

Submission of Hong Kong Family Welfare Society
“Age of Criminal Responsibility”

The Hong Kong Family Welfare Society supports raising the “Age of Criminal Responsibility” to 14 years of age. The Society, which was established as an independent welfare agency in 1949, employs more than 500 staff in a wide range of services provided from 27 centres, including family service, school social work, family life education, foster care, mental health and mediation services, home help and home care services, and many projects and programmes.

A major focus of the Society’s work since inception has been on work with the family, with children and youth. It is our firm belief that young people, particularly those of teenage and below, need a good family life experience, with protection, care, guidance and proper development. We also encourage the social and civic responsibility of children and youth in our work with them and their families.

- 1) Based on modern psychological and developmental theories, and based on our experience of work with young people, and in the knowledge of the potentially serious effects on a child’s future, we believe that children should not be brought into the criminal system at a young age i.e. below age 14.
- 2) Our view on the “age of responsibility” is consistent with the view taken in most areas of legislation, that a child of these tender, developing, years should not be held as ‘mature’ and independent in making serious decisions affecting his/her life e.g. schooling attendance compulsion until 15, consent to sexual relations until 16, etc. etc., as well as in ages of ability to sign contracts, status as witness, protection in acts of pornography, independent decision making on marriage and a host of others to which the LRC might refer to the Bills Committee.
- 3) We believe that the public does not fully comprehend the age in HKSAR of criminal responsibility, but that the public fully supports guidance and ‘discipline’ for young people who commit ‘criminal type acts’. If given a choice, with understanding of how this guidance and control may be “imposed”, the views of the Public appear to favour a non-

criminalising solution for young people under 16.

- 4) While we would like to understand more about the professional skills of the Police in offering ‘counselling and guidance’ to young people through the Superintendent’s caution scheme, and would like to know more about the proportion of police time taken with this area of their work, we appreciate the role of the Police in the prevention of youth crime and in their contribution to youth development services.

However we are also concerned about the rights of children, in that a ‘caution’, however well meaning and the subject of which is not ‘proven’ in Court, may be too easily accepted by vulnerable children, and anxious parents grateful for no ”legal action”, remaining on a child’s record and which may then be brought up in any later juvenile proceedings before a Magistrate (reference to Police Superintendent’s Discretion Scheme. Para. 7).

- 5) While noting that the age of criminal responsibility being below the age of 14 is most evident in countries of the former British Empire, which has not been noted for its care and concern for children in its former colonies e.g. the scandal of British children sent to Australia and the abuse of Aboriginal children there, we are concerned at some of the sweeping generalisations of the Law Reform Commission’s report and the basis for the recommendation to raise the age only to 10, e.g. “We consider that the limited number of crimes committed by children.....do not support maintaining the existing age.....” (Para. 8. Annex B reference of the Legislative Council Brief).

A crime is defined as such by law and the detection of crime is generally by the police, arrests certainly made by the Police. The “number of crimes” committed is possibly more to do with the detection (recognition/ reports) ability, time and interest of the police and action on arrests, than with the number of “criminal activities” of children. Certainly it is likely that the children arrested etc. are more likely to be from poorer, less educated, perhaps feckless or more vulnerable families. The children become the “criminalized” victims of their family background rather than their understanding.

- 6) We believe that in the 21st Century, raising the age of criminal responsibility to age 14 is not an ‘incautious approach’, (Para. 10).

The almost incredible belief by some that raising the age exposes children to being exploited by criminals, does a great disservice to the interests of children by criminalising them, attributing the adults’ behaviour to them while assuming that this is the major, and a

mature, reason for their acquiescence in the crimes of adults.

- 7) We propose raising the age to at least 14. Even in non-commonwealth countries where the age is 12 or 14 the child is often treated in special proceedings, with less criminal element, up to the age of 18 or 21.

We also propose that the welfare provisions for Care and Control (Care & Protection Orders) be reviewed so that young children under 14, committing “criminal acts”, may be handled in a manner that allows them to make recompense e.g. community service, have control and guidance e.g. in Special Schools, Youth Development and Guidance Programmes etc. etc.

The Youth Services in Hong Kong are substantially funded, generally well spread over the territory, and uniquely well developed to take on a greater “youth crime” prevention strategy as well as “youth guidance” programmes. In co-operation with Police programmes such as Junior Police Call, school liaison, School Parent Teacher Associations (P.T.A.s) etc. etc.. It cannot be beyond the imagination, knowledge and ability of Hong Kong S.A.R. to have a successful Alternative to the Criminalising of Young People in the 21st Century.

If this opportunity is not grasped now, because of the adoption of a timid and weak “cautious approach”, the Legislative Council will have missed the opportunity to put the “interests of children” as a paramount concern.

Submission 19/9/02

香港家庭福利會

(本會為註冊之有限公司)

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29th March, 1999

The Secretary
The Law Reform Commission
20th Floor, Harcourt House
39 Gloucester Road
Wanchai
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Dear *Secretary*,

Consultation Paper on the Age of Criminal Responsibility in Hong Kong

Please find attached the views of the Hong Kong Family Welfare Society compiled by a Working Group of the agency in consultation with staff.

We are concerned that this subject is not well understood by the public, as is evidenced by the contradictory views expressed in a survey undertaken by a well known youth agency. The incidence of crime among young people, the use of laws relating to the welfare of young people and the criminal law, the issues of welfare, punishment and rehabilitation, and the role of the police, appear to be not well understood by the public and even by many professionals.

We hope that this consultation exercise will contribute to more indepth and ongoing discussion on the criminal justice system in respect of youth in Hong Kong as well as the range of services which could be utilised for prevention of juvenile crime, and the treatment and rehabilitation of these young people. Within the youth field there has been little such informed discussion and the Commission on Youth could perhaps make more useful contribution. Greater expertise is required in this respect.

Yours sincerely,

Sandy Kwong (Ms.)
On behalf of
the Director

TJM/ac
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香港公益金資助機構
A Beneficiary of The Community Chest

HONG KONG FAMILY WELFARE SOCIETY

Views on the "Consultation Paper on The Age of Criminal Responsibility in Hong Kong"

INTRODUCTION

The Hong Kong Family Welfare Society was established in 1949 with the mission to deliver quality social service to enhance the well-being of families and individuals in Hong Kong. Our dedication in helping young people is reflected by our present status as the largest school social work service operating agency in the territory. Our school social workers, serving covering 68 secondary schools are in the very frontline in understanding and helping young people everyday. We also have substantial experience in working with young people and their parents in our counselling service, family life education and foster care service throughout the territory. This expertise in working with young people is the background of the views we would like to put forward in response to the "Consultation Paper on The Age of Criminal Responsibility in Hong Kong".

1. **MINIMUM AGE OF CRIMINAL RESPONSIBILITY**

We support having the minimum age of criminal responsibility at age 14. We take this view because a child aged 7 - 13 is too young to understand the gravity of his actions. Thus is not fair, nor is it necessary to criminalize a child at such tender age. As shared in the Paper, other Jurisdictions have a higher minimum age of criminal responsibility, especially taking reference from PRC, Taiwan and Macau, which are our immediate neighbors with similar cultural and social background. It is also obvious that the present minimum age is inconsistent with other legislative provision which protects children up to and in some cases beyond the age of 14.

2. **REBUTTABLE DOLI INCAPAX PRESUMPTION**

We recommend that the Doli Incapax presumption be retained to protect children in any intermediate age group if the age is set lower than 14. In our consideration of retaining the doli incapax presumption, we draw mostly from our frontline experience in working with young people on a day to day basis. We agree that better education does not guarantee a greater readiness to distinguish right from wrong.

3. **CRIMINALIZATION VS REHABILITATION**

There are some professionals who are concerned that delinquent children in need of help would slip through the net if they are not put through the criminal judicial system. However this need not be the case with a proper system of prevention and treatment. We urge for the approach to children to focus on rehabilitation instead of punishment. We agree that delinquent behaviour should be nipped in

the bud. Our ultimate goal is to help our young people to rehabilitate and not merely to impose punishment on them. We assert that it is not necessary to criminalize a young child in order to rehabilitate him / her. In view of this, we suggest:

- 3.1 The present Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme be modified to ensure its comprehensiveness when implemented in every district.
- 3.2 We propose that a special team of youth police officers be set up, perhaps within the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme, not merely to caution the child but to work in collaboration with social workers in the district, including youth workers, outreaching workers, school social workers and school personnel, as appropriate with the child, his / her peers and family.
- 3.3 The scope of Care and Protection orders should be utilised to provide rehabilitation for children committing less serious crimes without the stigma and serious consequences of a criminal conviction, allowing the relevant authorities to provide rehabilitative help.
- 3.4 In order to rehabilitate a child, significant parties should be involved within the context of a Care of Protection Order or an amended Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme. We propose that, as many or most delinquent children come from dysfunctional or broken families, to successfully rehabilitate a delinquent child, it is crucial to ensure the mandatory involvement of his / her family in the process, court proceedings, treatment, etc.

3.5 A strong and comprehensive support system is necessary to rehabilitate these children, as mentioned earlier. Better integrated use of community, family, child care and youth services, deployment of existing facilities and better use of governmental as well as non-governmental resources should be seriously considered in order to strengthen the support system for young people in addition to legislative changes.

3.6 Attached are extracts (**Appendix 1**) from the Five Year Plan for Social Welfare Development in Hong Kong - Review 1998 which outline the range of preventive, remedial and rehabilitative services which exist to bolster a raising of the age to 14. The pages speak for themselves. Additional resources may not be necessary to address the often stated public's concern about the incidence of child delinquency and the measures for prevention and control. These can also address the administration's concern and that of the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

4. **JUVENILES IN THE AGE GROUP OF 14 - 17**

In our consideration of the present age of criminal responsibility in Hong Kong, we feel it is necessary to also address the age group of 14 - 17.

Although this age group falls outside the scope of the Consultation Paper, we wish to raise our concern that sentencing should be rehabilitatively oriented as well as ensuring mandatory family involvement.

5. **AUTOMATIC ERASURE OF JUVENILE CRIMINAL RECORD**

Automatic erasure of the criminal record (except for very serious crimes such as murder) should be seriously considered once the youth reaches the age of 18 or within a reasonable period after the sentence expires. This should include police certificates. This would provide a chance for the youth to have a clean start without labelling or stigmatization by their peers or community.

CONCLUSION

We acknowledge and agree with the present need to review the age of criminal responsibility. It is important to have such a review within the context of the Hong Kong society although reference has to be drawn from other jurisdictions. From our experience in working with young people and their families, we are concerned very much with the systems governing and affecting our children, such as the educational system, social welfare system, criminal system and the family system. We are equally concerned about protecting society from criminal behaviour. That is why we conclude, that in addition to the points made earlier, the legislative changes must go hand in hand with the development of a strong and comprehensive support system to ensure our children do not slip through the net but have the necessary supportive and preventive assistance, and any necessary rehabilitative measures to become responsible members of society.

CHAPTER 5

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

I. BASIC PRINCIPLE AND OVERALL OBJECTIVE

1.1 The basic principle underlying services for children and young people is the recognition that childhood and adolescence are a period of rapid physical, psychological and social development, and the family, the school, and welfare services all have an important role in contributing to the healthy development of young people into responsible adults. Young people are society's valuable assets, the assurance for its continuation and advancement. The overall objective of services for children and youth is therefore to provide opportunities for and to assist young people to become mature, responsible and contributing members of society.

II. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

2.1 Services for children and youth should aim at:

- (a) fostering the development of positive personal values, personality and character;
- (b) enhancing family and other personal relationships;
- (c) encouraging participation in community affairs and political processes, cultivating a sense of civic responsibility and social commitment;
- (d) assisting those with adjustment difficulties or in disadvantaged circumstances to work through these in order to assume a more positive role in society;and
- (e) encouraging the development of an international perspective in young people in keeping with Hong Kong's international composition and status.

4.5 School Social Work

4.5.1 School social work is designed to identify and help students whose academic, social and emotional development is at risk. It seeks to assist them to solve their personal problems and to make maximum use of their educational opportunities and prepare them for adulthood. The service is rendered to secondary school students through school social workers of SWD and NGOs.

4.5.2 From 1995/96 to 1997/98, 58 additional school social worker posts were created. As at 31.3.98, 282 school social workers from 18 NGOs (Appendix 5.4) and four social workers of the department provided services to 449,127 students in 435 schools. The overall manning ratio was therefore 1:1,570. The planning ratio of one school social worker to 2,000 student population as pledged in the White Paper "Social Welfare into 1990s and Beyond" has been achieved in 1994/95. Deployment was subsequently made to strengthen the services for 132 schools with more student problems. These schools were provided with school social work service at the ratio of 1:1,000, and the resultant manning ratio of the remaining schools was 1:2,053.

4.5.3 A Working Group on Review of School Social Work Service was set up by SWD in December 1996 to review the school social work service and how the service could be further improved and to recommend how resources can best be deployed to address the needs of students. It comprises representatives from the Health and Welfare Bureau, Education and Manpower Bureau, SWD, NGOs, Education Department, Hong Kong Council of Social Service, school principals and an independent member. The Working Group has recommended a package of measures including strengthening co-operation and interfacing between school-based and non-school-based community services, redefining roles of school social workers, mobilizing parents and teachers and improvement to manning ratio in non-Academically-Low-Achiever schools. The Working Group has published a draft report for consultation. It is anticipated that the final report will be submitted in early 1999.

4.6 Outreaching Social Work

4.6.1 There are young people who do not normally participate in conventional social or youth activities but are vulnerable to undesirable influences. Outreaching social work aims to establish contact with these young people in the places they are known to frequent, such as playgrounds, fast-food restaurants and to provide counselling, guidance and other forms of service to help them overcome their problems, develop their potential and become socially re-integrated. Outreaching social work teams are established

in high priority areas with higher juvenile crime rate and unserved youth population. As at 31.3.98, a total of 33 outreaching social work teams operated by 12 NGOs are deployed in the high priority areas (Appendix 5.5).

4.6.2 Pursuant to the recommendations of the Report on the Review of Outreaching Social Work Service (1990), the resource corner for outreaching social work was set up in April 1994 and integrated into the SWD Family Life Education Resource Centre. Locality working bases have also been set up by some teams at places with demonstrated need.

4.6.3 In 1994/95, the Steering Group on Outreaching Social Work completed a review on the need for further expansion of the service. The Steering Group recommended an expansion of two teams per year for three consecutive years from 1996/97 onwards subject to availability of resources so as to meet service needs. It further suggested another review on the service upon the smooth implementation of the expansion. The report was endorsed by Social Welfare Advisory Committee in October 1995.

4.6.4 As recommended in the Report on the Review of Outreaching Social Work Service (1990), the programme subsidy to all outreaching social work services has been increased in October 1996.

4.7 Hotline Service for Youth at Risk

4.7.1 To provide hotline service for youngsters to call for help and advice instead of pending up their negative emotions leading to desperate acts, the Department has subvented a youth hotline since August 1995 to prevent youth suicide by offering timely intervention through counselling.

4.8 Uniformed Organizations

4.8.1 Based on the concept of youth development, uniformed group service aims at equipping young people with the necessary competency to face the demands of the future adult role. Through its programmes, members can learn practical knowledge and skills, develop self-esteem, learn social norms and social skills, cultivate leadership qualities and foster altruism. Most uniformed organizations adopt a distinctive approach which is characterised by uniform and rank system, structured group life, discipline training, voluntary service, need for members to go through enrolment and a progressive training process, opportunities for leadership training and international exposure.

CHAPTER 7

SERVICES FOR OFFENDERS

I. BASIC PRINCIPLE AND OVERALL OBJECTIVE

1.1 The basic principle underlying social work services for offenders is that the offender can be best rehabilitated within the community with suitable professional intervention and support for the offenders and their families. Residential training or custodial treatment is necessary for a minority of offenders when no community-based treatment option is suitable.

1.2 The overall objective of services for offenders is to use social work approaches to implement the court's directives in the treatment of offenders, through probation supervision, residential training, the Community Service Orders Scheme, the Community Support Service Scheme and statutory aftercare services. Voluntary aftercare services are also provided to ex-offenders to facilitate their re-integration into society.

II. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

2.1 The specific objectives of the eight main categories of service under this programme are :

(a) **Probation Service**

- (i) To prepare social inquiry reports on offenders' background as requested by the courts and on long-term and petitioning prisoners for reviewing of their sentences.
- (ii) To provide supervision and guidance to offenders placed on probation for a period specified under a probation order.

(b) **Community Service Orders**

To supervise and make arrangements for offenders to use part of their leisure time to perform unpaid work of benefit to the community as reparation for the harm they have done to the community, and to enable them to gain a changed out-look of life through the process of rendering community services.

(c) Community Support Service Scheme

To provide intensive and structured day-training such as community service projects, job training packages and social and counselling groups to young offenders, to stimulate their interest in school or work, and to help them develop social skills.

(d) Remand Homes and Places of Refuge

To provide legal custody, care and assessment to juvenile offenders, children in need of care or protection, and young illegal immigrants.

(e) Residential Training

To provide residential training and education to young offenders, and to bring about changes in behaviour and attitude to facilitate their re-integration into society as law-abiding citizens.

(f) Aftercare Service

To provide guidance, support and assistance to offenders to prepare them for discharge from probation homes, probation hostel or reformatory schools, and to facilitate their reintegration into society.

(g) Young Offender Assessment Panel

To provide the courts with a professional co-ordinated view on the most appropriate rehabilitation programme for individual convicted young offenders aged 14 to under 25.

(h) Support Services for Non-custodial Offenders and Discharged Prisoners

To provide support services to non-custodial offenders and offenders released from penal institutions of Correctional Services Department to facilitate their re-integration into society.

III. TYPES OF CLIENTS

- 3.1 Services are provided for the following categories of clients :
- (a) Juvenile suspects or offenders who are detained in places of detention pending police investigation, court appearance or awaiting sentence, or children detained in a place of refuge, or illegal immigrants detained under the Immigration Ordinance;
 - (b) Offenders on whom a pre-sentence social inquiry report is required by the court;
 - (c) Convicted young offenders referred by the court for further assessment;
 - (d) Offenders on whom a probation order or a community service order is made;
 - (e) Young offenders who are required by the court to undergo a period of residential training operated by the Social Welfare Department, including those placed under a detention order and young offenders discharged on licence from reformatory school;
 - (f) Non-custodial offenders and offenders released from penal institutions of the Correctional Services Department who request services on voluntary basis;
 - (g) Prisoners on whom a report is required to assist the Chief Executive in considering petitions for reduced sentences, or the Long-term Prison Sentences Review Board in connection with reviews of prison sentences;and
 - (h) Eligible adult prisoners under the provision of the Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Ordinance (Cap 475) in respect of whom a Social Welfare Report is required by the Post-Release Supervision Board, and adult ex-prisoners in respect of whom a supervision order is made by the Post-Release Supervision Board.

IV STATUTES

- 4.1 Statutory activities are carried out within the framework of :
- (a) The Juvenile Offenders Ordinance, Cap 226;

- (b) The Probation of Offenders Ordinance;Cap 298;
- (c) The Community Service Orders Ordinance, Cap 378;
- (d) The Reformatory Schools Ordinance;Cap 225;
- (e) The Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance, Cap 213;
- (f) The Immigration Ordinance, Cap 115;
- (g) The Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Ordinance, Cap 475;
and
- (h) The Long-term Prison Sentences Review Ordinance, Cap.524.

V CURRENT ACTIVITIES

5.1 The Social Welfare Department is responsible for discharging statutory functions while non-governmental organizations provide complementary non-statutory services.

Statutory Services

5.2 Probation Service

5.2.1 Probation service is provided by the Social Welfare Department in fourteen probation offices serving all magistracies, the district courts, the Court of first Instance and the Court of Appeal of High Court.

5.2.2 Probation officers, as the court may direct, prepare social inquiry reports on the personal and family circumstances of offenders on whom consideration for making of probation order may arise. Probation officers also prepare reports on background information of long term prisoners, especially regarding welfare factors relevant to the consideration of reduction of sentences. The number of reports prepared in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 13,041, 12,520 and 10,969 respectively.

5.2.3 Probation order may be made by the court on offenders of all ages. Except in a small percentage of juvenile cases who require a period of residential training, the order permits the offender to remain in the community under the guidance and supervision of a probation officer. Probation officers work closely with the probationers and

their families so that they may understand and deal with their personal and family problems more effectively, and for support and sustaining rehabilitation effects. Those in need are referred to appropriate government departments or organizations for further assistance in housing, employment, medical care, school placement, residential care and vocational training, etc. The number of probation supervision cases served in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 7,404, 7,643 and 6,882 respectively.

5.2.4 Community-based treatment programmes in the form of intensive and structured day training under the Community Support Service Scheme are provided to probationers as a supplementary support service to probation supervision. The project in Kwun Tong Community Centre serving cases of the eastern part of Kowloon and Hong Kong Island has started since December 1994 while the one in Tai Hang Tung Community Centre serving cases of the western part of Kowloon and New Territories has commenced operation in February 1996. The number of cases served in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 268, 467 and 406 respectively. (Please refer to paragraph 4.4 of Chapter 5 for information on two projects operated by non-governmental organizations.)

5.2.5 To promote greater community involvement in the rehabilitation of offenders, volunteers are recruited and trained by probation officers to befriend probationers and residents of probation homes, and to help them develop interest in wholesome leisure activities so as to steer them away from further crime commitment.

5.3 Community Service Orders

5.3.1 Where a person aged 14 or above is convicted of an offence punishable with imprisonment, the court may make an order requiring him/her to perform unpaid work of benefit to the community for a number of hours, not exceeding 240, within a period of 12 months. The Scheme is available to all magistracies. For offenders placed on such orders, probation officers make arrangements for them to perform unpaid work and provide guidance for their social rehabilitation. Unpaid work consists of group or single placements which last for a few months, or one-off community service projects for the elderly, the disabled, etc. The number of reports made in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 2,088, 2,268 and 1,701 respectively. The number of supervision cases served in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 1,253, 1,411 and 1,634 respectively.

5.4 Remand Homes and Places of Refuge

5.4.1 Two remand homes provide temporary custody, care and assessment for offenders aged 7 to under 16. Two places of refuge provide temporary shelter, care and assessment for children and juveniles (non-offenders) in need of care or protection aged 8 to under 18 (including those with a physical disability aged 9 to under 18 and those with a mental disability aged 5 to under 18) as well as illegal immigrants pending repatriation aged 8 to under 18. The periods of stay vary from a few hours to a maximum of six months. Various kinds of activities, such as handicraft, family life education, social and domestic skills training and informal education are provided to keep the residents meaningfully occupied. Psychiatric or psychological assessment/service is arranged if required.

5.5 Residential Training

5.5.1 Residential training for young offenders is provided in three probation homes, one probation hostel and two reformatory schools. The residential periods range from a few months to a maximum of three years. The training programmes consist of academic studies from primary to junior secondary levels, pre-vocational training such as woodwork, metalwork, electrical works and car repair, and social work programmes including counselling and group work to help them acquire the ability, skills, motivation and maturity to lead a law-abiding life upon discharge. Heavy impetus is given to promote volunteerism among the residents, rendering community service to the elderly, handicapped and other people and organization, with very favourable results. Work with parents is also emphasized to facilitate their re-integration into society.

5.6 Aftercare Service

5.6.1 Aftercare service is provided to all young offenders discharged from probation homes and hostels or on licence from reformatory schools or released prior to the expiry of a detention order. The services provided include counselling, family visits and assistance with accommodation, job and school placements.

5.7 Young Offender Assessment Panel

5.7.1 The Young Offender Assessment Panel is a special board jointly operated by the Social Welfare Department and the Correctional Services Department to provide professional co-ordinated views to judges and magistrates in the sentencing of convicted young

offenders. The Panel received cases referred from judges and magistrates. In 1995/96, 1996/97 and 1997/98, the Panel received a total of 500, 473 and 357 referrals respectively. The overall average acceptance rate of the Panel's recommendation by the courts were 85.8% , 83.6% and 88.1% respectively.

5.8 Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme

5.8.1 The Scheme, which commenced operation in December 1996, is jointly operated by the Social Welfare Department and the Correctional Services Department to supervise and provide support services for ex-prisoners, on whom supervision orders have been made by the Post-Release Supervision Board. Depending on their needs, individual and family casework are offered, and appropriate referrals to community resources are made. The number of supervision case served in 1996/97 and 97/98 were 141 and 627 respectively.

Non-statutory Services

5.9 Non-statutory services described below are provided by non-governmental organizations.

5.10 Services for Ex-prisoners

5.10.1 Social workers visit newly admitted inmates of penal institutions managed by the Correctional Services Department to brief them of social services available to them and their families, and interview the prisoners before discharge to offer appropriate voluntary aftercare services as required. The number of cases served in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 409, 495 and 662 respectively.

5.10.2 Four social therapy centres provide aftercare casework services to help ex-prisoners reintegrate into society. The number of aftercare cases served in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 6,504, 6,753 and 6,347 respectively. Two recreation centres provide supplementary group work services for these ex-prisoners.

5.10.3 Six hostels, with a total capacity of 122, provide short-term accommodation on a voluntary basis, normally for a period of three months, for ex-prisoners to facilitate their re-adjustment to normal independent living.

5.10.4 Four half-way houses, with a total capacity of 130, provide accommodation and training for ex-offenders with a history of mental

illness to help them reintegrate into society. The demand and shortfall of places are incorporated under the overall demand and shortfall for halfway houses for discharged mental patients under Chapter 8 on Rehabilitation Services.

5.10.5 A group of volunteers is recruited by a subvented organization to befriend ex-prisoners and their families and to provide assistance which does not require social work knowledge and skills.

5.10.6 A subvented counselling and volunteer support service provides assistance to offenders not given custodial sentences nor referred to the Social Welfare Department. The number of cases served in 1995/96, 96/97 and 97/98 were 172, 210 and 263 respectively.

5.11 Employment Services

5.11.1 The subvented sector offers specialized employment programmes including job assessment, guidance in job seeking, counselling in work adjustment and job placement to socially disadvantaged persons, including probationers and ex-prisoners. Group programmes on employment guidance are provided to residents of probation homes and reformatory schools, and short-term job-orientation service is provided at remand homes. One employment rehabilitation centre provides job preparatory programmes to ex-prisoners and an employment development service unit provides employment counselling service to ex-prisoners.

5.12 Crime Prevention Education

5.12.1 The subvented sector contributes to crime prevention education to interested groups by arranging talks by rehabilitated ex-offenders. Other government departments and organizations, such as the Education Department, the Hong Kong Police Force, the District Boards, the Fight Crime Committee, etc. also provide crime prevention programmes.

N FORECAST OF DEMAND

6.1 Demand for activities under this programme is affected by the following factors :

- (a) the crime rate (the number of reported crimes per 100,000 of the population), being 1,036 in 1997, a drop of 30.2% compared with 1995;

- (b) the crime detection rate, being 51.4% in 1997, compared with 52% in 1995;
- (c) types and severity of crimes: the total number of violent crimes continued to drop and a total of 13,749 were recorded in 1997, a decline of 19.5% compared with 1995;
- (d) the age of offenders: the number of juveniles (aged between 7 and 15) arrested for crime was 5,964 in 1997, a drop of 11.3% compared with 6,723 in 1995; the number of young persons (aged between 16 and 20) arrested for crime was 6,855 in 1997, a drop of 23.5% compared with 1995;
- (e) the sentencing pattern of the courts;
- (f) the strategy adopted in the treatment of different categories of offenders; and
- (g) public concern about crimes.