Youth Advocacy Day Exceeds Expectations

DARIUS REYNOLDS

THE 2005 YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY, SPONSORED by Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y) in Olympia, Washington was a great achievement. Over 90 young people and service providers came to support each other and meet their legislators. There are three bills ASK-Y is supporting, House Bill 2002, sponsored by House Representative Mary Lou Dickerson, extends services for youth in foster care until they are 21 (if they are in school). Senate Bill 5583, sponsored by Senator Debbie Regala, requires DHS to provide better training to CPS employees who work with adolescents who have been abused and neglected. Senate Bill 5763, sponsored by Senator James Hargrove, is designed to improve the quality and quantity of services for homeless people needing mental health and chemical dependency treatment.

We started our day in the Cherberg building at 10am. House of Representatives Senior Staff Jon Hedgedal explained to us how to talk to our legislators. We then watched a brief video presentation provided by Cocoon House, an independent living program that provides services for youth in Snohomish County, Washington.

During lunch the youth had a chance to talk about their experience with homelessness and foster care. While we were eating, State Representatives Ruth Kagi and Eric Pettigrew spoke to us. Representative Pettigrew said that he is constantly thinking of youth and encourages them to let him know what he should be doing to help.

Pettigrew stated, “We are your legislators; we work for you.”

The young people read poetry and talked about issues that concerned them at an open mic session in the State Reception Hall.

One of the youth, Robert Duff, spoke about the importance of drug and mental health counseling. Duff had this to say, “I am going to be down here today advocating for our needs; we are not supposed to react to the system—it is supposed to react to us.”

A few other youth wrote anonymously about their thoughts about Advocacy Day. One youth said, “It was empowering to see people fighting for equal rights today and it felt so good to be apart of that.” All in all it was a great day and I hope to see a lot more people make things better in this state.

Mockingbird Presents: Exploring the Dream

Mockingbird is proud to feature a new series celebrating the contributions that African-American and other under-represented citizens and cultures have made to American history.

In this installment, Mockingbird Reporters Anthony Guess and Ashley Grant recognize the contributions of African American historical figures who made a difference, but whose lives aren’t often discussed in the history books, and Contributing Writer Emile Redmond explores the impact of Malcolm X. Next month, read Mockingbird Reporter Princess Hollins’ in-depth look at the Black Panthers. In addition to the articles our reporting staff is busy preparing, we want you to challenge you out there to send us articles, poetry and artwork that illustrates the many contributions made and obstacles overcome by people and cultures who are so often unrecognized in our textbooks and media coverage. Is there an important figure or event in your community or culture that you want more people to know about? Do you have a personal story or account that you would like to share? Contact us at newspaper@mockingbirdtimes.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437) to find out how to get your story heard.

Unsung Heroes of Black History

MARTIN LUTHER KING, MALCOLM X, HARRIET TUBMAN, AND SOJOURNER TRUTH are most frequently mentioned when discussing Black History. But there were many other figures who played key roles and deserve to be recognized for their deeds.

Blacks faced many problems in the struggle for equality in this country. Some people who played significant roles in this struggle include Ruby Bridges, Medgar Evers, John Mercer Langston, and Ida B. Wells.

Ruby Bridges: As a six-year-old girl Bridges was the first student to integrate New Orleans public schools. She was escorted to school everyday by United States Marshals for the entire year. Even as a young girl, Bridges prayed for those people who swamped her chanting and screaming because they did not want schools to integrate. Bridges is a special person because she showed people that you can make a difference no matter how old you are.

Medgar Evers: Medgar was an educated man who served his country. He began working as a salesman, and also providing services for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). While working for the NAACP, Evers was passionate about equal rights in education in Mississippi. He advocated for this cause until the day he passed. On June 12th, 1963 Evers was shot down in front of his residence. Evers showed true aspiration for what he did. He was aware of the consequences that could occur and he still went forth with what he believed in. He was a true “soldier.”

John Mercer Langston: Langston was born a free slave in 1829. By the time he was five years old he was already an orphan, growing up in both black and white households. At fourteen he was enrolled in Oberlin College, where he received his Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree in Arts. Langston actively advocated for equal treatment of Blacks who were soldiers in the Civil War. He was also a professor of Law at Howard University. While at Howard he was also the Dean of the Law Department, Vice President, and Acting President of the college. Langston was the first black man elected in public office in the United States. Langston ran for Congress in Virginia and he accomplished that dream. Langston was recommended for Vice President of the United States twice on behalf of the Republican Party. John Mercer Langston is important because his accomplishments illustrate that you do not have to follow someone else’s footsteps, you can make your own.

Ida B. Wells: Born in 1862 Wells was the eldest of eight children. Wells faced many obstacles, from being the eldest child to being a black woman trying to become something in life. She graduated from
The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents involved in homelessness and foster care. It is so rewarding working with the youth, youth in foster care and youth who are exiting foster care. That way kids in the future will do good in school because that is what is expected of them. Some people choose to follow in other people’s path’s and others choose to make their own. I started a new path where others may have stopped to take a break.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and support the Mockingbird Society!

Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the Mockingbird Times as a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.50 and $15.00 an hour.

Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave

South Seattle 98122-3403

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Suggested Donations:

$1,000.00 – Protector $500.00 – Caretaker $250.00 – Organization

$50.00 – Supporter $25.00 – Foster Parent

Please bill me for the amount indicated.

I will match my gift; enclosed is my matching gift form.

I am interested in receiving information on the advantages of planned giving.

Please do not include my name on published donor lists.

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Exploring the Dream: Soldiers in the Fight for Equality
Malcolm X Has Lasting Impact

EMILY REDMOND

Malcolm X was a powerful voice for African American equality and freedom. His contributions to the civil rights movement were significant, and his legacy continues to inspire. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "I have not lived in vain if I can help others to stand on their own feet." Malcolm X would have understood this sentiment well. He believed in "by any means necessary" and fought for the rights of African Americans throughout his life. In his words, "I am no longer a man. I am a black god." Malcolm X's influence is still felt today, and his work serves as a reminder of the importance of continued struggle for freedom and justice. His impact will be celebrated long after his passing as we honor his memory and continue his fight for equality. Malcolm X's words and actions continue to inspire us to be a better world. We must honor his memory and continue his fight for freedom and justice.
Mockingbird Fundraiser a Lively Event

DARIUS REYNOLDS

ON FEBRUARY 6TH 2005 THE FOURTH ANNUAL MOCKINGBIRD Society Fundraiser was held in our new offices off of Rainer Avenue in Seattle. The fundraiser was our most successful event. We had a silent and live auction with some really nice items for bid, like a beautiful horse head made of all glass and an Xbox game console. The Rusty Pelican Cafe provided some delicious food. Bob Carroll and band played some lovely music for everyone. Over 100 people attended this event. Mockingbird Times’ Satellite Reporter Rico Evans co-facilitated the event with Executive Director Jim Theofelis. Evans and Reporter Anthony Guess told their stories in front of the guests about their work at Mockingbird. Guess stated that “Mockingbird is not a job where you come to work and just start working; it’s a job where we ask you about your day.” Reporters Courtney Konietzko and Echo Speed provided a short presentation about a documentary project that is being produced by Wild Geese Productions. Konietzko and Speed are working with Wild Geese on this project. A two-minute clip of the film was shown at the fundraiser. Seattle City Council member Peter Steinbrueck talked about the film and explained why it’s important. He said, “We have a chance to make the world better.” Deagle Cooper also spoke about her experience providing respite care to the Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project. About her speech, Konietzko stated, “Deagle gave a really moving speech about the need for a break...the need for foster parents to get respite so they can continue to do a good job. Cooper talked about taking in a child with problems, a child labeled as difficult and the toll it took. She later parred a break when they both needed it. When she talked about it she reminded me of the struggle I had with my parents and how my mom needed respite.”

This year’s Mockingbird Fundraiser was quite a lively event. We had a silent and live auction and sold tickets for $21,000. Thank you to all the Mockingbird Society supporters and we hope you all enjoyed the fundraiser.

For Your Information: all incoming Letters to the Editor should be addressed to Mockingbird Editorial Staff and will be opened by Editorial Staff. All incoming correspondence to reporting staff under 18 years of age will be opened first by Mockingbird Editorial Staff.

Pet Therapy Changes Lives

SHAKURA FELDER

DO YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN STRUGGLING with depression or an illness? Have you tried everything that you possibly could to help that person but nothing that you seem to do works? If you or a person you know has a strong interest in animals, consider getting involved in an animal-assisted therapy program. These programs, which are overseen by skilled professionals, rely on animals to help humans improve their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual skills.

Animal-assisted therapy programs have proven to have a huge impact on participants. According to the Delta Society, children living in homes with an animal have more empathy than children without any pets. In long-term facilities, the presence of an animal is entertaining to everyone in some type of way. To find out more about the Delta Society and the Animal-Assisted Therapy Program, visit www.deltasociety.org or give them a call at (425) 226-7357.

Many group homes and other facilities use animal-assisted therapy programs. The Canine Connections program at Echo Glen Children’s Center is one of these programs. Jo Simpson is the founder of the Canine Connections Program. This pet therapy program is for youth between 11 and 20 years of age who have committed felonies and are incarcerated at the facility. Youth in this program learn responsibility, patience, and communication, as well as other useful skills. I chatted with Jo Simpson about this program. Here’s what she had to say:

Simpson: How does this program meet specific goals for participants?

Jo Simpson: The program helps improve the lives of its young people, promoting mental growth and development as well as vocational development. The program provides education and training opportunities as well as educational opportunities to the youth. The Canine Connections components include pet therapy, rescue and adoption, vocational and educational opportunities and a service dog program.

Felder: What is the outcome of most participants in the program?

Simpson: The students seem to have learned compassion and patience. They are more accepting of others and can work better with their staff in the cottage. Several of the students have found a job working with animals either at a shelter, training facility, boarding kennel or veterinarian office.

Felder: Which success story were you most influenced by?

Simpson: I was deeply impacted by a story of a dog named Buddy. He was an 18-year-old dog who’d been incarcerated. He had shown no empathy for the year that he had been here locked up. We wanted to reach out to him somehow and thought that the dog program would be able to help him. We hoped that the teen would become more social and develop a sense of empathy. Buddy was the last dog to be selected by a handler because of his obnoxious behavior and the fact that he was unresponsive. The teen was paired with Buddy and was very upset because he felt that Buddy was not socializing or showing any way to be empathetic. He told us that this dog had great potential. I also told him that the second dog would be a more loyal friend than any of his gang could ever be and that the dog would worship the ground that he walks on. That’s when I saw a slight smile on the boy’s face.

Within days, the teen became more involved with Buddy. He helped with Buddy’s make-over and re-conditioning. They became very close friends. The boy’s tough gang member image began to change into a more positive one. He went from being angry with his assignment to Buddy and telling everyone that Buddy was the best dog in the class.

The teen benefited from the program because he began to change his behavior. He had more compassion and empathy than when he first started out in the program. He understood how his actions created a lot of pain and suffering in others. Before he didn’t have any remorse for what he had done in his past. Now it was the other way around; and he learned how to deal with his remorse through the program. Buddy was given a second chance by the Canine Connections program at Echo Glen and by the relationship and commitment that was created between him and his handler. Buddy was later paroled to a new adoptive home. On the day that Buddy left, the teen told me, “When I first was assigned to Buddy, I judged him by how he looked, not by what was inside. I have done this my whole life. People are just like me inside. I learned a lot from my dog.” This is one story that I will never forget.

Governor Meets Youth

I AM PROUD TO SAY THAT A LOT WAS ACCOMPLISHED AT YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY, but the highlight for me was meeting our newly elected governor, Christine Gregoire.

After giving a speech on the second floor of the capital building, Gregoire held a private meeting with a large group of youth for the sole purpose of answering questions. Mockingbird staff was part of this group. I asked the governor what she was going to do about racial disproportionality in Washington State’s Foster Care System. Her response was to direct the question to Regina Jones who is an active member in King County’s Racial Disproportionality Task Force.

When the governor arrived everyone fell quiet waiting for her to speak. She was very easy to listen to. Gregoire didn’t get all uptight or act hoity-toity like some politicians you see on TV. She seemed to be very interested in everything she talked about, including her answers to questions and the staff she was introducing to us. She seemed honest and clear; she explained what she was talking about. If she didn’t have a real answer to give, she either admitted to not knowing and expressed the problem’s importance, or she directed the question to someone on her staff who may’ve had the answer.

After Gregoire finished answering questions, she gave everyone a tour of her very grand and fine-looking office, and then took a group picture with everyone she had met with. Christine Gregoire seems like a very nice person and it appears that she hires a great deal of people to do what she does. I was happy to get the chance to meet her.

Canine Reflections

Amanda and Heather reflect on their experience with the Canine Connections Program

HELLO, MY NAME IS HEATHER. I have been in Canine for [a few months] and have learned so much. I’ve learned how fast you can bond with a dog you don’t even know. I fell in love with my second dog. Her name is Pearl and she is a husky yellow lab. Well, I thought she was a husky but what her name was because her coat is a yellowish white color. The first week I had her she was terrible she didn’t know how to sit or even how to walk on a leash! It was not as hard as you might think. She is wonderful. She can sit, stay, come, heel, down, bed, she kind of knows shaky if you put the treat in your hand close your hand and put your palm facing down. She can roll over, jump onto surfaces when told. She loves treats! She’ll do anything for one. She’ll even stand on her hind legs for one. Today (Feb. 2005) I had to walk down to the cottage to get this article and I had to hold my dog and about 5 minutes later the leash slipped out of Jo’s hand and my dog started tracking me down to the office when I was at my cottage. I heard security say that a canine had escaped. When I came back they told me the whole story and Mrs. Janet let go of my dogs leash again and she came running to me. I guess Pearl really loves me too.

MY NAME IS AMANDA, and I’m in the Canine Connections class. I help dogs find a good home, I train them to behave in basic obedience. In this class I have learned a lot about dogs and how to take care of them. Although I have had a lot of fun, at the end of a quarter I do get upset about the dog I bonded with leaves to go to a home, but I do know that that dog is going to a great home, so in the beginning of the next quarter I start all over with a new dog with that same goal to find that dog a good home too. I love to know that I’ve saved some dogs lives, and it makes me feel extremely good about myself, and then I realize how important I am to canine connections. This class helps me with my patience, it helps me deal with the stress of leaving.