Welcome

Welcome to the ninth edition of Family Relationships Quarterly, the newsletter of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

We'd like to extend a warm thank you to all respondents who were involved in our recent review of the AFRC. The results have helped the AFRC identify what is working well, what we can enhance and directions for the future. A summary of the results of the survey and stakeholder consultations is provided in this newsletter.

One of the aims of the Clearinghouse is to provide a forum for workers to share information on projects and research. In this edition we are fortunate to showcase two such initiatives. Robyn Parker reports on research conducted by the Barwon Regional Parenting Service to examine client dropouts, and how the results were applied to service delivery. Elizabeth van Acker outlines some of the challenges associated with delivering marriage and relationship education and discusses a new project at Griffith University that aims to seek comment on these issues from people in the field. Readers are welcome to respond directly to Dr van Acker.

A detailed conference report discusses the recent combined 1st National Indigenous Family and Community Strengths Conference and 5th Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference in Newcastle, NSW. The conference ran for five days and showcased numerous service, research and project responses to families and communities, as well as a number of prominent keynote speakers. A seminar report is also provided which highlights the most recent Family Alcohol and Drug Network (FADNET) seminar, addressing support for families facing dual diagnosis issues.

We'd also like to say goodbye and a huge thank you to Ren Adams as he moves on to a new position in the Institute. Ren has been involved with the AFRC since its inception and his enthusiasm, commitment and attention to detail will be greatly missed.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Family Relationships Quarterly.

Elly Robinson
Manager, AFRC

Australian Government

Australian Institute of Family Studies
Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse

The Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) is an information and advisory unit funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Clearinghouse aims to enhance family relationships across the lifespan by offering a resource and a point of contact for providers of family relationship and support services, policy makers and members of the research and broader communities. The Clearinghouse collects, synthesises and disseminates information on family relationships and facilitates networking and information exchange.

Contents

AFRC publications

The Clearinghouse publishes quality resources for providers of family relationship and support services, policy makers, and members of the research and broader communities. All Clearinghouse publications are electronic.

Family Relationships Quarterly

Published four times a year, the newsletter includes literature highlights, research updates, forthcoming conference and event listings and information about relevant training opportunities. Articles include reviews of policy developments, program spotlights, summaries of research and practitioner updates.

AFRC Briefing

Concise papers that cover literature reviews and synthesis or translation of key messages. *AFRC Briefing* is published six times annually.

AFRC Issues

AFRC Issues are in-depth papers that focus on policy and research topics relevant to family relationships. *AFRC Issues* is published twice per year.

All publications are available for free download from the AFRC website at www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/pubs.html

The early bird gets the worm!

To learn about new publications and other resources from the Clearinghouse subscribe to the email alert service, ***AFRC-alert***, at:

www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/ afrcalert.html

Review of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse

What you told us…

Late last year we posted a survey on the AFRC website asking you to tell us how we were doing. The Clearinghouse team would like to extend a warm thanks to those of you who took the time to complete a survey, participated in an interview or both. Claire Grealy and Geua Montana (Urbis JHD) completed the review, and a summary of the results is below. The review has provided us with the opportunity to reflect on the first two years of operation of the Clearinghouse and consider what has worked well and areas that we can improve.

Overview

The Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse began operation in April 2006, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The aim of the Clearinghouse at the time of the review was to collect and deliver the latest relevant research and best practice to family relationship service providers and practitioners across Australia. The Clearinghouse also aims to contribute to the goals of the Family Relationship Services Program by offering a resource and point of contact for providers of family relationship and support services, as well as policy makers, researchers and broader communities. It is intended that the material disseminated by the AFRC will enhance understanding of: research into family relationships; innovative and effective programs and practices; and the need for and means of achieving high quality program/practice evaluation.

In late-2007 the Institute contracted Urbis JHD to conduct an independent review of the Clearinghouse and its operations. The review consisted of two main parts:

- An online survey consisting of 25 questions
- 15 stakeholder interviews across Australia, including academics and researchers, member of the AFRC reference group, managers of organisations and government agencies with a role in family relationships policy and practice, and family relationship practitioners and service providers.

Survey results

The online survey yielded 160 responses, from a wide range of work areas and from throughout Australia. Respondents were asked to provide their views in relation to a range of Clearinghouse services, including, for example, services that they had used and their level of satisfaction with the service. Data derived from the survey indicated that:

- An overwhelming number of respondents utilised AFRC publications, with *Family Relationships Quarterly* being the most accessed publication and considered the most useful. Most respondents found all publications "useful" or "very useful".
- About two-thirds of respondents answered "agree" or "strongly agree" to the publications being "clear and concise", "accessible to a wider audience", "consider the practical applications of the findings", "thorough and well researched" and "well formatted".
- The AFRC-Alert was well utilised by respondents, with "new research and publications", followed by "new Clearinghouse publications", considered the most useful content in the alert.
- There were generally very positive responses to how the information and resources had benefited work, research and practice. The AFRC helped people remain informed, up-to-date and assisted in raising awareness of emerging issues. Other ways the Clearinghouse helped is by facilitating sharing of information with staff and clients, saving time and increasing awareness of professional development and other events.

Stakeholder interviews

The high level of satisfaction with the services provided by the AFRC was also reflected in the stakeholder interviews. Key points included:

- It was felt that the AFRC should focus on maintaining, consolidating and establishing itself as a key resource in the sector with existing target groups and refining its core business.
- AFRC-Alert is highly valued as a means of quickly and efficiently facilitating access to AFRC, particularly for time-poor people.

- There was general agreement that AFRC materials were of a high quality and that this perception was itself an inducement to accessing the information; of note were the bibliographies, publications and practice profiles. The use of prominent authors, researchers and practitioners, the high calibre of reference group members and the location of AFRC on the AIFS website contributed to the credibility of the Clearinghouse.

- There is a need for stronger signifiers and headings for Indigenous people who are using the site; information is less accessible for Indigenous workers.

- There was recognition that the AFRC had not been in existence for long, and was currently doing a good job, particularly considering the complexity of family/relationship area.

- A very positive response was received in regards to the way that the AFRC reviews and synthesises relevant research; having information in the one spot, including summary information such as trends and statistics articles is useful.

- The opportunity created by the AFRC for practitioners to document their work was considered a particularly positive benefit.

Future directions and recommendations

On the basis of data obtained via the surveys and interviews, the team from Urbis made a number of recommendations regarding areas of further development for the AFRC. For example, suggestions were made that the Clearinghouse could:

- Increase the accessibility of the websites for rural and Indigenous practitioners, as well as increase the content relevant to working with Indigenous families.

- Expand the target audience to other professional groups, for example, by including knowledge and research relevant to, and provided by, lawyers and family counsellors.

- Enhance the information about appropriate intervention with culturally and linguistically diverse families.

- New technologies could be explored, e.g. podcasting, as a way of providing resources and information that would complement major publications.

Conclusion

Overall, the review found that practitioners and service providers are generally positive and enthusiastic about the establishment of the AFRC and the resources it has to offer. In particular, evidence from the review suggested that in the short time of operation, the AFRC has become well established in the family relationships sector and the publications and research are generally considered to be of high quality, credible and relevant. For many practitioners, the Clearinghouse had an influence on better practice through the provision of relevant information and practice frameworks, stimulating discussion and alerting practitioners to training and conference opportunities.

The AFRC and the Institute have welcomed the findings of the review. The Clearinghouse can confidently move forward into the next year of operation in the knowledge that a positive start has been made in responding to the needs of the sector. Furthermore, the suggestions regarding future directions have provided good opportunities to consolidate and refine the work of the Clearinghouse, subject to resource constraints.

Readers are welcome to provide any further feedback or comments to the AFRC by emailing us on afrc@aifs.gov.au.

Join AFRC-alert

AFRC-alert is an email list for news and updates from the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse. You will receive messages with announcements of relevant news, publications, resources, conferences and other important information concerning family relationships.

You can join *AFRC-alert* on our web page at **www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/afrcalert.html**

Improving service provision through agency-based research—addressing client dropout

ROBYN PARKER

Research and evaluation activities are becoming more common within agencies across the family relationships sector. Here we present an example of how an agency gathered data from clients who had started but not completed a program, and applied the findings to improve services and service delivery. We outline the way in which data were collected, the difficulties and benefits experienced in the process, and how the findings were applied. If you have examples of research conducted within your agency, let us know. We'll be happy to help you let the sector know about it.

Barwon Regional Parenting Service (BRPS) provides a wide range of services for parents of children aged 0 to 18 years in the Barwon South Western region of Victoria. The service is committed to improving the level of parenting skills in the community by ensuring that parents have access to high-quality parenting information and support through:

- providing parent education and promoting and enhancing parenting;
- providing parenting information to families, professionals and other interested community workers;
- assisting organisations to conduct parent education and other parenting activities by providing facilitators and/or financial support;
- developing and supporting networks between organisations involved with families; and
- conducting programs and workshops for schools, community groups and the general public throughout the Barwon South Western Region.

Co-located alongside the Barwon Regional Parenting Service, in the City of Greater Geelong's Family Services Department are: SafeStart, Kids Go For Your Life, Best Start, the Parent Support and Supervised playgroup project, centre-based child care, Family Day Care, Community Child Health, the Barwon Inclusion Support Agency, school holiday programs, and community development work with families.

The BRPS dedicates ongoing resources to identifying service gaps and community/family needs, delivering group parent education programs, and improving links between the community and organisations providing parental support.

The majority of funding for the parenting service comes from the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. BRPS is the only Regional Parenting Service located within local government—others are based in welfare or community health agencies. While some programs are targeted at specific vulnerable groups, services at BRPS are primarily mainstream and universal. The rationale for maintaining this focus lies both in BRPS's status in local government, and in an effort to avoid an overcrowding of the sector providing services to vulnerable groups that may only have limited numbers of clients. Staff members at the service wear several hats and, to make the best use of their resources, the organisation invests in partnerships with other agencies and individual professionals to secure the required expertise. For example, as part of a program for first-time parents and grandparents, BRPS is negotiating with relationship educators from Lifeworks to offer an information session about the potential impact of grandchildren on the grandparent's relationship and lifestyle. Being part of local government assists in these partnerships as the established infrastructure facilitates access to a range of professionals, including qualified child care workers and maternal child health workers. However, being part of local government can also lead to expectations that services will be made more widely available than the limited resources enable.

As with many providers, BRPS collects participant feedback on its programs and services beyond that required by its funding bodies, gathering data about clients' overall satisfaction with the session/program, their expectations and the degree to which they were met, any benefits and/or changes that resulted from the program, and views on the

> **The Barwon Regional Parenting Service dedicates ongoing resources to identifying service gaps and community/family needs, delivering group parent education programs, and improving links between the community and organisations providing parental support.**

program facilitators. Satisfaction ratings are typically high, however since those who complete the program are more likely to have gained some benefit from it, there is likely to be a positive bias in these results. To gain a more complete picture of the clients' perceptions of programs, it was decided that clients who dropped out of a program would be contacted by phone and asked for their feedback, using the standard assessment form.

This survey was conducted in 2006 and 2007. Two factors played a key role in enabling the survey to go ahead. First, clients were routinely asked during their intake call whether they would mind the service re-contacting them at some time in the future. Those who agreed and who attended but did not complete a program formed the pool of clients surveyed. Clients who signed up for a program but did not attend any sessions ("no-shows") were not re-contacted. Second, the availability of an individual to conduct the survey is critical. In 2006 the agency was able to employ a retired sessional staff member who was familiar with the agency in general and the programs in particular. In 2007 a social work student repeated the survey while on placement. This was found to be less effective due to the range of tasks the student was required to complete as part of the placement, and the limited time available to the student to carry out the survey.

The reasons clients gave for dropping out of the programs, and suggestions for improvements to the programs, pointed to two aspects of service delivery that could be improved: the intake process and client expectations. Responses suggested the need to alter the intake process to ensure clients are directed into the appropriate program. Clients are now asked for more detailed information about the kind of program they are seeking to attend and why, which ensures a better match between client and program. For instance, some clients indicated that the program was not what they had expected with respect to the age group or particular issues it addressed, the range of experiences of the participants, or the type of information that was to be imparted.

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The survey showed that some parents had enrolled for programs that targeted a broad age group, but that they preferred to be in groups of parents with children of the same age as their own. As such, the agency revised its program profile so that programs are provided for narrower age ranges and particular programs are provided for specific age groups. For example, Triple P is offered to parents of 2–5 year-olds, 123Magic for parents of 6–10 year-olds, ABCD Parenting Young Adolescents to parents of 10 to 12 year olds, and a program designed by the agency's educators for parenting and understanding 13–18 year-olds. As a result of the survey the agency also reviewed their advertising materials, examining whether the programs were accurately represented. This process involved both administration staff and program facilitators.

The collection of data on the clients dropping out of programs has proved its worth to the agency as a way of fine tuning programs and administrative procedures, to the extent that there is active re-thinking of how to balance the community needs while also supporting ongoing research activities in the agency. One solution under consideration is to decrease the number of program hours in order to resource 16–20 hours of research activities. Finding a person with the right mix of research skills and experience in the field will be critical to its success, as will ensuring the data collected contributes meaningfully to improving service provision and practice at a local level. Clients also fail to complete a program for reasons that the agency cannot control, such as other commitments or family illness. However, the actions taken in response to the small amount of information gathered over the past two years provide a measure of confidence that the agency is doing as much as it can to facilitate access to appropriate services and that clients who do attend programs obtain the maximum benefit from their participation. While drop out rates may not fall dramatically (although a reduction could reasonably be expected), the reasons provided by future clients for not completing a program should predominantly reflect the vagaries of clients' everyday lives rather than their dissatisfaction with the program they attended. The evidence for the impact of changes to service provision will be revealed by the next survey.

For more information about the client survey reported here, or the Barwon Regional Parenting Service, go to:

http://www.geelongcity.vic.gov.au/Services_In_Geelong/Children_and_Family/Regional_Parenting_Service/ or contact Jan Keats: jkeats@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

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Capacity challenges for service delivery of marriage and relationship education

ELIZABETH VAN ACKER

Family relationship services are provided by a range of agencies, many of which operate in partnership with the Australian Government. The Australian Government funds and administers community-based agencies to provide support services to families through the Family Relationships Services Program (FRSP) but it does not operate directly on the front line. Governments and service providers rely on each other for different resources, particularly as policy making has become more complex and fragmented. First, a dependent partnership exists because service providers rely on the Government for funds and structural support. In exchange, governments rely on service providers to implement their policies. Second, a partnership exists among the service providers, independent of the Government (van Acker, 2008). In order to provide services most effectively, we need to know how successfully the various players work to utilise available resources and to deliver services.

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This article does three things.

- It outlines some of the challenges for governments and service providers in delivering marriage and relationship education (MRE).
- It provides a sketch of a proposed research project that would conduct interviews with people in the field to gather their views and comments about these issues.
- It invites feedback from the sector about how governments and agencies can address these challenges.

Service delivery challenges: Supply and demand

The Government's capacities to deliver MRE services are contingent on mobilising public and private resources and support. The proposed research project will examine the following factors that influence the capacity to deliver services effectively. The final analysis will suggest some ways of solving the problems.

Supply

Workforce issues

A major service delivery challenge for governments, organisations and practitioners concerns staff recruitment and training. The 2004 review of the wider FRSP highlighted recruitment and retention difficulties. Some agencies rely on volunteers. The workforce consists of low paid workers and many workers who "tend to be middle class women of a certain age" (Urbis Keys Young, 2004, p. 120–122). This may be a problem if the sector wants to attract younger people, who are in relationships, as potential clients. Moreover, according to anecdotal evidence, there are retention problems because many educators suffer "burn out". Recent attempts to professionalise the MRE sector include the development of competency standards that may assist in improving recruitment.

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Allocating funds

The research project will focus on a range of funding concerns. The sector has expanded the range of MRE services since the 1960s. Government interface with the sector is designed to build the capacity of the organisations and to purchase services to deliver to the community. The challenge is that

providers receive scarce funds that need to cover wages, training, materials and other costs. Moreover, they often see more clients than the funding model calculates, but are not paid for this extra work. Increased funding would undoubtedly make a significant contribution to alleviating some of the service delivery problems. Convincing the Government that this would be money well spent is an additional challenge. This is particularly the case when there is a lack of evidence about the effectiveness of MRE. Although research demonstrates that couples benefit from MRE (see Halford & Simons, 2005; Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006), more rigorous evaluation of the long-term effects of the programs is required. In turn, this would add costs to the public purse.

Demand

Stakeholders

The research project seeks to discover how governments manage competing demands from a range of educators in different agencies. In fact, policy capacity is dispersed across community, faith-based and not-for-profit organisations with a range of views. Agencies have developed different programs locally to address diverse client demands, learning approaches, skills and training (Halford & Simons, 2005). As such, it may be difficult to coordinate these programs and meet diverse clients' needs. A challenging characteristic of MRE—like other areas of service provision—is that no "one size fits all". For example, practitioners may hold conflicting beliefs about the value of the nuclear family and traditional marriage. Individual educators may strongly disagree about issues such as cohabitation, gender equity and same-sex marriage. The research aims to examine the values of service providers and the impact of these values on service delivery of MRE.

> The research project will consider how to develop resources so that clients with particular needs are accommodated.

"At risk" groups

Another demand for services relates to "at risk" groups. The research project will consider how to develop resources so that clients with particular needs are accommodated. There are gaps in the provision of programs for Indigenous and migrant groups, step-families, young people, older couples, and people with a mental illness or disability (Simons & Parker, 2002). In addition, MRE may not be a priority for those on low incomes, who may also be faced with housing and other insecurities. Delivering programs on a large scale to rural and remote communities presents further challenges (Catholic Welfare Australia & Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2006).
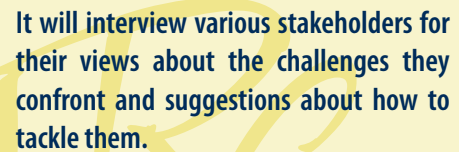
Potential clients

The proposed research project will also address the challenges in targeting potential clients.

- It will examine ways of raising public awareness about the availability and possible benefits of MRE programs. This may create additional pressures for service providers. How can they sell the message that it is useful to learn relationship skills when couples are happy and their relationship is healthy? The focus of MRE is always on the positive in language, attitudes and knowledge, but if couples are "in a good place" they may not see MRE as relevant or useful. Furthermore, potential clients who are ill-informed may perceive MRE as a form of counselling which they do not need. A major challenge is therefore to develop ways of shaping MRE as "normal" and as acceptable as antenatal or parenting classes.
- Improving awareness of services does not automatically result in greater public acceptance or participation in the programs (Parker, 2007).
- The issue of timing is important. Just before their wedding, many couples are caught up in preparations and attending a program might be seen as an added stress and cost that they wish to avoid. After marriage, couples get caught up in domestic life.
- It is not easy for governments to encourage participation in programs that concern emotionally-intense personal decisions, such as marriage (van Acker 2003). Simons, Harris and Willis (1994) found that many people view marriage as none of the government's business—their relationship is private. Therefore, strategies such as skills training and completing questionnaires are perceived as inconvenient and unnecessary. Couples

may prefer to read self-help books and magazines or search the Internet for resources within the privacy of their home.

The research project intends to examine problems relating to workforce matters, funding, stakeholder demands, "at risk" groups and potential clients and how to address them. It will interview various stakeholders for their views about the challenges they confront and suggestions about how to tackle them. Overall, it will investigate how and whether services that aim to build healthy relationships and strong families can "be done better". The research project will take two years, including a literature review, interviews, delivering conference papers and writing journal articles about the findings and analysis.

> It will interview various stakeholders for their views about the challenges they confront and suggestions about how to tackle them.

If you would like to offer your views about the nature of the research project, its methodology, the issues to be addressed, or would like to be interviewed to discuss these matters, please contact Liz van Acker, Department of Politics and Public Policy, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD, 4111. Phone 07 3735 7696; Email: E.vanacker@griffith.edu.au

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First National Indigenous Family and Community Strengths Conference, 14–16 April 2008

Our Culture: A Strength to Build On

Fifth Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference, 16–18 April 2008

Community Engagement: A Rewarding Business

REN ADAMS & ELLY ROBINSON

The First National Indigenous Family and Community Strengths Conference, held at the University of Newcastle in April 2008, occurred at a pivotal time for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—almost two months to the day since the Apology[1]. Co-convened by the Family Action Centre (FAC) at The University of Newcastle and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), the meeting was aptly named *Our Culture: A Strength to Build On*, a name consistent with the strong focus on embracing cultural, family and community strengths to improve life for Australia's Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous Family and Community Strengths Conference ran prior to and concurrent with the Fifth Australian Family and Community Strengths Conference. The first two days were focussed principally on Indigenous families and communities followed by a one-day "crossover" where the two conferences converged and combined—one ending and another beginning.

DAY 1

Professor John Maynard, Chair of Aboriginal Studies/Head of Wollotuka School of Aboriginal Studies at University of Newcastle, chaired the opening proceedings and began with acknowledgement of the traditional owners of the land on which we met, the Awabakal[2] people. Acknowledgment and respect to the Awabakal people, past and present, was maintained throughout the conference and was a predominant opening aspect of presentations.

Representing the Family Action Centre in welcoming delegates to the conference was Craig Hammond, Indigenous Community Worker with the Engaging Fathers Project and better known as "Bourkie". Bourkie took a reluctant centre-stage from beginning to end at the conference and could have been said to be the conference MC. His humour and relaxed approach made people feel very much at ease while heralding his call for delegates to "take back what you learn here to your community and your people". Muriel Bamblett, CEO of the Victorian Aboriginal Childcare Agency & Chair of SNAICC also welcomed guests on behalf of the conference convenors, speaking of the importance of Indigenous sovereignty, leadership, institutions and culture. The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs offered a congratulatory message via video-link that was screened later that day. The opening session concluded with entertaining performances from Gorokan Didgeridoo Players and the Ginjada Dancers, who were local young people. Mick Davison, a graduate of the University, played and provided lessons for the Yadagi (traditional name for didgeridoo).

Keynotes
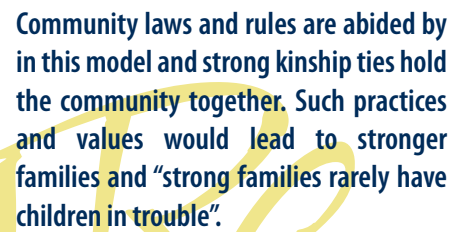
Muriel Bamblett presented the opening keynote entitled "Opening Eyes to the Strengths in our Families—From Cultural Blindness to Cultural Respect". Bamblett focused on the building of Indigenous strengths, values and approaches to child rearing. Acknowledging the past injustices of child removal, she points out these policies have contributed to Aboriginal people from many different tribal groups being located across the country, away from their

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1 The Formal Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, House of Representatives, Parliament House, Canberra, February 13, 2008. http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Speech/2008/speech_0073.cfm.
2 For information on the Awabakal people: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/awaba/awaba/group/amrhd/awaba/index.html

cultural and family base. Stating that culture is the key to wellbeing and resilience, Bamblett called on delegates to recognise the importance of spending more time with children, telling stories of the people—"our stories".

Bamblett presented "embedding culture as resilience" as an important direction for Indigenous service models, where culture is not just an add-on to existing approaches but is integrated into modern services. An example she presented was "traditional learning circles"—a holistic approach where land and spirituality are at the centre and the child's relationship is with the entire family, not just with the parents[3]. Community laws and rules are abided by in this model and strong kinship ties hold the community together. Such practices and values would lead to stronger families and "strong families rarely have children in trouble".

Community laws and rules are abided by in this model and strong kinship ties hold the community together. Such practices and values would lead to stronger families and "strong families rarely have children in trouble".

Wheturangi Walsh-Tapiata offered the final keynote for the day and spoke of Indigenous approaches to family and community as being inherently strengths-based. An Indigenous world-view was presented where commonality can be found in such elements as environment, time, identity, knowledge, sustainability, and language. However, it was emphasised that in recognising these points of similarity it is vital that individual groups, cultures and histories are not clustered together. The notions of identity, diversity and distinctiveness are important and those in helping professions have, according to Walsh-Tapiata, an additional obligation to understand the cultural aspects of service users.
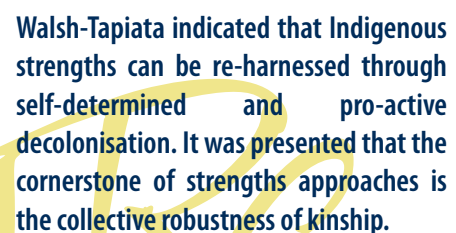
Walsh-Tapiata presented a non-linear model of decolonisation credited to Pōkā Laenui[4], where five stages of decolonisation can occur concurrently and in any combination. These are rediscovery & recovery, mourning, dreaming, commitment, and action. Walsh-Tapiata indicated that Indigenous strengths can be re-harnessed through self-determined and pro-active decolonisation. It was presented that the cornerstone of strengths approaches is the collective robustness of kinship. Other strengths identified included spirituality & healing practices, story telling, cultural practices, genealogy, and reciprocity.

Concurrent sessions

Presentations in concurrent sessions offered a variety of information on many excellent programs. In the family well-being stream there was a presentation on the New Parent Infant Network (NEWPIN[5]) from UnitingCare Burnside. Linda Mondy, Director for Burnside's preventative, child protection and out-of-home-care services in Western Sydney, and Anneliese, a Koori woman and former member of NEWPIN in Bidwell spoke of breaking the cyclical effects of destructive and negative family behaviour for families with children 0–5 years. Anneliese shared her story of self-referral to NEWPIN when she wasn't coping with life as a mother of an 8-month old child. With grounding in Attachment Theory and focusing on strengths, NEWPIN "surrounds" member families with a "village" of help for 2–4 days per week over a total period of 18–24 months, helping teach positive parenting and improving family life in a safe and loving environment.

A fine example of inter-agency collaboration was presented in the session on the Healthy Family Circles Project, run in central Sydney by Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Women's Centre in partnership with Relationships Australia (NSW). The project provides an example of a large mainstream agency working with a much smaller community organisation with established ties to local families and the community. The project aims to support and assist the community in building capacity and resilience with an outlook to improving family wellbeing.

Walsh-Tapiata indicated that Indigenous strengths can be re-harnessed through self-determined and pro-active decolonisation. It was presented that the cornerstone of strengths approaches is the collective robustness of kinship.

Other presentations included one on the Birra-li Aboriginal Birthing Service; and the Bankstown Community Resource Group presentation on the experience of a non-Aboriginal NGO in sustaining engagement with Aboriginal families in early childhood program.

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3   The notion of "family" for Indigenous communities must also include kinship. Kinship is more complex than the nuclear family. While biological relationships such as mother, father, brother, and sister are maintained, kinship broadens to recognising extended and tribal family.

4   Further information: http://www.opihi.com/sovereignty/

5   Further information: http://www.newpin.org.au

DAY 2

Keynotes

Michael Yellow Bird, Professor of Indigenous Nations Studies[6] at the University of Kansas, presented "The Strengths of Indigenous Peoples in the Time of Global Warming". Yellow Bird spoke of identity, along with connection to the land, as the greatest strengths of Indigenous peoples. He believes that the threat of global warming can be tackled by utilising the sustained strengths of Indigenous peoples and by honouring the land and its inhabitants. He reminded us of the Chief Seattle quote from 1854 "man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself." Yellow Bird also gave a workshop on mind–brain approaches and "Indigenous brain plasticity", offering additional insight into his vision to remove Indigenous disadvantage.

> **Yellow Bird spoke of identity, along with connection to the land, as the greatest strengths of Indigenous peoples.**

Brian Dowd then presented his moving keynote on the Black on Track[7] programs. Dowd shared his life-journey from being close to suicide to getting himself back on track. This led him to develop the very first Black on Track program that has now been expanded into a number of participant-focused services offered under the Black on Track banner, such as the Indigenous Men's Program and the Indigenous School Program. Another example, the Community Engagement Live-in Program, typically features a 5-day week schedule over 6–12 weeks. It involves workers travelling to and staying in a community, effectively providing 24-hour support, while operating program streams such as schools and family inclusion. Weekly topics include self-esteem, mental health, anger management, loss and grief, and employment. The program ends with a celebration dinner that Dowd notes has a corroboree effect. The commitment and passion that he shared was an inspiration to many attendees and the community-focused intervention model that he has developed seems likely to grow further.

In the afternoon, James Cook University's Lorraine Muller presented "Colonisation or Collaboration: Appreciation or Appropriation. Mainstream Agencies learning from Indigenous Ways". Muller showed the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) map of Aboriginal Australia[8] to draw attention to Australia's colonisation while calling for "history as acknowledgement". History is passed on by stories and Lorraine emphasised the importance of this transfer of knowledge for Indigenous people and cultures. She recognised the synchronicity of her work with that of Wheturangi Walsh-Tapiata, referring to stages of colonisation and decolonisation and to Indigenous Social-Health Theory as a preferred model of research and practice. Muller has previously written (that) "Indigenous Social-Health Theory, as I understand it to be, is a holistic model of practice that incorporates the many disciplines where the social, emotional (spiritual) and physical health of our people is central to practice."[9] "Grandmothers Law" was an example provided by Muller and was referenced to Lorna Fejo who appeared in the Prime Minster's Apology speech on February 13, 2008.

Dr Susan Gair wrapped up the days proceedings with a keynote centred on empathy as a crucial skill in social work and understanding others. Gair maintains that empathy is not an automatic and inherent skill—it needs to be learned.

Concurrent sessions

In the Partnerships stream Amy Creighton provided insight into the success of the Murri First Aid Course where the mainstream first aid course was vastly re-worked to suit Aboriginal participants. This example of cultural adaptation now boasts a 100% completion rate. Ed Bailey then presented a promising community development and partnership program from Barnados Queanbeyan (NSW). Gatherings in the Park brings together local families with children aged up to 8 years to develop networks between services and the community. Barriers to accessing services are broken down by providing an informal environment for community members to share lunch with service workers and develop community ties at the same time.

> **Barriers to accessing services are broken down by providing an informal environment for community members to share lunch with service workers and develop community ties at the same time.**

Several concurrent sessions comprised interactive workshops. Jody Saxton, Deaf Indigenous Community Consultant, presented on working with deaf or hard-of-hearing community members. Saxton's presence at the conference added a wonderful dimension with highly

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6 Further information: http://www.indigenous.ku.edu/
7 Further information: http://www.blackontrack.com.au
8 See: http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/aboriginal_studies_press/aboriginal_wall_map/map_page
9 See: http://www.croccs.org.au/downloads/2006_conf_papers/Lorraine%20Muller%20-%20Recognition%20of%20knowledge%20Indigenous%20%20Australian%20Social%20Health%20informing%20Tertiary%20Academic%20Theory.pdf (Accessed 2/5/08)

skilled translators being present at all keynote sessions. It was a reminder of the massive problem that hearing loss[10] and other ear complications present in many Indigenous communities in Australia. Highlights from other sessions included the I'm an Aboriginal Dad Program, which is aimed at families and building the capacity of Aboriginal dads in fathering. Dr Melisah Feeney, Director of Footprints in Time: Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children[11], also shared insights into the formative process involved in getting this study together and some of the outcomes and early results.
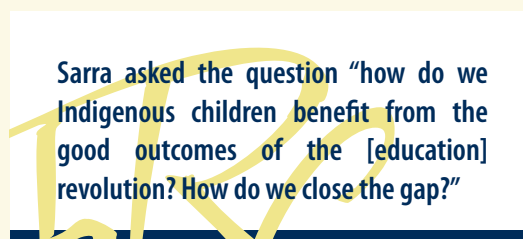
DAY 3

The convergence of the two Family and Community Strengths conferences was chaired by the Director of the Family Action Centre, Judi Geggie.

Keynotes

Dr Chris Sarra's opening keynote, "Moving Forward Together", focused on Indigenous children's education and was this author's highlight of the conference. In reference to the Prime Minster's "education revolution", Sarra asked the question "how do Indigenous children benefit from the good outcomes of the revolution? How do we close the gap?" Citing Treasury Secretary, Dr Ken Henry, Sarra identified seven platforms of development to improve Indigenous education:

1. security from violence
2. early childhood interventions
3. supportive home environments
4. access to primary health services
5. targeted welfare incentives that do not discourage engagement
6. realistic prospects of paid employment
7. Indigenous engagement in policy development

> Sarra asked the question "how do we Indigenous children benefit from the good outcomes of the [education] revolution? How do we close the gap?"

The impassioned Sarra said that the education revolution is about giving people a different way to think, act, believe, and to give hope. He called on delegates to stop colluding with those who have maintained the disadvantage and stated that rhetoric must be delivered on. He challenged the audience to embrace the future with enthusiasm and called for quality teaching and a focus on investment in those who are already doing good work in Indigenous communities. He believes the enhancement of capacity and agency is vital and he explored the concepts of agency and rites of passage as ways for Indigenous advancement. Sarra received a standing ovation and created a real buzz to begin the conference "cross-over" day.

Concurrent sessions

"Beautiful Minds: Overcoming Oppression in Aboriginal Communities Using Mind–Brain Approaches" was the title of Professor Michael Yellow Bird's engaging and thoroughly thought-provoking workshop. Touted by Yellow Bird as the "new neurodecolonisation science", this approach to understanding the brain's capacity to foster better outcomes in Indigenous populations builds on existing understanding of cognitive sciences. Yellow Bird referred to the Master–Slave paradigm (Hegel 1807) that states that in the aftermath of colonisation the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised becomes that of master and slave. This relationship can lead to a loss of Indigenous ideas, words, values and beliefs through lack of recognition and replacement by that of the coloniser.

The intergenerational trauma and oppression suffered by Indigenous people, according to Yellow Bird, can lead to a biologically diminished capacity for "positive, creative" thinking. However, the brain is able to be "re-trained" through positive affirmations and, through such "brain plasticity", the cycles of oppression and trauma can be negated. Yellow Bird also referred to the links between critical thinking and health outcomes, citing connections with auto-immune responses and propensity to depression. In a nutshell, regaining and positive reinforcement of Indigenous identity, language and values, and focusing on strengths, were presented by Yellow Bird as a "way out" of poor outcomes.

> Regaining and positive reinforcement of Indigenous identity, language and values, and focusing on strengths, were presented by Yellow Bird as a "way out" of poor outcomes.

Other highlights of concurrent sessions included Di Grennell's presentation looking at some of the challenges, particularly cultural, inherent in research in remote rural communities; an

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10 Further information on Indigenous hearing loss and ear conditions can be found at: http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/html/html_community/ear_health_community/ear_index.htm
11 Further information: http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/research/ldi-lsic_nav.htm

overview of the integration of the Adolescent Family Therapy & Mediation Service (RAPS) and Strength to Strength programs, catering to and engaging culturally diverse families and communities; and Ellen Cahill's presentation on the Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Service.

In anticipation of the 2020 Summit[12] occurring in the following days, Rev Tim Costello spoke of the challenges the country faces to reach a "civil society". In discussing the approach of many western governments, Costello outlined the need to move from a controlling approach where policy is steered irrespective of input from community groups, to a "grass-roots demand-led government". He spoke of governments using efficiency as a funding model determinant, but emphasised that "efficiency" doesn't always mean "effectiveness" when providing services to community. In closing, Rev Costello raised regional disadvantage as a great challenge to Australia's hopes for civil society, asking the question "how do we ensure that a postcode doesn't determine outcomes?"

> **Costello outlined the need to move from a controlling approach where policy is steered irrespective of input from community groups, to a "grass-roots demand-led government".**

The First Indigenous Family and Community Strengths Conference officially closed after three days of great atmosphere and stimulating content. It was also supported by great food, the highlight being the welcome barbeque that was held in the beautiful Birabahn building and surrounding gardens at the Wollotuka School of Aboriginal Studies[13]. An emotional Craig Hammond thanked colleagues and attendees while SNAICC Executive Officer, Julian Pocock, drew attention to the achievements of the conference. He reminded us to ask the question of whether the Awabakal nation would have been proud of what had been achieved over the three days. This author is amongst many others who believed that they would be.

DAY 4

Keynotes

The buzz from the previous three days was still apparent the following day, now concentrating on the more general themes of the Family Strengths Conference. Dennis Saleebey, from the School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas, presented the first keynote, "Heroism and Hope in Everyday Life: Consorting with the Strengths of Individuals and Families".

Heroism was described as endurance for one moment more, and Dr Saleebey conjured an image of the qualities, capacity and strength of families who manage to survive in the face of enormous problems. The job for practitioners, he stated, is to find out what skills, knowledge and wisdom a family brings to the situation, and look to a bright future rather than a dark past. Dr Saleebey talked of how problem behaviours often contain seeds of self-righting; practitioners have the job of trying to help the family figure out what they were trying to do, and maximise this, without ignoring any damage.

> **The job for practitioners, he stated, is to find out what skills, knowledge and wisdom a family brings to the situation, and look to a bright future rather than a dark past.**

Dr Saleebey discussed the individual deficit and disorders focus of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Once this is given weight, he argued, it is very difficult to move towards the value and promise of any individual. He suggested that whilst not ignoring adversity, rebounding from adversity should be the rule, not the exception, in which case a corresponding lexicon of strengths should also be developed.

Dr Saleebey called on practitioners to believe in the capacity of the client to change and to be conversant with client's dreams. Practitioners can help clients to work on pathways to dreams and achieve not necessarily all, but maybe one step towards them. This may help to continue to move away from something, towards something. He encouraged workers not to underestimate the power of realistically based positive expectations. Questions that could be used to find out about strengths fell into eight different categories, with examples:

- Survival questions: Given all the challenges that you have had to contend with, how have you managed to survive?
- Support questions: What people or organisations have given you understanding, support and guidance? Can I help reconnect you?
- Exception questions: When things were going well in your life, what was different?
- Possibility questions: What now do you want out of life? What hopes, visions and aspirations do you have?
- Esteem questions: When people say good things about you, what are they likely to say?

12 Further information: http://www.australia2020.gov.au/
13 Further information: http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/aboriginal-studies/

- Perspective questions: What are your theories or ideas of what is going on for you?
- Change questions: What can or should happen to bring about change?
- Meaning questions: Do you have a set of beliefs that give you meaning or direction?[14]

The second keynote on the Thursday was by Lois Smidt, the Executive Director and co-founder of Beyond Welfare (USA), an initiative built on the principles of asset-based community development and committed to the empowerment and economic interdependency of people marginalised by poverty. Smidt was one of eight women who developed Beyond Welfare 12 years ago, and described it as a place of "radical hospitality", where people can build intentional friendships and "merge energies"[15].

Concurrent sessions

Highlights among the concurrent sessions included a presentation by Tamara Cumming from SDN Children's Service in Sydney, who discussed a research project that examined strengths-based approaches to inclusion support. This was an excellent example of how research could be conducted via a two-way process in an organisation. Researchers were "embedded" into the program, giving them first-hand experience of using strength-based approaches in practice. In turn, staff and managers were consulted every step of the way, allowing them insight into the research process. Plans to publish the results of the research are in place, with an aim to share general principles around strengths-based approaches to inclusion support.

Tanya James, from the Blue Mountains City Council, gave an insightful account of how nine organisations in the region, all of which focused on vulnerable children and families, came together in a comprehensive and co-ordinated service system. James outlined the challenges, and the use of organisational development and conflict resolution approaches to help build the system. Distrust amounting from problems with past relationships and competition for funding interfered with good working relationships; strategies such as depersonalising and reframing conflict were used to address these issues.

DAY 5

Keynotes

Keynote speakers on the Friday morning concentrated on education, with Paul Ferris from Kavanagh College, Dunedin, New Zealand, providing an entertaining and passionate view of the case for change in the education system. He argued that education in Australia and New Zealand is high quality, but with low equity—there is a "long tail at the end" consisting of those who don't succeed. The challenge therefore is to achieve success not for most but for all. Mr Ferris argued that the deficit model of schooling is outdated, and that there are four themes for a successful transformation: students first, inspirational teachers, involvement of wider communities and technology. He gave a range of examples of schools that had transformed the way they operate, including the Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School in Toronto, Canada, which operates a self-directed learning model. Terry Lovat, from the University of Newcastle, was the second keynote speaker and discussed the links between values education, service learning and quality teaching.

Concurrent sessions

Concurrent sessions ran again for the rest of Friday, with the highlight being a range of presentations on care, connection and belonging. Research and program initiatives that were showcased included children with disabilities and their family relationships, families of offenders, local community engagement in a community centre, rural Tasmanian young people, and a playgroup for children living in caravan parks, based on occupational therapy principles.

The conference covered an enormous amount of ground in addressing family strengths, and there was an evident sense of commitment to shifting the paradigm from deficits to strengths in family work. The effect of this was to create an atmosphere of positive energy that augurs well for effective and respectful work with families and family members in the future.

Ren Adams is a Project Officer with the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse. **Elly Robinson** is the Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

14 More information on the strengths perspective as described by Dennis Saleebey can be found at
  http://www.socwel.ku.edu/Strengths/about.shtml
15 http://www.beyondwelfare.org/

Supporting families where there are dual diagnosis issues

ROBYN PARKER

FADNET seminar, Mackillop Family Services, Footscray, 23 April 2008

FADNET, the Family Alcohol and Drug Network, is a gathering of professionals from the drug and alcohol field with a particular interest in family work and in caring for family members affected by problematic substance use. FADNET conducts a number of seminars throughout the year for professionals in the drug and alcohol sector. The April seminar brought together two presenters whose work focuses on providing services for individuals with co-existing conditions, and information and support for their carers: Lorraine Johnstone, Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria, and Shane Sweeney, Substance Use and Mental Illness Treatment Team (SUMITT).

Mental illness and substance use frequently co-occur, often with serious implications for health and wellbeing and complications for the individual concerned as well as their families and friends. Anecdotally, practitioners in this field report that one of the key factors in the experience of the family and/or friends caring for a person with co-occurring conditions is information and support. Importantly, information about both conditions and how the symptoms and treatments might interact is vital for carers but is not often available. Practitioners and service providers working in one or other of the two fields—drug and alcohol use or mental illness—cannot always provide the expertise necessary to deal with issues raised by their co-existence.

Family and friends can often feel overwhelmed by the experience of living with or caring for a person with a dual diagnosis. The Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria runs Well Ways Duo, a psychoeducational program for carers of people with a dual diagnosis. Participants attend six weekly sessions of three hours each and four follow up sessions spread over 12 months. The sessions are informal and include a range of activities designed to provide carers with knowledge and skills for caring for themselves and the person with a dual diagnosis. The sessions are conducted by facilitators who are or have been carers of a person with dual diagnosis and who have undertaken training in the program. The program also includes presentations by members of the Police, Crisis Assessment and Treatment (CAT) teams, and psychiatrists. Participants also learn about service options and how the systems involved in the treatment and care of a person with a dual diagnosis operate, with a view to helping the various parties work together effectively. The program is evidence-based and updated every two years, and it has been evaluated by La Trobe University.

The Substance Use and Mental Illness Treatment Team (SUMITT) was established in 1998 via funding from the Department of Human Services, and was the first project to provide assessment and treatment services for clients experiencing co-existing disorders. The organisation aims to enhance the effectiveness of the service system, improve the capacity of other agencies providing services to attend to the needs of these clients, and overcome barriers to treatment and care. SUMITT staff conduct primary consultation to clients as well as secondary consultation to other health professionals. SUMITT also provides education and training, and opportunities for cross-training of professionals in the fields of mental health and drug and alcohol use.

Both speakers raised a number of issues that arise for families and friends of a person with co-occurring conditions and for professionals working with both groups, particularly in relation to the impact and implications of the complex interactions between substance use and mental illness for carers and health professionals. Among those discussed were:

- How families can come to define themselves in terms of the family member's condition. The Well Ways Duo program tries to address this through exploring the family's lives before the onset of the co-existing conditions and helping carers to deal with the grief and loss associated with the changes to their lives;
- How the stigma associated with having a mental illness or a substance use problem is compounded when both are present;
- How the compounded stigma affects the family, and how cultural issues can greatly exacerbate the effects of the stigma, leading to complete withdrawal from social activities;

- That families caring for a person with co-occurring conditions need comprehensive, easily understood information about each condition and how their interaction might manifest;
- How families can be very sympathetic with respect to the family member's mental illness but simultaneously very angry about their substance use;
- The importance of the quality of the information provided to families and, critically, how that is imparted. The way in which professionals such as police, CAT teams and psychiatrists relate to carers has a significant influence on how well carers can understand and deal with their situation; and
- That communication among professionals across the substance use and mental illness fields can be difficult due to the differences in the types of language they use and the systems within which they work.

The seminar brought together speakers who presented complementary perspectives to provide a well-rounded overview of some of the key issues encountered by those working in the substance use and mental illness sector. The discussion was lively, informative and practical, and the speakers were articulate and approachable. Information regarding future FADNET seminars will be posted on the FADNET website at www.odyssey.org.au/fadnet.

To find out more about FADNET, contact Tania Zapparoni: taniaz@mchs.org.au

Further information about the Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria is available at: www.mifellowship.org

More information about the Substance Use and Mental Illness Treatment Team (SUMMIT) is available at: www.mh.org.au/nw_mental_health/www/358/1001127/displayarticle/1001240%2ehtml

Robyn Parker is a Senior Research Officer with the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

Contributing to *Family Relationships Quarterly*

Guidelines for contributors

The *Family Relationships Quarterly* newsletter aims to provide a lively forum for ideas, argument and comment on family relationships. The newsletter includes literature highlights, research updates, upcoming conference and event listings and information about training opportunities. Articles include reviews of policy developments, program spotlights, summaries of research, and practitioner updates. These range from short reviews of books, conferences, workshops and projects to more substantial articles on significant issues relevant to family relationships.

Service providers, researchers and those interested in family relationships in Australia are encouraged to contribute to the newsletter. We welcome readers' letters, comments and feedback on issues discussed in AFRC publications.

The average length of contributions is 1,000–1,500 words, but may be as short as 300–500 words. If you would like to submit a longer article, or if you are unsure about the appropriateness of a piece, contact the Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse prior to submission.

Acceptance of all material is subject to a review process. Consideration will be given to whether articles are relevant, clearly written, and accessible. Consideration will also be given to the following criteria: timeliness of article; significance of the topic; factual accuracy; clear presentation and logical organisation of material; conclusions substantiated by convincing analytical argument; argument supported by references; quality and balance of the argument or information presented; and balance and relevance of any policy implications drawn.

Please email contributions in a Microsoft Word document to afrc@aifs.gov.au, or post to the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, Level 20, 485 La Trobe Street, Melbourne, Victoria, 3000 (Electronic provision of material is preferred where possible). For further information contact Elly Robinson, Manager of the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse, phone (03) 9214 7888, fax (03) 9214 7839, email: elly.robinson@aifs.gov.au

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News in brief

Recent AFRC publications

AFRC Issues No. 3—*Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families in Australia*, by Dr. Pooja Sawriker and Dr. Ilan Katz, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

Limited research has been undertaken in Australia on access to family and relationship services for different cultural groups and the effectiveness of interventions in these services for cultural groups. The paper synthesises and builds on the emerging international and national literature to develop a practice and policy framework that can be used to help overcome inequities in access to, or culturally inappropriate service delivery of, family relationship services for CALD families in Australia. Guidelines are suggested and prioritised for family services to use when considering how to increase the suitability of and access to their service for CALD families.

AFRC Issues No. 3 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/issues/issues3. html

AFRC Resource Sheet No. 3—*Enhancing family and relationship service accessibility and delivery to culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families in Australia*, by Dr. Pooja Sawriker and Dr. Ilan Katz, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

This Resource Sheet is based on information contained in AFRC Issues No. 3 and provides a concise and informative summary of the Issues paper.

AFRC Resource Sheet No. 3 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/resource/resource3.html

AFRC Briefing No. 10—*Effective regional, rural and remote family and relationships service delivery*, by Louise Roufeil, Charles Sturt University, and Kristine Battye, Kristine Battye Consulting.

This paper examines the growing need for improved delivery of family and relationship services in non-urban areas of Australia. After reviewing recent social demographic and economic trends and the literature on service delivery in rural settings, the authors consider several factors that enable or limit effective rural service delivery and outline a model for sustainable service delivery in rural, regional and remote areas.

AFRC Briefing No. 10 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing10.html

AFRC Briefing No. 11—*Working with families concerned with school-based bullying*, by Dr Jodie Lodge, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

School-based bullying and harassment continue to concern parents, teachers and those working with children and young people. This paper discusses the research literature on the effects of bullying on the health and wellbeing of young people, effective prevention and intervention strategies, and offers suggestions for engaging young people in conversations about bullying. Useful resources for practitioners, parents and young people are also provided.

Briefing No. 11 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing11.html

AFRC Briefing No. 12—*Housing stress and mental health and wellbeing*, by Elly Robinson and Ren Adams, Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse.

This paper explores the relationship between housing affordability, housing stress and health and wellbeing. Recent statistics on housing affordability in Australia are
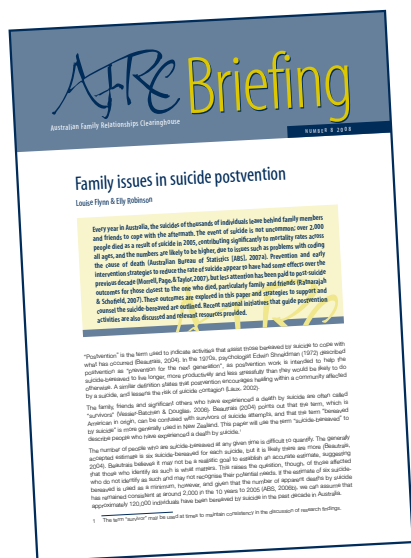
presented and the potential impacts of housing issues on health and wellbeing and how these influence outcomes for Australian families are considered. The authors then examine the relevance of these issues to family and relationship service provision, and provide suggestions for effective service responses.

Briefing No. 12 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/pubs/briefing/briefing12.html

Practice profiles

A number of new Practice Profiles have been added to the AFRC website:

- Children's Safety in Cyberspace (for supporting and informing parents about technology)
- Chinese Learning Discovery (introducing Chinese culture to kindergarten staff and children)
- Cultural X Change Project (targeting under-represented groups of Mensline clients)
- Explicit Affective Practice (a whole of agency approach to service delivery)
- Having Healthy Relationships Program (Relationship Education in Schools Partnership)
- Strength to Strength (a family relationships program for humanitarian entrant families)

Practice Profiles can be viewed at: www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/practice/practiceprofiles.html

Other clearinghouse publications and resources

Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA)
www.aifs.gov.au/acssa

ACSSA AWARE Newsletter No. 17, 2008—Articles include: What is the outcome of reporting rape to the police?; Forensic medical care for sexual assault victim/survivors in Australia; forum review, film review and more.

ACSSA Wrap No. 5, 2008—*Working with Indigenous survivors of sexual assault*, by Dorinda Cox, Manager, Aboriginal Healing Project, Western Australia.

National Child Protection Clearinghouse (NCPC)
www.aifs.gov.au/ncpc

Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter 16(1)—This edition includes the latest data from Child Protection Australia, recent conference and workshop highlights, and book reviews.

Child Abuse Prevention Newsletter 16(1) is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/newsletters/newsletters.html

Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 28—*Developing a road map for research: Identifying the priorities for a national child protection research agenda*, by Leah Bromfield (National Child Protection Clearinghouse) and Fiona Arney (University of South Australia, Australian Centre for Child Protection)

Child Abuse Prevention Issues No. 28 is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/issues/issues.html

Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse
www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au

ADFVC Newsletter No. 32, April 2008

This issue of the newsletter contains articles discussing the changes to the approach to family violence in Victoria and the impending changes in NSW, spotlights a program supporting female partners of men attending perpetrator programs in inner Melbourne, and reports on research into the relationship between mental health and domestic violence services, and on domestic violence and the workplace.

ADFVC Newsletter No. 32 is available at: http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Newsletter_32.pdf

Working it out: Domestic violence issues and the workplace. Suellen Murray & Anastasia Powell, ADFVC Issues Paper No. 16, April 2008.

This paper reviews the local and international literature on domestic violence and employment issues, discusses the impact of domestic violence on employment and employment issues on domestic violence, and provides examples of domestic violence prevention programs and models underpinning them.

ADFVC Issues Paper is available at: http://www.adfvc.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Issues%20Paper_16.pdf

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies (ACYS)
www.acys.info

Youth Studies Australia, 27(1)

Articles in this issue cover long-term support of at-risk young people, youth homelessness data for 2006, financial management and young Australian workers, the PATS peer support program, and the role of sport and recreation in supporting refugee young people to "settle well" in Australia. Electronic summaries of journal articles are available at: www.acys.info/journal (full access requires subscription).

ACYS Newsletter April edition (n.14)

This edition of the newsletter contains items on *Australia's Homeless Youth. Report of the National Youth Commission Independent Inquiry into Youth Homelessness*, the Australian Youth Forum, tips for writing successful grant applications, programs for youth, mental health, rural youth, and youth research.

The ACYS Newsletter is available at: www.acys.info/news/latest_newsletter

Other AIFS publications

Family Matters No. 78
www.aifs.gov.au

This issue of *Family Matters* contains articles on social inclusion, non-monetary measurement of wellbeing, parent–adolescent relationships, caring and women's labour market participation, children's views on family homelessness, an evaluation of a new post-separation and divorce parenting program, aspects of the early history of child protection in Australia, and changes and challenges in children's lives.

Family Matters is available on subscription. See: www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2007/fm78.html

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) Annual Report 2006–2007
www.aifs.gov.au/growingup

The annual report 2006–2007 for *Growing Up in Australia*, the longitudinal study of Australian children (LSAC), was released in May. This study, which commenced in 2003–04, is following the development of 2 cohorts of children over a number of years. This Annual Report includes an overview of the Wave 2 data collection process with highlights from the Wave 2 data, when the children were aged 2–3 years and 6–7 years. The report also includes feature articles on breastfeeding, mother's labour force participation, the financial wellbeing of families, childcare and employment, and parental work and time with children, and contains a listing of all publications and presentations using the LSAC data during the year.

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) 2006–2007 Annual Report is available at: www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/pubs/ar.html
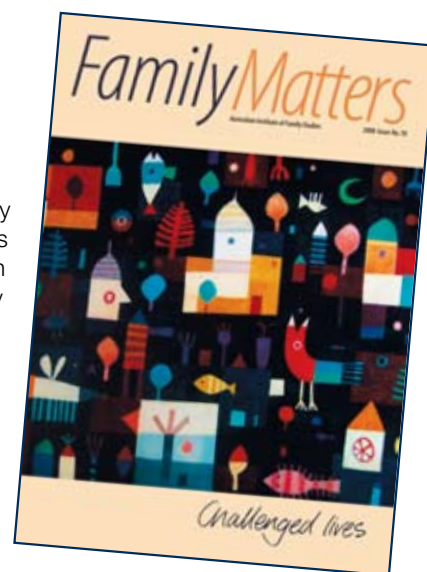
Other publications and resources

Brotherhood Comment April 2008

Brotherhood Comment is published three times a year by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. It highlights research, analysis and campaigns, and brings together issues of public debate. Articles in this issue include:

- Social inclusion down under
- "It changed my vision of Australia": Outcomes of giving refugees a chance
- Responding to climate change: Steps to assist low-income private renters
- Through school to work: Research directions to foster social inclusion of young people
- Youth listening to youth: Peer research into youth transitions
- Raising the bar: Responsible business conduct in a globalised economy
- A lifelong concern: Social inclusion and older people
- Re-fashioning community engagement: Rotary's PACE project
- Exploring new Indigenous partnerships
- Helping parents and children learn together: Insights into the impact of a home interaction program.

Brotherhood Comment April 2008 is available at: www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/commentapr08.pdf

West African refugee health in rural Australia: Complex cultural factors that influence mental health. (2008). J.Q. Nyagua, & A.J Harris. *Rural and Remote Health*, *8*(884) (Online).

This paper presents information about important influences on clients from West Africa of which Western practitioners are likely to be unaware and discusses ways in which practitioners can develop culturally sensitive practices to work effectively with clients from

this region. The paper is available at: www.rrh.org.au/articles/showarticlenew.asp?ArticleID=884

Work–life balance in Australia in the new millennium: Rhetoric versus reality. (2008). Dr Linda Duxbury & Dr Chris Higgins. Melbourne: Beaton Consulting

This report provides a broad view of the work–life balance of a large sample of Australian "knowledge workers" who are professionals, managers or executives. The survey examined four elements of work–life conflict: role overload; work interference with family; family interference with work; and caregiver strain. The authors discuss the impacts each of the work–life conflicts and the implications for employers and employees. The report is available at: www.beaton.com.au/pdfs/BC_WorkLifeBal_fullReport.pdf

Contemporary Australian archetypes: Different people, different needs (2008). Helen Berry, Peter Butterworth, Tania Caldwell & Bryan Rogers (Social Policy Research Paper No 32). Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

This paper presents the results of a large-scale study of how sociodemographic, psychosocial, and health factors combine and are expressed in the Australian population. Using data from the Housing Income and Labour Dynamics survey, researchers identified five groupings that provide policy makers and service providers with a new way of understanding Australians and their needs. The report discusses the implications of the ëarchetypes' for policy and practice. The report is available at: www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/research/prps-prps_32.htm

Lessons learned about strengthening Indigenous families and communities. (2008). John Scougall (Occasional Paper No 19). Canberra: Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

This document examines the contribution of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (2000–2004) to strengthening Indigenous families and communities. It reports on the achievements of the strategy in strengthening relationships and life skills among Indigenous families and communities, in improving Indigenous access to services, and increasing their capacity to develop new skills in a range of areas. The report discusses projects that have been successful and the factors that contributed to their success, projects that have not been effective and why, and how the outcomes of the strategy thus far can inform future interventions. The report is available at: www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/research/ops-ops19.htm

Families where a parent has a mental illness. A service development strategy. (2007). Victorian Department of Human Services. Melbourne: Author.

Families in which a parent has a mental illness may need additional support in their daily lives. This document outlines a strategy to help services strengthen and better coordinate their service responses for this group, and presents information about their prevalence in the community and the issues in service provision. The report is available at: www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/families/families.pdf

Families and mental health. A parenting resource kit. Victorian Department of Human Services.

Parenting can be challenging enough—but more so if you have a mental illness. This kit provides information about parenting, support services and a range of other resources including the stories, experiences and advice of parents with mental illness. A practical tool, the kit also provides space for parents to list relevant information and contact details of sources of help among family and friends if a crisis occurs, as well as information on a range of services and supports, references and resources (print, multimedia and online). The hard-copy kit can be ordered at: www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/publications/families

Understanding cohabitation: A critical study of the Living Together as Husband and Wife Rule in UK Social Security Law. (2008). Sue Kelly (Briefing 37). Edinburgh: Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

This research briefing examines how the assumptions underpinning the assessment of entitlement to benefits of cohabiting couples are out of step with how cohabiting couples perceive and arrange their financial obligations. It uses data from a qualitative study of cohabiting couples to illustrate the negative implications of the current law for couples and children. The briefing is available at: www.crfr.ac.uk/Reports/rb%2037.pdf

How Australians use their time, 2006: Summary of Findings. (2008). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

This document describes the time spent by Australians in various activities. Four categories of time use are examined: necessary time (sleeping, eating, etc); contracted time (paid work, education); committed time (domestic activities, childcare, volunteering; and free time (social and community interaction, recreation and leisure). Time use patterns are also examined for parents of children in various age groups, younger and older people, and for time spent alone and with others.

The report is available at: www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4153.0?OpenDocument

The overscheduling myth. (2008). Joseph L. Mahoney, Angel L. Harris & Jacquelynne S. Eccles. Washington, DC: Child Trends.

This article counters the myth that children and youth participate in excessive amounts of extra-curricular activities, citing research that demonstrates a need to focus on those children who do not participate in any organised activities rather than the few whose participation is considered excessive. The article is available at: www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2008_02_27_Myth.pdf

Literature highlights

COMPILED BY JOAN KELLEHER, LIBRARIAN

The following are a selection of resources received by the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse (AFRC) library collection. Print resources are available via the inter-library loan system. Contact your own library for details of this system. Electronic resources are available directly via the web address.

Parental mental illness

Borderline personality disorder, mother-infant interaction and parenting perceptions: Preliminary findings. (2007). Newman, L. K., Stevenson, C. S., Bergman, L. R., et al. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *41*(7), 598–605.

Parents diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD) are likely to find the emotional aspects of parenting challenging. Research into the difficulties that these parents experience, however, is lacking. The aims of this study were to gain an understanding of the interaction patterns of mothers with BPD and their infants, and to explore the parenting perceptions of mothers with BPD. A group of mothers with BPD and their infants and a control group of mothers and infants were compared on mother infant interaction patterns and on maternal self perceptions of parenting. The results showed that mothers with BPD were less sensitive and demonstrated less structuring in interaction with their infants, and their infants were less attentive, less interested and less eager to interact with the mother. The study concludes that early intervention is needed to promote maternal sensitivity and maternal perceptions of competence among mothers with BPD. (Journal abstract, edited)

Children at risk in families affected by parental mental illness. **(2005). Maybery, D., Reupert, A., Patrick, K. et al. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), Mental Health and Wellbeing Unit. Online only. http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/assets/contentFiles/Research_Report_COPMI.pdf**

The report outlines the findings of research commissioned by VicHealth to determine the extent and distribution of children and young people whose parents have a mental illness. It says that policy and service delivery to children of parents with a mental illness is often based upon the premise that risks to children are equivalent. It proposes that children living in disparate family circumstances are exposed to varied levels of risk. Population estimates of children living at moderate to extreme levels of risk are proposed according to the level of parental mental illness disability and number of parents in the household. Two approaches are used to triangulate estimates: a top down population approach employing Australian Bureau of Statistics data and a bottom up, actual service usage (Victorian Mental Health) assessment. Implications for policy and service delivery are outlined.

The PATS peer support program: Prevention/early intervention for adolescents who have a parent with mental illness. (2008). Hargreaves, J., Bond, L., O'Brien, M. et al. *Youth Studies Australia*, *27*(1), 43–51.

PATS (Paying Attention to Self) is a peer support program for adolescent children of parents with a diagnosed mental illness. The program aims to promote positive mental health, reduce the likelihood of mental health difficulties, increase young people's coping skills and empower them to meet their own and their families' needs. PATS combines peer support, group work, high levels of youth participation, a wide range of ongoing activities, and opportunities to develop useful life skills with lots of fun along the way. Central to the success of PATS is the belief that programs shaped by young people, for young people, will be attractive to young people. (Journal abstract)

Family law and children with mentally ill parents. (2007). Quadrio, C. In P. Hanlon (Ed.), *Reach out, connect: Contemporary TheMHS in mental health service. Book of proceedings, 16th Annual TheMHS Conference, Townsville, Queensland*. **(pp. 258–263). Sydney: Mental Health Services Conference Inc. of Australia and New Zealand.**

This paper examines issues involved in assessing families going through the family court in cases of disputed child residence where one or both parents have a mental illness. The paper addresses situations where the mental status of the parent may not relate simply to parenting capacity. It also looks at the dilemma between the role of the therapist or advocate for the parent versus child protection issues when a treating clinician is asked to report on a parent. Lastly, the paper considers the extreme vulnerability of these children, who are coping with the trauma and distress of family breakdown, the legal process, and the ongoing difficulties of having one or two parents with mental illness. (Author abstract, edited)

Funkey connections: Building resilience in children of parents with mental health issues. (2007). Shipp, J. In P. Hanlon (Ed.), *Reach out, connect: Contemporary TheMHS in mental health service. Book of proceedings, 16th Annual TheMHS Conference, Townsville, Queensland*. (pp. 302–305). Sydney: Mental Health Services Conference Inc. of Australia and New Zealand.

For a number of years programs to support children of parents with mental health issues have been developed throughout the Western world. These programs have each had their own challenges and successes, but many have relied on a pool of metropolitan resources, such as project officers to run the programs, accessible distances and public amenities. This paper outlines the efforts of a small team in New South Wales to create connections strong enough to have long lasting support for a deserving group of young people. It discusses the unique challenges of supporting people in remote townships, the importance of creating partnerships and the impact of the program on the lives of the young people and their families. (Author abstract, edited)

Gathering stories about growing up with a parent with mental health difficulties. (2006). Russell, S., & Newman, D. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work, No.* 3, 59–67.

This project aims to bring together stories that relate to the experience of children whose parents or carers have or had serious mental health difficulties. This paper introduces the project, provides a list of questions to assist people in describing their experiences, and contains some examples of stories.

Mental health consumer and carer participation in professional education: "Getting there together" for children of parents with mental illness and their families. (2006). Cowling, V., Edan, V., Cuff, R., et al. *Australian Social Work*, *59*(4), 406–421.

Getting There Together is a professional education seminar developed as a collaborative project by professionals, mental health consumers and carers aimed at service providers who work with children of parents with mental illness and their families. The need for such professional education concerning this group is well recognised and this project was initiated by a reference group of professionals, consumers and carers focusing on children of parents with mental illness in the Eastern region of Melbourne. The project began and continued as a collaborative effort during development and implementation. (Journal abstract, edited)

Mind the gap: Supporting children in families where parents have a dual diagnosis. (2006). Hegarty, M. In S. Robertson (Ed.), *Dancing to the beat of a different drum: Book of proceedings, 15th Annual TheMHS Conference, Adelaide, South Australia, 31 August–2 September 2005*. (pp. 71–76). Sydney: Mental Health Services Conference Inc. of Australia and New Zealand.

The National Illicit Drug Strategy Dual Diagnosis Project is a partnership between the Mental Health Co-ordinating Council (MHCC) and the NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS). The project, sponsored by the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, aims to improve support for children and young people affected by parental dual diagnosis. In 2004–2005, the Dual Diagnosis Project researched the needs of this population, and developed a series of information resources for workers, families and carers, to improve knowledge about parental dual diagnosis and support available. The project also aimed to improve support for families through the development of practice tools specific to dual diagnosis, improved cross agency collaboration and training. (Author abstract)

Workforce capacity to respond to children whose parents have a mental illness. (2006). Maybery, D., & Reupert, A. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *40*(8), 657–664.

This study aimed to identify the core barriers that impede adult mental health and other clinicians from working with patients about parenting and child related issues; to rate the importance of these barriers; and to compare barriers for adult mental health workers with other workers. Verbatim responses were collected from 60 mental health and welfare workers, regarding barriers in working with mentally ill patients about their parenting role and with their children. Then 20 adult mental health workers and 12 other workers responded to questionnaire items based on the qualitative barriers identified at phase one. The most important barriers highlighted by workers were patients not identifying their illness as a problem for their children, and patients denying that they had a mental health problem. All workers reported that it was part of their role to get involved with issues regarding their patients' children. (Journal abstract, edited)

Young carers, young victims, or young survivors? Impacts on, and responses of, children of parents with mental illness. (2006). Cooklin, A. *VAFT News*, *28*(3), 19–24.

The impacts on children and young people of having a parent with a mental illness are outlined. The article discusses results of a long-term project connected with the Kidstime workshops. It explores the experiences, needs and wishes of the children and young people, and the responsibilities of mental health staff.

Conferences

COMPILED BY MARK PIMPERL

The following list of forthcoming conferences is taken from the Conferences and Events page on the Australian Family Relationships Clearinghouse website. For the latest entries visit www.aifs.gov.au/afrc/conferences.html

18th Annual TheMHS Conference—Be the Change you Want: Workforce Ingenuity

2–5 September 2008
Auckland, NZ

This conference will focus on the following questions: How can we model the change we want? How can we be effective change agents? What tools, techniques and methods support workforce change and innovation?

Further information: www.themhs.org; Email: info@themhs.org: Phone: (02) 9810 8700

9th Australian Adoption Conference— "Connecting Past, Securing Future"

3–5 September 2008
Sydney, NSW

The theme for the conference was inspired by a quote from Hundertwasser who said: "If we do not honour our past, we lose our future. If we destroy our roots, we cannot grow." It was felt that that for each adoption journey, by acknowledging the past, we are able to make sense of and secure the future.

Further information: www.australianadoptionconference.com

5th World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and the Prevention of Mental and Behavioural Disorders— From Margins to Mainstream

10–12 September 2008
Melbourne, Vic

Accepting responsibility for mental health should be everybody's business. This conference will explore new ways that health services, governments and community organisations can promote mental health and prevent mental illness. Topics will include: social participation; freedom from violence; freedom from discrimination; and increasing access to economic resources.

Further information: www.margins2mainstream.com; Email: info@margins2mainstream.com; Phone: (03) 9370 1265

9th National Mediation Conference— Mediation: Transforming the Landscape

10–12 September 2008
Perth, WA

The theme of the Conference is "Transforming the Landscape": of mediation practice, with diversity, of related professional practices, to promote peaceful resolution of conflict, of the justice system.

Further information: www.promaco.com.au/2008/mediation/; Email: promaco@promaco.com.au; Phone: (08) 9332 2900

Early Childhood Australia Biennial Conference—Children: A Nation's Capital

3–6 October 2008
Canberra, ACT

The Early Childhood Australia conference is for all who are involved in supporting the growth, development and learning of young children. The theme of this year's conference is "Investing in our children"; presentations will explore approaches to working with young children, focusing on: social and emotional wellbeing; environment and sustainability; advocacy and leadership; theory into practice.

Further information: Early Childhood Australia website - www.ecaconference.com.au; Email: conference@earlychildhood.org.au; Phone: (02) 6242 1800

National Foster Care Conference "Better Outcomes"

October–2 November 2008
Brighton Beach, NSW

This is the only national conference that is dedicated to foster care issues. Attendees may include foster, relative, kinship, grandparent and permanent carers; non-government and government agency workers; policy makers; researchers; students and academics; and professionals working in areas intersecting with care and protection. The conference sessions and activities should focus on achieving positive outcomes or enhancing practice and, in particular, attempt to address the issues challenging the sector now and in the next five years.

For further information email the conference organising committee at conf2008@bigpond.com; Fax: (02) 62538887

70th National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference—"Lenses on Family"

5–8 November 2008
Little Rock, Arkansas, USA

The lenses through which we view family affect what is seen and unseen, as well as how our research findings are understood. The theme of this year's conference encompasses how families are defined, which family processes are presumed to be adaptive, and how our research findings are interpreted in the public arena.

Further information: www.ncfr.org/conf/current/annual.asp

Strength in Unity: Sharing and Building Skills

9–12 November 2008
Melbourne, Vic

This year's conference themes are: Indigenous issues; child safety and family wellbeing; international human rights and social development; housing affordability and access for all ages; mental health and wellbeing; educating students—direct practice and field education; injury rehabilitation and disability; changing employment context and work issues; social inclusion; youth, women's and men's issues; rural & Leadership.

Further information: www.iceaustralia.com/strengthinunity2008/index.html; Email: strengthinunity2008@iceaustralia.com; Phone: (02) 9368 1200

QEC 5th International Biennial Conference—Reaching Out to Vulnerable Families: Achieving Better Outcomes for Children

19–21 November 2008
Melbourne, Vic

The conference themes are: building responsive and resilient organisational culture; understanding and responding to staff and community; engaging CALD & Indigenous families; engaging fathers; promoting maternal and infant mental health; and protecting the safety and wellbeing of young children

Further information: www.qec.org.au/biennial-conference.php?id=61; Email: qec2008@meetingplanners.com.au; Phone: 1300 799 691

For a full list of conferences, seminars and events visit the Conferences page on the AIFS website at http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/conf/confmenu.html

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