



Jack, Learning for Life student

# Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives through sponsorship.

Autumn 2022



Creating better  
futures together



everyone's family

# Together we can help our students change their futures

**I am so proud to have joined The Smith Family team as CEO. For many years I have thought of the organisation as a 'national treasure' because of the difference made in helping children to participate fully in their education. This purpose deeply resonates with me, as someone who is the first in their family to receive a tertiary education. A great education is something I'd like every child we support to receive because it has the power to change their life.**

From its very beginning in 1922, The Smith Family has been a champion for children in need. In response to the COVID-19 global pandemic, sponsors like you have stepped up with kindness and generosity like never before. I want to assure you that you have helped your sponsored students get practical and tangible support to help them overcome the barriers they face. I want to thank you for this.

Throughout 2022, we'll be celebrating 100 years of having a lasting impact on the lives of young people across this nation. But we have much more work to do, because one in six children and young people is living in poverty in Australia. Sadly, the impacts of their poverty can flow on to affect them at school and stop them from realising their potential. This is why your support matters so much.

In this edition, we have some amazing students for you to meet. They're forging ahead thanks to sponsors like you. There's Jack, who credits his sponsor with helping him shape a successful music career. And Yvonne, who is really touched that her sponsor cares about her future.

I also want to assure you that as we continue to navigate the pandemic, we are doing everything possible to ensure the students we help get extra support if needed. Some will have fallen behind during lockdown. We will keep you posted throughout the year on this important work.

I look forward to being part of the life-changing work of The Smith Family. Together, I know we can help many more students create the better futures they deserve.

Best wishes,



**Doug Taylor**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



# The incredible power of your kind words

**A letter to a sponsored child is a powerful thing. Recently, a surprise letter from a sponsor to their student had a huge impact.**

The letter to *Learning for Life* student, Yvonne, age 11, arrived by post. It was a lovely surprise. The letter was jam packed with encouragement and kind words. Yvonne was thrilled. She took it to her *Learning Club* to show her friends and tutors. She – and all the other students – decided to write to their sponsors to show their gratitude.

The group wrote and decorated beautiful cards. They enclosed a form where they'd written their ideal jobs.

"Yvonne has big dreams. She wants to be a policewoman. Or a doctor," Yvonne's mum Safi says.

Yvonne has been taking steps to make this dream a reality, by showing up each week for homework help that makes a lasting difference to her learning. It's thanks to her sponsor that Yvonne can attend her *Learning Club* to get help with reading, writing and spelling.

This has given her the chance to share positive experiences with other students too, like getting a letter from her sponsor. Before Yvonne received support through The Smith Family, living near the poverty line meant that school essentials were out of reach. A sponsor changed that.

"We've been able to buy uniforms, books, and school shoes," says her mum Safi. "It's really good."

Safi says life today would be very hard without a sponsor.

"At *Learning Club*, Yvonne has been doing really well with reading and writing. She told me she's enjoying it. Yvonne knows she has a sponsor – and that's wonderful."

Thank you to Yvonne's sponsor for making an incredible difference in her education. You have also brought joy and inspiration to her entire *Learning Club*!



Yvonne, *Learning for Life* student

## Why write to your sponsored student?

Please remember, your ongoing support is the greatest gift. You are not expected to write unless you want to. If you would

like some tips for writing to your sponsored student, please visit [thesmithfamily.com.au/correspondence](https://thesmithfamily.com.au/correspondence)



## Jack's sponsor helped restore life's music

Music had been a big part of Jack's life since his childhood. But after his dad died tragically in a cabin fire, the melody went silent. Jack's mum tried to shield her kids from how tough things were financially. But even at 10, Jack knew she was struggling.

Jack, *Learning for Life* student



“Mum had the monumental task of raising four kids on a single income, while grieving the loss of her lifelong partner. It would have been so much work to hold everything together,” he says. “I understood we went with less because we didn’t have much money to spare.”

The death of Jack’s dad sent shockwaves through their family. It also worsened the money challenges they’d been enduring before the terrible accident. Jack already had a Smith Family sponsor. But as he grew older and watched his mum battle, he could now see just how critical that support truly was. It was the only way she could afford his school lunches, uniforms, supplies and music textbooks.

Jack didn’t want to add any extra pressure. He worried about school excursions and camps, so he tried to hide them from his mum.

“I didn’t want Mum to feel bad about me getting left out of these things, but she always found out,” he says. “She’d remind me that my sponsorship could help pay for them.”

At school, Jack was struggling to find his rhythm. There were many times he wished to leave. He felt different to the others; like an “outcast”. What helped him was his sponsor, who supported his music passion. They sent encouraging letters and their financial support helped pay for music lessons.

“I remember writing to my sponsor. It felt surreal that someone wanted to help me,” says Jack. “Their support reminded me no matter what

my classmates said, I did belong there and had a right to learn. It brought colour back into my learning. It gave me the space to follow my dream of music.”

Jack’s mum also loved her regular check-ins with his *Learning for Life* Coordinator, Judy, which were made possible through sponsorship support. Judy linked Jack and his family with learning and mentoring programs. She understood Jack’s unique needs and helped him fully participate in his education.

**“Judy was an amazing lady. She would encourage mum and tell her she was doing a great job,” Jack says. “I think this helped mum not to worry so much.”**

Hard work, determination – and support from a sponsor like you – meant Jack finished Year 12. He achieved outstanding marks for his VCE drama performance, ranking in the top 90 scores in Victoria. Jack’s sponsor continues to be there for him at university, where he is studying for a Bachelor of Music.

Today Jack’s life overflows with music. He plays live professional gigs, and even appeared on TV with his band recently. Jack teaches harmonica lessons ... and is about to record his first short-length album of original songs!

“If there’s one thing I can say to Smith Family supporters, it is ‘thank you’ from the bottom of my heart,” Jack says. “The Smith Family has been the key to my entire education. Thank you for believing that I can make a life for myself.”

## “I’ve learnt about careers I didn’t even know existed.”

**Sponsorship has already helped set Talon, age 14, on a pathway to entering high school with confidence. In Year 8 last year, Talon was really starting to enjoy his learning and even thought about life after school.**

“I like exploring stuff in science – from chemistry to biology,” he says. “And I just love maths – I’m good with numbers. I always thought I would love to go to university.”

However, Talon was facing challenges that could have stopped him chasing his dream before he even began. Talon’s parents had limited education. They wanted to help him pursue a pathway to university but were not sure where to start. It’s just one way that living with disadvantage can make it much harder for students like Talon to access education opportunities.

But recently, a world of possibility opened up when Talon became part of The Smith Family’s new *Growing Careers Project*. You can learn more about it on the next page. As part of the project,

Talon attended *Future Seekers*, a program which provides students in Years 7 and 8 with early exposure to the world of work. Over seven weeks, Talon attended hour-long sessions with classmates at school that helped fill the gaps in his career network and support systems.

With the encouragement of a trained Smith Family facilitator, Talon got to reflect on his skills, strengths and interests. He heard from inspirational role models who had turned their career hopes into reality. He completed activities that expanded his outlook on working life and the diverse job roles out there.

“I’ve learnt about careers I didn’t even know existed,” says Talon.

Through *Growing Careers*, Talon also has the chance to visit a university, hear about TAFE options and access career coaching. It’s helped him understand how he could turn his interest in people and passion for science into a career after school.



Talon, *Learning for Life* student

**“I didn’t realise how many opportunities were out there that I can take,” he says. “I’m thinking about studying psychology at university. I like talking to people and communicating, and I enjoy science.”**

# Growing Careers Project: a world of opportunities for students

**The *Growing Careers Project* aims to support young people living in disadvantage by connecting them to The Smith Family's career support programs. The *Growing Careers Project* is supported by funding from the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment.**

The project will run from 2021 until 2024 and will see The Smith Family working in close collaboration with a number of schools across the country. It will offer over 76,000 places for students to participate in multiple career programs across their secondary school journey, which could encompass anything from a short career-focused activity, to several weeks of one-on-one mentoring via an online platform – or spending a few days in a workplace.

We'll be following student participation across the four years of the project, to understand how they're progressing in their education. We'll look at what's resonating with them from a careers' perspective and what more we can do to support their career pathways when they leave school.

## Why is this program important?

- Young people's involvement in work, training or study post-school is heavily influenced by what happens to them in school.<sup>1</sup>
- Young people living in disadvantage are less likely to complete Year 12 and less likely to be in work, training or post-school study than their more advantaged peers.<sup>2</sup>
- Employer engagement while still at school has a positive impact on academic results, student motivation and student aspirations.<sup>1</sup>



1. It's Who You Meet: Why Employer Contacts at School Make a Difference to the Employment Prospects of Young Adults by Dr Anthony Mann, Education and Employers Taskforce, 2012
2. OECD (2018) Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing.

## Pat reflects on 100 years of kindness

### Pat's grandfather lived to help people.

When Pat was just three years old, her mother died. Along with her brother Ray and sister Liz, she went to live with her grandparents. Her grandfather Herbert would encourage them to give away toys and books to those in need. And nearly 100 years ago, he was fundamental in the early days of The Smith Family.

"My grandparents gave us a wonderful childhood," says Pat who is 95. "My grandfather instilled the importance of doing good. He was such a generous and kind man."

Pat's grandfather was aware of the urgent need to do more in his local community to support those struggling with disadvantage. Pat has warm memories of early Smith Family fundraisers with him. "There were big concerts for the children and all people at Christmas time," she says. "I went to these as a child. They had a magician. I can still remember that!"

And Pat took her grandfather's example to heart. She's given 50 years of volunteering to the Red Cross. Pat's daughter Diana followed the calling too and is part of her local *VIEW Club*, raising funds for The Smith Family and deeply connected to our work. "The Smith Family has come a long way," says Pat. "It's had an amazing legacy."

It's this tradition of giving that Pat will continue with her amazing decision to leave a gift in her Will to The Smith Family. Because of people like Pat, future generations of children in need will get support with their learning, so they can gain the skills to build a better future.



"It is a nice way to honour my grandfather and the beginnings of The Smith Family," says Pat. "It's wonderful that it can continue."

**"My grandfather instilled the importance of doing good. He was such a generous and kind man." – Pat**

# THE SMITH



# FAMILY

Dom

For 100 years, The Smith Family has been working to improve the lives of children in need.

For the last 30 years, it has supported children living with disadvantage to make the most of their education and create positive lives for themselves.

We asked one of our talented students to create an artwork that captures what The Smith Family's centenary means to them.

Year 11 *Learning for Life* student Dominic created this artwork. Dominic is passionate about art, and has taken part in The Smith Family's *SmArts* program over the last two years, extending his education aspirations and career knowledge of the creative arts.



*Creating better futures together*

## A sponsor like you helped Tyrell Sloan break the cycle

The day Tyrell Sloan, age 19, found out he would fulfil his life's dream and debut as a professional rugby league player for the St George Illawarra Dragons, the first person he called was his Nan.

"It was my Nan who brought me up," the proud Wiradjuri man explains. "My dad was only 16 when I was born. My mum and dad were in and out of jail. Nan fought for my custody through DOCS. My Nan is my rock. Everything I do, I do for her and my brother."



Tyrell, former Learning for Life student

Nan Colleen desperately wanted to be there for Tyrell and his big brother Ashley. But her selfless decision to take them in pushed her into hardship. They just scraped by. "Honestly, I don't know how she did it," Tyrell says.

From a young age Tyrell knew his family couldn't afford everything other students had at his school.

"I'd always been a kid who wanted to fit in with the other kids," he says. "To have the same shoes and things."

When Tyrell was eight, he was sponsored through The Smith Family by someone caring like you. His Nan could now buy the uniforms he and Ashley needed, football gear and the same shoes as other kids.

Sponsorship also meant this star-in-the-making could join our learning programs. Tyrell especially enjoyed our *student2student* program, where he'd practice reading over the phone each week with his buddy Ethan.

**"I'd always been a kid who wanted to fit in with the other kids. To have the same shoes and things."  
– Tyrell**

“I have really good memories of doing *student2student*. After school, I’d be out playing footy on the oval and at four o’clock, Nan would come out on the front veranda and yell out that Ethan was on the phone for me. Reading out loud to Ethan really helped me learn better,” he remembers.

The teenage years were tough for Tyrell. He moved from school to school trying to find the right fit. Instability affected every part of his life. He was at serious risk of leaving school early and living his life below the poverty line.

In situations like this, all it takes is one caring individual to help a young person turn their life around at a critical point. For Tyrell that was his sports teacher and careers advisor at Dapto High, where he went in Year 10.

“Every day my teacher was helping me at school, helping me with everything,” says Tyrell. “He is definitely one of the reasons I stayed. The financial support of my sponsor was also a massive help, right up until I finished school.”

Tyrell gets emotional thinking about his first game with the Dragons last July. That day his Nan Colleen presented him with his first Dragons jersey. Soon after he scored his first try for the team.

“Just to see her face after the game made me so proud, and I knew she was proud of me too,” he says. “It’s an achievement that she’s done as well.”

Tyrell has come so far to achieve his dreams, with the support of his teachers, his sponsor – and of course, his beloved Nan.

Today, he feels playing in the NRL is his chance to inspire other Indigenous kids and honour her.

**“Nan has made a lot of sacrifices in her life; it’s crazy what she’s done for me,” Tyrell says. “Now I want to break that cycle. I want to be a role model for the next generation coming up.”**



Tyrell with his Nan and brother after his debut game for the St George Illawarra Dragons

# Meet some Saints helping kids at Learning Club

**If you peeked inside a community hall in Wollongong, you might see a group of athletes patiently helping students with their tough homework questions.**

Their day job is to play professional rugby league for the St George Illawarra NRL Club. And for almost a decade, they've dedicated hours after school to helping students living in disadvantage catch up and keep up in class.

The players are heroes to many of these students in this Illawarra community. As role models they can have a lifelong influence on the students' confidence and aspirations.

Adam Bezzina, Dragons Community Manager, says players do it for many reasons. It could be their own childhood experience of poverty. It might be a simple desire to give back. Or even an interest in working with young people after their NRL careers finish.

The club is also committed to working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in this community.

"We understand and believe that reconciliation is everyone's business, and we will lead through our actions," Adam says.

Ultimately, St George players and staff who volunteer at *Learning Club* are there because it feels good to do good. "It's an opportunity to assist in the local community and provide

a positive experience for children who at times might be having a tough day," Adam says.

"On the flip side helping at *Learning Club* provides escape from the day-to-day NRL pressures. Helping a student read, encouraging them to eat a healthy snack or passing a ball can help players keep a healthy perspective on their good fortunes as footballers."

Thank you to our sponsors for making *Learning Clubs* possible. It's only because of our sponsors, donors and volunteers, that our students can get the homework help they need in a safe, secure space. They also get the chance to participate in inspiring initiatives like this decade-long partnership with the St George Illawarra Dragons.



St George Illawarra Dragons volunteers at Learning Club

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