



*everyone's family*

## HELPING YOUNG AUSTRALIANS TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

The Smith Family is committed to improving the long-term educational outcomes of young Australians living with disadvantage.

Our long-term, targeted educational support gives children and young people opportunities to help them succeed at school and fulfil their potential in life.



**The Smith Family**  
Snapshot 2019–20

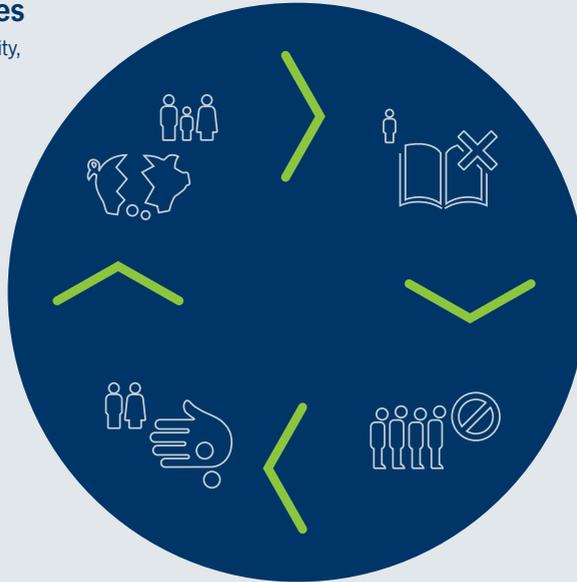
# The cycle of disadvantage

## 1 Low-income families

Challenges include sickness, disability, unemployment, difficulty affording basic living costs, inability to provide resources for their child's education, limited access to digital technology and skills, and a lack of knowledge or confidence about how best to support their child's educational development.

## 4 Poorer overall life outcomes

Inability to get ahead in life, health and wellbeing affected by disadvantage, and greater likelihood of passing on disadvantage to the next generation.



## 2 Poorer educational outcomes for children

Behind in essential skills when they start school, not having the items needed to fit in, limited access to resources to support learning development, falling behind at school and facing difficulty in catching up, and limited access to the support needed to guide study and/or career paths.

## 3 Difficulty getting a job

A lack of engagement and motivation with their education, lower educational performance, leaving school early with few or no qualifications, fewer job opportunities, and limited connections to community networks and services.

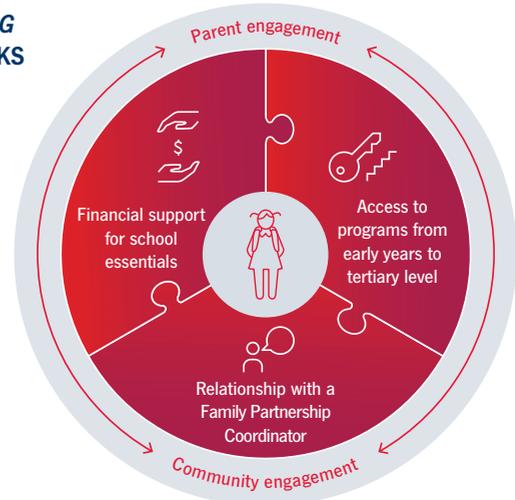
## How we help

We provide long-term support to children and young people who are experiencing disadvantage, so they can thrive in the classroom, complete their education and flourish in their adult lives.

*Learning for Life* provides:

- financial assistance to help families pay for school uniforms, books, digital tools and excursions,
- access to a Family Partnership Coordinator who supports the student's education journey and connects them to relevant local services and supports, and
- practical support, such as access to out-of-school learning and mentoring programs.

### HOW LEARNING FOR LIFE WORKS



# Our Five-Year Strategy

Our Five-Year Strategy provides a framework for supporting children and families living with disadvantage in a changing world.

## OUR AMBITION

Over five years to 2022 we will increase by 30% the number of young Australians reached with our effective, evidence-based programs, enabling them to break the cycle of disadvantage and thrive in the 21st century.

### SCALE EFFECTIVELY

Grow our reach by 30% over five years while maintaining the effectiveness of our programs.

### INNOVATE

Innovate to enable the children and young people we serve to thrive in a rapidly changing and increasingly challenging environment.

### ADVOCATE

Be an authoritative and influential advocate with those who shape public policy on behalf of disadvantaged children and young people.



### FUND

Develop a sustainable funding base to fund our scaling up and strategic initiatives.

### DATA ENABLE AND DIGITISE

Amplify and accelerate our mission through digital and data.

### ENABLE HIGH PERFORMANCE

Be a destination employer in our sector. Ensure systems are scalable and fit for purpose.

# WE TRACK OUR RESULTS

## 1 ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance at school is essential for students to achieve positive educational outcomes.

## 2 ADVANCEMENT

Each completed year of schooling enables better overall life outcomes and improves an individual's ability to contribute economically and socially to the community.

### LONGER-TERM RESULTS

*LEARNING FOR LIFE STUDENTS'*  
AVERAGE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN 2019:

**89.5%** primary school students  
(90.7% in 2018)

**83.6%** secondary school students  
(85.2% in 2018)

**84.4%** Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander students  
(86.3% in 2018)

*LEARNING FOR LIFE STUDENTS WHO ADVANCED  
THROUGH SCHOOL FROM YEAR 10 TO YEAR 12  
OR ITS EQUIVALENT BY 2019:*

**68.7%**

of *Learning for Life* students in Year 10  
in 2016 advanced to Year 12 in 2019.

Over the last seven years, 14,269 *Learning  
for Life* students across Australia have  
been supported to complete Year 12.

### SHORT-TERM RESULTS

Improved numeracy

Increased  
academic engagement  
and achievement

Increased  
self-management  
and confidence

Improved literacy

### PROGRAM RESULTS

*LET'S COUNT*

**94%**

of early years professionals  
felt that they had increased  
confidence engaging with  
parents/carers about their child's  
mathematical development.

*LET'S READ*

**95%**

of parents agreed that  
they now have more ideas  
about how to read, talk  
and sing with their child.

*STUDENT2STUDENT*

**97%**

of students improved their  
reading. 84% of students  
agreed student2student  
made it easier to do  
their schoolwork.

*LEARNING CLUBS*

**84%**

of participants said going to the  
Learning Club helped them do better  
in class. 88% of participants said  
going to the club makes them try  
harder at school.

We track the progress of students receiving *Learning for Life* support against four longer-term outcomes: school attendance; completion of Year 12 or its equivalent; the continuation and completion of tertiary studies; and post-school engagement in education, training or work. We also assess the short-term outcomes of our programs, as these help to put children on the path to reaching the four longer-term goals.

## 3 TERTIARY CONTINUATION RATE

This rate indicates the proportion of our first-year tertiary-level *Learning for Life* scholarship students who continue their studies into second year at university, while still on a scholarship.

## 4 ENGAGEMENT RATE

A key indicator of the success of our approach is the proportion of *Learning for Life* students who successfully transition from school to further education, training or employment.

LEARNING FOR LIFE TERTIARY SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS CONTINUING FROM FIRST YEAR TO SECOND-YEAR STUDY AT UNIVERSITY IN 2019–20:

94.5%

(88.0% in 2018–19)

FORMER LEARNING FOR LIFE STUDENTS ENGAGED IN POST-SCHOOL EDUCATION, TRAINING OR EMPLOYMENT:

79.2%

Four in five students who left in Years 10 to 12 were working and/or studying 12 months after leaving the program.

Only 4.5% of former *Learning for Life* students were not in work or study, and/or looking for work and/or volunteering.

Enhanced networks and relationships

Improved knowledge and understanding of study options and career paths

Improved knowledge and understanding of financial management

iTRACK

78%

of student respondents agree that their mentor helped them understand more about how they can reach their career goals. 81% reported that they know more about what career opportunities are available to them after leaving school.

CERTIFICATE 1 FINANCIAL SERVICES

83%

of participants attained the Certificate 1 qualification. 78% reported that they are confident making financial decisions.

SAVER PLUS

87%

of participants were saving the same amount or more three to seven years after completing the program.

# Early years

On starting school, one in three children in Australia's most disadvantaged communities are developmentally vulnerable in at least one key area. In the least disadvantaged communities, this figure is just 15%.<sup>1</sup>



## HOW WE HELP

Starting school is a major milestone for any child, and we work to make this transition as easy as possible for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We do this by helping families, educators and community professionals build the skills and confidence they need to support children in the pre-school years.

The Australian Early Development Census shows that children from low socioeconomic areas and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds are more likely to start school developmentally vulnerable. We know that by giving these children access to quality early learning in the year before school, we can help to reduce the outcomes gap between at-risk children and their peers.

That's why this year, with funding from the Department of Education, Skills and Employment, we commenced a project focused on improving pre-school enrolment and attendance rates for children experiencing disadvantage.

We began the *Early Years Attendance Project* with a national research effort that synthesised existing studies and documented existing programs and practices to increase pre-school participation. Taking a human-centred design approach, we conducted interviews and focus groups with families and other stakeholders to learn more about the barriers and enablers to pre-school participation in disadvantaged communities.

The next step involves working with communities in two states to design and test approaches for promoting participation. Unfortunately, the onset of COVID-19 has delayed this work, which we now expect to be completed in March 2021.

We're also continuing our pre-school *Let's Read* and *Let's Count* programs, and working with local service providers to deliver early intervention and prevention programs for children under 12 across nine *Communities for Children Facilitating Partner* sites.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Government (2019), Australian Early Development Census National Report 2018: *A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia*, Canberra: Department of Education and Training.

# 77,998

children aged under five participating in early-years programs

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

- *Child and Parent Centres*
- *Communities for Children*
- *Early Years Attendance Project*
- *Let's Count*
- *Let's Read*

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Children start school ready to learn
- Parents and community workers have skills and resources to support children's early language, literacy and numeracy development

# Primary years

Even when students from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve strong Year 3 NAPLAN results, they can be nearly two years behind their advantaged peers by Year 9 in terms of reaching educational milestones.<sup>1</sup>

One in five *Learning for Life* students do not have a computer or tablet that is connected to the internet.



## HOW WE HELP

The early years of school are formative for any student. But for children experiencing disadvantage, it's especially important to establish a strong pattern of attendance and engagement early on.

Our *Learning for Life* sponsorships begin the year a student starts school. From kindergarten onwards, financial assistance from sponsors helps families pay for school essentials, including uniforms, books and excursions, so children can get the most out of everything their education has to offer.

As part of *Learning for Life*, our Programs Coordinators work with local communities and partner schools to plan and support learning programs such as Learning Clubs, where students can get extra support from volunteer tutors. Students who need extra support with their reading can also access our *student2student* program, which matches students with

buddies who help and encourage them to improve their reading.

Access to the internet has become a more pressing challenge than ever, with disadvantaged students often unable to access what they need for learning in the home environment. In December, our long-term corporate partner Optus launched a new campaign to encourage its customers to donate their excess mobile data to *Learning for Life* students who might otherwise struggle to have reliable access to the internet. The response from Optus' customers was staggering and since January, additional data has been received by 11,253 *Learning for Life* students in total.

This year, we were also excited to pilot *Future Seekers*, an interactive career-related learning program that aims to give children the confidence and tools to start thinking about their post-school futures.

<sup>1</sup> Goss, P, Sonnemann, J, Chisholm, C, and Nelson, L (2016), *Widening Gaps: What NAPLAN tells us about student progress*, Grattan Institute, Melbourne.

# 54,316

students participating  
in programs

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

- *Communities for Children*
- *Future Seekers*
- *Kidpreneur*
- Learning Clubs
- *On PAR*
- *Partnerships for Education*
- *Passport to Success*
- *student2student*

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Children enhance their literacy and numeracy skills
- Primary school students start to think positively about the future world of work
- More children get access to online resources and opportunities

# Secondary years

Around 67% of young people from the lowest socioeconomic backgrounds complete Year 12, compared to around 92% for those from the highest socioeconomic backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>



## HOW WE HELP

When students can link their current learning to future educational opportunities and career options, they're more likely to stay engaged at school and complete Year 12. That's why our programs aim to expose students to a range of post-school options and give them the tools they need to pursue them.

In 2019–20, we continued the *Career Coaching* program, which focuses on supporting young people in Years 9 to 11 who are at risk of leaving school early. By providing active career coaching, the program helps these students stay engaged by setting goals for the future and developing plans to achieve them. We're pleased to report that the majority of *Career Coaching* participants have stayed at school, while we've helped many of those who left school to transition to further study or employment. We thank Citi Foundation for its support of the program in 2020.

Research tells us that creative enrichment programs can help children develop self-confidence, creativity and problem-solving skills. To encourage young people's creativity and broaden their aspirations, we run *SmArts*. Participants in this art enrichment program are also introduced to post-school educational and vocational options in the Arts.

This year, COVID-19 restrictions led us to develop a digital version of our *Work Inspiration* program. By running the program digitally, we continued to give *Learning for Life* students first-hand, meaningful exposure to the world of work. For example, students participating in the digital program in Tasmania were able to connect not only to Australian employers, but even across the globe, with engineering firm Arup taking pupils on a virtual tour of their California office.

1 Lamb, S, Huo, S, Walstab, A, Maire, Q, Doecke, E, Jackson, J and Endekov, Z (2020), *Educational opportunity in Australia 2020: Who succeeds and who misses out*, Melbourne: Centre for International Research on Education Systems, Victoria University for the Mitchell Institute.

# 36,931

students participating  
in programs

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

- *Career Coaching*
- *Certificate 1 Financial Services*
- *Girls at the Centre*
- *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program*
- *iTrack*
- Learning Clubs
- *Partnerships for Education*
- *SmArts*, including *Bella Momentum*
- *Work Inspiration*

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Secondary students improve their literacy and numeracy skills
- Students learn about available career options and pathways to further study
- Students improve their knowledge and understanding of financial management

# Post-school years

Around 49% of 24-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are not fully engaged in work or study, compared to 18% of those from the most advantaged backgrounds.<sup>1</sup>



1 Op. cit. Lamb et al. (2020).

## HOW WE HELP

For any student, the transition from secondary to tertiary education is full of surprises and challenges. For students experiencing disadvantage, who often lack the financial resources and digital technology that their peers rely on, the road can be even bumpier.

Our *Learning for Life* Tertiary Scholarship program helps school leavers from disadvantaged backgrounds continue their studies at university or TAFE. The program gives students financial support as well as specialised help tackling other obstacles that get in the way of their tertiary education.

Our national team of Tertiary Coordinators continues to assist our students to remain engaged with their studies, and provide additional resources and programs designed to help students take their first steps into the workforce.

This financial year, we worked with 23 employers who hosted Tertiary Scholarship students with paid summer work placements as part of the *Cadetship to Career* program. As well as vital workplace experience, the support of companies including Accenture, ANZ, ASX, Cochlear, Programmed, Rio Tinto, Telstra and WSP enabled cadets to receive training on a variety of topics from 'Making the Most of your Cadetship' to 'Delivering Dynamic Presentations'.

This year, we continued to develop our student-centred higher education strategy, which we are trialling in Queensland and Victoria. The strategy aims to develop deep, responsive and collaborative relationships between The Smith Family and universities and vocational training providers nationally, so that we can work together to support our post-school *Learning for Life* students.

# 1,620

tertiary students sponsored through *Learning for Life*

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

- *Cadetship to Career*
- *Care2Achieve*
- *Career Mentoring*
- *Learning for Life* Tertiary Scholarship

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Students stay engaged with their studies and attain a qualification
- Students benefit from supportive networks and relationships in their post-school years
- Students develop the skills they need to achieve success in the job market

# Parents and carers

Parental engagement in a child's learning is a bigger predictor of academic performance than a family's socioeconomic status. Regardless of background, students with engaged parents are more likely to do well at school, graduate from Year 12 and go on to higher education.<sup>1</sup>



## HOW WE HELP

Parents and carers play a central role in a child's education, which is why *Learning for Life* families enter into a Partnership Agreement with The Smith Family. This agreement acknowledges our shared goal of supporting a child's long-term education and the importance of parental help in achieving this.

Our Family Partnership Coordinators build strong long-term relationships with parents and carers, collaborating with them to develop ways to engage with their child's learning. These close relationships help our coordinators identify the opportunities that will most benefit children and their families.

This year, we experimented with a new interactive messaging system to improve communication with *Learning for Life* families, enable quicker service and help us to better understand the challenges our families are facing when interacting with

our processes. Family feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and indicates this new approach is easy to use and provides them with more information than traditional text message or email systems.

We also continued to expand the features and capabilities of My Smith Family, our online portal for families. Over the past 12 months, we've updated the portal to allow families to manage all scholarship documentation and track payments.

This year, we also broadened the reach of our *MoneyMinded* program to include *Learning for Life* families. *MoneyMinded* gives parents and carers training in basic financial skills and knowledge in a supportive setting. We were pleased to hear parents found this year's workshop helpful, with one participant commenting: "Hearing others share and being able to relate to others in the same situations was very helpful."

1 Fox, S and Olsen, A (2014), *Defining parental engagement*. Canberra: ACT Department of Education and Training.

# 33,115

parents/carers/other adults  
participating in programs

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

- *Child and Family Centres*
- *Engaging Parents and Community*
- *Let's Count*
- *MoneyMinded*
- *Partnerships for Education*
- *Ready Set Go*
- *Saver Plus\**

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Families feel more confident to support their children's learning
- Parents and carers benefit from helpful networks and relationships
- Families receive practical financial management skills and knowledge

# Working with community

School–community engagement helps students broaden their knowledge and develop new skills. It provides access to new networks – broadening students’ outlook and understanding of future employment opportunities, and encourages a positive attitude to life. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds particularly gain from community engagement.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW WE HELP

The Smith Family aims to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. One of the most effective ways to do this is by helping young people get the most out of their education. But this isn’t a simple task. The challenges facing our families are complex, multi-dimensional and often long-term.

To help parents and carers access the services they need, we work to build meaningful relationships between families, The Smith Family and other community organisations. We start this process even before children commence school. By training educators and other community workers to present our early-years programs, such as *Let’s Count* and *Let’s Read*, we help parents and carers develop their children’s early numeracy and literacy skills.

Factors like the availability of support networks and services, as well as

community and cultural influences, play a major role in determining educational outcomes for children and young people. That’s why we help families navigate service systems more easily and build closer community ties through the *Communities for Children Facilitating Partner* initiative.

In nine *Communities for Children* sites, we facilitate a community-based approach to program development that involves listening to families, establishing strengths-based partnerships with local service providers, and collaborating with local schools, businesses and government agencies. This helps ensure that the voices of children and families inform every aspect of planning, designing and implementing programs.

1 Gonski, D et. al. (2018), *Through growth to achievement: Report of the Review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools*, Canberra: Department of Education and Training.

# 29,827

participants supported through community programs funded by governments.

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

- *Child and Parent Centres*
- *Communities for Children*
- *Engaging Parents and Community*
- *Let’s Count*
- *Let’s Read*
- *Partnerships for Education*

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

- Improved collaboration and integration between community service providers
- Families can access community resources with confidence
- Communities across sectors partner to produce better outcomes for local children

# Our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

In 2019, the average school attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was 81.5%, compared to 92.0% for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW WE HELP

We understand that the most effective strategies for closing the gap in educational outcomes are community-led. To help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children achieve their full potential, we work closely with students and their families to design tailored and sustainable support initiatives that work for them and their communities.

In 2019–20, we put this philosophy into action by exploring ways of embedding Indigenous knowledge into our programs.

With funding from The Ian Potter Foundation and Equity Trustees – James Raymond Hartley Charitable Trust, we partnered with the Stronger Smarter Institute to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learning systems in our *Let's Count* program.

This year, we started developing a new Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), which sets out our strategy for addressing the inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. To kick off our new RAP, we held a forum with members of our Advisory Group on Issues Concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Their valuable insights helped us design and develop the targets set out in the new plan.

Working with this Advisory Group, we also developed new governance frameworks. Moving forward, the group will use these frameworks to review The Smith

Family's work and give us suggestions on how to deliver culturally appropriate resources for Indigenous children. To grow our cultural competency further, our team members, including senior leaders, participated in a range of cultural learning initiatives, as well as National Reconciliation Week activities, this year. We also joined several external forums to learn more about how other organisations are meeting their RAP commitments.

Over the past year, we've continued to transition ownership of a number of community-based programs to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. We've now transitioned *Ready Set Go*, which tackles Indigenous disadvantage in the early primary years, to community ownership. In the coming year, we look forward to working with communities to help this program deliver better outcomes for our families.

1 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2018), *Report on Government services, 2018, Volume B: Child care, education and training*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

# 23,067

participants in programs who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

## HIGHLIGHT PROGRAMS

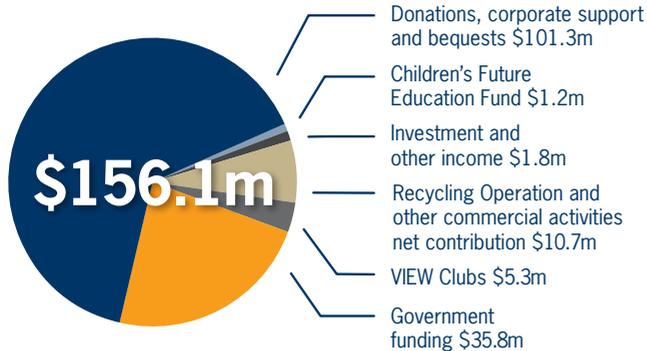
- *Engaging Parents and Community*
- *Girls at the Centre*
- *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program*
- *Ready Set Go*

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES

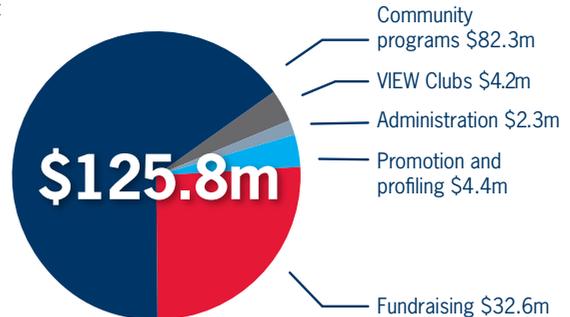
- Students of all ages improve their confidence, skills, knowledge and understanding
- Students stay motivated to attend school and complete Year 12
- School leavers engage in further study, training or work

# Financial summary 2019–20

## WHERE WE OBTAINED OUR FINANCIAL RESOURCES



## HOW WE APPLIED OUR FINANCIAL RESOURCES



## FUNDRAISING PERFORMANCE

# \$103.5m

in funds raised during 2019–20 from individuals, major donors, organisations, bequestors and VIEW Clubs of Australia

## EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS RAISED

In the five years to June 2020, 72% of donations and funding from individual supporters and partner organisations has been spent on our community programs.

This excludes revenue and expenses related to a short-term funding agreement with the Australian Government that enabled us to invest in the growth of our flagship program *Learning for Life* to build our long-term sustainability.

Our expenditure on administration averaged 1.5% throughout the year.

Transparency, robust governance and sound ethics are essential for any charity in our sector, and The Smith Family continues to perform strongly in these categories.

A survey conducted with our individual supporters revealed that 92% believe we make a real difference, 90% agree that we are ethical and honest and 88% feel confident that we use their donations wisely.

# 209,128 PARTICIPANTS

The Smith Family reached 209,128 children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals\* in 2019–20, up 1.1% on the prior year.

**77,998**

Children aged under five participating in early-years programs



**54,316**

Primary school students



**5,112**

Community professionals\*



**33,115**

Parents, carers and adults



**1,656**

Tertiary students



**36,931**

Secondary school students



**170,901**

children and young people participating in our programs in 2019–20, up 1.5% on the prior year.

**57,847**

*Learning for Life* sponsorship recipients, up 16.3% on the prior year.

\* Community professionals (not Smith Family team members) include early-years educators and program facilitators in communities.

# 91 COMMUNITIES

in which *Learning for Life* programs are delivered.



*Learning for Life* participation

## 21.5%

of students on sponsorship (12,417) in 2019–20 identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Partnerships with

## 741

partner schools attended by *Learning for Life* students, up from 694 schools last year, a 7% increase.

# 216,078 SUPPORTERS

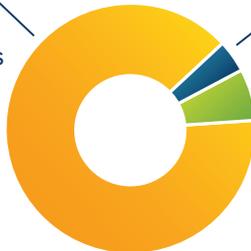
Up from 206,238 supporters last year, a 5% increase.

## 192,068

Sponsors and donors

- 55,375 Sponsors of *Learning for Life* students

- 136,693 Donors funding *Learning for Life* programs



## 9,149

Individual volunteers

## 14,861

Members in 305 VIEW Clubs Australia

## 247

Partner organisations

- 129 Corporate partners
- 105 Trusts and Foundations
- 13 Universities

# A helping hand for parents and kids

“I heard about the Westminster *Child and Parent Centre* from the nurse at my son’s newborn appointment. At the time I was feeling lost and isolated. I had a four-year-old son and a newborn and had no idea how to handle or raise children. I felt sad, confused and aimless. In 2016, I was diagnosed with a brain tumour. I went through four surgeries in the space of eight months. Then my husband was diagnosed with sleep apnoea in 2017 and ended up having to resign from his job. Bills and debts quickly started piling up.

The *Child and Parent Centre* has supported me emotionally and mentally by giving me back my identity and confidence. I think I’ve done about

80% of their programs on how to raise children. I love it so much I’m now in my second year as a volunteer.

My children have also gained valuable life experience through programs at the centre. It’s helped them a lot with learning, creativity and self-confidence.

The centres are a lifeline for many vulnerable families like mine in the community. They have become a place of comfort to make friends, learn new things and feel a sense of belonging. Thank you to The Smith Family for making them available.”

**Christina**, *Child and Parent Centre* participant

“There are lots of challenges in raising young children and this guidance helps both parents and children build resilience and strong bonds.”



## Learning to love reading



“I didn’t like to read before because I wasn’t very good at it. School is really tough for me, too. Then I did *student2student*. It was really fun. I liked my reading buddy. Her name was Louise.

We read three times a week for half an hour on the computer. I picked a book, then we read it together. If I came to a hard word, she helped me. I asked her to spell the word out for me separately.

Sometimes we’d read 10 books in half an hour. All together I’ve read 200 and something books now.

*Student2student* is good because when you read, you get better at learning. Then you get smarter. I feel much better about my schoolwork now.

I can also read the letters I get from my Smith Family sponsor. I’d like to say thank you to them for helping me improve my reading and my schoolwork. And if I could, I would give my reading buddy a big hug.

I still read a book every day and sometimes my mum reads to me. My favourite book is called *Animal Robbers*.

I think every kid should do *student2student*. You get better at reading, you get to be smarter and you also have a buddy to help you.”

**Alannah**, *Learning for Life* student and *student2Student* participant

“When you read, you get better at learning. I feel much better about my schoolwork now.”

## LEARNING CLUBS

# Building the confidence to succeed at school

Carissa



Photo: News Corp

"I first connected with The Smith Family about three years ago. As a single mum of three, life was quite hard. It didn't help that two of my kids have serious medical conditions. It was hard for me to get everything they needed for school.

The *Learning for Life* sponsorship has taken the stress off both me and the kids. I'm able to get them things like better quality clothes. They don't have to go to school with holes in their shoes and trousers anymore.

Learning Club has been great for my two boys, Noah and Bayden. They've improved so much in their English. Their confidence has improved and they don't feel like they're behind anymore. They are completing schoolwork a lot more

than they were before. I feel so proud when their teachers tell me how much they've improved.

*Student2student* has been a big help with their reading. At first, they were a bit shy, but now they enjoy it and look forward to it every week. They've come out of their shell and they are a lot more involved in the classroom.

I want my kids to get a good job when they finish and to do that, they need a good education. Thanks to The Smith Family, they're getting the opportunities they deserve."

**Carissa**, *Learning for Life* parent

"I'd like to say a big thank you to The Smith Family. My kids wouldn't have the opportunities they do without their support."

## Bridging the digital divide

“When I first reached out to The Smith Family, I was a struggling single mum. In the space of a week my partner was put in gaol, I lost my job and my mum got diagnosed with breast cancer.

I wasn't coping. I couldn't pay for things. I got behind on my rent, electricity and gas. I nearly had them all switched off. I went through

a bit of a mental breakdown and didn't know how I was going to feed my son, Thomas.

I'd saved and saved and saved and bought Thomas a laptop at the beginning of Year 7. But even before COVID-19 I couldn't afford Wi-Fi. I used to drive him to the local library or shopping centre where he could get free Wi-Fi and do his homework. Then when everything shut down during the pandemic, I didn't know what I was going to do.

When I found out The Smith Family were going to give us Wi-Fi access through the *Digital Access* program, it was such a relief. There's no

way Thomas would have been able to keep up with his studies without it.

The main thing for me was to give my son a good education. I'm so proud of him. He's doing really well at school and he wants to study robotics when he finishes Year 12. His Year 7 teacher even asked him to teach some of the Year 11 and 12 kids how to do 3D printing.

Thank you to The Smith Family for enabling my son to get a good education.”

*Merrily*, *Learning for Life* parent and *Digital Access* participant



“I'm so proud of him. He's doing really well at school.”



Susan

## LEARNING FOR LIFE

# It takes a village

“Every parent wants to give their child the best; it’s just that some of us struggle to do so.”

“I’ve been a single parent for well over six years. I came out of a very unhealthy relationship and had to find emergency accommodation for myself and my three kids.

When my youngest son was born with autism, I became a full-time, stay-at-home mum. I went from working a government job, which gave me security, to going on Centrelink. It was a struggle, but I had to do what was best for my family. You have to make sacrifices.

People who sponsor children are doing an amazing job. My kids struggled to stay motivated at school and didn’t feel part of a team – but being part of The Smith Family has really encouraged them. Now they realise why it’s important. It’s their path to a better life.

*Student2student* has been great for my kids, too. Reading aloud really benefits Indigenous kids like my boys because our history is aural. They’ve grown in confidence and independence because of it.

To know my kids love reading is probably one of the best feelings I can describe. It’s also created a connection between them. The older boys often read stories to my youngest child. He can’t verbalise that he’s enjoying it, but you can see it in his face. There are sounds of happiness. It’s a beautiful thing.

It takes a village to raise a family, and The Smith Family is part of my family’s village. I don’t think there are enough words to say thank you.”

**Susan**, *Learning for Life* parent

# Building confidence through learning

"I've been on the *Learning for Life* program for three years. When I joined, my confidence was really low and we were struggling a little bit, money-wise.

My mum worked really hard to make sure that I didn't miss out, but I know that it was really difficult.

The sponsorship has really taken the pressure off her. It's helped her to know that I'm more confident now. She doesn't have to worry about me as much because I'm now a bit more resilient and I'm more confident. It also takes that financial pressure off, which has been a tremendous help for her.

The best thing about being part of The Smith Family is the different opportunities I get.

I was pretty shy before. Doing the *iTrack* and *SmArts* programs has shown me how to come out of my shell. My confidence has grown so much. I don't know where I would be without these programs.

There are not enough words to say how grateful I am. I don't know the type of person I would be without the confidence that I have today. I just hope the sponsors know that not only have they changed my life, but they've changed a lot of other students' lives as well."

**Maddy**, *Learning for Life* student



"I want to make a difference like The Smith Family has made a difference for me.

Maddy

## Opening up new opportunities



“I used to live with my Nan, but she passed away in 2016. I’ve been living with my dad ever since.

Primary school was challenging because I didn’t really spend a lot of time there. When my Nan had cancer, I wasn’t really going to school often because I was looking after her. In Year 6, I was only probably there for two and a half terms.

I was accepted into The Smith Family’s *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program* (IYLP) and started as a boarder in Year 7. I wouldn’t be able to go [to that school] without The Smith Family’s support.

I was definitely behind when I started Year 7, but I’ve improved my grades heaps since then. The support when I got here was pretty good. I struggled

sometimes, but I had learning support teachers to help me.

The IYLP is helping me focus on school more. It also allows me to show leadership in my own way.

My dad is very proud because no-one in my family has graduated Year 12. He’s really hoping I can keep striving to Year 12 and finish.

I’m very grateful to The Smith Family for letting me be on their program. I think it’s really helped me. If I didn’t have the IYLP, I don’t know what I’d be doing.”

**George**, *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program* participant

“The IYLP is helping me focus on school more. It also allows me to show leadership in my own way.”

## Turning support into success

“It’s been just me, my younger brother, mum and grandma. When I was 10, my mum was diagnosed with a brain tumour. It was all a bit much for her, so my grandmother sent me and my brother to Vietnam to live with our extended family. We spent six months overseas. When we came back, I was super behind in school. That’s when all the trouble started.

I became involved with The Smith Family in Year 7. I was falling behind, and with mum not being able to work anymore and my grandma being retired, we didn’t have much family income.

I never really caught up at school until I started going to Learning Club. I would go twice a week. It really helped me catch up. Emotionally, I noticed the impact of Learning Club straight away. It was an escape from everything that was going on at home. It wasn’t until The Smith Family was involved that we had the income to be able to fund things like excursions and school camps for my brother and I.

I’m the first to go to university in my family. I’m super happy with what I’ve achieved, and my family is really proud of me.”

**Quynhi**, *Learning for Life* graduate

“Without The Smith Family, I would still be behind. I wouldn’t have been able to do the uni course I wanted to do.”



# Keeping students engaged in lockdown



We know that personal and financial pressures can make it harder for many children and young people to stay engaged with their studies.

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, one in five of the students on our *Learning for Life* program had no access to a home computer with reliable internet service.

To help tackle this problem, Suncorp and Allan and Gill Gray Philanthropy Australasia supported us to deliver 1,200 digital access packs to *Learning for Life* students in every state and territory. These packs, which provide students with a device, internet access and technical support, have been invaluable in helping students continue to learn in lockdown.

Colleen and her three children, who are all sponsored through *Learning for Life*, were grateful to receive one of the packs.

“At the start of lockdown, I was feeling very anxious about how I could support the kids.

My children were struggling to complete their work and really missing the social engagement with their friends. Home learning was a very new concept for them.

When we received the laptop and internet pack, the kids were so much more engaged,” Colleen says.

*colleen*

*Learning for Life* parent

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