First Annual Youth Leadership Summit

On the seventh and eighth of this past October, Mockingbird Youth Representatives were fortunate enough to attend the first annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, held at the beautiful Cedarbrook Retreat Center. It was hosted by Casey Family as well as The Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. The summit was aimed at young adults previously or currently in care. The purpose was to help youth find their voice and learn self-advocating skills. It was a very enlightening experience and I consider myself lucky to have attended.

When I arrived at the scene, I was awestruck by the beautiful setting. Tall trees and flowing brooks, calm serenity and the scent of the majestic woods invaded my nostrils. When I got into my room I was satisfied with the beautiful bathtub and the canopy ceiling. When I got into my room I was awestruck by the beautiful setting. Tall trees and flowing brooks, calm serenity and the scent of the majestic woods invaded my nostrils. When I got into my room I was satisfied with the beautiful bathtub and the canopy ceiling.

In our first activity, we explored what we as foster youth had in common, with a fun icebreaker. We all wrote down something that ailed us as victims of the system, and watched in surprise as they were read aloud and many other people stood up in agreement. We are redefining the quote "keep hope alive." says Jemila a youth currently in foster care from Lacey. “All of us are ultimately destined to do big things.”

My first session was called “Life After Foster Care.” The speaker was excellent. She told us about her story and showed a film. I felt really connected to her story because there were a lot of similarities between us. She was in foster care and had nine siblings then got custody of her brother. I was in foster-care with four siblings and am in the process of getting custody of my two younger brothers. It was very encouraging to me, because now that I’ve moved on I can do it too. Yes, she did say that there were some challenges and I am preparing for those that come my way. I really enjoyed how she had the audience involved. She asked for five volunteers to come and tell their stories. I was one of the five that got to share mine.

On the second day, we went to three sessions. The two I liked the most were: “So You Want To Be A Star” and “One Plus One Equals Everything.” “So You Want To Be A Star” was a very enjoyable workshop. We did a remake of American Idol and everyone was from a part of the audience or a volunteer. My job was to keep the crowd happy and upbeat for all the acts. I really liked this session because it was fun and encouraged people who might not usually feel confident enough to speak up to do just that. “One Plus One Equals Everything” talked about relationships between staff and participants. In this workshop we learned about healthy boundaries and how to make sure that everyone stays safe, but that good services are still provided.

My first session of day three was “It’s My Story.” This session taught us how to share stories by acting out stories. Some of the stories were funny and some of the stories left me with lots of thoughts. I was glad to take this one first because it helped boost my energy for the day. The last session of the day was “Speak For Yourself.” We were given three sentences in the beginning of class to think about and answer for our presentation. The three sentences were: “I was...” “I am...” and “I will...” Before our presentation, we did some exercises that helped us get the answers to our questions. My sentences were: “I was in foster-care with three of my siblings;” “I am getting custody of two of my siblings who still reside in care;” “Concerns about cultural awareness, the foster youth suggested that social workers, foster parents and CASA workers receive training on a wider variety of ways youth can connect with their heritage in a safe manner. Their thoughts were recorded and passed on to the right people.

“Overall it was a good conference that was very informative,” says Raquel Granath, Senior Youth Representative for Mockingbird Society. “The hotel vicinity was beautiful and I had a great time!” I agree that this Summit was a positive experience especially since it was aimed at youth as well as adults. I’m glad that we had a chance to talk to the important decision makers in our state and I think that this form of advocacy is the best way to make a difference. I can’t wait until next year and I hope we get to stay at the Cedarbrook again!

Casey Family Program’s It’s My Life Conference was held in Seattle this year from October 29th-31st. This year’s theme was “A Creative Journey.” The 4th annual event took place at the beautiful Bell Harbor International Conference Center on the pier. The conference was filled with lots of positive advice for youth and young adults leaving the foster-care system. It also provided many chances to practice skills that would be helpful to us in becoming independent and leaders in our communities. This was a very exciting experience and I had a great time.

It started on Sunday morning, where we were welcomed to a delicious breakfast buffet. Once we finished breakfast, we went up the general session where they had four amazing speakers who were alumni of the foster-care system. They each had struggles in their life, but those struggles helped them become the people they are today. After the general session we had lunch and a band played for us while we ate. It was very relaxing. When lunch ended, it was time for our first session.

Later on that evening we attended another interactive workshop in which we learned the “PREPs” model with Bernard Caliman from GSAN. He taught us a method in which to speak and be heard as well as persuade your audience. First state your Point, Then you have an Exam...
The Mockingbird Society is proud of the continued progress of the Mockingbird Family Model (MMF). Based on the “extended family concept”, the MMF addresses age-old problems plaguing the local and national foster care system (for more information on the MMF visit www.mockingbirdsoociety.org). Currently in King County, the Mockingbird Society has contracts with three private organizations (Casey Family Programs, Ryther Child Center, and Youth Advocates) and one contract with the Seattle office of the Division of Child and Family Services to replicate the MMF. Additionally, the Washington D.C. Child Welfare System has contracted with Mockingbird Society to implement two pilots of the MMF. During the first week of October, Degale Cooper and I were in Washington D.C. training their foster parents and social work staff on the MMF. Due to the work schedule of the foster parents, the trainings were conducted during the evenings going as late as 9:00 PM. It was so inspiring to see the staff and foster parents engaged in the training and passionately planning on how to better care for kids and families. One of the foster parents who attended the training brought her nine-year-old foster child, Twanna, who sat quietly during the training session reading, drawing and writing. At the conclusion of the final training session-again fairly late into the evening--I was giving some final comments to the group—when like a breath of fresh air Twanna slid a piece of paper on top of my notes. Given she was so quiet during the training I was rather taken aback by this behavior. As I looked at the paper she had placed on top of my notes I was truly overwhelmed. Here was a nine year child, in foster care, away from her family, listening to a group of adults who were focused on improving the quality of care for children just like her. I asked her if she wanted to read her writing to the group. She immediately stood up straight, grinning ear to ear and delivered her gift with clarity of voice and strength of character. She had listened to our words, observed our work and blessed us all to go forward with the courage of a nine year old separated from mommy. Below is the poem that Twanna shared that evening—the Mockingbird Society is proud to premier this new author. Happy Thanksgiving to you and those you love,

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsoociety.org

Congratulations Jim Theofelis!

Dear [Mockingbird Society],

We are writing to you and Mockingbird Society to say thank you for the superb job your organization did at facilitating a much needed focus group on the needs of foster youth. The information solicited will be used to inform the Washington Healthy Youth (WHY) Plan strategies and recommendations to enhance the health and well-being of youth in our state. The Mockingbird Society pilot test was a huge success and it will remain a model for our future focus groups. The youth who attended and facilitated the focus group showed a high degree of professionalism. They were intelligent, well-prepared, eager, and fun to work with. Their critical thinking abilities were impressive, as well as their level of commitment (they worked for nearly three hours).

We would like to extend a special acknowledgement to Jamica and Misty for facilitating and taking accurate notes which were essential to this process. Again, thank you from the WSY.

Sincerely,

Judy Schoder, MN, RN, Chair, Washington State Partnership for Youth Mickey Kander MSW, MPH; Adolescent Health Consultant, Washington State Department of Health

Meet Our Staff

Executive Director
Jim Theofelis

Youth LEAD Coordinator
Najja Morris

Operations Manager
Rui Shan

Administrative Assistant
Jenn Ramirez

Public Relations
Darin Gray

Executive Assistant
Lauren Frederick

Senior Youth Representatives
Mickey Loo Cheek, Dennis Fisher, Jamie Henderson

Youth Representatives
Larissa Abbe, Teresa Abbe, Sant Evans, Jessica Garcia, Raquel Granath, Renito Baske, Samuel Martin, Jannell Abb-Rahman

Contributing Writers
Shannel Darby, Twanna, Louise, Andrea Roldan

Volunteers
Christine Jackson
Mockingbird Times, November 2006

Homeless Youth Summit

Raquel Granath

Guess what everyone: homelessness is being abolished in this city right now. That’s right, there are people everywhere working hard to address the hardships of homelessness and inevitably end it.

The Homeless Youth and Young Adult Summit took place October 26th and 27th at City Hall in Seattle. It was sponsored by the fine people at Seattle King County Coalition on Homelessness (SKCCC), as well as many other generous beneficiaries. The first day was preparation for meeting the city council members to discuss topics of interest in the homeless community. We learned many new things about the patchwork of our city, some commonly known and some shocking to the ear.

The funding for homeless shelters and services is decided by the mayor. Council members are directly subordinate to him, and help propose where the money should be directed. Other sources of money included the federal government as well as HUD McKinney programs. Currently there is a $73 million surplus in our city, mostly due to the expansion of real estate downtown and the increasing amount of money received from property tax. The Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness plans to build 9,000 units of affordable housing, therefore decreasing the demand for emergency housing and ending people living in the streets.

What took place at the summit were the combined efforts of kids in the streets making a difference. We studied rigorously on how to talk to the council members, and brainstormed endlessly with what to say. A verdict was reached and the top six issues for discussion are as follows: 1. Better food at food banks, 2. Expanded services at drop in centers, 3. Bus passes for youth and young adults, 4. Work training, 5. Transitional housing with lower barriers and more age groups and lastly, 6. More shelters for young parents. Everyone divided into subcommittees and the tasks were allocated. Each group met with a different council member and requested that changes be made.

By the end of the day, everyone was exhausted but even more accomplished.

Charlotte Tucker, primary organizer of this event, concluded, “The summit was a beautiful thing. It brought together young people experiencing homelessness in different ways. It was an opportunity to share with each other, and people in the positions of power, to do something about it.” I think that Charlotte’s right and that this summit was a monumental step in the right direction.

Girls Flying High With Fitness

Rentia Baskin

Parents are always searching their community for the answer to the million-dollar-question: How can I keep my teenage girl out of trouble, healthy and with good grades? The answer to that question is school sports.

The reason I keep sports in my life is that I know that once I take it out of my life, I’m not going to be as motivated to do well in school. But, while sports are going on, I know that I have to keep my grades up if I want to play in all of my matches and games. Also, grades are one thing that coaches aren’t lenient about no matter how good of a player you are. No coach can allow you to participate in any extracurricular activities if you don’t have at least a 2.0 GPA (grade point average). I feel that being involved in sports has stopped me from getting into about three fights. I also stopped myself from arguing with my teacher and getting into other trouble around school because my coach is a teacher and I know that they all talk. So, every year at the end of the summer I have to give myself a big “attitude adjustment” compared to how I feel during the summer. Sports not only help me personally (with my grades and attitude at school), but it’s also a great way to get to know some of my peers I never thought I would actually hold a conversation with. It’s fun to learn how much I have in common with many different people. So, I guess you can say that sports help your social life grow as far as school goes.

“When sports season is going on, that’s when I get in shape because during the summer I don’t ever work out like my coach advises me to. I try to go running so that I won’t get the size that I was my 7th grade year before I really got into sports: I was overweight for my height and age. Since I was so young, everybody kept telling me that I was going to grow out of it. But, in reality, I just kept eating whatever I wanted and whenever I wanted. I didn’t believe in only eating three times a day; that was not enough food to last me a whole 24 hours. So, I stayed overweight until I got involved in the dance team in 8th grade at Aki Kurose middle school. Then, I began losing weight thanks to my instructor pushing me to my limits. Ever since then, I have been getting involved in as many physical activities as possible. Participating in sports keeps your blood pipes clear so that blood can circulate through your blood vessels properly. Also, girls that are constantly gaining weight sometimes have mental health problems and/or eating disorders. Not only does sports and constant physical activity help your health today, but it can really help you a lot in the long run. If you don’t want to try sports, you can also try the routine that has really grown to be a part of my daily lifestyle: instead of watching five hours of television every night I started out doing 45 sit ups and 65 crunches and now I’m up to 68 sit ups and 85 crunches. As long as you start off small and then go a step higher at your own pace, your routine will be sure to be successful.

I know it sounds too good to be true, but it is. Girls that are involved in sports are more likely to have good grades, less likely to get pregnant at a young age, and have healthier lives in the future. Youth might not be aware of this, but some of the major health problems for women are high cholesterol, high blood-pressure (both can cause heart-attacks), osteoporosis, diabetes and stroke. Many of these health issues can be avoided if we keep our daughters and ourselves more active and involved in sports from an early age.

Mockingbird on the Move

Youth representative Jessica Garcia celebrates her 18th birthday at the first annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit.

From left to right: Charlotte (45th Street Clinic), Julia (Seattle Human Services Coalition), Rachael (Rod Change), Stephanie (Northwest Network for Youth), and Raquel (Mockingbird Society) facilitate discussion at this year’s Homeless Youth Summit.

From left to right: Danielle Baxter (FPANS), Justice Bobbe Bridge, and Cheryl Stephan (Children’s Administration) listen as foster youth and alumni make regional presentations at Leadership Summit.

Mockingbird on the Move

Girls Flying High With Fitness
How Could You?

Louisiana

Andrea Roldan

I cry and I hide my tears from the world. In the corner alone Looking out the window Of the bus believing no one can see the pain Inside of me being uproasted and streaming down My face Then when the beat begins- My heartbeat; Tears flow like a remedy to my pain But my sour ocean won’t cure the Wounds Inside of me

Incurable, pt2

Andrea Roldan

All them things I got in my head When I close my eyes and I lay In bed I lay them to rest Don’t let it weigh me down Instead I lay it down cause When I close my eyes I let The pain subside Won’t let it keep me up I done that before I can’t do it no more Just wanna lie in peace Just wanna lie to sleep My issues I can’t even number But I stop counting before slumber

Incurable, pt2

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Insomnia

Andrea Roldan

It’s time to get focused. I can achieve these things by keeping work, church and school close to my heart. So far, the only issue that I have had has been from the opposite sex. After fleeing a domestic violence situation, this is very difficult. I have learned that in showing confidence in myself, others see the same, but some try to use it to their advantage. I’ve shed a few tears in this short period of time that I’ve been here because of the things that were presented to me from the start. Going along with lies for so long, you’ll eventually start to believe them. And, since the truth hurt (which it did), when it all comes to the table, all you can do is cry and the hurt that I feel behind the tears brings me to my third point.

The third thing for me is to STAY focused and get organized. Organize the things that I’m focusing on by managing my time, meeting deadlines, believing that what I’m doing is important and understanding that I’m not only helping myself but I’m helping others. I am starting to understand priorities, what comes first, what comes last and what just doesn’t matter at all. Who I am and what I stand for. When this is complete I can eliminate the distractions. Not saying that this is an easy step, but it is a step worth your while.

The Freshmen Fifteen

Sherrell Dorsey

Pizza during the late night dorm parties, top ramen meals and ice cream desserts. My roommates and I solved our dinner dilemmas with a pint of over-priced Ben and Jerry’s. Even though we danced and ran down 2nd avenue every now and then, we all returned home after our first semester with a few extra pounds and form fitting jeans.

By second semester, my roommates and I began to take our health a little more seriously. Because it was no longer 10 degrees outside we walked the 16 blocks from our dorms to our campus.

The new trend of the second semester was to get in shape for the summer. No one had the money to join the ever exclusive New York City Sports Club so we opted for a nearby recreation center. For $75 we got a full year’s membership to the weight room, treadmill, pool, gym and other equipment.

Staying in shape is important in college as well as eating healthy. Finding what works for you is the key to keeping your weight down and your energy up. Remember that the more you eat the more you’ll need to work to keep the weight off.

Mockingbird Times, November 2006

Creative Corner

You’re Something

Andrea Roldan

Your satisfaction is held in your arms and Your admiration in your eyes The music is new Make you dance Make you cry This young face That young smile is now A new age No longer a child

LaLa-La-La-La-

You hear it in your sleep You see it in your dreams While you’re awake You wanna scream your joy out loud Let the whole world know How proud you are Of someone else And you stare at yourself Content with what you are And what you’ve become so far So much more to expect You’ll receive no less than success Make breed to be What you couldn’t be But content you are, with who you are In your arms, your own heart Caressed by your own love Just to know that you are someone Like you hold a diamond: Shine Show the world what’s in your hands Show the world You’re something

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Staying in shape is important in college as well as eating healthy. Finding what works for you is the key to keeping your weight down and your energy up. Remember that the more you eat the more money you spend. Try eating at home. Finding great deals on grocery items are a must. Every other Sunday I traveled to Harlem to get cheap groceries. On Sundays there are many buy one, get one free items. Invest time in going to the library and getting cookbooks. The vegetarian recipes are great for cooking light and you can always add chicken or shrimp to any vegetarian dish.

Always carry a bottle of water with you instead of buying sodas. Food is so tempting. In New York there are so many vendors selling pretzels, hot dogs, kebabs and even egg sandwiches on the corner. Suing no is hard but your wallet will appreciate it and so will your body.

Being Successful in Life...

Maleka Taylor

...consumes a lot of time. It’s time well spent and I’m learning to love and trust my intuition. I’m a strong believer in holding on to your values. Although, sometimes issues present themselves in a manner that is unfamiliar, staying strong sometimes present themselves in a manner that is unfamiliar, staying strong is the key. Although the decisions that we make sometimes hinder us from the things we’re capable of, just remember that we go through these things only to make us stronger.

Referring back to the August issue of Mockingbird Times, I’ve found that since I’ve moved back to Portland, I’ve gained a new perspective on life. At this point, nothing matters to me besides these rules that will help me succeed. Also, being determined and loyal to my beliefs is helping me to just simply believe in me.

The first thing needed for me to succeed is for me to be willing. I am willing to love and believe in myself because the things that I want to accomplish are important to my well being. Despite the things that I’ve experienced, it’s just a stepping stone to my future.

The second thing is to get focused. I can achieve these things by keeping work, church and school close to my heart. So far, the only issue that I have had has been from the opposite sex. After fleeing a domestic violence situation, this is very difficult. I have learned that in showing confidence in myself, others see the same, but some try to use it to their advantage. I’ve shed a few tears in this short period of time that I’ve been here because of the things that were presented to me from the start. Going along with lies for so long, you’ll eventually start to believe them. And, since the truth hurt (which it did), when it all comes to the table, all you can do is cry and the hurt that I feel behind the tears brings me to my third point.

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The fourth thing for me is consistency: Being able to do these things on their own when I am alone as long as it takes to reach my goal. It can be difficult to give up the things that you enjoy to do like hanging out with friends, pleasure reading, or just relaxing and doing nothing at all, but I believe that for as long as you live you’ll understand that in giving your all into something that you trust is positive, you’ll then get all positive things out of it.

Last but not least; the fifth step: dedication. I am determined to get it done and give it my all as long as I follow these rules I have set for my life. I am ready and never felt as serious as I do today. I know I will sacrifice the things that I like to do in order to do the things that I have to do because I am truly dedicated and committed to beginning a new life for myself.

—Naomi Wolf

Mockingbird Times, November 2006