The Importance of Respite Care by Giovanni English

What is respite care and why is it important? Respite care is care provided by a state licensed provider. It is provided to foster parents when they go out of town or need a break from their foster youth. When thinking of respite care, think of it as dropping your kids off at grandma’s or your friend’s house for a day or two. For foster parents it is not that easy. They must call on a licensed state respite provider, and it is likely the respite care provider is not related to you or your child.

Respite care is often compared to being a babysitter or staying with your grandparents. In most families, a babysitter is called and generally help out for a day or an evening. But, for foster parents it is not that easy. They must call on a licensed state respite provider, and it is likely the respite care provider is not related to you or your child.

The reason this has become a concern is that all parents, even a foster parent, need a break and they can’t legally take one with normal supports, they have to use a licensed respite care provider. And, those folks are few and far between.

A lot of people getting ready to have foster kids go into it thinking that they can turn to their own extended family for support, saying to themselves, “Well, my parents will be there to help me care for these kids and that they will have proper placement.” The thing is – unless they are licensed too – they can’t provide a break – relief – support – or respite.

There are reasons why some youth get caught in the web of violence. Some people are born into it or exposed to it. One of the root causes of getting caught up in violence is lack of activities and programs that provide alternatives for youth. People often lack the experience and guidance to see a future, or possible success, or even a role as a professional. A lot of this has to do with the state – which really means the overall community – not providing enough funding for programs that provide access to programs that will improve their chances. Instead, these programs are being cut from budgets. Programs that provide resources to those that have already suffered and gone through this web are also losing funding. In the end, there should be no reason for a youth not to make it in anywhere in the world.

“Despite the many stereotypes youth of the system face, as well as the hardships and tragedies, many youth are still compelled to use their voice to make change, and stand up for the rights and well-being of all youth in care.”

The final report-out of this year’s Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit raised questions about whether some youth are safe in care. Two of the six topics presented were in regards to safety. One proposal was to require mental health evaluations for foster parents, so that mentally unstable foster parents can get the support that they need to care for their children. The other safety issue proposed by youth was random drug testing for foster parents, because drugs were possibly used in the home to control the youth, and to avoid questions about the youth’s safety.

“Most people would agree that if a child or youth was taken out of their home because of abuse, neglect, or just an unsafe environment, they shouldn’t get placed back into a similar situation. But, sometimes it happens. According to the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), statistics show that less than one percent of youth in care indicated maltreatment. It may not seem like a lot, but in reality, it shouldn’t be happening at all. In the foster care system there will be some of those families that are “as seen on TV,” as well as families that love and care about the youth that come into their home. Surely the child welfare system isn’t a perfect one, but it’s not completely bad either. From the way the media and news portray the system, it could change the perspective of people who are truly supportive to it all. It of the negativity and violence are exploited, but the media very seldom shows the bright side of foster care. Some youth are happy to have been in care because they were actually placed into better, loving homes or maybe even adopted. I think that people hear “foster care” and immediately think of stereotypes associated with media exploitation the system, and just all around troubled youth. Despite the many stereotypes youth of the system face, as well as the hardships and tragedies, many youth are still compelled to use their voice to make change, and stand up for the rights and well-being of all youth in care.”
Happy Holidays to each of you! The social challenges of your day are top of mind for all of us, but it is in these times we often come together as a community and rise to the occasion. That is what we do every day at The Mockingbird Society through our dedicated staff, volunteers, Board of Directors and the children, youth and families.

The Mockingbird Society accomplished much this year. We completed our 3-year strategic plan, funded with a grant from the Washington Women’s Foundation. This was an innovative process that included business and community leaders, child welfare leaders and youth to help develop deeper and stronger relationships.

Respite care is not put in place to say that a foster parent is rejecting a kid, or that they don’t like their foster youth. It’s supposed to be there for support for everyone involved. Foster parent Eric Kiley said, “Respite care is a Godsend.” His wife went on to say, “Sometimes it feels like the respite care is the make or break for us. It’s something that offers us a full night’s sleep if we are feeling like we’re at the end of our rope.” Comments like these help you to understand why respite care is so important in foster care and how much it really means to the parents. For some it is the deciding factor into whether or not they can become foster parents. Right now that deciding factor is limited, and as we know, supply and demand is what controls the market. This is one demand that we need to continue supplying foster parents so their needs can continue to be met and they will be stronger for their foster children and youth.

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 we have for mockingbirds?

Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to rest and sing.
The election is over and the results are in. Initiative 1098, an initiative that would have ultimately added about two billion dollars towards the education and health care for Washington State's children, lost in the general election with only 34.57% voting “yes” on Tuesday night November 2nd, 2010.

Initiative 1098 was amongst the most highly debated initiatives on the ballot for the 2010 election for the state of Washington. The argument seems to have been centered on trying to determine whether our children’s health and education is more important that our state’s current economic status in a time of recession.

Washington State has the most regressive tax system in the nation. According to The Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy, the poorest 20 percent in Washington pay 17.3 percent of their income in state taxes, while the top 1 percent pays 2.9 percent. The state also holds some of the highest sales taxes in the nation. And, while it is widely believed that the State of Washington is required by law to balance its budget, the only legal parameter is that the Governor submits a balanced budget to the Legislature for consideration, so it is really a myth. But the state tries to hold to that benchmark each year, even in times of recession. Because of this the state does one of two things. It either cuts programs, such as cutting the budget for the Department of Education, and the Department of Transportation, or it must raise taxes to fit the bill.

Budgets for programs were cut all around this year in response to the recession and education was one of those programs affected facing more than $1 billion dollars in cuts. If the initiative had passed not only would the initiative had covered that gap, but it would have added more money towards education and health care by adding a 1% income tax on people who make $200,000 or more a year.

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Although the election is over, now I feel it is important to state that if you are to invest in the economy, what better way than to educate children?

I’m the newest addition to The Mockingbird Network staff. Being the newest recruit, there are many things that people want to know about me, so they can further get to know me as a person. So, in this article, I am going to attempt to answer as many questions, as efficiently as possible, to give you (the public), a better picture of what kind of guy that I am, where I come from, and what I stand for...

So, to begin with, I was thinking I would talk a little bit about where I come from. My full name is Deonate Oshae Cruz. I am 18 years young, and I have been in foster care for all of those 18 years. My nationality is a mix of African American, Mexican, and Apache Native. Growing up in the foster care system has been a little rough to say the least. Because my parent’s parental rights were terminated at birth, I didn’t really know much of a parental figure in my life. I have been relocated a minimum of at least 30 times so that being someone, I don’t have much room to get to know anyone or have a parental figure in my life. Don’t get me wrong, I have seen blessings in my life, but I have also seen share of hardship as well. I’ve seen a lot of physical, verbal, and mental abuse. Not until recently, about 4 years ago, did I enter a stable placement that really helped me get a hold on my life. Family is a very important base of support. If there is one thing I have learned growing up, it’s that family is not defined by blood, but by the bonds that tie us together. People at work have been asking a lot, how much family do I have? If I want to go by my earlier statement, then it would take time to explain the amount of family that I have acquired over the years. That being said, I’m only going to keep it to immediate blood relatives. I have four sisters; Tiara Lee, Quinton, Terrance, and Vondrea Smith, and Natasha Hull. We have all been in foster care some time or another. One of their names is Tremaine. I am so glad I got the opportunity to interview her. My favorite Representative Roberts’ quote: “Information is powerful and the public needs more information.”

So let’s continue informing others about struggles or how our experience in foster care was, still is, or whatever your situation is, and how we can change it to make it better for future generations.

New Kid on the Block by Dionate Cruz

Representative Mary Helen Roberts (D-21st District) is a legislative champion for children and youth with a special focus on foster care. Representative Roberts also is a strong woman who seemed clear on what she wants in life and who possesses a true passion for what she does. After a key meeting with the House Early Learning and Children’s Services Committee, she is a champion for welfare reform, and by seeing that committee she has learned a lot about the struggle to be in that system. In her work as a legislator, Rep. Roberts also learned about youth transitioning out of foster care and the challenges they face. She said she was so surprised at how many youth become homeless as a result of being kicked out of their homes on their 18th birthday. She also said she felt they didn’t get the opportunity to be taught what to do after their 18th birthday. She said, “Even after the age of 18, we can’t stop helping.”

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Mary Helen Roberts is leading the effort to implement the Fostering Connections to Success Act which will allow youth to opt in to care when they age out. It also will help provide safe housing and transitional services. We talked about programs like Washington State’s Foster care to 21 pilot, how other conversations with the states helped pave the way for Congress- man McDermott’s sponsorship of the Federal Fostering Connections Act.

Rep. Roberts also emphasized how important the work of the youth in The Mockingbird Society is to educating legislators. “If you tell your personal story then it helps legislators understand more. It brings more reality to the conversation.” Representative Mary Helen Roberts also reminded me that potential Foster Care to 21 recipients have some leverage because we are voters. At 18 we can register to vote and advocate for what we need. She stressed how important it is to hear from youth. I am so glad I got the opportunity to interview her. My favorite Representative Roberts’ quote: “Information is powerful and the public needs more information.”

So let’s continue informing others about struggles or how our experience in foster care was, still is, or whatever your situation is, and how we can change it to make it better for future generations.

Support Youth and Alumni of Foster Care This Holiday Season!

The Mockingbird Times is distributed free of charge to people with a passion for improving the lives of children, youth and families. Please consider supporting our youth reporters by including The Mockingbird Society in your giving plans this holiday season!

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Inside Scoop with Representative Mary Helen Roberts

by Monique Howard (Reporting from Everett, Region 3)
Forbidden Love
By Abigail Antoinette Brunner
I stare into my bathroom mirror, watching as my eyes shed tears, crying silently so you won’t hear. Wondering about the stranger in the mirror. Swollen face, bloody nose, busted lip, knowing that sitting on the couch is who caused all of it.
I stand gazing dizzyly in the mirror, wondering why I’m still here. I take blows to the face, hits to the head, wondering why I’m still not dead. Wishing this pain would go away, but until then I pray for another day.
Finally my day came, my most prized day, no more bruises, and no more blood. No more of your forbidden love.
Now I stare into my bathroom mirror, a new beginning, a new year. No bruises, no cuts, no busted lips and blood. Because I am no longer addicted to your forbidden love.

It Pours Down
By Deamon
It pours down
I always feel it
But cannot hear it
I try to explain it
But no solving it
Like grace from God.
But in my life there is no God.
I try to explain it
Grace like rain
Pours down on me.
Hallelujah

Community Events
Region 1 (Spokane) UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone) by Jossey Davis
This month, Region 1 members, kicked off our chapter meeting with a Mexican fiesta/ Halloween party. A lot of new faces showed up, so during our fiesta we spent some time getting to know each other and then we played an icebreaker. There were a grand total of 21 people at the chapter meeting and 12 of them were new, so Sarah introduced Mockingbird to many new faces. She also discussed upcoming events. Serving the homeless (Thanksgiving Kickoff), ice skating, and playing games with the elderly are penned down from the position. We interviewed several youth for the chapter leader position, and Noah and I decided Kristina Thompson will represent Region 1 in a wonderful and enthusiastic way.
Region 2 (Yakima) A.C.T.I.F.R.S.T. (Around Community Two Fostering Individual Rights Safely Together) by Brandi Bailey
This Month ACT FIRST had an awesome Harvest Party at the Corn Maze in Yakima. It was a lot of fun, we roasted marshmallows and hotdogs. Then some of us went on the hay ride and went through the maze. On November 2nd Brenda and I facilitated the Life Advocacy 101 Training at the Yakima ILS Group. It was successful as we added more people to our group. At our next Chapter meeting we are going to discuss our Advocacy Day agenda. We also will be reviewing what was presented at the S.A.C.

News From The Mockingbird Network
Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 3 (Everett) H.E.Y.M.A.C. (Hearing Every Youth Make a Change) by Olivia Anderson
As an advocate I have learned how to share my story with others so they can gain some understanding and help other voices be heard. The advocacy training also helped me to not be afraid or hesitate to take a stand on my beliefs. I’m also not afraid of crowds anymore, which is nice because we need to get in front of a lot of people. I feel that Mockingbird has helped me become a better leader because they have given me a lot of opportunities that have made me a better public speaker. My Resource Specialist has greatly helped me because she’s not afraid to let me know what I need to work on and ways that will help me. Most important she hasn’t given up on me. Next month HEYMAC will be meeting with Rep. Mike Sells and The Young Democrats of Washington, GO HEYMAC!

Region 5 (Tacoma) Cour’ige (Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individualities Gaining Empowerment) by DeMarre Kirk
This month in Region 5, our chapter voted on a new chapter leader, Janessa Thomas. Janessa has been active member of our chapter and conducted many training workshops for youth. She is truly a great inspiration and a real leader. Welcome Janessa!
Our November meeting consisted of discussing myths and facts about youth in care. We talked about changing the facts and percentages of foster youth. We want to be the change, not the stereotype. In late November, we will have hosted two trainings, Life advocacy and Know Your Rights. We hope to encourage many youth to attend. On November 17th our chapter will have hosted a Thanksgiving dinner for the youth in collaboration with Pierce County Alliance. We will be doing the same thing in December for Christmas. On November 13th all regions will have met in Seattle for our Statewide Advisory Council (SAC) meeting to discuss the legislative agenda and the future of our system.