The annual Mockingbird Society fundraising luncheon will take place on October 6th. And I’m really excited. I’m a little nervous too, because it’s not your typical luncheon. Most non-profits inundate their donors with sob stories, saturate them with pathos, in the hope that they’ll feel sad enough or guilty enough to donate. Fundraising luncheons often end with some people crying, while other people sit around them and look uncomfortable.

So I should tell you a few things we’ve done in the last year.

This year, we took six different legislative initiatives to Olympia. Among them were subsidies for guardians, notification of the right to request an attorney for foster youth in dependency proceedings, and more safe housing and support for youth in care. In a session where the Legislature was facing down a $28 billion dollar budget deficit, every single item on our legislative agenda was passed. Every issue we took to the capital was addressed.

This year’s session also was particularly meaningful to me. House Bill 6832, which among other things added an alumnus of foster care to the Transformation Design Committee. I have the honor of being that representative.

I’ll explain a little bit about what the Transformation Design Committee does. We were established by House Bill 2106 in 2009 to guide the process of changing the State over to a new, performance-based method of contracting for services. The upshot of which is that we are redesigning the foster system. We’re creating a system that rewards service providers who take care of their youth.

We do things differently here. We don’t want our funders to feel sorry for us. Indeed, our funders should be proud; proud of the things we have accomplished, proud of the changes we have made in our lives, and the lives of others, proud that they have helped to create an organization that is zealous in its pursuit of truth, fairness, and hope for youth in foster care.

Sealing juvenile records are very important to those who have a criminal background. What most people think is that once you turn 18 your juvenile convictions are off your record. It is not quite that easy. Sarah Lysons, Coordinator of the Lawyers The Mockingbird Society has been helping create this environment that rewards service providers who take care of their youth.

Mockingbird has been helping create this change with the assistance from multiple other organizations. In 2004 the Legislature passed House Bill 3078 known as sealing juvenile records. The Mockingbird Society advocates said this ensures community protection and safety, while allowing youth with prior convictions to secure housing and employment. In 2010, the Legislature expanded the sealing of juvenile records through Senate Bill 6561. I’m proud to say we achieved this goal at The Mockingbird Society and it went into effect on June 20, 2010. SB 6561 will allow young people, who have committed a crime, but fulfilled all of the court requirements, including no further infractions with the law, to have their record expunged.

So how do you get your record sealed? If you’d like to know how to properly seal your records. If any one is wondering what people see on your background check you can always go to www.washingtontospacetax.com.

Until now, there has never been a seat for alumni of care at the tables where these decisions are made. Mockingbird changed that this year. We have created a space for foster youth and we have the right to vote on Committee decisions, as all Committee members do. There is finally somebody representing youth interests directly, in what may be the biggest foster care reform effort ever undertaken in this state.

Mockingbird is the only organization in the state working directly with state government to carve out a place for youth voice. We have youth in six different regions statewide that now have a voice in how they and their peers are treated. We are the experts on what is and isn’t working in foster care, because we are the people who have experienced foster care.

I can’t tell you how much it means to me that I have found a place where I can bring my skills and
Dear Friends,

As you are aware, The Mockingbird Society and its statewide network of youth and alumni of foster care, dedicate themselves to inspiring and educating our community and policymakers about the challenges of the system and how to fix them. The articles featured in our September 2010 issue of The Mockingbird Times highlight the struggles that vulnerable families face. But, these stories also demonstrate how building on strengths by teaching self-advocacy, basic life skills, and providing opportunities for safe housing can truly change lives.

I’d like to extend a special invitation for you to hear more of the personal stories of youth and alumni of care. Please join us on October 6th at the Seattle Sheraton for our 4th annual luncheon. The 2010 theme is Raise Your Voice and it honors the power of advocacy to ensure a more just system. Your contribution will ensure that youth and alumni of care are supported by policies that make sense, and that programs such as The Mockingbird Network continue to provide much needed youth development opportunities.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdociety.org

At The Mockingbird Society our job is to put a human face on the issues that children and youth of care face every day. And, despite the continued economic crisis we are not deterred. We will however, need your help in the coming year to ensure that we protect and retain essential programs, so that our children not only survive, but thrive.

I look forward to seeing you on October 6th! Together, we will continue to fight for what is right for all of our children.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

Sincerely,

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdociety.org

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 Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Mockingbird Society, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Mockingbird Society. Atticus, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Mockingbird Society, the widowed father of Jem and Scout, joins Mockingbird Society.

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.

Thank You!

Pierce County CASAs/GALs, Julie Lowery, Union Gospel Mission, Haz尔uth Adams, Elizabeth Anderson, Holly Cofer, Loren D. Hostek, Susan Clifford Jamroski, Margaret-Ann Leroy, James Maki, Microsoft Matching Gifts, Sarah Morley, Valerie Ramisch, Tracy Robinson, David and Linda Rose, Washington Women’s Foundation

The Fostering Scholars Program at Seattle University is one-of-a-kind. Not only does it provide youth in foster care in Washington state an opportunity for a free college education, but it also provides a place to live year round, even during the summer season. This combination of education and housing is what makes this program so unique and is making it a huge success for all the youth involved.

Already attending Seattle University, Hawaii native Paula Carvalho was filling out an application when an unknown source from the admissions office told her to apply for the Fostering Scholars Program. She never knew how to begin the process until she learned about Paula who would like to view her as that she could agree, but she likes to look at herself as a more therapeutic friend or counselor. Colleen does agree that her relations with the students and participants of the program.

Paula Carvalho is a history major with a psychology minor, and she completed 3 years at Seattle University before applying for the program. After interviewing Paula she turned me on to Colleen Montoya, Director of Fostering Scholars. Paula described Colleen as somewhat of a mother figure to the students and participants of the program.

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After an interview Colleen said for those who would like to view her as that as she could agree, but she likes to look at herself as a more therapeutic friend or counselor. Colleen does agree that her relations with the students and participants of the program are very strong and she stays in touch with them as best she can and it shows.

After my interview with Colleen I was able to gather lots of details and it could not sound any better. To start off, the program offers housing to students year round and is only available to foster care youth and alumni of foster care. Costs included in the program are housing and tuition, and any other student needs such as books and calculators.

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There is a new trend going around the country called freeganism. Freeganism was brought to my attention via the Oprah Winfrey show. The trend consists in part of people digging through garbage in search of free food. While I didn’t know much about it in a positive light on how the movement is growing and may reduce waste throughout the country, there is a very complex problem about this trend that I wish to address.

Food waste in the country is indeed a very serious problem. Yearly some 30 billion dollars in food waste is thrown out by restaurants and grocery stores harming the environment and wasting money. The health code laws require grocery stores to throw food out if the food doesn’t live up to health codes and has been on the shelf too long. This food definitely can be used for better purposes. The food that is thrown out annually could easily feed a very big handful of people; especially those in need of food.

While the benefits to freeganism is seen in pamphlets all over the country, in environmentally conscious communities, and Web sites throughout the internet, digging my own scavenging on the subject, I have not seen a whole lot on what freeganism will do for the homeless community, and the long term effects of it.

Homeless people do not dig through dumpsters in search of food to save a couple of bucks. Homeless people did not choose their lifestyle in search of greener environmental and cost efficient pastures. They dig through the dumpsters in search of food because that is typically their only source. And as someone who has dug through dumpsters in search of whatever there is to kill my hunger so I can live another day I find this trend to be a huge slap in the face.

The Road Ahead

In foster care as most people know, when you reach the age of 18, as if it is a magical number, you are an adult and must live on your own and take care of yourself. Transitioning out of care is typically a struggle throughout the foster care community. Youth are expected to know life skills, such as cooking, managing money, paying bills etcetera, even though in foster care they don’t get a ton of opportunities to learn these things aside from Independent Living Programs (ILP) and transitional living services.

Since I found that most youth are not prepared to transition out of care, I interviewed 2 alumni on their experience when aging out. Rhonda Smith, who is now 21 years old, spent 11 years in care, and she provided me with some insight on her experience aging out. “Since aging out I’ve had to learn how to care for myself and without the support of any programs, but I was not ready to live on my own and I didn’t have anyone that would help me out... There’s just so much more that I need to know to live on my own. It’s really hard when you have no support and that’s what I needed.”

Georgina Ramirez, MB’s very own Region 3 and 4 Resource Specialist who spent 14 years in care also shared some of her experience with transitioning out of care and insight on what could be improved in care. “To say the least, SUPPORT ALL! I feel like we have been friends for a long time, simply because he didn’t sugar coat anything whatsoever. He kept it real, he kept it with the quality that I look for in people.”

Youth in foster care can tell when someone is pulling their leg, so being genuine is a quality that youth in care look for as well.

Tony talked about how when he does certain speaking engagements, there is always talk about his accomplishments (Highlight red), but he said neither to forget that everything that glitters is not gold. Tony Shellman is just a regular guy that has lived through foster care, and is still living his life, influencing those to not carry the “Foster Care Child” label on their shoulders. Shellman said, “growth is ongoing, and know that you matter, so care for yourself.” Tony made sure that I will remember that, and I will, because only I can live my life.

The day that I interviewed Tony Shellman is a day that I will always remember. I was able to speak with an entrepreneur that is connected with on life issues, who is really no different from me, and is driving me to continue my dreams. Whether I fail or make it is all on me, and no one else. Tony Shellman is an inspiring man and a great person that anyone can learn a thing or two from.

RAISING OUR VOICE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Tony Shellman: A New Friend

Tony Shellman is an entrepreneur, Founder and Designer of Mecca Envy, Perish Clothing Inc, and Alumni.

In my experience to hear to create real change in people’s lives, I can’t tell you how much it means to me that I’m making change that will give youth like me a better shot.

What I can tell you is that we’re not even close to done yet. Every month, our regional chapters meet and develop more ideas for foster care reform. Every quarter we all get together and forge those ideas into a strong agenda for reform. Every year we go down to the State Legislature and make that agenda reality.

And next month, you can help us do it. I look forward to seeing you there.
Back to School Bash!!

Our region’s next chapter meeting will be coming up soon in September. It will be our what we had to say. Great turn out. We had 13 CASAs/GALs present. They were all very receptive of us and about being in care. We speak for those who can’t speak or are too scared to speak them both within and out of King County.”

Changes. Throughout the day there were abundance of workshops including housing July 29th marked the day when service providers from all over the State of Washong attended the homeless youth service provider conference hosted by Building Changes. Throughout the day there were abundance of workshops including housing options around Washington, post secondary education, coaching skills. Christina and I provided staff and event support for the event. I stopped to ask Corey Young, a Housing specialist. This is a very big decision. Josie and I look forward to the last SAC meeting with Lauren on the 28th where we will be discussing what is going on the 2011 legislative agenda.”

Region 2 (Yakima) by Brandy Baxley

On Saturday August 14th ACT FIRST went to Union Gospel Mission to serve lunch. We served about 55 youth and families. I didn’t realize that there were that many homeless families here in Yakima. I am really thankful to have people and family around me that love and care about me. On August 28th, Taylor and I will be traveling to Seattle for the SAC Meeting and we are getting ready to discuss our Advocacy Day Agenda!

News From The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 4 (Seattle) by Nick Holcombe

July 29th marked the day when service providers from all over the State of Washington attended the homeless youth service provider conference hosted by Building Changes. Throughout the day there were abundance of workshops including housing options around Washington, post secondary education, coaching skills. Christina and I provided staff and event support for the event. I stopped to ask Corey Young, a YMCA employee, what he thought of the conference. He stated “I found the conference very beneficial because I was unaware of the possible funding services that may be available.” I also asked Paula Carvalho-Johnson, a case manager at the YMCA. She stated “I found it beneficial because it informed us of numerous housing opportunities both within and out of King County.”

Region 5 (Tacoma) by Janessa Thomas

COURIGE has been representing youth in care this month like no other. This month, COURIGE has been planning and preparing for a community training called The Culture of Foster Care. This training is done from the perspective of youth and how they felt about being in care. We speak for those who can’t speak or are too scared to speak themselves. I guess you can say it takes COURIGE to be in front of people. Our training had a great turn out. We had 13 CASAs/GALs present. They were all very receptive of us and what we had to say.

Our region’s next chapter meeting will be coming up soon in September. It will be our Back to School Bash!!

Community Events

Region 1 (Spokane) September 1st-7th: Pig out in the Park - Riverfront Park September 18th: Downtown Library Celebration - 1-3pm. Serving free cream and cake!

Region 2 (Yakima) September 4th: Community Dance - 6-8pm Southeast Community Center

Region 3 (Everett) September 6th: Labor Day. No School

Region 4 (Seattle) September 8th-10th: Fiestas Patrias - Seattle Center House and Fisher Pavilion. Patriotic celebration recognizes freedom from colonial rule in Latin America and Latino culture in Western Washington with Hispanic foods, dance, mariachi music, exhibits and children’s activities; free (206-684-7200 or www.seattlecenter.com).

Region 5 (Tacoma) September 15th: Back to school Indo - 3-5pm PCA Free Food and Prizes

Region 6 (Olympia) September 28th: “Self Advocacy” Training for Mason County Youth - 3-5pm Shelton Library Meeting Room

“How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roes!”
~Maya Angelou

By Daniel Gresty

Grace Like Rain

It pours down
I always feel it
But cannot hear it
I try to explain it
But no solving it
Like grace from God.
But in my life there is no God.
I try to explain it
Grace like rain
Pours down on me.
Hallelujah

Family

By James W

We all are family,
No matter what,
Come on be friendly,
Don’t fight and fuss.

We may not know each other.
Even if we have different mothers,
We still should love one another,
‘Cause under God we are sisters and brothers

Without God we wouldn’t have feelings.
No love, no meaning.
You wouldn’t be breathing.
So thank God you’re living!

Getting ready to discuss
Taylor and I will be traveling to
Back to School Bash!!