

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



APPLY FOR SUMMIT!

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 **Samantha McDonald**
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 **Mandy Urwiler**
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 **System Reform**
Samantha McDonald

Hopeful Future for Foster and Homeless Youth



Members of The Mockingbird Society team pose with Governor Christine Gregoire as she signs HB 2592 into law on March 19th, 2012.

It has been a very busy year for Washington State legislators. They have put in countless hours getting bills passed and creating well-rounded policies. How has this impacted foster and homeless youth?

Programs that the legislature passed, protected, and expanded give foster and homeless youth the stability needed to thrive. It also provides them with the necessary resources needed to succeed and beat the challenges associated with being in the foster care system. Not long ago, The Mockingbird Society hosted Youth Advocacy Day where approximately 240 people, with almost 150 youth, were in attendance urging Representatives and Senators to support our priority bills, Extended Foster Care (HB 2592) and Homeless Housing Assistance (HB

2048). This advocacy helped inform many legislators of the importance of these bills; and they, in turn, informed the rest of their colleagues.

For the youth experiencing either foster care or homelessness, this looks like a positive development for the future! These bills help ensure the well-being of foster and homeless youth. Those of you who are reading this and wondering about what these bills do for you and future generations, just keep reading to find out.

HB 2048: The Homeless Housing Assistance Surcharge provides additional funding for the Home Security Fund by increasing the Document Recording Fee, which applies to submitting various documents related to buying or selling houses and property. When it becomes law, it is estimated to provide an additional \$4.4 million in revenue through the end of 2013. This bill supports

the Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP) and HOPE Centers. It has passed the legislature and is awaiting the Governor’s signature.

HB 2592: Extended Foster Care has passed the legislature and has been signed into law by the governor. This bill will allow foster youth the opportunity to remain in foster care until age 21 in order to achieve their post-secondary education goals, which will help them get closer to reaching their dreams. With the passage of this bill, we are one step closer to achieving The Mockingbird Society’s long-term goal of ensuring that all youth will be entitled to opt to remain in care to age 21, if they choose, so they have the stability to thrive.

We believe that the passage of these bills represents real, positive reform for foster and homeless youth. I am happy to say

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 **System Reform**
Diamonique Walker

Young Leaders Prepare for 2012 Summit

Now that the dust has settled after Youth Advocacy Day, the Mockingbird Youth Network is turning its attention to planning the seventh annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit.

For those of you who don’t know, the Leadership Summit is a three day, all expenses paid event that brings together about sixty youth and alumni from the six statewide Mockingbird Youth Network chapters. Throughout the event, youth will participate in workshops regarding the Network’s three main objectives: individual development, community engagement, and system reform. Each chapter will come prepared having identified a problem in child welfare, and a solution they feel

will help positively change the system for current foster youth, foster care alumni, and even youth who will be in the system one day in the future. At the end of the three days, youth will present their solutions to the Supreme Court Commission on Foster Care, which is co-chaired by Justice Bobbe Bridge and Assistant Secretary of DSHS Denise Revels Robinson. In this way, youth participants will have a chance to demonstrate their leadership as well as have their voices heard by people who can actually make a difference in their lives.

This year, our event will be held at a new and exciting venue. We will be hosting Summit at Islandwood School in the Woods, which is located on Bainbridge Island.

“Although we are just a short ferry ride away from Seattle, when you get to IslandWood’s 255-acre campus, you feel a million miles away. This will allow all of the Summit participants to focus on the work they need to do without the noise and the distraction of the city,” explained Laury Bryant, Islandwood’s Senior Conferences Manager. “[In between Summit activities, youth] will be able to take advantage of all our site has to offer—whether it’s in our Art Studios, at the Friendship Circle toasting S’mores, on a nature walk, or relaxing in their lodges.”

After some Network staff and I took a tour of Islandwood last November with

Young, on page 4



“Even though I have heard David speak before, I was blown away by his presence, insight, intelligence, analysis and thoughtfulness. And I was definitely not the only one.”
Letter to the Editor



“Something I will always remember about Mykal was his interest in people; in life in general.”
Mykal story

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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



Dear Friends,

Happy spring everyone! As we transition into a new season I am reminded of our continued efforts to ensure that youth in care can make their own transitions into adulthood with the same care, support and opportunities as youth from healthy families. This work is driven by The Mockingbird Society's legacy goal: to see to it that all youth aging out of care in Washington state have the opportunity to secure safe housing until age 21. Studies from across the country show the impact safe housing has on positive outcomes for youth in care. But just as importantly, the youth themselves say again and again that if they are worried about where they're going to sleep at night or where their next meal is coming from, they do not have time to worry

about getting an education or pursuing their career.

Over the past six years we have made significant progress towards achieving our legacy goal with the creation of Foster Care to 21, the Independent Youth Housing Program and Extended Foster Care. On March 19th, we took another huge step as Governor Gregoire signed into law HB 2592 – Extended Foster Care. Once implemented, this bill will expand the Extended Foster Care program to allow youth pursuing their post-secondary education to remain in care until age 21. In addition to ensuring safe housing for youth pursuing their education, this bill will also qualify Washington state for an additional federal funding match, saving the state money in a time where resources are scarce.

While the signing of HB 2592 is a huge victory, our work in Olympia is not yet finished. Budget negotiations between the

Governor, the House and the Senate have failed to result in a final budget and leaders from both parties remain in Olympia for a special session to work out a compromise. Please contact your legislators and urge them to support key child welfare priorities in the budget, including the Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman, Responsible Living Skills Program and Street Youth Programs. For more information on our advocacy priorities, visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org/advocacy.

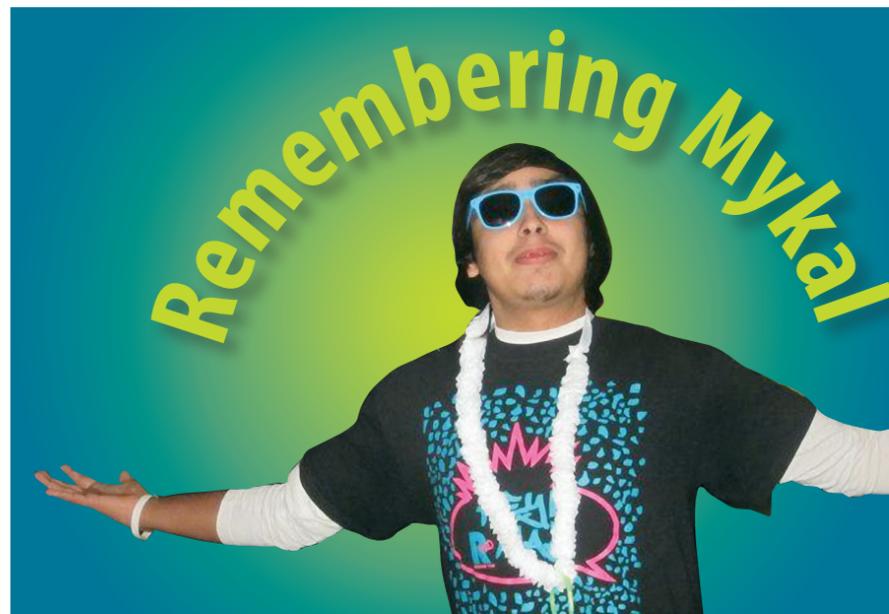
Thank you for your unwavering support of children, youth and families.

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
 jim@mockingbirdsociety.org



Special Contribution
Janell Braxton



Mykal was a dedicated member of the Mockingbird Youth Network; he brought a fun attitude to everything he did.

Recently, a beloved member of our Chapter passed away. Mykal Cochran was a unique character, great friend, brother and son. He left everyone he met with warmth,

knowing that people should live in the moment. He was always a hyper, positive, happy and goofy guy.

Mykal was a polite, outgoing, sensitive and bright young man who left behind a great legacy at H.E.Y.M.A.C, the Everett chapter



Special Contribution
Randy Simon

Letter to the Editor

On Sunday March 18th Youth Network Representative David Buck spoke on a panel at a community Teach In related to homelessness. The organizer of the event sent the following email to Jim Theofelis, Executive Director of The Mockingbird Society, after the program to thank David and the organization for bringing his powerful and unique voice to the discussion:

Dear Jim,

I have to write to tell you how wonderful David Buck was today — I don't have David's email address so please pass this on to him.

David was one of four speakers at the Temple Beth Am Tikun Olam Teach In: Homelessness and Economic Justice that I helped to organize. Laurie Lippold was the moderator. The other speakers were Bill Block, Megan Gibbard and Alison Eisinger.

We had about 60 people attend the panel discussion.

Even though I have heard David speak before, I was blown away by his presence, insight, intelligence, analysis, and thoughtfulness. And I was definitely not the only one. You should all be very proud of David.

But most of all, David, you should be very proud of all that you have accomplished.

of The Mockingbird Society. His experiences from his past foster homes gave great insight to those he shared with. He was always involved in The Mockingbird Society and would jump in to do things that no one else wanted to do. He made challenges that seemed daunting, difficult or boring into being fun. He was always finding ways to make the most of our time together.

Although this great kid passed away at a young age, he did not leave without making a powerful impact to those around him. Little did I know, from the time that I joined Mockingbird, that we would become good friends. We went to the same college; he only lived 15 minutes away from me and often would come over to play Nintendo 64 and have dinner. I'd visit him at his dorm to listen to music and dance. He would walk with me to my classes; we would talk about our days, and our lives.

Something that I will always remember about Mykal Cochran was his interest in people; in life in general. Mykal Cochran, you will always be missed and never forgotten.

I look forward to following you as you continue your journey — and let me know when you're ready to apply to law school — I'd be happy to send in a reference.

As we say to congratulate a person during a Jewish service — "Yasher Koach" — "may your strength be firm."

All my best,

Randy Simon



"I believe all youth deserve the same love and respect, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity." *GLBTQ story*



"It's just like our Youth Programs Director always says: 'the more you know, the more you owe.'" *Breaking story*



Power of One
Mandy Urwiler

GLBTQ Youth in Care: Rights and Resources

I am part of the 14.5% of foster youth in Washington state between 5 and 17 who identify as GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning).¹ I experienced discrimination because of my sexual identity just once while in care. The moment that discrimination occurred, I felt like I wasn't worthy of my foster parents' love because I was not living up to their standards. I was told that I needed to take down a collage I made about who I am. On it, I had a rainbow surrounded by the words, "Be proud of who you are no matter what," "love is love," and "Bi and PROUD!" My foster mother considered the collage offensive because she translated my statements to mean "I'm lesbian and if you don't like it, too bad." My message of pride in myself was responded to with a message of non-acceptance. I refused to take it down, and the topic was never brought up again.

I believe all youth in the care of the state should be given the same protection from

RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO GLBTQ YOUTH

- matthewsplace.com
- itgetsbetter.org

WESTERN WASHINGTON

Lambert House Seattle
206.322.2515 / lamberthouse.org

Northwest Network Seattle
206.568.7777 / nwnetwork.org

Stonewall Youth Olympia
366.705.2738 / stonewallyouth.org

GLOBE Everett
425.263.2908 / globeyouth.com

The Rainbow Center Tacoma
253.383.2318 / rainbowctr.org

EASTERN WASHINGTON

Odyssey Youth Spokane
509.325.3637 / odysseyyouth.org

Vista Youth Center Kennewick & Tri-Cities
509.396.5198 / vistayouthcenter.org

discrimination. I believe all youth deserve the same love and respect, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. If other youth are allowed to express themselves through art on their door that says something important about their identity, you should be too. Even if your caregivers believe that it's wrong to be gay, they still are required to respect your identity. If you are dressing in ways that don't meet birth-gender stereotypes, they are still compelled by law to allow that kind of self expression.²

I was lucky to have a very supportive biological family. I grew up knowing that they would accept me no matter what. Sometimes, I still felt like I needed someone outside my family to talk to. I needed other youth like me to talk to and just hang out with. When I needed those resources, I went to the Lambert House in Seattle and I went to weekly groups with GLOBE in Everett. But these are just a few of the organizations across the state that offer supportive

services to GLBTQ youth. For more resources, check out our resource box.

It can be hard to be a youth in foster care. It can be a lot harder to be a youth in care who identifies as GLBTQ. Just remember that there is help. There are others who have been through the same things you have. It does get better, as the It Gets Better Project (www.itgetsbetter.org) points out with every message they post. Whether you're straight, gay, bi, lesbian, pansexual, asexual, questioning, transgender, gender fluid, queer, gender queer, or anything in the middle, you have the right to have that respected. I believe everyone should be able to be proud of who they are no matter what others say or do.

¹From a September 2008 DSHS survey of foster youth in Washington state. Available at www.familieslikeours.org/content/glbtc-research

²RCW 49.60.030 (1) and WAC 388.148.0425



Pay It Forward
Deonate Cruz

Breaking the Barriers



Deonate Cruz urged stakeholders to support "opportunity youth" at a community meeting on February 29th.

Very rarely do representatives from different silos come together under one roof to address a common issue. But some issues are so complex and important that it requires input from many different perspectives. It is definitely a beautiful sight to watch the progress that these kinds of efforts bring forth.

One issue that is so colossal that it has brought together representatives from different silos (e.g. youth development, faith-based services, local government, education, etc.) is youth workforce development and the major barriers youth face with employment. According to the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB):

America's youth workforce is youth between the ages of 16-24 years of age. The total number of youth 18-24 years of age in Washington State is approximately 655,700. The percent of those youth who are working are 56%. Out of those 56% only 45% of them are in school. 16% of these youth are reported to be unemployed but pursuing education at either a secondary or post secondary level and 13% percent of them are

reported as disconnected youth (youth who are not employed nor in school). Over 80% of youth who are disconnected have a high school diploma or less.

Even when youth overcome these barriers to education, they face continued barriers to employment, especially when you take into account that "the unemployment rate for those with less than a high school diploma is 38.6% and for those with a bachelor's degree or higher it is 4.2% and the median hourly wage for those with less than a high school diploma is \$9 (which isn't even a livable wage) and those with a bachelor degree or higher is \$17/hr" (WTECB). That is a clear difference in median income between youth who are able to pursue higher education and those that aren't. This matters because income is a major component in the transition into adulthood and independence.

According to WTECB, in Washington State alone, there are 75,700 disconnected youth who do not contribute to the economy through taxes and such. So, in order to prevent this crisis from going any further, in 2010 President Barack Obama launched a Whitehouse initiative to target some of these barriers. Seattle was chosen to be one of the 30 cities hosting committees to identify and begin to create solutions to these problems.

The majority of the youth facing these barriers are minorities that come from low income communities. These youth are commonly referred to as "at-risk youth" because often times these youth are subject to negative outcomes such as criminal history, homelessness and other barriers

that accompany these issues, especially lack of employment; but President Barack Obama is referring to these youth with a different title to help promote this initiative and help break down these barriers. This title is "opportunity youth": "Opportunity youth are typically defined by what they are not doing... However, youth do not follow simple, direct life trajectories from school to college to work. Many youth are balancing work and education, as well as having other responsibilities such as family care; and even for those in school or employed, some outside behaviors — such as drug use or criminal activity — may have long run repercussions."

In conclusion, I would like to state that there is a clear overlap between "opportunity youth" and youth impacted by the child welfare system. It was for this reason specifically that Mockingbird was chosen to participate in the community conversation for the greater Seattle area, which I attended on February 29th. When you are done reading this article, I hope you feel compelled to play your part in reaching out to opportunity youth—even if you are a youth yourself. The reason for knowledge is to pass it on and help others learn more. It's just like our Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington always says: "the more you know, the more you owe".

¹Wanted: *Work Experience for Young Adults. A Report to the Washington Legislature* by The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, 128 10th Avenue SW, PO Box 43105, Olympia, WA.

²Clive R. Belfield, Queens College, City University of New York; Henry M. Levin, William Heard Kilpatrick Professor of Economics and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University; Rachel Rosen Teachers College, Columbia University.

upcoming

Tuesday Apr 17, 2012

Community Culture of Foster Care Training

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm
2100 24th Avenue S.
Seattle, WA

Community Rooms A & B
Attendance is free — please RSVP to Amber Carrigan:
amber@mockingbirdsociety.org

June 25-27, 2012

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit

Islandwood School in the Woods
Bainbridge Island, WA

Youth 14-24 years of age who live in Washington state and have experienced foster care are eligible to apply. Find application materials at www.mockingbirdsociety.org. Applications are due Friday, April 20th.

thank you

Alene Alexander, Patty Kilcup, Molly Allen, Coleen Quisenberry, Kelly Aldrich, Kenna Jonner, Karen Pratt, Safety Net Organization, Stacy Keller, Catholic Family and Child Services, Alicia Tonasket, Carol Lucas, Dae Shogren, Diane Steen, Dustin Welch, Gabriel Johnson, Jackie Liao, Jillian Gross, Jo Ann Herbert, Kevin Zelko, Larry Crim & Judith Mitchell, Linda McClamrock, Makeba Greene, Marsha Reagan, Milissa Morgan, Paul Wirsing, Puget Sound Skills Center, Roger Freeman, Rose Berg-Fosnaugh, Sarah Johnson, Suzann Marquess, Suzanne Akerman.



Art in Action
Leona Bill

Hold Your Head High

I hold my head high, because I have respect and therefore show respect only if shown the same. I hold my head high, because I carry faith and hope in whatever I may do. I hold my head high, because I will not allow myself to be lowered or looked down upon at all. I hold my head high, so I will not get trampled on. I hold my head high, not to prove people wrong but to keep my strength. I hold my head high, so I'm prepared to expect the unexpected. I hold my head high, because I'm prepared to take any challenge. I hold my head high, because I will not go down quietly without a fight. I hold my head high, because I take pride in my accomplishments. I hold my head high, for I know I can learn by observing someone else's mistakes. I hold my head high, because I can take in the positive and release the negative. I hold my head high, not just for myself but for my children as well. I hold my head high, so I can keep aware instead of having to beware. I hold my head high, for I was taught to hold and carry myself well. I hold my head high, because I know that no matter what situation I experience I will always be ok.

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.

Hopeful, from page 1

that I was a part of the effort—I testified, I marched, and I rallied with my peers. And it made a difference.

Of course, my voice, and the voices of other Mockingbird youth, would not have made much of a difference without decision makers who listened to us and acted on our behalf. So I'd like to close with a very heartfelt thank you to our legislative champions, and all who supported these reforms.



Seattle's ILP Conference Coming in April *by Violet Banks*

Region 2 South (Seattle) — Over the past few Months "Region 2 Stay Tru" has been working very closely with the YMCA's Young Adult Services (YAS) Member Advisory Committee (M.A.C) now know as "Region 2 M.A.C" on community service events. At our last chapter meeting we started coming up with new ideas on how to plan and execute amazing events in the King County area this year.

The first event we are collaborating on for 2012 is the Annual Independent Living Programs (ILP) Conference hosted by the YAS and Region 2 M.A.C. This conference is a major event that goes on in Seattle at the 2100 building. It is a great collaboration effort for us chapter members, because we get to plan everything from the theme of the conference to the entire day of



programming. This is the third year that region 2 M.A.C has held this responsibility now, and each year it has gotten better and better. Our chapter Leader Max Ream had this to say: "Learning from our mistakes in previous years while planning the ILP conference has helped it become that much better each year." The past themes have been, "The Carnival of Life" and "The Game of Life".

Members of Region 2 M.A.C are youth connected with youth in the community who know what type of classes/workshops YAS participants would not only enjoy, but gain useful independent living skills from. Max Ream stated, "We learn leadership skills from taking action in planning this event every year and giving back to youth around our age." Max has been involved in this event for all three years, and only wants to see the ILP conference grow.

In order to see the ILP conference themes this year and what workshops will be available come join us April 28th, 2012 at the 2100 Building: 2100 24th Ave South, Seattle Washington 98144, from 9:00am-5:00pm. For more information contact our Resource Specialist Jerry Bobo at (206)-838-6646 or J.bobo@mockingbirdsociety.org or Aaron Fox at (206)-749-7586.

Region 1 North (Everett)
by Jerrica Long



During Everett's last Mockingbird meeting, we did a numerous amount of fun activities. We did a "Hunger Games" puzzle and also counted a grocery bag of M&Ms — winning team got extra raffle tickets for a prize at the end of the meeting. One thing that I really enjoyed about the meeting was that we also talked about Mykal, our former chapter member who recently passed away. Garret had made a memory board to remember him, and our chapter is going to work on putting up memories and anything that we would like to say to honor him.

Region 1 South (Yakima)
by Brandy Baxley



Region 1 south (Yakima) is getting ready for the 2012 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit! Any youth or alumni between the ages of 14-24, who want to apply, go to mockingbirdsociety.org and follow the links for the Summit.

Chapter Snapshots



Region 3 South (Olympia)
by Chris Bauer



While experiencing what may have been the most bizarre meteorological event in the south sound's history, the Olympia chapter presented about YAD and the Leadership Summit in coordination with Centralia College Passport to College staff in an effort to recruit new members and allies. Despite some youth not being able to attend our presentation due to the sporadic weather, thanks to C.C staff, news traveled fast and 15 youth are now interested in becoming chapter members and leaders.

Region 1 North (Spokane)
by William Mendoza



The Spokane Chapter has stayed busy with a trip to the Chief's hockey game. We also recruited more youth at the Independent Living conference in Spokane this month. We were excited to have Fred from Mockingbird headquarters visit for our most recent chapter meeting on March 20th! Over the next few weeks we will be working hard on submitting applications for the Summit in Seattle before the deadline on April 20th.

Region 3 North (Tacoma)
by Tianna Oliver



On Wednesday March 14th, at Pierce County Alliance, we had our first official Education Advocacy training. With a larger turnout than the last couple groups, we had a lot of new faces and the opportunity to have really good interactions among the youth. During the puzzle activity we all had a great time learning about everyone's dreams. We explained to the attendees that the main thing that could help them achieve their dreams is finishing school.

Young, from page 1

Laury, we knew it would be a great place for the Summit. The Mockingbird Society and Islandwood have missions that align with one another. "Both, at their very core, are about making the world a better place for those that come behind them. In Islandwood's case, our mission is to provide exceptional learning opportunities and creating stewards for a better world," Laury stated during that November visit. Of course, at MBS, we are working towards

building a world-class child welfare system for youth who are in the system, who are aging out, and who have yet to come. So both organizations are trying to make a positive difference for future generations. Additionally, one hundred percent of the proceeds from our Leadership Summit go to funding the Islandwood's School Overnight Program for 4th and 5th graders.

The seventh annual Summit will be a powerful event that will provide dynamic training opportunities and allow participants

to display leadership in unique ways. If you are a foster youth or alumni of care age 14-24 please consider completing an application online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org. We'd love for you to join us in making a difference in the child welfare system.

For more information about Islandwood and their unique mission, visit www.islandwood.org.