



Newsletter

AUGUST 2004

Greetings!

It is hard to believe that it is about a year since we visited you to talk about your child for Wave 1 of *Growing Up in Australia*. Where has the time gone?

We hope the last year has been a good one for you, your *Growing Up in Australia* child and your family. We would like to hear how your child has been progressing.

The enclosed questionnaire covers a number of important aspects of your child's and family's life. If your child was a baby when we visited you, we have some special questions for a study that seeks to better understand parents' working lives before and after the birth of a child.

We would really appreciate you filling in the questionnaire and returning it. Also, if you have a change in contact details, please provide them for us on the form.

A study of 10,000 families

Yours was one of the first families to be part of *Growing Up in Australia*. We have continued to invite families to join the study during 2004, and so far almost 9,000 families have agreed.

We expect that by October we will have 10,000 families. This makes it the biggest study of its kind ever conducted in Australia, and it will allow us to understand so much more about our children's development.

Families continue to tell us how much they like being in the study. As one parent said:

"I like that the study looks at all aspects of the child's life, both at home and in the community. Being part of a study that will be taken into consideration when future services for families are planned is a good feeling."

The longitudinal study of Australian children

Initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services

Growing Up in Australia

is housed at the Australian Institute of Family Studies
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Did you know?

Some interesting facts from the early data:

- 55 per cent of the babies and 89 per cent of the four year-olds were living with brothers and sisters
- About a third of the babies were still being breastfed
- About a third of the babies had at least one regular form of child care, with care by grandparents the most popular option, closely followed by day care centres
- Most of the four year-old children were at pre-school, with some already at school



Australian Government
**Australian Institute of
 Family Studies**

Growing Up in Australia is the longitudinal study of Australian children. It aims to provide the database for a comprehensive understanding of children's development in Australia's current social, economic and cultural environment, and to become a major evidence base for future policy and practice regarding children and their families.

Growing Up in Australia will follow representative samples of 5,000 infants and 5,000 four to five year-olds and their families until 2010 and possibly beyond.

Growing Up in Australia was initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services.

You can visit the *Growing Up in Australia* website at any time to get the latest information on the study. Every three months we produce a general newsletter for the website with updates on the study's progress.

www.aifs.gov.au/growingup



The longitudinal study of
 Australian children

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Study launch



The Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon Kay Patterson, officially launched the data collection for the study in February 2004. Despite the soaring temperatures, more than 100 people, including about 50 children, turned out to take part in the event on the Rooftop Garden at the Melbourne Museum.

The launch began with a welcome from the Project Director, Professor Ann Sanson, who said that "while several other countries have national longitudinal studies of their children, Australia has not had one before."

Minister Patterson officially launched the study with the help of three young children. In doing so, the Minister described this study as "one of the most important pieces of research ever undertaken into Australian children".



One of the mothers involved in the early phase of the study, Sevi Anagnostopolous, spoke about her family's involvement.

She reflected positively on the experience:

"For me, this study is the first step towards making a difference nationally – it gives families the opportunity to have their personal experiences heard and to actively participate in shaping the future of child and family services".

Dianne Gibson, the Chair of the Australian Institute of Family Studies' Board of Management, brought the official proceedings to a close by saying she was delighted the Institute had a central role in developing the study that will make such a significant contribution to the lives of Australian children and families.

The launch received wide media coverage, including segments on most television news programs across Australia, as well as many follow-up radio interviews and newspaper articles.

Some phone calls about the study

"Had a call from a lady who needs a new time use diary. Apparently her daughter thought it would be a good book to read in the bath."

"Spoke to a really interesting dad who was a bit unsure about the study, but after hearing more information was so keen to do it. He wanted the interviewer to come in the next half hour – tried to contact interviewer on mobile, and luckily she was in the area and she could go out and do the study."

"A mother rang to thank us for including them in the study and let us know how wonderful the interviewer was and that they were looking forward to the next one."

"Rang to remind a dad to fill in his questionnaire, he said his wife had nagged him to get it done, but he usually waits till the nagging stops before he does anything she asks!"

NEXT INTERVIEW

We are starting to prepare for our next contact with you, which is due about this time next year. The children will then be two–three and six–seven years old. We know that the interviewers will be excited to be in touch and see how your child has grown, and how everything is progressing for you and your family.

SEND US AN E-PHOTO OF YOUR CHILD!

We would love to be able to gather a photographic history of your child's development. If you would like to send us an email every year with your child's name, contact details and photo attached, we will keep it and in the future be able to return the history to you. Please send to growingupinaustralia@iview.com.au

Please note that we will NOT use the photos for any other purpose without your permission.



Understanding cortisol

A number of parents with babies last year were asked to take part in a special study to measure cortisol levels in children. Thank you to those who agreed to take part.

Cortisol is one of the hormones produced by the body to handle stress and, in children, changes in cortisol can reflect stresses that the family is under. Understanding cortisol in children is important because high levels of cortisol can affect children's capacity to learn or cope with challenges, and may affect their capacity to resist infections and so increase their risk for health problems in later life.

Because of its scientific value, researchers designing *Growing Up in Australia* undertook a preliminary study of cortisol collection. The study used an innovative method of collecting saliva with a cotton stick, where one sample was collected between 4 pm and 7 pm each day for three days.

Researchers are now analysing the cortisol data, pairing this with information from the time-use diary on children's activities. We expect to have results from this analysis by the end of 2004. Given the success of the preliminary study, researchers designing *Growing Up in Australia* intend to seek funds to include cortisol measurement for a larger group of children in subsequent waves.

Watch this space!

Did you know?

Some more interesting facts:

- Children in the study were generally very healthy, with 96 per cent of parents saying that their child's health was good, very good or excellent
- 93 per cent of parents said that their four year-old children enjoyed physical activity
- Most parents received practical help (83 per cent) and emotional support (76 per cent) from other family members
- Over 80 per cent of parents said that their neighbourhood was a good or very good place to raise children

Some of the people behind the study

Many people have been involved in making *Growing Up in Australia* happen.

I-view/Colmar Brunton Social Research

So far you will mostly have had contact with the wonderful interviewing team from I-view. Supporting the team of 160 interviewers and supervisors around Australia is the I-view/CBSR Office team.

This team has organised everything that needs to be done for the data collection and is now processing all the information you and other families have supplied. This (de-identified) information is then passed to the Australian Institute of Family Studies for analysis.

Australian Institute of Family Studies

Growing Up in Australia is housed at the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), where its Project Operations Team is located. This team has developed the study, along with a Consortium of leading research institutions (CAG), to ensure that the best possible data are collected.

Department of Family and Community Services

As you know, this study was initiated and funded by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS). FaCS have a small team based in Canberra, which works closely with AIFS and its Consortium partners to help ensure that the Government is able to make good use of the information you give us.

Pictured below, with Senator Kay Patterson, are some members from the above teams.



Back row from left: Robert Porteous (FaCS), Robert Johnstone (AIFS), Glenn Maurer and Andrew Wicks (I-view), John Ainley (CAG), Sebastian Misson (AIFS), Peter Walkear (FaCS). Front row from left: Grace Soriano (AIFS), Ann Sanson (CAG), Christine Millward (AIFS), Senator Kay Patterson, Melissa Wake (CAG), Dianne Gibson (AIFS Board) and Alex Fraser (formerly AIFS).

DON'T FORGET!

You are unique and irreplaceable! If you move house or change your telephone number(s) or other contact details, please let us know - it will make it so much easier for us to contact you next year.

Please ring 1800 005 508 or email growingupinaustralia@iview.com.au to update your details.

And **thank you** for continuing to be part of this very important study. Only through your continued support can we obtain the best possible information for the benefit of all children.

Growing Up in Australia:

helping to make sure all children have a good start in life