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More Youth Advocacy Day photos on page 3!

Mockingbird Network by Samuel Martin

Youth Advocacy Day by Kenneth Larson-Rettinger

Friday, February 9th, was the fifth annual Youth Advocacy Day. I was part of the things that we were trying to pass was House Bill 3048. HB 3048, for people who don't know, is to establish a pilot program in a small county for every child in foster care, aged 12 and older, to have an attorney represent them in a court of law. Sponsoring this bill are Representatives Lentz, Goodman, Pettigrew, Roberts, Darnelle, Appleton, Hasegawa, and Kenney. Once I opened the bill fully, I realized how much this could potentially help foster children statewide. Even personally, I could see it helping me if I were still in foster care.

One of the most amazing parts of Youth Advocacy Day was, without a doubt, the fact that there were so many people to advocate for foster children. If children in foster care saw how many people there are that are advocating for them, they wouldn't feel so alone. There are many people out there that are working on foster care rights. One of the things that was really cool was the fact that I got to speak to the people there and it was so nice to see people listening to me and taking in all of what I was. All I did was tell them my foster care story and just that little bit of information really made people feel determined to advocate for foster children across the state.

Another great thing about Youth Advocacy Day was that we got to meet a whole bunch of people such as representatives and senators. It was so cool because those are people that are really important in Washington; it was sort of like meeting a famous person. I believe that we will get this bill passed eventually, even if not in this legislative session, because there were so many people advocating for it. We had a great turnout and we did a lot of convincing and even picketed with signs. You could hear the people marching from all around the capital. So I'm excited for this year and hopefully, we cared real hard to get our voices heard and I think that it really paid off.

The speakers at Youth Advocacy Day were really inspirational such as Samuel Martin and Jim Theofelis. I especially liked Sam's comparison of children in foster care to elephants in a circus. He talked about how the trainers start by restraining the elephants by their legs with heavy chains when they are young and working their way up to just fishing line and the elephants won't even try to get free because they gave up fighting when they had the chains. This really moved me because I thought that it was really true for children in the foster care system. I am happy that people got to hear my story and were really interested in talking in the future and can't wait to see people from the last Youth Advocacy Day there.

The Mockingbird Society Executive Director Jim Theofelis rallies up the crowd during the Youth Advocacy Day morning session before meeting with state representatives.

March 2008

The Mockingbird Network
by Samuel Martin

“IT IS TIME FOR US TO STAND AND CHEER FOR THE DOER, THE ACHIEVER, THE ONE WHO RECOGNIZES THE CHALLENGE AND DARES SOMETHING ABOUT IT.” - VINCE LOMBARDI

The doer is something that many of us strive to be but so few become successful at being. I bring to all of you great news: The Mockingbird Society's Youth LEAD Program is going state-wide in 2008.

During the summer of 2007, The Mockingbird Society took a trip to California and visited the Stuart Foundation. We went down in hopes of possibly receiving a grant to expand our youth programs, but, at that time, it was only a dream. While down there, we visited California Youth Connection which is California's state-wide youth advocacy group. What was unique about it was they had established chapters state-wide and each chapter picked an issue or something they felt should be changed in their county. I think it was a great idea. We also had an opportunity to visit Youth Offering Unique and Tangible Help (YOUTH). YOUTH consisted of youth being paid to give training to social workers on how to step up in certain situations that may arise in their profession. It was a wonderful experience.

Now, looking back and coming into March of 2008, we are beginning to see our dream of expanding coming to life. We ended up getting the grant from the Stuart Foundation as well as additional funding from the Casey Family Programs of Washington. We are officially establishing what is being called The Mockingbird Network, which will hopefully consist of 9-15 chapters state-wide, as well as a State Advisory Council consisting of one youth from each chapter serving as a representative. That youth will bring the issue most prevalent to their chapter and push it to get addressed in the legislature and, hopefully, adopted, which is, in essence, where we want to go with our ASK-Y program. Each chapter will be youth driven and adult supported, as well as existing in all six regions of the state. Executive Director Jim Theofelis summed it up as, “The Network is about leadership development and civic engagement for youth [in foster care] and alumni.”

This program has impacted me substantially coming up on my second year with The Mockingbird Society. I was here as we took off the ground. It has been one of the best plane rides of my life. I have had a chance to be a young leader and affects change in many ways. Now, to be able to say that we are going state-wide is an honor. I have had the opportunity to emcee two Youth Advocacy Days. We are creating the Mockingbird Network so that youth will bring the issue most prevalent to their chapter and push it to get addressed in the legislature. I have had the opportunity to emcee two Youth Advocacy Days. We are creating the Mockingbird Network so that youth can bring the issue most prevalent to their chapter and push it to get addressed in the legislature.

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Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

This month’s issue of the Mockingbird Times is a great metaphor for all that is going on and around The Mockingbird Society. We are in the final weeks of the 2008 legislative session and recently conducted our annual Youth Advocacy Day. What a great day for all involved! Once again the youth were amazing in so many ways. A special “thank-you” to the all the youth and alumni that participated, the legislators who took time from their busy schedules to meet with our group, the Planning Committee who has been working on this for months and, of course, all of the foster parents, professionals and private citizens who joined us for a truly inspiring day.

Also, in this issue is the announcement that The Mockingbird Society has received funding to expand our youth engagement program state-wide and we are thrilled to announce that Tiffany Washington has been hired for the Director position of our current Youth LEAD program which includes the expansion project which we are calling The Mockingbird Network. Additionally, Dr. Wanda and Marie have been working across the state and beyond helping organizations develop their plans to replicate the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM). We remain committed to our belief that the MFM is a practical, viable, service delivery model that will keep kids safe, reduce multiple placements, ensure siblings can remain together or in close proximity and serve as a retention and recruitment tool for caregivers.

At a weird time in my life, I ran into this dude who was a real character. When I met him, he introduced himself as Ryan. He was a cool, calm, normal, guy and, at the same time, very outspoken. He loved to be in the spotlight if not the spotlight itself. He would talk and talk and have a huge fan of music and loved every genre, even country and classical so he got along with almost everyone.

When we hung out, he would take me to places I always knew about but never appreciated the way he did. He had an eye for finding the beautiful pieces in something as mundane as a trash can. He loved to take pictures of the sunrise, sunset and had a weird love for “chicks.” Honestly thought he was weird myself.

But even weirder than that, I started noticing there were like two to three days a week he would disappear. The more I noticed this happening, he started realizing he was around, but just with other people and being a totally different person. He would act like he never saw me or knew who I was until the next day when he would not even acknowledge the others he knew.

I didn’t bother asking him about it at first until one day I finally did. He said to me “Oh yeah, those guys. That’s Peter Rico, Kory and Twist.” Puzzled, I asked, “What do you mean?” He said, “Those are all the people living inside of me, you know alter egos, split personalities.”

He explained to me that it all started with Ryan. Ryan was left alone and felt abandoned a lot when he was younger. He was raised by a woman who also left him alone a lot and was often left heartbroken by girlfriends who played with his feelings; that’s where Peter Rico came from. He made up that person in himself to be a ladies man or a Mac of all things and used to nest and sing.

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 “…Mockingbirds 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.

Thank you!

Anonymous; Julie Bell; Annette Blevayne; Patsy and Michael Bonconte; Celeste X. Carey, MSW; Karen Congall; Michael Davidson; Tatuya Fundisha-Bry; Positive Energy; Constance Gold; Kerri Goodman; Margaret-Anne and Mark Lamb; Patricia McDonald; Northwest Children’s Fund; Suzanne Shangier; Cynthia Shroude; Meryl Thulean; Susan Wells, MD.

Living Inside Your Head by Ryan Castellano

A lot of what his godfather (a former pimp) taught him. Peter Rico would always be talking to people about how to be around many people doing a lot for him and he would never feel alone again.

He said Kory came about because, when Ryan was younger, he didn’t like who he was or the color of his skin. All of his brothers were white and he was dark and thought his dad hated him for it. He would notice most of the white kids he went to school with had a better life then he did and had two parents to pick them up after school and come to all the school events. So, he made up Kory, a guy to live inside of him that could lie and be anyone for anything he wanted to be, around anybody he felt uncomfortable in front of.

Twist was just a name given by his b-dogs. He said, “Twist is still Ryan but that’s the part of Ryan that always wanted to feel like he was a part of something, feel power and have a family behind him in whatever he did. A family of thugs, blood brothers.” He said, “Twist only comes out every once in a while, when the dogs call him out to play,” and gave me a weird smile. I told him, “That’s really crazy,” and asked him why he came up with the idea to be all these people. To this day, he has never really answered me and every time I ask him he says, “Learn to live inside your head and nobody or anything will ever be able to keep you down.”

MEET OUR STAFF

Executive Director Jim Theofelis
Operations Manager Ros Ghan
Director of Mockingbird Family Programs Dr. Wanda Hackett
Youth LEAD Director Tiffany Washington
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Public Relations/Fund Development Darcie Gray
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Mockingbird Family Model Coordinator Marie Goines
Administrative Assistant Juan Ramirez
Senior Youth Representative Sarah Lin Martin
Youth Representatives Léona Bit, Jessica García, Kenneth Larson-Rettlinger, Rhonda Smith
Contributing Writers T. S. Berry, Emma Cummings, John Hemmingsway
Volunteers Claire Ghan, Christie Jackson, Jami Smith
Layout Kelly Hawkins

Become a Member of The Mockingbird Society

We welcome you to join us in making a difference in the lives of our nation’s most vulnerable children, youth, and families. As a supporter, you’ll receive a monthly edition of the Mockingbird Times. Thank you for your contribution.

NAME________________________
ADDRESS_____________________
EMAIL________________________
PHONE________________________

Enclosed, please find my check made payable to The Mockingbird Society in the amount of (please note amount on appropriate line): $1,000 + Protector $500 - $900 Champion $500 - $500 Advocate $500 - $250 Supporter $50 - $250 Contributor $5

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

I do not include my name on published donor lists.

Please mail this completed form and your check to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For questions or more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

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 written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. 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 up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 50,000 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 the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational management 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 content copyright ©2008, The Mockingbird Society.
The Mockingbird Society is pleased to announce that, after an extensive search, Tiffany Washington has accepted the position of Youth LEAD Director. This position will provide supervision and guidance to The Mockingbird Society’s award winning Mockingbird Times, the Youths’ Speaker’s Panel and our youth-driven advocacy coalition Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASKY).

Additionally, Ms. Washington will provide leadership and direction for the development of our newest program, The Mockingbird Times, a network of local youth-driven chapters in communities across the state, The Mockingbird Network will provide leadership development and strategic consulting work in local and state jurisdictions by engaging alumni, foster parents, birth parents, and relative caregivers as leaders whose participation and expertise will contribute to the improvement of foster care policy and practice.

Ms. Washington is a strong and active advocate ensuring that youth in foster care and other the traditional foster care population (high school, juvenile justice, and education) receive the support necessary to be successful, self-sufficient adults. As an alumna of foster care, Ms. Washington comes with a unique insight and expertise into the needs of children as well as system reforms and improvements. Ms. Washington has earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Services from Capella University.

MTB: Why did you choose The Mockingbird Society (MBS) as the place you wanted to continue your work with and on behalf of youth in foster care?

TW: I chose MBS because of its dedication to elevating the voice of youth in care. I believe that doing this is a critical piece of systems change and, when done authentically, can result in great change. MBS has demonstrated its commitment to constituent involvement in various ways such as Youth Advocacy Day, the Mockingbird Times, etc. I believe it is because it is committed to collaboration and community engagement. The Mockingbird Family Model is one way in which the organization shows its commitment to involving the community in solving the problem rather than having the “professionals” do so. MBS demonstrates the beauty of what can happen when staff, constituents, and allies come together for systems change.

MTB: What are your goals for your first year as the Youth LEAD Director?

TW: My main goal for year one is to connect with the regional groups, hear from them, and work with them to derive a plan. I think that it is very important for folks to get to know one another and develop a set of common goals before stepping out to impact systems. With that said, I am excited to see the groups connect with one another this year and think big about how they want to see the system changed for their brothers and sisters in care.

MTB: What most excites you about The Mockingbird Network?

TW: What excites me most is giving youth and alumni the opportunity to connect with one another and transform the system. Powerful things happen when youth and alumni get together, bond with one another, and discuss what things work well and what things need to be changed. Coming together gives them the confidence that they are not alone and the power to speak up with a collective voice and message.

Away at Job Corps

By JESSICA MARTIN

I came to Job Corps to accelerate progress in my life. I was tired of dead-end jobs and felt like I was going nowhere fast and becoming drug and alcohol addicted. I was burning myself out quickly. I filled my life with substances to relieve stress. I thought that life was short so I should enjoy what I could, so now I have to get my forklift certification. I really enjoyed Facilities Management and also get my certification in welding. Of course, how to weld BMX bikes. Of course I bought a bunch of shiny metal that I was inhaling. I also quickly realized that I didn’t have the patience to be a welder. I got frustrated with welding and decided to move on. I welded got worse and worse looking. It would be okay because I would practically be covered head to toe in a cow (leather).

My fifth week here, I did center support which every student does to give back to our campus. After my fifth week, I went straight into my vocation. I was lucky to get into my first choice because often students’ first choices are full and they have to do something else until there is space. I was also lucky to go straight into my job from Career Prep (the first four weeks) because I had TABED out of academics, meaning that I got high enough scores on both the reading and math TABE tests.

So I went straight into welding. I was excited to become good enough to learn how to weld BMX bikes. Of course, however, I had to start with the most basic stuff. All was going well at first. But then my allergies to metal started to show drastically. I was coughing up black phlegm everywhere and the metal was in my hair. I also quickly learned that I don’t have the patience to be a welder. I got frustrated with welding and welding line after line after line after. Each line I welded got worse and worse looking. It became apparent that welding was not for me.

Bummed, I came back to third week for more trade visits to find something else that I wanted to do. So far, I have visited the Facilities Maintenance and Plastering trades. I really enjoyed Facilities Maintenance, which is now my first choice trade. It is full, though, so I will visit Painting and decide what to go into until I am able to get into Facilities Maintenance.

My plan, from here on out, is to get into Facilities Maintenance and also get my certification all that go with the trade. I just got my flagger certification last week, so now I have to get my forklift certification to get a job to do that, though. I will first get my driver’s license which I am currently working on.

Once I have completed my vocation in Facilities Maintenance, I plan on staying here at Job Corps to do the college program. I want to get a business degree and Job Corps will help me start that by letting me live on campus while I go to Clatsop Community College.

Photo Gallery: Youth Advocacy Day 2008

The Governor’s Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (GJJAC) is seeking nominations for the second Annual “Spirit of Youth” award. The intent of the award is to recognize and celebrate a young adult who has made great strides in following involvement with the juvenile justice system; has overcome personal obstacles; and is today making significant contributions to society. A $1,000 scholarship is awarded to attend a Washington State College or University is available to the award winner. The award also provides the GJJAC and the public with an important opportunity to learn from a young person’s direct experience about the hard work and dedication it takes to build a better life, and how juvenile justice professionals and systems can most effectively be of help.

Criteria

The award recipient must be:

• Under the age of 24,
• A person who was adjudicated delinquent and involved in the Washington State juvenile justice system,
• Must have completed parole and/or probation conditions
• Currently involved, directly or indirectly, in bettering the lives of youth, and
• Has no outstanding court fines or restitution owed to victim(s) OR is demonstrating consistent payments of restitution in accordance with court order.

Nomination and selection process

The members of the GJJAC will promote the Spirit of Youth Award by distributing nomination forms to state and community organizations and media, and will be posted on the GJJAC Web site at www.dshs.wa.gov/ajg. The GJJAC will maintain strict confidentiality when handling award nomination forms.

Following is the 2008 nomination and selection process time line

• Nomination process announced and distributed .................... January 2008
• Nominations due to GJJAC .............................................. April 15, 2008
• GJJAC selects award recipient ........................................ May
• Award presented by Governor Gregoire ................................ Summer

The Washington State award recipient’s name and nominations will be submitted to the National Coalition for Juvenile Justice “Spirit of Youth Award.”
Beautiful Crane

Why Why Why

Heartbreak

There is Love

The Hero

Get Published – Get Paid!

Reconnecting With Family After Foster Care

Seeking Innovative, Creative, and Passionate Director of Development!

Letter to My Uncle

Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb.

~ Sir Winston Churchill