

立法會
Legislative Council

Meeting of LegCo Panel on Welfare Services on 13 May 2002

Background paper prepared by Legislative Council Secretariat

Support for Vulnerable Elders

Purpose

This paper gives a brief account of past discussions on support for vulnerable elders held by Members since 1998.

Background

2. In his 2001 Policy Address, the Chief Executive said that there was a need to establish a supportive environment that provided assistance and relief to vulnerable elders who were subjected to social isolation, increased dependency, deteriorating family relationships or poor living environment. The Administration aims to achieve this by strengthening the social network mechanism for vulnerable elders, enhancing awareness of elder abuse and neglect among frontline workers and the community, providing training to frontline workers, and stepping up suicide prevention efforts on elders with mental illness and previous suicide attempts.

3. The Administration would launch the following initiatives and targets to deliver results in strengthening support for vulnerable elders -

| <u>Initiative</u> | <u>Target</u> |
|---|--|
| To enhance the Client Information System of Support Teams for the Elderly | To enhance the capability of the existing computer system in 2002-03 to facilitate the matching of vulnerable elders with volunteers and maintain effective service planning and delivery to cope with the increasing demand |

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| To enhance understanding of elder abuse and neglect amongst professionals and the community and to provide training to the frontline staff and others on the prevention of elder abuse and neglect | - To compile a multi-professional protocol on combating elder abuse and neglect in 2002-03; and - To provide training for 400 professionals and 600 non-professionals in 2002-03 on the prevention of elder abuse and neglect |
| To establish an elderly suicide prevention programme | To set up multi-disciplinary teams to work on suicide prevention for elderly with mental illness and previous suicide attempts from 2002-03 onwards |

Chronological account of past discussions

Discussions held by the Panel on Welfare Services

Meeting of the Panel on 14 September 1998

4. At its meeting on 14 September 1998, the Panel discussed the progress and future development of the Social Networking for the Elderly Project (SNEP). For the purpose of building up a list of vulnerable elders and an informal network of volunteers, SNEP was set up in October 1996 funded by a Lotteries Fund grant of \$21,972,000. All 27 multi-service centres for the elderly (M/E) were each provided with one Social Work Assistant to implement this project from 1 October 1996 on an experimental basis for two years. The objectives of this project are -

- (a) to identify and maintain a list of elderly persons requiring networking service in each District Board administrative district; and
- (b) to identify service providers and volunteers from local organisations/groups to establish a network for the purpose of maintaining contacts with the elderly persons, to provide them with support to prevent their isolation as far as possible, including making appropriate referrals for formal service when necessary.

5. Service targets of SNEP are elderly persons aged 60 and above who are in need of social support and who wish to be regularly contacted by volunteers. Priority for networking service will be given to elderly persons who are more vulnerable or are at risk according to the following criteria -

- (a) those living alone with or without co-tenants, or living with somebody who cannot take care of him/her (e.g. another elderly person, an infirmed spouse, or a disabled dependent etc);
- (b) those without an existing network in place, e.g. those not regularly visited by Estate Liaison Officer, home helpers, relatives or others persons, and
- (c) those of advanced age (e.g. aged 70 or above); or those with poor health, e.g. bedridden/users of wheelchair/walking aid, or with chronic illness/ disability that affects daily living skills (poor health or disability is to be assessed by simple observation); or those living in unfavourable or hazardous environments.

6. A member expressed concern that although SNEP had been implemented for two years, only 7 073 vulnerable elders on the list were matched with volunteers. The Administration admitted that this was the situation at the end of July 1998, but pointed out that elderly persons were classified into priority (i.e. the disabled, the sick, etc.) and non-priority cases in SNEP, and that about 6 200 priority cases were already matched with volunteers. Those non-priority cases had yet to be served because the volunteers preferred to pair up with some other volunteers when undertaking the networking activities, e.g. paying home visits to the elderly persons at home. Notwithstanding, the Administration agreed to explore the proposal of expanding the volunteer network.

7. Noting that 36 support teams for the elderly (STEs) would be set up in M/E from 1 October 1998 to serve the needs of vulnerable elders in an integrated manner when funding for SNEP would end on 30 September 1998, a member asked if the planned provision of 36 STEs by 2000-01 would be sufficient to meet service demand. The Administration responded that the rate of expansion would be further studied once more information was made available from the evaluation study of SNEP conducted by a research team headed by Professor Nelson CHOW from the Department of Social Work and Social Administration of the University of Hong Kong (HKU).

8. Members may wish to refer to the Administration's paper for the Panel meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)231/98-99(02)) and minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)439/98-99) for details.

Meeting of the Panel on 1 February 1999

9. At its meeting on 1 February 1999, the Panel discussed the report of the evaluation study on SNEP prepared by the HKU research team and measures

taken under the social networking mechanism during cold spells to assist the vulnerable, single elderly. Recommendations put forth by the HKU research team on improving the social networking service were as follows -

- (a) social networking services should continue and a proactive approach should be adopted to reach out to vulnerable elders;
- (b) SNEP should be integrated with the work of M/E and the three-tier co-ordinating mechanism (i.e. M/E, district co-ordinating committee and Social Welfare Department (SWD)) should be streamlined;
- (c) enhanced publicity and promotion should be made to highlight the service characteristics and differences between SNEP and other similar services;
- (d) a new set of identification criteria should be devised so as to better identify vulnerable elders;
- (e) referral source should be widened, and closer linkage between various social and medical service agencies should be encouraged;
- (f) a standardised volunteer training package should be devised;
- (g) elderly people and volunteers should be encouraged to voice out their opinions on the service; and
- (h) the clientele information system should be improved.

10. Representatives of the Society for Community Organisation (SOCO) also attended the meeting to give their views on the matters. The main points made by SOCO were as follows -

- (a) the Administration should strengthen medical care for the elderly and give more attention to the health conditions of the singleton elderly;
- (b) the Administration should consider lowering the age requirement from 70 to 60 for singleton elderly to be eligible for the financial assistance from SWD to install emergency alarm systems in their homes. SWD should also take the initiative to install emergency alarm systems for the 200 000 singleton elderly in Hong Kong;
- (c) the Administration should strengthen the manpower of STEs to ensure that prompt services could be provided to these singleton

elderly in need as there had been cases of singleton elderly who needed to urgently approach volunteers for help but were unable to reach them through the SWD hotline;

- (d) staff of the Housing Department (HD) should assist by reporting back to SWD when they found singleton elderly who needed the emergency alarm systems on health grounds;
- (e) as only about 14 600 of some 200 000 singleton elderly in Hong Kong were served by SNEP and about 7 100 were matched with volunteers, the figures reflected the problem of manpower shortage of the project;
- (f) outreaching Teams for the Elderly should be provided in every district, instead of only in Wan Chai and Tsuen Wan; and
- (g) free vaccinations against influenza to elders living in elderly homes should be expanded to all elderly people.

11. During the meeting, members requested SWD to submit a progress report on follow-up actions taken regarding the recommendations put forth by the HKU research team on the evaluation study on SNEP with comments on the adequacy of the staffing provision for STEs.

12. Members may wish to refer to the Administration's papers for the Panel meeting (LC Paper Nos. CB(2)1136/98-99(03) and (04)) and minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)2672/98-99) for details.

Meeting of the Panel on 10 January 2000

13. At the Panel meeting on 10 January 2000, members discussed the progress report on the implementation of recommendations put forth by the HKU research team of the evaluation study on SNEP. Members noted that various new measures had been implemented by the Administration to improve the social networking services based on the recommendations of the HKU research team set out in paragraph 9 above.

14. Members may wish to refer to the Administration's paper for the Panel meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)766/99-00(05)) and minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1586/99-00) for details.

Meeting of the Panel on 14 February 2000

15. At the Panel meeting on 14 February 2000, members discussed the report

of the Working Group on Dementia. Representatives of the Hong Kong Alzheimer's Disease & Brain Failure Association (the Association) also attended the meeting to give their views on the matter. Representatives of the Association expressed concern about the inadequacy in the community care support for the demented elderly and their carers. Members called for the setting up of more dementia units in residential care homes and day care centres, increase in respite places in the day care centres and setting up of a psychogeriatric day hospital, as recommended by the Working Group on Dementia. The Administration responded that it supported all of the recommendations of the Working Group on Dementia and had been actively considering and implementing measures to take these recommendations forward.

16. Members may wish to refer to the Administration's paper for the Panel meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1041/99-00(08)), the Association's submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)1041/99-00(07)) and minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1344/99-00) for details.

Meeting of the Panel on 10 April 2000

17. At the Panel meeting on 10 April 2000, members discussed the provision of support services to carers of the elderly, namely, the setting up of two Carers' Support Centres since early 1999 to provide information, training and emotional support to carers and the provision of three types of respite services, i.e. residential respite service, day respite service and home respite service, to enable carers to take a break so that they could gather strength to perform longer period of caring tasks with less stress.

18. Members may wish to refer to the Administration's paper for the Panel meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1612/99-00(04)) and minutes of the meeting (LC Paper No. CB(2)1975/99-00) for details.

Questions raised and motion debates held at Council meetings

19. Members may wish to note that questions relating to the subject matter of support for vulnerable elders had been raised by Members at Council meetings. Details are as follows -

| <u>Date of meeting</u> | <u>Raised by</u> | <u>Main points of question</u> | <u>Type</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---|-------------|
| 12 May 1999 | Hon Fred LI Wah-ming | Whether the Government has assessed if the existing outreaching services for the elderly can cover all the aged carers who need assistance; and whether it has assessed if the services for the aged carers currently provided by the Administration and by the Carer's Support Centres are comprehensive and adequate. | Oral |
| 1 December 1999 | Dr Hon David LI Kwok-po | How many cases of abuse of elderly people have been reported to the authorities in the past three years and whether these cases are on the rise; whether the Government will commission a study on the causes of such abuse; and of its plan to contain the problem. | Written |
| 1 March 2000 | Hon Fred LI Wah-ming | Whether guidelines have been issued to frontline staff on handling cases of abuse of elderly people; whether consideration would be given to conducting regular statistical surveys on the gravity of the problem of elderly being abused; and whether legislation would | Written |

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| | | be introduced to prohibit the act of abusing elderly people and to penalise the abusers. | |
| 23 January 2002 | Hon WONG Sing-chi | Whether the Administration has assessed if it has not effectively promoted the concept that "old age is the golden age in life", and has therefore failed to achieve the objective of fostering a feeling of health and worthiness among the elderly, having regard to the fact that suicidal rates among the elderly from 1998 to 2000 were higher than those of other age groups. | Oral |

20. A motion debate on preventing and reducing suicide was moved by Hon Michael MAK Kwok-fung at the Council meeting on 21 June 2001. The wording of Mr MAK's motion, as amended by Hon CHOY So-yuk, and carried at the Council meeting, is as follows -

"That, as the problem of suicide has become serious in Hong Kong in recent years, this Council urges the Government to set up a task force for formulating effective strategies to prevent and reduce suicide, which include -

- (a) allocating more resources to enhance the counselling services provided by the Social Welfare Department and various social welfare agencies;
- (b) enhancing publicity and education in order to instil in members of the public, particularly the young people, the positive values of cherishing their lives; and

- (c) strengthening various studies on the problem of suicide, such as the causes of suicide, the backgrounds and psychological conditions of the people who committed suicide and the act of copycat suicide, and using them as the basis for formulating the relevant strategies."

Relevant Papers

21. All the above-mentioned papers are available on both the Research and Library Information System (RLIS) and the web site of the Legislative Council (<http://www.legco.gov.hk>), with the exception of the Association's submission (LC Paper No. CB(2)1041/99-00(07)) referred to in paragraph 16 above, which is only available on RLIS.

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