

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

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Educational Advocacy Program BY JERRY BOBO



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 their budget will be one of many programs considered for elimination during this difficult legislative session. The program offers more than 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 nothing but good things to say about the program. 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 youth have while in school the more they can relax. Marquice says, "My advocate was creative at helping me solve my problems with school. She and my parents [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 starting to grow up and see what support is and what it feels like.

Foster parents also benefit from TEA. Knowing that they are not the only ones looking out for the future of youth in the foster care system and whether or 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 on advocating for the children/youth to stay focused in school without any suspension."

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, "The reason we looked for a program like this for Marquice was mostly educational reasons. But the help he gets from his advocate is showing him how to be more independent." A positive outlook on any current situation is better than hoping for a new situation. Marquice's foster parents also state, "This program is great for all children/youth to participate in."

This is a very important program that has helped Marquice and many youth like him stay out of trouble, off the streets, and in school. Marquice says, "I had many disciplinary removals from school—a total of 47 days last term compared to one day this term." This is an accomplishment that he would not be able to do alone. However, this program is at risk of closing due to loss of funding unless people like you speak up and let your voice be heard. If you would like to find out more information about Educational Advocacy services and other Treehouse programs you can contact **Executive Director Janis Avery** at janis@treehouseforkids.org.

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 cause stress.

Broken sibling connections create risks for youth in care. In the most recent issue of *Represent*, a magazine focusing on the voices of youth in care, an article called *Torn Apart* 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 too much alcohol so 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.

The **Mockingbird Family Model (MFM)** can help to prevent the loss of sibling connections. The MFM is a group of 6-10 licensed foster families that live close together and are connected to a Hub home. This entire unit is called a Constellation. MFM usually keeps youth with siblings in the same home and, if they cannot do that, they try to keep them in the same Constellation. Having a Hub home where support is provided, youth with siblings can have sleepovers and spend time with their siblings as often as possible with this family oriented approach. In addition, siblings also have the opportunity to see each other whenever there are Hub home events within the Constellation. MFM also reduces the risk of youth running away by placing youth with family.

Even if siblings aren't in a placement together, it is still very important for them to be allowed to see each other. Keeping sibling connections is critical because, in some cases, it may be the only way youth can know about their background and biological family. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to maintain a connection with both of my sisters. My older sister does everything for me and will do anything for me. I don't know what I would do without her now. She has helped so much the past two years I've lived with her. Even though we don't always get along, I couldn't imagine being separated from my little sister. She can be difficult but I love her. I'm glad I

FOSTER YOUTH AND GREEN CARDS

BY GEORGINA RAMIREZ



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 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 takes for granted like access to financial resources for secondary education, employment, or any transaction that requires identification. I recently spoke with a case-worker who is highly concerned about youth not being educated on the process to become documented immigrants.

The question that caregivers, service providers, and even I have is who is missing this important step in the process of youth being transitioned 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**, Staff Attorney from the **Northwest Immigrant Rights Project**. This organization assists low-income immigrants and refugees. It assists youth through the **Immigrant Child Advocacy Project** in which they help youth who have suffered abuse, abandonment, or neglect and are dependents of the state. Youth in care may be able to qualify for **Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS)**. This is an immigrant visa that helps youth obtain a green card. Having a green card means that the youth is a lawful permanent resident of the United States and can apply for U.S. citizenship about five years later. Permanent residents can access resources to support their basic needs such as a job, education, financial aid, and the ability to rent a home. These are things that are very difficult for undocumented people to do.

However, there are stipulations to going through this process and each person is evaluated on a case by case basis. According to Diana, basic qualifications for the visa are that the youth must be under the age of 21, unmarried, and a dependent of the state. In addition, she placed a great emphasis on the fact that youth who are undocumented should respect the law. Any youth should respect the law but if you are undocumented, the moment you commit a crime you may become ineligible to obtain a green card. Since some crimes are more serious than others, even if you have been in trouble with the law before, it is still important to ask if you qualify for this program.

According to the **Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law Unaccompanied Minors Project**, there are some requirements to obtain a green card. The youth must be a "dependent of the state and eligible for long term foster care, adoption or guardianship due to abuse, neglect, or abandonment." This pro-

SIBLINGS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

GREEN CARDS, CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



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 time for any 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 in full swing and the mantra in Olympia is "if it costs money it probably 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 of Washington remembers its responsibility to the children and youth in foster care who, through no fault of their own, have become the children of Washington.

I 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 indepen-

dent 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, including college success, decreased criminal behavior, and becoming tax payers through increased 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 safe 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!

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Visit our Web site www.mockingbirdsociety.org and get informed about our legislative agenda, which includes safe housing for youth exiting foster care.

GREEN CARDS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

cess can take a long time and, if you are unable to acquire your visa or green card before you are emancipated or transition out of care, you may be denied. If you are a youth who is undocumented or if you work with a youth you suspect is undocumented, then this process needs to start as soon as possible.

This issue reflects one of the primary reasons why youth should have permanency planning. All of the adults involved in their cases should be accountable for making sure the proper actions have been taken to ensure youth have all the resources and essentials for their basic needs being met. Given this is a highly sensitive issue which has a lot of legal ramifications, I would recommend speaking with a legal professional from **Northwest Immigrant**

Rights Project or **Volunteer Advocates for Immigrant Justice**. Both organizations assist low income immigrants and refugees to maintain dignity, defend their human rights, and obtain legal status. Volunteer Advocates works with youth who are detained by **U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)**. Northwest Immigrant Rights Project works with all youth, including detained and non-detained. Neither one of them are associated with any government entity or USCIS which used to be called **Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)**. These organizations will not report you.

For more information visit www.lawyersforchildren.org/siteFiles/HB-Immigration/immigration.htm, www.ilrc.org/sijs.php, or www.immigrantchildren.org/SIJS.

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 continue working with you!

SIBLINGS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

have both of my sisters in my life, one for me to learn from and the other for me to teach. For me, it's a really big motivation. Without both of them I can't imagine how my life would be. The impact of siblings on a youth can be immeasurable and no youth in care should unwillingly be without their siblings.

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.

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!

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
 CITY/STATE/ZIP _____
 PHONE _____ EMAIL _____

For appropriate recognition, please write in the space above how you would like to be listed.

- Please do not include my name on published donor lists (check box).
- I prefer to receive my copy of the *Mockingbird Times* at the email address provided above.

My gift to help children, youth and families in foster care is (check box):

- \$1,000+ Protector
- \$500 - \$999 Champion
- \$250 - \$499 Advocate
- \$50 - \$249 Supporter
- \$25 - \$149 Contributor
- Other _____

Payment Options:

- Check (payable to The Mockingbird Society)
- Credit card: Visa MasterCard AMEX

Account Number: _____
 Expiration Date: _____
 Credit card billing address (if different than mailing address): _____

Signature: _____

- Please charge my credit card: One time Monthly Quarterly
- My employer will match my gift. Company Name: _____
 (Please enclose your matching gift form.)

So that we may recognize you for your gift, please write how you would like to be listed:

Please mail this completed form and your check to The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Avenue S, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

THANK YOU!

Anonymous; Patricia Baptista; Donna Barbrick; Bender; Sauveun Chim; Judy Conforti; Karen Cowgill; Bruce Cross; Janet Dwight; James and Lauriann Garland; Ann Giesel and Malcolm Jollie; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Karen and Fred Horvath; Loren Hostek; Elizabeth Upton and Rayburn Lewis; Donna and Bruce Lindseth; Wendy B. Marlowe, Ph.D.; Karina Martinez; Najja Morris; Charles Nordhoff; Dr. and Mrs. Pecora; Picket Fence Real Estate; Karen Pillar; Sarah Rafton; Vanitha S. Raman; Kelly Rickenbach; David Roberts; Jean Roberts; Alan Rothblatt and Sima Kahn; Ezzy Ramos Salazar; Suzanne Shawger; Elizabeth Strickland; Beverly Theofelis; Tip Top Creative; Patrick Tippy; Timothy Tomlinson; Alicia Tonasket; Mike and Erin Welch; Colleen White; William and Mary Little Foundation; Stuart Yarfitz

MEET OUR STAFF

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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 from across the country 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 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. No part of the *Mockingbird Times* may be reproduced without the written permission of *The Mockingbird Society*. All contents copyright ©2009, *The Mockingbird Society*.

Barriers To Connection BY ASHLIE LANIER



There are many barriers that prevent foster parents and youth from connecting. It seems as though foster parents are being trained not to get attached to the youth that come into their homes and foster youth are being taught not to connect with their foster parents. After talking to current foster youth, Alumni, and foster parents, psychological and systemic issues seem to be the cause of this barrier.

I interviewed a current foster mother who went through the foster parent and adoptive training. She says, "Although I was told not to become attached to my placement child, I show all the children that have ever come into my home love and appreciation. I also make sure they know that I am not trying to be their mother, I'm just an addition to their new support system. I think it is wrong for people to not get to know the child or inform them what's going on during this transition of their life no matter how many children come and stay or leave their family. There is no excuse." This current foster 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 term relationship with them, she started the adoption procedure.

I also interviewed a foster youth who informed me that his hostility towards the system came from his previous foster parents. 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 I would leave. 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 they 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, who they were to him now, and comfort him in their home, is his personal cause of hostility towards the system and, I'm sure, that of many others.

Looking at the systemic issues, 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 and a half years old. So when you are part of the system at that age and don't have a solid relationship with someone you trust, and you're going from home to home, of course there's going to be some hostility towards the system.

It goes the same way for foster parents. Those who have been foster parents a long time frequently have had many youth placed in their homes, often for very short periods of time. With youth coming in and going out of their lives, it is a psychological barrier that the youth will soon be leaving sooner or later so why get to know them? This prevents the foster parents from connecting with the youth.

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 parent is to be the temporary parent. It is much like babysitting: the child knows you are only there for a short amount of time but you are there to take care of them while the parents are unable to do so.

Streetchild: An Unpaved Passage BY JERRY BOBO



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 families, everything looked 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, Justin became a homeless youth. Other homeless youth became his new family and they automatically started looking out for little Justin as if he were their own little brother. They showed him the ins and outs of the rough streets of Seattle.

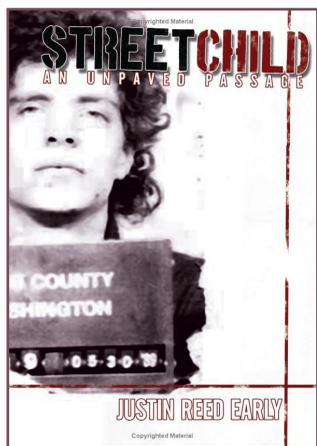
"I learned how to survive on my own. I saw a lot of shady things that no one should ever witness, but it was those types of situations that I excelled in that helped me deal with real life," Justin recalls. Even with all the situations he survived, he couldn't escape from getting involved in drugs. All of his new family (homeless youth) were doing drugs and peer pressure was all around so he started doing drugs to fit in with the crowd.

That mistake started to 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 but the money I got from hustling went directly towards drugs. 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 Francisco 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 let go of the past and every negative part of it, no matter how

painful it was going to be, and take responsibility for his own life. While staying at the facility, schooling became available, job opportunities arose, caring people showed him how to be a man, and his past life became exactly that: the past. Walden House gave Justin the help and resources he needed to continue his life after the streets.

There are many treatment centers in the State of Washington that provide similar resources as Walden House. However, with our economy the way it is, stories of recovery will be fewer if programs like Walden House are cut. A way for people to help is by making sure that state legislatures know how important these types of programs are. Everybody deserves a second chance at life no matter how much time it takes. Support is all one needs. If you would like to find out more information about these treatment centers, visit alcoholism.about.com/od/tx_wa/Washington_Treatment_Centers.htm. To purchase the book by Justin Reed Early visit www.streetchildmrmoir.com.



Native Children in the System BY LEONA BILL



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 that have been in 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 worker. It would take days for a call back. It got to the point where the group home staff would not leave messages anymore because our caseworkers would not answer.

These communication issues caused state and tribal caseworkers to become confused which affected my life. For example, when I or my caregivers had a question about placements or clothing, my caseworkers kept telling us to ask the other caseworker so I would get bounced back and forth between them. After I finally voiced my frustration, they decided that the tribal worker was the one who would handle my siblings and my case. The tribe determined that my sisters and I were bad examples, and therefore, since we were about to turn 18, they decided to no longer help us. We were thus left to our own devices. Many other youth in my situation have had similar or worse experiences.

Recently, two Native American boys died while in the foster care system. One was just a toddler about 20 months old and the other boy was only 15 years old.^{1,2} The teenager, **Robley Carr**, kept moving from one home to the next. He and his siblings were even placed in a home where they were horribly abused. **Child Protective Services (CPS)** was called repeatedly on his foster dad throughout the time the boy

stayed there however he was not removed from the home. In 2003, the **Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)** was found negligent in his case and settled by paying a \$5 million judgment. Yet Robley still was placed in another abusive home where he eventually passed away from taking some of his foster dad's methadone pills that were left out on the table.¹

The other child, **Devon Miller**, was just an infant and was also placed in a home that was not safe. Devon's caregivers were his family who had a criminal history. Devon was beaten to death while in this placement with his relatives.² It's sad to say that people ignored these terrible situations. With Devon's case, there was miscommunication between the caseworkers and the **Yakima Nation Tribal Court**. In Robley's case, he was not being heard despite a large number of CPS calls alleging drug abuse, lack of food and

clothing, the electricity being shut off, and filthy living quarters. His death could have been avoided.¹

These children's incidents 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. In Yakima, DSHS looked over all their cases and have had to move some kids out of their current situations and placed them in other foster homes. Background checks were run again as well as home visits.

All my experiences that I have been through have created the person I am today. I want to thank all the staff that helped me when I asked them to. It is sad that we lost two children in this world and it shouldn't happen again. Miscommunication can cause a lot more than we think!

¹ seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2008529306_dshs17m.html

² www.spokesmanreview.com/breaking/story.asp?ID=14404

Message from Julio Carranza, President of MBS Board of Directors and an Alumnus of Foster Care



Our country recently witnessed an historical election of a symbolic leader championing unity, hope and change. In a much more humble election, our Board of Directors of The Mockingbird Society (MBS) recently elected a new President to help steward the organization forward into its next chapter of development and growth. From orphan to advocate, I'm lucky enough to have been selected to this role and take on the challenges MBS faces in this tough economic time.

Like so many of the youth MBS serves, I share a personal background of overcoming abuse and neglect. As an infant, I was adopted out of Aguascalientes, Mexico from a destitute woman who survived by making tortillas. Sadly, my Mexican-American adoptive family was horrifically violent and abusive leading me to hospitalization and placement under the state's care in California and again in Idaho. By the age of 12, I was permanently placed in foster care, by the age of 14 my adoptive parents terminated their parental rights, and at the age of 18, I aged out of care with no family and a dubious future.

My childhood was very real but certainly not the worse that happens to children throughout this state or the U.S. Yet I was drawn to MBS because it has a real way of touching the lives of children who

are in, or who carry the effects of, being placed in foster care. For me, I was reached through an issue of the *Mockingbird Times* while I was in law school. As I read it, I realized that I was not alone in my horrific experiences of suffering abuse or growing up alone in foster care. The Mockingbird Society provided a beacon of light during a very difficult time in my life and I hope to continue shining that light for our most vulnerable children to ensure that my experience will never be repeated in another child's life.

I can personally attest, as a first generation everything, that so many of our foster children have the dream, the courage and will to succeed despite the barriers and circumstances they have endured or will have to overcome in pursuing a promising future. They just need our help, like every child does. Under my watch, MBS will continue to support **Jim Theofelis** and MBS staff in empowering foster children throughout this state with its innovative **Youth Lead** programs and the **Mockingbird Network**, maintaining moral accountability with the **Mockingbird Family Model**, and expanding public advocacy efforts for foster care reform. We have a solemn obligation under the laws of Washington and a higher authority to these children. We hope you will support MBS in our efforts to raise our most vulnerable children in a world class foster care system.

My Anger Issues

ROSIE 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

EBONY DIXON

While the red and golden delicious
crispness of nature lingers within my senses.
I awaken. The dawn of Autumn calls for my
witnessing. With vision wide open. I admire.
Leaves mixing 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 expressive 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.

Community Events**Region 2**

Feb 12th: NAACP Civil Rights Panel, South East Community Center.
Feb 12th: Youth Advocacy Day Training, Pierce County Alliance, 3-5 PM. Contact Nick at 253-502-5494 more information.
Feb 28th-Mar 1st: Dodge Ball Tournament, ages 16+. South East Community Center.

Region 3

Feb 6th & 7th: Valentines Day Ball, Girls 8-12 years old. An evening for daughters and their favorite father figures. Contact City of Mt Vernon Parks and Recreation for more information.

Region 4

Feb 21st: Black History Month Celebration and film, New Freeway Hall, 7:30 PM. FSPse-attle@mindspring.com.
1st Fridays, Speak On It Radio, KBCS 91.3 FM Community Radio, 6:30 PM. www.kbcs.fm

Region 5

Feb 16th Cocoa and conversation about Youth Advocacy Day, Mandolin Cafe, 2-4 PM.

"In order to be heard you must open wide, speak loud, and you will open their eyes. Your voice is the greatest weapon for change."

~ Jerry Bobo

Region 2 CHAPTER IN YAKIMA COUNTY BY CYNTHIA JONES

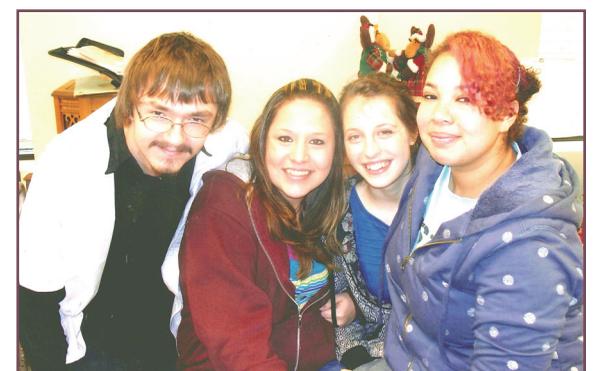
This month our meeting was mainly based around leadership, such as choosing proper leaders for the group, finding out the responsibilities of a leader, and going through how we are to choose them. We established that there will be two leaders from Yakima and two from the Tri-cities. The leadership roles 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 **Saundra** 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**.

**Region 3: Hey Mac CHAPTER IN SKAGIT COUNTY BY EVA ERVIN**

Our chapter met to discuss upcoming events and create signs to hold when marching in Olympia next month. We talked about our goals for working with a local retirement home and have solidified a date to volunteer with **Mountain Glen Retirement Community** in February. We will be playing Pictionary with the residents. Additionally, we voted on days and times to meet and decided to meet every second Friday of the month. We will also hold one event per month. Our most recent event was a video game party. We invited a local group home to join us to play video games and learn more about our chapter. It was great fun with karaoke, food, and games.

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 5 CHAPTER IN PIERCE COUNTY BY CASEY OVERTON**

This month, the Region 5 chapter meeting was very fun and empowering with the members learning who their legislators are. Afterwards, we made phone calls to set up meetings with them during Youth Advocacy Day on February 13. It was scary at first to call and set up a meeting with such important people but, after awhile, it was fun and everyone got the hang of it. We scheduled meetings with six different legislators. We are spreading the word about Youth Advocacy Day and are excited to join other youth from around the state. Next month is Youth Advocacy Day Training at **Pierce County Alliance** and we are all interested in learning more.

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!