

Submission to the Legislative Council
Panel on Welfare Services
Review on the Implementation of the Integrated Family Services Centre

From Christian Family Service Center on 18 Jun, 2010

1. The problems and needs of families in HK are becoming more complex. Traditional family structures and functions are rapidly eroding. More and more families are becoming vulnerable to risk. In meeting these challenges, family service programmes have to protect vulnerable families and strengthen family capacities to promote maximum independence. Looking into the future, IFSC should take the family as a unit of intervention, give special attention to the needs of children, and maximize support from the community. Thus, **the position of IFSC should be explicitly defined as “community –based integrated service center with focus on strengthening family”**. In essence, IFSC being family oriented, had no age limitation and no rigid eligibility requirements for services, But it did not mean that they had to be responsible for all the family-related problems. IFSC should have **clear core business** in order not to overlap with other services or act as a “trash bin” of cases. **We propose the core business of IFSC should be related to various kinds of family relationship difficulties such as couples, parent-child, in-law kinship, and related personal impediments.**

2. After the operation of IFSC, there are substantial amount of enquiries/cases for housing assistance, but not family or welfare needs, from residents. In general, case with housing needs almost occupied 20-30% of our caseload yearly. We would like to reflect that the existing practice is not cost-effective in handling housing assistance cases, as there is no standardized mechanism. Worse still, the professional manpower in family service which supposed to be handled family with risks is not utilized appropriately. The role of social worker is perceived as housing unit administrator. It is thus strongly recommended **all cases with presenting problem mainly as alternative housing assistance should be directly handled by the corresponding government, i.e. Housing Department or specialized pools of social workers under streamlined administration and standardized assessment mechanism to meet the users’ needs in a more cost-effective way.**

3. The central feature of IFSC design was to provide a continuum of services comprising preventive, support and clinical services. An IFSC should thus provide a wide spectrum of services for children, youth, adults, and elderly ranging from clinical counseling, therapeutic groups, support groups, brief counseling, training and educational classes, child care support and developmental programmes. As the social needs is uprising rapidly, the managers and social workers generally find that the workload much heavier and more demanding than before as the community demands and expectation had increased with increased publicity and reaching out efforts. There are eventually much expressed concerns on the escalating workloads of all levels of staff and the high levels of work stress produced due to the tight manpower of IFSC. The existing manpower structure basically remained unchanged since its formation. In order to ensure the quality service of IFSC, it is necessary to **allocate additional resources in all level of the manpower structure including the clinical supervisory support, social worker for both intensive counseling and developmental work, and supporting staff** to release the stresses of the staff in IFSC.

4. The Review by the HKU Consultant Team on the implementation of IFSC service mode had been completed with the concerted cooperation of all IFSC operators, administrators and frontline staff, service users, community partners and other stakeholders, The HKU Consultant Team clearly noted out the service strengths to reinforce as well as the problematic pitfalls to remedy. It is hoped that the sector and the concerned policy makers will work together to make the necessary changes and to devise the best strategies for service improvement. We propose to **have a clear and time-defined follow-up schedule, i.e. response to all recommendations that are addressed in the Report by the HKU Consultant team within 1 year. All operators of IFSC should be involved in the coming discussion and follow-up work through the “Task Group of Implementation of IFSC” led by SWD. We also suggest the membership of such task group should be at least included District Social Welfare Officers and 2 representatives (at management level) of each NGOs operators**

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Contacted Person:

PANG Shuk Ling (Ms)

Programme Director (Family & Community)

Tel: 23180028

Fax: 27536627