

Beginnings of SDN Kensington at UNSW Sydney

sdn
children's services

"I have a particular interest in teaching children about STEM and Arts because these learning experiences provide children opportunities to resolve problems, find facts, expand their critical thinking, and develop creativity and imagination."

- Lai (Angel) Chung, Centre Director at SDN Kensington

SDN Children's Services begins in 1905

In 1905 a determined group of women from Sydney's upper classes who understood 'the difficulties that beset the paths of working mothers' founded the Sydney Day Nursery Association (now SDN Children's Services). The Association aimed to improve the welfare of children whose mothers were facing poverty and had to work to provide for their family. Infant mortality was high and the Kindergarten Union was only able to provide day care services for a few hours a day. With no other option, these young children were often left to fend for themselves among the streets of working class Sydney.

In response, the Association opened its first Day Nursery in a terrace house in Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo in 1905, the first long day care centre in NSW. For just three pence a day, babies and children were bathed, fed, clothed and cared for from 7.00am to 6.30pm.

Due to overwhelming demand, the Association opened Day Nurseries in other locations in the inner city soon after. These were all areas of need in Sydney with large working populations.

History of UNSW

The University of NSW (UNSW) began operations in 1949 at its

Kensington campus in Sydney's eastern suburbs, the home of the traditional owners of the area, the Cadigal people. UNSW has its roots in the Sydney Mechanics Institute (1843) and the Sydney Technical College (1878). Initially named the New South Wales University of Technology, the institution took its inspiration from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Berlin University of Technology. Its goal was the improvement of the nation's material wellbeing through excellence in science and technology.

While UNSW's initial focus was on science and technology, today it offers courses in Arts, Fine Arts, the Built Environment, Commerce, Law, Life Sciences, Medicine and Management. The University has had a long engagement with the Asia-Pacific region and draws its diverse student body from around 120 countries.



Above: UNSW at Kensington, 1961.
Courtesy State Archives and Records
Authority of NSW

House at Pooh Corner

The House at Pooh Corner (THPC) was the first early childhood centre established at UNSW by the Student Guild in 1969. What began simply as a child-minding service run on a roster basis by student parents soon became a bigger proposition. The Student Guild realised that a lack of suitable and affordable childcare caused significant barriers for carers (especially women) participating in higher education, and that they should take the initiative to expand the service.

UNSW donated an old gymnasium on campus for the proposed childcare centre, but it became necessary to build a new building on the site. As there was no local precedent for a university building a childcare centre, the first two stages of the project were plagued by local government and childcare regulations.

Financial constraints also took their toll. THPC finally opened with exemplary facilities on 21 July 1969, with six full-time, fully trained staff looking after 35 children, much to the relief of parents and Guild members. The centre catered for the children of students first, then staff, and then non-university people. The third and final stage of the building was completed in 1971.

THPC was run on a non-profit basis. In the mid-1970s they allowed cash-strapped student

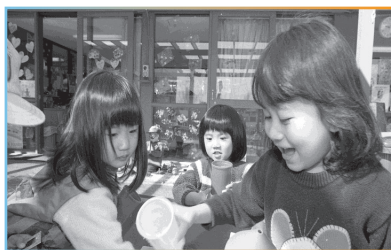
parents and carers to assist with the daily cleaning of the centre in return for reduced fees. The waiting list continued to grow, which was testament to the high-quality service being offered. The demand for onsite childcare became so great that the Student Guild arranged for a childcare centre in nearby Coogee to take some of the children on THPC's waiting list.



Above: House at Pooh Corner - exterior of building with children at fence 1970. Courtesy UNSW

“The District Inspector of the Education Dept has rated the educational programme of the kindergarten as “A” class.”

- Ed Quay, Board of Management and President, THPC, Tharunka, 5 April 1972.



Above: Girls having fun at House of Pooh Corner, 1998. Courtesy UNSW.

The SDN Era

In May 2020, UNSW announced it would be closing Kanga's House at the end of 2020 and calling for tenders to operate the remaining three centres. SDN successfully tendered, and following an extensive transition process, began management of Tigger's Honeypot, THPC and Owl's House on behalf of UNSW in January 2021.

SDN's agreement with UNSW included a provision to rename the centres. The Winnie the Pooh themed names do not fit with our naming convention which is generally geographical. Therefore, it was decided that as of June 2, 2025, SDN House at Pooh Corner Kensington at UNSW would become SDN Kensington at UNSW Sydney.

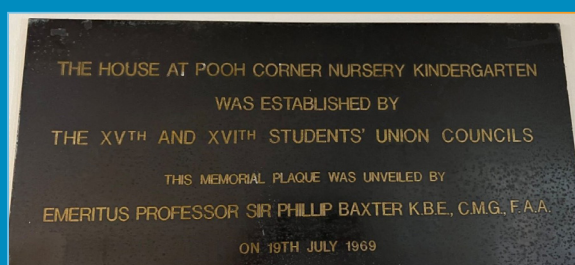
“The philosophy of SDN is very similar to that of UNSW in that they are very child and family centred, the educators seem to identify with the Village concept and they have existed as their own small village of professionals in the past. This ideal seems to be continuing now”

- Gerard Moon, Centre Director at SDN House at Pooh Corner UNSW, January 2021.



Above: SDN House at Pooh Corner staff taken on the first week of operation under SDN management in January 2021

Commemorative Plaque from 1969



Plaque commemorating The House at Pooh Corner Nursery Kindergarten in 1969 by the XVth and XVIth Student's Union Councils.

About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive, the State Archives and Records Authority of NSW and the UNSW Archives. The SDN Archive, established in 2002, is a unique resource in Australia's early childhood education sector. SDN Children's Services runs 26 children's education and care centres throughout NSW and the ACT, as well as offering disability services for children and young people, and delivering government funded programs supporting children and families and other sector organisations.

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