Mockingbird Celebrates Eight Years

by Christina Koshney

When I was asked to write the Mockingbird Society’s (MBS) anniversary article, I was very proud. Each and every staff member here is vital to the organization and brings an amazing bag of skills, personality, and heart. There is an impressive sense of pride that each staff member exhibits not only in themselves but in the organization. The only way this fabulous staff could exist is if this was an amazing place to be, and it is! One person, Jim Theofelis, came forth with an idea because he noticed a hole in the system and that youth were the ones losing the most. Jim made it a mission to change this and build a “world class foster care system.” This idea began with an initial staff of two in 2001. Currently the staff numbers over 20 and is still growing. A single idea has been expanded from one person’s heart to a nationwide mission to implement powerful and effective change in the child welfare system.

The mission of The MBS is a selfless one that strives for the betterment of the children and youth that must be part of this system. The MBS helps youth in a way that will lead to real and permanent change, not simply a comfort for the night. Each of us here at The MBS has committed ourselves to fighting for change in the legislature, so our state laws can reflect the ideals we carry.

This past legislative session was one for the records in a variety of ways. As a nation and as a state we are facing some of the greatest financial deficits we have ever experienced and, we were told several important things at the beginning of Youth Advocacy Day, two of which come to mind. The first was from a representative of the governor’s office, who graciously took the time to share some words with all the youth in attendance. She said there were going to be a lot of budget cuts and that not all of The MBS’s legislative agenda was on the governor’s agenda. As a state, we were in a struggle to get back to the basics and what is most important. The second was from a representative who told us that this would be a fight and that, as youth, we would need to come in strong and put our best foot forward. I believe we did. In this time of great financial strain, where teachers are getting laid off and schools are closing, all we have a reason to be proud as we were able to get almost all of our bills passed, including Fostering Connections (formerly Foster Care to 1), Independent Youth Housing Program, Consideration of Post Adoption Sibling Visits, and Notification of Rights for Youth in Foster Care.

These passed bills were the cherry on top of the hard work that is done every single day here at The Mockingbird Society. As we could become easily lost in political agendas, I thought it would be nice to take a moment to highlight some senior staff members. Lauren Frederick and Leona Bill are two amazing foster youth and their caseworkers but it is hoped that the switch to performance-based contracting will lower caseloads and allow caseworkers to be more involved and more impactful in the lives of the youth in their charge.

Overall, I think that this is a change we can be excited about. One of the major problems with child welfare services being provided by state agencies is that there is very little that can be done to hold these agencies accountable. Government being as large and ponderous as it is, it really isn’t possible to hold CA to the high standards that the people of Washington State need to have for the care and well-being of their foster children. When funding is directly tied to measurable outcomes for foster youth, I predict that agencies will get a lot better at providing the support that foster youth need simply because they must in order to survive. I will be covering this issue as it develops, and I look forward to updating you in September. In the meantime, keep your head up. Change is slow but it is happening, in large part thanks to the Mockingbird Network youth and the work they have done to make the system better for foster youth. We are on the way to creating a world-class foster care system.
**Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis**

It’s hard to believe that August 2009 marks the 8th Anniversary of The Mockingbird Society. As a point of irony and reflection, I recently came across some of my earliest notes and worksheets when I first began “visioning” the agency that would become The Mockingbird Society. I was pleased to read in my notes the importance of an organization that advocated for major change and accepted the responsibility of creating solutions to accompany our advocacy.

My notes reflected that I wanted an organization that provided youth and alumni from foster and kinship care a vehicle to carry their voice and wisdom forward, and to ensure that this new organization would offer youth and alumni a fresh opportunity to be more than a treatment plan for others to diagnose and “fix.” At this new organization I envisioned youth and alumni as employees, Board members, and indeed leaders within the organization, within their community, and certainly leaders in the social justice movement to build a world-class foster care system.

We have worked hard the past eight years and I am proud that so much of that initial vision is alive today. The Mockingbird Network coordinates and organizes youth across the state to be leaders in the creation of positive public policy and legislation.

**Man For Change by Ashlie Lamb**

Recently I had the opportunity to interview Eric Liu, the author of Guiding Lights: How to Mentor Youth and Heal their Life’s Purpose, the official book of National Mentoring Month. Eric has served as a speech writer for former President Bill Clinton. At the Washington State Board of Education, teaches at the University of Washington’s Evans School of Public Affairs, and hosts a television interview program called Seattly Voices. I was very anxious to meet with him.

“I first discovered Mockingbird through Real Change. Jim always stood out to me because of his commitment to change young lives,” Eric said. “Mockingbird helps youth to realize their own potential. After seeing the changes being made and the growth made, I want to be as involved as possible with the Mockingbird family.” We are pleased that Eric Liu will be our guest speaker at The Mockingbird Society’s Annual Luncheon in October.

Eric Liu’s Web site The True Patriot (www.truepatriot.org) lists 10 principles of what it means to be patriotic. After reading these definitions, I could not help but wonder whether these could be valuable when advocating for change about the system. “You are not here to just help youth get through it, we are trying to equip youth with the skills needed as they move through the system. When they leave the system in better shape than you found it in,” says Eric. Speaking of stewardship he says, “To indulge in immediate gratification and exploitation is an insult to previous generations, who sacrificed and labored for the rights we have received, and for the sake of the next generation, who depend on us for virtue. We must be good stewards. We are reaping what we have sown.”

**Support The Mockingbird Society!**

We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times. Please join us today!

**Thank You!**

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**About Us: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative policies and practices for 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 news, views and ideas produced and compiled almost entirely by and for young people.” All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additonally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times is a non-profit circulation of over 25,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is key to the agency. They are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All content copyright ©2009, The Mockingbird Society.

**Meet Our Staff**

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Operations Director Ros Gian; Mockingbird Family Program Director Dr. Wanda Hackett; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Development Director Madelaine Thompson; Executive Assistant Lauren Frederic; Development/Communications Dacia Gray; Finance Manager Catherine Lanham; Mockingbird Network Coordinator; Kara Sanders; Mockingbird Family Model (The MFM) Coordinator Amy Converse; A/Administrative/Communications Diana Clark; Development Assistant Alicia LeVezu; Resource Specialists Eva Ervin, Heaven Jones, Georgina Ramirez, Tammy Soderberg, Lauren Steed, Samantha Valle; Support Staff: Kirk Sederberg, Jon Steven, Jim Steed, Sunny Stover, Jimmy James, Ryan Johnson, Karen, Alisha Lawr, Jennifer Hall, Robyn, Laura, and206.323.5437.

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The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is an innovative foster, birth, and kinship caregiver service delivery model based on the extended family concept. It is designed to provide the tools and support necessary to foster care and teams and how both should be able to find ways to help prevent youth from ending up living on the streets. The MFM is designed to foster care and homeless systems and how both should be able to find ways to help prevent youth from ending up living on the streets again due to lack of a job. I began to give up and felt like the need to stay constant was more important than the other programs.

Fortunately, I was able to refocus my priorities and get an internship. I was able to break the cycle because I knew that, if you're going for round and round putting off things like school and work and school because the need to survive requires a certain type of freedom to go and not go. I hope you're not staying home. The only way to stay constant was more important than the other programs.

I will Never Give Up by JERRY BORO

Child safety is very important in the child welfare system. Since a lot of these youth come from homes that are addicted to alcohol and drug, they come into care vulnerable and traumatized. It makes no sense for them to get placed in the system and then be abused and neglected again by caregivers. While this happens to less than one third of a percentage point (32) of the children in care, it shouldn't happen at all in the child welfare system.

Research has found that there are five prevention measures that deter caregivers (whether birth, foster, or adoptive) from abusing and neglecting youth: 1. Successful preventive programs that are characterized by multiple types of intervention and frequent contacts; 2. Interventions such as counseling and skill training in combination; 3. Informal help such as support groups and community services; 4. Rapid response and intensive support; 5. Effective programs that reduce barriers, both within the family and within the organization.

When I was in the system, I was cared for by my older sister who was only 17. She didn't have these supports and so caring for me was like caring for an infant. When she was 17, she was unable to care for her foster sister. She didn't have these supports and she was the only one able to take care of me. When I was 17, I went back to the agency and started taking care of my younger sister. She was given to be out of the house. I looked for her wherever I could find her. I cried the whole time. I knew she was going to be in danger again by caregivers. While this happens to less than one third of a percentage point (32) of the children in care, it shouldn't happen at all in the child welfare system.

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My Spirit

Rose Valencia

My spirit is like a smooth and soft feather flowing back and forth in the wind. It likes to sing in the sky and makes everybody feel joyful.

My spirit is as blue as a sky and as big as a sun brightening up the day to make everybody feel better than they did before.

My spirit prays every night and day, asking God to help people who are sad and angry.

My spirit is like a river washing sadness and anger away, and helping others feel like a new person who can be more confident to make a better place for themselves.

A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership, of getting along with people, of getting things done.

― Dwight D. Eisenhower

Hate Don’t Mean a Thing

Sir Donald L. Stallworth

You can’t hate your family for too long cause it’s wrong. You can’t hate your family too long cause your love shouldn’t be like jewelry or diamond rings. Your love shouldn’t be like a glimmer or gleam. Your love should shine real bright. That’s exactly what I mean.

Some people take family for granted, I don’t understand it. For the family around you is the only one you’ll have; without them you’ll only go downhill.

But still sometimes they get annoying and make you mad. Sometimes they make you happy and glad. It is just the same. You love them so much you forget who to blame.

Through the rainy days and the cloudy nights they’ll be with you, by your side through the lowest and highest highs.

All this because hate don’t mean a thing.

Untitled

Nora Suthman

My spirit is like a river, flowing back and forth, as blue as a sun, brightening up the day, and as big as a sun. My spirit is as blue as a sun, feeling joyful.

and makes everybody feel joyful.

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 us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 1: Chapter in Spokane County by Onalee Stewart

Region 1 had two really exciting events this month. First, we had an Advocacy 101 training with Kara Sanders from The MBS. We had 10 youth and alumni attend and we learned about key skills such as communication, planning, and using our voice to advocate for ourselves in more positive and productive ways. Our second event was a chapter BBQ with Rep. Kevin Parker from the 6th district, and Shannon Waechter, Legislative Assistant to Timm Ormsby. We talked about The MBS, the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, the bills The MBS has gotten passed, and our chapter. They let us know what it’s like to be a legislator and the best way to have youth approach them in Olympia. We want to thank them as well as the Eastern Washington Women’s Networking group (for donating the food for our BBQ) and all the youth and alumni for coming and sharing in our desire to make change for the better!

Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Hunter Nelson

For the month of July we took things slowly, but that’s okay because next month we will be very busy. We will be talking with Senator Dale Brandland from the 42nd District in Bellingham about The Mockingbird Network and also learning about him. He’s been a strong supporter of foster youth. There will also be a couple of awesome trainings in August. The first one will be on our rights as foster youth, which is crucial. The other training will be a legal workshop with The MBS in Seattle. The Region 3 chapter is definitely pumped for the coming month!

Region 2: A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. Chapter in Yakima County by Holly Allen

This month we met and discussed what events will be happening in the future. For our community project, our group decided we will serve lunch at the Union Gospel Mission again. We are going to try to have Mayor Dave Edler come to one of our chapter meetings to discuss with him what it is like being the Mayor of Yakima and we would also like to add some fun competitive games. We also plan on having a day where we experience hands on budgeting. This chapter meeting was a BLAST!

Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Kevin Egan

This month we came up with a mission statement: Using our voice to empower, enrich, and improve the lives of foster youth through advocacy, education, and community involvement. Yolanda filled everyone in on what happened at the Leadership Summit. On August 14th we are having an event called The Inside Scoop where we will discuss advocacy for mental health and financial issues for youth. There will be ice cream as well. The event will be at the 2100 Building, 10 AM – 2 PM. We hope to see you all there. Please also join us for our monthly chapter meetings which are scheduled for the second Monday of each month.

Region 5: Chapter in Pierce County by Demarie

We are currently working with a group of youth to put on Culture of Foster Care training. This training is for social workers and foster parents to help them perform their jobs better by helping youth open up more and by advocating effectively for them. In August, we are going to participate with Catholic Community Services to feed the homeless. Giving back to people in need is a great thing you can do in life for people that do not have as much.

Region 6: SPEAK UP! Chapter in Clark County by Crystal Sharp

This month we had a special guest, WA State Representative Jim Jacks from the 49th district who came and talked with us. We explained what The MBS is and what we do within the Network. It was very nice that he recognized Amanda, one of the SPEAK UP! leaders, from town hall meetings and Charlieفارمنه from Youth Advocacy Day. He was very interested in what our goals are and asked many questions wanting to learn as much as he can from us. He is a very nice guy and is working hard to represent what we want. He believes as we do that with enough effort and persistence anything can happen. We really appreciated the time we had with him and hope to see him again at Advocacy Day next year. SPEAK UP! will now be meeting the first Tuesday of every month with the Independent Living Skills program. Regular meetings are still the second Monday of every month. Hope to see you there!