

Expenditure Initiatives in the 2001-02 Budget Speech

Tackling Youth Problems Head-On Concerted Efforts to Turn Back the Tide

Young people are our future. We have to provide them with a healthy environment for them to grow up as responsible adults. However, we have seen –

- a significant increase of 13.5% of juveniles aged under 16 arrested for crimes in 2000;
- an alarming involvement of young people in piracy activities with 153 juveniles arrested in the second half of 2000, compared to 55 in the same period in 1999;
- a worrying increase in substance abuse amongst young people with newly reported drug abusers aged under 16 increased from 108 in the first half of 1999 to 260 in the same period of 2000; and
- an estimated 18% of Form One students being potential at risk and more and more primary students exhibiting emotional, psychosocial problem and disobedient and bullying behaviours.

We -- parents, teachers, social workers, and the community at large -- must work together to turn back the tide.

2. In his 2000 Policy Address, the Chief Executive said that we have to complement our efforts in education with services in the areas of youth protection, development, counselling, support and rehabilitation to improve the well-being of our young people. We have to give timely help to young people who are at risk to overcome their problems.

3. In his 2001 Budget Speech, the Financial Secretary announced increased social investment in youth work with additional recurrent resources of \$177 million. \$84 million will be incurred in 2001-02.

4. The additional resources will be spent on a package of measures from early identification, timely intervention to effective rehabilitation to help young people who are at risk.

Identifying young people at risk

5. In 1994, with financial support from the Lotteries Fund, the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk chaired by DSW commissioned the Understanding the Adolescent Project (UAP). The Project involves the development and application of a screening tool amongst Form One students for identifying potential at-risk youth. The tool has been validated through longitudinal studies and implementation plans for its wider application have been piloted. The Project indicated some 18% of our students in Secondary One are at risk and should benefit from early intervention.

6. We have already announced the plan to implement the Project in 40 secondary schools from the 2001/02 school year. With the additional resources now available, we propose to implement the Project to a total of 200 secondary schools in phases over the next three years at a cost of about \$24 million per year. Under this initiative, and making use of the school-based social worker, each participating NGO will pair up with a school. We will provide additional resources of \$100,000 to each participating school for meeting the programme expenses. In addition, in view that children nowadays mature early and primary students are already exhibiting various at-risk behaviours, \$50 million per year has been set aside for bringing this early identification and preventive programme to primary schools.

Rendering timely support to youth-at-risk

7. We will implement four initiatives to target assistance towards youth at risk. They are -

- (1) expedite the formation of Integrated Teams in Youth Services to ensure delivery of youth services in an integrated manner. NGOs have made significant progress in rationalising youth facilities over the past two

years with the number of ITs increased from 34 to 54 in 2000-01 and 61 by the end of 2001-02 through redeployment of existing resources. We believe that the formation of ITs could be significantly accelerated with the additional recurrent resources of \$70 million available, phased over three years, namely \$30 million in 2001-02, rising to \$50 million in 2002-03 and \$70 million in 2003-04;

- (2) enhance Police's School Liaison Teams to support schools and social workers with an additional allocation of \$10 million per year;
- (3) strengthen SWD's district youth offices to co-ordinate the various efforts at the district level with an extra allocation of \$7 million per year; and
- (4) continue with the additional school-based support to seven large academically low achievement schools at an extra annual cost of \$1.4 million.

Steering marginal youth back to the right course

8. Despite early identification and intervention, a small number of young people will still fall prey to bad influences. We must do all we can to reach out to these marginal youth and give them the needed support. Specifically, we will -

- expand the coverage of services for young night drifters. We have already announced a plan to select 8 ITs in key areas to tackle young night drifters. With additional resources of \$12 million, we will now strengthen a total of 18 ITs (i.e. an extra 10) to provide more adequate coverage;
- expand the coverage of the Community Support Services Scheme for young people cautioned under the Police Superintendent Discretion Scheme. We are fully subventing two schemes at the moment and have already announced the plan to set up a third one serving the NT East region. We will now provide another two at an extra cost of \$2.7 million so that the service will be available throughout the territory.

Conclusion

9. The nurturing of young people is a major social responsibility of the whole community. SWD will work very closely with ED, the Police and other relevant Government departments to tackle youth problems in a concerted manner. We count on the unfailing support of our youth workers, principals and teachers to join the course. More importantly, we appeal to parents to care, guide and support their children as they grow up.

Social Welfare Department

7 March 2001