

# Beginnings of SDN Beranga

sdn  
children's services

*“Beranga is not just a building. The word Beranga means ‘belonging’ in the Darug language.”*

- SDN Beranga official opening speech by Theresa Collignon,  
then SDN president, 22 July 2013

## 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.

## SDN's Disability Services

From its earliest days, SDN provided professional, holistic services for children. At our first nurseries, children were cared for by qualified nursing staff, and provided with nutritious meals and access to free medical assessments.

Early to recognise that improved social conditions are as important

for children as physical care, SDN was also at the forefront in the employment of welfare and allied health professionals.

SDN's first formal disability unit was established in 1987. SDN subsequently introduced further support services: Inclusion Support Teams funded by SUPS, Child and Family Resource Centre (1997), Early Learning Program (1999) and Supporting Children with Additional Needs program (2002). When Inclusion Support Agencies were introduced in 2006, SDN became the key agency in multiple regions.



Above: The vacant site in Rooty Hill, 2010, prior to construction. Photo: SDN Archive

## SDN Beranga is announced

In 2010, SDN successfully tendered to build and operate the first Autism specific Early Years Demonstration Service in Western Sydney. The service would be known as SDN Beranga.

The innovative service delivery model, funded by the NSW Government, would significantly improve outcomes for children on the Autism Spectrum, and their families.

A 'lighthouse' centre would be built, which would provide outreach services to Greater Western Sydney early childhood education and care

'satellite' centres.

SDN Beranga's trans-disciplinary team would include early childhood educators, social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, and nutrition specialists.

By using innovative and best practices in early childhood intervention, SDN Beranga would support families raising children who are on the Autism Spectrum.

## SDN Beranga begins

In August 2011, a transitional SDN Beranga program was introduced for families. The program was run from local community centres, including the Mt Druitt Aboriginal Child and Family Centre, where many important and lasting connections were formed.

In January 2012, construction of the 'lighthouse' centre building began on vacant land purchased by SDN in Rooty Hill, Western Sydney. Established in the early-1800s, Rooty Hill is now a busy residential and business suburb with a diverse population<sup>1</sup>.

## The 'Lighthouse' opens

After several delays caused by rain, construction on the SDN Beranga 'Lighthouse' (the purpose-built, specialised centre for children on the Autism Spectrum and their families) was completed almost a year after commencing. Educators and staff welcomed children into the centre on 21 January 2013.

The building was officially opened on 22 June 2013. Following

<sup>1</sup>SDN Children's Services acknowledges the traditional owners of the land.

a Welcome to Country performed by Darug Elder Aunty Jacinta, over 100 guests enjoyed the celebration.

In attendance were SDN Beranga families, SDN Board and staff members, satellite staff members, the NSW Premier and Minister for Ageing and Disability Services, local MPs, and NSW Government representatives.



Above: Official opening of SDN Beranga with (l-r) Megan Zahra, Barry O' Farrell, Ginie Udy and Teresa Collignon. Photo: Anna Zhu.

In her opening speech, (then) SDN President Theresa Collignon acknowledged the benefits of quality, tailored, trans-disciplinary early childhood education and care for children on the Autism Spectrum.

The following year, SDN Beranga unveiled a new outdoor space and garden, specifically designed to enhance play and learning of children on the Autism Spectrum. The garden won a 2014 Kidsafe National Playspace "Highly Commended" Design Award.

## The importance of place

A mural in SDN Beranga's outdoor play area, by Darug artist Leanne Tobin, was unveiled in 2014. The mural informs the service's education program, and facilitates reflection on the importance of connection to country and builds relationships with SDN Beranga

families.



Above: SDN Beranga's award-winning play space, 2014. Photo: Anna Zhu

*"...And now [since coming to SDN Beranga] she is laughing and playing"*

- SDN Beranga parent, 2013

## SDN Beranga's outcomes

SDN Beranga's delivery model has been highly successful, and has produced outstanding results.

Since 2011, the 'Lighthouse' and 'satellites', working in tandem, have enabled hundreds of children to transition from highly specialised services to mainstream centres and schools when the children, and their families, are ready.



Above: Mural at SDN Beranga, by Darug artist Leanne Tobin. Photo: SDN Archive

Children attending SDN Beranga have demonstrated an increased

level of social interaction, communication and play. SDN Beranga families have also developed sustained relationships and support networks. SDN continues to work in partnership with all levels of stake-holders to secure the long term future of SDN Beranga, and to promote and build on this innovative service delivery model.

## SDN today

For more than 110 years, SDN has been committed to addressing social inequalities, improving children's quality of life and enhancing the life chances of all children.

*"...I can't believe it, this is so wonderful."*

- SDN Beranga parent, seeing their child sitting happily at a table, eating with others, 2013



Above: Children and staff playing at SDN Beranga, 2018. Photos: Anna Zhu

## About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive 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 children's education and care 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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