My name is Donnie Sellers. I am 22 years old and I first entered the foster care system when I was 11 years old. I was moved to thirty-eight different foster homes while I was in the state’s care because of my medical disability - known as Cerebral Palsy. I was moved to so many different foster homes because the group homes were unable to provide for my physical safety. For example, I was unable to get my wheelchair and other medical devices in and out of the homes. Many of the foster parents did not know or understand how to help me with my disability, especially when I had to have several operations on my legs. My disability made it difficult for me because I often felt like I was a burden to my foster parents. This led me to believe that I was unwanted. It was extremely hard for me to get the help and support I needed at this critical time in my life. It also was hard for my foster parents to care for me while I was in the foster care system because they did not have the medical training necessary to provide me care.

It was not easy for me to go through everyday life as a child and as a teen in the system with a disability. The operations, coupled with the constant moving, made graduating from high school seem impossible. Especially when it was a constant struggle to feel like I had a safe place to live. I thought I was going to struggle with my disability all my life and that I would never be able to accomplish or achieve anything.

In summer before my 8th grade year, when I was 15, I moved once again to another foster home in Ariel, Washington. However, this placement was different than all of my other placements. It was a medical foster home. My new foster parents knew that I needed a place to live that could handle my medical needs. They brought me into their home with open arms. For the first time I felt like I finally had a stable home. I ended up living with my medical foster family for more than five years. During that time, I was able to get the support and assistance I needed to graduate high school with a 3.5 GPA. My foster parents helped me with my Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and academic action plans to make my goal of completing high school a reality.

I attended the Springdale Job Corps Center, and graduated on September 27, 2010. While at Springdale I was recognized for my attitude and my ability to persevere and not give up when I was faced with challenges regarding my disability. I was asked to come back this year as a student speaker during their graduation in April. This was a huge honor because I really tried to make a difference for people with disabilities while I was at Springdale. I also recently started a new job with a local nonprofit in Vancouver called Innovative Services NW. I am a Youth Assistant/Resource specialist for their Transitions program, which helps foster youth. I am really excited to work there as it has always been a passion of mine to help youth who have struggled through the foster care system, much like I did. I know I will learn a lot and I am always up for a challenge.

Although our past is challenging, the one thing I have learned so far, is to never give up. I have stuck to this lesson, and I will continue to be a fighter, because after all, I am Donnie -- on the loose; wild, unhthinkable, unstoppable me.

Megan Johnson
National Jefferson Award Nominee

Recently I had the pleasure of interviewing Megan Johnson who is Washington State’s 2011 Jefferson Award winner chosen to represent our state nationally for her outstanding public service. Almost ten years ago, at the age of 10, Megan started a small organization called Megan’s Mission. She started out standing outside selling cider to raise money, so that she could buy supplies to make blankets, scarves and buy socks and gloves for homeless people in need. Part of her mission is to personally hand these items out to people that are out on the streets of Seattle. Since she started Megan’s Mission she has raised on average over $10,000 per year and helped four families regain stability.

Megan was in foster care in Korea until she was seven months old. Then she was adopted and brought to the U.S. Her adoptive parents also were foster parents, so she had foster siblings while growing up. Although she doesn’t remember her direct experience while being in care, she lived in close corridors with youth that experienced foster care.

Megan got the inspiration to start her mission when she was just ten. “When I was young, in grade school my church had vacation bible school every year during the summer. I remember seeing a five minute video about the homeless population living in San Francisco. They were living in cardboard boxes, under bridges. Basically they had nothing at all; they just looked extremely sad and lonely. They were shunned from everybody,” said Megan. “That really impacted me. I knew that I really wanted to help the homeless somehow because even though I had never been homeless before, I know what it’s like to be considered different from people. I know what it’s like to be treated like dirt.”

I asked Megan what impact she feels like she’s making on the homeless community and she modestly replied, “Just by seeing the results. Putting a smile on homeless people’s faces and letting them know they’re not forgotten. There’s someone that truly cares about them, whether it’s giving them a blanket, a pair of socks, or just a hug or a prayer.” Megan is doing something that no one else is doing out of the kindness of her heart. When it comes to inspiration she said, “I look up to God, for all he’s done for me, I couldn’t have done it without him. My family and friends of course, especially my mom – who is like my ‘manager’. Also, I am thankful for my co-manager from Baltimor—Maryland, who is about my age, I have a Megan’s Mission branch in the east coast.”

With The Mockingbird Society, youth are encouraged to participate in community service activities to change the face of foster youth in our communities. Megan has been doing exceptional community service for years now and has shared with me some ways to get involved. “You’re never too young or too old to volunteer. Anyone can volunteer and make a difference.” Youth that have a talent or passion for something can use it to volunteer and help out in their community. For example, she said if your passion is art, you could volunteer at a hospital and teach art classes to children that are sick.
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 “… the mockingbird doesn’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.” 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 care and concern that Atticus had for mockingbirds?

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

Siblings write at Camp to Belong

During my interview with Mrs. Schimmels, I was provided with some amazing personal insight into this camp and how it runs and functions. Because this camp is a nonprofit, it is run solely by volunteers; and because these individuals are volunteers they do it out of pure passion for these children and their families. With that being said, when Mrs. Schimmels is considering volunteer applications she personally values and considers applications from former foster youth who have moved on into adulthood.

This camp at first glance seems like a paradise: a Disneyland of sorts. There is swimming, tubing, canoeing, kayaking, arts and crafts, challenge courses, hiking, etc. There is more to it than just fun. There are many skill and relationship building exercises throughout the day. After all, the point of this camp is to bring together siblings separated by foster care and nurture and foster a healthy relationship between them.

That is the true meaning behind this camp. Although it has all the elements of a regular camp there is indeed a purpose behind the week participants spend there. Many of the youth who leave with a better connection than they had before they started; but it’s not just the youth who benefit, the camp counselors and staff also develop lasting relationships with them too. Aside from the counselors leaving feeling a little exhausted, they also leave with a more powerful feeling; the feeling within their heart knowing that they made a difference and selflessly helped someone else for a greater purpose. What can be more rewarding? After all, an individual volunteer at this camp to help further its purpose, which is to help the participants nurture and foster their relationship between their separated siblings. When you not only accomplish this but make an impact on the youth as well, then what can be more rewarding mentally and physically than that? This camp strengthens bonds and strengthens people.


texts in this monograph are distributed across Washington State and the USA, through a private distribution list and as an insert in Mockingbird Times, June 2011
**For every marginalized group of people, advocates need to be there to speak up for them in the community. That is what makes The Mockingbird Society so important; there’s just not enough of a voice for homeless youth out there. We need to secure the futures of homeless youth.**

PSKS was founded after Elaine Simon, Executive Director and Co-Founder for PSKS, was working as a school teacher at The Orion Center for homeless youth and started a conversation about the Becca Bill, which established the time in which authorities and services are required to inform police. That conversation helped to set the stage for the establishment of PSKS as an organization that implements a very similar outcome on the ground level.

Welcome Brenda Chérie Ortega

**BY ASHA BOUCRÉE**

Brenda Chérie Ortega is one of the new members of The Mockingbird Society as a Network Representative. She is a Network Representative who was recently hired, making us the “newbies” of MBS. My first assignment was to conduct a one-on-one interview with my fellow Network Representative. Brenda is 23 years young and has an excellent head on her shoulders. She has an excellent outlook on life and always walks around with a smile. Brenda was born not only a twin, but also a leap year baby, essentially making her the youngest member of The Mockingbird Society (Technically, she has only had five birthdays). Brenda has a one-year-old daughter, Abrielle, who she loves and nurtures with all that she has to give. Ms. Ortega considers herself a Seattleite, who she loves and nurtures with all that she has to give. Ms. Ortega considers herself a Seattleite, who she loves and nurtures with all that she has to give.

Over time, Ms. Ortega developed an appetite for change. Her priorities for change include reforming the trainings DSHS Social Work uses with foster youth, and to have the foster care system begin to tell the truth, and love are exemplified by her experiences. Brenda’s life in the foster care system is not something that she views from a growing and effects sharing her story with those who may not have enough knowledge about the trials and tribulations most foster youth experience. Before she started at The Mockingbird Society, Brenda was a regular member of the Member Advisory Committee (M.A.C.), which is a small yet successful organization put together by members of the YMCA Center for Young Adults. In this committee, Brenda would help her community, and attend regular M.A.C. meetings.

Brenda views the Becca Bill and the youth vote. And, most likely, and then go to a technical school. I want to have a broad range of skills and educational degrees and certificates. Asha Boucrée is an exemplary role model for children and young adults alike. She proves every day that a person can be better than their current circumstances, turn a pessimistic situation into an optimistic idea, and always be there when you need a smiling face. Congratulations and Welcome to the Mockingbird Society, and may your time with us be fruitful.

**MEGAN, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1**

Although Megan is like a super hero in her community, she’s just a regular person in her free time. She enjoys traveling, which she does often on business. She also likes to build legos and draw to help relieve stress. Watching television is something she likes to do as well including shows like Spongebob, Barney, and the Channel.

**Welcome Asha Boucrée**

**BY BRENDA CHÉRIE ORTEGA**

One of the newest members of the Mockingbird team is also the youngest. 17-year-old Asha Boucrée is joining the ranks of a striking team. Megan Boucrée has accompanied the Mockingbird Society on multiple projects that have helped her become a positive person, who will have something great to say when I’m 50.” As a “typical American who is from everywhere,” she has proven that she is passionate about changing our society. When asked to describe major problems with not only the foster care culture, but also within society at large, she responded, “Healthcare. They make funding an excuse when it’s more than that.”

Asha’s passion for knowledge, truth, and love are exemplified by her pastimes. “I love to write poetry, words of wisdom, and research topics. Everything smaller than me, I have a passion for, like little innocents.”

Her big heart and generous spirit did not come from such a loving upbringing, “I entered foster care as a newborn. My first birth of homelessness when I was nine. I had an apartment where my dad left me. I was alone, scared, and didn’t know what to do on the streets of LA.” However, when you look at Miss Boucrée, you do not see the child who slept under a bridge during the horrid 2008 snowstorm, nor the GED she obtained at the stunning age of 16. What you do see is a passion blooming in her eyes as she relays what she would do as well as what she can do.

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 mockingbirdso.org and/or contact us at 206-523-8347 or via email at boba@mockingbirdso.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.

We Welcome Your Work!
Reflection
By Brenda Cherie Ortega
If you could sit back and listen what would your heart tell you? Would it whisper sweet nothings of yesterday? Or would it scream about today? Would it sing a sweet melody of the things to come? Or would it simply hum? My life has been a turmoil of ups and downs. My ups were like I was upside down so really it was all the same. Then I reached the point where I couldn’t find any peace. So I let it go. I could review the past, and forget the present, and plan for the future. But there is too much neglect, sorrow, and anger; the dangerous three. I want to reflect the beauty that others see of me, then I could possibly be truly extraordinary.

Telepathy
By Mykal Alonzo
We know too much to go back, Aware and alert, We watch, As instinct tells those lost… “Run faster” In their minds the misguided think… “Liberty” My words… Deflected… They stop at a great distance… Or would it simply hum? My life has been a turmoil of ups and downs. My ups were like I was upside down so really it was all the same. Then I reached the point where I couldn’t find any peace. So I let it go. I could review the past, and forget the present, and plan for the future. But there is too much neglect, sorrow, and anger; the dangerous three. I want to reflect the beauty that others see of me, then I could possibly be truly extraordinary.

Community Events
Region 1 - North (Spokane)
June 16th: Spokane Valley Community Fishing Lot Event - 8-9pm. Eastpoint parking lot. Kids carnival, fire truck, yard sale, vendors. Free!
June 3rd-June 5th: Art fest - Coeur d’Alene Park in Spokane. Free!
Region 1 - South (Yakima)
June 13th: Free Nature Day - All day. Yakima Aboretum
Region 2 - North (Everett)
June 17th-June 19th: Edmonds Arts Festival - Fri 11-8pm; Sat 10-8pm; Sun 10-6pm. Frances Anderson Center, Edmonds. Free! More info: (206) 285-2455 or http://www.edmondsartsfestival.com.
Region 2 - South (Seattle)
June 4th-August 31st: ZoO Times Outdoor Concerts - Woodland Park Zoo.
Region 3 - North (Tacoma)
June 8th - Chapter Meeting - 3:30pm. PCA.
June 15th - End of the Year Party - 3:30pm. ICA.
Region 3 - South (Olympia)
June 6th: Chapter Meeting - 4-6pm. Community Youth Services in the Cal Sheldon room 2nd floor. More info: (360) 943-0780 x169
Mark your calendar: June 22th-29th Foster Youth and Leadership Summit, Seattle, WA.