
**Report of
A Study on International Experience of
Selected Countries in Supporting the
Low-income Family
in Helping its Members
and their Applicability to Hong Kong**

The Research Team

**Department of Social Work and Social Administration
The University of Hong Kong
November 2008**

Acknowledgements

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Glossary of Terms

AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
CAPC	Community Action Program for Children
CDI	Child Development Initiative
CDCs	Community Development Councils
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HKSAR	Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
HOPE	Home Ownership Plus Education
HM	Her Majesty's
HSP	Healthy Start Programme
JMC	Joint Management Committee
NAPS	National Anti Poverty Strategy
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NCB	National Child Benefit
PIEC	Partnerships in Early Childhood
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act
SSLP	Sure Start Local Programme
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program
USA	United States of America
WSP	Work Support Programme

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Executive Summary

Objectives

1. The objectives of the current study are to examine the policies and practices of selected countries regarding their experience in supporting the low-income family in helping its members, including measures to minimize the opportunities of inter-generational poverty; and to assess the applicability of relevant policies and practices to Hong Kong.
2. The policies and practices of six countries were studied: Australia, Canada, Ireland, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Our aims were to identify the rationale behind these policies and practices and their major features, details, and effectiveness. We then sought to determine the general trends among the measures used to support low-income families in these six countries. Finally, we made an assessment of the applicability of these policies, practices, and experiences to Hong Kong.

Method and Framework

3. To achieve the objectives of this study, comparative policy analyses were conducted through library and internet research, and correspondence with related authorities and overseas scholars.
4. Conceptually it is difficult to delineate whether or not anti-poverty strategies are adopting the family approach. Five characteristics are used to assess whether the anti-poverty measures are family-oriented or not. A measure is regarded as family-oriented if it possesses at least three of the following characteristics: a) the measure takes the family as the unit of reference; b) the measure supports the family in caring for and nurturing its members; c) the measure builds up resilience in the family in order to equip it well to stand up to the vicissitudes of life; d) the measure is multidimensional, as it cuts across different policy domains to meet the needs of different family members; and e) the measure emphasizes the coordination and integration of services and benefits. Another obvious criterion used to select policies and practices for studying is that the target of these measures is the poor, including those who are receiving means-tested welfare. A brief summary of the family-oriented programs we identified in the six countries is given in Table 1.
5. It cannot be emphasized enough that this review is not a stocktaking exercise of all of the anti-poverty measures used in these six selected countries; we focus only on those anti-poverty policies and practices which espouse the family approach.

General Trends in Selected Countries

6. Combating poverty is one of the major social policy issues in all of the selected countries, but each country has proceeded at its own pace.

Whether a country adopts the family approach in assisting the poor depends considerably on the core values and the unique socio-cultural characteristics of each particular society. In this review, family-oriented policies supporting low-income families have been found to vary greatly, forming a continuum among the six selected developed economies. Ireland and Singapore represent opposite ends of this spectrum. In Ireland in particular, the explicit National Anti-Poverty Strategy has little to do with the family approach, even though the family is highly supported and appreciated by the Irish Government and the people. On the other hand, Singapore, perhaps due to its collectivistic culture, has not only explicitly mentioned the family as a partner in its policy implementation, but also has developed many small-scale programs which are consistent with the family approach.

7. Falling in-between Ireland and Singapore are Australia, Canada, the USA, and the United Kingdom. The Australian Government adopts the view that support for families is one of the five key areas for anti-poverty measures. Although Canada does not have a national anti-poverty strategy, one of its provinces, Quebec, has supporting young parents and their children as one of the major measures in its provincial strategy against poverty. In the United Kingdom, the role of family, especially parents, is emphasized in policies aimed at the eradication of child poverty. In the USA, both early childhood intervention programs and employment supportive programs for parents, together with child care, are considered to be family-oriented anti-poverty measures.
8. We have observed that the role of family in an anti-poverty strategy has been emphasized explicitly in Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and Quebec. **Therefore, our conclusion is that the family approach to anti-poverty policy is a sensible course to pursue in Hong Kong, given the fact that the role of family still prevails within Hong Kong society.**

Australia

9. In the past decade, Australia has enjoyed a strong economy and a high employment rate, but it has not formulated its own national strategy against poverty and the Australian Government is reluctant to set an explicit anti-poverty target. However, the Australian Government has identified five key areas for anti-poverty policies, one of which is supporting families, as the role of family in relation to social stability and the prevention of intergenerational poverty is well recognized. From the government's point of view, employment is the major vehicle for a family to escape poverty; therefore, a comprehensive, family-oriented employment support program, coupled with high quality, accessible, and affordable child care, has been introduced.
10. The national family-oriented program, called the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, has the following aims: to help families and

communities make a better future for children; to build family and community capacity; to support relationships between families and the communities they live in; and to improve the communities' ability to help themselves through four themes, namely communities for children, invest to grow, local answers, and choice and flexibility in child care. Two of the four themes, communities for children and invest to grow, particularly utilize the family approach, as they aim to have a positive impact on early childhood development by strengthening families and communities. This approach is based on national and international evidence that family strength, parenting effectiveness, and child outcome are strongly related and that intervention can only be effective by involving children, parents, and the community at large. This strategy represents an unprecedented commitment to early childhood initiatives based on the compelling evidence about the effectiveness of early childhood intervention programs.

Canada

11. Canada, like Australia, had neither developed its own national anti-poverty strategy nor utilized the family approach in its scattered measures for tackling poverty, but it has managed to reduce poverty rates among older persons dramatically in the past 25 years, through a generous pension plan. However, during the same period, the poverty rates for all other age groups have remained almost exactly the same. Moreover, the House of Commons' commitment to end child poverty by 2000 has proven to be a hollow promise. One of the reasons for this failure in the anti-poverty war may be due to the absence of a national anti-poverty strategy in Canada.
12. However, there are provincial strategies against poverty in Quebec, as well as Newfoundland and Labrador. In Quebec, the strategy was formulated through a social movement involving numerous community organizations and is based on a law which called for the establishment of an advisory committee and a research centre on poverty, funding for measures aimed at combating poverty, a designated minister, a measurable goal, and a poverty proofing¹ policy. In its first provincial action plan against poverty, a welfare-to-work program, linked with child care, was one of the major measures proposed. In addition, two national measures and one local program are family-oriented: the National Child Benefit (NCB) Initiative not only provides cash benefits for families with children, but also a wide range of services, such as child care, health benefits, early childhood intervention, and children-at-risk services; the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) provides funding to local non-profit organizations to enhance the well-being of children living in poverty; and Best Start in Toronto is a local program that is family-oriented, as it provides both early childhood intervention and family support programs.

¹ Poverty proofing is a process through which government departments assess the impact of their policies and programs on poverty at the design and review stage.

Ireland

13. In Ireland, a government model of social partnership² has been in operation for over two decades and, in 1996, representatives from the community as well as the voluntary sector were invited to join the existing coalition of trade union representatives, farmers, and employers. The National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS), introduced in 1997, was the product of this coalition, as was an interdepartmental policy committee involving a wide range of relevant government departments. The NAPS was the first strategy within the European Union to set an explicit and measurable anti-poverty target and has proven to be a great success.
14. The success of the NAPS is the result of a number of factors: the growth in the Irish economy and the associated growth in employment; the active programs that have assisted people living in poverty to take up some of the job opportunities, and the maintenance of income support welfare payments for those who were unable to do so; the active involvement of the community and the voluntary sector; a strong consultative mechanism; and infrastructure measures, including the implementation of poverty proofing and the establishment of the Combat Poverty Agency.³ Furthermore, because of the substantial overall level of expenditure for these measures, a strong financial commitment and an assessment of financial sustainability by the government is also important.
15. Although the Irish anti-poverty strategy signals a public policy prioritization towards vulnerable members of society, the family approach had not been utilized explicitly in its strategy. This may be due to the fact that Ireland has long been a traditional and conservative Catholic society, in which the family is perceived as the natural, primary, and fundamental unit group of a society and is highly appreciated.⁴ The Irish Government has set up a Family Support Agency to support families, promote continuity and stability in family life, and prevent marital breakdown through family mediation services, relationship counseling, and parenting education. Only two anti-poverty programs are found to be family-oriented. One is the Family Literacy Program and the other is a new program, called the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children, which was established in 2006 to support and promote better outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas and some of the early childhood intervention funded programs.

² The government and the local social partners have agreements which cover a broad range of economic policy, national wage increases, and social development.

³ The Combat Poverty Agency was established in 1986, under the Combat Poverty Act, to advise the Irish Government on the prevention and elimination of poverty; it also initiates and evaluates measures for tackling poverty.

⁴ Evans, M.D.R., Kelley, J., & Hayes, B.C. (2000). Family values and labor force participation: Ireland in international perspective. *Gender Issues*, 18, 51-88.

Singapore

16. In Singapore, the role of family is explicitly highlighted. The importance of the family working closely with the individual and the community, in order to build up a cohesive and resilient society, is recognized, and the family is perceived as the primary source of emotional, social, and financial support for its members. A number of small-scale programs found in Singapore are family-oriented and they target different problems, such as unemployment and intergenerational poverty. These programs are very often targeted towards both children and parents or towards the needy family members, and they satisfy the multidimensional needs of the family involved: the Healthy Start Programme under ComCare Grow focuses on early childhood intervention; the Work Support Programme under ComCare Self Reliance is an employment support program; and the Home Ownership Plus Education Scheme provides housing grants and other subsidies to prevent intergenerational poverty. However, all of these programs are small scale and no evaluation data for them are available.

United Kingdom

17. The United Kingdom focuses on child poverty and, in 1999, the Prime Minister announced an historic target to eradicate child poverty by 2020 through direct measures, including financial support to families with children and target programs for children, and indirect policy measures to reduce unemployment among parents, by supporting them into employment and by making it pay for them to work, for example by introducing the minimum wage. Anti-poverty policies in the United Kingdom have had substantial success. As in Ireland, this has been due to several critical factors, including having transparent and measurable goals, strong economic and employment growth, active employment assistance, increase of welfare benefits, and committed resources allocation. However, only a few programs in the United Kingdom are family-oriented, for example the New Deal For Lone Parents (NDLP) at Jobcentre Plus, which provides an employment support service for lone parents and advises them on the availability of local child care services. It seems that, until recently, a family approach was not recognized in the United Kingdom as a pivotal strategy for the further reduction of child poverty by attuning to the needs of single parents. Among new initiatives of NDLP, one straight-forward, but previously neglected, measure is to join up the child care provision with employment programs for single parents.
18. Another early childhood intervention program, called Sure Start, aims to promote the development and education of children living in disadvantaged communities, and most of its funded projects are family-oriented, as they must follow the fundamental principles of involving parents and encouraging the coordination of existing local

services. After 2004, all Sure Start local programs were changed to Sure Start Children Centres; these provide family-oriented services to all children and work with Jobcentre Plus to provide employment support to parents of the children they serve.

United States of America

19. The USA declared a “National War on Poverty” in 1964, much earlier than the other countries examined; however, the family approach has never been adopted explicitly. The welfare reform introduced in 1996 represented a watershed in the anti-poverty war and emphasized strongly the transition from welfare to work. Although many measures and programs for low-income families in the USA utilize the household as the unit of recipient to meet basic needs, such as food, housing, and energy, only the programs for early childhood intervention (such as Head Start and Early Head Start) and for welfare-to-work (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) are family-oriented. Head Start is the largest and oldest early childhood intervention program that has been proven to have a positive impact on the language development and physical health status of children living in low-income families, and on reducing their behavioral problems. Empirical data support the views that the family approach is crucial to helping families move from welfare to work, and that high quality, but affordable, child care, coupled with an employment support service, increases the likelihood that current welfare recipients will be able to come off welfare and work full-time.

Applicability to Hong Kong

20. The success stories of Quebec, Ireland, and the United Kingdom suggest the importance of setting a measurable anti-poverty target, with both a time schedule and a sufficient financial commitment. Although setting a target may make us short-sighted without focusing on the causes of poverty, it certainly increases accountability and transparency in monitoring progress in reducing poverty. We believe that the advantages of setting a target outweigh the disadvantages; and, an anti-poverty target should be set with caution, given the limitations of such a strategy. In Hong Kong, although the former Commission on Poverty established a set of indicators of poverty, no anti-poverty target has been set so far.
21. Another lesson from the experiences of Quebec, Ireland, and the United Kingdom is that an engine for coordinating anti-poverty initiatives must be established, in order that the efforts towards anti-poverty among all parts of government and its partners within the community can be reinforced, maintained, and better coordinated. Therefore, a poverty proofing mechanism could also be applicable to Hong Kong so that the effect of all policies initiated by the Government on poverty will be evaluated.
22. Experiences in Quebec and Ireland also show that it is crucial to involve social partners within the community at all the stages of anti-poverty

policy, from policy development and implementation through to policy evaluation. Therefore, it is also relevant to consider that a joint partnership between the government and community in Hong Kong could be formed to develop, implement, and evaluate anti-poverty strategies and policies.

23. Families not only provide care for children and elderly persons, but also facilitate informal exchanges of time and money between family members at all stages of life. Despite the development of public services, the role of families in meeting the multidimensional needs of their members remains predominant in several of the countries examined in this study. The role of family in national or provincial anti-poverty strategies or policies has been mentioned explicitly in Australia, Quebec, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. Our review indicates that the family approach to anti-poverty measures is a sensible strategy to pursue in Hong Kong, particularly as, in Hong Kong society and Asian culture, the role of family is still predominant.
24. The employment of parents is perceived as a major means to escape poverty, but, for unemployed parents, individual or family circumstances may be barriers to them gaining employment. Comprehensive and individualized employment support services, coupled with high-quality, affordable, and accessible child care, are provided in Australia, Canada, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the USA. These measures are perceived as family-oriented, because they not only provide child care provision but also coordinated and integrated services to families in need.
25. In Hong Kong, there is a consensus within society that employment is a major means to reduce poverty, because it not only has a positive impact on the economic well-being of individuals, but also enhances their self-esteem, enabling them to provide good role models for their children.⁵ The HKSAR Government provides work incentives for welfare recipients through disregarded earnings under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) scheme, the transport support scheme, and the employment support services at one-stop Job Centres operated by the Labour Department. On the other hand, a range of day child care services including stand-alone child care centers, kindergarten-cum-child care centers, the Mutual Help Child Care Centre service, and the After School Care Programme provide government assistance to parents who cannot take care of their children because of work or other reasons.
26. However, in general, the individualized employment assistance services and child care services are being delivered separately. The exception is the New Dawn Intensive Employment Assistance Projects. However, even in this program, the timely provision of after-school care services is not always accessible once job-seeking parents secure employment. We

⁵ Commission on Poverty (2006). *Report of the Commission on Poverty*. Retrieved July 29, 2008, from [http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/ReportFull\(e\).pdf](http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/ReportFull(e).pdf).

believe that the integration of employment support services and child care services can enhance the employability, and the ability to sustain employment, of unemployed parents. Based on the experiences of the countries we studied, more integrated and coordinated employment support services, coupled with quality, affordable, and accessible child care provision could be considered in Hong Kong.

27. Investing in children has high payoffs, both for the children themselves and for society in general. Children who grow up in disadvantaged families simply do not have equal development opportunities compared to children living in more affluent families. The logic of early childhood intervention for children living in poverty is to compensate for various factors that place these children at risk of poor outcomes. Therefore, it is not surprising to find out that, in all six countries we examined, there are early childhood intervention programs in place for children living in low-income families. The reviews of the experiences of these countries have stressed the value of early childhood intervention in reducing the harmful effects on children of growing up in low-income families and in helping to prevent intergenerational poverty. The involvement of parents is considered as a crucial factor leading to the success of these programs.
28. We believe that family-oriented early childhood intervention for children living in low-income families deserves to be studied carefully for its applicability to Hong Kong. Specifically, it is important to provide support services to help disadvantaged children in aspects such as language, social skills, cultural exposure, and self image. In Hong Kong, there is no structured early childhood intervention program, especially for those living in low-income families. Although the Comprehensive Child Development Service has provided multi-disciplinary services to at-risk children, including children living in poor families, no established and well-structured early childhood intervention, coupled with parenting skills training or other family-oriented services, is provided for children living in poverty. In the light of the above, it is worthwhile for Hong Kong to consider enhancing the family-oriented early childhood interventions specifically for children living in low-income families.

Table 1 – Programs in Selected Countries Which Adopt a Family Approach in Supporting Low-income Families

Australia	Canada	Ireland	Singapore	UK	USA																																																		
<p>Welfare to Work package with child care services: Aims: To increase the employment of parents with children aged 6 to 15 through services such as skills assessment, the upgrading of skills, and high quality but affordable child care services.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach ^(Note):</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="152 699 465 758"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table> <p>Stronger Families and Communities Strategy: Aims: To give families, their children, and their communities the opportunity to build a better future. It focuses on early childhood initiatives and resources that can be used to achieve better outcomes for children, their families, and their communities. Its four streams are :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communities for Children (early childhood education and parenting support) 2. Early Childhood – Invest to Grow (funding for early childhood programs) 	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>National Child Benefit (NCB): Aims: To help prevent and reduce the depth of child poverty; to provide welfare to work program for parents; and to enhance integration of services. It works by providing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monthly payments to low-income families with children. 2. Benefits and services designed and delivered by the provinces/territories to meet the needs of families with children. <p>Before the NCB, moving from social assistance into a paying job often meant a loss of valuable benefits, including health, dental, and prescription drug benefits. The NCB works to reduce the welfare wall by providing child benefits outside of welfare when parents move from social assistance to paid employment.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="483 1329 795 1388"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>Family Literacy: Aims: To address the intergenerational nature of literacy. It enhances the lives of parents and children by promoting the joy of reading, improving their literacy skills, attitudes, values, and, behaviors, and breaking the cycle of poverty. It has been developed in various settings in conjunction with adult education, schools, libraries, and community projects.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="808 863 1120 922"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>x</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>x</td></tr> </table> <p>Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children: Aims: To improve the outcomes of children living in disadvantaged areas through more innovation, effective planning, integration and delivery of services. One of its projects, the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI), based in Tallaght, is aimed at</p>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	x	✓	✓	x	<p>Healthy Start Programme (Under ComCare Grow): Aims: To enhance parenting skills and parent-child interaction and to strengthen the family as a unit. It provides opportunities for children to receive early childhood education and development. The followings are provided to low-income families with children (aged 0 to 6):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parenting program – parenting skills to promote parent-child bonding. 2. Family development – counseling, family support and linking families to relevant community resources. 3. Subsidies for pre-school education – assistance to pay for kindergarten and child care fees for their children. <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1128 1222 1440 1281"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>Jobcentre Plus New Deal for Lone Parents: Aims: A voluntary program to help and encourage lone parents to enter paid employment, and to increase the job readiness of lone parents in order to increase their employment opportunities. Benefits include £40 per week, on top of salary, for one year, a personal advisor, a guaranteed job interview, and a work trial. A package of advice and support is provided (family approach) tailored to the needs of each lone parent :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advice on job vacancies. 2. Explaining what benefits are available if the lone parent finds work, and helping to arrange these benefits. 3. Explaining the incentives available when they start work. 4. Advising on the child care available. 5. Arranging training to update skills and providing payment of the Training Premium when they start an approved activity. 	<p>Head Start: Aims: To promote school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision, to enrolled children and families, of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services. It provides grants to local, public and private, and non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families, with a special focus on helping preschoolers to develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1778 1086 2089 1145"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table> <p>Early Head Start: A federally funded community-based program for low-income families with infants and toddlers and pregnant women. Aims:</p>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	2	3	4	5																																																			
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Australia	Canada	Ireland	Singapore	UK	USA																																																												
<p>3. Choice and Flexibility in Child Care (innovative child care solutions e.g. in home care for families with multiple children under school age)</p> <p>4. Local Answers (support for community programs)</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="152 598 465 657"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>Community Action Program for Children: Aims: To provide long term funding to community coalitions for the delivery of programs that address the health and development of children (0-6 years) who are living in conditions of risk. It places a strong emphasis on partnerships and community capacity building. Programs include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Established models (e.g. family resources centers; parenting classes; parent/child groups; home visiting). Innovative programs (e.g. street level programs for substance-abusing mothers) <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="488 1018 795 1077"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>x</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table> <p>Best Start (Toronto): A strategy for meeting the early learning and care needs of young children in Toronto. The program integrates the early childhood education (0-6 years) service, child care services, and family support programs, as well as</p>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	<p>enhancing the health, safety, and learning of the children of Tallaght West, and to increase their sense of belonging in their own communities. Its aim is to improve family outcomes by making the parent-child relationship better and providing parenting skills guidance. It has adopted an innovative model for the integrated delivery of services, consisting of three components: children, parents, and children and parents together.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="813 826 1120 885"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>Work Support Programme Under ComCare Self Reliance: Aims: To provide support and encouragement for needy families to work. Benefits may include: rent, utilities and/or services, and conservancy charges vouchers; monthly cash grants; child care subsidies; training grants; educational assistance; and medical assistance. Recipients are responsible for working out an action plan for them to follow in order to become self-reliant.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1133 874 1440 933"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table> <p>Home Ownership Plus Education Scheme: This means-tested program offers cash and services to low-income, young families who choose to keep their families small so that they can focus their resources on educating their children. Benefits include: educational bursaries; housing grants; training grants for parents; one-off utilities grants; cash incentives; and social</p>	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>6. Drawing up an action plan to guide them in the process of finding work.</p> <p>7. Providing an in-work support service to help them make the transition from benefits into employment.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1458 598 1765 657"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table> <p>Sure Start: Aims: To improve the health status, capacity of learning, and the social and emotional development of children and to strengthen families. The five core services of the SSLP include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach and home visiting. Support for families and parents. Good-quality play, learning, and child care Primary and community health care, including advice on child and family health. Support for children with special needs. 	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	<p>To promote healthy prenatal outcomes for pregnant women, to enhance the development of very young children, and to promote healthy family functioning. Contents include child development programs, family development programs, and community building programs.</p> <p>Characteristics of the family approach:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1783 662 2089 721"> <tr><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td><td>✓</td></tr> </table> <p>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: Aims: This sets a five-year time limit on receiving welfare and aims to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. States receive a block grant to design and operate their programs to :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Assist needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes. Reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. Prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies. Encourage the formation 	1	2	3	4	5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
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Note : Characteristics include: 1. Taking the family as the unit of reference; 2. Emphasizing on the coordination and integration of services and benefits; 3. Multi-dimensional: cutting across different policy domains in order to meet the needs of family members; 4. Supporting the family in the care and nurture of its members; 5. Building up resilience in the family so as to equip the family well to stand up against the vicissitudes of life.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Objectives of the Study

- 1.1 The study was commissioned by the Central Policy Unit (CPU) of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government in 2008. The objectives of this study are to examine the policies and practices of selected countries regarding their experience in supporting the low-income family in helping its members, including measures to minimize the opportunities of inter-generational poverty; and to assess the applicability of relevant policies and practices to Hong Kong.

Scope of the Study

- 1.2 The study covered six countries, namely Australia, Canada, Ireland, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the USA. The study aimed to identify the current policies and practices of the selected countries in supporting the low-income family to help improving the situation of its members including minimizing the possibility of inter-generational poverty, through a family approach. The major features and details of the relevant policies and practices were then set out clearly and concisely.
- 1.3 The study examined the rationale behind the policies and practices adopted by these countries, including the rationale for any major change culminating in the current schemes, and the effectiveness of these policies and practices. Finally, we evaluated the applicability of the policies, practices, and experiences of the selected countries to Hong Kong.

Methodology

- 1.4 This research used a desk research method, involving library and Internet research, literature review and analysis, and correspondence with relevant authorities. Information for this research was obtained from government reports, the Internet, and relevant reference sources. We placed a strong emphasis on ensuring the accuracy of the information we obtained and the correctness of the sources of this information, so that the information could be retrieved later if required.
- 1.5 Furthermore, the research team has strong connections with policy researchers in the six selected countries and we have liaised with these colleagues in the process of collecting and consolidating the data for these countries.

- 1.6 In our analytic work, we indicated the trends of the measures used in supporting low-income families within the selected countries and evaluated which measures are feasible to apply in the local context, given Hong Kong's unique socio-cultural and economic circumstances. Emphasis was placed on the measures which are also consistent with, or encourage, our core value, namely the importance of the family as a key value in social harmony.
- 1.7 In the following section, we delineate our meaning of the family approach, after reviewing the definition of family as well as family policy. Following this, the extent to which the policies and practices for assisting members of low-income families in the six selected countries are consistent with the family approach are examined, and the applicability of those policies and practices to Hong Kong is evaluated. Another obvious criterion used in the selection of policies and practices for studying is that the targets of these measures are individuals living in low-income families, including those who are receiving means-tested welfare.

Definition of Family

- 1.8 The definition of the family adopted in this study has important consequences for family-oriented policy (or policy utilizing the family approach) and its goals. Over the past several decades, changes that have occurred in the structure of the family include high divorce rates, an increasing number of female-headed lone parent families, more women working outside of the home, more dual earners within the family, a declining fertility rate, and an aging population. These changes have made it increasingly difficult to define the family.⁶
- 1.9 Sociologists and anthropologists have argued for decades about what constitutes a family.⁷ In North America, a family is composed of two heterosexual parents and their biological children; they all share a household with no other relatives present, based on the typical experiences of white, middle-class American families.⁸ At the other extreme, it is argued that a family encompasses any caring and enduring intimate relationships, regardless of their legal or blood ties.⁹

⁶ Zimmerman, S.L. (1992). *Family policies and family well-being: The role of political culture*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

⁷ Murdock, G. (1949). *Social structure*. New York: Macmillan; Parsons, T., & Bales, R. (1955). *Family socialization and interaction process*. New York: Free Press; Goode, W. (1963). *World revolution and family patterns*. New York: Free Press.

⁸ Eichler, M. (1997). *Family shifts: Families, policies, and gender equality*. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

⁹ Jamieson, L. (1998). *Intimacy: Personal relationships in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Smart, C. & Neale, B. (1999). *Family fragments?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

- 1.10 It is not feasible to define a family in such extreme terms in comparative policy analysis, and usually governments are unwilling to allow people to create their own definitions of a family when making decisions about eligibility for public welfare benefits. In this report, we use an inclusive definition of a family and this definition includes both nuclear and extended families, as well as lone parents.¹⁰ However, to avoid controversy and based on existing policies and laws in Hong Kong, long-term cohabiting couples and gay or lesbian couples are excluded from the current investigation. However, it should be noted that living under the same roof is not a prerequisite of being family members; for example, many adult children provide tangible and emotional support to their elderly parents who are living alone.

Family-Oriented Approach

- 1.11 One of the earliest definitions of family policy refers to it as “everything that government does to and for families.”¹¹ However, this view is contested, mainly by those who argue that any policy can affect families, even if it is not specifically targeted at them. Researchers continue to wrestle with the meaning of family policy; views range from a focus on specific programs (e.g. child care and family allowance) aimed at families with dependent children¹² to the wider view that almost all government policies have either a direct or indirect impact on all families.¹³ We argue that adopting either of these extreme positions on family policy would not be useful to our current investigation.
- 1.12 According to the wide definition of family policy, the measures which have been adopted by government, and fall under the label of family policy, could be numerous. Most policies may affect families eventually, either directly or indirectly; for example, environmental policy, consumer policy, and transport policy. Clearly, this broader definition does not assist with the screening of policies which support low-income families.
- 1.13 On the other hand, the narrower perspective restricts family policy to measures directly targeted to a particular type of family, namely those

¹⁰ Vanier Institute of the Family (2004). *Profiling Canadian Families 3*. Ottawa: VIF.

¹¹ Kamerman, S.B., & Kahn, A.J. (1978). *Government and families in fourteen countries*. New York: Columbia University Press.

¹² Gauthier, A.H. (1996). *The state and the family: A comparative analysis of family policies in industrialized countries*. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Cherlin, A. (1988). *The changing American family and public policy*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute; Dempsey, J. (1981). *The family and public policy*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co; Edelman, M.W. (1987). *Families in peril: An agenda for social change*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Scanzoni, J. (1991). Balancing the policy interests of children and adults. In E. Anderson & R. Hula (Eds.), *The reconstruction of family policy*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

families with dependent children; these measures include cash transfers, social services, and other public services, such as education, housing, and medical services. This narrow definition excludes many low-income families, such as families with dependent, elderly members. However, all families that are consistent with our inclusive definition of the family should be included, not only families with dependent children.

- 1.14 In the current study, it is necessary to examine the policies and practices used to support low-income families; in other words, the target unit is the family, not the individual family member. In fact, taking the family as the unit of reference is one of the advantages of family policy, because it facilitates comprehensive analysis in which all policies can be examined in terms of the fundamental question as to whether they take the individual or the family as the unit of reference. One typical example is the regulation, in Hong Kong's social security system, that family size is taken into account in assessing the level of benefits that families receive. This advantage of family policy could be interpreted as one of the characteristics used to identify a family-oriented policy or measure. In other words, family-oriented policy very often takes the family as the unit of service recipient, instead of the individual family member. One policy implication of this characteristic is a more comprehensive and well-coordinated package of benefits and services for needy families.
- 1.15 The family approach should acknowledge the power of family ties and also the variety of ways in which family members are constrained by their family context and responsibilities. Consequently, it must focus on the coordination of services and benefits in order to achieve the objective of a policy. For instance, if we believe that the employment of lone parents or mothers in low-income families is the key to reducing child poverty in these families, then the government must not only provide one-stop employment service and training facilities to increase the employability of mothers, but also deliver timely, high-quality, and affordable child care services for these families. Focusing on comprehensive and well-coordinated services or benefits is one of the characteristics of the family approach.
- 1.16 Another merit of family-oriented policy is that it cuts across different policy domains (e.g. welfare policy, population policy, and health policy) in order to overcome the usual boundaries between policies that are often administrative in origin.¹⁴ These policies promote more integrative conceptualizations and approaches to human needs, because families transcend categorical approaches to human needs such as health, education, housing, employment, and security. Families, like miniature social welfare states, provide all of these

¹⁴ Daly, M., & Clavero, S. (2002). *Contemporary family policy: A comparative review of Ireland, France, Germany, Sweden, and the UK*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration for the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

services at the same time. Therefore, we looked for family-oriented policies that could provide multidimensional measures to meet the multidimensional needs of family members.

- 1.17 Before continuing to outline the characteristics of the family-oriented policy, in particular the anti-poverty measures examined in this study, we identify four principles underlying family policy: a) the functions of the family are to provide care and nurture for its members; b) the place of the family in a society is as the fundamental unit for stability and well-being, membership of which confers rights, duties, and responsibilities; c) the nature of family relationships requires stability and continuity;¹⁵ and d) family policy is expected to promote independence and self-reliance, develop mutual help during hardship, and utilize existing social capital fully.
- 1.18 Following these principles, two characteristics are identified that distinguish family-oriented policies from others. The family-oriented policy must support families in carrying out their functions, namely providing care and nurture for their members. For example, the aging population is not only a challenge to policy makers but also an opportunity for the successful implementation of family-oriented policy. Horizontal bonds within families have grown more fragile, as modern children have fewer siblings than their predecessors. On the other hand, nowadays, as society is aging rapidly, more generations can benefit from each other. The vertical bonds within families have been strengthened; for example, it has become more and more popular for grandparents to become part of small children's lives. Therefore, although horizontal bonds have become more brittle, it should be possible to facilitate the promotion of important vertical bonds in different ways. Policy makers must devise measures to facilitate the building and strengthening of vertical bonding, especially in an aging society such as Hong Kong. This would be consistent with the core value, often shared and accepted by the whole of society, of self-reliance that must be considered in policy formulation relating to the family.
- 1.19 The personal freedom of families and citizens must be respected, as must the families' responsibility for the decisions they take and the way they conduct themselves. Most families have the resources to solve everyday problems and challenges. Parents are responsible for seeing that their children receive a good and safe upbringing. It is not the place of officialdom to usurp the family's obligations and responsibilities, but to be there to help when the family's own resources are insufficient. Also, in order to promote continuity and stability in family life, family-oriented measures must build resilience in families, so that families will not be broken up due to their problems

¹⁵ Daly, M., & Clavero, S. (2002). *Contemporary family policy: A comparative review of Ireland, France, Germany, Sweden and the UK*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration for the Department of Social and Family Affairs.

and challenges; for example, measures that could facilitate mutual help between family members during times of hardship and the accumulation of social capital strengthen the resilience of families.

- 1.20 To summarize, there are five characteristics of a family-oriented policy: a) the measure takes the family as the unit of reference; b) the measure supports the family in caring for and nurturing its members; c) the measure builds up resilience in the family so as to equip it well to stand up to the vicissitudes of life; d) the measure is multidimensional as it cuts across different policy domains to meet the needs of different family members; and e) the measure emphasizes the coordination and integration of services and benefits.
- 1.21 It must be emphasized strongly that the current study is not a study in which all of the anti-poverty measures used in the six selected countries were examined. We only examined anti-poverty measures which possess at least three or more of the above characteristics of the family approach; in other words, the measures are family-oriented. Another obvious characteristic used to select the policies and practices is that the target of these measures is the poor, including those who receive means-tested welfare. We identified and examined intensively the measures with these characteristics and evaluated their effectiveness. Finally, we evaluated whether the measures are applicable to the Hong Kong context.

CHAPTER TWO

AUSTRALIA

National Strategy for Anti-Poverty

- 2.1 In 2004, the Community Affairs Reference Committee in the Senate of the Parliament of Australia made public an anti-poverty report in which numerous policy recommendations were made.¹⁶ However, the Australian Government's response to these recommendations was that most of the policies proposed could only be implemented by crowding out other existing government programs or by substantially increasing tax. More importantly, the government refused to adopt these policy recommendations because they had not been proven to be effective in reducing poverty.¹⁷ In other words, the Australian Government takes a cautious attitude towards launching anti-poverty measures, due mainly to its concerns regarding their financial sustainability and effectiveness.
- 2.2 Also, the Australian Government refused to set a measurable anti-poverty target, as suggested by the Committee. It argued that it could be counterproductive if quick-fix policies are set without careful deliberation, because the adoption of simple targets might result in measures which are devised simply to achieve those targets, without tackling the fundamental causes of the poverty problem.
- 2.3 Despite all of these negative responses to the Committee's report, the Australian Government had actually laid down four closely connected and mutually reinforcing pillars for poverty eradication in 2001:¹⁸ the first pillar is to make the most of the sustainable rate of economic growth that provides jobs for those who are poor due to unemployment; the second is to strengthen the employability of the poor through training; the third is to encourage local governments, institutions, and donors to be more accountable to the poor; and the final pillar is to reduce the vulnerability of the poor. Support for families is one of five key areas for anti-poverty measures,¹⁹ as the Australian Government recognizes that

¹⁶ Parliament of Australia (2007). *Inquires into poverty and financial hardship*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/.

¹⁷ Australian Government (2005). *Government response to: Senate community affairs references committee report on poverty and financial hardship*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/gov_response.pdf.

¹⁸ Commonwealth of Australia (2007). *Poverty reduction*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.globaleducation.edna.edu.au/globaled/go/pid/181>; Downer, A. (2001). *Speech for Minister for Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved September 10, 2008 from http://www.ausaid.gov.au/media/release.cfm?BC=Speech&ID=7294_8773_8829_827_12_15.

¹⁹ The other four areas are: education and training, health, employment services, and homelessness.

the family is not only the single most important unit of social stability, but is also responsible for the care and nurture of its children and the prevention of intergenerational poverty.²⁰

Employment Service Plus Child Care

- 2.4 The Australian Government recognizes that being employed is one of the best means of reducing poverty and, in its 2005-06 Budget, the “Welfare to Work” package budget was AUD389.7 million over a period of four years. The aim of the package is to increase the labor force participation of parents with children aged between 6 and 15, through a wide range of services and benefits, including skills assessment, payment of course fees to upgrade skills, support and mentoring, and help with finding child care arrangements.²¹ It also changed the welfare payment arrangements, introduced new work or education requirements to enhance the employment prospects of these parents, and made other welfare benefits in cash available to them.²²
- 2.5 High-quality but affordable child care is an integrated component of this welfare-to-work package, as the government acknowledged that the prompt provision of quality and affordable child care is crucial to allowing parents to participate in the labor market. From 1997-98 through to 2004-05, the number of high-quality child care places rose by over 80% to 770,000 with funding of AUD9.5 billion from the government. In 2005-06, a further AUD266 million, over four years, was set aside to provide an additional 87,800 child care places. In addition, the introduction of Child Care Benefits in 2000 made certain that child care became affordable for parents.
- 2.6 This welfare-to-work package, especially with its child care arrangements for low-income parents, satisfies all five characteristics of a family-oriented measure: it takes the family as the unit of reference; it supports the family in caring for and nurturing its members; it provides multidimensional services to family members (upgrade skills training, employment services, and child care); it builds up resilience in families;

²⁰ Australian Government (2005). *Government response to: Senate community affairs references committee report on poverty and financial hardship*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/gov_response.pdf.

²¹ Australian Government (2008). *What is employment preparation?* Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.workplace.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/9029ACAD-CF33-4D6E-87B7-7AB01F57A21E/0/JN_What_is_Employment_Preparation.pdf.

²² Australian Government (2005). *Government response to: Senate community affairs references committee report on poverty and financial hardship*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/gov_response.pdf.

and it emphasizes the coordination of services (employment service and child care).

Early Childhood Intervention

- 2.7 Another active policy initiated by the Australian Government is the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy; this strategy is perceived as an investment in children living in low-income families in order to improve their life chances in adulthood and to prevent intergenerational poverty. This strategy is founded on convincing empirical evidence relating to the importance of early childhood for physical health, cognition and learning, and social and emotional development, and on a number of early childhood interventions that have been demonstrated to be effective in buffering the harmful effects of disadvantaged circumstances on children living in low-income families.²³ The original strategy, for 2000 to 2004, was launched in 2000 with funding of more than AUD226 million. In 2004, the renewed strategy for 2004 to 2009 was launched with four streams: a) communities for children; b) early childhood – invest to grow; c) local answers; and d) choice and flexibility in child care. We scrutinized the first two streams, as they are directly related to the subject under discussion in this current study.
- 2.8 The first stream of the new strategy, namely communities for children, encompasses four key action areas: a) enhancing early child and maternal health through pregnancy and post-natal care, promoting healthy lifestyles, and providing support for children with additional needs; b) improving early learning and care by means of well-integrated service delivery from birth and from the beginning of schooling; c) providing child-friendly communities by strengthening relationships and giving parenting support; and d) developing partnerships with service providers and communities. A total of AUD142 million was received by 45 disadvantaged communities to support local service providers in implementing activities and programs such as home visiting, early learning and literacy programs, early development of social and communication skills, parenting and family support programs, child nutrition, and community events to celebrate the importance of children, families, and the early years.
- 2.9 Funding of AUD70 million was allocated, for a period of four years, to the second stream, called early childhood – invest to grow, and its aim is to contribute to improved outcomes for young children by means of early childhood intervention. The funds are used to finance national early childhood intervention programs, to financially support the development of innovative models of early childhood programs, and to establish resources or tools for parents, community organizations, and professionals working in the field of early childhood intervention. Two

²³ Brambring, M., Rauh, H., & Beelmann, A. (1996). *Early childhood intervention: theory, evaluation, and practice*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.

specific programs illustrate that most of these programs are family-oriented. Firstly, The Benevolent Society received around AUD2.5 million under this stream to run a program, called Partnerships in Early Childhood (PIEC), that links families to support services and programs. PIEC recognizes that child care centers are ideal places to connect families and it uses the centers creatively as a bridge to other community services. In addition, PIEC espouses strong and healthy partnerships between families, communities, and child care center staff; a child and family worker is assigned to a child care center to work with the children, their families, and the staff, in order to find out how the child care setting can provide the best support for families. PIEC provides directly accessible information, resources, and opportunities that enable families to obtain more parenting support and to address their needs.²⁴

- 2.10 PIEC also provides training to the staff of child care centers to enhance their knowledge of children's social and emotional needs. The program also provides individual counseling and support for parents; its parenting sessions emphasize the needs and strengths of parents, supported playgroups, and mutual support groups for parents, as well as making referrals and links to other local service units and community supports.
- 2.11 The goals of the second program, Good Beginnings, are to build the resilience of families with infants and young children, to improve parenting capability, and to make parents more familiar with local community support services. Working in the communities, the programs strive to provide secure environments for families, to promote the development of services, and to establish stronger support networks by creating partnerships with government, community agencies, and businesses. One major reason for its success is its adaptability in devising novel solutions to parenting issues through close collaboration with local communities.²⁵
- 2.12 The Australian Government has provided AUD3 million over four years to allow Good Beginnings to expand the most successful of its early intervention parenting programs. This funding allows for the further

²⁴ Department of Families, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008). *Partnership in early childhood program*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-early_childhood_benevolent_society.htm; Benevolent Society (2008). *Partnerships in early childhood*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.bensoc.asn.au/search/result.cfm?item_id=EEE8B401A8E9AE434720F1C6347AF279.

²⁵ Department of Families, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008). *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004-2009 – Early Childhood Invest to Grow*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/aboutfacs/programs/sfsc-ec_good_beginnings_aust.htm; Good Beginnings (2008). *What type of Australia do we want?* Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.goodbeginnings.net.au>.

development and extension of the program to rural or suburban areas currently lacking this type of service. A wide range of services are delivered by the program: a) home visiting programs utilizing volunteers and professionals; b) parenting groups which provide both parenting information and enhance social network support among parents; c) age-appropriate development play and learning sessions for children and their parents; and d) programs that involve fathers, such as the Dads Connect program that provides antenatal support to fathers.

- 2.13 These two programs fulfill all five characteristics of a family-oriented measure for low-income families, as they take the family as the unit of reference, support families in caring for and nurturing their members, build up resilience in families, provide multidimensional services, and emphasize the coordination and integration of services. As most programs in the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009 are still in the implementation stage, no evaluation findings are available at present, but almost all of them have an evaluation component built-in to assess the impact of the programs on recipients.
- 2.14 On the other hand, in the original Strategy 2000-2004, evaluation was undertaken at the project level and a qualitative analysis was conducted, based on both quantitative and qualitative data provided by administrators of each of the 635 projects.²⁶ The results indicated positive outcomes in seven areas: a) participation and enhanced trust; b) awareness and development of partnerships; c) greater choice, understanding, skills, and capacity for initiative; d) demonstration of understanding, skills, and capacity; e) family and community trust, resilience, and adaptability; f) an environment in which communities drive their own solutions; and g) stronger families and communities.

Summary

- 2.15 In the past decade, Australia has enjoyed a strong economy and a high employment rate. Despite this, the government has neither formulated an anti-poverty target nor set up a specialized agency to develop and implement anti-poverty measures. The Australian Government is skeptical about setting an anti-poverty target because it believes that it may lead to policies being aimed at simply reaching, or getting closer to, the target, rather than confronting the causes of poverty.²⁷ To reduce poverty, the Australian Government's emphasis is on the welfare-to-work approach, and supporting the family is recognized as one of the

²⁶ Department of Families, Communities Services (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000 – 2004: Final Report*. Retrieved October 17, 2008, from <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/u2zpfyikhvq6.pdf>.

²⁷ Australian Government (2005). *Government response to: Senate community affairs references committee report on poverty and financial hardship*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/clac_ctte/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/gov_response.pdf.

key areas in which resources are allocated to help people living in low-income families. However, to avoid the labeling effect, the provision of most programs is universal in nature and provides a second tier, with more intensive services, to help those who are more needy. In Australia, the family approach is adopted in two national anti-poverty measures, namely the welfare-to-work package, with child care arrangements, and the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy that funds local programs, especially those involving early childhood intervention coupled with parenting skills training.

CHAPTER THREE

CANADA

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 3.1 During the past 25 years, the Canadian Government has managed to reduce significantly the poverty rates among older persons by means of a generous pension plan. However, during the same period, the poverty rates for all other age groups remained almost the same. In addition, the House of Commons' pledge to eradicate child poverty by 2000 was shown to be a hollow promise.²⁸ One possible reason for this may be the fact that Canada has no national anti-poverty strategy.
- 3.2 On the other hand, two provinces of Canada, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, have formulated their own provincial strategies against poverty. As Newfoundland and Labrador only developed its strategy in 2006 and its strategy is similar to the one in Quebec, we decided to focus on Quebec's strategy. In Quebec, the anti-poverty strategy was developed through a bottom-up process as it was initiated by a 1998 anti-poverty movement that was organized by 30 provincial organizations and 15 regional groups.²⁹ The movement brought in new legislation in 2002, entitled the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*.³⁰ This law required the establishment of an advisory committee, a research centre, and a fund dedicated to anti-poverty purposes; it also called for the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity to submit annual reports to the government on the progress of the measures implemented under the anti-poverty action plan. Quebec's overall anti-poverty target is to achieve one of the lowest levels of poverty among industrialized societies by 2013.
- 3.3 The provincial government also believes that it is imperative to ensure that policies against poverty are consistent and coherent³¹. Therefore, in the Second Annual Report on the Action Plan, a poverty-proofing measure was enforced so that, when making proposals to the provincial

²⁸ National Council of Welfare. (2007). *Solving poverty: Four cornerstones of a workable national strategy for Canada*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/documents/researchpublications/ResearchProjects/NationalAntiPovertyStrategy/2007Report-SolvingPoverty/ReportENG.pdf>.

²⁹ National Council of Welfare. (2007). *Solving poverty: Four cornerstones of a workable national strategy for Canada*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/documents/researchpublications/ResearchProjects/NationalAntiPovertyStrategy/2007Report-SolvingPoverty/ReportENG.pdf>.

³⁰ Library of Parliament (2007). *Poverty reduction strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0723-e.pdf>.

³¹ Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (2008). *Year two report – government action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/grands-dossiers/lutte-contre-la-pauvrete/plan_en.asp.

government, government departments and agencies must appraise how their proposed measures might affect the poor.³² In the first year following the launch of the action plan, a research center was established and an advisory committee was created to advise the Minister of Employment and Social Solidarity on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the strategy to combat poverty. The advisory committee also monitors government policies to ensure that they are making progress in relation to the poverty reduction agenda, and follows developments in the communities affected by poverty.³³

- 3.4 In 2004, the Government of Quebec announced the first national action plan against poverty, with funding of CAD2.5 billion over the next five years. The objectives of the plan are as follows: a) to ameliorate the lives of individuals living in low-income families through the indexation of welfare benefits, increasing the accessibility of affordable public housing, and the implementation of welfare-to-work initiatives; b) to avert poverty by increasing the minimum wage, developing quality early learning intervention and child care services, and supporting literacy programs in underprivileged areas; c) to engage society as a whole in this exercise; and d) to ensure consistent and coherent action in combating poverty.³⁴
- 3.5 It is still too early to assess the outcome of Quebec's anti-poverty policy goals, but, according to the available data, the proportion of people living on low incomes in the province dwindled between 1997 and 2005. However, much of this improvement in the poverty rate has been the result of the economic growth that has occurred in Quebec, and only people who are capable of integrating into the labor market have been able to take advantage of this phenomenon. Other factors contributing to the decrease in the number of poor people include the impact of employability measures, the measures for assisting low-paid workers, and family assistance initiatives.³⁵

Employment Service Plus Child Care

- 3.6 The Canadian Government not only recognizes the long-term consequences of children living in low-income families, both for the

³² Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (2006). *Year two report – government action plan to combat poverty and social exclusion*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/publications/pdf/ADMIN_bilan-plan-action_annee2_en.pdf.

³³ Library of Parliament (2007). *Poverty reduction strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0723-e.pdf>.

³⁴ Library of Parliament (2007). *Poverty reduction strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0723-e.pdf>.

³⁵ Library of Parliament (2007). *Poverty reduction strategies in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0723-e.pdf>.

children and for society in general, but also supports the view that low-income families are better off when parents have jobs. The National Child Benefit (NCB) Initiative is designed to reduce child poverty by delivering cash benefits to families in need, providing services to address the child care problems that are responsible for the difficulties faced by parents in entering the labor market, and enhancing the coordination and integration of government programs and services.³⁶ One important feature of this initiative is that it guarantees that families are never worsen off as a result of entering the workforce by subtracting the NCB benefits on a dollar-for-dollar basis from employment income so that the total income from the NCB benefits and employment remained at the same level before they worked.³⁷ The goal of this arrangement is to overcome the so-called “Welfare Wall” which refers to the disincentive effects of welfare payment on entering the workforce.

- 3.7 To accompany this initiative, the provinces and territories made a commitment to reinvest the savings resulting from such offset provisions (e.g. in additional program activities) and to explore whether they could make still further investments, above and beyond the welfare savings. Such incremental investments and reinvestments were to be focused on provincial and territorial programs aimed at providing additional assistance to low-income families with children. These services included the following: a) Child Benefits and Earned Income Supplements; b) Child Care or Day Care Initiatives that improve access to affordable child care in order to assist in the transition to work; c) Early Childhood Services and Children-at-Risk Services; and d) Supplementary Health Benefits.³⁸
- 3.8 Research findings strongly indicate that the NCB Initiative has had considerable positive effects in reducing both the incidence of low-income families with children and the harshness of low-income conditions for those families.³⁹ If the NCB Initiative had not been introduced, simulation results indicated that, in 2003, there would have been 487,400 low-income families with 983,200 children, accounting for 12.9% of all Canadian families with children. In fact, there were only 426,900 low-income families, with 824,200 children, in 2003, representing 11.3% of all families with children. Therefore, in 2003, the NCB Initiative was responsible for preventing an estimated 60,500

³⁶ The National Child Benefit (2008). *What is National Child Benefit?* Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/thenational1.shtml>.

³⁷ Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (2005). *Evaluation of the National Child Benefit Initiative: Synthesis report*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/SP-AH215/english/SP-AH-215-10-04E.pdf>.

³⁸ The National Child Benefit (2008). *Description of reinvestments*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from <http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/progdesc.shtml>.

³⁹ Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services (2005). *Evaluation of National Child Benefit Initiative: Synthesis report*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/SP-AH215/english/page00.shtml>.

families, with 159,000 children, from living in low-income circumstances.⁴⁰ However, there is evidence to suggest that the NCB Initiative had an inconsistent (including positive and negative) impact in terms of promoting attachment to the labor market. On the positive side, it was found that the percentage of low-income families in which at least one parent was employed increased from 55.7% in 1996 to 68.6% in 2003. On the negative side, the NCB initiative may reduce the number of working hours of employed parents.

- 3.9 The NCB Initiative is also consistent with the family approach, as it perceives the whole family as its recipient; it assists families in taking care of their children; it involves different types of needs in employment, health, and child care; and it emphasizes the synergy between programs and avoids duplication of services

Early Childhood Intervention

- 3.10 In addition to the NCB Initiative, the Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) is also family-oriented; this provides long-term financial support to community coalitions that deliver programs addressing the health and development of children, aged six and below, who are living in conditions of risk. It recognizes that communities have the ability to identify and respond to the needs of children, and it places a strong emphasis on partnerships and community capacity building.⁴¹
- 3.11 CAPC projects provide parents with the support and information they need to raise their children. Their programs include established models such as family resource centers, parenting classes, parent-child groups, and home visiting, as well as innovative programs, such as street-level programs for substance abusing mothers. One of its target groups is children living in low-income families. In 2001-02, there were 464 CAPC projects, with an annual budget of CAD59.5 million, reaching a total of over 50,000 children and over 48,000 parents or caregivers.⁴² The common principles used to develop CAPC projects are as follows: a) children as the primary consideration; b) strengthening and supporting families; c) equity and accessibility of services; d) partnership and collaboration with parents, families, communities, governments, and

⁴⁰ National Child Benefit (2007). *National Child Benefit progress report 2005*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.nationalchildbenefit.ca/ncb/Progress_Reports/2005/pdf/ncb_progress_report_2005.pdf.

⁴¹ Public Health Agency of Canada (2008). *Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/capc_goals_e.html.

⁴² Public Health Agency of Canada (2008). *Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/capc_goals_e.html.

service providers; and e) community based.⁴³

- 3.12 CAPC is managed by administrative protocols, signed at ministerial level, that identify funding priorities and specify the terms and conditions for administering projects in each province or territory. It is jointly managed by the federal government and the provincial or territorial governments through provincially based Joint Management Committees (JMCs) that include representatives from provincial or territorial ministries and community organizations. The JMCs determine how best to address provincial or territorial priorities and allocate financial resources accordingly. As a result, there are significant differences between the provinces and territories in terms of project size, sponsorship, and geographic distribution of projects.
- 3.13 In an evaluation of 40 CAPC projects, 87% of respondents agreed that their involvement with CAPC had brought positive changes in their lives. This is a very remarkable finding, as about 75% of these respondents were new participants in CAPC projects, and therefore they might not have been involved long enough to show the full extent of the changes that could result from these programs.⁴⁴
- 3.14 Two programs funded by CAPC were selected to demonstrate that most CAPC programs utilize the family approach. Family Place is a center-based service, started in 1994, that uses a three-pronged approach: parent focused, child focused, and family focused. In the first approach, focusing on parents, the center has developed its own parenting program and stress management program for parents. A major module of the child-focused program consists of the School Readiness Program for children and an early literacy program. The family-focused program involves drop-in and playgroup programs. This service encourages parental involvement by recruiting parents as volunteers to help carry out the programs, and the centre provides early childhood intervention for those with special needs through home visits and programs for prenatal mothers.⁴⁵
- 3.15 Kids R First offers a wide range of programs and supports aimed at parents and children, and a family resource center model is used. All

⁴³ Public Health Agency of Canada (1998). *Stronger families: Healthy children*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/publications/pdf/strong_families_healthy_children_ca_pc_e.pdf.

⁴⁴ Public Health Agency of Canada (1997). *Moving along, growing strong: The final report of the Atlantic Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) regional evaluation*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/atlantic/Publications/Moving_along/moving_1_997_e.pdf.

⁴⁵ Public Health Agency of Canada (2008). *Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/capc_family_e.html.

services at Kids R First are free and free transportation is provided for those without cars or who are unable to pay bus fares, in order to make the services more accessible to low-income families. The program offers a parenting program, prenatal support, emergency respite for post-natal mothers, and a cooking program to teach nutrition and healthy eating. In addition, Kids R First has developed Parents and Tots, a bridging early childhood program aimed at providing a stimulating environment for the development of children, aged between six months and two years, until the time that they are old enough for other literacy programs.⁴⁶

- 3.16 As is illustrated by both Family Place and Kids R First, most programs funded by CAPC utilize the family approach, as they perceive the whole family as their recipients, they assist families to take care of their children, they build up resilience in families, and they provide multidimensional services to members of families in order to maintain the physical and mental health of parents and their children.

Best Start in Toronto

- 3.17 In addition to these two national programs, namely the NCB Initiative and CAPC, another local program, based in Toronto, called Best Start also adopts a family approach to helping low-income families. This program provides support and help to children, aged six and below, and to their families by providing them with a wide range of well-integrated services. The objectives of Best Start are to strengthen early learning and child care services, to enhance healthy development during children's first years, and to support parents in reconciling work and family responsibilities during their children's development.⁴⁷ A total of CAD125 million was provided by the Province of Ontario for Toronto's Best Start for the years 2006-08.⁴⁸ In 2007, Toronto's Best Start Implementation Steering Committee (ISC) conducted an evaluation,⁴⁹ and the positive comments received from educators and service providers reflected the success of this program.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Public Health Agency of Canada (2008). *Community Action Program for Children (CAPC)*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/capc_kids_e.html.

⁴⁷ City of Toronto (2006). *Introducing Best Start in Toronto*. Retrieved July 23, 2008, from http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs/bs_brochure.pdf.

⁴⁸ City of Toronto (2006). *Best Start Plan: Toronto vision for children*. Retrieved July 23, 2008, from http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs/bsn_vision.pdf.

⁴⁹ City of Toronto (2007). *Fact Sheet: Best Start Survey Report, Fall/Winter 2007*. Retrieved July 23, 2008, from http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs/bs_survey_fact_sheet.pdf.

⁵⁰ City of Toronto (2007). *Best Start: Toronto vision for children*. Retrieved July 23, 2008, from http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs/bs_newsletter_june2007.pdf.

Summary

- 3.18 In the past 25 years, the Canadian Government has failed to reduce the poverty rates for almost all age groups, except the aged population. A plausible explanation for this may be related to the fact that, like Australia, Canada has not developed its own national anti-poverty strategy. However, two of its provinces have developed their own anti-poverty strategy, and Quebec's strategy is particularly insightful in its approach. This strategy was established by legislation, has the support of an advisory committee, and has been taken up by a minister. It has clear, measurable goals and a poverty-proofing measure, and has gained a financial commitment from the provincial government. In addition, two national programs, namely the NCB Initiative and CAPC, and one local program, Best Start in Toronto, are also considered as family-oriented measures which target low-income families.

CHAPTER FOUR

IRELAND

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 4.1 In 1997, Ireland's national government adopted a concerted anti-poverty strategy, namely the National Anti Poverty Strategy (NAPS), which was formulated as an outcome of the United Nations Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995. The NAPS was conceived through an Inter-Departmental Policy Committee in which all relevant government departments participated and other social partners were consulted.⁵¹
- 4.2 After a comprehensive investigation of the evidence on the nature, extent, and causes of poverty in Ireland, the NAPS was created with clear anti-poverty benchmarks across a number of areas, including income, education (e.g. literacy level and graduation rates), employment (unemployment rates), health, and housing, as well as among different target groups, including children, women, older people, vulnerable urban and rural dwellers, people with disabilities, and ethnic minority groups.
- 4.3 In Ireland, a quantified overall anti-poverty target was set to reduce the percentage of consistently poor within the population from 9-15% (1994 figures) to 5-10% of the population between 1997 and 2007.⁵² Consistent poverty is defined as earning less than 70% of the median income and being deprived of basic necessities. The overall poverty target set for the period between 1997 and 2007 was reached by 1999 and subsequently the anti-poverty target was amended to reducing the consistently poor percentage to less than 2% and eventually to eradicate consistent poverty.
- 4.4 The achievement and success of the NAPS are the result of a number of factors.⁵³ These factors include the growth in the Irish economy and the associated growth in employment, the active employment support

⁵¹ Department of Taoiseach (2001). *Review of National Anti-Poverty Strategy*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/ReviewOfNationalAntiPovertyStrategy.pdf.

⁵² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2002). *Replies by the Government of Ireland to the list of issues (E/C.12/Q/IRE/2) taken up in connection with the consideration of the Second periodic report of IRELAND concerning the rights referred to in articles 1-15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights (E/1990/6/Add.29)*. Retrieved December 5, 2008, from [http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/7cec89369c43a6dfc1256a2a0027ba2a/a1c6e2d7546523dec1256b7a003f5639/\\$FILE/Ireland3.PDF](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/7cec89369c43a6dfc1256a2a0027ba2a/a1c6e2d7546523dec1256b7a003f5639/$FILE/Ireland3.PDF).

⁵³ Australian Council of Social Services (2004). *International comparisons of anti-poverty plans – lessons or Australia*. ACOSS paper No. 366.

programs that have assisted people living in poverty to participate in the labor market, the maintenance of income support welfare payments for those who are able to work, active involvement of the community and voluntary sector, the provision of a strong consultative mechanism and infrastructure measures, including the implementation of poverty proofing,⁵⁴ and the establishment of the Combat Poverty Agency.⁵⁵ Moreover, because the overall level of expenditure for these measures is substantial, it needs a strong commitment and an assessment of financial sustainability from the government.

- 4.5 Since 1987, the Irish Government has adopted a government model of social partnership and the coalition comprises representatives from the trade unions, farmers, employers, the community, and the voluntary sector. This coalition provides an excellent platform for consultation on and the implementation of the NAPS. In the years following the introduction of the NAPS in 1997, Ireland experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth that underpinned the positive results of the strategy.⁵⁶
- 4.6 In 1998, poverty proofing was inserted into the NAPS. This is a process whereby all government departments are required to systematically examine all of their policies and programs, in order to assess their impact on poverty and inequality.⁵⁷ The Combat Poverty Agency⁵⁸ is a state agency that was established to prevent and eliminate poverty and social exclusion, and it is responsible for supporting the implementation of the NAPS at local, national, and European levels. The agency's specific roles involve research into the causes and extent of poverty, the development and evaluation of public services and area-based programs (poverty proofing), strengthening the capacity of the community development sector, and the general promotion of anti-poverty issues.

⁵⁴ National Economic and Social Council (2001). *Review of the poverty proofing process*. Dublin: NESCC. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.nesc.ie/dynamic/docs/40580_povertysproofing_no10.pdf.

⁵⁵ The Combat Poverty Agency was established in 1986 under the Combat Poverty Act to advise the Irish Government on the prevention and elimination of poverty; it also initiates and evaluates measures for tackling poverty. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://combatpoverty.ie/aboutus/index.htm>.

⁵⁶ Department of Taoiseach (2001). *Review of National Anti-Poverty Strategy*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/ReviewOfNationalAntiPovertyStrategy.pdf.

⁵⁷ National Economic and Social Council (2001). *Review of the poverty proofing process*. Dublin: NESCC. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.nesc.ie/dynamic/docs/40580_povertysproofing_no10.pdf.

⁵⁸ The Combat Poverty Agency (2008). *About us*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://combatpoverty.ie/aboutus/index.htm>.

- 4.7 To coordinate the NAPS, six guiding principles were established: a) guaranteeing access and participation for all; b) ensuring the rights of minorities through anti-discrimination measures; c) attending to the gender differences in poverty; d) actively engaging the community and voluntary sector; e) encouraging self-reliance by respecting individual dignity and promoting empowerment; and f) involving appropriate consultative processes.⁵⁹
- 4.8 Although the Irish strategy signals a public policy prioritization of those who are vulnerable members of society, the family approach is not explicitly utilized in its National Anti-Poverty Strategy. This is despite the fact that Ireland has long been a traditional and conservative Catholic society in which the family is perceived as a natural, primary, and fundamental unit group of society and is highly appreciated.⁶⁰ As a matter of fact, quite apart from its anti-poverty campaign, the Irish Government has set up an agency, called the Family Support Agency, which aims to support families, to uphold stability in family life, and to prevent divorce through family mediation services, relationship counseling, and parenting education.⁶¹

Early Childhood Intervention

- 4.9 We identified one program, called Family Literacy, that is aimed to improve the lives of parents and children through the joy of reading; to boost their literacy skills, attitudes, values, and behaviors; and to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.⁶² The targets of the program are children, their parents or caregivers, and other key family members.⁶³
- 4.10 The program is focused on the needs and concerns of the whole family and often it contains two components. The first component is either a formal or informal educational program to improve children's literacy; the second component focuses on parenting skills. The programs have been developed in various venues with the cooperation of adult education services, schools, libraries, and community projects; courses vary in relation to the contexts and the learners involved, and many

⁵⁹ Department of the Taoiseach (2001). *Review of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/attached_files/Pdf%20files/ReviewOfNationalAntiPovertyStrategy.pdf.

⁶⁰ Evans, M.D.R., Kelley, J., & Hayes, B.C. (2000). Family values and labor force participation: Ireland in international perspective. *Gender Issues*, 18, 51-88.

⁶¹ Department of Social and Family Affairs (2008). *Overview*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.fsa.ie/about/about.html>.

⁶² The National Adult Agency Literacy (2008). *Family literacy*. Retrieved October 17, 2008, from http://www.nala.ie/index.cfm/section/page/ext/Fam_lit_prog/.

⁶³ The National Adult Agency Literacy (2004). *Working together: Approaches to Family Literacy*. Dublin: The National Adult Literacy Agency.

programs involve these groups working in partnership.⁶⁴ There are three types of programs: short outreach courses for learners who are not familiar with adult education, programs which focus on specific skills, and intensive family literacy and numeracy programs.

- 4.11 An evaluation of a pilot study demonstrated the positive impact of the program on almost all of the participants and their families. Many participants, especially those from ethnic minorities, suggested that the benefits of the program extended further into their communities. Participants also indicated that mutual support groups were formed among mothers on the program.⁶⁵ Although evaluation is encouraged on the program level, national level evaluation is not available. This program is family-oriented, as it takes the family as the unit of service recipient, it helps parents to care for their children, and it satisfies the different needs of family members including children and parents (for their parenting skill).
- 4.12 Recently, in 2006, another program, called the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children, was established by the Irish Government to improve outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas through more innovation, effective planning, and the integration and delivery of services.⁶⁶ This program provides financial resources to local organizations to apply and deliver the services. The government has formed a partnership with the Atlantic Philanthropies to fund this program and a total fund of up to €36 million has been made available for allocation among successful projects. One project with a strong community commitment to improving outcomes for children in an area of severe disadvantage was identified, namely the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) Tallaght.
- 4.13 CDI Tallaght utilizes the family approach and has formulated a 10-year strategy to enhance the health, safety, and learning of the children of Tallaght West and to increase their sense of belonging in their own communities. More importantly, the strategy also proposes to improve family outcomes by improving parent-child relationships and providing parenting courses.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ The National Adult Agency Literacy (2004). *Working together: Approaches to Family Literacy*. Dublin: The National Adult Literacy Agency.

⁶⁵ The National Adult Agency Literacy (2005). *Evaluation report: NALA Health Literacy/Family Literacy Pilot Project*. Dublin: Unique Perspectives.

⁶⁶ Department of Health and Children (2008). *Prevention and intervention programme*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.omcya.ie/viewdoc.asp?fn=%2Fdocuments%2Fpolicy%2Fprevproject.htm&mn=polx&nID=3>.

⁶⁷ French, G., & Zappone, K. (2006). *The Childhood Development Initiative: Developing Quality Services*. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from <http://www.cecde.ie/english/pdf/Vision%20into%20Practice/French.pdf>

- 4.14 CDI Tallaght delivers an innovative model of integrated service delivery to children and their parents, as well as to children and parents together. High-quality education, child care, and home visiting services, together with specialist primary health care support in the areas of speech and language development, dental hygiene, nutrition, and psychological assessment, are provided to children.⁶⁸ The program encourages the involvement of parents and provides services to meet their specific parenting and educational needs.⁶⁹ In addition, parents can also engage in self-development and further education.⁷⁰ For children and parents together, focused work on supporting positive interactions and experiencing family days is provided. Clearly, this program is family-oriented because it involves the whole family, provides parenting skills training, builds up resilience by improving the child-parent relationship, focuses on the integration of services, and provides multidimensional services in health and learning.

Summary

- 4.15 In Ireland, although the NAPS does not adopt unequivocally the family approach, its great success is due to a number of reasons, including the growth in the Irish economy and its associated growth in employment, a social consensus, the setting of an explicit and measurable anti-poverty target, a strong determination backed by a financial commitment, the implementation of poverty proofing, and the establishment of the Combat Poverty Agency. Nonetheless, similar to the other countries examined in this study, national, family-oriented, early childhood intervention programs, namely Family Literacy and the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children, have been implemented in Ireland.

⁶⁸ French, G., & Zappone, K. (2006). *The Childhood Development Initiative: Developing Quality Services*. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from <http://www.cecde.ie/english/pdf/Vision%20into%20Practice/French.pdf>.

⁶⁹ French, G., & Zappone, K. (2006). *The Childhood Development Initiative: Developing Quality Services*. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from <http://www.cecde.ie/english/pdf/Vision%20into%20Practice/French.pdf>.

⁷⁰ French, G., & Zappone, K. (2006). *The Childhood Development Initiative: Developing Quality Services*. Retrieved October 17, 2008 from <http://www.cecde.ie/english/pdf/Vision%20into%20Practice/French.pdf>.

CHAPTER FIVE

SINGAPORE

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 5.1 From the perspective of the Singaporean Government, the individual, the family, and the community must collaborate to build up a cohesive and resilient society.⁷¹ Therefore, in Singapore, emphasis is placed on the family working closely together with the individual and community to establish such a society, and the family is perceived as the basic unit of society, in which emotional, social, and financial support are provided to its vulnerable members.
- 5.2 In 2008, the Singaporean Minister of the State for Community Development, Youth, and Sports stated that Singapore must be a society in which: a) children can grow up within a protected environment and receive first-class education; b) youth and adults can actualize their potential and make a contribution to society; c) older adults can experience active aging; and d) the needy can become self-reliant with assistance from a caring community.⁷² However, the role of the Singaporean Government is limited to laying down the overall framework and to mobilizing resources in the community using the Many Helping Hands approach, as it believes it is important that every citizen must be held responsible for his or her own future, that each family must nurture its members, and that the community must be actively involved in supporting the poor.
- 5.3 To be consistent with these foundations of a successful society, the Singaporean Government provides assistance to Singaporeans by strengthening marriages and families, helping those on low incomes, encouraging self-reliance, promoting good social relationships and neighborliness, and empowering the community to help itself. The government accentuates the role of family in providing support to its needy members before the government steps in to assist individuals living in low-income families. Other anti-poverty policies consist of the promotion of self-reliance through employment supportive services and the prevention of intergenerational poverty.
- 5.4 Singapore has developed a range of programs targeted at reducing poverty and disadvantage. Most of these are rendered through the Community Development Councils (CDCs) and there are three pillars to the programs. Firstly, ComCare Self Reliance targets those who are

⁷¹ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Introduction for "Families"*. Retrieved July 31, 2008, from http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/home_main.asp.

⁷² Shoon, Y.F.Y. (2008). *Speech for the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.mcys.gov.sg/MCDSFiles/Speeches/Articles/12-2008.pdf>.

able to work; the Work Support Programme is its major program. Secondly, the targets of ComCare Grow are children; this pillar includes the Health Start Programme (HSP) and other services, such as the center-based Financial Assistance for Childcare, the Kindergarten Financial Assistance Scheme, and the Student Care Fee Assistance Scheme. The benefits that ComCare Grow provides include child care, kindergarten and student care subsidies, and bursaries. Thirdly, the ComCare Enable pillar is targeted at older adults and the disabled, and the CDCs administer these welfare provisions.

Early Childhood Intervention

- 5.5 Under the ComCare Grow pillar, the HSP is a family-oriented measure that provides assistance to children growing up in low-income families. The HSP is designed to serve low-income families with newborn infants or children aged six years and below,⁷³ using a holistic early-intervention approach. Its objectives are to support the family through counseling and family support, to improve parent-child relationships in the family by means of parenting skills training, and to prevent intergenerational poverty by providing early childhood education to children at risk and offering subsidies for preschool education to pay for kindergarten and child care fees. In 2005, 1,200 children received HSP services, with a total funding of SGD24 million.⁷⁴
- 5.6 The HSP began as a pilot program in 2004 and its results were very impressive. An evaluation study indicated that 78% of the children who participated showed an improvement in their development and that the monthly household income of participants increased by 32%.⁷⁵ The increase in household income may have been due to the fact that this program provides subsidies for preschool education and for child care fees to enable the caregivers of children to participate in the labor force market. Consequently, in 2005, from a pilot project serving 350 children, the HSP was expanded by the Minister of State for Community Development, Youth, and Sports to cover 1,200 children. Despite this expansion, it remains a small-scale program.
- 5.7 In order to qualify for the HSP, a family must have children aged six or below who have little or no family or social support or are not receiving

⁷³ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Healthy Start Programme*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv_E_HSP.html.

⁷⁴ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2005). *Speech at the Committee of Supply (MCYS), 11 March 2005, 12pm (MCYS SPEECH NO: 17/2005)*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/corp_speech_story.asp?szMod=corp&szSubMod=speech&qid=1602.

⁷⁵ Speech by Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, Minister of State for Community Development, Youth, and Sports in 2005. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/corp_speech_story.asp?szMod=corp&szSubMod=speech&qid=1602.

preschool education, and a household income of below SGD1,500. In addition to fulfilling the economic resources criteria, a child also must meet a citizenship requirement.

- 5.8 This program is considered to be family-oriented because it takes the family as the unit of reference, it emphasizes the integration of different services, it provides different dimensional services, it builds up resilience through family development, and it supports the family in nurturing its children.

Employment Service Coupled with Child Care

- 5.9 Under the umbrella of ComCare Self Reliance, the Work Support Programme (WSP) also adopts the family approach. The goal of the WSP is to provide assistance to low-income families to enable them to overcome temporary adversity. The program recipients are entitled to vouchers for rent and utilities, cash benefits for basic needs, subsidies for child care and health care service, training grants, and educational assistance. The amount of assistance is assessed and determined by the staff of the Community Development Council on a case-by-case basis.⁷⁶

- 5.10 In addition to these benefits, the program staff develops an action plan for the program recipient and his or her family to implement, so that the recipient eventually will become self-reliant through gainful employment. The action plan may include seeking and keeping employment, prolonging working hours, skills enhancement, and reducing gratuitous expenditures. Program beneficiaries are requested to sign a “letter of undertaking” to demonstrate their commitment to following the action plan and cooperating with the program staff. The program staff meets the recipient on a regular basis to monitor the progress of the action plan’s implementation, and the program can be terminated if the recipient is found not to be cooperating with the program staff or implementing the action plan. The maximum period of the program ranges from 6 to 24 months, depending on the household situation of the recipient.⁷⁷

- 5.11 There are four criteria for WSP eligibility. The first is citizenship. Secondly, the program is means-tested and is available only to families with household incomes below SGD1,500. Thirdly, families must be able to demonstrate that they have little or no family and community support. Lastly, applicants must indicate their willingness to follow an

⁷⁶ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Work Support*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from http://www.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv_E_WS.html.

⁷⁷ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Work Support*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from http://www.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv_E_WS.html.

action plan to become self-reliant. The WSP, like the HPS, is a small program; in 2006, it covered 3,492 families.⁷⁸

- 5.12 The WSP is clearly family-oriented because it helps the whole family, it assists the nurturing of children, it builds resilience in families, it provides multidimensional needs, and it integrates services in different domains. However, no evaluation information related to this program is available.
- 5.13 In addition to ComCare, the Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE) Scheme also uses a family approach to help low-income families. HOPE is a targeted incentive scheme that helps young, low-income families by keeping their expenditure low, so that they can concentrate their resources on their children and prevent intergenerational poverty.⁷⁹ In 2006, 1,673 cases were covered by the scheme; again, this is a small-scale program.⁸⁰
- 5.14 The cash benefits provided by HOPE include educational bursaries for children from pre-school to university level, a housing grant of SGD50,000 to help the family to pay for the home mortgage, a grant of up to SGD10,000 per family to acquire skills training, an incentive of between SGD6,000 to SGD9,000 to encourage a couple to engage in family planning, and a one-off utilities grant of SGD1,000 to help a family offset utilities bills immediately after joining the scheme. In addition, the staffs of the social service agency provide mentoring and family support to HOPE recipients and make referrals to other community resources whenever it is needed.
- 5.15 To be eligible for the HOPE scheme, an applicant must be married with one or two children, the applicant's wife must be aged 35 or below, and the applicant must be employed. The scheme is also means-tested, the household income criteria being the same as for the WSP and the HSP. The applicant must be a citizen of Singapore and his spouse must be either a citizen or a permanent resident of Singapore. It is clear that this program is family-oriented: it perceives the family as the recipient, it helps families to take care of their members, it builds up resilience by improving family support, it provides services in different domains, and it emphasizes the coordination of different services.

⁷⁸ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sport (2008). *Work Support*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from http://www.mcys.gov.sg/web/serv_E_WS.html; Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Statistics – social support*. Retrieved July 30, 2008, from http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/SS_NumberOfBeneficiaries.asp.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Home Ownership Plus Education (HOPE) Scheme*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.mcys.gov.sg/web/HOPE.html>.

⁸⁰ Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (2008). *Statistics for social support*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://app.mcys.gov.sg/web/SS_NumberOfBeneficiaries.asp.

Summary

- 5.16 Singapore acknowledges the importance of the family in its measures to assist its people who live in low-income families. A number of programs found in Singapore are family-oriented and targeted at different problems, such as unemployment and intergenerational poverty. These programs are very often targeted at children, parents, and needy family members, and satisfy the multidimensional needs of the family involved. It must be noted that all of the programs discussed in this report (HSP, WSP, and HOPE) are small-scale measures and most of them do not provide evaluation evidence. Finally, the social security system safety net is much greater in Hong Kong than in Singapore; the Singaporean Government's expenditure on the social security system (called the Public Assistance Scheme) in 2007 was only about 0.25%⁸¹ of what the HKSAR Government spent on its social security system in the 2005-06 financial year.⁸²

⁸¹ Total government expenditure and the government expenditure on welfare assistance, which includes GST credits, Citizens' Consultative Committee (CCC) ComCare Fund, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and the Public Transport Fund, are the estimated figures in financial year 2007. Source: Ministry of Finance. *Budget speech 2007*. Online at: http://www.mof.gov.sg/budget_2007/budget_speech/downloads/FY2007_Budget_Highlights.pdf (February 5, 2008).

⁸² Social Welfare Department (2007). *Social welfare services in figures*. Retrieved July 25, 2008, from http://www.swd.gov.hk/doc/res_stat/2007fig.pdf.

CHAPTER SIX

UNITED KINGDOM

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 6.1 During the period between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, high unemployment in the United Kingdom led to a high poverty rate, especially among children. Based on official figures, the percentage of households with incomes below 50% of the average household income increased from 9% in 1979 to 24% in 1996. More alarmingly, 4.5 million children, constituting almost one-third of British children, were living in these low-income families.⁸³ In 1999, the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, undertook to “eradicate child poverty within a generation.”⁸⁴ Subsequently the 2001 National Action Plan (NAP), coupled with anti-poverty strategies, was developed and implemented.
- 6.2 As in Quebec and Ireland, the British Government introduced a measurable anti-poverty target, with a time schedule to enhance accountability of the policies, but it mainly focused on children. Following Blair’s statement in 1999, Her Majesty’s (HM) Treasury released anti-poverty targets on child poverty with a clear time frame: to reduce child poverty by at least 25% by 2004, to halve child poverty by 2010, and to completely end child poverty by 2020.⁸⁵
- 6.3 The government recognizes the crucial role of parents in taking care of their children and is convinced that parents have a duty in this respect. Therefore, it believes that its role is to provide support for parents so that they can nurture their children as society expects them to.⁸⁶ The anti-poverty strategy used by the government is based on the assumption that employment is the most effective method against poverty.⁸⁷ In addition, the government emphasizes child development, especially for those living in disadvantaged circumstances, and income support for those who are not able to work.
- 6.4 In 2008, the British Government’s policies to reduce the level of poverty rest on four pillars: a) to raise the employment rate of parents who can work by providing employment service and child care; b) to make work

⁸³ Piachaud, D., & Sutherland, H. (2001). Child poverty in Britain and the New Labour Government. *Journal of Social Policy*, 30, 95-118.

⁸⁴ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: Everybody’s business*. Retrieved September 9, 2008 from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud08_childpoverty_1310.pdf.

⁸⁵ HM Treasury (2004). *Child poverty review*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/childpoverty_chap1_290704.pdf.

⁸⁶ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: Everybody’s business*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud08_childpoverty_1310.pdf.

⁸⁷ HM Treasury (2000). *Spending review 2000: Public service agreements 2001-2004*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://archive.treasury.gov.uk/sr2000/sr2000.pdf>.

pay through the National Minimum Wage and the Working Tax Credit and to help families who cannot work through welfare benefits; c) to provide safe and sustainable communities in which families can thrive; and d) to prevent intergenerational poverty by improving opportunities and outcomes for children from low-income families through early childhood intervention.⁸⁸

- 6.5 The British Government has devised a mixture of direct and indirect measures to achieve its anti-poverty targets for children. Direct measures consist of increasing the rates of social welfare benefits; introducing a new financial support, the Child Tax Credit, for children in jobless and low-paid working families; initiating the reform of child support; implementing the Sure Start programs for early childhood intervention; establishing the Children's Fund to prevent future disadvantage; providing the Educational Maintenance Allowance as a full-time schooling allowance; setting up Connexions to provide information, advice, and personal advisers for teenagers; and launching On Track to reduce juvenile delinquency.
- 6.6 The indirect measures, aimed at increasing the human capital of low-income individuals, include: a) New Deal programs to assist unemployed young people, long-term unemployed people, and sole parents to advance into the workforce through substantial investment in work experience and training; b) improved maternity rights and access to parental leave; c) improved rights for part-time workers; d) executing the National Child Care strategy; e) launching the New Deal in communities and employment zones to tackle entrenched unemployment in disadvantaged regions; and f) commencing the Ambition Programme, which is a collaboration between the government, industry, and community sectors to support welfare recipients, through job training, into gainful employment in key industries that are experiencing labor shortages. Of these measures, the New Deal and Sure Start programs are believed to be family-oriented, and therefore these will be discussed in detail.

Employment Services Coupled with Child Care

- 6.7 The objective of Jobcentre Plus – New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP)⁸⁹ is to help and encourage lone parents to get a job, in order to improve their prospects and living standards, by increasing their employability and job readiness.⁹⁰ The targets of the program are lone parents with

⁸⁸ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: Everybody's business*. Retrieved July 28, 2008 from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud08_childpoverty_1310.pdf.

⁸⁹ Department of Work and Pensions (2008). *Information for New Deal or Lone Parents*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/outofworkhelplookingforwork/Getting_job_ready/Programmes_to_get_you_ready/New_Deal/New_Deal_for_Lone_Parents/index.html.

⁹⁰ Department of Work and Pensions. (2005). *Jobcentre Plus evaluation: Summary of*

children aged 16 and below who are unemployed or working less than 16 hours a week. The program gives priority to creating attractive incentives for parents to take up jobs, such as the minimum wage, Child Tax Credits, and earnings disregards.

- 6.8 The NDLP was started as a pilot project in 1997, and became a regular program in 2003. It not only provides £40 a week on top of the salary for one year, but also supports employment through the provision of a personal advisor, a guaranteed job interview, and a work trial. The package of advice and support tailored to the needs of each lone parent includes: a) offering guidance to lone parents on job vacancies; b) elucidating the provision of benefits which help the lone parent to secure employment and assisting in the arrangements for those benefit payments; c) encouraging lone parents to work by explicating the incentives available to them when they begin their job; d) advising on the accessibility of local child care; e) arranging training to upgrade skills and the payment of the Training Premium when the lone parent starts the training; f) developing an action plan with the lone parent so that he or she can follow it in the process of securing employment; and g) assisting lone parents to make the transition from welfare into employment by the use of an in-work support service. The total expenditure for the NDLP in 2006-07 was £41,517,000.⁹¹
- 6.9 The results of a survey of the NDLP recipients in 2004 indicated that 73% of lone parents regarded the personal advisors of the programs as being helpful.⁹² Since October 1998, over half a million lone parents have made the transition from welfare to work with the help of the NDLP, and 60% of these parents have entered sustained employment. Since 1997, the government has invested well over £21 billion in early years and child care services. As a result, the number of registered child care places has more than doubled, so that there is now a registered child care place for 25% of children aged eight and below.⁹³ The NDLP is family-oriented because it perceives the family, especially children and their parents, as its recipients; it makes it easier for parents to take care of their children; it builds up resilience in families; it provides multidimensional services; and it coordinates a wide range of services.

evidence. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep252.pdf>.

⁹¹ Department of Work and Pensions (2007). *Jobcentre Plus: Annual report and accounts 2006 – 2007*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/stellent/groups/jcp/documents/websitecontent/dev_014914.pdf.

⁹² Department of Work and Pensions (2005). *Jobcentre Plus evaluation: Summary of evidence*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2005-2006/rrep252.pdf>.

⁹³ Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007). *The children's plan: Building brighter futures*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/childrensplan/downloads/The_Childrens_Plan.pdf.

Early Childhood Intervention

- 6.10 The British Government recognizes the importance of the intergenerational poverty issue because the harmful impact of childhood poverty is well established and manifests itself in outcomes such as unemployment and low earnings in adulthood. Consequently, the government has pledged to give every child living in a low-income family the best possible start in life by alleviating the negative effects of poverty on children's development and life chances. This is essential to overcome the detrimental effects of growing up in early childhood in poverty, as the first few years in a child's life are vital for healthy child development in every aspect. Therefore, early childhood intervention must be implemented to tackle child poverty by ameliorating some of the immediate negative effects of growing up in poverty and providing poor children with the best possible start in their lives.⁹⁴ Based on this rationale, the Sure Start Local Programme (SSLP) was launched in 1999.
- 6.11 The SSLP was conceived as a means to promote the development and education of children, especially for those living in disadvantaged communities.⁹⁵ Based on the 2000 Comprehensive Spending Review, the Department of Education and Skills invested £1,907 million, during the five-year period since 1999, to support 524 local programs in the most disadvantaged communities with a population of 400,000 pre-school children. All of these programs were developed and implemented with three principles: the encouragement of parental involvement in every aspect of the program, good coordination and integration with existing local services to ensure added value, and all programs being culturally sensitive and avoiding the labeling effect.
- 6.12 The aims of the SSLP are to improve the health status, the capacity for learning, and the social and emotional development of children, and to strengthen families. The SSLP provides five core services: outreach and home visiting, support for families and parents, good-quality child care, primary and community health care, and support for children with specialized needs.⁹⁶ A number of recent studies have assessed the effect of the SSLP by comparing the development of children and families living in SSLP areas to those living in similar, non-SSLP areas.⁹⁷ These studies have shown that three-year-old children in

⁹⁴ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: Everybody's business*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud08_childpoverty_1310.pdf.

⁹⁵ Sure Start (2008). *Local Programmes*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/surestartservices/settings/surestartlocalprogrammes/>.

⁹⁶ Sure Start (2008). *National evaluation report*. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://www.surestart.gov.uk/doc/P0002519.pdf>.

⁹⁷ National Evaluation of Sure Start (2008). *The impact of Sure Start Local Programmes on three year olds and their families*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/documents/activities/impact/41.pdf>.

SSLP areas had better social development than children in similar, non-SSLP areas, and families living in SSLP areas used more child- and family-related services than those living elsewhere.

- 6.13 However, in 2004, the Ten Year Strategy for Childcare⁹⁸ brought a policy change, transforming the SSLP from a targeting program to a universal provision through the Sure Start Children's Centre program. It is proposed that, by 2010, one Sure Start Children's Centre will be established in every community. Sure Start Children's Centres in the most disadvantaged areas offer the following services: good-quality early learning coupled with full day-care provision for children, good-quality teaching and child and family medical care services, a base for a babysitter network, support for children and parents with special needs, and effective links with Jobcentre Plus to support parents who wish to receive training or take up employment. In addition to this modified universalism, a second important change, which is criticized as a dangerous shift in policy, is that Sure Start Children's Centres do not necessarily place an emphasis on parental involvement.⁹⁹
- 6.14 Sure Start Children's Centres have not only made a significant contribution to the availability and affordability of child care for all families, but also provide, by integrating other services, one-stop central hubs for children under the age of five and their families. In addition, they provide access to family health care services, advice, and support for parents, including drop-in sessions, outreach services, integrated early education and child care, and links to training and employment. There are currently over 2,500 of these centers offering services to around 1.9 million children under the age of five and their families.¹⁰⁰
- 6.15 The coordination between the Sure Start Children's Centres and Jobcentre Plus has reinforced the work of both programs. Children centers help parents to find and use a range of employment-related services. By working with the centers, Jobcentre Plus can overcome difficulties relating to accessibility and trust among customers who might otherwise be excluded, and can better support parents and carers, particularly those from the most disadvantaged families, who wish to consider training and employment.
- 6.16 During the period between 1998-99 and 2005-06, there has been substantial progress in tackling the problem of child poverty: a) the number of children in poverty living in lone-parent families has

⁹⁸ HM Treasury (2004). *Choice for parents, the best start for children: A ten year strategy for childcare*. Retrieved July 29, 2008, from <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/files/C7A546CB4579620B7381308E1C161A9D.pdf>

⁹⁹ Schnedider, J., Avis, M., & Leighton, P. (2007). *Supporting children and families: Lessons from Sure Start for evidence-based practice in health, social care, and education*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

¹⁰⁰ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: Everybody's business*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud08_childpoverty_1310.pdf.

decreased by about 200,000, and the likelihood of being in poverty for children in such households has been reduced from 46% to 35%; b) the number of poor children living in families with more than two children has diminished by about 600,000, and the risk of poverty in these families has been reduced from around 40% to 30%; and c) the number of children aged four and below in low-income families has fallen to around 500,000 children, with the risk of poverty falling from around 31% to 23%.¹⁰¹ Despite the substantial progress that has been made, 2.8 million children are still in poverty, meaning that there is much more to be done to meet the British Government's extremely challenging ambitions. Both the Sure Start Children's Centres and the Sure Start Local Programmes are family-oriented as they perceive the family, especially children and their parents, as their recipients; they make it easier for parents to take care of their children; they build up resilience in families; they provide multidimensional services; and they coordinate a wide range of services.

Summary

6.17 The anti-poverty policies in the United Kingdom have had substantial success. As in the case of Ireland, one reason for its success may be due to the setting of agreed-upon targets on child poverty that have allowed for transparency. Other elements that have contributed to this achievement include growth in its economy, active employment assistance, and improved tax and income support for the poor. This anti-poverty strategy is family-oriented because it emphasizes the role of parents and devises measures to assist parents to perform their nurturing responsibility to their children. Similar to programs in Australia and Canada, the two particular measures that are family-oriented are employment services with child care arrangements and early childhood intervention in children's centers.

¹⁰¹ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: Everybody's business*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud08_childpoverty_1310.pdf.

CHAPTER SEVEN

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

National Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 7.1 Although the USA was the first of this study's selected economies to address poverty issues, as it declared a "National War on Poverty" in 1964, the family-oriented approach has never been adopted explicitly. In the USA, social policies that redistribute from the rich to the poor are much more restricted than in Continental Western European countries.¹⁰² The expenditure of government in the USA is approximately 30% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), whereas in Continental Europe, government spending accounts for about 45% of GDP and in Scandinavia it is more than 50% of GDP; almost two-thirds of this difference derives from the expenditure on welfare benefits for the poor. However, the welfare states in Europe come at a price because they require high taxation and extensive regulations that may discourage work and reduce economic growth.¹⁰³
- 7.2 Welfare reform in the USA was launched in 1996, based on the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This was the watershed in poverty reduction policy and strongly emphasized the welfare-to-work principle. Its three basic approaches to the anti-poverty war are: a) making welfare a transition to work; b) providing comprehensive child support enforcement; and c) providing support for families moving from welfare to work.¹⁰⁴ Anti-poverty policy in the USA reflects and promotes the concept of self-reliance, as Americans expect people to be in charge of their own destinies.¹⁰⁵ It is therefore not surprising that the USA has employed a laissez-faire approach in which families are largely left to fend for themselves.¹⁰⁶

Early Childhood Intervention

- 7.3 Compared with children in higher-income families, children in low-income families are more likely to experience developmental delays

¹⁰² Lipset, S., & Marks, G. (2000). *It didn't happen here: Why socialism failed in the United States*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co; Alesina, A., & Glaeser, E.L. (2004). *Fighting poverty in the U.S. and Europe: A world of difference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰³ Alesina, A., & Glaeser, E.L. (2004). *Fighting poverty in the US and Europe: A world of difference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁰⁴ Seccombe, K. (2007). *Families in poverty*. New York: Pearson.

¹⁰⁵ Quadagno, J. (1982). *Aging in early industrial society: Work, family and social policy in nineteenth century England*. New York: Academic Press; Trattner, W.I. (1999). *From poor law to welfare state: A history of social welfare in America*. New York: Free Press.

¹⁰⁶ Seccombe, K. (2007). *Families in poverty*. New York: Pearson; Smeeding, T.A., Rainwater, L., & Burtless, G. (2000). *United States poverty in a cross-national context*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://www.lisproject.org/publications/liswps/244.pdf>.

and poor health conditions, and to be brought up in more troubled home environments, all of which can hinder their well-being and developmental outcomes. The Head Start program aims to give children living in low-income families an equal start with children from more well-off families. This program has a long history, as it began as an educational program for poor children and was also one of the features of the War on Poverty program implemented by the former president Lyndon B. Johnson.¹⁰⁷ At that time, nearly half of the nation's poor people were children aged 12 and below, and Head Start was developed to provide health and nutritional services to these poor children as early as possible and to improve their school readiness.

- 7.4 Head Start is the largest and oldest early childhood intervention program for young children living in low-income families. The objective of Head Start is to promote school readiness by enhancing social and cognitive development. Its target is children, aged between six weeks and five years, from low-income families, but most of them aged three to five. These pre-school children in general attended the Head Start for one year before starting their schooling. The program is operated by local, public and private, and non-profit and for-profit agencies, and it provides a range of services, including educational, health, nutritional, and social services, to enrolled children and families. The health care service is an important component of the program, as the immunization of children in Head Start is monitored closely and medical examinations for hearing and vision are conducted on a regular basis. The class size for the program ranges from 17 to 20 children and the class is conducted by two teachers. Parents are encouraged to volunteer their time in the classroom or to work as teacher aides. In the 2006 financial year, the preschool program served over 900,000 children at a budgetary cost of USD6.78 billion (USD7,209 per child).¹⁰⁸
- 7.5 An analysis of the effects of the Head Start programs on child development outcomes indicates that the interventions not only make a positive impact on pre-writing skills, vocabulary knowledge, and overall health status, but also reduce problem and hyperactive behaviors.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the data suggest that Head Start is a wise investment for society. The initial evidence of a randomly controlled study of more than 600 Head Start graduates showed that society gains nearly USD9 in benefits for every USD1 invested in Head Start children. These benefits

¹⁰⁷ Clemmitt, M. (2005). *Evaluating Head Start: Does it help poor children and their parents?* Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <https://faculty.washington.edu/bdjones/policyclass/Evaluating%20Head%20Start.pdf>.

¹⁰⁸ Reich, K. (2007). *The power of preschool: Early investment yields solid returns*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.frbsf.org/publications/community/investments/0709/power_preschool.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2005). *Head Start impact study first year findings*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/hs/impact_study/reports/first_yr_execsum/firstyr_s_um_findings.html.

include increased wages, employment, and family continuity, and reduced welfare payments and costs related to crimes, grade repetitions, and special education. Also, well-trained Head Start parents can save Medicaid costs by USD198 per family¹¹⁰ and Head Start children are less likely to have been accused of a crime than their siblings who were not Head Start children.¹¹¹

- 7.6 With the reauthorization of the Head Start program in 1994, Congress established a new program, called Early Head Start, for low-income families with infants, toddlers, and pregnant women. The aims of this program are to promote healthy prenatal outcomes, to enhance the development of very young children, and to promote family functioning. The targets of the program are young children, aged three and below, and pregnant women from low-income families. The program includes child development services, family development services, and community building services, and it serves about 70,000 children throughout the USA every year.¹¹²
- 7.7 Research has shown that the improvement in cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development was significantly greater in children who participated in the Early Head Start programs than in the children in a control group.¹¹³ Moreover, parents who participated in Early Head Start were more likely to report emotional support and feel less isolated than the control group parents. These parents also provided more support to their children in language development and learning than did the control group parents. Significant, positive impacts on parents' participation in education and job training activities were also found. Both the Head Start and Early Head Start programs are family-oriented because they take the family as the unit of reference, they support families (mainly parents in caring their children), they build up resilience in families, and their services are multidimensional and well-integrated.

Employment Services Coupled with Child Care

- 7.8 The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF) was created by PRWORA in 1996 to replace the earlier welfare program, called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), so as to achieve President Bill Clinton's promise of "ending welfare as we know

¹¹⁰ National Head Start Association (2008). *Benefits of Head Start (HS) and Early Head Start (EHS) Programs*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.nhsa.org/download/research/REDFactSheets1.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Garces, E., Thomas, D., & Currie, J. (2002). Longer term effects of Head Start. *American Economic Review*, 92, 999-1012.

¹¹² U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2008). *About Early Start*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs_resrch/ehs_aboutus.html.

¹¹³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2008). *Early Head Start research and evaluation project*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs_resrch/reports/dissemination/research_briefs/4pg_overall.html.

it.” The most significant departures from the AFDC program are the time limit and work requirement provisions of the TANF. Another difference is that PRWORA legislation removed a number of the federal regulatory authorities over the design of the program.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the state governments are free to set the amounts and forms of benefits, income limits, and asset requirements, and to use TANF funds to support child care, job search support, and other social services.

- 7.9 Although the TANF is aimed at assisting needy families to enable children to be nurtured in their own homes, its rules implicitly reveal many of its goals. The work requirement and time limits of the TANF embody the PRWORA principle of reducing dependency, which is defined as the long-term receipt of welfare benefits. Two further goals that are explicitly stated in the PRWORA legislation are encouraging marriage and reducing non-marital childbearing.¹¹⁵
- 7.10 The TANF increased the amount of contact with recipients, requiring them all to undergo an initial assessment of skills; on the basis of the results of the assessment, action plans for education, training, and job placement are formulated. The TANF also introduced a range of in-kind services, including unsubsidized or subsidized employment, on-the-job training, job search, child care services, transportation, and work support. In 2007, the TANF served over 20 million families, with 47 million recipients,¹¹⁶ and USD16.5 billion was made available, by the federal government to state governments, for the program.¹¹⁷ States could choose to spend TANF funds in a variety of ways, including cash assistance and wage supplements, child care subsidies, education and job training, and transportation assistance. To receive TANF funds, states are obligated to spend some of their own funding on programs, known as the “maintenance of effort,” for needy families.
- 7.11 Reports have indicated that the TANF has succeeded in engaging a high percentage of recipients in welfare-to-work program activities, the most popular job activity being unsubsidized employment.¹¹⁸ The job

¹¹⁴ Moffitt, R.A. (2003). The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program. In R.A. Moffitt (Ed.), *Means-tested transfer programs in the United States* (291-364). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2008). *Fact sheet of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA)*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opa/fact_sheets/tanf_factsheet.html.

¹¹⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2008). *Caseload data 2007*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/caseload/caseload_current.htm.

¹¹⁷ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2008). *Fact sheet of Office of Family Assistance (OFA)*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opa/fact_sheets/tanf_factsheet.html.

¹¹⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2006). *TANF seventh annual report to congress*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/data-reports/annualreport7/chapter13/chap13.pdf>.

performance of TANF recipients generally has been rated as either as good as, or better than, other workers' performance in the same jobs.¹¹⁹ Continued employment of TANF recipients was impressively high, as 90% of those who began on the TANF program, and were working, in 1999 were still being employed in 2000-01.¹²⁰ President George W. Bush is a strong believer in the merits of PRWORA, as it replaces welfare dependency with self-reliance. Throughout the first four years of the Bush administration, the caseloads of the TANF declined continuously and this led to it, with its stricter work requirements, being reauthorized until 2010.¹²¹

7.12 However, it is still not clear whether the TANF can eradicate poverty or not. Many studies report that between 50 and 75% of families were still living in poverty, even two to three years after leaving welfare.¹²² In addition, the percentage of families that would be eligible for the TANF but do not receive assistance has increased from about 20% of families in 1996 to around 45 to 50% in 2002.¹²³ Yet one result of this program is certainly true, namely that child care assistance is crucial to helping families make the transfer from welfare into work. The provision of subsidized, high-quality child care services definitely increases the likelihood that current and former welfare recipients will leave welfare and engage in full-time work;¹²⁴ under PRWORA, the state governments have been given increased child care funds.¹²⁵ The TANF is family-oriented because it takes the family as the unit of reference, it

¹¹⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (2006). *Private employers and TANF recipients: chapter 2: Review of the research literature*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/private-employers04/ch2.htm#Ch22>.

¹²⁰ Andersson, F., Lane, J., & McEntarfer, E. (2004). *Successful transitions out of low-wage work for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients: The role of employers, coworkers and location*. Retrieved June 16, 2008, from <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/low-wage-workers-transitions04/report.pdf>.

¹²¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2006). *Welfare rolls continue to fall*. Retrieved October 17, 2008, from http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2006/welfare_rolls_decline_june_o5.htm.

¹²² Acs, G., & Loprest, P. (2004). *Leaving welfare: Employment and well-being of families that left welfare in the post-entitlement era*. Kalamazoo, MI: W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research; Blank, R.M. (2002). Evaluating welfare reform in the United States. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 40, 1105-1166.

¹²³ Fremstad, S. (2003). *Falling TANF caseloads amidst rising poverty should be a cause of concern?* Washington, DC: Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities; Fremstad, S. (2004). *Recent welfare reform findings: Implications for TANF reauthorization and state TANF policies*. Washington, DC: Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities.

¹²⁴ Danziger, S.K., Ananat, E.O., & Browning, K. (2004). Child care subsidies and the transition from welfare to work. *Family Relations*, 53, 219-228; Scott, E.K., London, A.S., & Hurst, A. (2005). Instability in patchworks of child care when moving from welfare to work. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 370-386.

¹²⁵ Moffitt, R.A. (2003). The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program. In R.A. Moffitt (Ed.), *Means-tested transfer programs in the United States* (291-364). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

emphasizes the coordination of services, it provides multidimensional services, it supports the family in caring for its children, and it builds resilience in the family.

Summary

- 7.13 The USA has neither announced a national anti-poverty strategy nor set a measurable target for the fight against poverty. However, programs for early childhood development (e.g. Head Start and Early Head Start) and welfare-to-work (e.g. TANF) emphasize the involvement of all family members and adopt the family approach. The Head Start Program promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to enrolled children and families. The empirical data support the view that the family-oriented approach is crucial to helping families move from welfare to work; specifically, integrated child care and employment services increase the likelihood that current welfare recipients would work full-time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Applicability of International Experience to Hong Kong

- 8.1. Our review indicates that the fight against poverty has been declared in almost all of the countries examined in this study, but they are all proceeding at their own pace. In Canada (primarily Quebec), Ireland, and the United Kingdom, provincial or national anti-poverty strategies or action plans have been formed, inter-department advisory committees have been set up, poverty proofing has been implemented, and sets of measurable anti-poverty targets with time frames and adequate financial commitments have been made public. All of these strategies and action plans have made inroads into reducing poverty. Aside from the quantitative achievements of these benchmarking strategies in Quebec, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, poverty has been moved away from the public policy shadows into the limelight as a result of the pronouncement of anti-poverty targets and the acknowledgment of the problem, and raising awareness of poverty has been an important step in making progress. Setting anti-poverty targets have proved to be part of an effective strategy in Quebec, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. Their experience appears both relevant and applicable to Hong Kong.
- 8.2. It is important to emphasize that anti-poverty targets and benchmarks provide increased accountability and transparency in monitoring the progress of anti-poverty strategies, but the financial implications of achieving those targets, in terms of committed funding, must also be realized. Other factors, such as economic and employment growth, adequate income support, and employment programs, have combined with specific anti-poverty strategies to enable a reduction of poverty in Quebec, Ireland, and the United Kingdom.
- 8.3. In Hong Kong, the work of the former Commission on Poverty conducted a comprehensive review of the poverty problem in Hong Kong, and extensive policy recommendations were made to prevent and alleviate poverty in the future.¹²⁶ The Commission agreed that it is important to enhance the understanding of the magnitude of the problem of poverty in Hong Kong; therefore, a set of indicators of poverty were compiled and it was planned to update these annually to reflect the poverty situation in the future. However, no anti-poverty target was benchmarked.
- 8.4. We believe that an anti-poverty target must be set with extreme caution, not only because of its fiscal implications, but also because, as the Australian Government argues, the adoption of simple benchmarks may lead to policies only being directed towards reaching the target rather than tackling the main causes of poverty. Another problem of adopting

¹²⁶ Commission on Poverty (2006). *Report of the Commission on Poverty*. Retrieved July 29, 2008, from [http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/ReportFull\(e\).pdf](http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/ReportFull(e).pdf).

benchmarks is that the administration may tend to propose measures that have an immediate effect, rather than measures that may have a greater impact but take longer to manifest themselves. However, we believe that the advantages of setting transparent targets outweigh the disadvantages, as long as the government and the public recognize the limitations of such targets and the targets set are based on the consensus emerged within society.

- 8.5. Increasing the effectiveness of anti-poverty policies also requires improving the coherence of policies within governments. The experiences of the countries that have been most successful in eradicating poverty point to the essential importance of policy coherence among different parts of the government. In Quebec, Ireland, and the United Kingdom, high-level advisory committees develop, implement, and monitor the anti-poverty policies, and poverty proofing is in place to evaluate how the policies initiated by all government departments affect poverty. A poverty proofing mechanism could also be applicable to Hong Kong so that the effect of all policies initiated by the Government on the poverty will be evaluated.
- 8.6. Based on the experiences of Quebec and Ireland, it is important to involve social partners in the formulation of anti-poverty policies, and in the implementation and the monitoring of the outcomes of these policies. Their experiences indicate that the formulation of their anti-poverty strategies not only involved all of the relevant government departments, but also social partners, who are engaged through a proactive consultative mechanism. This is because the participation of social partners is essential to both the credibility and the actual success of any anti-poverty policies. Moreover, the implementation of these policies actively involves the community and voluntary sector to ensure good coordination of all measures. The anti-poverty policies should be formulated through informed public policy discourse and community support.

Overall Anti-Poverty Strategy

- 8.7. Setting targets and establishing the mechanism only sets the stage for combating poverty. It is the strategies and policies that enable the anti-poverty targets to be met that are paramount. The anti-poverty approach adopted in the Quebec Provincial Government's action plan against poverty evokes policies similar to those pursued in English-speaking countries, such as Ireland and the United Kingdom. Quebec's plan promotes "economic security and social inclusion through employment" and increases "protection for people with significant employment limitations." Therefore, we need an overall strategy in our anti-poverty policies.

Family-Oriented Anti-Poverty Policies

8.8. Families not only provide care for children and elderly persons, but also facilitate informal exchanges of time and money between family members at all stages of the life course. Historically, governments intervene when family members, particularly parents, are unable to carry out their functions of nurturing and caring for their vulnerable members. However, despite the development of public service systems, the role of families in attending to the social needs of their members remains predominant in many of the countries examined in this study. The role of the family in anti-poverty strategies has been mentioned explicitly in Australia, Quebec, Singapore, and the United Kingdom. Therefore, our review suggests that the family approach to anti-poverty measures is a sensible strategy to pursue in Hong Kong, especially as in Hong Kong's society and Asian culture the role of family is still predominant. More importantly, two categories of measures which are found in all of the six selected countries, namely employment services linked with child care and early childhood interventions with the involvement of parents, are also considered as family-oriented, based on the five characteristics identified for the family approach.

Employment Service Coupled with Child Care

8.9. Unemployment is one of the major causes of poverty and child poverty is a consequence of parental unemployment. The evidence suggests that, while some working-age individuals do not have a job due to individual or family circumstances, a large proportion of "inactive" individuals would choose to work, given the right conditions.¹²⁷ Parents on welfare are often one of the groups targeted by broad welfare-to-work strategies, such as the welfare-to-work packages in Australia, Canada's NCB initiatives, the WSP in Singapore, the United Kingdom's NDLP programs, and the TANF in the USA. The main reason why these measures are perceived as family-oriented is that not only do they involve child care provision, but they also provide coordinated and integrated services, such as job search support and other social services, to families in need.

8.10. Employment services which emphasize quick job entry and a one-to-one, personalized client-consultant relationship are more likely to be successful. Employment-focused programs rather than education-focused programs tend to be more effective, as skills assessment, upgrading skills training, and careful placements help to reduce the risk of failure.¹²⁸

8.11. One distinctive and desirable feature of these individualized strategies

¹²⁷ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2003). *Transforming disability into ability*. Paris: OECD.

¹²⁸ Carcillo S., & Grubb, D. (2006). *From inactivity to work: The role of active labour market policies*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved July 28, 2008, from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/8/36945194.pdf>.

used in welfare-to-work measures is that they require dedicated resources from employment services working in close cooperation with other services, such as welfare, education and training, health care, and child care arrangement. To achieve this, Singapore created the Work Support Programmes to provide integrated services for cash welfare payments and in-kind welfare payments for rental fees and to utilize subsidized training courses, educational assistance, and medical service assistance. In some cases, such as in the United Kingdom, it is also considered creative to coordinate the employment service and children centers.

- 8.12. The United Kingdom currently requires lone-parent beneficiaries to participate in work-focused interviews; the interviews take place every six months for the first year, and annually thereafter. The main aim of the interview is to make people aware of the risks of staying out of the labor market and to show them that they can be better off by working or by participating in various programs, particularly the NDLP, given its provision of various incentives to work.¹²⁹
- 8.13. The utilization rates of employment services are sometimes low for voluntary programs, because it is difficult to motivate lone parents to enroll when they are confronting the additional problem of child care.¹³⁰ Child care support enables lone parents, as well as parents in general, to get back to work.¹³¹ However, many families lack viable child care options during their employment hours. For many children, informal substitute care options are lacking, and formal child care is unavailable, unaffordable, and of inadequate quality.¹³² These kinds of problems undermine the labor market attachment of mothers and lone parents. Some young children, especially poor children, spend their time in low-quality child care; this compromises their safety and places them at developmental risk. Therefore, providing a high-quality, yet affordable and accessible, child care service is the most important component that must be attached to employment services for parents of low-income families. Consequently, almost all of the countries examined in this study have chosen high levels of child care spending, and this is linked with employment services.
- 8.14. The HKSAR Government also adopts the welfare to self-reliance policy

¹²⁹ Carcillo S., & Grubb, D. (2006). *From inactivity to work: The role of active labour market policies*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved July 28, 2008 from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/8/36945194.pdf>.

¹³⁰ Booth, A., & Coles, M. (2004). *Part-time employment traps and childcare policy (CEPR Discussion Paper No. 4357)*. London: Centre for Economic Policy Research.

¹³¹ Gupta, N., Smith, N., & Verner, M. (2006). *Child care and parental leave in the Nordic countries: A model to aspire to? (IZA Discussion Paper No. 2014)*. Retrieved June 18, 2008, from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=890298>.

¹³² Carcillo, S., & Grubb, D. (2006). *From inactivity to work: The role of active labour market policies*. Paris: OECD. Retrieved July 28, 2008 from <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/8/36945194.pdf>.

by enhancing employment, promoting employment opportunities, and providing effective employment support and suitable work incentives. There is a consensus within Hong Kong society that employment is a major means of reducing poverty, as it not only has a positive impact on the economic well-being of individuals, but also enhances their self-esteem, thus helping them to become good role models for their children.¹³³

- 8.15. In Hong Kong, relaxing the existing arrangement of disregarded earnings under the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme and the transport support scheme are measures to increase the work incentives, respectively, for welfare recipients and the unemployed living in remote areas. Also the Labour Department currently provides one-stop Job Centres where job seekers can complete the whole job-hunting process. Moreover, a personalized employment service, called the Job Matching Programme, is also available at Job Centres to help job seekers evaluate their academic qualifications, job skills, work experience, and job preferences, and to introduce them to suitable retraining courses. Close collaboration among the Labour Department, the Social Welfare Department, and the Employee Retraining Board has evolved into training and employment assistance. This has enhanced district-based support for those who are more difficult to employ because of the low levels of skills and education among middle-aged adults.
- 8.16. In addition, a range of day child care services, including stand-alone child care centers, kindergarten-cum-child care centers, the Mutual Help Child Care Centre service, and the After School Care Programme are providing assistance to parents who cannot take care of their children, due to work or other reasons. In the 2008-09 Budget, the Financial Secretary has further proposed to provide, in the next three years, funding totaling HKD45 million to strengthen day foster care services and to promote various types of child care services, such as more flexible neighborhoods, mutual help, and day child care services in districts where there is a greater demand.
- 8.17. However, in general, the individualized employment assistance services and child care services are being delivered separately. One exception to this is a new program called the New Dawn Intensive Employment Assistance Projects, funded by the Lotteries Fund; these projects are being operated by non-governmental organizations to provide tailor-made employment assistance and other supportive services such as after-school care services for children of welfare recipients who are lone parents with children aged between 12 and 14. However, even in this program, the timely provision of after-school care services is not always accessible once job seeking parents secure employment. We

¹³³ Commission on Poverty (2006). Report of the Commission on Poverty. Retrieved July 29, 2008 from [http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/ReportFull\(e\).pdf](http://www.cop.gov.hk/eng/pdf/ReportFull(e).pdf).

believe that the integration of employment support services and child care services enhances the employability, and the ability to sustain employment, of unemployed people with children. Therefore, based on the international experiences, more integrated and co-ordinated employment services coupled with child care provision could be considered in Hong Kong.

Family-Oriented Early Childhood Intervention

- 8.18. Investing in children has high pay-offs, both for the children themselves and for society in general. Children who grow up in disadvantaged households are more likely to have difficulties in school, to struggle to find jobs, and to be unemployed when they become adults. They are also more likely to become the parents of poor children themselves, threatening an ongoing cycle of deprivation, namely intergenerational poverty. Indeed, research suggests that the percentage of children brought up in low-income families who become low-income adults is respectively around 50%, 40%, and 33% in the USA, the United Kingdom, and Canada.¹³⁴ The logic of early childhood intervention for children living in poverty is to compensate for the various factors that place children at risk of poor outcomes, by providing additional support for parents, children, or the family as a unit that can affect children directly, through structured experiences, or indirectly, by enhancing the care-giving environment.¹³⁵
- 8.19. The attention paid to families with children in recent social policy discussions reflects a greater awareness of the fact that what happens during childhood is a critical determinant of outcomes in adult life. Moreover, most of the discussions have resulted in the adoption of the family approach, in which parents, or even the whole family, are actively involved in the interventions. Examples of this can be found in all of the six countries examined: the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy in Australia, the Community Action Program for Children in Canada, the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme for Children in Ireland, the Healthy Start Programme in Singapore, Sure Start or Children Centres in the United Kingdom, and the Early Head Start and Head Start programs in the USA. Evaluations of these programs generally reveal that early childhood interventions improve the cognition and academic achievement, the behavioral and emotional competencies, and the educational progression and attainment of the participating children. In addition, early childhood interventions reduce the levels of child maltreatment, health problems, juvenile delinquency,

¹³⁴ Corak, M. (2004). Do poor children become poor adults? Lessons for public policy from a cross country comparison of generational earnings mobility. In M. Corak (Ed.), *Generational income mobility in North America and Europe* (pp. 1-37). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹³⁵ Shonkoff, J.P., & Phillips, D.A. (2000). *From neurons to neighbourhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

and criminal behavior in adulthood.¹³⁶

- 8.20. All of the countries examined in this study have recognized that making affordable and high-quality early childhood intervention available to young children living in low-income families is a sound investment for the future. Reviews of the experiences of these countries have stressed the value of early childhood intervention in reducing the harmful effects on children of growing up in poverty, so that intergenerational poverty can be prevented. While there is no consensus as to the appropriate age of attendance, a large body of research indicates that early childhood education and care brings benefits for children's cognitive development (better literacy scores later in school), emotional growth (greater socialization of children; less aggressive behavior), and physical development.¹³⁷ As the benefits are especially great for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, early childhood education and care also helps to narrow the gap separating children and to reduce the concentration of the disadvantaged later in adulthood.
- 8.21. Parents play an important role in the development of their children, but some may need special and personalized assistance to carry out their parenting tasks successfully. However, it is essential to involve parents in those early childhood intervention programs aimed at decreasing the occurrence of emotional, behavioral, and social development problems in children. The evaluations of empirical investigations into drug prevention programs indicated that parental involvement in all stages of the program contributed to the long-term beneficial effects of the program.¹³⁸
- 8.22. Taking into account all of these considerations and findings, we believe that a family-oriented early childhood intervention program for children living in low-income families deserves to be considered thoroughly for its applicability to Hong Kong. It is particularly important to help disadvantaged children to enhance their language capacity, to build social skills, to increase their cultural exposure, and to strengthen their self-image, in order to enable them to have an equal start in development with children living in more affluent families. In Hong Kong, a wide range of existing policies and programs is available currently to promote the development of children, with a special focus on the needs of those from a disadvantaged background. In addition, the newly developed Comprehensive Child Development Service provides multidisciplinary services to at-risk children, including children living in

¹³⁶ Karoly, L.A., Kilburn, M.R., & Cannon, J.S. (2005). *Early childhood interventions: Proven results, future promise*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

¹³⁷ Kamerman, S.B., Neuman, M., Waldfogel, J., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2002). *Social policy aspects of child development: A literature survey (Social, Employment and migration working paper No. 6)*. Paris: OECD.

¹³⁸ Normand, C.L., Vitaro, F., & Charlebois, P. (2000). Involving parents in early prevention. *Isuma, Autumn 2000*, 38-43.

low-income families. Nevertheless, no established and well-structured early childhood intervention, coupled with parenting skills training or other family-oriented services, is provided to children living in poverty. In the light of overseas experiences, Hong Kong could consider developing family-oriented early childhood interventions specifically for children living in low-income families.

Conclusion

- 8.23. The objectives of this report have been to explore the measures that support low-income families in helping their members and to evaluate the applicability of relevant policies to Hong Kong. Using a family approach to tackle poverty is considered a promising strategy, especially in a society such as Hong Kong, where family is still the most treasured social institution in society. The government, communities, local authorities, service providers, employers, and families all have important parts to play in reducing poverty. We believe that only by working in partnership can poverty eventually be eradicated.