

**For information
on 10 February 2010**

Legislative Council Panel on Constitutional Affairs

Support Service Centres for Ethnic Minorities

Purpose

This paper updates Members on the operation of the four support services centres for ethnic minorities.

Background

2. At the meeting of the Panel on 17 November 2008, we briefed Members on our plan to establish four support service centres for ethnic minorities. In this regard, the Government had earmarked a recurrent funding of \$16 million per year as the operating expenses of the centres, and an additional \$8 million for the one-off setting-up costs of the centres.

3. At the meeting of the Panel on 15 June 2009, we informed Members that we had invited non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to submit proposals on the establishment and operation of the centres in December 2008. Among 22 applications received from 16 NGOs, we had selected four NGOs to run the centres, namely the Hong Kong Christian Service, the International Social Service - Hong Kong Branch, Christian Action and Yuen Long Town Hall Management Committee Limited. These centres are located in Kwun Tong, Wan Chai, Tuen Mun and Yuen Long respectively.

Latest developments

4. The four centres commenced operation in phases from May to September 2009. All of them provide language classes in Cantonese and English, cultural and community programmes, counselling and

referral services, and other integration programmes for ethnic minorities to facilitate their integration into the community and access to public services. In addition, the centre operated by the Hong Kong Christian Service also provides free centralized telephone interpretation services.

5. Services are provided to ethnic minorities throughout Hong Kong. Apart from providing services at the premises of the centres, support services are also provided in various districts through different channels, such as cooperating with other service units of their respective NGOs and other NGOs.

6. We set out in the ensuing paragraphs details on each of the four centres.

The Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents (CHEER)

7. The CHEER centre, operated by the Hong Kong Christian Service at Kwun Tong, commenced operation on 5 September 2009. The Centre provides English and Cantonese language classes and integration programmes with a view to facilitating ethnic minorities' integration into the community. Integration programmes offered by the Centre include social and orientation programmes (such as talks about employment laws and hospital services), technical literacy programmes (such as computer courses) and cultural literacy programmes (such as kung fu and paper cutting). As at end-2009, six language classes and 20 integration programmes have been held, with a total of nearly 500 participants. Apart from providing the programmes at the Centre in Kwun Tong, programmes are also being provided and scheduled in other districts, such as Sham Shui Po, To Kwa Wan and Tsim Sha Tsui.

8. In addition, the Centre provides free centralised telephone interpretation services to facilitate communication between ethnic minority service users and public service providers, including government departments. Seven ethnic minority languages / dialects are covered, comprising Bahasa Indonesia, Hindi, Nepali, Punjabi, Tagalog, Thai and Urdu. The majority of the enquiries and requests for interpretation involves issues in education, employment, housing and

social welfare. The centre also offers on-site interpretation services for ethnic minorities and translation services for the use of public services.

9. Publicity efforts, such as distribution of wallet cards, posters, district visits, and radio announcements, are made to promote the telephone interpretation and other services of the centre to the ethnic minority communities. The Centre also conducts a series of briefing for government bureaux and departments as well as NGOs and provides them with guidelines on using the interpretation and translation services in serving ethnic minorities.

“Harnessing Opportunities and Potentials for Ethnic Minorities” (HOPE) Support Service Centre

10. The HOPE centre, operated by the International Social Service - Hong Kong Branch at Wan Chai, commenced operation on 31 May 2009. The Centre provides English and Cantonese language classes, as well as integration programmes including personality development courses, health talks, computer classes and cross cultural interest classes such as Yoga and Thai massage. As at end-2009, 37 language classes, 36 computer classes and 19 integration programmes (besides computer classes) have been conducted with a total of about 1 600 participants.

11. The Centre has been particularly popular among foreign domestic helpers but it is actively reaching out to other ethnic minority groups through its network with other NGOs, schools and district organisations, as well as other efforts such as home visits and visits to the workplace of ethnic minorities. Through these efforts, the number of service users has been increasing.

Services for Harmonious Integration and Neighbourhood Empowerment (SHINE)

12. The SHINE centre, operated by Christian Action at Tuen Mun, commenced operation on 1 August 2009. Apart from English and Cantonese language courses, the Centre also conducts after-school tutorial classes for ethnic minority students at Primary level to assist them

in their homework and enhance their Chinese reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. Social integration and racial harmony programmes such as employment workshop and job referral services, cooking classes, cricket and music activities are also organised. As at end-2009, three language classes, one after-school tutorial class and 20 other social integration and racial harmony programmes have been conducted, with over 1 100 participants.

13. The centre is actively pursuing collaboration with ethnic minority organisations such as district and religious organisations, foreign domestic worker associations, other NGOs and government departments to promote their services and provide employment, family support and other services to ethnic minorities.

Yuen Long Town Hall (YLTH) Support Service Centre for Ethnic Minorities

14. The YLTH Support Service Centre for Ethnic Minorities, operated by the Yuen Long Town Hall Management Committee Limited at Yuen Long, commenced operation on 28 June 2009. The Centre has organised English and Cantonese classes as well as other integration programmes such as tutorial classes, computer classes, ethnic minorities cultural shows and festive celebrations such as Ramadan Festival, and traditional dance competition. As at end-2009, nine language courses, 11 computer classes, two tutorial classes and 61 other integration programmes have been organised either by the Centre alone or in cooperation with local organisations, with over 4 000 participants.

After-school tutorial classes for ethnic minority students

15. To further enhance the support to ethnic minority students in their learning and homework, especially in learning the Chinese language, we are working with the operators of the four support service centres to provide after-school tutorial classes for ethnic minority students from Primary 1 to Secondary 3 at their centres, schools or other suitable premises identified by the centres. This will be on top of their existing programmes. For this purpose, the Government has earmarked an operational funding of up to \$700,000 for the 2009-10 school year and up

to \$1.4 million for the 2010-11 school year, as well as a one-off setting-up cost of \$250,000 for the new initiative. We expect that the classes would commence services in the near future.

Way Forward

16. So far, the four centres have been running smoothly and in general, feedbacks from service users and ethnic minority communities have been positive. The four centres will continue to promote their services and programmes to the ethnic minority communities and, through networking and reach-out efforts, provide services to ethnic minorities in different districts.

17. We will continue to monitor the operation and performance of the centres through gathering feedbacks from the community, conducting visits, and other monitoring mechanisms such as reports and user evaluation of the activities of the centres.

18. Apart from the four support service centres, the Government also provides various support services to ethnic minorities by funding different NGOs and in different districts. These include community development teams and support teams as well as language classes. We will keep under review the support services in light of the operational experience and the needs of ethnic minority communities, with a view to facilitating their integration into the community.