

J.C.M.P

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# Action pledge over centre

I REFER to the story under the headline the "Scandal of forgotten children" (SCM Post, April 22).

Transit centres, including the one at Tuen Mun, provide emergency accommodation for people who have been made homeless in natural disasters such as fires, typhoons or landslips, pending investigation into their eligibility for permanent or temporary housing.

Others affected by environmental clearances or squatter control demolitions are also accommodated initially in transit centres.

Once checking and investigations are completed they will be allocated either temporary housing or permanent public housing. On average, the process normally takes up to one month and the families concerned are then advised of the reception estate or THA (temporary housing area) they are being offered.

However, if a family is selective about the rehousing location or take their time in fitting out their new home, their stay in the transit centre may be longer.

Since transit centres serve as emergency accommodation, only basic and communal facilities are provided. No rent or other fees are charged. Government spent an average of more than \$600,000 a month to manage and maintain the nine transit centres in the last financial year.

The Tuen Mun Transit Centre became operational in November 1983. It was converted from one wing of a Housing Authority flatted factory with a present capacity for accommodating 2,000 persons. There are communal kitchens, shower rooms, toilets and laundry areas.

It would be impractical to provide private units for families given the costs involved and the nature of transit centres. In addition, there are recreation rooms with TV sets and, for the children, a study room and playground. At present, there are 1,146 people staying at the Tuen

Mun Transit Centre.

On admission to the centre, families are briefed about the services and facilities available in the district, particularly on jobs, schools, clinics and transport.

In addition detailed information is provided on notice boards. In the past, whenever a major disaster has occurred, the departments concerned (eg the District Office, Social Welfare, Education, Labour and Housing) make a concerted effort to brief and assist victims.

But as your article has rightly pointed out, there is always room for improvement and the Housing Department will initiate action to see how Government can respond even more positively.

As to the specific issues raised in the article, I have the following comments.

**Medical:** There is no justification to set up permanent medical facilities in the transit centre. Those staying in the centre can call at the Tuen Mun Government Clinic and Yau Oi Polyclinic, which is about 10 minutes away.

In addition, there are four private doctors in Tai Hing Estate, which is just across the road. The Tuen Mun District Board is also considering the feasibility of a volunteer-doctor scheme in the district and, if possible, will include the Tuen Mun Transit Centre in its network.

**Education:** Some parents at the centre have managed to place their children in schools in Tuen Mun. Where necessary, the Housing Assistant helps in contacting the school principal and making preliminary arrangements.

The main problem is that since families are in transit, some parents are reluctant to spend money on school uniforms and books to place their children in local schools for a short time.

Many parents have overcome the "temporary" problem by leaving their children under the care of relatives or friends living in the district where they lived before so that their children can continue with their education in

their old school until parents are established in a permanent new home and can make new arrangements for their children's schooling.

We will liaise with the Education Department to see whether any further options are practical, eg busing children to schools. The Housing Department is also examining, jointly with the District Office, the feasibility of inviting some voluntary agencies to organise lessons for children in the centre.

Whenever one moves home, there are bound to be disruptions to one's normal daily life before a new home and daily routines are established. As a result of a fire or other emergency the situation is, of course, much more traumatic.

May I assure you that the Housing Department has every sympathy with families who find themselves in these circumstances and will continue to make every effort to help them in any way possible.

H.H.T. BARMA  
for Director of Housing