

# Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault

## LAUNCHED!

The Australian Institute of Family Studies was delighted that Senator Amanda Vanstone (former Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women) was able to visit the Institute to officially launch the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) on 26 September 2003.



Senator Vanstone, former Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women launches the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault at the Australian Institute of Family Studies on 26 September 2003.

In her address, Senator Vanstone remarked on the continued high levels of under-reporting of sexual assault, and acknowledged how critical it is for sexual assault to be recognised as a crime more often committed by people well known to the victim, as opposed to the levels of danger posed by strangers.

The launch marked the release of the Centre's first publications. The Briefing Paper, entitled *What lies behind the hidden figure of sexual assault? Issues of prevalence and disclosure*, considers how the experiences of victim/survivors of sexual assault may be even less visible for those who are homeless, or whose first language is not English, or where the assaults occurred when they were

children. Emphasis is also given to the difficulties faced by sex workers who are often assaulted on multiple occasions in the context of their work. Not only are these

victims less likely to figure within the estimates of large-scale victimisation studies, they are less likely to disclose or report their experiences to police. Nor are they amongst those victim/survivors who feel more able to access support.

The Centre's first newsletter, *ACSSA Aware No. 1*, was also launched by the Minister. It featured the Centre itself in terms of its operations and services, its research and advisory functions, and its Good Practice database. The newsletter's feature article



(From left) Melanie Heenan and Ann Sanson pictured at the ACSSA launch with Dianne Gibson, Chair of the AIFS Board of Management.

focused on the criminal justice system in reviewing the Victorian Law Reform Commission's *Interim Report on Sexual Offences* which recommends further changes to those laws and procedures that continue to work against the fair treatment of sexual assault victim/survivors who go to court.

The launch received a wonderfully positive response from the public, including service providers, victim/survivors, academics, and researchers who extended their best wishes and their encouragement for the future work of the Centre. We wish to thank them for their generosity, kind words and support, and we look forward to working collaboratively with them in the future.



Pictured at the ACSSA launch (from left): Jill Farrelly, Assistant Secretary of the Office of the Status of Women; Dr Ann Sanson, Acting Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies; Senator Vanstone; Dr Melanie Heenan, ACSSA Coordinator; and Dr Adam Tomison, Manager of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

## ACSSA WEBSITE

Access Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault website directly at [www.aifs.gov.au/acssa](http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa) or via the home page of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

The ACSSA website contains information on new developments in the field of sexual assault, online access to publications and a range of other resources including the Good Practice database, current statistical information on the incidence and prevalence of sexual assault, links to other organisations, bibliographies, and online access to the Australian Institute of Family Studies library catalogue and ACSSA's research and advisory service.

The website is regularly updated with information on forthcoming conferences and other events in the sexual assault field. You can also sign up to the ACSSA mailing list or join *acssa-discuss* – the online discussion group that is currently being established. The website is updated every fortnight. Bookmark us for ready access!

You can email your contributions or feedback on the ACSSA website to [Bianca.Dobson@aifs.gov.au](mailto:Bianca.Dobson@aifs.gov.au) – or fax them on (03) 9214 7839.