is a key component of our youth development program, the Mockingbird Youth Network. All youth reporters are paid employees, and contributors from across the country receive up to \$25 for published works. The Times is distributed nationally to more than 20,000 through our mailing list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. As a nonprofit organization, we appreciate your private contributions to support our youth and family programs. Donate online, by phone or mail.

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the name

The 1962 American classic **To Kill A Mockingbird** by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, teaches them that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because “...Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.” We work to bring the same commitment to our most vulnerable children, youth and families. Join us!

Letter from the Editor

Happy New Year 2012! It is my great pleasure to introduce to you our new and improved layout and look for the *Mockingbird Times*! This exciting new step is a testament to the growth of the paper as well as the entire organization over the past 10 years. What started with three street dependent youth and me producing the first *Mockingbird Times* now reaches over 20,000 people across the country each month, emphasizing the power of youth voice and the reach of our state-wide network. I look forward to the possibilities of the future as we continue to grow.

Last month, the legislature convened a special session in order to find the \$2 billion necessary to balance the budget. After almost three weeks in session, the legislature was able to find \$480 million in savings, thankfully without cutting any child welfare programs. However, we are not out of the woods yet. On January 9th, the legislature will convene for the 2012 regular session, and will be charged with finding the over \$1.5 billion remaining in order to balance the budget. Programs critical to our adolescents in care have been

targeted for cuts or elimination, including the Responsible Living Skills Program, Street Youth Programs and Family Reconciliation Services. Mockingbird will continue to be on the ground in Olympia working with our allies and champions in order to protect these programs and advance our legislative agenda.

Please **save the date** of February 10th for our annual Youth Advocacy Day at the Capitol! Join us as we bring together over 200 youth and alumni of care from across the state in order to advocate for themselves, their communities and safe housing for all youth aging out of the system.

We cannot balance the budget on the backs of our children, youth and families. Together, we can make sure our elected officials hear that message loud and clear.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Special Contribution
Courtney Canova

Level Ground: Healing Lives Through Hip-Hop



Spokane Chapter Leader Courtney Canova (left) and Resource Specialist Sarah Mahaffy pose with members of the hip-hop group Level Ground.

By this time, you have may have heard the song or seen the music video *Place to Place*, (which I was featured in, along with several other Spokane chapter members). If you have not, you are definitely missing out on the next big stars in the world of hip-hop. The group Level Ground features Herb, Sig and Harvey (and Mr. Tommy Williams behind the scenes), and these men are making inspirational music and being positive role models in the Spokane community.

In addition to recording powerful music, Tommy has founded the Operation Healthy Family Program. The program helps youth by teaching them basic information about healthy living, such as oral health education. They also provide employment and life skills support that all youth deserve and need to thrive. They provide some of these services through a part of the program called The Foster Care Awareness Campaign, which encourages businesses around the region

Important Information for Braam Lawsuit Class Members

The Department of Social and Health Services and attorneys for children in foster care have entered into a Revised Settlement Agreement in the “Braam” lawsuit. You can learn more about the Revised Agreement at www.braamkids.org, as well as on the Braam Panel’s website: www.braampanel.org.

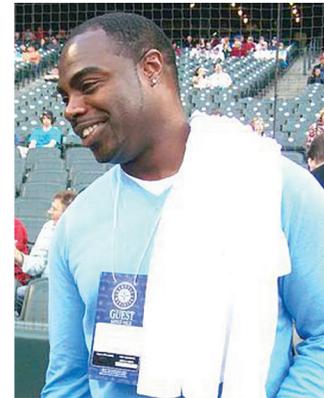
If you are a Braam class member and you object to the Agreement after reviewing the documents, you can send written objections to the court or attend a court hearing to tell the judge what you think about the Agreement. Information about how to object to the Revised Agreement is on the Braam Kids and Braam Panel’s website.

Written objections are due to the Whatcom County Superior Court by January 16, 2012. If you want to attend the court hearing to object in person, it is being held at the Whatcom County Superior Court in Bellingham at 8:30 am on January 25, 2012.



Power of One
Diamonique Walker

Dashawn Patrick: Foster Care Alumnus Gives Back to the “Village”



Dashawn Patrick on the field at a Seattle Mariners game during one of his many events supporting youth in foster care.

It is often said “It takes a village to raise a child.” Having the support of family, and community is vital to the upbringing of the next generation. Recently, I met a man whose story proves the “village” changed his life. Dashawn Patrick, a foster and kinship care alumnus, graduate of University of Washington, former professional baseball player, author of two books, and a motivational speaker, crossed paths recently with The Mockingbird Society. I took the opportunity to conduct an interview with him, and we both exchanged our stories.

Dashawn entered care at the age of two, and at age seven he was placed with a foster parent who accepted him as well as his two siblings. They lived with that same family for the next seven years, which gave them the stability needed to thrive. Dashawn became enthralled with sports; to him, his teams were like families. He found what he was lacking at home on the field. “I knew I had no control over my family but I could control how well I performed on the athletic field,” he told me.

At age 13, Dashawn tried out for a Premier Baseball Team that travelled the west coast playing in tournaments. “My foster mom could not afford to pay the fees, but coaches sponsored me and covered my expenses. I can’t underestimate how important that moment was for me. It was validation that I was NOT different! That the same rules of hard work, dedication and passion applied to me just like kids who were not in foster care.” His “village” helped him to pursue his passion with sports at a young age which ultimately changed his life.

In my experience, the system doesn’t always prepare youth to have a healthy view on family and the community, and I think many alumni of care relate to this struggle. Dashawn stated, “As a young father and husband I had to relearn my views of family. Overcoming the concept of ‘temporary’ was one of the most difficult hurdles of my life. It’s not about batting averages, stolen bases or diving catches. This is about raising my children to be productive, loving people



Pay It Forward
David Buck

SEA Puts Post-Secondary Education Within Reach for More Youth



For homeless and marginalized youth, education is the tightrope between poverty and a successful life. These youth are often required to navigate this tightrope alone and the statistics speak for themselves. According to a national survey by Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY), only 10% of foster youth enroll in college and, of those, less than 1% graduate.

The need to support marginalized youth in achieving post-secondary success is apparent. While there are programs that give academic advising and support for youth in care, there are many youth that don’t have access to these services because they are homeless but are not formally involved in the foster care system. This creates an even larger barrier to homeless youth attempting to access education.

That’s where Seattle Education Access (SEA) comes in. Established in 2001, SEA’s mission is to support homeless and marginalized youth succeed in college. Their strategy is clear: be the advocates youth need and guide them across the tightrope of education. Many youth on the streets don’t have the necessary proficiency in math or English necessary for college. Youth who engage with SEA’s services work one-on-one with staff, or volunteer tutors, towards achieving their education goals. Services are offered both at SEA’s office and at partner sites around King County. Many tutors are former SEA clients who have returned to give back.

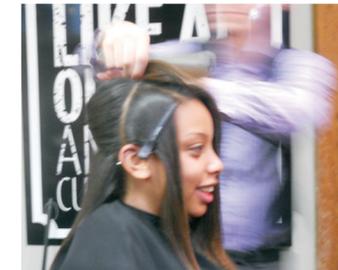
Anyone who has been to college knows that the challenges of college are not limited to academics. Many of the supports that youth from intact families take for granted, homeless youth struggle to secure. Homeless youth often don’t have financial support, so learning

SEA, see page 4

when I had no blueprint to draw from. This has been my greatest achievement in life!”

Dashawn is finding ways to give back to young people in care and aging out. Most recently, he gave back by coordinating an event with The American Cutting Company, which I attended. On December 10th, youth and alumni of care were able to get a full service hair cut for free by stylists at ACC who donated their time. This is just one instance of the “village” giving back to youth, and Dashawn hopes that this event can occur regularly and become more popular.

I want to thank the stylists at American Cutting Company as well as Dashawn for giving back to the village.



Senior Network Representative Diamonique Walker gets her hair cut at Dashawn Patrick’s recent event with the American Cutting Company.

Holiday Campaign Match Update!

Thanks to the generosity of more than 100 supporters and our generous 10-year donor who agreed to match holiday contributions in honor of the Mockingbird Society’s 10th Anniversary, we are pleased to announce that we achieved our year-end campaign goals and raised more than \$18,000! As an independent advocacy organization, The Mockingbird Society relies solely on private contributions and we extend our warmest thanks to all who support our programs and make our work possible.



upcoming

February 10, 2012
Youth Advocacy Day
9:00 am - 1:00 pm
State Capitol, Olympia

Please register online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or by calling Network Coordinator Fred Kingston at 206.407.2134.

thank you

Level Ground: Sig, Herb, Harvey, & Tommy Williams, Robyn Nance, Casey Family Programs and Catholic Family and Children Services in Yakima, Sheila Tate, Reiko Rosenquist, Heather Perry, Hazelruth Adams, Suzanne Akerman, Alfred and Tillie Shemanski Trust, Carolyne Allen, Anonymous, Linda & Tom Baker, Gitit & Yossi Banai, Samuel Bell & Belinda Butler Bell, Jewels Berg, Rose Berg-Fosnough, Lucy Berliner, Jane Beyer, Ann Bieri, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Matching Gifts Program, Ruth Blaw, Janice & James Borrow, Jim Bosler, Ryan Bosler, Jon & Bobbe Bridge, Susan Brook & Robert Johnson, Jon & Paula Brumbach, Cindy Buchanan, Bailey & Christopher Buckingham, Gerry Burnett, Paula & Paul Butzi, Catherine Holmes Wilkins Foundation, David Chelimer, College Success Foundation, The Community Foundation of South Puget Sound, Katherin Cooper, Karen Cowgill, Diane Coyne & Picket Fence Real Estate, Crafty Ladies of Queen Anne, Jordan Crump, Anne Daly, Marianne De Goede, Patricia Decker, Bailey Deiongh, Jacqueline Deleckie, Ann Denhart, Jennifer Dovey, Susan Elizabeth, Michael & Carl Etgen, Karlene Fazio & Therese Theofelis, Lauren Frederick, Roger Freeman, Alden Garrett, Shirlee Garrett, Robert O. Geballe, Ann Giesel & Malcolm Jollie, Krista Goodman, Makeba & Aaron Greene, Jillian Gross, Ilana Guttman, Jerrilyn Hamley, Lura Harrison, Jo Ann Herbert, Sheri Hill & Tim Quagliaroli, Charles Huffine, Ann Ramsay Jenkins, Gabriel Johnson, Sarah Johnson, Wendy Joseph, Beverly Juevas, Karin Kallander & John Unangst, Biji Keigley, Barbara Kezur, Kathleen Koch, Alex Landes, Keats Landis, Brian Lawrence, Roland & Elizabeth Lenz, Jackie Liao, Eric Liu, Carol Lucas, Kelly Jo & Christopher MacArthur, Ron Maier, Matt & Maureen Marinkovich, Wendy Marlowe, Mark & Cheryl Marshall, Matthew G Norton Co., Representative Marcie Maxwell, Robert & Shannon McCambridge, Judge Harry McCarthy & Carole McCarthy, Judge LeRoy McCullough, Patricia McDonald, Joe McGovern, Louise McIlraith, Vicki Merkel, Microsoft Matching Gifts Program, Larry Crim & Judi Mitchell, Sandra Mitchell, Miissa Morgan, Gretchen Mueller, Harvey & Hisako Nakaya, Ciaran Nienow, Nisqually Charitable Fund, Charles Nordhoff, Kylie Palzer, Nancy Parsons, Martin & Mary Jean Paup, Virginia Philbrook, Cecelia Porto, Georgina Ramirez, Marsha Reagan, Claudia Ridlon, Margarita Ruppert, Joanne & Paul Sabado, Eric & Kimberly Sano, Seattle University Criminal Justice Club, Dae Shogren, Divya Singh, Patricia Spence, Starbucks Coffee Company, Don Stark, Diane Steen, Jim & Ann Street, Stuart Foundation, Christine Swinehart, George & Beverly Theofelis, James Theofelis, Jim & Marcia Theofelis, Mary Anne Thorbeck, Caroline Tiltier, Alicia Tonasket, Christie True & Lawrence James, Shruti Van Wicklen, Beth Vance, Douglas & Stacey Waddell, Kayla Weiner, Dustin Welch, Selona Willett, Ruth Williams, Warn Willis, Paul Baron & Paula Wilson, Gail & Jay Winberg, and Paul Wirsing.

Art in Action
Thomas Darden

It's Really Different When You Grow Up

Knowing things as a child is one thing
 Growing up is however different
 I remember friends
 I remember having dreams
 I remember having nightmares
 I remember wanting to be a kid forever
 And times when I could not wait to grow up, because I did not want to have a bedtime anymore
 There were days when I picked to be twenty-one, sixteen, thirteen, or twelve forever
 I would watch others who were older than me and admire the perks of their age
 It's really different when you grow up
 You just remember
 Remember wanting to be twelve, thirteen, sixteen, and twenty-one
 I like those memories they're things I hold dear to myself

Art in Action
Jasmin Esters

Sometimes You Got To...

Sometimes you got to be a leader;
 Sometimes you got to fail in order to succeed;
 Sometimes you got to make mistakes in order to move on in life.
 Sometimes you got to lose in order for life to go on.
 Every day you got to see yourself not as a failure, but as a leader.
 Every day you got to see your mistakes as steps closer to success

We Welcome Your Work

We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be, or have been, published in the *Mockingbird Times* visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org, call us at (206) 407-2134 or email us at mbt@mockingbirdsociety.org.

Note: Incoming letters to the editor and correspondence to youth under 18 years should be addressed to the *Mockingbird Times* and will be opened first by adult editorial staff.

More Cuts, from page 1

National Alliance to End Homelessness, there are approximately 50,000 street youth in the United States each year, and those are just the ones that are there for the counts.

There are many more cuts proposed, and they will keep being proposed until the economy improves. Although here at Mockingbird we recognize that this is a challenging environment, and that the legislature must find solutions, we believe strongly that the budget should not be balanced on the backs of

vulnerable adolescents. Please contact your legislators and tell them that, if passed as proposed, these cuts will have a devastating effect on the youth of Washington.

SEA, from page 3

how to navigate the world of academic financial aid is challenging. Moreover, securing financial aid is a high stakes fight for survival for homeless youth. Completing the constant paper work, and having the information necessary to ensure you are up to date with all the



Chapter Voice

Spokane Chapter Supports Youth Across the Country by Courtney Canova

Region 1 North (Spokane) — Region 1 North had the month of a lifetime in December! To kick off it, chapter leaders Kristina Thomason and I partnered with Sarah Mahaffy to present the Life Advocacy Training to our chapter at our last meeting. About 17 youth attended, and I believe that each and every one walked away with a new insight on how to speak for themselves in a mature way. As a group, youth in Region 1 are raising expectations for social workers and Children's Administration with effective, mature, and passionate advocacy.

The next event that occurred was the opportunity to have one of our members interviewed by Robyn Nance, KXLY's local news anchor, as a result of the Level Ground video *Place to Place* (see Level Ground article



Spokane chapter members enjoy some time on ice.

in this issue). That experience was amazing because we got a grand tour of the studio.

Speaking of media, Region 1 has taken the spotlight for regional press this month. Many youth and alumni including myself were interviewed by the Inlander Northwest, a local newspaper for the Spokane area. The article was an in-depth story about

the hardships of being in care, as well as the resiliency of the youth who are put in challenging situations. Truly moving I'd say, not only speaking for myself but for all whom were involved.

Moving on, I know our chapter is excited to "take a break" and go ice-skating for our next meeting in January. All the hype and planning related to Advocacy Day is on our minds as we prepare to peacefully protest cuts to safe housing programs for youth in Olympia on February 10th. So in preparation we are taking a quick break to hit the ice and clear our heads to come up with more inspirational and powerful energy to bring to Advocacy Day.

Region 2 North (Everett)
by Garret Nadeau



On Thursday, December 15th, HEYMAC (Helping Every Youth Make A Change) held a Life Advocacy 101 training. Lashay, Garret, and Valerie facilitated. Our new Resource Specialist, Kate Storms, attended and got to know everyone. As the night came to a close we raffled off Starbucks gift cards, gingerbread houses and laptop bag covers. We look forward to the New Year and getting ready to dominate Youth Advocacy Day!

Chapter Snapshots



Region 1 South (Yakima)
by Brandy Baxley



A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. celebrated Victor Gonzales for being a great volunteer after aging out from Mockingbird Network. Victor was a member for two and a half years, when he turned 24 he decided to stay involved with Mockingbird by volunteering at our events.

Region 3 North/South (Tacoma & Olympia)
Special Report



The Mockingbird Society is excited to announce the hiring of Selona Willett, who will serve as resource specialist for both the Olympia and Tacoma Chapters. Selona was born in Clarkston, WA, and raised in Portland, OR. For a while, she attended college in Berlin, Germany, and she later earned her BA in Psychology and a Master's degree in Social Work. She comes to Mockingbird after seven and a half years working for the Native American

Youth and Family Center in Portland, where she provided Independent Living Program services to Native American youth ages 14-24. Regarding this opportunity, Selona states, "As I have worked with foster youth over the years I have always enjoyed reading the *Mockingbird Times*, and I am very excited to be given the opportunity to continue to engage and support foster youth through the Mockingbird Youth Network."

other complex steps related to remaining eligible for aid can be daunting. Most youth from intact homes have families that help them through these situations and tasks. Thankfully, homeless youth have SEA. In 2010, SEA supported over 450 students, and 116 students received \$62,140.49 in scholarships. Approximately 90% of students in SEA programs eventually complete their program of study or degree.

My endless admiration for SEA's efforts to help marginalized youth get the access and support needed to thrive in education

can be expressed by the words of a former client of SEA: "Seattle Education Access was not interested in sanitizing my life, choosing my friends, or assigning me their beliefs. They were only interested in one thing: giving me an opportunity for education, and letting me decide where to go with it."

Go to www.seattleeducationaccess.org to learn more about Seattle Education Access and resources for young people who want an education.