

# 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



MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH!



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**System Reform**

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**System Reform**

Samuel Martin

## The History of Foster Care

In the spirit of National Foster Care Month we at The Mockingbird Society noticed that though we often talk about the issue of foster care, we don't discuss the history of the system enough. In fact we still feel the ramifications of some of the initial legislation today. In this article we will look at a few of the key pieces of legislation that created the framework for foster care as we know it.

In 1961, foster care was created as a part of the nation's child welfare system through the Aid to Families with Dependent Children Act (AFDC). While this act was not solely for foster care, part of the legislation addressed the issue of keeping children in out of home care safe. It was soon found out that most states were not taking the proper precautions so the government had to continue to improve the infrastructure.

In 1980 the federal government established foster care as an independent system as opposed to a component of the AFDC. For the first time there was also federal adoption assistance. This legislation not only put a



stronger emphasis on financial support for children, it also provided an incentive to states for giving youth these services.

Next was the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), passed in 1997. The initial intention of this legislation was to decrease the amount of young people there were in the foster care system. The main component of ASFA was stringency of reunification efforts. This law required certain permanency planning requirements every 12 to 18 months and added new caseworker responsibilities. Not all children, however, need to be removed from their homes. As a result, the issue of re-unification persists and continues to challenge the system today.

Lastly, the most recent — and monumental — piece of legislation is the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (FCA). This act was designed to provide various benefits to foster youth including Native American youth, as well as youth in kinship care while strengthening the connection between

siblings in care. But most importantly, it gives states the ability to receive federal support for providing foster care and safe housing programs for youth in care until age 21 (see my colleague Diamonique Walker's article to see how Washington state has done implementing this part of FCA). It is a little too early to see the full impact of this legislation but soon enough we will know if it has truly increased the support and safety of children and families inside the foster care system.

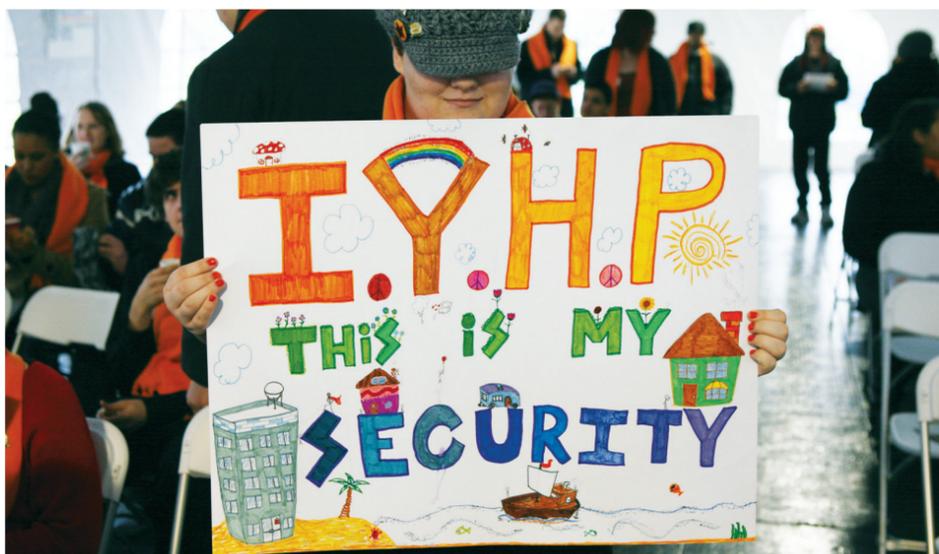
In light of National Foster Care Month it is very important to look at this because whether you had a good experience in foster care or a bad one, all of these policies have affected youth in care in some way. We can't fully understand the future of child welfare without knowing the past. Take a chance to look at your foster care system and see how your state interprets these laws. Some states do the bare minimum, and some states, like Washington, are moving to take full advantage of the federal guidelines and funding incentives. Lastly, do whatever you can to be an advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves during this year's National Foster Care Month!



**System Reform**

Diamonique Walker

## Fostering Connections Act: The Future of Foster Care



Programs like the Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP) have set the stage in Washington for Mockingbird's continued efforts to ensure safe housing for youth aging out of care.

Washington state's safe housing programs for youth aging out of foster care put our state at the forefront of foster care reform with only a handful of other states in the country. Since 2007 Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP) has been available for youth exiting Foster Care. With IYHP youth are able to receive funding and services for housing in various forms including:

monthly rent, utility payments, move in costs, cost for application fees, and even case management. In 2011, 127 youth total were served upon exiting care, while participating for an average of 408 days. Ultimately the program is keeping foster youth from having to experience homelessness while keeping them in safe environments.

More recently, Mockingbird has advocated, and the state has implemented, the Extended Foster Care program, which is available for youth who are exiting foster care. In Washington, Extended Foster Care stems from Foster Care to 21 which began as a pilot program in 2006. With a partial federal funding match available thanks to the Fostering Connections Act, passed in 2008, young people who are pursuing their secondary (high school or GED) or post-secondary (college or vocational training) education are able to stay in foster care up until the age of 21.

Last week, I was able to listen in on a webinar about how other states that have been implementing Supervised Independent Living Programs with support from the Fostering Connections Act. Experts from California, New York, Illinois, and Minnesota discussed the details, opportunities and challenges of their state's programs. There were many differences that I notice from Washington State's independent living programs to the other states that were presented in the webinar. For example, in Illinois, all youth in care at age 18 are automatically eligible to remain in care until

Fostering, on page 4

### youth reporters

**Diamonique Walker**  
Sr. Network Representative

**David Buck**  
Sr. Network Representative

**Amanda Bevington**  
Network Representative

**Deonate Cruz**  
Network Representative

**Samuel Martin**  
Network Representative

**Samantha McDonald**  
Network Representative

**Mandy Urwiler**  
Network Representative



**"It is time to honor those who work tirelessly to ensure our society's most vulnerable children and youth children and youth have the opportunity to not only survive but thrive." Letter from the Editor**



**"If I could wrap up my entire experience here at the Bird into one word it would be: PRICELESS." Jerry Bobo story**

## our team

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 Fredrick Kingston, *Interim Youth Programs Director*  
 Brian Lawrence, *Development Director*  
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### Network Representatives:

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 Samantha McDonald  
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## Letter from the Editor



Dear Friends,

May is National Foster Care Month! It is time to honor the caregivers, case managers, service providers

and advocates who work tirelessly to ensure that our society's most vulnerable children and youth have the opportunity to not only to survive, but to thrive. These unsung heroes understand better than anyone that these are all OUR children and deserve our love, care and support.

While we honor these dedicated individuals, we must also recognize the importance of the policies and programs that make it possible for them to provide such critical support for our youth in care. We are coming off yet another prolonged legislative session where we saw a final budget that restored and protected funding for every

Mockingbird priority program targeted for cuts or elimination (for more information on Mockingbird's legislative achievements, visit [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org)). It is a testament to our cause, our work, our

**We are just coming off yet another legislative session where we saw Mockingbird's two top priorities (HBs 2592 & 2048) signed into law.**

partners, and our youth that we continue to see such positive results in such difficult legislative climates in Olympia.

We now shift our focus to our hallmark event at The Mockingbird Society: the seventh annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, which will occur June

25th through the 27th. Every year we bring together 60 youth from across the state to help them realize the promise they hold as young leaders. Even now as we honor those who support youth in care, our youth are developing the next round of policy proposals to be revealed on the third day of the Summit. These proposals have the potential to help the very same caregivers, case managers, service providers and advocates create a better future for that six-year-old girl — who doesn't yet know that she will be in foster care.

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

Sincerely,

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



**Special Contribution**  
**Jerry Bobo**

## In a Word: Priceless



**Jerry Bobo (center) demonstrates his Mockingbird Pride at Youth Advocacy Day. He has been involved with The Mockingbird Society for four years as a chapter member, Network Representative and Resource Specialist.**

## 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 child'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!

For those of you that do not know who I am, my name is Jerry Bobo and I have been involved with The Mockingbird Society since 2008. I have loved all the support I have received as an employee, and all the love I received as a friend and family member. It is with mixed feelings that my time here at Mockingbird will come to an end May 11th, 2012.

I could list all of the accomplishments that I have achieved over the years like being the emcee at multiple events, speaking at our annual luncheons, etc., but I am not going to do that. All of the events I have attended and all the speaking engagements I have been involved in have had a positive impact on me, the youth from my Seattle chapter, and those that will experience some form of the foster care system. I have been around long enough to see The Mockingbird

Society grow dramatically as an organization, and I wouldn't change that for the world. If I could wrap up my entire experience here at the Bird into one word it would be: PRICELESS.

PRICELESS because The Mockingbird Society's work is all about giving back. It's about building a world-class foster care system. It's all about helping youth take control of their life while dealing with the pressures of independence, and the transition into adulthood. PRICELESS! All these priceless attributes have helped drive me to do the best work possible, and help the "Region 2 Stay Tru" chapter members be 100% themselves regardless of past experiences, and use those experiences to help change the foster care system and its youth. "Region 2 Stay Tru" is my extremely large extended family, and they are PRICELESS!

As I step down as Resource Specialist for the Seattle Chapter, I am comforted knowing that my extended family, "Region 2 Stay Tru" will stay true and continue building the world-class foster care system we always talked about in our monthly meetings. I am inspired knowing that the entire Mockingbird staff helped mold and develop the person that I am at this very moment. This is not a goodbye because I am still going to be a part of the bigger picture when it comes to making Washington state's foster care system world-class.

As I move on to finish my education and becoming a better leader in the process, just remember that Mockingbird is a PRICELESS organization that will help and support all of those involved with the bird. Love you all and see ya after the Leadership Summit!



“Cocoon House is a home, not a shelter. The staff here are amazing. They are honest, fair, supportive, respectful and treat every one of us like family members.” *Cocoon House story*



“Experiencing this program helped me appreciate nature, people and animals. It provided me with life skills like cooking, relationship solutions and being a leader.” *Fostering a Future story*



## My Transformation at Cocoon House

*The author is a resident at Cocoon House Complex in Everett. This facility provides long term transitional housing to youth ages 15-17 who have no other place to go. This is one in a continuum of services offered by Cocoon House to the homeless and at-risk youth of Snohomish County.*

**I am one of many small branches of a broken tree.**

**Always looking to the ones above for guidance, strength and security.**

**One little branch trying to keep the others from breaking away.**

**Who will fall? And who will stay?**

**Now I stand alone.**

Life for me growing up was never easy. I had my struggles with drugs. I lied, cheated, and stole from a lot of people. I can only learn and ask for forgiveness for the things I've done. Every day I prove that I can do better. I grew up in a trap/escort house for six years with my mother. When I was twelve my mother then forcibly introduced me to heroin and then I became hooked on it for two years. During this time I found myself doing as much harm as I could to the ones I loved. I was hurt, but my choices made my situation harder and increasingly unbearable. Today, I know that I am an addict. I may have had a hard life, but I have lived through my mistakes and improved my decision making skills. Now I am proud to say that I am a strong independent addict in recovery, with a full year clean!

Before coming to Cocoon House, I moved around often and never had a stable home. I chose to live at Cocoon House because there are many resources and opportunities available. Residents have opportunity to participate in arts shows — which are very popular events. Artists share their work with fellow residents and celebrate our creativity. Right now we also have a small group of people, including myself, that like to work in the garden. Later this summer we will sell part of our harvest at a farmers' market, splitting the profits. In addition, we put on film festivals and life skills classes, and soon we're going to be opening a ceramics program. Cocoon House is a home, not a shelter. The staff here are amazing. They are honest, fair, supportive, respectful and treat every one of us like family members. Each resident has a place in Cocoon House. We recognize individual's unique qualities and strong hearts; together striving to make a better life for ourselves. We can achieve anything.

I'm lucky to realize that my life is better than ever at Cocoon House. I would be truly lost without this home. Here, we are required to attend school daily — no excuses! Also, I actually have a healthy social life and enjoy participating in the artistic activities. I get assistance looking for work and help keeping a job. As I've grown here I've learned that if the help is available, it's in my interest to take it.

If I could change one aspect of the foster care system, it would be to make placements feel more like a home. In my opinion, the main reason why there are so many runaways is because there are too many miscommunications. All youth are scared and nervous when they enter the system. There must be open and strong relationships in the foster setting. In my experience, foster care feels more like a business and less like a secure home. It's important that the general public understands our struggles and is aware of the issues we face.

Currently, I am close to completing my GED. After I earn my GED I am going to attend Seattle Central Community College to study graphic arts. Art is my passion in life. I don't go a day without doodling, drawing, or looking at a tattoo idea. My plan is to build an art portfolio and become a tattoo artist as a hobby while I pursue business management professionally. I love seeing people's smiles after they get a tattoo. As an artist it inspires a lot of pride. I believe that you put an imprint on someone that will last forever. My body is my journal and tattoos are a part of that story.

**I am one of many.**

**But alone I will go.**

**And plant the new seeds, where a beautiful tree will grow.**

**I am the start of a new beginning.**

**Now I stand unafraid.**

## upcoming

**June 25-27, 2012**

*Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit*

Islandwood School in the Woods  
Bainbridge Island, WA



## thank you

Suzanne Akerman, Rose Berg-Fosnaugh, Paul and Debbi Brainerd, Larry Crim and Judith Mitchell, Bruce Cross and Perkins Coie, LLP, Pam Dost, Susan Elizabeth, Lawrence Evans, James and Rosemarie Flaherty, Adele and Paul Forte, Molly Forte, Roger Freeman, Makeba Greene, Jillian Gross, Ray and Jillian Gross (in honor of Grandma Gross), Sarah Hamilton, Lura Harrison, Jo Ann Herbert, Judith Hightower, Sandra Howard, Gabriel Johnson, Sarah Johnson, Ken and Ramona Kirsch, David Komendat, Jackie Liao, Carol Lucas, Erin Shea McCann, Karen McCutchen, Martin Powell, Joyce Price, Georgina Ramirez, Marsha Reagan, Heather Riley, Spafford Robbins, Representative Mary Helen Roberts, Dae Shogren, Janet St. Clair, Krysta Teker, Alicia Tonasket, Seattle Foundation, Steven Wayne, Windermere Real Estate (Capitol Hill), Windermere Real Estate (Renton), Paul Wirsing



**FAST FACT**

**24 YEARS AGO**

then-President George H.W. Bush issued a proclamation declaring May as National Foster Care Month. For more information, visit [www.fostercaremonth.org](http://www.fostercaremonth.org)

## Fostering a Future — Changing the World One Girl at a Time



*Fostering a Future helped Sammy become the leader and advocate she is today.*

A ten-year-old girl stands outside her house waiting for her leader to pick her up and take her to Girl Scouts. She looks out the car window at the clear blue sky as her leader asks her, “How has your week

**“I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and strong and responsible for what I say and do, and to respect myself and others, respect authority, use resources wisely and make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.”**

— Girl Scout Law

been?” She shyly answers “It was alright, I saw my mom. Who’s coming to troop tonight?” The troop leader then responds by telling her that everyone will be there. Little does she know she is gaining the support, resources and life skills needed for her future.

Juliette Gordon Low founded the Girl Scouts in 1912 with the vision that all girls had the

same ventures that she experienced. Being first of its kind in the nation, *Fostering a Future* was started in 2002 after a concerned group decided to expand the Girl Scout movement to include more girls in foster care and kinship care. *Fostering a Future* provides young girls the opportunity to grow into strong, confident, courageous women.

This unique program addresses the instability and social needs faced by girls in foster and kinship care. It gives girls the privilege to participate with others that share the same life experiences and challenges.

As the ten-year-old girl finds her way into the Girl Scout office with her leader she sees all her Girl Scout sisters. They all stand up and face the promise and law posters, sighting it in unison:

**“Promise:** On my honor I will try to serve God and my country, to help people at all times, and to live by the Girl Scout Law.”

**“Law:** I will do my best to be honest and fair, friendly and helpful, considerate and caring, courageous and

strong and responsible for what I say and do, and to Respect myself and others, respect authority, use resources wisely and make the world a better place, and be a sister to every Girl Scout.”

Eleven years later *Fostering a Future* still stands strong in helping girls like me. Experiencing this program helped me appreciate nature, people and animals. It provided me with life skills like cooking, relationship solutions, and being a leader. I now serve from my heart, with the respect for all people. From this I gained more than friends but a life time of memories.

Girl Scouts *Fostering a Future* is changing the world one girl at a time. This article is to celebrate this program. Thanks to all the leaders, mentors, volunteers and staff that help make it possible for girls in foster or kinship care have a future while in foster care. To find out more about this great program, visit [www.girlscoutswa.org](http://www.girlscoutswa.org).

**Art in Action**  
Jerrica Long



**Mykal**

one of a kind, great individual who didn't let anyone bring him down never complained moved on with life forgave everyone whether they were wrong or right

Mykal was himself caring and sweet very outgoing loud, never quiet and a good friend who kept your secrets safe

he loved his hair and oh my god, never stopped talking about it! those blue sunglasses were pretty cool he never took them off

the day he told everyone about his heart problems I wanted to put my head in my hands and cry you would have never thought such a young guy would not mention anything or talk about the pain

now that Mykal has passed away I show up at meetings a little sad which he wouldn't want but it's hard not to miss your best friend

**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](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org), call us at (206) 407-2134 or email us at [mbt@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto: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.

**Fostering, from page 1**

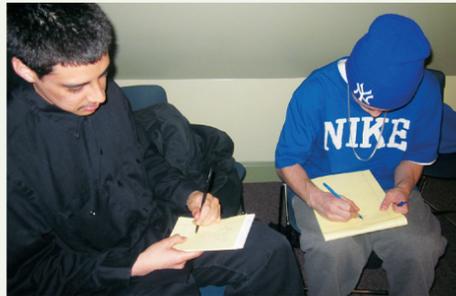
the age of 19. If a youth would like to stay in care for longer, they have to petition the court to keep their case open.

In Minnesota, the youth's Supervised Independent Living housing is based on their best interest and individual determination of needs. Housing settings include apartments, dorms, host homes, or other innovative ideas. With these different types of

**MOCKINGBIRD YOUTH NETWORK** Chapter Voice  
Our Voice. Our Future.

**Cour'ige in the Future** by Tianna Oliver

**Region 3 North (Tacoma)** — On April 11th, 2012 Tacoma's Chapter Cour'ige participated in the Voice Development training in preparation for the 2012 Foster Youth & Alumni Leadership Summit. The training was facilitated by Mockingbird staff Deonate Cruz and Tiffany Washington with guest observers Bailey Buckingham, Kate Storms, and Samantha McDonald. With this being Deonate's first time visiting with the Tacoma Chapter, we started off with a round of games to get everyone introduced and laughing. Also, because this was the first Voice Development training for many in the Chapter, we talked a lot about the Leadership Summit, what we do and what its purpose is for youth. Most importantly, during the activity about the pros and cons of sharing your story, we discussed what exactly could happen if you were to share your story in the wrong manner, or how it could influence people in a positive manner.



We ended the training with lots of laughs and additional people filling out applications for the Leadership Summit.

For the last couple weeks we have been brainstorming possible community engagement events we could host or participate in as a Chapter. One of our ideas is to hold a block party with the people in the community. We came up with this idea after asking around and talking to people about what they like to do during the summer. We found out that they already

have block parties every once in awhile around the different neighborhoods. We are hoping to collaborate with some of the people in our community and throw a big block party with food and games sometime in the summer. This would be a great opportunity to really get our youth involved in their communities and get the word out about The Mockingbird Society and what we do, as well as participate in a fun activity for all ages. We've also talked about going to some of the different events they have in the Tacoma area such as the Art on the Avenue and Tacoma Ethnic Fest, both in the summer, and both great opportunities to really mingle with people from all over the Tacoma region. Being a youth in foster care too often means moving from place to place. A block party would be a good chance to be a part of a community, even if it is only for a few hours. It only takes a few moments to make a connection that can last a lifetime.

**Region 2 North (Everett)**  
by Garrett Nadeau



On April 2nd the HEYMAC Chapter hosted a Summit Application Party at Youthnet in Mt. Vernon. Kate explained the purpose of Summit and described the application process. Our Network Representative, Diamonique Walker, assisted us with our essays. Diamonique gave great tips on how to write a persuasive and complete essay. We can't wait for Summit!

**Chapter Snapshots**



**Region 1 South (Yakima)**  
by Brandy Baxley



Youth of the Yakima Community Center gathered at the Southeast Community Center to participate in 100 Jobs For 100 Kids, Youth Career Fair. We had a total of 17 youth and alumni come to this exciting event, where they went through job readiness class, interviews, filled out job applications, and obtained their food handlers permit.

**Region 2 South (Seattle)**  
by Max Ream and Nick Holcombe



Last month we finally had the Independent Living Program (ILP) conference, "The Wizard of Life", and it was a great success. The Seattle Chapter and Region 2 M.A.C. worked very hard over the past few months to make sure everything fell in place for the conference. To celebrate all the work we've done thus far, we will be attending the Mariners game May 8th. On May 19th and 20th Nick Holcombe (our new Chapter Leader) and I will join the other chapter leaders at our quarterly State Leadership Council meeting to learn The Mockingbird Society's new "Transitions" training!

**Region 1 North (Spokane)**  
by William Mendoza



In our chapter we have elected Guillermo Mendoza to be chapter leader. Throughout the month we have been busy helping youth with applications for the Summit. On our next meeting we are going to plan community service projects in Spokane. We have also assigned three new committee leaders who are in charge of community service, individual growth, and system reform.

**Region 3 South (Olympia)**  
by Miqueko Johnson



Hello, My name is Miqueko Johnson and I am more than honored to be selected as a new Olympia area chapter leader to The Mockingbird Society! It truly feels like I've been through struggles in my life to get to this point to outreach to people just like me. I will keep my efforts strong and goals high. Every one of you is a blessing indefinitely. Thank you.

housing, to ensure appropriate supervision, youth must have at least one face-to-face visit per month with the agency.

New York, like Washington, allows youth to go out on their own for up to six months and decide if they would like to continue being in care or not. Unlike Washington, Youth will automatically be enrolled into the Extended Foster Care program unless they refuse. One example of a supervised independent living program in New York is a two phase program that provides services to youth all

over the state even those that are pregnant or parenting. The first phase requires youth to live in an agency building that has 24-hour staffing and requires youth to save half of their earnings. In the second phase, youth move into their own apartment in the community but are still keeping in contact with program staff.

Since the passage of the Fostering Connections Act came during the Great Recession, extending foster care to 21 has been an uphill battle. While we have made good progress in the state of Washington,

there is still much work to be done. At 18, very few individuals are ready to start out and form a life of their own (whether they are in foster care or not) and Fostering Connections is making it possible for youth to have bigger, brighter and better futures. The Mockingbird Society will continue to advocate for the expansion of the Fostering Connections Act until we achieve our legacy goal of ensuring that all youth aging out of care have access to safe housing until age 21.