

# Corporate Overview

1

## Corporate Overview

The Board of Management and members of staff were shocked and saddened to learn of the death, on 17 April 1998, of the Director, Dr Harry McGurk. Harry came to the Institute with an international reputation for his research into family matters, and he brought to the role of Director a strong commitment to social justice issues, especially those involving children. His energy, vitality and dedication is greatly missed.

The Board and members of staff were deeply saddened by the death, on 13 June 1998, of our colleague, Principal Research fellow, Dr Kathleen Funder. During her 15 years with the Institute, Kate played a crucial role in the Institute's research agenda, most notably the place of children in society and the adaptations of parents and children to the psychological and economic aftermath of marriage breakdown. She was recognised in Australia and internationally for the quality and policy relevance of her research, her many publications and her commitment to scholarship. Colleagues miss Kate and the ability she had of inspiring in others the interest, initiative and energy which she possessed in abundance.

### Research, Contracts, Activities

The year 1997–98 has seen the existing triennial core research program (1995–98) draw to a close. Detailed reports of research projects appear in Section 3, and a summary of Research Project Performance for the year is included at the end of Section 3 of this Annual Report.

Work is now well under way for the new research program for the next triennium 1998–2001. Details of the plan are still being developed but will centre in the

following areas of research: the life course of families; family formation, dissolution and reformation; parenting, child care and child protection; and social exchanges.

During the year the Rotary Health Research Fund continued its support of the Institute's evaluation of 'Looking After Children' – a new initiative in the provision of out-of-home care services in Victoria – by granting the Institute a further \$35,000 to enable the project's completion.

The Commonwealth Office for the Status of Women awarded the Institute a contract to collect data, within the context of the ongoing Australian Divorce Transitions Project, on the occurrence of violence between divorced and divorcing couples.

The Lincoln Gerontology Centre of LaTrobe University, with which the Institute has previously collaborated, has awarded the Institute a further contract to collect data on its behalf within the context of the Centre's project on healthy retirement.

Following a process of selective tender and a presentation to the Department by the then Director, Dr Harry McGurk, the Institute was invited by the Children's Services Program of the Department of Health and Family Services to form a partnership with another tenderer to undertake a feasibility study of children's routine exposure to formal and informal non-parental child care.

In consequence, a contract to carry out the feasibility study was awarded to a partnership comprising the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Australian Consortium for Research in Early Childhood – the latter comprising senior academic personnel from the

departments of early childhood studies at the Queensland University of Technology, Macquarie University, and the University of Melbourne. The work was completed in March 1998 and a report submitted to the Department that included specific recommendations concerning the design, data collection methods and management of a national longitudinal study of outcomes of non-parental child care in Australia. The Department is now considering how such an undertaking might be funded and will make recommendations to Government as appropriate.

Other contracts awarded during the year included the evaluation of the Family and Neighbourhood Links (FANL) and Enhanced Client Outcomes (ECO) projects for the Victorian Department of Human Services. Also conducted on behalf of the Department of Human Services was an evaluation of the Melbourne Western Metropolitan Region family outreach service.

The first stocktake of Youth Suicide Prevention activities was published in March 1998. The evaluation of the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy is currently being undertaken.

The National Child Protection Clearing House continued to develop and attracted ever increasing support. Currently the Clearing House holds over 3000 items directly related to child abuse/neglect.

The Institute's web site continued to grow and now includes several new features. An average of approximately 1200 visitors per month have accessed the site.

## **New Minister**

Following a reallocation of portfolios by the Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard in October 1997, the Institute has a new reporting Minister. The Hon. Warwick Smith was appointed Minister for Family Services and honoured the

Institute with a visit on 9 February 1998. During his visit the Minister spoke with staff over morning tea.

## **Board of Management**

The Board of Management of the Institute met on three occasions during 1997-98. Two new members of the Board, Mrs Susan Bastick and Dr Sarah Kennedy, took up their appointments in February 1998. The term of appointment of the Board's Presiding Member Ms Ann Sherry expired on 10 May 1998 and she has been replaced by Dame Margaret Guilfoyle. The term of appointment of Ms Adele Horin, who has served on the Board since 1994, expired on 20 June 1998. The contributions made by both Ann Sherry and Adele Horin have been most appreciated.

## **Social Justice and Equity**

As a Commonwealth-funded agency, the Australian Institute of Family Studies is committed to the active pursuit of the principles of Social Justice and Equity. The Institute has adopted a Social Justice and Equity Strategy, the intent of which is to ensure that its research reflects the diversity of families in Australia, and that the Institute's information and related services are accessible and relevant to all members of the Australian community. In particular, the Institute is concerned to ensure that justice and equity is not impeded on account of language, culture, race or religion. The extension of the Parenting-21 research project to include respondents from the Islander communities of the Torres Strait is a demonstration of our commitment in this respect.

Within the Institute, social justice and equity issues are addressed in the context of an Institute Consultative Committee (ICC) comprising representatives of management, staff and the Community and Public Sector Union.

## Staffing/Human Resources

With the death of the Director, the Institute's Business Manager, John Shelton, has been Acting Director since April 1998.

The year saw several staff leave the Institute, with the resignations of David de Vaus (Research Manager), Anna Gemmell (Library Assistant), Simon Gibbons (Information Technology Officer), Rosalind Moye (Assistant Editor), and Viviana Lazzarini (Research Officer).

During the year a number of appointments were made: Dr Trevor Batrouney as consultant acting in the capacity of Research Manager; Dr Mary O'Dowd and Penny Mitchell to the positions of Research Fellow; Anna Buratti, Jody Hughes, Belinda Murray and Robyn Parker to the positions of Research Officer; Joan Kelleher and Robin Jeffs to the positions of Librarian; Melissa Veit to the position of Information Technology Officer; and Sana Habib to the position of Library Assistant.

## Workforce Planning

With planning for the new triennial research plan nearing completion, work commenced to ensure that staffing resources to match the plan are suffi-

cient and flexible enough to achieve planned outcomes. Since March 1998, resources have been invested in ensuring staff are exposed to family policy development and implementation.

Accordingly, several senior officers from the Department of Health and Family Services have visited the Institute to brief staff on relevant issues.

During the year, resources continued to be invested in competency-based training and career enhancement.

## Agency Bargaining

Negotiations with staff in respect to a Workplace Certified Agreement, as specified in the Workplace Relation Act 1996, are near completion.

## Business Management

With the introduction of the Government's new financial management initiatives, much of the time of the Finance Manager and his staff has been spent on redesigning the Institute's financial system to reflect the introduction of full accrual budgeting and accounting. The task is now complete.

The Institute remains in a strong financial position. Financial Reports for 1997-98 are contained in Section 8 of this Annual Report.

### Financial and staffing resources summary (all programs)

	\$('000) and Actual Staff Years		
	Actual 1996-97	Actual 1997-98	Budget 1998-99
<b>Budgetary basis</b>			
Components of Appropriation			
Program costs (excl. running costs)	-	-	-
Running costs	3291	3240	3236
Total Appropriation	3291	3240	3236
Less adjustments	-	-	-
Total outlays	3291	3240	3236
<b>Staffing</b>			
Staff years (actual)	40.79	37.67	39.75

## Internal and External Scrutiny

During the year, Internal Audit undertook a review of the Institute's computing system, concentrating on security and related procedures. The auditor's report indicated that existing procedures were adequate.

There has been no significant comment on issues relating to the Institute in 1997–98. The External Audit Report relating to the 1997–98 financial statements contains no qualifications. Suggestions made by the Australian National Audit Office in respect to improvement of some processes will be addressed immediately.

### Summary table of resources

Reconciliation of Programs and Appropriation Elements for 1997–98							
\$( '000)							
	A +	B +	C +	D	= E	– F	= G
Program Number	Approp.Bills Nos 1 & 3	Approp.Bills Nos 2 & 4	Special Approps	Annotated Approps	Program Approps	Adjustments	Program Outlays
1	3240	–	–	–	3240	–	3240
2	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<b>Total</b>	<b>3240</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>3240</b>	<b>–</b>	<b>3240</b>