



SDN Beranga, 2014

From 2006 until 2016 SDN was an Inclusion Support Agency provider across several New South Wales and ACT regions, working with thousands of child care services.

In 2008, SDN's 'Community of Learners' proposal was approved under the NSW Government's 'Stronger Together' initiative. Through this funding SDN partnered with early childhood centres, supporting them to develop successful inclusive, family-centred transdisciplinary practices, and also worked with families to best meet the needs of their children with disabilities. At the same time, SDN's LanguageLinks professionals were working with families in their homes.

Continually developing our services for children with additional needs in 2013 we opened SDN Beranga, where children with Autism Spectrum Disorder are supported to move into mainstream centres and schools. The same year saw the announcement of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), an exciting new approach to the provision of care introducing individual funding packages. In 2015, SDN undertook 'fee for service' disability services pilots in the ACT and Nepean/Blue Mountains. Always bearing in mind that at the 'centre' of the funding is not only a child, but a family, SDN continues to play an important role in providing vital family services as this scheme is rolled out more comprehensively.

2015 also saw SDN introduce scholarships to financially support children with additional needs attending our centres.



## Looking ahead

*We are working towards a better, more equitable world where the promise and potential of every child is realised.*

*SDN Children's Services Strategic Plan 2016–2018*

### At SDN — The promise and potential of every child

Caring for young children is important and enjoyable. It can also be, at times, tiring and stressful. Caring for children with additional needs can provide further challenges, sometimes accompanied by difficult feelings, such as isolation and guilt.

SDN Disability Services now provides tailored and flexible support for families through the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Since 1905, SDN has understood the rewards and challenges associated with caring for and educating young children with disabilities. One of our foundation aims was 'to keep home and family together'. This aim still resonates today as we continue to work with, and support, all our families to help create the outcomes they want for their child. SDN's transdisciplinary teams continue to provide innovative and inclusive family-centred services for children with disabilities, where intervention is embedded into a child's everyday activities. Quite simply, at SDN, they are all 'children, first and foremost'.

Since we opened our first long day child care nursery in 1905, SDN has been committed to addressing inequalities and enhancing life chances to ensure the potential of every child is nurtured and realised. Today, SDN's excellent centres and innovative programs continue to help young children with disabilities access the services they need, participate in their activities of choice, and play an active role in their community.



Playing with sensory toys at an SDN nursery, 1935

[www.sdn.org.au](http://www.sdn.org.au)

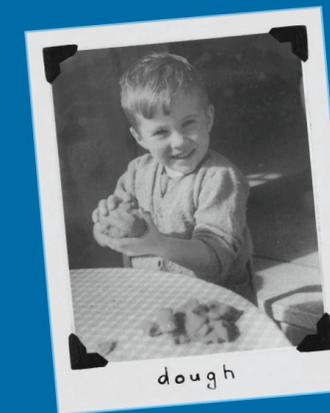
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This document was prepared by SDN's History and Archive team. The SDN Archive was established in 2002 to collect, maintain, research and promote the valuable and extensive collection of historical records amassed by SDN since its establishment in 1905.

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# Children first and foremost

## A history of SDN's disability services



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# We all have unique qualities, and some of us experience disability.

The World Health Organisation says that disability is ‘a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between features of a person’s body and features of the society in which he or she lives.’ In Australia, the care of children with disabilities has changed significantly over the years. At SDN children with disabilities have always been ‘children, first and foremost’. Since we opened our first nursery in 1905, in a small terrace house in inner-city Sydney, we have believed a child’s additional needs should form part of their life, rather than define it. For more than 110 years, the right of every child to receive quality early years education and nurturing child care, so they can reach their full potential, has been a cornerstone of our philosophy.

*An integrated ‘Early Intervention’ program is based on the concept that all children, whether they have disabilities or not are children, first and foremost.*

Early Intervention Programme Report, SDN Annual Report, 1989–90

## 1900 onwards

**FLASHBACK FACT** In the early-1900s, many children with disabilities in Australia spent their lives in hospitals originally built for adults with mental health conditions.



A professional educator directs play at SDN Woolloomooloo, 1932

Children at our nurseries enjoyed a safe and clean environment and nutritious meals. Unusually for the time, the children also benefited from free medical and dental assessments, parental support, and even home visits.

In the early 1930s, SDN also introduced the first nursery schools in New South Wales, staffed by graduates of the Nursery School Teachers’ College, which we established at the same time. At the nursery schools, the emphasis was broadened to include the physical, emotional and intellectual development of young children by our professional educators. SDN’s annual report of 1931 explicitly states the importance we placed on ‘the nurture and development, physical, social, psychological, of very young children by means of simple and carefully directed play and free physical activity’.

*To promote the health, happiness and future welfare of these little ones.*

One of the objectives of the Sydney Day Nursery Association, c.1925

### Case Study: Patricia

In the late-1940s Patricia, a little girl with visual impairment, started attending SDN’s Herne Bay Nursery School (now SDN Riverwood). With the support of staff, Patricia quickly embraced the routines of the nursery school, made a large group of friends, had fun joining in the many activities, and developed increasing independence. The SDN Supervisor of Nursery Schools at the time, Ethel Lakeman, reported ‘when Pat entered at the age of four she was completely dependent on her elders. After two months, she [could] do everything for herself, including playing with toys and outside equipment’.



Patricia, at SDN’s Herne Bay Nursery School (now SDN Riverwood). Sydney Sun and Guardian, 4 August 1950

## 1940 onwards

**FLASHBACK FACT** In the 1940s, a shift in the care of children with disabilities began in Australia and it was acknowledged that children should not spend their lives in medical hospitals. The importance of socialising and school attendance began to be recognised. However, children with disabilities often lived in residential homes or attended ‘special’ schools, and spent a large proportion of their time with others experiencing similar challenges. Their lives and futures continued to be defined by their additional needs and physical restrictions.



An SDN nursery excursion: A little boy who had a hearing impairment enjoying a visit to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, 1964

### At SDN — All-round development

There are many documented instances from the 1940s onwards of children attending SDN nurseries and nursery schools receiving additional support with regard to their speech, motor skills, emotional and psychological challenges, and cognitive abilities. The curriculum at SDN’s pioneering Nursery School Teachers’ College ensured graduates were well-equipped with the knowledge and skills required to enhance the development of every child through their inclusion in mainstream activities.

SDN was also ground-breaking with regard to the employment of Welfare Officers, and other specialist professionals, to assess children, work with families and prioritise nursery placements.

*[We] realise that the all-round development of our small charges depends on a close liaison between social, physical and educational workers.*

SDN Annual Report, 1951–52

## 1980 onwards

**FLASHBACK FACT** In the early-1980s, the number of children in Australia with additional needs was formally counted for the first time, and disability services across the country were mapped. Children with disabilities began to receive more community-based services. Also, the importance of the roles played by carers, and value of family consultation, began to be recognised.

### At SDN — How alike children are

SDN has always recognised the importance of early diagnosis, and incorporated intervention in mainstream activities. So when, in the early 1980s, an integrated approach was acknowledged as best practice more widely across Australia, we were well-



Listening and learning at SDN Lady McKell, Goulburn, 1987

placed to embrace this shift. In 1985, SDN received funding from the Commonwealth government to establish a ‘Special Needs Unit’. Based in SDN Linthorpe Street, Newtown, the Unit provided early intervention for individual children with disabilities who were attending SDN centres.

SDN’s disability service provisions were extended in 1997 when we became a sponsor of the FOCUS Support Service intervention program based in Parramatta which, in 1999, opened a centre that included a toy library and other resources for children with disabilities. At this time, SDN was funded by the Commonwealth government to offer the SUPS program. In 2006, the resource centre moved to Granville.

*In our programme emphasis is placed on how ‘alike’ our children are to the other children in the group rather than how different they are from them.*

Early Intervention Programme Report, SDN Annual Report, 1989–90



Playing at the Family Resource Centre in Granville, 2007

## 2000 onwards

**FLASHBACK FACT** By the 2000s, the concept of ‘disability’ began to be viewed in Australia as socially-created, rather than the attributes of specific individuals. It was increasingly advocated that society adopt a collective responsibility to facilitate the full participation of all children, including those with additional needs.

### At SDN — Stronger, together

In 2005 SDN marked our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. By this time we were providing comprehensive, embedded disability services in our centres and our Early Learning Program was supporting the families of children with disabilities in the community.



Enjoying a swing in the hammock at SDN Beranga, 2013

### Case Study: ‘Lawrence’

In 2003, eight-year-old Lawrence’s mum, Josephine, was struggling. She was raising Lawrence, who had been diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, on her own and she was also experiencing some personal problems. Josephine was referred to the newly-established SDN Parent Resource Program and Lawrence was offered a place in one of our high-quality child care centres, with integrated services supporting his additional needs. This enabled Josephine to undertake further education, obtain part-time work and gain confidence as a person, and a mother. The positive effects for Lawrence were life-changing.

From J Goodfellow (2006), *Parents Speaking Out: Stories of parents in SDN Children’s Services Parent Resource Program*. Redfern, NSW: SDN Children’s Services.

1905

SDN opens its first long day care nursery in Inner-Sydney, providing holistic care for vulnerable and disadvantaged children

1940s

Children with additional needs receive multidisciplinary support, care and education at SDN nurseries and nursery schools

1980s

SDN Special Needs Unit opens

1990s

SDN Inclusion Support Team formed under the SUPS national program

SDN FOCUS starts providing intervention service in Parramatta/Holroyd for local children with additional needs

2000s

Early Learning Program commences, providing ground-breaking home visiting services

SCAN (Supporting Children with Additional Needs) service introduced by SDN

2005

SDN starts operating Inclusion Support Agencies

Play Links services introduced by SDN

2010

SDN commences Community of Learners, supporting practitioners in best practice. LanguageLinks home-based services also commences

Early Start Program commences

Early Learning Program, Community of Learners, and Early Start adapted to become Early Childhood Links

2013

SDN Beranga (a centre supporting children on the Autism Spectrum transition to mainstream school) opens

2015

SDN successfully undertakes ‘fee for service’ disability services pilot in ACT and Nepean/Blue Mountains

SDN introduces Scholarships to financially support children with disabilities attending our centres