Media Release

Young carers are 'legends'

Aston, aged 8, is a kind, shy kid who loves animals, Lego and playing Minecraft. He also loves his big brother, Flynn, aged 11. Their bond transcends that of most siblings. Flynn acts as Aston's carer, alongside their mum Haeli Walker.

October 13-19 is National Carers Week, a time to recognise, celebrate and raise awareness of the 3 million Australians who provide care to a family member or friend. For-purpose aged and disability organisation VMCH is one of Victoria's largest state-funded carer support providers, supporting almost 3,000 unpaid carers, including 175 young people.

The 24-member Carer Services team focuses on the health and wellbeing of the carer and offers education and information, personal care, flexible respite and a multitude of special events.

It's a service Haeli and Flynn – who live in Narre Warren East – couldn't do without. Aston's diagnoses of autism, epilepsy and learning delays mean he needs 24/7 care. Haeli, who also juggles a career as a support worker, assists Aston with twice-daily medications, driving to medical appointments, personal care and advocating via the NDIS. It's an exhausting role, and one she'd struggle to maintain without Flynn, who helps Aston dress, do his homework, and help calm him down when he's upset.

"My caring role looking after my brother is hard," Flynn says. "But I love my brother and the time we spend together."

VMCH's Carer Services team helps Haeli and Flynn so that they can continue to be there for Aston. Haeli, aged 44, accesses carer catchups and events, and vital respite for weekends away with her partner.

"Being a carer has caused my mental health to escalate at times but having support helps me to cope with life's stresses," Haeli says. "Having the carers group gives me something to look forward to. Case Manager Nicola is a listening ear when we need someone the most. Without it, I would feel isolated and alone."

Flynn is supported with school equipment and supplies, and access to young carer events to connect with peers.

There is estimated to be around 71,600 young carers in Victoria, that's one in 11 people aged under 25.

Case Manager Nicola Mallinson believes this number could actually be double.

"We know that most young carers are hidden within our community because they don't really identify with the term, or grow up without realising that what they are doing is "caring", so there is huge underreporting."

Nicola says having support tailored to young people is vital.

"Young carers face challenges and have experiences that are really like no other young person. Each caring role is different, each family is different and having a network of support and people who exist to be on your team, wanting to understand what's going on for you, and lend a hand when you need it, is really important."

She describes young carers as "legends".

"They may not have always consciously made the choice to step up and take on more responsibilities, but they're showing up each day and making sure the people they love are able to get through with a bit more ease."

If you would like to learn more about VMCH Carer Services, call us on 1300 698 624.

VMCH

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About VMCH

Here at VMCH, our services are as diverse as the people we support.

Our values underpin the work we do. As a Catholic, for-purpose organisation, love, joy, hospitality and courage aren't just words to us, they guide us in everything we do.

While we've been around for over a century, we're always moving forward. Always staying true to who we are by supporting people and families to live their best lives; providing a place to call home and spaces to learn and grow.

Our professional and compassionate teams are with you on your life journey; helping you with a wide range of support from early learning and therapy, specialist education, disability services, affordable homes, residential aged care, retirement living and at-home aged care.

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