Mockingbird Youth rally at Youth Advocacy Day

Throughout the day we had several guest speakers who were passionate and supportive in making a change for youth of the foster care system. Some of the speakers included Denise Reynolds- Robinson, Assistant Secretary, Children’s Administration. Ms. Reynolds-Robinson always has listened and continually supported our advocacy efforts since she took her first- hand. Youth Advocacy Day was simply a chance to put a voice and face to the issues that either affect them directly or other youth affected. The Mockingbird Society and foster youth and alumni show that our advocacy efforts have made a difference. People were given a chance to speak out on their experiences. They spoke out about why we need to retain safe housing, implement unannounced visits, and keep the street youth programs. It was inspiring to see all the people that came up to the microphone speak straight from their heart. One young woman said, “Without reaching our full potential, keep us residential!” I think the match really made the day; it gave everyone an opportunity to feel like they made a difference whether it was by holding a sign or speaking out the chants or a combination of the two.

The day was a success. “This is the second time I’ve come to YAD and it keeps getting better and better. I feel more and more a part of a community than I come to YAD and it keeps getting better and better.”

Afterwards we all got to refuel with sandwiches, chips and juice. We all were gathered in the tent to listen to some more of guest speakers, chips and juice. We all were gathered in the tent to listen to some more of guest speakers, and soon came to an end with a drawing for prizes. The day wasn’t over after hearing all the voices raised; we still had a full day ahead of us. Next, we marched! This was a chance for everyone to raise their voice and hold signs so that maybe a legislator could see or hear that the issues we were fighting for are important, and they can’t be ignored. It was an opportunity for the youth who are affected by the laws to be seen as human beings, not just a budget item. This was the part of the day that I had been most excited for in preparation for the event. I couldn’t wait to lead the march with Terrell and scream into the megaphone until I was hoarse. A youth participant said they liked the march because “It was like telling the world I care,” and another youth said, “I got to scream my advocacy thoughts!” We yelled out, “Make it count, show up unannounced!” “A safe place to sleep, to keep me off the streets!” and “To reach our full potential, keep us residential!” I think the match really made the day; it gave everyone an opportunity to feel like they made a difference whether it was by holding a sign or screaming out the chants a combination of the two.

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Mockingbird Youth Marching at Youth Advocacy Day

According to www.dictionary.com the definition of advocacy is “the action of advocating, pleading for, or supporting a cause or proposal.” Before attending this year’s Advocacy Day I knew very little about what it truly means to advocate. After this day I was able to see it and feel it first-hand. Youth Advocacy Day was simply and powerfully, people like me standing up for their rights, like the people did during the civil rights movement. The youth that have been in foster care, or who are actually going through the struggles of being a foster kid, as well as a person who experienced homelessness, had a chance to put a voice and face to the issues that either affect them directly or other youth in care.

Speaking up for What You Believe In

The Mockingbird Network, foster youth and alumni of foster care about the issues we were fighting for are important, and they can’t be ignored. It was an opportunity for the youth who are affected by the laws to be seen as human beings, not just a budget item. This was the part of the day that I had been most excited for in preparation for the event. I couldn’t wait to lead the march with Terrell and scream into the megaphone until I was hoarse. A youth participant said they liked the march because “It was like telling the world I care,” and another youth said, “I got to scream my advocacy thoughts!” We yelled out, “Make it count, show up unannounced!” “A safe place to sleep, to keep me off the streets!” and “To reach our full potential, keep us residential!” I think the match really made the day; it gave everyone an opportunity to feel like they made a difference whether it was by holding a sign or screaming out the chants or a combination of the two.

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Mockingbird Youth Marching at Youth Advocacy Day

Although the day was cold that still didn’t stop people from coming. The tent was filled with youth from different regions of Washington. There also were many supporters from street youth programs and places like The YMCA. People gathered with the orange scarves that were given to them so that they could repre- sent the bold colors of The Mockingbird Society and speak with one voice for youth and alumni of foster care about the issues of a broken system.

People were given an chance to speak out on their experiences. They spoke out about why we need to retain safe housing, implement unannounced visits, and keep the street youth programs. It was inspiring to see all the people that came up to the microphone speak straight from their heart. One young woman said, “Without reaching our full potential, keep us residential!” I think the match really made the day; it gave everyone an opportunity to feel like they made a difference whether it was by holding a sign or screaming out the chants or a combination of the two.

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Mockingbird Youth Marching at Youth Advocacy Day

David Buck at the Youth Advocacy Day march

SPARKING UP, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Mockingbird Youth Marching at Youth Advocacy Day

David Buck, CA. Assst. Sec. Director, Revers- Robinson, Bette Cruz

Best Youth Advocacy Day Yet

In This Issue

Letter From the Editor

Jim Theofilis

One Night Count

David Buck

Thanks to Our Sponsors

Co-President, FPAWS

National Social Worker Month

Donnette Cruz

Pro Unannounced Visits

Amanda Bevington

Con Unannounced Visits

Statement from Mike Carfield

Jim Receives the Jefferson Award

Diamonique Walker

Peaceful Advocacy to Make Change

Ian Grant

Creative Corner

Welcome To The Show

Abigail Antoscente Brounner

You’re Not Alone

Jasmine Eaters

Calendar of Events

News From The Mockingbird Network

February 18th marked The Mockingbird Society’s 2011 Youth Advocacy Day (YAD). In my opinion, it was the best to date. Close to 250 participants including foster and kinship youth and alumni, homeless youth, service providers, foster parents, and concerned community members showed up in large numbers. I had the honor of co-emceeing with Mockingbird’s Executive Director, Jim Theofilis and Terrel Rosetti, my fellow Senior Network Representative.

This was the part of the day that I had been most excited for in preparation for the event. I couldn’t wait to lead the march with Terrell and scream into the megaphone until I was hoarse. A youth participant said they liked the march because “It was like telling the world I care,” and another youth said, “I got to scream my advocacy thoughts!” We yelled out, “Make it count, show up unannounced!” “A safe place to sleep, to keep me off the streets!” and “To reach our full potential, keep us residential!” I think the match really made the day; it gave everyone an opportunity to feel like they made a difference whether it was by holding a sign or screaming out the chants or a combination of the two.

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Best YAD, CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Mockingbird Youth Marching at Youth Advocacy Day
Dear Friends,

Youth Advocacy Day continues to prove to be a powerful testament to the importance of standing up for what you believe and doing so with respect for all who are willing to listen. It is truly one of my favorite days of the year. February 18th, 2011 was highlighted by Governor Chris Gregoire proclaiming this day Youth Advocacy Day in honor of youth and alumni of foster care, kinship care and homeless youth. This high honor presented on behalf of the Governor by Andi Smith, Executive Policy Advisor, shines a bright light on the importance of building a world-class foster care system, and on the potential of every child or youth who has experienced it.

This year more than 250 youth, with The Mockingbird Society’s orange scarves warming them, filled the tent at the Capitol Campus, voicing their own experiences in a call for reform for such safe housing for youth aging out of care, unannounced visits for safety in care, and retention of street youth programs.

The Mockingbird Network took the lead providing a platform for youth from across the state and hosting dignitaries including Children’s Administration Assistant Secretary Denise Revels-Robinson, Mary Mieng, Director, Office of Family & Children’s Ombudsman, and many of our legislative champions including Representative Mary Helen Roberts, prime sponsor of HB 1128 to extend foster care to youth who have not yet achieved their high school diploma or GED. We also heard from Representative Vueven Carlyle, Representative Roger Goodman, Senator Adam Kline, Representative Jamie Pedersen and Representative Eric Pettigrew. We also hosted community speakers such as Bill Block from the King County Committee to End Homelessness and held an incredible open-mic session.

As I reflect on the day, I am so grateful for the leadership of so many and their willingness to meet with youth and alumni in each and every corner of the state. These tough economic times have put tremendous pressure on many, and Legislators take time to listen and are committed to change.

The highlight of the day for me came during the march. It was in this trek across the campus that I met Donnie Sellers, a young woman, who was supported by two cruiches and walked every inch in the cold, negotiating stairs and crowds, who told me she came that day on behalf of medically fragile foster youth, so that we may truly recognize the issues faced by this segment of our foster care population.

Her strength, conviction and resiliency is an inspiration to us all.

Every year, I come back to what grounded me in our name taken from the classic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Atticus Finch said, “Mockingbirds don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.” On Youth Advocacy Day, it was clear to me that the world was listening.

2011 On National Social Work Month

Jim Theofelis

The following corrects a story focused on the Arc of King County published in our print version of The Mockingbird Times in February 2011 (The online version was correct). The printed article should have stated that The following corrects a story focused on the Arc of King County published in our print version of The Mockingbird Times in February 2011 (The online version was correct). The printed article should have stated that...
Pro Unannounced Visits By AMANDA BEVINGTON

2011 is shaping up to be a big year for foster youth and alumni of care, and all of us at The Mockingbird Society have been working hard to ensure that every child and youth are getting the proper care and become adults. We are going to do better when they age out of child and youth care. It is so hard to be taken from your home and loved ones and be placed into a house full of strangers. So imagine how hard it is for a 6-year-old child to explain their strengths and weaknesses to a social worker inside their own home. Most children may not understand exactly what makes a good home or a bad home. But what they do know is that they should not be getting unconditional love, support, and happiness from each parent. This makes me think of my favorite quote from Jim Theofelis, Executive Director, The Mockingbird Society. He asks: "Would you drop off your own child at any day care, with the understanding that as a parent you could not stop by any time as a parent you could not see how your child is doing?" Ninety-nine percent of responsible parents will say, "no". And the same idea applies to unannounced visits.

I was able to interview Deggie Cooper, who has been a foster parent for several years. She testified on the importance of unannounced visits and she was very passionate about the potential for raising awareness about the dangers of not having safety in care for children and youth. She said, "The purpose of unannounced visits is to improve the environment in all homes of the family. And, with guidelines, knowledge and understanding, better parenting, training, and implementing things will improve." She also said this proposal provides an opportunity for the youth and families to ask questions, and for them to be informed. She believes it also will help give caregivers the extra help and support that they need. According to Ms. Cooper, unannounced visits benefit children and youth, as well as the caregivers.

In conclusion, I’d like to say how I feel. I just know how hard it was to be in foster care, and most of my years in care were pretty negative. I hope that in some future new laws such as unannounced visits, that I can and will make a difference for future and current lives in the foster care system. I do not want to see any child or youth ever have to go through what I have been through while I was in care. And, the sad part about it is that many children are suffering now due to multiple failures in the foster and child welfare system. I believe, if you are dedicated to create changes in the system then let’s do so together, as our actions speak louder than our words.

Peaceful Advocacy to Make Change by JAN GRANT

The future is inherently a good thing. And we move into one winter at a time. Things get better one win- ter at a time. So if you’re going to celebrate something, then live in this: the winter, monthly and on balance, a better place to live this year than it was last year.” –Warren Ellis, Transmetropolitan

I will have to miss Youth Advocacy Day this year due to academic considerations. However, my mind very much resonates with the struggle that we face as a community of advocates. This winter has not been a good one for foster youth. Although we have a very successful 1128, extended foster care for youth working on their diploma, HB 1697, unannounced social worker visits, and efforts to save street youth programs are still ongoing strong, and this year’s Youth Advocacy Day promises to be one of the best yet, we have to acknowledge that both in- nati and national policies have often failed to attempt the limit ground we will lose in this budget firestorm.

As I write this, Honi Muharik, the (for the moment) President of Egypt, has just finished broadcasting what should have been an an- themic speech. Over the last few weeks, agitation against Muharik has risen to a fever pitch. He has ruled the country as a dictator since 1981, using the country’s Emergency Law to suspend the constitution and prevent elections. Today, he was expected to finally resign, . . . the word was leaked to the US Embassy and others that Muharik would transfer his power to his Vice President. (An numerous secret police.) Omar Suleiman. But the speech he gave made it clear that he had no such intention; that, while he would delegate certain responsibilities to Sulei- man, he would retain the office of President; elections are held in September.

The Al Jazeera network has been broadcasting a live view of Tiananm square in Cairo, and although the thousands of protesters there are very vocal and strong, they are also not as visible, it remains to see if more violence will break out.

Although the crisis in Egypt and our fight for decent foster care in Washington are on very dif- ferent scales, I believe the solution to both is the same: love. We can do it. Sometimes it becomes really hard to imagine or think of this as an option. When the protests rage on and families have touched, have part of the discourse for years now. And as a result, things have gotten, on average, a little bit better every year. That is the power that we wield as advocates; that over time, if we continue to par- ticipate, we can make foster care just that much better. Youth Advocacy Day is over now, but we need your voice more than ever.

This winter has not been good for foster youth. But we’re doing the best we can. And we have achieved significant things. We owe it all to your continuing enthusiasm, voice, and vigilance. We will need it even more, as we head into spring and time to count this vulnerable population. I do not want to see any child or youth ever have to go through what I have been through while I was in care. And, the sad part about it is that many children are suffering now due to multiple failures in the foster care system. I believe, if you are dedicated to create changes in the system then let’s do so together, as our actions speak louder than our words.

ONE NIGHT, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

nationwide in nearly every city, but the recent marches suggest the issue is still on the minds and time to count our vulnerable population. I believe having accurate numbers is crucial in the decision process of determining what I.U.D. and abortion is being discussed in the state to prevent and end homelessness. We can’t do it without accurate numbers. The One Night Count is simply not enough to get an accurate look at the homeless situation in an area.

http://www.homelessinfo.org/one_night_count/

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Jefferson Award

The Jefferson Award is named after U.S. President Thomas Jefferson because the Board felt that Jefferson "embodied the spirit of excellence in America." This is an award to recognize the dedication of people of all ages, from all walks of life, who, on a personal level, are making positive and impactful changes in peoples’ lives.

Of the many nominees chosen to get the prestigious Jefferson Award, Executive Director of The Mockingbird Society, Jim Theofelis; and four astonishing others received it: "I am so humbled and know this means that our community recognizes its responsibility to foster & kinship youth, youth aging out of the system and homeless youth in our community," Jim said upon receiving it. The fact that Jim received this award shows that others in our community are aware of the hard work that he and The Mockingbird Society are doing to make a difference in the lives of the vulnerable youth in Washington State. By founding Mockingbird Society and children’s administration, he is creating a regionally and nationally with people that share our concern for youth.

With The Jefferson Award, the power of voice and vision to open the eyes of the people of our community to vote and decide which of our five awardees will receive national recognition for their outstanding work. During the week of March 28th to April 1st, Evening Magazine on King 5 News will be spotlighting our community heroes to give you the public a chance to get to know them better. Voting for the national nominee will be open online the week of April 1st to April 8th at KING5.com. There will also be a breakfast on April 13th to honor our community heroes and at which The Board will announce who will be representing Washington nationally. For those of you that know Jim’s amazing leadership I encourage you to vote.

Mockingbird Times, March 2011
Welcome To The Show
By Abigail Antionette Brunner

Welcome to the show I am the main attraction. You will notice my life consists of Horror, Comedy, Drama and Action. You will notice not all of my relationships were of love and passion. You will notice that I am happy, confident and outstandingly cocky, and then you will notice the days where I am not me.

You will notice I am unstable emotionally, you will see my moods are changing constantly. My personality is most interesting. I am who I am today because my experiences built me.

So welcome to the show I am the main attraction. I am amazed at all the people I have attracted. They cling on to my every word and crave my thoughts and story like an addiction.

Then all I hear is how sorry they are about how bad I have had it.

I don’t want apologies or sympathy, just don’t talk and start listening. I hope you will then stop trying to play god by judging me.

So again, welcome to the show I am the main attraction, you will notice my life consists of Horror, Comedy, Drama and Action....

You’re Not Alone
By Jasmin Esters

You think you’re all alone in this cold world. You think you have no one who cares about you and nothing to keep you safe. You’re crying for help. You think nobody understands you, but they do.

So you’re walking home by yourself and... Bam! Surprise! You’re not alone

You have a family who cares for you, supports you, loves you, and cherishes you
And now you know you are not alone with your family.

Community Events

Region 1 (Spokane) UNITE! (Understanding Needs and Implementing Transformations for Everyone) by Noah Stiles
Starting off the New Year, Kristina, Sarah and I flew to Seattle to attend the State Leadership Council meeting where we learned how to properly facilitate the Legislative 101 training. At our January 24th Chapter meeting, Kristina and presented the group. We explained how a bill becomes a law and went over the 2011 Legislative Agenda. Our next meeting took place on February 8th where Region 1 began preparing posters for Advocacy Day and discussed ideas for community service projects. On February 18th, Kristina, Josie, James, Sarah, and I made a journey to the state capitol for Advocacy Day where we joined our fellow youth in the march around the Capitol Building for a peaceful protest. After that we met up with Representatives Andy Billig and Timm Ormsby who represent us from Spokane. We stressed the importance of retaining street youth programs, preserving Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP), and the importance of unannounced visits. Advocacy Day was a huge success, so we are going to use that energy now and get our chapter really excited about the 2011 Foster Youth & Leadership Summit.

Region 2 (Yakima) A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. (Around Community Two Foster- ing Individual Rights Safely Together) by Brandy Baxley
We had 2 trainings to prepare our youth for Advocacy Day. I hope everyone enjoyed this amazing Day as much as Region 2 did! We were so happy to meet and talk with Representative Curtis King and also with Representatives Mau- reen Walsh and Norm Johnson! I would like to thank them for their time. Our region had the honor to lead the march which was AMAZING!!! Thank you to everybody who helped us make the 2011 Advocacy Day possible! On March 12th we are going to serve lunch at our local Union Gospel Mission.

Region 4 (Seattle) Region 4 for Change by Sam Martin
What a GREAT MONTH in Region 4 for change. On February 18th we had our YOUTH ADVOCACY DAY! We did something very significant by going together to Olympia and asking for legislative change and exercising our right to free speech. This is important because too often do the people who are the most vulnerable in our society get left without a voice in big decisions that affect their lives. We also had our Legislative Advocacy Training which was a huge success. It helped prepare our young people on how to conduct themselves to effectively deliver our message in Olympia. Also our chapter is making great strides in progression and development. We are effectively continuing our relationships across the community and are building the strongest partnership with Treehouse, YMCA, as well as DSHS. Region 4 for Change is going strong!

Region 5 (Tacoma) Cour’ige (Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individu- alities Gaining Empowerment) by Jasmin Thomas
In the month of February Region 5 COURIGE: Changing Our Unique Responsibilities Individually Gaining Empowerment prepared for Youth Advocacy Day. In preparation for this we had our second chapter meeting. During our meeting we facilitated the legislative training. This training was about how a bill becomes a law, and what would be on the agenda for Youth Advocacy Day. Region 5 combined efforts with Independent Living Skills and worked on posters. We created ideas that came together in chants and during the rally. COURIGE also helped put together letters to give as gifts to the representatives and senators. Our “MBS” year is just beginning. We are planning on doing community service. We are also planning our next chapter meeting. With that being said, we have so much to look forward to and to be just as excited about the 2011 Leadership Summit.

Region 6 (Olympia) T.A.F.F.Y. (Truth and Ac- tion For Foster-Youth) by Amanda Ursulier
This month, Region 6 participated in Advocacy Day. We had a LOT of fun together in Olympia. There were more than 200 people there to support The Mockingbird Society, foster youth, alumni and homeless youth. I made a speech on the Street Youth Outreach Programs that are being cut, and Chris Bauer made a speech about why implementing unannounced visits will increase safety for youth in foster and kinship care. We also had a meeting with Representative Finn of the 35th district (Shelton) at the Youth Advocacy Day event. The meeting went very well. During the march, we got to scream our lungs out and MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD!!! Overall, Youth Advocacy Day was AWESOME!!! On March 16th, we will host a Culture of Foster Care training for Thurston County Juvenile Diver- sion volunteers. Stay tuned!