



2014 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit Report

One united voice for change



Dear Friends,

On July 1st and 2nd, our supporters and youth advocates from chapters throughout Washington state came together at our 9th annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit with the goal to build a world-class foster care system. Youth from Seattle, Everett, Tacoma, Olympia, Yakima and Spokane embarked on an exciting Summit to advocate for themselves, their peers, and that 5-year-old child who doesn't yet know she will enter foster care.

The Summit was also an opportunity for legislative staff, advocates and expert community partners to provide feedback to our young people about how to advocate effectively for systems reform. Youth participants then presented proposals inspired by their own experiences to the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. The issues they presented shed light on some of the most pressing needs in our child welfare system, including: support for undocumented youth in foster care, preventing the inappropriate medication of foster youth, fully implementing the

Extended Foster Care program, improving pre-licensure foster parent training, and increasing foster youth engagement in foster parent training. The Commission commended each chapter for their thoughtful and positive recommendations to reform the child welfare system in Washington.

The personal stories and policy ideas of these young people were heard by legislators and decision makers, and together we re-affirmed our community's commitment to improve the system for foster youth and parents alike. While the Summit has concluded, the summer months represent the beginning of The Mockingbird Society's annual advocacy cycle. We will now work with policymakers and our community partners to forge a path to reform for each of these priorities.

It is in times like these that I think of the words of the author, James Baldwin: "For these are all our children, we will all profit by or pay for what they become." I am proud to see the strong leaders and relentless advocates that our young people have become. Thank you for your unwavering support for our most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Theofelis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'J' at the beginning.

Jim Theofelis

Special thank you to Casey Family Programs and Children's Administration for supporting the printing and design of this report.



MOCKINGBIRD SUMMIT RAP

*By Terrance Hamilton
Tacoma chapter member*

Are you a turtle, rabbit, or hawk
leadership qualities in each we were taught

Fill in the gaps
by working together
and building bridges to walk across

Not to mention

The children in this foster care system
which need some fixing
was the reason we presented
to the Commission

The requirements to be a foster parent
is out dated
forget it

Youth voice need to be mandatory
for the development process
for better restrictions

I do this work for the summits like this

To speak out and be heard
I could never miss opportunities like this

Helping changing lives with The Mockingbird Society
getting effective results
making a lot of noise
so quietly

I ask myself
is all this worth it

"Jim Theofelis voice"

If you take it seriously,
practice hard,
speak from the heart,
it will be perfect.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

I'm perfect for today and that's perfectly ok.



One thing I learned at the Summit was that your voice can lead to change.



ADVOCACY IN ACTION



At the Report Out to the Commission I felt like a shining star, confident in my topic and ready to continue our topic on a steady and positive path.



“ During the Systems Reform Workshop I felt in the zone, learning and preparing.

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Change How Foster Youth are Placed into Group Homes

EVERETT CHAPTER

Currently, group homes are used too often, even when a youth is not in need of group care. The goal of the Everett chapter is to change how that works by requiring court approval before any youth goes into a group home, and only allow the placement when it is time-limited and therapeutic. Hopefully, such placements would be extremely rare so youth aren't inappropriately placed in restrictive settings.



Help Undocumented Youth in Care to Receive Legal Status

SPOKANE CHAPTER

When a youth comes into foster care, the state becomes his or her legal parent. For some undocumented youth, it's not that simple. Sometimes they don't even know that they're undocumented. Without proper documentation, they will not be able to find legal work to become contributing members of society. The Spokane chapter asks to have that fixed. The moment an undocumented youth enters foster care, their social worker should help him or her navigate the process to get them legal status.

If you must be in group homes, it should be rare, therapeutic, time-limited and approved by the Courts.

– Everett Chapter Member

Group homes are not all bad; we just want to re-envision how they are used in our state.

– Everett Chapter Member

It's a hidden issue and it's really important.

– Justice Bobbe Bridge

It's hard to go back and ask the home country to give you the birth certificate.

– Spokane Chapter Member

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Expand Extended Foster Care

SEATTLE CHAPTER

Allow youth with documented medical conditions to be eligible for Extended Foster Care – the final category included in the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which allows for federal support of Extended Foster Care. This would ensure that all youth aging out of care at age 18 would be able to opt into the program.



Overmedication

OLYMPIA CHAPTER

Foster youth are five times more likely to be prescribed medications than their peers from intact families. Washington state's current policy is that when a youth is prescribed five or more medications, or two medications from the same family, Medicaid has an automatic review to make sure these medications all have a purpose and are safe to use together. The Olympia chapter is asking for the automatic review to come earlier – at two total medications from any family.

Youth [aging out of foster care] are two times as likely to be arrested. Consider this: at its peak, extended foster care will cost the state \$31,000 per youth per year. The average cost per inmate is \$46,000 per year.

– Seattle Chapter Members

I didn't know until I was 17 that I could say no [to medications]

– Olympia Chapter Member

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Implement More Specialized Pre-Licensure Training for Foster Parents

YAKIMA CHAPTER

Foster parents are required to take extensive training before they are allowed to have a foster youth in their home. The trainings range from HIV/AIDS awareness to infectious disease control, and from proper discipline to meal planning, as well as cultural competency. They are also required to take at least 12 hours of ongoing training every year after being licensed. However, none of these training courses count toward foster parents' yearly training requirements until they already have their license. Yakima hopes to change that by asking the state to allow pre-licensure training to count toward their yearly requirements and for the state to offer more specialized training for the populations foster parents choose to take in.



Involve Foster Youth in Foster Parent Training

TACOMA CHAPTER

While foster parents receive a great deal of training, they only hear this information from an adult's point of view. The Tacoma chapter wishes to change this. They say it is important to see the other side of the foster care experience by modifying current curriculum so foster youth and alumni have appropriate opportunities to contribute to and be involved in pre-licensure foster parent training.

“There’s been a huge push to make training more relevant... relevant to the kids you’re taking in a variety of different areas.”

– Mike Canfield, Co-Chair, Foster Parent Association of Washington State

“We are asking for more involvement in [foster parent] training.

– Tacoma Chapter Member



HOW THE SUMMIT CHANGED MY LIFE

By Mykell Dampier-Daniels
Youth Network Representative

I'm going to tell you how attending the Summit changed my life. After last year's Summit, I didn't realize I had the potential to be a leader. In fact, I was just relieved to be done with my presentation. What I didn't know was that my leadership journey was just starting.

When I first came to Summit as a member of the Tacoma Chapter, I wasn't sure of the purpose that I had or how my small voice was going to be heard. I thought to myself, "Why would all these powerful people listen to me?"

As the Tacoma chapter prepared our presentation, I began stepping into a leadership position that I was definitely not used to. I helped facilitate group discussions, and I helped the team stay focused. Being that I am introverted, I usually stay alone and on the sidelines. But Summit completely made me go outside of my comfort zone in a good way. I'm not going to say that it was easy – but when we made our presentation people listened and it made me feel like my voice wasn't so small after all.

After the Summit I became way more dedicated to being an advocate with Mockingbird.

But last fall, even though things were going well, I decided to leave Washington state just after my 18th birthday. I was trying to take the next step in my life, like any other adolescent. And like many of my peers, I ran into a lot of obstacles right after I moved. It got pretty emotional, and I decided to come back to Washington just a few months later.

Now this is when the power of Mockingbird's advocacy hit me. When I got back, one of the first things I did was to call my social worker from the Orion Center, a Seattle drop-in center for homeless youth. I told him that I didn't know what

to do. He let me know that I could get back into Extended Foster Care and I got a placement that day.

I really was on the borderline of being homeless, but instead the foster care system was there with open arms to support me. Without being able to get into Extended Foster Care, I would not be where I am today. Throughout this journey I saw over and over again how Mockingbird touched the system and changed my life.

Today I am a leader, I am strong, and I'm working to make the system better for my foster brothers and sisters. I'm inspired to do this because it was done for me, and because I know it makes a difference.

The whole Summit experience is very powerful. I want other young people out there to know that you may have just started out on your own leadership journeys; and if you keep working hard, you too can make a difference for the youth coming behind you.

Thank you to the youth, to the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care, the legislators, and the Mockingbird supporters who make the Summit possible. The foster care system gave me the support I needed to be normal, healthy, successful, and hopeful for my future. And if we can work together – and listen to our young people – I think we can make it that way for everyone.

“Today I am a leader, I am strong, and I'm working to make the system better for my foster brothers and sisters.”

ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

For the first time ever, we asked each of the Mockingbird Youth Network chapters to nominate someone from their region who showed dedication to the chapter and The Mockingbird Society's mission for our Advocate of the Year award. Eligible nominees demonstrated strong leadership qualities including taking initiative and showing a strong commitment to continuous individual development. These youth have consistently participated in Mockingbird events, chapter activities, trainings, and speaking engagements. Staff from The Mockingbird Society selected a winner from the nominations. This outstanding advocate will have the opportunity to job shadow Washington State Representative Ruth Kagi, Chair of the Early Learning and Human Services Committee and champion for our young people.



Representative RUTH KAGI

Washington State Legislature

2014 AWARD WINNER



JIL NANCE

Everett / Mt. Vernon chapter

Jil has been a member of the Everett/Mount Vernon chapter for over three years. She has attended the Summit and Youth Advocacy Day multiple times, facilitated a Culture of Foster Care Training, and has only missed three monthly chapter meetings in the

last two and a half years. She is a key member of the Everett chapter's leadership team, helping to plan chapter meetings and events. She also writes beautiful poetry which is often featured in the *Mockingbird Times*. She has a quiet and humble spirit but when she voices her

opinions, she is thoughtful and powerful and her peers respect her.

In the words of her peers, "She is always bringing a positive attitude to all Mockingbird events. She is also very good at finding common ground and coming up with a clear plan." Another youth said, "She stands with Mockingbird in her belief that everyone's voice should be heard. She makes it a priority in her life to support those who lack the strength or courage to stand up on their own."

2014 HONORABLE MENTIONS



ROEL WILLIAMS

Seattle chapter



JAMES CAMPBELL

Yakima chapter



JESSICA COOK

Spokane chapter



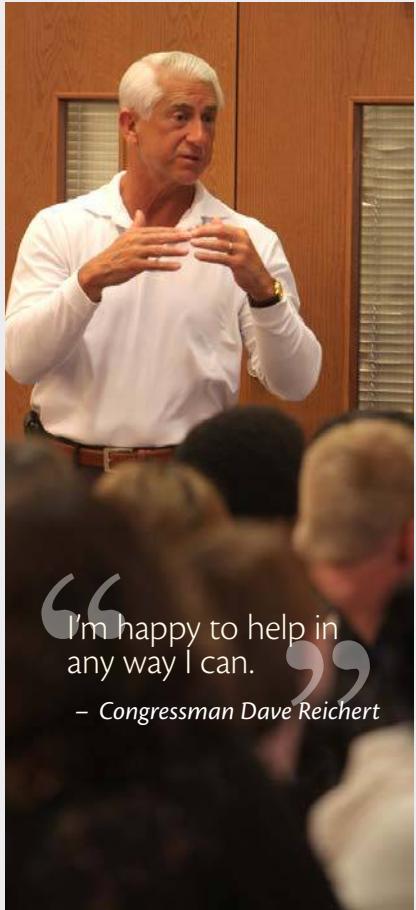
TERRANCE HAMILTON

Tacoma chapter



MIRACLE NEGRON

Olympia chapter



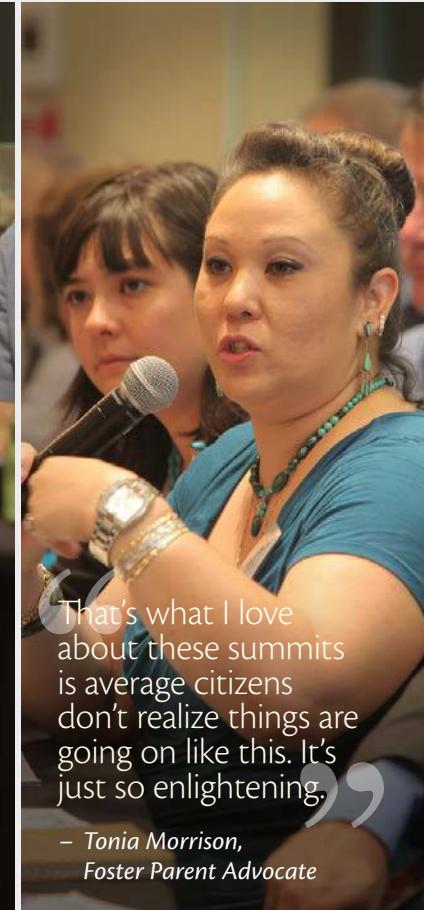
“I’m happy to help in any way I can.”
– Congressman Dave Reichert



“The recommendations are very well thought out, and I certainly agree with the need [for them].”
– Representative Ruth Kagi



“We see the benefits of Extended Foster Care so far and we really want to capture the last few kids.”
– Judge Kitty-Ann van Doorninck



“That’s what I love about these summits is average citizens don’t realize things are going on like this. It’s just so enlightening.”
– Tonia Morrison,
Foster Parent Advocate

ATTENDING COMMISSION MEMBERS

Justice BOBBE BRIDGE Ret.
Center for Children and Youth Justice, Co-Chair
EDITH HITCHINGS
*Director of Program and Policy, Children's Administration
(in place of Assistant Secretary Jennifer Strus)*
Representative RUTH KAGI
Chair of the Early Learning and Human Services Committee
JIM BAMBERGER
Director, Office of Civil Legal Aid
MIKE CANFIELD
Co-Chair of the Foster Parent Association of Washington State
JACOB D'ANNUNZIO
Managing Attorney, Office of Public Defense

DR. KEN EMMIL
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Designee for Randy Dorn
JEANNIE KEE
Foster Youth Alumni Representative
TONIA MORRISON
Foster Parent Advocate Representative
RYAN MURRAY
Executive Director, Washington State CASA
Judge KITTY-ANN VAN DOORNINCK
Designee for Judge Jeffrey Ramsdell, SCJA President
CARRIE HOON WAYNO
AAG, Washington State Attorney General Designee for Bob Ferguson

SYSTEMS REFORM WORKSHOP POLICY ADVISORS

LAURIE LIPPOLD
Partners for Our Children
RICK BUTT
University of Washington, Tacoma
ANDI SMITH
Office of Governor Inslee
SANDY HART
Casey Family Programs
DAN HAGEN
Office of Representative Roberts
LAMONT GREEN
Pierce County
PEGGY LEWIS
Children's Administration

NOAH ULLMAN
Office of Senator Fain
JOSEPH PEHA
Office of Representative Carlyle
CINDY BRICKER
Administrative Office of the Courts
LIZ TRAUTMAN
YouthCare
DAVID BOWERMASTER
The Raikes Foundation
MARILYN PEDERSEN
Office of Representative Hunter
CASEY TRUPIN
Columbia Legal Services

Thank you to our Commission members and to our Advisors for their commitment to youth-driven solutions!

Over the past nine years, youth proposals presented at the Summit have resulted in over a dozen major reforms, including:

- The Extended Foster Care Program
- Healthcare to 21
- The Independent Youth Housing Program
- Unannounced social worker visits
- Notification of the rights of foster youth
- Protecting sibling visits
- The Prudent Parent Standard

LEGACY OF THE SUMMIT

Forty-eight youth and alumni of foster care from across Washington state attended the 2014 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. Of those in attendance, 46 young people completed surveys – a response rate of over 95 percent.

Youth Experiences

- 50 percent of youth surveyed have lived in a group home.
- 63 percent of youth surveyed have experienced homelessness.
- 20 percent of youth surveyed are enrolled in Extended Foster Care.
- 39 percent of youth surveyed were prescribed 2 or more medications while in care.

Youth Impact

- 93 percent of youth surveyed reported that attending the Summit helped them make more positive relationships with other youth in care.
- 87 percent of youth surveyed reported that their involvement in the Summit helped them learn more leadership skills.
- 98 percent of youth surveyed reported that attending the Summit increased their belief that the foster care system will be better for the next generation.
- 85 percent of youth surveyed reported that participating in the Summit helped them learn how to describe problems and propose solutions.
- 86 percent of youth surveyed reported that attending the Summit increased their ability to communicate effectively with purpose.
- 93 percent of youth surveyed reported that Mockingbird has helped develop their leadership skills.
- 91 percent of youth surveyed reported that Mockingbird has helped them better understand advocacy and how government works.
- 93 percent of youth surveyed feel empowered when they help change the system.



OUR SINCEREST THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS

**FOSTER YOUTH AND ALUMNI
LEADERSHIP SUMMIT**

Sponsors



Our Mission

The Mockingbird Society

Our mission is to advocate for world-class systems of care for children and youth who must leave their family homes, based on the personal experiences of affected children and families.

The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care

Our Mission is to provide all children in foster care with safe, permanent families in which their physical, emotional, intellectual and social needs are met.

mockingbirdsociety.org



The Mockingbird Society
Building a world-class foster care system