

Australian Institute of Family Studies
ANNUAL REPORT 2002–2003

Board of Management
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Contact Officer for Annual Report 2002–2003

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Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

18 September 2003

Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone
Minister for Family and Community Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Board of Management, it is with pleasure that I present to you the twenty-third Annual Report of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in accordance with Section 9(1) of Part 3 of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*.

The report relates to the period 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Gibson', written in a cursive style.

Dianne Gibson
Presiding Member
Board of Management

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YEAR IN REVIEW



YEAR IN REVIEW

I am pleased to report that in 2002–2003, the Australian Institute of Family Studies continued to add an essential, family-focused perspective to a range of important and continuing policy debates in the Australian community.

It was a year marked by significant achievement, change and expansion of the Institute. A new research plan, the establishment of a new research centre, and the development and expansion of a number of Institute projects resulted in a significant increase in both budget and staff. We hosted a most successful conference, and Institute publications and internet resources were well received by their target audiences.

Strategic planning

The Institute has been developing a new planning framework structured around its three main areas – Research, Communication and Information, and Corporate Services. Overarching these is a strategic plan that sets the Institute's broad directions for the next three years.

The *Strategic Plan 2002–2005* was published and disseminated in November 2002, following a lengthy consultation and drafting process. This plan seeks to position the Institute as Australia's leading provider of family-related research and information.

The *Research Plan 2002–2005*, published in September 2002, provides a general framework for research activities over the next three years. While it identifies key themes and directions for research, it retains the flexibility required for the Institute to remain responsive to changing policy and scientific environments. It also enables the Institute to identify and take advantage of

new opportunities for pursuing our strategic directions and fulfilling our vision and objectives.

Development of the three-year *Communication and Information Plan 2003–2006* is well advanced. The broad framework of this plan, with its key goals, messages and strategies, was approved by the Institute's Board of Management in May 2003.

Work has also commenced on the final component of the Institute's new planning framework. The *Corporate Services Plan 2003–2006* will ensure more effective planning strategies, financial and project management and administrative support across the Institute. The plan will encompass information technology, records management, human resources and workplace relations strategies aimed at improving overall efficiency across the Institute.

Institute effectiveness is measured across the three program areas – Research, Communication and Information, and Corporate Services – by a number of criteria including feedback and more formalised accounting measures related to the budget and financial outcomes. The Institute's performance measures are outlined in the *Strategic Plan 2002–2005* and are reproduced in Chapter 2 of this Annual Report. As information presented in the following chapters confirms, in 2002–2003, the Institute achieved outcomes which can be measured very favourably against all these indicators.

Some highlights

In 2002–2003 the Institute continued to deliver a range of quality services and products for its stakeholders, as well as responding flexibly to changing priorities.

More than 450 delegates participated in our very successful 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Steps Forward for Families: Research, Practice and Policy*, held in Melbourne on 12-14 February 2003. The conference brought together academics, service providers, and policy makers, and addressed a range of current family policy issues.

Our research and clearinghouse expertise led to discussion with the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) about the establishment of an Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault. This resulted in the signing of a 2.5-year contract with OSW for approximately \$1.3 million. Work commenced on the establishment of the Centre in January 2003, and it will be fully operational in 2003–2004 (see Chapter 3 for more details).

It has been pleasing to see our collaborations with universities and a diverse range of other project partners continuing to expand during the year. The number and range of these partnerships is a measure of the high regard in which the Institute is held. The collaborative research is outlined more fully in Chapter 3 in the Overview of Research Activities and within each research program area.

Our research activities have continued to flourish and to be of considerable interest to policy makers, the research community, service providers and the media. For example, output from our Families, Social Capital and Citizenship project has been called on in a number of research, policy and practice areas. The first outputs from our Family and Work Decisions study are raising considerable interest. Data emerging from the Australian Temperament Project are being used to help guide interventions in the area of crime prevention. Growing Up in Australia (the longitudinal study of Australian children) has

made good progress in this developmental year, and close consultation with a large number of stakeholders is helping to ensure that the data will be relevant for policy and practice. In the area of family law, our Caring for Children after Separation study is providing much needed data on a highly topical issue. These and other Institute research activities are described in more detail in Chapter 3.

Over the year Institute staff engaged in consultation with a large number of researchers, policy makers, service providers and others. We have also hosted a number of visitors. Notable among these was Dr Tess Ridge from the University of Bath, who contributed to several ongoing research projects and publications during her three-month visit. Consultations and visitors are discussed in Chapter 3 of this report.

In accordance with Australian Government requirements, the Institute's National Research Priorities Implementation Plan was completed in May 2003. The priority of primary relevance to the Institute is Priority 2: *Promoting and maintaining good health*, in particular goal 1, A healthy start to life, and goal 2, Ageing well, ageing productively. In response to this priority, the Institute is currently developing a program of new research looking at aspects of ageing.

An encouraging development has been the increasing number of publications in external refereed journals at the same time as the Institute's traditional means of information dissemination have continued. In addition to these publications, research staff have been active in preparing submissions to a variety of parliamentary inquiries, and have presented many papers at national and international conferences, workshops, seminars and other gatherings. Staff publications and presentations are detailed under

each research program area in Chapter 3 of this report.

We continued to disseminate the results of our research widely, and staff commented on family trends and statistics in a wide number of media outlets, both nationally and internationally, resulting in very positive media coverage for the Institute (see Chapter 4).

Use of the Institute's website doubled during the year, with more than 4.4 million hits and 1.6 million page downloads recorded for 2002–2003. New sites were created, dedicated to the Australian Temperament Project, Stronger Families Learning Exchange, and Growing Up in Australia (the longitudinal study of Australian children).

We negotiated the latest Certified Agreement between August 2002 and May 2003, and this will be certified early in 2003–2004. The Agreement is designed to improve overall performance by linking pay and salary advancement to achievement of the Institute's goals, and will allow us to recruit and retain quality staff.

The Agreement includes provisions that reflect some of the family-friendly work practices that the Institute has investigated from a research perspective. It offers innovative work arrangements to staff caring for newborn or newly adopted children, and flexible work patterns for staff who are helping to care for ill or elderly family members.

Institute Board and Director

During the year, a number of the Board Members' appointments ended, and the Institute has been waiting to have these Board positions filled, particularly the permanent Presiding Member.

In January 2003, the Institute bade farewell to its third Director, Mr David Stanton. David came to the Institute as Acting Director in May 1999, and was appointed to a three-year term in November of that year.

David Stanton oversaw a period of great growth, a refocusing of the Institute's research on policy relevance, and a restructure of the Institute's research activities. He was a generous mentor and friend to many of his colleagues at the Institute, and staff benefited from both his wisdom and his inimitable sense of humour. He was farewelled both at the Institute and at our conference in February.

On David's departure, I was appointed by the Minister from the position of Deputy Director (Research) to Acting Director of the Institute.



Ann Sanson
Acting Director