

MEDIA RELEASE

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Young Carer's Selfless Devotion Wins Local Hero Award

Malakai Reinhard is not your average teenager. The fifteen-year-old balances school with being the primary carer for his family. This selfless devotion was recognised by Canberra's local community, who overwhelmingly voted him one of three inaugural 2018 Westfield Woden Local Heroes - a new community recognition and grants program celebrating individuals who promote social wellbeing and harmony in our communities. The other inspiring winners – amongst a worthy list of 233 finalists - were Nathan Costigan (Tara Costigan Foundation) and Suzanne Tunks (Stella Bella Little Stars Foundation).

Malakai cares for his mother Lenna, who suffers from a brain disease, and for his partially blind and deaf five-year-old sister Kataya. "It's just something I do for my family," Malaki says. "You support and love each other unconditionally."

Malakai manages the housework, buys the groceries, pays the bills and makes sure Lenna and Kataya get to all their medical appointments. He regularly messages his mum each day to make sure that she and his sister are okay, have eaten and have taken their medication. He also ensures they maintain their social network by helping them keep in regular contact with their friends.

"I feel really proud when I see my baby sister do things I've taught her like cooking, drawing and writing," he says. There have also been times when Malakai has been the only person in the house able to make vital decisions. "I've had to call an ambulance for help or organise support from other family members."

Despite the demands on his time, Malakai always finds time to talk things out with friends who are struggling teenage issues. "Being a carer from so young, I instinctively want to help people. I've been in tough times and know what it's like to have supportive friends."

Malakai is also passionate about raising awareness and recognition of young carers in the community and of the support available to them from organisations such as Carers ACT. "Carers ACT helped me stay on track, sorted out lots of issues at school, gave me heaps of information and advice, and helped me get my CIT asbestos awareness certificate and white card," he said. "I couldn't have done all that without them."

Each Westfield Local Hero's affiliated organisation receives a \$10,000 grant to support its work. Malakai's grant will go to Carers ACT's Young Carer Program, which provides emotional, educational and social support to young carers like Malakai to help them balance their school and caring responsibilities and build their life-skills.

"We're so proud of Malakai," said Carers ACT CEO Lisa Kelly. "He's an incredible young man and carer in our community and embodies the inspiring resilience and selflessness that many of our carers show day in day out."

“In his honour, we will use his grant to establish a young carer fortnightly drop-in session,” said Ms Kelly. “Young carers have identified a need to access a safe and supportive place to gather information and meet with other young carers. Our drop-in sessions will meet that need by teaching life-skills and providing information on topics such as budgeting, employment and navigating NDIS applications and care plans.”

“Hopefully these sessions will help lots of other young carers get the same support I did,” said Malakai.

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