This month we say goodbye to a person who has been in our program and the Youth Lead program, as well as being here to usher in the “golden age” of The Mockingbird Society (MBS). Najja Morris is leaving MBS and I would like to first off say to her, “Thank you so much for everything that you have done. I personally am grateful to you for how much you have helped me learn as well as everything that you do and have done for the youth here.” She has decided to go and pursue more education and that is something that MBS encourages. I can honestly say that she has really shown great leadership and an outstanding amount of love for us youth. I took the liberty of interviewing a few administrative that about Najja and what their favorite memory of her is.

Jim Theofelis: “I have many wonderful memories with Najja and it’s amazing how much growth has occurred during her time at MBS. I have many positive memories including taking youth to Washington, D.C., Baltimore and California, places young people have never been to before and metaphorically. My warmest wishes follow Najja.”

Wanda Hackett: “The Youth Lead trip to California to visit the California Youth Connection was a great team building experience! I also enjoy Najja’s zaniness; her laugh is infectious and always brings a smile to my face. I appreciate Najja’s conscientiousness and tenacity to get a great paper out every month, on time!”

Marie Goines: “I have so many favorite memories of Najja, but the ones that stand out for me are the teaching moments that we’ve shared. Thanks to Najja, I now know the value of laughter and the joy of connecting with and supporting the youth we serve.”

We share many fond memories of Najja. The fact is that she has a job that isn’t the same errors I made when I decided to attend college which is that I under-utilized my resources to get a great paper out every month, on time!”

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It’s June, so even though it’s 53 degrees and raining as I write this, I want to wish you all Happy Summer! June is a special month for so many reasons, not the least of which are the celebrations that come with high school graduations. May graduations. I want to express my congratulations to all of the young people in foster care who have made the sacrifices and achieved their high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED). This is not an easy accomplishment and speaks to the resiliency and fortitude of these young people. As you can see by my article in this issue of the Mockingbird Times, our own Sam Martin has earned his high school diploma and has been accepted to the University of Washington. Congratulations, Sam! I also want to express my congratulations to all of the foster parents, kinship caregivers, social workers and, of course, teachers who have supported the young people in their charge to persevere and achieve. This is critical as all the research indicates that the road out of poverty is guided by furthering one’s educational success. Again, congratulations to all of the 2008 graduates!

SM: Yes actually I do, I wish that I were eligible for them, for example the Governors Scholarship, Fostering to College, and Educational Training Vouchers.

MT: What advice would you give to foster youth preparing for college?

SM: What guidance is not there. The most important thing you need is someone to walk through the entire process. It is almost like school counselors expect you to just graduate and not go to the next level.

MT: What advice would you give to foster youth preparing for college?

SM: I would have them find an adult mentor or coach to help them through the process. Someone who is familiar with the process as well, such as a mentor from Coaching to College. [Ed. note: Coaching to College is a Treehouse program. See www.treehouseforkids.org/whatwe do/coaching_to_col lege for more information.]

MT: If you had the opportunity to redo anything, as far as college prep was concerned, what would it be?

SM: Start a lot earlier; I didn’t even familiarize myself with the process until October.

MT: Do you think there are enough resources available for you in the system as far as obtaining a college education in concerned?

SM: Yes actually I do, I wish that I were eligible for them, for example the Governors Scholarship, Fostering to College, and Educational Training Vouchers.

MT: What other resources do you think youth in care might need upon entering college?

SM: The same thing they needed all of their life: support. You can’t send a kid to college without support so what makes you think foster youth are any different.

For anyone who may think that you are incapable of attending school, I’m here to let you know that you can as long as you bring some focus to it. Dedicate some time every day to your goals no matter how big or small they are. Value yourself and your future and you can make any dream a reality, so remember to dream big.

Thank you!

Alaskan Copper & Brass Company/Alaskan Copper Works; Anonymics; Virginia Blayney; Kathryn Brooks; Karen Connell; Eastside Friends Meeting; Nancy Lussuci & Christine Jackson; The National Foster Parent Association; Conor Neu; Mary Schreiber; Suzanne Shaver; Christine Shull; Chris Townsend; Yancy Wright

Mockingbird Society
24th Ave South, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdso ciety.org

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We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation’s most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you’ll receive a monthly edition of the Mockingbird Times. Thank you for your contribution.

ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(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 advisor regarding your specific tax situation. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth authors of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, and poetry which are compensated up to $25 per published piece.

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A Monthly Newspaper Written and Produced by Youth Who Have Experienced Foster Care and/or Homelessness

Mockingbird Society
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Denial is typically the first stage. Denial can be experienced as numbness, avoidance, isolation, or just straight up denial. This is the stage where you just cannot accept the fact that a loss is occurring. It basically does not feel like the situation is real. The next stage is generally anger. At this stage you have gotten past the denial stage. Now you are angry and you might take it out on the people who are closest to you, which is what I used to do. Bargaining is the next stage. In this stage, you tend to come up with ways to get back whatever you have lost. For example, some people might ask, “If I change this or that, will you not leave?” The depression stage is basically the time for sadness. This stage is generally coming, after the first three stages. This stage is where you feel hopeless and helpless. It could also include crying, isolation or however you deal with your sadness. The last and final stage is acceptance. This stage is where you come to realize that the loss has happened and there is really nothing you can do about it. It can take awhile for you to reach the stage of acceptance. Even when you reach this stage you might still feel sadness and anger but you have come to accept the loss.

Through my life I have had a big problem with moving on. I am not only sure why, but I do have an idea. Maybe it is because of my parents running out of my life at such a young age. It could be because my adoptive parents gave me up. It could be because I was moved to over 50 places while in the foster care system between the ages of 11 and 17. I think it is probably a combination of these reasons. Within the last couple of months, I have had some people I was really close to leave out of my life. Since I have had this happen to me many times before, I have learned exactly how to keep what I was feeling inside. I ignored the fact that these people were moving on and would no longer be apart of my life. One day I was talking with my case manager. I was really stressed and sad because it seemed like everyone whom I had grown to trust and care about was leaving me. She told me about the five stages of grief which I had heard a little bit about before. As she was naming them, Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance, I was thinking to myself, “I have had all of these feelings.” The one that I had always struggled with was to acceptance. I don’t think I ever used to accept the fact that people who I trusted or loved left me. I would just put it in the back of my mind like it never happened. Even though I was well aware that it had happened. I just could never come to the point of accepting that reality.

When I was first introduced to the first five stages of grief, I was thinking, “That’s only what happens when a death occurs.” I was wrong. The five stages of grief happen whenever you loose someone or even something close to you, for example friends, counselors, social workers, case managers, and foster parents. It can also be your house, car, job, or school, basically anything that means something to you.

The five stages of grief don’t always go in any particular order, it just depends on the person and how they handle things. Denial is typically the first stage. Denial can be experienced as numbness, avoidance, isolation, or just straight up denial. This is the stage where you just cannot accept the fact that a loss is occurring. It basically does not feel like the situation is real. The next stage is generally anger. At this stage you have gotten past the denial stage. Now you are angry and you
Mockingbird Times, June 2008

Why Religion? BY JESSICA GARCIA

What is religion and why do we have it? There is more than one definition of religion so it can mean a lot of things. In general, religion is a combination of gods or goddesses who are responsible for the universe and its continuing operations. Some define it as sacred or spiritual, or being devoted to a certain thing you do regularly like exercising, going to church, meditating, or even going to the mountains on a nature walk to be one with nature. Doing these things can be religious because it’s something you do for your own personal growth and to have a source of spiritual energy which is also a form of religion.

We may ask ourselves why we need something to believe in. Well, maybe people need something to hold on to; something that will stay constant and not change in their lives because our lives are constantly changing even when we least expect it. Most people were born with some sort of religion, simply raised with their beliefs. But I didn’t want to question those beliefs, basically “blind faith.” Religion can give a feeling of community, friendship and support. Most religions and no one puts pressure on you to go to church, train your God, or obey his rules. Others believe that when we die, we are dead, that we have one life to live.

Streetlight BY Dre

My name is Dre. Today I want to talk to you about my definition of street life. Street life is not just a word. It’s a way to live. Doing drugs, selling drugs, killing, fighting—whatever your definition is, I’ve done it. I think back to the times I was housed. I’ve seen garbage you’ve only dreamed of. But I’m coming at you with no sugarcoated no one is going to hold your hand through this. If you want to know what street life is, come breathe it, go through this process. If you want to make our own choices between good and evil. The influence is on us. I go to church on Sundays which is a rest day, and I keep it holy by doing good deeds for other people and being positive. However, I do not think Christians should go around with guns and expect to have mercy, I mean it’s a mistake. I believe in Jesus, the son of God, did not want us to force religion on others. Some would say I’m Christian but I believe what I want to be. I go to church throughout my life and I was told God wouldn’t love me if I do this or that or if I don’t follow the ten commandments and that God would judge me for what I’ve done if I’m doing the best I can. My creator is a loving God and loves me no matter what. I have had fun finding your religion and may it help you in the best way on your journey through life.

When I got high the same stuff would happen. I would just sit there and chill. I didn’t care who was around me, what I looked like, what I did. Whatever I had to do with drugs. I thought of killing myself plenty of times. It’s what drugs do. They make you think irrational thoughts. I would end up being put in a cell and going to jail for a dumb drug. While I was locked up, I wanted to get out of there so I could get more drugs, I just wanted to get high. For six years I was in this mindset. I went to treatment. I went to drug and alcohol classes and had my support system set up. Of course I relapsed, but that’s a part of it. I just kept going. Now I’m back to the old me, using drugs, not giving a care. But my support system kicked in like it’s supposed to and got me back on track. My support system has changed with my support group. They taught me it’s okay to be an addict. I continued on with my treatment, opted into drug court, and began me a new life and a source.

Now I am going to school and getting my General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and living life as an adult. My life is going great. I am sober as day. I have never been so happy and I never thought selling drugs and getting caught would be the best thing that would ever happen to me. When I was getting high, I forgot all my skills that I had learned in grade school like reading, writing and math. I’m trying to re-learn those skills, slowly but surely.

Street life is more than a way of life. It’s a way of thinking, breathing, living, and it’s not going to change. It’s going to go on and on about how my life has dramatically changed. But I’m telling you this because there is actually someone who does care, and that’s yourself. Don’t ever let anybody tell you that you can’t do something or you can’t pass a test or you’re a waste of good air and space. Keep your chin up, like I do. I’ll never let my chin lower. The more you grow up, the harder life is. It’s never going to get easy. But one thing is for sure: you will get over it and go on about it. I have a walking miracle. Don’t do it for anybody else. Just do it for yourself. It is starting to get light outside. Hopefully I opened up your mind and explained something you didn’t know. The streetlight is going out so get up and learn about it.

Come Work for The Mockingbird Society!

The Mockingbird Society is hiring for the following positions:

· Development Assistant

Foster care alumni and people of color encouraged to apply. See www.mockingbird.org/jobs for details.

My Senior Year, the End BY SAMUEL MARTIN

I left off talking about getting into the University of Washington (UW). It was almost too good to be true. I felt that I should actually be on the decline. However, I am actually on an incline. Of course, wrenches are thrown at the way the all the time. Not to say that all hasn’t been well. I was really on top of the world when I found out I got accepted to the UW. I felt accomplished, everyone was so proud and everything worked. The fire inside was strong. All I needed was one more French credit and I could take a few more classes. So I signed up for Running Start at Central Community College (SCCC) which struck my interest. Yet that did not turn out to be the case; what happened was an example of being thrown for a loop.

During April, I rode the wave of being focused on school for a few weeks. Eight weeks before graduation I found out I needed an extra year of science as well as French. I also realized that Running Start wasn’t conducive for me. I stopped going. I wasn’t the smartest thing I have ever done. I know that I signed up for Bothell Beach High School once again. I signed up for quite a few classes there. I was in a completely different environment now that I was no longer at SCCC. Being away for a year made me really remember what the high school environment was like. Nothing against my school, it just took some getting used to. I will achieve my goal of graduating from high school. Now it just comes down to passing my last few classes. All focus is on these last couple of days and doing everything that it takes. But more importantly, I know will succeed, and the ember that I spoke of is already glowing.

The most important lesson I learned is to check in and keep records for what you have done in school. Make sure you know what classes you took and have a record of what you need to do to graduate. This applies anywhere. You don’t want to be stuck in a situation where this could be an error in your transcript or anything. It is important to step up for yourself and learn how to advocate. In The Mockingbird Society’s Life Advocacy 101 class we talk about why it is important to address any dispute you may have. This is a good example because if I hadn’t advocated for myself I wouldn’t be graduating. So, lesson learned on my behalf.

It has been a long hard struggle and it isn’t even complete yet. I have a lot of work to do but honestly, it all worked out before and I trust this feeling that I will continue to do well in school. It has been a long journey and I feel like to say that this has been a journey for me and I greatly appreciate you taking the time out to listen to me and go along for the ride. I hope that I painted a realistic picture for you.

To be a table captain, reserve a seat, or sponsor this event, please contact Darcie Gray, darcie@mockingbird.org or 206.323.KIDS (5437).
As Time Goes On
ASHLEY ABBOTT
As time goes on, you will realize that there are bigger and better things to do with your life and those around you. As time goes on, you will know that your life will not change if you do not want it to. As time goes on, there will be a change with every single person in the world. As time goes on, you will know that your life is not going to change when you do not want it to change. As time goes on, people are going to change their ways of doing things. As time goes on, you must be utterly insane.

A Flower’s Color
THOMAS DARREN
With wind blowing definition, captured in a photo.

A flower and the color is ravishing as the sensation of Mrs. Owens in her essence

The sequence of its growth The nature in its own habitat!

The flower’s own essence is essential to take note, because only in that would you appreciate

It in fullness Size, magnitude, color Essence Essence Essence!

Creative Corner

No person is your friend who demands your silence, or denies your right to grow.

~ Alice Walker

Lost in your silence, or denies your right to grow.

Losing a Best Friend
ANNA GONZALES
You are a great friend. A good friendship goes a long way. I remember the good times we had. You are a good friend, telling secrets, going shopping. You mean a lot to me. You care about my feelings as I care about yours. You are a good friend. I never meant to hurt you and I am really sorry. I hoped this could have lasted longer. A huge friendship becomes a huge miracle for everyone. I miss you.
You are a friend.

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 it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird because “…Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but make music for us to enjoy. They don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.”

What if we created an organization, a community, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment that Atticus had for mockingbirds?

Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

The Mockingbird Society’s Youth LEAD Program Presents
LIFE ADVOCACY 101

Learn how to be your OWN best advocate in all areas of your life. Participate in activities that will give you the skills you need to “make things happen” for your personal success!

Receive your own personal Life Advocacy 101 TOOL!

Contact us to today to schedule your FREE Life Advocacy 101 Training for your group or organization! Open to all youth and young adults ages 14 to 23.

Contact Sam at samm_mockingbird@yahoo.com or Naja at naja@mockingbirdscociety.org for more information and details.

Essence
Size, magnitude, color Essence Essence Essence!

Keeping Busy This Summer
DIAMONIQUE WALKER
This summer, there will be tons of programs and activities to do. For teens especially, this could be a good time to get your community service hours to graduate. As far as the summer goes, there will be a lot of great opportunities for volunteering and having fun, while keeping busy.

The YMCA has fun and free activities to do all summer. They go on monthly trips throughout the summer and they are all expenses paid. If you are a member of the YMCA then you may be interested in these trips and activities. If you want to be a part of them sign up at any YMCA. The Center at the 2100 Building, run by the YMCA, is a drop-in center for ages 17 through 24. Participation is free for those who are eligible and includes a free YMCA membership.

Some of the activities the YMCA is offering this summer include whitewater rafting in June, sea kayaking in the San Juan Islands in July, backpacking in the North Cascades in August and Sailing with the Orion Center in early September. Whitewater rafting is a challenging activity, where you use a raft to navigate down a river or other rough body of water. Back packing is a combination of hiking and camping. You carry everything that you need in a pack on your back, including food, clothes, sleeping gear and such.

Volunteer doesn’t have to be boring. If you volunteer for a cause that you believe or do something you enjoy, the time will pass and it could even be fun. At public libraries, community centers, schools, and many more places, you can find an opportunity for volunteering that suits you. One summer, I volunteered on Mount Rainier where I helped preserve a hiking path by carrying very large pieces of wood up a trail. We put them along the edges of the path so that the trail wouldn’t erode. I got to camp on Mount Rainier at night, which was my first time camping, and I thought it was pretty fun.

Another idea for the summer is to keep a diary or a journal. When you look back you may want to remember the good, the bad, and the ugly things that happened over the summer. When you read back on what you wrote, you could be reminded of an experience that you may have forgotten. Writing down your feelings is also a healthy way of releasing. With your journal, taking pictures to remember every detail of a moment is a good idea too. A picture is worth a thousand words. You can go back and relive the moment just like you were there again.

There are summer day camp programs at almost every community center. I participated in one a few years back and it was pretty fun. We did different stuff every day and it was always exciting. If you need help paying for it, you can get that as well.

There are scholarship funds and DSHS help as well. If there is something that you really want to do, you shouldn’t let money get in the way. There is usually always a way to help with that.

Some additional local activities for Seattle are:

Seafair
7/5/3/3 there are many events throughout Seafair including the Torchlight Parade, hydroplane races, the Bite of Seattle, and so many more. www.seafair.com

Umoja Fest
8/7/2/2 celebrating African heritage with a festival and parade. It will be located in the Central District from 23rd & Union to Judkins Park. www.umojaafest.com

Seattle International Film Festival
Now through June 15th. There will be 25 days of viewing throughout several different theatres including the Egyptian, Harvard Exit, AMC Pacific Place 11 Theatres, Broadway Performance Hall, Cinerama and Paramount Theatre. www.siff.net