

International Year of the Family

AROUND THE STATES AND TERRITORIES

At an international level, organisation of the United Nations International Year of the Family (IYF) began some time ago by encouraging every nation to organise a program for 1994. The United Nations General Assembly theme for the year is 'Family: Resources and Responsibilities in a Changing World'.

Many communities and businesses have put a great deal of time and sponsorship into the celebration of 'family' in the International Year and there are many more activities to happen. Your local IYF contact will know more about these (see contact numbers). Here is a roundup of some of the various themes and programs that have unfolded nationally and at the state level to date – in particular, programs that involve planning for families and their future.

Themes

A number of themes have emerged: 'Let's look after families' is being used nationally and in Queensland; 'Family life has important responsibilities' and 'Family life is the key to a successful community' are two key themes in Western Australia; Victoria has the theme 'Victorian families together'; Tasmania has set the theme 'Caring for and supporting each other – the challenge for Tasmanian families'; and the Northern Territory has chosen 'Strength in caring'. New South Wales has identified parenting, fairness in families and family-friendly communities for its major themes. Sub-themes of 'family and work', 'family harmony' and 'families of the future' have appeared in federal campaigns and in South Australia.

Community consultation

This year has seen a number of opportunities for people to voice their ideas in consultations. As part of the national program, the Australian Government has set up an Office of International Year of the Family to coordinate IYF activities, in addition to a 20-member National Council for the International Year of the Family chaired by Professor Bettina Cass. The Council released a discussion paper earlier this year called, *The Heart of the Matter: Families at the Centre of Public Policy*, and has since conducted community consultations on family issues. The consultations will inform the Council's final report to the Government with the aim of outlining principles and priorities for the support of families in the future.

New South Wales has been conducting community consultations to feed into the New South Wales Family Policy Statement, a blueprint for family initiatives until the end of the decade. The Northern Territory has a community-based committee undertaking broad community consultations on issues affecting families which is to present a report to the Northern Territory Government by February 1995. South Australia has been

LIZ SHARMAN
AIFS Communications Coordinator

conducting consultations which will be taken into consideration in a Family Strategy document underpinning future planning; the Australian Capital Territory has been looking at how services for families can be enhanced; and Victoria has been engaged in consultations with a number of state and community-based groups.

Community education programs

Most States are attempting to raise community awareness of the International Year where possible. For instance, New South Wales has been conducting a community

education campaign on its themes of parenting, fairness in families and family friendly communities, and Queensland has a public campaign on valuing children.

Awards

Awards schemes to tie in with the International Year of the Family have been implemented in a number of States. Western Australia has an awards scheme for people who make an outstanding contribution to families through voluntary work; an employee nominated Industry Award for family-friendly practices; and a Community Services Award in recognition of work in preventive programs or strategies for families by non-profit community-based organisations.

The Victorian Ministerial Council for International Year of the Family, in conjunction with Keep Australia Beautiful, is running awards for the family-friendliest cities and towns in Victoria. The awards will look at what local municipal councils are achieving for families with the support of the community.

Media awards

Several media awards are to be made available in recognition of the role the media play in raising discussion of family trends and behaviour. These include: the Family Court of Australia Media Award (which will be presented for individual achievement in three categories – print, radio and television), and a Western Australian award for an outstanding story which highlights the positive aspects of family life.

Grants

Western Australia has offered community grants of up to \$2,000 to initiate projects to strengthen families, and Family Research grants of up to \$10,000 for individuals and non-profit organisations to undertake research in relevant areas.

New South Wales has made funding available for community celebrations with a local 'family life' focus, and grant applications for Innovative Community Projects which 'establish new partnerships in the delivery of services for families, promote mutual support and self help activities or enhance coordination and planning of local services', close in early September.

The Northern Territory has distributed funds to more than 100 community groups to undertake projects; Tasmania has earmarked funds for a small number of pilot local government projects aimed at strengthening informal family support networks at community level; South Australia has made a number of small grants to assist local celebrations; and Queensland has funded an elder abuse research project and approximately 100 community projects.

International Directory of IYF Research Activities

The Institute is engaged in a joint project with the United Nations International Year of the Family (IYF) Secretariat to compile an *International Directory of IYF Research Activities*. The Directory will be an important record of the many accomplishments achieved by countries under the auspices of the IYF. It will provide international information for researchers and policy makers, and facilitate future networking, information sharing, and research collaboration between countries.

Questionnaires were forwarded to all IYF National Coordinating Committees in July requesting their cooperation in gathering contributions from organisations and individuals in their countries engaged in research activities for the IYF. Research activities are defined broadly to include research studies on the family or family related issues; surveys or reviews of the situation of the family or of family services or legislation; statistical reports on the family; special books or publications based on research; action research projects and so on.

We will be compiling a database of contributions from which a printed *Directory* will be published by the end of 1994. To meet this time frame we urge organisations and individuals who have been contacted by their National Coordinating Committees to reply promptly. Questions regarding the questionnaire or potential contributors who have not yet been contacted should address enquiries to:

Deborah Whithear, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000 Australia
Phone: (03) 608 6888; International 61 3 608 6888
Fax: (03) 608 6839; International 61 3 608 6839 E-mail: deborah@aifs.org.au

Conferences

A number of Conferences have been held to mark the International Year of the Family. Strong and positive themes have been the order of the day: healthy families, work and family, strengthening families. South Australia will host the national International Year of the Family Conference with federal support on 20–23 November 1994. For fuller listings see the Conference/Workshop Circuit round-up in this issue.

Activities

Events ranging from fun-runs through to picnics and street parties have been organised by local and state governments and community groups to celebrate their families. A 'family chain', not unlike a family time capsule, is being created in Victoria and will be sent to the United Nations at the end of the year. Families are invited to provide a memento of themselves, such as a photo, poem or description of the family, to be placed in a plastic pocket that will form a link in the chain.

Publications

A range of written material has been produced for the International Year of the Family. The National Council for the International Year of the Family 1994 has produced a discussion paper, *The Heart of the Matter: Families at the Centre of Public Policy*; a newsletter called *Focus on Australian Families* has been produced by the Office of the International Year of the Family in Canberra and is

available from GPO Box 666, Woden ACT 2606; the Australian Bureau of Statistics has compiled special family reports in some states; and a number of states have compiled folders with general ideas and information of interest to individuals and community groups about celebrating the International Year. You can check the information available in your state by phoning the relevant number below.

Contact numbers

(ask for the International Year of the Family unit)

International Year of the Family

Office (federal) (06) 289 3736

Australian Capital Territory

Chief Minister's Department (06) 205 0314

New South Wales

Social Policy Directorate, Department of Community Services (02) 367 6806

Northern Territory

Department of Health and Community Services (089) 892 722

Queensland

Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (07) 224 8851

South Australia

Department for Family and Community Services, Office for Families (08) 226 3637

Tasmania

Department of Community and Health Services (002) 33 4808

Victoria

Department of Health and Community Services (03) 412 6548

Western Australia

Department for Community Development (09) 222 2601

This issue of *Family Matters* gathers together articles concerning young people in Australia. Some examine the nature of 'youth'; others discuss issues concerning young people. Included are reports of new Institute research, papers written by Institute researchers, and papers by writers independent of the Institute, contributing their own research and opinion. The articles are supported by our regular column presenting selected references from the Institute's *Australian Family & Society Abstracts* database, in this case a Bibliography on Young People in Australia.

It is difficult to imagine a society which does not categorise people by age; our own certainly does in numerous ways. Age is often a very important element in our social and legal framework; assumptions about it are embedded in our language and our personal interactions. It is frequently the basis of expectations about what people are capable of and how they should lead their lives. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of young people. Yet even the most cursory analysis shows how diverse young people are, in their opportunities, their capabilities, their approaches to life, their backgrounds and experiences.

It is important to remember that the concepts of 'youth' and 'adolescence' have not always been with us. Such concepts are socially constructed or invented. Once, the only distinction was between infancy and adulthood. Now, some hundreds of years later, society distinguishes a range of distinct developmental and life stages — for example, early and late childhood and early and late adolescence. The main contributors to increasing age distinctions were industrialisation and the increased differentiation of jobs, together with the advent of schools to prepare, train, and 'make literate' the workforce required for new occupations. How the category of 'young people' is defined and what is expected of them changes significantly over time and differs according to social, cultural and economic factors.

Judith Bessant's article in this issue's Opinion/Comment/Analysis column touches on this theme. She argues that the tendency of adults to view young people as different and 'other' has had serious negative effects on our capacity to relate to and care for young people, and to be helpful in solving problems. The media perpetuate the myth of difference, but Bessant identifies academic theorists and professionals as contributing significantly to the view of youth as a 'rare and peculiar species'. She suggests that the starting point for change is for adults to recognise the commonalities between themselves and their children.

Focusing mainly on the Italian experience, Ellie Vasta discusses the ways in which the identities of a particular group of young people — non-English-speaking background immigrant youth — were constructed under earlier policies of assimilation, and in more recent times under multiculturalism. She examines the effect of racism, not only on individual lives, but also on the models which were used to explain youth identities, and concludes that the research questions we ask in the future are likely to be different from those generated by a culture of assimilation.

C O N F E R E N C E

International Year of the Family Conference

hosted by

The City of Melbourne

7–8 November, 1994 at The Regent Hotel, Melbourne

R E G I S T R A T I O N O F I N T E R E S T

Themes proposed for the Conference are:

- Cooperation and Initiatives of Government, the Business and Community Sectors to support and strengthen families and their quality of life
- Improving the 'Family Friendliness' of Cities and Towns

Keynote Speakers Include:

- Mr Charles Landry, Consultant CoMedia, Consultancy Research Planning, Gloucester, England.
- Mr Jeff Kenworthy, Institute for Science and Technology Policy, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.

Concurrent Sessions Will Cover:

- Physical and Environmental Attributes that Make a City Family Friendly
- Services that Support a City's Social Infrastructure
- Education Opportunities Across the Age Spectrum
- Recreational and Sporting Opportunities Offered by a Family Friendly City
- Arts and Cultural Experiences Available to the Whole Family
- Transport and Transport Systems, Public and Private, that Support the Family
- Opportunities for Community Participation

For registration
brochure and further
information contact:

The Conference Organiser

The Meeting Planners

**108 Church Street
Hawthorn, Victoria 3122**

Phone: (03) 819 3700

Fax: (03) 819 5978

C O N F E R E N C E