In This Issue
Letter From the Editor
Jim Theofelis
Page 2
A Change for the Greatergood, No Matter How Small
David Buck
Page 2
Teen Pregnancy Rates in the US
Diamonique Walker
Page 3
The House on the Corner
Ian Grant
Page 3
Creative Corner: I’m Almost There
Jasmin Esters
Page 4
The Rose
Randy
Page 4
Calendar of Events
Page 4
News From The Mockingbird Network
Page 4

Mockingbird Times
June 2010

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Youth Leader to Spend the Day with DSHS Chief
BY IAN GRANT

This year, The Mockingbird Society is partnering with the Department of Social and Health Services Secretary Susan Dreyfus to offer a very special opportunity to participants in the 2010 Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit. Youth from across the state were invited to submit essays about leadership to a panel of community leaders and child welfare experts. The author of the winning essay will spend the day with Secretary Dreyfus.

It is important to realize that this is absolutely unprecedented. Never before has the person in charge of Washington’s entire child welfare system invited a youth in care or an alumni of care to spend a day with her. This lucky youth will be able to see firsthand how big a job it is to oversee policies for children and families in need in our state. The Mockingbird Society applauds Secretary Dreyfus’ commitment to making sure that the people most affected by the child welfare system have a voice in how policies are made and people are served.

TRANSITIONAL LIVING
BY JERRY BODO

Transitional living to adulthood is tough for everyone, but it can be especially hard for youth who were touched by the child welfare system. One program that helps on that path to adulthood: transitional living programs.

These programs gain referrals through case managers and some are an extension of the Youth Care Housing Program. The time period and rules for transitional housing vary. I looked at several and they range from offering six months of stable housing for homeless youth up to two years. Programs that offer more time, allow youth to stabilize and get ready for true independence. The transitional living programs have less structure and are more like the real world, but they do give you the self confidence to ultimately survive on your own. These programs do not discriminate on the basis of race, gender or sexual orientation.

I live in transitional housing and know firsthand what a difference the program has made in my life. I talked to a few other youth that live in transitional housing to get the inside scoop, and another point of view. I also talked to the program manager of Youth Care’s Isis House. Isis House and Home of Hope (HOH) are both featured here and have a strong partnership.

Shortly after I started working at The Mockingbird Society, I found out about transitional housing. I was looking for stable living circumstances and my supervisor told me about Home of Hope (HOH) Apartments. To qualify to live there, I was treated in the same way I would have been if I were moving into a private apartment. I was treated like an adult and that is what I really like about the transitional housing program. Everything that a person has to do while living on their own, is what I have done and do. It is preparing me for life after care. I have been living at Home of Hope for over a year now. Having my own apartment is a dream come true. All boundaries are set by me, for what makes me comfortable, and that is apart of independent living.

The Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP) is another great program. IYHP provides rental assistance and case management to eligible youth aging out of the state foster care system. I had the opportunity to speak with Josephine Davis who has been living in this program for five months. She said, “I love living in the program. It has changed my life because it took me out of being homeless and now I am stable. My foster parents had kicked me out. If I follow the rules and pay my bills then I wont get kicked out of IYHP. I am now in charge of my life, and take care of my self.”

I feel the same way about HOH. It is just like following rules at someone else’s house, the only difference is that it’s my house and I have to pay bills in order to keep a roof over my head. I asked Josephine, what is the easiest part of living in the program, and what would you tell a new comer entering the program?

“The easiest part of living in IYHP is the financial help, and I would tell a new comer to pay their rent and not to screw up a wonderful opportunity of a

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Dear Friends,

June 2010 marks our 5th Annual Foster Youth and Alum
ni Leadership Summit.

Youth and alumni of care come together from every corner of Washington State to give voice to a population of youth legally and morally dependent on the state as "parent.

At the Summit, youth and alumni of care are given a platform and opportunity to stand up for themselves and those that follow them to make constructive change. Without advocacy, their life challenges can seem too complex and insurmountable.

These young people are full of potential and wisdom and insight, too often go unseen and unheard.

Their issues are featured monthly in The Mockingbird Times and touch on everything from transitional living skills to teen parenting -- from inspirational civil rights leaders to how to improve group homes. I'm struck in every article by the ability of youth to reflect on their own experience, and moreover, to learn and lead.

I invite you to read and reflect along with us. Contained in their stories is an essential truth: systems don’t change lives, families and relationships do. And, in the case of these children, who have been taken from their parents into state care, we are the state — you and I.

Please join me in supporting them as they emerge from the Summit. The Network Youth will be ready with their 2011 legislative agenda to seek reforms from increasing safe housing to safer family environments. They will be filled with the hope that their work will make it better for those children who through no fault of their own will end up in foster care.

That same day Dorothy Height was hired by the YWCA. She spent the next several years working to end segregation within the YWCA and inspiring unity within the neighboring communities. In 1957, Height was named president of the National Council of Negro Women, a position she held until 1997. During the height of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Height organized "Wednesdays at Mississippi," which brought together black and white women from the North and South to create a dialogue of understanding. She also marched with Dr. Martin Luther King through the deep South and can been seen in historical footage, in the 1963 March on Wash-

According to the Dictionary Of American Biography, "Without community support, we would not have a strong quality of life. It is important to the people who serve as well as the recipient. It's the way we grow and develop.

Dorothy Height started out as a case manager, and became civil rights icon. To the end of her life she did not distinguish between the two roles. To her, they were all work done for the greater-good, no matter how small, is of equal value, and as important as any that should be remembered throughout history.

We at the Mockingbird Society are working towards the greater good. And we have succeeded on many fronts, but it's a long road and the words of Dorothy Height ring true for me, and hopefully will inspire others.

Dorothy Height was model for humankind as it should be. She dedicated her life to striving for social change and justice. She was a case worker for foster youth to marching with Dr. Martin Luther King; she always strove towards an ideal making the world a better place. People like Dorothy Height drive me in my ideal that I might be able to achieve some good as well. To me it doesn’t matter how small of a change, or how big of a change we make, as long as we make the world a better place for future generations. Whether a case worker trying your best to give foster youth a chance, or being a spokesperson for the civil rights movement, we have all done our duty.

http://www.ncnw.org/about/height.htm

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Teen Pregnancy Rates in the US by Diamonique Walker

Every year around 750,000 teenage girls will get pregnant in the United States. That means more than one-third of girls get pregnant before the age of 20. The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the industrialized world.

Sadly, in some situations teen age girls get pregnant and get kicked out of their living arrangements. Being a teen mother myself, I’m thankful that I have accepting parents that they have supported my decisions. But not everyone is so fortunate. I recently talked to someone who just encountered this situation. She got kicked out of her home (with her parents) because she refused to have an abortion. So, where does a pregnant teenager go?

In Seattle, there are resources available to young mothers. First time mothers can take parenting classes or join support groups. There also are group homes that are designed for teen mothers and even independent living programs for this specific population. These places can give teen mothers the opportunity to learn the skills they’ll be needed to be great and successful mothers, and young women, while guiding them on the transitional path to adulthood.

At Ariddell Mitchell Home, they accept young mothers between the ages of 15-17 and can house up to 6 families at a time in individual apartments. This program requires young women to stay in school, get training and experience, and provide youth with the skills to live independently. They also offer case management and help the young people to transition into a nice home because you won’t get a chance like this again.”

I agree with Josephine, because these programs are once in a lifetime chance to prepare for life alone.

Program managers and staff of these programs are there to help push the youth further into adulthood; to help increase the peace with in the facilities, inform about resources available, and the basic independent living skills one will need to survive.

“These programs are once in a lifetime chance to prepare for life alone.”

Kate Culpeper, Isis House gave me insight from staff point of view. I asked her how long a youth can stay at this house and this was her response: “A youth can stay up to two years if that’s what they need to become stable. And, we always try to have a place for youth to go. We are Phase 1 transitional housing.”

For a long time, group homes have been an oft-forgotten cul de sac of the child welfare system. The place where the children who are too old, or too problematic, or too hard to find places for end up. They run the gamut from somewhat independent-designed to teach independent living skills or to serve specific populations to correctional facilities and psychiatric institutions. They are often vilified as little better than juvie facilities where the system sticks to inconvenient kids until they age out and the State no longer has to worry about them. They are often praised as necessary facilities which prevent troubled youth from slipping through the cracks entirely.

They are, in a word, complicated. To shine a better light on this somewhat misunderstood aspect of foster care, I spoke to a gentleman who manages several group homes for a private agency. The gentleman in question was previously the manager of a single group home. He spoke on condition of anonymity, and I will refer to him as Mr. Doe. Foster care administrators have in the war against burnout and turnover.

Mr. Doe recommends taking the following steps. First, provide emotional and physical safety; talk with your child openly and honestly; listen to your child’s concerns; respect your child’s responses; acknowledge your child’s contributions; and to work through their differences and struggles; support your child’s needs; get involved in your child’s school; teach your child the right from wrong; protect your child from feeling of loneliness and isolation; defend your child openly; and create opportunity for your child to learn; teach your child right from wrong; protect your child from feeling of loneliness and isolation; defend your child openly; and create opportunity for your child to learn. To shine a better light on this somewhat misunderstood aspect of foster care, I spoke to a gentleman who manages several group homes for a private agency. The gentleman in question was previously the manager of a single group home. He spoke on condition of anonymity, and I will refer to him as Mr. Doe.

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TRANSITIONAL LIVING, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

And Run Away Teens, Continued From Page 1

problems. Many teens that runaway from home do not have the proper support from their parents and/or guardians to help them transition into adulthood. Many teens need reassurance that they will be safe and secure no matter what — whether they are living with their parents, a foster family or on their own. Teens need structure and guidance in their life. We need parents that will not give up on us; that will push us to find our talents and reach for our hopes, and dreams.

Even though running away might feel like it’s the best option, it’s not. There are major consequences for being on the streets.

There are greater risks of severe anxiety and depression, suicide, poor health, nutrition, and low self-esteem. Also attending school or trying to get back into school is very difficult. You need transportation to and from school, proof of residence and medical records.

Being a runaway is extremely hard for the youth, as well as the family. To prevent teens from running away the Polly Klaas Foundation recommends taking the following steps. First, provide emotional and physical safety; talk with your child openly and honestly; listen to your child’s concerns; respect your child’s responses; acknowledge your child’s contributions; and to work through their differences and struggles; support your child’s needs; get involved in your child’s school; teach your child the right from wrong; protect your child from feeling of loneliness and isolation; defend your child openly; and create opportunity for your child to learn.

Thank You!


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Page 3

Mockingbird Times, June 2010
**I’m Almost There**
_by Jasmin Esters_

My heart sinks when you’re gone.
I’m alone in the darkness with no one to help me.
I yell for help but nobody comes.
The light never shows in a million years because you’re gone
And you aren’t here to protect me.
Today I’m strong and I will not give up on you.
I will put my faith in God and in myself.
I’ll never give up on myself.
I will work till the end.
God put me on this earth to succeed not to give up on my life.
My life maybe going bad but God is in my life so it can’t be hard
Now I see the light that shines real bright like a smile on my face.
Now I feel free that you’re watching over me.

“We Need Your Work!”

We are in great need 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 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.

“Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other.”

~Abraham Lincoln

**Region 1** by Noah Stiles

On May 1st, we flew to Seattle for the Strategic Advisory Council (SAC) meeting. We presented our topics and received great feedback. Alya, Josey, Alene Alexander, and I attended the 3rd annual educational conference which promotes secondary education and wrap around services. We spoke on how Independent Living Skills, Passport, and other educational assistance have helped us to succeed. Back at Volunteers of America, members of our chapter had an opportunity to share experiences in foster care and gave input on how the system needs to be changed as part of a federal assessment. Josey and I facilitated a Voice Development training with members of our chapter in preparation for the upcoming Leadership Summit. At our Chinese New Year-themed chapter meeting, we chose the final topic that we will present at the Summit.

**Region 2** by Brenda Gonzalez

Brenda and Taylor represented Region 2 at the SAC meeting. We discussed what each region wanted to present to The Commission during the Leadership Summit. On May 15th ACT FIRST had a Voice Development Training for the participants that will be joining the Summit. Some of the youth learned how to say “no” if they were not comfortable with the questions. We ended the training with a discussion of rules for the Summit and agreed on the rules of conduct to ensure we show respect to all during the event.

**Region 3** by Hunter Nelson

This month we had a S.A.C. meeting where we discussed the future work of the Mockingbird Society. In our chapter, we decided to focus on the importance of court hearings as our topic to bring to the Leadership Summit. Next month we will have the honorable Representative Mary Helen Roberts (District 21) attend our chapter meeting. Region 3 is excited and looking forward to hosting Representative Roberts who is a huge advocate for children, youth and families, and supporter of the Mockingbird Society.

**Region 4** by Rashunda Johnson

This month’s Region 4 chapter meeting focused on the future. Among the SAC updates, there was a discussion in our meeting about how different chapters are doing events distinctive to their regions for chapter leaders to focus on. In our meeting we came up with ideas that could help us improve both as individuals, and as a region for success. The ideas included keeping lines of communication between chapter regions open, having certain roles for certain chapters, staying consistent and doing things outside of our chapter meetings. We touched on the Leadership Summit Committee topics for the conference. We chose the following six topics: Court Proceedings, Transitioning out, Leaving care, Healthcare, Safety and Well being, Education, and Placement and Vision.

**Region 5** by Cameron Williams

Our chapter has been discussing some of the troubles that foster youth have had during the time they were in the system. For the Summit, we currently have come up with two ideas; the rights and laws of the foster youth. For the youth attending the Summit, we did a training session on how to use your voice and present your story properly. Next chapter meeting will be our End of the Year Party.

**Community Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Region 1</td>
<td>June 18th</td>
<td>Kids Concert - Riverfront park. Free music and entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region 2</td>
<td>June 26th-27th</td>
<td>Hooted. Downtown Spokane. 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region 3</td>
<td>June 19th</td>
<td>Singing Contest for youth. Ahtanum Youth Park.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region 4</td>
<td>June 27th</td>
<td>Seattle Pride Festival. Seattle Center, Downtown Seattle</td>
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<tr>
<td>Region 5</td>
<td>June 9th</td>
<td>End of the Year Party - PCA. 3:30pm</td>
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By Jasmin Esters

By Randy

By Brenda Gonzalez

By Hunter Nelson

By Rashunda Johnson

By Cameron Williams

By Noah Stiles

By Jenni Esters

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Watch the Mockingbird Society’s Facebook page at facebook.com/theMockingbirdSociety.

Visit mockingbirdsociety.org to submit your work to the Mockingbird Times.

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