“Youth Advocacy Day was a day that impacted many people, changed many minds, and influenced a whole generation of new leaders.”
— Tianna Oliver

“[HB 2592] IS AN IMPORTANT BILL IN ORDER TO IMPROVE GRADUATION RATES AND PROVIDE CONSISTENCY IN THE LIVES OF YOUTH.”
— Representative Kevin Parker (R-6th District)

“This is my third time going to Youth Advocacy Day. I can say each year only gets better. It is very cool to see everybody representing The Mockingbird Society by wearing their bright orange scarves and engaging with powerful people. Something that stood out to me was when the House of Representatives recognized the staff and youth from The Mockingbird Society after passing HB 2592. It was very powerful to see the legislators stand up and clap to show their appreciation to the youth.”
— Amanda Bevington

“The more the years go by, the more the Mockingbird Youth Network grows, and the more powerful our voices become. Advocating and standing up for what you believe in is a powerful act, and the next generation of leaders is learning that the present and future will be the better because of their leadership.”
— David Buck
Letter from the Editor

Youth Advocacy Day 2012 was yet another memorable experience for me and the crew of 240 youth from across the state who came to Olympia to help build a world-class foster care system. It 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. There are too many important events from this day to mention here, but the images and reflections in this issue of the Mockingbird Times will tell a story of youth coming together and making a difference not only for themselves, but for all those that follow in their footsteps.

This year, youth spent time meeting directly with legislators and their staff in order to urge support of youth priorities, including HB 2592 – Extended Foster Care and Street Youth Programs. Special thanks to all the legislators and staff who took the time to meet with and listen to our youth. Also, for the second year in a row, the Governor’s Office honored us by proclaiming February 10th, 2012 Youth Advocacy Day. Andi Smith from the Governor’s Executive Policy Office and Secretary of DSHS Robin Arnold-Williams joined us on the Capitol Steps to present the Proclamation.

For me the highlight of the day was watching from the galleries as our priority bill, HB 2592, passed the House of Representatives with a bi-partisan 88 to 9 vote. As if this was not enough, House members took the time following the vote to formally recognize our youth and The Mockingbird Society with a standing ovation. Seeing our youth experience their impact in real time was a truly special moment.

Finally, I want to recognize and thank our program speakers, including Representatives Carlyle, Hunter, Billig and Pederson, Assistant Secretary Denise Revels Robinson, Mockingbird Family Resource Specialists: Virginia Philbrook, Lauren Frederick, Evaluations and Information @mockingbirdsociety.org

The Mockingbird Society is a leading advocate for foster care reform built on youth-inspired solutions, powerful coalitions and public support for every child’s right to a safe home and a bright future. The Mockingbird Times is a key component of our youth development program, the Mockingbird Youth Network. All youth reporters are paid employees, and contributors from across the country writing and editing. The Times is distributed nationally to more than 20,000 through our mailing list and an insert in The Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. As a nonprofit organization, we appreciate your private contributions to support our youth and family programs. Donate online, by phone or mail.

The Mockingbird Society
2100 24th Ave S, Ste 240
Seattle WA 98121
www.mockingbirdsociety.org
206.323.5437 (KIDS)
information@mockingbirdsociety.org

No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without written permission. All works copyrighted 2009, The Mockingbird Society.

Understanding the Misunderstood

The struggles of youth in the child welfare system and the struggles of those who fought for equality and civil rights are prime examples of groups that faced, and continue to overcome overwhelming challenges. When I think about the reason why many organizations do the work that The Mockingbird Society does, I can’t help but realize it’s because, like minorities in early America, we — youth in care — are plagued by a lack of equality when compared to those who come from intact homes.

At the same time, while there are obviously clear barriers that keep us from being “normal,” we also have a variety of awesome and powerful organizations working to provide us in an attempt to make up for our lack of equality. This situation is very similar to opportunities that America’s minority groups have been provided due to the historical struggles that they have faced.

Changing Perceptions, Changing Systems

Imagine you are 17 years old, having grown up in foster care your whole life — you are surrounded by negative stereotypes about foster youth. Who is working to change these stereotypes and misconceptions about youth in care?

John-Paul Chaissen-Cardenas, Executive Director of Foster Promise, saw himself as someone who could lead the work of changing perceptions about foster care. John-Paul became involved with the child welfare system in 1997 when he was in graduate school at the University of Iowa. He recalled, “My interest was sparked by my research into the causes of systemic disproportionality between kids who are white and kids of color. This interest led me to focus on three interlinked areas where the disproportionality is glaring: the schools, the juvenile justice systems and child welfare.”

These were the seeds of inspiration that eventually grew into Foster Promise. The mission of Foster Promise, founded in 2008, is “Supporting children, youth and families by changing the public’s perception, understanding, and investment in foster care.” The members of Foster Promise believe that children in foster care deserve the opportunity to reach their potential. They believe that children in foster care are there by no fault of their own, and that they deserve safety, permanency, and well-being.

The organization works to increase public awareness, understanding and support for youth in foster care. They do this by working to increase the immediate availability of permanent, appropriate homes for children in foster care, increasing cultural relevance and racial equity within the child welfare system, and increasing support for kinship and foster families. In short, they work to make foster care an emotionally secure home for children by changing perceptions about foster care.
Attorneys Learn from the Experts

As a Youth Network Representatives, my colleagues and I am able to take part in a systemic change on many levels. We do this in very visible ways, like during our ever-impactful Youth Advocacy Day. But less visible projects can be just as powerful. For example, this January we worked on an amazing project to help lawyers across the nation support youth going through dependency as best they can.

We teamed up with a program called the Quality Improvement Center (QIC) that works with lawyers to make sure that youth in care have effective legal representation. The QIC is a five-year, $5 million project to gather, develop and communicate knowledge on child representation, promote consensus on the role of the child’s legal representative, and provide one of the first empirically-based analyses of how legal representation for the child might best be delivered.1 Deonate Cruz and I were selected to play the roles of Marco/Margo for a video to help train lawyers on how to improve their skills in engaging and representing young clients more effectively. Our character was a teenager who has just entered the foster care system and feels confused about what is going to happen next. In our scenario, we were introduced to a lawyer who was there to guide us through the process of dependency court hearings. She asked questions about how we felt and what we actually wanted, and she even tried to get to know us a little bit in a short amount of time. Deonate described his perspective of the experience stating: “It was an enlightening experience. It was very different in the sense that it was less of an acting role and more of being in a role that I was very familiar with.

1

We do this in very visible ways, like during our ever-impactful Youth Advocacy Day. But less visible projects can be just as powerful. For example, this January we worked on an amazing project to help lawyers across the nation support youth going through dependency as best they can.

We teamed up with a program called the Quality Improvement Center (QIC) that works with lawyers to make sure that youth in care have effective legal representation. The QIC is a five-year, $5 million project to gather, develop and communicate knowledge on child representation, promote consensus on the role of the child’s legal representative, and provide one of the first empirically-based analyses of how legal representation for the child might best be delivered. Deonate Cruz and I were selected to play the roles of Marco/Margo for a video to help train lawyers on how to improve their skills in engaging and representing young clients more effectively. Our character was a teenager who has just entered the foster care system and feels confused about what is going to happen next. In our scenario, we were introduced to a lawyer who was there to guide us through the process of dependency court hearings. She asked questions about how we felt and what we actually wanted, and she even tried to get to know us a little bit in a short amount of time. Deonate described his perspective of the experience stating: “It was an enlightening experience. It was very different in the sense that it was less of an acting role and more of being in a role that I was very familiar with.
We Welcome Your Work
We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be, or have been, published in the Mockingbird Times visit www.mockingbirdtimes.org. Call us at (206) 407-2134 or email us at mbt@mockingbirdtimes.org.

Note: Deciding on whether the editor and correspondence to the editor and correspondence to urban youth are addressed to the Mockingbird Times and will be opened first by adult editorial staff.

Changing, from page 2
build a community that embraces all children in foster care as their responsibility and provides the support they, as 65% of Americans believe. Their public policy and advocacy team works in partnership with policy leaders, nonprofit organizations such as The Mockingbird Society, government agencies, and local communities to develop and advocate for solutions to challenges of the foster care system on the local, state and federal levels. They remind policy leaders that children have unlimited promise and deserve support to fulfill their potential. It is John-Paul’s belief that most of the “isms” in this world are founded on social constructs or mental images that allows those who have privilege to dismiss those who don’t. Many people either believe that children in the child welfare system are “irreparably damaged” or that children are in foster care because they are delinquents, as 45% of Americans believe. These misconceptions hurt foster youth by characterizing them as different or less than other kids.

John-Paul believes that we as communities can make sure foster youth get the love, patience and support they need, just like other children. He thinks we need to put aside the horror stories on the news and start celebrating the foster kids in our community who are doing good.

John-Paul’s passion and commitment to his work was developed through his personal experiences as a person of color, an immigrant, and “troubled kid.” He learned about the power of community in the face of great adversity and injustice. As a result of his experiences, he is now devoted to helping people who are deprived because of circumstances out of their control.

Perhaps someday, a 17 year old in foster care will grow up to become an Executive Director because an organization like Foster Promise assisted them in reaching their full potential.

*2007, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

Attorneys, from page 3
what it was like...with this project, I was kind of able to remember some specific details of my past and ultimately I wanted to work at The Mockingbird Society.”

My experience was quite similar to Deonate’s. I found that I didn’t really have to act or pretend, but that this “real play” was just like my own experiences and I was telling my story all over again. Throughout the filming, I was thinking that I wished that I had a lawyer who explained things to me and told me what was going on. I was going through dependency court. I felt that if youth were more included and engaged by the child welfare courts and attorneys there would be even better outcomes.

So far, the curriculum that QIC developed has been used in Atlanta, Georgia. “...We just finished doing the training for the first time (including showing people the video we created). The training went very well, and people loved the video. It was very helpful,” said Tim Jasko-Fisher, a UW law professor who assisted in the development of the trainings. This project is just another example of how The Mockingbird Youth Network can not only help empower other youth in care, but also educate those responsible for representing youth and their interests. Both efforts result in powerful change and progress towards a world-class foster care system.

*More information about QIC: www.improvehildrep.org

Chapter Snapshots

Region 2 North (Everett) We in the Everett chapter are pleased to be joining hands with Cocoon House this year. Cocoon House fosters personal growth and healthy relationships to strengthen and empower at-risk and homeless youth and their families in Snohomish County.

We had the opportunity to work forward to in 2012 and Youth Advocacy Day was just the start of a great alliance. There were seven participants from Cocoon House, including staff members Elysa, Amelia and Julito. They joined our twenty chapter members as we stormed the Capitol to witness the passage of HB 2592. This was a grand day for all of us to see our hard work in action after meeting with Rep. Mary Helen Roberts of the 21st District (Sponsor of HB 2592) and the legislative staff members of Representative Kirk Pearson of the 39th District and Senator Steve Hobbs of the 44th District.

Watching the passage of HB 2592 from the gallery was amazing, especially because Rep. Roberts represents many of our Chapter members in the Lynnwood community. If it becomes law, HB 2592 will see to it that we have basic support, like safe housing, as we transition out of care and pursue post-secondary education, through expanding the Extended Foster Care program.

Another stirring moment for us was listening to Rep. Reuven Carlyle, Assistant Majority Whip from the 36th District, give a very enlightening speech. He said that we must seek to find the spark within our own soul to move forward, to be passionate and courageous in our approach to systems reform. We all have the ability to make change in the world, and as members of Mockingbird, we can take those first steps in standing for what we believe in: A democracy in which we all have a say!

Thank you to Cocoon House for joining us. Their representation is valuable as we work collectively to end youth homelessness in Washington State and continually improve the foster care system.

Region 2 South (Seattle) by Max Beaum

The Mockingbird Network had the opportunity to watch the bill for extended foster care, HB 2592, pass the House of Representatives. This was a very emotional day. I am not afraid to admit I teared up a lot. I met other foster youth who have become my new friends and I learned about new agencies that help support foster youth.

Region 3 North (Tacoma) by Tianna Oliver

During YAD the Tacoma chapter visited Representative Jeanne Darnielle, and spoke to her legislative aid. We learned that the Representative often sticks up for foster youth. The aid told us that recently another lawmaker incited that foster youth without safe housing should live in their cars to get a taste of the “real world.” But Representative Darnielle informed him publicly how inaccurate and unethical his views were, and she received a standing ovation from other lawmakers present.

Region 1 South (Yakima) by Blandy Bailey

The Mockingbird Network had the opportunity to watch the bill for extended foster care, HB 2592, pass the House of Representatives. This was a very emotional day. I am not afraid to admit I teared up a lot. I met other foster youth who have become my new friends and I learned about new agencies that help support foster youth.

Region 1 North (Spokane) by Kristina Thomassson

Region 3 South (Olympia) by Chris Bauer

Talking to Senator Jim Hijar’s Legislative aid during Advocacy in Action at YAD was one of my favorite moments. I felt empowered to speak about the issues that mattered to me, like YHP, and I could tell I made a difference. The aid was definitely impressed with my ability to thoughtfully answer all the questions he asked.

Chapter Voice

Cocoon House Joins Everett Chapter at YAD

by Anthony Holmes

We in the Everett chapter are pleased to be joining hands with Cocoon House this year. Cocoon House fosters personal growth and healthy relationships to strengthen and empower at-risk and homeless youth and their families in Snohomish County.

We had the opportunity to work forward to in 2012 and Youth Advocacy Day was just the start of a great alliance. There were seven participants from Cocoon House, including staff members Elysa, Amelia and Julito. They joined our twenty chapter members as we stormed the Capitol to witness the passage of HB 2592. This was a grand day for all of us to see our hard work in action after meeting with Rep. Mary Helen Roberts of the 21st District (Sponsor of HB 2592) and the legislative staff members of Representative Kirk Pearson of the 39th District and Senator Steve Hobbs of the 44th District.

Watching the passage of HB 2592 from the gallery was amazing, especially because Rep. Roberts represents many of our Chapter members in the Lynnwood community. If it becomes law, HB 2592 will see to it that we have basic support, like safe housing, as we transition out of care and pursue post-secondary education, through expanding the Extended Foster Care program.

Another stirring moment for us was listening to Rep. Reuven Carlyle, Assistant Majority Whip from the 36th District, give a very enlightening speech. He said that we must seek to find the spark within our own soul to move forward, to be passionate and courageous in our approach to systems reform. We all have the ability to make change in the world, and as members of Mockingbird, we can take those first steps in standing for what we believe in: A democracy in which we all have a say!

Thank you to Cocoon House for joining us. Their representation is valuable as we work collectively to end youth homelessness in Washington State and continually improve the foster care system.