

Chapter XIII

COMMUNITY CARE, SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION

(A) Complementary Support

13.1 As expounded in Chapter II, youth drug abuse is a complex problem, intrinsically linked to a number of other social issues. It may be merely one of the many symptoms of some fundamental issues of the family, growth, learning or career being faced by our younger generation. To tackle the drug abuse and other youth problems in a comprehensive manner, support from many policy perspectives is necessary.

(a) Support for family

13.2 Families are fundamental building blocks of society, occupying a unique position that deserves special attention and support. The Family Council set up in December 2007 under the Chief Secretary for Administration's chairmanship advises the Government on strategies for supporting and strengthening the family. One initiative being pursued by the Family Council is to strengthen family education through a life-course family education approach to address the needs of family members at different stages of life. Pre-marriage and parenthood education is key to such an approach.

13.3 Many young drug abusers and youth at risk could be indirect victims of various family problems or dysfunctional family processes, such as poor parenting, parental absence, non-intact families, parental marital problems, domestic violence, families at risk or without adequate capacities, drop in family solidarity, etc. There may also be other concurrent risk factors in action, such as academic difficulties, poor peer relationships and involvement with the juvenile justice system. In turn, a troubled member who has drug abuse or other youth problems would take a heavy toll on the family.

13.4 At present, the provision of family support services spans over various Government bureaux and departments (e.g. EDB, Labour and Welfare Bureau, DH and SWD). Measures being pursued in various areas would complement the preventive efforts and contribute to the anti-drug cause.

(i) Strengthening general parental education

13.5 Apart from drug education for parents, more general parental education would be helpful, in areas like understanding the physical and psychological development of children, adolescent health, effective parenting skills as well as skills in preventing and dealing with children's behavioural problems.

13.6 The Women's Commission (WoC) has also placed nurturing caring families as one of its major foci in recent years, with particular emphasis on parenting education. It has piloted two projects in collaboration with the Kwun Tong District Council and the North District Council, seeking to promote quality parenting education and mutual support for parents on parenting issues. Separately, through its Capacity Building Mileage Programme, educational courses on childcare and youth development have been provided.

(ii) Enhancing support for needy families

13.7 In formulating family support initiatives and measures, there is a need to pay special attention to families having more complex needs, such as those related to family separation, immigration, income, housing, health, etc that impact on their well-being and progress. Parenting in such families may be easily weakened, or children in these families may be more vulnerable to parental marital problems.

(iii) Promoting healthy work-life balance and family-friendly employment practices

13.8 In Hong Kong, the quick and busy working life style has placed many working fathers and mothers under constant stress and

pressure, which potentially undermines their parenting role in families. While certain measures have already been in place to promote family-friendly employment practices and work-life balance in Hong Kong, the Family Council and other advisory bodies such as the WoC will advise on how to pursue more with a view to building up such an atmosphere in society, raising awareness of these practices among employers, and encouraging “family-friendly” firms.

(iv) Strengthening family support services

13.9 A diversity of family support services are currently provided by bureaux, departments and NGOs. Their various service units and agencies¹ will continue to strengthen their services to impart knowledge and skills on managing family life through different channels and platforms.

(b) Support for youth development

13.10 As discussed in Chapter III, positive youth development is a major protective factor to prevent drug abuse. Young people are often said to be growing up in a greenhouse, where their relatively smooth upbringing would make them difficult to handle life adversities. Apart from care and guidance that would best be given by parents and families, relevant skills training during this developmental period will be very useful in preparing them to face life’s future challenges, before growing into mature, responsible and contributing citizens. There is a continuous need to promote positive youth development to equip youngsters with life skills, refusal skills, interpersonal skills and the abilities to cope with life adversities.

13.11 As a matter of policy, youth development is promoted by the Home Affairs Bureau who works closely with the Commission on Youth in implementing programmes to achieve various objectives like enhancing the civic awareness of young people and their participation in community

¹ These include Maternal and Child Health Centres, Parent-Teacher Associations, Family Life Education Units, Integrated Family Service Centres, etc.

affairs, promoting leadership training for young people, broadening their horizons and international perspective, etc. Through its various programmes and initiatives, youngsters are encouraged to actively participate in community affairs, cooperate with youths of different background, interests and abilities, thereby fostering mutual respect and tolerance for other people, and strengthening their sense of commitment and devotion for the community.

13.12 In addition, SWD also plans and subvents an array of NGO-run preventive, developmental, supportive and remedial services to address the multifarious and changing needs of young people of different backgrounds through an integrated and holistic mode of service, notably through its core youth services comprising Integrated Children and Youth Services Centres, School Social Work Service, District Outreaching Social Work Teams, Overnight Outreaching Services for Young Night Drifters as well as the Community Support Service Scheme.

13.13 Another important player to promote positive youth development is the school system, which is, apart from the family, a large part of the life of an adolescent. The pivotal role of the school sector is discussed in Chapter V.

(c) Support for healthy growth

13.14 To help young people face the challenges of growing up, high priority has been given to promoting healthy lifestyle and psycho-social health of youngsters. In this respect, the Student Health Service (SHS) is a flagship programme of DH for primary and secondary school students. Services ranging from health examination, individual counselling, health education and referral are provided through its Student Health Service Centres. With a view to imparting health knowledge to students at an early age, SHS started in 2007 a “Junior Health Pioneer Workshop” targeting Primary Three students. It comprises health talks, games and group activities to educate students on the harmful effects of drugs, tobacco and alcohol, and equip them with refusal skills.

13.15 SHS has also launched the Adolescent Health Programme (AHP) as an outreaching service to secondary schools provided by a multi-disciplinary team comprising doctors, nurses, dieticians, social workers, clinical psychologists and health promotion officers. Apart from refusal skills and basic life skills training covering emotion and stress management and healthy living, AHP educates students on the harmful effects of drug abuse to health. In addition, AHP runs topical programmes for students, teachers and parents on topics including suicide and substance abuse prevention.

13.16 In view of the rising trend of youth drug abuse, DH has been working towards enhancing drug education as an integral element in promoting adolescent health. Starting the 2008-09 school year, drug abuse prevention and relevant life skills training will be made mandatory for all participating Secondary One classes. This should be an effective way to make use of the AHP platform manned by healthcare professionals and staff.

(d) Support for youth employment

13.17 Supporting youth employment is an important policy area of the Government. The work on this front has been significant and multifarious. Chief among many measures are the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme (YPTP) and the Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YWETS) championed by the Labour Department.

13.18 Launched in September 1999, YPTP aims to enhance the employability and competitiveness of school leavers aged 15 to 19 through a wide range of employment-related training. All eligible applicants are admitted and provided with modular training on leadership, discipline and team building, job-search and interpersonal skills, as well as job specific skills. On completion of modular training, trainees may undergo a one-month workplace attachment training at organisations including social service institutions and private companies.

13.19 YWETS was launched in July 2002 to enhance the employability of young people aged 15 to 24 with educational attainment

below the degree level by providing them with real work experience in the form of on-the-job training of 6 to 12 months. YWETS offers a variety of tailor-made employment projects to cater for trainees' needs and interests, covering such industries as wholesale and retail, aviation, tourism, information technology, education, social services, and catering.

13.20 A latest major initiative of the Labour Department is the establishment of two resource centres called Youth Employment Start (Y.E.S.) targeting those aged 15 to 29 who are leaving school, seeking new employment, or contemplating to start their own business. The aim is to provide one-stop service to help young people start their career on the right track, enhance their employability, and facilitate their access to the latest labour market information. Y.E.S. has also launched a mentorship scheme, inviting volunteer entrepreneurs and business professionals to give career guidance to young people.

(e) Collaborative efforts

13.21 The efforts from various policy perspectives are contributing in different complementary ways to tackle the drug abuse and other problems among the youth. The Task Force affirms the directions being pursued and lends support to various initiatives in the pipeline, particularly those mentioned above. There should be more opportunities for collaboration with such other policy programmes, through, for example, information exchange, joint programmes and thematic activities, the sharing of experience, expertise and resources, etc.

Recommendation 13.1

The Task Force recommends that efforts in tackling the youth drug abuse problem should be made by relevant bureaux and departments in a complementary manner, and where appropriate, with more collaborative opportunities in pursuing the programmes in related policy areas, including family matters, youth development, health matters and youth employment.

(B) *Path Builders: Promoting a Caring Culture in the Community*

13.22 The battle against youth drug abuse has to be fought at more fundamental levels outlined above. The Government is unable to fight it alone. Government-funded programmes are only part of the overall efforts to support the family, youth development, and health and career development of young people. Many NGOs, including social welfare agencies, community organisations and religious bodies, are already carrying out various activities and programmes with community resources to promote these causes.

13.23 However, the needs for care and positive influence among our young people are huge. To meet these needs, the Task Force sees the need to intensify efforts to mobilise greater community participation, to tap into the goodwill and resources of different sectors including corporations, businessmen, professionals and even individuals. In the course of consulting various sectors of the community in connection with its work, the Task Force is pleased to learn a significant number of people in Hong Kong are concerned about the youth drug problem and are both capable of and keen on making a contribution to this cause. The challenge lies in establishing a platform where these resources can be effectively connected and matched with the needs.

13.24 Support from the wider community can come in many different ways. Companies may provide youth employment and pre-employment training opportunities, or offer visits to students. Individuals can become mentors for vulnerable youths or tap into other opportunities to share with young people their valuable life experience. Experts like doctors and lawyers may give anti-drug talks from different perspectives. Businesses may disseminate the anti-drug messages to their employees or through their clientele networks, or provide space for anti-drug advertising or activities. People with skills and talents can put their expertise to help vulnerable youth in innovative ways. Some sponsors may wish to adopt a school or an NGO. Or some may like to make donations to selected bodies or anti-drug projects.

13.25 Such possible contributions may be channelled to our anti-drug programmes or other related policy programmes, or may go to the beneficiaries direct. The important thing is to pique people's interest in a good cause, present them with different feasible ways to help, and match their offerings big and small to those in need through various channels.

13.26 Young people need real opportunities for development, skills and confidence to resist peer group pressure and a genuine way to get out of trouble if need be. Some of them may just be stuck at a cross-road. Access to someone who cares could provide a turning point in the life of a young person. The Task Force firmly believes in the value of everyone in society playing a part. Together we can reach out to those who have so far not been exposed to drugs or are at risk, to give them opportunities and strengthen their resistance to adversity and temptations.

13.27 As set out in Chapter IV, involving the community and mobilising different sectors are a key part of our territory-wide campaign against youth drug abuse. The aim is not confined to combating drug abuse only, but also igniting a caring culture in the community to support the growth of our younger generation.

13.28 More importantly, in addition to reinvigorating the five-pronged approach, the Task Force believes that sustaining the culture of community care, support and participation should become a core part of our response to the drug problem.

Recommendation 13.2

The Task Force recommends that, with the territory-wide campaign against youth drug abuse setting the scene, a major initiative should be launched to appeal to all sectors of society to lend a helping hand to our younger generation and to facilitate anyone who wishes to contribute by any means, with a view to promoting a culture of community care, support and participation. Efforts should be sustained to foster the culture for our younger generation.

Measures taken thus far

On 12 September 2008, the *Path Builders* initiative was formally launched. The Administration and ACAN are making proactive efforts to promote the initiative in the community.

