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Gubernatorial Campaign Representatives Meet with Youth

On Saturday September 15th, the Mockingbird Youth Network’s participants and advisors gathered for the quarterly State Leadership Council (SLC) meeting with some very exciting guests. For those of you who don’t know, the state of Washington is electing a new Governor this year. Rob McKenna, our Republican candidate, is currently the Attorney General of the State of Washington and served on the King County Council for three terms. Our Democratic candidate, Jay Inslee, is a former Congressman from the 1st and 4th Congressional Districts.

The afternoon of Saturday September 15th was full of focus and passion. Mockingbird Youth Network participants were respectful and engaged as we gathered to discuss advocacy and system reform. Jon Brumbach, Public Policy and Communications Coordinator, talked about a couple of different topics. He gave us an overview of the legislative goals we have had in the past and where we turn our head to in the future. Jon talked about progress Mockingbird has made on the 2011 youth-generated issues. In the area of safe housing, we have passed the Mockingbird Family Model, Independent Living, and Extended Foster Care, sibling accommodation, which are Extended Foster Care, sibling accommodation, then they can be eligible for housing.

Another important issue youth raised last year was preserving normalcy in the lives of those in care. As a result, Mockingbird advocated for the creation of the Normalcy Workgroup. This workgroup is co-chaired by Rick Butt, from Children’s Administration and Jeanneie Kee, alumna of foster care. Normalcy issues include participation in extracurricular sports, overnight events and any other normal activity that youth in care might not have regular access to as wards of the state. Thirdly, the Pregnant and Parenting Youth Workgroup was created last year due to concerns raised by the Olympia chapter. This group meets regularly and promotes positive resources for teen parents. Overall, Network participants are proud of these substantial accomplishments and the youth who participate in these workgroups.

Then, Jon presented the 2012-13 issues, which are Extended Foster Care, sibling visits, savings accounts for foster youth, overmedication, family connections, and thorough 17.5 meetings. For each topic, Jon explained the current status, the proposed solution and possible legislative and funding needs. This was a good way to get a status report and feedback on advocacy progress.

After the wonderful presentation, each set of chapter leaders discussed their updates and plans for community engagement this fall. During this time, I talked about my experience when Diamonique, Jan, Jim, Laurie Lippold, and I went to Bellevue to speak with Representative Ross Hunter.

The final part of this SLC was very special and unique. In the past, chapter leaders have voted for their top two legislative priorities at this meeting. This year, however, was different. As a group, we decided to endorse all six issues to work on in the 2013 legislative session. This is a new and exciting future for all Network participants. Each chapter did an amazing job researching and presenting their work. Because of this, the Network as a whole committed to pushing the issues forward to build a world-class foster care system.
Embracing My Next Stage

After I graduated from high school, I thought about going to college but wasn’t sure what I was supposed to do. The counseling center at Yakima Valley Community College referred me to Catholic Family and Child Services. They helped me fill out financial aid forms and register for classes. I felt empowered and excited when I completed all of the coursework I needed to start college. I didn’t start school until I was 20 years old, but qualified for many scholarships such as Education Training Voucher (ETV), Pell Grant, Student Need Grant, Yakima Nation Higher Education, and many others. With the help of Catholic Family and Child Services and those scholarships, I was able to make a living while going to college. I was also in the E-work program with Youth Housing P, a public office as well. We were pleased to welcome the Policy Directors for both gubernatorial campaigns to our quarterly State Leadership Council meeting this September for a Q&A with our Mockingbird Youth Network Chapter Leaders. While we do not endorse, support or oppose any candidate for public office, we want to take advantage of any opportunity to engage those who seek public office so they are aware of the issues faced by the children, youth and families impacted by the child welfare system.

On October 11th, I hope you will join us in celebrating another full year of advocacy and civic engagement. The Mockingbird Society will hold our 6th Annual Benefit Luncheon at the Sheraton Seattle Hotel. This year’s youth-led program will feature powerful and inspirational stories of perseverance, achievement, and hope. Our team of Youth Network Representatives will be featured prominently, with the role of Master of Ceremonies to be filled by our own Deonate Cruz, while Amanda Bevington will be the keynote address. This program will showcase the strength of youth in care, not their struggles. You will see youth empowered by their advocacy, leadership and civic engagement.

If you have not registered for this year’s luncheon, please do so at www.mockingbirdsociety.org, and please encourage your family, friends and colleagues to do the same. If you cannot make it in person, please consider making a contribution on our website. It is only through your support that we will be able to give youth and alumni of care the same opportunities we have been given.

Thank you for your unwavering support for children, youth and families.

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Power of One
Deonate Cruz

Join Me on
10/11/12

October 11th is Mockingbird’s 6th annual luncheon. If you feel passionate about changing the child welfare system, want to learn about advocacy, or just want to get involved in a positive cause, I highly recommend attending. Besides that, I, Deonate Cruz, will be your MC throughout the whole event and I pledge to keep things very interesting. Plus we will have an awesome keynote speaker, my fellow Network Representative Amanda Bevington, and some great guest speakers. It will also be a great way to get to know some of the people and resources available to you as well as an awesome way to make a positive difference.

Some of you might think that I am just urging you to get involved because I write for the Mockingbird Times, but that is definitely not the case. Last year was actually my first time attending the Luncheon. I went not knowing exactly what to expect, but what I saw was magnificent. Georgina Ramirez, last year’s keynote speaker, gave a speech so powerful, it was almost as if you were there going through her experiences with her.

I challenge you to think of a good reason why you shouldn’t attend. This gives you the perfect opportunity to get involved with an organization that is on the forefront of child welfare reform. If you are interested in coming please register at our website, www.mockingbirdsociety.org
Memories Made, Never Forgotten

I have had the opportunity to be the Spokane Resource Specialist for the past two years. I have had the honor to build relationships with my youth and the community. As I think about my time at Mockingbird I have had the privilege of working with my amazing group of youth who have made an impact on me in more ways than they will ever know. The relationships and mentoring opportunities I have gained have been the best of my career. Some of my favorite memories about being a Resource Specialist are monthly meetings, Pay it Forward, and even incorporate field trips learning experience they even incorporate field trips to places like the Center for Wooden Boats, the Museum of Flight, and the Museum of History and Industry.

Orion Center Helps Youth Earn their GED

The Orion Center GED program in Seattle is a great resource for youth between the ages of 16 and 23 who don’t have their High School Diploma and want to earn their GED quickly. The atmosphere is open and inviting where youth can work independently or with the help of a tutor one-on-one. There are two full time tutors, Zach Selke and Jill Hansen, and several volunteer tutors that come in so that there are always enough tutors to go around to those that need them.

The program runs at the Orion Center 9am-12:30pm Monday through Friday with extra tutoring time for those who need extra help or can’t make it during those times. If you show up to the program at 8:30 am, you can have breakfast and you can have lunch at 12:30. You can also get referrals to other services like case management. Services like this, along with providing bus tickets to youth make this program a great option for youth who otherwise wouldn’t be able to attain their GED. This program has been so successful that they graduated 29 young people in 2011 alone!

The first step to getting into the program is coming in on either Tuesday or Thursday at 9am and taking your placement test. From there, Zach or Jill will help you get into the program through a one-on-one orientation. After that, you will take pretests in each subject the GED tests on so that they know where to start you working to be ready to test. If you test with high enough scores, they will give you an official GED pretest, where you need to score 650 or above to go take the real test. If you don’t score high, they will give you packets of work to do to help you learn what you need to learn. As you work, the tutors will come around and ask you what they can do to help. If you are confident on your own, they will let you work on your own. If not, they will find out your learning style and tailor their teaching to your specific needs. Along with the individual work, there are group discussions and mini-lessons. To enhance students learning experience they can incorporate field trips to places like the Center for Wooden Boats, the Museum of Flight, and the Museum of History and Industry.

When you pass the pretest, they will pay for you to take your GED test at either Seattle Central Community College or Edmonds Community College. Once you pass all of the tests, there will be a graduation where you can invite all of your friends and family and get to wear a cap and gown. You can also get referrals to post-secondary education help when you graduate including college counseling services and job-training programs. Take advantage of these supportive services to improve your future.

“I challenge you to think of why you shouldn’t attend. This gives you the perfect opportunity to get involved with an organization that is on the forefront of child welfare reform.” - Deonate story, page 3

The Mockingbird Society Board of Directors

We are governed by a volunteer Board of Directors who serve and represent the organization in diverse and meaningful ways. This fall we are excited to welcome new Board members and grateful for the leadership and commitment of our continuing members.

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Chapter Voice

Seattle Chapter Scaling New Heights by Samantha McDonald

Region 2 South (Seattle) — On August 29th in Seattle at the 2100 Building, The Mockingbird Society held a Transitions Training for Seattle youth. There was one facilitator, five co-facilitators and 34 youth in attendance. This training was introduced by the Mockingbird Youth Network in June of this year. The Seattle Chapter is very optimistic about what they learned. The training is divided up into three key parts: Ending, Neutral Zone and New Beginnings. These three stages left youth with knowledge about the difference between change and transition. Georgina Ramirez described that change was the external factor and transition was the internal process someone goes through when transitioning.

The Seattle youth went through several simulations to teach them the healthy ways to transition. In Georgina’s experience she states, “It’s been more than pleasure to facilitate the training transitions to more than hundred foster youth and alumni. Engaging with youth people and watching participants go through the journey of transitions and why they are relevant to their lives was memorable. Once youth were able to understand some of the key concepts they were able to apply it immediately to situations that weren’t relevant to care. Whether it was applying the information to their employment, relationships, education or transitioning out of care it was a rewarding opportunity to see the curriculum come to life.”

As a reward for all of Seattle youth’s hard work they were offered a great time at the Seattle Bouldering Project facility. Georgina added, “The Seattle Bouldering Project event displayed one of the key learning points from the training, which is the power of rituals and celebrations. This celebration event provided attendees an opportunity to reconnect with the transitions language. Afterwards, attendees sat down for a moment to reflect on the transitions training. We discussed some of the key points of the training such as the difference between transitions and change, the three phases of the transitions process, but most importantly youth shared what the training meant to them and how they think about their lives differently.”

Campaigns from page 1

Youth Housing Program (YHP) and Extended Foster Care (Formerly Foster Care to 21). They spoke with enthusiasm about the programs and it seemed hopeful that youth would continuously be able to have access to them. At Mockingbird we have a central belief in elevating youth voice. It was encouraging that each of our guests expressed interest in keeping youth and alumni at the decision-making table during discussions about the future of child welfare. In response to a question raised about supporting foster youth in post-secondary education, James Paribello suggested that Washington youth need more support from wraparound services, and teacher training for unique issues that foster youth are facing. Faber agreed that having effective and efficient services is more of a concern than finances in regards to these critical issues. In this context, wraparound services are those that provided holistic support (education, healthcare, housing, employment) to dependents of the state. We concluded the morning with a highly informative voter registration proposal. This is an important for elections, both locally and nationally. Being a registered and active voter and engaging in our democratic processes is critical for self-advocacy. Make sure you are registered to vote and commit to making your voice heard.