**Youth Advocacy Day: The Survey Results Are In**

IN FEBRUARY 2005, A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 100 YOUTH AND SERVICE PROVIDERS GATHERED IN OLYMPIA, Washington to advocate for youth in the homelessness, juvenile justice and foster care systems. Youth Advocacy Day, organized by Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y), included youth from the Mockingbird Society and other agencies around the state. Throughout the day, youth met with legislators, Governor Christine Gregoire, and advocates for the rights of children and youth. At the end of the day, youth and service providers completed surveys about their experience. The results from those surveys are now in.

Youth reported overwhelmingly positive experiences with the day. When surveyed, 91% of youth felt they made a difference. One youth stated that, “by being present and being seen, I felt like I made a difference.” Other youth reported that talking to legislators and “opening[ing] doorways in legislators’ heads” demonstrated the youths’ impact. Primarily because they felt they had made a difference, all youth surveyed would recommend Youth Advocacy Day to others.

Youth and service providers listed many favorite aspects of Youth Advocacy Day. Meeting legislators topped the list; one youth loved meeting Representative Ed Murray: “I really enjoyed hearing that man!” Youth and service providers also enjoyed hearing stories of everyone’s experiences, spending the day with like-minded people, and learning about advocacy issues. Youth had many other positive things to say about Youth Advocacy Day, as well. One youth said, “speaking up does have an impact!” Another commented that “it was so empowering to see people fighting for equal rights today and it felt so good to be a part of that.”

ASK-Y is already planning for Youth Advocacy Day 2006. The results from this survey will help make the day even more effective and positive for all involved. If you would like information on how to get involved with ASK-Y and/or Youth Advocacy Day, please visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

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**PELZER’S A CHILD CALLED IT**

I RECENTLY HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ DAVID PELZER’S A CHILD CALLED IT and meet the author himself at an event in Seattle. Pelzer’s memoir gave me chills and a strong sense of sympathy for Pelzer, whose childhood was highlighted in this dreadful, and very true tale of abuse. I had so many questions to ask Pelzer while reading his book; questions about his childhood and how it affects him now, questions about his father, questions about his mother. This story is definitely worth the read, not only for the important content but because it’s very quick and easy to read. I was able to knock it out in only a couple of hours.

What’s strange about A Child Called It is that it opens with a happy ending but by the time you get to the end it leaves you with no sense of happiness. It ends abruptly...no closing, no anything (of course there are the sequels). Pelzer reminiscers on many childhood stories, and at the end it’s almost as if he ran out of horrible stories so he just stopped writing when he finished his last one. I am used to books that close with happy endings...or at least an ending period. However, at the beginning of the book Pelzer puts in a bit about being rescued from his life with his family, so you understand that somehow he survived long enough to be saved.

Pelzer’s life as a child was filled with cruel and unusual torture. Something went terribly wrong in his mother’s head and she cruelly focused her frustrations on his small little frame. Whenever something went wrong in her life she abused little David. Whenever she was bored she abused little David. Whenever she was drunk (which was every night) she abused little David. Now, we’ve all heard abuse stories and maybe even experienced it first hand. It’s unfair to say one’s abuse story is more significant than another’s; abuse is abuse and being traumatized is — well you get the picture. Pelzer’s story, however, is very unusual and bizarre. Why you ask? Because his mother was very unusual and bizarre...and unfortunately for David she had a very creative imagination. Here’s a short list of some of the things she did: dislocated his arm while beating him; stabbed him with a knife while drunk; forced him to eat spoonfuls of ammonia; forced him to eat food he had vomited up; because she was starving him, she made him vomit everyday school in case he had eaten there; tried to make him eat fresh baby poop from his brother’s diaper; made him stick his hand over a burning flame; on their kitchen stove; had him clean the bathroom while breathing a toxic gas that was produced from the bucket of bleach and ammonia she locked in there with him (an idea she got from a newspaper). That’s not all...his mother was a woman with serious mental issues. His father—his “hero” felt sorry for little David, but always just stood by and watched as if he could do nothing to stop it. Also, the reaction of his teachers and others is unbelievable. It took them seemingly forever to figure out why David was covered in bruises, famished, and stealing food from other kids. Little David was so brainwashed and afraid of his mother that he wasn’t going to say anything. Even the social worker who visited him ignored his skinny body and bruised limbs when he said that it was nothing (hint: don’t ask a kid if he’s being abused while he’s sitting next to his abuser).

**Youth Reflect on Advocacy Day**

- “[I feel I made a difference because I] expressed thoughts, feelings and beliefs and opened doorways in legislators’ heads.”
- “Of course [I would recommend Youth Advocacy Day to others!]. This day was so inspiring and makes you feel like you really matter.”
- “Thank you for caring about homeless youth. There are too many individuals out there in society who walk through life with blinders on, barely acknowledging our existence. It is people like you who make it possible to succeed.”
- “I’m so glad I came.”
- “[I felt prepared to talk to my legislators because] they’re just like me.”
- “[I felt I made a difference] because legislators actually listened to us.”
- “Just by being here I made a difference.”
- “I loved hearing from all the Reps and being able to question them.”
- “It was really interesting to see how our government works, while advocating for what we believed in.”
- “Advocacy is the most effective way to reach our legislators!”
- “[My favorite part is] the energy that everyone puts in advocating for the issues. It’s very exciting to see so many people wanting to make a difference.”
- “I really enjoyed learning what exactly youth advocacy was about and why it’s so important.”
- “I liked hearing about this year’s advocacy topics, since I didn’t know about them at all and it was very interesting.”
- “I have never experienced homelessness or the foster care system, but it was so empowering to see people fighting for equal rights today and it felt so good to be a part of that.”

**Mockingbirdbird Times**

Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth

**May 2005**

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak out Across the Nation

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-5437 (KIDS)

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Echo Speed with author David Pelzer, May 2005

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Letter from the Editor

JIM THEOFELIS

Life at the Mockingbird Society has been a little like getting a drink from a fire hydrant. It’s all good and exactly what we want, but there is also a lot of it coming very fast. First, let me remind you that May is National Foster Care Month. I encourage you to give thanks to the 174,000 licensed kinship and non-relative caregivers across the nation. Governor Christine Gregoire has joined other states in celebrating National Foster Care Month on behalf of the 6,000 licensed foster parents across Washington who contribute every day to the lives of children and adolescents. As noted, the Mockingbird Society has been very busy this past month and the forecast looks like more of the same. We are in the process of moving from the third floor to the second floor in the amazing 2100 Building in Seattle. This will allow us to double our space, including a new facility for the Mockingbird Times, ASK-Y and our Youth Speakers’ Panel. Additionally, the documentary that youth have been creating is close to completion and we are all excited to see the final product. We continue to be immensely appreciative to the good folks from Wild Geese Productions for all of their support and help in leading this project.

The Mockingbird Foster Family Constellation Project continues to demonstrate quality results through our collaboration with LJIMA Community Services with plans to replicate the Mockingbird Model in five new sites for 2006. This remarkable opportunity is due to a private foundation that recently concluded.

The children and adolescents in out-of-home care benefited from some very good advocacy and a lot of hard work from several individuals and organizations that deserve recognition: Representative Kagi, Representative Dickerson, Representative Pettigrew as well as Senator Regale, Senator Hargrove and Senator Stevens. Additionally, the good folks at the Children’s Alliance as well as Laurie Lippold from Children’s Home Society and Casey Trupin from Columbia Legal Services did amazing work on behalf of children, adolescents and youth. Of special note is the passage of SB 5583, sponsored by Senator Regale, which mandates that Washington’s Child Protective Service train CPS workers in adolescent development, track the number of adolescent referrals received, and the disposition of such referrals. Many of us have been concerned about undeniable trends in which adolescent referrals are de-prioritized based on the age of the adolescent rather than on the risk of harm. Mockingbird sponsors the Advocates for System Kids and Youth (ASK-Y) coalition, which worked very hard on advocating for SB 5583. This bill will be signed into law by the Governor on Monday May 8th.

Finally, we at Mockingbird want to welcome Ros Ghazh as the new Operations Manager. Ros comes with a remarkable set of skills and commitment to the children, youth and adults we serve. As you can see a lot is going on at Mockingbird, but then again it takes a lot to build a world class foster care system.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsoociety.org

Thank You’s

Leslie and Jen from Sanctuary Arts, CASA, Seattle PI, Amy from Aradia Health Center, Bruce Cross & Perkins Coie, LLF, Joe Kahn

Aging Out

AGING OUT, a new 90-minute documentary by Roger Weisberg and Vanessa Roth, chronicles the struggles of three young adults who must learn to fend for themselves after being discharged from the foster care system. AGING OUT premieres during National Foster Care Awareness Month on Thursday, May 26 (2005) from 10 to 11:30 p.m. ET/PT on PBS (check local listings).

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MSW Interns
2005

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Contributing Writers
Camron, Jay-son Foreman

Volunteers
Anna Trambly, Patricia Gray, Anta Kennedy, Denise Redinger

All Illustrations by Echo Speed.

Letter to the Editor

Hi Shannon,

We heard about the Mockingbird Society from Nicole Ayala at AMARA Parenting and Adoption Services. We adopted our son, Cameron, through AMARA. Camron was in foster care system for several years before we were lucky enough to meet him at the Kids Fest event.

Camron loves poetry and loves to write. The one I’ve attached here is very special, so special his teacher made sure I got a copy right away. Camron is 8 1/2 and wonder why! He is going to be working with Nicole at AMARA to help give back to kids in the foster system.

Regards,
Cheryl Pomp King

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 involved in homelessness and 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 the Mockingbird Society are paid between $7.50 and $8.50 an hour. Additionally, youth from across the country submit articles, artwork and poetry and are compensated up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times has a monthly circulation of 40,000 copies being distributed across Washington State and the U.S.A, through a private distribution list and as an insert in Real Change.

A McKINGBIRD INSIDE YoUR MailBox

Make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable youth and support the Mockingbird Society! Donations may be tax deductible and all donors receive the Mockingbird Times. Enclosed, please find our check made payable to: The Mockingbird Society in the amount of: $ ____________________________

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Please fill out and mail this form with a check or money order payable to: The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Ave South Suite 350, Seattle WA 98144

Pelfer CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

I had the recent pleasure of meeting the famous David Pelzer at a local event. Pelzer seemed very wrapped up in himself. He did not appear very interested in talking to a youth reporter. The only question of mine he answered was the one question he kept badgering me to ask him (this question was, “How did you get through?” which he already made crystal clear his books). When I finally asked the question, Pelzer became this lively actor: animated with a well-practiced song and dance. I asked if he’d ever let me interview him and laughingly he said no...because he turns down interviews with reporters who are "much rarer, which makes them important." I can’t be sure, but I think that he meant I wasn’t good enough to talk to him if I wasn’t Barbara Walters. He also mentioned how lucky I was and that “not many people talk to the famous David Pelzer.”

...how lucky I am indeed. For all the horrors this man dealt with as a little boy, I’m sure he probably deserves more than others to be rich and famous. It’s just so sad to see someone who made it through so much be consumed by his own fame and ego that easily. Though Mr. Pelzer is a busy man, I assumed he of all people would take a little time to chat with a young girl and former foster kid anxious to speak to the author of a captivating book about hardship. One other thing I learned while listening to David was that because he was rescued into the “system,” he didn’t approach for anyone with a single complaint about the foster care system. I didn’t make the mistake of mentioning any of the many things that unfortunately go wrong inside the “system,” though I was shocked to see he was oblivious to certain realities about state care. So the lesson here is that people are not what you expect. The book is worth the read, however. Enjoy!

Aging Out

AGING OUT, a new 90-minute documentary by Roger Weisberg and Vanessa Roth, chronicles the struggles of three young adults who must learn to fend for themselves after being discharged from the foster care system. AGING OUT premieres during National Foster Care Awareness Month on Thursday, May 26 (2005) from 10 to 11:30 p.m. ET/PT on PBS (check local listings).

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**Positive Power: Playing Guitar for Under $200**

**Misty Lou Cook**

The Sanctuary Arts Center has been around as an alternative resource for homeless young people in Seattle to express themselves since 1999. It is a unique place because it is a non-profit art center in a church where homeless youth up to age 21 can come and create work using various media like stained glass, paint, charcoal, and beads. I used to go to the Sanctuary Arts Center when I was living on the streets of the University District and it was a great experience for me. I am glad they are still going strong and able to be there as a positive resource and creative outlet for street-involved youth. The recent Sanctuary Arts Center benefit held to raise funds for this program, was a smashing success. Not to sound like Austin Powers, but yeah baby yeah! They raised a total of $4,000 for the Art Center and an additional $2100 was raised for the youth artists whose work was displayed at the benefit.

I was stoked to get to see Captain Smartypants for the first time performing at this benefit. I plan on attending their performance on June 4th at the Nordstrom Recital Hall. Captain Smartypants is a group of incredibly talented individuals, and a sub-division of the Seattle Men's Chorus, who can sing better than anything I've heard on American Idol! There is emotion and fluidity behind their voices, their faces are expressive while they sing, and they are proud to be queer. They sing silly songs about "straight guys looking at the floor" and "songs that were never meant to be covered" like a harmonic rendition of Sir Mix A Lot's Baby Got Back. I think I'm a hard one to make laugh but Captain Smartypants and Jeff City Improv had me rolling in my seat. Jeff City Improv is a group of performers who take suggestions from the audience and act them out while the Improv guy in the corner keeps a hard steady beat. Once you have your guitar and guitar tuner, you're well on your way to Rock 'N Roll High School. The only book you'll need to study in Rock 'N Roll High School is by Terry Burrows. Burrows wrote a book for the Keep-It-Guitar-Tuner and&Tune Man Guide to Playing the Guitar," that is jam-packed with everything; how to string and tune your guitar, how to play different chords, scales and keys, how to play blues, country and rock, even how to record yourself and find handy Internet sites for further details on everything (from scales to home-recording)! The full U.S price of this book is $20 and this is the last item you need to purchase - the mp3s and music, the songs and tablature you can get from the internet; the practice, practice, practice, is absolutely free. You can most likely find this book for a fraction of the price at a discount book store like Half Price Books, Sam's Club or some other used/discount book store that is in your region. I got this book from a friend and he got it for $8. Your friends are your best resource.

You'll need a computer for free music/mp3s and tablature. Your friend, your cool aunt, your friend of a friend, your mom, your dad, your foster-sister, your homeless youth drop-in center, your work or your school buddy most likely has a computer and a printer that you can borrow for an hour or two. First, what tablature is and what it's all about. Tablature is an easy way to distribute, write and read music. It is written on six lines that represent the six strings on a standard guitar, either acoustic or electric. The numbers written on the lines represent the frets numbers where you will be placing your fingers. The frets of a guitar are the different sections on the guitar neck, usually divided by metal bars, where you place your fingers to create chords, tones and rockin' sounds.

The best Guitar Tab Websites that I have found are www.guitartab.com, which features over 40,000 different guitar tabs, and www.mxtabs.net, which, as of April 5, 2005, had 155,161 tabs, including drum, bass and guitar tabs. You can search for your own favorite tablature sites at www.TabFind.com or just enter “Free Tablature” into www.google.com. Tablature is a great method to teach yourself guitar, and this article is all about do-it-yourself guitar stacked.

Now that you have the tools, go out there and show 'em what you got, and, after all, it's like Ani DiFranco once said, "every tool is a weapon – if you hold it right".

---

**Benefit For Art Center a Smashing Success**

**Courtney Konietzko**

The recent Sanctuary Arts Center benefit held to raise funds for this program, was a smashing success. Not to sound like Austin Powers, but yeah baby yeah!

I'm doing the best I can

I can't make it all the way

I'm doing the best I can

I can't make it all the way

I'm not writing rhymes I'm telling feelings

I want to be successful so everybody can remember me

I got no more else to say, if I don't talk to you tomorrow it was nice telling you about my day.

---

**Poetry Corner**

**My Day and How I Spend It**

**Jayson Foreman**

When I wake up I wipe the crust from my eyes

Thinking how the day is going to go

Fast or slow

It's 8:30am so I got to get my clothes on and go

With my CD player on and my 2pac keep your head up song

I look off the bus and something goes wrong

A black kid hits another black kid same old drama

Not going to school living on the streets when they should be home with dad and mom

My mom was the only mother I had but no pops

Life is hard for a kid, selling drugs and getting your ass harassed by the cops

I never wanted that so that's why I make the best of myself so no one can bring me down

I got better stuff to do than post up in the town

My clothes are matching I look real nice

Everything that I have cost a price

So why do I have to settle for

Clothes don't make the person

The personality makes you who you are

I'm myself no one else

Work is stressful bosses on my back

It's the only job I can find until I can get some money stacked

School, work, everything that you go through I feel the same way

So sometimes I just get on my knees and pray

That's my only way of relieving stress

This life is only for a short period of time so make the best of it

Before it's too late

I'm doing the best I can

Owning a business is my plan

So when I snap back into reality I'm on my way to the coffee house

Lonely room, been like this for a while need a spouse

I'm not writing rhymes I'm telling feelings

I want to be successful so everybody can remember me

I got no more else to say, if I don't talk to you tomorrow it was nice telling you about my day.

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Mockingbird would like to recognize the work of John Stout, Executive Director of Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program for Children in Foster Care, who passed away recently. We want to offer our condolences to his family and to the CASA program. He will truly be missed.
Abortion: Facing a Tough Decision

How did you feel when you did not get the abortion? I felt good. I looked forward to it, especially after I found out it was a girl. I felt relaxed about the pregnancy. Just now I was worried about the labor pains.

Who or what encouraged you to keep the child? Cortez (the baby's father), Jamica (the God mom), the father's stepmother, and my best friend Karania. Some family members did not want me to keep the baby. Some thought I was not ready and did not see me as a mother, did not think I was capable of taking care of a child.

What do you think would have happened if you got an abortion? I would have regretted it for a while. I probably would have felt sad and depressed. I would have felt like a murderer taking an innocent child's life. It would be a part of me I could and would never forget.

By not getting an abortion, do you feel that you made the right decision for you, the baby, or both? For both. Corlecia is well taken care of. She's got everything she needs. She's a blessed child. I made the right decision because having her has motivated me not only for myself but the both of us.

Did you ever think about having the child and giving it up for adoption? No, because after going through nine months of pregnancy I would want to keep the child and raise him or her.

What did you learn form the situation? If you could give the next person some advice, what would you say? I learned that even though I'm happy with my daughter and love her to death, you should really think about the me and who you do the baby and all the responsibilities of being a parent for go it. You also learn, while raising the child, ways to become a better parent. If it comes down to getting an abortion just think about what's good for baby. Because you also have to go through. The foster parent treats you to things when you do well in school. The foster parent parent treats you to things when you do well in school like your parents would do if you were to live with them. So a functional foster home is like a regular home with the mother and the parent still. I have been in some functional foster homes while I have been in the foster care system. But I really like the foster home that I am in right now. I like it because the foster mom cares for me and she is helping me. Some functional foster homes do not do me and let me know what I can and can't do. She is helping me get my driver's license. I have also been in foster homes where I have been moved around. The foster mom does to show me that she cares to let me know what I can and can't do. She is helping me get my driver's license and soon will be helping me find another job so that I can get a car and pay for the insurance of the car.

Larishica Asher

What Makes a Good Foster Home

In this news report I will be talking about the differences between functional and dysfunctional foster homes. A functional foster home is one where the kids are not cared for and loved. The house might be dirty, there might be too many kids, and the parents might never be around and there might even be abuse and neglect happening in the home. There are many reports of neglect and abuse in foster homes. The house might be dirty, there might be too many kids, and neglect is about 55.9% (www.casey.org/mediacentr/mediacentfactsheet.com).

One of the dysfunctional homes that I lived in was really dirty. I got sick from the smell and all of the dirt that was in the home. I caught an infection and the foster parent would not take me to the doctor so that I could get checked out to see what I had. When I moved I finally got taken to the doctor and my infection started to heal slowly but I still have a scar. I always thought that you were supposed to get taken care of in foster care, that the state puts you with people who can take care of you. You think that are moving you somewhere safe but they really are not.

A functional foster home is one where the family takes care of you. The home is clean and the foster parent takes care of you when you are sick. Some very great functional foster homes are organized and make time for the child to be in the home and activities for the children to do so that they don't get bored sitting in the house. And they also have to go to school. The foster parent treats you to things when you do well in school like your parents would do if you were to live with them. So a functional foster home is like a regular home with the mother and the parent still. I have been in some functional foster homes while I have been in the foster care system. But I really like the foster home that I am in right now. I like it because the foster mom cares for me and she is helping me. Some functional foster homes do not show me that she cares to let me know what I can and can't do. She is helping me get my driver's license and soon will be helping me find another job so that I can get a car and pay for the insurance of the car. I have also experienced a lot of new things while I have been in this foster home. Some of the new things that I have done are flying to Florida, and riding a motor scooter. I will also be taking my Driver's Ed class. I am also going to Las Vegas.

Right now I am hoping that my little sister can come and live with me in this foster home. But it seems like the foster care system does not want the little girl to come and live with me even though she wants to and so does her mother. It doesn't seem like they are doing anything to help her move in with me. When she does come to live with me she can be free just like I am and happy from here on out.

I interviewed two of my coworkers about their opinions on functional and dysfunctional foster homes. Here's what they had to say:

Jackie Henderson has never been in a dysfunctional foster home. She was first placed in a foster home when she was 14 years old. She has never moved from the foster home she is in and she is there till this day. She is now 18 years old. Her opinion on what a dysfunctional foster home is when a child is not getting enough attention from the parents. And the parents do not take care of the child.

Ashley Grant says that when she first moved to her home it was dysfunctional home at first. She realized that she couldn't do anything about it. So she came to the conclusion that she had to age out of the foster care system. Her opinion of a dysfunctional foster home is when no one can get along and there is constant bickering, arguing, and lots of verbal violence.

She entered in the foster care system when she was 14 years old also. And she has also been in the same foster home and has never been moved not one time and she is now 18 years old.