

**Australian Institute of Family Studies**  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2005–2006**

Board of Management  
Australian Institute of Family Studies

*Contact Officer for 2005–2006 Annual Report*

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The cover shows detail from art featured on the covers of the 2005–2006 editions of the Institute's research journal, *Family Matters*.

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**Australian Government**  
**Australian Institute of Family Studies**

27 September 2006

The Hon Mal Brough MP  
Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister,

It is with pleasure that I present to you the twenty-sixth 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 2005 to 30 June 2006.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Hayes".

Alan Hayes  
Director

## **Mission**

### *Who we are*

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is a national and international leader in identifying, developing and providing timely and reliable information about issues affecting families in Australia.

## **Vision**

### *What we do now and in the future*

The Australian Institute of Family Studies will contribute to family wellbeing in Australia by undertaking high-quality research that informs the Australian Government and the community and influences policy, services and support for families.

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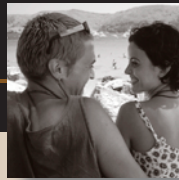
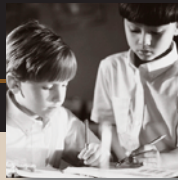
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# 1

YEAR IN REVIEW



## YEAR IN REVIEW

I am pleased to report that 2005–2006 was a very productive year for the Institute. Our 25th Anniversary, in 2005, provided a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge our past, and all those who have contributed to the Institute's first quarter century. It was also a time to look to the future. While acknowledging our past achievements, our focus has been both on the present circumstances and the future prospects of the Institute. This has been a year in which we have taken stock, reviewed our priorities, operations and organisation and framed plans for the future.

### Review of corporate governance

In September 2005, the then Department of Family and Community Services completed a review of governance arrangements for the Institute that was undertaken as part of the implementation of the *Review of Corporate Governance of Statutory Authorities and Office Holders* (Uhrig Report).

The Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon Kay Patterson, accepted the recommendation from her Department that the Institute no longer be subject to the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (CAC Act) and that an executive management structure and operation under the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* (FMA Act) was the appropriate model under which the Institute should operate.

In February 2006, the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and the Institute established an interagency Transition Committee to oversee the transition from CAC Act to FMA Act.

The Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation (2006 Budget and Other Measures) Bill 2006 was introduced to the House of Representatives on Thursday 25 May 2006, and received Royal Assent on 30 June 2006. The Bill amended the *Family Law Act 1975* to effect the necessary structural changes to the Institute, from 1 July 2006.

On 1 July 2006, the Institute will move from its current Board structure under the CAC Act, to an executive management structure under the FMA Act. The statutory functions that were previously the responsibility of the Institute itself will rest with the Director. While this transition will change the legal status of the Institute, the name and functions of the organisation remain unchanged. The Institute will continue to generate excellent research into issues affecting families. An Advisory Council will be established to replace the Board and provide advice on the strategic directions and research initiatives of the Institute.

In addition to the legal obligations imposed by the FMA Act, the *Public Service Act* and other applicable legislation, Uhrig recommended the introduction of annual statements of expectation from ministers to agency heads, and statements of intent from agency heads to ministers. These have been exchanged between Minister Brough and myself and the documents are publicly available on the Institute website.

A communication protocol between the Institute and FaCSIA was developed by the interagency Transition Committee and signed by the Secretary of FaCSIA, Dr Harmer and myself in June.

A considerable amount of work was undertaken to ensure all necessary actions required to effect the transition from CAC Act to a prescribed agency under the FMA Act were completed by 30 June 2006.

### Strategic and research plans

A key element that focused our attention above the horizon was the research consultation program. The Institute consulted extensively and sought feedback at several points in the preparation of our *Strategic Plan 2006–2008* and *Research Plan 2006–2008*. The research consultations started in Darwin on 12 August 2005. Consultations followed in every other state and territory capital, and a selection of regional centres, concluding in Canberra.

Among the themes that emerged were the need for a better understanding of relationships, their formation, transitions, pathways and outcomes; the role of the Institute in collating the evidence for particular approaches to interventions focused on families; the family law reforms, including the need for evaluation of the Family Relationship Centres initiative; as well as the need for research on family impacts of the key social policy developments. Also highlighted were some of the issues that relate to Indigenous families and families in regional, rural and remote locations. The response from key stakeholders was very pleasing. The meetings were well attended and involved very worthwhile discussions. The constructive comments of those we consulted were thoughtfully considered and, where possible, were incorporated in the plans. The plans were approved by the Minister and are available on the Institute's website ([www.aifs.gov.au](http://www.aifs.gov.au)).

### Restructure

As foreshadowed in last year's Annual Report, an organisational restructure was implemented in the early part of the reporting period. A total of nine staff took up the offer of voluntary redundancies between July and December 2005. The new structure is illustrated in Table 2.3. Internal transfers filled all of the newly created General Manager positions, and most staff took on new or different responsibilities. A number of new positions were created, and recruitment to these were mostly completed by the end of 2005–2006.

*Dr Matthew Gray* took up the position of Deputy Director, Research, on 11 July 2005. Matthew had been Principal Research Fellow heading the Institute's Family and Society Program from November 2000 to May 2004, before leaving to join the staff of the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University as a Research Fellow.

*Ms Sue Tait* was appointed to the position of Deputy Director, Corporate and Strategy, in May 2006. Sue has experience as a senior executive in both the public and community sectors. She joined the Institute in 2005 after working as a General Manager in the not-for-profit sector. Prior to that she had appointments ranging from Principal to Regional Director and General Manager in the Office of School Education, Victoria. She has also served as a non-executive director on a range of community and education focused Boards.

## Research highlights

The Institute entered 2006 with considerable momentum and an appreciable expansion of our research program.

### *International forum*

The Institute hosted the International Forum on Family Relationships in Transition, which was held in the Public Theatre in Parliament House, Canberra, on 1–2 December 2005. It brought together international and national keynote speakers. An invitation-only meeting, with 100 delegates and 100 observers, the program included a message of welcome from the Prime Minister and addresses by the Governor-General, the Attorney-General, Minister Patterson, the Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, the Chief Federal Magistrate along with several international keynote speakers. Delegates attended from the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam. A number of key meetings were held with delegates from the Asian Region. The forum took place with the generous support and assistance of the Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, and was a fitting culmination to the Institute's 25th Anniversary year.

### *Growing Up in Australia*

Wave 2 of *Growing Up in Australia*: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), is underway. Across the country, interviewers from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) have started contacting the 10,000 families who took part in the study for the first time two years ago. Early reports from the ABS indicate that the study families are looking forward to the interview. With Wave 2 successfully in the field, Institute staff are working with the design teams to develop proposals for Wave 3 content.

LSAC represents a unique dataset that will benefit Australian children, families and communities in this and subsequent generations. *Family Matters* No. 72 included a set of the first articles based on LSAC Wave 1 data, and it has proved a rich source of descriptive and comparative data for Institute staff and external users.

The data are available to researchers, and there is widespread demand for use of this unique set of information. The extent of interest from university and other researchers in the first wave of data from LSAC is evidence of recognition in many quarters of their value, timeliness and relevance.

### *Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family*

On Tuesday 2 August 2005, and again on 10 April 2006, staff of the Institute appeared before the Melbourne hearings of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services Inquiry into Balancing Work and Family. The Institute was congratulated on the quality of its submission and on its responses to the Committee's questions. The Institute's contributions on work and family issues across the years were included in many of the other submissions to the inquiry.

### *Links in the Asian region*

In collaboration with the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Institute continues to strengthen its cooperative links with countries in the Asian region. A key feature of current work involves assisting the

Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPFC) in the design of its first National Survey on Families. This survey is also the first of its kind to be funded by the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), New York. UNICEF is therefore very interested in monitoring the entire process, including the Institute's current and future involvement.

In July 2005, Institute Principal Research Fellow Ruth Weston spent a week in Hanoi, working with members of the VCPFC and representatives of other Vietnamese organisations who are involved in the planning and implementation of the survey, along with the Program Officer, UNICEF Vietnam Country Office. The team made excellent progress in setting up the framework and overall design of the survey.

### ***National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy***

In 2005, the Institute established the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA). In addition to being a key element of the National Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS), CAFCA will have a major role in disseminating the learnings and examples of Promising Practice Profiles (PPPs) from the initiatives funded under the strategy.

We are now working with the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales to undertake the national evaluation of the SFCS. Our two prime areas of involvement are the compilation of PPPs by CAFCA, and the planning of the Stronger Families in Australia (SFIA) study, which will be a short-term, longitudinal evaluation in a number of Communities for Children sites around the country. SFIA data collection commenced in June 2006 and was almost complete by the end of the financial year.

### ***Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse***

During the opening session of the International Forum on Family Relationships in Transition the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon Kay Patterson, announced the allocation of funding to the Australian Institute of Family Studies to establish and operate the new Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse. The purpose of the Clearinghouse is to facilitate exchange of information about family relationships throughout life. It will also distribute information about best practice and innovative service delivery approaches across the range of family relationship services, from prevention and early intervention to post-separation.


### ***Family law research***

In addition to the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse the Institute worked with both the Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to undertake work related to the review of what is the largest set of family law reforms since the original passage of the *Family Law Act 1975*. The government has committed to the establishment of new and expanded services across the next four years. These include a network of 65 Family Relationship Centres (FRCs) and changes to both the legislation and the court systems, processes and supports. These are key priorities for the government. The Institute is well placed to participate in the evaluation of the reform package.

The 25th Anniversary of the Institute in 2005 provided a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge our past, and all those who have contributed to the Institute's first quarter century. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the support and work of the Board during this time of change. The contribution of the Board to the Institute over the past 25 years has been considerable, and I thank all past Board members for their support.

The foundations laid in 2005–2006 provide a sound base for the expansion of the Institute's research program. Finalisation of the new strategic and research plans provides clear direction for the future. The prominence of families in policy and practice, together with the current growth of the research program, make this a very exciting time to be working in these areas.

The Institute is well positioned to continue the contributions to Australian society that have been the hallmark of its first quarter century. Families are the foundation of any nation, and understanding their characteristics, capacities and challenges is vital to Australia and its future prospects. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has a rare privilege and a great responsibility to provide the best possible information to guide policy and practice to the benefit of all Australian families. As we enter our next quarter century we renew our commitment to discharge these obligations to the best of our ability.



Alan Hayes  
Director