



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

Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives.

Autumn 2021



everyone's family

Never have I been more grateful for volunteers like you

This year's National Volunteer Week theme is **Recognise. Reconnect. Reimagine.** I would like to recognise you, one of our incredible **8,265 volunteers**, for all that you **do**. The ups and downs of 2020 have shown us the value of volunteers more than ever.

In these unsettling times, I want you to know that your volunteering 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 amazing people like you help our students gain confidence for school **they've never had before**. That is extraordinary.

And see what success looks like today for former student Alex. With school and university now complete, she is achieving things she never thought possible, because she had caring people like you in her life.

As a Smith Family volunteer, you are having a remarkable impact on children in need, creating opportunities for them to build better lives for themselves.

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

Warmest regards,



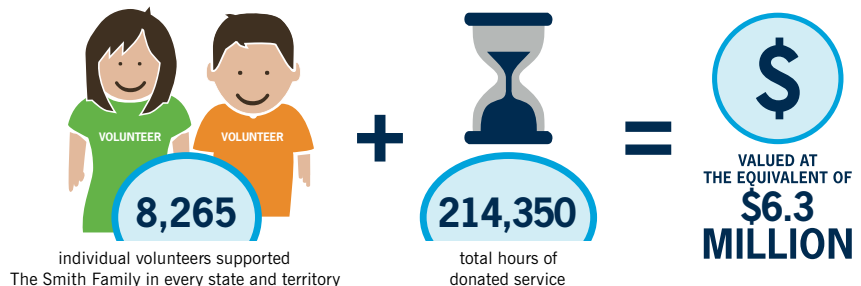
Judy Barraclough
Acting Chief Executive Officer



92% of volunteers would talk positively to friends, family members and colleagues about their volunteering experience at The Smith Family.

Thank you to our volunteers

Every year, we are grateful that so many compassionate people choose to help The Smith Family by volunteering their time and skills. Over the 2019-20 financial year:



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

Today Alex devotes her spare time to helping disadvantaged students in Tasmania. But things could have turned out differently without her sponsors, who cared about her future.

At the end of Year 6, Alex’s parents split up and it was a very sad time. The family was plunged into poverty as Alex’s mum struggled to get a job to put food on the table. She didn’t have the time or resources to help Alex and her siblings keep up at school.

Alex always loved school and dreamed of being a teacher. But entering Year 7 with her family in serious hardship made learning much harder. Sadly, we know that many students like Alex never complete Year 12. They miss out on achieving their dreams.

Fortunately, Alex soon discovered she wasn’t alone. Several of her teachers – caring people just like you – noticed Alex was doing it tough and stepped up to help her reach her goals.

“I had some wonderful teachers, including one who would bring food to class because she knew I was in a bad situation,” remembers Alex.

“And I had an art teacher who would always leave the art room open at lunch, if we just needed to be somewhere quiet. My dance teacher knew about my situation and would always check in with me.”



Alex, Learning for Life graduate and Learning Club volunteer

Fast forward to 2021, Alex is now living in Tasmania, and recently achieved her Master of Teaching degree. She signed up as a *Learning Club* volunteer tutor: a way she feels she can pay forward the support she received at school. “It is the perfect opportunity to help other kids who have been in situations like me,” she says.

Alex is proud when students she helps succeed. One girl was always in trouble, but now she is calmer and more respectful and is doing well in class. “Recently, she showed me a book from school that had a record of all the good things she’d done,” says Alex grinning. “She said, ‘Look at all these smiley faces for my good behaviour’.”

It’s only thanks to people like you and Alex that students can get the kind of boost in support to break the poverty cycle – as Alex herself has now done. **“You only need to spend a little bit of time with someone to make a difference,” says Alex. “I had people who encouraged me to do what I love – and that changed my life.”**

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 the dedication and kindness of volunteers like you made it possible for Noah and Bayden to get their learning back on track. Carissa discovered there was one of our *Learning Clubs* at their school, where the boys could get support from trained volunteer tutors to complete their homework and learn new skills. Noah and Bayden gained coding and robotics skills and improved their English and mathematics.

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

"I learnt things a bit differently at school from the way they learn now, and the volunteer tutors are up-to-date with how the learning system works, so my children are learning the right way to do things," says Carissa.

"Knowing there is someone else who can give them one-on-one time in a 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."

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."

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. Thanks to their volunteer tutors, she is thrilled that her sons now have "heaps of ideas" about what they want to do after school.

"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 Smith Family supporters and volunteers, they are getting the opportunities they deserve."

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



Innovation team discovers the simple joys of volunteering

When Nick asked if his busy tech team members at Bank of Queensland (BOQ) would volunteer for our Christmas Toy and Book Appeal, every hand shot up. “A chance to step out of the office together and do something for a great cause felt really important to everyone,” says Nick.

Soon after, Nick’s innovation team swapped app design and complex coding for a day sorting and packing Christmas presents and books, donated by the community. “It was a whole day on our feet being an extra set of hands,” says Nick. “There were probably 100 other people there and thousands of toys stacked around. At the end of the day, everyone in our team was saying: ‘Can we do more tomorrow? How else can we help?’”

A proud community partner of The Smith Family, BOQ encourages all its staff to volunteer. A dad to a young daughter himself, Nick knows that thousands of Australian children go without a gift in the holiday season because their families can’t afford it and why it’s so important to help where you can.

Volunteering for the Christmas Toy and Book Appeal is now a firm tradition for Nick and the team. This will be their third year running supporting the appeal. It’s a rare chance for them to step away from demanding jobs to stop and reflect. “Christmas can be a very indulgent time for a lot of people,” Nick says.

“The ability to pack someone’s Christmas present – maybe the only present they will get that year – just adds a bit of perspective to our day-to-day lives.”



Nick, The Smith Family volunteer

Thank you for your support of our Toy & Book Appeal!

- **3,000 generous volunteers helped with the packs and delivery day.**
- **27,000 toy and book packs were delivered to children across Australia.**

Theju may have the most uplifting volunteer gig in Australia

It's no wonder Theju loves her volunteer role: she gets to see the best of humanity every day.

Theju is the lucky person who opens the heartwarming messages of support and gratitude that flow between our sponsors and students. She works in our administration team at Sydney's head office. She carefully reads each inspiring sponsor letter and every joyful artwork and note from our students. Then she logs them in our system before they are popped in the mail for their grateful recipients.

The magical letters from sponsors to students move Theju every day. **"They focus on motivating a child to do better, helping them improve their circumstances and encouraging them as much as possible. These letters are really wonderful," she says warmly.**

It was only two years ago that Theju arrived in Australia from India to start a new life with her husband. The former engineer took time out of paid work to raise her daughter. As she prepared to return to the workforce, she turned to this volunteering role as a stepping-stone to a paid job in her new country.

As she relishes this truly heart-warming volunteer gig, Theju shares another reason this job inspires a deep love for this country.

"I've had the opportunity to talk to all people from different cultures. It helps me understand Australian society. It motivates me to work better, inspiring me to grow and do something good."



Theju, The Smith Family volunteer

Jackson and Edward almost gave up on 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. So, she was thrilled when her boys were offered the chance to attend a Smith Family *Learning Club* at their school. “Their *Learning Club* tutors have really encouraged them and I am glad the battle of trying to get them to go to school is over.”

For keen footballer Jackson, Year 6 had become such a chore, but his *Learning Club* tutor changed that. He loves the variety – from art sessions, to homework help, activities with classmates and even the occasional treat of pizza. “My tutor helps 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 reading support from a volunteer reading buddy 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 volunteers realise how big a part they’re playing.

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

“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

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.

Program Spotlight: *Learning Club*

A calm, safe place to get homework help – and so much more – is something we could offer over 3,800 disadvantaged students last year, thanks to amazing volunteers like you.

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 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, because volunteers like you stepped up.

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 Years 12 can attend. Along with completing their homework, they build academic skills in English, science and maths. Students 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 volunteers once their homework books are shut!

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

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



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 poverty 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 her daughter's transformation, Donna then became a *Learning Club* volunteer herself. Making a difference to children – giving them the time they need – 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 heal with them."

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

* Name changed for privacy.



Donna, *Learning Club* volunteer

To find out about our volunteer opportunities near you, visit thesmithfamily.com.au/volunteer

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!



by Crystal, Year 11



by Tarranum, Year 3



by Riley, Year 7



by Nicolette, Year 11

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