

Commission on Poverty (CoP)
Task Force on Children and Youth

Sharing Session on Parenting

Date : 15 December 2005 (Thursday)
Time : 12.30 – 2.30pm
Venue : 1/F, New Annex, Central Government Office, 11 Ice House
Street, Central, HK

Gist of discussion

Part I – Presentation on services and programmes in relation to parenting, with reference to measures targeted at families with special needs /from disadvantaged backgrounds

Representatives from the Department of Health (D of H), Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB), Social Welfare Department (SWD), Secretariat to the Women's Commission (WoC) and Home Affairs Bureau respectively briefed the Meeting on the existing parenting programmes provided in health, education, social service and the community sectors. These include measures and programmes provided at Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) and Integrated Family Service Centres at district level, school-based parenting programmes, as well as other parenting programmes organised at community level by the WoC and the Committee on Promotion of Civic Education. Relevant presentation materials were tabled at the sharing session.

Part II – Sharing session/Open discussion

2. Professor LAM Ching-man, Professor Frank TAM and Dr YEUNG Ka-ching were invited to share their observations on existing parent education, especially on how to strengthen the parenting support to parents from disadvantaged families. The Chairmen of the Task Force, the WoC and the Community Inclusion and Investment Fund (CIIF) Committee, as well as members of various relevant committees also expressed their views on it. Beside the CoP Task Forces on Children and Youth and on District-based Approach, these committees comprise the WoC, the CIIF, the Social Welfare Advisory

Committee, the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education and the Committee on Home School Cooperation.

3. Major issues discussed were summarized as below-

(i) General

It was noted that while conscientious efforts had been made by respective bureaux and departments in promoting parenting, in particular providing support and services for families in special needs or from disadvantaged background, the mismatch of existing parenting programmes in terms of target, approach and content etc. was the major problem that needed to be tackled to ensure effective parenting.

(ii) Targeting

The Meeting recognised the greater needs of certain disadvantaged groups on parenting, such as single-parent families (especially single-fathers) and the new arrivals. It was noted that these groups of parents also had some common characteristics, like having low confidence to teach their children/to be parents, low awareness of the importance of balanced development of their children, low incentive of participation in family and school activities and low education level etc. which usually resulted in a strong reliance on school teachers to teach their children. Some of these disadvantaged parents were even rather withdrawn/hard-to-reach for parenting assistance.

While the Meeting was aware that different mechanisms had been put in place to identify “high-need parents”, such as the programmes offered at MCHCs and the Understanding the Adolescent Project (成長的天空) at primary schools, committee members considered it important to redeploy existing resources in order to focus more on outreaching work to the high-need parents at an early stage and strengthen the efforts to provide them with timely support and to raise their self-confidence and awareness.

(iii) Agent

The Meeting recognised that parents were in the best position to educate their children. It was therefore crucial to empower parents themselves, including

enhancing their self-confidence and capabilities. In doing so, some academics noted that current packaging/presentation of parent education programmes easily put negative labelling effect on the high-need parents and discouraged them to participate in these programmes and seek parenting assistance.

In addition, while noting that schools should provide a good platform to reach out to the high-need parents, the Meeting noted that teachers were not trained or equipped for the challenge. They would need support from other professionals. Though school social workers were better placed for the task, many of them had not been given the relevant training.

Some committee members also proposed that support and mentoring networks among parents could be considered. As parents, they were likely to have significant shared needs/concerns. In addition, high-need parents who had been transformed and were proactive would be good resource persons to share their experience with and support the others.

(iv) Approach/content

The Meeting considered that existing parent education should go beyond parenting skills and lectures. It should put more emphasis on the wholesome development and empowerment of parents, including parenting values and community networking. The content of parenting for the high-need families should also be more practical to address their problems and avoid being too “middle-class”. The Government should therefore re-think and review the effectiveness of the existing approach.

Currently, most parenting programmes were based on overseas and western models which might not totally fit the local circumstances of Hong Kong. The Meeting was informed that local adaptation was being conducted to the Triple P programmes and considered that similar steps were also required in other parenting programmes.

(v) Platform

The Meeting considered that identification of high-need parents was just the first step, and more networks should be established to ensure easy access by these parents to timely parenting support and assistance.

It was considered that school was the most suitable platform in providing parent education, as well as in reaching out to the high-need parents because of the 9-year compulsory education. The Parent-teacher Associations (PTAs) should also be encouraged to take a more pro-active role in promoting school-based parenting programmes and facilitating home school cooperation.

At the wider community level, the outreaching programmes of IFSCs should act as another platform to identify and provide intervention to “high risk” families at an early stage. Social education and dissemination of pro-social values should also be reinforced.

There should also be greater coordination between the community and school levels of work so that high-needs parents identified in the community outreaching efforts would also be enticed to join school-based parenting programmes; and likewise, treatment of family problems unearthed in context of school-based work could also be complemented with intervention at the community level.

Part III – Conclusion

4. The Meeting felt that to enhance the parenting capability of the high-need parents, early identification and effective parent empowerment programmes should be put in place. While reaffirming the usefulness of the existing work, Members felt that there should be greater emphasis on outreaching and there should be greater coordination and interface between work at the school and community levels so as to optimize the tripartite partnership among parents, schools and community. In addition, the approach, contents and presentation of parenting programmes should be reviewed and reformulated with the specific needs of the high-need parents in mind. Relevant school personnel should be given adequate support and training to help empower parents in the context of home-school cooperation. The various policy bureaux and committees would take account of the sharing in planning their future work.

Commission Secretariat
16 December 2005