

Australian Institute of Family Studies
ANNUAL REPORT 2003–2004

Board of Management
Australian Institute of Family Studies

Contact Officer for 2003-2004 Annual Report

Strategy and Communications Manager
Australian Institute of Family Studies
300 Queen Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia
Telephone (03) 9214 7888 Facsimile (03) 9214 7839
Website www.aifs.gov.au/

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The cover shows detail from art featured on the
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Australian Government
Australian Institute of Family Studies

13 October 2004

Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson
Minister for Family and Community Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

It is with pleasure that I present to you the twenty-fourth 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 2003 to 30 June 2004.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Gibson', is positioned above the printed name.

Dianne Gibson
Presiding Member
Board of Management

VISION STATEMENT

The Australian Institute of Family Studies will achieve eminence as a centre of excellence for research and information on family wellbeing.

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YEAR IN REVIEW



YEAR IN REVIEW

I am pleased to report that 2003-2004 was a very busy and productive year for the Australian Institute of Family Studies as it continued to contribute an essential, family-focused research perspective to a range of important and continuing policy debates in the Australian community.

It was a year marked by substantial progress on research projects, a number of new initiatives and collaborations, high quality publications and conference presentations, considerable positive exposure in the media, the firm establishment of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), and closer project management of research projects.

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 2003-2004, the Institute achieved outcomes which can be measured very favourably against all these indicators.

Some highlights

In 2003-2004 the Institute continued to deliver a range of quality services and products for its stakeholders, as well as responding flexibly to changing priorities. Our research activities have continued to flourish and to be of considerable interest to policy makers, the research community, service providers and the media.

The year 2003-2004, the middle year of the Institute's current research triennium, saw significant progress on the Institute's core research projects, continued work on long-term contracts, and work on a number of short-term research contracts.

Core research

Core research is funded entirely from the appropriation and focuses on specific research topics identified in the Institute's Research Plan. Good progress was made over the year on core projects including the Australian Temperament Project, Children and Family Life, Child Care in Cultural Context, Caring for Children after Parental Separation, Family and Work Decisions, and ongoing monitoring and analysis of demographic trends and family law.

Long-term contracts

The then Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, launched the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), along with its first publications and website, on 10 September 2003.

Following a successful dress rehearsal, conducted during August and September 2003, the first wave of data collection for the landmark Longitudinal Study of Australian Children study was launched by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson on 8 February 2004.

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse continued to fulfil a valuable advisory and research role in 2003-2004. A number of new publications and an expanded

information network helped ensure the renewal of the Institute's contract for the Clearinghouse for 2004-2007.

The Stronger Families Learning Exchange continued to provide support to 50 Stronger Families Fund projects. Support included regular visits to projects as well as assistance in developing and implementing evaluation frameworks and supporting projects to record and disseminate information about their work. The Stronger Families resource collection has been further developed with a focus on early intervention, action research, social capital and community development, to cater to the research and practice interests of community-based projects.

Collaborative partnerships

The Institute's collaborative research ventures enhanced our research productivity and impact during the year. The number and range of these partnerships is a measure of the high regard in which the Institute is held.

Among our collaborative endeavours, the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey provided a rich data source for a number of new publications. A new collaboration with the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) and the Victorian Transport Accident Commission (TAC) exploited our longitudinal Australian Temperament Project (ATP) dataset to explore a variety of questions around driver behaviour. The Institute continued to be actively involved with the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). The collaborative research is outlined more fully in Chapter 3 in the Overview of Research Activities and within each research program area.

The Institute is also the main sponsor of the 19th Biennial Meeting of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD) which will be held at the Carlton Crest in Melbourne in July 2006. In conjunction with a professional conference organiser, a Local Organising Committee comprising representatives from the major universities in Victoria and staff at AIFS is taking the lead in planning this international event. This Meeting should attract around 800 delegates from both overseas and Australia.

Submissions to inquiries

During the year the Institute prepared submissions to a number of Parliamentary Inquiries. The Institute contributed a substantial submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs Inquiry into Child Custody Arrangements in the Event of Family Separation, and Institute representatives appeared before the Committee on 13 October 2003.

The Institute also prepared a detailed submission to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care and made brief submissions to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Provisions of the Family Law Amendment Bill 2003; the National Audit Office's preliminary study of the administration of the Family Court and the Federal Magistrate's Court; the Senate's Inquiry into current legal aid and justice arrangements; and provided evidence to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission CyberCrime Inquiry.

Consultations and visitors

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 international visitors. Staff have made presentations at international conferences and held meetings with senior government officials and with researchers while on overseas conference trips. A listing of Australian and international consultations can be found in Table 3.3 in Chapter 3 of this report, and specific details can be found on the Institute's website.

There were at least three notable visits for the year. In December 2003 the Institute was pleased to receive a delegation of senior policy makers from Singapore, led by the Minister for Community Development and Sports and Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs Dr Yaacob Ibrahim. Our visitors were interested in the research conducted by the Institute, particularly in the areas of children and families, fertility, and child abuse and neglect, which provided an opportunity for the Institute to showcase its work. Presentations were made on the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, the Institute's current research on fertility and family formation (the Fertility Decision Making Project), and the work of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, housed at the Institute.

On 13 April 2004 the Institute hosted a visit to Melbourne by Dr Wade Horn, the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families in the United States Government. Dr Horn spoke on the topic, "Welfare Reform and Family Policy: Implications for Australia from the US Experience", to an audience of 50 invited guests, including representatives from the Australian Government Departments of Family and Community Services (FaCS) and Prime Minister and Cabinet, Ministerial Advisors, the Ministry of Social Development in New Zealand, senior academics and heads of research organisations, heads of peak organisations in family and community services, and Institute researchers. Following the seminar, Dr Horn and a group of senior members of FaCS and representatives of the academic and welfare sectors returned to the Institute for a further meeting, including a briefing about the Institute and Australian family policy.

In April 2004, Acting Director Ann Sanson and Principal Research Fellow Ruth Weston were part of the Australian delegation to the East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families. This meeting, attended by ministers and delegations from 13 countries in the region, was jointly hosted by Mme Le Thi Thu, Minister-Chairwoman of the Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children, and Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, the Australian Minister for Family and Community Services. The focus was on the impact of modernisation on the family. While in Hanoi, Institute delegates met with key people from a number of government and non-government agencies including a visit to the Scientific Institute for Population, Family and Children (Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children). This institute, founded last year, was modelled on the Australian Institute of Family Studies after a visit to the Institute by a delegation from the Commission. It has expressed strong interest in working on joint research with the Institute.

Communication and information

Institute research has been widely disseminated through our own publications, online and in external refereed journals. In addition to these publications, staff 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.

Research 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 5).

Development of the *Communication and Information Plan 2003-2006* was put on hold in late 2003, when it was decided to undertake a strategic review of our activities in this area. Details of the review are outlined in Chapter 5.

A major task achieved during the year was the redesign of the Institute logo and all publications, websites and stationery in accordance with the new Australian Government branding regulations.

The refereed research journal *Family Matters*, the Institute's main dissemination medium, continued to publish Institute research findings, as well as a diverse range of perspectives and analyses of family research and policy options from other Australian and overseas researchers. Another highly successful publication this year was the substantial Research Report on parent-child contact and post-separation parenting arrangements which we anticipate will attract much attention, particularly in the wake of the Institute's submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Child Custody Arrangements in the Event of Family Separation, mentioned earlier.

Use of the Institute's six websites continued to increase to almost 7 million hits during the year, and more than 2.6 million pages were downloaded, an increase of one million over the previous year.

The year saw continued development of the Institute's library collection and services. Worldwide access to the library catalogue is enabled by its location on the Institute's website, and during this year the catalogue received an average of nearly 7,000 hits per month.

Staffing

Senior Research Advisor, David de Vaus was appointed full professor and Head of School of Social Sciences at La Trobe University. He was replaced by Dr Alison Morehead, who came to the Institute from the Department of Education, Science and Technology.

Family and Society Program Principal Research Fellow Matthew Gray left the Institute to take up a position at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University. He was replaced by Michael Alexander, from the Victorian Department of Industrial Relations.

Jan Duffie, from the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne, joined the Institute as a maternity leave replacement, Principal Research Fellow in the Children and Parenting Program.

Dr Adam Tomison left the Institute after nine years in the National Child Protection Clearinghouse to take up a senior role in child protection policy with the Northern Territory Government.

Dr Melanie Heenan was appointed as the first Manager of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault. The staff appointed to the Centre have quickly cohered into an enthusiastic and effective team.

On a sadder note, in October 2003 we were confronted by the sudden and untimely death of a loved staff member, Christine McCarthy. Chris had been with the Institute for four years. In her role as Survey Operations Manager, she brought great enthusiasm and competence to all the varied tasks that she so willingly took on, which included recruiting, training and supervising our CATI interviewers, but also a diverse array of other research support activities.

Farewell

This will be my last report for the Australian Institute of Family Studies. When I came to the Institute in 1999, I was given a three-year secondment from the Department of Psychology at the University of Melbourne. This was extended to four and a half years once I took on the role of Deputy Director, and later Acting Director. It is now time for me to return to the University, and this will take effect on 30 July 2004.

My time at the Institute has been stimulating, challenging and busy. I will miss it, but will remain very grateful for the privilege of working with so many dedicated, generous and talented colleagues, and for the unfailing support of the staff and the Board of Management through some unsettled times.

At a time when families are so high on the national policy agenda, the Institute's vision – to be a centre of excellence for research and information on family wellbeing – has never been so pertinent. I am confident that the Institute will continue to flourish in fulfilling this vision.



Ann Sanson
Acting Director