



**OFFICIAL MINISTERIAL OVERSEAS TRAVEL
Outcomes Report**

Name of Department / Agency	Department of Health and Human Services Department of Education and Training	
Departmental / Agency Contact	Annalise Bamford Director, Executive Services and Oversight Department of Health and Human Services	
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TRAVEL DETAILS		
Minister's Name	Jenny Mikakos MP	
Portfolio/s	Families and Children Youth Affairs	
Did the Minister's spouse accompany the Minister in an official capacity?	No	
Accompanying Ministerial staff	Catherine Neville, Chief of Staff	
Countries visited	United States of America	
Date of travel	30 October to 9 November 2015	
Number of official travel days (include day of departure and day of return)	11	
Funding source (list Department/s or Agency)	Department of Health and Human Services	
EXPENSES		\$
Air fares (including taxes and fees)		\$29,110
Accommodation (including taxes and fees)		\$8,770
Other expenses (including surface travel and travel allowances)		\$10,069
Travel cost for Minister and ministerial staff		\$47,949
Are the above costs final and complete?		YES

Context

I have embarked on an historic reform of the child protection and family support system to make it sustainable and targeted at providing the best and earliest responses for vulnerable children and families.

We cannot do more of the same. We need to reform the system to make it sustainable and targeted at providing the best and earliest responses for vulnerable children and families.

And for those children who cannot live safely in their own homes, my aim is to ensure home based care is available for most, if not all, of these children. Residential care needs to be seen as a transitional placement for children and young people.

Challenges

We are all too familiar with the challenges that exist in the community and across the system that supports vulnerable children.

Currently, family violence continues to drive an increase in child protection reports and rising demand for out-of-

home care.

Disadvantaged and vulnerable children, especially Aboriginal children, are under-represented in early years services such as maternal and child health and kindergarten but over represented in child protection, out of home care and the justice system. We need to turn this around.

Purpose of travel

The purpose of my travel to the United States of America (USA) was to meet with key experts to seek information and advice on the development and implementation of two priority areas within my portfolio – the *Roadmap for Reform* of the Victorian child and family service system and the early childhood component of the *Education State*. Drawing on international experience is vital to the success of these ambitious reform agendas.

The Roadmap for Reform: Strong Families, Safe Children is examining how services and programs can intervene early to prevent abuse and ensuring that where children cannot live safely with their own parents, ensuring that the out-of-home care system is as good as it can be and has an emphasis on home-based care.

The USA has made significant in-roads into improved responses for vulnerable children and families through early intervention and prevention approaches and system transformation.

The Education State aims for excellence in outcomes and services for every Victorian child as the foundation for lifelong wellbeing. The early childhood component of the Education State focusses on early health, care and learning before the age of five, especially among young children who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

Both the Roadmap for Reform and the early childhood component of the Education State aim to develop substantial reforms to be put into action over the long term. They both aim to enhance care and support to vulnerable children and their families and ensure all children, young people and families live in supportive communities.

Itinerary

In 8 days on the ground, I travelled to five large cities across the USA; Los Angeles, Portland, Boston, Washington DC and New York City (NYC) for 26 meetings with over 35 experts in the field as well as meeting people who are receiving services.

I met with leaders from academia, government and non-government community service organisations, as well as organisations that offer intermediary services between government departments and community service organisations. This provided insights on the operation of complex child welfare service systems, information systems and a wide array of child and family and early childhood education and care service models and approaches.

A list of meetings and site tours is provided at **Appendix one**.

While the child welfare and early childhood development systems in the USA differ from Victoria's, there are common challenges in relation to increasing complexity, rising demand on tertiary and statutory child welfare services, underutilisation of universal early childhood services among children in the lowest socio-economic brackets and widening inequality of outcomes among young children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Policy objectives by states and local government authorities in New York, Massachusetts, Oregon and California also align directly with the Victorian Roadmap for Reform and the early childhood component of the Education State. Victoria can productively learn from innovative policies and programs that have been developed and implemented successfully in these states to intervene early to prevent child abuse and neglect, keep more families safely together through crisis, and secure better futures for children who cannot live at home. For example, social care reform and transformation in NYC has led to a demonstrable reduction in residential care.

The **Centre on the Developing Child** at Harvard University, Boston is a pre-eminent source of new ideas for more effective policies and services focused on the early years of life that are being used across the globe.

Connections were also made with people with particular expertise in early childhood education and care in order to understand ways of improving quality in the Victorian early childhood education and care system, particularly for

the most vulnerable children. This included representatives from the federal **Office of Head Start**. Head start is an internationally recognised early childhood intervention that is currently in its 50th year of operation. The **Administration for Children's Services** in NYC is also poised to implement recommendations from the *NYC Early Care and Education Taskforce*, which has several points of contact with the early childhood component of the Education State goals to lift the opportunity and life chances of vulnerable children through effective intervention in early childhood.

I met with representatives from the **National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)**, which is a national voice for American Indian children and families. I was able to draw on their experience to discuss priority areas identified by my recently established Victorian Aboriginal Children's Forum on how to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children/young people and enact key principles of Aboriginal self-determination. This included discussions about the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which is a Federal Statute governing the placement of American Indian children who are in any out-of-home placement.

Agency visits highlighted several opportunities to develop an integrated and graduated service continuum for children and families in Victoria to improve the health, wellbeing and learning outcomes for all children.

Benefits of travel to the State of Victoria

My travel has been of great benefit to the State of Victoria. My meetings have helped shape the Roadmap for Reform and helped build the policy work on the Education State to keep children safe, strengthen the connections between children and their families and improve children's long-term success.

Lessons learned cover six key themes:

1. Reappraisal of the role that residential care can play in the continuum of care
2. The importance of intervening early in life and early in the development of problems
3. Promote service accessibility and flexibility and customisation in service delivery
4. Need to focus on natural connections to culture and community
5. Community wellness and strengths can promote child safety and wellbeing
6. Establish data systems to provide a feedback loop for continuous improvement

Theme 1: *Reappraisal of the role that residential care can play in the continuum of care*

Jurisdictions that I visited have reappraised the role that residential care can play in the continuum of care. They have reduced residential placement options and successfully implemented family based alternatives and wrap-around services to manage children's emotional and behavioural problems.

New York City (NYC) has been particularly successful in reducing residential care numbers. The **Administration for Children Services for NYC** indicated this was achieved through the expansion of evidence-based programs combined with workforce development, caseload reductions, flexible allocation of funds and five-year contracts for funded agencies.

I found that ensuring children/young people receive the appropriate level of care and support from the commencement of their placement to be a critical element of success. The models of care, practice approaches and policy levers that I learnt of and which ensure an appropriate level of care and support to traumatised children/young people are highlighted below.

I was particularly impressed by the idea of providing wraparound family services and supports to children and birth families during an episode of out-of-home care to address the child's trauma, maximise opportunities for children to return safely to the care of their parent/s and also to support carers to meet children's needs. Wraparound support for out-of-home care children emphasised children's development needs, their integration with the community and connection to key universal services such as education. My meeting with representatives from **NICWA** also indicated that Native Indian communities embraced the concept of services that wrapped around their children.

Many of the programs implemented under the *Strong Families NYC* reform were developed at the **Oregon Social Learning Centre**, which I also met with. This enhanced my appreciation of scientifically based service interventions

in out-of-home care, including *Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care*, *Keeping Foster and Kin Carers Trained and Supported* (KEEP), *Parenting through Change* and *Parent Management Training* and the opportunities and challenges of implementing evidence-based models in Victoria.

The New York Foundling is one of New York's oldest and largest child welfare agencies (est. 1869) and operates programs in five boroughs of New York. It demonstrated that professional foster care can help to reduce placement breakdowns and the need for residential care.

Since my visit several Victorian community service organisations including OzChild, Windermere, Mallee Family Care and Upper Murray Family Care and Anglicare Victoria with the University of Melbourne Department of Social Work hosted a forum at the University of Melbourne – *Improving outcomes in out-of-home care and family services: An international perspective* – in which Dr Sylvia Rowlands from the New York Foundling spoke about how the introduction of evidence-based models was a contributing factor to the reduction of numbers of children and young people in residential care in the state of New York.

The **Stetson School** in Barres, Massachusetts is a 766 bed residential treatment program for boys and young men aged 9-22 years that aims to reduce problem behaviours and foster community reintegration. The school's multi-disciplinary team centred approach including a range of on-site clinical, behavioural and psychological services was very impressive. There were key learnings from this visit on how Victoria could improve its existing therapeutic treatment programs for children and young people who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviours.

The **Trauma Centre at the Justice Resource Center** showcased the *Attachment, Regulation and Competency Treatment Framework*, which is a promising practice for treating childhood trauma by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Discussions focused on how the framework has been applied in residential settings with traumatised youth.

People at the **Andrus Centre** discussed their *Sanctuary Model* - an organisational framework that integrates trauma theory with the creation of therapeutic communities to promote safety for all. The Sanctuary Model has been adopted by more than 200 agencies across the United States, Scotland, Canada and Australia, including McKillop Family Services in Victoria.

Good Shepherd Services was established in 1857 in NYC. It presented a track record of success in delivering a wraparound approach in schools in partnership with local leaders, volunteers and businesses.

I was impressed with how many NYC social services organisations provide wrap-around family services and supports to children and families during an episode of out-of-home care to address the child's trauma, maximise opportunities for children to return safely to the care of their parent/s and also to support carers to meet the needs of the child. Services and support for children in out-of-home care emphasised children's development needs and ongoing connection to critical universal services such as education.

The **Annie E Casey Foundation** is the largest foundation in the USA focussed on safely reducing the need for foster care. It has introduced innovative practices to support effective decision-making in child protection, including multidisciplinary reviews with independent facilitators and family-led decision-making. Leaders from the AECF are scheduled to visit Victoria early in 2016 to continue dialogue on the reform of Victoria's child and family system.

Theme 2: *The importance of intervening early in life and early in the development of problems*

A key reason for my travel was to source new ideas for reducing the number of reports of child protection concerns involving very young children.

Ten years ago, Victoria learned from research about the impact of a child's experiences of care, protection and stimulation on early brain development. This work informed legislative change that recognised the seriousness of cumulative harm, and required consideration of children's development as well as immediate risk in decisions about whether and how to intervene.

In the absence of effective prevention and response to family violence and other problems, these developments have driven increased reports to child protection.

The **Harvard Center for the Developing Child** explained that parents' capacity to reliably and sensitively respond to the needs of their children lays the foundation for future health, behaviour and learning. This vital relationship between parent or adult care-giver capabilities and child development is simply described by as "the serve and return interaction". This interaction must provide a clearer focus to our work with children and their families – keeping families strong for the wellbeing of their children.

The **Harvard Center on the Developing Child** reinforced the fact that early childhood is a heavily experience-dependent period of opportunity or vulnerability. This reaffirmed the importance of focusing on early childhood in the early childhood component of the Education State. Representatives discussed the importance of programs that focus simultaneously on learning and developmental opportunities for young children as well as efforts to strengthen parental capacities. This meeting also provided greater insight into the complex issues affecting young children's development, how core concepts in the science of early childhood development can be effectively communicated to parents, carers and professionals who work with young children and how science and research can drive innovation in policies and programs.

Focusing on parent capabilities and engaging parents in education and employment was also discussed on a number of other visits, including **the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute**. By working concurrently with the child and the parent, earlier, more intensively and over a sustained period where problems are chronic and entrenched, it is possible to prevent escalation of risk factors and harm to children.

Theme 3: Promote service accessibility and flexibility and customisation in service delivery

A central purpose of my travel was to identify new ways in which the Victorian child and family system can respond to the full range of children and families who are the subject of a child protection concern.

Key learnings included the need for flexibility within and across service provision, access to community-based services from non-stigmatising settings and customised approaches were critical elements of effective system design.

The importance of integrated models of community services was raised by a number of agencies visited, including **NICWA, the Oregon Social Learning Centre** (emphasising links to universal service platforms), **Centre on the Developing Child** (intergrading mental health services into paediatric practice) and the **Centre on Law and Social Policy** (combining child care with home visiting).

Co-located models for community prevention included *Family Success Centres* in New Jersey, *Family Empowerment Centres* (proposed) in NYC, *Health Hubs* and *Beacon Preventive Centres* in schools.

A number of these models highlighted the importance of delivering enhanced services from places that are trusted and stigma free such as health services, early education centres and schools.

The **Annie E Casey Foundation** highlighted the importance of working with a cluster of providers who have a continuum of care so that services and support can be graduated according to need over time.

The most successful systems have coordinated services to eliminate delays and duplication and ensure that preventive services are available to families and teens seeking help on their own. These systems have also boosted preventative systems in partnership with the service delivery sector.

Discussions with the **Office of the Mayor NYC** highlighted how technology can be better harnessed to support integrated service models. Since its implementation in 2008, the *Health and Human Services-Connect Initiative* has led to significant improvements in information sharing and collaboration amongst health and human service agencies, and, in turn, service accessibility for residents of NYC. This is an on-line portal that residents can access for information on government services in their local community.

Discussion also impressed the importance of families knowing what is available in the community to support them.

Theme 4: Need to focus on natural connections to culture and community

As well as introducing more effective early intervention responses, the Roadmap for Reform aims to evolve the child and family service system towards more preventive ways of addressing child wellbeing issues, that is, to serve low-risk families as well as high-risk families to prevent problems from occurring in the first place.

My meetings highlighted the importance of supportive communities for families raising children, including how informal and natural helpers drawn from families and communities can help to strengthen communities.

Several people that I met with also discussed community engagement as a key factor in preventing child protection concerns. The **Administration for Children Services for NYC** emphasised the importance of engaging parents in playgroups and other activities in order to develop their personal support networks. Positive personal support networks, regular opportunities to interact with other parents and young children and easy access to family-friendly settings and services were themes in discussions with the **Harvard Centre on the Developing Child** as well.

My meeting with representatives from **NICWA** highlighted the importance of culturally strong environments in protecting Indian children as well as the importance of developing the spiritual strength of Native Indian children and a positive cultural identity.

Theme 5: Community wellness and strengths can promote child safety and wellbeing

The Roadmap for Reform and the early childhood component of the Education State aim to tackle seemingly intractable social issues and lingering effects of trauma across generations through a robust approach to the early years and social care. I was interested in exploring interagency and community partnership approaches as a means of achieving breakthrough outcomes.

My visits to service delivery organisations demonstrated that comprehensive and localised approaches can break the cycle of poverty and revitalise disadvantaged communities. *Promise Neighbourhoods* and *Magnolia Place* utilised successful methods to create safe and supportive environments in which children achieve the best results and live free of abuse and neglect. The goals of the *Magnolia Community Initiative* and *Promise Neighbourhoods* align very closely with those of the Roadmap for Reform and the early childhood component of the Education State, namely educational success, good health and safe and nurturing parenting.

Promise Neighbourhoods is a program of the US Department of Education that provides funding to entities to improve the educational and development outcomes of children and young people in disadvantaged communities. This is achieved mainly via a continuum of services spanning from early childhood through college and enhanced family and community supports. Promise Neighbourhood's model has a strong commitment to results-based planning and improvement using real-time data.

Magnolia Place is a partnership between the county, city and community that aims to improve the lifelong health, educational, social and economic outcomes of the 35,000 children and young people living within the 500 block Magnolia catchment area in Los Angeles. The Magnolia Community Initiative has become an international model/framework for building community wellness, resilience, prevention and community support.

Theme 6: Establish data systems to provide a feedback loop for continuous improvement

In seeking advice on ways to evolve effective early childhood development and child and family service systems, a number of the people I met with raised the importance of collecting, monitoring and sharing population, service and client data with service providers as well as linking evidence-based services to specific outcomes.

These discussions emphasised the need to place significant focus on the information enablers of reform – building knowledge, translating research and developing an intelligent, learning system. This includes appropriate investment in evaluation and research.

My meeting with representatives from the **Harvard Kennedy School** and the **Malcolm Weiner Centre for Social Policy** focused specifically on performance measurements for the early childhood system in Victoria and the proposed outcome areas and measures for early childhood development under the early childhood component of the Education State reforms.

I gained valuable insight on how to measure and monitor outcomes, including technology applications that could assist in doing this. Of significant note:

- **Promise Neighbourhood Institute** – highlighted its strong commitment to outcomes-based planning and improvement using real-time data.

- **NICWA** showcased the use of data as a storytelling tool to inform approaches aimed at reducing the over-representation of Native American children and young people in out-of-home care.
- The **ACS NYC** illustrated how States are provided opportunity to use federal funds more flexibly in order to ensure evidence based approaches to child welfare service delivery and financing.
- **The Robin Hood Foundation** demonstrated how its systems of metrics, dubbed 'Relentless Monetisation', aims to spend philanthropic money smartly, thereby driving evidence based care and better outcomes. The Robin Hood Foundation is focused on finding, funding and creating programs and schools that generate meaningful results for New York's poorest families.

Next Steps / Follow Up

Travel to the USA has informed the broad directions for the Roadmap for Reform and a new way forward for providing better outcomes for vulnerable children and families. The Department of Health and Human Services will play a key role in implementing the Roadmap for Reform.

The travel will also inform the development of the Government's early childhood component of the Education State reforms.

Important international partnerships are also starting to develop as the result of my visits, particularly between the Annie E Casey Foundation and the New York Foundling, which carry the potential for more long-term strategic consulting and assistance that could greatly enhance the Victorian child and family welfare system and improve the lives of Victorian children and families. Key community service organisations are also developing contacts with the New York Foundling about enhancements to their own frameworks, services and programs.

Appendix one: Scheduled meetings

Those I met with during official travel to the USA included:

Child welfare policy and practice

- Dr Patti Chamberlain, Science Director and Dr Marion Forgatch, Senior Scientist Emerita, Oregon Social Learning Centre
- Joseph A Allred J.D., Vice President, Stetson School and Staff
- Rob Geen, Director, Policy Reform and Advocacy, and Tracey Feild, Director, Child Welfare Strategy, Annie E Casey Foundation
- Dr Sylvia Rowlands, Vice President, William Baccaglini, CEO, The New York Foundling and Staff
- Board of Trustees, The New York Foundling
- Panel of 6 Social Services providers in NYC
- Deborah McCoy, Managing Director, Early Childhood and Youth, The Robin Hood Foundation
- Andrew White, Deputy Commissioner, Policy Planning and Measurement and Staff, and Susan Nuccio, Commissioner, Financial Services and Staff, Administration for Children's Services for NYC
- Sister Paulette LoMonarco, Executive Director, Good Shepherd Services
- Jacquelyn McCroskey, DSW, John Milner Professor of Child Welfare, USC School of Social Work, and Fesia Davenport, Interim Director, Office of Child Protection

Youth offending

- Father Greg Boyle SJ, Executive Director, Homeboy Industries / Board member, National Gang Centre Advisory Board and a tour of the Homeboy Centre and meeting with Staff and Clients
- Robert L Listenbee, Administrator, Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
- Dr Margaret Blaustein, Director, Training and Education, and Dr Elizabeth Warner, Director, SMART program, The Trauma Centre, Justice Resource Centre

Early childhood education

- Al Race, Deputy Director / Chief Knowledge Officer, and James Cairns, Director, International Initiatives, Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University
- Dr Julie Boatwright Wilson, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy, Malcolm Wiener Centre for Social Policy, John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- Olivia Golden, Executive Director, Centre on Law and Social Policy
- Edith Hawkins, Chief Program Officer, and Chrystal Starr-Brown, Senior Director, Early Childhood Programs, and a tour of the Head Start Campagna Centre including meeting four Head Start teachers
- Amanda Bryans, Director, Educational Development and Partnerships Development, and various senior staff, Administration for Families and Children
- Dr Jeremy Kohomban, President and Chief Executive, The Children's Village
- Dr Michael McAphee, Promise Neighbourhoods Institute
- Alex Morales, President and Founding CEO, Children's Bureau

Information systems

- Tayyab Walker, Director of Enterprise Data Solutions, NYC Mayor's Office of Operations

Indigenous children and families

- Terry Cross, Founding Executive Director and Senior Adviser, National Indian Welfare Association

International Victorian Government Business Offices

- Michael Kapel, Commissioner for Victoria to the Americas, and Nathan Elia, Health Director, International Victorian Government Business Offices