

Mockingbird Times



Recipient of 2005 Congressional Angels in Adoption Award
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

September 2007

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

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Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

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It's that time again. Yes, school. I know those of you who are still in school are wondering, is this the end of the summer already? Well it is, but that does not mean fun time is over. It does mean that it is time for homework again. But what about the fun stuff that happens while you're in school, like the sports, spirit weeks, dances, and seeing your friends that you did not get to see while you were on your summer vacation? For some people, school might not be their best friend and for some it is. I was one of the ones that loved going back to school after summer. It was time to get back to work.

School is work for those who are in school. You get up at six and have to be there by seven forty-five and be there until two. The difference is you're not getting paid by the hour. You get paid by quarter, semester or should I say when your grades come; that is your paycheck. Good grades show that you put hard work into your work and if it's the other way around than that means you need to pick up your slacking. School is a very important part of our lives nowadays. You can't get a good job with out having a high school diploma or showing that you completed some type of education in your life. This year, let's look at school differently, meaning, have a positive attitude starting with yourself.

Here are a few words of encouragement and tips to help you start your school year off. You have to want to go to class every day. Remember, those of you who are high school

It's Back to School Time BY JAMICA HENDERSON

freshman, sophomores, and juniors, that in order to graduate you have to pass all the classes that are needed.

- Push yourself to be on time to school and to each class.
- Get REST! I know that it is school time and you want to talk on the phone or stay up late to go to the movies. But remember, there is the weekend. You have plenty of time to do all that fun stuff.
- Study for at least one hour a day for all your classes. I know some classes you don't have homework in and some you do. Of course, you are going to do the work from the class that assigned you homework. This year let's do something different. Once you have finished that assignment, check in all your other classes to make sure that you did everything and if not, that's your time to do it.
- Don't wait for the last minute to get in an assignment for a credit or make-up credits. Teachers take it very seriously when a certain assignment is due and know you want to do it to get the credit.
- When you get into your senior year, you don't want to be making up credits. You want to be enjoying your senior year. PLUS you still have the Senior Project to do and that requires the whole senior year. So tips for all lower classmen: Pass all your classes because what you don't do will come to the light. Remember this is your grade. You don't look dumb or stupid or not cool for passing your classes.

- Show that you care about your education. If you are a part of a group that is not doing their part in the project, say something. Remember, that affects your grade and if you want the grade you deserve, you must show it.
- Be involved with your school. When school comes around, does it mean no fun? There is plenty of fun. Football, basketball, baseball, track, cheerleading, dance teams, volleyball, swimming and so on, are all available. I would not have had much fun in high school if it wasn't for school spirit.
- Don't forget to eat breakfast or lunch. Even if you think you don't have time to eat, try to take time and eat anyway. That is a very important part of your day, especially if you are going to be using your brain. Pack a snack if that helps you to remember to eat.

This should help you start the year off with a kick. Remember, this is your job and you want to get paid with a bonus so stay focused, have fun and enjoy the school year.

I have one more tip for you. Go to the Web sites below and look at the positive tips that will help you get through the school year. Print what you like out and paste it on a piece of paper. Every time you feel like giving up, go over them and encourage yourself that you can do it. Have a great school year!

Web sites referred to in this article:
www.aap.org/advocacy/releases/augschool.htm
kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/school/back_to_school.html



Opened in 1999 by Deacon Mary Shehane, Sanctuary Art Center (SAC) creates "a warm safe calm environment for [homeless] youth to build success and creativity through the use of various artistic media," says Annie Cotton, current program manager. SAC is an arts program open a few days a week where homeless youth can go to get away from their everyday monotony of the street life. Three days a week, they can go and make a variety of different art projects from ceramics to stained glass to painting and so on. On Saturdays, youth can go and either do any one of many art projects or learn or practice music on the drum set, electric and acoustic guitars, bass guitars, piano, etc.

But the center is not just for cranking out projects. The staff build relationships with the youth as well. The youth "connect with people here and feel like they've got people to turn to when things aren't going well. When they do art and complete a project it's a positive experience for them, that they take away something that helps them understand their past, is useful for their future. Or they make something that is useful like clothing, etc," says Executive Director Troy Carter. This is able to happen because SAC is smaller and more individualized than other drop-in centers.

The program staff hopes to give the kids an atmosphere where they can start a project or goal and finish it and even sell it so they can feel success. They strive to provide a place to chill out and get indoors, a place to go when in need. When the youth finish an art project, they can keep it. Or they can sell it at one of

Homeless Creativity BY JESSICA MARTIN

the several art shows SAC holds throughout the year. If their artwork gets sold, a majority of the proceeds go back to the artist.

The music program began in 2004 and happens on Saturday mornings from 10am until 1pm. Youth who participated in SAC's art program specifically asked for a music program, and so it began. It provides an opportunity for youth to experience a free-form jam session supervised and instructed by local musicians. "I think it's a very good venue for youth who don't communicate well with words, a neat way to involve everyone in a room because everyone can 'talk' at the same time. It's fun. Music is a way to get people to smile and laugh. It's visceral, a media," says Troy.

Now you may be asking yourself, "What makes SAC happen? How is it funded?" First and foremost, SAC would not be around without the staff. They are the ones who apply for a lot of grants each year. SAC is also supported by churches, volunteers, and many donations from artists and individuals who have heard about the program. About 80% of the art supplies come from donations. If you want to help out by donating, the center is looking for art supplies and sometimes

food and clothing donations as well. Another way that SAC is supported is from several art shows they hold each year and especially an annual auction they hold every spring.

Because of the hard working staff, volunteers, and donations, SAC was able to serve 308 different youth last year with 1,617 visits because many of the youth often return for more than one visit in order to complete larger

projects or many smaller projects. This year so far, SAC has served 194 different youth.

"I love SAC. It is a great place. I like to come here a lot. I come here because I can do things I would never get to do otherwise. I get to be creative and relax for a while. The staff here are super duper. I make jewelry, sew, and play the drums," says Jason, one of the many youth that come to SAC on a regular basis.

"This place is wonderful to come and relax, cool off, get my

mind off of things and take a break. I make books. It helps me to take time off, get things together and to recuperate and freshen up for life. I do my hobby: making books [sewing torn out magazine pages together like a journal] that I otherwise don't have the time,



A mosaic table was created by Jessica Martin at SAC. The table took three months to complete.

Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS



I must say, the older I get the more I seem to greet the month of September with very mixed feelings. Everyone is enjoying the sunlight and the longer days. Fruit trees and wild berries grow on nearly every block in the neighborhood. I especially love the very early mornings during the summer and the warm, quiet air that feels like a special invitation to this new day. It's as if September was in a meeting with the other months--all twelve of them--and it became clear that one of them had to be the "bad guy" and bring everyone back to reality. Imagine that conversation: "Why should I be the one to tell children it's time to go back to school? Let April do it!" Well, we all know how that one turned out, so here again is September calling us to account.

Returning to school, especially if they are attending a new school, can be very exciting to kids but also very anxiety provoking. For children and youth in foster care, it can be especially difficult. The past several years have seen a marked increase in awareness and support regarding the critical importance of education for kids in foster care. I want to send a special

thank you to the thousands of foster parents, kinship caregivers and state case workers who will go the extra mile to ensure they provide the support, resources and advocacy necessary for the child(ren) in their care to be successful in school.

In Washington State and across the nation, opportunities are increasing for youth from foster care to attend college. Let's make sure that all kids in foster care know that if they do work hard in school they have future opportunities for their academic success. But school success is more than academics. It involves participating in the enrichment activities sponsored by the school and community, which also supports the social development and quality of life of all kids.

I believe one of the best things we can do for kids is to help them identify and develop their own interests and passions. Of all the homework we will be doing with our kids, I tell you--being a cheerleader for them is one of the most rewarding and long lasting. Here's to September!

 Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Good-bye, Misty!



Youth LEAD Alumna Jamica Henderson, Youth Representatives Andrea Roldan and Jessica Martin, and Youth LEAD Coordinator Najja Morris bid adieu to Senior Youth Representative Misty Lou Cook.



Executive Director Jim Theofelis and Youth LEAD Alumna Jamica Henderson pose with Senior Youth Representative Misty Lou Cook at her farewell party. Misty worked for The Mockingbird Society for three and a half years.

Turning Your Passion Into Profit BY SHERRELL DORSEY



Lately, the media has been consumed with young entrepreneurs turning simple hobbies into multi-million-dollar companies. *YouTube*, *MySpace* and *FaceBook* are prime examples of incredible ideas turned into profitable business ventures. So, if they can do it, why can't you? Well, I'm here to assure you that you can. You don't need an incredibly outlandish idea to start your own business. Start simple by turning your talent or passion into a business venture. No matter how young you are, you can become your own boss.

Do you baby-sit on a regular basis? Congratulations, you are already the president of your own company! Grow your business by alerting other parents about your services. Design your own business cards and fliers. Ask daycare owners if they can pass out your fliers to parents. Can you speak a foreign language fluently? You can make money teaching your language to eager learners. Start a tutoring program and charge your students an hourly fee. Post your services on Craigslist (www.craigslist.com).

When you have decided what kind of business you want to start, take a moment and do a little research. Will you need sup-

plies for your company? How much will it cost? You will also need to alert others about your business. How much will it cost to print fliers? Write down a list of places that you can post your fliers. The library, local businesses and community boards may be a great place to start. Speak with the person in charge at each location and tell them about your business. They will be more than happy to help you out.

I recently started my own company, *AccessionPR*. I took my love for writing and passion for meeting people and turned it into a business venture that helps small businesses gain a presence in the media. But before I could outright start my business, I had to do a little research. I had to find out who my competition was, learn the dynamics of starting and operating my own business, and get advice from professionals.

You may not need to go too far into details for your own business, but remember that you can always learn something new. Make an effort to learn more. There are magazines and Web sites geared to young business owners like *Teenpreneurs* magazine and *YoungBiz.com*. Discover what other kids your age are coming up with to develop their own businesses. Remember that you can do anything you put your energy and effort in to. Teach dance. Walk dogs. Cut grass. Stuff envelopes. Just do something. Take your talent and make it work for you.

If you have any questions about starting your own business, contact the author at Sherrell@AccessionPR.com.

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

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, to sing, to fly.

Update Your Subscription

If you have recently moved, need to change the number of issues you receive, or if the address we are mailing the *Mockingbird Times* to needs to be corrected, please complete and mail the subscription request form found below so we can update our records.

THANK YOU!

KAREN COWGILL; BEVERLY CUEVAS; CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS: TOM GILL; LYNN LAMBY; MARGARET-ANN AND MARK LeROY; LYNNEA AND KIRK MANAHAN; SHANNON REAGAN; ADELL RICHARDSON; AND KERRY SCHULLER

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We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you'll receive a monthly edition of the *Mockingbird Times*. Thank you for your contribution.

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Please mail this completed form and your check to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

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Executive Director
Jim Theofelis

Operations Manager
Ros Ghan

Public Relations/Fund Development
Darcie Gray

Executive Assistant
Lauren Frederick

Programs Manager
Dr. Wanda Hackett

Youth LEAD Coordinator
Najja Morris

Mockingbird Family Model Coordinator
Marie Goines

Administrative Assistant
Juan Ramirez

Youth LEAD Alumna
Jamica Henderson

Senior Youth Representative
Samuel Martin

Youth Representatives
Leona Bill,
Vanessa Hutt,
Jessica Martin,
Andrea Roldan,
Mellissa Stringer

Contributing Writers
Jonelle Abd-Rahmaan,
Jamila Booker,
Sherrell Dorsey,
Anna Gonsales,
Robert Parker

Event Planning Assistant
Kim Callahan

Volunteers
Chrissie Jackson

Layout
Kelly Hawkins

How to Save a life By Being a Friend BY MELLISSA STRINGER



Do you ever feel like you're all alone and the world has given up on you? Well if that's the case, then you need to hear what I have to say, I have been there before so I can relate. There are times when you just feel like you don't want to fight or want to just give up, because you just feel like nobody cares anymore. But then you feel like there is possibly one person who can make it better, so you think about it and you realize that there is that one friend that has always been there no matter what. So you turn to them and they try everything in their power to make you feel better.

They try everything to make you laugh, even try to get you to crack a smile, maybe even act a little crazy. But sometimes that doesn't work and you still feel alone.

Things start to run through your head like you're not worth anything, like nobody cares about you and nobody cares if you are dead or alive. That is never the case. There is always somebody out there that cares about you, even if you feel like you are alone.

A long time ago, I lost a friend to suicide because he felt like he didn't belong in this world and that everyone gave up on him. His mom had died a few months before from breast cancer and his dad just died emotionally: he was never there and was always drunk. My friend just felt so hopeless and he blamed himself for his mom's death. So he just gave up. What sucks the most about it all is that he called me three days before school started and said "I love you, Mellissa. Just know that." I just replied, "I love you, too," not knowing that was the last time I was going to talk to him. He killed himself the following Thursday.

After he killed himself, I was never the same. I was lost and not very talkative. I

just went blank. I barely ate anything. I felt like killing myself too, because he was gone. But then, one of my friends pulled me aside and said, "Mellissa, if anybody ever tells you that you are not worth the fight and are a waste of time they obviously don't see what the rest of us that love you see in you. Because what we see is somebody that lights up a room when she smiles, a person that can make a person come right back up when they are feeling down. You are special, Mellissa, not a waste of time. You are worth the fight. I would fight for you any day."

Those simple words saved my life. They helped me see that life is full of so many things and there is so much to live for. I realized that somebody out there actually cared about me. Sometimes, just hearing that someone cares makes all the difference in how someone thinks about things.

"A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart and can sing it back to you when you have forgotten the words."

~ Anonymous

So, this article has such deep meaning because so many people everyday feel alone and just want to give up on everything. I don't want to have to bury another friend. Here are four signs that someone may be wanting to commit suicide: 1. Change in eating pattern 2. Change in sleeping 3. Change in personality 4. Talking about dying.

If you know of anyone who is exhibiting these symptoms, have them call the suicide hotline at 1-800-suicide or call them yourself.

Just always pay attention because you never know when your loved one or even you might be feeling like this. I know that somewhere there is somebody who needs to be cared about. That is why I wrote this article: to show that person that they are not alone.

CREATIVITY, CONT. FROM PAGE 1

space, or supplies for. And there's food here," says Isabel, another youth.

If you want to know more about SAC, you can contact them at (206) 522-6256. Or you can check out their Web site at www.sanctuaryartcenter.org. Or you can always stop by if you are in the University District at 1604 NE 50th St. Seattle, WA 98105 in the church at the North side doors (facing 16th Ave NE) upstairs. Hours of operation are: Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 9am to 12pm, but you must be there before 10am to get in. Friday evenings from 4:30pm to 7:30pm, but you must be

there before 5:30pm to get in. Saturday mornings from 10am to 1pm, but you must be there before 11am to get in.

If you are not located in range of the University District, there are still other programs for you. Arts Corps offers free art education classes to kids in grades K-12. Experienced teaching artists create rich learning environments in educational facilities all over King County, fostering their greatest resource: young people. For more information, you can check out their Web site at www.artscorps.org or you can reach them at (206) 722-5440.

Being Separated From Your Siblings BY LEONA BILL



Can you imagine not being able to grow up with your own brothers and sisters? In foster care, most children get separated from their siblings. It doesn't even matter if there are only two or three kids, they can still get separated from one another. One of the most common reasons that siblings get separated is that the family group is large and there isn't a home available that can take all of them. There are also times when a case worker may feel that the eldest brother or sister might be of a bad influence on their younger sibling(s) or has had to take care of the younger ones and hasn't had a chance to be a kid.

Sometimes, foster parents will decide to change the ages of children they are licensed for or only take in certain genders. When foster parents change their minds like that, it makes it hard on children because it increases the likelihood for siblings to get separated from each other.

My four sisters and I have been in and out of foster care since we can remember and have been in multiple placements. I have four sisters and one brother; I'm the eldest out of all six of us. One of my sisters and I had to move from one home we were placed in together because the foster parents decided that they wanted only boys, not girls. There was no place available to take both of us so we got separated and we had not even been there for a full year.

Since there were six of us in my family, we barely got the chance to live together or see each other. My sisters and I were first taken away in the same vehicle and I remember asking the adults in the van, "Where are we going?" and "Are we all going to the same place?" They kept telling me they didn't know! My oldest sister and I had to see our siblings get dropped off before we did. We remained separated for most of the time we were in foster care. There were only two foster homes that we got to live in with each other.

The first home, which took all five of us girls, had four other kids already, making nine in total. We lived with each other there for about a year. Before the foster parents let us go, they made sure we were still going to be placed together and in a good home. In the beginning, our baby brother was still living with our biological mother, but my sisters and I came home from school one day to find that our baby brother was going to be living with us. However, because he hadn't seen us since the day we were taken from our mother (when he was an infant), he wasn't talking with anyone; he had no idea he had five sisters.

Over the next couple of years, our baby brother finally got used to us and understood that we're his actual sisters and

shared the same mother. This became a problem later on because my baby brother would only listen to me and sometimes my sisters. Our foster parents and DSHS worker agreed that this wasn't good at all. The case worker tried separating us from our brother but we and our biological mother made the point that it would just be more traumatic for our brother. The six of us remained in that foster home for about three years then we were able to go back to live with our mom.

After only a year, though, we were all in the foster care system again. This time there was very limited contact between us. We didn't even get visits with each other and we were hardly ever allowed to call each other on the phone. If we were able to call each other at all, the phone call was supervised. Now, the three oldest of us have aged out of foster care and the younger three are still in the system. We all talk to each other once in a great while but being separated from each other in the past has made it difficult for us to keep in contact with each other as well as making it difficult for us to get along with each other now.

This has not just been my experience. I have other friends who have been in foster care and also had siblings that they were separated from. My co-worker, Jamaica, who has three siblings, was separated from two of her younger siblings for five and a half years. When the four children were placed in foster care, they were immediately separated. Jamaica and her sister were able to be placed together but their brothers were placed in a different home. Jamaica and her siblings fought to keep contact with each other and are still in touch with each other. Jamaica has actually gotten custody of her brothers. When I asked how being separated affected the relationship between her and her siblings, she told me that there was a distance in some way, but it also helped better them, relationship-wise, and it made her want to communicate and talk more to them.

This is how I feel about my siblings and I'm hoping that over the years we will have more contact with each other. I also dislike the fact that I see my younger cousins and my younger siblings being separated from their families and not being able to grow up with their siblings.

I really hope that social workers and the state realize how important it is for kids to grow up with their siblings after they have been taken from their parents and that they make a better effort to keep sibling groups together. They need to encourage foster families to take sibling groups and provide the resources to help make the placements work. It really does have a lifetime affect on those relationships and others throughout our lives.

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I Found Mother Nature

JONELLE ABD-RAHMAAN

I found Mother Nature
(One day) by the road
She smiles she laughs
She says to me sister
You've got soul the
Villagers see you coming
Around the corner with
The necklace of wisdom
With the shield of faith
I stopped in Egypt drinking
With the camels consenting
To drink after dark beautiful
As you are they say you
Are on your way to Damascus
Road I was knock off my horse
Got back off exchanged words
With brother wind turned
The other cheek even though
Fear had took me a hold

The Little Girl Cries

ANNA GONSALES

Will the little girl cry because
She suffered so much pain
Will the little girl cry because
She was abandoned
Will the little girl cry because
No one loved her
Will the little girl cry because
She was threatened
Will the little girl cry because
She never met her mom and dad
Will the little girl cry because
She had no friends
Will the little girl cry if she
Gives up her secret
Will the little girl cry if she
Chooses the right path

Untitled

ROBERT PARKER

There are many paths,
Which will you choose?
For only one,
Is truly you,
Not the one you lead,
But it's the path,
In which you craft,
Won't be easy,
Will be hard,
However,
True happiness,
Is in your heart,
Before it's to late,
Start.

How Deep Is Your Soul?

JONELLE ABD-RAHMAAN

How deep is your soul?
The unlinking of deceit
Many false prophets
Many deserted lot countries
Of people who do not mean
Me well apposed by my
Promotion
Thoughts racing not many
Faces lies, lies, lies
Snakes wolves calf's animals
Sheep dogs, danger ahead
Heck we all have our demons
Some more than others some
Wont agree I am not your
Mother but I know the
Trails and tribulations
To the secrets of life

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 homelessness. If you want to be published in the Times, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org. For more info and to check us out, go to www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

Bridge of Glory

ANDREA ROLDAN

It's a bridge of beauty and unique scenery,
over glistening waters of wonder of what lies beneath.
Bringing joy and peace to the mind when anticipating my arrival to seconds of amazement.
Looking up to the heavens, a perfectly painted picture.
The sky resembles promise and truth during the sunset hours,
shadowing deep purples and pinks under crests of white clouds.
Over bright blue skies filled with colors of happiness.
Releasing any unwanted thoughts of waste into the dark water, reaching spiritual nirvana.
Only until I cross the bridge completely and nature's trees shatter my view from the windows of the bus.
So I'll hold images of poetry in my mind of the bridge of glory until I experience it another time.

The only way of finding the limits of the possible is by going beyond them into the impossible.

~ Arthur C. Clarke

La Vie en Rose BY ANDREA ROLDAN



La Vie en Rose, the American title of the film "The Extraordinary life of Edith Piaf" means "life is rosy" in French. This English-subtitled film by Oliver Dahan and Picturehouse Entertainment takes the audience through a tour of the life of the French singer Edith Piaf. Though, her life was not always rosy, it was driven by compassion and love.

Edith grew up in extreme poverty, abandoned by her mother and raised in a brothel when she was young. Her father eventually took her away from there and with him onto the streets. She began singing for money in the beginning to support her and her father. When she became old enough, she sang to support herself and her best friend. Eventually she made her way into performing on stages, in diners and later got a record deal. She was born to be a star.

Her voice was amazing and just as strong as she was. She fell in love with Marcel Cerdan when she arrived in New York City. He was a boxer, very attractive, but also a married man. That didn't stop the endless love she had for him until he went back home to visit his wife and never returned to Edith's arms. Living the life of fame and wealth made her sick in her old age, when all she could do with her time was reflect. The visuals of the movie, the

stirred emotions during its climax, and Edith's powerhouse voice-over singing "No regrets" could give you goosebumps. There were plenty of boring when I was tired of reading the subtitles and her life didn't seem very interesting to me but the final scene, the finale, was amazing.

When watching the movie I tried to get a feel for the character, the singer, the star. After she became famous, she seemed also to become wild. Her attitude was more demanding and she was stubborn. She never wanted to hear what people had to tell her if she didn't agree with the idea. You could see how she lost her best friend after falling in love: jealousy. These two women always looked out for each other on the streets and, when Edith became a star, she started to forget who was there for her when no one else was. The more successful she became, Edith got more interested in her own affairs and their friendship slowly faded. That seems like a natural thing for us to do; when we "rise" and find success as we move out of the dark past we were shadowed in, we tend to forget about people who protected and supported us.

I enjoy watching independent/foreign films because often times they portray the subject matter in a different perspective than "Hollywood." I had a short discussion with an audience member who was older than I about what she thought of the film and how Piaf's life was portrayed. Being that I had never heard of Edith Piaf before watching the movie, I had nothing to compare it too. She told me that comparing what she already knew about Edith Piaf's story and the film, the film was definitely "realistic and harsh." Marion Cotillard, who played Edith, won the "Hollywood Breakthrough Award" at the Hollywood Film Festival and the "Golden Space Needle Award" for best actress at the Seattle International Film Festival.

Passion To Action Anniversary BY JAMILA BOOKER

You may have heard about the group **Passion to Action** and wondered what they are all about. Well, we are a statewide foster youth and alumni advisory board that was developed by Children's Administration (CA) in partnership with Casey Family Programs and the College Success Foundation. We provide Children's Administration with input and recommendations regarding their policy and practices. We do an array of things such as sit on advisory boards, workgroups, committees, etc. We do presentations to CA and other community partners on issues relating to foster care. We also give feed back on brochures, Web sites, etc..., pretty much making sure that the foster youth voice is incorporated into all aspects of foster care.

On Saturday, August 18, 2007, Passion to Action celebrated our two year anniversary as an advisory board (we were developed in April of 2005). To celebrate our two years, we invited Assistant Secretary of Children's Administration **Cheryl Stefani** to join us. We had a lot of fun. At most meetings (which are every other month) we are mainly working. This time we mixed it up; we were able to ask Cheryl questions and go over our accomplishments as a group for the past two years. After we did that, we all got a surprise: Cheryl awarded each member with a plaque thanking us for our commitment and dedication to the group and working towards making the lives of

our brothers and sisters in care better. Once each of us got our awards, we finished our celebrations with some cake and awarded our group's coordinator **Rick Butt** with a small gift from all of us.

One of the things we did during the celebration was to go through each of our favorite memories and moments we've had as a group. My favorite moment was going back and presenting to Children's Administration's management team. Just two years ago I had presented to them and it was the first time I had ever spoken to a group of people. It was so nerve racking but in the end I loved it and it just empowered me to want to keep doing it more and more.

I was in the group the day it formed and it has been such a journey for me. All the members became not only my friends but part of my extended family. They have watched me grow as I have done the same for them. We all have a bond and connection that is indescribable and no matter what our stories are, we all have something in common

about our experience. Although we have had members come and go, we bond just as strongly with the new members. There are no groups - we are just one big family. We all have a passion to use our expertise to make life better for us and our extended family in foster care. Through Passion to Action, I have found a voice not only for myself but also for those who cannot speak and I know that each member has had a similar if not the same experience.



Jamila Booker of Passion to Action receives an award of appreciation from Assistant Secretary of Children's Administration Cheryl Stefani.

Submitting Letters

All incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to the *Mockingbird Times* Editorial Staff and will be opened by editorial staff. All incoming correspondence to reporting staff under 18 years of age will be opened first by *Mockingbird Times* Editorial Staff.