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New, young voices share their dreams at MLK event

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Mia Zirkle, a first-place essayist from Mukilteo Elementary, reads over her essay before the 2014 Prodigies for Peace awards ceremony Wednesday at the Carl Gipson Senior Center in Everett. Contestants from local schools wrote essays and made artwork about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.



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2014 Prodigies for Peace contest winners Israel Miller (left) and Un Wally, both of Discovery Elementary School, laugh together before the awards ceremony Wednesday at the Carl Gipson Senior Center in Everett.

By [Julie Muhlstein](#), Herald Columnist
Charlize Weiss has a dream.

"A dream of mine is changing the nation by kindness, giving hope to others just by being kind," said Charlize, a seventh-grader at Lynnwood's College Place Middle School.

Mia Zirkle has a dream.

"I'd like to remind people that they're as good as anyone," said Mia, who is in fourth grade at Mukilteo Elementary School. "And I want my world not to judge people who are different," Mia said.

Cody Farhrenkopf has a dream.

"My dream for the world is that countries will put aside all the hate," said Cody, a fourth-grader at Discovery Elementary School in the Mukilteo district.

These students and others shared dreams for themselves, their communities and the world during a [Prodigies for Peace Essay and Art Contest](#) awards ceremony Wednesday at Everett's [Carl Gipson Senior Center](#).

Part of a [Martin Luther King Jr.](#) community celebration, the annual event is sponsored by the city of Everett, Snohomish County, United Way of Snohomish County and the YMCA of Snohomish County.

Winners for essays and artwork in elementary, middle school and high school categories were recognized at the reception that brought together proud parents, teachers and local leaders.

"We contact every school in the county," said Beth Lucas, a volunteer organizer of the contest for a decade. There were 345 entries this year, said Lucas, whose husband, Snohomish County Superior Court [Judge Eric Lucas](#), spoke to the students about King.

"Never, never forget that Dr. King was a real person with real problems," the judge said. He added that King's life offers an incredible example of what one person can achieve.

Judge Lucas told a story about a boy named Michael, who grew up in the South. On a two-hour bus ride with his teacher to an essay contest, Michael had to give up his seat when white passengers got on the bus, Lucas said. "Michael's name was later changed to Martin," Lucas said, sharing that King "was an essay contest winner like you guys."

Students read their winning pieces before an audience that included [County Executive John Lovick](#), Everett School District [Superintendent Gary Cohn](#) and Dennis Smith, CEO of [United Way of Snohomish County](#).

Lovick recalled his [childhood in segregated Louisiana](#), where his home had no electricity. He said he "would not be here today" without the sacrifices of King and others who pushed for racial equality through nonviolent means. "His ability to forgive resonated with me," Lovick said.

With presenter Kay Barnes, of the city of Everett's human resources department, local officials shared their thoughts about King, whose ["I Have a Dream"](#) speech marked its 50th anniversary in August. The civil rights leader was assassinated April 4, 1968.

"That speech impacted me," said Barnes, who remembered hearing King's words as a 9-year-old. Barnes grew up to serve in the U.S. Navy before working in city government.

The [50th anniversary](#) of the speech brought King's soaring language and enduring message of equal opportunity "to the fore," Beth Lucas said. Through the essays, new voices interpret the civil rights leader's words for today's world.

"It's our way of keeping the dream alive," Beth Lucas said.

A nuanced essay by Sophia Maggio, an Everett High School sophomore, won the top prize in the high school category. She wrote that 50 years after King's "I Have a Dream" speech she hears insults some teens hurl at others because of racial differences or sexual orientation.

"People may claim to know all about Martin Luther King and praise him for his work in the civil rights movement, but his work has no meaning — no impact — if the fruits of his labor aren't reflected in our everyday lives," she wrote.

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Essay winners

Elementary school: 1st Place, Mia Zirkle, fourth grade, Mukilteo Elementary; 2nd Place, Cody Fahrenkopf, fourth grade, Discovery Elementary; 3rd Place, Kiana Oos, fourth grade, Cougar Creek Elementary.

Middle school: 1st Place, Ariella Mendevil, seventh grade, College Place Middle School; 2nd Place, Maritsa Sanchez, seventh grade, College Place Middle School; 3rd Places, Charlize Weiss, seventh grade, College Place Middle School and Aleah Goodwin, Eisenhower Middle School.

High School: 1st Place, Sophia Maggio, 10th grade, Everett High School; 2nd Place, HyeWon Ahn, junior, Kamiak High School; 3rd Place, Samantha Lundell, 12th grade, Kamiak High School.

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