



# SJAF e-magazine



St Jeanne Antide  
Foundation

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## Domestic Violence – a success story of protection and resilience

by Elaine Compagno, SOAR Service Co-ordinator

Too often we read about the difficulties faced by victims of domestic violence when they try to access the systems that are meant to protect them, serve justice and support them. This has been overwhelmingly evident in the recent anecdotal research that SOAR Service has carried out among survivors of domestic violence in preparation for the upcoming conference on the 4th of December between 8.30 to 11.45am. During the conference, we shall present a snapshot of what it is like to be a survivor.

One particular case was quite intriguing however, as the survivor had a very different story to tell. She spoke of how, in her case, all the pieces fell into place and it was easy to see the positive effect this had on her. Smiling from ear to ear, Sandra\* spoke of how well the police had treated her. She said they were polite, sensitive and took genuine interest in seeing to her wellbeing in those moments when she was so very afraid.



*“I could count on them. They always turned up when I called, always polite. They accompanied me back home the first time I reported so that I could get my stuff and leave. I felt safe and protected.”*

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Sandra trusted the police and because they did their job so very well, she had strong faith in them and lots of praise. When we spoke about lawyers, Sandra said she felt blessed to have the best lawyer she believes is out there.

*“She is extremely supportive. I feel safe because she knows exactly what to do. She explained what all the fees were for and was very transparent and understanding.”*

For a victim of violence, the ability to trust is greatly hampered by past trauma. For many, the lawyer is the first person to gain some of that well-protected trust, but when the lawyer fails their client, it is often devastating to the victim. For Sandra, her lawyer was another important person who went on to strengthen and empower Sandra even more.

Sandra spoke of her homelessness when she left her home. She had to stay with relatives and felt like she was ‘in their way’ sometimes. She argued that the police should have the power to remove the perpetrator right away, and not wait to fight it out in court. And Sandra went on to do just that – she fought it in court and the magistrate immediately gave her a protection order, insisting that the perpetrator leaves the house.

*“The magistrate helped me feel at ease. I felt very uncomfortable explaining what happened in front of my husband, but the magistrate told me to look at him, and not at my husband. That really helped me in that moment.”*

When marriages break down due to violence, mediation often becomes part of the experiences of a survivor. Even though mediation is contraindicated for such situations, it is very often that mediation is allowed to go on, many times resulting in added trauma and very unfair, unbalanced contracts. For Sandra however, the system worked as it should have and at the first sign of violence and an imbalance in power between her and her husband, the mediator shut down the mediation on the first day.

*“One cannot discuss with a man who wants to beat you in that same mediation room. I was very afraid. I am against this set-up”.*

When we discussed financial matters, Sandra’s smile disappeared. She explained how she had worked all her life at home, raising a family of 6 and now she knows that she’ll be getting a very small pension in a few years. She described how she went through a life of slavery to support and care for her husband and while he will now earn a good pension, she will barely make ends meet.

*“It’s not fair. It’s not fair.”*



However, whereas survivors may find it difficult to re-enter the labour market and to find a job after many years of being inactive, Sandra had the determination and empowerment to get herself employed. She now has a job and supports herself and her teenage son. Finally, we discussed how informed she felt through each phase or process that she had been through. Her face lights up once more with a big beaming smile.

*“My lawyer told me all that I needed to know. Thanks to her, I felt very informed.”*

Today, thanks to the efficiency, understanding, professionalism and dedication of the front-liners that she met, like the police, the lawyers, the mediator and the magistrate, Sandra has moved on and excitedly looks forward to a second chance at life, love, dignity and respect while putting the past far behind her.

\*Original name has been changed to respect confidentiality.

**PART 3** (see the August and September 2015 issues of SJAF Magazine for the first 2 parts)

## Weathering the Storm

– tips for family caregivers of mentally ill persons

(Extracts from the book: **BDOTI FIL-MALTEMP**. Edited by Nora Macelli and Connie Magro. Published by the Mental Health Association and the St Jeanne Antide Foundation, 2015.)

Translated by **JEAN KILLICK**

*In the past 2 issues of SJAF e-Magazine, family caregivers were provided with tips on how they should continue the difficult journey of care with more confidence, knowledge and ease. Part 1 (August issue) article focused on Phobia, Depression and OCD. Part 2 (September issue) focused on Eating Disorders, Hoarding Mania and Bi-Polar Disorder. In this issue, we provide tips on Psychosis, Personality Disorder and Relapse. We encourage you to read the full book. These articles are just extracts.*

### Tips on PSYCHOSIS

Psychosis rarely occurs suddenly. What happens is that symptoms start to appear and worsen over a period of months or even years. Amongst the early symptoms one can notice changes in thought processes and feelings which begin to disable a person before the illness worsens and is identified. If diagnosis is carried out at an early stage, there is a good chance that one can overcome the disability and prevent the acute stage of the illness from setting in.

#### How can you take care of a family member suffering from psychosis?

Love and support are crucial for recovery.

Accept the illness and the difficulties that it brings. If you do not accept it, everything you do will result from lack of understanding, fear, resentments and unwise decisions.

Be realistic on what you expect from your suffering relative and from yourself. Otherwise you will give up because the reality will be very different from your expectations. Help your relative to have realistic objectives. For example, if they are students about to sit for exams, do not force them to sit for all the exams; discuss with the psychiatrist what would be realistically possible. Depending on the situation, help your relative to apply for an extension of the course or exams.

Don't go into denial about the problem. Don't look for excuses. The more you try to deny the facts, the more difficult it will be for you to understand and help. Some people try to avoid the issue by looking for other reasons, such as: "He's like that because he was bullied at school." Or "He's so arrogant and spoiled."

If the person you care for is young, don't fuss, over-protect or do everything for them because this will only make things much worse and will prevent them from developing their character. Help your relative to strengthen their skills and independence. You may have conflicting feelings about whether you can trust them; remember that your relative must progress at their own pace and must be given space to go on in life.

Educate yourself. Learn about the illness and treatment so that that every decision you take is based on good foundations. The more you know about the illness, the better you can manage your life, help to resolve crises and work towards recovery.

Avoid stress. Create a structured environment that supports you.

Couples should work as a team. Go on a course together. Look for help together. Talk and discuss. If you don't, your efforts will be fragmented and may move in different and opposing directions. Your relationship will suffer.

Don't nag your suffering relative – the situation will worsen if they are pressurized. They are probably already blaming themselves and nagging is the last thing they need.

Prepare your relative for special occasions (whether happy or difficult ones), thereby reducing stress and possibly avoiding another attack of psychosis.

Be patient with slow progress!

Encourage and support the treatment.

Check that the treatment is being followed and medication taken. The patient may not be aware of the real situation and may say "You don't believe that I feel ok. I don't need to take the pills." Calmly and patiently, try to convince them that they cannot abruptly stop taking the medication because the symptoms will worsen. Continue to check that medication is being taken; if you notice any worrying side-effects, discuss these with your relative's psychiatrist.

Be alert for signs of a relapse. Let's take the example of mania: your relative may wake up shouting, fighting or arguing, singing at night, shutting himself in his room with headphones on.



Prepare yourself for crisis situations; be prepared about what you should do when a crisis happens. Seek guidance. You must understand that you cannot reason or argue with a psychotic patient because the situation will explode into a crisis. Remember that the patient is probably afraid. So, if they irrationally say (for example) "You want to kill me", don't argue with them.

Try not to be irritated or angry or show this to your relative. Stay calm.

Don't shout.

Don't be sarcastic or ridicule them. If your relative says: "The police are chasing me", don't reply "Of course not! It's all in your mind. Come on, you don't need to be afraid." Don't say that, because what your relative imagines is real to them.

Don't contradict your relative. Say: "You're right. You can hear them. Reality can be different. But I understand you." Or "I know you can see them, but I cannot."

Try to reduce distractions like television.

Don't get too close and don't try to touch your relative in such a state.

Avoid looking into their eyes for any length of time.

Sit down and ask your relative to sit down too.

Seek professional help, such as the Crisis Intervention Service at Mater Dei hospital or the hospital's emergency service. Phone 179 at other times. Phone the social worker from Mount Carmel Hospital assigned to your relative.

Be aware that 30% of psychotic attacks are one-offs. In another 30% of cases, the illness will get worse despite the love, support and treatment provided. Despite this, one must not be discouraged as treatment can control many of the symptoms.

## Tips on BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER and violent behaviour



There is a difference between understanding and accepting feelings, and understanding and accepting behaviour. Violence is not only aggression but results from the person feeling threatened. But violence should never be acceptable.

With medication and support, mentally ill patients who have aggressive tendencies do not present a danger to the general public. If you feel threatened by your relative's behaviour, don't dismiss it; protect yourself by leaving and asking for help. In the meantime, do the following:

- Avoid touching your relative.
- Leave a physical space between you and your relative.
- Don't get between your relative and the door.
- Ensure that there is a building exit you can quickly use.
- Talk calmly and softly.
- Don't argue and don't answer back angrily.
- If your relative asks a question, give a brief reply in a reasonable tone. That way the patient will not feel ignored.
- Try not to show that you are uncomfortable, nervous or afraid.
- Don't point your finger at your relative, or put your hands at your waist – it will look as though you are challenging him.
- Don't move suddenly.
- Show him or her that you are there to help.
- Not every unusual or strange behaviour is violent.

## Tips on RELAPSE

### *How to reduce the risk of relapse*

When you feel well, the chemicals in the brain are relatively balanced. Symptoms that lead to a relapse can mess up this chemical balance and cause a relapse. It is important to learn to spot signs of a relapse, so that preventive measures can be taken early on. The best way to prevent this is to take good care of yourself. In addition, there are a number of steps that you can take to avoid the recurrence of the illness. These include continuation of medication prescribed, adopting a positive life style, controlling your environment, and awareness of the symptoms.

It is useful to learn more about the mental illness and medication. Discuss the medication and its effects with professionals in mental health and psychiatry. Search out further written information on diagnosis and treatment. If the medication prescribed is not working, ask about other medicines. Be guided by your doctor so the correct medicine and dosage can be established.

Above all, there must be a strong commitment to taking the medication daily. Although it may not help, be aware that one should never stop the medication without discussing thoroughly with the doctor why one feels the need to change the medication and dosage and what the side effects are. Recognise the early symptoms that warn you of a possible relapse. Remember that the symptoms can be detected right at the start of the relapse.

Take note of any changes you notice, such as strange occurrences at the start of the illness and changes in behaviour that other people have noticed. Remember to stay alert for:

- \* Any symptoms that may appear;
- \* Any new symptoms that occur suddenly;
- \* Any increase in residual symptoms. Residual symptoms are those that lessen but do not disappear totally, despite the medication prescribed. Some remain the same, worsen or never improve.
- \* Take note of early symptoms so that the illness will not recur. Write down the early symptoms so that you can easily spot them and refer immediately to the doctor.

Some early symptoms that you should be on the look out for in your suffering relative:

- \* Sleepless nights or lack of sleep;
- \* Difficulty in concentrating or paying attention. They cannot think as clearly as usual.
- \* One minute they are laughing, the next they are crying.
- \* Being more forgetful or absentminded than usual.
- \* Hearing voices.
- \* Fear of people, places or things that would not normally frighten them.
- \* Excessive anger and more arguments than usual.
- \* Strange reasoning, words and behaviour.
- \* Continuous bad or worried moods.
- \* Thinking that people are talking about them or laughing at them.
- \* Spending much more money than usual.

It is important to deal with symptoms of a relapse, so that:

- \* Hospital stays may not be necessary – a relapse can be avoided.
- \* Your relative may start and continue to feel well.
- \* They do not regress.
- \* They lessen the chances of ending up in hospital.
- \* See that they do not shut themselves up!  
about any bad news with someone close to you. It doesn't matter if you need to talk and cry often. This is part of the mind's natural healing process.
- \* Keep yourself active. Go for walks and take part in other activities. Do housework. Try to do maintenance work around the house to keep your environment clean, attractive and restful. Don't give up those activities that are part of your normal routine.
- \* Make sure you eat regularly. Eat a mix of fresh fruit and vegetables. If you lose weight rapidly, you will lack vitamins and feel worse.
- \* Avoid drugs (especially Cannabis and alcohol). Don't try to cheer yourself up with alcohol or drugs as these will make you feel better only for a very short time; later you will feel much worse. These will worsen your mental illness. Illegal drugs and alcohol prevent you from working on your problem. They are also bad for your physical health.
- \* Sleep: try to sleep and wake at regular times.
- \* Don't be discouraged by thinking that you are the only one suffering mental illness. Be brave – if you are careful, eventually you may be able to overcome the illness. Sometimes, after a mental illness, it is possible for a person to be stronger than before the illness. When you face difficult situations with a positive attitude, you will notice that your relationships have also improved.
- \* Decisions: The more you manage your illness, the stronger your decision-making skills will become and you will be able to initiate changes in your life that possibly you may have avoided making in the past. Make small changes at a pace you can cope with, to avoid needless stress.
- \* Decrease stress: Keep stress levels as low as you can. A lot of stress, even good stress, can cause a relapse. If you feel any new stress, speak to the doctor or to a member of your treatment team. To decrease stress, avoid stressful situations and instead, do something that you like – listen to some music, watch an interesting programme on television, have a shower or bath, write down your thoughts in a diary, go for a long walk, go swimming, talk to a friend or family member, paint, go out into the countryside and take pleasure in the natural beauty around you, do some exercise to relax you.
- \* Control your environment: If you live in a house full of noise that irritates you, see if you can change your environment. Perhaps you can try to live somewhere else on your own. You can ask for help as a family from a family therapist so that you can all learn to live in harmony.



## Official Opening of Ċentru Enrichetta

With start up funding from the EEA NGO Fund for Malta managed by SOS Malta, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation has set up another Family Resource Centre in Birzebbuga called Ċentru Enrichetta. Yesterday evening, an official opening took place at which the Archbishop of Malta Mons. Charles Scicluna celebrated a thanksgiving mass with the participation of Parish Priest Fr Anton Galea Scannura and other members of the clergy. During the homily, Mons. Scicluna highlighted Pope Francis's injunction to humanity yesterday morning to steer away from the corrosive influence of greed which pulls families apart.

Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, spoke about the benefits to vulnerable families of such community-based Family Resource Centres which hubs for the delivery of a range of multi-disciplinary support services. She mentioned her initiative to set up a community-based branch of the Malta Community Chest Fund at Ċentru Enrichetta so as to be closer to families needing to access MCCF support. President Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca highlighted the effectiveness of street outreach work that the Foundation carries out in order to identify and support hard-to-reach families in difficulty.

Sr Salvina Bezzina, Provincial Superior of the Sisters of Charity who is also the Chairperson of the Governing Board of the Foundation, spoke about the Province's commitment to serving categories of families that are most underserved by existing social support systems. She explained how, through its NGO, the Province continues to find new ways of identifying and supporting families who suffer the brunt of social stigma and social exclusion. She thanked the staff team at the St Jeanne Antide Foundation for being imbued with the charisma of St Jeanne Antide and collectively working with love, humility and passion to better serve those on the margins of society.

Sr Nunzia De Gori, Mother General of the congregation of the Sisters of Charity who is based in Rome, was also present with two of her council members.

A reception followed at the Centre which has been operating since early this year.



## Turning the tables: a conference with a difference.

The St Jeanne Antide Foundation is organizing a short morning conference entitled MY PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE, MY HUMAN RIGHT: MY GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSIBILITY - A CALL TO ACTION. The conference marks 3 years since the founding of SOAR Service and falls between the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the Human Rights Day.

Domestic violence is directly touching at least 40,000 to 50,000 women in Malta and Gozo, and a number of men. We know that it doesn't discriminate between class, race or sexual orientation, young or old. It leaves a devastating impact on the victims, and also on their children, on the victim's immediate and extended family, and friends. We know that coercion and control in domestic violence leads to a drop in the female workforce and therefore has direct implications for the financial well-being of the victims and the larger economy. It also leads to a rise in mental health incidence and other health-related issues, including loss of life.

We know that domestic violence contributes directly to the rising figures of separation, single parenthood, childhood trauma, loss of property ownership and the slide into poverty that ensues with the subsequent mounting demands that stretch social welfare and housing resources even further.

Presently, for many victims, domestic violence is the beginning of a downward slope into a black abyss that they still find themselves in, many years after leaving. Our research shows that survivors face violence from the same perpetrator repeatedly for many subsequent years and this concerns fellow citizens who are seeing this crime going on in the community with impunity. It also concerns every tax payer who funds the cost of the support services, the law enforcement services, the court services, the health care services, and the welfare system. Domestic violence is a scourge of our society and indeed a serious concern for us all.

SOAR Service is responsible for the process leading to the conference and key features of this innovative initiative during the conference will include:

- 5 short presentations by survivors themselves on principal themes, based on 22 in-depth interviews about survivors' experiences, 12+ focus group meetings and individual meetings with key professionals from state agencies and NGOs to glean their perspectives.
- 5 thematic workshops intended to discuss the way forward and produce a timely plan of action.



***For more information on the conference and on how to register, contact St Jeanne Antide Foundation on [carmen.sjaf@gmail.com](mailto:carmen.sjaf@gmail.com)***

Conference partially funded by:



IL-PREMJU TAL-PRESIDENT  
GĦALL-KREATTIVITÀ



## Outcome of SWOT analysis of LEAP Project

One of the workshops at the closing conference of the LEAP Project was a presentation about the outcome of a S.W.O.T. analysis carried out with a number of stakeholders. In brief, the analysis included the following points:

### STRENGTHS

everyone appreciated the goodwill of stakeholder representatives and their eager readiness to collaborate;  
 mutual understanding was a key feature of the initiative;  
 efficiency and, hence, less duplication;  
 worthwhile initiatives are evolving;  
 there is extensive sharing of information and a healthy sense of ownership;  
 many stakeholder representatives expressed that they appreciate the fact that they have come to know workers from across so many sectors and are now more able to liaise and collaborate;  
 attendance to regular network meetings remains high;  
 the process is leading to bottom-up policy change  
 the Leap project is a good example of cross-Ministry collaboration.

### WEAKNESSES

lack of human resources result in stakeholders working alone; disappointment due to rising expectations due to the dynamic collaborative process;  
 concern expressed about misuse of data-protection principle;  
 attitude of some who block innovation by stating “that is how we have always worked”;  
 much more needs to be done to facilitate lack of communication between agencies

### THREATS

stakeholders come across service users who abuse services;  
 homelessness rising;  
 ageing population;  
 long-term planning not always possible;  
 brain drain in Gozo.



### OPPORTUNITIES

unique opportunity for continuity of services  
 working together across sectors;  
 streamlining procedures across regions;  
 networks can build upon achievements during the post-Leap period;  
 development of policies for certain regions.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

networks should continue, irrespective of decisions about project continuity;  
 through community work activities, workers need to emphasis citizens’ obligations since the tendency nowadays is to speak about rights without any emphasis on corresponding responsibilities;  
 strengthen inter-Ministry Committees;  
 need a central committee of regional stakeholder representatives;  
 more information needs to be shared about projects and initiatives;  
 introduce a memo of understanding between entities committed to working together.



# Rokna Poeżija



## Kien Hemm Żmien

kien hemm żmien meta x-xemx  
kienet tkun għal kulhadd  
fis-sewwa u fil-ħaqq, u  
b'mogħdrija bla tarf —  
jaqaw dan m'għadux hekk?

kien hemm art fejn il-ħlejjaq  
kienu huma l-hena stess  
u l-hena welldet ħlejjaq  
ta' ħajjithom festa —  
jaqaw dan m'għadux hekk?

rabtiet rotob bħal fwieħa  
twaħħid delikat



Pride makes us artificial and humility makes us real.

(Thomas Merton)



**3 CRAFTS STALLS** - Staff and volunteers had 3 stands full of crafts made by themselves and by service users. 1 stand was set up at Siggiewi during the Festa Majjal held on Saturday 10th September. The other stand was set up during the Mental Health Expo held at Tigne Point on Saturday 10th September whilst the third Crafts stall was set up as part of the Senglea Maritime Festival held on Sunday 25th October.



Every square of this patchwork cover represents a Sister of Charity. Every Sister of Charity from 32 countries contributed one patch representing a story...a culture...a charisma...It is a symbol of Christ's love for humanity and a celebration of unity, in the midst of diversity.

# Mental Health Expo



On Saturday 10th October, the Commissioner for Mental Health, Dr John Cachia, organised a one day Mental Health and Wellbeing Expo at The Point shopping mall. Around 22 service providers took set up stalls through which they provided information about their services and initiatives.





Find us on:  
**facebook®**

<https://www.facebook.com/SjafAntideCentre?fref=ts>



#### DONATIONS

Your donation is truly appreciated. It enables us to sustain our services to vulnerable and poor individuals and families.

Donation to the St Jeanne Antide Foundation can be made as follows:

**Cheque** issued to The St Jeanne Antide Foundation and posted to the Foundation: 51 Tarxien Road, Tarxien TXN 1092

For **local bank transfers**: **APS** 2000 0681 886      **HSBC** 013175021001  
**BOV** 4002003379-0      **BANIF** 00210404101

If you are a Go/Vodafone/Redtouch subscriber you can donate by sending a **blank SMS** (SMS tariffs applicable):

€2.33 – 50617371      €4.66 – 50618095  
€6.99 – 50618909      €11.65 – 50619217

You will receive a text message of thanks and acknowledgement

For **bank transfers from overseas**: APS Bank, 146/147, Antoine De Paul Square, Paola PLA1260

Bank Code (Swift) APSBMTMT IBAN No: MT03 APSB 7708 0005 5047 2000 0681 886 (last 11 digits are the account number).

#### HOW YOU CAN HELP US - OTHER OPTIONS

- If you are getting married: make a donation instead of buying wedding souvenirs.
- If you are having a birthday party: ask friends to make a donation instead of buying a gift.
- If you are having a wedding anniversary celebration: convince your guests to make a donation instead of buying a gift.
- For funerals: you may wish to make a donation instead of buying flowers.
- Get Together: organise a spontaneous collection.
- You may wish to send us a monthly or annual donation, whatever the amount.
- You can encourage others to consider donating to the Foundation.
- Ask your employer for a matching scheme which will make your contribution go even further!

**Become a HELP-SJAF Champion and ask friends and family to make a donation.**

**CONTACT US:** [sjafngo@gmail.com](mailto:sjafngo@gmail.com)

#### Foundation SERVICES

##### 1. Family Resource Centres:

- **Centru Antida** in the heart of Tarxien. Open from 7.30am to 5 pm daily in winter time (sometimes later as well).; up to 1pm in summer Serves localities of Tarxien, Paola, Fgura and Santa Lucia. Social Work, community outreach, advocacy, referral, information, emotional support, support groups.

**Volunteering** opportunities, included inclusive volunteering for service users.

**Volunteer Handymen** in support of vulnerable and poor families.

**Learning Support** for vulnerable persons supported by Foundation Social Workers. Includes: *For Children*: weekly learning support for primary level students; *For adults*: non-formal learning opportunities such as self-esteem groups & literacy.

**Volunteer Befriending** for lonely, home-bound elderly persons

**Counselling;**

**Bazaar** in Tarxien (recycling and fundraising)

- **Centru Enrichetta in Birzebbuga**. Open Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 8am to 2pm. Social Work service; Family Literacy Support Programme; MCCF service on Tuesdays from 8am to 11am (Project financed for 12 months by the EEA NGO Malta Fund managed by SOS Malta).

**2. LWIEN Service – support for family carer-givers** of persons with mental health problems. Includes family consultations, counselling, support groups, home-visits, social work.

**3. IRENE Service** in support of very vulnerable women involved in street prostitution. (Project financed for 18 months by the EEA NGO Malta Fund managed by SOS Malta).

**4. SOAR Service: advocacy and support** for victims and survivors of domestic violence. Includes workshops on dating violence for young persons (soarmalta@gmail.com)

**5. Emotional Freedom Service** for persons wanting to be free from their anger, fear or other emotional distress;

**6. Overseas Development Projects:** SJAF works with partners in developing countries to formulate anti-poverty projects. It has also arranged for public funding of such projects in Pakistan, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Malawi.

**7. Centring Prayer Group** for contemplative prayer practice.

PUBLICATIONS: ask us for list.

See “Services” & “Reports” on  
[www.antidemalta.com](http://www.antidemalta.com).