Educational Advocacy Helps Youth

This year, Treehouse and the Mockingbird Youth Network collaborated to create the Educational Advocacy training targeting youth in high school or pursuing a General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.). In the training, facilitators lead youth through a series of exercises and activities that are designed to help youth think about their goals and aspirations as well as obstacles they might face during their educational endeavors. Youth are also given a variety of tools to use to help them advocate and navigate through those obstacles. With this training youth are given a reference guide (A Youth Guide to School and Success) that offers specific information to help youth advocate for themselves from high school through college.

As the Mockingbird Youth Network digs even deeper and really hones in on system reform we find more ways to contribute and take part in making a change. Being a participant of the Educational Advocacy training may not seem like system reform, but it actually is. We are trying to fill in the gap so that youth won’t have to rely solely on others to be successful on their educational paths. One of the training’s objectives is to get youth involved with their future and become less dependent on the system as a whole. As an advocacy organization, we can’t stress enough how youth can be their own best advocates, given the right tools and coaching.

In the Educational Advocacy training there are some powerful and shocking statistics regarding youth in care and their educational success rates including: Only 44% of foster youth graduate, compared to the rate of 73% for the general population in Washington state.1 A mere 10% of foster care alumni go to college or vocational school, and of them, only 3% actually complete those programs by age 26.2 With outcomes like these, youth need to advocate for themselves to find the support systems, resources and stability to change these statistics.

Education is the Key

Sometimes I wonder if youth understand the importance of their secondary education. Finishing high school and attending college are fundamental steps towards living a successful and independent adult life. Whether it’s a four year college, a community college, vocational or trade school, youth should pursue the highest level of training available in their professional field or area of interest. If you do not have an education then it is extremely hard to provide for yourself and family. The more education you have, the more money you will be able to earn.

I wish I had listened to people when I was younger about how much I need education to survive in this world, but regrettably, I didn’t. I was hard headed and needed to learn from my own mistakes. I ended up dropping out of high school at the end of 10th grade and tried to pursue my G.E.D. Unfortunately, I didn’t realize how hard the tests were and how long it would take me to even pass all five of them. At the time I was also working part-time at a fast food restaurant and homeless. This was not the life that I wanted to live, so by the 12th grade I dedicated myself to studying one-on-one with a teacher to earn enough credits to get my high school diploma. Earning my diploma under these circumstances made me feel incredibly proud and accomplished.

After high school I had no idea what I wanted to do. I was still homeless and I was dealing with a series of personal crises. I tried different community colleges and vocational schools, but never could quite find my passion. By the time I was 22 I realized what I wanted to do and go to school for: a Master of Social Work degree. Specifically, I want to work with children and youth that have behavioral problems. Even though it took me a long time to figure out, I know now I want to become successful in life, earn enough money to support myself, and enjoy my career every day.

Education is hard but it does pay off. There are many programs that help youth succeed in school. S.E.A. (Seattle Education Access), Treehouse and College Success Foundation are just a few resources available. I would advise you not to wait until the last minute to continue your education. The longer you put it off the harder it gets. For more information on trainings, visit www.treehousekids.org

Resources for Continuing Your Education

Treehouse for Kids
2100 24th Ave S # 200, Seattle 98144
(206) 767-7000

Volunteers of America — Spokane
525 W, Second Ave, Spokane 99201
(509) 624-2375

College Success Foundation
1665 NW Savannah Rd #200
Issaquah 98027
(425) 416-2000

Cassy Family Programs — Yakima
454 North Third Street, Yakima 98901
(509) 457-5872

Independent & Transitional Living Services
www.independence.wa.gov/eduction

Youth Against Violence, Literally

The Youth Philanthropy Board of the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation was formed about two years ago as part of the Youth Against Violence Initiative. It has been using the experiences of youth to help reduce violence involving youth in our communities, as well as to find alternatives for youth who are in violent situations. Board members are given valuable life skills in business and the non-profit world, tools to become philanthropic and community leaders and many other skills that can help them further in life.

The board of about 12 youth aged 15-24 was originally thought of after the tragic death of a young teenage boy. He was killed near one of Tacoma’s teen clubs, which was designed and funded to reduce youth violence by giving them a safe hang out spot they could go to on the weekends with their friends. The community was outraged by the proceedings and declared that Downtown Tacoma was not a safe place for young adults. World Vision, a program spearheading youth against violence alternatives came up with the idea of having a board of youth who could give their opinions, thoughts, and concerns about the issues surrounding youth violence and their thoughts on how to fix these issues from their perspective. Thus the Youth Philanthropy Board was born.

Violence, on page 4

Pay it Forward
Tianna Oliver

System Reform
Diamonique Walker

Power of One
Amanda Bevington shares her story of dropping out and returning to high school. page 1

Pay it Forward
Tianna Oliver describes the powerful work of the Greater Tacoma Community Foundation. page 1

Special Contribution
Mi’Quelo Johnson details the experience of a facilitator for Culture of Foster Care training. page 3

Pay it Forward
Samantha McDonald and Deonate Cruz’s report from the Leaders for Change Conference. page 3

System Reform
Amanda Bevington discusses a productive meeting with Rep. Ross Hunter. page 4

Art in Action
Hoping for the Best by Kristina Thomason. page 4

Chapter Voice
Eden Francis Hottman-Nance reflects on strong momentum in the Everett Chapter. page 4

youth reporters

Diamonique Walker
Sr. Network Representative

David Buck
Sr. Network Representative

Amanda Bevington
Network Representative

Deonate Cruz
Network Representative

Samantha McDonald
Network Representative

Mandy Urwiler
Network Representative

September 2012
Letter from the Editor

With the first day of school around the corner for thousands of children and youth, I cannot help but think about the many youth in care who will be entering classrooms at high schools, colleges and voc-tech schools and universities. They are staking their own strength and dedication. I am proud of the fact that Washington state now rewards their perseverance by guaranteeing that youth pursuing their education will be able to maintain safe housing until age 21 through the Extended Foster Care program. Safe housing too often means the difference between a successful transition and a struggle for survival for youth aging out, and The Mockingbird Society will continue to fight to ensure that ALL youth in care have access to safe housing until age 21.

While the Extended Foster Care program has opened doors for many youth, there are still too many obstacles keeping youth in care from achieving academic success. Articles in this issue of the Mockingbird Times feature statistics showing an unacceptable high school graduation rate gap between youth in foster care and their peers, while college attendance rates are in the single digits for alumni of care. Children and youth in foster care deserve better and it is our collective responsibility as a community to ensure they have the same opportunity to succeed as their peers outside of the system. I look forward to working with our elected leaders in Olympia to ensure that educational achievement for foster youth does not fall through the cracks.

On Thursday, October 11th, we will hold our 6th Annual Benefit Luncheon at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel. I invite you to join us in celebrating our accomplishments, our impact, and our powerful youth who inspire change for thousands of our most vulnerable children, youth, and families. The Mockingbird Society is an independent voice for sound public policy and practices, meaning we do not accept state funding for our advocacy work. We depend on supporters like you to build a world-class foster care system. Please register for our Benefit Luncheon online at our website: www.mockingbirdsociety.org. Thank you for your unwavering support for children, youth and families.

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Olympia Youth Facilitate Powerful Culture of Foster Care Training

When I arrived at the Red Lion in Olympia, WA on August 3rd for the Reasonable Efforts Symposium, I felt a little nervous. But I was determined to send a message about the Culture of Foster Care. Five weeks of preparation came down to this one day; people will hear our stories about our lives in and out of the foster care system. While I practiced, I received my co-facilitators, Gerald, Talisa and Nicole. I felt nervous about advocating in front of so many people. My fellow chapter members, however, kept me motivated and on track. When we stepped into the convention hall in front of about 90 people, I knew it was game time. The audience was not smiling at first but we sure were. Most people had no idea that they were about to go through a mini version of the foster care experience.

I began our training with an ice breaker activity, a modified version of “Pin the Tail on the Donkey.” It was fun interacting with the audience and seeing them engage with each other. Through this activity I think they all learned what it feels like to grab something for only to have it not be there. We were demonstrating the importance of having a caring advocate that gives you good direction, information and guidance. Telling our stories and listening to each other speak impacted all of us. I felt stronger and wiser. It felt good to have their attention and seeing them on the edge of their seats listening to us and participating.

The feedback I received at the end of the training was my favorite part. Many told me they knew some of this, but they had not gotten to see it in depth before, not through our eyes. One CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) administrato told me she really liked what I had to say and asked me to become a CASA for foster youth. I would like to speak to youth in foster care to help them realize the things I did not know or understand when I was in foster care.

Across the mountains in Yakima, another group of young people with The Mockingbird Society were also hard at work preparing for their Culture of Foster Care training at the Reasonable Efforts Symposium in the Tri-cities area on August 17th. Yazmin Guinn, Roxxy Holden and Daniel Martinez shared with us their experience of giving the training to about 75 people. They also received positive feedback on their stories and the facilitation of the training activities. Daniel shared as a facilitator, “The most impactful part for me was the Removal from Home activity. The looks that the participants got when they had to give up their stuff showed they understood what it’s like to have no control over your own belongings.” Yazmin reflected, “What motivates me is I hear all these stories about kids constantly getting bounced around in the foster care system and I feel like if people hear my story, it’ll give them hope. I want to make a difference in the lives of youth like myself. What I’ll take away from the experience of presenting the Culture of Foster Care training is that even a few youth like us can make a difference when given the chance.”

On behalf of Gerald, Talisa, Nicole, Yazmin, Roxxy, Daniel and I, thank you to the planners of the Reasonable Efforts Symposiums for giving us the chance to make that difference.
Mockingbird Engages in National Reform

Leaders for Change Conference Hosted by National Foster Youth Action Network
August 3rd – 7th, 2012
California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, California

Participants:
- Nebraska Project Everlast
- Oregon Foster Youth Connection
- California Youth Connection
- Foster Youth Connection of Indiana
- H.E.R.O.S. of Massachusetts
- Washington Mockingbird Youth Network

Key Issues:
- Group Home Accountability
- Using Social Media to Raise Awareness
- Sibling Involvement in Dependency Hearings
- Support Systems for LGBTQ
- Foster Parent Accountability
- Mental Health Accountability

Participants from Nebraska, Washington, California, Oregon, Massachusetts and Indiana have lunch with representatives from California Youth Connection (CYC).

Mockingbird Network Representatives met with Philip Bailey of the Earth, Wind and Fire band. Along with participants from the National Foster Care Network, they discussed strategies to form powerful connections using social media.

On August 1st a team of Mockingbird staff went to Bellevue to meet with Representative Ross Hunter of the 48th Legislative District. I was joined by Senior Network Representative Diamonique Walker, Public Policy and Communications Coordinator Jon Brumbach, Executive Director Jim Theofelis, and Director of Public Policy for Partners for Our Children Laurie Lippold. At the meeting, we talked about the six different proposals that the Mockingbird participants presented at the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit in June. We were able to listen to Representative Hunter’s feedback and suggestions regarding each of these critical issues. Thank you Representative Hunter for your active support and passion for making the foster care and child welfare system a better and safer place for Washington’s youth.

Pay It Forward
Samantha McDonald & Deonate Cruz

System Reform
Amanda Bevington

Youth Meet with Representative Ross Hunter

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Only 44% of foster youth graduate, compared to the rate of 73% for the general population in Washington state.” Diamonique story, front page

“Even though it took me a long time to figure out, I know now I want to become successful in life, earn enough money to support myself, and enjoy my career every day.” Amanda story, front page
Hoping for the Best

Time to start over
Time to rekindle the relationships you’ve been denied
Wondering if they will like the person you have become
The last thing you want is to be a waste of time
Trying to remember the last memory you had before being taken
This isn’t going to be easy
what if the past gets brought up the past 1 made myself
I forget the fear of the unknown
the fear of rejection
maybe I’ll be a good thing
maybe they will like me
maybe it’ll be like nothing ever happened
maybe.

thank you


We Welcome Your Work

We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be, or have been, published, in the Mockingbird Times visit www.mockingbirdtimes.org. Call us at (206) 407-2134 or email us at mbt@mockingbirdtimes.org.

Note: Incoming letters to the editor and correspondence to youth under 18 years should be addressed to the Mockingbird Times and will be opened first by adult editorial staff.

Training from page 1

Through the Network we promote activities that encourage youth to be active and productive citizens that are not only advocating on behalf of themselves but their peers as well.

The next Educational Advocacy training will be held September 8th at the Spokane Volunteers of America. For more information email Sarah Markey at sarah.markey@mockingbirdtimes.org


*Casey Family Programs foster care Alumni Study

Education from page 1

wait, the harder it is to earn that degree.
Remember that you should always start early
and set goals to prepare yourself for college.
If I could do it over I would have stayed
in high school and listened to my teachers
and school counselors. Let’s stop fostering youth
from becoming specialists and increase the
college rates within the members of our community.

Violence, page 2

On August 20th I had the opportunity
to talk to three members of the board,
Imari Romero, Vigo Beninger,
Kenya Adams, and the Community Initiative
Coordinator, Holy Chea. They all equally expressed how important being a part of
the board is to them. The feeling of empowerment
they get every time they get to express their
own thoughts on an issue, and how people are
actually listening to them because their opinion
matters. They talked about how all these people
of different walks of life, different religions,
and ethnicities come together for one cause
and really showcase how our communities are as a
whole is really impactful.
Most of all they expressed how they want even
more youth to become involved in the board
and how it’s an easy process for someone
who cares and really wants to make a
difference to apply to be on the board.
You’re not required to be an outstanding leader in your community or have great leadership skills. You just need to have
the willingness to participate and the ability
to commit and go to all of the meetings
and trainings. Simply go to the
website of www.gctf.org and browse to the Youth Philanthropy Board tab and
there you will find all of the information
you will need to apply.

Chapter Voice

by Eden Francis Hottman-Nance

Everett Chapter Committed to Local Advocacy

H.E.Y.M.A.C has renewed motivation and commitment after the Summit! At our chapter meeting in July we had a great Educational Advocacy training facilitated by our Resource Specialist, Kate Storms. During the training youth were asked to explain their educational goals and work through different scenarios in which they had to advocate for themselves academically.

Our August meeting started off with a game of Dixit, the game was used to demonstrate how a comment can be taken an infinite number of ways depending on the perception of the individual who hears it, which was a wonderful way to show how having so many perspectives in our chapter gives us the capacity for great understanding when we use our minds collectively.

Later, we evaluated our experiences at the Summit, identifying our strengths and challenges. We also made Venn diagrams listing things that we are good at doing, things that we enjoy doing and things that our community needs from us. In the intersecting middle of the diagram we illustrated how those skills crossed over. We realized that we have the ability and drive to valuably contribute to our foster care community. When the individual diagrams were finished, one was made showing our collective skills and how they can benefit the foster youth, youth in kinship care and homeless youth in our community.
We signed our names to this group diagram as a commitment to be passionate advocates.

Overall, we have had some great team building experiences in the last few months; we have also gained several new members! Looking back on all H.E.Y.M.A.C has accomplished since the beginning of 2012, I think I can safely say that we are teeming with excitement for the upcoming months to change and growth the upcoming months will bring.

Region 2 South (Seattle)

The Seattle Chapter is preparing representatives to participate in the Statewide Leadership Council meeting that will be held at Mockingbird headquarters on Saturday, September 15th. Participants are eagerly anticipating the hire of a new Resource Specialist this fall. The Chapter has shown great strength and flexibility in 2012 and looks forward to welcoming new participants and leaders in the months ahead. If you live in the King County area and are interested in participating in upcoming meetings and events, please email Mockingbird’s Director of Youth Programs, Fred Kingston at fred@mockingbirdtimes.org.

Region 3 North (Tacoma)

At the August chapter meeting we discussed ways to move our Summit policy issue, protecting sibling visits, forward in the community. One solution we discussed is having youth talk to the new groups of foster parents during their training. We are also interested educating judges on this issue so that young people can be empowered in court to speak out about sibling visits.

Region 1 North (Spokane)

by Guillemone Mendocca

On August 14th our chapter met with three of our Representatives from the Washington State Legislature: Representatives Andy Billig, John Ahern and Timm Ormsby. Senator Michael Baumgartner’s Legislative Assistant also joined us. We had a barbeque at Malrite Park and had a good turnout of about 30 people! We also had a good bye party for our amazing outgoing Resource Specialist, Sarah Makaffy.

Chapter Snapshots

The Olympia Chapter is always looking for new opportunities. This explains the excitement for the Transitions Training that was held in Olympia on August 21st. Having the training locally allowed many young people to learn how to deal with changes and new situations. The training gives us more tools to tackle any challenge life throws at us.

The Mockingbird Times is an important tool for youth to get involved in their community. It offers a platform for youth to express themselves and learn from each other. This is a great opportunity for youth to develop their writing, critical thinking, and public speaking skills.

The Mockingbird Times is a valuable resource for youth to stay informed about local and national issues. It provides youth with a unique perspective on the world around them and empowers them to make a difference in their community.

The Mockingbird Times is a great way for youth to build their network and connect with others who share their interests and passions. It provides a space for youth to meet others who are passionate about making a positive impact in their community.

September 2012

Mockingbird Times

Art in Action
Kristina Thomson

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