

**For discussion
on 10 July 2017**

**Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services
Residential Child Care Services**

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the current position of residential child care services and their development in recent years.

Service Objectives

2. To support children who cannot be taken care of in a suitable manner by their families temporarily for various reasons or young persons with behavioural and / or emotional problems under the age of 21, the Government has been subsidising non-governmental organisations to provide various types of 24-hour residential care services to facilitate their growth and development, having regard to their physical, social, emotional and intellectual needs. The service users include homeless and abandoned children, as well as those with severe disabilities that warrant intensive care and continuous training.

3. Residential child care services can be categorised into institutional and non-institutional services. Institutional services include residential child care centres (also known as residential creches and residential nurseries), residential special child care centres, children's homes, children's reception centre, boys'/girls' homes and boys'/girls' hostels. Non-institutional services include foster care

service, small group homes, integrated small group homes and small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children, which provide a home-like environment for children with residential care needs. The target service users of residential child care services are detailed at Annex.

Present Service Provision

4. As at the end of May 2017, there were a total of 3 826 residential child care places, including 110 places in residential special child care centres, 1 708 places in residential homes for children, 874 places in small group homes, 64 places in small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children and integrated small group homes, as well as 1 070 foster care places.

5. The various types of residential child care places as mentioned above must be offered on referral by social workers after confirming service needs or pursuant to court decisions. Having regard to the circumstances of individual cases and with emphasis on the children's long-term well-being, social workers will work out appropriate care arrangements and permanency plans for the children, including arranging for suitable types of residential care, determining the duration of stay, as well as formulating other long-term arrangements (e.g. adoption), etc. Caseworkers will follow up on the conditions of the children concerned on a regular basis and assess their welfare needs, so as to refine or adjust their existing residential care arrangements. Caseworkers will strive to facilitate the reunion of the children with their families or other relatives if this is practicable and in the best interests of the children concerned.

6. When children are receiving residential care services, caseworkers will regularly follow up on their conditions and conduct case review meetings with them, their families and the social workers of the relevant residential care service units to assess and discuss the children's welfare needs, with a view to refining or adjusting

the permanency plans for the children’s best interests. Besides, caseworkers and the relevant supervising officers will regularly review the welfare cases of the children receiving residential care services (including the implementation schedules of permanency plans, the progress and the case handling directions), and adjust the respective permanency plans in the light of the circumstances and needs of individual cases.

7. Besides, for children with disabilities and special needs, residential special child care centres will formulate individual educational programmes, and provide them with occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy services, etc. having regard to their developmental needs. Children receiving other residential care services may also seek necessary support from pre-school day rehabilitation services if they have special needs. Children with special needs in small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children may also receive support from the special schools in which they are studying.

Waiting Time

8. In 2016-17, the average waiting time for various types of residential child care services was as follows -

Service type	Average waiting time (Month)
Residential child care centre (Aged under 6)	3.5
Children’s home	4.0
Boys’/girls’ homes and Boys’/girls’ hostels	1.1
Foster care	1.7
Small group home	4.4

Service type	Average waiting time (Month)
Residential special child care centre	14.8
Small group home for mildly mentally handicapped children/ Integrated small group home	15.6

9. For children in need of emergency residential care services, caseworkers may make reference to the vacancies of such services on the designated website. The information will be updated by the operators of emergency residential care services as soon as practicable, so that referring social workers may approach those operators with vacancies direct for enquiries and referrals. If there are vacancies in emergency residential care service units (including emergency / short term care in small group homes, foster care (emergency) and children's reception centre), referring social workers could arrange for prompt admission of the children.

10. In addition, for children with disabilities who are urgently in need of residential care, social workers may apply for priority placement for them according to their circumstances. The Central Referral System for Rehabilitation Services will exercise discretion when considering such applications. Moreover, short-term residential respite service is available for children with disabilities aged 6 to 14 in some residential care homes for persons with disabilities subvented by the Social Welfare Department (SWD), so that their families or carers may take a planned short break (e.g. travelling abroad) or attend to personal business (e.g. receiving a medical operation). This also provides these families or carers with temporary relief from their caring duties and stress. As at the end of May 2017, a total of 166 residential respite service places were available for children with disabilities aged 6 to 14.

Service Provision and Quality

11. The Government has been monitoring the demand for and utilisation of various types of residential child care services, increasing service provision as necessary, and striving to enhance the quality of residential child care services.

12. From 2012-13 to 2016-17, the SWD provided a total of 91 additional residential child care places through in-situ service expansion. In 2017-18, the SWD will provide 188 additional service places, including 30 places in small group homes, 5 places in emergency / short-term care in small group homes, 9 places in girls' homes, 84 places in girls' homes with schools for social development on site, 12 places in residential special child care centres and 48 places in small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children. In 2018-19, it is expected that there will be 46 additional service places, including 30 places in small group homes and 16 places in small group homes for mildly mentally handicapped children.

13. As for foster care service, the SWD will increase the level of various foster care allowances in 2017-18 and provide 240 additional foster care places (including 60 foster care (emergency) places) by phases. The total number of foster care places will be increased from 1 070 at present to 1 310, of which the number of foster care (emergency) places will be increased from 95 at present to 155. To encourage foster families to take care of young children, the SWD will introduce an extra incentive payment for foster parents taking care of children under the age of 3. In April 2017, the SWD launched a series of Television and Radio Announcements in the Public Interests and poster about foster care service, so as to enhance public awareness of the service and to encourage and recruit more suitable persons to take part in foster care service by becoming foster families.

14. Regarding service enhancement, given the increasing complexity of the emotional and behavioural problems experienced by children and young persons receiving residential care services in recent years and the considerable number of

children with special needs among them, the Government provided additional funding in 2013-14 to strengthen support for professional staff of residential care homes by enhancing the manpower of social workers and introducing clinical psychological service, benefiting a total of 131 residential child care services units. The SWD also allocated additional resources in 2014-15 to strengthen supervisory and paramedical support, including the enhancement of supervisory support for small group homes and emergency / short-term care in small group homes, boys'/girls' hostels and residential special child care centres, as well as the regularisation of the additional funding calculated on the basis of two additional points above the mid-point salaries for supporting staff (e.g. nurses in residential child care centres and children's reception centre, nurses and paramedical staff in residential special child care centres, and clinical psychologists in residential homes for children, etc.). Besides, in 2017-18, the SWD will provide additional recurrent funding to cover the electricity charges of air-conditioning in all subsidised residential child care service units, with a view to providing better care for service users and improving their quality of life. The SWD will continue to discuss with the sector how to improve the environment of residential child care services units in order to meet the present daily needs of children and young persons.

15. In the meantime, the Education Bureau will implement the policy of Free Quality Kindergarten Education starting from the 2017/18 school year. The child care sector is very concerned about the possible impact of the policy on the operation of day / residential child care service units and pre-school rehabilitation service units. To address the recruitment and staff turnover issues, the Chief Executive announced in the 2017 Policy Address that the SWD would provide additional resources in 2017-18 for the service units concerned (including residential child care centres and residential special child care centres) to enhance the remuneration for qualified child care staff for retention and recruitment of such staff.

Way Forward

16. The Government will closely monitor the demand for and utilisation of various types of residential child care services, discuss with the sector to explore feasible measures for service enhancement, as well as increase service provision through re-engineering or allocation of additional resources when necessary.

Advice Sought

17. Members are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau

Social Welfare Department

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Age of Target Service Users of Residential Child Care Services

Service type	Age of target service users
Residential child care centre (also known as residential creche)	0 - under 3
Residential child care centre (also known as residential nursery)	3 - under 6
Children's home	6 - 21
Children's reception centre (Note 1)	0 - 18
Boys' /Girls' homes (Note 2)	7 - 21
Boys'/Girls' hostels (Note 2)	14 - 21
Foster care & Foster care (emergency) (Note 1)	0 - 18
Small group home & Emergency / short-term care in small group home (Note 1)	4 - 18
Residential special child care centre	2 - 6 (Some centres admit children aged under 2)
Small group home for mildly mentally handicapped children / Integrated small group home	6 - 18

Note 1: For children whose families are in emergency situations.

Note 2: For young persons, in school or at work, with behavioural or emotional problems.