

Shelby, *Learning for Life* student

# Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives through sponsorship.

Autumn 2024



**The Smith  
Family**

Learn today, change tomorrow.

# This is the crucial difference you 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 on our *Learning for Life* program 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.

Despite all the challenges stacked against them, our students show such determination to push on with their education. This speaks volumes about their strength and spirit.

And when you add support from a caring sponsor like you, they can feel even more encouraged. You help unlock opportunities for your student, so they can achieve the wonderful things they are capable of. I can't thank you enough.

That's what sponsors like you did for siblings Adam and Kelly and it's amazing to see. When someone very close to them became ill, almost overnight everything changed, including their

schooling. In this edition we share how their sponsors helped support their education at this turbulent time.

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 sponsorships like yours 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 students in need.

Warmest wishes,



**Doug Taylor**  
Chief Executive Officer



1. The Smith Family Pulse Survey 2023-24

# 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 sponsor 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 been a sponsor now for close to 20 years. Through my financial support, my 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!

## Q. What would you say to people about the importance of sponsoring a child?

A. When it comes up in conversation, I always spread the word that the opportunity exists to sponsor a student through The Smith Family. There is always going to be a need for sponsors like us to support and encourage young people who are missing out on education support for one reason or another. I encourage anyone to do it!

## Shelby's sponsor turned on a light switch in his mind



Shelby, *Learning for Life* student 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 had to cut down her work hours. It was while she was studying to get a better job. "We were living week to week," Sandy says. "We were watching what we were paying, whether it was petrol in the car or swimming fees. It was always something that we had to keep an eye on."

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 sponsorship from someone like you - someone who knows that every child needs the right support to do well in life.

Financial support through sponsorship brought immediate relief for Sandy, especially during remote learning. "It was expected that we had

pens and paper and rulers and glue at home,” she remembers. “But we had to go out and purchase all that ourselves.

**“Support from Shelby’s sponsor made things like that a lot easier. Having Shelby’s uniforms and shoes paid for has also been such a fantastic thing.”**

Shelby had noticed he was behind compared to his peers. “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.”

Sponsorship then gave Shelby access to The Smith Family program called *Catch-Up Learning*. He began receiving one-on-one literacy and numeracy tutoring, with qualified teachers.

Shelby was now grasping 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.”**

Shelby is now in Year 9 and knows maths is important in all aspects of life. He is channelling his new skills and confidence 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 his sponsor’s support. It feels amazing that he can do things now that he couldn’t do before.

“By sponsoring a student, you are showing that you care about someone out there,” he says. “Thank you for supporting students like me.”



Shelby, *Learning for Life* student

## Sponsorship helps 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 herself. "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.

Then through The Smith Family's *Learning for Life* program, Audrina was connected to a sponsor like you. 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."**



Audrina, *Learning for Life* student and her mum Melita

Audrina's sponsorship provided crucial financial support. Now she could have the essentials she needed for school. "I could afford to get Audrina the basics like uniforms, shoes, bags, pens, pencils and books," says Melita.

She could also participate in extra-curricular activities with her classmates. "Sponsorship allowed Audrina to get involved in netball. This helped develop her social skills and connected her to the community," Melita explains.

Additionally, with her sponsorship, Audrina could access The Smith Family's out-of-school learning programs like *student2student*. This reading program 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."**

All children need learning support to succeed at school. And when students like Audrina receive this support through sponsorship, 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.

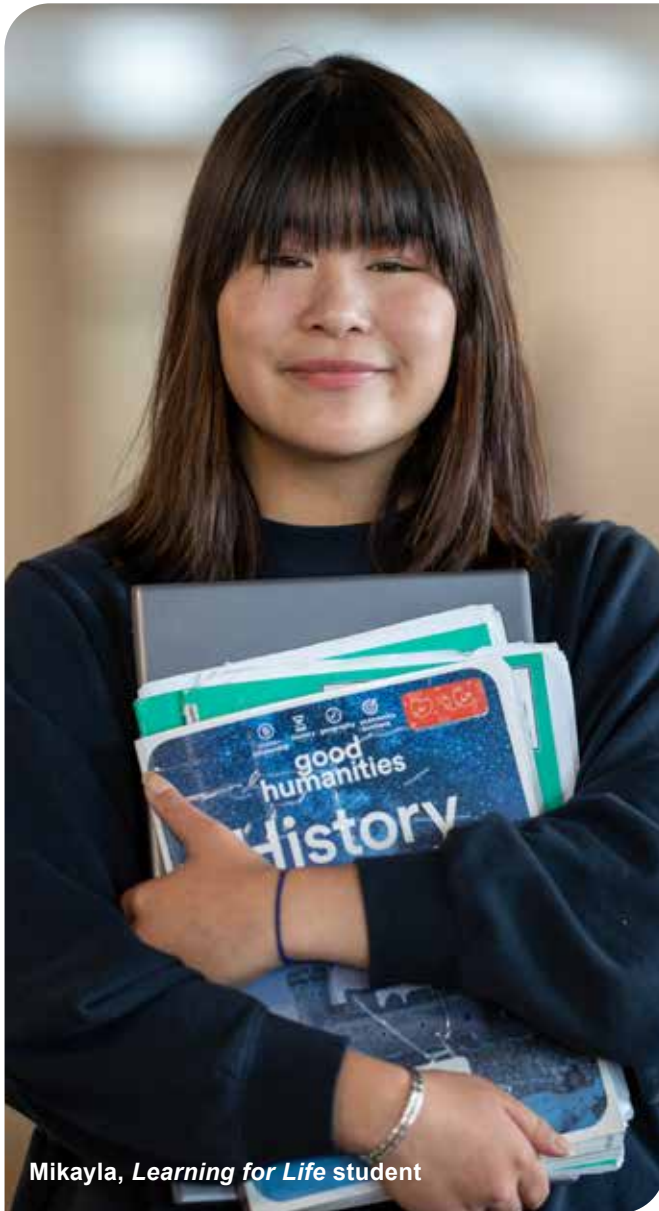
"I want her to beat the past barriers our family members have faced, and her sponsor is helping her do that," she says.

"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, Learning for Life student

**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.**

When serious health problems affected Myha's lung and heart, and in turn, her income, Mikayla's *Learning for Life* Coordinator and sponsor were a vital support.

“Before The Smith Family, it was difficult to afford the basic things for Mikayla with school,” Myha says. 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. Sponsorship has helped to remove these barriers so she can make the most out of school.

The financial support sponsorship provides has enabled Mikayla to purchase new shoes and uniform. Thanks to Mikayla's sponsor she 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, *Learning for Life* student and her mum Myha

“With the help of the Smith Family and Mikayla’s sponsor, she’s able to have new shoes, uniform, and books like any other kid,” says 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.”

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.**

Sponsorship has given Myha 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.”

# Adam and Kelly's sponsors gave them a fair go when they needed it most

**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 were adjusting to their dad not being at home and fitting in at a new school. Financially it was very tough for Anna to cover food, bills, housing and the kids' education costs all on her own. 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. Anna and her children met a Parent Engagement Officer at their new school, Ricky, who introduced them to The

Smith Family. Soon after, wonderful sponsors 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. "It served as a positive sign that there is always hope," Anna says.

Financial support from sponsors like you in the four years since has covered their learning essentials like excursions, stationery and textbooks. A huge barrier to the children's success had been removed. "I used the support for school bags, shoes and socks, and uniforms," Anna says. "These are always outgrown and worn-out after the last school year.

**"They are enjoying attending school and engaging in school activities. Having the essentials boosts their self-confidence and I believe this also helps them adjust easily to the new school environment."**

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.



Parents Anna and Zdenek with Adam and Kelly, Learning for Life students

Anna saw their communication skills blossom and a growing enthusiasm to learn. “They didn’t miss a single reading session,” says Anna.

As part of our *Digital Learning Essentials* program, the children also receive free internet through the Optus Donate Your Data™ initiative, helping 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 both siblings can participate fully in their education thanks to support from their sponsors. 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.

**“Sponsors give my children the motivation to learn more and enjoy every school experience,” Anna says. “It’s a great feeling keeping in touch to let their sponsors know how much we value them and appreciate their support.**

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

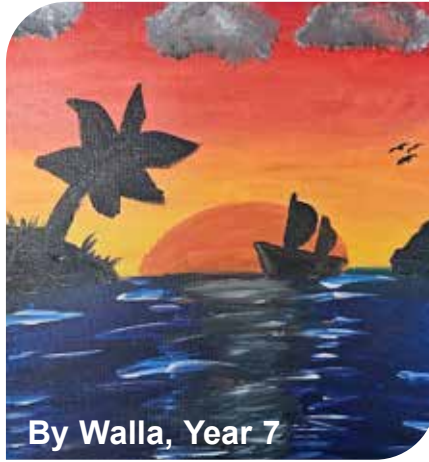
**Anna’s moving poem shows how, when The Smith Family, schools and sponsors like you come together to help a student, that extraordinary feeling, care and support wraps around the entire family.**

“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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