

Make a new resolution for better work-family balance

Address to Centrelink management and staff
to mark National Families Week 2008

Brian Babington, Chief Executive, Families Australia
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This week, National Families Week, will see a record number of over 120,000 people across Australia celebrating the importance of families.

People will get involved in an amazing range of things – from morning teas, film nights, art competitions, sausage sizzles, to seminars, book launches, and work/family balance surveys.

Over 800 events will take place around Australia, from Hobart to Bamaga in Cape York, from the Blue Mountains to Broome. On average, there is a National Families Week gathering happening somewhere in Australia every 10 minutes this week.

National Families Week has been going for six years and is funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. In that time, well over half a million people have participated in celebrations.

This morning, I mainly want to say that, without Centrelink's involvement, National Families Week wouldn't be the success it is.

A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of going along to a National Families Week event at your Hurstville office. What made it special was to see how the staff used the Week to engage their local community and add a different dimension to their customer interactions.

We estimate that, of all the National Families Week events that take place, around 30 percent are run by Centrelink - and so a very big thank you from all of us at Families Australia.

Well, just what or who is “us”? Families Australia has been going since 2001 as the national, independent, peak body which promotes the interests of families at the national level.

In a nutshell, we are a policy think-tank and advocacy organisation. We have around 400 member organisations across Australia, representing in turn some 150,000 workers in the family and community NGO sector.

Our members include many of the largest NGOs, as well as hundreds of local community bodies, such as child care centres and youth and counselling services. To give you an idea of what we do, in the past year, we have been playing a leading role in the NGO push for a National Child Protection Framework – I am pleased to say that that work is bearing fruit under the new Government.

We have also been pushing hard for the concept of family wellbeing to be a touchstone in the development of Government policies, and for greater Commonwealth involvement in supporting grandparents, foster and kinship carers, and carers of people with disability.

To return to National Families Week, and to conclude, this year’s special theme is “Work and family - getting the balance right”.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures released yesterday again show that we’ve got a long way to go in terms of redressing work-family and gender imbalances. While more women are joining the workforce on a full-time basis, the figures are that mothers working full-time devote 18 hours per week to housework, while fathers who work full-time devote only half that number of hours to household chores. This is unjustifiable imbalance clearly needs to be improved upon.

We’d like to encourage every Australian to do practical things to more effectively balance work and family responsibilities. We’ve distributed tips for balancing work and family as a way of generating ideas about what we can all do in this area.

I'd like to suggest that everyone here take home tonight at least one new resolution for better work-family or work-life balance. Thank you again for being part of National Families Week.