Washington Supports Foster Youth

Thanks to the literally hundreds of supporters and advocates from across Washington State, the Foster Youth Achievement Act House Bill 2002 has made it through all its numerous legislative steps and is now waiting for Governor Gregoire’s signature. House Bill 2002 allows young adults in foster care to still have a home with their foster parents until the age of 21 if they enroll in higher education. This bill will help support those who are not ready to be on their own yet, while preparing for their future.

Although many youth who had aged out of foster care wished HB 2002 could have taken effect a little sooner, they still worked hard and helped support the efforts by providing testimony, attending Advocacy Day, and talking to their legislators. With the help of these young adults and their willingness to share their stories of aging out, HB 2002 has been passed 97-1 in the House and 45-0 in the Senate and now is in the Governor’s hands. House Bill 2002 gives Washington state the authority to allow up to fifty youth reaching age eighteen to continue in foster care or group care (as needed) to participate in or complete a post-high school academic or vocational program, and to receive necessary support and transition services. In 2008 and 2009, the state has the authority to allow up to fifty additional youth per year reaching age eighteen to remain in foster care. In order to stay eligible the young adult must remain in school with a 2.0 GPA or higher.

We are all very excited about the passing of the bill and know that things will change for the better from this point on for kids in care. On behalf of Mockingbird Society we would like to give thanks to: Representative’s Dickerson, Roberts, Kagi, Kerney, Santos, Chappo, Also Senators Regala, Hargrove, Prentice, Stevens, Brandland, Thibaudeau, Kohl-Welles and so many others. We also want to thank all those who volunteered their time, and those who just never gave up. For more information on House Bill 2002 you can visit: www.leg.wa.gov or www.mockingbirdociety.org.

The Braam Settlement

A lot of young people in the foster care system live a life of constant change, always moving, always searching for their place, their community, a sense of family and belonging. Many of these young people have been moved from foster “home” to foster “home”, experiencing neglect, abuse and sometimes even worse. I have friends, here at the Mockingbird Times and elsewhere, that have been through over 10, 15 and even 20 different foster “home” placements. What these children and young people need is community, support and a home fostered from love and guidance. What these young people get is insufficient and underpaid care workers, a negligent State parent and policies that cut young people off from medical insurance, housing and food money as soon as they turn 18 years old(1). The Braam Settlement is supposed to change this.

I had heard a lot of conversations about this very large Class Action Lawsuit called the “Braam Settlement”. A Class Action Lawsuit is an “action where an individual represents a group in a court claim. The judgment from a group in a court claim is an “action where an individual represents a group in a court claim. The judgment from this very large Class Action Lawsuit called the Braam Settlement is supposed to change this.

The ultimate goal of this Class Action Lawsuit was to improve WA State’s foster care system, and the Settlement, approved by the court, ordered the State of WA to improve its foster care system, focusing on six essential “areas” agreed upon during the Settlement. The six areas of necessary improvement are: “Stable Placements, Mental Health Services, Foster Parent Training and Support, Unsafe or inappropriate placements, Separation of siblings when placed in out-of-home care and Services for adolescents (4). The Settlement created a Braam Oversight Panel, which is important and necessary for the Braam Settlement to be effective, and which is working with WA State, WA State’s DSHS, the plaintiffs and stakeholders on reforming WA State’s Foster Care System. The Braam Oversight Panel consists of five members, each a specialist that was mutually agreed upon by the State of WA and the plaintiffs. The Braam Oversight Panel has deadlines for foster care reform here in WA State, and they will be responsible for ensuring that the necessary improvements are made, in the six essential areas mentioned previously, over the next seven years (started in 2004).

The panel will issue Monitor Reports every six months until the Settlement is over June 31st, 2011. If you would like to be updated about the progress of the panel, join the listserv or recommend a foster care reform solution, such as implementing the Mockingbird Family Model, the Braam Oversight Panel “actively solicits comments from the public and organizations regarding its recommendations and reports”(5). You can join the Braam Oversight Panel listserv by going to http://listserv.wa.gov/ archives/braam-panel.html or call for copies of the reports at (509) 586-7508. You can check out updates about the Braam Settlement at www.mockingbirdociety.org, www.braamkids.org or go to www.braampanel.org for more information. Advocate your ideas on how to improve the foster care system.

It is important to remember that these young people are counting on us to improve this system. They need good homes and families, and we are responsible for creating a healthy, loving environment for them to grow and thrive in. These young people did not ask to become part of the foster care system, they did not ask for hardships, and many of them are dealing with issues of abuse and neglect. We need to help them heal, not punish them for being hurt. We need to fix the child welfare and foster care system, for the health, well-being and future of all of our children.

“The for these all our children. We will all profit by – or pay for – whatever they become.” ~ James Baldwin

(2) http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=class%2Action
(3) http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/pubs/2004perfrm.asp
(4) http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/braampanel/
(5) http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/braampanel/publicomment.asp
Letter from the Editor

Jim Theofelis

"Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth" is the mission statement that drives our work at Mockingbird Society. We strive to integrate our direct services work with youth into our advocacy and system reform efforts. As we look forward to celebrating Mockingbird Society’s 5th Anniversary at our Annual Event on March 30th, we are joining so many others from across Washington in also celebrating the passage of HB 2002 - The Foster Youth Achievement Act. HB 2002 was passed by the 2006 Washington State Legislature, and needs only Governor Gregoire’s signature to become law. Then Washington State will join a small number of states across this country that extend foster care services to youth beyond age 18. Prior to HB 2002, youth who earned a high school diploma or GED and turned 18 became immediately ineligible for foster care. This frequently resulted in homelessness, early parenting, incarceration and the loss of young dreams and lives. Because of the great work of so many youth, foster parents, social service advocates, private citizens, and of course, legislative champions, youth in Washington will now have the option of voluntarily remaining in foster care and retaining their housing and health insurance while pursuing education after age 18. An evaluation will be conducted to measure the outcomes for youth who remain in foster care through HB 2002. I believe this evaluation will demonstrate what the national data has shown: those youth who continue to receive emotional and tangible supports such as housing and healthcare have outcomes that are significantly more positive for them personally and society as a whole. I would like to thank all of the legislators across Washington who, in a truly bi-partisan style, supported HB 2002 and the foster children and youth this landmark legislation will serve. Representative Mary Lou Dickerson deserves special acknowledgement for her willingness to lead this effort, starting work on this bill during the 2005 legislative session. Senator Debbie Regala also deserves special recognition for leading the support of HB 2002 in the Senate. Finally, I also want to express my appreciation to all the members of the ASKY-V (Advocates for System Kids and Youth) Coalition for their dedication and perseverance during this amazing campaign. Because of all of you, Washington truly is one step closer to building a world class foster care system - and our most vulnerable children and youth deserve no less!

Jim Theofelis

Mockingbird Times, March 2006

Mockingbird Society invites you to join us for our 5th Annual Fundraiser and Premier of the documentary, A Place to Sing, a film about Mockingbird Society’s innovative approaches to youth development, public education and foster care reform on behalf of our nation’s most vulnerable children, youth, and families.

Thursday, March 30
6-7:30 Silent Auction, Wine, Hors d’oeuvres
7:40-8:30 Film Premier and Program
8:30-9 Dessert and Coffee

At the Broadway Performance Hall
1625 Broadway (and Pine)
Seattle, Washington 98122

Tickets $35, may be purchased in advance and at the door.

Thank You’s

Meet Our Staff
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Youth LEAD Coordinator Raje Harris
Operations Manager Rus Ghim
Public Relations Darcie Gray
Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick
AmeriCorps Member Dieta Clayton
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Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1962 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, 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.

David Eiffert’ Lisa Taylor; Roberta L. Blayney; Margaret-Ann and Mark LeRoy; Nancy Nelp and Douglas Steers; John Reinke; Shawn and Elizabeth Ungar Mintek; Leslie Anasazi; Richard and Anne Dodd Besteline; Anne McBride; Lewis and Gloria Garling; Carol Collins; Elizabeth Farmer and Thomas Phillips; Nancy LeVine; John and Janet Morse; Susan Connolly; Laurie K. Lemay
Thanks to everyone who helped with the food for Youth Advocacy Day! Sarah Benton and Friends of Youth, Jessie Forsythe, Marlon Hamilton, and Victoria Curry.

Suggested Donations:
$ 1,000+.....Protector $500-999.....Caretaker $250-500.....Organizations $50+.....Supporter $25.....Foster Parent

Match Donations
My employer will match my donation.

ABOUT US: 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. The Mockingbird Times is 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 $7.63 and $8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 50,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A. through a private distribution list and as an insert in Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of the Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society are 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 2006 The Mockingbird Society.

A Mockingbird Inside Your Mailbox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and support the Mockingbird Society by donating. Donations are tax deductible and all donors receive the Mockingbird Times.

Enclosed, please find my check made payable to Mockingbird Society in the amount of: $__________________

Suggested Donations:
$ 1,000+.....Protector $500-999.....Caretaker $250-500.....Organizations $50+.....Supporter $25.....Foster Parent

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Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144, or donate online at www.mockingbirdsb.org.
Gay Civil Rights Bill

Jaxx

I couldn’t hang out as much or have the choice of not going to work. Furthermore, I had to change my attitude about life from “I don’t care about anything” to “I have to do everything for my little angel.” My girlfriend decided to keep it, and at the time I already had a job, but I went out and found another one and enrolled back in school. I felt like I had to create a new image for myself, one that was more suitable of a new father. I simply had to transform my life. After doing so, I got an apartment for my new family, and stopped talking to those who I felt weren’t contributing to my new success. I want my daughter to grow up in a loving and accepting home so she can have good morals and self-respect. Unlike the home I grew up in... home was never there; I was raised (well watched) by the state until I “aged out.”

I was blessed to see the birth of my child, and I started crying before she actually entered this complicated world. The feeling and connection that I had when I first held her is an indescribable emotion. I will never understand how a parent can ignore that one-on-one feeling that a child seeks from their mom and dad. I work for a non-profit organization whose model is, “building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.” Once being apart of the system, and now having my own child allows me to leave the world I was a part of behind. A million things of kids enter the system every year and only half or less of them get to experience love and acceptance from a loving family. That bothers me and I’m glad that I have a chance to practice what I preach.

He is now strong enough to nursery, for now it’s nothing but crying, feeding, and changing pampers with my daughter (which is very stressful) and I know it is only temporary. The long intensive wait for her first step and words outweighs that feeling. Becoming a teen parent is in fact hard. For instance, a lot of your childhood dreams get put on hold, and your well-being is thought of last. But growing up in the foster care system is indeed a lot harder. One has no say where he or she is placed. Instead of helping kids with problems that they have, agencies set up special accommodations and diagnose children as depressed, or other severe problems. Safety is their biggest priority, and I believe that kids in the system needs more than a pill, or a therapeutic session, they need something as simple as love. Unlike the American dream which defines wealth as, a big house or the fancy cars, or even the extensive amount of money in a bank account, I think I’m richer than most people because I can offer love and watch my family unfold beautifully like a fresh sunflower.

At the age of 20, I am currently obtaining my GED (I have one more test to take which is writing). I am finding that life presents you with situations that you’re sometimes unprepared for. I didn’t think issues in my past would prevent me from moving forward with my goals. I am now having to face consequences for some decisions I made when I hit the streets after aging out.

Growing up in a home lacking support, friendship and just down right love, I found strength early. “Fend for yourself,” port, friendship and just down right love, I found strength early. “Fend for yourself,”

I was extremely excited, I felt on top of the world until I got to background information. I answered everything honestly and waited. The computer took me to a page that said that I was ineligible, my heart dropped. I was made aware that people who have drug related felonies are not eligible. Now I have to jump through all these hoops to put myself through school. I could either wait for a year from the day of my conviction or I could go through drug rehab and have to undergo random drug tests and the treatment facility would have to be qualified for state or federal funds as well as what ever the treatment facility requires of you. After looking on the internet once more I found out that states say that “A federal law suspends federal student aid eligibility for students convicted under federal or state law for possession or sale of illegal drugs and students in default on a prior loan or those who are not making satisfactory academic progress as defined by the school.” I then looked into my reflection and figured out that person the results are still the same. I tried to type in a different felony but there was no section for any thing else but drug related felonies.

At this point I decided to contact NELA and South Seattle Community College financial aid representatives. They confirmed that people who were convicted of a drug felony were the only felonies ineligible. After asking why is it that only people convicted of possessing drugs were targeted, the answer I received was that congress wanted to prevent convicted drug offenders from receiving federal money as a way of fighting the use and distribution of illegal drugs. I can’t help but think that there is a whole group of people being targeted by this law. I feel that it discriminates against people of poor backgrounds and people of color, knowing that they are disproportionately represented in this class of felonies across the country.

Although there are ways to get around this, it is very discouraging to me and I am sure many others many others who have been faced with this problem. With a great support system and a positive mentality I know I’ll be able to overcome many of life’s obstacles including this one. The one thing that I have learned from this and will never forget is that the past can be a scary place, but to never let it hinder you from the future.
I had somewhere to go back to. Still, some homeless thing for the fun of it. I quickly kind of alliance, like maybe they were male, they would look into my eyes and were a young man they sometimes would concerned eyes. I started seeing the children ty truck rolling down the streets, and they still in awe of how bare the streets were. I walked up towards Broadway and perfect time to get a taste for how things people choose to conduct business even in the digital clock underneath my TV said into the rainy cold world. My last glance and I wore a very special kind of a purse, jeans and a tee shirt underneath. This time of comfortable high quality sneakers, the the lioness out in me, and I put on a pair imitation leopard coat, that sort of brought Seattle night. I wanted to remind myself of to feed my inspiration I was going to have ed [me], sometimes though even though some money. I ran away really fast but I in a car, I think he knew I was homeless, money for the internet. I was stuck down a transitional living program. She stated, can't get into a temporary shelter, she cur from the same drop in center about her has gone through at least one night like desperately measures. Even youth shelters usually hide out in especially when it's there all the places that homeless youth desolate by doing good deeds. I was stuck down with no place to go. I was really scared when this guy started following me in a car, I think he knew I was homeless, and he kept on telling me he could get me some money. I ran away really fast but I was really scared because no one would be around if the guy straight up abduct [me], sometimes though even though I didn't do that, especially when its raining I do think about going down to Denny and doing tricks, but I don't think its got stability. I really hope I can find a kind of housing, things are getting really bad out there.” she explained with a look of sincere worry on her face.

Seattle homeless youth services and the youth services in all the cities in America really should provide some place for youth to go during the nights, even when shelters are overfilled. They probably wouldn't be able to go to sleep, but it would be at least a good place for them to get some clothes, and sometimes to eat. Maybe they could provide creative projects and stuff to keep everyone alert. I think it is the duty of the youth services in this city to do something about these kids that are walking around with no place to go at night. Take it from me, no mans land at 4 am in the morning is a very scary place for a vulnerable young person.