



Director's report

Alan Hayes

Following the federal election, the Institute remains within the portfolio of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), with the Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP, who is now the Minister for Human Services and Minister for Social Inclusion, being the Minister responsible for the Institute. This positioning maintains the role of the Institute in providing research to inform policy relating to family wellbeing, within and beyond the portfolio. The Institute's Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) came under Minister Plibersek's previous portfolio responsibilities. I am looking forward to welcoming Minister Plibersek to the Institute early next year.

Interest in the Institute's work continues apace, and we have hosted a steady flow of national and international

visitors. On 7 September 2010, the Institute was privileged to welcome the Governor-General of Australia, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce AC, His Excellency Mr Bryce, and three staff from Yarralumla. Her Excellency was most interested in our current research and publication programs and very generously affirmed the value of the Institute and the contributions of those who have worked here across our three decades. She noted the extensive use she had made of the Institute's research across her career.

While maintaining our central focus on national research, policy and practical relevance, international outreach, especially within the Asia-Pacific region, is growing in priority. Institute researchers are increasingly invited to present our work overseas and we have also recently welcomed delegations from several countries.

4th East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families

With Ruth Weston, PSM, I joined the Australian Delegation for the 4th East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families. The Ministerial Forum commenced on 9 November in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia under the theme: Safe and Resilient Families: Protecting and Empowering At-Risk and High-Risk Families. The forum was attended by more than a dozen other nations from East and Southeast Asia.

Before the Ministerial Forum, we participated in the Senior Officials Forum, which included discussion of each country's progress in implementing the Bali Statement, exchange of information on current policy, practice and research priorities with a focus on building family resilience, and the drafting of the Forum Communiqué, to be considered and endorsed by the Ministers on the following days.

At the invitation of Dato' Amine Abdul Raman, Director-General of the Malaysian National Population and Family Development Board at the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, I presented the opening paper titled *Building Family Resilience and Creating "Bounce Back" Families: Providing the Evidence Base, Assessing What Works and Disseminating the Knowledge* as one of three presenters in a session on Building Family Resilience: Creating "Bounce Back" Families. The paper provided examples of ways in which the Institute's research and evaluations have contributed to policy development and practice and improved our understanding of the



Her Excellency Quentin Bryce with Professor Alan Hayes



Her Excellency Quentin Bryce with (l. to r.) Dr Matthew Gray and Reverend the Hon. Professor Brian Howe

developmental paths to resilience and vulnerability. These examples highlighted some of the personal, social and financial resources that families need in order to achieve resilience and to emphasise the importance of community-based, family-focused, and socially inclusive supports in assisting families in this endeavour. The paper was well received and generated several questions from the Ministers. They were particularly interested in how the Institute's research and evaluation activities inform and influence family policy and practice, the value of Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and the role of the Institute's clearinghouses in disseminating research information and promising practice to policy-makers and practitioners. In the final communiqué the ministers resolved to explore the feasibility of each nation establishing a repository of policy and research and consider ways in which information might be made accessible across the nations participating in the forum. Clearly, the work of the Institute and our clearinghouses is of growing interest across the region.

While there was considerable commonality in the challenges confronting each nation (including disadvantage and poverty, family violence and relationship breakdown), it is clear that marked differences in cultural and national contexts result in very different approaches to addressing these. Despite similar challenges, the clash of traditional cultures with the impacts of globalisation, development and "modernity" formed another dimension of the complexity. All in all, this was a very valuable opportunity to gain a much richer perspective on our region and Australia's engagement with our neighbors in the Asia-Pacific. I expect that we will have further visits from regional delegations and ministerial interest in learning more about the Institute. The forum also provided an excellent opportunity to progress negotiations around closer collaboration with several countries, including Vietnam, South Korea, Singapore and our hosts in Malaysia.

Other Institute international presentations

Institute researchers increasingly are invited to present our work at major international conferences. For example, in June, Dr Daryl Higgins, General Manager (Research), delivered a plenary presentation on Global Challenges on Disabilities and Sexuality at the 4th International Conference on Peer Education, Sexuality, HIV and AIDS in Nairobi, Kenya.

The following month, Senior Research Fellow Carol Soloff made presentations on LSAC to the European Child Cohort Network (EUCCONET) International Workshop, at the University of London; at the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College, Dublin; at the University of Mannheim; and at the International Association for Time Use Research Sciences, in Paris.

In October, Dr Michael Alexander, Principal Research Fellow, travelled to Italy to speak on recent parental leave changes in Australia at the International Parental Leave Policies and Research Network annual seminar in Bologna, and on fathering and family-friendly work arrangements at Barcelona University.

International delegations

Equally important for building capability and exchanging knowledge, are the visits made to the Institute by international delegations and scholars.

In July, we welcomed a delegation from the Singapore Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports. In the same month, the New Zealand Families Commissioner, Mr Gregory Fortuin, visited to discuss the commission's Safety of Children project and Supporting Families and Whanau in Financial Hardship. In addition, the Institute also welcomed a delegation from the Hong Kong Council of Social Services.

A Taiwanese delegation from the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office visited the Institute in September. During this visit, we learned of the innovative approach being taken in Taiwan to technology and its use both in school education and programs for senior citizens, and of that nation's enduring cultural commitment to filial piety. Members of the delegation were very well informed about the Institute's work and keen to explore opportunities for further engagement.

Also in September, we welcomed a delegation from the Vietnamese Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Ms Ruth Weston, General Manager (Research), has worked over many years to establish and maintain our links to Vietnam and across the region. The delegation conveyed the Vietnamese Government's interest in pursuing a formal collaborative agreement with the Institute.

In November, the Institute welcomed a very large delegation from China. Our visitors represented the National Bureau of Statistics of China and 19 regional bureaus. One of the Institute's Research Fellows, Lixia Qu, invaluable explained in Mandarin our statistical survey methodologies and the means by which our survey data inform the Institute's research activities.

Also in November, we were very pleased to host a visit by members of the UK Family Justice Review, commissioned by the Ministry of Justice, the Department of Education and the Welsh Assembly Government. The review is examining both public and private law cases; exploring whether better use can be made of mediation and how best to support contact between children and non-resident parents or grandparents; examining the processes (but not the law) involved in granting divorces and awarding ancillary relief; and considering how the different parts of the family justice system are organised and managed. The aim is to provide advice that produces a system that allows families to reach easy, simple and efficient agreements that are in the best interests of children, while also protecting children and vulnerable adults from risk of harm. The delegation included Mr David Norgrove, the Chair, and Mr Justice Andrew McFarlane, a Judge of the High Court. They were particularly interested in the findings of the Institute's *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms* and their impacts and implications for the UK family law system.

International visiting scholars

The Institute continues to attract international researchers to spend time working with our project teams. Dr Leanne

Smith, of Cardiff Law School in Wales, visited the Institute in July 2010 to research Australia's family relationship services and to be briefed on the *Evaluation of the 2006 Family Law Reforms*. Dr Smith's visit also served to build links between AIFS and the new Research Network for Family, Regulation and Society, an interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers of family issues at the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Exeter and Cardiff.

From September 2010 to February 2011, AIFS welcomes Dr Sharon Vincent from the University of Edinburgh. Working with the resources of the Institute's National Child Protection Clearinghouse, Dr Vincent is conducting fieldwork as part of her project on mechanisms for reviewing child deaths within and across nations.

Ms Johanna Bosinski, a final year Psychology student from the University of Hamburg, joined us in September for a period of four months, to work with the social and emotional development data from LSAC.

Dr Matthew Gray



After over five years at the Institute as Deputy Director (Research), and following an earlier time with us (from November 2000 to early 2004), it is with considerable ambivalence that we bid farewell to Dr Matthew Gray. From the start of 2011, Matthew will be

taking up the position of Professor of Indigenous Public Policy at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU). CAEPR is currently Australia's major social science research centre focusing on Indigenous economic and social policy.

Throughout his time at the Institute, Matthew has published extensively on a wide range of Australian social and economic policy issues. His particular expertise has been a valuable asset to the Institute, in a range of areas including work and family issues, labour economics, social exclusion and social inclusion, measuring wellbeing, the economic consequences of divorce, child support, and social and economic policy development.

While at the Institute, Matthew has led our research and evaluation programs for a wide range of organisations, including the Attorney-General's Department, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations.

He will be sorely missed! I wish Professor Gray and his family well for a very exciting move and look forward to our continuing collaborative relationship.

Ms Maren Helland from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health arrived in October to spend six months working on comparative analyses of the LSAC data and longitudinal data from the Norwegian study, Tracing Opportunities and Problems in Childhood and Adolescence (TOPP).

In short, the international interest in the Institute's work grows, and is resulting in very valuable collaborative opportunities, with tangible benefits.

Memoranda of understanding

In addition to memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with Australian entities—including the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)—the Institute continues to build international relationships, including the renewal of our MoU with the Norwegian National Institute of Public Health and a new MoU with our nearest regional partner, the New Zealand Families Commission.

Family law research

This edition focuses on key topics relevant to the family law system. The completion of the evaluation of the 2006 reforms to Australia's family law system, commissioned by the Australian Government, represents one of the Institute's major achievements of 2009–10. The report, released in January 2010, continues to attract considerable interest and the results of the evaluation are being used to inform the ongoing development of policy and practice in the family law area.

AIFS is continuing its family law work via the evaluation of two pilot programs, being undertaken for the Attorney-General's Department, that aim to strengthen the delivery of services for separated parents. One pilot program is designed to build better partnerships and greater collaboration between Family Relationship Centres and legal assistance services, while the other is for legally assisted and supported family dispute resolution in family violence cases.

Concluding thoughts

Increasingly, a key priority for the Institute is to strengthen our international links, especially across our region, while ensuring that we extend the impact, value and relevance of our work, nationally. As I have outlined, above, there is pleasing progress in achieving the former, with considerable extension of our international links. The articles in this edition of *Family Matters* highlight the latter, and demonstrate how the work of Institute researchers and their colleagues in other institutions is contributing to a much stronger evidence base to inform policy and practice in an area of vital family policy—the family law system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Hays'.