

Five babies a day left at Chinese city's 'baby hatch'

March 17 2014

More than 260 unwanted children, most of them babies, have been abandoned in a Chinese "safe haven" in just over six weeks—more than five a day—since it opened in late January, authorities said.

The "baby hatch" in Guangzhou, in the southern province of Guangdong, was suspended on Sunday after the city's welfare home exceeded its capacity to handle new arrivals.

All of those abandoned suffered from illnesses including cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome and [congenital heart disease](#), and 67 percent of them were less than a year old, the Bureau of Civil Affairs of Guangzhou Municipality said.

The facility was set up in late January and 262 children had been abandoned at it by Sunday morning, it said in a statement.

The 1,000-bed welfare home was housing 1,121 residents, with another 1,274 being cared for by foster families, the statement issued Sunday said.

Its quarantine facilities were "not enough to meet the demand" and wards that had previously held 50 children were now caring for 80 to 100, it added.

China has set up 25 baby safe havens in 10 provinces and major cities since June 2011 and plans to roll out the facilities to most of the country,

the official Xinhua news agency reported in February.

The havens—introduced to reduce the risks of children dying after being abandoned in the street—usually have an incubator, a delayed alarm device, an air conditioner and a baby bed, that report said.

Welfare staff retrieve a baby five to 10 minutes after a person leaves the child and presses the alarm button, allowing families to give up the infant safely and anonymously.

Many [babies](#) are given up because parents cannot afford expensive medical bills and fees for special education, it said.

A disabled child can be a huge drain on a family's resources, and although the country's one-child policy normally allows parents to have another baby if their first is disabled, the restrictions can be a factor in other abandonments.

Anyone leaving a child at the Guangzhou safe haven will now be reported to police, the city statement said. Any re-opening will be announced at a later date, it added.

"Losing the care and love of the family at a young age will cause lifetime psychological damage to a child," it cited the head of the welfare home, Xu Jiu, as saying. "And abandoning [children](#) is illegal. I hope parents who want to do so think prudently before acting."

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