

Family Life Education

PURPOSE

This paper examines the key elements of “Family Life Education”, sets out existing work done by the Government and the community on promoting Family Life Education, and suggests areas for further research and enhancement of work.

WHAT IS FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION (FLE)

2. The premier professional organization in the United States for Family Life Educators – the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) – explains Family Life Education (FLE) as “the educational effort to strengthen individual and family life through a family perspective. The objective of the FLE is to enrich and improve the quality of individual and family life.”

KEY ELEMENTS OF FLE

Background

3. FLE is not a new terminology. It has existed informally throughout mankind’s history, and passed on from generations to generations since ancient times.

4. Unlike “Family Therapy” which intervenes primarily after problems set in, FLE works primarily on a prevention approach — helping family members to enrich family life and prevent problems before they occur.

5. Research from the Rand Corporation³ (the Rand research report *Early Childhood Interventions: Proven Results, Future Promise* by Lynn A. Karoly, M. Rebecca Kilburn, and Jill S. Cannon) and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis⁴ (in its report *Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return*) proves that family problems would be less damaging for people, and less expensive for society, when they can be tackled by prevention. FLE recognizes that all families can benefit from education and enrichment programs — not only those families experiencing difficulties.

6. The definitions of FLE vary across countries and nations. Currently, an array of FLE programmes and related activities are provided through service units under the Education Bureau (EDB), Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB), Department of Health (DH), Social Welfare Department (SWD) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Family Life Education Units (FLEUs), Integrated Family Service Centres (IFSCs) / Integrated Services Centres (ISCs) and Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) as well as the school social work service. Through a wide range of educational and promotional activities such as seminars, talks, groups, and exhibitions, they seek to prevent family and social problems, promote harmonious interpersonal relationships and help families function effectively.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF FLE IN HONG KONG TODAY

7. To put the FLE in perspective in modern Hong Kong society, the Family Council Secretariat has attempted to set out the key elements of the FLE, in order to facilitate Members' discussion and deliberations of the work ahead in different areas —

³ The RAND Corporation is a non-profit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

⁴ The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis covers the 9th District of the Federal Reserve, including Minnesota, Montana, North and South Dakota, northwestern Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The Minneapolis Fed has strong ties to the economics department at the University of Minnesota. Nobel laureate economist Edward Prescott was affiliated with both institutions for a long time. The Bank publishes *The Region*, a magazine featuring articles about economic policy and interviews with famous economists.

- Prepare for marriage –
 - Pre-marriage education

- Be a better parent –
 - Preparing for parenthood (including preparation during pregnancy, budgeting, making child care arrangements)
 - Parents working as a team and strengthened fatherhood
 - Grand-parenting
 - Care-giving by Relatives/Kinship/Neighborhood

- Strengthen family relationships –
 - Caring for aging family members and the care-givers
 - Caring for family members with special needs e.g. disabled members and the care-givers
 - Caring for younger members of the families in troubled times (e.g. substance abuse) and the care-givers, and preventing the problem from occurring
 - Support for high-risk / needy families

- Promote family as a unit –
 - Promote Work-life Balance education
 - Promote Family Perspectives

8. In the following paragraphs, on-going work in the above areas of the FLE currently provided by different Government bureaux and departments and/or NGOs, together with suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives are set out for Members' information and consideration.

9. In the school curriculum, the promotion of core values conducive to harmonious family relationships such as responsibility, respect, commitment is duly emphasized in relevant topics and subjects in pre-primary, primary and secondary curricula including Liberal Studies as a core subject in new senior secondary curriculum to be implemented in 2009. Ample opportunities, for example, in the form of child-parent activities are provided in school to complement the curriculum in the nurturing of these family values. Family life is an essential curricular theme to promote family values in Moral and Civic Education. Caring and love are recommended as the core value for promotion in the interim

review of curriculum reform in 2008. In the newly revised Moral and Civic Education curriculum framework, the importance of the role of family and the responsibility of family members is further strengthened. To support schools in promoting family life education and family values, a dedicated web page was launched in April 2008 for teachers' reference.

A. Pre-marriage Education

10. It is not uncommon for couples getting married to spend more time preparing for the wedding day than the marriage itself - thus exposing themselves to the future risk of marital discord and breakup. Research tells us that marriage preparation is a useful means of reducing marital dissolution and breakup. Marriage preparation may not prevent all sorts of problems in marriage, but it can equip couples with the tools to handle disappointment in marriage and sustain a marriage.

11. It is imperative to view marriage preparation as a process of learning involving various stakeholders. Pre-marriage education is more than simply a counseling or therapeutic process. It should be viewed as a life-changing educational process for all who are considering to get married and their relatives / friends around.

On-going initiatives to promote pre-marriage education

12. To better prepare couples-to-be for marriage, FLEUs / IFSCs / ISCs / ICYSCs provide a wide range of FLE programmes to help them understand the meaning of marriage and their expectations, assist them in family planning and budgeting, and strengthen their skills in handling in-laws relationship and resolving conflicts, etc.

13. Student Health Service (SHS) of DH puts emphasis on pre-marriage education, parent education and nurturing good psycho-social health of children and adolescents through distribution of pamphlets, health talks and conducting workshops to students and parents. For pre-marriage education, the focus is on friendship skills, self acceptance, mutual respect, emotion and crisis handling as well as sex-education.

Suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives

14. Subject to the availability of additional resources, FLEUs / IFSCs / ISCs / ICYSCs may develop more focused programmes and activities to meet the different needs of couples-to-be.

B. Parent Education

15. A child's development is influenced by his/her genetic and physiological make-up, as well as his/her environment. As the family is the immediate environment for a child to grow up, the quality of parenting and parent-child relationship have significant bearing upon the healthy development of the younger generation in all domains.

16. Children have varied developmental needs in the course of their development. Their needs range from basic physical satisfaction and attachment to the caregiver as a secure base in infancy, through the mastery of the environment and social recognition in childhood, to independence and individuation in adolescence. Above all, parental love and attention is conducive to the fulfillment of all the other needs. Parents have to learn to adapt their expectations and parenting strategies during different stages of their children's development. Understanding the temperament of their children is also important to facilitate acceptance and behaviour management of their children.

17. Research has shown that ineffective parenting may hamper children's development and lead to child behaviour problems. Without prompt intervention, it may result in adolescent conduct and mental health problems which are associated with high social and economic costs⁵.

18. Though most parents attach great importance to nurturing their children, not many have the dedicated time or energy to learn about

5 Webster-Stratton C, Taylor T. Nipping early risk factors in the bud: preventing substance abuse, delinquency, and violence in adolescence through interventions targeted at young children (0-8 Years). *Prevention Science*, 2001;2:165-92.

parenting. While some have good skills that come naturally with becoming parents, we still need to empower the others in their parenting. Furthermore, they need also to constantly update themselves in knowledge about the risks their children are exposed to, such as in the areas of drug abuse, information technology, fads and trends in youth culture, etc. Bearing in mind positive parenting practices could prevent development of emotional and behaviour problems in children and is conducive to the establishment of harmonious relationship in families which form the basic fabric of our community, parents should be made aware of the importance of positive parenting.

19. And as children grow into adolescents, many risk factors will set in increasingly, like curiosity, inadequate life skills, underachievement, undesirable peer influence, undesirable youth sub-culture, growing addiction culture, availability of illicit drugs, poverty, pessimism in upward social mobility, etc. At this critical stage, parents play a key role in helping their children weather the risks and stay on the right path to adulthood. (Another important player is of course the school system, which is, apart from family, a large part of the life of an adolescent.) Poor parenting can easily contribute to a dysfunctional family process which may possibly lead to many social problems given all the risks in store.

20. Traditionally, women usually take up the main parenting roles. Many men are not able to find time for fathering, largely due to prevailing social norms, their job commitments and possibly the fairly quick and tangible rewards (bonuses, pay rise, promotion, admiration, higher social status) associated with a successful career. Social stigma might exist for fathers investing their time in parenting and giving up their career. On the other hand, the increasing number of working mothers indicates that mother as a major parenting figure in the family has changed. The couple needs to work as a team for effective parenting.

21. In view of the changing social circumstances and aspirations, the modern Hong Kong society needs to take a new look at “Parent Education”, as it begins to take up new meanings. There should be reinvigorated efforts in promoting better parenting through a correct and effective approach, in addition to seeking more contribution from fathers

and involving others as proposed below. It is the quality that counts. Generally speaking, there should be holistic educational efforts targeting parents and other caregivers in the areas of physical and psychological development of children, effective parenting skills, communication skills, emotion and stress management for parents, and dealing with children's behavioural problem. There should also be specific educational efforts targeting parents from different specific policy perspectives, like adolescent health, anti-smoking, preventing gambling addiction, etc. For example, in combating the problem of youth drug abuse is concerned, parents are an important target of preventive educational efforts. The aim is to emphasise the key role of parents in protecting their children from illicit drugs, and educate them with effective communication skills, contemporary drug knowledge, and skills and means to identify at-risk youth for seeking professional help.

(a) Parents Working as a Team and Strengthened Fatherhood

22. There is increasing discussion on the importance of involvement of both parents in the lives of their children for their future healthy development. It is common for mothers to work full-time. For couples who live together to raise children, there is a need to promote **couples working as a team in parenting** and **strengthened fatherhood**, as these are conducive to a healthy family life.

23. With increasing number of divorces, single working mothers/fathers supporting the families alone are also increasingly common. How to promote **shared/cooperative/joint parenting** even after divorce is important to the continual development of the children in a normal and healthy manner.

24. Teamwork/ shared / cooperative / joint parenting does not imply simply a fixed proportion of parenting time allocated for the children. It involves a community education process to instill in the minds of fathers and mothers that positive and effective parenting is essential to the well-being of their children and a responsibility of both genders.

(b) Grand-parenting

25. Grandparents play an increasingly important role as caregivers, confidante, friends and nurturers of a family. Companionship and support is increasingly seen as the major relationship between grandparents and the rest of their family members.

26. Grandparents have to learn new ways to fill the roles. For some grandparents whose adult children are divorced, it could bring added responsibilities, both financially and emotionally. Grandparents have to emotionally support their adult children and grandchildren, and may feel their lives affected as much as their divorcing child.

(c) Care-giving by Relatives / Kinship / Neighbourhood

27. Families are encouraged to build up and strengthen the extended kinship and neighbourhood network to provide immediate and emotional support to families and its members when need arises. The sense of care and mutual support amongst the extended family and neighbourhood will also foster harmonious relationship amongst family members and in the community.

On-going initiatives to promote parent education

28. Programmes and activities to promote various aspects of parent education are provided by the EDB, SWD, DH and the Women's Commission (WoC). In particular, as part of the efforts to combating youth drug abuse, the Government has also organized preventive educational programmes for parents.

29. The Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC) under the EDB will continue to collaborate with the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and Federations of PTAs (FPTAs) to step up parent education and relevant activities at the school, district and community levels to cater for the diversified needs of parents and to foster sustainable home-school cooperation.

30. FLEUs / IFSCs / ISCs organise programmes on the physical and

psychological development of children, parenting skills, communication skills, emotional and stress management, behavioural problems of children, etc. for families with children at different developmental stages.

31. DH has launched a territory-wide parenting education initiative since 2002. Parenting education is delivered through the distribution of printed materials, audiovisual materials, 'Happy Parenting!' workshops, and individual counseling, to all parents-to-be and parents of children of 0-5 years attending Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs). The general public can also access these information through pre-recorded parenting hotline and DH's website. An intensive parenting programme, the 'Positive Parenting Programme' (Triple P) is held regularly for parents who have children aged 2-5 with early / mild behaviour problems or those who encounter parenting difficulties.

32. The Triple P and various parenting groups are also held in Child Assessment Centres (CACs) for parents of special needs children attending CACs.

33. Furthermore, the SHS of DH also give focus on harmonious parent-child relationship, parent-child communication, understanding adolescents and parental support to children in its pamphlets, health talks and workshops.

34. As for grandparents, advices on parenting of grand children including communicating with their adult children and children-in-laws about parenting are available in leaflets. They are also welcome to attend the parenting programmes in MCHCs.

Initiative of the Women's Commission

35. WoC has, since 2006, initiated the Quality Parenting Pilot Project in collaboration with the Kwun Tong District Council and North District Council to promote caring families, quality parenting and instill core life values in the younger generation. It also seeks to establish a support network for parents so that they can share experiences and help each other in parenting.

36. For this project, the District Councils concerned provided funding to district organisations for offering a variety of parenting education programmes, including courses, workshops and seminars, day camps, exhibitions, competitions, etc. WoC plans to promote the project in other districts.

Targeted parent education programmes

37. Targeted parent education programmes have been launched to address youth problems. For example as far as combating youth drug abuse is concerned, Government has all along been targeting preventive educational efforts at parents through various means, including talks, workshops, home-school seminars, experience sharing sessions, courses, etc as organised by the Narcotics Division of the Security Bureau (SB), NGOs, EDB, Home-School Cooperation Committee, parent-teachers bodies, District Fight- Crime Committees, etc.

38. The Beat Drugs Fund and the Narcotics Division have also sponsored many preventive education programmes and research projects targeting at parents. A recent one is a research into “Engagement of parents in anti-drug work”.

Suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives

39. Strategically, delivery of parent education requires the concerted efforts of different sectors such as the social service, health and education. The CHSC, FPTAs and PTAs will continue to collaborate with various sectors to organize seminars, talks and activities to promote home-school cooperation and to disseminate positive family values at the school, district and community levels to facilitate effective learning and healthy growth of our children.

40. Subject to the availability of funding:

- (a) the DH will convert all printed materials on parenting into audio-visual form, to facilitate better penetration of positive parenting messages into the public; and

(b) FLEUs/IFSCs/ISCs may step up their programmes and activities in this regard.

C. Caring for aging family members and care-givers

41. Watching a parent grow vulnerable and dependent is an uncomfortable transition. We may not feel equipped to handle the welfare of those who raised us. Confusion, sadness and helplessness may have put us off from facing the question during this unsettling transition period of life. On the other hand, shifting family roles are becoming increasingly common as more and more people try to meet the demands of their own children, while feeling the tug to assist their aging parents.

42. Providing care for parents involves major change. There are debates, for example, on whether different generations should live separately to avoid tension and conflicts, and how to change the perception of seeing older adults as a burden to the families.

On-going initiatives to promote care for aging family members

43. The Government has been providing a wide range of support and educational services to **help carers to take care of elders** in their families. In particular, the Government provides information, training and counselling services to carers through elderly centres throughout the territory. These centres also assist carers by forming mutual help groups, setting up carer resource centres, and providing demonstration and loan of rehabilitation-aid equipment. For elders who have long-term care needs, the Government provides subsidised centre-based and home-based community care services. For those who cannot be adequately taken care of at home, we provide subsidised residential care services.

44. As a form of community education, the Opportunities for the Elderly Project (OEP) adopts **intergenerational integration** as one of the major themes. Through OEP, young people are involved in a wide range of activities in order to promote a sense of worthiness amongst the elders

and to advocate a community spirit of care for the elders.

45. **Empowerment of the elderly** and their carers to improve their health and self-care ability is the key to promote care for aging family members. To disseminate health knowledge and advocate for a healthy lifestyle, Elderly Health Service (EHS) of the DH outreaches into the community to deliver health education programmes to both elderly and carers in collaboration with various elderly service providers. Apart from these health education activities, various media channels have been employed to increase publicity on elderly health and active ageing, including 24-hour telephone information service, newsletters, leaflets, VCDs, books and internet website. EHS also produces DIY (Do-It-Yourself) health education kits for self-reference and use by elderly service providers in conducting health educational activities in their own settings.

Suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives

46. A number of initiatives have been launched to care for aging family members and provide relief to carers. At the community level, the Elderly Commission (EC), LWB and SWD launched the District-based Trial Scheme on Carer Training in three districts, namely Eastern and Wanchai, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung, and Kowloon City and Yau Tsim Mong, in October 2007. A total of eleven District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) were each provided with seed funding of \$50,000 to organise carer training programmes in collaboration with community organisations. Upon completion of training, the trainees would be engaged in “carer services” to stand in for carers temporarily, thereby giving the latter relief. It is expected that the scheme will train at least 660 individuals in the first year.

47. To help elderly dischargees remain in the community after being discharged from hospitals, and relieve the burden of their care-givers, the Government has earmarked \$96 million to launch a pilot Integrated Discharge Support Programme for Elderly Patients. The integrated support services under the programme include discharge planning, transitional rehabilitation training, transitional home-based services, carer training and support. The first pilot has been launched in Kwun Tong in

March 2008, with the second pilot scheduled to be launched in Kwai Tsing later in August. It is estimated that 3 000 elders and 1 000 carers can be served under each pilot per annum.

48. To **enhance the quality of life of elders without family support or living with other aged family members**, who live in dilapidated homes with poor fittings and lack financial means to improve their home conditions, the Government has allocated \$200 million to launch a “Home Environment Improvement Scheme for the Elderly” (the Scheme). Under the Scheme all DECCs will provide elderly households with minor home maintenance and improvement services as well as essential fittings based on a home environment assessment. The amount of subsidy for each eligible elderly household will be subject to a ceiling of \$5,000. We hope that the Scheme will further enhance the support for elders without family support at the community level and promote a culture of caring for the elderly.

49. To **promote active ageing** so that elders can enjoy fruitful lives through engaging in learning, EC and LWB launched a school-based Pilot Elder Learning Scheme in early 2007. In the meantime, there are 32 Elder Academies jointly operated by schools and NGOs throughout the territory offering more than 5 000 places in this academic year. Cross-sectoral and inter-generational collaboration is the mode of operation of these **Elder Academies**. The objectives are to encourage elders to continue to engage in learning, maintain the physical and mental well-being of elders, foster a sense of worthiness among elders, promote inter-generational harmony, strengthen civic education and promote cross-sectoral collaboration.

50. EC and LWB have been working on extending the concept of Elder Academies to the tertiary institutions. Support from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Shue Yan University and Lingnan University has been received. We are approaching other tertiary institutions to solicit their support.

51. The Pilot Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project (PNAAP), launched by EC and LWB, aims to promote the concept of active ageing through neighbourhood platforms. Under PNAAP, NGOs enter into partnership with residents’ organisations, Elder Academies, religious

groups, schools or the commercial sector to train up volunteers to organise activities regularly for the elderly and pay visits to singleton elders to strengthen neighbourhood support. They can also help to identify hidden elders or elders-in-need for NGOs to follow up with district elderly community centres, neighbourhood elderly centres and social centres for the elderly.

52. The two-year PNAAP will be carried out in 19 areas across the territory, reaching out to every sector of the community, including private residential estates, public housing estates, old tenement buildings and rural areas. PNAAP is expected to cover about 32 000 elders.

53. EHS of DH has collaborated with various organizations in providing health education activities for elderly and carers in support of the Active Ageing campaign initiated by the EC. One example is the Pilot Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project (左鄰右里積極樂頤年試驗計劃) organised by the EC, in which EHS will collaborate with Hong Kong Geriatrics Society to provide training for volunteers to promote active ageing.

D. Caring for family members with special needs e.g. disabled members and the care-givers

54. It is the Government's policy objective to facilitate community living of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and their full integration into society. While advanced technology, medication, physiotherapy and other treatments available nowadays have enabled PWDs, even if their disabilities are at a severe level, to live with their families and friends in the community, the encouragement and support of family members are crucial to their rehabilitation and social integration. Caring for a family member with disability can be stressful. It also requires a lot of courage and efforts from both the PWDs and their families to face the physical and/or mental challenges arising from the disabling health conditions. In this regard, the Government seeks to provide the necessary support services to PWDs and their family members/ carers.

On-going initiatives to promote care for family members in need and the care-givers

55. The Government provides a series of day care and community support services for PWDs and their families / carers to meet the training needs of PWDs, assist them in developing their potential and prepare them for full integration into the community. These services also aim at strengthening the carers' caring capacity and relieving their stress so as to improve their quality of life and that of their family members with disabilities. Services provided include day activity centre, training and activity centre for ex-mentally ill persons, resource centre for parents and relatives, community mental health link, social and recreational centre for the disabled, home-based training and support service, residential respite service, day care service for severely disabled persons, holiday care programme, family-based respite service, specialized programmes for persons with autism and mentally handicapped persons with challenging behaviours, etc. For PWDs who cannot live independently and those who cannot be adequately cared for by their families, the Government also provides a wide range of residential services to improve their quality of life and relieve the caring burden of the carers.

Suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives

56. The Government supports the continuous development of these day care and community support services and recommends enhancing people-oriented services, providing more support to the carers, developing mutual help networks and rendering multi-disciplinary support services. One upcoming new initiative for 2008-09 is the setting up of district-based community support centres to provide one-stop support services for PWDs and their families / carers, so as to enhance the community living skills of the PWDs as well as strengthen the caring capacity of their carers and relieve their stress.

E. Caring for younger members of the families during their troubled times (e.g. substance abuse) and the care-givers , and preventing the problem from occurring.

57. Some quarters of the community are increasingly concerned about the acute youth problems such as addictions and the correlation between these problems and other family problems. There have been calls for the adoption of a more integrated and family focused approach to tackle the issues faced by youths.

58. Taking the youth drug abuse problem as an example, youth drug abuse is a complex social problem, intrinsically linked to a number of other social issues. It is suggested that youth drug abuse is only a manifestation of some fundamental problems, chief among which are dysfunctional family processes. Some young drug abusers are said to be indirect victims of various family problems, such as poor parenting, parental absence, unbalanced work life, non-intact families, nuclear families, parental marital problems, families at risk or with inadequate capacities, drop in family solidarity, etc. There are of course other concurrent risk factors which may contribute to the problem, such as academic difficulties, poor peer relationships, involvement with the juvenile justice system etc.

59. The worst part is that the youth drug abuse problem and some of the risk factors would reinforce each other and they could be both the cause and the effect. In any event, the adverse consequences would be felt by all, the troubled youngsters themselves, their family members, the community, and society in general.

60. Substance-abusing youth may be alienated from and stigmatized by their peers and society. These young people also often disengage from school and community activities, thus depriving their peers and communities of positive contributions they might otherwise have made. Depression, developmental lag, apathy, withdrawal and other psychosocial disorders are frequently linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Many aspects of their family life are jeopardized, sometimes resulting in or reinforcing family dysfunction. High economic and social costs can result from monetary expenditures and

emotional distress related to alcohol- and drug-related crimes, increased burdens for the support of adolescents and young adults who are not able to become self-supporting, and greater demands for medical and other treatment services and the criminal justice system for these youth.

61. This vicious cycle must be broken, at all possible points. We need complementary efforts from different policy perspectives with equal rigours. From a family perspective under the mandate of this Council, many initiatives being or to be pursued can go a long way to help prevent the occurrence of the problem, like parental education, support for high-risk/ needy families, promotion of work/life balance education and promotion of family perspectives. There should be similar efforts from other policy perspectives, like adolescent health and youth development. Of course, tackling the youth drug problem is a worthy cause in its own right and such efforts will continue and be intensified, as highlighted below. This will not only address the problem head on, but also contribute to handling other social issues.

On-going initiatives to promote care for younger members of the families during their troubled times

62. The Narcotics Division of the SB is tasked to formulate anti-drug policy and to coordinate efforts among different bureaux, departments and NGOs in anti-drug programmes, following a multi-prong approach covering preventive education and publicity, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement, research, and external cooperation. For example, to help youngsters troubled with the drug abuse problem, a package of inter-related core youth services as well as designated non-medical drug treatment and rehabilitation services subvented by SWD are in place to provide multi-level social work intervention ranging from prevention and education, outreaching and early identification, to voluntary treatment and rehabilitation to tackle the problem head-on.

Suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives

63. “Adolescence Growth and Development” is a major component of family life education, targeting at adolescents. There should be reinvigorated educational efforts in areas like self-understanding,

relationship with parents, roles and responsibilities, emotion and stress management, dating and courtship, adolescence growth and development in sexuality, etc

Measures to combat youth drug abuse

64. The Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse led by the Secretary for Justice is spearheading cross bureaux and inter-departmental collaboration against youth drug abuse, with a view to drawing up long-term, sustainable and comprehensive strategies by October 2008. Meanwhile it has devised a series of initial measures that can be implemented in the short to medium term with additional resources of \$53 million earmarked in 2008-09, as follows -

Preventive Education and Publicity

- (a) launching a territory-wide campaign in June to mobilise the whole community to fight against youth drug abuse;
- (b) equipping principals, teachers, guidance teachers, school social workers and parents with knowledge and skills on anti-drug education, identification of high-risk youth and handling of drug abuse cases;
- (c) strengthening anti-drug preventive education for students;

Treatment and Rehabilitation

- (d) enhancing the district youth outreaching social work teams and overnight outreaching services;
- (e) setting up two additional Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers;
- (f) strengthening the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme by enhancing services of the Juvenile Protection Section of the Police and Community Support Service Scheme of the SWD;
- (g) providing more subvented places in drug treatment and

rehabilitation centres;

- (h) opening two Substance Abuse Clinics under the Hospital Authority and enhancing the provision of psychiatric medical social services;
- (i) providing training to private medical practitioners, so that they can provide early medical advice, treatment and referral services for patients who have drug abuse problems;

Law Enforcement

- (j) strengthening the Police School Liaison Programme;
- (k) enhancing intelligence-gathering capabilities of the Police;
- (l) enhancing the detector dog services at the boundary control points; and

Research

- (m) extending the coverage of the next round of the survey of drug use among students (which will be conducted in the second half of this year) to include students from primary four to post secondary, and conducting future rounds more frequently, at three-year intervals.

65. With the recommendation and support of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse chaired by the Secretary for Justice, an additional annual sum of \$53 million has been earmarked in 2008-09 and thereafter for concerned bureaux and departments to implement a series of initial and mid-term measures to tackle the problem of youth drug abuse problem. SWD is primarily responsible for strengthening existing social rehabilitation and treatment services on the downstream to cope with the anticipated increase of service demand arising from tightened law enforcement effort on the upstream. These enhancements include, amongst others :

- (a) enhancing day and overnight outreaching social work service for at-risk youth;

- (b) setting up two new counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers;
- (c) strengthening the community support service scheme, and
- (d) providing more subvented places in residential drug treatment and rehabilitation centres.

F. Support for high-risk / needy families

66. Families may have complex needs, such as those related to family separation, immigration, housing and health, that impact on their well-being and progress. It is essential for the supporting organizations (e.g. schools) to respond to these needs and support the families. Good communication that identifies the immediate needs of the family and the wider needs of the children and other members of the families, sign-posting these families to local agencies and services, and tracking systems developed to ensure their progress is properly monitored may help.

On-going initiatives to promote support for high-risk / needy families

67. EDB offers school placement service to the newly-arrived children (NAC) upon their arrival in Hong Kong. To help these children integrate early into the community and education system, EDB provides them with additional support measures, including a full-time 6-month Initiation Programme, an Induction Programme, and a School-based Support Scheme Grant where primary and secondary schools can flexibly make use of the grant to run school-based support programmes (e.g. supplementary language classes) for their newly arrived students.

68. The 61 IFSCs and two ISCs operated by SWD and NGOs across the territory provide a continuum of preventive, supportive and therapeutic welfare services, including family life education, parent-child activities, enquiry service, volunteer training, outreaching service, various groups and programmes, intensive counselling and referral service etc, for individuals or families in need. The aim is to enhance their capacity

in problem-solving and facing life's challenges. Tangible services such as financial and housing assistance may also be provided. A continuum of preventive, supportive and developmental programmes to meet the multifarious needs of children and youth aged 6 to 24 is also provided by the neighbourhood-based ICYSCs.

69. To increase contacts with needy families who are reluctant to seek help, the SWD has launched the Family Support Programme (FSP) since early 2007. Under the FSP, through telephone contacts, home visits and other outreaching programmes, we aim to introduce families at risk, including families at risk of domestic violence, psychiatric problems and social isolation, to various support services available and motivate them to receive services to prevent further deterioration of their problems. Volunteers including those who have overcome family / personal problems or crises have also been recruited and trained to contact these families and to provide them with support and assistance.

70. Since 2005, the Administration has also been implementing the Comprehensive Child Development Service (CCDS) in phases. Using the MCHCs and other service units as the screening platform, the CCDS aims to identify at an early stage at-risk pregnant women, mothers with post-natal depression, families with psychosocial needs, as well as pre-primary children with health, developmental and behavioural problems. Children and their families in need are referred to appropriate health and welfare service units for follow-up. The CCDS currently covers six districts and will be further extended to Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing this year.

Suggestions for enhanced / new initiatives

71. EDB plans to enhance the course content of the Initiation Programme and the Induction Programme to cover NAC up to the age of 18 years.

72. Subject to the availability of additional resources, IFSCs / ISCs / ICYSCs may step up their programmes and activities in this regard.

73. The Administration will also monitor the implementation of the CCDS and fine-tune its model as appropriate.

G. Promote Work-life Balance education

74. Every one of us wishes to do our best both at home and at work. We cannot deny that much of our identity and sense of accomplishment come from our career. It is easy for us to put in more time at work to pursue career advancement than at home. We may be adept at deciding between work projects that are important as opposed to those that are simply urgent. Unfortunately, we do not often apply the same principles when it comes to our family.

75. To truly put in place a balance between work and life, a community education process is essential, however long and hard it would take. Working fathers and mothers must learn to know and to believe that a career is a means to an end - supplying for the physical and emotional well-being of one's family. Consequently, one could be better able to make decisions about promotions, transfers, and work schedules based on how these would affect one's family. Furthermore, one could learn to view his/her work as one more aspect of fathering/mothering, providing opportunities to model a healthy work ethic and demonstrate leadership skills for his/her children.

76. Discussion on work-life balance is spelt out in detail in Family Council Paper 14/2008.

H. Promote Family Perspectives

77. A main core of a successful FLE is the instillation of a family perspective in the mentality of ordinary man and women – be they a parent, a human care professional or simply a recipient of service. Inculcating the family perspectives and sensitivities and building them in our considerations of policies and programs which affect the families would help usher in a family focus in tackling individual and social problems, and contribute to the building up of a pro-family perspective.

78. The issue on promoting family perspectives will be discussed in greater detail by the Family Council.

ADVICE SOUGHT

79. Members are invited to comment on the on-going initiatives and proposed new initiatives to better enhance/co-ordinate different aspects of the FLE, and to advise on the way forward.

**Family Council Secretariat
June 2008**