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How to get out of the difficulty of insufficient resources?

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The diverse caring needs of the boarders of special school dormitories, the incompatibility of dormitory environmental facilities and situations of the boarders, the high turnover rate of frontline staff and the serious shortage of manpower are challenges of operating special school dormitories. Facing the current difficulty, how can we find a way out?

Special schools generally comprise of students with diverse disabilities. Some may have mental and behavioral problems, such as autism, hyperactivity, self-harming, wandering and other rebellious behaviours. Therefore, in addition to taking care of the living conditions of the boarding students, frontline staff also have to take care of their feelings. In the event of a crisis, one-on-one staffing is definitely not enough. The dormitories often have to mobilize more staff members to offer assistance. However, when dealing with boarding students who have intense emotional behaviours, staff members must take into account the safety of the boarders and ensure that they themselves are well protected from harm. At the same time, they also have to consider whether their handling is in accordance with established procedures, so as to avoid any complaints raised by parents in the future. Employees with multiple concerns will undoubtedly bear much psychological pressure, resulting in the continuous loss of manpower.

Furthermore, the houseparents of the school dormitories are at the social work officer rank. Their duties include taking care of the daily life of the boarders such as bathing, feeding and changing diapers. In addition, it is also necessary to take care of the students' emotions, homework guidance, personal growth and discipline and conducting training, etc. The plethora of duties has made many houseparents feel that they have not been able to play the role of social workers.

To this end, we expect the Education Bureau to face up to the problem and propose solutions as soon as possible, including:

1. When setting up the staff establishment, consideration should be given to increase the number of houseparents for boarders with autism, hyperactivity and severe mental illness (SMI), etc.
2. Improve the environmental support of the dormitories such as the provision of independent counseling rooms, infectious disease isolation rooms and quiet corners.
3. Establish a binding inspection mechanism to regularly assess whether a student is suitable for communal living. If the boarding student is assessed as having the potential to pose a threat to others, the Education Bureau should make other suitable accommodation arrangements for the boarder.
4. Add a personal care worker to the staff establishment so that houseparents can focus on social workers' work. At the same time, it is also necessary to improve the remuneration package for non-professional staff.

We hope that the Education Bureau can continue improving the allocation of human resources to meet the operational needs of special school dormitories so as to achieve the educational philosophy of integrating able-bodied and disabled persons.