The outcome of hard work and dedication by Ashley Laniier

Advocacy is the strongest way to implement change for youth in today’s society. It is the best way for youth to get their voices heard. The Mockingbird Society (MBS) is working to create a system of care in which there are enough foster families to provide the 900,000 children who need foster care every year. We are working to “build a world class foster care system through collaboration, innovation and advocacy.” The Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit and Youth Advocacy Day were two annual events in 2009 that MBS hosts where Foster and Alumni all across the State of Washington have the opportunity to advocate for what they would like to see changed in the child welfare system.

During the 2008 Washington State Foster Youth and Alumni Summit, youth had the opportunity to talk to legislators and other professionals about the changes that they would like to see in the child welfare system. Each region picked one topic of interest and was then decided to present to the Commission for Children in Foster Care. The topics included more benefits for kinship youth, sibling visitation, notification of rights, federal and state foster care having equal benefits and post adoption visitation. After speaking and providing our opinions about these issues, we went back to our communities and formed chapters to create the Mockingbird Network. Two chapter leaders in each region went to the State Advisory Meeting to vote on the 2009 Legislative Agenda. In February, the MBS and the ASK-Y coalition held the 2009 Youth Advocacy Day. Over 200 foster youth, alumni and supporters made their way to our state’s beautiful capital that shivering cold morning. The MBS legislative agenda consisted of HB 1492 Independent Youth Housing Program, HB 1961 Foster Connections (formerly known as Foster Care to 21), HB 1183 and SB 5609 Legal Representation, HB 1938 Post-adoption Connections, and SB 5811 Notification of Rights.

We marched around the capital shouting for our rights and our needs. We sat in hearings for our bills and some youth got the opportunity to testify. After hearing heartfelt stories, meaningful statements and unanswered questions from youth impacted by these bills, legislators were left with a decision. All we could do was continue to call our local legislators for support and wait for results.

On April 21st 2009, Governor Gregoire signed HB 1492 the Independent Youth Housing Program providing safe housing for youth in care. I had the privilege to witness the signing and have my name on this bill. A week with stress and emotional trauma developed while working on this bill, but it was worth it. I had been to Olympia before, but not as a lobbyist. I walked in, I saw Governor Gregoire smiling and shaking hands. She read the bill description then said, “Let’s make this a law now,” and signed the bill. We gathered around her and had our pictures taken. She then shook all of our hands and gave us an awesome pen with her signature on it. I couldn’t help but smile walking out of the room thinking about all the work we put in to make this possible and how many young lives will be affected.

However, it did not stop there. On April 29th, two more bills were signed: HB 1938 Sibling Visitation, asking adoptive parents and guardians to provide family in the same constellation, attending the orientation occurs, by having youth stay with a foster family in the same constellation, attending the same school and staying connected with peers and people they know and trust.

Ryther Child Center is a great example of how the MFM has brought positive change. Beginning in December of 2008, all of their therapeutic foster families were part of two MFM constellations. Last October, Ryther’s second constellation was launched. Foster parents went through training and learned about the MFM and how it works. Ryther believes that putting youth in foster care in constellations is important because it provides them with normalcy in their lives. Youth that would typically be isolated are in communities with youth that have similar struggles and are given the opportunity to play and have relationships like other kids.

Ryther’s MFM experience is an example of how the system is changing for the better. If other agencies decide to adopt the model and implement it throughout their organization, it will bring kids in foster care another step closer to having a normal life.

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Happy June! I want to begin by giving a “shout out” to all the young people who have earned their G.E.D. and/or are graduating from high school or college. This is a special time of year for all families who proudly celebrate the accomplishment of graduation. However, those young people who are in foster care or homelessness have extra hurdles to overcome. I had the opportunity to attend this year’s Governor’s Scholarship Ceremony sponsored by the College Success Foundation. What a remarkable and inspiring event! It was great to see so many dedicated youth receive the support they need to pursue their academic goals. Again, congratulations to all of you and your families.

I also want to thank the many legislators who attended our Legislative Review and Celebration on May 27th. We were honored to be joined by House Speaker Frank Chopp, Representatives Ruth Kagi, Mary Helen Roberts, Mary Lou Dickerson, Reven Carlisle, Eric Fettigrew, Rog Og Goodman, and Senators Fred Jarrett and Adam Kline. We were especially appreciative that Congressman Jim McDermott was our guest of honor. I also want to thank Justice Bobbe Bridge who is now the founder and President of the Center for Children and Youth Justice for her ongoing contribution to the children, youth and families we serve. Finally, I do want to thank Governor Gregoire for her support during a very difficult budget year.

As we welcome the summer months I am asking you to take a moment and reflect upon the achievements and success of The Mockingbird Society. As you know this is a very difficult economic climate for families and non-profits. The Mockingbird Society accepts no government dollars and we do not benefit financially from any of the legislation we help get passed. We rely on private donor support and grants which have seen a significant reduction during this economic period. Please take a moment and determine if you can give a donation to The Mockingbird Society so we can continue to build a world class foster care system.

Thank You!

Anonymous; E.H. Baker; Corrine Bill; Casey Family Programs; Karen Cowgill; Beverly J. Deckelmann; KiKora Dorsey; John and Jennifer Dowdy; Sandi Everlove; Steve and Judi Finney; Constance Gold; Jillian Gross; Dr. Wanda Hackett; JoAnn Herbert; in memory of June Herbert; Anne L. Huguley; William Jarchus Loeppie; John-Jrown; Jada Jones-Savage; Kristin Lasher; Kelly McKnight; Marshal McReal; Naiza Morris; Chuck Nordhoff; Mike Oliver; Karen Pillar; Sarah Rafton; Vanitha S. Raman; John and Judi Finney; Constance Gold; Jillian Gross; Dr. Wanda Hackett; JoAnn Herbert, Mike Oliver; Karen Pillar; Sarah Rafton; Vanitha S. Raman; John Reineke; Debra C. Ronnholm; Kenny Schutler; Suzanne Shawger; Janet Stanton, in memory of Shanka Stanton; GustavoTell and Jim Fair; Sara Thompson; Alicia TonaKeset; Betty J. Williams; Ruth Williams; Mark WittoW of K&L Gates; Ray Wright and Hazel Dell Lanes.

Support The Mockingbird Society!

We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times. Please join us today!

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So that we may recognize you for your gift, please write how you would like to be listed:

☐ Please do not include my name on published donor lists (check box).
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My gift helps children, youth and families in foster care (check box):
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☐ $200 - $249 Supporter
☐ $100 - $199 Contributor
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OUTCOMES, continued from page 1

to consider keeping sibling connections and HB1961 Fostering Connections (Foster Care to 21) which allows foster youth to have the opportunity to continue in the foster care system until the age of 21 and to have the opportunity to continue in the workforce.

We were especially inspired by an event on June 27th. A veryMoving event! It was great to see so many accomplished graduiates. However, we should really think about the foster children and youth who have not graduated. For them, school was not an option. They have no place to go through of the house every time they come to have a face to face visit. If one doesn’t think that the social workers have control over what goes on behind closed doors. No one does. I do think, however, social workers should do a better job than many do now.

The state should also do a better job at finding good foster parents. There are a lot of bad people out there in the world and they shouldn’t be given the opportunity to do bad things to good people. No one wants to see their child be eaten. Foster youth should not feel unsafe after being removed from a horrible situation.

They should not be placed into a home with the same problems or an even worse situation. It really makes you think, when are you really truly safe?


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. We hold up the widoweds family, the lawyer, 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 sing their hearts out and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

Meet Our Staff

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Operations Director Ros Ghan; Mockingbird Programs Director Dr. Wanda Hackett; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Development Director Madeline Thompson; Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick; Development/Communications Darce Gray; Finance Manager Catherine Lanham; Mockingbird Network Coordinator Kara Sanders; Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator Amy Convers; Administrative Coordinator Diana Clark; Administrative Assistant (AA) Liliana Davies; Mockingbird Network AA Milisa Morgan; MFM AA Stephanie (Stevie) Giberson; Development Assistance Specialist Erin, Katie Brown, Danielle, Taylor Judd, Yolanda Kilgore, Amanda Spady, Onalee M. Stewart; Volunteer Chriszie Jackson; Copysteding and Layout Kelly Hawkins.

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 produced and produced with financial support from our members and businesses. 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 work, and poetry and are compensated for their work. The Mockingbird Times is distributed to 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 our success. 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 ©2009, The Mockingbird Society.

When You Think You Are Safe

It’s cases like these that make me think really hard about the foster care system. Is it the fault of the social workers that things like this happen to youth? Should social workers have more face to face visits with youth? Should they have to do a walk through of the house every time they come to have a face to face visit? I don’t think that the social workers have control over what goes on behind closed doors. No one does. I do think, however, social workers should do a better job than many do now.

The state should also do a better job at finding good foster parents. There are a lot of bad people out there in the world and they shouldn’t be given the opportunity to do bad things to good people. No one wants to see their child be eaten. Foster youth should not feel unsafe after being removed from a horrible situation. They should not be placed into a home with the same problems or an even worse situation. It really makes you think, when are you really truly safe?


Tribal Colleges by LEONA BILL

There are very few of our people that can speak Native languages. There are many Native American colleges across the United States, some of which offer courses to learn these languages. Some also offer a chance to practice Native art. Most offer Associate’s Degrees, but a few offer Bachelor’s degrees. Tribal Colleges can also help you transfer to major universities. Not all the Tribes share the ability to have a college of their own, but there are opportunities out there.

There are also scholarships available for Native Americans. This relates stress in trying to find money to pay for school. I am too old to receive most of the scholarships that are specifically for foster youth but these Native American scholarships for those who are over the age of 21.

I am an eldest child and have nieces and nephews as well as younger siblings. I see my younger sisters struggle in life and I want to see them be productive. I also worry that my little brother will drop out of school. I have a vision and I want to make sure it comes true. That vision is to encourage my cousins, sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews and my doorways to complete high school. I want them to not only graduate but go on to college. I know that there are families out there that want to see the cycle of middle and high school dropouts in their family be broken. I want to encourage all young children and youth to receive their education, graduate and be able to say “I broke the cycle; I was the first in my family to graduate.” Not only do Native American colleges are a major help for Natives and that these colleges can help my vision come true.

To find a list of Native American Colleges please visit www.ed.gov/about/initeis/list/tribal/edlite-tclist.html. To view a list of majors offered by different Native American Colleges visit www.alcoherecolleges.org/ TCImajors.cfm. For more information about resources for Native Americans to pay for school visit www.societyofcounsel.org/crime_classifica tions.htm. To find out about some scholarships and some tips that can help you find money to pay for college you can also help you transfer to major universities.

Community Help From Within by BRENDA GONZALES, REGION 2

Julie Cruz is a grandmother and parent to six boys who are between the ages of 12 and 20. One of the boys was hit by a train in 2009 and in a wheelchair. Julie is a giving woman. She has set up a donation center in her home and helps local people in need. She tells us that she doesn’t have much to offer, but a heart to give. She lives in a house that needs remodeling. The home has no insulation. They use space heaters to heat the house. The electrical and plumbing systems are frequent hassles.

The Cruz family was nominated twice for Extreme Home Makeover. They became finalists but then the show decided not to come to Washington State. The Cruz family was devastated when Julie broke the news to her grandchildren.

However, the Yakima community put their heads together to rebuild the Cruz’s home by putting together fundraisers and by donating money. While in the process of getting things together, Julie has had a van donated to her family.

Construction on the home begins March 5th and it will be on through Labor Day. What an incredible example of how a community can come together and make a difference in the lives of many.

Juvenile Felony Offenses by CHRISTINA KOSHNEY

What do you do when you have been in the foster care system most of your life, without the support of a loving family you might have received in a more traditional family and you are soon to “age out” of care, but you have a Clue Master’s Degree? Often, when convicted of a felony, the consequences can be great depending on the class of the felony and the specific crime.

In Washington State, crimes are classified as felonies or misdemeanors. Felonies are divided into three classes for adults! which are further broken down into additional categories for juveniles. The classification of a crime depends on the crime and prior offenses, varying sentences are applied which can range up from 18 months to 20 years of imprisonment. Felonies are also divided into three classes for adults! which are further broken down into additional categories for juveniles. The classification of a crime depends on the crime and prior offenses, varying sentences are applied which can range up from 18 months to 20 years of imprisonment.

One major consequence is that “Juvenile criminal history does not go away” when a person turns 18. Washington has one of nine states which allows the public release of juvenile records without any restrictions. This can be mitigated only after going through legal processes of sealing juvenile records (see article in the May 2009 Mockingbird Times), but there are restrictions.

Having a Class A felony precludes you from pursuing a career in many fields. The record of a juvenile record can be used against you when considering sentencing for an adult crime. Other consequences include not having the right to vote, being financially obligated to pay restitution or the other party’s attorney’s fees. Your case can be reported to your school which could cause restrictions in graduation or if you could be subject to further consequences in the family court system.

Each of these listed consequences affects real lives, as in the case of 19 year old Joe, an alumni of foster care. Joe was convicted of a Class A felony at the age of 13 at a time when he was an adolescent and family circumstances were out of his control. Joe is currently attending community college and has not committed any other further criminal offenses. However, Joe is still dealing with repercussions including not being able to pursue his dream of a career in the military. Even more important, he has not been able to have a Civilian’s Driver’s License for a year after actively pursuing his options.

Joe has actively tried to better his situation. He has sought the advice of several lawyers but non are able to help because what he is facing is an exception of Washington State law. Joe attended Advocacy Day in Olympia where he testified and shared his story with legislators who were impressed by his words. Part of Joe’s message was not only how he is currently struggling to pursue his chance at life but how his goal is to help better the system for others. Joe understands that it is likely that the legislation will not change any time soon to help his situation but he is making the best of his situation in spite of the lifelong sentence the criminal justice system has given him.

Recently Joe said, “What gets you down doesn’t mean you are stuck. Sitting with Joe that afternoon I could see a young man who is striving to take a part in life, both his own and others, and to be a part of the community. Joe was still a juvenile, compared to the cases reviewed when the youth turns 18 and, if the youth has few to no other offenses and is able to show how they are not contributing to themselves, then have some of these restrictive consequences lifted. He is not asking anyone to eliminate the past offenses, only to lift the sentencing stereotypes beyond the time served for the crime, and to allow, (especially youth), to freely join the struggle to find happiness in this world and be positively productive participants.”

www.societyofcounsel.org/crime_classifica tions.htm


www.defensenter.org/resources/publications -1/beyond/juvenile/court%20journals/ 2010/Court.pdf

Life After High School: Money to Make It Happen

Would you like to attend college someday but think you won’t be able to afford it? If you are in 7th, 8th or 9th grade now, you may be eligible for a full tuition scholarship. For children who are in foster care, there is also a scholarship available to them from a possible $50,000 tuition. For students in high school, the opportunity to pay for college tuition and other expenses is possible through the federal government’s financial aid programs.

To find out more, check out the following links:

www.fafsa.ed.gov

www.aihec.org/colleges/


www.societyofcounsel.org/crime_classifica tions.htm


www.defensenter.org/resources/publications -1/beyond/juvenile/court%20journals/ 2010/Court.pdf

Sources used in this article:

www.acedxchange.org

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ACES, continued from page 1

comes with a traumatic childhood, they are physically underdeveloped in terms of their ability to deal with their emotions and learn new skills. They also unable to regulate their internal cortisol level and are thus constantly in a biochemical state of stress. The reason this research is so important is that we are only now seriously talking about how we didn’t know; the concept that an unhealthy childhood leads to unhealthy adult behaviors is a fairly intuitive one. However, we know now that not only how they developed, but the specific experiences that manifest, and that makes all the difference in terms of coming up with effective ways to address these issues.

Further, your further treatment goals can also help you transfer to major universities.

The difference is that foster youth come from backgrounds of fear and stress which defined their early life. We can fix that. Next issue, I will be writing about how the Tribal Family Model helps to address some of these problems and gives foster youth the support network they need to deal with traumatic pasts so that they don’t repeat the same mistakes earlier in their lives.

In the meantime, I would encourage every reader to think about how their childhood shaped who they are and to try to do something to help beat the statistics if you get help and you are persistent. Keep trying.

Sources used in this article:

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These Wounds Won’t Heal

*Force*

These wounds won’t heal
Scars keep reopening
Detachment from the world’s surroundings
Not my real outlook on my way of life
I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired
Don’t like being ignored
No one seems to hear what I have to say
I still can’t handle the train
Or maybe I’m just having a problem with living
They say that I’m worthwhile but I don’t believe it myself
I don’t trust those around me
Hard to surrender, hard to give up
When you feel completely unlovable
Trying to build a better image
Rearrange your focus
Trapped behind locked doors
Paralyzed with fear but YOU HOLD THE KEY.

I Could See the Light

*Lisa Marie Toccalano*

I could see the light
As it grew dim
I felt the darkness
Rise from within
I watched my skin
Drift with red
I saw the world fade
From inside my head
It stole all my happiness
Draining me dry
Replaced it with pain
Just to laugh at me cry
I’m left with my tears
This is how I wish to die
All bloody and bruised
My body shall lie

Get Published ~ Get Paid!

We are looking for 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*, contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org.

What If I Brought You Back to Life?

*Danielle*

What if I brought you back to life?
Would you be the same?
The same ol’ G selling weed up until that fatal day
Or
Would you try to change time so you’d still be alive
Or
Would you say no to gangs and YES to peace?
As I look at you, motionless in that casket, I ask myself, would I bring you back to life?

Rearrange your focus

“Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Community Events

Region 1

June 19: KPXB Kids Concert, 12 - 1 PM, Clocktower Meadow.

Region 2

June 13: Life Advocacy 101, 2.5-PM, Casey Family Programs.
June 15: GetSet begins, Info: Traci DeOchoa @ (509) 457-8197.

Region 3

First Thursdays: Teen Wii Night, 6 - 8 PM, Blaine Library.

Region 6

June 18: Clark County Fair Employment Session, 7 - 830 PM, Exhibition Hall B.
June 23: Clark County Fair National Anthem Auditions, 5:30 PM, Exhibition Hall B. All ages welcome.

Region 1: Chapter in Spokane County by OnaLee M. Stewart

Region 1 is excited to finally have a Resource Specialist and participate in their first Chapter Meeting, June 3rd at Volunteers of America. On the agenda is a discussion of the upcoming Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit on June 27th and 28th, as well as our plans for future Chapter involvement. On May 16th, two alumni, Josephine and OnaLee, traveled with our Resource Specialist, Lauren, to attend a State Advisory Council meeting at The Mockingbird Society in Seattle. We are eager to get started and make a positive impact on our community and our region. Our plans for next month include meeting our local legislators (who we sent thank you notes to for their support on behalf of foster youth), have an awesome chapter meeting where we will brainstorm our message for the Summit, and make a plan to get actively involved with our community.

Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Eva Ervin

We had a fun and active month! We presented two different trainings. The first was Voice Development Training facilitated by group members Sassi and Hunter. With only minimal background support and guidance from the Resource Specialist, these two chapter members co-facilitated an engaging and educational training like pros. Then, Mark and Eva co-facilitated the Life Advocacy 101 training for homeless youth at Oasis Teen Shelter in Mount Vernon. This was a challenging training because the material was all new to the youth in attendance, but Mark did an awesome job keeping everyone on task, and Carlito was there showing support and modeling appropriate behavior. After our training, they gave us great reviews saying, “It was fun and I learned a lot!” Additionally, we brainstormed about topics to bring to the Summit. There were many impassioned suggestions for change in the foster care system. Finally, we attended the State Advisory Council to share updates and connect with other chapters. What an exciting and eventful month!

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

At our last meeting, we discussed what ideas we wanted to present at this year’s Foster Youth/Alumni Leadership Summit. We first watched a video featuring rapper Tupac Shakur addressing many social issues through rap, talking, news clips, and other methods. Not only did this set the tone for the rest of the meeting but it showed that there is more than one way to have your voice heard. Everyone shared their experiences going through the foster care system. Overall, it was a phenomenal experience that resulted in the identification of topics that need further discussion and possible change. This month we also hosted our first Know Your Rights training for foster youth. Five of the chapter member co-facilitated the training with the resource specialist. By the end, participants felt that they had received a better understanding of their rights while in care. If you are a foster youth and want to get involved with Region 4 For Change, our next chapter meeting will be June 8th at the 2100 building from 3:30-5:30 PM. Your voice might be the one that inspires change that is needed. Hope to see you there.

Region 5: Chapter in Pierce County by Karra Brown

Region 5 had our kick-off meeting with nine members present. The members present learned more about The Mockingbird Society. We also talked about what are some problems in our personal lives in regards to foster care. Together, we came up with solutions that were realistic for the state as well. We will be holding a Know Your Rights training on June 11th. We also have been planning our community service. We decided to read to little kids in the area. We also plan to get the youth together who are attending this year’s summit in order to come up with ideas we can present at the Summit in order to enact change.

Region 6: SPEAK UP! Chapter in Clark County by Heather Jones

We held our SPEAK UP! chapter meeting this month while bowling. We briefly discussed some ongoing volunteer opportunities and the youth have expressed interest in two areas: reading to young foster youth and working with the Community Gang Task Force to help cover up graffiti. Next, the chapter members made a list of things they would like to see changed in the foster care system and what they want to advocate for next year. Finally, the youth brainstormed ideas on fun ways to teach responsibility at the Foster Youth/Alumni Leadership Summit this year. Our leaders facilitated Know Your Rights training to a group of youth at Innovative Services and received a good response from those who participated. We also want to give a “shout-out” to one of our chapter leaders who, on May 16th, attended a town hall meeting where she thanked our legislators from District 49 for their support during this last legislative session. (You can view this Town Hall meeting on www.crttv.org)