

WOMEN'S COMMISSION MEETING ON 5 DECEMBER 2012

Childcare Services

Purpose

This paper is to brief Members on the provision and development of various types of childcare services under the purview of the Social Welfare Department (SWD).

Childcare Services

2. It is the fundamental responsibility of parents to take care of their young children for the best benefits of their developmental needs. To support parents who are unable to take care of their children temporarily because of work or other reasons, SWD has all along provided subvention to Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to run a variety of childcare services, and assist low-income families to obtain the needed services.

3. Different day childcare services are available to meet the different needs of parents¹. Child Care Centres (CCCs) provide day care for children below the age of three. Apart from standalone CCCs, many CCCs are attached to Kindergartens (KGs) to form KG-cum-CCCs to provide edu-care services for children aged six or below. To support parents with sudden engagements or various commitments, Occasional Child Care Service (OCCS) on full-day, half-day or sessional basis is provided by some CCCs and KG-cum-CCCs. Families requiring longer hours of childcare

¹ For children below the age of 18 in need of out-of-home care due to family problems and/or their behavioural or emotional problems, a wide range of residential services are provided free of charge, including residential childcare centres, foster homes, small group homes, children's homes, girls'/boys' homes, and girls'/boys' hostels. Some residential homes extend their services to the young persons till the age of 21 to meet their special needs.

assistance may use Extended Hours Service (EHS) in some CCCs and KG-cum-CCCs. Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) are set up by non-profit-making organisations, women's associations, church groups, etc. to recruit volunteers to form mutual help childcare groups to take care of each other's children. For children aged 6 to 12, After School Care Programme (ASCP), which is operated by NGOs on self-financing and fee-charging basis, provides supportive services including homework guidance, parent guidance and education, skill learning, meal service as well as other social activities. The service hours, provision and utilisation of different childcare services are shown at **Annex**.

4. To ensure that needy low-income families can afford different kinds of services, fee subsidies in various forms are available. Parents having children attending full-day CCCs or CCCs attached to KGs may apply for 50%, 75% or 100% fee remission under the Kindergarten and Child Care Centre Fee Remission Scheme subject to their passing the social need assessment and means test. Some CCCs and KG-cum-CCCs provide direct fee remission to needy low-income families for their use of OCCS and EHS. SWD has also strengthened the service provision of MHCCCs since January 2008 by providing financial incentives to service operators who are also subsidised to provide fee remission for needy low-income families. To enhance self-reliance of women and family carers, SWD provides 'Full Fee Waiving or Half Fee Reduction Subsidies Scheme' for low-income parents who are engaged in open employment or employment-related retraining/attachment programmes and whose children attend ASCP.

Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

5. To enhance service flexibility and accessibility while at the same time, promote community participation and mutual assistance in the neighbourhood, SWD introduced the pilot Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) for children below the age of six in 2008-09. NSCCP has two service components: (i) home-based childcare service operating from 7 am to 11 pm; and (ii) centre-based care group operating till at least 9 pm in the weekdays and covering some weekends and some public holidays. Full or half fee remission is available for low-income families with social needs. Children aged six or above may also use the service under exceptional circumstances so that they would not be exposed to risk of being left unattended.

6. In view of the proven effectiveness of the three-year pilot project in meeting service needs, NSCCP was regularised and extended to all 18 districts in October 2011. Resources have been increased to enhance social work support, set up project-based service hotline, extend the operation hours of the centre-based care group and provide escort service for needy service users. With the service extension to 18 districts, the minimum number of childcare places has been increased by 64%, that is, from at least 440 places to at least 720 places (including 468 home-based childcare places and 252 centre-based care group places). To meet the community's demand for childcare services, service operators would increase the number of home-based childcare places on a need basis and develop child carers' network. From October 2011 to September 2012, a total of 9 292 children were served under NSCCP². The service hours, provision and utilisation of NSCCP are shown at **Annex**.

7. NSCCP is delivered at the neighbourhood level and targets needy families, including working women, new arrival mothers and single mothers, in the community who can approach service operators direct or be referred for service by social workers, local groups, etc. Women, if performing their role as family carers, are also involved to help in the provision of home-based childcare service to make a contribution to neighbourhood support in the community. SWD has also collaborated with the Employee Retraining Board to provide childcare support under NSCCP for grass-root new arrivals participating in the 'Certificate in Foundation Skills for Employment', which was first piloted in 5 districts in 2010-11 and extended to 14 districts as a regular programme in 2012-13.

Support to Women

8. The Administration is concerned about the well-being and the needs of women in Hong Kong. Different forms of childcare services have been developed to meet the different working hours and needs of women. Various childcare support services are in place to support and strengthen family integrity and functioning.

² SWD captures the service utilisation of NSCCP by counting the number of children using the service in each month. One child is counted only once in the month.

Way Forward

9. The Administration will continue to closely monitor the need for childcare services, and explore ways to further enhance the scope and provision of flexible childcare services to safeguard the best interests of children in need, assist low-income families and promote the well-being of women in Hong Kong.

Advice Sought

10. Members are invited to note the paper and provide advice from the women's perspective as appropriate.

Social Welfare Department
December 2012

Annex

Service Hours, Provision and Utilisation of Different Child Care Services

Services	Service Hours	No. of Places for the Whole Territory	Average Enrolment Rate from April to September 2012
Aided Standalone Child Care Centres (CCCs) ³	Monday to Friday: 8 am to 6 pm Saturday: 8 am to 1 pm	690	100 %
CCC s attached to Kindergartens (KGs) ⁴	<u>Full-day</u> Monday to Friday: 8 am or 9 am to 4 pm or 6 pm <u>Half-day</u> Monday to Friday: 8 am or 9 am to noon; or 1 pm to 4 pm or 5 pm	about 23 000 (as at September 2011)	76% (as at September 2011)
Occasional Child Care Service (OCCS)	Monday to Friday: 8 am to 6 pm Saturday: 8 am to 1 pm	383	82 %
Extended Hours Service (EHS)	Monday to Friday: 6 pm to 8 pm Saturday: 1 pm to 3 pm or 8 pm	1 230	85 %

³ To more effectively meet the different needs of parents and encourage mutual assistance in the neighbourhood by building up support network at the district level, SWD has focused its resources on developing child care services that offer greater flexibility in the community. Thus, SWD has no plan to expand child care services in the mode of standalone CCCs.

⁴ Only the places for CCCs attached to KGs are included. About half of the non-profit-making KG-cum-CCCs provide services for longer hours in the weekdays and till 1 pm on Saturday. The service places and enrolment rate for the 2012/13 school year are not yet available at this stage.

Mutual Help Child Care Centres (MHCCCs) ⁵	MHCCCs provide services according to district needs, and the normal service hours are from morning to evening. MHCCCs participating in the Subsidy Scheme for MHCCCs provide services to families in need from 6 pm to 10 pm on Monday to Friday, and 8 hours of service on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays through appointments.	314	8 %
After School Care Programme (ASCP)	<u>Half-day</u> 8 am to 1 pm (am session) 1 pm to 6 pm (pm session) <u>Late-afternoon</u> 3-4 pm to 7-8 pm (some operating NGOs are ready to extend their service hours on weekdays' evening and Saturday)	around 5 500 (including places other than 'full-fee waiving places')	86.5% (as at September 2012)
Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP)	<u>Home-based child care service</u> 7 am to 11 pm <u>Centre-based care group</u> till at least 9 pm in the weekdays and covering some weekends and some public holidays	at least 720 (including 468 home-based child care places and 252 centre-based care group places)	9 292 children were served from October 2011 to September 2012 ⁶

⁵ Given the low utilisation of MHCCCs and that SWD has provided additional resources to regularise and extend the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (a similar service with greater flexibility) to all 18 districts, SWD has no plan to further expand the service of MHCCCs.

⁶ SWD captures the service utilisation of NSCCP by counting the number of children using the service in each month. One child is counted only once in the month.