

Enacting Integration: Progress Report for SDN Children's Services

Never Stand Still

Arts & Social Sciences

Social Policy Research Centre



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Abbreviations

ECEC Early Childhood Education and Care

ECT Early Childhood Teacher

HREA Human Research Ethics Advisory

SDN SDN Children's Services

SLT Senior Leadership Team

SPRC Social Policy Research Centre

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1. Executive Summary

This report contributes findings from research assessing the journey of SDN Children's Services (SDN) in becoming, and being, an integrated organisation. The report is based on information collected in late 2014, as part of the second of three annual waves of data collection.

SDN's journey to integration has gained momentum since the baseline data was collected in late 2013. Rather than discussing integration as an idea or aspiration, SDN leaders and staff have come to see integration as core to their mission and practice, and have begun to experience the benefits of working in integrated ways.

In comparison to 2013, research participants in 2014 tended to feel SDN was more connected and working more effectively internally, and taking a more strategic approach to its external relationships and collaborations. Integration remained a priority for SDN leaders. SDN leaders generally felt that SDN was achieving results through integration, and several interviewees highlighted new initiatives, including processes for determining priority of access to SDN services, which were expected to further increase the organisation's ability to achieve its vision and mission.

SDN staff in the three fieldwork sites also maintained a commitment to integration. The interviews showed the number of SDN staff who saw integration working to benefit their practice and enhance their capacity to achieve outcomes for children and families. As was the case in 2013, program delivery staff were more familiar with integrated service delivery models than staff in centre-based settings. However, educators were receptive to the idea of collaborating with other organisations, and were actively focused on integrating children and families into education and care settings, and ensuring feelings of belonging. Staff in both types of settings felt their work was increasingly complex, and many identified supports which would help them to continue to enact SDN's integrated approach.

In 2014, SDN families continued to consider SDN services to be convenient and efficient; more than 90% reported feeling confident approaching SDN staff about their needs. Families' experiences of using SDN services appears to have improved, insofar as a smaller proportion reported that SDN had asked them for the same information more than once; 2 in 5 survey respondents reported that they had been asked for the same information more than once in 2013, while in 2014, this was the case for only 1 in 5. While this may reflect compositional differences in the survey sample, it suggests that improvements to systems and practices are resulting in smoother pathways for families.

Interviews with partner organisations showed that within the service network, SDN is well regarded for its contribution and leadership. Representatives of partner organisations valued SDN as an organisation with good resources and networks, and capacity to deliver a diverse range of services. Partner organisations strongly valued SDN's willingness to support children and families with complex needs.

Overall, the data suggests SDN has progressed in its journey. We expect this process to continue in coming months, as more SDN staff experience integrated working and build their capacity to achieve SDN's vision and mission.

2. About The Research

2.1 Background

The Social Policy Research Centre entered into a partnership with SDN in mid-2013 to monitor and assess SDN's journey of becoming and being an integrated organisation. The research was designed to explore:

- the factors that led to SDN's decision to become an integrated organisation, including organisational thinking and decision making over the last three years;
- factors contributing to the likelihood of success in the three nominated sites;
- past, present and potential challenges involved in the 'integration journey', both for SDN as a whole and for each nominated site; and
- outcomes achieved by 2015 by children and families, staff members and communities in the three sites, and the role of organisational integration in achieving those outcomes.

The work is informed by and positioned within SDN's strategic agenda. SDN's Strategic Plan 2013-2015 refers to the delivery of 'high quality, integrated and inclusive services' as a way to achieve SDN's high level objectives of enhancing children's quality of life, and ensuring children and families from traditionally excluded groups belong, and have opportunities to participate in services. SDN has framed integration as a means through which it works to achieve outcomes for children and families.

The first wave of data was collected in late 2013, and is reported in the baseline report¹. The data contained in this report was collected in late 2014, to help assess progress made in the previous 12 months.

2.2 Methodology for the 2014 study

Like the baseline study in 2013, the 2014 study used a mixed methods approach. The study included the following elements:

- Conducting 11 interviews with representatives from SDN's Integrated Services Leadership Team (see Section 3). The Leadership Team brings together the organisation's senior executives, regional managers and community leaders. The interviews helped capture how senior personnel were experiencing SDN's journey towards becoming and being an integrated organisation, including their perceptions of progress over the last 12 months, what had been working well, and what would help SDN as it continued the journey.
- Examining responses to relevant questions from SDN's annual employee survey, conducted in late 2014 (see Section 5).
- Collecting data from three SDN service delivery sites:
 - SDN Ngallia Children's Education and Care Centre at Lidcombe, combined with SDN's Granville hub. The Granville hub includes a range of additional programs, including the Child and Family

1 Cortis N; valentine k; Brennan D, 2014, *Becoming and being an integrated organisation: the experience of SDN Children's Services [baseline report 2014]*, SPRC Report 17/2014.

Resource Centre; Early Childhood Links, which helps families access a range of services to promote participation by children with additional needs; and the Inclusion Support Agency, which builds the capacity of childcare centres to provide a quality and inclusive environment for children with additional needs.

- SDN Milperra Children’s Education and Care Centre, which opened on 30 April 2012 and is located within the grounds of Milperra Public School.
- SDN Redfern, encompassing the Redfern Children’s Education and Care Centre, and Brighter Futures, which is located upstairs from the centre, and provides families with services and supports to prevent escalation of problems affecting families’ ability to care for their children.

Across the sites, the fieldwork involved:

- **interviews with frontline staff** ($n = 34$) about their experiences of delivering SDN services, what integration means in the context of their work, what SDN staff hope integration will achieve, and their perceptions of progress made so far (Section 4);
- **a survey of parents/carers** ($n = 96$) about their experience of receiving services from SDN, and the ways SDN staff have facilitated access to other services and supports in SDN and the community (Section 7);
- **interviews with staff in partner organisations** ($n = 8$) about their experiences of working in partnership with SDN (Section 6).

While a small number of parent interviews were undertaken in 2013, in 2014 this was not attempted. Information was instead obtained from families through the parent survey. Ethics approval was obtained from the UNSW Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel (Approval Number 9_14_035) and the Research Ethics Committee at SDN (reference E1403DB).

Response Analysis

Table 1 provides a summary of the methodology and responses for the 2014 fieldwork. This shows that of the 34 staff interviews, the largest group were in Granville / Ngallia. As the aim of the interviews was to capture the perspectives of a cross-section of SDN staff working in each site, it was not essential to interview the same people in 2013 and 2014. Regardless, several staff participated in interviews across both years, although many were in different positions.

A total of 96 completed parent surveys were received, with the largest number coming from Redfern. Eleven interviews with members of the Integrated Services Leadership Team were completed, and eight interviews with representatives of partner organisations. The SDN sites that the partner organisation interviewees had worked with are not identified, to maintain their confidentiality. Results of the employee survey for SDN were also considered as a whole, as data was not available in disaggregated form for each site.

Table 1: Summary of fieldwork responses, 2014

	Granville/Ngallia	Milperra	Redfern	Total
Staff interviews	15	7	12	34
Parent survey	35	23	38	96
Integrated Services Leadership Team		11		
Partner organisation interviews		8		
Employee survey		404		

3. Perspectives From SDN Leaders

This section reports findings based on interviews with members of SDN's Integrated Services Leadership Team, which includes senior leaders, regional managers and community leaders. Overall, 11 leaders participated. Six were members of SDN's senior leadership team (senior executives or regional managers) and five were community leaders. Interviews were undertaken in person or over the phone, depending on practicality and interviewee preferences. Overall, the interviews demonstrate that in 2014:

- Integration remained a priority for SDN leaders
- SDN leaders generally felt that SDN's journey to integration had gained or maintained momentum, although some considered progress to be patchy across the organisation
- SDN leaders were seeing results from SDN's integrated approach
- SDN leaders generally felt that SDN is working more effectively internally
- SDN leaders felt the organisation was approaching partnerships more strategically
- Recruiting staff who can work in integrated ways remains an ongoing challenge for SDN
- The rollout of new priority of access processes are expected to further increase the number of children and families from target groups attending SDN services, which will assist SDN to achieve its social justice mission.

Perceptions of progress over 12 months: Implementation and results

SDN leaders described how integration had remained an important principle and priority for the organisation over the previous 12 months, and understanding of integration had improved throughout the organisation. A number of leaders noted that recent developments reflected progress in SDN's journey to integration, including the refinement of how sites were organised among SDN communities, and the structure and leadership of 'Shared Services' in Head Office. Although some leaders had experienced moments of frustration through the internal changes implemented in 2014, at the time of interview, they tended to reflect on these as necessary steps towards enhancing SDN's integrated approach. One Community Leader, for example, observed:

We're in a really good place and some significant changes have happened and I think that that's important.... Coming out from the changes I think we're actually in a stronger place now, and we are really working with shared services and the service delivery programs and centres. We really are starting to connect together. (Community Leader 4)

Leaders generally felt that ideas about integration were now better understood and more explicit within the organisation. Many commented that implementation had progressed over the previous 12 months, although a few felt that the progress made had been uneven across the organisation. One described feeling that SDN was more connected and collaborative compared with 12 months ago:

We've been able to draw on each other more. So there's more willingness to ask for help, and use the team around the family concept. (Community Leader 2)

Several leaders explained that SDN was now enacting its vision of integration by translating ideas into practice, including through the development of more sophisticated internal structures and communication networks, and through staff recruitment. A few explained that SDN was intending to roll out policies which were currently in development, including guidelines for implementing a consistent priority of access process across the organisation, and a client management system. When in place, these were expected to provide SDN with important ways to further enact its integrated approach.

Among interviewees, there was recognition that strong and determined leadership had been a driver of SDN's journey to integration. One Community Leader described how SDN leaders' strong intent to implement change had ensured SDN's journey to integration had gained momentum in the previous months:

The leaders in the organisation have a very strong intention of making it an integrated organisation and there's a lot of work behind that, which then results in lots of discussions and a solid basis to make that happen, which then translates into people understanding it at different levels.... it's something that has to be understood and the benefits of it felt in a very practical way, to actually make it really gain momentum... ..I feel it has momentum and is gaining momentum (Community Leader 3)

One leader described how discussions at the recent leaders' day had provided evidence of change, as the focus had turned from the concept of integration to its practicalities:

We're not having discussions about should we, would we, why wouldn't we... That's all gone. It's now the how, and it's hard, and we need support, and we need a system... (SLT 1)

Another described evidence of how SDN had progressed in terms of improvements in staff understanding of the families SDN was targeting for service provision:

There's a huge consciousness out there and it's about what is our vision and who are the families that we really want to be able to work with. So that definitely has changed (Community Leader 1)

Leaders also described how the results of implementing an integrated approach were reflected in new contracts resulting from successful tenders, including expansion of the Early Childhood Links program. These successes were seen as the outcome of a strategy to expand services in line with SDN's mission of supporting families in a connected, integrated way, and a reflection of SDN's commitment to expanding services for families from traditionally marginalised groups. While program expansion was providing opportunities to build on an integrated approach, there was recognition that there had been some temporary disruption to services, as established staff were pulled into new areas to develop new programs and sites.

Many SDN leaders also noted implementation was at varying stages in different areas. Notwithstanding, some felt SDN was seeing results of its efforts, albeit in 'pockets' across the organisation, and that this made integration 'real' and demonstrated the value of working in an integrated way. As one leader explained:

I think there's a broader understanding and awareness of the rationale, the value behind working in an integrated way, and it's real. You know when you get the support from another team or another person, or there's a really good outcome from a family because you've forged a good connection or a pathway, and things have just come together or, you've brought a team around a child with a disability, and then transitioned off to school effectively. There's great job satisfaction in that, and I think we're seeing that in pockets, and I think yeah people are really, people that are here and very aligned with SDN's philosophy and mission are really seeing the value in working in an integrated way with those more practical examples, rather than just talking about it theoretically. (Community Leader 2)

Overall, the interviews with SDN leaders indicated a shared perception that SDN had made progress towards integration in 2014, and that the results of change were tangible.

Implementing integrated working within SDN

Interviewees cited many examples of the ways that SDN had become better connected internally, and staff were increasingly receptive to working across the organisation. The newly established regular meetings of SDN senior and service leaders within and across SDN communities were highlighted as examples of how SDN had progressed its integration agenda in the previous year. These meetings were seen as evidence of the progress SDN had made in consolidating and utilising its community-based structure, but also as a mechanism for further strengthening SDN internally. The regular meetings of program and centre staff within communities, and program staff across communities, were also seen to be helping strengthen SDN's integrated approach, along with regular meetings of administrative staff, who were SDN's key interface with families. Some commented that SDN was making more use of IT to support better communication across the organisation. Other leaders described how written resources, such as the program logic for service types or the 'roadmap' describing how SDN services fit together, were helping promote understanding of SDN services and locations and underpinning better communication and sharing.

In particular, there was strong recognition of the central role played by community leaders in promoting connections across SDN. Community leaders were recognised for their key role in promoting connections across SDN services, and in developing knowledge within communities, to ensure SDN services were connected and responsive. Within communities, opportunities for leaders to meet were very well received, and were considered to be effective ways of promoting co-ordination and problem solving. As one interviewee described:

*The community leaders meet with all the managers in their community on a regular basis...
...They're all getting together and talking about common themes or assisting each other with ideas to resolve a challenge at their site (SLT 4)*

Regular meetings were seen to be helping to improve leaders' understanding of what was happening elsewhere in the SDN community, and promoting understanding of the priorities of other SDN services or teams. Leaders also described how regularly coming together as a community was a way to enhance their professional development, and provided an opportunity to share information about services or agencies, which further expanded understanding of the programs and supports available for families and children. As a result of these meetings, many had found their opportunities to connect on a day to day level had expanded. Community Leaders described how their leaders' meetings had helped the community to share good practice and support knowledge exchange, especially between programs and centres. This form of internal collaboration was sharing good practice in general, regardless of whether or not services were working together with a family. As one interviewee explained:

They don't have very many families in common at all, it's more information about what they do, like what's good early childhood practice and you know, what do you do with a family where there's drug and alcohol abuse? (Community Leader 2)

While some commented that regular meetings were easier for SDN communities which were geographically close, interviewees also described how more dispersed communities had strategies and initiatives in place to ensure regular connections and face to face meetings.

In addition to meetings within communities, SDN had also established its "Integrated Services Leadership Team", which was bringing all community leaders together with regional leaders and other members of the senior leadership team, promoting integrated working across areas, and driving change. As such, collaboration, co-ordination and communication among SDN leaders appeared to be more formalised, planned and intentional, and the benefits of integration at this level were expected to filter down to teams. However, not all leaders felt internal working was better in all areas of the organisation, and a number found it difficult to promote collaboration among frontline staff, and saw collaboration among educators to be inevitably constrained. As one community leader described:

It would be great if we could provide more opportunities for them [educators] to connect more with support staff across the organisation... We just don't have the time to release these people

to engage in copious amounts of interaction, whether it be professional development or making phone calls to head office to explore something. So really it is about, unfortunately, the constraints of their role which doesn't allow them as much freedom. (Community Leader 1)

Notwithstanding, there was evidence that SDN centres and programs are, on the whole, working together more effectively. One leader for example explained how she had seen the results of bringing together centre and program staff to support a child with additional needs to transition to school:

Everyone had a role to play and everyone fulfilled their role and responsibilities to then help that child to transition to school successfully... it's been really great to have a network of people come together to further support their family where [one staff member] didn't have to do it all on their own (Community Leader 5)

A further factor promoting improved integration within SDN was the documentation of program and service logic, known as the 'roadmap', and the updating to policies and procedures:

I think the development of the updating of the policies and procedures has had a significant impact on people's practice, knowing more and being more confident in what they are doing on the ground. (SLT 2)

Another leader described feeling the journey to integration was rewarding on a personal level, as it had helped to develop and reflect on her own leadership skills and effectiveness in catalysing change:

My leadership skills have been completely transferrable to allow me to see outcomes in all different programs and to enable people to work together, even though they probably never dreamed of ever working with [colleagues from other professional disciplines] (SLT2)

Notwithstanding this progress, some interviewees also commented that SDN had further work to do to improve how it worked internally. The most common suggestion was that SDN could improve communication, across all levels of the organisation. Leaders suggested that communications with staff could be more open, inclusive and consultative, and that better communication among staff from different disciplines would help break down barriers to effective working within SDN.

Integrated work with children and families

Leaders described good progress towards working with children and families in an integrated way, and explained how disability service provision had become an area of growing importance within SDN. Several interviewees highlighted organisational initiatives which had been developed to train staff and improve their practice with children and families. This included training in cultural competence, and structuring conversations to assist families with complex needs. Leaders described making better and more intentional use of opportunities to work together that were afforded through co-location. This was seen, for example, with program managers working closely together to refer families across programs and support children transitioning between programs. Many described the value of 'team around' approaches, and felt the use of these had ensured correct personnel were drawn in from around the organisation. One highlighted initiatives to translate program information into community languages, to better engage families.

There were mixed perceptions about whether SDN was achieving its target of serving more families from traditionally marginalised backgrounds. Some leaders, for example, pointed out that SDN's metrics did not indicate any increase in the proportion of target families enrolled in services. Others however reported that the proportion of children with disabilities had increased in SDN centres, a perception which was shared by many staff in the centres.

In general, there was a perception among the leaders that were interviewed that there is genuine organisational commitment to working in integrated ways with children and families. A few leaders noted that working with families with complex needs was likely to become a major challenge for SDN, and that there was an urgent need to improve staff capacity to work with such families. As one explained:

It's not just enough to be willing and to have social justice values and principles. You actually have to know how to do it... like inclusion, it's not just enough to have the families there. It's about how you work with them when they are there.... ...childcare's really difficult at the moment because we lose staff easily anyway, and it's hard to attract good staff. So it's about, if we're going to be asking them to do this sort of work, and want them to stay, how do we have to be thinking differently about that? Do we need to be prepared to put them through three months training before they even go into the centre, around all these core components of that knowledge that would really support them in going into an environment that is proactively seeking to engage marginalised families (Community Leader 2)

Another explained how it could be difficult to recruit staff with the skillset required to work in an integrated way with children and families:

Our challenge is if there's already a workforce shortage out there and we're looking for a particular mindset or disposition on top of the skills and experience that someone brings to ensure that we surround ourselves with people who are sharing the same vision.... We're looking for that other layer. I don't think that that's just a natural layer. (Community Leader 1)

Several interviewees highlighted that the level of capacity building required to work with children and families with complex needs will take time. As well as recruitment, some noted that there are practical barriers to overcome in upskilling existing staff, including enabling centre-based staff to leave their usual duties for training, while maintaining familiar faces at centres, and also managing budgets. Another challenge was that leaders perceived centre-based staff to lack knowledge about local communities and the issues affecting children and families, as many were commuting to, and not living in those areas.

Promoting integrated working with other organisations

Most leaders interviewed reported that SDN had developed its capacity to work with other organisations in the previous 12 months, with increases in partnerships, a more strategic approach to collaboration, and more exposure of frontline staff to working in partnership. Many highlighted SDN's success in developing relationships with government agencies and promoting understanding of SDN programs in other agencies, as well as success in attracting significant funding to expand programs, notably Early Childhood Links, and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services in the ACT. Some also gave examples of how SDN services had connected with other non-government agencies and local government, to participate in community events and increase their presence in local communities.

Significantly, leaders described how their decisions about collaboration now involved an assessment of the extent to which possible partnerships would fit with SDN's mission and model of integration, and whether the partnerships would help promote outcomes for families. As one explained:

I can definitely say that there has been a huge increase in partnerships. We are being more strategic about what sorts of things we participate in in the community. When I say more strategic, there is a link between what is that community group doing, what is that meeting achieving, what are the goals, what are the aims and how does that fit with our strategic plan? (SLT 2)

Another explained how working with other organisations had changed in the previous 12 months:

I think those connections are definitely stronger, and people are much more aware that collaboration is an expectation. Not just an expectation. That's what's going to be strengthening for families. Because you know the particular service that that family is part of might not be there forever... I know certainly the centres are much more aware of how they can support a family (Community Leader 2)

Several interviewees felt SDN had been building up networks and connections, including in areas of anticipated future need such as the NDIS and health. Significantly, leaders reported these networks and connections were being used to strengthen the support offered to children and families. For example, one Community Leader explained how programs were successful in collaborating to implement SDN's vision and mission throughout the service network, and took a leadership role in doing so:

We have responsibility to educate and build capacity of other educators and centres so that they will value including all children, whether it's [children from] culturally diverse background or children from refugee backgrounds, or children with disabilities.... We need to be supporting our community and the other educators and centres. So we have a very strong role in doing that (Community Leader 4)

Many interviewees felt that people were being brought together across communities and organisations, strengthening relations and continuing relationship building. In this way, the value of network and interagency meetings were well recognised. Community leaders in particular were instrumental in supporting SDN service leaders to connect with external services, including through interagency networks, mapping services in the community, and promoting expectations of networking among staff. One interviewee, for example, explained how working with other organisations had provided opportunities and new networks for the organisation:

having that opportunity to participate in a Council event and represent SDN at that event as well, we made a lot of new networks and strengthened a lot of relationships by just showing our face there. I think being able to do that – which SDN encourages us to do and supports us in doing- it has provided a lot of opportunities of creating those new networks (Community Leader 5)

Some pointed out that while collaboration happened at a high level, such as regional managers networking with government agencies, it was also seen as critical within SDN programs for practitioners to be networking and broadening their connections. A few commented that external collaboration of centres could be improved, as knowledge of other services in the community tended to be highly concentrated among managers.

Expectations for next 12 months

Leaders explained how SDN was looking towards the future, working to finalise and roll out new priority of access processes, to be supported with improved IT systems. These processes were expected to be key facilitators of the next phase of integration, would help give a consistent approach to structured decision making around priority of access, and would help SDN increase the proportion of children in services from target groups. The new processes could also help provide more information to families about other SDN services, and other services in the community, at an early stage of their involvement with SDN.

As well as expecting numbers of children from target groups to increase, leaders suggested that in the next 12 months there are likely to be more 'team arounds' used across the organisation, that SDN would have formal relationships with more organisations, and that these collaborations would be better aligned with SDN's strategic goals. There were also suggestions that SDN would ensure staff had specific training and professional development opportunities conducive to working in integrated ways, including working with children with disabilities, and child protection training. It was however acknowledged that these changes take time. As one leader stated:

I think it would be another good 18 months before people [families] would be saying 'oh yes, the reason I've chosen SDN is because they have all this range of services and I know that if, at any time, I found myself in extreme difficulty or whatever, that SDN has a whole lot of other services that could help me and my child or my family, and that's why I've chosen them.' (SLT 6)

Notwithstanding, the interviews with representatives of the Integrated Services Leadership Team clearly show the organisation has progressed the integration agenda, with new initiatives being implemented, and leaders observing integration making an impact.

4. Perceptions Among SDN Staff

As in 2013, interviews in 2014 were conducted with frontline staff across three SDN sites: Milperra, Granville and Ngallia, and Redfern. While some interviewees had participated in 2013, this was not a prerequisite for participation; the aim was to gather a perspective on the site and organisation in 2014, and not the process of change experienced by individuals. During interviews, participants were invited to discuss their perceptions of SDN's journey to integration and any progress made, the effects of any changes, and any challenges encountered. In 2014, frontline staff corroborated the perspectives of leaders, largely perceiving SDN to be enacting and progressing its commitment to integration, and also experiencing the benefits of SDN's integrated approach.

The results of interviews from 2014 found that:

- Staff at the three sites had become more familiar with SDN's commitment to integration, were more aware of ways SDN had enacted its commitment, and were more comfortable with the practice of integrated working.
- Staff recognised the importance of working collaboratively, had better awareness of the services and supports SDN offers to families, and had experienced benefits of working collaboratively.
- Staff appeared to be making more use of co-location at the sites, with more engagement between co-located services.
- The pace of change had been overwhelming for some.
- Many staff felt that SDN's journey to integration meant their teams were facing higher demands, and needed more support with the practicalities of supporting vulnerable families.

4.1 Enacting SDN's Commitment to Integration

Interviews with staff across the three sites demonstrate how SDN has progressed its journey to integration in the previous 12 months. In the interviews, several staff recognised the progress made, either describing their service as an integrated one, or referring to integration as something that had occurred, or was in progress. Compared with the first round of interviews in 2013, staff were more familiar with SDN's commitment to integration, and many pointed out the efforts the organisation had made in enacting this commitment, including developing a focus on pathways for families. Where staff were aware of program logic for services or the 'roadmap', these documents were well received, particularly for articulating the overall vision and philosophy of SDN, and showing what services were doing to support the vision of an integrated approach.

Across centres and programs, staff generally recognised the importance of knowing about other services in the community and how to access them, and recognised the importance of services working together. A number of staff observed that as a result of SDN's efforts, colleagues were talking about integration and collaboration more frequently, even if it wasn't practiced all the time, and that there was also a more sophisticated understanding of different ways of working together. One interviewee felt integration was 'becoming a way of being':

SDN have worked really hard to help us understand what that looks like. I think the 'Roadmap' has really reinforced that meaning and integration is used as a common language now. We're an integrated site. We're an integrated community, things like that, so we're becoming a bit more used to that, and it's sort of becoming a way of being now (Redfern 2)

Many staff said that over the year they had become more familiar with 'Pathways for Families', had developed a better awareness of what SDN offers to families, and had improved their capacity to support families to navigate through SDN and other services in the community. Some noticed that communication among staff about children with additional needs and strategies to support them had improved. In centre-based settings, several staff commented about improved efforts to involve parents in the centre.

Compared with the interviews conducted in 2013, interviewees in 2014 seemed more comfortable with the practice of integration. One person, for example articulated how integration had lost its 'mystique', as staff realised it involved simple changes to practice, and became more comfortable with it in practice:

It's one of those simple things. It's just about having a conversation, picking up the phone it's not this massive complication really (Granville 3)

The perspectives of frontline staff corroborated leaders' observations that discussions within SDN no longer framed integration as a theoretical position or goal. Rather, it was taken for granted, at least by some, as a common and uncomplicated practice.

It is also clear that the journey to integration had progressed, because there was a belief in all the sites that employees' understanding of SDN's mission and philosophy had improved, and this was a source of cohesion among staff. Knowledge of SDN's vision, mission and approach appeared to have developed particularly well in the centres. One participant, for example, explained how she understood integration in terms of a commitment to all children to opportunity and access:

It's just giving everyone the same opportunities and chances, no matter what. Physical ability, language ability, anything. It's just giving everyone the same opportunities. We're all equals. It's just allowing everyone that access to the services (Milperra 2)

Another articulated a feeling of cohesion between SDN staff within and across services:

It feels like it's very much everyone's heading towards the same goal, there's no difference. It doesn't matter what the program or the centre is, you know we're all supporting children and families, and services. And yeah, we're all headed towards the same goal even though we just do it in a little bit of a different way. So yeah, it's a nice feeling, because everyone's working together (Granville 1)

Other participants expressed similar sentiments:

I have got a better understanding of SDN's missions around inclusion and things like that. That's more strongly understood by myself... I think there has been a bit more sharing within the building (Granville 5)

Some staff felt SDN had become more effective at recruiting staff who were aligned with the organisation's philosophy and approach:

They're not just focusing on experience but they're looking at attitudes of staff as well which I think is very important because you need to recruit people not just with experience, but that have the same philosophy and mission statement as what SDN does as an organisation (Granville 3)

Some staff recognised that SDN had been improving policies and procedures to promote integration, but were slightly overwhelmed with pace of change. Indeed, many felt there had been rapid change, without sufficient time to fully embed it:

They've got really kind of high expectations, and they're very keen... But I found that sometimes you got something, and then you got something else very soon after, and I myself needed a bit more time to get my head around one kind of system or process to follow..... sometimes it's kind of like, bang bang bang, oh my god I've got all these things, and it felt a bit overwhelming at times. To feel like, I want to follow them all properly, but it needs a little bit more time to embed that process into the program properly (Granville 1)

4.2 Staff are Experiencing the Benefits of Integration

In this wave of interviews, it became apparent that staff were more aware of the need to work in integrated ways, and were experiencing the benefits of this type of work. Some staff felt that their capacity to work with children who were vulnerable, or who had additional needs, had improved, as they had seen positive results from collaborating or using new strategies. One staff member from a centre-based setting explained the impact of collaborating with a program:

It actually opened up my way of thinking a little bit in term of working with children with special needs. So now I think it's time for some of my colleagues to step outside the centre and really listen to other people, see different ways of doing things (Ngallia 1)

In another centre, staff had enacted new strategies and approaches, which had been effective:

We've brought them [children with additional needs] into the program a lot more just by communicating more with the children and understanding what they want (Milperra 5)

Others also felt there had been improvement in the capacity of centres to support families to access other services, and were observing that this made SDN more effective than other services. Many also recognised the value of co-location, for example, saying exchanges helped to broaden their knowledge of services. At Milperra, the centre was making more of the opportunities afforded by being located on school grounds, including using the school library. At Ngallia, which is located on a university campus, staff recognised the benefits of easy access to resources from the university, including activities offered for children which were run by students as part of their courses. Staff also felt there was more engagement between co-located services at Granville and Redfern over the previous year. As one centre-based staff member explained:

It is great because if you have something in your service that you're not sure about, you can just call upstairs and they know the community really well (Redfern 2)

It was evident that within SDN, there was better understanding of the importance of collaboration and sharing, and better communication, including from head office. Several staff from programs commented that their manager encouraged them to make connections and work across services and organisations, as this was a key part of their job. Many recognised that leaders had become better connected across the organisation, as they were coming together regularly to share information and work together across services and sites, and this use of time was welcomed by leaders and staff alike. Staff also felt that their leaders had been upskilled and observed that their knowledge of the organisation had grown. A number of staff reported that service leaders and managers were more likely to work in integrated ways than frontline staff, on the basis that it was integral to their role to work across SDN and with other services. While some staff in similar roles or with the same skillset were meeting regularly, others suggested they would benefit from connecting with staff in this way, but realised the practical challenges of doing this. Some highlighted that while working together was celebrated, it was a matter of getting the balance right between working together and separately on specific issues:

Sometimes when you do put centres and programs together its difficult, because they have different needs (Granville 1)

Even where there were no formal structures in place to connect staff, many commented that they felt well supported as assistance was only a phone call away. While educators were aware that leaders were meeting regularly with the Practice Unit and shared services, and were aware of some other services that came to their site for various reasons, they tended to have fairly limited contact with the rest of the organisation.

4.3 Challenges in this Phase of Integration

While SDN has clearly made progress in its journey to integration and staff are experiencing the benefits of SDN's integrated approach, many interviewees described how the complexity of working in integrated ways had become apparent in the previous 12 months.

Integrated working is making service delivery more complex

Staff described how in this phase of SDN's journey, they were concerned with the practicalities of supporting vulnerable families, and being realistic about how they could support them. While staff recognised the achievements SDN was making in working with Aboriginal children, children with disabilities and others, many mentioned they still needed to upskill staff. A few also said that they felt their service couldn't take on too many children with additional needs, because of the implications for resourcing, workloads, or (in centre based contexts), the room dynamics. Some interviewees felt it could be frustrating to commit to supporting a child with additional needs, when resources to fully enact this commitment were not available.

Many interviewees felt that integration meant that their teams were facing higher demands. Experienced staff in centre-based settings explained how their role had changed, and rather than focusing on 'cleaning up and nappy changing', their role was to build relationships with children and families, and focus on their interests, goals, and programming to achieve these goals. Several described how their service was working with families with more complex needs, but staffing ratios or caseloads had not changed. One interviewee explained the impact in a centre-based setting:

They need to take into consideration that you know, taking kids with extra needs, we do need extra staff. Because we need extra support to look after them and to take care of them (Ngallia 2)

Other interviewees at Ngallia also observed that staff needed more support for working with children with additional needs, and explained that, as the children could have vastly different needs, they required a wide range of skills and strategies. Similarly, Brighter Futures staff described how policy changes had meant their program was working with higher risk families, and that they were trying to work in a more 'hands on' way, and be more child focused, for example:

We are much more child focused, much more aware of the voice of the child and the risk to the children, and really trying to [focus on] the needs of a child and what's most important for that child to be safe (Redfern 7)

Others highlighted the complexity of engaging with migrant families and Aboriginal families, and the focused attention educators required to give to children with additional needs in centre-based settings. As a result, some participants wanted to see more resources allocated to working with vulnerable children and families, and better recognition by management of the growing complexity of their work, including working in multi-disciplinary, multiagency ways, and with families with complex needs:

Within this office everybody understands what we all do, but I think from there up, I don't know that they genuinely have a feel about what we actually do on a day-to-day basis (Redfern 11)

While new priority of access processes were welcomed as a way to identify families' needs and target services, some interviewees were concerned with how it would work in practice to ask families for detailed information on enrolment forms. Program staff in particular voiced concerns that administrative staff or educators, who might be a family's first point of contact with SDN, may be asking potentially sensitive information as part of enrolments, without the depth of experience in dealing with disclosure of complex needs.

Communication could continue to improve

Some interviewees felt that although SDN was trying to break down silos and share knowledge, this agenda could be further progressed, to ensure staff could connect in the most effective ways. For example, requirements to obtain permission from managers to ring or meet with people in other areas of SDN or other organisations were seen to impede efficiency and effectiveness.

At centres, some staff said they tended to feel isolated and focused on local issues, but acknowledged that some information from head office did 'trickle down'. A few participants said they felt SDN remained hierarchical and that recent structural changes within the organisation had undermined a sense of safety among staff, causing people to be guarded in their dealings with other parts of the organisation:

You feel like you're defensive from the get go or you have to just say something that you know they want you to hear rather than what the reality is.... Going to head office is scary (confidentialised)

Another highlighted the need to break down a fear of shared services:

There's always this fear that people from Head Office are always watching and looking and judging whereas that's not what they're doing... actually there is a support system, but from past experiences for these people, having lots of turnover and different management having to take over, they constantly fear something's going to happen (confidentialised)

However, it should be noted that overall, interviewees felt communication within SDN was improving, with managers and head office generally perceived to communicate more often and more effectively than previously.

5. Findings from the 2014 Employee Survey

The annual SDN employee survey, conducted in late 2014 by Measured Insights, provided the opportunity to capture the perspectives of SDN staff across the organisation. Due to small sample sizes for individual services or sites, 2014 data cannot be disaggregated for the study sites.

Employees were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements. The survey items relevant to SDN's journey to integration included:

- Q4. I understand SDN's integrated approach
- Q5. I am committed to SDN's integrated approach
- Q6. I have good knowledge of the services SDN provides and supports
- Q7. I feel confident in helping families find what they need from SDN
- Q8. I feel confident in helping families find what they need in the community
- Q15. All work areas/departments cooperate effectively across the organisation

Levels of agreement were measured on a 7-point scale. The total number of responses was 404, although this differed across some questions.

5.1 Understanding and Commitment to Integration

Across SDN, 86.9% of respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) that they were committed to SDN's integrated approach, providing scores between 5 and 7, on a 7-point scale. This was roughly the same as in 2013, when 84.8% of respondents agreed. Similarly, 84.8% agreed that they understood SDN's integrated approach which is very close to the 2013 figure of 83.4%. These high levels of commitment and understanding offer SDN a strong basis for subsequent stages of SDN's journey to integration.

5.2 Integrated Organisation

The survey items 'I have good knowledge of the services SDN provides and supports' and 'All work areas/departments cooperate effectively across the organisation' provide information about organisational integration, as indicated by employees' knowledge of SDN and perceptions of internal co-operation. These indicators showed little change from 2013. As in 2013, there were relatively high levels of knowledge of SDN services: 89.1% agreed they had good knowledge of the services SDN provides and supports, which was equivalent to the 2013 figure (89.7%). However, a smaller proportion agreed that there was effective cooperation across SDN. In 2014, 69.1% of respondents agreed that 'all work areas/departments cooperate effectively across the organisation'. Again, this is very close to the 2013 figure of 70.2%.

5.3 Integrated Service Delivery

The survey items 'I feel confident in helping families find what they need from SDN' and 'I feel confident in helping families find what they need in the community' capture employees' capacity to help families access services and supports, and navigate the service system. This showed staff had high levels of confidence in helping families find what they need from SDN and in the community.

In 2014, 89.1% of respondents agreed that they feel confident in helping families find what they need from SDN, while 86.3% agreed that they feel confident in helping families find what the need in the community. These are almost identical to the 2013 results.

6. Partner Organisations' Perspectives on SDN

The research team asked the three fieldwork sites to provide contacts for all partner organisations with which they had worked with in the previous 12 months. Representatives of the 33 organisations on these lists were then invited to participate in a voluntary telephone interview about their experiences of working with SDN. Eight interviews were completed. The representatives of partner organisations were asked to provide detail on the following:

- Their organisation and role, and the ways their organisation worked with SDN
- What working with SDN has meant for the children and families they work with, and what working with SDN has meant for their organisation
- How arrangements had worked well, and what could be improved
- If there were any barriers to the partnership working effectively, and what else could be done to help SDN work with other services.

The eight interviewees from SDN's partner organisations described having very positive experiences of working with SDN. These partners described how their organisations had been involved with SDN as recipients of supports for services, through interagency networks, as participants in joint case meetings, as collaborators to support children and families who received services from both organisations, and as partners in referring, or receiving referrals from, SDN.

Across these different ways of working together, experiences had been positive, and interviewees' contributions demonstrated how SDN is well regarded for its role in the service network. Partner organisations had experienced positive leadership at SDN centres; effective processes and good communication and knowledge transfer when children and families transitioned between services; and good collaboration and communication between centres. They had also observed SDN to have close partnerships within the early childhood sector.

Several recognised SDN as an organisation with good resources and networks, a diverse range of services, and one which was willing to support children and families with complex needs. One organisation recognised the strengths of SDN as a large community-based organisation with the capacity to enact values. This participant described:

They have those infrastructures to support and filter down the right value systems in their staff, whereas you don't really see that in the private sector and that's what's made an impression on me with the interactions that I had (Partner Organisation 2)

The same participant went on to explain how SDN was valued for its contribution for building capacity in the sector, and being a catalyst for the mindshift required to promote inclusive children's services:

I think SDN has been quite a good support for children and families by empowering the children's services. So by building children's services' capacity to be inclusive as a service rather than just as the individual, and that's a mindset shift that we all have to work towards (Partner Organisation 2)

Another interviewee, who had worked with an SDN centre to build capacity, distinguished SDN from other centres in the way that staff had been receptive to new strategies and ideas:

I found the staff at SDN to be really receptive to that plan of me coming in and giving them new strategies and ideas, which doesn't always happen in preschools. So it's been really nice to be able to work with the staff who are just really receptive and open to trialling new things, and they've also been really open about strategies if they haven't be helpful... just like open and honest communication.... We would see SDN as a really good centre to work with. I know myself

and other staff members on the team have had really positive experiences working with SDN.... We would also I guess recommend other families to SDN's services, because we see them in that high regard (Partner Organisation 1)

A number of participants noted that working with SDN had been a way for their organisation to improve how they worked with families, including complementing their expertise through collaboration with an organisation that was a specialist in meeting families' needs. When asked what working with SDN meant for their organisation, one participant explained how, through a series of interactions, SDN had helped to clarify processes and models of support and improved collaboration between allied health and early childhood services for children with additional needs:

It has meant that I have a clearer idea of how that support is given at childcare centres and I have been able to talk to my colleagues about that. That means that if we are working with a child with autism we understand the extra support that they will be getting and how that might be used. So that can really inform us, like when we do visits to childcare centres, we now understand how creatively that can be used... having that contact with early childhood professionals is extremely important, because otherwise you can get stuck in your own little profession... even if its not a formal kind of meeting... its about these small exchanges that you do while visiting a centre (Partner Organisation 3)

This participant also described SDN as a leader in the early childhood field:

They are a service that seems to be highly aware of what's going on in their sector and very proactive (Partner Organisation 2)

Several referred to the quality of SDN staff and leaders, making statements such as:

The contact I have had has been with incredibly caring and well intentioned professionals who really are focusing on what is right for the child and family. So I would have to say that it has been a very positive experience. (Partner Organisation 3)

Many felt it was reassuring to have SDN in their service network, as they could provide referrals for families they were unable to support, and felt confident that SDN would be able to assist them. They also felt confident that SDN would get back to them about the outcome of their referral, or welcome their follow up on a family post-referral. As one explained:

They kind of keep everybody in the loop and keep including them in the meetings and things, and that's been really helpful (Partner Organisation 8)

When asked how working together could be improved, interviewees had few suggestions. One mentioned that waiting times to access services could be improved, and that SDN could consult more with partners when setting meeting agendas. Another suggested SDN could make more visits to their service. Some suggested there could be better communication about SDN and the services and supports on offer, and that information about services with current availability could be made more readily available. Another participant explained that there could be better communication about changes within SDN, including new programs and changes to existing programs. This participant felt staff could also be better equipped to explain the range of SDN services, in addition to the one they directly delivered:

I talk to people from SDN about the particular program that they run, I don't feel that the staff know what other programs (SDN has), so I think that creates confusion about whether they know what sort of services they're providing (Partner Organisation 7)

Another also felt SDN was difficult to understand, as an organisation, from the outside:

I suppose because SDN's so big and so broad, sometimes it can get confusing about who's dealing with what, and who's in what office, and who can answer my queries because there's so many sections. (Partner Organisation 6)

Notwithstanding, the feedback from SDN's partner organisations was very positive. SDN's services and supports are highly valued in the service network.

7. Families' Perceptions and Experiences

In each of the fieldwork sites, SDN staff distributed a survey to families with a child using SDN services, on behalf of the research team². In most cases, a link to the online survey was distributed, although hard copies with reply paid envelopes were provided to those who preferred this option. Whereas email contact was a more standard means of communicating with families in centre-based settings, hard copy distribution of surveys was considered more appropriate for programs. As an incentive to participate and a symbol of appreciation, the research team made a donation of \$5 to the service for each completed survey. Due to the multi-modal survey distribution process, there are no firm numbers with which to calculate a reliable response rate.

7.1 About Responding Families

As Table 2 shows, a little over two thirds of parents in the sample had one child using SDN services (68.1%)³, in comparison to the 2013 sample, where 78.1% of respondents had one child using SDN services.

Table 2: Number of children using SDN services per respondent family

	One child		Two or more		Missing	Total
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
Granville/ Ngallia	23	69.7	10	30.3	2	96
Milperra	12	52.2	11	47.8	0	23
Redfern	29	76.3	9	23.7	0	38
Total	64	68.1	30	31.9	2	96

In 2014, almost half (46.1%) of respondents had been involved with SDN for two years or more (see Table 3). This differs from 2013 where 26.3% of the sample had been involved for more than two years. The longer involvement rate may be due to responses from families at the Milperra centre; the centre only opened in 2012, with families accounting for a longer duration of involvement in 2014.

Table 3: Families' duration of involvement with SDN

	Less than 1 year		1–2 years		More than 2 years	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Granville/ Ngallia	12	34.3	10	28.6	13	37.1
Milperra	7	30.4	7	30.4	9	39.1
Redfern	3	8.1	12	32.4	22	51.4
Total	22	23.2	29	30.5	44	46.1

The sample in 2014 also consisted of a slightly higher proportion of families from CALD backgrounds, 41.7% in 2014 compared with 34.2% in 2013 (see Table 4). This describes the survey sample, and should not be taken as representative of all SDN families at these sites, due to the relatively small sample size.

² The survey was not distributed to Brighter Futures families.

³ Data was missing for two respondents.

Table 4: Characteristics of children using SDN services

	Respondents		Total (n)
	n	%	
CALD background	40	41.7	96
Special needs	9	9.4	96

Respondents were asked to indicate which SDN services they had used. Overwhelmingly, families had used one SDN service only (102 respondents, or 89.5%). In most cases, this was a centre. At Milperra, only one respondent reported using a service other than the centre. At Redfern, two respondents had used more than one SDN service. Among respondents from Granville/Ngallia, seven had used more than one service, although none of these were Ngallia families. Rather, the use of more than one service was reported by families using services from Granville or elsewhere. The most common combination was to have used both Stay and Play and the Child and Family Resource Centre (5 respondents).

7.2 Perceptions of SDN Services

Convenience and efficiency

To gauge convenience and efficiency, the survey asked parents to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- ‘SDN services are convenient for families’
- ‘SDN services are efficient for families’, and
- ‘SDN has asked me to provide the same information more than once’.

Answers were captured on a 5-point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’.

Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed or strongly agreed with these statements, although there were some slight differences between the sites.

As shown in Figure 1, 92% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that SDN services were convenient for families. This was the same proportion as in 2013. However, the figure was slightly lower among respondents from Granville/Ngallia (86%), both compared to the 2013 figure and compared to the 2013 figure for that site. The figure for Redfern increased from 80% in 2013 to 97% in 2014.

Figure 2 shows that overall, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that SDN services are efficient for families (87%). Among respondents from Redfern, a very high proportion reported that they strongly agreed that SDN services were efficient for families (79%). In contrast to 2013, 27% of respondents from Redfern strongly agreed that SDN services were efficient for families.

In 2014, 22% of respondents agreed that they had been asked for the same information more than once. This is notably lower than in 2013, when the figure was 42%. However, it may be affected by differences in the composition of respondents in each year. It is also notable that a higher than average proportion of respondents at Redfern reported that they had been asked for the same information more than once (35% compared with 22% overall). However, the Redfern figure was lower than in 2013, when 70% of respondents agreed that they had been asked to provide the same information more than once.

Figure 1. Respondents who agree that SDN services are convenient for families (n=96)

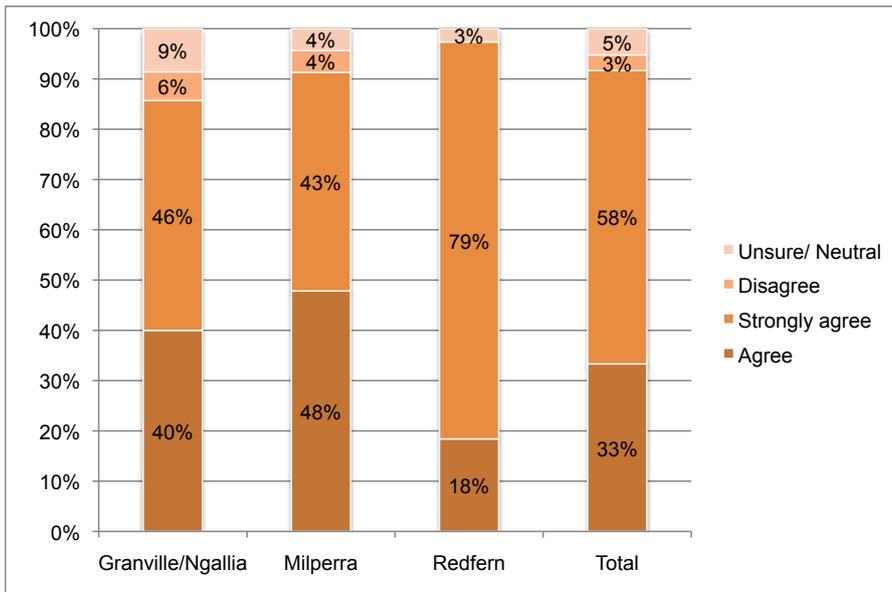


Figure 2. Respondents who agreed that SDN services are efficient for families (n=96)

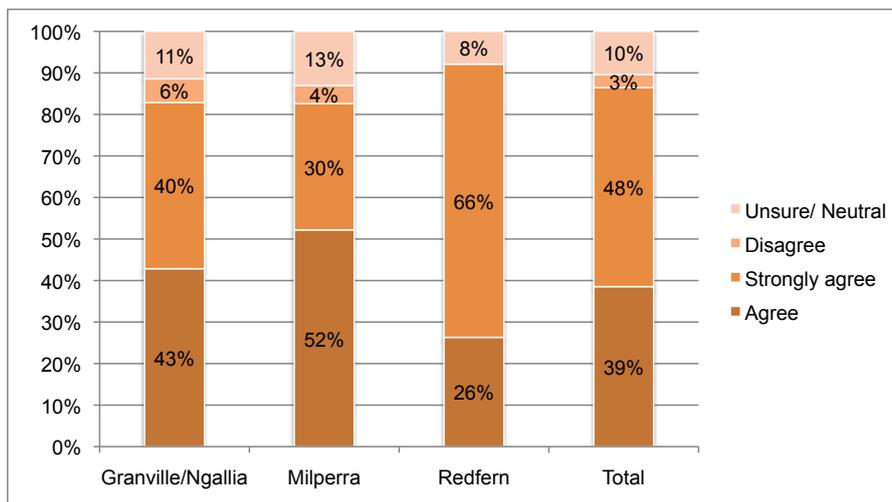
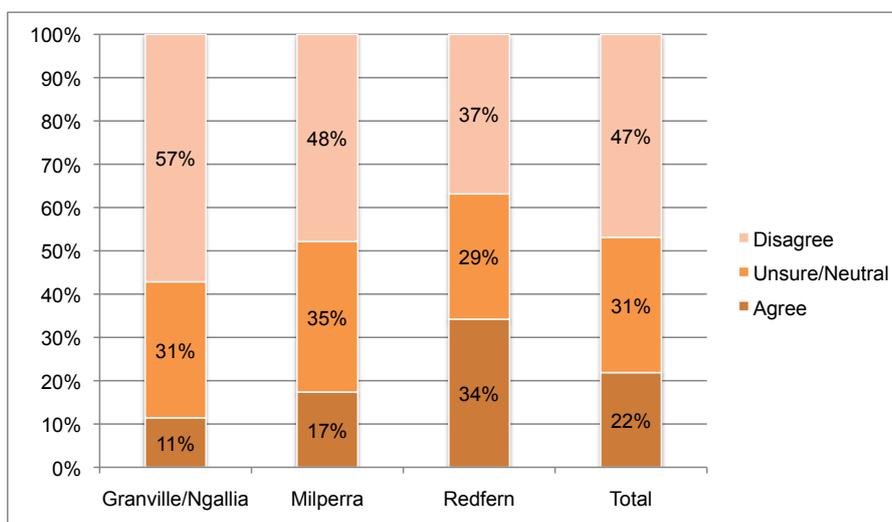


Figure 3. SDN asked me to provide the same information more than once (n=96)



Families' Relationships With SDN

The survey sought to capture families' involvement in, and relationship with, SDN services, by asking whether respondents agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- 'I have felt confident approaching SDN staff about the needs of my family'
- 'I have contributed ideas about SDN services' and
- 'SDN has taken my views on board'

As shown below in Figure 4, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt confident approaching SDN staff about the needs of their family (93%). This is equivalent to the 2013 figure of 92%.

As Figure 5 shows, 45% of respondents had contributed ideas to SDN, although this was slightly lower at Milperra (34%). Figure 6 shows that roughly the same proportion of respondents (43%) reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that SDN had taken their views on board, which was slightly lower than in 2013 (51%). The 2014 figure was higher at Redfern (50%) and lower at Milperra (34%). In contrast, in 2013 it was highest at Granville/Ngallia, when it was 61%. It should also be noted that a relatively high proportion of respondents were unsure or neutral about whether SDN had taken their views on board, which may indicate an opportunity to improve communication about responses to suggestions from families.

Figure 4. I have felt confident approaching SDN staff about the needs of my family (n=95)

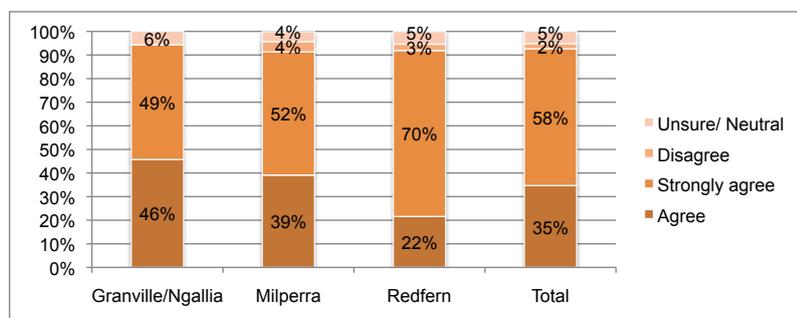


Figure 5. I have contributed ideas about SDN services (n=96)

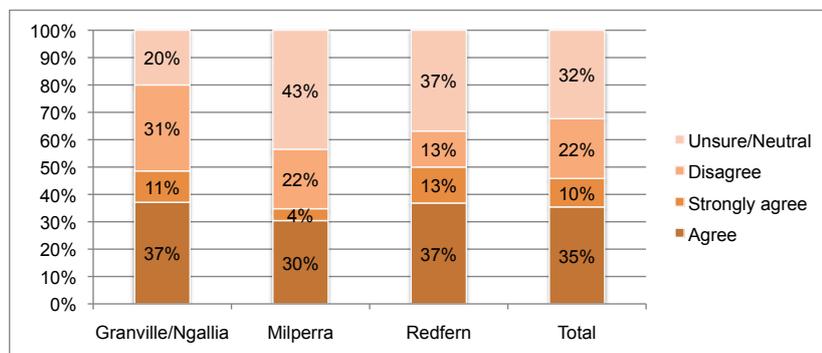
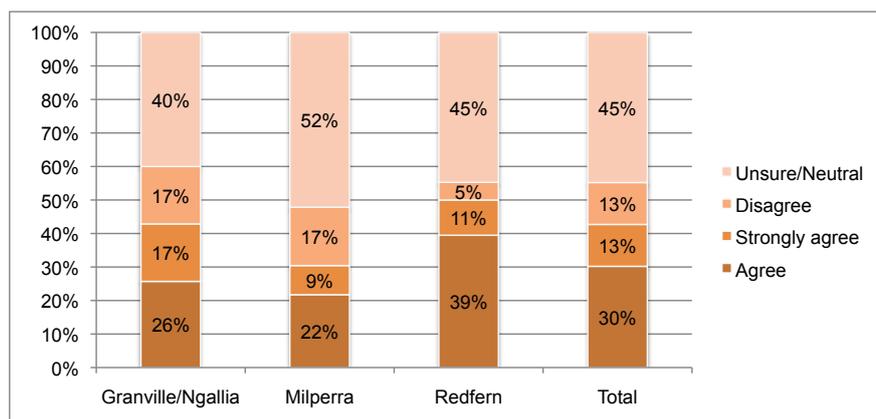


Figure 6. SDN has taken my views on board (n=96)



Families' Access to Other SDN Services and Supports

To assess families' access to other SDN services and supports, respondents were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with the following statements:

- 'I have good knowledge of the services SDN provides for children and families'
- 'SDN has encouraged or helped my family to access other SDN services to meet our needs'
- 'SDN has helped my family find what we need in the community'

Seventy-six percent agreed or strongly agreed that they had good knowledge about the services and supports SDN provides (see Figure 7). This is less than in 2013, when the figure was 85%. The proportion agreeing was higher at Milperra (87%), and slightly lower at Granville/Ngallia (63%).

A smaller proportion, (40%) agreed or strongly agreed SDN had helped their family to access other SDN services to meet their needs, although this was slightly lower at Milperra (35%) and higher among respondents from Granville/Ngallia (46%) (see Figure 8). Forty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed that SDN had helped their family find what they need in the community. As in 2013, this figure was higher at Granville/Ngallia (54%) than in the other sites.

Figure 7. I have good knowledge of the services SDN provides for children and families (n=96)

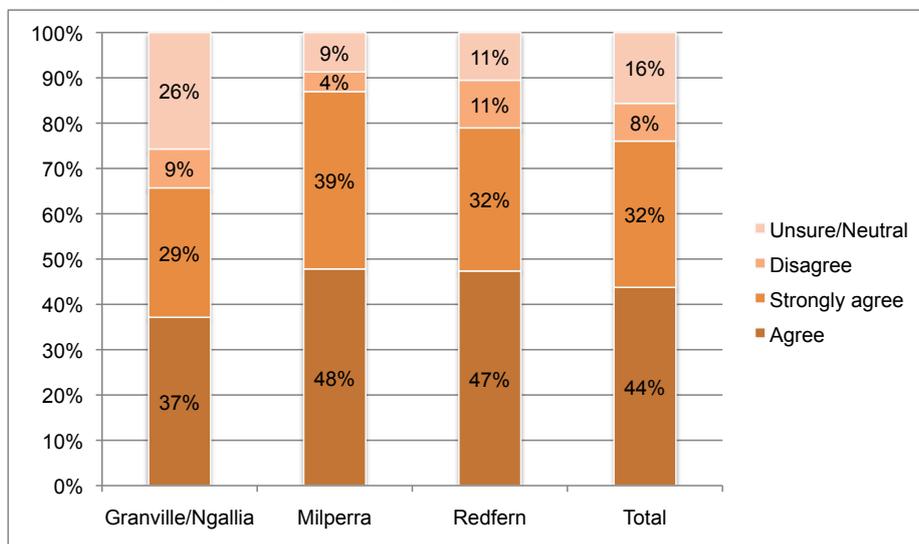


Figure 8. SDN has encouraged or helped my family to access other SDN services to meet our needs

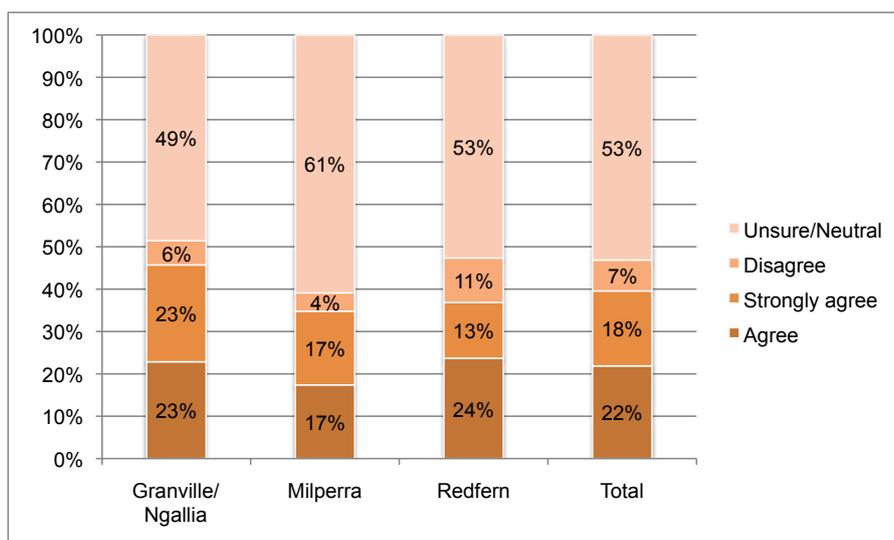
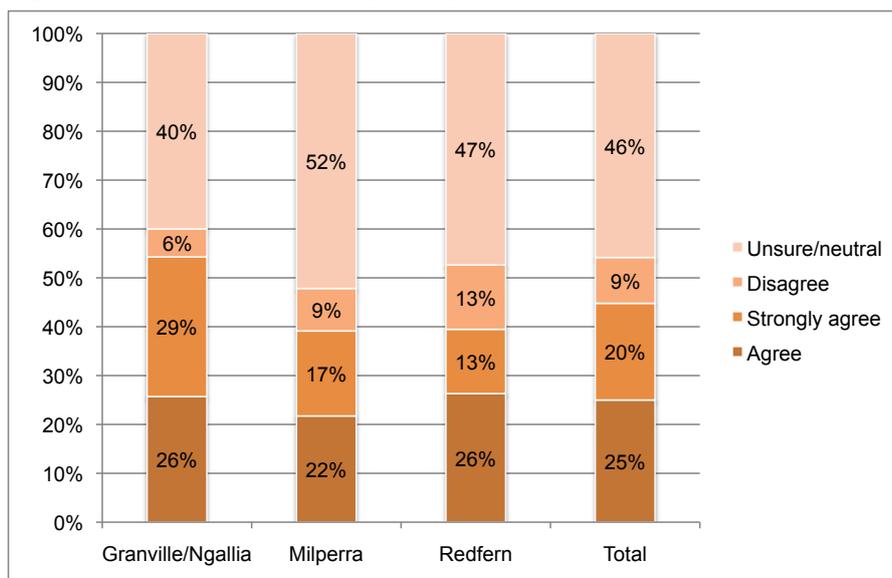


Figure 9. SDN has helped my family find what we need in the community



Respondents were also asked if, in the previous 12 months, SDN had supported their child or family in a number of ways. Just over one in five respondents (21.9%) had been provided with information about other SDN services, while a higher proportion (36.5%) reported that they had been provided with information about other services or activities in the community. Smaller numbers of respondents had received assistance to access another SDN or other service (9.4% and 5.2% respectively), and small numbers had had a therapist or other worker visit at SDN, or an SDN therapist meet with another worker. These figures are broadly similar to the results of the 2013 survey.

Table 5: Support from SDN to access additional services

	Granville/Ngallia		Milperra		Redfern		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
SDN provided information about other SDN services	9	25.7	3	13.0	9	23.7	21	21.9
SDN provided information about other services or activities in the community	12	34.3	7	30.4	16	42.1	35	36.5
SDN helped a child or family to access another SDN service	6	17.1	2	8.7	1	2.6	9	9.4
SDN helped a child or family access another service in the community	4	11.4	1	4.3	0	0	5	5.2
SDN met or consulted with a doctor or therapist that a child or family member was working with	3	8.6	0	0	0	0	3	3.1
Allowed a therapist from outside SDN to visit a child at SDN	1	2.9	1	4.3	0	0	2	2.1

8. Conclusions

This report has provided findings from data collected in 2014, as part of the second wave of research into the experience of SDN in becoming, and being, an integrated organisation. In 2013, the baseline data showed how SDN had several elements of integration in place, and possessed the resources and capabilities to support its aspirations for integration. This report has shown how SDN's journey to integration continued to progress during 2014.

Staff and leaders remain strongly committed to working in integrated ways, and generally understand the value of SDN's integrated approach. Rather than being an abstract idea or plan for the future, integration has become embedded practice for many leaders and staff, while others have become more receptive to opportunities to work in integrated ways.

While the employee survey data showed little change from 2013, progress is evident in the changes to practice and relationships that leaders and frontline staff described in the interviews. Compared with 2013, research participants feel SDN is working more effectively internally, and taking a more strategic approach to its external relationships and collaborations. Staff, leaders, and partner organisations also appear more comfortable with SDN's identity as a provider of a diverse range of mainstream centre-based services and programs for children and families with additional needs.

While staff delivering SDN programs feel they have a more extensive tradition of collaborating across organisations and programs, educators in 2014 were highly focused on promoting inclusion and ensuring a feeling of belonging in centres, including for children from traditionally marginalised backgrounds and those with additional needs. Notwithstanding, staff in centres are increasingly aware of options to work collaboratively across SDN and other organisations, and many have experienced the benefit of working in integrated ways, and aspire to continue to do so. In 2014, staff and leaders reported that SDN's work had become increasingly complex, and anticipated the need for additional supports to ensure staff were well equipped to deliver on SDN's vision and mission.

Partner organisations had positive experiences of working with SDN, reflecting that SDN is well regarded for its role in the service network. Partner organisations recognised SDN as an organisation which was receptive to new ideas and models, and willing to enact its commitment to supporting children and families with complex needs.

Over the next year, we expect SDN to continue to consolidate its capacity to work in integrated ways, particularly through the roll out of guidelines to determine priority of access for SDN service. These processes are expected to help SDN services to increase the proportion of families with complex needs accessing SDN services. The third wave of data collection for this study, scheduled for late 2015, will again capture leader and staff perspectives of SDN's journey to integration, and partner organisations' experiences of working with SDN. As SDN consolidates its identity as an integrated organisation, it is important to ensure that changes in SDN's processes and practices are translated into improved service experiences and outcomes for children and families. SDN could also consider a regular feedback mechanism to continue to monitor partner organisations' experiences of working with SDN, and identify ways to maintain and improve the external collaborations which are essential to enacting SDN's integrated approach.

Appendix A: Interview Schedules

SDN Leaders

1. Can you tell me about your role at SDN? How long have you worked at SDN?
2. What does it mean to be a leader in SDN?
3. Thinking about the services in your region / community... In what ways do they work together? Has this changed in the last 12 months? In what ways?
4. In what ways do services in your region / community work with other areas of SDN? Has this changed in the last 12 months? In what ways?
5. In what ways do services in your region / community work with other organisations (if any)? Has this changed in the last 12 months? In what ways?
6. How well do you think SDN services in your region / community meet the needs of the children and families you work with? What about children with special needs, or from disadvantaged backgrounds?
7. Has SDN changed anything about how it works with these groups in the last 12 months? What else could be done to improve this?
8. Are services in your region doing anything to improve families' awareness of what SDN offers? What else could your service do to improve pathways through services?
9. As you would be aware, SDN has been working to become a more integrated organisation. What does 'integration' mean in the context of your work? Has this meaning changed in the last year? In what ways?
10. Over the last 12 months, what do you think has been working well for SDN in becoming an integrated organisation?
11. Over the last 12 months, what have been some of the challenges in becoming an integrated organisation?
12. What do you think would help SDN as it continues the journey to integration? What kinds of obstacles are there? How do you think they could be addressed?
13. Is there anything else you would like to say about integrated services, or SDN's journey to integration? Or your experience with SDN over the last 12 months?

SDN Staff

1. Can you tell me about your role at SDN? How long have you worked at SDN?
2. (If worked for more than a year) → In the last year, what, if anything, has changed about how SDN does its work?
3. In what ways does your service work with other areas of SDN, if at all? Has this changed in the last 12 months? In what ways?
4. In what ways does your service work with other organisations (if any)? Has this changed in the last 12 months? In what ways?
5. In the last 12 months, has anything changed about how your service works with children and families? What about for children or families with additional needs, or from disadvantaged backgrounds?
6. What else could help your service to work with children with additional needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds?
7. As you would be aware, SDN has been working to become a more integrated organisation. What (if anything) does 'integration' mean in the context of your work? Has this meaning changed in the last year? In what ways?
8. Over the last 12 months, what do you think has been working well for SDN in becoming an integrated organisation?
9. Over the last 12 months, what have been some of the challenges in becoming an integrated organisation?
10. What do you think would help SDN as it continues the journey to integration? What kinds of obstacles are there? How do you think they could be addressed?
11. Is there anything else you would like to say about integrated services, or SDN's journey to integration? Or your experience with SDN over the last 12 months? Or what SDN could do better for children and families?

Staff in Partner Organisations

1. Can you tell me about your organisation and your role?
2. In what ways has your organization worked with SDN?
3. What has working with SDN meant for the children and families you work with?
4. What has working with SDN meant for your organisation?
5. In what ways has the arrangement worked well?
6. In what ways could the arrangement be improved?
7. Have there been any barriers to the partnership working effectively?
8. What else could be done to help how SDN works with other services?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about working in a collaborative, partnership or integrated way with SDN?