

process, the disproportionality grows.

The welfare system is supposed to be able to help every child and family with services that prevent these types of problems. It will hopefully only get better from here, since progress has already been made and more is underway, but it will take the help of the community, alumni of care, and the support of other organizations to help bring these reoccurring problems to an end.

^{1, 2, 3} waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/110/cwlafr.pdf

^{4, 5} www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/trends.htm

Christina Koshney

my sister, there is supposed to be a CASA who is a civilian volunteer and knows little of this complex system. This is all from my experience thus far but I have heard far too many similar stories that relay this same message: that kids in this system are pushed to the side while adult agendas are attended to.

This is similar to the Juvenile court system, another system that I have experienced, where kids are being represented by lawyers that barely know their names, let alone what their goals or interests are (pertaining to their particular case and future). These are two pivotal systems in our society that deal with our most vulnerable population, the youth. Youth rights not only need to be better established, but known as well.

If there is one thing I could suggest in bettering these systems, it would be for the adults and professionals in these systems to take the time and actually listen. It has been my experience that a lot of youth in these systems know exactly what they need to better their situation, but no one wants to listen or has the time to do so (which to me is equivalent to not wanting to listen).

My passion for change in the child welfare and juvenile court systems makes The Mockingbird Society (MBS) a good place for me to share my passion and help institute a positive change. MBS also allows me the opportunity to share the story of my younger sisters and me to connect to others and to be heard. More than anything, it is my two younger sisters who inspire me to make a difference, and, in making a difference for them, I also want the same change and opportunity for all youth.

care of foster children and when it comes to needing clothes and school supplies, the state only gives so much support.

Last year, five former Washington State governors raised money for foster children primarily through the **Governors' Cup Golf Tournament** which takes place every September in Seattle. On May 19,



Slings and Arrows is a series of articles examining the challenges faced by foster youth and alumni in school written by Melody Newburn whom I interviewed this month. Ms.

Newburn is the Education Coordinator for the **YMCA Independent Living Program**. It's no secret that foster youth have a harder time in school than most other students. In fact, the problem is much greater than many would suspect: foster youth have, on average, a 38% chance of graduating from high school (compared to 75% for the general population).¹ Ms. Newburn believes that the biggest problem facing foster youth is the lack of placement stability: foster youth move around a lot. You lose 4 to 6 months of educational achievement every time you switch schools.² If you move more than once or twice in your high school career, it's very hard to recover.

Part of the problem, according to Ms. Newburn, is that the schools don't know what to do about foster youth, a relatively small group in a very large and complex educational system, and teachers aren't necessarily getting training on how best to help the population succeed. There have been improvements recently as educational advocates have been dispatched to school districts across the state to help educate teachers and school administrators. But, like any big system-wide change, it's going to take time. Right now, in general, foster youth are still more or less on their own as far as school is concerned.

It doesn't have to be this way. One of the most important things you, as a foster student, can do is learn how to talk to teachers to get the help you need. When

attend college, which I know will be the next step in my life.

For more information about the Governor's scholarship, visit www.collegesuccessfoundation.org/gg/index.htm. For more information about Treehouse and their services, including their Christmas gift program, visit www.treehouseforkids.org.

Slings and Arrows BY IAN GRANT

adults fail to advocate for you, often the best thing you can do is advocate for yourself. Talk to your teachers and your school counselor. Connect with **Treehouse**, **The Mockingbird Society**, or the **YMCA**. There are advocates out there, both in and out of school, and they can help you explore your options and achieve your goals.

Sometimes, you just don't know what you need help with. A lot of people don't get the help they need simply because they don't know which questions to ask. You have to determine what resources you need to be able to stay in school—things like childcare, transportation, and money. There are lots of options for your future, but there are people that are willing to

help you figure it out. If you wish to keep your personal circumstances private, sometimes you can get the help you need just by telling your teachers that you moved a couple times. You don't have to tell them why; it's your information,

your life, and you're in control of it. The most successful foster students are on top of their education, the students that keep track of the details of their life rather than hoping that somebody else will do it. They know what they need to do to graduate, make a list of what kind of help they need, and are strategic about making sure that they get what they need. It's entirely possible to beat these odds, but you have to work harder than other students. It's unfair, but it's true. School can be hard, but it is something that will get easier. Once you get a couple of people in your court, a lot more doors open. If you ask for help, keep track of your progress, and work hard at it, you can succeed.

^{1, 2} www.k12.wa.us/cisl/improvingoutcomes/index.htm

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them?

~William Shakespeare