



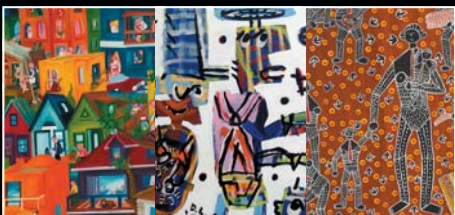
Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

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ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007



The cover shows detail from art featured on the covers of the 2006–2007 editions of the Institute's research journal, *Family Matters*.

Australian Institute of Family Studies
ANNUAL REPORT 2006-2007

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Annual Report 2006–2007
Designed by Double Jay Graphic Design
Printed by CanPrint Communications Pty Ltd
ISSN 7726–9870



Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies

14 September 2007

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-seventh Annual Report of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, for presentation to parliament in accordance with Section 114LC of the *Family Law Act 1975*.

This report has been prepared pursuant to the Requirements for Annual Reports approved by the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit.

The report relates to the period 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007.

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

Professor Alan Hayes
Director

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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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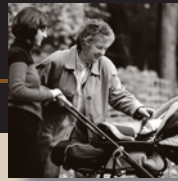
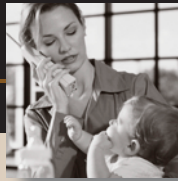
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DIRECTOR'S REVIEW



DIRECTOR'S REVIEW

Overall, 2006–2007 has been a very productive year for the Institute, marked by significant change and development, completion of existing work, initiation of new research projects, dissemination of a range of quality publications, and provision of expanded services to its stakeholders. The Institute's research has again proved to be policy relevant, widely used and extensively cited by governments, non-government organisations and practitioners, as well as the general public. Successfully completed projects have been replaced by several new contracts and Institute-initiated, appropriation-funded developments, including a groundbreaking study of the social and economic impacts of drought on Australian families.

Transition to the FMA Act

Operationally, on 1 July 2006 the legislative framework for the Institute changed from the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* (CAC Act) to the *Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997* (FMA Act).

The move from the previous Board Structure under the CAC Act to an executive management structure under the FMA Act was successfully achieved. As a result, the statutory functions that were previously the responsibility of the Institute and its Board of Management now rest with the Director. An Advisory Council replaces the Board as the prime source of advice to the Director on the research strategic directions and performance of the Institute.

While this transition changes the legal status of the Institute, its name, aims and functions remain the same. As a statutory agency, the Institute will continue to undertake rigorous, relevant research that is responsive to the needs of policy makers, practitioners and the wider community. New processes have been put in place to ensure compliance with the requirements of the FMA Act, and some fine-tuning has been undertaken in regard to the Institute's staffing and organisational structure in order to address the new regulatory requirements.

Relocation

After 20 years at 300 Queen Street, Melbourne, on 26 February 2007 the Institute relocated to 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne. The new premises offer a slightly larger area and the capacity to house the Institute on two contiguous floors. They also offer better facilities in a building that meets our current needs and likely future growth.

Research highlights

Throughout these major changes the Institute made uninterrupted progress in meeting the objectives of its Strategic and Research Plans. Priority was again placed on communicating the Institute's research, through both its own publishing program and external publication, as well as via the work of the Institute's clearinghouses, seminar program, and media contact. Emphasis was also placed on strengthening stakeholder networks and research partnerships.

The Research Plan 2006–2008, *Families Through Life: Diversity, Change and Context* identifies a number of areas requiring greater emphasis, and progress has been made in addressing these during 2006–2007. One of the most important of these relates to Indigenous children, families and communities. The Institute has undertaken significant work on the particular issues that Indigenous families face, and has published a special issue of *Family Matters* with this focus. Another emerging issue identified in the Research Plan is families in rural and remote areas. A major new project, *Families in Regional and Rural Australia: The Impact of Drought, Economic and Social Change*, explores multiple facets of the challenges confronting so many families and communities as a result of the drought. This project illustrates how the research of the Institute, as guided by its research plan, makes positive contributions to social justice and equity for Australian families.

The Family Relationships theme in the Research Plan has been considerably expanded during the year to address the national evaluation of the Family Law reforms introduced on 1 July 2006.

Family Law Reform Evaluation

During 2006–2007 the Institute was commissioned by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) to evaluate the family law reforms. These are the most significant reforms to family law in Australia since the enactment of the *Family Law Act 1975*, and this project provides the first vital steps towards ensuring that the reforms are evaluated in a systematic, multifaceted way. The evaluation methodology includes a major longitudinal study of separating families.

Allegations of Violence in Family Law Proceedings

The Institute was commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department to research and report on allegations of violence raised in family law proceedings, and the way the courts deal with these. This is a landmark project that is playing an important role in informing the Australian Government's Family Law Violence Strategy. The findings have been disseminated as an Institute Research Report, *Allegations of family violence and child abuse in family law children's proceedings: A pre-reform exploratory study*. The report has stimulated a great deal of interest with extensive media coverage and invitations to present them to government departments, and at seminars for the judiciary, legal practitioners, and other professionals with interests in relationship support, prevention of domestic violence, and child protection.

Magellan Project

This project was commissioned by the Family Court of Australia and examines the effectiveness of the Court's Magellan case management system for responding to allegations of sexual abuse or serious physical abuse of children. The project's preliminary progress report has been completed with the final report nearing finalisation. The project will inform the way the court manages allegations of sexual and physical abuse of children. This is another example of the Institute working in partnership with an organisation that has a great deal to do with Australian families, and demonstrates how research informs the development of policy and practice.

Growing up in Australia

Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) is gathering the first ever comprehensive data covering the most salient aspects of

the lives of Australian children and the contextual influences on their development. The data are providing a solid evidence base on which to develop sound policies in areas concerning children's development, health and wellbeing. Not only do the results inform social policy, but they also provide a unique window on early intervention and prevention. Data from Wave 1.5 were released in November 2006, and Wave 2 data will be released in the second half of 2007. Interest in this project and its data has been significant. LSAC is realising its potential as a prime source of information to assist policy and service development for families.

The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA)

The Institute is a key partner in this important data collection. The HILDA dataset is being used extensively by researchers in universities and government departments, as well as by staff of the Institute. The May 2007 federal budget extended funding for HILDA to allow for collection of survey data for a further four years, guaranteeing the collection of twelve annual waves of data. The Institute has responsibility for the development of the Family Dynamics module of the survey, and actively participates in the design of each data collection wave. Institute researchers are also active in encouraging the use of HILDA data wherever appropriate.

Partnerships and networks

The Institute also focused on extending and further strengthening partnerships and networks across government, the community sector and academic organisations. Strategic partnerships extend the research capacity of the Institute and enable more effective transfer of knowledge to those with prime responsibility for the development of policy and services for Australian families. Examples over the year include the strengthening of our partnerships with FaCSIA, the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), and closer working relationships with the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia, the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, the Australian National University, the University of Adelaide, La Trobe University and Odyssey House. The formalising of the relationships included the development of an overarching Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for conducting projects with FaCSIA and the signing of a MOU with AIHW.

In March 2007, the Institute's Deputy Director (Research) and I travelled to Wellington, New Zealand, to take part in collaborative exchanges with the New Zealand Families Commission. This partnership opportunity provides a valuable extension of the Institute's capacity and influence, as well as exciting prospects for staff exchange.

Information and communication

Clearinghouses

The Institute's national clearinghouses are a vital part of fulfilling the key objective of informing the Australian community of research into family issues. They have successfully met this objective. In 2006–2007, the Institute added a fourth clearinghouse, the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC). It specifically aims to improve the wellbeing of families and children by supporting practitioners, service providers and policy makers in the development and delivery of family and relationship programs, ranging from prevention and early intervention to post-

separation services. The AFRC became fully operational in September with the launch of its website. The material disseminated by the AFRC will enhance understanding of research into family relationships, and will inform the development and evaluation of high-quality programs to support Australian family relationships. It is a very significant addition to the Institute's capacity, and one of the most exciting changes to its profile this year. Interest in the clearinghouse has been impressive, with more than 80,000 pages downloaded from its website in its first nine months of operation.

Families Week

To mark National Families Week in May 2007, and to inform the community about its work, the Institute developed and distributed a Facts Sheet that provided a snapshot of the ways Australian Families spend their time. This information sheet supported the aim of the week, which was to encourage families to spend more time together. I was delighted to take the role of Ambassador for Families Week 2007, to help in promoting the vital importance of the family in Australian society, and to highlight the Institute's role in supporting the needs of Australian families.

Media

The Institute's work consistently informs media debate about family and broader social issues. Again this year the media profile has been high, with a mix of media mentions that are directly related to the Institute's research, combined with contributions to the wider public interest in family trends and related issues. The total media mentions for the year was 972, and these were exclusively positive. Coverage was truly national, with our comment being sought from Townsville to Albany, Melbourne to Perth and Darwin to Devonport, and many cities and towns in between.

Vice-regal visit

On 4 August 2006, I was pleased to welcome their Excellencies, the Governor-General and Mrs Jeffery, to the Institute for a comprehensive overview of recent developments in our research and dissemination. Their Excellencies' interest in the Institute and its work is greatly appreciated.

For the future

I am privileged to have led the Australian Institute of Family Studies through another year of great achievement. The Institute continues to develop in terms of the calibre of its work and the role it plays in providing the research to underpin the national policy agenda for Australia's families in the 21st century.

As we move into another year, I am committed to ensuring that the Institute supports staff not only to fulfil its existing project commitments, but also to pursue further opportunities to advance understanding of Australian families. Such understanding is vital to a nation that values families so highly and takes the quality of family relationships and family life so seriously.



Professor Alan Hayes
Director