

Government to strengthen support for children and families in need

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The Government will soon invite interested non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to submit proposals for implementing the pioneer projects of the Child Development Fund so that the first batch of projects can be launched in the latter half of this year.

Speaking at the installation ceremony of the executive board of Zonta Club of Hong Kong East today (May 22), the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, said the fund was established to promote the longer-term personal development of children aged between 10 and 16 from a disadvantaged background.

"We hope that these children, through developing and implementing their own personal development plans, training and savings programmes, and guidance from their volunteer mentors, can develop positive attitudes and an asset-building habit to accumulate both financial assets as well as non-financial assets which are important to their future development.

"As a start, we will implement the first batch of seven pioneer projects, one each on Hong Kong Island, in Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East, New Territories West, Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung. In the light of experience, we will roll out subsequent batches in future.

"With a funding commitment of \$300 million, we estimate that at least 13,600 children will benefit from the fund," he said.

Noting that child welfare was of paramount concern within a family and the community, Mr Cheung stressed that the Government fully appreciated the need for child care services with more flexible operating hours to meet the different needs of parents.

"We will allocate extra funding of \$45 million to promote various types of child care services and strengthen day foster care service for a period of three years.

"The Social Welfare Department is inviting proposals from interested NGOs and district organisations with a

view to launching a 'Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project' in October this year," Mr Cheung said.

He noted that the project comprised centre-based care group and home-based child care service, and would be implemented in phases in six locations where the demand for child care services was more pressing, namely Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tung Chung, Kwai Chung, Kwun Tong and Sham Shui Po.

"Service operators will train up local residents to become home-based child carers and assist in implementing the centre-based care group service," he added.

Turning to families affected by domestic violence, Mr Cheung said the Government would strengthen support for victims of domestic violence and families in need.

He said measures in the pipeline included enhancing the hotline service of the Social Welfare Department, increasing the capacity of refuge centres for women and residential homes for children, and sustaining publicity campaign and public education efforts.

"On the legislative front, we have reviewed the Domestic Violence Ordinance and introduced an amendment bill in June 2007 to strengthen the protection for victims of domestic violence.

"The bill is now at the final stage of the legislative process and we look forward to its early enactment and commencement so as to enhance protection for victims," Mr Cheung said.

Last but not least, he said he looked forward to working with the Zonta Club and other welfare organisations in exploring collaboration in various initiatives to foster a harmonious community.

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