

**For discussion on
8 June 2020**

**Legislative Council
Joint Meeting of Panel on Welfare Services and Panel on Home Affairs**

**Language Support Services and Dedicated Outreach Services Teams
Provided by the Social Welfare Department for Ethnic Minorities**

Purpose

In accordance with the suggestions of some Members, the Panel on Welfare Services will discuss the captioned matter at its meeting on 8 June 2020. This paper briefs Members on the language support services and dedicated outreach service teams provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for ethnic minorities (EMs).

Language Support Services

2. The SWD has put in place various measures to ensure that EMs have equal access to social welfare services. Social security staff and social workers of the SWD and subvented non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may arrange interpretation services as appropriate through various means when providing services for EMs.

3. Currently, leaflets of most mainstream welfare services provided by the SWD are printed in Hindi, Bahasa Indonesia, Nepali, Tagalog, Thai and Urdu, in addition to Chinese and English, to facilitate different EMs' understanding of the relevant services. The SWD has provided "Information for Ethnic Minorities" on its homepage to facilitate EMs / the public / social workers to have easy access to the relevant service information in different EM languages, including advice for EMs to seek welfare assistance and telephone interpretation arrangements, etc. from SWD service units as needed. The SWD has issued "points-to-note" to the service units concerned, including information such as the cultural practices and interpretation needs of EMs and the relevant resources available with a view to enhancing frontline staff's awareness of the needs of EMs and enabling them to provide appropriate support and assistance as needed.

4. The SWD has installed web-cam facilities in its 10 service units for conducting tripartite video conferencing among service users, staff of the service units and interpreters when needed in order to help EMs overcome language barriers and access the welfare services they need. For EMs in need of interpretation service when seeking assistance from mainstream service units, telephone interpretation services may be arranged on the spot, or on-site interpretation service may be arranged by appointment as necessary through the Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents operated by the Hong Kong Christian Service with funding from the Home Affairs Department.

5. The SWD has employed 3 EM Urdu speakers as Welfare Support and Liaison Assistants for integrated family service centres in Kowloon City, Yau Tsim Mong and Yuen Long districts. They are mainly responsible for assisting in building contacts and liaison with EMs to assess their service needs, and organising activities for service users as well as setting up community networks to enhance communication with EM communities at the district level.

6. In addition, the SWD provides training programmes on an ongoing basis for frontline staff to enhance their knowledge and sensitivity on the culture, lifestyle and service needs of EMs so that comprehensive need assessment and suitable services can be provided.

Dedicated Outreach Service Teams

7. The needs of EMs for public services and support have become more diversified. Hence, SWD has commissioned three NGOs, namely Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council, Hong Kong Christian Service and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council Limited, to set up three outreaching teams with employment of EM staff on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon and the New Territories respectively to proactively reach out to EMs and connect those in need to mainstream welfare services. The outreaching teams will also provide case counselling, groups and activities for EMs, so as to meet their social and welfare needs. The main targets of the outreaching services include :

- (a) identifying needy EMs by reaching out, introducing and providing welfare service support to them (including simple interpretation and translation services and assistance in filling out the related application forms);
- (b) building EM's support network in the neighbourhood (including collaboration with other community organisations) to enhance their accessibility to mainstream welfare services and make referrals for services as appropriate;
- (c) providing casework counselling, groups and programmes for EMs to meet their social and welfare needs;
- (d) providing training for the frontline social workers of mainstream welfare services to enhance their cultural sensitivity and knowledge in the relevant community resources; and
- (e) cultivating better understanding between EMs and local residents through community programmes in pursuit of racial harmony.

8. The outreaching teams have been providing services since 1 March 2020. Their major scope of services includes :

- (a) raising EM's awareness of mainstream welfare services through outreaching service, game-stall activities and promotional programmes, and handle EM's immediate welfare needs through providing on-the-spot intervention;
- (b) providing information of the outreaching teams or mainstream services to EMs through telephone enquiry and engage them for early intervention;
- (c) conducting initial assessment on EM's needs to provide immediate / short-term intervention and long term casework support and arrange referral service for the needy cases, and conduct regular case review and maintain regular contact with the case managers of mainstream casework units;

- (d) conducting preventive / developmental / therapeutic volunteer groups tailored to EMs' welfare needs by running family life education programmes to enhance EMs' family cohesion and problem solving capacities;
- (e) establishing support network for EMs in local community and collaborating with other service units for promoting racial equality and developing a harmonious community; and
- (f) enhancing through training the knowledge and skills of the frontline workers of mainstream welfare services in providing services to EMs.

9. The SWD has provided grants through the Lotteries Fund to meet the cost of fitting-out works and procurement of furniture and equipment for each of the outreaching teams' office bases, including the provision of a vehicle for each team to reach out to areas where EMs reside for promotional activities, so as to enable EMs to have equal access to welfare services.

EM District Ambassador pilot scheme

10. The SWD will launch a three-year EM District Ambassador pilot scheme in 2020-21 to enhance EM services provided by district centres / service units in 9 districts with higher EM population, i.e. Central and Western, Islands, Wan Chai, Eastern, Yau Tsim Mong, Kowloon City, Kwai Tsing, Yuen Long and Sham Shui Po. Under the pilot scheme, additional resources will be provided to some welfare service units of the SWD and subvented NGOs, including medical social services units, integrated family service centres / integrated services centres, parent / relatives resource centres, district elderly community centres, district support centres for persons with disabilities and integrated service centres for ex-offenders and their families. A total of 46 "EM District Ambassadors" will be employed so as to enhance service provision for EM communities.

Conclusion

11. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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