

Mockingbird Times



Special Edition Sponsored by the Marguerite Casey Foundation

Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth



May 2004

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation

Volume I, Issue I

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Stop and Think before Running Away

ANTHONY GUESS



IS IT REALLY SMART TO CHOOSE TO RUN AWAY or just deal with what seems to be nothing but painful nights? As a teenager it sometimes feels unbearable to live at home with people telling you what to do, but the alternatives are a lot worse.

I ran away at the age of twelve. Now that I'm seventeen years old, I wish I had never made that choice. I had to accept it and try the best that I could so that it wouldn't get the best of me. I was placed in three group homes before being placed in a foster home.

My experience in group homes was not all sugar and spice; as a matter of fact it was the total opposite. The staff switch shifts, so you have different people telling you what to do, instead of just your mom and dad. Teenagers have to attend drug and alcohol classes and/or participate in other types of counseling session, and also have to deal with case workers who seem to only care about getting their job done. They don't really pay attention to what you would like or want unless it makes their job easier.

The thing I hated the most was the court appearances. There was a lot of time wasted: the attorneys might have the teenagers come in at nine o'clock in the morning, but they wouldn't be seen or talked to until ten thirty, sometimes even later than that.

As far as foster homes go, they're a little bit better because you have more freedom; in my experience you don't have to attend counseling if you don't want to. There aren't so many people telling you what to do, and you have more one-on-one interaction with adults. It's often a long process before you're placed in a foster home, depending on your case and especially if you're a teenager.

Before Running Away...

STOP

- Take a breather.
- Ask yourself if running away is something you want to do.
- Try to make it work (if you're being abused, tell an adult immediately).
- See if your school counselor can help.

THINK

- Educate yourself about the foster care system and homeless system.
- Talk to some one who has been in the system.
- See if you can visit a couple of homes.
- Think about what you have (freedom, clothes, money friends, etc.).
- Is there a family member who can care for you?

ACT

- Make a decision.
- Call the Runaway Switchboard (before running away).
- Deal with your choice.

Basically, my life changed drastically upon entering the system. I was no longer a teenager--it felt like I was a prisoner. There are things that teens no longer can do once entering the system. For instance, I couldn't use the phone whenever I wanted to. If I wanted to go somewhere; like to the movies, mall, or even to my friend's house I needed to have what they called a pass. A pass is only good for a couple of hours depending on what your case worker says.

I strongly suggest for teens who are feeling so down and depressed at home that they want to leave, talk to someone before doing so. For example, talk to your school counselor or someone you know who's been in the system. Or if you don't want people to know that's how you feel call the **Runaway Switchboard at 1-800-621-4000**. They are open 24 hours a day and are free and confidential. But please, if you're being abused let someone know immediately. No child should have to put up with

physical, sexual or verbal/mental abuse. Teens, you only have one life and to me the part that means the most is the part that the foster care system takes away: your teenage years.

The Horror of Child Abuse

RICO EVANS



When you are walking up and down the street and you see kids playing, do you ever stop to think about what's going on in their homes? Do you ever stop to think if they are being abused or if they are in foster care? Most people will answer no.

In 2001, there were 903,000 children being abused in the nation (www.casey.org). Since then there was a survey conducted by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect that states that there have been 2,700,000 reports of abuse and there have been at least 1,200 fatalities every year. There are also three child abuse-related deaths every day. Now if you think about the kids who never got help, who never reached out to anyone, how many do think there would be?

Most kids who are being abused are too scared to say anything about it. They were likely raised to think that it is ok that they are being hit. They may sometimes think of saying something but think that it's not going to make a difference and so never say

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Some Consequences Of Running Away

- Get picked up by police.
- Get taken to Secure CRC (Crisis Residential Center- 72 hr. lock down facility for runaway youth).
- If the CRC is full you will probably go to "juvy" (Juvenile Detention Center).
- Get a juvenile record.
- Hurt your relationship with your parents and/or family.

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Foster Parents Speak Out

JAMICA HENDERSON



CURRENTLY IN WASHINGTON STATE there are 10-12,000 kids in foster care (www1.dshs.wa.gov). Foster care is mandated by federal and state laws to protect children from neglect and abuse.

Foster Care is a temporary placement for the child to stay with families or people outside the family. The reason children are put into foster care is because they are not getting the care they need. This means: their parents are not giving them the right kind of attention (neglect), they are being abused, and/or parents are addicted to drugs.

Many foster parents are taking care of kids they don't even know. The percentage of foster kids placed with non-relatives is 73.8 percent in Washington state (www.kitsapgov.com). One reason the percentage is so high might be because a lot of the residents in Washington don't have family here.

The Department of Social Health Service is currently trying to place more children in kinship care, which means the child will go and stay with a family member with help from the state. If the child does not have any family here then the next thing to do is to place him/her with a family they don't know.

I interviewed two foster parents to find out more about why people get involved in this system.

Bob Partlow was a news reporter for twenty-seven years. Now Partlow is a Program Manager for DSHS. He recruits people into becoming foster parents and is a foster parent himself.

Jamica: Why did you choose to be a Foster Parent?

Bob: I chose to be foster parent because I wanted to make a positive change in the childrens lives.

Jamica: Who told you about foster care?

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Letter From the Editor

I am both pleased and proud to present this special edition of the *Mockingbird Times*; a cause for celebration for a number of reasons. *Mockingbird Times* is three years old and this is the first time that we have produced two issues in the same month. We are on our way to implementing part of our strategic plan regarding the *Mockingbird Times*, hoping to regularly produce two issues a month.

This edition is sponsored by the **Marguerite Casey Foundation**, and we are very appreciative for their support. Another reason this edition is cause for celebration has to do with the remarkable young people who produced it. Several months ago, Shannon and I visited Cleveland High School to present the *Mockingbird*

Future Mockingbird Plans

Hello Mockingbird Readers,

We are continuously pondering new ways to expand and perfect our paper. During this process a receive and response column was suggested, (like: Dear Abby). We would love for you to submit any questions, concerns, and general situations related to or non-related to foster care or kinship care, which may need advice, assistance or a second opinion. We will personally research and investigate to give the best and accurate advice as possible.

Thanks for supporting the Mockingbird Times!

Sincerely,
Princess Hollins
Satellite Reporter

Meet Our Staff

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Shannon Barello

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Times and see if any students currently involved in foster/kinship care had interest in working with us. We had a brief meeting with a small handful of students and left some copies of past issues with our contact information for them to review. The very next day all of the students who had attended the meeting as well as a young woman from Rainer Beach High School were at our office ready to start work!

The motivation, energy and thoughtfulness these young people have displayed in working on this project has been exceptional. In fact, I am amazed at the similarity between the articles and concerns expressed by these young reporters and the issues and concerns discussed in the child welfare field by the "experts". I want to express my appreciation to **Anthony Guess, Jamica Henderson, Rico Evans, Ashley Grant and Princess Hollins** for their great work in producing this issue of the *Mockingbird Times*. Additionally, I want to thank **Mary Ann Herrick, Bob Partlow, Darrell Dawgs and Kikora Dorsey** for their contributions to this issue and for the work they do every day on behalf of kids. Finally, a very special thank you to **Shannon Barello**, who each month seems to produce a newspaper even stronger than the month before.



Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.

-Maya Angelou

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents in foster care. The *Mockingbird Times* is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of Mockingbird Society are paid between \$7.50 and \$8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to \$25 per published piece. The *Mockingbird Times* has a monthly circulation of 28,000 copies being distributed across Washington and the U.S.A. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. All donations to The Mockingbird Society are tax-deductible and greatly appreciated. No part of the *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright 2004 The Mockingbird Society.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox:

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anything. The kids who are scared have it the worst of them all. They probably think about what the consequence will be if they tell about their abuse. What will the parents say or worse--what will they do?

According to an article in the *Seattle Times* in 2003, there was a case in Washington in 1990 where three kids were left in a foster home for four months after the abuse was reported. The report was made in August and the kids were not removed until October, and reportedly only because the foster parent, Pauline Hortman, did not pass her alcohol assessment. The kids did not say anything about the abuse until they were told they were not going back to her home.

One situation leading to their removal from Hortman's home happened allegedly when one of the boys said that he was not going to eat dinner. Hortman set his T-shirt on fire. His brother then said something to her and she punched him so hard he passed out at the dinner table. The little boy who had his T-shirt set on fire was only five at the time. When Hortman and the boy went to the doctor for the burns the doctor made a report but nothing happened. The kids were also forced to have oral sex with someone in the home.

After the kids were removed there were reports that they were acting up in their new placements. The girl was sent to 30 different homes, also were then placed in a psychiatric ward. Despite all of this Hortman still wanted the kids to come back to the home, denying that any abuse happened in her home. Hortman was never convicted of the abuse.

After hearing this story, do those kids you saw playing in the street seem a little different? Do you wonder about what going to happen to them when they go home? Everyone should feel that way about kids and not just expect that their life is perfect. 🐦

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

WA State: 1-800-562-5624

Nationwide: 1-866-endharm (1-866-363-4276)

Check out web for info about reporting at www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca

For a crime, physical or sexual abuse or life-threatening situation, call 911

The Importance of Siblings Staying Together

ASHLEY GRANT



CHILDREN LOVE TO KICK BACK AND BE COMFORTABLE in the homes they reside in with their families. Home being the root word of the sentence. The meaning of the word itself has a lot of definitions including: a residence, a household, a place of origin, a comfortable and relaxed environment. All these definitions mean something more than just the physical place. Home ties a person on an emotional and mental level. It is who a person is and where they came from.

That's why it's so vital for children who are being pulled out their usual environment to stay with their siblings. In my opinion, siblings should always be placed in the same homes unless there are viable reasons why they should not be kept together, like abuse. Siblings who have been brought up in the same household should continue to be together because that is what each child has adapted to.

Sibling relationships can be the most lasting relationships there are-- their bonds are usually stronger than oak. "When a child has not grown up with their other siblings it feels as if a wonder has left their heart," stated, "Sally"* a 17-year-old girl (currently living in a kinship care situation).

In my experience, siblings who are separated can also have emotional and behavioral problems because of the separation. Some may lose even the desire to get to know their other family as a result.

When siblings see each other on an everyday basis it makes it easier to go through all those transitions (such as being taken out of their home) than it would a child going through it on their own. Although it is difficult to find a household that is willing to take more than one child, it is safe to say that they are out there. Usually children do not have a say in where they are placed, nor do most of them know how long they will be there.

There is something becoming more common these days called "Kinship Care," where family members take the children and raises them. On most occasions the siblings are not separated, but there are a few families who can not accommodate the needs of all the children. In 2002 an estimated 16,000 children in the United States were placed with kin, of that 5,280 (33%) were in Washington state, according to the United States Bureau Table DP-2 Profile Social Characteristics.

It is important to keep what is left of the entire family together because there is more of a chance that the children will move on and keep hope and dreams alive. I asked "Sally" if she thought the state could have done a better job of keeping her and the rest of her 4 brothers and sisters together? She answered "Yes, because if they cared the state would have tried harder to put us back together" 🐦

*Sally's name has been changed because she wished to remain anonymous.

Placing Kids With Kin

PRINCESS HOLLINS



LEAVING FAMILY/LOVED ONES CAN BE A VERY DIFFICULT TIME in a child's life, regardless of the circumstance. Although the government and community have provided kinship and foster care to reduce the stress, and provide a safe and productive temporary home for the child, it still can be mind-boggling for the family and child: the mental distractions, emotional upsets and long stressful entry process into the system.

We usually don't pay much attention to things that aren't directly affecting our lives, but it's time to work as a community and save youth from further destruction by providing them with good, stable and nurturing foster homes. Kinship care can provide this kind of home.

For those who don't know what kinship care is, it is similar to traditional foster care (licensed by the state to adopt or give temporary care to a non-relative), except it is care provided by a licensed relative, who still receives all the same benefits for the child as a foster care parent, who will provide for their family member.

To find out more about kinship care, I interviewed **Kikora Dorsey**, Senior Manager at Casey Family Programs. According to their website, Casey Family Programs is the first social service agency in the country dedicated to offering planned long-term foster care (www.casey.com). Dorsey is a wonderful enlightening woman who has educated many people, myself included about the foster care system. She speaks about the positive progress and improvement needed in the system. She also has personal experience as a foster parent.

Q. What is your understanding of kinship and foster care?

R. How I would distinguish between the two is that foster care is really about children who can't live at home with

their parents or relative, who need to go into what's called "Stranger Care". In Stranger Care children are placed with licensed parents, who they don't know. Within foster care there's something call "Licensed Relative Care", which is offered as kinship care.

Kinship care involves those children who can't live at home with family, who have or haven't been in contact with the welfare system, which is being cared for by a relative. A relative is not limited to an aunt or uncle, first cousin or grandma, its can be an individual who is identified by the family or child to be significant. It could be a friend of the family, relative through marriage, church member or community member.

Q. In your opinion what is better for children, foster or kinship care?

R. I think the first step should be to place children with kin, although it may require a lot of intense work to search for relatives that may be able to provide for the child. When working with the system families don't always speak out about other alternate relatives, and it should always be an option to find blood or non- blood relatives, so the child can feel emotionally secure.

Q. What is something that the system lacks? How can it improve?

R. The system lacks the ability to [promote effective] systemic change, and find and keep good people [who have] a passion for their work. What we need is to have continuity across the system, with the expectation of the same energy and devotion, regardless of your role in the system.

We can improve by making policies that can apply to everyone and work with the community, which could help reduce caseloads, thereby giving social workers time so they can do their job. There needs to be a financial investment in Social Workers to be trained and knowledgeable about their work. We also need to recruit youth and parents who are/ have been consumers and have personal knowledge about the system that could help improve. 🐦

For the full interview with Kikora Dorsey, see www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Poetry Corner

Who is the Boy Inside

Anthony Guess

Who is the boy inside

Can someone tell me with no lies

Who is the boy inside

Is he shy does he cry

Who is the boy inside

Is he a ball of sunshine

Who is the boy inside

Is he scared and unsure why

Who is the boy inside

Is he happy all the time

Who is the boy inside

Does he wonder or just say never mind

Who is the boy inside

Is he held by greed or is his mind, heart and spirit free

Why don't I know when the boy inside is me

The poem means a lot to me, because at the time of my life I was going through a lot, my brother had just died and I wasn't doing so well in school. I was unsure who I was, or was going to be in life.

It felt as if my life was going no where slow. After reading the poem to myself over and over again, I finally found the boy inside and what he was like.

I realized that a lot of people can benefit from this poem and that as soon as we understand the boy or girl inside of us, we can better understand the man or women we grow into. Even though age tells whether you're a child or adult, the child that we once where never leaves he or she has just been under the worlds greatest dream. When we grow up we forget the little things that meant so much to us, and once adulthood comes we tend not to understand why situations appear or why we handle certain circumstance differently than others.

Don't hide or let go who you once were as a child, just follow him/her so that so you will always know.

Famous People Who Were Foster Kids

Duante Culpepper, NFL Quarterback

Tommy Davidson, Comedian and Actor

John Lennon, musician

Tom Monaghan, founder of Domino's Pizza

Alonzo Mourning, NBA Superstar

Eddie Murphy, Actor and Comedian

Dave Pelzer, Author

Babe Ruth, Baseball Legend

Ice T, Rap Musician, Actor and Director

Victoria Rowell, Soap Opera Actress

Dr Ruth Westheimer, Psychologist and Author



Positive Power: Warning Signs Of Suicidal Youth

PRINCESS HOLLINS

DOES YOUR LIFE FEEL REHEARSED--LIKE EVERYTHING YOU DO IS THE SAME? You wake up every morning at the same time and prepare yourself in the same order as usual. You never have time to eat breakfast and you have to ride the same smelly bus, with an old crabby bus driver who always has a nasty frown on his face; and you always arrive to school 15 minutes late. To top it off, you sit next to the most popular girl in your school, 4.0 student, and class president; who has a smile that can light up the world. You despise her for her flawless manner. She always copies your homework and only talks to you when she needs something.

Well, allow me to spice up your life. You wake up in the morning 10 minutes late, and you prepare yourself little differently. Today you ride a different bus, with a pretty lady who smiles and greets you properly. You get to school five minutes earlier than usual and actually have the time to eat the breakfast that you always miss. When your first period starts, the class feels awkward. Somethings wrong! Your teacher seems disturbed and the girl who sits next to you is not there.

Your stomach drops as the teacher approaches the front of the classroom; announcing the girl who sat next to you has committed suicide the night before. You instantly feel sad and confused. Wondering why and how, and if you had any influence on her suicide. It's just too weird, she seemed so satisfied with her life and everything she did was perfect.

Well, put yourself in her shoes. Imagine living every day of your life trying to please and impress others and you don't have anyone to trust and confide in, not even your family. You and your parents don't have an open relationship. They never have time to participate in your life, beside to nag about your grades and how you needed to improve; and meet their standards.

This was a girl who needed to impress her parents and live up to the many stereotypes that everyone had developed for her. She didn't have friends to hang with and used her time studying, participating in extra curricular activities; not by choice. Despite all the productive activities, she consumed drugs on a daily basis to ease the depression and cutting insecurities. Now, you understand. Behind her beautiful smile she hid all the pain and loneliness, although, it didn't seem that way. Things aren't always as they seem.

Approximately 1 out of every 10 youth between the ages of 15-19 years old have reported having attempted suicide; and half of those will actually commit suicide. For every completed suicide there are roughly 23 attempts made. Male youth are four times likely to complete suicide and female youth are at greater risk for attempts. In Washington state, on average, **every week three young people take their own lives** and it is the second leading cause of death (www.Doh.wa.gov/topic/suicide.htm).

Your stomach drops as the teacher approaches the front of the classroom; announcing the girl who sat next to you committed suicide the night before.

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention 20-56% of people who commit suicide have noticeable warning signs, like:

*Talking or thinking about death.
*Making comments about being or acting helpless, hopeless or

worthless.

*Imagining or stating your non-existence.

*Depression (, trouble sleeping, deep sadness, change of eating habits).

*Sudden change of mood or behavior.

*Losing interest or slaking on things commonly important.

Sometimes our lives become stressful and too overwhelming to handle; and during various stages in our lives we may feel a little suicidal. It's important to pay attention to our peers and family. If you notice any unusual behavior or suspect any warning signs from yourself, peers, or loved ones, take action and SEEK HELP. There are many outreach prevention programs that will help you or your friends and family against suicide like: The Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program (YRSP) which is a non-profit organization founded in September of 1994, The Suicide Prevention Coalition, the Suicide Resource Center (SPRC) and People of Color Against Suicide (PCAS).

If someone you know appears to show warning signs of suicide you should take them seriously and be as understanding as possible. Always listen and make sure you emphasize that you are willing to help. Never try to argue them out of killing themselves, because it only causes more stress and pressure. Never leave someone you suspect alone and remove any objects that maybe considered a weapon. And always be supportive. It doesn't take much for people to feel like jumping off the edge. And reach out for help, you don't to be alone with this.

There's just so much that we take in and there's so much that we ignore. Take more time to talk to your family and friends, and listen, because as long as it's out in the open there's room for healing. 🐦

Where will *you* be in Ten Years?

MARY ANNE HERRICK

When I was ten years old I was placed in foster care, and the last thing on my mind was going to college. Once things settled down, I eventually did decide that I needed to pursue a college education, but I still did not know whether I would be able to afford it. I did not have parents who could help pay for college and I knew it would be very expensive. I also wondered if I was *capable* of being successful in college.

Fortunately, I was accepted into a good school, received enough scholarships to help pay for my education, was given much emotional support from my friends, family, and community, and eventually obtained both my bachelor's and master's degrees in social work.

Now I feel like the luckiest person in the world, because thanks to my education, I have a wonderful job with the Washington Education Foundation, and get paid to do what I love. I get to support other independent students, who are in situations like I was, to continue their education through high school and college graduation. Today I work with 155 independent students who are receiving college scholarships through the Foundation, 67 of whom are former foster youth.

If you should decide to pursue a college education, the first step is to stay in school. Generally, the harder you

work in high school, the better chance you will have of being admitted to the college you want to attend and receiving scholarships to help pay for tuition and other living expenses.

Remember that each college has certain admission requirements including particular classes you must take in high school. It's a good idea to research the schools you are interested in a few years ahead of time.

If you too are questioning whether or not you can afford a college education, you should learn about the many scholarship opportunities for foster youth.

College funding sources for foster youth in Washington State include the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid*, the *Governor's Scholarship for Foster Youth*, the *Washington State Education and Training Voucher*, *Treehouses's Coaching to College Program*, the *Casey Family Scholars Program*, and the *National Foster Parent Association Scholarship* (For scholarship descriptions and contact information see the March issue of the Mockingbird Times).

Every year hundreds, maybe even thousands of former foster youth attend college on these scholarships and grants. Who knows, you may be one of the next foster youth to go to college! 🐦

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Bob: My wife Deanna read about it in an article. She asked if I wanted to check it out. We both liked the idea and have been involved ever since than.

Jamica: How long have you been a Foster Parent?

Bob: I was a foster parent for eight years.

Jamica: What are your plans for these children?

Bob: My goals were to give children the advantage of being kids and have a childhood. To be a parent, a good role model, and to help make a difference in their lives. I wanted to show them there was a better meaning in life.

Jamica: Have you ever thought about adopting any of your foster kids?

Bob: My wife Deanna and I did think of adopting one of our kids when she was six years old, but we did not want to separate her from her siblings. My wife Deanna and I would have taken all the siblings but we did not have enough room for the family.

Jamica: Are you glad that you made this decision to become a Foster Parent?

To Become a Foster Parent:

- You have to be 21 or older.
- Have a home for a foster child.
- Pass health/safety inspection and fire safety.
- Attend Interactive Parent Training .
- Have a good income to meet family needs with out foster care payment.
- Pass Criminal history check and CPS Check.
- Gun Safety.
- Have a First 1st Aid/CPR Certification.
- Take an HIV/AIDS Awareness class, Renew Foster Care license every three years.
- Pass TB test for family 18 and older.

These sources came from www1.dshs.wa.gov.

Bob: Yes, you get so much back from the kids coming your way. You can tell the improvement from when they first come and when they leave. [For example you see a change in their] health, attitude, self confidence, respect for themselves and others.

Jamica: How has this changed your life?

Bob: It has changed my life a lot. Being a foster parent has helped me personally. I have a better look at life and compassion for the kids' life in the world. Being a foster parent has helped me a lot when I am recruiting the other families to join. I can look at a lot of the kids and say that I am happy because my wife and I have helped them make a change in their lives. Watching them grow is truly amazing.

If you have been encouraged by this article to become a Foster Parent, please contact **Bob Partlow** at 1-888-794-1794. 🐦

See **Jamica's** second interview with Darrell Dawgs online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

Reports Just In

***Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project (MFFCP)** program evaluation by the University of Washington is available at www.mockingbirdsociety.org

***HHS Federal Review** of Washington State's Child Welfare System is available as a link on www.mockingbirdsociety.org