As most of our readers know, preceding our Annual Youth Advocacy Day, The Mockingbird Network has been working hard to gain support for two main priority bills to make foster care better for current youth, as well as youth aging/transitioning out of foster care. Due to the budget crisis in Washington State, bills that have a fiscal note attached are almost immediately killed. Both of our bills have passed through the House and are currently in the Senate Rules Committee. We’ve made a great amount of progress in the legislature despite our current budget deficit and our bills are still alive.

There are tons of youth in this state that could testify as to why having safe housing is so important and life changing to them. One such individual is Josie, a networkparticipant from our Region 1 chapter who was put out of her home while attending college, at the age of 18. “I did not become a statistic because of the YHP program. I was given the chance for a new beginning and I ran with it. The program didn’t just give me a place where I can sleep at; it blessed me with a stable apartment that I can call my home. I was given a healthy living situation that I’ve never had that before in my life. I am almost ready to transfer to a University. I know how to pay my own bills. I’m not depending on anyone for anything anymore and I have the YHP program to thank for that.” Josie’s story is just one example of how important and impactful safe housing programs can be. Many more youth in Washington share the experiences and have been able to overcome obstacles similar to Josie’s.

There are times in my life where I feel very proud of my community. I learned at a young age that if people come together for the common good then great things will come out of it. Sometimes all it takes is a small group of concerned members of the community to come together at a church meeting to start a wave of change that will ultimately affect the lives of thousands of people for the better. This article is intended to share one of those amazing moments. According to local statistics between 2000 and 2001 homelessness in King County hit an all time high. Members of the community who were at a loss as to what to do began a community dialogue around the issue of homelessness and convened at St. Mark’s Cathedral. These community dialogues lead into what would eventually become the Committee to End Homelessness in King County and the formation of the Ten-year plan to End Homelessness. The Ten-year plan to End Homelessness in King County is designed not only to deal with the symptoms of homelessness, but also to cure the cause of homelessness itself. This includes a wide variety of outreach and prevention initiatives. Since 2005, when the plan first came into effect, 9,500 units of housing have been secured and a 98% reduction in the number of homelessness has been reported according to the One Night Count. The plan is currently in the mid-plan review.

On March 1st I was given the opportunity to attend one of the three community meetings involving members of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County, organizations affected by the plan, and more importantly, homeless people whose lives are ultimately at stake with the outcomes of the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. These community meetings are key to the overall effort. It is a time when the committee and members of the community take a look back in the last five years and see what went well, what went wrong, and what to do now.

From April 25th to the 29th, 2011 the mid-plan review will conduct what is called a ‘charette’ – essentially a collaborative effort to design solutions addressing the problem of homelessness. The charette is organized to get the maximum amount of participation from the people involved. Select issues will be the center of the charette and those issues will have panels that participate. The panels will consist of service providers, members of the committee, community members, and others. At the end of the charette a draft set of recommendations will be presented to the steering committee that will then make final recommendations.

This whole process, and the Ten-Year Plan itself, all started with a group of concerned individuals who really cared about their community. It is important to note the positive effects a group of people caring for their community can cause. At the end of the mid-plan review, we will hope to see a guide that will take the Ten-year plan through its next stages that will ultimately end homelessness in King County; thus fulfilling a long goal that those caring individuals have hope to see occur.

SAFETY CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdnetwork.org or call 206-312-KIDS (5437)
Save the Date: June 27th-29th Foster Youth & Leadership Summit

The Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit is an event that brings together youth in foster care from across the State, ages 14-24, for three days of: Leadership development, positive peer relationship building and support, and formation of recommendations for The Commission for Children in Foster Care. Applications are due April 13th, 2011! Mail applications to: Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, Attention: Milissa Morgan, 2100 24th Avenue S. Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98141

Questions? Email Milissa Morgan: milisa@mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-5437

Space is limited.

Thank you!

Alpenland Delicatessen, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Matching Gifts Program, Patricia Bodziak, Capitol Hill Windermere Real Estate, Cellar 46, City of Seattle Combined Charities, DP Peyton Contractors, Lindsey Foley, Deanna Grace, Aaren and Makeba Greene, Justgive.org, King County Employee Giving Program, Lyman Legters, Carol Lucas, Mercer Island Printing Plus, Mercer Island Martial Arts Center, Mo’s Pizza & Wine Dive, Target, Tattlet, Sammamish and Barbara Throm, Anne Tattle, Union Way, King County Employee Giving Program, and Windermere Foundation. Representative Andy Billig and Representative Timm Ormsby. Catholic Family and Child Services. The Y. Treehouse for Kids. For information on how the Mockingbird Society works in communities and their efforts to help homeless youth, including those from the Washington State Youth Authority, see the resources below.

The Mockingbird Society and its Network youth have been privileged with the opportunity to testify before the House and Senate on the power of these great programs. In fact, this month we were asked to provide a summary of the research data demonstrating the benefits of safe housing to the Senate Committee members. Recent studies, including those from the Washington State Institute for Public Policy and the Chapin Institute, show that homeless youth are at especially high risk of “aging out” of care. In Washington State, it is rare for foster youth to receive all of the resources available to the youth, then the barriers they face when exiting care. With a safe and stable place to live high on their priority list, education takes a back seat, if it is even considered in the first place. If a youth doesn’t have the skills to live independently or the resources for independent living, then the idea of college is replaced with the thoughts of survival instead.

When the question of how good the resources are to encourage foster youth to go to college compared to youth who come from intact families arises, I encourage you to consider the following statistic: According to Children’s Administration, less than 3% of youth who aged out of foster care actually earned their college degree by the time they were 25%. According to the National Foster Care Coalition about 20,000 youth age out of foster care each year. However, it is not logical to say that the government can pay for 20,000 youth to go to any college of their choosing (especially with the budget conditions that the United States is facing right now).

The Truth about the Benefits

Many people are unaware of the different struggles that youth go through. A lot of people realize that different youth go through different things depending on their situation. One of the most differing lines between youth that people may not understand is that some youth are in the foster care system and some have intact families. This can make a huge difference on the resources available to the youth, and ultimately the outcome of that youth’s life. The Mockingbird Society and its Network will share the stories of two youth who have never been in foster care and show how different their experiences are compared to youth who come from care. This study shows that this sheds some light and knowledge about the different struggles that each individual may face.

In December of 2007, the Joint Center for Politi- cal and Economic Studies issued a report labeled Aging Out of the Foster Care System to Adult- hood: Findings, Challenges, and Recommendations. The report covers the process of aging out of foster care and the key details revolving around youth who age out of the foster care system. Some of the key findings that came out of this report are as follows:

• In comparison to other youth in the United States, youth who age out of the foster care system are less prepared to function independently.
• 47 percent of surveyed social workers sur-veyed throughout the US rated the resources in their foster care system as fair or poor with only 11 percent rating them as excellent.
• Many youth in foster care have stated that they feel that they lack an adult advocate to guide them through life in preparation for the future.

The Story Behind the Name

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, The Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Miss Maudie in teaching his kids 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.”

What if we created an organization, a community, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment that Atticus had for mockingbirds?

Join The Mockingbird Society today and help give young people a safe place to rest and sing.
I had the honor of interviewing Darriell Beaumonte and learning about his accomplishments of overcoming the statistics against foster youth. He is now a running back for the Championship Eastern Washington University; this is his story. At 10 months old, Darriell Beaumonte was forced to steal from the nearest grocery to foster home. Darriell's first foster home was given only one quarter, one chance to make it. Zena Sturgis seemed to be the perfect support system for Darriell especially during his last two years of high school. Zena gave Darriell only one option for his future; it was college. This was why he called Darriell "Team Beaumonte." Darriell was declared seven, so he had the opportunity to learn coping skills and numerous techniques on how to survive the foster care system by learning how to make the best of every situation. Darriell always had to deal with many people from different backgrounds coming and going out of the home for many years, so he learned how to "stand on his own two feet." When Beaumonte was first taken away from his mother, he went to live with his grandparents. Beaumonte was the youngest of seven, so he had the opportunity to learn from colleges all over, which forced Team Beaumonte back to the drawing board. After many efforts and much time Darriell finally received a letter of acceptance from Eastern Washington University. Darriell was given only one quarter, one chance to get anywhere. If he failed even one class, he was out of school. Darriell said he took the easiest classes, so he could continue going to school. Darriell was so excited to finally be in college and felt very accomplished, but in order to have the full college experience he still had one more obstacle: football. When Darriell knew he was going to Eastern, he called the coaches and sent in film. On the only thing on Darriell's mind was getting recruited. After not hearing anything for months, Darriell almost gave up hope the summer before moving to Cheney. Finally two days before summer football training, Darriell's phone rang. The voice on the other line said, he was in. When Darriell arrived he wasn't allowed to workout with the team because he wasn't in shape. Darriell spent numerous hours watching the team, and doing those same workouts on his own. Next fall, Darriell was recruited on the team and received a full ride scholarship to Eastern Washington University. Darriell had to overcome so much in his life. Children and adolescents in foster care do the same. Darriell finished the interview by saying, "To all the foster youth still in the system, don't be ashamed to be a foster youth because this is forming you for the person you will one day become. You can't give up, there is so much more out there. And to all foster youth that have exited care keep going hard, keep going, you overcome the adversity that giant is overcome, so why give up now when there is so much more out there." 

Meet the Staff

BY AMANDA BEVINGTON

We have such a great team at The Mockingbird Society. We always are growing from a small group as well as learning new ideas and skills from one another. A couple of months ago, The Mockingbird Society added a new employee. After interviewing him, I feel we are "blessed" to have another awesome leader. He brings so much to our organization. He always comes to work, with a smile on his face, never a frown. He always has a great attitude and is willing to help others as best he can. He brings such a good aspect to the team. He is a team player, who is very devoted to the work he does at The Mockingbird Society. He is hard-working, very determined, and action driven. So bet everyone who is reading this is wondering who I am describing. His name is David Forte and he is the Executive Coordinator. The Executive Coordinator helps to tell the story about the organization and demonstrate the impact of The Mockingbird Society. He works with youth, the community, funders, and is always looking at areas for improvement. David Forte was born on July 25 which makes him a Leo. According to my understanding of astrology, the Leo individual is ambitious, confident, independent, and loyal. I believe David brings all those traits to The Mockingbird Society. David is an only child. He went to college in Texas, but is currently at the University of Washington and is studying public administration. He will graduate with his master's degree in June 2011. His hobbies are bike riding, hanging out with his dog Lance, and he loves being outdoors. David is really passionate about the work he does at The Mockingbird Society and is mission-focused. He believes that our mission to create a world-class foster care system is really important and explains that The Mockingbird Society plays an important role to help youth advocate for themselves, as well as influencing youth to help inform legislative policies and focus on issues in the child welfare system. David is really impressed with all the hard work that is put into The Mockingbird Society and said that, "I hopefully we will continue to succeed, as we move forward." I hope that everyone will have a chance to meet such an awesome man, and is able to welcome David to the team. Remember David is trustworthy, takes initiative, positive role model, and always has a great attitude. So if you have a second come step by and say hello to our new employee David Forte here at The Mockingbird Society.

SAFETY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Kristina, network participant. "The foster parents would be doing what they need to do all the time and be cautious of what they do." Youth all over the state feel that having "unannounced visits" will make a difference in safety for the lives of children and youth everywhere. If children are taken out of homes for being ill, dead or neglected, they shouldn’t be placed into a similar environment again. I hope that with passage of this bill, social workers can make sure young are in a safe place without foster parents "putting on an act."

May is National Foster Care Month!

Currently, 426,000 children in the United States are in foster care because their own families are in crisis and unable to provide for their essential well-being. Many children in care are unable to return home safely because their parents lack access to services that could help strengthen families.

Now is the time to get involved! No matter how much time you have to give, you have the power to do something positive that could impact the of a young person in foster care.

To find out how to volunteer with The Mockingbird Society, call (206) 323-KIDS. To learn more about National Foster Care Month go to www.fostercaremonth.org or call (888) 799-KIDS.

Alive & Free Program

www.fostercaremonth.org

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 with homelessness. If you want to be published in the Mockingbird Times, visit mockingsociety.org and select Mockingbird Times under The Mockingbird Network or contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at katrola@mockingsociety.org. Note: If you have submitted something before that hasn't been published, we need your submission agreement in order to print it. Please submit again via the web location listed above. Because of space constraints, shorter poems have a higher chance of being published.
Region 1 (Spokane) UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone) by Kristin Thomas

Hey Everyone! Region 1 is doing fantastic! We just had our March monthly Chapter meeting. We talked about what we did at Advocacy Day; prepared for the Summit by reviewing what we want to see change and handed out applications. We circulated signup sheets for community service events that we are participating in; for committees within our chapter, and for voting for Jim at King5.com! We had more new faces than old faces, we then had some of our older chapter members stand up and explain what Mockingbird is and what we do. It turned into a great discussion! Sarah made us delicious Lasagna with garlic bread and salad as we celebrated St. Patty’s Day! It was a great laid-back meeting!

Region 2 (Yakima) A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. (Around Community Two Fostering Individual Rights Safely Together) by Brandy Beasley

Hello Mockingbird Society! We hope that every region is doing great! On March 12th our region went to the local Union Gospel Mission. We served food, washed tables and also cleaned the windows. The meal there was a great homemade Mexican lunch. On March 26th we are going to have a chapter meeting where we will fill out and go over the Summit Applications. For next month we will prepare to do a Life Advocacy Training and the 100 jobs, 100 Kids event.

Region 3 (Everett) H.E.Y.M.A.C. (Hearing Every Youth Make a Change) by Cari Nadeau

For HEYMAC’s March meeting we had a lot of NEW people show up AGAIN! We went over the Leadership Summit and showed a video of the summit, so people know what to expect. We talked about why HEYMAC is important and how they can make a difference. Two AWSOME chapter members Maria and Marta brought enchiladas for the group. We had new members sign chapter member applications and we got four people interested in being new chapter leaders. It was a very productive meeting with lots of goals for the future! GO REGION 3!!!!!!!

Region 4 (Seattle) Region 4 for Change by Sam Martin

Region 4 for Change is coming off of a very exciting March meeting. This month we have begun to extend opportunities for chapter members and involvement in a more tangible, immediate way. We are right now attempting to transition in new leadership for the chapter. In order to do that we need to make sure that young people are able to handle the responsibilities of becoming chapter leaders. We have also begun to focus heavily on collaboration with several different entities within the community. We realize that it is impossible to thrive and survive without the support of the community. Also our attention has turned to the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit 2011. This is a place where young people are allowed to present real and tangible problems to decision makers and work on solutions. Region 4 has been at the forefront of presenting topics that will result in actual change and progress. Region 4 is really attempting to make sure that we are a face in the greater King County area.