Youth Leadership on Display at Our 10th Anniversary Benefit Luncheon

BY DAVID BUCK

In addition, our very own Network Representatives Amanda Bevington and Deonate Cruz, along with Olympia Chapter member Chris Bauer were featured in a video filmed at our last Youth Advocacy Day. This personal piece focused on their lives, and the power they have shown through their work at The Mockingbird Society. Youth led the program, but adult’s efforts were highlighted as well. Executive Director Jim Theofelis took the stage to share the founding of The Mockingbird Society and its humble beginnings in the basement of the Richard Hugo house. He reflected upon the early challenges of the organization. There was a time a year after Mockingbird was founded, when he called his youth reporters together for a meeting. He explained that meeting that Mockingbird was out of money, leaving the young staff members devastated. However, the next morning, Jim received a message from Senator Patty Murray, who explained that Mockingbird would receive a large grant to fund the Mockingbird Family Model. At this point, Jim introduced a video featuring Patty Murray thanking The Mockingbird Society for ten years of effective advocacy and endorsing The Mockingbird Family model. Afterwards, several Network youth came up to express their thanks to Jim for changing their lives in such a positive away and presented him with an award: a plaque featuring the very first issue of the Mockingbird Times published in 2001, as well as the 10th anniversary edition published in August 2011. The plaque was signed by staff members, Network youth, Board members, and many others who have been touched by Jim’s compassion.

The climax of the event occurred when Georgina Ramirez, our Youth Development Specialist Georgina Ramirez delivered her powerful Keynote Speech. She told her story of being in Juvenile Detention, where, at least, Georgina felt safer than when she was with her foster mom. Although she faced many challenges, Georgina eventually found The Mockingbird Society, and felt empowered as a systems reform advocate. She told her story so that everyone in the room understood her strength and her inspiration for what she does at The Mockingbird Society, so that others would be inspired to do what they can to help future generations. Her story gripped us, and reminded us that even now as we celebrate 10 years, there’s still a lot of work that needs to be done for the sake of children in care everywhere. I’m happy to have an ally like Georgina Ramirez on our side to help pave the way for the future.

Bolsters Support for New Kinship Center with Mockingbird to

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdsociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)
Lawyers Fostering Independence Partners with Mockingbird to Help Youth

BY: BRENDA ORTEGA

Last month the Mockingbird Youth Network staff met with a great organization providing support for youth in care. The Center for Children & Youth’s Justice (CCYJ): Lawyers Fostering Independence (LFI) program is dedicated to assisting and advocating for foster youth and alumni with non-criminal legal issues. LFI is always looking to partner with the MBS to be able to reach out and connect to more youth in need of legal representation.

The legal help and resources that LFI provides are free for children and youth of care (ages 17-23). This means if you were in kinship care, group homes, or foster care in King County then they can assist you! The types of issues they deal with are civil issues, which include: sealing juvenile records, court fines, restitution, avoiding evictions, defending against illegal discrimination, dealing with property conversion, emancipation, public benefits, and many others.

Last month Cheryl Kleinman, who serves as LFI’s Program Coordinator, in addition to teaching at the University of Washington Law School, sat down with the current Mockingbird team to talk about what LFI was, and what role they play in helping youth in the foster care system. What Cheryl said LFI asked from Mockingbird was to identify ways that they could improve their outreach to youth and to brainstorm ways how they could spread the word about their program. Through the partnership with MBS, LFI wants to understand what it is that youth in care go through, and how Mockingbird can help. The lawyers have experience and knowledge with the legal issues, but they want to know more about working with youth directly. Since the MYSN is comprised of young and adult youth who have been impacted by the system, we are hoping to help bridge the gap and help spread the word about LFI’s services.

Based on my own personal experience with Cheryl, and in addition to the experiences of youth in care today, LFI is very accommodating to the often shifting circumstances youth face. They can give you a helping hand, and even if they cannot help with your particular problem, they often are able to connect you with someone who can.

Like MBS, Cheryl and LFI strive to make positive changes for foster youth and alumni of care. Both organizations also strive to advocate based on the needs expressed by the youth themselves, which makes this an ideal partnership. With so many legal challenges facing youth in care today, it’s comforting to see Mockingbird and other organizations like LFI for those who need support in dealing with legal issues. If you are a youth in care in need of LFI’s services please email them at lfiintake@ccyj.org or call them at (206) 696-7503.

We Welcome Your Work

We welcome submissions of articles, poetry, artwork, and photography from our young readers who have experience in the foster care system and/or homelessness. If you want to be published in Mockingbird Times or Mockingbird Society, please email the Managing Editor (you can find our contact information above), and include information about yourself, the artwork, or your poem. We are especially interested to hear about your experience with Mockingbird. We want to hear about the experiences you have, how you’ve overcome challenges, and how Mockingbird has helped you. We want to hear about what Mockingbird has taught you about life and the world around you.

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 (MBS) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization that provides free legal advice to young people in need of legal representation. MBS provides support and resources to young people who are involved in the foster care system, and even if they cannot help with your situation they want to know more about the experiences that you’ve had. The MBS is dedicated to helping young people navigate the legal system and providing them with the tools they need to be successful.

What 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? For the Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to nest and sing.

Meeting the Staff

Jim Theofelis, Executive Director
Ros Glan, Deputy Director
Cari Nash, Program Director
Trista Thorne, Youth Programs Coordinator
Fredrick Kingston, Director
Aine Cowan-Kuist, Youth Programs Coordinator
Brian Lawrence, Youth Programs Coordinator
Tiffany Washington, Youth Programs Coordinator
Jerry Bobo, Receptionist

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Each year the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute provides all U.S. Congress members with the opportunity to honor people or organizations in their community that are doing extraordinary work to improve the lives of the at-risk children and families involved in the child welfare system by nominating them for The Angels in Adoption Award. This year one of Washington State’s nominees hit close to home. Representative Eric Pettigrew, who is no stranger to The Mockingbird Society, has the honor of being nominated for this prestigious award by Congressman Jim McDermott.

Representative Pettigrew has done some phenomenal work in support of child welfare system reform. This includes sponsoring many bills that not only affect children and youth, but also those that have been in the foster care system and that have been adopted. He has been a co-sponsor on some of Mockingbird’s most significant advocacy priorities, including: Extended Foster Care, Independent Youth Housing Program (IYHP), Post-adoption Sibling Visits, and Health Care for Foster Youth.

Representative Pettigrew has definitely made an impact on youth through his work. The Angels in Adoption Award is a nice reminder that his hard work isn’t going unnoticed by the community. Being a Legislator for one of the most diverse districts in Washington State is no easy job, and it’s great to see him get the recognition we believe he deserves.

On behalf of The Mockingbird Society, I would like to congratulate Representative Eric Pettigrew on a well-earned award for his exemplary work within the child welfare system, and for all youth for that matter. Thank you for being a continuous supporter of Mockingbird, as well as recognizing, and listening to, the power of youth voice.

Eric Pettigrew is just one of our community partners who has been honored with this award over the last several years. The Center for Children and Youth Justice (CCYJ), founded by Justice Bobbe Bridge, was also honored with The Angel in Adoption Award in 2010. This organization does exemplary work for youth in the foster care system as well as the juvenile justice system in an effort to create balance so that foster youth and kids in the juvenile justice system have the same opportunities and support as youth in intact homes. Their work definitely coincides with our mission and vision at Mockingbird, so we have and will continue to proudly partner with CCYJ.

The Mockingbird Society’s very own Executive Director, Jim Theofelis, was also an honoree of The Angel in Adoption Award in 2005. It is no surprise that Jim was nominated for this award seeing as he has helped to inspire system reform on many occasions. So in the spirit of partnership and continued progress toward building a world class foster care system, we honor and thank Representative Pettigrew, as well as all our other “partner angels.”

Kinship, continued on page 4
creative corner
Sometimes I feel
by Diana Guzter

Sometimes I feel like I am nothing in this world because all the bad things I’ve done. Because of all the pain I put my mom through when I would run the streets at night. Because I let drugs and the gang life style take over who I was and I let them change the person I was. Sometimes I feel like crying. Because I see what I put myself through and I keep doing it. Because I want to stop but I just don’t know how. Because I miss the love and trust I had from my family but gave it up for a line, a bottle, or just a bit of a high. Sometimes I feel like going away and never being seen again. Because if I wasn’t here my mom wouldn’t be in pain anymore worrying about what I am doing or if I am dead somewhere. Because my sisters wouldn’t be put in danger worrying about the gang life. Walking out on the street and having the fear of getting shot. Rushed, or even killed just because they are related to a known gang member. Because I won’t have to watch my back 24/7. Because I won’t have to worry about the gang life, my sisters wouldn’t be put in danger worrying about the gang life. Because of all the pain I put my mom through. Sometimes I feel like there is still hope for me. Because I want to change and am doing my best to not do drugs. Be a thug or a druggie—I want to be a normal teen girl. Because a lot of people give up on themselves but never will I do that. Because the only thing in life that I want is to be sober and gang free; I just want to be as normal as I can.

kinship continued from page 3
responsibilities around the issues of non- parental custody, guardianship and adoption. The Kinship Center provides many different activities that are directed towards youth, as well as caregivers. These activities include:
- Support groups and tutoring
- Case management
- Educational, youth centered workshops
- Youth activities such as drill team and gum squad
- Outings, parties, and celebrations for Kinship Center youth and families
To get more information on this great new program, or if you would like to visit please feel free to stop in and say hi. The Kinship Center Program is located at the Central Area Senior Center on 500 30th Avenue S, Seattle, WA 98118. The contact number is 206-633-3601, direct emails to Kimberly at kinblyw@seniorservice.org or find them online at www.centralareaassetscenter.org/ program and services/kinship care.aspx. They are also on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TheKinshipCenter. The Kinship Center is open 8:30 am – 4:30 pm, Monday thru Friday, with extended hours of 10 am to 6 pm on Wednesday and Thursday. Drop-ins are welcome.

special thanks to D’Artagnan Caliman and Kimberly Walker for providing important information during the writing of this article.

chapter
region 1 north (Spokane)
Chapter Update
by William Mendosa
On October 19th, Sarah, Courtney and I had the opportunity to go to a DSHS Town Hall meeting led by Secretary Susan Dreyfus. The impact of the great recession and the further budget cuts in Washington was on the agenda. They informed us of Washington’s plan to have to cut another 10% in DSHS services which would be $573 million and would have to be cut before our biennium is up in 2013. The funding the government has worked to protect included programs to help children in care achieve permanency, and programs which encourage independence for clients with functional and developmental disabilities. The government is thinking of reducing/eliminating programs that support children in out of home placement. There is also reduction in state funding for vocational rehabilitation services. Another big hit could affect benefits for immigrant and undocumented children. Since July of 2009, DSHS has experienced $22.1 billion in cuts, with 90% of those cuts impacting programs and services. (Department of Social and Health Services, September 2011)

region 2 south (Seattle)
Chapter Update
by Lakeisha Scharner
The YMCA’s Member Advisory Committee (MAC) and Mockingbird Society’s Region 2 (Stay True) Have Been Partnering together since September 2011 to empower young adults to take on leadership roles, advocate for positive change, and build community. In the months to come we have a few different events coming up, which are The Boo Bash, The Annual Young Adult Services Thanksgiving Feast, and The Culture of Foster Care training. In November we will be partnering in two events. The first is on November 10th which will be the Culture of Foster Care Training. The purpose of this training is to put the audience in the shoes of foster youth and see what it is like to experience feelings associated with care. The Second event is on November 7th which will be our annual Young Adults Services Thanksgiving Feast. This event invites Center Members to come and enjoy great food and people as we honor Thanksgiving Days that are celebrated throughout the world.

Region 2 south (Everett)
Chapter Update
by Janelle Braxton
This month I represented HEYMAC at a Youth in Leadership and the Arts event hosted by Seattle Art Museum. There were six exceptional youth panel speakers discussing how art has become incorporated with their life and how it changed them for the better. They all represented art in all its forms, including acting, music, painting/drawing, and poetry. Their interactive personalities made the entire room recognize the importance of art being a part of everyone’s life. As one panelist said, “Art allows you to individualize and express yourself.” This session looked at the critical role of youth voice and mentorship in the arts. This session looked at the critical role of youth voice and mentorship in the arts.

region 2 north (Tacoma)
Chapter Update
by Tramana Oliver
This month’s chapter meeting was Halloween themed. Our Resource Specialist surprised us with decorations all over the walls with Frankenstein’s and ghosts as well as pumpkins and little creepy crawlers. Though it was all fun and games in the beginning, we got down to business and brainstormed some new topics for next year’s Youth Advocacy Day and Leadership Summit. And we also decided what we wanted to do for our next Community Service, which was to give people in our community goodie bags filled with personal hygiene items. Our next chapter meeting will be November 9th at PCA from 3:30-5. Hope to see all of you there.

region 3 south (Olympia)
Chapter Update
by Mandy Urwiler
Greetings from Region 3 South Olympia! On October 4th, we had fun at a Life Advocacy 101 (LA101) training at our host agency, Community Youth Services. At the LA101 training, Fred Kingston, the Mockingbird Youth Network Coordinator, and Tiffany Washington, the Director of Youth Programs, taught us how we can advocate for ourselves in our daily lives as youth in foster care. They showed us that something as simple as asking our foster parent to let us go to a party is advocacy, if you do it in the right way. When you tell your teacher what you need to succeed in a challenging class, that is advocacy too. The training taught us to use communication tools like body language, confidence, respect, and a positive and determined attitude to make it easier to advocate for ourselves in everyday life. Remember: Advocacy is speaking up for what you believe in!

sadly, that evening we also said goodbye to our Resource Specialist, Graham Parrington. In November, we will be hiring a new person to take his place. This will be a slight transition, but I know we can do it!