

2010

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit Report

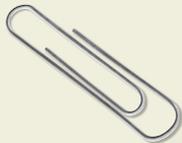


The Mockingbird Society

Building a world-class foster care system



Jim Theofelis
Executive Director
The Mockingbird Society



Dear Friends,

June 2010 marked the 5th Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, sponsored by the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Foster Care, Casey Family Programs, the Center for Children and Youth Justice, the Department of Social & Health Services, and The Mockingbird Society. This event brought together youth in foster care from every corner of the state to develop individual leadership skills, learn more about the power of community giving, and identify policy issues and legislative solutions to improve the system.

This year's summit was nothing short of incredible. More than 60 youth from each region of our state joined with community and business leaders, child welfare advocates, and legislators to discuss the issues and help shape possible solutions. Each region brought a key issue to the table. Throughout the event, a central theme emerged: the safety and normalization of youth in foster care.

The approaches varied, but for the youth and alumni of care who gathered at the summit, youth safety was top of mind. In this report, you'll find a recap of the solutions presented by these youth advocates. Following the Summit the youth have reshaped these ideas under the policy heading of increasing safety while in care. We also are taking steps to meet with foster parents who share the goal of child safety. The report features excerpts from the winning submissions for the summit's Leadership Essay Contest. You'll see evidence of how youth and alumni of care continue to find their voices and learn to use them effectively. They are learning how to "pay it forward" (as shown in the summit's community engagement workshop), and how to reform the system through changes in policy and law.

At the 2010 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, participants truly became One United Voice for Change. Despite the economic challenges we all face, these youth and alumni of foster care and kinship care are asking for our commitment. They need and deserve the same level of care, support and resources as youth from healthy families. Please join me in embracing the outcomes of this summit by lifting up our voices, at every opportunity, to build a world-class foster care system.

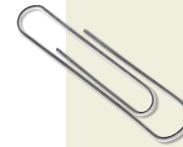
Thank you for your support.



Jim Theofelis
Executive Director, The Mockingbird Society

Voices of Change

Summit recaps from the Mockingbird Network, a statewide organization of youth and alumni of care, with regional chapters, who advocate for improving child welfare services while strengthening their peers, their communities, and themselves.



ENSURING THE SAFETY OF FOSTER YOUTH WHO ARE HOMELESS

REGION 1 ★ SPOKANE



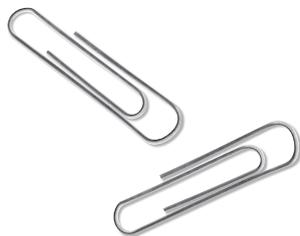
UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone)

By Noah Stiles

Region One came to the summit with a topic that we were all passionate about. We decided to present on revising the Child in Need of Services or "CHINS" petition because a member of our chapter went through a great deal of trouble trying to get into foster care as a homeless youth, and other members had experienced the same issue surrounding homelessness. We felt that the court system should take control over the responsibility of homeless youth that get repeatedly denied to enter care and are forced to struggle on the streets alone.

We revised the petition in three ways. 1) Once filed, the youth would have a safe haven in the period between the parents receiving papers and the court date, 2) an option for a dependency, and 3) an agency would help guide a youth to find a healthy placement and provide services.

Bringing ten members of our chapter gave more voice than the four we had last year. The workshops at the summit proved to be very successful; we received much positive feedback on the topic and ideas to make our presentation more effective. Our region learned a lot about how to present and be better speakers, and we will be able to utilize these skills in our quest to advocate and be successful in our own personal lives.



All of us came from different backgrounds and we have powerful stories to share. And when you put all that together we can make a difference and be the change.

Rebecca – (Region 5, Tacoma)

RANDOM DRUG TESTING FOR FOSTER PARENTS

REGION 2 ★ YAKIMA

A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. (Around Community Two Fostering Individual Rights Safely Together)

By Brandy Baxley and Taylor Judd

This year, ACT FIRST is very passionate about the safety of current foster care youth. During this year's summit we proposed to have random drug testing for foster parents. If this does not work out then we are wanting foster parents to go through drug testing during their application process. We desire this and hope to find a Champion because some of us have been exposed to drug use in our foster homes. We believe that if soon-to-be-foster parents know that in the intake process they will be getting a drug test, then this might weed out any potential foster parents who might be using drugs.



TRANSPORTATION TO DEPENDENCY HEARINGS

REGION 3 ★



H.E.Y.M.A.C. (Hearing Every Youth Make a Change)

By Garrett Nadeau

H.E.Y.M.A.C. brought the issue that youth are not adequately notified of their dependency hearings and when notified most of the time they have no transportation to get there. The policy is to notify the youth of their first hearing and if they do not attend that hearing to then notify their attorney. Most youth do not have an attorney so they aren't notified. One of our chapter members shared her story where she did have an attorney but was notified the morning of the hearing. She made efforts to make it to her hearing on the buses, but when she arrived to her hearing it was already over. She had to wait two hours for someone to come pick her up. She felt very disrespected and was passionate on getting this changed because no other youth should have to experience this. Our proposition is that all youth be notified and reminded of their hearings and have transportation for them so that they can attend hearings and know what is going on in their life.



ADEQUATE NOTIFICATION OF DEPENDENCY HEARINGS

REGION 4 ★



Region 4 for Change

By Christina Koshney

Region 4 came forward with the issue of Notification to Dependency Hearings.

The issue is that youth of all ages are not being adequately notified of their dependency hearings, not allowing them to be active participants in major decisions that are being made about their lives. Dependency hearings include decisions concerning a youth's entire world, including who they will live with, where they are to live, where they are to go to school and much more. Our chapter felt that it is not enough to send a legal document to an address but to have an adult appropriately explain what is occurring and to provide proper support ensuring the youth can attend.



MENTAL HEALTH EVALUATIONS FOR FOSTER PARENTS

REGION 5 ★



Cour'ige (Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individualities Gaining Empowerment)

By Rebecca Miranda

At the summit this year, Region 5's topic to present to the commission was a psychological background check for incoming foster parents. We wanted foster parents to be checked for possible behavioral issues or other issues deemed unfit for foster parents. The aspiring foster parents would be put through daily occurrences that could happen with foster kids and normal youth of all ages, identifying any red flag behaviors such as overreactions of frustration and/or abuse of a physical, mental, or emotional degree.



MANDATORY ALLOWANCES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

REGION 6 ★



T.A.F.F.Y. (Truth and Action For Foster Youth)

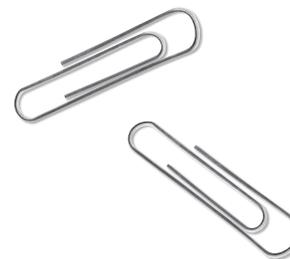
By Chris Bauer and Graham Parrington

Region 6 is asking for mandatory allowances for youth in family foster care, which most U.S. families (62%) provide. We feel that if a youth has opportunities to make choices with money, they will have a far easier time transitioning into adulthood. Currently, group care facilities “must give the children under their care allowances based on age, needs and ability to handle money” (WAC 388 148 0695). We propose modeling family foster care allowances on the group care practice. We believe this would help achieve normalcy, the drive to succeed, and the basic skills needed to do it.



I really liked it all because this year was well organized and it was executed wonderfully; I look forward to next year and to Advocacy Day!

Taylor Judd – (Region 2, Yakima)



The Voice of Leadership

This year, the Mockingbird Society and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) offered a unique opportunity to summit participants – our first ever Leadership Essay Contest. Essay winners were awarded a day with DSHS Secretary Susan Dreyfus. Following are excerpts from the winning essays

FIRST PLACE

Samantha Evans, Olympia

"The leadership summit produces leaders several ways: by giving youth an example of what leadership is, by letting some people out of their shells, and by teaching when to let others talk and how to support them. It was so amazing for me to see other members of my chapter step up and take charge and it made me more motivated to see everybody so pumped to be there. Knowing that we were all there for the same reason, to better the foster care system so that the kids going into it can have a good experience in the system, was very inspiring. It was amazing for me to see people I know wouldn't normally talk in front of others calmly present to the Commission. I, as well as others in my group, learned to step back and let others have a chance to tell their stories so that all voices could be heard, and how to work as a team where everybody wins. It was such a supportive environment that encouraged you to let your inner leader out and make a change in not only yourself, but the world".

– Samantha Evans, Olympia

SECOND PLACE

Josie Davis, Spokane

"In order to be a leader, the person needs to Listen, be Enthusiastic, Ambitious, Effective and Responsible. I have learned these characteristics are ingredients for a leader to have in order to lead and inspire his/her cohorts. I have learned being a good leader isn't all about being bossy to his/her cohorts or making all the decisions. It's all about the leader bringing the cohorts together and work as a team. A leader embraces cohort's ideas and opinions with enthusiasm and ambition, so that inspiration can be born in the hearts of the cohorts. Dedication and being effective is very important for a leader to dedicate their time, heart, and mind into leading with passion and teaching with compassion. Your cohorts will want to follow in the leader's footsteps. A leader has many responsibilities towards his/her cohorts and one of the biggest responsibilities is preparing them to become a leader, not just any leader, but a leader with a big heart and open mind who inspires all while being a mentor."

– Josie Davis, Spokane



Individual Development

Community Engagement

Systems Change

SUMMIT WORKSHOPS

Individual Development

Youth learned how to effectively present an issue to a large group of people in this seminar led by D'Artagnan Caliman from Casey Family Programs and Dae Shogren from Community Youth Services. D'Artagnan began with a live demonstration of bad public speaking, exhibiting several mistakes that a public speaker can make when presenting a topic. Afterwards, the speakers took the youth through the bad presentation point-by-point, pointing out errors that were made and ways to improve the presentation. Youth were given five key elements of a good presentation:

1. Be aware of yourself.
2. Know your audience.
3. Look sharp.
4. Slow down when necessary.
5. Keep your message short and to the point.

Participants then had an opportunity to practice these skills. Each region selected one of the topics and worked as a team to develop their message and deliver it to the larger group.

Our region learned a lot about how to present and be better speakers, we will be able to utilize these skills in our quest to advocate and be successful in our own personal lives.

Noah Stiles – (Region 1, Spokane)



Community Engagement

How can youth create positive change in their communities? This was the question explored during the summit's Community Engagement workshop, led by Tiffany Washington, Mockingbird's Director of Youth Programs, and Kara Sanders, the Mockingbird Network Coordinator. The purpose of the workshop was to see examples of concerned individuals and groups working to create positive change in their community, and discuss their application to creating change in Washington State. Tiffany presented on the importance of engaging the wider community as well as working within the child welfare arena. Participants then split into regions and watched video clips of three separate community initiatives. After each clip, participants discussed what they saw and how they could apply those lessons to community work as Network participants.

System Reform

In the summit's System Reform workshop, youth were given real-life practice advocating for system change. Stakeholders from across the state conducted an intensive training on how to get decision-makers to buy in to the change you want to make. For this hands-on workshop, six teams of two stakeholders were positioned throughout the conference space, and each region had four minutes to pitch the policy change that they had brought to the Summit. The stakeholders included legislative aides (Bryan Bissell: Legislative Aide to Rep. Reuven Carlyle, Samantha Casne: Legislative Aide to Speaker Frank Chopp, Tia Durham: Legislative Aide to Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos, Dan Hagen: Legislative Aide to Rep. Mary Helen Roberts, April Dickinson: Legislative Aide to Rep. Eric Pettigrew and Mary Soderlind: Legislative Aide to Rep. Tina Orwall), child welfare professionals (Rick Butt, Laurie Lippold, Columbia Legal Services (Erin Shea and Casey Trupin) and others (Rose Berg and Brian Lawrence), and following the presentation, they provided feedback to each region on how well they had presented their issue.

Seeing so many selfless people and hearing their stories didn't just inspire me to break the chains that bound me but to also speak out for the rights that foster children deserve.

Chris Bauer – (Region 6, Olympia)



Beating the Odds

and Moving Forward with Style

An Interview with Tony Shellman, Entrepreneur and Alumnus of Care

By Jerry Bobo

Guest speakers at events are there to give inspiring words to the issue at hand. Mr. Tony Shellman did exactly that at the Mockingbird Society's Annual Foster and Alumni Leadership Summit in June of this year. As a young African American male it is great to see another African American male that had to deal with the many things that came from being in the foster care system, and became successful.

Tony briefly gave the staff and participants the inside scoop on his life story. He was born into foster care. Being in care had an effect on his personal life, but it wasn't immediate, it was something he grew into. Because of the support his foster parents gave him, he was able to go through the effects it had on his personal life and come to terms with them.

Like all youth in foster care, family support is the one thing we look for, and Tony's life story proved that with support of family, you can do anything.

He was lucky to work at Nordstrom's but in the beginning it wasn't what he thought. He started out as the person that got all the store hangers together in the basement, until one day when he was working, a group of men came into the basement. He started talking to them and told them how he was the best hanger person ever and challenged them to shuck hangers with him. That statement and his audacity to ask these men to help made an impact on one of the men – Peter Nordstrom. Soon after this event Tony found himself moving from hangers to many other departments while at the same time developing a relationship with Peter Nordstrom that opened many opportunities for Tony in the future.

From those different departments he learned many things about fashion, gaining 21 years of retail experience. His friendship with Pete Nordstrom grew and through advocacy, Pete Nordstrom helped Tony find resources to help him pay for schooling (Parsons School of Design) in New York City. His friends liked his style of clothing and he decided to create his own clothing lines (Mecca, Enyce, and Parish clothing) that has opened many doors for Tony.

Speaking to the youth at the 2010 Leadership Summit was inspiring to many of the youth in attendance that weekend. Hearing the story of a successful person that has come out of foster care was moving and let us know we can do whatever we want to. Like Tony Shellman said, "Believe in self. Yesterday was yesterday, move forward."



Children's Administration Chief Hears Youth

An Interview with Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson

By Ian Grant

This year, Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson, the official in charge of Children's Administration, was present at the Leadership Summit. She was "very, very impressed," saying that "the level of active involvement of youth" surpassed anything she had seen in other states. She hasn't had many opportunities to spend time with youth, and stated that she was pleased to hear directly from the regional representatives. The Assistant Secretary also said she was impressed by the level of polish and preparation of the youth in presenting their recommendations to the Commission members – they had both the passion and the data.

Assistant Secretary Robinson says that including the youth voice is an important part of her approach to leading CA, remarking that she's "always believed that [she] needs to have an authentic voice if [she] is making policy decisions." When asked what she'd like to contribute to next year's summit, she replied, "An opportunity to present to the youth what we have done on the prior year's recommendations," and to "close the loop" between CA and foster youth and alumni.

When asked how she intends to implement the youth recommendations and perspectives she heard at the leadership summit, the Assistant Secretary said that she intends to follow up with foster parent representatives and the Mockingbird Network's own regional chapters, to implement youth participation in the training of social workers, and ultimately to build youth involvement in training and policy into the system so that "it's the way we do business, every time."

We, on behalf of the Mockingbird Network, we'd like to thank Children's Administration and the Assistant Secretary for her commitment to creating a place within CA for youth involvement and the youth voice. We look forward to our future partnership and to seeing her at Youth Advocacy Day and at future Youth and Alumni Leadership Summits.

The summit made me realize that there are officials who are receptive to what is actually going on from a youth perspective. It felt good to voice an opinion and not be looked down on for how I feel.

Cameron – (Region 5, Tacoma)



Denise Revels Robinson
Assistant Secretary
DSHS Children's Administration

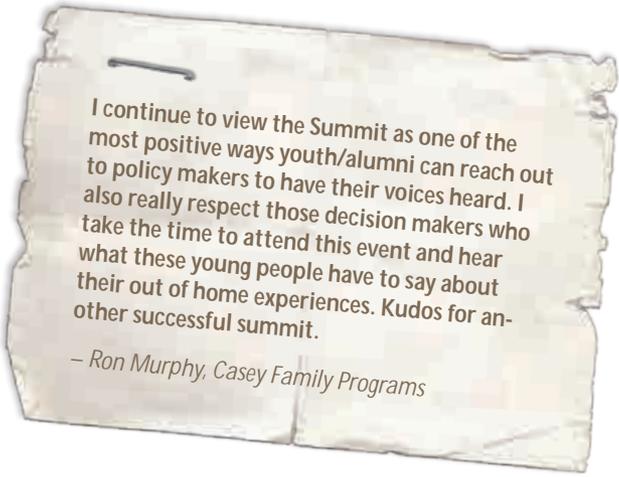


Praise for the 2010 Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit



The Summit gets better every year! The quality of the presentation to the Commission by the outstanding youth leaders who participate has increased to an amazing level of sophistication. With work on-going throughout the year in the regional network groups the youth leaders are much more sophisticated about the interconnections in the child welfare system. I can't wait until next year. The possibilities for positive change are endless!

– Justice Bobbe Bridge



I continue to view the Summit as one of the most positive ways youth/alumni can reach out to policy makers to have their voices heard. I also really respect those decision makers who take the time to attend this event and hear what these young people have to say about their out of home experiences. Kudos for another successful summit.

– Ron Murphy, Casey Family Programs

I believe that the Foster Youth and Alumni Summit impacted a lot of people, and impacted them in various different ways. As for me, I was deeply transformed by the experience, but first you should know something about me. I am normally a shy person, I usually carry angst about meeting new people and sharing my thoughts and feelings. Through my experience in the foster care system, I have seen a lot of people that didn't speak up for themselves. Some for fear of retaliation and others for the same exact reason I zippered my mouth closed. Coming to the summit and seeing so many other people standing up for the rights and beliefs of foster children and not only themselves but those who would follow them. Seeing so many selfless people and hearing their stories didn't just inspire me to break the chains that bound me but to also speak out for the rights that foster children deserve. The summit, I believe, was a profound support structure. All the different regions came together to discuss the things that they felt needed to be improved in the foster care system, and I think the whole engagement worked out perfectly.

– Chris Bauer (Region 6, Olympia)

Youth Leaders Give Summit "A" Grades

2010 Summit Survey Results

A total of 52 youth and alumni attended the 2010 Leadership Summit. Of those, 46 completed surveys indicating how much they learned or gained from their experience. Of the 46 survey respondents:

- 87% of attendees reported that they learned "a lot" about how to advocate for themselves.
- 85% of attendees reported that they gained "a lot" of skills on how to get support from community leaders when advocating for an issue.
- 89% of attendees reported that they gained "a lot" of understanding of the value of giving back to their community.
- 87% of attendees reported that they gained "a lot" of skills in presenting to a large group of individuals.
- 80% of attendees reported that they gained "a lot" of skills in sharing their story to help transform the foster care system.
- 85% of attendees reported that they made "a lot" of better connections with other foster youth and alumni of care.

Sincere thanks to our generous Alumni
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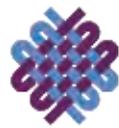


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