

All cases given the same consideration

WE were surprised and disappointed when we read from newspapers on May 27, about the Social Welfare Department's allegation that the voluntary agencies operating homes-cum-schools for "problem children" always had excuses for not accepting the most difficult cases although their vacancy rates stood at 26 per cent.

As the co-ordinating body of voluntary welfare organisations in Hongkong, the Hongkong Council of Social Service wants to clarify that by no means would the agencies refuse to take in the more difficult cases and that their vacancy rates are not as high as quoted.

First about the accusation of rejecting the most difficult cases, we want to assert that all cases are given the same consideration.

Believe it or not, in many cases it is not the home which refuses to accept the child, but it is the child who refuses to go to the home or his parents who decline to let the child do so.

In such cases the homes can only inform the referral sources that there is no admission.

Second, we cannot understand how the Social Welfare Depart-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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ment comes up with the wrong vacancy rate.

As at May 25, the seven boys'/girls' homes for behavioural problem children had a total capacity of 630 residential places and 595 of them were occupied, representing an overall enrolment rate of 94 per cent, which is much higher than the accused figure.

As to the six special schools attached to six of the above homes, their total capacity on the same day was 750, with 650 being filled up. The overall enrolment rate was 87 per cent.

Even in the year 1990/91, the seven homes with a total capacity

of 630 had served 758 behavioural problem children (owing to normal turnover, the number of children being served exceeds the total capacity).

It can be seen that the home facilities are fully utilised most of the time.

As to the vacancies in special schools, the main reason is the discrepancy in capacity between the school and home sections.

Such discrepancies are found in all the six homes: the school/home capacity in Chak Yan Centre is 270/160, in Shing Tak Centre 120/140, in Island Hostel 75/60, in Hongkong Juve-

nile Care Centre 105/70, in Pelletier Hall 90/80, and in Marycove Centre 90/80.

Such discrepancies came about through the interaction of the following factors: historical reasons including the different timing in setting up of the two services; the change in the standard of teaching staffing provision of one class for 20 students to one class for 15 students in special schools; and the need to maintain a certain number of forms for different age groups.

Such discrepancies cause under-enrolment in some of the special schools.

The problem of discrepancy in capacities of the two services and the need to have a better referral system etc are in fact being examined with the Social Welfare Department and the Education Department.

Agencies hope that constructive ways can be worked out to achieve effective running of services and a better utilisation of resources.

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