

### Evaluation of the family law reforms: The Service Provision Project

The Australian Institute of Family Studies is undertaking research about the changes to the family law system introduced by the Australian Government in July 2006. A key component of the evaluation is the Service Provision Project, which is exploring how the reforms are affecting the new and expanded family relationship services program (FRSP), and the clients of these services.

The types of services included in the Service Provision Project are:

- specialised family violence services;
- men and family relationships services;
- family relationship counselling;
- family relationship education and skills training;
- family relationship centres;
- family dispute resolution;
- children's contact services; and
- parenting orders programs.

The Service Provision Project comprises three main studies:

- qualitative interviews with service managers and staff;
- online surveys of family relationship services staff; and
- a survey of clients who have attended family relationship services.

This article provides a brief update about the progress of the three studies.

#### Qualitative studies

In late 2007, Institute researchers Kelly Hand and Lawrie Moloney visited family relationship service providers across Australia. Services taking part included the first 15 Family Relationship Centres, the Family Relationship Advice Line and a number of different early intervention and post-separation services.

The second wave of the qualitative study is currently in the field, with the Service Provision Project team conducting interviews both face-to-face and via the telephone. Interviews in this second wave of the study are being undertaken with staff and managers from both services that participated in the first wave and services that have subsequently opened.

In both waves, the interviews explore service providers' experiences of providing assistance to clients experiencing family relationship difficulties in the context of the changes to the family law system.

#### Surveys of service provider staff

Online surveys of family relationship service provider staff have also been undertaken. The surveys explored similar themes to those of the qualitative study. The first of these surveys, conducted in early 2008, involved staff in services in operation as of 1 July 2006. This included staff in the first 15 Family Relationship Centres and the Family Relationship Advice Line. More than 500 responses from across the sector were received. The second of these surveys, involving staff in all services funded as part of the FRSP commenced in April 2009. Over 850 responses were received in the second wave.

#### Survey of family relationship services' clients

A survey of family relationship services' clients took place during August 2009. This involved a sample of clients who attended these services from 2008 to March 2009. The survey was conducted online or via the telephone and asked clients about their experiences of attending the different family relationship services and the extent to which they believed these services were able to meet their needs.

In addition, de-identified administrative data for the family relationship services program is also being analysed, to create a picture of service use across the sector since commencement of the family law reforms.

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