

Putting Children FIRST



PENANG CHILDCARE POLICY & ACTION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

On 1 March 2013 the Penang State Government adopted the Penang Childcare Policy and Action Plan making it the first state government in the country to set out its strategy to promote universal rights and access to affordable, safe and quality childcare to ensure the well-being of every child in the state.

The Penang State Government recognises the need to protect the rights of children as embodied in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and the problems faced by families in caring for their children in the current socio-economic conditions. Better childcare provisions will also help uplift the economy of Penang by enabling the increase in women's participation in the workforce and encourage a healthy balance between work and family life as part of the State Government's programme for development that is holistic and sustainable.

WHAT IS THE PENANG CHILDCARE POLICY?

It has 3 main objectives and 5 principal policy thrusts.

3 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE 1: Promote children's well-being and safety through better access to quality and affordable childcare

The childhood years are the most important in any individual's development. Investing in the nurturance of children is crucial for the moulding of future generations who are well adjusted and who will then be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of society and economy. Childcare is therefore not just a private need but a PUBLIC GOOD which requires the State Government to play an active role. This is especially critical to help reduce the disadvantages faced by families in the lower income groups and will help improve the life chances of their children and the children with special needs.

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase women's participation in the workforce

For Penang to develop, it is necessary to increase the participation of women in the workforce. Although Penang's women's labour force participation rate at 56.5% (2010) is higher than the national average of 46.1%, it is much lower than those in developed countries (e.g., Sweden and Denmark >74%). It is also recognised that better childcare provisions will enable more women to remain in the workforce after marriage and child birth.

OBJECTIVE 3: Promote a better work-family life balance

Better childcare facilities will help parents find a better work family life balance that will add to a better quality of life. This has to be complemented by a shift from the stereotypical "male=breadwinner/female=carer" type of family to one that is dual earner/dual carer that entails the sharing and redistribution of care of family members: from mother to both parents in the family, and from family to society. It is equally important that family-friendly policies be promoted alongside an expansion of childcare services to ensure a better balance between work and family life for both men and women.

Childcare is not a private issue but a public one, with tremendous social and economic implications.

5 PRINCIPAL POLICY THRUSTS

To achieve the objectives, the following 5 principal policy thrusts have been identified, each with an Action Plan to be implemented.

1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare
2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres
3. Establishing Community-Based Childcare Centres
4. Improving Home-Based Care
5. Assisting the Private Childcare Service Sector

WHAT IS THE PENANG CHILDCARE ACTION PLAN?

The following Action Plan has been drawn up.

- 1. Ensuring Equitable Access to Safe and Quality Childcare**
 - ▶ Undertake mapping of childcare centres to assist parents in locating appropriate centres, assist state government and local



authorities with planning and encourage setting up of centres in underserved areas.

- ▶ Help provide childcare allowance for low-income families to enrol children in registered centres.
- ▶ Provide subsidised training for childcare providers to upgrade quality of care.
- ▶ Encourage centres to include enrolment of children with special needs through conducting awareness campaigns, incentives and providing appropriate training and assistance to the childcare providers.
- ▶ Set up teams of early childhood care and education (ECCE) professionals, therapists and Home Visitors to support childcare centres and home-based childcare providers.

2. Increasing Workplace Childcare Centres

- ▶ Review regulations and guidelines to facilitate the setting up of workplace childcare facilities.
- ▶ Organise sector-based roadshows and dialogues with employers to encourage setting up of childcare facilities at the workplace.
- ▶ Initiate a shared childcare facility for the manufacturing sector in

one of the industrial areas as a showcase for emulation.

- ▶ Set up a childcare centre at KOMTAR.

3. Establishing Community-Based Childcare Centres

- ▶ Help organise pilot childcare centres in three low-income communities as test cases of community-operated centres which will also serve as an income-generating activity for the local communities.
- ▶ Provide training, professional support and monitoring to ensure sustainability of the community childcare centres.
- ▶ Require developers to provide custom-designed childcare facilities when applying for planning approval of housing schemes.

4. Improving Home-Based Care

- ▶ Provide training to those undertaking home-based care.
- ▶ Introduce certification and registration to rationalise the home-based care sector.
- ▶ Provide professional support and upgrading of skills through a team of Home Visitors who are trained in ECCE.



5. Assisting the Private Childcare Sector

- ▶ Help provide training to increase the pool of qualified childcare providers.
- ▶ Organise roadshows and dialogues with private sector operators to encourage registration and provision of more affordable and inclusive (especially for children with special needs) childcare facilities.
- ▶ Implement the Guidelines proposed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to help speed up licensing.
- ▶ Improve procedures to assist the private sector.
- ▶ Set up an online mechanism to facilitate the registration and monitoring of childcare centres.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK TO IMPLEMENT THE POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan (2013–2016) will be carried out by PWDC in the first year after which a Child Rights and Childcare Unit will be set up within the State Government to take over the implementation with the cooperation and help of all stakeholders.

The true measure of a nation is how well it attends to its children – their health, safety, and material security, their education and socialisation, and their sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies into which they are born.

– UNICEF, Innocenti Report Card 7, 2007



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