Two Journeys For One
Mockingbird Network

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Mockingbird Times
Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Education is So Important by Amanda Blevington

Most youth do not understand how important education really is to their future. Most youth feel that there is no point going to high school because the skills they teach feel pointless. A lot of youth feel that there are more serious problems that they need to fix before going to school. It is important to understand that if you do not graduate from high school it makes it extremely hard to fulfill your future and long term goals.

I am speaking to the many youth that are failing in school because I care and something needs to change. The children are the future, so without good education what will happen to us?

According to www.all4ed.org, each year, approximately 1.2 million students fail to graduate from high school, more than half of whom are from minority groups. Over the course of his or her lifetime, a high school dropout earns an average, about $260,000 less than a high school graduate. The dropout problem is likely to increase substantially through 2020 unless significant improvements are made. Many people do not know that most dropouts start failing in middle school.

So before you start walking out on your education, remember what matters to you the most. And believe in yourself that you can make a change. Believe me without education it is extremely hard to achieve your goals.

Making the Connection by Deonate Cruz

The US Administration for Children and Families reports a substantial proportion of the approximately 70 percent of children in foster care, who have siblings in care, are not placed together. It is also true that the connections between these siblings are not maintained. While many people shurg it off and think of the problem as irrelevant to the youth’s care or placement, the fact of the matter is separating siblings is a big problem. Let me explain.

There are two main forms of sibling relationships; the first is a biological sibling relationship, which is a relationship between two siblings that are blood related. The second is dubbed a “fictive kin” relationship. This is a relationship between two siblings that do not share any blood relation. The reason for this distinction is because children are less formal about their view on who their siblings are, in comparison to adults. In general, this openness leads children to foster many more connections than adults. There are many things that influence the quality of a sibling relationship; some are: gender, age spacing, and order of birth. Ultimately the nature and importance of relationships vary with each individual.

One of the reasons that it is so important to maintain biological sibling relationships is because they are very powerful and critically important in the mental and emotional development of children. Siblings are a child’s primary peer group, and through interactions with siblings a child learns social skills, particularly in conflict management, by negotiating with siblings. Siblings also are a constant base for support for one another. A 1996 study done by Marjut Kosonen showed children who had a problem to solve would first seek out their mother, and then they would turn to an older sibling before going to their father. This is a powerful fact that demonstrates the importance of sibling connections. Sibling connections also lower the chance of a child becoming an “at risk” youth. Often, children who are labeled as, “at risk youth,” have behavior outbursts that are linked to trauma from their past. A 1994 study reports that warmth in sibling relationships is associated with less loneliness, fewer behavior problems, and higher self-worth. It also is true that siblings offer crucial support for isolated children, and isolation is neglected. This usually leads to the child having a higher risk for a number of negative outcomes, including placement disruption, running away, and failure to exit the system to reunification, adoption, or guardianship. It is the duty of the state foster care system to find a stable and long-term placement for any child in foster care and provide them with support and beneficial resources. But, the question still remains: Why are there still so many siblings under the state’s guardianship who are not being placed together when it would be very beneficial to these children? The research I conducted pointed to two things: 1) many foster parents who care for a child, who has a sibling in care, feel that they cannot “handle” any more children than they already have 2) it costs the state more money and is more work in the short run, to find a home that is willing to care for siblings. Now, it may be tougher than ever to do the right thing in the first place given the looming state budget cuts.

I hope as we work to balance the budget we also remember to keep in mind the lives of children and young people that are affected, and that maintaining sibling connections is a positive and healthy choice that is beneficial to the children involved in the long run, and if we invest in them, it will be beneficial to the whole community.

http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/

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Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! 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 2011 Legislative Session which begins January 10th. The session will hold great challenges and opportunities to mobilize support for children, youth and families impacted by the system, as Governor Gregoire and the legislature grapple with a $5.7 billion deficit for the 2011-2013 biennium. This is an unprecedented economic crisis and The Mockingbird Society will be laser-focused on safe housing for youth both under and over 18 years of age.

The Mockingbird Society will lead advocacy on behalf of youth and alumni of care in Olympia. We must not turn back the clock on behalf of youth and alumni of care in foster care, homeless youth, youth and alumni of foster care, homeless youth, or with homelessness. If you want to do one thing but sing their hearts out for these young people. This year, we may still have to go to bed early, but we can make music for us to enjoy. They don't need your submission agreement in order to print it. Please submit again via email at mockingbirdsociety.org.

Tip #1: Avoid getting sucked in and establish a routine.

College was probably the most complete and sudden lifestyle change I made since I entered adulthood. Of my routines, my old habits, simply didn't work in the new environment. If you're like me, you'll need to figure out how to restructure your life in a way that works for you. This is a potential source of lots of chaos and confusion; if you're living in campus housing, for example, you're going to be among a whole bunch of other students that are all doing their own thing - which may or may not mesh very well with what you want to do. It's very easy to simply go with the flow, and you can end up halfway through the quarter before you even know it. Take the time to think about how to structure your life to accomplish your goals; if you don't establish a routine and stick to it, you're going to be at a serious disadvantage in the classroom.

Tip #2: Keep in touch.

Unless you're going to a local school, you've probably become somewhat separated from your old support network. It is vital to keep in touch; part of what motivates you and keeps you sane in the college environment is contact with the people that we care about, and it's really easy to lose track of that in the sound and fury of the typical college experience. The people that cared about you before you left still do; even if you haven't had the most successful of quarters, give them a call anyway. It might just be what you need to get back on the horse, or to stay on it.

Tip #3: Earn it on the page.

No matter where you're going to school, there is a wild variance in pay compared to what you may have experienced in high school or other places. Unfortunatley, a lot of the people that you are are one of many hundreds of students that your typical professor has to deal with on a day-to-day basis. It's not the nature of her higher education experience a little smoother.

The publication of this month’s Mockingbird Times comes at the beginning of the winter quarter at my new alma mater, The Evergreen State College. I thought that I would take the opportunity to acquaint you all with a few things you may now know about me that were known when I started here. While this is far from a comprehensive guide, I hope that these three tips will make your higher education experience a little smoother.

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 Maudie in teaching his kids that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because “...[m]ockingbirds 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 nest and sing.

Tips for Success in College

by Ian Grant, Olympia Bureau

Thank You!


Meet Our Staff

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Deputy Director Ros Ghani; Mockingbird Family Programs Director Dr. Wanda Hackett; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Public Policy Director Rose Berg; Development Coordinator Kyle Palmer; Development Governor Lawrence; Finance Director Beth Vance; Executive Assistant: Lauren Frederck; Mockingbird Family Programs Coordinator Kara Sanders; Administrative Coordinator Aine Cowan-Kuist; Evaluations and Database Coordinator David Forte; Administrative Assistant (AA) Liliana Davila; Mockingbird Network Program Assistant Missa Morgan; Resource Specialist Gerry Bobo, Sarah Mathews, Graham Parrington, Georgia Ramriez, Tammy Soderberg, Samantha Vald; Senior Network Representatives Ian Grant, Terrell Rosetti, Diamonique Walker; Network Representatives Adam Jacobson, David Buck, Doreen, Dayna, Blanche and Mike Welser; Assistant to the Executive Director writers & Artists Chris Bauer, Bradly Barley, Nickle Critics, Jasmin Esters, Sam Martin, Garrett Nadeau, Max Ream, Janessa Thomas, Kristina Thomasin; Design & Layout: Highdivde.com

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care, while advocating for improved outcomes of foster care. All donations are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your specific tax situation. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper published and produced by youth who have experience in foster care, homeless youth, or with homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $8.50 and $12 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit artwork, art work, and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of over 25,000 copies being distributed in Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and as an insert in various newspapers throughout the state. Youth Advocates Day is a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and mission of the Mockingbird Society. Mockingbirds are involved in all aspects of organizational 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 ©2011 The Mockingbird Society.
Employment is the key to financial stability, building a support network, positive self-esteem, and developing goals for the future. Jobs provide valuable work experience, help youth build references, learn money management skills and provide educational focus. But many foster youth are discouraged from working or are not given the support they need to access employment opportunities and to develop skills.

I decided to write about this because I noticed that a lot of youth who are either in foster care or have aged out - and even those that are homeless - do not have jobs. There are reasons why I believe that this is a tough decision. One reason is because youth don’t want to settle for a minimum wage job. I talked to Aaron Fox at The YMCA Center for Young Adults, whose resources are provided to foster youth and those that are experiencing homelessness. A key reason for employment assistance, whether it’s just finding a job or helping with job-related skills or providing a weekly list of job opportunities. He told me that “youth are discouraged from applying or even seeking a minimum wage paying job such as a fast food place or a retail job in the mall.” Aaron also said, “This is not good, because as a youth, you have to take advantage of what you can get, and build experience and skills, so that you can move up in employment opportunities.”

I know from experience that this is true. In the summer of 2009 I was having a hard time finding employment because it was a time when the economy was suffering, I ended getting into the YMCA WAGES program that provided me with an internship. I knew that they were going to only be paying me minimum wage for only twenty hours a week. I was discouraged because of the pay, but at the same time I was thankful and saw it as a chance to make some money. By going through this summer internship I fell in a groove of having good job habits and skills. I found it easier to find employment after this. I ended up gaining an internship at The because of this “groove” that I developed. The first step is to just swallow your pride and take what ever you can get to begin. And then you have the technology, and all you can do is build from there and keep picking up tools along the way. Networking is important because according to statistics 80-per cent of all jobs are never advertised. Which means networking and asking around is the key to opening the door to employment opportunities.

When youth are able to find a support system, they almost always succeed. It doesn’t have to be a parent or family member; it can be someone else. In the community. By having this support system or network you have someone to bounce ideas off of and you can look for job opportunities. Networking is important because according to statistics 80 percent of all jobs are never advertised. Which means networking and asking around is the key to opening the door to employment opportunities.

Youth in foster care, as well as those that are experiencing homelessness, need to seek resources, and build a community network of people that will help them succeed. There is a song that I like by Too Short, and in one of the verses he says: “Get it while the gettin’ is good.” What this means networking and asking around is the key to opening the door to employment opportunities.

The way that I can give back is to help out with the Seattle King County Coalition for Homelessness. I have been a mentor and a volunteer for months and months. I ended up living at my grandmas’ house, for themselves.

My Days in the Foster Care System

By Max Ream

My life in foster care began when I was 10 years old. Some of it is hard to remember because I was so young. I did have a different “father” in my life, one who moved a lot. The other thing that made it hard was the custody battle between my mother and grandma. It went on for months and months. I ended up living at my grandma’s house, for themselves.

Kawabe Memorial Center Visit

By Diamonique Walker

Each holiday season, for the past 3 years, Mockingbird Network Representatives and Region 4 for Change chapter members have visited the Kawabe Memorial Home to spread holiday cheer to our neighbors and friends. Kawabe Memorial Center is a retirement home located just east of the International District, in what is commonly referred to as the Central District. The City of Seattle states that forty percent of the residents at Kawabe do not speak English, 86 percent are Asian American, and 75 percent are Japanese or Korean. The other 14 percent of the residents represent many other ethnic backgrounds.

Each November, in preparation for our visit we make several pies to share with the residents at Kawabe. In exchange for our treats, they teach us how to put together simple origami shapes like cranes, pianos, and of course samurai hats. It’s always fun for us to visit them during the holidays and they definitely seem to love our time together. The office of the office is nice for us. And, inspiring, Kawabe residents to do something different from their daily routine makes it even more rewarding.

Just last week, as well as the past few December, the Network “Reps” picked out their favorite Christmas carols to sing to our friends at Kawabe. We sang “Silent Night” especially for them. They all love to sing that song. As a special treat, they sang a Japanese children’s song to us. And the more time we spend there, the more they realize that we had prepared and socializing with them. They always talk about how much fun they’ve had, and as how thankful they are that we came.

The more we go there, the more of an impact I feel like I have on them. It gives them something to look forward to and to be excited about each holiday. I’m always glad to be there, and I’m always going to be there. It’s really a special and exciting experience for the residents and for us. Not only are we doing our part to give back to the community, but also a part of giving back to the last remaining community relationship which is a big part of why The Mockingbird Society and The Mockingbird Network is so important.

If you are interested in learning more about UDASKANK or becoming a member, please contact us. We are looking for homeless youth dedicated to being part of the Region 4 Chapter for Change.

UDASKANK is an American Indian youth organization that is dedicated to helping those who are homeless. UDASKANK is unique and important. UDASKANK isn’t waiting for others to solve problems. UDASKANK is striving to improve the community now, and its members strive to make a difference now, creating a locker/storage program for youth who are on the streets.

UDASKANK follows a principle that appears similar to The Mockingbird Society’s guiding truth, “If you are going to be affected by a decision, then they should be heard and part of the decision making process.” The power of youth has been seen within The Mockingbird Society and Xavier seems to be aware of this power. UDASKANK is still a small collaboration that was formed no more than 6 months ago, but already we can see a collaboration that is dedicated to holding service providers accountable, helping service providers as a consulting group, and providing a voice for homeless youth by homeless youth. UDASKANK welcomes any and all supporters who share similar beliefs and stories with The Mockingbird Society and Xavier seems to be aware of this power. UDASKANK is an American Indian youth organization that is dedicated to helping those who are homeless. UDASKANK is unique and important. UDASKANK isn’t waiting for others to solve problems. UDASKANK is striving to improve the community now, and its members strive to make a difference now, creating a locker/storage program for youth who are on the streets.

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**Creative Corner**

**Two Journeys For One Mind**
By Nicole Crites

Home to Home around the world

around nobody seems to care.

Many places

one child
two children.

Opening door...

shuts in your face.

On the road,

we have no place.

Angry minds flutter about.

One decision,

give no doubt.

We are the kids

smart and bright.

all we need

is one chance

This is life.

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**I Am Walking**
By Jasmin Esters

I want to be something in the future and want it to work.

I am not a low life girl

I’ve been surviving this world

I’ve been through bad times and nothing about the good times

I’ve been pushed to many different towns

To where I want it to stop now

So I’m taking my first step and I’m not going back

Because I want to change

I got my pride and I’m on my way to success

So listen up I’m walkin on the path I got my pride

And I’m not looking back

Because now I am walking on the path to success

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**News From**

Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

**Region 1 (Spokane) UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone)**
by Kristiss Thomas

Hello, I’m the new Chapter leader for Region One and so far I absolutely love it and I am really enjoying meeting new people! Region One has been pretty busy. On November 17th we had a chapter meeting where we went over plans for the rest of the year and began to talk about Advocacy day. We are all very excited. We have a lot of new members and a lot of people who want to get involved! We just did a holiday kickoff with Crosswalk where kids from Crosswalk and Mockingbird went down to the Spokane plaza and we made and served meals to the homeless. It was a great success, and the kids of Mockingbird got to know each other better and bond which is always great to see. For our December chapter meeting we will be having a more laid back get together where we get to go ice skating! I am very stoked, and I know other kids are too. I can’t wait for the New Year and what it has in store, not only for Region One, but for me as the new Chapter Leader! Have a great Christmas and rest of the year!

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

Happy Holidays from ACT FIRST! We are looking forward to the New Year and to what will happen in our Chapter and in the Network this coming year. This month Brenda and I will be co-facilitating the “Your Rights, Your Life” Training. This will be our last training of the year. We also are super excited because Casey Family Programs will be donating our Winter Festival Dinner! This will help us to be able to host a Gingerbread-making booth, a holiday inspired card making booth, and a fabulous gift booth. Stay tuned to the next issue to find out all about our awesome holiday festival!

**Region 4 (Seattle) Region 4 for Change**
by Sam Martin

This time of year can be good and bad for some. I remember growing up and the holiday celebrations were especially disappointing. For foster youth, this time can be a very discouraging because some of us are not always in connection with family. But the Mockingbird 4 for Change recognizes that and we do our best to create a family dynamic. This month we will be doing “White Dove” which is a gift exchanging game and everybody has to bring in something created or made from home. We also will be building Gingerbread houses and reflecting on the past year we spent together, being around people that care about you can be all the difference in making someone’s holiday season special.

**Region 6 (Olympia) T.A.F.F.Y. (Truth and Action For Foster Youth)**
by Chris Bauer

I became a Chapter Leader to help advocate for the underprivileged and those in need. Having been homeless in the past, I find it heartbreaking that the best resource homeless youth can harness in Lewis County is the U.S. Post Office. Recently, I had a conversation with a 17 year old youth at the Amtrak Station. He told me that he sleeps in the atrium of Centralia’s Post Office, a small but dry anteroom with heat and some privacy. Why: “There just isn’t anything around here to help with my situation; I’m only 17, I can’t find work and none of the shelters will admit me.” If today’s youth are the future of this country than why aren’t we arming them with the skills and resources they need to support themselves? I believe we have the responsibility to give everyone a chance at success, regardless of background and status. With today’s problems we need strong trusses to support the bridge of social evolution.

That’s why we’re doing trainings for the youth at Haven House, serving meals for the homeless at Camp Quixote (TBA) and starting work on a local resource guide for low/no income people.

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**Community Events**

**Region 1 (Spokane)**
January 1st-Jan 7th: Exhibition: Collections and Cultural Events - 10-6pm
NW Museum of Arts and Culture
January 29th: NW Museum of Arts and Culture - Displays and learning on historic material about Children of Different Tribes

**Region 2 (Yakima)**
January 15th-17th: 30th Annual MLK Basketball Tournament

**Region 3 (Everett)**
Every Friday Night: Open Mic: 7-9pm Tim Noah Thumbnail Theater
Musicians, comedians, poets, artists. Family friendly venue.
January 9th: - 12-3pm. Bellingham International Maritime Museum
Cost: admission by donation.

**Region 4 (Seattle)**
Every week Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday through January 22nd:
Teatro ZinZanni - 600pm

**Region 5 (Tacoma)**
January 12th: Chapter Meeting - 3:30-5pm. PCA. Free Food.

**Region 6 (Olympia)**
1st and 3rd Saturdays: Youth ‘N Action - 1:30, 618 7th Ave SW, Olympia WA 98502
www.youthaction.org
Every Monday: Movie Night - 9pm. Le Veyuer Café 404 East 4th Ave Olympia WA 98501
Info: (360)945-5710, www.levoyeur.netfirms.com/
February 18th: Youth Advocacy Day - 9:30am to 3pm.
Washington State Capitol Campus.

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**Do all you can, with what you have, in the time that you have, in the place that you are.**
~Nkosi Johnson, 1988-2001

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

Representative Mike Sells joined us for our November chapter meeting. We took the opportunity to talk to him about safe housing for foster youth and why we think it should be retained. Joyce and Garrett facilitated a Mockingbird presentation for Representative Selvig and new chapter members. Since it was our November meeting, our theme was Thanksgiving. We had lots of food including Pumpkin Pie! Overall it was a good meeting that gave us a great opportunity to represent Mockingbird and HEYMAC. Next month is our Christmas theme with Gingerbread houses to build and a good conversation with our legislative guests! We also will be conducting a “Know your Rights” training and Life Advocacy 101 Training for other youth in care.

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**Region 5 (Tacoma) Cour’ige (Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individualities Gaining Empowerment)**
by Janessa Thomas

When I first heard about the Mockingbird Society, I was a little flustered and didn’t how the program could help provide the type of essential skill improvement training that I was seeking. I was looking for new ways to apply my skills and help better the foster care system. I already had hands-on training with community service by volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club, Safe Streets, and The Junior Reserved Officer Training Corps. I knew one important thing: I wanted to continue giving back to others by working to improve the foster care system. The vision I foresaw was: to be a voice, some way or somehow for the little children who couldn’t voice their concerns. I wanted to help youth realize they are important too. And, with The Mockingbird Society, I found a passionate group of advocates who shared my vision.

In 2010, our chapter accomplished a lot. We have held chapters and trainings and hosted a barbecue. It was a blast. In 2011 we are planning to spread COUR’IGE around the Tacoma area. We are preparing to march in Olympia, so we can advocate for youth in foster care and help change laws. We are most definitely trying to put The Mockingbird Society out into the world more. By spreading our wings, and flying, we can do it together! This is the start toward a great new year.