

Beginnings of ...

SDN Batemans Bay Preschool

'In October we took on the management of Batemans Bay Preschool and have been supporting staff and families there '.

SDN Children's Services Annual Report 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.



Batemans Bay Pre-school Kindergarten in its first year of opening, 1975, at 1 Herarde Street. *Southern Star*, 23 May 1975

History of Batemans Bay

The traditional owners of the area are the Walbunja People, part of the traditional lands of the Yuin Nation.¹

The name Batemans Bay was given to the area by Captain James Cook in 1770. Gold was discovered in the 1850s and at the same time timber, oyster farming and fishing industries were established in the area.

By the 1940s, Batemans Bay had a picture theatre, general stores and a hospital. The Batemans Bay bridge was opened in 1956, which greatly improved accessibility across the Clyde River.

The Batemans Bay Pre-school Kindergarten opens in 1975

In 1969, a resident of Batemans Bay, Mrs Margaret Backhouse, felt there was a necessity for a local preschool. Mrs Backhouse contacted the local Chamber of Commerce who surveyed the community through circulars and confirmed there was a need.

Mrs Backhouse began a fundraising effort to establish the preschool, and at a public meeting the Batemans Bay Pre-school Committee was elected. Shortly afterwards, a mothers' club was also formed.

Five long years of hard work followed, during which time a temporary preschool was established. The lobbying continued and the Committee was delighted to receive a donation from the Batemans Bay Soldiers' Club, and then a \$32,000 Federal Government building program grant.

The new Batemans Bay Pre-school Kindergarten finally opened its doors to

the local children in May 1975 at 1 Herarde Street. The official opening ceremony was on 26 July 1975, performed by NSW Independent member for the South Coast, Mr John Hatton MLA, and attended by a large gathering of guests. In charge of the 55 children enrolled by that first week was Sydney trained preschool teacher, Susan Perry.



Batemans Bay Pre-school Kindergarten opening family fun day, 1975, at 1 Herarde Street. *Southern Star*, 1975

The preschool was managed entirely by the community-run Committee and by the families who attended. It was the first and still the only community-based not-for-profit preschool in Batemans Bay.

Batemans Bay Preschool joins the SDN family in 1999!

In April 1999, Batemans Bay Preschool contacted SDN Children's Services with a request to manage it as an SDN service.

Batemans Bay Preschool officially became part of the SDN family on 11 October 1999, when SDN took over management, supporting the



Batemans Bay Preschool in its original location at 1 Herarde Street, 2001. SDN Archive.

continuing staff and families. This was the fourth regional centre SDN had managed, alongside centres in Katoomba (1943–1963), Bathurst (opened 1951) and Goulburn (opened 1954).

SDN Batemans Bay Preschool moves location in 2005

In 2000, the Eurobodalla Shire Council accepted a residential developer offer to purchase the location in Herarde Street, which meant that the Batemans Bay Preschool would have to move.

The Council promised \$75,000 towards a new building. This presented the opportunity to create a new multipurpose family centre with other community organisations, but more money was needed to construct the building.

The community once again sprang into action to ensure the preschool could continue operating.

The Batemans Bay Preschool assembled the Batemans Bay Children and Family Centre Project steering committee on 9 April 2001, comprising representatives from various local children's community groups, including the Batemans Bay Preschool staff and parent committee. The steering committee was chaired by longtime Batemans Bay Preschool staff member Doreen Levensmith (now SDN Batemans Bay Preschool's Centre Director).

In August, a public meeting was held to decide on the needs of a multi-purpose children and family centre.

Lobbying by the steering committee, including a community letter-writing campaign, eventually led to success - nearly \$500,000 in State and Federal government grants, as well as Batemans Bay Preschool raising \$100,000 and donations from businesses, community groups and individuals.

'The committee thanks all the individuals and community groups who wrote letters of support for the project that showed there is great support from the Batemans Bay community for a centre which will provide a large number of child and family related services'

Doreen Levensmith, Steering Committee chair, *Bay Post*, 6 March 2002

By 2002 the Eurobodalla Shire Council had confirmed a site on Melaleuca Crescent. The steering committee was then able to oversee the design and construction of the new modern and light-filled centre.

The building was designed to be multipurpose, enabling it to be shared with other community services, such as playgroups, a toy library, family support services and girl guides.



The new SDN Batemans Bay Preschool, 2013, at 1a Melaleuca Crescent. Photo Anna Zhu.



SDN's CEO Ginie Udy (far left), dignitaries and preschool staff members at SDN Batemans Bay Preschool's official opening of the new building, 2005. SDN Archive.

SDN Batemans Bay Preschool relocated to 1a Melaleuca Crescent at the beginning of term 3, 2005. Staff members and families all worked hard to ensure the move went smoothly.

The official opening event for the new building was 9 September 2005, by Eden Monaro MP Gary Nairn. The community was invited to look inside, and a family fun day offered face painting, play dough and lots of fun activities for children.

In 2007, SDN was successful in becoming lead agency delivering the Brighter Futures program in Batemans Bay and Moruya, continuing our community focus in the area.

SDN Batemans Bay Preschool today

Since its beginnings, SDN Batemans Bay Preschool 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.



SDN's centenary celebration 'sister-centre' gift from SDN Batemans Bay Preschool to SDN Erskineville, 2005. SDN Archive

About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive and the Eurobodalla Shire Council website.

The SDN Archive, established in 2002, is a unique resource in Australia's early childhood education sector. You can also see the SDN Archive on HistoryPin: www.historypin.com/en/person/32804

SDN Children's Services runs 25 children's education and care centres throughout NSW and the ACT, as well as providing a range of children and family support programs.

¹ Spelling sourced from the Batemans Bay Local Aboriginal Land Council, July 2015