



# The Mockingbird Family Model

An Innovative Approach  
for Child Welfare Reform



The Mockingbird Society



“Theories don’t change lives — relationships do.  
Programs don’t create nurturing homes — dedicated adults do.  
Systems don’t raise healthy children — families and communities do.”

—Jim Theofelis, Executive Director and Founder of The Mockingbird Society

# The Mockingbird Family Model

## An Innovative Approach for Child Welfare Reform

Far too many children in our nation are vulnerable to the trauma of being removed from family and placed into foster care—a devastating experience even when the decision is a prudent one. Child welfare authorities would agree—too few initiatives effectively prevent or alleviate that trauma.

The Mockingbird Family Model 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. Designed to link children and families within a larger network of community, the Mockingbird Family Model focuses on supporting families while targeting many of the issues that often leave children vulnerable to more trauma.

**The Mockingbird Family Model emphasizes family features proven to benefit children and their caregivers, including:**

UNCONDITIONAL CARE	› All children deserve a safe, warm, nurturing home life
CAREGIVER SUPPORT	› Taking good care of the adults who take good care of children
SIBLING CONNECTIONS	› Siblings are able to live together or in close proximity to one another
CULTURAL RELEVANCY	› Children do best when connected with the culture they identify with
CONTINUITY OF CARE	› Same neighborhood, same school, same soccer team
PERMANENCY	› Every child should have a "forever family" and a safe, stable home



AdoptUsKids highlighted the Mockingbird Family Model as “one of eight model respite programs around the U.S.” in their 2008 respite manual: *Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Respite in Your Community*.

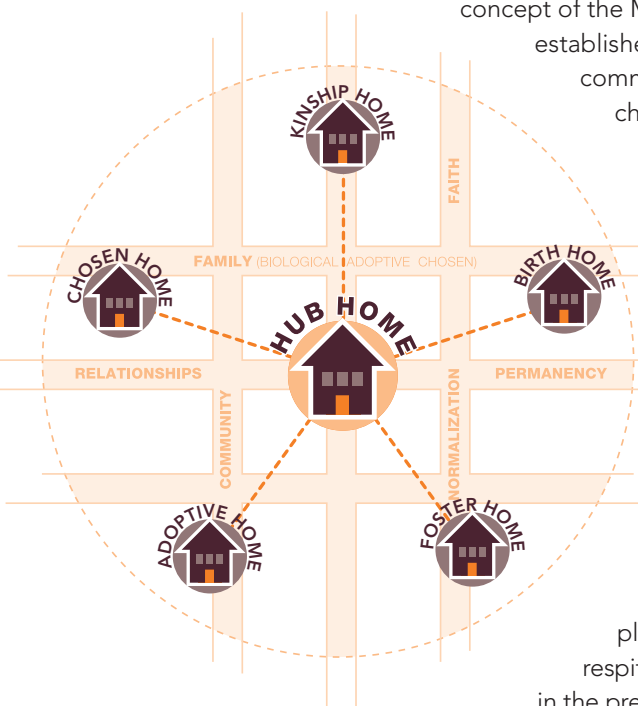
# The Mockingbird Family Model Approach:

## Family and Community Support

At the center of the Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) is the simple, yet innovative concept of the MFM Constellation, 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 or respite care family (Hub Home) whose role is to provide support. The support provided through the Hub Home includes 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. The Model builds in the predictable resources necessary to support families, stabilize children, and increase opportunities for prevention of placement into foster care, birth family reunification, adoption, and other permanency options.



"The Constellation has been the glue that kept us together as a family... What a miracle of support."

– Foster Parent in an MFM Satellite home

Constellations function like an extended family in the best sense—with the Hub Home serving like Grandma or Auntie's house, where both children and the adults who care for them can find quality, tangible support in order to thrive. Parents and children no longer have to face problems alone; they can rely on the experience and support of an extended community of peers who understand the challenges they face each day.



## A Comprehensive Approach:

### Keeping Families Together — Preventing Foster Care Placement

The Mockingbird Family Model creates a support network around families with the goal of keeping families together and reducing the number of children entering the foster care system. The Hub Home family helps birth parents and kinship caregivers effectively navigate systems and access community resources:

- » Respite/child care and navigation of social service systems for birth families and kinship caregivers.
- » Peer mentoring and coaching in the context of a social network (Effective Parenting, Problem Solving, Conflict Resolution) to stabilize families and prevent crisis situations.

### Restructuring Foster Care

The Mockingbird Family Model offers innovative solutions for some of the most frequent problems facing children in the foster care system:

- » Relationship-based planned and crisis respite care that prevents placement disruptions, provides a safe space for relationship pacing, and reduces caregiver burnout.
- » Peer mentoring and coaching to eliminate the feeling of isolation caregivers often experience, facilitate conflict resolution and problem solving, and increase placement stabilization.
- » Support for children to maintain connections with siblings and birth families while experiencing the safety, stability, and well-being associated with an “extended family.”



### Stabilizing and Supporting Transitions

The Mockingbird Family Model places a special focus on issues of permanency—including early reunification, adoption, and preparing youth for a healthy transition to adulthood:

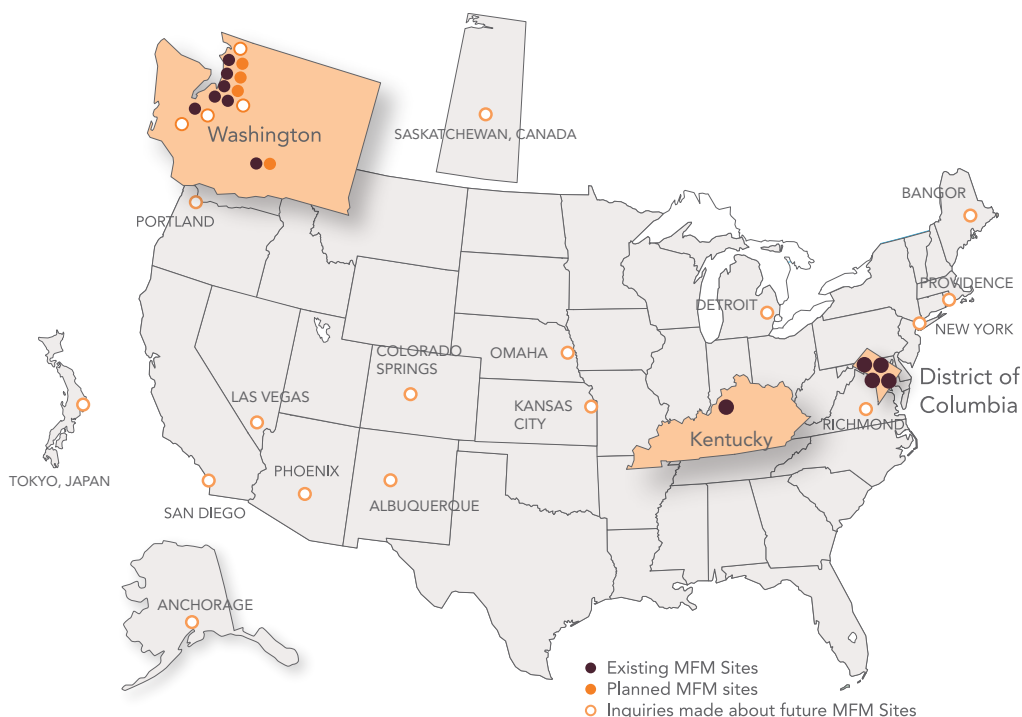
- » **Early Reunification:** Supporting families so kids can transition back home quickly.
- » **Foster-to-Adopt:** Helping children form relationships with potential adoptive families and supporting the transition process.
- » **Transition to Adulthood:** Preparing foster youth for a successful future and providing support as they transition into adulthood.

# Replicating the Mockingbird Family Model:

## Expanding Our Reform Efforts

The Mockingbird Society is not a family support, foster parent licensing, or child placement/adoptive agency; instead, we collaborate with both public and private agencies to plan and launch new MFM Constellation sites. These “host agencies” share our commitment to improving the lives of children and are forward-thinking agencies looking to support families in new ways.

Through our partnerships with host agencies, replication sites have been implemented and/or planned across Washington State and in various other parts of the country. With additional inquiries for future Constellation sites from dozens of other national and international jurisdictions, the Mockingbird Family Model is poised to impact the lives of children on both a national and international scale.



- ▲ As the Mockingbird Family Model expands across the country and the success stories continue to mount, more families are discovering an answer that works—one that protects children and youth, strengthens families, and engages a supportive community.

*Note: The map depicts model expansion as of November 2009—used here for illustrative purposes only.*

"I recently had an urgent situation. I had someone on the phone within minutes, then I had a backup call, and then I had an e-mail. And I thought, 'I'm not alone'... Even though it was a trying situation, I wasn't alone... We're a family. And that's what makes us so successful."

– Hub Home Parent in an MFM constellation

## **Here is how you can be a part of improving the lives of children as part of our replication and reform efforts:**

### **For Parents And Caregivers:**

Because The Mockingbird Society is not a family support, foster parent licensing, or child placement/adoptive agency, you will need to talk to your service delivery agency about becoming part of an MFM Constellation. Call your agency to find out if there is an MFM Constellation in your area. If not, ask your agency to call The Mockingbird Society about becoming an MFM replication site. You can also refer your agency to our website for more information: [www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org).

### **For Public and Private Child Welfare Agencies (Host Agencies):**

First, to replicate the Mockingbird Family Model, your agency **MUST** be a family support, foster parent licensing, or child placement/adoptive agency. The Mockingbird Society is a non-profit child welfare advocacy agency and does not supervise children in foster care, license foster care providers, or place children for adoption.

Secondly, determine whether the MFM is the right service delivery structure for your agency by going to The Mockingbird Society website (**[www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org)**) for additional information. While there, review the three-year evaluation of the MFM applied to foster care, conducted by the University of Washington, School of Social Work (2004-2006).

If your agency goals fit with those of the Mockingbird Family Model (supporting child/youth health, safety, social development and well-being; supporting families to prevent out-of-home placement; and/or restructuring and optimizing foster care delivery, including preventing child/youth placement disruptions, connecting siblings, supporting caregiver retention, and supporting connections to cultural identity), contact The Mockingbird Society at **[mfm@mockingbirdsociety.org](mailto:mfm@mockingbirdsociety.org)**. We will arrange a telephone discussion for you with the appropriate Department of Family Programs staff member who will be happy to answer your questions and describe the technical assistance and training process that is required to replicate the Mockingbird Family Model.



## The Mockingbird Society

Building a world-class foster care system  
through collaboration, innovation and advocacy

The Mockingbird Society is a 501(c)(3) and 501(h) nonprofit organization based in Seattle that serves children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system throughout Washington State and nationwide. Through our nationally-recognized programs, The Mockingbird Society is committed to working collaboratively with youth, families, and community partners for system reform and improvement.

The Mockingbird Society has two major programs: The Mockingbird Network and the Mockingbird Family Model. The Mockingbird Network is an organized network of youth and alumni who advocate for improving child welfare services while strengthening their peers, their communities, and themselves. The Mockingbird Family Model is an innovative service delivery model based on the extended family concept that supports birth, kinship, and foster caregivers and is designed to increase child well-being through prevention and permanency efforts. Indirectly, The Mockingbird Society serves thousands of minors involved in the child welfare system through our system reform efforts.

To find out more about The Mockingbird Society's award-winning programs, please visit our website at **[www.mockingbirdsociety.org](http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org)** or contact us:

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