

Assistance Programme under Community Care Fund Evaluation Report on Training Subsidy for Children who are on the Waiting List of Subvented Pre-school Rehabilitation Services

Background

Community Care Fund (CCF) has been established since early 2011 to provide assistance to people facing economic difficulties, in particular those who fall outside the social safety net or those within the safety net but have special circumstances that are not covered. In addition, the CCF can take forward measures on a pilot basis to help the Government identify those that can be considered for incorporation into the Government's regular assistance and service programmes.

2. Steering Committee on the CCF endorsed at its meeting on 20 April 2011 to launch this assistance programme in 2011-12 for subsidising children from low-income families who have been on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services on or before 30 November 2011 to receive appropriate training / therapy services provided by special child care workers, psychologists or occupational therapists / physiotherapists / speech therapists, so as to facilitate their learning and development while they are waiting for subvented services. Each eligible child can receive subsidised services of not exceeding \$2,500 per month for a maximum period of 12 months.

3. This programme, with budget of \$128.82 million (including the administrative cost of \$2.82 million), is administered by the Social Welfare Department (SWD) and estimated to benefit 4 200 children.

Implementation of Assistance Programme

4. SWD organised a briefing session in October 2011 for the service providers (SPs) interested in providing training services for the programme, and to invite them to apply for joining this programme as authorised SPs. SP approved for providing training services in this programme must be an organisation or a body exempted from tax under Inland Revenue Ordinance Cap. 112 Section 88 with at least one-year experience in providing government subvented¹ or self-financing pre-school rehabilitation services. Upon vetting,

¹ Government subvented pre-school rehabilitation services shall mean Early Education and Training Centres, Integrated Programmes in Kindergarten-cum-Child Care Centres and Special Child Care Centres, which provide services for children with special needs from birth to six years old.

18 eligible SPs were approved by SWD in December and the service boundaries covered all over Hong Kong.

5. SWD announced the details of this programme and arranged publicity² in December 2011. At the same time, based on the information from Central Referral System for Rehabilitation Services - Subsystem for Disabled Pre-Schoolers (CRSRehab-PS), SWD also sent invitation letters³ to about 4 700 parents / guardians of the eligible children for inviting them to submit the application on or before 29 February 2012.

6. The CCF Team of SWD was responsible for vetting the applications and arranging the eligible children to receive training from the approved SPs, based on their choices in the applications. The subsidy will not be released to the parents / guardians directly and the approved SPs have to apply for release of subsidy from SWD according to the actual sessions of subsidised services provided for each child. As at the end of August 2012, SWD received 983 applications and 870 eligible children have been arranged to receive services. The subsidy claimed by the approved SPs was about \$7.94 million.⁴

Result of Analysis

7. Taking into account the recommendations of the independent consultant, SWD has analysed the collected information and data for the evaluation as follows.

(a) Statistical Data on Application and Service Arrangement

8. SWD received a total of 983 applications among 4 694 invitation letters issued (Please refer to paragraph 15 to 16 for the reason for the discrepancy between the number of invitees and the number applications). Excluding 17 withdrawn applications and 5 applications pending processing⁵, there were 90.6% eligible applications (871 cases, 20.5% of invitees) and 9.4% ineligible applications (90 cases) among the 961 applications vetted. All the ineligible applications were due to exceeding the required family income limit. Relevant statistics are at Appendix I(a).

² Besides distributing the programme leaflets via District Social Welfare Offices and the Home Affairs Department, SWD has also uploaded all relevant information onto SWD website.

³ Letters were sent to the parents / guardians of all children who are on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services as at 30 November 2011, as SWD had no available data on their household income.

⁴ This is the amount of subsidy claimed by the SPs for January to June of 2012.

⁵ Some applications were pending for the applicants to provide relevant supporting documents for verifying the eligibility of their children.

9. Among the eligible children, majority was aged 3, account for 36.8% (321 cases) and aged 4 which account for 25.3% (221 cases). For disability types, the beneficiaries mostly suffered from delayed development, account for 55.2% (481 cases) with the rest including speech impairment, autism and attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder. Relevant statistics are at Appendices I(b) and I(c).

(b) Information from the Approved Service Providers

10. All the SPs approved by SWD for providing training in this programme shall be the organisations or bodies exempted from tax under Inland Revenue Ordinance Cap. 112 Section 88 with at least one-year experience in providing government subvented or self-financing pre-school rehabilitation services. The subsidised services provided by these approved SPs include training / therapy rendered by special child care workers, psychologists or occupational therapists / physiotherapists / speech therapists. The types of services provided by the approved SPs varied, except family support services which are mandatory. In general, majority of the SPs could provide training / therapy rendered by special child care workers, occupational therapists and / or speech therapists. Please refer to Appendix I(d) for details.

11. Majority of the eligible children (about 87.3%) could be assigned with services provided by the first three SPs chosen in their application. Among them, 63.1% were assigned with their first choice. Relevant information is at Appendix I(e).

12. Majority of the eligible children (713 cases, about 83.1%) could be referred to the SPs for training services within 30 days.⁶ Some of the cases, needed longer processing time due to special circumstances such as incomplete or insufficient information / document provided by the applicants or parents / guardians preferred waiting for the SPs chosen which had no training places left and declined to receive training from other SPs or in other location. The relevant details are at Appendix I(f).

(c) Survey on Beneficiaries

13. SWD has conducted an opinion survey on the parents / guardians of the 50 randomly selected beneficiaries (5.8% of the total). Except one

⁶ This means the number of days, including Saturday, Sunday and Public Holiday, counting from the date of receipt of application to the date of confirming the assignment of SPs by the parent / guardians.

interviewee who had no comment, all the other interviewees agreed that this assistance programme was beneficial to the learning and development of the beneficiaries and all the interviewees were satisfied with the arrangement of the programme. Most of the interviewees also satisfied with the services arranged by the SPs. The views given by some interviewees include relaxing the eligibility requirements, increasing the number of training sessions, and regularising the programme. Details are at Appendix II(a).

14. This survey also studied the training services received by the beneficiaries from other organisations before and after the grant of subsidy. Details are listed at Appendix II(b). There were about 46% of the beneficiaries (23 cases) received training services from other organizations before the grant of subsidy, majority of them spent less than \$500 per month. After the grant of subsidy, however, the number of cases which were still receiving the related training services dropped to 28% (14 cases) while the relevant expenses had no significant change.

(d) Survey on Invitees

15. As there was a discrepancy between the number of application (983 cases) and the number of invitees (4 694 cases), SWD also conducted an opinion survey to 40 randomly selected invitees, who had not submitted applications (about 1% of the invitees), to explore their reasons of not submitting application and their comments on the assistance programme.

16. Most of the interviewees did not submit the applications as they could not meet the eligibility requirements (35 cases, 87.5%), and these interviewees mostly have family income exceeding the income limit. Most of the interviewees offered no comments on the programme. Other views include relaxing the income limit and increasing the amount of subsidy, etc. The relevant data is listed at Appendices III(a) and III(b).

(e) Survey on Service Providers

17. SWD also conducted a survey on the 18 approved SPs by questionnaires and 17 of them completed the questionnaires.⁷ All the 17 SPs agreed that the programme could help the learning and development of the beneficiaries and were satisfied with the arrangement and assistance of SWD. Some SPs have made suggestions such as relaxing the eligibility requirements including extending the specified date of the children being on the waiting list of

⁷ The SP without completing the questionnaire has not been chosen by any beneficiaries in this programme.

subvented rehabilitation services, extending the subsidised period, strengthening publicity of the programme and regularising the programme etc. to benefit more children. In general, the SPs were satisfied with the arrangement of this programme and indicated their willingness to join similar programme. Details of the survey are at Appendix IV.

(f) Public Enquiries

18. In the course of implementing this programme, SWD has set up an enquiry hotline to provide support and information regarding the programme to the public. From November 2011 to August 2012, SWD received 616 enquiries on the programme, the majority of which concerned application procedures, completion of application forms and eligibility criteria. The details are at Appendix V.

Conclusion

19. As reflected from the findings, the interviewees and the SPs were generally satisfied with the effectiveness of the assistance programme. From the result of survey in Appendix II(b), the beneficiaries could receive appropriate rehabilitation services through the programme and subsequently received less training services from other organisation after the grant of subsidy. This demonstrated that the subsidised services had already satisfied or supplemented their training needs. The result also suggested that the purpose of the programme has been achieved through effectively helping the children to receive timely training and relieve their families' financial burden. It has also fulfilled the objective of CCF which is to provide assistance to people facing economic difficulties, in particular those who fall outside the social safety net.

20. It is a crucial learning and development stage for the children aged below 6, especially those preschoolers with special needs. Timely arrangement of training for children with special needs would be definitely beneficial to their learning and development. Owing to the increase of public understanding on the special needs of children and enhancement of assessment services in recent years, there was an increasing trend for the number of children diagnosed with special needs which also induced a significant increase in new applications for pre-school rehabilitation services. The increasing service quota, however, could not sufficiently meet the growth of service demand. The programme has effectively filled the service gap of waiting for the subvented services and enabled the disabled children of low income families to timely receive necessary services earlier, which enabled them to enjoy a higher chance of admitting to

normal school and participating in daily activities. We consider that the programme is in line with the development direction of rehabilitation services policy under Hong Kong Rehabilitation Programme Plan and suggest incorporating it into the regular service programmes.

21. The experience and mode of services of this programme are worth to be considered in planning the regularisation, i.e. inviting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to provide subsidised pre-school training services (extending the invitation to private service sector could also be considered under feasible condition). The beneficiaries are therefore allowed to choose the SPs to procure the services according to their needs while they are waiting for the subvented services. Besides, with reference to the result of the evaluation, the Government should also consider the factors that would affect the service quality when determining the details of service arrangement, such as the different service needs of beneficiaries with different types of disability, availability of trained professionals or services in the market to absorb the demand, the distribution of training places in individual district, the choice and needs of families for the services, etc.

22. Bearing in mind that this assistance programme only provides subsidised services for low-income families, which is about 19% of the total number of children being on the waiting list of subvented pre-school rehabilitation services, and there are still a small number of cases waiting for assignment of SPs. In planning the regularization of the programme, a thorough study to explore the availability of NGOs from both subvented and private sector to cope with the service demand is necessary for effective allocation of resources and services for serving the most needy children.

23. Since the regularisation of the programme have far-reaching implication on the future development and operational mode of pre-school rehabilitation services, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth study on its feasibility and consult relevant stakeholders including parents groups, NGOs providing rehabilitation services, healthcare professionals, etc. to ascertain meeting the needs of the service users before a concrete timeline for the regularization can be made.

24. Having regard to the time required for the above-mentioned preparatory work, it is anticipated that a concrete proposal for regularising the pre-school programme concerned may only be available in early 2013 the earliest. Before the regularization can be actualised, extension of the assistance programme is proposed so as to enable the children in need to receive timely and

necessary training. Based on the result of the evaluation, the parents / guardians and the SPs were satisfied with the arrangement of the programme and the followings could be considered in the arrangement for extension of the programme:

- (a) The average waiting time for the subvented services ranged from 12 months to 17 months in 2011-12. Though a portion of the beneficiaries will start receiving the subvented pre-school rehabilitation service and ceased using the subsidized service under CCF, it is expected that some children may still need to wait for the subvented services after the end of subsidising period. As the programme is planned to be regularised in first half of 2014, the subsidised period may be considered to be extended to 31 March 2014 so that the existing beneficiaries can continue to receive the subsidised training before admitting to the subvented pre-school services or primary education;
- (b) Besides admission to subvented pre-school rehabilitation services, some existing beneficiaries will be admitted to primary education and thus more training places will be released by then. Another round of application may be considered by extending the specified date (e.g. 31 August 2012) for children being on the waiting list so as to benefit more children in need; and
- (c) There was suggestion on relaxing the income limit (i.e. 75% of Median Monthly Domestic Household Income (MMDHI), excluding assets). Though this could allow more children to benefit, the additional service demand may not be absorbed readily by the SPs in view of the limited number of training places and trained professionals provided by existing SPs. The affordability of the SPs to absorb the service demand has to be thoroughly assessed, or the time on service assignment will be prolonged and another waiting list for subsidised services be created. This certainly violates the objective of the programme.

25. To conclude, in view of its effectiveness, regularisation of this programme is recommended. While it is necessary to take time to consult relevant stakeholders and undertake comprehensive study on the regularised programme to better addressing the needs of the service users and optimizing the

use of resources, CCF can consider extension of the assistance programme in the interim to allow the children in need receive appropriate training timely.

Social Welfare Department
October 2012

Statistical Data on Application and Services Arrangement and
Profile of Service Providers

(a) Average Household Income of Ineligible Applicants

Household Size	75% MMDHI (Note 1)	Number of Applications	Average Monthly Household Income	Income Exceeded in %
2 persons	\$11,250	5	\$14,327.80	27.36%
3 persons	\$15,450	42	\$20,610.86	33.40%
4 persons	\$20,025	40	\$24,769.00	23.69%
5 persons	\$25,875	2	\$32,590.50	25.95%
6 persons	\$29,325	1	\$70,000.00	138.70%

Note 1: According to the Report on General Household Survey for Third Quarter 2011 published by Census & Statistics Department.

(b) Age Distribution of Beneficiaries (Note 2)

Age	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Below 1 year old	14	1.62%
1 year old	62	7.16%
2 years old	165	19.05%
3 years old	321	36.72%
4 years old	221	25.29%
5 years old or above	88	10.16%

Note 2: The categorisation here is based on the age of beneficiaries as at the date of receipt of the application.

(c) Disability Types of the Beneficiaries

Disability Types	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Physically Handicapped	11	1.27%
Mentally Handicapped	26	3.00%
Visually Impaired	13	1.50%
Hearing Impairment	19	2.08%
Delayed Development	481	55.31%
Autism	277	31.87%
Speech Impairment	433	49.54%
Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder	209	23.90%
Specific Learning Difficulties (including Dyslexia)	81	9.35%
Others	84	9.70%

(d) Types of Service offered by the Service Providers

Types of Service	No. of Service Units	%
Occupational Therapy	54	72.00%
Physiotherapy	34	45.33%
Speech Therapy	53	70.67%
Psychological Service	12	16.00%
Special Child Care Worker's Service	68	90.67%
Family Support Service	75	100.00%

(e) Assignment of Service Units for the Beneficiaries

	Number of Beneficiaries	%
Service unit of first choice	541	63.05%
Service unit of second choice	129	15.04%
Service unit of third choice	79	9.21%
Service unit out of the three choices	109	12.70%
Pending for assignment of service unit	3	
Application withdrawn before assignment of services	10	

(f) Time for Assigning Service Providers for the Beneficiaries

Time	Number of Beneficiaries	%
14 days or below	417	48.60%
15 days to 30 days	296	34.50%
More than 30 days	145	16.90%
Pending for assigning service unit	3	
Application withdrawn before assignment	10	

Survey on Beneficiaries**(a) Satisfaction and Comments of the Interviewees on this Assistance Programme**

Questions and Comments	No.	%
1. Do you agree that this programme could benefit the learning and development of the beneficiary?		
- Agree	49	98.00%
- Disagree	0	0.00%
- No comment	1	2.00%
2. How would you rate the services offered by the service provider?		
- Very satisfactory	8	16.00%
- Satisfactory	40	80.00%
- No comment	2	4.00%
- Unsatisfactory	0	0.00%
- Very unsatisfactory	0	0.00%
3. In general, are you satisfied with the arrangement of this programme?		
- Yes	50	100.00%
- No	0	0.00%
4. Do you have any comments on this programme?		
- No comment	37	74.00%
- Targeted beneficiaries	4	8.00%
- Relaxing the criteria for eligibility (2)		
- Beneficial to the targeted beneficiaries (2)		
- Amount and period of subsidy	5	10.00%
- Increasing the number of sessions of subsidised training (2)		
- Extending the subsidising period (3)		

Questions and Comments	No.	%
- Other	4	8.00%
- Enhancing the flexibility of training arrangement (3)		
- Launching the programme earlier (1)		

(b) Comparison of Beneficiaries Receiving Other Training Services before and after the Grant of Subsidised Training

Questions and Comments	No.	%
1. Which type of service has the beneficiary been received?		
- Occupational Therapy	15	30.00%
- Physiotherapy	11	22.00%
- Speech therapy	27	54.00%
- Clinical Psychologist Service	0	0.00%
- Special Child Care Worker's service	18	36.00%
- Other (e.g. play therapy, music therapy)	6	12.00%
2. Had the beneficiary received other related training services before having subsidised training from CCF?		
- No	27	54.00%
- Yes	23	46.00%
If it is 'Yes', the services received was:		
- Occupational therapy, physiotherapy and/or speech therapy services from Hospital Authority	6	
- Self-financing services from NGOs	6	
- Services from private institutes	11	
- Other	0	

(b) Comparison of Beneficiaries Receiving Other Training Services before and after the Grant of Subsidised Training (Cont'd)

Questions and Comments	No.	%
3. If it is 'Yes' in Question 2, how much did it cost per month?		
- Free of charge	4	17.39%
- Less than \$500	10	43.47%
- \$500 or more, but less than \$1,000	2	8.70%
- \$1,000 or more, but less than \$1,500	5	21.74%
- \$1,500 or more, but less than \$2,000	0	0.00%
- \$2,000 or more, but less than \$2,500	0	0.00%
- \$2,500 or more, but less than \$3,000	1	4.35%
- Could not provide	1	4.35%
4. Has the beneficiary received other related training service after receiving subsidised training from CCF?		
- No	36	72.00%
- Yes	14	28.00%
If it is 'Yes', the services received was:		
- Services as stated in Question 2	7	
- Services in addition to the services stated in Question 2	2	
- Other types of service	3	
- New services (Note 1)	2	
5. If it is 'Yes' in Question 4, is there any change on the expense for the service?		
- Increase	1	
- No change	11	
- Decrease	0	
- Could not provide	2	

Note 1: The three options above are for the beneficiaries who had received other related training service before the grant of subsidy while this option is for the beneficiaries who did not receive training service before but additionally received other training service after having subsidised training.

Survey on Invitees who have not submitted Applications**(a) Reasons for Not Applying the Subsidy**

Reasons	No.	%
Not meeting the criteria for eligibility - Income exceeded the limit (29) - Has been admitted / will soon be admitted to the subvented services (6)	35	87.50%
No subsidy need	3	7.50%
Missed application deadline	2	5.00%

(b) Views of Invitees

Views	No.	%
No comments	28	70.00%
Relaxing the income limit	9	22.50%
Beneficial to the beneficiaries	2	5.00%
Increasing the amount of subsidy	1	2.50%

Survey on Service Providers**Satisfaction and Comments of Service Providers on this Assistance Programme**

Questions and Comments	No.	%
<p>1. Do you agree that this programme could help the learning and development of the beneficiaries?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The beneficiaries were enabled to timely receive training which helped their rehabilitation (8) - Children of low income family were allowed to receive the training (5) - Improvement was shown in the learning of beneficiaries (2) - Disagree - No comment 	<p>17</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p>	<p>100.00%</p> <p>0.00%</p> <p>0.00%</p>
<p>2. Is the arrangement and preparation of SWD (including the briefing session, guideline of service requirement, application form, notification etc.) appropriate for the service providers interested in joining this programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information and support provided by SWD was sufficient (10) - Information provided could be more simplified (1) - Briefing session could be arranged earlier (2) - Inappropriate - No comment 	<p>17</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p>	<p>100.00%</p> <p>0.00%</p> <p>0.00%</p>

Satisfaction and Comments of Service Providers on this Assistance Programme (Cont'd)

Questions and Comments	No.	%
<p>3. Is the arrangement on assigning the service units for the beneficiaries according to their preference appropriate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need of the parents / guardians could be satisfied by this arrangement (5) - Training arranged by the services units chosen by the parents / guardians may not be able to satisfy all their needs (2) - More information about the service providers could be provided to the parents / guardians (1) - The cases could be sorted according to the degree of disability of the beneficiaries before the assignment of service units (1) - Inappropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cases should be evenly assigned to all the service providers for better utilising the resources (1) - No comment 	<p>14</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p>	<p>82.36%</p> <p>5.88%</p> <p>11.76%</p>
<p>4. Is the arrangement of releasing subsidy to the service providers appropriate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subsidy was timely released (1) - Procedures was clear (3) - It would be better if the procedures could be more simplified (2) - Inappropriate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Subsidy should be directly released to the families of the beneficiaries (1) - No comment 	<p>16</p> <p>1</p> <p>0</p>	<p>94.12%</p> <p>5.88%</p> <p>0.00%</p>

Satisfaction and Comments of Service Providers on this Assistance Programme (Cont'd)

Questions and Comments	No.	%
5. In general, are you satisfied with the arrangement of this programme? - Satisfied - Clear guidance and appropriate follow-up were provided (4) - Unsatisfied	17 0	100.00% 0.00%
6. Are you willing to join similar programme again in the future? - Yes - No	17 0	100.00% 0.00%

Summary of Public Enquiries

Number and Nature of Enquiries for this Assistance Programme (Note)

Nature of Enquiry	Number
Criteria for Eligibility	167
Application Procedure	25
Completion of Application Form	236
Supporting Documents for Application	55
Submission and Receipt of Application	66
Progress of Application	24
Arrangement of Services	144
Others	24
- Enquiry from the service providers about operation of this programme (7)	
- Update of information (8)	
- Launching date of this programme (3)	
- Explanation on the approval letter (4)	
- Enquiry hotline for following up the submitted application (2)	

Note: If an enquiry involved more than one subject nature, each subject would be categorised and summarised in this table.