

# Real People, Real Stories Autumn 2024



Shelby, *Catch-Up Learning* participant

**Thank you**  
**for being**  
**a Champion.**



**The Smith  
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

## This is the crucial difference **your gifts make**

In our annual survey of 2,200 families, nearly 9 out of 10 respondents said they were worried about affording all the things their children will need for school in 2024.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the families we support are coping with big challenges because of poverty. Their children are living with hardship that no person should experience at such a young age. And they can go without the resources all children need to do well at school.

The students in our learning programs show such determination to push on with their dreams. This speaks volumes about their strength and spirit.

Knowing they have caring people like you on their side can make them feel even more encouraged. You help unlock opportunities for students. You help them achieve the wonderful things they are capable of – and I can't thank you enough.

That's what your generous support did for siblings Adam and Kelly and it's amazing to see. Almost overnight everything in their lives changed, including their schooling. In this edition we share how you supported their education at this turbulent time.

1. The Smith Family Pulse Survey 2023-24

And I'm excited that you'll meet an energetic student called Shelby, 14, who felt sad and frustrated as he fell further behind his peers. Shelby's mother Sandy pinpoints the moment things began to turn. And she makes the power of your generosity beautifully clear.

Finally, it's that time of year I look forward to when we share amazing art by students who entered our Creative Showcase. I never stop feeling inspired by the incredible imagination on display. I hope you enjoy the examples we've included.

Thank you for helping to open up a world of opportunity for children in need.

Warmest wishes,



**Doug Taylor**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Thank you!

Our supporters donated **\$5.19 million** to our Christmas Appeal which will provide **12,349 children** with the crucial educational support they need in 2024.

# One word sums up why Lynette's stayed a supporter for 20 years

When Lynette was young, she felt locked into a pathway that didn't give her opportunities to learn and thrive. Fortunately, she had people in her life who believed that she deserved a fair go – and helped her seize the keys to success. It's why today Lynette is driven to help students living with disadvantage to achieve their potential. And she's doing it as a sponsor through our *Learning for Life* program.



Lynette, *Learning for Life* sponsor

## Q. How important is education to you?

A. That's an easy one-word answer: critical. Without a good education, so many other things in life are denied to you. Unfortunately, not everyone can get that opportunity without some extra support. There are young people in our community who will leave school without ever getting the chance to achieve their best.

## Q. How do you think students benefit from being sponsored?

A. I've chosen to be a sponsor now for close to 20 years. Through my financial support, students have been able to go on excursions and get the

books and stationery they would not otherwise have. They have been able to join out-of-school learning programs like *iTrack*. I know it also makes a difference that I encourage them and care how they're going.

## Q. What inspired you to become a sponsor?

A. I feel it's the least I can do. In my early life, I never thought I was as good or bright as others, but I had mentors who encouraged me to try... and my self-confidence grew. Eventually, I was able to go on to university and that made a huge difference to my life and to my family. And because I've benefited from a good education, I want to help others achieve their potential too.

## Q. What do you like about being a sponsor?

A. I like it when my students write to me about how they are doing at school. And I love finding out the difference sponsorship is making to children and young people in this newsletter. I've even read of sponsored students who went on to have bright futures and are now back volunteering with The Smith Family. They are helping other children achieve what they have. It's incredible!

## Like to learn more about sponsorship?

To find out more about how you can sponsor a student living with disadvantage and provide support individually tailored to their educational needs, please visit: [thesmithfamily.com.au/sponsor-a-child](https://thesmithfamily.com.au/sponsor-a-child)



## You helped turn on a **light switch** in Shelby's mind



Shelby, *Catch-Up Learning* participant and his mum Sandy

**14-year-old Shelby is an energetic child excited about his future, and with a clear vision of where his education might lead him. But Shelby and his mum, Sandy, have certainly faced some challenges together over the years.**

Life got especially difficult when Sandy was studying to get a better job. She had to cut down her work hours. Surviving on a lower income – combined with the study demands – made life very challenging.

“We were living week to week,” Sandy says. “Shelby had also just started high school and was having a really difficult time. He was starting to notice that he was a little bit behind compared to his peers.”

All young people need guidance and encouragement to achieve their potential. But this hardship and stress made it much harder for Sandy to support Shelby's education as much as she wanted to. Shelby had so many strengths, but he was struggling to reach his goals.

That's why Sandy was thrilled that Shelby could access extra learning programs thanks to Champions like you, who know that every child needs the right support to do well in life.

At the time, Shelby was coming home and getting really frustrated that he wasn't quite getting it, especially with his maths. "It was really hard," says Shelby. "I'd want to go home and do simple maths homework, but I just couldn't do it. It did make me mad and sad because I had no idea what to do."

Champions like you gave Shelby access to The Smith Family program called *Catch-Up Learning*. Twice a week, he began receiving one-on-one literacy and numeracy tutoring, with qualified teachers.

At first tutoring was hard – Shelby didn't always get the results he hoped for. But Shelby didn't give up and soon began to grasp tough maths concepts with his tutor's help.

What happened next was phenomenal. Shelby's overall learning and mindset began to transform! Sandy noticed her son now seemed excited to go to school. He was finally 'getting it'.

**"It's like a light switch just changed for him," Sandy says. "You could see his mood changed. He was more confident with what he was doing at school. He caught up to where he needed to be."**

Thanks to you, Shelby could receive this tutoring for two terms, and this helped remove learning blocks that were holding him back at school.

Today, Shelby's confidence continues to grow. He is in Year 9 and knows maths is important in all aspects of life. He is channelling his new skills gained from the *Catch-Up Learning* program into practical subjects, like woodwork. Shelby is even exploring a new and exciting pathway for his future.

"I feel like I'm getting better at maths. It's helping me with understanding the calculations and the measurements in woodwork. You need math to learn other things in life, like woodwork.

**"I do like working with my hands, because I can see things come to life," says Shelby. "When I finish school, I want to be a carpenter and I want to run my own business. I want to build my mum a house – it's a dream goal for me."**

Shelby feels proud of how far he's come with your generous ongoing support. It feels amazing that he can do things now that he couldn't do before.

"By supporting students like me, you are showing that you care about someone out there," he says. "Thank you – you're creating brighter futures for students in need."



Shelby, *Catch-Up Learning* participant

## Thank you for helping **Audrina find her voice**

**To say single mum Melita was busy is an understatement. When she wasn't raising her daughter Audrina, now 12, she was working in aged care. And she was caring for her elderly mother.**

This proud Gamilaroi woman from the Riverina region was also providing kinship care for nieces and nephews. As she was putting her heart and soul into caring for all these people, she was struggling financially. "I'd lost my home and was just making ends meet on a casual wage," Melita says.

Melita's priority was to ensure Audrina had all the support she needs while growing up. She wanted her daughter to feel confident and to participate fully in class without being held back by adversity. But Melita had so many responsibilities. Without more support, she couldn't give her daughter every chance to thrive.



*Audrina, student2student participant and her mum Melita*

Then, with support from Champions like you, Audrina began to access The Smith Family's out-of-school learning programs. She now had a whole team of people helping her become all that she could be. "This opportunity restored my faith in our community," Melita says. "The Smith Family became part of our village."

Because of your generous ongoing support, Audrina could join *student2student*. This came at a critical time, as she was struggling with reading. That soon changed, thanks to her wonderful buddies Savannah and Bella, with whom she'd read over the phone. Their friendship and encouragement lit a spark in Audrina!

"Audrina's growth in reading has excelled," Melita says. "She has climbed reading levels confidently and improved in spelling tests."

**"As a single parent, I'm often battling to keep the house running, so having *student2student* is like another parent, providing extra support to encourage Audrina."**

All children need learning support to succeed at school. And when students like Audrina receive this support through Champions like you, it creates a positive cycle in their life. As her reading skills improved, Audrina built up her confidence and felt encouraged to apply herself in other areas. She could see exciting possibilities all around.

She discovered a new passion: public speaking. Audrina's school gave her lots of opportunities and she excelled.

"Audrina presented the Uluru Statement in front of 500 people at a public information session," Melita says. "The Elders and many community members congratulated Audrina on doing an awesome job."

Melita's number one wish is for Audrina to be happy and follow her heart and passions. It fills Melita with hope to know she is part of a village that gives Audrina the same opportunity as other students to achieve her best.

**"I want her to beat the past barriers our family members have faced, and Smith Family supporters in the community are helping her do that," she says.**

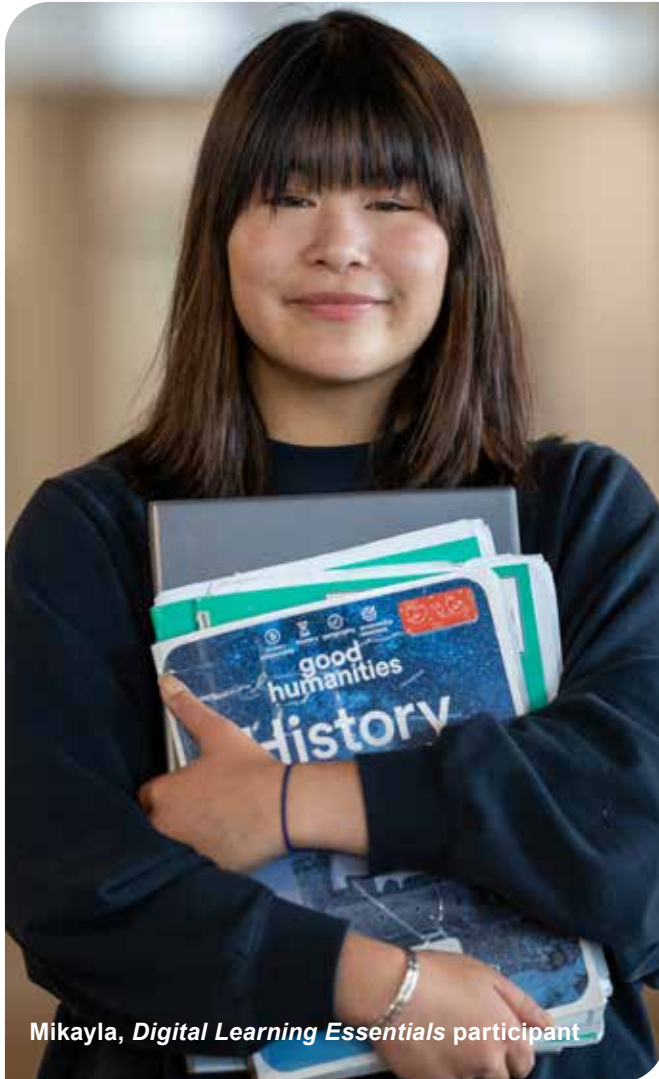
"I hope you know how life-changing your support is. You've given children like her stepping stones to take on the path to more amazing opportunities."



Audrina and Melita

# Mum and daughter team **building a brighter future together**

Mikayla and her Mum, Myha have always been there for one another – a strong team who value each other immensely. Myha has always wanted the best in education for Mikayla, and Mikayla acknowledges how hard her Mum has worked.



Mikayla, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant

When serious health problems affected Myha's lungs and heart, and in turn, her income, Smith Family Champions were a vital support.

**“Before The Smith Family, it was difficult to afford the basic things for Mikayla with school,” Myha says.**

Being digitally included is now crucial for high school students to complete their schoolwork and participate fully in the classroom. But Myha could not afford all the digital resources that Mikayla needed.

It became clear to Myha how poverty was blocking Mikayla from having the same opportunity as her peers to reach her full potential. Mikayla is a bright student. Support from Champions like you helped remove these barriers so she could make the most out of school.

Thanks to Champions like you, Mikayla was able to access The Smith Family's *Digital Learning Essentials* program. This program provides students with access to the digital tools and skills they need to unlock the learning opportunities all children deserve. Mikayla received a refurbished laptop as part of the program, and she also receives free internet through the Optus Donate Your Data™ initiative, which helped to give her the same chance as her classmates to achieve her best at school.





Mikayla, *Digital Learning Essentials* participant and her mum Myha

**“Having the support of The Smith Family puts my mind at ease. I have less stress knowing that Mikayla’s going to also have a laptop and prepaid data – the essentials for going to school,” says Myha**

Having access to the digital resources she needs for school has unlocked new freedom for Mikayla to enjoy being with her classmates and to dream big. Now Mikayla wants to use her passion for learning, and her empathy and understanding of others, to develop a career as a psychologist.

“I think what’s really helped boost my confidence this year is all of the support I’ve received, and how it shows people care.

“It makes me feel really lucky that I’m able to have the same things as my friends at school, and I don’t feel excluded. It makes me feel like someone cares about me, even if they don’t know me personally,” Mikayla says.

With your support, Myha has peace of mind in knowing Mikayla’s got what she needs to grow and learn.

“To anyone that’s thinking of supporting The Smith Family I’d say go for it, because you are giving a bunch of other children heaps of opportunities – and they could really use the support,” says Mikayla. “I’d like to say thank you for helping me gain a massive opportunity for my future.’

## Your kindness helped Adam and Kelly get back to solid ground

**When Anna's husband's health started to deteriorate, everyone in the family, including Adam, 14 and Kelly, 12 faced big challenges. They had to move from the country to a larger city in Queensland where he could get full-time care.**

The children Adam and Kelly, were adjusting to their dad not being at home and fitting into a new school. Financially it was very tough for Anna. She had the huge task of keeping on top of their educational costs, parenting and running a household all on her own.

As a family, they were coping with so much change. It was difficult for Anna to give Adam and Kelly all the extra support they needed to keep up with their homework or even sit down to read together at night. Every child needs stability and support to fully participate at school, or else they can be blocked from achieving their goals. With all these daily challenges, there was now a risk that Adam and Kelly would miss out on the fair go that Australians expect everyone should receive.

Fortunately, this wasn't the case. At this disruptive time, a Parent Engagement Officer at their new school, Ricky, introduced them to The Smith Family's learning programs. Champions like you stepped up to ease some of the challenges and ensure Adam and Kelly could receive the educational support all children need to flourish. "Getting this learning support for my children served as a positive sign that there is always hope," Anna says.

A family health crisis like Adam and Kelly went through can be so overwhelming. It can disrupt a student's focus and emotional wellbeing. They can then struggle to concentrate and engage in their lessons.

But thanks to programs like *student2student*, Adam and Kelly could rebuild their confidence to take on challenges. They enjoyed many happy afternoons reading with their buddies after school. Anna saw their communication skills blossom and a growing enthusiasm to learn. "They didn't miss a single reading session," Anna says.

As part of our *Digital Learning Essentials* program, the children also receive free internet through the Optus Donate Your Data™ initiative, helping



Parents Anna and Zdenek with Adam and Kelly, *student2student* participants

them reap the educational benefits that come with being digitally connected. “They are becoming tech savvy and improving in the skills they need to achieve their goals,” Anna says.

Today Adam is a determined learner in Year 9 and loves being on the school basketball team. Kelly is in Year 7 and involved in everything – from choir to volleyball and student council. Both can participate more fully in their education, because of your support. They now also feel confident completing their homework without Anna’s help.

**“Today, I am much less anxious about meeting Adam and Kelly’s education needs,” Anna says.**

“The Smith Family’s learning programs give my children good motivation to learn more and enjoy every school experience. I hope the people who support these programs know how much we appreciate them.

“Thank you for being kind-hearted people sharing your blessing to help people like my family. We truly appreciate all your support.”

**“My children getting this learning support served as a positive sign that there is always hope,”**

**– Anna, Adam and Kelly’s mother**

**Anna’s moving poem shows how, when The Smith Family, schools and Champions like you come together to help a student, that extraordinary feeling, care and support wraps around the entire family.**

“One fine day, one lovely Ricky, walking in the school  
She saw one lonely Me, sitting and looks uncool  
She greeted me hello, her eyes with a glow  
A kind-hearted person, in front of me I saw  
I shared my troubled life, for her to know  
She listened with sincerity, to me it shows  
She acted right away, to assist me with my needs  
Her kindness overflows, and a friendship start to grows  
She is busy as a bee, in her work indeed  
But manage to see, my latest at full speed  
With her never-ending support  
She helps improve, my life in short  
From hardship to survivorship  
From friendship to fellowship  
From scholarship to apprenticeship

From assistantship to wageslip.  
To show my deepest gratitude to Ricky  
and the community hub we know  
I am happy to recite, this poem I made  
To share my thoughts, and not be afraid  
The community hub is a right place to go  
With kind-hearted people always on the know  
With one genuine goal  
To help and support,  
People of all sort  
People they helped, like me, is here to stay  
To share our time, and extend our support  
For our hub to succeed, and to attain its goal.  
Thank you, and God bless you all.”

# CREATIVE SHOWCASE

Creative Showcase gives students the opportunity to express their creativity. Last year we received many entries from our students and we'd love to share some with you.



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