

**LegCo Panel on Welfare Services**  
**Services for Street Sleepers**

On 8 November 1999, Members discussed a Panel paper entitled “Response to SOCO’s Submission on Street Sleepers”. This paper updates Members on the progress of work carried out by various government departments and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

***Territory-wide Survey on Street Sleepers in 2000***

2 To better gauge the size and profile of street sleepers, Social Welfare Department (SWD) conducted a territory-wide survey of street sleepers (the survey) in January 2000. In the light of advice from Members and making reference to the remarks in SOCO’s survey report, SWD revised the survey questionnaire. This ensured the capture of more in-depth information, particularly in regard to street sleepers’ educational levels, reasons for street sleeping, their service needs and reasons for declining welfare services.

3. In addition to surveying street sleepers, SWD also made use of the opportunity to visit the street sleepers identified. The survey/visit was carried out from late evening on 14 January to early morning on 15 January. SWD mobilized 378 staff to conduct the survey which covered the whole territory and solicited the assistance of 80 volunteers to pay visits at the same time. Through these outreach efforts, we aim to convey our concern to street sleepers and motivate them to receive our services, as well as strengthen community education on the problem of street sleepers in the locality.

4. Data verification and analysis will take some time. Hence the findings below are preliminary and subject to revision. The major initial findings are :

**Number of street sleepers**

- (a) 819 street sleepers were identified in the survey. This represents an increase of 13% over the number identified in the 1998 Survey (726). Among those registered, 9 were not of Chinese nationality. 2 of them were willing to receive service and were being followed up by SWD family services centre and the Society for the Rehabilitation of

Offenders, Hong Kong.

Age

- (a) Among the 639 street sleepers who agreed to reveal their age, 61% (388) were over 50; and 12% (75) were between 20 and 39. The findings are similar to the 1998 survey results of 61% and 11% respectively. It therefore appears that the age distribution of street sleepers has remained stable over the past two years.

Location

- (b) The highest number of street sleepers was recorded in Yau Tsim Mong (30%) and Sham Shui Po (18%). This is similar to the findings in the 1998 survey.

Education level

- (c) 21 (4.3%) out of 487 street sleepers who revealed their education level indicated that they had completed secondary education. Of these 21 street sleepers, 7 were aged 20 to 39 and 15 have been street sleepers for less than 1 year.

Reasons for street sleeping

- (e) Among the 593 street sleepers who provided reasons for street sleeping, 31% (183) indicated that street sleeping was their personal choice. Reasons given include street sleeping was more convenient, to save money, and preferred street sleeping to living with others.

37% of respondents (217) claimed that they could not find accommodation with an affordable rent or had no income because they were unemployed. Compared with the 1998 survey, this is an increase of nearly 10%.

In view of this, SWD has worked closely with the Labour Department (LD) to help street sleepers reintegrate into the work force. To help them, discretionary grants for rental deposits have been offered to street sleepers with a genuine need, to assist them to move to proper accommodation or before they receive their first month's pay. Details are given in paragraphs 19 to 25.

**Improvement on the environment/facilities provided in day relief centre/temporary shelter/urban hostels for street sleepers**

5. The service objective of temporary shelters run by the Street Sleepers' Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated (SSSSTI) is to offer overnight accommodation, facilities such as dormitories, washroom, television, fans, etc. are provided to meet basic need. SSSSTI is a non-subsidized NGO. Nevertheless, SWD has been supporting SSSSTI on various fronts. For example, SWD has supported SSSSTI to obtain a Lotteries Fund grant to improve the living environment and facilities, including various furniture and equipment such as bedding, storage cupboards etc. in its shelters in Yaumatei and Wanchai in late 1999. The improvement works were completed recently.

6. SWD has also held a series of meetings with the SSSSTI management to discuss ways of further improving its Yaumatei Shelter. SSSSTI has agreed to undertake several improvement measures, including installation of a telephone for lodgers to facilitate them to find jobs, and to re-provision the female dormitory to its Shamshuipo Shelter so that the vacated space in Yaumatei Shelter can be used to increase the capacity of the male dormitory. The latter arrangement will ease congestion in the Shelter and meet the increasing demand for male shelter places. In addition, during heavy rain, stormy weather or cold spells, the shelters will open round the clock.

7. On the issue of the drug problem in the Yaumatei Shelter, SSSSTI has reached agreement with the police who will carry out periodic visits to the Shelter in order to curb any illegal drug activities. To avoid causing misunderstanding to lodgers, particularly the new ones, notices about this arrangement have been posted in the Shelter for lodgers' information.

8. With the objective of improving facilities and equipment in all street sleeper shelters, SWD has liaised with all of the operating agencies to identify areas for improvements. Thirteen service units have proposed to carry out improvement works in their hostels or shelters and their applications for Lotteries Fund are under processing.

**Drop-in centres for street sleepers**

9. Although there are at present only two subvented day relief centres run by the Salvation Army and St. James' Settlement serving Kowloon and Hong Kong Island respectively, there are also service units run by self-financing NGOs which provide drop-in service for street sleepers. These include the Activity Centre of the Christian Concern for the Homeless Association at Sham Shui Po and the St. Barnabas' Home – Drop-in Centre for street sleepers in Western District. The former is being supported with rates subsidy from the Government.

**Provision of temporary shelter/hostel service to street sleepers**

10. SOCO has stated that there were only 586 shelter/hostel places available for street sleepers. The number is in fact 670, details of which are provided in the Annex. These shelters/hostels provide overnight/short-term accommodation to homeless persons, regardless of their nationality and duration of residence in Hong Kong. Street sleepers are the main target group but other persons in need, such as other homeless persons, may also make use of these facilities. Between November 1999 and February 2000, 46 street sleepers (or 53 % against the total admission of 87 residents) have been admitted to the urban hostels.

11. The average utilization rate of shelter/hostel places for street sleepers in 1998/99 was 75%. Having taken into consideration the service demand in different districts, 120 additional hostel places are under planning to further improve the provision of accommodation service for street sleepers.

12. Social workers in hostels provide counselling and guidance for street sleepers during their stay and help them seek long-term accommodation. For those shelters/hostels without provision of social workers, staff refer needy street sleepers to Family Services Centres for service. In addition, family caseworkers also pay visits to residents in shelters/hostels to introduce welfare services and intake new cases for follow-up service. Staff in the shelters/hostels and family caseworkers work closely in assisting street sleepers.

**Age restriction in admission to temporary shelters/hostels**

13. SWD has reached agreement with all NGOs to exercise flexibility for all urban hostels to admit street sleepers of younger age groups with genuine needs, on top of those aged 55 or above. In the past four months, there had been a total of 19 street sleepers aged below 55 (41 % of the total street sleepers admission) admitted to these hostels. As for the temporary shelters, they are open to all regardless of age.

**Free meal service**

14. At present, nine of the hostels and the four day relief centres mentioned in paragraph 9 provide free meals/food to street sleepers who are in difficulty. Five of the hostels/centres provide meals at a very low price. These units are located in Sham Shui Po, Yaumatei, Central & Western, Wanchai & Eastern Districts where there is a high concentration of street sleepers.

15. To help street sleepers meet their basic needs in the long run, they can apply for Comprehensive Social Security assistance (CSSA) which covers meal charges. Able-bodied unemployed persons including street sleepers who apply for CSSA have to actively seek a job by joining the Support for Self-reliance Scheme. Applicants who are found eligible will normally be entitled for assistance one month from the date of application. However, for applicants with genuine hardships, payment can be made from the day of application for CSSA. For those who do not wish to apply for CSSA but who in genuine need for short-term financial assistance, they can apply for trust and grants to tide them over.

**Strengthening of outreaching service to street sleepers**

16. To address the problem of street sleepers in Yau Tsim Mong and Sham Shui Po districts which have the highest number of street sleepers, a West Kowloon Regional Task Group on Tackling Street Sleepers has been operating since 1995 to develop strategies to assist street sleepers, enhance public education on the problem in the locality, strengthen staff training in working with street sleepers and render focused and intensive intervention to help street sleepers. Following the success in implementing the pilot project in helping street sleepers

in two congregation spots in Yaumatei, which helped reduce the number of street sleepers from 38 to 10, SWD will continue to focus its efforts in outreaching to new street sleepers in order to provide early intervention and help them quit street sleeping as early as possible.

17. At the same time, SWD is stepping up its outreaching service to street sleepers through its family services centres and street sleepers outreaching teams to identify new cases, particularly those who are young and unemployed. For example, in addition to normal outreaching visits to street sleepers, the front-line caseworkers in Yaumatei (the district with the highest concentration of street sleepers) pay regular late-evening visits to spots where street sleepers congregate and to temporary shelters/cold shelters to identify new street sleepers cases, in order to assess their needs and introduce welfare services to them. In the past four months, 49 street sleepers in Yaumatei were contacted through such proactive late-evening outreaching visits. Of this group of street sleepers, 29 were motivated to receive welfare assistance and 9 showed positive changes subsequent to the intervention and successfully left the street by either moving to private accommodation or obtaining a public housing unit through compassionate rehousing. Based on the success of this proactive service, other districts with concentration of street sleepers would also adopt this approach.

#### **Publicity on services for street sleepers**

18. To enhance public awareness of the full range of services provided to street sleepers and for ready service referrals, SWD has recently produced an information sheet on the existing welfare services available to street sleepers including contact details of the relevant welfare agencies. Such information sheets are widely distributed to concerned agencies/volunteers working with street sleepers as well as Government departments and NGOs. Moreover, the West Kowloon Region of SWD has recently produced a video on the subject of street sleepers to strengthen the training of frontline caseworkers and volunteers in working with street sleepers and for use in future public education efforts.

#### **Employment service to street sleepers**

19. In November 1999, the Local Employment Services (LES) of the

Labour Department (LD) launched a pilot scheme with a view to providing active employment assistance to street sleepers. SWD and four NGOs also took part in this scheme. The LES has been providing active employment assistance to help street sleepers find suitable jobs. As at February 2000, a total of 43 street sleepers had been referred by SWD and NGOs to the LES for employment assistance under the pilot scheme. A total of 100 job referrals has been arranged for them for posts like labourer, watchman/security guard, shipping clerk, cleaner, waiter/waitress and delivery worker. It is observed that -

- (a) most of the jobs referred were elementary level jobs;
- (b) most participants were non-skilled;
- (c) most participants have low educational background, but there was some exception; and
- (d) one street sleeper had operated a successful business before, but the business collapsed as a result of the recession and he has now taken up retraining.

20. The low level of motivation of street sleepers to work is the greatest obstacle in finding jobs. After four months, 10 placements have been successfully secured for them but some of the participants quitted their jobs after a few days or weeks. On the whole, the scheme provides a useful channel for well motivated street sleepers to find jobs. LD will continue to work closely with SWD and NGOs to offer customised employment service to street sleepers.

### **Rental deposit under CSSA Scheme for street sleepers**

21. Street sleepers on CSSA who are old, disabled or medically certified to be in ill-health are eligible for special grants for rent deposits where the need arises.

22. SWD recognizes that unemployed able-bodied street sleepers are a vulnerable group having special difficulty in finding a job because of lack of a contact address and employer's prejudice against job-seekers who are homeless.

23. In recognition of the special difficulty faced by the unemployed able-

abled CSSA recipients who are street sleepers, a discretionary payment can be considered in cases where the recipient is genuinely in need of additional financial assistance to meet the payment of a rent deposit. A recipient is considered to be genuinely in need of additional financial assistance for meeting his/her rental deposit if he does not possess enough savings or other resources to meet such payment.

24. A CSSA recipient can lodge a complaint with the District Social Welfare Officer (DSWO) if he thinks that his case has not been properly dealt with by staff of the Social Security Field Unit. He can also lodge an appeal with the Social Security Appeal Board if he is not satisfied with the decision made by SWD.

25. From June 1999 to February 2000, a total of 29 able-bodied street sleepers had obtained such discretionary grant to meet the payment of rental deposit.

### **Way Forward**

26. To assist street sleepers, we will :

- (a) step up the efforts by SWD and NGOs to reach out the street sleepers, particularly the new and young street sleepers, in order to provide assistance in a co-ordinated manner;
- (b) assist NGOs to improve their services to the street sleepers, including seeking of appropriate funding for improvement works whenever necessary;
- (c) keep in view closely the statistics and profile of street sleepers and provide services to meet their service needs;
- (d) collaborate closely with NGOs to organise programmes for street sleepers and public education activities to minimize the community's misunderstanding towards street sleepers. Volunteers/ex-street sleepers will also be involved in such programmes.

27. A summary of services available to street sleepers is at the Annex.

Health and Welfare Bureau/Social Welfare Department  
April 2000

**Annex**

**Welfare Services for Street Sleepers**

**1. Introduction**

Social Welfare Department (SWD) works jointly with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide direct services for street sleepers, particularly the elderly, the disabled, the poor and the sick, those who are mentally-ill and those suspected to be drug abusers. NGOs are also given funding support for their work in helping street sleepers.

**2. Welfare services provided by SWD**

- (a) counseling service, including assistance towards family reunion :
  - (i) 65 Family Services Centres operated by SWD and NGOs, and SWD's Hotline (2343 2255) provide counseling for street sleepers. Caseworkers in family services centres also provide an outreach service to help needy cases;
  - (ii) SWD's Outreaching Teams for Street Sleepers handle hard-core cases, such as those who are suspected to be mentally ill.
- (b) accommodation assistance, such as shelters and hostels for the homeless, homes for the elderly and the disabled;
- (c) referral for financial assistance, welfare services, including compassionate rehousing, medical treatment, drug treatment and rehabilitation, employment, and other miscellaneous matters; and
- (d) distribution of blankets and referrals to cold shelters managed by Home Affairs Department when the temperature drops below 12°C.

**3. Welfare services provided by non-governmental organizations**

- (a) reaching out to street sleepers, providing material assistance and to encourage them to receive welfare services.
- (b) day relief centres and drop-in centres to provide relief for street sleepers, such as supportive counselling, personal care service, food, bathing, hair-cutting, clothing, referral for medical or residential services, etc.

- (c) temporary shelters/hostels in areas where street sleepers congregate. Temporary shelters provide overnight accommodation for street sleepers while the hostels offer short-term accommodation placement to street sleepers. Residents in these shelters/hostels are provided with counselling service, personal care, group and recreational activities, religious activities, arrangements for long-term accommodation. A list of these shelters/hostels is as follows :

<b><u>Temporary Shelters/ Urban Hostels</u></b>	<b><u>Number of places</u></b>	
	<b><u>Male</u></b>	<b><u>Female</u></b>
<b>Caritas- Hong Kong</b>		
(a) Cable and Wireless Temporary Shelter for Street Sleepers, Wong Tai Sin District	32	
(b) Mount Davis Hostel for Single Persons, Central and Western District	30	
<b>Street Sleepers' Shelter Society Trustees Incorporated</b>		
(a) Un Chau Street Shelter, Sham Shui Po District	40	52
(b) Shanghai Street Shelter, Yau Ma Tei District	48	22
(c) Kat On Street Shelter, Wan Chai District	46	30
<b>Missionaries of Charity</b>		
Home of Love, Nam Cheong Estate, Sham Shui Po District	50	20
<b>Salvation Army</b>		
(a) Nam Ming Haven for Women, Sham Shui Po, District		42
(b) Shun On Hostel, Yau Ma Tei District	14	
(c) Yee On Hostel, Sham Shui Po District	40	
<b>Christian Concern for the Homeless Association</b>		
(a) Yan Lam Hostel, Yee Kuk Street, Sham Shui Po District	10	
(b) Yam Chak Hostel, Kei Lung Hostel, Sham Shui Po District	11	
<b>Pok Oi Hospital</b>		
Pok Oi Hospital Jockey Club Hostel for Single Persons, Siu Sai Wan Estate, Eastern District	40	
<b>Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council</b>		
Jockey Club Lok Fu Hostel for Single Persons, Wong Tai Sin District	24	18
<b>St. James' Settlement</b>		
Li Chit Street Single Persons Hostel, Wan Chai District	40	

**Yan Chai Hospital**

Yan Chai Hospital Urban Hostel for Single Persons, Tsuen Wan District	28	12
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**Light of Yung Shu Tau Christian Society Limited**

(a) Sheung Lok (Temporary ) Hostel, Sham Shui Po District	11	
(b) Kei Lok (Temporary ) Hostel, Sham Shui Po District	10	
Total :	474	196
Grand Total :		<b>670</b>