

Acting Director's report

A N N S A N S O N



New Principal Research Fellow for Institute

I am pleased to announce that *Michael Alexander* has accepted the position of Principal Research Fellow heading the Family and Society research program at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. He takes over the program following Dr Matthew Gray's acceptance of an appointment at the Australian National University (see last edition of *Family Matters*, no. 67, Autumn 2004).

Michael is a labour economist who has worked for both state and federal government departments and several universities. His work to date has had a workplace focus, and he was part of the research team that designed, collected and analysed the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey. His most recent publication is *The Price of Feminised Jobs: New Evidence on the Gender Pay Gap in Australia*, published by Labour and Industry (December 1999).



Michael Alexander

Michael has joined us from Industrial Relations Victoria where he was responsible for research development and labour market analysis.

Michael started at the Institute on 20 July 2004. The Board of Management and members of staff join me in welcoming Michael to the Institute.

Farewell to Adam Tomison

On 27 May 2004 the Institute farewelled *Dr Adam Tomison* who has taken up a position as Director of Research (Population and Evaluation) in the Northern Territory's Office of Aboriginal Health, Family and Social Policy.

Adam was appointed in 1995 as Research Advisor to the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, then newly located at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Adam conducted high quality research in the area of child maltreatment, and he produced a substantial number of valuable reports on the state of

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INSTITUTE PRESENCE ON NEW CHILD SUPPORT MINISTERIAL TASKFORCE

In response to the House of Representatives Committee on Family and Community Affairs Inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Larry Anthony, recently announced the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce to conduct a comprehensive re-evaluation of the Child Support Scheme. This evaluation is the first major review in almost a decade.

Institute Research Fellow, *Bruce Smyth*, is one of eight members of the Taskforce. Former Institute researcher, *Mathew Gray*, is also a member, while former Institute Director, *David Stanton*, is Deputy Chair. The Chair of the Taskforce is *Patrick Parkinson*, a professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Sydney.

The Taskforce will evaluate research, debate policy issues and propose practical options for change. It will be supported by a Reference Group comprising a mix of experts, stakeholders, and interest groups. More information about the terms of reference, and membership of the Taskforce and Reference Group can be found at: www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/content/child_suppt_min_taskforce_ref_group.htm

child abuse prevention in Australia. Under Adam's leadership, the Clearinghouse has developed into a centre for excellence with a national and international reputation in the field of child abuse prevention and child protection. Adam also played a valuable role in the development of two other Institute-based projects – the Stronger Families Learning Exchange, and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault.

Adam was a highly regarded colleague, and we appreciated his commitment and enthusiasm. The Board of Management and members of staff join me in wishing Adam all the very best in the future, and we look forward to a continuing association with him.

Changes at the Family Court

At this time of farewells, I would like to take the opportunity to mark the retirement of *Chief Justice Alistair Nicholson* after 16 years at the helm of the Family Court of Australia. His proactive stewardship of the court through times of great change has ensured a vigorous contribution by the Court to the debate on issues of concern in family jurisprudence.

We welcome the appointment of *Diana Bryant* as his successor. Like Elizabeth Evatt, who was the first Chief Justice of the Family Court (and the first woman to head any court in Australia), Ms Bryant, before her current appointment, also headed a newly constituted federal court – the Federal Magistrate's Court – in 2000. This followed a distinguished career in the practice of family law both in Western Australia and Victoria.

Congratulations are also in order for the Presiding Member of the Institute's Board of Management, *Dianne Gibson*, who recently took up the position of Principal Mediator at the National Support Office of the Family Court. Previously the National Director of Relationships Australia, Dianne first became directly involved with the Institute's Board in 2000.

Given the historic ties linking the Court and the Institute (both having been established under the *Family Law Act 1975*), we applaud these two appointments and look forward to a continuing strong collaborative partnership with the Court.

Institute presence at international conferences

Institute researchers have presented a number of papers at important international conferences in the last two months.

In April 2004, *Ruth Weston and I* were honoured to be invited to attend the *East Asian Ministerial Forum on Families*, co-hosted by the Australian and Vietnamese governments, and attended by ministers and delegations from 12 countries in the East Asian region, along with representatives from around one dozen international and non-government organisations (see Ruth Weston's report on the forum on page 60 of this edition).

In June 2004, *Ruth Weston, Christine Milkward and Jody Hughes* each presented papers on Institute research on work and family issues at the international conference, *Work-Life Balance Across the Lifecourse*, hosted by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships in Edinburgh (see also page 57 of this edition).

Also in June 2004, I gave a keynote address at the *Parent Child 2004* Conference in London, organised by the UK National Family and Parenting Institute. The paper, drawing from the Institute's collaboration with Crime Prevention Victoria, drew considerable interest from researchers and the media.

In July 2004, two Institute researchers were among about 1300 delegates from over 30 countries attending the meeting of the *International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development* (ISSBD), held in Ghent, Belgium. At this meeting I co-convened a symposium on national longitudinal studies at which the Growing Up in Australia study and UK Millennium Cohort Study were discussed, and Sarah Wise reported on two Institute studies – the Child Care Choices and Children and Family Life studies (see also page 56 of this edition).

Institute to host major conference in 2006

An additional reason for our presence at the ISSBD meeting was that the Institute in conjunction with the University of Melbourne has won the privilege of hosting the next meeting of the Society, in July 2006 in Melbourne. This is a major conference on development over the life-span and the Melbourne ISSBD meeting will provide a fantastic opportunity to showcase the Institute's research, and Australian research more generally, to the world. We are already working with a local (Melbourne-based) and a national organising committee, which comprise representatives from many universities and professional organisations across Australia, to ensure that this conference will be an outstanding success. Stand by for further news on our Melbourne ISSBD conference in future issues of *Family Matters*.

Institute conference 2005

Speaking of conferences, planning is well underway for the Institute's next biennial conference, entitled "Families Matter", to be held in Melbourne on 9–11 February 2005. The conference provides a wonderful opportunity for researchers, policy makers and family service providers to discuss a wide range of family issues. Further information is available on the following pages of this edition, and from the conference link at the Institute's website www.aifs.gov.au.

"Being young" and other articles in this issue

I hope this issue of *Family Matters* will provide material of interest and value to all our readers. As usual, contributions are authored by both Institute researchers and external authors.

While the coverage of this edition of *Family Matters* is diverse, its main theme is the development and wellbeing of youth in Australia today. Adolescence is often seen as a time of *sturm und drang*, but it is notable that the papers in this edition that relate to the developmental periods of adolescence and early adulthood are taking a much more even-handed approach, acknowledging young people's strengths and wellbeing as well as the complexity of adolescents' lives these days and some of the challenges they face.

The issue also presents: a timely paper addressing one of the complex issues arising from technological advances in genetic testing – the trend for men to seek genetic testing to determine the paternity of children; an analysis of the Institute's Family and Work Decisions study data; an opinion piece on the phenomenon of "date rape" and lessons to be learned from how it has been treated in the United States; and a consideration of some of the implications of the family-related measures contained in the federal Budget brought down in May this year.

Farewell

This will be my last *Family Matters* report as Acting Director. When I came to the Institute in 1999, I was given a three-year secondment from the Department of Psychology at the University of Melbourne. This was extended to four and a half years once I took on the role of Deputy Director, and later Acting Director. It is now time for me to return to the University.

My time at the Institute has been stimulating, challenging and busy. I will miss it, but will remain very grateful for the privilege of working with so many dedicated, generous and talented colleagues, and for the unfailing support of the staff and the Board of Management through some unsettled times.

At a time when families are so high on the national policy agenda, the Institute's vision – to be a centre of excellence for research and information on family wellbeing – has never been so pertinent. I am confident that the Institute will continue to flourish in fulfilling this vision.



Professor Alan Hayes

APPOINTMENT OF NEW INSTITUTE DIRECTOR

Just as this issue of *Family Matters* was going to press, we received the welcome announcement that *Professor Alan Hayes* has accepted the invitation to be the new permanent Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Announcing the appointment on 29 July 2004, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator the Hon Kay Patterson, said that Professor Hayes would take up the position on 9 September 2004 for a period of five years.

Senator Patterson said: "Professor Hayes will bring with him a wealth of experience and knowledge across the areas of families and children."

"The Institute's research on families is important and highly valued", Senator Patterson said, "and Professor Hayes' passion for this area and his undoubted skills will be a great advantage to the ongoing success of the Institute."

The appointment is welcome news indeed. Alan has been a friend of the Institute for many years, and has been a member of the Institute's Board of Management since July 2000. He has strong credentials both as a researcher and as an administrator. He is currently Professor of Early Childhood Studies and Dean of the Australian Centre for Educational Studies, a division of Macquarie University, Sydney, as well as the Chair of the Australian Council for Children and Parenting.

I have every confidence that the Institute will thrive under his leadership.

For the brief period before Professor Hayes takes up his position, *Ms Denise Swift* will act as Director. Denise also knows the Institute and its work well, having held appointments within the Department of Family and Community Services and having managed many programs relevant to the work of the Institute. The Institute will thus be in very safe hands during this hand-over period.

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