Date: 10 February 2023

**W M Forster’s legacy of compassion: Sparkways celebrates 140 years of changing lives**

[Sparkways](https://sparkways.org.au/) has been empowering children and young people to thrive since 1883, and in 2023 will celebrate 140 years of making a difference in the lives of those in need.

Then known as the TRY Society, the organisation is the brainchild of William Mark Forster, a successful and well-connected clothing merchant and philanthropist, who was concerned for the plight of under-privileged children left behind by a rapidly expanding Melbourne society in the late 19th century.

His simple idea inspired both the name of the society, and its ethos: that with opportunity and guidance all young people could be successful in life - all they had to do was try.

W M Forster’s ideas were considered bold for their time and were a precursor to the approach the organisation takes today. A number of cutting-edge initiatives followed through the early years of the organisation - from meetings that taught young people through lectures on health and wellbeing and activities such as music lessons to boot repair and shorthand, the organisation is always one which has “grown with the times” and in response to the needs of those it serves.

In the 1990’s the organisation moved into early childhood education, managing a kindergarten for the City of Seymour, and then moving into mentoring and job skills training.

Reflecting the changes of today’s complex world, the organisation changed its name in 2021, in recognition of the fact that simply trying, in today’s society, is no longer enough, pivoting to be named Sparkways.

The new name reflects the long-held values of the organisation, given a modern lift to reflect the capacity to spark change in the lives of others, CEO Daniel Findley explained.

Mr Forster’s legacy has remained pervasive throughout Sparkways, as those it employs continue to build on his vision and work through youth programs, mentoring programs, and the work done in Sparkways’ network of 45 early childhood education and care services which support Melbourne’s children and families.

To mark 140 years, and the rich legacy established by Mr Forster, Sparkways will conducting events both internally and externally throughout the year and give Victorians a look at the people both past and present, whose lives were changed by their association with Sparkways and TRY.

“It’s both an honour and a privilege to be a part of an organisation which has supported Melbourne’s children and young people for so many years,” Mr Findley said.” We will continue to work with our communities, and together we will make a difference for another 140 years.”

To learn more about Sparkways please see [here](https://sparkways.org.au/). For interviews, imaging or more information contact Caroline Henricks at caroline.henricks@sparkways.org.au or on 0437 896 091

ABOUT SPARKWAYS

We are a Melbourne non-profit organisation working operating for 140 years alongside our communities. We work to ensure our children and young people are given every opportunity to reach their full potential.

We run:

- Youth Services programs; Mentoring and employment, and

- Early Learning services; Childcare centres and Kindergarten Management.