

## **WOMEN'S COMMISSION**

### **Equal opportunity and services for women with disabilities**

#### **Purpose**

This paper sets out, for Members' information, the efforts we have made on the rehabilitation services front to cater for the special needs of women with disabilities.

#### **Background**

2. The Second Report of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women already outlines the comprehensive range of services for women with disabilities. Relevant sections are extracted at *Annex A* for Members' easy reference. This paper will focus on issues that are of concern to the Commission.

#### **General statistics on women with disabilities**

3. Based on the General Household Survey on persons with disabilities and chronic diseases conducted by the Census and Statistics Department in 2000, it was estimated that there were 269, 500 people with restriction in body movement, seeing difficulty, hearing difficulty, speech difficulty, mental illness and/or autism in Hong Kong. Among them 143, 400 (i.e. 53%) were female. The higher percentage is attributed to their longer life span: the total number of women with disabilities over 60 years of age is 36% higher than that for men.

4. In addition, there were about 62, 000 to 87, 000 people with mental handicap in Hong Kong around the same period of time. Female constituted about 41% of them.

## **Equal opportunities for women with disabilities**

5. The Disability Discrimination Ordinance seeks to ensure equal opportunities for people with disabilities, including both women and men, to facilitate their integration into the community to the fullest extent possible. Under this Ordinance, it is unlawful to discriminate against or harass a person on grounds of his/her disabilities in the areas of education, employment, access to premises, provision of goods and services, etc.

## **Rehabilitation services and facilities**

6. Along the principle of equal opportunities, our rehabilitation programme provides a full spectrum of services and facilities catering for the special needs of women with disabilities, on par with their male counterparts. These services and facilities include:

- (a) accessible transport and physical environment;
- (b) preventive and early identification measures;
- (c) education;
- (d) vocational training and employment services;
- (e) community support and carer empowerment;
- (f) social rehabilitation; and
- (g) medical rehabilitation.

## **Specific services and facilities for women with disabilities**

- (a) Accessibility

7. It is the Government's policy to develop a barrier-free physical environment that allows access to all buildings and facilities for people with disabilities. Under the Buildings (Planning) Regulations, the *Design Manual – Barrier Free Access 1997* (DM97) sets out the standards of the provision of barrier free access. All buildings constructed or substantially altered in and after 1997 have to comply with the obligatory requirements stipulated in DM97. The Government has been taking the initiative to improve the accessibility of all pre-1997 government buildings, particularly those frequented by the public, for compliance, as far as is technically feasible, with the standard of DM97.

8. Under the purview of the Department of Health (DH), there are a total of 31 Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) and three Woman Health Centres (WHCs) all over the territory providing a wide range of preventive, early identification and medical services to cater for the special needs of women, including those with disabilities.

9. The Government has put in efforts to provide accessible facilities in all 31 MCHCs and three WHCs. The position on barrier free access for those with physical handicap are:

- (i) 27 of them are accessible to people with walking disabilities, with the provision of ramps and lifts;
- (ii) the remaining seven, including Ann Black, Hung Hom, Robert Black, Wong Siu Ching and South Kwai Chung MCHCs and Chai Wan and Tuen Mun WHCs, are technically not feasible for installation of lifts to reach all service floors and/or building of ramps at entrances; and
- (iii) all of them, except one due to technical problem, are provided with accessible toilets.

10. DH will continue to plan for the installation of other access facilities in the MCHCs and WHCs, including tactile guide paths and PA systems in lifts for people with visual impairment and visual fire alarm systems for people with hearing impairment.

11. As regards the 43 hospitals under the Hospital Authority, 41 of them are providing barrier free access to people with disabilities. It is not technically feasible to install lifts/ramps in parts of the service buildings of the remaining two hospitals.

(b) Gynaecological examination couch specifically designed for women with disabilities

12. To facilitate women with walking disability to join the Cervical Screening Programme, DH has in December 2005 procured a gynaecological examination couch specifically designed for them. It is installed in the Maurine Grantham Maternal & Child Health Centre, one of the busiest centres in New Territories West. The couch cost \$46,500.

13. To encourage the use of the couch, a trial run was specially arranged in April 2006 for the Association of Women with Disabilities (the Association), which suggested the addition of handrails to the couch to make it more user-friendly. The handrails, that have to be specially designed and tailor-made overseas, have been procured at the cost of

\$6,000. The shipment just arrived and safety examination and final fitting of the handrails will be completed by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department within this year.

14. To further encourage women with disabilities to conduct cervical screening test, DH arranged a health talk on “Prevention of Cervical Cancers” specifically for the Association’s members on 3 July 2006 and arranged special sessions for members of the Association to conduct cervical screening tests. So far, a total of 18 women with walking difficulties have used the couch since its procurement last year, and among them, 17 were members of the Association specially arranged to undertake the screening. Subject to users’ feedback and usage rate, DH plans to provide additional couches in their other clusters, i.e. Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories East.

(c) Gender mainstreaming

15. In response to Women’s Commission’s call for implementation of gender mainstreaming in public programme, we initiated, in 2005, the application of the principle to our Child and Adolescent Mental Health Community Support Project, which provides specialized support for young persons with early sign of mental health problem. We have identified this project with due consideration that women are more prone to suffer from internalizing mental health problems like anxiety and depression. We would take into account the experience, and extend the application of gender mainstreaming checklist to more rehabilitation projects.

## **Conclusion**

16. Since the publication of the 1995 White Paper on Rehabilitation, the Government has taken a big step forward in terms of policy directions for rehabilitation and the provision of rehabilitation services. Every effort has been, and will continue to be, made to promote the integration of all people with disabilities into the community. In the course of developing rehabilitation policy and programme, we will continue to consult and to involve women with disabilities to ensure that their specific needs are factored into the process.

**Extract from the Second Report on  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Under the Convention on  
The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women**

*Services for Women with Disabilities*

40. The Government aims to provide equal opportunities and full participation in the community for people with disabilities. To enable women with disabilities to fully participate in the community, the Government has been actively promoting a barrier-free environment. The Disability Discrimination Ordinance that came into effect in 1996 offers protection to people with disabilities against discrimination, harassment or vilification in areas including employment, accommodation, education, access to premises, partnerships, vocational training, clubs and sporting organisations.

41. Rehabilitation services offered by both Government and non-governmental organisations to disabled women include prevention and assessment of a disability, medical rehabilitation, pre-school training, integrated and special education, vocational training and social rehabilitation. The Government is actively promoting 'A Society for All' to arouse public attention and enhance acceptance of the disabled in the community. In promoting self-reliance, the Government actively encourages the open employment of disabled persons through various new initiatives such as the Self-help Integrated Placement Service and the Trial Placement cum Mentor Scheme. In addition, the Government has worked with employers to provide on-the-job training opportunities as well as seed money grants to NGOs to set up small businesses that employ people with disabilities. IT awareness and training programmes have also been provided.

## **Highlights on Services for Women with Special Health Needs**

### **Women with Disabilities**

238. Disabled women in Hong Kong are provided with equal treatment as regards access to health facilities and services just like any other person in the community. In respect of services in connection with pregnancy and women health, disabled women are treated no differently from other women.

239. In addition, disabled women are provided with care and services specially designed for people with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Programme, including prevention and assessment of disability, and medical rehabilitation in hospitals, clinics and infirmaries. As for residential services, as at December 2002 there were 5,421 hostel and home places, and 223 supported hostel places for people with disabilities who could neither live independently nor be adequately cared for by their families. For aged blind people who were unable to look after themselves adequately, or in need of care and attention, 899 places were provided in homes and care-and-attention homes. For ex-mentally ill patients, there were 980 long stay care home places and 1,349 halfway house places.

240. Professional back-up services from clinical psychologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists are provided for people with disabilities in rehabilitation day centres and hostels. Support services such as home-based training and support for mentally handicapped persons, community mental health link for ex-mentally ill persons, after-care service for discharges of halfway houses, domiciliary occupational therapy service, and the community rehabilitation network for persons with visceral disability or chronic illness are provided in the community. Furthermore, respite service for disabled persons, occasional child care service for disabled pre-schoolers and six parents resource centres are provided to meet the special needs of families with disabled members.

### **Women with Disability**

285. Disabled women in Hong Kong have the equal rights to enjoy economic and social life as do any other citizens. Their rights are protected by the DDO, which aims “to render unlawful discrimination against persons on the ground of their or their associates’ disability in respect of their employment, accommodation, education, access to

partnerships, membership of trade unions and clubs, access to premises, educational establishments, sporting activities and the provision of goods, services and facilities; to make provision against harassment and vilification of persons with a disability and their associates; to extend the jurisdiction of the Equal Opportunities Commission to include discrimination against persons on the ground of their or their associates' disability, and for connected purposes.” (Cap. 487) The DDO binds the government as well as the private sector.

286. At the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (UN ESCAP) in October 2002 to conclude the Asian Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002), Members endorsed a regional framework of Action (Biwako Millennium Framework for Action) aiming to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. “Women with disabilities” is one of the seven priority areas for action under the framework. It was agreed by the High-level Intergovernmental Meeting that the Biwako Millennium Framework for action would be valuable in setting guidelines and targets for national, sub-regional and regional programmes on disability over the next ten years. The meeting also agreed that the seven priority areas specified in the framework provided a useful focus for future programmes and activities. The HKSAR being an affiliated member of UN ESCAP will continue to support the Decade movement and draw reference from the contents of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action in developing its future programmes and activities related to women with disabilities.

287. Disabled women receive the same services and assistance provided for people with disabilities under the Rehabilitation Programme which includes vocational training and employment assistance. Access to education and health services for women with disabilities is covered under Articles 10 and 12 respectively.

288. Regarding the employment situation of women with disabilities, according to a territory-wide household survey conducted in 2000, of the 260,500 persons aged 15 and over with disabilities<sup>1</sup>, 22.9% (i.e. 59,700) were economically active and 35% of these economically active persons (i.e. 20,900) were females. Those employed persons with disabilities had relatively lower educational attainment than the total employed

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<sup>1</sup> Excluding mentally handicapped persons as their number was considered to be subject to under-estimation in the survey.

population probably because of their physical or mental constraints. About 40.6% of them had primary education or below, as against 18.4% for the total employed population. With a view to assisting persons with disabilities in obtaining paid employment positions, the Labour Department provides special employment services to job-seekers with disabilities. In 2002, it registered a total of 4,225 job-seekers with disabilities, out of whom 1,815 were female. Of the 2,572 placements secured by persons with disabilities in the same period, over 47% were filled by females. This compares with the figure of 38.8% in 1999. The three most common industry sectors which employed persons with disabilities were engaged in were the community, social and personal services sector (28%), the wholesale, retail and import / export trades, restaurants and hotels sector (25%), and the manufacturing sector (14%). About 60% of the employed persons with disabilities earned less than HK\$10,000 (US\$1,282) per month in 2000. The median monthly employment earnings was HK\$8,000 (US\$1,026), for all employed persons with disabilities taken together. This was slightly lower than that of the total employed population, which was HK\$10,000 (US\$1,282) at that period.

289. In facilitating people with disabilities in seeking open employment, the government has introduced the Self Help Integrated Placement Service (SHIPS) and Trial Placement cum Mentor Scheme for People with a Disability since April 2000 and January 2002 respectively. SHIPS aims at encouraging and helping disabled job-seekers to be more pro-active and independent in the search for jobs. Group counselling sessions are provided to the disabled job-seekers to improve their job-searching skills and interviewing techniques. Computer facilities (including internet browsing), telephones and fax machines and access to the latest careers information are made available to the disabled job-seekers in the employment offices. Parallel to the continual placement service rendered by the Labour Department, the disabled job-seekers are encouraged to search and apply for jobs on their own initiative. As at 31 December 2002, 1,743 job-seekers with disabilities (of whom 797 are women, i.e. 46%) have participated in the programme. The programme has successfully placed 1,323 disabled job-seekers (of whom 618 are women, i.e. 47%) in employment, representing an overall placement rate of 75.9%.

290. The Trial Placement cum Mentor Scheme for People with a Disability is also in place at which the disabled workers undergo a one-month trial period and their employers receive a subsidy equal to half of the wages paid to them during the trial period, subject to a maximum of



HK\$3,000 (US\$385). 600 disabled job-seekers are expected to benefit from the scheme in three years. To enhance peer group acceptance, which is highly conducive to the early integration into the workforce and retention of the disabled employees, participating employers are requested to appoint a staff member as the “mentor” of each disabled employee so that immediate assistance and social support may be rendered to the disabled employees throughout the trial period. The initial response to the scheme is encouraging. Up to 31 December 2002, of the 237 disabled persons (of whom 110 are women, i.e. 46%) participating in the scheme, 185 (of whom 90 are women, i.e. 49%) were offered full employment by the employers upon completion of the one-month trial.

291. Disabled women, like other women in Hong Kong, are protected from various forms of violence and abuse as enunciated in detail in this Report under Article 5. However, women with mental deficiency may have higher risk in becoming targets for sexual abuse given that perpetrators are more likely to take advantage of their deficiency. In addition to the protection given to them by their families and the police, the Criminal Procedure Ordinance (Cap. 221) protects and assists vulnerable witnesses in criminal proceedings. Protection includes live television link and video recording of a witness’ testimony.