

Real People, Real Stories Autumn 2025



Emmanouela, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant with her parents Nancy and Alex

Thank you
for being
a Champion.



**The Smith
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

Thank you for helping students **tap into their true potential**

The new school year is in full swing! Your regular support is already making a huge difference to students living with disadvantage, ensuring they can overcome the barriers poverty puts in their way and reach their goals in life. From supporting them in their school journey to empowering them to reach their full potential at university, your care is felt by these students, every step of the way. Thank you!

In 2024, 178,430 students had access to a wealth of resources and learning programs thanks to you. And with your ongoing support as a Champion, these students will continue to open new worlds of opportunities, possibilities, and experiences. This helps every student achieve their best and thrive at every stage of their education.

In this edition of *Real People, Real Stories*, we bring you heartwarming stories of young people whose dreams are becoming reality.

You'll meet Poppy and Sarah, best friends with unique dreams and challenges. Champions like you helped connect them with out-of-school educational support at their local *Learning Club*. They are now equipped with a powerful toolkit of resources, confidence and networking skills. Discover the exciting news their principal recently shared with them, made possible by your generous support, which has helped remove the barriers to their success!

You'll also meet Emmanouela, a gifted gymnast who faced the tough reality that talent alone wasn't enough. Disadvantage almost stopped her fully participating in her education and sport.

Yet, last year, Emmanouela was able to realise her biggest, wildest dream of competing in the 2024 Paris Olympics. Hear why Emmanouela believes Champions like you played a critical role in getting her there.

And don't miss our exclusive interview with former rugby league star Christian Welch who has sponsored a student for the past five years. In this heartfelt conversation, Christian shares why he's so passionate about sponsorship and the extraordinary difference you could also make as a sponsor. "It takes a community to raise a child and a team effort to tackle an important issue such as educational inequality," he says.

I'm so proud of the young people you support who are now poised to thrive in the year ahead. I know you're cheering these students on too! None of it is possible without your kindness and commitment to education – a proven pathway out of disadvantage. Thank you for putting the power to change the future in the hands of students.

Warmest wishes,



Doug Taylor
Chief Executive Officer



Christian knows what it takes to overcome barriers – that's why he's choosing to sponsor a student



Former rugby league star Christian Welch is an inspiring individual. In a 10-year career, he's reached three grand finals, won a premiership, and become Melbourne Storm player number 167. But even more remarkably, Christian is helping to transform the lives of children experiencing disadvantage through child sponsorship. Like many Australians, Christian knows that education is a powerful change agent for children in poverty. Together, your gifts are giving students the chance to achieve their best at school this year. Thank you!

Christian witnessed the impact of poverty on educational inequality and was moved to make

Explore Sponsorship

To find out more about how you can sponsor a student living with disadvantage, please visit thesmithfamily.com.au/donate/child-sponsorship



a difference by becoming a child sponsor. "Imagine being the only student not in school uniform. Or how hard it must be to meet learning milestones when you can't do your homework. All because you don't have an adequate internet connection or a laptop," Christian reflects.

"I think it's so rewarding being a sponsor. Being able to help a young Australian who is doing it tough – that's the best feeling. Education is the key to breaking the cycle."

As a sponsor, Christian helps give his student access to essentials like books, uniforms and excursions. Sponsorship also provides his student with support from a *Learning for Life* Coordinator, who connects them to local learning opportunities tailored to their needs. This is in addition to the out-of-school learning programs that your generosity helps provide.

Having built his football career on determination and overcoming barriers, Christian wants to ensure his student has an equal chance to succeed - no matter their circumstances. Through sponsorship, his student is building core numeracy and literacy skills and working towards their full potential. "It's amazing to be a part of that journey with them," he says.

Thank you for joining people like Christian, who are passionate about making a difference in the lives of young people who need it most. Together, you are creating a brighter, fairer future for Australia, one child at a time.

Thanks to supporters like you, gymnast Emmanouela has broken through the digital divide



Emmanouela, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant, with her parents Nancy and Alex

Last year, 17-year-old Emmanouela competed as the youngest member of Australia's Rhythmic Gymnastics team at the Paris Olympic Games. Her achievement is extraordinary, but what truly sets Emmanouela apart is her determination and the obstacles she's overcome.

When Emmanouela was young, her parents, Nancy and Alex, moved from Greece to Australia. They dreamed of a better future for their children. "We came with zero," Nancy recalls. The family battled huge financial struggles. The hardship was intensified by language barriers and the challenges of adapting to a new culture.

Despite the challenges they face, Nancy and Alex remain unwavering in their commitment to helping their children become all that they can be.

From a young age, Emmanouela was showing exceptional promise in gymnastics. But with so much to juggle, her family found it hard to give her the learning essentials and support all children need to thrive and unlock their full potential.

A breakthrough came in Year 5 when Emmanouela's family embraced the life-changing opportunity of being connected with The Smith Family. Your generous gifts provided access to additional learning support to equip Emmanouela to achieve her best.

As Emmanouela entered high school, her parents continued to support her gymnastics training and Emmanouela was proud to discover the focus and dedication she'd developed in sport were translating into success at school!

“Through gymnastics, I’ve learned how to be disciplined, work hard for what I want, and stay organised. I know that if I don’t put in the effort, I won’t reach my end goal.” – Emmanouela, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

However, Emmanouela faced a new challenge: a laptop was essential for her studies. Although her father worked multiple jobs, they still couldn’t afford one. But Emmanouela didn’t lose focus. Having already overcome so much, she found reassurance in knowing she had caring people like you backing her – she didn’t have to face this hurdle alone.

Your regular gifts gave Emmanouela access to our *Digital Learning Essentials* program, which provided her with a refurbished laptop. Through this program she also received free internet donated by Optus customers. These resources enabled her to complete assignments at school and home. “Without the laptop and internet, I wouldn’t have been able to do my schoolwork,” Emmanouela explains. “I’m so very grateful for the support.”

When Emmanouela learned she’d be competing in the Paris Olympics, she felt overjoyed. All the hard work had paid off. “Going to the Olympics was one of the best experiences in my life. Living with and walking next to the world’s best athletes was surreal,” she says. “The whole competition – the crowd, my team, the emotions, the arena. I felt euphoria.”

Like all parents, Emmanouela’s want her to reach her full potential. Her mother Nancy is deeply

grateful that Emmanouela can receive support to overcome the challenges of poverty, a reality that can affect any young person.

At just 17, Emmanouela also understands that it takes a village to help a student like her thrive. “To get to where I am, it took a lot of sacrifices – not just from me, but from my family,” she says. “It took a lot of resilience to keep going. But with hard work and support from my family, coaches, and The Smith Family, the process became a bit easier.”

“It’s why regular support for a child makes a huge difference – not just to the children, but the parents too. Knowing there’s someone out there looking out for you is a very nice feeling.”

“A big thank you to The Smith Family supporters,” adds Nancy.

Every young person deserves the chance to reach their full potential. Thanks to your kindness and generosity, Emmanouela and other students can reach for the stars! Thank you.



Emmanouela, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

Poppy and Sarah have emerged as confident leaders on their *Learning Club* journey



Sarah and Poppy, *Learning Club* participants

Year 6 students, Sarah and Poppy love learning together and have big dreams for the future. “I want to be a vet,” says Sarah. “I want to be a teacher,” adds Poppy. But when it came to building their confidence, neither knew where to start. Their families care deeply about their education but living with disadvantage means they can’t always support their daughters’ learning as much as they would like. As a result, the girls didn’t always have access to the guidance and resources that all students need to reach their potential. This made it hard to fully engage in their education.

That changed when they joined *Learning Club*. Thanks to the generosity of Champions like you, they now have extra learning support where

they need it the most. At *Learning Club*, they are guided by their devoted tutor and mentor, Susie.

Their mentor Susie is proud to be part of a program filling that gap for students like Sarah and Poppy, helping them build the vital skills they need. Each week, Sarah and Poppy arrive at *Learning Club* after school, ready to tackle homework and practise maths and reading comprehension.

No matter the learning challenges they face, Sarah and Poppy know Susie is there to help. And when the homework’s done, there’s always fun to look forward to. “I like doing my homework with my amazing mentor, Susie,” Sarah says, “and if we have enough time, we can play a game!”

While Susie encourages laughter, she takes her tutoring very seriously and the impact is clear. Each week Susie watches the girls’ skills, knowledge and self-assurance grow.

“*Learning Club* is about our kids’ future. Education is power. With the right support, the world is Sarah and Poppy’s to explore. We equip them with what they need to grab every opportunity.”

– Susie, *Learning Club* mentor

“When a student has confidence, they’ll take the leap to try and get what they want out of life. I believe confidence is key,” Susie says.

Before *Learning Club*, Sarah had struggled with public speaking. “Sarah has great leadership potential, but she needed encouragement,” Susie says. “I told her to go to the other end of the room because I wanted to hear her project her voice. I couldn’t hear her at first, but eventually, she was able to do it. I saw her speak confidently, and it was the most natural she’s ever been.”

It’s Champions like you who make this possible, helping students like Sarah and Poppy overcome the barriers that poverty has put in their way and ensuring they have the chance to reach their full potential. Thank you!

The impact of *Learning Club* is clear. Recently, Sarah and Poppy got elected to school leadership. It’s an achievement Susie has watched them

work hard to earn. When they were called to the principal’s office and told they were school captains, they felt thrilled. “Poppy got PE captain and I got Library captain,” says Sarah. “It’s all thanks to Susie, who helped us get there.”

“Before *Learning Club*, I hated public speaking,” says Sarah. But thanks to support from Susie, she now regularly speaks at assemblies. She credits Susie for giving her “the confidence to go on stage”.

Thank you for your generous regular gifts. Your ongoing support helps students like Sarah and Poppy achieve their best. It’s thanks to amazing Champions like you that students can grow and choose their future. In Poppy’s words: “I like how they always want me to be my best”.



Poppy and Sarah, *Learning Club* participants

How Champions like you are helping students discover brilliant careers they never knew existed

For a student experiencing disadvantage, hearing from adults with similar backgrounds and seeing them succeed in their chosen field can make a powerful difference. This moment can be a turning point, helping a student truly believe in their own potential and beyond the challenges they currently face.

As a Champion, you are making experiences like this possible through our *Work Inspiration* program. By connecting students with real-world career opportunities, you are helping them discover some of the amazing career pathways available.



Work Inspiration participant



Recently, a group of high school students from north-west Tasmania joined our *Work Inspiration* program and participated in an incredible two-day journey to discover the industries that drive their community. Many of the students come from families with big financial hurdles and limited professional networks, which makes it harder for them to access career guidance and explore different pathways. Through *Work Inspiration*, the students gained a valuable glimpse into a broad range of careers, many of which they had never considered before. They discovered new possibilities and gained insights into future paths they hadn't imagined.



To begin, our Program Coordinator, Eddie, took the students on a visit to Grange Resources, a mining company. There, they saw the team working with 1300-degree smelters to turn molten metal into iron ore pellets for shipping around the world.

The next day, they visited Epiroc and Elphinstone where the students watched as massive machines – built to tackle the toughest jobs on Earth – were constructed right before their eyes.

“Using a hands-on approach like this means students stay engaged instead of zoning out in the classroom. Taking them to workplaces and exposing them to the world of work shows them that life after school is real, and this is what it could look like.” – Eddie, *Work Inspiration* Program Coordinator

“The most important part of *Work Inspiration* is making it engaging,” Eddie explains. “My role is to help students access the program. I advocate for visits to industries that interest them.”

One student in the program says: “The best thing was learning from people who have faced challenges and succeeded despite them”. Eddie agrees: “It shows students that there are many paths to success and that everyone’s journey is unique. Having access to this program showed the students that, despite the setbacks they’ve faced, they still have ability to pursue their career ambitions.”

The *Work Inspiration* program also helps inspire students with the variety of jobs out there. “Not everyone at a mining company is a miner,” Eddie points out. “You could be an accountant, or an IT support specialist. These industries offer a broad range of opportunities that students may never imagine. It’s in moments like these that a student can have a lightbulb moment and think, “This is the job for me”.

Students living in poverty may not get a chance to see all the career opportunities available to them. Because your regular support makes this program possible, students are being motivated by what they discover in the world of work. They’re more likely to continue their education if they’re equipped with the resources and confidence they need to explore career pathways. Eddie knows access to these opportunities is life changing and will help each student to realise their full potential.

Thank you for helping students see beyond the barriers of disadvantage. You’re not just showing them jobs; you’re helping them believe they too can thrive in whatever field they choose.



Charlotte, *student2student* volunteer reading buddy

How Charlotte's dedication (and yours!) is helping students become proud, confident readers

Every time Charlotte picks up the phone to call her reading buddy, she's doing more than helping her read. She's laying the foundation for her future success, one conversation at a time.

Charlotte is a 14-year-old volunteer reading buddy in our *student2student* program. She helps younger students facing disadvantage who are at risk of falling behind at school. By improving their

literacy skills, she ensures they can keep up and reach their potential.

The *student2student* program you help provide encourages students to take risks and tackle new challenges in the classroom, and to gain more confidence in themselves and their abilities. The extraordinary results they are reaping simply couldn't happen without you!

On their regular calls, Charlotte helps her buddy gain reading skills and confidence she can take back to the classroom. Over the 18-week program, Charlotte will make 54 calls, providing her reading buddy with many hours of valuable literacy support that she would otherwise go without.

“It feels so good to see my buddy improve week after week. I love hearing how she’s become more confident reading aloud in class or reading to her mum and making her proud. It makes me proud too.”
– Charlotte, *student2student* reading buddy

Charlotte’s reading buddy looks forward to their calls, excited to share what’s happening in her day. It’s that simple connection that helps her buddy feel at home in the world of books and gives her the tools she needs to succeed with her reading.

After two years of volunteering, Charlotte loves these shared reading sessions more than ever. She can’t imagine stopping! “The main thing they gain is confidence,” Charlotte says. “They get so much more confident – not just in reading, but in talking with you, too. Their reading improves, and even their writing gets better. It’s amazing to see them blossom throughout the experience.”

Charlotte is one of many young Australians using their time and skills to support students who are being locked out of learning. She calls it a “great experience”, knowing that an hour a week is making a real impact on her buddy’s future.

“It makes you feel more positive and happier throughout the week. I know I’m making a difference,” Charlotte says. “Volunteering is so important – especially in this program. You’re not just helping with literacy. You’re making a real difference – and that positivity spreads.”

It’s thanks to Champions like you that *student2student* volunteers are equipped to help students living with disadvantage to thrive at school. Thank you for giving students access to vital learning programs like this, so they can build a better future for themselves.



Charlotte, *student2student* volunteer reading buddy

Girls at the Centre explore the world of theatre thanks to supporters like you

&Juliet Musical Australia hosted a Q&A with a group of Smith Family *Girls at the Centre* participants. The students had the chance to hear about cast and crew experiences and learnt what it would be like to work in the world of theatre.



Girls at the Centre participants



Girls at the Centre

Girls at the Centre is a mentoring program that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls to make the most of their educational experience by providing focused resources, activities, coaching and events.

It aims to strengthen social, emotional, and cultural knowledge, and ensures young women have opportunities to build academic aspirations, form lasting community relationships, and develop important life skills.

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