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Views

Regularization of supportive services for new public housing estates

With the upsurge in rents and property prices, it needs almost \$3000 per month to rent a partition unit under 40 ft², for those who are allocated public housing, they are like winners at the game of life. They being the lucky ones, should not be asking for more local facilities; they are criticized for being ungrateful instead of being contented. Undeniably, the living condition in public housing is an improvement, other living expenses like water, electricity, gas can be greatly reduced, however, they have problems of their own: indebtedness, working poverty, unemployment, children are left unattended at home or on the street by working parents, etc, then, can these be improved at the same time? Of course not! Everything remains the same, it is only the background that has been changed: from partition units to public housing.

According to frontline social workers, problems associated with newcomers to the public housing are more related to supportive networks of the past was torn apart, other problems are serious shortage of schooling and job opportunities, medical and community facilities, markets and transport infrastructure. These give rise to a new round of adaptive difficulties and pressure of life. There is still a long way to live in peace and work in contentment. It takes even longer for adjustments in a new district. For new public housing estates like On Tat Estate and On Tai Estate, the residents mocked themselves as hillside inhabitants like living in the margin of the society and be deprived of facilities. Actually, Dr C K Law, Secretary of labor and welfare also admitted that there was a discrepancy between provision of social service and the time when residents move in which was caused by lack of coordination among government departments and at the end the government has to provide transitional support service.

At present, to ease the adaptation difficulties, district government offices relied on social services in the neighborhood to provide assistance. However, these social service organizations are preoccupied by meeting the needs of residents who are already there, without additional resources, not much can be done. Therefore, a way out "rehousing before provision of ancillary facilities" is when the government is willing to put in additional resources to set up new public housing support team to coordinate manpower to address to the pressing needs of



the residents during the transitional period.

There was indeed successful past experience where a district government department collaborated with different resources to provide assistance to newcomers to public housing. In 2015, there were 9400 households with 23,000 residents moving in On Tat Estate in Anderson Road. The Social Welfare Department at Kwun Tong district coordinated Hong Kong Christian Service and 4 other NGOs including Christian Family Service Centre, The Pentecostal church of Hong Kong, Po Leung Kuk, Haven of Hope Christian Service to launch a joint collaboration model through applying for various funds to pull in additional manpower to provide timely assistance to the residents as soon as they move in. This joint effort was called "Anderson Model" by the field. While we experimented the new public housing support service through participation, we gained solid experience and operation strategies, these include: social workers and residents move in at the same time, providing assistance through street stationing model, mobilizing the residents to support one another using their personal strength to form a mutual support network. These are the unique characteristics of the support service. Its outcome and effectiveness were highly recognized by different stakeholders such as, the government, commercial sector, community, residents, schools and political parties in Kwun Tong district.

Together with the social service sector, we are advocating the regularization of the support service in order to continue this model. We are appealing for an extension of government subsidy from 3 to 4 years, provision of sufficient space for new support team to enhance effectiveness. Furthermore, we also suggest that funding should begin once the residents obtain keys to their apartment in order to achieve the target of "early intervention, timely support" of social service.

According to government information, there are many new public housing estates in remote areas to be completed, such as area 54 of Tuen Mun, Queen's Hill at Fanling, quarry mine at Anderson Road. We look forward to regularization of public housing support service to provide timely and appropriate service and to build up social capital with different stakeholders of the community.