



Shelby, *Catch-Up Learning* participant

Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives.

Autumn 2024



**The Smith
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

This is the crucial difference your commitment makes

In this year's National Volunteer Week edition of *Real People Real Stories*, we celebrate the crucial difference your volunteering commitment makes.

In our annual survey of 2,200 families, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents said they were worried about affording all the things their children will need for school in 2024.¹

Many of the families on our *Learning for Life* program are coping with big challenges because of poverty. Their children are living with hardship that no person should experience at such a young age.

As a volunteer, you get to witness their determination to push on with their dreams. It speaks volumes about their strength and spirit. And the support from a dedicated volunteer like you can make them feel even more encouraged. You help unlock opportunities for students. You help them achieve the wonderful things they are capable of – and I can't thank you enough.

That's what caring student volunteers did for siblings Adam and Kelly, and it's amazing to see. Almost overnight everything in their lives changed, including their schooling. In this edition we share

how their *student2student* peer buddies who read with them helped support their education at this turbulent time.

And I'm excited that you'll meet Christine, whose own experience of childhood disadvantage motivates her to generously give her time to those who need it most. It's heartwarming to see how much volunteering means to Christine.

Finally, it's that time of year I look forward to when we share amazing art by students who entered our Creative Showcase. I never stop feeling inspired by the incredible imagination on display. I hope you enjoy the examples we've included. Also, thank you to our wonderful virtual volunteer team who help make this activity come to life.

Thank you for helping to open up a world of opportunity for children in need. Happy National Volunteer Week!

Warmest wishes,



Doug Taylor
Chief Executive Officer



1. The Smith Family Pulse Survey 2023-24

Thank you!

Our incredible army of 5,162 volunteers donated 108,341 hours of service last year, equivalent to \$3.4 million!

National 20-26 MAY 2024
Volunteer
Something for Everyone **Week**

Volunteer Spotlight! Meet Christine.



Christine, Smith Family volunteer

“I have always been interested in helping people and have a passion for volunteering.

My first volunteering experience was dropping into the Children’s Hospital on my way to work, to read to the kids. Since then, I’ve worked with international food and refugee charities, and fostered children from all over the world.

“For me, volunteering has always been about having a strong sense of community and a feeling of doing something positive for society.”

– Christine

I started volunteering at The Smith Family around six years ago. At first, I mostly did admin work at the volunteer centre [Volunteer Coordination Unit], but I have since started helping at my local *Learning Club*. I’m also training to be an early learning reader.

“I love working with a wonderful team, and celebrating the wins and joys of the students I support.”

– Christine

I’m motivated to give back because I know what it’s like to receive a helping hand when times are tough. I experienced disadvantage as a kid and was raised by my mum in a single-parent household. I love working with a wonderful team, and celebrating the wins and joys of the students I support.

COVID was a challenging time for me as I have health issues, but I was able to keep volunteering with The Smith Family through remote admin work. I did it because I wanted to stay connected to my network.

It [is] a really amazing feeling to be recognised by The Smith Family... For me, volunteering has always been about having a strong sense of community and a feeling of doing something positive for society. I really do give it my all and am always happy to put in the extra hours.”

Christine, Smith Family volunteer

Shelby's tutor turned on a light switch in his mind



Shelby, *Catch-Up Learning* participant and his mum Sandy

14-year-old Shelby is an energetic child excited about his future, and with a clear vision of where his education might lead him. But Shelby and his mum, Sandy, have certainly faced some challenges together over the years.

Life got especially difficult when Sandy had to cut down her work hours. It was while she was studying to get a better job. "We were living week to week," Sandy says. "We were watching what we were paying, whether it was petrol in the car or swimming fees. It was always something that we had to keep an eye on."

All young people need guidance and encouragement to achieve their potential. But this hardship and stress made it much harder for

Sandy to support Shelby's education as much as she wanted to. Shelby had so many strengths, but he was struggling to reach his goals.

That's why Sandy was thrilled that Shelby could access sponsorship from The Smith Family who knows that every child needs the right support to do well in life.

Financial support through sponsorship brought immediate relief for Sandy, especially during remote learning. "It was expected that we had

pens and paper and rulers and glue at home,” she remembers. “But we had to go out and purchase all that ourselves.

“Support from Shelby’s sponsor made things like that a lot easier. Having Shelby’s uniforms and shoes paid for has also been such a fantastic thing.”

Shelby had noticed he was behind compared to his peers. “It was really hard,” says Shelby. “I’d want to go home and do simple maths homework, but I just couldn’t do it. It did make me mad and sad because I had no idea what to do.”

Sponsorship then gave Shelby access to The Smith Family program called *Catch-Up Learning*. He began receiving one-on-one literacy and numeracy tutoring, with qualified teachers.

Shelby was now grasping tough maths concepts with his tutor’s help. What happened next was phenomenal. Shelby’s overall learning and mindset began to transform! Sandy noticed her son now seemed excited to go to school. He was finally ‘getting it’.

“It’s like a light switch just changed for him,” Sandy says. “You could see his mood changed. He was more confident with what he was doing at school. He caught up to where he needed to be.”

Shelby is now in Year 9 and knows maths is important in all aspects of life. He is channelling his new skills and confidence gained from the *Catch-Up Learning* program into practical subjects, like woodwork. Shelby is even exploring a new and exciting pathway for his future.

“I feel like I’m getting better at maths. It’s helping me with understanding the calculations and the measurements in woodwork. You need math to learn other things in life, like woodwork.

“I do like working with my hands, because I can see things come to life,” says Shelby. “When I finish school, I want to be a carpenter and I want to run my own business. I want to build my mum a house – it’s a dream goal for me.”

Shelby feels proud of how far he’s come with The Smith Family’s support. It feels amazing that he can do things now that he couldn’t do before.

“You are showing that you care about someone out there,” he says. “Thank you for supporting students like me.”



Shelby, *Catch-Up Learning* participant

“We never felt less-than”: Coleen reflects on the early kindness that led her to VIEW



Coleen, VIEW Club member

It was the 1950s, and Coleen was just five years old with two young siblings and more on the way. Her mother was caring for the family, while they were living with grandparents as they waited for housing. It was such a difficult time – then The Smith Family entered their lives.

“They gave us food hampers, clothing and financial assistance,” Coleen recalls. “We never felt ‘less-than’; the caring people from The Smith Family made sure of that.”

Coleen never forgot that interaction, and decades later, The Smith Family re-entered her life. She'd moved to northern NSW with her husband Michael and was invited to visit her local VIEW club. Someone there mentioned VIEW's connection to The Smith Family. This sparked Coleen's curiosity, and she found out that The Smith Family was now focused on supporting the education of children living with disadvantage.

Coleen was delighted to learn that VIEW's 14,000 members around Australia share a common goal: to support the work of The Smith Family. “I joined that night and found my purpose,” says Coleen. “Children are our future. To support children on their education journey is paramount.”

In 2021, Coleen and Michael retired to Lowmead, a small, rural town in Queensland. With no local VIEW club, Coleen, with help from an experienced member of the VIEW leadership team, set to work to start one. Within six months Bundaberg VIEW Club was formed, with Coleen as President.

The Club's 45 members worked hard to make connections in their community and have now raised enough funds to sponsor four students on The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program.

After a lifetime connected to The Smith Family, Coleen can't think of a better way to give back. "The impact The Smith Family had on my life was huge," Coleen says.

"Helping children experience a positive and happy school life is so important. I didn't have all the items I needed in my early years, so I try every day for this to be available to the children Bundaberg VIEW Club sponsors."

Now Coleen is helping lay the groundwork for a new VIEW club in another nearby community. VIEW offers women like Coleen purpose, skills development, social activities and friendship.

Along the way, members gain fulfilment knowing they are helping children experiencing disadvantage access life-changing support to reach their full potential. "Every child deserves the best education and the items and tools for them to grow, dream and prosper," she says. "My heart is full re-living my Smith Family journey and the joy of VIEW."

VIEW is a leading national women's volunteer organisation, exclusively supporting The Smith Family. With around 300 clubs across Australia, VIEW members participate in numerous volunteering activities and collectively sponsor 1,725 students supported by The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program. For more information, visit view.org.au



Coleen, VIEW Club member

Mum and daughter team building a brighter future together



Mikayla, *Digital Learning Essentials* Participant

Mikayla and her Mum, Myha have always been there for one another – a strong team who value each other immensely. Myha has always wanted the best in education for Mikayla, and Mikayla acknowledges how hard her Mum has worked.

When serious health problems affected Myha's lung and heart, and in turn, her income, Mikayla's *Learning for Life* Coordinator and sponsor were a vital support.

"Before The Smith Family, it was difficult to afford the basic things for Mikayla with school," Myha says. It became clear to Myha how poverty was blocking Mikayla from having the same opportunity as her peers to reach her full potential. Mikayla is a bright student. Sponsorship has helped to remove these barriers so she can make the most out of school.

The financial support sponsorship provides has enabled Mikayla to purchase new shoes and uniform. Thanks to Mikayla's sponsor she was able to access The Smith Family's *Digital Learning Essentials* program. This program provides students with access to the digital tools and skills they need to unlock the learning opportunities all children deserve. Mikayla received a refurbished laptop as part of the program, and she also receives free internet through the Optus Donate Your Data™ initiative, which helped to give her the same chance as her classmates to achieve her best at school.

“With the help of the Smith Family and Mikayla’s sponsor, she’s able to have new shoes, uniform, and books like any other kid,” says Myha. “Having the support of The Smith Family puts my mind at ease. I have less stress knowing that Mikayla’s going to also have a laptop and prepaid data – the essentials for going to school.”

Having access to the digital resources she needs for school has unlocked new freedom for Mikayla to enjoy being with her classmates and to dream big. Now Mikayla wants to use her passion for learning, and her empathy and understanding of others, to develop a career as a psychologist.

“I think what’s really helped boost my confidence this year is all of the support I’ve received, and how it shows people care.

“It makes me feel really lucky that I’m able to have the same things as my friends at school, and I don’t feel excluded. It makes me feel like someone cares about me, even if they don’t know me personally,” Mikayla says.

Sponsorship has given Myha peace of mind in knowing Mikayla’s got what she needs to grow and learn.

“To anyone that’s thinking of supporting The Smith Family I’d say go for it, because you are giving a bunch of other children heaps of opportunities – and they could really use the support,” says Mikayla. “I’d like to say thank you for helping me gain a massive opportunity for my future.’



Mikayla, *Digital Learning Essentials* Participant and her mum Myha

Volunteers like you gave Adam and Kelly a fair go when they needed it most

When Anna's husband's health deteriorated, everyone in the family, including their children Adam, 14, and Kelly, 12 faced some big changes. They had to move from the country to a larger city in Queensland where he could get full-time care.

The children were adjusting to their dad not being at home and fitting into a new school. Financially it was very tough for Anna. She had the huge task of keeping on top of their day-to-day costs, parenting and running a household all on her own.

As a family, they were coping with so much change. It was difficult for Anna to give Adam and Kelly all the extra support they needed to keep up with their homework or even sit down to read together at night. Every child needs stability and support to fully participate at school: or else they can be blocked from achieving their goals. With all these daily challenges, there was now a risk that Adam and Kelly would miss out on the fair go that Australians expect everyone should receive.

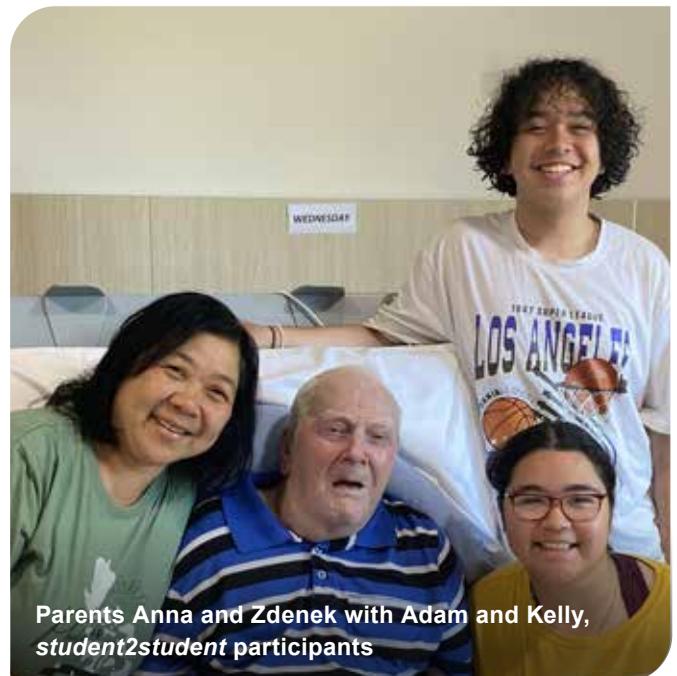
Fortunately, this wasn't the case. At this disruptive time, a Parent Engagement Officer at their new school, Ricky, introduced them to The Smith Family's learning programs.

Soon after, wonderful volunteers like you stepped up to ease some of the challenges and Adam and Kelly began to receive the educational support all children need to flourish thanks to their caring volunteer buddies. "Getting this learning support for my children served as a positive sign that there is always hope," Anna says.

A family health crisis like Adam and Kelly went through can be so overwhelming. It can disrupt a student's focus and emotional wellbeing. They can then struggle to concentrate and engage in their lessons.

But thanks to programs like *student2student*, Adam and Kelly could rebuild their confidence to take on challenges. They enjoyed many happy afternoons reading with their volunteer buddies after school. Anna saw their communication skills blossom and a growing enthusiasm to learn.

"They didn't miss a single reading session," Anna says.



Parents Anna and Zdenek with Adam and Kelly, *student2student* participants

As part of our *Digital Learning Essentials* program, the children also receive free internet through the Optus Donate Your Data™ initiative, helping them reap the educational benefits that come with being digitally connected. “They are becoming tech savvy and improving in the skills they need to achieve their goals,” Anna says.

Today both siblings can participate fully in their education with support from volunteers in our literacy and learning programs like you. Adam is a determined learner in Year 9 and loves being on the school basketball team. Kelly is in Year 7 and involved in everything – from choir to volleyball and student council.

“Today, I am much less anxious about meeting Adam and Kelly’s education needs,” Anna says.

“Caring people who volunteer with The Smith Family’s learning programs give my children good motivation to learn more and enjoy every school experience. I hope these wonderful people know how much we appreciate them.”

“Thank you for being kind-hearted people sharing your blessing to help people like my family. We truly appreciate all your support.”

Anna’s moving poem shows how, when The Smith Family, schools and volunteers like you come together to help a student, that extraordinary feeling, care and support wraps around the entire family.

“One fine day, one lovely Ricky, walking in the school
She saw one lonely Me, sitting and looks uncool
She greeted me hello, her eyes with a glow
A kind-hearted person, in front of me I saw
I shared my troubled life, for her to know
She listened with sincerity, to me it shows
She acted right away, to assist me with my needs
Her kindness overflows, and a friendship start to grows
She is busy as a bee, in her work indeed
But manage to see, my latest at full speed
With her never-ending support
She helps improve, my life in short
From hardship to survivorship
From friendship to fellowship
From scholarship to apprenticeship

From assistantship to wageslip.
To show my deepest gratitude to Ricky
and the community hub we know
I am happy to recite, this poem I made
To share my thoughts, and not be afraid
The community hub is a right place to go
With kind-hearted people always on the know
With one genuine goal
To help and support,
People of all sort
People they helped, like me, is here to stay
To share our time, and extend our support
For our hub to succeed, and to attain its goal.
Thank you, and God bless you all.”

CREATIVE SHOWCASE

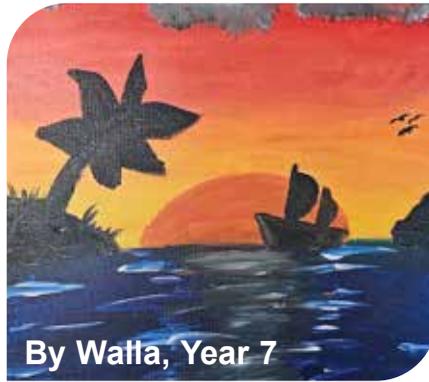
Creative Showcase gives students the opportunity to express their creativity. Last year we received many entries from our students and we'd love to share some with you.

Did you know?

We have a dedicated team of 'remote' volunteers supporting our work online. Last year, they completed **3,700 Creative Showcase** entry checks through our Virtual Volunteer Activity Centre!



By Bethany, Year 11



By Walla, Year 7



by Jakai, Year 3



By Mais, Year 7



By Grace, Year 6

thesmithfamily.com.au

Email: volunteer@thesmithfamily.com.au

Phone: 1300 397 730

Mail: The Smith Family
GPO Box 5348, Sydney NSW 2001

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