

Child Development Fund in full swing next month

The \$300 million Child Development Fund (CDF), which aims at giving children from a disadvantaged background more development opportunities through the collaboration of the public, the business sector and the Government, will be in full swing next month.

Speaking at the launching ceremony of the CDF today (November 23), the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, said he believed that children from poor families could also have a bright future as long as they adopted a positive attitude towards life and had the courage to struggle against adversity with the assistance and guidance of their parents and mentors.

"The idea of the fund is to capitalise on the strengths of various sectors in the community to help our disadvantaged children. The mentors will give advice to the children on how to plan for their future, better equip themselves and make use of their savings to hit their set targets," he said.

The CDF is applicable to children aged between 10 and 16 from disadvantaged background. The project is expected to benefit at least 13,600 children. A total of 750 children will join the first batch of seven pioneer projects operated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on Hong Kong Island and in Kowloon East, Kowloon West, New Territories East, New Territories West, Tin Shui Wai and Tung Chung.

The seven pioneer projects are operated by six NGOs. They are the Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service, Christian Action, Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship, Tung Wah Group of Hospitals, the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups and Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council.

The CDF has three major components - the personal development plan, mentorship programme and targeted savings. Among these, the mentorship programme which helps build up connections between the mentors and the children is most crucial. Mentors will be the role models of the children. They help to widen their horizon and social networks, as well as develop a positive attitude towards life. On the other hand, the mentors will gain valuable experience from their roles as "big brothers". This helps promote cross-sectoral interaction and build up a harmonious society.

Participating NGOs will identify a mentor for each participating child. The mentors will assist the children in drawing up their personal development plans and setting targets relating to education, vocational training or skills upgrading. The CDF has set aside \$15,000 for each child for relevant training programmes.

The children are also encouraged to attain a savings target of \$200 per month in the first two years. NGOs will seek partnership from the business sector or individual donors to provide at least 1:1 matching contribution. The Government will provide a financial incentive of \$3,000 to each child upon completion of their two-year savings programme. In the third year, the children may spend their savings in accordance with their personal development targets.

"It is hoped that the children will build a positive attitude towards life under the guidance of the mentors. They can also identify their potential through the training programmes and become more confident in meeting the challenges ahead.

"I believe that the CDF will help children from a disadvantaged background to develop their strengths and contribute to our society in future," Mr Cheung said.

Mr Cheung thanked the CDF's three strategic partners, the Centum Charitas Foundation, the Lions Clubs International District 303 – Hong Kong and Macau, China, and the Child Development Matching Fund, for providing matching contributions and mentors. He also thanked other organisations for their support to CDF.

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