# Beginnings of …

# SDN Bluebell

'We are named after the ACT state flower, the Royal Bluebell'.

**Inscription on SDN Bluebell's 'sister' gift to SDN Forest Lodge for the Centenary celebrations of SDN in 2005**

## 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 five more locations in the inner city soon after. These were all areas of need in Sydney with large working populations.

## History of Canberra

The land where Canberra was built is thought to be a meeting place for the traditional Aboriginal owners and caretakers of the land.

In the 1820s, the area was a sheep station called Canberry, established by grazier Joshua John Moore.

On 1 January 1911, the Federal Capital Territory, now the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) was officially established. The new city of Canberra was declared on 12 March 1913, designed by American architect Walter Burley Griffin.

It wasn't until 1966 the Canberra District of Belconnen was established.

SDN has been connected with the ACT since the 1950s, often attending the Australian Pre-school Association meetings held in Canberra.

'This has been a year when many of our plans for expansion have come to fruition... And in the year ahead [SDN] will undertake the management of child care centres in... Barton and Belconnen in the Australian Capital Territory.'

*Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association Annual Report 1996*

## An invitation

In the early 1990s, SDN formed a taskforce to look at opportunities for expanding our centres in areas of need.

In April 1996, SDN was invited to submit an Offer to Operate the new purpose-built Bluebell Child Care Centre on behalf of a consortium of four Commonwealth Government organisations — the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Maritime Safety Authority and the Spectrum Management Agency.



**The Belconnen area in 1951—the District was not formerly established until 1966. Source: National Archives of Australia**



**The opening of the Bluebell Child Care Centre was on 4 December, 1996. Source: SDN Archive**

By June 1996, SDN was very happy to have been awarded the management contract and shortly after the first Centre Director, Lyndall Read, was appointed.

The Bluebell Child Care Centre opened its doors for children on 9 September 1996. In attendance at the official opening, on 4 December 1996, were Genevieve Kirton (SDN President), Mary Hill (outgoing SDN President), Tonia Godhard (SDN CEO) and Linda Mitchell (Community Co-ordinator).

The contract has been extended regularly since 1996, the Centre becoming known as SDN Bluebell in 2003. SDN Bluebell still retains links to the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Community fundraising, a major part of SDN's foundation, featured in the early years of SDN Bluebell. Selling sweets raised thousands of dollars for the Centre in the 1990s, and donations from the Labour Club and Ainslie Football Club in 2001 funded the installation of new blinds. In 2008, the SDN Bluebell Betterment family committee planted a large vegetable garden.

## An important part of the SDN story

SDN Bluebell is geographically a long way from 'head office', but it is an important part of the SDN story.

Connections have developed through our shared history and by many reciprocal visits made between Canberra and other SDN sites. In 2010, during



SDN Bluebell's 10th birthday celebration! 2006. Source: SDN Archive.

'[To celebrate] Harmony Day each room took part in an art project that will see each child have their hand print on a group canvas [...] The children also took part in the planting of a tree.'

Colin Lee, Centre Director, *Community Times, Issue 118, April 2014*

one of SDN CEO Ginie Udy's many visit to SDN Bluebell, she was delighted to field many fun questions asked by the excited children, including 'do you like to paint?' and 'do you like ponies?'

In June 2002, SDN's centre managers embarked on an educational field trip, including SDN Bluebell, as part of a two-day program to explore innovative early education environments and education programs.

## Inclusion and integration

In 2015, SDN was successfully awarded the tender to provide disability services for families in the ACT under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

SDN Bluebell has always provided an inclusive and integrated approach to education and care.



SDN Bluebell's 'sister' gift for our Centenary celebration in 2005—a map with Australian flowers. Source: SDN Archive

SDN's 2015 Annual Report tells of a child with high support needs, who has flourished in SDN Bluebell's inclusive environment as a result of a team approach by the Centre, working with local programs.

## SDN Bluebell today

Since its beginnings, SDN Bluebell 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.

'..the children watched with keen interest as areas were fenced off, bark was laid and, the highlight of the process, a small yellow digger came to dig up the garden!'

*Community Times, Issue 80, December 2010*



SDN Bluebell's new garden, December 2010. The garden was upgraded again in 2012 as part of SDN's Capital Upgrade Program for Centres. Source: *Community Times*