



Celebrating 93 Years

On Saturday 14 November, the *A Start in Life* team and Executive Committee were delighted to host the 93rd anniversary luncheon for the former students of the William Thompson Masonic School - the earliest beneficiaries of our charity.



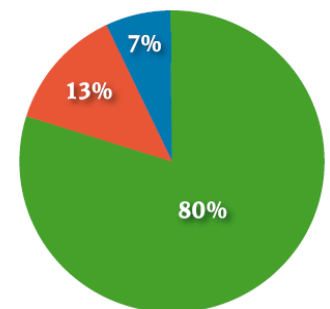
The Class of 2015

With Christmas holidays nearing and the 2015 academic year coming to an end, the *A Start in Life* team and Executive Committee wish to extend a huge congratulations to each of our students for their effort and determination over the past 12 months. We continue to be inspired by their resilience and encouraged by their progress, and we are deeply humbled by the positive feedback we have been receiving from the students, their families and carers, and from their teachers. Clearly, our increased level of support is already making a significant difference to the students' performance, motivation and wellbeing.

This year, again, we received many new applications for support from students and families, each with unique but equally complex circumstances and needs. At the same time, we continue to support those whose level of need necessitates long-term engagement in order to effectively address the barriers to their education. Whilst the education levels of our students vary, most are living in single parent households and all are living below the poverty line.

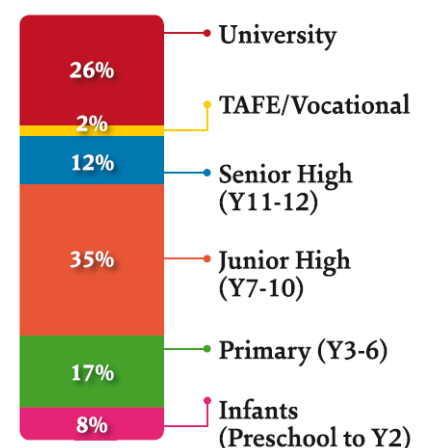
Here we share with you a snapshot of our students in 2015...

Family Arrangements in 2015



- Single parent family
- Two parent family
- Grandparent/Kinship care

Level of Education in 2015



Duration of Support to 2015



Did you know?

The most common field of study for our tertiary students in 2015 was Medical Sciences, Nursing and Medicine, with 19% of students working towards qualifications in this area.

A Mum's Message To Our Supporters

"My son started high school this year. He was so used to not having things others kids had, he thought he was not going to fit in.

But *A Start in Life* changed his world. He is now playing with his school band on stage and in the right uniform, and he is able to contribute so much more because he has the right equipment. He is really reaching his true potential.

My daughter too is able to wear her proper uniform to school and loves looking like all the other kids. She is also doing theatre/drama as an extracurricular activity, which is helping her reading, writing and self-confidence in the process.

For me, the support has meant not being ashamed at school, because my kids can now go on excursions and camps. I love to see my children so HAPPY when they get to do these things – it's the best. To see what it does for my children brings so much happiness (and dignity), and just how much the small things can change a child's outlook on life is amazing! So thank you."



Farewell Janneke

The *A Start in Life* team is very sad to farewell Janneke Phillips who will be leaving us as a volunteer this November after three and a half years of service. Janneke has been a pleasure to work with and a shining light in our office. We wish her well in her future endeavours.

Christmas Art Competition

This past October, *A Start in Life's* primary and high school students participated in our first ever Christmas art competition. Students were asked to design Christmas trees and baubles, with the chosen designs to feature on plantable Christmas cards, on sale at at Shangri-La Hotel, Sydney and Lowes stores nationwide throughout December. "Judging the designs proved extremely difficult," said *A Start in Life's* Fundraising & Communications Manager, Lisa Colquhoun. "All the students did such a fantastic job; it was hard to pick only ten winners," she added. Congratulations to Angelina, Ezeline, Isabella, Katrina, Lasveta, Morrison, Nelson, Rebecca, Sophie and William, who were each awarded a \$30 voucher for their winning Christmas designs.



Making Christmas Brighter

Every year, it seems to start earlier and earlier: shopping malls adorned with Christmas decorations; supermarket aisles overflowing with confectionery; letterboxes filled to the brim with toy catalogues; and children's favourites like *The Santa Clause* and *Home Alone* airing on TV. For most Australian kids and families, the lead-up to Christmas is as exciting as it is hopeful; however, for those supported by *A Start in Life*, it can often be a time of sadness, disappointment and enormous financial stress.

87% of the children supported by *A Start in Life* are living in single-parent families or are being cared for by grandparents or other relatives. Some of these children have lost a parent or both parents either through death or abandonment; others have been removed from their custody. In stark contrast to the images of happily families gathered around the Christmas turkey, so prevalent at this time of year, these children are often mourning or missing once key family members.

"Many of our students are hurting at a time when their peers are celebrating," said *A Start in Life's* CEO, Neil Robinson. "Their pain is only amplified by the disappointment of missing out on Christmas gifts which their peers often take for granted," he added.

Spreading Christmas cheer to our families

To make Christmas a little brighter for our students, and to ease the financial burden on parents and carers, *A Start in Life* will again be drawing from our funds to present each student with a Coles/Myer gift voucher to spend over the holidays.

"We know from working with the families just how much they need and value the gift vouchers, and how they feel remembered and cared about over the holiday season," said Student & Family Management team member, Sara Lamedo.