



Family Education & Support Services

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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 Thurston, Whatcom, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties. To interview a winner, contact Shelly Willis at 360-754-7629 or email Shelly@FamilyESS.org)

OLYMPIA – Families from across Washington will gather on Wednesday, **July 18th, 2012 at 11:00am** in the Senate Rules Room of our State Capitol Building to honor six children who submitted winning essays for the 9th 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. Lt. Governor Brad Owen will present each of the six children with a signed certificate and a check for \$100 donated by Twin Star Credit Union.

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 this year's Kinship Essay Contest. The contest was initiated by the Statewide Kinship Oversight

Coalition, and is coordinated by Family Education and Support Services and is sponsored by TwinStar Credit Union.

This year nearly 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 listed below. For more information about this contest or to learn about Kinship Care Resources contacting Shelly Willis @ 1-877-813-2828 or e-mail Shelly@FamilyESS.org.

Exerts from the winning entries

5-7 Age Category



"I Love My Family"
Mary ~ Age 5



"I am Happy because they are nice and they love me"
Chevelle – Age 7

Winning Entries – Age 8 – 12 years

"The heart is for love that I have. The colors are for the happiness in my life. The key is for safety I feel. I have hope for a bright future. I love living with my Omie!"
(See artwork below)



Kyle ~ Age 10

When I was living with my mom I never had a childhood. I had to be the parent. So that meant cooking, cleaning, making sure that all of our farm animals were fed and watered before school. I got up at five in the morning so I was tired and I could not focus in school. Every time I was reading I would fall asleep with a book in my face. I was not a good student, I was nasty to all my teachers and I never did homework. I really didn't know anything. The reason I went to school was to get away from home. I was a kid without friends, the one who sat in a corner and talked to herself.

One day that all changed when I went to live with my Aunt Cathy. She has helped me and encouraged me to do many things. I'm now an athlete, have lots of friends, I don't sit in a corner anymore. I am smarter, I do my homework and now that I am in middle school my grades are important. The best part is I can be a kid; I don't have to worry about all that anymore.

Syvanna Warren ~ Age 12

Winning Entries – Age 13- 19 years

WHY MY GRANDPA IS MY INSPIRATION

Anytime anyone asks me who my hero is I reply "my grandfather of course" and they ask me why he's my hero and I respond because he has saved my life.

When I lived with my mother she would beat me. She would only buy food for her, and get mad when I took food. She never let me get into sports because we never had enough money. The reason that we never had money for anything was because she would spend it all on drugs and alcohol. I was not in a positive environment so I did not do well on my school work and got horrible grades.

I moved in with my grandpa and he helps me with my school work almost every night. He encouraged me to get into sports. I did volleyball and softball and in both sports won the most improved. And once when we lived in Oak Harbor he even tackled me off of the motorcycle I was riding before I hit the blackberry bushes at the bottom of the hill.

I hope that you can now see why my grandpa is my inspiration.

Angel ~ Age 14

I was raised along with my three brothers by my grandparents. They took us in when we were 1,5,6, and 11 years old after the murder death of our mom. Her life was taken by our father and he then took his own life. I was the one year old, I am now 18. I will be graduating this summer and looking ahead to my future.

I would not be looking ahead if it were not for my grandparents and the values that they raised us with. We were told from our beginning that we could be anything we put our hearts and minds to. I sustained a very bad head and shoulder injury that resulted in surgery and traveled to Seattle twice a month for treatment for one year. I was the high school quarterback and was told I would never play again. I had to go into Special Ed for over a year to catch up and **catch up I did**. I am now graduating with a 4.0. The love and respect I have for my Gram and Pop are beyond anything you can imagine. Thank you.

Anden ~ AGE 18