

SDN's Strategic Plan 2024-28

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



We help to create an equitable world through our purpose, which is:

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

sdn
children's services

We're here for the **wellbeing, learning and development** of children and young people in inclusive environments.

SDN's *Wellbeing Wheel* defines how we approach the wellbeing of children and young people.

We know that all six elements of our wellbeing wheel have to be in place for children and young people to thrive, but we can't achieve those outcomes without supporting the wellbeing of the whole family, and without supportive systems and processes in place. *Fundamental to this is being a child safe organisation.*

This strategic plan commits us to going 'beyond quality', which means not just doing what we have to do to be compliant and meet standards, but to be leaders in our practices, which are informed by evidence and research.

To achieve our plan we need staff who are skilled and experienced, who share our commitments to children and young people, are aligned with our values and purpose, and create safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces for children, young people, families and each other.

Our early learning programs are based on our deep understanding of learning through play, developed since we started in 1905, using Australia's Early Years Learning Framework to explore a diverse curriculum. Our work with children and young people with disabilities and developmental delays uses best practice early childhood intervention principles and therapies.

We partner with their families and work as a trusted partner to support the wellbeing of the whole family. Our work with families facing challenges is based on our own innovative evidence-based framework that aims to create the safe and supportive environments that we know are necessary for children and young people's wellbeing and optimal learning and development.

A vision for an equitable world starts with inclusive attitudes

Inclusion and social justice are strong values for SDN and have been so since our beginnings. Inclusive attitudes help to shape an equitable world, and we want all children, young people and adults of diverse backgrounds and abilities to be part of the SDN village.

We foster inclusive attitudes in children and young people, and model and advocate for inclusion. We create places for children, young people, families and our staff to participate, innovate and transform.

Our goal for this strategic plan 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.

This means that core to our new strategic plan is the consistent delivery of the SDN Way, every day, by everyone across SDN. The SDN Way guides us in how to go beyond the basics and deliver our high quality services in a way that is unique to SDN.





The SDN Way is what makes us **special**.

Built on our Pathways approach, the SDN Way describes the four ways we bring the SDN village to life for children, young people and families.

Firstly, we put children and young people at the centre of everything we do. We support the children and young people in our village to use their voices. And when they do, we listen.

Secondly, we partner with families to create a wellbeing and development journey that supports their child's strengths. Our village helps families feel more confident, capable and connected.

Thirdly, we value one another's unique strengths, values and perspectives. We partner with each other so that, together, we can build a better world for children and young people.

Finally, we design, use and maintain our environments 'on purpose' and 'for purpose' so that they can become places for children, young people, families and staff to learn, connect, participate, innovate and transform.

Core to this strategic plan is the consistent delivery of the SDN Way, every day, by everyone across SDN.

SDN's Planned Outcomes

2024 | 2028

Our purpose We're here to promote and enhance children's wellbeing, learning and development in inclusive environments.

Our strategy 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. To deliver our strategy we will need to achieve each of five key goals.

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.



Desirable

- ▶ Offer an inclusive village that supports the wellbeing, learning and development of children and young people and delivers the SDN Way.
- ▶ Work in partnership with families so they are confident, capable and connected, supporting their child's wellbeing, learning and development.
- ▶ Provide services that are valued by our clients and customers, that are accessible, clearly communicated, and delivered consistently across SDN.
- ▶ Offer dedicated and skilled supports for SDN families and prospective families who need extra resources to navigate systems and processes, and follow through to the result.

Enriching

- ▶ Work in partnership with our staff on our shared journey to build a better world for children and young people.
- ▶ Support staff to realise their calling, to enjoy their work and to grow as individuals.
- ▶ Offer learning environments that are safe and actively support staff in their professional development.
- ▶ Create strong teams and professional leadership.
- ▶ Offer staff fair pay and benefits, balanced with affordability for families.

Ethically sustainable

- ▶ Have a portfolio mix across and within our service streams that delivers surplus so that we can offer more services for the people who need them.
- ▶ Ensure financial sustainability together with ethically sustainable growth by applying Environment, Sustainability and Governance (ESG) business standards and principles to our decision making and planning.
- ▶ Leverage the value of our property portfolio to grow for the long term, taking account of access to workforce and community needs for quality service providers.
- ▶ Work in partnership with other organisations and across sectors.

Impactful

- ▶ Extend our impact through advocacy for children, young people, families and our staff.
- ▶ Support our staff to be advocates by sharing our views internally.
- ▶ Contribute our expertise to advocate for the closing of service gaps.
- ▶ Work with others in our sectors to keep up to date with policy and service issues.
- ▶ Advocate for the development of the sectors we work in including responding to policy and legislative changes, and training and capacity building opportunities.

What else do we need to do? Our priority actions are needed to achieve our strategic goals, in addition to our 'business as usual' projects.

- 1

Progress our 'children as citizens' framework to underpin our focus on children and young people's participation as vital for wellbeing.
- 2

Increase our reach and impact with a balanced portfolio of locations and services, co-locating and integrating our services wherever possible.
- 3

Respond to the evolving legislative, policy, talent acquisition and management landscapes by working in partnership with and investing in our workforce through nimble recruitment, intentional onboarding, professional development, competitive pay and conditions.
- 4

Embed our inclusion focus in services and workforce expertise for Autistic children and young people, children and young people with developmental delay, and with the impact of trauma including inter-generational trauma across all of our service streams.
- 5

Implement processes and systems to ensure SDN services and activities are environmentally sustainable, and environmental sustainability is embedded in our organisational decisions.

Our values In carrying out our purpose, we commit ourselves to being: **Trustworthy & Reliable** + **Inclusive & Respectful** + **Creative & Innovative**

It's in our DNA

IN NO SENSE does 'school' imply formal education. [B]eing preliminary even to the partial formality of Kindergarten work... [nursery school education is] the nurture and development, physical, social, psychological, of very young children by means of simple and carefully directed play and free physical activity."

— 1936/1937 Annual Report of Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association (now SDN Children's Services)

SDN has always understood the importance of the combination of education and care in enhancing the development of young children, right from our beginnings in 1905.

SDN has weathered many things in the intervening 118 years. This particular stage of our journey began in 2011 when SDN decided to refocus efforts to become an inclusive organisation that used our interdisciplinary expertise to deliver our services in an integrated way, and to extend that expertise to support families to provide safe and supportive home environments.

Our commitment to children's wellbeing, learning and development in inclusive environments continues with this strategic plan. Our *Wellbeing Wheel* shows the six elements and supporting systems we know need to work together for children and young people to thrive.

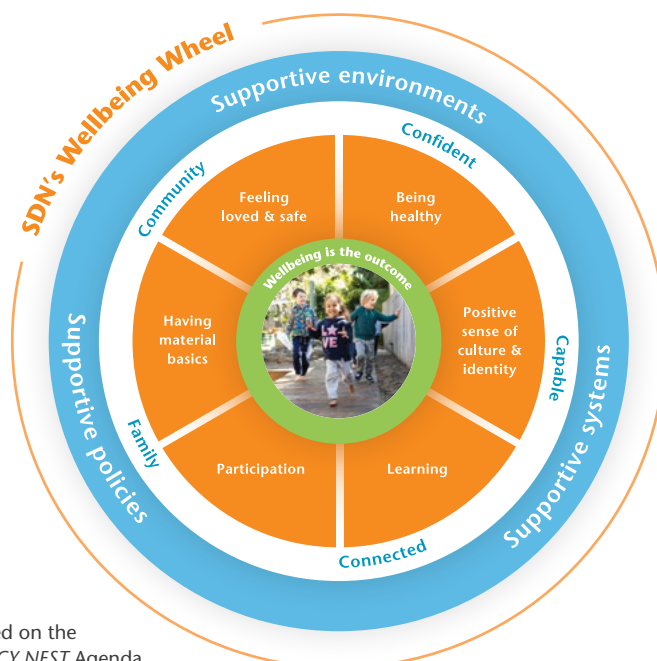
This plan continues our focus on quality for children and young people, offering value for families, being financially sustainable, and sharing our expertise to have impact on the wider community.

We're extending our commitment to children and young people to not only being a child safe organisation, but to go beyond just meeting quality standards and doing what we have to do, to being leaders in practices that champion 'children as citizens'.

We know that supportive environments are vital for the wellbeing of children and young people, but those environments have to be safe and sustainable. We will have a bigger focus on environmental and social sustainability and our own role as a 'corporate' citizen, while continuing careful management of our finances and assets.

The quality of our workforce has the most influence on our ability to keep our commitments to children, young people and families, so we have added a fifth pillar to our strategy – working in partnership with our staff and creating enriching experiences for them. Our success is determined by our ability to attract and retain highly talented, committed staff who are leaders in their field, and this is even more true now after the COVID pandemic.

This is a new strategic plan, but our strategy is not new – evidence-based and play-based services that prioritise the earliest intervention when additional support is required so we enhance children and young people's wellbeing, that are offered in sustainable and inclusive environments, that are responsive to the needs of families, and are delivered by skilled, committed staff. This is who we've been from the start, and we will continue to deliver on that legacy and vision.



Based on the ARACY NEST Agenda.



Our strategy in action

Our Services

SDN is a shared village centred on children and young people, created in partnership with children, young people, families and our diverse range of professional staff. Like members of a village, our services take the time to build trust with children, young people, families and each other. We know that it is on this foundation of trust that curiosity and exploration blossoms.

Our early learning centres continue to be at the core of what we do. While our utilisation is higher than the national average in a changing market, this strategic plan provides the opportunity to further differentiate and build quality in our services through embedding the SDN Way. In particular we will focus on developing the ways we listen and respond to children and young people, building staff capability to deliver inclusive services and preparing for possible changes to government funding and policy.

We will open opportunities for more Autistic children and young people to join the SDN village by building practice across all centres and by continuing the positive social impact of the Autism Specific Program at SDN Beranga and we will expand the locations where we offer our autism specific program.

Our early childhood intervention programs and therapies for children and young people will focus on sustainably supporting children and young people who are Autistic, have developmental delay, and those who have been impacted by trauma. We will continue to use best practice early intervention models.

Our government funded family support programs will continue to support children, young people and families when they need it most, partnering with families under a framework designed to help them to achieve their own goals. Making the most of our unique Thriving Families framework, we will continue to apply for more grants and funding opportunities to expand the support we provide.

This mix of services will provide revenue from across multiple streams that supports both coordinated delivery of services to families and SDN's financial sustainability.

Our *strategic priorities* —

In order to achieve the goals in this plan, as well as our day to day work, we will need to focus on some key areas:

01 We will progress our '*children as citizens*' framework to underpin our focus on children and young people's participation as vital for wellbeing.

'Participation' is one of the elements of wellbeing and inclusion. Participation includes children and young people being able to have a voice; and being a citizen by caring about the good of the community and the planet; and participating actively to make things better. We will increase the emphasis on participation to match the attention we pay to the other elements of our *Wellbeing Wheel*.

02 We will increase our reach and impact with a balanced portfolio of locations and services, co-locating and integrating our services wherever possible.

SDN applies a balanced portfolio approach across our centres as well as our mix of services. This means we actively evaluate the contribution of new programs and services to the overall mix and consider partnerships and co-location of services as we progress with our long-term property strategy.

03 We will respond to the evolving legislative, policy, talent acquisition and management landscapes by working in partnership with and investing in our workforce through nimble recruitment, intentional onboarding, professional development, competitive pay and conditions.

SDN needs to be seen to be a leader in the sectors we work in with innovative recruitment and retention practices that deliver an enriching experience for employees. In this way we can respond to the significant shifts in workforce expectations and changes to industrial relations laws, and reap the benefits of our new People system. Workforce has therefore been elevated to a priority action.

04 We will embed our inclusion focus in services and workforce expertise for Autistic children and young people, children and young people with developmental delay, and those living with the impact of trauma including inter-generational trauma across all of our service streams.

SDN is developing significant, valuable expertise in early learning and early intervention for Autistic children, young people and their families. The need for inclusive services for this cohort is high, as we know that targeted and intensive early intervention can support children to access mainstream schooling. Our mix of services for Autistic children and young people allows them to choose the support that meets their needs and their preferences. This focus on offerings for Autistic children and young people reflects the lack of services available for young Autistic children in particular.

05 We will implement processes and systems to ensure SDN services and activities are environmentally sustainable, and environmental sustainability is embedded in our organisational decisions.

Our vision is for a world where all children thrive, and this requires our stewardship of resources now so that it is a reality in the future. SDN has a responsibility to be environmentally sustainable and we will use the Environment, Social and Governance principles and standards as the framework for our planning. We will focus on the Environment elements to drive the development of our environmental sustainability strategy.