The Mockingbird Society’s Youth Advocacy Day by Diamonique Walker

January 2010

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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The Mockingbird Times is switching to electronic! See below for details.

Mockingbird Times

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Volume XI, Issue I

The Mockingbird Society’s Youth Advocacy Day by Diamonique Walker

Recently it was announced that certain programs that help youth in foster care may be cut even without the Washington State 2010 budget. There are three programs in particular that are in serious danger: HOPE Center beds, Street Youth Outreach Services, and Educational Advocacy Coordinators. Youth without family support depend heavily on these programs. All three have been serving the State of Washington for at least ten years. In response, Jim Theofilis, Executive Director of The Mockingbird Society, wrote a letter to Governor Christine Gregoire expressing how important it is to save these programs from the 2010 budget cut. Shelter is just as important to homeless youth as it is to youth that are in intact homes. Shelter is necessary for everyone. Youth on the streets need shelter to stay warm and prevent exposure. A HOPE Center is a temporary residential facility where youth can stay for up to 30 days while being evaluated for possible placement, education, and treatment services, including family reconciliation if appropriate. This is a part of the HOPE Act passed in 1999. In Jim’s letter to the Governor, he states how important this program is. “This program provides emergency housing to adolescents who are legal dependents of Washington State as well as young people who are from families experiencing ‘family in conflict’ issues. The HOPE Center beds are the only beds that young people can ‘self refer’ to and they have been instrumental in giving young people a viable way to exit the streets and return to the foster care system, their families, and communities. Without the HOPE beds, programs across the state will be decreasing and even eliminating their availability to respond to our most vulnerable adolescents who want to return to services and family.” If given 30 days, youth have time to receive the help they need. The HOPE beds can connect youth too many different resources.

The Street Youth Outreach program promotes efforts by its grantees around the state to build relationships between street outreach workers and runaway, homeless, and street youth. This is another program that Jim wants to save from the 2010 budget cut, saying, “The Street Outreach program allows organizations across the state to ‘be on the front lines’ of the battle to save young lives from the predators that prey upon our most vulnerable teenagers. As you know, the media is full of recent stories of the growth of sexual exploitation of our most vulnerable teenagers. The predators who exploit our youth are organized and strategic about how and where they begin the grooming process for these youth. Eliminating the Street Youth Outreach will be good news to the predators who are the only ones who will benefit from elimination of this program.” This is the reality that homeless youth face every day. It is a struggle to stay out of the way of dangers; those struggles will increase with Street Outreach Programs being eliminated.

Concentrating on school work when you’re in the foster care system can be a hard task. Dealing with other problems that come with being in case takes your mind off school, making it hard to focus. In addition, many foster youth do not have caregivers who know how to access the services the youth needs to succeed. The Education Advocacy Program is there to help youth with those problems. For cases requiring intensive advocacy, coordinators will directly intervene to resolve the situation. Examples include school enrollment or placement crisis, school discipline issues, and accessing services such as Special Education. Jim feels strongly about this as well. “As we all know, youth being informed of the right to request a lawyer. We are also defending several programs from cuts in the 2010 state budget including street youth outreach services, HOPE Center beds, and reducing and even eliminating their availability to respond to our most vulnerable adolescents who want to return to services and family.” If given 30 days, youth have time to receive the help they need. The HOPE beds can connect youth too many different resources.

The 2010 Budget Cuts Making a Drastic Change by Jerry Bobo

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 to publish a more robust online edition in early 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” in the spring. 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.
Happy 2010! On behalf of the staff and Board of Directors at The Mockingbird Society, I want to wish each of you a very Happy New Year. Of course, the big news for those of us in Washington State is the beginning of the 2010 legislative session which begins January 11th. The session promises to be full of intensity, stress, and opportunity as the governor and legislature will grapple with a 2.6 billion dollar deficit in the state budget. As you may recall, last year’s legislature faced a nearly 9 billion dollar deficit so while 2.6 is much smaller than last year’s deficit, it is still staggering. During this time more than ever, advocates for the children, youth and families in the child welfare system are needed.

The Mockingbird Society will continue to have a strong presence in Olympia ensuring the voice and needs of children, youth and families are being heard. Given the current economic climate, our main agenda item will be to retain the quality programs and policies that have been adopted and proven effective. For example, we have made incredible progress over the past several years in providing safe housing for older adolescents in the foster care system, including those who have turned eighteen. I’m confident none of us want to balance the budget by returning to a practice of discharging 18 year-olds from the foster care system directly to the streets or homelessness. As a result of bipartisanship support from kids in foster care, we as a state have made tremendous progress in this area and The Mockingbird Society is committed to retaining this progress and continuing to advocate for funding for HOPE beds.

HOPE beds were established by the 1999 Homeless Youth Prevention/Protection and Education (HOPE) Act, which created two programs: HOPE Centers and Responsible Living Skills Programs (RLSPs). Hope Centers are places where youth can stay for up to thirty days while the Center connects them with placement, education, and treatment resources, and tries to reestablish contact with the youth’s parents. Responsible Living Skills Programs are long-term placement environments where youth can get the help they need to do well in school, find employment, and try to reopen lines of communication with their parents.

An interesting fact about the HOPE Centers is that the majority (over 60%) of the youth that are admitted to them don’t have any recent history of homelessness. HOPE Centers are a significant part of the front line in the battle against youth homelessness; they are the only program to which youth can self-refer (except for admission without a worker), and the services they provide prevent youth from falling further into homelessness. RLSPs, on the other hand, are there to help youth rebuild a life often already severely damaged by abuse and poverty. And they work; youth placed in an RLSP are more likely to be employed, more likely to pursue postsecondary education, and more likely to reestablish contact with the most vulnerable of our children.

One of the cuts that appear in Governor Christine Gregoire’s recommended supplemental 2010 budget is the elimination of state funding for HOPE beds. I invite each of you to SAVE THE DATE of February 19th for our annual Youth Advocacy Day in Olympia. It is a remarkable day to participate in the democratic process, cheer and advocate for the youth who participate, and to observe the work of The Mockingbird Society. Again, Happy New Year and let’s make it a great year!

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Thank you!
Hazelhurst Adams; Anonymous (5); Linda and Thomas Baker; Garvey Schubert Barer, On Behalf of Jim Kibble; Black Family Charitable Trust; Gerry Burnett; Belinda Butcher-Bell and Sam Bell; Paula Butzi; Casey Family Programs; Daniel Cequitella, Tacoma Bates Academy; Ricardo Chavez; Stephen and Arlene Cohen; Perkins Cove; Congregation Beth Shalom, Social Action Committee; Karen Cowgill; Trudy Davies; Frances Demarco; John and Jennifer Deviney; Eastside Community Member Engagement Team; Employee of General Dynamics; Penny and Patty Fewing; Vi Fran and Friends; Robert O. Gebula; General Dynamics OTS; Mr. and Mrs. Germani; Ann Giesel and Malcom Jollie; Makeba Greene; Jillian Gross; Dr. Wanda Hackett; JoAnn Herbert, in memory of June Herbert; John Holland; Server of Trainer Holt; Amy Marie Holt; Shellee Leger; Elena Lamont; Wendy Lane; Laura Leving; Eric Liu; Diane Lob; Shannon Loveland and Robert Arteaga; Yaffa Maritz; Mark and Cheryl Marshall; Sean Mears; Sofie and Alan Muller; Miles Otuopaa; In honor of Joseph Buck, PFC; and Tacoma Bates Academy; Noah and Sarah Porteous; Yvonne Raman; Lance and Cindy Richmond; Jeff Bred and Stephanie Garlict; Heather Riley; Juana Royster; Mark and Lisa Schneider; Mary Schroeder; Ellen Shaman; Sparrow Properties; P. Spence; The Stuart Foundation; Lucy Sullivan; Tamarack House & Services; Phoenix House; Youth Ambassadors; A Love That Heals; A Life That Mends; Sam and Barbara Thom; Meryl Thulean; Alicia Tonasket; U Village Tree of Winter Wishes participants; Vancouver ILS staff; Erin and Mike Welch; Gail Winberg; Matt Wittow.

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.

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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
Eight Hour Notification by David Buck

Domestic Violence by Amanda Bevington

Domestic Violence (DV) and emotional abuse are behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Partners may be married or not married; heterosexual, gay, or lesbian; living together, separated, or dating. These behaviors can be physical, sexual, or mental. According to domesticviolence.org, 2.5 million females experience some form of violence each year. In the United States, 1% of children and adolescents are sexually abused by an abusive partner or ex-partner. 20-50% of the female population of the world will become the victims of domestic violence.

The bill introduces a bill opening more homes to foster children and no longer available online. Other resources: www.childrensdefense.org, www.childrensdefense.org

"...75% of youth who engage with social services return to the families while 15% to 20% go to alternative housing situations and only 5% return to the streets..."

Every Child Deserves a Family Act by David Buck

A bill was recently introduced to Congress that may make it so more homes are available for youth in the foster care system. The bill is not only gaining a lot of attention from foster care advocates, but it is also receiving attention from GLBTQ rights organizations, as well as anti-gay organizations. According to opencongress.org, on October 15th 2009 Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), Chair of the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee, introduced H.R. 3827 – Every Child Deserves a Family act for the 111th United States Congress. The bill is designed to prohibit discrimination in adoption or foster care placements based on gender identity, or marital status. The idea behind the bill, according to Stark, is to increase adoption for foster care youth, many of whom have been removed from their homes because they are foster care placement centers that are allowed to blacklist adoptive parents based on, among other things, sexual orientation. "We get 52,000 kids a year in the foster care system and the work- fare system without permanent foster care or adoptive care, and the prospects of those children having a successful adult life are diminished greatly," Stark said. "These kids who even up in the criminal justice system, or end up homes." According to The Washington Blade, a highly acclaimed GLBT newspaper, if the bill passes it would greatly affect states like Utah, Florida, Idaho, Arizona, Nebraska, and Mississippi, as well as several private adoption agencies. The bill has sparked anger on both sides of the party line but, according to Stark, he remains hopeful. The bill would make available homes drop significantly. Cate Ulpeper, social worker and program manager of a transitional living house, said: "I just think if couples who are stable and are helping other doors based on this bill, then that is just another example of institutional discrimination that in the end will only be counterproductive and unfair to the children." Others are worried about the psychological effects such adoptions have on children. Many against the bill feel that youth adopted by homosexual and transgendered partners or even single-straight individuals are hazardous to youth’s emotional stability. One youth who was adopted by a lesbian couple, said, "As I got older, I found that I really didn’t care what people had to say about me or my family. If I am happy then that is all that matters." So far the bill sits quietly in Congress and isn’t expected to pick up speed until the next legislative quarter. Despite this, it is still getting a lot of attention amongst both pro- and anti-gay groups. As of now however, the Rights Campaign has expressed support for the bill as have many others. The bill is currently being co-sponsored by the Rep. Jesse Jackson (D-IIL-2) and Rep. Shelley Berkeley (D-NV-1) and others. The bill is currently in a legislative status, but will have more placements. Whether or not you agree with the bill, that is exactly what it will do. Foster care organizations and equal rights organizations support the bill. Some fundamentalist Christian organizations have threatened to shut their doors if this bill is signed into law. "[If] you want to make the children to make the right decision here; I hope this article helps you decide.

8 SAVE THE DATE: Youth Advocacy Day is February 19th. Join other foster youth, alumni of foster care and supporters in our legislative action date. Visit mockbingbirdsociety.org for more information.

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, The Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Miss Malouf in teaching his kids that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because “ ...Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.”

What if we created an organization, a community, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment that Atticus had for mockingbirds? Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to rest and sing.
**Creative Corner**

**Her Joy**

Rashunda Johnson

There is this girl who opens her heart to a noble man; what is it that she finds? A book that tells his affections for her, the key to his heart and the relationship filled with rubies of love that conquers their pain: She has always endured unstable relationships in her past: So she thinks, out loud: WHY is he so special?! She leaves no hesitation because words are not always her best judgment: Instead, she uses her five senses to outwit her vocabulary to make this set valuable, from how much her heart has broadcasted her love for him. Tears of joy is the center of compassion: The word that utmost defines herself as a woman of color: Friendship is their background: Touchy words are used as thoughts that strikes the deepest part of their emotions: A kiss holds the tale of love that erupts at every moment and/ or with homelessness. If you want to be published in the Mockingbird Network, visit mockingbirdociety.org and select Mockingbird Times under The Mockingbird Network or contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at kara@mockingbirdociety.org.

**Love**

Anna Gonzalez

Love is pure.
Love is kind.
I wish my mom gave me that.
Love is to nourish someone.
I wish this wouldn’t have happened if you made the wrong choice.
I “love” you mom and I don’t think I can hold this grudge longer, but I know you loved me but you never showed it.
Love is eternal and forever.

**The new year is in motion, lets not forget the past but embrace it, because memories will last.”**

~ Jerry Bobo

**Community Events**

**Region 1: UNITE! Chapter in Spokane County by Onalee Stewart**

UNITE will not have a chapter meeting in December, as our Resource Specialist is getting married this month! Congratulations Lauren and Levi! We had 16 people attend Thanksgiving dinner at Ginkerda- gers in downtown Spokane. We ate a lovely turkey dinner and had plenty of pumpkin pie to celebrate the holiday. We will be having a New Year’s Party Chapter Meeting on January 20th where we will celebrate January birthdays and prepare for Advocacy Day in Olympia. I will also be facilitating a Strategic Sharing workshop to help prepare for Advocacy Day.

**Region 2: A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. Chapter in Yakima County by Francesca Cantu and Tammie Soderburg**

December has been a refreshing month for Region 2. December 6th we watched the lighted parade in downtown Yakima and went on a safari to a cool interactive Christmas house. There we got out of the car and walked around and played with some of the cool decorations. We defiantly would like to thank Cherokee for showing us this really cool house. Our next event was even cooler! It was a very fun day. A lot of the youth got together and made gingerbread houses and holiday cards and we ate awesome Mexican food. Everyone seemed happy and everyone walked away with a prize! Cyndi and Isaiah won the gift certificates. It was the last meeting of the year so everyone is excited for the plans in 2010!

**Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Josie Tooney**

This month we went on a walking tour at Mountain Glen Retirement Center and saw many smiling faces as we traveled from room to room. We also finished three fleece blankets that we will be donating to children in need. Then we had a chapter meeting were we got to know Georgina who will be taking over as our new Resource Specialist. We will greatly miss Eva but we are looking forward to working with Georgina. It will be exciting to see how our chapter comes together once we start meeting in Everett where it will be easier for more people to join us. During our last meeting of the year, we had a gingerbread house-making party. It was very fun and festive.

**Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Georgrina Ramirez**

Region 4 had a fantastic chapter meeting. Everyone enjoyed a wonderful dinner and had a blast celebrating their one year anniversary and the holiday season. We started the meeting with a fun game of Would You Rather, State Advisory Council updates, and the development of the transition Team! Casey Trupin from Columbia Legal Services came in to talk about Adequate Legal Representation. Lastly, we ended our meeting with some seasonal fun! We made gingerbread houses and listened to some seasonal tunes. A great time was had by all. Come and check out the next chapter meeting January 11th, 2010 at 3 PM, at 2100 24th Ave in Seattle. We will talk about Youth Advocacy Day 2010!

**Region 5: Cour’Ige Chapter in Pierce County by DeMerea Kirk**

Last month we came up with a name for our chapter: Cour’Ige which stand for Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individualities Gaining Empowerment. Also, our region had a Communication in Action youth got gifts. New people came to the group to become involved with the Mockingbird Network. At our last State Advisory Council meeting we discussed issues that should be brought to the upcoming leadership summit. So, at our chapter meeting we asked our youth “Is making a law going to change what the youth are going through?” and “What other issues can we change for our upcoming summit in 2010?” Everyone have a safe and happy new year.

**Region 6: Chapter in Thurston County by Crystal Sharp**

On December 8th, Graham and I facilitated a Voice Development training with the Van- couver chapter. I felt everyone left with a better knowledge of how to share their stories in a manner that gets the point across effectively. Knowing how to share your story effec- tively also can help you advocate at the upcoming Advocacy Day on February 19th for surprise health and safety visits and adequate legal representation! If anyone in Region 6 would like to participate and speak at Advocacy Day, get a hold of Graham Parrington!