Mockingbird Family Model Replication Update

Misty Lou Cook

The Mockingbird Society is very excited to announce that it will be replicating its Mockingbird Family Model (MMF) throughout this nation, expanding with Regions 2 and 3 in Washington State (North and Central Washington), while Washington D.C. is proudly replicating the MMF in two different regions as well. This means that there are six MMFs throughout this nation, each with up to ten families, with plans for Region 15-18 by the end of 2007. We are both excited and proud for Mockingbird Society and Jim Theofelis, Mockingbird’s founder and the creator designee of this revolutionary foster care model. The Mockingbird Society has been receiving a lot of attention for this effective foster and kinship care model. Creative solutions, nurturing, extended family communities, reliable, fun respite care and a motto of “thriving, not just surviving” are some of the key features.

The Mockingbird Society first opened its doors in 1997. Their primary goal is to keep siblings together, provide stability and increase the chances of foster children’s success. It has received outstanding positive outcomes from the University of Washington’s NW Institute for Children and Families (NICF). The MMF helps prevent a myriad of youth from ever feeling alone and in a place where they feel they have to escape. Reductions in feelings of isolation and multiple placements are just some of the results of this incredible foster care model.

According to the NICF’s 2005 evaluation of the MMF, because of the Mockingbird Family Model and its innovative solutions, “siblings did remain together,...parents reported feeling supported in their roles as foster parents and caregivers were very satisfied with the availability and quality of respite care...[and] parents of the children who received tutoring reported that the children showed improved attention in class and increased concentration...” Since the end of October, with “15 families that resulted in improved grades in the majority of classes”.

The evaluation results will be posted on our website and reviewed in future issues of the Mockingbird Times. Jim Theofelis and the Mockingbird Society are currently working on creating what is being called “prevention models” in King County for families who are at-risk for entering foster care. We are also expanding the MMF to include non-licensed kinship care, such as grandparents or other secure and safe family members who wish to be included in the MMF. The MMF Prevention Models will support biological families while reducing the number of children and youth who enter foster care in the first place.

Mockingbird Society was awarded a federal grant in 2003, with the help of Washington State Senator Patty Murray, to test-pilot this remarkably innovative new foster care model. The MMF is based on the concept that unconditional care, support, community-building, and planned respite care will lead to fewer placements, stability, and safety for all children. The MMF is based upon the philosophy of “taking good care of the people who take good care of the youth”, which means that there are plenty of opportunities for our foster children and the other in Southeast D.C. serving 8 families.”

Mockingbird is a tangible, practical solution to many of the problems young people, foster parents and case managers experience everywhere. It is truly an amazing and effective new foster care model that is both nurturing and motivating for young people and families who participate.

The MMF was replicated in four different sites in 2006, with the help of an anonymous donor, and the results of the 2006 evaluation will be released in late January of 2007. I expect nothing but great and satisfactory results.

A New Year

Jessica Garcia

What are you planning for your New Year’s resolution? What exactly is a New Year’s resolution? Well, I’m going to explain it to you. For a while now, people all over the world do take time to do this for the New Year. They figure out what their plan is going to be to accomplish new goals that they set for the upcoming year.

The first thing that I do is sit down and grab some paper or not if you are good at doing this type of thing in your head. What you want to list is things that you want to change or do. Some examples are attending college, getting a place and/or car of your own, getting on track, staying clean, losing weight, etc.

Then what you want to do is to figure out steps that will help you reach your goal. It might be working extra hard to get to get another job so you can get the car or apartment. Doing extra homework, studying hard, or getting a tutor to get through college. You might decide to join a narcotics anonymous (NA) meeting or go see a drug and alcohol counselor to help with staying clean. If your goal is to lose weight you might make a plan to get to the gym to work out more and eat healthier.

To meet your goals for this New Year, you have to put your hand to it and stick with it. You have to remember that it is something that you really want and do whatever is reasonable to make it happen! All your resolutions might not be as easy as getting something small, but a huge life-changing goal that seems impossible to accomplish. Always know that by following your steps and a lot of determination and positive thoughts it will come with time and dedication.

I have a lot that I want to accomplish so I’ll go through the steps that I’m going to get them done. 1. I want to pass my GED, get through one year of college and complete Drivers Ed. without failure. What I’m going to do is work extra hard and when I need help with something then I’m going to ask questions, get a tutor when I need one, be on time to school and call when I need to miss, do great on my tests, study extra hard and take notes, follow instructions. 2. I want to get my own car and apartment. So, what I need to do is get my GED, prepare my resume, get my records sealed and begin searching for a good job. See, that seems easy, but the hard part is following through with your goals. Remember, life is hard, and I know for those of you who are inappetant; it’ll come with time and hard work.

So try this out. Have clear goals and a good plan for your resolutions! I hope that it works for you and I’ll let you know how it’s going for me. Keep at it because I promise it will be worth it in the end. Happy New Year to you all!

Below are some sites that you can visit on the web to help you with your resolutions: http://frugaliving.about.com/cs/specialreading/g/1230053.htm
http://www.lifeshack.org/articles/uncategorized/new-year%20%94s-resolutions-and-decifer-thinking.html
Letter from the Editor

Happy New Year!
The Mockingbird Society is pleased to announce that Representative Mary Helen Roberts is sponsoring proposed legislation to Extend Medicaid to 21 for foster youth aging out of the foster care system. This will ensure that all youth who are legal dependents of the State of Washington on their 18th birthday will have health care coverage, including mental health, until their 21st birthday; Senator Rosa Franklin has agreed to sponsor the same bill in the Senate.

This is an exciting opportunity to continue all of our efforts to ensure that young people who leave foster care at age 18 do so with resources, opportunities, and hope. The research is very clear that young people aging out of foster care are at extremely high risk for homelessness, incarceration, unemployment and early parenting. We will need your help in convincing legislators that this is a solid piece of public policy that is morally and fiscally sound.

Youth Advocacy Day is February 9th and we need a strong turnout at the Capitol. Youth Advocacy Day is always a day filled with inspiration, meaning and fun! Please do join us and bring young people from your school, organization, or make it a family day. We will be sure to let you know when the legislative hearings are scheduled and we will keep you informed of other critical dates when you could assist us in getting this legislation passed into law.

If you are not on the ASK-Y list serve contact Lauren at 206-323-5437 or lauren@mockingbirdsociety.org. She will add you to the list to ensure you receive all of the updates during the legislative session. Please do join us in this important effort as Mockingbird Society continues “...building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.”

RePLiCatioN, continued from page 1

I hope that you all share in the excitement at Mockingbird Society prepares to replicate the MFM in 2007. The MFM could be compared to a guardian angel, invisible, helpful and full of magic. It could potentially help so many underpaid case managers, struggling foster care youth and families. In my personal opinion, it should be replicated all over this nation and world, wherever children need safe, happy and reliable families, which is everywhere.

“The Mockingbird Model should improve support for foster parents, who do so much for our kids.” ~ WA D.C. CPSA Interim Director Uma Ahluwalia

(1) MFM Press Release – official script
(2) http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/pdf/jul05.pdf

Treehouse Referrals
Don’t forget to ask your social worker to make a new treehouse referral for 2007. All youth must have current referrals on file to receive any treehouse services this year.

Thank You’s
Anne McBride; Brooke Stout; Donald Jones; Silvana Brusel; Clearwire; Karen Cowgill; Erin & Mike Pugh; Nancy Speth and Shannon Reynolds; Katherine Cooper; Lynnea Manahan; Kaye Mathews; Beverly Cuevas & Tom Gill; Ron & Susan Fain; Barry Ess; Florence Marone; Martin & Alex Tobias Foundation; Felicia Cross; George & Bev Theofelis; Betty Jean Wilsons; Patricia McDonald; Shirley & David Allen Foundation; Jennifer & Jeffery Redinger; Harvey & Hisako Nakaya; Elizabeth; Lucinda Richmond; Andrew & Jeanne Morse Stephens; Byron & Alice Lockwood Foundation; Gail Winkler; John & Shelby Hersman; Valerie Ramisch; Kathy Elias; Diane Coyne; Donna Mathus; The Black Family; Rhonda Berry; Wendy Marlowe; Keith Gormezano; Virginia Blayney; Kathryn Brooks; Susan Weiss; Chuck and Tracy Nordhoff; Samuel Smith; Joyce Schwalter; Joan Stewart; Chrisis Jackson; Stecker Foundation; Bruce Gross & Perkins Coie; Chris Marsh, Attorney; Fremont Rotary; University Sunrise Rotary; University Village Rotary; Seattle University; Alicea Clairborne & Seattle University; YMCA Young Adult Services.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of foster care, while advocating with decision makers for system reform. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.63 and $8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, 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 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 2006 The Mockingbird Society.

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We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation’s most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you’ll receive a monthly edition of The Mockingbird Times. Thank you for your contribution.

Extending Medicaid to Foster Care
Youth Aging Out of Care
Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y)

Proposal
Last year, 456 foster children “aged out” of Washington’s foster care system by reaching their 19th birthday without being adopted or reunited with their birth family. The vast majority of these youth will lose critical health care coverage at age 19, despite the fact that federal law allows Washington State to offer coverage to these youth until age 21. This proposal would take advantage of this federal option.

Significant Health Problems
Children in foster care often suffer from health problems greater than those of homeless or very poor children who live at home; as they grow older they are often at serious risk of health problems due to early neglect, prenatal drug exposure, and the results of conditions left untreated in the first three years of life. Mental health issues among foster youth persist into adulthood and rates of mental health problems among foster care alumni are significantly higher than those in the general population.

Few Other Opportunities for Health Insurance
Insurance through employment is rarely available for this population, as less than half of former foster youth (ages 20-33) are employed, and half of those employed were still earning wages equal to or below the federal poverty level. Yet a third of foster care alumni had no health insurance – double the national uninsured rate for people of similar ages.

A Growing Trend
Since 1999, federal law has given states the option to extend Medicaid to former foster youth. Currently, 12 states have adopted this expansion, including states as diverse as California, Mississippi, Indiana, Texas, and New Jersey.

A Small Cost with Future Savings
The lack of health care coverage for this population is not only unfair, it is likely that many young adults with working parents are covered into their 20s, but it is costly. Without medical support, former foster youth, who often have significant health care needs, may end up using costly services for primary care, such as emergency rooms, may elect not to receive medical treatment necessitating more expensive care later, and may also, end up in jail, public assistance, or living on the streets. The cost of Medicaid expansion would be shared evenly by the federal government and Washington State, covering hundreds of youth with significant federal financial support.

Fiscal Note
$07-09: $1.6 million GF-S/ $3.3 million total funds; 09-11: $4.6 million GF-S/ $9.5 million total funds

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Update Your Subscription
If you have recently moved, need to change the number of issues you receive or the address we are mailing the Mockingbird Times to needs to be corrected, please complete and mail the subscription request form found on page 2 so we can update our records.

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Mockingbird Times, January 2007
**Quer Youth in Foster Care**

**Raquel Granath**

Recently it was fortunate enough to watch a screening produced by LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning) Youth who were formerly in foster care. It was entitled “Breaking the Silence” and was a glimpse of what life is like for so many youth who find themselves outcasts based on their sexual orientation and/or gender preference. I later enjoyed it because it was so original. Each clip was made by the youth themselves and so each story was very personal and unique. All of the youth presented themselves as extremely talented. Their stories touched my heart, although their message was universal: something must be done about persecution in the foster care system.

One individual, who identified as a male, recalled how his aunt would beat him with no mercy because she thought he was “possessed by demons.” Another female who identified as a lesbian reminisced on how her grandmother wouldn’t allow her to sleep next to her sisters growing up because she feared her homosexual tendencies would rub off on them.

George’s entry into foster care begins at age three. His biological parents abandoned him, and he moves in with his aunt. The time that he spends there is filled with maltreatment, both physically and mentally, based on his sexual preference and gender identity. When he begins his school career, a teacher forces him to perform oral sex and then gives him $50 not to leave because social life was getting more appealing as the days went on.

Another example of the persecution of queer youth in the foster care system is Danielle, who realized at 11 years old she was attracted to the same gender. While in a foster home, she was forcibly sexually abused by her foster mother and misunderstood the way lesbians have sex and love each other. At first she only “came out” (as gay) all the way to her social worker, and identified as bisexual with her biological father. Her social worker told her to keep her orientation a secret, which she did, until she was 18 years old. When her older brother found out, he kicked her out of his house and told no one else in their family. Through the program California Youth Connection (CYC), the same one that funded this documentary, she was able to overcome her doubts and come all the way out as a person who identifies as LGBTQ.

Nicky is a queer woman of Asian ethnicity/ancestry. When she was in high school, she realized he was the face for scoring only 99% on a math quiz, so naturally her parents opposed her liking the same gender. She came out at the age of thirteen and was viciously beaten as a ritual because she was told that homosexuality “is an abomination” in the Buddhist religion. Subsequent to her coming out, she started to experience abuse stopped, whereas the emotional and verbal abuse doubled. She was tormented at school and in her group home, and it constantly gnawed at her self-worth. She was finally able to find affirmation in her fiance and now finds joy advocating for youth in schools.

Last but not least is Kevin who was biologically (or “originally”) born as a female, but identifies as a man in his life. Kevin says they had positive experience and is not bitter for the challenges he faced. He was always a tomboy growing up, and was rewarded by his ‘masculine’ behavior when he was young. When his social worker called him lesbian he didn’t understand, and when he was ridiculed in class, he lashed out and ended up getting expelled. As a result, Kevin received a new social worker who he thanks for the progress he later made campaigning all the way to Congress for Gay rights.

I recommend this video to all people who want a glimpse into the reality of life for teens with different gender, identities and sexual orientations. It is a powerful tool to take these stories as lessons and apply the message to the system and improve it. We must develop a system where every youth has a chance to be heard. After seeing the stories, you will understand that “the greatest thing you can do for a child who is questioning themselves, is to reach out a helping hand and ask, ‘is everything okay?’” If we take the steps to educating people, then we won’t be an ignorant society. We need to promote acceptance and understanding so that all people can feel that they belong.

To request a free copy of this DVD, please contact:

**Mockingbird Times, January 2007**

**My First College Experience**

**Samuel Martin**

Anything worth doing is not supposed to be easy. If I lived to learn, I have realized one of the hardest decisions of my life. My choice was to cut my high-school career short and move to college as a part of the Running Start program. This would make a dent in my social life, and move me into an environment that is a complete mystery. After contemplating the decision for about five months, I finally decided that my high-school experience wasn’t working out for me and I signed up for the program. On September 2006 I stepped into Seattle Central Community College for the first time.

This proved to be a whole new adventure and I was ready to explore. The reason I felt that it was time for me to move into the Running Start program was because I felt that I needed to move on with my life outside high-school. The “student life” was constantly frustrating. It’s not that I had a problem with anybody, but I felt that my maturity level was higher than most. I don’t want to hold myself on a pedestal, but I just felt like I had grown up a lot sooner than most people. Students were constantly disrupting the class and messing with substitute teachers. I feel like it’s something I could not handle, and was wasting my time. My personal beliefs are that every student (especially African Americans) need to take advantage of K-12 education only because there is too high a dropout rate in the African-American community. If everyone graduated from high-school, we would have a much greater chance of getting into colleges and universities and being more successful in life. At my school, I feel like people sometimes take for granted the opportunity that is given. At the same time, I did not want to leave because social life was getting more and more appealing as the days went on. However, I still knew I needed a different environment to learn in.

At the beginning of the quarter I was completely intimidated by the whole environment. I was afraid to raise my hand and literally thought I was not good enough to attend college. I felt I should not have been there. I was also having a hard time adjusting, so I continued to go to my high school after class, because I did not want to feel like I was missing out. After the first few weeks I started to get a little more comfortable. I continued to flinch when I raised my hand even when I knew the answer. But an old friend told me that “by perseverance the snail reached the ark” - Charles Haddon Spurgeon. I sat back and realized that if I did not have what it takes to continue to be here, I would not have gotten the opportunity. I was doing fine in my classes and I needed to stop doubting myself. I continued to work hard and strive for success.

Another thing that was difficult for me to handle was the fact that I had a ridiculous amount of freedom. In high school they called your house when you skipped, they sent home report cards, and they also sent home mid term progress reports if you were failing (don’t worry I was never failing). I will admit that I had a problem assuming the responsibility of going to class; it didn’t become a huge problem. It made me feel like I could just do whatever I wanted to do in the world. I had class from 8-11 and after that I was free until 3 which is when I had football practice until November. I began to see the pattern for self-destruction and I was in danger. So, instead of straying off the track, I buckled down and put myself to the test.

All in all I think that it was a great experience and a good start of my college career. I bet you are dying to know what my GPA was for the first quarter. I ended up getting 3.1 GPA. I was proud of my work. I learned a lot about myself, my education, and how things work at the college level. I honestly believe the first quarter is the hardest one, but then again I have only been through one. Well, I just started my second and it looks challenging, but I have developed some study habits and I now know what I need to do to continue with my success.

Mockingbird Celebrates the Season

Senior Representative Janica sharing ingredients for the perfect gingerbread house.

**I Found My Love: Photography**

**Melissa Stringer**

When I first started to take photo’s I thought it was just a hobby but then it started to become more to me. When I first started to like photography it was when I was on the ferry to go to Kingston in Edmonds. I had a 35mm throw away camera with me. There was a beautiful sunset on the way over, and I just picked up the camera and started to shoot the pictures. When I got the pictures back that is when I knew I had a gift.

However I am up about something I just pick up a camera and start shooting the camera and that’s when I feel most at peace with myself. I remember when I first went into the dark room. It felt as though all my problems just lifted off my shoulders and nothing mattered to me anymore. I know that this doesn’t make much sense to you but you have to feel it. The feeling of a camera in my hands is like holding my heart. When I take a picture I am putting everything that I have into it. Personally I think without photography in my life I wouldn’t be much at all. When I graduated from high school, my photography was the career I was going into. My grand told me to never give up hope and to keep on believing because I have talent.

I didn’t believe him because for the longest time I didn’t believe in myself at all. But when I took Youth in Focus that all changed. For once people got to see the work that I was capable of, which meant a lot. Since then I have never felt more confident in my photography is that this is what I want to do as a living not just a hobby. I just wanted to thank every single person that has ever had faith in me in my art work. If it wasn’t for you guys putting up with me, I wouldn’t have gotten this far.

**GET EDUCATED!**

Dynamic workshops for caregivers, middle school youth and high school students! Help with: WASL prep, study skills, college applications, post-graduation planning, tutoring and more.

Saturday, January 20, 10 AM - 2 PM
Technology Access Center
801 23rd Ave S, Seattle
Free lunch. Free childcare with reservation: Call Joan at (206) 691-2334.

For more information, please contact The Mockingbird Society at (206) 323-5437 or info@mockingbirdsociety.org.
Rain

I love the rain, the sound it makes... When I hear it my breath it takes To be under it feeling the raindrops touch my skin, To enjoy this lovely trance i’m in The way the raindrops run down my window slowly... Looking and watching the rain is so peaceful and holy, A kiss in the rain, so full of romance and purity, The hold and lock of the lips, a form of security... Just standing alone in the rain puts me in the mood of content, To just stand there for the utmost extent Not afraid to get sick, Not there to leave quick... I stand there for a reason, No matter the season I love the rain The way it washes away pain It is better to cry under the rain because no one can tell For us cannot see the tear drop that fell Away from us cheer Down onto the street Drifting away down the drain to the sewer Only one tear less and fewer I love the raindrops in my hair I just stand alone right there The rain is warm and welcoming, yes it’s true It helps me think things through Being in the rain or just admiring it from afar Learning that the rain is seeping into my invisible scar I love the rain For it does not let us be vain Just let it rain, rain on me As long as I am here longing and free...