

MOBILIZATION OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES AND SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION OF OFFENDERS

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper gives an account of the philosophy of the Hong Kong Correctional Services (HKCS) to facilitate the reintegration of offenders into the community as law-abiding citizens and the various initiatives taken by the HKCS to that end and to help reduce crime, including continuous improvement of rehabilitative services, involvement of the community, and mobilization of community resources.

II. REHABILITATIVE PHILOSOPHY

While penal custody is the primary sanction against people who have breached the criminal code, and serves the purposes of deterring offenders and others from committing the same crime, we should never forget that offenders come from our communities. Eventually, most of them will return to live with us. It is therefore essential that they are not caught in a vicious circle of reoffending. Correctional systems are expected to make those who pass through become better persons when they leave than when they enter, and to pose less of a threat to society. As asserted by Elliott Currie (1998), if the system neglects to successfully help offenders achieve a productive lifestyle, a steadily increasing cohort of ex-offenders with limited life chances will be on the street. Their chances of success in the legitimate world have, if anything, been severely diminished by their prison experiences. Though punishment may produce short-term reductions in the crime rate, only rehabilitation and treatment can produce long-term gains.

HKCS recognizes that the goal of rehabilitative philosophy is to change an offender's character, attitudes or behaviour patterns so as to diminish his or her criminal propensities (Hirsh 1976). In recent years, numerous international researches (Andrews *et al.* 1990; McGuire *et al.* 1995; Day & Howells 2002) reveal that rehabilitation programmes can be effective in reducing reoffending. Rehabilitation of offenders has since become higher on the agenda of the correctional administrators. Thanks to globalization and professional exchanges of best practices with overseas counterparts, HKCS has been able to learn and develop a rehabilitation policy that fits the local context.

III. PARADIGM SHIFT TOWARDS REHABILITATION

A correctional administration and its staff have to believe in offender rehabilitation before they walk the talk and commit to the cause. HKCS has undergone a major transformation in the last three decades, which can be highlighted by the following events:

- (i) we changed our name from the original "Prisons Department" to "Correctional Services Department" in 1982, signifying an important aspect of our work on offender rehabilitation in addition to custodial service;
- (ii) we formulated our "Vision, Mission and Values"¹ (VMV) statements in 1996 to strengthen our commitment to rehabilitation of offenders and updated them subsequently by benchmarking with the best practices of other advanced correctional administrations, ensuring that HKCS is geared up to meet the new challenges ahead. To bring our staff on board, we implemented a corporate cultural change project in 1999 to develop, resonate and reinforce an appropriate corporate culture across the Department in order to match with our VMV statements;

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¹ See Appendix 1 for details.

- (iii) we established a Rehabilitation Division in 1998 to co-ordinate the delivery of comprehensive rehabilitative services and have since adopted a proactive approach to encourage community participation in providing and improving rehabilitative services;
- (iv) we adopted a new service emblem in 1999. The design of the emblem centres on the motto "We care" which represents our teamwork to pursue the ultimate goal of offender rehabilitation through the combined process of safe custody and care;
- (v) we officially replaced the Chinese term of "discharged prisoners" with "rehabilitated persons" in 2000 to reduce stigmatization and to encourage greater community support and acceptance of rehabilitated offenders; and
- (vi) we restructured the Rehabilitation Division last year to prepare for a new assessment system² that classifies offenders according to reoffending risks and rehabilitative needs for better programme matching. The idea is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of rehabilitation services to address the needs of offenders and the diverse expectations of the community, apart from building the capacities of the Division. The restructuring is also aimed at further strengthening the organizational culture and mindset of our correctional officers towards the rehabilitation of offenders through innovative and strategic initiatives.

Apart from organization and staff, we also strive to foster cultural changes among prisoners and rehabilitated offenders. They are encouraged to equip themselves and participate in cultural activities, hobby classes and community education programmes during their detention. To demonstrate their talents and help reinforce their confidence in turning over a new leaf, we produced in the past few years a series of music CDs and video CDs collecting songs composed and performed by prisoners for free distribution to the public. Prisoners with talents for music, dancing and other performing arts are encouraged to stage performances. Serving prisoners and rehabilitated offenders share their personal experience with students and young people under the Personal Encounter with Prisoners Scheme, Green Haven Scheme and "Options in Life" student forums.³ These arrangements have encouraged prisoners and rehabilitated offenders to come forward voluntarily, telling the public about their experience of losing freedom under incarceration, the problems encountered during their reintegration, their remorse for causing harm to their families as well as to the victims, and their determination to turn over a new leaf. Apart from educating the public on crime prevention, all these measures aim to assist prisoners to recognize their own values and potential, as well as to develop their positive self-image and confidence in reformation.

IV. REHABILITATIVE SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES

Apart from carrying out the mission of detaining offenders in a decent and safe environment, we are also tasked with providing comprehensive rehabilitative services and programmes with a long-term objective of reducing crime. The purposes of these services are to prepare offenders for their eventual release by helping them to address their criminogenic issues, develop a socially acceptable behaviour, strengthen their confidence to cope with difficulties upon discharge, and enhance their potential for securing decent employment. These are mainly achieved through discipline building and various services including pre-sentence assessment, programme services, psychological services, education, vocational training, and supervision services rendered to the discharged offenders.

To facilitate effective planning and delivery of rehabilitative services and to arouse public awareness on the problems and needs of rehabilitated offenders, HKCS conducted a survey covering some 1,600 discharged offenders and serving prisoners in 2000. The survey revealed that the most immediate problems at the initial stage of their release were securing employment, improving family relationships, seeking financial assistance and looking for a dwelling place. In response to the findings of this survey, measures and initiatives were taken to address the identified needs. Internally, we organized more structured family-related activities for offenders to rebuild relationships, conduct suitable job training techniques to assist offenders in securing employment after release, and provide financial assistance to needy prisoners for

² See para. 13 for details.

³ See Appendix 2 for details.

various educational pursuits. Externally, we established a telephone hotline to provide timely guidance and crisis intervention services for discharged offenders, provide information on non-government organizations (NGOs) and trust funds which discharged offenders with pressing financial needs can approach for short-term cash assistance, identify those offenders in need of longer-term aid and refer them to the Social Welfare Department for financial support under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance Scheme,⁴ and provide financial assistance to discharged offenders under statutory supervision to pursue education programmes and employment-related courses. Working on the foregoing measures, we further developed and improved the various rehabilitative services on an ongoing basis, which are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

A. Education and Vocational Training

Apart from making ex-offenders productive, employment can also help them take care of their families, develop valuable life skills and strengthen their self-esteem and social connectedness. Research has indicated that having a legitimate job lessens the chances of reoffending following release from prison (Sampson and Laub 1997; Harer 1994). HKCS is conscious of the importance of employment to rehabilitated offenders and has been strengthening employment service support for offenders through education and vocational training.

For offenders under 21 years of age, they receive half-day vocational training on industrial or commercial skills, and half-day education programmes. It is comparatively easier to reform young offenders since they are not yet hardened in criminal ways and could be steered in the right direction. More importantly, it could prevent huge damage and social costs that would be incurred to the community if offenders could successfully turn over a new leaf at an early stage.

All adult prisoners are required to engage in useful work unless physically unfit. This arrangement enables prisoners to develop good work habits and a sense of responsibility on top of learning the spirit of teamwork and acquiring concepts and basic skills in specific trades. After all, engaging prisoners in industrial activities fosters a stable penal environment which is conducive to effective implementation of different rehabilitative programmes. Having said that, HKCS also arranges market-oriented vocational training courses for prisoners on an ad hoc basis, such as exhibition-booth setting, cleaning and pest control, beauty care and manicure, etc. In 2007, we plan to provide 450 such training places in adult correctional institutions.

To further enhance prisoners' employability upon release, we have taken a proactive effort by setting up a vocational training centre at Lai Sun Correctional Institution in July 2006, which will eventually provide 260 full-time training places for local male prisoners. The training programmes cover a wide range of trades including computer skills training, mechanical craft, food and beverage services, kitchen assistant training, printing and desktop publishing and hairdressing, with clerical training and commercial studies, painting and decorating, air-conditioning and refrigeration, and electrical fitting and installation to be introduced at a later date. Participants who have completed the courses and passed skills certification examination will obtain accredited certificates issued by the relevant authorities.

We encourage adult prisoners to participate in self-studying courses or distance learning programmes run by the Open University of Hong Kong and other tertiary institutions to make optimal use of the resources and expertise from external accredited educational organizations. We have embarked on a new project entitled "Continuing Education for Offenders" in collaboration with the School of Continuing and Professional Education of the City University of Hong Kong, aiming at arousing participants' interest in pursuing further studies. "A Taste of University", one of the programmes under the project, was launched in September 2005 and March 2006 wherein ten two-hour lectures on a variety of subjects were given by university lecturers to offenders. The topics included sociology, psychology, business, environmental protection, computer and social skills. A reading programme to promote reading culture has since been launched in October 2006.

B. Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocol for Offenders

Our latest initiative to improve rehabilitative services is the adoption of a scientific and evidenced-based

⁴ The Scheme provides a safety net for those who cannot support themselves financially.

approach to offender management and rehabilitation. Supported by automation and specialized clinical measures, we introduced last year a "Risks and Needs Assessment and Management Protocol for Offenders" for evaluating the custodial and reoffending risks and rehabilitative needs of offenders. From January 2007, we will start to arrange programme matching for serving local inmates to address their reoffending risk and rehabilitative needs in phases. These integrated procedures, in addition to shaping our rehabilitation strategy in the foreseeable future, will take us to the forefront of the field together with other advanced penal administrators. Periodical programme evaluation will be carried out to ensure the effectiveness of the programmes.

V. FOSTERING REINTEGRATION THROUGH COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

While HKCS is committed to providing the best possible opportunity for all offenders to make a new start in life upon release, the efforts made by the government and the offenders themselves are not adequate. Their successful reintegration also depends on how ready the community is to support and accept them. The common misconceptions about offenders and, to a certain extent, the prison regimes, are mainly due to lack of information and public education. This not only creates obstacles to the smooth reintegration of rehabilitated offenders but also leads to wastage of resources devoted to their rehabilitation.

Recognizing the importance of community acceptance and support of the successful reintegration of rehabilitated offenders, HKCS established a "Committee on Community Support for Rehabilitated Offenders" in late 1999. Comprising community leaders, employers, education workers, professionals and representatives of NGOs and government departments, the Committee's terms of reference are to advise HKCS on rehabilitation programmes, and reintegration and publicity strategies. Having regard to the advice of the Committee, a series of publicity activities addressing the general public have been organized to help the community better understand, and to appeal for their support of, the needs and problems of rehabilitated offenders. These include special TV and radio programmes, roving exhibitions at district level, a TV docu-drama on rehabilitated offenders – "The Road Back,"⁵ appointment of local celebrities and public figures as Rehabilitation Ambassadors and television and radio announcements in the public interest.

To assess the effectiveness of the publicity activities, we carried out two opinion surveys, in 2002 and 2004. The findings were encouraging as the percentage of respondents who advised that they had come across at least one of the publicity activities increased from 65.7% in 2002 to 82.2% in 2004, and those who considered it worthwhile for the government to conduct publicity activities to appeal for community support for rehabilitated offenders rose from 83.6% in 2002 to 91.9% in 2004. Obviously, these figures illustrated the growing awareness and support of the general public for offender rehabilitation.

Another new initiative to enhance the public's understanding and support of our work is the establishment of the Hong Kong Correctional Services Museum. Opened in late November 2002 with monthly admission of about 5,000 visitors, the Museum serves to preserve and showcase the history of HKCS and the evolution of local corrections from a closed system that focused on punishment to the contemporary model that emphasizes rehabilitation and community partnership. In essence, the Museum helps lift the veil of correctional work, dispel the misconceptions held by the public about prisons, and enhance our public image.

To enhance the cognition of prospective employers of the rehabilitated offenders, HKCS organized in conjunction with the Centre for Criminology of the University of Hong Kong a "Symposium on Employment for Rehabilitated Offenders" in 2001, 2003 and 2004. Through discussions and experience sharing, we managed to cultivate a deeper understanding among employers of various trades in this regard and appealed to them to provide equal job opportunities for rehabilitated offenders. Subsequent to these promotional

⁵ The HKCS, in collaboration with Radio Television Hong Kong, produced three 10-episode TV docu-drama series "The Road Back" in 2000, 2002 and 2004 and all of them were well received. The first series was awarded the Silver Award for Best Television Programmes and the New Television Programme Award in 2000. The second series in 2002 was awarded the Gold Award in Entertainment Programme and Silver in the Best Television Programmes Award, while the third series in 2004 was awarded the Gold Remi Award at The Houston International Film Festival and the Bronze Plaque in the 53rd Columbus International Film & Video Festival. The fourth series was telecast from May to July 2006.

activities, we have received more enquiries from employers concerning employment of rehabilitated offenders. So far, we have a database of over 320 employers who have offered more than 670 job vacancies in 100 different trades to rehabilitated offenders. Most importantly, some 280 rehabilitated offenders have successfully secured a job. Enthusiastic business organizations have also conducted a “One Company One Job” campaign⁶ since 2004 in local districts to promote fair job opportunities for rehabilitated offenders.

VI. EXPANSION OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement and participation in various aspects of offenders’ correctional and rehabilitative process narrows the gap between the public at large and the offenders. It helps change the negative attitude of society towards offenders. To help diversify and enrich our service delivery, we need regular and active participation of non-government organizations and religious bodies. As a result of the Department’s incessant publicity efforts, supportive connections and partnerships conducive to offenders’ reintegration have been established. At present, there are more than 60 religious bodies and non-government organizations partnering with us to provide services to help prisoners reintegrate into the community. These organizations, through enlisting social workers, volunteers and rehabilitated offenders, offer counselling, recreational, and religious services to persons in custody. They also provide social service, employment and accommodation assistance for their clients. With a view to strengthening co-operation amongst NGOs and providing all NGO partners with an opportunity to exchange views on matters relating to rehabilitation services, HKCS conducts forums with NGO representatives annually. Besides, a web-based messaging platform has been set up to provide members of NGOs with an interactive forum for sharing. Another remarkable example of partnership between HKCS and NGOs is the implementation of a “Continuing Care Project” since early 2004 wherein seven NGOs provide follow-up services for supervisees who are assessed as being still in need of, and are willing to receive, counselling services after completing the statutory supervision. As at the end of December 2006, a total of 314 cases have successfully been referred to respective NGOs for the service.

To further broaden the scope of public involvement, we have decided to invite dedicated individuals to work with the Department to pursue the rehabilitation cause. A Rehabilitation Volunteer Group, comprising mostly university students and serving teachers, was formed in 2004. Volunteers of the Group conduct interest groups on language, computer and other cultural pursuits for offenders in various correctional institutions and on occasions assist in publicity campaigns to promote the acceptance of rehabilitated offenders. With more than 220 volunteers, the Group has hitherto conducted over 370 classes and served some 4,000 inmates.

To ensure co-ordinated channels for disseminating our messages, we need to establish a network at different local districts to deliver the message far and wide that rehabilitation can help prevent crime and reduce reoffending, a message signifying social responsibility on the issue. The Department accordingly co-operates with all of Hong Kong’s 18 District Fight Crime Committees⁷ by inviting them to organize publicity activities relating to offenders’ rehabilitation. Senior correctional officers are appointed as Regional Liaison Officers to facilitate the co-ordination of these activities and to provide necessary support. With this network of channels functioning, we organize year-round activities in all districts and sustain a broad and pervasive permeation of the rehabilitation message to the public.

Responding to our call for support and assistance to rehabilitated offenders, the involvement of and sponsorship from renowned community organizations such as the Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Zonta Clubs, and local charitable organizations in various programmes for prisoners and rehabilitated offenders have been

⁶ The campaign is about promoting the members of those business organizations to employ at least one rehabilitated offender in each of their companies.

⁷ The District Fight Crime Committees, which are district bodies appointed by the Government to advise on means to combat crime, consist of both members of the public and government officials. They help monitor the crime situation at district level; co-ordinate community resources to assist in fighting crime; and make recommendations to the Central Fight Crime Committee with regard to fight crime measures and community involvement. Chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration of the Hong Kong SAR Government, the Central Fight Crime Committee draws up plans to reduce crime; co-ordinates efforts in fighting crime; monitors the results; and determines ways in which the public can be stimulated to contribute to the reduction of crime.

increasing in recent years. Between 1999 and 2006, we have received donations of over \$8 million Hong Kong dollars (equivalent to over US\$1 million) towards rehabilitation and welfare of offenders. Coupled with other non-monetary support, such community care, this conveys a positive message to rehabilitated offenders and reinforces their motivation to turn over a new leaf.

VII. CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD

Reoffending adversely affects public security, traumatizes victims, and increases government spending on the criminal justice system, not to mention the problems associated with prison over-crowding resulting from the perpetuation of this vicious circle. In Hong Kong, the provision of secure and safe custodial services is critical and conducive to a stable and optimal environment for rehabilitative work. HKCS strives to enhance its custody services to sustain the solid foundation of our rehabilitation programmes. We firmly believe that the main objective of detention is to prepare offenders for reintegration into the community as better citizens, not as recidivists. Rehabilitative work, being the collective responsibility of the whole community, requires joint participation across different social sectors rather than the sole effort of correctional jurisdictions. Whether rehabilitated offenders can successfully reintegrate into the community will depend on the wide acceptance, recognition and support from members of the community in addition to offenders' determination to turn over a new leaf. Over the past years, we have adopted a proactive approach to appeal for public acceptance of rehabilitated offenders. By promoting community involvement, we managed to reduce public myths of prisons, increase transparency of our services, improve public understanding of correctional work and establish close partnerships with community organizations. We are pleased to note that members of the public increasingly share the view that the community as whole would benefit from the successful reintegration of rehabilitated offenders.

In the midst of an ever-changing environment, HKCS, like our overseas counterparts, encounters numerous challenges in the local context. These include, among others, providing appropriate and updated facilities along with our improving education and vocational training, incorporating rehabilitation programmes in the compact daily routine of penal institutions, nurturing a rehabilitation culture for staff and community, and balancing the diverse views of the public on the conservative and liberal continuum in terms of various philosophies of criminal justice. After all, there are indeterminate factors that will affect the effectiveness of our rehabilitation services, such as the sentence lengths, age profile and responsiveness of offenders towards different programmes. That said, we will enlist stakeholders to strengthen community acceptance and support for offenders' rehabilitation, establish a wider community network for mobilizing public involvement, and look for ways and ideas for continuous service improvement. We are confident that our efforts are instrumental in helping to reduce crime and ensuring Hong Kong remains safe and becomes Asia's world city.

To conclude, our publicity slogan, "Support rehabilitated offenders for a more inclusive society", in essence, prescribes our commitment to enlist community involvement for the reintegration of offenders.

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APPENDIX 1

Vision, Mission and Values of Correctional Services Department

Vision

Internationally acclaimed Correctional Service

Mission

As an integral part of the Hong Kong criminal justice system, we detain persons committed to our custody in a decent and healthy environment, and provide comprehensive rehabilitative services in a secure, safe, humane and cost-effective manner, so as to enhance the physical and psychological health of prisoners, protect the public and help reduce crime.

Values

Integrity

- We value honesty, humility, uprightness and personal responsibility.

Professionalism

- We take pride in our profession and are committed to continuous improvement in efficiency, competence and quality of service.

Humanity

- We recognize that all persons have the right to correct and fair treatment with dignity, whether they are members of the public, members of staff or persons in our custody.

Discipline

- We respect the rule of law, orderliness and harmony.

Economy

- We optimize the use of resources and emphasize sustainability.

APPENDIX 2

Personal Encounter with Prisoners Scheme

CSD runs the Personal Encounter with Prisoners Scheme as part of the community's fight crime campaign. Youths and students visit one of the several designated institutions to meet with reformed prisoners in experience sharing sessions. The purpose is to help prevent delinquency through the deepening of participants' understanding of the untoward consequences of committing a crime. A total of 3,399 young people and students visited the institutions under the Scheme in 2006.

Green Haven Scheme

CSD started the Green Haven Scheme in January 2001 to promote the anti-drug message and the importance of environmental protection among young people. Participants meet with young inmates of the Drug Addiction Treatment Centre to gain insight into the detrimental effects of drug abuse. They also take part in a tree planting ceremony to indicate their support for rehabilitated offenders and environmental protection, and vow to stay away from drugs. During this year, 33 visits were arranged for 904 participants.

“Options in Life” Student Forum

To demonstrate the willingness of rehabilitated offenders to making a contribution to society, CSD conducted from late 2003 to 2005 a round of district-based student forums in all 18 districts to provide opportunities for secondary students and rehabilitated offenders to interact and discuss the untoward consequences of crime. In 2006, in line with the Department's community involvement strategy, we invited 12 non-government organizations to organize similar forums so as to continue this public education initiative of deterring youngsters from committing crimes and abusing drugs. Resource kits for conducting the activity were also distributed via the NGOs to interested schools and youth agencies.