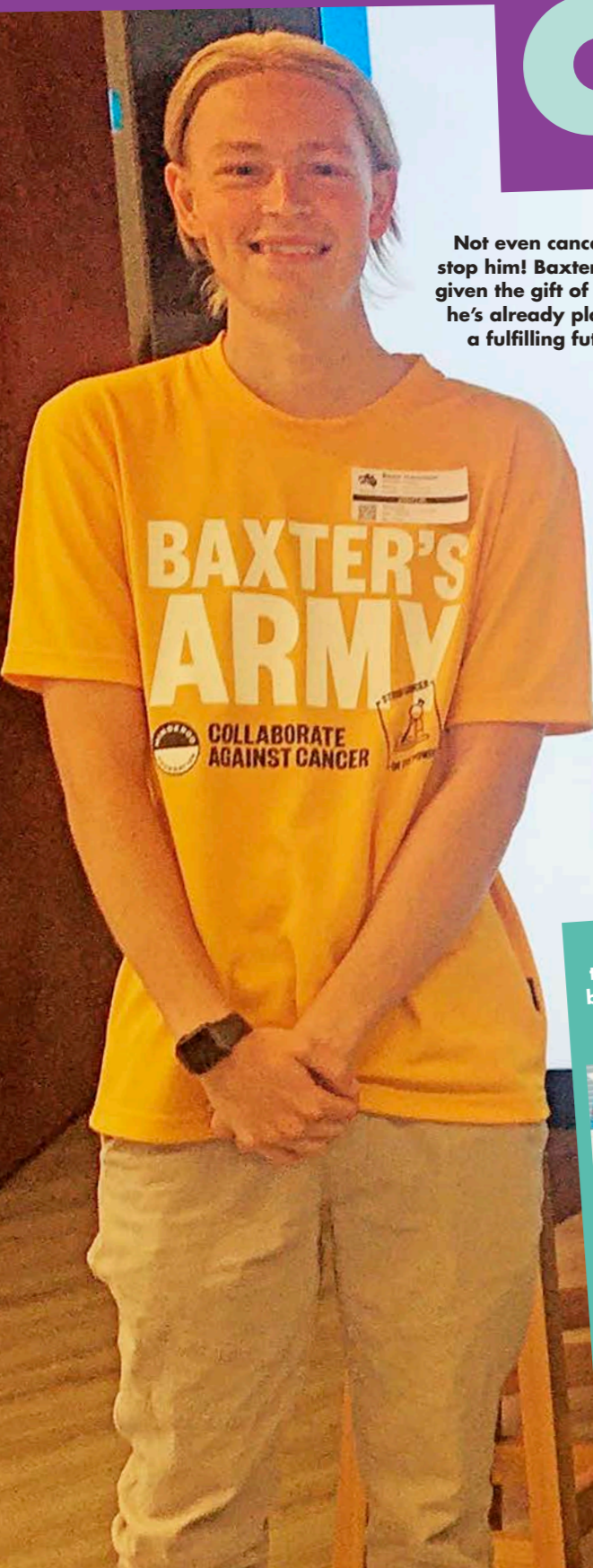


CANCER-FREE FOR CHRISTMAS



Not even cancer can stop him! Baxter's been given the gift of life and he's already planning a fulfilling future.

BAXTER WAS ON THE BRINK UNTIL A STRANGER GAVE HIM THE GIFT OF LIFE

Baxter Hutchinson was a bright and energetic 18-year-old with the world at his feet.

A top student and state-level soccer player, he had big dreams of a professional soccer career. But no-one could have predicted the devastating turn that would shatter his dreams and change his life forever...

Just three weeks before his high school graduation, Baxter received the results of hospital tests after suffering three months of severe vomiting. Doctors diagnosed

him with two medulloblastoma brain tumours, a common and often deadly form of cancer in children.

While doctors removed most of the primary tumour wrapped around Baxter's brain stem in an 11-hour operation, the metastasised tumour behind his optic nerve near the pituitary gland was inoperable.

Baxter's mum, Carolyn, could only watch helplessly as her son suffered horrific side effects from his surgery – losing the ability to swallow, speak and even see. He couldn't feel his arms or legs and became trapped inside his body.

"It was so scary watching him in the ICU," Carolyn, 47, tells New Idea. "Doctors couldn't promise when or if he would ever regain his abilities."

Thankfully, the brave teen from WA was a fighter. And with his mum spurring him on, his condition gradually improved. He could see and move again, but there was still a long, gruelling road to recovery ahead of him, which included months of radiation, chemotherapy and rehabilitation.



Despite terrible illness, the young lad smashed his fundraising goals – given to him by Andrew (right).



Baxter still hopes to play soccer professionally.



The teen was trapped inside his body post-surgery, after losing the ability to move.

"I missed my 18th birthday celebrations, graduation parties, saying goodbye to friends going their separate ways after school," says Baxter. "I should have been training for soccer and going to Germany for trials at the end of the year."

Life was suddenly a bleak

though I went through a horrible experience, I knew there were so many people worse off than me," he says. "I wanted to help other kids if I could."

When Minderoo's Chairman, billionaire philanthropist Andrew Forrest, got in touch with

"DOCTORS COULDN'T PROMISE WHEN OR IF HE WOULD EVER REGAIN HIS ABILITIES"

shadow of the bright future he'd been looking forward to.

So, when the opportunity to become an ambassador for the Minderoo Foundation's Collaborate Against Cancer initiative came up, Baxter saw it as a way to take his mind off his pain.

"I live in a country with the best medical facilities, so even

Baxter, he made an incredible offer – to match Baxter's fundraising efforts dollar for dollar if he could raise \$100,000 for charity.

"It seemed like a daunting challenge," recalls Baxter, who had undergone his surgery just seven weeks earlier. "I was going through radiation and feeling the brutal side effects."

His body was covered in burn marks, and he suffered from severe stomach pains, vomiting and fatigue. But Baxter saw Andrew's offer as a gift – a new goal.

By spreading the word and doing a 5km sponsored walk, the Aussie battler not only rose to the challenge, he smashed it out of the park. With the addition of Andrew's donation, Baxter raised over half a million dollars for Cure Brain Cancer Foundation's Walk4BrainCancer.

To top it all, just before Christmas last year, doctors announced that Baxter was cancer-free and could spend the holidays with his family.

"It was the best Christmas present ever," smiles his mother, Carolyn.

This year, Baxter – the Christmas miracle – has continued as an ambassador for Minderoo and even started playing para-soccer, with the hope of eventually joining the Australian Paralympic soccer team. Next year, he's looking forward to university.

It might not be exactly how he'd pictured his future, but if there's one thing Baxter knows, it's that life is a gift and he plans on making the most of it.

By Astha Gupta