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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **Six Young Artists Speak Up About Kinship Care!**

**(Editor's Note: The six children winning the awards are from Cashmere, Forks, Port Townsend, Olympia, Naches, and Roy 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 **Tuesday, May 23, 2017, at 11:00 am** in the Governor's Mansion located near our State Capitol Building to honor six children who submitted winning essays for the 14<sup>th</sup> annual Voices of Children contest. Each of these young children and youth, ages 5 - 19 years old, created inspirational pieces of written and/or visual art about their experiences being raised by a relative caregiver. Each child submitting a winning entry will be awarded with a signed certificate, 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 member 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 the child and the 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. Judges included Bill Moss, David Stillman, Terry Jefferies, Amanda Stevens, Carrie Petit, Lori Mahar, Mike Fenton, Jennifer Strus, Teri Agulara Flemming, Shelley Arneson, Karen Fraser, Bonnie Jacques, Melissa Goldman, Olvia Schu, and Trista Mason.

This year 52 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 artist experienced in living with a relative caregiver. The winning entries are:

Joseph, age 6 - Olympia, WA  
Casey, age 7 - Roy, WA  
Taryn, age 8 - Forks, WA  
Thomas, age 10 - Port Townsend, WA  
Summer, age 13 - Naches, WA  
Brittany, age 15 - Cashmere, WA

In addition to the children being honored we will also acknowledge Ms Judy Lin, Our 2017 booklet compiling all entries into the Voices of Children contest has been dedicated to Judy in honor of her substantial contributions to Kinship Caregivers across our State.

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



Excerpts from the winning entries are below:



Family is like gears-they all connect together.

Joseph, age 6 - Olympia, WA

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I Love you because you protect  
Me!



Casey, age 7 - Roy, WA

I am Taryn. I have been raised by my grandma since I was 3 years old I love her so much she does so much for me I don't know where I would be without my grandma. She is the love of my life I never want to lose her I have been through tough times when I am feeling down she cheers me up grandma has made sure I am busy like cheerleading basketball baseball gymnastics were also involved with church I am now taking Villon lessons we go on vacations together my grandma comes to school and has breakfast with me when I have bad dreams my grandma is always there to comfort me.

Taryn, age 8 - Forks, WA

Hi am here to tell you about why I love living here with my grandma and grandpa and how it has made a positive difference in my life. When I'm feeling sad and I want to give up they come and help me. When I get mad they don't get mad and don't hurt me. They are the best grandma and grandpa I could ever have. Even though I make mistakes sometimes, they still think I am the best star; and this is why I love them. They are nice to me and they are kind. They got me a new back pack because I tore my old one. Even though I get angry and hurt them they never hurt me and be mean to me. I love my grandma and grandpa!

Thomas, age 10 - Port Townsend, WA

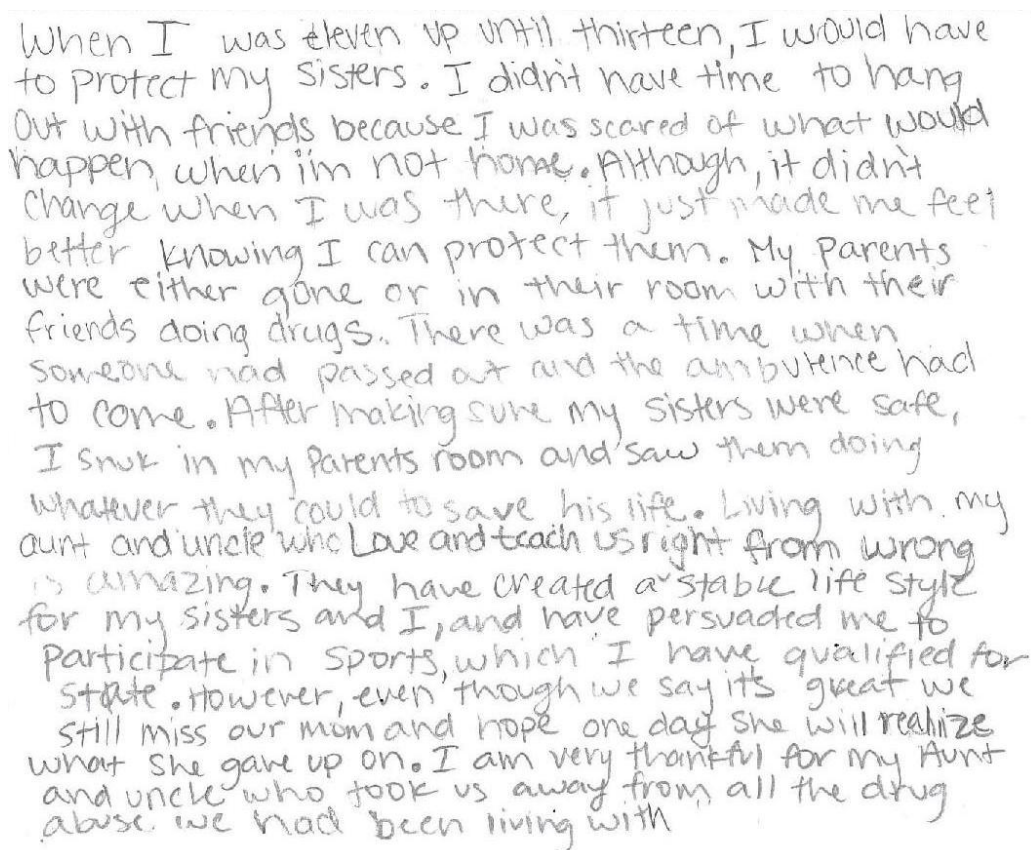
**Hi, my name is Summer. I live with my grandparents, Diana and Levi, and with my brother Payton. My brother and I live with our grandparents due to the death of our mother and we don't live with our dad because he was the one who caused our mother's death.**

**The positive things my grandparents do to make a difference in my life is, they always help me through everything, such as sports, grades, problems. They help my brother as well, my brother Payton has ADHD, and that makes him hyper. They work with my brother's teachers, to make sure he is doing good, and he is.**

**My Nana and Papa are the best thing that has happened to me. They are really nice, they are loving and I love them so much.**

**When we lived with our dad we were not doing good, now we are. We used to get bad grades, and always get into trouble. Now that Payton and I live with our Nana and Papa we have really good grades and don't get in so much trouble, and that's it. Thank you.**

Summer, age 13 - Naches, WA



When I was eleven up until thirteen, I would have to protect my sisters. I didn't have time to hang out with friends because I was scared of what would happen when I'm not home. Although, it didn't change when I was there, it just made me feel better knowing I can protect them. My parents were either gone or in their room with their friends doing drugs. There was a time when someone had passed out and the ambulance had to come. After making sure my sisters were safe, I snuck in my parents room and saw them doing whatever they could to save his life. Living with my aunt and uncle who love and teach us right from wrong is amazing. They have created a stable life style for my sisters and I, and have persuaded me to participate in sports, which I have qualified for state. However, even though we say it's great we still miss our mom and hope one day she will realize what she gave up on. I am very thankful for my Aunt and uncle who took us away from all the drug abuse we had been living with.

Brittany, age 15 - Cashmere, WA

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