



[Contact Us](#) | [Email Sign-Up](#) | [Donate](#)

[Home](#)[About Us](#)

[Our Mission](#)[Board of Directors](#)

[Jim Theofelis: Executive Director](#)

[Photo & Video Gallery](#)

[Leadership Summit Video \(high res\)](#)[Leadership Summit Video \(low res\)](#)[Mockingbird Society 2008](#)

[Annual Report](#)[Employment](#)

[The Mockingbird Family Model](#)

[A Comprehensive Approach](#)[Existing MFM Sites](#)[Frequently Asked Questions](#)[Reports & Evaluations](#)[We Can Fly Quarterly E-Newsletter](#)

[The Mockingbird Network](#)

[Network Chapters](#)[State Advisory Council](#)[Speakers Program](#)[Leadership Trainings](#)[Foster Youth/Alumni Leadership Summit](#)[Mockingbird Times](#)

[Mockingbird Times Current Issue](#)[Earlier Mockingbird Times Archives](#)

[Advocacy](#)

[Advocacy Updates](#)[Advocacy Agenda](#)[Achievements](#)

[News & Events](#)

[News](#)[Events](#)

[Resources](#)

[Budget Cuts 2010](#)[Child Welfare System – National](#)[Child Welfare WA State](#)[Cultural Relevancy](#)[Educational Resources](#)[Homelessness](#)[Mental Health & Foster](#)

[Care](#)[Transitioning Youth](#)

[How Can I Help?](#)

[Attend an Event](#)[Donate Your Time](#)[Make a Donation](#)

News & Events

[Join us for the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit 2010](#) 11 May 2010

One United Voice for Change Join us on Friday, June 25th...

[Save the Date: Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit](#) 7 April 2010

ONE UNITED VOICE FOR CHANGE June 24 & 25, 2010 •...

[Youth Advocacy Trainings](#) 25 January 2010

You're invited to join us at your local Network Chapter...

[More events](#) | [More news](#)

Advocacy

[The Mockingbird Society 2010 Legislative Summary: Bringing Hope to Youth and Alumni of Foster Care](#) 4 May 2010

This year an uncertain economic climate challenged our Legislators to...

[More advocacy updates](#)

The Mockingbird Times

[May 2010 Mockingbird Times](#) 5 May 2010

Vol. XI, Issue V >>2010 Legislative Successes by David Buck >>May Marks National...

[View all issues](#)

[« Go back](#)

March 2009 Mockingbird Times

Vol. X, Issue III

>> [2009 Youth Advocacy Day by Ashlie Lanier](#)

>> [Youth Advocacy Day—An Inside Perspective by Christina Koshney](#)

>> [Advocacy Day by Maria Martinez, Region 2](#)

>> [Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis](#)

>> [Meet the Staff: Ashley Vassar](#)

>> [Cultural Relevance by Diamonique Walker](#)

>> [Racial Disproportionality by Jerry Bobo](#)

>> [Meet the Staff: Ian Grant](#)

>> [Tribal and State Court by Leona Bill](#)

>> [Creative Corner](#)

- >> [Community Events](#)
- >> [News From the Mockingbird Network: Your Needs, Your Voice](#)
- >> [Save the Date](#)
- >> [Quote of the Month](#)
- >> [Thank you!](#)



2009 Youth Advocacy Day by Ashlie Lanier

On February 13th 2009, over 200 foster youth/alumni as well as supporters made their way to Olympia for the **2009 Youth Advocacy Day**. **The Mockingbird Network** (a statewide network of youth advocates who are informed, trained, and empowered and determined to transform the system) and **ASK-Y** (Advocates for System Kids and Youth Coalition) collaborated to put on Youth Advocacy Day.

We started the day off with the presentation of the 2009 Legislative Agenda performed through a skit created by The Mockingbird Society Network staff to make it more appealing to youth. The definite Mockingbird Legislative Agenda consists of **HB 1492–Independent Youth Housing Program** and **HB 1961–Foster Care to 21**. These bills are designed to provide safe housing for youth after exiting care or give them the alternative to stay in the foster care home they are in while furthering their education.

Joint HB 1183 & SB 5609–Legal Representation provides a lawyer to youth for their dependency hearings not just in juvenile court. We also presented **HB 1938–Sibling Visitation** which came out of the **2008 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit**. It essentially encourages the adoptive parents of siblings of youth in care to continue visitation rights after adoption. Finally, **SB 5758–Notification of Rights**, also a product of the Leadership Summit, makes it mandatory for caseworkers to inform all youth in care at the age of 12 of their rights.

Throughout the day we had five influential people come give us inspirational speeches showing their support: **Kari Burrel** from the Governors Office; **Laurie Lippold**, a lobbyist; **Representative Roger Goodman**, a sponsor of HB 1138 & SB 5609–Legal Representation; **Representative Ruth Kagi**, Champion for HB 1961–Foster Care to 21 and HB 1938–Sibling Visitation; and **Representative Eric Pettigrew**, Champion for all the bills in our Legislative Agenda.



Youth swarm the capitol building, advocating for the rights of youth in care.

After hearing all the impactful speeches and getting fired up, we marched around the campus shouting for what we wanted and when we wanted it. My personal favorite chant was; “We don’t want no garbage bags, we want homes!” Youth that attended the march carried large black garbage bags waving them in the air symbolizing what foster youth carry their belongings in. There was a lot of media coverage including **KING 5**, **The Seattle P.I.**, **The Tacoma Tribune**, and **The Olympian**. At one point, I caught myself getting that exciting feeling in my stomach, I had finally realized the importance of what I was doing when I watched the crowd roaring and the cameras filming. Network staff member **Ian Grant** expressed, “The march was the most visceral part of my experience. It’s one thing to sit in an office and work for change. It’s quite another to stand on the marble steps of the Capitol with 200 other people demanding it.”

During the day, Regions Two through Six all had the opportunity to speak with their local representatives. **Region 4 For Change** had the chance to speak with **Senator Adam Kline**. Three youth gave short personal statements that included logical reasons why he should support the bill. This was many of the youths’ first time getting the chance to advocate for themselves and others to important people who can produce change. The youth definitely put on their game faces, especially **Mockingbird Network Resource Specialist Georgina Ramirez**. She provided assertive yet logical arguments and opinions in the defense of these bills.

At the end of the day came the hearings. We actually had the chance to sit in on a real hearing about HB-1961 Foster Care to 21 and HB-1938 Sibling Visitation. The Sponsor was **Representative Mary Helen Roberts** and the Chair was **Representative Ruth Kagi**. Over 15 youth had the opportunity to testify about their personal experiences in the foster care system, why these bills were so important and why they need to be approved. At the end of the hearing this was clear to everyone. Network staff member **Christina Koshney** summed it up with, “Youth Advocacy was a day for the underdogs to come together and make a big roar, and that’s exactly what we did in Olympia, all 200 + of us.”



I strongly believe that despite the debt our state is in, “You cannot put a dollar amount on a child’s life.” No one in the system asked to be put there and without these programs many youth’s lives will be changed for the worse. The 2009 Youth Advocacy Day was definitely a day where we, the youth, advocated for ourselves and succeeded.

[>> back to top](#)



Youth Advocacy Day—An Inside Perspective by Christina Koshney

Friday the 13th is associated with terror and horror in popular culture, but this February, 2009, Friday the 13th was a day of terror in Olympia, as foster youth tore through the capitol. This may seem a frightening way to represent Youth Advocacy Day, but to me it paints a picture of the passion that was brought by the 200 plus foster youth and supporters that attended Youth Advocacy Day. Olympia was brought a new energy, a new spirit that day and it was from the foster youth. We had something to say and we came with some very specific goals.

It was the several legislative representatives and other Olympia staff, taking the time to welcome the foster youth voice to Olympia that allowed a platform for us to be heard. I appreciated the representatives that let us know that we did have some friends in Olympia and that our fight was a worthy one. The representatives also made it very clear that this is a time of great financial deficit and that to get all these bills passed, it would be a fight for our rights and all the more necessary to speak loud and clearly to the board members and chair in Olympia. Fortunately, if anyone missed the message on Advocacy Day there was plenty of media coverage including **King 5 News**, **The Olympian**, and other media, to remind us. I had the opportunity to share with an independent radio source my perspective on foster youth and the specific issues we brought to Youth Advocacy Day this year. I was caught off guard by the sudden opportunity but excited to have my voice heard by a broader range of people. It made me feel important and recognize the great opportunity that The Mockingbird Society is offering me, not only to have a voice but to become a recognized leader.

It was very great to be so welcomed and to see that people really wanted to hear what we, as foster youth, had to say. We were a valued resource and seen as the experts on the issues. Besides being so welcomed and having the opportunity to be heard, I think one of the best parts for me was our march around the capitol. Previous to this event I couldn’t see myself as someone who would be marching for an issue, I’d rather speak to someone directly. However, with each stride with garbage bags in hand and chanting phrases such as, “we don’t want no garbage bags, we want homes” I became a part of the march. It truly was empowering to be a part of this thundering voice that shouted out for all foster youth, the generally unseen, unheard, and uncared for. I was filled with pride and hope that we will be heard!

[>> back to top](#)

Advocacy Day by Maria Martinez, Region 2

On February 13 over 200 youth and alumni of foster care from all over Washington gathered for the common goal of fighting for the out of care benefits that could possibly be cut from the budget this year and years down the line. Meeting with the representatives on the legislative board was both benefiting and frustrating. **Legislator Walsh** showed great concern, sympathy and interest by sitting and speaking with us personally. The discussion was emotional and uplifting, giving us hope and a better understanding of the circumstance in which our bills were in jeopardy. But the most influential part of the whole experience was the youth from all different backgrounds and current situation coming together and striving to help one another. The sense of belonging and acceptance was all around us as we marched and raised our voices to let our presence be known to anyone in ear shot. I was full of amazement on that day and would not think twice about going again.

[>> back to top](#)



Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

In the midst of so much darkness and anxiety there is always hope—especially for those who know where to look. Our annual **Youth Advocacy Day** was February 13th, 2009. This annual event sponsored by The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is an opportunity for youth in foster care, kinship care and/or homeless to participate in the legislative process. This year we had over 200 youth, alumni, and allies converge on Olympia to share with legislators our Advocacy Agenda, which was voted on and approved by young people in foster care. This year's Advocacy Agenda includes **Safe Housing** for youth exiting foster care, **Notification of Rights**, and **Sibling Visits**. For more information on these issues and their progress in the legislative process, please visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

It was a beautiful, although chilly, morning on the Capitol Campus, which only encouraged our group of young leaders to speak up, speak out, and stay warm! Several legislators visited our group and expressed their support for our Advocacy Agenda. We were most fortunate to have a senior policy advisor from the Governor's office also come by and speak to the youth. The young people, as always, were simply amazing. They asked compelling questions and presented themselves as accomplished advocates who were determined to ensure that lawmakers understood the ramifications of their decisions. Before lunch, we gathered for a parade around the Capitol Campus chanting, carrying signs and American flags, and offering spectators a sight to behold. During the afternoon, youth testified before the **House of Representatives Early Learning and Children's Services Committee** about two issues: the need for safe housing for youth who turn age 18 and are discharged from the foster care system and the need for sibling visitation to occur even if one of the siblings is adopted. It was really an amazing day that demonstrated just how passionate and engaged young people are. MBS is proud to sponsor Youth Advocacy Day and proud to stand alongside so many of the wonderful organizations that participated.

A special thank-you to all of you who have donated to MBS and helped create meaningful opportunities for youth to exercise their leadership skills while also ensuring that public policy reflects our community commitment to our children and youth.



Foster youth and alumni of care, along with their supporters, joined together to speak up for the rights of youth in care on Advocacy Day in Olympia.

[>> back to top](#)

Meet the Staff: Ashley Vassar

Hi my name is Ashley Vassar, I am 16-years-old and I am from Seattle. My mother is also from Seattle and my father is from Alabama. However, I was not raised by my parents. Instead, I was raised by former relatives and a few foster parents. I have an enormous amount of experience in kinship care, foster care, and living in a group home. My mother passed away when I was 12-years-old. Ever since then, I have been very determined to graduate from high school, go to college, and also achieve many great things in life. I was in kinship care for the first 15 years of my life. In the last two years I have been in two foster homes. Now I am in a group home in Burien where I have been there for the past eight months.

I am currently attending Highline High School and Puget Sound Skills Center in the culinary arts class program.

In my spare time I love to write poetry. I mostly like to write about my problems or a memory of some sort. I have a passion for drawing portraits of my friends and family. I am ambidextrous. My favorite thing to do is to dance and sing to my favorite songs. Some of my favorite singers are Keisha Cole, Mary J. Blige, and Mary Mary.

In the past, I have won many accolades and awards such as being a participant on the youth panel at the **2004 Kinship Care Gathering** at African American Academy. The gathering highlighted issues around family members who serve as long term caregivers for other members of their family. That experience was great and I really learned a lot from it including how to advocate for myself as a young individual and what my rights are as a child in the foster care and kinship care systems.

On April 2, 2004, I won Youth of the Year at **Atlantic Street Center** in recognition of my hard work and accomplishments towards meeting and achieving my goals and enhancing my personal growth. It took me a while to accomplish my goals but when I finally achieved them I was very proud of myself. Some issues in today's society with foster care and homeless youth is the lack of visitation with relatives. Most teenagers and young adults in care find it very difficult to keep in contact with their younger siblings. If I could change one thing about the foster care system it would be to keep all siblings in the same household, not separate them into different foster homes. I wanted to be a part of the Mockingbird Network so I can tell my side of the story and to let my voice be heard.

[>> back to top](#)



Cultural Relevance by Diamonique Walker

To me, cultural relevancy in foster care is everyone being able to engage with and identify with others of their same or different backgrounds in a way that makes the youth feel supported and safe. When there is no one around the youth that shares their particular culture, to have an open-minded child welfare professional that is willing to experience a youth's culture, when it is different from their own, and share it with the youth to get a better understanding, can make that much of a difference in a young person's life.

For a youth to be in a home that is culturally insensitive to them, "...has the potential to be damaging to the youth," says **Mockingbird Family Model's** (MFM) Hub Home parent, **Degale Cooper**. They may question who they are and who they identify with. But, by being culturally relevant, we are supporting the healthy development of youth in care. Having a 'one size fits all' way of thinking and not regarding cultural differences between the youth and caregiver can negatively influence youth to be closed-minded as well. "As caregivers, our own cultural incompetence can have a direct effect on youth and may lead to confusion and uncertainty of who they are as individuals," said Ms. Cooper.

The MFM supports cultural relevancy in foster care by training Hub Home parents to be culturally sensitive professionals. A culturally sensitive person is gaining the knowledge and skills to develop effective relationships with diverse individuals and works to break down barriers to fairness and equity within groups and organizations (Hackett, W. & Hanson Smart, D., 2006. **Bridges to Engagement: Tools to Support Cultural Competence**). Such a person is learning to be empowering—actively furthering youth's self confidence; validating—providing settings where cultural norms are practiced, acknowledged, shared and experienced amongst others; and transformative—helping youth and families develop effective skills and using anti-racism and anti-bias practices. **Dr. Wanda Hackett**, Director of Family Programs at The Mockingbird Society reports that the MFM requires "Hub Home and Satellite Home families to be sensitive to and/or reflect the comfort and experience of the culture and ethnicity of the children and youth being served."

All child welfare professionals should find ways to be more culturally relevant. Ms. Cooper not only serves the youth in her Constellation but insures that the youth's surroundings are culturally relevant as well. In her Hub Home there are youth and adults of different ages, races, cultures, and sexual orientations. Everyone is different so no one feels left out. Ms. Cooper also mentioned initiating age-appropriate discussions with the youth asking the youth to contribute stories, ideas, and questions they have about culture. Ms. Cooper also made a reference to the importance of signage being evident in foster homes. This could be posters and pictures displaying different cultures, customs, and beliefs.

Keeping cultural relevancy in foster care is important because many youth don't have connections with their birth families thus no connections to their backgrounds and cultures. With the idea of cultural relevancy, we are giving youth the opportunity to explore, experience, and share their culture and learn about that of others. Racial disproportionality is another thing that makes cultural relevancy so important. The number of youth of color in foster care nationally is about fifty nine percent.¹ Many of these youth of color are often put in placements where the primary caregiver is of a different race and/or culture. With cultural relevancy in foster care, youth and families are able to explore, understand, and respect each others' cultures and customs.

¹ www.fostercarealumni.org

[>> back to top](#)



Racial Disproportionality by Jerry Bobo

Do you know what disproportionality is and how it affects the community? Disproportionality is the over representation of a particular race or cultural group in a particular program or system.¹ It comes in many different forms and is then turned into stereotyping African American communities. It's a numbers problem that doesn't seem to add up but in reality the numbers are correct. For example, Washington State is the third most prolific incarcerator of blacks for drug offenses in America. Blacks make up only 3.6% of the population², but 55.5% of people sent to state prison for drug offenses are black.³ Does this make sense to you?

Drugs are a big problem within all American cities, especially inner cities. It would seem good that the criminals are getting caught for their actions, but it's not fair that one race would receive more time than another race for the same crime, male and female alike. Drug-related prison sentences have made a significant dent in the overall African American population of King County. A white male and black male do the same related crime, but the black male is sentenced to prison at a rate 25 times higher than the white male and black females are sentenced at a rate 20 times higher than white females: same crime, more time. What is this doing for the community other than creating a greater distance between state authority and the community? Inner city youth end up on the short end of the problem, with some of them losing parents to the system.

Watching the actions of parents, youth follow in their footsteps and become foster children lost in the child welfare system, becoming statistics themselves.

Foster youth of color that then experience their own form of disproportionality as children of color enter the system at disproportionately high rates.⁴ It takes one person to direct someone in the wrong direction but it takes a group to stop the direction of that person. A community takes care of itself through the people in it. To help stop the increase of disproportionality we have to help the community and break the cycle of race discrimination.

¹ www.dfps.state.tx.us/about/Renewal/CPS/disproportionality.asp

² quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/53000.html

³ www.hrw.org/en/node/62236/section/6

⁴ www.casey.org/OurWork/Disproportionality

[>> back to top](#)



Meet the Staff: Ian Grant

My name is Ian Grant. I entered care at age fourteen and spent my time in care in five group homes over three and a half years. That's the way group homes work: even if you comply with all the rules and restrictions (which is more or less impossible to do and retain your sanity), your stay is limited.

Group homes are pretty unpleasant, although there are differing degrees: I had the good luck to avoid placement in some of the truly horrible ones, but even a good group home is leagues away from what most people would call a stable, functional home. In group homes, I was treated like a prisoner. I wasn't allowed to leave the house without (usually written) permission. Every fun activity or escape was withheld as an "incentive." Liberties that normal youth have as a matter of course, like going to the mall with friends or joining an after-school club, were either not acceptable or required advance written permission, usually contingent on meeting every arbitrary goal and complying with every arbitrary restriction that the group home administration set.

I joined the Mockingbird Network because I believe that we can do better. It has been said that evil prevails when good men do nothing. Most people don't know how bad the foster care system is. We have a duty as foster youth and former foster youth to work to make the system better for those that come after us. No child deserves to have the upbringing I had or to face the challenges I had to face. They don't have to. We are the future and we can and will fix these problems. We have no choice; nobody else is going to fix them for us.

I believe that the biggest problem in our society is that of insulation. There are so many issues, so many great and small injustices, that people stop paying attention. They are overwhelmed by the deluge of hard-to-solve problems, come to the conclusion that they can't do much about them, and stop paying attention. Eventually they stop caring entirely. Why bother? Most people have problems of their own and they don't see the point in beating their heads against the wall in an abortive attempt to solve other people's problems. They have a point; most people are not in a position to create meaningful change in their communities. Why? This attitude. People think of themselves only as individuals and not as members of a community, and so most of the community doesn't communicate. No communication, no community.

I urge every foster youth and foster alumnus to put themselves in a position to change their community. Sometimes it's as easy as finding someone in power and telling them your story. Every foster youth I've met has a compelling one. I look forward to the day when foster youth don't have to struggle to survive. I look forward to a foster system that produces tomorrow's leaders, not today's problems. We can make it happen.

[>> back to top](#)



Tribal and State Court by Leona Bill

When Native American children are taken from their home they get taken away by the State Indian Child Welfare. The State must inform the Tribe why they want to enter on to tribal land request permission to step foot on Tribal Land. The state will be escorted on to Tribal Land.

When Native American children are in foster care, the family deals with either state court or tribal court. Instead of a judge, tribal court has the chief of the tribe, tribal councils, and elders in the Court room. All these people decide what happens in all cases that are in tribal court. When in out of home care, Native Americans are protected by federal legislation. The **Indian Child Welfare Act** (ICWA) is a law designed to protect American Indian/ Alaskan Native children who were being removed from their Tribal Communities and Tribal Families at an alarming rate. The ICWA requires that an Indian child is to be placed with an Indian relative or within their tribe or else with another tribal nation. The last resort of placement is a non-Native foster home. This law protects the right of Indian children to maintain connection to their culture and ensures that the rights of a tribal nation to oversee and govern the welfare of its children is protected and enforced. This law applies to the children and family whether or not the family is enrolled in a Tribal Nation.

The Native children's cases are handled by either the tribal nation and or by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). If there is an area that has a high concentration of Native American people, DCFS has what is called a "Native unit." The Native unit is responsible for Native cases is trained to

uphold the ICWA. The only times that cases are not handled by tribal court and are handled by state court is if the tribe is out of state or the tribal court has decided to not take jurisdiction.

As an alumna of foster care, I have had experience in dealing with both systems. My case was passed back and forth between the tribal court and state court. This had a major effect in my life as I was not always sure who had jurisdiction over my case. I was constantly calling both Tribal and State to try and find out who I needed to speak with about my needs or speak with them to receive permission to go on outside activities, such as horseback riding, rock climbing, rowing and sailing. Since my case was passed between the two systems it took a long time to get a hold of the right worker that was in charge of my case. The last time I was in foster care, tribal court was handling my case, and I was disappointed with the decision because my reservation's tribal court did not want my mother to get us back. Although we experienced many different challenges, my mother still did as they ordered and received custody over us again. When the tribal court was supposed to work for and help my family it felt like we were receiving the opposite. Because my mom had no money, it took a very long time for her to find an attorney. The attorney she finally found was very helpful with our case and helped her win back custody.

If tribal court is not providing help for parents with their case they can turn to the **Northwest Justice Project** (NJP) for legal help. If parent(s) cannot afford an attorney, NJP will try to find them an attorney for free. Parents that can afford an attorney and are in tribal court can ask court clerks for a list of attorneys who are admitted in practice. Parents can also try to hire a private attorney who does dependency law.

To receive either legal advice or find an attorney visit www.nwjustice.org or www.washingtonhelp.org/WA/index.cfm.

Thank you to Janeen Comenote and Chori Folkman for taking time to answer questions I had about the tribal system.

[>> back to top](#)

Creative Corner

Indulge by Rashunda Johnson

He is special with a hint of vanilla: purposely the gentleman without doubts but what is it that makes me wait: I love the fact that he's similar yet a cliché model of a human being: That's not the usual or is it: My mind races as if I was sprinting: not continuing other races but still a hold on this one... the 2: I am his interest: I own an interest for him: His name is special and sincere: His name is a name that's speaks to me whenever I need words: His name is my belonging: Passion of communication erupts when there're thoughts: Passion of warmth soothes me when he's near. The words of a humble gentleman never intimidate but fiercely accommodate me with his intentions of acknowledging me: Love is sudden: Commitment is already here, yet unsure because of waiting: Waiting for time: waiting for us: waiting...: The days go by and I miss his words, so not his style: A sprinter like I: We, the brains of the relationship: His eyes make me melt: His voice a patient rattle: His face, round: His body, muscular: His ambition is more than street life: His presence is my friend, my man... Indulge.

All One by Ashley Vassar

In my mind the cord got cut
 But the world keeps spinning
 All the shows that they show
 and all the games that they play are fun and satisfying
 but no one's winning
 my life is like a toy that never shuts down
 my reality is like a boy that never plays around
 sometimes the truth hurts
 but you just have to open your mouth and let it burst
 it may cause a little pain, you may gain a little fame
 but in the end nothing will be the same
 'cause my life is your life our life we live together
 from my brotha
 to my sista
 to my cousin
 to my motha
 to my pops
 to my peoples
 we are all one within each other

[>> back to top](#)

Community Events

Region 2

Mar 19th, Central Lutheran Church & March 26th KDNA Radio: Community Education Forum, Supporting Successful Futures for Youth in Foster and Kinship Care; 10 AM – 3 PM.

Mar 30th – Apr 3rd: Alternative Spring Break: East Meets West, For more info call Kim Lopez, (509) 575-6114.

Region 3

March 26th, Everett Community College: 3rd Annual Region 3 Educational Summit.

March 13th, Mt Vernon Youthnet: Life Advocacy training, 4-6 PM.

Region 4

March 17th, Seattle Center: St. Patrick's Day Parade, 12:30 PM.

March 28th, McCaw Hall: *Taking Root*, the story of Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai, (Part of Seattle International Film Festival) 12 PM to 2 PM.

Region 6

March 13-22nd at Washougal High School: CYS Theater presents *The Music Man*.

March 23rd, Hilton Vancouver: Women of Achievement Celebration—25 Years, 200 Women; For more info call Heather, (360) 906-9136.

[>> back to top](#)

News From the Mockingbird Network**Region 2 Chapter in Yakima County**

Voice Development Training by Sandra Hunt, Chapter Youth Leader: On Saturday, February 21, 2009, we had a **Voice Development Training** here at the **Yakima Casey Family Programs** Field Office. I had the opportunity of being a co-leader alongside **Nathan** and **Amber** from the Tri-Cities. It was all rather fun, and everyone who attended seemed like they enjoyed it too. Laughs were shared, smiles were exchanged, and candy was eaten. To end the meeting, we raffled off a \$25 gift certificate to Target. The lucky winner was **Yadira Mendoza**. On March 7th we are voting for a name, figuring out our service project, and figuring out when we are going to the Yakima City Council.

Volunteer Activity by David Smith: On Saturday, February 14, 2009, Region Two went to a local convalescent center for the elderly in Yakima, **Crescent Convalescent Center**, to pass out valentine grab bags to the residents of the center. The bags consisted of candy and a little "happy valentine" card, this gesture not only made the residents feel valued but we as youth learned some life advise from some of the residents. Margaret, who just turned 94 on valentines, advised us to "always find ways to improve yourself." **Helen** who was up and walking on her own at 95 advised us to "never give up and listen to your mother," she was rather inspiring. **Harry** who was 86 advised us to "never lose your sense of humor." Harry even proved he didn't lose his, he told us a joke as we all got to hear it in his room. The residents really enjoyed our visit, some let us get to know a little bit about themselves, we let them know about us and we were even invited to attend the church that one of the residents attends. The youth that went, all really enjoyed the experience, and agreed that they would like to do it again.

**Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Sassi Ellsworth**

On February 13th, all around Olympia, the buzz of hundreds of people from all around the state rings through the air. Excitement for this big day can be felt everywhere. What is this special occasion? Youth Advocacy Day. Advocacy Day was our chance, as foster youth, to meet with our state legislators and give them a face to associate with the upcoming bills about to go through the house. Among the bills being voted on are **House Bill 1961 (Foster Care to 21)**, **House Bill 1183 (Legal Representation for Youth in Care)**, and **Senate Bill 5758 (Notification of Rights for Youth in Care)**. Foster youth congregated here at the Capital, marching and meeting with their local representatives. Coming from a participant's stand point, I feel that this day was one of the most beneficial days of my life. Seeing how much these politicians care is quite moving and I can guarantee that they care more than we give them credit for. When it all comes down to it, regardless of the outcome of our bills, participating in this incredible day has changed my outlook on these representatives who once seemed so different and strange.

**Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Yolanda Kilgore**

Words cannot describe the emotions running through my body as I lead the march down the street in the Washington capitol as I chanted “What do we want? When do we want it?” We made it to the capitol building and, as I rallied the other youth, alumni and supporters, I felt totally exhilarated by the fact that my voice was being heard. When talking to the cameras after the march, I felt like it was finally my chance to tell my story and let the world know that we, as foster youth and alumni, deserve more than “Hefty-bag suitcases,” that we do need contact with our brothers and sisters, it is not ok for us to walk into a court room without legal representation, and seeing as the average American doesn’t fully get on their feet until they are 25 and the majority live at home until they are 24 it shouldn’t be right to send us out on to the street at 18 and say “fend for yourself”—we need Foster Care to 21. Our chapter, Region 4 For Change, spoke with **Senator Adam Kline** about our Legislative agenda. Youth Advocacy Day gave me the chance to speak at the hearing and tell **Rep. Kagi** and the committee about how much Foster Care to 21 means to me and the foster care community. By doing so, I found a way to use my voice to make an impact in the right way. How many eighteen-year-olds can say “I got to speak to my state legislature this week?” Thanks to Youth Advocacy Day, I am one of the lucky alumni of care who is able to proudly say I helped make a difference by standing up and speaking out.



Region 6: Speak Up Chapter in Clark County

Youth from Vancouver’s SPEAK UP! chapter joined over 200 foster youth, alumni, and allies in Olympia on February 13th for Youth Advocacy Day. They had the opportunity to talk to eight of our local legislators in one-on-one meetings about issues facing foster youth today and the importance of continuing current programs like **Foster Care to 21** and the **Independent Youth Housing Program**. Our two SPEAK UP! leaders even testified in a committee hearing in front of a panel of legislators and a room full of supporters about issues that are important and impact them. Congratulations to the youth who participated. Thank you for taking the time to SPEAK UP!!



[>> back to top](#)

Save the Date

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit: One Voice United For Change

June 27th and 28th 2009 in Seattle

Current and former foster youth ages 14 to 24 and their supporters will gather to discuss issues of concern to youth in care. For more information or to fill out an application visit at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

[>> back to top](#)

Quote of the Month

“My backbone is the strongest part of my body, why? Because it allows me to stand strong and pulls me back up when I’m down.”

~ Jerry Bobo

[>> back to top](#)

Thank you!

Anonymous; Lydia Balk; Casey Family Programs; Catholic Families; Susan Connolly; Karen Cowgill; The Crescent Confessant Home; Miranda Cunningham; Rashaun Filgo; Robert O. Geballe; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Rachel Hay; Jo Ann Herbert; Sandy Howard; Sara Levey; Stacey and Dan Levitan; Maureen Marinkovich; Chris Marsh, Attorney; Najja Morris; Linda and Cameron Myhrvold; Northwest Children's Fund; Sarah Rafton; Vanitha S. Raman; Maya Rowland; Ezzy Ramos Salazar; Suzanne Shawger; Washington CASA; Natalie Wood

Advocacy Day

Joseph Batch; Megan Burr; Kari Burrel; Larry Crim; Alexia Everett; Representative Roger Goodman; Lura Harrison; Representative Ruth Kagi; Curtis Knopf; Laurie Lippold; Maureen McLemore; Johnny Ohta; Emily Page; Representative Eric Pettigrew; Milissa Raap; Representative Mary Helen Roberts; Molly Robertson; Dae Shogren; Joe Torres; Danille Woolery

[« Go back](#)

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