Introducing The Mockingbird Network by Samuel Martin

Earlier this year I wrote about “The Network,” which is now known as The Mockingbird Network. The idea is to have statewide youth-driven chapters in all 50 states and the D.C., to develop young leaders in the world, as well as for them to realize that they can make this world a better place step by step. One of the biggest lessons I have learned at The Mockingbird Society is that it’s not about me, it’s about the other kids that will come through foster care. “How do I help them?” is a question I constantly ask myself.

Later this year the statewide chapters will begin having meetings and doing activities in their local communities. We are currently working on the logistics and have established host agencies and resource specialists in regions around the state. We have five chapters up and running this year. What has made this all possible were three grants we received from Casey Family Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and most recently the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

At this time, we have established five out of six host agencies, a local organization in every region that has partnered with the Mockingbird Society (MBS) to form The Mockingbird Network. The host agency’s responsibility is to provide meeting space for the youth representatives and the Resource Specialist. The host agencies are Casey Family Programs – Region 1, The Mockingbird Society – Region 4, Pierce County Alliance – Region 5, and theYWCA in Vancouver – Region 6.

A Resource Specialist is a part-time employee of MBS and the host agency. His or her primary responsibility is to recruit youth and ensure stability in the chapter. Early on they will be responsible for leading meetings and guiding things along so that the young people can maintain youth leaders with the tools and abilities that they need. They are also responsible for helping to get youth started in the chapter meetings. They basically make sure all things run smoothly. Five of the six Resource Specialists have been hired as well: Tammey Soderberg – Region 2, Eva Ervin – Region 3, Nicholas Ruff – Region 5, Heather Jones – Region 6 and our own Georgina Ramirez, the Resource Specialist for Region as well as the Senior Youth Representative with Youth LEAD.

The biggest thing that will put The Mockingbird Network in gear is The 3rd Annual Youth/Adult Leadership Summit, where youth from around the State of Washington can come and meet other foster youth. It is an opportunity to develop leadership skills as well as find out that they are not alone. My first year at MBS I went to the summit and it was very powerful. I remember speaking.

NETWORK, continued on page 2

MB Times Youth Reporter Returns for Internship by Shakaura Felder

After an extensive but productive second year at Bethune-Cookman University, I wanted to do something meaningful and couldn’t find anything more enjoyable than spending a portion of my summer vacation with The Mockingbird Society (MBS). Throughout my brief stay, I found myself entirely reminiscent. My mind constantly traveled back five years to the time when I was first introduced to the organization through the Seattle Youth Employment Program (SYEP) in 2004.

Having faced many obstacles growing up in a single-parent, low income household as a person of color, things weren’t so easy. My family and I were often faced with hardships that seemed almost insurmountable. I am very grateful that programs such as SYEP and organizations like MBS provide outstanding opportunities to the disadvantaged. Being a part of the organization has been a great privilege and an enriching experience as I continue to strive towards greater success and academic achievement.

While studies and statistics tried to limit me to a world of hopelessness and failure, I was able to beat the odds by proving them wrong. I wasn’t prepared for the amount of rejection that came with the college admission process and I suffered from a great deal of disappointment, but I now realize that those things made me stronger. I became worried because my family had no way to fund the education of my twin sister and me. Then, an opportunity struck. I was blessed with a full academic scholarship upon graduation during my senior year of high school in 2006. From then on I knew the possibilities were endless, and I never wanted to make the mistake of forgetting those that supported my efforts in the pursuit of accomplishing my future aspirations.

MBS gave me a chance to share my joy of writing throughout the community as well as abroad. The experience has definitely widened my perspective of life as I gained skills to better my future. Through them I have been able to experience the values of compassion, leadership, teamwork and networking. Although the office is now renovated and occupied with a fresh set of adventurous, determined staff, I still keep the same principles with the same unique mission. The happiness, laughter, and encouragement in the Youth LEAD department fills me with warmth and makes me feel like I have never left. It’s amazing to see the tremendous growth and expansion that has taken place over the years. I am glad I’ve been given the opportunity to contribute my skills for a good cause and I am proud of the growth that I’ve been a part of as much as a positive influence and inspiration as MBS and its many staff have been to me.

To the youth, I would like to say that no matter what: always believe you have gone through in life, never give up. Use your struggles as strength to motivate and excel. Thanks to everyone and happy anniversary!
**Mockingbird Times, September 2008**

**Letter From the Editor** by Jim Theofelis

Happy September! I want to begin by saying how appre-ciative I am of the staff and Board of The Mockingbird Society. As you can see from this issue of the Mockingbird Times “we really have it going on.” We are busy planning the annual Youth Summit which is co-sponsored by Casey Family Programs, Court Improvement Program, The Center for Children and Youth Justice, and Children’s Administration.

We have youth from across the state ready and eager to come together for a two day Summit to focus on improving the Washington State child welfare system.

Additionally, The Mockingbird Network continues to develop including having established Chapters in five of the six Children’s Administration regions and the Resource Specialists to support the Chapters are hired and onboard. As part of our mission, we want to provide meaningful resource guides to youth and alumni of care and, with that in mind, I am pleased to report we have completed the long awaited Foster Rights Manual and expect that to be released very soon. The manual will be in both hard copy form as well as on the MBS Web site.

**NETWORK, continued from page 1**

specifically there was an activity called “What we have in your life. Are you taking the responsibility to create change? If you believe in what I am saying and believe in what MBS does, come get involved. There are so many opportunities, we need your help. I took a stand long time ago to take on this responsibility. I don’t know where my life would be if I didn’t do this work, not just for the youth but for myself. Now I ask you one more time to get involved and help make the lives of some of the most unsupported youth better.”

I want you to think about what choices you are making in your life. Are you taking the responsibility to create change? If you believe in what I am saying and believe in what MBS does, come get involved. There are so many opportunities, we need your help. I took a stand long time ago to take on this responsibility. I don’t know where my life would be if I didn’t do this work, not just for the youth but for myself. Now I ask you one more time to get involved and help make the lives of some of the most unsupported youth better.

The Mockingbird Society: The Story Behind the Name

The 1982 American classic To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee is the inspiration for our name, The Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jim 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 rest and sing.

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!

**A Vulnerable Population At Risk** by Delilah Bruskas

Losing family through foster care is a traumatic experience and I believe that children in foster care deserve support and guidance during their time of distress. This is one of my core beliefs and my life’s mission. As a nurse and alumna of foster care, I believe that foster care interrupts children’s developmental stages of childhood.

I wrote about my beliefs and my convictions in a paper titled: Foster Care Children: A Vulnerable Population At Risk. I was thrilled beyond belief to learn that it was accepted for publication in the Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing. My work was accepted on Mother’s Day of 2006. I told everyone I knew about it, but nearly two years later, I was still waiting for it to be published. I did not realize that an accepted work could take so long to be published. After a while, I felt like a “broken record” and thought others might doubt my claims. Honestly, I was discouraged more than once and feared that my article would not be published. When it finally did get published, after being bumped another three months, I could not believe it. But the best part was realizing that it got published in May, the National Foster Care Month. I felt like God was smiling or winking down at me. It was so much better than I could have published back when it was supposed to be published in February.

The person who designed my Web site helped make the lives of some of the most vulnerable children and youth interrupts children’s developmental stages of child-care, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment as Atticus had for mockingbirds. Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to rest and sing.

Thank You!

KAREN COWGILL; M. GOINES; SANDY HOWARD; POINT B SOLUTIONS; DR. DOANE RISING; ALAN ROTHBLATT, MD; T.I.P.S.; CASY TRUPIN; ELIZABETH UPTON AND RAYBURN LEWIS

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About Us: The Mockingbird Society is a 501c(3) nonprofit corporation developing innovative models for improving the outcomes of foster care, while advocating with decision makers for system reform. All contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. Please consult your tax advisor regarding your gift tax situation. The Mockingbird Society is a highly respected, subject of newspaper and magazine articles and is considered a leader in the field of children’s developmental stages of child-care, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth were protected and valued with the same commitment as Atticus had for mockingbirds. Join The Mockingbird Society today and help us give young people a safe place to rest and sing.

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**Thank You!**

KAREN COWGILL; M. GOINES; SANDY HOWARD; POINT B SOLUTIONS; DR. DOANE RISING; ALAN ROTHBLATT, MD; T.I.P.S.; CASY TRUPIN; ELIZABETH UPTON AND RAYBURN LEWIS

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Mockingbird Goes International by Georgina Ramirez

I met with Torell Sarey, a youth in foster care in a home that is a part of the Mockingbird Family Model, who recently visited Cambodia. He is fortunate because he got to experience his own culture and spend time with his biological family. His foster mother, Elaine, gets along pretty well with the family and that makes a difference.

“My grandmother tries to take one grandchild [of 30] per year [to Cambodia],” Torell said. Making this possible was not easy. “We had to get my biological mother’s permission, the court’s permission for taking a foster child out of the country, and a medical release.” When the obstacles were overcome, Torell went on his sixteen day trip to Cambodia. He visited Siem Reap, Phnom Penh, and a village near Thailand.

He noticed some cultural differences. “They were a lot less materialistic and they couldn’t believe I was American.” In the Cambodian culture, many of the possessed sessions that we care about do not really matter to them, for example their top priorities are not cell phones and iPods, like most Americans. Also, he noticed that a lot of Cambodians wear long sleeves for working in the fields to prevent tanning. To them, being in a position of power in status you’re considered. If you can imagine how hot it is there, wearing long sleeves while in the sun is showing dedication to this cultural standard.

For Torell, this trip was historical, cultural, and even emotional. After he visited the “killing fields,” this excerpt from his journal shows the sensitive side of the trip.

Mockingbird Family Model Foster Youth Torell Sarey and his foster mom ride an elephant while in Cambodia.

and their remains left. Over the course of the four years Pol Pot was in power, over 2,000,000 Cambodians died under his rule. Pot’s inspiration came from China’s Communist Cultural Revolution executed by Mao Zedong.1

Torell’s family was among the many Cambodians who fled the country in fear of the take over. His family fled to a refugee camp in Thailand. They stayed in the refugee camp until they could all leave together to go to America, which ended up taking around three years. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) was the organization that helped get them here. Torell and his 29 cousins are the 1st generation of his family born in America.

Mockingbird Family Model Foster Youth Torell Sarey and his foster mother.

Mockingbird Times, September 2008

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit

October 25 & 26, 2008

Current and former foster youth ages 14 to 24 and their supporters will:

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Learn to use your voice effectively

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Identify pressing issues to discuss with state policy makers.

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If you have any questions, email: leadershipsummit@mockingbirdsociety.org

Mary is ready to transition to helping graduate from college. She also provides leadership to Governor’s Scholarship Program for Foster Youth and Make it Happen, a college experience program which occurs each summer for foster youth. She received her Master’s degree in social work in 2002 and has always had an interest in the well-being of children all around the world.

Having spent over seven years in foster care, “I learn new ways it has impacted me everyday,” says Mary. Being in foster care helped her handle changes and challenges with ease. Being in a job with advocacy is second nature to her as being in foster care, she, as well as most young people in care, always had to advocate for herself. Mary also handled an issue that is a trust issue which is commonly found in youth who have been, or are in care. When I asked how foster care has helped her, she said, “It has given me the ability to access people clearly, not in a judging way but getting a good sense of their character.”

Mary has been in foster care, still became successful. She didn’t let it stop her from following her dreams. She reached her career goals and decided that she is ready for the new challenges that she will face in Latin America.

As a role model for youth (especially youth in care), Mary shows that you can do anything no matter what your circumstances are. “There are so many resources available in Washington State and there is no reason for youth not to follow their dreams,” she says.
Sad Times
SAMANTHA MCDONALD

I've been pushed down...
Slapped around...
Neglected...
But I still try to keep on going...
Going where she didn't want me...
She didn't think about how her children would feel...
She didn't even think about herself...
She just tried to forget the pain by drinking...
Every night she'd come home and pick up a glass
Filling it up with whiskey...
The stuff people think gets rid of pain,
But it only creates more.
The stuff I know I hate...
I've been cheated,
Locked out...
Lied to...
But I know I'm going
Where she isn't...
I'm going where she didn't
Want to go, because
I'm going where she isn't...
And where she won't be...

As Time Goes On
ASHLEY ABBOTT

As time goes on, you will realize that it’s not all about you.
As time goes on, people will realize that it’s not all about the street.
As time goes on, you might just be in the wrong place at the wrong time.
As time goes on people are going to change their ways on doing things.
As time goes on you will know that your life is not going to change when you do not want it to change.
As time goes on you will realize that when you’re with your friends you might have to choose the right path.
As time goes on there will be a change with every single person in the world.
As time goes on you will know that your life will not change if you do not want it to.
As time goes on everyone’s that’s in a gang will realize that there are bigger and better things to do with your life and those around you.

Wanted
Ann Cosgrove

I’ve always wanted to be somebody in the future
My dreams are just getting bigger.
I’ve always wanted a family with me.
Why did you leave me all alone?
I’ve always wanted a brother beside me
To guide me and take care of me.
I wanted to fit in but you pushed me.
I thought making a choice will make it better.
I wanted an education and that’s why
I became intelligent.
I wanted to make my family happy, and
It worked, but
Not for so long.
Wanting a lot of things to come takes time and commitment
But face it,
Its okay to feel wanted because now
Here it starts.
Don’t let WANTED fear you at all.

Love is Hard
JOHN HEMINGWAY

Love is hard, why we ask must something so simple is so complex, love is something so big but yet so small at the same time. We all spend our lives searching for our one true goal in life, to find love and hold onto it for the rest of our lives; we go through pain, anger, and remorse to see if this is the one we want to be with. That is why love is so difficult but when the day comes and you find the one you love all the happiness in the world will become yours.

Homelessness in Seattle
BY RHONDA SMITH

Homelessness in Seattle is a really big problem. Living in the heart of the University District I come across homeless youth on a daily basis. I always think to myself, “What can I do to help these young people?” I realize I cannot do much by myself but I can introduce these youth to a couple of organizations that can and want to help them. Believe it or not, this city cares about the homeless youth community and offers a range of programs to help them. “People do care. Clearly that’s why there are advocacy days and ASK Y meetings that the government supports,” Yuka Hayashi, a University District Youth Center (UDYC) case manager who works with homeless youth says of the positives in King County around homelessness issues.

According to the 2008 One Night Count by the Committee to End Homelessness in King County, there are 618 homeless youth locally. Why are there so many homeless youth? Yuka believes that there is not enough affordable housing and jobs that pay a living wage available to youth. Leona Bill, a homeless youth and The Mockingbird Society staff member, says that although there are a lot of resources available it is the age cutoff that is keeping a lot of youth from accessing those resources. Leona says the biggest barriers to getting into housing are having a criminal history and not having a job.

Some programs that were recommended that homeless youth should look into for resources include UDYC, The Center in the 2100 Building, New Horizons, Orion Center, and others. All these places are there to help homeless youth with their education goals, to obtain employment and housing. They all provide clothing and most of them provide up to three hot meals a day. They also provide counseling, case management, drug and alcohol counseling and many other services. UDYC offers employment and schooling. I attend school there and went through the employment program with wonderful teachers who do care and work hard to help students succeed.

UDYC also offers a drop in center where they have clothing and food, movies, and case management. The Center, located in the 2100 Building, works more with foster youth or youth who aged out of the system as a lot of kids who age out of foster care become homeless. The Center provides Independent Living Program (ILP) case management and help with school and housing. Orion Center is part of an organization called Youth Care. They provide schooling, transitional living housing, employment opportunities, a school, counseling and much more.

I have been in unstable living conditions and I was thankful that someone gave me information to better my situation. That’s the point of my article: to try to better a homeless youth’s life even if it means, at the very least, finding one of these programs to have a meal or some one to talk to.

In general, foster youth thought lawyers are to defend their clients views and then don’t...and they mainly had no idea what a CASA/GAL is.

The Mockingbird Network Meets the Washington Defenders Association
BY ROBERT PARKER

Foster youth from The Mockingbird Society and The Mockingbird Network (MBN) chapters in Tacoma and Seattle joined the latest MBN chapter from Vancouver, called SPEAK UP!, in meeting with people from the Washington State Defenders Association (WADA). The WADA wanted to hear from foster youth and alumni in order to improve how our opinions are defended within the system and in court.

Around the room they had placed large sheets of paper on the wall. There were a total of four, one for each role in the court system: lawyer, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)/Guardian Ad Litem (GAL), judge, and social worker. Everyone then received sticky notes and wrote what they thought each position does. These were collected and placed on the proper paper on the wall. In general, foster youth thought lawyers are to defend their clients voices and if they don’t, they feel case workers are there to support you and visit you or take you out to eat, etc., judges are there to make the final decision that screws your life up as much as possible and they mainly had no idea what a CASA/GAL is.

Then the foster youth broke into groups and each group was assigned one of the positions. The groups were asked to come up with five things they thought that position should do whether it’s something they do or not. WADA collected the information and then began to explain what the positions jobs actually are along with a foster child’s court rights, which a surprisingly few people knew about. This was followed up by foster youth asking questions about why they didn’t receive a lawyer or get to go to court when they repeatedly asked to go. They also wanted to know why they often don’t even know their CASA/GAL, a person who is making suggestions about what’s best for someone who they have never even met?

After WADA gathered this information they talked about a few future possibilities. One would be changing court dates so that all foster kids who age out of foster care become homeless. The Center provides Independent Living Program (ILP) case management and help with school and housing. Orion Center is part of an organization called Youth Care. They provide schooling, transitional living housing, employment opportunities, a school, counseling and much more.

If you would like to RSVP to attend, or are interested in Event Sponsorship or volunteer opportunities, please contact Darcie Gray at (206) 407-2136, or by email at darcie@mockingbirddb.org

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