



Lily (left) and Holly (right), *Learning for Life* students and their mother, Ebonie

Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives through sponsorship.

Spring 2024



**The Smith
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

In the times it matters most, you are there for your student

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 sponsor like you, supporting your student from primary to high school, is so important.

You give your student the learning support all young people need to prepare for and adapt to high school. Your donations surround a student with caring people who can provide the extra learning support they need to thrive at school and beyond. This can include a *Learning for Life* Coordinator, *student2student* reading buddy, *Learning Club* tutors, *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 and is 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 support of a very special person like you!

Iesha 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 sponsorship, you are helping a family 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 a student with the 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 their sponsors 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 sponsorship and her support. Recently, she was visiting a local hospital. There,



she met a young Indigenous woman who was once sponsored by someone 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 sponsorship - students getting to work hard, succeed and flourish. “The best thing is seeing an Aboriginal student who has been sponsored 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 sponsorship ensures 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.

Ilesha's dad encouraged her to do what he couldn't – and her sponsor helped her succeed



Ilesha, *Learning for Life* student

Ilesha'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 Ilesha.

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

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 her education.

“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 financial and learning support that she needed to do her best at school. Her father was still physically hampered and unable to support his family.

But Ilesha's parents never gave up on the bright future they had planned for her. They were connected with The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program. This helped unlock additional support to equip Ilesha for school.

It was such a relief that she could access our *Digital Learning Essentials* program thanks to her sponsorship. Sponsorship has 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.

In addition, the financial assistance sponsorship provided was a lifeline, covering her books, uniforms and excursions. Because Ilesha had the learning essentials her peers had, she could fit in and focus on her studies. “It took that strain off my family,” she says.



Ilesha, *Learning for Life* student

Ilesha is very thankful that she has successfully completed Year 12 with her parents and sponsor cheering her on. “I can see clearly how my sponsor 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 her sponsor. It's such an extraordinary legacy. “I want to say thank you to my sponsor for making a difference in my life and in the life of my parents,” she says. “Without their 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's *Learning for Life* program. 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, were linked with amazing sponsors like you. They received financial support for school essentials that had fallen out of reach.

"It absolutely did help my kids, being presentable and having their new school bags and shoes and uniforms. They could feel just like all the other kids."

— Mandy, Montana's mum

From primary school through to high school, Montana's sponsor has stayed a vital presence in her life. Her mum Mandy appreciates the continuity of care they bring. Sponsorship has also kept Montana and Mandy connected to their *Learning for Life* Coordinators, Yolanda and Tania.

They are valued Smith Family team members who are deeply connected to their community. They are out there every day, helping families get the most out of sponsorship. "They ring me up and email me about the different Smith Family programs that are available to my kids," Mandy says.



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

Over the years, Montana has been an enthusiastic participant in these out-of-school learning programs. As part of her sponsorship, she could join *Learning Club* and *student2student*. Participating in these programs supported Montana to develop crucial academic skills like reading and kept 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. Montana says: "My buddy was only a few years older than me and we'd read and chat over the phone. I benefited a lot – it made me a more confident reader."

Learning Club became a safe, supportive place to fill gaps in Montana's understanding. "The tutors would say: 'Let's sit down and go through this together,'" Mandy says. "Sometimes you need that one-on-one support and Montana really enjoyed it."

Ice hockey and art have become Montana's 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 her 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 Montana recently completed. She is one of 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. Montana made the most of this life changing opportunity. She hit plenty of goals on ice and returned a confident public speaker too, as she became team spokesperson for countless media interviews!

"I've really grown," Montana says. "I can stand up in front of a crowd and put something together on the spot now, which is a big step for me."

What Mandy has always wanted for her daughter is happening – chains of poverty have been broken thanks to Montana's sponsor. Montana is now free to achieve her potential. She's also an inspiring role model for her brother Darcy, now in Year 8. "Montana is a shining star and a natural on the ice and with a paintbrush," Mandy says. "Her brother adores her for it. Montana's sponsor has had a big hand in getting her where she is today, and I can't thank them enough!"



Montana, *Learning for Life* student



Lily (left) and Holly (right), *Learning for Life* students and their mother, Ebonie

Ebonie wants to give her daughter Lily the world – a sponsor is 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 cost-of-living bites, Ebonie is having to squeeze more out of the family budget. It was five years ago that things got really hard. Tougher economic conditions meant that things all children need for school were now beyond reach for her girls. “I wasn’t working, and Lily had started school. The uniforms cost a lot and I was struggling to get all the bits and pieces,” Ebonie recalls.

Children get their best chance to thrive when their parents have the help they need. When someone like you stepped up to sponsor Lily, it helped ease Ebonie’s strain. With the financial support, Ebonie

could cover Lily’s school essentials. As a result, Ebonie didn’t have to sacrifice her daughter’s education needs to cover things like rent and food.

“One time, I couldn’t afford new school shoes and I hoped Lily’s shoes could last a few more months. Thanks to her sponsor, I don’t have to stress about that now,” Ebonie says.

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.

Fortunately, through her sponsorship, Lily got to join our *student2student* program. She was matched with a peer buddy to read over the phone. These friendly, low-pressure sessions helped Lily find her voice. “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.

“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

Ebonie loves that she can call Lily’s *Learning for Life* Coordinator, Kirsty, for advice and support. Kirsty helps Lily get the most out of *student2student* and other learning programs that are offered through sponsorship.

At Lily’s age, a laptop is a staple for homework, research and creative activities. 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.

Ebonie spoke to Kirsty about their digital access problem. “Kirsty said she had some laptops for families like mine,” she says. The refurbished laptop was offered to Lily through the *Digital Learning Essentials* Program. Ebonie knows that it’s thanks to sponsorship, that they have Kirsty in

their corner, ensuring Lily gets access to online learning opportunities her classmates have.

Every parent wants their child to set their sights high. But only when a student like Lily gets the support they need to fully participate in learning can they achieve all they aspire to and work so hard for. The learning support you provide is allowing your student to achieve what may have once felt impossible to them.

“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 says.

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



Holly and Lily, *Learning for Life* students

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. “I like that physics 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 explains.

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, a wonderful sponsor like you entered Yasin’s life.

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.”

Unfortunately, Yasin’s parents were struggling to cover their bills and other costs. “Eleven times, we moved from one place to another to find a job,” says Charlotte. That’s why financial support through sponsorship was so helpful. Yasin could



Yasin, *Learning for Life* student and his mother, Charlotte



Yasin, *Learning for Life* student

get his own stationery and uniforms, where in the past he'd relied on hand-me-downs. "Now we don't have to worry about books or textbooks, or my uniform – The Smith Family has that covered," Yasin says.

In the pandemic Yasin needed a laptop to work on, but his family couldn't afford it. "Yasin had to join video calls and write essays on his phone," his mum Charlotte says. "It was hard."

"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." – Yasin

Sponsorship has given Yasin access to our *Digital Learning Essentials* program which provided him with a laptop. Through this Smith Family program, he also receives free internet, calls and texts through the 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, Yasin was able to figure this out through our *iTrack* program. This is an out-of-school mentoring program he could access as part of his sponsorship. 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.

Charlotte feels relieved and hopeful as, despite the challenges poverty has put in his way, Yasin can get opportunities to succeed. Sponsorship is removing those barriers. "I'm very appreciative, as Yasin's sponsor has given him a lot of support. I know he'll have a very bright future," says Charlotte. "To his sponsor, I say thank you so much!"

“No greater act of kindness and generosity than this”



Paul, *Learning for Life* alumni student

Paul was raised by his grandparents in a public housing community in Nowra. In Year 6 he joined the *Learning for Life* program and was 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 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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