Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

November 2008

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Mockingbird Times

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Foster Youth Leadership Summit by Diomunique Walker

On October 25th and 26th, the Third Annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit was held at a retreat center in SeaTac, WA. This event offered current and former foster youth the opportunity to gain skills in using their voices to improve the foster care system. It was a way to connect with other youth in care with similar experiences and share our stories.

Three years ago, community members, foster youth and alumni got together to help encourage courage in youth to care for their voices to develop their voices. The result was a two-day leadership summit and, now in its third year, it’s still uniting the foster care community in making changes. “It made me realize that there are people with the same beliefs that we need to change the foster care system,” says foster youth Rikki when attending the 2008 summit. The first workshop of the summit was called What We Have In Common. It was a chance for everyone (youth, alumni, and allies) to get to know each other and see how similar we all were. It was surprising how many of us had similar experiences. Georgina Ramirez, The Mockingbird Society (MBS) Senior Youth Lead Representative and Resource Specialist, and Angie Cross, Director of Social Engagement and Communication for the Canadian National Youth in Care Network, were the facilitators. Angie Cross later facilitated a workshop on the history of the youth and alumni movement. The youth and alumni movement started ten years ago and since then there have been many changes in laws, policies, programs, and people. MBS Youth Lead Coordinator Kara Sanders and I led a training on foster youth rights. This was to make sure youth know their rights around court, personal safety, education, and placement/visitiation. It was a very fun and interactive way to deliver the information. Lawyer and alumna Julio Caran. Jill Malat of the Washington Defender Association, and Children and Youth Advocacy Clinic lawyer Kim Ambrose did a courtroom demonstration. I was a defendant so I got to see what it’s like when an attorney can do for care. The demonstration showed three different scenes of what you can accomplish first with no representation, then with a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) as representation, and, finally, with a lawyer as representation.

On Sunday morning, Kinship Care Alumni Samuel Martin and D’Artagnan “Ber” Leona Bill facilitated a workshop on the history of the foster care system. Youth currently in foster care and alumni of foster care gathered in October to lend their voices towards improving the foster care system.

A Kinship Care Needs Change by Ashlie Lanier

The majority of youth in kinship care are not being informed of the many resources and benefits that they are entitled to. Many youth have no idea that there are many scholarships and programs that could help them financially if and when they do, they receive little or nothing. This might have to do with Washington State’s view of kinship caregivers as non-licensed foster care parents which means they are not entitled to the same or as many benefits as licensed foster parents. This should be changed because any amount of financial support would help. Additionally, kinship caregivers are the ones who should be informed of available resources once entering the kinship care system.

From my perspective, I think that even though the information on my own custody or guardianship over a child is a relative, they are not obligated to do so. Just because they are a family member does not mean that it is their contractual obligation to do so. I also believe that the youth’s parents were supposed to do just like any other foster care parent should be entitled to benefits to get all the child’s requirements met.

I recently became another youth within the kinship care system and no one informed me that there are numerous community, state, and federal resources available to youth and alumni who only take care of expenses. I have only been in kinship care for a short amount of time but there’s no telling when I would have been informed if I did not research resources on my own.

In most cases, even though caseworkers sometimes claim that they give foster youth the decision to go with relatives or to be put into a different family’s home, chances are the youth did not have a choice. Many youth say that they started off in a relative’s house where they were happy then were removed because either the house was undersized or the relative couldn’t afford the youth living there. In similar circumstances involving a licensed foster parent, the foster parents would have, in all likelihood, access to and knowledge of many resources available to make sure that the family was stable and the youth well taken care of.

“I just wish they would keep in mind that the youth are looking for family, so they should remain within their family,” Samuel Martin, a former foster youth at Mockingbird Society (MBS) Senior Youth Lead Representative says. Samuel shared more about his life and how he was in kinship care for his first 18 years and had no idea he had any resources. He assures us how frustrating it was and still is for him. “I did not find out about my resources until joining MBS. Now I am 18, in college, and just trying to get by. Life could have been much easier and less nerve-racking if I had received just a little help.” Many young adults that are 16-21 are saying the same thing. Now that we are considered grown and responsible, the resources we could have had are no longer available to us and we are left out of luck hoping to make it on our own. However, resources within the kinship care system have been progressing. In 2003, Washington State Substitute House Bill 1201, Washington Youth Foster Care, confirmed that kinship caregivers are al...
I was an evaluator in.

The story above is not uncommon. Dependency hearings can be very intimidating. If your child was Miss Doe in the above scenario, wouldn’t you want her to have an attorney, especially since everyone else in the courtroom has one? For all youth in care, please speak up and let your voice be heard. If you do not understand what is going on, ask someone to explain it to you until you do understand. Be an active participant in your case because it is your life.

If you are a youth in care who does not know your legal rights or needs to learn how to advocate for yourself, please contact The Mockingbird Society or visit our Web site at http://www.FosterYouth.org to request a Life Advocacy 101 training.

Thank you!
Evangeline Anderson; Anonymous; Margaret Casey; Ros Ghans; Marie Hansen; Lonnie Johns-Brown; Jackie Kayali; Mary Cartwright Lorenzen; Suzann Marquess; Doug Palmer; Ann Rudnicki; Suzanne Shwager; Whitstitt Family Fund; William M. Jenkins Advised Fund

Meet the Staff: Amy Converse

Mockingbird Times staff took a moment to sit down with our new Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator Amy Converse to get to know her.

MT: What was your position before coming to The Mockingbird Society?
AC: I worked at a place called Communities & Schools. I was an evaluator in Chicago.

MT: What is your favorite hobby?
AC: I like to go backpacking.

MT: What attracted you to MBS?
AC: I talked to people who told me that this organization is well respected and influential.

Support The Mockingbird Society!

We invite you to join us in making a significant difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children, youth and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times. Please join us today!

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ATTORNEY, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In King County, all youth in foster care twelve years of age and over have the right to an attorney. In addition, the Washington Supreme Court Commission on Children Foster Youth and Alumni Summit wishes each of you a Happy Thanksgiving!

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, and connected 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.

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

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Mockingbird Society

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Operations Director: Ros Ghans
Mockingbird Family Programs Director: Dr. Wanda Hackett
Youth Programs Director: Tiffany Washington
Development Director: Madeleine Thompson
Executive Assistant: Lauren Beierl
Communications Coordinator: Darcie Gray
Administrative Coordinator: Kari Sanders
Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator: Amy Converse
Administrative Coordinator: Diana Clark
Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant: Milissa Morgan
Youth Administration Assistant: Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson
Development Assistant: Alicia LeVez

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Money Management by Joyce Camacho-Cruz

The importance of money management for youth is crucial, especially for foster children. It is important to set the basics of how to save money, buy savings bonds, or establish checking accounts. Having this knowledge right off the bat will be beneficial for them.

First and foremost, what is money management? Money management is the process of taking care of all financial areas including investments, budgeting, banking, and taxes. It is important to set achievable goals, get organized, cut spending waste, build a budget, and save money. There are even classes you can attend on saving, spending waste, build a budget, and save money.

For example, what is the money going to be spent on? The goal could be putting money towards college, that care you wanted, or an apartment. How can we set goals? The easiest way to set achievable goals is to get organized, cut spending waste, build a budget, and save money. There are classes you can attend for this kind of information.

Aaron Fox of the YMCA who works with youth on money management says, ‘Youth should be aware of what their money going to be spent on. The easiest way to set achievable goals is to get organized, cut spending waste, build a budget, and save money. There are even classes you can attend for this kind of information.

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Beware of how you manage your money and how it will affect you. Sooner rather than later, we must learn how to manage our money. A part of the process of saving money is the ability to save money. The money you save is the money that you can save when you have the money to save. When you have the money to save, you must save it. Beware of how you manage your money and how it will affect you.

The Young Money Management Curriculum (YMCC) helps you learn about finances. The money management curriculum has a 20-hour program of six one-hour sessions. You will learn how to manage your money and how to save money. The money management curriculum has a 20-hour program of six one-hour sessions. You will learn how to manage your money and how to save money.

Young money management training is often required for students who are enrolled in high school. The money management curriculum has a 20-hour program of six one-hour sessions. You will learn how to manage your money and how to save money. The money management curriculum has a 20-hour program of six one-hour sessions. You will learn how to manage your money and how to save money.

The YMCC helps you learn about the basics of money and what to do with it. The Young Money Management Curriculum (YMCC) helps you learn about finances. The money management curriculum has a 20-hour program of six one-hour sessions. You will learn how to manage your money and how to save money. The money management curriculum has a 20-hour program of six one-hour sessions. You will learn how to manage your money and how to save money.

SUMMIT, continued from page 1

important and empowering way without making ourselves too vulnerable or getting ourselves in trouble. I have been through the stage where I was where I was going to close it regardless of what I was going to do or did not do. I have been through a difficult time saving/calculating how much they’ve spent.” Speaking from personal experience with managing money, she chose to ignore it. She donated my money to the Humane Society.

“You don’t spend money, you don’t have money. Youth should avoid car payments and credit cards. The YMCA offers a program to help you learn about the basics of money and what to do with it. Beware of how you manage your money and how it will affect you. Sooner rather than later, we must learn how to manage our money. A part of the process of saving money is the ability to save money. The money you save is the money that you can save when you have the money to save. When you have the money to save, you must save it. Beware of how you manage your money and how it will affect you.

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Dont’ spend money, you don’t have money. Youth should avoid car payments and credit cards. The YMCA offers a program to help you learn about the basics of money and what to do with it. Beware of how you manage your money and how it will affect you. Sooner rather than later, we must learn how to manage our money. A part of the process of saving money is the ability to save money. The money you save is the money that you can save when you have the money to save. When you have the money to save, you must save it. Beware of how you manage your money and how it will affect you.

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If you have not finished your college education, there are always options. There are always options. You can always go back to school. In 2006, the Washington State Legislature doubled funding for the Kinship Caregivers Support Program (KCSP), Kinship Care Solutions Project, and the Kinship Navigator Project. Much information can be found at www1.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare.

The Mockingbird Society; Kelly Stockman-Reid, CASA

The Only Constant is Change by Rhonda Smith

Minding the spirit of these young people is difficult for this kind of information. They were selfish and used me for their own gain. They would always try to get a positive attitude about things but it just seems like when things start to go back on track, something else happens to stop us in our tracks. What I think is that everything will eventually get better because I have been through the stage in my life in many different ways before.

This is my last year of high school. I should be super happy but I am now in doubt about it. I guess my problem, just like a lot of youth in care and youth who have been through care, is that change is not a good friend of mine. I am not the best at dealing with it. I say I am trying to handle change, I have been told to change is a part of growing up. Last January, I entered Running Start, a college program for high school just to get something back in January but I had to drop them because it was all too much for me. So I left it a year fall quarter and, sure enough, I had to drop that class, too. I did some thinking and I think I figured out the real reason why I never finished: I am afraid of failure.

I have a lot of people in my life who want the best for me and try to push me to success. When I dropped that class I felt like I disappointed everyone who was proud of me. It was just me thinking of things I was doing wrong. I hit rock bottom and there were no arms wide open and a shoulder to cry on. As far as I am concerned, those people are family. They are the ones that make me smile. I am forever thankful to have people like that in my life.

As I said, I am 20 years old and still in high school. Most people my age have graduated or completely dropped out of school. I cannot and I will not drop out because that would mean the people who said I couldn’t and wouldn’t have won. I don’t want to be a foster kid statistic. I am going to graduate from high school. I am going to attend a four year college. Most importantly, I am going to be somebody in life.

Kim Ambrose; Anttono D. Bennett; Lynn Biggs; D’Artagnan “Bernard” Caliman; LJ Carnagey; Julio Carranza; Rocio Carrion; Connie Crane; Angie Cross; Debbie DiPietro; Brenda Gonzales; Annie Gonzalez; Sophia Koudiougiles; Molly Lawrence; Pablo Martinez; Ron Murphy; Cheryl O’Donnell; James O’Donnell; Lisa Predovich; Kyle Rapan; Heather Riley; Represenative Mary Helen Roberts; Maya Rowland; Angela Rowland; Cassandra Sachse; Grace Scartaccini; Kate Vaughn from Perkins Coke; Katie Winter; Natalie Wood; Justice Bobbie Bridge; Center for Children & Youth; Julio V. A. Carranza, Foster Youth Alumni; Stephen Hassett, Senior Counsel, Attorney General’s Office; Ron Hertil, OSPI; Sassi Jarvela, Foster Care Youth; Representative Ruth Kang, Serving north King and southeast; Aleksa Lazarewicz, Communications Coordinator, CASA; Judge Richard McDermott, President, SCJA; Joanne Moore, Director, Office of Public Defense; Cheryl Stephani, Director, Children’s Administration; Kelly Stockman-Reid, CASA

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Kinship Care, continued from page 1

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act will go into effect in 2010. This legislation has many significant improvements around maintaining and permanent placements with relatives. For a review of H.R. 6893 visit thomas.loc.gov.

For more information, assistance, services, referrals, and resources look for the following online: The Relative Support Services Fund (RSF); Foster Care Youth Support Program (KCSYP), Kinship Care Solutions Project, and the Kinship Navigator Project. Much information can be found at www1.dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare.

When My Frustration Takes Over...

Anonymous

I can't focus, I want to scream, I want to cry, nothing's fair. . .

Calm down,
This is a time when you feel like you're losing your mind.

Calm down,
You feel like no one understands you or the things you're going through.

Calm Down
Every day another problem pops up and you don't know if you can handle it.

Calm down,
Don't let stress or anxiety push you into depression, you've already been down that avenue and it turned out to be a dead end. . .

Calm down,
Just stop and think about all of the roads of support, your family and friends who helped you get this far.

Calm down,
They are still proud of you and are supporting you.

Just stop and think about all of the roads of support, your family and friends who helped you get this far.

Now get back on track, keep fighting, and push from a distance, you just needed a moment of clarity.

They are still proud of you and are supporting you.

I'm sorry, I won't be with you right now but we will be here when you return home. Also I want to thank my three role models for being there for me.

I'm thankful for all the help and support that I'm receiving. I know that if I wouldn't have had these resources and support I would have been struggling badly.

I want to thank everyone that lent me a helping hand, especially when I needed it the most.

I'm thankful and greatly appreciate them being here for me.

Now I feel bad because now I know that when I am older I will regret what I said to my mom.

Mom I was wrong, I just wanted you to give us love and forgive us.

Before

John Hemingway

Before I did my dumb little tricks, I was an average ordinary kid. I thought I was cool'cause a bunch of fools said so. But was I really? NO of course not, there is nothing cool or great about being a 16 year old fool with nothing more to look forward to except sitting in jail waiting for meal call. So if you think spending your childhood locked away having to listen to others tell you what to do besides your parents is the way to go then go ahead ruin your life throw it away. Because there is always a better way to live and be what you want to be. As long as you try and put your best foot forward you can win any battle in your life.

Meet the Staff: Ashlie Lanier

My name is Ashlie Lanier. I am 18 years old and I live in Kent, Washington. I am an intern from the YMCA in Downtown Seattle. Currently I am out of school but, hopefully, I will be attending community college next fall to help get me started with my goal of becoming an editor at a newspaper or magazine. In my spare time, I like to do things such as spending time with family and friends, shopping, writing, reading, and dancing.

My experience with kinship care seems almost nonexistent. I moved in with my cousin after having problems at home and the rest is history. I never even knew that there was a name or “system” for my situation. I had no idea that there were benefits that I could have received until interns at The Mockingbird Society.

That leads me to a big issue in today's society: Homeless youth and/or youth within the foster/kinship care system aren't given all the beneficial information that could prevent them from struggling once exiting. Some youth don't find out about all the scholarships and programs that could help them until it's too late. There is no telling the amount of homeless or foster/kinship care youth who are struggling right now from not being informed.

If I could change one thing about the homeless/foster/kinship care system it would be the re-entry window. I think that instead of only 6 months after leaving the system you should have up to a year to return to care if you change your mind. Say I leave the system right now at the age of 18, fresh out of high school and everything is going well. I have a home and apartment but I get laid off. What will happen to me?

Where would I go? This is exactly why I was wrong.

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