



families australia UPDATE



THINK FAMILIES, STRENGTHEN FAMILIES, CELEBRATE FAMILIES NO. 1, WINTER 2009

Welcome

Welcome to issue No. 1 of Families Australia **Update**, a quarterly update on what we are doing on the national front to help advance the wellbeing of Australia's families.

Update complements our monthly electronic publication, **National Family News**, which provides information about the latest major developments in national family policy, services and research from across government and the non-government sectors.

This issue touches on some of the key things we have been doing over the past few months. In particular, there is an update on child protection, kinship care and the Forgotten Australians. There are two short member profiles.

We are keen to hear from you to better inform our national policy work. In the coming months, we will be seeking your ideas through an online survey as a way of preparing for the 2010 Federal Election. We will also be giving a lot more attention to 'getting around the country' to hear from members and other stakeholders.



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We always welcome your comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us by phone (02 6273 4885), email (admin@familiesaustralia.org.au), or by mail (PO Box 83, Campbell, ACT 2612).

Child protection plan underway

Families Australia has been playing a leading role over the past few years in developing and negotiating the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. After more than a year of consultations, the Framework was announced on 30 April 2009 by the Council of Australian Governments. It is a roadmap for Federal, State/Territory and NGO efforts to reduce child abuse and neglect through to 2020.

Families Australia is the secretariat for the Coalition of Organisations Committed to the Safety and Wellbeing of Australia's Children, a grouping of around 70 of the country's leading NGOs and academics working with the Federal and State/Territory Governments to advance the Framework.

In the coming months, several NGO and government working groups will start working on topics such as the development of national standards for out-of-home care.

The involvement of the NGO sector in the Framework's evolution and implementation has been a landmark development – an illustration of how well players from a variety of sectors can come together to work collaboratively for the wellbeing of children, families and communities.

Families Australia's Chief Executive Officer, Brian Babington, undertook a Churchill Fellowship earlier this year to the UK, Ireland, Canada and the US to examine child protection systems. His report is on the Families Australia website, www.familiesaustralia.org.au

In Canberra

As well as keeping in touch with politicians, Families Australia serves on many committees that are relevant to enhancing family wellbeing. Several times a year, we participate on community stakeholder committees run by a range of Government agencies: Medicare, Centrelink and the Australian Taxation Office.

To give you an idea of the issues being discussed: at the recent Centrelink forum, members were briefed on upcoming pensions changes and were able to give comments and draw Centrelink's attention to potentially vulnerable groups.

Families Australia also maintains close and ongoing relationships across the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. In the past few months, for example, we participated in consultations for the new Family Support Program and on the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program (PHaMs).

Grandparent and kinship carers in spotlight

Anne McLeish from Grandparents Australia and Brian Babington from Families Australia co-chaired a forum in Melbourne in late June which highlighted the many compelling issues facing kinship and grandparent carers.

The conference was attended by over 200 carers, community workers and officials, with over 50 different grandparent carers attending. The forum was the first state-wide kinship carers' conference to be held in Victoria and attracted participants from across the State. It was a wonderful opportunity for the issues facing carers to be raised with officials and community service providers.

Thanks to all who participated, including Victorian Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary, Argiri Alisandratos, Assistant Director, Placement and Support in Child Protection, and Robyn Miller, Principal Child Protection Practitioner, Department of Human Services.

A date has been set for a second conference, which will be conducted on 1-2 October 2010. It is expected that Families Australia will be invited to play a role again.

Families Australia and Grandparents Australia have also been working to reinvigorate Federal Government attention on the situation for grandparents who provide primary care for grandchildren. In the past few months, we have met senior officials in the Attorney-General's Department and spoken at a major inter-Departmental forum. We are planning to make the need for greater support to grandparent and kinship carers a top priority in Families Australia's policy advocacy.



Kinship carers from across Victoria.

Alliance for Forgotten Australians

Highlighting the needs of 'Forgotten Australians'

There were around 500,000 children in institutional or other out-of-home care in Australia in the period between the 1930s and the 1970s. Many of them suffered physical, sexual, psychological or other types of abuse. As adult survivors, they are often socially excluded through mental or physical illnesses, homelessness or lack of education. They are called Forgotten Australians.

Families Australia has been auspicing the national peak body, the Alliance for Forgotten Australians, since 2007, assisting these survivors in their campaign to receive justice for the abuse they suffered.

In July this year, the Senate delivered its second report in a decade on the plight of the Forgotten Australians, calling for the Australian and State Governments, along with the Churches and agencies that ran the institutions, to respond more holistically, thoroughly and consistently in delivering redress and services to Forgotten Australians.

Another National Families Week record

Thanks to the hundreds of Families Australia members and other community organisations who made National Families Week in May this year such a success. A record number of 125,000 people participated in local events to celebrate the importance of families.

This year was the 7th National Families Week. The theme was "**National Families Week – Celebrate how everyone makes a difference**", which aimed to encourage all Australians to think about and celebrate the many different people who make families united and strong and the many different types of families across society, each deserving respect and acknowledgement. Around 800 events were organised by 600 community, business, government and other service organisations across Australia.





Families Australia out and about

In the past year, we have held face-to-face meetings with our members in Darwin, Melbourne and Canberra. These meetings have been very productive in enabling us to hear from members about what they want us to advocate for at the national level. In April this year, for instance, our Melbourne members met to discuss priorities leading up to the next Federal Election. They asked us to focus (or keep focusing) on grandparenting, child care, mental health (especially as it affects young people), stepfamily issues and foster care. It was agreed that YMCA and Grandparents Australia would call Victorian members together again to meet with the Families Australia CEO to coordinate pre-election strategies.



Participants at Melbourne Members' Forum

Did you know...?

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) 2009 National Conference on 'Transforming Australia for our children's future: Making prevention work' will be held in Melbourne, 2-4 September 2009.

See: www.aracyconference.org.au/

The 8th ISPCAN Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, incorporating the 12th Australasian Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, will be held in Perth, 15-18 November 2009.

See: www.napcan.org.au/documents/APCCAN_09.pdf

The 'Australia's Welfare 2009' conference will be held in Canberra on 17 November 2009.

See: www.guest.cvent.com/EVENTS/Info/Summary.aspx?e=7be89b98-74da-47c9-bca4-a617198cc580

Board members honoured

Congratulations to **Bev Orr** and **Anne McLeish** for being awarded honours in the Queen's Birthday honours list in June this year.

Both received Medals of the Order of Australia (OAM).

Bev is President of the Australian Foster Care Association and, with husband David, has been a foster carer of over 200 children and young people over the past three decades. Anne is President of Grandparents Australia and a leading advocate on grandparents' issues.

Earlier this year, on Australia Day, we were delighted that our Chair, **Sandie de Wolf**, was made a **Member of the Order of Australia (AM)**. Congratulations to all three!

Hearing members' views

In the coming months, Families Australia will be embarking on a campaign to hear more from its members. **How?** We'll be holding member consultations in Brisbane on 7 August and in Perth in mid-November, with more being planned for early 2010. In addition, we will soon launch our online members' survey to get your family policy ideas.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Families Australia office in Canberra at any time.

Member snapshots



Local member: Parentline ACT

Parentline ACT is a free, confidential telephone service for parents and families in the ACT and surrounding area. The organisation has now been running for 30 years and receives several thousand calls each year.

Parentline offers: immediate counselling and support over the telephone; ongoing and after hours support by trained volunteer support workers; face to face counselling; information on other services; referral to other agencies; and ideas and resources about parenting.

Parentline provides a quality service to assist with the range of issues from new-born babies through adolescents to adult offspring. The most important work that Parentline does is in helping to strengthen the relationship between parents and children to support the life long nature of parenting.

See: www.parentlineact.org.au/



National member: Australian Foster Care Association

AFCA is a membership-based, voluntary organisation supporting and representing the voices of foster, relative and kinship carers, their families and the children they care for throughout Australia. It does this mainly through working to influence policy improvements at a national level and working in partnership with other community organisations in the child and family welfare sector to provide the support necessary for children and young people who are unable to live at home to achieve better outcomes.

Bev Orr, AFCA President, stressed the need for collaboration between State and Federal departments and NGOs in the development of policies which assist foster, relative and kinship carers in their role of caring for the community's most vulnerable and needy children. Through such processes, AFCA has been involved in many policy improvement initiatives, including: the provision of Health Care Cards for all children and young people 'in care'; the introduction of the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) for young people leaving care; carers' right to access Child Care Benefit for children in care; and the exemption of carers from the work aspect of Welfare to Work.

See: www.fostercare.org.au/



You can stay updated on what Families Australia is doing via our website, www.familiesaustralia.org.au

We always welcome your views and enquiries.

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