

SDN Children's Services

Annual 20 Review 25



sdn
children's services



SDN Acknowledges the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in our culture and history, and expresses this by recognising the Traditional Custodians of the many lands our services are situated on, and paying respect to Elders, past and present.

Auditors

BDO Audit Pty Ltd
Level 25, 252 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Solicitors

Bartier Perry
Level 10, 77 Castlereagh Street
Sydney NSW 2001

Bankers

Commonwealth Bank of Australia
Tower One, Darling Park
201 Sussex Street
Sydney NSW 2000

ABN: 23 000 014 335

SDN Children's Services is a not for profit company limited by guarantee and is a charity registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). SDN has a wholly owned subsidiary SDN Child and Family Services Pty Ltd which is endorsed as a Public Benevolent Institution and is responsible for managing government program contracts and services, and programs funded by donations.



Contents

About SDN	4
A review of our 120 th year	10
News & highlights	12
Our Strategic Plan	17
Our Advocacy: Influence, inclusion and impact	20
Children and Young People's Feedback	21
Our Impact	22
Celebrating 120 Years of SDN: Providing quality children's services since 1905	24
120 Years of SDN: How we celebrated!	28
Our Staff	31
Case Study: Educators as communicators	38
Case Study: Lost in translation — A family's journey to understanding each other	40
Financial Position 2024 – 2025	44
Meet our latest life members	54
Case Study: SDN's Access and Inclusion scholarship	56
New family support program	58
Be Involved	60
Our Supporters	63



We are sdn

children's services

A not-for-profit organisation that has been delivering quality children's services *since 1905*.

Our Philosophy

We believe that every person and every living thing has inherent worth, and is owed respect and care.

We believe that we live in an inter-dependent world, where we all belong and are enriched by each other's contributions.

We have always believed, since our beginnings in 1905, that the world can be a better and more equitable place, and that we can help to make it so.

We believe that potentials and possibilities are realised when everyone offers and experiences care, connection and challenge.





Our Vision

is for an equitable world where all children thrive.

Our Purpose

is to promote and enhance children's wellbeing, learning and development, in inclusive environments.

Our Values

in carrying out our purpose we
commit ourselves to being:

Trustworthy
+ Reliable

Inclusive +
Respectful

Creative +
Innovative





More about us

Our strategic goal is to build on the strengths, values, capabilities and assets of the whole SDN village to deliver safe, inclusive, evidence-informed and co-ordinated services that create lasting positive impact for children and young people and a legacy for the future.

In 2025, SDN turns 120. We are proud of our long history of working with children and their families and supporting the development of practitioners and children's services. With more than 740 staff across 33 sites in Sydney, regional NSW and the ACT, we are one of Australia's most respected children's services organisations.



We
provide

Early childhood
education and
child care

For **children from birth to 6 years**, across 27 centres and preschools.

Therapies
for children

For **children from birth to 16 years**, including services provided under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Family support
services

That **help children and young people thrive** by promoting strong, functional and well-supported families.

A review of





SDN turns 50! Children celebrating the Golden Jubilee event in 1955 at Sydney Town Hall.

our
120th year

News & Highlights

20
25



From left to right: The Hon. Kate Washington, MP, Brooke Townend, SDN Macquarie Park's Centre Director, and Kay Turner, CEO.

SDN Macquarie Park opens doors to families and inclusion

In January, SDN Children's Services opened its newest early learning centre, SDN Macquarie Park. Located on the Optus campus, the purpose-built centre has been refurbished with design principles and concepts of inclusion and neurodiversity in mind. The service features a dedicated Autism Specific Preschool program alongside spaces for infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

To celebrate the wonderful addition of this service to our village in our 120th year, we hosted a grand opening event at SDN Macquarie Park in March. The centre was officially opened by the Hon. Kate Washington, MP, NSW Minister for Families and Communities and Minister for Disability Inclusion.

The Minister unveiled a plaque, helped cut cake and spoke to SDN staff, special guests, children and families about the importance of an early learning centre like SDN Macquarie Park, as a step towards creating more inclusive and welcoming communities.

Happy 50th birthday Batemans Bay Preschool

Batemans Bay Preschool celebrated five decades of operation this year and marked the milestone anniversary with a birthday party in May. The event was a joyful tribute to the strength of community, connection, and care that has defined the preschool since its founding in 1975.

Batemans Bay Preschool was founded by a community-run committee and became part of the SDN family in 1999. Special guests included the Hon. Fiona Phillips, Federal Member for Gilmore; Councillor Amber Schutz from Eurobodalla Shire Council; and Aunty Loretta Parsley, a Walbunja Yuin Elder who wore a possum-skin coat to the celebration.

Among the event's highlights was the return of educator Beth Eppelstun, who began working at the preschool in 1975 and whose children and grandchildren have all attended.



Celebrating 50 years (from left to right) are Labor MP and Federal Member for Gilmore, Fiona Phillips, with SDN Batemans Bay Preschool Centre Director Rebecca Lester.



SDN UNSW centres embrace new names

In June, we announced new names for SDN's three early learning centres at UNSW, reflecting the next phase of our partnership with the university, which began in 2021.

The centres are now:

- **SDN Kensington at UNSW Sydney**
(formerly SDN House at Pooh Corner)
- **SDN Kingsford at UNSW Sydney**
(formerly SDN Owl's House)
- **SDN Randwick at UNSW Sydney**
(formerly SDN Tigger's Honey-pot)

The new names align with SDN's location-based naming convention. SDN Archivist Ben Woods visited the sites to honour each centre's legacy, to collect memorabilia and document their histories.



New step-by-step enrolment resources for families

In April, we published a comprehensive suite of enrolment resources to support vulnerable families across New South Wales. Funded by the NSW Department of Education, a step-by-step roadmap and checklist simplifies the enrolment process for early learning services and for families.

Additional tools include a downloadable checklist, a short informational video, and printed materials featuring QR codes linked to online support. These resources were distributed across SDN centres and Family Preservation offices.



Children's Therapies new hub model

In 2025, SDN Children's Services undertook a significant restructure of its Children's Therapies program, transitioning to a hub-based model operating directly out of SDN centres.

The change reflects SDN's commitment to inclusive, integrated service delivery, bringing therapy into the heart of children's everyday environments. By embedding therapists within our early learning centres, we've created a more natural and responsive support system, where children receive care in familiar settings and families experience greater continuity across their journey.

Two hubs, SDN Macquarie Park and SDN Lois Barker, began engaging in the SDN funded Family Resource Program, which provided coaching for Centre Directors working with families facing complex vulnerabilities and children with disability. This program drew on our expertise from early learning, therapies and family support, strengthening teams to better support children and connect families with community services. Centre Directors report increased confidence in engaging with other professionals and fulfilling mandatory reporting responsibilities.

Behavioural support continues to be offered to children in the places they live, play and learn.

The restructure builds on SDN's learnings from SDN Beranga Autism Specific Preschool at Rooty Hill, which has been offering a family-centred, integrated-hub approach since 2013.



A new model for SDN Hurstville

SDN Hurstville will embark on a new chapter, transitioning to a dedicated preschool program for children aged 3–5 years in January 2026. This change comes in response to strong community feedback and increasing demand for high-quality early education in the years before school.

The new preschool model will offer flexible options for families, including extended hours (7:30am–6:00pm) and a new short-day session (9:00am–4:00pm) at a reduced fee.

Families will continue to benefit from Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Start Strong funding, ensuring care remains affordable and accessible. The enriched curriculum will focus on key areas such as early literacy and numeracy, creative arts, science and technology, nature play, and social justice.

SDN to launch new CRM system next year

We are preparing to implement a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in 2026, marking a major upgrade to our IT infrastructure. The new platform, HubSpot, will centralise family records, improve marketing and reporting capabilities and transform how we engage with prospective families.

The project follows extensive consultation with centre staff, the Family Engagement Team, Marketing Team and families, revealing the current system's limitations.

Implementation is scheduled for early 2026. The system is expected to greatly improve the experience for both families and staff, offering more personalised, timely, and consistent communication throughout the childcare journey.

SDN Crookwell grows to meet demand

As Crookwell's population grows, so does the demand for early childhood education. SDN Crookwell Preschool has increased its licensed daily capacity from 29 to 35 children — adding 30 extra places each week to meet the need.

When Crookwell families spoke, SDN listened — sparking a year of reflection, persistence, and collaboration that led to this proud milestone for the preschool team.

Months of planning brought SDN Crookwell's expansion to life, with Centre Director, Mandy Wooll, Operations Manager Colin Lee and Senior Facilities Manager, David George working closely with Upper Lachlan Shire Council and SDN teams.

"This growth helps us reach more families and strengthen our shared vision for an equitable world where every child thrives," said Mandy.

The increased licensing begins in 2026, with enrolments expected to fill quickly.



Our Strategic Plan

Last year, we introduced our ambitious five-year strategic plan (2024–2028), laying a strong foundation for sustained growth and impact. In 2025, our focus has shifted to execution — embedding our priorities while also adapting to a fast-changing regulatory landscape and responding to unprecedented challenges across the sector.



Beyond quality



- ▶ Have the child at the centre of everything we do, in safe and supportive environments that are Child Safe.
- ▶ Go beyond what we have to do, to be leaders in practices that champion inclusion and children as citizens.
- ▶ Leverage our expertise across our services to increase the impact we have on children, young people and families.
- ▶ Use evidence-based, evidence-informed approaches and practices that enhance strengths and interests and prioritise the earliest intervention when additional support is required.
- ▶ Listen and respond to the voices of First Nations peoples to ensure we hear their voices and remove barriers to access and participation.
- ▶ Listen and respond to the voices of children and young people living with disability to ensure we hear their voices and remove barriers to access and participation.

At the heart of our strategic plan is a commitment to go **beyond quality**, which means not just doing what we must do to be compliant and meet standards, but leading with practices which are grounded in evidence and research.

Our commitment to going beyond quality is evident throughout our village — from our strengthened advocacy efforts to a deepened dedication to children, young people, families, and the passionate staff who support them.

In 2025, national reviews by the Productivity Commission and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) placed early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the spotlight, prompting discussion about affordability, access, quality and child safety.

Our advocacy efforts, made together with like-minded organisations, contributed to key policy outcomes including the introduction of a three-day early learning guarantee for families and Worker Retention Payments for eligible early learning staff.

Turn to page 20 to read more about SDN's leadership in the sector.

Child safety a focus

This year highlighted the **importance of keeping children safe**. Media investigations revealed serious cases of harm caused by some early learning and disability providers, prompting public concern and an urgent government response.

At SDN, we foster a culture where every staff member is expected to take responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. In 2025, we have strengthened our child safe organisation framework further by:

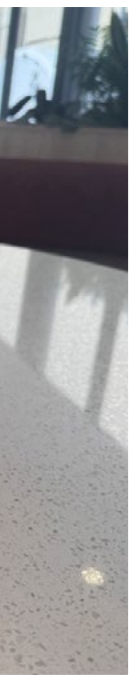
- restricting the use of personal devices when working with children
- improving screening during recruitment
- promoting our “see something, say something” approach
- refreshing our code of conduct
- improving required learning and education for all staff.

SDN also joined other sector leaders to advocate for meaningful reforms that support a safe and trusted ECEC system.



Children's Therapies

In 2024–25, we continued our commitment to inclusive, evidence-based support for children with disability and developmental delay, including as a registered NDIS provider. We prepared for the future by restructuring our children's therapy services as **location-based, integrated supports within our early learning centres** so that children can have consistent, inclusive supports in familiar environments.



Family Support Services

This year, our Family Preservation and Support Services assisted **812 families facing challenges** and **over 1,100 children and young people**.

Using our innovative Thriving Families Framework, our practitioners focused on what matters most to families, building confidence, resilience and better outcomes for children while reducing risk. Our Family Resource Program continues to strengthen support through regular coaching and capacity building for SDN educators.

SDN's selection for the ACT Sustaining Families Panel expands our reach beyond NSW. The NSW Government extended funding for Family Preservation and Targeted Earlier Intervention programs for a limited time.

You can learn about the transformative impact of our Thriving Families Framework on page 40. This family story highlights the importance of what our Family Preservation caseworkers do: they walk alongside families in crisis, offering tools, strategy and unwavering encouragement — empowering vulnerable families to rewrite their futures.

Investment in strategy

Despite operating in a complex and rapidly changing environment — and experiencing a slight reduction in the number of children and families served due to ongoing flexible work arrangements and staffing pressures, SDN remained firmly focused on delivering our 2024–2028 Strategic Plan.

We made deliberate financial and resource investments to strengthen our services, support our people, advocate for inclusion, and lay the groundwork for future growth.

In January, we opened our new centre at **Macquarie Park in Sydney's North-West**. The centre **integrates early childhood intervention and an autism-specific preschool program into a mainstream early learning centre** and adds to those already operating at SDN Beranga and SDN Lois Barker.

More than traditional early learning centres, these centres operate as an integrated hub, offering quality early learning, family support, an autism-specific preschool program, and children's therapies.

An internal cross-functional group has designed an inclusive, autism-specific preschool model that reflects our values, vision, and experience working with autistic children. You can read more about SDN Macquarie Park's grand opening on page 12.

Looking ahead!

As we reflect on 2025, it's clear that SDN has made strides in implementing our strategic plan. From strengthening child safety and amplifying children's voices, to expanding inclusive services and investing in our people, every initiative has been guided by our commitment to go beyond quality.

As we look to the year ahead, SDN continues to lead with **integrity, innovation, and impact**. Despite sector-wide challenges and shifting policy landscapes, we've remained focused on what matters — creating a safe, inclusive, and equitable world where all children, families, and staff can thrive.



Our advocacy: ***Influence, inclusion and impact***

Over the past year, CEO Kay Turner has led SDN's advocacy efforts with clarity and compassion — championing reforms that put children's safety, inclusion and wellbeing at the centre of child and family service delivery.

In response to national reviews by the Productivity Commission and ACCC, Kay worked alongside early childhood educator and care (ECEC) sector leaders to influence policy outcomes that matter and are helping to bring about systemic change, such as the introduction of a three-day early learning guarantee and Worker Retention Payments for eligible staff.

Her leadership alongside other established children's services not-for-profits helped shape SDN's contribution to the NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into the ECEC sector, calling for full funding of the National Quality Framework, stronger enforcement against non-compliant providers, and the establishment of a National ECEC Commission. Her presence at the National Early Years Policy Summit signals SDN's ongoing commitment to her leadership in the early childhood education and care sector.

Internally, Kay spearheaded reforms within SDN to strengthen our child safe organisation framework, including tighter recruitment screening, refreshed codes of conduct, and a "see something, say something" culture.

Her advocacy has influenced inclusive education for autistic children, with the launch of a new Autism Specific Preschool model grounded in equity, opportunity and tailored support. This model reflects SDN's values and our vision for a world where no child is excluded.

As co-Chair of the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia and a member of the Early Childhood Intervention Best Practice Network (ECIBPN), Kay's influence extends nationally and enables SDN to share our cross-sector expertise.

SDN's growing engagement with policymakers from local councillors to federal ministers is led by Kay and supported by our Stakeholder Relationship Coordinator, Debra Morrison. Their work ensures that SDN always has a seat at the table and continues to be heard at the highest levels of government.

In 2025, various Parliamentarians attended our events including Kate Washington, NSW Minister for Families and Communities and Minister for Disability Inclusion, Sarah Mitchell, NSW Shadow Minister for Education and Early Learning, and NSW Leader of the Opposition and Liberal leader, the Hon. Mark Speakman,

In September, Senator Jess Walsh, Federal Minister for Early Childhood Education and Youth and the Federal Member for Banks, Zhi Soon toured SDN Milperra for a special roundtable chat with Kay and educators.

Through strategic partnerships, policy submissions, and ongoing internal reform, Kay has consistently positioned SDN as a trusted voice and is a true change-maker, helping to shape a safer, more inclusive future for children and their families.

— Thank you, Kay!

Children and young people's feedback

In 2025, we continued to progress our program for listening and responding to children and young people in our services. Four of our early learning services participated in the program: SDN Lady McKell, Goulburn, SDN Riverwood, SDN Woolloomooloo and our new centre SDN Macquarie Park.

The program aims to evaluate SDN services from children's and young people's points of view, giving SDN opportunities to learn from them and make changes based on this learning.

We use SDN's Wellbeing Wheel, based on ARACY's The Nest, to shape questions that make sense to children and help us understand if we are contributing positively to their wellbeing, from their perspective.

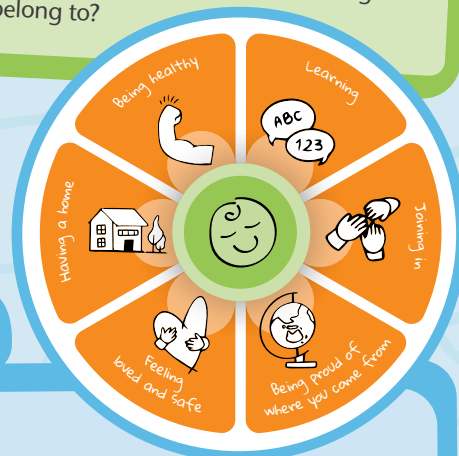
The 2025 method

- ✓ Services self-nominate
- ✓ The program is embedded into the educational program for four weeks
- ✓ Children are led through the program by a familiar educator
- ✓ Educators choose from a bank of questions to investigate with children
- ✓ Educators observe, discuss, create and use visual prompts with children

Some of the questions we asked

- * What helps you when you feel sad, angry, excited or frustrated?
- * What does it mean to play? What do you enjoy playing the most? What do you not enjoy playing?
- * How do you know when you are hungry? What do you like to eat at SDN? What don't you like to eat?
- * What does 'belong' mean? Where do you belong? Who do you belong to?

What children told us



Understanding how children participated in the program led to other insights that we can use to shape next year's program and the way we listen and respond to children more broadly as an organisation.

- * Asking children for permission to join in helps them know their voice is important.
- * Helping children understand what we're asking helps them to respond authentically.
- * Thinking and learning about something over time and in different ways is important for learning.
- * Sometimes children know more than adults think they do.

As 2025 ends, we're sharing these insights with SDN staff across all teams so they can consider how they might change the way they work, and how they can keep listening and responding to children and young people on the agenda.

Our Impact

2024
2025

SDN works with children and families across **three main streams**: our early learning services, children's therapies, and family support programs, including Family Preservation, Playlinks and our Child and Parenting Support program.

1

Early Learning

2

Children's Therapies

3

Family Preservation & Support

An overview

This year we positively impacted **4,901** children and families.

Last year: 5,235

4,901
children and families
positively impacted

2,797

children provided with
high quality early learning
through our 27 centres.

Last year: 3,007

321

additional children facing
challenges supported
to be enrolled in
mainstream settings.

Last year: 137

502

children with disabilities
supported with early
intervention.

Last year: 593

We know that children thrive in safe and supportive environments, and in 2024–25 we worked with **812 families facing challenges**.

SDN is active in supporting the children's services sector to be *more inclusive of children.*

In 2024–25, we supported **304** other service providers through the following programs:

(Last year: 363)

Family Preservation

194 services

(Last year: 233)

Playlinks

25 agencies

(Last year: 28)

Child & Family Interagency
Inner & Eastern Sydney

80 agencies

(Last year: 74)

Start Strong Pathways

5 agencies

(Last year: 6)

165

children in supported
playgroups and activities.

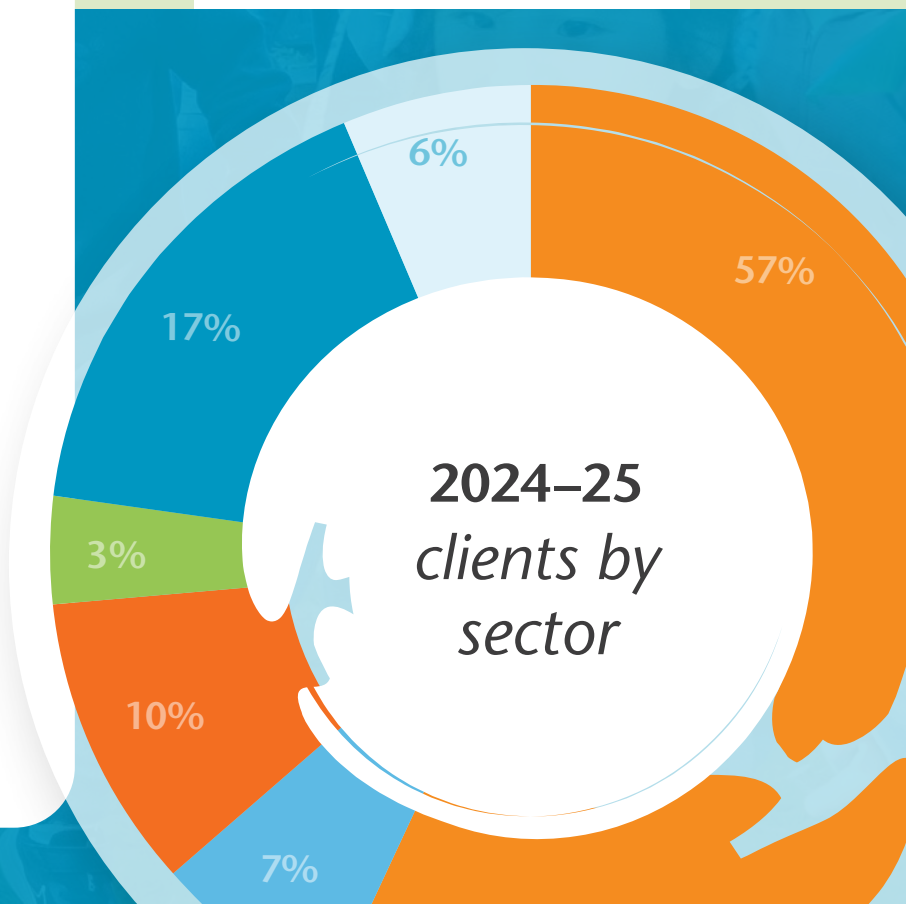
Last year: 138

812

families facing challenges
supported

Last year: 887

- SDN Centres
- Children facing challenges
- Children with disabilities
- Playgroups
- Families facing challenges
- Other children's services



2024–25
*clients by
sector*



In a world that continues to change rapidly, SDN remains a constant: a trusted partner for families, a leader in early childhood education, and a proud advocate for children's rights.

Celebrating 120 years of SDN:

Providing quality children's services since 1905

In 2025, SDN Children's Services proudly celebrates 120 years of continuous service to children and families across early learning, children's therapies, and family support.

In 1905, SDN's founders created a revolutionary service that recognised the rights of children and the dignity of working mothers. Today, SDN continues to honour that legacy as one of Australia's most respected children's services organisations.

From our beginnings in a small terrace house in Woolloomooloo to more than 750 staff across 33 sites, SDN's story is one of vision, education, and enduring social impact.

To put this in context, this year, KU (Kindergarten Union) celebrates its 130th year, while the Benevolent Society has been working alongside children and families in Australia for 212 years. Now it's our turn to celebrate and acknowledge 120 years of impact.



SDN officially turns 120 on 7 December 2025.

However, celebrations have not been limited to one day and happened across our village throughout the year. These have included centre events, commemorative publications and a special time capsule. Turn to page 28 to see how we are celebrating this milestone.

In August, we marked the anniversary of the very first meeting that led to the founding of SDN with an event at NSW Parliament House. Turn to page 29 to see more.

Pioneering Women, Enduring Impact

A look back at just some of the women who've shaped SDN over the years and who continue to have an impact today.



Ethel Davenport

A founding woman and SDN's first President. Ethel described SDN's first nursery as "an institution started by fellow women, who fully realise the difficulties that beset the paths of working mothers".



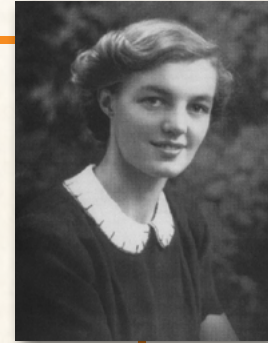
Dorothea MacKellar

Now famous for her poetry, Dorothea believed that social reform required direct action and joined SDN's first General Committee at 19. Her father Charles MacKellar chaired the 1904 Royal Commission¹.



Marguerite Fairfax

A founding woman who devoted 57 years to SDN, Marguerite married into the Fairfax media family, and became a cornerstone of the organisation's growth and stability.



Joan Fry OM

An early graduate of the Nursery School Teachers' College (NTSC), Joan later went on to become its Director before her expertise led to an invitation to chair the federal government's first Australian Preschools Committee.



Lady McKell (left)

Passionate about children's welfare, Lady McKell, wife of the Governor-General of Australia, Sir William McKell, fundraised £3000, to help the establishment of a nursery in Goulburn, the association's third regional nursery.

¹Royal Commission into the Decline of the Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales.



Lois Barker

SDN Lois Barker, Waterloo was named for the celebrated preschool teacher when she worked for City of Sydney Council. The centre had a long relationship with Lois, symbolising the important partnership between SDN and the council in supporting vulnerable children and families.



Effie Bland OAM (left)

Effie spearheaded the establishment of SDN's Historical Archive, doing much of the heavy lifting in researching and compiling our rich history. The Archive has grown ever since.



Helene Phillips

Helene Phillips was an early president, and the family association with SDN continues today. Helene's daughter Barbara Selby (nee Phillips) was an NSTC graduate who spent 20 years on SDN's executive committee. Helene's great granddaughter Kirsty Albert sits on the SDN Board today.



Tonia Godhard AM

Tonia Godhard was CEO of SDN Children's Services from 1994 to 2002. She held the reins at a time of immense change, including the organisation's name change from The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association to SDN Children's Services in 1999.



Ginie Udy

Ginie Udy was CEO of SDN Children's Services from 2002 to 2017. Up until this point, Ginie is SDN's second longest serving CEO. Her time as CEO included marking SDN's centenary and embedding SDN's Integrated Services Model.



Kay Turner

Kay Turner is the current CEO of SDN Children's Services, taking on the role in 2017. She also serves as co-chair of the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia (ELACCA).

Her long tenure and progression through SDN's leadership ranks reflect her deep commitment to early childhood education and integrated community services.

Committee women and staff members, Surry Hills 1934

120 years of SDN: How we celebrated!

Our 120th anniversary has been a celebration of history, creativity, and community. Birthday celebrations have taken many forms, from walking tours to our very first centre on Dowling Street in Woolloomooloo, and cupcakes to the unveiling of commemorative artworks.



SDN Pyrmont: sculpture.

SDN Woolloomooloo's walking tour to our very first centre on Dowling Street.



SDN Erskineville's 120th Birthday Celebration.



SDN Family Preservation team's art-making session and 120th celebration.



Marking many milestones at NSW State Parliament

On 7 August, NSW Parliament House was the setting for a truly historic celebration. Politicians, SDN members, Board representatives, long-serving SDN educators, and sector leaders gathered to honour 120 years since the very first meeting that led to the founding of SDN. It was a moment steeped in history set within the walls of Australia's oldest parliament.

CEO Kay Turner welcomed guests to the event including Christine Legg, CEO of KU Children's Services; Nicole Jones, Gowrie CEO; Professor Marianne Fenech; and Parliamentarians such as the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC, NSW Shadow Minister for Education and Early Learning, as well as the Hon. Mark Speakman MP, NSW Leader of the Opposition, among others.

Speaking at the event, the Hon. Kate Washington, MP, NSW Minister for Families and Communities and Minister for Disability Inclusion paid tribute to SDN's enduring impact, saying: "It's remarkable that an organisation founded in 1905 is still making a massive difference today — and that's because everyone who has taken the baton over the past 120 years has seized the opportunity to change children's lives and create stronger communities."

SDN 120th anniversary celebration at NSW Parliament House, 7 August 2025.



Celebrating our way: A village united through art, history, and heart

Art-making and SDN's rich history have been central to the festivities, and this year we are proud to be publishing two special books: a commemorative yearbook, *Art from the Heart*, showcasing artworks from each SDN centre, site, and program, and a history book written by SDN Archivist Ben Woods, *Breaking Down Barriers: A history of integrated service delivery at SDN Children's Services*.

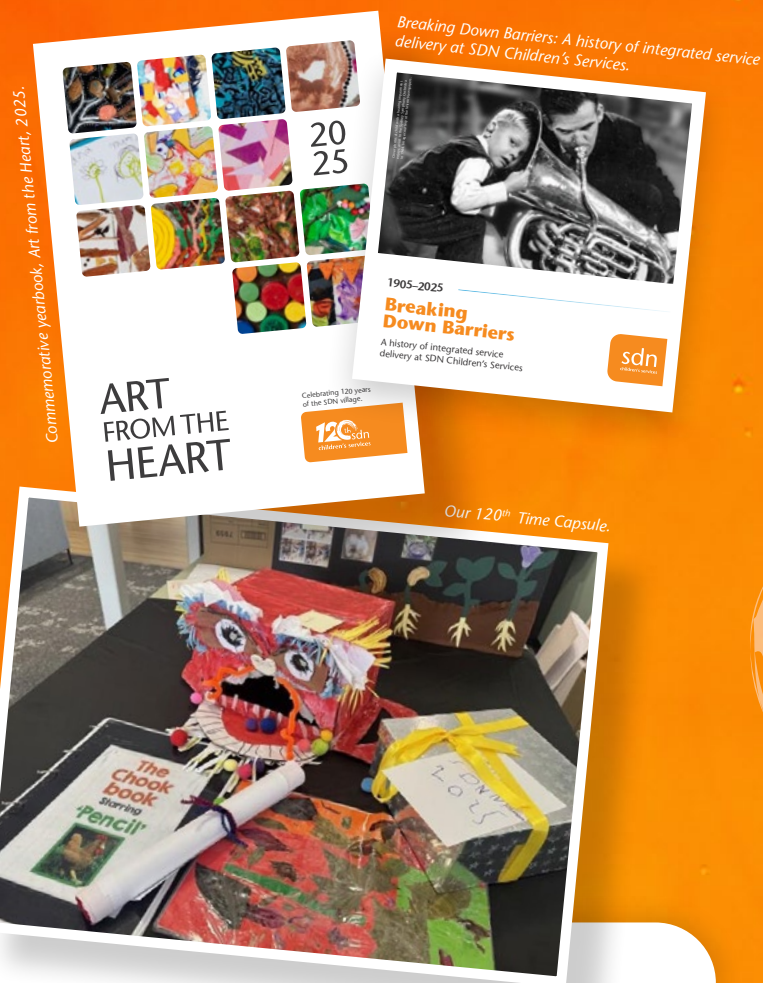
Both books showcase the creativity and diversity that define our village and help mark this incredible milestone

Preserving our present:

The 2025 Time Capsule

One of the most meaningful projects this year is the creation of our 2025 Time Capsule. This capsule will preserve objects, photographs, and records from our centres, offices, programs, and communities, offering future generations a window into our shared story.

It will be held in the SDN Archive and opened at a future date, serving not just as a box of artefacts but as a living narrative of our people and places.



Then and now

While much has changed since 1905, SDN's core values remain the same. We are still driven by the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to thrive, that families deserve support, and that communities are stronger when we care for one another.

In a world that continues to change rapidly, SDN remains a constant: a trusted partner for families, a leader in early childhood education, and a proud advocate for children's rights.

This year is more than a milestone — it's a moment to unite our village, honour our history, and look forward with renewed hope and purpose.



Our Staff

Our people are **integral** to fulfilling SDN's purpose and creating an enriching and rewarding employee experience that fosters connection and growth.

This year, we significantly boosted education and career development, supported more students and saw strong retention and engagement.

Over half of our staff have been with SDN for more than three years. Engagement remains high, with survey results showing that our staff stay because they believe in our purpose, feel supported and safe and see a future with SDN.

Throughout 2025, the sector experienced significant shifts that directly impacted workforce dynamics. In response, the federal government announced substantial workforce investments,

including a \$3.6 billion Worker Retention Payment, a 3.5% minimum wage increase, a forthcoming 5% rate increase Gender Undervaluation Review affecting Children's Services (CSA) and Social, Community Home Care and Disability Services Industry (SCHADS) awards and a Portable Long Service Leave NSW scheme.

Despite these measures, the sector continues to face persistent workforce pressures, such as staff shortages, high turnover, increased demand for flexible working arrangements and consolidation of providers, particularly in regional areas.

Additionally, concerns about training quality have emerged, with allegations against several early education institutions underscoring the need for stronger oversight of educator qualifications.

These developments continue to shape SDN's workforce strategy and highlight the importance of targeted investment in our people and capability.

Our staff *at a glance*



Our workforce is
*diverse, qualified
and experienced* and
complies with the
*Workplace Gender
Equality Act.*

As at 30 June 2025, we employed **738 staff**.

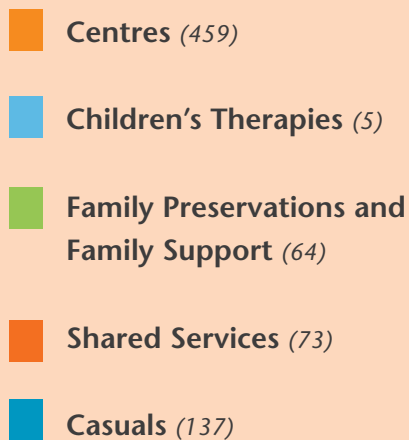
Of these:

69% are permanent employees, **13%** are employed on contracts (e.g. ISS roles, parental leave cover or via restrictions) and **18%** are casual staff.

This reflects a slight increase in the proportion of permanent staff compared with 2023–24, consistent with adding a new centre (SDN Macquarie Park).

Staff by service stream

2024–25



SDN has a new EA and secured the WRP for our staff

After a lengthy bargaining process and following a majority yes vote, our new Enterprise Agreement (EA) was lodged with the Fair Work Commission and approved in June.

In a positive show of support, 62% of eligible voters voted for the SDN EA 2025, and of those, 93.19% voted yes.

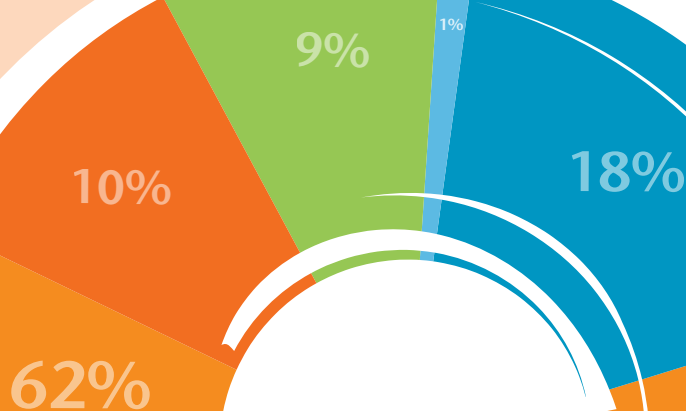
We also successfully applied for a Worker Retention Payment (WRP) grant from the Australian government for eligible centre-based staff. This grant will pay for a wage increase. Salary reviews for non-EA employees also took place in July 2025.

Embedding our People System

SDN’s cloud-based HR system (Dayforce) launched in July 2024 to support our Employee Value Proposition and streamline workforce management.

Since then, several key modules have gone live, including Payroll, Time & Attendance (T&A) and Recruitment. The transition of Payroll from the previous system, Preceda, was completed successfully and confirmed by a positive audit outcome in early 2025.

dayforce

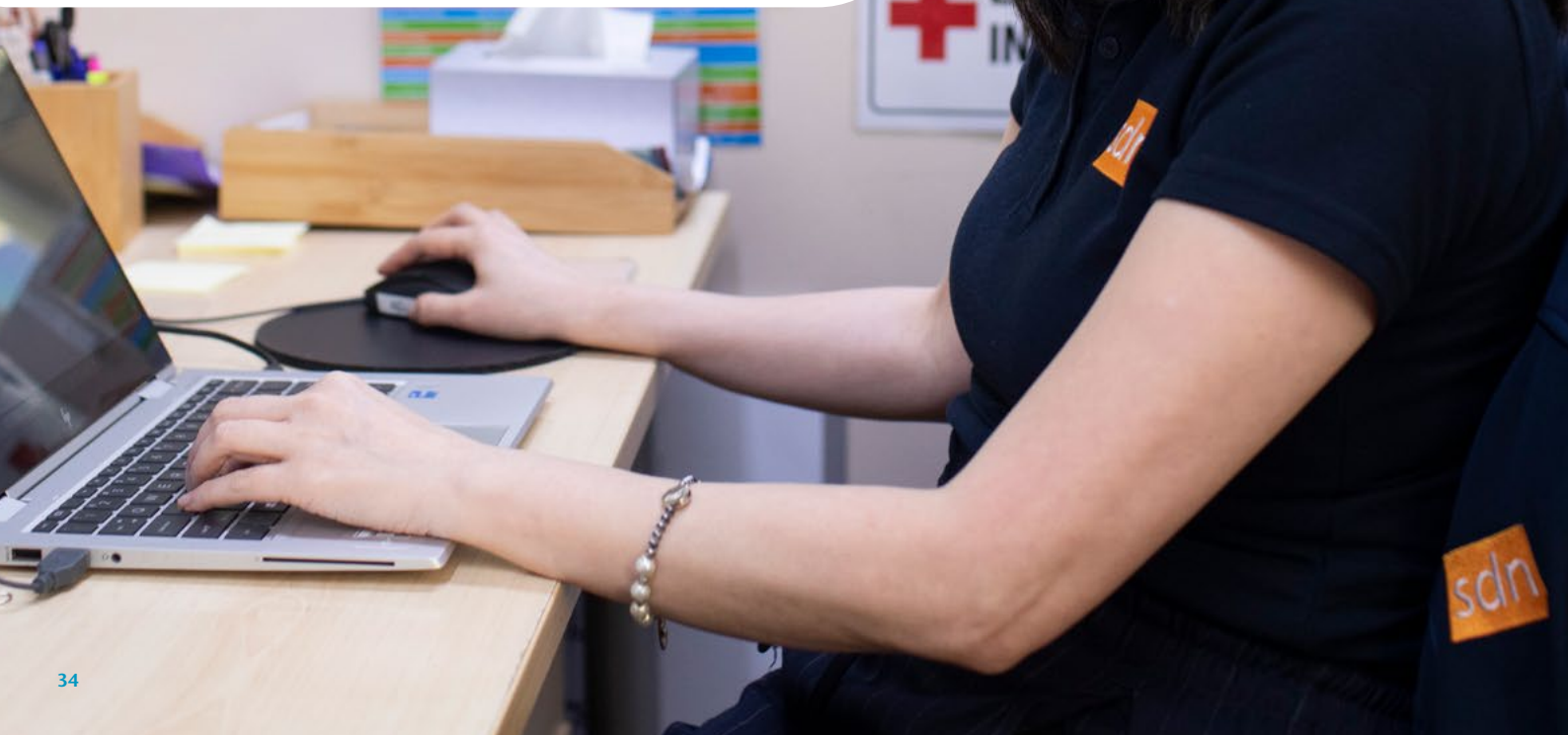


Exciting new learning and development platform rolled out

In May, we proudly launched **My Learning @ SDN** — our dynamic new online learning platform powered by Dayforce. Designed to support both online and in-person training, the platform enables our People and Organisational Development Team to create, host and manage courses.

Following its debut, the platform received an upgrade in September as part of a Dayforce enhancement. This update introduced a new dashboard, equipping SDN managers with streamlined tools for assigning courses, tracking progress and accessing rich learning data all in one place.

One of the key opportunities in our Engagement Survey last year was the need for career and development pathways. This rollout marks a significant step forward in SDN's commitment to fostering a culture of continuous learning and professional development.





Professional development, students and trainees

In 2024–25, SDN supported 128 student placements across its centres, with the majority in Early Childhood Teaching (ECT) degrees.

Of these, 61 placements (47%) were filled by SDN staff reflecting our ongoing commitment to internal workforce development.

SDN also continues to address sector-wide teacher shortages by supporting six educators through the University of Wollongong's Accelerated Pathways Program, with two expected to graduate in late 2025. Eight student placements converted to casual roles.

Following the cancellation of three Registered Training Organisations by Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA), SDN assisted affected educators to re-enrol with accredited providers, adjusting employment status accordingly.

Demand for postgraduate Graduate Diplomas in Early Childhood increased, driven by national skills shortages and accelerated courses, while universities maintain strict entry standards.

Ten trainees were employed, with six completing qualifications. The slight decline in trainees reflects stabilised staffing and reduced demand for Certificate III qualifications.

In 2025, SDN delivered extensive training and professional development across the organisation:

- ✦ **2,554 attendees** participated in centrally-provided training
- ✦ **12,500 hours** of training was completed
- ✦ **896 sessions** were conducted

Key training highlights included:

- ✦ **Children's Therapies:** Team development, Crisis Prevention Intervention
- ✦ **Family Preservation:** Risk assessment, supervision, culturally safe trauma-informed practice, domestic violence support
- ✦ **Organisation-wide:** SDN culture and induction, emergency response, IT security
- ✦ **Early Learning:** Positive behaviour support, nominated supervisor training, Early Years Learning Framework, ASD awareness, first aid and food safety
- ✦ **Administration:** Photo consent, enrolment processes, family mindset training

These programs enhance workforce capability in line with SDN's strategic plan and will serve as a solid foundation for a long-term roadmap extending into the year ahead and beyond.

SDN annual Family Survey 2025

Every September we run our only census survey including all families enrolled in our early learning services.

This year we had reassuring responses from families who have a high regard for their centre. Our Net Promoter Score is 69, which means that more than 75% of families are actively recommending our centres to their friends and relatives.

The three areas in which SDN performs very well include relationships with children, with 74% of families delighted with these relationships. 79% of families said we support them with feeling confident, capable and connected most of the time. Furthermore, 92% are happy with the ability and skill of our staff.

One key insight the Family Survey tells us is that in an increasingly competitive sector, SDN needs to work harder to set ourselves apart from other service providers.

In the words of a family:

"The centre is wonderful at connecting me to the centre as a community and making everybody feel welcome and comfortable and included. We love all of the events hosted by the centre. The staff are wonderful and look after my child and his needs. We know and trust everyone and feel confident knowing he is in a safe and supportive environment".

Our Net
Promotor Score

69

2024: 67.7

SDN

Employee Feedback Survey

We know a great workplace is built on listening, learning, and acting on what matters most to our people. In 2025, we revised our approach to staff engagement and a single comprehensive survey was launched in October.

This year's staff engagement survey has been thoughtfully redesigned to be more impactful. With 30 focused questions, the survey is quicker and easier to complete. The updated format includes new questions that delve into key areas such as career development, leadership confidence, innovation, and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI), ensuring the survey reflects what matters most to our people.

Top-line results will be shared in December, with detailed insights made available in February 2026.





our staff

as at 30 June 2025

181	Senior Educators (Diploma qualified)
137	Educators (Certificate III)
137	Casuals
59	Early Childhood Teachers
57	Social Workers, Practitioners, Team Leaders & Area Managers
29	Centre Directors
27	Centre Administrators
23	Cooks
17	Finance, IT, Risk & Property team members
16	HR, Payroll, WHS and Organisational Development team members
11	SDN Enquiry Team members
11	Communications and Marketing specialists
6	Operations Managers
6	Program Administrators and Project Officers
5	Allied Health Professionals, Early Intervention and Behaviour Support Practitioners & Manager
4	Administration support
4	Members of the Executive
3	Directors of Shared Services Functions
2	Specialist Business Professionals
2	Trainees
1	CEO



Educators as
communicators

Educators as communicators

“

The program recognises an educator's role as a trusted advisor to families and the power of partnerships for children's wellbeing, learning and development, as well as for a family's understanding of what makes SDN different.

A new program that combines insights into the experiences of families and the language of early learning is helping early childhood educators put *empathy* at the heart of everything they do.

In 2022, we shared SDN's pride at winning a Good Design Award for design strategy. A period of co-design with The Customer Experience Company led to the development of four family 'mindsets' which help us to understand how family's experiences shape the way they feel.



In 2025 we combined the mindsets with insights gathered through our research with families on their preferences, perspectives and understanding of our early learning programs, to create a new **SDN program — Educators as Communicators**.

Educators as Communicators offers early childhood educators a suite of tools to understand a child's unique family context and their mindset, giving them the opportunity to talk about what's true for the child in a way that's meaningful for the family. Tools include workbooks with real scenarios from our services and open-ended knowledge cards.

The program recognises an educator's role as a trusted advisor to families and the power of partnerships for children's wellbeing, learning and development, as well as for a family's understanding of what makes SDN different.

The unique context of each service and each team means that professional learning can take many shapes and forms. Educators as Communicators is a versatile program that can be explored as time becomes available, meaning learning can remain intentional, responsive and reflective, even when undertaken in shorter bursts.

Feedback on the tools at their launch with Centre Directors in February 2025 was overwhelmingly positive. Every service was given a toolkit, and we'll soon be distributing more.

Diving deep

A 'deep dive' was offered this year as one method for exploring the Educators as Communicators concepts. Systematic and targeted, the deep dive brought a small group of practitioners together to work through their own unique challenge.

Meeting across two months, six early learning room leaders workshopped the mindsets with facilitators from SDN's Customer Experience and Communications teams, shared family partnership successes and challenges and coached one another through action plans.

The participants shared how they valued being able to connect with peers and develop their knowledge over time. Feedback from the Operations team has been positive as well, and we're now reviewing possibilities for varied formats for the program in 2026.

"Just wanted to give some feedback re: Educators as Communicators, yesterday I met with one of my Centre Directors and she said that the educator attending returned from the training inspired and reflecting on herself as an educator and her relationships with the other team members ... After one session we are seeing a change in her thinking and reflection on her practices. Thanks again for accommodating her in the project and I look forward to hearing more as the time goes on."

— Renee Padovan, Operations Manager



Lost in translation: A family's journey to understanding each other

“

I felt listened to. SDN listened to our problems. Matthew and I are talking now. Listening to one another and talking about how best to care for our son. I bring my Japanese ways of being and raising children, and Matthew brings his Australian ways.

— Hiroko* (Sydney mother of one child.)

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) referred the family to SDN Children's Services due to concerns about maternal psychosocial health and possible postpartum depression following an incident where the mother, Hiroko* had left her newborn son at home unsupervised while she went for a walk and her husband, Matthew*, was out shopping.

Hiroko's pregnancy had been difficult, requiring frequent hospital visits due to high blood pressure. She was an ocean away from her native Japan, had no friends, no family, and little grasp of the language spoken around her. She was also grieving the recent loss of her Japanese stepfather, to whom she was closely bonded.

Matthew was back in the office, juggling his full-time job and responsibilities at home while growing increasingly concerned for his son, Alex*, and his wife's wellbeing. Matthew's family lives on the NSW north coast, and although supportive, they could not provide any practical day-to-day help.

Hiroko did not know how to cook meals or clean (skills she'd never mastered) and lacked confidence in caring for her infant son. Matthew did his best—cooking, cleaning, and caring for Alex—but he was sleep-deprived, and completely overwhelmed.

Increasingly isolated and living in a small, overcrowded unit, the couple struggled to understand each other's behaviour and one another's language. (Hiroko is from Japan and is not confident in speaking English, while Matthew is Australian-born and speaks no Japanese).

Both new parents struggled to bond emotionally with their son and interpret his needs beyond the basics. They loved Alex, but in those early days they had trouble expressing it. There were gaps — in skill, in confidence, and in understanding each other.

Hiroko admitted it to herself: "I hoped I would love him more. I wanted to feel closer to Alex".

Culturally-sensitive trauma-informed support

Our Thriving Families Framework, SDN's family-centred framework, is a Family Preservation program. It's delivered by working in partnership to build the skills of parents and caregivers to promote well-being outcomes for their children and young people and reduce the risk of children and young people entering the child protection system.

From the outset, case worker Trix took a capacity-building and trauma-informed approach when partnering with this family. She conducted separate sessions with each parent before bringing them together to work on their goals with the help of a trusted translator.

Trix said: "It was important to give them a separate space to talk to me so I could understand each of their perspectives. Because of the complexity of using a translator, we decided to do early morning sessions together at a local cafe."

Trix intended to work on Hiroko's and Matthew's wellbeing and the wellbeing of the entire family and home environment. She took the time to observe and listen deeply.

Trix saw that Hiroko's distance with Alex wasn't indifference. It was fear, trauma, and a childhood shaped by emotional neglect. She gave Hiroko space to express her emotions about her traumatic upbringing in Japan, helping her understand how it impacted her ability to parent.

She saw that Matthew's constant "rescuing" wasn't dominance — it was a learned survival skill of a parentified boy habitually trying to fix broken things following his parents' divorce.

Slowly, Trix assembled a village of practitioners around the family, calling on Child Development and Wellbeing Practitioner Rachel and Family Systemic Practitioner Julia to work alongside the family.

Julia sat with Hiroko and Matthew in early morning sessions, navigating their bilingual silences with the help of a Japanese interpreter.

Together, the SDN team of three practitioners helped the couple see not just Alex, but also to see each other and what they each bring to the marriage. They also helped prepare both parents emotionally for a visit to Hiroko's mother in Japan by anticipating emotional triggers and strategising ways to manage them.

Rachel brought play into Alex's world by introducing games, toys and singing action rhymes in Japanese and English, showing Hiroko and Matthew how to interact with their son — a foundational step in forming secure attachment.

Rachel collaborated with both parents to assess the home environment to identify safety risks. She helped Hiroko develop practical parenting skills such as preparing meals, playing with Alex, and understanding his developmental needs.

Part of this work involved decluttering the home to provide Alex with space to crawl and explore his surroundings. It also involved working on sleep routines and encouraging Hiroko to take gradual responsibility-taking, especially during nights when Matthew was working, to help her become more independent in caring for Alex.

Identifying relationship patterns

Recognising the benefits of a systemic approach, the team brought Julia in as a Family Systemic Practitioner (FSP).



Her role involves working therapeutically with individuals and families, focusing on the broader family unit and surrounding systems.

“This lens allows me to explore how different members of a family interact and influence each other, rather than focusing solely on one person,” Julia explains.

Julia described the couple as initially “very private and reluctant to share”. They had limited experience with support services before Alex’s birth, which made trust-building a gradual process.

One of her key tools in early sessions was the use of a genogram — a visual family map that helps identify relationship patterns, significant events, and points of trauma or disconnection in the family history.

The couple were both able to reflect on their family of origin and the impact this has had on them today and would continue to have on their parenting.

Over 12 months, Julia worked with the couple in fortnightly sessions. Much of the therapeutic focus was on improving communication and sessions often involved unpacking recent conflicts to help each partner feel heard and understood.

Activities such as This or That, where each partner answered questions from the other’s perspective, helped build empathy and understanding. Despite their language barriers, Hiroko and Matthew remained committed to the process and never missed a session.

Throughout their time together, Julia observed substantial growth. Arguments became less frequent and intense. Matthew became more understanding and supportive, while Hiroko gained confidence in her parenting, evident in recently caring for Alex independently over a weekend on her own.

Julia reflected that working with the family was deeply rewarding.

“Their openness to growth, respectful engagement, and willingness to be challenged made the work particularly meaningful.”

Bit by bit: Building attachment and bonding

Slowly over time, Hiroko began to understand that parenting meant presence. Commenting on this growth, she says:

"I learned how to care for Alex with the support of SDN.

By taking care of Alex, I became close to Alex.

"At the beginning, I couldn't care for him at all. That's why Matthew used to take care of him. He took all the responsibility. But gradually my part is growing bit by bit."

In a recent session, Trix observed that when Alex reached for a shelf and teetered, Hiroko didn't freeze. She moved instinctively, putting her hand out and wrapping a protective arm around him.

Matthew learned to step back; to "gently teach instead of take over". Together they applied for daycare and Hiroko learnt how to cook small meals, taking Alex to the park or to the library and playgroup on her own. It was no longer all on him. And for the first time, he could sit on the sofa and enjoy his family, not as a caretaker, but as a father and a husband.

The impact this has had on Matthew's own mental health and marriage satisfaction has been significant. For Matthew, the most challenging aspect has been the juggle.

"SDN has helped Hiroko to bond with Alex and care for him more and they have helped me to manage my full-time job, childcare and all my responsibilities. They have given practical help like getting Alex on solid foods, transitioning him from bottles or trying to work on him sleeping through the night."

"Communication between Hiroko and myself is improving, but it's something we have to keep working on to make sure we understand each other and work as a team."

"We're trying to get our home environment more organised and comfortable and trying to get Alex happy and healthy – and he is!"

Along the way, there have been hard conversations. About clutter and about hygiene in the home. About shouting and swearing, and the negative impact this

has on Alex's development. About invisible expectations. But there have also been breakthroughs such as going on a recent family outing to the beach or hearing Alex say "mummy, mummy" and watching Hiroko's face light up in response.

With the help of a translator, Hiroko shares: "I felt listened to. SDN has listened to our problems. Matthew and I are talking now. Listening to one another and talking about how best to care for our son. I bring my Japanese ways of being and raising children, and Matthew brings his Australian ways."

Today, the once-isolated mother reads Japanese picture books to her son.

"I talk to him in Japanese. I think he understands. I feel much happier than when Alex was born... I feel like I love him," Hiroko says.

The previously overburdened father comes home to a partner who can meet him halfway. And Alex, now a toddler, knows what it feels like to be seen, to be delighted in, and to be loved.

“
A key tool is the use of a genogram — a visual family map that identifies relationship patterns, significant events, and points of trauma in the family history.”

20

Financial Position

24

20

2024-2025

25

The SDN group maintained a **strong financial position** over a challenging year.

Net Assets 2024–25

\$56,553,758

2023-24: \$49,576,250

Cash Equivalents 2024–25

\$17,370,285

2023-24: \$14,717,154



Operating Result for 2024-25

The SDN group successfully navigated lower utilisation levels and reduced children’s therapies activities to continue our investment in increasing our reach and impact by opening a new centre at Macquarie Park and delivered a small deficit. Revenue remained flat with revenue from fee increases being offset by the lower utilisation and continuing higher wages for staff so we could remain competitive.

2024–25 - Deficit of
\$(55,759)

2023–24: Surplus of **\$319,311**

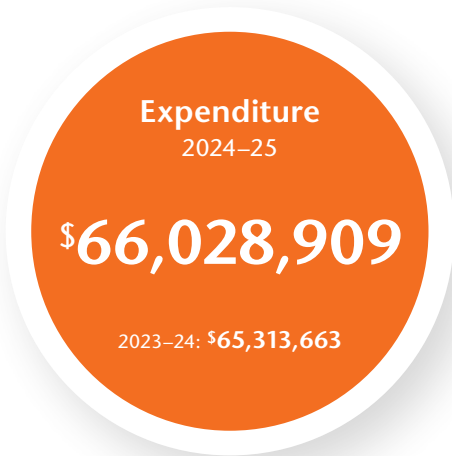
FY2025 includes operating surplus of \$41,060 from SDN Child and Family Services

Revenue

Revenue growth remained flat when compared to the prior year’s performance with most revenue continuing to be derived from the provision of Early Childhood Education and Care services.

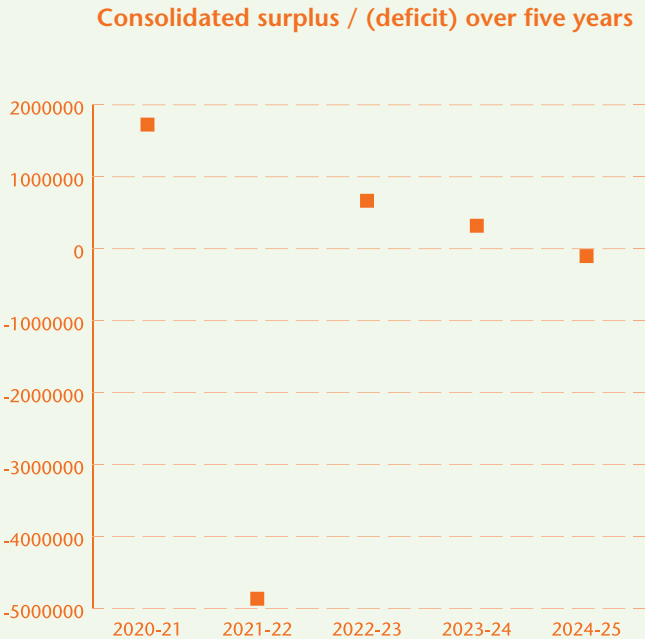
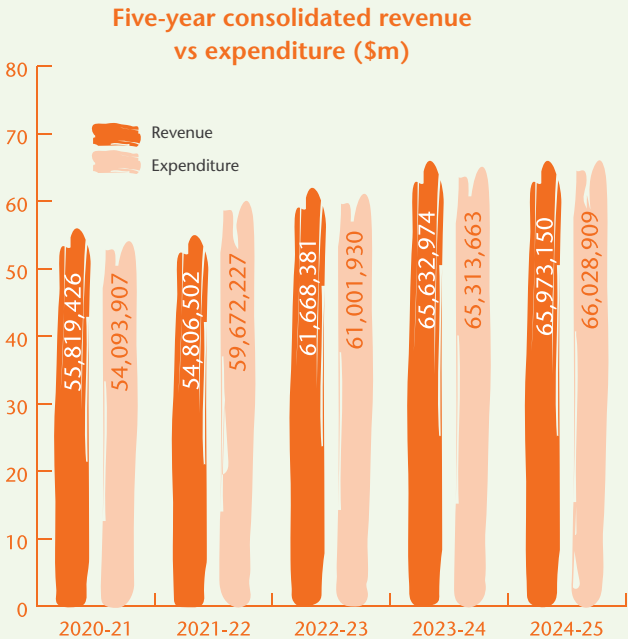
The impact to ECEC demand from the effects of ongoing cost of living pressures and the sustained changes to family work patterns and expectations continues as remote and hybrid working models become the norm for many of our families. Revenue from Children’s Therapies services dropped. This remains a challenging market in which to participate with uncertainty about future funding models for supporting children with disability or developmental delays contributing to significant staffing challenges and impacting on service delivery. Revenue from the delivery of our government-funded programs remained steady.





Expenditure

Expenditure was tightly controlled throughout the year. Staffing challenges continued to be experienced in all sectors of SDN operations as services competed in highly competitive job markets. This has an impact on staff turnover levels and an ongoing upward pressure on wages. The current inflationary and cost of living pressures have been felt across SDN’s cost base with upward pressure on both direct and indirect expenses experienced throughout the year. Strategically important projects delivered during the year, such as the implementation of a new Human Resources Information System and the establishment of our new SDN Macquarie Park centre are also reflected in this year’s expenses.

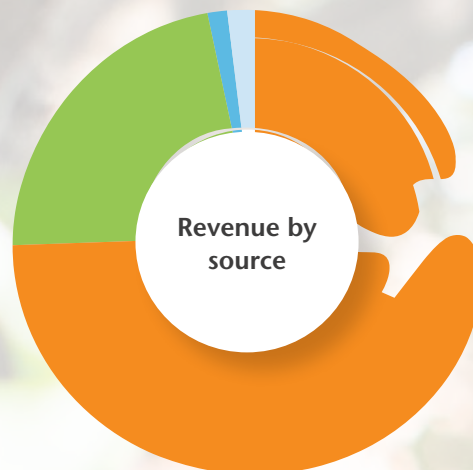


Revenue & Expenditure

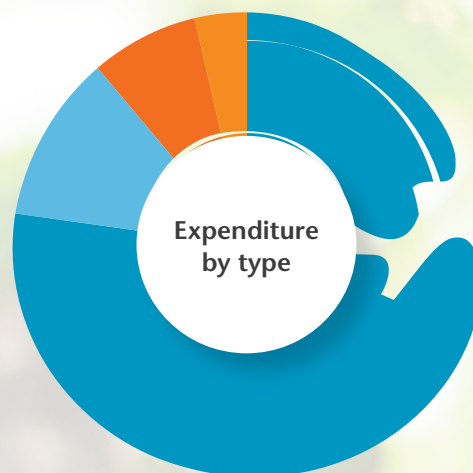
Fees from Early Childhood Education and Care centres continue to be our most significant source of revenue. The ongoing impacts of increased cost of living pressures, changes in community expectations, lifestyles and work patterns, all have had an adverse impact on utilisation patterns across our centres.

During 2024–25, revenue from our fee-for-service therapies for children with a disability or developmental delay decreased on prior year levels. We continue to see results from the capacity building focus on improvement of work practices, systems and processes. We are preparing for future restructuring in this sector and have transitioned to a location-based integrated supports model over the second half of the financial year.

Federal and state government funding is for the delivery of specific programs and projects resulting from successful tenders and grant applications. The majority of this comes from our delivery of the Family Preservation program.



- Parent fees and child care benefits
- Government grants and subsidies
- Children's Therapies
- Other



- Staff costs
- Occupancy expenses
- Administration
- Service delivery



Children’s Education and Care Centres

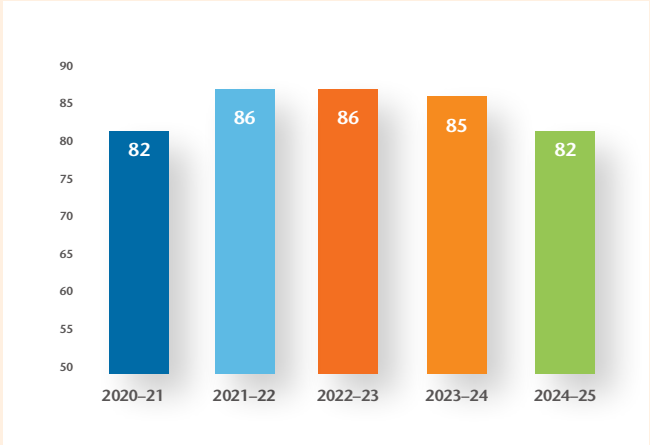
Revenue remained steady over the year, with cost-driven fee increases offset by shifts in consumer behaviour — particularly the persistence of flexible work patterns, which have contributed to uneven demand for services. Delays in opening our newest centre also impacted revenue. Despite these challenges, SDN continues to experience strong utilisation levels, albeit slightly lower than the previous year, in a competitive market. While increased public scrutiny across the sector has placed additional demands on service delivery, SDN has maintained its commitment to delivering early learning outcomes that go **beyond quality**, guided by the SDN Way.

Revenue
2024–25

\$49,148,679

2023–24: \$49,780,267

Centre Utilisation as a % of approved places over 5 years



A background image showing a child in a pink polka-dot shirt and white pants, standing in a garden with green plants and a green metal trellis.

Children's Therapies

Revenue
2024-25

\$887,583

2023-24: \$1,705,000

Fee-for-service revenue for Children's Therapies declined during the year, driven by significant challenges associated with operating under the NDIS and ongoing difficulties in recruiting qualified staff. In response, SDN restructured its approach in the second half of the year, transitioning to a new, integrated centre-based model of service delivery. While activity levels decreased, this does not reflect the underlying demand for support among children, families, and carers. The new model builds on earlier work to streamline back-end processes and enhance the experience for families, with services now delivered through several SDN centres rather than stand-alone locations. Recruitment and retention of experienced staff remains a critical challenge.

Revenue
2024-25

\$9,994,839

2023-24: \$9,687,840

Family Preservation & Support Programs

We have sustained our level of support for families and continue to be trusted advisers. Our largest government-funded contract is for the NSW Family Preservation program which is in its third and final year of the current commissioning contract. We have contributed to the NSW Government redesigning of this program and have tendered for the new Families Together program and contract for effect from 1 April 2026, if successful. Funding for our other programs was maintained during the year.

Other resources

Philanthropy

There was a significant rise in philanthropic grants and donations during the year largely due to generous donations received to mark the celebration of our 120th anniversary.

2024–25

\$217,177

2023–24: \$87,811





Fundraising

Many of our children's education and care centres benefit from the additional equipment purchased for centres from fundraising activities of families.

2024–25

\$2,974

2023–24: \$6,832

Scholarships for Children

During **2024–25** we supported:

22 children

with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships totalling **\$132,000.**

Last year: 23

+

8 children

with Access and Inclusion Scholarships children totalling **\$48,000.**

Last year: 9

Celebrating a lifetime of dedication

SDN awards life membership to two remarkable women

Adrienne Miles

Marion Taylor



In July, SDN was proud to honour two exceptional women, Marion Taylor and Adrienne Miles, with life membership in recognition of their extraordinary contributions and 70-year association with our organisation.

At a special morning tea held in their honour, Marion and Adrienne were presented with life membership certificates and flowers, and the opportunity to share heartfelt memories from their decades-long journey with SDN.

Their story began in the 1950s as students at the Nursery School Teachers' College (NSTC), where a lifelong friendship and professional bond was formed.

Adrienne and Marion's careers are intertwined with the history of SDN's pioneering work in early childhood education and care, with both women taking leadership roles at the Melanie Alexander Demonstration Nursery School in Newtown.

Marion graduated from NSTC in 1955 and became the inaugural Director of Melanie Alexander in 1957. A recipient of the prestigious Thyne-Reid Travelling Scholarship, she studied child development in London and returned to teach at SDN's NSTC until 1968. A gifted musician, Marion also contributed to children's educational programming on Channel 9 on show called *Playroom* and later played a pivotal role in establishing the SDN Archive in 2002.

Adrienne Miles commenced her studies at NSTC in 1951 after completing her Leaving Certificate. During her training, she undertook placements at several childcare centres, including Alexandria Day Nursery, and graduated in December 1953. Adrienne went on to serve SDN with distinction until her retirement in the early 1990s.

Adrienne graduated from NSTC in 1958 and became Director of Melanie Alexander in 1959. She later received the Alice Creswick Scholarship, allowing her to pursue postgraduate studies in early childhood education.

Adrienne joined the NSTC teaching staff in 1969 and remained deeply involved with SDN's educational and archival work for decades.

This marks the first time in over a decade that SDN has awarded a life membership, making it all the more special during our 120th anniversary.

SDN Board President, Helen Hamilton-James, acknowledged their "long personal and professional connection with SDN, their invaluable contribution to the History Committee, and their ongoing active support of SDN — its people and its work".

✧ We proudly recognise Marion and Adrienne as life members and thank them for a lifetime of service to the SDN village.

How a scholarship to SDN Milperra gave Bodhi a head start

“

Bodhi's connection to the world around him deepened through sensory-rich experiences. Water play became a favourite activity, where he delighted in controlling the flow and speed of the tap.

Bodhi* attended SDN Milperra on an SDN Access and Inclusion Scholarship, where with support, he became a joyful and resilient learner ready for primary school.

Diagnosed with autism and a developmental delay, Bodhi came to SDN Milperra exhibiting self-harm behaviours and rarely showed interest in the children around him.

From the beginning, Bodhi had a strong bond with his educators, often expressing affection through hugs and guiding them by hand to communicate his needs.

Although non-verbal, Bodhi's expressive personality shone through in all his interactions. His educators embraced his communication style, using strategies like 'observe, wait and listen' to understand his cues and foster meaningful engagement.

Bodhi's love for music became a powerful tool for learning. Group activities centred around songs and rhythm helped him to participate more fully, and familiar songs like *Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* brought joy and connection.

While he preferred solitary play, Bodhi gradually developed the capacity to share and take turns, with 1:1 support helping him navigate social interactions.

Bodhi's connection to the world around him deepened through sensory-rich experiences. Water play became a favourite activity, where he delighted in controlling the flow and speed of the tap.

His confidence grew steadily, and he began to learn strategies to cope with frustration and unexpected changes. Though he exhibited self-harming behaviours (e.g. head banging) when overwhelmed, his educators provided calm, reassuring guidance to help him feel safe and understood.

Bodhi also made strides in physical development and self-care. He became increasingly active, enjoying outdoor play and ball games, and began learning routines around hygiene and mealtime. Educators adapted mealtime experiences to suit his sensory preferences, ensuring he felt comfortable and supported.

Drawing and art also became important outlets for expression — Bodhi began creating symbolic faces and experimenting with pencil grip, showing emerging fine motor skills and creativity.

As Bodhi prepares to transition to primary school, he carries with him a rich foundation of skills, experiences, and relationships built at SDN Milperra.

His journey reflects the power of inclusive early childhood education — and the profound impact of educators who see each child's potential and meet them where they are.



SDN Family Connection Program

Generous donation funds new autism support program for SDN families

New family support program



“ This act of philanthropy not only honours SDN’s legacy but strengthens SDN’s future, ensuring that families and caregivers of autistic children continue to feel confident, capable, and connected.

In celebration of SDN’s 120th anniversary, we were honoured to receive a generous personal donation from long-standing philanthropist and friend of SDN, Helen Kirby.

This exceptional gift will allow us to pilot and deliver our Family Connection Program at SDN Beranga Autism Specific Preschool in Rooty Hill, with the aim of potentially expanding it to all centres offering Autism Specific Preschool programs.

The SDN Family Connection program addresses the increasing need for safe, inclusive spaces where families of children with disabilities can connect, share experiences, and support each other.

“Families of a child with a disability are often isolated and find it difficult to socialise with other families. Many environments are unsuitable for their child, or they feel judged and unwelcome.

“Sadly, this means they rarely seek connection or know where to find the support they need,” explains Debra Morrison, SDN’s Stakeholder Relationship Co-ordinator.

The pilot program is intended to provide a framework of monthly and term-based meetups, facilitated by SDN staff, where families can come together to share their journeys and use the safe environment of SDN Beranga to build a network of peers and friends.

“Our staff at SDN Beranga — including teachers, educators and allied health professionals and our SDN Beranga Family Resource Worker (social worker) — are all trained to work not only with the children in their care but also with their families,” says Debra.

Thanks to this donation, we can cover the costs of additional staffing, resource development, catering, and targeted support services to offer this program without increasing families’ fees. The funding will allow us to trial the program over two years, with the potential to expand to other SDN centres, including SDN Macquarie Park and SDN Lois Barker.

Commenting on the project, our benefactor Helen Kirby thanked SDN for the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of these children, saying: “You all should be so proud of what you’re embarking on for young children with autism — it will be a game-changer for so many families”.

This act of philanthropy not only honours SDN’s legacy but strengthens SDN’s future, ensuring that families and caregivers of autistic children continue to feel confident, capable, and connected.

— We thank Helen Kirby
for her incredible generosity.

Be Involved

SDN's vision is for an equitable world where all children thrive.

We believe in every child's right to access high quality early childhood education and early intervention, regardless of economic circumstances, development or cultural background. Our purpose is to promote and enhance the wellbeing, learning and development of children in inclusive environments.

As a not-for-profit organisation, we earn much of our revenue through fee-for-service activities, as well as government funding. However, we do need to find additional funds to extend our work to those who are particularly vulnerable and who otherwise might fall through the gaps.

SDN thanks all our supporters, including staff, members, government, local businesses, donors, families, and other generous supporters.

Make a donation at

We accept donations from philanthropic foundations, businesses and individuals for our work with our priority areas, including:

Support from our families

Many of our early learning services are supported by volunteer fundraising committees run by the families who use the service. The funds raised are used to buy additional equipment for the centre, or for special excursions.

Many of our families also donate to our annual **'Families helping families'** fundraising campaign, which has raised funds for 20 scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children since 2020.

If you would like to support a local centre, please **contact us** to find out how.

Support from the community

We receive **grants** from philanthropic trusts, and foundations to support our childhood scholarship programs, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and for children with disabilities or developmental delays.

Support from our staff

SDN established its **Staff Giving program** in July 2012 to support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships. In 2015, we extended it to include our Access and Inclusion Scholarships for children with a disability or development delay. It is a voluntary regular payroll giving program, and to date the program has contributed to a total of **38 scholarships**.

SDN Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships

In 2007, SDN established its **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Scholarships** as it was apparent that many Aboriginal children were not accessing mainstream childcare and preschool due to cultural barriers and costs.

These scholarships are one of the few funded education scholarship programs in Australia offered to Aboriginal children in the early years before school. They cover the cost of a child attending an SDN Children's Education and Care Centre, two days a week for one year. The scholarships aim to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children access to high-quality early education and lay the foundations for lifelong learning, ensuring more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can start school on an equal footing.

Since 2007, we have provided **scholarships to 174 children**, which has only been made possible thanks to donations from philanthropic foundations and individuals.

You can see our list of supporters on page 63 of this report.

www.sdn.org.au/donate

✱ our **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Scholarships**

✱ our **Access and Inclusion Scholarships** for our early learning centres

✱ our work with **children and families facing challenges**

✱ the **SDN Building Fund**

Our subsidiary company, SDN Child and Family Services, is endorsed by the Australian Tax Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient, and donations greater than \$2 are tax deductible.

SDN Access and Inclusion Scholarships

In 2015, SDN established its **Access and Inclusion Scholarships** to help to reduce financial barriers and increase participation for children with disabilities or developmental delays by covering the cost of a child to attend an SDN Children's Education and Care Centre, up to two days a week for one year. Our inaugural scholarships were awarded thanks to funding from long term supporters the Jenour Foundation. We have now provided scholarships to **55 children**.

SDN Building Fund

In 1992, SDN set up a tax-deductible **Building Fund** to assist with the upkeep and repair of SDN's buildings. This Fund is supported by donation only.

More information

To find out how you can be involved, call us on 1300 831 445, visit our website www.sdn.org.au, email us on sdn@sdn.org.au, or follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook or Instagram at [@sdnchildrensservices](https://www.instagram.com/sdnchildrensservices).



Our Supporters

The following people and organisations have given financial support to SDN and its subsidiary SDN Child and Family Services during the 2024–25 financial year. *We thank them for their support.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships

Mrs Kirsty Albert
Mrs Angela Donohoe
Barbara Fewings
Dr Joy Goodfellow
Mr Glen Hughes
James N. Kirby Foundation
McEwen Family Foundation
Mrs Coral Miller
Susan Mills
Mrs Adrienne Miles
Mrs Adrienne Neilson
Mrs Marion Taylor
Mrs Marina West

SDN Access & Inclusion Scholarships

Mrs Elizabeth Albert
Mrs Deb Brennan
Mrs Nancy Butterfield
Mrs Angela Donohoe
Mrs H.E. Fairfax
Jenour Foundation
Mrs Hilary Hannam
Mrs Sue Perdriau
Mrs Barbara Wise

SDN Family Connection Program

Helen Kirby

**130 SDN Staff
and Families**
contributed to
our Scholarships
through staff giving
and our **Families Helping
Families campaign.**

SDN Building Fund

Mrs Tonia Godhard
Alice Killen
Mr Tom Taylor

SDN Access & Inclusion Scholarships

Mrs Elizabeth Albert
Mrs Deb Brennan
Mrs Nancy Butterfield
Mrs Angela Donohoe
Mrs H.E. Fairfax

*Thank you for
your support.*



t 1300 831 445 | **e** sdn@sdn.org.au

a Level 3, 19-37 Greek Street, Glebe NSW 2037
PO Box 654, Broadway, NSW 2007

www.sdn.org.au

Follow us on [!\[\]\(0f848bbd71cef6b345273b16f905912a_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(d873c0073cfd3b74a7c9b5ca09bad0c7_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(9126fbb278b6412ee8b215b5e71dadba_img.jpg\)](#)

sdn
children's services



View our full Annual Review and Annual Report at www.sdn.org.au/corporate-publications

Produced by SDN's Communications Team | Photography by Anna Zhu & Linda Maclean | November 2025

Joint Vice-Regal Patrons: The Honourable Margaret Beazley AO KC, Governor of New South Wales and Mr Dennis Wilson