The reach of the Institute’s work continues to grow and not only informs policy development and, through evaluation, policy improvement, but guides innovations in initiatives focused on strengthening, supporting and sustaining families. The work of the Institute also advances wider understanding of the factors affecting the wellbeing of Australian families. The Institute continues to extend our key research activities by growing our capacity and capability, building increased levels of national and international collaboration and sharing information through our conferences, seminars, publications, website and media engagement.

New minister and department

The Institute welcomes our new minister, the Hon. Kevin Andrews MP, to his portfolio of Social Services. The Institute will continue to work closely with our portfolio department, the Department of Social Services (DSS; formerly the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs), while maintaining valued links with our departmental and agency partners across the Australian Government. Some functions of the former department have moved in or out of DSS. Indigenous affairs and the Office for Women have transferred to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, while aged care, multicultural affairs, settlement services, income support, disability employment services, the non-profit sector and volunteering have become the responsibility of DSS.

Visitors to AIFS

The Institute hosted visits by several distinguished guests in this half year.

The Governor General, Her Excellency Quentin Bryce AC CVO and His Excellency Mr Michael Bryce AM AE visited the Institute for a briefing on the recent and upcoming work of AIFS in 18 July 2013. After attending a presentation and update on AIFS’ major projects and future directions, the Governor-General and Mr Bryce joined the Institute’s staff for morning tea, which gave them the opportunity to meet and talk with a wide array of staff.

On 1 August, the National Children’s Commissioner, Ms Megan Mitchell, visited AIFS to discuss areas of common interest in child protection and the wellbeing of children.


Research

Building a New Life in Australia

Building a New Life in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Humanitarian Migrants aims to trace the settlement journey of 1,500 humanitarian migrant families residing in five major metropolitan centres and six regional areas. The study will examine their journey from arrival in Australia through to eligibility for citizenship in order to better understand the factors that influence their settlement
processes, both positively and negatively. Both offshore and onshore humanitarian migrants will be included in the study and it will involve five annual waves of data collection.

During the past 12 months substantial work has gone into the study design, developing participant communication materials and survey content, and gaining ethical approval for the project. In order to inform key aspects of the project AIFS actively engaged representatives from peak agencies (government and non-government), the academic community, humanitarian settlement service providers, cultural, community and faith-based groups, and former humanitarian migrant communities.

Pilot fieldwork was conducted in the first half of 2013 with over one hundred migrating families (154 individuals) to test the overall methodology and survey instrument. This has paved the way for the first wave of data collection, which commenced in October 2013.

The information gathered in this study will be used to inform the development, improvement and targeting of evidence-based policies and programs for humanitarian arrivals in Australia.

Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)

Preparations for the LSAC Wave 6 data collection began in July 2013. Wave 6 includes new measures that are designed to collect important information relevant to the journey through adolescence, including topics such as relationships, sexuality and sexual health and alcohol-related harms. Two new direct assessments will also be introduced that measure executive functioning and language difficulties.

LSAC is also collaborating with Screen Australia and Heiress Films to produce the fifth series of the Life At documentary, Life at 9.

Forced Adoption Services Scoping Study

The Institute has been commissioned to undertake the Forced Adoption Support Services Scoping Study, to be conducted between August 2013 and February 2014. The purpose of the study is to develop options for service models that will enhance and complement the existing service system to improve support for people affected by forced adoption policies and practices. More information is available at <www.aifs.gov.au/pae/scopingstudy>.

The work of this project links closely to the Institute’s recently completed 18-month research project into the needs of people affected by past adoption practices. The report of the study, Past Adoption Experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to past Adoption Practices, was published in August 2012 and helped to inform the Australian Government response to the inquiry into former forced adoption or removal policies and practices, including the National Apology and the allocation of funds to address the needs of those affected by these former practices.

Vietnam Veterans’ Family Study

The project specification for the Vietnam Veterans’ Family Study (VVFS) was signed in September 2013, as part of a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) and AIFS. The project involves the analysis of data from the Vietnam Veterans’ Family Study.

The VVFS is a multigenerational study of the physical, mental and social welfare of the families of those who served in the Australian military during the Vietnam era (1965–72). It is based on a survey of Australian military personnel who, in turn, recruited members of their families (e.g., spouses and children) to take part in the survey. The survey comprises a sample of both Vietnam veterans and a sample of those who served in the military but were not deployed to the war in Vietnam.

DVA has engaged AIFS to analyse the results of the survey in order to evaluate the intergenerational effects of service in the Vietnam War. Specifically, our role is to estimate the effects of active military service on the health and wellbeing of the children of Vietnam Veterans and to identify possible mechanisms through which those effects were realised.

The analysis will examine various outcomes, including those related to:
- mental health (e.g., depression, suicidal ideation and self-harm);
- physical health (e.g., birth complications, hearing problems, miscarriage, still birth and spina bifida);
- social functioning; and
- education and economic wellbeing (e.g., employment status).

Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Review and Evaluation

AIFS is conducting two research projects for the NSW Government as part of the Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Review and Evaluation.
The purpose of this research is to identify:
- the role that domestic and family violence services play in addressing the needs of at-risk groups and/or children, and the effectiveness of these services in addressing those needs;
- the characteristics of good practices and exemplar models in targeting at-risk groups and communities and/or children; and
- strategies to build on existing good practice.

The first project concerns prevention and early intervention services that target groups and communities known to be at higher risk of experiencing domestic and family violence, or who face barriers in accessing existing services. These groups include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; women with disabilities; women in culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are same-sex attracted, intersex, sex or gender diverse; younger women; and women in remote communities.

The second project focuses on prevention, early intervention and response services that target children who are affected by domestic and family violence. The research is centred on children aged 0–8 years and will identify what services children who are affected by domestic and family violence need, what is being done to support them, what models of service delivery are most effective, and what are the gaps in services. This study aims to improve the evidence base to help curb inter-generational violence.

This research will contribute to the implementation of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. For more information about this project, see <www.aifs.gov.au/vpr>.

Evaluating the 2012 family violence amendments

In early 2012, AIFS was commissioned by the Attorney-General’s Department (AGD) to undertake research on the experiences of recently separated parents in the family law system, including experiences of domestic and family violence. The purpose of this work was to establish benchmarking data to support an evaluation of the effects of the family violence amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 that were introduced in the Family Law Amendment (Family Violence and Other Matters) Act 2011.

AIFS has now been commissioned by AGD to conduct further research to evaluate the effects of the 2012 amendments, which will enable comparisons to be made with the benchmarking data collected through the Survey of Recently Separated Parents (SRSP) 2012. In addition, this new evaluation will include a survey of family law professionals and service users, which will help to understand the professional practices used when dealing with people experiencing domestic and family violence.

The research has two parts:
- **Responding to Family Violence: A Survey of Family Law Practices and Experiences**—an online survey examining the practices and experiences of professionals across the system and of service users who accessed services funded by the Family Relationship Services program. The survey is designed to understand the current practice approaches of family law system professionals and the extent of change in practice in response to the enactment of the family violence amendments.
- **Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2014**—a follow-up of the SRSP 2012, with a new cohort of separated parents. The survey will take place in April–May 2014.

**Child sexual abuse research**

The Institute continues to support the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse through a portal on the AIFS website, which guides people to relevant Institute publications and resources relating to child sexual abuse (see <www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/carc>). AIFS staff have collated resources and information for victim/survivors of child sexual abuse, practitioners/service providers and those interested in finding out more about support services for victim/survivors and their families, child sexual abuse, its effects, statistics, prevention and responses.

The Institute will continue to develop and update these resources to enable easy access to reliable information for researchers, the media and other interested people. Institute staff are also assisting the Commissioners by providing background material and access to existing information resources.

**Conferences**

**The Fifth International Community, Work and Family Conference**

The Fifth International Community, Work and Family Conference took place on 17–19 July at The University of Sydney and was organised by Professor Barbara Pocock, Centre for Work and Life, Hawke Research Institute, the University of South Australia; Professor Marian Baird, Women and Work Research Group,
Business School, the University of Sydney; and Dr Michael Alexander, an Executive Manager within the Institute.

The conference focused on the challenges and opportunities for families, communities and organisations of the rapid changes and transitions in society, with a special focus on work, families and communities in a globalising world.

The conference program and information about the keynote speakers are available at <www.aomevents.com/CWFC2013>.

Bridging Research and Practice: Family Life Education Conference

In October, I was delighted to accept an invitation to present the keynote address in Singapore at the Bridging Research and Practice: Family Life Education Conference, convened by the Ministry of Social and Family Development. My paper, Bridging the Divide and Returning the Balance: The Power of Parenting in the Middle Years and Beyond, drew on recent evidence from Australia’s suite of longitudinal studies—including the Australian Temperament Project (now in its 33rd year) and the flagship, Growing up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC).

Analyses of these rich data resources, among others, provide valuable insights into the positive pathways most children take on the journey to adulthood. They also identify the factors that can place young people at risk of a range of problems and vulnerabilities. Most importantly, however, they show the prime power of parenting and positive family functioning to support young travellers on life’s journey.

The Humboldt Colloquium

Later in October, I was very pleased to attend the Humboldt Colloquium “Looking to the Future: International Research in a Changing World”, hosted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. Alumni, Fellows of the Foundation and young researchers from Australia, New Zealand, Germany and several other countries travelled to Sydney for the event, held in celebration of the 60th anniversary of the foundation and the bicentennial of the birth of Ludwig von Leichhardt.

The conference theme had much to do with the observation that while changes in the way we think and act as researchers have always been central to scientific or scholarly undertakings and are linked quite inevitably to a future-driven mind-set of science and scholarship, the pace of these changes has increased, forcing researchers to reflect more often on the conditions that shape their research activities. I was invited to talk about the Institute and our position spanning the boundaries of research, policy and practice. The generosity of the foundation in bringing so many of us together was indeed impressive.

Infant and Early Childhood Social and Emotional Wellbeing Conference

My keynote address at this conference was titled: Looking at Childhood Through the Long Lens: Australia’s Longitudinal Studies as Windows on Human Development Across the Lifespan.

The conference, jointly convened by the Australian Association for Infant Mental Health and the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, and in collaboration with the Infant Mental Health Association of Aotearoa New Zealand, was held from 30 October to 2 November in Canberra, and the program aimed to close the gap between what we know about healthy child development and what we do to ensure that children thrive. The presentations focused on infant and early childhood social and emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Growing up in Australia and Footprints in Time (LSAC–LSIC) Conference

The Growing up in Australia and Footprints in Time (LSAC–LSIC) Conference was held in Melbourne on 13 and 14 November. There were more than 60 oral presentations focused around the themes of Early Childhood Education and Social Policy, Mental Health, Obesity, Language and Learning, Parenting, Work, Community and Housing and Disability and Health.

Three excellent keynote speakers headlined this year’s program:

- Captain Steven Hirschfeld MD, Director, The National Children’s Study (USA);
- Associate Professor Susan Morton, Director, Growing Up in New Zealand; and
- Dr Maggie Walter, Associate Professor School of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania, and member of the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) Steering Committee since 2004.

For the second time, the two datasets—the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous
2014 AIFS Conference: Families in a Rapidly Changing World

The 13th biennial AIFS conference will be held at the Melbourne Convention Centre from 30 July to 1 August 2014. The conference website is live at <www.aifs.gov.au/conferences/aifs12> and the call for abstracts is now open.

Three excellent keynote speakers have also been confirmed:

- **Professor Paul Amato**, Arnold and Bette Hoffman Professor of Family Sociology and Demography, The Pennsylvania State University, USA;
- **Emeritus Professor Dorothy Scott OAM**, Director, Bracton Consulting Services Pty Ltd, Inaugural Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia; and
- **Mr Trevor Huddleston CBE**, Chief Analyst and Director of Analytical Services Directorate, Department for Work and Pensions, UK.

This three-day conference will continue its well-earned reputation as the premier event for discussing cutting-edge research findings, policy priorities and topical issues important to family wellbeing in Australia.

The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA)

The National Centre for Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (NCE) began operational work in early 2013, and with its establishment, much of ACSSA’s work will transfer to the new centre. AIFS has been contracted by NCE to house and continue to provide certain clearinghouse functions until September 2014.

Over the last 10 years, ACSSA has established significant networks and valued relationships across a range of sectors including sexual assault services, police, criminal justice agencies, as well as the policy and research communities. AIFS has been privileged to have ACSSA’s expertise, wealth of knowledge and wise counsel.

Given the effects of violence, abuse and neglect, and our focus on child protection, AIFS will continue to work in the sexual victimisation field and contribute to the NCE’s priorities under the national research agenda.

Concluding thoughts

The year to come is shaping up as another busy one for the Institute as we prepare for the 13th AIFS Conference in Melbourne in July/August 2014 while celebrating the 10th anniversary of the collection of the first wave of data for Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children and the 20th anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

Alongside our current research priorities, we are expanding our research into other areas, such as the implications for families of demographic change and population ageing, including further work on disadvantage across the lifespan and an emphasis on the role and experiences of grandparents and carers.

Vale Justice John Fogarty AM

It is with great sadness that I mark the death of Justice John Fogarty AM. While his outstanding reputation as a leading jurist in the Family Court of Australia has been widely acknowledged, here at AIFS he is warmly remembered for his many contributions to the Institute since its inception, including his term as the Presiding Member of the Institute’s Board of Management, from 1986 to 1989. The Institute was indeed fortunate to have Justice Fogarty’s wise counsel, ever-keen insight and wealth of knowledge to guide the work of AIFS in those early years.

Over the years, Justice Fogarty maintained his interest in the work of the Institute. In 2001, he wrote an article for Family Matters providing a very personal, insightful account of the drafting of the Family Law Act 1975 and the establishment of the Family Court and the Institute. He contributed another piece in 2008 to Family Matters on the history of child protection in Australia and other Western countries, including the harsh experiences of children transported to Australia in the First Fleet. More recently, we were delighted to welcome him back just last year to present a seminar on the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry, which demonstrated his incisive intellect and enduring commitment to the wellbeing of children and their families.

As his obituary in The Age commented, “his compassion and humanity shone through all aspects of his life”—an attribute that was clearly apparent in the many ways he supported AIFS and its staff. We send our sincere condolences to his family.