Beginnings of …

SDN Ultimo

'In January SDN became the manager of two TAFE Centres at Ultimo and Petersham.'
SDN Children's Services, *97th Annual Report*, 2002

'…helping our children to get ready to confidently take the next step in their educational journey was very satisfying'
Educators supporting SDN Ultimo children transition to school, *Community Times*, 2015

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

Sydney Technical College from Mary Ann Street, 1891-92. Source: Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences (Powerhouse Museum)

History of Ultimo

The traditional owners of the land are the Gadigal people of the Eora nation[1].

The land is a rich soil area at the end of the sandstone ridge of Pyrmont.

The name Ultimo was coined by surgeon John Harris in the early 1800s, for his home Ultimo Farm. The name celebrated a court case Dr Harris won by paperwork error, where the Latin word Ultimo ('last month') was accidently used.

The area was used for farmland, before being subdivided for housing in the 1850s, and by the early 1900s workers of nearby industries lived in poor and crowded conditions. 'Slum clearances' took place where factories replaced many houses.

From the 1980s, many warehouses and sites began to be turned into housing and apartments again.

TAFE in Sydney

In 1878, various Sydney trade organisations established a technical college, known since 1882 as the Sydney Technical College. Students studied trades such as mechanical drawing and engineering alongside general education subjects, such as reading and philosophy.

In 1891, Sydney Technical College moved to Ultimo. The impressive main College building facing Mary Ann Street was designed by Government Architect William Kemp in Romanesque Revival style, with two Queen Anne style buildings on either side. The College expanded and added more buildings and annexes across Sydney.

In 1992, the College was renamed Sydney Institute of Technology.

Mural created by the children of SDN Ultimo, for the Mural Production Panel as part of Central Park's Community Engagement Program, 2014. Source: SDN Archive

SDN Ultimo Children's Education and Care Centre, Mary Ann Street, Ultimo, NSW

In 2000, it became Ultimo College, part of TAFE NSW's Sydney Institute.

SDN Ultimo opens in 2002!

On 19 October 2001, SDN was thrilled to receive a fax from TAFE NSW to announce that SDN was successful in a tender to operate children's education and care centres at two TAFE campuses —Petersham and Ultimo.

From 1 January 2002, SDN Ultimo was open for families!

SDN Ultimo as part of the SDN family

All of our centres are part of the SDN family, and we share stories and achievements.

In 2003, National Families Week saw staff and children at SDN Ultimo sharing family photos. And in 2005, SDN Ultimo joined all of SDN in celebrating 100 years of SDN! Each centre had a party, complete with birthday cake and a gift for another centre. The party at SDN Ultimo featured a petting zoo!

Also that year, SDN Ultimo was one of 21 centres across Australia to participate in the first trial of the new National Quality Standards, and a delegation of early childhood education experts from China visited SDN Ultimo to study strength-based programs in early childhood education in Australia.

The welcoming entrance to SDN Ultimo in the historic building on the Sydney TAFE campus. The centre is located in the oldest building on campus, constructed in 1891 and first used for plumbing and patternmaking workshops. Photo source: SDN Ultimo

SDN Ultimo belongs to wider communities. As part of the TAFE campus, in 2007 the children enjoyed the grounds for a spontaneous picnic and became impromptu dance stars during a campus DJ set, requesting Twinkle Twinkle Little Star!

Exploring is a big part of SDN Ultimo, such as in 2007 when the children went on an excursion to see two steam trains behind the ABC offices for Science Week.

And in 2010, the children and staff members enjoyed a visit by an Aboriginal artist and dancer.

In 2014, the children contributed a beautiful mural as part of Central Park's Community Engagement Program.

In 2016, SDN Ultimo was assessed by Australia's national quality authority and achieved the outstanding result of the 'Exceeding the National Quality Standard (NQS)' rating in all seven quality areas.

SDN Ultimo today

Since its beginnings, SDN Ultimo has undergone many changes, reflecting a strong connection with our families within a diverse, regional community.

The 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 our vision and commitment to addressing social inequalities, improving children's quality of life and enhancing the life chances for all children.

'Every one belongs' by SDN Ultimo children, 2017

SDN Ultimo staff and children watch the Olympic torch relay on Broadway, 2004. Source: SDN Archive

SDN Ultimo celebrates 100 years of SDN! 19 October 2005. Source: SDN Archive

[1] Spelling sourced from the Metropolitan Aboriginal Land Council