



2016 Youth Leadership Summit Report

One united voice for change



The Mockingbird Society
Improving foster care | Ending youth homelessness

WELCOME FROM MOCKINGBIRD'S LEADERSHIP



We stand on common ground

Dear Friends and Allies,

In 2005, the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care began to lay the foundation for meaningful youth engagement by hosting the first ever Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. I am thrilled to report that in 2016 we continued to build on this legacy and expanded the event to include a broader range of voices and perspectives.

This year, the Supreme Court Commission co-hosted the re-named Youth Leadership Summit in partnership with the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee. And for the first time, young people in our Mockingbird Youth Network (MYN) who have been in foster care were joined at the Summit by their peers from our Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) program.

We are grateful that the Supreme Court Commission and the Advisory Committee have recognized and responded to the critical common ground on which foster and homeless youth often stand.

MYN and YAEH chapter members from across the state worked diligently throughout the year to engage in thoughtful discussions, research and refine their proposals, and practice their presentations. But this is only part of what is happening in our local Chapters. In addition to their hard work, I have also been privileged to witness the development of community, personal transformations, and the impact that meaningful youth engagement has had on individual young people.

Chapter members support one another beyond the development of their policy and practice issues. They come together to create positive change in the world, to make meaning out of their common experiences, and to share their triumphs and struggles. This is true not only with individual Chapters but cross our statewide network. Nowhere was this more evident this year than at the Summit, demonstrated by the attention and encouragement MYN and YAEH participants gave to one another as each Chapter presented. There is power in youth engagement that runs deeper than any one event can convey.

This work would not be possible without the support and guidance provided by our wonderful allies. We are fortunate to have so many community partners who are willing to serve as expert advisors to our youth leaders throughout the issue development process. On behalf of Mockingbird staff and Youth Programs participants, we appreciate the time, thoughtful input, creative collaboration, and advice you offered leading up to the Summit, and throughout the year.

Thank you also to our Summit sponsors, the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care, the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee, our staff and board, and the many guests who attended the Youth Leadership Summit. But most of all, I am grateful to the young people for standing up, sharing their stories, and proposing solutions to some of the most persistent barriers they face.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Annie Blackledge", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Annie Blackledge
Executive Director

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



YOUTH ADVOCACY

By Kim Hines

Amending injustice
Providing advocacy
Fighting for change, for equality.
Putting a face to the issues, providing
clarity
Proof of a shared reality...
The Mockingbird Society
Empowering youth to alter perceptions,
to tell their story.
To be the best they can be,
To demand justice, to fight for equality.
Neglecting self-fulfilling prophecies.
We determine who we're gonna be.
You and me
Creating change, endless possibility
Nothing is fixed, transform reality.



**NOBODY CAN ADVOCATE
FOR WHAT YOU NEED
BETTER THAN YOU**

By Tyler Donhardt

“You will inspire many young people who come behind you to stand up—and speak up—in the future.”

I first came into contact with Mockingbird two years ago while volunteering for the University District Library in Seattle. I had just moved to the area from Indiana, so I've pretty much been around Mockingbird for as long as I have been in Seattle. I was intrigued when I met Mockingbird staff at the library. We talked about a lot of issues in the world, and I could tell they were passionate and opinionated.

Shortly after that, I stopped volunteering at the library because I started participating in a program called YearUp that took me out of that whole sphere—or at least, I thought it had.

I met Roel in YearUp. He always talked about the leadership and public speaking experience he gained in some group he was in. He was pretty on point, and was a leader in YearUp too, especially around issues that tied into foster care. I was actually really impressed. It wouldn't be until a year later that I found out Roel was an alumni of Mockingbird.

After YearUp ended, I applied for the Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness Chapter Leader position at Mockingbird. At my first event, I ended up seeing Roel, and I guess it all kind of came together for me. Mockingbird had given me a really good opportunity—and I was taking a step toward being something that I found really cool and impressive in the community. I was getting the chance to start exercising the same kind of leadership I saw Roel display with YearUp.

Now I feel confident and prepared speaking to large groups. I'm not sure I would have been able to do that a year or two ago. But being with Mockingbird has given me the opportunity to grind through many speaking events, and to develop the comfort level I am at now.

As Summit participants, you have all been focused on writing your presentations for the last six months. You have put in the time and effort at chapter meetings, during research sessions, and in consultation with experts in the community. You

have practiced your speaking parts in trainings and during the Systems Reform Workshop. You've been grinding, and you've been developing your skills as advocates and public speakers. You were always experts on your own experiences in foster care, or with systems that serve homeless youth. And now you have honed your ability to deliver a policy presentation. This is what I want you to know: There is nobody who can advocate for what you need better than you.

As I have grown with Mockingbird, there have been some big milestones along the way. The first was when I was hired as a Chapter Leader; the second was when I was promoted to Network Representative; and the third was this past February when I helped represent our agency at a national conference on youth homelessness in Oakland. When I look back at these milestones, I am surprised by how far I have come—how many more opportunities I have now than I did before. And I believe that for you, presenting your ideas before your community and decision-makers will represent a milestone in your growth as well. It will also be a milestone for our state as we bring youth who have experienced homelessness together to advocate with foster youth, in solidarity with one another.

In closing, I want you to know that you are not alone. You are a part of something bigger than what you can see represented at the Summit. Generations of young leaders, like Roel and many others, have come before you to advocate for what is smart and what is right. And you will inspire many young people who come behind you to stand up—and speak up—in the future. It will not be easy to build a world class foster care system, or to end youth homelessness. But I do believe that if there is any chance of accomplishing these goals, it is because of us.

MOCKINGBIRD YOUTH PROGRAMS' ANNUAL ADVOCACY CYCLE

The Mockingbird Youth Network (MYN) is a powerful statewide coalition of young people affected by foster care. The MYN brings together young people who have experienced the child welfare system first-hand and want to share their stories so tomorrow's foster youth will not have to face the same challenges.

Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) gives young people who have experienced homelessness a chance to speak up, tell their stories, and advocate for programs and services they think will improve the lives of young people who do not have a stable home.

Annual Advocacy Cycle: MYN and YAEH participants begin the annual advocacy cycle each spring by identifying problems or barriers they have experienced while in foster care or during times of housing instability and homelessness. Then they conduct research and consult community experts to define solutions to those problems. Each MYN and YAEH chapter presents their proposal at Mockingbird's annual Youth Leadership Summit. After the Summit, youth work with leaders in their communities to build support for their proposals, while Mockingbird's Public Policy team identifies opportunities to advance this agenda via legislation, budget requests, or policy reform. Finally, youth engage in direct advocacy during Washington state's legislative session by making calls, sending emails, providing public testimony before legislative committees, and meeting directly with policymakers and their staff.

Results: This cycle of year-round youth-led advocacy has resulted in over two dozen pieces of signed legislation, and many more rule changes and practice reforms within the child welfare and youth homelessness systems.



ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Thank you to our Policy Advisors for their time and expert guidance!

 The Systems Reform Workshop offers youth an opportunity to practice the proposals that they will present to the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care and the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee. The youth practice in front of panels of policy advisors, which include child welfare and youth homelessness experts, state agency staff, Mockingbird staff and alumni, and other community partners who provide the youth with insightful feedback.



Systems Reform Workshop Policy Advisors

Alicia LeVezu – *University of Washington Children and Youth Advocacy Clinic*

Annie Blackledge – *The Mockingbird Society*

Beth Van Fossan – *University of Washington School of Social Work*

Cacey Hanauer – *YMCA of Greater Seattle Young Adult Services*

Cindy Bricker – *Administrative Office of the Courts*

Cole Ketcherside – *Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs*

Danielle Prince – *The Mockingbird Society*

George Yeannakis – *TeamChild*

Hickory Gateless – *Center for Children and Youth Justice*

Jeff Lindstrom – *YMCA of Greater Seattle Young Adult Services*

Jess Lewis – *Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction*

Julie Brown – *YMCA of Greater Seattle Young Adult Services*

Kate Baber – *Washington Low Income Housing Alliance*

Katie Kaiser – *College Success Foundation*

Kelly Warner-King – *University of Washington Court Improvement Training Academy*

Laurie Lippold – *Partners for Our Children*

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Thank you to our Policy Advisors for their time and expert guidance!



“I love seeing where the presentations start, and how polished, confident, and empowered the young people are when they present to the commissions. This is the highlight of my summer!”

– Katie Kaiser, College Success Foundation

Systems Reform Workshop Policy Advisors (continued)

Leo Fernandez – *Alumnus of Mockingbird Youth Programs*
Lisa Matchette – *The Mockingbird Society Board of Directors*
Liz Trautman – *YouthCare*
Maggie Schmeelk – *The Mockingbird Society*
Mary Van Cleve – *Columbia Legal Services*
Mireya Beltre – *Children's Administration*
Nick Holcomb – *Alumnus of Mockingbird Youth Programs*
Pam Crone – *Contract Lobbyist for The Mockingbird Society*
Patrick Dowd – *Washington State Office of the Family & Children's Ombuds*

Peggy Lewis – *Children's Administration*
Roel Williams – *Alumnus of Mockingbird Youth Programs*
Sam Martin – *Treehouse, Alumnus of Mockingbird Youth Programs*
Samantha Wiese – *All Home Youth and Young Adult Initiative*
Sara Rylaarsdam – *YouthNet*
Taku Mineshita – *Children's Administration*
Toni Sebastian – *Children's Administration*
Trai Williams – *YouthCare, Alumna of Mockingbird Youth Programs*
Tyler Donhardt – *The Mockingbird Society*

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Provide Legal Representation for All Children and Youth in Foster Care

YAKIMA CHAPTER

The Yakima Chapter wants all children and youth in foster care to be provided legal counsel before their 72-hour shelter care hearings. Attorneys can ensure that young people are aware of their rights, make legal terms more understandable, and allow their voices to be heard in court. In a recent study, experts in King County found that 22 percent of youth represented by an attorney at the 72-hour hearing were never found dependent, and 48 percent never spent a night in foster care. Currently, not all youth are assigned attorneys in Washington state. Whether or not they are represented by an attorney often depends on the county where they reside. This justice by geography is fundamentally unfair. By providing attorneys for all young people before shelter care hearings, we can increase their rates of permanency, and therefore create better outcome.

“We ask for you to do what is morally and legally just: give all youth in care a well-trained attorney who will let our voices be heard and fight for our rights.”

– Jade Tillequots, Yakima MYN Chapter Leader



Eliminate Youth Detention for Status Offenses and Expand Family Reconciliation Services

TACOMA CHAPTER

The Tacoma Chapter wants to eliminate use of the Valid Court Order Exception in Washington state that allows juvenile detention for status offenses. In addition, the Chapter is advocating for funding to restore and expand the Family Reconciliation Services program to prevent juvenile detention and provide families with supportive alternatives. Status offenses only apply to youth under 18, and punish young people for actions like running away or breaking curfew. Washington detains youth for status offenses more than any other state in the country. Studies have found that juvenile detention usually increases the severity of problem behaviors and can increase the chances that the youth will be detained or incarcerated in the future. Juvenile detention can also worsen mental illness and put youth at greater risk for self-harm. By prioritizing early intervention and reconciliation, and eliminating the practice of detaining minors for status offenses, the state could save money and ensure better outcomes for at-risk youth and their families.

“Even if this not a problem in your district, youth in other districts are still suffering.”

– Emily Freeman, Tacoma MYN Chapter Member

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



“Going to school is hard enough when you have everything you need. Now, imagine going to school when you have no place to call home.”

– Sierra Phillips, YAEH Chapter Leader

Expand Educational Supports for Students Experiencing Homelessness

YOUTH ADVOCATES ENDING HOMELESSNESS CHAPTER

The Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) Chapter wants to improve high school graduation rates for students experiencing homelessness or housing instability by ensuring there is a trained point person in every school that can build relationships with young people, help identify homeless students, connect them with services, and create individualized support plans for their educational success. Furthermore, the Chapter proposes the state guarantee supplemental instruction and services to these students under the definition of basic education. Experts estimate there are nearly 5,800 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness or housing instability in Washington’s schools. These youth are more likely to fare worse on standardized tests, are disproportionately individuals of color, and are 240 percent more likely to drop out of school. Only 30 out of 295 school districts in Washington receive federal McKinney-Vento funding intended to meet the needs of homeless students, which YAEH members believe is insufficient. By providing funding for a point person in every school and prioritizing the needs of homeless students alongside other vulnerable student populations, the state can better provide youth the supports and tools they need to graduate at an equal rate with their stably housed peers.

Appearing for the first time at Summit: YAEH!

The Mockingbird Society and our community partners who sponsor and support the Youth Leadership Summit chose to include the YAEH chapter in this year’s program. We see this as a reflection of Mockingbird’s mission and dual focus on improving foster care and ending youth homelessness. We recognize that youth who experience these systems all need our support. As advocates, we want to work together in a coordinated, combined effort to address the underlying problems that stand in the way of every child having a safe, stable home.

The Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care and the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs have committed to inviting both the MYN and YAEH chapters to present alongside each other at all future Youth Leadership Summits.

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Allowing Partial Credits for Unresolved Coursework Due to Foster Care Placement Transfers

SEATTLE CHAPTER

The Seattle Chapter wants to improve high school graduation rates for youth in foster care by awarding partial credit for unresolved coursework. Experts estimate that every time a young person in care changes placements, they lose six months of academic progress. Given that each youth in foster care goes through an average of three placement changes, on average they fall eighteen months behind their peers in school. Only fifty percent of foster youth graduate high school. Youth who drop out of high school are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, and have poor health outcomes. They are also three times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested. By awarding partial credit to students when they transfer to a new school mid-term, foster youth can lose less ground due to placement changes and improve their chances to be on a path to success in school and life.

“Foster youth are graduating high school at a much lower rate than their peers due to instability, social stigma, and lack of school and home support. Being in the child welfare system should not determine a young person’s path to graduation.”

– Johnathan Hemphill, Seattle MYN Chapter Member



Increase Access to Driver’s Permits and Licenses for Foster Youth

OLYMPIA CHAPTER

The Olympia Chapter wants to implement a statewide program that will make it easier for foster youth to obtain driver’s licenses and permits. Having the ability to drive expands the opportunities for foster youth to pursue employment and education. This is especially true in rural areas and smaller towns or cities where there may be limited public transportation. For foster youth, being able to drive also promotes a sense of normalcy, and allows them to participate in a wider range of activities. Currently, the costs and administrative processes related to obtaining a driver’s license and insurance present barriers for youth in care. A Florida study of youth in foster care found that only three percent youth in foster care under age 18 had driver’s licenses, compared to 54 percent of their peers who were not in care. By implementing a program that would reduce the paperwork burden and pay all of the fees associated with driver’s education, licensing, and insurance for foster youth, our state could help ensure they are on the road to successful independence.

“We believe that increasing the number of foster youth with driver’s licenses would achieve a measurable impact [...] and result in young adults being more financially independent and prepared for our futures. Please give our youth the keys to independence!”

– Sabian Hart, Olympia MYN Chapter Leader

CHAPTER VOICE

Youth-Inspired Solutions



Provide Comprehensive Sexual Education for Youth in Foster Care

SPOKANE CHAPTER

The Spokane Chapter wants foster youth to have access to comprehensive sex education to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Youth in foster care engage in sexual activity at higher rates than their counterparts from intact families. They also become pregnant and experience STIs more often than their peers who are not in care. The Alliance for Child Welfare Excellence does not currently offer any specific training for foster parents or social workers about how to discuss sexual health with youth, and not all community-based service providers offer sex education programs. By training foster parents and state social workers, and providing sexual education curriculum to Independent Living Program service providers, foster youth will have the best opportunity to learn what healthy relationships look like and how to make good decisions about sexual health and family planning.

“We feel comprehensive sex education is necessary to reduce the disparities between those in care and those that aren’t. We want to ensure the best future we can for those in foster care and [...] that each youth has access to this information.”

– Joey Freeman, Spokane MYN Chapter Member



Address the Foster Parent Crisis by Implementing the Mockingbird Family Model

EVERETT CHAPTER

The Everett Chapter wants a new Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) constellation to be implemented in the Everett region, with an emphasis on recruiting foster parents who want to care for adolescents. Chapter members recognize the difference that dedicated foster parents make in their lives, and they believe the MFM is the best way to empower caregivers to do their jobs in a supported, sustainable way. In every MFM constellation, six to ten licensed foster families live in close proximity to a veteran foster care family – called a Hub Home – that provides peer support, social activities, planned and unplanned respite or crisis care, and assistance in navigating the child welfare system. Early evaluations showed how the MFM improved rates of child safety, permanency, placement stability, sibling connection, culturally relevant care, and caregiver retention. In the Everett region, there were only 46 licensed foster homes to serve 300 youth in crisis in 2014. Without enough options, youth might be placed in an institutional setting, or outside of their home community. They might also be moved from place to place until something more permanent becomes available. The Chapter wants to avoid those negative outcomes, and instead provide youth and caregivers with the support they need to thrive.

“Foster care can be challenging and isolating, but having a family-led support system can be amazingly powerful. [...] Our chapter believes the Mockingbird Family Model can provide foster parents with [a] support system of peers to share their experiences and challenges.”

– Jil Nance, Everett MYN Chapter Leader

YOUTH REPORT TO COMMUNITY LEADERS

Thank you to the members of the *Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care!*



Attending Commission Members

Justice Bobbe Bridge (ret.), Center for Children & Youth Justice, Commission Co-Chair

Mike Canfield, Foster Parents Association of Washington State

Judge Kitty-Ann van Doorninck, Superior Court Judges' Association (SCJA) Designee for Judge Michael Downes

Sabian Hart, Youth in Foster Care Representative, Olympia MYN Chapter Leader

Kristy Healing, Northwest Intertribal Court System Representative

Representative Ruth Kagi, 32nd Legislative District, Chair of the House Early Learning and Human Services Committee

Jeannie Kee, Foster Youth Alumni Representative

Jill Malat, Office of Civil Legal Aid, Children's Representation Program

Joanne Moore, Washington State Office of Public Defense

Tonia Morrison, Parent Advocate Representative

Ryan Murrey, Executive Director, Washington State CASA

Dan Newell, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Designee for Randy Dorn

Kimberly Ong, Supreme Court Commission Staff

Linh Tran, Assistant Attorney General, Washington State Office of the Attorney General

Carrie Wayno, Assistant Attorney General, Washington State Office of the Attorney General, Designee for Bob Ferguson

YOUTH REPORT TO COMMUNITY LEADERS

Thank you to the members of the *Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee*



Attending Advisory Committee Members

Representative Jake Fey, 27th Legislative District
Melinda Giovengo, Executive Director, YouthCare, Committee Vice Chair
Kris Hermanns, Executive Director, Pride Foundation
Katara Jordan, Senior Manager, Policy and Advocacy, Building Changes

Kim Justice, Executive Director, Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs
Sierra Phillips, Youth Representative, The Mockingbird Society
Casey Trupin, Youth Homelessness Program Officer, Raikes Foundation, Committee Chair

2016 JIM THEOFELIS ADVOCATE OF THE YEAR

The Jim Theofelis Advocate of the Year award recognizes MYN and YAEH participants who demonstrate exemplary leadership, a passion for advocacy, and dedication to the mission of The Mockingbird Society. The award is named in honor of Mockingbird's founding Executive Director. Youth are nominated by their peers, and staff members select the winners. The Advocate of the Year, the overall award winner, has the opportunity to shadow a legislator or government official during the following legislative session as a reward for their hard work.

The 2016 Advocate of the Year is Melisa Suljic, Everett Chapter Leader. Known for being a well-spoken advocate, Melisa was the keynote speaker at the 2015 Mockingbird Luncheon, and helped to facilitate a workshop at the National Alliance to End Homelessness Youth and Families Conference in Oakland, California this past February.

Melisa's Engagement Specialist had this to say about her: "She leads with passion, integrity, and tenacity. She is always looking for new opportunities to grow and learn. She takes pride in this work, and anyone who has worked with her knows that her spirit shines bright. She challenges everyone around her to be the best that they can be, while also having as much fun as possible. It has been a true pleasure to get to work alongside her this year and I have no doubt that she will continue to be an amazing advocate and a powerful leader in whatever comes next for her."



**MELISA SULJIC AND
JIM THEOFELIS**

Melisa will have the opportunity to shadow Representative Timm Ormsby, Chair of the House Appropriations Committee and champion for our young people.



REPRESENTATIVE TIMM ORMSBY

*Chair of the House Appropriations Committee
3rd Legislative District*

2016 HONORABLE MENTIONS



SIERRA PHILLIPS
YAEH Chapter Leader



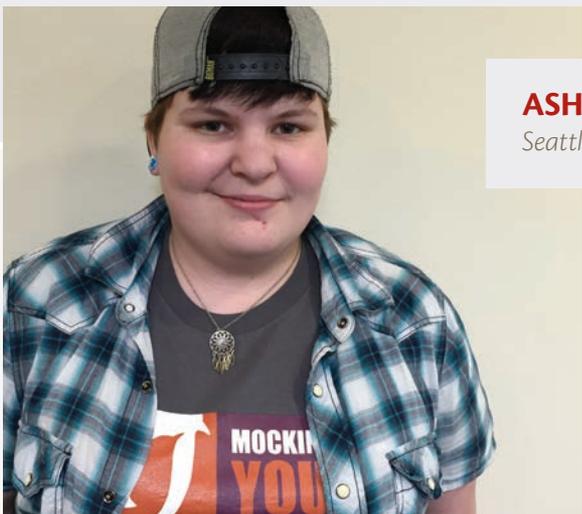
SABIAN HART
Olympia MYN Chapter Leader



JADE TILLEQUOTS
Yakima MYN Chapter Leader



MINNIE BLIESNER
Spokane MYN Chapter Leader



ASHLEY ALDRICH
Seattle MYN Chapter Member



CAROL FREEMAN
Tacoma MYN Chapter Leader



The Mockingbird Society

Improving foster care | Ending youth homelessness

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About Us

The Mockingbird Society

The Mockingbird Society is an advocacy organization that works with young people and families to improve foster care and end youth homelessness. Our youth programs train young people who have been homeless or in foster care to be their own best advocates. By doing so, they change policies and perceptions that stand in the way of every child having a safe and stable home. Our family programs advocate for innovation in the way services such as foster care are delivered. Together, our solutions focus on improving the social service systems that ultimately serve thousands of children, youth and families each year in Washington and beyond.

About Us

The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care

The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care's mission is to provide all children in foster care with safe, permanent families in which their physical, emotional, intellectual, and social needs are met. The Commission's goals are to:

- Monitor and report on the extent to which child welfare programs and courts are responsive to the needs of the children in their joint care.
- Broaden public awareness of and support for meeting the needs of children and families in foster care.
- Institutionalize collaboration beyond the terms of office of individual agency directors and elected officials.

The Commission can achieve its goals through initiating policy decisions and needed legislative and court rule changes.

About Us

The Office of Homeless Youth Prevention & Protection Programs Advisory Committee

Created in 2015, the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs leads the statewide efforts to reduce and prevent homelessness for youth and young adults through five priority service areas to ensure our youth and young adults have:

- Stable Housing – Every youth has a safe and healthy place to sleep at night.
- Family Reconciliation – Families are reunited when safe and appropriate.
- Permanent Connections – Youth have opportunities to establish positive, healthy relationships with adults.
- Education and Employment – Youth have opportunities to advance in their education or training and obtain employment.
- Social and Emotional Well-Being – Youth have access to behavioral and physical health care; services nurture each youth's individual strengths and abilities.

The work of the office is guided by a 12-member Advisory Committee composed of advocates, legislators, law enforcement, service providers, and other stakeholders. Except for legislative members, Advisory Committee members are appointed by the Governor.

mockingbirdsociety.org

