

21 August 2020

Select Committee on Autism
Committee Secretary
PO Box 6100, Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600
autism.sen@aph.gov.au

Response to Question on Notice

Dear Chair and Committee Members

Thank you for inviting SDN to speak at the Committee's hearing in Sydney on 28 July 2020 and for your interest in our model of supporting children with autism in early childhood education.

As outlined in SDN's submission to the Inquiry and in the hearing, SDN operates SDN Beranga Autism Specific Preschool. The service began as a long day care centre which was subsidised by the NSW Government. In 2018 the service transitioned to a preschool after losing state government subsidies during the transition to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

In order to address the Question on Notice to SDN we have relied on figures from SDN Beranga's time as a long day care centre in 2017-18. We have also adjusted figures by to allow for inflation and increases in staff costs.

Below is an estimate of the annual cost per child in response to the Question on Notice, followed by further detail regarding the costs of the original long day care model.

Annual cost per child

SDN estimates that the cost of access to high quality early learning and care in an autism specific long day care centre would be \$250 per day.

The annual cost would range from \$25,000 to \$63,000, based on attending 2-5 days per week, 50 weeks per year.

If a family were to receive the highest rate of the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) at 85% of up to \$12.20 per hour, then the out of pocket costs would be \$141.34 per day, subject to eligibility and the rules of the activity test and the annual cap. Families may also be eligible to receive Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) due to child wellbeing, financial hardship or other circumstances.

SDN has previously been advised that NDIS funding cannot be used to pay for the cost of attending SDN Beranga. However, children attending the centre may be eligible to receive NDIS funded therapy which could be delivered to individual children on site.

SDN Beranga long day care model

In 2011, SDN was funded by the NSW Government to establish SDN Beranga as an Autism Early Years Demonstration Service with two parts:

1. A long day care centre for children aged between 2-6 years with ASD per day (Lighthouse Centre). The centre prioritised children at risk and vulnerable families.
2. Outreach services to 13 childcare centres operated by a range of providers (Satellite Centres) that were supported to develop autism-specific practices.

Key features of the SDN Beranga long day care centre:

- A high ratio of one educator to every three children
- Centre Director with qualifications and experience in supporting children with autism
- Allied health therapists embedded within the centre including speech therapist and occupational therapist
- Family resource worker/social worker to support families accessing services, building resilience and transitioning to school
- Children attending 2-5 days per week
- A purpose-built centre including design features which increased supervision, reduced noise and improved safety, and an outdoor space and garden specifically designed to enhance play and learning of children with autism.

Previously, SDN Beranga received funding from the state government which funded the additional support required for children with disability and vulnerable families. Funding from the NSW

Government Ageing, Disability and Home Care paid for the cost of therapists within the centre, the higher ratio of educators to children and providing outreach support through the satellite program.

The centre supported up to 27 children, 10.5 hours per day, five days per week for 51 weeks per year. The daily fee was \$103 per child, with one child on scholarship.

Families received Commonwealth childcare subsidies in the form of CCB and CCR depending on eligibility. The average gap fee for families was approximately \$45 per day per child.

Fee for service - Childcare	\$620,172
NSW Government grants	\$1,245,996
Total fees and grants	\$1,866,168

Applying Beranga long day care model today

In order to apply the SDN Beranga long day care model to the current circumstances we would need to account for the increases in wages and inflation. SDN has applied a 4% increase each year since in order to estimate this impact.

Although the work of the centre and the satellite program were integrated the approximate cost of the satellite program has been excluded from these calculations.

The additional cost of some of the necessary design features of the centre has not been factored into the estimate.

The Australian government funded Inclusion Support Program provides inclusion support within long day care, including funding for additional educators to support children with disability.

Previously, SDN has been advised that the program may be unable to support the SDN Beranga service due to the centre operating as an autism specific centre, rather than a mainstream service, and the higher ratio of staff to children already being factored into the model. If the centre was eligible for funding for additional educators, this may reduce the cost of staffing and ultimately reduce the cost to families.

SDN welcomes any additional enquiries regarding our model of support for children with autism in early childhood education, including the SDN Beranga Autism Specific Preschool. Please contact SDN CEO Kay Turner on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] if you require any further information.

Kay Turner

Chief Executive Officer

SDN Children's Services