



Learning for Life student, Lee

# Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives.

Autumn 2019



*everyone's family*

# You're removing barriers for students in need

**Thank you for your wonderful support. You are helping disadvantaged students to reach their potential by supporting them to get the most from their education!**

But your support does far more than this. It also removes barriers. Nothing is more disheartening for students than to be held back by their circumstances, despite their best efforts at school. But your generosity helps students through our vital learning programs.

As a valued supporter, you provide learning and mentoring programs that really make a difference. You are helping us reach thousands of children in need – as you can see on the next page.

I hope you enjoy all of the stories inside. Thank you for giving disadvantaged students the chance to be their best at school.



**Dr Lisa O'Brien**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

CEO, Dr Lisa O'Brien



# THANK YOU!

**Our supporters donated \$3.76 million to our Christmas Appeal, which will provide 8,952 children with the vital help they need in 2019.**

# 2017 – 18 Outcomes

Thanks to generous supporters like you, The Smith Family reached 143,648 children and young people through our vital learning programs – that's up 19% on the previous year. And our programs are delivered in 94 communities across Australia.



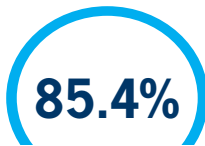
We track and measure the progress of our *Learning for Life* students against three longer-term outcomes: school attendance; completion of Year 12 or its equivalent; and post-school engagement in education or work. We're pleased to share these results from *Learning for Life* students with you below:

## ATTENDANCE



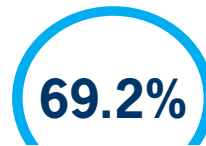
primary school student attendance (91.0% in 2016)

## ADVANCEMENT



secondary school student attendance (86.3% in 2016)

## ENGAGEMENT



of students in Year 10 in 2015 advanced to Year 12 in 2017



of students who left school in Years 10-12 were working/studying 12 months after leaving the program

## “Now I’m one of the top students” – Shiva, 12

**When Shiva was six years old, he and his mum fled to Australia from an Indian refugee camp seeking a better life. Starting school in a new country was challenging.**

“I couldn’t speak a word of English. It was just the two of us with no other family support,” said Shiva.

“When we first arrived my grades were Ds and a few Cs. Mum wasn’t able to help with my studies.”

Many disadvantaged children start school behind.

Without access to early learning experiences and resources, they often feel like they can’t keep up with what’s going on in class. As each year passes, without support the gap can widen between these children and their classmates.



Shiva, *student2student* participant

That's why supporters like you are so important. By providing vital learning and mentoring programs, you give children in need the chance to make the most of their education. For Shiva, that support changed everything.

**“The Smith Family provides programs to help improve my studies. Student2student gave me the extra support with my reading. In two years, my reading age went from eight to 12.**

“And thanks to *Learning Club*, I understand my homework. If you're struggling with something, you can just ask the tutor. You don't have to feel shy or worried. They've helped me most with English and maths. Now I can complete my homework in one day instead of five.

“I'm one of the top students in Year 6, and School Captain!”

Shiva has been inspired to become a teacher. He also wants to be a student buddy and help other children learn to read, the way they helped him. Shiva's mum is so proud - she's always smiling now. Families like Shiva's can now see a better future, thanks to the support of our donors.

### Did you know?

The reading gap in primary school between the lowest socio-economic students and the highest socio-economic students is equivalent to almost three years of schooling<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education, Science and Training (2005). Teaching Reading National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. Commonwealth of Australia

## student2student evaluation 2017 – 2018

The *student2student* program pairs students who are at least two years behind in their reading with trained buddies who work with them to improve their reading skills.



of students improved their reading ability



reported that they now find reading more enjoyable

## Lachlan has a plan thanks to you and his mentor

Everything shifted for Lachlan when his parents split up. Suddenly his mum, Lynette, was raising four children on her own. Then Lachlan's older sister developed ongoing health issues that put her in hospital. So when, at 15 years old, Lachlan found himself struggling with a career path, he needed some additional help to guide him.

Taking part in our online mentoring program *iTrack* was perfect for Lachlan. *iTrack* gives students in Years 9 to 11 access to personalised advice about study and career options. Building a connection with his volunteer mentor changed Lachlan's life.

"The experience I had with *iTrack* was very helpful. We discussed what sort of careers I wanted to pursue and

what they would entail," said Lachlan.

**"My mentor helped me to figure out the things I really wanted to do.**

"I am interested in civil or mechanical engineering but since talking to my mentor I think that I would really like to become a carpenter or builder."

Lachlan, *iTrack* participant



**Research shows that completing Year 12 (or equivalent) increases a young person's likelihood of continuing their studies, and finding employment.**

It also leads to higher annual earnings for individuals, greater community involvement and economic benefits for our country as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

Having an aspiration for the future can be a key motivator for continuing with school. That's why learning programs like *iTrack* are so important.

**“Education is the foundation that they're going to build the rest of their lives on,” said mum Lynette**

If they get a solid grounding now, then it's a great platform to move forward as they go into their adult years.”

Lynette is so grateful to supporters like you for helping her children to create better futures for themselves.

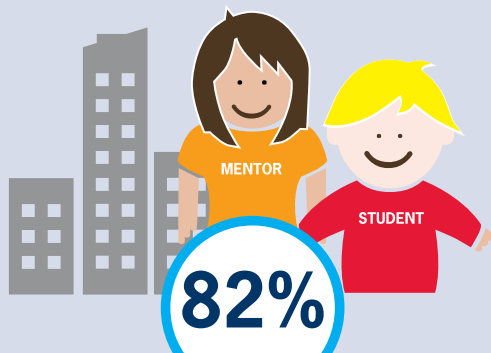
“We've had such a rough time with the separation. With The Smith Family, the kids have people that they can turn to for support,” said Lynette.

With your help, students now have other people that they can turn to for support. The learning programs, that your donation has helped fund, assist students to focus on their studies and guide them through some of life's challenges.

<sup>1</sup> Access Economics 2005, *The economic benefit of increased participation in education and training*. Dusseldorp Skills Forum and Business Council of Australia, Sydney.

## ***iTrack* evaluation 2017 – 2018**

The *iTrack* program pairs students in Years 9 to 11 with an adult mentor who provides guidance about study and career options.



of students agreed their mentor helped them understand more about how they can reach their career goals.



agreed that their mentor helped them feel more confident about their future job, career and study options.

## “The volunteering experience has been absolutely fulfilling” – Beryl

After 21 amazing years as one of our volunteers, Beryl has decided to retire. Over the decades she has helped to transform the lives of countless students. We are so very grateful to Beryl for her generous spirit and selfless work. Here's her story.

“I was a teacher in music and the arts. When I retired, I didn't want to just stop teaching and not have specific things to do. I felt I had energy and I wanted to put it into the community in some way,” said Beryl.

“So I sought out an organisation that I thought was really credible and that led me to make inquiries with The

Smith Family. I started off in reception and helping with the Christmas Toy and Book pack distribution.

**“I didn't expect that my role at The Smith Family would increase so much over the years. But I was delighted that it did!**

Beryl with Learning for Life students at a graduation ceremony





"I became involved with community relations. A lot of that was speaking to community groups. I particularly loved talking to children in schools.

"And through the *student2student* reading program, I partnered with a school for fourteen years as the supervisor. I oversaw 10 to 14 students each year in that program and I loved it.

"I have also really enjoyed meeting people. Speaking with other volunteers at lunchtime and knowing their varied backgrounds was very enriching. I just feel so privileged to have been able to have this experience after I finished working!"

As an ex-teacher, Beryl knows the importance of education in helping students to break the cycle of disadvantage. And she repeatedly saw the tangible impacts of her efforts in students' lives.

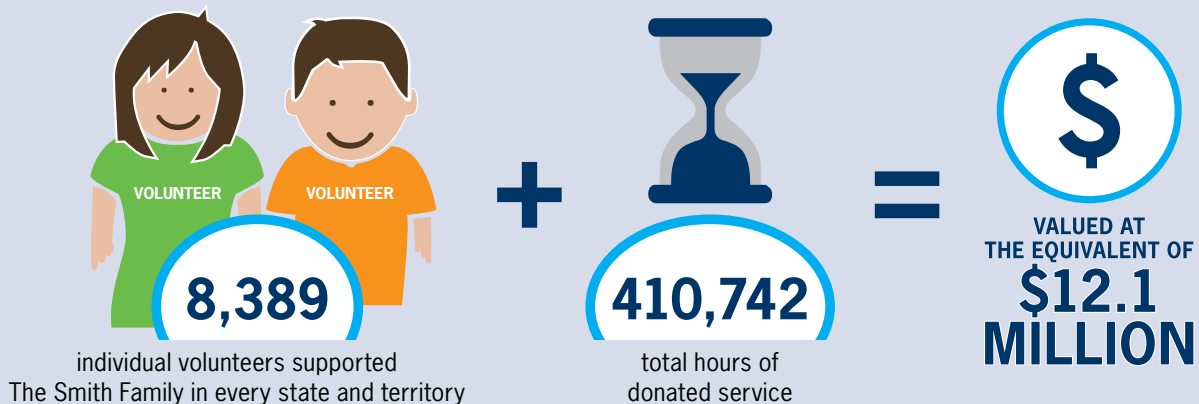
"So many disadvantaged young people drop out of school because they lack personal support or the finances to move forward. It's unfair that everyone in Australia doesn't have the same opportunities," said Beryl.

"Education is the basic thing that students need so they can choose what they would like to do in the future. I'm just amazed when I look at the results some of The Smith Family students have gone on to achieve, such as their Masters at university!

**"The volunteering experience has been absolutely fulfilling. There's such respect between staff and volunteers and I've learned many new skills. I can hardly believe where the 21 years have gone."**

## Thank you to our volunteers

Every year, we are grateful that so many compassionate people choose to help The Smith Family by volunteering their time and skills. Over the 2017-18 financial year:



## Lee almost gave up on her education

**When she started Year 10, Lee was at high risk of cutting her education short. Health challenges in primary school meant she missed many days while she was in hospital. By high school, she was so far behind it was hard for Lee to catch up, and this affected her motivation.**

“I’ve struggled with maths since primary school. And then in high school I failed English because I was slacking off,” said Lee.

“By Year 10, I had lots of stress. My grandpa was battling cancer. Later that year my dad and brother had a car crash and a close friend died. It was a lot to deal with.

“I was thinking about leaving school early.”

The feeling that graduating high school is an impossible goal is all too common for disadvantaged students. Last year, we released the first Australian study *Attendance lifts achievement: Building the evidence base to improve student outcomes*, which demonstrates the relationship between school attendance, achievement in English or maths, school completion and post-school work or study.

It showed that 75 per cent of students with high attendance in Year 7 completed Year 12. This compared to only 48 per cent of those with very low attendance.

**Our research also demonstrated that it is essential to provide targeted and timely support to improve students’ low school attendance and below-satisfactory achievement in English and maths.**

For Lee, receiving support was the deciding factor that kept her at school.



Lee with mum Karen and dad Craig

“Mum called The Smith Family and that’s how I joined *Learning Club*,” said Lee.

*Learning Clubs* provide safe and supportive out-of-school learning environments where students get help with their homework from trained volunteer tutors.

Read the full research report on our website:

[thesmithfamily.com.au/research](https://thesmithfamily.com.au/research)



Lee with Learning Club tutor, Anne

The practical support made Lee feel equipped to keep up in the classroom.

“Since *Learning Club*, I feel more confident with maths and I know how to do homework,” said Lee.

**“Now I am on track to graduate Year 12. My goal is to become a qualified hairdresser and own a salon.”**

Lee’s parents, Karen and Craig both left school before graduating. So they hadn’t felt equipped to help Lee succeed at school. But our learning programs that your donations go towards have really opened doors for Lee. And Karen and Craig couldn’t be more grateful.

“As parents our hearts were breaking because we couldn’t give our children the support they needed. We just wanted to see our kids go above and beyond with their education and happiness,” said Karen.



Find out more about Lee’s story in her video:  
[thesmithfamily.com.au/lee](https://thesmithfamily.com.au/lee)

Your support really means so much for students like Lee and her family. Thank you!

# Thanks to you, students are thriving

Each year, students are invited to take part in our Art & Writing competition, giving them the chance to express their creativity. We'd like to share with you this beautiful entry by 12-year-old Richez.



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