

One United Voice for Change

*2018 Youth Leadership
Summit Report*



Improving foster care &
Ending youth homelessness



The Mockingbird Society's

13th Annual Youth Leadership Summit brought together youth leaders from across Washington state to present their proposals for state-wide systems reform to improve foster care and end youth homelessness.

Day One

Chapter members received feedback on their proposals during a Systems Reform Workshop in front of panels of policy advisors. Experts in child welfare and/or youth homelessness, Mockingbird staff and alumni, and other community partners provided the youth with insightful feedback.



Day Two

Youth took the stage to present their proposals for change to the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care and the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee. The audience also included community partners and policy makers who came to listen and learn from the experts.



Day Three

Chapter members heard from several schools and programs at the University of Washington and learned about how advocacy skills can be applied to different career paths. Summit attendees also had the opportunity to explore many iconic destinations around Seattle including the Seattle Aquarium, Pike Place Market, and the Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP.)



Jim Theofelis Advocate of the Year

The Jim Theofelis Advocate of the Year Award recognizes Mockingbird youth program participants who demonstrate exemplary leadership and dedication to advocacy and to The Mockingbird Society. The winner of this year's award, De'Mazi McDowell, will have the opportunity to shadow State Rep. Eric Pettigrew (37th legislative district) during the upcoming legislative session.

Award Winner De'Mazi McDowell
with Jim Theofelis, founder of
The Mockingbird Society.

“What we hear at the summit are well thought-out, well-researched, and important proposals from young people who combine passion and lived experience—we collectively witness the movement of sound policy for a better future for young people.”

— Casey Trupin, Chair OHY Advisory Committee

What Youth Are Saying About Summit

“My favorite moment of Summit was watching how compassionate and caring the Board and Commission was.”

“During Summit, I learned that one voice can make a difference.”

“Summit made me realize how tall we are when we stand together.”

2018 Summit Proposals

Olympia Chapter

Topic: Youth participation in state plan to prevent exits from systems of care into homelessness

In 2018, the state legislature passed SB 6560, which requires the Department of Children, Youth, and Families and the Office of Homeless Youth to jointly develop a plan to ensure no unaccompanied youth is discharged from a publicly funded system of care into homelessness by December 31st, 2020. The Olympia Chapter would like the opportunity to guide youth engagement in the planning process of SB 6560, including partnering in developing and facilitating multiple youth focus groups.

Yakima Chapter

Topic: Safety and youth voice in group homes

In 2016, the Office of the Inspector General performed unannounced visits to 20 group homes in Washington state, and every group home failed to meet at least one state licensing requirement. These findings echo troubling experiences foster youth report from their time in group homes. The Yakima Chapter proposes increasing the proportion of homes receiving unannounced visits and adding a requirement to include youth residents in program operations.

Seattle Chapter

Topic: Access to financial education for youth in foster care and experiencing homelessness

The Seattle Chapter proposes a mandatory Financial Education Class offered in high school, potentially via an online course. States with Financial Education courses given in high school have been shown to lead to higher credit scores and lower instances of missed payments as compared to states that didn't require these financial literacy classes. While all young people benefit from learning about personal finance, a lack of financial skills disproportionately impacts foster and homeless youth who may not have financial support to help them into adulthood.

Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness Chapter

Topic: Expanded opportunities for youth with lived experience to inform policymaking

The Youth Advocates Ending Homelessness (YAEH) Chapter proposes to expand representation of the Office of Homeless Youth (OHY) Advisory Committee and the Commission on Children in Foster Care (CCFC) to two young adults currently in or recently exited from homelessness or foster care. Additionally, YAEH proposes expanding internship opportunities at the legislature and state agencies such as the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and the Department of Commerce.



Spokane Chapter

Topic: Transition planning for youth in foster care

The Spokane Chapter proposes that permanency meetings and other shared planning meetings for foster youth should include a discussion of options if youth do turn 18 while in care. The Spokane Chapter also proposes that additional training be provided to social service workers on how to facilitate these meetings with adolescents and how to work best with Independent Living providers.

Tacoma Chapter

Topic: Building independent living skills for foster youth

Tacoma proposes a three-part ask: 1) Increase ILS program funding to expand access to services in rural areas; 2) Provide mandatory training to foster parents who serve adolescents on how to support youth in learning life skills, and 3) Create adolescent units in each DCYF office, allowing caseworkers to focus on documenting life skills goals and adolescent-specific needs during health and safety checks.

Everett Chapter

Topic: Supportive foster care placements for LGBTQ+ young people in care

Approximately 22.8% of youth in out-of-home care identify as LGBTQ+, compared to roughly 3.8% of the general population. 19.6% of LGBTQ+ youth were moved from their first foster placement at the request of their caregiver compared to only 8.6% of heterosexual youth. The Everett Chapter proposes expanded recruitment of LGBTQ+ foster parents and including explicit anti-discrimination language in the Washington Administrative Codes.

Network Representatives

Topic: Eliminating Youth Detention for Status Offenses

Since 2015, Mockingbird youth have been working on eliminating the use of the Valid Court Order exception in Washington state, which allows youth to be arrested and jailed for status offenses. A status offense is an action which would not be considered a crime for an adult, such as running away or truancy. Washington state jails youth for status offenses more than any other state in the country, and Native American and Hispanic youth are disproportionately more likely to be jailed for status offenses.



ACE Award

In 2018, The Mockingbird Society presented its inaugural ACE Award to Justice Bobbe Bridge (Ret.) and Representative Ruth Kagi. The ACE Award celebrates those individuals who have made a significant impact on the lives of young people and families. The ACE is a reference to an “ace” in your hand, one factor that makes all the difference in the hand you are dealt. Justice Bridge and Representative Kagi have shown tireless dedication to improving the child welfare system for our state’s most vulnerable people. One youth advocate said, “Seeing both leaders constantly looking to us, the youth, for advice on how to better the systems we are involved in is something that is tremendously motivational. It makes me feel like change is possible.”

At The Mockingbird Society, we believe that everyone has the potential to make a difference in the lives of others. We look forward to celebrating those that live up to that potential for many years to come.



“I cherish these summits and the chance to learn: learn to be inspired, learn to be motivated and learn to be wowed.”

—Justice Bobbe Bridge (Ret.), Co-Chair, CCFC

“Young people are leading the way. Their proposals represent the best ideas and solutions to end youth homelessness and improve foster care.”

—Kim Justice, Executive Director, Office of Homeless Youth





Special Thanks

Thank you to members of the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care and the Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee for attending our 2018 Summit and for supporting youth advocacy in action.

Top: Office of Homeless Youth Prevention and Protection Programs Advisory Committee. Left: Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care.



“You capture our hearts and minds and move us to action. Always hold your incredible power to influence both public policy and opinion. Thank you.”

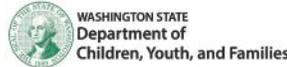
—Connie Lambert-Eckel, Co-Chair, CCFC





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