

# Mockingbird Times

FOSTER CARE AND HOMELESS YOUTH SPEAK OUT ACROSS THE NATION

September 2008

Building a world class foster care system through collaboration, innovation and advocacy.

Volume IX, Issue 9

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## 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 to allow youth to grow individually, improve their local communities, and to help with system reform in the statewide child welfare system. An example for improving a local community is where the youth might build up a park that has been trashed for years. They would fundraise as well as ask for support from the local neighborhood businesses and people to help improve that area. The theory behind the network is 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 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 regional chapters. We are currently up and running this year. What has made this all possible were three grants we received from **Casey Family Programs**, **The Stuart Foundation**, and most recently the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation**.

Out of six host agencies, a local organization in every region that has partnered with

the primary responsibility is to provide meeting space for the youth representatives and the Resource Specialist. The host agencies are **Casey Family Programs—Region 2**, **Youth Net—Region 3**, **The Mockingbird Society—Region 4**, **Pierce County Alliance—Region 5**, and the **YWCA in Vancouver—Region 6**.

A Resource Specialist is a part-time employee whose 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 at the same time training youth leaders with the tools and abilities that they need. They are also responsible for helping to get youth to chapter meetings. They basically make sure all things run smoothly. Five of the six Resource Specialists have been hired as well: **Tammy 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 a Senior Youth Representative with Youth LEAD.

The Mockingbird Network in gear is **The 3rd Annual Foster Youth/Alumni 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 and to share experiences. The summit and it was very powerful. I remember spe-

my 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 a Senior Youth Representative with Youth LEAD.



## MB Times Youth Reporter Returns for Internship BY SHAKURA FELDER

After an extensive but productive second year at Bethune-Cookman University, I wanted to do something meaningful and couldn't do a portion of my summer vacation with The Mockingbird Network. I found myself entirely reminiscent. A major part of my summer was spent in the organization through the **Seattle Youth Employment Program**.

Having faced many obstacles growing up in a single-parent, low income household as a member of a family and I were often faced with hardships that seemed almost insurmountable. I am very grateful for the 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.

A major part of my summer was spent in the organization through the Seattle Youth Employment Program. Having faced many obstacles growing up in a single-parent, low income household as a member of a family and I were often faced with hardships that seemed almost insurmountable. I am very grateful for the 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.

To the youth, I would like to say that no matter what circumstances you may have gone through in life, never give up. Use your struggles as strength to motivate and excel. Thanks to everyone and happy anniversary!

## Kinship Caregivers Have Fewer Resources BY JULIAN BARRINGTON



Kinship caregivers are entitled to the same resources as licensed foster caregivers. This is where the primary distinguishing factor between kinship care and formally licensed "formal" foster care providers comes into place.

One thing we do have to remind ourselves any time we are talking about kinship care providers is they become caregivers unpredictably, often without legally-recognized, written consent from the biological parent. "I don't have legal custody of my children, but when their mother was sick she signed a TANF document saying she was giving her kids to me," Anetrice a kinship caregiver of two explains. Linda talks about how she lost her daughter and that how her kids are the only piece of her daughter she has left.

The unpredictability factor is a sudden shadow that falls upon kinship care provider families. According to the 2002 Kinship Care Report to the Washington State Legislature, people become kinship caregivers due to the mental and physical ills of the biological parent such as serious illness, incarceration, homelessness, mental health or chemical dependency problems which cause them to be unavailable and frequently unreachable.

Without parental permission, kinship caregivers are not recognized as licensed foster caregivers and aren't entitled to the same services through DSHS programs. Caregivers on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) have access to considerable fewer resources.<sup>1</sup> Anetrice has experienced this situation. "I receive \$180 a piece for each child," she explains. "I only get \$700 under TANF and it's so sad because yesterday I just received my medical coupons for the kids when I've been asking for them for months."

A similar situation happened to Linda. "I have to go to the food banks, stand there for hours waiting for food. I have to go to the oldest child complains how he's the only one at school without a uniform that I can't afford to pay for, and I can see the hurt in his eyes." There are lots of relative caregivers who don't have access to the programs and services that are out there to help them and/or aren't able to access them due to health conditions. "I miss a lot of the information out there because I'm sick and just can't make it," Anetrice explains.

But all is not hopeless. Some are glad they're in the organizations they are in now. "The grandmothers' support group has allowed me to see others like me, and lets me know there're other organizations out there," Linda explains. There are a range of organizations out there specially aimed to help kinship caregivers such as the Economic Services Child Support Enforcement, King County Bar 5 West Women's Law Center, Seattle Human Services Department, and Aging and Disability Services. Visit [www.kkinship.org](http://www.kkinship.org) or call the King County Kinship Collaboration at (206) 268-6785 for more information.

<sup>1</sup> 2002 Kinship Care Report to the WA State Legislature



Letter From the Editor BY JIM THEOFELIS



Happy September! I want to begin by saying how appreciative I am of the staff and Mockingbird Society. As you can see from this issue of the Mockingbird Times "we really have it going on."

Additionally, The Mockingbird Network continues to develop including having Children's Administration regions and the Resource Specialists to support the Chapters are hired and onboard.

Speaking of Web site, we have just completed our redesign. Please check out the launching of our new Web site at www.mockingbirdsociety.org!

The Mockingbird Family Model new ways (soon we will have out-of-home prevention pilots underway) and gaining great article by Georgina regarding our recent guests from Japan.

Finally, I want to draw your attention to the amazing youth and alumni featured in this issue. It is through their ongoing perseverance, hope and talent that we hold the promise of a true "world class foster care system."

Handwritten signature of Jim Theofelis

Jim Theofelis

jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

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.

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 Welfare.

I felt like God was smiling or winking down at me. It was so much better than being published back when it was supposed to be published in February.

The person who designed my Web site tried to comfort me once and told me that I felt like God was smiling or winking down at me.

A miffing of the foster care system is and addresses foster care outcomes. It also points out the risk factors for poor mental health associated with foster care but it mostly emphasizes the oppression and domination that exist in foster care.

In the "Five Faces of Oppression" conditions is needed to determine if a group of people is truly oppressed. These conditions are: Oppression, Domination, Violence, and Isolation.

I am so excited to share that I will be presenting my work at the 19th International Nursing Research Congress Focusing on Evidence Based Practice in Singapore on July 9th, 2008.

As a nurse, I know that we cannot ignore the mental health needs of those in foster care. As an alumna of foster care, it is hard for me to understand why it is taking so long for the needs of those in foster to be noticed.

To read my work in its entirety, you can visit my Web site at www.alumnaoffostercare.org and obtain a copy for free.



A young girl smiling, identified as a young child.

NETWORK, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

we have in common." Sitting in that room I saw a young girl shed a single tear when we began to talk about how we were all separated from our siblings.

Denis Waitley put it beautifully: "There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them." 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 kindness, we need the help.

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 father of Scout and Jem, is a lawyer who defends the innocent.

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

THANK YOU!

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

MEET OUR STAFF

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Operations Director Ros Ghan; Mockingbird Family Programs Director Dr. Wanda Hackett; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Development Director Madelaine Thompson; Executive Assistant Lauren Frederick; Development/Communications Darcie Gray; Youth LEAD Coordinator Kara Sanders; Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) Coordinator Marie Goines; Administrative Coordinator Diana Clark; Administrative Assistant/IT Juan Ramirez; Youth LEAD Administrative Assistant Milissa Morgan; MFM Administrative Assistant Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson; Development Assistant Alicia LeVez; Resource Specialists Eva Ervin, Heather Jones, Georgina Ramirez, Nicholas Ruff, Tammy Soderberg; Senior Youth Representatives Samuel Martin, Georgina Ramirez; Youth Representatives Julian Barrington, Leona Bill, Rhonda Smith, Diamonique Walker; Contributing Writers & Artists Ashley Abbott, Delilah Bruskas, Shakura Felder, Anna Gonzalez, John Hemingway, Samantha McDonald, Robert Parker; Volunteers Chrissie Jackson; Editing and Layout Kelly Hawkins

Support The Mockingbird Society!

Kids and families. In gratitude of your support, we will send you a monthly issue of the Mockingbird Times.

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For appropriate recognition, please write in the space above how you would like to be listed.

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MFM Youth Travels to Cambodia BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER



I met with Torell Sarey, a youth in foster care in a home...

I am [fubXa chYf' f]Yg' h' HU\_Y cbY grandchild [of 30] per year [to Camb...]

He noticed some cultural differences. "They were a lot less materialistic and they couldn't believe I was American."

For Torell, this trip was historical, cultural, and even emotional. After he visited...

Torell and his foster mother shared a brief history of the Cambodian genocide...



A cWj[VfX' : U] 'mi A cXY' : cghf' Mi h' HfY' Sarey and his foster mom ride an elephant while in Cambodia.

and their remains left. Over the course of hYZi f'mYfgDc' Dchik Ug'jb' dck Yfz'cj Yf'...

Torell's family was among the many 7Ua VcXjUbg'k \c' UYX h'YWi bfmj]b' ZUF'...

Mockingbird Goes International BY GEORGINA RAMIREZ



g'h YA cWj[VfX' : U] 'mi A cXY' fA : A EUci hlc' [c' ]b- hfbUjcbU'3A : A UhfUMg'Uh...

When the Japanese guests arrived they were able to provide some insight on the way foster care is approached in Japan...

Japan has recognized the fact that their system is in need of change and is making an effort to examine other approaches to foster care.

Dr. Wanda Hackett A 6G'8' fWmf' cZ : U] 'mDfc' fUa g' Uj Yuh'cfc' [ \ Y d'UbU- hcb'cb'ck' h'YA : A 'lg'UXX'Ygg'b' [ Z'ghf'...

foster youth as well foster care providers. H'Y df]a Um]gg' Yg' h'Uhi A : A 'UXfYgg'Yg'...

A : A WbbYmg'gl' h' h' b' Z'ghf' #\_ ]bg' ]d' homes to create a constellation and in the center of this community there is a Hub Home.

A : A f'Wj [bnYg'h'Y] a dcfhUbw'cZubX' tries to honor the value of sibling connections by placing sibling with one another whenever possible.

HcXUz' A : A 'Ug' d'fcj Yb' h'c' VY a cFY' than just a conceptual approach to system reform.

A : A 'Ug' VYb' [ fck ]b' [ fUd]X'mVch' locally and nationally. By November 30, 2008 there will be 8 constellations in the State of Washington...

Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit

ONE UNITED VOICE FOR CHANGE

October 25 & 26, 2008

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

- Discuss the stigma related to growing up in foster care.
• Learn to use their voice effectively.
• Establish local youth and alumni action groups to address issues important to them.
• Identify pressing issues to discuss with state policy makers.

Apply on-line at www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

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



Foster Alumna Spreads the Message BY DIAMONIQUE WALKER

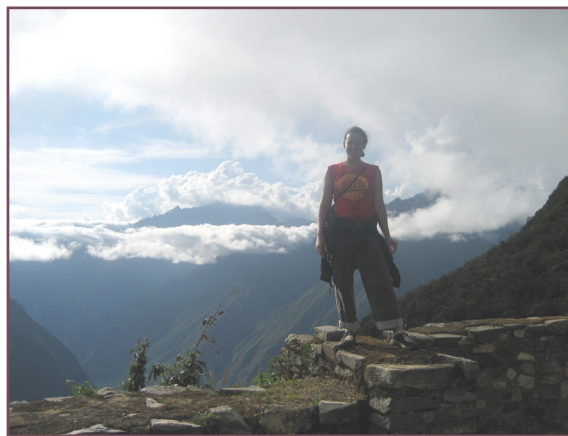


Mary Herrick, a foster care alumna, became successful helping youth in foster care graduate from high school, get into college and graduate from college.

CbY cZA Ufn'g' a Uj' Z'WgY'cb' this trip is to help develop a foster care system in Latin America, seeing as it does not have one.

A Ufn'g' fYUX'mlc' h'fUbg'h'cb' h'c' \Yd]b'...

in Latin America because she has met her goal working with the foster care system in America.



Mary Herrick in Peru

graduate from college. She also provides oversight to the Governor's Scholarship Z'f' : cghf' Mi h' UbX' A U\_Y ]h' < UddYbZ'U...

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 Y' Yfn'XUz' g'hg' A Ufn'G'Y]b' ]b' Z'ghf' WfY' helped her handle changes and challenges with ease.

A Ufnz' \Uj ]b' [ VYb' ]b' Z'ghf' WfYz' 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.

