Mockingbird Network

2010 Youth Advocacy Day by Ashley Lanier

"Today is for youth in the foster care system to see and speak on change."

Youth participant Reigan Miller

On February 19th, 2010, The Mockingbird Society hosted the 12th annual Youth Advocacy Day. Youth Advocacy Day is a day where youth involved in the Mockingbird Network, as well as youth from other organizations, come out and learn how to be their own best advocates while speaking truth to those in power. The Mockingbird Society is dedicated to inspiring the youth voice and making sure the youth know how important and effective their voices are. On Youth Advocacy Day, we have the opportunity to go to Olympia and be heard about changes that need to take place in the child welfare system. After all, these changes affect not only our lives but the lives of the children who, in the future, will find themselves in the child welfare system.

The day began with over 200 people coming out to support us, including the Mockingbird Network chapters and many other organizations from all across the state. After people got settled, each organization and chapter had the opportunity to come up and share a little about themselves. "This was my favorite part of the day: to see all these programs that I’ve been with throughout the past couple of years come and meet, a lot of them happen to know me," said a youth participant from Region 4.

We then focused on our legislative agenda which was divided into Tier 1 and Tier 2. Tier 1 is our top legislative items and Tier 2 we focus on supporting other organization’s advocacy efforts. The Tier 1 agenda consists of saving the HOPE beds and the Responsible Living Skills Programs (RLSPs), the Foster Care to 21 program, and the Independent Youth Housing program. Tier 2 includes Subsidized Guardianships; Expanding Sealing Juvenile Records, 8-hour Notification, and retaining funding in the Passport to College program. We are asking the Washington State Legislature to assist with each of these bills. In the past, The Mockingbird Society has played a pivotal role in getting most items on our Tier One agenda passed through legislation and hopes to be successful this year as well.

Network Representatives Ian Grant and David Buck explained in more detail about each legislative item with participants from each region coming up to share their personal experiences withdiscussing what item was important. You could really see the impact another youth’s story had on some of the participants. For me it was like looking in a mirror, we all have something in common and without these programs all of our lives will change.

As the day moved forward, we had some guest speakers. They all came to discuss the importance of the youth voice, how important it is for us to be there to put a face to the issues that they are fighting for in legislation, and a little bit about what they do and why we have their support. I know this meant a lot to youth in the crowd, seeing and hearing from important people who are able to make change. Our guest speakers included Representative Roger Goodman, Representative Mary Helen Roberts, Representative Reuven Carlyle, Representative Ruth Kagi, and Representative Mary Lou Dickerson. After that, Laura Lippold, lobbyist, gave us a brief description of her job, sort of like a “day in the life of a lobbyist.” She also answered some of the questions from the participants in the audience. It really gave youth a better understanding of how many other important issues legislators are forced to choose between.

Then we marched around the capital. A memorable moment was the cry, “Give us hope…Give us beds!” as all of us marched around the capital. On Youth Advocacy Day, foster youth, alumni of foster care, and their supporters met with senators and representatives to advocate for legislation critical to the success of youth in care. The day’s events included a march around the capital, stakeholder meetings with legislators, and a rally. After that, the Mockingbird Society hosted the Youth Advocacy Day banquet, where we celebrated the hard work of the youth and their advocates.

Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson Listens to Youth by Jerry Bobo

When I have the chance to interview people that are making a difference in some form or fashion for youth, it excites me. This will be the second issue where Assistant Secretary of Children’s Administration Denise Revels Robinson has been featured in the Mockingbird Times. She is a great ally for youth to have on their side. She is ready to take Children’s Administration, her department of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to a new level—which will allow young people to have a bigger effect on the legislative agenda.

Out of the many questions I asked Mrs. Robinson, the answers to three of my questions stuck out in my mind: How she sees the partnership with The Mockingbird Society (MBS) working and what she wants to do with the Mockingbird Network, how she feels about equalizing resources for homeless youth and foster youth, and what ways youth make an impact on the legislative agenda.

Everything has a process to it, including a partnership. The MBS has many partnerships, but the partnership between DSHS and The MBS is a partnership that will continue to grow and give youth a voice and an upper hand in another area of their lives. So I asked Mrs. Robinson how she sees the partnership working out. She stated, “I see it as a very close and open collaborative professional relationship. Work with The Mockingbird Society to continue to work and hear from the youth and young people directly about their current or past experience in foster care or involvement with the child welfare system. I also want to hear from them recommendations to continue to improve how we primarily serve older youth because most of the recommendations come from older youth. I want them to help inform, help educate, and help come up with solutions to serve adolescents. I also want their active involvement as we are developing policies around primarily older youth.” To know that someone that is employed by the state and who can make major changes wants the youth to be involved while the policies are made about and for youth is amazing.

There is a price to pay when becoming a homeless youth and many times you don’t have access to certain resources even if you are a part of the foster care system. I asked Ms. Robinson how she feels about equalizing resources for homeless and foster youth, and she said, “My commitment is to understand what the needs of homeless youth are, and to try and address those issues so we can serve them better. I wouldn’t say equalize, I would say understand the needs of homeless youth.” It was uplifting because she doesn’t want to equalize resources for both homeless and foster youth, but she wants to understand what it is that homeless youth really need and how it is they can be better served.

Youth Advocacy Day was the week following this interview and Denise Revels Robinson was one of our guest speakers. On that day she said that it is important to “recognize that even though the legislative process is still going, it is important to testify on bills and provide information about [your] needs to Children’s Administration.” No matter how many times I hear that youth need to be responsive when it comes to the legislative agenda, I feel somewhat responsible. I am an advocate for youth, and even though there are many other youth that advocate for other youth, there aren’t enough of them and Ms. Robinson wants to see that change.

It was hard to pick and choose only a few highlights of our conversation but the more I read over the interview, the more I kept coming back to these questions. Then I thought about the times I’ve seen her speak over the past few months. She has the same passion and drive that we do here at The Mockingbird Society. Its more then just a job, its a job that others need to see done well and, when dealing with young people, they need to start to be there. The Assistant Secretary of Children’s Administration is doing her job right. I feel her passion and know she puts her heart into her work.
One of my favorite days of the year is Youth Advocacy Day. This year’s event surpassed all others in so many ways. First, we had over 200 youth and allies attending from all across the state of Washington proclaiming their belief that the voice of the children and youth in foster care should be front and center in the public discussion regarding balancing the state budget.

This year was highly successful for so many reasons including the increased leadership role that youth and alumni from the Mockingbird Network have taken. When I say success I mean more than the trainings that were conducted by youth and alumni on Youth Advocacy Day. This has always proven to be so powerful for both youth and the legislators.

It was especially wonderful to have Susan Dreyfus (Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services) and Denise Revelles Robinson (Assistant Secretary of Children’s Administration) address the group at our closing ceremony. But the highlight for me was listening to young people who carry the burden of abuse and neglect, multiple placements, and separation from family to youth leaders calling for unity, engagement, and opportunity. It is listening to these young mockingbirds singing their song of hope that inspires me, and I hope you as well.

All of this and more contributes to the day being successful, including youth and alumni meeting directly with lawmakers to ensure a mutual understanding of the issues facing youth and alumni from foster care. I am so appreciative of all of the legislators and their staff who took the time to meet with youth and alumni on Youth Advocacy Day. This has always proven to be so powerful for both youth and the legislators.

Okay, now for the bragging. This year was a record. I also mean more than the trainings that the Mockingbird Networks’ regional chapters have taken. When I say success I mean more than the trainings that the Mockingbird Networks’ regional chapters have taken. When I say success I mean more than the trainings that the Mockingbird Networks’ regional chapters have taken.

We'll be checking in with you, our loyal supporters, and sharing news about our progress. We hope to be “live” by mid-year. The Mockingbird Times is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovation in the foster care system, with a focus on 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 youth advocates. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $9.50 and $12 an hour. Additions, youth from across the country submit articles, art, and poetry to our bi-annual magazine called Real Change. The Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational decision and development-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Society’s activities or publications are associated with any religious, political, or other organization.
From January 24th to the 27th, homeless youth representatives from organizations nationwide got together to represent themselves at the National Network for Youth Symposium in Washington DC. The National Network for Youth (NN4Y) is the country's largest advocate organization for homeless youth. It includes counselors, clinics, advocacy organizations, runaway shelters, and many other organizations working for homeless youth. Their mission is "to connect and champion the needs of runaway, homeless, and other disconnected youth through our ‘TOOLBOX’, which includes data collection, community building, and services.

I had the honor of being one of the four delegates representing YouthCare, along with Ian Grant, another Mockingbird Network Representative. YouthCare is a Seattle-based organization whose mission is "to build confidence and promote self-sufficiency for homeless and underserved youth by providing shelter, hope and support." In 1974, YouthCare established the first shelter for homeless youth on the West Coast, and now administers seven transitional living programs, two shelters, and a drop-in center providing education and job training, among other things.

The symposium went well. On the agenda were workshops covering various topics in the field of homeless youth services, as well as plenary speakers Kathleen Selcuk, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, and Ron Sims, Deputy Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. But I and others believe that the symposium structure could be better utilized to share the experience and knowledge of youth leaders. It is my recommendation that the symposium should be restructured so that barriers between homeless youth and services providers are lowered and honest discussions about policy and legislation can take place.

The purpose of the symposium was to encourage homeless youth to use their experience as homeless youth to create change. I expected that there would be dialogue and discussion between service providers and youth about legislation and policy that youth deserve to have a voice in. Instead, the structure of the symposium compromised the dialogue. I attended a small networking event to talk about the symposium and the training to use it effectively. Youth are instilled with qualities of leadership and values that can be implemented in their professional, educational, and even personal lives, for the rest of their life.

I recently interviewed three former Mockingbird Network youth, Samuel Martin, Rhonda Smith, and Jessica Martin, to ask them about ways The Mockingbird Society has changed since they left, as well as what they have been doing since leaving The MBS. While at The MBS, these youth learned skills that they are still using in their lives today. Advocacy is the biggest thing, I can use it everywhere. Public speaking and using my voice, and being able to write are huge. I write in school all the time," said Samuel. When I asked Rhonda she said, "Advocacy is one thing that I use every day. I advocate for myself to get what I need all the time. Rhon- da learned not only about advocacy, but [While at The MBS], I learned a lot of communication skills." All of these skills are those that can be used in many parts of your lives, whether you are working or not.

Since leaving The MBS, these youth have gone on completely different paths. Jessica left The MBS to go to Job Corps at Tongue Point in Oregon where she graduated from the pre-apprenticeship plastering program and transferred to Clearfield Job Corps in Utah for advanced training in automotive repair. Now she is back in Region 4 trying to get her school’s attention. "[While at The MBS], I learned a lot of communication skills." All of these skills are those that can be used in many parts of your lives, whether you are working or not.

There are a lot of foster youth in Washington State that don’t know that they have a shot at going back to their birth fami- lies. And I believe they should.

Robert Gower, an attorney with CDOCC, believes that a legislative mandate DCFs will not act to inform youth of their rights unless they are required by law. "Many of the youth’s parents would be in his or her best interests, that reunification wouldn’t present a risk to the youth’s safety," he said. "Lawmakers and the parents have fixed the problems that caused the dependency in the first place. If the court finds that all of this is true, paren- thetical statement seems to be the per- iod. If the youth has to be removed from the home again due to abuse or neglect, and the court finds that the youth was actually abused or neglected, then the order is dismissed and the parents lose their rights again. If not, at the end of the six months, the court orders that the parents’ rights be permanently reinstated and dismisses the dependency or reinstates them and protects parents from liability for child support for the time that the youth was in care. If you would like to exercise your right to terminate parental rights, the best thing to do is to talk to a lawyer. If you haven’t been appointed a lawyer, the first step is to let the judge or commissioner know as soon as possible or at your next de-
We think it's cool when we get in trouble but we ain't cool with trouble. Teachers, they can't discriminate but they intimidate. When students dominate the halls, but all greats must fall, right?
Teachers have the power, but won't do what they must, And all the while trying to build the trust, Of superintendents, and overrated principals, not that they're all bad, I just need to vent a little. Well now, kids think teachers don't think And teachers think the kids don't think And that is the problem at hand. Perfection is perfected so I'm gonna let it sit. But nobody's perfect so I guess we're all twisted a little bit.

**News From the Mockingbird Network**

**Twisted Teacher**

**Hunter Convington**

Teachers put on a smile when you talk smack, But really, they wish they could talk back, We don't realize how hard they try, That sometimes they cry that they have lives, And us as kids just act like fools.

**Little Sister**

**Sir Donald L. Stallworth**

My little sister is the queen For her crown gleams With the shine of a thousand suns, for she is the one. My little sister, man how I miss her Without her, my pain is like an empty abyss For there are no more roses, they are all dead With my heart painted red, it's slowly turning black Hacking through my feelings, hacking through my soul The pain is unbearable for me as a whole Taking its toll on me, taking its toll on us, For in God we trust, and this is a long process, We must be patient, we must not rush. My little sister, oh how I miss her For her name is Queen For there is no shade, there is only truth. For my truth is her and sometimes pain Although they are not the same For we share the same blood, we share the same momma. We share the same pains and we share the same drama We share the same eyes, we share the same ears. We share the same heart, and we share the same fears She protects her love, I protect her with my tears That's the beginning of our lives, through all the black-hearted years.

**We Need Your Work!**

We are in great need of 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, visit mockingbirdtimes.org and select Mockingbird Times under the Mockingbird Network or contact us at 206-323-5437 or via email at kara@mockingbirdtimes.org. Note: If you have submitted something before that hasn’t been published, we need your subscription agreement in order to print it. Please submit again via the web location listed above. Because of space constraints, shorter poems have a higher chance of being published.

**Community Events**

**Region 1: UNITE! Chapter in Spokane County by Onalee Stewart**

Lauren and I facilitated a Legislative Advocacy 101 training for 12 youth and alumni to prepare for Advocacy Day on Feb 19th. We had a Valentine’s Day theme for our Chapter meeting on the 1st and thirteen of our youth and alumni made posters for Advocacy Day. We talked about the upcoming Leadership Summit and handed out applications. Katrina, Jocey, Lauren, and myself had a great time at Youth Advocacy Day.

**Region 2: A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. Chapter in Yakima County by Saundra Hunt**

On Youth Advocacy Day, we talked with Sen. Curtis King about not taking away Foster Care to 21 and Passport to College. He listened to us and when we got done he handed out his business cards and told us that we can give him a call if we are ever in need. Thank you Sen. King! Representative Walsh also took part in the panel and ACT FIRST would like to say thank you for all of your support! Advocacy Day was a lot of fun and very inspiring. As a chapter leader, I felt very important because we were able to lead a march that could change the future for foster children. I would definitely encourage more youth from Region 2 to go next year because it was fun, educational, and impactful!

**Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Josie Toohoe**

This month we had Legislative Advocacy 101 training to get ready for Youth Advocacy Day. Youth Advocacy Day was outstanding; I felt the passion from each person there. First we met with Sen. Curtis King who gave us some pointers and was really interested in how we got to where we are now. We enjoyed hearing what other regions have been up to and what issues were most important to them. When we marched and chanted it felt so amazing to be heard and I believe we got their attention! Later we handed out Thank You cards to some senators, some of whom took us to the Senate floor where they vote on bills. Even though they are busy people they took time out of their day to listen and ask questions. We put a face to the issues they vote on so they have a better idea of who it affects. Next month we will be focusing on the Leadership Summit.

**Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Christina Koshey**

Last month we held Legislative Advocacy 101 training with a turnout of over 50 foster youth alumni and supporters. All contributed to making this an awesome preparation for Youth Advocacy Day. At Youth Advocacy Day this year, Region 4 had the honor of holding an open table presentation with Senator Joe McDermott and Representative Tina Or- well, where we talked about the bills we wanted passed and left the table with positive feedback and new friends in Olympia. We are working hard to improve as a chapter and to make change in our region and this is only the beginning! Thanks to all Region 4 youth that brought amazing energy to this year’s Youth Advocacy Day!

**Region 5: Cour’Ige Chapter in Pierce County by DeMarea Kirk**

This month we prepared for our Youth Advocacy Day. We held our Legislative Advocacy 101 training at Pierce County Alliance (PCA) in order for all youth to gain familiarity with the 2010 Legislative Agenda. We also used an Independent Living Skills meeting at PCA to talk about Advocacy Day and make posters for the march around the capitol. All the regions came together in Olympia. We got to listen to personal stories of other youth and alumni who explained what they have been through and why certain programs should not be cut. We all marched around the capitol, chanting and holding signs to get our voices heard. At the end of Advocacy Day, we went around to the Senators and legislators from our districts and dropped off thank you gifts for their work on supporting foster care youth.

**Region 6: Chapter in Thurston County by Samantha Evans**

Last month I went to the Legal and Practices Subcommittee of the Transformation Design Committee and together we made a list of the core services to be offered for the privatization of foster care. We also had a great turn out at our Legislative Advocacy 101 training in Lewis County where we prepared for Youth Advocacy Day (YAD) and showed why it is important. It was wonderful to have everybody come to our neck of the woods for YAD. We were able to meet with the staff for Representative Sam Hunt, Representative Kath Haig and Senator Karen Fraser. They were both very responsive and were impressed by us. At our next chapter meeting we will finally be naming our chapter.