

For discussion
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Paper for Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

AN UPDATE ON THE ENDING EXCLUSION PROJECT FOR SINGLE PARENTS ON COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE

PURPOSE

This paper is to update Members on the measures taken to improve the social well being of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) single parent recipients under the Ending Exclusion Project (EEP).

BACKGROUND

2. At the meeting on 10 December 2001, Members endorsed the proposal to implement the EEP from March 2002 to assist CSSA single parent families whose youngest child is under 15 to become more self-reliant and reduce their risk of social exclusion.

3. As a start, about 2 000 CSSA single parent recipients were invited to join the Project which comprises a voluntary employment assistance programme, improved work incentives, help with child care and enhanced supportive services. Priority was given to single mothers aged under 50 whose youngest child was aged 10 to 14, as they normally have a lesser burden in child care; single fathers aged under 50, irrespective of the age of the youngest child because they may enter the job market more readily if not engaged in child caring; and all single mothers who were of younger age (early twenties or below) as their chances of getting a job are relatively more promising. Single parent recipients who do not fall into the priority groups may join the Project if they wish.

4. The voluntary employment assistance programme is a proactive service to help single parents to find jobs. Project participants are assisted to

access up-to-date market information and employment training opportunities and develop personalised action plans to find work. Where appropriate, they are also referred to the Special Job Attachment Programme (SJAP) and Intensive Employment Assistance Fund (IEAF) projects, especially those targeting single parents. Those attending training/retraining programmes, participating in paid employment or activities under SJAP or IEAF projects or actively seeking work, may be assisted with coupons for free After School Care Programme (ASCP) places for their children in over 130 centres. The use of coupons is intended to meet the needs of single parents with maximum flexibility as they offer a combination of parental choice together with certainty of placement. To help single parents overcome problems and stress arising from single parenthood, restore resilience, build up a social network of support and mutual help, and improve their self-esteem, they will be referred, depending on individual circumstances, to Single Parent Centres (SPCs) for assistance where they can receive a range of services such as counselling, family education and parent education programmes, training programmes on child-minding and job skills, as well as referrals for other supportive services. To provide a greater incentive to work, the maximum level of disregarded earnings for single parents with young children has been revised from \$1,805 to \$2,500 per month since March 2002.

5. As at the end of the one-year period from March 2002 to February 2003, a total of **2 442** CSSA single parent recipients including 678 (27.8%) single fathers and 1764 (72.2%) single mothers have joined the Project. Of them, 1 324 (54.2%) participants considered themselves to be job-ready. Out of that number, 272 (20.5%) have succeeded in securing employment after joining the Project. Of the 1 118 (45.8% of total) non job-ready participants, 1 037 (92.8%) have been referred to SPCs for appropriate services. On the other hand, 375 single parents who showed no response to our invitation and who might therefore be at risk of social exclusion have been referred to SWD's Family Support Networking Teams for appropriate follow up services.

6. After one year's operation, the Project has been well received by participants generally and is endorsed by the relevant advisory committees and different groups as an innovative programme. The initial results suggest that the Project has achieved its objective in helping single parents to become more self-reliant and reduce the risk of social exclusion. With the aim of assisting more single parents to improve the family life of themselves and their children,

we have decided to extend the Project from March 2003 and are exploring various means to enhance the Project.

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROJECT

The Research Study

7. To help evaluate the effectiveness of the Project, SWD has commissioned a joint research team from the City University of Hong Kong and the Chinese University of Hong Kong to conduct a one-year Longitudinal Study to gauge the psychological, attitudinal and behavioural changes of the single parents and their child(ren) over time and assess the effectiveness of the Project in terms of the following areas of outcome:

- Improved awareness of the need for ‘social participation’;
- Improvement in psychological well-being (e.g. self-esteem);
- Improved awareness of the need to establish self-reliance;
- Understanding on the importance of employment; and
- Success in gaining employment.

Methodology

8. The Study adopts a longitudinal or repeated-measures design with an experimental group and a control group through a set of questionnaires. Under this design, respondents in the experimental and the control groups will be interviewed four or three times respectively in a one-year evaluation period with a four-month and six-month interval, starting from April 2002. One of the advantages of this design is that the changes gauged are more reliable because the same group of people are involved for each measurement. More importantly, it is possible to compare participants with similar backgrounds who differ only in their programme participation. This can control for the natural changes among all the participants in the evaluation over time.

9. Respondents in the experimental and the control groups are invited to attend a face-to-face interview to complete a questionnaire in each Wave of data collection. In Wave 1, 1 722 respondents participated in the experimental group, and 295 respondents participated in the control group. Majority of the respondents were females (71%), in the 35-44 age group (61%), divorced (55%), and with a primary to junior secondary education (75%).

10. Interviewers are staff of SWD or SPCs who are responsible for following up the cases of the respondents and meeting the respondents regularly.

11. To shed light on possible changes observed in EEP participants, preliminary statistics based on the first two waves of the study have been compiled. It should be noted that these findings and interpretations based on preliminary statistics are tentative and a complete picture will not be available until later this year when all the four waves of data collection have been completed. The following presents some key findings from the research to date.

Preliminary key findings of the Study

12. Generally speaking, the views of the experimental group were quite favorable about the Project and its constituent components. Respondents from both groups were favorable about the total disregard of first month earnings when finding a job and the monthly disregarded earnings. In particular, the majority (84%) of the respondents in the experimental group considered that the arrangement of monthly disregarded earnings ‘can bring extra income to improve the quality of life of their families’ whereas similar proportions of them stated that it ‘can encourage them to find a job (81%)/stay with a job (79%)’. Smaller percentages were observed in the control group (74%, 74% and 77% respectively).

13. Respondents received moderate support from their families and social network in job-seeking, with the experimental group receiving more support than the control group. There were respectively 53%, 55% and 54% of the respondents in the experimental group saying that their children, other family members and relatives/close friends agreed that the respondents ‘should try hard to look for a job’. The percentages in the control group were 35%, 37% and 38% respectively.

14. A significant proportion of the respondents seemed to be slightly disturbed by their unemployment. This can be reflected by the fact that although the respondents had a high level of belief in “hard work will pay” (average score was 3.81 on a 5-point scale), a reasonable level of self-esteem

(3.23), their level of optimism was moderate (3.13). Moreover, the respondents were moderately cynical (3.37) and socially isolated (3.33). About 49% of the respondents in the experimental group intended to find a part-time job (the percentage in the control group was 26%). The average number of daily working hours that these respondents wanted to work was 4.6. Of the remaining 51% of the respondents who had no intention of finding a part-time job, it is observed that they had slightly lower average age of youngest child (9.8) and longer average hours spent on child care (7.4 hours), compared to 10.3 years of age and 7.2 hours respectively observed in those having an intention to find a part-time job.

15. As regards their social network, 93% of the respondents never participated in activities organized by different organizations. About 58% reported that they generally could not ask their relatives or friends to help to take care of their children when needed. About 24% of the respondents also needed to take care of aged relatives or relatives with chronic diseases.

16. In the Wave 2 interviews which were conducted about four months later, it was observed that respondents had participated in more activities connected with employment counselling organised by the social centres over the previous three months. A slightly higher percentage of the respondents in Wave 2 stated that people similar to them could find a full-time job. This may indicate that respondents' perception of successfully getting employed have slightly improved in Wave 2. In the experimental group, the percentage had increased from 24% in Wave 1 to 28% in Wave 2. The increase in the control group was from 30% to 33%. More respondents had a part-time job in Wave 2 in both groups. The percentage in the experimental group had increased from 5% to 10%. The increase in the control group was from 4% to 5%. There were also more respondents expressing an intention to find a part-time job in Wave 2.

17. Both groups seemed to show a slight increase in self-esteem and a decrease in cynicism and isolation in Wave 2. More respondents in the experimental group in Wave 2 than in the control group mentioned that they had participated in more community activities in the past three months; were less hesitant/ reluctant to seek social help and were also less likely to become emotional when facing the difficulties of single parenthood; spent more time on work and self development and less time on child caring. Most of them seemed

to realize the need to ‘step out of the family’ to initiate changes in their life.

18. To sum up, there are some *encouraging* differences between the two waves that are suggestive of a positive programme effect. However, similar trends have also been observed in the control group as well. A more reliable picture will emerge after the entire data collection exercise is completed later in the year.

Analysis of administrative records

19. Separately, SWD has been monitoring the progress of the Project by keeping relevant administrative records since its implementation. Key findings/observations from the records covering the period between March 2002 to February 2003 are summarized below:

- (a) Among the 2 442 participants, 419 (17.2%) single parent recipients who were not from the priority groups had taken the initiative to approach our Employment Assistance (EA) Teams to express their readiness to take up employment and requested enrollment in the Active Employment Assistance (AEA) Programme.
- (b) Of the 2 442 single parents whom we had served, 678 (27.8%) of them were single fathers and 1 764 (72.2%) were single mothers.
- (c) 1 324 (54%), a little more than half of the participating single parents, were motivated to find full-time employment, though the majority of them might still prefer part-time jobs. These results were consistent with the views gathered in the Longitudinal Study.
- (d) The rate of using ASCP service is on the low side. There had been only 215 ASCP full-fee waiving coupons issued to 64 single parent families (4.8% of the cumulative job-ready participants) to release them for working, training or seeking employment.

- (e) Out of the 272 (11.1%) participants who had secured employment, 204 (75%) of them had a monthly income of \$1,610 or more^{Note}. Among them, 75 (27.6%) had earned \$4,549 or more enabling them to enjoy the maximum disregarded earnings of \$2,500 per month. Another 68 (25%) participants had taken up part-time work and managed to make an income although their monthly earnings were just below \$1,610. It is believed that the higher level of disregarded earnings did play a part in encouraging single parents to work.
- (f) 34 participants (12.5% of those who had secured employment), became totally independent and left the CSSA net and 170 (62.5% of those who had secured employment) had reduced their dependence on CSSA after taking up a job although they remain in the 'single parent family' category and have not shifted to the 'low earnings' category.
- (g) Among the 1 118 (45.8% of all participants) participants who considered themselves not yet ready for employment, 1 037 (42.5% of all participants) had been referred to the five SPCs for supportive services. Of these 1 037 single parents, 240 (23.1%) of them reported to have restored resilience later on and consequently felt ready to take up employment. Twenty-four (2.3%) had successfully found a job eventually.

A summary of relevant statistics from the administration records of CSSA single parents joining EEP is at Annex I.

20. There are two other components in the EEP that are under special attention, namely the use of ASCP coupons and the referrals to SPCs for support services. The coupon concept was introduced based on the philosophy of funding the service user direct rather than through the conventional way of funding the service provider. We believe that this would be a more flexible arrangement as parents may choose their preferred centre to receive the government-subsidised service for their children. These coupons are issued to eligible single parents initially on a monthly basis so that SWD

Note: Monthly earnings of \$1,610 or over is used for defining gainful employment for CSSA purposes.

staff administering the Project can make use of the opportunity to review participants' progress in job searching or development of employability through attending employment-related training. However, for those who have taken up paid employment but still on CSSA, coupons would be issued up to the end of the validity period of their CSSA payment with further extension subject to review. Since coupons are issued based on need and respondents have given this arrangement favourable response, we do not feel that we need to be unduly worried about the low rate of utilization. We expect that as time goes by and with increasing familiarity with the concept, utilization will increase.

21. Five SPCs were set up in February 2001 to provide an integrative package of services to single parents. However, a survey of single parents' needs prior to the introduction of the EEP showed that single parents preferred community centres to these dedicated single parent centres in receiving services. With the launching of EEP in March 2002, SPCs have been serving an increasing number of target clients through direct referrals from the Social Security Field Units. Through this in-built referral mechanism, SPCs can save much time and effort in reaching out to targeted clients and consequently have devoted more efforts in raising their employability. The working relationship established between social security and social work streams is also considered to be valuable. Among the 1 037 referrals under EEP, 923 single parents have been successfully reached by the SPCs and engaged in service. A summary of the service statistics of the SPCs is at Annex II.

THE TRENDS AND PROFILES OF CSSA SINGLE PARENT CASES

22. As at February 2003, the number of CSSA single parent family cases stood at 33 881 (12.6% of the total CSSA caseload). This category of cases has been increasing constantly from 5 350 in July 1993 (6.2% of the CSSA caseload) to 25 299 in July 2000 (11.2% of the CSSA caseload) and 31 191 in July 2002 (12.1% of the CSSA caseload). The 33 881 cases in February 2003 represent an increase of 533%, as compared with July 1993 when the CSSA Scheme was introduced. In contrast, over the same period, the total CSSA caseload has increased by 213%.

23. The profiles of CSSA Single Parent families as at the end of February 2003 are given as follows:

- Gender and age of single parents

81% of the single parents were women. Majority of the single parents were in their thirties (36%) and forties (45%).

- Causes of Single Parenthood

The main causes of single parenthood were divorce (35%), separation (25%), and death of spouse (19%). Unmarried mothers constituted less than 3% of the total single-parent families.

- Whereabouts of Spouse of Married Single Parents

65% of the married single parents had spouses in the Mainland. 55% of the married single parents were male.

- Educational Attainment of Single Parents

65% had received primary education or below and 23% had received junior secondary education.

- Age of Children in a Household

The single-parent families contained about 54 000 children, representing 38% of all children on CSSA. 56% of these children were under the age of 12, 23% were between age 12 and 14, and the remaining 21% were of age 15 and over.

69% of the youngest child (or the only child) in the single parent families receiving CSSA were below age 12, 20% were between age 12 and 14, and the remaining 11% were 15 years of age and over.

- Number of Children in a Family

Majority of the cases were small families: 47% of the single parents had one child whereas 40% had two children.

- Household Income Other Than CSSA Payments

82% of the cases relied entirely on CSSA. About 3 200 families (i.e. 10.0% of the total single parent CSSA cases) had employment

earnings while some 1 200 families (i.e. 3.7% of the total CSSA single parent cases) received maintenance payments of non-nominal amounts.

- Age of the Youngest Child and Whether Single Parents were with Employment Earnings

Single parents with employment earnings usually have youngest child of an older age. 60% of single parents with employment had a youngest child of age 12 or over. The percentages for those with the youngest child of age between 12-14, 10-11 and below 10 were 10.1%, 6.8% and 4.0% respectively.

- Duration of Continuously Receiving CSSA

In terms of the periods of continuous dependence on CSSA, 63% had been receiving CSSA for two or more years, including 27% between five and ten years, and 4% for ten or more years. The median length on CSSA was 3.3 years.

WAY FORWARD

24. Upon completion of the Longitudinal Study later in the year, we shall conduct comprehensive analyses of the findings and review our operational experience in order to further consider the best way to help single parents achieve self-reliance.

ADVICE SOUGHT

25. This paper is presented for Members' information and comments.

Social Welfare Department

April 2003

**A Summary of CSSA Single Parent Recipients Joining EEP
(Position as at February 2003)**

		Active Case (%)	Cumulative (%)
1	Total no. of EEP participants remain joining the Programme	2008	2442
	(a) No. of participants from the priority list	1638 (81.6%)	2023 (82.8%)
	(b) No. of participants NOT from the priority list	370 (18.4%)	419 (17.2%)
2	Breakdown of the number of participants by sex		
	(a) No. of single father	496 (24.7%)	678 (27.8%)
	(b) No. of single mother	1512 (75.3%)	1764 (72.2%)
3	Breakdown of the number of participants by age group		
	(a) No. of participants aged below 20	10 (0.5%)	11 (0.5%)
	(b) No. of participants aged 20 to below 30	81 (4.0%)	100 (4.1%)
	(c) No. of participants aged 30 to below 40	818 (40.7%)	981 (40.2%)
	(d) No. of participants aged 40 or over	1099 (54.8%)	1350 (55.2%)
4	Breakdown of the number of participants by age of the youngest dependent child		
	(a) No. of participants with the youngest child aged below 5	182 (9.1%)	220 (9.0%)
	(b) No. of participants with the youngest child aged 5 to below 10	499 (24.9%)	629 (25.8%)
	(c) No. of participants with the youngest child aged 10 to below 15	1327 (66.0%)	1593 (65.2%)
5	Breakdown of the number of participants by number of children in the family		
	(a) one child in the family	745 (37.1%)	914 (37.4%)
	(b) two children in the family	888 (44.3%)	1094 (44.8%)
	(c) three children in the family	312 (15.5%)	363 (14.9%)
	(d) more than three children in the family	63 (3.1%)	71 (2.9%)
6	Breakdown of the number of participants by length of continuously receiving CSSA		
	(a) length of continuously receiving CSSA < 1 year	265 (13.2%)	310 (12.7%)
	(b) length of continuously receiving CSSA 1 - < 3 years	546 (27.2%)	678 (27.8%)
	(c) length of continuously receiving CSSA 3 - < 5 years	581 (28.9%)	707 (29.0%)
	(d) length of continuously receiving CSSA > = 5 years	616 (30.7%)	747 (30.5%)
7	Breakdown of the number of participants by job-readiness		
	(a) No. of participants ready for job [% of total participants]	1061 (52.8%)	1324 (54.2%)
	- out of (a), the no. of single fathers	249 (23.5%)	337 (25.5%)
	- out of (a), the no. of single mothers	812 (76.5%)	987 (74.5%)
	- out of (a), the age of the job-ready participants		
	1. No. of participants aged below 20	3 (0.3%)	3 (0.2%)
	2. No. of participants aged 20 to below 30	40 (3.8%)	52 (3.9%)
	3. No. of participants aged 30 to below 40	448 (42.2%)	551 (41.6%)
	4. No. of participants aged 40 or over	570 (53.7%)	718 (54.3%)
	- out of (a), the no. of job ready participants with child aged 6 - <12	535 (50.4%)	643 (48.6%)
	- out of (a), the no. of participants showing interest in SJAP	155 (14.6%)	187 (14.1%)
	- out of (a), the no. of participants showing interest in IEAF projects	247 (23.3%)	281 (21.2%)

**A Summary of CSSA Single Parent Recipients Joining EEP
(Position as at February 2003)**

	Active Case (%)	Cumulative (%)
(b) No. of participants having secured employment (% of job-ready) and [% of total participants]	164 (15.5%) [8.2%]	272 (20.5%) [11.1%]
1. Salaries of the job secured :		
1.1 under \$1610.-	53 (32.3%)	68 (25.0%)
1.2 from \$1610 - \$3,999	72 (44.0%)	101 (37.1%)
1.3 from \$4,000 - \$7,999	35 (21.3%)	85 (31.3%)
1.4 \$8,000 or above	4 (2.4%)	18 (6.6%)
2. No. of participants who have left CSSA net after securing employment (% of job-ready), [% of total participants] and { % of secured employment }		(2.6%) 34 [1.4%] { 12.5% }
3. Age range of participants having secured employment		
Male :	24	53
2.1 aged below 20	0	0
2.2 aged 20 to below 30	0	0
2.3 aged 30 to below 40	8	20
2.4 aged 40 or over	16	33
Female :	140	219
2.5 aged below 20	0	0
2.6 aged 20 to below 30	4	8
2.7 aged 30 to below 40	53	87
2.8 aged 40 or over	83	124
4. No. of participants having joined SJAP/IEAF and also secured employment		
3.1 SJAP	27 (16.5%)	41 (15.1%)
3.2 IEAF	44 (26.8%)	61 (22.4%)
(c) No. of participants not ready for job (% of total participants)	947 (47.2%)	1118 (45.8%)
- out of (c), the no. of single fathers	247	341
- out of (c), the no. of single mothers	700	777
- out of (c), the no. of single parents referred to SPCs for services (% of non-job-ready)/[% of total participants]	764 (80.7%) [38.0%]	812 (72.6%) [33.3%]
- out of (c), the no. of single parents still considering the available options (% of non-job-ready) and [% of total participants]	183 (19.3%) [9.1%]	306 (27.4%) [12.5%]
(d) Total no. of participants referred to SPCs (including those non-job-ready) [% of total participants]		1037 [42.5%]
8 No. of referrals made to FSNT (% of total participants)		375 (15.4%)

**A Summary of CSSA Single Parent Recipients Joining EEP
(Position as at February 2003)**

		Active Case (%)	Cumulative (%)
9	No. of EEP participants using ASCP services (% of total active/cumulative EEP participants) and [% of total active and cumulative job-ready EEP participants]	12 (0.6%) [1.1%]	64 (2.6%) [4.8%]
10	Reasons for participants using ASCP coupons		
	(a) No. of participants using ASCP coupons for reason of taking up employment	6	21
	(b) No. of participants using ASCP coupons for reason of attending employment re-training course	1	9
	(c) No. of participants using ASCP coupons for reason of engaging in activities run by NGO under the SJAP/IEAF	3	29
	(d) No. of participants using ASCP coupons for reason of seeking job actively	1	8
	(e) Others	1	1
11	(a) No. of child beneficiaries having received ASCP services	15	79
	(b) Age of child beneficiaries at the time of receiving ASCP services		
	1. Age 6	3	12
	2. Age 7	4	15
	3. Age 8	2	15
	4. Age 9	3	13
	5. Age 10	1	11
	6. Age 11	2	8
	7. Age 12	0	5
12	No. of monthly coupons issued		215
13	No. of monthly coupons confirmed having been used		164

**Statistics on services provided by single parent centres
on single parents referred under the Ending Exclusion Project (EEP)
from April 2002 to December 2002**

Output standards	Achievement by individual Single Parent Centres					Total output achieved by 5 SPCs
	Caritas - Mutual Aid Centre for Single Parent Families	HKSPA – West Kowloon Single Parent Career Development Centre	CFSC – Lai Chi Single Parent Centre	Yan Oi Tong – Single Parent Centre	NAAC - Single Parent Centre	
(I) Total no. of new single parent families served	31	112	247	154	331	875
(II) Total no. of participants in family education/parent education programmes	1	139	492	260	262	1154
(a) family education	0	115	191	207	230	743
(b) parent education	1	24	301	53	32	411
(III) Total no. of single parents with brief counseling rendered	15	115	112	145	205	592

Output standards	Achievement by individual Single Parent Centres					Total output achieved by 5 SPCs
	Caritas - Mutual Aid Centre for Single Parent Families	HKSPA – West Kowloon Single Parent Career Development Centre	CFSC – Lai Chi Single Parent Centre	Yan Oi Tong – Single Parent Centre	NAAC - Single Parent Centre	
(IV) Total no. of participants in supportive/mutual help/volunteer groups	0	62	91	23	72	248
(a) Supportive groups	0	21	78	0	24	123
(b) mutual help groups	0	27	11	23	22	83
(c) volunteer groups	0	14	2	0	26	42
(V) Total no. of participants in job skill training programmes	6	43	75	124	126	374
(VI) NO. of referrals made to other service units (e.g. FSCs)	0	2	0	3	38	43
(a) SWD	0	2	0	0	0	2
(b) NGO	0	0	0	3	38	41

FCW Section/SWD March 2003