It’s going to be a rough year for people who depend on state government to help meet their basic needs. Many essential services, including the state Basic Health program, community mental health programs, and the State Food Assistance Program, are missing from the proposed budget and aren’t likely to be restored. But these cuts are just the beginning. Even after taking the current cuts into account, the state still faces a budget shortfall of $5.6 billion for the 2011-2013 biennium. And foster youth, youth aging out, and homeless youth may be most at risk as we head into this legislative session.

Children’s Administration, the arm of DSHS that oversees foster care, is preparing to implement Phase I of HB 2140, the 2009 legislation which mandated that CA change the way it contracts with service providers. Specifically, HB 2140 mandates that CA build a mechanism for accountability into CA contracts with service providers; this takes the form of financial incentives and penalties when certain targeted performance measures (for example, the number of youth placed with their siblings) are met.

However, just as CA is preparing to make this historic shift, the State is heading into a legislative session where legislators will be desperate to cut anything that they can lay their hands on. The consensus among those close to the budget process seems to be that new revenue (taxes and fees) are going to have to be found to cover the additional costs of some of the more vulnerable populations. To make matters worse, the State is also facing a $5.6 billion budget shortfall for the 2011-2013 biennium. This has many people in this state that are promising for the state of Washington’s residents. There are tons of social services that support many people in this state that are on the “chopping block” for the upcoming legislative session. DSHS had to make 6.7% cuts across the board to balance out the budget. Children’s Administration (CA) which supervises the child welfare system has had to make cuts to the critical programs serving the youth in the system. Without the support of these programs, youth will be at an even greater disadvantage in this already imperfect system.

Many people have been hurt by the budget climate, but some of the more vulnerable populations include elderly people, disabled people, and of course youth and families in the child welfare system. When it comes to decisions about what programs would lose funding, there are no easy decisions. Safety and health were some of DSHS’s top priorities, but programs that keep children, youth and families safe are still in jeopardy.

With the budget in mind, The Mockingbird Network becomes even more important this year. We will be advocating for safe housing for youth aging out of foster care. The many stories of the youth that have benefitted from these housing programs don’t stress enough the devastation of what would happen if safe housing doesn’t get passed this session. With HB 1128/ SB 5245, youth will be able to stay in foster care until the age of 19, which isn’t nearly enough support, but it’s better than being put out on the streets on their 18th birthday.

Meanwhile, a victory for youth and alumni in the federal arena, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, may help safeguard housing for youth that age out of care. Fostering Connections provides a federal match for states that spend money to create housing alternatives for foster youth ages 18-21. In other words, they provide a 50% federal match for every dollar the state spends on housing for alumni. So, Rep. Mary Helen Roberts and Sen. Debbie Regala are sponsoring HB 1128/SB 5245 to allow the state to combine the Foster Connections to Success and Adolescent HIV Prevention program and allow the state to opt-in to the federal match. The upside is the program will be retained and serve twice as many youth up to the age of 21. But, at least this session, we might have to take what we can get. The alternative may be losing a program we know works, for taxpayers as well as for us.

As the contracting structure changes and the state faces this budget shortfall, older foster youth stand to lose a lot of what they’ve gained in the last few years. We need your help now more than ever to make sure that safe housing for foster youth is preserved, and that the state budget is not balanced on the backs of foster youth. CA has said that Phase I of the implementation of HB 2140 or Performance Based Contracting will not change “how young people aging out of care will be served by the child welfare system.” We have to hold them, and the rest of the state government, accountable to that promise.

For a long time, foster youth in this state have been running the “Red Queen’s race.” We’ve had to run faster and faster just to stay in the same place; just to preserve the programs that we currently have. There is nothing to suggest that this year will be any different; in fact, we will have to fight harder than ever, and we will still almost certainly lose some of the things we’ve gained over the past few years. One thing is certain—we will continue to be relentless in our pursuit of a world-class foster system.

Advocacy Day will Focus On Safe Housing by Diamonique Walker

This year’s budget is less than promising for the state of Washington’s residents. There are tons of social services that support many people in this state that are on the “chopping block” for the upcoming legislative session. DSHS had to make 6.7% cuts across the board to balance out the budget. Children’s Administration (CA) which supervises the child welfare system has had to make cuts to the critical programs serving the youth in the system. Without the support of these programs, youth will be at an even greater disadvantage in this already imperfect system.

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Another piece of legislation that the Network will be advocating for is increased safety in foster care by allowing unannounced visits to foster homes. Unannounced visits (HB 1697/ SB 5393) will make it so that foster parents cannot put on a show when they know that social workers or case managers are coming for a home visit. As a parent, I wouldn’t leave my child at a daycare that wouldn’t allow me to drop by at anytime, so to me, the same idea applies to this bill. This bill will make foster homes safer for youth by ensuring that they are in a safe and appropriate environment.

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Even though our economy is struggling, there are some things that are particularly critical to youth that we still need to get passed this legislative session. Without these crucial programs we will find it even harder for foster and homeless youth in this state to develop into healthy adults, stay off the streets, and be in safe homes. We go into the legislative session knowing the circumstances, but still hoping for the best outcomes. Having as many youth and community partners, at our Youth Advocacy Day, as possible will be a key in making the changes we want to see happen. The more people we have, the greater our chances of being heard will be.

Come join us for our Youth Advocacy Day on Friday, February 11th! Many of the youth in this state will come together in the Tivoli Fountain on the north lawn. For information on legislative trainings near you or check the community events section. Or for information about the event, please contact Kara Sanders at Kara@mockingbirdociety.org
Dear Friends,

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 $5.6 billion dollars. The proposed cuts to balance the budget will reduce state services to those most in need. 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. For the past ten years Mockingbird has been advocate for safe housing for youth under 18, and over 18 for youth aging-out. We have made progress, but now we are perilously close to going backward.

The Chapin Hall Mid-West Study and Washington State Institute for Public Policy study on programs for youth aging out demonstrate statistically—what you already know in your heart—young people who are housing insecure have much better outcomes than those who end up homeless and street-involved. The Mockingbird Society needs your help!

Please support HB 1128/SB 5245 which extends foster care to 19, allows us to opt-in to the Federal Fostering Connections Act, allows us to opt-in to the HOPE Act, and provide a safe home to youth to age 19. Please support retaining funding of The HOPE Act. Created in 1999 by the Washington State Legislature, it protects youth and provides Responsible Living Skills (RLSP) beds that reduce the number of children on the streets. Please support Street Youth Programs. Many of the youth are dependent of the state and end up homeless when they run away from a foster care placement. These programs are currently cut in the proposed budget. Please Support HB 1697/SB 5993 to help youth safer while in care. This best practice should be offered in our state and would allow that at least 10% of children in care receive at least one unannounced monthly visit per year by a DSHS social worker.

CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS and ask that they support Safe Housing to 19. Unannounced Visits and oppose cuts to the HOPE ACT/RLSP and Street Youth Programs included in the proposed 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.

Help us build a world-class foster care system.

If you are reading this and have a juvenile record, then this article is very important for your future. Most youth think that once you are released from the juvenile system, or even if you were arrested and did not go to jail, then those charges are automatically taken off of your criminal history. Well, not exactly. It is more difficult than that. I would advise anyone that has been charged as a juvenile to take charge of your life. You need to realize that your juvenile record could affect your adulthood.

Mike Felton, a law student from the University of Washington, is advocating for legislation that will help youth or adults that have had juvenile offenses overcome their past and move forward with their lives. According to the Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic, Washington is one of only nine states to allow unannounced access to juvenile records. Companies, such as credit screening agencies, take advantage of this access to the information to profit from clients. This means that data companies are taking a youth’s information, profited in a juvenile record, and reselling it to other agencies. This makes it extremely hard for youth to be able to get access to housing, employment, loans, school, and other opportunities without being turned down due to their past mistakes. Having a juvenile record should not hurt you for the rest of your life. It is time for youth to take advantage of this tool and be able to move on from this experience.

The Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic said that the Washington Court system currently allows public access to juvenile record in several ways.

• Public website, offering limited information about individual records
• In-person visits to the courthouse, offering full information about individual records
• Purchase Access
• Submission to service to (JS-Link, offering full information about individual records, or
• Bulk purchase, offering full information about bundles of records

Currently anyone in Washington state is able to get access to your juvenile record and to share that information. The UW law students want to hold companies accountable and make it illegitimate to distribute private juvenile records to for-profit companies. They know it may take time to change the law, but are hopeful that there are enough caring adults who believe that youth should have a right to a second chance.

If SB 5598 is passed, it will prohibit the sale and distribution of juvenile records to private data-base companies, limit public access to juvenile records, and, in the process, give the population the law grants them, and create an enforcement mechanism to penalize companies and individuals that disseminate private information about rehabilitated youth.

In my opinion, every youth that has had problems with law enforcement should worry about who we let companies judge or deny access to housing and jobs? Clearly young adults need to provide for themselves, but how can you begin to accomplish that goal if you are haunted by a juvenile record? These kinds of obstacles make young adults want to give up. And, if they continue to do what they know best—on the streets, that leads to being in and out of jail, and not much of a future.

It can take months to have your record sealed. And, even after you have gone through the process, it may take even longer before it is visibly taken off of your record. So I advise anyone that has had their juvenile record officially sealed, to keep proof of it, so you can provide evidence if any question comes up. For more information about SB 5598 Contact Child and Youth Legislative Advocacy Clinic [University of Washington School of Law delridealtime@gmail.com | 206.685.8420]

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 decisive 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 Society is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth salaries of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $8.50 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 production of over 25,000 copies delivered to over 2,500 unique homes. By entering your name in the “submit” box you are agreeing to have your submission reviewed by Youthnet staff. Please use the word “submit” in your subject line.
Support Safe Housing – HB 1128/SB 5245 by TERRILL ROSSETI

According to The Chaplin Hall Midwest Study on the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, participants in transitional housing programs have more positive outcomes including: graduating from high school or receiving a GED and attending college. Also they are less likely to become homeless, engage in criminal behavior, or become par- ents at an early age.

This year, Washington State has a great op- portunity to continue the Foster Care 21 and Independent Youth Housing Programs, and ensure that we provide safe housing for youth up to the age of 19. The bill known as HB 1128/SB 5245 will serve as many youth as currently are served under the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth House- ing Program. How? This legislation will allow the state to fund the program with ex- isting resources - no new money - and gain up to a 50% federal match to meet this basic human need - one that many youth rely on, I was able to interview people that have ben- efited from youth housing options. The peo- ple I interviewed have had diverse personal backgrounds. Some of them are currently in the Foster Care to 21 Program and others are returning to their families of origin. All of them have spent a good amount of time in either foster or kinship care.

I asked, “How does this bill directly affect you, Why is safe housing and bills that sup- port individuals with disabilities important to you?” Their responses were emotional and important. These programs save lives. One youth said, “It gives me a place to stay and keeps me off the streets and allows me to pursue my goals and dreams.” Another youth told me that, “…if you’re in a foster home and turn 18 you are no longer considered a ward of the state, and the kids in his house that are under the age of 18 have priority to beds.” Youth who don’t get access to these critical programs can end up on the streets.

We need your support to ensure we keep safe housing opportunities for youth up to the age of 19 and over 18. Whether you are a caring adult or youth or alumni of foster care, join on February 18th for Your Child’s Advocacy Day at the Capitol Campus in Olympia. We will stand up and speak out for proposed legis- lation that will directly affect youth that are currently receiving services through foster care. If you can’t make it, you can do some- thing as little as emailing or calling the legis- lator and let them know that you support this bill. The bill that I wrote about is HB 1128/SB 5245, and that is a bill that will need to pass so that youth don’t end up on the streets or incarcerated and become another victim of society, so they too can strive without having to worry about a roof over their heads when they get out of foster care. With this bill Washington citizens will con- tinue to save money and improve outcomes by offering youth a chance to capitalize on the opportunity to remain in foster care. This program is expected to serve twice as many youth as are currently served under the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth House- ing Program. How? This legislation will allow the state to fund the program with existing resources-no new money and gain up to a 50% federal match to meet this basic human need that many youth rely on.

The Power of the Arc by DEBINA CRUZ

The Arc of King County is an affiliated chapter of The Arc of the United States. The focus of The Arc is helping the families of individuals with developmental disabilities. The Arc is aware that many of these individuals are also diagnosed with one or more development- al disabilities. Developmental disabilities are conditions that occur prior to the age of 18 and are projected to last through an individual’s life- time. The Arc provides support to the individu- als, and the family of the individuals, through the development and coordination of services and resources. The Arc is there to help them work on the streets or incarcerated and become another victim of society, so they too can strive without having to worry about a roof over their heads when they get out of foster care. With this bill Washington citizens will continue to save money and improve outcomes by offering youth a chance to capitalize on the opportunity to remain in foster care. This program is expected to serve twice as many youth as are currently served under the Foster Care to 21 and Independent Youth Housing Program. How? This legislation will allow the state to fund the program with existing resources-no new money and gain up to a 50% federal match to meet this basic human need that many youth rely on.

Veronica Guzman, a native of Colombia, has a heart and passion for helping individuals that have developmental disabilities. Veronica’s heart is as big as her soul is; as far as she can remember, Veronica has had a heart and passion for helping individuals with developmental disabilities. Veronica grew up in Colombia who are at a disad- vantage in life due to their developmental dis- abilities and lack of support for people with this type of disability. Verónica has 3 cousins like Khadijah, Verónica’s driving passion stems from watching other people that live with developmental disabilities. Verónica also hit me with the heartbreaking fact that there are few government/public pro- grams in Colombia to help developmentally disabled individuals. After thorough- shattering my heart with such sad informa- tion, she melted it away by letting me know the very encouraging story of Verónica’s dream. She personally chose to enter this field in order to help people with developmental disabilities. Verónica’s journey was partially from having family members with developmental disabilities. Verónica was able to interview people that have been affected by developmental disabilities. It gives me a place to stay and keeps me off the streets or incarcerated and become another victim of society, so they too can strive without having to worry about a roof over their heads when they get out of foster care. Verónica’s heart is as big as her soul is; as far as she can remember.

As Congress and state legisla- tors begin their 2011 work, or- ganizations that serve homeless youth across the nation are working hard to keep youth off the streets and in school, help those who are under the age of 18 have priority to beds. Youth who don’t get access to these critical programs can end up on the streets.

In Washington State it is homeless youth who are most likely to be waiting along with many vulnerable populations. As of right now it appears that Hope Beds will be reduced, and street youth programs such as Rosie’s Place, Ori- ent Center and Crosswalks could be eliminated altogether. But as I try to find hard statistics and information on this, I find that this is something we will all have to talk about in our personal perspective, as one who is dedicated to fighting for homeless youth issues, it’s easy for me to believe that everyone actually cares about what homeless youth services hold about a street youth at the centering edge of a knife. It is also hard for me to believe that the state can do this since many of the youth who end up in shelters are dependent on the state and have run away from a place- ment. If things go south for the youth who are homeless or youth who are in prison, and we will see a rise in homelessness, criminal activity, and worse.

The Importance of Having a Mentor by CAMERON WILLIAMS

Many youth in and out of foster care struggle with a range of social and academic problems. These problems often occur when a youth lacks a positive role model or has poor communication with their parent or guardian. Well I’m here to tell youth that having a mentor can really work to improve things and work out the struggle.

What is a mentor? To me a mentor is a wise and trusted counselor or teacher who gives advice and support. As a 7th grade student, I spoke with Walter Washington. He is a men- tor at Mentoring Children of Promise and he has been a mentor for 2 years. He is a core mentor, Corey Young, who is a Resource Specialist from YMAC OF Greater Seattle. They both have seen how lives can be changed through the power of mentorship. They both said mentorship has the potential to improve a youth’s self esteem, and give them guidance and personal support. Have stressors in their life, they give advice, not to discipline the youth.

I also interviewed a youth (who will remain anonymous) and asked him about the impor- tance of mentors. I asked him whether it was helpful to have a mentor. He said, “Growing up is a lot harder without a mentor.” He went on to say, “Without a mentor, I would make stupid mistakes and lacked awareness, that’s good just asking for a mentor and it was easier to get through school.”

In my web research I found the following sites: www.helphfordkids.org/hero_page; and www.100blackmen.org. Homeless. Some of those sites talked about empowerment, saying, “A mentor can give you encouragement. A mentor can help you reduce mistakes. A mentor can help you eliminate your weaknesses. And, a mentor can bring out the best in you.”

Personally, finding a mentor made all the dif- ference. There have been plenty of times in my life that I made mistakes, and I didn’t always have a strong connection with my foster parent or guardian. Sometimes, I would feel like there was nobody I could talk about my struggles with. But when I finally had a mentor, I was less depressed because they are not feeling loved or appreciated. They tend to just quit on life or don’t communicate with their parent or guard- ian because they feel as if there’s no understand- ing. But when I finally tried a mentoring pro- gram, I realized that mentors aren’t there to give you help or advice to solve your problems. It is just the opposite. They don’t act like a parent or a coach. They don’t try to be your best friend. They are not, they DO focus on establishing a bond, a feeling of attachment, a sense of equality, and a mutual enjoyment of shared time.

The main reason for my article is to show youth that there are many important reasons on hav- ing a mentor. A mentor can help you make a difference in your own life, by reaching out to people that want to help you. It’s your life; a mentor is just a guide to success!
Mockingbird Times, February 2011

Creative Corner

My Life the Nightmare
By Dearmen

It started three o’clock
March 26th I had a good life
Everybody was happy-go-lucky
But June first
Three o’clock
Rolled around and
My nightmare began
I began to go insane
I thought I was going to murder
Somebody
I had to get away
I didn’t know how
I just knew I had
too

Happy New Year to all regions! ACTFIRST hopes that your holiday season was awesome and that you’re ready to take on 2011! Saturday January 22nd Brenda and I will be flying to Seattle to attend the State Leadership Council. We will be getting the Advocacy Day Agenda and learning how to do the Legislative Training for Region 2. Saturday the 29th we are having a chapter meeting and we will discuss what we want to do for Advocacy Day and what was said during the SLC. We will also be getting our 2011 calendar updated.

News From The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Without safe housing I would be one of the many foster youth who ended up homeless after graduating because they had nowhere to turn.”

~John Metzger (Region 6, Olympia)

The World is Coming Together
By Jasmin

You’re walking down the road
Looking for somewhere to go
Waiting for someone to walk by
And notice you wanting freedom and peace
While wild fires burn and oil in the gulf is hurting the animals
Homes are gone
Its dark out, not a light in sight
But wait the world is coming together.

Creative Corner

Region 1 (Spokane) UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone) by Kristina Thomason

In December, the Region 1 chapter went down to Riverfront Park and went ice skating! I know for me it was great getting to know everyone more and meet new people! We had 23 people total for our Mockingbird ice skating day! Sarah, Noah, and I are getting ready to go to our January State Leadership Council (formerly SAC) meeting and our next chapter meeting on January 24th. We are getting really excited for Advocacy Day in February; we have been observing kids that show leadership and a strong passion for Mockingbird to come along to help advocate! I’ve never been to Advocacy Day, so Sarah and Noah filled me in on how cool it is and how we can make change, and I can’t wait!!!

Region 2 (Yakima) A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. (Around Community Two Fostering Individual Rights Safely Together) by Brandy Bailey

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Region 3 (Everett) H.E.Y.M.A.C. (Hearing Every Youth Make a Change) by Garrett Nadeau

For the month of December region 3 HEYMAC conducted two trainings, Life Advocacy 101 and Know Your Rights. We had a special guest at our chapter meeting Representative John McCoy. We built gingerbread houses to give to a local homeless shelter in the Everett area. While Representative John McCoy was here we discussed our concerns about retaining safe housing for youth in care and the Fostering Connections Act to help fund the safe housing programs in the state budget. Over all it was a very productive meeting and we look forward to doing more for the next chapter meeting after the new year! Happy Holidays from Region 3 HEYMAC!

Region 4 (Seattle) Region 4 for Change by Christine Kohney, Chapter Leader

It’s a new year with a fresh start and room to grow! We started off our meeting with a crazy creative story that our region came up with as an ice breaker. From there it was very productive. Our three committees: Civic Engagement, Individual development, and Systems Change set the stage for the year to come with trainings, community activities, and ideas for 2011. We did a lot of brainstorming and collaborating as we planned. We are preparing for the upcoming Legislative Training on February 7th. Region 4 For Change is looking forward to this year’s Youth Advocacy Day, and the opportunities to work with more youth from the surrounding group homes and hub homes. We’re always looking to include more youth voices and leaders to bring fresh perspective, feel free to contact our Resource Specialist for more information.

Region 5 (Tacoma) Cour’ge (Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individualities Gaining Empowerment) by Tianna Oliver

At this month’s chapter meeting the main topic was the 2011 Youth Advocacy Day and the programs that are on the chopping block. Our main goal was to effectively inform our members of all the resources and advantages that would be lost if these programs were indeed cut. Splitting them into groups we each read a small section of a one pager of each program and explained to everyone in basic terms what it meant. We then answered questions and further explained what these programs offer for youth, and how even if it doesn’t apply to them personally that it’s still important to fight for the law because there are other youth and children who are going to need it in the future. The rest of this month is going to be dedicated to getting ready for Youth Advocacy Day, explaining how a bill becomes a law, going over the Legislative agenda, making appointments with Legislators and preparing the youth to testify. Our Legislative training will be February 9th at PCA.

Region 6 (Olympia) T.A.F.F.Y. (Truth and Action For Foster Youth) by Rosie Warren

Region 6 (“T.A.F.F.Y. – Truth and Action for Foster Youth”) has been busy. December began with our holiday party. Then we visited Haven House where we facilitated “Life Advocacy” training. This followed a “Your Rights, Your Life” training there in November. Region 6 also facilitated a “Culture of Foster Care” training there in November. Region 6 is looking forward to the State Leadership Council Meeting on the 22nd of January, committee hearings at the capitol, the “Legislative Advocacy Training” on the 1st of February at CYS, and last but not least Youth Advocacy Day on February 18th on Capital Campus in Olympia! See you there!