

**The Hong Kong Council of Social Service**  
**Service Development (Family & Community)**  
**A Proposal on Housing Social Service Team**  
**to Tackle Housing Problems of Families**

**Background**

In the last 6 months, February to August 2006, there were 15 family tragedies / homicide cases happened, which led to 12 deaths. Among these cases, 13 of them were living at public housing estate or facing split tenancy problem (Table 1). For instance, two ladies were killed by their husbands, triggered by disputes over split tenancy and divorce problems; happened on June 7 and June 10, 2006 at Long Ping Estate of Yuen Long and Lek Yuen Estate of Shatin.

Some of the cases also reflected the weakening neighborhood support in public housing estates. For instance, the homicide suicide case happened at Oi Man Estate at Ho Man Tin on July 25, 2006.

In this light, early and timely support and intervention of the families in stress is essential to prevent family relationship and problem from deteriorating, which leading to family tragedies. Families with housing needs or problems would be a good entry point to get into contact with these high-risk / hidden families.

Though service integration facilitates more flexibility and synergy in resource mobilization to meet community needs, specialized service should also be developed at the same time, which the service providers have targeted service skills and work focus.

In 2005-06, 21 NGO IFSCs handled 2,400 cases with housing needs. It is projected that there are around 7,000 cases of this type for all 61 IFSCs. In handling these cases, social workers at IFSC have to conduct social assessment and writing reports for application of special housing arrangement, such as, split tenancy, conditional tenancy, compassionate re-housing, additional tenancy, eviction order and illegal occupancy.

In supporting families to handle the public housing issues in a time manner, the social workers need to have a good knowledge of the housing policies, practices and procedures. Moreover, good coordination and close collaboration with staff of the Housing Department is the pre-requisite for effectively working with families with housing problems.

On the other hand, each NGO IFSC worker has to take care of 80 cases and 11 groups / programmes on average and 133 enquiries/ intake reports each year. It is important to develop specialized service to work with the integrated service so as to enhance better service synergy in meeting the increasing and competing service demand.

### **Recommendation:**

Drawing from the experience of the social service teams established by the Buildings Department and the Urban Renewal Authority respectively, it is suggested the Health, Welfare and Food Bureau and the Social Welfare Department to explore with the Housing, Planning and Lands Bureau / Housing Department on the feasibility of setting up specialized **Housing Social Service Teams (HSSTs)**.

### **Aims**

The service with the aims of:

- (1) providing first-hand support to vulnerable families with financial, psychological and social problems and needs relating to public housing. Where necessary, counselling services will be provided to individuals / families concerned; and
- (2) enhancing mutual understanding and communication between residents and Housing Department so as to reduce resistance in relation to housing matters.

### **Target groups**

- (1) Public housing tenants in needs of alternative housing assistance / arrangements; or
- (2) Applicants on the public housing waitlist; with social / emotional needs.

### **Scope of Services**

- (1) To handle and follow up cases involving social issues by liaising with and referring to other departments / community services.
- (2) To provide brief counseling service to families with social issues and housing problems referred by Housing Department offices, through home visits / interviews / telephone contacts, etc.

- (3) To outreach, on need basis, to those families may encounter financial, psychological and social difficulties
- (4) To organize community programmes to promote harmonic neighborhood support and relationship

### **Benefits to service users & Housing Department**

The service users are expected to benefit from the prompt one-stop HSST service, in which both the housing, family and other social needs can be effectively handled at the same time. For clients with family and social problems who need more long term follow up, they can be referred to IFSC after the housing problem is dealt with.

The service team could support and enhance the effectiveness of the Housing Department in handling cases with social matters.

### **Service Interfacing**

The HSST is supported by a team of professional social worker with experience in casework, community development and outreaching services in meeting the social and emotional needs of the families arising from housing problem / needs in a timely and coordinated manner with the Housing Department.

When social workers of the HSST find families in need of intensive counseling service; community based family support service; and or other family resources; referrals should be made to existing community services. For instance, Integrated Children and Youth Service Centres; Integrated Family Service Service; District Elderly Community Centres; Neighborhood Elderly Centres; Community Centres, etc.

### **Remarks**

Office equipments and premises are to be provided by Housing Department. The professional service supervision is monitored by the operating social service agency.

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The Hong Kong Council of Social Service  
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