

The Hong Kong Council of Social Service

**Increasing the Options of Day Care Service for Children
And
Providing Affordable Quality Child Care**

Paper for Meeting of the LegCo Panel on
Welfare Services on May 12, 2000

A) The Changing Needs for Child Care Support

1. In the past two years, there have been increasing requests from women organizations and labour groups for the provision of a variety of day care services for children. The rationale is, the needs for child care are changing and families are demanding modes of services different from the existing ones.
2. Currently, the day nursery and day creche service form the major trunk of day care service for children under 6. While the operating hours of 8:00 a.m. to 6:00p.m. are still convenient to some parents, there requires more modes for meeting the diversified needs of the working parents now. It is found that many parents are now working in the service industry with working hours shift to late morning till evening. It is also found that many parents have to be engaged in overtime work or in one to two part-time jobs which make their working hours irregular.
3. On the other hand, the government is encouraging the single parent families to seek employment rather than depending on CSSA. The availability of child care facilities is important to facilitate the single parents to seek job and employment.
4. The day care service agencies had held sharing session with the women/labour groups, and these "consumers" request for **the provision of a variety of day care services to meet the different child care needs of the parents**. The request has also been shared with the SWD.

B) Recommendations

The Council would like to make the following recommendations:

5. To create more options in service provision for parents, e.g.
 - to support one to two centres in every district to try out a different mode (there is no need for every centre to do the same as there might not be enough demand). The different modes can include weekend service and flexible modes of day care service including even half-day nursery

- to expand the provision of extended hours of service. While appreciating government's effort to aim at expanding 100 units of extended hours of service in the day nurseries / creches this year, the provision should contain different choices in the service hours for parents
- supporting the setting up of mutual help groups amongst parents for child care
- promoting supervised childminding service

Given the diversification in needs, child-minding service will best meet the needs of individual families. Moreover, it offers employment opportunities for the women. The service should therefore be best utilized to meet the changing needs.

Experience from overseas countries (e.g. New York of USA) show that their governments support the development of quality child-minding service by providing setting up grants and training. The applicability to Hong Kong could be considered.

- there could have many other options of services and could involve many other parties, not necessarily just the welfare organisations. For instance, the employers could be encouraged to set up child support programmes
6. The government should seriously consider extending the fee assistance scheme for needy families to different forms and operation hours of child care services rather than limiting it to the 8am - 6pm service (day nursery and creche service only).
 7. To set up child care resource and referral centre for parents: the centre could help parents select appropriate child care services for their child(ren) and make appropriate referrals.

In short, there should be more options of child care services and affordable child care facilities for families.