Grounded in a wartime **promise**

Each November, **poppies appear on lapels across Australia to mark the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month,** when the guns fell silent in 1918. *A Start in Life* wears its own version: a yellow poppy, marking a debt deeper than a single day of remembrance.

On Armistice Day 1922, five thousand Freemasons walked in procession along Seven Hills Road in Baulkham Hills to open a school built on a former dairy farm: a home and an education for the children of men who had gone to war and never came home. A year later, William Thompson, Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, whose own son had been killed on the Western Front, established the NSW Masonic Schools Welfare Fund to carry the support further. Along the boundary, 364 Brush Box gum trees were planted that year, one for every mason lost in the war, an avenue the children living there were asked to tend.



MW Bro William Thompson, Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of New South Wales, and founder of the NSW Masonic Schools Welfare Fund in 1923, the organisation that became A Start in Life.

What changed & what did not

For nearly fifty years, support was limited to the masonic community that built it. In 1972, the organisation widened its constitution to reach any young Australian facing financial hardship and took the name it carries today. More than 7,000 students have been supported since 1923.

> *...an education for the children of men who had gone to war and never came home.*

The need has changed shape, not size. Today's floor of government support still has gaps: a uniform, a laptop, a TAFE course just out of reach. *A Start in Life* now supports students aged 4 to 24 across NSW and the ACT with no government funding.

Why lodges still answer

Amongst the many Freemason supporters of *A Start in Life,* Bro Simon Pierce captured the importance of education simply:

'Education is the metaphorical map. Children need to be given every opportunity to learn as much as they can, so they will be well informed as to their path in life.'

W Bro Guy Thornycroft shares a similar view: 'Boys become men and Masonry aims to take good men and make them better. *A Start in Life* offers children the chance to have more financial freedom than their circumstances bias them towards.'

Their words capture a belief that has guided *A Start in Life* for more than a century: that every child deserves the opportunity to reach their potential, regardless of financial circumstances.

It is the same instinct William Thompson acted on in 1922. This Remembrance Day, may every Freemason see in that legacy not only a memory to honour, but a charge to carry forward: to keep giving so that the next generation may stand taller than the last.

Ready to support the next generation of Australian students? Learn more about ways to help here: