

# Heavy burden for young shoulders

But teen says 'I choose to thrive' in helping ill mom

By Katie Foutz  
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Early in her treatment for lupus, Ann Marie Glaviano, a single Naperville mom, was so fatigued that she came downstairs exactly twice a day: once to make breakfast and once to cook dinner.

"We lived in a townhouse with 15 steps up and 15 steps down, but the kids had to do all the running," she said.

Now, even on good days, she depends on her two teenage children for help. Lupus — a chronic autoimmune disease — attacks her joints, kidneys and blood cells, and the medication that treats it leaves her with little energy.

Vincent, 16, shares cooking duties with his mom — omelets are his specialty — and Ariel, 13, is learning. Vincent also walks or bikes to the grocery store, does laundry and mows the lawn. Ariel — who splits time living with her father and mother — feeds and cleans up after the family cats, birds and fish when she's at Ann Marie's.

"It really reverses roles and makes them realize how much you count on them," Ann Marie said. But those roles have a price, and it's getting national attention. The Glaviano family will be part of an "NBC Nightly News" report, scheduled to air today, about young caregivers and the negative effects of taking on responsibilities beyond their years.

**Short-, long-term effects**  
A recent study by the American Association of Caregiving Youth found that children who provide substantial assistance to ill relatives or household members are given jobs that can inter-

## ON THE AIR

The Glavianos' story is scheduled to air on "NBC Nightly News" at 5:30 p.m. today.



Kate Szrom / Staff photographer

For six years, Vincent Glaviano, 16, has assumed the role of caregiver for his mother, Ann Marie, who was diagnosed with lupus in 2000. The Glavianos will be featured in an "NBC Nightly News" story scheduled to air tonight.

fere with homework in the short term and disrupt emotional development in the long term.

When chemotherapy treatment forced Ann Marie to stay in bed, Ariel got angry at her, said Ann Marie, who was diagnosed in 2000.

"Ariel told me, 'I can't even stand the sound of your voice sometimes' — because that's the voice that would call from the bedroom," she said.

Ariel declined to be interviewed for this story and for NBC.

Vincent said he picked up his mom's housework and some of her parenting work, all while keeping up in school. He earned a 4.2 grade point average last semester at Naperville Central High School.

"I took on extra responsibilities — emotional support-type things and spending time with (Ariel) — because sometimes when stuff like this happens, you just want to escape sometimes," he said. "But you can't because it's your home."

## FYI

A recent study by the American Association of Caregiving Youth found that child and adolescent caregivers:

- have adverse physical and psychological ramifications of caregiving common to an adult family caregiver.
- are disadvantaged short term and long term with effects on current and future education and employment.
- have responsibilities beyond their years that may result in developmental and emotional burdens.
- may become bullies or victims of bullying.

Ann Marie is more mobile now, though she says she has one speed: slow. During her more difficult days and weeks, friends contribute meals and drive the kids to activities.

## Support on the way?

A pilot program in Boca Raton, Fla., is starting to support young caregivers by building their caregiving skills, giving respite from their duties, connecting them with resources and more.

Organizers hope the project becomes a model for similar programs nationwide — and so does Vincent.

"A program like that would've cut down on a lot of insecurity that I have faced," he said.

He's used to juggling his dual role as son and caregiver, but he realizes other kids aren't. He said he does it by "choosing to be stubbornly optimistic."

"I just take it because that's what life dealt to me," he said. "I can be upset about it and get nothing done, or work on it and ... try to succeed."

"It's a difference between thriving and surviving, and I choose to thrive."

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