The Mockingbird Youth Network is growing and its voice is getting louder. And as the Mockingbird chapters become stronger, chances will arise for the chapters to reach legislators and members of the community who need to hear what it is the youth of the Mockingbird Network have to say. On August 10th, Tiffany Washington, Fred Kingston, Jon Brumbach and David Buck from Mockingbird Society headquarters visited our Spokane Chapter for a BBQ that looked like any other but would ultimately become a powerful statement about collaboration. In the spirit of this collaboration, this article is co-authored by David Buck and Kristina Thomason, our Spokane Chapter Leader.

David: Upon arriving in Spokane, we were treated to a tour of our Spokane Chapter’s host agency, Volunteers of America, which hosts a variety of different organizations including Crosswalk, a homeless shelter for youth under the age of 18. Sarah Mahaffy, Resource Specialist for our Spokane Chapter, along with Kristina were great tour guides as we were able to meet and talk with employees of many organizations doing inspiring work.

Kristina: Hours later the BBQ began with around 20 chapter members at Manito Park. And while the BBQ seemed like just a normal BBQ, it turned into something more as youth in the chapter made lasting impressions on legislators and reinforced the mission of The Mockingbird Society and the power of the Mockingbird Youth Network. This BBQ with Spokane Legislators was very important to the Spokane region because it was a chance to help legislators, as Jim Theofils would say, “put a face on the issue.” It was a chance for youth to talk to Legislators about serious issues in a laid back environment. I heard amazing conversations as I walked around.

David: Legislators on hand included: Representative Andy Billig, and Senator Majority Leader Lisa Brown.

Kristina: And I took advantage of the opportunity to sit down with the legislators and ask them questions. All of the Legislators had heard about the Mockingbird Youth Network and really enjoyed the opportunity to meet young people face to face in a relaxed environment. Representative Parker has been a follower of the Mockingbird Youth Network for three years and said, “When people ask me about MBS I tell them it’s full of inspirational stories.” Later Representative Billig said, “We need advocates… like Mockingbird and foster children to educate us legislators about how to get to that goal that we are all striving for.” The Mockingbird Youth Network’s voice is being heard and we hope to continue this amazing collaboration.

**A Struggle for Educational Perseverance**

**by Deonate Cruz**

As a student at Highline Community College, I have many classmates who, like me, have fought through adversity to pursue their education. Many of these youth come from backgrounds involving poverty, gang violence, divorce, and drug & alcohol abuse. What is even more interesting is that while this usually leads to involvement in the criminal justice system and economic instability, these hardships have given way to a change within these individuals; an epiphany if you will. These individuals now have ambition and motivation to be financially secure by pursuing a post-secondary education.

Too often, the life of a foster youth can be traumatic, stressful, and filled with countless struggles in and out of the system. For example, according to On the Move, a youth development organization, youth in foster care are 44 percent less likely to graduate from high school. After aging out, 40 to 50 percent never complete high school and less than half of former foster youth are employed four years after leaving foster care.

During my life in the foster care system, I have forged bonds with individuals that are greater to me than blood. I have seen many of my family members incarcerated for gang violence, drugs, theft, and other crimes, just to make a little extra money to survive. More often than not, the money supported their kids, or younger family members, so they can eat and survive. Those who have experienced poverty, gang violence, divorce, and drug & alcohol abuse. What is even more interesting is that while this usually leads to involvement in the criminal justice system and economic instability, these hardships have given way to a change within these individuals; an epiphany if you will. These individuals now have ambition and motivation to be financially secure by pursuing a post-secondary education.

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Dear Friends,
September marks the begin-nings of another school year. And, as we enter the fall sea-son, I am reminded of the obst-aclues too many youth in foster care face when pursuing an education. Success in school can be tough when a child or youth experiences multiple placements, an unsafe environment, or finds themselves street- dependent. The articles in this issue of The Mockingbird Times highlight some of these experiences, and will serve as resources to help youth move forward in their lives.

Over the past decade, The Mockingbird So-ciety has consistently advocated for youth in under and over the age of 18. We ask policy-makers to see youth voice as fundamental to ensuring a child welfare system that works. We ask the community to see these kids as their own, and provide them with the sup-port, care and resources necessary not only to survive, but to thrive.

On Thursday, October 20th, I’d like to in-vite you to join us for our 10th Anniversary Benefit Luncheon. We are celebrating A De-cade of Advocacy - A Lifetime of Change. I promise hearing their stories will inspire you, fill you with hope, and underscore the importance of having an organization such as The Mockingbird Society that is laser fo-cused and mission driven toward meaning-ful system improvement and reform.

With your ongoing support we will be able to continue as a lead advocate for fos-ter care, built on youth-inspired solutions, powerful coalitions, and public support for every child’s right to a safe home and a bright future.

We look forward to seeing you on October 20th at the Seattle Sheraton!

Thank you for your unwavering support, and best wishes to you and your families!

Jim Theofelis
jim@mockingbirdsociety.org

Providing College Support for Alumni of Care

Many people will tell you, go to college if not for the education, than at least for the experience. They don’t tell you that that ex-perience entails being broke, ac-cumulating ever-growing debts and insurmountable stress. Being a factor in being in the foster care system, college might seem impossible. Some have noticed the additional challenge that alumni of foster care have gone through and have founded organiza-tions that can help. The College Success Foun-dation (CSF) and the College Success Program (CSP) are two prime examples.

The CF is a program whose mission is “To pro-vide scholarships and mentoring to low income, high potential youth.” Bob Craves and Ann Ramsay-Jenkins founded CF in 2000. While they offer services geared toward all youth, what they offer for current and former foster youth are The Make Happen Program and several scholar-ships to college. The Make It Happen Program is for foster youth who are currently in their junior or senior year of high school. Participants are able to “live” the full college experience. They stay in dorm rooms, shadow classes, learn the steps it takes to get into college, find what money is available, and hear from speakers about col-lege, some who are alumni of care.

The scholarships that CF offers are the Gover-nors Scholarship, as well as being a supporter of the Passport to College Promise scholarship. The Governors Scholarship is available for cur-rent seniors in high school, with a minimum GPA (grade point average) of 2.0. This schol-arship is $2,000 to $4,000 a year for up to five years, toward earning a Bachelor’s Degree.

The CSP is a program that helps low-income youth get into college through financial and non-financial services. To qualify, low-income youth must be a high school graduate, have a 2.0 GPA, a 1000 SAT score, and complete a 12-week training program.

The mission of the College Success Program at Seattle Central Community College is “To primarily help make the transition into college and complete the program they are trying to ad-here.” Brigit McDavitt, Mildred Ojio and Joan Ray founded this program in 2007 with initial funding granted by Casey Family Programs. The services CSP offers include advocating for students within the campus, referrals to other programs such as Casey Family Programs and Treehouse, and help with housing. Every year in the fall, they have an orientation for new and returning participants. Every other week there is Drop-In Day in the afternoon. Students can come in and talk to other students like them-selves, get help with their studies, or whatever they want to do while eating pizza and soda. During the weeks in between, they have pro-grams to help students with their college classes.

The Role of Children & Youth in Labor Day

When we think of Labor Day, which falls on the first Monday in September, we usually think of having a BBQ and just having a good time with people that we love. I really didn’t know much about the origins of the holiday before writing this article. Taking a closer look at the history and doing some research, I learned that Labor Day is meant to be more than just a little fun in the sun. Labor Day is a holiday to honor and remember the Labor Movement that this country went through so that labor workers would get treated fairly and humanely. This movement ensured fair wages, reasonable working hours and conditions, and even more importantly, stopped child labor to protect the wellbeing of children.

Since this is such a broad topic, I chose to research more specifically about child labor because of its link to the child welfare system. Before this movement, children that were a part of the industrial revolution were given very little pay, while they were almost always over-worked (12-18 hours per day), barely surviving up to $25 per published piece. The Mockingbird Times is a monthly newspaper written and produced by youth who have experience in foster care and/or homelessness. All youth employees of The Mockingbird Society are paid between $8.50 and $12 per hour. Additionally, youth working on the newspaper get paid $50 for every article, essay, artwork, and ad they submit.

The Mockingbird Society and Real Change, a Seattle-based community newspaper. Youth involvement is the key to the philosophy, values, and success of The Mockingbird Society and, as such, youth are involved in all aspects of organizational development and decision-making. Donations to The Mockingbird Society may be tax-deductible and are greatly appreciated. No part of The Mockingbird Times may be reproduced without the written permission of The Mockingbird Society. All contents copyright ©2011 The Mockingbird Society.

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 have their song but sing for us.”

What if we created an organization, a community, indeed a world, in which our most vulnerable children and youth could be 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.
I was nominated by my English teacher from Mariner High School, Mr. Bourellard. He told me that I was an outstanding student, friend, and sister; he’s seen what I’ve gone through and believed that I should be recognized. I didn’t hear about the award until I was called down to the college and career center. I was thoroughly surprised and really excited. I did a lot this year at Mariner and in the Everett community. In the community, I dedicated my Mondays after school to clean a little part of our city. I’m involved in sports like Cross Country, I dedicated my time in school to do M&M connections at Mariner High School (M&M is a program to assist and mentor the incoming freshmen), tutoring peers in English and math. All while handling my biological & foster families, friends, boyfriends, and Type 1 Diabetes. This award was bestowed to me because I am a foster child that has stood outside of the realm of being characterized as a menace, a failure. I’ve come to realize that school is of utmost importance and that it’s the only key to my ideal future.

We are foster kids, we are human beings, and we are the children of tomorrow. We are no different from other children, we breathe what everyone else breathes, and we have the same needs to eat, sleep and strive like anyone else. Don’t lessen anybody’s value just because they were born in the foster care system. It’s not your fault if you are a foster child, there are no limits to what you as an individual can do for yourself and for those around you!

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Pay it Forward: Baby & Co. Steps Up to Help Youth in Need

Baby & Co., a women’s designer clothing boutique located in the Belltown neighborhood of downtown Seattle, hosted its highly anticipated annual Closet Sale August 11th through 14th. The sale was co-hosted by Baby & Co. owner and long-standing Mockingbird supporter, Jill Brandmarker-Donnelly, and Mary Bridges Gelesen. For the third consecutive year, The Mockingbird Society was honored to be a primary recipient of a portion of the proceeds.

The sale has become well known by women across Seattle for its extensive selection of new and gently used clothing, shoes and accessories from some of the “best closets in Seattle.” In support of Jill and the sale, Mockingbird Youth Network Representative Deonate Cruz and I spent an afternoon on site greeting customers and spreading word of the sale around the neighborhood.

This was a great opportunity for some of the MBS staff to see and be a part of the hard work that goes into fundraising and donating to organizations. It was the first time we participated in an event where some of the proceeds would be donated to help our organization. We were able to really execute our “community engagement” objective by spreading the word about our organization and explaining to customers that their purchases would benefit the foster care community.

The sale had a great turn out and was a smashing success! In addition to helping The Mockingbird Society, a portion of the proceeds will support juvenile diabetes research. Remaining clothing is being donated to YouthCare and Dress for Success. A special thanks to Baby & Co., as well as Mary Bridget Gelesen and the designers and community members who donated clothing for the sale.

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Healing at the Coffee Oasis

I recently had an experience at the Coffee Oasis in Bremerton that impacted me on a deep and emotional level. I interviewed Angelica Gavron and Daniel Frederick, employees of the Coffee Oasis. Daniel is the Program Director of Street Hope. His job is to help provide opportunities to children who are homeless. Daniel’s vision is to move forward and have more organizations like Street Hope. He plans on growing international—day one.

Right now as we speak, the Coffee Oasis is in a renovation plan to be a better place for the youth by making a shelter for them above the coffee shop itself. If that isn’t completion then what is? Daniel Frederick talked a lot about the influence his parents have had on him and his family life. On his life, Daniel said, “The lack of community, made me realize the community needed healing.” He also stressed how his family showed him the difference-stable relationships can make in the lives of children and youth.

Coffee Oasis has a magazine, or “Street Zone” called A Voice. Angelica is in charge of writing editorials for the Zone. While interviewing her, I noticed her life was similar to mine. She has channeled her anger through writing and is fighting back. A Voice’s audience is directed toward adults who currently are fighting, is going on with youth who are living on the streets in their hometown.

Currently, A Voice is distributing their fourth edition magazine. The magazine gives the youth the privilege to voice their concerns and express themselves by writing. A Voice consists of poetry, photography, and writings on various topics.

Daniel, his parents, and Angelica are amazing people who are ready to commit to youth by providing opportunities for stable relationships and through writing. They started by caring, being supportive, and showing compassion to the youth. They have helped many youth through providing love and shelter. When I say shelter I mean that it gives the youth a feeling of being secure and safe. They have supported youth and presented them that worst part is over. Daniel and Angelica both believe “Your time is now, and you must not give up because they believe in us.” While coming to an end of the interview Angelica said, “A Voice is a megaphone for the street and homeless youth in the community.”

If you are interested in helping out, volunteering, or you yourself just simply need any type of resources, please don’t hesitate to contact Daniel Frederick, he is the Program Director. Please call at 1 (360)377-5560. Or email, envocizine@gmail.com. Their main website is www.thefoozlezone.com.

1 http://www.thefoozlezone.com/

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SPOKANE, continued from page 1

have a very important role in changing the system. It was amazing to see how much these “people in command” really do care. They showed us that it’s not just a job to them. They showed concern for the foster care system. We were not just another face or another problem. We became friends with these legislators, friends that are willing to help us make change.

After dinner, the entire Chapter took pictures with legislators later said their goodbyes knowing that connections had been created and reinforced. Collaboration plays a key role in our strategy to create change and the BBQ in Spokane shows us all the potential the Mockingbird Youth Network has to offer.

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Thank You!

All the YMCA Center for Young Adults staff, Samantha Valle, Georgina Ramirez, Graham Paranimpit, Youth Community Services, Dae Shogren, Amy Pearson, Casey Family Programs, Catholic Family and Child Services, Pierce County Representative Andy Billig, Senator Lisa Brown, Legislative Aides to Senator Michael Baumgartner & Representative John Ahern, Karen Cowgill, Miriam & William Epstein-Stiles, Linda Foley, Goldman Sachs, Deanna Grace, Makeba and Aaron Greene, Jillian Gross, Lura Harrison, Jo Ann Herbert, Joshua Isaac, Lyman Legters, Margaret-Ann Leroy, Carol Lucas, James Maki, Perkins Coie, Poetic Graphic Design, Cecilia Porto, Alicia Tonasket, Anne Tuttle, Peggy & Bob Wilkerson, Helen & Robert Bailey, Phil & Cindy Parsons

http://www.collegesuccessfoundation.org
Hello from Region One North! The Spokane Region once again has had a pretty busy month. On August 10th we had a BBQ with local Spokane Legislators. It went great and was laid back but an important event for our chapter. Sr. Network Representative David Buck and I also got to co-write an article about the experience and success of the BBQ. Also, our chapter was invited to a Spokane Indians baseball game, which is very exciting! We will be having Marcus Riccelli, Senior Policy Advisor for Senate Majority Lisa Brown—who we met at the BBQ—speak at our next meeting. Coming up next month we are doing our Rights Training so keep your eyes out for those results and feedback! Region 1 North UNITE!!

The Mockingbird Youth Network’s Western Washington’s inter-regional BBQ was a huge success! It was a great opportunity to get together for a collaborative event in which every chapter brought something to create a fun and powerful day. Jerry, Seattle Resource Specialist, was our cook, preparing and cooking various foods. After everyone ate, we participated in a great scavenger hunt that the Tacoma chapter created for us. It was full of laughs and gave us an opportunity to get to know the other regions’ chapter members and work together on a team activity. LaShay from Everett brought a great activity involving digging for gummy bears in a pie full of whip cream! This pie contest inevitably turned into a whip cream fight. Graham, the Olympia Resource Specialist lost this whipped cream battle, but was a great sport.

After everyone calmed down, we all came back together to focus on a part of what Mockingbird is about: community service. Georgina, one of our amazing Resource Specialists from Everett, baked 120 cupcakes for the homeless communities in Seattle and Olympia. Everyone helped decorate them, and while it was very hard not to eat those delicious baked goods, we all managed for the sake of the families.

The Olympia and Seattle chapters both ended the day by distributing the cupcakes all the regions worked together to decorate. Seattle’s chapter distributed a portion of the cupcakes to the homeless people downtown in Seattle. They gave out at least 40 of the cupcakes to the homeless community and had a great time doing it. Olympia’s chapter took a portion of the cupcakes to the Family Support Center of South Sound’s shelter for families. They also took the left over fruits and vegetables from the BBQ to the shelter and hope to keep this relationship growing by setting up future opportunities to volunteer at the family shelter.

This day was a true display of what the Mockingbird Youth Network is about, creating connections with one another, collaborating to have a great day of teamwork, and staying dedicated to creating change in our communities. Go Mockingbird!!

Region 1 South (Yakima) Chapter Update by Kristina Thomason

Hello from Region One South! The Yakima Region once again has had a pretty busy month. On August 10th we had a BBQ with local Yakima Legislators. It went great and was laid back but an important event for our chapter. Sr. Network Representative David Buck and I also got to co-write an article about the experience and success of the BBQ. Also, our chapter was invited to a Spokane Indians baseball game, which is very exciting! We will be having Marcus Riccelli, Senior Policy Advisor for Senate Majority Lisa Brown—who we met at the BBQ—speak at our next meeting. Coming up next month we are doing our Rights Training so keep your eyes out for those results and feedback! Region 1 North UNITE!!

Regions 2 and 3 (Central to East) Chapter Update by Deonate Cruz

Welcome to the central and eastern regions! This summer has been busy and exciting for all our chapters. We have worked hard to engage our youth members into the community by hosting events and volunteering. We have also focused on educating our youth on their rights and responsibilities through our Rights Training. Keep an eye out for updates on our chapter meetings and events. We welcome your input and ideas for future events.

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Westside Regions Joint Update by Xoe Dozier, Garrett Nadreau, Chris Bauer, Max Ream and Jessica Mayer

Creative Corner

Network youth decorate cupcakes for the homeless.

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 with homelessness. If you want to be published in the Mockingbird Times visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org, or contact us at (206) 407-2134 or via email at mbt@mockingbirdsociety.org. If you have submitted something before that hasn’t been published, we may need your submission agreement in order to publish your work. Please submit materials and completed agreement again via the email address listed above.

Note: Any incoming letters to the editor and any correspondence to youth under 18 years of age should be addressed to the Mockingbird Times and will be opened first by adult editorial staff.