



Learning for Life students Edward and Jackson, with their mum Susan

Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives through sponsorship.

Autumn 2021



everyone's family

Never have I been more grateful for sponsors like you

In these unsettling times, I want you to know that your support is bringing huge relief and happiness to your sponsored child and their family. In one of the stories in this edition, a principal from a Western Sydney school explains how you make it possible for your student to do things **they've never done before**. That is extraordinary.

As a sponsor, you are having a remarkable impact on a child, creating opportunities for them to build a better life for themselves.

On page 8, I hope you'll enjoy meeting Noah and Bayden. They face some unique health problems but are now catching up at school, thanks to people like you. With skills gained through our programs, they feel better equipped to tackle the challenges that life has thrown their way.

And see what success looks like today for two former sponsored students, Alex and Amar. With school and university now complete, they have come full circle and want to give others the gift they received.

Thank you once again for putting your trust in The Smith Family to deliver help and hope to your student. Together, we are achieving great things for Australian children in need.

Warmest regards,



Dr Lisa O'Brien
Chief Executive Officer



Highlights from 2019-2020

We're delighted to share the achievements of our *Learning for Life* students:

- **68.7%** of students in Year 10 in 2017 advanced to Year 12 in 2019.
- **94.5%** of tertiary students continued from first-year to second-year study in university.
- **79.2%** of former students engaged in post school education, training or employment.

Thank you to our generous sponsors!

With her dream now within reach, Alex is ‘paying it forward’

Alex was in Year 6 when her parents split up. The sad time was made worse because her mum had to start from scratch as the family breadwinner. “Mum couldn’t find work because she had always been a stay-at-home-mum and didn’t have any qualifications,” says Alex.

In their small town in regional Victoria, Alex’s mum struggled to put food on the table. She began training as a childcare worker but knew it would take time to complete her training and find employment. For Alex, having the same things her classmates did – like notebooks, pens and dance gear to continue her ballet classes, was suddenly impossible. Then, Alex received a *Learning for Life* sponsorship – only possible because of sponsors like you. It gave her the chance to feel equal to her peers, focus on school and even continue her dance lessons.

“It was nice to know someone wanted to help a kid they didn’t even know,” marvels Alex. “It just motivated me to try harder.”

Fast forward to 2021, and Alex is living proof of how sponsorship turns dreams into reality. Now living in Tasmania, she recently achieved her Master of Teaching degree. “I always wanted to be a teacher,” she says. “I had some wonderful teachers, including one who would bring food to class because she knew I was in a bad situation.”



Alex, *Learning for Life* graduate and *Learning Club* volunteer

Alex devotes her spare time to helping disadvantaged children, as a Smith Family *Learning Club* tutor. **“It is the perfect opportunity to help other kids who have been in situations like me,”** she says.

Thanks to you, Alex is now helping other young people achieve their goals and create a life of independence and stability. “I had people who encouraged me to do what I love – and that changed my life,” she says.

Poverty and illness a tough juggling act for families

All single mum Carissa wanted was for her three children to have the same opportunities as other kids. But with two of her children battling medical conditions, meeting time and financial demands were stretching her to breaking point.

Carissa was constantly worrying about how she could afford everything Mia, 7, Noah, 11 and Bayden, 12, needed for their education. They were scraping by, with no money for extras. If the kids got holes in their school shoes, they just had to endure them for the rest of the year. When their trousers were damaged – they still had to wear them: she couldn't afford spares.

“With one child's health issues, we had to travel back and forth to Melbourne all the time – and that took a chunk of our finances,” Carissa says.

Imagine the feeling of relief when kind people like you stepped up to help Mia, Noah and Bayden get back on track with a *Learning for Life* sponsorship. Finally, they could fit in and focus on their learning.

“The sponsorship has taken the stress off both me and the kids,” says Carissa.

“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.”

Caring for three kids on her own, while juggling the medical needs, made good homework habits impossible. Carissa had so little time left to help with schoolwork, and the boys just couldn't keep up.

But thanks to their sponsors, Noah and Bayden both began attending our *Learning Club*. They gained coding and robotics skills and improved their English and mathematics with help from trained volunteers. At home, they are now excited to tackle homework. “Their confidence has increased – and they don't feel like they're behind anymore,” says Carissa. “I feel so proud when their teachers tell me how much they've improved.”

Through our *student2student* program, Noah has also been paired with a reading buddy who is a little bit older – he now dives into books. “At first, he was a bit shy, but now he enjoys it and looks forward to it every week,” says Carissa. “He's come out of his shell and is a lot more involved in the classroom.”

The schools and teachers are doing a good job, but sometimes these families need more. On the hard days, the boys' *Learning for Life* Coordinator, Sandy, is just a phone call away. Sandy connects Carissa with The Smith Family programs and other local opportunities for her kids and provides advice and reassurance to support Noah's and Bayden's different learning needs. “I've now got the support to get my kids where they need to be, so they can do well in high school and beyond,” says Carissa.

Parenting is always a juggling act. When you throw poverty and health issues in the mix, keeping all the balls in the air is almost impossible. Carissa just wants her children to get the best education they can. She is thrilled her sons now have “heaps of ideas” about what they want to do after school.

Learning for Life students Mia, Noah, Bayden, and their mum Carissa



“Bayden is definitely hoping to one day go to university,” she says.

“The kids now realise education is their path to a better life. Thanks to their sponsors, they are getting the opportunities they deserve.”

Around 40% of Learning for Life students and 50% of their parents/ carers have a health or disability issue

“I can’t imagine going to school without the basic necessities”

We’d love you to meet one of our amazing sponsors, Maddie. Straight from the heart, she shares why sponsorship means so much to her:

Q. How important is education to you?

A. For me, education is one of the most important things that you can give anyone in the world, child or adult. It gives you the foundation to build your life and go on to do anything.

Q. What do you think children need to thrive at school?

A. Children need to feel comfortable. I can’t imagine going to school without the basic necessities: the right uniform, shoes, schoolbooks, or a laptop if you need it. It’s just heartbreaking that some kids won’t go to school, or have a horrible time at school, because they don’t fit in.
No child wants to be the odd kid out.

Q. How do you feel about being a sponsor?

A. When I heard about The Smith Family’s sponsorship program, I really liked the idea of supporting an individual child in Australia. I can make sure that child has equal access to education support, money to buy their school shoes, and for excursions and books.

“Education is one of the most important things you can give.”



Maddie, Learning for Life sponsor

Q. Can you share a time your student really inspired you?

A. I sponsored my first student from Year 6 through to Year 12. His mum would write and tell me how my sponsorship was encouraging him to go to school – and to like school. When he graduated, he went on to a TAFE course. His mum said she hadn’t thought it possible. I’m sponsoring two students now. **I hope they get to see that they can aspire to do whatever they want in their lives.**

Amar received the best welcome gift possible

When Amar arrived from Turkey with his family, life was hard. Both parents were unemployed. They shared a small unit with his grandparents. “My parents were constantly worrying about money, so financial strain made it difficult to afford necessities for school,” Amar recalls. “I remember feeling left behind.”

Amar’s neighbour knew The Smith Family could assist families in severe hardship and encouraged them to get in touch. Amar was able to be sponsored by someone amazing like you through our *Learning for Life* program.

“Sponsorship helped me so much,” he says. “It provided immediate relief for me and my family, and meant we could afford things like books, stationery and a school uniform.”

Then, at 16, Amar joined our *iTrack* program. He was matched with a volunteer mentor who encouraged him to strive and gave him critical advice about work, study and a career.

With great dedication, Amar achieved his dream: acceptance into a dual business and international business degree. “The transition from school to university can be challenging, but my mentor gave me such great advice on managing my time and helped me develop planning calendars to ensure I finished projects on time,” he says.

Today, when Amar remembers the early struggles, he is proud of how far he has come – and grateful for the support he received. Now in his final trimester of university, Amar has a job lined up in a digital marketing agency. “I’m really excited to start and work towards my goal of being a Marketing Director,” he says.



Amar, *Learning for Life* student

83% of *iTrack* participants agreed that their mentor gave them more ideas about possible plans after leaving school

Jackson and Edward almost gave up at school

Life had been a rollercoaster for Susan and her three sons, Edward, Jackson and Lawrence. After coming out of a very unhealthy relationship, Susan tried to make a new life for herself and her children. But when Lawrence, now six, was diagnosed with autism, she had to give up her job and they plunged further into hardship. Money was very tight. “It was a real struggle,” recalls Susan.

Through all life’s ups and downs, school had always been the stable foundation for Edward, 9, and Jackson, 11. But, with one massive challenge after another, their love of learning was almost extinguished. **“My children were struggling to stay motivated at school – they didn’t feel part of the team,” says Susan.**

Susan knew education was her sons’ path to a better life. She was thrilled when her boys were offered sponsorships, thanks to generous people like you. “The sponsorship has really encouraged them, and I am glad the battle of trying to get them to go to school is over,” she says.

The impact was almost instant – from new uniforms, to backpacks, basic sports equipment and even a laptop to share for their schoolwork, the kindness of strangers put school essentials back within reach. It also meant so much to Susan and the boys to meet their warm, welcoming *Learning for Life* Coordinator, Kate, who could help them get the most out of their sponsorship.

For keen footballer Jackson, Year 6 had become such a chore, but *Learning Club* changed that. He loves the variety – from art sessions, to homework help,

activities with classmates and even the occasional treat of pizza. “*Learning Club* has helped me with my homework, so I can understand more the next day at school,” says Jackson. “I’ve gained confidence.”

Chatty little brother Edward is in Year 4 and loves basketball. He is now also full of confidence thanks to reading support through our *student2student* program. “My reading buddy Emily is a good friend,” says Edward. “I struggle sometimes, and she helps me with the words. My favourite book is *The Gruffalo’s Child* and now I just want to read it to my little brother Lawrence.”

“It’s a great program,” says Susan. “They ring up each other and have a chit-chat and read their books out loud together. For Indigenous cultures, traditionally we’re an aural based community, so it’s nice this program has that aspect.” Susan is so relieved her boys have given school a second chance. Their teachers have noticed too. “Feedback from Edward’s school is that he is very engaged,” says Susan.

“I don’t think sponsors realise how big a part they’re playing. They’re coming into people’s lives without even knowing them or meeting them.

“It takes a village to raise a family, and as a Smith Family sponsor, you became part of that village.

“You are willing to support a family who you’ll never meet. You are instrumental in that child’s learning journey, and that’s huge. Whatever that child may do in the future, you have played a part in that. I don’t think there are enough words to say, ‘thank you!’”



Learning for Life students Jackson and Edward, and their mum Susan

12,417
students who
identify as
Aboriginal and
Torres Strait
Islander peoples
were sponsored
through our
Learning for Life
program in
2019-20.

It takes a village to close the gap

The challenge

School can be a struggle when children are already behind their classmates in basic skills. A wide range of complex social and cultural factors have affected the educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, including lower levels of school attendance. Fewer days at school can lead a child to struggle with their education and this can worsen over time if attendance levels remain low. Not finishing Year 12 can compound the problem, with their future study and work options reduced.

How you help

One in five of our *Learning for Life* students is from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait

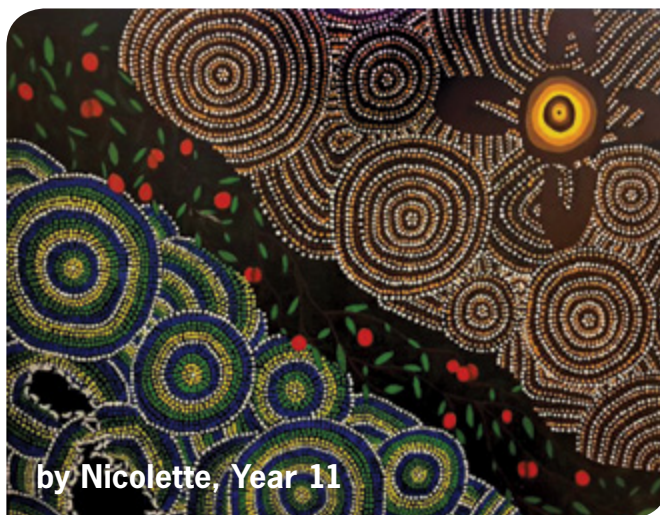
Islander background. Sponsors like you make it possible for us to work with families to help support their children's educational outcomes.

A chance to see the world

One key program for high school-aged students is our Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP), enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attend high-performing secondary schools and universities. Further wrap-around support is provided to help to develop motivation and aspiration, which keep young people in school longer. Exposure to new life experiences and post-school opportunities is also part of the program.

CREATIVE SHOWCASE

Creative Showcase gives students the opportunity to express their creativity. Last year, we received many wonderful entries from our students. And here are some of them!



The place where I want to go



I want to go to star land.



I want to climb star land's large huge mountains and ride and feed an unicorn. In that land



birds sing nice songs together.

I wonder how the star fruit on the tree tastes. In star land,



the sun is shaped as a star and alive! just like the other



stars! There are star rains

in star land where rain drops

are shaped as stars. There

are lots of rainbows in the

sky which the air is fresh.

People there are friendly.



Everyone is happy in star land.

There is no COVID-19 there!

I will be able to play with my

friend when ever I wish.



Tarranum, Year 3

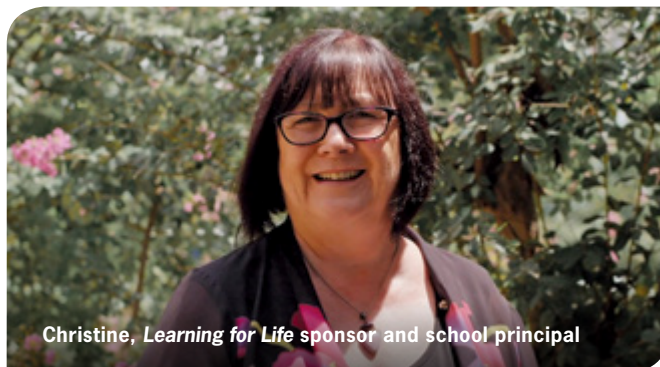
Principal shares tales of struggle and triumph

It can be hard to imagine, in a country like Australia, that one in six children and young people are growing up in poverty.

But Western Sydney high school principal, Christine, has seen countless families fall into financial hardship and knows that the problem is very real. “I’ve seen many single parent families who, if they lose their job, become extremely vulnerable very quickly,” she says. “Other families live constantly on the edge, pay-to-pay, or may struggle with language barriers to find employment.”

One student whom she will never forget, is now a highly successful businesswoman. She moved with her family from Lebanon as a young girl. Her father had just started a business when her mother died suddenly. The student was only 12 years old when she had to take on huge responsibility.

“She had to work in the family shop all the way through secondary schooling,” says Christine. She also stepped into the role of running the household and helping raise her brothers. It meant there was little time left for her to simply enjoy her childhood. And she described to me some years later that school became her ‘safe place’, where she could be herself.”



Christine, Learning for Life sponsor and school principal

Christine has seen first-hand the difference that organisations like The Smith Family make to the lives of families who are struggling.

“Schools are doing a great job. But schools can’t do it alone. And The Smith Family’s work is particularly critical for the most disadvantaged kids,” she explains.

“I’ve seen a student get a pair of soccer boots because of your help – that’s a huge difference. And for the first time, they can play a sport they love.

“Or the student that was able to go on an excursion for the first time and called it ‘the best day of his life’ because he’d never been outside his suburb. So many parents reflect later that sponsorship was the thing that turned around their child’s attitude about schooling, by being able to participate in things they had not been able to do before. Sponsorship really is an amazing gift.”

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