

**Working Hand in Hand with The Community through Non-
Governmental Organisations**



**Correctional Services Department
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China**

The Correctional Services Department (CSD) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region – Working hand in hand with the community through non-governmental organisations

Apart from the provision of safe custody, Hong Kong Correctional Services Department (HKCSD) has also provided various kinds of services and support to persons in custody (PICs) to help them live a law-abiding life upon release. Recognising that successful rehabilitation hinges on the determination of PICs to make a fresh start as well as community support, the HKCSD works closely with various Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and religious bodies, which are named as “Rehabilitation Synergistic Partners” who have played a supplementary role in organising rehabilitation and reintegration programmes to PICs.

Family relationship is one of the distinct challenges among PICs (Schekter et al., 2017). Researches showed that family contact in correctional facility is an important aspect of PICs’ and their families’ health (Dixey and Woodall, 2012; Woodall, 2010) and forms the main focus of this paper. In Hong Kong, family contact can happen in several ways, but predominantly through letter writing, telephone conversations and through face-to-face either online or in person, contact through the visitation processes. Evidence shows how visiting can promote PICs’ mental health by reducing social isolation (Cochran and Mears, 2013). PICs who have regular visits from family have a reduced likelihood of post-release depression (Wolff and Draine, 2004) and are also more likely to have better post-release outcomes in relation to finding employment (Niven and Stewart, 2005).

Working through The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP)

Over the recent decades, the HKCSD has collaborated with over 100 Rehabilitation Synergistic Partners of whom The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) is one of the HKCSD's key links with the community. Established in 1957, the SRACP supports the HKCSD in developing and delivering diversified rehabilitation services, helping rehabilitated offenders reintegrate into society and rebuild relationships with their families and friends.

While as mentioned, family support is known to be a critical factor for the successful rehabilitation of PICs, the HKCSD and the SRACP have, since 2005, extended the efforts to also assist and support the children of the PICs, given that children with incarcerated parents would face deep impact to their emotional, physical, educational, and financial well-being. Such efforts are put together under the project of "Blue Bus" with emotional and social support offered to children during and after their parents' imprisonment, aiming to help these children adjust to family changes and rebuild self-confidence.

In recent years, there has been a greater focus on the ways in which social visits and family contact, especially with PICs' children, should be maintained and offered. In Hong Kong, the most common form of prison visit takes place in purpose-built visiting facilities, and during these visits, convicted PICs and their families are able to spend not more than 30 minutes together for a closed type visit which is monitored closely by correctional staff and during which physical contact is generally restricted. Yet, the CSD and SRACP noted the challenges of visits and the difficulty for families connecting in a natural way.

The “Blue Bus Jockey Club Together We Grow Project” (BBJC) was launched to allow PICs and their children to interact. From 2019 onwards, the CSD and SRACP has co-worked with the Boys’ and Girls’ Club Association of Hong Kong to organise, under which comprehensive supporting services have been provided to facilitate the setting up of a healthy living environment for and to improve the well-being of the children of the PICs and to rehabilitate offenders.



Counselling course for rehabilitated offenders and their family members

Over time, the services provided under the BBJC have become much broader and can be grouped under 2 major areas, namely **services for PICs’ children** and **services for PICs on family bonding with their children**.

Services for PICs’ Children

Strength-based Developmental Support for Children

The social workers of the BBJC would educate PICs’ children with positive value, problem solving skills and emotion management techniques through counselling groups and

programmes such as the 'Experiential Learning and Character Education Programme'.



Experiential Learning and Character Education Programme for PICs' children

Prison Visit and Escort Service

The social workers and/or trained volunteers of the BBJC would help support the needy families to register visits to PICs, and offer individual escort service for children and youth requiring special assistance to correctional institutions.

Birthday / Seasonal Greetings Delivery

To assist PICs to express their caring about their child(ren), upon the request of PICs, social workers of the BBJC would help celebrate the birthday of their child(ren) and youth with gift and cake based on the birthday gift idea and words of heart given by the PICs.

Services for PICs on Family Bonding with Their Children

Intensive Counselling

The HKCSD and the BBJC would arrange individual counselling to PICs with child(ren), aiming at teaching them with parenting and communication skills from children's perspective.

Distance Parent Course

PICs with child(ren) are encouraged to join the Distant Parent Course, under which they would have letter exchange with the social workers of the BBJC. Apart from getting connected with the outside world, the participating PICs can also obtain updated news about their families, and learn more parenting information from the social workers of the BBJC. The social workers would also take the lead to encourage and guide the PICs to share their essential life experiences in their family-of-origin and their parenting experience, and reflect on themselves throughout the course, particularly, at the end of every session. Letter writing in the course offers the PICs an emotional outlet, avoids impulse, and encourages natural reflections. Sharing of news and experience about their families would help promote reintegration to their respective family after release.

Be My Hero – Prison-based Parent Education Programme

HKCSD has collaborated with the social workers of the BBJC to arrange group activities for PICs to meet their child(ren) upon inviting their child(ren) to enter the correctional institution. Through the face-to-face communication and under the facilitation of professional social workers, the family bonding could be strengthened. The PICs would also be able to practise the parenting skills learnt during the session with their child(ren).

Since this programme would highlight the common concerns and distress of PICs in which

they feel guilty for not accompanying with their family members, in particular during the developmental stages of their children, the PICs' parental sense of competence would be increased after their participation in this programme and the PICs should be able to reflect on themselves and in turn reduce their anxiety when they have to reintegrate into their families after release.

Parent-child Centres

Currently, the HKCSD has set up parent-child centres in female correctional institutions for mothers who are PICs to physically contact and play with their children. Allowing agency in a structured correctional environment where security must be of the highest concern is rare (Woodall et al., 2013a), but with the mutual trust between the NGO partner and corresponding security measures being taken suggests that allowing PICs' families to have play time are a relatively new addition to the suite of prison rehabilitation programmes. To better support the BBJC and our other relevant rehabilitation programmes, the facilities and equipment inside these centres would continuously be upgraded with professional advice from scholars and play therapists, to create a home-like and educational environment and to enhance the parent-child interaction with electronic platform, sensory stimulation zone, play and life experience area, etc.



Existing Parent-child Centre in Lo Wu Correctional Institution

Through repeated practice and feedback among the staff of the HKCSD and the social workers of the BBJC, the parent-child bonding between PICs and their child(ren) is expected to be built more effectively.

Way forward

BBJC offers the opportunity for families of PICs to play an active role in shaping a positive future. It is revealed that for some families and children, visits and continuous counseling are an important part of sustaining health and well-being outcomes. To this extent, a collaboration between the NGOs and prison administrator should form a close partnership for families to stay connected.

The effectiveness of rehabilitation services depends on the joint participation and support of all sectors of society. Care from family members, job opportunities provided by employers, support from social services and tolerance from the public are all indispensable. The

HKCSD would continue to enhance its collaboration with NGOs and/or individuals sharing the same objective of supporting offender rehabilitation in a strategic manner, so as to gain wider community support and help build a safer and more inclusive society in Hong Kong.

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