

Neighbourhood Advice-Action Council
Eastern/ Wanchai District Youth Outreaching Social Work Team
Opinions Concerning “MAP for Handling Unruly Children & Young Persons”

Based on our past experience in working with youth-at-risk, we have come up with the following opinions regarding the MAP for young offenders aged 10-17:

1. We basically welcome the introduction of alternative measures for handling young offenders. The availability of choices with social work or therapeutic elements facilitates better tailor-made rehabilitation for them. However, we think that “institutionalization” may not be necessarily ineffective to some very unruly young offenders. The problems facing HK or other countries now may be the lack of package services (such as in-depth counseling during their institutionalized period) side by side with institutionalization. It is a pity that there are not many researches about how “institutionalization” is implemented and the different effects with different package services.

2. So the next point, a very significant point, is that, enough (or even extra because of the possible decrease of cost put in institutionalization) resources must be put in the welfare services provided in MAP. Although at first sight it seems that the programs to be provided for the targets are just what welfare agencies are operating routinely, there must be some tailor-made components; follow-up work in a more intensive manner is needed too. With inadequate resources, any good ideas will turn out to be ineffective or even harmful because such youth may turn out to be left unattended outside institutions.

3 Another crucial point next to the above is monitoring. The current problem of measures like the Police Superintendents’ Discretion Scheme (PSDS), where its initial rationale is good, is the lack of monitoring on the young offenders who are supervised under the scheme. Some of our service-users told us that they have received only several short calls from the police during the PSDS period of one year or more. They could still behave like what they used to be, such as hanging out late in the street with undesirable peers. Without adequate monitoring, not only is MAP not conducive to positive changes on the part of youth, it may even be abused by them or even by the triad society members who would utilize youth for crimes.

4. We suggest therefore that a mandatory, compulsory system be adopted when they are granted MAP. At present, the offending young persons who are subject to PSDS could voluntarily choose whether to join the Community Support Service Scheme (CSSS) or not. Also, even if some have joined it because of mistakenly thinking it as mandatory, they may not have turned up from time to time. So it is recommended to set up a mechanism similar to, say, Community Service Order in benchmarking the number of hours and attendance, and so on.

5. It thus follows that to set up a mechanism of taking them back to the police, prosecution or court is a must when they do not meet the requirements set. This could be equally applied to PSDS since at present there is no such mechanism.

6. Although the concept of victim offender mediation (as introduced in 11.5.3 in the research report) is new to Hong Kong and to the Chinese, and although it should not be a must in MAP, it is considered to be a good direction. In our experience in working with youth-at-risk, similar measures have been tried when working with youth having conflicts with each other and the results are not bad. Perhaps more studies could be made in the near future about the details in trying out this kind of restorative measures.

7. Clear guidelines and regulations should be set up for all parties involved, including the NGOs that provide the services for MAP and the youth subject to MAP. Unclear guidelines and regulations would lead to loopholes and unattended areas.