

International Social Service Hong Kong Branch (ISS-HK)

Submission to the Joint meeting of the Legislative Council's Security and Social Welfare Panel July 18, 2006

International Social Service Hong Kong Branch (ISS-HK) has been in the service of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees since its inception in Hong Kong in 1958 to date. As an international organization present in over 150 countries, ISS has been in the forefront of advocating for the protection and promotion of the dignity and integrity of children, women, families and individuals using human rights based approach for over 80 years.

ISS-HK has worked as an implementing partner of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Hong Kong government in serving the needs of the asylum seekers and refugees including the Vietnamese population since the 1970s to date providing basic services such as accommodation, food, clothing, transport, counseling, education and skills training, medical referrals and training for resettlement.

The Social Welfare Department has commissioned the International Social Service Hong Kong Branch to provide mainly assistance in-kind to vulnerable asylum-seekers and torture claimants which includes housing, food, clothing and transportation.. This paper seeks to provide information to the panel on the humanitarian assistance provided.

Since the project commenced in April 2006 to date, each case has been assessed individually and **no applicant has been rejected for assistance**. To date, there are 178 asylum-seekers and torture claimants receiving assistance, 90 of which are on the full assistance package of housing, food, clothing and transport. Service recipients include couples with children, single mothers with children, single females, single males, single female who is pregnant and a couple. Within the single males are 16 unaccompanied minors (i.e. refer to those who reported to UNHCR as unaccompanied minor when they made their application for refugee status determination.)

1. Asylum-seekers and torture claimants apply for assistance with the Social Welfare Department Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) who conduct the initial interview. **SWD refers the clients to ISS-HK for assessment of the nature and level of assistance required by the clients for housing, food, clothing and shelter and the provision of these basic needs.**

Other requests for assistance such as medical assistance, counseling, and education are handled by the Social Welfare Department or referred to other NGOs and agencies.

2. ISS-HK social workers conduct the interviews with the clients within one week of the SWD referral handling an average of 16 interviews per day, 6 days a week including weekends and holidays.
3. **The level of assistance required per case is assessed on a case to case basis looking at the specific needs and resources of the clients.** This includes their current housing arrangements, the food requirements based on age, religious beliefs, medical conditions and health requirements, the nature of their activities including access to education, their recreation, religious and social activities and the availability of community resources providing them assistance. The clients are immediately informed of the approval of their requests and are asked to sign a contract of agreement with ISS-HK on the level and nature of their assistance.

4. **Accommodation:** All clients have the choice to (a) live in the ISS-HK rented flats in Yuen Long where all utilities are provided for at a capacity of 11 residents per flat or (2) seek their own accommodations in the district they desire at an agreed level of rent with ISS-HK. Shared flats are encouraged for single cases for cost effectiveness.

ISS-HK inspects the client's preferred accommodation specifically looking at its appropriateness to the client's needs and whether it meets basic requirements in hygiene and safety. ISS-HK directly pays the rent to the landlords.

To date, ISS-HK rented accommodation in Yuen Long has 6 single men in Flat 1 , 7 single men in Flat 2 and one family with two children in Flat 3. Flat 4 is ready for occupancy and waiting for decisions of clients to move.

5. **Food:** Each client is provided a Food Order Form where they are able to indicate their preferences for regular food supplies and special requests in consideration of individual needs and preferences. Food is distributed every 10 days. Clients are assigned dates and times for food pick-up either in Yuen Long or Jordan.

Feedback and monitoring of food is done every ten days by staff through direct interviews, visits to their housing and telephone calls. Each client has a highly personalized list. Children's food requirements are listed by the parents in the request form and are purchased as ordered.

During the food distribution, the client sees his order form and the costs of the food being provided. Each client signs an acknowledgement of receipt of the items per delivery. The changing conditions or requests of the clients are integrated in the food request system as they require.

6. **Clothing** is provided in kind and as requested. The clients are provided personal toiletries such as toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, shampoos, and feminine hygiene products on a regular basis.
7. **Transportation** is provided in cash with the cheapest mode of transport in consideration to allow the clients to attend their appointments with the Immigration Department, UNHCR and medical facilities. All other requests for visits to churches and other appointments are assessed and consulted with the Social Welfare Department.
8. Delays in assistance provision has mainly been due to the clients opting to look for their own accommodation and spending three weeks to a month before making a final decision. Clients who opt to live in the ISS-HK rented flat in Yuen Long can move in on the same day as the signing of their contract during the interview with ISS-HK.
9. The provision of humanitarian assistance is on its second month and the applicants have a decent house, food supply, clothing and transport provided. No one among those who have been interviewed by ISS-HK applied has been left to fend for themselves. Even if they have not made up their mind on housing, food and other assistance is already provided.

ISS-HK Branch is committed to provide a safe, decent and adequate service for the asylum-seekers, torture claimants and refugees it serves ensuring that basic needs are met. ISS-HK through its private sponsors and donations have contributed significantly to the set-up of the accommodations, the provision of additional support services such as recreation, counseling and opportunities for skills training and the provision of social workers and supervision and management of the assistance.