

Mockingbird Times,



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

November 2006

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Volume VI, Issue 11

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

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First Annual Youth Leadership Summit

**RAQUEL
GRANATH**



On the seventh and eighth of this past October, Mockingbird Youth Representatives were fortunate enough to attend the first annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, held at the beautiful Cedarbrook Retreat Center. It was hosted by Casey Family as well as The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. The summit was aimed at young adults previously or currently in care. Its purpose was to help youth find their voice and learn self advocating skills. It was a very enlightening experience and I consider myself lucky to have been in attendance.

When I arrived at the scene, I was awestruck by the beautiful setting. Tall trees and flowing brooks, calm serenity and the scent of the majestic woods invaded my nostrils. When I got into my room I was satisfied with the beautiful bathtub and the spaciousness of the bedroom. After settling in, we went to eat lunch and as the icing on the cake, the food was terrific.

In our first activity, we explored what we as foster youth had in common, with a fun icebreaker. We all wrote down something that ailed us as victims of the system, and watched in surprise as they were read aloud and many other people stood up in agreement. "We're redefining the quote 'keep hope alive'," says Jemila a youth currently in foster care from Lacey. "All of us are ultimately destined to do big things."

Later on that evening we attended another interactive workshop in which we learned the "PREP" model with Bernard Caliman from GSAN. He taught us a method in which to speak and be heard as well as persuade your audience. First state your Point, then give the Reason, next give an Example and then readdress the Point. After we completed these exercises, we continued on to dinner.

Following dinner was Open Mic in which youth enjoyed singing Karaoke and everyone indulged in some of my poetry. I would have stayed longer but it was Jessica's 18th birthday so Najja, Jamica, Sam and I proceeded to the rooms and hid in the corners to surprise her. After singing Happy Birthday and dining on cake and complimentary sodas, we retired for the night, looking forward to the next day.

After dining on eggs, sausage, and potatoes, we met in the main room where I proceeded to stump the audience at Simon Says. We then divided into groups based on each of the regions in Washington, in order to develop local Alumni Groups. I was shocked at all the different cities people had traveled from to get here, ranging from the Tri-Cities all the way to Rice, Washington. I got an A+ in Geography class and even I never knew some of these places existed! Mockingbird Reps were all in region 4, which was, of course, the biggest. We basically recruited more people to the Greater Seattle Alumni Network, otherwise known as GSAN, as opposed to starting a new group. Everybody had such clever ideas and we went to break feeling very accomplished.

When we returned from break, everyone was ecstatic about getting the opportunity to present some of our ideas and concerns to the Commission on Children in Foster Care as well as several other prestigious members of our fine government. "I think this was

amazing getting to talk to these important people directly," says Destiny, a youth from Cheney. Guests included Cheryl Stephani from the Children's Administration, Daniele and Steve Baxter from FPAWS, my personal favorite Justice Bobbe Bridge, as well as many other prominent people. Each region had a chance to address the panel about different topics which require modification including sibling separation, cultural awareness and transitional housing.

Participants shared their experiences about the failures of the system and some recommendations were compiled. Youth requested transitional living skills be offered before exiting care as well as more information regarding school scholarships. In reference to sibling separation, youth proposed that phone cards should be provided to maintain contact. They also wanted mandatory visitation and knowledge of the whereabouts of their family. In regards to concerns about cultural awareness, the foster youth suggested that social workers, foster parents and CASA workers receive training on a wider variety of ways youth can connect with their heritage in a safe manner. Their thoughts were recorded and passed on to the right people.

"Overall it was a good conference that was very informative," says Jamica, Senior Youth Representative for Mockingbird Society. "The hotel vicinity was beautiful and I had a great time!" I agree that this Summit was a positive experience especially since it was aimed at youth as well as adults. I'm glad that we had a chance to talk to the important decision makers in our state and I think that this form of advocacy is the best way to make a difference. I can't wait until next year and I hope we get to stay at the Cedarbrook again!

It's My Life Was an Inspiration

**JAMICA
HENDERSON**



Casey Family Program's It's My Life Conference was held in Seattle this year from October 29th-31st. This year's theme was "A Creative Journey." The 4th annual event took place at the beautiful Bell Harbor International Conference Center on the pier. The conference was filled with lots of positive advice for youth and young adults leaving the foster-care system. It also provided many chances to practice skills that would be helpful to us in becoming independent and leaders in our communities. This was a very exciting conference and I had a great time.

It started on Sunday morning, where we were welcomed to a delicious breakfast buffet. Once we finished breakfast, we went up the general session where they had four amazing speakers who were alumni of the foster-care system. They each had struggles in their life, but those struggles helped them become the people they are today. After the general session we had lunch and a band played for us while we ate. It was very relaxing. When lunch ended, it was time for our first session.

My first session was called "Life After Foster Care." The speaker was excellent. She told us about her story and showed a film. I felt really connected to her story because there were a lot of similarities between us. She was in foster care and had nine siblings then got custody of her brother. I was in foster-care with four siblings and am in the process of getting custody of my two younger brothers. It was very encouraging to me, because now that I've met someone else who took in their siblings, I know that I can do it too. Yes, she did say that there were some challenges and I am preparing for those that come my way. I really enjoyed how she had the audience involved. She asked for five volunteers to come and tell their stories. I was one of the five that got to share mine.

On the second day, we went to three sessions. The two I liked the most were: "So You Want To Be A Star" and "One Plus One Equals Everything." "So You Want To Be A Star" was a very audience involved workshop. We did a remake of American Idol and everyone was either a part of the cast or a volunteer. My job was to keep the crowd happy and upbeat for all the acts. I really liked this session because it was fun and encouraged people who might not usually feel confident enough to speak up to do just that. "One Plus One Equals Everything" talked about relationships between staff and participants. In this workshop we learned

about healthy boundaries and how to make sure that everyone stays safe, but that good services are still provided.

My first session of day three was "It's My Story." This session showed us how to share stories by acting them out. Some of the stories were funny and some of the stories left me with lots of thoughts. I was glad to take this one first because it helped boost my energy for the day. The last session of the day was "Speak For Yourself." We were given three sentences in the beginning of class to think about and answer for our presentation. The three sentences were: "I was...", "I am..." and "I will..." Before our presentation, we did some exercises that helped us get the answers to our questions. My sentences were: "I was in foster-care with three of my siblings;" "I am getting custody of two of my siblings who still reside in care;" "I will be a good parent and get all my nursing prerequisites done by the end of summer 2007."

In all, this was a great conference. I got to meet new people and eat very good food. Many people complimented me on sharing my story and how proud they were of me. It really touches me when people are inspired by my experience. In attending this conference, I remembered that "it's my life" and considering everything I have been through, things are going pretty well.

Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS



The Mockingbird Society is proud of the continued progress of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM). Based on the "extended family concept", the MFM addresses age-old problems plaguing the local and national foster care system (for more information on the MFM visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org). Currently in King County, the Mockingbird Society has contracts with three private organizations (Casey Family Programs, Ryther Child Center, and Youth Advocates) and one contract with the Seattle office of the Division of Child and Family Services to replicate the MFM. Additionally, the Washington D.C. Child Welfare System has contracted with Mockingbird Society to implement two pilots of the MFM. During the first week of October, Degale Cooper and I were in Washington D.C. training their foster parents and social work staff on the MFM. Due to the work schedule of the foster parents, the trainings were conducted during the evenings going as late as 9:00 P.M. It was so inspiring to see the staff and foster parents engaged in the training and passionately planning on

how to better care for kids and families. One of the foster parents who attended the training brought her nine-year-old foster child, Twanna, who sat quietly during the training session reading, drawing and writing. At the conclusion of the final training session--again fairly late into the evening--I was giving some final comments to the group--when like a breeze of fresh air Twanna slid a piece of paper on top of my notes. Given she was so quiet during the training I was rather taken aback by this behavior. As I looked at the paper she had placed on top of my notes I was truly overwhelmed. Here was a nine year child, in foster care, away from her family, listening to a group of adults who were focused on improving the quality of care for children just like her. I asked her if she wanted to read her writing to the group. She immediately stood up straight, grinning ear to ear and delivered her gift with clarity of voice and strength of character. She had listened to our words, observed our work and blessed us all to go forward with the courage of a nine year old separated from mommy. Below is the poem that Twanna shared that evening--the Mockingbird Times is proud to premier this new author. Happy Thanksgiving to you and those you love,

 Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Letters to the Editor

Dear [Mockingbird Society],

We are writing to you and Mockingbird Society to say thank you for the superb job your organization did at facilitating a much needed focus group on the needs of foster youth. The information solicited will be used to inform the Washington Healthy Youth (WHY) Plan strategies and recommendations to enhance the health and well-being of youth in our state.

The Mockingbird Society pilot test was a huge success and it will remain a model for our future focus groups. The youth who attended and facilitated the focus group showed a high degree of professionalism. They were intelligent, well-prepared, eager, and fun to work with. Their critical thinking abilities were impressive, as well as their level of commitment (they worked for nearly three hours).

We would like to extend a special acknowledgement to Jamica and Misty for facilitating and taking accurate notes which were essential to this process. Again, thank you from the WSPY.

Sincerely,

Judy Schoder, MN, RN; Chair,
Washington State Partnership for Youth
Mickey Kander MSW, MPH;
Adolescent Health Consultant,
Washington State Department of Health

Hello Jim,

I really enjoy reading the Mockingbird Times. It's one of my nightly papers. After my granddaughter goes to bed, I get the paper and start reading. Most of the time, I fall asleep after reading one part of the paper. I awake around three a.m. and finish reading the paper and go back to sleep. I call the paper my nightly in-between sleep reading.

Sincerely,

Shirlee, a Grandmother

Congratulations Jim Theofelis!

Congratulations to Jim Theofelis for being named one of Seattle Magazine's most influential people of 2006! Featured in the November issue, Jim is recognized for his work on behalf of children, youth and families, and for his commitment to improving the foster care system through Mockingbird Society's innovative programs and initiatives. The November issue of Seattle Magazine is on stands now, or you can learn more by visiting our website at: <http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/society/press.php>.

Thank You's

James and Rosemarie Flaherty;
Joyce Schowalter; Karen Cowgill;
Louise McIlraith; Patricia Bodzioch; Calvin and Rainier Scholars

MEET OUR STAFF

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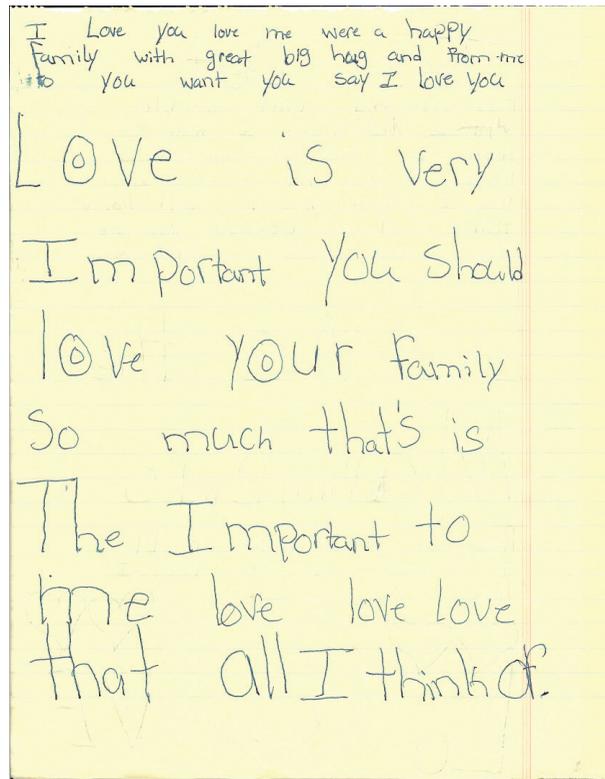
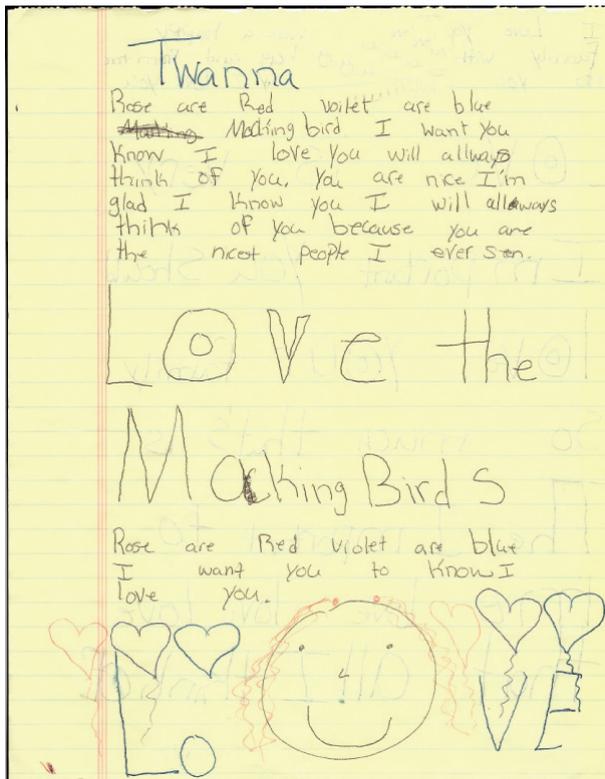
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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents involved in homelessness and foster care. The *Mockingbird 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 \$7.63 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 50,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A, through a private distribution list and as an insert in *Real Change*, a Seattle-based community newspaper. 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. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of the *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright 2006 The Mockingbird Society.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and support the Mockingbird Society!

Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the *Mockingbird Times*. Enclosed, please find my check made payable to Mockingbird Society in the amount of: \$ _____

Suggested Donations:

\$ 1,000+..... Protector \$500-999.....Caretaker \$250-500.....Organizations \$50+.....Supporter \$25.....Foster Parent

NAME _____ EMAIL _____
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Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 240, Seattle WA 98144, or donate online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

- Please bill me for the amount indicated.
- My employer will match my gift; enclosed is my matching gift form.
- I am interested in receiving information on the advantages of planned giving.
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Homeless Youth Summit

RAQUEL GRANATH



Guess what everyone: homelessness is being abolished in this city right now. That's right, there are people everywhere working hard to address the hardships of homelessness and inevitably end it.

The Homeless Youth and Young Adult Summit took place October 26th and 27th at City Hall in Seattle. It was sponsored by the fine people at Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCH), as well as many other generous beneficiaries. The first day was preparation for meeting the city council members to discuss topics of interest in the homeless community. We learned many new things about the patchwork of our city, some commonly known and some shocking to the ear.

The funding for homeless shelters and services is decided by the mayor. Council members are directly subordinate to him, and help propose where the money should be directed. Other sources

city, mostly due to the expansion of real estate downtown and the increasing amount of money received from property tax. The Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness plans to build 9,000 units of affordable housing, therefore decreasing the demand for emergency housing and ending people living in the streets.

What took place at the summit were the combined efforts of kids in the streets

“Youth got very passionate while discussing their needs. We brainstormed for over an hour and the list grew to several pages. I was very disturbed to discover that when a shelter doesn't have enough beds, they conduct a lottery. The youth whose names are drawn must find another place for the night.”

– Summit Participant

making a difference. We studied rigorously on how to talk to the council members, and brainstormed endlessly with what to say. A verdict was reached and the top six issues for discussion are as follows: 1. Better food at food banks, 2. Expanded services at drop in centers, 3. Bus passes for youth and young adults, 4. Work training, 5. Transitional housing with lower barriers and more age groups and lastly, 6. More shelters for young parents. Everyone divided into sub-committees and the tasks were allocated. Each group met with a different council member and requested that changes be made. By the end of the day, everyone was exhausted but even more accomplished.

Charlotte Tucker, primary organizer of this event, concluded, “The summit was a beautiful thing. It brought together young people experiencing homelessness in different ways. It was an opportunity to share with each other, and people in the positions of power, to do something about it.” I think that Charlotte's right and that this summit was a monumental step in the right direction.



From left to right: Charlotte (45th Street Clinic), Julia (Seattle Human Services Coalition), Rachael (Real Change), Stephanie (Northwest Network for Youth), and Raquel (Mockingbird Society) facilitate discussion at this year's Homeless Youth Summit.

of money included the federal government as well as HUD McKinney programs. Currently there is a \$73 million surplus in our

Mockingbird on the Move



Youth representative Jessica Garcia celebrates her 18th birthday at the first annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit.



From left to right: Daniele Baxter (FPAWS), Justice Bobbe Bridge, and Cheryl Stephani (Children's Administration) listen as foster youth and alumni make regional presentations at Leadership Summit.



Mary Herrick (Greater Seattle Alumni Network) and Youth Representative Raquel present Region 4's recommendations to the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care at the Leadership Summit.



Mockingbird Society Youth Representatives Raquel Granath and Jamica Henderson staff this year's booth at Casey Family's It's My Life Conference.

Girls Flying High With Fitness

RENITA BASKIN



Parents are always searching their community for the answer to the million-dollar-question: How can I keep my teenage girl out of trouble, healthy and with good grades? The answer to that question is school sports.

The reason I keep sports in my life is that I know that once I take it out of my life, I'm not going to be as motivated to do well in school. But, while sports are going on, I know that I have to keep my grades up if I want to play in all of my matches and games. Also, grades are one thing that coaches aren't lenient about no matter how good of a player you are. No coach can allow you to participate in any extracurricular activities if you don't have at least a 2.0 gpa (grade point average). I feel that being involved in sports has stopped me from getting into about three fights. I also stopped myself from arguing with my teacher and getting into other trouble around school because my coach is a teacher and I know that they all talk. So, every year at the end of the summer I have to give myself a big “attitude adjustment” compared to how I feel during the summer. Sports not only help me personally (with my grades and attitude at school), but it's also a great way to get to know some of my peers I never thought I would actually hold a conversation with. It's fun to learn how much I have in common with many different people. So, I guess you can say that sports help your social life grow as far as school goes.

When sports season is going on, that's when I get in shape because during the summer I don't ever work out like my

coach advises me to. I try to go running so that I won't get the size that I was my 7th grade year before I really got into sports: I was overweight for my height and age. Since I was so young, everybody kept telling me that I was going to grow out of it. But, in reality, I just kept eating whatever I wanted and whenever I wanted. I didn't believe in only eating three times a day; that was not enough food to last me a whole 24 hours. So, I stayed overweight until I got involved in the dance team in 8th grade at Aki Kurose middle school. Then, I began losing weight thanks to my instructor pushing me to my limits. Ever since then, I have been getting involved in as many physical activities as possible.

Participating in sports keeps your blood pipes clear so that blood can circulate through your blood vessels properly. Also, girls that are constantly gaining weight sometimes have mental health problems and/or eating disorders. Not only does sports and constant physical activity help your health today, but it can really help you a lot in the long run. If you don't want to try sports, you can also try the routine that has really grown to be a part of my daily lifestyle: instead of watching five hours of television every night I started out doing 45 sit ups and 65 crunches and now I'm up to 68 sit ups and 85 crunches. As long as you start off small and then go a step higher at your own pace, your routine will be sure to be successful.

I know it sounds too good to be true, but it is. Girls that are involved in sports are more likely to have good grades, less likely to get pregnant at a young age, and have healthier lives in the future. Youth might not be aware of this, but some of the major health problems for women are high cholesterol, high blood-pressure (both can cause heart-attacks), osteoporosis, diabetes and stroke. Many of these health issues can be avoided if we keep our daughters and ourselves more active and involved in sports from an early age.



partnered with

The Mockingbird Society

proudly present

HOLIDAY STARS

DATE: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14

TIME: 6-9 PM

Kids, families, caregivers, and friends are invited to a fun-filled evening celebrating the passions and talents of Treehouse and Mockingbird youth! From powerful poetry, martial arts demonstrations to innovative dance, come see the wide array of talents our young people possess. If you want to showcase a talent in singing, dancing, juggling, poetry or more, contact Rachel Walker: (206) 267-5141 or rachelw@treehouseforkids.org. Call or email to register by November 27.

Location: 2100 Building,
Rooms 1A and 1B
2100 24th Ave. S.
Refreshments provided.

MOCKINGBIRD YOUTH WILL EMCEE THE EVENT AND JUAN RAMIREZ WILL D.J. .

Creative Corner

How Could You?

Louisiana

how could you toy with my emotions
how could you pierce my heart
a thousand pricks and slowly I die

if you
just said so
i would have let you go

if you
just said so
i would have known

but
naïve to me I was
caught up in a lie
but love sink, pain
and there ain't no medication
to

make
it
go away

and now you're gone
a part of me knew this all along
that things were gonna be this way

but I ignored the signs
fronted with the lies

and engaged my time
with something
that didn't even say
GOOD-BYE

Incurable, pt2

ANDREA ROLDAN

I cry and
I hide my tears from the world
In the corner alone
Looking out the window
Of the bus believing no one can see the pain
Inside of me being uprooted and streaming
down
My face
Then when the beat begins-
My heartbeat;
Tears flow like a remedy to my pain
But my sour ocean won't cure the
Wounds
Inside of me

Insomnia

ANDREA ROLDAN

All them things I got in my head
When I close my eyes and I lay
In bed
I lay them to rest
Don't let it weigh me down
Instead I lay it down cause
When I close my eyes I let
The pain subside
Won't let it keep me up
I done that before
I can't do it no more
Just wanna lie in peace
Just wanna lie to sleep
My issues I can't even number
But I stop counting before slumber



You're Something

ANDREA ROLDAN

Your satisfaction is held in your arms and
Your admiration in your eyes
The music is new
Make you dance
Make you cry
This young face
That young smile is now
A new age
No longer a child

LaLa~LaLa~La~

You hear it in your sleep
You see it in your dreams
While you're awake
You wanna scream your joy out loud
Let the whole world know
How proud you are
Of someone else
And you stare at yourself
Content with what you are
And what you've become so far
So much more to expect
You'll receive no less than success
Make breed to be
What you couldn't be
But content you are, with who you are
In your arms, your own heart
Cared by your own love
Just to know that you are someone
Like you hold a diamond:
Shine
Show the world what's in your hands
Show the world
You're something

*Only one thing is more frightening
than speaking your truth
and that is not speaking.*

—Naomi Wolf

Being Successful in Life...

**MALEKA
TAYLOR**



...consumes a lot of time. It's time well spent and I'm learning to love and trust my intuition. I'm a strong believer in holding on to your values. Although, sometimes issues present themselves in a manner that is unfamiliar, staying strong is the key. Although the decisions that we make sometimes hinder us from the things we're capable of, just remember that we go through these things only to make us stronger.

Referring back to the August issue of Mockingbird Times, I've found that since I've moved back to Portland, I've gained a new perspective on life. At this point, nothing matters to me besides these rules

that will help me succeed. Also, being determined and loyal to my beliefs is helping me to just simply believe in me.

The first thing needed for me to succeed is for me to be willing. I am willing to love and believe in myself because the things that I want to accomplish are important to my well being. Despite the things that I've experienced, it's just a stepping stone to my future.

The second thing is to get focused. I can achieve these things by keeping work, church and school close to my heart. So far, the only issue that I have had has been from the opposite sex. After fleeing a domestic violence situation, this is very difficult. I have learned that in showing confidence in myself, others see the same, but some try to use it to their advantage. I've shed a few tears in this short period of time that I've been here because of the things that were

presented to me from the start. Going along with lies for so long, you'll eventually start to believe them. And, since the truth hurt (which it did), when it all comes to the table, all you can do is cry and the hurt that I felt behind the tears brings me to my third point.

The third thing for me is to STAY focused and get organized. Organize the things that I'm focusing on by managing my time, meeting deadlines, believing that what I'm doing is important and understanding that I'm not only helping myself but I'm helping others. I am starting to understand priorities, what comes first, what comes last and what just doesn't matter at all. Who I am and what I stand for. When this is complete I can eliminate the distractions. Not saying that this is an easy step, but it is a step worth your while.

The fourth thing for me is consistency: Being able to do these things on their assigned day for as long as it takes to reach my goal. It can be difficult to give up the things that you enjoy to do like hanging out with friends, pleasure reading, or just relaxing and doing nothing at all, but I believe that for as long as you live you'll understand that in giving your all into something that you trust is positive, you'll then get all positive things out of it.

Last but not least; the fifth step: dedication. I am determined to get it done and give it my all as long as I follow these rules I have set for my life. I am ready and never felt as serious as I do today. I know I will sacrifice the things that I like to do in order to do the things that I have to do because I am truly dedicated and committed to beginning a new life for myself.

The Freshmen Fifteen

**SHERRELL
DORSEY**



Sadly, college freshmen are notorious for gaining an extra 15 lbs (aka the "Freshman 15") during their first year in college. In the current day and age of child obesity, trim spa pills and no-carb, no-eating diets, college students rebel against the fight against fat stocking up on

pizza during the late night dorm parties, top ramen meals and ice cream desserts.

My roommates and I solved our dinner dilemmas with a pint of overpriced Ben and Jerry's. Even though we danced and ran down 2nd avenue every now and then, we all returned home after our first semester with a few extra pounds and form fitting jeans.

By second semester, my roommates and I began to take our health a little more seriously. Because it was no longer 10 degrees outside we walked the 16 blocks from our dorms to our campus.

The new trend of the second semester was to get in shape for the summer. No one had the money to join the ever exclusive New York City Sports Club so we opted for a nearby recreation center. For \$75 we got a full year's membership to the weight room, treadmill, pool, gym and other equipment.

Staying in shape is important in college as well as eating healthy. Finding what works for you is the key to keeping your weight down and your energy up. Remember that the more you eat the more money you spend. Try eating at home. Finding great deals on grocery items are

a must. Every other Sunday I traveled to Harlem to get cheap groceries. On Sundays there are many buy one, get one free items. Invest time in going to the library and getting cookbooks. The vegetarian recipes are great for cooking light and you can always add chicken or shrimp to any vegetarian dish.

Always carry a bottle of water with you instead of buying sodas. Food is so tempting. In New York there are so many vendors selling pretzels, hot dogs, kebabs and even egg sandwiches on the corner. Saying no is hard but your wallet will appreciate it and so will your body.