Educational Advocacy Program by Jerry Bobbo

The Treehouse Educational Advocacy program (TEA) began serving King County youth in 2001 and expanded its service to the whole State of Washington in 2006 through a contract with Children’s Administration. TEA is a program that is designed to improve academic outcomes, increase school stability, and protect the educational rights of students living in foster care by providing advocacy services to youth, social workers, and caregivers. Last year in the State of Washington, a total of 2,574 children and youth received Treehouse’s advocacy services. However, this statewide program is dependant on public funding and thus is not sure. Treehouse has been looking for new programs considered for elimination during this difficult legislative session. The program offers more then just school help, they also help youth think about life after high school, build resumes, and get them ready for the real world.

Marquice, a youth that is involved in TEA, has foster parents that are making sure the advocate is creative at helping me solve my problems. When my foster parents [were] making sure that the promise of help was met by the school. My [foster parents] were making sure that the advocate was creative at helping me solve my problems. Marquice says, “This program helps me stay focused in my daily tasks in school. My advocate is at my school all the time making sure that I get the help that I need.” If young people with advocates can alter their thoughts on school and work harder at their education, why not continue the funding? The more support we have while in school the more they can relax. Marquice says, “My advocate was creative at helping me solve my problems. When my foster parents [were] making sure that the promise of help was met by the school.” My [foster parents] were making sure that the promise of help was met by the school. My advocate and my parents are very supportive when it comes to my life.” At the age of 17, Marquice is still growing to see and up what support is and what it feels like.

Foster parents also benefit from TEA. Knowing that they are not the only ones looking for the future of youth in the foster care system and who they not they receive all the educational support they are eligible for. Marquice’s foster parents say, “This program brings great opportunities for all kids in the community, especially for those the children/youth to stay focused in school without any suspensions.”

Independence and education is very important in today’s society. You need to be educated properly for great independence and parents appreciate that. Marquice’s foster parents say, “This program brings great opportunities for all kids in the community, especially for those the children/youth to stay focused in school without any suspensions.”

The Importance of Sibling Connections by Diamonique Walker

Sibling connections in foster care can be affected in many ways. For example, siblings could be moved into different homes because of age, number, or gender. “When my brothers and I got taken away from our home, we were unable to be placed together. I was placed in a home with teenage girls while they were somewhere with kids under the ages of ten. Even though I wasn’t placed with them, at least my little brothers got to be together, but I would probably have been more comfortable being with them. Knowing that they were okay and emotionally stable would have made me feel better about not being at home,” says one foster youth. When you’re used to talking and interacting with your siblings every day, being separated unwillingly can be hard to do. Broken sibling connections create risks for youth in care. In the most recent issue of Repsides, a magazine focusing on the voices of youth in care, an article called, “A Love Story” talks about this issue. The anonymous author tells about being separated from their siblings. “I just wanted to be back with my siblings. I’d start fires or drink to the point that the ambulance would have to come and take me to the hospital.” A youth misbehaving because they miss their siblings isn’t uncommon in foster care. Behavioral issues just lead to moving to different homes and more instability which does not promote healthy development.

Keeping siblings together can help. When siblings talk to each other they can be helped to do that without their green cards or visas, even though they may be eligible for one. This places limitations on many things average citizens take for granted like access to financial aid, jobs, healthcare, or education. Employment, or any transaction that requires identification. I recently spoke with a case worker who is highly concerned about youth not being able to process to become documented immigrants.

The question that caregivers, service providers, and even I have is who is missing this important step and how are they transitioning to becoming dependents of the state? In a world of files, case numbers, and all the professionals who come in contact with youth in care, whose responsibility is it to make sure that youth who are undocumented immigrants get the appropriate paperwork done in a timely matter?

In my efforts to find resources for youth who may be undocumented, I spoke with Diana E. Moller initiatives to help youth become documented.

Many youth in care already have insecurities about revealing they are involved in the foster care system, but can you imagine being an undocumented immigrant in foster care? As a youth, how would you know if you are undocumented, or know who to inform without the risk of deportation? Children who are entering the foster care system as undocumented immigrants are frequently transitioning out of the system without their green cards or visas, even though they may be eligible for one. This places limitations on many things average citizens take for granted like access to financial aid, jobs, healthcare, or education. Employment, or any transaction that requires identification. I recently spoke with a case worker who is highly concerned about youth not being able to process to become documented immigrants.

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Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

Once again, the youth and alumni have produced an amazing issue of the Mockingbird Times giving voice, insight, and wisdom to the issues facing children, youth, and families involved in the foster and kinship care system. This is not an easy place to toil for an American family as the economy continues to lose jobs, casting many workers aside. We are certainly seeing that in Washington State with a budget deficit anticipated to hit as much as six billion dollars. The Washington legislative session is at full swing and the mantra in Olympia is “if it costs money, probably it ain’t going to happen.” This is sadly true, especially for human services, public education, and child welfare. The Mockingbird Society remains committed to ensuring that, even during these darkest economic times, the State truly remembers its responsibility to the children and youth in foster care who, through no fault of their own, have become the children of Washington.

Believe this responsibility does not end at the arbitrary age of 18 and that included in this is the responsibility to provide safe housing beyond age 18. As a result of some great leadership by legislators, youth and alumni of foster care, and The Mockingbird Society, Washington State recently implemented the Foster Care to 21 program that authorizes young people to remain in foster care while attending college or a voc-tech program. Additionally, the Independent Youth Housing Program was added to provide a broader range of housing options to include more independent housing models for youth who are not able to remain with their foster parents.

Recent research has confirmed what Grandma knew all along: if you send 18 year old kids out the door with no resources or support, they don’t do so well. Due to the survival-based lifestyle they will be forced to lead, society can expect them to be dependent upon public assistance and they will experience increased mental and physical health problems, early parenting, and homelessness. However, if you act responsibly and provide basic support, including safe housing, these same 18 year olds will have much healthier outcomes, completing college success, decreased criminal behavior, and employment.

What can you do to help, you ask? Visit our Web site www.mockingbirdsociety.org and get informed about our legislative agenda, which includes safe housing for youth exiting foster care. Call your legislator and let them know you want youth from foster care to have housing and that you disapprove of state policy and practice to discharge kids from foster care directly into homelessness. Join us on February 13th (Friday the 13th) for Youth Advocacy Day in Olympia when over 100 young people will share their voice, experience, and wisdom with lawmakers that they need and deserve safe housing when exiting foster care. See you there!

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!

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Meet the Staff: Liliana Davies

The Mockingbird Society (MBS) would like to welcome Liliana Davies, our new Administrative Assistant. She has been with MBS for a month and a half.

MBT: What attracted you to MBS?

LD: The mission.

MBT: What do you enjoy about working for MBS?

LD: I like the welcoming, the environment and the fact that everyone works together with the same beliefs and goals.

MBT: What was your position before you joined MBS?

LD: An Administrative Assistant 1 in Purchasing.

MBT: What is your favorite hobby?

LD: Exercising. Lifting weights is one of my favorites. I’ve been a member at the YMCA in the University District for 10 years.

Welcome to MBS Liliana. We look forward to continuing work with you!

Thank You!

Anonymous; Patricia Baptista; Donna Barbbrick; Benda; Sauvene Chim; Judy Conforti; Karen Cowgill; Bruce Cross; Janet Dwight; James and Lauriann Garland; Ann Giesel and Malcolm Jolie; Dr. Wanda Hacket; Karen and Fred Horvath; Loren Hostek; Elizabeth Upton and Rayburn Lewis; Donna and Bruce Lindteffy; Wendie B. Marlowe, Ph.D.; Karina Martinez; Naja Morris; Charles Nordhoff; Dr. and Mrs. Pecora; Picket Fence Real Estate; Karen Pilliar; Sarah Rafton; Yantha S. Raman; Kelly Rickenbach; David Roberts; Jean Roberts; Alan Rothblatt and Sima Kahn; Ezzy Ramos Salazar; Suzanne Shavger; Elizabeth Strickland; Beverly Theofelis; Tip Top Creative; Patrick Timbrell; Timmy Topp; Karen Theofelis; Erin Welch; Colleen White; William and Mary Little Foundation; Stuart Yarfitz

Meet Our Staff

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Operations Director Ros Ghari; Mockingbird Family Programs Director Dr. Wanda Hackett; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Development Director Madeline Thompson; Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick; Development Coordinator Mandy Gray; Youth LEAD Coordinator; Kara Sanders; Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator Amy Converse; Administrative Coordinator Diana Clark; Administrative Assistant Liliana Davies; Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant Mississiga Morgan; MFM Administrative Assistant Stephanie (Stevie) Giambaris; Development Assistant Alice LeVeen; Resource Specialists Eva Ervin, Heather Jones, Georgina Ramirez, Nicholas Ruff, Tammy Soderberg; Senior Youth Representatives Leona Bill, Georgina Ramirez; Youth Representatives Jerry Bobo, Ashley Lanier, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker; Contributing Writers & Artists Ebdon Jones, Cynthia Jonas, Casey Overton, Kyle Rapin, Crystal Sharp, Rossie Valenta; Volunteer Chrisjie Jackson; Editing and Layout Kelly Hawkins

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of 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 newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additionally, youth are granted the opportunity to submit articles, art work, and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of over 25,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and a national reach 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. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright ©2009, The Mockingbird Society.
There are many barriers that prevent foster parents and youth from connecting. Justin Reed, a former foster youth, is one example of this. Foster parents and youth are being trained not to get attached to the youth that come into their homes and foster youth are being taught not to get attached to their foster parents. After talking to current foster youth, Alumni, and foster parents, psychological and systemic issues seem to be the biggest areas of concern.

I interviewed a current foster mother who went through the foster parent and adoptive training. She says, “Although I was 10 years old when I was adopted, I was the youngest of two foster children. My mother ended up adopting two foster youth that were placed in her home. They came back and forth to her house and, after a long period of time, she started the adoption procedure. I also interviewed a foster youth who informed me that his hostility towards the system came from family friends of former foster youth. He says, “When I lived there it was like I was undetectable. They barely got to know me and did not inform me that in two years they were planning to adopt me. It was very confusing to me and I was young and wondering when my mother was coming back. Foster parents are usually only temporary but there just might have been that one chance where you could have had a chance to adopt me. I was there almost three years and I have nothing to say positive about them or the foster care system.”

This foster family’s failure to inform him why he was there, or how they were going to take care of him, is his personal cause of hostile towards the system and, I’m sure, that of many others.

The foster youth that I talked with about the foster care system were not told why they were there, how they would be taken care of, or what their futures would hold. The foster care system is not made for personal connections. No child chooses who comes in and out of their life when they’re in the system, whereas adults get to choose what relationships they want to be involved in. It is a psychological barrier. People usually develop trust issues by the age of one. Children that have grown up in the system at that age and don’t have a solid relationship with someone you trust, you’re going to be homesick to the system’s care.

This issue is not always the case between foster parents and their placement youth but it is for many. I think foster parents should start informing the youth of what is going on in this transitional period of their lives. Yes, it is true that a child that is placed in a home may be moved again, however, the job of the foster parents is not the temporary parent. It is much like babysitting: the child knows you are only there for a short amount of time but you are to take care of them while the parents are unable to do so.

Justin Reed Early entered into this world in September 1969, into what appeared to be a picture perfect family. He had loving parents, two brothers, and a family dog. Like many foster kids, looking back is better from the outside. Justin states “My father and I had many conflicts. He was a drunk and very abusive.” At the young age of 10, when the other kids were in a home, he was running from his home and started getting involved in drugs.

Like many others, he could not control his life. Justin says, “A given day on the streets was filled with the pressure of being free. Hustling was the way to get money to pay for drugs and they were more important than food to me. That’s how I would deal with the pain.” This was a continuous mistake for 13 years. Wanting to stop, Justin found help. The place was in San Francis- co at a facility called the Walden House. People like Justin would go there to get the help they needed to put a stop to living wrongfully and get a second chance at life. The Walden House was something different for Justin. In order for the program to be successful, all rules needed to be followed and he needed to complete a few difficult tasks. He needed to lose weight and get letters of recommendations. He had to do group therapy, he had to be a man, and to past the life he became successful. He said he would not leave if he was not able to get a response from either the Tribes or the State. Steps are being taken to make sure no other kids will ever witness, but it is an important part of the story. Justin was beaten to death in foster care.

Foster youth who are Native American have it different than other foster youth. These differences sometimes cause unnecessary pain. I experienced these pains and so have many other Native American youth entering the foster care system. When I was in foster care, I had two different caseworkers: my state worker and tribal case worker. It was always difficult for my siblings, family, group home, staff, and foster parents to get a response from either. Justin was 12 years old and he had nowhere to turn. He was beaten to death in foster care and it would have been avoided.

These foster youth’s incidences have changed how things are between the Tribes and the State. Steps are being taken to make sure no other kids will experience any neglect or such tragedies. It is amazing to see how things have changed over all these years and have to move some kids out of their current situations and places them in other foster homes.

All my experiences that I have been through have created the person I am today. I am glad I was a foster youth and I am happy it happened. It helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think! I interviewed a current foster mother that I helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it should never happen again. Communication can cause a lot more than we think!
My Anger Issues
ROSE VALENCIA

My anger used to be out of control
Like a car
That would crash
Into a bridge between me and happiness.

But now, my anger is more like a cushion
Because it's softer than it used to be
It doesn't crash
It just flops open and the anger just floats away into air.

I tried really hard to get rid of that old anger because it didn't feel good
Writing poems gets my expressions out
Makes me feel better
And now I can get across that bridge well
The cushion calms me and helps me not crash anymore.

Autumn Dawn
ECHO DIXON

While the red and golden delicious
crispiness of nature lingers within my senses.
Awaken. The dawn of Autumn calls for my witnessing. With vision wide open.
I admire. Leaving me with painted colors, one on top of the other.
The fiery existence of chilling peace is near.
The dawn of Autumn calls for my witnessing.
The air, deliciously freezing my organs of breath and life, as I inhale
its mellow fragrance of sharp bitter sweet apple.
The strength of the stand on a grassy hill,
standing still as an ice sculpture while the expansive season wildly accelerates
in a pleasing eye with none other than art itself.
A non-verbal power.
Existing in my protective imagery.
This silence of beauty beholds humans are not moved, feeling as though they are spiritually touched in such a way.
Well, for those... come here. Stand on this grassy hill with me.
Close your eyes, you can feel this, you won't be disappointed.

Region 2: Chapter in Yakima County by Cynthia Jones

This month our meeting was mainly based around leadership, such as choosing proper leaders for the group, finding out the responsibilities of a leader, and going through how we are to choose them. We established that there will be two leaders from Yakima and two from the Tri-cities. The leadership roles will change once every 6 months. Each leader must attend at least 4 out of the 6 meetings and 4 out of the 6 activities within their 6 month time period. This will show that they truly care about the position and that they are committed as well. The first two Yakima Leaders chosen are Sandra and Taylor. We discussed major cut backs that the state and certain organizations are taking and certain activities that we, as a group, would like to participate in such as spending time with the elderly and helping at food banks or with food lines. We wanted to choose a name for the group but we have decided to hold off until the Tri-cities group is present. We established our activity for the month of February, which will be going to a convalescent home on Valentine’s Day to pass out goodies to the elderly. On February 21st, we will be getting Voice Development Training.

News From
The Mockingbird Network
Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Kylie Rapinan

On January 12th, Seattle received an influx of new ideas for foster/out-of-home care at our Region 4 chapter meeting. As a chapter, we decided on a name. In recognition of the election we decided on Region 4 for Change. Region 4 is ready to change the child welfare system and make our lives better as well as the lives of future young people in care. As a group, we developed and decided the inner workings of our chapter format, including speaking to our local representatives in Olympia for Youth Advocacy Day. We also simulated an exercise with an ally who was not in foster care with a pin the tail on the donkey game and drew some excellent analogies. We made a lot of great decisions including participating as a chapter in Casey Family Programs new School of Life, which is an opportunity for personal growth. To close the meeting, we had a raffle where participants won some free movie tickets! The tacos and burritos for dinner were the best part. Make sure you come next month; Region 4 for Change is where the change will happen!

Region 6: Speak Up Chapter in Clark County by Crystal Sharp

This month, the members of the Speak Up program volunteered with elderly and disabled people and decorated gingerbread cookies at Innovative Services. At first, all of us were a little shy of each other but when we all warmed up to each other we started having a great time. They shared stories with us and talked about how wonderful their holidays were. Towards the end, we played a game of trivia and then our time was up. We learned communication skills and how to deal with people with differences. Being in the community and helping people out gives us a feeling of purpose. Next on our agenda is the Youth Advocacy Day in Olympia where foster youth get together and debate what laws should be in place to benefit foster youth such as Foster Care to 21. We elected new leaders for the Speak Up! chapter in Vancouver: Crystal Sharp and Amanda Spady. We are excited to have these new leaders and welcome them to SPEAK UP!