



New Australian Centre for Child Protection

With core funding from the Department of Education, Science and Training of \$1 million per annum for 10 years, the University of South Australia has established the *Australian Centre for Child Protection*.

The Centre is embarking on two major national programs:

- *Child Protection Research in Action*, undertaking multi-disciplinary child protection related research within the framework of a national research agenda, and facilitating the translation of research into policy and practice, and;
- *Child Protection Professional Education Initiative*, assisting those training the practitioners of the future, such as health professionals, teachers, social workers, psychologists, early childhood educators, and Indigenous service providers, to ensure that they are equipped with the best knowledge and skills to prevent and respond to child abuse and neglect.

The newly appointed Director of the Centre, Professor Dorothy Scott, has recently moved from the School of Social Work at the University of Melbourne to take up the challenge of leading the centre. She says she is very excited by the potential of the Centre and is looking forward to working with an advisory board of eminent Australians from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, and to creating a strong, multi-disciplinary team of researchers and project workers.

"The time is ripe for a knowledge-based reform agenda in child protection. We are facing a crisis situation. While we know more about child abuse and neglect than ever before, the gap between what we know and what we do in child protection is immense, and so we need to make sure that the research done in this field has the maximum possible impact. We still have a lot to learn about how to translate research into policy and practice but the starting point is to forge a genuine partnership between researchers, policy makers, practitioners and those who are most directly affected – children, families and communities."

One of the first things the Australian Centre for Child Protection has done is to commission the National Child Protection Clearinghouse to undertake an audit on child protection research in Australia. Associate Professor Judy Cashmore is assisting the Clearinghouse with the audit, which complements the recently completed audit of "out of home care" research completed by Judy Cashmore and Frank Ainsworth in 2004.

Professor Scott believes that the audit of child protection research will be very valuable. "Not only will it provide a succinct summary of the research that has been done to date and make this accessible to everyone, but it will provide an ongoing database for future child protection research. Most importantly, the audit will highlight where the key gaps are and help determine priorities for future research."

After the release of the audit later in 2005, the Australian Centre for Child Protection will host a symposium for key stakeholders to develop a national child protection research agenda and develop some major collaborative projects across different states and territories to tackle high priority issues.

"The only way forward in child protection, whether it is in research or in service delivery, is to work together in partnership. We cannot afford to compete at the expense of the children we are here to serve. Large projects across different sites will yield substantial samples and allow for much greater generalisation of the results," says Professor Scott.

The Child Protection Professional Education Initiative will be one way of translating research into practice. It will map the curricula of key professions and disciplines to identify their strengths and weaknesses in relation to child protection content. "We hope this will enable us to learn from the exemplary work currently being done in some courses," says Professor Scott. "New technologies now provide us with such wonderful opportunities. For example, we could use multi-media to simulate case-based decision making in child abuse cases, encompassing the expertise and roles of different professions, and then put the case into its broader epidemiological context to highlight community variables associated with high levels of child abuse and neglect. This could then stimulate students and practitioners to think how they might 'go from case to cause' in child protection and tackle the big challenge – prevention."

Dr Dorothy Scott is the Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia.