

Chapter 10

Social Welfare

The Government is committed to maintaining an environment in Hong Kong that is conducive to social harmony. It encourages family unity, fosters mutual care, and stimulates partnership among different segments of the community. While providing a safety net of last resort for its citizens in need, the Government also helps them to become self-reliant and to participate in the city's economic and social life.

The Labour and Welfare Bureau (LWB) is responsible for formulating social welfare policies and overseeing their implementation by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). The Social Welfare Advisory Committee, the Rehabilitation Advisory Committee (RAC), the Elderly Commission (EC) and the Women's Commission (WoC) advise the Government on the welfare policy.

In 2007, the total recurrent expenditure of the SWD was \$33.8 billion, of which \$24.2 billion (71.6 per cent) was for financial assistance payments, \$6.8 billion (20.1 per cent) for recurrent subventions to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the remaining \$2.8 billion (8.3 per cent) for departmental expenditure, including \$500 million for hire of services.

Major Achievements

Targeted Efforts to Strengthen Support for Families in Need

The Government adopts a family-oriented policy in preserving and strengthening family solidarity. On top of the provision of a continuum of preventive, supportive and therapeutic family welfare services, the SWD places emphasis on proactively reaching out to needy families, especially those who are socially isolated. Through home visits, telephone contacts, and other outreach services, the Family Support Programme was launched to maintain regular contacts with the vulnerable families and encourage them to seek and accept appropriate assistance.

In 2007, the SWD secured additional resources and implemented a series of measures to strengthen its services and support for victims of domestic violence. A two-year pilot project, the Batterer Intervention Programme (BIP), first launched in January 2006 by the SWD and an NGO, continued to provide specialised treatment to

batterers who may either participate in the BIP voluntarily, or are compelled to receive treatment as required in their probation orders. At year-end, 33 groups comprising 267 batterers had received treatment.

The SWD also increased the number of teams in the Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) from eight to 11 during the year. In addition, eight more psychologists were employed to strengthen the service. An additional Clinical Psychology Unit will be set up in the first quarter of 2008 to provide more accessible service for residents in Tin Shui Wai, Yuen Long and Tuen Mun.

In addition, the SWD stepped up public education, training and district liaison work to tackle increasing domestic violence. Support services rendered by the Family Crisis Support Centre and the four Refuge Centres for Women were enhanced and the number of places for people seeking residence in these centres was increased from 172 to 180. Furthermore, a new Multi-purpose Crisis Intervention and Support Centre (the CEASE Crisis Centre), commenced phase one of its operation in March 2007 to serve victims of sexual or domestic violence and individuals or families in crisis or distress. It operates a 24-hour hotline and provides outreaching/crisis intervention services and case consultations under phase one and will provide short-term accommodation services in phase two. It adopts a coordinated approach in collaboration with multi-disciplinary professionals in providing its services.

Employment Assistance for Single Parents and Child Carers

The SWD commissioned NGOs to launch a 30-month Enhanced New Dawn Project in October 2007 to help single parents and child carers on the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) and whose youngest child is aged between 12 and 14 to better help themselves, avoid social exclusion and move towards self-reliance through engagement in paid employment. The operating NGOs provide all project participants with ordinary employment assistance services such as updated labour market information, job-related and non-job-related counselling, job matching, and post-placement and other supportive services. Participants with no or limited working experience are also provided with intensive employment assistance services including basic skills and job skills upgrading training to enhance their employability. By year-end, 2 659 people were participating in the project.

Employment Assistance for Able-bodied Unemployed Youth

To help long-term CSSA able-bodied unemployed youth aged between 15 and 29 return to the workforce or mainstream schooling, the SWD commissioned NGOs to continue running the Special Training and Enhancement Project (My STEP) for two years from October 2007. In addition to personalised career counselling, non-employment related counselling and other supportive services, participants are provided with structured motivational/disciplinary training to help them enhance their self-image, self-confidence and sense of responsibility. The project also interfaces with the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme administered by the Labour Department to provide participants aged 15 to 24 with opportunities to gain work experience through job attachment. By year-end, 216 unemployed youths were participating in the My STEP project.

Improved Arrangements for Disregarded Earnings under CSSA Scheme

To encourage CSSA recipients to rejoin the labour force and to become self-reliant, the arrangements for disregarded earnings were improved in December 2007 by raising the 'no-deduction' limit of the monthly disregarded earnings from \$600 to \$800 and relaxing the criteria for allowing CSSA recipients to be eligible for disregarded earnings from not less than three months on CSSA to not less than two months.

Enrolled Nurse Training Programme for the Welfare Sector

To alleviate the shortage of nurses in the welfare sector, particularly where services are provided for the elderly and for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, the SWD, in collaboration with the Hospital Authority (HA), launched the third batch of the Enrolled Nurse (General)/Enrolled Nurse (Psychiatric) Training Programme. Together with the first two classes launched in 2006, the programme provided a total of 330 training places, with priority given to those currently working in the welfare sector. Tuition fees were fully subsidised by the SWD. Trainees would have to work in the welfare sector for at least two consecutive years after graduation.

Enhanced support for elderly people and carers

The SWD has enhanced the resources of the District Elderly Community Centres (DECCs) and the Neighbourhood Elderly Centres (NECs) to reach out to singleton and hidden elders. A trial scheme with seed money from the LWB was launched in three administrative districts of the SWD, namely, Eastern and Wan Chai, Wong Tai Sin and Sai Kung, Kowloon City and Yau Tsim Mong districts for the DECCs to collaborate with community organisations to run carers' training courses and develop 'carer' services. The LWB, SWD and the EC jointly organised a territory-wide campaign to give recognition to the contributions of carers of elderly people.

Community Mental Health Intervention Project

The SWD together with the HA launched the Community Mental Health Intervention Project in October 2007 to provide specialised care including casework, therapeutic and supportive group services to persons in the community with suspected mental health problems and/or their family members, to help them cope with problems arising from their poor mental health conditions.

Social Welfare Programmes

Family and Child Welfare

To preserve and strengthen family unity and harmony, a range of family and child welfare services is provided by the SWD and NGOs.

Family Services

The SWD adopts a three-pronged approach to providing services to families in need.

At the primary level, attempts are made through early detection, public education, publicity and empowerment to prevent family problems from occurring. A territory-wide publicity campaign called 'Strengthening Families and Combating

Violence' was conducted during the year. The SWD continues to operate a departmental hotline to provide service information, counselling and other forms of assistance.

At the secondary level, a range of support services, from developmental programmes to intensive counselling, is provided by 61 Integrated Family Service Centres across Hong Kong and two NGO-run Integrated Services Centres located in Tung Chung.

At the tertiary level, specialised services, including crisis intervention, are provided in cases of domestic violence, family crisis or custody dispute.

Services for Children

The SWD provides a wide range of welfare services to children and young people who need care or protection because of serious family problems or because of their behavioural or emotional problems. There were 3 432 residential places in 2007 for these children, of which 950 are in foster homes, 887 in small group homes, 207 in child care centres and 1 388 in boys' and girls' homes and hostels.

The SWD also arranges adoptions for children abandoned by their parents or whose parents are unable to support them. Three welfare NGOs were accredited as 'accredited bodies' in accordance with the Adoption Ordinance for making arrangements for inter-country adoption of Hong Kong children by suitable overseas parents. The SWD plans to involve accredited bodies in local adoption arrangements, which are currently handled by the department.

There were 12 aided stand-alone child care centres which can accommodate up to 662 children in 2007. Child care centres and kindergarten-cum-child care centres continued to provide full day care services and additional support for families through the provision of 495 occasional child care places and 1 244 extended-hour places. In 2007, the SWD created 40 day foster care places and 15 day small group home places.

Social Security

The CSSA Scheme and the Social Security Allowance (SSA) Scheme form the mainstay of Hong Kong's social security system. They are supplemented by three accident compensation schemes, namely, the Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme, the Traffic Accident Victims Assistance Scheme and Emergency Relief. There are 37 Social Security Field Units and two centralised offices administering these schemes across Hong Kong.

The CSSA Scheme

The CSSA Scheme is non-contributory but means-tested. The scheme provides cash assistance to people suffering from financial hardship to enable them to meet basic needs. Applicants must satisfy the stipulated residence requirements. At year-end, there were 288 145 CSSA cases providing assistance to 496 922 people, compared with 295 333 cases and 521 611 people in 2006. The scheme's total

expenditure in 2007 amounted to \$18.12 billion, representing an increase of 2.8 per cent over the previous year.

Elderly people who have received CSSA continuously for at least one year are allowed under the Portable CSSA Scheme to continue receiving assistance in Guangdong or Fujian if they choose to retire there.

Intensified Support for Self-reliance Measures

The SWD continues to provide personalised employment assistance under the Support for Self-reliance Scheme to help able-bodied unemployed CSSA recipients move towards full-time paid employment and become self-reliant.

The SSA Scheme

The non-contributory SSA Scheme provides cash allowances to meet the special needs of the severely disabled or elderly people. It comprises allowances provided under the following headings: Normal Disability Allowance, Higher Disability Allowance, Normal Old Age Allowance and Higher Old Age Allowance. At year-end, 591 654 people were receiving SSA, compared with 580 840 in 2006. The scheme's total expenditure during the year was \$6.02 billion, an increase of 11.1 per cent over the previous year.

Accident Compensation Schemes

The Criminal and Law Enforcement Injuries Compensation Scheme offers financial assistance on a non-means-tested basis to innocent people who are injured or to dependants of people killed in crimes of violence or by law enforcement officers while combating crime. In 2007, \$6.63 million was paid out under the scheme, compared to \$6.41 million in the previous year. The Traffic Accident Victims Assistance (TAVA) Scheme provides financial assistance to people injured or to dependants of those killed in road traffic accidents on a non-means-tested basis regardless of who is responsible for the accident. During the year, \$162.9 million was paid out under the scheme, compared with \$159.5 million in 2006.

Emergency Relief

Emergency relief in the form of meals or cash-in-lieu of meals and other necessities is given to victims of natural and other disasters. Grants from the Emergency Relief Fund are paid to eligible victims or to their dependants in cases of death. Emergency relief was given to 21 victims of 7 disasters during the year.

Social Security Appeal Board

The Social Security Appeal Board considers appeals against SWD's decisions on CSSA, SSA and TAVA issues. The board ruled on 375 appeals during the year.

Prevention of Fraud and Abuse

To preserve the integrity of the social security system and ensure the proper use of public funds, the Special Investigation Section continues to prevent and combat fraud and abuse of social security payment. In addition, a special hotline (2332 0101) is in place to receive reports from the public. As part of the community education programme, anti-fraud information panels displaying prosecution figures and court

news about defrauding social security payment have been installed in all social security field units to promote a law-abiding spirit. At year-end, 219 abusers were jailed, bound over, ordered to perform community service, fined, or given warnings.

Services for the Elderly

The Government encourages and assists elderly people to lead active and healthy lives. It provides various community care and support services for them to age in their homes or familiar surroundings. Elderly people who need long-term care but cannot be adequately cared for at home may apply for government-subsidised residential care services.

The SWD continued to subsidise the Opportunities for the Elderly Project run by community organisations to make life more meaningful for elderly people. During the year, 280 programmes were subsidised by government grants amounting to \$2.7 million.

Over the years, more than 1 million Senior Citizen Cards had been issued to elderly people in Hong Kong with which they can obtain concessions, discounts and priority service at various companies, organisations and government departments.

Community Care and Support Services

At year-end, there were 213 elderly centres, (including DECCs, NECs and social centres), 120 teams serving elderly people (including integrated home care service teams, enhanced home and community care service teams, support teams for the elderly and a home help team), 51 day care centres or units, and one holiday centre for elderly people. Support is also provided for their carers.

Residential Care Services

At year-end, a total of 25 737 subsidised residential care places were available for elderly people, including 4 747 subsidised self-care hostel places and home-for-the-aged places, 19 126 subsidised care-and-attention places of which 6 435 were purchased places from private residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs), and 1 864 subsidised nursing places.

To meet the growing care needs of elderly people, the SWD is implementing in phases a programme of converting self-care hostel and home-for-the-aged places into care-and-attention places to provide continuum of care. At year-end, a total of 2 572 care-and-attention places with continuum of care were created through the conversion programme.

The Government is committed to enhancing the quality of RCHEs. The Residential Care Homes (Elderly Persons) Ordinance and its subsidiary regulation provide for the regulation of RCHEs through a licensing system. As the licensing authority, the SWD is responsible for licensing control, capacity-building, monitoring and enforcement. To help RCHEs enhance their drug management capability, the Department of Health, the HA and the SWD compiled an Operational Manual on Drug Management in RCHEs and organised talks on drug management to enhance the RCHE staff's drug management skills and knowledge.

Rehabilitation Services

With the aim of integrating persons with disabilities into society and helping them to develop their capabilities fully, government departments and NGOs provide a variety of rehabilitation services to meet their different needs. These services are coordinated by the Commissioner for Rehabilitation on the advice of the RAC.

Services for Children with Disabilities

At year-end, there were 1 860 integrated programme places in ordinary kindergarten-cum-child care centres, 1 474 special child care centre places, including 110 residential places, and 2 045 early education and training centre places for children with disabilities before they enter school. In addition, 56 places in small group homes were also provided for mildly mentally handicapped children who cannot be adequately cared for by their families.

Services for Adults with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities were provided with 1 655 supported employment places to work in open settings with support and assistance. In addition, 432 places created under the On-the-Job Training Programme for People with Disabilities and 311 places for young people with disabilities or showing early signs of mental illness created under the 'Sunnyway' programme were made available to handicapped persons looking for jobs. Those not yet ready to compete for jobs in the open market were accommodated in sheltered workshops where 5 113 places were provided.

A total of 453 places in integrated vocational training centres and 3 399 places in integrated vocational rehabilitation services centres were created to provide a range of integrated vocational training and rehabilitation services. Funding was approved under the 'Enhancing Employment of People with Disabilities through Small Enterprises' project for 23 NGOs to set up small businesses that can employ persons with disabilities. It created 44 businesses which provided jobs for about 530 persons unable to compete for jobs in the open market because of their disabilities. The Marketing Consultancy Office (Rehabilitation) assisted vocational rehabilitation services units to develop their marketing and business strategies and employment-aided services.

Day activity centres provided 4 370 places where mentally handicapped persons were taught how to live more independently. There were also 230 places in training and activity centres set up to help former mental patients adjust to normal daily life.

There were 6 699 places in hostels and care homes for persons with disabilities who are unable to live independently in the community, or whose families cannot care for them adequately. Elderly blind persons were provided with 825 places in care-and-attention homes. For former mental patients and discharged chronic mental patients, 1 509 places in halfway houses and 1 407 in long-stay care homes were provided for them.

Professional Back-up and Support Services

Back-up services provided by clinical psychologists, occupational therapists and physiotherapists are available to persons with disabilities in rehabilitation day centres

and hostels. Speech therapy service is also available to children attending pre-school rehabilitation centres.

Other support services include home-based training and support services for persons with mental handicap or physical disabilities, community rehabilitation day services for discharged patients with mental, neurological or physical impairment, community mental health care services and after-care service for those discharged from halfway houses, and rehabilitation services for persons with visceral disability or chronic illnesses.

Residential respite service for adults with disabilities, occasional childcare service for pre-schoolers with disabilities and six parents/relatives resource centres are also available. In addition, there were five social clubs for ex-mentally ill persons and 16 social and recreational centres for persons with other disabilities to encourage them to participate in community leisure activities.

Preparation for New Legislation to Regulate Residential Care Homes for Persons with Disabilities (RCHDs)

To prepare for new legislation to regulate all RCHDs in Hong Kong, the SWD visited all 240 or more subvented, self-financing and private RCHDs, to give them professional advice on matters such as management, health care, building and fire safety. The SWD also set up a working group in July 2007 to revise the existing code of practice for RCHDs.

Financial Assistance to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) patients

The SWD administers the trust fund for SARS patients. The fund was established to provide special ex-gratia relief payments or financial assistance to SARS patients or families affected by the disease. Additional resources were injected into the fund in January 2007 to provide continuous support for SARS patients who remain dysfunctional. By year-end, 1 119 applications had been received relating to 320 deaths from SARS and 799 patients who had recovered from the disease or who were suspected of having it. Of these, 888 applications were approved, payments for which amounted to \$152 million.

Medical Social Services

Medical social workers are stationed in public hospitals and some specialist clinics to help patients and their families with psychosocial problems. Such patients are given counselling, financial and other tangible assistance, as well as referrals to rehabilitation and support services to help them recover and reintegrate into society. During the year, medical social workers dealt with around 168 000 cases.

Services for Offenders

Under related ordinances, the SWD discharges statutory functions and provides community-based and residential services to help people who have committed crimes to reintegrate into the community and become law-abiding citizens.

The probation service helped 14 224 ex-offenders during the year. Probation officers assess and report to the courts on ex-offenders' suitability for Probation Orders, and continue to supervise them while they are under those orders. The officers also prepare reports on long-term prisoners and petitioners for consideration of early release.

During the year, 3 074 people aged 14 or above who were convicted of offences punishable by imprisonment were placed on Community Service Orders. They were required to perform unpaid community work arranged and supervised by SWD officers. The newly built Tuen Mun Children and Juvenile Home, with 388 places, commenced operation in the year, providing educational, prevocational and character training to juvenile offenders and children and young people with behavioural and/or family problems.

The Young Offender Assessment Panel, jointly run by the Correctional Services Department (CSD) and the SWD, provides the courts with professional views on sentencing options for offenders aged between 14 and 24. The Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme, another joint service of the SWD and the CSD, assisted 985 discharged prisoners during their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community in 2007. An NGO is being given subvention to provide hostel and supportive services to ex-offenders.

Services for Young People

The overall aim of welfare services for young people is to help those aged between six and 24 to become mature, responsible and contributing members of society. A range of preventive, supportive and remedial services is provided by NGOs to help bring this about.

At year-end, there were 134 Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) providing children and youth centre service, outreach social work service and school social work service under one management to address the changing needs of young people in an integrated and holistic manner. Eighteen ICYSCs also provide what is called 'overnight outreaching service' to help young night drifters get back on the right track. With funds from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and the Lotteries Fund, five ICYSCs were able to modernise their premises with trendy furniture and equipment that better cater to the needs of today's young people in the last batch of modernisation programme.

At year-end, 490 secondary schools were each provided with a school social worker to help students with academic, social and emotional problems and to maximise their educational opportunities. Sixteen District Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams provided services to high-risk youths and dealt with juvenile gang issues.

A total of 230 secondary schools joined the Positive Adolescent Training through Holistic Social Programmes (PATHS) to Adulthood, A Jockey Club Youth Enhancement Scheme in the 2007-08 school year. The four-year project funded by the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, was launched in the 2005-06 school year and aims to

promote the holistic development of junior secondary students into responsible young adults.

The Government allocates \$15 million annually to the SWD to provide direct cash assistance and implement projects under the District Support Scheme for Children and Youth Development to meet the developmental needs of children and young people in deprived circumstances, which cannot be met by their families and/or the mainstream education systems.

The Community Support Services Scheme (CSSS) assists young people who have broken the law or are under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme to avoid breaking the law again. During the year, six CSSS teams, one operated by the department and five by NGOs, provided services to these young people. The Family Conference Scheme, jointly run by the SWD and the Hong Kong Police Force, assists juveniles cautioned under the Police Superintendent's Discretion Scheme for the second time or who are in need of the services of three or more parties. Social workers, police officers, teachers and the parents of these young people work together to decide on which treatment is best for them.

The SWD adopts different approaches to providing drug treatment and rehabilitation services for young drug abusers. At year-end, the department had subvented 14 voluntary Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres (DTRCs)/halfway houses, five counselling centres for psychotropic substance abusers and two social clubs for ex-drug abusers. Under the Drug Dependent Persons Treatment and Rehabilitation Centres (Licensing) Ordinance, 27 certificates of exemption and 12 licences for DTRCs were issued or renewed in 2007.

Clinical Psychological Services

Working under the SWD and NGOs, 71 clinical psychologists provide a range of services to welfare units handling family casework, rehabilitation and correctional matters. The services include psychological assessment, treatment, consultation, staff training and public education. During the year, 4 420 clients were treated, and 2 982 psychological assessments and 18 372 treatment sessions were conducted.

Voluntary Work

The Steering Committee on Promotion of Volunteer Service ran a series of promotional and publicity programmes during the year to encourage cross-sector collaboration and family participation in voluntary work. By year-end, 1 752 organisations and 675 418 individuals had registered for voluntary service.

Subventions and Service Monitoring

Recurrent subventions and capital grants were given to 173 NGOs to provide social welfare services in accordance with government policies. Capital grants from the Lotteries Fund were allocated to NGOs on the advice of the Lotteries Fund Advisory Committee. The Service Performance Monitoring System keeps track of the

output, outcome and service quality of subvented units according to 16 well-defined Service Quality Standards and a specific Funding and Service Agreement.

Information Technology

Following the implementation of the Technical Infrastructure project in April 2005, the SWD improved its email system to tie in with the Government's Accessibility Programme. The majority of SWD staff is now able to communicate better through electronic mail. The department will continue to develop a workflow-based Client Information System to facilitate case management and service planning. It is expected to be completed in 2009-10.

By year-end, about \$207 million in Lotteries Fund grants had been approved for 42 Information Technology development projects in the welfare sector.

Elderly Commission

The Elderly Commission was tasked with the responsibility to advise the Government on the policy and services of the elderly. Recently, focuses are placed on promoting 'active aging' and advising on the means to further enhance long-term care services for the elderly. A series of programmes were launched in 2007 while others were planned for 2008. Among others, 32 Elder Academies have been established throughout the territory, offering more than 5 000 places to elders. The commission plans to further extend the scheme to tertiary institutions, and in primary and secondary schools in the coming year. Besides, the Pilot Neighbourhood Active Ageing Project (PNAAP) was launched aiming to promote the concept of 'active ageing' through neighbourhood platforms. Under PNAAP, NGOs enter into partnership with different sectors 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' follow-up actions. 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.

Enhancing Social Capital: Community Investment and Inclusion Fund

A \$300 million Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF) has been set up to build social capital and foster social harmony in Hong Kong. The goal is to encourage people in the community to care for and assist each other and to collaborate in neighbourhood building activities

The setting up of the CIIF was announced by the Chief Executive in his 2001 Policy Address. At the end of 2007, the CIIF had allocated over \$110 million to help carry out more than 140 projects in 18 districts. The projects are in different phases of development. CIIF funding for 40 projects has expired and different strategies are now being tried out to sustain their social benefits, as well as further develop social capital. Different models of tripartite partnerships have emerged. The projects are implemented with support from over 3 000 schools, businesses, local organisations

and other bodies. The projects have transformed over 22 000 service recipients into service givers. Over 400 mutual help networks have been established, providing support to over 10 000 families. Over 20 cooperatives are being formed, and more than 2 000 jobs are being created. Over 300 000 people benefited from these initiatives.

An independent evaluation consortium comprising seven research teams from five universities has studied the strategies promoted by the CIIF in 2006 and found them effective. The next evaluation will focus on the critical success factors in developing and sustaining social capital.

The CIIF invites new funding proposals in May and November each year.

Tripartite Cooperation: The Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged

A \$200 million financial commitment, called the Partnership Fund for the Disadvantaged, was set aside in 2005 to promote tripartite partnership, comprising the Government, the business sector and the NGOs, to help the disadvantaged in Hong Kong. The fund is administered by the SWD. Donations from the business sector are matched dollar-for-dollar by the Government. The money and other forms of assistance go towards helping NGOs to carry out social welfare projects. As at end-2007, over \$29.4 million in government matching grant had been approved, and more than 70 NGOs had obtained funds to implement 97 welfare projects. Many of the business partners also served as volunteers.

Women's Commission

The Women's Commission (WoC) was set up in January 2001 to promote the well-being and interests of women in Hong Kong. The commission identifies women's needs and addresses their concerns in a holistic and systematic manner. It advises the Government on policies concerning women and seeks to ensure that their perspectives are taken into account in the formation of government policies.

The WoC comprises 21 members including the chairperson who is a non-official member. Its quest is 'to enable women in Hong Kong to fully realise their due status, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life'. In line with this goal, the commission has adopted a three-pronged strategy: providing an enabling environment, empowering women and promoting public education. On advice of the WoC, the Government has since 2002 gradually introduced gender mainstreaming in different policy areas to provide an enabling environment. A Gender Mainstreaming Checklist was drawn up to help officers take women's needs and perspectives into account in the formulation of government policies in a systematic way. In addition, gender-related training has been provided to over 2 700 civil servants of different grades since 2001. All bureaux and departments now have their own Gender Focal Points through which matters concerning women's interest and status can be channelled.

As for the empowerment of women, the WoC always strives to promote development of new service models and good empowerment practices. The introduction in March 2004 of an innovative and flexible learning mode, called the

Capacity Building Mileage Programme, was a major step towards helping women develop to their full potential. The programme seeks to enhance women's all-round abilities and promote life skills. It is carried out in collaboration with the Open University of Hong Kong, a radio station and nearly 80 women's groups and NGOs. By the end of 2007, more than 20 000 women had enrolled in the programme, a figure that does not include the large audience reached through radio programmes. The programme was first introduced on a trial basis for three years with funding from the Lotteries Fund. The Government has since March 2007 been providing funds for the programme to continue.

Regarding public education, continuous efforts were made to raise public awareness of women-related issues and to reduce gender stereotyping. To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the WoC organised a series of events under the title 'Colourful Lives of Women' to give recognition to the contributions made by women from different walks of life in Hong Kong. The events included the 'Colourful Lives of Women – IWD 2007 Exhibition on Empowerment of Women', held on March 8, 2007 and a series of short TV programmes to show the work done by local women's groups and NGOs to help women build self-confidence and to be independent. The commission held an exhibition entitled 'Women of Hong Kong – A Century of Contribution and Development' from November 30 to December 3, 2007 as a finale to the series of events it organised to mark the HKSAR's 10th anniversary. The exhibition highlighted the role women played in the areas of work, family, education and society at different periods of Hong Kong's existence and the achievements they made over the years to the present time.

Websites

Labour and Welfare Bureau: www.lwb.gov.hk

Social Welfare Department: www.swd.gov.hk

Community Investment and Inclusion Fund: www.ciif.gov.hk

Elderly Commission: www.elderlycommission.gov.hk

Women's Commission: www.women.gov.hk