



## Unbreakable Crowns Resilience Award Winner

### Melanie Carrigg

*Military Children 2025 World Expo*

**To every child who has ever been underestimated — this crown is yours.**

The Unbreakable Crowns Award is given to those who exemplify unmatched courage, relentless hope, and an unwavering commitment to changing the world for the better. Today, we

honor **Melanie Carrigg**, a young warrior whose story has sparked systemic change and inspired a nation.

### Meet the Winner: Melanie Carrigg

#### **Advocate. Overcomer. Light-bringer. Leader.**

Born with **Down syndrome**, a **congenital heart defect**, and a **metabolic disorder**, Melanie began her life journey with challenges that would test even the strongest adult. But from the very beginning, she showed us all what it means to rise — not just to survive, but to shine.

In 2017 and 2018, Melanie became one of the very first **Little Lobbyists**, walking the halls of Congress alongside her mother to advocate for children with disabilities. She visited nearly every House and Senate office, participated in news conferences, and stood in front of the nation with her light, her voice, and her truth.

Then in 2020, Melanie's world changed again. She suffered a catastrophic **right MCA stroke**, leaving her right side paralyzed. Doctors said she would likely not make it — and if she did, she would never walk again. But Melanie had other plans.

By April of that same year, **she not only walked again — she walked out of the hospital**, just as the nonprofit her mother founded in her honor, **Exceptional Families of the Military**, received its official 501(c)(3) status.

### **A Crown of Courage and Community**

Melanie now serves as a **Junior Ambassador for Exceptional Families of the Military**, continuing to pour hundreds of hours into advocacy, education, and outreach. Her work has raised national awareness about the barriers faced by **military-connected families with disabilities**, contributing to meaningful changes in **base assignment policies** and support systems.

Her favorite way to share her story is through video interviews — including one of her most cherished appearances with **Norah O'Donnell** — where she lights up the screen with joy, purpose, and determination.

## **Why She Embodies the Unbreakable Crown**

Melanie represents the more than **1.6 million military-connected children** across the U.S. — and especially those living with complex needs. Her life is not defined by her diagnoses, but by the strength, leadership, and light she brings to the world.

She has moved the hearts of **lawmakers, military leaders, and families nationwide**, proving that one voice — no matter how young — can lead to national change.

In her laughter, in her advocacy, in every courageous step she's taken since her stroke, Melanie reminds us all: **The crown you wear isn't made of what you carry — it's made of how you carry it.**

Today, we celebrate Melanie — and through her, we honor every child who has ever faced the world and smiled back with hope.

**You are seen. You are celebrated. And your crown is unbreakable.**

