

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Measures to Support At-risk Youths

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on measures put in place to support at-risk youths.

Background

2. To address the changing needs of young people, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has adopted a holistic and integrated service mode to assist and encourage young people to become mature, responsible and contributing members of society. Regular subvention is allocated to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide a wide range of preventive, developmental and remedial services for young people. To better tackle various emergent youth problems including juvenile gangs, drug abuse, school bullying, internet-related problems etc., SWD has enhanced the existing services and put in place some new measures in recent years in order to prevent at-risk youths from going astray and direct them to a more positive lifestyle.

Strategic Direction to Supporting At-risk Youths

3. SWD is committed to nurturing and supporting at-risk youths through a spectrum of services. The strategic direction of our services includes early identification and intervention, timely support, steering at-risk youths to the right course, and cross-sector collaboration.

Early Identification and Intervention

Enhancement of School Social Work Service

4. SWD has implemented the policy of “one school social worker (SSW) for each secondary school” since the 2000/01 school year. In September 2011, SWD allocated additional resources to 34 NGOs to enhance social work services in secondary schools by providing a total of 96 additional SSW posts, representing a 20% increase in manpower, to

help prevent and tackle student drug abuse and other related problems. As at the end of March 2012, a total of 574 SSWs are serving 478 secondary schools. Through collaboration with the school personnel and parents, SSWs offer assistance to students with academic, social and emotional problems, and help them leverage on their educational opportunities. They also organise groups and programmes to promote parental involvement and enhance parent-child relationship as well as parenting skills which are crucial in sustaining positive change and healthy development of at-risk students.

Launching Pilot Cyber Youth Outreaching Projects

5. In view of the rapid growth in the use of the internet by young people as well as the difficulty in reaching out to the growing group of potential at-risk youths through traditional services, SWD has commissioned three NGOs to each launch a pilot cyber youth outreaching project with funding support from the Lotteries Fund with effect from August 2011. The three pilot projects adopt the strategy of multi-level intervention (viz. preventive, developmental, supportive and remedial level) and use various cyber means such as email, Short Message Service, MSN, ICQ, blogs, e-learning platform, Facebook and online games, etc. to proactively reach out to young people, in particular at-risk or hidden youths, who engage in at-risk behaviour in the internet like compensated dating, cyber bullying, etc.. Those who are assessed to be in need of follow-up services will be linked up to the existing mainstream social services for better service synergy.

6. SWD has also in parallel commissioned the Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention of the University of Hong Kong to conduct a study to systematically evaluate the feasibility, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of these pilot projects and recommend the way forward for cyber youth work. The study will be completed by the end of 2014.

Timely Support

Enhanced Outreaching Social Work Service

7. To complement centre-based services, outreaching social work service plays an important part of rendering timely support by reaching out and engaging young people, in particular those who are at-risk. Currently, there are 16 District Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams

(YOTs) which seek to identify and engage young people who are not receptive to social norms and are vulnerable to negative influences. The teams aim to prevent further deterioration in their behaviour and instill positive lifestyles so that they can overcome difficulties, develop potentials and foster the development of positive social values and attitude. Additional recurrent resources had been provided to the 11 operating NGOs to address the growing youth drug abuse problem in 2008 and 2010 respectively. The total number of social workers has increased from 160 in 2007-08 to 192 in 2011-12, representing a 20% increase in manpower.

8. To strengthen services for at-risk youths, since 2001, 18 designated Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) have been providing 18 overnight youth outreaching teams to reach out to young night drifters from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. the next day. These teams go to hotspots in the street where young people usually gather at late night and provide on-the-spot crisis intervention. Additional recurrent resources were provided to the teams to enhance support for at-risk youths in 2005 and 2008 respectively. The total number of social workers of the teams has increased from 98 in 2007-08 to 116 in 2011-12, representing an 18% increase in manpower.

Setting Up Additional Youth Outreaching Teams

9. To better tackle the growing problem of juvenile gangs, SWD will set up three additional youth outreaching teams, one each in Tseung Kwan O, Ma On Shan and Tung Chung to reach out to more at-risk youths, counsel them and refer them to mainstream services. Through invitation of proposals, SWD will commission NGOs to operate these new teams in the latter half of 2012-13. Flexibility will be given for NGOs to propose the new service delivery mode, including service hours, which can achieve better service interfacing and synergy and meet specific district needs.

Steering Young People Back to the Right Course

Setting Up Additional Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers (CCPSAs)

10. CCPSAs are designated community-based service units providing counselling and assistance to habitual/ occasional/ potential psychotropic substance abusers (PSAs) and at-risk youths with a view to

assisting them to abstain from psychotropic substance abuse and develop healthy life style. Services provided include counselling for PSAs and their family members, groups, preventive education programmes and professional training for allied professionals. Adopting a proactive approach, social workers of CCPSAs conduct outreaching service to those hotspots frequently visited by young PSAs for early identification and timely intervention.

11. To address the upsurge of youth drug abuse problem, the Security Bureau (SB) provided additional resources to SWD to set up two additional CCPSAs in December 2008 and another four CCPSAs in October 2010, making a total of 11 CCPSAs over the territory to strengthen district-based collaboration amongst various stakeholders. To further enhance anti-drug work, additional resources have also been provided to launch on-site medical support service at all CCPSAs since October 2009. Through provision of body checks, drug tests, motivational interviews and drug-related consultation rendered by the multi-disciplinary team of registered nurse and social workers as well as procurement of medical support services from the community, the CCPSAs help identify and motivate drug abusers and at-risk youths to seek early rehabilitation services and stay in the treatment programme.

Enhancement of Community Support Service Scheme (CSSS)

12. Five CSSS teams, operated by NGOs and attached to ICYSCs, assist young people who are under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme. Through the provision of guidance and counselling, treatment groups, skills training/ education groups, recreational activities and community services, CSSS teams help the target at-risk youths reintegrate into mainstream education or work force, and reduce their likelihood of re-offending. The manpower of these teams was first enhanced in 2005-06 with provision of a total of 25 additional social workers. To cater for anticipated increase in the number of cautioned juveniles as a result of enhanced law enforcement efforts to combat youth drug abuse, SWD allocated additional resources to provide each of the CSSS teams with one additional social worker in October 2008.

Pilot Project on Enhanced Probation Service

13. Pursuant to SB's policy initiative of tackling the youth drug abuse problem, as well as a recommendation of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse chaired by the Secretary for Justice, apart from the existing

probation services for young persons convicted of drug offences, SWD has launched a two-year Pilot Project on Enhanced Probation Service (the Project) at the two Probation Offices serving the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts and Kwun Tong Magistrates' Courts respectively since 1 October 2009 to provide more focused, structured and intensive treatment programmes for young offenders aged below 21 who are convicted of drug-related offences and put on probation supervision pursuant to the Probation of Offenders Ordinance (Cap 298). Its major services include conducting more frequent interview sessions and urine tests to ascertain probationers' drug status, arranging regular home visits and curfew checks to monitor the behaviour of the probationers as well as monitoring school/ employment performance of the probationers in helping them lead a meaningful life. Besides, the Project also aims to gain more involvement of the court in the rehabilitation process of the probationers, including the court seeking more progress reports on the probationer's performance and giving directions as appropriate. In the 2012-13 draft estimates, it has been proposed to extend the Project for one year. Evaluation will be conducted with a view to deciding the way forward.

Continuous Promotion of Cross-sector Collaboration

14. The Government recognises the need for concerted efforts among related professionals, policy bureaux, government departments and NGOs to address the changing needs of young people has been well recognised. At the central policy level, SWD has set up the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk, which is chaired by the Director of Social Welfare and comprises representatives from relevant government bureaux/ departments, advisory bodies, tertiary institutions, education and youth sector and NGOs. The committee meets regularly to examine current youth-related issues and recommends effective measures to address the changing needs of youths at-risk. SWD has also set up Local Committees on Services for Young People at the district level to enhance consolidate efforts in examining current youth problems and the development of suitable intervention strategies.

Advice Sought

15. Members are invited to note and give views on the measures implemented to strengthen support for at-risk youths.

**Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
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