



The global financial crisis makes these particularly uncertain times, and its ramifications and impacts on the economy are both extensive and difficult to foresee. Such a climate of uncertainty places extra stresses on many, while galvanising the resilience of others. Given the likely challenges that many will therefore face over the coming years, the working title of our next three-year Research Plan, "Sustaining Families", has added poignancy. The work completed under the Institute's current Research Plan places us in a good position to contribute evidence that informs policy decisions in these challenging times.

Research news

The Institute has published research on a range of issues since the last edition of *Family Matters*, including in the areas of family relationships and mental illness, social inclusion, sexual assault and adults with a disability, return to work after childbearing and child protection. We continue to explore these topics and more in accordance with our Research Plan.

Development of next Research Plan 2009–12

The current Research Plan, *Families Through Life: Diversity, Change and Context*, covered the period from 2006 to 2008. Historically, the plan has been based on the calendar year. However, the next Research Plan will be aligned with the financial year reporting cycle of the Institute's *Annual Report* and so will be for the period 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2012.

In order to ensure that the Institute's research continues to be meet the needs of all stakeholders, the development of the next Research Plan will involve an extensive program of consultations, including with: Australian government agencies, state/territory government departments, local governments, the education sector, professionals in the family services sector, community organisations and non-government organisations. Consultations will be

undertaken in a number of states and territories (with some taking place in regional centres).

New insights into school readiness

Recent analyses of data from *Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)* cast new light on some of the challenges confronting families and their young children. They indicate, for example, that while social class differences are not evident in early infancy, by the time a child is 6 or 7 years old, their parents' social position will start to influence their own achievements. Neighbourhood social status has broad effects on children's development prior to school entry, especially for boys, in terms of their social and emotional development.

Work completed for the Smith Family, a major not-for-profit organisation, clearly shows the extent to which the financial position of families powerfully influences their children's readiness for school. Collectively, these new results further demonstrate the value of longitudinal studies such as LSAC. The report, *Home-to-School Transitions for Financially Disadvantaged Children*, was published by the Smith Family in November 2008.

Conferences and seminars

AIFS Conference 2008

The 10th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Families Through Life*, was held 9–11 July at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre. A capacity audience of nearly 500 delegates attended the event, which was sponsored by the ANZ Bank and supported by the Australian Government departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet; Attorney-General's; Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Yvonne Paulke

Yvonne Paulke has worked at the Institute in a variety of capacities since mid-2007 but has recently been appointed Executive Manager (Accountability and Reporting). Before joining the Institute, Yvonne was an organisational management and leadership consultant for 12 years. In this role, she worked on a wide range of projects both large and small in both government and non-government organisations throughout Australia and overseas. Yvonne's background is primarily in education, having worked with the Victorian Department of Education as a teacher, a school leader, a curriculum and

leadership consultant and policy developer. She has also been a lecturer and course developer in the field of education.

Yvonne has completed a range of postgraduate studies in education, law and languages. She has travelled extensively and lived in Japan for 3 years, where she worked in a voluntary capacity supporting international postgraduate study for women through an extensive scholarship program.

Yvonne is a valuable addition to the team, ensuring that the Institute meets its legislative and reporting obligations, developing associated procedures and managing its contracts.

Following the welcome to country by Aunty Doreen Garvey-Wandin, Senior Elder of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nations, the conference was officially opened by the Member for Jagajaga and Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Jenny Macklin.

The Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, the Hon. Diana Bryant, chaired the first keynote presentation by Professor Andrew Cherlin, Professor of Sociology and Public Policy, Department of Sociology, Johns Hopkins University, Maryland, USA. The address compared and contrasted relationship trends in the US and Australia. I was honoured to chair the second keynote address, which was presented by Ruth Weston, PSM, General Manager (Research) at the Institute, and explored demographic and social trends affecting Australian families. The Reverend the Hon. Professor Brian Howe, AO, Centre for Public Policy, Department of Political Science, University of Melbourne, chaired the third keynote address by Professor Peter Whiteford, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, and previously with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The address explored social policy approaches across the OECD. The three keynote addresses were very well received and stimulated considerable discussion among delegates.

Two panel sessions were a feature of the conference. The Social Inclusion Panel was chaired by Richard Aedy, host of the ABC Radio National program *Life Matters*. Panel members included: Rhonda Parker, Office of Aged Care Quality and Compliance, Department of Health and Ageing; Chief Federal Magistrate John Pascoe, AO, Federal Magistrates Court of Australia; Muriel Bamblett, AM, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC); Tony Nicholson, Brotherhood of St Laurence; and Serena Wilson, Social Policy Division, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Institute's Deputy Director (Research), Dr Matthew Gray, chaired the second panel on Work and Family. The panelists included Dr Willem Adema,

OECD; Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner and Commissioner responsible for Age Discrimination; Susie Babani, Group Managing Director, Human Resources, ANZ Bank; and Sharan Burrow, Australian Council of Trade Unions.

Feedback on the conference was very positive and I thank all staff of the Institute who contributed so massively to ensuring its success. It has set a very high bar for our next event to be held in 2010!

Dorothy Scott seminar

On 11 September, I was delighted to host an AIFS seminar by Professor Dorothy Scott, Foundation Chair in Child Protection and the Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia. The seminar, *Think Child, Think Family, Think Community: Building the Capacity of Adult Services to Respond to the Needs of Vulnerable Children*, was held during NAPCAN's National Child Protection Week 2008. This was a major event in the AIFS Seminar Series calendar and was held at the State Library of Victoria Conference Centre Theatre in order to accommodate the large audience who attended. Professor Scott discussed some of the major challenges in protecting children from abuse and neglect and advocated for a coordinated response in building the capacity of adult-focused services. A focus on such services as mental health, alcohol and drug treatment services, disability, family violence, corrections, homelessness and resettlement services will, according to Professor Scott, enable greater awareness and better responses to the needs of vulnerable children in the families they serve. A version of Professor Scott's seminar will be published in the next issue of *Family Matters*.



Ruth Weston



(l. to r.): Dr Matthew Gray, Professor Alan Hayes, the Hon. Diana Bryant, Professor Andrew Cherlin and Dianne Gibson



Professor Peter Whiteford (left) and Reverend the Hon. Professor Brian Howe

Media coverage

Interest in the work of the Institute continues to grow, with nearly 2,000 mentions across radio, television, print and Internet media in 2007–08. The total estimated audience reach of this coverage was more than 52.4 million. Although the greatest coverage for the Institute was on radio, where there were 1,096 mentions, press had the highest circulation, with a total estimated audience of more than 32.3 million. The research topics that received coverage included work and family, mothers' return to work following child-bearing, maternity leave, carers of people with a disability, fertility and family policy, child abuse and neglect, family formation and dissolution, and changes in children's wellbeing over the last 20 years. In addition to the mentions in press, radio and television, there were 926 items on the Internet mentioning Institute research during 2007–08.

The Institute's conference also generated considerable media coverage. Over the three days of the conference, 9–11 July 2008, there were 37 articles in the print press about the Institute's research. Print and electronic media coverage focused on the Institute's research on the effects of the drought on farming and other rural families.

While we are very pleased with the number of mentions in external media sources, we are equally delighted by the number of people who are using the Institute's websites to retrieve information and download documents. In 2007–08, there were nearly 10 million hits on the Institute's six websites (an increase of 6% from the previous year) and 3.4 million web pages and documents were downloaded (an increase of 11%).

Official opening of the Institute's premises

Wednesday, 10 September 2008, marked a major milestone for the Institute with the official opening of the new premises by the Hon. Jenny Macklin, Minister for Housing, Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; and the Hon. Anthony Byrne, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister.

The function took place during NAPCAN's National Child Protection Week 2008 and Minister Macklin launched a fact sheet addressing the theme of the week: *Child Protection in Australia: Children See.*



Professor Alan Hayes (left) and the Hon. Jenny Macklin at the opening of the Institute



The Hon. Jenny Macklin and the Hon. Anthony Byrne speaking at the opening of the Institute

Children Do. Make Your Influence Positive. Compiled by Prue Holzer from the National Child Protection Clearinghouse, the fact sheet provides background material on child abuse trends in Australia.

Director's activities

Farewell to the foundation Chief Commissioner, New Zealand Families Commission

On 5–7 August, I travelled to New Zealand at the invitation of then Prime Minister, the Right Hon. Helen Clark, to attend the function she hosted to farewell Dr Rajen Prasad, the Chief Commissioner of their Families Commission. Held in the Banquet Hall at Parliament House, Wellington, the event was attended by the Governor-General, the Hon. Anand Satyanand; Lady Susan Satyanand; the Hon. Ruth Dyson, Minister for Social Development and Employment; and the Hon. Peter Dunne, Minister of Revenue; as well as a very large number of invited guests. I was honoured to speak, presenting the opening greeting in Maori, emphasising the value of the links between the commission and the Institute and highlighting the key role that Dr Prasad played in establishing the relationship.

Soon after I started my time as Director, Dr Prasad contacted me and suggested a visit the Institute. That visit took place around the time of our biennial conference, in early 2005. His enthusiasm was electric and his vision inspiring. From that initial contact, the links between our organisations have grown ever stronger. We now relate on a number of levels and



Standing: Dr Rajen Prasad; seated (l. to r.): The Hon. Peter Dunne, Professor Alan Hayes, then Prime Minister Helen Clark

reciprocally exchange our publications and other resources. Our staff increasingly move between our organisations in both directions across the Tasman. On behalf of the Institute, I wish Dr Prasad and his family well in the next stage of life's journey, with its new challenges, achievements and satisfactions.

Sir Harold Wyndham Memorial Lecture

I was honoured to present the 2008 Wyndham Lecture, following an invitation from the NSW Institute for Educational Research, on 17 October. My address, titled *Divided Nation? Why Educational Opportunity is an Engine of Social Inclusion*, argued that modern Australia is a nation that was founded on a great social divide between the convicts and the free. Yet within a generation, as Robert Hughes observed in *The Fatal Shore*, the children of the convicts had moved into most walks of life and generally become law-abiding, contributing citizens. In this sense, we have been an inclusive society, with progress through merit and opportunity—or social mobility—the very foundation of the nation. True, our achievements have not always matched this aspiration, but the success of the “lucky country” has not been a matter of chance. For our size, Australians achieve impressively in so many fields.

There are signs, however, that this ability to get ahead is getting even harder for some. There are portents contained in recent comparisons of education around the world that show Australia's prized ability to see people get ahead based on their own merit may be changing. The divide is opening up in equal access to education, particularly when combined with other widening gaps in health and wellbeing within Indigenous Australia.

Intervention in children's lives at preschool can better equip children through an approach that connects them into the community, works on

family conflict and improves parenting skills. However, early childhood interventions alone don't provide inoculation from social exclusion. The gains in early life have to be sustained through educational and social supports beyond the early years, as there are many points at which lives can be changed, for better or worse.

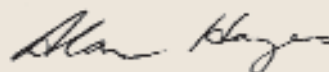
Concluding thoughts

It is never too early nor too late to effect change. The most powerful forces for positive change for disengaged young people are re-engaging in education, gaining vocational skills, living in stable family relationships and having support for mental health and substance abuse problems. It is those social policies and institutions underpinning a child-friendly society that will be crucial in ensuring that investments, be they early or later in life, are sustained.

While we can look to the policy approaches of other countries as Australia develops its own social inclusion agenda, we need Australian solutions to our problems.

Lifelong learning from early childhood to adulthood and access to employment are engines of opportunity for overcoming social exclusion. To be socially inclusive, fair and open, societies need to support families, value their diversity and provide accessible, high-quality educational and employment opportunities for all. Failure to do this weakens societies and, ultimately, results in divided nations that squander their diversity of talent and ability.

After all, these are aspirations that are true to Australia's cultural heritage.



Dr Angela Tidmarsh

Dr Angela Tidmarsh joined the Institute in late June 2008 as General Manager (External Relations and Human Resources). Angela brings a decade of experience in the Australian Government to her role, which involves the recruitment and development of our people, communications and relationship management and the reporting of our performance to government.



Having occupied a range of policy positions in the federal communications and arts portfolio in Canberra, Angela shifted to Melbourne in 2004 and migrated to strategic corporate roles, including statutory reporting, knowledge management and cultural development. With her own doctorate under her belt, Angela is well placed to bridge the dual research and policy drivers that underpin the Institute's core business.

Farewell to Dr Zoë Morrison

The Institute would like to take this opportunity to thank Zoë Morrison, who finished in July as coordinator of one of our clearinghouses, the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA). Zoë has moved to a new position as Senior Manager of the Research and Policy Unit at the Brotherhood of St Laurence. In her new role at the Brotherhood, we are delighted that Zoë will be able to continue to contribute to the ongoing work of the Institute as a member of the Reference Group for ACSSA. There, she joins an eminent group of experts on policy, research and service provision in relation to sexual assault prevention and responses who will guide the work of the Institute as we continue to develop the work of ACSSA. Zoë has been a valued leader within the Institute, and on behalf of the Institute, I wish Zoë well with her exciting new role at the Brotherhood.

