The Capitol Hill Homeless Summit by GeorGina ramirez

In the confrontation between the stream and the rock, the stream always wins, not through strength but by perseverance.

~H. Jackson Brown

The Capitol Hill homeless community brought their voices, life experience, and dedication to initiate change to the Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets (PSKS) Capitol Hill Homeless Summit. PSKS is a non-profit organization that focuses on advocacy for Seattle’s homeless community. PSKS is a comprehensive program that provides a wide range of resources that prepares its participants for transitions from the street to homes. They help their clients with programs that focus on case management, substance intervention, employment, and education.

At the summit I met Blue who has been an active participant of PSKS and gave me some background on the culture of the homeless community and what the organization does. Some of the things that Blue liked about the organization was he felt it was not an organization that was judgmental but rather a way to be on the street but was a resource they could utilize if they truly need help. The organization has a very diverse community; he has met people of all ethnicities, orientations, individuals, street families, and couples, and of all age ranges. He also explained why much of the homeless community resides on Capitol Hill, which is because “Capitol Hill is a little more free and you don’t have to worry about being handed or judged.” The most inspiring information about the agency Blue shared was that PSKS actually is a community that cares about you and doesn’t treat you like a number or data. If that is what you’re looking for then come to PSKS.

The summit gave all the attendees an opportunity to hear first hand from the community what they needed to assist them with the challenges of homelessness. The panel was composed of a youth and an adult who are currently homeless and a youth and an adult who are no longer homeless. They discussed the current trends that are affecting their community among youth who were under the age of 26. They found that there were the same amount of females and males, mostly of European descent, and some Native Americans.

Some factors that contributed to the youth being homeless were family problems and substance abuse, the majority of youth were “couch surfing” as a way of life. The homeless adults were defined as being in the age range of 27 and above. Trends when it came to the gender ratio went three times more numbers of males than females and they were primarily of European descent. Some of the factors that contributed to adults becoming homeless included having health problems, having a criminal background, and unemployment. Most of the adults were squatting or living in cars.

The panel spoke about the barriers that impede the progress of the homeless community on two basic levels. The first level is individual barriers such as addictions, bad credit, pets, lack of storage, budgeting, and personal choice. The second level is systemic barriers like lifestyle creative criminal records that block future resources, needing medical assistance, inability to meet program criteria due to lifestyle or age restrictions. After hearing the panelists speak about all of the barriers they face on a consistent basis, it is evident that there is a need for more resources that will assist the community in breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Elaine Simons, Executive Director & Co-founder of PSKS states “The Capitol Hill Homeless Summit was a great success. We now have some action steps that we hope to focus on and have a joint summit of both the homeless community and the folks who can help implement them.” The Panelists did an awesome job representing both the current and former homeless community. I am so proud of Mama Sara, Raven, Cassidy and Jaclyn, they are such strong women.”
Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

I begin this monthly message by saying how much I appreciate being able to simply STAND UP! In mid-May I ruptured my Achilles tendon, which resulted in my having surgery the day after my 52nd birthday. Now, some of the youth I serve may point out that at 52 I’m lucky to be able to do anything including lay down and have a doctor “cut on me.” However, at the time of the surgery, I was not quite in touch with how lucky I was. In fact, I was in a lot of physical pain and experiencing a great deal of anxiety regarding my ability to fulfill my responsibilities at work and other areas of my life. But there is something about the words: “...and then put that gown on and lay down on your tummy. The Doctor will be in shortly,” that put this 52 year old goat firmly in touch with the present. I realized at that moment how truly fortunate I am. I was reminded repeatedly how blessed I am to have family and friends who provide me with so much support.

I also was reminded just how critical it is to have health insurance which allowed me to navigate the health care system without undue barriers. Up until last week, my main mode of transportation has been crutches and wheelchair, although not necessarily at the same time. But throughout this entire experience I was haunted by the thought of a child or teenager in foster care being sick or injured and in need of extra support. I send a special “thank you” to the thousands of foster and kinship caregivers who take such good care of our children during these times. I draw strength from the courage and resilience of these children and youth and strive to return to this most valuable gift by remaining steadfast in our commitment to The Mockingbird Society: to build a world class foster care system and STAND UP! for and beside the children, youth and families we serve.

Jim Theofelis
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On the Good Side by Rhonda Smith

Most young people, when asked about their experience in the foster care system, say it was awful and the worst experience that they have ever had. I do agree that there is a lot of stuff that happens that is not right, that no child should have to experience. But I also believe that there are some good things that happen, such as the people who have stayed in the child’s life from start to finish. I am well aware that this doesn’t happen often but I’m saying it does and I’m pretty sure there are more foster youth out there that have had a tight support system. It just seems to me that everybody focuses on the negative sides of the foster care system when there are some good things and some good people who really care and want what’s right for the child.

I’m not going to say that the foster care system is top notch and needs no improvement because the system is all messed up. Some of the foster parents really don’t care and are very hurtful but not all of them are like that and not all workers have looked closely at foster care the way that they can see their clients. Although in my experience in foster care, the cons outweighed the pros by a lot, I’m tired of only hearing about the negative. I moved around a lot that’s for sure. But I had a great support system.

I had a wonderful social worker who I had for about 6 years. I had the same Guardian ad Litem (GAL) [now called a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)] for a long time until she got pregnant. When I got a replacement who was written also great. I had monthly visits with my GAL and social worker. My social worker used to take me out to eat, buy me magazines, and was just always there for me even when I didn’t want her to be. I still talk to her and I’m thankful for the providers that helped me out even when I didn’t think it was the best for me.

Since I have been working at The Mockingbird Society (MBS), I have heard a whole bunch of stories about foster kids never seeing their social workers or GALs. This was surprising to me because I didn’t ever have those problems. I was always at my dependency court hearings and I always had my visits whether I was locked up in juvenile detention or where ever.

I just feel we should give thanks to the social workers and GAL workers and all the other people who have been there for the youth. Its not all bad in the system. I know there are some terrible foster homes out there and there are bad workers. But I don’t think we should give the good workers a bad name because of those ones that did youth wrong. I want to let people know there are great people out there who really care about foster youth. Even though the system needs a lot of improvements on a little bit of everything, I feel we should not put down the social workers and the GALs and whoever else might be working with foster children. They have a lot of responsibilities. I am not trying to make excuses for the social workers who don’t communicate with their clients. It is possible to do a good job because mine communicated perfectly. My point is, I’m tired of hearing about the bad side of the system. We need to show the providers who do work hard every day for the foster youth some love.

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China's Earthquake and Me by Leona Bill

As I continue to go about my life, thoughts of thankfulness are always running through my mind. Thankful that I'm inside every night, thankful that I'm able to eat, and, most of all, thankful that I'm not sleeping outside like I've had to do in the past. Recently, what made me realize what I have more than I actually do is normally an article that I read one morning about the horrific disaster in China.

On Monday May 12th at 2:58 PM local time, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck China. The quake was on a level the region sees once every 50 to 100 years. More than 1,000 aftershocks rocked the area. With over 40,000 people already confirmed dead and another 32,000 people missing, the remaining tens of thousands were left homeless and had to spend the night outdoors. Some people slept under plastic sheeting while others were bused to relief stadiums in the city.

By Tuesday May 20th, Vice Minister for Civil Affairs Jiang Li said 5 million people were left homeless and the government was setting up temporary housing for victims. A kind of tent city was created. Nearly 280,000 tents were shipped to the area, 700,000 more had been ordered and the factories were working overtime to create more. The camp had a clinic, food distribution points, toilets and a trash dump. There were even plans for a temporary relief stadium in the city.

The Mockingbird Times, July 2008

Go Green by Diamonique Walker

Going green used to be simply recycling. Now it is so much more than that. Recycling is still a major part of the fight, but the issues are so much bigger than all volunteers with China's Red Cross. The clinic runs from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

In conditions similar to the disaster that has just taken place, I hope the helpers are kind of set to a certain schedule if they want to see a doctor or a dentist. Dinner times are always set and provided by volunteers. Like my food, the hospital food was down because of lots of random mishap. It's really frustrating when the drop-in's get shut down, especially for those who really need the one thing they don't have anything to do with any of the vandalism.

I've been thankful and grateful that I've been able to take care of myself while feeding those closed for a night or two. However, I feel bad but yet at the same time I have to put this guard up when I'm out and about on the streets because if don't, I then end up giving too much and end up putting myself in a bad situation. I find it hard to say no to food so I don't feel anything about doing with any of the vandalism.

Very bad, very bad. I eat more. The camp had a clinic, food distribution points, toilets and a trash dump. There were even plans for a temporary relief stadium in the city. In the next few issues I will gladly be in different and that there's a great team work and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.
Change

Stephen Phan

Change

From a time I finish writing my poems, To a time you finish reading my text. From old-fashion letters, To new-fashion texting. Within every new, There’s a little old. Faith, Hope, Love, Fear, Time, Change, Is something we just can’t change.

“Flow like a butterfly,” “Sting like a bee,” “You can’t hit,” “What you can’t see.” From a time a butterfly decides to land on your shoulder, To a time a butterfly decides to leave, There’s change.

Angel Heart

Emma Cunningham

The angels cry from above they remind us of a forgotten love, between two people, who were meant to be, but one had to set the other free. The tears falling from her eyes, made her want to join everyone who dies, you see she had loved and lost, because everything has got its cost. His heart belongs to another now, and all she wants to know is how, could he treat her this way? how could he break her heart today? why couldn’t it be someone else? These questions will eat away, at her every day, for you see, she had loved with all her heart, and lost everything from the start.

Dew Drops

T.S. Berry

As the moon waves good-bye The stars start to cry Their tears are left on the grass To the earth, the moon starts to crash The tears glister in the brand new light As the birds take in this sight Every morning this it shall do For the tears of the stars is the dew.

Booze Rap

Anthony Yanatta

You think I drink boosts booze gives you the blues it makes things scary my name is Gary you ask me to carry all these scary thoughts about me drinking all these shots now I’m seeing all these white spots you want to share but I don’t care I also say that’s not fare while I shoot up this flare for people to help me God just give me the key so I can see all these opportunities and possibilities in these dark cities instead of having all these people thinking pity of me including my family please stop drinking cuz yourstinking at life put down that knife life is worth living you don’t know what you are doing life’s worth giving so give it a chance and stay away from lance he’s giving you too much beer you remember you hit that deer and drinking all that beer it left you with stitches and bruises you almost died in your brand new ride thank goodness God was there so he can guide you in the right direction you want to glide for what’s right you want to fight all these boozy so you don’t have the blues its like you don’t care its not fair to me I am your son we’re suppose to have fun but now that you’re drinking your life is done you expect me to take all this in I see you’re driving again but all I see is a sin so does that make me win

Creative Corner

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“With fear I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid...I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood.”

~ Audre Lorde

Being Aware of Your Financial Responsibility

by Georgina Ramirez

I thought that with all the graduations that have taken place in the last month that it is my duty as an alumnus to share one of the difficult realities I have had to face. When I graduated from high school, I was so excited about the fact that I was going to attend college. I didn’t do one of the most important tasks when preparing to go to school. I did not read my student loan paperwork. In retrospect, how was I supposed to know about financial responsibility at that age? No one ever discussed it with me. All I knew was that I was supposed to fill out a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and sign my student loans so I could attend class in the fall. Instead of reading the loan paperwork from the lender, I just let a relative fill it out and I signed the paperwork without thinking about it twice. It turns out that I signed a contract that would obligate me to start repayment before graduation.

When it was time to pay for my loans I did not have the money and initially I just ignored the bills. Finally, I contacted the student loan lender and told them that I didn’t know I would have to start paying the loans back and I thought I didn’t have to start repayment until I finished school. They were extremely firm when they delivered the message that they pretty much didn’t care if I didn’t know what my financial obligation was and they wanted the money.

As soon-to-be scholars, you need to make the connection between student loans, credit and debt needs now so you are prepared to handle one of the most serious obstacles that comes along with transitioning out of care and college, which is financial responsibility. Preparation is essential to accomplishing any great task so I am here to give you a short financial literacy session on the connection between credit, debt, and student loans.

Let’s start with student loans, which are a type of financial aid that must be repaid with interest. Most students apply for student loans through FAFSA. Don’t worry, it’s a process that a large percentage of college students go through. However, make sure that you keep all of your loan documents to refer to when it becomes time to repay your loans. If you are unsure about what type of loan you have or want to obtain and what responsibilities are associated with it, go to the FAFSA Web site or talk to a counselor at a financial aid office at any college campus. Many students think financial aid is free money but that is not always true. The more assistance you ask for that doesn’t come in the form of grants or scholarships is money you are going to have to pay back. You are financially responsible for all the money that is loaned to you and repayment is not dependent on your graduation. Whether you graduate or not, you are responsible for the allocated funds.

Which brings us to debt. You are obligated by law to repay these funds and will be until they are paid off. Debt is the amount of money that you have borrowed that hasn’t been paid back yet. If you do not repay your lender as stipulated in your loan documents, various repercussions can take place, such as additional fees or garnishment of your wages. Regardless of how the lender penalizes you, the end result is damage to your “financial trustworthiness” and your credit score summarizes how you manage your money and finances. You want to protect your credit because it will be needed for future endeavors such as purchasing a car, getting a home loan, or renting an apartment, and even some employers run credit checks. If you would like more details about credit you can find information on the Federal Trade Commission Web site (www.ftc.gov).

Protecting your credit is a simple task but can be difficult to execute because it takes a great amount of patience and dedication. The first step is to express caution when you borrow money you can’t pay back. Secondly, if you do borrow funds, make your payments on time. I am providing this information not to deter your future scholastic endeavors but to make you aware of the financial responsibility that comes along with school. Stay dedicated and focused while you’re in school to finish on time or early. You would be surprised at the difference a term or two makes financially. When it’s time to repay your student loans, do your best to pay them back on time. Having good credit is one of the first steps toward establishing wealth. If you put in a little effort now, you can reap great rewards later.

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