Mockingbird Times

Recipient of 2005 Congressional Angels in Adoption Award
Building a world class foster care system while serving our neighborhood youth.

November 2007

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation
Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsoc.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)

Volume VIII, Issue 11

NOVEMBER IS
NATIONAL
HOMELESSNESS
AWARENESS MONTH

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Second Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Summit

Second Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Summit by Andrea Roldan

October 20-21st was the Second Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Summit, held at the Cedarbrook Leadership Center in Seattle, Washington. The purpose of the Summit was to bring foster youth and alumni from around Washington State together to create One United Voice for Change, this year’s motto. Foster youth are youth who are currently in care and the alumni are youth who have aged out or are no longer in care. By participating in the workshops and groups sessions, youth were able to explore commonalities with other youth who have similar experiences in care or the system, develop individual leadership skills and further develop growth, expansion, and action within the six regional groups.

These groups formed the First Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Summit, and are formed into different areas of Washington State. The most important session that took place at the Summit was the regional groups’ presentations to the Washington State Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. Each presentation contained a specific recommendation for the Commission to take into consideration for the 2008 legislative session. The previous legislative session proved the Summit to be helpful; two of the biggest issues raised at the First Annual Summit resulted in a passing bill: Medical care for foster youth is now extended until the age of twenty-one and foster youth can continue to remain in care while attending school after the age of 18.

The youth prepared to give powerful presentations to the Commission by attending different workshops that honed their communicative skills. Youth discussed experiences in care with other youth—what worked and what didn’t work. They compared the numbers of those who have experienced common situations and challenges and focused on what recommendations would make the system work more efficiently. After thinking about how many common experiences foster youth share, the participants wrote down the amount of issues that need to be addressed within the foster care system. This will also help produce effective, more thorough recommendations.

Some of the most popular themes raised at this year’s Summit were: more social workers and smaller case loads; independent allowances for youth; fewer placements and family reunifications; more training and preparation for youth who will be transitioning; more funding for clothes, vouchers and resources; extending foster care benefits to kinship; care for those who are random, and inspection of foster homes. Most of these issues were addressed by the eight presenting groups.

Presentation and delivery to the Commission was intense because of the lack of time, but some issues received an immediate reaction from the Commission because of the large number of youth in the crowd who supported the idea. Figuring out the process for foster youth to obtain licensing from the Department of Licensing seemed to work well. This was my first time attending the Summit and I was excited to see the results during the next legislative session.

At one point during the presentations, I questioned myself and why I even attended the Summit. I thought to myself “Why do I work to change the system? I’m not in care anymore. I’m emancipated, I don’t receive benefits from the state, and any new bills that get passed for the foster care system won’t effect me. Why does my heart find fulfillment in advocating for foster youth?” For a moment I was saddened because I didn’t understand the importance of what I was doing and its role in my life. I looked around. I saw Jim Theofelis, The Mockingbird Society’s Executive Director, Naja Morris The Mockingbird Society’s Youth Lead Coordinator, my regional members and more than 50 foster youth from around the state advocating for themselves. At that moment I had an epiphany, “I know why I love doing this, why this is important to me.”

I have a younger sister who’s 15 years old. In a short amount of time she has found herself in a plethora of extremely dangerous situations on the streets. Addicted to heavy drugs, prostituting herself for money and drugs, sleeping wherever she can find a place.

SUMMIT, continued on page 3

The Elizabeth Gregory Home by Jessica Martin

In hopes of homeless women feeling supported and nurtured, the Elizabeth Gregory Home (EGH) in the University District has opened a drop-in center for women 18 and older. EGH is the only transitional housing program for women 18 and older in the University District and one of only 5 transitional housing providers for single women in King County. Not only that, but it serves the hard-to-place women—women with criminal histories, mental health and substance abuse issues, immigrants, and women with chronic health problems and permanent disabilities.

Within six months of opening, EGH was deemed a “critical community resource” by the Crisis Clinic’s Community Info Line. EGH is named in memory of a long time University Lutheran Church (ULC) member who was a lifelong advocate for women and children. In 2001, ULC’s congregation decided to support a housing program for women in transition. More than 75% of ULC’s membership supported EGH with over $250,000.

Having been open for just over a year as a transitional housing program, EGH has now opened a drop-in center to provide a safe daytime environment for women hoping to get their lives together. Homeless women are often forced to leave emergency shelters during the day and have no place to turn but the streets. The drop-in center provides women with access to basic human necessities like hot meals, clothing and hygiene banks, and laundry services. It also provides services like Internet access for things like job searches and a network of support for their journey off the streets. All of this should help enable the women to break the cycle of homelessness.

The EGH drop-in center anticipates serving 20 to 25 women daily between 350 and 700 women monthly. It is open 7 hours a week and is open to any homeless woman 18 and older in Seattle. Located in the University District, it will be the only day center offering services to homeless adult women in the area. But will be available to any homeless women in all of Seattle. The following are some other services available to young adults:

• University District Youth Center: ages 13-22, open M-Th 1:15-3:45PM. Services include: drop-in, food, clothing bank, interagency school, case management. 206-526-2992.
• Orion Center, Downtown: ages 13-21, open M-F. Services include: drop-in, food, clothing, interagency school, case management. 206-622-5935.
• Lambert House, Capitol Hill: ages up to 22, call for hours. Services include: GLBTQ drop-in, case management, showers, laundry, bus tickets, clothing, housing, medical referrals. 206-322-2515 x19.
• New Horizons, Downtown: ages up to 22, call for hours. Services include: counseling, employment education, drug rehab, mail and phone services, food, laundry and clothing and showers. 206-374-0866.
• Street Youth Ministries, University District: ages 13-22, open M, T, TH, F 7:30-9:30PM. Services include: showers, phone use, laundry, snacks, mentoring. 206-524-7301 x186.
• Rising Out Of The Shadows (ROOTS), University District: ages 18-25, open 7 days a week 9PM-8AM. Services include: overnight shelter, food, showers, laundry, clothing, 206-632-1635.
• The Landings, Bellevue: ages 18-24, open Sun-Th nights. Services include: overnight shelter, food, showers, laundry, clothing. 425-822-9349.
Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

This issue of the Mockingbird Times is yet another example of the courage and determination that so many of the youth we serve demonstrate each and every day. Several of the articles in this issue provide a detailed view of the world from a young person’s perspective. How many of us could not only tolerate what so many of these young people have endured but also continue to persevere striving to create a life that includes what they deserve—hope, support, and community.

I am so proud of Jessica for her courage to face issues head on. As a strategy to support her, The Mockingbird Society has agreed to ensure she continues to receive her regular paychecks while she is in treatment. Sam Martin shares the struggles of his senior year in high school but also makes it very clear that his determination and commitment toward his goals will ultimately prevail. Sam is an amazing young leader who has endured so much but yet continues to strive toward achievement and connection. All of the youth in this issue show us the way through their honesty and courage.

November is the month of Thanksgiving and I, like many of you, have so much to be thankful for. I am so thankful for all of the foster and kinship parents who each and every day give the “second efforts” to kids in their care. I am thankful for the state social workers who are continually asked to go the extra mile and often do so without others ever noticing.

I want to remind us that November is also the month of Veterans Day and, as such, I am so thankful to the men and women who have answered the call of duty and especially to their children and loved ones. I am so thankful for the children, youth, and young adults who enrich me and the quality of my life every day. Finally, I want to share with each of you how much I appreciate the support you have given to The Mockingbird Society and the kids and families we serve. Together we can build a world class foster care system. Happy Thanksgiving to you and those you love.

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdtimes.org

It’s time to prepare for the 2008 Legislative Session and Advocacy Day

What change would you like to see for foster and homeless youth? What message would you like to send to the legislature this upcoming year?

NOW YOUR CHANCE TO BE HEARD AND MAKE CHANGE

Please join us for our next ASK-Y (Advocates for System Kids and Youth) meeting on November 26th from 3:30-5 at the 2100 building, 2100 24th Ave. South, Seattle.

At this meeting we will be finalizing our agenda for the 2008 legislative session and preparing for our annual Youth Advocacy Day! Hope to see you all there!

For more info, please contact Lauren or Naja at The Mockingbird Society, 206-323-5437.

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.

My Senior Year, pt. 2 by Samuel Martin

It has been a very successful month in some ways and an unsuccessful one in others. I have been working on a lot of things inside of myself realizing that I thought I learned so much this month. I have made the mistake of putting all of my energy into one thing instead of managing myself equally. The good news for this month is that I have been the starting defensive tackle. On the bad side, I have put every ounce of energy I have into football so that I didn’t have anything left for school. This month has been very different. Unfortunately, the fire I had from last month isn’t burning as strong.

What’s off is that I had not been getting very much playing time in football. I almost quit, then I realized that I wanted to quit every single day. It takes perseverance to keep going. Since I came to that realization, I went to practice every single day for six weeks straight. Unfortunately, toward the end of the season, I had to miss a couple of days practice. All in all, I have been a starter, playing very well and doing very well. I need to do try to get to the next level. I am very glad of my decision of continuing going strong in football.

On Friday November 2, 2007, I played the last game of my high school career. It feels completely different. I have been torn between feeling upset and feeling complete because I have been physically hurt. I have suffered to my last hurt. “One more Friday night under the lights.” I have, unfortunately, not been doing as well as I would like in school. I have had a lot of trouble going to class, a common problem with a lot of high school seniors, and some college students even. Part of it is to do with my over commitment to certain things. I really am upset that I haven’t been going to school; I just need to get myself in the game again. I only have 4 weeks to get in gear. It hasn’t been easy. I am not doing work; I am just not taking it as seriously as I should.

I realize that if I don’t get great grades now, it will hurt my chances of getting into college and after doing so well in school now is not the time to start messing up. I also understand that I need to start managing my time better and only commit to what I absolutely know I can do.

I have a few words of advice for those of you who are also having some trouble with things like “senior-itis.” It is best to look at school in an optimistic light because even if you think it isn’t influencing your future, it really is. Colleges look at your course load and the difficulty of those classes. It would be a disservice to yourself to not finish strong your senior year. I know you have worked hard the previous three but now is not the time to mess up. I realize now in an optimistic light that I have been slipping up but I am going to look for help in other places which can get me what I need. This is another tip I would extremely suggest—Self-help is not all it’s cracked up to be. You can’t do it all on your own. There is nothing wrong with being independent but you also need to know when and how to find the help you need.

As you can see, I have a different issue this month. As I wrap up football, I am beginning to work on school and work a lot more. Now I have to see if I can do what I need to get the best grades I can while also learning how to manage my time and my energy. There is a lot going on but I think it will all work out. If any of you have any suggestions for myself, or information you think would be useful to other people my age, you can send it to The Mockingbird Society and I will use it to get to my best ability. Once I’m been slipping up but I am going to look for help in other places which can get me what I need. This is another tip I would extremely suggest—Self-help is not all it’s cracked up to be. You can’t do it all on your own. There is nothing wrong with being independent but you also need to know when and how to find the help you need.

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My Story by Rhonda Smith

Violence has affected my life in so many ways. My mom and I were talking one day about my dad because I’ve never met him so I wanted to know a little bit about him. She told me my dad was the meanest man she’s ever had. My dad use to beat up my mom. One day he stabbed her over a stupid argument. When my older siblings would try to get into the middle of the fights, he would threaten them. I’m so thankful I was not around for all that. When all the fighting was going on my mom was pregnant with me. That’s why I hate my dad and I’m going to be mad at him forever.

I got adopted when I was three years old. The first couple years were great until my adopted dad’s first wife passed away. He remarried to an evil lady. I don’t remember my adopted dad being violent before his wife passed away. But when he married this lady, he started hitting me and so did she. It wasn’t spankings that they gave me; I use to get bloody noses and deep scratches from day to day. This went on for at least six years. I hated my life and everyone in it. It was only a little kid who didn’t do anything to deserve to be treated like this.

I was sexually abused by my adopted brothers for three years, from age eight to ten. That is just about the worst thing that has happened to me and I would rather get beat up than go through one day of that again. Honestly, I would rather be dead. I was eight years old; I didn’t even know what was happening. Being scared to go to bed every night is really not cool because you know what’s gonna happen when all the lights go out. I’ve gotten pregnant sometimes I think it might have been easier if I were dead so I wouldn’t have to deal with the pain that I’m still dealing with.

Holiday Memories by Melissa Stringer

When you think of the holidays you think of getting together with family. You think of everything that you guys do together. You think of all the laughter, the games. Just everything you do. Whether it be the smell of the Christmas tree at Grandma’s with smell of warm apple pie, warm cookies, warm apple pie in the oven, or ham soaking getting ready to cook. Presents under the tree keep iv iving you that itchy feeling of wondering what’s inside of that paper. People are sitting there watching all the little kids making gingerbread cookies. And all you feel is love in the air. Those holidays are a time for love and memories from the past. When I think of the holidays, I always think of how great it feels to be with my family, the love I feel when I walk into a room full of people I care about.

I asked a friend what he thought of the holidays. At first, he was a little scared to answer the question but then he replied honestly. He said, “I don’t like the holidays. I never had a real one. I was always left behind. My family thought I was a mistake.” I felt horrible for him because I simply never had that happen to me.

Sometimes I find myself thinking of what the holidays really mean to someone and how they really treat people. When ever it gets close to the holidays I get this itchy feeling inside me knowing that I will be with my family really soon. The holidays always get the way. The holidays I was always of wondering to eat good food, or money, or presents at that. It’s about spending time with your family.

Saturday evening was exciting, memorable and funny. I met a lot of youth from different regions that I had a lot in common with. I spent a majority of Saturday hanging out with a few really memorable friends with people while participating in some of the activities offered. Exercising with everybody was really fun; we practiced the latest dances, gymnastics, even karate. Karaoke was next! No longer feeling relaxed, I performed with some of the people I had gotten to know pretty well and I think we did a lot of fun.

On Sunday though, as the time passed, the excitement faded because I knew that after our presentations I’d have to say goodbye to all the friends I had made. Because some were from different regions, I didn’t know when I’d see them again, if not at next year’s Summit. The fun new friends are the best part of the weekend really focused, professional and (because I didn’t know anyone except the Mockingbird Staff) reserved. I knew I had some important work to do that weekend, but I didn’t know I would also be able to have a LOT of fun. Factually, I can honestly say I’ve had in months. In the evening, when we had finished all the workshops, group discussions and initial prepartions for the next day, there wasn’t much time for other opportunities to have tons of fun and make friends.

My Path To Treatment by Jessica Garcia

I started using drugs when I was 14 years old. I took my first drugs because I had no control over my life and I had no control over the situation that I was in. When I was using, however, I would forget about all of my problems. When I was on drugs, I felt like I could forget about my life and being in foster care and it seemed like the best thing to do. Plus, everyone else used drugs and they seemed cool. They were going to make something of themselves right? I also felt like I was really cool because we had a gang and we all used drugs together. I felt safe and secure even when I was getting high.

It all came down, though, when I was hanging out with my so-called friends. Every thing seemed cool but people ran out of money and we had to do things like rob houses so we could get our next fix. Some people would do licks (just a little bit) so they could get high more often. Cops would question us and half of us had warrants so some of us would get arrested.

When it was time to come down from drugs, I would turn myself in and that would get me out of using so I was locked up for 30 days. I would come down off my high and be rude and agitated. I didn’t want to change my ways because nothing really had been any different.

While I was high, I and the people I kicked it with had all one thing in common and that was that we all liked the same drugs and we all went to the same school and we were friends if we didn’t use. Some of us grew up in bad situations and some of us just wanted the crazy life. When I used, I felt like I was on another planet and I could do just do about anything. Nobody could stop me or even touch me and what au thorities tried to do didn’t mean anything, it went in one ear and out the other.

Over and over I tried to stop using but I couldn’t. Somehow the streets kept calling me. I followed that call because I insisted the crazy life and the adrenaline rushes I would get from my high. I would run from my placement just to get that rush again. While I was on the run, I wouldn’t be with the same people I was with the first time I got high. I would end up with different people but they liked the same drugs and they liked to do drugs. I thought I had something in common with those people: we all used drugs for some reason or another.

I have now decided to stop using because of the life I keep liv ing is bad pattern. I do drugs not for good re asons but for bad. When things get a little hard and I feel like I can’t handle it then I use and fall right back where I was. I see people around me that I never thought I would see. I keep putting myself on this rollercoaster ride for no reason. I’m tired of lying to myself about how bad it is. I don’t see the benefit of being able to save money instead of wast ing it on stuff that in the end is going to kill me.

What scares me the most about going to treatment is that I’m going to open up the door to reality and I’m going to see who my real friends are and be able to see more clearly who and what I want around me. I’m scared to give up the bad people because I feel like that’s going to be most of the people in my life.

The process for treatment has been hard for me because I want to just say “No, for get this, I don’t need treatment.” I’m better and I can do this on my own.” But in reality, I have to wait and be patient and call the treatment center to see when my start date is. It’s hard but I have to do this.

My plan to stay clean is to drop anything and everything that I used to do, the places I used to kick it, and people I used to hang out with. I’m going to go to church and twelve-step meetings and stay away from clubs where I know I have gotten messed up on drugs. I’m going to try to find better ways to be clean such as exercising, volunteering at schools and food banks, going to work, and starting college.

My advice to people who want to stay clean is, get off drugs, and start life is to stop surrounding yourself with the people that keep you sick. Find better places to hang out. If it looks no good, stay away. It’s hard to stay clean, I’m not saying that it’s easy because trust me, it’s not. It’s really bad, talk to someone about getting into treatment and go to detox because you can help you find a place to go and help you get in faster.

Thank You!

Moss Adams; Anonymous; Judi Beck and Tobi Alberg; Virginia Beatty; Paul and Debi Brainerd; Kathryn Brooks; Karen Conwell; Doug and Jeri Donnelly; Wanda Herndon; Genevieve Heiler; Linda Johnson; Shelley Keir; Sara Lovely; Harry J. McCarthy; Mary Mining; Ann Reidnick; Sheila and John Scates; Don Stark; Cynthia Strong; Taybor; Mary Anne and Tom Thorrbeck; Susan Webb

SUMMIT, continued from page 2

Her story is unimaginable. We were both in care when we were young. I’ve grown up in unstable, unsafe environments. We are two very different young women and emerging from our pasts we have arrived at different places in life. All the people and services I’ve referred my sister to—both personal and professional, my family and others—have unani mously suggested that she become a ward of the state. But my sister has such bitter memories from our experiences and a liv ing fear of the foster system that had reputa tion that she refuses to be part of it and, instead, she runs. I assured myself that I advocate for foster youth and push for pos itive change for my younger sister; to prevent other children from being afraid of the system and, instead, be able to accept the support that it has to offer; and I work to help make what they have to offer to the best.

Having a deep, personal revelation, honing my leadership and story telling skills, and being with my reg ional group for the first time wasn’t the best part of the Summit. The best part was both a gift and a curse. I arrived at Cedarbrook and I learned to spend the weekend really focused, professional and (because I didn’t know anyone except the Mockingbird Staff) reserved. I knew I had some important work to do that weekend and
Motivation

Nyako Issei

Motivation, who am I? I am black and African; I come to this world from my mother. These people see me ask who am I and say “who are you to ask me such a question?”

Standing up to the fear of my little sister so I can protect her

I want to be strong

To take a bear and face them

Being strong means to me that I can punch back when somebody hits me

Being strong means to me that I can believe in anything that I want to do

Being strong means to me that I can stand up to the things I don’t believe in

Being strong means to me that I can tell the world that I’m afraid

Being strong means to me that I can stand up to the fear of my little sister so I can protect her

For the sake of my little sister so I can protect her

To let others girls know that I want to be strong

They can’t take advantage of me

I want to be strong

The Face of Homelessness

By Shanya M. Harris

At least once a day, I see a homeless person sleeping at a bus stop or curled up in a doorway of a business and each time I have looked away or kept walking, as if it were normal or not a problem. I didn’t try to offer or say to help the situation—not because I have never been homeless, I have been many a time, but because even though I was homeless I have never had to curl up in a doorway. I have always had somewhere to lay my head because I knew how to find such places. I had resources.

Today, I am wondering why there are so many people who have to resort to sleeping in bus stops, doorways, and other places where no human being should have to rest. I think that these people do not know about the resources that are available to them. The community should find ways to bring resources to their attention.

There are many types of homelessness and different types of people who endure homelessness. There is the runaway, the addict, the mentally ill and disabled, the immigrant, the ex-con, and the family. Each group of people goes through homelessness in a different way.

A young girl runs away from home for whatever reason and sleeps on a friend’s couch for a couple of days and ends up feeling like a burden. She turns to drugs and begins to try to make money independently. This girl might become a prostitute or a drug dealer or she might turn to stealing. Either way, she might end up in jail.

Jail is supposed to be a place where people go to rehabilitate so they don’t do the wrong thing again. It is the perfect place to save this girl from recurring homelessness. If the jail had resources to hand out like they hand out punishment; I believe there would be a smaller number of people being detained and a much smaller amount of people living on the streets.

The addict who has spent all he has on drugs is now homeless and all he is thinking about is more drugs. He steals something to pawn and ends up in jail. Jail gives probation and he is let out. He goes to the mandatory drug treatment but because he is also homeless, he cannot attend all classes, so probation is revoked and he is placed back into custody. This man may never have the will to change but before releasing this man, the jail, the probation officer and whoever else was involved with this man could have prevented wasted time and money and I think you should know me by now. I am a red rose, but I’m the roots that hold it up. Trying to see what life is going to bring me.

I sometimes feel the pain and I’m being hurt within, I can show it in my walk and body language. My card is telling the truth. I need to find myself a new nourishment source. I have the beauty of an African queen. I’m this daughter of a mother of lost love. Motivation, thinking of who am I. I know I’ve inspired and have confidence in the words I speak. I speak in good motivation, for I will speak more of what I know. Some people know me as a planner of an outgoing personality. I am a girlfriend of a hard worker that makes me love more. It is tough in our society to focus on my dreams. This is motivation, this is who I am and will be in the future.

The beauty of being straight forward is staying strong enough to know who you really are and telling the truth. Motivation, being nice is tough in a mean society. Motivation, I was sitting here listening to Soul Child speak of his poem about his identity. This had me thinking, do I really know where I come from and who am I? Speaking with confidence, thinking of what I plan to do with myself. I’m here, releasing the air I breathe within. What is it that I need to know? Can I reveal what’s next in my journey? Motivation.

Dad

Anna Gonzales

Dad: U say you love me. Why don’t you nourish it?
Dad: Why don’t you nourish it for me? Why didn’t you see you?
Dad: You think about me. Why can’t I feel it?
Dad: You say I look like you. Why don’t I picture it?
Dad: Why did you abandon me? I wanted to be by your side.
Dad: Why don’t u let me dance on your toes like ur daughter dreams of?
Dad: Will u be there when I get married? I’d love to see you.
Dad: I forgive u about the mistakes you’ve done.
Dad: I sometimes dream about having a dad and daughter dance. Why don’t u make happy?
Dad: I think about the good times we had together.
Dad: I love u with all my heart and soul.

Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.

~ William James