

**Paper for Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services  
Progress Report on the Three-year Action Plan to Help Street Sleepers**

**Purpose**

On 9 April 2001, Members were briefed on a three-year Action Plan to Help Street Sleepers drawn up by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) in consultation with agencies concerned to tackle an increasing number of street sleepers. This paper reports to Members the progress of the Action Plan's first year of operation and other improvement measures taken during the period to complement the Action Plan.

**Background**

2. A Lotteries Fund grant of \$8.73 million was approved for implementing a three-year Action Plan from April 2001 to March 2004. The plan is composed of three key elements:

- (a) midnight outreaching and other integrated supportive services (such as counselling, advice on employment and arrangement of job placement, administration of emergency funds, follow-up support to prevent relapsing to street sleeping, etc.) for street sleepers provided by three non-governmental organizations (NGOs), namely St. James' Settlement, Salvation Army and Christian Concern for the Homeless Association;
- (b) an emergency shelter in Wan Chai run by St. James' Settlement; and
- (c) an evaluative research conducted by the City University of Hong Kong (CityU) to assess the effectiveness of the services in (a) and (b) above as well as existing services in tackling the street sleeper problem.

## **Initial Outcomes of the Action Plan**

### ***The Evaluative Research conducted by CityU***

3. To undertake an overall evaluation of the Action Plan, the research team of CityU has conducted regular meetings with the three NGOs and SWD to keep track of the progress and performance of individual midnight outreaching teams, discuss on strategies in assisting street sleepers as well as to refine the measurement tools to be used throughout the research. Training has also been provided to the frontline staff not only to enrich their professional knowledge and skills but also to facilitate their involvement in the research. The research team, together with staff of the outreaching teams and SWD, had also paid visits to day relief centres, hostels and shelters, so as to get familiar with the service delivery mode and operation of units providing street sleeper services.

4. One of the tasks of the CityU research team is to conduct a baseline study on the homeless population at the start of the Action Plan so that more concrete information is made available to compare the changes thereafter upon delivery of services through the Action Plan. The research team conducted a territory-wide baseline study of the homeless population from 5 October 2001 to 8 October 2001 to gauge the population size, record their profile and benchmark the relevant social indexes of street sleepers. **586** street sleepers were identified in the study whereas another **88** spots, with personal belongings and bedding, were believed to be occupied by street sleepers. This made up a total identifiable street sleeper population of **674**. As street sleepers might choose to stay in some of the less conspicuous spots difficult to be identified, the research team estimated, with reference to similar survey results of SWD, that the total homeless population at the time would double that identifiable. Accordingly, for the purpose of the baseline, the total number of street sleepers was estimated to be around **1,300**, roughly the same as that recorded in SWD's Street Sleepers Registry as at October 2001 (i.e. **1,340**). Among the **586** street sleepers identified, **312** completed questionnaires were collected, with **298** (95.5%) valid for research purpose. The remaining were those who refused to be interviewed, sound asleep during the visit or mentally unsound to be interviewed.

### ***Findings of the Baseline Study***

#### **(a) Socio-economic profile**

5. Findings from the profile of the street sleepers as generated from the 298 valid questionnaires confirm the prevailing characteristics of street sleepers as follows:

- More younger street sleepers (53.2% are aged between 20 and 49);
- Majority having received formal education (82.3%);
- More are having a shorter history of street sleeping (57.9% have been street sleeping for less than one year); and
- Majority claimed economic reason being the main reason for their street sleeping (60.4%)

*(b) Social Indexes*

6. Apart from the profile of the street sleepers generated from this baseline study, the research team attempted to use some common social indexes viz. index of social-tie, social loneliness, well-being, homelessness and job attachment to show the social situation of these streets sleepers. From the baseline study, it was found that the social loneliness of street sleepers was even higher than a similar study on the elders. On the well-being index, again, the mental health of the street sleeper group scored lower than other groups such as children and youth. The findings that the indexes on homelessness, job attachment and social tie had significant correlation with the index of well-being led the research team to suggest that improvement in homelessness, job attachment and social tie would enable a person to have better well-being. The information on these social indexes will be used as a benchmark to facilitate on-going assessment and overall evaluation of the Action Plan.

7. Apart from conducting the territory-wide baseline study and compiling the relevant social indexes the details of which have been reported in previous paragraphs, the research team have also completed the formation of the Client Information and Service Intervention System in November 2001 to monitor the inputs and outputs of all service projects for use by the three NGOs and the three SWD Street Sleeper Outreaching Teams. Summary information on the output and outcome of the outreaching teams is at Annex 1.

***Midnight Outreaching Services***

8. Since May/June 2001 when the three midnight outreaching teams have completed recruitment of staff, proactive outreaching visits at a frequency of three or four nights per week between 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. have been conducted by the teams in order to contact street sleepers, especially those who are returning late to their dwelling place. By the end of March 2002, the three teams had contacted **934** street sleepers of whom **320** subsequently became active cases of these teams. In this connection, they have achieved the objective of contacting as many street sleepers as possible in their work process.

9. An analysis of these **320** active cases shows the following features:

- among the 130 street sleepers with known age, 86 (66%) are aged between 20 and 49;
- among the 187 street sleepers with known health condition, 166 (88.8%) are in normal health;
- among the 196 street sleepers with known education level, 186 (94.9%) have received formal education; and
- among the 210 street sleepers with known length of street sleeping, 136 (64.8%) have been street sleeping for one year or less.

10. The above information shows that the three teams have successfully targeted street sleepers who are younger, better educated, in normal health and with shorter duration of street sleeping through early intervention to prevent them from becoming habitual street sleepers which is the main goal of the Action Plan.

### ***Meeting Accommodation Needs***

11. During the period from May 2001 to March 2002, **201** street sleepers have been assisted to move to the following types of accommodation:

- 57 (28.3%) to private tenement,
- 139 (69.1%) to temporary shelters/urban hostels, and
- 4 (2%) to public housing.

12. All the three teams have either achieved or over-achieved their original outcomes in terms of accommodating these street sleeper cases over the first 11 months of operation. For example, St. James' Settlement and Salvation Army have pledged to annually accommodate 50 and 60 cases respectively and now they have accommodated 74 and 77 respectively.

13. The Action Plan includes a newly set up emergency shelter run by St. James' Settlement. With an area of 110m<sup>2</sup> and a capacity of 10, the shelter is located in a private premises in Wan Chai. It is self-contained with a living room, three bedrooms, a toilet and a kitchen and is furnished in a homely manner with television, refrigerator, cooking utensils, cupboards and double-bunk beds. The shelter started to receive users since 29 June 2001 upon completion of renovation work. A total of 78 street sleepers had been served in the past nine months. Occupancy rate is over 90% at all times. Counselling and appropriate welfare services have been offered to assist the residents to seek long term accommodation and lead an independent life. This is considered an important resource as the street sleepers being contacted late at night can immediately be referred to the emergency

shelter. The high turnover rate (24% of cases staying for less than 2 weeks and 76% of cases staying for 2 to 5 weeks) as reflected by the number of street sleepers served in the past months with average duration of stay from 2 to 3 weeks also proves the effective use of the emergency shelter as an expedient form of transit housing. They are mostly assisted to seek accommodation in the private rental market or arranged for placements at hostels after leaving the emergency shelter. Follow-up services to these discharged residents of the emergency shelter will be provided for six months to prevent them from relapsing to street sleeping and assist them in adjusting to life in the community.

### ***Assisting in Employment***

14. 120 (37.5%) street sleepers have been successfully matched with job placements through referrals to specialized employment service units, Employees Retraining Board, NGOs' Special Job Attachment Programmes as well as job matching with private sector employers. These jobs are mostly cleaners, restaurant workers, watchmen, etc. Among them, 103 are having jobs with a monthly income at or above \$4,000. Among these 120 cases, eight of them were on Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme prior to job matching while the others had been successfully prevented from falling into the social security net.

### ***Improving Social Well-being***

15. Using the information from the baseline study, the research team of CityU is able to compare the scores of various indexes of the street sleepers who have received services from the Action Plan. It is found that they have marked improvement on their well-being while their sense of homelessness has reduced after receiving services. However, there is a slight deterioration in both the index on job attachment and social tie. The research team holds the view that it may be too early to have a realistic assessment of the social tie dimension as it usually takes a longer time (for example, six months after living off the street) to bring out the effect. As for the job attachment index, the research team suggests that the three NGOs should attempt to assist street sleepers to secure and stay on more stable jobs.

### ***Providing Emergency Funding Support***

16. Another special feature of the Action Plan is the provision of emergency funds for immediate and direct disbursement to needy street sleepers by the NGOs concerned. These emergency funds may be used under an endorsed set of administration guidelines to provide timely assistance to street sleepers who are in genuine financial difficulty. In the past 12 months, a total amount of \$285,156 has been granted to 263 needy street sleepers. About 55% of the payments are related to rental expenses, 27% related to employment expenses, and the other payments are to

meet daily living expenditure and miscellaneous items. Details are at Annex 2. This is another important source of support to street sleepers who only need temporary or one-off financial assistance on items such as rental deposits, travelling/meal expenses, etc. without the need to resort to the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.

### ***Other Observations on Performance***

17. Apart from the above, the research team has the following initial observations specifically on the performance of the three NGOs and SWD's Street Sleeper Outreaching Teams:

- With 69 persons being arranged for jobs, St. James' Settlement's team has the best performance in this aspect. The designation of a staff specially for job arrangement and to maintain close liaison with potential employers is possibly a good practice for such success.
- When compared with the other two teams, the cases of Christian Concern for the Homeless Association have the highest scores in all the social indexes. Besides, 9 out of 13 cases with job placements arranged have a monthly salary over \$6,000. The quality of service is commendable.
- The Salvation Army has the highest number of cases being assisted to live off the street. Probably, the backup and integration of the agency's available resources such as day relief centre for street sleepers and urban hostel/singleton hostel are effective.
- The monthly average of street sleepers newly contacted and the monthly average of street sleepers assisted to live off the streets by SWD's Street Sleeper Outreaching Teams are lower than the three midnight outreaching teams. This is understandable as SWD's teams are taking care of some very hard core cases, e.g. chronic cases (over five years), suspected mentally ill cases, etc. This may pose difficulties to the teams in helping the street sleepers live off the street in the short run. SWD's teams not conducting midnight outreaching have to assume the role of co-ordination with other relevant departments/agencies in the districts such as District Councils, Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, etc. for joint operations in tackling the street sleeper problem.

18. The research team will continue to work closely with the three NGOs and SWD teams for the remainder years. Comparison of outcomes and share of good practices will be made during the joint meetings to make further improvement on services.

## **SWD's Preliminary Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Action Plan**

### ***Number of Street Sleepers Declining***

19. The number of street sleepers on the Street Sleepers Registry reveals a decreasing trend since the operation of the Action Plan. For the period April 2001 to March 2002, 827 new/reactivated cases were registered compared with 950 being de-registered during the same period. As a result, the total number of street sleepers on the Street Sleepers Registry decreased from 1,203 in April 2001 to 1,027 in March 2002. Upon close scrutiny, 547 (58%) of the de-registered cases during the period had been assisted to live off the street through arrangement into long-term, temporary accommodation or to receive treatment in appropriate health facilities while the others had been lost trace of. During the same period, only 132 (16%) are reactivated cases, suggesting that we can keep those de-registered cases from relapsing to street sleeping reasonably well.

20. It is evident that with the operation of the three midnight outreaching teams since May 2001 and the intensive efforts to contact street sleepers, the Action Plan is quite effective in assisting them to live off the streets. This has resulted in more de-registrations since November 2001, i.e. 700 de-registered cases against 387 new/reactivated cases from November 2001 to March 2002. At the same time, SWD has made concerted effort in ascertaining the more up-to-date status of reported street sleepers by drawing reference from various sources such as the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance System to match with the information of the Street Sleepers Registry. With the available information gathered, SWD's frontline staff had made vigorous reviews on the street sleeper cases through visits and collateral contacts. As a result, some of these cases were assisted to live off the street and the most updated information would be reflected in the Street Sleepers Registry after de-registering cases that are no longer found street sleeping.

21. To further improve the situation and to ensure accurate and up-to-date information of the Street Sleepers Registry, SWD has improved the guidance notes to facilitate input of data by frontline social work staff to the Registry.

## ***Promoting Self-Reliance***

22. The Action Plan and the complementary efforts mentioned in the paragraphs below have also helped to promote self-reliance amongst the street sleepers. As can be seen from Annex 3, both the actual number and percentage of street sleepers on CSSA have decreased since November 2001 when the Action Plan's positive effect became prominent. Besides, we should not underestimate the benefits of preventing cases from falling into the social security net.

## **Complementary Efforts**

23. To tie in with the Action Plan, SWD has taken a number of initiatives and measures as described below.

### ***Improved Hostel Service***

24. The Yee On Hostel, a subvented hostel for single persons operated by Salvation Army, was reprovisioned from Cheung Sha Wan Estate to Hoi Fu Court in Mong Kok in April 2001. The hostel provides 40 places to cater for the demand of Yau Tsim Mong District where street sleepers congregate. The hostel also interfaces with the day relief centre and the midnight outreaching team of the agency to form a spectrum of services for street sleepers promptly.

25. Besides the Sunrise House which offers accommodation assistance to needy homeless persons, the High Street House under the Home Affairs Department (HAD), with the management entrusted to Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council (NAAC), started admitting cases in August 2001. With a capacity of 270 places (108 Female, 162 Male), the NAAC will also receive referrals of street sleepers in need from SWD and NGOs.

26. With the assistance of SWD, the Caritas Hung Hom Hostel, a self-financing hostel, was re-provisioned from Mount Davis in Western District to Hung Hom, a more accessible premises to street sleepers especially those in Yau Tsim Mong District. SWD has also secured a Lotteries Fund grant to cover all the renovation costs and expenses on purchase of furniture and equipment for the hostel. Commencing operation in April 2002, the capacity of the hostel is increased from 30 to 40. In order to better meet the changing needs of street sleepers, the hostel provides a package of integrated services, including counselling, employment-related counselling, job placement, social skills training, etc. aiming at helping the residents to regain self-reliance.

27. A full list of the relevant support services run by NGOs on a subvented or self-financing basis is at Annex 4.

### ***Co-ordination with Specialized Service Units and Co-operation with Other Agencies***

28. Through the co-ordination of SWD, the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) has agreed to interface with service units providing services to street sleepers. SRACP will receive referrals for specialized counselling, supported employment service, temporary or transitory work placement, vocational training and offers jobs to street sleepers who are ex-offenders through networking with private sector employers. On the other hand, SRACP will refer suitable cases discharged from prisons to urban hostels for single persons for placements if its half way houses are full so as to prevent them from becoming street sleepers.

29. Under the same co-ordination arrangement, the mutual referral mechanism between the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Abusers (SARDA) and service units of street sleeper services has been formalized to ensure that specialized drug treatment service would be provided to street sleepers who abuse drugs. Besides, as Shek Kwu Chau Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre of SARDA admits new cases only on Wednesdays, it has been agreed that those street sleepers with high motivation for admission will be admitted into the Sunrise House in the first place, where the Salvation Army, as the operating agency, will provide them a programme to prepare for their admission into drug detoxification centres.

30. The three midnight outreaching teams have worked in partnership with SWD service units including street sleeper outreaching teams, family services centres, integrated family service centres, family support and networking teams in handling street sleeper cases. Family services centres of SWD also provide counselling, outreaching and supportive services to needy street sleepers if required. To enhance the co-operation and sort out operational issues between the midnight outreaching teams and SWD service units, regular district-based sharing sessions have been held so that efforts can be better co-ordinated to help the street sleepers.

### ***District Effort in Tackling the Street Sleeper Problem***

31. SWD District Offices have also stepped up their efforts in assisting street sleepers. For example, apart from organizing regular observational visits to elderly homes, public housing units, hostels/shelters for street sleepers and mobilizing volunteers to conduct concern visits, the Yau Tsim Mong District Social Welfare Office organized a number of exhibitions, with some conducted at nights, at the HK Cultural Centre and other spots where young street sleepers gathered. A pilot project

was also introduced to assist those suspected mentally ill street sleepers. Through joint efforts of social workers and the community psychiatric team of the Hospital Authority, two suspected mentally ill street sleepers had been arranged for psychiatric treatment in hospitals during the period. The Sham Shui Po District Social Welfare Office had organized lunch programme for ex-street sleepers to share their successful experience in quitting street sleeping with current street sleepers. In Tsuen Wan District, regular briefing sessions at night had been held at Princess Alexandra Community Centre to introduce the services available for street sleepers and provide intake service for street sleepers. Volunteers had also been mobilized to conduct regular outreaching visits to street sleepers in the district.

## **Conclusion**

32. The Action Plan has some initial positive outcomes since its operation a year ago. Although the three NGO teams have different strengths, with some teams capable of helping street sleepers with accommodation while others more job placements, etc., the practices which are considered effective in tackling the street sleeper problem are shared among the agencies through the input of the research team. The co-operation of relevant agencies and service units to assist street sleepers in a more concerted manner are illustrated in the complementary efforts made and the close collaboration achieved. The Department with the assistance of the research team will continue to closely monitor the situation as well as the implementation of the Action Plan.

Social Welfare Department  
June 2002

**Key Statistics on the 3 NGO Midnight Outreaching Teams  
(May 2001 – March 2002)**

	<b>St. James' Settlement</b>	<b>Salvation Army</b>	<b>Christian Concern for the Homeless Association</b>	<b>Total</b>
(a) No. of street sleepers contacted	204	321	409	<b>934</b>
(b) No. of active cases (as at March 2002)	100	120	100	<b>320</b>
(c) No. of accommodated cases				
(i) Private tenement	24	21	13	<b>57</b>
(ii) Temporary shelters/ Urban hostels for single persons	49	56	34	<b>139</b>
(iii) Public Housing	1	0	3	<b>4</b>
Sub-total	74 <sup>1</sup>	77 <sup>2</sup>	50 <sup>3</sup>	<b>201</b>
(d) No. of cases successfully matched with jobs	69 <sup>4</sup>	38	13	<b>120</b>

<sup>1</sup> original pledged output is 50

<sup>2</sup> original pledged output is 60

<sup>3</sup> original pledged output is 50

<sup>4</sup> original pledged output is 50

**Utilization of Emergency Fund  
(May 2001 – April 2002)**

- (a) Total no. of cases benefited : 263 cases  
(b) Total payment approved : \$ 285,156.12  
(c) Average payment per case : \$ 1,084.24  
(d) Breakdown of the payment:

<b>Nature of payment</b>	<b>Payment</b>			
	<b>St. James' Settlement</b>	<b>Salvation Army</b>	<b>Christian Concern for the Homeless Association</b>	<b>Total</b>
(a) Rental related expenses	\$39,063.00	\$64,839.72	\$52,772.00	\$156,674.72 (54.9%)
(b) Employment related expenses	\$14,391.00	\$37,911.90	\$24,554.00	\$76,856.90 (27.0%)
(c) Expenses on daily living	\$27,895.50	\$11,186.30	\$10,188.70	\$49,270.50 (17.3%)
(d) Others (including medical expenses, etc.)	\$1,754.00	-	\$600.00	\$2,354.00 (0.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$83,103.50</b>	<b>\$113,937.92</b>	<b>\$88,114.70</b>	<b>\$285,156.12</b>

**No. of Street Sleepers on CSSA  
(April 2001 – March 2002)**

<b>Month</b>	<b>No. of street sleepers</b>	<b>No. of street sleepers on CSSA</b>	<b>%</b>
Apr 2001	1203	765	64
May	1223	787	64
Jun	1227	803	65
Jul	1268	840	66
Aug	1280	847	66
Sept	1305	870	67
Oct	1340	732	55
Nov	1322	899	68
Dec	1320	846	64
Jan 2002	1129	680	60
Feb	1128	680	60
Mar	1027	601	58

## List of Support Services run by Non-governmental Organizations

<b>Name of Service Unit</b>	<b>Subvented (S) / Self-financing (SF) / Lotteries Fund (LF) Singleton hostel of Home Affairs Department (HAD)</b>	<b>No. of Places</b>	
		<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b>1. Caritas – Hong Kong</b>			
(a) Cable and Wireless Caritas Temporary Shelter	(S)	30	-
(b) Caritas Hung Hom Hostel	(SF)	40	-
<b>2. Street Sleepers Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated</b>			
(a) Wan Chai Shelter	SF	72	18
(b) Yau Ma Tei Shelter	SF	70	-
(c) Sham Shui Po Shelter	SF	46	30
<b>3. Missionary of Charity</b>			
(a) Home of Love	(SF)	50	20
<b>4. St. Barnabas' Society &amp; Home</b>			
(a) Drop in Centre for Street Sleepers	(SF)	-	-
<b>5. Pok Oi Hospital</b>			
(a) Pok Oi Hospital Jockey Club Hostel for Single Persons	(S)	40	-
<b>6. Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council</b>			
(a) Jockey Club Lok Fu Hostel for Single Persons	(S)	24	18
(b) High Street House	(HAD)	162	108
<b>7. Yan Chai Hospital</b>			
(a) Yan Chai Hospital Urban Hostel for Single Persons	SF	28	12
<b>8. St. James' Settlement</b>			
(a) Day Relief Centre for Street Sleepers	(S)	-	-
(b) Li Chit Street Single Persons Hostel	(S)	40	-
(c) Emergency Shelter in Wan Chai	(LF)	10	-
<b>9. Salvation Army</b>			
(a) Day Relief Centre for Street Sleepers	(S)	-	-
(b) Nam Ming Haven for Women	(S)	-	42
(c) Yee On Hostel	(S)	40	-
(d) Shun On Hostel	(SF)	14	-
(e) Sunrise House	(HAD)	238	72
<b>10. Christian Concern for the Homeless Association</b>			
(a) Activity Centre	(SF)	-	-
(b) Yan Chack Hostel	(SF)	21	-
(c) Yan Lam Hostel	(SF)	-	10
<b>11. Light of Yung Shu Tau Christian Society Limited</b>			
(a) Kei Lok (Temporary) Hostel	(SF)	10	-
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>330</b>
	<b>Grand Total:</b>	<b>1,265</b>	