

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL GROUP ON FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

The inaugural seminar and workshop to establish an Asia Pacific Regional Group on Families and Relationships was held in Hong Kong on 31 July 1996 as part of the 27th International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) Conference.

The Australian International Steering Group on Families and Relationships established by the three peak organisations in the Family Services Program (Relationships Australia, Family Services Australia, and Centacare) and the Legal Aid and Family Services Division of the Attorney-General's Department had developed the proposal to the stage where it could be presented to interested organisations and individuals at the workshop/seminar. This was done in cooperation with interested groups within Australia, including the Australian Institute of Family Studies, and with representatives from several countries in the region.

The first session of the workshop was a mini conference with papers given by Professor Jamilah Ariffin of Malaysia, the Australian Group, and the Secretariat of Aboriginal Islander Child Care (SNAICC).

In the second session information was given on ICSW, the International Union of Family Organisations and its Commission on Marriage and Interpersonal Relations, and the regional body of the UN, the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific.

The proposal to establish the Asia Pacific Group on Families and Relationships was put to the meeting and unanimously supported. This means that there is a mandate to move ahead with the establishment of the Regional Group with the following objectives which have been adopted as initial guidelines:

- to promote policy, service and professional development in the families and relationships field;
- to aid development of services for families and relationships within the region;
- to foster an exchange of learning across cultures, share professional practices and expand professional development and training opportunities for mutual benefit;

- to encourage international interest in the specific family and relationship needs of the region;
- to represent the interests of the Asia Pacific region in international conferences and forums; and
- to explore possible appropriate linkages with relevant international bodies.

The Asia Pacific Steering Committee has been established with members from 11 countries including Australia. Helen Disney, National Director of Relationships Australia, is Chair of this Committee and the Australian Group is providing the secretariat.

The task for the Steering Committee is to develop the plans for the establishment of the Asia Pacific Group for Families and Relationships for launching officially in September 1997 at the Regional Conference of the ICSW to be held in Djakarta in September 1997. Discussions are being held with the Indonesian representatives on the possibility of a joint secretariat arrangement between Australia and Indonesia.

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