

For discussion on
9 November 2015

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Pilot Scheme on Peer Supporters for Ex-mentally Ill Patients

Purpose

This paper sets out the proposal for the Pilot Scheme on Peer Supporters for Ex-mentally Ill Patients (Pilot Scheme).

Background

2. The Government attaches importance to the community rehabilitation need of ex-mentally ill persons, and their families and carers. The Social Welfare Department (SWD), in 2010, reorganised the community mental health support services, and set up 24 Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs) across the territory to provide one-stop, district-based community support services ranging from prevention to risk management for ex-mentally ill persons to assistance to persons with suspected mental health problems, their families/carers and residents living in the district. The 24 ICCMWs are operated by 11 non-governmental organisations (NGOs)¹.

Proposed Pilot Scheme

3. The Chief Executive announced in the 2015 Policy Address that a pilot project would be implemented under the Lotteries Fund for trained ex-mentally ill persons to serve as peer supporters to provide encouragement for others in rehabilitation through sharing their recovery experience.

4. The feedback to the Pilot Scheme as put forward by the Government from the community, especially from the social welfare organisations, has been

¹ The 11 NGOs are namely Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service, Caritas-Hong Kong, Christian Family Service Centre, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council Limited, The Mental Health Association of Hong Kong, New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association, Richmond Fellowship of Hong Kong, The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong, Fu Hong Society, Stewards and Tung Wah Group of Hospitals.

generally positive. It is generally considered that peer supporters can learn how to help and communicate with their peers through training, and display their abilities and boost their self-confidence in the process of being a peer support. This would speed up their own recovery and help them to join or rejoin the open employment market. On the other hand, for ex-mentally ill patients receiving peer support service, they can obtain support and encouragement from peer supporters who have had similar experience. This would help them to tackle various challenges in their rehabilitation process. Furthermore, through the Pilot Scheme, the public's positive understanding and acceptance towards ex-mentally ill patients would be enhanced.

5. After consulting the stakeholders (particularly the 11 subvented NGOs operating ICCMWs), we propose that the key features of the Pilot Scheme should be as follows:

(a) Objectives of the Pilot Scheme

6. The Pilot Scheme aims at:

- (a) training suitable ex-mentally ill persons to serve as peer supporters with a view to speeding up their own recovery, and helping other ex-mentally ill persons in need;
- (b) providing support for other persons recovering from mental illness by peer supporters; and
- (c) enhancing public acceptance of ex-mentally ill persons.

(b) Operators of the Pilot Scheme

7. We will invite the 11 subvented NGOs operating ICCMWs to participate in the operation of the Pilot Scheme.

(c) Duties of Operators

8. We will provide operators will two to six full-time peer supporter positions, depending on the service scale of the ICCMWs they operate. NGOs may, based on actual operational situation (e.g. certain peer supporter is unable to take up the job on a full-time basis), engage peer supporters on part-time or full-time basis not exceeding the equivalent number of full-time positions allocated. Peer supporters will become employees of the operators. NGOs must ensure that the employment conditions are in compliance with the Employment Ordinance.

9. NGOs must arrange and / or ensure peer supporters receive suitable training, which seeks to equip them with basic knowledge and skills for carrying out their duties (including the role and responsibilities of peer supporters, establishing good communication skills and trust relationship, the skills in sharing personal recovery experience and leading groups and activities, and the use of community resources, etc) and boost their confidence.

10. Operators must provide peer supporters under guidance of professional staff in carrying out their duties. Peer supporters may also be deployed by NGOs to other psychiatric service units (e.g. half-way houses) where necessary to provide support for those ex-mentally ill persons in need.

11. Apart from supporting other ex-mentally ill patients, the Pilot Scheme seeks to assist peer supporters in pursuing open employment (including jobs in NGOs or the open employment market). Operators should provide peer supporters with employment counselling and assistance, including training on interview skills, establishing positive work habit and working with colleagues, etc. Operators should also provide substantive support to assist peer supporters to take up jobs in the open market.

(d) Duties of Peer Supporters

12. Peer supporters, after receiving training and under the guidance of professional staff, will provide emotional and recovery support for ex-mentally ill persons in need, including offering them counselling service over the phone.

13. Apart from the above, peer supporters will assist the professional staff of NGOs in conducting outreaching or caring visits, and organising group activities and education programmes on mental health to enhance public understanding and acceptance of ex-mentally ill persons in a positive way.

(e) Timetable and Implementation Arrangement

14. The two-year Pilot Scheme will be funded by the Lotteries Fund. Depending on the vetting of the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee, the required funding is expected to be in the region of \$8.8 million, broken down by individual items as follows:

Item	Amount (\$)
Salary and Mandatory Provident Fund for Peer Supporters	7,850,000
Training Expenses	100,000
Insurance and Administration Costs	460,000
Other Charges	390,000
Total	8,800,000

(f) Evaluation and Review of the Pilot Scheme

15. We hope that operators can launch the Pilot Scheme in early 2016. An evaluation on the effectiveness of the Pilot Scheme will be conducted during the pilot period, so as to facilitate the Government to consider whether to regularise the Pilot Scheme in future and the model to be adopted in the regularisation.

Advice Sought

16. Members are invited to comment on the proposal for the Pilot Scheme.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
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