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Young Wodonga carer gives back

A carefree childhood is something everyone should be entitled to. But for many young people, the responsibilities of adulthood come far too quickly than they deserve.

Wodonga resident Mikaela Reid was just eight years old when she became a carer. Her father has a mental illness and two brothers and sister live with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and anxiety. Helping out around the home, particularly while her mum was at work, became the norm.

“I helped my siblings get ready for school, do their lunches, make sure they had their medication. With my dad I helped with showering, making food for him and daily home duties like gardening, dishes, washing, and also making sure he had his medication. When I got my driver’s licence I drove my siblings to work, appointments and shopping, and my dad wherever he needed to go.”

Mikaela was supported by not for profit organisation VMCH for more than five years. Now aged 20, she’s giving back to the program that helped her through the toughest time of her life by volunteering as a mentor in its Young Carer Mentor Program (YCMP).

VMCH YCMP Coordinator Marion Rak says the impacts of caring as a young person can be serious. Social isolation, depression and dropping out of school to continue their caring role are common.

“Volunteer mentors act as special friends for the young carers; giving them respite from the family home to grab a coffee, go to the movies or just get some fresh air and have a chat. The role of a mentor may be simple, but it’s impact is immeasurable,” Marion said.

Mikaela agrees.

“When I was caring I fell behind with some of my school work. I bottled up my emotions because my mum sometimes did not have time for me because she was so busy looking after everyone. I did not socialise much because there was not enough money or time. Being part of the carer program really helped me have some time to myself. I got to attend different events, trips and camps, and had time to talk to people about my situation and being around other young carers going through similar things you are.”

Mikaela, who is studying early childhood education and works part-time, now mentors an 11-year-old boy.

“I just wanted to help other young carers or siblings after what I went through over the years,” she said.

VMCH is seeking ten volunteer mentors in Wodonga, Wangaratta, Shepparton, Benalla and surrounds. If you can help, call Marion Rak on (03) 5722 9046.

MORE



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About Villa Maria Catholic Homes

Through our passion and commitment to everyday people, Villa Maria Catholic Homes (VMCH) works in partnership with people of all ages and abilities. From all faiths and backgrounds, to achieve their goals, remain connected to their community and maintain independence.

We're a Catholic not-for-profit organisation, providing services to 7,600 people across Victoria. Ask anyone at VMCH and you'll find we're driven by wanting to achieve outcomes that enhance the lives of older Australians, people with disability, families and carers.

We have a long history in listening to what people want and need. By making sure we can deliver services to match those needs, we can offer greater choice and opportunity to our customers. We want to help build compassionate and sustainable communities, so everyone is included.

Today we offer services that cover affordable housing options, residential aged care, retirement living, home community and disability services and specialist education. We're an agile organisation constantly improving how we do things.