



This edition of *Family Matters* reports on the research findings of the Institute's *Australian Divorce Transitions Project*. This is a major study of the processes of divorce and its consequences – a study that builds on previous groundbreaking work of the Institute in this area in the last two decades, published as *Settling Up* in 1986, *Settling Down* in 1993, and *Remaking Families* in 1996.

A key researcher involved in these earlier Institute studies, and pivotal in developing our conceptual frameworks, was the late Dr Kathleen Funder, a Principal Research Fellow of the Institute. All at the Institute would want to acknowledge the contribution of Kate's work not only to our past research, but also in the way it shaped and continues to influence the current Australian Divorce Transitions Project.

There are four articles based on data from this Institute Project. Ruth Weston and Bruce Smyth explore the financial living standards of men and women after divorce; Jody Hughes looks at the experiences of men and women in relation to repartnering after divorce; Grania Sheehan and Jody Hughes discuss the division of matrimonial property; and Bruce Smyth examines the situation of child support for young adult children.

Two other Institute studies are also highlighted in this *Family Matters*. Christine Kilmartin draws on the *Young Adults' Aspirations Survey* to look at the pathways young people are taking to adulthood that may have implications for current child support policies. And in reporting on the Institute's work in the area of positive family relationships – the other side of the 'divorce coin' – Robyn Parker draws on data from the *Marital Perspectives Study*, a pilot study in which participants were invited to discuss the meaning of marriage, what makes for a satisfying and long-lasting marriage, and how such marriages can be promoted and supported.

We are also pleased to publish several pieces by distinguished external contributors which continue the edition's focus on 'families, divorce and family law'. Maureen Baker, Professor of Sociology at the University of Auckland, reviews the kinds of social policies that might best support sole mothers to re-enter the workforce after separation. Greta Sviggum, a Lecturer at Telemark College in Norway, and a Visiting Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies during 1999, gives an insight into the perspectives of children on their parents' separation. Patricia Noller and her colleagues from the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland round this out with a report of new research which examines adolescents' reactions to marital conflict.

In a thought provoking article, the Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, Justice Alistair Nicholson, provides the legal context of family law in this country, and Belinda Fehlberg, a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute, provides a comprehensive update on key changes in the area of family law – a useful review in the light of the many changes before Parliament or anticipated for introduction. An interesting piece on the legal recognition of gay and lesbian families by Jenni Millbank, of the Law Faculty of the University of Sydney, comprises our *Opinion* column in this issue.

All these themes relating to 'families, divorce and family law' are drawn together in a clear and succinct discussion and overview (pp. 3-5) by Institute Research Fellow Grania Sheehan, who compiled this special edition, and Belinda Fehlberg, Head of the Institute's *Family and Marriage Program*.

Families and social policy reform

In a speech at the National Press Club on 29 September 1999, Senator Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Family and Community Services, announced that social policy would be a major reform priority of the Howard Government. Senator Newman announced the formation of a Reference Group on Welfare Reform to assist the Government to develop a Green Paper on welfare reform. The Chair of this group is Mr Patrick McClure (CEO of Mission Australia).

The Australian Institute of Family Studies has sought to contribute to informed discussion on this very important policy issue. The theme of the last, special edition of *Family Matters* was 'families, welfare and social policy' with contributions from both Australian and international sources, and the Institute has also made a Submission to the Reference Group.

The Interim Report of the Reference Group was released on Tuesday 28 March 2000. The Report is titled 'Participation Support for a More Equitable Society' and it provides a challenging presentation on how the current social support system could be the subject of fundamental reform. The Report envisages 'a major re-orientation of the disparate elements of the existing social support system to create a new approach which places greater emphasis on ensuring that all Australians are encouraged and supported to participate, as fully as possible, in economic and social life' (p. 4).

The Reference Group is keen to engage public views and encourage debate on the contents of the Interim Report to help formulate its final Report to the Government.

These issues are very important for Australian families as the future direction of the social protection system is debated and reformed. The Institute will be seeking to encourage debate on these issues at its conference in July 2000.

Stronger families and communities

On 16 April 2000 the Prime Minister and the Minister for Family and Community Services announced the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. The Strategy commits an additional \$240million over four years to prevention and early intervention initiatives including a Stronger Families Fund, parenting and relationship education, community leadership training, the development of volunteering, and expanding partnerships between public and private sectors.

The Strategy focuses on four areas particularly important to families and builds on the priorities announced by the Prime Minister in June 1999. The four areas are: early childhood and the needs of families with young children; strengthening marriage and family relationships; balancing work and family; and building community capacity. For more details see p. 58 of this issue.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies will be taking a close interest in these initiatives, as it has done with the National Families Strategy to date. The Institute will seek to continue to contribute through its own research activities and knowledge of Australian and overseas research and, where possible, assist in the assessment of the effectiveness of the policy initiatives.

Register now

Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

Sydney 24-26 July 2000

Calculating the costs of children

The Institute has recently released a new publication, *A Guide to Calculating the Costs of Children*. This is a ready reference source on research published in past issues of *Family Matters* in the area of the costs of children. It is a helpful source of material that outlines alternative approaches to this question. Research and analysis in this area has a long history. Seebohm Rowntree was struggling with these issues a hundred years ago in his study of poverty in York (published in 1901 under the title *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*). In Australia, the use of equivalence scales based on a 1954 New York study of the costs of families of different size and composition and housing tenure still determine the relative costs of children in the commonly used 'Henderson poverty line'. The publication by the Institute emphasises the complex conceptual and methodological issues involved in this area. (For details of other Institute publications see pp. 95-96 of this issue.)

Conference 2000

Plans are well under way for the 7th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference to be held at the Sydney Convention Centre, 24-26 July 2000. The title of the conference is *Family Futures: Issues in Research and Policy*. Keynote speakers have been confirmed and the conference program is now available. For details of the conference see the announcement in these pages.

Senior staffing

Dr Ann Sanson and Dr Belinda Fehlberg commenced with the Institute in January 2000 as Principal Research Fellows in charge respectively of the Children and Parenting Program and the Family and Marriage Program.

Dr Ian Winter, Principal Research Fellow in charge of the Family and Society Program at the Institute, has accepted promotion to the position of Research Director at the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. The process for filling this vacancy has commenced and the position has recently been advertised. Mr John Shelton, the Institute's Business Manager, has taken early retirement, and Dr Andrew Burbidge, Senior Research Fellow, has also left the Institute. I take the opportunity to thank John, Ian and Andrew for their contributions to the Institute over many years.

Sarah Hanton

Family futures: issues in research and policy

We invite you to register for the Seventh Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Family futures: issues in research and policy*. Join us at the Sydney Convention and Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour, Sydney, from Monday 24 July to Wednesday 26 July 2000.

The Conference 2000 program will generate thought-provoking presentations and discussions on issues that will shape the future of family policy in Australia. If you have a professional or personal interest in Australian family research, family services or family policy, this conference is for you.

Conference themes

The Institute's Conference 2000 Committee has selected more than one hundred papers for this year's program. Delegates will be able to choose from sessions, workshops and symposia on a wide range of topics addressing the three conference themes.

■ **Children and Parenting.** Sessions include the latest research on: the role of fathers in families; child abuse and protection; meeting the parenting needs of children in care . . . and more!

■ **Family and Marriage.** Sessions offer research and debate on topics including: co-parenting after divorce; strategies for supporting marriage

and family life; current directions in family law; responses to family violence . . . and more!

■ **Family and Society.** Delegates will be challenged by policy development and research in areas including: mutual obligation and the welfare state; family support services; perceptions of family; social capital and civil society; workplace flexibility and family . . . and more!

The full Conference 2000 program is available at the Institute's Web site: www.aifs.org.au/ or a printed version can be mailed to you by contacting the Institute at 300 Queen Street, Melbourne 3000.

Keynote speakers

Lawrence Mead is Professor of Politics at New York University where he teaches public policy and American politics. He is an internationally known writer on social policy issues, especially welfare and welfare reform, on work requirements in welfare, and on the implementation of welfare employment programs. His books include *Beyond Entitlement* (1986), *The New Politics of Poverty* (1992), and *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty* (1997).

Carol Smart has been Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK, since 1992 and is founding Director of the University's Centre for Research on Family, Kinship and Childhood. Her recent publications include *Family Fragments* (1999), *The 'New' Family* (1999), and *Objects of Concern: Children and Divorce* (1998).

Gillian Calvert is NSW's first Commissioner for Children and Young People. Previously she was the Director of the Office of Children and Young People in the NSW Cabinet Office; a Senior Policy Adviser to the Minister for Community Services; a Lecturer in Social Work; and a therapist working with troubled children. Her publications include: *Preventing Child Abuse: A National Strategy* (1993), and *The Practice of Child Protection: Current Australian Approaches* (1992).

Resgistration, travel, accommodation

Earlybird registrations (before 30 June 2000)
Full conference \$440.00 Single day \$220.00

Late registrations (after 1 July 2000)
Full conference \$462.00 Single day \$242.00

Conference dinner

A dinner will be held at *WatersEdge Restaurant* on Sydney Harbour on Tuesday 25 July. The cost of \$75.00 includes dinner, drinks, and the boat trip to the venue.

Travel and accommodation

Special arrangements have been made for conference delegates to receive discounts on air travel and accommodation. Please refer to your registration form for details.

Further information

For further information about Conference 2000 *Family futures: issues in research and policy*, including the conference program, registration form, and details of accommodation and travel, please contact the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 300 Queen Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, Australia. Phone (03) 9214 7888. Fax: (03) 9214 3839. Or visit the Institute's Web site at www.aifs.org.au/

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