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Hong Kong Social Workers Association Limited

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Interim Report on The Implementation of Family Service Review

The Association is deeply concerned about the recent family service review since it has significant long-term impact on the future development of social services in Hong Kong. In particular, we are alarmed to learn that the SWD intends to implement the recommendations of the Consultant's Interim Report in May 2003 despite the fact that the original intended duration of the review should be two years, i.e. to be completed in March 2004. We question the basis upon which the recommendations were made and we urge the Social Welfare Advisory Committee to put a halt to the immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Interim Report.

In the briefing session held on June 2, 2003, the SWD endorsed the recommendations of the Interim Report of the Consultant and announced the following directions and plan of actions:

- To transform all Family Service Centres (FSCs) into Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs)
- To redistribute all FSCs/Counselling unit resources in order to fill service gaps and to avoid resource duplications
- To pool all resources, including those from existing FSCs/Counselling units as well as those beyond the family services, to the recommended IFSCs
- That "merging", "self-transformation" are the preferred modes of transformation and that "strategic alliance" and "partial Integration" will not be considered

In response to the above developments, the Association has the following views:

1. IFSC as the right direction

The Association supported the formation of Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) proposed by the Consultant team in their earlier 2001 review and endorsed the future direction of family services to be "Family-centered", "child-focused" and "community-based". The Association also welcomed the built-in review for the IFSCs.

2. A Participatory Approach is welcomed

The Association supported the SWD and the NGOs' effort in trying out four different modes of formation into IFSCs, i.e. the "merging", "self-transformation", "strategic alliance" and "partial integration" modes. We also supported the built-in

2-year evaluative study involving the participation of all stake-holders as a rational and necessary step for good service development.

3. The Study should adhere to the original 2-year schedule

The various conclusions made in the briefing session should be noted with caution as they are only based on the initial findings gathered during the first 9 months. It is doubtful whether the initial findings of the Interim Report have adequate evidence to support the above-mentioned recommendations and to preclude the potential future development of the “strategic alliance” and “partial integration” modes. It is essential that the evaluation should adhere to the original 2-year schedule and to gather adequate evidences on the performance, outcome, and output of the four different formation modes before final recommendations should be made.

4. Strategic Alliance as a possible option

The Association has reservations towards the negative comments made by the Consultant on the effectiveness of the “Strategic Alliance” and “Partial Integration” modes of formation in his Interim Report. It is evident from the experience of operating agencies that there are obvious advantages of the “Strategic Alliance” such as easy accessibility, shared culture and practices among partnering agencies, shared resources etc. The basis for dropping this mode at such an early stage in the evaluation process is questionable.

5. Consideration of Efficiency Savings should be separately considered

Efficiency savings have been mentioned by SWD in its considerations for re-engineering the family services. If efficiency saving is the main cause for the recommendations for this review, it should be regarded as a separate issue and should not impact on the findings of the present study, which is intended to be objective, neutral and evidence-based.

6. The continuing need for specialized services

The recommendations, if implemented, will imply the further pooling of resources from existing community services, children and youth centers etc. to the IFSCs, this trend will strongly impact on the overall development of service delivery model in Hong Kong. It is envisaged that the future delivery model of social services in the district will be eventually dominated by the three main types of integrated centres for family, children and youth and elderly, while specialized services will be gradually reduced or even abolished. The Association is deeply concerned about this possible trend of development and wish to stress the importance to continue with the provision of specialized services such as mediation service centres and crisis intervention service centres etc, for special target groups and clients with special

needs. Further deliberation including key stake-holders in the sector is essential before any major policy decisions should be made.

Our Recommendations

1. The Association requests to put a halt to implement the recommendations of the Interim Report. The choice of operation modes of IFSC should be based on more elaborated analysis of data related to the different modes and findings of the full two-year study. The Association is also concerned about the status of the Interim report in the study and whether a final report would be issued.
2. Measures to tackle efficiency savings should be dealt with separately rather than mixing it with the family service review.
3. The overall service delivery model to be developed at the district level deserves further discussion and should involve wider consultation involving members of the profession and the community.

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