

LCQ6: Care services for children

Following is a question by the Hon Alice Mak and a reply by the Secretary for Labour and Welfare, Dr Law Chi-kwong, in the Legislative Council today (May 22):

Question :

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) implements the foster care service to provide residential family care for children in need under 18 years of age, and provides children under nine years of age with day care services through the home-based child carers under the Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project. Regarding these two types of care services for children, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on foster care service in each of the past three years: the respective numbers of foster families, foster children and children waiting to be placed, as well as the respective average time for which the children waited to be placed and stayed with the foster family; the number of home-based child carers and the number of children they took care of in each of the past three years;

(2) as it is learnt that SWD has encountered difficulties in recruiting foster families and home-based child carers, whether the Government will raise the allowance and incentive payment for foster parents, as well as the incentive payment for home-based child carers; whether SWD will set target numbers of these two types of carers to be recruited; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and

(3) of the measures put in place to enhance public recognition for the contributions made by these two types of carers; whether it will formulate new measures for stepping up its support for these two types of carers; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply :

President,

My reply to the Hon Alice Mak's question is as follows:

(1) Foster care service provides residential family care for children aged under 18 who cannot be adequately taken care of by their families due to family problems or crises, so that they may continue to enjoy family life before they re-unite with their families, join an adoptive family or live independently; and foster care (emergency) service provides immediate and short-term residential family care to children whose parents cannot care for them because of emergency or crisis situations. In the past three years, the number of foster homes, the number of children in placement, the average number of children on waiting list, average waiting time and duration of stay with foster families are at Annex 1.

The Neighbourhood Support Child Care Project (NSCCP) aims to provide a flexible form of child care service for children aged under nine at the neighbourhood level and, at the same time, to foster mutual help and care in the community. In the past three years, the number of home-based child carers and the number of children served are at Annex 2.

(2) In order to further support families in need and recruit more families to provide foster care service, the Social Welfare Department (SWD) has raised various foster care allowances by more than 20 per cent since December 2017. The SWD has also introduced a new grant of extra incentive payment for taking care of children under the age of three, so as to encourage foster families to take care of young children. As for the NSCCP, home-based child carers provide child care service as volunteers in the spirit of care for others and will receive incentive payment for recognition of their contribution to the service. The SWD will raise the level of incentive payment to child carers in 2019-20 to show appreciation and encouragement to the home-based child carers for their service. The SWD will discuss with the service operators details of the arrangement later.

As regards the recruitment of foster families, in order to let more general public learn about foster care service and recruit more suitable foster families, the SWD launched a set of television/radio Announcement in the Public Interest and posters in respect of foster care service in April 2017, so as to strengthen the promotion of foster care service. The SWD will continue to collaborate with the 11 foster care agencies to promote and recruit foster families through various channels and the media. Apart from encouraging more families with selflessness, love and enthusiasm to provide foster care service, the SWD also welcomes those who can commit themselves to join in the force of foster parents for being short term or substitute carers in taking care of foster children, so as to provide services to more children in need. As for the NSCCP, since its implementation, service operators have been recruiting suitable volunteers to serve as home-based child carers. Also, the SWD has been producing promotional materials for NSCCP and promoting it to the public and social service units through different channels including seminars and meetings.

(3) The SWD organises the Foster Families Service Award Presentation Ceremony on a biennial basis to recognise and commend foster parents' commitment to foster care service and let foster parents exchange and share their experience, while promoting foster care service through the media. As for the NSCCP, in addition to the incentive payment for home-based child carers, individual service operators will also hold volunteer recognition ceremony on a regular basis to recognise their contribution to the service and to encourage more volunteers to join as child carers and continue promoting mutual help and care in the neighbourhood and at the same time meeting the need of child care services.

In addition, to provide support for foster parents, the SWD in collaboration with the foster care agencies organise relevant training programmes for them, including pre-service training for prospective foster

parents and training on care of foster children. It also provides assistance to foster parents in learning about the characteristics and development needs of children with special needs, as well as the caring skills required and how to communicate with the birth parents. When the foster parents encounter difficulties in caring for foster children, the responsible supervising foster care workers will provide them with timely assistance and support.

As regards the NSCCP, the SWD will further enhance the service quality in 2019-20, including additional provisions for service operators to increase professional and supporting staff under NSCCP so as to strengthen training for home-based child carers.