

Beginnings of ...

SDN Gumnut

'SDN is excited about becoming part of the Lithgow community and working with the children, families and staff of Gumnut House. In turn, we look forward to welcoming them into the SDN community'.

SDN's *Community Times*, May 2012

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



Lithgow, main street, 1953. Source: State Library of NSW GPO 2 - 03723

after. These were all areas of need in Sydney with large working populations. Expansion in the 1940s and 1950s also led to regional nurseries, such as in Goulburn and Bathurst.

History of Lithgow

The traditional owners of the land are the Wiradjuri nation¹.

In 1813, the first European explorers crossed the Blue Mountains into the Lithgow Valley. Coal was found in the mineral-rich area in the 1840s, followed by a gold rush in the 1850s.

With a railway line reaching the valley shortly after, collieries began to appear all over the area. Coal mining remained an important economic activity in Lithgow until a slow decline in the industry began in the 1930s.



The original Gumnut House located in Read Avenue, Lithgow. Source: *Lithgow Mercury*, 8 September 1983

'Council will continue to play a supportive role in ensuring the project remains viable...'

Lithgow Mercury, 8 September 1983

From little things, big things grow...

Gumnut House, as it was originally known, grew from an initiative of the Lithgow community in the 1970s.

A survey by the NSW Department of Youth and Community Services showed an essential need for co-ordinated child care for Lithgow's children. This led to the Lithgow Multi Purpose Child Care Association being formed in September 1979. This committee, with the support of the Lithgow Council, secured a government grant of \$200,000 for a large child care centre.

A project officer was employed and a Gumnut House management committee formed, comprised of enthusiastic volunteers. Finally an old building at 26 Read Avenue was able to be purchased in May 1982.

The building required renovations, and equipment for the new centre (including basic items such as bibs, bottles, feeding cups and facewashes) needed to be purchased. A gap in funding of \$10,000 was energetically filled by local businesses and community groups. Fundraising to offset the shortfall included a 'Sink or Swim Aquatic Festival', a bush dance, fashion parade, 'beauty morning', wine bottling, face painting and cake stalls.

Materials and voluntary practical help from donors, including the Joint Coal Board and the Apex Club, saw the completion of brickworks, ramps, a pergola, and the electrical re-wiring of the building.

The impressive effort of the local community saw Gumnut House quickly ready to welcome 50 children and their families.

Gumnut House opens!

Gumnut House opened on 5 September 1983. Lithgow now had its first multi-purpose early childhood education and care centre!

The first staff members included a professionally-qualified Director, a teacher, child care workers and nurses with a wide range of experience.

A lengthy article appeared in the *Lithgow Mercury* on 8 September 1983 celebrating the community effort to open Gumnut House. The article contained a large number of messages of support from local businesses, many of whom had donated items or funds.



SDN Gumnut's outdoor space in 2012
Source: SDN Archive

About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive, and information from the Australian Government 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: <https://www.historypin.org/en/person/32804/>

SDN Children's Services runs more than 20 children's education and care centres throughout NSW and the ACT, as well as providing a range of children and family support programs.



The original logo for Gumnut House, c. 1983. Source: SDN Archive.

The Gumnut House building also became a central hub for children's services in Lithgow, where outreach workers facilitated creative children's activities, operated a toy library, and ran the Birra Lee Playgroup for children with disabilities. The building was also a base for the Galloping Gumnut mobile early childhood education and care service.

'I'm delighted to be welcoming SDN Gumnut into the SDN 'family'. I have very fond memories of working at the centre in the late 1980s when I lived in Lithgow'

Ginie Udy, SDN's CEO, *Community Times*, September 2012

SDN welcomes Gumnut

Gumnut House moved to its current home in Proto Avenue in the mid 1990s. It continued to be run by a community committee until SDN was invited to take over management from 2 October 2012. SDN honoured the centre's beginnings with its new name - SDN Gumnut!

For Ginie Udy, SDN's then CEO, this was a journey that had come full circle. Ginie had worked at Gumnut House as an early childhood teacher in the 1980s, running parenting groups, and even driving the 'Galloping Gumnut' van!

SDN Gumnut has a long history of providing an important service in a regional area, with skilled professionals supporting families as they explore child development and parenting skills, and SDN continued to build on this history.

Gumnut today

In 2017, SDN was not successful in a tender run by Lithgow Council, and management of the centre passed to a new provider from 5 March 2018.

Since its beginnings, the Gumnut early childhood education and care centre has undergone many changes, reflecting a strong connection with families within a diverse, regional community.

SDN is happy that Gumnut has been part of our vision and commitment to addressing social inequalities, improving children's quality of life and enhancing the life chances for all children.



SDN Gumnut on a snow day! July 2015
Source: SDN Archive

¹ Spelling sourced from the Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council