2009 Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit by Ashley Lamier

On June 27th and 28th, 2009, The Mockingbird Society held its 4th Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. The Summit gives youth the opportunity to gain skills on what it takes to become a better leader as well as come together to discuss key issues and challenges youth in care face every day. The summit also provides the opportunity to present those issues to important policy makers and important people who can make change.

This year was totally different than last year. For starters, there was a much smaller group of us due to budget cuts. Each region had 4-6 participants so, during our Team Building/Timebreaker Activity on the first day, it was really easy to connect with everyone. Personally, by the end of the summit I knew everyone by their first name.

This year there was only one main workshop, “The qualities of being a leader,” led by Dr. Wanda Hackett, Director of Family Programs for The Mockingbird Society. Each region was given one of six qualities and had to come together as a team to present them the rest of the participants. Dr. Wanda directed us to use the theory, “tell ‘em, tell ‘em what you told ‘em, and tell ‘em again” in order to get our message understood. This theory would later be used as an important key communication while presenting to the Washington Commission on Children in Foster Care.

Do you know how impactful the youth voice is? How much credibility you are held accountable for when speaking to policy makers, legislators, and others as a youth or alumni of care? Our voice has been heard and resulted in change. We have had four laws passed because of youth that spoke at the last three Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summits. That is one of the many reasons why this summit is so important.

The first law, Medicaid to 21, is a program in Washington State that allows foster youth to receive health care benefits until the age of 21. The second law, WA State Identification Cards, made it so that social workers can request WA State Identification cards for youth placed in foster care including youth placed in WA State through ICPC ( Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children). The third law was Sibling Visitation, which asks adoptive parents to consider keeping sibling connections.

The fourth and last law was Notification of Rights. This law says that, at the age of twelve, youth are informed of their rights in the foster care system.

On day two of the summit, each region developed their Washington State message. Each region presented to the Commission their key issues, challenges, or request for change. The commission members present were Jim Bamberger (Director of the Office of Civil Legal Aid), Justice Bobbe Bridge (Center for Children & Youth Justice), Julius V.A. Caranza (Foster Youth Alumni Representative), Mike Curtis (Executive Director, Commission on Children in Foster Care), Susan Dreyfus (DSHS Secretary), Chloite Folkman (NW Intertribal Court System Representative), Stephen Hassett (Senior Counsel, Attorney General’s Office), Ron Hertel (Supervisor, Readiness to Learn, OSPI), Sassy Jarvela (Foster Youth Representative), Allison Krutsinger (Legislative Assistant to Rep. Ruth Kagi), Judge Richard McDermott (Judge, King County Superior Court, representing SCJA), Joanne Moore (Director, OPD), Representative Mary Helen Roberts (23rd Legislative District), Diane Schulteis (WA CASA Board member & Legislative Committee Chairwoman), and Tess Thomas (Vice-chair, FPAWS).

Regions one and six talked about the importance of having surprise health and safety foster home visits. Region two presented the need to have region-to-region case transfers. Region three presented the importance of youth having more control in their own placements. Region four presented the need for youth to have legal representation. Region five presented the benefits of the Foster Care to College mentoring program.

After each region presented, the people on the Commission had many questions. They

Mockingbird Society and Washington Women’s Foundation Join Forces by Jerry Bobo

On June 17th, 2009, The Mockingbird Society (MBS) was awarded a $100,000 grant by the Washington Women’s Foundation (WWF). Over the next two years, the grant will be used to give strength for a better foundation, capacity, and the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) programs at MBS. The Mockingbird Network gives strength for a better foundation, capacity, and give more width to the core vision on Children in Foster Care.

Dr. Wanda Hackett of the Mockingbird Society, MBS, WWF, and other nonprofit organizations.

MBS and WWF are neighbors in the 2100 building. Deputy Director of WWF Marion DeFrost says that in order to get on the radar for possible funding, a letter of inquiry (LOI) must be submitted online. That’s how MBS got in contact with the funding committee which is part of the beginning of the process.

A group of women come together, bringing their passions and experiences, to discuss a broad array of different organizations and issues and to make the grant decision. There are five categories: arts, education, environment, health, and human services. This year, there were 260 LOI’s across all five categories. In the human services category, which is where MBS falls, there were 70 total LOI’s and only five were chosen for the next step. Each organization chosen had to write a proposal. 12 to 14 people read and discussed all of the proposals and, from these five, selected three organizations for site visits. This visit is based on presentation of the case, the type of people the organization impacts, the depth of the impact being made in addition to the proposal, and how strong the organization seems. Out of the three sites visited, two are put on a ballot, and one final organization is chosen.

At the end of the process, MBS came out on top, starting a relationship with the WWF. The Impact Assessment Committee is a team that consists of three people, two WWF members, and an executive director of another nonprofit organization. This team reads over materials and a site visit happens around winter 2009-10. It then makes a report and a written progress summary for year one. The assessment process is then repeated for year 2.

This is not just to know what’s going on, but to help explore the foundations of the organization might be having. For the most part, it is to keep the relationship growing and strong. WWF was started by Colleen Willoughby. She mobilized 116 of her best female friends together around the idea of collective giving. Since individuals give small moderate gifts to many different nonprofit organizations, they thought of putting their money together for a greater impact. So, instead of 116 small donations around the community, it would be a larger contribution when combined and given to one organization. The organization started by giving a $100,000 grant to Mothers Against Violence in America and since has transformed into a bigger movement. There are now 500 members of the WWF and, combined, they give out grants that total up to $500,000. 60-70 members of the WWF decide
Tribal Court Resources by Leona Bill

When I think about the fact that my siblings are in foster care but their case is handled through our tribe, I feel lost because, as members of a tribe, the state laws do not apply to us. There is a lot that seems unfair in my life. Being in foster care means living a Native belonging to a tribe turns everything around. When it comes to my rights as a youth in care, I feel that switching my case from the state to my tribe makes things harder on my family and me. I am unfamiliar with my rights and the tribe when I want to discuss an issue with the tribal case worker, I feel like I am talking to a person who’s really not hearing me. It’s like the case worker is not there.

I talked to the program which works for the Tulalip Tribe named Cheri Folkman. She was able to give me some general information about tribal courts. Not all tribal courts work the same—it varies depending on the tribe itself. In a dependency hearing with the tribe, the parents will have to find a way to get an attorney to represent them in tribal court. All mentioned that tribal courts are different and have their own laws and rules. The only ones that the tribes share in common are federal laws like the Indian Child Welfare Act.

It is difficult to describe a youth’s rights in tribal court because it depends on the tribe itself. Some tribes only hold court in certain districts, and many tribes do not have the same issues. Tribes don’t have enough money to provide as many resources as the state does. If a tribe wants to, they can change their own rules, which is what makes it unique.

I also want to thank Carla Lewis and the staff and members of the Washington Foundation (WF) for mentoring The Mockingbird Society as the 2009 winner of their $100,000 human services award. The WF is an outstanding organization that has been a leader in philanthropy and community building. The Mockingbird Society is proud to have received this distinguished award from such a stellar organization.

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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 Jeff and Scout, joins Miss Maudie in teaching his kids that it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because the mockingbirds don’t do anything but sing their hearts out. They 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? Because the Mockingbird Society today, the Mockingbird Society and help us give young people a safe place to rest and sing.
Connecting to resources in the community can often be challenging for foster parents and caregivers. One of the main reasons for this is because “…many social workers are not aware of them and some choose not to use them.” Ms. Anne, a Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Hub Home parent. Another reason this can be difficult is that caregivers are also unaware of how to access resources because they don’t know who to contact and where to find out about resources.

Not connecting to community resources can affect the foster families. Sometimes youth are unable to participate in various activities and events in their communities because caregivers don’t know about them or don’t have the resources to fund them. Caregivers come from a wide range of private agencies and state offices. Because of this, information is not shared with all caregivers so not all available resources are being used. “A lack of resources simply drains the foster parent in many ways such as stress, lack of personal well-being, and feeling overwhelmed by the needs of their children,” says Ms. Anne.

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is innovative in its support of the foster care provider service delivery model based on the extended family concept and designed to support prevention and permanency efforts. It is focused on supporting and strengthening families. MFM supports caregivers in connecting to resources in various ways. For one, with each Constellation being a community of practice, family members are able to be shared with all caregivers. “MFM has been an excellent help with providing activity resources, such as books, movies, sports, and coding classes.”

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There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from.

~ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

### Region 1: Chapter in Spokane County by Josephine Davis and Lauren Steed

This month we had our kick-off chapter meeting June 3rd. Twenty youth and alumni attended the Marti Gras themed meeting. The masks, candy, and new MBS information was a perfect lead-in to building a successful chapter. Everyone was involved and had a good time. Our next meeting will be a BBQ July 30th at 3:30 PM in Coeur d’Alene Park in Spokane. We will discuss a community action plan, a chapter name, and share the work and fun that was had at the Summit. A special thanks to The Mockingbird Society for such a wonderful event. Every time I go to the Summit it feels like we are part of a family and everyone stands up for each other. Hopefully, during our next chapter meeting we can share the same ideas and leadership skills that we did at the Summit with our own local legislators!

### Region 2: ACFTFIRST Chapter in Yakima County by Sandara Hunt

This year’s Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit went quite well. There was a welcome and a super fun team building activity, which involved a scavenger hunt that went on throughout the entire grounds of the hotel. There were some fun leadership workshops and funny karaoke that went on. As usual, the food was great, and there was a lot of it. I was sad when it was over but I have a feeling there will be more bills passed. This month our chapter held Life Advocacy 101 Training at the Yakima Casey Family Programs Field Office. It went fantastically and, as usual, I was training alongside Tammy.

### Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Hunter Nelson

This year, the Summit was smaller, so we spoke louder and made sure that our issues were clearly put on the table for everyone to hear. The speeches could only be three minutes each, so we had to make our strong points quickly. Our region spoke in support of making more stable placements for foster youth. I can assure you that all the regions including ours made the issues clear. We definitely made our voices heard and the Commission Board was moved by what we had to say. After the speeches were done, there was time for questions and for pictures to be taken as well. At the end, there was a raffle during which many people won iPods, gift cards, flash drives, and many fun prizes. In conclusion, the Leadership Summit was wonderful. I would strongly encourage any eligible youth to attend next year. It could be your voice that makes the difference for other youth around the state of Washington.

### Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Yolanda Kilgore

This month we decided what we wanted to focus on at the Summit this year. There were many important issues we wanted to see changed but we chose to focus on Legal Representation. The chapter was updated on what happened at the State Advisory Council Meeting. Chapter leader elections were also held and we also voted to not allow revolving chapter leaders to have consecutive terms. We gained a new chapter member as well, Kevin, who was elected to be our new revolving chapter leader. Next month’s meeting will be held on August 10th at the 2100 building from 3:30-5:30 PM. We will work on how we want to help our community and plan some fun civic engagement activities. I hope to see some new faces in the chapter meetings. The Summit was amazing and gave youth a chance to network and make stronger connections. All the chapters’ presentations were outstanding.

### Region 5: Chapter in Pierce County by Kiaraa Brown

This month we had Know Your Rights training and the Summit, which made me more interested in The Mockingbird Society (MBS). I was impressed because there were a lot of youth at the Summit who were interested in joining MBS because they wanted their voices to be heard. In our region, the Summit group met three times to decide what topic to present to the Commission. The topics that we decided on were problem solving and the Foster Care to College Mentoring Program. We presented how mentors impact the lives of youth in the foster care system and how we want the community to get involved in the lives of foster youth so they can better succeed. Being involved in the Summit was a great moment for me because I had the opportunity to meet extraordinary foster youth from across the state as well as members of the Commission.

### Region 6: Speak Up Chapter in Clark County by Alexis Holland

This month I had the opportunity to go to the Summit where I really enjoyed the atmosphere with all the youth. The foster youth were very welcoming and I got to know people who’ve experienced the same things I have. We first did a scavenger hunt with members of other regions. Then we worked on the six qualities of leadership with our own regions. Our region had “responsibility.” We performed a skit and the highlight was Crystal dancing to “She Works Hard for the Money.” The other regions had very creative ideas and were entertaining as well. The next day we spent most of the morning preparing our speeches which we gave in front of all the youth and received very helpful feedback. Then came our final presentations. All of the regions did very well and I believe the Commission was very interested in our ideas. In my opinion, our points were truly noticed. All in all, it was an informative and fun weekend. Great job youth and alumni!