

**The Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong
Family Support Service
Jockey Club Home Circuit**

**“Beyond the Bars” – Research study on families of inmates and discharged
prisoners**

Press Conference (Saturday, 27 June 2009)

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Press Release

A study discovered that **the family members also suffered from ‘punishment’ when their children / spouses were sentenced to jail. They have to bear even greater sufferings as a result of emotional disturbance.** The family system fails to give them support to overcome the difficult time. Feeling isolated and desperate, some of them have to consult medical service for depression.

The study was conducted by “Jockey Club Home Circuit”[1] of the Society of Rehabilitation and Crime Prevention, Hong Kong (SRACP) earlier this year. Discharged prisoners and family members were interviewed to understand the difficulties they encountered, the change of family status, and other associated needs during the stages of imprisonment and discharge. **The research findings show that the family members have to bear greater emotional sufferings than the prisoners. On one hand, they felt guilty and helpless; on the other hand, they were ambivalent to give continuous support to the imprisoned members.** They tend not to tell or seek help from their relatives or friends to avoid from being discriminated and labeled. Sometimes, they received negative feedbacks and felt stressful after disclosed the family secret to relatives or friends. Some of them were thus suffering from depression with suicidal thoughts. Besides, they worried about how to rebuild trust when the prisoners were released. The research also found that the discharged prisoners not only concerned about securing a stable job upon discharge, but also expected assistance on handling the conflicting relationship and the communication problems with their family members.

Two parents shared their experience and feelings towards the sons’ imprisonment. They felt at a loss on facing the change. Without receiving support from other family members, they were desperate and have thought of committing suicides. They shared how they work through the difficult time and improve the relationship with their sons after receiving professional services from Home Circuit. They also got the warmest support from other families with similar background and finally regained strength to become a volunteer for helping other needy families. A discharged prisoner also spoke of his need for assistance to handle the relationship problem and to rebuild trust with his family before and after he was released from correctional institutions. He pledged that he would never commit crime again for his family’s sake.

SRACP suggests rendering a **one-stop tailor-made specialized service for families of inmates and discharged prisoners to help them relieve their negative emotions at an earliest time and under an accepting environment. Hence, the even greater tragedy can be prevented. Moreover, the needs of both the prisoners and their family members should be well-considered during and after imprisonment. Timely intervention to mediate misunderstanding and conflicts between family and the imprisoned**

members as well as to enhance their family relationship should be made. Also, SRACP appealed for the public to build a community with love and concern, where the needs of these families are emphasized and cared. More resources should thus be allocated to help them rebuild the harmonious family life and to discourage the discharged prisoners from re-offending.

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“Jockey Club Home Circuit” is a service programme funded by Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust since 2002. The service aims to render intensive counseling and a wide spectrum of support services to support the family of inmates and discharged prisoners to resolve living difficulties arisen from arrestment and imprisonment as well as enhancing family adjustment through strengthening mutual understanding and trust to achieve family harmony and reducing recidivism.