April 2007

Mockingbird Times

Recipient of 2005 Congressional Angels in Adoption Award
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

Volume VII, Issue 4

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdinc.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

LEgalS UPGRADE, COnTINUED ON PAGE 2

Mockingbird Society Legislative Update

Misty Lou Cook

April is National Sexual Assault Awareness Month. For that reason, I find it necessary to write a piece about methods of prevention and what steps to take if you do experience sexual assault. It is important to understand what sexual assault is in case you experience it and also what steps to take to toward safety and security. Sexual assault can occur in many different ways, but in all ways one thing remains the same: the victim does not want it to happen. Any touching of inappropriate areas; vaginal, oral or anal penetration; rape; unwanted sexual remarks; attempted rape; and molestations are all forms of sexual assault, including, incest, date rape and non-consensual voyeurism or exhibitionism. Understanding the difference between these things is important.

There are arguments regarding the definition of rape. Some consider rape to be any forced sexual action between either sex, assault only involving the penis and the vagina, or any forced sexual activity in molestation that considered the forcing of any undesired sexual act from one person to another; it is often used interchangeably with the term sexual abuse. Voyeurism is when a person witnesses a private or sexual act. An exhibitionist is someone who exposes his private parts in public areas. Incest is having sexual relationships with family members, or any forced sexual activity in molestation that considered the forcing of any undesired sexual act from one person to another; it is often used interchangeably with the term sexual abuse.

The first thing you need to do is establish your rights, which are often violated. The second thing is to report the incident to the police, who will then file a report that will be used to prosecute the perpetrator. The third thing is to get medical attention as soon as possible. If you are not sure whether or not you were sexually assaulted, it is recommended that you seek medical attention even if you do not think you were.

Date rape is the most common form of rape: 78% of girls are expected to experience date rape by the age of 25. Date rape is likely to happen in a situation when drugs and alcohol are present, but a person can be assaulted in many other instances: in an isolated area, on a planned date, and, sadly, in places where people are supposed to be safe, such as schools and community centers. In all cases, and places, it is not the victim's fault. Sometimes the attacker may intentionally or unintentionally make the victim believe it is by using psychological, misleading phrases such as, “you wanted it”, “you didn’t believe they wanted it when they didn’t”. Even if the victim was engaging in sexual acts, when they decide they no longer want to, “No” means “No.” Speaking your mind as soon as possible is a good way to make it clear to a person that you don’t want to engage in sex with them. That is always a better option than just thinking it and keeping silent.

If you find yourself in any situation that sounds similar to these, try to get out of it safely. If you cannot and you are sexually assaulted, you need to know how to get help for yourself and information that is important for your health. The first thing to do is get away to a safe place and call the police, go to a hospital or go into a police station and tell them what happened. Unpredictably, you may be responsive by communicating with people; protect your personal space and let people know where you are and have them call and check up on you in intervals such as every hour or half-hour. When you are out of a group of friends, one person or alone, pay attention to your surroundings. Especially in an area you are not familiar with, pay attention to street signs, landmarks and even people around you. Be assertive by communicating with people; protect your personal space and let people know when you feel uncomfortable. Exercising confidence is one of the best methods and actions because you will seem harder to take advantage of. Trusting your instinct is another good way to stay out of unsafe situations instead of reflecting with, “I knew I should’ve done that.”

SEXUAL ASSAULT, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
Letter From the Editor

Jim Theofelis

This issue of the Mockingbird Times is full of the realities that children and youth in foster care deal with every day. Topics such as child abuse, rape, parental neglect and abandonment converge on this issue like an echo in a dark, scary cave. Imagine being a child in a dark, scary, cave without the benefit of a loving, protective parent. For most of us, the image of child abuse is one that we cannot allow ourselves to experience. Consider for a moment the ten-year-old child that has been removed from mom and daddy long ago and is now a veteran of changing homes and schools like most kids change notebooks.

The articles in this issue of the Mockingbird Times relate the echoes of trauma and abuse on children’s lives and the emotional pain and unending questions that endure. I want to thank our youth staff for presenting to this issue of the Mockingbird Times with its pain, truthfulness and hopefully healing and hope. Part of that hope lies in the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) which has just received its evaluation for 2006. Many of you are aware of the MFM

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We have a companion bill in the Senate, SB 5305, which has passed thorough the Policy and Fiscal committees and is ready to leave Rules for a full vote of the Senate. Support still remains critical, so sending emails, phone calls and lending the use of your and your organizations’ names would be a great way to improve the chances of the passing of this essential piece of legislation. Take action. Jim also wanted to send a “special Thank you to” Representative Mary Helen Roberts who has been a very steady champion for HB 1201 and a number of others bills as well. Also, Senator Rosa Franklin has been so amazing in the Senate and she is so well-respected and admired that I had great confidence from the moment she agreed to sponsor the Senate version of Represen- tative Ruth Kagi for her great work and for taking on so much leadership for child welfare reform in this state.

Jim Theofelis wanted me to emphasize that “these bills represent meaningful system improvement by genuinely providing more and better services for youth.” He also said “I am so thrilled that I feel it will take far too long to do any good for me. So, I want someone else to have it. Maybe someday, instead of building dozens of ridiculously priced condos and townhouses, the contractors and people who fund the buildings will see the importance of helping cut down the homeless- ness in Seattle.

The reason I want to work for Mockingbird Society is because I feel like I have a strong voice that should be heard. I like to fight for the things I believe in and also like to write and fight for rights. I feel like Mockingbird does a great job of showcasing skills that young writers have and helps each person on the staff here grow into an amazing person. I feel as though I have a lot to offer Mockingbird and the staff. I am happy to be a part of this team.

Meet the Staff: Vanessa Hutt

My name is Vanessa Rochelle Hutt and I am 21 years old. I was born January 9th, 1986, at 11:38 pm in Port Angeles, WA at the Olympic Memorial Hospital. I gradu- ated from Port Angeles High School in 2004. I lived in Port Angeles until I was 19 years old. In my spare time, I love to listen to music, read, draw, and hang out with my friends.

I have been homeless since I was 18 years old. Most of my homelessness was caused by my own faults and drug abuse. Only a few months after moving back to Port Angeles, I stayed clean maybe a month at a time but not much longer than that. After that, I was left in Seattle, WA at the downtown Greyhound station. My ex-boyfriend and I have been here ever since, making ourselves a life in this huge city. I steadfastly fought to survive by dealing drugs and trying to fight in a city that would’ve eaten me alive if I would have let it.

I currently stay at a Youth Care housing program called Passages. It is an amazing program that helps 18-22 year old girls get the skills they need to move out into the real world and be successful members of soci- ety. I have been so blessed to be part of this program. It was introduced to me through the Barista Training and Education Program. I graduated that program which gives eight weeks of intensive training to become skillful baristas. It’s awesome. I gave it a passion I didn’t know that I had. I have currently been sober almost 5 months. It has been easier than I thought it would be. Maybe that means that I don’t have to have any chemicals in my body to make me amazing and talented like I am now. I wouldn’t change the way I feel now for the world. The Passages and Youth Care staff have supported me through all of this. I am so thankful for them and my family. I really do know where I would be without them.

When I was on the street I saw many, many people who needed help that they are not getting. I feel like it’s wrong and discouraging to see people with such se- vere addictions and mental health issues out on the streets at all hours of the night and through all kinds of weather. I feel like control- bted better or the city should at least get a better grasp on how big of an issue this is. There are people who need serious help and it seems like nothing is getting done. I mean, those are people’s children, brothers & sisters, moms & dads, and grandparents out there like that; looking so helpless. I just can’t really grasp onto any reason people needing help like that should still be on the streets.

I wish I could change the way the home- less are taken care of and how the housing is done as well. People have been wait- ing for years to get appropriate housing. We haven’t even applied for some because I feel it will take far too long to do any good for me. So, I want someone else to have it. Maybe someday, instead of building dozens of ridiculously priced condos and townhouses, the contractors and people who fund the buildings will see the im- portance of helping cut down the homeless- ness in Seattle.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of foster care, while advocating with decision makers for system reform. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation.

The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness.

All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.43 and $8.00 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 30,000 copies being distributed across Washington State, USA, through a private distribution list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Your donation is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, in such, youth are involved in all stages of organizational development and decision- making. Donations to The Mockingbird Times are tax-deductible and greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright ©2007, The Mockingbird Society.

Meet Our Staff

The Mockingbird Times, April 2007

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Volunteers Christie Jackson, Layout Kelli Hawkins

Become a Member of The Mockingbird Society

We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation’s most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you’ll receive a monthly edition of The Mockingbird Times. Thank you for your contribution.

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Enclosed, please find my check made payable to The Mockingbird Society in the amount of (please note amount on appropriate line): $1,000+ Protector $500 - 999 Champion $250 - 499 Advocate $50 - 249 Supporter $25 Contributor

Please mail this completed form and your check to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South, Suite 230, Seattle, WA 98144. For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.
I have experienced several forms of abuse throughout my life. I can start by saying that none of them were in any way, shape or form a way that any young person or their caregiver was physically and verbally abusive. This is because she was an alcoholic. This is one of the many causes of child abuse. I went through 11 years of physical beatings with things like vacuum cleaners, belts, and many other weapons. Unfortunately, child abuse is not too uncommon even in our neighborhoods. Nationally, CPS receives 50,000 reports of suspected child abuse each week. In 2002, 2.6 million reports concern the welfare of about 4.5 million children were made. Two-thirds of these cases had enough evidence to be investigated. Out of those investigated, 880,000 children were being abused. Remember, abuse doesn’t have to be just physical; there is emotional and sexual abuse as well as neglect.

These are some big numbers; let’s forget that these are only the ones reported. I can speak from experience that some people do not report that their parent or guardian abuses them. It is one of the scarcest forms of abuse, as when someone is abusing you, you never know how that person will react, or if you have to send back into a home with that person. When I was younger, I would call the police on my grandmother and she would act as if she was a “saint” and the cops would not believe what she was doing. So I had to continually stay where I was. As soon as the cops would leave I would get beat. No power. I had absolutely no power, the power was in the hands of drug that affects your decision making ability. I knew that I was not experiencing the position that one should to be toughened up to face the hardships of life.

At the time, most parents/guardians don’t realize the lifelong effects of child abuse has on children. Speaking from experience, I, to this day, suffer from low self-esteem. I was told that I am going to be worth nothing and I will be a failure. I also go in and out of depression and have relationship difficulties. I think one thing that affected me the most was eating. When I was being abused I ate. There are many other consequences; almost all children who are abused show signs of their abuse. It’s not the child’s fault either. Unfortunately, millions of other children had or have had to go through this.

There are some people who are trying to help out the abused children: professionals like teachers, social workers, daycare providers, and foster parents. There are also non-professionals who help: for example, friends, neighbors, and relatives. The most important thing to do is to keep your eyes open. Some clues to watch for in the physical area are bruises, red marks, burns, broken bones, and dental injuries. Some behavioral signals of these injuries, parents not seeking medical assistance instantly, and children making up excuses for the injuries. Some signs of sexual abuse are venereal disease, weight sitting down, and pain, itching or bruising in the genital area. Other signs are children who are constantly talking, attempting or hinting, or getting sexual behavior, and signs of emotional abuse are the fact that the child may show signs of depression. Negatively speaking of themselves, and acting isolated. They may doubt themselves and act out in school or other areas of their life.

Like I said before, I was physically and verbally abused as a child. My suggestion for people who have been and are being abused is to do that one thing that I was very afraid to do myself: speak up. When your voice be heard. I know it can be the scariest thing to tell someone you are suffering or possibly others’ lives. You can be assured that you will not be immediately placed back with the person who is abusing you. Think about you and your safety in situations like this. I probably wouldn’t be where I am today if I didn’t say anything. Keep your safety in mind. Be strong.

Some places to get help are the National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD and the National Youth Crisis Hotline at 1-800-448-4663. But the most efficient way to seek and get help is to call or go to the closest place where your voice be heard. I know it can be the scariest thing to tell someone you are suffering or possibly others’ lives. You can be assured that you will not be immediately placed back with the person who is abusing you. Think about you and your safety in situations like this. I probably wouldn’t be where I am today if I didn’t say anything. Keep your safety in mind. Be strong.

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Overall, it is important to know and understand the facts of sexual assault, just as it is to know when you are being sexually assaulted. Keeping Web addresses and hotline numbers will be useful for an unexpected situation and also if you want to inform yourself by independently studying the topic. Learn of local organizations and clinics in your community that can be helpful before you get into a bad situation or if a friend needs the information. Keep yourself safe, look out for others and be courageous when dealing with these situations.

On Wednesday, March 28, 2007, Mockingbird Society’s Youth LEAD program had a wonderful opportunity to take a trip to Microsoft. We were joined by Kelly Montiero and Silvana Bruzel. This trip was very interesting and fun. I learned a lot about technology and how it affects our lives one way or another. Many people don’t realize how much it can be in the near future. It’s crazy to think that not too long ago cell phones were expensive and not everyone could afford them. Now-a-days, technology will change our lives in the future. I can’t help but wonder how much control we will have over new technology. As technology expands, is it going to be expensive or is it going to be affordable for all working class people to enjoy and benefit from?

Sexual assault, continued from page 1

Get in the habit of keeping your car and home windows and doors locked. Try to avoid isolated areas as much as possible. Avoid isolated areas near school and the National Youth Crisis Hotline at 1-800-448-4663. But the most efficient way to seek and get help is to call or go to the closet place where you can be assured that you will not be immediately placed back with the person who is abusing you. Think about you and your safety in situations like this. I probably wouldn’t be where I am today if I didn’t say anything. Keep your safety in mind. Be strong.

Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome.

—Booker T. Washington

Microsoft staff Lauren (left) and Najja (right) with hosts Silvana get handwriting analysis at the Microsoft Visitor Center.
Dear Mom,

I know you won’t ever get this, but somehow deep down inside I am convinced you will. Ever since I can remember, all I ever wanted was a mom, but I guess I was asking for too much. I am sorry you didn’t get to watch me grow up but that was your choice. I just wish you wouldn’t have chosen drugs over me and you wouldn’t have let me get raped.

All my life I have had to walk around trying to make my life work, worrying that somebody was going to turn you out like you. Always worrying I won’t be loved. All because you didn’t care about me. I was so afraid of turning out like you that I never got to enjoy life like I should have. Always being bounced around from home to home never knowing where home will be. Never having the time to love somebody, anybody at all. I used to blame you for not caring but then I couldn’t anymore because it was hurting too much. All I have ever wanted was just for you too hug me and tell me everything will be okay. That I will love again and that one day some guy will just look at me and I will take his breath away.

I really needed you to be around while I was growing up, but you didn’t want me. Honestly, if you didn’t want me then you just shouldn’t have had me. I just hate knowing that you’re not around to help me. You know what hurts the most about it all? Knowing that you’re not around to help.

Well mom, I will always love you no matter what, but honestly, I don’t think I can forgive you; not this time. You break my heart every time you promise something. Just tell me something; was it worth it? The drugs, the pain, no kids, prostitution. Was it all worth it? Because you lost everything, didn’t you?

Mom, I will always love you no matter what, but honestly, I don’t think I can forgive you; not this time. You break my heart every time you promise something. Just tell me something; was it worth it? The drugs, the pain, no kids, prostitution. Was it all worth it? Because you lost everything, didn’t you?

In the long run, your choice was the best choice ever. I am who I am because you gave me up. I wouldn’t have graduated from high school. I wouldn’t be talking about it in this way. Because you lost everything, didn’t you?

Your daughter