



Stronger Families  
Learning Exchange

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The Stronger Families Learning Exchange at the Australian Institute of Family Studies provides a clearinghouse for strengthening Australian families and action research support for Stronger Families Fund projects.

The objectives of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange are both to contribute to the evidence base about the effectiveness of early interventions for families, and to support the work of Stronger Families Fund projects.

The Exchange will provide information, resource sharing, training and advice on family wellbeing, primary prevention and early intervention, and will service Stronger Families Fund projects and a larger network of people concerned with strengthening families and communities. The Learning Exchange is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Views expressed in Learning Exchange publications are those of individual authors and may not reflect Department or Institute policy.

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## INTRODUCING

# Stronger Families Learning Exchange

We are pleased to welcome readers to this publication – the first edition of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange Bulletin.

As part of its Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services has contracted the Australian Institute of Family Studies to provide a "learning exchange" to support parents, families and communities in their role of caring for young children.



JUDY ADAMS

The Stronger Families Learning Exchange has now been established at the Institute with the objective of contributing to the evidence base about the effectiveness of early interventions for families.

As part of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange, a *national clearinghouse* will provide the latest information on research and programs concerned with family wellbeing, primary prevention and early intervention.

The Exchange will also provide *special training and support in action research evaluations* to Stronger Families Fund projects. These are projects that operate under the Commonwealth Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, financed by its Stronger Families Fund. The Fund is expected to establish about 80 projects across Australia to support parents and families. Local communities are being encouraged and supported to develop ideas and local projects that meet the needs of individual communities and the diverse

families that live in them. To date, 14 of these projects have been funded. (See the article by Gai Stern elsewhere in this Bulletin for more information on the Strategy and the Stronger Families Fund.)

We trust that readers will find this Bulletin useful and informative, and that you will make full use of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange

at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. We look forward to your continued interest and support.

More details follow about the nature of the Exchange and the services provided.

### *Stronger Families Clearinghouse*

The Stronger Families Clearinghouse will inform government policy and community program development by:

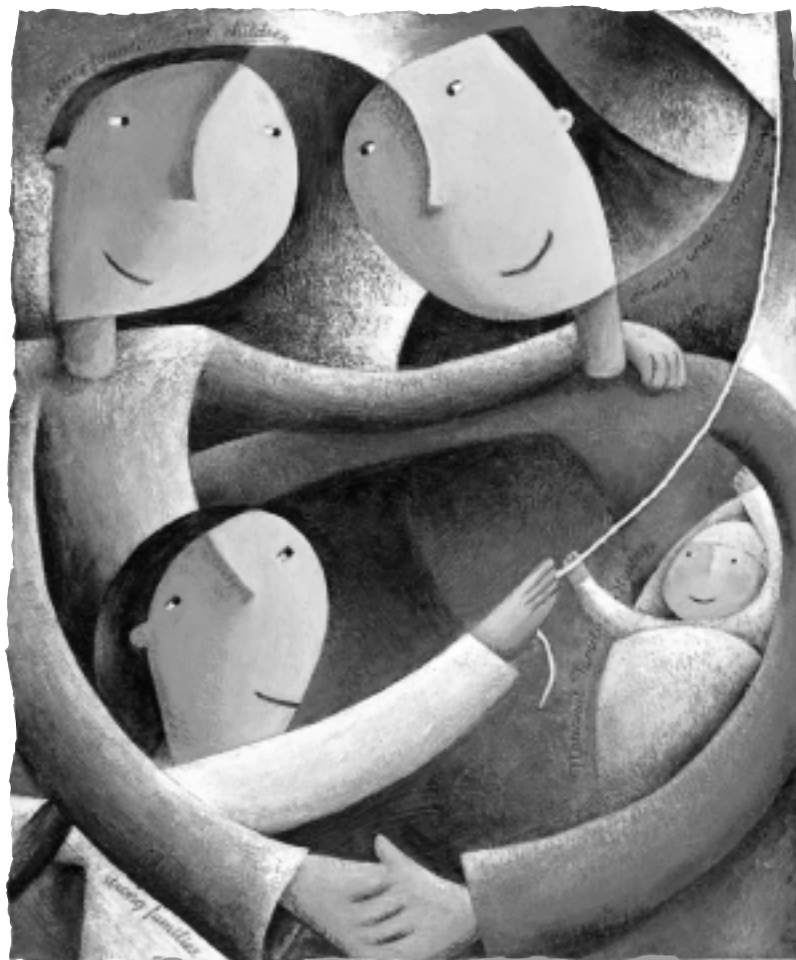
- collecting and analysing data from Stronger Families Fund projects;
- disseminating learnings about the projects back to the projects, the Department and other stakeholders, as well as the wider community;
- providing special information services to project workers and government officers, including a number of databases containing information about Australian early intervention and prevention projects, and the use of action research methodology;

- analysing aggregated project data to demonstrate trends in early intervention and prevention services for families and children;
- providing regular six-monthly Bulletins containing information about the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, Stronger Families Fund project descriptions, news from the projects, evaluation results, and the latest developments in the field of early intervention and prevention;
- providing a website containing current information and links to resources on prevention, early intervention and capacity building to support the stakeholders of the Stronger Families Fund projects and the wider community; and
- providing an email discussion list for primary stakeholders which offers a venue for the discussion of research, policy and practice issues.

The Clearinghouse will include a help desk with a toll-free telephone line and access to resources on community development, early intervention and prevention, and action research. The website will also make project contact details and stories accessible to other projects and stakeholders via a database containing information about the projects, project reports, and lessons learned from the action research process.

#### *Action Research Training and Support Team*

The Department of Family and Community Services recognises that an action research evaluation may be a new endeavour for some organisations, and that building it in to everyday work may take some time.



To help with this process, each Stronger Family Fund project will be assigned a member of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange Training and Support Team to help with the process of designing and running an action research evaluation. Team members will work with projects to develop an appropriate and workable action research evaluation, and support projects through the cycles of data collection, analysis, reporting and planning for change.

The Training and Support Team member can help projects in the early stages of their work with establishing reference groups for community consultation, and providing practical advice on developing key performance indicators consistent with an action research approach. Subsequently, team members will work with each project to assist with research design, methods,

ethical clearance, data collection, data analysis and interpretation. The support will be offered via a combination of site visits and telephone, fax and email interactions.

In the longer term, the project will generate national data on effective practice and early intervention strategies. The Training and Support Team will analyse and report on findings across all projects to the Department of Family and Community Services and in various publications. The results, which will be reported in the Bulletin and on the website, will inform government policy and programs and academic work in the field.

**Judy Adams** is the Acting Coordinator of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. See p. 31 for contact details.

