A number of Conferences have been held to mark the International Year of the Family. Strong and positive themes have been the order of the day: healthy families, work and family, strengthening families. South Australia will host the national International Year of the Family Conference with federal support on 20–23 November 1994. For fuller listings see the Conference/Workshop Circuit round-up in this issue.

Activities

Events ranging from fun-runs through to picnics and street parties have been organised by local and state governments and community groups to celebrate their families. A ‘family chain’, not unlike a family time capsule, is being created in Victoria and will be sent to the United Nations at the end of the year. Families are invited to provide a memento of themselves, such as a photo, poem or description of the family, to be placed in a plastic pocket that will form a link in the chain.

Publications

A range of written material has been produced for the International Year of the Family. The National Council for the International Year of the Family in Canberra and is available from GPO Box 666, Woden ACT 2606; the Australian Bureau of Statistics has compiled special family reports in some states; and a number of states have compiled folders with general ideas and information of interest to individuals and community groups about celebrating the International Year. You can check the information available in your state by phoning the relevant number below.

Contact numbers
(ask for the International Year of the Family unit)

International Year of the Family Office (federal) (06) 205 0314

Australian Capital Territory
Chief Minister’s Department (06) 205 0314

New South Wales
Social Policy Directorate, Department of Community Services (02) 367 0806

Northern Territory
Department of Health and Community Services (089) 892 722

Queensland
Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (07) 224 8851

South Australia
Department for Community and Family Services, Office for Families (08) 220 3637

Tasmania
Department of Community and Health Services (002) 33 4808

Victoria
Department of Health and Community Services (03) 412 6548

Western Australia
Department for Community Development (09) 222 2601

International Year of the Family Conference

hosted by

The City of Melbourne

7–8 November, 1994 at The Regent Hotel, Melbourne

REGISTRATION OF INTEREST

Themes proposed for the Conference are:

• Cooperation and Initiatives of Government, the Business and Community Sectors to support and strengthen families and their quality of life
• Improving the ‘Family Friendliness’ of Cities and Towns

Keynote Speakers Include:

• Mr Charles Landry, Consultant CoMedia, Consultancy Research Planning, Gloucester, England.
• Mr Jeff Kenworthy, Institute for Science and Technology Policy, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.

Concurrent Sessions Will Cover:

• Physical and Environmental Attributes that Make a City Family Friendly
• Services that Support a City’s Social Infrastructure
• Education Opportunities Across the Age Spectrum
• Recreational and Sporting Opportunities Offered by a Family Friendly City
• Arts and Cultural Experiences Available to the Whole Family
• Transport and Transport Systems, Public and Private, that Support the Family
• Opportunities for Community Participation

For registration brochure and further information contact:

The Conference Organiser
The Meeting Planners
108 Church Street
Hawthorn, Victoria 3122

Phone: (03) 819 3700
Fax: (03) 819 5978
Some of the Issues

Dave Palmer and Len Collard are also concerned about inappropriate models. They call for a re-examination of research frameworks that tend to generate and perpetuate stereotypes about Aboriginal youth, and do not allow for other interpretations. They report on work with Nyungar young people in Western Australia which challenges conceptions of Aboriginal youth as predominantly deviant and culturally impoverished.

Not surprisingly, current Institute research concerning youth has an emphasis on young people and families. This is reflected in the paper by Robyn Hartley and Ilene Wolcott which summarises the key points from a recent publication completed for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. The full report reviews recent trends in the position of young people in relation to family and discusses some of the problems of striking the most appropriate balance between government, community, family and individual responsibility for young people.

Income support provisions for young people are closely linked to questions about responsibility. The Federal Government’s May 1994 White Paper included some significant changes to current arrangements, which are nevertheless in line with trends over the last decade. Anthony King tackles the complex job of analysing the gains and losses for young people, and the possible effects on their moves towards independence. He sees some potential for positive outcomes but suggests that the ‘big question-mark’ is the fundamental philosophy about solutions to unemployment underlying the White Paper.

A quite striking example of shifts in the way in which the period of youth is conceived is reflected in increases in educational participation over recent decades. In the past, the majority of 15–19 year olds were not in education; now the great majority of under-19 year olds, and a high proportion of under-24 year olds are in education or training. Data from the Institute’s Australian Living Standards Study are used by Peter McDonald, Helen Brownlee and Evelyn Greenblat in their discussion of the determinants of young people’s participation in education and training.

Ian Winter also takes up the education and training theme in his article. However, the main focus is on young people’s access to services in the outer urban fringe areas of Australian cities, compared with the inner-city areas, an issue which has major implications for urban planning.

There are multiple causes of tensions in relationships between parents and young people (including Bessant’s point that a ‘them’ and ‘us’ mentality has been established). The need families have for assistance in resolving problems is clearly demonstrated by the use made of the (relatively few) existing Parent–Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy Programs funded by the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department. Ilene Wolcott and Ruth Weston identify some positive outcomes from mediation in the Institute’s evaluation of this program.

In her report of research in progress, Kate Funder describes a study which is exploring links between young people’s family experience and sexual risk-taking behaviour — a major issue of concern for young people and for families.

This edition of Family Matters discusses some aspects of the changing institutional structure and competing value structures which young people in Australia face in the 1990s. However, the issues raised — as well as others not included, such as the unprecedented high levels of youth suicide, youth homelessness, and the need for appropriate health services for young people — are not just ‘youth’ issues. They are concerns that have an impact on families, society, and the nature of research about young people.

ROBYN HARTLEY

Robyn Hartley, who helped coordinate this issue of Family Matters, is a Fellow at the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Her special research interests include youth policy and cultural diversity in Australia.