

**For discussion
on 10 May 2021**

Legislative Council Panel on Welfare Services

Welfare and Support Services for Children and Youth

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the major welfare and support services provided by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) for children and youth.

Welfare and Support Services for Children and Youth

2. SWD provides a range of welfare and support services for children and youth directly through its own service units, subvented services operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or funded projects.
3. The services include those provided in integrated services (e.g. family services and rehabilitation services) and those specifically for children and youth. The services aim at assisting children and youth in meeting various life challenges, supporting them to become healthy and responsible members of the society and assist those with special needs.

Developmental, Supportive and Preventive Services

Child Care Centres (CCCs)

4. CCCs provide day care service to children from birth to under 3 years old in a safe, stimulating and learning environment, aiming to enhance their growth and development as well as provide support to parents who are temporarily unable to take care of their children due to work or other commitments. Since 2015-16, the Government has provided additional resources in enhancing the manpower of CCCs, including the enhancement of the manning ratio of qualified Care Centre Workers in day and residential CCCs in the 2019/20 school year. The “Child Care Centre Parent Subsidy” was introduced in February 2020 by the Government to partially subsidise the CCC

service fees afforded by parents directly in order to alleviate their financial burden. Additionally, to enhance the long-term planning of child care services, the Government formulated an appropriate population-based planning ratio for aided CCC places with a view to reserving suitable premises in housing development projects for CCC operations so as to better meet the service demands in the new community.

Pilot Scheme on Social Work Service for Pre-primary Institutions (Pilot Scheme)

5. For early identification of and to provide assistance to pre-primary children and their families with welfare needs, the Government launched a three-year pilot scheme in the 2018/19 school year to provide social work services in phases for about 150 000 pre-primary children and their families in more than 700 subsidised/aided Pre-primary Institutions (PPIs), including aided standalone CCCs, subsidised kindergartens (KGs) and KG-cum-CCCs, across the territory. Phases 1, 2 and 3 of the Pilot Scheme have commenced operation in February 2019, August 2019 and August 2020 respectively. At present, a total of 57 social work teams have been set up serving 725 eligible PPIs.

6. The services include providing professional counselling and referral service for children and families; organising parenting education groups and talks; organising relevant thematic activities to consolidate family relationship; providing professional consultations for teaching staff and parents; and providing crisis management for cases in need. SWD has commissioned the City University of Hong Kong to conduct an evaluation study on the current mode of operation, as well as the service performance and service outputs/outcomes of the Pilot Scheme, with a view to shedding light on the way forward of the service.

Re-engineering of Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) to provide After School Care Programme for Pre-primary Children

7. MHCCCs are run by NGOs on a fee-charging and self-financing basis, providing a flexible form of child care service for children under 3 years old (children under 6 years old may also use the service if needed) and facilitating mutual help and care within the community. To cope with community's needs and optimise the use of resources, SWD will re-engineer the 19 MHCCCs across the territory from 2021-22 to 2023-24 to provide After School Care Programme for pre-primary children, and increase the number of social workers and supporting staff so as to better meet the child care needs in the community.

After School Care Programme (ASCP)

8. ASCP aims at providing supportive care services for primary school children whose parents are unable to give proper care to them during after-school hours because of work, job search or other reasons. Through the Fee-waiving Subsidy Scheme (FWSS), SWD provides financial assistance for children of low income families to attend ASCP. Since October 2020, SWD has implemented a host of enhancement measures, including adding 2 500 full fee-waiving subsidy places, relaxing the application eligibility and streamlining the means-test procedures of FWSS, increasing the subsidy level and providing extra subsidy for children with special educational needs, etc.

School Social Work Service for Secondary Schools

9. School social work service for secondary schools aims to identify and help students with academic, social or emotional issues. To enhance teenagers' mental health and resilience in coping with stress, SWD has implemented the measure of "two school social workers for each school" with enhanced supervisory support starting from the 2019/20 school year. SWD will also strengthen the supporting manpower for school social workers in the 2021/22 school year.

Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs)

10. ICYSCs serve to meet the multifarious welfare and developmental needs of children and young people aged 6 to 24 by providing guidance and counselling, supportive programmes, developmental and socialisation programmes as well as community engagement programmes. Currently, there are 139 ICYSCs over the territory operated by NGOs subsidised by SWD.

Services for At-risk Youths

Youth Outreaching Services

11. NGOs are subsidised by SWD to operate 19 youth outreaching social work teams and 18 teams of overnight outreaching service for young night drifters throughout the territory. These teams reach out during the day and night, through adopting modernised and flexible approaches and more online means, to identify and engage target young people, provide crisis intervention and counselling service to help them overcome their problems and develop their

potentials, thereby facilitating their integration into the community in the long run. SWD will strengthen the supervisory manpower for the youth outreaching social work teams in the fourth quarter of 2021 to assist frontline workers to handle the increasingly complicated and diversified youth problems.

Cyber Youth Support Teams (CYSTs)

12. To address the changing needs and problems of the hidden youth in the cyber world, SWD has subsidised NGOs to set up five CYSTs since December 2018 to reach out to the at-risk and hidden youth on the online platforms commonly used by young people. The CYSTs provide advisory and counselling services with regard to the aforementioned young people's problems in social life, emotion, personal growth and development as well as deviant behaviours relating to the use of the Internet. Where necessary, with the consent of the young people, the social workers will meet with them for in-depth discussion and provide suitable follow-up services, including referring them and their family members to relevant mainstream services. SWD will strengthen the supporting manpower for CYSTs in the fourth quarter of 2021.

Community Support Service Scheme (CSSS)

13. Five CSSS teams serve juveniles aged under 18 cautioned under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme, the arrested youth and their peers with a view to eliminating their deviant and unlawful behavior, reducing their law-infringing likelihood and enhancing their law-abiding awareness. The CSSS teams provide individual and family counselling, therapeutic groups, skills training, positive life training, community services and crime prevention programmes, etc. SWD will enhance the supervisory manpower for the CSSS teams in the fourth quarter of 2021.

Crisis Residential Service for Youth-at-Risk

14. With a total of 30 residential places, two Crisis Residential Centres provide immediate accommodation and professional intervention for at-risk youth aged 8 to 21 who have short-term residential needs (such as those with relationship problems with their families, running away from home and unwilling to stay at home).

Rehabilitation Services

Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

15. SWD provides subvention for NGOs to provide rehabilitation services for pre-school children from birth to six years of age assessed mainly by the Child Assessment Centres of the Department of Health to be in need of professional intervention, including the services of Early Education and Training Centres (EETCs), Integrated Programme in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres, On-site Pre-school Rehabilitation Services (OPRS) and Special Child Care Centres (SCCCs). As of the 2020/21 school year, there are a total of about 8 000 OPRS places. 2 000 additional OPRS places will be provided in the 2021/22 to 2022/23 school years, bringing the total number of service places to 10 000. Over 1 200 additional service places in SCCC and EETCs will also be provided from 2019-20 to 2021-22, bringing the total number of service places to about 6 700.

Support Centres for Persons with Autism (SPAs)

16. SPAs seek to, through services of multi-disciplinary teams, enhance the various skills of young persons with high-functioning autism to cope with the needs in the transition to adulthood. SPAs also provide support for parents and carers as well as advisory services and professional training for other subvented rehabilitation service units and frontline staff serving persons with autism. In 2019-20, SWD has increased the number of SPAs from 3 to 5.

Integrated Community Centres for Mental Wellness (ICCMWs)

17. 24 subvented ICCMWs provide one-stop, district-based community mental health support services for persons in recovery and persons with suspected mental health problem aged 15 or above, their family members/carers and local residents. From October 2018, SWD has provided additional resources to strengthen the professional support for children of persons in recovery. From October 2019, SWD has extended ICCMWs' service coverage to secondary school students with mental health needs and strengthened the professional support for them and their family members/carers.

Other Support Services

Residential Child Care Services

18. To support children who cannot be adequately cared for by their families temporarily for various reasons or young persons under the age of 21 with behavioural and/or emotional problems, SWD has been subsidising NGOs to provide various types of 24-hour Residential Child Care Services. Among them, institutional care services include residential child care centres (also known as residential crèches and residential nurseries), children's homes, children's reception centre, boys'/girls' homes and boys'/girls' hostels. While non-institutional care services include foster care service and small group homes, where a home-like environment is provided for children with residential care needs.

District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development – Direct Cash Assistance

19. The District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development provides one-off financial assistance to children and young people aged 24 or below in disadvantaged circumstances to meet their learning and educational needs, job skills training and employment needs as well as social and potential developmental need.

Child Development Fund

20. Child Development Fund, set up in 2008 with \$900 million injected over the years, funds three-year projects which promote the longer-term development of children aged between 10 and 16 or studying Primary Four to Secondary Four from a disadvantaged background and encourage them to develop an asset-building habit, and formulate and implement Personal Development Plans with a view to reducing inter-generational poverty. So far, 169 Projects operated by NGOs and 71 school-based Projects operated by schools have been rolled out, benefitting over 21 000 underprivileged children.

Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged (PFD)

21. PFD was established in 2005 to promote tripartite partnership among the welfare sector, the business community and the Government to help the disadvantaged, including disadvantaged children and youths. The Government has thus far injected \$1.2 billion into the PFD. Under the PFD, \$400 million was

designated as the Dedicated Portion (DP) to implement more after-school learning and support programmes for primary and secondary students from grassroot families for strengthening these students' whole-person development and alleviating the pressure on working women in looking after their children. As at March 2021, about \$260 million under DP have been granted to implement over 400 after-school learning and support programmes, benefitting more than 130 000 primary and secondary students.

Adoption Service

22. The goal of the adoption service is to find suitable and permanent homes for children, whose parents are unable or unwilling to take care of them and provide them with a loving and nurturing environment, with the best interests of the children as the paramount consideration. At present, the Adoption Unit of SWD is working with three NGOs duly accredited by the Director of Social Welfare as Accredited Bodies, namely the International Social Service Hong Kong Branch, Mother's Choice Limited and Po Leung Kuk, in securing local and overseas families for children available for adoption in Hong Kong.

Advice Sought

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

Labour and Welfare Bureau
Social Welfare Department
May 2021