



Cecilia, former *Learning for Life* student

Real People, Real Stories

Thank you for changing lives through sponsorship.

Spring 2020



everyone's family

Your sponsorship has never been more critical

I can't thank you enough for being a sponsor. Since March, we have seen the biggest disruption to education ever posed to Australian children. Families, schools and communities continue to face difficult times. We are concerned that children who were already living in disadvantage before COVID-19, will face additional hardship. And if they do so, they risk slipping further behind in their education.

That's why we need sponsors like you, now more than ever.

Your sponsorship is so important. It helps your student in three critical ways:

- 1** Financial support for educational needs. This includes schoolbooks, stationery, and money to go towards digital devices and/or internet access.
- 2** A *Learning for Life* Coordinator who works closely with families and their children to support their educational needs at all times.
- 3** Access to our literacy, numeracy and mentoring programs which are delivered outside of school. These relieve the pressure on family members to support learning and help deliver structure.

This continued support will help your sponsored student as we go through this crisis.

Thank you again for all you do as a sponsor. I hope you enjoy seeing some of the wonderful outcomes of sponsorship in this edition of *Real People, Real Stories*.



Dr Lisa O'Brien
Chief Executive Officer



I would like to thank everyone who donated to our [Winter Appeal](#). I'm thrilled to announce that we surpassed our fundraising goal. Thanks to your generosity, more than **16,000 disadvantaged children will have access to our out-of-school learning programs, providing critical support for their education this year.**

Teyanah loves knowing she's not alone

Teyanah was very young when her mum passed away. Along with her two siblings, she went to live with her grandparents. It was a loving home, but Teyanah's grandparents weren't expecting to be raising children again at that stage of their lives. And it hasn't been without challenges.

"The children came to us almost 10 years ago. My husband is retired and I'm only working part time," said Teyanah's grandmother, Judy.

"We started receiving sponsorship for them nine years ago.

It has been an amazing help in being able to buy their uniforms and books and all of that. We would not have managed without it!"

When Teyanah reached the age where she needed to make decisions about her future, she didn't know who to turn to. Many decades had passed since her grandparents had finished school. Sponsorship gave her access to our online mentoring program *iTrack*. It was exactly the support Teyanah needed to form goals and a plan to achieve them.

"*iTrack* was really helpful. I didn't know what I wanted to do after school. My mentor pointed out different options. Now I know what I want to do and the program really helped with that. I want to go to university to study modern history," said Teyanah.

When the opportunity arose for Teyanah to also participate in our art enrichment program,



Teyanah, Learning for Life student, with her grandmother

SmArts, she jumped at it. *SmArts* supports students' engagement with school by increasing their creative skills and self-confidence. For Teyanah, the best part was meeting new people and the sense of community.

"Through *SmArts* we got to be active and learn to be more confident. We had a major dance company come out and show us some stuff," she said.

"It was really fun because we got to meet different people who were also with The Smith Family. I've now got a good friend from that experience. It's good to know that there's more than just my family out there struggling.

"I would like to say thank you to the sponsors for everything that you do. You have no idea how much you help the students that you sponsor!"

Extra help got Sylvana online during school closures

Sylvia took on the role as grandmother and mother when Sylvana was of very young age. It had been some time since Sylvia went to school and even then, there were no such thing as computers, and she learned to type on an old style typewriter. When COVID-19 hit, overnight Sylvia had to step into the role of teacher as well. Yet with no computer and limited internet, it was difficult to access Sylvana's learning materials.

"All the instructions for the school work each day were sent out in an email from the teacher in the morning. I had to keep opening the email on my phone to read and understand it. And I had to write it all down, because I didn't have a printer," said Sylvia.

"I only had a mobile phone with 10GB of data. I didn't have a computer. It wasn't easy because the schooling was all on YouTube. I ran out of data so quickly that I couldn't upload anything for Sylvana's assignments or responses back to the teacher."

Every sponsored student and their family is matched with a *Learning for Life* Coordinator. Our *Learning for Life* Coordinators, like Jenny, worked extra hard throughout the COVID-19 crisis to ensure students had the support they needed.

"Jenny called regularly to check how we were going and see how she could help. It was wonderful having someone who understood. Most of the other parents are in their 20s or 30s, so it's very different for me," said Sylvia.

When Jenny heard that Sylvana couldn't access the school materials, she was able to provide her with a laptop that had been generously donated by one of The Smith Family's corporate partners.

"The look on Sylvana's face was priceless when she opened the laptop. She was over the moon! Sylvana's new laptop and all her schooling stuff was set up on the dining table and that's where she did all her work."

"There are so many children out here that need this help and support, and parents don't want to ask because they feel it's intimidating. It makes them feel inadequate, like I did," said Sylvia.

Sylvia is so grateful to Sylvana's sponsor and the extended support of The Smith Family. It has been essential in helping Sylvana to participate fully in her schooling.



Sylvana, *Learning for Life* student

How did the COVID-19 crisis affect students?

Learning for Life Coordinators like Jenny and Nicole offer families guidance and support and connect them to learning opportunities. Here, Nicole gives you an inside look into what this has meant to families in need.

Q. What were the key issues facing families during the crisis?

A. There was a heightened anxiety for parents, and feelings of inadequacy about teaching their kids at home. I also spoke to parents of children with special needs, such as autism or physical disability. They couldn't access the therapy their children needed. It was a very challenging time for our families. Many don't have the internet or a device to access telehealth. Our families are so disadvantaged in that digital space.

Q. How did you offer support during this time?

A. One of the highlights was delivering the laptops that our corporate partners donated. I remember two siblings who were so excited because it meant they could do their homework. You don't expect kids to get excited about that. It was like Christmas for them.

I also spent a lot more time on the phone talking to families. I think it alleviated a sense of isolation. As well as the financial assistance, we support families through community referrals and connecting students to our own learning programs. That extra support is vital.



Nicole, Learning for Life Coordinator

Q. What sort of extra support do students need?

A. Mentoring is one example. A while back there was a boy who was interested in becoming a doctor. He had lost his dad and the family had plummeted into poverty. But he never let go of this dream. Through the mentoring he was paired with a doctor. His mum recently told me that he was going into medicine!

It's the little things that lead to the big stuff. I really love that our programs plant seeds of inspiration and encouragement.

Thanks to sponsors like you, students and their families are connected with our Learning for Life Coordinators. Having someone there to listen and help makes a world of difference. This help has been so essential during this time of crisis, and it will continue into the future.

A love of reading sparked a special project for these buddies

Mariah wasn't big on reading. She struggled in class and felt sad that her friends were ahead of her. So we paired up Mariah with her reading buddy, Lottie, through our *student2student* reading program. The results were electric. And it inspired them to create their own book!

One in three children in the most disadvantaged communities is developmentally vulnerable in one or more key areas when they start school.¹ When Year 11 student, Lottie, heard this, she wanted to help.

"The *student2student* Program Coordinator gave a presentation at our school assembly. When I heard the statistics, I felt like I could make a difference as a volunteer reading buddy," she said.

Through sponsorship, students like Mariah can take part in *student2student*. The program helps younger students who are two or more years behind in their reading to catch up. By reading over the phone, the pairs never meet in person, so students in need still received this vital support during the COVID-19 isolation period.

Mariah and Lottie read together over the phone two to three times a week. Each call was meant to last 20 minutes. Yet they enjoyed themselves so much that their calls would often last double that. Over the 18-week program, Lottie saw an enormous shift in Mariah.

"At the start, Mariah's reading was a bit stilted. I found that she knew how to read the words or sound them out, yet she was reluctant to try. By the end, she was reading quite fluently. And she would have a go at every word," said Lottie.

"After the program, I received a letter from Mariah. She said her favourite book was the first Harry Potter book. It made me feel really proud. I think that exemplifies the change in her confidence. She can now tackle a novel that, in some respects, is quite difficult."

Huge leaps in reading weren't Mariah's only accomplishment. Mariah and Lottie developed a great friendship and they came up with a joint project.

"Lottie was a friend to talk to and we started knowing each other well. It was really good! Then she said we should make a book," said Mariah.

"Each time Lottie called me, I was really happy because we were making a book. She asked, 'What should we put in the book?' She suggested animals and I said, 'Yes.'"

And they did it! You can check out their book on the page after next.

Although Mariah and Lottie have now completed *student2student*, they will never forget the journey they shared. And it was all possible because of sponsors like you.

"Coming home and reading with Mariah was the highlight of my day. I am really grateful for the program and I think I probably wouldn't be the person I am today without it," said Lottie.

1. Australian Government (2016) *Australian Early Development Census National Report*, 2015: A snapshot of early childhood development in Australian, DET: Canberra.



Lottie, *student2student* reading buddy

“*Student2student* is an amazing program. It showed me how crucial strong literacy foundations are for a child to feel comfortable and more confident at school. But the number one thing I took away from it was the importance of kindness and friendship that’s founded upon mutual trust and understanding,” said Lottie.

Mariah and Lottie's *student2student* storybook

Dear Mariah,

I hope you like the story we wrote together!
I have really enjoyed reading to you and I hope you've had fun reading as well!

You should be so proud of the progress you have made, you are an amazing reader!

Always keep reading and always be yourself. You are so kind and funny and you should be really proud of who you are.

Thank you for being such an amazing buddy Mariah! I will never forget our friendship!

From Lottie 

Mariah loved her pets so much! She always wished that she could take them to school with her...



And one day, she did!

Once upon a time, there was a young girl. Her name was Mariah.



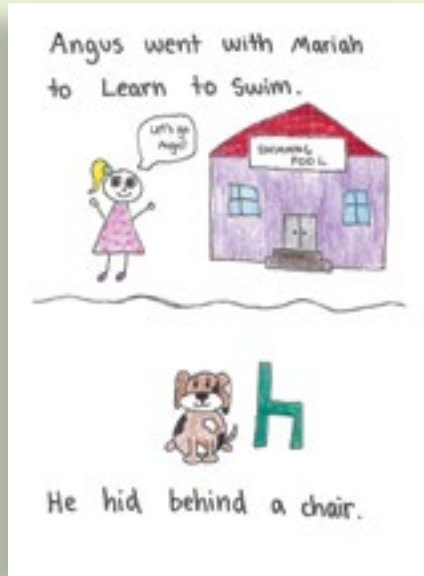
She loved the colour

 PINK! 



Charlie hid at the top of a tall tree.

Left and below, excerpts from the story book that Lottie and Mariah developed together.



Having a sponsor helped Fahad push through hard times

“There’s one story I think summarises pretty well how it was growing up. My brother and I were big fans of superheroes. When Spiderman 1 came out, my mum said to us, ‘Do you want to eat or do you want to watch Spiderman?’ We couldn’t afford both. We chose Spiderman,” says Fahad.

“Ever since Year 3 or 4, I’ve been sponsored through The Smith Family. The support meant we could buy things like my school uniform. It helped me fit in and feel like I was normal.

“For university, the sponsorship ramped up. You have to pay for travel, buy course packs, have good technology and all these things that cost a lot of money. The sponsorship made sure that I could meet those costs and worry less.

“I’ve wanted to do medicine for as long as I remember. But I got rejected three years in a row. I feel that my experience with hardship was really important in giving me discipline and resilience. I didn’t give up. The fourth time got me in!

“Right now, medicine is something that’s dominated by people from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. You’re working with people where they’re very vulnerable. I feel that as a doctor, I can use my disadvantaged background to connect with people from a low socioeconomic community.



Fahad, *Learning for Life* student

“I wouldn’t be where I am without people like my sponsors supporting me. That really compels you to push through the hard times. I feel that I’ve been blessed with the opportunity to be able to study medicine.”



Four in five students

who left in Years 10 to 12 were working and/or studying 12 months after leaving the program

Berne was told she would ‘never amount to anything’

“I went to 23 different schools and lived with 17 different foster parents. One of my strongest memories was walking to school, aged 9 in an adult skirt that was held together with a pin, and a shirt that was stained and falling apart. I was often told, ‘You’ll never amount to anything. You’re dirty. You smell,’” said Berne.

“When I see the ads for The Smith Family and the young girl in the ill-fitting uniform, I just hope that people understand that this is very real. It’s not just media. Kids in Australia really experience this.”

Berne has never forgotten how hard her early years were. But she also remembers the kindness of generous strangers. The Smith Family has a long history of helping children living in poverty. When Berne was younger, that came in the form of food and clothing.

Now, through sponsorship, we make sure disadvantaged children have the financial assistance, program support and emotional guidance to help them go further with their education. And Berne is passionate about giving children in need the chance to have a better future.

“Now my husband and I sponsor five children. We write letters and send them birthday cards and gifts. We also gave each of our own children a sponsored child one year for their Christmas present. And they continue to sponsor them, which is wonderful!”

These days Berne is an executive in Digital Health Management and an Associate Professor at a university. It was a long road there and she worked for it every step of the way. She knows that having education support in those early years can make all the difference.

“I feel like breaking that cycle of disadvantage is what I have been able to do and what I want for other young Australians. I love being able to think that the money that I’m giving back is helping some others, making their dark days a little bit better,” said Berne.



Berne, The Smith Family sponsor

Thanks to generous sponsors like you
49,735 students
received vital sponsorship
support last year

A student's letter to their sponsor

Dear Sponsor,

Thank you for all the support that you have given me. You've helped me without even knowing who I am, and I am forever grateful for that. Without the support, I don't think I would have been able to graduate with a Bachelor of Education degree.

I would like to deliver some good news. I've landed a full-time job as a primary school teacher and I LOVE IT!

Life was hard for my parents. I recall them working many hours on minimum wage. We could barely afford basic needs. It was harder when my dad suddenly passed away. My mum was struggling to cope with raising two kids, as well as my grandparents. Education became harder too. Without the uniform, books, stationery and excursions, I felt different to everyone else. I told my mum, "I don't want to go on excursions", to ensure I didn't add to our financial burdens.

But one day, the school principal told me that The Smith Family would like to sponsor me. It saved my family from the darkest times. I had proper uniforms and books. It was the best feeling ever. When I was in high school, textbooks became more expensive. At tertiary level, the fees grew bigger, but so did my passion and love towards teaching. Sponsorship reduced the financial burden.

From a young age, I decided to pursue teaching so I could work closely with children and support their education. I truly feel that education changes lives.

Thanking you from the bottom of my heart,
Cecilia



Cecilia, former Learning for Life student

thesmithfamily.com.au

Email: sponsorship@thesmithfamily.com.au

Phone: 1800 633 622

Mail: The Smith Family
GPO Box 10500, Sydney NSW 2001

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