



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

HARRY MCGURK

It is exactly one year since I wrote my first report for *Family Matters* as Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The intervening 12 months have seen a number of significant changes at the Institute.

The management of the Institute has been restructured and, as detailed in my last report (*Family Matters*, no.40), new appointments have been made to the positions of Research Manager and Business Manager. The Institute's Board of Management has a new Presiding Member, Ms Ann Sherry. Management, Staff and Board have been working on a new forward plan for the Institute, and the Institute has taken on a major new function in the form of assuming responsibility for the National Child Protection Clearing House.

The Institute is now well placed to carry forward into the 21st century its mission 'to promote, by the conduct of research and other appropriate means, the identification of, and development of understanding of, the factors affecting marital and family stability in Australia' (Family Law Act 1975).

In the lead article of this issue of *Family Matters*, David de Vaus, the Institute's Research Manager, provides an account of our new research program as it is now emerging. The program has been developed following extensive consultations with the community, with researchers, and with policy makers and service providers. It includes projects which build upon work previously carried out by the Institute, as well as opening up new areas of research.

Our intention is that the research program should provide a sound data base, one that is accessible and relevant to the needs of all those concerned professionally and personally with family policy and research. This is one of the most effective ways in which the Institute can fulfil its objective of informing the development of

policies, programs and services designed to promote the wellbeing of the nation's families.

The Institute has published two significant books recently. The first, *Work and Family Life: Achieving Integration*, by Institute Senior Research Fellows Ilene Wolcott and Helen Glezer, is the outcome of a productive collaboration between the Institute and Esso Australia. As part of its International Year of the Family program, Esso provided the Institute with a substantial contribution towards the costs of preparing this new book on how Australia is facing up to the challenge of achieving harmonisation between the demands of paid work and the responsibilities of family life, especially for employees who are also parents. I am delighted to be able to take this opportunity to thank our sponsor publicly.

The second new publication is a book entitled *Today's Child Care, Tomorrow's Children!*, by Gay Ochiltrie and Don Edgar, respectively former Senior Researcher and former Director of the Institute. The book, the final volume in the AIFS Early Childhood Study series, reports the findings of a retrospective longitudinal study of the effects of exposure to long day care during the first year of life on children's subsequent adjustment to primary school. Ochiltrie and Edgar conclude that, considered in isolation, early exposure to child care has insignificant effects on later social and cognitive adjustment compared with such factors as socioeconomic background, parenting values, child personality and gender. In other words, experience of child care is just one, and by no means the most important, among a host of factors which influence children's development.

These findings are commensurate with a trend towards adopting a holistic, ecological approach towards understanding the processes that influence the development of children and their families as opposed to reliance upon the overly simplistic, single variable approach characteristic of much recent North American research on the effects of day care on children's development.

At the same time, although they did not assess quality of day care directly, the Ochiltrie and Edgar report is also commensurate with the well substantiated finding from early childhood research that the quality of care they receive, regardless by whom

it is provided, is the most important characteristic of children's rearing environments.

From this latter perspective, the Institute publication of the Ochiltrie and Edgar volume is timely. It is just over two years since the Commonwealth *National Quality Improvement and Accreditation System* (QIAS) was put in place. Readers of *Family Matters* will be aware that the objective of QIAS is to enhance and secure the quality of care offered by long day care services to children whose parents are eligible to receive Childcare Assistance. Under the operation of QIAS, in order to receive Childcare Assistance, eligible parents must use the services only of providers who are registered with the National Child Care Accreditation Council and who, following guidelines on standards of quality prepared and distributed by the Council, arrange to have the quality of the care they provide assessed and approved by the Council.

QIAS was developed as an incentive to long day care providers in the private sector to offer a quality service in return for their becoming eligible to provide services to families in receipt of Childcare Assistance; essentially, QIAS provides the private day care sector with access to substantial federal subsidies.

The final date by which providers had to register with the National Child Care Accreditation Council and seek assessment of the quality of their day care services was 30 June 1995. By the due date the overwhelming majority of providers throughout Australia had complied with these requirements. To that degree, QIAS must be counted a success in ensuring that the nation's substantial investment in securing a quality care service for its children and their families is providing the return intended.

However, there remains a small pocket of providers who are resisting the process but who, until the time of writing, continue to enjoy the same financial benefits as those who have conscientiously met the full requirements of QIAS.

It is critical for the future integrity of a quality day care service throughout Australia that the Accreditation Council takes whatever steps are necessary to secure complete compliance throughout the service. Research evidence from other countries strongly suggests that without such singleness of purpose quality is compromised, to the detriment of the children and the families involved.

Harry McGurk

The 5th Australian Family Research Conference, hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, will be held in Brisbane from 27-29 November 1996.



Australian Family Research Conference 1996

As in past years, the 1996 Australian Family Research Conference should attract high quality research papers and symposia, and provide a valuable forum for family researchers, professionals working with families, policy makers, policy analysts and service providers.

Full details of the Conference and an official Call for Research Papers will be published in the 1995 Spring/Summer edition of *Family Matters*.

In the meantime, if you would like further information about the Conference, please contact Ms Grace Soriano at the Institute (phone (03) 9214 7888).

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