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Young Journalist Award 2018: Young Catholics see hope in their communities

Australian Catholics magazine, in conjunction with Australian Catholic University, is pleased to announce the winners of the magazine's 2018 Young Journalist Award.

More than 700 students from around Australia entered this year's competition, which was themed 'Voices of hope'.

The students identified a range of people in their communities who were inspirational in their work for charities and the marginalised, and those who in their day-to-day lives and jobs, endeavoured to improve the communities they live and work in. Emergency services, police and nurses were popular subjects, but parents and teachers will be pleased to know there was also appreciation for their work.

Saying it on the playing field

For the winner of the Junior Section (Years 5 and 6) Ryan Murdoch of St Peter Chanel Primary School, Qld, it was the commitment of the local parish priest that impressed – not that Fr Stanley Orji needed to say anything aloud to have his voice heard.

Early this year, children from The Gap Parish were thrilled when the new priest joined them in a friendly soccer match. He didn't preach or lecture, but his voice was heard loud and clear; they were important. ... Fr Stanley believes we need to change the way we view each other, 'to a language of love and respect'. Just like the soccer match, rather than advise from the sidelines, he lets his actions do the talking.

For the Junior Section runner-up, Holly Burfitt, St Justin's Primary School, Oran Park, NSW, it was the community work of a retired rugby league player Shaun Spence that provided inspiration.

When he's not coaching in his downtime, Shaun's working week has him responsible for more than 60 different programs overseen by the West Tigers that vary from working with disengaged high schoolers to those that tackle abuse issues. ... Shaun remarked 'the feeling that I get from helping someone is the best feeling in the world and I consider myself extremely lucky to be able to have that impact, so I want to use it as much as I can'.

Georgia Vahland, St Catherine's Primary School, Berwick, VIC, received an honourable mention for her article on the Gippsland Young Veterans' Fitness and Mateship program.

Miscarriages and infant loss

'Changing the Tasmanian view of pregnancy and infant loss' was the subject tackled by the winner of the Intermediate Section (Years 7, 8 and 9) winner. The Year 9 student* wrote about the 'Bears of Hope' charity that provides support for parents who have lost a baby.

If people are thinking about generally creating change in the community, Maria says, 'Just do anything. Do something. Anything. It doesn't matter what. If you don't know what to do then just be kind to someone, just start there...'

Runner-up in the Intermediate Section was Phoebe Sheridan, St Joseph's College, East Gosford, NSW, for her profile on Paralympian and politician Liesl Tesch.

Liesl genuinely cares about the people in her community and I'm lucky enough to have experienced this first hand. Liesl heard a deaf girl was joining our Aussie Rules team. She took it on herself to come down to training. Liesl introduced herself to our team. Her advice was simple – enjoy footy and treat Cathleen like everyone else. ... 'So many people with disabilities don't have role models. I want to support Cathleen's bravery. She's stepped out of the box and [has] done something that some who is deaf may not have done before,' Liesl explained.

Debora Belay, Thomas Carr College, Tarneit, VIC, received an honourable mention for story of an Eritrean young woman who arrived in Australia as a refugee and now works at Mercy Community Health.

Australian Catholics editor Michael McVeigh congratulated every entrant for the high quality of articles. He said the students covered a range of interesting topics.

'It was a real joy going through the entries', he said. 'There were many amazing stories, all well told. Our judges had a difficult time narrowing down the winners, and we hope everyone who entered feels encouraged to keep writing.'

'The winners were able to capture the stories of the people they interviewed in ways that leapt out of the page. We hope our readers enjoy the winning articles as much as we did.'

Mr McVeigh thanked Australian Catholic University for its continuing major sponsorship of the awards, as well as other prize sponsors, Penguin Random House, *Eureka Street*, Sharpie and PaperMate.

The winning stories are in the Spring edition of *Australian Catholics*, which is being distributed to schools and parishes this week. The stories will also be published online at www.australiancatholics.com.au over the next few weeks.

The winning trophies and prizes are being sent to the schools to be presented to students. For details of the presentation, or to arrange a photo, please contact the respective schools.

Please direct any enquiries to Michael McVeigh, *Australian Catholics* Editor, on (03) 9421 9611 or email michael.mcveigh@jesuit.org.au.

***SUBS NOTE: The intermediate winner has asked not to be named.**