Mockingbird Times

February 2008

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation
Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

Volume IX, Issue 2

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Status of the Candidates by Samuel Martin

Don’t forget to vote! The presidential primary for Washington State voters is February 19th.

Testimony to the Judiciary Committee on HB 3048

The following is a transcript of Jim Theofelis’s testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee on HB 3048: Legal Representation for Adolescents in Dependency Hearings, January 29, 2008.

Good Morning. For the record, my name is Jim Theofelis and I am the founder and Executive Director of The Mockingbird Society. We are an advocacy based organization with a mission of building a world class foster care system through collaboration, innovation, and advocacy.

First, I would like to thank you, Madame Chair, and Representative Goodman for sponsoring HB 3048 and to all the members of the committee for hearing this important bill.

HB 3048 is clearly a bill whose time has come. As I mentioned earlier, our mission statement is to build a world class foster care system for the nearly 10,000 children and adolescents in Washington’s system. One of the ways in which we define “world class” is the standard that kids in foster care receive the same level of care and support that kids from intact families receive. I can tell you, as a parent, I would never, and assume most parents would never, allow a child to set foot into a court room without adequate legal representation. It is my contention that once the state has gone into a family’s home and removed the children, the state then assumes a major responsibility as the parent. We have been very fortunate in that the Washington Legislature has viewed the responsibility of caring for kids in foster care as a bi-partisan issue. The Dependency Hearing is a very critical hearing in which major life decisions are made and we believe it is inappropriate and counter-therapeutic to put kids in this type of position without adequate legal support.

You can see from the bill that we have worked hard to introduce this concept in a measured fashion. HB 3048 would begin as a pilot project that includes training, a cap on the number of clients an attorney can have, and a study to determine the benefits of this proposal. We further scaled the proposal back to only include youth 12 and older. We believe we will see improved outcomes for the adolescents who participate in this program, including ensuring that court ordered services are indeed provided to kids and families, better educational outcomes, and increased placement stability.

In the words of J.K. Rowling: “We are all of us children; and we will profit by or pay for whatever they become.” I believe this bill is the right thing for our kids in foster care and, if given the opportunity, HB 3048 will clearly demonstrate its effectiveness. Again, I thank you for hearing HB 3048 and I encourage a “Do Pass” vote out of committee. Thank you.

HB 3048: Legal Representation for Adolescents in Dependency Hearings

Establishing a pilot project in two regions, this bill would provide youth 12 and older an attorney for their Dependency Hearings.

For more information, contact Jim Theofelis at (206) 323-4720.
Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

The 2008 Washington legislative session is underway. The Mockingbird Society is once again proud to be actively involved in training and supporting youth to participate in the legislative process. We are especially excited about this year’s Youth Advocacy Day on February 8. This is a day when youth who are typically left out of the civic engagement process are able to meet directly with state legislators and share their voice, experiences, and perspectives regarding public policy. The youth are directly involved in planning the day’s events, training other youth on salient legislative issues, and being powerful advocates while in Olympia.

While I believe this is a great experience for the young people who participate, I also believe it’s proven to be immensely beneficial to the legislators themselves. I know this because so many legislators have expressed the power that comes from listening to the young people themselves who have been in foster care and/or homeless.

On another note, The Mockingbird Society is experiencing another growth spurt. We are expanding our Youth LEAD program to truly be a state-wide program engaging youth in communities across the state. Additionally, our Mockingbird Family Model continues to receive high praise from caregivers and we have plans to replicate in a number of sites including some outside of Washington.

One very exciting development is what we are calling Prevention Models. Our plan is to implement the Mockingbird Family Model with birth parents in an effort to give them the support they need in order to prevent their children being placed in foster care. Another example of our Prevention Model is to support relatives who are raising a child in their family, e.g., grandparents, aunts and uncles, older siblings, etc. We believe that children will do better with a safe and healthy relative and we want to give these relatives the tangible supports they need in order to be able to keep their young relatives out of the foster care system.

Finally, I want to thank all of you who continue to provide financial support to our work and mission.

Jim Theofelis

jim@mokwingbird.org

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.

Sandra

Letter To The Editor

Hi Jim,

I just wanted to thank you again for the presentation that you gave at the grandparent group yesterday. I got so much from it. I had been really feeling the weight of parenting lately and your words have given me more strength to keep doing what I am doing. When you said thanks to us for doing the parenting because it is keeping more kids from having to go into the system, it really made me rethink a few things. Sometimes it gets hard and you feel like you don’t know if you can continue but with people like you, it can make a difference.

Thank you!

Sandra

Thank you for your contribution.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITYSTATEZIP
PHONE EMAIL

Enclosed, please find my check made payable to The Mockingbird Society in the amount of (please note amount on appropriate line):

$1,000 + Protector $250 - $500 Advocate $50 - $250 Supporter $25 Contributor

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 any published donor lists.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes for foster care, while advocating with decision-makers for system reform. All contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation.

The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper produced and published 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 50,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and in “Real Change”, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and mission 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 ©2008, The Mockingbird Society.

Meet the Staff: Rhonda Smith

My name is Rhonda Smith. I am 19 years old. I’m from all over Washington. I was born in Seattle. I moved to Port Orchard when I was three. From 11 through 13 I stayed all over Kitsap County. I moved to another county after that. Around the age of 13. When I was 16, I moved to Snoqualmie. Around the age of 17, I moved to Burien. Since I turned 18, I’ve been staying all over Seattle. I currently live in the Seattle Central District. I am a senior in high school. I attend an interagency school. I also go to Seattle Central Community College. I love music and hang out with my friends. Writing is something I’ve wanted to do forever.

I’ve been in the system basically my whole life. I got taken away from my birth parents at birth because my mom and dad were both into drugs. I got adopted when I was three years old. That didn’t work out for very long, I got taken out of that home for abuse and my behavior. I moved out of there when I was 11 years old. I started acting out when I was around 10. My first time in juvenile detention was about a week after my 11th birthday. I hated it, but I couldn’t stop going. Every time I’ve been locked up it was for assaults. The day I left first foster home I went to was the worst. It was the day before Christmas Eve, in a house I’ve never been in my life, with someone who took me in and I had never met them in my life. It was all just scary and I hated that.

I started getting into more trouble in and out of homes and schools and had to leave Kitsap County because there weren’t any foster homes who would take me. So, I moved to Pierce County. Things did get a little better for a while. I moved in with a foster parent that was older and cared for the worst kids in the program. I lived with her for a little over a year. I left there because my behavior was getting worse. I always kept in contact with her, though.

One day at school, my old foster sister said that my recent foster mom lost her license. I guess there were some allegations about all types of abuse. I almost started crying. It was crazy because I had told myself that maybe when I started to control my anger she would let me come back, but that didn’t happen.

Everything went downhill from there. A couple of weeks after she lost her license she had a stroke. As soon as I found out, I went to the hospital. It was one of the most painful things I had ever seen. The woman who took me into her home and loved me like I was her own couldn’t talk or move. Months later I got arrested and spent 9 months in Echelon. When I was released I got sent to a group home and later got told that the foster mom who had the stroke had passed away. After I left Echo Glen, I decided I didn’t want to be in a place like that ever again. I’m going to change, I thought, and, sure enough, I did. I haven’t been in trouble with the law since then. I’ve just been working on myself.

I think the foster care system has its ups and downs. I experienced a lot of downs but being in over 50 placements will do that to you. I am proud to be part of the Youth LEAD program because I love to write and I know what foster kids go through from personal experience. If I could give back anything or to anyone, it would be to foster kids.

Rhonda Smith

The Mockingbird Society

2100 24th Ave South, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144

For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirddogs.org.
Movie Review: Martian Child by Kenneth Larson-Rettiger

Martian Child is a movie that stars John Cusack, Joan Cusack, and Bobby Colman. The plot in this movie isn’t that great, but the motive behind the movie is really hard to miss. Perhaps it’s the out of nowhere storyline, or maybe it’s the fact that this movie isn’t really based on anything, but truly, this movie is an inspiration.

The fact is, this movie probably isn’t going to be that appealing to people that haven’t experienced a lot of hardship in their life, but it really can move people that have had problems with their family. Perhaps it could even move people into thinking a little more about children in foster care because the child in the movie is in a foster home.

Children shouldn’t have to think that they are from Mars because no one wants them. I think that is a good point in this movie because the child pretends to be from Mars and although that is not what all children in foster care do, it’s not uncommon for a child to make up something about themselves since they don’t feel like they belong. In my opinion, this movie is a must see if you have been in foster care or are adopted because this movie really touches on those points.

Eating Disorders by Leona Bill

Eating disorders are more common among young adults and pre-teens. While they can affect both males and females, it’s most often girls who have eating disorders. Anorexia and bulimia are two types of eating disorders. Anorexia is characterized by emaciation caused by extreme eating behaviors like deliberate self-starvation. Bulimia is characterized by recurrent and frequent episodes of eating large amounts of food (binging) followed by purging behaviors such as vomiting and fasting. Anorexia and bulimia may share some of the same symptoms, for example the obsession with food, but the way the obsession is handled is very different. A person who has bulimia will eat a lot but may later vomit while a person with anorexia will eat only very small amounts of food if they eat at all. People with anorexia are worried about being fat. Even when a person with anorexia is dropping below the average weight for their age and height, they continue to obsess about gaining weight. An anorexic person may be thin and still losing weight but in their own eyes they see themselves differently. An anorexic person looking at their reflection doesn’t see how skinny they may be, they always see themselves as fat. A person with anorexia wants to lose weight and may over exercise to do it. A person with bulimia will binge eat then purge by such methods as taking laxatives or making themselves vomit. When they throw up, they do it after they finish eating. People with bulimia may be at or above their healthy weight, but may have tooth decay from vomiting. People with anorexia may have a problem with eating. People with bulimia may be at or above their healthy weight, but may have tooth decay from vomiting. People with anorexia may have a problem with eating. People with bulimia may be at or above their healthy weight, but may have tooth decay from vomiting.

Small Charity Gives Big To Foster Kids by Sandy Mann

In June of 2004, Owen Bunstine Sr. founded the NW Alliance For Foster Children, Inc. (NWAFFC) as a direct result of his personal experiences growing up in the foster care system. Seeing first hand how difficult it was to be in foster care and finally finding the family that I was looking for. I cried at this movie because of the similarities that the title character experiences and the experiences of my life. One of the characters, Dennis, had a line that blew me away. He asks why parents leave if you’re a good kid; if they truly loved you, why do they leave. I used to wonder this, too, when I was younger. I hated when people would tell me that I was so smart and that my birth parents were so lucky to have a child like me. When I asked, “If I am so smart and likeable why did they get rid of me?” they replied that they didn’t know. Once again, someone else didn’t take that extra second to think about me.

This movie really helps you get the answers that you are looking for about your birth parents and about why, if you’re truly as good a child as people say, someone would want to get rid of you. Also, it reminds you that you’re just a child and you really have no control over the actions of your parents, such as divorce or them abandoning you. If you need a little re-minder of these things, or you just want to go back to a really good movie, I would recommend Martian Child because it is a movie that will really make you think.

Photo Gallery

Senior Youth Representatives Andrea Riden and Samuel Martin lead the Life Advocacy 101 training.

Youth Representatives Kenneth Larson-Rettiger and Jessica Garcia learn how to advocate for themselves.

Foster Youth Need You

Hundreds of children in our communities are in desperate need of a safe home.

Please call Foster Our Future at 1-866-958-KIDS

Foster Our Future is a contractor with Washington State Children’s Administration. An experienced foster parent will answer your questions and mentor you through the foster licensing process.

“Some children need a home for a day, others will need a family forever.”

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Mockingbird Times, February 2008
**Without a Family**
*Emma M Cummings*

I believe that when I went to treatment, it didn’t help as much as I thought. My problem is that I keep failing and failing. I went to a clean and sober house, but it just got too hard for me because I had to do so many things that didn’t seem to help with my situation. I felt over-watched and mistrusted like no one believed that I wasn’t going to use or had faith in me.

I was put in a situation I couldn’t handle and I began to fall way back, hanging around new people who I didn’t drink with before but who basically do the same things as I did with my old using friends. I feel like I’m in a situation that is so hard and difficult, and I can’t get away from it. But now, I finally realize something: It’s me I keep running from. I’m not accepting change and not wanting to change.

I feel as though I’m distant from all my good friends and the people who love, care about, and respect me. I’m becoming a person who doesn’t care about life. I’m just going with the flow, hanging with random guys, putting myself in risky situations and not caring about myself. I had to leave the place where I was living because I didn’t come back when I was supposed to and I had relapsed. When I returned, I didn’t lie. I’m honest so I admitted I relapsed. They told me that I knew the rules and could no longer stay there.

I really don’t want to be a person with no future, in and out of jails. I want to be back on track and not fall down. A part of me doesn’t want to use but another part says, “Yes, I’m in a messed up position so I might as well.” Before I got into treatment, I was blessed by my higher power with so many things. I was still with the person I am in love with and he stayed and supported me. I got paid to go into treatment by The Mockingbird Society, which was such a blessing. I had tears of joy. The Mockingbird Society supports me so much and they don’t give up on me. They tell me not to give up on myself which keeps my hopes up higher. I don’t want to give up on myself. I have come so far but I feel like I can’t get out of the situation I’m in. The truth is, though, that I can. I have to put those things in my life which I want in it. They say you are who you hang around and I believe that is so. Right now, most of the people I hang around are gang affiliated or drug dealers or on drugs and they feel miserable and don’t care about themselves and don’t want to go to college or have plans. I don’t want that for myself. When I’m around these people, I’m unhappy, I feel stressed, I feel judged behind my back, and I feel used. I feel as though, in the end, I have no friends, just myself and God. I have faith in my higher power, but not enough to change.

I don’t have a heart or mind. I don’t care about anything but getting my drugs. I don’t want to be like that, that’s not who I am and I don’t want to destroy the good me. I don’t want this lifestyle of hating and deceiving anymore. I’m going to let everyone who I think are my friends go and change my ways. It’s the only way I can help myself. I can’t give up on me. I’m going to stop going to the clubs and change everything. I’m going to college. I’m going to find a nighttime job and keep working here at The Mockingbird Society, go to support meetings and change everything. I’m going to respect myself and I’m going to put myself in risky situations and not give up on myself which keeps my faith up higher, but not enough to change.

I’m going to respect myself and I’m going to put myself in risky situations and not give up on myself which keeps my faith up higher, but not enough to change.

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**Creative Corner**

**Spent the Nyte**
*Mikal Haunted*

I caught a glimpse of shadows, moving like spiders. I take a deep breath, then phantom coldly. I am the city, the nyte life. Is the day against me? Or do I long for the cloak-of-darkness beneath the sky? I stand open handed. I talk to the rain. The call of the wild. The after-hour king. Running from the sun. Hiding from the shadows. If they find me, tell her not to cry for me. For it keeps me up at nyte. That’s all. While some dance under bright lights. I sing about how I spend the night.

**This Is Who I Am**
*Rhonda Smith*

This is who I am, I don’t need to hide
This is who I am, no more tears to cry
This is who I am, I know I will rise
This who I am, I stand tall with pride
This is who I am, ready to let go of the past
This is who I am, I will never be last again
This is who I am, I’ve made it through the pain
This is who I am, my life is no longer a game
This is who I am, I’m getting stronger every day
This is who I am, successful at everything I do
This is who I am, real and improved
This is who I am, ready to face the world
This is who I am, shining like a pearl
This is who I am, not ready to give up
This is who I am, letting you all know what’s up
THIS IS WHO I AM

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**Changing for the Better** by Jessica Garcia

I don’t have a heart or mind. I don’t care about anything but getting my drugs. I don’t want to be like that, that’s not who I am and I don’t want to destroy the good me. I don’t want this lifestyle of hating and deceiving anymore. I’m going to let everyone who I think are my friends go and change my ways. It’s the only way I can help myself. I can’t give up on me. I’m going to stop going to the clubs and change everything. I’m going to college. I’m going to find a nighttime job and keep working here at The Mockingbird Society.

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**The Mockingbird Society’s Youth LEAD Program Presents**

**LIFE ADVOCACY 101**

Learn how to be your OWN best advocate in all areas of your life. Participate in activities that will give you the skills you need to “make things happen” for your personal success!

**Receive your own personal Life Advocacy 101 TOOL!**

Open to all youth and young adults ages 14 to 23.

Contact us to today to schedule your FREE Life Advocacy 101 Training for your group or organization!

Contact Sam at sam_mockingbird@yahoo.com or Naja at najia@mockingbirdsociety.org for more information and details.