# OPEN DOOR OPEN HEART

An overview of the operations of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation in 2020 including the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the provision of support services for vulnerable families in distress

ANNUAL REPORT
St Jeanne Antide Foundation
2020



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#### Affiliate membership:

- Anti-Poverty Forum (APF);
- Diocesan Diaconia Secretariat Forum of church-based organisations;
- Malta Health Network;
- Aģenzija Żgħażagħ;
- Mental Health Association;
- Network of service providers in area of Domestic Violence;
- WAVE (Forum Network);
- NGO network under the aegis of the Commission on Domestic Violence;
- Platform Against Homelessness;
- Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHRO);
- SKOP (Solidarjetà u Koperazzjoni) an NGDO Forum;

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# PART 1

# THE ST JEANNE ANTIDE FOUNDATION (SJAF) IN 2020

The St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SJAF) is a registered social purpose non-profit organisation. It is the social care services arm of the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide Thouret. Its overarching aim is to provide professional support services to very vulnerable individuals and families who are suffering due to very difficult life circumstances, and those who are sliding into poverty and are socially excluded. SJAF is administered by a Governing Board with a Chief Executive Officer and is registered as an NGO with the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations (VO/0005) and as a Foundation with the Registry for Legal Persons (LPF-101).

The Foundation has always followed a non-discrimination policy towards service users. It celebrates the beliefs, religious identity, and dignity of persons who belong to any religious or spiritual tradition (or none) – all are loved and respected. Thus, we see, welcome, and celebrate the infinite value of any human being, just as they are. We guarantee that anyone intending to make use of any of the Foundation's services will be made to feel comfortable, whoever they may be.

Workers at the Foundation work in partnership systematically in teams for the support and self-empowerment of socially excluded persons, families, and minority groups. The mission of the Foundation is to be present for individuals and families who need someone who can listen to them with compassion, link or guide them to appropriate existing support services, support them in the restoration of their dignity, and guide them towards self-reliance, resilience and fulfilment of their potential. Looking holistically at persons in need, the Foundation's mission is to give all round support to such persons.

#### Governance

A Governing Board is responsible for the oversight of strategic planning, policy development and financial management. Board members come from such diverse backgrounds as social work and nursing, financial management, social care service planning and management, medicine, and overseas development work. The CEO is a non-voting member of the Governing Board that meets monthly.

#### Services

The Foundation works in partnership with community-based organisations as well as State agencies and NGOs that are national in scope. Since 2007, it has carried out street outreach work as a means of identifying and extending support to hard-to-reach vulnerable families, assisting them as close as possible to where they live.

Since its establishment, the Foundation has set up several core services. Operating from two community-based service sites, SJAF has naturally evolved into an organisation that is at the service of neighbouring communities. Its scope is both local, and national. During 2020, the Foundation ran the following services:

# Family Support Service Centre and satellite centre (Scope: community based).

Čentru Antida is the Foundation's main family services hub. It lies in the heart of Hal Tarxien. Although SJAF operates a satellite family support centre in Birżebbuġa - Čentru Enrichetta - the centre had to be closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Support services at Centru Antida during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic months included the following:

..Social Work: the family supports provided included needs assessments, care planning, home-visits, advocacy, referral, accompaniment, information giving, emotional support, groupwork and in-kind support. Generic social work support was undertaken mainly in the catchment areas of Hal Tarxien, Paola, Fgura, Haż-Żabbar and Birżebbuġa. The service was also extended to service-using families that make use of SJAF services that are national in scope such as the LWIEN Service.

..Volunteering opportunities such as mentoring, befriending, crafts production and admin support.

.. Bazaar in Tarxien, next door to Centru Antida, which operates as a fundraising mechanism and a means to provide in-kind support to families facing financial hardship. It opened every Monday and Wednesday from 9 am to noon except for the months during which it had to be shut down because of the pandemic.

The **SOAR Service** (Scope: national): advocacy and support by survivors for victims and survivors of domestic violence (soar@ antidemalta.org). The service includes a preventive dimension through its workshops for stakeholders. The Foundation's Social Workers co-work with the SOAR Service team to support self-referred and referred women and their children.

The LWIEN Service (Scope: national): offers professional guidance and non-formal education for family caregivers of persons with severe mental health problems. The service includes family consultations by a senior practitioner (mental health nurse), home-visits, social work, mediation with employers and officials in post-secondary education and training establishments, and support literature in Maltese.

Linked to the LWIEN and the Social Work services is the Emotional Freedom Service for per-sons wanting to be free from their anger, fear, grudges and resentment or other emotional dis-tress. (Scope: national)

Y-Assist Service (Scope: national): launched in September 2017, Y-Assist is a supported accommodation service commissioned by The Malta Trust Foundation. Two residences provide independent living accommodation coupled with educational support for vulnerable homeless women and their children. Due to the complex challenges triggered by the COVID-19 Pandemic, new admissions had to be halted between March and December 2020.

The Social Work Service of the Foundation cuts across all the above services. In the main, workers operate at community level. (Scope: mainly community-based)

#### Human Resources

In 2020, 14 employees were engaged with SJAF, 5 of whom on a full-time basis, 7 on reduced hours basis and 2 on part-time basis. Apart from these, xxx Volunteers were engaged in service provision across the different SJAF services and initiatives. The staff and volunteer complement comprised the following:

- 14 remunerated personnel including 3 social workers,
   1 mental health nurse, a service coordinator of SOAR,
   a Family Services Centre manager and a manager for finance and administration.
- 90 Volunteers, one of whom led the Emotional Freedom Service on a voluntary basis; 2 co-managed the SJAF bazaar; 24 served as Volunteer Learning Support Tutors. Of these 90, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, 44 had to discontinue their service while 46 remained active.
- 4 professionals who provided occasional professional services on a pro bono basis.

Volunteering hours in 2020 totalled 26,663 – equivalent to equivalent to practically 13 full-time workers. Were the hours of service of volunteers to be remunerated, their service would have cost the Foundation a minimum of €136,515. Their service contribution is invaluable and valued. Volunteers are considered as partner colleagues of the SJAF professionals.

#### Ethos

Personnel maintain a friendly, humour-filled atmosphere in relating to each other - this is detected and appreciated by visitors and service users. The personal values, compassion and respect for others of the main workers, including volunteers, and the policies of the Foundation, have created an environment and an approach to vulnerable service users that has resulted in a certain ethos, culture and atmosphere.

Service users frequently comment on the attentive listening, acceptance, peacefulness and love they find at SJAF, and on the humane and personal approach in the different fields of practice. The economic, psychological, emotional and social freedom and self-acceptance found by distressed or vulnerable persons through the work of the Foundation recovers human dignity. Not only do the staff love the service users but the latter also come to discover their own capacity to love. Spontaneously or through SJAF encouragement, some service users even offer their voluntary service to help others. These are signs of the healing power of the divine at work through loving-kindness and compassion.

#### Initiatives halted in 2020

The challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic led to a number of decisions that had to be made to reconfigure operations. Thus:

- The Enrichetta Family Support Services Centre in Birżebbuġa was closed down and staff posted to the Ċentru Antida;
- The monthly electronic SJAF Magazine was wound down after 14 years of regular e-publishing. Instead, SJAF focused on chronicalling its work via its facebook page – Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide.
- The monthly weekend Wholeness Group Meetings organised by the SJAF Emotional Freedom Service and held at Porziuncola Retreat House had to be halted.
- The Friday children's Learning Support Programme for children of vulnerable families supported by SJAF were halted as well.
- The Saturday SOAR Club for female survivors of domestic violence and their children had to be halted as well.
- A substantial amount of home visits to families and street outreach work stopped due to the high risk nature of the work.

#### Acknowledgement to donors

- The Foundation acknowledges the significant contribution, during 2020, of the following donors:
- The Malta Delegation of the Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide which contributes the use of four service sites and the salary of the CEO.
- The Alfred Mizzi Foundation for their highly valued significant financial contribution towards key SJAF services across the years.
- The Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity for its financial backing of Centru Antida and the Community Social Work Service.
- Solidarity Meals initiative of the Alfred Mizzi Foundation
- The Malta Trust Foundation which commissions the two Y-Assist supported residences for vulnerable homeless women and children; and for the food hampers provided through its Food Aid Project
- PG Group
- APS Bank for its financial support to the SOAR Service
- QPml for its professional pro bono architectural services for the SOAR Hub renovation planning.
- Regjun Xlokk
- · Planning Authority
- Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS)
- · Carlo Gavazzi Ltd. Malta
- Association of International Women (AIWM)
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- The Archdiocese of Malta
- II-Ven.da Konfraternità tal-B.V. Marija tal-Karità, il-Belt Valletta
- MPS Ltd
- Gasan Foundation
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- Jobsplus
- Deloitte
- Eurolifts
- Malta Together/ Inspirasia Foundation
- · Djakonija Parroċċi Unit, Caritas Malta
- · Cool Ride Pooling
- Pragmatic Play

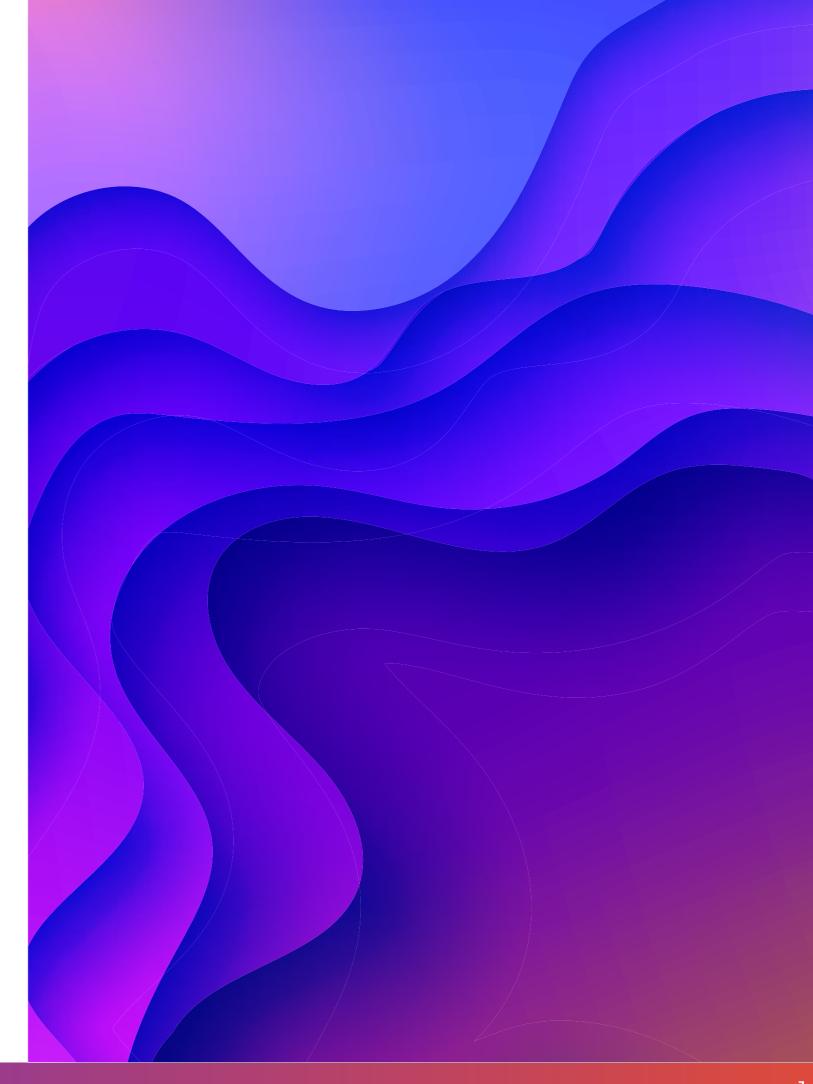
- · Wilhelmsen Lines Malta Ltd.
- Carter and Chain Supermarkets for placing food collection boxes in their supermarket
- Lions Club Sliema
- Ryde Taxis
- Trireme Pensions
- Eurolifts
- Express Trailers
- James Caterers Ltd
- V. Demajo & Bros
- Artist Marisa Attard for creating a number of MEMES illustrations for SOAR Service
- Malta Charity Central Facebook page
- Knorr
- 360 Food Imports Ltd
- Focolare Movement
- · Mediterranean Culinary Academy
- Ufficcju Parrokjali Birżebbuga
- Trellerborg Sealing Solutions Malta
- Tutto Marketing
- Lidl Malta.

Gratitude is expressed to countless other benefactors and members of the general public who contributed donations and in-kind items needed by vulnerable families supported by the St Jeanne Antide Foundation.

# Financial Management and Annual Audit

A financial audit is carried out annually by the auditing firm Andrew Galea and Associates; the firm provides this service on a pro bono basis as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility policy. Audit reports for the previous years were submitted to the Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations and to donors. Similarly, the narrative Annual Reports which are published and made available to donors and the public on the SJAF

website: www.antidemalta.org/annual-reports.html



# PART 2

# CHRONICLES OF SJAF OPERATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

# Compiled from SJAF records by Dr Ingrid Bianco, SJAF Volunteer

And just like that, all around the world, people were practicing social distancing, limiting contact with other people, whether family, friends, work colleagues and people making use of their services. Suddenly, we're all avoiding touching people, things and surfaces and we're continuously washing our hands and applying sanitizer. The COVID-19 pandemic struck our shores in early March 2020 and, by the 13th of the same month, our NGO had swiftly made changes to its operations, especially the way it would continue to reach out and support people in distress.

By March, in line with national health guidelines, we switched to working from home. All around us, we saw an escalation of distress and anxiety as many lost their jobs or had to work less days for less pay. Parents started home-schooling their kids, the elderly and the vulnerable went in strict isolation. Health care workers left their family homes in an attempt to keep their families safe and dedicate themselves completely to their vocation. Many families were put in quarantine to avoid spreading the disease further, with all the emotional, social, psychological, and also monetary repercussions that isolation inevitably brings about.

March 2020 will be remembered as the month in which Malta too, like the rest of the world, woke up to this new reality. One in which all schools were closed, visits to old people's homes and prisons were prohibited and employers were actively encouraged to let their employees work from home. Fear and anxiety took over the best of us, most of us waiting eagerly and somewhat fearfully for the public health bulletin which was then broadcast every day at lunchtime. Fear of this unknown virus crept in, taking over our thoughts all day, and for most of us, all night long. Little did we know, back then, that this would be the new reality for at least the rest of the year, as the country and the whole world sought to collectively fight back the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ever since March 2020, the executive team of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation (SJAF) started drawing up a plan on how to operate remotely. Much of this plan, albeit continuously being revisited and improved, continued to be adopted and implemented throughout 2020. The staff team at SJAF worked tirelessly and intensely to find effective ways of responding to the needs of individuals and families in distress. Experiencing first-hand the huge impact of the pandemic rendered the staff team more flexible and creative in finding solutions to reduce anxiety and distress of its service-using families.

"COVID-19 radically changed many aspects of people's lives and livelihoods during the first half of 2020. Conditions have worsened for those with whom social workers usually work – people already on the margins of society, suffering poor health, poverty, racism and other forms of oppression and inequality. Social isolation has increased, jobs have disappeared, and some social services have been reduced. Social workers have struggled to continue to do their work – having to adapt and innovate to meet new needs and re prioritise the most urgent and important aspects of their roles."









The pandemic changed both the way that social work is practised by service-providers like SJAF, but also the way vulnerable service users cope and adjust to this new reality which is often characterised by fear and anxiety, apart from added financial difficulties and burdens. From an administrative viewpoint, this meant that policies and procedures needed to be continuously reviewed and adjusted. Collaboration with other organisations and corporate partners also need to be intensified to maximise beneficial outcomes for SJAF service users.

SJAF worked continuously on multiple levels to support communities that are affected or very fearful of Covid-19 and to channel the energy taken up by fear, grief and loss into positive elements like collaborative networking, nurturing a sense of hope and readiness to become more self-determined, self-empowerment and inner transformation.

# HOW DID THE PANDEMIC AFFECT SJAF?

"Covid-19 and measures to control and prevent its spread have restricted the services and responsibilities usually carried out by social workers, while generating new needs and demands. Social workers have both struggled and worked creatively to meet needs in risky and uncertain situations, and to respect people's rights to privacy and involvement in important decisions about their lives."

Social workers and other family support workers at SJAF too started adapting and adjusting to the situation at hand. Many practices were initially, and some still are, discontinuing face-to-face services, regular home-visits and street outreach work and moving to remote contact with service users in an attempt to maintain on-going contact and support. With all probability, the biggest practical difficulty encountered by both staff members and service users was the restricted access to these vulnerable families in their communities as a result of very onerous infection control measures.

This drastic change in operations created unprecedented pressures on the way family support services operate and on the tried and tested professional approaches which had been successfully used for years. Some rapid adjustments needed to be made, using creativity and innovation, but without completely abandoning the human contact aspect which is so central to social work in particular and family support work in general. Increased resort (almost 100%) to remote working also needed adjustment. For staff members, boundaries between home and office space disappeared. For some, their bedroom was the only confidential space away from family members. For some, it felt like they were meeting their many service users in their very personal space at home. This, of course, necessitated new self-care measures for SJAF personnel and dialogue about setting new boundaries and breathing spaces.

- COVID-19 impacts included the following:
- New health and safety policies and measures were drawn up and staff trained and supported to implement them;
- all fundraising efforts had to be halted except for Facebook appeals for food items, toiletries, detergents, and backto-school items to counteract the fact that Scheme 9 of the Ministry of Education reduced its range of support resources to one item per eligible student;
- SJAF staff felt moved and compelled to create a Debt Relief or bailout Fund for high support families who risked being evicted or having utility and telephony services halted:
- Of course, one of the biggest challenges created by the pandemic was the family support practitioners' inability to carry out home visits to their many vulnerable service users – especially those who were already socially excluded, disadvantaged, isolated and lonely.



The challenges presented by COVID-19 motivated SJAF staff to create different family support pathways. They had to learn to connect with their many service users using IT tools such as Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp and Face-time. Mobile phones became a vital tool since many of these families neither owned nor had access to IT hardware such as Laptops or Tablets and had thus only mobile phones to keep them connected with their support practitioners.

- 1. SAGE Journals, ISW, Practising ethically during COVID-19: Social work challenges and responses Volume 63 Issue 5, September 2020
- 2. IFSW Ethical Challenges for Social Workers during Covid-19, A Global Perspective June 2020

# USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO MOBILISE IN-KIND SUPPORTS

SJAF staff also turned to online networking and social media tools to mobilise in-kind supports to vulnerable families who, due to the pandemic, were increasingly falling into more debt and, hence, more fear, anxiety and pain. In-kind supports became a lifesaver as they provided for and nourished many families and enabled them to save money to sustain financial commitments such as rent utilities, WiFi and telephony. The following difficulties were amongst those identified by SJAF family support practitioners late in 2020:

- SJAF family support practitioners were faced with a significant number of individuals and families in distress facing different type of crisis. Unlike previous years where new referrals each month tended to be a mix of individuals and families needing either intense high support from the outset or medium to low support, those referred to SJAF between March and December tended to present high support needs due to different crisis that erupted in their lives
- Families whose case had already been successfully closed reconnected with SJAF for the same reasons.
- Family support interventions had to be shifted, in the main, to online connectivity, mobile phone calls, pre-scheduled appointments with all safeguards in place, meeting service users in a nearby open-air spaces, and limiting but still carrying out home-visits to those living in dire conditions at home.
- Core family intervention tools had to be sacrificed: regular home visits; visits by whole families; group-based activities; the Saturday Club for single mothers and children who are survivors of domestic violence; face-to-face office meetings; accompaniment to certain departments, court, the Police, hospital, psychiatric hospital; the learning support programme for a group of 24 children led by 24 matched Volunteer Learning Support Tutors; and others.
- The loss of opportunity to meet families in their own home environment or face-to-face as is normal, resulted in family support practitioners taking longer to establish trust in such a way as to be able to quickly assess needs. The same was found to be true for service users themselves

   finding it harder to establish trust and feeling at ease from the very first meeting.
- Economic hardship predominated. Financial difficulties were the result of loss of employment, escalating mental ill health, loss of income and inadequate income leading to non-payment of bills, risk of eviction, rising debts in unpaid telephony and utility bills, inability to purchase prescribed medication, lack of funds to purchase backto-school items and other needs. SJAF had to swiftly

create the wherewithal to quickly mobilise a wide range of income.

Older vulnerable volunteers had to halt their volunteering.
The SJAF Volunteer Manager and all staff created a roster
of fellowship calls to these volunteers who missed their
volunteering and volunteer colleagues and also missed the
SJAF staff. Between March and June, SJAF had lost over
40 volunteers to inactive volunteering.

#### MAJOR PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY VULNERABLE FAMILIES DURING THE PANDEMIC

Whereas it must be said that most of the service using families were already facing many hardships even before the onset of the pandemic, Covid-19 only made their situation worse. Some pressures which were otherwise kept at bay resurfaced with a vengeance, while others which were until then unknown, crept over some families already crushed by many problems.

The difficulties faced by these families are innumerable, ranging from job loss, especially within the sectors which were mostly affected by the pandemic, such as the catering and tourism industry, retail, aesthetic and many others. Job loss sets forth a myriad of connecting problems such as the inability to pay rent and the consequent threat of eviction, mounting bills and hence debts, inadequate nutrition and lacking personal hygiene. The rising feeling of insecurity and anxiety inevitably led to a very negative impact on mental health. All of this, coupled with the isolation and marginalisation which the pandemic strongly brought about, and the difficulty to access family support practitioners and other professionals who would otherwise be readily available, led certain families to experience what was indeed one of the most trying times of their lives.

# SOCIETY'S RESPONSE TO FAMILIES IN DISTRESS

During the COVID-19 pandemic months in 2020, SJAF experienced a heightened sense of social solidarity. Many citizens became motivated to look beyond themselves and their own pain and challenges by reaching out to others and offering whatever resources they could afford to SJAF and to other family support organisations. This collective and evergrowing social solidarity movement made things happen – solutions that seemed farfetched and impossible happened on their own. Serendipitous and providential expressions and offers of support overwhelmed SJAF workers with gratitude.

# DISTRESSED INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES SUPPORTED BY SJAF IN 2020

In 2020 alone, SJAF provided a range of support services to 684 individuals in distress from 367 families in difficulty who are either already poor or are sliding into poverty and

becoming more socially excluded. Apart from these, SJAF continued to support over 220 vulnerable families referred to it in previous years. The SJAF Mental Health Nurse alone provided 1,726 sessions to highly anxious and overwhelmed family caregivers of severely mentally ill persons. The SJAF SOAR Service team of trained and mentored survivors of domestic violence supported 120 women who, for many years, suffered the trauma of domestic abuse and violence. The Social Work team managed a large caseload often requiring intense on-going nurture, guidance, support, encouragement through support care plans agreed with families who turned to SJAF for support.

Needs assessments of so many supported families naturally necessitated the solicitation of many types of in-kind supports from the public. The response was quick, generous, and led to dialogue about why families were facing such levels of distress.

Below are some stories of families supported which highlight the types and extent of difficulties and challenges which individuals and families faced, some even before Covid broke out, but which escalted once the pandemic hit us. SJAF, teaming up with some of the other voluntary organisations mentioned above, helped them through their respective rough patches and helped in providing for their psycho-social, emotional and financial needs. Personal details have been altered to protect the individual's privacy and confidentiality.

#### Family 1

Hannah is pregnant with her fourth child. Work related pressures coupled with her anxiety about giving birth at a time when she risks being infected with the COVID-19 virus and having to give birth without her husband by her side have led to a relapse of PTSD. Her husband is looking after the children and his wife. He has become a full-time caregiver overnight. Money is tight. Solidarity meals is easing some of the pressures and enabling the husband to nurture their children's learning journey with a measure of cheer.

#### Family 2

Marianne is a single mum of 4 young children. After having separated as a consequence of years of psychological, financial and physical abuse, she is now settling down to living behind a front door that is locked, and her tormentor is no longer allowed inside. Solidarity meals is helping Marianne achieve a measure of security until such time as she can make plans to find a job and become financially independent. However, her ex-husband is still creating problems, visiting her house and pressing the doorbell intermittently – signalling his wordless presence. He is now doing his utmost to block the Solidarity meals delivery by threatening the meals delivery persons. The children wait out on the balcony for the delivery people and beg their father to let them be.

#### Family 3

Silvio and Rita are both frail and very sick. The COVID-19 crisis has frightened them both since they depended on others to help them with basic cleaning, shopping and fellowship. Silvio's mental ill health is deteriorating and Rita's frailty and inability to handle cooking is deepening her state of confusion. Solidarity meals is helping them get through the crisis and they are very grateful for the sense of security it brought with it.

#### Family 4

85-year old Melina has no family. She lives in a run-down unhygienic tenement teaming with cats, soiled clothes and bedding, putrid smells, and the detritus of years of neglect. Melina adamantly refuses to live in a residential home for the elderly. She says she is making do on her own. Now that she can no longer venture out on her own to shop for basics and with her neighbours fearing infection, she has accepted to have a Solidarity Meal delivered daily to her doorstep.

#### Family 5

Susan left work because she heard a customer brag about the fact that, on arriving in Malta from overseas, she did not bother to go into quarantine. Afraid to be the one to pass on the virus to her one-year-old son, she quit her job. Her husband is now working less hours and their family income has drastically reduced, barely covering the rent, utilities and telephony bill. They have barely enough money left for food and other basic necessities. Solidarity Meals helped them by delivering meals for their family for a two week period until they started receiving their social welfare benefit.

# NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

During the initial COVID-19 months, SJAF participated in and contributed to emerging NGO networks. Among them were the following, whose work and co-operation with SJAF led to many families breathing a sigh of relief in a situation which otherwise lacked oxygen for many of them.

#### FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS

Many faith-based organisations committed to serving the most disadvantaged groups in society stepped in and united with more strength during the pandemic. This network was quickly formed when the COVID-19 pandemic erupted and a corporate body – The Alfred Mizzi Foundation (TAMF) launched the Solidarity Meals initiative and started delivering 700 meals a day to families in financial difficulties sliding into poverty, with Caritas Malta Diaconia Unit taking the coordinating role. The CEO of SJAF and the newly recruited Caritas Head of the Djakonija Parročći Unit got together to plan out a strategy on how to make effective and efficient

utilisation of this TAMF initiative. Both organisations got together and started the network which today includes the two early partners – Caritas Malta Djakonija Parročći and SJAF as well as Millennium Chapel, Fondazzjoni Sebħ, SAS Malta, St Julians Parish Social Work Unit, Paolo Freire Institute and Marsaskala Djakonija Volunteer Team.

#### **SOLIDARITY MEALS**

Solidarity Meals, run by The Alfred Mizzi Foundation, delivered hundreds of meals every day to distribution centres around the island. Volunteers from Caritas would then either deliver the meals to people's homes, or the needy families themselves would pick the meals up from the different parish hubs which were set up for this purpose.









Anti-Poverty Forum Malta (APF) is a network of 14 organisations, including SJAF, working together to combat poverty, advocate, disseminate information and create awareness on poverty and social exclusion in Malta. During the pandemic, the main concern of APF became the increasing number of individuals and families sliding further down the poverty line. As people lost their jobs, the anxiety, insecurity and fear experienced by the families whose primary income was lost to lay-offs led to a spike in mental ill health. Poverty started being experienced by children, adults, families and the elderly, and hit hard a large portion of the vulnerable groups. After various discussions held between APF member organisations in the early months of the pandemic, the following commonly-experienced and felt pressing concerns were collaboratively identified and brought to the attention of stakeholders and policy makers through submissions and press statements.

#### 1. Food and Food Distribution

Several service-providing NGOs had no choice except to raise funds through appeals – in these difficult times - to build a reserve of food items for distribution to their most vulnerable service users, especially the housebound and those with mobility problems. This uncoordinated humanitarian aid initiative had to be resorted to since certain family support services were not accepting new referrals. Food was being provided by several NGOs to countless families, but these NGOs cannot continue do so on their own. Various responses started mushrooming at both local and national levels. All stakeholders need to join forces at a national level to work towards a workable action plan.

# 2. Children of Single parents testing positive for COVID-19

Attention was also drawn to single parent families whose parent carer tests positive and needs to be hospitalised. Concern was raised about the care for the children, understandably, since none of the residential care services for children would want to risk the health of their own resident children and their carers. Intervention and co-ordination was requested in this regard.

#### 3. Accommodation and Homelessness

Under the circumstances, emergency shelters were not only full but also adopted new policies with the aim of controlling the spread of the virus. People and whole families were facing homelessness. Some landlords reduced rents in view of their tenants becoming jobless. It was recommended that housing rent subsidies be temporarily increased for the jobless, under certain conditions such as rent thresholds, and that a helpline for tenants at risk of defaulting on rent payments be set up, with a view to quickly gaining access to advice as to options and measures they can tap into. Quick monitoring is essential to ensure that landlords do not unduly panic or exploit their tenants.

Government was also urged to introduce bedsits in Malta. These are one-bedroomed units of accomodation typically consisting of combined bedroom and sitting room with cooking and toilet facilities. Their need is urgently felt in Malta so that the homeless and people living on very limited income may have access to essential accomodation at an affordable price.

# 4. Swift reactivation of Social welfare benefits

Great concern was expressed as regards the following two scenarios:

(a) single mothers who lose their job and have no money to fall back on. Due to the closure of schools and pre-schools and national guidelines to stay distant from elderly persons, many single parents have had to make the diffuclt decision to leave work since they cannot leave their children with grandparents. Thus, the need for swift re-activation of their welfare benefits and stricter measures to ensure that maintenance is being paid; and

(b) the need for persons with disabling mental ill health conditions and illnesses to access the same rights and support measures as persons with a disability. In 2020, the Commissioner for the Rights of Persons with Disability and the Mental Health Commissioner, in collaboration with NGOs working in the mental health sector, signed a declaration highlighting the importance of both Commissions and NGOs to work together in order to contend that the services and aids required by persons with mental health issues should be given equal strength as other forms of physical impairments. The pandemic not only presented additional challenges to those already suffering from mental health issues; but has also effected people who had not previously experienced any mental ill-being, including care-givers and front-liners.

# 5. Access to services - overcoming the barriers due to COVID-19

Emphasis was made on the fact that no one should be left on the lurch because new admissions to services are halted. This includes persons released from prison; persons with addictions; homeless persons and many others. It was suggested that swabbing and isolation facilities with medical clearance are adopted to prepare persons to be admitted to services. Safety of current services users would be thus assured while still offering access to new service users. Frontline service providers also need protection, since, with every case of illness, the resources would be stretched even further.

# 6. Befriending schemes for homebound and isolated persons at community level:

Parishes, local councils and community-based organisations were urged to come together to daily follow-up residents who feel isolated and lonely. The YouSafe was one such initiative

where a Community Support Platform was set up to enable lines of communication between the Local Councils and its Community and between residents themselves, to energise the community around particular ideas, challenges, solutions, initiatives, and requirements.

# 7. Mental wellbeing and Family Caregivers of persons with mental health problems

The mental wellbeing of many people is likely to deteriorate because of anxiety, fear and insecurity. The loss of the usual routines and inability to create new ones, loss of income, fear of what the future holds in store can cause tensions in the family. Family caregivers are particularly at high risk of falling apart themselves, especially since most help to the persons with mental health problems were suspended during the pandemic. The only national support service for these family caregivers was the Lwien Service of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation but the demand was overwhelming and mental health practitioners trained to work with, guide and support family caregivers were limited. This organisation proved willing to provide online training to state Mental Health Nurses to widen their competencies to include family caregiver support. Other Practitioners were encouraged to reach out differently to offer support online. Practitioners' support tool-kit should

#### 8. Carers in residential settings

Besides the anxieties and practical constraints of COVID19, restrictions in residences brought about added burdens. Children often present challenging behaviour even in normal circumstances, let alone in a limited space, unable to meet their parents, and while having their therapeutic sessions and other support services suspended indefinitely. Additional inhouse support was encouraged for these residential homes.

# 9. Elderly in dickensian home environment

Deep concern was expressed about the very vulnerable elderly living in a deplorable unacceptable state at home. These would be elderly with mental health problems who are noncompliant with medication, do not turn up for medical followup appointments, are unable to manage their income from pension and are being financially abused. They'd have pets dirty the house, would not launder their clothes and bedding, are unable to do the house cleaning, live on the groundfloor, have un-maintained roofs that leak and risk crashing down on them, eat canned food and bread. In SJAF's experince, industrial cleaning companies refuse to clean up such homes, even though the NGO concerned would be paying. NGOs constantly liaise with the mental health system but no mandatory admission to the psychiatric hospital seems to be possible because these hapless persons are not considered a 'danger to self and others.' These elderly need help especially in times of national crisis.

13

#### 10. Age discrimination

Pensioners continue to highlight the anomaly that exists in our pension system: Pensioners were divided in two categories. In Category A fall those born on January 1,1992 and thereafter. In Category B fall those born on December 31,1961 and before. This discriminatory policy is unjust, and calls were made for it to be revisited. (see Times of Malta article, February 22, 2020, by Mr Carmel Mallia, President of the Alliance of Pensioners' Organisations).

#### 11. Third Country Nationals

These are not entitled to contributory benefits. NGOs are doing their utmost to help with food and other essential items like personal hygiene products. However, this is not enough to enable them to get by without taking unnecessary risks.

# 12. NGOs unable to raise funds to continue their service provision

Due to the pandemic, NGOs were no longer in a position to raise funds to sustain their services to vulnerable groups. The dilemma was whether to halt services or to move on with determination and hope despite the financial insecurity. Many NGO services fill gaps in national service provision to families. Jobs within this crucial sector should not be threatened. Services offered by NGO volunteers involving contact have had to be reduced or halted for the safety of the same volunteers and their families.

Pro-active measures were called for to ensure that civil society organisations and vulnerbale groups are adequately protected and are able to continue to protect the health and well-being of their staff and beneficiaries. The sector has had to shift in strategy, prioratisation and programme adjustment with the infrastructure of our organisations under immense financial pressure.

Together we must and shall continue to advocate a culture of solidarity and civic action now more than ever.

#### PLATFORM AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

Through the Platform Against Homelessness, initiated by YMCA Malta, 16 service providers working with vulnerable individuals came together to share their concerns and work to help find solutions for these individuals and families.

The platform entered into discussions with the Ministry for Social Accommodation (MSA) and the Superintendent of Public Health who welcomed the creation of a specific health protocol for a quarantine period for the homeless. Through the Social Care Standards Authority's Legal Notice (LN74/2020), work started on the operational side of three shortlisted homes to be used for self-isolation prior entering a homeless shelter,

all in compliance with health directives on containment and social distancing. The Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity and FSWS also stepped in and supported the platform in achieving a coherent referral system.

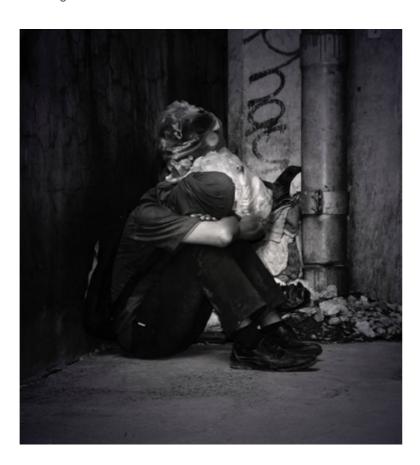
Within a matter of days, this collaboration resulted in the creation of a separate process for swabbing, the creation of a centralised referral system and the provision of transportation for those who do not have their own means.

#### OTHER COLLABORATIONS

Other entities and individuals also stepped in to give their contribution and help families in need during these trying times. SJAF also collaborated with the Women for Women Foundation to maximise effective and timely support to women in distress. It also started to link up with online supportive groups active on Facebook, who offer in-kind supports to families in difficulty. These include Malta Charity Central and Recycle Malta.

# VOLUNTEERING AT SJAF DURING THE PANDEMIC

Elderly volunteer crafts-persons who used to hold handicrafts making sessions at SJAF 4 mornings a week shifted continued their volunteering from home. They too found a way of sustaining their work by working remotely and found new ways of selling their crafts online. A SJAF Hanicrafts



3. Video https://newsbook.com.mt/en/ymca-malta-launches-platformagainst-homelessness/, accessed on 30 December 2020

Facebook page was started to showcase and sell the group's products. Members of staff and volunteers delivered raw materials to these elderly volunteer's homes and picked up completed handicrafts, while thanking them and checking on their physical and mental needs

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE PANDEMIC

In recent years, SJAF has increasingly embraced the use of social media as a chronicler of how the NGO operates, the challenges its service using families face, identified needs of vulnerable families as well as an appeal tool to mobilise in kind supports. To this end, the SJAF Facebook posts throughout the pandemic days became a hybrid diary of how SJAF was operating and responding to the emerging needs and escalating crises of many families in distress, whilst at the same time sharing the experience and state of mind of the workers and volunteers of the Foundation, each adapting in their own way to this new way of working.

Through this our 2020 Annual Report, we wish to share with our donors, collaborators, practitioners, volunteers, staff and other family support agencies some of our organisation's 2020 facebook posts as a summary chronicle of the collective experience which rendered many of us more resilient and capable to swiftly adapting to a national crisis for the benefit of the many families in distress we are committed to love and serve. We are sharing moving ones and those of a lighter character.



#### SJAF FACEBOOK DIARY MARCH - SEPTEMBER 2020

#### 13th March

#### Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide March 13 · 🚱

Ghežiež mijiet ta' individwi u familji fid-diffikultà u tbatija li ahna bhala tim ta' haddiema fi hdan il-Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide nghinu. Insellmukom u nserrhulkom raskom li, ghalkemm I-ufficini taghna u c-CENTRU ANTIDA se jkunu maghluqin mill-lum sa tmiem il-gimgha d-diehla, ahna se pispathu proteoti ghilipom kidiking in magi

- Is-Servizz LWIEN ghall qraba li jiehdu hsieb kuljum membri tal-familja li jsofru minn mard mentali – In-Nurse Psikjatrika tagnna Connie Magro se tkun qed iccemplilkom familja familja biex tkompli tghinkom. Se tkun qed tuza' I-mobile, il-WhatsApp Talk Time, I-email u I-Messenger. Tinkwetawxl
- Is-Servizz ta' Social Work: Is-Social Workers se jčemplu lill-familji kollha li jgħinu biex jaččertaw ruħhom mill-qagħda preženti tagħkom. Intom ukoll tistgħu iččemplu lis-Social Worker tagħkom fuq in-numru tal-mobile tax-xogħol, kif ģieli tagħmlu. Tistgħu tużaw ukoll il-messenger tal-Fondazzjoni (Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide), jew email (info@antidemalta.org) jew I-email tas-Social Worker. Tistgħu ukoll tibgħatu messaġġ fuq 77052305 jew 77053837. Xi appuntamenti bi skype se jkunu possibbli wkoll.
- İs-Servizz Melsien Emozzjonali: tistghu tikkomunikaw, kif soltu taghmlu, permezz tal-mobile jew bl-email. Appuntamenti bl-iSkype huma wkoll possibbli.
- Is-Servizz SOAR: bħal dejjem. tistgħu tibqgħu tikkomunikaw bil-messenger, telefon u email.
   Amministrazzjoni: email info@anidemalta.org jew messenger minn: Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide.

Qed nagfimlu minn kollox biex, waqt li nsegwu dak kollu li qed jiggwidawna fh l-istat u l-awtoritajiet tas-safiha, nibqghu prezenti ghalikom.

Hudu nifs qawwi u ftakru li aktar ma nžommu kalmi u mimlija tama, aktar ma nevitaw ansjetà u naghmlu l-affarijiet ta' kuljum bʻkalma u bʻmohh car. Grazzi, paci u barkiet, Nora Macelli, Kap Ezekuttiv

OO Loredana Maggi and 46 others

7 Comments 17 Shares

#### 17th March



#### 17th March



21st March

3



1 Share

23rd March



#### 27 March



#### 26 March

**OO** 3



During this unprecedented time of national crisis due to the spreading of the COVID-19 virus, we NGOs that, year in year out, continue to offer a range of support services to very vulnerable individuals, families and groups, feel a ballooning sense of compassion towards those whom we serve. It is true that we are working from the safety of our homes, because we are following the directives of our health authorities. But, our responsibility towards our service users has not abated. On the contrary, we are constantly discussing different ways of reaching out and being of service.

There are a number of situations which the public needs to be aware of to understand the hidden reality of vulnerability, distress, suffering and poverty. Poor families do not necessarily have funds for a mobile top-up, Imagine being unable to do this in this time of crisis when connecting is a life-saver. Imagine families with an old generation basic mobile with no facility to use WhatsApp for free calls and video talk time, no access to facebook to tap into the myriad invitations to access educational resources, invitations to follow mass and access Lenten talks, message relatives, friends, and support service organisations. Imagine 8 persons being cooped up in a tiny flat with no yard or veranda. Inter-personal relations in such small closed environments often mean incessant expression of high emotions their home becomes a ticking time-bomb.

Imagine too what the hundreds of family caregivers of mentally-ill persons are going through right now. With no day centre to go to, no walks around the community, no friendly band clubs to visit, persons with severe mental health difficulties are having a hard time to cope. Their daily routine is shot, their readiness to comply with medication may be lost, they risk relapsing. And many are relapsing, as we see from our Lwien Service which supports and guides relatives who care for a loved family member. We are seeing a surge in relapses. We experience the heightened anxiety and distress of their caring relatives.



QDO 16 1 Comment 9 Shares

#### 28th March

4 Shares



u ma' ofirajn interessati sabiex jinstabu voluntieri biex iqassmu I-ikel lii familji vulnerabbli hafna mghejuna minn dawn I-organizzazijonijlet u mill-parrocci.

Dan kollu ma kienx se jikun possiibbli II kieku ma nhoiqitx inizjattiva ohra superba minn Fondazzijoni ta' kumpanija privata ii hi maghrufa ghali-inizjattivi kbar tagfiha ta' solidarjetà socjali (nghidulkom liema hi din II-kumpanija I-gimgha d-diehial). Naqighulna I-kappelii Din II-fondazzijoni privata ma toqghodx tistenna NGOs biex jistaqsuha ghal ghajnuna u rizorsi u fondi ohax tikprunahom hi inizziattivi bhal dawn.

Li ridna naqsmu maghkom illum hu II, hafna familji II čempiinielnom II-blerah bkew biI-ferh. Langas kellhom kliem biex jirringrazzjawna. U nittingrazzjaw III Alla tal-barka kbira II tinhass b'mod aktar qawwi fi zminijiet bhal dawn.

U nesprimi mhabba u rispett köir lejn I-NGOs koliha II nahdmu mai-faxxa tas-socjetà taghna II Ccîrkostanzi rrendewhom vulnerabbii u foqra. Filimkien, u bi shab ma' kumpaniji b sens ta' aitruwizmu pratiku ta' azgjoni socjali u qsim ta' rizora, risponsabbilità u solidarjetà socjali, nilhqu aktar familji fid-diffikultà - b'moghdrija, hsieb u pjan, u mhabba.



#### 29th March



#### 30th March

Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

March 30 · 🍪

Mhux facli tghin individwi u familji vulnerabbli bit-telefown. Dan ghax hafna. specjalment dawk kbar fl-età, m'ghandhomx it-teknologija li taghmililhom possibbli li jikkomunikaw b'mezzi bla hlas b'vidjow, bhal ma hu l-iskype. Ghandek fattur iehor – hafna la jinteressahom u lanqas iriduna nispjegawlhom kif inizzlu b'xejn is-software halli kemm huma, kemm ahna, insibuha facli nitkellmu wic-imb-wicc. Ma jikunux iriduna nkellmuhom dwar dawn il-possibiltajiet ghax. kif jghidulna. "se ttini rasi!" Lanqas ma jaccettaw is-suggeriment li jistaqsu xi qarib biex jghinhom.

Yond jidii allura? Dawk fostaa fil-fondazzioni li pohinu famili fil-bionn and ibossu rashom se

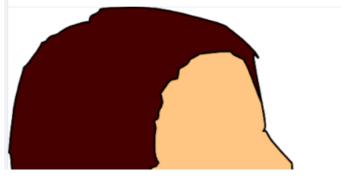
X'qed jigri, allura? Dawk fostna fil-Fondazzjoni li nghinu familji fil-bżonn qed ihossu rashom se tixpakka ghax djalogu fit-tul bit-telefon hu intens. Il-wićć u l-ģesti ta' dak li jkun ma tarahomx. Jinqalghu hafna punti li wiehed irid jiehu nota taghhom halli ma jinsihomx biex jiccekkja jekk finimniex sew – ghax persuna mhux lakemm twaqqafha meta tkun emozzjonata u ghandha hafna xi tixtieq tqhid. Qed ikollna telefonati ta' siqha jew aktar.

Hawn ukoʻll dawk li qed jgħidulna li, la ma jistgħux jarawna, ma jħossuhomx komdi jitkellmu magħna bit-telefon. Ngħidulhom: "Imma daqs kemm ilek tigi c-Centru Antida (jew ic-Centru Enrichetta)." "Mhux I-istess." jgħidulna. "Fejn naf min hemm ħdejk, min qed jismagħni...."

Biss, nafu li, bil-mod il-mod, dan il-mod gdid ta' komunikazzjoni se jkollu jindara.

Qed inhossu hafna ANGLI TA' VERA jhufu madwarna, lesti li joffru I-ghajnuna sabiex inkomplu ghaddejjin bis-servizzi ghal familji fid-diffikultà. Dalghodu persuna baghtitilna messagg li tixtieq thallas xi kontijiet tad-dawl u ilma pendenti ta' xi familji foqra. Ohra qrat wiehed mill-posts taghna u offitilna kotba (meta tghaddi I-krizi) xinqassmu. Ohra baghtitilna £200. Ohra staqsietna kif tista' tghin. Jehor qed jara kif isibilna fondi halli nkunu nistghu nordnaw deliveries ta' prodotti ta' hasil tal-hwejjeg, tindif u personali – ghax certu familji mhux ikel biss ikollhom bzonn minhabba nuqasa ta' mezzi.

Insomma, il-ħidma baqgħet għaddejja straxxnata – minkejja li qegħdin ġewwa fi djarna b'rispett u imħabba għall-għajrna. Ninkwetaw imma għall-ħaddiema kollha fil-qasam tas-saħħa, puluzija, suldati, tindif, deliveries, ħwienet tal-ikel u supermarkets u tant oħrajn li qegħdin hemm barra...



#### 1st April



Apr 1 · ♥ · This morning we staff team at the St Jeanne Antide Foundation had our weekly skype meeting. Being together face-to-face boosts our morale and

energises us. We get to see each other informally with our hair down, white

roots growing, beards getting longer by the day! These meetings enable us to...



...

COMment 1 Comment

The above post deserves to be quoted in full as it poignantly highlights the concerns and challenges faced by both service users and SJAF staff. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 lock down also brought to light another sad and horrendous aspect of the pandemic both locally and globally – that of the surge in domestic violence as many women found themselves trapped indoors with their abuser.

"This morning we staff team at the St Jeanne Antide Foundation had our weekly skype meeting. Being together face-to-face boosts our morale and energises us. We get to see each other informally with our hair down, white roots growing, beards getting longer by the day! These meetings enable us to take stock of how we are managing to operate our family support services at a distance, relying on IT as much as is possible to continue to connect and communicate with the vulnerable families we serve.

Some of our current concerns:

#### **ACCOMODATION**

- Those families who have had to leave their rented accommodation are facing huge financial obstacles since they lack funds to pay the deposit on the lower rent accommodation they have found.
- For those who have very recently found, and lost, a new job with an employer who had not registered them with jobsplus – these cannot hope to apply for the unemployment measure of Euro 800 a month.
- Homeless persons no longer have a shelter to go to.
- No B&B will admit homeless persons, even if we were to have the funds to pay for their stay since such establishments are closed.
- Those who have recently found a new job and are still in it and are renting from the private sector are afraid that something will happen to them and they would be unable to pay rent. Some brokers (sensara) and lessors are allowing postponement of payment money due to them. But eventually, money owed will have to be paid.

# CASHING OF WELFARE BENEFIT CHEQUES

Families used to receiving their monthly welfare benefits cheque by post have been advised by social security to open a bank account for direct credits. Those having no bank account cannot do so, at this point in time, given bank branches closures. The Central Bank measure enabling 'only' cheques to be cashed by another party means that now families can find someone they really trust to cash such cheques for them. Such trusted persons can deposit such cheques, signed at the back of course, in their own bank account using ATM, wait until the amount has been credited to their account, then withdraw the amount to give to the person on welfare benefits.

Those having NO trusted person to carry out such a transaction for them can go directly to MaltaPost and cash it themselves. Or they can apply for a MaltaPost Account, wait for some 20 days, and when it's done inform social security to start the benefits direct credit process. We find families who are signing their cheques to someone they know and get instant cash, less the commission charged. More opportunities for abuse of those subsisting on a low income.

#### SELF-STIGMA

As a previous facebook post of ours explained, we are currently making arrangements for families in dire need to be given a daily pre-cooked meal. Meals will be delivered to their doorstep by trained volunteers, ensuring all safeguards recommended by our health authorities. More about this soon.

HOWEVER, we find that a significant number of families who truly need these meals refuse to have their address and telephone numbers revealed. Despite the fact that so many of us are currently relying on deliveries, they are afraid that neighbours, seeing someone delivering a package to their doorstep, would know that they are a 'charity case'.

#### VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE NEED CRUCIAL INFORMATION

There is a lack of information on how police and court systems are operating for the protection of victims and survivors of domestic violence. This lack is felt among SOAR service users and among SOAR staff too. SOAR will be following up on questions it had sent to the Commission on Domestic Violence about the police and court services at this stage.

#### **DELIVERY OF MEDICINES**

An article published in today's Times of Malta states that only those who are under obligatory quarantine may benefit from the delivery service of POYC medicines. It is concerning that vulnerable service users have been receiving conflicting information. There is confusion and uncertainty among service users about whether it is safe for them to go for hospital appointments and to run essential errands when they are on the vulnerable list."

4. UN WARNS OF 'SHADOW PANDEMIC' AS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE INCREASES GLOBALLY, https://www.voanews.com/covid-19-pandemic/unwarns-shadow-pandemic-domestic-violence-increases-globally, VOA NEWS, NOVEMBER 25, 2020, accessed 29 December 2020

#### 2nd April

# Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

KIF IHOSSUHOM UHUD MILL-VOLUNTIERA TAGHNA:

- RECEPTIONIST: "Kemm qed nieħu gost nisma' leħnek. Jien ghaddejt xi drabi minn quddiem iċ-Ċentru Antida biex forsi nilmaħ lil xi ħadd minnkom għax vera nimmissjakom. Imnalla jkun il-facebook għax ta' l-angas rajt lil waħda minnkom hemm!"
- BEFRIENDER: "La ma nistax inżur aktar lil dawk li jhossuhom wehedhom, ged inderri b'modi ohra biex nghin bit-telefon."
- LEARNING SUPPORT WORKER: "Qed inżomm ruħi okkupata gtates, pjanti u facebook."
- MEMBRU TAL-CRAFTS GROUP: "II-Crafts kollha li kelli naghmel spiċċajthom. Ma baqaghlix materjali aktar x'nuża. Kollox lestejt. Imbierek il-ħin li kont niġi hemm."
  - RECEPTIONIST: "Kollox sew s'issa, tafx. Għadna sodi."

Kunu safe! Ahna nimmissjawkom hafna wkoll!



## 5th April



It is becoming increasingly clear to us how much of a lifeline our calls to the families we support have become. Even to those who can venture out of the house to shop for food or go to the pharmacy. They tell us that they look forward to our calls since they reassure them and lessen their loneliness. Since they already know us well, they do not hesitate to talk freely and at each call, we pick up from where we left off. Many are very much afraid of unknowingly being contaminated and that, unwittingly, they will contaminate things they touch and pass on the virus to their loved ones.

Some are becoming obsessive about cleaning, changing bedsheets some 3 times a week.

Following the loss of a brother with whom she was very close and the loss of frequent visits by friends, one elderly woman clutched tightly to the call of her social worker at our Foundation and did not want to let go. The call lasted some 90 minutes. She shared how she is valiantly doing her best to cope. She has come up with a new routine: morning prayers, a shower, breakfast, some basic cleaning up, planning her lunch and cooking it, lunch, rest, TV, some reading, supper, radio, sleep.... She shared how afraid she is that we would give up on her and not phone her anymore because she had been candid with us and admitted that she is coping. We promised we would continue phoning her and praised her for managing an effective routine. She felt validated and reassured that we will remain present in her life, especially now that social connectivity is taking a totally different shape.



#### 11th April

Another pressing challenge escalated by the pandemic was that of mental ill health, both of mental health patients and of their family care givers.



21

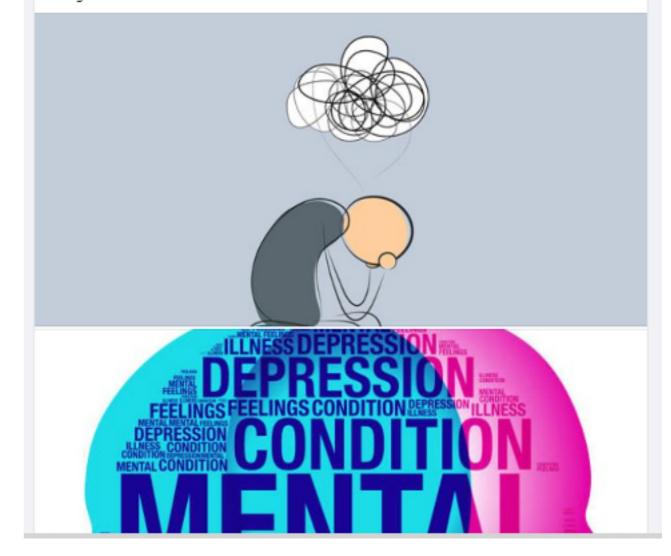
QRABA LI JIEHDU HSIEB MEMBRU TA' FAMILTHOM B'MARD MENTALI: Hafna persuni li jerfqhu din ir-risponsabbiltà kbira, tqila u kumplessa qed tikber fihom ansjetà kbira. Biss biss f'jum wiehed, il-Mental Health Nurse tal-Fondazzjoni li tmexxi s-Servizz LWIEN ghenet 10 persuni li jiehdu hsieb membri tal-familja taghhom b'mard mentali. Kull laqgha bl-iskype jew WhatsApp talk time ħaditilha siegħa jew aktar.

Qed tinnota żewó effetti partikolari tal-imxija tal-COVID-19:

- li ħafna graba li ged jieħdu ħsieb membru tal-familja b'mard mentali ged jiżżersgu huma wkoll f'dipressjoni, u li
- I-OCD ged teskala.

Intom li qed terfqñu din ir-risponsabbiltà ta' kura ta' qarib b'mard mentali, kif qed tkampaw? X'qed jgħinkom? Iktbulna bil-messenger ħalli nwasslu dak li qed jgħinkom lil ħaddieħor.

F'dan I-Ghid partikolarment difficli, nassigurawkom hafna talb u preżenza ta' ghajnuna meta teħtiġuha.





Omm ta' erbat itfal źgħar għadha kif kitbet hekk lill-ħaddiema tagħna li tgħinha:

"Bongu. Nittama li tinsab tajba! Għadhom kif waslulna l-affarijiet li konna qed neħtiegu. Ma nistax nemmen li kull ma kelna bżonn wasal. Grazzi u proset ta' kemm intom ta' għajnuna u ta' kemm qed tagħmlu differenza kbira fil-ħajja tan-nies għax bħalissa il-htiega ta' għajnuna qed tkun ikbar u ikbar. Grazzi ħafna." #CovidCantStopGOOD







Dawn I-aħħar jiem glajna ħafna ħelu ta' I-Għid mingħand bosta benefatturi sabiex inkunu nistgħu

naghtuhom lil familji fil-bžonn. Hu hekk ghamilna. Imma kif?

Iddecidejna li naghtuhom lil organizzazzjonijiet li qed iqassmu ikel lil tant familji fid-diffikultà.

Casa Antonia – dar privata għall-anzjani - kellhom 100 figolla extra u Sarah, li taħdem hemm, offriethom lil llona Busby mill-Malta Charity Central. llona mbagħad offriethom lilna. Issuġġerejnielha li tgħaddihom lil The Malta Trust Foundation li qed tqassam kaxex ikel kull ġimgħatejn lil tant familji madwar Malta.

Is-Sinjura Helen Sammut tatna 40 figolla u ahna ghaddejniehom lil Djakonija Parročći Unit ta' Caritas Malta biex jitgassmu ma' ikliet mhejjija mill-Alfred Mizzi Foundation.

Helu tal-Ghid minghand Marisa Attard ghaddejniehom lil Danny's Restaurant sabiex jinkludihom mal-ikliet li qed isajjar u jwasslilna lil nisa li garrbu vjolenza domestika.

Tutto Marketing tana 94 kejk. Qed nippjanaw kif se jitqassmu dawn ukoll. Il-principju – kull ma naqalghu naqsmuh ma' haddiehor halli jikber ic-cirku ta' organizzazzjonijiet li nahdmu flimkien ghal ghan wiehed – solidarjetà socjali. #CovidCantStopGOOD





A MESSAGE FROM ANOTHER MUM WE HAVE BEEN HELPING: "Dear ones: I hope I am not bothering you but I need to tell you dears that I have received the cooked food. It's a very nice cooked meal with also fruit and bread and I don't have a way to thank you all enough for what you are doing to people that really need help like me and my children. Thank you. It is such a relief of mind and the weight on my shoulder has got lighter because of you all.

Someone that has no connection with me, I mean someone who is not my family, who helps me out of the blue like this is like a candle in a dark path. Your support has relieved a lot of my worries that if I could make a book about, it would be endless, I wish that in the future I could give back. I'm so grateful and I appreciate this so much! Thank you hafna hafna." #CovidCantStopGOOD





...

II-jum it-tajjeb! Żewġ familji bikkewna Ilum. Koppja anzjani immigranti bla graba u ekonomikament batuti rreferew gara Maltija ghax qed tibki u thossha iddisprata ghax ma tistax toħroġ u tiltaga' ma' ħaddieħor. Cempilnielha u tkellimna fit-tul. Ftehemna kif nistgħu ngħinuha. Hi armla u ghandha pensjoni ta' €490 li minnhom taqta' €350 ghal kirja issussidjata.

Meta tkellimna fuq ikel qaltilna: "Le. Ikel m'qhanndix bzonn qhax nghaddi bi ftit brodu tattiģiega. Langas ged ikolli aptit. Dak biżżejjed għalija. Imma I-ģirien tiegħi langas għandhom għaxja ta' lejla. Lanqas flus biex jixtru ikel m'għandhom. Min dak li jkolli jien nagħtihom. Dawk nies ta' vera. Angli tafx. II-genna dritt sejrin." Meta staqsejnieha ghaliex qed tghid hekk fuq ilģirien tagāha galet: "Gāax dawk jisimgāuni nibki mix-xaft u I-mara tinzel tiģri tāabbatli biex tara kif jien u toqqhod hdejja tismaghni."

II-bićća hi li I-koppja anzjani immigranti ćemplu għall-għajnuna għall-ġara tagħhom meta filfatt kienu huma li kellhom I-aktar bżonn. II-mara bdiet issejhilhom b'isimhom mix-xaft u niżlu jaraw x'kellha bżonn. Irringrazzjathom talli hasbu fiha billi cemplu lill-NGO taghna ghall-ghajnuna għaliha. Tkellimna magħhom. Se ngħinuhom ukoll. #CovidCantStopGOOD



Victoria Ann and 82 others

12 Comments 7 Shares

25



Good morning! One of the families we have just helped is of a single mother of 2 children, all struggling with mental ill health. The recent marriage separation took its toll on all of them; and so has the move to another flat and being further away from relatives and friends. The children are slowly settling down. Having access to reconditioned laptops we provided is helping the children cope better with the COVID-19 crisis.

The mother is trying to find a balance between ordering sufficient food items to last a forthnight or more or ordering food to last a few days at a time. The reason is that the children are eating more now that they are cooped up at home all day and her meagre income is already stretched to the limit. Also, the shopkeeper who delivers tells her he does not do deliveries for a few items. However, her cash flow is insufficient for a large purchase. We explored a number of options and have come up with a good one for the family for the COVID-19 period; we are providing the occasional food package and toiletries.

Through Women for Women (Malta) (WfW), we have also provided the mum with a TV set since theirs was out of order and she did not want to use her children's laptop since they were really making good use of them. TV, the mother told us, keeps her abreast with current news and interesting programmes. She was ecstatic when WfW delivered a large screen TV – a larger one than she had dared hope for. Thank you WfWI #CovidCantStopGOOD



# Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

Good evening! Our Volunteer Bazaar Managers Mildred and Freddie Zammit are getting antsy moving around the house without the excitement of meeting so many regulars who frequent our Bazaar and the adventure of accepting and displaying so many surprise donations. Their roof garden is getting more populated by the day, waiting for the day when the Bazaar re-opens.

"Naĥsbu ĥafna fikom li tiġu gĥandna regolarment gĥax togħġobkom il-kumpanija u l-affarijiet li nbiegĥu. Insellmulkom u nħeġġukom tibqgħu ġewwa bħalna għall-ħarsien tagħna lkoll. Xorta waħda nimmissjawkom!"

("We often think of you our regular customers who frequent the Bazaar in Tarxien Road. Greetings! We urge you to stay indoors, as we do, for the safety of all of us! But still we miss you!").

We miss you too dear Mildred and Freddie!



27

#### 30th April



II-jum it-tajjeb! Aktar ma nćemplu u nitkellmu ma' individwi u familji li sabu ruħhom f'diffikultajiet, u aktar ma nfasslu pjanijiet magħhom biex ngħinuhom skont il-bżonnijiet partikolari tagħhom, aktar ma nilmħu anġli ta' ġirien fit-toroq u blokkok ta' flettijiet fejn joqogħdu dawk li qed ngħinu.

Mafna jgħidulna b'ġirien li jċemplulhom biex jaraw kif inhuma u jeħtiġux xi ħaġa. Oħrajn jaqsmu dak li jkunu rċevew ma' oħrajn li jħossu li aktar għandhom bżonn minnhom. Oħrajn iċemplulna biex jgħidulna b'persuni li jistħu wisq jaqbdu t-telefon u jċemplu għall-għajnuna. Hemm min, anke minn gallarija jew xaft, joqogħdu bil-paċenzja jispjegaw lil xi ġar kif jista' juża' t-telefon aħjar biex, per eżempju, jibda juża' il-WhatsApp u jikkomunika b'xejn u wiċċ-imb-wiċċ. Ġesti sbieħ immens li juruna xi qlub li jafu jagħdru u jgħinu lill-għajrhom hawn madwarna.

Aħna I-ħaddiema tal-Fondazzjoni ma waqqafniex il-ħidma ta' għajnuna lil familji fid-diffikultà. Pjuttost qed naħdmu b'mod aktar intens u b'sigħat itwal. Il-messaġġ tagħna Ikoll: aħna qegħdin hawn għalikom!





14 Comments 5 Shares



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29

II-jum it-tajjeb! II-pozittività madwarna tinhass bhal mewga kbira li ma tistax tahrab minnha u jkollok tintelaq maghha u thalliha tmexxik.

Daqs kemm ićemplu u jiktbulna nies fid-diffikultà fuq il-Helplines u l-Messenger tagħna, hekk ukoll ićemplu individwi u kumpaniji li jixtiequ jgħinuna fil-ħidma tagħna ta' għajnuna lil min qed jaffaċċja aktar diffikultajiet milli diġà kellu qabel il-COVID-19. Min iwasslilna frott, bajd u ħaxix, min kaxex ippakkjati bil-preserves tal-ikel, u min joffri li jgħin familji biex isibu tarf tal-home-schooling. Avukata u Nutar aċċettaw ukoll li jgħinuna b'xi diffikultajiet li niltaggħu magħhom.

Kull ģurnata fiha s-sabīħ tagħha, minkejja l-intensità tal-ħidma u n-numru dejjem jiżdied ta' min jeħtieģ għajnuna.

Kif urejna I-bieraħ fil-video li tellajna b'xi messaǧǧi minn familji li qed ngħinu, bħalissa qed nistinkaw biex ngħinu madwar 420 individwi u familji fid-diffikultà. Minnhom, 301 individwi minn 96 familja qed ngħinuhom b'ikel (preserves jew ikliet lesti), toiletries u detergents.

Wehedna ma naslux. Ghalhekk inbena cirku wiesa' ta' msiehba li, flimkien, kulhadd bil-mod tieghu, qed nistinkaw biex jekk jista' jkun, hadd ma jibqa' jbati bla ghajnuna. Grazzi lil kulhadd. Ahna qeghdin hawn ghalikom. #CovidCantStopGOOD



II-jum it-tajjeb. Omm ta' ħamest itfal għadha kif qaltilna hekk: "Qas qatt ma ħlomt li I-providenza tista' tkun hekk. Qed inħoss il-providenza laqtitni u għadni mbellħa. Għandi ħamest itfal u tlift I-impieg malli faqqas il-virus. Għadna għaddejjin bis-separazzjoni. Manteniment ma jagħtinix. Ma rridx niddependi fuq il-benefiċċji soċjali. Irrid naħdem. Alla laqqagħni mal-ħaddiema tal-Fondazzjoni. Hassejt serħan u, iva, ferħ ukoll malli ġejt hawn.

"Qed inħoss li Alla refagħni mill-qtigħ ta' qalb kbir u disprament. Grazzi li sibtuli sponsors li ħallsuli I-kont dejjem jikber tad-dawl u I-ilma. Veru ma kellix flus biex inħallsu. Dejjem noħlom b'dan il-kont u x'nista' nagħmel biex inħallsu. Grazzi ukoll tal-ikel li ipprovdejtu lill-familja tiegħi ta' sitta dawn I-aħħar xhur. U grazzi tal-impieg li sibtuli. Bdejt illum! Grazzi, grazzi, grazzi."

Lid-Direttur tal-Kumpanija li ħallsitilha l-kont tal-ilma u elettriku kitbitlu din il-kartolina ta' ringrazzjament:



Crozzi to li ghojnunc kbira
Li taghjtuni jalla il banbien
izom idejhom tukkom.
gat muhr se nisa danil
gest satila li ghomiltu
miestri u na tal

#### 22nd July

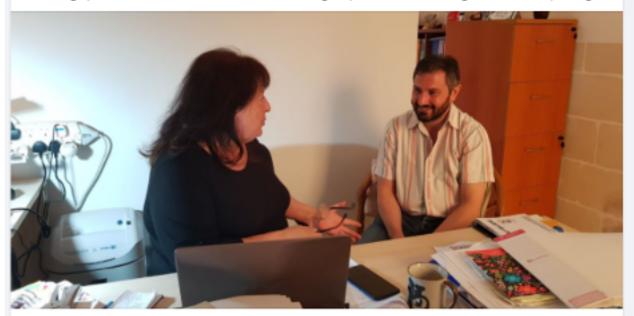


Good day! Care planning session just finished in support of a young mother of 4 – in her late 20s. Children's ages between 3 and 8.

The mother does her utmost to manage with the social assistance she receives from the Social Security Department, children's allowance and maintenance from one father for one of the children only. The grandmother lives with the family but has a substantial unpaid bill to contend with and ill health.

Our support care plan with the mother includes, among other things, the following:

- Educational support to the young mother on family budget management;
- A sponsor covered the cost of a fridge and another will be providing funds for a cooker. Both were faulty and posed a risk for the chilren;
- A supply of kitchenware from families who donate such items to us: plates, cutlery:
- Bedsheets and covers for 2 of the beds;
- Liaising with the entity to whom the grandmother owes money;
- Finding a corporate CSR team to whitewash at least the kitchen:
- Getting quotations for a basic kitchen and finding a sponsor. The existing one needs replacing.



○○② Ira Shak and 50 others

5 Comments 3 Shares

#### 27th July



Good morning! Yesterday afternoon we held a very lively zoom meeting for some of our VOLUNTEER MENTORS. Our Volunteer Mentors are matched with vulnerable young single mothers, children and young persons; they become a kind of big sister/ big brother and special friend to their Mentees.

To us, Volunteer Mentors are very special persons who commit themselves to a loving-kind and supportive relationship with persons who, throughout their difficult lives, lacked a stable, supportive, inspirational and nurturing adult role model.

Mentor Petra: "Thank you very much for the informative meeting just now. It was very interesting and useful to hear the mainly positive and some problematic experiences of the mentors and their mentees. This will help me forward in my new task as Mentor. I am looking forward to this

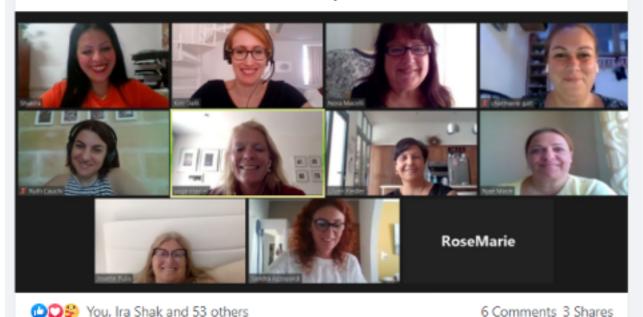
Mentor Ruth: "Hajr ta' dak kollu li qed taghmlu f'gieh il-'batut', I-aktar vulnerabbli. Il-punt tat-tluq tagħkom huwa I-punt tat-tlug tiegħi wkoll u allura nħossni komda nappartjeni f'din il-Fondazzjoni. Iddiskutejna hafna punti validi li jehtiegu hafna aktar approfondiment permezz tat-tahrig li se jkollna."

Mentor Kim: "Thank you for the fantastic session."

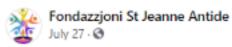
Ruth kitbet ukoll: "Kieku kelli ndomm kollox dwar I-esperjenza tal-laqgha li kellna, nispjega ruhi hekk:

lż-źring imxennag li jofrog I-ilma giegħed li jitliegheb biex jilghab mal-ilma gieri jghaddi minn caghka ghal ohra anke fejn iz-zkuk bla ħajja jbarru l-mixja libera."

Thank you to the older Volunteer Mentors Lilyen and Sandra who yesterday shared their experience with the new Mentors. Mentoring is a very powerful growth experience for persons who welcome such volunteers into their life. Thank you!



6 Comments 3 Shares



Good afternoon! This morning all our staff thanked our colleague Melanie Piscopo - Manager (Finance and Administration), for her assiduous and meticulous work in ensuring the health and safety of all of us - staff, volunteers and families that turn to us for support - throughout these past months since the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

Melanie was given a CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE for her planning and implementation of related measures including the policies and procedures. Thank you Melanie for your impeccable contribution!



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28 Comments 1 Share

#### 10th September

# Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

Good afternoon. It's not so good though for a young Amanda and her daughter Lea (names have been changed to protect confidentiality). Both Amanda and Lea are still suffering the trauma of long-standing domestic violence and current threats and stalking, despite the separation. Amanda had to flee their home to be safe. She went to live with her parents. Having been abused herself in childhood, Amanda could not stay with them long; she wanted to protect her Lea at all costs – whatever it takes.

We have found Amanda and her daughter accommodation and are helping her get a job so that she can be self-sufficient. At this point in time, going to work is difficult since she has no one who could help out by looking after Lea.

This week Amanda had the fright of her life when her very abusive ex-partner tried to snatch Lea when Amanda and Lea came out of her parents' house. She managed to rush back inside.

Given that they still have shared custody, Amanda's most pressing action right now is to immediately file a request to the court to issue and enforce a protection order.

Your financial support would be appreciated so that we can cover her legal fees. We shall keep you informed of the amount we raise. Our donation line is the following: https://donorbox.org/donate-sjaf

Blessings to you from all of us at SJAF.



#### 10th September



...

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned our lives upside down.

The crisis continues to present us NGOs that support families in distress with many challenges. One of these is the risk of carrying out home-visits. Visiting families-in-difficulty whom we support is crucial in our line of work. But. nowadays, home-visits have become risky. Rather than slowing down, we have adapted to the situation and are creatively finding different ways of forging ahead with our support services.

Since the 13th of March, our NGO has accepted 217 NEW CASES of families in distress. For our small NGO, this is a significant number. In total this year, we managed to start supporting 302 families, apart from those whom we continue to support from previous years since their difficulties persist.

We thank off our donors, benefactors, families that donate items to other families, those of you who respond to our various appeals, those of you who constantly send us donations or ask us how they can support us in our work. Without all of you, our spirits would have been dampened. After all, we are all human; and we would not want to have to be constrained to stop any of the services we currently offer or refuse to help new families who come to us for help.

Good day. If you feel you are in a position to support us financially, our donation line is the following: https://donorbox.org/donate-sjaf

Blessings to you and your dear ones.



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#### 17th September



Good afternoon! One of the persons we are currently helping very intensely is a young mother who is very hardworking and determined to forge ahead with her life plan. She has suffered a lot but her openness to make the best of professional guidance and support means that we can together move fast to ensure the wellbeing of her family.

We are looking for sponsors for the debt relief plan of this woman. She has significant debts related to utilities (€800), telephony (just over €400; without connectivity it would have been very difficult to communicate with support services), rent (€1,500) and her legal bill (€800). Today she has a job which she loves and walks to work to save on transport.

Her ex-husband has never paid any maintenance, thus forcing her to struggle on her own with accumulating bills, including the legal ones to fight for her children's rights to maintenance. We want to help her clear 3 of the debts so that we can then together plan a phased payment of the remaining two.

Your financial support will be highly appreciated. Our Foundation's debt relief emergency fund is drying up. Our donation line is the following: https://donorbox.org/donate-sjaf

Blessings to you and your dear ones.



#### SAFE RE-OPENING OF SJAF CENTRU ANTIDA IN THE SUMMER OF 2020

Following the closure period 13 March to 12 June 2020 during which services operated remotely, SJAF started preparing for the gradual re-opening of Centru Antida family services centre in phases.

During Phase 1 which started on the 30th June 2020, SJAF staff were divided into two teams so as to alternate between working a week-on-site and a week-from-home basis. At the same time, service users had the opportunity to request SJAF practitioners for a personal office-based session. Such meetings needed to be pre-booked and confirmed. No group meetings could however be held, but home visits were re-started and carried out under very strict and restrictive protective measures.

During Phase 2, which started on the 31st July 2020, all SJAF workers re-started working together while still closely following the public health authorities' protocols and implementation guidelines at that time.

Access to Čentru Antida was given to authorised persons, after having pre-booked a meeting with a staff member. SJAF placed signage promoting social distancing and safety procedures, at entry point and on the noticeboard in the foyer area; keeping an electronic log of persons coming to Čentru Antida, recording name, number of persons visiting, the reason for the visit and the time of arrival and departure, and keeping such records for a minimum of four weeks. Temperature checks continued to be taken of all visitors, including staff and volunteers, at the entry point, while entry was refused to any individual either displaying or complaining of symptoms, not wearing a facemask, or having a temperature of over 37.2C.

Among the safety measures encouraged and enforced at SJAF premises are to date, full disclosure of swabbing or close contacts with positive cases, frequent hand washing, the use of sanitizers with an alcohol contect of at least 70%, social distancing, adequate ventilation and the frequent disinfection of the below items and surfaces.











Doorknobs

Lift Buttons

Keyboard & mouse

Touch-screens devices

Kitchen surfaces

SJAF pandemic related protocols continued to be regularly and systematically revised in line with the guidelines and directives of the Public Health Authorities.

#### CONCLUSION

As we are all adjusting "from the new normal to a new future", we are slowly recognizing that the COVID-19 virus will be with us for a long time. With the EU's policy of mass vaccination underway, the future seems a little better and hopeful and somewhat brighter. The hope nurtured by all family support practitioners across key sectors augus that things will slowly go back to normal. Having hope gives everyone an incentive to hang in there, to be the best we can and to have faith in better times to come. We are starting to see a way to restore health, the economy and society as a whole. As we come to appreciate more what we've lost, we adjust day by day to what we've acquired. A year into the pandemic is still mostly an unknown. But what has emerged is that a year after the pandemic must and will be one where we all come together to ensure that no one is left behind, and that we all truly experience a new beginning.





5. WHO, "From the "new normal" to a "new future": A sustainable response to COVID-19", 13th October 2020, WHO Western Pacific, accessed on 29th December 2020

# PART 3

#### A CASE-STUDY OF SJAF'S SOAR SERVICE IN 2020

SOAR is a survivor-led, strengths-based, peer support service for women and children exposed to domestic violence. SOAR offers a range of long-term services to support women and children survivors who are exiting shelters or already living in the community. To carry out its objectives, every year, SOAR runs a number of initiatives to empower women through access to knowledge, peer-o-peer mentoring, support, inkind assistance, social inclusion interventions and non-formal education and advocacy. Through these measures, women and their children find loving-kind fellowship, healing, stability and improvement of the quality of their lives while on their journey of recovery away from violence.

At the end of 2020, SOAR had 1 full time worker, a part-time one and 6 volunteers, covering the running of the service: case management, social support provision, event organisation, individual project leadership, social justice advocacy, outreach work through social media, facebook page maintenance and case management. The SJAF Project Office/ Fundraiser was responsible for the management of the SOAR Hub renovation project and for seeking funding partners. QPml Ltd continued to provide its pro bono services on anything to do with the preparation and submission of all documentation and plans to the Planning Authority related to the SOAR Hub.

#### **OVERVIEW OF SOAR SERVICES**

One-to-One Support was offered to around 131 women who sought SOAR support, 57 of them newly referred in 2020. Personalised support plans were prepared by SOAR personnel. SOAR staff frequently liaised with other organisations, foundations and benefactors to assist survivors and their children to meet identified needs. A risk assessment was carried out on a case-by-case basis to determine the best way forward for each woman.

SOAR Support Group: the group continued to offer peer-support to survivors within a tight-knit community of women and children. SOAR staff and survivor-volunteers continued to be trained and guided to provide peer-to-peer support. The support group proved to be invaluable in enabling women to combat exclusion, isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety through a range of social activities and cultural projects. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the group split up into smaller groups that continued to meet online.

Peer-Mentoring: this continued to be the mainstay of SOAR. Peer-mentoring continued to be offered to survivors who set particular life-goals and requested support to reach their personal goals. Whether the goal was to find a rental apartment, find a job, settle in a new community or in a new routine, or take up studies, mentoring was used as a tool to coach and guide a survivor as an elder sister would. Mentoring was also offered to survivors who need support with getting out of debt.

Training on issues related to domestic violence: such training is normally offered to small groups of employees, volunteers, team leaders, HR managers, police recruits, health practitioners, legal practitioners, judiciary and others.

Advocacy: this is an essential element of SOAR and rooted in the belief that survivors are experts in their own right. Survivors' wealth of experience of violence and the subsequent difficulty of navigating the services, the systems and the struggle to survive means they are well placed to make recommendations for changes to policy and practices. SOAR continued to work closely with survivors, organising focus groups and online discussions to take survivors' collective recommendations and lobby for the necessary changes.

#### SUPPORTING 131 SURVIVORS DURING 2020

As the pandemic reached our shores and the country was forced into a lockdown, most survivors faced economic-related issues and mental health issues linked to isolation, anxiety and fear around the unfolding health situation. Some survivors risked facing eviction because they could not make the payments on their rented flat. Many struggled to make ends meet and some reported that the prices of their regular grocery items had gone up.

To alleviate most of the impact, SOAR shifted its focus more heavily towards peer-support. Since SOAR staff started working remotely from home because of the COVID-19 pandemic, technology became a critical tool for connectivity with members. The SOAR team tapped into as many forms of connection as they could, using social media, WhatsApp facetime, phone calls, voice recordings and zoom online group meetings to keep the group meeting every week. SOAR continued to review how best to organize better group activities given the pandemic.

SOAR remained active in the Network Forum Malta and in the DV and GBV Commission 's NGO Network through which information on changes to organization and public service practices were shared.

#### SUPPORT DURING COVID

As SJAF offices went on lockdown in mid-March 2020, SOAR re-strategised its practices for outreach and support, as the whole world scrambled to set up remotely and as seamlessly as possible. Being small meant that the SOAR team could adapt faster, and for SOAR, some of that adaptation to online and remote working was already in place before Covid-19.

Technology and the use of phone, chat, video chat, social media and messenger apps have always featured heavily in the strategies that SOAR has used to provide its service since its inception in 2012. Thus, the cross over to working fully remote was practically seamless.

The strongest impact was felt on the sudden cessation of group-related work. Even as this transitioned online, there was no time for closure to the rituals that now formed part of SOAR and service users' weekly routine. There was no time for one last hug. Group meetings were replaced with video calls and phone calls and for some, they're just not the same as meeting their 'tribe' and support network in person. However, everyone had accepted that group meetings had to stop for their own benefit. Even though some members required technical assistance and coaching to gain the skills needed to access new online apps, programmes and features on their devices, over the course of a few weeks all of the active and new members had made use of technology to keep in touch. Three new service users commented that having the long disclosure discussion over the phone has made it easier for them to talk.

# A SOAR CASE – HOW WE SUPPORTED ONE PARTICULAR MEMBER

Fatima (name changed) was forced to escape her violent partner and for the last 2 years she has been living in the only apartment she could afford, paying €450 monthly in rent and another €50 for utilities. She has a minimum wage job and her daughter is in school. Fatima is a hardworking woman, but her income is barely enough to keep a roof over their heads, very little is left for food. During the Covid lockdown, she lost some of her income and her situation became worse. Because she is not a European citizen, she is not entitled to rent subsidy. Through frequent communication, we were able to assist Fatima with some of her most dire needs. We supported her with cooked food from the Solidarity Meals provided by the Alfred Mizzi Foundation, groceries, toiletries and detergents

from the SJAF itself collected thanks to donors. All these supports to Fatima and her daughter were delivered to her thanks to the sponsored Ryde and Cool Taxis as she lives far away from SJAF headoffice and does not drive.

Recently there have been works in an old adjacent building and suddenly Fatima's home became infested with cockroaches. She tried to control the situation, but it got out of hand. This had a negative impact on her mental health, as her home became a place she did not want to sleep in.

Thanks to a sponsorship from Women for Women Foundation, SOAR was able to organize a visit by a pest control company to sort this problem out. Since Fatima does not know how to write in English or Maltese, SOAR team members communicate frequently with her using WhatsApp video, voice recording and voice calls. Now that her daughter is starting post-secondary education, SOAR was additionally able to support her by providing a new student laptop to assist her in her studies. Fatima is now looking for a cheaper residence, closer to where she works, so as to cut down on transport costs too.

Fatima's SOAR Peer Mentor will continue to follow up on her, re-evaluating her situation as time passes.

Fatima's story shows how survivors will suffer long-term consequences of having to escape a violent partner. It also shows the intersectionality of survivors as women, as refugees, as poor persons and as mothers, and it shows the complexity of their needs.

## COOKED MEALS FOR SOAR FAMILIES

With the help of many caring people such as the owners of Briju & Pulled Meat Restaurants and Danny's, SOAR was able to ensure that it could move on with the provision of a wide array of support services to vulnerable families who suffer many setbacks due to the complex and difficult life circumstances.

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During the COVID-19 crisis months, SOAR managed to, swiftly and effectively, adapt to the challenges presented by the pandemic. During the pandemic, SOAR managed to provide those service-using families who were in poverty with a number of supports – as can be seen below:

Support initiative utilised	In-kind supports extended to poor families	No. of families benefiting
Victory Kitchen by Rafel Sammut (for survivors of domestic violence and their children)	Regular pre-cooked meals	12
Danny's by JP (for survivors of domestic violence and their children)	Regular pre-cooked meals	24
Malta Trust Foundation Food Aid initiative	Food Packs	4
The Solidarity Meals initiative of the Alfred Mizzi Foundation coordinated by the Djakonija Parročći Unit of Caritas Malta	Cooked Meals	8
SJAF's range of in-kind supports such as food packs, personal and home hygiene products, clothing, baby items (buggies, clothing, nappies), bed linen, second-hand furniture, furnishings, Bailout Fund assistance, books, toys, sponsorships for other very particular needs such as medicines, small gifts to raise morale.	St Jeanne Antide Foundation's in-house initatives	52

## MENTORING FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The pandemic brought with it loss of jobs and loss of earnings. Many of our service users were finding it difficult to make ends meet. Some said that the usual groceries they purchased every month had increased in price and their income was simply not enough.

SOAR supported survivors facing particular difficulties with mentoring in household budgeting. Each session was an exercise in examining weekly, monthly and yearly needs, discussing and prioritizing these needs, splitting income over the different needs and discussing ways to create more income or ways in which to supplement income.

For some individuals, a life of upheaval, struggle with mental health, living with violence and raising very young children meant they were at a great economic disadvantage, unable to keep a roof over their heads without incurring and amassing more and more debt. With families who were committed to receiving holistic support to overcome the difficulties in their lives and empower their economic wellbeing, SJAF was able to help survivors bail out some of their debts. One family of 5 would have ended up homeless within 24 hours had not SJAF intervened swiftly.

#### SUPPORT GROUP

During COVID-19 months, the weekly support group meetings had to stop abruptly to safeguard everyone's health. SOAR then shifted to using only online spaces, making use of a range of these to reach and support SOAR members, such as the Facebook support group, WhatsApp, Messenger and Zoom. Weekly online group meetings took place during lockdown months to keep the Saturday meetings rhythm and routine going. These online meetings were well received by many women who would have hardly seen or spoken to anyone else that week. It provided for a safe space to discuss, chat and feel cared for during what was a very fearful time that only exacerbated survivors' anxieties. Invariably, SOAR women expressed their gratitude:



MARRIED WOMEN DON'T GO OUT WITH FRIENDS!

"Saturday group sessions were a lifeline at a time when all seemed so dark around me and loneliness was going to drown me. The support of the sisterhood is unmeasurable and much appreciated. I have gained a new family. Thank you all!"

"Every Saturday I would look forward to virtually seeing you all, sharing experiences and laughter. It certainly helped ease the pain of Covid-19, knowing that you were all there when needed."

"The support offered by SOAR is something I appreciated immensely. I looked forward to our chats on Saturday afternoons as they took my mind off the situation for a while." "SOAR is a second family. A sense of belonging one thinks they may have lost, sisterhood at its best!"

# MEMES – RAISING AWARENES ON SURVIVING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

During 2020, SOAR survivors submitted anecdotes from their own experiences so that these could be turned into awareness raising memes.

The following Memes are a small selection of the 10 created by artist Marisa Attard and digitalized by MPS Ltd.



LET'S TAKE MUMMY TO MOUNT CARMEL!

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

February 2020 saw the year's first femicide. As a response to yet another killing of a woman by an estranged partner, SOAR rallied to raise awareness on the gaps in the system that left women unprotected, poor, vulnerable and struggling to stay sane.

SOAR subsequently submitted a list of recommendations to the Minister for Justice and Equality and lobbied for a dialogue meeting which was subsequently organised by the Ministry following the femicide. The SOAR recommendations focused on the areas of:

- Enforcement of protective measures;
- Court sentencing;
- Manipulation of the systems by perpetrators through which they continue to perpetrate vi-olence on their victims:
- Child support measures;
- · Housing and economic empowerment;
- · Rape and marital rape.

#### **SOAR HUB**

During 2020, SOAR held several meetings and site visits with the engineering and construction company QPml to confirm the required support by the various departments and Planning Authority for the project moving forward. Issues were raised and tackled.

The following is a summary list of the main critical points that were discussed tackled and all the works that were completed during 2020:

- Bank guarantee was settled.
- Neighbouring site inspection was completed and condition reports were sent to the re-spective neighbours.
- Discussed completed about electrical, plumbing, and drainage systems.
- A plan drawn up of the equipment and furniture required for each room.
- Discussions about the room data sheets, detail with respect to the quantity and what type of services would be required in each room.
- · Conceptual design for the majority of services was finalised.
- Concluded the designs related to the finishes package and all the finishes required.
- Indication of where SOAR intend to have the electrical socket outlets, network & telephone points, A/C units, water and CCTV.
- Decided what electrical load would be required from Enemalta.
- Identified the rock level and/or the existing foundation levels.
- Clearing garden from shrubs and scraping of walls through various CSR days involving several companies and groups of workers.
- · Description of works was finalised.
- · Concept budget was finalized.

In addition to the above, a meeting was held with the Development Planning Fund Committee (DePFC) to discuss how the Development Planning Fund could be tapped in order to be able to initiate the SOAR Hub renovation works programme. Subsequently, a meeting was held with the President of Regjun Xlokk regarding the SOAR Hub Project and how the Region's respective local councils could support it. At the beginning of October 2020, the application for funds was submitted to the Planning Authority.

#### STITCH-IN-TIME PROJECT

The project titled A Stitch in Time brought women together during one of the most isolating times in their lives. In collaboration with Hajja, a social enterprise run by Bibiche Rath, a number of weekly sessions were held where participants learned new bobbin lace stitches, documented their progress, shared their lace stories and memories, shared jokes and learned about the cultural history behind the lace, the bobbins and threads. Each session provided a safe space for an exchange to be made: sharing and learning, dotted with moments of calm silence broken only by the relaxing chime of the wooden bobbins knocking each other as busy fingers worked.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck Malta barely one month into the project group sessions, SOAR was faced with the possibility of being forced to end the project. As SOAR team members all moved to their homes to work remotely, they needed to find a remote solution to keep up the contact with participants. Soon enough, a way was found to make the project work, by using recorded tutorials, the group's WhatsApp group, and Zoom. Arts Council Malta supported the necessary budget changes so that SOAR could accommodate this shift, beat the challenges and complete a successful project during a time when it was needed the most.



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# CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOAR STAFF

Date	Title	Туре	Organiser	Number of Staff
24 & 31 January; 5 &	Art Therapy Programme	Therapeutic groupwork	St Jeanne Antide Foundation	1
20/02/2020	Solidarity Not Stigma: Poverty relief as a right?"	Round Table Discussion	Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society	1
14/04/2020	Dialogue session with 4 representatives of the Ministry for Social Accommodation	Skype meeting	St Jeanne Antide Foundation	2
10/06/2020	Homicide Timeline	Webinar	Dr Jane Monckton Smith, University of Gloucester- shire, School Of Natural and Social Sciences	2
10/06/2020	Domestic Violence and Child Contact: European Perspectives	Webinar	Improving Justice in Child Contact and European Women's Lobby	1
18/06/2020	Helping Them Stay Sane: How to Help Someone Victimized by Coercive Control: WHAT TO DO if someone you know and care about—whether a friend, family member, or a professional client—is a victim of domestic abuse including coercive control.	Webinar	Partner Violence and Mental Health Network. Speaker: Lisa Aronson Fontes, PhD, international expert on child abuse and violence against women. Organised by: Health Sciences School Division of Nursing and Midwifery  The University of Sheffield	1
25/06/2020	The New Cohabitation Law	Webinar	Malta Council of Women	1

#### TRAINING PROVIDED

7 online workshops of 3.5 hours titled Domestic Violence and Risk each were led by SOAR in 2020 reaching 64 practitioners:

Date	Participants
26th May 2020	16 Survivors of DV
4th June 2020	9 SJAF Staff
17th June 2020	4 members from Women for Women
23 July 2020	4 Social workers from Gozo
28 July 2020	6 team members of MEP Dr Miriam Dalli
5th August 2020	15 practitioners from different agencies
18th August 2020	10 practitioners from different agencies

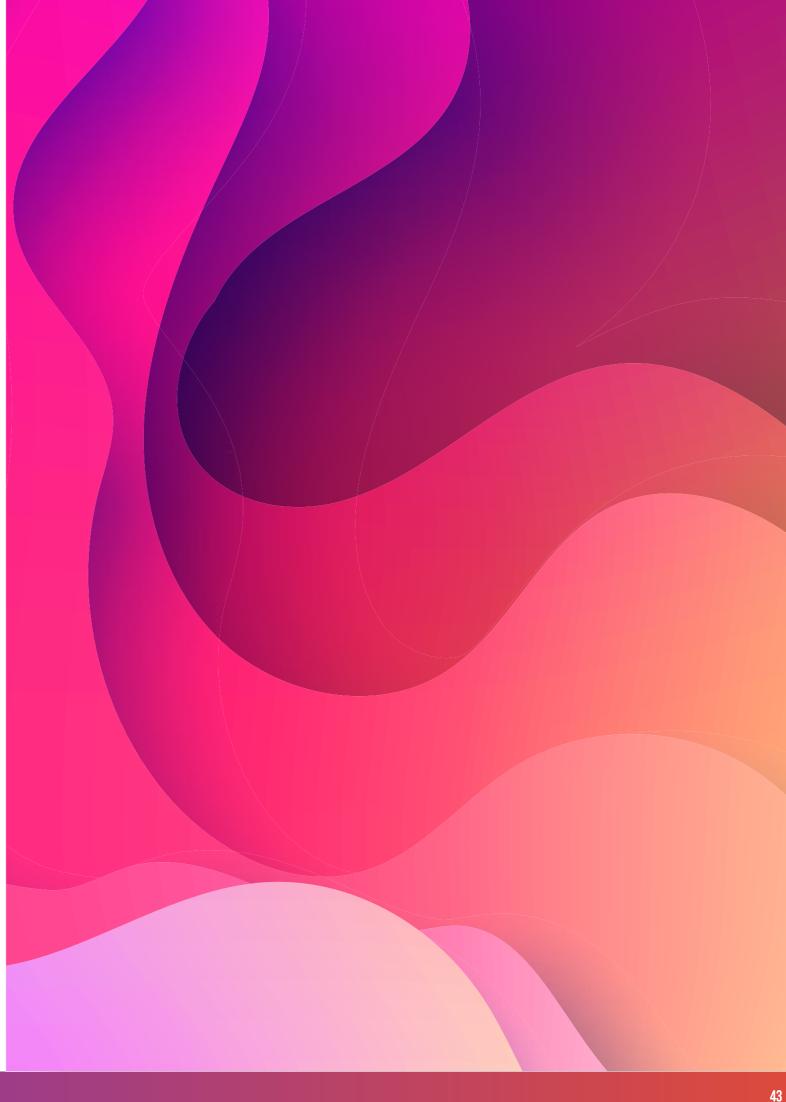
#### **PARTNERS AND DONORS**

SOAR expresses its gratitude to its foremost donors, partners and sponsors for their support throughout 2020. These include:

APS Bank Malta Cool Taxis Arts Council Malta Lovin Malta The Alfred Mizzi Foundation Malta Together Artist Marisa Attard Ryde Taxis

Beverly Gilbert - Cohort 4 UK

Bibiche Rath of ĦAJJA VO Women for Women Foundation.



# PART 4

# 2020 - OVERVIEW STATISTICAL DATA

During the 14-year time-span since SJAF was set up - 2007 to 2020 - SJAF has provided support to 6,619 individuals from 4,132 vulnerable families through its range of support services. In 2020 alone, SJAF provided a range of support services to 684 individuals in distress from 367 families in difficulty who are either already poor or are sliding into poverty and becoming more socially excluded. Apart from these, SJAF continued to support over 220 vulnerable families referred to it in previous years.

# LWIEN Service - in support of primary family caregivers of mentally ill persons

- 1,726 consultation sessions provided by the SJAF Mental Health Nurse to caregiving families
- 238 caregiving families received on-going support, 118 of which were newly referred in 2020 and 120 who continued to benefit from support from previous years.
- The SJAF Mental Health Nurse provided advice and support to families practically every day, including on 393 Saturdays.

#### Community Social Work Service:

The Community Social Work team managed a large caseload often requiring intense on-going nurture, guidance, support, encouragement through support care plans agreed with families who turned to SJAF for support and provision of a wide range of in-kind supports to enable them to make it through the distressful anxiety-ridden pandemic months.

During 2020, the Community Social Work team members supported 994 individuals from 434 vulnerable families. Of the 434 families supported, 300 were cases opened in previous years whose needs became more acute as the COVID-19 pandemic wore on. Of the total 434 families supported by the Social Workers, 262 cases were closed in discussion with the social work supervisor while 172 cases remained open at the end of December 2020. Referrals by state agencies constituted 74 or 17% of the 434 total families supported by the SJAF Social Workers. Depending on their need, families

could also access other supports provided by the Foundation. Such supports included: - consultations with the Foundation's Mental Health Nurse, a wide range of in-kind supports such as cooked meals or food packages, clothing, household goods, toiletries, detergents, second-hand furniture and furnishings, baby items, vouchers for clothes and other needs, back-to-school packs for children of poor families, certain debt bailouts in crisis situations, and used laptops. These support resources available to SJAF social workers is partly managed by the Manager of Čentru Antida. Regular individual and group case reviews and professional supervision sessions were held.

#### **SOAR Service:**

The SJAF SOAR Service team of trained and mentored survivors of domestic violence supported 131 women who, for many years, suffered the trauma of domestic abuse and violence.

#### Volunteering:

2020 was a year like no other. In one way or another, COVID19 left its mark on SJAF volunteering as well. In January, SJAF had a total of 90 serving volunteers. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, 9 had to discontinue their service because of personal or family vulnerability while 35 had to discontinue for other personal reasons or because of the halting of the SJAF service they were attached to. Active volunteers during 2020 provided a range of services which included, among others: Learning Support (17), Reception work (12), Handicrafts making (14), Mentoring (6), Befriending (13), SOAR Volunteers (6), Handymen (2).

Volunteering hours in 2020 totalled 26,663 – equivalent to practically 13 full-time workers. Were the hours of service of volunteers to be remunerated, their service would have cost the Foundation a minimum of €136,515. Their service contribution is invaluable and valued. Volunteers are considered as partner colleagues of the SJAF professionals.

## All new cases in 2020 across all SJAF Services

SJAF registered 367 new cases during 2020 involving 684 individuals.

The following charts summarise the main type of difficulty for which families turned to SJAF for support, the localities where families reside and the referral source.

Main presenting problem of new referred families in 2020	Number of families	% of total	
Overwhelmed and anxious family caregivers of severely mentally ill persons/ mental illness	142	39%	
Financial difficulties and slide into poverty	114	31%	
Abuse in intimate relationships	57	16%	
Emotional distress	21	6%	
Homelessness & substandard housing	12	3%	
Conflictual family relations and inability to manage family affairs	10	2%	
III health and frailty	7	2%	
Other	4	1%	
TOTAL	367	100%	

# Locality of residence of 367 families referred in 2020

Locality of residence	No. of families
Fgura	23
Paola	21
Ħal Tarxien	18
Santa Lucia	12
Marsaskala	12
Birżebbuġa	10
Other localities	271
TOTAL	367

# New cases of vulnerable families supported between 2007 and 2019

Individuals	Families
	367
	313
	381
706	375
622	397
543	373
424	288
481	320
473	298
540	324
412	284
185	150
231	169
121	93
6,619	4,132
	684 533 664 706 622 543 424 481 473 540 412 185 231 121

#### Continuous Professional Development opportunities

39 online continuous professional development sessions were accessed by SJAF personnel throughout the year.

Individual and Group-based Professional Supervision Sessions

Individual: 73 Team-based: 21

