

Beginnings of SDN Ngallia

sdn
children's services

“With the patience, understanding, care and dedication of the [educators] at Ngallia, he is now outgoing and inquisitive, participating in group activities...”

- Parent of a child at SDN Ngallia, 2002

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 Lidcombe

The traditional owners of the land at Lidcombe are acknowledged as the Dharug (also spelled Daruk or Darug)¹.

Lidcombe has had various names since European settlement - including Haslam's Creek and Rookwood. The name Lidcombe

was chosen in 1913 by combining the surnames of popular Mayors - Frederick Lidbury and Alexander Larcombe (a stonemason who also provided services to Rookwood cemetery established in 1867).

The area was originally full of trees - grey box, ironbark, stringybark, and red gums. The Parramatta River was the main means of transport in the early colonial days, however a track from Sydney to Parramatta developed in the 1790s, and then the railway started from 1855.

The 1920s and 1930s saw many factories established, such as Ford and Associated General Electric, and these producing military aircraft during World War II. The area flourished after the war and become increasingly diverse with many migrants calling Lidcombe home.

The Cumberland College of Health Sciences was officially opened in Lidcombe in 1978. In fact, students from the College would visit SDN centres for practice experience. The College became the Cumberland Campus of the University of Sydney in the late 1980s.



Above: Weighing at the SDN nursery.
Source: NLA

Expanding SDN

During 1994, SDN formed a special task force to expand existing centres and open new centres in 'areas of need', assisted by the newly established SDN Building Fund. By 1996, SDN had opened new centres in North Parramatta, Hurstville and the ACT, and was managing the PHOCIS early intervention service in the Parramatta area.

“The Association [SDN] was successful with an Expression of Interest to manage a new purpose built centre on the Cumberland Campus of the University of Sydney in Lidcombe. This 40 place centre opened for children in June 1997.”

- Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association Annual Report 1997

In 1995, an opportunity presented itself in Lidcombe when the Commonwealth Government approved funding under the New Growth Strategy for a new centre at the Cumberland campus. SDN submitted a successful tender to manage the new centre for the University of Sydney— named Ngallia.

Ngallia is named

The name 'Ngallia' was proposed by a group of lecturers from the University's nearby Yooroang Garang Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Support Centre, following suggestions from the Local Aboriginal Land Council. 'Ngallia' has a few reported definitions—'meeting place of children', 'friendship', or 'with me, ally, friend' - all perfect for the new centre!



Above: Educator and child, learning together, 2002.
Source: SDN Archive

SDN Ngallia opens on 23 June 1997!

SDN Ngallia opened for operation on 23 June 1997 with 8 children in attendance. Unfortunately it was thought that the centre may need to close due to low enrolments in 1999. However an increase in enrolments and NSW Government grant funding saw the centre thrive. Although closing temporarily during the Sydney Olympics in September 2000, by 2001 demand for places at the centre was strong and extra educators were needed.

SDN Ngallia went from strength to strength. In 2002, quotes from SDN Ngallia families and educators were featured in the National Childcare Accreditation Council's Putting Children First newsletter, and the Centre Director was

nominated by SDN for an Employers First: Employee of the Year Award. And in 2003, SDN Ngallia hosted delegations from the Federal Government and Korea.



Above: SDN CEO Ginie Udy (left) helping cut the birthday cake when SDN turned 100 years old, SDN Ngallia in 2005. Source: SDN Archive

SDN's centenary year in 2005 was a chance for SDN Ngallia staff and families to celebrate with the whole organisation. Centres were paired with each other as 'sister centres' and exchanged birthday presents! SDN Ngallia's sister-centre was SDN Ultimo. Educators and children created a beautiful gift for SDN Ultimo—a colourful collage called Shining Forever made of painted fabric pieces. A sunflower in the middle symbolised how SDN is 'shining forever'.

Over the years, the relationship with the local community has continued to be strengthened, such as with walks in the local bushland areas and visitors to the centre.

During NAIDOC Week in 2009, a lecturer from the Sydney University's Yooroang Garang Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Support Centre visited the children to share his culture and also magic tricks!

In 2010, a new garden was unveiled, embracing natural materials and environmental

awareness. The garden was updated again in 2013 to provide a space for children to learn through play and connect to the environment.

Families have always been celebrated at SDN Ngallia, with many special events, such as a high tea in 2015 and a recent Mother's Day event, that connects children and their families to the centre and creates a sense of community.

Staff and families at SDN Ngallia were interviewed as part of commissioned research in 2013 to 2015 by the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW, which found that SDN's practices aligned with its vision of an integrated, responsive organisation focused on child wellbeing.



Above: Children playing together at SDN Ngallia, 2019. Source: Anna Zhu

SDN Ngallia today

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

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

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

¹Spelling sourced from the AIATSIS Language and Peoples Thesaurus

About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive, and information from the City of Sydney Council and the Dictionary of Sydney. The SDN Archive, established in 2002, is a unique resource in Australia's early childhood education sector. SDN Children's Services runs 26 Early Learning 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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