

Cover photo: A child with a hearing impairment enjoys a visit to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1964. Image courtesy of the Mirror Newspapers.



1905–2025

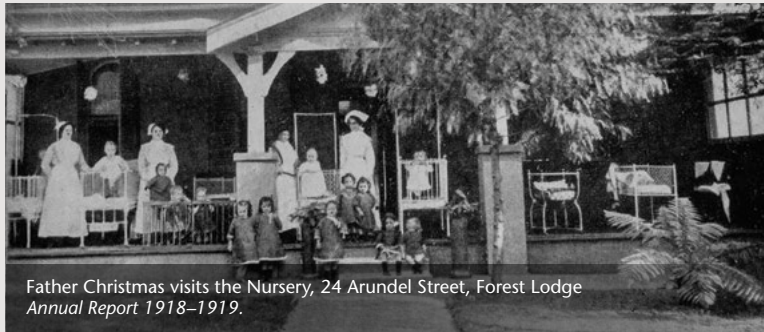
Breaking Down Barriers

A history of integrated service
delivery at SDN Children's Services

sdn
children's services



SDN Beranga, 2013.



Father Christmas visits the Nursery, 24 Arundel Street, Forest Lodge
Annual Report 1918–1919.



SDN Beranga, 2013.

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Introduction

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

In late 2025, SDN is proud to commemorate 120 years of providing impactful services for children and families.

Throughout SDN's history, its founding values have remained steadfast. Ideas around welfare, education and social justice have led to early interventions that helped to break down barriers for children and families and shape the organisation's integrated approaches to working with children and families today. *Breaking Down Barriers: A history of integrated service delivery at SDN Children's Services* focuses on SDN's long history of designing and delivering programs that support inclusion and improve outcomes for children and their families.

The book is a companion piece to Dr Leone Huntsman's *For the Little Ones, the Best: SDN Children's Services 1905–2005*, which broadly covers the development and progress of SDN up to its centenary in 2005.

It draws on Dr Sandie Wong's and Dr Deborah Brennan's theoretical work as well as interviews with current and former SDN staff and holdings of the SDN Archive.

A short history of SDN from founding to today

In *For the Little Ones, the Best*, Leone Huntsman notes the founding women of SDN were strongly influenced by the Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birthrate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales, published in 1904.

Prior to this, **in 1891**, female graduates founded the University of Sydney Settlement, where students would live alongside local people “in an attempt to improve the lot of slum dwellers in suburbs immediately joining the campus”. It was from among these women that the Kindergarten Union (now KU Children’s Services) was founded in 1895.

Dr Sandie Wong (2013) notes that this was a period of “progressive idealism but also one marked by huge disparity in the distribution of wealth”.

She goes on:

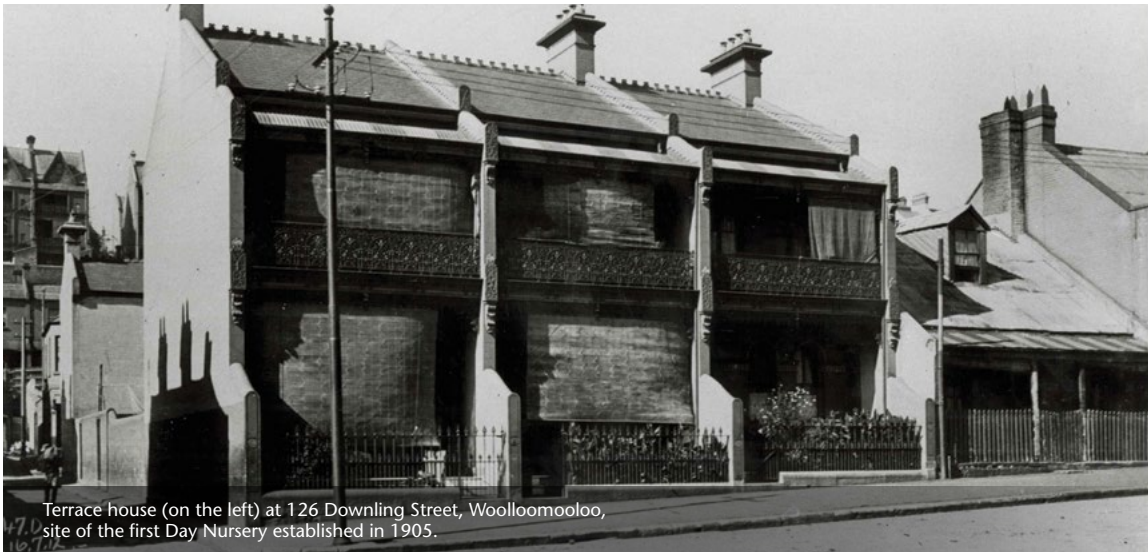
In Australia, a few had amassed vast fortunes, but very many more lived in abject poverty (Clarke, 1981). In Sydney, increased industrialisation had led to rapid, and largely unplanned, urbanisation, resulting in a shortage of accommodation, overcrowding and associated problems such as endemic disease and insecure tenancy.

In the poorest suburbs, many children lived in dangerous conditions, and child mortality and morbidity were extremely high. Newspapers reported daily on children’s ill health, injury, murder and/or abandonment, provoking one commentator of the day to refer to the large numbers of children’s deaths as ‘The Massacre of the Innocents’ (Arthur, 1894).

In 1903, KU decided not to admit children under three years of age, prompting the first meeting of the Sydney Creche Association on 3 August 1905.



Children playing at the first SDN centre in Woolloomooloo, 1906.



Terrace house (on the left) at 126 Downling Street, Woolloomooloo, site of the first Day Nursery established in 1905.



Unknown SDN location ca. 1950s.

This note from the first *Annual Report (1906)* goes to the heart of the reasons for the founding:

These mothers are forced to leave early in the morning to pursue their work in a shop, factory, or steam-laundry, and their babies, often two or three in number, ranging from a few weeks to a very few years, are left in the care of a child, little more than a babe herself ... It is not to relieve these mothers of their responsibility, but to ease their overwhelming burden of care and anxiety, to enable them to keep their home and family together,

and to supply to their little ones with the wholesome and loving care of which they are deprived, and which is so necessary to their wellbeing, that the Sydney Day Nursery Association has been formed.

The first creche opened in a terrace house at 126 Dowling St, Woolloomooloo, on 7 December 1905. A lack of understanding of the word 'creche' soon led the Creche Association to be renamed the Sydney Day Nursery Association.

In an interview (2024) Wong says:

When looking back at the history of SDN in the very early days, it's important to remember the context in which the founders were operating. The turn of the century of was a time of nationalism and of economic challenges and associated changing views about charity and progress. As well, there were new understandings about children's development and eugenics coming from science, changing and controversial views about the role of women in society, and arguments for a move to more progressive educational pedagogies within public schools. So right

from the very beginning, the founders of SDN had to operate within a complex discursive context.

The founders recognised the urgent need for care for younger children, especially to enable women to participate in work, but they also knew that they had to advocate using the dominant language and ideas of the day, otherwise they would never have got the ear of authorities or funders. So, they had to 'play the game'. What they did and achieved was amazing, especially considering the context within which they were working.

An unnamed SDN centre ca. 1950s.



In 1911, *Australian Kindergarten Magazine* reported that the Sydney Day Nursery Association saved “many a little child from running around the streets from morning until night.” By that time the Association had opened three centres and by 1927 another two had begun.

By the late **1920s** a need for a more intense educational program for children in long day care over two was identified, creating a sort of ‘pre-kindergarten’ designated as Nursery Schools.

Soon enough it was clear that nursery schools required nursery school teachers — importantly, a different skillset from the nurses employed in day nurseries and the kindergarten teachers employed by KU.

The Nursery Schools Teachers’ College (NSTC) is inarguably one of SDN’s greatest achievements. For most of its life it operated out of the specially refurbished ‘Retreat’ at Burren St, Newtown, which opened **in 1945**.

In 1974, the administrative functions of the college were taken over by government and in 1982 the college was

amalgamated with Sydney Kindergarten Teachers’ College, which in 1994 moved to the Institute of Early Childhood (IEC) at Macquarie University.

In the 1940s it became broadly acknowledged that children with disabilities should not spend their lives in hospitals and in care but should be socialising with other children in the broader community. SDN was a leader in employing welfare officers who would assess children and families to ensure that the neediest received a nursery school placement.

Between 1946 and 1965, SDN expanded due to the post-war baby boom and stronger public demand and acceptance of early childhood education and care.

During this period new centres were opened at Waverley, Herne Bay, Bathurst, Double Bay, St Peters, Goulburn and Newtown. By 1965 SDN operated 15 nursery schools (for children over three) and six day nurseries (for children birth to three).

In 2025, SDN operates 27 early learning centres, two preschools, one autism-specific preschool, family support services and therapies for children with autism or developmental delay.



Nursery School Teachers' College, 146 Burren Street Newtown ca. 1958.

A history of integrated service delivery

02



SDN Beranga, 2013.

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“So, it has always been SDN culture to see if those with the most needs can be provided for.”

Ginie Udy, SDN CEO from 2002–2017, noted in 2024 that the full gamut of children’s services employed by SDN today were there in some form from the beginning:

The babies and toddlers that SDN started for, and the young mothers on their own, were on the outer of society, were the ones that society had basically rejected with that shame of having had a baby and not having a male figure floating around. And therefore, what are you going to do with that baby? Or even not have the baby ... But there’s a link with the founders who said their aim was to preserve family life.

And I think that’s also a link back to why SDN culture fitted so beautifully for children with disabilities and there’s a whole lot of stuff in the history on what was originally called the Parent Resource Program, where again this issue was identified. So, it has always been SDN culture to see if those with the most needs can be provided for.

Part one

A NEW ERA begins



The integrated services that SDN employs today have their roots in the federal government's Special Needs Grants in the 1970s.

The grants began in 1972 with the enactment of the Commonwealth Child Care Act. SDN's *Annual Report* (1972) noted that the purpose of the Act "is to provide capital and research grants and some recurrent costs for defined organisations providing full day care for children with special needs, i.e. one parent families (e.g. deserted wives, widows, unmarried mothers etc), migrant families, ill parents and very low-income groups. As these are areas in which the Association has always worked, we are eligible for assistance."

In the 1970s, SDN prioritised Commonwealth Child Care Act funds for capital works rather than for special needs cases. It wasn't until the 1980s that family services outside of centres began to be offered at scale.

Writing about SDN's history in 1999, SDN Coordinator Marge Barns noted, "1980 was a time of considerable change. Funds were becoming difficult to find, government subsidies were beginning to diminish and the first staff cuts affected trained teachers, being the costliest to employ."

Around this time, the Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, as it was still known, began to provide services for children with disabilities via the Special Needs Grants. It was here that a new integrated services era began.

1981

1981 is designated the Year of Disabled Persons and the *SDN Annual Report* (1981) notes the movement towards disability services at SDN. The official designated year is said to have helped families with people with disability “break down barriers.” The *Annual Report* goes on to say, “the staff awareness and support to children with special needs, and also to their parents, has been most outstanding during the past months.”

1986

SDN’s *Annual Report* (1986) notes, “the Department of Youth and Community Services have an increasing number of families with young children who need special care and welfare assistance. Our Association continues to accommodate some of the children and in so doing takes on children with social and emotional problems, developmental delays, speech delays, marked physical handicaps and children at risk. We are grateful to the therapists who have helped us during the year with the special needs children.”

1987

On 4 May 1987, the Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association establishes the Special Needs Unit, embedding disability services as part of the organisation’s core business.

The unit begins with Sue Little as Coordinator and Mary Ackerman as Child Care Assistant. The program is set up to help children under five years of age with special needs. This includes children with a disability, general developmental delay, language delay, behavioural difficulty, inadequate social and emotional development, or English as a second language.

It operates out of the first floor of the Newtown Day Nursery (today SDN Linthorpe Street, Newtown).

Sue Little says at the time:

The role of the Special Needs Unit is also to assist staff in the implementation of such programs and discuss with parents their child’s needs and providing an ongoing program for parents to carry out at home, where possible, and refer parents to other services if the need arises. It was decided that the Special Needs Unit would be based in one centre at a time, implementing a full program then visiting regularly to maintain the program with the child, staff and parents. We envisage that the funding will continue, and we will endeavour to provide a worthwhile service for the children, parents and staff of our nurseries and nursery schools.

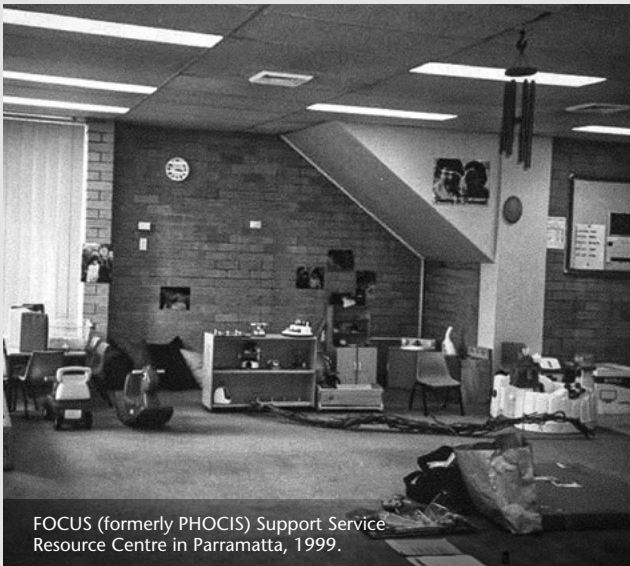
1989

The Special Needs Unit becomes the Early Intervention Program (EIP). Margi Barns, the Coordinator of the newly named EIP, notes in the *Association Annual Report* (1990) that, “special education and migrant children’s needs became quite marked in some nurseries and showed little evidence of either need in other nurseries.”

June Brooks, a special education teacher, and Anne Levis, a childcare worker, work with around 20 children with developmental delays in ten Association nurseries. Additionally, some children receive help from other professionals through Association centres and others make private arrangements.



Jill Stephens (left) and former SDN CEO 2002-2017 Ginie Udy (right) teaching at Lithgow Early Intervention Program (LEIP) in 1986. Operating out of Lithgow Public School, it was where Ginie’s particular interest in holistic children’s services began.



FOCUS (formerly PHOCIS) Support Service Resource Centre in Parramatta, 1999.

1996–1997

The Early Intervention Program is funded by the federal Supplementary Workers Program (SUPS), which means that staff are redefined as ‘facilitators/trainers’. This means that children requiring one-to-one support now must be referred elsewhere.

In March 1997 the Association begins managing the Parramatta Holroyd Optimal Intervention Service (PHOCIS). This comes after submitting an expression of interest to run the program via SUPS funding. Along with federal SUPS funding it also receives NSW Government funding for a teacher and speech pathologist.



CEO Profile

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. A significant reason for this was the expansion of special needs programs, which meant the corporate identity was better reflected as SDN Children's Services.

Tonia Godhard, SDN CEO 1994–2002 pictured on her last day in 2002 receiving gifts from children.

Tonia was born in 1940, grew up in Sydney's eastern suburbs and went to boarding school in the city while her parents lived in Palm Beach. She went to a girls' school and always wanted to be an early childhood teacher.

While studying at Sydney Kindergarten Teacher's College, she so impressed the academy that they asked her to work there but she declined in favour of working in England and at KU at Rushcutters Bay.

Her work in England in a disadvantaged area was a transformative experience:

“

“I learnt a lot ... I was interested in going into [disadvantaged] areas ... and of course you knew all the parents and there were a lot of very difficult stories. A lot of the fathers were in jail, a lot of the women alone, although there was a spirit in the community of supporting each other.

But it was an interesting place to have early teaching experience and basically directing experience as well.”

Tonia did eventually revisit Sydney Kindergarten Teacher's College to lecture (for a time with her daughter Kate in tow). In a managerial role at KU she oversaw a special education team, ensuring that there were resources for children in most need, and provision for First Nations families.

In her oral history recorded in 2006, Tonia expanded on her achievements as SDN CEO:

We got preschools, we got long day care, we opened the first work-based centre, Bluebell, in the ACT ... Then eventually we also took on outside school hours care and we had some of those. I think there was one person involved in special education when I went there — we grew the special education component. We were approached by a group called PHOCIS, the name is still there, which is where [current CEO] Kay Turner is.

That really grew because once we took on the old PHOCIS, which was pretty much just disability services, we were then approached about an occasional care service in Parramatta which then became the Resource Library. We then got other money for specific early intervention programs ... PHOCIS really grew because of that geography and Kay's and that team's talents let us apply for other grants to grow that unit ...

Then I applied for the preschool SCAN [Supporting Children with Additional Needs] money, which again is disability, Aboriginal-Torres Strait Islander, South Sea Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse families ... It is interesting now looking back because all of that has grown, so SDN has grown on those and used those in its applications for early intervention, Families First money etc.

Tonia Godhard was awarded an AM in 2002 for services as an advocate for early childhood education and care and to organisations that promote opportunities for children.

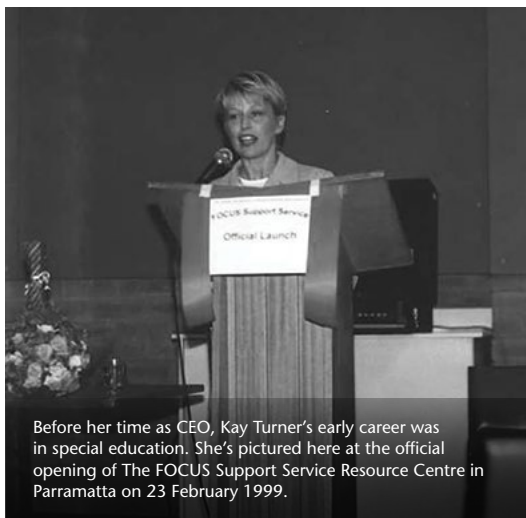
1999

The penultimate year of the 20th century sees the Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association become SDN Children's Services Inc. A marketing plan led by consultant Ann Fletcher-Nicholls drives the change. SDN President Melia O'Donnell writes, "the name reflects SDN's move into care for our children up to 12 years through expansion into Out of School Hours care and the extended role of the Inclusion Support Team (formerly EIP) and FOCUS (formerly PHOCIS)."

The launch of the newly-named FOCUS expands the service through Parramatta, Holroyd and Auburn through the Commonwealth SUPS program and the State Disability Services Program. The FOCUS Support Service Resource Centre is officially opened by NSW MP, the Honorable Gabrielle Harrison.

2000

The Waterloo Parent Resource Program evolves out of an identified need to better service low-income families who are accessing SDN centres, particularly after the loss of an operational subsidy and the subsequent fee rises. The program is designed to facilitate child and family development.



2002

SDN is successful in winning the contract from the Department of Community Services (DoCS) to operate the Supporting Children with Additional Needs (SCAN) program across the south-east and inner west areas of Sydney. The SCAN program runs statewide.

With the funding, SDN supports children with a disability, children from culturally diverse backgrounds, children with challenging behaviour and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

2003

SDN wins the National Child Protection Award in 2003 for the Waterloo Parent Resource Program. The Program is extended to six other SDN centres and these are rebranded as Child and Family Learning Centres. The centres receive funding from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS).

Scholarships begin through the Parent Resource Program. These are targeted to families with young children not currently accessing a children's service. Along with centre attendance, it gives participant families a chance to access parenting programs.

2006

In the *Annual Report (2006)*, SDN's 101st year, new CEO Ginie Udy outlines the structure of SDN's programs and the resources that supported them. They are:

- 1. Early Childhood Education and Care** (representing 86% of SDN staff and 55% of SDN clients)
- 2. Child and Family Support** (representing 6% of SDN staff and 10% of SDN clients)
- 3. Resourcing and Consulting to other childcare providers** (representing 6% of SDN staff and 35% of SDN clients)

2007

The year marks significant change in SDN's integrated services landscape, particularly with the development of the new SDN Child and Family Resource Centre, and the funding of Inclusion Support Agencies and the Brighter Futures program.



Glynis Chang pictured working alongside children at our Simpson Family Resource Centre, originally the CPS Simpson Service Resource Centre in 2000.



SDN Child and Family Resource Centre Open Day, 2011.

SDN Child and Family Resource Centre

In 2005, Parramatta City Council planned to redevelop their Council building, meaning the SDN Family Resource Centre (formerly FOCUS Support Service Resource Centre) needed to find a new home. Staff and families at the Resource Centre were determined to keep the service open and in 2006 secured a new property in Granville.

A survey of the local area and families using the Resource Centre found that support with parenting was needed and wanted. The SDN Child and Family Resource Centre model was developed in response in 2007.

The centre offered an early learning program with funding from the NSW Department of Human Services Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC), the NSW Department of Education and Training and the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing Community Services & Indigenous Affairs.

It was a program for children under five with a diagnosed disability, developmental delay or where there were concerns about a developmental delay.

A range of other services operated from Granville to support the needs of local families. These included a Stay & Play service

— a weekly one-hour group session involving free play and music groups.

The Community of Learners Project also operated out of Granville with funding from ADHC. In order for select centres to participate they had to agree to enrol at least three children with disability. SDN supported the centre to meet the needs of these children.

Playlinks also operated out of Granville. It was a supported playgroup for children aged 0–5 living in the Parramatta and Blacktown LGAs who had or may have had a disability.

Finally, Language Links was a funded home-based early childhood intervention program operating from the Resource Centre.

One Language Links team member trained in speech pathology was able to assess communication difficulties in children. A Family Resource Worker was also employed to support family relationships and help people access community resources.

The toy library operating out of Granville was also successful.

Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs)

Inclusion support teams had been in operation at SDN for a number of years before a significant boost in federal funding allowed the organisation to begin Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) from early 2006. These replaced the Commonwealth SUPS program.

Kim Martin, Inclusion Support Facilitator at SDN Cumberland Blacktown ISA, tells her story (2007):

I've been supporting a long day service in Mt Druitt — the Steve Lyons Children's Centre, Mt Druitt TAFE. They rang and requested support because they had eight families who are refugees from Sudan who had enrolled their children in the service this year. Staff were concerned about the nutrition of the Sudanese children. They felt that the families didn't have information about the lack of nutritional value of certain foods in Australia and so were sending chips and biscuits for children's lunches. The centre staff requested assistance from the Inclusion Support Agency to work out what to do.

I worked with the staff to do an Assisted Inclusion Readiness Plan. It meant I helped them work out what the issues were, what they knew and were doing already and what they wanted to learn and I helped them find out where they could go to

get help. As a result, they have made links with the Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre. They've learnt that the Sudanese mothers want what's best for their children like everyone else does but they don't know how to shop in Australia and what the foods are as it's so different to what they are used to. The centre agreed that if they had a short-term worker from the bicultural workers who spoke Arabic, Dinka and English they could help the families increase their knowledge about the foods they could buy in Australia and where to buy them.

I contacted the bicultural workers pool but they didn't have a Sudanese worker. However, they were interested in recruiting. I made a return visit to the childcare centre. There I met Alakier, a Sudanese mother. The Centre Director and I chatted to her about the need for an Arabic and Dinka speaking worker for the bicultural workers pool. Alakier was interested in applying so the Centre Director helped her complete the application. Alakier's application was successful. She was able to work at the centre to support the inclusion of the Sudanese children and families as well as to help the families to understand about the foods they were providing for their children's lunches.

Now Alakier is working with other childcare services in the area to help them include Sudanese children and families.



SDN Riverwood Centre, corner of Belmore Road and Roosevelt Avenue,
The Brighter Futures office was located within the centre, 2007.



Brighter Futures

The year 2007 was important for SDN as the Brighter Futures program, funded by the then Department of Family and Community Services, began. SDN's *Annual Report* that year stated:

The ultimate goal of the Brighter Futures Early Intervention Program is to develop families' strengths to enable them to have healthy families in the future. In the eight months that the Sydney programs have been running, we have helped 126 families.



In order to strengthen the families, Early Intervention Workers not only provide case management and model ways to achieve their goals, they also connect families with a variety of services who will equip them with the skills to address their needs.

The following is a case study of a client of Julie Bruce, a Brighter Futures Early Intervention worker, which offers an insight into the work of the program:

I arrived on a first home visit in March 2007 and met Najma who had recently given birth. She had post-natal depression, a history of perinatal psychosis from her first-born child and wasn't taking her anti-psychotic depression medication.*

On top of this her child, aged three and a half, was non-verbal. Najma didn't speak English and had no friends or family in Australia. Her husband worked long hours and she found herself afraid to leave their top floor unit alone.

In just a few months the Brighter Futures Early Intervention Program made a huge difference. Najma had begun seeing a psychiatrist and there were improvements in the health and wellbeing of the three-and-a-half-year-old.

The child is on the waiting list for language development assessments and she's about to start childcare two days per week at an SDN centre, with Brighter Futures covering most of the costs.

Najama and the children attend a playgroup one day a week and are all experiencing new and exciting things.

The baby is healthy and flourishing and importantly there is a strong and healthy attachment to her mother. Najama is catching a bus on her own with her children and her confidence has grown. I communicate with Najama through our Cultural Support Partner thereby ensuring that the casework is culturally sensitive.

**Name has been changed for anonymity.*



NSW MP Reba Meagher (glasses at back) launching SDN's Brighter Futures program.



**CHILDREN'S
SERVICES INC.**

educating and caring

In 2007, Glynis Chang, Manager of Child and Family Programs (today Director of Organisational Development), provided another insightful case study.

Chang explains some of the outcomes achieved by the Early Intervention Program:



Sam and his family joined the Early Intervention Program during 2006. Sam has Down syndrome. He can be quite a handful and keeps his family and preschool staff on their toes. I visited his family at home to talk about their priorities.*

They asked me to show them things they could do at home to help Sam. The family had a lot of plans for Sam but wanted help to approach preschools and schools, including help with the paperwork that was needed. At first, I did some things for them — ringing preschools for example.

Slowly I started pulling back and coaching them on what to do. The family then made

contact with preschools themselves and enrolled Sam in the preschool of his choice. I could then visit Sam at his preschool and addressed any staff concerns and showed them strategies that would work for them and for Sam. Everything was based on an Individual Family Service Plan worked out with the family and SDN Early Learning Program staff.

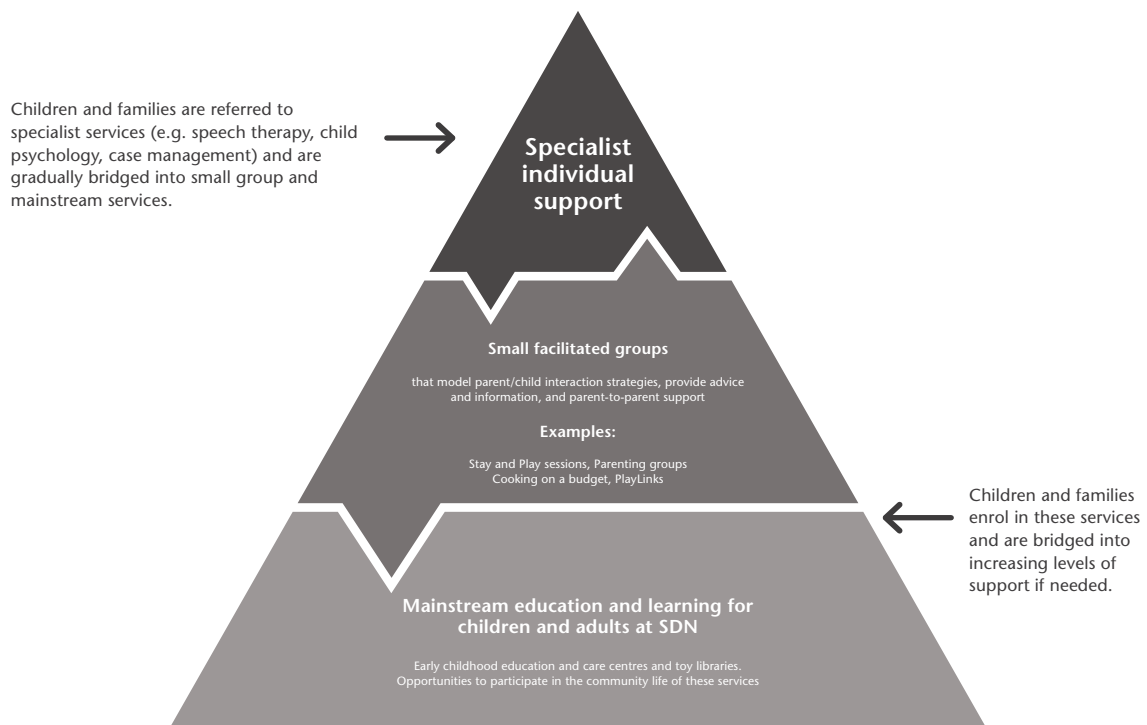
The Early Learning Program has been able to be there for Sam and his family through all those transitions. It feels great when you see the confidence and skills that families develop. Sam's family will be the best advocates that he'll ever have.

*Name has been changed for anonymity.

2008

In the 2007–2008 financial year SDN embeds their Integrated Services model. Of the new SDN structure, SDN President Darren Mitchell says, “we began in 1905 offering not just care, but a nurturing, educating, and supportive environment for families and children. The SDN model of Integrated Services is illustrative of how in the 21st century a seamless, tailored approach is cultivated for each and all of these activities. Our beginnings were in dedicated locations which continue to provide the focus for our work. However, the domain of SDN Children’s Services is not just a physical centre, but a network of integrated partnerships with governments and other like-minded organisations.”

Pyramid of SDN’s Integrated Services from the SDN Annual Report (2008):



All professionals from a range of disciplines work collaboratively, from a strengths-base and within the SDN Child and Family Learning Framework.


2008 is a significant year for programs tailored toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. The first ten scholarships enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to attend SDN early childhood education and care centres are offered at SDN Redfern.

SDN also runs the Stepping Stones program this year. The project consists of three parts: playgroup facilitation training for young Aboriginal women in inner Sydney based at the Alexandria Park Community School, and supported playgroups at the Aboriginal Children's Service in Redfern and in Bankstown. Finally, a parenting course is facilitated by TAFE NSW.

SDN wins a national Equal Opportunity for Women Agency Award from the Australian Government for the Advancement of Indigenous Women. The award is given following SDN staffer Deb Mann's work establishing the TAFE course specifically for Aboriginal women.

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY PLAYGROUP COURSE

**Playgroup Facilitation for
Aboriginal Communities
Certificate I**



*Access to Work and
Educational
Opportunities.
This is a 10 week
course for local
Aboriginal women to
gain knowledge and
experience in running
playgroups. In addition a
Senior First Aid Certificate
Course will be provided.*

Deadly Opportunity for Aboriginal Women

WHERE: Alexandria Park Community School (Power Ave, Alexandria)





WHEN: Starting 2 May 2008, runs for ten weeks followed by a 2 week senior first aide course.
10am-2pm on Fridays, plus some playgroup work placement.

Working with children check will be required before commencing the course.

REGISTRATION: Contact Deb Mann on 9557 9125 to register for this course.

BE QUICK AND REGISTER NOW—PLACES ARE LIMITED
Transport and child care will be provided

This course is part of SDN's Stepping Stones Project which is funded by the Australian Government under the Indigenous Children's Program

Poster for Stepping Stones program, 2008.



A child receiving a scholarship from SDN team members at a special morning tea, 2014.



Ginie Udy (former SDN CEO) and an SDN team member painting with a child recipient of the Aboriginal scholarship, 2014.

Part two

BUILDING ON

our expertise



SDN Lois Barker, Waterloo, 2024.

By 2010, SDN had decades of experience working with children and their families in programs outside early childhood education, and critically, integrated service delivery had become a strategic approach to delivering on the organisation's purpose.

This strategy saw SDN restructure as it looked to become more inclusive, address inequities and use its expertise to respond to major funding changes to child and family programs and disability services.

SDN's Ngara Nanga Mai Aboriginal Unit was established in this era, and the opening of SDN Beranga at Rooty Hill, SDN's first groundbreaking centre for autistic children set a benchmark for SDN to later co-locate Autism Specific Preschool programs within early learning centres.

These and other early intervention programs were significant markers for an organisation building on its expertise to respond to the needs of diverse groups of children and their families.

2010–2011

In 2010, SDN establishes an Aboriginal Unit. This dedicated unit for Aboriginal families is considered the best way to support them. The new unit takes responsibility for Aboriginal programs such as Tracks in Learning, the Aboriginal Early Childhood Scholarships, Aboriginal Playgroups and the Aboriginal Early Learning Project.

The unit begins with six team members whose responsibilities include mentoring Aboriginal staff, support for staff working with Aboriginal families and improving SDN's relationships with Aboriginal communities. The unit is headed by Deb Mann, who by this time has more than 30 years' experience in early childhood education and care.

In 2011 SDN's Aboriginal Unit is relaunched as the SDN Ngara Nanga Mai Unit to great fanfare by SDN and Federal Minister for Education Peter Garrett and Aboriginal NSW MP Linda Burney. Ngara Nanga Mai (pronounced ingara nanga my) is an Eora Sydney name which means "listen and dream."

SDN Ngara Nanga Mai Unit was launched to great fanfare in 2011.



Just before the launch, SDN CEO Ginie Udy says:

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

In 2014, the decision is made that SDN's work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is most effective when delivered by frontline staff, and the work of the unit is distributed across other teams so it can be embedded into practice.

With the range of services offered by SDN now extending across early learning, early childhood

intervention and family support programs, a major restructure is undertaken in 2011 to integrate these services to make them more inclusive and efficient. After internal discussions, a decision is made to streamline SDN's services into seven geographic hubs, each comprising several SDN centres as well as government-funded early childhood intervention and family support programs.

The *Annual Report* (2011) notes that, "this integrated approach will give children and families greater and easier access to the education, care and programs we offer."

Glynis Chang is there at the time of the restructure and later notes the change was implemented so SDN services became more inclusive for families with children with disability or who are otherwise vulnerable. Though the process is difficult at the time for many staff, it is largely successful.




(L-R) Then NSW Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Linda Burney is pictured with Uncle Max and Director of SDN Ngara Nanga Mai, Deb Mann, at the unit's launch in 2011.



Linda Burney and Federal Minister for Education, Peter Garrett, unveil the Creation Snake artwork at Ngara Nanga Mai Unit launch. Today, the artwork can be found displayed at SDN Linthorpe St, Newtown.

SDN CEO, Ginie Udy, speaking at her farewell event in July 2017. Ginie's legacy at SDN is marked by a deep commitment to inclusion, quality care, and community connection.



 Lectrum



CEO Profile

Ginie Udy

Virginia, aka Ginie, Udy was SDN CEO from September 2002 to July 2017 and has been SDN's second longest serving CEO. Ginie's time as CEO included marking SDN's centenary and embedding SDN's Integrated Services Model.

Ginie was born in Nelson, New Zealand, to Australian parents. Her father was an Anglican minister and was asked to assist the Anglican Church across the ditch. She returned to Sydney with her parents when she was three.

She was initially educated at SCEGGS Anglican School at Cremorne. After the family moved to Dural, she completed her high schooling at Tara Anglican School for girls and finally at Barker College. She began teaching Sunday school at the age of 14 and has remained a committed Christian. She was also interested in teaching from an early age.

A formative experience for Ginie was spending 12 months in Indonesia on a Rotary exchange scholarship. In her 2007 oral history interview with historian Rosilyn Burge, she detailed at length the effect the Indonesian experience had on her.

“

"I look back on that time and I realise that that was the time when I first realised that values and morals are very culturally determined and that it was quite a shock to me. I think you get brought up to believe there is right and there's wrong and that they are very set and pure."

Ginie goes on to say that her experience in Indonesia made her see that there could be different but equally moral ways of doing things. She cites the custom prioritising not giving offense in Indonesia as an example. She found that they put this above truth telling and this was at first frustrating.

She felt the experience gave her an ability to interact with different cultures:

The work SDN is doing now cross-culturally, a lot of the work with Aboriginal families and children, I have some real understanding of. I am not really saying I'm driving [our work] but that I can understand what it takes to be successful in that kind of [cross cultural] environment.

Before becoming SDN CEO, among other work Ginie was Director of Children's Services for the Uniting Church from

1993–1996 and Deputy Director of peak body Early Childhood Australia from 1997–2001.

Her particular interest in holistic children's services can be seen in her work with the Lithgow Early Intervention Program (LEIP) in 1985. It operated out of Lithgow Public School and aimed to provide children with disabilities in Lithgow with a tailored program. Ginie was there from the beginning as an Early Intervention Teacher. She left there in 1990 but in 2014 things came full circle when SDN took over the program as part of SDN's Early Childhood Links. Unfortunately, the program had to be suspended in 2019 due to lack of resources.

For Ginie, the rationale for the investment of resources in children's therapies and services outside traditional early education and care centres is SDN's holistic approach.

Ginie noted in 2013:

It is very heartening to witness our 42 service managers work with the seven Community Leaders in our three regions, in collaboration with staff from our Inclusive Education and Care Practice Unit, our Service Delivery Accountability Unit, our Research, Evaluation and History Unit and staff from Corporate Services, the Communication Unit and our People and Organisational Development Unit to achieve the support, the service and the high level outcomes of our new Strategic Plan.

2012

By 2012 SDN employs 30 social workers serving families as part of the Brighter Futures Program. The following is an edited extract of a letter received from a Brighter Futures parent, reprinted with their permission:



We were referred to SDN Brighter Futures by a social worker at a Community Health Centre 18 months ago. When she was completing the referral form, I was rather alarmed to see mention of DoCS [Department of Community Services] in the paperwork. Until that time, I had always thought that DoCS deals with 'BAD PARENTS' and I didn't want to be labelled as 'ONE OF THOSE'.

The social worker explained that DoCS funds the Brighter Futures program as an early intervention program for parents who have certain vulnerabilities, such as mental health issues, lack of family or social support, parental learning difficulties or intellectual disability, or problems with child behaviour management. I started to understand that some parents (including my husband and I) may have certain problems which can make the already challenging task of parenting even more challenging.

We met with some of the SDN Brighter Futures staff who explained the program in more detail, said we would get our own caseworker and

outlined a variety of resources that would be available to us. It sounded pretty good to us. After my initial DoCS concern, I was quite enthusiastic to accept all help available to us!

Our case worker was very down-to-earth and had a great sense of humour. She touched base with us with home visits and informed us of all the courses and events which were available. The main thing was she treated us like normal human beings who are good, loving parents with some issues which make life and parenting difficult. We were always treated with warmth and respect.

The parent goes on to explain some of the Brighter Futures Services facilities she and her partner made use of:

- The Playbus: a playgroup for families in similar situations
- The Circle of Security: a course that helps parents bond with their children, encouraging children to learn and become independent
- A budgeting course

The new SDN ISA team in the ACT, 2013.





Kay Turner on the right (current SDN CEO) with the team who worked on the Inclusion Support Agency tender in 2012.

2013

SDN's Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs) get a boost by successfully tendering to operate ISAs for the entirety of ACT as well as Inner West Sydney and North West Sydney. These add to SDN's ISA operations in Inner Sydney, Sydney North and Sydney Central West.

By 2013 SDN employs 42 social workers (33 in service delivery, nine in managerial roles), six allied health professionals and seven Community Leaders. At this time there are 273 early childhood assistants employed, 124

Early Childhood Teachers (in various roles) and 107 early childhood educators.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is legislated as a national insurance scheme for people with a disability in 2013. Prior to this SDN has been receiving so called 'block funding' to deliver its early childhood intervention services for children with disability and developmental delays, and their families.

SDN Beranga opened its doors at Rooty Hill in western Sydney in January 2013. Created as a 'lighthouse' centre for children with autism, SDN Beranga was begun as a long day care centre working with other 'satellite centres' across western Sydney. In the beginning, 59 children were enrolled to attend across each week. It catered for up to 27 children each day.

SDN Beranga's multi-disciplinary approach included early childhood teachers, social workers, psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists working directly with children throughout the day to deliver specific strategies for autistic children.

The centre was built with support from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services — Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC). The official opening

on June 22, 2013, saw NSW Premier Barry O'Farrell and then Minister for Ageing and Disability Services, Andrew Constance, among proud SDN staff, directors and members joining to declare SDN Beranga open.

The service later became an Autism Specific Preschool in 2018, following changes to state funding with the roll out of the NDIS.

In later years other SDN centres would offer Autism Specific Preschool programs within mainstream education and care centres to support the transition of autistic preschool children into primary school. The first such program was established at SDN Ultimo in 2022 and was transferred to SDN Lois Barker at Waterloo in 2023 after Ultimo closed. A second program was launched at SDN Macquarie Park when it opened in January 2025.

SDN Beranga Opening 22 June 2013: (L-R) Megan Zahra, Service Manager SDN Beranga, Barry O'Farrell NSW Premier, Ginie Udy, SDN CEO and Theresa Collignon, SDN President.





SDN Beranga first opened its doors in 2013. Even as SDN expands its autism-specific programs to other centres like SDN Macquarie Park and SDN Lois Barker at Waterloo, SDN Beranga remains the benchmark — the 'lighthouse' guiding best practice across the network.

In 2015 surveys were conducted with families using the **lighthouse centre** at

Rooty Hill and the satellite centres. In a report produced by Kay Turner and Megan Zahra (then SDN Beranga Service Manager) the results of the 2015 surveys were analysed:

Since its opening in January 2013, the Lighthouse has provided services to a total of 220 children and their families and has successfully transitioned 176 children to a mainstream service or school setting that has been sustainable. (It is important to note the difference between the two figures relates to the 44 children still currently enrolled in the Lighthouse).

The Lighthouse provides a specialised service that offers short term intervention and respite in an early childhood education and care environment for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), until both the child and family are able to successfully transition into a mainstream service or school.

The service is successfully delivering an early childhood education and care program, with a range of individually tailored supports that can be replicated in a mainstream childhood education and care setting. We have consistently demonstrated that children are achieving goals as set out in their Individual Education Plans.



A group of early childhood practitioners attend a Reflection on Practice session as part of the Sydney Central West Early Childhood Links program, 2015.

2015

In July 2015 SDN's Early Childhood Links program is set up in the Nepean Blue Mountains area of NSW, alongside existing SDN early childhood services for children in Penrith and Lithgow. In the ***Annual Report (2016)***, it's noted that funding for this program is being phased out in line with the roll-out of the NDIS.

The following is a case study from the SDN *Annual Report (2015)* about Early Childhood Links in the ACT.



SDN's services in the ACT are demonstrating the benefits of a team approach. Representatives from three services share the special story of Jane*, a girl who has touched the lives of staff and children.

"Jane has a rare condition which has high support needs," explains Michelle Groeneveld, Manager of SDN's Early Childhood Links program in Canberra. "When Jane came to us, we saw the challenge her family was facing. Her parents spoke little English and were trying to cope with the implications of her condition." The Early Childhood Links team recognised that both Jane and her family would benefit from Jane spending time at an SDN Children's Education and Care Centre. Having a child with Jane's particular disability in the centre meant that during the first few weeks educators focused on getting to know her, learning her routines and signs and discovering as much as they could about her condition.

"This means everyone now feels comfortable providing the same high level of care to meet Jane's support requirements, which has brought the teams very close together," says SDN Centre Director Colin Lee. "The dedication shown in getting to know Jane has been a joy to watch!"

Even in a relatively short time, having Jane at SDN Bluebell has been a resounding success. Jane's small achievements are widely celebrated throughout the centre, whether it's noticing that she is tracking the educator's movement with her eyes during nappy changes, rolling over and beginning

to get her arms out from underneath herself, or lifting her head for short periods during 'tummy time'.

The other children at the centre see Jane as no different to any other child. One little boy likes to crawl over to her on the mat, and the children sit around Jane at story time. As well as the support of Early Childhood Links, a key element in Jane's successful inclusion has been the involvement of SDN's Inclusion Support Agency (ISA). ACT ISA Manager, Rebecca Johns, says the service was able to provide a special feeding chair for Jane so she can sit face-to-face with the other children. Jane's future needs are already being considered.

"As she grows and moves to older rooms in the centre, we will support the service to get funds for an additional carer," she says. "The high level of capability and professionalism of SDN's staff has further strengthened SDN's reputation in the ACT and has had a ripple effect through encouraging other services to also consider taking children with high needs."

There are still many challenges in caring for Jane. "She can have up to 30 seizures a day, and some will leave her not being alert enough to eat or drink and she will spend most of the day in bed," says Colin.

"Those days can be very difficult and have a huge impact on the team and Jane's parents. However, knowing that back up support from ECL and ISA is just a phone call away make things a lot easier."

**Name has been changed for anonymity.*



A personalised approach

Your key worker will visit you at home and get to know you, your child and what's important for your family.

Together, you'll develop a plan to suit your needs based on your short and long term goals. This plan can include help to:

- develop communication and language skills
- develop physical skills
- develop strategies to manage behaviour
- take part in sports or leisure activities, e.g. dancing
- develop daily living skills, e.g. eating, dressing, toilet training
- participate in group activities
- learn social skills and make friends
- transition to kindy or school.

Because we know that children learn best in settings that feel natural and familiar, your key worker is available to visit you at home, day care, school, the local park, sporting activity or shops.

Do you have a child with a disability?



We can help you today



www.sdn.org.au



We can help you and your child today

Our highly trained professional staff can provide therapy for your child with a disability or developmental delay.

We will come to you and together we'll find the best way to reach your goals.

Our therapy happens in the natural context of your daily life and is tailored to you to match the goals of your family.

You know your child best so you'll be involved at every stage. We work with you to give you the skills you need to help your child every day.

With our support, your child's life can change. They can learn, grow and reach their full potential.

SDN Children's Therapies brochure from 2019. It was printed in eight languages.

2016

On 1 July, the Inclusion Support Programme (ISP) replaces the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP), including Inclusion Support Agencies (ISAs). SDN is unsuccessful in its tender to deliver services under this new structure, and the 40 SDN staff involved in the program are redeployed or offered redundancy.

In a positive development, SDN establishes six new Disability Services Networks in response to the roll out of the NDIS. These cover the Sydney metropolitan area, the Blue Mountains, NSW Central Tablelands, Southern NSW and the ACT. The work is done by teams of education and allied health professionals overseen by Disability Services Network Managers.

2017–2019

On 16 October 2017, SDN Disability Services is launched. This is the new grouping for government funded services that previously came under the Early Childhood Links banner. Largely driven by the new NDIS funding model, the name is changed in late 2018 to SDN Children's Therapies.

The move to the NDIS sees a gradual shift away from best-practice early childhood intervention to a more medical model, driven by NDIS funding that supports one-on-one therapies. Delivering sustainable services in response to this changed funding landscape is a challenge from the start of the NDIS and continues to this day.

In April 2019, the SDN Board decides to focus on services for children with autism, developmental delays and children who have experienced trauma in the metropolitan Sydney area.

2021

From July SDN's Brighter Futures program becomes known as Family Preservation. Funded by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), as of 2021 the program is described as a short-term program working with families for an average of 12 months and up to 18 months to strengthen families' support network. Part of the program includes families learning parenting skills through attachment-based parenting programs.

Brighter Futures photoshoot, 2015.



Thriving Families:

SDN's Family-Centred Framework

The Thriving Families approach to Family Preservation work began in 2021. SDN engaged the Parenting Research Centre for program design using the best available evidence. The program took two years of research and development before it was ready to implement in practice.



Catalysts for change: A Thriving Families case study

“Sometimes what is hard to overcome is not impossible to overcome. Keep going, Keep going! ... I thought I had no strength but now I know I do... It’s important to have the right people in your life — you want people to build you up, not bring you down.” — Simone* (Sydney mother of two) on working with SDN’s Family Preservation caseworker, Sam*

At first, there was silence and disengagement when SDN caseworker *Sam began working with *Simone, a young mother of two children eleven-year-old *Ruby and ten-year-old *Eli. Sam’s attempts to make contact were mostly unsuccessful: text messages were not returned, scheduled home visits were cancelled last minute and no one answered the door when he visited.

SDN’s Family Preservation team received a referral from the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). The Department had become involved after a report of possible neglect following a neighbour’s concerns that the children were taking out the bins late at night without supervision.

The mother has a long history of physical and mental health concerns. Simone lives with schizophrenia, for which she receives monthly injections as part of her treatment. This is a strong

medication with significant side effects. She has limited mobility due to being overweight and experiences anxiety and severe sleep disturbance from sleep apnoea.

The family lives in a public housing property. There were concerns about a lack of routine at home, the impact of past family violence and lived trauma, and ongoing school absenteeism (the children averaged 30 per cent attendance per year).

There was also a pattern of this family being passed from one family support program to another with previous providers closing the case due to a lack of contact.

“Without consistent engagement, it can be hard to support a family through change. I was averaging one visit per month, but my supervisor urged me to keep going and to keep trying,” Sam said.

Sam persevered for six months and slowly began to build a relationship. Reviewing Simone’s SDN partnership agreement and committing to weekly visits was a big step forward.

Importantly, the regular visits allowed Sam to gain a deeper understanding of what was going on for this family. It was a true turning point. Simone was now ready to engage and open to getting support. She began looking forward to sessions.



Attendance matters: The impact of absenteeism

Our Thriving Families Framework, SDN's Family-Centred Framework, is a Family Preservation program that can run for up to 18 months.

It's delivered by working in partnership to build the skills of parents and caregivers to promote wellbeing outcomes for their children and reduce the risk of children and young people entering the child protection system.

While 18 months might seem like a long time, for this family it was a necessary period to help bring about meaningful change. It allowed Sam to slowly build trust with Simone and her children.

Simone genuinely wanted an education for Ruby and Eli but had to be reminded just how much education they were missing out on.

Simone identified routines as something she wanted to work on. Initial explanations for non-school attendance were that the children weren't getting up, uniforms were not washed, or there wasn't enough food to take for lunch.

The Thriving Family framework has an 'owning phase' during which caseworkers seek ownership from the parent, getting them to identify what needs to shift before moving into the 'exploring',

'planning' and 'doing' phases.

Initially, the difficulties identified by Simone were child-oriented: "They're not getting up in time", "they're not making their snacks/lunch", "they're not putting their uniforms in the clothes basket" and so on.

When Sam asked the family to talk him through an average day, he learned that the children were awake before their mum, made their own breakfast, and prepared and packed their lunchboxes before trying to wake Simone up, all things that were Simone's responsibility.

"Once she realised it was down to her, we were able to start planning and explore what we could do together," Sam said.

The family decided to focus firstly on their bedtime routine. The goal was for everyone to be in bed by 9.30pm. They did this for 12 weeks and, with some trial and error, things began to improve.

The work SDN was doing with the family also coincided with Simone, who has a strong Christian faith, beginning to work with a new counsellor at her church. This person understood her religious and cultural perspectives and was able to support Simone's confidence and self-belief.



Simone showed initiative and began setting more goals for her family. She wanted to create a creative corner for books, games and musical instruments so her children could begin music lessons and play sport. Sam sourced donated items for Simone to set this up.

“Simone suddenly had momentum. She realised she could do it and from there, things really took off. The visit after that, and without my prompting, she had sat down with the children and created a morning and afternoon routine chart.”

This positivity had a flow-on effect on school attendance. Simone was more present in the morning routines and was getting Ruby and Eli to school on time. To celebrate and track this progress, Sam started printing out a monthly A3 school attendance tracker, which the children updated.

Fostering skills and building small successes

Things really clicked into place for Ruby, who began thriving in terms of friendship and feeling connected to the school and her peers. Her attendance went up markedly from 30 per cent to 90 per cent. This would set her up for the important transition to high school.

“Unfortunately, Eli’s progress was slower. He experienced some bullying and had some body image issues from being teased at school about his weight. Eli didn’t have the same level of attendance, but it increased from 30 to 70 per cent, and he was now playing sport,” said Sam.

Seeing the shift in her daughter was also a confidence boost for Simone, who hadn’t worked since having children. With her newfound confidence, she secured employment and a paid community liaison role within her church.

When asked why this program worked so well for this family, Sam believes it was the Framework, his persistence and Simone’s own strength of character.

“Simone appreciated that I kept showing up even when she didn’t want to see me. She appreciated that I stuck around, went slow and was patient when things weren’t really moving,” Sam said.

“We’d talked and talked for months and then it all fell into place. Once she had the self-belief that she could make positive life-altering changes for herself and her children, she didn’t need much prompting — she took steps herself to make it happen,” Sam said.

**Names have been changed for anonymity.*

Aboriginal Playgroup Graduation,
4 July 2008.



2025

In its 120th year, SDN continues to deliver programs that break down barriers and foster the inclusion of all children and their families, including:

SDN Playlinks

SDN Playlinks is a weekly playgroup for families in western Sydney. As well as a playgroup, SDN Playlinks offers home support and helps families understand their child's development to assist parenting.

improving the skills of parents and caregivers. Priority is made for families with children under five, migrant families, families not accessing other services and vulnerable families. SDN operates CAPS in the inner-city region and the Canterbury and Parramatta LGAs.

Glebe Aboriginal Playgroup

Operating out of Glebe Schools Community Centre, this playgroup is run by trained Aboriginal staff who understand child development and how they learn through play. Staff consult with parents about health and offer general parenting tips and often receive visitors from the local Aboriginal community, including Elders.

Child and Family Support Program (CAPS)

CAPS is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services and aims to support the wellbeing of children by

Start Strong Pathways

The Start Strong Pathways program is funded by the NSW Department of Education and is operated by SDN in the Parramatta, Cumberland and Eurobodalla local government areas. The program works with families in priority groups who are not currently enrolled in preschool.

Early childhood teachers and social workers use a play-based learning approach in preparation for preschool. The program targets children with disability or additional needs, Aboriginal children, children from low-income families, children from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, children who are at risk of significant harm and children from socially isolated families.

Inner & Eastern Sydney Child & Family Interagency

Interagency support is funded by the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and operates in Inner and Eastern Sydney. The program is a forum for workers from different agencies to share ideas and information on best practice.

Children's Therapies

The review of the NDIS conducted by the Australian Government in 2023 included several recommendations on the way the NDIS is delivered to children under seven years of age, including the introduction of 'foundational supports'.

This aligns with best practice for early childhood intervention, which states that young children with disability are best supported through intervention and support in their daily lives, rather than one-on-one therapy isolated from family and their usual activities.

In 2025, SDN refocused its Children's Therapies services to work solely in their early learning services rather than through clinics and home visits. This allows SDN's therapists to work with the children in familiar environments and support their day-to-day functioning, in line with best practice.

Family Preservation

SDN has been delivering the NSW Government's Family Preservation (previously Brighter Futures) in metropolitan Sydney and Eurobodalla since 2007. In 2024, the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) announced that it would be recommissioning its Family Preservation program into a new program, Families Together.

That tender occurred in the middle of 2025, and at the time of writing, the outcome was unknown. Either way, the changes to the program will affect SDN's work, the only question is how significant the impact will be.



SDN's 120th Anniversary celebration with staff and board members, 2025.



SDN's 120th Anniversary

In 2025, SDN marked its 120th anniversary. Among the festivities was a special event at NSW Parliament House where long-term staff and special guests joined SDN leaders and the board to celebrate.

A new logo was created to mark the milestone, incorporating a circular brush stroke to represent the way SDN continues to write its narrative.



CEO Profile

KAY TURNER

In 1998, Kay Turner took over the role of PHOCIS Coordinator (Parramatta Holroyd Optimal Intervention Service) from Jenny Kneipp and hasn't looked back. Employed from the beginning in SDN's special services rather than in early childhood education and care centres, she has seen SDN's work in this area expand and is in many ways at the heart of this story.

Kay Turner, SDN CEO 2022. Kay's ongoing tenure at SDN is one of strategic growth, sector leadership, and a deep commitment to equity in early childhood education.

Kay is deeply aware that a child's needs must be met for them to be fully educated and thrive as adults. She became Director of Child, Family & Children's Services in 2006 and Head of Organisational and Business Development in 2014.

She was appointed SDN's Deputy CEO in 2014 and became CEO in July 2017 where she remains in 2025.

Kay was born in Arncliffe and went to Arncliffe and Hurstville Public Schools. She was interested in social work during school and considered studying social work but ended up doing a Diploma of Teaching in Early Childhood.

Her first role in early childhood education and care was as a director of a church run centre in Mortdale. A decision she described in 2006 as "probably not wise" but "interesting." She remained in the role for six years until she had her daughter.

Eventually, Kay found a job as a special needs teacher in Green Valley with Mission Australia, and it was here that Kay says she found her niche.

Here is Kay on her experience at Green Valley:

I loved the children, and I loved the families ... very rarely was anything straightforward; the children and families are so complex so where in a text book or in other areas I'd worked there might be a child with cerebral palsy, for example, but other things being equal there are lots of resources for the family to draw on.

You often found that a child might have a disability that was undiagnosed and the family didn't have financial resources; they might be struggling with a drug or alcohol issue as well as a child with learning problems ... So, it was complex but that meant you had to bring lots and lots of specialist knowledge, but I had to give up some values. I learnt a lot about how biased I was, how middle class and white I was, and I learnt to be able to give that up and meet people where they were at.

Today Kay thinks that in essence SDN does what it has always done and that is to "put the child and the family at the centre" in all their diversity. She says the founders of SDN wouldn't have used the word 'holistic' but that is in essence what they were doing when matrons made home visits in 1912 and when some centres had a dental room in the 1950s.

**Looking towards
the future**

03



SDN Macquarie Park, 2025.

Our Continuous Purpose

SDN's leadership team says inclusion and social justice are strong values for SDN and have been so since inception. Inclusive attitudes help shape an equitable world where children, young people and adults of diverse backgrounds and abilities can be part of the SDN village.

Going forward, SDN's 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. They will continue to use best practice early intervention models.

The organisation's 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 achieve their own goals. Making the most of their unique Thriving Families Framework, SDN will continue to apply for more grants and funding opportunities to expand the support it provides.

Acknowledgements

04

This history has largely drawn from records held in the SDN Archive as sources of information. This includes annual reports, executive committee minutes and research reports undertaken by and about SDN. The archive's vast collection of photographs has been used to illustrate the book.

The SDN Archive was begun in 2002 in preparation for the organisation's centenary and contributed to the publication *For the Little One's the Best: SDN Children's Services 1905–2005* by Dr Leone Huntsman.

The Politics of Australian Child Care: From Philanthropy to Feminism by Deborah Brennan (1994) was an invaluable primer on the history and political economy of early childhood education and care in Australia.

Dr Sandie Wong's doctoral thesis *Early Childhood Education and Care in NSW: Historicising the Present* (2006) was a source on the social and political history leading to the formation of SDN and its evolution.

Some photographs used to illustrate the book were sourced via the State Library of NSW's online collection.

Eva Cox was not referenced in the book but was an invaluable source on the struggles of the early childhood education and care movement in Australia and SDN in particular. Cox is a sociologist and worked in the early

childhood education and care sector.

Dr Sandie Wong, researcher at SDN and Professor in Early Childhood and Co-Deputy Director of the Centre for Research in Early Childhood at the Macquarie School of Education was interviewed for this project.

Great support and sources of information were found in former SDN CEOs, Tonia Godhard and Ginie Udy, who were interviewed.

Current SDN CEO Kay Turner and Glynis Chang, Director of Organisational Development, were also interviewed and their reporting for SDN was also referenced.

Thanks also to former SDN Head of Communications and Corporate Affairs, Dianne Speakman, and current Communications Manager, Olivia Liva, for editorial advice.

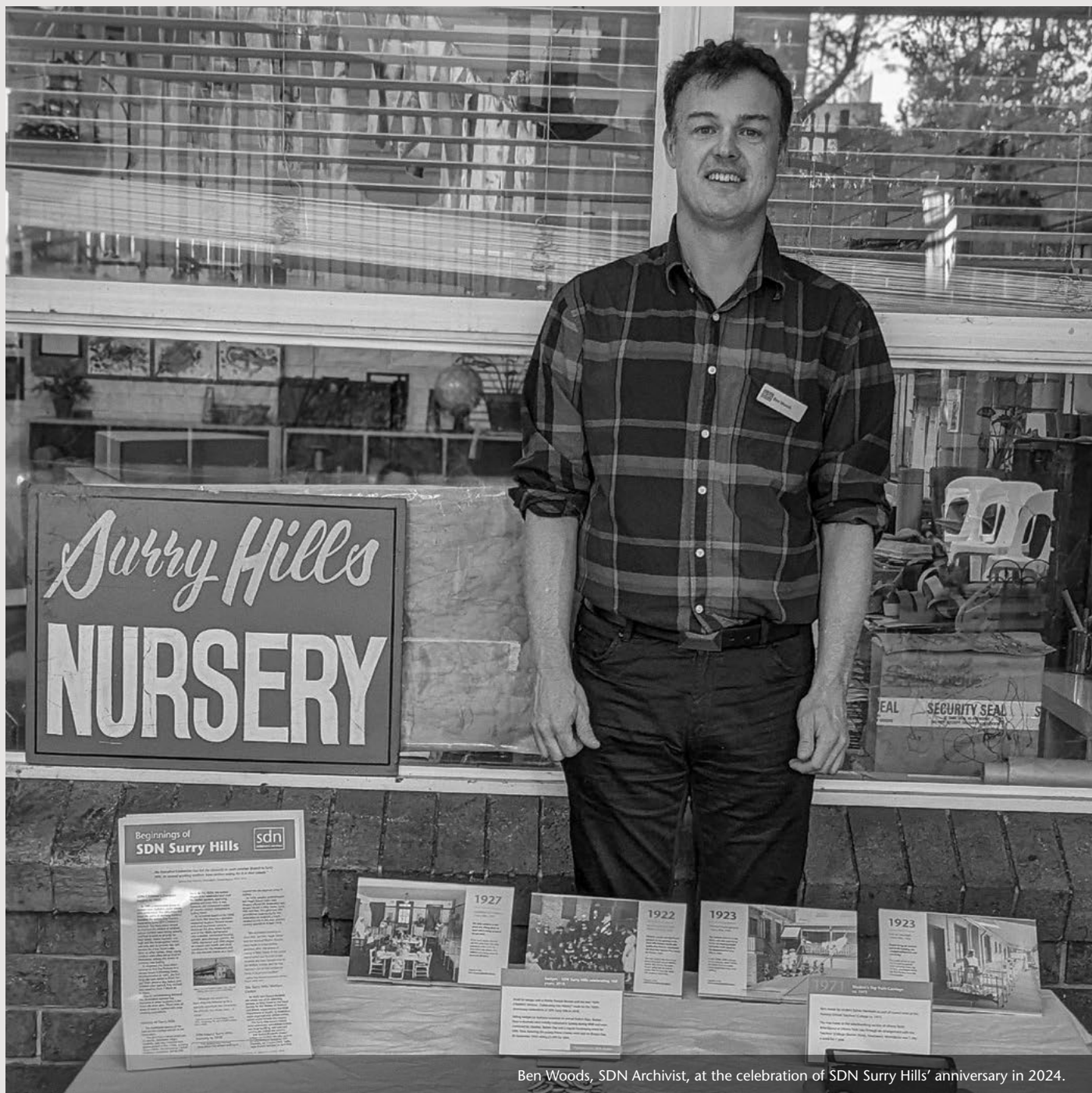
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About the Author

Ben Woods has been the SDN Archivist since 2021 and is the Senior Archivist at Australian Mutuals Archives. He has also worked at the State Library of NSW, NSW Parliament and as a journalist. He holds a Masters of Human Rights which included a curatorial internship with WA Museum.

05



Ben Woods, SDN Archivist, at the celebration of SDN Surry Hills' anniversary in 2024.



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

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