

# Ngara Nanga Mai

SDN's strategy for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



SDN Ngara Nanga Mai



# Who we are



**SDN** Children's Services is a not-for-profit organisation that has been delivering quality early childhood education, care and family support since 1905. We are proud of our long history of working with children and their families, working with communities, and supporting the development of practitioners and children's services. With around 700 staff across 36 sites in Sydney, regional NSW and the ACT, we have grown into one of Australia's most respected children's services organisation.

## Our mission

We are working towards a future where:

- ▶ the promise and potential of every child is realised
- ▶ families and communities are strong and caring
- ▶ children's services are valued and well resourced.

## Our vision

- ▶ provide high-quality, inclusive early childhood education and care. This means our services are safe, affordable, inclusive and as inspiring as possible
- ▶ strengthen families and communities. This means we build strong connections within communities
- ▶ address inequalities faced by children. This means we challenge discrimination and help remove barriers to full inclusion.

# What we do



We know from research and our own experience that getting a good start in life means that a range of resources and services are needed, and are more effective if coordinated. Our mix of professional skills means we are able to provide a range of options for children and families, including:

- ▶ early childhood education, including pre-school programs
- ▶ long day care for young children
- ▶ playgroups
- ▶ parenting programs



- ▶ family support
- ▶ therapeutic intervention
- ▶ practitioner capacity building.

Our person-centred, place-based 'Pathways approach' provides the framework for these different service models to be combined in ways that make sense to families and help children the most.

# Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



There is considerable evidence that, from a social justice perspective, quality early education and care experiences can turn around the negative effects of disadvantage. Our organisational strategic plan identifies that we need to do more so that particular groups have more opportunities to participate in and benefit from our services. We have identified three priority groups that we have experience working with, where we have existing capability and where we believe we can have the greatest impact; one of these groups is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

SDN formally recognises and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of this country. Our Ngara Nanga Mai strategy for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples stems from our underpinning philosophy and our vision of a world where the promise and potential of every child is realised, and families and communities are strong and caring. It reflects our mission to address inequalities faced by children, and our values of inclusion and respect.



*Ngara Nanga Mai* is an *Eora* (Sydney) name that means ‘listen and dream’. The purpose of this strategy is for us to listen to and dream with Aboriginal children and adults and their communities and Elders to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices, approaches and perspectives throughout the organisation.

In August 2014, SDN’s Board approved our ‘Stretch’ Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), which has been endorsed by Reconciliation Australia. Our RAP documents the practical steps we are taking and our goals for developing relationships, showing respect and increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We employ Aboriginal Practice Leads within our Practice, Learning and



Development Team. Their role is to lead and implement capacity building strategies that enhance the capabilities of SDN practitioners so that they are able to use practices that are culturally appropriate, reflective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and consistent with SDN’s approved approaches and policies.

Additionally, SDN delivers several government-funded programs to support Aboriginal children and families in our local communities.

SDN as an organisation values the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our organisational infrastructure has proven an invaluable and essential framework, ensuring the success and sustainability of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholarship program.

# A snapshot of SDN's work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

**N.S.W. State Secretary,  
Federal Council of  
Aboriginal Advancement:**

Asking for the Association's endorsement of proposed petition to Federal Parliament for a national referendum to alter the Commonwealth Constitution in order to remove two clauses which hinder the development of Australian aborigines.

It was proposed by Mrs. Brocklehurst and seconded by Mrs. Gregory that the Association should endorse the above petition.

Carried.

The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association (the original name for SDN) Executive Committee meeting minutes, 19 November 1962. Source: SDN Archive



Nursery school teacher Jennifer Hill and child, Surry Hills Day Nursery and Nursery School (now SDN Surry Hills), 1964. Source: SDN Archive



Joan Fry, Principal of SDN's Nursery School Teachers' College, 1956. Source: National Archives of Australia: A1501, A467/1.

'I see Ngara Nanga Mai as the next logical step for us to take in thinking through our stated mission of addressing inequalities faced by children. The inequality that Aboriginal peoples experience in health, education and employment is on public record. SDN is committed to listening more closely to what Aboriginal people themselves have to say about this and what together we can do to progress. I welcome Ngara Nanga Mai and am excited about its potential to shape SDN's policies and practice'. Ginie Udy, CEO, SDN Children's Services, 2010

'By wearing the SDN Ngara Nanga Mai uniform, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners are able to demonstrate their pride in their cultural identity and SDN's commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture throughout the organisation in respectful and meaningful ways'. **Aboriginal Practice Lead, 2013**



'The SDN Reconciliation Action Plan commits our whole organisation to create meaningful relationships and sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as Australia's First Peoples and custodians of this land.' **Darren Mitchell, SDN President, 2014**



Like all parents I would like the best start in life for my child. Being a single Aboriginal mother has only strengthened my resolve to provide her with the best education possible, the scholarship has given us that chance.' **Parent of a Scholarship Recipient**

'In 2014 SDN made a commitment to a Cross Organisational approach to Learning and Development and identified being a Culturally Competent Organisation as a priority for SDN's Pathways Approach. Community Leaders and Practice Learning and Development team members partnered with Charlotta Oberg Founder/Director of PRISMA Cross Cultural Consulting, to become trainers and began to facilitate the roll out of the Foundation Course: Cultural Competence for SDN Staff.

In 2015, SDN Practice Leads partnered with Charlotta Oberg to facilitate the Foundation Course: Cultural Competence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff working in SDN Services.

It provided the opportunity to connect with practice stories to support embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and being in our programs and services'. **Glynis Chang, Director, Practice, Learning and Development, 2015**

# Gangari artist: Kathryn Dodd Farrawell

Gangari artist from Cape York/North Queensland Kathryn Dodd Farrawell created *The Creation Snake* in 2010 to symbolise the collective listening and dreaming of many people and communities that staff have worked with for our children. Aunty Kathy has woven the rainbow throughout to link the collaborative process and visions of all the listeners and many dreamers that inspired the birth of SDN's Ngara Nanga Mai strategy for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Each panel represents the collaborations of programs over many years. The following pages outline the story of each panel at the time the artwork was created, and the story the panels tell of our vision now and for the future.

The original storyline is from many conversations between the children, families, community and staff. Aunty Kathy's time spent with the children at SDN's Glebe Aboriginal playgroup and at SDN Linthorpe Street in Newtown, enabled Aunty Kathy to authentically document the many voices and experiences of children, staff, families and community.



# SDN's Ngara Nanga Mai logo

In 2014 SDN's Aboriginal Practice Leads, in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners, reflected on how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture influences the educational program within our programs and services. This project transformed 'The Creation Snake' story panels reflecting our past work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to an artwork also reflective of our vision for now and the future.



SDN's Ngara Nanga Mai logo was inspired

by Kathryn Dodd Farrawell's *The Creation Snake*, and is only used for activities that explain or promote SDN's work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



**SDN Ngara Nanga Mai**

The inspiration for the logo appears in panel seven. The large white circles in the logo represent the gathering of people and communities to transfer knowledge, communicate and encourage two-way learning. The white lines between the circles display this two-way learning process, with knowledge passed between people and communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community are depicted through the small white inner circles. The orange lines in the logo represent the tracks to learning, and the transferring and passing of knowledge between generations.

# Panel 1: The vision



**The original vision** The rainbow represents promise as the images of the sun, moon and stars shine equally on everybody. It represents hope as there's always a chance of recovery; it's like a guiding light moving forward to better things. It is positive as when you see rainbows you think of happy times and strength.

**Our vision now and for the future** The head of the snake represents the vision. The rainbow is symbolic of promise, hope and strength, and aligns with SDN's vision of a world where the promise and potential of every child is realised, and families and communities are strong and caring. It provides an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on SDN's Ngara Nanga Mai strategy and their individual contribution towards addressing inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

## Panel 2: Working together



**The original vision** The children are the spirit and hope of the past, present and future and they are heart and soul of our work and the reason we continue to demand that all children are given equality and rights.

This panel depicts the importance of relationships between practitioners, children, families and community, to embed culturally inclusive practices within SDN programs and services. The children in the artwork remind us that the reason we are working together is to enhance the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's lives and their life chances, through participation in our services and programs.

**Our vision now and for the future** From a practice perspective, authenticity and transparency, as well as the establishment of genuine relationships with children, families and communities is critical. Consultation and partnerships with the local community also strengthens SDN's commitment to our past, present and future work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Panel 3: Cultural awareness



**The original vision** “It is about acknowledgement, recognition, ceremony, protocol and everything that reflects respectful and strong relationships to share Aboriginal cultural knowledge.”

**Our vision now and for the future** This panel highlights the value of participating in shared dialogue and knowledge. SDN’s Pathways approach recognises that all people and activities working for and on behalf of SDN have a shared responsibility for children’s wellbeing and directly or indirectly influence outcomes for children. Participation in culturally inclusive, high quality early childhood education programs and care assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to get the best start in life.

## Panel 4: Pathways for families



**The original vision** “Children bring new perspectives and connection to everyday learning. This panel is all about the children at SDN’s Ngara Nanga Mai Glebe Playgroup. The people of the community, the children and the staff work together, share knowledge and contribute to the playgroup to make it work.”

**Our vision now and for the future** This panel highlights SDN’s early vision for Pathways for Families, reflecting the SDN Glebe playgroup. The children’s painted hands remind us to be present in the moment and actively listen to children. Playgroups enable practitioners, families, community and children to co-construct knowledge together. Offering strong, culturally competent practice provides opportunities to strengthen families, thereby enhancing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

## Panel 5: Acknowledgement



**The original vision** “The purple balloons are for the Native Hibiscus for the Stolen Generation. Stolen Generation history is a shared history and we are all responsible to make sure this doesn’t happen again.”

The colour purple denotes compassion and spiritual healing, and the purple balloons in this panel represent the native hibiscus, symbolic of the Stolen Generation.

Few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have escaped the impacts of the forcible removal of children, so this panel recognises stolen generation history.

**Our vision now and for the future** As part of the organisations vision for reconciliation, SDN believes that without acknowledgement, there can be no healing and without healing there can be no reconciliation.

Each year, programs and services across SDN recognise this significant day for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Panel 6: Education



**The original vision** “This panel represents knowledge, teaching and learning. It symbolises strength and determination to keep on learning. The images are of students learning, keeping focussed and achieving. Our learning starts with our family at home and when we track from our home and family we always remember that each day brings new opportunity for hope.”

There are many pathways to educational success and knowing who you are, and not forgetting where you come from, gives us the strength and determination to keep on learning.

**Our vision now and for the future** The swing signifies motion, and reminds us that motivation is a contributing factor to keeping focused and achieving. As an organisation we recognize the support and positive influence of family, Elders and community as significant to educational success. From a practice perspective, this encourages us to continually reflect on the relationships we have with families and communities in our programs and services, and be mindful of how we actively engage significant others in supporting and motivating children to continue their love of learning.

## Panel 7: Ngara Nanga Mai logo



**The original vision** “Our logo was chosen from this panel to represent the Aboriginal people in communities, and there are tracks leading to the community and connecting lines are for two-way learning and sharing.”

**Our vision now and for the future** The motion of the hands are reaching out and drawing together communities, evolving and making change to strengthen and value all learning experiences.

This panel inspired the logo for SDN’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategy. The large white circles in the logo represent the gathering of people and communities to transfer knowledge, communicate and encourage two-way learning. The white lines between the circles display this two way learning process, with knowledge passed between people and communities. Aboriginal people in the community are depicted through the small white inner circles.

## Panel 8: Momentum through practice



**The original vision** “The tail is what’s keeping the momentum. Like a rudder on a boat, it is the steering and guiding force. You can’t move forward unless you know that your past has a beginning and an end.

The images we see in the tail are of children playing and having fun in communities.

The colours of the background are like seeds on the ground for regeneration and the roots of many generations to remind us to listen and learn from mother earth.”

The final panel, the tail of the snake, represents the momentum that keeps SDN’s vision alive. It is the everyday practices of individuals and teams within programs and services, which enhance equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.”

**Our vision now and for the future** Embedding culturally inclusive practices within the educational program ensures a sense of belonging for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and enables our programs and services to be responsive and unique to each community.

# Planning for the future — SDN's Reconciliation Action Plan



**SDN**'s Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) is our public statement that formalises elements of our Ngara Nanga Mai strategy. Our RAP outlines the practical actions SDN is taking to build strong relationships and enhanced respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. Our RAP also sets out our plans to enhance the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to belong and have opportunities to participate in our services.

SDN's RAP is overseen by a cross-organisational team of senior staff, led by our Chief Executive Officer. Our RAP has been endorsed by Reconciliation Australia as a 'Stretch' RAP.

SDN's vision for reconciliation in Australia is that all Australians:

- ▶ have respect for and understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures
- ▶ understand the histories, including recent history, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ▶ have and show respect for all cultures and people
- ▶ participate in shared dialogue and knowledge
- ▶ work to close the social, economic and health gap, and create equitable outcomes
- ▶ create a level playing field for all Australians.



# SDN's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Scholarships

**SDN**'s unique Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Scholarships help to reduce financial barriers for Aboriginal families to access quality education at an SDN children's education and care centre for their children in the early years before school. We believe this improves the education and life outcomes for these children, at a time when families make choices that can change their children's life trajectory.

Since 2007, we have awarded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Scholarships to more than 60 children in the wider Sydney metropolitan region, many of whom have a disability, additional needs or their family is facing significant challenges.

An annual Scholarship of \$6,000 supports a child to attend one of our early childhood education and care centres for three days per week for a year, covering the gap between the fee and government support to families paid through the Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate. The family commits to a small co-payment of \$5 per day, which reflects their commitment to their child's education and future.

Our scholarships are entirely supported by donations (including from our own Staff Giving Fund), with 100% of donations going to cover the cost of the child's fees in our centres. SDN bears all administration costs.



The children receiving Scholarships are supported in our centres by our Aboriginal Practice Leads and other key staff in a 'team around the child'. Our focus is on enhancing outcomes for children through the provision of an educational program that is responsive to individual children and their family. We work alongside families to maximise outcomes for children, and value families as the experts in their children's lives. The 'team around' approach also provides the forum which empowers the family to make decisions that impact on their children's life trajectory.



In 2014, SDN Beranga and the SDN Practice, Learning and Development team commissioned local artist and *Darug* Elder Leanne Tobin to create a mural depicting and celebrating the *Darug* traditional land on which SDN Beranga is built.

The mural has created an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on the importance of connection to country in shaping cultural identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It has also led to practitioners reflecting on the importance of building and maintaining authentic relationships with all families within their service. SDN practitioners use this information to guide practices and to influence the educational program.

*Darug* source: Leanne Tobin



SDN Ngara Nanga Mai

**sdn** Children's Services  
educating and caring for our children

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