



# RELATIONSHIPS FORUM

## Annual Report for 2006-2007

This report marks the first full year of activity of Relationships Forum Australia (the Association).

The Association is a not-for-profit organisation that aims to promote the importance of relationships as a fundamental ingredient of individual and community wellbeing. Its activities are governed by an honorary Board, formed according to its Articles, which also prescribe the way the Association must operate.

The Association held its formation meeting and inaugural Board meeting in Sydney on 17th March 2006.

Consistent with those objectives, the Association's work is directed mainly at researching, from a relational perspective, critical issues in the areas of politics, economics, business and society, and at promoting the key findings of that research.

Accordingly, the key focus of the first year's activity has been the development, conduct, promulgation and promotion of research directed at achieving the Association's objectives. Chief amongst these has been the "Working Time" project.

### The Working Time project

We were successful in obtaining generous external funding support for this project. This, together with the many hours of time and effort volunteered by Association members and supporters, enabled the working time project to commence.

We were very pleased to welcome Paul Shepanski as the principal researcher for this work. Paul, in turn, identified an appropriately-qualified researcher, Michael Diamond, to undertake the larger part of the working



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RELATIONSHIPS FORUM AUSTRALIA - [www.relationshipsforum.org.au](http://www.relationshipsforum.org.au)

**Incorporated** in New South Wales under the Associations Act 1984. Incorporation No. INC9885252  
**Address:** C/- Toomey Pegg Drevikovsky, Level 25, 2 Park Street, Sydney NSW 2000 Australia  
**Board:** John Collins (Chairman), Bill Hurditch, Stephen Toomey, Michael Schluter  
**Executive Director:** Paul Shepanski

time study, with Paul and Michael Schluter providing essential advisory, interpretational and editorial input.

The Association invited a number of high-profile Australians to participate in an independent Reference Panel to provide guidance and feedback on the work as it progressed. The Panel comprised:

- The Hon Bob Carr – former Premier of NSW
- The Hon John Anderson – former Deputy Prime Minister and Member for Gwydir
- Mr Lindsay Tanner – Shadow Finance Minister and Member for Melbourne
- Mrs Kay Hull – Chief National Party Whip and Member for Riverina
- Mr Ben Keneally – Executive Director, (NSW) Premier's Delivery Unit

The Reference Panel held consultations with the project team in mid December 2006, including briefing meetings and a structured consultation meeting convened in Sydney and involving teleconferencing with some members.

### *An Unexpected Tragedy*

The Report of the working time study – entitled *An Unexpected Tragedy: evidence for the connection between working patterns and family breakdown in Australia* was released on 6th March 2007. The report received extensive media and public attention. Paul Shepanski acted as spokesman for the RFA in the context of the study, and fielded an enormous amount of calls and requests for interviews and follow-up conversations. Vicki Campbell also greatly assisted with the administration of aspects of the work, and in particular the report's presentation and media liaison.

The Association is also indebted to Shamus Toomey for his expert establishment, management and moderating of the Association's new website: [www.relationshipsforum.org.au](http://www.relationshipsforum.org.au).

### **Further research proposals**

During the year the Association advanced the development of proposals for additional research work, including:

- Working Time – Phase 2: A second stage of the working time research, aimed at developing an appropriate set of metrics of social capital for Australia, and to help find the means to internalise such measures in the delivery and evaluation of public services.
- Collaborative Care: A study of principles and opportunities for collaborative care, aimed at proposing better ways to manage financing of welfare in specific circumstances. The approach would

focus on the concept of “welfare syndicates” as a framework and incentives-basis for people to reallocate and leverage available resources within extended families and interest groups, to enable them to better plan for the future care needs of all their members, including those who are less well off. This may include providing new financial products, tax incentives and other structures to make collaboration more feasible. This is likely to result in more flexible use of state funds, enabling families and other community groups to engineer own-care solutions., and

- Integrated Public Policy: a study, in conjunction with The Relationships Foundation, to document the need for, and suggest ways to progress, a proper integration of social, economic and environmental aspects of public policy in Australia and Great Britain.
- Relational State-of-the-Nation Report: a study of wellbeing in Australia – in the form of a national scorecard, or “state of the nation” report, of relational health across Australia, as measured by a number of key indicators.

Potential project sponsors and other funding sources for these pieces of work are currently being sought.

### Board meetings and other activity

The Board met on three occasions during the year in review, with an additional two meetings held by teleconference. Those meeting were aimed at managing and directing the affairs of the Association, including reviewing and stewarding its finances.

The Association maintained its links with its “sister” organisation, The Relationships Foundation, and a number of reciprocal visits between Sydney and Cambridge were held.

### Executive director

During the year the Board appointed Paul Shepanski as its first honorary Executive Director. Paul has proved a dynamic, authoritative and credible advocate for the Association. As well as many media appearances, Paul has delivered presentations at a number of important forums, including an address to the Melbourne Institute’s Public Economics Forum in Canberra in late June 2007. Paul has also secured opportunities for ongoing media comment via an opinion column in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and further media liaison are articles in development.

The working time study and its ensuing profile and publicity has established the Association’s reputation within the Australian social policy landscape. A large range of invaluable links with researchers, organisations and

politicians has been established. This will enable the Association to enjoy continued access to policymakers and opinion leaders in the future.

### Special thanks

The directors would like to particularly thank the following people and organisations for their support and enthusiasm during its first year of operations:

- Michael Schluter, Michael Clark and the staff of The Relationships Foundation, especially John Ashcroft and Nicola Templeton
- Paul Shepanski
- Vicki Campbell and Shamus Toomey
- The staffs of Toomey Pegg Drevikovsky, Clayton Utz and The Fifth Estate for their ongoing assistance with administrative and practical matters
- Michael Diamond, and
- All those participants in the RFA's work who have assisted us in making this a successful first year of our operations.

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John Collins  
Chairman