

THE HONG HONG KONG COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

**Study Visit on Services for Women
In North America**

19th – 30th October, 1998

June, 1999

Content

I. Introduction

II. The Study Tour – an overview

III. Observation/Implications to Hong Kong

IV. Other recommendations

Appendices

- Itinerary
- List of Publications brought from the Study Visit

I. Introduction

1. This is the first visit organized by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service to study services for women outside Hong Kong. The United States was chosen in view of its long-history and well developed women services and women's groups. The study tour was proposed by the Working Group on Women Services, Community Development Division and financially supported by the Lotteries Fund.

Participants

2. The six delegates were individuals who are either service provider or interested individual concerned about the development of women services in Hong Kong. They were:

Ms. Hung Suet Lin (Caritas-HK)

Ms. Hui Wai Fan (Hong Kong Children & Youth Services)

Ms. Lau Yuen Wah, Josephine (The Family Planning Association of Hong Kong)

Ms. Lee Ka Lai, Linda (Social Welfare Department)

Ms. Elle Shum (Individual)

Ms. Lilian Law (Hong Kong Council of Social Service)

Types of Organization visited

3. The study tour lasted for 14 days, from 19 to 30 October, 98 during which the delegation had visited three cities, i.e. New York, Minneapolis/St. Paul and San Francisco.

4. The delegation had visited three types of organizations :

a) Direct services rendered to Women

b) Networks of women and groups

c) Funding Structure and support among these agencies

A total of 32 organizations were visited and a detail list was included in Appendix 1.

II. The Study Tour – an overview

1. The delegation stayed in New York from 19th through 25th October; Minneapolis from 26th to 28th October and San Francisco from 29th to 30th October, 1998. Each city had its own characteristics. Amongst the three cities the delegation visited, the programmes varied.

New York

2. In New York, the delegation had spent four full days visiting agencies and met with officials from the three levels of US government; namely the federal, state and city offices. Agencies visited included domestic violence centre, child care services for high-risk families prone to child abuse, home-setting child care services, retraining programme for elderly and community health care clinics.
3. The focus of discussion and issues concerned were around those services for low-income mothers, battered women, childcare support as well as the impact of the welfare reform towards teenage single-parent–mothers and their children.

Minneapolis/St. Paul

4. In Minneapolis/St. Paul, the delegates met with different networks of women groups and services. Minneapolis was being considered to be at the frontier of social services development in the United States. The co-ordinator, Ms. Grace Harkness, came from the Women Consortium of Minneapolis. The Consortium itself physically refers to a building which houses a number of women organizations. It was the symbol of the well-knit network among different women groups as well as the mainstream services for women.
5. During a brown bag lunch organized by the Women Consortium, the delegates had a chance to join in the discussion and experience the connection among various groups of women. These participants met regularly and discussed any uprising issues/concern/policies on women every Monday.
6. Besides the Women Consortium, the delegation had met with the Commission on the Economic Status of Women under the State Office, Coalition for the Battered Women, the Women Funding Network and the Asian Women United. The Commission was basically a policy and research unit which maintained good connections with various women groups in the city. In their `newsletter, they would select topics on women issues, e.g. education and women, and conduct

secondary analysis of facts and findings. The analysis would then be circulated to concerned policy makers for reference and use.

San Francisco

7. In San Francisco, the delegations had a chance to experience different modes of direct services which include Women's Economic Agenda Project (WEAP), a community safe centre and home, a multi-service centre for girls etc. In addition, visits were also paid to women health organization, a centre for women labour and a neighbourhood based community centre.
8. The visit to the Women Economic Agenda Project was impressive. In receiving the delegation, the organization transformed it to be a rally for empowering the women on welfare. Over 200 participants including councilman, district supervisor, women organizers and welfare recipients attended.
9. The delegates were also impressed by the Girls Inc., a multi-service youth centre for girls, which carried a professional outlook and innovative programme designed. Such wide range of programmes were offered in a single-sex setting, which was supported by researches and findings from their research centre in Indianapolis.
10. More details about these new programmes would be discussed in the following chapter. In brief, the study tour was nicely webbed up by an informal discussion with a scholar in the University of California in Berkeley on the role and function of women commissions under the various levels of government in the United States.

III. Observation/Implications to Hong Kong

General Impression

1. The women services were well developed in the U.S. The number and range of programmes for women were vast and diversified. The initiatives of women in generating services and programmes were keen, their network was strong and their ability to mobilize resources was powerful. However, disadvantaged women groups such as minority women, migrant women, undocumented women, battered women and women on welfare still constitute a main concern and the major targets for service provision.

Welfare Reform

2. The government departments, both at the federal and city level, were concerned about the growing number of welfare mothers, most of them single parents, and eager to claim the success in the reform in reducing the dependency of such group on welfare. Based upon the experience in Wisconsin, after 8 years pilot projects, the Federal Government set time-limit for welfare for these women while providing them other support and training programmes such as child care and maintenance programs.
3. As for the welfare women group and women policy advocate, the welfare cut might have raised their consciousness for policy changes and initiated economic programmes to help the welfare recipients to get involved in small business and getting away from poverty.

Implication to Hong Kong

The increasing number of single parent families receiving cash assistance from the Government is also a growing concern in Hong Kong. The U.S. experience could shed light on both programme ideas as well as policy arrangement for helping such groups to get away from poverty.

Domestic Violence

4. Across the three cities visited, services for battered women were also one of the common themes. The protection for the battered women was more deliberated and services were more developed.

Implication to Hong Kong

There are two areas, as stated below, that the service providers in Hong Kong could further consider:

- a) Domestic violence policeman and protection order –In each police station of New York, there are police officers and detective who were specifically assigned to handle civil cases and crimes involving domestic violence. A “Protection Order” could be applied which provided effective protection for battered women who fear for their safety. The Court order could be granted within 1 day.
- b) Involvement of Community – Besides shelters set up for the battered women and their children, there were also “safe homes” and “safe hotel” in the community and some of them being offered by volunteers.

Networking

5. In Minneapolis/St. Paul, the various women groups connected to each other through A wide range of Networks among different women groups, women service providers and funders were set up and their link were close and strong. As in staying under one roof, a constant updated directory, regular informal sharing session and internet exchange.

Implication to Hong Kong

To start with, the following areas could be considered:

- a) A regular informal forum on women issues –the informal sharing session (which was named as the brown bag lunch in Minneapolis) would be useful for different women groups to have a platform to regularly review concerned policies/measures related to women. It would be a good sample to follow. There are quite a number of women groups in Hong Kong but communication among them was weak. An informal discussion forum could be a good start for them to get together sharing different concerns and issues.
- b) A women service directory – A simple and handy directory on women services would useful and helpful for users as well as other social service providers in utilizing existing services. The directory on women services in Minneapolis, which was compiled with help from volunteers from colleges, could serve as a feasible model for developing a similar project in Hong Kong.

- c) The women service building - it would be desirable to have a space/piece of land to house all different types of the women services. The co-location of these units would help to consolidate existing women services and build up a more obvious image.

Government Structure

6. There are different Division for Women/Commission on Economic Status of Women set up under different level of governments: from Federal (President's office), State (Governors' office) to County level (Councilmen's office). Such structure was considered as voices representing women's interest in the political arena. In Minneapolis' Commission, the Commission on the Economic Status of Women tried to position itself as a political neutral body and focus on research and policy-analysis on situations/problems faced by women.

Implication to Hong Kong

Further exploration on the feasibility in setting up a Women Commission or Division on Women in Hong Kong within the Government Structure should be pursued.

Women's fund

7. A funding network –In Minneapolis, a Women Foundation Network was found and it served as an advisory body for foundations/funding bodies for financing programmes and services for women as well as for promoting the setting up women funds. The network was countrywide and communicated through the internet.

Implication to Hong Kong

A women's fund in Hong Kong is desirable to finance innovative projects, such as economic and policy advocacy projects which often are not funded by the government and well-established funding sources. Such a fund will also be able to tap international resources to fund new initiatives in women development programmes.

New Service Models

8. Group family day care in Brooklyn, New York –

This project was organized by the Chinese Planning Council, which provides services for Chinese new arrivals in New York. Women are trained to provide

group child care services in their own homes. The project is intended to be income-generating rather than mutual help. Start up assistance such as furnishing and equipment allowance was offered by the State Government. Registration procedures were also simplified. Group family day care is an attractive income generating business to many new arrivals women in New York. It often becomes a means to earn income among homemakers in low-income families.

Implication to Hong Kong

Though the living condition is less favorable to group care in Hong Kong, the experience in New York highlights the possibility of establishing a better organized system of childminding services here and also providing group care by cooperation among two or three women.

9. Employment & Training Programs

Another programme offered by the CPC for new arrival women is employment training. Courses are subvented by government to provide training on vocational skills including fashion design, home attending and clerical careers training. Though not restricting the sex of participants, participants of these courses are predominately women. The Home Attendant Program offers employment opportunities and is mostly welcome by older women. Its working hours can be flexible and jobs can be matched between the needed families and the attendants. The Program helps in job matching.

Implication to Hong Kong

Sensitivity to labour market demand is significant to increase the employment opportunity of women. While garment industry declines in Hong Kong, there is a trend to develop u-market fashion. Training on fashion design can be explored in Hong Kong Kong. The need for home attendants or escort services for elderly and disabled is increasing in Hong Kong too. In view of the advantage that women can integrate such part-time work with family care, training housewives home attendance skills can serve dual purposes of filling service gap for the elderly and providing part-time job opportunities for unemployed women. A critical factor for such projects to be successful, however, lies in the availability of a coordinating body that performs job matching. Social welfare agencies can advocate for the establishment of such bodies on community basis.

10. Women's Economic Agenda Project

African women activists in San Francisco initiate this organization. The Project has successfully purchased a 4-storey building in the city center of Oakland after vigorous fund raising. At present, they rent some parts of the building for income and reserve two stories for direct services. As the name of the organization tells, its main concern is on the economic well being of women of colour. A number of income generating businesses are established with the assistance of the Project including express delivery services of legal documents, retail shops. Funding support is solicited from local banks and large corporations.

The image of policy advocacy is strong. During our visit, the reception turned out to be a large conference on the "World Economy and Women". Council members (almost equivalent to the legislative councillors in Hong Kong), organizers of women's groups and more than 200 welfare recipients were invited to share their views on the Welfare Reform. A campaign is undergoing to voice their objection to the Reform.

Implication to Hong Kong

The economic well being of social welfare recipients has not been a major concern for years in Hong Kong. The only related concern is that on the increasing number of single mothers receiving CSSA. That grassroots women could organize among themselves and advocate for their economic well being is impressive. Organizing women on welfare to voice their opinions on the reform is significant at this stage and more vigorous effort should be put to enable the low-income women to become masters of services by forming their own groups and start their own business.

11. Rape Crisis Centre

The Rape Crisis Centre operates mainly with a 24 hours phone line. A well-designed telephone system connect volunteers who take shifts in answering phone calls at home and providing immediate assistance such as accompanying the victims to hospitals and police offices. The Centre had 25 full time staff providing services for about 500 cases a year. It offers a lot of training to volunteers, nurses, other medical professionals and the police. Educational programmes in schools targeting at boys and girls are widely launched.

Implication to Hong Kong

Crisis intervention for rape victims is a service gap in Hong Kong. While such service requires intensive manpower and people who always stand by, reliance on professionals will be too expensive to be afforded by any agencies. The mobilization of volunteers who are connected by phone lines resolves the critical problem of manpower. It would be worthwhile to try out such service delivery model in Hong Kong. The quality of the volunteers is of course very significant. More educated, mature volunteers are needed and they have to be well trained. With the support of professionals, community human resources can be tapped. With the support of professionals, community human resources can be tapped. In Hong Kong, small-scale attempts can be made in centres at community level if resources are not available for a Hong Kong wide centre.

12. **Girls' Inc.** – children and youth centre for girls (single sex)

The Girl's Inc. can be conceived as a children & youth centre for young girls. To serve girls in a single sex environment is to recognise that women are in a disadvantageous position in the American society. It is expected that in a single sex environment, it would facilitate the development of young girls and free them from social pressure of conforming to gender stereotypes in schools and families. In addition, there are programmes with positive discrimination orientation to support girls to get into universities. In particular, programmes had been uniquely designed for young girls of low aspiration and unwed teenage mothers. Girls of low-income families are selected and offered training during summer holidays for three consecutive years for all rounded development. It was reported that the success rate of the programme is high with about 70% of participants getting into the universities.

Implication to Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, there is generally a lack of concern among social workers in working with girls or young women. The idea of positive discrimination for girls, counteracting gender stereotypes at young age is not widely recognized by youth workers. The Girls' Inc. is impressive especially the programme to assist girls from low-income families to enter universities for upward social mobility. It is recommended that, as a first step, girls' groups can be experimented in children and youth centres with a gender perspective.

Follow up Actions

13. In brief, the following areas worth further exploration regarding its feasibility and application in Hong Kong:
 - a. encourage and foster networking among women organizations in Hong Kong and start compiling a women service directory.
 - b. Start a regular but informal forum among concerned individuals and NGOs on uprising issues concerning women.
 - c. Consider the feasibility to set up a Women Commission or Division on Women in Hong Kong under the existing Government structure.
 - d. Experiment new service models and set up women fund for it. The new programme ideas worth try out include: the WEAP, Rape Crisis centre, Girls Inc. Police protection order.

IV. Other Recommendations

In general, the study tour, in particular the trip to Minneapolis and San Francisco was found fruitful and stimulating to the members on the development of women services/programmes. Through the trip, the delegation had started relationship with a range of women organizations that could further connect and continue to exchange of ideas. Further, a substantive portion of literatures, manual and written materials had been brought back which serves as a useful pool of information for local service providers in Hong Kong. Similar visits could be organized in future while new programme ideas, such as networking and women funds, could be tried out in Hong Kong.

However, for similar event to be organized in the coming future, there are two areas that could be further improved. These include:

1. Better Preparation for the Study tour –

a. Information Package on Hong Kong –

In many occasions, the delegation was expected to provide general situation of Hong Kong and were asked to answer questions such as the population in Hong Kong, the life expectancy, the median income of families in Hong Kong etc.

Hence, we suggest that some basic fact sheets on Hong Kong could be prepared and provided to delegations for reference. These informations could include:

Population size

Overall social service budgets

Demographic characteristics of the population

b. Clear understanding and expectation –

Clear and unified expectation among members towards the study tour would also be an essential condition for the successful planning of the visiting programmes. In pre-study tour meetings, a special session could be arranged for members to share their views and clarify their expectations. It would also facilitate the arrangement and planning of programmes of the visit.

2. Selection of delegates and co-ordinators in the visit

- a. Selection of delegates - Language proficiency of delegates was important for them to fully participate in the discussion and learn from the visitation programmes. Hence, a stricter criterion would be needed for selecting delegates who are proficient in language especially for those who would participate in a study tour.
- b. Good co-ordinators or contact persons – Able to solicit help and support from good co-ordinators would be one of the utmost important conditions for the success of the visitation programmes. Hence, after each visit, the delegation could generate or record a list of overseas co-ordinators that had been helpful and resourceful in lining up visits in overseas study tour.