

Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

May 2009

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May is National Foster Care Month

In This Issue

Letter From the Editor
Jim Theofelis
Page 2

Meet the Staff:
Catherine Lanham
Page 2

Family Team Decision-making Meetings
Ashley Lanier
Page 3

Placement Stability
Diamonique Walker
Page 3

Meet the Staff:
Lauren Steed
Page 3

Meet the Staff:
Samantha Valle
Page 3

Creative Corner:
The Truth About Me
Rosie Valencia
Page 4

Creative Corner:
These Are the Days
of a Foster Child
Sonady Chea
Page 4

Calendar of Events
Page 4

News From The
Mockingbird Network
Page 4

May is National Foster Care Month BY JERRY BOBO



May was first proclaimed **National Foster Care Month** in 1988. The **National Foster Parent Association** (NFPA) persuaded then **Senator Strom Thurmond** to introduce the month of May as a resolution for foster care. Every year of his presidency, **George H. W. Bush** issued an annual proclamation that provided a push towards state, county and city proclamations. The main focus was to show appreciation and recognition of the tremendous contributions that foster parents have made for foster youth all across the nation. Two years later, National Foster Care Month started to focus more on the youth that were older, particularly those that were aging out of the foster care system. The **Chafee Foster Care Independence Act** was passed as a result of the leadership from the **National Foster Care Coalition** and **Casey Family Programs**. National Foster Care Month brings light to foster care issues and provides an opportunity for the individuals and organizations that work hard to support foster children and foster families through the year to be heard.¹

According to **Lawrence Adams**, an advocate from fostercaremonth.org, all across the nation there are over 523,000 children and youth in foster care. This year alone, 20,000 of those youth will age out of the foster care system. This month, a great deal of community events are planned all around the country to help attract and support seriously needed foster parents as well as providing needed support and advocacy for foster youth. Youth that are aging out of care are very vulnerable and the latest statistics show the price that we are already paying today because of our failure: Only 54 percent of foster youth earn a high school diploma, only 10 percent of those go on to college and only 2 percent of those obtain

a Bachelors degree or higher. In addition, 51 percent of youth aging out of care will experience unemployment due to a lack of skills, 30 percent have no health insurance, 25 percent will at one time will be homeless, 30 percent receive some type of public assistance, 37 percent become incarcerated, and over 40 percent will become involved with drugs or alcohol. So May is the month to cut these statistics down and change the lives of youth in and aging out of care.²

Fostercaremonth.org has taken a closer look at the numbers and diversity of people who were once in foster care. It has been estimated that there are 12 million foster care alumni in the United States, which represent all walks of life, from regular people to well-known celebrities.³ There are stories of those who have grown up to be thriving adults while others have struggled with the challenges of life alone. There is a difference between triumph and tragedy. Success stories come in all forms and fashions, but the best come when someone takes the time to offer comfort, support, advice, or just a milestone moment for a youngster enduring difficulties in family situations.

As an alumnus who grew out of care, I understand fully the importance of May being National Foster Care Month. I missed out on a lot of opportunities to gain the support and comfort needed to prepare myself for life after care. From my experience, there is little help for youth that age out of care. Every person needs a helping hand sometimes. For more information on foster care and for a list of all the events going on across the country visit www.fostercaremonth.org.

¹ www.fostercaremonth.org/TheCampaign/HistoryAndOrigin/Pages/default.aspx

² www.fostercaremonth.org/home

³ www.fostercaremonth.org/pages/default.aspx

Sealing Juvenile Criminal Records BY CHRISTINA KOSHNEY



The things that we are capable of from the early ages to 18 years, both good and bad, are unlimited. I personally can say that I have done some very amazing things such as graduating at 18 years old with my diploma and AA degree from community college. At the same time, I have also done some very unwise things that could have further involved me with the criminal justice system. This is not unlike all youth who have done things that they may not be proud of but who are, nonetheless, much more than any one stupid thing they may have done. Understanding how, as humans, we all make mistakes and how we learn and grow through these mistakes is key in understanding the importance of sealing juvenile records.

A juvenile record includes any record of a youth having been involved in the juvenile justice system. This would be "the official court file, the social file, and records of other juvenile justice or care agencies involved in a case."¹ These records of your involvement with the juvenile system do not disappear once you turn 18 years of age but, in some cases, you may be eligible to seal these records. Once an individual's records are sealed they are not available for public examination, meaning that when you fill out a job or housing application, those companies would not be able to access your juvenile criminal his-

tory and you would be legally eligible to state that you do not have a criminal record, assuming you don't have any further adult criminal record.

After your records have been sealed, they are still able to be reopened if you're convicted of another crime (meaning you were found guilty). While this sounds contrary to getting your records sealed so that they can't be reopened, this is the way the juvenile system works, for better or worse. The only way to legally ensure your records are never re-opened is if the records are destroyed, but in Washington, only juvenile diversions are eligible to be destroyed. (Diversions are not convictions. For more information on diversions visit www.kingcounty.gov/courts/JuvenileCourt/diversion.aspx.)

Even if your records are sealed, it's important to be aware of the fact that the **Washington State Patrol** also keeps criminal history record information which includes incident reports detailing the offense, charges, and sentences given. This record is still accessible by government agencies but should not be accessible to the public with the exception of convictions and arrests as well as registered sex offenders and kidnappers which remain available. You can contact the Washington State Patrol and request that they delete non-conviction data, such as arrest records.

SEALING RECORDS CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

SLINGS AND ARROWS II

BY IAN GRANT



Slings and Arrows is a series of articles examining the challenges faced by foster youth and alumni in school. This month, I interviewed **Lynne Welton**, Education Program Manager for the **Washington State Children's Administration** whose job is to develop policy that improves educational outcomes for foster youth in Washington State.

According to Welton, the two biggest obstacles foster youth have to overcome in order to achieve their educational goals are the stability of their placement and the continuity of their educational career. These are related: placement stability is how often you move around between placements and how secure it is that the place that you're living now is the place you're going to be living for a while. Educational continuity is the ability of a student to stay in the same school and work with the same teachers and administrators that they have already made connections with. Research shows that this is critical to educational success: a student loses an average of four to six months of educational progress each time he or she changes schools.¹

However, things aren't necessarily as bad as they seem. It turns out that about 61% of foster youth in Washington State only move schools once while in care.² That's not ideal but it's a good start. One of the biggest problems with ensuring that foster students maintain their educational continuity is the availability of foster homes within the current school district of children entering care.

The **Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction** (OSPI) is currently working on a program to partner with local school districts to recruit more foster parents and make sure that the current ones are well connected with the school district. So far, of the 295 school districts in the state, the OSPI has signed agreements with about 140 of them. These agreements outline how school districts and Children's Administration can work together to improve educational outcomes for foster youth.

Unfortunately, there's not much an individual foster youth can do to move this process along: the school districts and Children's Administration are large organizations with lots of inertia and improvement is going to be gradual. In the meantime, Welton believes that one of the biggest things an individual foster youth can do is connect with an adult that you know and trust. The school system, no matter which level of education you are at, can be confusing and frustrating. It's important to have a cultural translator that can advocate for you at levels where certain people would be more likely to dismiss somebody who is not an adult.

Foster youth are just one part of what many would characterize as a broken and unfair educational system. Even among the general population, only 75% of high school students receive a diploma.³ For foster youth, it's even worse: only 54% graduate from high school.⁴ Foster youth do not have the luxury of waiting for the system to improve; many of the most important and consequential reforms will take effect after they have already left both foster care and the public educational system.

SLINGS AND ARROWS CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS

May is **National Foster Care Month** and an excellent opportunity to pause and thank all of those foster parents and other caregivers who extend themselves and provide the highest quality of care, love, and support each and every day. There are also the many counselors, social workers, CASA's, and so many others who conduct an important role for children in out-of-home care who also deserve our gratitude.

May also marks the end of the 2009 Washington State Legislative session which concluded April 26th. With a 9 billion dollar deficit, the 2009 legislative session turned out to be as grueling and exhausting as anticipated, particularly in the areas of health care and education. However, due to the leadership and commitment of so many legislators, The Mockingbird Society (MBS) legislative agenda was nearly 100% achieved. Both the **Independent Youth Housing Program** and the **Fostering Connections** bills passed with funding in the budget. These critical programs provide safe housing for youth being discharged from foster care. Many of the young people participating in these programs testified in legislative hearings that if the program closed on June 30th as

planned, they would be homeless for the 4th of July.

Additionally, two other bills passed including one that encourages adoptive parents to ensure visitation if any siblings of their adoptive child remain in foster care and a bill that increases the notification to youth 12 and older about their rights and benefits while in foster care. Finally, I am so pleased that during such a tumultuous budget year the legislature continued funding the **Mockingbird Family Model Constellations** that are sponsored by the state. I also want to say that the one bill that did not make it through the process was the **Adequate Legal Representation** for youth in Dependency Court. The MBS remains steadfast in our commitment to this issue and expect to continue this effort going forward. Finally, I want to give a hearty "thank you" to the youth and alumni who participated in this year's session, the over 200 who attended **Youth Advocacy Day** and again to the legislative leadership in both the **Senate** and the **House of Representatives**.

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Meet the Staff: Catherine Lanham

Mockingbird Society would like to introduce our Finance Manager, **Catherine Lanham**. This position is a new one for The Mockingbird Society (MBS) and we are glad to welcome Catherine Lanham as a new staff member.

CL: It is a toss up between writing and gardening.

Thank you Catherine for joining us in our mission of creating a world class foster care system through collaboration, innovation, and advocacy!

MT: What attracted you to the MBS?

CL: I heard a lot of good things, I read the paper, and I am also a foster parent. I had a good friend who told me of the opening here.

MT: What do you enjoy about working for the MBS?

CL: I love working with this great group of people. I also really appreciate being part of an effort in changing the system for the better.

MT: What was your position before you joined the MBS?

CL: For the last 9 years I had been a consultant working in accounting with a non-profit agency.

MT: What is your favorite hobby?

FOSTER YOUTH AND ALUMNI LEADERSHIP SUMMIT: ONE VOICE UNITED FOR CHANGE

June 27th and 28th 2009 in Seattle

Current and former foster youth ages 14 to 24 and their supporters will gather to discuss issues of concern to youth in care. For more information or to fill out an application visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

SEALING RECORDS, CONT FROM PAGE 1

Sealing records is a very involved process that is not easily completed by an individual without legal training and can often become complicated and frustrating. So, if a young adult wants to get a job or housing but doesn't want the mistakes made while a youth coming back to haunt him or her, how does he or she go about sealing juvenile records? **Street Youth Legal Advocates of Washington (SYLAW)** is one of a few legal resources available to youth. They are a not-for-profit services provider that runs a **Juvenile Record Sealing Clinic** with law students from the **University of Washington, Seattle University**, and several other partners.

A 19 year old youth who took a few missteps, as many of us have, found himself in trouble with the law and worked with SYLAW to help seal his records. In a recent interview, this young man openly expressed how he recognizes his mistakes and takes responsibility for his actions but found that when he went to seek job opportunities he was left with unreturned phone calls. He instead had to settle for what he described as, "secondary, under the table and really bad jobs. I couldn't move past it and it's been about three years of bad jobs." He further stated that he wanted to be an activist, and to "participate in good causes," but due to his record he was unable to do this.

When I asked him about the process of going about getting his records sealed, he said that finding out about the programs to do this was the most difficult. Through online research he found several advertisements for overpriced programs that he couldn't afford. Finally, he found SYLAW where they provided free services of

which he says, "King County at least owes me that." This young man also felt it important to tell others that when it comes to sealing records, "every kid under eighteen that commits a crime, your record isn't automatically cleared. It stays with you until you seal it."

This young man had many a wise word to share with those in similar situations and even had the opportunity to go down to Olympia with the SYLAW program to advocate for the automatic sealing of certain juvenile records. The bill was HB 1954 and **Governor Gregoire** signed it into law on April 25, 2009. This young adult felt it important to do this because, "I just wanted to do my part in preventing others from having to go through the same things I did. It really was crippling." He is currently working, has his General Equivalency Diploma (GED) and is taking steps towards being an activist by utilizing his voice and his story.

He adds, "I was kind of an impulsive kid who made reckless decisions, but there were a few people along the way who helped me, like the probation officers and the treatment facilities. They helped me in a way that was out of my family's control. Every kid who goes through this system is dealing with something unique; it helps to have people in the juvenile system."

For more information on SYLAW and their free clinic please visit www.sylaw.org.
¹ www.lawhelp.org/documents/2168014902EN.pdf?stateabbrev=WA

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 make music for us to enjoy. They don't do one thing but sing their hearts out for us."

What if we created an organization, a community, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment that Atticus had for mockingbirds?

Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

Thank You!

Anonymous; Bruce Cross and Perkins Coie; Dave Eiffert; Sandi Everlove; Rose and Jim Flaherty; Brian Fujimoto; Krista Goodman; Henry and Jennifer Gordon; Dr. Wanda Hackett; Laura Levings; Stacey Levitan; James Maki; Lynnea Manahan; Chris Marsh; Louise M. McClraith; Microsoft; Najja Morris; Pierce County Alliance; Sarah Rafton; Vanitha S. Raman; Steven Rayson, in honor of Elizabeth Hershman-Greven; Steve Shafer and Kelly Nolan Shafer; Pat Spence; Patrick Tippy; Mark Wittow and Preston, Gates, and Ellis

Support The Mockingbird Society!

We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the *Mockingbird Times*. Please join us today!

NAME _____
 ADDRESS _____
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For appropriate recognition, please write in the space above how you would like to be listed.

- Please do not include my name on published donor lists (check box).
- I prefer to receive my copy of the *Mockingbird Times* at the email address provided above.

My gift to help children, youth and families in foster care is (check box):

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Signature: _____
 Please charge my credit card: One time Monthly Quarterly
 My employer will match my gift. Company Name: _____
 (Please enclose your matching gift form.)

So that we may recognize you for your gift, please write how you would like to be listed:

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

MEET OUR STAFF

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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 over 25,000 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 development 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 contents copyright ©2009, *The Mockingbird Society*.

Family Team Decision-making Meetings BY ASHLIE LANIER



While growing up, you are surrounded by family and friends. They help define your identity as well as help you discover who you will become. They are always there and dependable when you need help making life altering decisions. In a "normal" family setting, there are members of your family and community support to help you through your times of need. In the foster care system, that isn't always true but **Family Team Decision-making Meetings** (FTDM) might be one of the first steps.

FTDMs occur whenever a placement decision is needed. Ideally, the purpose of these meetings is to make sure the youth maintains his or her current placement. When this is not the case, the participants in the meeting are required to come up with a solution and a well thought out plan. If the group is not able to make an agreement, the social worker as well as his or her supervisor has the authority to create the plan for the youth.

Your FTDM facilitator, who can be contacted at your local **Department of Social and Health Services** (DSHS) office, will determine the practice within your agency and is responsible for inviting participants. The participants in an FTDM typically include parents, the youth, relatives, family friends, neighbors, caregivers, community members, and service providers along with social workers and supervisors. The meetings are often held in the **Department of Children and Family Services** (DCFS) office but may be held at a youth's school, a local hospital, or elsewhere in the community.

During the FTDM, the facilitator informs the participants of why the meeting is needed. Families are then given the opportunity to talk about a number of things such as what is going well, accomplishments, and anything needed in order to continue to support the growth and development of the youth. Creating family

strength is one of the underlying goals of the meetings.

FTDMs are required for all cases involving a placement decision such as emergency, imminent or considered removal of a youth, placement preservation, planned or unplanned placement move decisions, and exits from care involving reunification with the family from which the youth were originally removed. When there is an imminent risk of placement into foster care, the purpose of an FTDM is to see if there is a way to create a plan that will allow the child to remain safely in the home. If this is not a possibility, the group comes up with alternate placement ideas for the youth. The relatives and supporters attending the meeting are important assets because they can become placement resources and a solution to prevent the youth from entering the foster care system.

When youth are removed from placements in an emergency, FTDMs are important to determine whether or not the youth is okay to safely return. When this is not a possibility, the group determines if the current placement is in the youth's best interest or if an alternative plan would be more appropriate. This is also another situation where the participants in the meeting can offer a kinship care alternative.

I think foster/kinship youth and relatives can really take advantage of these meetings. If a relative is aware of problems at home that need to be confronted, or the youth wants to move out of their placement for some reason, they can request a meeting and actually receive benefits from it. I believe that FTDMs are a solution to help prevent and treat broken family bonds. For the most part, when family comes together there is a feeling of love and compassion. Through these meetings you and your family can make a concrete plan to keep the love and bonds intact.

To request a Family Team Decision-making Meeting, speak to your social worker or visit www.dshs.wa.gov.

Meet the Staff: :Lauren Steed

Lauren Steed has joined The Mockingbird Society (MBS) by becoming our Resource Specialist for Region 1. Lauren is a part of The Mockingbird Network that is growing strong. We would like to welcome Lauren to the MBS.

MT: What attracted you to the MBS?

LS: I am most attracted to the idea that the MBS is making a difference through the voices and strength of young adults and youth who want to make positive changes and improve the foster care system. One way to build a world-class foster care system is to start with our most valuable resources and I find this extremely important and exciting to be a part of!

MT: What do you enjoy about working for the MBS?

LS: What I enjoy most about working for the MBS is the collaboration, innovation, and advocacy component that makes up the Resource Specialist position. Youth have become my passion and what better way to work with youth than by helping make a difference through creative minds, eagerness, and lots of energy? It is fulfilling knowing that the MBS strives for positive change!

MT: What was your position before you joined the MBS?

LS: Before I joined the MBS, I had a few different positions. One, I was a Program Developer for **Project Safe Place**, a non-profit organization devoted to helping youth in crisis or at risk. My second position was a case manager in **Crosswalk**, an emergency shelter and a school drop-out prevention program dedicated to breaking the cycle of youth homelessness. Before this, I taught public speaking courses at **Eastern Washington University** while obtaining my Master's Degree.

MT: What is your favorite hobby?

LS: My favorite hobby would have to be going to Priest Lake in Idaho. Here, I am able to take part in swimming, wakeboarding, running trails, cross-country skiing, going on jeep rides, reading, making bonfires, kayaking, and just enjoying nature at its best!

Life After High School: Money to Make It Happen

Whatever you're planning to do after you finish high school, one option is going for more education—community college, technical college, or university. If you think chances are not good that you will be able to afford college, think again. You may be eligible for a full-tuition scholarship and books at any higher education program in Washington State when you graduate. The requirements? Sign a pledge with your foster parent or social worker in 7th, 8th or 9th grade, have at least a 2.0 cumulative GPA at graduation, and be a good citizen (no felony convictions). It's a great opportunity that happens sooner rather than later: you must apply by June 30th at www.hech.wa.gov/collegebound.

Placement Stability BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER



In my opinion, placement stability in foster care is being in a suitable foster home that fits the youth and foster parents. It's also staying in a placement for a long time, being familiar with your surroundings, making connections with peers and the community, and keeping in touch with your resources. Placement stability is important in the lives of all foster youth. Having the opportunity to build and maintain relationships is very important for developing youth.

Being moved from placement to placement, youth in care miss a lot of important things. Education is important in all youth's lives, but this is one of the major things foster youth miss every time they move to another placement. Nationally, on average, the number of placement changes a foster youth experiences in a year is one to two. According to the **Center for the Improvement of Student Learning**, each time a youth in care switches schools they lose 4 to 6 months of educational achievement, which means the youth probably get behind in schooling. Youth in care have an average rate of only 38% for graduating from high school, whereas the general population has a 75% rate.¹

The **Mockingbird Family Model** (MFM) helps create placement stability in foster homes throughout the constellations. The Hub Home is a place that eases placement stability in each constellation. For example, if a youth and foster parents are having trouble, the youth can go to the Hub Home for respite care and transition back to their foster home or, if necessary, find a new placement, hopefully within the constellation. In the Hub Home, the youth is still in a familiar environment, able to attend the same school, and stay in contact with peers, which are all important to healthy development. Within the MFM the average number of placement changes per year per child is less than one.

Ms. Anne, one of MFM's Hub Home parents, has recently been involved with helping two young children in foster care become stable in their placements. There is a family in the constellation that is an older

couple with some minor medical conditions. Two small children were placed in the care of this older couple. However, these children had major behavioral issues. For example, the older sibling would start fires, break things, and had a hard time keeping hands and feet to himself, while the younger sibling was not potty-trained. The couple had a hard time caring for these two children so they contacted their agency and the Hub Home parent (Ms. Anne), and requested to move these children to a more suitable home.

One huge benefit of the MFM in this situation was that other families knew these children and lived in the same school district. Meetings with families in the constellation were set up to match the kids to a family with proper training, experience, and qualifications to take care of children at this level. Within the constellation there was a family that suited the kids perfectly. The children were then placed in the Hub Home until the transfer was worked out with the proper child welfare professionals. Although the placement change couldn't be prevented, the good news was that the children were able to stay together, in the same school district, and with parents they were familiar with, thus reducing possible trauma.

¹ www.fostercaremonth.org/GetInvolved/Toolkit/Support/Documents/Educational_Outcomes_and_Foster_Care.pdf

Make it Happen!

THE COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM

Seattle University July 22-25, 2009

Make it Happen is an all expense paid, four day, three night college readiness program. Come connect with other foster youth from all across Washington State and learn about all the resources available for you! Make it Happen will help prepare you for your personal educational plan. Change your life: Make it Happen!

Meet the Staff: Samantha Valle

The MBS would like to welcome **Samantha Valle** to our continuously growing Mockingbird Network. Samantha is our Region 5 Resource Specialist. Welcome to The Mockingbird Society (MBS) and thanks for joining us in always doing our best in changing the system and working with so many youth.

MT: What attracted you to the MBS?

SV: What attracted me is the fact that the MBS truly does make a change. Working for a group home, I wasn't seeing the changes I imagined, so I knew it was time for a career change and the MBS was what I was looking for. After hearing the testimonies of all the youth, I knew this was more along the lines of what I have a passion for.

MT: What do you enjoy about working at the MBS?

SV: Being new to the MBS there are so many aspects I have come across, but so far I enjoy the everyday interaction with the youth and the people who want to see a positive change in the foster care system.

MT: What was your position before you joined the MBS?

SV: Before the MBS I was a residential counselor for a **Behavioral Rehabilitation Services** group home. While working for two different group homes, I learned a lot about the foster care system and wanted to help with making changes and help improve the lives of the youth who partake in this system.

MT: What is your favorite hobby?

SV: My favorite hobby is participating in all kinds of sports and being in the water whether it be boating, swimming, or cliff jumping. I also love to spend time with my family since I don't see them very often.

SLINGS AND ARROWS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Graduating from high school is possible. As hard as it can be sometimes, anyone who is willing to work hard at it and make it a priority can achieve their educational goals. It's hard to focus on your education when you're dealing with difficult issues at home, but it is your future. Find an adult you can trust and get their help.

¹ www.k12.wa.us/cisl/improvingoutcomes/index.htm

² www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2008documents/WashingtonStateCommunityLearningCenterProgRpt-Nov2008.pdf

³ www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/pubdocs/GradDropout/05-06/2005-06GradDropoutStatistics.pdf

⁴ www.fostercaremonth.org/pages/default.aspx

The Truth About Me

ROSIE VALENCIA

The truth about me
is I can sing like a bird
flying through the rainbow.

The truth about me is that
sometimes I get out of
control, and I can
listen to music or write
in my journal to make all
my bad feelings go away.

The truth about me is that
I feel sad sometimes
because something bad
has happened and I want
to wash it away like a river
rushing through the rocks.
It's bumpy, but it gets
better and better as I go.

The truth about me is
that I am as gentle as
a bunny, but I'm also as
strong as a mountain.
Nobody can knock me
completely down.

The truth about me
is that I'm as open as a door
that lets good people into my heart.

These Are the Days of a Foster Child

SONADY CHEA

Staying awake all day, sleeping all night,
waiting for our mothers to hold us tight.
Thinking of the days we spent together,
always laughing with one another,
always watching each other's backs,
making sure nobody attacks.
Little children coming in and out,
always wondering without a doubt.
Someone watching our every move,
thinking of what we'll try to do.
Going to church every Sunday,
asking the Lord to take care of our families.
Crying in our minds and in our hearts,
looking at the day we got ripped apart.
Sitting by the window wondering why,
laying on our beds looking up at the sky.
Thinking of our brothers and sisters safe at home,
crying our hearts out for being so alone.
Doing the same things over and over,
thinking of the days we got closer and closer.
Waking up the next day in an empty room,
shouting, "Finally, I get to go home!"
Happier than ever, yelling real loud,
these are the days of a foster child.

APOLOGY

We would like to apologize for the obvious plagiarism of the poem Please Listen in last month's *Mockingbird Times*. The actual author is unknown so we are unable to properly credit it.

Youth Writings Reach Larger Audience

Some of the *Mockingbird Times'* (MT) writings will be published in **Seattle University's Journal for Social Justice (SJSJ)** volume 7, issue 2, which will be an issue devoted to the unique legal issues facing kids who are homeless. The following writings (the issue of the MT in which they were originally published follows the title) will be included in the article: Anastasia Klatt, *Lonely Girl*, June 07; Anonymous, *Understanding*, June 08; Anonymous, *When My Frustration Takes Over*, November 08; Rhonda Smith, *Reconnecting With Family After Foster Care*, March 08; Ashley Abbott, *The Shadows Of My Shady Past*, August 08; Bridginae Green, *Don't You Wonder?*, October 05; Cassandra, *Pictures to my Mom*, September 05; Rhonda Smith, *Reconnecting With My Dad*, April 08; Whitney Allen, *Untitled*, January 08. If any of these are your writings, please contact Kara Sanders at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org to receive a gift card.

Community Events**Region 1**

May 14: Spokane Public Schools Forum, 7-8 PM, Glover Middle School.

May 19-20: *Pizza, Pop, & Power Tools*, showcases career options to 8th grade girls, 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM, Apprenticeship and Journeyman Training Center. Info: Tim O'Halloran (509) 354-5644.

Region 2

May 14: Family Night, 6:30-8 PM, Southeast Community Center.

Region 4

May 16: Foster Alumni Family Reunion, 11 AM - dusk, Heritage Park. More info: Loopsydoop77@gmail.com.

Region 6

May 16: Downtown Spring Cleanup, 7:30 AM - 1 PM, Esther Short Park. More info: stephaniediaz@umpquabank.com.

"One who makes no mistakes makes nothing at all."

~ unknown

Region 1: CHAPTER IN SPOKANE COUNTY BY LAUREN STEED

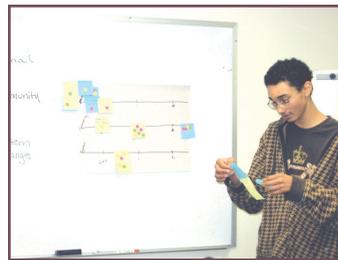
Hurray for Region 1! We are finally on board and eager to start participating more with The Mockingbird Society (MBS). Already, I have had two meetings in Region 2 with **Tammy Soderberg**, the Resource Specialist hosted at **Casey Family Programs**. The first meeting was a chapter meeting where I lost every game we played. The second meeting was a **Know Your Rights** training where I learned key components on how to become a facilitator. Tammy and the Region 2 chapter have helped in making me feel extremely comfortable! Region 1 plans to hold their first chapter meeting June 3rd, 2009. The agenda calls for full introductions, getting to know one another, learning about The Mockingbird Network and having fun! I hope Spokane can be a wonderful addition to the MBS, and we look forward to seeing what we can create!

Region 3: Hey Mac CHAPTER IN SKAGIT COUNTY BY MARK MILANO

At our last meeting, we talked about job skills and how to present yourself at a job interview. For example, dress well, have a well-typed resume, and have a portfolio. We discussed teamwork in the activity we did, which was to have two teams build a ramp that a golf ball could go down using straws, paper, a little bit of tape, and pipe cleaners. Then both teams had to connect them without testing it out until the end. We went roller skating as a chapter activity to help get other youth involved in the chapter. We also volunteered at the **Mountain Glen Retirement Community**.

Region 2: A.C.T.F.I.R.S.T. CHAPTER IN YAKIMA COUNTY BY SAUNDRA HUNT AND TAMMY SODERBERG

On April 18th, we led the **Know Your Rights** training and, of course, had a blast. We all learned lots about our rights and responsibilities in a fun and energetic way. **Saundra** was responsible for teaching the other youth about safety and well-being, the court proceedings, and a fun definition activity. She was also able to do the ice breaker, which was the inner/outer circle question activity. On April 20th, we were invited by **Kinship Involvement Xperience (KIX)**, a support group for youth in kinship care, to join them in learning how to become more successful advocates for our physical and mental health with doctors. The session included a discussion of barriers to honest conversation, asking effective questions, and keeping our documentation organized. Over all, it was a great session. The youth said that they learned how to be more vocal concerning their health care needs and the doctors said that they learned more about the issues facing youth in care.

**News From****The Mockingbird Network****Your Needs, Your Voice****Region 4: For Change CHAPTER IN KING COUNTY BY YOLANDA KILGORE**

This month's chapter meeting was housed at a new location, **Casey Family Programs**. We enjoyed nachos while discussing the results of the **Seattle Public Schools' Penny Harvest**, an event where a group of organizations came together and spoke about pressing issues affecting youth. We are happy to say that we were chosen as one of the top three organizations that they wanted to support. We also voted on civic engagements and system change. As a result, we will be creating a special gift that will be presented at this year's **4th Annual Leadership Summit**. Our vote for system change was "Don't ignore the problems." At the next chapter meeting, everyone will have the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in care. These ideas will then be presented at the Leadership Summit to key policy makers. We are also having a **Life Advocacy** training this month. If you are in foster care and want to see changes in the system, please join us at our next chapter meeting May 13th, 3:30-5:30 PM at the 2400 Building. Hope to see all of you at one or both of these events!

**Region 5: CHAPTER IN PIERCE COUNTY BY SAMANTHA VALLE**

Region 5 is in a transitional period. We just got a new Resource Specialist, **Samantha Valle**. For the last month, Samantha has been networking with all those involved at **Pierce County Alliance** to get more youth involved within **The Mockingbird Network** and the **Foster Youth Leadership Summit**. Samantha has been working with **CenterForce** to engage in community events such as picking up trash in Lakewood and working with **Pierce County Alliance** to have the youth come up with a community service project they would be invested in. We also just had our first **Life Advocacy** training. The attendees were lively and actively participating, including many new faces. We are excited to see who will be attending the Summit this year from Region 5, and what changes they will bring.

Region 6: SPEAK UP! CHAPTER IN CLARK COUNTY BY AMANDA SPADY

This past month SPEAK UP! had a movie night to recruit new members. The movie night was a great success and we gained two new members. SPEAK UP! presented the **Know Your Rights** training for the **Independent Living Skills Program** at the **YWCA**. It was a lot of fun; the youth and volunteers all enjoyed themselves and learned a lot. Together with other local organizations, we are also going to be helping develop and open a winter homeless shelter for youth ages 16-24. To do this, we are brainstorming fundraising ideas, helping to create a survey that will address youth needs, and one of our leaders will be sitting on the **Continuum of Care Committee** for the project. This is an exciting opportunity and the group as a whole has voiced their enthusiasm.