

Patron : Prof. Ian Grenville Cross
GBS, SC

贊助人 : 江樂士教授
GBS, SC



13/F, Corn Yan Centre, 3 Jupiter Street, North Point, Hong Kong.
香港北角木星街3號澤盈中心13樓
Tel: (852) 3542 5722 Hotline: (852) 2755 1122 Fax: (852) 3542 5709
Home Page: <http://www.aca.org.hk> E-mail: aca@aca.org.hk

Chairperson : Dr. Patrick Cheung
BBS

主席 : 張志雄醫生
BBS

Director : Ms. Donna Wong
總幹事 : 黃翠玲女士

“Policies Related to Carers”
Views from Against Child Abuse
Submitted to Panel on Welfare Services of Legislative Council
Subcommittee on Promoting Carer-centric Policies
14.6.2023

Foreword

Established in 1979, Against Child Abuse (ACA) has been committed to eliminating all forms of child abuse in Hong Kong and promoting a caring and non-violent environment for the optimal growth and development of children.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) launched the “Improving Early Childhood Development: WHO Guideline” on 6 March 2020. The new guideline provides global and evidence-informed recommendations, saying that all infants and children should receive responsive care during the first three years of life; parents and other caregivers should be supported to provide responsive care. The guideline focuses on the needs of young children and caregivers. It is relevant for a wide range of stakeholders including parents, caregivers, service providers and policymakers.

According to the Child Protection Registry of Social Welfare Department, the number of newly registered child abuse and high-risk cases in 2022 was at a record high. Most of the abusers are the parents of the children, which reflects that children are fragile and vulnerable, and they are unable to protect themselves.

In terms of child care, many parents agree that it is their responsibility to take care of their children. However, for grassroots families, most parents have to work to earn living and meet their children’s learning needs, which often makes them struggle to balance work and child care. Some parents have to give up their jobs and take care of their children at home around the clock, resulting in financial pressure. Some of them lack the supportive network and face long-term care pressure. It makes their emotions prone to anxiety, tension and irritable, which will increase the risks of parenting crisis and child abuse.

The Care for Carers released the results of the “Survey Report on Child Carers 2023” in May this year. It shows that about 97% of the surveyed child carers are women, and they spend an average of 6.1 days a week, and 11.8 hours a day for taking care of their families. About 70%

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of the respondents even give up their career or personal interest in taking care of children. More than 50% of the respondents express that no one could share the caring work, and the main source of pressure is financial difficulties. Carers of children with special educational needs or single parents are more psychologically stressed than general child carers.

Based on the data from various parties, ACA has the following views on the policies related to carers:

Establish Allowance to Child Carers

Children are the future of society. Their growth and development depend on the love and care of their families and carers. It is very important to care for the needs of child carers and provide them with appropriate support. We aware that the government will regularize the “Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families” and “Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Low-income Carers of Persons with Disabilities” in October 2023, and increase the amount of subsidies. Both are good policies. We suggest that the government could also provide general and higher allowances to child carers from low-income families according to the different types of children they take care of, so as to relieve their financial pressure and affirm their efforts.

Set Up a 24-hour Special Line Service

Long hours of caring work can exhaust the carers physically and mentally, leading to emotional distress and affecting mental health. We suggest the government setting up a 24-hour special line service to provide immediate consultation, emotional support, counseling, emergency outreach, referral to appropriate community services, etc. for child carers.

Review and Enhance Day Child Care Services

We are pleased to learn that the government has allocated additional resources to optimize residential child care services. We suggest the government to review the admission quota and waiting time of child care centers in various districts to assess whether they can meet the needs of grassroots families, and strengthen day child care services to assist families in need and support those parents who are temporarily unable to take care of their children.

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Review and Improve Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project

The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project aims at providing flexible day child care services at the neighborhood level for parents in need, and enhancing community mutual help and care. However, the project often encounters a shortage of carers and lack of stability. In some areas, the waiting time for community carers is longer, which fails to provide timely support for family needs. We suggest the government to review the implementation of the project and the feasibility of increasing the subsidy, and strengthen publicity and training in order to recruit enthusiastic people and ensure the quality of community carers.

Carry Out Publicity Campaigns on Caring for Child Carers

Protecting children and supporting child carers is a shared responsibility of the government and all sectors of society. Carers also have the needs to be cared for. We hope that the government and community partners will work together to promote publicity and public education activities to support child carers, so as to create a caring atmosphere and a carer-friendly community.

Against Child Abuse