
PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS' PAPERS

EFFECTIVE RESETTLEMENT OF OFFENDERS BY STRENGTHENING 'COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION FACTORS'

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I. PURPOSE

This paper gives an account of the development of the initiatives in promoting community engagement by the Hong Kong Correctional Services (HKCS) to appeal for the community's support for rehabilitated persons.

II. BACKGROUND

As an integral part of the Hong Kong criminal justice system, HKCS's mission is to protect the public and help reduce crime. To achieve this, we have identified four critical success factors, namely (i) quality custodial services; (ii) suitable rehabilitative services; (iii) offenders' motivation and responsiveness towards rehabilitation; and (iv) the community's acceptance of rehabilitated persons.

While the first two factors are within HKCS's control, achieving them alone is not sufficient to build a safer and more inclusive society. The remaining factors are affected by many independent but interrelated and complicated personal, social and economic issues. We need the offenders and the community to play their respective parts. In respect of community support, we believe that public acceptance is crucial for offenders' reintegration. Therefore, the wide support of the community as a whole has always been our focus for enhancing effective offender rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region is a vibrant and modernized international city with some seven million citizens. Though a small city, Hong Kong people are among the most informed in the world, due largely to the city's dynamic news media. Excellent communications have been an essential element in Hong Kong's development as an international business and financial centre. The city has one of the most sophisticated telecommunications markets in the world, and its people are kept well informed by an efficient and vigorous media.¹ In view of such, HKCS has taken this advantage into consideration and carefully designed our departmental strategies for the promotion of public acceptance and community support for offender rehabilitation by means of networking and media.

The setting up of the Rehabilitation Division in 1998 represents a milestone in HKCS's development. To facilitate community engagement for offenders' reintegration, we have adopted three major strategies, viz. *Public Education*, *Publicity* and *Community Support*. Against this background, HKCS has organized a series of education and publicity activities since 1999 to appeal for public acceptance of and community support for rehabilitated persons. The community's response to HKCS's publicity campaign has been encouraging. The public is increasingly aware of the need for collaborative efforts to facilitate offender rehabilitation. Many community organizations and merchants/trade associations have expressed interest in co-operating with HKCS in promoting the welfare of rehabilitated persons. In view of the positive response, HKCS will continue to organize different education and publicity campaigns to enlist the community's support on this front.

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¹ 'Communication, the Media and Information Technology', www.yearbook.gov.hk/2007.

III. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FOR OFFENDERS' REINTEGRATION

A. Public Education

HKCS understands the importance of the community's acceptance and support in helping to stop the vicious circle of reoffending. The best way to achieve this is through continuous public education. Since the 90s, HKCS has been actively involved in youth education.

HKCS has been running the "*Personal Encounter with Prisoners Scheme (PEPS)*" since 1993, with a view to generating attitudinal and behavioural changes among youth at risk. Under this Scheme, youths and junior secondary students visit our correctional institutions, and have face-to-face discussions with reformed prisoners. The objective is to prompt the participants to think about the untoward consequences of committing crimes. Another purpose is to spread the message of offender rehabilitation and appeal for the public's acceptance of and support for the rehabilitated persons. At the same time, the participating prisoners can develop a positive self-image and build up confidence through the experience-sharing sessions. Up to end of 2009, more than 60,000 youths and students have participated in the Scheme.

HKCS started the "*Green Haven Scheme*" in January 2001 to promote anti-drug messages as well as the importance of environmental protection among young people. Under the Scheme, participants visit the drug information centre at the Drug Addiction Treatment Centre on Hei Ling Chau and meet with young inmates there to learn about the harmful effects of drug abuse. They also make vow to pledge support for rehabilitated persons and environmental protection, as well as to stay away from drugs. This Scheme helps to educate the youths to accept and support rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. Up to end of 2009, more than 7,274 youths and students have joined this Scheme.

To demonstrate the willingness of rehabilitated persons to contribute to society, HKCS in 2003 launched a series of district-based "*Options-in-life Student Forums*" in all 18 districts of Hong Kong to help reduce juvenile delinquency and provide opportunities for secondary school students to interact with rehabilitated persons and discuss with them the detrimental consequences of committing crimes. We also hoped that through the Forum, the participants would have better understanding of rehabilitated offenders' determination to turn over a new leaf, thus accepting them and supporting their reintegration. This has proved to be an effective public education medium to spread the anti-crime message. In line with HKCS's community involvement strategy, 12 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been enlisted to run similar forums starting from 2006.

The above public education initiatives are very well received by schools and youth organizations. In order to extend the services to a wider spectrum of young people and to tackle the long waiting period for schools or youth organizations to participate in the programmes, which is usually more than six months, we have consolidated the above public education programmes under a new project entitled the "*Rehabilitation Pioneer Project (RPP)*" with effect from September 2008. Aiming at reducing crime and promoting public support for offender rehabilitation, the project offers education talks, prison visits, visits to the Hong Kong Correctional Services Museum and forums for youth. Among them, the education talk and museum visit are newly introduced elements which aim at strengthening the message of crime prevention, and the importance of public acceptance and support for reintegration of offenders. Moreover, we have opened up more correctional institutions for student visits (up to ten institutions at present), and expanded the target group to include university and elite students.² We have also taken a new step to recruit outsiders as part-time staff to run the project. It reduced the workload of our staff and at the same time served as an effective medium for public participation, which helps to promote the message of offender rehabilitation across the community via this group of newly recruited part-time staff members.

² Since 1993, PEPS has been organized to invite students and youth groups, aged between 13 and 18, to visit HKCS' institutions, which include three maximum security prisons, a detention centre established in 1996 and one more maximum security prison established in 1998. Under the RPP, which was commenced in September 2008, the correctional institutions opened up for visits have been extended to ten institutions and the target group has also been expanded to include university and elite student groups. We hope that these groups of persons, with their exceptional status and calibre, will help to take the lead to spread the message of offender rehabilitation.

B. Publicity

Publicity is another major area in which we place our resources for the promotion of community engagement. Since 1999, we have launched a series of publicity activities to appeal for public acceptance of rehabilitated offenders and foster community support. One of the core activities was the production of a series of television documentary dramas, namely, *“The Road Back”* between 2000 and 2008. Narrating through real stories, the drama aims at telling the public that most rehabilitated offenders are ready and willing to lead a decent life upon returning to society. Beginning in 2000, a total of five series have been broadcast at six month intervals.

Another ground-breaking initiative is the *Appointment of Rehabilitation Ambassadors*. Through appointing famous artistes and renowned athletes as ambassadors, we can make use of their influence to help capture the interest of the media and convey more effectively the rehabilitation messages across the community. Our Rehabilitation Ambassadors, famous artistes such as Mr. Andy Lau, Mr. Richie Yam and Mr. Leo Ku Kui-kei, and renowned athletes like Mr. Wong Kam-po and Mr. Chan King-yin, participated in different publicity activities, visited various correctional institutions and gave encouragement to offenders.

Other activities like production of posters, printing of slogans on government envelopes, offender rehabilitation messages on public buses and departmental vehicles, are also part of the publicity campaign. As television is an influential medium by which to appeal for public acceptance and support for offender rehabilitation, we regularly produce TV variety shows entitled *“Support Offender Rehabilitation for a Safer and More Inclusive Society”*, and TV and Radio Announcements in the Public Interest (APIs).

To mark the 10th Anniversary of the Rehabilitation Division of HKCS, an Information Booklet was produced in August 2007 to review what and why HKCS has been doing to facilitate offenders' reintegration into the community, and most important of all, to plan the way forward for continuous promotion of community support and public education for youth.

To assess the effectiveness of its publicity activities as perceived by the public, HKCS carried out three Telephone Opinion Surveys in mid 2002, end of 2004 and early 2008 respectively. The findings of those surveys are positive, with the early 2008 survey revealing notably that 71% of the respondents agreed that those activities could enhance their understanding of rehabilitated persons and 85% considered it worthwhile for the Government to continue to conduct publicity activities to appeal for community support for rehabilitated persons.

C. Community Support

Recognizing the importance of community acceptance and support to the successful reintegration of rehabilitated persons, HKCS established in late 1999 the Committee on Community Support for Rehabilitated Offenders. Comprising community leaders, employers, education workers, professionals and representatives of NGOs and government departments, the Committee advises on rehabilitation programmes, as well as reintegration and publicity strategies. Since then, the above mentioned publicity and public education activities, targeting four community groups, viz. students, general public, employers and community leaders at district level, have been organized to appeal for community support for offender rehabilitation as well as to educate the public on crime prevention.

HKCS has been undertaking joint projects with the District Fight Crime Committee³ since 2001 in the organization of district-level publicity activities relating to both offender rehabilitation and crime prevention, such as roving exhibitions in Hong Kong's 18 districts. Our senior officers are appointed as Regional Liaison Officers to provide necessary support and to facilitate the co-ordination of such activities. We also believe direct participation in various aspects of the offenders' rehabilitative process will narrow the gap between the public and the offenders.

The involvement of various NGOs and religious bodies are worth mentioning because they have played

³ The District Fight Crime Committees, consisting of both members of the public appointed by the Government and Government officials, help to monitor the crime situation at district level; co-ordinate community resources to assist in fighting crime; and make recommendations with regard to fighting crime measures and community involvement.

a supplementary role in organizing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for serving prisoners and rehabilitated persons over the years. Up to 2010, more than 60 organizations and bodies with some 2,000 volunteers have provided rehabilitative services to prisoners, such as hobby classes, religious services, recreational and cultural programmes, and individual and group counselling programmes.

One of the examples of co-operation between HKCS and NGOs is the *Continuing Care Project (CCP)*, which has been implemented since February 2004. The CCP aims to provide continuing care and professional services to ex-supervisees on a voluntary basis by NGOs with a view to reducing their recidivism after expiry of their statutory supervision period. Since then, seven NGOs have joined the CCP. The professional services provided by participating NGOs include individual counselling, employment and education guidance, group and recreational activities, volunteer services, financial assistance and hostel accommodation, etc. As of 31 March 2010, a total of 1,066 cases were referred to the participating NGOs.

Some other examples of co-operation with NGOs and religious bodies are: the *NGO Forum*, which has been held annually since 2003, and provides an opportunity for HKCS and NGOs to exchange views and share experience on matters relating to rehabilitative services; the *NGO Service Day*, organized in December 2007 and December 2009, aims to appeal for public support for volunteer work in offender rehabilitation by mobilizing volunteers from all NGO partners to provide services to offenders in the event; the *Recital for Offender Rehabilitation*, co-organized with Buddha's Light International Association of Hong Kong and Liu Shih Kun Piano & Arts Centre, aims to bring community care, concern and encouragement to offenders as well as appeal to the public to accept serving and rehabilitated offenders.

Another example of co-operation worth mentioning is the *Correctional Services Department Rehabilitation Volunteer Group (CSDRVG)*, which was established in early 2004. The Group, comprising over 330 volunteers, who are mostly university students and serving teachers, aims to supplement the services of HKCS, particularly in terms of addressing the reformative, emotional, educational, social and recreational needs of inmates. Apart from conducting interest groups on topics like languages, computer studies and other cultural pursuits for offenders in various correctional institutions, they also assist in other areas of rehabilitation work, such as public education activities for promoting community acceptance of rehabilitated persons.

HKCS values partnership with community organizations to take forward projects and initiatives for the benefit of serving and rehabilitated offenders. With the assistance of *Partnered Community Organisations*, HKCS broadens the scope of vocational training for offenders, arranges for offenders to attend outward bound courses and furnishes institutions with additional recreational facilities, etc. Such partnership can bring community care and support to offenders, enhance public awareness of life in prison and challenges faced by offenders, as well as solicit their participation in offender rehabilitation.

Throughout the past years, HKCS has appealed to local employers for fair employment opportunities for rehabilitated offenders. So far, we have joined up with about 397 *Caring Employers* who have provided job opportunities to rehabilitated persons to help them reintegrate into society, particularly during the initial stage after their discharge from correctional institutions. Co-operating with the Centre for Criminology of the University of Hong Kong, HKCS has organized a number of *Symposia on Employment for Rehabilitated Offenders* since 2001, appealing directly to employers for fair employment opportunities for rehabilitated persons. HKCS will consider organizing another such symposium in June 2010, appealing for the support of big corporations and small employers.

In line with the policy of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government to promote the development of social enterprises through tri-partite partnership among the Government, business and community, HKCS has assisted an NGO and a local catering operator to establish a food manufacturing workshop to provide employment opportunities for rehabilitated persons. The partnership, namely the "*Rice Dumpling Production Project*", is supported by a grant of HK\$1.4 million under the Enhancing Self-Reliance Through District Partnership Programme run by the Home Affairs Department. HKCS have made referrals of suitable rehabilitated persons to the project and also assisted with the promotion of the project. So far, 48 rehabilitated offenders have attended the basic training course in food safety and hygiene. Fourteen of them have undergone field placement at the workshop. Up to the end of March 2010, 12 rehabilitated persons had once been or were being employed as workers there, while 33 rehabilitated persons had once been or were

being engaged in the food and beverage field after receiving the training.

The Autumn Fair, first held in 1953, has been a long-standing attraction to the public. This meaningful annual event provides an opportunity for prisoners to contribute to the community. Funds raised in the fair, including proceeds of sales of products hand-made by prisoners, are donated to various charitable organizations. In 2009, an equivalent of US\$145,000 went to some 46 local charitable organizations.

Employment is a key factor to reintegration. Therefore, HKCS has linked up with various training institutes such as *Clothing Industry Training Authority (CITA)*, *Vocational Training Council (VTC)*, and *Construction Industry Council Training Academy (CICTA)* to arrange for young and adult offenders to take the public trade tests and examinations in an attempt to obtain recognized qualifications. The current courses for young offenders include decorative joinery, electrical and electronic servicing, mechanical engineering craft, plumbing and pipefitting, vehicle body painting, computer servicing and food and beverage service, etc.

As for adult offenders, we have established and operated a pre-release vocational training centre at Lai Sun Correctional Institution (LSCI) since July 2006 to provide full-time market-oriented training for male adult prisoners, including mechanical engineering craft, language and information technology, book-keeping and accounts, office computing and practice, junior chef training, food and beverage service, and hairdressing, etc. After a thematic evaluation on providing full-time market-oriented training for adult prisoners, the HKCS has decided to decentralize full time vocational training courses in different institutions. Up to May 2010, there are five Institutions, namely Lai Chi Kok Correctional Institution (LCKCI), Pak Sha Wan Correctional Institution (PSWCI), Pik Uk Prison (PUP), Tong Fuk Correctional Institution (TFCI) and LSCI providing full time vocational training. Separately, we also line up with the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP), an NGO, to provide follow-up employment services to the prisoner-trainees after their release. On top of the full-time vocational training, we have also strengthened vocational training for prisoners in other adult institutions by conducting some other training courses. In 2009, inmates and prisoners attempted 1,396 public examination papers and trade tests, and the overall pass rate was 97%.

From 2009-2010, HKCS will provide 800 part-time training places and 200 full-time training places for adult offenders. Regarding the part-time training places, HKCS will co-operate with the *Employees Retraining Board (ERB)* to run the following seven types of courses for adult offenders:

- Environmental hygiene and cleaning worker training;
- Removal and logistics training;
- Exhibition booth setting and decoration training course;
- Horticultural assistant training;
- Retail salesperson training;
- Laundry assistant training;
- Nail technician training.

With past encouraging experience, HKCS has taken a further step to reorganize the Correctional Services Industries as the new Industries & Vocational Training Section of HKCS's Rehabilitation Division in February 2009, with a view to better integrating vocational training (VT) elements into the industries to enhance the employability of offenders upon release. This latest strategy enables the provision of more comprehensive 'one-stop' services to offenders from admission to reintegration in collaboration with NGOs and better integration of prisoners' work with vocational training to improve adult prisoners' access to vocational training opportunities, thereby helping to enhance their employability upon release.

With respect to education for offenders, we have also lined up with prestigious tertiary institutions to provide opportunities for adult offenders to pursue life-long learning. Offenders are encouraged 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 also embarked on a 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 run in September 2005, March 2006, May 2008 and December

2009. Each course consisted of 10 two-hour lectures on a variety of subjects given by university lecturers to the offenders. The topics included sociology, psychology, business, environmental protection, and computer and social skills.

A reading programme, named "Rainbow Reading Award Scheme", to promote reading culture, was launched in October 2006 in one of the correctional institutions and extended to a second one in September 2007, a third one in December 2008 and fourth one in January 2010. We also co-operate with the Open University of Hong Kong to provide learning support for inmate students through counselling and visits by voluntary staff and tutors of the University. To support and assist prisoners to pursue further education, the Prisoners' Education Trust Fund was established in December 1995 to provide financial assistance to prisoners in joining external courses, procuring reading materials and participating in external examinations. Over the past 13 years, 2,618 prisoners have benefitted from the Fund. With grants from the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust, HKCS set up the "Jockey Club Inmates' Education Subsidy Scheme" for four years starting from October 2004. A total of 508 prisoners benefitted from the Subsidy. In 2008, some HK\$0.5 million (equivalent to about US\$64,000) was granted to 591 prisoners under the Prisoners' Education Trust Fund and Jockey Club Inmates' Education Subsidy Scheme. To meet the growing needs of prisoners in further education, two more education subsidy funds, namely, the New Life Foundation and the Prisoners' Education Subsidy Fund were founded in 2009 with donations from an anonymous philanthropist and public donors.

IV. CHALLENGES AHEAD

For the past years, we feel encouraged to see that HKCS has built up a 'reciprocal' relationship with the community as a whole. With the implementation of public education, publicity activities and community support programmes, we have witnessed many positive achievements, such as an increase in resources and public support, enhanced public image, a drop in complaint cases against the department and a drop in the recidivism rate.⁴ We strongly believe that community engagement remains an essential element to supplement HKCS' rehabilitative services and to promote public acceptance and support for offender reintegration. Through networking and collaboration, it does greatly enhance mutual care and trust, mutual assistance and reciprocity, social solidarity, social inclusion, self-help and mutual help, and positive values.

Still, we, as correctional officers, have many challenges ahead. The value added equates to workload added. Nonetheless, HKCS continues to strive for promotion of community engagement for the well-being of offenders under our custody and rehabilitated persons under our supervision in the community, thus helping to build a safer and more inclusive society.

⁴ The newly calculated recidivism rate, defined as the rate of re-admission within three years after discharge of all local convicts released from our custody, reached a record low of 41.6% in the past 13 years.