

**For information
On 4 November 2017**

Legislative Council Subcommittee on Children's Rights

Welfare Support for Grassroots Families with Children

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the welfare support provided by the Government for grassroots families with children.

Existing Welfare Support

2. The Government has been providing appropriate financial assistance and support services for grassroots families with children through various welfare measures.

The Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme

3. The CSSA Scheme provides a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially owing to old age, ill health, disabilities, single parenthood, unemployment, low income, etc. The Social Welfare Department (SWD) will provide financial assistance for recipients to meet their basic needs having regard to their needs and circumstances.

4. At present, the CSSA standard rates for children are higher than those for adults of similar physical conditions so as to meet their needs. In addition to the standard rates, eligible students on CSSA are entitled to a wide range of special grants to meet their educational expenses, which include grants to cover transport fares to and from school, examination fees, application fee for Joint University Programmes Admission System, and selected items of school-related expenses (e.g. books, stationery, school uniforms, etc.).

Working Family Allowance Scheme

5. The Government launched the Low-income Working Family Allowance (LIFA) Scheme in May 2016. Its objective is to encourage self-reliance of low-income families through employment, with a focus

on supporting families with children and youths to ease intergenerational poverty. Apart from providing a working hour-linked allowance for LIFA families fulfilling the working hour requirements, a Child Allowance is especially provided for each eligible child or youth in the family. As at 20 October 2017, over 36 000 families (involving around 130 000 persons, of which over 58 000 were children or youths) have received LIFA, with a total amount of allowances disbursed at around \$ 950 million.

6. The Chief Executive's 2017 Policy Address has announced a series of improvement measures on the LIFA Scheme to provide further support for working households in need, including increasing the rate of Child Allowance.¹ Furthermore, the LIFA Scheme will be renamed as the Working Family Allowance Scheme. The Government expects that the relevant improvement measures will be implemented on 1 April 2018.

Child Care Services

7. To support parents who cannot take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons, the Government subsidises non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide various child care services, including child care centres, the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project and mutual help child care centres. Poor or low-income families are provided with fee waiving/ fee reduction of varying degrees.

After School Care Programme

8. NGOs provide supportive after-school care services for children aged 6 to 12 so that children whose parents are unable to take care of them during after-school hours owing to reasons such as work and job search can receive appropriate care. SWD, through the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme for the After School Care Programme, waives or reduces the fee of after-school care services for children to help low-income

¹ Improvement measures on the LIFA Scheme include –

- (1) extending the Scheme to cover singletons;
- (2) introducing a tier with the income limit pitched at 70% of the median monthly domestic household income (MMDHI), and adopting the MMDHI of economically active households as the basis for calculating the income limits;
- (3) adding a new tier of working hour requirement of 168 hours a month for non-single-parent households and a new tier of 54 hours a month for single-parent households. Households meeting the respective monthly working hour requirements are eligible for higher rates of allowance;
- (4) allowing household members to aggregate working hours for assessing the allowance; and
- (5) increasing all rates of allowance, and adding another tier of 3/4 allowance rate between the current full-rate allowance and half-rate allowance.

families. As at end-September 2017, the Scheme had a total of about 1 780 full fee-waiving places. The Government, through the Community Care Fund, rolled out on 3 October 2017 a three-year Pilot Scheme on Relaxing the Household Income Limit of the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme under the After School Care Programme for Low-income Families and Increasing Fee-waiving Subsidy Places. Under the Pilot Scheme, a tier of fee reduction is added such that families whose income is higher than 75% but not exceeding 100% of the relevant Median Monthly Domestic Household Income can receive a one-third fee reduction, and the number of full fee-waiving places will be increased by 2 000.

Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged (PFD)

9. The PFD has, since 2015, set up a dedicated portion of \$200 million to encourage the business sector to collaborate with welfare NGOs and schools to implement more after-school learning and support programmes to facilitate the whole-person development of primary and secondary school students mainly from grassroots families. To date, three rounds of application have been launched under the dedicated portion, and grants totaling about \$123.9 million have been approved to match with business donations for the implementation of 165 after-school learning and support projects, benefiting over 80 000 primary and secondary school students. The Government will inject \$400 million into the PFD in 2018-19, of which \$200 million will be allocated to the dedicated portion. The injection is expected to benefit about 130 000 additional primary and secondary school students from grassroots families.

Child Development Fund (CDF)

10. The Government set up the CDF in 2008 to promote the longer-term personal development of children from a disadvantaged background, with a view to reducing intergenerational poverty. The projects are operated by either NGOs or schools. Through CDF projects, children draw up and implement their own development plans, learn to have savings, and accumulate intangible assets such as a positive attitude, personal resilience and social networks, thus helping their long-term development. The Government will inject \$300 million into the CDF in 2018-19, and this is expected to benefit about 9 000 additional grassroots children.

Advice Sought

11. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
Working Family and Student Financial Assistance Agency
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