



Kaytlyn, *Learning for Life* student

# Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives through sponsorship.

Spring 2022



Creating better futures together



everyone's family

# You are helping your student flourish whatever may come

**Thanks to you, the extraordinary efforts to build a better future for our children reached new heights this year, with donors showing amazing compassion.**

In March, devastating floods hit New South Wales and Queensland and 3,179 *Learning for Life* students let us know they were directly affected. Thanks to our generous donors, we provided some additional financial assistance so students can replace school essentials lost or damaged in the floods. For this incredible response, I can't thank you enough. You have helped provide exactly what students need to get back to learning, so they don't have to face added strain, on top of other challenges.

If there is a health crisis or natural disaster that affects our community, The Smith Family is ready to do all it takes to be here for our students. But we are also prepared to reinvent our organisation as the needs of our young people and families change.

It's why recently we've recognised the critical importance of digitising our learning and mentoring programs. On the next page, you can read about the innovations underway in program digitisation. We believe with this approach we can help more young Australians in need. None of this is possible without you.

I hope you'll be moved by the story of Declan in this edition, a boy who loves to help others, but almost gave up on himself. Declan's learning outlook has changed dramatically thanks to his sponsor. His outstanding progress – and the delight this brings him – is something I dearly want for all the young people we support.

As always, I thank you for helping to build a better future for all children. Your sponsorship is building a stronger, more educated society – one where we can live and thrive in harmony.

Warmest wishes,



**Doug Taylor**  
**Chief Executive Officer**



# The Smith Family's Program Digitisation Roadmap

**The Smith Family has embarked on a three-year program digitisation initiative. This initiative will help students thrive in a digital world.**

We are planning to provide access to more of our programs and services online. This will improve skills and access to technology to reduce the digital divide for young Australians in need.

Students will be able to choose fit-for-purpose programs that align with their educational needs. We will also deliver improved services to enhance our partnerships with schools and teachers.

**Putting the student at the centre of our work and our solutions, we are future proofing the organisation to remain sustainable and effective.**

This initiative is vital to our organisational effectiveness. It is essential for all *Learning for Life* students to be digitally included so they can fully engage in learning and be equipped for the world of work.



## ***Student2student goes digital***

*Student2student* is one of The Smith Family's programs that has already undergone a digital transformation. Thanks to you, we are able to match students who need to improve their reading with trained peer buddies.

When the program began, the student and their buddy received the same books by post and read them together over the phone at set times. However, in the last two years, your support has enabled us to make great innovations in the digital space.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, we experienced delays with post and couldn't have staff and volunteers in offices to supply and deliver the books. In response, The Smith Family worked with existing online library provider Chatty Kids to upgrade and create a new website to deliver *student2student* online.

Now, 80% of the program's participants use Chatty Kids to read together, using a laptop or other device. It allows instant access to resources. When students finish a book or move up a level, they can do so straight away.

Having *student2student* online is also helping bridge the digital literacy gap with families given training and practice on using technology.

# Kaytlyn's boost to reach big goals

**Growing up on the north-west coast of Tasmania, Kaytlyn dreamt of one day going to university. However, instability at home and living in a small, remote community made her goals feel out of reach.**

Kaytlyn joined our *Learning for Life* program in high school. Support from a generous sponsor like you gave Kaytlyn the opportunity to create a better future for herself.

"I always had the vision that I would go to university, but there were a lot of unknowns," Kaytlyn, 21, says.

"I didn't know how I was going to get there because of my family's financial situation at the time. There were never any real conversations about how university would be funded, or where I was heading.

**"I was lucky to connect with The Smith Family and that was where things kicked off. The Smith Family was there to help me in the transition and have that confidence and security to move away.**

"I still feel grateful that someone would donate their own, hard-earned money to a child in need. It's these people who don't even want the thanks or the accolade of helping. They're just there to help you."

Kaytlyn reached her dream of going to university, moving to Melbourne to study a Bachelor of Science, specialising in climate change.

"Natalie, my *Learning for Life* Coordinator, was super helpful – particularly in COVID times. I was able to call her and talk about it, and she always kept in touch with me.

"So, it's not just that financial confidence and stability that's provided, but sponsorship also gave me that one-on-one mentorship, or mental support."

Empowered by her sponsorship, Kaytlyn has become an inspiring young leader.

She is a key member of Project O, an initiative that empowers young rural women to develop new skills, connect with their communities, and use their voices to campaign for change.

Her leadership and passion were recognised this year when she had the honour of being named Young Australian of The Year for Tasmania.

"I've been given a platform to speak out about the issues that are important to me," Kaytlyn says. "The importance of inclusion of Indigenous people in our communities; the importance of taking action on climate change and the importance of giving young people a voice.

"This is a once in a lifetime opportunity, to speak about what I care about. I'd love to just squeeze the most out of that and make the most of every opportunity that I get."

Kaytlyn always had the drive to conquer her situation, but the financial and personal support provided by her sponsor smoothed her path. Sometimes sponsorship is the boost a young person needs to know their potential – and to know they can go for it.



Kaytlyn, Learning for Life student

## Connecting with culture

**Growing up, Kaytlyn experienced stereotyping around her Palawa Aboriginal heritage. Comments like “Oh, you don’t look Aboriginal” and “You’re not Aboriginal, there’s no Tasmanian Aboriginal people left” confused her.**

Connection to culture and identity are strengths for First Nations people. Kaytlyn felt she never had the chance to explore hers, and she became driven to change the narrative.

“I think that stems from a lack of conversation

intergenerationally, and that’s something I would like to break down.

“For me, growing up, it was the older generations that didn’t want to talk about it. And that’s hurtful, because I want to know who I am, and I wanted to know who my family is.”

Taking pride in who she is and where she’s from, Kaytlyn fought for her goals. She’s become an inspiring leader to many young Tasmanians, especially those in the Indigenous community.

## Declan gave books a second chance and found joy in the pages

At age 10, Year 5 student Declan would tell anyone who'd listen he hoped to be a policeman one day. But Declan's mum Cassandra felt worried about his reading problems and low confidence. Both could block him from his dream.



Declan, Learning for Life student

Cassandra was unable to support Declan's learning as much as she'd like, especially with reading, which he didn't enjoy.

"Declan's biological father is dyslexic, and we suspect this got passed on to him too," she says.

When Declan received sponsorship through our *Learning for Life* program, Cassandra was impressed by the range of extracurricular activities he could join to help him catch up and keep up.

"I thought the programs were excellent," she says.

Through our *Digital Access* program, made possible by our philanthropic partners, Declan received a free laptop. This helped him stay connected to his class during lockdowns.

"At the time, I was struggling to even cover our groceries and petrol, so we really couldn't afford an internet connection," says Cassandra. "But Declan also received free WiFi through The Smith Family. That made a massive difference to us."

Even so, remote lessons were tough for Declan and his learning suffered setbacks.

"I was so relieved when he could finally go back to school," Cassandra says. It was then Declan decided to join *student2student*, our out-of-school reading peer support program.

Declan was paired up with his buddy Matteo. Matteo would call Declan twice a week to chat, listen to him read and help him sound out hard words.

"Suddenly, Declan was falling in love with reading," says Cassandra.

In the two years since, Declan has moved up six reading levels at school and, remarkably, will read anything and everything!

"I read before bed and in the morning at school with my class. I love Harry Potter, fantasy, and adventure books," Declan says.

Cassandra loves that she can connect anytime with Declan's *Learning for Life* Coordinator Sarah to help him access our learning support programs.

**"Our lives have changed dramatically since Declan got sponsored. We feel so supported and Declan can do much more than before." – Cassandra**

In fact, now Declan's reading confidence is spilling over into other subjects like art, science, and sport.

"I am enjoying school now because I know a lot more words," Declan says.

Not only can Declan access our *student2student* program, he now has the learning essentials he needs for school. "It is so great that my sponsor helps me be able to do school sport and have a uniform like every other kid," Declan says.

As a sponsor, this is how you disrupt disadvantage, helping your student take small but crucial steps to achieve their long-term aspirations.

"Thanks to his sponsorship, he has self-pride in wearing his uniform," Declan's *Learning for Life* Coordinator Sarah says. "Having access to these programs – all of those things combined has really changed his outlook as a young student."

"I've wanted to become a policeman since I was a little boy, and that's still my dream," says Declan. "My mum and teacher are so proud of me for how far I've come."

# From awkward silences to priceless conversations: the transformational power of a mentor

**Meet Billy, one of our very special volunteers with a big heart for helping students plan for life after school. He shares some of the challenges and unforgettable moments of life as an *iTrack* mentor.**

## **Q. Why did you decide to sign up to be an *iTrack* mentor?**

I've learned a lot from having mentors at different points in my life, and so the opportunity to pass on whatever wisdom I've gathered so far in life was something I jumped at. With the benefit of hindsight, I think that your teenage years are when you could probably do with some advice the most (whether at the time you realise it or not!). Some of the things that still stick with me are things I learned back then, from my parents, from teachers, and from others in my community.

## **Q. What kinds of things did you talk with the student about in your mentoring sessions?**

Mentoring sessions can be a little slow to start off with. Students often take a bit of time to warm up and taking the time to establish a bit of a rapport – no mean feat over text – is important. Each student is different, but I typically have found that they're curious about how the world beyond high school works. Some of the students know what they want to do, so we chatted about university entry requirements, career pathways, and scholarships. Others are in an earlier phase, so we chat about their interests, what their more immediate high school elective choices are, and different possibilities that could open up for them.

## **Q. What was the most rewarding part of being a mentor?**

Having the chance to connect with a student and know that you've helped them in some small way. There are some conversations you have where you can see that you've been able to trigger an 'Aha!' moment for a student or exposed them to a different way of thinking. The excitement that you can see – they start chatting with more questions, very quickly – is very gratifying.

## **Q. What value do you think the program brings for students?**

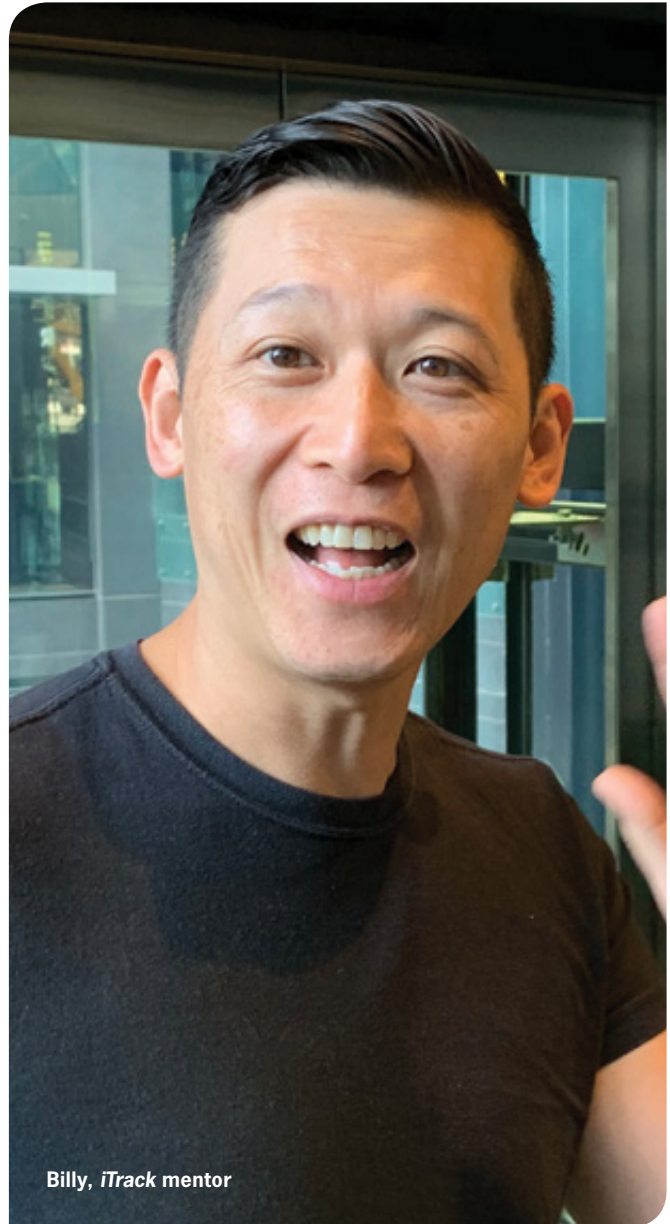
I think that it can often be difficult for students to have people to talk to about their education in a safe space. Their peers might not think it's cool to be planning ahead, sometimes their family may not have experience in the avenues that they're hoping to pursue, and they may perceive their teachers as authority figures, and be nervous about appearing ignorant. *iTrack* gives them a chance to ask those questions from a friendly adult anonymously, without those worries. I think the most consistent change I saw was students becoming more confident.



**Q. What value do you think the program brings for mentors like yourself?**

As someone who finished high school multiple decades ago, I think it's so valuable to be able to revisit that phase of life. You quickly realise that your circumstances are different, and the context that today's students are in has also changed, and being able to learn about what teenagers today think and care about is such a gift.

***iTrack* is an online mentoring program over 18 weeks. Students are matched with a trained adult mentor from a professional background to help guide them in their area of interest. Students receive advice and support on their post-school plans in one-hour sessions delivered via secure online chat.**



Billy, *iTrack* mentor

# Meet a woman devoted to ensuring students aren't left behind

**My name is Claire. I'm a *Learning for Life* Coordinator at The Smith Family. I provide long-term support and information to students and families about their education.**

With your help, I work alongside families through their education journey. I provide information about school attendance, study plans, preparing for high school, and future goals. I also help families who need to be referred to other community agencies.

I often work with students from single parent families or grandparent carer families. I also work with a large number of families from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Some of their challenges include economic disadvantage, living off one single parent income or an age pension. Or still finding their feet in a country after fleeing war or political turmoil.

Recently, I have been working with a student who has a learning disability. They have repeated the last year of primary school. And their family had some worries about the student's readiness to transition to high school.

In discussion with the parents and the student, we decided that the *student2student* program would be a good fit. This reading program would give the student peer support of a reading buddy. It also builds up the confidence in their literacy and ability to the transition into high school.

I also supported this student to be linked in early to their high school. And we discussed additional learning concerns and potential support available. This has really helped put the family's mind at ease in regards to the transition which is fantastic.

The *Learning for Life* program helps children to achieve their best in school now and in the future by providing support from the first year at school right through to the end of year 12 and on to further study.

The Smith Family supports families in three ways. Firstly, we have the individual support from the *Learning for Life* Coordinator, me. My role is to provide that holistic long-term support for children and young people.

Secondly, we have the financial support in the form of the scholarship payment. And they spend this on learning essentials like books, stationery, uniforms, shoes and excursions.

And thirdly, we have access to programs such as *student2student* reading program, *Learning Clubs* homework assistance, and *Career Mentoring*. These programs help students to have the best opportunity to get the most out of their education.

**The Smith Family's sponsors like you ensure that these families are not left behind. Families can now afford what they need for school so they can get on with their education.**

I have always been passionate about helping families and students in their education journey. I enjoy working through the challenges and supporting the successes our students have.



Claire, Learning for Life Coordinator

**“Education transforms lives, not just minds. Thank you for believing in our vision of creating opportunities for every child so they can build a better future for themselves.”**

# A letter to my sponsor, from Maddie\*

This was written by one of our *Learning for Life* students. We are sharing it with you just as she wrote it. The name has been changed to protect the student's privacy.

To my sponsor

Hi my name is Maddie\*. I am 12 years old this year. I graduated from primary school last year on 9th December 2021. My favourite book is *Street Kid* by Judy Westwater. I know it isn't a movie but at my dad's, I like to watch *sweet tooth* on Netflix. I adore books. I love dogs, I have two dogs. Both are girls.



At school I love swimming but my favourite subjects are English, Maths and Drama. I was accepted into an academic and creative arts academy for my high school so I was excited for this.

When I grow up I would love to open a homeless shelter. There is a lot of homeless people. I would like to help people. I coordinated a hamper drive through school last year for the women's shelter that helped us - collecting food and toy donations for Christmas, that our local radio station had going so I asked school could we help. I also baked cookies for our swimming carnival and sold them for extra money for the hampers and we bought some more items, like food that can make a lot: flour, milk, sugar and other things.



My hobbies are singing, drama and writing. I don't have a favourite song but if I had to choose it would be "little do you know" by Alex and Sierra. "Pretty girl" is a great song too.

2021 brought a huge rollercoaster. However one quote (I like quotes and memes) was "if you are brave enough to say bye your reward will be a new hello."

All I have to say is "thank you for sponsoring me, you don't know how much it means to me, and my mother."

Bye for now  
Maddie

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