The 2010 Foster Youth and Leadership Summit was a great success. It featured Mockingbird Network youth, from across the state, who presented key issues to the Washington State Commission on Foster Care. The Commission included a distinguished group of community leaders, co-chaired by former Supreme Court Justice Bobbie Bridge, Founder of the Center for Children and Youth Justice and Denise Revels-Robinson, Assistant Secretary of Children’s Administration. Justice Bridge said “The Leadership Summit gets better every year.” It is the one opportunity for the Commission to hear from youth first hand.

Region 1 stated that there is an issue with homeless youth and older youth not having an avenue into the foster care system and receive the care that they need. To fix this, they recommended that the (Child in Need of Services) CHNS petition be revisited so that older and homeless youth get the services and care they need.

The 2010 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit

June 24th and 25th marked the fifth year for the Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. The importance of the Summit is to bring all six Mockingbird Network chapters together, so youth leaders can present issues to the Washington State Commission on Children in Foster Care. The commission board consists of legislators, attorneys, judges, members of DSHS/Children Administration, and alumni of foster care. The Leadership Summit, its network youth, and the Mockingbird Society have successfully passed legislation for the past several years, and this year is shaping up to be no different.

The first day started early, but it was a fun and full of activities. To kick it off, we had a team building activity, where the group was split into teams who had to work together to accomplish one goal: to get know one another better. In the afternoon, the main focus of the day was three workshops: 1) Community Engagement, 2) Individual Development, and 3) System Reform. All the workshops were geared to help us with key issues, build confidence and improve our presentation skills.

At the Community Engagement workshop we talked about the importance of being involved with our community, and how the community really makes up the people who support us. We also talked about how giving the youth a voice is more powerful, and it helps if youth begin by volunteering at the local level. We saw three different film clips of people who have helped their community grow in a positive way. We discussed the clips, and why giving back is important and how it helps us grow. The Individual Development workshop provided

There are several reasons that I want to attend the Youth Leadership Summit. (The main reason being that this is the year that I am able to attend this event). I am excited to have the chance to be a part of something so amazing that helps so many young people. I feel that attending the Summit is the perfect opportunity for me to grow not only professionally, but also personally. I feel that one of my biggest weaknesses is my fear of public speaking and being overly self-critical when it comes to public speaking, I am a bit of a perfectionist. And, when I get nervous I start to stumble and then get upset because I messed up, and I find it really hard to recover from that. Even though others reassure me that I did a good job, I am still hard on myself. This opportunity allows me to break out of my shell, be open to the idea that I am a good public speaker, and to inspire others with similar problems when it comes to addressing a crowd.

If I had the chance to go up to a legislator and tell them anything it would be that the thing that anybody can do to better the foster care system is listening. Listening to voices of the youth in care; hear their stories about where the foster care system has taken them. Listening to the social workers and taking their ideas to improve their working conditions so that they can more effectively serve the youth. There are many youth in the system that have not had a horrible experience, like mine. In my opinion it would be more effective to see what is working and expand on that instead of over glorifying the negative. Yes, the foster care system is not perfect and it may never be. But why can’t we, as concerned citizens and former foster youth, who have firsthand experience with system flaws, highlight what works currently in the system and build on that? It’s just like a parenting the system flaws, highlight what works currently in the system and build on that? It’s just like a parenting style, with its foster youth. Why not take a proactive approach? 
Dear Friends,

Wow! The 2010 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit demonstrates, once again, that by bringing youth and alumni together; providing them with the skills and confidence to lead and present their ideas; and most important by listening; true change can take place. Thank you to our distinguished group of sponsors; Casey Family Programs; the Washington State Commission on Foster Care; the Center for Youth Justice; and the Department of Social & Health Services.

Each Mockingbird Network Chapter brought forward one proposed policy. One thing is clear: youth want to feel safe in their homes; and some experiences have led youth to conclude foster parents need more support — whether it is family counseling services or respite care — youth can see the ‘burn out factor’ in some foster parents, and they are asking for help. Region 1 is seeking a new Child In Need of Services or CHINS policy that would allow

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 Maudie in teaching his kids that “... Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t 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.

Not all foster care stories end badly. In fact, roughly 61% of the youth that exit foster care in Washington State go back to their families. National Reunification Week, which took place June 13-19, was launched this year to celebrate the families that come back together after care.

One of the fundamental principles upon which child welfare in Washington is founded is the notion that a child is best raised in a healthy, intact family. So, whenever possible the State hopes to reunify parents who have followed through with their court-ordered intervention plan with their children. Many people don’t realize that foster care is designed to be temporary; it’s supposed to be an emergency alternative to an unsafe home, not a long term placement. Most reunifications happen within a year of a child entering care.

Of course, those children were removed for a reason. And not every reunification is successful. According to a US Department of Health and Human Services report to Congress, roughly 16% of them end with the child reverting foster care within a year. And, the parents have to be willing to work through what is a very difficult and complex process. One interesting fact from a 1999 study entitled “Parental visiting and foster care reunification” was that, youth who had regular visits with their mother while in care were roughly ten times more likely to be reunited with their birth family.

In particular, foster youth have the right under certain conditions as three years in a terminated parent right; and no permanent placement plan secured, to petition the courts to reinstate their birth parents’ parental rights. The parents have to have complied with any and all court-ordered requirements. Foster youth are eligible to file a lawsuit during this process. The lawyer, youth, and parents work together to establish that returning home would be in the best interest of the foster youth. Unfortunately, the petition is not an option if a youth has already been adopted or entered into a legal guardianship.

It’s hard to find data on what happens to youth after reunification. One 2001 study, entitled “Children Who Return Home From Foster Care: A 6-Year Prospective Study of Behavioral Health Outcomes in Adolescence,” is sobering. According to the research, “reunified youth showed more self-destructive behavior, substance use... received a ticket or have been arrested, to have dropped out of school, and to have needed lower grades.” It concluded that “youth who re-unify with their biological families after placement in foster care have more negative outcomes than youth who do not re-unify.”

This all speaks to the importance of working with the family to make sure that it is a safe and healthy one where children can thrive. Washington State does do a reunification assessment to determine that a particular family is safe before a child is reunified, and works with the family to create a transition and safety plan. Unfortunately, they also cut funding for parental visits by $1.3 million, and family intervention by $287,000. The effect of these decisions on the number and success of reunited families remains to be seen. We need more data on what happens after reunification in order to have a good approach to reunite broken families. It’s not an easy or a quick process, but we owe it to the youth and families affected by the foster care system to ask them if our approach is working.

Thank you for Listening!

A heartfelt thank you to our generous sponsors:

Casey Family Programs
Center for Children & Youth Justice
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
Children’s Administration
Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501c(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 adviser regarding your specific tax situation. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newsletter written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art, poetry, and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times distributes over 25,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the USA, 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, value, 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 ©2000, The Mockingbird Society.
Helped us youth grow as individuals. Taught us the importance of stakeholder and the chance to craft its message in a shop, each chapter represented a different is passionate about. During this work to the next level. We receive feedback from the entire group. That we all had the chance to give and that we all had the chance to give and sometimes d a d y. 

LISTENING, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

What is leadership to me? A leader is some- one who steps up and is an example to those around them no matter what the situation. Some of the qualities that make me a better leader are my openness to new things, my perseverance, my resilience and my spirit. I have found the most important aspect of leadership to be my opinion on something without finding out as much about it as you can. How can you be ef - fective fighting a battle without ammunition? For me, it is setting yourself up for failure. An example would be that when I am in meet- ings as a youth voice, before hand I like to talk with other youth to gain perspective on things that I have not been through or may not know as much as they do, so I can be as effective as possible.

My life has never been easy, even before enter- ing the foster care system in my life I had been knocked down so hard so many times, but each time I came back with a renewed spirit and drive. I think about this every time someone tells me that I cannot do something because of my position in life and it makes me want to do better. I have always con- sidered myself to be a free spirit and have used it to my advantage. My personality is such a melting pot of awesomeness that I have no problem relating with others and really getting along with anybody. The fact that I also have had the opportunity to have some very powerful women in my life to show me what good leadership looks like, and how leadership and peer without overstepping your bound- aries and still being respected, has given me strength.

Tony Shellman was our guest din- ner speaker. He wrapped up three workshops by explaining how to use all these skills within our daily lives. He gave a very inspiring life story that uplifted every youth. It was a great way to close out our first day together. Day two was entirely dedicated to preparing each group for representation for the Commission on Children in Foster Care. It included speaking tips, practice in front of the entire group with feedback, and more practice. I think it looks like, and how leadership and peer without overstepping your bound- aries and still being respected, has given me strength.

The Foster Youth and Leadership Sum- mit just keeps getting better. Each year new youth and alumni attend, and some return. If we didn’t have the Leadership Youth Summit, I don’t know what would the Commission on Children in Foster Care hear our problems? Would we be successful in our mission if we didn’t have the Sum- mit? I can’t imagine our futures without it. We are making positive change. And, its change that is needed based on the real life experiences of youth and alumni of foster care and kinship care. Every year more youth leave home for the streets. How many is not certain, but they are a critically understudied population. One study by Portland State Univer- sity gives a figure of 1.6 million homeless youth in the nation. A little over a million of them are between 13 and 17 years old.

Homeless youth need a safe place to live. On the streets, every youth is very pain ful and sometimes d a d y. Homeless youth are highly overlooked by people ranging from ser- vice providers to legislators, and for that mat- ter, the foster care system. And when families fall apart, older youth often have no place to go but the streets. The Mockingbird Times (Region 1 – Spokane, Washington) hopes to change that by reforming the Washington State Child in Need of Services (CHINS) peti- tion to be better suited to older runaway youth. The CHINS petition itself is a temporary re- quest for services where the court will decide whether or not a youth receives services. This can include housing, food vouchers, educa- tional services, counseling and others. Just fill- ing a CHINS petition is not enough, the policy, and ultimately the judge decide on whether they are provided. And, as of right now there is no legal policy on how to handle homeless youth filling a CHINS petition.

Region 1 heard about a youth who was look- ing to get into foster care and has been denied more than once. Region 1 investigated further and decided to bring the idea of re- forming the Washington State CHINS petition to the Mockingbird Society’s 2010 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. The hope is that community leaders and Legislators will see the wisdom of supporting homeless youth and take a change in the policy to do so. They recommended to the Committee that the requirements for becoming a foster parent be increased involving the following: A national criminal background check, a psycho - logical evaluation, situational testing involving situations foster parents typically witness, lie detector testing, and the age requirement be changed from 21 to 25.

Many youth in Region 6 who have been in or are in family foster care have stated that they do not have spending money to even fund typical youth developmental issues and recom- mended that it be required by law that allow- ances be given to youth in family foster care, in amounts and frequencies that are appropriate for age and ability.

One of the most powerful moments was after Region 4 presented the issue of being noti- fied of hearings and transported to hearings, the Committee (Region 1 – Spokane District) asked if youth who had not been to their dependency hearings could stand up. It was a shock to see that more than half of the participants had never been to their depen- dency hearing. And, it clearly showed how important the Leadership Summit really is, because in that moment dozens of youth put a face on that one issue. Runaway youth and homeless youth are a vastly understud- ied population. They should be as supported by the child welfare system, as foster youth. A wise man once said “the success of a na- tion is dependent on those who depend on the nation.” In other words, our nation’s suc- cess depends on how we treat our poor and neglected populations. And when a popula- tion is largely forgotten, it is unseen, and often feel that say about our community or our child welfare system? Homeless youth have to rely on homeless youth drop-in centers which are nonprofit organizations dependent on private and donors. And, given that policy that the police must be notified when at youth is at one of these resource centers or shelters, most youth continue to run.

By revising the CHINS petition, or finding a better system of getting runaway youth and they have any kind of life at all, we can get many youth off the streets and with a higher chance of success at life.


SAFETY, 2010 SUMMIT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

2010 LEADERSHIP SUMMIT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a better understanding of how to present in front of large groups. Members of the staff preformed two different skits, the wrong way to handle a presentation and the right way. We then broke into teams, had ten minutes to prepare, and figure out how to present it to the entire group. The good thing about this activity was that we all had the chance to give and receive feedback from the entire group. We learned the importance of knowing the audience, being self aware, looking sharp, keeping a timely pace in actuality, and keeping it short. All these tips moved us to the next level.

System reform is something the Network is passionate about. During this work- shop, each chapter represented a different corner of the state. And, each chapter had the chance to create a presentation in a powerful way, and present its key issue experts to opinion leaders and child welfare experts. This exercise gave us candid feedback, helped us hone the presentation and taught us the importance of stakeholder buy-in. All these workshops were important and helped us youth grow as individuals.

Mockingbird Times, July 2010

Great Mind
By Evan B

The moon shines brightly in the night.
The forest glows with a great sight.
Water seems to sparkle as it trickles down a stream.
Fish sit and chill in the pond with time to kill.
A lonely wolf prowls in the darkness waiting for its next victim. It sees a wild hare running into its hole.
The hare is scared, tired and wounded --- wounded by life, and his mind, hidden from spite.
Scared of the way life has been seeming to get worse, and worse as each day goes on.
Tired of trying to survive without a great outcome in life.
Life is a path of survival and discouragement.
It may get better.
It may just foster. Foster in the minds of an angry soul, causing more trauma that it can hold.
If your one with a great mind, you can put it behind. Look the wolf right in the eyes, as it comes to attack.
Face it and relax.
You stare the darkness dead on.
It gets weaker and slowly shines --- to light.
Let it brighten up your day and make the best of your stay.

Hope
By Steven Phan

Hope
There’s hope for the homeless,
There’s hope for the poor.
There’s hope for the little girl down the hall, (crying)
Don’t misuse hope,
For hope isn’t for destruction,
For hope is to cleanse.
For the little girl,
Please don’t cry,
Please don’t cry,
Hope is to believe,
Believing is to hope.
For one to hope,
Is for one to desire.
From a time to cry,
To a time to care,
Please don’t cry,
I’m here.
From a time a butterfly decides to land on your shoulder,
To a time the butterfly decides to leave.
There’s hope

Community Events

Region 1
July 25th: Royal Fireworks festival and Concert - In the evening at the floating stage in Riverfront Park. FREE.

Region 3
Late Expression award - The City of Everett Cultural Arts Department presents the Saturday Evening Waterfront Concert Series and welcomes Latin Expressions, power salsa orchestra. Location: 1705 W. Marine View Dr.
Site Link: http://www.enjoyeverett.org

Region 4
July 10th-12th: Pacific Days - Parades, activities, car smash, car show, raffles, vendors, food, crafts and dance with live music.
Pacific City Park, 600 Third Ave. S.E., Pacific; free
www.pacificpartnerships.org/pacific_days.html
Contact Glenda White: chairperson@pacificpartnerships.org

Region 6
Every Thursday, All Day: Fresh Organic Vegetable Pick up for Youth Community Services
711 State Ave NE
Olympia WA 98506
Independent Living Skills Lobby

We Welcome Your Work!

We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or with homelessness. If you want to be published in the Mockingbird Times, visit mockingbirdtimes.org and select Mockingbird Times under The Mockingbird Network or contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org. Note: If you have submitted something before that hasn’t been published, we need your submission agreement in order to print it. Please submit again via the web location listed above. Because of space constraints, shorter poems have a higher chance of being published.

Enjoy when you can, and endure when you must.”

~Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

News From

The Mockingbird Network
Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 1 (Spokane) by Josephine Davis
The Leadership Summit was AMAZING! I can confidently say that every person who attended the Summit brought a piece of the experience back with them. Whether it was going home with more confidence, or becoming an advocate or public speaker, or five years down the road, remembering how much fun we had watching Lauren, Tammy, Kara, and Graham break it down in our dance circle. Nearly all the foster youth and alumni will surely remember coming together to put their individual passion, voice, enthusiasm, and leadership skills to work. We also went back with excitement around winning two great awards: the Systems Reform workshop, and two of our members Sam Evans and me were acknowledged for our Leadership essays!

Region 2 (Yakima) by Brandy Baxley
Taylor and I trained mental health workers on the “Culture of Foster Care.” It was a success, and one participant said that “[s]he needs to continue to work towards eliminating the clinical language.” We also had a chapter meeting where Tiffany, Kara, Amanda, and David visited from Seattle. They helped us figure out our one-pager to hand out at the Summit. We believe that we did really well in our presentations! We are PUMPED for next year!

Region 4 (Seattle) by Rashunda Johnson
At the Region 4 Change chapter meeting our agenda was to choose one main topic to present to the State Commission. We wanted it to be a “representative tribute” to youth and alumni of foster care. The issue: Youth of all ages are not being adequately notified of their dependency hearings and not ensured of proper support/transportation to be in attendance of initial and ongoing hearings. We argued youth of all ages should be present and part of Dependency proceedings with an attorney. The youth should feel motivated to participate and be able to discuss their current foster care situation.

Region 5 (Tacoma) by Tianna Oliver
This year at the Summit, Region 5 members did an excellent job presenting why we feel it is important that foster parents have psychological evaluations done. We participated in workshops the staff planned out for us. We were active and involved, asked questions when needed, and took the criticism given to us, and effectively used it to enhance our proposal. When we presented it to the panel, we were all confident and spoke loud and clear making sure that the panel understood our needs, wants and concerns were.

Region 3 (Everett) by Garrett Nadato
The June chapter meeting featured a special guest, Representative Mary Helen Roberts and preparation for the Foster Youth Leadership Summit. We talked to Rep. Roberts about the summit, and then spent a little discussion time getting to know her. Georgina facilitated the voice development training. As for food --- and the theme --- it was very low key, we ordered pizza and had pop and snacks. For the next chapter meeting we will decide what we want to do to give back to the community around us.

Region 6 (Olympia) by Sam Evans
Another month has flown by here in Region 6. I attended another Transformation Design Legal and Practice Subcommittee meeting. We prepared for our presentation to the Washington State Commission on Children in Foster Care. At our chapter meeting, we began discussing what we would like to do to give back to our community and how we also can improve the image of foster youth and get more youth involved in our chapter.