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A Letter to Ms. Michelle Obama by Ashlie Lanier

To Ms. Michelle Obama,

Your biography written for the White House Web site states that you found your true calling in life was to serve communities and their neighbors. I share that common calling in the concept of serving my community by informing them of the many issues within the child-welfare system and getting them resolved. The reality of being a youth in care is that you grow up often not knowing your rights. When I joined The Mockingbird Society (MBS), I had no idea that living with my cousin and friends was considered informal kinship care. I also had no clue about all the many resources available to me.

I work for MBS as a Senior Network Representative. MBS is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to improving the lives of current and future youth in the foster care system. Our mission is to “Build a world class foster care system through innovation, collaboration, and advocacy.” The Mockingbird Society consists of two programs: The Mockingbird Family Model and The Mockingbird Network. I am a part of The Mockingbird Network, Region 4, King County. Our chapter name, Region 4 for Change, was inspired from the 2008 Obama/Biden campaign. **President Obama** speaks about change and how important it is for us as citizens to be inspired by hope and our supporters.

The Mockingbird Network is a Washington State-wide initiative bringing together youth and alumni of foster and kinship care, with a vision to develop individual leaders, engage and strengthen communities, and reform the foster care system. There are a variety of ways in which The Mockingbird Network accomplishes these goals.

One avenue that youth use to advocate for themselves and other foster youth is through the *Mockingbird Times*. Over 22,000 copies are distributed every month and there is also a digital version on the MBS Web site www.mockingbirdsociety.org. The Foster Youth & Alumni Leadership Summit is another way that youth from care can advocate for themselves. This opportunity gave me the ability to learn more skills on what it takes to become a better leader. It also allowed me the opportunity to get together with youth like me to discuss key issues and challenges we face every day while being able to present those issues to important policy makers. For youth in today’s society, advocacy is the strongest way to implement change and get our voices heard.

Youth Advocacy Day is yet another method that youth use to stand up for themselves and others in care. This last year we marched throughout our beautiful capital in Olympia, shouting for our rights. (“We don’t want no garbage bags we want homes!”) I actually sat down in the hearings for the bills and watched youth testify. After hearing heartfelt stories and meaningful statements, the legislators were left with decisions to make. On April 21st 2009, **Governor Christine Gregoire** signed HB-1492 Independent Youth Housing Program. On April 25th 2009, she signed HB-1938 Sibling Visitation and HB-1961 Fostering Connections. On May 11th 2009 HB-5811 Notification of Rights was signed into law.

Ms. Obama, MBS is one of the most change fulfilled organizations I have ever been a part of. I understand government officials are concerned about health care and jobs but what about the youth? More specifically, what about the youth who are a part of the child welfare system, a system based on a concept that suggests that the government is our parent? Today’s youth are our next presidents, legislators, judges, lawyers, and other professional people of importance. With a broken child-welfare system, how do we expect the children to succeed? You cannot put a dollar amount on a child’s life.

No one asks to be brought into the system. I, along with other representatives, would love it if you personally or someone from your administration could come visit our headquarters and go through the Culture of Foster Care training, a training created and facilitated by the government’s children and tomorrow’s leaders. I think it would be a great asset to your calling of serving communities and their neighbors.

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Mockingbird Family Model Expansion by Jerry Bobo

The population of the State of Washington in 2008 was 6,549,224. Out of that number, there are 10,068 children in the foster care system. Of that, 52.3% are between the ages of 13 and 21.¹ That’s a big number. Prevention is the key to stability, and having a better child welfare system is part of the equation. The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is an award-winning, innovative model for foster care delivery that offers practical, cost-effective solutions to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children and youth.

MFM is a simple yet innovative concept which establishes a sense of extended family and community around the participating children, youth, and families. In each MFM Constellation, six to ten families (foster, kinship, foster-to-adopt, and/or birth families) live in close proximity to a central, licensed foster care family called a Hub Home whose role is to provide assistance in navigating systems, peer support for children and parents, impromptu and regularly scheduled social activities, planned respite nearly 24/7, and crisis respite as needed. By taking this model and expanding it, The Mockingbird Society is going in the direction of prevention.

I asked **Jim Theofelis**, Executive Director of The Mockingbird Society, where the idea of expanding the MFM into prevention came from and he replied, “The prevention applications have always been part of the concept—we needed to first demonstrate effectiveness with the traditional approach of the MFM. Also, **Dr. Wanda Hackett** and the MFM team have been incredible in their efforts and their learning about what makes the MFM work and how to best apply it to other sub-populations. But again, in the effort to build a world-class foster care system, we believe we need to support the families and communities caring for children **before** they are removed and placed into the formal foster care system.”

The average time a child spends in foster care is 2 years. 7,595 foster children are waiting to be reunified with their birth families, and 2,179 are waiting to be adopted with an average waiting time of 40 months.² A constellation directed towards prevention would definitely lower these numbers drastically. Not only that, but it will be a form of motivation and support. A constellation is a positive and effective way to put a program geared towards prevention together. A prevention constellation will also help lower the time that a youth is waiting to be adopted by a family. I asked Dr. Hackett, Director of Family Programs here at The Mockingbird Society, how this method will connect children with adoptive families better than the standard MFM way.

She said, “The foster-to-adopt application of the MFM would connect families looking to adopt children to existing Constellations. The intent would be to incorporate pre-adoptive families into the Constellation activities (monthly meetings, social events, etc.) so families could get to know children (free for adoption) and children could get to know the families. If an adoptive ‘match’ occurs, great! The goal is more time to build a relationship and achieve a ‘more natural match’ between children and potential adoptive families than is usually the case.”

I could have been in foster care but I was lucky enough to stay with my family in unlicensed kinship care. The whole time that I was living with my relatives the main goal was to be reunited with my birth mom. That reunification was a very important part of my life. Negative experiences molded my perceptions on trust and positive experiences helped me to grow and appreciate what little prevention help I received.

The Mockingbird Society expanding the MFM design in the direction of prevention is not only great for the organization but for youth and communities as well. The constellations will provide the nurturing that is needed to prevent disappointment, trust issues, and fear. The MFM is continuously growing and making a difference in the lives of those involved. MFM is a family working with families and supporting families. Prevention is the key when you in the foster care system.

1, 2 states.fosterclub.com/washington/resources/statistics

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Letter From the Editor by Jim Theofelis

I like November if for no other reason than it seems like it is the month that both prepares us for and shifts us into a season of special days. Of course, Thanksgiving is this month and a wonderful opportunity for each of us to reflect upon our many blessings for which to be thankful.

But even before the “big holiday” in November we have others that also call upon us to take a moment and consider not only our blessings but of the contributions and blessings of our fellow citizens. For example, November typically brings us an election and this year is no exception. We are so fortunate in this country that we have the right to vote and make a direct impact upon how our democracy comes alive. **I encourage each of you to exercise your right to vote.**

Additionally, November is the month of one of my favorite holidays which is Veterans’ Day. I personally want to thank the men and women in uniform who are serving our country. I especially share my gratitude with those who are serving on foreign soil away from their loved ones during such a precarious time in our history. **To the Veterans who have returned from their tour of duty and especially to those who come home injured, I say, “Thank you for your sacrifice and your service!”**

As November welcomes us to the change in weather including more cold and rain and less light, we are challenged to bring our own warmth and light to our cherished relationships, to those less fortunate, and to our own healing and growth. These are trying times for so many of us and our neighbors and yet there is opportunity all around to reach out and share a simple act of kindness to those around us.

As you enter this season of holidays I ask you to keep The Mockingbird Society in mind and heart. **We remain dedicated to our mission of building a world-class foster care system so that our most vulnerable children and teenagers are also reminded of just how special they are to all of us. On behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of The Mockingbird Society I wish each of you a very Happy Thanksgiving!**

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Toy Soldiers by Ashlie Lanier

In school they teach you that violence is never a way to solve issues. Teachers and counselors continuously remind us that violence will only lead you to two places: a grave or prison. Yet over the last two years there has been a huge increase in youth violence. There are 12 and 13 year old teens playing with fire, trying to make sure that people know who they are and how much work they put in, but for what? To represent the area they live in? To show their peers how they deal with issues when they are upset?

In 2006, Washington State recorded 539 firearms fatalities. It is too easy for youth to get their hands on guns. In 2008, there were 19 teens tried as adults for gun-related crimes. So far this year there have been at least 36 teens tried as adults, nearly all for gun-related crimes.

Youth are turning to guns to fix problems. Whatever happened to talking it out? Peer Mediators? Counselors? The amount of teens buying guns has made it so that few places are safe. People in the communities should not be afraid to go outside and live life. Friends turn on friends and enemies become your worst nightmares.

On September 10th, people gathered at Seattle Central Community College for the **Aaron John Sullivan Memorial Anti-Gun March**. **Aaron Sullivan** was killed last July with a military assault rifle fired by one of his peers. His incident was not gang-related or drug-related; it was simple a gun-related crime. The march was to inform the community of this particular act of violence and to fight against it as well as celebrate Aaron's journey to enlightenment.

Between January and June 15th 2008, the number of incident reports showing some kind of gang involvement was 66, according to department statistics. During that same period this year statistics show there were 88. Every day there is a child that grows up without a father figure, or a child that enters care, or a child that takes on the responsibility to care for another sibling. Every day there is a youth that joins a gang.

Youth join and involve themselves in gangs for many different reasons. Some search for that father figure and most likely find it in what gangs call Big Homies. Many join to become a part of the hustle, to feel the family vibe and a sense of comfort. Others join because they just want to live the life of a gangster. You see it on television all the time; the music videos, movies and late night documentaries that promote gang violence. They make it seem as if it would give you a sense of belonging and a name for yourself. This type of promotion leaves troubled teens open to suggestion.

Youth violence (gun and gang-related) in Seattle has increased 22 percent in the first seven months of this year compared to the same period last year. However, homicides have decreased in 2009. So far there have been 15 in Seattle, including 10 shooting deaths. That's down from 21 during the same period last year.

In order to provide a solution to this problem there are many programs and events dedicated to change. For example, the **Aaron Sullivan Weapon Ban** bill which would ban the sale and discharge of military type assault weapons in the State of Washington. It might not solve youth violence as a whole; however banning the most fatal weapons available to youth in our communities is a great start.

There is also **Washington Ceasefire**, "a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to reducing gun violence in Washington State through education, research and advocacy." There are more than 6,000 members across the state, all citizens affected by gun violence who came together.

Another great organization is the **Seattle Youth Violence Prevention Initiative**, "taking a new approach and intensively focusing on 800 young people living in central, southwest, and southeast Seattle facing the highest risk for perpetuating or being victimized by violence."

Youth are around our neighborhoods buying, selling, and shooting guns. Youth are around our neighborhoods affiliating themselves with gangs. Our future, our youth are becoming toy soldiers.

References: www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/emstrauma/injury/data_tables, washingtonceasefire.org/resource-center

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Reunification by Diamonique Walker

When youth age out of care, whether it was foster care or kinship care, often one of the first things they want to do is reach out to their birth parents if possible, a process called reunification. Reunifying may not be so simple because the youth might have feelings such as abandonment, resentment and anger towards their parents. Even with negative feelings, reunifying can be important to provide closure on a youth's foster care experience as well as open a door for a fresh start with birth parents.

Sometimes youth are able to reunify with birth parents before they age out of foster care which can be an even more difficult transition, especially for younger children. This can sometimes be better though. Whether youth get taken away from their parents because of abuse, neglect, domestic violence, or whatever reason, they sometimes are able to be reunified because Child Protective Services (CPS) feels that the parents have their stuff together and are

capable of being adequate parents. The transition can be difficult on the youth's part because they may have insecurities about being sent back into foster care whether it is for their parents not doing the right thing or themselves not doing the right thing.

I was in a kinship placement then I transitioned back into my mother's care when I was 16. Reunifying was made easier for me by gradually spending more and more time with my mom then finally living with her again. I think having reunification be a gradual process is what made it easier on me and my mom. Not everyone has as good a reunification experience as I did though. Someone I know, who is an alumna of foster care, had a not so great reunification experience. After emancipating out of care, she pursued relationships with both of her birth parents. "I wanted my mom's love like no other... When I got older and closer [to my mom] things got bad, my mom's addiction took over our relationship, she stole from me and said some things that can never be taken back," she said. "My dad had me fooled. He was playing like nothing could tear us apart again. He tried to buy my love and I fell for it, but he eventually got back hooked on drugs and that ended our relationship."

Reunification isn't always a good thing. Youth may come to find out that their parents really don't want anything to do with them when they age out of care. Parents sometimes don't change from their old ways that got their child put in foster care to begin with, so it makes renewing their relationship after care nearly impossible, as with the alumna that I mentioned. In some cases when youth get reunited with parents before aging out, their parents may have misled CPS to believe that they are capable parents although they haven't refrained from their old ways that got their child put in care. Then the youth may eventually end up back in foster care.

While some youth have negative experiences reunifying with birth parents, it is still important. It can open up doors for other family bonds. "Yes, I am happy that I got to meet my parents, the only great thing that came out of it was meeting my siblings who love and care for me and will always be there for me no matter what," said the alumna mentioned above.

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Sharing Our Stories by Ian Grant

Everything has a price. For foster youth, telling our story is the price we pay for getting people to listen to us, to help us. It is ironic that the part of us that we would most like to forget, the part of us that most of us wish could be erased from existence, is the one that we are constantly called upon to share in order to better our lives and the lives of those who come after us.



I spoke to an alumnus of care, whom I will call Jack, about this contradiction, and how it affected his life. He left his home at age 11, after running away several times. His parents wanted him gone because they were concerned that he was a bad influence on his younger siblings, that they would follow in his footsteps. He couch-surfed for a while, and then a social worker placed him in a group home, where he lived until he was 15 years old. He spent the remainder of his time in care placed with a foster family, before aging out at 18.

Jack struggled with the expectations of the people that were assigned to his case, saying "I had to share with people that I didn't know, and didn't have a relationship with. I didn't trust those people... After therapy sessions, I would wonder if they were going to say something, or if I were going to get in trouble. It was uncomfortable." Although Jack acknowledged that it was important to build trust with his service providers, he felt that they often went too far—"They're always trying to dig deeper. I felt like they were probing me, like I was a science experiment...and when you're 11, you...don't know how to cope with that sort of thing. I learned to tell my first psychiatrist what I thought he wanted to hear."

Jack is doing well now. Although the meetings with service providers were sometimes uncomfortable, he feels that "in the end, it was worth it. It got the pressure off my chest... [and] helped me with my behavioral issues." He said that service providers "need to trust their kids... social workers are there to build relationships that help kids, and if you're digging and probing, you aren't able to do that."

After I talked with Jack, I spoke to **Henry Author Jenkins, Jr.**, a case manager with the **YMCA Independent Living Program**. He has worked as a case manager for the last five years, and regularly interviews youth in care and alumni of care in order to provide them services. He tries not to bring people's history into things initially—the questions he asks at the first meeting are along the lines of "What do you want from this program?" and "What are some of your goals?" He knows that most people "aren't going to tell me their whole life story the first time they meet me. Ultimately, I need to know what drives them—why they want to achieve the goals that they have set for themselves." Like Jack, a lot of foster youth have learned to tell service providers what they want to hear, and Jenkins says he often finds himself in situations where youth "tell me what I want to hear, what [they] told other service providers."

Jenkins tries to be fair, saying "If a person tells me their story, or if a person doesn't tell me their story, I have to treat them each the same way." However, he says that knowing more about a participant's background can help him in his work: "I try to remember the stories that each participant tells me, because that's the connection I have with them...I like to take the stories to...make a parallel to whatever goal that they want to achieve." He admits, however, that

it's not always easy to remain objective: "When I hear the stories, and I try not to do this, but I do—I hurt for them. And it's hard, because I would like to be professional, but I'm still human; when I see a participant who has gone through serious trauma because of something an adult did to them, it affects me. It makes me think about my kids... I carry it around with me. It's real."

I asked Jenkins what he would say to other case managers, and he said "When a young person tells you their story, listen intently. Don't just listen for the traumatic part of it, don't listen for how you can jump in and save the day, but just listen, and be there... And then you can take all that you've heard, and you can use it to best help the participant in whatever they are doing."

Jack and Mr. Jenkins are on opposite sides of the social services equation. But they can each see that being respectful and compassionate with the stories that youth share is absolutely central to building effective relationships with those youth, and that poking and prodding tend to undermine those relationships. Some service providers occasionally need to be reminded of this fact. Trust is the single most important factor when building a relationship and the only way to build trust is to show respect for each other. I hope that hearing these two stories helps you to do that. Good luck, and keep fighting.

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Being in the System by David Buck

The child-welfare system as a whole is problematic for youth, but what I hope to be able to give you is a better understanding of just how the system affects children. I will be focusing on one of several issues on how the system makes things difficult. Psychological problems manifest themselves everywhere: in social situations, on the job, in families, etc. I'm going to be focusing today strictly on the social issues around the child-welfare system.

Whatever problems led youth into the system, the consequences are usually the same. Being removed from their families is hard on youth, as is being separated from their neighborhoods, their schools, their friends, and other family and this sense of loss is very traumatizing for those so young. Take these emotions into a new environment where children need social relationships such as friends, family, and mentors you got yourself a big heap of problems.

According to **Casey Family Programs**, more than 500,000 children are in foster care in the United States. Most of these children have been the victims of repeated abuse and neglect and have not experienced a nurturing, stable environment during the early years of life. A 2003 issue of the **Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry** says that neglect can distort the attachment aspect of a child's development. They go on to state that "children who have experienced chronic abuse and neglect during their first few years may live in a persistent state of hyper-arousal or dissociation, anticipating a threat from every direction." According to the **Child Welfare League of America**, some 2,500 kids were removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect in Washington State alone.

Psychologists with the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services** who studied the affects of the child-welfare system on children have pointed out that many of these youth have almost completely avoided attachment in their lives. It's very common for a youth in care to feel like the only person he or she can trust is him- or herself.

When I was in care that was how it was with me: I refused to make friends because I always felt like they would be lost too quickly and abruptly down the road. A twenty year old alumna of the system, **Zematra Bacon**, says, "I stayed very private about myself with the friends I did have and didn't talk about issues I was having."

Research shows this continues into the youth's adult lives; it makes it very hard for youth to feel like they can trust anybody even into adulthood. "It was hard for me after leaving the system to get the ability to be open with people again," Zematra says. Loving relationships developed at this time can be tough on both the alumna and the people the alumna cares about. This often results of the cycle of abuse continuing, a very real problem that needs to be addressed.

According to the **American Psychiatric Association** which studied the effects of those in the system, the best treatment option for those in these situations is large support groups for these youth: large, effective, integrated support where those in the system won't just one day feel like all those connections get ripped out. It is very common for youth leaving care, once all those supporters they had while in the system are removed, to have those old feelings returned or reinforced.

References: aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;106/5/1145, www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm, www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm07/chapter3.htm, ndas.cwla.org_abuse.suite101.com/article.cfm/child_maltreatment_and_brain_development

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Meet the Staff: David Buck

My name is David Buck. I am one of the new Network Representatives for The Mockingbird Society. I currently live in the University District in Seattle in a

transitional living house. My goal here, as well as in the future, is to continue doing what I love: activism in general. I hope to always have a career doing exactly that, whether that is through social work, writing, music, or whatever else I see along those lines. I hope one day to be a monk in Tibet as a Buddhist Bodhisattva (someone whose life ambition is to help others achieve enlightenment).

I am a musician; I'm classically trained in bass and I am also proficient in piano and drums. Literature plays a big part of who I am. I read novels by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.; Aldous Huxley; Jack London; and many others. My biggest influences are Victor Wooten, Hunter S. Thompson, and Bill Hicks. I am also a Buddhist who practices Taoism.

My experience in the foster care system is limited. I was in a group home for nine months and in foster homes for three. But I have experienced homelessness for about two years which is only now starting to end. My experience in homelessness was directly linked to my experience in foster care and was directly related to why I was in foster care.

A major issue in the system that I am passionate about is the educational problems associated with those in foster care. If children are our future then it is very important that our children are educated and youth in the foster care system are at an incredibly high risk for educational problems. Another issue that I am passionate about is the issue of homelessness for youth in the foster care system. Many of those in foster care become homelessness upon leaving. I have experienced homelessness and know just how rough it can be, especially for those who haven't had it easy in the first place.

One thing I would definitely change about the system is the education policy centered on youth in the foster care program. I believe those in foster care should have a no-questions asked ability to attend charter schools for foster care youth and other alternative programs specially designed for those in foster care who want them. Education is incredibly important for all youth, but foster youth specifically face incredible challenges when pursuing their educational goals.

I became a part of The Mockingbird Society because I've always felt that it is right to stand up for what you think is right and foster care reform is just something I believe in. I've always had a passion for writing and I'm writing about a subject I'm passionate about. I believe that spreading awareness about the system and the truth of the matter is the only way to bring about change.

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Meet the Staff: Amanda Bevington

My name is Amanda Bevington. I am a new network representative at the Mockingbird Society. My goals are to be a case worker or counselor for foster youth. My interest and hobbies are music, food, and shopping, boxing, and playing basketball.

My experience in foster care started at the age 1. I was told by my grandma that the reason I had to be in another home was because my birth mom was too young and addicted to drugs. I was too young to understand. By the time I reached 4 years old I was told by a judge that I could live with my birth mom and my brothers, but only if she agrees to complete alcohol and drug treatment. As I got older I gave up on my birth family because I thought they never cared. My mom never went to treatment, and my brothers and I ran away from the pain.

One major issue I have with the system is the judge thinking they know what's best for foster kids. I never had the chance to say how I felt or what I would like to happen. For example, it's not fair to say I can only live or visit with my birth mom if she completes treatment. It's not fair to get family privileges from someone that barely knows you or your background, or even yet someone that does not want to know you. I bet the judge never walked in my shoes. I blame the judge for taking me away from my family and having me grow up thinking nobody loves me.

One thing I would change about the system is; if you ever get adopted let the children pick the family not the adoptive parents pick you. That makes youth feel like we are in a dog pound waiting for a new family. People pick out the cutest puppy; In this case they're picking out the cutest kid. Also when you get adopted I think you should be with parents that our similar to your ethnic background, religion, and not be separated from siblings. In my case I got adopted when I was about 8 years old to two moms. This made my experience very hard to explain to others why I have two moms and they didn't. Kids would laugh at me because I am different and would assume I would end up liking women too. This situation would make me get into fights and expelled from school.

I became a part of the Mockingbird Society because I've always wanted to work with foster kids. I've always wanted to make the foster care better somehow. I enjoy working with other young adults that are similar to me and that came from the same background as me. The Mockingbird Society is a great organization that will help me pursue my dreams and goals. I am looking forward to be a part of the team in The Mockingbird Society.

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Catch-22 by Ashlie Lanier

The media is one of the primary outlets in which all of us receive information. We shape our values, beliefs, and perspectives around the information given from the Internet, news, books, newspapers, television, and radio. There has been an ongoing argument on the portrayal of people in general through media coverage, both negative and positive, changing perspectives and judging people based on limited information.

The Internet is the “greatest source for free speech, civic engagement, and economic growth.” People are able to speak on anything they believe in and provide information to persuade others to believe the same. For instance, while attending high school, I had to write a history paper on Martin Luther King. I was supposed to dig deeper and find more information than others already knew. I came across a very biased and bigoted site which claimed that Martin Luther King Jr. was a communist, plagiarizer, and cheater. With all the so-called “facts” the writer gives, I could have easily been convinced that the man that stood and fought for equality was really a fake.

With radio, there is a different approach. The radio is meant for active listeners who receive and analyze information. Here in Washington State we have radio shows like KUBE 93, KISS 106.1, and MOVING 92.5. Besides the great and not so great music, there are talk shows. Radio personalities speak on different topics and with people live on the air, stating their opinions. Topics can vary from, “Who is the best rapper alive?” to, “Does President Obama deserve the Nobel Peace Prize?”

Television is a broad topic in general. We have channels ranging from MTV, BET, and VH1 to local channels like KIRO 7 and Q13. Television is able to serve the public and educate others, as well as engage and inform audiences around the world about different places and different people. However, things are not always so positive. For instance, an angry 15 year old girl from Cincinnati wrote a letter to BET (black entertainment television) saying, “All of the values that my parents seek to instill in me and my brothers seems to be contradicted by a more powerful force from the media, and your show is at the forefront.”

Books are used to, “read in order to use critical thinking and your imagination.” We start our education using books. From kindergarten through middle school, we are taught straight out of books, picture books then chapter books. In high school and college, books are required to meet the curriculum. However, on a personal level, urban books in the community are molding young teenage girls. Books like **The Coldest Winter Ever**, **Fly Girl**, and **A Hustler’s Wife** are expanding young girls’ minds to determine what kind of woman they might become in the future. Books like Karrinne Stephens’s **Confessions of a Video Vixen** are top sellers putting educational books on the back burner.

Knowledge has been questioned and changed once we utilize the information we’ve researched. For example, consider racial stereotypes. If you live in a small community where there are few ethnic minorities, all you know about them is information you’ve seen in the media where blacks are gang members and drug addicts, Mexicans are illegal immigrants, and Muslims are terrorists. So when you come across someone that looks like one of these people, do you automatically assume they are that way? After all, that’s all you hear about them. The media has both positive and negative affects, it is a Catch-22.

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Creative Corner

Godly Sorrow by Anthony

For what delight I feel
when early morning dew
touches my fingertips.

In the air there’s a feeling of
tranquility, peacefulness.

My Heavenly mother; I’ve been gone too long.
I’ve helped in the destruction caused
and the hand which is killing you.

For I have polluted you and abused you,
destroyed you.

And now I’ll help to revive you,
nurture you, feed you. As you have me
for sixteen years.

I’m sorry you have called
and I have not answered,
for I have been blessed, yet
did not appreciate.

I turn my face
just as others have of me.
Now I face you, as you have
done to me.

How treacherous man can be
to you, my Lord.

Do not punish them for sins

they know not of; but love
them as you love me.

Help me open their eyes and
their hearts.

O' Lord, my Father, start through me.
Start through me.
And when I serve my time and meet
you face to face, you will see;

Love through me. AMEN

Listen by R. J. Howard

Sound the trumpet for a sacred feast
Sing! Beat the tambourine
Play the sweet lyre and the harp
But people please listen to me
Just asking you this please
Play music have a good time
God made me and you shine
With desires so sweet...
With a fresh new beat
Help the sick, fill them with pride
Wash the sins the people bring in
One huge tide
Listen to the heart
With the beat only
It knows when to start.

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Community Events

Region 1

Nov. 24: Brown Paper Bag Community Service Project, 3:00-5:30 PM, Crosswalk School; (509) 868-2125.

Region 2

Nov. 16-23: Deliver Thanksgiving food boxes to those in need in our community; (509) 853-4305.

Nov. 26: Serve a traditional Thanksgiving dinner at the Union Gospel Mission; (509) 853-4305.

Region 3

Nov. 12: monthly public meeting, 6:00-7:30 PM, Sedro-Woolley Alfy's.

Region 4

Nov. 17: Martin Luther King Celebration Committee, 7:00-8:30 PM, CAMP; (206) 296-1002 or
www.MLKSeattle.org.

Region 5

Nov. 18: Your Rights Training, 3:00 PM, Pierce County Alliance; Food and Prizes provided.

Region 6

Tuesdays: Providence St. Peter's Drug and Alcohol Unit informational meeting, 9:00-11:00 AM, Rosie's Place.

Wednesdays: Partners in Prevention Education, 2:00-4:00 PM, Rosie's Place.

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Quote of the Month

Tell me and I forget, show me and I remember, and if you involve me I understand!

~ *Anonymous*

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News From the Mockingbird Network: Your Needs, Your Voice

Region 1: UNITE! Chapter in Spokane County by Onalee Stewart

UNITE had an awesome month! We had three alumni and two youth on a panel for a CASA training on at the Red Lion Hotel in Spokane. There were 55 CASA volunteers that participated in the training. Our youth and alumni gave powerful narratives about the culture of foster care and several of the CASA volunteers came up to thank us for our courageous stories. Many said this was the best training they'd ever been to. Overall, it was a great experience and we hope to have more chances to speak in the future. At our Halloween party we made caramel apples, decorated pumpkins, and discussed next month's Thanksgiving community service project.



Region 2: A.C.T. F.I.R.S.T. Chapter in Yakima County by Francesca Cantu

Some of the youth and alumni from Mockingbird Network went to the corn maze for our Harvest party. We roasted hotdogs and had s'mores. We all enjoyed the different events such as looking at the animals, sliding down the slide, and watching the little kids in the mini straw maze. We all took the hayride all around the corn maze. It was fun to get the truckers to honk at us! Not only did we have a blast but we also got down to business. We discussed how we would want the Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit to be like next year. We would like to speak to the lawmakers about how we could relax on overnight stays with our friends. We would also like them to understand how important support groups such as The Mockingbird Network are! Over all our Harvest Party was awesome and we bonded over the campfire. Lastly, we would like to say a big thank you to **Casey Family Programs** for donating our hotdogs and s'mores!



Region 3: Hey Mac Chapter in Skagit County by Josie Toohey

Well, this month has gone by fast. Our region celebrated the fall season by having a pumpkin painting contest with prizes. We also had a change in our group's leadership. Congratulations to Hunter for becoming a new chapter leader! He's already doing a great job. **Hunter** and I lead a Life Advocacy training. An example of advocacy is talking with your teachers to explain where you're struggling in school and asking them how they can support your learning. We also talked about some important advocacy tools like speaking up, having a game plan, and having a good attitude with confidence. Hunter and **Eva** also did a Life Advocacy training in Everett. There were lots of youth there and everyone had a great time. We are looking forward to building our chapter with more people from the Everett area. We'd also like to say a special thanks to **Tamarack House** for joining us at our chapter meetings this month!



Region 4: For Change Chapter in King County by Ian Grant

This month, our chapter had a very productive and fun meeting. We had a Halloween theme, and we all got a chance to make a caramel apple before getting down to business on our agenda. Our meeting centered on the topic that Region 4 is bringing to Youth Advocacy Day which is adequate legal representation for youth in foster care. We spent a lot of time discussing why legal representation is so important for vulnerable youth in dependency hearings, and we had **Jana Heyd**, a dependency attorney who has been practicing law for almost twenty years, give us the attorney's perspective on why this is so crucial. It was a good time, and we encourage any youth or alumni in King County who is interested in making the system better for foster youth, and in particular to ensure that the legal rights of foster youth are protected, to come to our monthly chapter meetings. We meet every second Monday at the 2100 Building, from 3-5 PM.



Region 5: Chapter in Pierce County by DeMarea Kirk

This month we had a group training on how to speak not only to professionals, but also how to communicate with people on an everyday basis. We also learned how not to over share our lives when speaking in front of people. During Voice Development training we talked about credibility and its importance. We have been lucky and recruited new participants to our chapter. We all have been very active in educating our peers about what is currently going on in foster care and what we can fix. Also, we are hoping to help with a food bank for Thanksgiving so families can have food on their table. All in all I'm proud of all the regions and the impact they are making for change.



Region 6: Chapter in Thurston County by Sam Evans

This has been a very exciting month for us. Our chapter moved from Vancouver to Olympia. We have a new resource specialist, new chapter leaders and are starting new chapter meetings. This month, Graham and I held our first training together on Life Advocacy 101. This personally was very scary for me being the first big thing to facilitate on my own and there were a lot more people there than I thought there would be. I also sat in on the **Center for Children & Youth Justice** Summit Meeting and gave my input to the members of the panel on how the foster care system should be reformed. **Graham** and I are currently planning the kick off for our chapter meetings. We look forward to seeing this chapter flourish in Olympia, right next door to the Capitol.

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Thank You!

Anonymous; Lucy Berliner; Bob Bowman, Rosauers; Casey Family Programs; Paula Clapp and Matthew G. Norton Co.; Community Youth Services Independent Living staff and volunteers Heather Guz, Brian Hatcher, Danille Kettel, Sarah LaGrange, and Dae Shogren; Steve Garcia, Albertsons; Krista Goodman; JoAnn Herbert, in memory of June Herbert; Jana Heyd, Sandra Howard; Williams Kastner, in memory of Raymond Sims; James Maki; Mary Meinig; Megan Notter; Refugee Women's Alliance; Heather Riley; Ray Sandy and Jillian Gross, In Celebration of Maegan and Leo Dirac; Steve Shafer and Kelly Nolan Shafer; Alicia Tonasket; Sean Walsh; Sara Wolfgang

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Update Your Subscription

If you have recently moved, need to change the number of issues you receive, or if the address we are mailing the print version of the *Mockingbird Times* to needs to be corrected, please complete and mail the subscription request form in your copy so we can update our records.

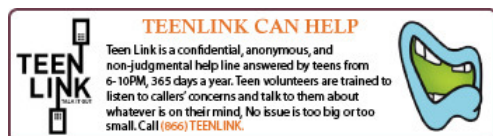
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Get Published ~ Get Paid!

We are looking for 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*, [view our guidelines](#).

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TeenLink Can Help



TEENLINK CAN HELP

Teen Link is a confidential, anonymous, and non-judgmental help line answered by teens from 6-10PM, 365 days a year. Teen volunteers are trained to listen to callers' concerns and talk to them about whatever is on their mind. No issue is too big or too small. Call (800) TEENLINK.

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