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Mockingbird Times
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.
Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

December 2005
Volume V, Issue 13

In This Issue

“It’s My Life” in Washington, D.C.

On November 12th, Jim, Najja, Dietra (all of Mockingbird Society) and Degale (of Treehouse) flew to Baltimore, MD for the annual Casey Family “It’s My Life” conference. I had never been anywhere on the East Coast before, so I spent a lot of time on the flight wondering what was ahead. We arrived at about 6 pm that night and I was in shock from seeing such a large number of black people dressed nicely and running things. I just don’t see that here in Seattle and it made me wonder why. I got up to my room and decided I needed to recap what I just saw. Eventually, I calmed down and fell asleep.

The next morning, I had the best breakfast in my life. I ate a buffet of fresh smoked salmon, eggs, sausages, hashbrowns and biscuits with gravy. The service at our hotel was terrific. After breakfast, we all settled in the car and headed for Washington D.C. It was roughly an hour from Baltimore. Our first stop was the famous White House, home of a current president (who I won’t comment on). It wasn’t as big as I thought and my curiosities about security were quickly answered when I saw a whole bunch of men in all black with guns rise on the roof. I’ll never question the safety of the White House again.

Our next stop was the Vietnam Memorial and it was sad to all the people’s names on the wall that died. My great grandpa was one of them. Then we visited the Lincoln Memorial, which I had for so long wanted to see. I got to step upon those same steps and see the exact setting that Dr. Martin Luther King gave his infamous “I Have A Dream” speech in. I plan on being there again many more times. We visited the Washington Monument then drove back to the hotel for some sleep. I had a long, serious two days ahead of me.

Monday, I woke up and attended the first workshop on my schedule, “Foster Youth Education.” I was upset to see the shocking statistics of high school graduation Blacks are at the bottom of the list with 51%. It gets worse. When it comes to Black kids in foster care, only 31% graduate. I was also shocked when I heard the teacher say she visited Seattle and named Rainier Beach High School as the worst academic school she’d seen in the country. I was really angry when I left that session. My second class was called “Choose Your Friends Don’t Let Them Choose You.” That class was the most inspiring class of all. The teacher was an ex- gangbanger and he told the class all the stories about when he was getting into trouble.

D.C. CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

The Fight for Gay Adoption

Something happened to me after I saw the movie “We Are Dad.” I had realizations. I had real, unmistakably heartfelt epiphanies that I haven’t been able to put into words until now. I nearly cried, screamed, laughed, shouted and whispered to my neighbor when it hit me that gay people aren’t legally able to adopt. Queer (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, etc.) people, no matter how great, famous, loving, caring, smart or able cannot legally adopt, except in four states (California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Vermont). These four states “explicitly permit joint adoption by lesbian and gay couples.” (1) This does not mean there is not hope. As a matter of fact, “in some states joint adoption by lesbian and gay couples is, at least in certain parts of the state, almost routine even though there is no court decision or statute specifically allowing for it. For example, Oregon falls into this category.” (2)

In the movie and real-life documentary “We Are Dad,” two gay white men adopted 4 black and 2 white children, all with AIDS or HIV + from birth. The family was essentially under the state of Florida’s microscope, because the two dads were gay and the state of Florida has very strict policies about security were quickly answered when I saw a whole bunch of men in all black with gays. I realized that there are so many thousands of children suffering from neglect in the foster care system and wanting nothing more than a safe, happy, healthy and loving home. Half of the kids I met on the streets were running away from abusive foster families, the other half were either kicked out for being queer, neglected or running away from a variety of abuses as well. I realized that there are so many thousands of safe, happy and healthy queer couples out there who want nothing more than to raise a child to be safe, happy and healthy. These people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they are as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights. These people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they are as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights.

In the movie I learned new perspective to me, especially in regards to why queer people be legally allowed to adopt. This movie brought new perspective to me. I know, from working at the Mockingbird Times and from being on and off the streets since I was 14, that there are so many thousands of children suffering from neglect in the foster care system and wanting nothing more than a safe, happy, healthy and loving home. Half of the kids I met on the streets were running away from abusive foster families, the other half were either kicked out for being queer, neglected or running away from a variety of abuses as well. These people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they are as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights.

The Florida Gay Adoption Ban, which is the strict strict adoption ban in the United States, was based on fear. A woman named Anita Bryant led a notoriously homophobic campaign in the late 1970’s called “Save Our Children.” Many people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they are as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights. These people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they are as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights. These people fought for their rights because they knew in their minds and hearts that they are as equal as a male or a white person, and they deserved their civil rights.

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Letter from the Editor

Jim Theofilis

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays:

It seems amazing that another year comes to a close which is always a time for reflection and introspection. Mockingbird Society has experienced a remarkable year of growth and achievements that fill us with pride as well as inspiration to continue our work on behalf of the children, adolescents and families we serve. We are especially proud of the young people who have worked in the Youth LEAD program which includes the Mockingbird Times, ASK-Y and our Speakers Panel. We continue to received feedback from around the country that Mockingbird Times is a quality newspaper full of the type of insight and wisdom that can only come from youth. It is very gratifying that many of our youth reporters have moved on to secure employment in the private industry and/or enrolling in higher education programs.

ASK-Y and our Speakers Panel have been instrumental toward increasing positive public policy and public awareness regarding the issues facing children and youth who are homeless or in the foster care system. Youth recognize their own personal growth and confidence through their participation in the public speaking associated with ASK-Y and our Speakers Panel. The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is set to expand throughout King County and continues to receive attention from across the nation as a promising practice that stabilizes children in placements, allows siblings to live together, improves educational outcomes and retains and recruits foster/kinship parents. Indeed this has been a remarkable year of growth and achievement for the Mockingbird Society and we are appreciative of your support. As you decide on the recipient of your holiday giving I hope you will consider the Mockingbird Society. I believe we are deserving of your support and I believe our results demonstrate this is so. In closing I wish each of you the best of the holiday season and in particular send my heartfelt blessings to the children and youth who find themselves away from their families.

Jim Theofilis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

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. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to $25 per piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 40,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A. through a private distribution list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated.

Thank You’s

To the Community:

Mockingbird Society:
The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, 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 nest and sing.

Mockingbird Society’s 3rd Annual Auction and Fundraiser: We Believe We Can Fly

Thursday, March 30, 2006
6-9 pm
Wine, hor d’oeuvres and dessert
Silent and live auction
Premiere of the Mockingbird Society documentary, A Place to Sing

At the Broadway Performance Hall
1625 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122

Tickets are $35 and may be purchased in advance or at the door.

Mockingbird Society celebrates the holidays with a gingerbread house making party. Come enjoy the scents of our gingerbread lane!

Meet Our Staff

Executive Director
Jim Theofilis
Youth LEAD Coordinator
Raja Morris
Operations Manager
Ros Ghan
Public Relations
Dacia Gray
Executive Assistant
Lauren Frederick
Americorps Member
Dietra Clayton
Senior Staff Reporters
Misty Lou Cook, Dennis Fisher, Courtney Konietzko
Staff Reporters
Ashley Grant, Jamecia Henderson, Echa Speed, Lauren Asher, Teresa Asher, Jacob Harrison, Anthony Evans
Contributing Writers
Leslie, Alison Morris, Stancia Ague, James Möller, Beth Ramirez
Volunteers
Patricia Gray, Anna Trombley

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and the Mockingbird Society!

Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the Mockingbird Times.

Enclosed, please find my check made payable to Mockingbird Society in the amount of: 

Suggested Donations:
$1,000+.....Protector $500-999.....Caretaker
$250-500.....Organizations $50+.....Supporter $25.....Foster Parent
NAME ____________________________
ADDRESS _________________________
CITY ___________________ STATE ____ ZIP _______ PHONE __________

Please bill me for the amount indicated.

My employer will match my gift enclosed is my matching gift form.

I am interested in receiving information on the advantages of planned giving.

Please do not include my name on published donor lists.
The Importance of Donating

I know that when I was homeless, living on the streets of Seattle, one of the things that sucked the most was sleeping in the snow. I had one thin blanket that I was sharing with another person and it was not enough. I remember it was too cold to stay asleep and the other person and I kept waking up looking at each other in frozen misery. Being cold-to-the-bone is one of the worst things a person can experience and still when I get cold I remember the streets.

Homeless people need blankets, warm clothing, beanies and gloves, hygiene kits with things like travel size toothpaste and floss, vouchers to warm places to hang out in or go eat at like movie theaters and fast food restaurants, sweatshirts with hoods are always appreciated, socks and underwear, and those hand warmer things, most youth (I am a shoe fiend) I don’t need those things though. It’s amazing, the feeling I get from giving. I like watching people’s faces light up because they got something they loved.

If you can’t give someone a home, give them what they need to survive until they can get a home. Volunteer your time serving a holiday meal or donate the below items.

Drop-in centers are places where homeless youth can go to get clothes, a warm meal, showers, and other services that move them towards healing and self-sufficiency. These are important places to donate to in the holiday season because they help homeless youth survive on the streets and give them a Christmas they otherwise wouldn’t have.

University District Youth Center
4516 15th Ave. N.E.
Seattle, WA 98105
(206) 526-2992
Contact Person Rick King x17

Holiday Donation List:
• Gift cards (Safeway, Bartell Drugs, Fred Meyer, University Book Store, Tower Records)
• Pre-paid phone cards
• Battery-operated travel alarm clocks & flashlights
• Hooded sweatshirts
• Bus tokens (Packs of ten $1.25 tokens)
• Packs of AA batteries
• Sleeping bags & Backpacks (Dark colors preferred)
• New underwear and white tube socks
• African American hair products
• Journals, notebooks, and day-timers
• Disposable food serving supplies (Plates, bowls, plastic forks/spoons/knives)
• Pre-packaged snacks

The Orion Multi-Service Center
1020 Virginia St. Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 622-5555
Contact Person Jaesa Papillon

Holiday Donation List:
• Gift cards (shoe stores, grocery stores, restaurants, clothing places)
• Movie passes
• Bus passes
• Sleeping bags
• Blankets
• Socks and underwear
• Beanies and gloves
• Portable food (peanut butter crackers, fruit cups, etc.)

We are looking for 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 published in the Times, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org. For more info and to check us out, go to www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

Leona’s Story

I grew up in the foster care system all of my life. It’s been a difficult experience. After I aged out, I was on my own, but luckily I already knew of some resources that have been helping me out, in the past and in the present. Ever since I aged out, I’ve been in and out of jail and on and off the streets. I’ve had a hard time trying to maintain a decent life. I’m as well as homeless, I’m always on the move. I don’t stay in one place for too long. I’m used to this, because I was constantly moving in foster care, from one home to another. This effected my education, which created gaps. It also got me in the habit of keeping to myself. I still have a hard time opening up to people, and I also have difficulty in communicating with other people like my friends or significant other. I tend to keep a lot of things bottled up, which stresses me out so much. Not only do I have a hard time accepting changes, but I tend to be very insecure of myself. I carry myself very well, from what I’m told by most of my friends.

I always have a hard time dealing with. When I say “letting go,” what I mean is I don’t like separating from my friends or family. I know that if I don’t learn to let go of things or to let go of closeness, then it’ll just slowly tear me down. So letting go isn’t always easy for me, but after letting go, my load or burden seems to be lighter.

I always have a hard time because of what I’ve been through in the past, but eventually I know things will work out. Hopefully, sharing my experiences with the foster care system will help others.

Steve and Roger, the two dads from the movie-documentary “We Are Dad”, are very affected by Florida’s Gay Adoption Ban that are currently in a battle to keep their kids. Frank and Tracy, the two eldest children they raised since infancy, were recently taken away from Steve and Roger by the state of Florida and placed in new “homes”. Bert, their third child, is in constant danger of being taken away from his family because queer people still aren’t legally allowed to adopt in the state of Florida. Bert commented on this in the documentary, “We Are Dad”. He said, with much heartfelt confusion and pain, “It’s illegal to adopt kids if you are gay”. Steve and Roger have already been plain-tiffs for two years in an ongoing American Civil Liberties Union federal lawsuit challenging the gay adoption ban and are in danger of losing Bert, a child they raised since infancy. Half of the proceeds made from the movie-documentary “We Are Dad” go to Steve and Roger and towards their fight to keep their children and be able to legally adopt in the state of Florida.

Leona’s Story continued from Page 1

Children(4), which was aimed at repealing a gay rights law in Miami, Florida. Those seeds of fear bloomed into massive quantities of homophobia which eventually led to a ban restricting all queer people from adopting children. The main reason why Bryant said gays shouldn’t adopt is because she believed that all gay people were child molesters. Her prejudice and fear of gay people led to a law that prevents gay people from adopting and building families and that Gay Adoption Ban in Florida is still in effect to this day.

Should Steve and Roger be able to keep their children? Is a ban restricting all queer people from adopting children helping or hurting children and the foster care system? Let us know what you think. Letting people know where you stand on gay adoption could save a life, enhance a childhood or just make you feel better.

http://www.letthemstay.com/big-pict_perspectives_couples.html
(3) http://www.pbw.org/georgewashington/teaching/teachory1_2.html
(4) http://www.pbs.org/lawsuit.html
**Creative Corner**

**Life**

*Stacia Ague*

Hurt, pain and confusion, Is what I used to feel, Now that I know Jesus I feel like I am so alive and real God has planted a seed in me, And now I know where my life is heading and my destiny Though I still have hardships and struggles, All I have to do is hold on to his word and cuddle, When I’m having a bad day God is there to be my best friend and always has the right thing to say Growing up I didn’t get much love or affection, But now god is leading my life and will not lead me the wrong direction

**A dead man’s Heart**

*James Milner*

I’m a dead man with a dead heart Not willing to let the die come, but to go because of someone that once helped me feel alive and someone who helped someone remember what and who I should stay alive for, But now a lot of the time I feel everything but emotion of happiness I am a dead man Or if not I feel dead there’s no ending to my sorrow besides the times… I love her And at that time I don’t know if she believes it or even if the feeling is still mutual, I always seem to feel alone in this world against millions and I know I won’t make it on, So I pray for his will to happen and want the worst to come But I want and pray for so much and get nothing this is a dead man talking.

**Chantelle**

*Stacia Ague*

Bay girl you mean the world to me, Even though life is tough right now I hope you learn that’s not the way it has to be, I feel like I let you down so much, I miss your cute little baby touch, I had no guidance in life growing up, Look, the same things happening to you and I have no control which really sucks, I look at your pictures often, And wonder if our mothers’ heart will ever soften, Getting locked up was the best thing that ever happened to me, Even though it has been hard for other people to see I have done everything in my power to change my old ways from who I use to be, Now my goal in life is to succeed, Please know one day I’m going to be there, And you can count on me Together we’re gonna make it just you and me.....

Mockingbird Represents on Youth Legislative Youth Advisory Council

*Jamica Henderson*

This weekend I had the opportunity to participate in the first meeting of the Legislative Youth Advisory Council. It was held in Olympia on December 2nd and 3rd. There are 22 members on this council and I am proud to be one of them. We are a group of young people from all over Washington state who want to see positive changes happen for young people. One of the important things that this group does is read over bills that are already written or if necessary, come up with new ones that we feel would be more beneficial.

Our mission statement is: As the Washington State Legislative Youth Advisory Council we strive to be a voice for youth; examine issues of importance to Washington youth and vocalize concern to legislators and we also promote youth participation in state and municipal governments as well as foster long lasting relationships between state legislators, adults, and young people.

I will keep the Mockingbird readers up-to-date with our next activities. Get ready for a new change and stay tuned for more details regarding our 2006 Advocacy Day.

Don’t forget February 2nd is advocacy training, and February 3rd is Youth Advocacy Day! This year we are advocating for HB 2002, which would extend services to age 21 for youth who want to stay in care and go to school.

I Am a 19 Year Old Street Kid

*Alicia Morris*

I am a 19 year old street kid. I have been homeless for my own in Seattle for 2 years and off now. Over all I have been homeless for 4 and a half years. My passion in life is writing. I work for UDYS in the Zine project in the U-District in Seattle, so I’m excited to get a chance to write for the Mockingbird Times (hopefully they’ll accept this piece of writing.)

I was homeless with my twin sister but she has now left for Job Corps, so I am alone for the first time ever. I’ve never experienced true loneliness until the last 2 months. I had no idea what it was like. It must be so hard for all the people that don’t have a twin. I’ve become so independent in such a short time.

I sleep in the Roots Shelter. From 9pm to 6 am they allow young street kids to sleep there. I don’t know what I would do without it. The streets of Seattle are no place to be. Drugs are everywhere. This is a place of drugs, sex and alcohol. Take a good innocent kid, like I used to be, and put them on the street for 9-12 months, maybe less, and you will see their lives change for the worst.

I love my street family, they are my closest friends on the streets. I would die for them. But the streets will wear you down. I wander the streets through rain, storm and shine. I’m out there with no place to escape the cold. Sometimes I would just go to the park but it sucks when you can really feel yourself getting sick and there is absolutely no warm place to go and you have no choice but to sit there and get sick. Plus medicine is not easy to come by, Yeah, that really sucks.

I have one thing left that I still have from my youth. The most precious possession I have; my virginity. The last of my innocence. I guard it well.

I want to have a normal life (not homeless) and if I ever want to be a successful adult then I need to get away from the streets. Away from my friends, whom I love to death, and away from the drugs. It will pull you down once you’ve gotten off the streets if you continue to have the drugs and homeless people as your surroundings. It just sucks you into this black hole called homelessness.

I never did hardcore drugs, like heroin or cocaine or meth, so my body is not addicted to anything. It doesn’t depend on a drug to function normally. But a lot of kids out here are not so fortunate. All it takes is one hit and you can be addicted. For these homeless kids it will be so much harder for them to get off the streets. Their bodies depend on these drugs. They can not even think clearly if they are sober.

But to have a normal life the first step is to get away from the drugs. After that……well, I don’t know because I’m not there yet. I’m leaving in one week to Job Corps. I’m…. well to be honest I’m terrified. Homelessness is the only life style I have ever lived. I’ve been excited to have a bed to sleep in and to be able to shower easily and to cook and eat the food that you choose, not what is given by teen feeds. These are the things most people take advantage of. But I know there is another way of life out there with no drugs and the drama of homelessness. I will write back to the Mockingbird when I am in Job Corps and explain what it’s like and if I made a good decision. Maybe this can be a small project I can do for all the homeless kids out there. I will be a living example if Job Corps is good or not for the street kids. I’ll get back to you guys with info. In a little while. Sincerely, Alicia Morris. trixelina@yahoo.com