January 2006

Mockingbird Times

Recipient 2005 Angels in Adoption Award
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdtimes.org or call 206-332-KIDS (5437)

Volume VI, Issue 1

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Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

HB 2002

Misty
Lou Cook

It's a crazy world we live in, one where some people make more money than others, one where if you don't make enough money then you can not even afford to eat a loaf of bread, one where if you're a youth in foster care, you're penalized for getting your GED or High School Diploma. What else is insane in this world? If you're a youth in the foster care system in WA State, you lose all State support on your 18th birthday. Some 18th birthday present! Can you imagine? “Happy Birthday Bobby, now I hope you've gotten better everywhere you need together for your adult life, because you don’t have our support for food, shelter or clothes anymore, or any healthcare. Good luck and good bye Bobby!” Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, in the midst of discussing foster care youth dilemmas, told us that “less than 2% of foster care youth get a Bachelor’s Degree”. Foster care youth has been being punished for academic achievements. As soon as a youth in the foster care system earns their GED or High School Diploma here in WA State, they are cut off from WA State support and will no longer receive medical insurance or money for food, shelter and other basic needs. Many of us would like to change this ignorant policy that forces way too many youth out of their nest before they have even begun to fly. Instead of kicking them out before they’re ready, we should teach these young adults how to fly. House Bill 2002 (HB 2002) would help foster care youth achieve and soar to the greatest of heights, and support them like any proud parent would. Essentially, HB 2002 acknowledges that any youth who just graduated from High School or earned their GED still needs assistance and guidance un

The Foster Care Achievement Act

At the end of every year many people in our society think of a New Year’s resolution we want to achieve. How many of you have ever made a New Year’s resolution and stuck to it? Well I can be the first to admit that I have made many resolutions and forgot about them. When I was younger I did not quite understand the purpose. A New Year’s resolution is something you want to work on personally. It’s a goal that you set for your self. Not to please other people but to please yourself and knowing it can be done. Do you know the New Years? New Years started 4000 years ago. It was first observed in ancient Babylon. Back then they did not have a calendar so they celebrated New Year’s on March 23. This was a time of rebirth and a time to plant new crops. The Egyptians celebrate new years at the end of September. They celebrate at this time because it was the time the Nile River flooded and it was a good time to grow crops. The Romans also celebrated their new years in March but the new emperor wanted to add some changes to the calendar and decided to celebrate New Year’s Day on January 1. Ninety years later is when the Babylonians started celebrating New Year’s on March 25. This was a time of rebirth to preventing youth from having to sleep on a stranger's couch or under a bridge. Having a safe bed for abused foster care youth to stay at until they find a safe and healthy home is very basic and it works. Finally, in order to prevent youth who “age out” of the foster care system from being homeless, we have to support them. Most youth who are 18 and have just graduated from High School still heavily rely on parental support before and during college, and foster care youth are no different in this way. Statistics show a small percentage of incidences reported. According to King County’s website, half of the youth in homeless shelters throughout King County are ages 12, 13, 14 and 15 years old. The fact that there are over 500 youth who are 16 and 17 and homeless in King County is disgusting. We need to protect these vulnerable youth. The reasons that youth have resorted to running away to the streets vary widely, but statistics from King County’s website indicates that “physical abuse” and “emotional abuse” are the top reasons that youth have resorted to running away from home. The situation will become tax payers instead of financial re

What’s your New Year’s Resolution?

JaMiCa Henderson

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http://www.fridgedoor.info
http://adoptionworld.org
Happy New Year! The Mockingbird Society welcomes 2006 as the Year of Opportunity. The opportunity to strengthen the services and supports available to the children, youth and families involved in the foster care system. The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is set for replication and we are excited about working with our community partners to bring this promising practice to scale. I'm convinced that the MFM is a practical, cost-effective model that promotes increased stability for kids and families, allows siblings to remain together and offers quality and timely support to caregivers including respite care. Increasing stability in kid’s lives is paramount to improving their well being and permanency.

Our Youth LEAD programs (Mockingbird Times, Youth Speaker’s Panel and ASK-Y) will also continue to grow and be forum for youth from foster care and/or homelessness to express their views while developing their leadership, employment and literary skills. Despite the myth that “troubled youth don’t care” the young people from Youth LEAD continually demonstrate their passion and investment in creating a better world for themselves and others. The Mockingbird Society offers them the opportunity to participate in something meaningful which hopefully reminds them of their special meaning to all of us. Unlike many youth employment programs Youth LEAD does not operate on an internship model where time in the program is limited to a certain number of weeks. Youth LEAD operates on a business model which clearly states our goals, deadlines and the skills necessary to develop a product that is relevant and fundable. Last year the Mockingbird Society was supported by an average of $16,000 to over forty youth; twenty-two of which were hired as employees of the Mockingbird Society. We embrace the opportunity to teach youth how to fish rather than simply giving them the proverbial fish that keeps them stuck in the “client” role. At Mockingbird youth are employee’s, writers, public speakers, interviewers and a host of other positive roles.

I am hopeful that you will continue to support us in our work with children, youth and families and to join us in the opportunities that come from building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Mockingbird Society’s 3rd Annual Auction and Fundraiser:
We Believe We Can Fly
ORDER TICKETS NOW!
Thursday, March 30, 2006
6:30 pm
Wire, hord’oeuvres and dessert
Silent and live auction
Premiere of the Mockingbird Society documentary,
A Place to Sing
At the Broadway Performance Hall
1625 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122
Tickets are $35 and may be purchased in advance or at the door.

We are looking for articles, poetry, artwork and photographs from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be published in the Times, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at newspaper@mockingbirdsociety.org. For more info and to check us out, go to www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name
The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Miss Maudie in teaching his young son to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes. 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 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.

Thank You’s
Robert Blayney; Virginia Blayney; Kathryn Brooks; Washington Women’s Foundation; Camp SeaStar and Roz Owen; Lucinda Richmond; Robert and Deborah Fleming; Ms. Faith Ireland; Dr. Alan Rothblatt and Sima Kahn; Linda Mihalov; Deborah Fiscus; Dawa- nuda Pesica; Janet Dwight and Patrick Gompel; Elizabeth Strickland and Daniel Klepinger; James and Lauriann Garland; Howard Muntz and Barbara Goff; David Rawl- ings and Kathryn McGonigle; The Black Family; Kimberly Faucher, Diane, Kelsey and Darcey Gray; David and Shirley Allen; Douglas and Ann Ferguson; Kelly Jo and Christophe MacArthur; Charles Janeway

Darcie Gray; David and Shirley Allen; Douglas and Ann Ferguson; Kelly Jo and Christo- pher MacArthur; Charles Janeway

Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 240, Seattle WA 98144.

Sisters Larishica and Terasa have holiday meal
Dennis pondering new hat

About Us: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents involved in homelessness and foster care. 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 Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.50 and $8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to $25 per piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 40,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A. 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 2005 The Mockingbird Society.

Jim: I sat down to breakfast this morning and read the Dec. 2005 Mockingbird Times. I just wanted to tell you how impressed I am with the thoughtfulness and quality of writing in your publication. I was especially captivated by the lead article written by Jacob Harrison. It was compelling reading and allowed me to experience Washington DC from a very different perspective than my 60 year old point of view. That young man can write!

All the best,
Curt

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All the best,
Curt
FAFSA 101

Courtney Konietzko

If you are a new college student, it takes awhile to learn the ropes and the mountains of paperwork can seem daunting. Take a deep breath and remember it gets easier, once you fill out your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) you are on your way. Remember, now is the month to do it! Fill your FAFSA out in January every year in order to get the most money you can in order to go to college for the Fall ‘06-Summer ‘07 year. There is also money available for Spring and Summer of ‘06 on a case by case basis, so do not hesitate to apply even if you didn’t make the deadline. If you do not fill out your FAFSA in January, the money award you get to pay for classes and books will be significantly less and you might have to look at alternate sources of funding. It took me awhile to learn the ropes coming from a background of being self-supporting since I was 15. Being homeless, in foster care, or having previous experience with either can also serve you well by helping you qualify for certain scholarships.

Presentation from his book, Bud, Not Buddy (the story of a 10-year-old orphan who runs away from an abusive foster home in order to find his father) on Friday January 13th at 7pm downtown library. For more info go to www.spl.org

Get Your Hair Colored or Cut for Free! – Seven Hair Salon needs models for cuts and color every week M-F. Salon located in Bellevue. For more info call (206) 903-1299.

Free Web Design Class – Tuesday January 10 6-9 p.m. at the Lake Forest Park Towne Centre. Space is limited so call to reserve your spot. (206) 533-6700.

Show off your Photography Talents! – CLSP Productions is hosting a photo exhibition for anyone who wants to take part. There will be chances for outstanding photos to win prizes. For more info go to www.myspace.com/cssproductions

Screening of The High Cost of Low Price – movie about Wal-Mart’s practices. Thursday January 19th 6:30pm reception, 7pm screening at Planned Parenthood of Washington located on Madison at 20th Ave. For more info call (206) 632-8547.

Fremont Freedom Flicks – every Sunday at 7:30 p.m. (doors open at 7) at Visionary Studios located at 4128 Fremont Ave N. Admission by donation, suggested donation $5. but no one will be turned away due to the inability to pay. For more info go to http://www.weaponsofmassdistractionproject.org

HB 2002 CONTINUED from Page 1

sponsibilities of other tax payers. Invest in your own children and you will be taken care of in the future, because these children will grow up and run this nation one day, and they will lead it with the knowledge that we bestow on them. If we think about the future costs of not helping these youth, we’ll need to incorporate the costs for the increase of cops needed for patrolling the streets, the cost of the tax payers paying for hospital bills due to no health insurance or education for sustainable jobs and so many other unpredictable expenses. Tax payers will lose money, businesses will lose money, cities and counties will lose money, and we’ll need more teen feeds, drop-ins, shelters and staff to run these services. Ask yourself how much money that costs, then ask yourself how much the happiness and safety of a foster care child means to you, and I know that you will agree that we need HB 2002 to protect these children and young adults.

Due to the negligence of this State, in regards to it’s foster care young people and children, the counties and cities “jobs” are and have been to pick up “aged out” and runaway foster care youth from off the streets. Preventative measures like the HB 2002 are a sure-fire solution that works towards ending homelessness. Trust me. I know the kids on the streets, or at least I knew of them and their struggles before they died. I am speaking on behalf of the youth in the foster care system when I say that we need HB 2002 so that young people can lead healthy, happy and productive lives.

Walk-a-Mile a Success

Janica Henderson

On December 14th this year’s Walk-a-Mile program had it’s closing ceremony at the University of Washington. In this great program, a legislator gets matched up with a young person who is, or has been in, foster care. The idea of the program is for them to “walk a mile” in each other’s shoes. This gives them a chance to meet one on one. While the legislator is doing this activity, they have to live off the same income as the student has to live off of. The legislator must also spend one day with their student to see how they live their daily life and the student must do the same with the legislator.

At the closing ceremony, the legislators and participants were asked to explain the time they had together and what they liked about the program. All the pairs that spoke had great stories to tell. The legislators we excited to see how hard the young people worked throughout their life and still were accomplishing goals in their lives. The former foster youth who participated were excited the legislators took the time to do the program. They also spoke about seeing how hard it was to be a legislator. Both parties were happy to be involved in the program for the month and most still want to keep in touch with one another.

In all, this was a great program. If you don’t know what it’s like to be a foster kid or legislator then you should join Walk-a-Mile next year. If you’re interested and would like more information, you can call Sierra Rowe at 206 683-6979 or visit their website at www.walkamile.org

January Calendar of Events

Courtney Konietzko

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The Life and Death of Stanley “Tookie” Williams

Stan “Tookie” Williams was put to death December 13, 2005 at 12:36 p.m. after being on San Quentin’s death row for 16 years for murdering a family and an individual two weeks apart from each other. His death came after much debate and pleas from his supporters to save his life after he made a big transformation in prison that included writing books to help keep kids away from gangs. His trial and conviction ended after a last request for clemency from Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was denied. In 1971, Stan and a friend of his founded the Los Angeles Crips gang. In 1981 he was convicted of murdering four people during two robberies and sentenced to death row at San Quentin State Prison. Stan deeply regreted his gang involvement and had always maintained his innocence of these crimes. Before Tookie died, there were many people who had a lot to say about not killing him. People like rap artist such as Snoop Dogg (a Long Beach Cali- formia Crip) and music artist Pharell (who is not affiliated with gangs but had some really thoughtful things to say about Tookie before he was set to death). Snoop Dogg in a recent interview said “I’m afraid to label him Afraid to run away from him Afraid to save myself from him But once I do that I will be free.

December 21, 2005

Phil Gasper who nominated Tookie four times for the Nobel Peace Prize. Phil Gas- per says “Tookie should have clemency because he is a remarkable character who turned his life around without help from the authorities. He should also have clemency because no one should die if they can reduce gang violence.”

As Tookie was growing up, he was a very troubled child. He had so much anxi- ety inside him that he didn’t know what to do with, so he and some other friends of his started the Crips street gang. The Crips ended up being one of the largest gangs in the history of this country and made their way to almost every state. Tookie was tried and convicted of four cold blooded murders that he says he didn’t commit. Stanley has always claimed that he was in- nocent, but he was still sentenced to death row. Many people felt that Tookie had an unfair trial.

In the last 16 years of Tookie’s life in prison on death row, he wrote eight chil- dren books about staying out of gangs and one book about his life in prison. While writing his books he was nominated four times for the Nobel Peace Prize and a mov- ie was made about his life starring Jamie Foxx.

I feel that Tookie should have gotten clemency because he had an unfair trial and if he would have went back to court around 2000, I believe he would have only gotten 25 to life and would have gotten out years earlier. It was after the trial the prosecutor removed three African Americans from the jury. I also feel that it was not fair for him to die and not have a fair chance to fight for his life and that his life wasn’t spared because he was a black man in prison that succeeded in changing his life and became a successful book writer and childrens love to read his books. I think Arnold Schwarzenegger (the governor of California) did not like the fact that he could have all that influence in prison and felt that he should die. Now that Tookie is dead, I hope that his soul rests in peace and the Crips and other fellow people around the world will miss you and we love you Stan Tookie Williams.