

**For discussion on
28 September 2017**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Support Services for Families with Single Parent

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the support services provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for or capable of benefiting families with single parent.

Family Service

2. The Government is concerned about the service needs of families with single parent and, through strategies of early identification and intervention, provides timely support to enhance their positive functioning. The 65 Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) and the two Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) operated by the SWD or subvented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) provide a spectrum of preventive, supportive and remedial welfare services for individuals and families in need. Services include family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry services, volunteer training, outreaching service, groups and programmes, intensive counselling, financial assistance and referral services, etc. Social workers of IFSCs/ISCs, equipped with related experience and skills, thoroughly assess and take care of the welfare needs of those in need and provide them with appropriate services.

3. IFSCs and ISCs provide welfare services for those living in their respective service boundaries to facilitate persons seeking help to identify and use the services. To address the needs of single parents and their families, IFSCs/ISCs organise groups and programmes specially designed for them (such as mutual help groups, talks, etc.). Social workers of IFSCs/ISCs conduct comprehensive assessment on the needs of the service users and, through such work strategies as early identification and intervention, service integration as well as partnership with related service stakeholders, offer appropriate services (including those on effective parenting and positive attitude towards life challenges).

Hard-to-reach families with single parent in need

4. The SWD has, since 2007, implemented the “Family Support Programme” through IFSCs, ISCs, Family and Child Protective Services Units and Medical Social Services Units in the psychiatric setting to proactively contact and provide services for hard-to-reach individuals or families in need, including those prone to domestic violence, mental illness and the problem of social isolation but not willing to seek help, through more intensive support and outreaching services. Apart from proactive telephone calls, home visits and other outreaching services, IFSCs/ISCs also recruit and train ex-service users who have experienced similar problems or crises to become volunteers of the “Family Support Programme” to contact those families with a view to building up a caring and supportive community network.

Social Security

5. The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme provides a safety net for persons who cannot support themselves financially owing to old age, illness, disability, single parenthood, unemployment, low earnings, etc. Recipients of different categories receive different amounts of assistance to meet their basic needs. Under the CSSA Scheme, in addition to the standard rates and related special grants (e.g. rent allowance and school grants for children), single parent supplement is also payable to eligible single parent families to address the special difficulties faced with single parents in taking care of a family.

Day Child Care Services

6. The SWD has all along been providing subsidies for NGOs to run a variety of child care services for children aged below six to support parents (including single parents), who are unable to take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons. At present, there are about 30 700 child care centre (CCC) places serving children aged below three in the territory. Among them, about 7 000 places are provided by aided standalone CCCs and aided CCCs attached to kindergartens. Some of the above aided CCCs provide 434 places of occasional child care service and 2 254 places of extended hours service (EHS) for children aged below six so as to support parents who cannot take care of their young children due to sudden engagements or long

working hours. Mutual help child care centres also provide 275 child care places for children aged below six. Besides, the Government has waived or reduced the fees of day child care services for needy families.

7. To further address the service demand, the SWD has implemented the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project across 18 districts in the territory to provide flexible day child care services for children aged below nine at neighbourhood level and to foster mutual help and care in the community. The Project includes home-based child care service and centre-based care group, and provides no less than 954 places in total. The service operators have the flexibility to increase the places to meet the demand in the respective districts, for which additional funding will be provided.

8. To support women (including single mothers) in fulfilling work and family commitments, the SWD has taken various measures since 2015-16 to enhance child care services, which include increasing the number of EHS places and aided standalone CCC places, and commissioning the “Consultancy Study on the Long-term Development of Child Care Services” to advise on the long-term development of child care services.

After School Care Programme

9. The After School Care Programme (ASCP), operated by NGOs on a self-financing and fee-charging basis, offers appropriate care services for children aged six to 12 whose parents are unable to care for them during after-school hours due to work or other reasons. At present, there are a total of 158 ASCP centres operated by NGOs throughout the territory, providing about 5 600 ASCP places. Since 2005, the SWD has, through the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme for ASCP, provided fee waiver and fee reduction for children using the ASCP service. This enables parents of low-income families to work or receive vocational training so as to strengthen their self-reliance capabilities. At present, the SWD provides more than 1 800 full fee-waiving quotas for needy families. Eligible needy families, including single parent families, may directly approach the organisations operating the ASCP to apply for full fee waiver or half fee reduction.

10. To further support parents with longer or unstable working hours or those who need to work at weekends, the SWD has implemented the Enhanced ASCP since December 2014 with some of the organisations

operating the ASCP extending the service hours on weekday evenings, Saturdays, Sundays and school holidays. At present, there are 34 ASCP centres operating the Enhanced ASCP, providing more than 450 additional full fee-waiving quotas for needy families.

11. Since some low-income families may not have benefited from the existing Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme for ASCP, the Government will roll out a “Pilot Scheme on Relaxing the Household Income Limit of the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme under the After School Care Programme for Low-income Families and Increasing Fee-waiving Subsidy Places” in October 2017 to strengthen the support for needy families (including single parent families) with service needs in taking care of their children. The Pilot Scheme will last for three years and the number of full fee-waiving quotas will be increased by 2 000 in total. With the funding provision of \$52 million, the Pilot Scheme is expected to benefit about 3 000 children. The SWD will consider seeking additional funding to meet the actual service demand if necessary.

Conclusion

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

Social Welfare Department
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