

Teenage shelters rife with problems: An investigation into the right to social security¹

Teenage shelters are meant to provide the care and services to homeless and runaway youths before ultimately putting their lives back on track. However, it has been reported that unfavorable circumstances has forced some youngsters to fend for themselves after leaving the shelters. These children are likely to fall into a vicious circle of poverty and even criminality Control Yuan Members launched an own-motion investigation and identified negligence by the Ministry of the Interior and a number of government agencies.

The investigation found that the Ministry of the Interior has failed to supervise local agencies in ensuring that adequate service and placement be delivered to children in distress as required by law. Children, both below and above the age of eighteen, are sometimes discharged from the shelters for reasons including having trouble adapting to life at the shelter, overstay, and aging out of facility care. Early discharges have violated children's right to be protected and cared for. Young adults between the ages of twelve and twenty have been thrust into the society prematurely and are weighed down by tuition, meals, and healthcare insurance. The Ministry has also failed to conduct aftercare services and keep track of individual cases. Such failure has been the main reason behind poor policy making, assessment and widespread data inconsistency. Some follow-up activities have been inappropriately assigned to local social workers who were already overworked and subject to high turnover. The counseling and guidance provided by social workers have been fragmented at best due to a lack of assessment and poor resource sharing.

In response to Control Yuan's redress, the Ministry of the Interior has added new regulations governing the placement of underage minors; increased counseling staff members; launched pilot programs for children with special needs and learning groups for teens; and put in place transfer services and youth homes. At the request of the Ministry, the Child Welfare Bureau has set up twelve independent youth homes staffed with social workers. The Bureau has also devised comprehensive assessment before sending the kids back home or into foster care. The assessment includes scales measuring independent life skills, self-care trainings, as well as dormitories for kids to develop independent life skills. Progress and results of individual placement cases will be closely monitored and listed among annual targets to be met. New regulations have been drafted that aim to resolve problems of education facing teenagers on independent living programs. Local government and placement facilities will be required to cover the healthcare premiums for independent teenagers before they become self-sufficient

¹ Case no. 0990800296

employees. Starting in 2012, independent youths can access occupational trainings free of charge. Teenage shelters around Taiwan will be updated on the latest training program available before registering the children for suitable classes according to individual needs.