

MEDIA RELEASE

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Not your average 18 year old!

Most 18 year olds are either at Uni, working, on a gap year or hanging out with friends. But Gabi Palme isn't most 18 year olds.

Gabi is a young carer. In fact, she is one of Australia's [235,300](#) unpaid young carers under the age of 25. She cares for her 90 year old grandma, Elaine, who suffered from a stroke in January earlier this year. Both Gabi's parents are in the teaching profession and work full time so she takes care of Elaine - who has moved into the family home.

After spending the day with Gabi and Elaine it was clear to me where Gabi got her infectious laugh, adventurous twinkle in the eye and zest for life from. Their similarity and connection is undeniable.

"We enjoy each other's company and like talking about birds and nature. My main carer responsibilities for my grandma are personal care, making her food, making her feel comfortable, and doing daily activities like arts and craft, going out for a walk, or grabbing a coffee. Grandma also enjoys brushing her cat Fluffy. The best thing about being a young carer is that I'm caring for someone that I love, and knowing that I'm making her life better," says Gabi.

"She is always bright, cheery, interesting, busy and on the go. She's a go-girl! As a family we all get on well and aim to do things together," says a clearly proud Elaine.

George Olivares leads the [Carer Gateway Program](#) at [Your Side](#) and is a carer himself - caring for his 19 year old son who has autism. He understands the stress that can go with being a carer, but says help is on the horizon for young carers who are finding it hard to cope.

"The message this National Carers Week that we want to share with young carers is that they are not in this alone. There are 2.8 million unpaid carers in Australia and more experienced carers are here to share their stories and support younger carers. The Carer Gateway has in-person, phone and online services to support anyone feeling the burden of caring for others," says George.

Clearly, one of the hardest parts about being a young carer is the weight you are carrying on your shoulders at times at such a young age.

"Sometimes you do feel the stress having to care for someone and not seeing friends as much as you would like to. I feel like my friends don't fully understand - they try to, but most of them don't because they are not in the same situation as me," says Gabi.

"Since I have started using the young carer services through the Carer Gateway I have been able to talk about the problems I am facing, or ask for advice. They also help me plan my future and figure out what I would like to do."

It seems that Gabi's capacity for compassion as a carer doesn't stop at caring for her grandmother. She sees her future in the nursing profession.

"I really want to help people. So I am really interested in the educational programs and mentoring that the Carer Gateway has to offer young carers. I think that will help me a lot getting a job as a nurse. As a

young carer sometimes your responsibilities can affect your availability to work or study. The Carer Gateway can help with tutoring and respite as well. Another cool thing is that they can help you with driving lessons, which is quite handy if you are doing a lot of running around,” says Gabi.

“[Deloitte Access Economics](#) calculated that in 2020, 2.8 million Australians like Gabi will deliver unpaid, informal care. If we had to pay for this care, it would cost \$77.9 billion. Those carers between them have given up an estimated \$15.2 million in foregone wages to deliver this care. In Carer’s Week we stop and acknowledge the extent of this contribution. We say a huge thank you to carers like Gabi who give so much to those who, with a little support, can live a good life,” says CEO of Your Side Australia, Danielle Ballantine. “They are on the frontline keeping older people safe during this pandemic, and without them our system would fall apart.”

When Gabi does have her own time she is a regular 18 year old who loves to swim at the beach, have coffee with her friends and hang out with her two over protective Chihuahua’s Bart and Rosie. Gabi also has a number of hidden talents and an adventurous spirit. She is a talented painter and plays an unusual sport called ‘[floorball](#)’ in which she has represented Australia in under 19s competition.

“Floorball is like a combination of ice hockey and soccer played indoors. I love it!” says Gabi.

What is clearly a theme for a lot of carers is the importance of feeling seen and heard. Sometimes caring for others makes them feel “invisible”.

The message that this amazing young woman wants to share with other young carers in National Carers Week is, “never give up and always do your best. Sometimes it is hard, but there is always help around the corner if you need it.”

As a carer (of any age) you can call the Carer Gateway team on **1800 422 737** between 8am - 5pm Monday - Friday or visit www.carergateway.gov.au

But it would seem fitting that the last piece of advice should go to 90-year-old Elaine who offered the following to the younger generation, “Enjoy yourself and have fun, but don’t get into trouble.” Sounds fair enough to me.

- END -

PHOTOS & VIDEO

To download photos of Gabi & Elaine

[CLICK HERE Web Res](#)

[CLICK HERE High Res](#)

Photographer: [Bec Lewis](#)

[To watch the video CLICK HERE](#)

AVAILABLE TO INTERVIEW

- Danielle Ballantine - CEO, Your Side Australia
- George Olivares -Team Lead Your Side for Carer Gateway
- Gabi Palme - Young Carer

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