

Paper for Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
An Action Plan to Help Street Sleepers

PURPOSE

On 8 November 1999 and 10 April 2000, Members discussed two papers on Welfare Services Provision for Street Sleepers. This paper updates Members on the recent upsurge in the number of street sleepers and a three-year action plan to help these street sleepers.

BACKGROUND

2. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) and non-government organisations (NGOs) provide a range of welfare services for street sleepers. These include outreaching and counselling service, accommodation assistance (such as temporary shelter, urban hostel and compassionate rehousing), day relief centre, referral for financial assistance, medical and drug treatment.

3. SWD maintains a computerized Street Sleepers Registry for keeping a central record of the general characteristics of street sleepers and the type of welfare services provided to them. The Registry is continuously updated with information input by frontline staff who come into contact with street sleepers and from the annual/biennial territory-wide surveys on street sleepers conducted by SWD. The entry will be deleted when the street sleepers live off the streets.

PROFILE OF STREET SLEEPERS

4. During the year 2000, the number of street sleepers in the Registry

increased by 54%, from 819 in January 2000 to 1 259 in December 2000. This trend remains unabated. By end February 2001, the total number of street sleepers on the Registry shot to 1 399. We have analysed the increase between January 2000 and February 2001. The 580 additional cases were made up of 935 newly registered or re-registered cases and 355 cases deleted from the Registry. Over 60% of the newly registered cases are staying in three urbanized districts, namely, Yau Tsim Mong (31%), Sham Shui Po (16%) and Eastern/Wan Chai (14%). This distribution by district is very similar to findings of previous surveys. Of the 355 de-registered cases, 316 street sleepers had been assisted to get accommodation either in the public or private sector, while the rest were admitted into drug treatment centres, imprisoned or lost trace of.

5. An analysis of the 935 newly registered or re-registered cases shows the following features -

- that 553 (59%) are aged between 20 and 49;
- that 721 (77%) are in normal health;
- that 679 (73%) have received formal education; and
- that 416 (44%) have been street sleeping for less than one year.

Besides, there is growing evidence to show that some of these younger street sleepers only return to their dwelling places late at night.

6. Among these 935 street sleepers, 865 of them provided reasons for street sleeping. The main reasons were :

- 241 (28%) claimed difficulty in finding accommodation with affordable rent or had no income to pay rent due to unemployment or

low-paid jobs;

- 240 (28%) indicated that street sleeping was their personal choice;
- 135 (16%) attributed street sleeping to relationship problems with their families or co-tenant; and
- 114 (13%) experienced difficulty in finding accommodation upon discharge from prison or drug treatment centres.

7. The above information shows that some of these street sleepers end up on the streets recently as a result of their limited ability to cope with economic and social changes. The younger age-group of able-bodied persons who has received some formal education has increased. Their street sleeping history is relatively shorter. With the changing profile of street sleepers identified, there is a need to develop a strategy that is able to reach these younger able-bodied street sleepers by early intervention and to prevent them from becoming habitual street sleepers.

HELPING STREET SLEEPERS

A New Strategy

8. The development of this strategy and action plan signifies a new approach of collaboration and partnership between SWD and NGOs. SWD, in consultation with three NGOs specializing in street sleeper services, has worked out a three-year action plan to tackle the special needs of this newly identified group of street sleepers, which includes an in-built evaluative research to be carried out by an academic institution. The strategy is characterized by -

- making full use of existing services whilst plugging certain service gaps. For example, we will introduce proactive mid-night outreaching services

to contact the street sleepers in need of services;

- assisting street sleepers on a case management basis, offering them immediate support and following them through with a continuum of services; and
- emphasising on assisting street sleepers to become self-reliant and lead a normal life, rather than simply inducing them to leave the streets.

The three-year Action Plan

9. SWD has obtained a Lotteries Fund grant of \$8.73 million for implementing a three-year action plan from April 2001 to March 2004. Grants will be disbursed to three NGOs, namely St. James' Settlement, the Salvation Army and Christian Concern for the Homeless Association, to undertake mid-night outreach and to offer to street sleepers identified the day and residential services run by these NGOs and others. The three NGOs have agreed amongst themselves their respective target areas with the highest concentration of street sleepers. St James' Settlement with its existing day relief centre and hostel on the Hong Kong Island will concentrate on the Hong Kong Island; the Salvation Army will service the Yau Tsim Mong Districts whereas the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association will look after the rest of Kowloon and the New Territories. In addition, the LF grant will finance the setting up of an emergency shelter in Wan Chai by St. James' Settlement to augment accommodation services on the Hong Kong Island. The shelter will accommodate eight to ten persons at a time.

10. Under the plan, the continuum of services available to street sleepers includes the following -

- (a) mid-night outreaching visits to contact street sleepers especially those returning late to their dwelling places;

- (b) emergency funds (to be disbursed directly by the three NGOs concerned under a set of prescribed conditions) to meet expenses on meals, transportation, rental, etc.;
- (c) counselling on social/life skills and interpersonal relationship;
- (d) advice on employment and arrangement of job placement;
- (e) emergency placements;
- (f) long-term housing arrangement; and
- (g) follow-up support to prevent relapsing to street sleeping.

11. All the three NGOs have a long history and solid experience in helping street sleepers. They have the related backup services such as day relief centre/activity centre and hostel for homeless person. With proactive mid-night outreaching to these street sleepers, counselling can be offered to them to quit the streets and admission can be immediately arranged into their emergency shelter/transit hostel/urban hostel. In this connection, it is relevant to note that there is no shortage of accommodation in Hong Kong to meet the needs of street sleepers. A list of relevant services run by NGOs on a subvented or self-financing basis is at the Annex. The overall utilization rate of shelters/hostels for homeless people is only about 70%. Therefore apart from the additional emergency shelter/transit hostel included in the project by St. James' Settlement in view of the shortage of this facility on the Hong Kong Island, we have not proposed additional day or residential services. We will closely monitor the situation and consider additional accommodation services if this is clearly needed.

12. In particular, to assist those younger able-bodied unemployed street

sleepers to join the work force, the three NGOs will line up with the Labour Department, retraining centres and employers to provide employment training and job placements as appropriate. They will also administer some emergency funds to subsidize those street sleepers with genuine financial difficulties to meet their work-related expenses such as transportation, clothing for new jobs, etc. Through adopting an integrated approach, the three projects will be able to cater for the accommodation, social, psychological, employment and financial needs of street sleepers in a holistic and co-ordinated manner and on a case management basis.

13. In line with the strategy to make full use of existing services, these three NGOs have also built up close network with other NGOs which have agreed to offer back-up support in assisting street sleepers located. Through SWD's co-ordination, they have also lined up with the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers and the Society for the Rehabilitation of Offenders to ensure specialized services will be provided effectively to street sleepers with special needs. In addition, the Sunrise House, providing medium-term accommodation for displaced bedspace lodgers, which is under the administration of the Home Affairs Department and managed by the Salvation Army, will also admit cases, including street sleepers as suitably referred by social workers.

14. To complement the new approach and the work of the three NGOs, the three Street Sleepers Outreaching Teams of SWD will be re-engineered to strengthen collaboration among NGOs, SWD, other government departments, District Councils, etc. in order to ensure smooth co-ordination in delivery of services for street sleepers. In addition, under the Active Employment Assistance Programme, able-bodied street sleepers who are on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance will be assisted to get access to up-to-date labour market information and other support services to overcome barriers to work. They will be helped to develop personalized action plans to find work. The three NGOs will also interface with such existing services so that a continuum of care can be provided to street sleepers to meet their changing needs.

Evaluation on Service Provision

15. To undertake an overall evaluation of the service approach to help street sleepers, SWD has commissioned the City University of Hong Kong to carry out an evaluative research to assess the effectiveness of the three new projects as well as existing services in tackling the problem. The evaluative research includes the set up of a Client Information and Service Intervention (CISI) Database System and formulation of performance standards and measurement tools to ensure resources are maximized to support street sleepers to resume a normal and self-reliant life. The CISI will throw light on the record of all service interventions for the street sleepers so as to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of different service programmes as well as to monitor the street sleepers' condition of employment, mental health and social networks. The prevention of relapsing into street sleeping will be a major aspect in assessing the outcomes of the three projects. The evaluative research will also give light to future service delivery mode which will assist street sleepers more effectively.

WAY FORWARD

16. SWD will work closely with the three NGOs and the City University of Hong Kong to monitor the effectiveness of the various measures in assisting street sleepers through focused and concerted efforts.

*Social Welfare Department
March 2001*

**List of non-governmental organizations providing back up support
to the three pilot projects**

1. Caritas – Hong Kong
 - (a) Cable and Wireless Caritas Temporary Shelter (S)
 - (b) Mount Davis Hostel for Single Persons (SF)
2. Street Sleepers Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated
 - (a) Wanchai Shelter (SF)
 - (b) Yaumatei Shelter (SF)
 - (c) Shamshuipo Shelter (SF)
3. Missionary of Charity
 - (a) Home of Love (SF)
4. St. Barnabas' Society & Home
 - (a) Drop in Centre for Street Sleepers (SF)
5. Pok Oi Hospital
 - (a) Pok Oi Hospital Jockey Club Hostel for Single Persons (S)
6. Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council
 - (a) Jockey Club Lok Fu Hostel for Single Persons (S)
7. Yan Chai Hospital
 - (a) Yan Chai Hospital Urban Hostel for Single Persons (SF)
8. St. James' Settlement
 - (a) Day Relief Centre for Street Sleepers (S)
 - (b) Li Chit Street Single Persons Hostel (S)
9. Salvation Army
 - (a) Day Relief Centre for Street Sleepers (S)
 - (b) Nam Ming Haven for Women (S)
 - (c) Yee On Hostel (S)
 - (d) Shun On Hostel (SF)
10. Christian Concern for the Homeless Association
 - (a) Activity Centre (SF)
 - (b) Yan Chack Hostel (SF)
 - (c) Yan Lam Hostel (SF)
11. Light of Yung Shu Tau Christian Society Limited
 - (a) Kei Lok (Temporary) Hostel (SF)

(S) : subvented service
(SF) : self-financing service