Homeless Youth Illustrate Endurance

DARIUS REYNOLDS

Endure: To carry on through despite hardships. Endurance: The act, quality or power of withstanding hardship or stress.

- dictionary.com

ON MARCH 30 2004, the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs held a forum called Personal Story to Policy: Voices for Change/Addressing the Needs of the Homeless, moderated by Lori Matsukawa and covered by King 5 News. Many community members, including young people currently and formerly homeless, were in attendance.

What impacted me the most about this forum was when PSKS (Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets) employee and formerly homeless person Mama Sara (CHHEW Program Director) told her story. It was so inspiring to hear from someone who went through so much and survived it all—who is now doing all she can to help others.

Work from the Civic Endurance exhibit, a collection of photographs and videos that document homeless young people in Seattle, was shown at this event. Attendees were invited to see the exhibit after the forum.

The Endurance exhibit is a collaborative effort by artists Bradley McCullogh and Jacqueline Tarry and participants and staff of PSKS. It took a lot of courage for the 13 young people who participated in the exhibit to allow strangers to videotape them spilling their guts and talking about their personal life for other strangers to see. The Endurance exhibit is an inspiring eye opener and a reminder of the things people have to go through to survive in this world.

The message that I got from watching those 13 people stand up for an hour and from listening to them tell their story was never to give up on yourself—whatever obstacles get in your way: whether it is a drug addiction, homelessness, or constant ridicule from strangers.

Stand tall for what you believe in; whether it is your friends, your lifestyle, or your religion. Watching the film of the 13 young people talking about their experience was very intense. I almost started crying a couple times.

I would like to thank everyone who worked hard to put together the Endurance exhibit because it was beautiful, poetic, and artistic and that’s what this world needs more of. As a former homeless youth, it really made me happy to see homeless young people getting together and speaking their minds, both at the forum and the exhibit.

Now all people have to do is listen so they can get a better understanding of what they go through.

With more understanding, there is nothing to fear. People can help these young people help themselves or just be there for support. You never know what can happen; you could be in this position tomorrow.

May is National Foster Care Month

According to Casey Family Programs, every year approximately 170,000 families care for over 500,000 children whose parents cannot take care of them. Foster care parents and workers deserve to be appreciated for the hard work and dedication they provide to ensure the care of so many children across the nation. To show your appreciation or to get involved as a foster parent, volunteer, mentor or employee, check out www.fostercaremonth.org.

RENÉE PRATTE

WHEN I WAS ONLY 17, MY LIFE CHANGED COMPLETELY.

In February 2001, I had a choice to make. I could run away or tell someone about what happened to me. I chose to save myself and tell. I had no idea what would happen to me, but I did know that I was never going to go back home to the unbearable abuse from my father.

I had known nothing about foster care except that it had a negative image. The general public also doesn’t know much about the foster care system but they need to. There needs to be more awareness about this issue, about the kids in care and about the kids transitioning out of care.

If I hadn’t been taken out of my home and placed in a safe environment, it’s scary to think what circumstances I would be in right now. My whole childhood was full of verbal abuse and watching my mother being physically abused. My life was controlled and I hardly was given the opportunity to experience a normal family setting that was very healthy for me. Sue and Steve helped me get through the trial I faced against my biological parents.

I testified at the trial with my parents in the room. It was probably one of the hardest things I had ever done. However, the jury found my father not guilty. I found out afterwards that even though the jury had believed me, it could not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Shortly after the trial, my parents tried to run me down while I was in my car. I had no choice but to get restraining orders against both of them. The restraining orders will be in effect until May 2005.

I have been in therapy for almost three years now; trying to get over everything that has happened to me. Two months after my 19th birthday, I transferred to a new school. I have been here since June 2002 going to school year-round. I will have my Associate of Arts degree in May. I also work at Hagerty Insurance full-time. I am Vice President of the Let Our Voices Echo foster youth board, a group of youth who are part of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which advocates for foster youth transitioning out of the system.

In the fall of 2002, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative hired Lake Snell Perry & Associates (LSPA) to conduct a study exploring public knowledge of and about perceptions about the challenges facing young people leaving foster care. This study had two components: a nationwide telephone survey and five focus groups. This study shows little awareness—but a significant level of concern.
Letter From the Editor

MAY IS NATIONAL FOSTER CARE MONTH and I encourage you to find some way to celebrate and honor the thousands of good folks who work tirelessly on behalf of the children and adolescents involved in foster/kinship care. Mockingbird’s vision of “building a world class foster care system” demands that we not only change what is not working but that we acknowledge and support what is working well for kids.

Send a card, email or voice mail thanking a foster parent for their commitment and work, send a donation or volunteer at an organization that serves kids in foster care or find some other creative way to “take good care of the folks who take good care of kids.”

Foster Care Alumni in Active Duty: Mockingbird is looking for individuals who were in foster/kinship care and are currently serving in the U.S. military. If you have any ideas on active duty personnel who would want to receive correspondence from a pen pal, including copies of the Mockingbird Times please let us know their name and contact information.

Youth Leadership at Mockingbird: I want to thank Liz Gelinas and Joshua Kaplan-Lyman for their great work on behalf of The Mockingbird Society. Liz and Josh are both seniors at Franklin High School in Seattle. To fulfill their graduation requirements Liz and Josh chose The Mockingbird Society for their Senior Project. The focus of their project was a fundraiser on behalf of Mockingbird, which included organizing, coordinating, procuring and all of the innumerable tasks involved in orchestrating a major event. Nearly 200 folks attended and were treated to scrumptious desserts, beautiful music and great presentations from guest speakers. Washington state Representative Eric Pettigrew joined Mockingbird Times reporter Jennifer Eboh in sharing with the audience the hope and promise within The Mockingbird Society.

Nearly $5,000 was collected, with an especially generous contribution made by the Ken and Marleen Alhadeff Foundation. I want to express my appreciation to Liz and Josh for recognizing the work of The Mockingbird Society and sharing their energy and talents on our behalf. I also want to thank all of you who attended the event as well as the many family, friends and business owners who supported Liz and Josh and made the event so successful.

A Special Thank you to our April Donors


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ABOUT US: The Mockingbird Society is a private non-profit organization dedicated to building a world class foster care system and improving the other systems that serve children and adolescents in foster care. 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 Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.50 and $8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, art work, poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 28,000 copies being distributed across Washington and the U.S.A. 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. All donations to The Mockingbird Society are tax-deductible and greatly appreciated. No part of the Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright 2004 The Mockingbird Society.

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Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth.

ALUMNI CORNER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

– about the challenges facing young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

The foster care system and the issues facing its alumni are not top-of-mind issues for most Americans. A two-thirds majority say they know little or nothing about the system. Most people also agree that 18 is too young for anyone to be on their own. Yet the foster care system cuts us lose at 19, sometimes 18. Americans’ feel- ings about the importance of assisting young people leaving foster care are captured well by this quote from a focus group participant:

Once the child reaches 18 he is grown physically but a lot of the time they are mentally unprepared because of the lack of experience of being independent and being a productive member of society. Instead of just throwing them out there, they need a couple of more years in some type of support system. The system may not be as intensive but something to give them a step up. Everyone will benefit, not only the child but also the community will benefit.

It seems that the media, mainly the news media, is where most people get their knowledge about foster care. Six in ten Americans (62%) say they have learned a lot or some of what they know from the news.

Our voices must be heard and people must listen. My story is just like thousands of others. I have already spoken at conferences and public events about my life experiences. I have also been published twice regarding my life.

The public must know what really goes on in the homes of so many children, and they must realize how desperately we need the system to be more productive. Every day in the newspaper there is an ad about needing more foster homes.

Somewhere out there is a child that needs to be saved. I have met several people who never were, and because of that, they didn’t turn out okay. We have to stop the cycle of abuse and neglect. 
Surviving the System

ECHO SPEED

WHEN I TURNED 18, I WAS FINALLY FREED FROM THE SYSTEM. I owned my life again. Things were going great now that I was home again with my family and friends, plus my workers had hooked up my case so I wouldn’t even have to attend court for my release out of the Kansas State Care system. I didn’t care that I wasn’t finished with school, and that I had in reality very few useful skills in being independent, and neither did anybody else care for that matter.

I was just thankful to be out of a system that had caused a great deal of pain and heartache for me through years of excessive carelessness and avoidance, and although I could’ve chosen to remain in their clutches longer, I was much too sick and disgusted with THOSE people to, quite frankly, give a damn.

Now only 8 months later, I have two jobs to keep up with and I’m struggling to find another place to live. Although this should be my senior year, I’m not attending school. I don’t even have a Drivers License yet because it would’ve been impossible for me to get while I was bouncing around back and forth between different group and foster homes. My situation is currently stable, but could get really bad from this point if I don’t get off my “arsh” and start doing something that’s more beneficial to my future. It’s going to be hard work, but never will I turn back to a system that I feel crippled me for any help at all.

However, I know that I missed out on a lot while I held on in the system. There were plenty of opportunities I missed out on that would’ve helped my independent skills or maybe even my education. The one Independent Living Program my workers allowed me to try only lasted a few months because I got kicked out. And even though I rarely stayed in one school long enough to earn much credit, I should have definitely tried a lot harder to get my workers to let me take my GED or attend some sort of alternative schooling.

I now realize that the whole time I was feeling sorry for myself I should’ve been milking the system for all they were worth. I shouldn’t have walked away. If I had only set my sights high and have standards if you want to get a job you like, but expand your search if needed. Just remember, fill out applications everywhere you want to work and a few where you could at least see yourself working. Call back to see if they had time to look over your resume or application. And always ask to speak to the hiring manager. Make a good impression, and good luck!

The manager said that she put my resume aside and that she would be calling for interviews next week. Hopefully I get called for the interview, because I think I would be a great employee. I have good attendance and I’m a team player.

Here is what I learned on my job search: when turning in your resume or application, ask to speak to the manager on duty. They will know if the company is hiring or not, and you can give a good impression. First impressions are important. Wear nice clothes to set that impression, keep your head up and be polite. If they say they are not hiring, still fill out an application so they can have it on file, and call back and tell them that you would make a great employee.

You have to set you’re sights high and have standards if you want to get a job that you like, but expand your search if needed. Just remember, fill out applications everywhere you want to work and a few where you could at least see yourself working. Call back to see if they had time to look over your resume or application. And always ask to speak to the hiring manager. Make a good impression, and good luck!
History of Foster Care

J. Eboh

In 1959, the Child Welfare League of America conducted a national study on foster care and found an uneven and discriminatory method of social service delivery. This report found that children were being removed from their homes without reason, and that there were more children of color and children from low income backgrounds in the system. The study also established that children were placed in foster care settings that were unstable and undesirable. Biological parents were largely ignored, and few attempts at reunification occurred, while adoption was typically reserved for white children.

In 1974, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act provided model legislation for states to pass mandatory child-abuse-reporting laws and set up procedures for investigating abuse and neglect reports. In 1993, the Family Preservation and Support Initiative was passed in order to provide children with a safe home on a temporary basis until family reconciliation or permanent care can be established.

The foster care system has seen many changes over the past century. This system affects the lives of over half a million children and families daily. The intention of today’s foster care system is to provide children with a safe home and foster children to assimilate into the dominant American culture.

The Nineteenth Century brought about some positive changes for youth. After the child abuse case of Mary Allen Wilson, a young girl in New York who was abused by her foster mother, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was founded. Around the same time, foster homes started to be formerly established for children.

The Twentieth Century brought about many changes, particularly in the form of legislation for foster youth. In 1912, under the Roosevelt Administration, the U.S. Children’s Bureau was created. The bureau’s responsibilities included topics pertaining to the welfare of children; which included legislation, oversight of children’s institutions and statistics on birth rates and infant mortality.

Main Entry: foster
Function: transitive verb
Inflected Form(s): fostering; fostered
Meaning: 1: to give parental care to; nurture
2: to promote the growth or development of
Encourage
Source: http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary


Mockingbird Times, May 2004

StreetLinks Still Exists

Dennis Fisher

ON MARCH 12, THE STREETLINKS VAN MADE ITS LAST RUN, providing some of Seattle’s estimated 1,000 homeless youth with food, hygiene supplies, warm clothes and blankets, friendly smiles and listening ears. (www.seattlechildrenshome.org - 2001) Seattle Children’s Home (SCH), the operator of the StreetLinks and SafeLinks vans, gave them to YouthCare (a non-profit agency serving homeless youth) as a part of a partnership, with YouthCare taking on the outreach program, and SCH ill hiring a mental health professional to be part of the outreach team “to expedite mental health assessments and referrals from the street. (www.seattlechildrenshome.org)” SCH chose to form this partnership with YouthCare because SCH decided that its focus should be on mental health.

Previously, YouthCare had one van that served the University District, Capitol Hill, Aurora Avenue, and downtown Seattle. The newly transferred StreetLinks van will operate at least at the level of the current YouthCare outreach van, and will allow for better coverage of the existing areas. One significant difference between the services of StreetLinks and YouthCare outreach is that, although YouthCare gives out blankets and sandwiches just as StreetLinks did, they do not give out hot food (StreetLinks provided hot tomato soup and hot chocolate). Instead, they provide transport to other places that serve hot food—places which usually close well before StreetLinks’ 1AM stopping time.

“The integration of the street outreach teams will increase services for youth served by both programs to transition them from street life,” said Debra Beyer, Ph.D. of YouthCare. “More youth will be provided comprehensive services and a full continuum of care to assist them in leaving the street including basic needs, meals at YouthCare’s Orion Center, transportation to medical services, stable housing and improved access to mental health services.” (www.seattlechildrenshome.org)

As of an interview in late March with Debra Beyer, Associate Director at YouthCare, YouthCare was still exploring possible ways to utilize the SafeLinks vans. It’s sad to know that such a wonderful program has been cut, but it is comforting to see that some of the resources from it have gone to good use.

Mockingbird Fundraiser

Mockingbird Staff Anthea Doelefs, J. Eboh with Representative Pettigrew and Liz Gelinas. Photo by MBT Staff


JOB OPPORTUNITY!

The King County Kinship Care Gathering Planning Committee is looking for 8 young people to help plan an event for Kinship Care families. This is a paid position where you could earn up to $100/month from May to September.

To apply you must:

• Be between the ages of 12 and 18.
• Have experience living in a kinship care arrangement (being raised by a relative other than a parent).
• Live in King County, WA.

Check out the full job description at www.mockingbirdsociety.org, or call Anna at 206-322-3417 x2132

Poetry Corner

Family Photo

YaSmiNA DAmJAN Ellis

I remember the afternoon
My mother put me up for adoption-
I was 13, maybe 12.
I don’t remember for certain.
She said:
“Let’s get in the car-
Let’s drive real far.
“Let’s get ice cream”
and also, “Isn’t it a lovely day?”

How strange.
I looked toward my father,
who was not looking at me.
He would not offer an answer.

In the car, we did drive far.
The day was lovely; the sun in my hair.
We turned into the police station,
there was no ice cream there.
She turned to me then,
Eyes streaming,
Cries filled with knives-
“You ungrateful thing!
You go live with someone else now.”

Someone else? There was no one else.
There were only the overstuffed chairs
in the station’s waiting room.

Mockingbird Times, May 2004