2012 Foster Youth and Alumni
LEADERSHIP SUMMIT REPORT

System Reform
Mockingbird youth convened on Bainbridge Island for the 7th Annual Leadership Summit. Front page

System Reform
Amanda Bevington describes how participants perfected their advocacy skills at the Systems Reform Workshop. Page 2

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Power of One
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On June 25th, 26th, and 27th, fifty-six foster youth and alumni gathered at Islandwood on Bainbridge Island for leadership and advocacy development.

Exit Funds Savings Accounts
Seattle Chapter. Youth aging out of care lack a universal savings tool to help teach them the value of saving money. Financial resources currently provided for youth aging out are strictly limited to certain demographics, only cover immediate costs for basic necessities, and cannot be used for savings.

Overmedication in Foster Care
Everett Chapter. Youth in care are disproportionately prescribed mental health medications when compared to youth from intact families. Youth, case managers, and caregivers must be better informed of the impacts of medications and have more opportunities to encourage a second opinion.

Provide Safe Housing for ALL Youth Aging Out of Care
Olympia Chapter. Youth in care have lost significant family and permanent supportive connections. While efforts are made to find relatives, these searches are conducted primarily for placement purposes, without considering the value of maintaining relationships with these extended family members.

Ensure Better Outcomes for Youth Transition Plans
Yakima Chapter. The legislature has created Extended Foster Care for youth pursuing their education. Ensuring safe housing for youth aging out of care is critical to providing the stability and support necessary to succeed as an adult. Youth who do not choose to continue their education or are not in a position to do so due to disability, money, or other hardship, are not ensured this support even though in many cases they are the most in need.

Spokane Chapter. By law, youth who are going to age out of foster care must have a transition plan meeting at age 17.5. Youth transitioning out of care need their 17.5 meetings to ensure they have access to the records, documents and resources necessary to successfully transition into adulthood.

Tacoma Chapter. Youth in care should not be kept from visiting their siblings for inappropriate reasons. Too many youth in foster care are being sanctioned or punished with the removal of sibling visits.

Encouraging Family Connections
Youth aging out of care must have an extended reconnection to family. These extended family connections are vital to providing the stability and support necessary to succeed as an adult.

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**Letter from the Editor**

On June 25th through the 27th, 56 youth & alumni of care from across Washington state came together for our 7th annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. Youth entered to lead and inspire passionate young leaders and leave as empowered advocates for the next generation of child welfare reforms.

First of all I want to thank our Summit sponsors for their continued support. This opportunity for youth would not be possible without them: Casey Family Programs, the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care, the Center for Children & Youth Justice, the Federal Court Improvement Program, and the Department of Social and Health Services. This year’s Summit themes included: permanency, elevating youth voice, and healthy transitions. This year also brought with it a number of new and exciting changes. The first two days of the Summit were held at the beautiful Islandwood School in the Woods on Bainbridge Island, providing an amazing environment for the youth to enjoy. This year’s Summit also saw the unveiling of The Mockingbird Society’s latest training, Transitions. This innovative curriculum, made possible by a generous grant from the Andrus Family Fund, is designed to help youth in care deal with the challenges many youth face while in care.

The third day of the Summit we once again took the time to reflect on our system reform successes in the past year, and honor the champions who led the way, I am grateful for the many passionate designers who not only support our priorities, but who take the time to meet with youth, and listen to their perspectives.

Finally, we culminated an already amazing 3 days with the Rosenberg Commission on Children in Foster Care. After months of hard work, the youth came prepared with some of the most well-developed policy proposals I have ever seen at the Summit. I am confident that these proposals will lead to real reforms that will benefit all children, youth, and families impacted by the foster care system.

Thank you to each and every one of you who support The Mockingbird Society and help improve the lives of youth in care, as well as for those five year old child, who doesn’t yet know that she will be entering foster care.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

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**Practice Makes Perfect Advocacy**

Youth participants at the Leadership Summit said that this year the workshop was great. They said this year did not feel rushed and they appreciated that they were given a total of 30 minutes for presenting, receiving feedback, and regrouping back into their chapter to debrief. Many youth said it was helpful to hear from the advisors and to role play like it was the real thing. The System Reform Workshop not only allowed youth to practice standing up for what they believe in and using their voices effectively, but the way it has changed over the years is a great example of how Mockingbird listens to youth as it refines workshops and trainings so that participants grow into the best advocates they can be.

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Brian Lawrence, Development Director
Beth Vance, Finance Director

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**Mockingbird Times**

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**about us**

The Mockingbird Society is a leading advocate for foster care reform built on youth-inspired solutions, powerful coalitions and public support for every children's right to a safe home and a bright future. 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 20,000 through our mailing list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. As a nonprofit organization, we appreciate your support. You can contribute your private contributions to support our youth and family programs. Donate online, by phone, or by mail.

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**Practice Makes Perfect Advocacy**

Youth receive expert feedback as they hone their policy topic presentations on Day 2 of the 7th Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit.

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**Our Policy Advisors**

Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children
Casey Trupin, Columbia Legal Services
Justice Bobbe Bridge, Office for Children & Youth Justice
Ron Murphy, Casey Family Programs
Rick Butt, Children’s Administration
Miranda Leskinen, Speaker Frank Chopp’s Office
Dan Hagan, Representative Mary Helen Roberts’ Office
Kari Boiter, Representative Mary Lou Dickenson’s Office
Marlyn Pedersen, Representative Ross Hunter’s Office
Kimberly Mills, Seattle City Attorney’s Office

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**The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name. Accused, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, teaches them that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because "...Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us." We work to bring the same commitment to our most vulnerable children, youth and families. Join us!**

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**the name**

"These proposals will lead to real reforms that will benefit all children, youth, and families impacted by the foster care system." Letter from the Editor

"Youth are extremely passionate about creating change in the foster care system, now and in the future." Practice Makes Perfect story
Report-Out Reflects Months of Hard Work

“Commission members and the youth both used their personal stories to put a human face on the issue of youth in foster care.”

Commission Report-Out story

Making it from Point A to Point B

This year The Mockingbird Society received an amazing grant from the Andrus Family Fund (AFF). This grant was given to us on the terms that we develop the content and material for Mockingbird’s newest training: 

Transitions.

If you are anything like me, the first thing you might think of when you hear the word “transition” is a physical movement from point A to point B. But in the AFF model, created by author William Bridges, transitions means something very specific and different. Thanks to our very own Georina Ramirez, Mockingbird’s Youth Development Specialist, we learned that change and transition was the first step in learning the framework. After getting that distinction down, we got into the heart of the training — learning the three phases of transition: Endings, the Neutral Zone, and New Beginnings.

This training was very rich in content. If you haven’t had the opportunity to enjoy this experience yet, do not worry. Mockingbird Youth Network chapter members will be able to participate in this training in Olympia on Thursday August 23rd 2012, in Seattle on August 29th and in Tacoma on August 30th.

Mockingbird   Times

If you are interested in learning more, please contact Selena Willet, Selena@mockingbirdsociety.org for information on the Olympia and Tacoma trainings, and Georina Ramirez, Georina@mockingbirdsociety.org for information on the Seattle training.

“Commission members and the youth both used their personal stories to put a human face on the issue of youth in foster care.”

“Pay It Forward
Deonate Cruz

Seattle Chapter Member Max Ream participates in an energizer during the Transitions Training.

“When you go through transitions, it’s very much like an iceberg in the same way that everything you see is only 10% of the big picture.” Making It story

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Summit Essay Contest

First Place Summit Essay, “Foster Care Saved My Life”

Kimberly Hines, Everett Chapter

I grew up thinking that I was nothing. I had no motivation to do well upon entering care. I met numerous people who helped me gain this motivation. My best friend, Brittany Oswald, and my aunt/LEGAL guardian, Cheryl Frazer, helped me get back on the right track. Before I entered care, I only went to school because my friends did and even then I only attended once a week. I didn’t think that getting good grades was a priority. It wasn’t until I was placed into care that I started to see how important they are. Brittany and Cheryl helped me see that I could do things that I never would have dreamed of that I could do. They gave me motivation that my parents never did. I went from having a very low GPA to maintaining a 3.6 through freshman and sophomore years. I have never been able to do this without their help. Brittany even helped me study, and I got into the Running Start Program. These are things that I would have never even attempted to do before I was placed into care. It was only about three years ago that my siblings and I were placed into the foster care system. In that amount of time, I feel like have come a long way from where I used to be. I had the most negative outlook in the world about everything and I was steering myself down the wrong path. I was spending time with gangs, drinking and using several types of drugs. My life consisted of having fun and then going home and being beaten and put down. My life was an ongoing rollercoaster that never went back up. I never told anyone about being abused because I didn’t want their sympathy. I didn’t want to involve anyone. In care, I realized that abuse isn’t a part of regular life and that it wasn’t me who should be ashamed. I also realized that I shouldn’t hate the State for taking me and my siblings out of our parents’ custody, but that I should thank them. When I first entered care I promised myself that I was going to turn around and do better than I had been. In 8th grade I had a teacher, Mr. Freeman, who taught me that nobody was better than anybody else. He talked about how a certain percentage of students don’t make it to college and how he didn’t want any of us to be a part of that percent. This motivated me as a student and a person. He was like the father that I never had, but always wanted. In that same year, I participated in a group called Affected Others. It was a group for students who lived in homes with abusive parents. I had been holding a lot of anger and frustration inside of me, and this group gave me the opportunity to let it all out. I want my siblings to have a better childhood than I did, the motivation and support that every child needs. Although I wanted to change for me, the real reason I wanted to change was for my younger siblings. They look up to me and I’m their role model. I regret that I was so busy being preoccupied with myself and that I left them alone at home with our father. This is part of the reason why I really would like to attend Summit 2012. This conference gives me the opportunity to directly improve our foster care system for future generations. I look back on my childhood and I am ashamed of myself and regret many things. But, what I progressively learned as a foster youth is that you can’t change the past but you can change the future. If I never went into foster care, I can’t, and don’t even want to imagine where I’d be today.

Runner-Up Essay, “Compelled by a Bright Future”

Chris Bauer, Olympia Chapter

Each of us is motivated by something. Whether it be by friends, family or some deep personal ambition; we all have a self-pronounced personal trainer of sorts to help us reach our goals in life. I am no different and even though there is some embarrassment that comes with what motivates me to succeed, I must explain after throwing it out there in the first place.

I wouldn’t say that I have the worst hand in life by far, but my life was no walk in the park nonetheless. Without taking pity, as this is not what I am asking for; I am asking for an understanding that many people are motivated by the hope of a better life. With that, believe me when I tell you, it is a dang good motivator.

So, what is it that motivates me? I’m tired of making poor choices for myself. I got tired of making excuses for why I’ve gotten myself into trouble. Believe me, I’ve been through all the standard operating procedures and after hearing myself repeat the same redundant justifications, over and over again, I got to thinking if it was my thinking that was the problem.

It’s true that misery loves company. It’s one thing for me to live my life as a drifter. It’s not hard to be the ignorant lone rock among the winds of change but as I went along I began to see my choices affect others around me, and often the results were not even close to satisfaction. I wasn’t happy with the results to say the least. So here comes the start of a new life. It’s time to get healthy and feed my mind right. I have been told that I can be anything I want to be in life as long as I have faith in myself, and from that moment on, that’s what I have done. I didn’t have the life I wanted but I knew the steps I needed to take to get where I wanted to be. I finally knew what I wanted and that alone was enough to propel me into the real world. The want for more, a slight greed you can say, motivated me to get my G.E.D. attend post-secondary education, and engage with and inspire those around me, I vow to do just that and I feel that I can also motivate people to be what they want to be.

Life is a journey and as with all journeys there are hazards and detours along the way but I have my road map and the motivation to see it through. That, to me, is all someone needs to transform a journey into an enjoyable adventure.

Report-Out, from page 3

response to the Report-Out on his blog saying, “These young people make incredibly powerful presentations that get right at the heart of how to make our foster care system actually work for the kids instead of the adults. It’s frustrating because the solutions seem like they should already have been done, and some themes repeat year after year. Every year we take some of the ideas they present on and try to get them implemented... Some of the ideas struck me as immediately implementable and almost criminal that they haven’t happened yet.”

Representative Hunter then committed to continuing the conversation with Mockingbird to make sure these issues are addressed.

Source: www.rosshunter.info/