

Christian Action
Submission to
The Subcommittee to Study Issues Related to Mainland-HKSAR Families
on welfare needs of cross-border students
7 December 2009

1. Rationale

Based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), into which Hong Kong was included since 1994, children have universal rights for survival, development, protection and participation. Cross-border students are Hong Kong residents and they should be entitled to the full range of services and support for a healthy upbringing, irrespective of where they live in Hong Kong or Shen Zhen.

In the school year of 2008-09, there were 6,768 cross-border students but in 2009-10, the number increased to 8,038. This increasing trend persists in the past five years. Difference in culture, education and parenting style usually causes them to face difficulties in adjusting to local schooling system.

The Hong Kong Government has made efforts to increase means of transportation, enhancing the inbound and outbound procedures and providing limited supportive services to cross-border students in the past few years. However, from our direct experience of serving these students and their families, there is still room for improvement.

2. Safety issues on transportation

The main strategy of the government to alleviate the problem of cross-border transportation at Lo Wu Control Point is to adopt cross-border school bus in the long run. However, there are only 1,500 cross-border students using this transportation means although the number of bus runs has been increased to 40 with another 16 extra "Northern runs" right now. The under-usage is due to the fact that bus runs are scheduled and not flexible enough to catch up students who join extra-curricular activities after school. More bus runs should be arranged to tackle this problem.

Also, there are 1,780 kindergarten students among the 8,038 students crossing the border in the school year of 2009-10. The huge school buses are not a safe means of travelling for them, even though there are care-takers on the buses. Accidents may occur as students have to get on and off the buses. We suggest the existing "inbound check on the bus" system testing at Man Kam To and Sha Tau Kok Control Points should

be extended to all control points. Besides, the quality of care-takers should also be enhanced through in-service training. One year ago, we held a training workshop with for 70 care-takers working on the school light bus at Shen Zhen. Feedback from participants was very encouraging as they could get more comprehensive skills of handling children's safety and behavioural problems.

3. Transportation expenses

Existing financial assistance to cross-border students for transportation expenses is given through the Student Travel Subsidy Schemes. Calculation of amount of subsidies only includes items within the territory of the HKSAR. For transportation in Shen Zhen, such as the expenses for travelling from students' homes to the boundary control points have to be paid by parents. We would suggest the government calculate the full range of travelling expenses in Shen Zhen and Hong Kong when giving out subsidies to cross-border students of families with financial difficulties.

4. Supportive services to cross-border students

Cross-border families face family problems such as marital relationship, parenting, financial hardship, family violence and so on. The government claims that there are mainstream services in Hong Kong including school social work, integrated family service centres and Social Welfare Department which can provide supportive services to cross-border students and their parents.

In reality, most of the cross-border parents (mainly the mothers waiting for one-way permit to Hong Kong) live in Shen Zhen. Existing main stream services in Hong Kong are not able to help them because local social workers will not go to Shen Zhen to deliver services. Even though they come to Hong Kong to seek help, they have to spend a considerable amount on transportation cost and finally they will be turned away by these service units as they are not local residents.

Obviously, there is a service gap for cross-border families. We would perceive the integrity of the family is vital for healthy upbringing of children. It is not feasible to deal with children's problems without intervening into other issues of their families. Therefore, it is worth giving active and out-reaching services to these families as early as possible, to prevent their problems from deteriorating. We would suggest the government to subsidize Pilot Service Projects for cross-border parents at Shen Zhen.