

Beginnings of ...

SDN LEIP—Early Childhood Links

‘In January, the Lithgow Early Intervention Program (LEIP) officially became part of SDN. LEIP was established in 1985 and works closely with families in the Lithgow area to support them to provide the best opportunities for their children with a disability’.

SDN Children’s Services, Annual Report 2014

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



A miner’s hut, Lithgow Valley, c.1885:
<http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an24615487>

after. These were all areas of need in Sydney with large working populations.

From the very beginning, SDN adopted a holistic approach to child wellbeing that acknowledged children’s physical, emotional and cultural needs, including the support of children with additional needs.

History of Lithgow

The traditional owners of the land are the Wiradjuri nation¹.

In 1813 explorers crossed the Blue Mountains into the mineral-rich granite belt of the Central tablelands. These minerals were to shape the future of Lithgow as an industrial area.

In the 1850s to 1870s, gold rush fever hit, and coal had also been identified in 1841. When the railway opened to Lithgow, coal was able to be mined and sold from Lithgow, and collieries soon appeared all over the Lithgow Valley. From the 1930s, the coal mining industry in Lithgow declined.

The Lithgow Early Intervention Program opens in 1985

In the mid 1980s, Lithgow Public School identified a need for an early intervention program for children with disabilities in the community, before they reached primary school.

As a result of funding secured from the Commonwealth Government’s Schools Commission, an early intervention teacher, Ginie Udy (now CEO of SDN Children’s Services), and teacher’s aide, Jill Stephens, were employed to provide an early intervention service.

The first meeting of the Lithgow Early Intervention Program (LEIP) Management Committee was held on 6 February 1985.

It was decided that the ongoing Committee would consist of the class teacher and aide, a parent representative, a medical professional, an occupational therapist from the Bathurst Rehabilitation Unit, the District School Counsellor and representatives from Lithgow Public School, Mitchell College Child Development Unit, Lithgow Community Health Centre, and the NSW Department of Education.



Family Picnic Day, Lithgow Early Intervention Program, 1987. SDN Archive



SDN LEIP received two generous donations in 2014 from the workers of Centennial Coal (Angus Place Colliery), pictured above with SDN LEIP staff members (manager Pennie Hudson, far right) and The Great Walk Foundation.

The service aimed to support young children with disabilities in Lithgow, to assess and provide a tailored program for each child to build gross motor, fine motor, language and social skills in a play based environment.

LEIP operated out of the Lithgow Public School, initially for 3 days a week, as well as having the flexibility to offer home visits.

LEIP grows within Lithgow

Many local community groups helped support the new program with donations, both financial and equipment and toys for the children.

LEIP's parent representative Sylvia Webb took on the role of publicity officer and made sure that the local community was informed about the program. Interviews with local radio (Radio 90 and 2CR—now local ABC) and stories in The Lithgow Mercury were quickly organised. A video was created providing another way to inform and promote LEIP. All of these efforts resulted in support and interest.

LEIP started with five children. By the end of the first year, 15 children were enrolled in the program, and one child was able to graduate to the Special Education Unit at the primary school.

The importance of understanding children within the context of their families was increasingly recognised as

the program progressed. Ginie Udy had previously run parenting courses at Gumnut House (now SDN Gumnut), and this family based approach continued at LEIP. Supporting and listening to families was pivotal, and parents often participated in the sessions with their children.

'The aim of giving emotional support and practical assistance to the parents has been very well met and I feel this has become one of the cornerstones of our programme.'

Ginie Udy, *Lithgow Early Intervention Program Annual Report, 1986*

The opportunity for social experiences was important too, such as an end of term coffee meeting for all parents held on 23 August 1985. Support groups for fathers and another group for siblings of children attending LEIP were formed.

From the start, LEIP worked in an integrated way within the community. Links were formed with other organisations in the community such as Birrilee Play Group. Advice was given to staff at other early childhood education service providers, including Gumnut House and Pied Piper Pre-school.

Allied health professionals and local doctors worked with LEIP and the family within a transdisciplinary service. This was important to maintain a consistent and informed treatment for the children.

LEIP teachers kept up to date with current practices by attending training courses, conferences and joining groups such as the Early Intervention Association.

LEIP joins the SDN family

On 27 January 2014, LEIP became part of the SDN family as SDN LEIP Early Childhood Links. SDN's CEO Ginie Udy was at the official welcoming and



SDN's CEO Ginie Udy at the SDN LEIP official opening, 26 March 2014, with the fold-out family corner from 1985 still in use!

opening of SDN LEIP on 26 March. Ginie welcomed the program she had started back in 1985 and had left in 1990, and was thrilled to see some familiar faces.

SDN's current centre-based logic knowledge base asserts that children learn from birth, and this is reflected in LEIP's rationale from the start.

'The period of a child's life from birth to school age is a period of rapid development. Research has shown that early intervention can substantially raise the functioning levels of developmentally delayed children.'

Lithgow Early Intervention Program Rationale, 1987

SDN LEIP ECL today

Since its beginnings, SDN LEIP ECL has undergone many changes, reflecting a strong connection with our families within a vibrant and diverse community.

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.



Jill (left) and Ginie (right) teaching at the Lithgow Early Intervention Program (LEIP), 1986. SDN Archive

About this history and the SDN Archive

This history was put together from documents held in the SDN Archive and the Lithgow City Council 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 25 children's education and care centres throughout NSW and the ACT, as well as providing a range of children and family support programs.

¹ Spelling sourced from the Bathurst Local Aboriginal Land Council, March 2015