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September 2009

Mockingbird Society

Foster Care and Homeless Youth Speak Out Across the Nation

Volume X, Issue IX

Center for Children & Youth Justice—Supporting Justice by Christina Koshney

Partnerships are the stepping stones in building any strong organization. If your goal is to implement change, a single individual may spark the thought that it takes the arms and work of many in a variety of ways to bring about widespread change. As we are striving for a “world class foster care system” here at The Mockingbird Society (MBS), we need to ensure that we build quality relationships with all the community agencies that may impact us, from city council or other government organizations to other nonprofit or community organizations. By doing this, we have developed a team that supports us and that can be just as passionate and useful in achieving our own organizational goals of changing the child welfare system.

Justice Bobbe Bridge is a community leader who shares a passion for changing the juvenile court and child welfare systems so that they best benefit youth. Justice Bridge served as a judge for 18 years and, through her experience, she has built an extraordinary network of friends, colleagues, and others. She is a tremendous gain to our community and to The MBS as she now dedicates all of her work towards her own organization as well as several other community partners.

It is through these partnerships that she has the ability to develop The Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ), a nonprofit organization she started in 2006. Helping run CCYJ, Justice Bridge is fully committed to fulfilling CCYJ’s mission, “to advance justice for and enhance the lives of children and youth through juvenile justice, child welfare, and related systems reform.” CCYJ serves as a central base for all of the work that is being done in child welfare and juvenile justice and is designed to be a place that works to ensure that everyone’s goals of implementing change in these systems can actually happen.

The major projects that CCYJ has currently taken on include Models for Change (a juvenile systems reform initiative that is working on how to better the system on three fronts), Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network (incorporating mental health professionals and services into schools instead of police officers and jail sentences), Child Welfare Resources Bank (creating and updating a central database for all the recommendations to change the child welfare systems so they can be followed up on), Supporting Early Connections (focusing on how to best benefit infants and toddlers and their families early on so they can heal quickly and exit the foster care system), Highly Vulnerable Youth: Promoting Positive Outcomes (introducing community programs that have been proven to benefit high risk youth), and Lawyers Foster Independence (a program that encourages lawyers to provide free legal services to youth ages 17 to 23 in the system so that legal matters or other road blocks are no longer barriers to their success).

Justice Bridge recognizes her community partnerships as a necessary part of CCYJ’s functioning. She says CCYJ’s partnership with The MBS serves many purposes, one of which is being a sounding board for CCYJ, making sure that the youth voice is heard. Here, The MBS we are an organization that strives to not only include the youth voice but to also be driven by the youth voice and to be a partly youth-run organization. We too, are very committed to changing the child welfare system so that it may be “world class” and we do this through “innovation, collaboration and advocacy.”

CCYJ and The MBS collaborating is like magic. I am proud to be a voice at The MBS. Justice Bridge wants to remind youth that CCYJ has an open door for our voice and serves as a strong bridge to change. As parting words on ways to use advocacy everyday, Justice Bridge says to ask a lot of questions, don’t just assume what is happening to you is supposed to be, speak your rights, and to be a “smart patient” in researching and asking the right questions, not just taking what you’re told by the doctor. She also says CCYJ is here to take suggestions, comments and even complaints. Visit www.ccyy.org to leave an email or contact their offices. Thank you Justice Bridge for your time and commitment.

Siblings are often separated when put into the child welfare system. If siblings are separated, it is usually mandated that they have visits frequently, the standard being twice a month.1 However, this is not a perfect system and that does not always happen. When youth do get to have visits with their siblings, it’s often in an uncomfortable and even unfamiliar setting that can make sibling interaction awkward.

When my siblings and I were removed from our home, I would have liked to have been able to maintain their relationship outside of the parent’s home. From my experience, I have felt uncomfortable but I wouldn’t have let that stop me from enjoying the time we were allotted to spend together. However, despite the countless times that I asked to see my siblings, my social worker ignored my requests. I still have not seen my little brothers since we were put into care but I have at least been able to talk to them on the phone occasionally.

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is an innovative foster/birth/kinship caregiver service delivery model based on the extended family concept and designed to support prevention and permanency efforts that both increase child safety and strengthen families, which is being implemented nationally. The MFM supports comfortable sibling visits and connections in various ways. In Constellations, youth are given the opportunity to have visits in a safe and familiar environment. There are monthly constellation meetings that siblings, even those who are not placed in a constellation, can participate in. There are also fun, engaging, and safe activities that youth can participate in with the Constellations. A significant portion of youth in the constellations benefit from sibling visits that are organized by Hub Home Parents.2 As Hub Home parents, we feel responsible to bring siblings together, says Hub Home parent Degale Cooper. In her constellation, there have been a few different instances where she has facilitated sibling connections in a positive way while they were in a comfortable setting. In one example, two siblings were in the same home until one got moved because of behavioral issues and wasn’t getting along with the caregiver. The two siblings were able to maintain their relationship outside of the home in a more positive environment (the Hub Home), considering it as an extended family member’s home. There, the two youth (facilitated by the Hub Home parents) were able to engage without their foster family and were able to make and maintain a genuine connection.

Giving youth the opportunity to maintain healthy sibling connections and relationships is important to all youth whether in an out of home placement or not. “Without these sibling connections, youth forget how important their siblings are to them and what their relationships really mean,” says Degale. My siblings and I have irreplaceable relationships. When we got removed from our home, we lost our connections because we weren’t able to spend time together and interact as siblings anymore.

1 www.braampanel.org/MonRptOct08AppGuide.pdf
2 The Mockingbird Family Model Evaluation results.

Mockingbird Family

The Mockingbird Family Model Supports Sibling Connections by Diamonique Walker

To be a table captain, reserve a seat or sponsor this event, please contact Alicia LeVezu, alicia@mockingbirdociety.org or 206-323-KIDS (5437). There is no cost to attend. However, there will be an opportunity to donate. Suggested minimum donation is $150.

Join The Mockingbird Society for Our Third Annual Benefit Luncheon

September 2009 Benefit Luncheon | The Mockingbird Society

Visit us online at www.mockingbirdociety.org or call 206-323-KIDS (5437)
Imagine under what circumstances you as a parent or we as a nation would tolerate a legal proceeding in which the state and a judge decide where children and adolescents live without an attorney to adequately protect their rights and advocate for their views. In fact, every year, judges make decisions in thousands of foster care hearings even though the youth has no attorney to protect their rights or advocate for their views. The Dependency hearing is a legal proceeding in which critical life altering decisions are made that determine where 24 year olds will live, whether familial visits will occur (including sibling visits), and what services will be provided by the child welfare system to facilitate family reunification or other permanency options. After significant consideration The Mockingbird Society has decided to support the foster children currently arguing in an appeal in Washington State that they and other children in foster care have a constitutional right to adequately protect their rights and advocate for us as alumni!”

“real” change at a political and policy level. Once again, thank you so much for your tireless efforts and for listening to us as alumni!”

Meet Our Staff

Executive Director Jim Theofelis; Operations Director Ros Ghana; Mockingbird Family Programs Director Dr. Wanda Hackett; Youth Programs Director Tiffany Washington; Executive Assistant: Lauren Frederick; Development/Communications Coordinator: Catherine Lanham; Mockingbird Network Coordinator: Kara Sanders; Mockingbird Family Model (The MFM) Coordinator: Amy Converse; Administrative Coordinator: Dana Tidd; Assistant to the Executive Director: Millisa Morgan; The MFM AA Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson; Development Assistant Alicia Leveu; Resource Specialists Eva Ervin, Georgia Ramirez, Tammy Soderberg, Lauren Steed, Samantha Valentine; Senior Network Representatives: Leekor Bill, Ashley Rumsey, Betty Wani; Resource Specialists: Stephanie (Stevie) Glaberson, Development Assistant Alicia Leveu. The Mockingbird Society

Supporting Those Who Support Youth by Ashley Lanier

Everyone has a solid foundation on which to build. They can put their foot down and be there to catch them. Everyone needs support. Foster parents often do not feel as appreciated as they should. The withdrawal rate of foster parents is becoming a huge problem in maintaining the system as it results in a decrease in the number of caregivers. Because of this, every year, we will have more youth and not enough foster parents. Statistics show that from 1983 to 1992 the number of children entering the system went up only one third and the number of foster homes declined by nearly 11%. In 2008 there was an 81% retention rate for foster parents for the first time in 10 years. The national average for foster parent retention is closer to 50%. A vital part of the MFM concept is support in the form of respite care. It has been proven by experts to be one of the top tactics in recruiting and retaining great foster parents. Planned respite care is when appointments are planned trips to attend court or other big happenings on the constellation calendar in advance. About 64% of the youth in MFM constellations have benefited from planned respite care.

“The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is an innovative foster/birth/kinship caregiver service delivery model based on the Mockingbird Family Model concept and designed to support prevention, out of home placement, foster parent retention and permanency efforts that both increase child safety and strengthen family bonds. The MFM is being implemented nationally.” Within each group of 6-10 families, called a Constellation, there is a Hub Home. The Hub Home provides breaks for both foster children and youth. This reduces the amount of stress individuals might build up and normalizes everyone’s experiences. Crisis respite care is when unplanned issues, appointments, or events happen. For example, if the caregiver became sick or a child/youth began having behavior issues, they would be able to use the Hub home for crisis respite care. 15% of The MFM youth have benefited from this particular type of respite care.

The MFM also has other support services like monthly support meetings within the constellation which increase peer support and decrease the isolation experienced by foster parents and youth. There are also MFM trainings with topics like First Aid/ CPR, life skills, aging out options, back-to-school support, stress management, self care, and DHSIs guidelines around birth family and sibling visits. These trainings help caregivers develop the skills to effectively address challenges.

Peer mentoring is an important aspect of Constellation support. The Mockingbird Family Model offers peer mentoring provided by the Hub Home to Constellation youth and foster families. Last year, peer mentoring was provided on topics such as educational advocacy, accessing mental health services, crisis stress, adoption and permanency, stress management, and other stressful encounters with birth families, and navigating the DHSIS system.

Please review the Clinical Supervisor for Casey Family Programs Seattle Field Office, Emily Cator. “We all need support and MFM is one way of getting it. Parents feel less alone, and other kids understand kids, so I think getting support from other parents is really valuable,” she says. Each Hub Home has an adult parent in their life, a “parent of the foster parent. They are one of the best available resources for caregivers.

“I think in order for caregivers to feel supported they need for us to be responsive; if they need help with trainings, behavior issues, etc., we need to help them individualize their needs. What are their foster kids needs? Based on that we can be part of the decision making throughout the process, which is what the MFM inclusively covers,” says Emily.

After many assessments, the Mockingbird Family Model continues to show that it is more a program that ameliorates the challenge of the lack of support for caregivers. For more information on the MFM, visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

1. Mockingbird Family Model Evaluation reports

I commend you and MBS for the courage to address issues such as these on behalf of my brothers and sisters in and from the foster care system. As a matter of fact, I depend on your work to move the foster care system towards

Youth 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!

My gift to help children, youth and families in foster care is (check box):

$1,000 + 1% Supporter
$500 - 999 Champion
$250 - 499 Advocate
$200 - 249 Supporter
$100 - $19 Contributor
Other

My gift is (check box):

a one time gift

лиз payment options:

Check payable to The Mockingbird Society
Credit card:
MasterCard
AMEX

Account number:
Expiration date:
Credit card billing address (if different than mailing address):
Signature:

Please charge my credit card:

One time
Monthly
Quarterly

My employer will match my gift:

Company Name:

(please enclose your matching gift form)

Please mail this completed form and your check to The Mockingbird Society, 2100 24th Avenue S, Suite 240, Seattle, WA 98144. For more information, call (206) 323-KIDS (5437) or visit www.mockingbirdsociety.org.

Support The Mockingbird Society!

NAME
ADDRESS
PHONE
EMAIL

Supporting Those Who Support Youth by Ashley Lanier

Supporting Those Who Support Youth

Thank You!

Anonymous; Apex Foundation; Senator Dale Brandland of the 42nd District; Karen Brandviken-Baker; Gerry Burnett; In Celebration of Chelsea and Candace’s Marriage: Claire Nunneye Levy; Children’s Administration; In honor of Jeff, Jenny, Jay and Nicole Cravens; The Sundby-Penticosts; In honor of Jill Donnelly; Shari Behnke, Eastern Washington Women’s Networking Group; Beth Emmons; Sandi Everlove; In memory of Thomas Freeman; Jacqueline Gause; King County Councilmember Larry Gossett; Patricia Gray and Spencer Noland; Jillian Gross; Dr. Wanda Hackett; In memory of June Hedle at least as much for our own children; Karen Hill; Sarah Rafston; Vanitha S. Raman; David Roberts; Debra Ronnholm; Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos; Steve Shea and Kelly Nolan Sheafer; Suzanne Shawger; Stephanie Solien and Franklin Green; Captain John C. Spence USCG Ret. and Mrs. Patricia Spencer; Street Youth Legal Advocates of Washington; Timothy Tomlinson; Alicia Tonakoset.

In Celebration of Matt Troxslad and Natasha Jankauskas’ Marriage; Elizabeth Bamber, Four Points by Sheraton, Robert Isbell, Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund; Betty Wani; Maurice Ward; Erin and Mike Welch; Winndrume: Real Estate; Capitol Hill; Yakima Union Gospel Mission; Celeste Miller; Kate White; Emily Gause; Michael Cherry; Megan Campbell; Reyna Hayashi; Sugg; Sascha Sprinkle & Megan Giske.

Northern Initiative for Foster Youth.

Be a Mockingbird Network Representative

The Mockingbird Society is hiring! We are looking for youth with experience in the foster or kinship care system. Duties include public speaking and advocacy, writing articles for the Mockingbird Times, and other organizational and leadership opportunities. For more information, contact Kara at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org or (206) 323-5437.

If you would like to become a Mockingbird Network Representative, please fill out the form below and submit it to Kara at kara@mockingbirdsociety.org.
There are a lot of resourc- es out there for teen drinking and alcohol abuse. The resources are well known and can easily be found but the most difficult part about teen drinking is breaking the cycle.

When I worked for Northwest Area Foundation we researched poverty in urban Indian communities. We discovered that there are enough resources for drinking and promote it but the main con- cern was breaking the habit for good. A person can go to treatment but what about afterwards? How can we, as a commu- nity, help curb the hard issue of the cycle of alcoholism? Most teens start drinking before they turn 21. From my experience, as well as from speaking with other youth, it seems that a large portion of fosters get sent to treatment numer- ous times. Within the past two months, I personally have experienced the loss of two close friends from alcohol abuse. Too many people I know have similar experi- ences.

When I was younger, on the run, and still in care, I used to have a really bad drinking problem. I sometimes got in trouble with the law because I was simply drunk and was not even aware of it. I had gotten arrested quite a few times but I had been really bad. My dad and I had always been good but I never would have thought that when I was drinking, even though I didn’t actually do anything my- self. Getting in trouble for something you don’t understand is not worth it and should be a wake-up call.

On the news and in newspapers we see deaths reported from car wrecks due to driving under the influence (DUI’s) and sometimes suicides. Even if I am in the University District I am always being aware of people getting into fights and even arresting themselves. If I ever I am in the University District I am always two blocks away from the area and usually hear stories about a whole lot of drama that always occurs. I am always aware of the people around me and I can tell from those around me that this is a cycle of alcoholism. Most teens start drinking before they turn 21. From my experience, as well as from speaking with other youth, it seems that a large portion of foster youth get sent to treatment numer- ous times. Within the past two months, I personally have experienced the loss of two close friends from alcohol abuse. Too many people I know have similar experi- ences.

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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 do one thing but sing.”

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.

News From

The Mockingbird Network

Your Needs, Your Voice

Those Days
Annasia Ellis
I am not just an ordinary person with a simple personality.
I got shot in my heart with a bullet and it was labeled personality.
You people love could be your enemies, backstabbing you, telling lies.
About random things that have you wondering.
That also have your mind rumbling and stumbling.
Upon the beat of your heart slowly gliding across cold thin ice.
Desire boils through your insides.
This is why I am asking you, do you ever have those days?
This is that moment when you reach and grab the facts.
You find out the truth, bring it to the light, and watch them turn their backs.
This becomes a reason for giving season.
Though you may think that the days are the last.
Think again, my sister, my brother, another one has been passed.
Now this time I hit you with a sweet rhyme.
It didn’t cost me a nickel not even dime.
Now this time I hit you with a sweet rhyme.
It doesn’t matter to me who lies & cheats.
It doesn’t matter to me.
I want to know what lies in the confines of your concieved mind.
trapped and caged, broken and filled with unadulterated Rage.
It doesn’t matter to me that I don’t pop pills like peanuts or drink like a fish because at times I wish I was like others, bask in pain only to be covered.
I want to know, am I good enough to be bad?
I want to know.

I Want To Know
Imma Johnson
It doesn’t matter to me who you are in the world’s harsh flow.
what you are and how much you know,
when you’ll be there and how much compassion you’ll show.
Or why I don’t just take a puff of weed & let my mind blow.
I want to know how you live in the hollows of that empty vessel you call home.
Or when you will release the manifested anger that has turned into pure hunger.
It doesn’t matter to me who lies & cheats.
It doesn’t matter to me.
I want to know what lies in the confines of your concieved mind.
trapped and caged, broken and filled with unadulterated Rage.
It doesn’t matter to me that I don’t pop pills like peanuts or drink like a fish because at times I wish I was like others, bask in pain only to be covered.
I want to know, am I good enough to be bad?
I want to know.

Community Events

Region 1: Chapter in Spokane County by OnaLee Stewart
This month, two of our members, OnaLee Stewart and Katrina Dyer attended a State Advisory Council meeting as well as the Street Youth Legal Advocates of Washington (SYLAW) training with Seattle University law students. We split into groups and discussed the responsibility of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to youth, and the Youth Rights document from The Mockingbird Society. We had eight youth and alumni attend our chapter meeting where we played Independent Living lepards; made nacho’s; had candy; discussed chapter names, a community action plan, and the difference between a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) and a lawyer; and decided on leadership terms of office. It was an extremely productive month!

Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Sahsheena Ellis-Worth
Region 3, HEYMAC, has been hard at work to make a difference. In the last month, we have participated in many fun activities, such as hosting a Q&A session with Senator Dale Brandland from Washington State’s 42nd District, and participating in a legal rights training. The meeting with the senator went fantastically, resulting in invitations to visit him at the capital and the senator feeling more inspired to make a difference for foster youth. We are currently a small group but we are growing each month and we have a strong passion about what we do!

Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Georgina Ramirez
This month we had an excellent turn out with a lot of new faces so we discussed what a chapter meeting is and what we are here as a group to accomplish. Next, we talked about adequate legal representation, our Leadership Summit topic. Since this is a controversial issue, we thought about how we are going to create a game plan to bring to Advocacy Day. We also discussed recruitment ideas as well as a sign-up for the Inside Scoop event that we hosted. Karen Pillar, Beth Emmons, and Brenda Nguyen came in to talk to us about various subjects of importance such as how to be our own best advocate with mental health providers, protect our identity, and how to become future millionaires. Next month we are going to talk about team building activities and legal representation some more. Please join us September 14, 3:30 – 5:30 PM.

Region 5: Chapter in Pierce County by DeMarea Kirk
Region 5 has been busy. This month we volunteered with Catholic Community Services in their Help Kitchen where we plan to do again in September. The interns for Culture of Youth Care have been meeting to get their presentation ready. Recently, all the regions came together to discuss how and what we were going to do for making the Your Rights book more efficient and easier for everyone to understand as well as what to put into the new manual. There was also a training with SYLAW educating us on ways to clean up our criminal records, how to live in an apartment and manage our lives, among other topics. Thanks to those who put on the trainings!

Region 6: SPEAK UP! Chapter in Clark County by Crystal Sharp
This month we say good-bye to our Resource Specialist, Heather Jones. Her biggest highlight here was, “watching the youth prepare for Advocacy Day and seeing them in action. Watching youth advocate for themselves and other foster youth is very rewarding.” Heather joined The MBS and started the first Network Chapter, SPEAK UP, in July 2008. She wanted to be a part of a team that helps foster youth become advocates and leaders. “The way The MBS empowers youth is very impactful.” In her time with The MBS, she has seen great change in youth, like one young man from region 3. “He was sitting on the State Advisory Council for the first time and was very shy and had a soft voice. Seven months later he was at the Youth Leadership Summit and showed up with a great speech and an outgoing attitude and was a great advocate for himself.” We are sad to see Heather leave and will miss her greatly!

Don’t forget to check your email for our August newsletter with the full report from Region 5’s Advocacy Day and the children’s book we made with TanyaColumns.com called “The Unmistakables.”

The Mockingbird Times
September 2009

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