



*Amelia, student2student and Learning Club participant*

# Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives.

Spring 2023



**The Smith  
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

## Thank you for sheltering our students from the storm

After COVID, we thought students would get to take a breath to recover. Instead, those in the most disadvantaged communities are once more under intense pressure.

One flow-on from the pandemic is a nationwide teacher shortage. This shortage is creating major staffing disruptions and impacting school capacity.

The cost-of-living crisis and rental pressures are also spiralling further out of control. More than ever, families are having to make difficult choices. They are struggling to pay for excursions, books, and digital devices. We live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world and that simply doesn't add up. Australian children are missing out on the chance to succeed at school because of family poverty.

Thanks to the support of donors like you, we are able to help thousands of children catch up and keep up with their education. In these unstable situations, we continue to work closely with our partner schools to provide support to families.

With the right support, poverty doesn't need to stop a young person realising their full potential, as the stories of triumph in this edition show. The dedicated individuals you'll meet in this edition, like Jaye and Jemimah, are proof of how your generosity is helping students achieve their best at school – and beyond.

Thank you for being part of this huge collective effort with The Smith Family. You are ensuring students have the help they need to unlock a better future for themselves.

Warmest wishes



**Doug Taylor**  
Chief Executive Officer



## Bridging the digital divide for students like Jaye

At The Smith Family, we have found the increasing need to bridge the digital divide as online learning and digital tools have become a central part of today's classrooms. But 1 in 2 families said they didn't think they'd be able to afford these crucial resources for their children.<sup>1</sup> Find out how you can help today.

1: The Smith Family Pulse Survey (2022)



# Thank you for helping Jaye scale the digital divide

Jaye lives in a public housing community in a Perth suburb. Jaye's dad had always promised him things could be better if he worked hard. "My dad would say: 'We are confident, we have a plan, and we are not going to continue the poverty cycle.'" But Jaye hadn't understood what he meant.

In high school, Jaye was fiercely determined. He worked hard to maintain high grades. Then in Year 11, the pandemic struck. Remote learning disrupted normal school routines for over two months.

Jaye and his younger brothers needed digital tools in lockdown – but his family didn't have the internet. Fortunately, through our *Digital Learning Essentials* program which you help fund, they could receive a free laptop and internet access, thanks also to our philanthropic partners. Jaye could also access free tech support to make the most of this new technology. "The amount of stuff I had to do online would have been really tricky without this support," says Jaye.

Jaye is now in his second year of marine biology, conservation, and wildlife biology studies at university. He wants to be a marine biologist. Thanks to your kind gifts, Jaye can still freely access the digital tools he needs to make the most of his university education. "I used to take it for granted when I was young, but without the internet and a computer, I'd have to go without or borrow other people's stuff. This helps a lot and saves me a lot of money. It's a huge, huge amount of help... so a massive, massive thanks!"

**And Jaye finally understands what his father was saying: that a strong education would take him toward a better life.**

"I've worked hard with the help of The Smith Family's supporters and my brothers and my family. I'm succeeding."

**"This helps me out a lot and saves me a lot of money as well. This is a huge, huge amount of help... so a massive, massive thanks!" – Jaye**



Jaye, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

# Today Amelia has the world at her feet thanks to you

**Amelia had a happy childhood but money was always tight. “I grew up in public housing in regional Victoria with my single mum and twin sister,” she says. “I was very aware of the financial situation my family was in.”**

Amelia’s mother was kept very busy working to support the family. They all knew money was tight, and Amelia would often remind her mum when bills needed paying.

The money worries took a heavy toll on Amelia, at a time when most children get to be carefree. School was the one place the anxiety went away, where Amelia felt free to be a child. “School was a distraction and one of the only stable things in my life,” she says. “It was amazing to learn so many things.”

**“I grew up in public housing in regional Victoria with my single mum and twin sister. I was very aware of the financial situation my family was in.” – Amelia**

It’s no surprise that in Year 3, Amelia accepted a “very exciting” opportunity to join The Smith Family’s learning programs. It was only possible thanks to incredible supporters like you.

Programs like *student2student* were thrilling. Amelia’s reading buddy opened her mind to books she’d never heard of before. “It was really fun, I got very excited about using a phone to read with my buddy, because we didn’t even have a computer at home,” Amelia says.



Amelia, *student2student* and Learning Club participant

**“*student2student* really helped me develop my reading skills. I could then advance through the reading levels at school.”**

As Amelia studied hard in Year 12, with big plans for university, support from her *Learning Club* tutor – made possible by your generous gifts – helped boost her marks.

“I found it incredibly beneficial,” she says. “I was studying biology – having medicine students as tutors was pretty handy!

“It was great that my tutors could explain things in different ways. I got to meet students from other schools and collaborate with them! It was an

environment where we could study, learn and be social at the same time!”

Now 22, Amelia is in her third year of a law and global studies degree. Her world has expanded as she now lives away from her family and supports herself financially.

Amelia’s world has grown even wider. Last year she travelled overseas for the first time – on a student exchange to Germany for uni. A little girl from a small town who worried about the bills is now a woman of the world, being rewarded for her determination.

**“There is so much to learn and understand. I’m loving it.” – Amelia**



Amelia, *student2student* and *Learning Club* participant

## Marine biologist or Olympian? Charlize is thrilled by the options unfolding with the help of your amazing gifts!



Charlize, *student2student* participant

Thanks to donors like you, life is now full of options for Charlize. But that hasn't always been the case. Malina, Charlize's mum left Sydney for the Gold Coast "escaping a bad situation" and crippling cost of living. She left everything she knew, and took her four children, including the youngest Charlize to Queensland. "My kids had been through trauma – now we were on our own."

Things were bleak. Malina was studying teaching and money was tight. She couldn't even afford Christmas presents. But she was determined to give her children a safe, secure life, so they could flourish.

If Malina could finish her studies and get a good job, she knew they could overcome the obstacles poverty had put in their way. But studying full-time, while supporting four children alone and helping them heal from trauma was overwhelmingly hard. "We were just getting by," says Malina.

**At the toughest time in their lives, Malina seized an opportunity for Charlize, Year 2, to access The Smith Family learning program *student2student*. It was possible thanks to wonderful supporters like you.**

Now, Charlize could get help to avoid falling further behind in her reading. And there was less strain on Malina to help her catch up. She could focus on her studies and getting a job, to lift her family out of poverty.

“At the time, homework time was chaotic – I was studying, cooking and cleaning on my own after school, while trying to help four kids with their homework,” says Malina.

Malina remembers how Charlize loved to read with her student buddy. “I think doing her reading with another young person kept it more interesting for Charlize,” Malina says.

The results were remarkable. “With *student2student*, she got comfortable speaking in front of someone else. Then she felt confident to do it at school,” Malina explains. Charlize eventually won an award for her public speaking.

Today Charlize is 16, in Year 10, and a world-class athlete. She was recently selected to represent Australia at an international rugby tournament in Japan and she’s being courted by elite sports clubs and is even eyeing the Olympics!

But Charlize also continues to prioritise her education, with the confidence of knowing she can use her voice – and the power of her education – to change the world. She recently went on an excursion to the Great Barrier Reef. This has inspired her to study biology and make a difference. “After looking at the ecosystems, she came back motivated to solve the problems of the reef!” Malina says.

Malina wants you to know you are her hero. “When Charlize needed it most, you were there providing the best learning support available, so I could get my family through this,” she says.



Charlize and Malina, Charlize’s Mum

**“You helped Charlize when things were at their lowest. We knew someone still cared – and that made such a difference. Thank you for being there for my children. You’re an absolute champion.”**

# Thank you for giving Jemimah the power to be bold

All parents want the best for their children. Eva is not any different. She had brought Jemimah and her three other children here from Uganda to give them a brighter future. Eva worked so hard, doing night shifts to keep her children fed. But surviving financially left little time to help her children prepare for school and be all that they could be.

“I am the only parent they have. I must provide everything they need, and I go out of my way to do that. But when I’d come back from night shift in the morning, they would have already gone to school,” says Eva. “I didn’t even know if they’d packed their lunch and worn their jumpers to stay warm. That was so hard.”

Because education matters so much to Eva, she was very pleased for Jemimah, Year 7, and

her siblings to join The Smith Family’s learning programs. It was all thanks to amazing supporters like you!

**“I had braced myself for the hard times, but having this help means everything and it’s such a relief,” she says.**

Five years since the family arrived, Jemimah is now 18. Thanks to your generous donations, she was recently introduced to *iTrack* online mentoring, a program that helps students with advice for life after school. You are now helping her plan an exciting career pathway.

She’s loved connecting with her mentor, who designs buildings for a living – something Jemimah wants to do too.



Jemimah, *iTrack* participant





Jemimah and her family

“When I finish school, I want to go to university and be an architect,” Jemimah says. “I’m speaking to people in the industry. I’m getting the skills to push myself more, to think for myself – that’s what I’ve learnt to do.”

Jemimah’s mother Eva sees how rewarding *iTrack* is. “After Jemimah has these conversations, she is really happy and has a clear vision of what she wants to become.”

Jemimah also received free internet donated by Optus customers through our *Digital Learning Essentials* program. The internet has helped her stay connected and keep up with digital learning. “I can access the internet wherever I am, be it at school or home.”

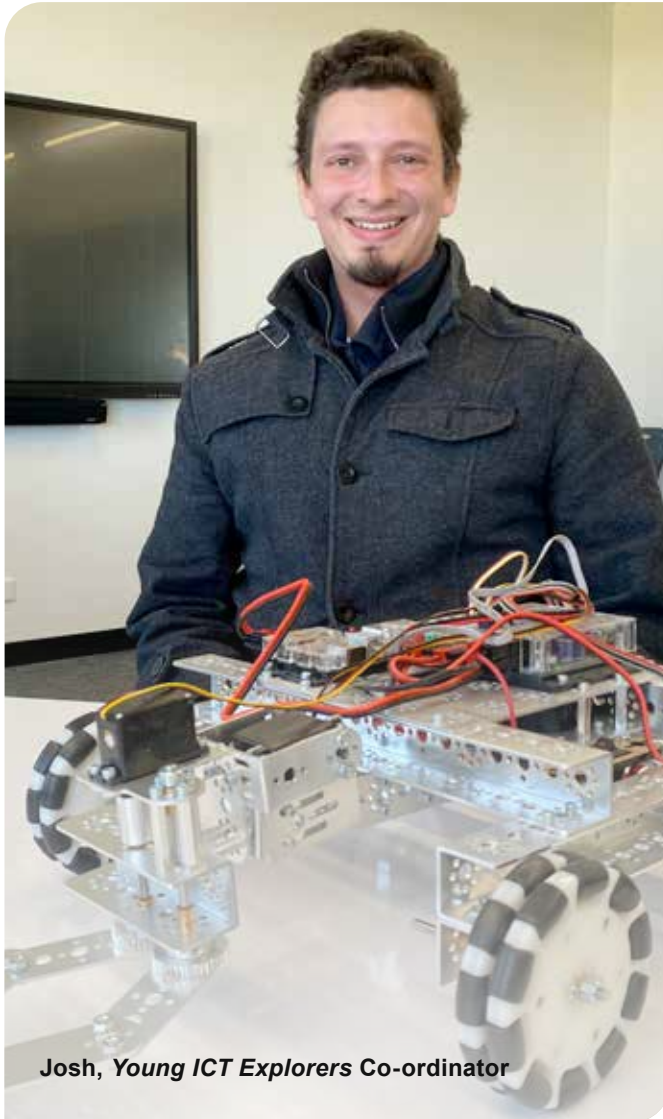
Eva is grateful that you can see Jemimah’s potential and have chosen to invest in her future.

**“When a kind stranger lends a helping hand, this is the community helping my child become what they deserve to be,” she says. “It makes such a difference, knowing your children have the support they need to succeed in life.”**

Thank you for helping young Australians like Jemimah to get the most out of their education and reach their full potential.

# Budding entrepreneurs dream big, beyond their backyard

We'd love you to meet Josh who organised *Young ICT Explorers* at his school. This high school teacher expected a lot from his Year 8 competition team. They more than delivered!



Josh, *Young ICT Explorers* Co-ordinator

## **Q. Tell us about your competition team**

**A.** I had this great Year 8 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) class. I got them to submit a project for the competition. In the classroom, they came up with an idea and planned how we were going to do it. We worked through the STEM process. I was teaching them how to define the problem, identify their constraints... things like that. Then the pandemic hit!

## **Q. What was their idea?**

**A.** Usually when you return a book to a library, the librarian must put it away. Their idea was to simplify this. Their prototype involved fitting each book with a little tracking tag. Then, when you walk into the library with your book to return it, the tag identifies where it should go.

## **Q. You mentioned a lockdown soon after you started?**

**A.** Yes. It was stressful for the kids: they had to do the bulk of the work at home. They took their STEM skills and applied them to working together online. They did really well.

## **Q. Why do students need STEM opportunities?**

**A.** Our society is moving away from low-skilled jobs. Nowadays, students need technology skills. These students also need to know how to work as a team, manage their time, plan, and prototype. These are skills they can take into any profession.

**Q. What do you love most about the program?**

**A.** The program teaches my students things they don't usually learn at school. This includes entrepreneurial skills like how to design a product and market it. These are important skills!

**Q. How did your students go in the end?**

**A.** *Young ICT Explorers* expanded my Year 8 students' horizons. It let them look out further than their everyday world. They got to see how their little idea could become an entrepreneurial opportunity. It planted a seed.

They also came third in NSW – they were very happy with that!

*“Young ICT Explorers expanded my students’ horizons. It let them look out further than their everyday world. They got to see how their little idea could become an entrepreneurial opportunity. It planted a seed.” – Josh, Young ICT Explorers Co-ordinator*

## Spotlight: Young ICT Explorers

### What is the Young ICT Explorers Accelerator Program?

It's a national digital technology competition open to The Smith Family partner schools.

### What's involved?

Years 3 to 12 students are invited to create a technology-based competition entry. They must solve a real-world problem and showcase their passion using technology. Finalists get the chance to pitch their project to a panel of tech leaders.

### Why are schools excited?

Teachers are inspired. It's a chance to encourage their students to explore technology.

The students are learning skills for the future. The schools receive free teacher mentoring and project resources for their students.

### Why this program matters?

The Australian economy is changing fast. Digital literacy skills are critically important. In fact, 9 in 10 future jobs will require these abilities.

The program is removing barriers in disadvantaged schools that prevent the teaching of STEM. Students experiencing poverty are getting to showcase their creativity, strengths, and talents.

## What our students say

It's a special thing to hear directly from the children and young people who are benefiting from our programs. Below are some of the students' and teacher's comments who participate in *Young ICT Explorers*.

We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we did!

*YICTE is always a great experience. Thanks for the support. Ability to apply a wide variety of understandings and skills (interpersonal relationships & technology) into a real world context.*

- Teacher

*Thank you to all the YICTE members who organised this program to students. Thank you also to The Smith Family for funding and helping schools get the needed equipment. It was a great experience and I'll definitely participate again!*

- Jian Year 5 - 6

*I think it was a very fun program for kids that want to learn about technology and also just to have fun it also helped with learning about friendship and teamwork this is why I give this program 5 star review.*

-Prudence, Year 5 - 6

*I am glad I have participated in YICTE for the past 3 years and have gained many new skills.*

- Reese, Year 5-6

*It is a great program that really helps engage students of all abilities, it caters to students with a keen interest in digital tech and it helps them work collaboratively. The support from The Smith Family is also amazing, it helps us with technology we otherwise would not afford to purchase, so thank you!!*

- Teacher

*It was a great opportunity for the students to develop their skills in this area. Having the support and being able to develop my own professional learning and network with other teachers/schools was fantastic.*

- Teacher

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