

# Director's report

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This issue focuses on Indigenous children, families and communities. As such, it is consistent with the commitment to an increased focus on research with Indigenous families, as outlined in the Institute's *Research Plan (2006-2008)*. The contributions that make this an especially rich *Family Matters* include those by Ms Josephine Akee, an Indigenous Family Liaison Officer with the Family Court of Australia; Dr Sue Gordon, AM, a Magistrate with the Children's Court of Western Australia and Chair of the National Indigenous Council; and Professor Mick Dodson, AM, a member of the Yawuru peoples who is Professor and Chairperson of the Australian National University's Institute for Indigenous Australia, and Chairman of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. The topics addressed are highly relevant to research, policy and practice at this time of change, challenge and opportunity within and beyond the nation's Indigenous communities. The genesis of this issue came from Dr Matthew Gray and I acknowledge with gratitude his great work as Executive Editor in bringing this important issue of *Family Matters* to fruition.

## Web activity

Along with the pleasing expansion of our research program, the growth in the use of the Institute's websites has been remarkable (see Box below). The Institute is currently responsible for seven websites. These are the Institute's main site, four sites for clearinghouses (the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault, the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, and the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse), and two sites for our major longitudinal research projects (*Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children*, and the Australian Temperament Project).

## Clearinghouse developments

Just as the established websites are showing very strong growth in usage, the two new sites are developing well. The Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) and the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) websites were established in October 2005 and September 2006 and have already registered 42,578 and 18,106 downloads, respectively.

Each of the Clearinghouse websites is designed to respond to the information needs of particular stakeholder groups. For example, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse caters to the needs of researchers and professionals working in the fields of child abuse prevention and child protection; the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault provides

## Web statistics 2005-2006

Statistics for website use show an increase in both hits and pages downloaded in 2006, compared with 2005. Overall, the increases were 18 per cent for hits and 15 per cent for pages downloaded with 8,609,785 hits and 2,895,715 downloads, respectively

As downloads of web pages or documents are a more accurate indication of actual use, the following are downloads for the 12 months to 30 November 2006 and the percentage increase on the previous year:

Main site – 1,358,854 (+7 %); Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) – 229,583 (+24%); National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC) – 703,104 (+16%); and, *Growing Up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* – 90,885 (+33%).

access to current information and resources to assist those working to prevent sexual assault; the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia primarily supports those involved in initiatives funded under the Australian Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy; and the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse collects and delivers the latest relevant research and best practice to family relationship service providers and practitioners.

The National Child Protection Clearinghouse continues to extend its information and advisory service with presentations last year to a range of fora including community-based events, national workshops, research seminars and conferences.

Dr Zoë Morrison, Manager of the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) and her staff have also been very active in presenting the work of the Centre widely as well as providing expert commentary on issues such as the 'Werribee assault DVD' ([www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/abuse-its-now-entertainment/2006/10/27/1161749313111.html](http://www.theage.com.au/news/opinion/abuse-its-now-entertainment/2006/10/27/1161749313111.html)).

Staff of the Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia (CAFCA) continue to extend the website, with regular postings on the 'e-evaluate' discussion list, the establishment of a password protected extranet for local evaluators and the launch of the website for the Promising Practice Profiles. In December CAFCA co-hosted with the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) a workshop that explored existing research and evaluation projects in Indigenous early childhood. The second Stronger Families and Communities Strategies (SFCS) Evaluator's National Newsletter was published and distributed in July 2006.

## New partnerships and collaborations

### Disability Carers

The Caring for a Family Member with a Disability Project is being conducted in collaboration with staff from the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). Fieldwork is now complete, with 1,000 carers surveyed and analysis currently underway. In addition to the collaboration with the Disability and Carers Branch of FaCSIA, the interview schedule was developed in consultation with experts from the university sector, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the disability support sector.

### Magellan Project

Another key collaboration that commenced in 2006 involves the Family Court of Australia. The Institute has been commissioned by the Court to examine the effectiveness of the 'Magellan' case management system for responding to residence and contact disputes involving serious allegations of violence. The Magellan system consists of a team of judges, registrars and mediators who handle the cases from start to finish, with significant resources directed to the case in the early stages (including uncapped legal aid for those who qualify) with the aim of resolving cases within 6 months. The evaluation seeks to compare cases subjected to the Magellan process with comparable cases from another jurisdiction without Magellan in place.

### Staff Exchange

In addition to the productive collaboration between staff from the Department of Families, Communities and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) and the Institute to work on the Disability and Carers Project, I am pleased to announce an

exchange of staff involving the secondment of one of the Institute's General Managers (Human Resources and External Relations), *Catherine Rosenbrock*, to work with the FaCSIA Victorian State Office, for a period of 12 months. This will afford a valuable opportunity for Ms Rosenbrock to broaden her management and leadership experience in a larger policy and program setting. In her place, *Boris Kaspiév* will be seconded to the Institute from FaCSIA for a year. He brings substantial experience related to internal and external communications, human resources and strategic planning.

#### **Memorandum of Understanding**

A significant collaborative relationship was cemented in December with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This will enable both Institutes to share information and expertise and, in addition to undertaking collaborative research projects in areas such as family well-being and child protection, staff exchange possibilities will be actively pursued.

#### **Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children**

Wave 2 data collection took place last year, with a very pleasing response rate (around 90%). This rate of response is a credit to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, its teams of field data collectors, and of course, the 10,000 families at the heart of the study.

The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) has confirmed funding for the next 'between waves' mail-out (Wave 2.5). An important function of the between waves mail-out is to maintain contact with families in order to ensure that the high level of response is maintained. It also enables us to obtain further data on children's development and other aspects of their life. Additional data will be gathered for children in both cohorts on Child Support patterns and the impact of the 'Welfare to Work' reform.

Finally, the development of content for Wave 3 of the study is well underway. Proposed content for Wave 3 has been reviewed in terms of the relevance to child outcomes and developmental stage.

#### **Recent work in the East Asia Region**

The Institute's involvement with countries in the East Asia Region has intensified over the last two years. In addition to our hosting visits from several delegations in the region, staff at the Institute joined with members of FaCSIA to assist in

the design of Vietnam's first National Families Survey, undertaken last year by the Vietnam Commission for Population, Family and Children (VCPFC). The Institute will continue to support this important study by providing advice on statistical analysis and preparation of the report.

In August, *Diana Smart* provided a keynote paper on child, family, peer and school factors for adolescents' antisocial behaviour at the *Family Scholars Colloquium*, "Protecting and Strengthening the Family: Challenges and Opportunities" in Kuala Lumpur. The colloquium was organised by the Department of Women, Family and Community Development, Malaysia and the Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.

In September, *Dr Matthew Gray* presented a paper (co-authored with *Lixia Qu* and *Ruth Weston*) on fertility and family policy in Australia at the Policy Forum on Low Fertility and Ageing Society, held in Seoul, Korea. The paper was very well received and has already been published in the conference proceedings. (More detailed reports on each of these initiatives in the East Asia Region appear later in this issue).

#### **New Governance arrangements**

As previous reports have indicated, last year was a time of major change for the Institute and its governance. As part of those changes, a Risk Assessment and Audit Committee (RAAC) has now been established. Its first meeting took place late last year. The Charter outlines the operational requirements, policies and procedures for the Committee. To provide continuity, I was pleased that *Ms Angela MacRae*, the chair of the previous Audit, Finance and Administration Committee of the then Board of Management, agreed to chair the inaugural meeting of the Risk Assessment and Audit Committee.

#### **Final thoughts**

2007 brings another milestone for the Institute with our move to new premises. It will be a year of further expansion of our research program, particularly in the family relationships and family law areas. There is a crucial need for better information on the pathways Australian relationships take and the factors that make some vulnerable and others resilient. Given our extensive experience in longitudinal research, the Institute is well placed to contribute to such work. As such, in 2007 we extend our commitment to research and dissemination that benefits all Australian families.



### **The Institute on the move!**

After 20 years at our Queen Street location, the Institute moved in late February to new premises in La Trobe Street, Melbourne. These offer a slightly larger area and the capacity to house the Institute on two contiguous floors. They also offer better facilities in a building that meets our current needs and likely future growth.

The process of moving has involved a great deal of planning and effort by all staff. I would like to register my great appreciation of the spirit in which all have worked to prepare for this major relocation. I would also gratefully acknowledge the support in facilitating our relocation of the Australian Government and its Departments of Families, Communities and Indigenous Affairs; Finance and Administration; and Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Our new postal address is

**Australian Institute of Family Studies  
Level 20 485 La Trobe Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000**

The Institute's telephone and facsimile numbers remain unchanged, as do our email and Internet addresses.