

# Beginnings of SDN Hamilton St

sdn  
children's services

*"The Nursery School, since opening in February, 1951, has established its excellence as a pre-school centre in the city of Bathurst..."*

— Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association Annual Report 1951/52

## SDN Children's Services begins in 1905

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

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

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

## History of Bathurst

The traditional owners of the area are the Wiradjuri people<sup>1</sup>.

The city was named after Lord Bathurst, Secretary of State for War and Colonies, on 7 May 1815. The discovery of gold in 1851 led to a gold rush in the area, and Bathurst flourished. In 1885, Bathurst was declared a city.

Capitalising on the goldfield trade, coach manufacturers Cobb & Co. transferred its headquarters to Bathurst in 1862. When the railway line was extended from Lithgow to Bathurst in 1876, Bathurst became a gateway to the west. Agricultural industries flourished in the area, such as the Edgell cannery factory which was established in Bathurst in 1926.



Above: A store in Bathurst, c. 1870s. Image from the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales — ON 4 Box 52 No 145

In 1938, the first of the famous motor races at Mount Panorama were held. The city also became well known for its schools and colleges.

Below: Opening of the Bathurst Nursery School, 25 February 1951. Mrs McElhone, President of the Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, is seated (second from right). Image from the SDN Archive



*"If any assistance is needed, Council will do whatever it can to make the establishment of the nursery in Bathurst an accomplished fact"*

— Bathurst Mayor, *The Western Times*, 21 June 1943

## SDN plans a Nursery School in Bathurst

SDN Hamilton Street was originally known as Bathurst Nursery School. The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association formed the Bathurst Committee in August 1943 at a meeting in Bathurst Town Hall, with the Bathurst Mayor presiding as Patron.

The community recognised that there was a great need for a nursery school, especially with the stress of wartime conditions which saw many women taking on paid and voluntary work.

In fact, the need was considered so great that the Committee started

planning for not one, but two nursery schools in the area!

Also in 1943, an anonymous donation of £2,000 was gratefully received from a returned soldier. This meant that the search could be started in earnest for a suitable location.

Fundraising by the local community continued, with money raised from catering at the Panorama Light Car Races, a cabaret, dances, and selling badges on 'button day'.

The opening of the nursery stalled for some years, partly due to difficulties in finding land. Thanks to the perseverance of the Committee, headed by Mr Hole as President, by 1949 a block of land in Hamilton Street had been purchased and at last there were plans for a building to be constructed.

## Bathurst Nursery school opens in 1951!

Bathurst Nursery School was officially opened by local Committee member Mrs Sydney Jamieson on 25 February 1951. Mrs McElhone, the President of the Association, along with the Mayor of Bathurst and the architect, Hedley Carr, proudly looked on as a crowd of 150 people celebrated the opening and inspected the building.



Above: The long awaited Bathurst Nursery School building in 1951, SDN Archive

The architects had specially scaled down the building proportions in their design, 'so that



Above: Teachers and children at Bathurst Nursery School, c. 1951-55, SDN Archive

it is a little school for little people'.

Those first visitors found that the L-shaped building consisted of two large playrooms — one for 2 to 3 year olds and the other for 3 to 5 year olds — and was well equipped with attractive toys and a miniature stage. The bathroom provided children's height towel racks and lockers, identified by different animal stencils.

The kitchen, with its 'modern gas stove', was the place where a balanced meal was produced, with a local newspaper noting plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables on the menu, all served at 'pint sized' tables and chairs.

Colourful decoration was a feature throughout the centre, and the focus on learning through play, especially in the outdoor spaces, was very important.

Fundraising required to run the Bathurst Nursery School continued. Fees charged did not meet the cost of running the school, as many parents in need of the service could not afford to pay much.

During 1951, a dance at a bowling club, a fête, jumble sale and a card party were held to raise funds. The community rallied around the Nursery School with gifts of fruit, clothing, toys and

vegetables. Fundraising and support by parents past and present meant that the Nursery School was able to purchase sun blinds for the front windows, a slippery dip and more toys.



Above: Outdoor nap time at the Nursery School, c. 1950s, SDN Archive

## SDN Hamilton Street today

Since its beginnings, SDN Hamilton Street has undergone many changes, reflecting a strong connection with our families within a vibrant community.

The changes in the sector to increase the quality of early childhood education and care have confirmed our own approach to professional skilled staff and services since our beginnings.

What hasn't changed is our vision and commitment to addressing social inequalities, improving children's quality of life and enhancing the life chances for all children.

<sup>1</sup>Spelling sourced from: Bathurst Regional Council

## About this history and the SDN Archive

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

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