

Hong Kong Society for the Protection of Children
Suggestions on Pilot Projects of Child Development Fund

Suggestion one: lower the age limit of target participants from 12 to 16 years old teenagers to include children of all ages from deprived families

Suggestion two: run pilot projects with children aged 9 to 12

Rationales for running pilot projects with younger children

(A) Late childhood is the prime time to invest in a child's future and smooth transition from primary to secondary school is crucial to a child's lifelong education

The main objective of Child Development Fund is to motivate children and their families from a disadvantaged background to build up their own assets and plan for their own future. Late childhood is an important time for a child to develop independence, self responsibility and self-identity. This period is also crucial to build a healthy personality that enables a child to resist negative peer pressure and make better choices for themselves as teenagers and adults.

Besides, during this period of time, children face with their first life challenge---building their foundation for life long learning and planning for their future educational path. Most parents regard receiving education in a good secondary school as crucial to their children's character building and future success. In Hong Kong, most children are placed to secondary school by Secondary School Places Allocation (SSPA) system, which is based on a child's school scores collected in three internal assessments in primary school at the end of P5, mid-year of P6 and the end of P6.

Due to the keen competition to get tertiary education, children and their parents experience lots of pressure in striving good academic performance to get to a good school. Thus, children aged between 9-12 are prime time for early investment in a child's potential for academic success and to shape their personality.

(please refer to appendix 1 for interview with parents of deprived families on their view of Child Development Fund)

(B) Numerous parents of deprived families failed to support their children in late childhood

Parents of deprived families are usually less educated and they cannot assist the academic as well as developmental demands on their children. Many

deprived children cannot cope with the demand from school. Very often, children aged 8 or 9 starts to fail in school and become academic low achievers in P3 and P4. Furthermore, many primary schools switch from activity-based teaching to more emphasis on academic study in P.3 or P.4.

The difficulties in children's early study are likely to continue and for most of them will aggravate. A large number of older children eventually lose interest in study in senior grades in primary school and become early school leavers in secondary school. Juvenile delinquency or anti-social behaviors are common problems among this population who fail in school. It will further shut their door for future success in adulthood.

In order to break the vicious cycle of "intergenerational poverty" of deprived children, extra support to primary school aged children is deemed necessary to help them to build good foundation for study and life long learning. Then early guidance and support starting from late childhood is deemed necessary.

(C) Timely support to parents receiving CSSA to develop ability in self-help and to plan for their children's future

Children in families receiving Comprehensive Social Security Scheme (CSSA) is one of the major targets that will benefits from the proposed Child Development Fund and many of these families are single parent families. New Dawn (ND) Project requires single parents receiving CSSA whose children aged 12 to actively seek paid employment, otherwise, an amount of \$200 will be deducted from their monthly CSSA entitlements.

As many of these parents with children aged 12 or below have been unemployed for many years and they need a lot of support to return to the labor market. Furthermore, long years of reliance on CSSA hinder their ability to plan the future of their children as well as for their family. Parents receiving CSSA need more incentive to step out of the dependence mode of life style and gradually learn how to be financially independent and be responsible to plan for the future of their children.

Child Development Fund as an asset-building project is a very good means to cultivate work incentive of these parents and to encourage them to develop their self-reliance and capacity to be financially responsible for their child, before they are "required" to do so when their child turn 12 years old. Single parents are then motivated to seek for paid job, being supported to build up their habit of saving money and were given necessary assistance to plan for the future of their children early on.

(D) Efficient use of public resources in capacity-building for children in deprived families

“Youth pre-employment training program” and “Youth work experience and training scheme” have been providing support to young school leavers aged 15-19 and 15-24 years old youth respectively. Recently Retraining Board also plans to extend their service to adolescents aged 15 and above. These resources are helping youngsters to build their capacity for career and development. However, no public resources are particularly designed to help deprived children aged 12 or below to build their capacity for future development.

Thus, we proposed to extend the pilot project to serve deprived children aged 9 to 12, so public resources can promptly support deprived children to build up their personal capacity for future development both in study and employment, as well as personal effectiveness as a responsible adult. Our approach of early intervention is also an effective strategy as late childhood is the prime time to cultivate good learning habits as well as to develop positive personality.

[Suggestion three: outreach to ethnic minority children to facilitate them to join the pilot project](#)

Rationale to outreach to ethnic minority children

HKSPC started to provide family services to ethnic minority children in 2004. In last 3 years, we found that a large number of ethnic minority children live in very poor families and a large number of them are CSSA recipients. Owing to language as well as cultural barriers, these families are very isolated and do not receive any help from social services. As a result, children in ethnic minority families start to fail in primary school, especially in Chinese. This paces their way for inter-generational poverty as their door to many jobs will be closed in the future.

A model for pilot project with children aged 9 to 12 drawn on HKSPC experience

As late childhood is an important time for a child to develop a healthy personality, self-identity, self responsibility and a good foundation for lifelong learning, we suggest we can support parents to develop personal development plans for a child, with the support of operating NGOs and corporate or individual mentors.

Examples of possible personal development plans for children:

- ◆ To cultivate positive learning attitude and motivation
- ◆ To provide early identification of personal talent or potential and to provide follow-up support to them
- ◆ To develop good personality
- ◆ To develop positive habits and life planning, such as saving habit, good diet, study plan

As parents are crucial party to develop a child's capacity for future successes, we recommend that operating NGOs also develop plans with parents on how to support their child to achieve their personal development plans.

Supporting parents:

- ◆ To facilitate positive parenting skill
- ◆ To develop capacity in supporting their child's study
- ◆ To enhance knowledge and ability to execute life and financial planning for their child's academic and personal development.

Mentorship Programme

Psychological disempowerment is also common among the poor parents. It refers to the level of despair and the gradual development of the sense of helplessness. Lots of self-defeating thoughts or attitudes might be resulted. This kind of negative attitude will also pass on to their children through day to day parent-child interaction.

A personal mentor is important to provide guidance to parents to develop personal development plans for their children. As lack of good role model is a significant factor for children in poor families to lose motivation for academic and personal success, we suggest that the focus of mentorship program should be to provide good role-model to the deprived children.

Flexible arrangement to facilitate poor families to contribute to targeted savings and encourage CSSA single parents to attend pre-employment training

As many targeted poor families of Child Development Fund cannot afford to save \$200 a month, we plan to employ flexible arrangements to encourage them to develop saving habits for their children's future.

To provide not more than 6-months pre-employment support or to offer volunteer services opportunity to unemployed parents so as to develop their working habit.

Parent monthly attend 40 hours volunteer services or pre-employment training course can be waived of the monthly saving target of \$200 for not more than 6 months. Targeted savings is suggested to implement from 7th month.

Evaluation for Award of Government Additional Award of 3,000 Dollars

(A) Qualitative Analysis

Behavior analysis

Behavioral checklist will be formulated to record and to evaluate the behavioral performance of children related to positive learning attitude and good personality traits. Similarly, behavioral checklist will also be formulated to record parent's commitment to children's personal development plan, such as positive parenting behaviors.

(B) Quantitative analysis

We shall also develop quantitative requirement of achieving the children's personal development plan, including short-term goals and long-term goals for both children and parents.

HKSPC's experience in running asset-building programmes for disadvantaged children

- ◆ Experience in using an "Asset-building Model" to run a non-subsidized Children and Family Service Centre in Ma Tau Ching since 2003 (for details, please refer to appendix 2)
- ◆ Commitment to help poor families since 1926
At present, HKSPC has been operating two funds to support poor families: "*Education Start-up Fund*" and "*Protection of Angels Fund*" since 2004. These two initiatives are possible through generous donation from corporations and HKSPC's long term supporters.
- ◆ With long-term collaboration with a number of private corporations and an extensive network with donors since 1926, HKSPC has the capacity to secure donations from the business sector and mobilize corporate volunteers to provide steady mentors to support the project. Just in 2006-7, HKSPC received donation from 240 corporations to support our year long fundraising activities and children services
- ◆ HKSPC has experience to recruit and sustain volunteer participation to provide role model to children from deprived families since 2004

Feedback from CFS service users on Child Development Fund

Background information

4 women were interviewed on the government proposal on child Development Fund. 3 of them were single parents and receiving CSSA while the other one came from low-income intact family. Except one single-mother rearing a 10 year old child with dyslexia is now hunting for job, all other women have engaged in part-time jobs.

Welcome the idea for asset-building project

All interviewees agreed with the asset-building rationale of the Child Development Fund and viewed the project as an effective means to achieve self-reliance.

Criticize to the age of target participants

Interviewees criticized that the target participants of the Fund (12-16 years old children) as too late for children to cultivate positive personality or to build up good foundation for education or learning. Thus, they suggested to start the scheme with 9 or 10 years old children.

Suggestion on pre-employment supportive services

Interviewees suggested to include Pre-employment supportive services such as vocational training or traveling subsidize for volunteer services in the scheme, to help participants to overcome barriers to employment and to improve their work skills.

Good time for parent to engage in paid job

Interviewees opined that children were in need of caring until the children reach 10 years old. They felt that engagement in work not only increased family income but also developed their positive thinking and personal resilience.

Successful experiences in adopting an “Asset-building Model” in Running HKSPC’s Children and Family Services Centre

About Children and Family Services Centre in Ma Tau Chung

Taking the lead to respond to the social needs of the community, HKSPC moved with a new initiative to establish a non-subvented Children and Family Services Centre in Mau Tau Chung in March 2003. It is our intent to enhance, strengthen and stabilize family life as well as to promote the well being of children and their families. The target users of the Centre is for the family with children aged 12 or below. Now we have around 1,300 members and around 40 % of them are from deprived families, including CSSA recipients, low income families or ethnic minority families.

Our service emphasizes on preventive work and provides all round support to deprived families with children that are struggling with difficulties in parenting. In this centre, we also intend to outreach to ethnic minority families to establish a supportive network within the community and prevent family or child development problems before they surface or worsen into more complicated ones.

Asset-building Model in CFSC

As the priority clients of our centre are children and families from a disadvantaged background, we adopt an “Asset-building Model” to help these families. Our experience in serving disadvantaged children shows that many of them start to fail in school and pick up many bad habits in early years. Generally they have poor self image and low self confidence too. These are detrimental to their overall development as a responsible citizen and perpetuate inter-generational poverty.

A) Relationship between deprived family and academic low-achiever

Socio-economic status of the family, the educational level of the parents, the financial condition of the family and the parental aspiration on success are key factors that influence the academic performance of children. Deprived parents usually have lower motivation to equip themselves and to acquire knowledge related to their children’s development or learning. They also have to deal with multi stressors, life crisis or poor physical or mental health of themselves or other family members, their ability to nurture their children is also adversely affected. Thus, children growing up in deprived family are less likely to have high academic achievement.

B) Needs of deprived children

Academic low-achievers from deprived families who may be 2 to 3 years behind their fellow classmates, thus sufficient academic support and social learning opportunities to children are important to help them to improve their academic performance so as to give them access to better occupational choices and earning attainment.

Besides, it is common for academic underachiever to suffer from additional handicaps of emotional or behavioural disorders. In Hong Kong, it was found that behavioural problems could place Chinese children at increased risk for conduct disorder, violence, substance abuse, depressions and even suicide. (Bennett 2003). The problems of low achievers are usually more than inadequate learning skills or poor aptitude, many of them also suffer from emotional and behavioural problems. Above all, they also have very low motivation to improve their study as the result of learned helplessness. Therefore, effective intervention must include addressing their social and emotional needs before we can effectively ameliorate their problem of low academic achievement.

C) Needs of deprived parents

Low social class is always associated with harsh or submissive parenting styles and poor parenting skills that consequently affect the cognitive development of their children. Enhancement of parenting skills in homework supervision and intensive training to children's study skill are of equal importance so as to improve the learning ability of the children and to develop their self-competence in meeting the requirements of the competitive school culture.

Apart from the poor parenting skills, deprived parents often exhibit poor self-image and sense of helplessness. In order to avoid psychological disempowerment from transmitting from parent to their children, intensive counselling work for deprived parents is very important.

D) Needs of ethnic minority children

According to the 2006 Population Census, Kowloon City is the second highest district concentrated with 9.1 % (31,140) overall ethnic minority population in HK.

Due to poor community integration, children from ethnic minorities seldom seek community resources or participate in the extra-curricular activities offered by social service agencies. Another major obstacle affecting their access to social services is language barrier that always cause mutual misunderstanding, apathy or sometimes rejection from social service providers due to cultural barrier and further impede initiative of ethnic minorities to use social service. Besides, EM parents are

not able to supervise the homework of their children due to language barrier, thus EM students are in need of extra support in order to meet the daily demand from the school.

D) Our Learning Together Project

In view of the complex factors contributing to low academic achievement and overall poor development of children from deprived families, we have launched the “**Learning Together Project**” for both local and ethnic minority primary school students in CFSC since 2004, so as to develop the asset of deprived children for future success and help deprived children to be academically successful as well as stopping inter-generational poverty. The project composed of three main parts as follow:

(1) Intensive after-school support for children

We provide intensive learning supportive services to deprived children, including weekday after-school tutorial classes, educational courses, summer courses and a series of group activities on personal development, to help deprived children to improve their learning motivation, boost up their self-confidence and develop a pleasant personality.

(2) Individual follow-up service for children and their family

We provide intensive social and emotional support as well as guidance and counseling to the deprived children and their parents so as to enhance their adjustment to school life and enhance parents’ capacity to help their children’s study and overall development

(3) Parenting education services

We provide supportive and educational services to parents so as to enhance their skills in assisting children’s homework and give them appropriate support and be effective parents to support their children’s study and overall development.

In addition to the paid tutors or staff, the project also recruits many volunteers to provide personal support to deprived children and to provide role-model for the children. We are now serving around 42 children daily and 90% of them are from deprived families. The project has been proved very successful in the following areas:

- (1) Parents of deprived families became aware of the developmental needs of their children

- (2) Increased self-esteem of the deprived children
- (3) Improved learning motivation and academic performance of deprived children
- (4) Outreach to ethnic minority children and provide prompt support to them