

MLK Day on the Hill
Washington Mentors and Boys and Girls Clubs of Washington
Capitol Rotunda
January 20, 2014

First of all I'd like to give a big welcome to all of you with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Washington, Washington State Mentors and other organizations that are here to add your voice to a cause I believe in very much, that is the cause of mentoring.

Mentoring works, and it works because mentors are adults who care about the future of our youth in Washington state. And the youth whom they mentor are eager to change their lives and move in a new and positive direction. Thank you for being here. I would like to read a proclamation signed by Governor Jay Inslee proclaiming January National Mentoring Month (read proclamation).

I applaud those words by our governor.

To be successful in life, youth need to graduate from high school....ready for work, college and life. Focusing on school and academics is very important these days. That means working hard during school in your classes, getting involved in activities, clubs, sports and your communities.

I'm glad to see you are involved in Boys and Girls Clubs. The clubs provide a safe environment for you to go before and after school, as well as a place to do your homework and get involved in fun activities.

It also means surrounding yourself with positive, caring adults that can help you in your journey. A mentor, whether at school, or at your club, or in your community, can give you support. You can share your successes and struggles with them, and they can help you reach your goals.

It is fitting that on this day that we honor the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King we also recognize the role of mentoring. Dr. King was said to have had his own mentors and sources of inspiration. They ranged from American author and abolitionist Henry David Thoreau, to Mahatma Gandhi and a preacher from South Carolina named Benjamin Elijah Mays.

It was Henry David Thoreau who said: "What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals."

Mentors help their mentees identify and achieve their goals by helping to lay down a path on which they can walk, or even run, toward living a successful life themselves.

Mahatma Gandhi as many of you know was a great leader of the Indian people. He led by example, living very simply but employing nonviolent civil disobedience to organize peasants, farmers and urban laborers in a movement for civil rights. Gandhi led India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

Benjamin Mays was among the most articulate and outspoken critics of segregation before the rise of the modern civil rights movement in the United States. Mays emphasized two themes throughout his life: the dignity of all human beings and the gap between American democratic ideals and American social practices.

Dr. King, of course inspired through his own words and actions led the modern civil rights movement in America. We all know his line from his famous I Had a Dream speech when he said: I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

He opened doors for generations of young people born then and in later generations, and in the process inspired untold numbers of mentors of his own. So you see, once mentoring takes hold it sticks and it has lasting impacts. You are all a part of the mentoring movement and I applaud you for it.

Today we see many youth-driven state agencies like OSPI and DSHS join together with Washington State Mentors, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Washington and more in solidarity to show us that good mentoring programs are worthwhile and are critical in the support of our children.

It is now my pleasure to recognize one of winners of the GATEways of Expression Art Contest, a contest sponsored by OSPI and WSM. We are recognizing Bing Nguyen, a student at Garfield HS. Bing submitted a drawing that depicted an important person in his life, his grandmother. He shared with us it was his grandmother who encouraged him to come to America and pursue an education. He is grateful for his grandmother’s support and wisdom, and understands the important role she has played in his life.

Thank you Bing for your entry and for sharing your story with us. Your art will be featured on future publications and displayed at OSPI for all to see.

I am honored to be chair of Washington State Mentors, and appreciate our partners at DSHS and OSPI here today to participate in the event. When state agencies, youth-serving organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs and WSM, and kids come together, it is a recipe for change. It is an exciting time to see us all working together to make the world a better place for all youth.

I am speaking again here at noon at another rally for prevention, specifically the prevention of substance abuse and violence. I hope you can join me for that rally as well. You are all invited. Thank you and enjoy your day at the Capital.