



▲ Melanie Alexander c.1945

Melanie Alexander

Melanie Alexander, President of the Newtown Training College and Nursery School Committee, was responsible for overseeing an SDN fundraising canteen at the Showground, staffed by volunteers, from 1942 until 1946. Profits from the canteen, which totalled more than £12,000, funded the purchase of 'The Retreat' in Newtown. This building was used to house SDN's Nursery School Training College, later known as the Nursery School Teachers' College, from 1946 until the early 1970s.



▲ Fundraising plant sale at the SDN Woolloomooloo street fair, c.1977

Voluntary assistance and local support

Throughout SDN's history, the provision of our services have been supported by acts of **voluntary assistance and philanthropy**. Members of the founding Executive Committee, and today's equivalent SDN Boards, offer their services in a voluntary capacity.

Local businesses, professionals and communities have always made vital contributions of time, funds and equipment to our centres. In the early days, 'sewing circles' were formed by local young women to make children's clothes, and in Woolloomooloo the nearby steam laundry washed the children's clothes and linen for free. Local companies would donate food and toys. Later, a volunteer-run 'tuck shop' at the East Sydney Technical College, first set up in 1927, provided 15% of SDN's income for nearly 15 years.

Families have also always contributed to SDN's success in a voluntary capacity. In 1935, an early Superintendent of Nursery Schools and of training, Miss Town, started a mothers' club, which met once a fortnight. Further parents clubs were subsequently formed to provide social and

The Phillips Family

The Phillips family has a long history of involvement with SDN commencing in 1905 when Mrs Louis Phillips (then Miss Julie Cohen) became the first Honorary Treasurer. Her sister-in-law, Helene Phillips (Mrs Orwell Phillips), joined SDN in 1908/09 and remained a member of Executive or branch committees for 68 years, retiring in 1977. Mrs Phillips served as President in the 1920s, and frequently acted as President during absences. The Phillips' connection with SDN has continued over three subsequent generations. Helene Phillips' daughter, Barbara Selby (*née* Phillips), served on SDN Branch Committees and was Vice President through the 1980s. Helene's grand-daughter, Elizabeth Albert (*née* Selby), also sat on several SDN Branch Committees and her great-granddaughter, Kirsty Albert, is currently an SDN Board member.

practical support as well as fundraising and helping around the centres. Parent Committees later fulfilled this role.

The Mothers' Club makes for a friendly atmosphere at the Nursery School. Parents receive educational advantages and occasionally take part in money raising activities.

Nursery School Mothers' Club Rules, c.1956

Guidance through governance

Guidance through governance has always been recognised by SDN as the foundation of a successful organisation. An Executive Committee was established on formation in 1905, along with subsequent branch sub-committees for each centre, to provide effective governance and **strategic leadership**. This role is now undertaken by the SDN Boards.

We achieve our vision and fulfil our purpose by providing high quality, inclusive early childhood education and care from birth, strengthening families and communities and addressing inequalities faced by children.

SDN Mission, SDN Road Map, 2015

SDN's future

For more than one hundred and ten years, SDN has believed the world can be a better and more equitable place, where the promise and potential of every child is realised. Every member of the SDN team, no matter where they are based, plays an important role in making this a reality for children now and in the future.



Right: SDN Brighter Futures

Front right: SDN Lois Barker, 2015

Front left: Trainee students, Woolloomooloo Day Nursery and Nursery School, c.1935-36

www.sdn.org.au

Level 2, 86-90 Bay Street, Broadway, NSW 2007 02 9213 2400
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This document was prepared by SDN's History and Archive team. The SDN Archive was established in 2002 to collect, maintain, research and promote the valuable and extensive collection of historical records amassed by SDN since its establishment in 1905.

'This spirit of unity'

The SDN team



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children's services

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SDN Children's Services is here for wellbeing of children, now and for the future. We know that children's wellbeing is directly influenced by those around them, so we value family and parenting, and always work with children in the context of their family and community. Since our beginnings in 1905, our generalist and professional staff have worked together as a team, across a range of disciplines, to provide quality early childhood education and care, disability services for children and family support services, and to work with other children's services to support practitioner development so they are as inclusive as possible.

It is this spirit of unity that has enabled (us) to meet efficiently the many, and sometimes unforeseen, demands...

Lady MacCallum, President, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1930-31*

Beginnings of SDN

Imagine needing to leave your children unattended on the streets, or alone at home, during the day so you were able to earn money for your family to survive. In Sydney, during the early years of the 20th Century, this was the distressing situation faced routinely by many working mothers. Increasingly troubled by the plight of such families, a group of wealthy young women formed the Sydney Day Nursery Association (now known as SDN Children's Services) and opened a children's day nursery in Woolloomooloo on 7 December 1905.

Professional care

Over the following decades, SDN opened many more day nurseries in economically deprived areas of inner Sydney, where the young children in attendance were cared for and nurtured by professional **nursing staff**, and their assistants.

...it is encouraging to note the marked improvement which follows [the children's] admission to the cleanliness and comfort, and the wholesome living of the Nursery.

Nurse Breden, *Sydney Day Nursery Association Annual Report, 1905-06*



▲ Advertisement for first Matron, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 1905

Health issues experienced by many of the children highlighted the importance of access to **professional medical services**. A number of local doctors including Doctors Fairfax, Blackburn, Macdonald Gill and Phipps-Waugh stepped in to provide their medical services free of charge. The doctors also, on occasions, donated much-needed items of medical equipment. Children were monitored for infectious conditions, and advice was provided to families regarding illness, environment and nutrition. Referrals were also made to hospitals or for other medical treatments, if required.

...we must furnish more such nurseries as near factories and other working places as possible.

Dr Clubbe, SDN's Chief Honorary Medical Advisor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September 1922

Sarah Breden

SDN's first paid staff member was Nurse Sarah Breden, Matron of the day nursery that opened in Woolloomooloo in 1905. Having graduated from general hospital training at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital (there were no specific infant care courses at the time) Nurse Breden was one of the first members of the newly formed Australasian Trained Nurses' Association, and had experience working with some of Sydney's most economically deprived communities. By March of 1906, with 16 children attending the nursery each day, a partially trained assistant was employed. Further assistants were subsequently engaged. Though not all had received formal nursing training, a passionate commitment to improving the wellbeing of children in their care was essential. Nurses continued to manage the cot rooms up until the 1990s.



▲ Nurse Sarah Breden, *The Sydney Mail*, 20 June 1906

The importance of good dental health was also acknowledged in the very early days of SDN. In the 1920s Louisa Cherry became the first of our **honorary dentists**, providing services for children of SDN Paddington. In the 1930s, Margaret Ogilvie, only the 10th woman to graduate from the University of Sydney's dental school, became the honorary dentist for SDN Woolloomooloo, where she visited once a month. The dentists provided children with free dental checks. Eventually, dental rooms were installed at some of our locations, such as Redfern, Erskineville and Woolloomooloo.



▲ Redfern Day Nursery and Nursery School, c.1948-50

Early childhood education and care

SDN was an early advocate for the education of very young children undertaken by trained professionals. In the early 1930s, SDN established the first nursery schools, which were run alongside the day nurseries, and the first **nursery teacher training** centre in New South Wales. The principles on which the training centre (subsequently known as the Nursery School Teachers' College) was founded still resonate soundly with SDN's contemporary practices, and we continue to recognise the requirement for professionally trained staff, supported by dedicated assistants, in all early childhood settings.

The aim of the course is to offer the students a professional training [which is] a broad and cultural one [with] special emphasis laid on the scientific study of the needs and development of young children.

Prospectus of Nursery School Training Centre, Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, c.1939

Dorothea 'Dorrie' Priest

Dorothea 'Dorrie' Priest graduated from the Nursery School Training Centre (later known as the Nursery School Teachers' College) in 1937. The College had been established by SDN in 1932 at SDN Woolloomooloo. The College gave a broad education in the subjects of literature, music and dance, woodwork, art and craft, psychology, child health, child development and social welfare. Regular nursery school practical training days were also included in the curriculum. Dorrie was employed as a teacher at SDN Redfern and SDN Paddington. In an oral history recording made in 2014, Dorrie fondly remembers her training in communicating with and caring for children at SDN Woolloomooloo, where she also learned practical skills including creating children's toys, designing pictures for storytelling and puzzles, and using 'sense training' apparatus to assist children's developmental needs. Dorrie also recalls, during her time as a qualified staff member, 'living in' at SDN Redfern during the week, where she slept in the bedrooms upstairs.

▼ Dorrie Priest featured in *Sunday Sun and Guardian*, 29 Nov 1936



▼ Excerpt from an article about Maud Walsh, *The Telegraph*, 15 August 1954

FIVE days a week, from early morning till late at night, a tiny, grey-haired woman with calm, friendly eyes behind steel-rimmed spectacles walks the cracked pavements of Sydney's "underprivileged" areas.

Maud Walsh

Maud Walsh took up the position of Welfare Officer at SDN in the mid 1940s. She was responsible for undertaking home visits, adjusted fees according to financial circumstances and provided advice to staff on matters such as record keeping and communicating successfully with parents. Miss Walsh also implemented an early version of our current 'priority of access' policy. Her role was busy, with an article appearing in *The Telegraph* on 15 August 1954 reporting 'Miss Walsh's job is to look into the backgrounds of the roughly 1,300 children cared for by the Day Nursery Association...'

Welfare and developmental specialists

SDN has employed **welfare and disability professionals** for over half a century. Our first Welfare Officer, Ivy Allen, was employed in 1943. In 1954, SDN President Mrs McElhone (a position she held from 1938 until 1963) represented SDN at the International Conference of Social Work in Canada, and in 1965 the NSW Association of Mental Health held discussion groups with SDN's nursery school teachers about how best to meet the needs of children from birth to six years.

As early as the 1930s, SDN's nursery schools were utilising 'occupational' toys and play designed to encourage developmental skills. SDN was an early advocate of the importance of meeting child development goals, and extra care was provided within centres, or specialists were engaged, when a child was observed to need additional help. From this early time, students from **allied health and social welfare professions** visited SDN centres to observe practices. In 1987 SDN opened its first dedicated disability service, the Special Needs Unit, which was funded by the Federal Government.



▲ The cook at SDN Erskineville, 1978

Known subsequently as the Early Intervention Programme (1989) and Inclusion Support Team (1999), the service ran until 2006 when SDN continued this work through the Inclusion Support Agencies.

[Services] ... must provide staff who are qualified to interpret children's behaviour and provide for them what is best for their optimum development.

Joan Fry, Nursery School Teachers' College Principal, *Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association Annual Report, 1970*

Nutrition planning

In the early years, the SDN Matrons managed the day nursery menus, on the advice of the Executive Committee and Honorary Doctors. Many of the children were malnourished, and they were provided with regular nutritious meals at the nurseries. The 'Regulations for Parents' in 1906 stated that children would be given 'suitable food at proper intervals' as part of the fee of three pence per day, and instructions were given on food to be given at home. Initially, the Matron and nurse assistants shared cooking duties with maids and later housekeepers. By the 1930s, specialised cooks started to be employed, although other staff members were always ready to assist with this duty if required.

The children's weight charts all show steady increases and we feel that a tribute is due to our cook, Mrs. Evans, who prepares the tasteful and nourishing meals served daily.

Bathurst Nursery School (now SDN Hamilton Street), *Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association Annual Report, 1952-53*

Support services

When SDN formed in 1905, administrative support duties (arranging meetings, managing correspondence, account keeping and reporting) were undertaken by an Honorary Secretary, the first being Jeanie Dane. In 1918, this voluntary position was replaced by a paid General Secretary. Stella Davies (one of the first students to graduate from University of Sydney's social work course in 1931) undertook the role from 1923 until 1931, and introduced many office

Betty Greenfield (née Sloan)

Betty Greenfield (née Sloan), a nursery school teacher at SDN Riverwood and Director at SDN Surry Hills, became SDN's first Staff Advisor in 1971, a role she held until her retirement in 1979. A shared services role that provided practice and management support to Directors in SDN's centres, this position developed into Area Coordinators, then Community Leaders.



▲ Jeanie Dane. Source: *The Kindergarten Teachers College, 1897-1981*, Ruth Harrison, 1985

innovations, including the purchase of a typewriter! Catherine C. Thomson was SDN's longest-serving General Secretary, undertaking the role from 1946 until 1974. The General Secretary position developed to become the Executive Officer and subsequently the CEO. Other **essential support functions** including management, finance, IT, training, marketing, and property management are now provided by a comprehensive and dedicated team of shared services staff.