

Beginnings of SDN Paddington

sdn
children's services

"..so great is the need of the little ones living in this crowded part of Sydney..."

— Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1923/24

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 Paddington

The traditional owners of this area are the Aboriginal people of the Cadigal clan, of the Eora nation.¹ James Underwood, a merchant and former convict, subdivided part of his land in 1839 and named his estate Paddington after the borough in London.

In the 1800s, Paddington was



Above: 'Olive Bank', 1925 and right, the building in 2007. Permission to reproduce image (left) from Woollahra Council Archive.



home to grand residences on large estates, the Victoria Barracks and smaller artisans cottages.

By the early 1900s, rows of terrace houses had been built on most of the large estates. Paddington became one of Sydney's most overcrowded and polluted suburbs, with a large working class population living in small Victorian terraces and workers cottages.

SDN plans a Day Nursery in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney

In 1922, the Association was approached by the then Paddington Municipal Council, led by the Mayor, Alderman Purcell, 'urging the necessity of a Day Nursery in their district'. This was the first time a council had directly approached the Association to open a Day Nursery. What's more, Paddington, Waverley and Woollahra Councils each offered £100 (equivalent to about \$7,000 today) towards the first year's expenses of the new Nursery. The Councils continued to contribute funds for many years, as well as providing assistance with fundraising and building alterations.

The Association's Eastern Suburbs Committee was formed by women from Paddington, Woollahra, Waverley and Sydney, and immediately started raising funds. An article in the Sydney Morning Herald, 25 April 1924, described the meeting held in the drawing-room of the Hotel Australia '... in order to discuss the best means of raising funds for expenses which will be incurred'.

The Eastern Suburbs Committee raised funds with many events, such as dances, jumble sales, concerts, and by printing £1 books containing Day Nursery stamps worth six pence each, making donations affordable.



Above: Committee women in the playground at the Eastern Suburbs Day Nursery and Nursery School, c.1938-1942

The Committee initially struggled to find a suitable building in 'so populous an area'. Finally in 1924, The Grange in Heeley Street

was purchased for £2,000. The colonial style villa dated back to around 1868 as the residence for merchant John Elly Begg and was originally named Olive Bank Villa. This was the last of the grand Paddington mansions built before terraces overtook the suburb. The renovations on the building added another £1,250 to make it suitable as a Day Nursery.

The local community rallied around, with businesses promising to 'give donations of articles for the equipment of the Nursery as soon as it is ready'. Local dairymen promised milk for the Day Nursery and the City Council gardener helped lay the grounds. Paddington resident Mrs W. Cherry sponsored the first cot (a popular fundraising method) named The Louisa Cherry Cot. She later became the Nursery's Honorary Dentist, while a local doctor offered to be the Honorary Medical Officer, a position he held for many years.



Above: Children at Paddington Day Nursery and Nursery School being seen by the doctor who would visit regularly, 1962. State Library of NSW, GPO 2-19239

The Eastern Suburbs Day Nursery opens in 1924!

On 29 November 1924, the Eastern Suburbs Day Nursery was officially opened in the presence of Lady MacCallum, President of the Sydney Day Nursery Association, and a large gathering of citizens

¹Source: Woollahra Municipal Council

from Paddington, Woollahra and Waverley.

In the years that followed, the Committee continued to raise funds to run the Day Nursery with dances, a Christmas Carnival helped by the Paddington Town Clerk, and a Juvenile Ball. Albion Street Public School hosted a Christmas concert for the children, the Junior Red Cross of Waverley Public School made clothing and Oxford Pictures donated £10 worth of picture tickets. Welcome gifts of fruit, clothes and toys were also accepted.

The introduction of Nursery Schools and a change of name

In the early 1930s, the Association introduced the first system of Nursery Schools in NSW, providing an educational environment for children aged two to school age. In 1937, the Nursery changed its name to 'The Eastern Suburbs Day Nursery and Nursery School.'

By 1955 the name was changed again to 'Paddington Day Nursery and Nursery School', to reflect the primary district it served. In 1969, a new Nursery School building was added to provide more room for the children, thanks largely to the tireless work of the Committee, and over 12 years of extraordinary fundraising efforts by SDN benefactors Mr and Mrs Supple, who held weekly dances at Paddington Town Hall for many years.

"We are very gratified that a Nursery School has at last been established here. [...] It is very nice to see the little ones happily occupied, with the interesting

and varied devices made by the teachers."

— Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association Annual Report, 1937/38



Above: Play time (top) and meal time at Eastern Suburbs Day Nursery and Nursery School, c.1938-1942.

SDN Paddington today

Since its beginnings, SDN Paddington has undergone many changes, reflecting a strong connection with our families within a vibrant and diverse 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.

About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive, Woollahra Council, Dictionary of Sydney and the State Library of NSW. 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 2- programs supporting children and families and other sector organisations.

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