Mockingbird Celebrates Successful Third Year

The Mockingbird Society has made great progress over the last three years. To continue our progression, we need your support, so help us celebrate our 3rd Annual Anniversary by continuing to read and subscribe to the Mockingbird Times and provide support to our programs. We also invite you to our open house on August 13th, 3-6pm in our new location at 2100 24th Avenue South, Suite 350, Seattle, WA 98144.

Reflections from Mockingbird Staff and Friends...

Gina Hills, Managing Producer at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, has been a participant in monthly meetings between the PI and Mockingbird Times staff for a little over a year. Hills enjoys meeting with reporters to edit and revise articles and has seen them gain tons of confidence. Hills would love to see the Times expand to hire more reporters and write more articles. Hills appreciates the influence that the paper has on the community, stating, “The Times has helped educate the public about homelessness and foster care.”

Anthony Guess, Satellite Reporter, has been working with the Mockingbird Times for six months now. Guess believes that if he didn’t have the opportunity to work at Mockingbird, his testimony would have never been heard. “Mockingbird Times has allowed me to inform society about the foster care system by speaking out about my experience, while making a little money on the side.”

Shannon Barello, Program Coordinator, has been with the Mockingbird Society for one and a half years. Shannon loves the youth interaction, stating, “It is inspirational to see reporters gain confidence through their writing and interactions with professionals in the social service and journalism fields...[for example] it is a beautiful thing to see youth reporters interact with Seattle PI staff.”

Princess Hollins, Satellite Reporter, has been involved with The Mockingbird Society for six months. Hollins states, “This experience has provided me with essential information about the foster care system, which had allowed me to share my knowledge with others in need of resources. I’m thankful that I have the opportunity to be part of something so positive. Thank you Jim Theofelis, Shannon Barello and Mockingbird supporters!”

Budget Cuts Hit Close to Home: SECTION 8 Program In Jeopardy

Nationally there are over two million people on the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. If these cuts go through, 30% of the Section 8 program will be affected by 2009. Seattle City Council Member Tom Rasmussen states, “12,000 people in our communities in Seattle alone depend on Section 8 subsidies to meet their month’s rent.” According to the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) website, SHA provides affordable housing to nearly 24,000 people in the city of Seattle. SHA house more than 8,000 residents in their public housing units and more than 14,600 residents through the HUD-subsidized Housing Choice Voucher Program. Approximately 8,400 SHA residents are children.

What are people going to do? How can your own country kick you out on the streets? According to Rasmussen, Seattle already has “1,700 homeless people on the streets at any given night and another 3,700 in transitional housing (temporary housing, two-year stay on average, helps people prepare to live on their own)...” Crisis services are strained to the point of breaking.

It seems much more cost effective to house people permanently than to have people cycling through crisis services like the emergency room. Karyn Cooper, speaker at the July forum, states, “The vacancy rate in Seattle is at 7%. Many complexes are running at 10%...there is housing out there for people, it is ridiculous that the units should just sit there.

Mockingbird By The Numbers...

16 youth are currently employed as Mockingbird Times (MBT) Reporters.

60 young people have had work published in the Mockingbird Times.

240 articles have been written by youth reporters.

$60,000 has been paid to youth writers over the last three years.

50 young people were trained by Mockingbird and ASK-Y to advocate for Foster Care and Homeless Youth in Olympia.

30,000 copies of the Times are distributed each month.

40 interviews with community members, legislators and other youth have been conducted by MBT Reporters.

40 poems have been published in the Times from kids all across the nation.

24 training sessions have been held with MBT Reporters and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer staff.

30 state receive copies of the Mockingbird Times every month.

Mockingbird Times is distributed inside Real Change (a community newspaper in Seattle) and is also available online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.
The Mockingbird Society marks its third anniversary with the same steadfast focus and determination in which it was born. We are dedicated to improving the current and future lives of young people involved in the foster care system as well as those who are homeless and street-involved. As we celebrate our accomplishments of the past three years, we want to reaffirm the philosophy that drives our work.

We will continue to stand by the philosophy of Unconditional Care as the guiding light for Washington and indeed the nation’s foster kinship care system. Unconditional Care demands that “all children and adolescents deserve a safe, warm, nurturing environment independent of age, ethnicity, economic status or behavior.” We renew our commitment to the fundamental notion that we must take good care of the adults who take good care of children. The first effective strategy of recruiting new families to provide foster care is to ensure that we are honoring and supporting current foster kinship families. A third philosophical position we hold is the mandate that all services need to be culturally relevant to the kids and families receiving such services. Children of color are over-represented in the foster care system and, in order to make any meaningful improvement, we must first accept the fact that institutional racism is a reality.

Finally, the Mockingbird philosophy is rooted in the principles of youth development and leadership, ensuring that young people are provided the training, support and opportunities to become effective agents of positive change. Youth involved with the Mockingbird Society participate in community meetings and forums, give public speeches and testimony and of course serve as youth reporters for the Mockingbird Times. Three years ago I met with three youth and two part time staff as we crafted the inaugural edition of the Mockingbird Times. Since then, young people have responded to the call to become leaders in the social justice effort to “build a world class foster care system.”

Without question, our survival and success are due to the power, insight and involvement of the many young people who have come to Mockingbird. There are so many individuals and organizations who have supported The Mockingbird Society and the work we do. On behalf of the Board of Directors, staff and the youth and families we serve, I want to express my appreciation for the tremendous support you have given us. I encourage you to join us at Mockingbird as we renew our commitment to ensuring that all of our children and youth are welcomed to the table of community and truly cared for just as we would care for our own.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Charitable Planned Giving

Mockingbird Staff recently interviewed Marie Trombley to learn about Charitable Planned Giving, a great way for individuals and organizations to make meaningful donations to non-profits. Here is what Trombley had to say:

MBT: What is charitable planned giving?

Trombley: Every year millions of Americans donate money to their favorite charities. In fact, in 2000, about $203.45 BILLION dollars was contributed to charitable causes. When we talk about a “planned gift” what we mean is the process in which a donor determines the most financially effective way to make a gift to a nonprofit organization. This can be as simple as making an annual donation by check, or as complex as creating a charitable remainder trust. The planning allows a donor to choose the gift form that meets their financial, charitable and estate planning goals.

MBT: How can it help non-profit organizations, particularly in the current political climate?

Trombley: Our American tax system is designed to encourage tax paying citizens to contribute to nonprofit organizations. The way this happens is that we receive “tax deductions (when yearly income taxes are filed)” for making charitable donations. The theory behind tax deductions is that the charitable contribution eases the burden of income taxes. For others, it allows the donor to give to the community in which they live; or a way of giving to the community in which they live. A charitable remainder trust provides them with certain tax incentives. For others, the reasons for giving may be based on a deep desire to give to the community in which they live, or a way of affirming their belief in the value of an education, or the commitment they have to their belief that all children should be given the best possible start early in life, or a desire to honor another who has struggled with an illness. The reasons and benefits are individual and precious to each donor.

MBT: How can our readers get involved?

Trombley: If you are interested in learning more about charitable planned giving, you can speak with your financial advisor, CPA, or attorney – you can contact Jim Theofelis of Mockingbird – or Marie Trombley, Watermark Asset Management, Inc.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents involved in homelessness and foster care. 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 Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.50 and $8.50 an hour.

THANK YOU:


Meet Our Staff

Executive Director
Jim Theofelis

MFFCP Coordinator
Shannon Barebo

Administrative Assistant
Lauren Frederick

Staff Reporters
Dennis Fisher, Courtney Konietzko, Darius Reynolds

Satellite Reporters
Shay Deney, Eboh, Rico Evans, Ashley Grant, Anthony Guets, jamica Holloway, Echta Speed, Hollis Riggins, Shakra Felder, Misty Cook

Contributing Writers
Joyce Canacho

Volunteers
Anna Trombley, Kirsten Hansen-Day, Aleta Kennedy, Denise Redinger
HAVING YOU EVER WATCHED THOSE INFOMERCIALS ABOUT KIDS IN OTHER COUNTRIES who live in really bad areas, and can’t find food, or even go to school? I always thought that I would end up in one of them, but I was wrong. Well, we do seem to be living in a place, like I found a needle in a haystack. A non-profit organization called Global Visionaries (GV) has been taking teens from different schools, and different racial, religious, and ethnic backgrounds, to Guatemala for the past seven years to open their eyes to different cultures and help them have an understanding of how their ecological footprint affects the whole world. One example of this is the US using more water than any other country. The teens involved in GV get to choose how they want to help: the choices are construction, Common Hope (social visits to homes), and/or work in the hospitals.

I was fortunate to go on the trip this summer. It was the most profound experience I have ever had. I realized that there aren’t a lot of machines in Guatemala, so everything is done by hand. Also, what we call poor (in the US) doesn’t come close to what is considered poor in Guatemala. In the morning I worked with the construction team for four hours, and my group built a school in Hato, located 5 miles from Antigua. In the afternoon we went on trips to secure churches, and also we went to the market for an hour. After school we had the rest of the day free.

At the end of the trip we were asked two questions: the first question was what have we learned and what will we be taking back with us to the states. I replied that we take things for granted and show no appreciation at all. What I’ll be taking back with me is a more in-depth understanding about the world as a whole. The other question was would I ever come back? My response was a highly enthusiastic “Yes!” I’m going back after my senior year and will be staying six months; I’m also on the youth board. This allows me to help plan the next trip.

Another example is the 9-11-01 heart-breaking event. After it took place many US citizens distrusted people who looked Arabic. Unconsciously it seems like the US traveled back 50 to 60 years. For example the airport became rechecked, security was increased, and racist freely flows from people’s mouths and actions. Furthermore we always complain about not having transportation or not feeling like going to school or work. Overall we are very culturally centered, and we tend to let the little things keep us from engaging in one another’s company.

In 1996, the longest civil war in Guatemalan history had ended. The war was between the poor and the rich. Surprisingly enough, the United States played a major role, supplying the wealthy people of Guatemala with weapons and permission to do whatever they wanted. The war left 150,000 dead and 50,000 missing. What makes this war so devastating is the fact that the Guatemalans had nowhere to run except to the hillsides, because of fear of the army and the guerrillas. If they were captured by either the army or the guerrillas they were tortured and killed.

Despite the US involvement in this tragic event, Global Visionaries has been taking teens to Guatemala for the past seven years and not once have the participants been treated disrespectfully. Guatemalans are polite and at peace with themselves and each other. Even though most of the Guatemalans wake up to 10-15 hours of work per day, they go on time and work diligently for they know what will happen if they don’t.

A man of great value once said, “Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value” Albert Einstein. We as US citizens can’t change conditions, but we can change the way we treat each other and become “richer.” Global Visionaries is one organization I found that’s making a difference. I’m sure that there are a lot more out there trying to do the same. For more information on the GV program check out www.global-visionaries.org.

Information about Guatemalan history was found at www.latinamericanstudies.org/guatemala/massacre.htm and http://www-ppsk.wa.gov/content/nt/2130/amountused.html.

How to Take Action in Preventing Child Abuse

Polly: If you suspect a child is being abused or neglected, call the police or 1-866-ENDHARM.

Hollis: Did you ever try to get help? If so what happened?

Polly: Yes, when I was 9 I told my teachers and my school counselors but no one believed me. They said it was because I was probably misbehaving, They didn’t start to believe me until I was around 11, and even then they didn’t do anything.

Hollis: What could someone who knew about your situation have done to help?

Polly: The teachers and the counselors could have come and done an investigation or told CPS so they could take me out of that home.

Hollis: Do you feel that the DSHS/Foster Care system does a good job of monitoring foster parents? Why or why not?

Polly: I think it depends on who your caseworker is. Some do a better job than others.

Hollis: In what way were you abused?

Polly: She (foster mom) would hit me if I did something she didn’t like even if it wasn’t necessarily bad. She would tell me I was ugly and say things like I would never amount to anything.

Hollis: What advice do you have for someone who may be in your situation right now?

Polly: I would tell them to get help by speaking up. If people don’t believe you just keep being persistent.
The program offers this kind of training because they believe that it's an accessible job field for the age group of the youth participants.

Participants begin by learning about the history of coffee as well as other things like workspace hygiene and the basics of being a barista. They are then given the chance to practice their newfound skills in the real world. First they get to work in the Farestart café, located off of Rainer Avenue in the south end of Seattle. This convenient location allows participants to work in a building where they can access services that can help them on the path towards self-sufficiency. The café is also located in a low traffic part of town so that participants can develop their skills without feeling overwhelmed. The next step is moving to a coffee cart in the downtown public library where they can put their matured skills to work.

Another advantage of the program is that while youth are training they can earn monetary stipends. If they complete the program, participants receive six-hundred dollars in stipend funds. In addition, they can continue to earn up to four-hundred dollars in stipends after the program if they complete goals like opening a bank account or obtaining a job and keeping it for at least three months. All of this is done not only to help the clients financially but also to encourage them to take steps in improving their lives. Since the program works exclusively with homeless youth they also work with youth on finding housing—be it in a shelter, one of Youthcare's housing programs or other transitional housing programs.

The program maintains a drug free environment. If a participant is struggling with addiction they are given referrals to programs that can help them. This program works and supports youth while challenging them to face and take responsibility for issues in their lives that interfere with their employability. Java Jobs offers a great opportunity for youth who might usually find it difficult to get job training and experience. Through their determination to help youth, Java Jobs gives a whole new meaning to the concept of “unique blend.”

WHEN PEOPLE THINK OF THE PHRASE “UNIQUE BLEND” in regards to coffee they might start thinking of Starbucks jargon, like “Tall Mocha Latte” or “Venti Tazo Tea” or “Grande Espresso.” But today I am going to introduce you to a different (and far less confusing) kind of blend. It doesn’t have anything to do with a coffee bean—at least not entirely. What I am talking about is hope and homelessness, two concepts that usually never go together.

The “Java Jobs” Youth Barista training program in Seattle is one of these two concepts. Java Jobs is headed by a partnership between Youthcare and FareStart, and was started in July of 2003. In September of 2003 they started accepting participants. The two major goals of the program are employment and education for homeless youth. This is how they provide hope to young people facing homelessness.

On the education side, the program provides support and incentives to the participants for completing goals like enrolling in a GED program, community college or a certificate program. When youth enter the program they are given a basic skills test. Their results are used by the program to determine what skills they have and what they need to improve. Once their needs are determined, they are provided with tutors to help them improve those academic areas that need attention. If by the end of the program they have made improvement on their test scores, they are rewarded with a monetary incentive.

In terms of employment, the program offers eight weeks of job training, so that participants can acquire jobs as baristas upon completion of the training. Baristas are the people at cafés and coffee houses that prepare and serve coffee.

For alternative media and information on poverty, please visit the Mockingbird Society. To request a film or other resources, please contact the Mockingbird Society at 1-800-562-5624 or 296-1134 or 296-1135; Regional Justice Center (Kent) at 206-296-1134 or 206-296-1135.

Barista Program Blends Hope For Homeless Youth

J. EBOH

HoHo

WHO IS NOT THERE.

LIFE GOES ON.

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I WAS YOUNG?

POETRY

JOYCE CAMACHO

WHY SHOULDN'T I CALL YOU FATHER?

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I WAS YOUNG?

YOU DON'T LOVE ME.

WHY SHOULD I CALL YOU FATHER WHEN YOU ARE NOT AROUND?

YOU COULDN'T PICK ME UP WHEN I WAS DOWN,

HOW COME HUH?

IF YOU LOVED ME YOU WOULD STAY,

NO MATTER HOW FAR YOU ARE.

IT JUST TAKES ONE STEP THAT'S ALL.

NOW I FOREVER BANISH YOU FROM ME,

SO YOU'RE NOT THE FATHER YOU WOULD BE.

LIFE GOES ON.

EVEN IF YOU AREN'T AROUND.

TAKE A LOOK TO SEE IF YOU CAN FIND ME,

ANYWHERE.

NOT THERE AM I?

OR IT IS YOU?

WHO IS NOT THERE.

SO, WHY SHOULD I CALL YOU FATHER?