



Dylan, *Learning Club* participant

Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives.

Autumn 2023



**The Smith
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

Changing today to give students a brighter tomorrow

Welcome to our National Volunteer Week edition of *Real People, Real Stories*. This year's National Volunteer Week theme is **The Change Makers**. In this issue, we celebrate our change makers, volunteers like Annette and Robert who share a dedication and drive to help students change their futures through education.

Here at The Smith Family, we believe every child deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential. It's something we all hold dear – and that I personally believe in very strongly.

2023 marked the beginning of our new ambitious five-year strategy. This strategy aspires to make a bigger difference by reaching more children and families living in Australia. With a clear vision to expand our evidence-based programs, our goal is to help more children make the most of their learning today so they can change their tomorrow.

Children like Dylan, who you will meet in this edition. Dylan's learning has come along in leaps and bounds, thanks to volunteers just like you. It's wonderful to see him thriving with personalised *Learning Club* support.

You'll also be introduced to Jamal on page 6. Just imagine what changes the young volunteers in our *student2student* program are making by unlocking the wonderful world of books with Jamal and his brother!

NATIONAL 15-21 MAY 2023
VOLUNTEER
THE CHANGE MAKERS WEEK

95% of surveyed volunteers said they would speak positively to friends, family members and colleagues about their volunteering experience with us.

We have heard from our families that they are experiencing further financial hardship as the cost-of-living crisis deepens. We know the link between poverty and its effect on educational outcomes. Over the next 5 years, we aim to boost the number of students participating in our out-of-school educational programs to 250,000 (an increase of 70,000).

Volunteers will be integral to The Smith Family achieving our ambitions, together we can all be powerful change makers in the lives of young Australians.

I'm eternally grateful to volunteers. By working directly in our programs and supporting our operations in events, corporate support or administration, you make a profound impact on the lives of so many children and their families every day.

Best wishes,



Doug Taylor
Chief Executive Officer



Your support is helping Dylan reach his dreams

Ten-year-old Dylan loves being part of *Learning Club*.

He's been participating in this crucial after-school learning and mentoring program at his primary school since 2020.

At *Learning Club*, volunteer tutors help Dylan correct his spelling and writing mistakes and guide him in maths. By helping build the literacy and numeracy skills he needs to keep up in class, Dylan's confidence and love of school has soared.

"He's worked so hard, so it's wonderful to see his persistence finally pay off," says Dylan's mum Amy.

The most exciting thing Amy has noticed is the great love of maths Dylan has developed at *Learning Club*. Dylan is now talking about turning his passion for maths into a career as a banker one day.

Dylan's dream of building a career based on his favourite subject is one many young people share. But when faced with financial difficulties, it makes it harder for us to support our children's education. And when disadvantage puts barriers in Dylan's way of achieving success at school – pursuing his goals and reaching his full potential becomes much harder.

This is why we're so grateful that volunteers like you help Dylan's mum give him the extra learning support he needs to catch up and keep up at school.

As well as receiving homework help and one-on-one support, students can also take part in play-based learning. Through these games students can build new friendships and uncover new passions. Like Dylan, who also discovered a love of chess at *Learning Club*.

"I like to play chess with Bobby," says Dylan. "Most people think chess is boring but it's fun when you know how to play it. And I am really good at it!"

When Amy told us, "*Learning Club* has been a great help to Dylan and me", it reminded us just how vital volunteers are to our programs. Thank you for generously giving your time to help children discover that anything is possible if they are given the chance to explore their potential.

"At *Learning Club*, you learn how to correct your spelling mistakes. And it helps me with the things we are learning in class." – Dylan



Dylan, *Learning Club* participant

Volunteering brings connection and fulfilment to Annette

Annette has devoted her time to several Australian charities for more than half her life. It's a passion that has given her friendship and fulfilment for almost 50 years.

Annette used to work with The Smith Family at one of our partner schools, helping refer students who may benefit from participating in our programs. So, when she retired six years ago, Annette immediately raised her hand to become a volunteer. Now, she volunteers at three local *Learning Clubs*. She also does data entry and administration for the Ballarat office.

Annette receives a deep sense of fulfilment every time she helps a *Learning Club* student. She loves seeing the difference she makes to those who need personalised support.

And she loves the friendships she has forged with her colleagues and the families she has met along the way. And spending time with other volunteers at regular breakfast catch-ups has become a highlight of her week.

The last three years have proven difficult for our amazing volunteers. There have been few opportunities for volunteers to meet face-to-face with their students. So, it was important for volunteers to find new ways to stay connected and deliver our programs.

“Having eight lockdowns was really tough. I was worried about the impact this would have on the students I tutor at *Learning Club*,” Annette says.

“I like to think my impact is pretty significant. I've built such a wonderful relationship with children. To see them achieve milestones, no matter how small, is deeply rewarding.” – Annette

Annette was a consistent beacon of hope for children in the Ballarat *Learning Clubs*. She was part of a remote *Learning Club* trial with local primary schools across the region. During eight Victorian lockdowns, students in the program joined small online study groups.

Here, children who needed mentoring and learning enrichment received crucial ongoing learning support. This consistent support helped them to keep up with their schoolwork while not at school.

Annette looks forward to meeting up with her students every week. She encourages anyone to volunteer at a local *Learning Club* and become part of the amazing community.

“Don't hesitate because making a difference in the lives of young people is everything.”

Annette, Smith Family volunteer



Photo credit: © Lachlan Bance - The Courier

Volunteers like you help bring books to life

All children deserve the opportunity to develop a passion for reading. And for 12-year-old Jamal, a volunteer just like you has helped give him the support he needs to unlock the wonderful world of books.



Jamal lives in a busy household with his parents and five siblings. Sam was a single mum to Jamal and his two brothers before meeting Matt. Now with their combined family, they have a vibrant and bustling household of six young children.

Partners Matt and Sam both work hard to provide for Jamal and his siblings. Sam works full-time as a disability worker, often working early mornings and late nights. When Matt isn't working part-time as an upholsterer, he is playing dad's taxi – taking the kids to school and afternoon sports. Like all parents, Matt and Sam are very passionate about supporting their children's interests and education. But for some, financial disadvantage means that they have limited access to the essential school supplies all children need, like books.

Matt and Sam were relieved when their school connected them with The Smith Family. Through our *Learning for Life* program, Jamal and his siblings get the same chance as other children to participate fully in their education.

The three brothers have been part of the *student2student* reading program for the past year. Here, they receive one-to-one reading assistance from a student volunteer reading buddy.

“Smith Family’s volunteers have helped take the pressure off”, says Matt. “Jamal and his brothers have the freedom and responsibility to learn with their reading buddy.”

The boys' reading has improved in leaps and bounds since joining *student2student*. Especially Jamal, who struggled with his reading before.

"The *student2student* reading program is so good for the boys," says Sam. "Each week, I see their reading and writing improve. They learn new words. And this helps their overall confidence and learning at school."

Jamal has noticed a difference in his reading too, "I can pronounce words better and I get better at reading every time I read with my buddies. I like reading in front of the class much better now too!"

It's wonderful to see how generous volunteers like you are empowering children living in disadvantage so they can unlock their full potential. We can't wait to see how Jamal's learning progresses now that he has the extra support he needs to thrive.



Jamal and his family

It's lights, camera, action for Yashoda!



Yashoda, *iTrack* and *SmArts* participant

Photo credit: © Karen Watson

For 16-year-old Yashoda, the creative arts are her passion.

“I love exploring new things. Poetry and singing and everything related to music and creative arts is really what I like!”

In Year 9, pursuing her passion became a little harder for Yashoda. Unfortunately, her school is no longer able to offer creative arts as a subject. Paying for after-school workshops has not been possible for Yashoda's father, who is the sole carer for Yashoda and her two siblings.

At times, Yashoda has found it difficult to balance the demands of Year 11 study and pursuing her passion for the arts. That's where The Smith Family *iTrack* and *SmArts* programs have been so beneficial for Yashoda, and volunteers are playing a critical role as change makers in the lives of students living with disadvantage.

Participating in *iTrack* has helped Yashoda learn how to balance the demands of senior school study and think about her future. *iTrack* links students with a trained volunteer mentor, who can give them advice and encourage them with their post-school plans. Mentors give students the space to ask questions they may not feel comfortable asking their family, teachers or friends about their career options.

Yashoda's grateful to work alongside *iTrack* mentor Natalie to plan her time better. Natalie helps her do the best she can in school. And she's always there to provide advice on how Yashoda can turn her creative passions into a career in the future.

“It’s been so good to talk to Natalie about how I’m feeling, the things that are happening at home and school, and my plans for the future.”

It’s been incredible to see this budding artist explore her creative abilities by participating in the out-of-school *SmArts* program.

SmArts is designed to provide students in Years 8 to 12 who are interested in creative arts with links to art organisations and relevant career information. In the past two years, Yashoda’s enjoyed participating in *SmArts* poetry, vocal and music classes and has really seen her creativity flourish.

Yashoda had an opportunity to be part of a four-day production workshop recently. She took part in acting, set design, costume design, lighting and stage management workshops with other teens participating in *SmArts*. At the end of the course, they presented a live theatre production for friends and family.

Participating in the *SmArts* workshops has had a positive impact on Yashoda. “I did a theatre workshop during the last school holidays. It was all about behind-the-scenes work: How to choose a play and how everything comes together. It was really cool. *SmArts* teaches me about the different career options.”

Amazing volunteers right around the country are supporting students like Yashoda to access out-of-school learning and mentoring programs, helping students to discover what is possible, and what they are truly capable of achieving. Thank you for the wonderful gifts you give.

I’m sure just like us, you can’t wait to see her name up in lights!

“Sometimes school can get a little overwhelming. Being able to talk to Natalie about balancing school life, home life and what I want to do in the future has helped me a lot. Now I believe that I can turn my passion for the arts into a career.”
– Yashoda



Yashoda, *iTrack* and *SmArts* participant

Photo credit: © Karen Watson

Robert raises \$20,000 for children living in disadvantage

Have you ever dreamed of hitting the road and exploring new places? Few of us take time out of our busy lives to live out our dreams. Robert has. Earlier last year, Robert rode his motorcycle 15,000 kilometres around Australia in 50 days. Pretty impressive, right?

What's more impressive is that Robert did it all in the name of charity.

Giving back has been a big part of Robert's life since childhood. With his 50th birthday looming, Robert thought he'd celebrate the milestone in a big way. He turned it into a truly inspirational gift for children living in disadvantage.

In April 2022, Robert set off on a two-month trip of a lifetime, riding his motorbike around Australia. His goal for the journey was to raise \$15,000 for The Smith Family.

People he met along the way were fascinated by what he was doing and eager to help him reach his goal. So much so, that he raised an amazing \$20,000. He even had truckies donating online to his cause in the middle of the Nullarbor!

Robert was compelled to undertake this trip of a lifetime as a fundraising adventure because he knew the difference it makes to Australian children experiencing poverty.

"I was lucky to grow up with all the things I needed for my education, and I'm fully aware of this privilege," says Robert. "I'm equally aware that not everyone has the tools to participate in school fully. So I'm passionate about bridging that gap."

Robert's generosity doesn't end there. He first learned about The Smith Family through a corporate partnership between The Smith Family and a previous employer six years ago.

"I learnt so much about the impact of education on young people and how it's a foundation for everything that happens after school. And it lit a bit of a spark in me."

This spark led Robert to become an *iTrack* mentor. As an *iTrack* mentor Robert provides career guidance and encouragement to students in Years 9 to 11. They help students consider and plan for their work, study and career options after school.

Robert's constantly amazed by his impact as a mentor on a child through simple conversation and a listening ear.



Robert, *iTrack* mentor and fundraiser

Photo credit: Joseph Ryan – Freeway Project

Robert, *iTrack* mentor and fundraiser



Photo credit: Joseph Ryan – Freeway Project

“One boy I mentored went from saying ‘I might do this’, to ‘I’m looking forward to doing this’. It was a real wow moment for me. It made me realise that sharing your experiences as a mentor can change a young person’s perspective of what’s possible, and what opportunities are within their grasp.”

We’re so pleased that volunteers like you are helping young Australians create a brighter future for themselves. Thank you to all our amazing volunteers!

“I was fortunate and never missed out on things like excursions. To think that some parents have to decide between putting food on the table or opportunities for their kids is heartbreaking to me.”

– Robert

CREATIVE SHOWCASE

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



by Song, Year 7



by Hannah, Year 1



by Muhamed, Year 9



by Angelina, Year 12

thesmithfamily.com.au

Email: volunteer@thesmithfamily.com.au

Phone: 1300 397 730

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

Join us on



 **The Smith Family**
Learn today, change tomorrow.