

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services**

**Initiatives to Strengthen Youth Welfare Services**

**Purpose**

This paper reports on the new initiatives to strengthen welfare services for young people.

**Background**

2. Members will recall that we last reported to the Panel on the Administration's efforts to tackle youth problems at the meeting held on 12 March 2001 highlighting the new initiatives in enhancing youth welfare services as announced in the 2001 Budget. In his Policy Address this year, the Chief Executive stressed that the Administration should sustain efforts in promoting healthy development of young people, providing support and assistance to help youth-at-risk overcome difficulties they face in their development, and providing room for young people to reach their full potential as well as to play an active role in building the community. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) contributes to these overall efforts through enhancing existing youth welfare services and pioneering new initiatives. The objective is to assist young people in becoming responsible and contributing members of society.

**Progress in implementing initiatives in the 2000 Policy Address and 2001 Budget**

3. With full co-operation of the welfare sector, the education sector, and the Police, we have succeeded in -
- (i) implementing the Understanding the Adolescent Project (UAP) in 150 secondary schools in the 2001/02 school year for early identification of developmental needs of students and early intervention;

- (ii) extending the UAP to primary schools on a pilot basis starting from the 2001/02 school year;
- (iii) continuing recurrent funding for two Crisis Residential Centres for youth-at-risk upon expiry of the Lotteries-Fund-financed project;
- (iv) implementing the Secondary School Liaison Officers Programme in the 2001/02 school year with the creation of 33 Police Sergeant posts to enhance support to all secondary schools;
- (v) strengthening district co-ordination of efforts to serve youth-at-risk through the creation of 13 Assistant Social Work Officer posts in SWD's District Offices with effect from September 2001, which together with other staff will be transformed into the District Planning and Co-ordinating Teams by March 2002;
- (vi) extending the service hour and service focus of 18 integrated teams (ITs) to provide services for young night drifters on a territory-wide basis since September 2001;
- (vii) achieving full coverage of the Community Support Services Scheme (CSSS) for young people cautioned under the Police Superintendent Discretion Scheme over the territory with the setting up of three additional CSSS teams in East Kowloon, West Kowloon and New Territories East Regions in September 2001; and
- (viii) maintaining additional school-based support to seven large academically-low-achievers schools with the creation of 3.3 Assistant Social Work Officers in April 2001.

## **2001 Policy Address**

4. To build on the collaboration in addressing the multi-farious needs of our young people, the Chief Executive, in his 2001 Policy Address, pledged to sustain our efforts in early identification, timely intervention, and effective rehabilitation to help youth-at-risk with additional recurrent resources of \$85 million earmarked. We

report below the progress on taking forward these additional initiatives.

#### Extending the Understanding the Adolescent Project (UAP)

5. The response from both the education and welfare sectors to implementing the UAP in secondary schools was overwhelming. A total of 253 applications to start the UAP in the 2001/02 school year were received. In light of this response, SWD has increased the first year implementation of the UAP from 100 to 150 schools. The participating schools were identified with the help of the Education Department.

6. The large number of applications in the first year of operation testified to the enthusiasm of schools and social workers alike towards effective identification and timely intervention to build up the resilience of our young people in order to face life's challenges. To continue our efforts in the direction, we will extend the UAP to another **104** secondary schools (including existing and new schools to be commissioned in that year) in the 2002/2003 school year and to a further **163** existing schools in the 2003/2004 school year with total additional resources of **\$26.7 million**, thus achieving full coverage of all secondary schools. Meanwhile, to assess the effectiveness of the UAP, we are in active discussions with the Centre for Clinical Trials and Epidemiological Research of the Chinese University of Hong Kong with a view to commissioning the Centre to undertake a full evaluation. It is hoped that the evaluation would shed light on whether the UAP should become a permanent feature in schools for early identification of young people for enhanced support. The Centre was involved in the development of the screening tool and was responsible for the evaluation of the UAP during the pilot study.

#### Continuous formation of integrated teams (ITs)

7. In the 2001 Budget, a total of \$70 million of new recurrent resources has been earmarked for expediting formation of ITs over a three-year period. Within this allocation, \$5 million per year has been earmarked for the operation of two Crisis Residential Centres for youth-at-risk starting April 2001.

8. In working out the details of speeding up the formation of ITs by phases for holistic, integrated services for young people, the welfare sector has re-assessed the efficacy of ITs in meeting the current needs of youth given the tremendous socio-economic changes in the territory in the past years. Upon consultation with Non-

governmental Organisations (NGOs), the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, the Hong Kong Social Workers' General Union and the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk, it is recognised that serving the changing needs of young people through ITs is in the right direction. On the other hand, outreaching social work service can be restructured to address the needs of high-risk youth and handle issues of juvenile gang. SWD is in the process of finalising the details of speeding up the formation of ITs by phases and restructuring existing outreaching social work teams with a view to achieving a full spectrum of services to meet the needs of general youth as well as youth-at-risk. NGOs operating young people services will be invited to submit proposals in the coming months.

9. Whilst recognizing that NGOs operating young people services have made great efforts to re-deploy their existing resources to fund new initiatives under the Fundamental Expenditure Review on Youth, new recurrent resources totaling **\$37.6 million** have been earmarked for setting up new ITs over a period of four years starting from 2002-2003 in premises to be made available in **six** districts. This has been welcomed by NGOs as ITs in new areas were hitherto financed through pooling of existing resources.

#### Provision of peer counsellors

10. Both local and overseas experience indicates the effectiveness of engaging peers in providing support and guidance to young people, in particular youth-at-risk. Being of a similar age, the peer counsellors will be able to communicate more effectively with young people at-risk, exert positive influence as well as instill socially acceptable values in them. This will also create job opportunities for young people who have successful experience in ironing out growing pains to serve other youngsters who are now muddling at the crossroad.

11. Starting from January 2002, we will make available new funding at a full year cost of **\$15.4 million** to engage a total of **150** peer counsellors (remunerated at \$8,000 per month for full-time employment while part-time employment is also allowed). By nature of the services to be rendered, peer counsellors should be well received by the target service recipients. They are expected to be of at least Secondary 5 standard and will be engaged for a period of about two years. The service will be provided as part of the services of children and youth centres and ITs targeting at Secondary 3 school leavers for early identification of their needs and early intervention to address those needs. The effectiveness of the programme will be

reviewed to assess their value and effectiveness.

#### Setting up of additional psychotropic substance abuse counseling centres

12. In 2000, the Central Registry of Drug Abusers reported that there were 18,275 drug abusers with 4,000 under the age of 21, indicating an increase of 12% and 61.2% respectively when compared with the figures of 1999. Among the young drug abusers under the age of 21, 82% took psychotropic substances, which represented an upsurge of 119% over the figure of 1999.

13. While 35.6% of reported drug abusers were living in the East Kowloon and Hong Kong Regions, there are at present no counseling centres for young psychotropic substance abusers in these regions. On the other hand, the existing three centres, covering the West Kowloon, New Territories East and New Territories West Regions, are already stretched beyond their full capacity. To ensure fuller coverage to deal with the increasing number of young drug abusers, additional recurrent resources of **\$5.7 million** per year will be allocated from 2002-2003 to NGOs for setting up **two** additional counseling centres for young psychotropic substance abusers in the East Kowloon and Hong Kong Regions. At the same time, we will review the existing provision of public and school-based education on substance abuse.

#### All-night drop-in centre for youth-at-risk

14. Apart from the provision of two Crisis Residential Centres as back-up shelter for YNDs, it is recognized that there is still a lack of centre-based services for youth-at-risk in late evening until dawn. As recommended in the Report on Evaluation Study on Youth Mobile Team Service for YNDs, the provision of a safe place for YNDs to hang out, to calm down, to meet with social workers, to stay the night and so on will minimise the chance of these youngsters falling prey to negative influence on the streets.

15. With the impending relocation of SWD's Kai Nang Sheltered Workshop & Hostel (KNSW&H) in Kwun Tong early next year, SWD is planning to make use of the premises to set up an all-night drop-in centre for young people at-risk on an experimental basis with funding from the Lotteries Fund. The objective is to provide overnight centre-based services as well as a temporary shelter or crisis house for youth-at-risk. Situated in a convenient and accessible location yet without residence

in the vicinity, the premises of KNSW&H are considered suitable for the purpose.

16. The proposed drop-in centre will provide a comfortable and appealing place where young people can talk, laugh, eat and drink; a place with some inexpensive entertainment/activities; a place that provides plenty of personal space with a minimum of authority and control (though young people using the centre would be under social workers' attention and supervision); and a place where the staff can provide affection and support for the emotional needs of the young people. The target group of the service will be boys and girls who are at-risk on the street at night identified by the ITs serving YNDs. The centre is expected to operate from 6:00 p.m. till 12:00 noon the next day. The facilities would include counselling room, crisis residential unit, cyber café, gymnasium, karaoke room, band room, basketball field, etc.

17. The Department has consulted the Social Service Committee of the Kwun Tong District Council on the proposed set up of the centre in Kwun Tong at its meeting on 22 November 2001 and has gained full support from members. SWD has invited the Youth Outreach, which is currently operating the Crisis Residential Centres for YNDs, to manage the drop-in centre. NGOs serving young people, especially those with enhanced ITs outreaching to YNDs, are expected to use the centre for back-up and support. We are planning for the centre to start operation by July 2002 the earliest.

### **Advice sought**

18. Members are invited to note the progress in implementing the initiatives to strengthen youth welfare services and to offer views on the new initiatives under planning.