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Mockingbird Times
February 2010

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

The New DSHS Leadership by Jerry Bobo

On January 14th, Mockingbird Network Representatives had the opportunity to meet with Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus and Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson, both of the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Combined, these women have over 50 years of experience working in child welfare.

Before coming to Washington, Denise Revels Robinson served as the Executive policy advisor for the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. One of her many accomplishments was as Director of the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare, a state run county child welfare system where she helped safely reduce the number of children in foster care from 6,800 to a low number of 2,600 in just six years. This was done by focusing on reunifying children with their families in 70 percent of cases. 30 percent were adopted within 24 months of entering foster care...At the University of Minnesota she was a part of the faculty for the School of Social Work. As a leader in the child welfare system, Robinson has made an impact within her state and now is bringing that leadership to the State of Washington. In October 2009 she was appointed to her position by Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus.

Susan N. Dreyfus was a resident of Wisconsin before being appointed to the position of DSHS Secretary in May 2009. She has held many different positions that were involved with the child welfare system including being a Vice President for Strategy with Rogers Behavioral Health System, Inc., the largest nonprofit behavioral health provider in Wisconsin. Before Rogers, she was the Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of necessary, including child welfare practice, system design and management, contracting, policy, and financing on both state and federal levels. As Administrator of Children and Family Services in the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, Susan led many state reform efforts. In all of the positions held by Secretary Dreyfus we see one common goal: improving the child welfare system to better serve vulnerable children and adults.

Washington State DSHS is in the hands of two women that take their jobs very seriously, not because it is required, but because they are passionate about their work. “Throughout my career, I have been committed to improving the lives of vulnerable children and adults and their families,” says Dreyfus. That is a dedication that can truly be appreciated.

Youth representatives from The Mockingbird Network met with Secretary Susan N. Dreyfus and Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson to discuss the future of DSHS.

Constructing Villages by Ian Grant

It takes a village to raise a child. Or so we’ve been told, often enough that repeating it here probably doesn’t go unheeded by some of you. But what of the youth without villages; the youth that have been pushed out of their village, or were never born into one? What of the youth that lack not only villages but homes? How do we build a community around vulnerable youth to protect and nurture them as they grow into adulthood?

There are a lot of social service programs in Seattle, but the majority of services for homeless youth are concentrated in the University District. YouthCare, a large agency that provides services including housing, education, life skills, employment and employment training, counseling, and basic needs like food and showers, makes its home there; as do many smaller agencies like Teen Fed (a free dinner program for homeless youth), SYM (Street Youth Ministries, a drop-in center that also provides life skills and case management), and SEA (Seattle Education Access, an agency that provides scholarships and educational assistance).

One of the problems that any homeless youth or former foster youth faces is having to deal with several different agencies to get the services they need to achieve their goals. Because each agency has its specialty, youth are often stuck between many well-meaning organizations, many with mandatory classes to attend and meetings that sometimes conflict. How do agencies help eliminate these barriers so that the youth they serve can get the help they need?

In social services, you hear the term “wrap-around services” a lot. Briefly, providing wrap-around services means that you give youth everything that they need: basics like food, shelter, and clothing; case management; education support; job training—everything that they require to get their life back together and accomplish their goals. It’s an ideal; obviously it’s incredibly hard to do everything for an individual youth, but there are agencies that come very close. YouthCare, for example, prides itself on providing wrap-around services to its clients. It runs a continual of care, from street outreach teams that distribute health and hygiene supplies to youth on the street; to a large drop-in center that contains an alternative high school, counselors and case managers, employment programs, and meals, in addition to many other services; to a network of shelters and transitional housing programs for youth in various stages of development. Because it does so much, YouthCare is big; it owns several buildings around downtown Seattle and North Seattle, and was worth about $10.8 million in 2007.

Obviously, every agency cannot be that big. One of the ways the many small agencies in and around the University District is through the University District Service Providers Alliance (UDSP). UDSP is an alliance of service providers in the University District. Member agencies include 45th Street Youth Clinic, a free clinic for homeless youth; ROOTS (Rising Out Of The Shadows), an emergency shelter, and Teen Fed, mentioned above. Services you can get under the UDSP umbrella include health care, case management, meals, hygiene, clothing, bus tickets (including SYM’s “runaway railroad”), a program that provides Greyhound tickets for youth who have run far away from home (or were displaced for other reasons) and wish to return, an emergency shelter, scholarships, help with school, and many others. That comes very close to wrap-around services and most of the agencies under UDSP refer to agencies outside UDSP for things which UDSP doesn’t provide.

UDSP itself is comparatively small. All UDSP member agencies are completely autonomous. UDSP provides a way for those agencies to share information to better help the people they serve and keep each other abreast of developments in the often turbulent University District.

These are two very different models, each with their own advantages and disadvantages, each striving toward the same goal: to protect, serve, and nurture the most vulnerable of our youth on their rocky, perilous journey toward adulthood and self-sufficiency. I would encourage anyone who is interested in finding out more about these programs and the people they serve to take a look for yourself at YouthCare online at www.youthcare.org, and the UDSP at www.udsp.org. We need to remember that homeless youth are often alumni of care, and foster children are often thrust into homelessness when they reach majority, and that helping one group will help the other. We are, after all, all in this together.

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)
Washington State joins most other states across the country in trying to balance a budget that is short on revenue—short to the tune of 2.6 billion dollars in the case of the Evergreen State. The Mockingbird Society is greatly concerned about the governor’s proposed budget and the numerous programs that are reduced or eliminated in the child welfare system. In particular, we have prioritized housing programs for youth under 18 and over 18 targeting those youth who are currently in foster care or aging out. Staying alive over and over what Grandma knew all along is that those youth who have safe housing have much better outcomes than those who end up homeless and street-involved. In 1990, The HOPE Act was created by the Washington State Legislature to ensure that we protect youth and develop programs that reduce the number of teenagers on the streets. The Governor’s proposed budget cuts 44% of the funding for Responsible Living Skills (RLSP) beds and $32/200 out of the HOPE Centers. HOPE Centers provide 30 day emergency shelter for youth ages 13-18 that are living on the streets and/or are homeless. Many of the youth are dependents of the state. The RLSP provides older dependent youth, who have experienced multiple foster home changes, with stable housing environments that focus on the skills necessary to exit foster care and transition successfully to adulthood. Both programs help keep kids safe and off the streets.

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS and ask that they oppose the cuts to the HOPE and RLSP programs that the governor included in her budget. Take 5-15 minutes to do your part to ensure we do not balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable teenagers!

DON’T KNOW HOW TO CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS?
Visit www.leg.wa.gov and click “Find your legislator” on the left hand side. If you don’t know who your legislators are, enter your address in the search field. You can contact your legislator by email or phone using the contact information provided. Don’t be shy—your legislators need to hear from you!

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Thank You!
Casey Family Programs; Derrick Redricks; Heather Riley; Cody Schmidt; Trinity Catholic Family Services; Reynelda Solitaire; Lynn Welton

Conserving Resources and Honoring Your Preferences

In an effort to increase awareness of the Mockingbird Times—and the voice of its contributing writers, youth and alumni of care—we plan to begin publishing a more robust online edition in 2010. This also will allow us to conserve resources and reduce costs. So, watch for regular updates on our progress. We hope to be “live” by mid-year. We’ll be checking in with you, our loyal readers, in the near future to learn more about your preferences.

Thank you for your support.

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. A father and daughter duo, Jem and Scout, meets 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 foster children, our underprivileged children and youth are 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 building a world-class foster care system. In gratitude for your support, we would like to send you a monthly e-version of the Mockingbird Times.

NAME
ADDRESS
CITY/STATE/ZIP
PHONE

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

☐ Please do not include my name on published donor lists (check box)

☐ Yes! I would like to receive a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times (email address required above)

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

☐ $1,000+ Protector
☐ $500 - $999 Champion
☐ $250 - $499 Advocate
☐ $50 - $249 Supporter
☐ $25 - $49 Contributor
☐ Other

Payment Options:

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Account Number:

Expiration Date:

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Signature:

☐ Please charge my credit card:

☐ One time

☐ Monthly

☐ Quarterly

☐ My employer will match my gift. (Please enclose your matching gift form) Company Name:

Other:

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

Homeless Shelters Necessary

Having homeless shelters is important in Seattle and any other city with an abundant homeless population. In Seattle, alone, there are at least 20 shelters and/or organizations that support the homeless. There are shelters that are only for men, only for women, and there are those that just serve youth, typically ages 13 to 21.

Shelters do not have the capacity to serve all of the homeless, so there has to be a way to decide who will be served. In pretty much all homeless shelters and services, resources have to be first come, first served basis. The person wanting shelter will have to get there in a timely fashion. If they don’t, they probably won’t have shelter for the night. In most shelters, you can stay for one night but then you have to get up in the morning and leave. So, if you’re homeless again, you must come back again the next evening.

Catalyst is a new one-of-a-kind program that is an in-between homes/transition housing shelter. The program is at Straley House which used to house a transitional housing program. Catalyst is an extended stay shelter where youth can stay up to 6 months and get help getting into a transitional living program or a permanent housing placement. Youths that live there agree that there should be more shelters like Catalyst because they provide more opportunities that youth need and help them to prepare for permanent or transitional housing. “Youth that live there agree that there should be more shelters like Catalyst because they provide more opportunities that youth need and help them to prepare for permanent or transitional housing.”

SAVE THE DATE!

Youth Advocacy Day is February 19th. Join other foster youth, alumni of foster care, and supporters in our legislative action. Some of our key agenda items are:

• Safe Housing and Support For Youth in Care: Save the HOPE in the HOPE Act
• Notification of the Right to Request Counsel in Dependency Proceedings

Please visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org for more information.

Meet Our Staff

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Operations Director Ros Ghan; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick; Finance Manager Catherine Lanham; Mockingbird Network Coordinator; Kara Sanders; Mockingbird Family Model (The MPF) Coordinator Amy Cooke; Administrative Coordinator Diana Clark; Administrative Assistant (AA) Lilana Davies; Mockingbird Network AA Melissa Morgan; The MPF AA Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson; Resource Specialists: Graham Pangborn, Georjena Ramirez Steed, Samantha Walls, Vivian St. James; Senior Network Representatives Ashlie Laniar, Jerry Bobo; Network Representatives Amanda Bevington, David Buck, Ian Grant, Diannahome Walker; Contributing Writers & Artists Nyaquou Chouoi, Katrina Dyer, Samantha Evans, Demarea Kirk, Asia Rose, Lulu, Sam Martin, Hunger Nelson, Alyson Guing, Volunteer Chrissie Jackson; Copy Editing and Layout Kelly Hawkins

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation devoting its efforts to 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 published 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 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 to the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youths 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 Society may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright ©2009, The Mockingbird Society.
Flux: Life After Foster Care is a book by that follows more than 100 alumni of foster care across the US and Canada throughout their time in the foster care system until they reach adulthood. The alumni in this book talk about their struggles, challenges, opportunities, and successes. This book is aimed to support young people in their emotional transition from foster care to adulthood. "FLUX: Life After Foster Care was written by foster care alumni from across the US and Canada for our younger brothers and sisters. The development and compilation of the book was led by [their] FLUX Management Team and sponsored by Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA). FCAA was established in 2004 with the support of Case Family Programs to advocate for the needs of youth in and alumni of foster care. "The mission of FCAA is to connect the alumni community and to transform theory and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from foster care." FCAA was formed.

FLUX: Life after Foster Care provides questions to help you think about your transition into adulthood. There are six different chapters in the book that talk about transition: Who Am I Now, Support System, Biological Family, Intimacy, and Parenting. These topics like this can really help young adults that are either in or have aged out of foster care.Personally I don’t like to read, but I enjoyed this book a lot because I could relate to it. I made it look at life differently. It’s interesting to read stories from other alumni that have experienced the same things that I have. The book is not just a book that shares a lot of different personal stories, but one that teaches young adults about real life experiences and how to deal with them in a healthy, mature way. I believe people who have experienced the foster system in some way are curious about the topics that are in this book.

In the State of Washington, there are a number of drop-in centers for young adults within urban areas. In January, The Mockingbird Network Representatives and I went to visit a few of them in King County. These places provide different types of resources to youth that have aged out of the foster care system, youth that are homeless, and youth that need another support system. I had the chance to speak with Emily Bandy at the University Family YMCA, and Gina, a teacher at the Orion Center. These are a few of the different drop-in centers that help you in the Seattle area. When we visited University Family YMCA, we met with Emily Bandy, and had a conversation about their program. The majority of drop-in centers are available for youth Monday through Thursday, but the YMCA is available for youth on the weekend as well. Emily told me how many youth visit the YMCA on the weekends. “On average, we serve up to 65 youth on Saturday and up to 55 on a Sunday. We help youth between the ages of 13 and 25, regardless of age, and we give services to the ages of 20 and 23.” I then asked her what types of resources are available at this YMCA location. “There is tons of stuff. We’ve got resources in this area. Job training, housing resources, general emergency, chemical dependency counselors, as well as food and shower facilities. We don’t have case management resource but can refer the youth.”

In order to get these supports, you have to research your options and find someone to help you apply.

The Orion Center, one of the youth drop in centers in the Seattle area, works with interagency schools to help youth complete their education. Working for The Mockingbird Society, I knew what the Orion had to offer youth, but my knowledge grew once I got the inside scoop from a teacher named Gina who works with 14 different interagency schools. An interagency school is a school that helps homeless youth, youth in transition, and youth that want a smaller class setting with a learning plan to fit their style. Gina works with students that have English as a second language, ESL, and bilingual students. Gina told me that her responsibilities as a teacher at the Orion center are, “to teach and support teachers with teaching youth how to read and write, and passing the WASE, which is the Washington Equivalency Diploma, or Diploma.” With this being a more casual environment than a traditional school, youth find it easier to understand what is being told. For example, the Orion offers the WASP and obtain a diploma, or earn a GED.

Gina explained to me how the credit system works. “The rules are the same as public or private schools. They are a little modified to fit with the interagency school here at the Orion Center. The classes are credited the same and the expectations are just a little different.” This is great information for those youth that are homeless, in transition, or just wanting a different pace for learning and getting an education. The good thing about drop-in centers is that they maintain close connections with one another. For example, if there were a homeless youth that was visiting the University Family YMCA and wanting to get into high school, the YMCA could refer them to the Orion Center. Or, if a youth was at the Orion Center on a Friday and wanted to come back on the weekend, they would be referred to the YMCA. Drop-in centers want to make sure that youth know they are there to help them, no matter what the youth’s situation is. If there were not drop-in centers, where would all the homeless youth, and youth in transition go for help?

Am I Homeless? by ASHLEY LANIER

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines homelessness as: "having no home or permanent place of residence." Here in Washington State, we classify homelessness in three different sections:

- **Section One**: an individual living outside or in a building not meant for human habitation or which they have no legal right to occupy. As well as living in an abandoned or derelict, or in a temporary housing program which includes a transitional and supportive housing program if habitation time limits to exist.

- **Section Two**: those living on the streets, temporarily living with family and friends, or "doubled-up" aka couch surfers.

- **Section Three**: chronically homeless. According to HUD (the Department of Housing and Urban Development), chronic homelessness is defined as having a disabling condition, having been homeless for a year or more, or having had at least six episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Statistics from 2007 Second Statewide Point in Time Count show that there were a total of 11,995 homeless individuals (not including families with children). 4,335 were in transitional programs, and 3,778 were in emergency programs. This is a 3% increase from homeless in households from 2006 to 2007. Within Region 4 King County, there were 7,902 homeless people, 5,680 sheltered, and 2,222 unsheltered. As a young adult (youth) you are classified as homeless if your living situation is determined to fit the Washington State definition of homelessness or the HUD's definition of chronic. Being able to understand what sort of homeless group you fall into and understanding what means, is really important when applying for special resources.

Like many youth who have experienced informal kinship care, my experience with homelessness is couch surfing. I stayed at different friend’s houses or my cousin’s houses for long as well as short periods of time. I never really knew anyone of the resources that were available to me because I also had to find resources from the state and my mother still has full custody of me there would be no available resources for me. Little did I know, there are a lot of resources that help youth in their situation as well as help with transitional living and rental assistance. In order to get these supports, you have to research your options and find someone to help you apply. Most of these places have someone available that can help you through the process if you don’t have a caseworker.

Previously this month The Mockingbird Network Representatives went to visit local drop-in centers and homeless shelters for young adults. I was pleased with all the hard work and dedication each program put into help youth in care. As far as eligibility goes, all programs pretty much had the same expectations. For starters, you need to be a young adult (youth). I learned that different programs have different age ranges, many end at 21 and many start after age 13.

Of course, depending on what resources you apply for you might have to meet some more requirements for that individual program. After speaking with various youth at the different centers, I was given a clear understanding that you have to have motivation to get things accomplished. For example, when dealing with caseworkers you have to check up on resources you apply for or other assistance that you need. One youth I spoke with said, “You can’t just wait around for them to tell you what’s going on you know? You have to be a bug-a-boo.” This statement makes sense if you want something done that affects your life it’s extremely important to advocate for yourself. I would like to give a special thanks to all the youth that let me shadow them and the places we visited: YouthCare’s Orion Center, Catalyst, Roots, and YMCA’s The Center. 

1. www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homeless
2. housing-information.us/housing/summary
On the Inside

Amas Rose Lui

On the outside, you all see is the smile
And on the inside, I cover up hurt
I cover it up myself
Because I do not want to acknowledge
The dark feelings
I do not want them to take over my life.
So I try to look past them
And I try to forget them
And I usually succeed.

I am scared
Of not being happy.
I am scared
To show hurt to my mom.
I am scared
To be in the dark.
To be overwhelmed with feelings of grief.

I just am so confused.
Am I really a fake?
No, I know that I am real.
I am just good at controlling my emotions
Because I am scared
To see what happens when I let go.
When I let go.

It’s hard to be happy
When faced with so much uncertainty
People say that this is the hardest age
I don’t know what it’s like for others
But I know what it is like for me.

Not knowing where I’m going to be in the next month.
Not knowing how my family will look the next day.
Not knowing who my friends are
Or if people enjoy my company.
I am so filled with doubt – it’s holding me back.

We Need Your Work!

We are in great need of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or with homelessness. If you want to be published in the Mockingbird Times, visit mockingbirdsoociety.org and select Mockingbird Times under The Mockingbird Network or contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at karo@mockingbirdsoociety.org. Note: If you have submitted something before that hasn’t been published, we need your submission agreement in order to print it. Please submit again via the web location listed above. Because of space constraints, shorter poems have a higher chance of being published.

Community Events

Region 2
Feb. 11: Annie, 7:30 PM, Capitol Theatre; (509) 853-8000.
Feb. 17: Harlem Globetrotters, 5:30 PM, SunDome; (509) 248-7160.
Region 6

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Region 1: UNITE! Chapter in Spokane County by Katrina Dyer
We had a New Year’s themed chapter meeting with tons of food and cupcakes to celebrate three birthdays in January. We discussed the legislative agenda for advocacy day, got prepared for what will happen then, and brainstormed two chants for when we walk around the capital. I will be going to Advocacy Day along with Onaeele Stewart and our Resource Specialist, Lauren. We were also able to look over the 2010 Leadership Summit agenda and make suggestions. We are so excited for Advocacy Day and look forward to going to Olympia!

Region 2: A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. Chapter in Yakima County by Alyssa Quaring Tammy spoke to us about what The Mockingbird Network has to offer in Region 2. She also talked about what she does at MBS and how she helps kids to not survive but also to thrive. Scott, a lawyer from Team Child talked to us about how he helps youth who go in and out of the juvenile system. Team Child helps teenagers not parents; they focus on us and what we need to be able to succeed in school. Scott’s job is to listen to us and help us fight for our safety. He doesn’t make choices for us but it is our right to have legal representation!

Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Sam Martin
Hey everyone! I have been elected the new Region 4 for Change Chapter Leader and Christina Koshney was selected for the quarterly position. I am very excited for the upcoming year and doing what I can to help develop and grow our chapter. This past meeting we got some very important things done. First we reviewed our Legislative Agenda and then discussed the upcoming Youth Advocacy Day. As a former Network Representative, I know the importance of Youth Advocacy Day and the impact it can have on the lives of youth throughout the state. Region 4 is getting prepared and ready to go. Be sure to join us for Youth Advocacy Day in Olympia February 19th!