# Growing Up in Australia



# Newsletter

DECEMBER 2006

Another busy and productive year is drawing to a close for *Growing Up in Australia*. Thank you to everyone who has so generously given their time for the second interview. Results from this second wave will be available in late 2007. The response from parents and children alike has been overwhelmingly positive. I want to share with you some reflections and anecdotes from interviewers about their experience of visiting and talking with families:

"... I would just like to say how thankful I am for having the opportunity to work on Growing Up in Australia. This would have to be the most enjoyable interviewing yet. I just love all the cups of tea and happy respondents."



Pictured are staff from the Institute and the Australian Bureau of Statistics at interviewer training in Sydney.

"We sat at the dining table and began the interview. I watched the 3 year old study child, who at this stage was staring at me. I asked him if he was ok, and he replied, "Your hair is beautiful". I thanked him very much. I had a change of style and colour and was not sure if I liked it, but I got the thumbs up from him so I knew it must be ok. He then asked me "to do a twirl" for him, so I twirled and then did my best curtsy for him to a huge round of applause. Thanks, you made my day."

Work has already started on developing questions for our next visit to you (Wave 3), when the study children are aged 4-5 years and 8-9 years. Some Wave 3 interviews will occur next year. A number of people and organisations help to ensure that the questions we ask are relevant to you and your children as they continue to grow and develop, including leading researchers at research institutions and universities throughout Australia and various Australian Government departments.

We have continued to receive phone calls, emails and letters from many of those of you who have moved. Keeping track of 10,000 families can be challenging, so your efforts to help us keep in touch are really appreciated. If you do move during the year, please let us know your updated details by phoning free-call 1800 005 508, emailing growingup@abs.gov.au or completing and sending the pre-paid change of address card (located at the back of the 2007 *Growing Up in Australia* calendar).

I want to take this opportunity to again thank you for your ongoing commitment to *Growing Up in Australia*. The wealth of experience that you generously share with us continues to be the study's biggest asset and is of immeasurable benefit to all Australian children.

Wishing you all a safe and happy holiday period.

throughout Australia

Growing Up in Australia

The longitudinal study of Australian children

Initiated and funded by the

**Australian Government Department of** 

Families, Community Services and

Indigenous Affairs

Managed in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies,

with advice being provided by a

consortium of leading researchers at research institutions and universities

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Best wishes

Professor Alan Hayes

Director, Australian Institute of Family Studies





Growing Up in Australia is the longitudinal study of Australian children. It is designed to identify policy opportunities for improving support for children and their families and for early intervention and prevention strategies.

Growing Up in Australia is following representative samples of 5,000 infants and 5,000 four to five year olds and their families from 2003-4 until 2010 and possibly beyond.

You can visit the *Growing Up in Australia* website at any time to get the latest information on the study. Every three months we produce a general newsletter for the website with updates on the study's progress.

www.aifs.gov.au/growingup



The longitudinal study of Australian children

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## Information from the study

The level of interest in *Growing Up in Australia* continues to grow. Publications include a special edition of the Institute's own research journal, *Family Matters* (Issue 72), which contains articles using *Growing Up in Australia* data on childhood injuries in different types of family, neighbourhood influences on children's wellbeing, work-family balance, child care, the role of grandparents in children's lives, and children's temperament and adjustment.

A range of reports has been commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and findings from the study have appeared in independent journals and been presented at a number of national and international conferences. For further information about these and other publications that use the *Growing Up in Australia* data, please visit the study's website, www.aifs.gov.au/qrowingup.

# Highlights from the mail-out questionnaire

Coupled with information from the first interview (Wave 1), the information from the mail-out questionnaire (Wave 1.5) provides the first opportunity to track childrens' progress and family experiences over time. The first analysis from the mail-out questionnaire is included in the 2005-06 Annual Report for *Growing Up in Australia*, which was released in late November. The following are highlights from these data.

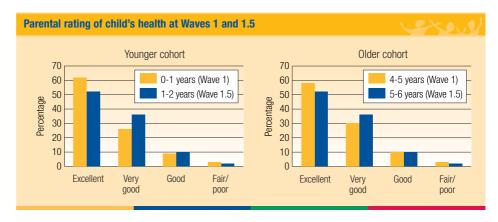
#### Life events

Most families (approximately three-quarters) experienced an important event in their lives during the previous twelve months. The most common events were:

- changing jobs or returning to work (30 per cent);
- increased work hours (23 per cent);
- pregnancy or the birth of a child (18 per cent); and
- moving house (17 per cent).

#### Health

Most parents continued to rate their child's health as either very good or excellent.



#### Sleeping

- At each wave, about 70 per cent of the parents of the older cohort children and around half of the parents of the younger cohort children stated that their child's sleeping pattern or habits was not a problem for them.
- On average, sleeping habits that caused concern were reported more frequently for children aged 1-2 years, than when aged 0-1 years. In contrast, children aged 5-6 years were reported by their parents to have less sleeping habits of concern than when aged 4-5 years.

- Around 40 per cent of parents with children aged 1-2 years reported 'waking during the night' as a problem, and it was identified as an issue for just over 10 per cent of 5-6 year olds.
- Other common problems were: the child is not happy to sleep alone (about one in five or six children for 5-6 year olds) and the child has difficulty getting to sleep at night (about one in ten children aged 1-2 years and 5-6 years).

#### Education and child care

- Over 90 per cent of parents with a child attending school or pre-school reported that their child looked forward to going to school or pre-school most days.
- About eight per cent of parents reported that their child was reluctant to go to school at least once a week. This reluctance is expected to lessen as the children mature.
- Over three quarters of children attending school were reported as liking their teacher 'a lot' and a further 20 per cent were reported as liking their teacher 'quite a bit'.
- Children in their first year at school were slightly more likely than children in higher years to like their teachers a lot.



- Child care arrangements were being used by twice as many children aged 1-2 years than aged 0-1 years (65 per cent compared to 36 per cent respectively).
- When children reached 1-2 years, child care centres had slightly outstripped grandparents as the most common form of child care.
- When children were aged 1-2 years, the proportion of children in each type of child care had increased substantially.

#### Parental Leave in Australia

The mail out questionnaire for parents of children aged 1-2 years also included questions on parental employment and leave around the time of the birth of the study child. These questions were part of 'The Parental Leave in Australia Survey', conducted by Dr Gillian Whitehouse (University of Queensland), Dr Marian Baird (University of Sydney) and Dr Chris Diamond (University of Queensland). Initial findings include:

- The most common leave arrangement for mothers was a combination of paid and unpaid leave, with 38 per cent taking both paid and unpaid leave.
- Twenty-six per cent of mothers took no leave and most of these mothers indicated that this was the case because they had left their job.
- While the overall average duration of leave taken by mothers was 38 weeks, fathers took an average of 14 days leave.
- Twenty-five per cent of employed fathers took no leave. The most common reason given by fathers for taking no leave was self employment.

Early next year, Gillian and her team will be in touch with a random sample of about 100 study families who indicated on their questionnaire that they were willing to be contacted to take part in a 1 hour follow-up interview. If you are contacted and this is not convenient for you, you of course do not have to take part, but Gillian will be most appreciative if you are able to make the time.

If you would like a copy of the Annual Report, you can download a copy from www.aifs.gov.au/growingup/pubs.html or contact the Institute to have a copy sent.

## Life at 1 documentary series

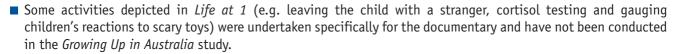
Life at 1, the documentary series inspired by Growing Up in Australia and produced by Film Australia in association with Heiress Films, premiered on ABC TV at 8.30pm on Thursday 12th and 19th October.

Life at 1 was the first instalment in a series following 11 babies and their families over time. With information provided by the children's families and child development experts, and with reference to data from *Growing Up in Australia*, the series explores what it takes to give a child the best start in life. It is hoped that further snapshots of the lives of the 11 babies and their families will be taken over the coming years.

Although *Life at 1* draws on many aspects of the *Growing Up in Australia* study, there are some differences:

- The families in *Life at 1* were recruited separately from the *Growing Up in Australia* study.
- Life at 1 shows experts providing information on the 11 families and children recruited for the documentary. However, any information

you provide to *Growing Up in Australia* will remain confidential, with all interviewers, researchers and others involved in the main study required to comply with the *Privacy Act 1988* and the *Privacy Amendments Act 2001*.



Further information and updates on the series can be found at abc.net.au/tv/life or www.filmaust.com.au.



During Wave 2, interviewers approached some families to provide drawings for the calendar. Thank you to the children who provided such colourful and interesting pictures! We received quite a number and it was hard to choose

which drawings to include in the calendar. We hope to use the others in future publications.

### **Wave 2.5**

We will be in touch with most of you later next year with a short mail-out questionnaire, similar to the previous one we sent you. As well as a short set of questions to update us on your child's progress, we are also considering including some questions on return to work and child support.

# If you are moving...

Please help us keep in touch by updating your address and contact details. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Phone free-call 1800 005 508
- Email growingup@abs.gov.au
- Complete and send the pre-paid change of address card located at the back of the 2007 *Growing Up in Australia* calendar.

Thank you!

## Growing Up in Australia:

helping to make sure all children have a good start in life