

Preliminary baseline assessment and observations of the age-friendliness in Southern District

Background

Population Ageing in Southern District

As in other districts of Hong Kong, the Southern District is facing population ageing. In 2004, 34400 elderly (aged 65 or above) made up 12.2% of the total population in the Southern District, the median age of the population was 38 (C&SD, 2005).

After a decade in 2014, the number of elderly in the district had sharply increased to 41116 persons, and the proportion had increased to 15.2%. The median age had risen to 43 (C&SD, 2015c). As of 2015, Southern District ranked 5th in the most aged population of the 18 Hong Kong Districts (C&SD, 2015b).

Economical and living situation of the elderly living in the Southern District

According to the Hong Kong Poverty Situation Report 2014 by the HKSAR Government (2015), there are 27400 poor populations in the district in the year 2014, in which 34.3% (~9400 persons) were aged 65 or above. It could be calculated that 22% of the elderly population is living in poverty in the Southern District.

From the 2011 Population Census (C&SD, 2015a), there are at least 17415 elderly (~45% of the total elderly population in the district) found living in the public housing provided by the Housing Authority and low rental housing by the Hong Kong Housing Society.

Although a large portion of the elderly is in public housing, the living conditions of the other elderly are diversified. Besides basic private tenements, mid-end and high-end residential units are quite abundant in the district, such as the Residence Bel-air, Redhill Peninsula and Chi Fu Fa Yuen, etc. These persons had made Southern District one of the least poor districts in Hong Kong, which only have a poverty rate of 11.1% (HKSAR Government, 2015).

Baseline consideration for developing an Age-friendly

Brief overview of challenges facing by the elderly in the District

Based on the Community Diagnosis done by the Southern District Healthy and Safe Association and the Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (2011), it was found that person aged 60 or above in the district is generally satisfied in their physical and psychological well-being, as well as interpersonal relationship and the environmental quality.

The report indicates that the residents of the District are familiar and satisfied with the local elderly services (scoring 6.77/10). However, residential care homes are found inadequate, especially governmental subvented homes. The interviewees also reflected that information dissemination of social and volunteer service is not enough, especially towards hidden elder.

Medical services, however, is heavily criticized. Waiting time is generally considered over-lengthy in emergency services and public clinics, and some systems like the notification systems were found non elderly-friendly. The interviewees also regard the public clinic's automated-telephone reservation system hard to use by the elder.

There are also environmental concerns in the district as well. The numerous steep slopes in the district are recognized as an environmental threat to elder. Traffic in the area is not too satisfactory. Also, in the 8 local public housing estates provided by the Hong Kong Housing Authority (2016), the average age of the building blocks is 32 years, and with the oldest Wah-Fu Estate (1) and Wah-Fu Estate (2) being 49 and 46 years old respectively. Age-friendly features are not emphasized when these aged residential estates were built.

Age friendly initiative in Southern District

Following the initiation of the "Hong Kong Plan of Action on Ageing" in 2008 (HKCSS, 2008), the Southern District has joined as a participating pioneer districts. Since then, the Southern District Council, jointly with the Southern District Healthy and Safe Association Limited and the Aberdeen Kai-fong Welfare Association Social Service, had been working to improve the age-friendliness of the district.

According to the World Health Organization guidelines, the opinions and comments of older people should be highly regarded. For that, the Southern

Age-friendly and Safe City Group was established since 2009, which consisted of 60 elderly representatives from 11 Elderly Service Units in the District.

Through conducting site visitation, collecting information from the elders and engaging them in all level of activities that empower the elderly participation and speak up, the group was able to constantly reflect their insights to the relevant governmental departments and organizations, as well as service and facility providers. In short, the Southern District Council supports and embraces a bottom up approach to co-create an Age-friendly City.

Throughout the years, different topics are studied by the group, the topics matched well with the aforementioned challenges faced by the older people in the District. Below is a brief summary of the community project:

Year	Topic
2009-2011	Outdoor spaces and buildings (Outdoor recreation facilities for elderly and the access to these facilities)
2011-2012	Transportation (Green Minibus service)
2011-2012	Social participation (explore platforms for retired elderly to continue involving in and contributing to the society)
2013-2014	Outdoor spaces and buildings (The street market service in Southern District and the community facilities)
2014-2015	Housing (Age-friendly elements in housing design and telephone booking of medical service)

The Direction

Future Plans

1. Two of the major public housing estate and low rental housing in the district, Wah Fu Estate and Yue Kwong Cheun, which housed 35% of the district elderly living in public housing (Census and Statistic Department, 2015), will be redeveloping in the near future (HKSAR, 2014; HKHS, 2015). The group sees this as an opportunity to drastically upgrading the age-friendliness of the district by voicing out through the bottom-up approach when plans of redevelopment are considered. Therefore, the development of the group will be one of the prior plans.

2. Starting from 2016, more elderly volunteer ambassadors would be recruited. This is done not to only increase the elderly insight to the District age-friendliness, but also to raise the awareness of the elderly towards the topic of “Age-friendly cities”, and empower more older people to express their thoughts and views, thus becoming stakeholders of the society with invaluable resources.

For the coming 4 years, our ultimate plan is to build up an effective Age-friendly Working Committee, subordinating to the District Council, in which $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total number of the working group member quota are reserved for older people. The elder are expected to be one of the core members, so that their voice can be directly channeled to the District Councilors and eventually to the government.

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