

Ward Records Plan

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a detailed plan to enable the Department of Human Services to implement recommendations of the *Investigation into the Storage and Management of Ward Records by the Department of Human Services* tabled in Parliament by the Victorian Ombudsman in March 2012.

1.2 Intended Audience

The Ward Records Plan is intended for publication on the department's website per recommendation 6 of the Ombudsman's report.

The intended audience of this plan is the Ombudsman Victoria; Victorian Auditor-General's Office; organisations which support former wards and care leavers; Public Record Office Victoria (PROV); Victorian Privacy Commissioner and the National Archives of Australia.

1.3 Definitions

Accession

A group of records transferred from a single source into the department's custody.

Appraisal

The process of evaluating business activities to determine which records need to be captured and how long the records need to be kept to meet business needs, the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations.

Care Leaver

A person who has left institutional or out-of-home care.

Community Service Organisation

A non-government agency funded by the State of Victoria to provide services.

Department

The Department of Human Services

Departmental Records

Records kept by the Department of Human Services and its predecessors.

Digitisation

A method of converting physical format records into digital format records (i.e. from paper to a digital image).

Institutional Records

The administrative records of children's homes, receptions centres and other institutions who provide out of home care to children.

Permanent Record

A public record which has been appraised by the *Keeper of Public Records* as required to be kept as part of Victoria's State Archives. Permanent records are specified in Retention and Disposal Authorities issued by the Keeper.

PROV

The Public Record Office Victoria.

Provenance

The 'office of origin' of records being the agency, office or person that created, received or accumulated and used the records in the conduct of its business.

Public Record

A public record is defined under the Public Records Act and includes any record made or received by a public officer in the course of his or her duties.

Public Records Act

The *Public Records Act 1973*.

Retention & Disposal Authorities (RDAs)

Standards issued by the Keeper of Public Records under section 12 of the Public Records Act that define the minimum retention periods and consequent disposal actions authorised for classes of records described in those standards. RDAs provide continuing authorisation for the disposal of these classes of records. RDAs may be specific to an agency or applicable to more than one agency.

Sentencing

The process of identifying and classifying records according to a RDA, recording/registering the appropriate disposal decision and action for the records, and applying the disposal actions specified in the authority.

Series

A group of records which are recorded or maintained by the same agency (or agencies) and which:

- Are in the same numerical, alphabetical, chronological or another identifiable sequence; and/or
- Result from the same accumulation or filing process and perform the same function.

Temporary Record

A public record which has been appraised by the Keeper of Public Records as being required to be kept for a specific period of time for legislative or other requirements, before it can be destroyed. Destruction must be in accordance with standards issued under section 12 of the Public Records Act. Temporary records are specified in RDAs issued by the Keeper.

Wards

Children removed from their families for any reason and placed either in the direct care of the State of Victoria or placed by the State of Victoria in private institutions pursuant to the *Neglected Children's Act 1887* or the *Social Welfare Act 1970*.

1.4 Related documents

The Ward Records Plan has been written as part of the department's strategy to address recommendations of the following reports:

- *Storage and management of ward records by the Department of Human Services*, Ombudsman Victoria March 2012
- *Freedom of Information*, Victorian Auditor-General's Office, April 2012

The plan also acknowledges aspects of the following documents in relation to access to records by care leavers:

- *Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices*, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, February 2012
- *Report of the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry, Chapter 10: Meeting the needs of children and young people in out-of-home care*, January 2012
- Victorian Government response to the *Forgotten Australians* report recommendations, September 2009
- *Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Revisited, Report on the progress with the implementation of the recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports*, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, June 2009
- *Forgotten Australians, A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, August 2004
- *Lost innocents: Righting the record: Report on child migration*, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, August 2004.
- Victorian Response to *Bringing Them Home*, 2002
- *Bringing Them Home, The report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, 1996. Part 5 including recommendations 21 to 25.
- *Rights of Relinquishing Mothers to Access to Information Concerning Their Adopted Children*, Australian Human Rights Commission Discussion Paper, July 1984.

2. Project Overview

2.1 Background

The Victorian Ombudsman tabled his report *Investigation into the Storage and Management of Ward Records by the Department of Human Services* in Parliament on 1 March 2012. The report found that the department 'does not have a thorough appreciation of the number of persons whose personal history is contained in its archives, nor where to find all the records relevant to these people. This presents significant barriers... in trying to locate all relevant records relating to a person's time in care'.

The Ombudsman considered that the department should 'take immediate action to ensure that it has a thorough understanding of the records it holds in its collection so that care-leavers can be assured that they have been provided with all the available information regarding this often traumatic chapter of their lives'.

The Ombudsman's primary recommendation was that the department, in consultation with the Keeper of Public Records and other relevant stakeholders, 'develop a three year plan with specific actions, timelines, measures of progress and funding strategies for the identification, indexing, conservation, storage, management and provision of ready digital access for all records relating to former wards of the State of Victoria'.

In April 2012 the Victorian Auditor-General tabled a report on Freedom of Information examining the extent to which Victorian public sector departments and Victoria Police meet the requirements of the *Freedom of Information Act 1984* and associated guidelines. One of the report's recommendations concluded that the department should 'improve its records management practices to minimise loss of documents and enhance access to information'¹.

In May 2012 the department established the Health and Human Services Records Management Steering Committee to provide governance and strategic oversight of Records Management across the departments of Health and Human Services. The Committee includes senior representatives from both departments and the PROV. One of the key roles of the committee is to provide leadership and advice and monitor implementation of the recommendations published in the Victorian Ombudsman's report.

The department holds an estimated 80 kilometres of records in storage across the state of Victoria. Approximately 28 kilometres of these records are stored at the Bourke Street repository and a further estimated 1.8 kilometres are stored as an interim arrangement at the PROV. The records stored at PROV have not been formally transferred and require processing and documentation work.

2.2 Objectives

The Ward Records Plan has been developed to meet specific requirements of the Victorian Ombudsman's report and also address issues raised in the Auditor-General's *Freedom of Information* report.

The overarching objective however relates to the right of former wards and care leavers to access information about themselves.

The objectives of the project are therefore to:

- Provide efficient and timely access to records of former wards and care leavers in the department's custody.
- Ensure ward and care leaver records are appropriately conserved and stored.
- Mitigate the risk of loss and physical damage to records.
- Provide contextual information for these records including administrative and institutional history where possible.

¹ Victorian Auditor-General's report into Freedom of Information, 18 April 2012.

2.3 Scope

The scope of the Ward Records Plan is restricted to records in the custody of the Department of Human Services and the PROV.

Ward and care leaver records in the custody of Community Service Organisations or other agencies are outside the scope of this plan. Ward and care leaver records in the custody of Community Service Organisations which are funded by the Department of Human Services will be addressed in a related plan developed specifically to meet the requirements of Recommendation 5 of the Ombudsman's report.

2.4 Related Activities

- The Health and Human Services Records Storage Strategy will cover all hardcopy departmental records state-wide except for those in scope of the Ward Records Plan. Implementation of the strategy will run in parallel to the Ward Records project and report to the Records Management Steering Committee.
- Development of a plan to address Recommendation 5 of the Ombudsman's report with respect to ward records held by Community Services Organisations funded by the departments of Human Services and Health.
- Development of Electronic Document and Records Management (EDRM) business cases for the departments of Human Services and Health.

Note: The department will not be in a position to ensure that all ward and care leaver records held by the department have been identified until all actions described in the Ward Records Plan and Health and Human Services Records Storage Strategy have been completed.

2.5 Success Criteria

Success of the Ward Records Plan will be measured in meeting the criteria below:

1. All Department of Human Services ward records are identified, indexed, appropriately conserved and stored to ensure efficient digital access when requested in the future.
2. The discovery of any further collections of records relating to former wards and institutions will be communicated to relevant stakeholders and support groups via the Department of Human Services and the Find & Connect website. This may include the discovery of collections held by other agencies.
3. A reduction in the timeframe needed to respond to requests for ward and care leaver records.
4. Completion of the project on time and within budget.

3. Project Delivery

3.1 Ombudsman's Recommendations

Recommendation 1

In consultation with the Keeper of the Public Records and relevant stakeholders, develop a three year plan with specific actions, timelines, measures of progress and funding strategies for the identification, indexing, conservation, storage, management and provision of ready digital access for all records relating to former wards of the State of Victoria.

This recommendation has been met with the completion of this Ward Records Plan in consultation with the PROV and relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 2

Include within the plan priorities for action where the documents may be at risk and/or may need to be readily accessible for any known, pending civil proceedings and/or are being sought by former wards with foreshortened life expectancy.

This prioritisation process is addressed in current business processes of the department's programs which facilitate release of this information including the Corporate Integrity, Information and Resolutions unit (CIIRu) and Family Information Networks and Discovery (FIND). These units prioritise incoming requests where there is a known compelling reason such as age or medical state.

Recommendation 3

Communicate the discovery of any further collections of records relating to former wards and institutions, to relevant stakeholders and support groups and via the department's website and the Find & Connect (formally Pathways) website.

This requirement will be met in the development and implementation of a specific stakeholder communication process during the life of the project.

Recommendation 4

Provide for the relocation of records of wards to specific purpose document archival storage facilities.

The Ward Records Plan provides for the relocation of records of wards to 'specific purpose document archival storage facilities'. For permanent records this means transfer to the PROV through a staged transfer program. PROV storage and work program capacity may mean some permanent records may need to be stored in PROV approved facilities as an interim step. Other care leaver records which have been deemed by PROV to be 'temporary' will be transferred to a PROV approved storage facility.

Recommendation 5

Negotiate agreements with each non-government agency holding records of former wards of the state in order to either:

- *identify and index all such records and hand them to the department for further conservation and management; or*
- *maintain them and provide assumed access under protocols formally agreed with the department.*

Recommendation 5 of the Ombudsman's report regarding records in the custody of non-government agencies is out of scope of the Ward Records Plan and will be addressed in a related project.

Recommendation 6

Publish the three year plan on its website.

This plan has been published on the department's website to meet the requirement of this recommendation.

3.2 Project Approach

Identification and Prioritisation

In order to ensure all records in scope of the Ward Records Plan are identified a thorough survey of departmental holdings state-wide will be completed (including holdings at PROV).

The project will be phased to ensure that those accessions which contain ward and care leaver records or which are likely to contain ward and care leaver records have the highest priority.

Also in scope, but a lower priority, will be those collections of client and administrative records which may contain ward and care leaver records.

PROV has provided advice to the department on how to ensure the accessibility of records within the scope of the project. This advice has informed the Project Activities (3.3 below) with the proposed 'treatment' of the records tailored according to the type of records.

Project Delivery

The Ward Records Plan will be implemented by Department of Human Services' staff at the Bourke Street repository to minimise any risks associated with the highly sensitive nature of the records. For example risks associated with transport are minimised as there is no requirement to transfer records from Bourke Street to PROV or a PROV approved storage facility until they are appropriately indexed and conserved.

This approach also ensures that in-house knowledge of departmental records, legislative and compliance requirements and Retention & Disposal Authorities can be efficiently utilised.

Compliance

The Ward Records project will comply with mandatory Whole of Victorian Government requirements for managing records.

3.3 Project Activities

The objectives of the Ward Records Plan will be implemented by carrying out the following activities:

- Identification
 - A survey of the department's record holdings state-wide will be completed to determine collections which contain ward records or may contain ward records.
 - Identification of the department's records held at the PROV which contain ward records or may contain ward records.
 - An audit of records held at Bourke Street and data integrity review of the TRIM recordkeeping system.
- Appraisal and Sentencing
 - Review and appraisal of all accessions in scope of the project to determine the appropriate treatment for records in each collection.
 - Application of retention periods to all records in scope of the project in accordance with PROV-endorsed Retention & Disposal Authorities and with appropriate consideration of PROV's *Advice 18 - Crimes (Document Destruction) Act 2006*.

- Indexing
 - Registration of high level metadata into the department's recordkeeping system (TRIM) describing individual records including all of the department's ward, care leaver and institutional files, accessions, registers and index cards.
 - Manual indexing of hand-written records such as registers which even if digitised cannot be searched through the application of Optical Character Recognition software.
- Conservation
 - Preparation of all ward records according to PROV storage standards for long-term storage or permanent retention as state archives.
- Storage
 - Development of a permanent records transfer program with PROV.
 - Transfer of all permanent retention records to PROV in accordance with the agreed program and temporary records to a Public Record Office approved storage facility.
- Management
 - Development of finding guides to facilitate access by capturing this information during the life of the project in parallel to other tasks.
 - Capture of administrative history in parallel to other tasks to enable stakeholders to understand the context and history of the child welfare function, arrangements (such as wardship) and the history of individual institutions.
- Digital Access
 - Development of a digitisation plan to assess and determine those records which require digitisation because they:
 - are control records with multiple names and subjects within and are required to facilitate searching and accessibility e.g. ward registers
 - are fragile and require frequent handling e.g. index cards.
 - Enhancement of accession or series descriptions to provide context for the records and ensure related collections are linked (i.e. predecessor series).
- Project Management
 - Development of a Project Initiation Document (PID) for endorsement by the Records Management Steering Committee.
 - Documentation of all project procedures including registration and processing protocols.
 - Project team training (as required) in PROV transfers, TRIM Context, and records indexing, sentencing and transfer processes.
- Stakeholders
 - Development of a process to ensure that the discovery of further collections relating to wards and institutions is communicated to relevant stakeholders and support groups.
 - Development of a communication plan as part of the PID to ensure stakeholders are kept informed of progress in completing the Ward Records Project.

3.4 Project Phases

Phase 1 – Project Preparation

Item	Resource/s	Timing
Develop Project Initiation Document	Project Manager	January 2013
Develop Project Processes	Stream Lead Processes	January 2013
Secure Project Funding	Project Sponsor	January 2013
Purchase equipment and establish work areas	Team Leader Operations and Accommodation Unit	March 2013
Recruit and train project resources	Stream Lead Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing	March 2013
	Timing	March 2013

Phase 2 – Priority 1 Records

Item	Resources	Records
Ward Files (Register, sentence & conserve)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	6497 boxes
Ward Registers (Register, transcribe, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	270 registers
Index Cards (Register, sentence, digitise & conserve)	Digitisation Team	98 boxes
Institutional Records (Index, register, sentence & conserve)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	2331 boxes
Audit of Children, Youth & Families Client Files	Identification Team	184,000 files
	Timing	February 2014

Phase 3 – Priority 2 Records

Item	Resource/s	Records
Children, Youth & Families Client Files (Index, register, appraise, sentence & conserve)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	19,460 boxes
Non-accessioned Children, Youth & Families Client Files (Index, sentence and conserve)	Identification Team	148,000 files
Client Index Cards (Index, register, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	87 boxes
Client Registers (Index, register, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	15 registers
Records Stored at PROV (Index, register, appraise & sentence)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	4551 boxes
Children, Youth & Families Administration files (Index, register, appraise & sentence)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	5916 boxes
	Timing	February 2015

Phase 4 – Priority 3 Records

Item	Resource/s	Records
Disability Client Files (Index, register, appraise & sentence)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	12,755 boxes
Disability Index Cards (Index, register, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	53 boxes
Disability Administration Files (Index, register, appraise & sentence)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	6,724 boxes
Mental Health Patient Files (Index, register, appraise & sentence)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	21,877 boxes
Disability Registers (Index, register, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	5 registers

Mental Health Index Cards (Index, register, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	1436 boxes
Mental Health Registers (Index, register, sentence & digitise)	Digitisation Team	928 registers
Mental Health Administration Files (Index, register, appraise & sentence)	Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing Team	5643 boxes
	Timing	February 2016

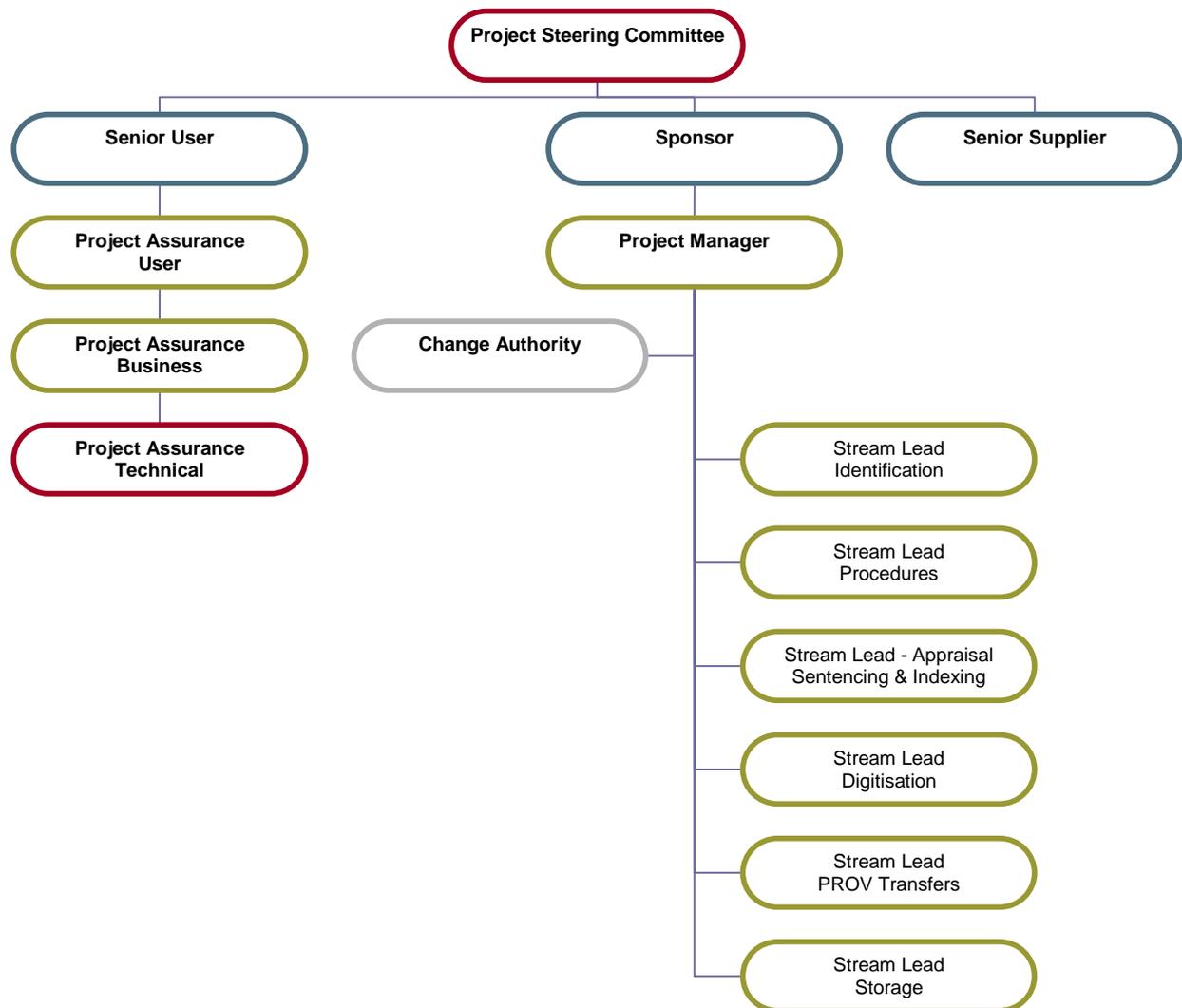
Long-Term Project Activities

Item	Resource/s	Timing
Bourke Street Audit & Data Reconciliation	Identification Team	November 2013
Develop and implement PROV Transfer Program	Stream Lead PROV Transfers	February 2016
Transfer records to PROV or APROSS	Storage Team	February 2016
Accession descriptions, finding guides and administrative history.	Stream Lead Appraisal, Sentencing & Indexing	February 2016
	Timing	February 2016

Note: Quantities of records in the above tables are indicative figures only and may be subject to change during the course of the project, which may impact upon the timing for completion of related actions.

4. Project Organisation Structure

4.1 Project Structure



4.2 Roles and Responsibilities

The role descriptions below are a brief overview only.

Project Sponsor

- Is ultimately responsible for the project.
- Ensures that the project provides value for money and that it delivers the agreed benefits.
- Chairs the Project Steering Committee meetings.
- Secures funding for the project.
- The ultimate decision maker supported by the Senior User and Senior Supplier in the decision making process.

Senior User(s)

- Represents the interests of all those who will use the outputs of the project.
- Ensures that the project delivers outcomes that meet users' requirements and satisfy the acceptance criteria.

Senior Supplier(s)

- Provides resources to the project.
- Responsible for quality of outcomes.
- Ensures that plans are realistic and that the project can deliver within agreed budgets and timescales.

Project Assurance

- Responsible for monitoring the progress of the project on behalf of the Project Steering Committee to ensure that the project is being managed efficiently in all respects.

User Assurance

- User needs and expectations are being met.
- An acceptable solution is being developed.

Business Assurance

- Adherence to the business case; ongoing viability of the project.

Technical Assurance

- Adherence to quality and PROV standards.
- Provides specialist knowledge on particular aspects of the project.

Project Manager

- The day-to-day authority within the constraints agreed with the Project Steering Committee.
- Ensure the project delivers the required products within the specified tolerances of time, cost, quality, scope, risk and benefits.

Change Authority

- Review and approve or reject all requests for change and off-specifications within the delegated limits of authority and change budget set by the Project Steering Committee.

Stream Leads

- Take direction from and report to the Project Manager.
- Plan, monitor and manage the team's work.
- Take responsibility for the progress of the team's work and use of team resources.

5. Management and Control

5.1 Governance

The Ward Records Project will report through the Records Management Steering Committee to the Department of Human Services Board.

5.2 Reporting

Monthly progress updates will be provided to the Project Steering Committee and the Records Management Steering Committee, and quarterly updates will be provided directly to the Ombudsman.

5.3 Schedule

Project Start Date	Project End Date
March 2013	March 2016

Deliverable / Milestone	Due Date	Sign-Off Requirement
Endorsement of Ward Records Plan	November 2012	Executive Director Corporate Services
Phase 1	March 2013	Records Management Steering Committee
Phase 2	February 2014	Records Management Steering Committee
Phase 3	February 2015	Records Management Steering Committee
Phase 4	February 2016	Records Management Steering Committee
Project Closure	March 2016	Executive Director Corporate Services

5.4 Project Funding

The department is currently assessing how much capital versus operating funding is required to implement the Ward Records Plan. The department has access to the capital component for the plan this financial year and will determine how to obtain the operating funding once the assessment is complete.

The project cost will be offset in part by the use of the department's staff, facilities and equipment.

6. Project Management

6.1 Quality Management

The Ward Records project must be completed in accordance with PROV standards and the department's procedures and processes. A Quality Management Strategy will be developed as part of the Project Initiation Document (PID). To ensure best practice and effective quality management, project activities will be developed and implemented in consultation with PROV.

6.2 Risk Management

The Project Manager will actively monitor risk and update the risk register and mitigation actions. Risks will be mitigated and managed in accordance with the Department of Human Services Risk Management Framework and Policy.

Any risks assessed as 'Critical' will be referred to the Project Steering Committee for guidance as to the suitable mitigation activities. In addition, the status of such risks will be reported on at each Project Steering Committee meeting.