

LC Paper No. CB(2)2321/04-05

(These minutes have been seen by the Administration)

Ref : CB2/PS/1/04

Panel on Welfare Services

Subcommittee on Review of the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme

Minutes of the 6th meeting held on Thursday, 23 June 2005 at 10:45 am in the Chamber of the Legislative Council Building

Members	: Dr Hon Fernando CHEUNG Chiu-hung (Chairman)
present	Hon CHAN Yuen-han, JP
	Hon LI Fung-ying, BBS, JP
	Hon Alan LEONG Kah-kit, SC
	Hon LEUNG Kwok-hung

Members	: Hon LEE Cheuk-yan
absent	Hon Fred LI Wah-ming, JP
	Hon TAM Yiu-chung, GBS, JP
	Hon Frederick FUNG Kin-kee, JP

Public Officers : <u>All items</u> attending

Ms Salina YAN Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security)

Mrs Brenda FUNG Principal Assistant Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and Social Security) 2 Mr Paul TANG, JP Director of Social Welfare

Mrs Rachel Cartland, JP Acting Deputy Director of Social Welfare (Administration)/Assistant Director of Social Welfare (Social Security)

Mr LAI Shiu-bor Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 2 Social Welfare Department

Miss YEUNG Kok-wah Chief Social Security Officer (Social Security) 4 Social Welfare Department

Mr Kenneth NG Senior Statistician (Social Welfare) Social Welfare Department

Professor TANG Kwong-leung Department of Social Work The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Professor CHEUNG Chau-kiu Department of Social Work The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Deputations : <u>Item III</u>

by invitation

The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong

Ms NG Sau-man Assistant Project Manager

The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong Training & Employment Service Centre (Kwan Tong)

Mr LAI Ka-ching Vocational Counselor Society for Community Organization

Miss LEUNG Mei-kuen Community Organizer

Hong Kong Lutheran Social Service

Mr LEUNG Kin-to Senior Social Work Assistant

The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong

Ms CHAN Hoi-yan Employment Development Manager

Mr SZETO Kit-sang Supervisor

Hong Kong Employment Development Service

Mr YIU Hung-chi Executive Director

Tuen Mun District Women's Association

Ms TANG Wai-ling Deputy Director (Social Service)

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

Mr CHUA Hoi-wai Business Director, Policy Advocacy and International Networks

Mr WONG Kwai-yau Chairperson, Specialized Committee on Social Security and Employment Policy

Evangelical Lutheran Church Social Service - HK

Mr WONG Kwok-kei Supervisor

New Territories Association Retraining Centre

Mr CHAN Yuen-shing Executive Director

Hong Kong College of Technology

Mr CHEUNG Tsz-kin Project Officer

Miss CHAN Hung-sau Project Officer

International Social Service Hong Kong Branch

Mr YIU Cheuk-hin Project Worker

Christian Action

Mr Sam KWONG Assistant Director

YMCA of Hong Kong

Mr Eric AU YEUNG Kwok-wai Centre In-charge

Ms Venus CHAN Chui-ping IEA Project Co-ordinator

- Clerk in
attendance: Ms Doris CHAN
Chief Council Secretary (2) 4
- Staff in
attendance: Miss Mary SO
Senior Council Secretary (2) 8

Miss Maggie CHIU Legislative Assistant (2) 4

Action

I. Confirmation of minutes

(LC Paper No. CB(2)2052/04-05)

The minutes of meeting held on 24 May 2005 were confirmed.

II. Date of next meeting and items for discussion

2. <u>Members</u> agreed to discuss the following items at the next meeting to be held on 22 July 2005 at 2:30 pm -

- (a) annual adjustment of the standard payment rates under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme and the Social Security Scheme; and
- (b) progress report on the review of arrangements for single parent recipients under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme.

III. Evaluation study of the Intensive Employment Assistance Projects for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and near-CSSA recipients (LC Paper Nos. CB(2)2028/04-05(01) to (07) and CB(2)2048/04-05(01) to (02))

3. <u>Ms LI Fung-ying</u> noted that an evaluation study of the Intensive Employment Assistance Projects (IEAPs) for Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and near-CSSA recipients conducted by the research team from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) was near completion. In the meantime, the research team had come up with 10 main areas of recommendations as set out in paragraph 9 of the Administration's paper (LC Paper No. CB(2)2028/04-05(01)). <u>Ms LI</u> asked when the full report of the evaluation study could be provided to members, so as to facilitate more meaningful discussion of these recommendations.

4. <u>Director of Social Welfare</u> (DSW) responded that the full report of the evaluation study should be ready by next month. The Administration was presently studying the recommendations made by the research team and would draw up a response later on. It was the Administration's plan to report to members on its response to the recommendations after the summer break.

5. <u>Ms LI Fung-ying</u> hoped that the Administration would not implement any recommendations made by the research team, such as requiring CSSA single

parent recipients with youngest child below 15 to work, before these recommendations were thoroughly considered by this Subcommittee. <u>The</u> <u>Chairman</u> concurred.

6. <u>Deputy Secretary for Health, Welfare and Food (Elderly Services and</u> <u>Social Security</u>) (DSHWF (ES&SS)) assured members that the Administration would not implement any recommendations made by the research team before first consulting the views of all relevant parties, including this Subcommittee. The reason for informing members of the findings to date of the evaluation study was to apprise members of the direction in enhancing the capacity/incentive to work among people receiving CSSA and likely to receive CSSA. As mentioned by DSW earlier at the meeting, the Administration was presently studying the recommendations made by the research team and would draw up a response later on.

7. DSW supplemented that apart from conducting a study to evaluate the effectiveness and suggest measures to improve implementations of the IEAPs, the research team had also been tasked to look into other Support-for-self-reliance measures, including the Active Employment Assistance Programme, Community Work (CW) Programme and Disregarded Earnings (DE). Although two of the main areas of recommendations made by the team were on requiring CSSA single parent recipients with youngest child below 15 to work and reviewing the DE arrangement, it should be pointed out that these two recommendations had no direct bearing on two similar reviews undertaken separately by the Administration. The review regarding CSSA single parents had started long before the commissioning of the evaluation study of the IEAPs. Hence, there was no question of the Administration using the findings of the evaluation study to justify the implementation of the proposal to require CSSA single parent recipients with youngest child aged six to 14 to seek at least part-time employment in order to continue the single parent supplement. The review on DE would be completed by end 2005.

8. <u>Ms LI Fung-Ying and the Chairman</u> enquired about the timetable for implementing the 10 main recommendations made by the research team.

9. <u>DSW</u> reiterated that it was the Administration's plan to revert to members on the progress on the review of arrangements for CSSA single parent recipients in July 2005, and on the outcome of the DE review before the end of 2005. No definite timetable, however, had been set for the implementation of the recommendations set out in paragraph 9(i)-(ii) and (v)-(x) of the Administration's paper as more time was needed to come up with a response. For instance, in-depth discussions would need to be made with regard to the recommendation made by the research team of setting a time-limit on CSSA entitlement for able-bodied recipients, taking into account the steady increase in the median stay on CSSA of unemployed recipients from 1.9 years of three years ago to 2.6 years at end of 2004-05. With regard to the recommendation made by the research team of improving the CW Programme, the Administration would take into account the findings of two pilot projects which were being implemented to enhance the CW Programme to make it more interesting and beneficial to participants when formulating the way forward.

10. At the invitation of Chairman, <u>Acting Deputy Director of Social Welfare</u> (<u>Administration</u>) (DDSW(A)(Atg)) briefed members on the background of the IEAPs and the trend and achievements to date, details of which were set out in the Administration's paper and the relevant powerpoint materials given in **Appendix I**.

11. <u>The Chairman</u> next invited Professors TANG Kwong-leung and CHEUNG Chau-kiu of the research team from CUHK to brief members on the findings and recommendations of the evaluation study of the IEAPs, details of which were set out in the relevant powerpoint materials given in **Appendix II**.

12. <u>The Chairman</u> then invited deputations to give their views on the operation of the IEAPs. All of them found the IEAPs to be generally effective in helping CSSA and near-CSSA recipients move towards self-reliance, and should be continued. They however considered that there was room for improvements, and their suggestions in this regard were summarised as follows -

- (a) more flexibility should be provided to operating agencies to use the Temporary Financial Aid (TFA) to provide subsidies to participants attending on-the-job training which generally paid very little, to cover their long distance travelling costs to get to work, to help them to obtain the necessary practising licences, etc;
- (b) the existing three-month assistance period to participants should be extended, so as to allow more time for operating agencies to help participants, particularly those who were ethnic minorities and new arrivals, to remove work barriers, enhance their employability and get back to work through a range of activities such as job matching, job skills training, employment counselling and post-employment support. Apart from this, more funding should be provided to those agencies whose IEAP participants comprised mainly or many ethnic minorities;
- (c) the measure of allowing no DE for all categories of recipients in the initial determination of eligibility and in cases which had been on CSSA for less than three months should be abolished, so as not to discourage people receiving CSSA for less than three months to seek

employment. Consideration should also be given to raising the maximum level of monthly DE which currently stood at \$2,500;

- (d) measures to better help participants to sustain full-time paid employment, such as providing them with enhanced post-placement assistance, such as job-skills training, should be introduced;
- (e) operating agencies should be provided with the authority to penalise those participants who refrained from attending the activities aimed at helping them to seek work;
- (f) emphasis of the programme should be shifted from helping participants to seek work as soon as possible, to helping them to build up their self-confidence, such as strengthening counselling not related to employment (e.g. personal and family life) and training not directly related to employment (e.g. social skills);
- (g) consideration should be given to providing CW participants with a certificate certifying that they had working experience, albeit in community work; and
- (h) the existing requirement that able-bodied CSSA recipients must earn at least \$1,430 and work at least 120 hours per month in order to continue to receive CSSA should be reviewed, as such requirement might cause some of these recipients to deliberately take up very low-paid jobs, which in turn would encourage employers to pay wages below the prevailing market rates. Moreover, many long unemployed participants or those who had never participated in the workforce would find it very difficult to meet the 120-hour requirement.

13. Other views/suggestions made by deputations to help CSSA and near-CSSA participants to lift themselves from poverty and move towards self-reliance were as follows -

- (a) a comprehensive policy involving different policy bureaux and government departments, such as the Economic Development and Labour Bureau, should be drawn up to help the unemployed find employment, as the problem of unemployment could be not solved from a social welfare angle;
- (b) a review should be conducted to ensure that unemployed persons of different age groups were provided with employment assistance programme(s). For instance, unemployed persons aged between 20

and 30 were too old for the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme and too young for the Re-employment Pilot Programme for the Middle-aged launched by the Labour Department;

- (c) statutory minimum wage and maximum working hours should be established;
- (d) a second safety net to help low-income families in the form of providing them with financial assistance to cover basic expenses, such as rent, medical costs and utility charges, should be established;
- (e) requiring CSSA single parent recipients with youngest child below 15 to work should not be implemented across-the-board, having regard to the fact that the existing supportive services, such as after school care service, were still inadequate. For those not ready to take up employment, arrangements could be made for them to take part in community or voluntary work to build up their self-esteem and reduce their risk of social exclusion;
- (f) more resources should be provided to local tertiary institutions to train social workers on vocational counselling;
- (g) merely helping participants to find employment would not be enough to lift them from poverty or falling into the safety net, in view of the fact that wages for low-skilled jobs only averaged about \$5,000 per month which were not enough to support even a small household. To address such, a family-centred approach focusing on helping all able-bodied family members to move towards self-reliance should be explored; and
- (h) the existing arrangement of releasing the remaining \$100,000 administration fee for those projects having achieved the minimum requirement in the end of the implementation period was unsatisfactory, as this had led some operating agencies to hire staff on lower salaries because of budget constraint.

14. <u>Mr CHAN Yuen-shing of the New Territories Association Retraining</u> <u>Centre</u> hoped that the report of the evaluation study of the IEAPs would include the cost-benefits of the Projects.

15. <u>Representatives of the Hong Kong College of Technology, International</u> <u>Social Service Hong Kong Branch and YMCA of Hong Kong</u> hoped that operating agencies could be given more autonomy in approving applications for TFA by IEAP applicants, in order to better meet the immediate needs of needy participants. They pointed out that at present operating agencies were required to report to the Social Welfare Department (SWD) of the TFA applications in order the enable the Department to check whether the applicants concerned had applied for similar assistance from another agenc(ies). Such a process generally took one week to complete.

16. <u>Mr Sam KWONG of the Christian Action</u>, however, held the view that the administration of TFA should best be carried out entirely by SWD which had more resources and expertise at its disposal, so as to relieve operating agencies to do what they were most capable at, namely, helping participants to find employment, stay in employment and live independently. <u>Mr KWONG</u> further expressed reservation about the recommendation made by the research team with regard to integrating the IEAPs with the work of the Commission on Poverty, Community Investment and Inclusion Fund and Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged for funding supporting for building social capital to help promote CSSA recipients' and low income people's motivation to work and self-reliance, as this would complicate the existing arrangements and reporting channel with SWD.

17. Mr CHUA Hoi-wai of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service urged the research team to take away those recommendations which were not directly related to the IEAPs, such as imposing a time-limit on CSSA entitlement for able-bodied recipients and requiring CSSA single parent recipients with youngest child below 15 to work, as it was questionable how the findings of one single employment assistance programme could provide any evidence to substantiate With regard to imposing a time-limit on CSSA such recommendations. entitlement for able-bodied recipients, Mr CHUA pointed out that this recommendation should be considered by the multi-disciplinary Commission on Poverty and the community at large before formulating the way forward. Consideration should be given to enacting legislation to effect such as practised in many overseas jurisdictions. Mr CHUA further said that if the Administration was determined to help CSSA recipients to leave the safety net, it should conduct a comprehensive review of the CSSA Scheme instead of conducting piecemeal reviews.

Discussion

18. <u>Miss CHAN Yuen-han</u> said that the success of the IEAPs was no panacea to the existing problem of high employment among people of low educational attainment with little or no job skills. <u>Miss CHAN</u> urged the Administration to adopt a macro approach in addressing the problem, which should no longer be treated merely from a social welfare angle.

19. <u>Mr LEUNG Kwok-hung</u> said that the wealthy in the community had the

responsibility to provide a safety net to those middle-aged people who were made jobless due to economic restructuring. <u>Mr LEUNG</u> did not agree to the existing arrangement of making this group of people work despite the fact that there were not enough jobs in the market to absorb them. He pointed out that such a requirement had resulted in them stigmatised lazy people which was unfair.

20. <u>Ms LI Fung-ying</u> noted from paragraph 6(ii) of the Administration's paper that one of the objectives of the evaluation study of the IEAPs was to analyse the success factors of the programme, among others. <u>Ms LI</u> asked why the Administration had presumed the programme to be a success prior to the commissioning of the evaluation study.

21. Professor TANG Kwong-leung responded that there was no question of the research term having already presumed the IEAPs to be a success when taking up the evaluation job commissioned by SWD. Although the scope and objectives of the study were determined by SWD, the study was conducted in an independent and impartial manner. For instance, the research team was surprised that DE might not have the effect of encouraging CSSA recipients to work as originally thought. DDSW(A)(Atg) supplemented that the research team did not just talk about the success factors of the IEAPs and had come up with recommendations to better programme, details of which were set out in paragraph 9(ii) of the Administration's paper.

22. <u>Ms LI Fung-ying</u> expressed concern that making IEAP participants take up paid employment would further drive the wages of low-skilled jobs down. In the light of this, <u>Ms LI</u> asked whether the Administration had conducted any impact assessment of the IEAPs on the labour market.

23. <u>DDSW(A)(Atg)</u> responded that although no impact assessment of the graduates of the IEAPs on the labour market had been made, it should be pointed out that with the economy on the rebound, fewer people had to resort to CSSA as a result of unemployment. This was evidenced by the facts that the unemployed CSSA caseload had been on the decline in the past 20 months and there had also been a sharp drop in the CSSA applications due to unemployment. <u>DDSW(A)(Atg)</u> further said that with the economy changing from a manufacturing to service-based economy, the research team had recommended synchronising the welfare policy with the changing and restructuring economy so as to facilitate the employment of CSSA recipients in the burgeoning service sectors like the tourist industry. SWD would follow up with the relevant policy bureaux/government departments on ways to take this forward.

24. <u>Ms LI Fung-ying</u> expressed regret that no impact assessment of the IEAPs on the labour market had been made. <u>Ms LI</u> pointed out that although the economy was improving, people of low educational attainment with little or no job

skills still had great difficulties in finding jobs.

25. $\underline{DDSW(A)(Atg)}$ responded that the Administration hoped that the review of DE, which was being conducted, would help to shed light on ways to better help recipients of low-earning category. The Administration aimed to complete the review within this year. $\underline{DDSW(A)(Atg)}$ admitted that although the wages of low-skilled jobs were low, there was sign of them edging upwards in recent months.

26. <u>The Chairman</u> said that the aim of helping the unemployed was not only to lift them out of the safety net but to lift them out of poverty. <u>The Chairman</u> suggested to also invite representatives from the Economic Development and Labour Bureau and the Labour Department to attend the discussion of the review of arrangements for single parent recipients under the CSSA Scheme at the next meeting. <u>Members</u> agreed.

27. <u>Mr Alan LEONG</u> hoped that more tailor-made assistance could be rendered to the more vulnerable groups such as single parents and middle-aged people with low educational attainment. <u>Mr LEUNG</u> further hoped that a platform could be provided for different operating agencies to share their experience in running the IEAPs, so as to better the programme.

28. $\underline{DDSW(A)(Atg)}$ responded that it was SWD's plan to organise experience-sharing sessions for all participating agencies in the near future. $\underline{DDSW(A)(Atg)}$ added that as the types of service provided under the IEAPs were new to the NGOs in Hong Kong, one of the features of the programme was to build in training for participating agencies from the beginning. Overseas trainers well experienced in providing such employment assistance services had been brought in by SWD to provide the aforesaid training.

Conclusion

29. In closing, <u>the Chairman</u> urged the Administration to take into account views expressed by deputations in order to better the IEAPs, such as giving greater flexibility to the operating agencies to use the TFA to run training courses and provide transport subsidy to participants, etc. and not to withhold giving out the remaining \$100,000 administration fee to the operating agencies until after they had met the performance standards of IEAPs. <u>The Chairman</u> also urged the Administration to abolish the existing measure of allowing no DE for all categories of recipients in the initial determination of eligibility and in cases which had been on CSSA for less than three months, and to review the existing requirement that able-bodied CSSA recipients must earn at least \$1,430 and work at least 120 hours per month in order to continue to receive CSSA. <u>The Chairman</u> also hoped that the research team could use a more social welfare

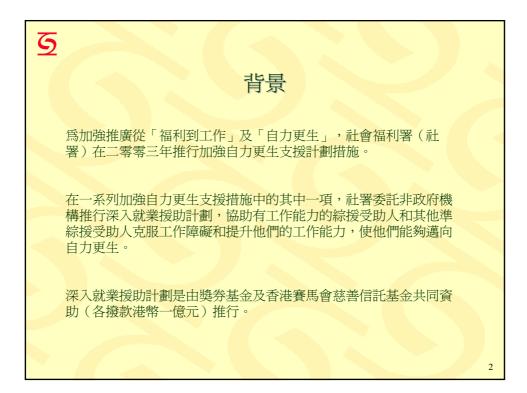
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perspective in analysing the findings of the evaluation study, in order to avoid coming up with a misleading conclusion. For instance, it was mentioned in the powerpoint presentation that CSSA recipients who had been penalised by SWD or who received less care and support from SWD were more willing to seek employment. This might mislead SWD staff to think that penalising CSSA recipients or giving these recipients less support and care would better encourage them to move towards self-reliance.

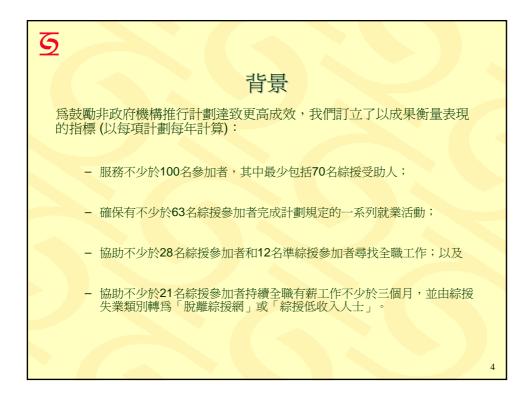
30. There being no other business, the meeting ended at 12:55 pm.

Council Business Division 2 <u>Legislative Council Secretariat</u> 20 July 2005









3	5 計劃截至目前的成績 (二零零三年十月至二零零五年四月)							
	項目總數	70						
	參加者總人數	15 449						
	• 綜援參加者	12 236 (79.2%)						
	• 準綜援參加者	3 213 (<mark>20.</mark> 87%)						
	綜援參加者因尋找到有薪工作並能 夠脫離綜援網或減少依賴綜援的人 數(佔所有綜援參加者的百分比)	3 990 (32.6%)						
		5						

5 深入就業援助計劃(綜援及準綜援)參加者 成功就業的工作性質 (二零零三年十月至二零零五年四月) (包括兼職及臨時工作)									
	工作性質		2003年10月 至2004年9月		2004年10月 至2005年4月		合共		
		人數	百份比	人數	百份比	人數	百份比		
	非技術工人	1433	1 <mark>8.9%</mark>	1441	19.0%	2874	38.0%		
	服務工作及商店銷售人員	1206	1 <mark>5.9%</mark>	1563	20.7%	2769	36.6%		
	工藝及有關人員	406	5.4%	376	<mark>5.0%</mark>	782	10.3%		
~?	機台及機器操作及裝配員	138	1.8%	96	1.3%	234	3.1%		
	文員	170	2.2%	202	2.7%	372	4.9%		
in the second se	輔助專業人員	78	1.0%	36	0.5%	114	1.5%		
	專業人員	16	0.2%	15	0.2 <mark>%</mark>	31	0.4%		
;	經埋及行政級人員	17	0.2%	6	0.1%	23	0.3%		
	其他	209	2.8%	158	2.1%	367	4.9 <mark>%</mark>		
	合共	<mark>36</mark> 73	48.5%	3893	51.5%	7566	100. <mark>0%</mark>	6	

5 深入就業援助計劃(綜援及準綜援)參加者 從工作中賺取到的每月薪金 (二零零三年十月至二零零五年四月) (包括兼職及臨時工作)									
		年10月 14年9月			合共				
每月薪金	人數	百份比	人數	百份比	人數	百份比			
\$1430 以下	458	6.1%	450	5.9%	908	12.0%			
\$1430-\$5000	1883	24.9%	2075	27.4%	3958	52.3%			
\$5001-\$8000	1088	14.4%	1185	15.7%	2273	30.0%			
\$8001 或以上	244	3.2%	183	2.4%	427	5.6%			
合共	3673	48.5%	3893	51.5%	7566	100.0%			
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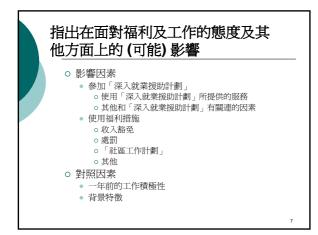


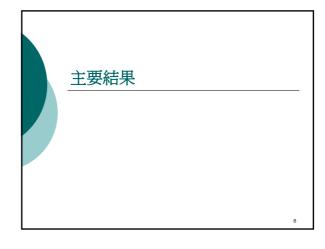
研究小組成員	
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 會澍基顧問(本地顧問) 支援 倪錫欽教授 林靜雯教授 	2



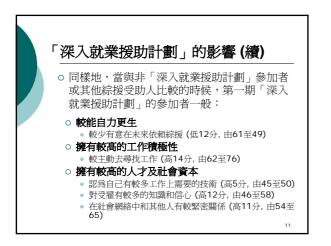


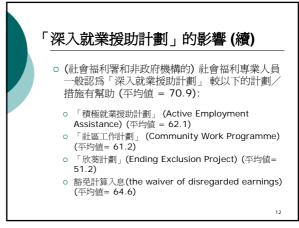


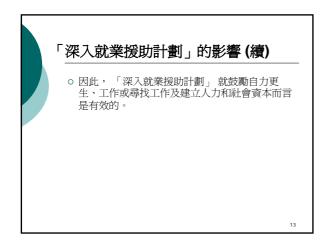


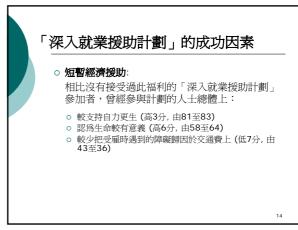


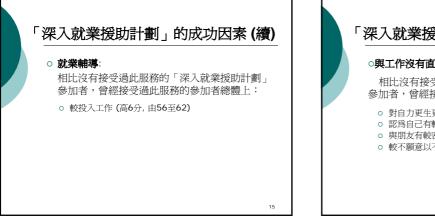


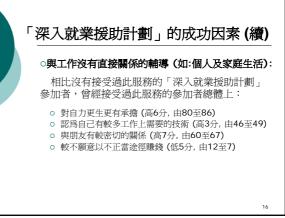


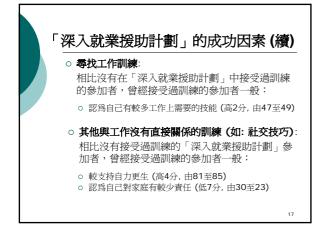


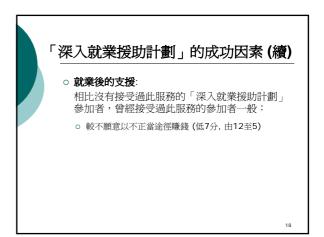


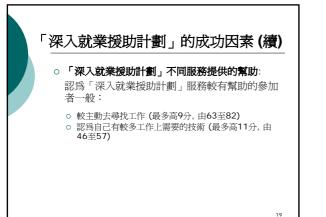


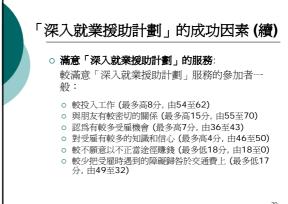


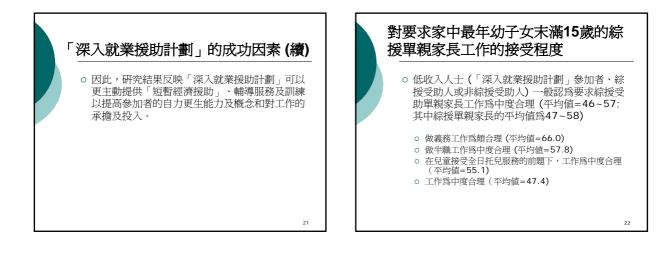


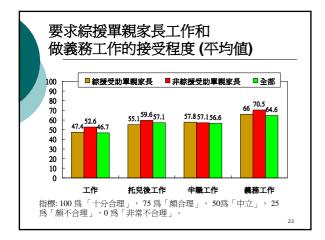


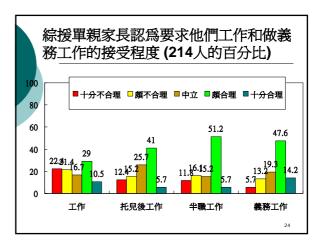


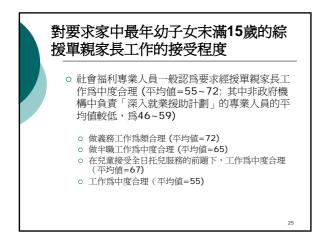












對綜援單親受助家長工作的意見 (平均值) □ 深入就業援助計劃 ■社會福利署 100 75.8 80 72.4 69.7 65.6 60.8 59.1 57.2 60 46 40 20 0 工作 托兒後工作 半職工作 義務工作

