

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Rehabilitation Policy for Adult Ex-prisoners

Purpose

This paper is to give an account of the rehabilitation programmes currently conducted by the Correctional Services Department (CSD) for persons under its custody and the supportive services provided for them by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) after their discharge and to consider the issues raised by the Society for Community Organization (SOCO) in its submission on rehabilitation services for discharged offenders.

Rehabilitation Services

2. One of the prime missions of the CSD is to provide the best possible opportunity for all inmates to make a new start in life, by offering timely, apt and comprehensive rehabilitation programmes. In this connection, CSD has developed, delivered and managed a series of rehabilitation programmes to assist offenders in equipping themselves for leading a lawful life after discharge. CSD has also adopted a comprehensive recidivism rate (i.e. the rate of re-admission within three years after discharge of all local convicts released from CSD's custody) since 2000 to facilitate studies on re-offending behaviour and provide timely feedback for programme monitoring and evaluation.

Psychological Services

3. Psychological services are provided to prisoners by CSD to promote their psychological well-being and to gain a better insight into their offending behaviour. Apart from individual case work, treatment programmes are conducted for inmates with special needs. They include the Sex Offender Evaluation and Treatment Services for sex offenders, Mental Health Programme for long-term offenders and Offending Behaviour Programme for young offenders. The Substance Abuse Awareness Programme as well as the Relapse Prevention Course are also conducted for inmates with substance abuse problems.

Welfare Services

4. Prisoners' Welfare Officers / Aftercare Officers provide assistance and guidance to inmates under their charge to deal with personal and emotional problems. Cultural activities such as pop bands, essay writing competition, fashion design competition and hobby classes are promoted among prisoners to explore their talents and help them develop positive self-image.

5. Group counselling sessions, Pre-release Re-integration Orientation courses and Never Again Programme are organized to help prisoners re-integrate smoothly into the society upon release. Through these activities, prisoners are provided with information on community resources such as social welfare services, medical services, legal assistance and labour market information, etc.

Work and Vocational Training

6. Unless physically unfit, adult prisoners are required to engage in useful work. This arrangement enhances stability and improves the operational efficiency inside penal institutions through workplace discipline. It also enables prisoners to develop good work habits and a sense of responsibility and to learn the spirit of teamwork. In acquiring some basic skills in specific trades, they also come across quality concepts. This together with education and other rehabilitation programmes will improve prisoners' prospects of re-integration into the society upon release.

7. Inmates under 21 years of age receive compulsory half-day vocational training on industrial or commercial skills. A wide variety of courses to help them obtain accreditation by external examination authorities, such as Sir Isaac Pitman Limited and Hong Kong Examination Authority, are conducted. There are also courses of which successful completion will help them obtain exemptions for continuing training in the Vocational Training Council (VTC), or to obtain skills accreditation by VTC or the Construction Industry Training Authority (CITA).

Correctional Education

8. The Education Unit provides half-day compulsory education programmes for young offenders under the age of 21. Adult offenders may participate in educational studies on a voluntary basis and this is arranged after their normal work. Besides general subjects, practical courses such as computer-related and commercial subjects are taught. Distant learning courses offered by external educational bodies are also available. Needy prisoners / inmates may apply for financial assistance for various educational pursuits from the Prisoners' Education Trust Fund.

Aftercare Services

9. Inmates discharged from Detention, Training and Drug Addiction Treatment Centres, and prisoners released under the five statutory early release schemes (Annex I) are subject to a period of post-release supervision. In preparation for effective supervision, aftercare officers strive for fostering a trustful relationship with inmates/prisoners as well as their families/significant others during the inmates/prisoners' period of detention. Aftercare officers also provide inmates/prisoners with appropriate support and guidance to adapt to the institutional programme, to become aware of their inadequacy and the difficulties ahead. Through regular contacts and visits, inmates/prisoners discharged under supervision are assisted to lead a law-abiding and decent life. .

Half-way House Programme

10. Following release, supervisees in need of a period of transitional adjustment reside in a half-way house from which they go out to work or school during daytime and to which they return at night. The programme seeks to cultivate a sense of self-discipline and positive work habit within a structured and supportive environment.

Non-government Organisations (NGOs) and Religious Services

11. Some 25 NGOs maintain liaison with CSD in providing services to help prepare prisoners for re-integration into the community. The services provided include counselling, employment assistance and recreational activities. Religious services are offered to all inmates who wish to participate.

Community Support

12. Community acceptance and support are important to the successful rehabilitation and re-integration of offenders. The Commissioner of Correctional Services has therefore appointed the Committee on Community Support for Rehabilitated Offenders with mainly unofficial members from various sectors of the society to advise the re-integration strategies and to promote community support through education, publicity and public involvement.

Supportive Services for Discharged Prisoners Provided by SWD and NGOs

13. SWD provides support to vulnerable members of the community through its extensive network of service units run by the Department itself and by over 180 NGOs. Discharged prisoners who need support may approach these service

units as appropriate. In addition, under SWD's programme on services for offenders, annual subventions of about \$45 million are provided to Society of Rehabilitation And Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) to provide counselling, group activities, residential services and employment opportunities for ex-offenders with the objective of helping them re-integrate into the community and lead a law-abiding life. SRACP is the only NGO with subvented services contributing to the programme on service for offenders under the ambit of SWD. Social workers of SRACP's Pre-release Preparation Service pay regular visits to the penal institutions of CSD to promote its services to prisoners. They help them formulate discharge plans through individual interviews, talks, video presentation and distribution of information leaflet, etc.

Financial assistance

14. The Aftercare Officers of CSD and social workers of SWD and NGO would refer those eligible discharged prisoners for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) on the ground of unemployment, medical reason or disabilities. Besides, caseworkers of social security field units (SSFUs) and family services centres (FSCs) of SWD will grant trust funds or urgent cash grant under discretion to eligible and needy discharged prisoners. With the subvention of SWD and sponsorship by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust (HKJCCT), social workers of the Social Therapy Centres of SRACP will grant short-term cash assistance to discharged prisoners.

Accommodation

15. Prisoners before discharge will be put on the waiting list for hostel placement if they indicate their needs when social workers of SRACP visit them in the penal institutions. The existing Shelters for Street Sleepers and Hostels for Single Persons are also open to all homeless persons with genuine accommodation need. Discharged prisoners will be referred by the Aftercare Officers of CSD and social workers of SWD and NGO or self-approach these temporary shelters or urban hostels when necessary. A comprehensive list of these shelters/hostels is at Annex II. We are aware that hostels run by SRACP specifically for discharged prisoners have a considerably higher utilisation rate than the other singleton hostels, probably because of the other support provided by the agency. In recognition of the demand for these dedicated hostel services for discharged prisoners, SWD has been helping SRACP to identify suitable premises for setting up additional hostels. However, the search for suitable premises has met with considerable problems.

Survey on Needs of Discharged Offenders

16. To enhance its planning and delivery of rehabilitation services, CSD conducted a survey in 2000 with a view to identifying the re-integration needs of discharged offenders. Valid questionnaires from 1,215 discharged persons under active statutory supervision and 431 to-be-discharged local Chinese prisoners with a sentence of 3-month or more were collected for the purpose.

Survey Findings

17. The survey revealed that the most immediate problems identified by the respondents at the initial stage of their release were -

- (i) securing an employment;
- (ii) improving family relationship or handling family problems;
- (iii) seeking financial assistance; and
- (iv) looking for a dwelling place.

Some discharged offenders also advised that they had the experience of being discriminated against, in one way or another, by their neighbours, employers or work-mates when their ex-offender identity was revealed. On the basis of the above findings, CSD has reviewed its services and mapped out a series of initiatives in the following paragraphs to address the needs expressed by the inmates and discharged offenders.

Enhancing the Bridging Role of Welfare Officers

18. To facilitate their re-integration, rehabilitated offenders should be better linked to community resources. Offenders discharged under supervision are looked after by CSD's aftercare officers. For other offenders, CSD's welfare officers would identify those persons who may be in need of assistance and refer them to SWD and the appropriate NGOs for intervention and possible follow up after discharge. For details, please refer to paragraphs 13 -15 above.

Telephone hotline

19. As the provision of instant advisory and/or supportive services may help reduce re-offending behaviour, CSD has commissioned SRACP since December 2001 to set up a telephone hotline to provide timely referral and crisis intervention services

for discharged offenders. Their family members, friends and other interested parties can also call the hotline for assistance and advice if necessary.

Training on job-hunting and interview techniques

20. Having regard to the survey findings, training to enhance offenders' job hunting and interviewing skills has been arranged. Besides job searching techniques, the training helps the offenders face up to their convictions and handle related questions posed to them during employment interviews.

Family relationship and communication

21. To assist offenders in improving family relationship and communication, CSD has organized more educational and recreational activities for offenders and their families. The department is also extending the Inmates-Parents Centre¹ Programme which is successfully implemented at the Tai Tam Gap Correctional Institution to other Training Centres. Given the satisfactory outcome, further extension of the scheme to other categories of offenders and their families will be considered.

Financial assistance

22. While financial hardship is perceived to be one of the main concerns in the survey, CSD notes that a range of financial assistances is readily available in the community². CSD's aftercare officers and welfare officers would continue to provide information and counselling to prisoners / inmates to ease their anxieties and guide them to budget for their future.

23. To enhance their employability, supervisees are encouraged to engage in various forms of training and education. Those having difficulties in meeting school / vocational training fees may apply to the Prisoners' Welfare Fund for a subsidy in the first year after discharge.

¹ Opened in 1999, the Inmates-Parents Centre provides a relaxed setting in which family counselling, talks, inmates-parents programmes and recreational activities are conducted to promote parental care and forge family bonds between inmates and their parents/guardians.

² Offenders with pressing financial needs upon discharge can approach SRACP for short-term cash assistance. Grants from the Li Po Chun Charitable Trust Fund, Tang Shiu Kin & Ho Tim Charitable Fund and other charitable funds are also available for their application. Those in need of longer-term aid can apply for financial assistance and special grants under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance scheme.

Dwelling place

24. SWD and SRACP are aware of the demand of hostel service by discharged offenders and have been considering possible ways to meet their needs, including site search for new hostel development and possible accommodation in housing estates.

Public acceptance

25. CSD has organized a series of publicity activities to appeal public support for rehabilitated offenders, such as community involvement activities with various District Fight Crime Committees, TV and radio APIs, roving exhibitions, posters and a symposium on employment for rehabilitated offenders. It will continue to organize educational and publicity programmes to explain to the public that their support is important for the successful re-integration of rehabilitated offenders.

SOCO Report

26. On the basis of a survey conducted among 70 discharged offenders, SOCO considers the existing supportive services for offenders are not adequate in addressing their needs (i.e. financial, employment, housing and information needs) and the re-integration programmes place too much emphasis on long-term offenders and young inmates. SOCO urges the government to review its rehabilitation services, in particular those provided to adult offenders with a sentence less than 2 years.

Administration's Response to SOCO Submission

27. CSD is committed to provide the best possible opportunity for all inmates to make a new start in life. Every effort has been made to ensure that the most appropriate services are provided with the available resources. After the needs survey conducted by the department in 2000, concerted measures as set out in paragraphs 18-25 above have been initiated to improve the chance of discharged offenders in meeting re-integration needs, including employment, financial and housing needs.

28. The Director of Social Welfare (DSW) has met with SOCO and a group of ex-offenders on 9 June 2002 on the submission and findings of SOCO. In the main, SWD noted the concern of the discharged prisoners on issues relating to CSSA, accommodation and accessibility to information on welfare services.

Shortening the application/processing time on application for CSSA

29. Subject to satisfying other eligibility criteria, payment to successful applicants will normally start one month after the date of application. However, in genuine hardship cases, payment from the first month can be made to the successful applicant at discretion. Discharged prisoners on CSSA who are old, disabled or being medically certified to be in ill-health are eligible for special grants for rent deposits. For able-bodied discharged prisoners, we can consider a discretionary payment in cases where the recipient is genuinely in need of additional financial assistance to meet the expenses.

30. In order to facilitate the application for CSSA by discharged prisoners who are assessed by SRACP to be genuinely in need of urgent financial assistance, we have streamlined the referral procedures from SRACP to SSFUs. A standard referral form has been in use by SRACP to facilitate the process of application by SSFUs effective from February 2001. Looking ahead, building on SRACP's present short-term cash assistance scheme and taking reference from the operation of emergency funding disbursed by the NGOs providing direct service to street sleepers, SWD is prepared to consider alternative emergency funding arrangements to ensure more timely provision of support to discharged prisoners.

Alleviating the pressure of the need of hostel placement

31. The long waiting list and strict rules and regulations of some singleton hostels are of concern to discharged prisoners. While SWD will continue to facilitate referral to singleton hostels for admission, we accept that there is a strong case for expanding the current hostel service of SRACP that currently provides only 122 places. SWD is seeking the assistance of the Government Property Agency in finding suitable premises for this purpose.

Halfway House

32. The Halfway House programme of CSD is an extension of the rehabilitative efforts carried out within the penal institutions. It is a transit measure assisting prisoners discharged under supervision in adapting to the community. The programme seeks to cultivate a sense of self-discipline, positive work habit and decent living pattern within as structured and supportive environment. As such, certain rules and regulations with which residents should comply are necessary, or else the purpose of programme would be defeated.

Vocational Training for Adult Offenders

33. All adult prisoners, unless physically unfit, are required to work whilst in custody. In addition to keeping them meaningfully and gainfully occupied, the prime objective of the arrangement is to help them develop good working habits, understand their responsibilities and learn the spirit of teamwork. Relevant trainings and instructions are given before the offenders are engaged in various types of industrial work in 13 trades. They include laundry services, furniture making, uniform manufacturing and sign making. Some also take part in domestic duties as well as minor construction work projects.

34. Where possible, opportunities for skill accreditation are provided for the inmates to take the Intermediate Trade Tests conducted by CITA. As a new initiative, the Construction Labourer (General) Course is also held for inmates of some correctional institutions on voluntary basis starting from 2000.

Employment of Discharged Prisoners to the Civil Service

35. The Government has established guidelines in the employment of ex-prisoners. Employment policy as laid down in Civil Service Regulation 148 & 151 state that the Government should take a lead to employ the ex-prisoners where this is not inconsistent with the public interest. Evaluation of application will be considered on equal terms with other candidates.

Enhancing the dissemination of information on welfare services

36. Through the Welfare Officers of CSD and social workers of Pre-release Preparation Service of SRACP, service pamphlets and information on welfare services are already disseminated to prisoners before their release. On top of providing information on welfare services, Welfare Officers of CSD can refer those needy cases to SWD for early intervention and assistance. We will consult CSD on how improvements on provision of information can be made.

Supportive Services for Adult Offenders

37. Statutory aftercare services are now provided to certain categories of inmates (please refer to paragraph 9 above). The majority of them are (a) young offenders; and (b) adult prisoners with a sentence of two years or more for committing certain crimes.

38. CSD is fully aware of the rehabilitation needs of other offenders who are mostly adult offenders with a sentence less than two years. Their programmes inside the penal institutions are not different from those required post-release supervision.

All of them, before discharge, would attend the Pre-release Re-integration Orientation Course in which they would be provided with, inter alia, updated information of supportive services that they may seek for assistance after discharge. CSD also identify offenders with anticipated difficulties and refer them to SWD and appropriate NGOs for intervention and possible follow up after discharge. Upon discharge, offenders would be issued with a handy booklet containing the telephone numbers of major welfare organisations. They may also call the telephone hotline set up specifically for them since December 2001 for instant advice.

Service Re-engineering and Enhancement

39. Since SRACP is at the moment the only NGO rendering subvented services for discharged prisoners, we consider a need to re-examine its scope and organisation of services to identify room for improvement. Accordingly, SWD has approved a sum of \$520,000 from the Lotteries Fund to SRACP for them to conduct a Business Improvement Project. The Agency is expected to take a fresh look on its service delivery and future positioning. The proposed scope of the study will include reviewing the current service process structure and service costing, identifying improvement areas and re-grouping service portfolios, developing an implementation action plan, facilitating the implementation and conducting compliance audit as well as developing effective service costing model and assessing efficiency achievement. It is expected to be completed by June 2003.

Conclusion

40. The Administration takes note of the survey findings of SOCO on the needs of rehabilitated offenders. The findings of the SOCO survey are similar to the conclusions of the 'Needs Survey' conducted by CSD in 2000, which were already released to all concerned parties, including the Fight Crime Committee and District Fight Crime Committees, in mid 2001. The Administration will make continuous efforts to develop and strengthen its rehabilitation services since successful re-integration of rehabilitated offenders will reduce recidivism, help build a safe society and save public expenses. Also, the Administration will work closely with SRACP in its coming study with a view to re-engineering subvented services to better meet the needs of discharged offenders.

FIVE STATUTORY EARLY RELEASE SCHEMES

Pre-Release Employment Scheme (Cap. 325)

Under the provisions of the Prisoners (Release Under Supervision) Ordinance (Cap.325), prisoners other than those serving life sentences or subject to deportation upon discharge, who are serving sentences of two years or more may, upon successful application, join the Pre-release Employment Scheme (PRES) within the last six months of their sentences.

Release Under Supervision Scheme (Cap. 325)

Under the provisions of the Prisoners (Release Under Supervision) Ordinance (Cap.325), prisoners other than those serving life sentences or subject to deportation upon discharge, who have served not less than half or 20 months, whichever is longer, of a sentence of three years or more, may, upon successful application, be released under the Release Under Supervision Scheme (RUSS) to undergo supervision for the outstanding balance of their sentences.

Post-release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme (Cap. 475)

The Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Ordinance (Cap. 475) provides a statutory aftercare supervision scheme for those adult prisoners sentenced to:

- (i) imprisonment of six year or more;
- (ii) imprisonment of two years or more but less than six years for triad-related / sexual offences or crimes of violence.

The Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme (PRSS) aims at assisting these discharged prisoners to re-integrate into the society and to protect the public from any threat that they may pose.

Conditional Release Scheme (Cap. 524)

Under the Long-term Prison Sentences Review Ordinance (Cap.524), prisoners with indeterminate sentence may, before the Long-term Prison Sentences Review Board makes the final recommendation as to whether their indeterminate sentence would be converted to a determinate one, be release under the Conditional Release Scheme (CRS).

Supervision Aftercare Release Scheme (Cap 524)

The Supervision Aftercare Release Scheme (SARS) provides post-release aftercare supervision for those prisoners with a determinate sentence converted from an indeterminate one.

List of Shelters/Hostels Run by Non-governmental Organizations

Name of Service Unit	Subvented (S) / Self-financing (SF) / Lotteries Fund (LF) Singleton hostel of Home Affairs Department (HAD)	No. of Places	
		Male	Female
1. Caritas – Hong Kong			
(a) Cable and Wireless Caritas Temporary Shelter	(S)	30	-
(b) Caritas Hung Hom Hostel	(SF)	40	-
2. Street Sleepers Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated			
(a) Wan Chai Shelter	(SF)	72	18
(b) Yau Ma Tei Shelter	(SF)	70	-
(c) Sham Shui Po Shelter	(SF)	46	30
3. Missionary of Charity			
(a) Home of Love	(SF)	50	20
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)	40	-
6. Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council			
(a) Jockey Club Lok Fu Hostel for Single Persons	(S)	24	18
(b) High Street House	(HAD)	162	108
7. Yan Chai Hospital			
(a) Yan Chai Hospital Urban Hostel for Single Persons	(SF)	28	12
8. St. James' Settlement			
(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	-

Name of Service Unit	Subvented (S) / Self-financing (SF) / Lotteries Fund (LF) Singleton hostel of Home Affairs Department (HAD)	No. of Places	
		Male	Female
9. Salvation Army			
(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
10. Christian Concern for the Homeless Association			
(a) Activity Centre	(SF)	-	-
(b) Yan Chack Hostel	(SF)	21	-
(c) Yan Lam Hostel	(SF)	-	10
11. Light of Yung Shu Tau Christian Society Limited			
(a) Kei Lok (Temporary) Hostel	(SF)	10	-
	Total:	935	330
	Grand Total:	1,265	