

WOMEN'S COMMISSION

Initiatives of Home Affairs Department to Support Grassroot Women and New Arrivals from the Mainland

INTRODUCTION

This paper :-

- (a) informs Members of the initiatives undertaken by the Home Affairs Department (HAD) to promote information technology (IT) usage and community participation of grassroot women and new arrivals from the Mainland (new arrivals);
- (b) informs Members of the concerted efforts made by HAD, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the private sector to support grassroot women and to facilitate early integration of new arrivals into the community; and
- (c) invites Members' comments and views on the initiatives.

BACKGROUND

2. The Government is committed to maintaining Hong Kong as a vibrant, caring and harmonious community. HAD has been working closely with Government bureaux and departments, as well as NGOs and the private sector, to encourage public participation in community affairs and to instill a greater sense of belonging. To this end, dedicated services and support are provided for grassroot women so that they can maximize their potential and actively participate in the community. Moreover, as the coordinator of new arrival services, we have also set up effective machinery to facilitate the early integration of new arrivals into the local community.

3. Our efforts in relevant areas are introduced in detail in the following paragraphs.

PROMOTION OF IT USAGE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

4. Faced with the rapid development of IT, there remain certain segments of the society which may not be able to enjoy the benefits of IT developments. In particular, grassroot women do not normally have access to computers and suffer most from the "digital divide". In order to tackle this problem, we have taken steps to raise the awareness and confidence of women in the use of IT. Since 1999, we have implemented the following projects:

- Community Cyber Points: Since mid-1999, about 2,500 computers have been installed at community centres/halls, district offices and public libraries for use by members of the public, free of charge.
- IT awareness programmes: Introductory classes on IT have been organised throughout the 18 districts. The first series of classes was launched from October 2000 to January 2001 and, of the 6,000 participants, about 70% were women. The second series was conducted from January to March 2001, providing training for about 3,000 participants. The third phase will take place from August to December 2001, involving about 360 classes for 7,200 participants. The target will be women and new arrivals.
- Publicity on IT: At the district level, various IT promotional activities, such as seminars, courses, competitions, fun days, have been organized to enhance residents' interests in IT.

Partnership with NGOs and the Private Sector

5. We believe that the promotion of IT in the community should be a joint effort by the Government, NGOs and the private sector. For example, the "E-Community Ambassador" project is run by an NGO with logistical, financial and technical support from Government and some private firms. The project comprises a mobile computer room which goes from district to district promoting various Government IT initiatives.

The coordinating role of HAD

6. The Director of Home Affairs (DHA) chairs the Central Co-ordinating Committee on the Promotion of IT Usage among Women. The aim of the Committee is to equip grassroot women and new arrivals with more knowledge of, and access to, IT. The Committee comprises representatives of relevant Government bureaus and departments (including Information Technology and Broadcasting Bureau, Information Technology Services Department and Health and Wealth Bureau (HWB)), NGOs and some interested Legislative Councillors.

7. The Committee has met twice so far and has made the following suggestions:

- District Co-ordinating Committees be set up in phases in the 18 districts to co-ordinate efforts and initiatives at the district level.
- A web-site should be set up to link up information and services of interest to grassroot women, housewives and new arrivals. This could be done under the Women's Commission web-site.
- The possibility of maximising the use of computer facilities and resources in the community should be explored. More than 1,500 computers are available in public libraries for community use.
- Further joint efforts by Government, NGOs and the private sector should be promoted. A good opportunity for such joint effort would be the new Super Cyber Centre which will be ready for use in mid 2001. The Centre will have about 100 computers including a children's corner for parents to use computers with their children. We will also liaise with private sector companies to recruit their staff as IT volunteers in our training courses and activities.

NETWORK WITH DISTRICT-BASED WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS - YIN NGAI SOCIETIES

8. HAD maintains close liaison with various local organisations to strengthen the community network. The Yin Ngai Societies are major district-based women's organizations that have been very active in organising various community-building initiatives. The first three Societies were established in 1980, in fact, by the existing DHA who was then serving in the New Territories Administration. Their main objective is to encourage women at the grassroot level, especially housewives, to maintain an active social life, to develop their own potential, and keep in close touch with community developments. Through organising social and learning activities to members, the Societies provide an opportunity for them to develop their potential and self-confidence, and to promote neighbourliness in the community.

9. 33 Yin Ngai Societies can be found today in all 18 districts, and their membership is over 6,000.

10. In 1984, with the support of HAD, the Yin Ngai Central Council was set up to formulate a central strategy and co-ordinate the efforts of the district Yin Ngai Societies. A number of District Officers are Honorary Presidents to the Societies and provide advice and support to them on a regular basis.

11. The Societies are now operating autonomously and are self-financing through members' subscription and donations. The Societies may also apply for funding from District Councils and District Offices.

12. Apart from providing services to members, the Societies are also active in community-building initiatives and charitable activities. They have contributed to many fund-raising and welfare projects in Hong Kong and the Mainland. In view of the rapid development in IT and in support of the government's drive to promote IT in the community, the Societies are organizing training classes on IT applications for their members with a view to broadening their horizons.

SERVICES AND SUPPORT FOR NEW ARRIVALS

13. It is our policy objective to facilitate the early integration of new arrivals, and we have been working in close coordination with Government departments and partnership with NGOs.

14. At the central level, the Secretary for Home Affairs chairs a Steering Committee on New Arrival Services to give general direction to new arrival services. Since 1996, the DHA has been chairing a Coordinating Committee on New Arrival Services which meets bi-monthly to monitor the overall provision of new arrival services, and identify measures to meet the needs of new arrivals. At the district level, District Officers chair 18 District Coordinating Committees to complement the work at central level. Every 3 months, DHA also meets with 25 major NGOs providing new arrival services, and visits their centres regularly to monitor the effectiveness of services provided. We have also produced a service handbook to provide new arrivals with useful information on general conditions in Hong Kong and major services available for them.

Profile and Needs of New Arrival Women

15. Since July 1995, we have been maintaining the daily quota for One-Way Permit Holders at 150. This amounts to 54,000 new arrivals each year. According to surveys conducted by Census and Statistics Department and HAD, about 70% of new arrivals are female and nearly half of them are aged 25 to 44. It is expected that this trend will continue.

16. Through HAD's regular contacts with NGOs, we understand that many newly arrived women are in need of child care services to enable them to seek employment. To this end, the Social Welfare Department, together with NGOs, will continue to expand relevant services for families in need, including newly arrived families. We also understand that many newly arrived women have not received formal education before they come to Hong Kong. The Government has therefore been providing them with family services, such as counselling, parent

education and language classes. Adult education and retraining programmes will also be provided in order to help them acquire useful knowledge and skills to contribute to society.

Community Education Programme to Promote Community Acceptance of New Arrivals

17. To promote community acceptance of new arrivals, the Home Affairs Bureau and HAD have launched a community education programme in February 2001. The theme of the programme is “建設美好家園、共奏和諧樂章 - Building a Harmonious Future Together”. We have produced TV and radio Announcements of Public Interest to convey the message to the public. We will also, in collaboration with NGOs, organize a series of district-based community involvement activities throughout the year of 2001 to facilitate two-way communication between new arrivals and other citizens.

WAY FORWARD

18. The above initiatives have been very well-received in the community. We will continue our efforts to enhance the welfare of grassroot women and new arrivals in furthering our objective to build community awareness and to facilitate community spirit.

ADVICE SOUGHT

19. Members are invited to :-
- (a) note the initiatives of HAD to support grassroot women and new arrivals; and
 - (b) give comments and views on the initiatives.

Home Affairs Department
May 2001