



## A particular contribution

The Brotherhood of St Laurence seeks not only to offer services but to understand and counter the sources of poverty and disadvantage. The Life Chances of Children Study seeks to understand and better protect one of the most important but vulnerable groups in our society — our children. This important longitudinal study makes a unique contribution to knowledge of Australian families in the 1990s.

The study has received major support from the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, the Bureau of Immigration and Population Research, the George Adams Estate and the Research and Development Grants Advisory Council (RADGAC).

## Our aims

- to examine over an extended period of time the life opportunities and life outcomes of a small group of Australian children, including the influences of social, economic and environmental factors on children's lives;
- to compare the lives of children in families on low incomes with those in more affluent circumstances;
- to contribute to the development of government and community intervention to improve the lives of Australian children, particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances.

## The children and their families

The children in the Life Chances Study were born in 1990 in two adjoining inner Melbourne municipalities. They are broadly representative of all children born in those suburbs and live in families which are very diverse. They include low-income and high-income families, families with two parents employed and those with no employed parents, those in government high-rise flats and those in private detached houses, recent refugee families and those with Australian-born parents. We are keeping contact with the families as they move away from the inner suburbs.

## Interviews have been conducted so far as follows:

- Interviews with the mothers of 167 children when the children were about six months old.
- In addition, 23 small group discussions were held in four outer areas with mothers of children about six months of age to explore whether they faced different issues from those of families in inner urban Melbourne.
- A second interview was conducted with mothers when the children were 18 months old.
- A third interview with mothers was conducted when the children were between two and a half and three years of age. The fathers of many of the children were also interviewed briefly.
- When the children were aged about five, the mothers were interviewed to consider their experience of kindergarten services.
- The fifth stage was undertaken when the children were about six years of age to explore their progress in their first year or two of school. This involved contact with mothers, fathers, teachers and the children themselves. Contact was made with 148 of the original 167 children.

The main focus of these interviews has been to collect information on mothers' assessments of the children's health and well-being, their views of the children's future prospects and information about the family's situation, including their social and economic circumstances. Of particular interest have been the income, employment and housing situation of families, their use of services and a range of measures of family and child well-being.

*We wish to acknowledge  
the very special and central contribution the  
Life Chances families have made to the study.*

## Achievements so far

- ▶ Collection of data over a six-year period, with most of the families remaining with the study.
- ▶ The broad dissemination of the study's findings to decision makers through:
  - Published research reports (see over)
  - Unpublished reports
  - Chapters in books
  - Conference presentations
  - Articles in a range of publications
  - Media coverage of report findings
  - A 55-minute documentary film 'Life Chances' involving seven of the families in the study (Film Projects and SBS)
- ▶ Communication of findings related to services to local service providers.
- ▶ Direct advocacy work on behalf of people on low incomes has included:
  - Submission to the Commonwealth Government's white paper on employment opportunities.
  - Input into State Government policy on the Maternal and Child Health Service.
  - Public advocacy on the need to improve public transport
  - Publicity about the impact of increased kindergarten fees.
- ▶ Communication of findings to the families involved in the study.

## Future plans

We hope to maintain contact with the Life Chances families as the children progress through primary school.