

Real People, Real Stories **Spring 2024**



Yasin, *iTrack* participant

Thank you
for being
a Champion.



**The Smith
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

In the times it matters most, **you are there for students**

Each year of schooling a child completes leads to better overall life outcomes. Once a student stays at school and finishes their education, it opens up more opportunities for them in life. But long before final exams, there are important milestones to pass first, such as the transition to high school and senior school.

For any student, the transition period can be an unsteady experience. But when a student lacks resources all children need to meet the new expectations of high school, it can hinder their ability to fully participate at school and dampen their confidence. That's why a Champion like you, supporting a student from primary to high school, is so important.

You give students the learning support all young people need to prepare for and adapt to high school. Your donations surround students with caring people who can provide the extra learning support they need to thrive at school and beyond. This can include a *student2student* reading buddy, *Learning Club* tutors, their *iTrack* mentor – and more!

In this edition you'll meet Christine from The Smith Family. She's an incredible individual on this dream team! Christine's a proud Gunaikurnai woman, building trust to help Aboriginal students achieve their best at school. Christine has fascinating insights from the frontline to share.

Yasin, whose story is also featured, has known hardship at every stage of his education. Yet he's had the resources and support he needs. He's now well prepared for the next big transition

to post-school study and work. Yasin's journey towards an innovative and meaningful career is a testament to his dedication. It's also thanks to the ongoing support of very special people like you!

You'll also be introduced to Iesha who is studying law and shares a close bond with her dad. He never had the chance to achieve his potential at school and it's what he wants most for Iesha. Discover how, through your regular gifts, you are helping families like Iesha's break this cycle of disadvantage through education.

I continue to be inspired by the strength and resilience of our students and families. And I'm so thankful you have chosen to be part of this passionate team, providing students with the ongoing support to achieve their educational milestones and life aspirations!

With gratitude,



Doug Taylor
Chief Executive Officer



Conversations with The Smith Family Podcast

A thought leadership podcast and video series exploring the work being done across Australia to help young people change their future through the power of education.



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For Christine, unlocking student potential is a matter of trust

Christine, a proud Gunaikurnai woman, is a Smith Family Education Engagement Coordinator. Christine gets to work with over 90 Indigenous families and 200 *Learning for Life* students in Gippsland, Victoria.

Christine delivers support directly to students that helps remove the barriers poverty creates, so they can remain engaged. This is especially important in the momentous shift from primary to high school and, later on, to post-school study and work. These are crucial milestones for students' academic success and future opportunities.

One day Christine will be helping students transition to high school or giving career guidance. The next, she'll be advocating for a young person in her community who urgently needs a laptop for homework. She also organises cultural events, including NAIDOC Week celebrations. None of it, she says, could happen without building trust.

“Building trust is at the top of my list. I want families to feel comfortable to turn to me if they need support to keep their child in school. I can also help them get the most out of learning programs regular supporters help them access, like *student2student*.”
– Christine, Smith Family staff member

Christine finds her work extremely rewarding. She gets to see the big gains Aboriginal students make thanks to your regular gifts and her support. Recently, she was visiting a local hospital. There, she met a young Indigenous woman who was



Christine, Smith Family staff member

once supported through The Smith Family by caring people like you. Today, she's about to qualify as a doctor. “It was amazing to see her there, doing her placement back in her old town,” Christine says. “I get really emotional about it because I'm so proud of them.”

Working directly with families means Christine sees first hand the impact of your support - students getting to work hard, succeed and flourish. “The best thing is seeing an Aboriginal student, who has been supported by generous people in the community throughout their education, getting to graduate from high school. Whatever that student does in life, they'll pass on the benefits and opportunities they received to their kids.”

Your generous donations ensure dedicated Smith Family staff like Christine can empower students to fully engage in their education, paving the way for a brighter future. Through this vital support, you are helping these students learn today and change their tomorrow.

Iesha's dad encouraged her to do what he couldn't – and you are helping her succeed



Iesha, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

Iesha's dad had to leave school in Year 6, due to war in his homeland of Lebanon. Later, he came to Australia as a refugee. He worked three jobs before suffering a devastating workplace accident. Sadly, ever since, the disabling injury and his disrupted education have restricted the work he's been able to do. This has had a big impact on Iesha.

“My dad gave me that extra push with my education because he didn't have it, so he wanted me to have an education. I look up to my dad because he inspires me to keep learning and to implement something in the world.”
— Iesha, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

As Ilesha transitioned into her senior years and planned for university, much of her schoolwork moved online. Like everything else, education has been changed so much by technology. Digital tools are now a fundamental part of learning, especially for high school students like Ilesha. But restricted by her monthly internet plan, Ilesha couldn't fully participate in learning.

“I only had a few gigabytes to use each month and when they would run out, I'd have to wait for the next month,” Ilesha recalls.

Ilesha's parents found it really tough trying to provide her with the learning support that she needed to do her best at school. Her father was still physically hampered and unable to support his family.

But neither of Ilesha's parents ever gave up on the bright future they had planned for her. They were connected with The Smith Family. This helped unlock additional support to equip Ilesha for school. The mentoring programs can be crucial in helping students like Ilesha navigate academic challenges and stay motivated to finish Year 12.

It was such a relief that she could access our *Digital Learning Essentials* program thanks to your regular support. Regular donors like you helped unlock free internet, calls and texts for Ilesha through Donate Your Data®, an Optus initiative. “I no longer had to worry as I was able to have internet and access to it at any time that I needed it,” she says.

Ilesha is very thankful that she has successfully completed Year 12 with her parents and donors like you cheering her on. “I can see clearly how



Ilesha, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

Smith Family supporters changed things for my family,” she says. “It's given me so many opportunities other students might not have, and I'm so grateful for that.”

Today, Ilesha is studying a Bachelor of Laws at university. “I absolutely love it,” she says. “My dream is to represent people who are at a disadvantage because I was at a disadvantage once in my life.”

One day soon, Ilesha will use her education to promote the rights and freedoms of those facing hardship. Maybe even refugees like her dad. She's so grateful for what her parents have helped her achieve in partnership with people like you. It's such an extraordinary legacy. Ilesha wanted to say to you: “I want to thank you for making a difference in my life and in the life of my parents. Without your support, I wouldn't be able to pursue my dream.”

Meet Montana, an artist on the ice rink, easel and microphone

One night, single mum Mandy saw a TV ad about The Smith Family. She knew this was what she needed to help her children reach their full potential. The next day, Mandy knocked on the assistant principal's door at her children's school. "I wanted to see if they offered the program," she says.

Soon after, Montana, in Year 4, and Darcy, in Reception, got access to tailored out-of-school learning programs, thanks to Champions like you. From primary school right through to high school, the extra learning support has been something stable Montana can rely on to help her harness the extraordinary power of education.

"It's amazing for parents who are not otherwise in a position to give their children that help. It gives you a sense of something to look forward to. You know – something better for your child."
— Mandy, Montana's mum

Over the years, Montana has been an enthusiastic participant in various out-of-school learning programs. These help her develop crucial academic skills like reading and keep her motivated – key ingredients to be an active participant at school.

Through our *student2student* reading program Montana was matched with a peer buddy to help her practice reading skills she'd need later in every aspect of life. She read with her buddy two to three times a week for at least 20 minutes for 18 weeks. Montana says: "My buddy was only a few



Montana, *Learning Club* and *student2student* participant on her way to Canada for a five-month study and Ice Hockey tour.

years older than me, and we'd read and chat over the phone. I benefited a lot – it made me a more confident reader."

In Year 6, *Learning Club* became a safe, supportive place to fill gaps in Montana's understanding after school. She continued to attend through to Year 8. Being in that familiar supportive environment with tutors she knew eased the stress of the high school transition. "It was a positive space for kids to come and

finish their homework and I enjoyed the support,” Montana says. “My brother Darcy really enjoyed it too.”

High school was also a big digital shift. Montana remembers how “everything converted from pen and paper over to laptops and computers”. But her mum Mandy couldn’t afford internet at home to access these exciting learning opportunities that her classmates were enjoying. “I could only look things up on mum’s phone when it was convenient,” Montana recalls.

Thanks to you, Montana could join the *Digital Learning Essentials* program too. She receives free internet, text and calls as part of the program. Now in Year 12, Montana is researching different degrees she may apply for after graduation. All the information’s online, so the free internet is crucial.

For Montana, ice hockey and art have become huge passions. Mandy looks at her daughter and sees a resilient learner, working toward her goals. This became clear to her recently. A major artwork Montana had produced for the city’s annual art prize got damaged. Montana set to work, painstakingly restoring the painting. “It took her weeks to fix it, but she did it and she won in the First Nation section,” says Mandy.

Another thrilling achievement was a five-month study tour of Canada with the Kaurna Boomerangs, Australia’s first Indigenous ice hockey team. It’s one of those amazing learning experiences all parents dream their child might get!

What Mandy has always wanted for her daughter is happening – chains of poverty have been broken thanks to Champions like you and she is getting to achieve her potential.

“Montana is a shining star and a natural on the ice and with a paintbrush. Her brother adores her for it. Smith Family supporters have had a big hand in getting Montana where she is today, and I can’t thank them enough!” – Mandy, Montana’s mum



Montana, Learning Club and student2student participant



Lily (Left) Holly (Right), *Learning Club* and *student2student* participants and their mother, Ebonie

Ebonie wants to give her daughter Lily the world – you are helping her do it

Ebonie loves to give her daughters Lily, 9, and Holly, 11, inspiring and eye-opening experiences on the weekends. She wants to encourage them to dream big!

But as most parents will agree, there's not enough hours in the day. Working fulltime and doing her best to provide for her daughters, Ebonie is chronically time poor. She's also experiencing financial hardship. "I've been struggling a bit," she admits.

Children get their best chance to thrive when their parents have the help they need. That's why Ebonie was thrilled that Lily and Holly could access extra learning support all children need to succeed, thanks to Champions like you. Lily was able to join our *student2student* program and now also attends *Learning Club*. Ebonie's girls are

flourishing, but it's also eased the strain on this devoted mum. The Smith Family's programs fill gaps where Ebonie lacks time and expertise to help her girls keep up at school.

Ebonie's youngest, Lily, has a friendly, warm personality and a way of looking out for others that is far beyond her years. Ebonie believes this could take Lily far in life. She wants to ensure that adversity does not hold Lily back.

At one point, Lily was too shy to practice reading out loud in class, putting her at risk of falling behind. "Lily brings home readers and, with me working fulltime, I find it difficult to make time to sit

down and read the books with her, so she can get the extra practice,” Ebonie says.

But through our *student2student* program, Lily was matched with a peer buddy to read over the phone. These friendly, low-pressure sessions helped Lily get that extra reading time she needed to feel confident to use her voice in class. “After a few sessions, Lily opened up and had a wonderful experience. Her reading has improved a lot – she’s now at the same standard as the rest of her classmates,” Ebonie says.

Ebonie is also delighted at the engaging experiences Lily has at *Learning Club* each week. Thanks to Champions like you, she’s getting extra maths practice via weekly cooking lessons.

After school, the caring volunteer tutors will be waiting with a yummy new recipe for the children to try. Lily, her sister Holly, and the other students get their hands deliciously dirty. As they prepare lovely treats, they’re learning maths! “Lily loves maths anyway, but we’ve found that incorporating maths into cooking is really fun,” Ebonie says.

“Since doing *student2student*, she’s probably, if not the first person, the second person to put a hand up to answer the question.”

— Ebonie, Lily’s mother

Lily is finishing Year 5 this term. She is starting to get ready for highschool. A laptop is a staple for homework and research during this transition. So, it worried Ebonie that she and the girls had to rely on one old laptop between them which barely worked. She couldn’t afford a new one.

Thankfully, through our *Digital Learning Essentials* program, Lily was offered a refurbished laptop to help her keep up and thrive at school. Ebonie is so grateful that Lily can now have reliable access to opportunities her classmates have.

Every parent wants their child to set their sights high. With the learning support you help provide, Lily can now fully participate in learning and achieve all she aspires to and works so hard for.

“My kids’ education is very important. I didn’t do well in school, so I’m glad that my kids are doing a lot better than I was at their age,” — Ebonie, Lily’s mother

“I want to say a big thank you to your generous supporters, but that’s not enough for what they’ve done to help her.”



Holly and Lily, *Learning Club* and *student2student* participants

This young physics buff knows how quickly the world is moving forward – and now he’s part of the action!

Yasin, 16, is a bright, curious boy. His great passion is physics. “What I like about physics is that it helps you learn about how this world works. I find cars and planes very interesting, especially the way they move and how the shape affects everything they do. If I were to work on a machine, it’d probably be like a super car or maybe a jet,” he says.

But despite a natural enthusiasm for learning, he’s had to overcome hurdles to achieve his potential. This began back in the primary years when Yasin’s family was living on the edge financially. Around this time, Yasin was able to join The Smith Family out-of-school learning programs thanks to regular gifts from Champions like you.

Yasin’s father had arrived here in Australia from Morocco to create a better life. Having little English made it hard to get work. His mother

Charlotte grew up with disadvantage. She hadn’t been able to fully engage in her own education, but she wants her children to have a better chance than she did. Charlotte says:

“My kids are my goals and my motivation. And I always tell my kids, ‘Education is important’. Graduate and find your goals.”

With the financial struggles and demands of raising five children, there was only so much Yasin’s parents could do to support his learning. There were some big disruptions. “Eleven times, we moved from one place to another to find a job,” says Charlotte. And while Charlotte and Yasin’s dad have always gone above and beyond for their children, they needed help to provide him the learning support all children need to get the most out of their education.



Yasin, *iTrack* participant and his mother, Charlotte



Yasin, *iTrack* participant

In highschool, digital access becomes crucial to the learning experience in and out of school. As Yasin was going through highschool during the pandemic, a connected device is so important to complete homework. Yasin says:

“Internet is a very big part of all the work we do at school today. When I didn’t have a device or the internet, I felt like I wasn’t getting the education the other kids were. I did worry about my future.”

His family couldn’t afford a laptop for him at the time. “Yasin had to join video calls and write essays on his phone,” his mum Charlotte says. “It was hard.”

Thanks to your generous support, Yasin could join our *Digital Learning Essentials* program and receive a refurbished laptop last year. Through this Smith Family program, he also receives free internet, calls and texts through Optus Donate Your Data® initiative. “Now I can easily research and do all my online work that I have from school with no setbacks,” Yasin says.

Now in Year 11, Yasin is still highly inquisitive, with a technical mind. Yasin is focused on what life will be like after high school. Planning for a future career can be overwhelming for a Year 11 student. If they have a career goal, they need to understand what subjects to study. Yasin has felt certain he wants to build a future involving physics. What he’s less sure of is how to make this happen.

Fortunately, through our *iTrack* mentoring program, Yasin was able to figure this out. He was paired with an online mentor whom he talked to weekly for 18 weeks. Yasin’s mentor helped him explore the careers that could make the most of his maths and science passion and select the right subjects. “My mentor helped me find my path to achieve my goals. After school I’d like to go to uni and hopefully I’ll become a mechanical engineer,” Yasin says.

That’s why the generous support of Champions like you has been so helpful. With the opportunity to access targeted out-of-school learning, like *iTrack*, Yasin feels reassured he can get the best chance to achieve what he’s capable of. “The support has definitely made me feel more confident with everything I do in school,” he says. “I don’t feel I am left out or behind the other kids – I felt like we are on the same playing field.”

Charlotte feels relieved and hopeful as, despite the challenges poverty has put in his way, Yasin can get opportunities to succeed. Champions like you are removing those barriers. “I’m very appreciative, as Smith Family supporters have given Yasin a lot of support. I know he’ll have a very bright future,” says Charlotte. “To his supporters, I say thank you so much!”

“No greater act of kindness and generosity than this”



Paul was raised by his grandparents in a public housing community in Nowra. In Year 6 he was connected with The Smith Family and supported throughout high school and university. Today he is a successful solicitor and an elected local government representative.

As a solicitor Paul will often help people through the process of leaving a gift in their Will to charity. When a client tells Paul they are leaving a gift in their Will to The Smith Family, it speaks volumes to him. That person is making a decision that will help future generations of Australian children. Their gift will unlock ongoing support for children experiencing disadvantage – like he once was – so they can get the most out of their education and reach their full potential. Whether this means completing Year 12, going onto further study or getting an apprenticeship, this support can be life changing.

A gift in your Will has the power to help future generations of young Australians overcome the

educational inequality caused by poverty. What an extraordinary legacy to leave: a more fair and equal society.

“While a Will is a statement of love and gratitude for our family and friends, it can also have a positive life changing impact on others,” Paul says. “There is no greater act of kindness and generosity than gifting some – or even all of your estate – to support the educational aspirations of the next generation.”

Recently Paul made this incredible commitment himself. He knows first-hand that it’s a powerful way to make lasting change. “I remain eternally grateful for the support I received through The Smith Family,” Paul says. “So I didn’t hesitate to make the decision this year to include a gift for The Smith Family in my own Will.

“Through the transformative power of education, we can make sure everyone has the right to be somebody, the right to step out from the shadows and the right to rise. I encourage anyone else who can to do the same – you won’t regret it.”

For more information on how leaving a legacy can empower future generations to build a brighter future for themselves visit: thesmithfamily.com.au/donate/give/bequests

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