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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Six young writers Speak up about Kinship Care!

(Editor's Note: The six children winning the awards are from Yakima, Cosmopolis, Edwall, Langley, Union, and Forks Washington. To interview a winner, contact Lynn Urvina at 360-754-7629 or email Lynn@FamilyESS.org)

OLYMPIA – Families from across Washington will gather on **Monday, May 19th, 2014, at 10:00am** in the Governor's Mansion located near our State Capitol Building to honor six children who submitted winning essays for the 11th annual Voices of Children contest. Each of these young children, ages 5 -19 years, wrote inspirational essays about their experiences being raised by a relative caregiver. First Lady, Trudi Inslee will present each of the six children with a signed certificate. In addition each child will receive a \$100 check donated by Twin Star Credit Union and an overnight stay at the Great Wolf Lodge for their family.

Most children find safety and comfort in the arms and care of their family, including grandparents and other relatives. For more than 2 million children in the USA, living with a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other family members has become a permanent or long-term arrangement. When parents are unable or unwilling to care for their children, placing them with a relative caregiver can have some advantages. Kinship care reduces the trauma children experience when placed with strangers. It enhances children's sense of identity and self-esteem, continues connections children have to their siblings and other relatives, and strengthens the family's ability to give children the support they need. Kinship care often comes as a surprise to both child and relative caregiver.

What does it mean to a child who can't live with their parents to know he or she is safe, loved, and has a place to belong? Some answers to this question are offered in the winning entries submitted to the Kinship Voices of Children Contest. The contest was originally initiated by the Statewide Kinship Oversight Coalition, and is coordinated by Family Education and Support Services in collaboration with Aging and Long Term Support Administration/DSHS, Lewis-Mason- Thurston Area Agency on Aging, and Kinship Navigators and advocates across Washington State. The event is sponsored by TwinStar Credit Union in collaboration with the Great Wolf Lodge.

This year over 50 entries were received. Some are funny, some serious or even sad, but all are sincere and offer testimony to the value, sense of family, and love each young author experienced in living with a relative caregiver. The winning entries are:

Journey G. – age 7 – Yakima

Teagan F. – age 7 – Cosmopolis

Courtney L. – age 11 – Edwall

Mya G. – age 12 – Langley

Dru M. – age 13 – Union

Jeremiah S. – age 13 - Forks

You will find the winning entries listed below. For more information about this contest or to learn about Kinship Care Resources contacting Lynn Urvina at 1-877-813-2828 or e-mail Lynn@FamilyESS.org.



Exerts from the winning entries are below:



Journey Age 7



Teagan Age 7

Not so long ago there was a little girl who lived in a not so nice world. She was abandoned several times by her mother. She was left with her grandmother several other times. She was forced to care for her infant sister by changing diapers and feeding her. She was beaten, had bruises all over, locked in closets and had a little to eat. She now belongs to a family. She has learned to love herself and the people she cares about. That little girl was me. I have a new name now and a new life in a happy world.

Courtney age 11

8 months old
you took me into your home
like I was your own
loving, caring, appreciative
thoughtful and heart warming
you taught me
good from bad and
right from wrong
you are the light
to my day
my role model
I can count on you
no matter what
because of you
I am who I am today

Mya Age 12

I came to live with my Grandma when I was a month old. I don't remember much when I was that young so I believe everything was good. Since I have been getting older we do have our ups and our downs. Mostly about schoolwork. She wants me to do good and get a good education. I can talk about many things she always listens and gives me good advise. She spoils me in a good way. I know she will always be there for me at the end of the day. I sleep well.

Jeremiah Age 13