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PRESS RELEASE

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Local Student Earns Prestigious Award

Tahquitz High School Student Elijah O'Leary, age 15 has served his community well – and his efforts have not gone unnoticed. Part of his voluntary accomplishments that has earned him The Congressional Award, Bronze Certificate is for volunteering at the Annual Angel Tree Christmas Party with the Community Outreach Ministry. The ministry, cofounded in 2000 by Dr. Mona Davies and her husband Bob, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of girls and boys like O'Leary, whose mother is in and out of prison. Now under the care of a

relative, the high school student never lets any obstacles of having an incarcerated mother stop him from either achieving his goals or choosing to help others along the way.

The Congressional Award offers young Americans the opportunity to be recognized for their service in four program areas including voluntary public service and youth up to the age of 24 can earn Bronze, Silver, and Gold Certificates as well as Bronze, Silver, and Gold Medals according to the website <https://www.congressionalaward.org>. The award accommodates young people with special needs or disabilities who are willing to take the challenge and achieve their goals. The Congressional Award is not based upon grade point average; however, Elijah is a high academic achiever with support from his caregiver. O’Leary’s great grandmother in San Diego cared and helped by tutoring him at home, picking him up from school, and meeting with his teachers until her death. Although his dad was also in San Diego, both mom and dad have been absentee parents. Elijah has had to face harsh realities as a young boy, and he is grateful for his great grandmother who intervened and demonstrated her love for him.

Community Outreach Ministry offers a multitude of programs and services to at-risk children in Riverside County impacted by parental incarceration. From “Gearing Up For STEM” Mentor Protégé Workshops to camping activities and guidance on available community resources, the nonprofit organization also helps youth celebrate the holidays through numerous events including its annual Angel Tree Christmas Party. In partnership with the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Program®, boys and girls like O’Leary are invited to a traditional holiday celebration replete with gifts, catered meals, and live entertainment. O’Leary participated in these activities over the years, and he decided to give back to his community by volunteering his time at events like this as a teen because he understood how important it was to celebrate the holiday season despite having neither his mother nor father to share in the moment.

As a three-year-old, O'Leary began to receive Christmas gifts from his incarcerated mother and remembers how getting those gifts was important to him. At first, those gifts were all he received which is what motivated him to volunteer his time when he was older. His caregiver has encouraged him to register for The Congressional Award Program and he is now well on his way toward earning the Silver Certificate. O'Leary has a heart for baseball and is a player on the Murrieta Red Wolves Colt team. He has also registered with the Red Cross and is taking a first-aid course for dogs as well as walking dogs in his community.

Donations for events hosted by Community Outreach Ministry are always welcome. Visit <https://www.communityoutreachministry.org> or send a text to DONATE CHAMPIONS to 609-212-0627. For more information call 951-698-7650 or email the nonprofit group at info@communityoutreachministry.org.
