

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society:

Children's Hub (Empowering Children to be Active Citizens for Inclusion, Diversity, Human Rights to create a culture of positive peace):

We engage in processes of assessments such as CPAT & DG Just to create a safe for children for them to bring forward their opinions and their aspirations and discuss what matters to them. This the way we believe that we can effectively implement their right to be listened to on a national and international level.

Both processes were conducted with children coming for diverse communities including migrant children. Examples of the diverse communities of children:

1. Children from out of home care, both from children's homes and fostered children;
2. Unaccompanied children asylum seekers;
3. Migrant children;
4. Children with different abilities;
5. Children from the Young Offenders' Unit; (most of the children at the Young Offenders' Unit are unaccompanied asylum seeking children who upon arrival to Malta, claimed to be children, however, they were turned down as children, and therefore were put in detention and after trying to escape from detention, and captured, they were actually recognized as children and put at the Young Offenders' Unit);
6. Children from diverse faith traditions;
7. Children who due to for example their parents' separation experienced the justice system first hand.

Children's & Young People's Council: we empower children to speak and share their opinion and aspirations with policy makers nationally and internationally. MFWS prides itself on opportunities that it creates for children's empower and then takes the role of being the catalyst to create the opportunity for children to speak directly to policy makers. Recent examples of meetings with policy makers:

1. Minister for Education & Employment regarding online learning during lockdown;
2. Minister for the Infrastructure and Minister for Local Government regarding the need for open spaces in communities;
3. Participation of children in a specialized webinar on education, whereby children spoke directly to academics about their concerns regarding the education system with special focus on online learning.

Children's Interfaith Dialogue which is being transformed into a Children's Interfaith Council.

Progett Komunitarja is a project with Children and for Children within communities for a healthy environment for Children to have the opportunity to enjoy their Right to Play. It will therefore provide:

- Green spaces;
- Safe spaces;
- Inclusive spaces;
- A community feeling;
- Space for non-formal education;

Children's Ethnobotanical Hub

Play is fundamental to children's Wellbeing. Every child should be given the opportunity, space, and time to develop a healthy life, playing outdoors in nature. Nature gives children the opportunity to grow and explore the world in their own terms and create a significant understanding and respect towards planet earth.

There is a growing number of studies and campaigns putting forward evidence showing that a connection with nature makes us healthier and happier people. Research shows that nature and our physical and mental wellbeing are interconnected. Frank Lloyd Wright, the great architect, designer, writer, and educator who believed in designing in harmony with

humanity and its environment said, **“Study Nature, love Nature, stay close to Nature. It will never fail you.”**

Throughout this past year, the Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society has created ample of safe spaces for children to come together; to connect and discuss; to understand and build relationships and to listen and share. These activities brought together children from different faiths, different nationalities, different ages, different abilities together. Different children from different walks of life have one common factor; they are all children.

The Children’s Ethnobotanical Hub is a 3year project aimed at creating a platform of people (children and adults) who are interested in the area of ethnobotanical studies focusing on improving local communities by giving them the possibility to actively participate in related activities from inception to completion

Mental Health App

The Malta Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and the Centre for Resilience and Socio-Emotional Health at the University of Malta are leading a collaborative project on the prevention of suicide amongst young people in Malta, namely the adaptation of an existing international App on suicide prevention amongst young people.

Hal Far Project

The main aim of the Hal Far project, is to create a space where the people of Hal Far can get together. The project is aimed to create opportunities for social integration, while increase the wellbeing of the locals, and creating safe space where they can interact, be active and connect with each other.

The collaborative effort will bring together several Ministries, partners, and experts to create a safe, family space and sports area open to the general public, targeting the needs of the local population. The project’s long-term goal is to create an environment for leisure activities and sports in a sustainable manner. This will be achieved by giving ownership of

the premises to the community itself by being active participants in the restructuring process.

The Malta Trust Foundation:

The Malta Trust Foundation was Set Up with a specific purpose to develop initiatives that support young people and communities that are facing particular challenges and who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

The Malta Trust Foundation Brings together collaborative platforms of civil society organisations, members of the business community, Experts, Academics, Practitioners and other stakeholders.

The Food Aid Project during Lockdown:

The Food Aid Project was established after receiving several requests for assistance from people who had lost their jobs because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The families who were currently without any income whatsoever, with most having to pay rents or loans, were unable to cope. The number of applicants escalated substantially since the start of the pandemic, with over 6000 people now receiving food every fortnight.

The Malta Trust Foundation also collaborated and supported NGOs who were struggling to assist vulnerable families. The Trust also took referrals from the Foodbank Lifeline Foundation, who were unable to accept new cases.

The Food Aid Project was made possible through the generous contribution of businesses who donate funds specifically for this purpose. Other companies, including supermarkets and vegetable wholesalers, donate food which was then distributed throughout Malta and Gozo.

Supporting Families to meet Covid-19 Challenges organized by the National Centre for Family Research – Carried out by MFWS

To mark the International Day of Families on the 15th May 2020 (during lockdown) the MFWS organized a virtual round table discussion focusing on Supporting Families to meet Covid-19 Challenges organized by the National Centre for Family Research (NCFR) within the MFWS.

The event was intended to gain further insight on the experiences and needs of families in relation to COVID-19 and to facilitate an exchange of ideas and proposals to support families in the face of the multifaceted challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Prior to the event, participants were requested to send their feedback to three main questions (below)

1. The experiences of families with whom they have been in contact during the first weeks of COVID-19

Feedback:

Benefits: Slowing down and reflecting on the 'old normal' has been experienced in a positive way by some, who may be reluctant to be pressured back into their former pace of life. Many families have welcomed the possibility to spend more quality time together and to catch up on missed experiences.

Challenges: Overall, however, families have experienced a strong uncertainty, and a fear of contracting the disease and of missing out on essential goods. Fear has created a sense of instability for many.

Material impact: Many families have been affected financially, either through job loss or reduced income. Government aid is mitigating these challenges to some extent but hardships remain. Some families are finding it hard to pay rent, and risk being homeless; there has been a rise in the number of people requesting food and/or shelter. A good number of older adults who cannot leave their house run out of money and cannot go to the Bank. Single parents who only have one income and cannot work are particularly hard hit.

Migrant women face multiple disadvantages which have been exacerbated by COVID-19. For instance, 30 mothers have lost their financial income, and in 20 families, both spouses have lost their income. Their main concerns relate to payment of rent and utilities and basic necessities. Even if some landlords have been generous, reduced rents still need to be paid. Single migrant mothers are particularly disadvantaged.

Emotional: Now that the initial anxiety surrounding the transmission of the COVID-19 virus has abated somewhat, a different kind of impact of the pandemic on emotional wellbeing has started to emerge. The sense of unpredictability, and the loss of control over what is happening around us, is causing emotional difficulty. People feel a sense of loss, especially in respect of many social and practical aspects of their former lives, leaving many with feelings of deprivation, anger, injustice and despair. Anxiety has been exacerbated, especially among those prone to it.

Relationships: Many people are frustrated at their inability to spend time with other family members outside the household. On the other hand, spending an unprecedented time together has caused problems for some relationships. COVID-19 stress is causing negative communication patterns in some families. The risk of an increase in domestic violence was noted, especially where families with troubled relationships have to share a small space together for long.

Parenting: Parents are spending an unprecedented amount of time with their children. Even so, many families have lost the structure of routine. It is a challenge for many to occupy their children day after day. That said, some parents still have to go to work which is almost impossible for those without a partner at home, or those who have lost access to the care usually offered by grandparents. For some parents, COVID-19 has resulted in difficulties with managing their children's behaviour, making them feel a loss of parental competence. Many are feeling overwhelmed and are experiencing burnout, and do not know how they can continue to manage their children and take care of their education, while doing their own work and tending to housework and cooking. Besides, not everyone has the space or technology at home to accommodate both telework and children's online education.

Families with terminal illness COVID-19 has made it harder for people with terminal illness and their families. 10 Patients and their families experience an intensified fear and anxiety

because the patient is immunocompromised. While advanced medicine has meant that cancer can be managed as a chronic disease, the fear of contracting COVID-19 brings the fear of death to the fore once more. The inability to visit inpatient relatives causes anguish. Children in paediatric wards are allowed one parent 'locked in' with them for two weeks at a stretch, without the support structures they are accustomed to. Children whose parents are inpatients cannot understand why they are unable to visit. Cancer patients who lived alone (for instance, due to estrangement from family) lose access to all the social groups that have closed down under COVID-19, thus exacerbating their isolation.

Loss of access to services and support: Vulnerable people, for instance, those with serious mental health difficulties, have ended up on their own and without their prior support networks due to social distancing. Parents of children with disability have felt very strongly the loss of community services and therapeutic services. The closure of SAPPOR centres has interrupted the progress that its clients were making.

2. The main challenges that they expect families to be facing over the coming months

Main challenges to families anticipated over next few months: The overall sense of uncertainty created by COVID-19, especially in respect of reduced family income, is expected to endure over the coming months. This uncertainty is particularly worrying for those who have long-term contracts such as expensive mortgages; for those with dependent children; and for persons with disabilities or ill health for whom life is much more expensive. Numerous people will face the trauma of jobloss which is particularly problematic for those without savings. Those who had to close their business due to bankruptcy might find it hard to find a job if labour demand is depressed. Homelessness is likely to increase. In general, poverty and homelessness are only likely to increase until economy gets on its feet again.

Other challenges already outlined above are likely to persist, including social isolation, loneliness and relational difficulties. A heightened risk of domestic violence (versus spouse and/or children) may persist. Physical and mental illness may be exacerbated, and an increase in anxiety and depression has already been noticed. The effort to be resilient has, over time, a negative impact on mental health and may be thinning out. Prolonged fatigue and stress is particularly likely among families of persons with disabilities, making these

caring relationships hard to sustain. Apart from emotional support, these families need respite.

3. Their proposals to support these families to meet these challenges.

Proposals to help families meet these challenges: The coming months will constitute a 'new normal'; no-one has visibility of the future at this point, and we need innovative methods to cope with this new normal which requires 'out of the box' thinking. Despite this lack of visibility, though, we still need to reduce uncertainty as best we can by drawing up, and making public, timely plans that help people and businesses to adapt and re-adapt to an evolving situation.

Specific recommendations:

Regulatory: It was pointed out that our laws should provide for such public emergencies, protecting not only individuals but also the common good. Such laws would provide clarity and predictability and would help minimise distrust between, for instance, consumers and businesses. Arrangements could be made for debt relief in the case of the hardest hit, for instance, in respect of the payment of rent, utilities and ICT expenses. One suggestion was the creation of a bail-out fund to be used for paying the bills of genuine cases. Another was to cancel the debts of the most vulnerable individuals or families.

Services: Service providers should remain accessible to families. This may mean opening up to see clients in person wherever possible, and with suitable protection for staff and clients. Where this is not possible, online or helpline services should be widely available.

There should be very close collaboration between schools and parents. Parents should be seen as partners in the education system; this should always be the case but particularly now, as many families are worried and uncertain about their children's academic progress. A plan of action is needed to ensure the smooth return of children to school. Some families with low human capital with whom teachers may not have contact may be helped through a 'buddy system'. Parents who need it should be taught to use digital platforms necessary for their children's education.

In particular, parents of disabled children should be consulted before schools re-open, as the challenge of adapting once again may be particularly onerous for these families. More psychological support should be made available for disabled persons and their families to deal with COVID-19 difficulties. A plan of action is needed for persons with disabilities to gradually return to SAPPOR day centres.

Incentives and subsidies: New employment opportunities and measures should be created, as well as new forms of tax relief. NGOs playing an important role in supporting families during COVID-19 should be supported financially. Incentives to employers for telework may prevent staff being called back to work when in fact they could perform work from home under the circumstances. It was noted that not all work can be performed remotely.

Outreach and awareness-raising: We need to raise more awareness about the importance of resilience, and to tap people's energy and skill. People who are suffering need to be helped to accept that they are in a difficult situation mentally or emotionally. This recognition will then help them to seek support and move forward to overcome strains.

Other: Research should be undertaken on (a) the evolving rental market under COVID-19 and the situation of persons in precarious housing conditions; (b) on precarious work, the implications of which have been brought so clearly to light by COVID-19. 18 There are children who are vulnerable and in poverty. Their wellbeing needs to be protected as otherwise, according to scientific literature published in the OECD report on the impact of children during COVID-19, the impact will remain for 5 generations in the future. There should be designated safe spaces for children to play in. This is particularly necessary for children with challenging behaviour who may have suffered significantly under social distancing measures.

The Blossom Project:

Through our fruitful partnership with Blossom Foundation, The Malta Trust Foundation is working on the Blossom Project counselling services initiative which enables us to provide full-time and trans-cultural counselling in schools. This project started in 2016 within the Primary School of St Paul's Bay, a community that is faced with a variety of socio-economic

challenges – this project is ensuring timely and effective support to children and young people.

In collaboration with Deloitte Foundation, the Blossom Project was extended in 2020, to also provide counselling services at the Naxxar Middle School.

Progett Tbissima:

Programm Tbissima, a non-formal education programme was launched as a way of providing therapeutic, meaningful, and tangible community-based support to children, young people, and their families within the locality of Marsa. Incorporating a range of services (show list) and implemented for the Malta Trust Foundation, by Right2Smile and in collaboration with the Alfred Mizzi Foundation, Programm Tbissima reaches those children who research shows us that they might otherwise slip through the net of mainstream education and social services.

- * Homework Club
- * Drop-in Counselling Service
- * Social Mentorship
- * Arts and Crafts
- * Reading Programme
- * Job and Career guidance
- * Practical Skills Courses
- * Sports and Games
- * Increasing Accessibility to Mainstream Services
- * Other Activities

The Villa Bianca Music School: (Ariadne PR)

Villa Bianca School of Performing Arts in Santa Venera is expected to start receiving its first students early next year realising a longstanding dream of the Down Syndrome Association.

1. Malta Trust Foundation chair Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca started following the Association's work some years back when it was teaching children with different abilities through the help of Resonaari Special School of Music in Finland.
2. A rapport was struck and, together with the commitment of the Assistive Devices for the Visually Impaired Centre (ADVICE) and the Autism Parents Association, has led to the creation of this specialised music school.
3. This school is expected to fill the existing lacuna and help children with different abilities develop through the universal language of music.
4. In all, the Malta Trust Foundation's international partners contributed €600,000 for five years, while 15 local business entities committed €360,000 over three years.
5. It is estimated that €220,000 a year will be needed to keep the school running, so Ms Coleiro Preca is encouraging more business entities and individuals to come forward and support this cause.
6. The school will focus on providing high quality music education for all pupils with different abilities, from children with Down Syndrome, to those on the autism spectrum and children who are visually impaired.
7. It is geared to help develop and nurture these children's skills — social and communication skills, as well as movement — through music.
8. The school will be training and employing specialised music teachers, and drawing on the expertise of visiting music professionals to help children express themselves through music.
9. The music curriculum will be underpinned by Sounds of Intent, the only musical development framework for children with special abilities and early years that is based on years of research.

Enhance

Making higher education accessible to all is the aim of Enhance, an initiative offering different scholarship opportunities to young people coming a disadvantaged background.

The ongoing enriching academic scholarship programme that commenced in 2017 enables selected undergraduate students to study business in Rome. This materialised through a collaboration with Fondazione Terzo Pilastro Internazionale, the University of Malta, and the

LUISS University in Rome. Another scholarship programme with IDEA Education Malta, provides learning opportunities to students at masters level

Mental Health Community Service in Gozo:

The Sunrise Project- Gozo - A Diverse Community- Level Therapeutic Mental Health Programme for Young People in Gozo

1. The Sunrise Project sees its inception in 2018
2. This project is uniquely designed to assist Gozitan young people suffering from mental health difficulties, empowering them to lead an independent quality of life.
3. Research has established that 7,800 individuals out of a population of 33,000 individuals, will at some point in their lives, experience mental health difficulties.
4. There are only two Mental Health Professionals working in the health care system at the Gozo General Hospital, that also support individuals in the community.
5. Rapid socio-economic changes in recent years have impacted the community and created more challenges.
6. Stigma of mental health in Gozo is even more challenging than in Malta.

Objectives:

1. Practical and emotional support;
2. Short/medium/long-term rehabilitative care at home;
3. Information and brief interventions;
4. Liaison with primary and secondary health services;
5. Psychosocial education; and
6. Opportunities to enhance personal, social and leisure skills.

Implementation:

1. In collaboration with Richmond Foundation, a dedicated mental health welfare officer was engaged.
2. Within a year of commencement, this project has seen a full case load on a continuous basis.
3. All service-users are compliant with treatment through a continuous collaboration with the Mental Health Association Gozo and relevant Mental Health Professionals.

Indicators of successful outcomes:

1. Only 4% of service-users were re-admitted to hospital since the beginning of this service, recording a drastic drop in re-admissions to hospital by 96%.
2. 24% of the service-users are in gainful employment or in training.
3. 40% of the service-users are attending leisure activities or voluntary work. This has had a direct impact on positive enhancement of their social skills and their integration within the community.

Maltacan:

The MaltaCAN network was established to promote, foster and support children's rights and child participatory mechanisms in Malta. It aligns its work to the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Adopting a child based approach, the Network priorities child participation and its implementation at a local level, through an integrative and collaborative approach.

The Network seeks to raise awareness, and influence policy by creating working groups tasked to react and/or promote particular topics and issues related to children's rights and child participation, all the while making sure that the fundamental pillar of the Network remains the respect for the voice of child.

As one of its main aims, the Network shall give greater visibility towards a better understanding of children's rights on the national agenda.

emPOWER:

The Platform for women's organisations strengthens the work of the individual organisations and also facilitates cooperation and provide an opportunity whereby women's organisation can work together as one on issues of common concern. emPOWER also works to Support women in all their diversity and women's organisations in Malta in all aspects of society. Stakeholders meet on a regular basis to discuss a number of initiatives and topics related to women's rights including female representation in politics, the gender pay gap and other matters related to gender equality. To date, emPOWER brings together 13 different organisations including 100 Women in Finance, Business and Professional Women Valletta Malta, Foundation for Women Entrepreneurs, Malta Association of Women in Business, Malta Confederation of Women's Organisations, Malta Girl Guides, Migrant Women Association Malta, National Council of Women, Nisa Laburisti, Soroptimist International Malta, Women Directors in Malta, Women Women's Rights Foundation and Young Women's Christian Association (Malta). The Platform has also created 2 subcommittees. One of the sub-committees was tasked to support SOAR in holding a closed roundtable discussion on the topic of Domestic Violence. The second sub-committee has worked to increase the visibility of MEP female candidates who contested the MEP elections in May 2019.