

THE HONG KONG COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

Study Visit on
Community Development Services in Singapore
(March 20 - March 31, 2000)



Prepared by delegation:

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I. Introduction

This was the first study visit of our workers to Singapore in the social work field during the last decade. The visit lasted for two weeks that provided us with more comprehensive views on Singaporean Government's public policies, social service programme and had cultural exchange. Singapore, which is a multi-racial community with rapid social changes, has many aspects that are similar to Hong Kong. Their works on promotion of cohesion and harmony in its multi-racial community should bring us insights on building a cohesive community.

Policy makers in Hong Kong usually make reference to the good practices and policies in Singapore that the visit should let us have better understanding to its policy making, service and impact to the Singaporeans. Their experiences and service model might shed light to the development of community development service in Hong Kong.

The study tour was proposed by the Community Development Division of the Hong Kong Council of Social Service and financially supported by the Community Chest.

i. Participants

The four delegates are the community development workers or involved in service planning and coordination. Workers are also come from different community development service setting. They are:

⊕ **Ms. Chiu Lai Suen, Elsa**
Assistant Division Officer
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⊕ **Ms. Hung Suet Lin, Shirley**
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⊕ **Ms. Lai Mei Fung, Welky**
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⊕ **Mr. Lam Kwok Wai, Laurence**
Service in Charge
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ii. Duration

March 20 – 31, 2000 (Two weeks)

iii. Goals

1. To study the welfare system and community development service on community building in Singapore
2. To study service on volunteer development and family services in community
3. To study the works on community integration among multi-racial groups and disadvantaged groups in community
4. To study town planning urban re-development and rural area development

iv. Types of services visited

1. Government ministries
2. NGOs coordinating organization
3. Quasi-governmental organizations
4. Direct services rendered to individual family & community (children, youth, elderly, lone parent families, etc)
5. Politicians, district leaders & social work academics

v. Attachment Programme

Three attachment programmes were arranged. Two delegates went to the Tampines Family Service Centre for three days and the other two spent one day at Changi General Hospital and then two days at Macpherson Social Service Centre.

Altogether, delegates visited 20 agencies and details visitation programme and agency visit records are included in appendix 1 and 2 respectively.

II. Background

For better understanding of Singapore, the following figures are quoted as reference.

	Singapore 1998	Hong Kong 1998	Hong Kong 1999
Land Areas (sq km)	648.1	#	1100
Total Populaton ('000)	3.865.6 (Male and Female about the same numbers)	6.6872 (Male and Female about the same numbers)	6.843 (Male and Female about the same numbers)
Aged 60 or above (%)	10.3	10.5 (aged 65 or above)	10.7 (aged 65 or above)
Population Density (per sq km)	5,965	6,217	6,354
Median Age	33	35.5	#
Literacy Rate (%)	93	90.5 (1996 figures)	#
Doctors Per 1,000 population	1.3	1.4	1.4
Crime Rate (per 100,000 population)	1,240	1076.06	#
Labour Force participation rate	63.9 (Male:71; Female:46)	62.3	62.1

	Singapore 1998	Hong Kong 1998	Hong Kong 1999
Average monthly income (S\$) (4 th quarter 1999)	S\$3287 (approx. HK\$ 15120) (2600 in the previous period)	#	HK\$17500 (median household income, household size 3.3persons) HK\$9500 (median monthly income)
Unemployment Rate	3.2	5.7	6.0
Divorce/ Separation Rate	1.6	13129 (divorce discee)	#

No. is not found

Singapore and Hong Kong share many similarities in its composition and economic development. However, policy, legislation and service planning concepts and models are quite different. The study visit on the Community Development Service in Singapore may shed light to our services provision and policy advocacy. It can also let us have better understanding on its policy planning and good practices.

III. Observation and Implication to Hong Kong

Overall speaking, the community development services/ social welfare services of Singapore are far less developed than that of Hong Kong. They are largely remedial structured in a way that reinforces work ethics and individual responsibility strongly upheld in the society at large. The psycho-medical model is prevailing and tangible assistance, such as food, free clinics, to poverty groups is still widely provided by social welfare agencies. When compared with the CSSA in Hong Kong, social security benefits in Singapore are set at a level much lower than that of Hong Kong. Fortunately, or unfortunately, it is very likely that the Hong Kong social welfare services will follow their track in the near future in views of the recent trend of welfare cut.

The welfare philosophy, being remedial, has to be understood against the political and social background of Singapore. People living at a reasonable standard has been secured by having a comprehensive public housing programme which emphasizes housing ownership, and the central provident fund scheme. These two interlocked provisions have been so successful that people's basic living is largely secured. People do work hard to earn their daily living but they do not have to worry about housing and retirement. Education and medical services are also comprehensive and job opportunities are abundant up to now. Social welfare services, in this context, are supposedly only for people with personal misfortune who cannot support themselves for various reasons.

The unique political and social context of Singapore explains its social policy and social services orientation. Being a society with a dominant central government and tight political control, policy directions are clearly and firmly stipulated and implemented top-down. Being a country of multi-racial, though Chinese are 70% of the population, enhancing racial cohesion is the objective of all policies. Social services have to be provided in a way that no racial group is to be discriminated. The conservation of heritage of different cultures is accorded high priority in urban redevelopment.

Besides racial integration, strengthening the family and maintaining its integrity is also a social goal of the whole country. There is a well-established family policy with supportive legislation such as the Maintenance Parents Act. A tribunal has been set up in the Ministry of Community Development (the central government department on social welfare) to mediate disputes on parents' maintenance. There are also mandatory counseling services for perpetrators in family violence, mandatory mediation services for couples facing divorce. Family service is therefore regarded as the most significant type of social welfare services by the government and more expansions are expected to come in the near future.

Clear central directions being well integrated in legislative and social policy devices and implemented fully are observed to be the critical difference between Singapore and Hong Kong. The same as in Singapore, that family is to be upheld has been stated clearly in social welfare policy papers of Hong Kong. However, the design of social welfare services, housing and social security policy, for example, may have worked against this direction when closely examined. The effectiveness in social engineering is obviously much lower here.

There are of course costs of being top-down. Overall, there is little room for grassroot initiatives in social changes in Singapore. The relationship between government and non-governmental agencies (known as voluntary welfare organizations, the VWOs, in Singapore) is not so much partnership but funders and implementers. Not much advocacy work done in reforming social welfare services is found.

Given the difference of the political and social context of the Singapore and Hong Kong society, it is difficult to draw direct implications to Hong Kong. To change for a top down orientation in governing with a controlling centralized government would be very controversial here. Nevertheless, concerning the social welfare services, there are some areas that we can learn and implications to Hong Kong can be drawn.

i. Family services

The family service centres (FSCs) are in fact similar to community centres in Hong Kong. When compared with FSCs in Singapore, there are rooms for FSCs in Hong Kong to become more community based.

The opening hours of FSCs in Singapore are from morning till evening for most of the days.

FSCs can tailor made their services for the community they serve, for example, the Macpherson Moral FSC, located in an old public housing area, changes their focus to elderly services.

FSCs also provide youth services including services for marginal youth, school children and school social work. The integration of marginal youth services and family counselling in one centre is seldom, if not never, the case in Hong Kong. According to the experience in Singapore, there is not much difficulty in accommodating both youth at risk and families in discord as long as rules of using facilities are clearly set and implemented. There are also before and after school care programmes in FSCs.

There has been active mobilization of volunteers in FSCs in Singapore. For example, the Fei Yue FSCs have mobilized volunteers to provide tuition services for children of low income families, activities at the Retirees Centre, the RAISE Programme and also the Helpline. The Helpline is run by volunteers who, after training, provide short term counseling on family, marital and parenting problems. The Helpline operates at 2-5pm by 5 to 6 volunteers with one phone line.

ii. One stop service model of family service

A renowned feature of the family service in Singapore is the one stop service model. Every needy person can reach the nearest family service centre through the HelpLine which is operated throughout Singapore by dialing a unique telephone number. After assessing the needs of the clients, the FSCs will make the appropriate referral linking the clients to the necessary community resources. If there is such a system in Hong Kong, the needy ones will not have to be frustrated by not knowing where to turn to.

iii. Mandatory counseling and mediation services

1. Mandatory Counseling for Domestic violence

There have been recently strong advocates from women's organizations in Hong Kong to make counseling services for male batterers mandatory. In Singapore, it has been mandatory and FSCs are to provide the counseling services.

FSCs are to take up cases referred by courts who are victims and/or perpetrators of domestic violence for mandatory counselling. The court pays the counselling service at \$80 per hours up to 8 sessions for each client. According to the experience of the Fei Yue FSC, in the past, usually 8-9 sessions were provided. But owing to factors like clients may resort to a divorce, a minimum of 4 sessions is the norms now. There are also programmes developed for male perpetrators. Counselling, however, remains the major working approach in views of the difficulties in running groups for perpetrators who are of different ethnicity.

2. Mandatory Mediation Services for Divorce Couples

Mediation services for divorcing couples are to be provided on an experimental basis in Hong Kong. In Singapore, they have also been made compulsory. Some FSCs, assigned by the Government, function at the same time as mandatory mediation centres. Again, the government will pay the FSCs subsidies on hourly basis.

3. Police Caution Cases Guidance Programme (PCCGP)

It is a six-month programme including individual and family counselling provided to youths below 16 who are first time offenders. They are referred by the Police to the FSCs.

The Program is carried out with the participation of the parents. As observed in our visits, instead of focusing on the behavioral problems of the children, parenting is the focus.

While the PCCGP is similar to the community support schemes for youth under police caution in Hong Kong, the integration of the programme into family services, located in the neighbourhood, may weaken the social stigmatization and punitive orientation of the programme.

iv. Services for single parents and children

While there has been wide societal concern on the increasing number of divorce and single parent families, services for single parent families have not been specialized in Hong Kong. Similarly, the Singapore government has not supported services for single parent families. However, the Community Chest in Singapore does provide continuous support to initiatives that fill the gap of government services.

The HELP (Help Every Lone Parent Family Service Centre), one of the two single parent family service centres in Singapore, was set up fifteen years ago and has been funded totally by the Community Chest raised by the National Council of Social Services. It provides specialized services for single parent families including counseling, group work and volunteers programme. It is also a mandated representative of the RAINBOW Programme, originated from the United States, designed for children of single parent families. The Centre provides training to volunteers and staff of other VWOs to carry out the Programme.

With strong connection between the Centre and other organizations such as schools and FSCs, the Centre can reach the needy clients though it is not community based.

The need of setting up service centres providing specialized professional services for single parent families has to be reviewed in Hong Kong. Experience in Singapore suggests that single parent family service centres can provide professional support, in addition to direct service provision, to FSCs and schools. It is not a duplication of existing services, but is pioneering as well as supplementary.

The Rainbow Programme is also worthy of trying in Hong Kong. But since this programme was developed in the United States and the use of it has to be closely monitored, for example, accreditation is needed to run the programme and any amendment of any part of it has to be approved, it is not sure whether indigenously developed programmes in Hong Kong would be more appropriate in view of the different cultural context. Nevertheless, the idea of working with grief and lost of children is welcomed.

v. Services for deprived children

In addition to the RAINBOW Programme specially designed for children of single parents families, it is observed that there are other programmes adopted from the United States as far as services for deprived children is concerned.

To quote some of the examples, the READING TREE Programme. The Programme is originated from the United States to stimulate learning interest of the students outside the regular school curriculum. The programme has been widely utilized by FSCs in Singapore. For example, in the Tampines FSCs, it has been set up for children scoring below 30% in school examinations in English and Mathematics. Another FSCs, the Fei Yue, integrating development of social skills and the READING TREE Programme, develops the RAISE Programme (Reading & Interpersonal Skills Enrichment Programme). The Programme is specially provided for the low-income students aged 7 and below to develop their interest in reading and interpersonal skills. It is a nine-month programme for 15 children provided once a year. Since the government does not subvent the Programme, the Fei Yue FSCs, out of their own initiatives, wrote proposals to private companies and funding organizations solicit financial support for it.

Before and After School programmes, also know as student care centres or childcare centres, are widely provided in Singapore by the VWOs as well as private organizations. In Hong Kong, the focus of such programme is primarily tuition and activities. Resting time is limited. The Before and After School Care Programmes in Singapore schedule regular resting time for the students in between study time. There are also bathing and afternoon sleep. To provide childcare support to working women, government subsidies are given to working women to encourage them to work. Families with monthly income below \$2500 can also apply for government subsidy on a sliding scale. These two types of subsidy are absent in Hong Kong.

vi. Community Organizing

Community organizing is highly political in the Singapore context. The tightly knitted network from the People's Association (PA) as the central coordinating body at the top, down to the Community Development Councils (CDCs), the Community Clubs at district level and Resident Committees (RCs) at housing block level, has successfully put all grassroot activities under the supervision of the Government. In view of the different political and social context of Singapore and Hong Kong, it is doubtful whether the Singapore model is suitable and feasible in Hong Kong. However, some reflections can be drawn from their strategies of community organizing.

Lots of government money goes into the CDCs. For each CDC, yearly government subvention is given at \$1 for each resident, amounting to \$330,000 in the Ang Mo Kio CDC. It is a government policy to match funds raised by the CDC. Every dollar of donation will be matched by a government grant of three dollars. It acts as a great incentive for the CDC to raise money from the community though financial support is never a problem to be worried. As a result, resources are abundant for community activities.

In addition to money support, a lot of incentives are given to grassroot leaders and active residents in the community. They can be material benefits as well as social recognition. In a block party organized by a resident committee we joined, the Vice Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, was officiating the opening ceremony and presenting prizes to residents. The social recognition to the residents given by the central government is impressive. Material benefits such as priority in allocating housing flats, car park slots are also given to core members of RCs. There is also one community leader's club specially built for executive committee members of RCs and other centrally appointed committees.

Tenants' participation has to be highlighted. Instead of managing public housing estates by officials of central government department, the authority to manage is delegated completely to town councils. A Town Council, headed by elected Members of the Parliament (MPs) of the constituency, is responsible for promoting neighborhood participation in public housing management. It has the real power in estate management including financial management, allocation of resources, design of buildings and the overall redevelopment of the estates. One interesting point noted is that there is restriction imposed on people's geographical mobility in terms of home moving. A tenant or homeowner is not allowed to move out within five years resulting in stable communities. In view of these, tenants' participation in housing management is far more developed in Singapore than in Hong Kong.

vii. Use of Volunteers and fund raising

Promoting volunteerism is also a national goal of Singapore. The National Volunteer Centre was set up recently in the National Council of Social Services (NCSS), the coordinating body of VWOs in Singapore, specializing in volunteer services. The Centre is to coordinate volunteer work in the whole country. Close liaison is to be made with different ministries to solicit opportunities for volunteer work. Environmental conservation, cultural and heritage are some of the areas that volunteers can contribute. It is reported that 11% of the total population has been volunteers in social services in 1995.

All students in Singapore are to provide at least 6 hours voluntary work a year on compulsory basis. As observed, the students are sources of help in children homes, before and after school care programmes and school extra-curricular activities. A lot of efforts are also put into advocating volunteerism in the business field.

Fund raising has been an important source of income to social welfare services in Singapore. The FSCs, for example, are half funded by the Ministry of Community Development (MCD), the central government department on social welfare. Another half of the income comes from donation either raised by Community Chest or funding campaigns of individual welfare agencies or churches.

IV. Evaluation

i. **Organization / arrangement of the organizer**

1. **Variety of service of the visit**

It seems to have visited too many Family Service Centre (FSC). We had visited two FSCs and had attachment programme at two different FSCs on a three-days' basis. Other types of service such as rehabilitation, can also be included. The variety of service will be more comprehensive if service for the minority groups, e.g. Malays can be included.

2. **Relevance of visit to community development in Hong Kong**

The work of the People's Association (PA) and Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), are more relevant to the existing Community Development service in Hong Kong. The other services though are community based, the service delivery model is not similar to HK and these services are more case-oriented.

In order to get a comprehensive picture of the political situation in Singapore, which greatly affects the resource distribution, delegates can visit the only two constituencies that are led by the union (different political party from the Government – People Action Party). More diverse views and political profile can be learnt.

3. **Duration of the study visit**

Considering the variety of agencies we visited, the duration of the study visit could be shortened to about seven to at most ten days instead of two weeks.

4. **Organization of the attachment programme**

Attachment programme is worthy participating as we can have a more in depth observation about the service. However, the duration can be more condensed and shortened to about one or one and a half-day.

The attachment programme of the two delegates visiting the Children center in Medical setting and Mahperson FSC was organized very hastily. The Ministry of Community Development (MCD) in Singapore could not find the suitable agency for attachment until one day before the programme started. The situation would be much improved if the programme could be arranged earlier that it can give more time for the receiving centre to prepare.

5. Preparation of the visit

As the community development in Singapore has great relevance of the government policy implementation. In order to have a clearer understanding of the situation, it would be better for us to have basic understanding of the social policies such as housing, education, medical care and social security, before the visit was conducted.

6. Accommodation

Accommodation had been very well arranged. The hotel was located at the town centre. Thus, it was very convenient for the delegates to get around to every corner of Singapore.

7. Schedule of visiting agencies

Most of the time, two agencies were arranged for a one-day visit. The schedule was suitable for such a long trip and the delegates could have sufficient energy for the various visits.

List of Publication brought from
the Study Visit on Community Development Services in Singapore 2000

Agency / Author	Name of Materials	Types
Ministry of Community Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Singapore Family Values (新加坡家庭價值觀 和忠孝敬愛) ■ Singaporeans – Maturing with Age (樂齡歲月) ■ 一個電話 無限關懷 ■ 新加坡扶助貧困家庭之道 ■ Services for the family ■ Service for couples ■ Understanding your child's development patterns ■ Managing Misbehavior in Children ■ Helping your child cope with study stress ■ Helping your teenager cope with peer pressure ■ Better intergenerational relationship ■ You hit, we hurt – it's everybody's business to stop spousal violence ■ Understanding the elderly ■ Growing old graciously ■ Effective communication with the elderly ■ Small Families Improvement Scheme ■ Information Kit about Child Care Centre ■ Maintenance of Parents Act (Revised Edition 1996) ■ Tribunal for the Maintenance of Parents 	Booklets and pamphlets
National Council of Social Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Directory of Social Services (7th Edition) ■ Overview of Children Youth & Family Services in Singapore ■ Annual Report 98/99 	Directory
Volunteer Action & Development Centre (VADC) National Council of Social Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Weaving the Community together: Partners in Community Service ■ A Guide for Volunteer Coordinators: Making a Difference Calling Volunteers Join us and make a difference ■ A Handbook on Motivating & Sustaining Volunteers: Keeping the spirit of volunteerism alive 	Booklets
People's Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ About People's Association ■ Annual Report 1998-1999 ■ Ang Mo Kio – Cheng San Community Development Council (CDC) Information Kit ■ "Citizen" (民眾報) 	Booklets

Agency / Author	Name of Materials	Types
Help Every Lone Parent Family Service Centre (HELP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service pamphlet ■ Rainbows Program (For children of Single Parent Family) ■ Annual Report 1998-99 	Pamphlet Booklet
Asian Women's Welfare Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Elderly Services ■ Annual Report 1997-1998 	Booklets
Changi General Hospital Child Care Centre (Workplace)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service pamphlet ■ Child Care Centre Handbook 	Pamphlet Booklet
Changi General Hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A Smile and Other Medical Services available at Changi General Hospital 	Booklet
Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society 德教太和觀	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Information Booklet 	Booklet
Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society Charity Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Booklet ■ Moral Network of Older Persons Handbook ■ Alert Alarm System0 	Booklets
MacPherson Moral Family Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Newsletter 	Newsletter
REACH Family Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service pamphlet ■ Newsletter 	Pamphlet
Fei Yue Family Service Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Service pamphlet 	Pamphlet
Urban Redevelopment Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Living the Next Lap: Towards a tropical city of excellence 	Booklet