

# REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES Autumn 2021

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



**THANK YOU FOR BEING A  
CHAMPION.**



*everyone's family*

# NEVER HAVE I BEEN MORE GRATEFUL FOR CHAMPIONS LIKE YOU

In these unsettling times, I want you to know that your regular support is bringing huge relief and happiness to disadvantaged children and their families. In one of the stories in this edition, a volunteer *Learning Club* tutor from Adelaide explains how you help our students gain confidence for school that **they've never had before**. That is extraordinary.

**As a Champion, you are having a remarkable impact on children in need, creating opportunities for them to build better lives 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 former student, Amar. Now in his third year of university, he is achieving things he never thought possible, thanks to you.

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

Warmest regards,



**Dr Lisa O'Brien**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2019-2020

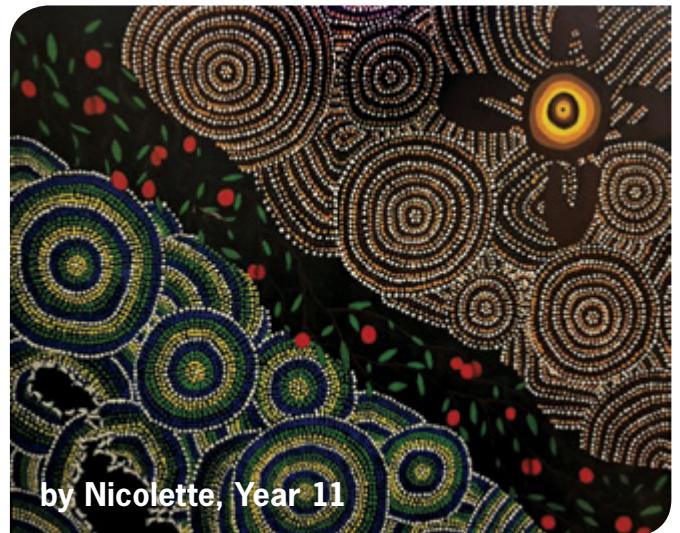
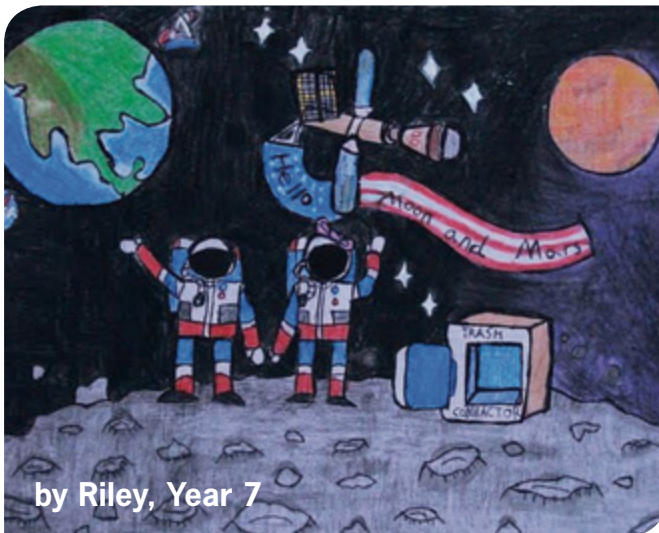
We're delighted to share the achievements of our students:

- **97% of student2student participants** improved their reading.
- **84% of participants** said going to *Learning Club* helped them do better in class.
- **78% of iTrack participants** agreed that their mentor helped them understand more about how they can reach their career goals.

**Thank you to our generous supporters!**

# CREATIVE SHOWCASE

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



# 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 her time and finances were stretched to breaking point, as she helped two of them battle health problems on top of life's other demands.**

Carissa was constantly worrying about how she could support Mia, 7, Noah, 11 and Bayden, 12 with their schoolwork. With two of her children requiring ongoing medical treatment, often involving interstate travel, it meant the boys often missed school. Weekly routines like good homework habits became impossible. Carissa had so little time left to help with schoolwork: the boys just couldn't keep up.

That's why it was such an amazing feeling when loyal Champions like you made it possible for Noah and Bayden to get their learning back on track. Thanks to your regular gifts, the boys could start attending our out-of-school *Learning Club*. There, with help from trained volunteers, they have improved their English and mathematics. And they have even gained new skills in coding and robotics.

**"Knowing there is someone else who can give them one-on-one time in the subject they are having trouble with has really helped me," says Carissa. "They look forward to *Learning Club* every week.**

They are a lot happier when they come out. It makes me happy that they're catching up with their classmates."

At home, things have changed too. Carissa's boys 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. The pair read together over the phone a few times a week and Noah now dives into books. "Noah wasn't really interested in reading because he didn't feel confident in himself to read things properly without mucking up and getting words wrong," says Carissa.

"At first, he was a bit shy with his reading buddy, but now he enjoys it and looks forward to it every week. He's come out of his shell and is a lot more involved in the classroom. It also means I can concentrate on Mia and Bayden with reading – I'm not trying to break myself in three to help them progress. This has taken quite a bit of stress off me."

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 The Smith Family supporters, 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**

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: **LEARNING CLUB**

**A calm, safe place to get homework help is something we could offer over 3,800 disadvantaged students last year, thanks to your regular gifts.**

In local libraries, community centres and classrooms across the country, busy Smith Family staff and volunteers put out pencil jars, turn on laptops and set up fun activities.

Soon, when school ends for the day in our nation's cities and regional towns, some of the most disadvantaged students will pour through their doors for a chance at a better future. This is *Learning Club*.

Last year, 3,801 students were able to attend The Smith Family's *Learning Clubs* after school. Only with your generous gifts could we train our volunteer tutors and purchase vital stationery and supplies for the students in need who attend.

*Learning Clubs* are hubs of hope, where children receive one-on-one support to help them catch up at school – delivered with kindness and patience. Students from Kindergarten to Year 12 can attend. During the pandemic, we also trialled moving our clubs to a digital platform, which was very well-received by participants. Along with completing their homework, students build academic skills in English, science and maths. They can even learn coding and robotics.

There are many reasons disadvantaged parents can't always give a child the support they need to reach their potential. Run with our community partners, *Learning Clubs* are making sure these students don't miss out. It's a fun place – students say they love catching up with their classmates who go. Best of all, there's often time for a game or two with the team once their homework books are shut!

### WHAT THE STUDENTS SAY:

- **88%** of students agree going to *Learning Club* makes them try harder at school
- **83%** of students agree it's taught them to ask for help at school when they need it

### WHAT THE TEACHERS SAY:

- **90%** of teachers agree the club has positively influenced students' completion of homework



On the next page, hear what Donna has to say about volunteering at one of our *Learning Clubs*.

## YOU HELP US COACH THE COACHES

**Learning Club** tutor, Donna, and her student Leisl\* spot each other from across the classroom. With a big grin, Leisl runs to Donna. It's hard to believe this is the same girl who was once so angry and disruptive at *Learning Club* and refused to do her homework. "The confidence that has come out in this girl is amazing," says Donna. "She doesn't miss a week."

As a single mum herself barely making ends meet, Donna first saw the power of *Learning Club* when she fell into hard times and her own daughter was struggling at school. With the help of a *Learning Club* tutor, Donna's daughter caught up with her classmates.

Inspired by this transformation, Donna then became a *Learning Club* volunteer herself. It's only thanks to supporters like you that we have the resources to recruit and train amazing volunteers like Donna. Because of her training, Donna is confident and well-prepared to give children at *Learning Club* the time and support they need.

And getting to make a difference has kept Donna coming back for five years now. Her commitment and patience bring lifelong benefits to disadvantaged students like Leisl.

"I've had some difficult kids that need a bit of one-on-one help and some of them have opened up. It takes some patience, but you learn techniques to support them."

\* Name changed for privacy.



Donna, *Learning Club* volunteer

**"If you can help any kid, even just one, it's worth it. I feel so privileged that I can do this for them."**

# JACKSON AND EDWARD ALMOST GAVE UP AT SCHOOL

**Life had been a roller coaster 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 the opportunity to participate in Smith Family learning programs, thanks to generous Champions like you.

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, Year 4, loves basketball. He is now also full of confidence thanks to the reading support your monthly gifts make possible, 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 your supporters 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 Champion, you became part of that village. You are willing to support students who you’ve never met. You are instrumental in their learning journeys, and that’s huge.**

*“Whatever these children 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

Thanks to generous supporters like you:

**23,067**  
students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples benefited from Smith Family programs in 2019-2020.

## 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

Over 22,640 of our learning program participants are from an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background. With your support, we are working with their communities to help close the gap in educational outcomes for these students.

### SOMEONE TO CHEER THEM ON

One of the programs for high school aged students is *Girls at the Centre*, improving learning outcomes for female students in Years 7 to 9 at participating schools. Support from dedicated Girl Coaches and engaging after-school activities have helped boost attendance and academic achievement. Mentoring and excursions to expand students horizons are increasing confidence and self-esteem.

# 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,” Amar recalls. It was so hard learning in a new country. “I remember feeling left behind at school,” says Amar.**

Amar’s neighbour knew The Smith Family could help students facing severe hardship to catch up and build a better future and suggested his family get in touch. Thanks to Champions like you, Amar was able to join our *iTrack* program. Your ongoing monthly gifts meant he could be matched with a volunteer mentor from the business world. In weekly online chat sessions, Amar’s mentor encouraged him to strive and gave him critical advice about work, study and a career.

**“My mentor was extremely helpful throughout,” says Amar. “I explained my passions and they supported me and were able to provide different options that I didn’t know were possible.”**

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 in the real-world, and work towards my goal of being a Marketing Director,” he says.



Amar, *iTrack* participant

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

# JACKIE HELPS STUDENTS CHOOSE THE RIGHT PATHWAY

**When a student has overcome so much just to stay in school, helping them plan their career and study pathway is deeply satisfying for *iTrack* mentor Jackie.**

Being a team member at The Smith Family herself, Jackie understands the importance of *iTrack*. *iTrack* is a program that couldn't exist without people like our volunteer mentors, who freely offer their time and encouragement to some of Australia's most disadvantaged students, to guide their career, work and study plans.

When Jackie and a student log on for their first online chat, the young person may be shy and unsure about the process. As a former journalist, Jackie knows that building trust will be vital for a fruitful experience.

“Being able to draw the young person out is very much part of the process,” she says. “Trying to find common ground can be an interesting process, and I really enjoy our early chats about what we might be reading or watching, popular culture, or what the student is planning to do on the weekend.

“Breaking the ice lets you deal with harder things like: ‘How’s school going?’ or ‘Is there anything I can discuss with you today that might help you get where you want to be?’”

Jackie has been an *iTrack* mentor for two years now and remembers fondly the students she has helped kickstart their career journey – whether it be to write for a living or become a childcare worker. She sees the pressure these students can feel to choose the right subjects



for their post-school plans. Financial struggles and family stress at home can greatly intensify the challenges of their final school years.

**“It feels good to use my experience to let the students know that career paths often involve very ragged or jagged ways of getting where you want to go,” says Jackie. “Sometimes something will be just around the corner that you might not have considered, and that’s okay.**

“It’s so rewarding when a student I’ve been working with says ‘Thanks for that, I didn’t know that’, or ‘That’s something I didn’t think about: I’m going to go away and look up the resources you suggested’. It makes me feel like I’ve added value: it’s about helping that young person stay committed to their future.”

“If I can help anyone else achieve their dreams and get where they want to be, then that’s something I’m really keen to be involved in.”

# EDWARD REFLECTS ON A REMARKABLE LEGACY

**After nearly half a century of generous support, retiree Edward, also known as Ted, recently told us he is considering leaving The Smith Family a gift in his Will.**

Like so many people of Edward's generation, things haven't always been easy. "My wife and I didn't start off with any money to speak of," he says. "Our first donation to The Smith Family was in the 70s, to help deliver hampers to families living in poverty."

Edward made a wonderful, secure life, but never forgot about the thousands of children growing up in poverty across Australia. He gave what he could when he could. Then, last year, Edward was able to expand his support further, sponsoring a student through our *Learning for Life* Program.

**"We've been fairly fortunate with our jobs and other things, so I always thought I should contribute to something," he says.**

"It must be awful for the kids not being able to take part in school things because they haven't got the right shoes or can't afford to go on excursions or things like that."

As Edward reflects on almost a lifetime of support for children facing poverty, his thoughts



have turned to making another great gift – one that could help generations to come. **"I'm considering leaving a gift in my Will for the same reason I support The Smith Family now, while I'm alive. It will still be needed.**

"I would like to see the next generation of children all do well at school – reading, writing, mathematics. And to keep doing the best they can in learning to get a job in the future."

Leaving a gift in your Will makes a lasting difference to children's lives. If you have any questions or would like to find out more, please contact our Gifts in Wills Manager, Jakki Travers, on 02 9085 7118.

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