

30 Sept. 1990

Anger at delays by residents to half-way home

PLANS to build a half-way house in Kwun Tong for people discharged from mental hospitals has been delayed by intense local opposition, despite the acute shortage of services for these people in Hongkong.

Ms Kimmy Ho Wai-kuen, Acting Director of the Mental Health Association, which will manage the half-way house, said: "If the Government had stood firm, the project would have got underway. We are quite frustrated over the delay as it has been planned for more than eight years."

While there is a demand for nearly 1,150 half-way places in Hongkong, there are only 769 beds provided in 20 half-way houses around the territory.

In Kwun Tong, the two-year delay was seen as normal to consult the community, according to the department's Senior Social Work Officer (Rehabilitation/Project).

He confirmed that the Government would go ahead with its plan regardless of residents' opposition. "Whether people like it or not, discharged mental patients should have the right to re-integrate into society. We cannot keep them in hospital all the time," he said.

Construction work would start in the 1992-93 fiscal year at the junction of Kung Lok Road and Hong Ning Road, in Kwun Tong, in an area at present used as a car park.

However, two years' consultation is unlikely to modify residents' negative feelings of the plan, which has already been trimmed from 120 beds to 80.

Distict Board member David Cheung Shu-fun said he personally agreed that a half-way house should be built in Kwun Tong, which has a population of 680,000 people, but not for 80 discharged patients.

Apart from the "unusual capacity", residents are also concerned by the plan to keep 20 discharged mental patients with violent tendency in the half-way house.