

# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN CORRECTIONS IN HONG KONG

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes to outline and evaluate the current community involvement in corrections in Hong Kong. It will focus on corrections under the penal jurisdiction i.e. the Correctional Services Department, and the community based corrections like probation and community service orders, which come under the Social Welfare Department in Hong Kong.

There are at any time over twenty Non-Government Organizations involved in the work of the correctional system in Hong Kong. They are dominated by religious organizations which mostly engage in evangelistic activities. There are others which provide reintegration support, prison visits and counseling services. The Society for the Rehabilitation of Offenders in particular is dedicated to help ex-prisoners' reintegration. It bridges a service gap for adult prisoners most of whom, unlike the young offenders or drug addicts, do not have the benefit of statutory aftercare supervision. The Prisoners' Friends' Association on the other hand is dedicated to providing prison visits primarily to those prisoners who do not receive visits from relatives or friends. There are some 80 members, of whom some two-thirds come from the expatriate community. They can only cater for a fraction of the total demand.

Apart from Non-Government Organizations, private individuals from the community also involve themselves in

diverse ways. Services and activities range from evening education classes, hobby classes, sports training, recreation, presentation of certificates and character training. Most involve the young offender programmes which place great emphasis on character training and reintegration. The powerful media has a role too. It has a lot to contribute in promoting public awareness of and influencing public attitudes towards the goals of offenders' rehabilitation. The Hong Kong Correctional Service does recognize the potential for the community to become involved in the work of corrections. It welcomes and actively seeks such involvement.

### A. Background

The Correctional Services Department in Hong Kong now operates 21 penal institutions of all types. These include male and female prisons, reception centres, training centres for boys and girls, detention centre for young males, and drug addiction treatment centres. There are currently some 11,423 inmates in all categories.

Inmates discharged from training centres, detention centres and drug addiction treatment centres, as well as young prisoners discharged from prison, are subject to statutory supervision. Aftercare officers provide throughcare during custody and supervision. Aftercare service is available to adult prisoners on a more limited basis under two statutory schemes.<sup>1</sup>

Welfare officers are available in every

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prison and reception centre to look after the welfare needs of all convicted and remand prisoners. Apart from the limited minority who are placed under statutory supervision schemes, adult prisoners having completed their sentence do not have the benefit of an aftercare service. The service gap is basically filled by non-government organizations.

## **II. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN CORRECTIONAL WORK**

### **A. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)**

There are at any time over twenty NGOs involved in the work of the correctional system in Hong Kong. A few are dedicated to providing services to offenders. Many have a religious background. A list of the NGOs currently involved is annexed to this paper. Services provided by the NGOs range from practical reintegration support to prisoner visits, or evangelistic activities.

It is noteworthy that the field is dominated by religious bodies. They include various Christian, Catholic, Buddhist and Islamic denominations. After all, offenders are more in need of spiritual guidance for their reform, as well as the spiritual strength, to cope with life in custody. These religious bodies primarily

engage in evangelistic activities, their members visiting various institutions on a regular basis to hold religious services and seeing individual prisoners. Some also organize recreation and entertainment for the general prison community on holidays and festive occasions.

One of the largest NGO's dedicated to the field of corrections is the Hong Kong Society for the Rehabilitation of Offenders (SRO). This is a government subvented organization with a long history of association with the system of corrections. Its stated aims are to provide a professional social work service for offenders and discharged prisoners, as well as to establish and maintain centres for case work, counseling, accommodation, employment rehabilitation and recreation for its clientele. Its workers regularly visit various penal institutions to introduce its service to prisoners, especially those prior to discharge. It is by far the single most important NGO filling the service gap in the reintegration of adult prisoners.

### **B. Prison Visitors**

Under the Prison Rules, the Commissioner of Correctional Services may, from time to time, appoint any person interested in the welfare, reform and aftercare of prisoners to be a prison visitor. Indeed, regular visitors from the NGOs are so appointed and issued with prison passes. Worthy of mention are members of the Prisoners' Friends' Association. The Association was first established in the early eighties with the support of the Correctional Services Department. The object was to provide a service of regular visits for prisoners who are in need of friendship with members of the outside community; basically those who do not receive visits from relatives or friends.

Members of the Association come from different walks of life. Interestingly, some

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<sup>1</sup> One is the Release Under Supervision Scheme, a parole scheme, which came into operation in 1988. So far, less than 300 have been released under this scheme. The other is the Post Release Supervision Scheme, which has come into operation since December 1996. This scheme is aimed at helping the reintegration of certain categories of prisoners who have completed their sentence. The prisoners have either been sentenced to six years or more, or to a shorter term for specific gang related or sexual or violent offences. A total of 1,142 prisoners have been brought under this scheme as at 15/3/1999 and the success rate of those expired cases is 97.46%.

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two-thirds are expatriates of different nationalities. This in part has to do with its history. It more or less began with concerns for expatriate prisoners who had no visits and who were socially handicapped amongst the local prisoners because of the language barrier. The key founding members also came from the expatriate community. With an active membership of some 80 persons, they can still only meet with a fraction of the total demand.<sup>2</sup>

There is perhaps also a cultural factor in the lack of enthusiasm in the local community for this kind of voluntary work. Prisons and prisoners are still taboo to many local people, let alone to go on prison visits. Nonetheless, members of the Association have been doing a commendable service in providing desolate prisoners a link with community, and a friendship that helps ease the deprivations of prison life. Such interactions are perhaps of greater benefit to the social and psychological bearing of the prisoners than one may readily recognize.

Another kind of prison visitor is the more officious Justices of the Peace. It is provided in the Prison Rules that two visiting justices (one official and one unofficial) shall visit each prison at least once a fortnight. The official justices are appointed by virtue of their public office, normally of at least assistant director level in various government branches and departments. The unofficial justices are people of good character and social standing, appointed from a wide spectrum of the community.

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<sup>2</sup> A survey towards the end of 1998 found some 1,781 prisoners were not receiving visits from their relatives or friends, and about a third of this number were catered for by members of the Prisoners' Friends' Association.

Visiting justices are charged with duties to promote the efficiency of the service, to report abuses, to hear and investigate complaints, to protect the general well being of prisoners and to advise on the industrial employment and occupation, with particular relation to their employment on discharge.

The regular visits by justices have become an established part of prison life. Not only do they present a channel for prisoners to ventilate grievances, they also demonstrate a kind of community interest and presence. Given the diverse background and experience of the justices, their advice is highly valued and often provides the spur for improvement in the work of corrections.

### **C. Personal Encounters with Prisoners**

The objectives of the scheme of personal encounters with prisoners are two-fold: through exposure to personal experiences of serving prisoners, the "youth at risk" may develop insight which will become new guidelines for their behaviour. The project may also serve the reciprocal purpose of inducing positive changes amongst the prisoners concerned and may, in the long run, facilitate their rehabilitation.

Target groups participating in this project include students between Form 2 and Form 6, or aged between 13 and 18; clients of outreach social work teams; and youngsters displaying maladjusted behaviour. The project represents a concerted effort in preventing juvenile delinquency. The support of schools, youth centres and parents to the project are determinant factors to its success.

### **D. Community Services**

Other activities to encourage community involvement include community service programmes for young inmates, such as the

Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, Outward Bound, Scouting, etc. Continuous efforts are being made to involve more training centre inmates in these activities as community reintegration programmes of the department. In addition, CSD has been arranging for more inmates to take part in personalised social services for the elderly and the mentally or physically disabled before discharge. The Department has also sought assistance from the Hong Kong Council of Social Services to identify more interested welfare agencies for support. The scouts training was set up a decade ago with the personal and financial support of a few dedicated individuals who have maintained their sterling support to this date.

### **III. CREATING AND SUSTAINING THE INTEREST OF THE COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT IN CORRECTIONS**

#### **A. General**

Correctional services in Hong Kong aims to provide a disciplined but humane environment where inmates can receive appropriate counseling, educational and vocational training, and where they can prepare themselves to return to society as law-abiding citizens upon release. Since it takes time for the community to see how much the correctional programmes can achieve, the positive aspects of correctional work has often been under-assessed, if not totally ignored. In the worst case, correctional work often encounters adverse criticism where the public tends to associate correctional services with media reports on prison riots and escapes.

There are some ideas on soliciting public interest and support for correctional services in Hong Kong. This has a lot to do with promoting public awareness of and influencing public attitudes towards the objective of rehabilitating offenders.

Means of achieving this end include the development and enhancement of rehabilitation based programmes, adopting measures to improve corrections-community relations and encouraging community involvement in correctional work.

#### **B. Development and Enhancement of Rehabilitation Based Programmes**

The commitment on the part of the Correctional Services Department (CSD) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to rehabilitation is clearly demonstrated by the level of resources that has gone into prison workshops, educational and vocational training, and parole systems. In the financial year 1997-1998, HK\$434.1 million has been allocated to rehabilitation programmes, representing 17.4% of the total expenditure of the Department.

##### 1. Rehabilitation Programmes of CSD

The Department has developed a whole range of rehabilitation programmes and services for offenders which are being implemented. Different rehabilitation programmes and supervision schemes address the rehabilitative needs of offenders in different kinds of institutions, such as prisons, detention centres, training centres and drug addiction treatment centres. Education programmes not only provide intellectual training to prisoners, but also serves as a channel for them to touch base with the community. These programmes include evening education classes, correspondence courses and self-study programmes which lead to accredited academic qualifications. Aftercare service is another major aspect of the rehabilitation programmes which facilitates released inmates' smooth transition from custody to freedom, through strict supervision conditions, job placement and guidance to strengthen the

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confidence of the offenders. At present, the rehabilitation programme is carried out by 200 professionally qualified CSD officers in different institutions. Over the years, the rehabilitation programmes have evolved and developed. The Department also has its prison chaplains who pay regular visits to prisoners to provide them with spiritual guidance and reintegration support.

2. Research on the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation for Young Offenders

In April 1996, the City University of Hong Kong was commissioned by the Standing Committee on Young Offenders (SCYO) of the Fight Crime Committee (FCC) to conduct a one-year evaluation on the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes for young offenders, an area of considerable public interest. The evaluation covers rehabilitation programmes currently run by CSD and the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Areas of study relating to CSD includes detention centres, training centres, youth prisons and halfway houses. The overall objectives are:

- to estimate the functions, characteristics, content, duration and resource input of existing rehabilitation programmes for young offenders;
- to measure the programmes' effectiveness upon the young offenders' completion of treatment;
- to identify factors relating to the success or failure of the programmes;
- to find out favourable or unfavourable conditions in the implementation of rehabilitation programmes; and
- to assess the quality, effect and service gaps in existing rehabilitation programmes based on the responses of young offenders and the professionals involved in providing the programmes and in sentencing offenders.

The research found, on the whole, high satisfaction levels in areas including aftercare services and officers, throughcare services, education, vocational/pre-vocational training, physical, social and mental health. The research has, nevertheless, recommended 30 sets of recommendations to strengthen areas, including educational training, vocational training, services for the families of young offenders, community reintegration, throughcare, half-way houses and a proposed short-term residential programme. These recommendations are now being followed through by the newly established Rehabilitation Division of the CSD, which formulates strategies for the long-term development of rehabilitation programmes and aftercare services, and to better co-ordinate the provision of these programmes and services for both young and adult offenders.

**C. Measures to Improve Corrections-Community Relations**

1. The Public Relations Unit

The inception of the Public Relations Unit (PRU) in CSD has played a significant role in improving corrections-community relations. A better public information service, with greater transparency, has become the norm in the public sector. It is recognised that the public has the right to know, though sometimes only out of curiosity, the process of rehabilitation. On the other hand, the department is also making use of every opportunity to inform the public of its operations in order to enhance departmental image.

The functions of the PR Unit include disseminating information to the media via press releases, arranging interviews with senior management staff on specific topics relating to the Department, and organising press visits to penal institutions. Media contribution in shaping public opinion,

values and attitudes (towards creating a positive image of the Department) are notable. CSD is well aware of this potential and so works closely with the local media through its PR Unit.

Press conferences, press statements and media visits to penal institutions are the means to inform the community on the work of corrections, and help promote a more positive public image of the Department. On the other hand, major PR events such as the Department's annual parade, autumn fair, scout rally and Staff Training Institute (STI) open day, which forms part of the recruitment campaign, are organised for the public. The opening of new facilities, education certificate presentation ceremonies, and prison visits by prominent public figures also provide good publicity. These activities assume profound significance in linking the community with the Department and help to shape public attitudes towards the nature and goals of correctional work.

Since January 1998, information about CSD ranging from historical events, facts and statistics, news and events of individual institutions on special topics relating to prison development projects can be accessed through the Department's homepage on the Internet. This provides an additional channel to communicate with the public who may be interested in the work of the Department.

## 2. The Complaints Investigation Unit

On the operations side, the setting up of the Complaints Investigation Unit (CIU) as the Department's independent mechanism to redress grievances from inmates, staff and the public, is another measure to enhance corrections-community relations. The creation of the Unit, which is headed by an Assistant Commissioner and staffed by teams of trained officers, is expected to inspire

greater public confidence in the impartiality of complaints investigation.

## **IV. SERVICES FOR OFFENDERS PROVIDED BY THE SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT**

### **A. Objective**

Offenders' rehabilitative measures, to be effective, should incorporate means to guide them onto the right track, prevent them from committing crimes again, and assist them to start afresh so that they can become not only lawful citizens, but also contributing members of society. The overall objective of the services for offenders is to help them become law-abiding citizens and reintegrate into the community. This is achieved through both community-based and residential services, adopting social work approaches. It is hoped that through proper supervision, counseling, academic, pre-vocational and social skills training, the offenders will be equipped with the necessary skills to deal with life demands.

### **B. Means**

This objective is achieved through the following means :

- discharging statutory responsibility;
- probation service;
- administering community service orders;
- community support services;
- remand home services;
- residential training services;
- improvement measures; and
- assisting the magistrates through the Young Offender Assessment Panel.

### **C. Statutory Responsibilities**

The Department is responsible for discharging statutory functions within the framework of the following ordinances :

- Juvenile Offenders Ordinance, Cap. 226

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- Probation of Offenders Ordinance, Cap. 298
- Community Service Orders Ordinance, Cap. 378
- Reformatory Schools Ordinance, Cap. 225
- Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance, Cap. 213
- Immigration Ordinance, Sec. 35(1) of Cap. 115

**D. Probation Service**

During 1996/97, 162 probation officers served all the magistracies, the District Courts and the High Court, as welfare agencies. The Department prepares social inquiry reports on offenders, long term prisoners and petition cases. These reports provide information on the offender's background to facilitate the court's and concerned parties' decision on suitable sentencing options for disposal of the offenders.

Probation officers also supervise offenders (of all ages), who are placed on probation, to comply with the requirements of the probation order. 12,520 probation officer's reports were produced and 7,643 clients were served in 1996/97. Out of the 3,659 cases completed, 2,779 probationers (75.9%) satisfactorily complied with the conditions of the order. The 880 probationers who failed to comply with the requirements of their probation orders were referred back to the courts for re-sentencing.

To promote greater community involvement in the rehabilitation of offenders, volunteers (under the Volunteer Scheme for Probationers) befriended 71 probationers/residents of correctional homes and helped them carry out activities and programmes to serve the community.

**E. Community Support Service Scheme**

A pilot community support service scheme was introduced in December 1994 to help rehabilitate juvenile offenders through a community-based treatment programme. The programme provides structured day-training, such as social groups, community service projects, job training packages and counseling groups, to stimulate young offenders' interest in school or work and to develop their social skills. During 1996/97, groups were formed for 312 probationers/dischargees of residential homes for juvenile offenders, and 155 family members.

**F. Community Service Orders**

A community service order may be made against an offender of or over 14 years of age convicted of an offence punishable with imprisonment. The offenders perform unpaid work of benefit to the community for a number of hours, not exceeding 240, within a period of 12 months. The probation officers will assess the suitability of the offenders for performing such work, as a rehabilitation/sentencing option.

During 1996/97, 2268 social inquiries were conducted and 882 orders were made. Out of 745 cases completed, 662 (88.9%) offenders satisfactorily rehabilitated themselves through the 105 group projects and 15 single placements organized in 112 centres of NGOs and government departments.

**G. Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme**

The Post-Release Supervision of Prisoners Scheme commenced operation in December 1996. It is implemented jointly by staff from the Correctional Services Department and the Social Welfare Department to provide statutory supervision for certain categories of discharged adult prisoners. The officers

conduct interviews with the prisoners in penal institutions well before their discharge to prepare them for their return to the community, and to pay regular visits to the supervisees at their home/workplace to help them rehabilitate and reintegrate into society. Employment, accommodation, financial assistance, and counseling are rendered. During 1996/97, 141 ex-prisoners have been placed on supervision.

**H. Remand Home/Place of Refuge Service**

Children and juveniles who require short-term remand/place of refuge facilities are now accommodated in Pui Yin Juvenile Home, Begonia Road Boys' Home, Pui Chi Boys' Home and Ma Tau Wei Girls' Home, which provided 281 places and had a total of 3746 2new admissions in 1996/97.

These homes provide temporary custody, assessment and care to offenders aged 7 to 16, illegal immigrants aged 8 to 18, and children/juveniles in need of care or protection aged 8 to 18, including children/juveniles with a physical disability aged 9 to 18, and those with a mental disability aged 5 to 18.

Various kinds of developmental and therapeutic activities, e.g handicrafts, domestic skills, family life education, social skills, etc, are arranged to keep the residents meaningfully occupied during their stay in the homes. Young offenders requiring residential training are

accommodated in the below-listed homes.

**I. Residential Homes for Offenders**

The period of placement in probation homes/hostels ranges from six to twelve months, with a period of aftercare supervision in the community. The period of reformatory school training ranges from twelve to eighteen months, followed with eighteen months of aftercare supervision in the community. Counseling and training programmes in academic studies, prevocational and social skills are provided. There were 305 new admissions in 1996/97. The reprovisioning project for Begonia Road Boys' Home (to improve service standards) is under smooth progress. The construction work is anticipated to be completed in 1998/99.

**J. Young Offender Assessment Panel**

The Young Offender Assessment Panel is a special board with panel members drawn from the Department and the Correctional Services Department to provide co-ordinated professional views to magistrates in the sentencing of young offenders aged 14 to 25.

In 1996/97, 55 magistrates and seven judges made a total of 473 referrals to the Panel. 462 panel cases were disposed of by magistrates and the panel's recommendations to the courts had an acceptance rate of 84.2%.

Nature	Name	Capacity
Probation Home	Begonia Road Boys' Home	80
	Fanling Girls' Home	20
	O Pui Shan Boys' Home	48
Probation Hostel	Kwun Tong Hostel	60
Reformatory School	O Pui Shan Boys' Home	48
	Castle Peak Boys' Home	75



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**V. SUMMARY**

The benefits of community involvement in corrections are manifold. First and foremost is the tapping of community resources. They include not only the direct human resources, but also the professionalism and the organization which allows such resources to be used to best effect. Without community involvement, the government will either have to directly or indirectly provide resources, or accept that such services will not be provided at all, or provided on a reduced level or scale. Even if the government is prepared to substitute community resources, it may not be as cost effective because it is not geared to provide particular kinds of services.

Secondly, the very nature and diversity of community involvement is not what government officials and money can deliver. The effects on, and acceptance by, prisoners are peculiar to the people involved, by the very fact of their being members of the community or particular sectors of the community. Thirdly, the more extensive community involvement in corrections, the greater the community awareness of issues of corrections, and the more likely community attitudes will support offenders' rehabilitation.

The Hong Kong Correctional Services is well aware of the benefits of community involvement. It welcomes such involvement and it does everything possible to support and facilitate such involvement. It is also constantly watching out for new opportunities to enlist greater community involvement. Having said all that, it must be conceded that the current extent of involvement by the local community is still relatively limited. What can be done is limited by the community resources actually available and to a far greater extent, the prevailing attitudes of the community at large. Hong Kong is

renowned for its materialism and brisk pace of life, rather than for its community spirit. Doing voluntary work for offenders is not the dream of many and community attitudes do not change overnight.

Looking ahead, the Hong Kong Correctional Services should continue to build on the community involvement it has already secured and to actively promote community awareness of the goals of corrections and the role the community can play.

**List of NGOs involved in the  
Correctional System in  
Hong Kong**

1. The Society for the Rehabilitation of Offenders Hong Kong
2. Prisoners' Friends' Association
3. Caritas Lok Heep Club
4. The Hong Kong Christian Kun Sun Association Limited
5. International Social Service Hong Kong Branch
6. Shuval Israel Centre
7. The Alliance Bible Seminary Student Evangelistic Band
8. Christian Prison Pastoral Fellowship
9. Hophzibah Evangelistic Centre
10. Aberdeen East Congregation Jehovah's Witnesses
11. Mother of Good Counsel Parish
12. Lotus Buddhist Association
13. Hong Kong Buddhist Association
14. Hong Kong Ling Yan Pentecostal Holiness Church
15. Good Shepherd Saitere
16. Buddhist Library of China
17. Pentecostal Church of Hong Kong
18. Christian & Missionary Alliance Church Union of Hong Kong
19. The Leprosy Mission
20. The Islamic Union of Hong Kong
21. Land of Virtue Buddhist Centre
22. St. Augustine Youth Association
23. Canossian Micsrons