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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 Fircrest, Lacey, Pasco, Yakima, and Kent 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 **Thursday, July 7th, 2016, at 1:00 pm** in the Governor's Mansion located near our State Capitol Building to honor six children who submitted winning essays for the 13<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. 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 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.

This year 38 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:

Hope, age 5 - Kent, WA  
Nevaeh, age 6 - Yakima, WA  
Syrus, age 8 - Pasco, WA  
Xena, age 12 - Lacey, WA  
Beverly, age 17 - Lacey, WA  
Esther, age 17 - Fircrest, WA

In addition to the children being honored we will also acknowledge Mr. Dennis Mahar, Executive Director of the Lewis, Mason, Thurston Area Agency on Aging. Our 2016 booklet compiling all entries into the Voices of Children contest for 2016 has been dedicated to Mr. Mahar in honor of his 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 contacting Lynn Urvina at 1-877-813-2828 or e-mail [Lynn@FamilyESS.org](mailto:Lynn@FamilyESS.org).



Excerpts from the winning entries are below:

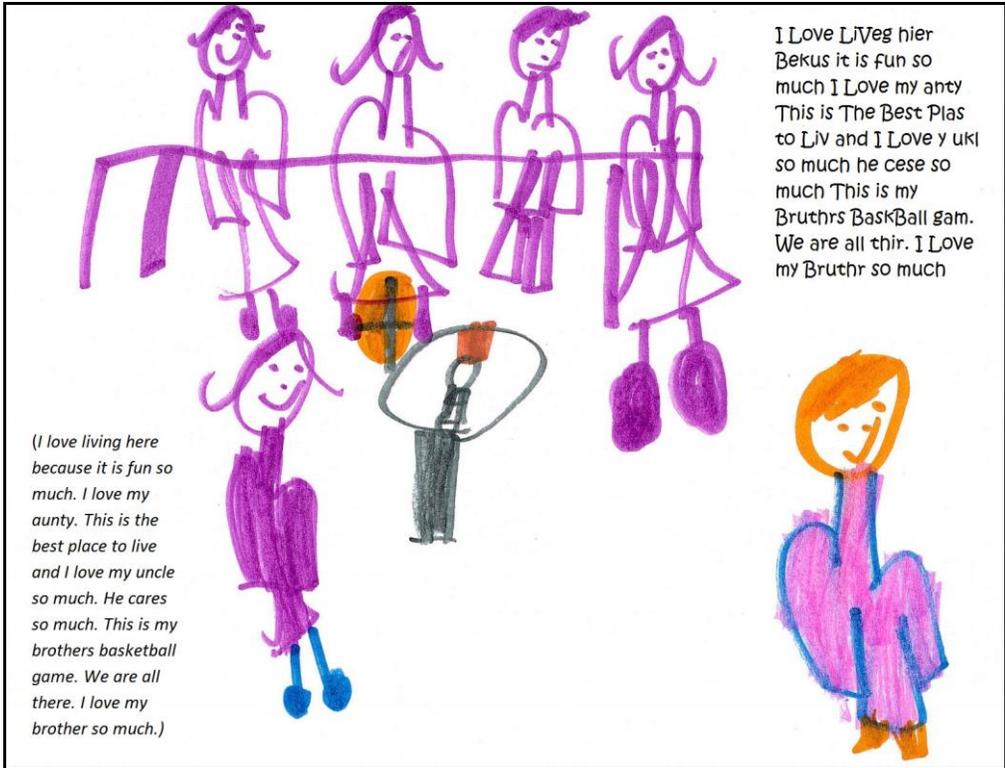
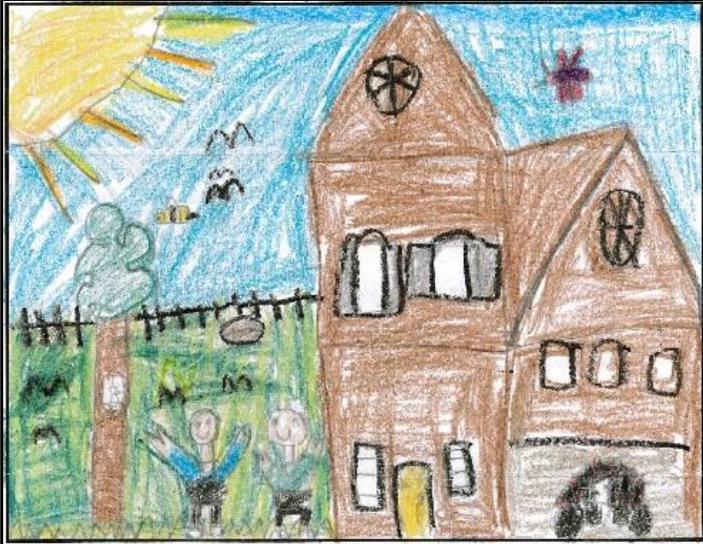


Figure 1: Hope, age 5, Kent, WA



Figure 2: Nevaeh, age 6, Yakima, WA



I Love my grandma and grandpa and they love me they take me to Church. And they take me on trips and play foot ball ~~which~~ with me ~~when~~ while my mom gets well. then I can go home and be safe this time

Figure 3: Syrus, age 8, Pasco, WA

Ever since I got adopted by my grandparents, I have had a roof over my head, good meals, and clean clothes on my body every day. But most importantly I have love and a good family.

My grandma helps me keep on track for homework, studying, and chores. Even when she pops her top, gets really mad and starts yelling, I know she still loves me. Grumpy grampa's grumpy a lot but deep down in his heart I will always have a place.

Grandma says you need to learn something new every day. They're always trying to teach us new stuff, and how to be better people. One of the many things I love about my grandparents is that they let me see my mom and didn't separate me and my siblings. In fact, we even got to meet our oldest brother for the first time last summer.

My grandparents give us all that we need. Even though they might not be the perfect grandparents, or the funnest, they are all I need, and all I want. I wouldn't trade anything for them. Someday I'll get to live with my mom again, but until then, I love my life here.

Figure 4: Xena, age 12, Lacey, WA

### What They Wanted – What We Got

**They wanted:** grandchildren born healthy and happy.

**They wanted:** to be able to put a few dollars away for retirement.

**They got:** bills taking care of children that weren't theirs.

**They wanted:** to have grandchildren on weekends and holidays and spoil rotten then send home.

**They got:** three of us all the time to parent and teach and discipline and fight.

**They wanted:** temporary custody so mom could go to rehab then we could go home.

**They got:** full custody with no end in sight.

**They wanted:** to be able to retire and spend time together, to relax and enjoy life.

**They got:** to retire early to take care of us; doing homework, and conferences, and carpools, and PTA.

**They wanted:** laughter and hugs and love.

**They got:** scowls, and muttering, and disrespect, and theft, and attitude.

**They wanted:** peace, and calmness, and order.

**They got:** chaos, us always fighting with each other, and our stuff left everywhere constantly.

**They wanted:** appreciation for what they were providing.

**They got:** I want cell phones, laptops, notebooks, name brand clothing, and more and more and more.

**They wanted:** "you're the best grandma and grampa ever."

**They got:** "you're not fair, this sucks, and I hate living here."

**What we got:** unconditional love, and everything we ever needed, and a chance to grow up and have a good life without drugs, without alcohol, without abuse or neglect. We were lucky. We got them.

Figure 5: Beverly, age 17, Lacey, WA

*What a Blessing it is to Have Relatives*

*By: Esther*

*My aunt and uncle are one of a kind*

*I love them so much*

*I'm glad they're mine*

*They lift me up*

*Through my ups and downs*

*I am so thankful to have them around*

*Life is not perfect*

*Its full of many shapes and colors*

*But I'm glad to know that we have each other*

*To have this peace*

*To have a place to call home*

*With my aunt and uncle by myside*

*I'll never be alone*

*They've been there for me*

*Through thick and thin*

*Their love is so strong*

*They don't have to pretend*

*I appreciate my relatives*

*Mine are as special as can be*

*I love my aunt and uncle very much*

*Thank you God for giving them to me*

Figure 6: Esther, age 17, Fircrest, WA