

Director's report

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The year 2001 marks four anniversaries of relevance to the Institute. The first of course is the Centenary of Federation, and this provided the impetus for us to publish in this edition of *Family Matters* several feature articles that look back over 100 years of change affecting Australian families.

Less well known perhaps is that 2001 also marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Family Court of Australia, and the twenty-first birthday of the operation of the Australian Institute of Family Studies. We have taken the opportunity to publish a special feature on both of these organisations.

The fourth anniversary is that of the Centenary of the Australian Public Service. This event has been celebrated in various ways in the course of the year, with some

Commission, takes a thematic approach to "the ideas and the issues that have been central to the development of the Service over the last century". The Public Service Commissioner, Helen Williams, reminds us of the observation of the Spanish-American philosopher, George Santayana: "Progress, far from consisting of change, depends on retentiveness. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." Understanding "the journey" thus is important in "helping us to appreciate our roots, where we are now and how to build for the future" (p.v)

The Commonwealth's role in health is outlined in *Putting Life into Years* by Francesca Beddie, published this year by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. The Secretary of the Department, Andrew Podger, observes in the book: "Over the last 100 years Aus-

Celebrating some Australian

Departments and Agencies issuing special booklets, books and histories of much interest.

One hundred years of the public service

The Centenary of Treasury, 1901–2001: 100 Years of Public Service, by the Department of the Treasury, celebrates Treasury's "contribution to the life, the development and the growth of our nation" (p. iii). The Treasury was foreshadowed in the Federal Constitution, along with six other departments – Attorney-General's, Customs, Defence, External Affairs, Home Affairs, and Postmaster-General's. Treasury had an important historical role in social policy and administration, having responsibility for pensions and maternity allowances until 1941.

Serving the Nation: 100 Years of Public Service, published by the Public Service and Merit Protection

tralian have seen major improvements in their health, with increases in life expectancy, reductions in child mortality and more years of healthy living and so on. However, we must not be too self-congratulatory: there are problems we have not solved, and some we have neglected for too many years and still have not adequately addressed. Foremost amongst these is the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians." (p. 111)

In the introduction to this interesting book it is noted that: "If you had been born in 1900, you could expect to live until the age of 52 if you were a man, 55 if a woman. But you could have died from diarrhoea or enteritis before you were five; one in ten children did. You may never have known your mother – six women died in every one thousand live births. By the 1990s it was 11 in every 100,000 confinements. If your father had not been killed in a work accident, or caught tuberculosis or



pneumonia, he may have died from a heart attack. Today he is still likely to die of cardiovascular disease or cancer, especially if he was a smoker, but not until the age of 70. In the early 1900s, your brother might have died in a horse accident. By the 1970s, he was more likely to be killed in a car crash, and by the end of the century it was suicide that was claiming many young male lives. Over the century, advances in science and in the health-care system substantially increased the chances that Australians would live out the natural span of a human being's life. A boy born in 1996 can expect to live for 74 years and a girl for 81; they can also expect a healthy old age with access to high-quality care." (p. 1)

The Department of Family and Community Services has also produced a book, this one entitled *Foundations for the*

m i l e s t o n e s

Future: Celebrating the Centenary of Federation. As the Secretary of the Department, Dr David Rosalky, notes in his Foreword, the publication celebrates "the achievements of staff, past and present and acknowledges their hard work and innovation". He also notes that: "The development of social protection for Australians has a diverse and rich history – one very worthy of celebration in the context of the Centenary of Federation and the Australian Public Service".

This book includes the observation: "Federation has meant not only the formation of a nation but also the beginning of a national system of care for its citizens. Australia has been a pioneer in providing social and community services, reflecting its fundamental egalitarian belief in the right of all to a fair go." (p. 5)

History of social protection

The history of social protection in Australia is indeed interesting, with significant changes having occurred over the last 100 years.¹ At the turn of the century there was no social security system in Australia. Charitable relief was provided to needy people by voluntary organisations, in some cases with the assistance of government grants.

The Commonwealth of Australia was formed on 1 January 1901 by federation of the six states under a written constitution that, among other things, authorised the new Commonwealth Parliament to legislate in respect of age and invalid pensions. The Commonwealth exercised this power in June 1908 when legislation was passed that provided for the introduction of means-tested flat-rate age and invalid pensions, financed from the government's general revenue. The new pensions came into operation in July 1909 (age pensions) and December 1910 (invalid pensions). This established a form of social security support and a set of terms and conditions that remained the basis for social security in Australia throughout the century.

A number of milestones then established the spread of the welfare state that we know today. Here is but a selection of the key measures that were introduced to form the basic building blocks in social protection:

1912	Maternity allowance
1941	Department of Social Services began to function as a separate organisation
1941	Child Endowment
1942	Widows Pensions
1942	Commonwealth assumes full responsibility for Income Tax
1943	Funeral Benefits
1945	Unemployment and Sickness Benefits
1946	Referendum passed enabling the Commonwealth Parliament to make laws with respect to "the provision of maternity allowances, widows pensions, child endowment, unemployment, pharmaceutical, sickness and hospital benefits, medical and dental services (but not so as to authorise any form of civil conscription), and benefits to students and family allowances"
1947	A consolidated Social Security Act
1950	Child Endowment extended to the first child
1969	Pensions Means Test liberalised
1972	Department of Social Security established
1973	Supporting Mothers Benefit
1976	Family Allowances
1977	Supporting Parents Benefit (extending assistance to male sole parents)

This expansion and consolidation of the social security system led to a system that provides a wide range of cash payments that cover all the major contingencies of life.

In the article "Families and Income Security: Changing Patterns of Social Security and Related Policy Issues" in this issue of *Family Matters*, Peter Whiteford, David Stanton and Matthew Gray outline the development of policies in Australia that have the objective of providing income security to families with children. At various times the objectives of these programs have included contributing to the cost of bearing and raising children and redistributing resources over the life cycle, alleviating child poverty and boosting low family earnings, promoting capacity within the tax system, redistributing within families, and relieving unemployment and low income traps.

The article discusses the Australian system of support for families with children and focuses on child-related income supplements and those income support payments provided to families with children. The main historical developments are described and the major factors underpinning these changes are identified.

The authors outline potential lessons from Australia's experiences with assisting families with children over the



last century. The Australian system provides integrated payments for families receiving income support and those in low-paid employment. It has achieved high levels of take-up and has contributed to very substantial reductions in child poverty over the last decade or so. But the system has become increasingly complex and has resulted in high effective marginal tax rates for a substantial proportion of families with children. The reforms to the system over the last 25 years illustrate the continuing tensions between the differing objectives of family assistance.

The Australian experience highlights the trade-offs between universality and selectivity, the advantages and disadvantages of targeting, alternative means of delivering payments to families, and the problems of complexity and the continuing search for simplicity and ease of understanding.

Recording family change

When Australia was colonised “as an economic means of disposing of felons”, the British Government insisted that comprehensive records be maintained and reports prepared (Year Book of Australia, 2001: xxvii). Indeed, it has been noted that “a gaol requires the careful counting and identification of prisoners” (Year Book, Australia, 1988: 2). In 1822 an annual reporting system was established, called the “Blue Books” (blue on account of the colour of the report cover), involving the preparation of annual statistical returns of the Australian colonies to the Colonial Office.

From such beginnings we can see the importance given to data gathering and analysis in Australia, and all this eventually led to the establishment of the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics and the highly professional national statistical service we have today in the Australian Bureau of Statistics. I can recall consulting the Blue Books for Western Australia (that commenced in 1834) as a young Statistics Cadet in the 1960s – they were held under lock and key and any access was very much under the close scrutiny of the Librarian!

Australian families have indeed changed dramatically over the last 100 years. Ruth Weston and colleagues at the Institute give an overview of some of the key statistical trends in their article on “Australian Families in Transition: An Analysis of Socio-demographic Trends”. Over the 20th century the


their relationships, “Starting Out Together Through Cohabitation or Marriage”. Family formation patterns have changed considerably in the last few decades. Although the majority of people still get married, marriage rates have declined. Those who enter into marriage do so later in life, often having cohabited with their partner before marrying.

Michael Gilding from Swinburne University of Technology gives an insightful overview of how families have changed in the last 100 years in Australia in terms of family structure and values. In his article “Changing Families in Australia 1901–2001”, he notes that in the public sphere there is a history of “moral panics” and anxieties around the family, and he discusses the sense that family structure “has gone a full circle – from diverse families, to nuclear families, and back to diverse families again – a view that emphasises the ebb and flow of family relationships”. Michael Gilding’s article is a valuable contribution, for in order to understand where the family is heading, it helps to know whence it has come.

Ann Sanson and Sarah Wise from the Institute discuss emerging views on childhood, child development and the role of parents. As opportunities for informal learning from extended family have decreased, so parenting books and programs seem to have proliferated. Their article, “Children and Parenting: The Last Hundred Years”, reflects on the determinants and practice of child rearing in Australia over the past century. The beliefs surrounding childhood and child development, as well as the social context in which child rearing takes place, are examined.

The article concludes with the observation that: “Parents’ capacity to fulfil their responsibilities depends upon the provision of family support, education, opportunities for employment, and protection from poverty, as well as the recognition that the task of rearing the next generation is a difficult but rewarding and highly valued one.”

Adam Tomison, the Research Adviser for the National Child Protection Clearinghouse at the Institute, gives an interesting overview of the history of child protection and efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect in his article: “A History of Child Protection: Back to the Future”. In the last 50 years, in particular, the mistreatment of children has created ongoing, widespread public concern. This in turn has led to the development of government and



Australian population increased more than five-fold in size, changed from youthful to ageing, and from Anglo-Celtic to multi-cultural in its make-up. Living standards have improved and life expectancy has been increased by about 20 years. The article focuses on the changing patterns of common family transitions – young adults leaving home, the formation of partnerships, having children, divorcing, and re-partnering.

The transitions being experienced in Australia are common to many other western societies. These transitions include a post World War II marriage and baby boom, followed by a fall in marriage rates, a retreat from early marriage and childbirth, growth in women’s labour force participation, and increases in childlessness, ex-nuptial births, cohabitation, and divorce. The proportions of single-person, couple-only and sole-parent households have increased, while the proportion of couple parents with children has decreased.

Also in this edition, Institute researchers Lixia Qu and Ruth Weston examine in some detail how couples start

non-government services designed to protect children from harm and to prevent the occurrence of maltreatment.

It is also fitting at this time of heightened historical perspectives to give some focus to long-lasting marriages. Some marriages dissolve in a relatively short space of time while others can go on for 75 years or more and still support vibrant and happy relationships. In her article “Making Marriages Last”, Institute researcher Robyn Parker emphasises that the Three Cs – “commitment, communication and conflict management” – seem to be at the heart of a “successful” marriage. For older couples marriage was also a constant at a time of great economic and societal change, while for young people it seems change itself is one of life’s few constants. Two decades of divorce seem to have instilled in the younger generation a wariness of marriage, and a lack of willingness to commit to a partner. The author emphasises that older married couples may be good role models that can support and enrich younger marriages in many ways.

This issue of *Family Matters* also contains an article on “Understanding Community Strengths” by Wendy Stone and Jody Hughes of the Institute. With much discussion on the need to promote stronger communities in recent years, the authors debate whether existing theory can provide an overall framework for achieving and identifying strong communities. The concepts of social cohesion and social exclusion are considered to provide useful theoretical frameworks of relevance in Australia.

Family Court celebrates 25 years

As well as celebrating the century of Australia as a federation, it is also the first 25 years of the Family Court of Australia.² The Family Law Act which established the Family Court of Australia came into operation on 5 January 1976, having received the Royal Assent in June 1975. The Chief Justice of the Court, the Hon. Alastair Nicholson, has noted that: “The Act’s passage was controversial and the legislation remains so today, marriage breakdown being a topic that understandably stirs up deeply held emotions at an individual and societal level” (*Courtside*, July 2001: 1).

The Attorney-General, the Hon. Daryl Williams, emphasises that over the last 25 years “the Court has undertaken the difficult, and at times thankless, task of providing a responsive and compassionate service to Australian families in distress” (*Courtside* July 2001: 3). It was indeed a landmark change to have no-fault divorce introduced in Australia.

In recognition of the Family Court’s 25th anniversary, we are pleased to publish in this edition the reflections of Justice John Fogarty on the background and events leading up to the Family Law Act in 1975, and the establishment and early years of operation of the newly created Court.

Justice Fogarty writes from personal experience of many of these pivotal events, for he was appointed to the Family Court at its inception in 1976 and has had a distinguished career in Family Law. He was Chair of the Family Law Council and was also closely involved in the evaluation of the Child Support Scheme in the early 1990s through his chairmanship of the Child Support Evaluation Advisory Group. Justice Fogarty was also a Board member of the Australian Institute of Family Studies from 1986 to 1990, and Presiding Member from 1987 to 1990.

The coming about and operation of the Institute

As Catherine Rosenbrock relates in this edition’s special anniversary article, “The Australian Institute of Family Studies: The First Twenty-One Years”, the Institute was itself a creature of the Family Law Act 1975 (section XIVA of the Act), and the Institute came into existence on 28 February 1980 with Don Edgar as the foundation Director. This year is therefore the 21st year of operation of the Institute.

As this article testifies, the Institute has certainly made a significant contribution to public and policy understanding of the changing nature of Australian families. It has identified factors affecting family stability and wellbeing, and has highlighted the impacts of social and demographic change, as well as government policies, on families. In so doing, it has played an important role in the formulation of policy, particularly in the area of child support.

Institute’s contribution recorded

Since its inception in 1980, the Institute has made a major contribution to research evidence and policy debate on the

family in Australia. The Institute has published material in its widely distributed and popular flagship magazine *Family Matters*, and via its books and monographs, its Research Papers, Research Reports, Working Papers, Briefing Papers, and Conference Papers, and in external journals and edited collections.

To mark twenty-one years of key research, the Institute has released a bibliography of all material it has published. Compiled from the Institute’s *Australian Family & Society Abstracts* database by Deborah Whithear, the bibliography is entitled *Collected Works 1980–2001*. The volume is testament to the Institute’s research involvement in virtually every aspect of interest concerning families – from issues to do with children and adolescents through to the aged, and material relating to family formation, families and the law, marriage and re-partnering, families and society, and family policy.

With more than 2000 citations, this volume should provide an extremely interesting and useful reference work and source for researchers, policy advisers, practitioners and others when undertaking research and analysis on the Australian family.

A time to reflect

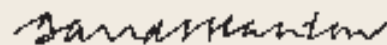
As the Institute’s 21st year draws to a close, this is an appropriate time to reflect upon the Institute’s performance against the expectations held of it, to examine how it has developed, and to look forward to what might be achieved in the future.

Such a review of the past activities and contribution of the Institute cannot afford to be self-satisfied or self-indulgent as we face up to the next phase of our Strategic Planning (including a new Research Plan) for the coming three years.

Together with the Institute’s Board we will be seeking to continue to develop and refine our planning to ensure the work of the Institute is relevant and challenging, and continues to make a contribution to informed debate on issues affecting families.

In her article on “Emerging Research Issues”, the Institute’s Deputy Director (Research), Associate Professor Ann Sanson, has raised some possible areas of priority for future research activity at the Institute. A critical issue will be the need to reflect on emerging policy issues and seek to identify how we might be able to best contribute our social science research expertise to informed policy debate. Ann has raised important issues to do with “diversity”, “change” and “work and family”. Our readers will no doubt have areas that they would see as of critical priority, and we would welcome their input as we seek to further refine our research agenda.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to wish readers of *Family Matters*, and all those who follow the activities of the Institute, seasons greetings and very best wishes for a safe and happy new year.



Endnotes

- 1 See Pamela Roberts and Andrew Herscovitch, *History of Australian Social Security*, *Social Security Journal*, December 1990, pp.1-5, and David Stanton and Bob Daprè, “Financing Social Security Pensions: The Australian Experience”, *Research Paper No.68*, Department of Social Security, AGPS, Canberra, July 1995.
- 2 See *Courtside: 25th Anniversary Edition*, July 2001, Family Court of Australia; A. Nicholson and M. Harrison, “Family Law and the Family Court of Australia: Experiences of the First 25 Years”, *Melbourne University Law Review*, Vol.24, 2000, pp.756-783.