

**For discussion on
12 March 2012**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

**Work Progress of the Family Council – Measures in Support of the Policy
Directions Arising from Findings of the Four Thematic Studies on Youth
Drug Abuse, Youth Prostitution, Child Neglect and Elderly Neglect**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the findings of the four research studies, the new policy directions arising from the findings, and the measures to support the new policy directions.

Background

2. The 2009-10 Policy Address pointed out that many social problems including juvenile drug abuse and prostitution as well as the neglect of elderly people and children could be traced back to the family. To effectively tackle these problems from a family perspective, the Family Council was tasked to conduct focused discussions and research in these aspects, and propose new policy options to alleviate such problems from the family perspective. The Family Council had commissioned the Central Policy Unit (CPU) to co-ordinate work in these areas. Local universities were invited by the CPU to undertake researches focusing on whether and how such social problems were related to families, and make an attempt to come up with solutions.

Findings of Research Studies

3. The four research studies have identified that many of the causes of the four social problems could be traced back to the family -

- (a) ***Youth drug abuse***: Most of the factors causing the problem are related to unstable family background, such as dysfunctional

families due to unstable family conditions (e.g. poor marital relationships, family crisis, divorce of parents, single-parent families); family members working long hours or earning low wages (e.g. insufficient time to spend with the family, less time to care for their teenage children or poor parent-child relationships); and poor/ineffective communication between young people and their families (e.g. inadequate/poor parenting and bad parent-child relationship);

- (b) **Youth prostitution:** Parents' improper behaviour (e.g. promiscuous parent); bad examples (e.g. parents working in vice establishments); domestic violence (parents abusing their children) and frequent inter-generational conflicts are contributing factors to higher risk of problems;
- (c) **Child neglect:** Parents with poor parenting knowledge/competency or incorrect parenting concepts would have a greater tendency to neglect their children. Single-parent families, especially deprived families, are particularly prone to child neglect; and
- (d) **Elderly neglect:** For families with frigid husband-wife relationship and alienating parent-child relationships, their already weak family bondage would be prone to be undermined by factors such as death of spouse, growing up of children and their forming of new families. The elderly would easily have nobody to rely on and have to live their final years in neglect. Cross-boundary marriages between ageing husbands and young wives whose relationships are not based on love but on practical interests are also at high risks. Their age differences are the crucial factors to a power transfer (in the family) in future, which would result in a huge power imbalance between the strong and the weak in the family relationship. The weaker side, such as an ill-stricken elderly, could easily become the subject of neglect.

4. On a related note, the four research studies have proposed a number of family-focused strategies and measures (**Annex A**) which were deliberated

by the Family Council at its meeting on 4 July 2011. The Family Council noted that it was difficult to generalize the causes of these social problems as they were complicated, multi-layered and multi-faceted. This notwithstanding, the research studies had a common finding that many of the causes of the social problems could be traced back to the family. The research studies confirmed the need for a “family-based” strategy in order to tackle such problems effectively. In short, not only do we need to target relevant individuals or groups, but we also need to focus on the family. Moreover, while the support of the neighbourhood and local community should be enlisted, we should strive to forge cross-departmental and multi-sectoral collaboration, bringing together input from different professions.

New Policy Directions

5. To sufficiently and effectively prevent relevant social problems, families and various sectors in the community must work hand in hand. Towards this end, the Family Council recommends three new policy directions as highlighted below -

- (a) **Family Engagement:** “Family-focused”, with emphasis on formulation of project/activity objectives, decisions and expectation-oriented strategy through a mutual communication and partnership mode;
- (b) **Prevention:** Early identification in different areas of families with greater needs; and
- (c) **Community-based Family Support:** Community resources (including retirees, religious bodies and supportive neighbours) should be better utilized.

6. The abovementioned new policy directions have featured in the Policy Agenda of the 2011-12 Policy Address.

Measures in Support of New Policy Directions

7. At its meeting on 9 February 2012, the Family Council further deliberated the measures in support of the new policy directions. They are set out at **Annex B**. The Family Council considered that government policy initiatives, services and programmes should continue to take into account the interests and well-being of families. To enable bureaux/departments to have good family awareness and sensitivity in balancing such considerations against other policy objectives and considerations, they would continue to be reminded regularly to include family perspectives as a factor in policy formulation. The Family Council also considered that a cross-sectoral approach in strengthening families was conducive to devising family-focused strategies and measures to tackle the social problems and explore how to take them forward.

Advice Sought

8. Members are invited to note the new policy directions as well as the measures in support of the policy directions to combat the social problems.

Home Affairs Bureau
March 2012

**Family-focused Strategies and Measures
Proposed by the Four Research Studies**

A. Strategies

- (a) ***Youth drug abuse***: It is essential to nurture positive family relationship, identify high-risk families and provide more training, seminars and workshops for them. Equally important is to arrange professionals to visit neighbourhoods to promote family education and to impart the knowledge and skills to deal with related problem.
- (b) ***Youth prostitution***: Strengthening effective parenting and parent-child relationship; providing counseling on family reunion and remarriage for broken families; providing counseling for youths from problem families for joint counseling or services for parents and children together; and providing parent education for parents in need regarding crisis intervention; as well as providing guidance to children on proper use of the Internet are important strategies.
- (c) ***Child neglect***: Family-focused strategies include providing support and assistance for families with potential child neglect problems according to the scale of the problems and the “threshold” for intervention in order to enhance the effectiveness of parenting and prevent child neglect.
- (d) ***Elderly neglect***: It is important to implement preventive and intervening measures on three levels, including strengthening family, community and school education in relation to respect and care for the elderly; promotion of filial piety; encouraging frequent interaction and expression of love among family members.

B. Measures

(a) Family Engagement

With reference to the success of the overseas experience and the situation of Hong Kong, the Government is invited to consider offering tangible incentives to families, such as concessionary rates to families for public recreational and cultural venues and facilities to encourage family engagement. Besides, the Government could also make more proactive efforts to encourage the commercial sector to offer similar incentives to families. Other viable options include offering intangible incentives to families, such as providing support to families in need through mentoring¹.

(b) Prevention

“Early identification and timely intervention” could help mitigate conflicts between family members before the problems become complicated or intensified to the extent that they could not be solved. Towards this end, the Government is invited to consider the following measures -

(i) *Development of assessment and management tools for family risks:*

Assessment tools for family functioning have been developed in other countries. Nonetheless, most of the family assessment tools adopted in the Chinese societies target at specific age groups (e.g. young people) only. Apparently, evidence-based assessment tools for comprehensive assessment of the risks in various stages of the

¹ Mentoring is becoming increasingly important to be adopted in schools, universities, business companies and enterprises to help develop the social capital since the late 1990s in Hong Kong. It generally aims to provide a platform for a more experienced/knowledgeable person (as mentor) to work in partnership with a less experienced/knowledgeable person (mentee) through various activities, training or volunteer services. Mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient (i.e. mentee) as relevant to work, career, or professional development. Studies conducted in Hong Kong in the mid-2000s have confirmed the positive impact of mentoring by enhancing the intergenerational relationships at the familial or societal level, and tackled with the problems of at-risk groups in the community. Putting it into a local context, the aims of mentoring are to build support networks. For example, community resources, such as owners’ committees and resident organisations, could be served as the platform for recruiting mentors and mentees. The ultimate goal is to promote the concepts of mutual support and help create a harmonious society.

family life course and practical guides for tackling various family problems for use by parents and related professionals are not available in Hong Kong. As such, there is a need to develop such tools and establish a certification framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the “family-risks assessment tools and practical guides” in the long run.

- (ii) ***Strengthening family education:*** Family education should continue to be widely promoted for different stages of the family life cycle (including sex education, dating education, pre-marriage education, parental education and cross-generational family education), with particular focus on families with potential risks (e.g. low income, single-parent, divorce-parent and cross-border families); adolescents with poor academic performance and low self-esteem; and irresponsible parents and parents with deviant behaviour (e.g. drug abusers and crime offenders). To take this forward, the Government is invited to take stock of the current state of family education programmes/provisions in Hong Kong and consider accreditation of family education courses for quality assurance purpose as necessary.

- (iii) ***Providing more professional training and counseling:*** In view of the fact that today’s social problems are more complicated and challenging than those in the past, more professional expertise and skills are needed to tackle them. As such, it is recommended that more professional training and counseling courses should be provided to encourage the participation of parents, carers, social welfare institutions and specialized service organizations in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the services through training and exchanges.

(c) Community-based Family Support

Community resources should be better utilised. Resources available include retirees, religious bodies and supportive neighbours. The Government is invited to consider the following measures -

- (i) ***Building neighbourhood and friendship networks for the community***: The Government may consider exploring ways to increase neighbourhood support in combating and identifying social problems in the community by partnering with the 18 District Councils for “Neighbourhood Watcher Programme”². On a related note, the Government should proactively foster informal support for parents with problems and difficulties in child care at the community level. Another possible measure is to encourage families to form self-support groups for mutual assistance.
- (ii) ***Encouraging cross-sector collaboration***: Stand-alone efforts of a single party - families, schools, social workers, police, counselors or the Government, cannot effectively tackle the social problems. The Government should promote collaboration amongst various sectors in the community and a culture of loving society in order to provide concerted support for the disadvantaged groups and the high risk/problem families.
- (iii) ***Continuing to foster and strengthen family core values***: The Government should continue to work closely with different sectors, including families, schools, non-governmental organizations, and the business sector to promote the importance of individuals’ responsibilities to take care of their family members.

² “Neighbourhood Watcher Programme” (the Programme) is often used in the US and UK to combat crimes and related social problems. They consider a good neighbour could be one of the most effective crime prevention tools. The Programme will recruit citizens as “neighbour watchers”. After training, they help recognize and report suspicious activities in their neighbourhood. In other words, it serves as an informal community-based support which help identify crimes or related social problems by using community resources. Putting in into a local context, the aims of the Programme are to build neighbourhood and friendship support networks. For example, each District Council could help mobilize their community resources, such as owners’ committees and residents’ organisations. They will serve as the platform and recruit volunteers and train them as neighbourhood watchers who will provide care and support for those in need or high risk groups in the neighbourhood. The ultimate goal is to promote the concepts of mutual support and help create a harmonious society.

Measures in Support of the New Policy Directions

Family Engagement

Proposals made by the Four Research Studies	Measures implemented / to be implemented by Bureaux/Departments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government is invited to consider offering tangible incentives to families, such as concessionary rates to families for public recreational and cultural venues and facilities to encourage family engagement. Besides, the Government could also make more proactive efforts to encourage the commercial sector to offer similar incentives to families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) offers museum family pass as well as organizes a wide range of thematic exhibitions and family-based extension/educational activities in public museums. The Family Council will explore the possibility of networking with various chambers of commerce and related retail associations for offering concessionary incentives to families, such as family sales day by the retail industry, and family discount by the travel industry, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government may consider providing support to families in need through mentoring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Home Affairs Bureau (HAB), with the assistance of the Home Affairs Department (HAD), will consider exploring

Proposals made by the Four Research Studies	Measures implemented / to be implemented by Bureaux/Departments
	ways to incorporate the proposed mentorship programmes in the community by partnering with the 18 District Councils for “Neighbourhood Watcher Programme” proposed by the research team.
	<p>Other measures</p> <p>HAB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Youth Programme Co-ordinating Committee under the Commission on Youth attaches great importance to beating youth drug abuse problem and according priorities to support district-based beat drug related activities. Youth participants are encouraged to join individual activities with their family members. • Starting from 2010/11, HAB grants thematic funds to subvented youth organisations for “Happy Family” projects. Youth members and their families are encouraged to participate in activities organised by the youth groups.

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	<p>Through various programmes, the bond of youth members and their families could be strengthened.</p> <p>LCSD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each year, LCSD organises some 36 900 recreation and sports activities including training courses, recreation activities and competitions for participation by members of the public. While most of these programmes are open to all, about 650 of them (for a total of 200 000 participants) such as sports fun days and carnivals, dance nights, camping and excursions are particularly suitable for family participation. • To further encourage family participation in recreation and sports activities, LCSD has also introduced a series of Parent-Child Sports Programmes including badminton training course / fun day, ultimate fun day and social dance training course. In 2011/2012, LCSD will organise 156 parent-child programmes to cater for over 7,000 family

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	<p>members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hong Kong Public Libraries (HKPL) have been organizing a variety of extension activities targeting families, such as workshops, talks and thematic programmes for the promotion of family reading on an ongoing basis. <p>Social Welfare Department (SWD)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs), Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) and Psychiatric Medical Social Services Units (Psy MSSUs) over the territory have been implementing the Family Support Programme (FSP). FSP aims to connect needy families which are unable/unwilling to seek help from the suitable family support services so as to prevent their family problems from deteriorating. Under FSP, social workers and volunteers together form a community network to proactively reach out to vulnerable families through various means such as telephone contacts and home visits, etc.

Proposals made by the Four Research Studies	Measures implemented / to be implemented by Bureaux/Departments
	Volunteers recruited under FSP include those who have gone through similar problems or crises before.

Prevention

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government should develop assessment and management tools for family risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SWD: Three assessment tools for spouse battering or child abuse have been developed and validated in a consultancy study conducted in 2005. Professionals may make reference to the assessment tools developed in 2005 for identifying at-risk families.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government should continue to strengthen family education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bureaux/Departments (B/Ds) are actively strengthening family education. Their efforts are set out below - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health (DH): The parenting programme is one of the core service components of the Integrated Child Health and Development Programme and aims to provide parents-to-be and parents with anticipatory guidance on child care, child development and parenting issues. Education Bureau (EDB): Family education is provided through a holistic school curriculum and “Family Life”

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	<p>will be included as a core module in the new subject “Life and Society” to be launched at junior secondary level from the 2012/13 school year onward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - LCSD: The HKPL has been organizing on a continuing basis a variety of extension activities to promote the building of harmonious family, such as talks on parenting and parent-child reading programmes. - The Family Council has engaged the Hong Kong Polytechnic University to conduct a consultancy study on family education in Hong Kong. The objective is to take stock of the existing landscape on the provision of family education and to recommend possible areas for improvement. The Family Council will be briefed on the findings in its June meeting and consider the way forward.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More professional training and counseling should be provided to encourage the participation of parents, carers, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narcotics Division/Security Bureau (ND/SB): “Train-the-trainer” sessions have been organized to enhance

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social welfare institutions and specialized service organizations in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of the services through training and exchanges.	the capabilities of relevant stakeholders to organize anti-drug parent education within their networks.
	<p>Other measures</p> <p>DH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) provide a comprehensive range of health promotion and disease prevention services for children from birth to five years of age through the Integrated Child Health and Development Programme. <p>EDB</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family education is provided through a holistic school curriculum. Promotion of knowledge, skills and values conducive to family education covering the elements of sex education, drug education and filial piety, such as

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	<p>roles and responsibilities of family members, preparation for marriage and maintenance of harmonious family relationships, etc. are emphasized in various Key Learning Areas/Subjects as well as learning experiences outside classroom. To support the implementation of family education in schools, learning and teaching materials are produced for teachers' reference and adoption.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other Learning Experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools are advised and encouraged to organise a wide range of learning activities for the cultivation of family values. It may take the form of, for example, organizing the students to provide community services for different social groups and organisations or family sports day. These activities help students better understand the needs of other family members and problems faced by some families in Hong Kong. Students will also have opportunities to reflect on ways to cope with those problems and to lead a healthy family

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	<p>life as well as to practise communicative skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of Home-School Co-operation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through the platforms of the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), parent activities and seminars are organized for promoting home-school cooperation. The PTAs act as a bridge between parents and teachers to foster communication, understanding and mutual support. Publications and resources are provided to equip parents with knowledge in helping their children’s personal growth and understanding the educational development. Publicity programmes, sharing of good practices, workshops and seminars for parents are also conducted with focus on home-school co-operation, students’ learning and personal growth. • Anti-drug Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To enhance parents’ knowledge on anti-drug education and skills to identify high risk children, EDB assisted ND/SB to produce and deliver the leaflet “無毒家教有

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	<p>妙法” to all parents through schools in 2009. The leaflet was updated and redistributed to parents in April 2011.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To strengthen relation with parents and to foster an environment conducive to the healthy development of students, EDB issued a circular in 2010 encouraging schools to formulate a school-based “Healthy School Policy” starting from the 2010/2011 school year. - To equip parents with the knowledge, skills and attitude in handling young drug abusers, EDB is organizing anti-drug education activities for parents with Federations of Parent-Teacher Associations. <p>SWD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFSCs provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial services to address the needs of different individuals and families. They have adopted various measures to prevent family problems and promote parent-child and family relationship, such as organising

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	<p>groups and programmes. They have also put in place a mechanism to facilitate timely assessment of the family problems of needy families for timely follow-up.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are 41 District Elderly Community Centres and 118 Neighbourhood Elderly Centres in Hong Kong providing an array of community support and care services to elders and their carers. They also have outreaching teams to identify and support singleton and hidden elders. • To tackle elder abuse, the Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) and the Elderly Commission (EC) jointly launched a 2-year pilot Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project (NAAP) in 2009, with “Caring for Elders” as the theme. The purpose is to promote respect for elders and help identify abuse cases.

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	<p>ND/SB : Anti-drug Measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An anti-drug resource kit has been produced to provide useful reference materials for stakeholders, such as NGOs, schools and PTAs, to plan and organize anti-drug activities targeting parents and their family members. • Telephone support service manned by social worker provides real-time support to parents. Newsletters on anti-drug parent education and district-based anti-drug seminars for parents have been organized to enhance parents' general knowledge of drugs, communication skills with children, and skills to handle children with drug abuse problem. • Through the Beat Drugs Fund, different sectors are encouraged to put forward initiatives to provide support to families, and organize activities promoting harmonious family relations as a means to prevent drug abuse among young people.

Community-based Family Support

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnering with the 18 District Councils for “Neighbourhood Watcher Programme” with a view to building neighborhood and friendship networks for the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HAB, with the assistance of HAD, will consider the proposal of exploring ways to increase neighbourhood support in combating and identifying social problems in the community by partnering with the 18 District Councils for “Neighbourhood Watcher Programme” proposed by the research team.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government should proactively foster informal support for parents with problems and difficulties in child care at the community level. Another possible measure is to encourage families to form self-support groups for mutual assistance. 	<p>SWD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) was introduced in 2008-09 to provide more flexible forms of child care service and promote mutual help at the neighbourhood level. The NSCCP was regularized and extended to 18 districts in October 2011. IFSCs, FCPSUs and Psy MSSUs over the territory have been implementing the FSP. FSP aims to connect needy families who are unable/ unwilling to seek help to the suitable family support services so as to prevent their family

Proposals made by the Four Research Studies	Measures implemented / to be implemented by Bureaux/Departments
	<p>problems from deteriorating. Under FSP, social workers and volunteers together form a community network to proactively reach out to vulnerable families through various means such as telephone contacts and home visits, etc. Volunteers recruited under FSP include those who have gone through similar problems or crises before.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government should encourage cross-sector collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LWB: The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund promotes community participation and cross-sectoral projects to foster social capital development. It encourages mutual support in the neighbourhood as well as community building. Many of the funded projects are geared toward the enhancement of children and family networks, youth development, social integration, cross generation integration, and elderly empowerment. SWD: IFSCs adopt various community-based support strategies to strengthen family functioning including collaboration with different government departments, welfare service units and local stakeholders to provide

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	services for individuals and families in need.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government should continue to foster and strengthen family core values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an ongoing effort of Family Council as well as different B/Ds to foster and strengthen family core values. For example, SWD launches publicity campaign on “Strengthening Families and Combating Violence” every year, under which territory-wide and district-based publicity and education programmes are organized to enhance public awareness of the importance of family solidarity and prevention of domestic violence. Positive messages reminding parents of the needs of children and family core values are included in the publicity programmes. Besides, the Family Council has also launched the “Happy Family Campaign” and the “Happy Family Info Hub” (an online platform allowing easy access to a wide range of family-related information and facilitating sharing of family-related issues on the Internet) to promote family core values on an ongoing basis.

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	<p>Other measures</p> <p>LCSD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The HKPL has been collaborating with related Government departments and NGOs for organizing thematic workshops and talks and providing venues to support exhibitions on family related topics. <p>DH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Comprehensive Child Development Service, a joint initiative of the LWB, EDB, DH, Hospital Authority and SWD, has been implemented in phases since July 2005. • Under this programme, MCHCs serve as a platform for delivering coordinated services among health, education and social services provided by Obstetrics, Psychiatry and Paediatrics Departments of hospitals; Integrated Family Service Centres / Integrated Service Centres and pre-primary institutions. The aim is to ensure early identification of children and their families with special

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	<p>needs so that appropriate services can be made available to them in a timely manner.</p> <p>SWD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various child care services including child care centres, occasional child care service (OCCS) and extended hours service, are in place to support families who cannot temporarily take care of their young children because of work or other reasons. SWD has also subsidized operators of OCCS to provide family support activities to enhance parents / carers' awareness and understanding of safe and proper care for children. • To promote family responsibility at the community level, LWB and EC jointly launched a new phase of the NAAP in July 2011, which subscribes to the Family Council's theme of "sharing family responsibilities in love and filial piety". • The Opportunities for the Elderly Project provides subsidies to community organisations to plan and implement

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	innovative programmes and activities for promoting a sense of worthiness among elders and intergenerational interactions.