



# Preventing Drug Abuse Among Young People – Community-based Programmes in Hong Kong

Ng Ting-kwong, Allan  
Social Welfare Department  
Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

## ***Abstract***

According to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse administered by the Narcotics Division, Security Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the percentage of young people under 21 abusing ketamine grew rapidly to 74.5% in the first half of 2004 whereas only 56.7% was recorded in the same period in 2003, and there is also an uprising trend of poly drug abuse among young people.

The Social Welfare Department (SWD), being one of the HKSAR government departments in combating drug abuse, proactively collaborates with Non-governmental Organisations by subventing them to deliver drug prevention and rehabilitation programmes through a holistic approach. Examples are the preventive programmes provided by the Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers at secondary schools, one-stop preventive, outreaching and remedial services for normal and marginal youth by the Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres and support services for young offenders by the Community Support Services Scheme, etc. This paper attempts to highlight SWD's subvented community-based programmes and the multi-disciplinary collaboration in creating a drug-free environment for the healthy development of the young generation.

## ***Challenges in Present Drug Scene***

Living in a metropolitan city like Hong Kong, young people here have to face many challenges resulting from the fluctuating economy and rapid social changes. Because of this, coupled with the gradual weakening of family support and diminishing opportunities for personal development and employment, young people become vulnerable to undesirable influence and may engage in delinquent acts when they go through the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Wayward behaviour and acts such as school bullying, drug abuse, triad affiliation and crime-related activities have become part and parcel of the youth sub-culture.

Amongst the complicated social, psychological and behavioural problems threatening the healthy development of young people, psychotropic substance abuse is one warranting not only our attention but also concerted efforts in our society to fight against the rising trend. According to the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA) administered by the Narcotics Division (ND) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), the percentage of people abusing ketamine amongst other kinds of drug grew quickly from 9.8% in 2000 to a peak of **18.2%** in the first half of 2004 (Narcotics Division, 2004).

This phenomenon has aroused much concern in the welfare sector, especially frontline social workers, as according to CRDA, **74.5%** of the young drug abusers under 21 abused ketamine in the first half of 2004 whereas only 56.7% was recorded in the same period in 2003 (Narcotics Division, 2004). Apart from helping those who are already abusing drugs, preventive work against drug abuse among young people is equally of paramount importance.

### ***Launching Anti-drug Campaigns***

All along, the HKSAR government demonstrates great determination to combat drug problems. Vigorous enforcement actions, such as close collaboration with different countries and cities in detecting drug smuggling and raids on entertainment dens to reduce the supply of drugs, have been carried out to deter drug trafficking. In preventing drug abuse, publicity and educational programmes to spread anti-drug messages widely to the public in particular young people about the harmful effects of drug abuse have been launched. In this regard, the ND has been taking the lead in involving relevant stakeholders and the community at large in anti-drug campaigns. In the Hong Kong Narcotics Report 2004 (Narcotics Division, 2004), the objectives of Hong Kong's drug preventive education and publicity are stated as follows:

- to keep the public aware of and to warn them about drug abuse;
- to prevent drug abuse among young people; and
- to make widely known Hong Kong's anti-drug actions.

As one of the alliances in the anti-drug campaigns, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) joins hands with other relevant stakeholders to put forth collaborative endeavours to cultivate a drug free society in Hong Kong as far as possible.



### ***Proactive Intervention through Community-based Programmes***

SWD adopts a proactive approach not only in spreading anti-drug messages but also in early identification of young people's needs and problems, so as to provide timely intervention through various services. Community-based programmes are designed in such a way as to arouse their interests in developing a positive lifestyle and to keep them away from the temptation of substance abuse. To this end, SWD collaborates with the Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and provides subventions for them to deliver tailor-made services for young people including drug prevention and rehabilitation programmes through an integrated service mode at both school and community levels.

The NGOs subvented by SWD operate different services geared at meeting the needs of young people. As peers, school and family systems are all important platforms to engage youth, services are provided at different community-based levels as a package of comprehensive and holistic programmes to cater for different target groups of young people.

#### *School Social Work Service*

When students lack the ability and support to overcome the difficulties they come across in their school lives, they will be prone to naughty behaviours including possible drug abuse. In this light, school social work service helps in the early identification of students with difficulties in their academic, social and emotional development. By assessing the problems of the students and providing appropriate follow-up services including case and group counselling, the school social workers assist the students in solving their problems, after which they can regain a sense of confidence and make full use of their learning opportunities to develop their potentials. A total of 484 secondary schools in Hong Kong are provided each with one school social worker in the 2004/2005 school year (SWD, 2004).

#### *Peer Counsellors Programme*

Youths of similar age are able to communicate more effectively with each other. The time-limited Peer Counsellors Programme implemented since January 2002 has engaged 150 peer counsellors to help Secondary Three school leavers (SWD, 2004). Through making friends and providing positive influence for them in particular those youths-at-risk, it is hoped that these young school leavers can make appropriate choices in life.

### *Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres*

The Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres (ICYSCs) provide diversified one-stop preventive services including children and youth centre services, outreaching social work and school social work services to meet the multifarious needs of children and youth aged 6-24. They provide four core programmes, i.e. guidance and counselling, supportive service for young people in disadvantaged circumstances, socialisation programmes and development of social responsibility and competence. Other programmes such as drop-in service, interest groups, summer youth programmes and study / reading room services are also provided to offer opportunities for children and youth to spend their leisure time constructively.

To enhance service quality and cost-effectiveness of the huge recurrent resources invested in youth, the provision of corresponding hardware support for the service is equally important. A modernisation programme of ICYSCs is therefore launched with joint financial support from the Lotteries Fund and the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charitable Trust. Under this programme, the ICYSCs will be modernised with more creative design as well as trendy furniture and equipment to make the centres more appealing to young people, in particular those marginal youths, to better suit their needs. Out of the 132 ICYSCs in Hong Kong, it is estimated that a total of 92 ICYSCs will benefit from the programme by 2006-07 (SWD, 2004).

### *District Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams*

While the modernised ICYSCs become a focal point in attracting young people to centre-based services, some youth however prefer street activities. The 16 District Youth Outreaching Social Work Teams reach out to high-risk youths and handle their problems of affiliation with the juvenile gangs and/or drug abuse.

### *Overnight Outreaching Service*

Young Night Drifters (YNDs) are accustomed to hanging out late at night for fun-seeking activities and thus become more vulnerable to delinquency and drug abuse. In order to minimise the chance of young people mixing with undesirables, 18 ICYSCs have extended their service hours to provide overnight outreaching service and timely intervention for YNDs on a territory-wide basis. To facilitate



their work, funding for necessary service equipment such as vehicles and mobile phones is also provided. This will facilitate fast outreaching work and timely crisis intervention for young people in need (SWD, 2004).

As an enhanced YND service, an All-night Drop-in Centre operated by an NGO was set up in 2002 with grants from the Lotteries Fund on a pilot basis. It offers 24-hour centre-based service with various facilities including counselling rooms, cyber café, recreational and cultural activity rooms, basketball field and rock-climbing facilities, crisis residential unit for young people to hang out and meet social workers in a safe place. The centre provides a safe place for young people to hang out, calm down and stay overnight with the company of social workers so as to minimise their chance of falling prey to undesirables. This centre is now integrated into the agency's new purpose-built headquarters building as one of the core services in meeting the ever changing needs of the YNDs.

#### *Community Support Services Scheme*

Children and youth who have committed minor offences and have been cautioned under the Police Superintendents' Discretion Scheme are offered a chance to re-integrate into the community by means of the Community Support Services Scheme (CSSS) (SWD, 2004). The five teams of the CSSS aim at helping these young people to resume mainstream education or work, thus reducing the likelihood of re-offending. Services of the Scheme include individual and family counselling, therapeutic groups, skills training / educational groups, adventure activities as well as recreational and community services. Moreover, to enhance support for young offenders, family conferences are also conducted to bring together the cautioned juveniles and their family members as well as professionals from relevant government departments and agencies at an early stage to assess the needs of the juveniles and to draw up follow-up plans to address their problems.

#### *Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers*

In response to the rise in psychotropic substance abuse, SWD provided additional subventions to NGOs for running two more Counselling Centres for Psychotropic Substance Abusers (CCPSAs) in 2002, bringing the number to a total of five operating on a regional basis for territory-wide coverage of service (SWD, 2004). The CCPSAs aim at helping substance abusers to abstain from the drug-taking habit and develop a healthy lifestyle. The social workers of the CCPSAs reach out to young

people for follow-up actions such as setting up mobile booths at the lobbies of railway stations. They would dissuade young people seeking fun in the entertainment arenas across the border from trying drugs. To make the provision of services comprehensive, the CCPSAs also provide counselling and support programmes for family members of substance abusers in the helping process.

As school is an ideal place for disseminating anti-drug information and offering primary preventive education to dispel young people's common misconceptions about drug abuse, the social workers of the CCPSAs organise regular preventive education programmes for secondary school students. These programmes are often good entry points to early identify potential / occasional or habitual young drug abusers for timely intervention and referrals. The CCPSAs conduct professional training to allied professionals such as teachers so that they can be equipped with knowledge and skills to assist young substance abusers.

#### *Voluntary Non-Medical Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre*

HKSAR adopts a multi-modality approach in providing drug treatment and rehabilitation services. In order to keep in pace with the rapid change of the trend, SWD's subvented non-medical residential drug treatment and rehabilitation services have been re-engineered to serve more young psychotropic substance abusers. The programmes have been enriched to focus more on vocational training, family work and after care services for young substance abusers with the ultimate objective of reintegrating them into the community (SWD, 2004).

These centres also provide outreaching services to drug abusers attending Methadone Clinics, street-sleepers and also students through sharing of the personal experiences of their rehabilitated residents. Some NGOs have set up anti-drug websites to attract young people to access up-to-date anti-drug information and seek professional advice from social workers or emotional support from rehabilitated peers. An NGO has also started a pilot training project involving rehabilitated drug abusers and ordinary youth in manning a web-radio channel. With lively and interactive atmosphere in the cyber network, this approach arouses young people's interests in learning ways to refuse drugs and developing a positive life view.



### ***Allying Strategic Partners***

Despite the fact that there are already community-based programmes as mentioned above, cross-sector collaboration is indispensable for successful prevention of drug abuse among young people.

#### *Committees at Central Policy and District Levels*

Chaired by the Director of Social Welfare, the Committee on Services for Youth at Risk comprises representatives from advisory committees e.g. the Action Committee Against Narcotics, policy bureaux and departments of the Government, tertiary institutions, the education sector, NGOs and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service. Through regular meetings, the Committee examines current issues relating to the needs and problems of youth and to suggest possible measures to echo the issues. At district level, 17 Local Committees on Services for Young People chaired by the District Social Welfare Officers of SWD have been set up in all districts for planning youth services with reference to district characteristics and implement welfare services that are in line with the youth policy of the central Government and gearing to meeting local service needs. Members of the Local Committees include representatives from local organisations / bodies such as schools and churches, District Councils, government departments and NGOs of the district.

#### *Collaboration with Stakeholders Concerned*

SWD collaborates with different essential stakeholders for a holistic and comprehensive service provision for young people in need. Some of the examples (SWD, 2004) are as follows –

##### Education Sector

- The “Smart Teen Challenge Project”, jointly organised by the Education and Manpower Bureau and various disciplinary forces like the Hong Kong Police Force and the Customs and Excise Department together with the participation of school social workers, aims at developing students’ self-discipline and enhancing their confidence and social skills through vigorous discipline and physical training.

### Health Sector

- The “Student Health Service” is a programme run by the Department of Health to provide young people with more comprehensive guidance and support during the puberty stage. SWD has, jointly with the Department of Health, the Education and Manpower Bureau, NGOs and the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, set up referral systems to early identify young people’s needs and ensure prompt referrals to suitable service units so that timely follow-up actions can be rendered as appropriate.

### Law Enforcement Agencies

- The “Secondary School Liaison Officers” are police officers of the Hong Kong Police Force posted at secondary schools for maintaining regular contacts and communication with schools and school social workers. They provide professional advice and assistance in handling criminal related activities including drug taking behaviour of the students. Through the launching of educational activities by the Liaison Officers, it is hoped that a spirit of discipline and proper values can be instilled in students so that they will become law-abiding citizens.

### Labour Sector

- The “Youth Pre-employment Training Programme” (YPTP) and “Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme” (YWETS) of the Labour Department are supported by multi-sectoral “social partners” including the Government, business sector, social services sector, training organisations as well as labour associations for helping young people who remain unemployed. The YPTP serves school leavers between the age of 15 and 19 by providing a range of job-related training, workplace attachment opportunities, career counselling and support service. The YWETS provides on-the-job training for youth aged between 15 and 24.

### ***Cultivating a Healthy Community***

Being one of the team players in anti-drug campaigns, SWD works closely with all stakeholders in cultivating a healthy environment for our general public, especially the young people to become responsible and contributing members of our society. SWD will continue the strategic partnership with other stakeholders in tackling the drug abuse issue in Hong Kong and put forth more new



initiatives on preventive measures as necessary. With the multi-disciplinary collaboration with various sectors, it is hoped that Hong Kong's community awareness about drug abuse problems among young people can be further strengthened and young people can grow up and live healthily, confidently and purposefully in a drug-free environment.

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