

Mrs. Carrie Lam
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Hong Kong

Dear Mrs. Lam

Integrated Family Service Centre
Delineation of Duties and Staff Establishment between
Assistant Social Work Officer and Social Work Assistant Grade

Over the past 23 years, assistant social work officer (“ASWO”) staff and senior social work assistant (“SSWA”) / social work assistant (“SWA”) staff of the SWA grade are performing more or less the same duties in the Department’s family service centres. This we reflected to the Secretary for the Civil Service in January 2002. In her reply of 11.4.2002, the Secretary for the Civil Service advised that “The consultancy team (of the University of Hong Kong commissioned by the Department) has recommended a new service delivery mode of an integrated family service centre (“IFSC”) (to replace the family services centre) which will possibly offer a solution to end the controversy over case assignment.”

To our understanding, the IFSC will compose of three major components, namely the family resource unit (“the FRU”), the family support unit (“the FSU”) and the family counseling unit (“the FCU”), and 15 pilot projects are carried out from April 2002 to March 2004, for which some assessment tools are applied for the screening of cases as far as case assignment is concerned. Among other, the IFSC will be provided with social work staff from ASWO and SWA grade including SSWA and SWA staff, the organization chart of which is at Appendix I. The mode of IFSC is shown at Appendix II and job specifications of various grades of staff at Appendix III. While the IFSC could suggest a distinction of duties between ASWO and SWA grade staff, it is observed that the SWA grade staff are involved in a variety of programmes for early intervention in family problems. Only when the needs of intensive counseling are identified will the cases be passed to the ASWO staff in the FCUs. It follows that the SWA grade staff stationed in the FRUs and FSUs play the primary role of a gatekeeper for controlling resources, rendering basic counseling to prevent the cases from deteriorating and falling in the hands of the ASWO staff. To recruit customers and engage them in centre services could necessitate the running of massive programmes and functions with the participation of a considerable number of SWA grade staff.

In balancing manpower between the ASWO and SWA grade staff, the factor of cost effectiveness should be taken into account. Therefore, it is necessary to staff the IFSC with sufficient SWA grade staff to sustain the ASWO staff at the higher echelons. With the introduction of assessment tools on trial, it is found there is a sharp decline of cases requiring ASWO staff’s attention. In this respect, you may refer to the most recent Monthly Statistical Report on SWD Service July 2003, which stipulates changes of numbers of case in the Department by service types. It is thanks to the assessment tools that most cases are classified as less complicated and simple for which the SWA grade staff ought to do the trick. For the nascent IFSCs, there are 2,863 active cases requiring intensive counseling in July 2003, against the 3,193 in July 2002, a drop of 330 cases or 10.3% and there are 178 new/reactivated/transferred-in cases justifying for intensive counseling, compared with the 230 in July 2002, which means a drop of 52 cases or 22.6%. In other development, the Report indicates that in the wake of the community-based service delivery mode for out-patient of Department of Health and Hospital Authority, the number of active cases of the medical social services (manned by ASWO staff) drops by 28.3% in the same period. The outcast medical social services cases could end up at the FRUs and FSUs under the pilot project. With the assessment tools in place, it is believed that the SWA grade staffs’ cases will outnumber ASWO staffs’ in the IFSCs.

It is gratifying that the Department is taking positive steps towards the setting up of the IFSC though the non-government subvented organizations are in no hurry for it. But the IFSC should have a staff establishment at a reasonable manning ratio. After all, the Department is expected to urge economies by deploying more SWA grade staff who are less generously remunerated for the handling of cases of less complicated or simple natures. Indeed, those of the SWA grade staff who have their share of toiling in FRUs and FSUs have given their views to our association. We have come to the conclusion that the staff proportion between the ASWO and SWA grade staff in an IFSC should be 1 : 2. (At present, in the family services centre, the ratio between ASWO and SWA grade staff is 2 : 1)

We understand that the Department is grappling with the implementation of the IFSC. We would be delighted to give our contribution, particularly on its staffing condition. We would like to have a discussion with you and the concerned parties (addresses of copies of this letter) about it. For enquiries, please contact the undersigned at 9619 0666.

Yours sincerely

(Lai Wing-shing)

Chairman

Encl

c.c.: Secretary for the Civil Service

Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food

Secretary General, Joint Secretariat for the Advisory Bodies on Civil Service and
Conditions of Service

Chairman, Welfare Panel of the Legislative Council

Chairman, Consultant Team, Department of Social Work and Social

Administration of the University of Hong Kong

Chairman, Social Welfare Advisory Committee

Organization Chart of an IFSC

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|-------------------|
| IFSC |
| Centre Supervisor |
| SWO |

| | | |
|-----|-----|---------------------|
| FCU | FSU | Administrative Unit |
|-----|-----|---------------------|

| | | | |
|---------------------|------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Family Counselor(s) | Unit Coordinator | Programme Officer(s) | Clerical Staff |
| ASWO | ASWO | ASWO | |

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Programme Worker(s) | Assistant Programme Worker(s) |
| SWA Grade | WW |

Appendix II

Model of an Integrated Family Service Centre

Integrated Family Service Centre

| Components | Family Resource Unit | Family Support Unit | Family Counseling Unit |
|------------------------|--|--|---|
| Functions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy access to catch cases - Early identification - Educational, developmental - Support and preventive - Empowerment & advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some remedial - Preventive - Support - Advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Remedial |
| Core Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drop-in services - Information giving - Family life education - Developmental groups - Mutual help groups - Volunteer development - Outreach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brief counseling - Emotional support - Referral for tangible service - Support groups - Mutual help groups - Family education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensive counseling - Therapeutic groups - Crisis intervention |
| Complementary Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hotlines - Employment skills training - After school care/tutoring - Child minding/ Occasional child care - Respite care - Play groups - Recreational/Social activities - Toy libraries - Research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family Aide Service | |

Appendix III

Job Specification of the Staff of an IFSC

| Post | Rank | Responsibilities | Core Competencies |
|-------------------|------|---|---|
| Centre Supervisor | SWO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - head of the integrated centre - overall administration of the center - planning and evaluating the programmes of the centre - building partnership with government organizations and service units in the community - supervising and developing the staff of the centre. - Supervisor of the FCU - Performing caseload management - Rendering clinical supervision to the family counselors - Rendering direct clinical treatment to complicated cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multi-skills and experience in counseling, group work, networking, management and team building - advanced clinical training |
| Family Counselor | ASWO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assessing the needs of individuals and families and making appropriate referrals - rendering intensive counseling to individuals and families - conducting therapeutic groups - rendering crises intervention to families at risk - liaising with multi-disciplinary team of professionals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - minimum three years of family services or casework experience - advanced clinical training preferred - skill in handling family crisis - skill in clinical treatment to individuals or in groups |
| Unit Co-ordinator | ASWO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - head of the FSU and the FRU - planning and coordinating the programmes of the two units - supervising and developing the SWA grade and WW staff - assessing the needs of users and making appropriate referrals - assigning cases and caseload management - conducting support groups to vulnerable families | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - minimum of three years of experience in casework and group work. - Skills in team building, networking, group work and needs assessment |
| Programme Officer | ASWO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - networking with government departments, organization and service units for referrals and programme implementation - planning, organizing and implementing family life education and family education programmes - conducting support groups to vulnerable families - rendering brief counseling service to those users who do not require intensive counseling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - skill in networking - skill in public speaking - skill in casework and group work |
| Programme | SWA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - rendering brief counseling to | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - skill in casework and group work |

| | | | |
|----------------------------|-------|--|--|
| Worker | Grade | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - less complicated cases - making referrals for tangible services - conducting support and developmental groups - in-charge of the drop-in area, which includes giving information and answering enquiries, early identifying users in need of social work intervention - coordinating volunteer training - reaching out to at-risk families | - skill in organizing and conducting mass programmes |
| Assistant Programme Worker | WW | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - outreach to at-risk families - developing and coordinating volunteers - manning the drop-in area and coordinating resources materials - conducting social and recreational activities - organizing interest groups - coordinating the complementary programmes of the FRU such as after school tutoring, child minding, employment skill training, etc. | - good in interpersonal and communication skill |