



# Webwords 37

## Families, the heart of the matter

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The complicated logo for the United Nations International Year of the Family (IYF) depicts a heart linked by another heart in a house. It symbolises life and love in a home characterised by warmth, caring, security, tolerance and acceptance. The opening represents continuity with a touch of uncertainty, while the roof's sweeping brushstroke hints at the complexity of the family. By contrast, the simple slogan for the year was 'Families, the Heart of the Matter'.

Since the IYF in 1994 the International Day of Families has been celebrated annually<sup>1</sup> on 15 May. Each international day has a special focus, and in 2010 it was the impact of migration on families around the world. This theme has immediate relevance for Australians grappling with the human rights issues embedded in immigration policy, humane treatment of asylum seekers, child protection, our roles and responsibilities in the Asia-Pacific region, racism and all things FaHCSIA.<sup>2</sup> It also draws Australians back an imponderable 40 to 60,000 years to the migration of the ancestors of today's Indigenous families<sup>3</sup> via the Malay Archipelago and New Guinea.

Adventurous Europeans visited in the 1600s and 1700s and colonisation began in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleeters<sup>4</sup> who included representatives of 60 different nationalities. By the time they heard their first Sydney kookaburra, the country and coastal islands were inhabited by 700 indigenous cultural groups, speaking 250 different languages,<sup>5</sup> and bound by a spiritual closeness to country and a sense of kinship that stretches way beyond the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of geography, real estate and the nuclear family.

### The First Fleet

(Gillen, 1989, p.445)

| Embarked at Portsmouth     | Arrived at Port Jackson    |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Officials/passengers 15    | Officials/passengers 14    |
| Ships' crews 323           | Ships' crews 306           |
| Marines 247                | Marines 245                |
| Marines' wives/children 46 | Marines' wives/children 54 |
| Convicts (males) 582       | Convicts (males) 543       |
| Convicts (females) 193     | Convicts (females) 189     |
| Convicts' children 14      | Convicts' children 22      |
| Total embarked: 1420       |                            |

From that time onwards our population has observed increasing cultural diversity, remaining largely oblivious to the inexorable attrition of indigenous languages or language death (Crystal, 2000, pp. 1–27). It watched the ludicrous enforcement and slow dismantling of the White Australia policy (1901–73), softened in 1966, when a coalition government farcically permitted the immigration of a trickle of "distinguished" non-Europeans. It noted the pre-war obsession with "Britishness" and a preference for *northern* over southern Europeans as "New Australians" (Kunek, 1993). To our shame, it stood by and allowed assimilation

policy (1951 to the 1970s) with its attendant and ongoing tragedy of the Stolen Generation, and, more positively, it participated in the steady unfolding, since 1973, of multiculturalism.

### Values

Promoting multiculturalism,<sup>6</sup> the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) upholds Aussie mateship, a fair go for all and the pleasing view that every Australian shares the benefits and responsibilities arising from the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of our society. The department's website offers, in English and 37 community languages, booklets called *Beginning a Life in Australia*, welcoming new migrants and humanitarian entrants, and a 46-page downloadable book, *Life in Australia*.<sup>7</sup> Crammed with information about Australian history, culture and social structures, the publications are designed to help newcomers understand Australian values before signing the values statement on their visa applications. And everyone who wants a visa *has* to sign. The book may be useful for speech pathologists who work with migrants, refugees, and other clients, or indeed colleagues who have recently arrived in Australia.

The values are not uniquely ours, but they are agreed to, according to DIAC, in broad terms by our community and underpin Australian democracy, society, culture. They include:

- respect for the equal worth, dignity and freedom of the individual;
  - freedom of speech;
  - freedom of religion and secular government;
  - freedom of association;
  - support for parliamentary democracy and the rule of law;
  - equality under the law;
  - equality of men and women;
  - equality of opportunity;
  - peacefulness; and
  - a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces tolerance, mutual respect and compassion for those in need.
- As well as having a code of ethics, Speech Pathology Australia has a charter in which its vision, mission and values are briefly stated. Our values as speech pathologists are that "we strive to:
- be client centred and provide ethical services to our client communities;
  - demonstrate excellence and continual improvement in providing maximum standards of service within our places of employment; and,
  - uphold our professional integrity."

### Kinship

It is tempting to think that if an Indigenous Australian had participated in composing either set of values that the word "family", or even "kinship", would be in there somewhere. Indigenous people<sup>8</sup> comprise an important (to our national identity) 1.4% of the population. Their survival and the extraordinary preservation of unique, sustained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures can probably be attributed in large part to strong, traditional kinship



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structures. But let's not forget that these structures, like the disappearing languages, have often been "removed" through a sorry process of colonisation, oppression and the removal of children from their parents.

Some new Australians may be thrilled to bits with the whole respect, freedom, support, equality, peacefulness, compassion and democracy thing. On the other hand, the original Australian families who live in third-world health conditions in communities around the country, and the professionals who work with them, are unlikely to view the values as part of their everyday reality. The parallels between the dislocation and trauma experienced by most humanitarian entrants to Australia, and the privations endured by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are obvious.

## Resources

Speech pathologists working with families in either category will find a wealth of resources on the Internet. Webwords 32<sup>9</sup> addresses multicultural issues, culturally effective health care and education, and the development of mutually respectful dynamic relationships between providers and consumers. The Upper Hunter Community in NSW in a project of the Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Services Team has produced a helpful website on Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and their Communities,<sup>10</sup> including practice tips and the implications for practice of family and kinship structures, and the intimate connections between land, language and culture.

## References

- Commonwealth of Australia. (2007). *Life in Australia*. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Citizenship.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gillen, M. (1989). *The founders of Australia: A biographical dictionary of the First Fleet*. Sydney: Library of Australian History.
- Kunek, S. (1993). *The brides: A multimedia installation*. Melbourne: Kunexion.

## Links

1. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/IDF.html>
  2. <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>
  3. <http://www.familiesaustralia.org.au/resources/atsi.htm>
  4. <http://gutenberg.net.au/first-fleet.html>
  5. <http://www.dnathan.com/VL/austLang.htm>
  6. <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/>
  7. <http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/values/book/>
  8. <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/overview/Pages/default.aspx>
  9. <http://www.speech-language-therapy.com/webwords32.htm>
  10. <http://www.workingwithatsi.info/index.htm>
- Webwords 37 is at <http://speech-language-therapy.com/webwords37.htm> with live links to featured and additional resources.

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