

Mockingbird Times

Youth Leadership. Youth Voice.

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20 Years of IMPACT
The Mockingbird Society™

LEAVING A LEGACY

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System Reform

Celebrating 20 Years of Impact!



Participants at Youth Advocacy Day 2020 advocating for the expansion of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ and long-term housing options for minors experiencing homelessness.



First issue of the Mockingbird Times, published August 2001



City of Seattle Proclamation honoring Mockingbird's first anniversary.



Participants at Youth Advocacy Day 2020 advocating for the expansion of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ and long-term housing options for minors experiencing homelessness.

Pay It Forward Alyssa Downing 20 Years of Youth Voice



First offices of The Mockingbird Society, located in the University District, Seattle WA

The Mockingbird Society started in 2000, as a small organization dedicated to self-advocacy for youth in foster care. Now, 20 years later, let's look back on the history of Mockingbird, and reflect on just how much things have changed.

When they were founded, The Mockingbird Society started publishing *The Mockingbird Times*, a monthly newspaper with articles written by current and former foster youth. That's right, *The Mockingbird Times* used to be published monthly! In it were the usual articles about relevant political topics and legal advocacy, but it also featured product reviews, media analysis, and mental health

advice. This was to educate and dispel stigma from those who worked in the system about the youth and young adults they served. To show them that foster youth are no different from any other youth.

As Mockingbird honed its focus on legislative advocacy, the articles shifted away from variety content and more towards political and legal issues. But the heart and soul of *The Mockingbird Times* — centering youth voice — never changed.

In 2004, The Mockingbird Society achieved a significant legislative win: HB 3078, sealing juvenile records to ensure youth could find employment and housing as adults. While *The Mockingbird Times* makes a small mention of this, it's an historic event in the organization's history.

In the following years, Mockingbird would continue to champion legislative change throughout Washington state. Resources like Extended Foster Care would not have existed if it were not for the youth and young adults in the organization advocating for change.

In 2004, Mockingbird started the MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ program, a model of foster care that resembles an extended family. Lisa Carscadden and Degale Cooper were some of the first to take on this new system, and they certainly weren't the last. MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ hasn't just taken off in Washington state. New York, California, Japan and even the UK are starting to adopt MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™.

By 2013, Mockingbird had noticed that foster youth would often end up homeless and vice versa, and therefore foster youth and homeless youth shared a lot of the same issues. So, they extended their efforts to homeless youth, eventually helping create the Office of Homeless Youth in 2015.

Today, 20 years after its founding, The Mockingbird Society continues to fight for the rights of youth experiencing foster care or homelessness. Mockingbird now has seven chapters around the state, several annual advocacy events, and over 70 MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ constellations worldwide. We've come pretty far from just being a monthly newspaper, and we've still got a ways to go to achieve our goals: Ending youth homelessness and transforming the foster care system. ■

shout outs!

Every quarter the Mockingbird Youth Network highlights a few chapter members' accomplishments



Congratulations to Emily Stochel for being appointed to the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care! Way to go!



Shout out to Chan for a new role on the... Welcome, Chan!

our team

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 Hickory Gateless, *Deputy Director*
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Letter from the Executive Director



Annie Blackledge
Executive Director

No one could have predicted that 2020 would be upended by a global pandemic, or that we would still be struggling with the stress of a long-term health crisis, social distancing, isolation and so many other challenges. While we have all been coping with these changes, we know this will eventually come to an end and our lives will return to normal. But what if these disruptions didn't stop? What if you had no control over your circumstances? The place where you sleep, your school, your family, friends and supports could all be taken away in an instant. This is the story of children in foster care, where the system removes children from harmful circumstances, but in doing so takes them away from everything that made them whole: community, school, friends, and extended family.

During this turbulent year, we celebrate Mockingbird's 20th anniversary and the many accomplishments that have changed youth and young adult lives for the better. But we must also take a hard look at the problems that remain in the foster care system and address how it upends children's lives, resulting in negative outcomes for youth who experience foster care. And, it disproportionately impacts children and



Power of One
Esther Taylor

Creating Change



Despite 2020 being a challenging year, I'm fortunate to have connected with and become a part of The Mockingbird Society. I was originally searching for an interesting internship and am now working to change the foster care system. It has become something even greater than I had imagined. I am now a Leadership Team Member for the Mockingbird Society's Tacoma Chapter. It has been an amazing experience to be a part of a group of ambitious people with the goal of transforming the foster care system and ending youth homelessness, just like me.

Having been in foster care more than once, I'm grateful that I can bring my personal experience to the table when creating solutions that will change the system for good. My favorite part about collaborating with other young people at The Mockingbird Society is that we can relate to one another because of what we've been through in the system. In creating solutions, it's true that two heads are better than one. Also, I've enjoyed getting to know the various leaders and facilitators at the organization, as they're in full support of seeing young people thrive in the leadership roles we've been given.

If you would have told me back in 2007 that in 2020, I would be doing amazing things to help change the foster care system, I

youth of color, affecting their life paths for years to come. In the words of an adult with lived experience of foster care, "the system breaks you." So, what can be done to fix a broken system? Transformation from the inside out.

MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ is the needed change. It is critical to stopping the cyclical trauma experienced by those who have lived through foster care or homelessness. The key to this change is support. This model of foster care delivery maintains the original supports that are so important to a child's growth and development. It's an intuitive model that recognizes the damage caused by tearing away the structure and supports children rely on. We can avert this initial trauma by keeping children in their community and ensure that children can maintain the crucial supports that are so important to their development. Remaining in the same school district, staying close to extended family, and keeping important ties with those they are close to leads to significantly better outcomes for young people and children in care.

Another crucial benefit of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ comes from the importance placed on cultural competency. Not only is being torn from their communities damaging; children are then thrust into a new environment they must quickly adapt to, often facing consequences if they do not. Children thrive in environments that resemble the culture and traditions they are used to practicing. We do a disservice to children by placing them in placements that

lack cultural competence, adding additional layers of trauma by requiring them to navigate through new and unfamiliar environments and expectations.

But we have a way forward with MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ if we commit to fundamental systemic change. We are proud to build on the legacy our Founder, Jim Theofelis, began with MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™. He started the program here in Washington, and it has grown to serve communities around the world. Our UK partners, The Fostering Network, received the Big Impact Award earlier this year for their work implementing the model in their community. The judges said, "[MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™] is a fantastic and innovative project, bringing real change and with demonstrable impact." Indeed, this sea-change can, and is, happening for children and families all around the world.

As we celebrate all of Mockingbird's successes and accomplishments, we must also remind ourselves that the work is not finished. We must transform our foster care system into one that serves the children who experience it, not traumatizes them. We must make it into something that gives back to the families and keeps children close to the things that support their growth. Maintaining connections to existing supportive structures and keeping children in their original community means keeping them close to everything that makes them whole. That is what we want for every child. And I know — based on all we have accomplished together so far — that we can make this a reality. ■

Annie Blackledge
Executive Director

through. That's why I'm grateful to be a part of The Mockingbird Society. It has given me confidence to know that my experiences in foster care matter and can help change the system for good.

As a member of The Mockingbird Society, I've had amazing opportunities come my way. One of those opportunities has been to be part of a speaker series called Through the Lens of Lived Experience. As of recently, I've had the privilege to facilitate the series when it goes live on YouTube. I introduce our speakers and acknowledge the work that leaders from the organization have put into the program to make it what it is. I get to inspire young people that have experienced foster care and homelessness who are watching and let them know that they too have a voice.

Not only have I helped facilitate the series, I'm a part of the series, too. I had a discussion with Annie Blackledge, Mockingbird's Executive Director. Our conversation was based around our shared experiences of being in foster care, how the system has affected us, and what we want to see changed in the system moving forward.

To be able to be a part of a series that brings awareness to the foster care system is a huge accomplishment for me in 2020, when the world has been turned upside down due to COVID-19, racism, and the many other important things that need to be taken care of. Becoming part of The Mockingbird Society has been my light at the end of the tunnel in a year that's been filled with darkness. ■

about us

The Mockingbird Society's mission is to transform foster care and end youth homelessness. We create, support, and advocate for racially equitable, healthy environments that develop and empower young people at risk of — or who are experiencing — foster care or homelessness. Working in partnership with young people with lived experience, we change policies and perceptions standing between any child and a safe, supportive and stable home. We envision each young person, regardless of race or individual experience, reaching adulthood with an equitable opportunity to thrive. The *Mockingbird Times* is a key component of our youth development program, the Mockingbird Youth Network. All youth reporters are paid employees, and contributors from across the country receive up to \$25 for published works. The *Times* is distributed nationally to more than 20,500 through our mailing list and as an insert in *Real Change*, a Seattle-based community newspaper. As a nonprofit organization, we appreciate your private contributions to support our youth and family programs. Donate online, by phone, or mail.

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e Seattle Leadership Team!
andler!



Shout out to Ezra Alem for starting his
undergrad studies in Political Science at
Seattle University!

 **Pay It Forward**
Brianna Franco

Soup for the Soul: Restorative Practices

Restoration: Restoration: it is the act, by definition, of returning something to its rightful owner, place, or condition. Therefore, the practice of restoration is the action of making amends to someone or something that was wronged in a process of change. We need restoration in our community, in the city of Seattle and King County, in our state and nation, and we need it now more than ever. Restoration makes communities stronger and more unified, forcing us to step out of our individualistic culture to realize the power of coming together to bring healing to those who deeply need it.

Restoration could come through facilitated conversations. In some cultures, elders were considered the proper facilitators when groups within a community had conflict or wronged one another. The conversation would be driven by first coming to an understanding of one another to then figure out how they might move on together. In this case, healing comes through shared perspectives and the humanization of each of us, while also requiring all sides to be open, willing to learn, and vulnerable with one another. Having conversations is a powerful tool, especially when coming together despite disagreement, because we can bring light to issues the other party may not have considered, therefore encouraging a change in perspective and outlook. Even in the face of persistent disagreement, that can strengthen the development of a solution that encompasses more members in the community.

 **System Reform**
Wesley Stewart

Restoration can also come in the form of undoing the wrong that has been done — whether that be an implemented rule that doesn't have the best interest of everyone in mind, the taking of land or property or returning an item that may be important to an individual or community. Practicing restoration can improve the quality of life for community members in every arena, including the workplace environment, in institutions that make decisions on the behalf of its people, in the places we call home, and can increase access to resources. Practicing restoration actively breaks down gatekeeping because everyone needs access to the proper information to be on the same page in order to rightfully engage with one another.

Where does restoration apply? Well, it can apply virtually anywhere you see injustice.

For example, the school to prison pipeline is, in part, fueled by the fact that police have a presence on school campuses. Although some students benefit, there is criminalization of misbehavior in schools — it is unlawful to disrupt class, write on school property (like a desk or a chair), or push someone in the hallway. This criminalization negatively impacts students of color in particular. Why is it necessary to allow police to be involved with misbehavior from a student? This is something the school should be dealing with, not the legal system. Restoration in schools looks like removing police presence from middle and high school campuses AND substituting their presence with something “troubled” youth could actually use: more counselors on campus, more career support and encouragement of career exploration,

more mentorship programs, and more engaging educational opportunities.

Another school example where we have made progress in restoration is truancy. Truancy is when a student has been regularly absent and becomes subject to appearance before a truancy board. Until recently, truancy in Washington required a court appearance, and even held the possibility of jail time. Due in part to young people's advocacy with Mockingbird, Washington is eliminating the jailing of minors for truancy. School districts around the state are strengthening to a more holistic model of supporting young people when they miss school. Truancy boards must work to answer the question: What is going on in a young person's life to prevent them from adequately attending school? The truancy boards then match children and families with services, rather than sending them to court. Asking a young person what they — leads to restoration, instead of deeper exposure to the legal system which negatively impacts a young person's short and long-term outcomes.

Restoration is needed in institutions outside our legal and education systems, too. It is needed for youth and young adults who enter the child welfare system, for the BIPOC community, for the LGBTQ+ community, and for those who are experiencing homelessness. The framework of restoration is essential to our world moving forward. It enables us to find long-term solutions that work for everyone, particularly the most vulnerable among us. ■

Through the Lens

Our first virtual Luncheon was a success! Here's what our community said about our speaker series, Through the Lens of Lived Experience. Transforming foster care and ending youth homelessness isn't possible without the support of our community. Thank you for joining us in this work!

QUOTES FROM OUR SPEAKERS



“For 20 years, Mockingbird has been giving young people the tools to

become leaders by validating their experiences and expertise. Foster care and youth homelessness are community issues. We all need to be part of the solution”

Deonate Cruz, Alumni,
The Mockingbird Society



“We have 20 years of proof that valuing the stories and leadership of youth experiencing foster care and/

or homelessness, results in more effective public policy, impactful programs and a more engaged and compassionate community.”

Jim Theofelis, Founder,
The Mockingbird Society

QUOTES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

“Nationally, the entire culture around youth homelessness has shifted because Mockingbird paved the way.” **Ashley Barnes-Cocke**

“Relationships, healing, power, and advocacy lead to systems change. Mockingbird completes the circle.” **Makeba Greene, Board Member,**
The Mockingbird Society.

Why Does Self-Improvement Scare Seattle?

In the last issue of *The Mockingbird Times*, I asked readers to visualize their communities without police. Many readers responded with appreciation of that vision

but lack the eagerness to make it come to fruition. What part of self-improvement scares Seattleites so much? What about Housing for All, Medicare for All, Carbon Neutral

Economy, and building an Anti-racist Police Alternative makes Washingtonians hesitate?

Americans have an irrational fear of public institutions. However, one institution we all adore is the Fire Department. The first publicly funded and paid fire department dates to 1679 in Boston. Elsewhere, fire

services were social organizations with unpaid volunteers. Entire cities burned to the ground because a market of fire insurance companies determined which



Seattle's Ballard fire station circa 1903

buildings had paid for the privilege of fire suppression. It wasn't until after the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 that destroyed 3.3 square miles of the city, left 100,000 residents

homeless, and killed 300 people, that American cities began to see fire safety as a community necessity. Today, Americans take it for granted that our firefighting forces are trained in emergency medical assistance, hazardous material mitigation, technical rescue, vehicle rescue, high-angle rescue,

and wildland firefighting.

If you're struggling to imagine a world without publicly funded and universal fire protection, I bet you can imagine a nation where 200,000+ people have died from a deadly contagion because a market of health insurance companies determine which families have the privilege of health care. Is it too soon?

Imagine a nation where Black and Indigenous people are murdered on the street, in public parks, and in their homes because an institution of state-sanctioned executioners prioritizes the protection of property over the lives of people. Is that too harsh?

Imagine a city that has the greatest density of millionaires and billionaires suffering from a homeless crisis because the government chooses to favor the

development of office space over housing. Does that hit too close to home?

The fear of city-leveling fires awakened Americans to the necessity of universal fire protection. In Seattle, we suffer from a series of compounding crises but lack any willpower to address a single issue. We complain about the pandemic, about homelessness, about crime but are we ready to create solutions?

Let the Fire Department be our inspiration to design effective publicly-owned and accountable institutions — privatization of services is literally killing Americans. We need housing now. We needed universal healthcare seven months ago. And we needed carbon neutrality decades ago. Let's care for our community and build solutions today. ■

blog bar

“The reality is that MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ has been around since the beginning. People everywhere have been raising children within an extended family network for thousands of years. It is these bonds that are allowed to develop...unlike in traditional foster care and within institutions. For our partners who have been able to take MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ to a huge scale, like in the UK, they’ve been able to demonstrate that by implementing MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ they can provide a completely different type of foster care.” — Fernando Clara, Director of Practice Innovation.



Power of One
Avrey Tuttle

The Notorious R.B.G.



Rest in Power Ruth Bader Ginsburg
March 15, 1933 — September 18, 2020
(Photo: Sebastian Kim)

Feminist icon and judicial behemoth, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, passed away on September 18th, 2020. In her seven decades of public service, she changed the course of history for every woman in the United States. She broke her way into male-dominated spheres and excelled, despite efforts to keep her excluded.

Ruth Joan Bader was born on March 15th, 1933 — the same year Eleanor Roosevelt became the First Lady. Ruth grew up in a working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. From a young age, her mother instilled in her the value of a good education and independence.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg always excelled in school and was heavily involved in extracurriculars. Her excellent grades in elementary, junior, and high school earned her a full ride scholarship to Cornell University. She graduated Cornell with a degree in Government with high honors. She then began attending to Harvard Law School, where she continued to set herself apart academically. She also served on the

prestigious Harvard Law Review. Ruth was one of nine women in her class, out of a class of five hundred. Ruth and her female colleagues faced gender discrimination and were often told they were taking the places of qualified males. She transferred to Columbia University after two years. Although she graduated at the top of her class, distinguished law firms refused to hire her based on her gender.

In 1980, Ginsburg accepted President Jimmy Carter’s appointment to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. She served on the court for thirteen years, until President Bill Clinton appointed her to the Supreme Court of the United States in 1993. Until the 2018 term, Ginsburg had never once missed a day of verbal arguments — not even the day after her husband passed away, or when she was undergoing chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer.

Barely weighing 100 pounds and reaching just over five feet tall, Ginsburg often received comments on her fragile appearance. But, judicially, she was a giant. A student studying law gave her the nickname the Notorious R.B.G., a play on the name of the Notorious B.I.G. — a famous rapper who, like Ginsburg, was also Brooklyn-born. The image that became an internet sensation features her wearing her

trademark lacy collar over her robes, her small face framed by her oversized glasses. She wears an expression that is both intimidating and friendly and has a crooked gold crown on her head.

Young women had her portrait tattooed on their arms; children were dressed up as Ruth Bader Ginsburg for Halloween. “You Can’t

Spell Truth Without Ruth” could be found on bumper stickers and graphic t-shirts. In her final years, her popularity soared, but Ruth Bader Ginsburg is much more than just a feminist meme.

Before her death, Ginsburg was at the height of her popularity among young people. They started to acknowledge her as a role model for justice, a powerhouse, and female empowerment icon. Along with gender discrimination, Ruth also passionately

advocated for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, for people with disabilities, and undocumented people. She also fought to expand and protect voting rights, especially for marginalized communities.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s legacy, and her vehement fight for social justice lives on. The impact of her commitment can be found in our everyday lives. May her memory serve as a call to action. ■

Ruth was one of nine women in her class, out of a class of five hundred. Ruth and her female colleagues faced gender discrimination and were often told they were taking the places of qualified males.

Race Equity Vision
The Mockingbird Society will define racially equitable partnerships, practices, and processes. Mockingbird has an internal culture dedicated to addressing racial inequity and intersectionality for ourselves and those we serve.

Race Equity Mission
The Mockingbird Society is committed to actively creating racial equity and eliminating the negative impact of intersectionality in our work by embodying the changes we want to see.

We Welcome Your Work
We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be, or have been, published in the Mockingbird Times visit mockingbirdsociety.org, call us at (206) 407-2134 or email us at youthprograms@mockingbirdsociety.org.
Note: Incoming letters to the editor and correspondence to youth under 18 years should be addressed to the Mockingbird Times and will be opened first by adult editorial staff.

Thank you for joining us for **Through the Lens of Lived Experience: A Speaker Series.**



Founder Jim Theofelis and Mockingbird alumni Deonate Cruz discuss the power of lived experience.

Thank you to our sponsors:



Your support makes our work possible. Thank you for joining us!