

SOAR

unlocking human potential



An account of a survivor-led initiative,
which is today a national service

2012 – 2022

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23 November 2022

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SOAR UNLOCKING HUMAN POTENTIAL

AN ACCOUNT OF A SURVIVOR-LED INITIATIVE,
TODAY A NATIONAL SERVICE - 2012 – 2022

ST JEANNE ANTIDE FOUNDATION
23 NOVEMBER 2022

A MESSAGE BY NORA MACELLI

CEO, ST JEANNE ANTIDE FOUNDATION

Since early 2012, we have been working very closely with survivors of domestic violence and their children, the silent shattering of their collective hopes keep rumbling and impacting our daily lives. We suffer endlessly with them. Sleepless nights, fear and anxiety, mental ill health, poor health, poverty, homelessness, over-indebtedness, hopelessness, and helplessness blacken the rich splashes of colours that should gladden their and their children's hearts, minds and souls.

There are many of us who do our utmost to support victims and survivors of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. However, in our experience at SJAF, the healing and transforming power of SOAR's Peer Mentoring is undoubtedly a key trigger of mental wellbeing in survivors' lives. Our SOAR Service is run by supported, trained, and mentored survivors of domestic violence who commit themselves to nurturing and supporting the forward journey of so many women still bearing the weight of abuse by someone they loved. SOAR Peer Mentors are the ones who continue supporting women's recovery from the trauma of an abusive relationship – assisting them in picking up the pieces and summon the energy needed to commit to moving forward – despite the suffering, loss and continued vexatious tactics, stalking and threats.

This commemorative book is testimony to the unlocked potential of many women who boldly embarked on a journey of rebuilding their lives and helping others. Each chapter unfolds more layers of their collective journey towards recovery, healing, forgiveness, and service to the community. We are often humbled by SOAR women's faith in God and in the possibility of a better future for themselves, for their children and for so many other beautiful souls.

I will forever treasure this 10-year SOAR journey.



A MESSAGE BY SHAKIRA FENECH

SOAR COORDINATOR – 2020 TO DATE

Today we are here; tomorrow, we do not know where we will be! Each moment is a given one, and we do not have any control over what is in store for us. The same goes for domestic violence. DV has no face and can happen to anyone.

In my experience with SOAR, I have seen women survivors from various parts of Malta and from all social backgrounds and professions. What I wish to say is that domestic violence is everyone's problem. We cannot turn our back on it. Many of us have come to realise that we are a product of a society that turned its back on domestic violence.

I am at SOAR fully determined and honoured to do my utmost – my very soul best – to continue supporting women and children who have been traumatised by domestic violence. Our SOAR philosophy is to enable women and their children to break the cycle, to untangle themselves from stigma and self-stigma, and to re-invent themselves. When victims of domestic violence decide to survive and thrive and help others do likewise, they need a country and communities, ready to embrace and support them as Experts-by-Experience. For this system to continue to flourish, a robust and humble system of multi-agency collaboration is needed – a system that is not beholden to ego.

The future looks bright for SOAR. It has grown and thrives because the women that started it and worked to make it grow, found the right system through which to make things happen. SOAR is now taking things to the next level – of having its own space to reach many others. The SOAR Hub constitutes this next level of growth, and refurbishments on an old town house in Tarxien, is underway. Once completed, this Hub will have all the different SOAR services and initiatives under one roof.

SOAR is also working hard to influence and empower the younger generation to understand and prevent Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and other forms of abuse. Education is the key to prevention. We are not what happened to us. We are whom we choose to become.

THANK YOU to all those who invested in SOAR.



A MESSAGE BY ELAINE COMPAGNO

CO-FOUNDER OF SOAR AND SERVICE COORDINATOR – 2012 TO 2020

There are moments in life when you feel that something meaningful and unforgettable is about to happen. Huddled around a large well-worn wooden table, with steaming mugs and notebooks, heads of white, auburn, and dark brown bob up and down as the brainstorming session gets well underway. The air hangs heavy with expectation and promise, as the excited voices whip up a frenzy of cascading ideas. Yes! Our next big idea is coming together.

When I look back through the kaleidoscope of the ten years of SOAR, no matter how changing the pattern of each year has been, I see it dotted with this scene playing out over and over. To me, it is more than a low-key random event taking place in the larger engine of an organisation. To me, it symbolises everything SOAR is about: combined feminine energy, sisterhood, and resilience. A coming together, an exercise of pooling and sharing and of finding solutions to problems. An energy fuelled by a passionate fire that burns within to fight for social justice, underpinned by a drive to create change, and support our peers through acceptance, compassion and loving-kindness.

This wasn't, and still isn't, a new or innovating thing. Women's work in domestic violence has been around for decades and we enjoy a legacy of work that has been (and is still being) carried out by the women that came before us, upon which we continue to contribute. The innovation of SOAR is that it is built by, for and around domestic violence survivors. Borrowing a slogan from the disability rights movement of the 90s, "Nothing about us, without us" is a core SOAR principle in which years of advocacy at SOAR have been rooted. We knew it was time that survivors had representation in spheres where decisions are made, and change takes place. Traditionally, these spaces use gatekeeping to maintain exclusive access reserved for academics, experts, and policy makers.

It is our belief that a survivor has much to contribute on account of her experience. She has lived through years of violence, and experienced the processes of the social support, police and legal systems. An expert by her experience. If 1 in 4 women in Malta has experienced domestic violence, why hadn't policy makers been talking to them? Why weren't they considered to be stakeholders? It was an unacceptable situation, and with the guidance and networks of St Jeanne Antide Foundation, we changed that. Today, SOAR is recognised as a worthy contributor to policy recommendations, its participation is sought where policy and practices are discussed, and it has established a voice for survivors in these exclusionary spaces.

We can look back over the last ten years and see how it all came to be. We, a handful of survivors, came together around a worn big wooden table because, despite knowing we couldn't change anything for ourselves, we wanted to bring about change, reach out a hand and offer sisterly support to those who are yet to experience and escape domestic violence. We worked together to secure the interest, commitment, investment, and the precious spaces of St Jeanne Antide Foundation and the Sisters of Charity, along with the support of all the staff and the invaluable sustained mentoring of its CEO, Nora Macelli, to whom we all owe so much gratitude.

It all started ten years ago because someone believed us and believed in us.



DEDICATION

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

It's not your fault that they hurt you,
that they made you feel small and unworthy.
You were young, and sought strength from a man,
who abused your vulnerable heart..

But now you're an adult, and you know better.
You know that you are strong and capable,
that you are worthy of love and respect.
And you will no longer let anyone treat you as less.

The past does not have to define your future.
You can choose to heal from the pain they caused,
to move on and create a life that is beautiful and good.
You have the power to change your story -
so write a new ending, one that is full of hope and joy.
(Source: SJAF)

TISTA' TAGHŻEL

Li weġġgħuk, tort tiegħek ma kienx,
li ġiegħluk tħossok dudu bla dinjità.
Kont żagħżugħa li fittxet wens minn raġel
li abbuża mill-vulnerabbiltà.

Imm' issa kbirt u taf hafn'aħjar.
Taf b'hiltek, u f'hiltek fis-sod,
taf li jixraqlek imħabba w r-rispett,
u daqshekk jittrattawk ta' dudu.

Ma nħalluħx l-imgħoddi ipitter lill-ġejjieni:
tista' tagħżel li tfieq mill-uġiġħ
u timxi triq ta' tieba, triq ta' ġmiel.

Tista' tibdel l-istorja u r-rotta ta' ħajtek,
u tikteb... tmiem ġdid ta' tama, ta' ferħ.

(Sors: SJAF)

INTRODUCTION

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

Seeing SOAR developing, from a group of women who had endured the unending pain and trauma of domestic violence, to the development of a Peer Mentoring Service, embracing myriad initiatives has been a humbling, engaging and eventful learning experience. The SOAR journey started when the then chairperson for the Commission on Domestic Violence – Mrs Joanna Xuereb – suggested to the small group of women that had contacted her to approach the St Jeanne Antide Foundation to seek advice on how to start a group that would offer support to other women who, like them, were victims of domestic violence. The group included Sr Joan Garner from the Good Shepherd Sisters who had known the women from her service days at Dar Merhba Bik – the first ever shelter for victims of domestic violence.

The Foundation embraced the opportunity to provide the space, resources and group mentoring. The women's idea dovetailed with the ethos of the Foundation of nurturing and supporting the self-determination and active participation of service-users in becoming social solidarity frontliners. Thus, in March 2012, the SOAR group of survivors was helped to dialogue and reflect about their idea of service through fellowship, friendship, and emotional accompaniment to other women too shaken and disempowered to take the necessary steps that would lead them to a better life.

Things started happening from there – the aims of the group were debated and formulated, those support needs which the group members themselves could provide were identified, a short-term action plan drawn up, a brochure prepared, a Facebook page set up, and operational procedures outlined. The group started reaching out to other women and meeting socially. Therapeutic activities for both mothers and their children were organised and different sites identified for further discussion during social and training meetings.

From the outset, SOAR was conceived as a survivor-led, strength-based, peer support service for women and children exposed to domestic violence. Today, 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 several initiatives to empower women through access to information, informal and non-formal education, Peer Mentoring, personalized and group-based support, a wide range of much needed in-kind support, social inclusion interventions and advocacy and occasional debt relief. 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. SOAR has become a springboard from which survivors access specialized training to assume the role of Peer Mentors.

SOAR'S MISSION, BROAD AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

SOAR's mission is to mobilise mentored and trained survivors of domestic violence, to support and bolster the resilience of other still-traumatised survivors of domestic violence, whose spirit and sense of self has been fractured and battered to a pulp. It also strives to create a ripple effect among the community of survivors, enabling more to look to the future with dignity, hope and faith that God is with them along the way to rebuilding a better future for themselves and their children. To this end, SOAR will continue to help nurture and build an entrepreneurial spirit and mindset through the strengthening of tiny start-up MERAKI social enterprise and to explore other such initiatives collectively.

Broad aims

- To mobilise women who have experienced intimate partner violence to influence policy and practices.
- To enable families to break the cycle of vulnerability caused by violent intimate relationships.
- To contribute towards the elimination of violence against women.

Specific objectives

1. To provide opportunities through which members can provide fellowship and support to each other.
2. To provide opportunities and safe spaces for members to participate in self-care, personal growth and educational programmes and activities that make them resilient while opening other life-opportunities to them and their children.
3. To provide opportunities for training in Peer-Mentoring and peer-support to recovering survivors.
4. To analyse relevant legislation and practices so as to pinpoint aspects that are oppressive to victims and survivors of abusive relationships and present recommendations to policy makers.
5. To raise awareness about attitudes and practices that are helpful and empowering to victims and survivors.
6. To train persons who have experienced violence in intimate relationships to provide front-line information, guidance, and support.
7. To network and participate in different fora to represent the perspectives and interests of survivors and their children.

SOAR'S KEY ADVOCACY ROLE AND ACTIVE NETWORKING

Women survivors have first-hand experience of the oft inefficient justice and protection systems, and a unique understanding of how policies are falling short of being practical and effective for the survivor and her children. However, because they are women, they have less cultural capital, lacking resources and opportunities to participate and to have an active influence in the policies that effect their lives. Women as a group struggle to be heard and be taken seriously. When these women are victims and survivors of domestic violence, victim-blaming in public discourse shuts down their voices even more severely. Survivors are shamed and discouraged from speaking out, afraid of the stigma and shame that they perceive will have negative consequences for their children, their families and their career. Inadequate and uncreative opportunities for engaging survivors limit them from challenging public discourse and ineffective policies.

In order to ensure SOAR's potential broader impact, in 2014, the Foundation invested in a full-time post of a SOAR Service Co-ordinator. This measure was crucial to ensuring a robust service able to meet the demand for Peer Mentoring, research and preventive work among young persons.

This book is unique; it outlines in narrative and graphic detail the SOAR story and much more. It celebrates the voice of the many victims and survivors who shared their tortuous journey with other SOAR members who, like them, were still, or had been, trapped in an abusive relationship. Each chapter outlines the work outcomes of the many SOAR initiatives during a specific year – spanning 2012 to 2022.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The list of persons and organisations SJAF and all SOAR members are grateful to is truly too long to reproduce here. Despite this, we would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone most heartily while mentioning those organisations that stood/ stand by us – offering their invaluable support to SOAR through a number of years. These are:

- The Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights for believing in the social impact of SOAR and investing in its sustainability through a Public Social Partnership (PSP) which covers a percentage of the budgetary requirements.
- The Alfred Mizzi Foundation
- Voices Foundation (today defunct)
- Voluntary Solidarity Fund (VSF)
- APS Bank plc
- QPml
- The Planning Authority Development Fund
- Association of International Women in Malta (AIWM)
- Inner Wheel
- Premju tal-President għall-Kreattività, managed by Arts Council Malta: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
- The Community Chest Fund Foundation – Strina NGO Grant Scheme, 2016, 2017
- Women for Women.
- Artist and book illustrator Marisa Attard.

2012

THE FIRST YEAR OF SOAR



In March 2012, a group of victims and survivors of domestic violence approached the Foundation for support to start a self-help and advocacy group. A planning group was formed. It met regularly to formulate objectives, map out a start-up strategy, develop information materials, link up with key service providers in the field of domestic violence, solicit professional pro bono assistance from professionals and start a series of regular meetings and self-development sessions.

Throughout the year, SOAR Committee members had on-going access to technical assistance from the Foundation ISCEO. The Foundation committed itself to supporting the SOAR founding members to fulfill their dream of being of service to others by nurturing the development of skills that would ultimately ensure the success of the SOAR initiative.

Why 'SOAR'? SOAR members chose this name for the group as they viewed themselves as resilient persons who are able to move away from their unacceptable painful existence so as to face life with the spirit of someone who is able to fly and glide to become who they are meant to be – persons worthy of love, compassion and respect. The symbol of the phoenix was chosen by members as a group logo as it represents a being rising from the ashes.

Membership: SOAR started to promote itself as a group of women who have experienced the horrors of domestic violence. What linked them was the shared experience of domestic violence and a desire to be of support to others in a similar situation with the support of professionals.

SOAR COMMITTEE

The first SOAR committee was composed of 6 members who, in 2012, met practically weekly during the planning phase between March and November 2012. Following this, meetings were held fortnightly. Two Committee members started participating in a training course for Voluntary Organisations organised by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.

During the planning phase, the SOAR committee worked on an introduction pack useful for new members. SOAR started to feature on Facebook with information inputted daily. By December 2012, the SOAR Facebook page enjoyed a following of 469 individuals.

SOAR AT R_U_ONLINE? SEMINAR IN FINLAND

Between the 2nd and the 7th of October 2012, a SOAR committee member and a young volunteer from the Learning Support Service of the Foundation participated in Youth-in-Action training course in Oulu, Finland, organised by CIMO – the Youth-In-Action Finnish national agency. Over the span of 6 days, the internet and its effect on young persons' daily lives was discussed and analysed. Workshops were held using creative ways to explore methods of using the internet to reach out to people and so as to disseminate useful and positive messages.

During the seminar, SOAR focused on learning more about the opportunities that lie within Youth in Action for young people to get involved. It focused mostly on the possibility of a youth initiative which can either be national or transnational, opening the opportunity for youths from disadvantaged backgrounds to plan and organise an awareness raising project, focusing on a young person's perspective on violence in intimate relationships.



Images: networking sessions during R_U_Online? Seminar in Finland

SOAR LAUNCH

In September 2012, the SOAR committee contacted service providers in the field of domestic violence to inform them about the SOAR group developments and to invite referrals to the support group. A meeting with the group of shelter managers that met regularly was held. This group was, and is still, led by Marceline Naudi from the University of Malta.

The SOAR committee leader started accepting invitations from the media to publicly speak about the group.

On the 25th September 2012, three SOAR members participated in a Conference organised by Malta Institute of Management about violence on women.

On the 27th October, the group started receiving referrals following which a meeting for new members was held at SJAF on 17th November 2012. Fortnightly meetings were subsequently held at different venues to determine what worked best for the group. With each meeting, membership grew.

On the 23rd of November 2012, SOAR participated in the organisation of a Walk of Solidarity which took place in Valletta to mark the International Day For the Elimination of Violence on Women. SOAR members also participated in the seminar held on the same day organised by the Commission on Domestic Violence. They introduced SOAR to the audience and made several interventions regarding members' own appalling experiences.

Also in November 2012, a funding application was submitted to the Small Initiatives Scheme (SiS) of the VO Fund of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS). The application was approved and funds utilised for education and outreach through social media, printing of materials and other start-up running costs.

On the 8th of December 2012, with the support of Wing Tsun Academy, SOAR organised a Self-Defence training activity in Mosta.

During the year, SOAR contacted journalists and TV and Radio programme presenters to suggest more public discussion on violence in intimate relationships. SOAR was invited to take part in a number of TV and radio programmes, among which were:

ONE TV: IIsien in-Nisa on 22nd November 2012 at 21:30
Breakfast News on 5th December 2012 at 8:30

ONE Radio: Ma' Pauline on 5th December 2012 at 10:30

RTK: NewsRoom on 26th November 2012 at 17:30

The Times of Malta featured three articles about SOAR and its activities.



COLLABORATION WITH OTHER NGO'S

During 2012, SOAR actively collaborated with:

- Victim Support Malta, an NGO which provided training and other types of support to SOAR committee members.
- the Shelter Managers Group.
- Millenium Chapel Foundation which agreed to provide free access to, and use of, its facilities at St. Julians including access to counselling services and the provision of courses designed for SOAR members, such as financial planning and parenting.

INFORMATION LEAFLETS IN MALTESE

A SJAF graphic designer assisted SOAR in the development of a logo for use in letterheads and printed materials. The following resource materials were produced in Maltese:

- Information pack
- Cycle of Violence Wheel (Duluth Wheel).

Information about SOAR regularly featured in the monthly, widely-circulated, SJAF electronic Magazine. SOAR also featured in the Helping Hands Magazine sold across Malta and Gozo in December 2012

SOAR IN

2013

During 2013, SOAR held 15 Committee meetings and 8 meetings between the SOAR Organiser and the SJAF Mentor. It organised 27 social, educational and therapeutic meetings for its members and their children. Committee members attended a total of 12 seminars in a bid to gain more knowledge and share survivor insights.

Committee members held meetings with, and collaborated with, other organisations on 24 occasions. Members actively participated in media programmes and made presentations for other organisations on 20 occasions.

SOAR survivors have always felt that they have much to contribute to the anti-Domestic Violence sphere, in Malta and overseas. To this end, during 2013, SOAR made itself and its collective insights available to policy makers, advocating for better policies relating to poverty, justice, general health with mental health in particular, child-related challenges, housing, education and welfare.

As a group, SOAR tried to be as visible as possible in spite of the general trend for victims and survivors to be invisible. They reached out to other survivors they knew were out there, with regular articles in the SJAF e-magazine, media presence and almost daily updates of SOAR Facebook pages. SOAR also formed part of the Coalition that set up Men Against Violence, which was chosen as one of the best ideas of 2013 in an article on news portal Maltatoday.com.

SOAR Committee members attended diverse training seminars and conferences on the subject of gender-based violence and domestic violence, rape and the related Maltese laws and policies. The group also met with the Police Vice Squad on a number of occasions to build an effective and sensitised working relationship with the squad which also deals with domestic violence cases. This measure helped SOAR members to understand the limitations of the Police. It also helped the Squad officers to understand the reality of a victim/survivor's experience, especially those visiting Police stations, given the turbulent psychological state of victims. SOAR also worked closely with lawyers to help its members become more familiar with related legal procedures.

"Isolation is one of the most devastating effects of violence in intimate relationships. The concept of SOAR brought people together and broke away the isolation that victims got used to living in." (SOAR Coordinator)

In 2013, SOAR organised a variety of meetings for members and their children, such as picnics, movie Sundays, therapeutic dance classes, group therapy, informal get-togethers, creative self-expression activities, and therapeutic and cultural outings.

During 2013, SOAR received a grant from the Small Initiatives Scheme (SIS) of the VO Fund of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector.

**"I'm so glad I found this group. I have never felt more understood."
SOAR member.**

SOAR IN

2014

During 2014, SOAR held 5 committee meetings, organised 15 socio-educational events, participated in 7 seminars, held 14 meetings with other organisations, provided 32 presentations to other organisations on their request and accepted 8 new members.

For SOAR, 2014 was an exciting and memorable year particularly for its launch into the educational sphere. During the year, 20 youth outreach workshops about Dating Violence were delivered to young people in their school or youth club environment. In a separate initiative, students from Verdala International School collaborated with SOAR on a school-wide project through which students learned and raised awareness about dating violence among their peers, using various creative methods and in the process practising teamwork, organisational, leadership and delegation skills.

The importance of education in the prevention of domestic violence field has been discussed time and time again by major stakeholders and SOAR felt proud to be at the forefront of such initiatives to raise awareness among children and young people.

SOAR also formed part of the Coalition that worked together throughout the year towards the eventual setting up of Men Against Violence, a voluntary organisation that aims to engage men in the elimination of violence on women.

Often participating in TV and Radio discussion programmes throughout the year, SOAR worked towards reaching people in their homes, in the hope that victims who may be isolated from society get the opportunity to learn about support systems that exist for them. SOAR also reached out to students on the university campus and participated in street-based awareness raising activities such as 'One Billion Rising' and 'Ability Fair'.

The SOAR Coordinator and committee members participated in 7 training and development opportunities during the year. In early March, SOAR participated in the launch of the results of an EU-wide survey on Gender Violence, organised by the Fundamental Rights Agency in Brussels. SOAR also networked with shelter managers in Vienna, Austria, to share the aims, objectives and the process of growing SOAR.

Survivors of domestic violence often suffer from isolation as they try to start putting their lives together again. As a group, SOAR often organised social activities for its members, where members met to create bonding friendships, give each other support, learn together and socialize. SOAR members attended popular social events, theatre productions and concerts together. Such activities were possible through the Foundation's initiative of obtaining free tickets from event organisers. Other times, SOAR members met up for a quick coffee as their lives got busier whilst occasionally members would cook a meal or organise a food-sharing party that they all enjoyed together. Getting back on one's feet is much easier when one has supporting people around.

2014 saw SOAR's support and advocacy initiatives and capabilities develop and grow; it became known to many more people, both locally and overseas.

SOAR IN 2015

In 2015, SOAR formally became a core service of the Foundation based at Ċentru Antida Family Service hub in Hal Tarxien. Its scope remained national. During the year, SOAR operated with one full-time Service Co-ordinator, one volunteer administrative assistant, and a committee made up of survivors who volunteered their time and effort in support of others. SJAF Social Workers provided support whenever their intervention was required.

KEY ELEMENTS OF SOAR

- To date, the SOAR service connected with and supported 101 women.
- In 2015, a supportive relationship was regularly maintained with 48 women.
- 621 young persons accessed SOAR's 3-hour workshops on DV and Dating Violence.

During 2015, the SOAR service had four key elements:

- The running of a survivors-led support group. This aspect of the service included interviewing new members, meeting them individually to provide emotional support and information, effecting referrals to other service providers, the organisation of regular social activities for members, and management of the SOAR social media channel for women wishing to connect to SOAR.
- Advocacy initiatives which were grounded in qualitative insider research. Work included the writing of articles for print and online publishing as well as participation in TV and Radio programmes highlighting problematic social issues related to domestic violence.
- Educational programmes for prevention and awareness, using purposely designed non-formal educational tools and publications for schools, youth groups and other groups.
- Publication of resources and booklets in English and Maltese on healthy and unhealthy relationships, domestic violence and the initiatives that SOAR undertakes.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Research leading to a National Conference: During 2015, SOAR embarked on an insider qualitative research exercise whose methodology included semi-structured in-depth interviews with 22 victims residing in shelters and members of SOAR; a thematic data-analysis leading to the identification of key commonly experienced problematic issues; and focus groups with SOAR members to delve deeper into the identified themes.

Following the conclusion of the research exercise, SOAR members accessed regular coaching from a highly experienced theatre director on voice projection, script writing, conference planning and organisation and much else. This coaching enabled a team of SOAR members to prepare conference papers for presentation during the National Conference which SOAR planned in minute detail, organised and led.

The SOAR Conference was held on the 4th of December. The whole dynamic exercise led to the formulation of recommendations for policy makers. Research outcomes would be published in an illustrated book scheduled for mid-2016. The book would be made available for victims, survivors, students, researchers, practitioners and the general public.

Publications: On the 19th of June 2015, the SOAR story book for young persons entitled *Caterpillar in a Jar* was launched at the President's Palace at San Anton gardens. The story is written by a survivor and reflects realities that children experience as they grow up in a home where domestic violence occurs. The story goes on to describe how a child witness grows into a teenager who experiences a controlling relationship with her boyfriend and the courage she needed to walk away from it. The book may be enjoyed as an independent short story or as part of a tool for learning on dating violence.

Il-Mela Darba Tiegħi – ġrajjet veri tagħna t-tfal: children who experienced domestic violence contributed to the published collection of stories by child service users of the Foundation. They also created illustrations for their stories. The book may be used by teachers in primary schools to discuss difficult life situations in an interesting and non-personal way.

Helping Hands Magazine: The 70th issue was dedicated to the subject of domestic violence. SOAR published five in-depth articles spread over ten pages, about domestic violence issues for the general public.

Flimkien Magazine: An interview with a SOAR member was published in the November 2015 issue of Flimkien magazine which is widely disseminated in Maltese households by the Diocesan Curia.

DEVELOPING AND USING AWARENESS-RAISING EDUCATIONAL TOOLS FOR YOUTH

In November, SOAR became a finalist in the National Learning Tool Fair organised by European Union Programmes Agency in Malta (EUPA) in conjunction with the national youth agency Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ. SOAR presented the newly designed tool for learning *Caterpillar in a Jar*. This initiative provided SOAR with the opportunity to participate in the tenth International Tool Fair in Budapest, Hungary between the 8th and 12th December, and to showcase various informal learning activities used by SOAR to raise awareness among youth on elements of healthy and unhealthy relationships.

SOAR uses these tools for learning in various secondary and post-secondary school settings and youth groups as part of its action towards prevention of domestic violence. A more formal style of session is available for adults on the subject of Domestic Violence. A diary-style article about the Hungary Learning Tool Fair was published in the issue number 95 of the SJAF e-magazine for the months of November and December.

WORKSHOPS FOR YOUTH

During 2015, over 621 young persons accessed a 3-hour workshop at their school or youth group on domestic violence, dating violence and unhealthy relationships. The following is a list of workshops led by SOAR during the year.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 28/1/2015 | 2 sessions on Dating Violence held with two groups at M.A. Refalo Higher Secondary School in Rabat, Gozo. (40 youths) |
| 24/3/2015 25/3/2015 | 4 sessions on Dating Violence held for all Forms 4 and 5 male students from St Clare College, Sliema. (200 youths) |
| 21/4/2015 | Session on Domestic Violence held with Social Care students at MCAST vocational college. (9 youths) |
| 10/5/2015 | Session on Domestic Violence held with 4th year law students from the University of Malta. (8 youths) |
| 2/6/2015 | Session on Domestic Violence held with students in level 4 BTEC Health and Social Care course at MCAST vocational college. (8 youths) |
| 3/7/2015 | Session on Abusive Relationships held with women inmates at the Corradino Correctional Facility (CCF). (8 women) |
| 5/8/2015 | Session on Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships held with participants of the Being Youth course participants, organised by the LEAP! Project of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity at Hal Kirkop. (4 youths) |
| 11/8/2015 | Session on Dating Violence held with youth members of the Adolescent Day Programme Group, Aġenzija Appoġġ, held at Valletta. (6 youths) |
| 26/8/2015 | Session on Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships held with participants from the Being Youth course organised by the LEAP! Project of the Ministry for the Family and Social Solidarity at Ċentru Enrichetta, Birżebbuġa. (8 youths) |
| 26/10/2015 9/11/2015 | 5 sessions on Equality and Dating Violence held with all Forms 1 to 5 at the Immaculate Conception School, Hal Tarxien. (over 250 youths) |
| 17/11/2015 | Session on Dating Violence held with young persons from the MGRM Rainbow Support group. (8 youths) |
| 19/11/2015 | Session on Equality and Dating Violence with Form 5 students at the Girls Secondary School, Blata l-Bajda. (12 youths) |
| 9/12/2015 10/12/2015 | 4 sessions on Dating Violence held with students from the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), Pembroke. (60 youths) |

COLLABORATION AND NETWORKING WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS

Shelters Network – SOAR was invited to join the Shelters Network of representatives of organisations providing a service to victims of domestic violence. The network meets from time to time to share information and discuss ongoing issues and changes in the field of domestic violence.

Men Against Violence – SOAR collaborated with Men Against Violence at St Clare College in Sliema during March.

Gender Studies Department, UOM – On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence on Women, SOAR participated in a panel discussion on Domestic Violence at University of Malta.

Merħba Bik Emergency Shelter – SOAR approached Merħba Bik shelter for permission to undertake qualitative insider research with residents. Following approval by the Shelter, a number of residents took part in the SOAR research. A number subsequently became members of SOAR and participated in the SOAR's National Conference organised on the 4th of December.

Pre-conference Networking – SOAR held networking meetings with various stakeholders in the field of domestic violence: the Legal Aid Agency, Police Vice Squad, Family Mediation Service, Rainbow Support Group, the Commission on Domestic Violence, the Domestic Violence Services of Aġenzija Appoġġ, a Magistrate, the Gender Studies Department at the University of Malta and various policy makers. These meetings served to establish contact with those stakeholders SOAR needed to meet and to reinforce collaboration with. This initiative served as an opportunity to learn in more depth about the work of key stakeholders and to share concerns and ideas for further collaboration.

TURNING THE TABLES: SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PLAN AND LEAD A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

In 2015, SOAR organised the first ever survivor-led national conference on domestic violence entitled *My Protection from Violence, My Human Right: My Government's Responsibility – a Call to Action*. The process was an intense one for SOAR on many levels. It involved holding discussions with key stakeholder representatives, planning and carrying out insider qualitative research, data analysis, preparation of papers, voice and presentation training, and conference organisation.

Between May and July, SOAR conducted interviews with 22 survivors of domestic violence to identify common experiences. The data gathered was subsequently thematically analysed. The identified themes were then discussed in focus groups that were held over the summer months.

SOAR held networking meetings with various stakeholders mentioned during the focus groups to glean their perspectives. Papers were written based on the evidence compiled and these were presented by survivors during the national conference held on 4th December 2015, attended by over 150 guests. The presentations were backed up with matching slides quoting articles from the Istanbul Convention that specifically addressed the issues being mentioned by each paper presenter. Workshops were held and various recommendations were made by those participating.

The conference was a call to policy makers to implement the Istanbul Convention that Malta had ratified in 2014.

Some of the recommendations generated by the Conference workshops included the following:

1. Government should consider the possibility of setting up an on-call multi-disciplinary team composed of practitioners from the fields of social work, health, police, and psychotherapy, to act as one coordinated response system. Such a measure would work similarly to the multi-disciplinary and multi-agency Sexual Abuse Response Team (SART).
2. The design and delivery of a preventive educational programme on responsible relationships introduced from a young age. Training should target both girls and boys with due attention to be given to stereotypes about gender roles and gender power. This will assist in reducing the harmful belief that men 'by default of their gender' have a right to power over women.
3. Trained professionals need to be available at the police stations when victims lodge a report. Such a measure will ensure that a proper needs and risk assessment is conducted.
4. Preferably to recommendation '3' above, conference participants suggested that a one-stop Police Unit be set up to handle all reports made to the police by victims of domestic violence.
5. A need was felt for the setting up of an informal group of stakeholders to address domestic violence through a more practical networked approach.
6. The law needs to be changed to make it possible for perpetrators of domestic violence to lose their parental right to give consent for important therapeutic interventions aimed at the wellbeing of their child or children. There are many cases where children do not attend school or participate in therapy sessions because the father refuses to sign the consent form for change of school and/or therapy.
7. As a solution to parents who refuse to pay child maintenance, it was suggested that the child maintenance money determined by the Court should be paid to a fund managed by the Court. It would be the court that credits the custodial parent. In this way, the mother will never have to suffer the distress generated by late or no payments. This measure will ensure that harrowing regular contacts between perpetrator and victim are avoided.
8. Perpetrators who are fathers need to be made aware of their responsibilities towards their children. Fathers would be expected to attend rehabilitation and parent-craft courses by court order.
9. Custodial parents should inform the Heads of School about their family circumstances.
10. A Perpetrators Register should be started similar to the register of sex offenders. In the UK, this measure is called Clare's law. It gives Police domestic violence specialist the ability to disclose information to the potential victim when women make a request about their new partner's history and the police decide that a risk does exist for her and her children.

SOAR planned to publish a book the following year to present its research outcomes and conference recommendations. The research, Conference and publication were made possible with grants from The Voices Foundation (2014) and the President's Award for Creativity (2015).



SOAR IN

2016

SOAR continued to offer one-to-one support, a social support group, educational workshops and presentations, prevention workshops, research and publications. SOAR empowers its members to take an active role in advocating for social justice on behalf of other victims and survivors less able to do so.

SOAR's online support group had 70 active members. The service had 53 new referrals with the average the average age of the survivors seeking support being 41 years.

MATERNAL ALIENATION SUB-GROUP

The need was felt to set up a sub-group within SOAR to focus on Parental Alienation. It had become increasingly evident that parental alienation of the victim-parent was a concern being experienced by some in the group who were experiencing it. The group had 5 members. It was then decided that the focus of the group should be squarely on the Maternal Alienation experienced by survivors of domestic violence. This is not to say that alienation does not happen to fathers too; it does. However, motherhood is a very gendered social construct that places particularly high and different expectations on the female parent.

Social and cultural sanctions are imposed on the 'bad mother'. Therefore, the implications of alienation upon the survivor-mother are not only those of continued violence and emotional loss, but alienated survivor-mothers experience much shame and find themselves having to explain and convince those around them of the hidden and subtle alienation and violence they are experiencing. This is highly stressful and upsetting to the alienated mother who is already in great pain.

The Maternal Alienation sub-group was tasked with taking initiative on raising awareness on this hidden form of domestic violence and the ultimate form of hate crime.

TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS

SOAR facilitated 23 educational training sessions, workshops and presentations, reaching a total of 1,068 persons. SOAR's work in schools and youth groups was carried out largely in collaboration with Men Against Violence (MAV). During 2016, MAV became partners in a St Jeanne Antide Foundation project titled A Package of Outreach Services for Social Wellbeing funded by the Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme (VOPs) of the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties which is managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS). SOAR and MAV researched and used educational tools to design and implement workshops on prevention of dating violence. Professional resources and learning tools for violence prevention workshops were purchased from overseas from the UK (Tender) and the U.S. (Mentors in Violence Prevention). Others were obtained online wherever these were available (GEAR). Subsequently, different types of age-appropriate workshops were designed around the resources, with adaptation for the local scenario. The project came to an end in April 2017, reaching over 2,000 young persons.

TRAINING ACCESSED

SOAR team members received continuing professional development (CPD) training and attended seminars and conferences on 10 occasions:

| | |
|--|-------------|
| Understanding some of the problems in the systems that provide family support | 22/1/2016 |
| Forum on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond | 28/3/2016 |
| Commission on Domestic Violence Conference – Domestic Violence and Children | 30/3/2016 |
| Training by Dr Michael Flood on Engaging Men | 3-5/4/2016 |
| Human Resources Training: Meetings and Leadership | 16/4/2016 |
| Self-reflective Writing for professionals by Dr Jeannie Wright (organised by SJAF) | 27/6/16 |
| Conference on the Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (and proposed changes in the law). | 4/12/2015 |
| Beginners' First Aid Course organised by SJAF. | 7-9/11/2016 |
| Conference organised by the Commission on Domestic Violence on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence: Everybody's business. | 23/11/2016 |
| Training on Engaging victims of domestic violence in working with children who have witnessed traumatic events. | 5-7/12/2016 |

MEDIA PARTICIPATION - TV AND RADIO

SOAR has participated in awareness-raising TV segments and radio shows 6 times

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | Radju Santa Katarina – Breakfast Show | 15/1/2016 |
| 2 | Net TV – Elle | 29/2/2016 |
| 3 | TVM 2 – Qalb In-Nies | 10/5/2016 |
| 4 | Radio 101 – Opportunitajiet Indaq | 6/8/2016 |
| 5 | Radju Hompesch – Bejn Erbgħa Hitan | 25/8/2016 |
| 6 | Radju Hompesch – Bejn Erbgħa Hitan | 22/9/2016 |

NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION



SOAR staff participated in 25 networking meetings with other NGOs and NGO networks, state agencies, commissions, institutions, and The Malta Police Force. SOAR often collaborated with Men Against Violence, Women's Rights Foundation, Victim Support Malta, Merħba Bik Foundation, Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu, the Domestic Violence Services (DVS) of Aġenzija Appoġġ and the Commission on Domestic Violence, among others. SOAR represented the Foundation in a number of fora and participated in informal alliances. These included the Platform of Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHRO); the NGO network under the aegis of the Commission on Domestic Violence; and the DV Shelters Network.

ART THERAPY

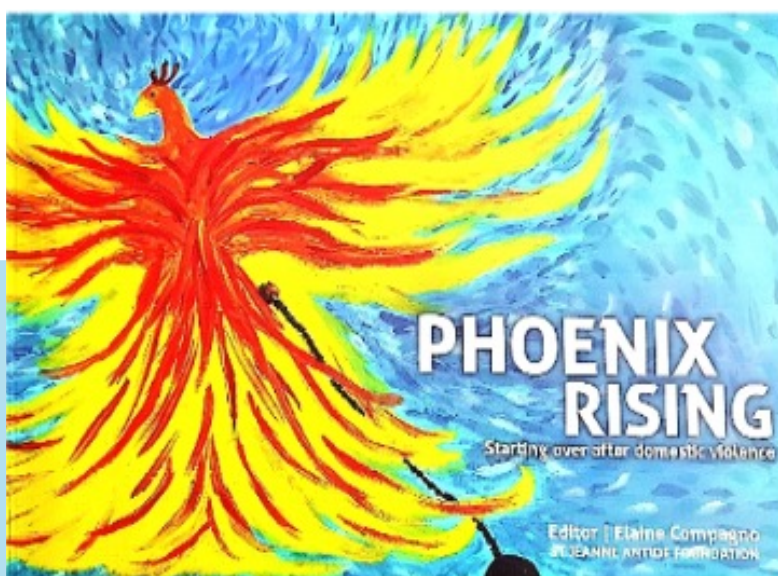
During the second phase of the project My Survival, My Experience, 8 survivors participated in 10 sessions of Art Therapy, facilitated by an Art Therapist engaged for this purpose. With the permission of the participants, some of the art that emerged from the art therapy sessions were used to illustrate the book Phoenix Rising – starting over after domestic violence. The book brings together survivors' experiences of systemic oppression and re-victimisation and is used as a tool for advocacy and awareness raising.

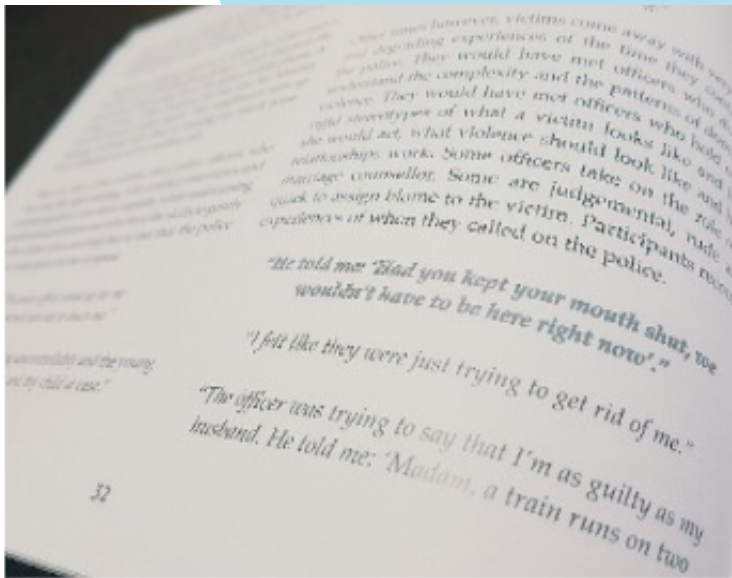


PUBLICATION - PHOENIX RISING: STARTING OVER AFTER DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The end product and final action of the project My Survival, My Experience funded by The President's Award for Creativity 2015, managed by Arts Council Malta, was the publication of the book Phoenix Rising. This is a distinctive and unique book about the journey of surviving domestic violence, as told by survivors themselves.

The nine (9) chapters in the book immerse readers in the turbulent world of violence, manipulation, desperation and struggle. It is a showcase of the incredible courage of survivors and their undying determination to overcome systemic obstacles and so as to live a life of dignity, free of violence.





Phoenix Rising includes five (5) papers from qualitative insider-research carried out by SOAR involving 22 in-depth interviews and 15 focus group meetings. The papers explore the collective experience of surviving domestic violence and discuss common themes such as experiences at the police station, experiences at the Courts of law, becoming homeless, the effects of financial violence, mediation and separation. The final chapter includes 37 policy recommendations that emerged from the SOAR National Conference held in December 2015.

CREATE, LIBERATE, INTEGRATE!

During November 2016, SOAR launched a new project titled Create, Liberate, Integrate! which received funding support from the the Arts Council Malta which manages the annual President's Award for Creativity.

The project was implemented over the span of 12 months. The creative skill-sharing project involved diverse marginalised women, including migrant women and third country nationals, who are survivors of gender-based violence, and their teenage or young children. The project consisted of a number of therapeutic short programmes based on creativity and skill sharing with the aim of creating a safe space where diverse women and children connect for healing, integration, improved interpersonal relationships between mother and child and exploration of one's creativity.

Participants were empowered to learn new skills of creative self expression. Through the project, diverse women connected and networked, learnt team- building skills, presentation skills and shared their creative artistic skills and culture with other women in the group.

These are some of the images that emerged from the photography session, the first activity of the project.



SOAR IN

2017

By the end of 2017, the online support group had 91 active members. During 2017, SOAR received 40 new cases overall with the average age being 38 years. All requests for support were made by women or for women.

PARENTAL ALIENATION SUB-GROUP

During 2017, Group membership rose to 13 and a co-ordinating committee of 3 survivors was set up. The sub-group continued to raise awareness on this hidden form of domestic violence, an ultimate form of hate crime.

MOTHER-AND-CHILD DRAMA THERAPY

A trainee Drama Therapist offered her service to two mothers who faced difficulties in their relationship with their child due to factors arising out of domestic violence and manipulation of child by the abusive partner/ father.

TRAINING

Between May 2016 and April 2017, a number of workshops were facilitated by SOAR for young people in different settings, offering age-appropriate and tailor-made workshops for each group. A number of schoolteachers were offered training on the same topic for a multiplier effect. Resources that are easily accessed online at no cost were shared with PSCD teachers to encourage follow-up lessons. Secondary school students were the largest group to benefit from the workshops, reaching 1,457 students in all.

Each group of students accessed a 2-part workshop:

Part 1 focused on identifying gender stereotypes and becoming aware of how they restricted all people, some more than others. The workshop challenged participants to rethink their prejudices and preconceived notions of gender roles and abilities. Videos were used to engage students in discussion on these themes. From the discussion, the facilitators assisted students to see power imbalances that were directly and indirectly caused and affected by rigid gender expectations. Some of the learning outcomes of part 1 of the workshop included the following:

Students began to recognize:

- stereotypical gender roles and the limitations such roles have on different genders.
- the learned social constructs of gender (boys are tough, girls are weak or cute).
- the double standards related to gender and how to challenge them.
- the unequal power that comes about because of these social constructs and gender expectations (women expected to become mothers and housewives and have no earning power; men expected to work outside the home and have earning power).
- that anyone can do and be whatever they want no matter what gender.

Part 2 further investigated gender stereotypes through the use of a game about power or a video on music-lyrics analysis. The video was followed by a discussion on objectification and power. The facilitator then moved on to what an abusive intimate relationship could look like and feel like, using a table with the different forms of violence in relationships (physical, psychological, sexual etc.). Themes discussed included: jealousy, financial abuse, and coercion. The workshops ended with a video (source: WellCast) on how to leave an abusive relationship and information on where to access support in Malta. Some of the learning outcomes of part 2 of the workshop included the following:

- understanding what having power and what not having any power feels like (game);
- understanding what a bystander can do to be proactive;
- gaining the skill to critically analyse lyrics in the music they often hear and the images they see for messages of gender-based violence, objectification and sexualisation;
- recognising different forms of violence in intimate relationships, particularly economic abuse, isolation and coercion;
- gaining a healthy understanding of what jealousy is and how to deal with it;
- gaining the skill to recognise an unhealthy relationship and the skill to know how to exit such a relationship.

| Type of workshop setting | Persons reached |
|--|----------------------------|
| Secondary School-based workshops | Reached 1,457 young people |
| Higher Education based workshops | Reached 242 young people |
| Youth group based workshops | Reached 76 young people |
| Training to other women's groups | Reached 134 women |
| Training for youth volunteers, support services and teachers (multiplier effect) | Reached 89 people |
| Total reached 1,998 | |

TRAINING ACCESSED BY SOAR

| Who attended | Title of training received |
|---|--|
| The SOAR service Coordinator, SOAR office Administrator and 4 SOAR Volunteers | Full Cooperation: Zero Violence Training: a 3 day seminar organised by the Ministry for EU Affairs and Equality on the 16th, 17th and 18th of October. |
| Service Coordinator | An Introduction to Project Development & Project Cycle Management for Voluntary Organizations' organised by the St Jeanne Antide Foundation for its staff with funding from the Training Initiative Scheme (TIS) of the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS). |
| Service Coordinator | COST Action IS-1206 on Femicide across Europe - Final Conference (2 days) organised by the Department of Gender Studies, Faculty for Social Wellbeing, at the University of Malta on the 14th and 15th March. |
| Service Coordinator | Presentations on the work of NGOs in the field of domestic violence made by members of the NGO Network that meets regularly under the aegis of the National Commission on Domestic Violence; 13 June. |
| Service Coordinator, SOAR Office administrator, 3 SOAR Volunteers | Listen to Me! Giving Children A Voice: Annual Conference organised by the National Commission on Domestic Violence on the 24th November. |

NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION

SOAR collaborated with a number of other organisations. These included: the Women's Rights Foundation, Men Against Violence, the Victim Support Malta, Merħba Bik Foundation, Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu, the Domestic Violence Services of Aġenzija Appoġġ, and the Commission on Domestic Violence. SOAR represented the St Jeanne Antide Foundation in a number of fora and participates in informal alliances.

Through collaboration with the Commission on Domestic Violence, SOAR provided training to the Judiciary, Police cadets and to MCAST lecturers and students from the MCAST Photography course. It also contributed to the organisation of children's focus groups with the Commissioner for Children in preparation for the annual conference of the Domestic Violence Commission entitled 'Listen to me! Giving Children a Voice'.

In order to keep interested organisations, practitioners and survivors informed about the work of SOAR, informative articles were regularly published in the monthly electronic magazine of SJAF.

PROJECT GRANTS ACCESSED IN 2017

ORANGE CIRCLES – a 2017 grant from the President's Award for Creativity managed by the Office of the President and Arts Council Malta. The aim of this project was to equip female survivors of domestic violence with skills and competencies that enable their resiliency and healing.

Impact:

- Enabling socially excluded female victims of domestic violence to access a range of life-long learning and therapeutic activities.
- Emerging out of depression and isolation; enabling access to creative methods of learning, self-reflection and self-expression; a space for socio-emotional connection and discovery with others, enabling women to access therapeutic group activities.
- Empowering women with knowledge about their rights and how to access them; mentorship to enable women to tap into their own skills set and learn new ones, learning skills for financial literacy; learning skills for coping in difficult situations; understanding their children's needs and learning new parenting methods.

PHOENIX RISING – support to victims and survivors of domestic violence. Funding from The VOICES Beneficiaries Fund. Thanks to this project, SOAR provided online support and advocacy work, detached support work, office-based support work, organised and coordinated social and educational events for survivors, developed creative advocacy initiatives and disseminated informative material among survivors assisted through this project.

CREATE, LIBERATE, INTEGRATE! The 2016 grant from the President's Award for Creativity managed by the Office of the President and Arts Council Malta which concluded in 2017. The project aimed at marrying the creative arts with healing for improved wellbeing among women survivors of gender-based violence and domestic violence, and their children.

Details at a glance:

- **Project Duration: November 2016 – November 2017 with concluding Art Exhibition launched in December 2017 for closure in January 2018;**
- **Number of participating women: 23**
- **Number of participating children: 14**

Activities undertaken throughout project:

1. Photography
2. Art Therapy
3. Drama Therapy
4. Drum Circle (1)
5. Creative Writing for Myself
6. Jewellery Making
7. Drum Circle (2)
8. Quilling (Paper Filigree)
9. Pottery Making

This creative, skill-sharing, project involved the participation of diverse marginalised women, including migrant women, who are survivors of gender-based violence, and their teenage or young children. The project consisted of a number of creativity-based therapeutic short programmes in a safe space where participants could connect for healing, integration, improved interpersonal relationships between themselves and with their children and exploration of one's creativity.

The short programmes took place over the span of 10 months, most lasting between 4 to 8 weeks whilst allowing participating women to choose which elements to take part in.

The process threw a spot light on the survivors' messages of renewed hope, stronger single-parent families, inclusion, love, resilience and sisterhood.

Social impact:

Drum Circle 2 project was held in collaboration with Dar Qalb ta' Ġesù at the shelter for ease of access to women and children residing there. It provided space for socio-emotional connection and discovery with others;

Cultural impact:

Enabling socially excluded women victims of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, to access a range of creative self-expression activities; enabling the target group of women to feel part of the local cultural milieu which other citizens take for granted but from which the women and their children are excluded.

- Women who have escaped gender-based violence, including domestic violence, often end up marginalised and struggle to restart their lives.
- Systems oppress Maltese and migrant survivors in both similar and different ways.
- The justice system re-victimises survivors, often failing to keep them safe.
- Women struggle financially for years later. Many support schemes are inaccessible in practice, such as free child care for working mother becomes a non-option unless the estranged father consents to the child attending a child care centre.
- Steady increase in 3rd country nationals becoming 'trapped' in second stage shelters, unable to work.
- Supplies for creative pursuits are generally expensive and inaccessible to the most vulnerable.

The project led to increased accessibility and active involvement in the arts and social dimension. The process used had been chosen specifically to make creative arts accessible to the most vulnerable. Creative self-expression was linked to healing. Participating women explored the diversity within women as a group and as a community of circumstance. They gained the opportunity to participate in compassionate activism, and to appreciate, respect and support one another whilst discovering their own talents and abilities.

- Collaborations on a wide scale with well established artists, musicians and artistic therapists;
- Gave space for upcoming creative artists and artisans and supported small cultural/ musical NGOs like Malta Tama Tnabar Association;
- Programme included a variety of creative and therapeutic sessions including drama, music, art, writing, photography and pottery.

Reflections from the SOAR Service Coordinator

"As the project Create, Liberate, Integrate comes to an end, organisers, facilitators, mentors and participants alike feel a great sense of accomplishment. Looking back across the twelve months of this project fills me with happiness and hope.

"The women came together in sisterhood, be it at the drum circle, the jewellery making table, the drama-therapy room, or the dusty clay-making table. They came to learn something new about an art or craft form and left learning a lot more about themselves, their relationships and their strengths. They gave time to themselves, to process pain and to simply be around those who understood them the best.

"Domestic violence often leaves victims feeling broken and useless in its wake. Perpetrators of violence will use different ways and methods to make their victims feel worthless. Recovering from this psychological trauma is a long process, but with each time a survivor makes it to the meeting or session, and with each new thing she creates, a small part of that pain is undone and unraveled. She tells herself, "I just did that", and others in the group will say, "Wow, what you just did is awesome" and that's how self-confidence and trust start to be rebuilt.

"I sat in during some of the sessions and during those times I would always come away with a good feeling. The women would make every session fun with their jokes and banter – a reminder that life goes on, that survivors are resilient and wounds can heal."

Testimonials

"It was an experience I cherish as it enhanced my sense of creativity which I thought I only owned as a child. Besides, it was a good exposure to my sense of 'being good enough'."

"It was a completely different form of self-discovery. Bringing pictures to life was a true visualization and projection of very important life experiences that affect me deeply."

"The creativity of jewelry-making unlocked a creative spirit within me."

"It was a great opportunity to take the time out to not think about anything other than beading wires, creating a pattern, snipping bits of wire, choosing beads. It didn't matter if you made a mistake! No-one judging you, no nasty comments, all accepted as equals."

"It was something different for me. It challenged me."

"I love writing. It was an experience because we had to write without thinking. I brought out my emotions and feelings."

"Never knew what quilling was. I have learned something new. It adds to my portfolio of life."

"I had never done any clay making, I never thought I could do it, so the fact that I did it meant that I can accomplish so much more than I think."

"My bowl cracked in the kiln and at first I was disappointed. But then I saw the beauty in the break. The fault became an important feature. I could connect with that so strongly."

"When you create something, you leave a piece of you with the universe."

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

On the 20th December, as part of the Create, Liberate, Integrate! Project, the Foundation set up an exhibition at Fondazzjoni Kreattività – Spazju Kreattiv. The exhibition offered a snapshot of the project's processes and the women's creativity and skills. There were 14 pieces of art from the Art Therapy group, samples of jewelry, pottery items and samples of quilling. All of the exhibited works were made by the survivors during the project.



SOAR IN

2018

In 2018, SOAR supported 32 women and their children and continued to provide assistance to 28 others referred in previous years. These SOAR members accessed holistic support via one-to-one sessions, online support group meetings, weekly creative groupwork, monthly social activities, art therapy (UMAMA project - see below), drama therapy, accompaniment to agencies, provision of a wide-range of in-kind supports, online personal support-chats and referrals to other services and agencies.

SUPPORT GROUP

Survivors who are often left isolated after domestic violence benefited significantly from joining the SOAR support group which remains user-led with a core team of 6 volunteers who assist with the upkeep of the group's online space. The volunteers provided logistical and emotional support to other members online and during social activities.

The SOAR members' online group continued to serve as a safe space for survivors to chat and share interesting information and articles. For the service, it serves as a key tool for instant group-based communication and allows for the consented collection of data from polls and other focus-group type discussions that may be started. It also serves as a notice board for the group where information about short courses, job openings, project participation applications, social outings and other opportunities are shared.

Social activities are a perfect opportunity for survivors to build new social support networks with other women who have overcome many of the same challenges facing the 'new' survivors. Thus, in 2018, 12 social events were successfully organised for support group members. During a typical social meeting there was an exchange of 'best practice' on managing difficult moments in practical ways, strengthening parent-child relationships, learning to develop healthy boundaries and learning to overcome structural hurdles in the systems, whilst maintaining a supportive, loving and joyful environment.

"This group helped me get back the confidence I lost. I lost trust even though I tried to hide behind a smile. This is a space safe for me because I have your support and I thank you all for that. Because of this group I know I am never alone."

"It's amazing to be supported instantly, during situations in which one feels alone, by people who have been there."

"This online chat has given me hope and a sense of belonging and safety."

"It is a wonderful way to feel safe. I know that what I say will not be judged and that others will support me and keep my secrets."

"Being able to open up about my worries or just to express my achievements with those who understand me fully, and so quickly as it is online, is fantastic. It feels reassuring."



A social sharing and networking event with migrant women in collaboration with UNHCR and Migrant Women Association



A food making activity involving SOAR women and children

KIND CRAFTS CLUB - CREATING AND SUSTAINING ADULT-LEARNING

Kind Krafts Club was created in early 2018 following a successful project that married the creative arts with healing therapies. The feedback received from participants showed that creative arts have a key role in the healing process for survivors. It also brought women together, giving them the opportunity to meet and build a new social life after having been cut off and isolated by their abuser.

By Summer, the group learned how to make soaps, bathbombs, body scrubs and candles through online learning programmes, tutorials and practical demonstrations. The weekly activity brought survivors together, for a fun and educational activity that included learning about recycling, chemicals, mathematics (weight, volume, percents, fractions, time, cost, conversion etc.), reading and listening to tutorials in English, video making, editing, marketing and planning, labelling requirements, entrepreneurship and leadership.

The Kind Krafts Club used a drop-in approach, where survivors are invited to attend but not required to. This respects their need for flexibility and remained something they choose to keep coming back to, without pressure. Women were offered the opportunity to develop their creative selves in a safe space at their own pace. Some of the women preferred to create food and, together, they made delicious low-cost lunches for the whole group.

Items made had to pass a quality control test following which they were then sold. All proceeds went back to supporting this and other SOAR support initiatives. Survivors were encouraged to participate in the craft markets and corporate events where the products were sold, boosting their self-esteem and self-confidence. Survivors learned to build trust in their skills and abilities, slowly recovering from psychological harm caused by verbal abuse (such as being repeatedly told: "Can't you do ANYTHING right?").

Throughout 2018, 25 women and 22 children participated in the Kind Krafts Club with an average of 8 – 9 women participating each time.

"I love the fact that I belong and am encouraged to overcome my weaknesses. I love the happy atmosphere and the togetherness."

"SOAR has helped me a lot. On Saturday we make soap and candles, we cook... I love it! Sometimes when I am at home alone, I cry, but when I speak to our Peer Mentors I feel so much better."

"It's always fun, the atmosphere is welcoming and the air smells great. I enjoy knowing that I helped to make something pretty and that people want to buy."

"I feel accepted, trusted and loved without judgement. I can be myself and it's always something to look forward to. In fact, I cannot come next Saturday and I am already sad about it."

"The Saturday club is a place where I feel safe and not judged, in a family-like environment."



Photos: (Left) Preparing for a soap making activity. (Right) A Christmas market stand in collaboration with HSBC Foundation

UMAMA PROJECT

Project UMAMA, meaning 'mother', was launched in 2018. It was a creative project that involved particularly vulnerable women and children affected by domestic violence, marrying the arts with a therapeutic process that left a great positive impact on the lives of participants.

The project consisted of two main activities that focused on establishing and strengthening the mother-child relationship after escaping violence, through creativity and artistic expression. Mothers and their children connected for therapeutic healing, improved relationships, strengthened inclusion and the exploration of one's ability for self-expression. An exhibition was planned for March 2019. The end-of-project exhibition will give the women an opportunity to raise awareness on the many hidden challenges faced by mothers after domestic violence. The exhibition itself and the printing of an exhibition catalogue was supported by APS Bank Malta plc.

"You can feel that your child has become a weapon for revenge and you don't want to be party to your child being torn apart. In the end, you let go. You let go to save her, and then you grieve for the loss of your living child."



St Jeanne Antide Foundation thanks the President's Award for Creativity, Arts Council Malta and APS Bank for their invaluable support to the UMAMA project.

SOAR SURVIVORS' HUB

In 2018, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation secured the long-term use of a premises in Tarxien belonging to Dar tal-Providenza, through a rental agreement with the Assets Office of the Diocesan Curia. Once refurbished and furnished, the house will serve as the national base for SOAR services. The acquired town house will be a survivor-run, physical safe space offering the much-required infrastructure and information relating to all services, provided for domestic violence survivors and their children.

The town house is in a bad state, having been abandoned for a considerable number of years. Nonetheless, following a planned extensive restoration and conversion project, it will house offices that provide SOAR support services, two small social enterprises and a location for several SOAR survivor-led creative and therapeutic projects aimed at enhancing the social, emotional and psychological wellbeing of survivors.

The renovation process started in October 2018 with the cleaning up of the garden from overgrown vegetation and debris with the assistance of various CSR teams from different corporate bodies.



From left to right, the team from HSBC Call Centre in Swatar that kicked off the works. A skilled worker from Local Government removing wiring. His team managed to clear several disposable items on the day. Environmental Landscapes Consortium (ELC) Gardeners pruning the trees along with police recruits in the garden.



From left to right, volunteers who removed the foliage and tree trunks. KPMG volunteers were briefed on how to proceed with the work. Form 4 students from St Joseph School, Blata l-Bajda. Employees of HSBC Call Centre who opted to spend a Saturday volunteering at the Hub.

Heartfelt appreciations go to the Alf Mizzi Foundation; HSBC Malta plc; QPml; Fidem Foundation; Turning Point Investments Ltd.; ELC; Academy for the Disciplined Forces; St Jeanne Antide College Primary School; Borg Brothers furniture movers; Sanitech; Department for Local Government; Tarxien Local Council; Wasteserv; Rock-A-Go Skip Rentals; and SOAR volunteers. SOAR also thanks MCAST marketing students and their lecturer for working on the design of a short-term social media promotion during Christmas time.

SOAR is overwhelmed by the positive attitude and the support of volunteers provided through the Corporate Social Responsibility activities of several organisations. Their time and generous efforts have filled us with hope and encouragement.

In 2018, SOAR enabled the self-empowerment of women survivors to become actively involved in processes that influence policy, since they are considered to be experts-by-experience. SOAR brokered their engagement with other organisations, networks, institutions, and Government bodies during the President's Road Table (see below).

SOAR organised support services, mentoring and capacity building for the participating women. Powerful narratives were used to influence local policy and public discourse, challenging some of the strongest-held cultural myths and stereotypes about violence against women (VAW). SOAR provided opportunities for authentic participation in processes that aimed to effectively influence policy and practices

PRESIDENT'S ROUND TABLE ON PERPETRATORS' MANIPULATION OF THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

On 6th April 2018, SOAR set up and accompanied 3 survivors to a meeting with Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta. During this meeting, Her Excellency heard the testimony of the survivors about how the support systems, the justice system in particular, were being used by the perpetrators as tools to continue their campaign of violence against them and others. The survivors outlined how the system was being used to terrorise them and to break down the relationships they had with their children. Her Excellency was visibly moved by the disclosures of the women and she offered to host a round table to provide that safe space that the survivors needed to talk about their experiences with members of the judiciary. They did this not for their own benefit, but to raise awareness and advocate for the benefit of those who were yet to suffer the same fate.

SOAR subsequently collaborated with emPOWER which is supported by the President's Foundation for the Wellbeing of Society and a round table was held on 29th November 2018. Members of the judiciary, the Commissioner on Domestic Violence and other stakeholders were present on the day. A sound system was set up to allow the three survivors to speak from a different room to protect their identity. Their poignant testimonies highlighted difficulties, trauma and risks that survivors and their children face when they are dragged through and caught up in the inefficient wheels of justice. The CEO of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation, Nora Macelli, chaired the Round Table. A follow up was planned to take place in 2019.

"It was such an honour to be able to share my experiences with Her Excellency and to feel that she identified with the situation and that she wants to help women survivors. After the round table, I felt emotionally drained but hopeful for the future. Thanks to SOAR for making this possible."

"This provided a great platform where, as a survivor, I could safely voice my experience navigating the legal system safely. Not only my own, but also that of my children, the silent victims of legal loopholes. Hopefully it will be the start of change."



TRAINING PROVIDED

SOAR contributed to training sessions, seminars and conferences on 11 occasions throughout 2018. Police recruits, nurses, midwives, family doctors, corporate staff, University degree students, community workers and migrant women are some of those who received our training.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPDS) AND TRAINING

SOAR recognises survivors' competences and acknowledges them as experts-by-experience. Opportunities were offered to build on these competences to strengthen capacity for effective advocacy, risk assessment, peer-support and peer-mentoring. SOAR staff and the Core Team of volunteers followed various training opportunities to enrich their learning and offer a quality service.

| Date | Training | Number of Staff/ Volunteers |
|-----------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 5 February | Full Cooperation: Zero Violence - Launch of research findings. | 1 |
| 6-8 March | Full Cooperation: Zero Violence. Part 2 of the raining course | 1 staff + 3 Volunteers |
| 17 July – 30 August | Award in Financial Literacy (Level 3) consisting of 60 contact hours and 90 self-study hours. Course provided by FSWS and MCAST. | 2 |
| 23 July | UNHCR – Seminar on the new Domestic Violence Law and Migrant Communities. | 1 |
| 27-28 September | Mental Health First Aid for Youth Leaders consisting of 14 contact hours. | 1 |
| 22-23 October | WAVE Conference. | 2 |
| 7 – 11 November, 2018 | DASH Risk Checklist Training, OCN Accredited Peer-Mentoring Training, Self-care and Motivational Interviewing by Cohort4, Atherstone, UK. | 2 staff + 4 volunteers |

SOAR IN 2019

At the end of 2019, SOAR had the equivalent of 2 full time workers and 6 volunteers, covering the overall management of SOAR and Meraki Soaps, the SOAR Hub project management, social support provision, event organisation, individual project leadership, social justice advocacy and case management.

OVERVIEW OF THE SOAR SERVICE IN 2019

During 2019, SOAR provided the following services:

One-to-One Support: personalised support plans based on needs assessment. Frequent liaison with other agencies and benefactors to assist survivors and their children to meet identified needs. Risk assessments were carried out on a case-by-case basis to determine the best way forward for each woman.

SOAR Support Group: the group offered peer-support to survivors within a tight-knit community of women and children. Staff and survivor-volunteers continued to be trained to provide peer-to-peer support. The support group worked towards combating exclusion, isolation, loneliness, depression and anxiety through a range of social activities and cultural projects.

Peer-Mentoring: was offered to survivors who had set specific life goals and requested support to reach them. Whether the goal was to find a rented apartment, get a job, settle in a new community or routine, or to take up studies, mentoring was used as a tool to coach and guide a survivor as a compassionate elder sister would.

Training on issues related to domestic violence: offered to students, volunteers, groups, staff, team leaders, HR managers, police recruits, health practitioners, legal practitioners, judiciary, and others. SOAR also offered DASH Risk Checklist (2009) Training (see more below).

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 national support systems and the struggle to survive means they are well placed to make recommendations for changes to policy and practices. SOAR works closely with survivors, organising focus groups and online discussions to take survivors' collective recommendations and lobby for the necessary changes.

SUPPORTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

In 2019, SOAR supported 112 women survivors, while improving the lives of the 155 children in their care. Of these, 28 were new cases, 4 cases less than the previous year. However, the number of already-registered cases carried over or re-opened during 2019 tripled from 28 (in 2018) to 84.

This three-fold increase shows how volatile a survivor's life is in the years that follow their escape from domestic violence. The increase also shows a strengthening in SOAR's capacity with the addition of a part-time support worker and better accessibility to the service through regular and consistent weekly group meetings.

136 face-to-face sessions were held with countless hours of support over the phone or chat apps and occasional accompaniment given to supplement the sessions.

"When a survivor leaves an abusive relationship she becomes like a rudderless boat in the middle of a stormy sea. The waves are huge and scary, you don't know where the safe haven is and how to get there. SOAR is like a tug boat, helping you navigate a way forward to safety. Along the way, the waves subside and you start to be able to navigate yourself, confident in your skills to face the sea alone. SOAR gives us survivors various tools and supports to build up self confidence, independence and learning to trust one's own abilities again. SOAR is the sum of all its members, each one helping the other, leaving no one behind. All of us have come from a dark place, but we walk together towards the light."



A COMMUNITY OF SURVIVORS

OUTREACH through an Online Support Group

SOAR has been utilising social media to reach out to survivors who lead busy lives but can still benefit from peer-support. In 2019, the SOAR secret online support group had 104 members remaining constant between those joining and those moving on.

"This online chat has given me safety, a sense of belonging and hope."

Offline Support Group

SOAR organised 14 social activities for its member base and their children. These activities provided members with opportunities, which are often out of their reach, to spend quality time with their children and their peers. The outings make survivors feel worthy of the time they take to focus on themselves and build connection. This is often a challenge because they waste a lot of energy and time keeping themselves safe from the continuous abuse that they face.

"It's amazing to be supported instantly, during situations in which one feels alone, by people who have been there."

"I'm accepted for who I am, given support when I need it without a restriction of time. This has lifted my spirit and has definitely given me strength to rebuild my life."

SATURDAY SOCIAL CLUB - A LIFELINE

SOAR opened the main offices at the Ćentru Antida Family Services hub of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation every Saturday afternoon to run a Social Club for a group of women and children. Over the year, 34 women and their children were reached through this activity. Each week, a team of survivors prepared lunch for the group, while a different weekly 'head chef' made her speciality dish for her peers.

The activity is an important weekly appointment that has created stability in the lives of the participants. Survivors provided peer-to-peer support and, from week to week, SOAR staff spotted a multitude of difficulties and subsequent needs that those attending had been facing in their daily lives. These included situations of food and material deprivation, difficulty with paying bills, stress and high anxiety, re-traumatisation and worsening mental health problems, a change in risk level, need for training and education, housing needs, low interpersonal skills, and repeat abuse such as stalking and vexatious reporting.

Follow up meetings were then scheduled to offer a holistic and tailor-made support plan to each survivor and her children. The feedback received has shown that the social club has been a lifeline to those who attend. The following are some testimonies shared within a group discussion about how SOAR and the peer-to-peer support has impacted their lives:

“SOAR gives me unconditional love and support like a normal family should. I feel trusted, accepted and understood and this gives me mental security to be able to heal from my abusive childhood and marriage. It’s a healing and personal growth journey I’m embarking on, and I have faith that I can do it. I am learning to be a role model for my children through being loved and accepted without judgement.”

“SOAR is an amazing group of women who support each other like no one else can, as they understand and don’t judge you as you go through the ups and downs of surviving an abusive relationship. The time spent together helps soothe the scars and give hope.”



MENTORING

SOAR offered mentoring to 10 women in 2019: 5 with goals in further education, 5 with personal life goals. Trained survivor-mentors kept weekly contact and set frequent meetings with their mentees to guide them towards their respective goals offering support, access to resources and specialist advice.



ADVOCACY

SOAR represented the St Jeanne Antide Foundation on the following fora:

- Consultative Council for Women’s Rights (Ministry for Equality and European Affairs);
- Network Forum (Members of WAVE); and
- NGO’s Network (Commission on Domestic Violence).

Being a powerful advocacy tool for survivors, SOAR endlessly strives to give a voice to survivors’ perspectives, experiences and recommendations to policy makers, researchers and practitioners working in the field. SOAR’s advocacy role includes making appeals to boards, agencies, commissioners, practitioners, public officers, ministers and parliamentary secretaries to highlight issues which remain obstructive barriers to survivors’ wellbeing and their children. These barriers result in re-victimisation, re-traumatisation and unnecessary prolonged suffering for the recovering family. Issues that were highlighted during 2019 included:

- Lack of housing options for survivors;
- Vexatious reporting to court by perpetrators;
- The use of legal tools available within the judicial system, specifically the Family Court, by perpetrators, to maintain control over their estranged partners;
- The lack of an independent designated key worker providing support for children during Supervised Access Visits;
- The recent change in law on stalking and temporary restraining orders that went through without any consultation with survivors;
- How the current tapering policy on income and social assistance does not provide a solution to a particular bracket of people (including survivors) who are stuck in their circumstances.

PROJECTS

SOAR managed to find much-needed funds to implement short-term projects that benefit survivors and their children. As with past years, in 2019, SOAR concluded one creative self-expression therapeutic project and started two new ones. All three projects were funded through grants from The President's Award for Creativity managed by Arts Council Malta.

On the 8th of March, SOAR launched the **UMAMA** art therapy exhibition with the support of APS Bank and The President's Award for Creativity managed by Arts Council Malta. The exhibition ran between 9th March and 14th April at the head office of APS Bank in Swatar. The exhibition shone a light on domestic violence by proxy, a silent pervasive form of violence where the perpetrator targets the victim through manipulation of the children, vexatious reporting to child protection services, or continuous requests to court for custody and access even when courts have previously decided that this would be detrimental to the children. The exhibition showed expressive works by mothers and children impacted by domestic violence by proxy.



During 2019, SOAR led another project called **Meraki Collective**, making a range of performing arts accessible as part of each individual's personal healing process. Weekly sessions took place over the first half of the year in collaboration with Mill Art Habitat and vocal/dance tutor Ms Pamela Gauna. The process included a sharing session between the participants, where a young survivor singer/song-writer wrote the music and lyrics to a song that reflects the expressions that emerged from this session and others before it. The song Empty Pages is bi-lingual and was eventually recorded and released with a video in 2020. The song is a provocative monologue on the insidious continuation of violence despite the survivor having ended the relationship and being determined to start a new life away from the violence.



A Stitch In Time was another project embarked upon by SOAR combining the learning of Maltese lacework with peer-support within a safe space for women. The project kicked off in November 2019 with a well attended taster session. The sessions ended in June 2020. The project included a trip to Gozo during Lace Day. SOAR collaborated with social enterprise HAJJA on this project funded and managed by the President's Award for Creativity and Arts Council Malta.

"I feel a great sense of achievement when I see the pattern emerge. Time flies when you're having fun!"

"I'm having fun, it's great! I'm learning something new."

"I am totally enjoying the lessons and learning new stitches. It feels so good to create something beautiful out of thread! The teacher makes it so educational, and we can talk about serious stuff or laugh and joke between us. Every Monday I am on edge at work waiting for time to pass to come to the lesson."

MERAKI SOAPS – AN EMERGING SOCIAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPED AND RUN BY SURVIVORS

Meraki Soaps is the result of a long process of evaluation and planning for the setting up of a small social enterprise that could sustain part of the SOAR Service. It is envisaged to start offering part-time work to survivors of domestic violence in 2020 and foresees growth over the coming 3 years. Meraki Soaps operates mainly within a niche market for wedding souvenirs that support a social cause. It also makes seasonal 'Collections' of full-size products and gift boxes from time to time.



A total of 52* mentoring hours on enterprise development (*see the 'Awards' section below) were utilised during 2019 and a feasibility study was carried out. During the year, the team shared skills and knowledge to design, create and test a range of handmade bath and body products. A focus was put on creating products that are made fresh, that utilised local products and that did not use any unnecessary plastic wrapping. Volunteers set up 15 market stalls throughout the year and sales were also made via orders received online through the Meraki Soaps Facebook page and through face-to-face consultations.

ENISIE AWARD FOR MERAKI SOAPS: PROFIT FOR PURPOSE

SOAR's Meraki Soaps idea won first place in the ENISIE Award for National Social Innovation, winning 40 hours of business mentoring by Dr. Eng. Nicholas Sammut and the use of the Malta Innovation Hub. The mentoring led to the creation of a feasibility study and the tools required to write a business plan for Meraki Soaps. ENISIE was a project funded by INTERREG Italia-Malta Programme 2014-2020.



SOAR – A FINALIST OF THE MALTA SOCIAL IMPACT AWARDS

Following an intense and intensive preparatory phase, which included mentoring by Take Off at University of Malta and by Julian Azzopardi at Up Your Level, SOAR became a finalist in the Malta Social Impact Awards 2019. It also participated in the Malta Social Impact Fair. The entry attempted to win funds to set up a Soap Kitchen and a retail shop for its social enterprise Meraki Soaps. Although SOAR did not win any funding in the finals, it raised the interest of a few businesses at the dinner event. MPS Ltd have since become a solid backer for SOAR, supporting the service's marketing and fundraising needs to renovate the SOAR Hub in Tarxien.



WORKSHOPS FOR TEENS

In March, SOAR carried out two workshops with children in Form 4 at St Benedict's College as part of a project by Education Plus (Early School Leaving Unit) under the Ministry for Education and Employment. SOAR delivered training on dating violence to prepare students to design an awareness raising brochure for other students across secondary schools in Malta and Gozo. The brochure was launched on 5th December and named Take Care #tc.



EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, OSLO, NORWAY

In partnership with Cohort 4, a UK based organisation offering peer-support to survivors of domestic violence, SOAR co-submitted a paper for consideration by the European Domestic Violence Conference (ECDV). Our submission was approved and on the 2nd of September, Ms Beverley Gilbert (Cohort 4) and Ms Elaine Compagno (SOAR, SJAF) presented their combined experiences of survivor peer-support in Malta and the UK, highlighting the benefits and the challenges of both.

The 3-day Conference brought many researchers, experts and activists together, offering a wide range of themed presentations around domestic violence.

DASH 2009 MASTERCLASS AND TRAIN-THE-TRAINER

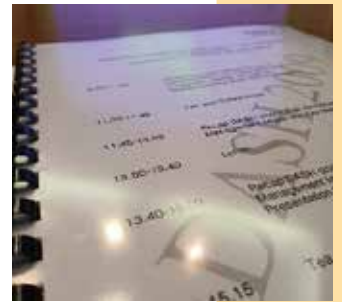
Two SOAR staff members received training on the DASH 2009 Risk Model thanks to the Charles Miceli Scholarship in Social Solidarity awarded by the Alfred Mizzi Foundation. Training was held in London on the 11th and 14th of October, facilitated by psychologist, criminal behavioral analyst and expert Laura Richards. SOAR planned to hold its first DASH Risk Assessment Training, designed for the local context, in April of 2020.

RENOVATION OF AN OLD TOWN HOUSE IN TARXIEN TO BE TRANSFORMED INTO A NATIONAL SOAR SURVIVORS' HUB

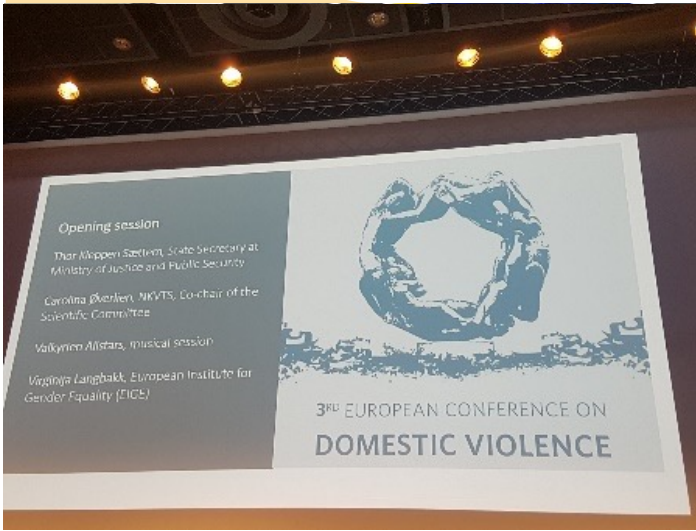
The Dar Tal-Providenza Foundation, through a rental contract with the Asset Management Office of the Archdiocese, provided the Foundation with the long-term use of an old disused town house in Tarxien which will eventually, after renovation works are completed, become the Hub for the services and 2 social enterprises run by SOAR. SJAF is very grateful to Dar tal-Providenza Foundation for its support to new gap-filling initiatives requiring a building to house them.

Employees of Vodafone Malta, LESA and the Malta Police Force and others from the 39th Basic Training Course of the Academy of Disciplined Forces volunteered at the SOAR Hub as part of their organisation's corporate social responsibility. The teams spent days carrying out cleaning works in preparation for the eventual renovation of the building.

QPml continued to provide invaluable pro bono professional services. A QPml team has prepared floor plans and a package of applications for the Planning Authority. Meetings and site visits were held throughout 2019 to discuss and plan for water, electrical and drainage services, beam repairs and interior design. The permit application was approved in December.



Once completed, the Hub will be a base for the SOAR services and space for expansion of its social enterprise activities.



CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPDs)

SOAR recognizes survivors' competences and acknowledges survivors as experts-by-experience. Opportunities were offered in 2019 to build on these competences to strengthen capacity for effective advocacy, risk assessment, peer-support and peer-mentoring. SOAR staff undertook various up-skilling training opportunities to continue offering a quality service.

| Date | Training theme | Members participated |
|-----------------------------------|---|----------------------|
| 22, 29 March, 5, 12 April 2019 | Crop in a Pot: Building skills for sustainability and resilience. Organised by SOS Malta. | 2 |
| 8-9 May 2019 | Bringing Social Innovation Ideas to Life. Interreg V Italia-Malta Programme, ERDF. | 3 |
| 31-May 2019 | In-house training on Borderline Personality Disorder. | 2 |
| 19 June, 10, 24 July 2019 | Mentoring on Pitching a Business Idea by the Take Off Business Incubator, University of Malta. | 3 |
| 2-4 September 2019 | 3rd European Conference on Domestic Violence held in Oslo. Organised by the Norwegian Social Research agency (NOVA) and the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies (NKVTS). | 1 |
| 21 August, 13 & 16 September 2019 | Mentoring on Public Speaking and Project Pitching by Julian Azzopardi from Up Your Level. | 3 |
| 3 October 2019 | In-house training on Basic Fire Fighting: Prevention emergency action measures. | 2 |
| 9 & 11 October 2019 | Accredited DASH Risk Checklist Masterclass Training and DASH Risk Checklist Train the Trainer, Laura Richards BSc, MSc, MBPsP & Associates (London). | 6 |
| May to November 2019 | Business consultation and start-up mentoring by ENISIE Interreg Italia-Malta Programme 2014-2020. Mentor: Dr. Eng. Nicholas Sammut. | 5 |

SOAR IN

2020

At the end of 2020, SOAR had 1 full time worker, a part-timer 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 Officer / Fundraiser was responsible for the management of the SOAR Hub renovation project and for seeking funding partners. QPml continued to provide its pro bono services on all aspects of the preparation and submission of all documentation and plans to the Planning Authority.

SERVICES

One-to-One Support was offered to 131 women who sought SOAR support, 57 of them newly referred in 2020. Personalised support plans were prepared and reviewed. SOAR staff frequently liaised with other organisations, foundations and benefactors to assist survivors and their children to meet identified acute needs. Risk assessments were 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 them. Mentoring was also offered to survivors who needed support with moving away from over-indebtedness. Advocacy: 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 difficulties and mental health problems linked to isolation, anxiety and fear around the unfolding health situation. Some survivors risked facing eviction because they defaulted in their rent payments. 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. Remote work having become the norm, 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 effective 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 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

As SJAF offices went on lockdown, in mid-March 2020, SOAR re-strategized its practices for outreach and support, as the whole world scrambled to set up remotely 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 always featured heavily in the strategies that SOAR used to provide its service since its inception in 2012. Thus, the shift to working fully remotely 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 weren't 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 two 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 worsened. Not being a European citizen, she is not entitled to rent subsidy. Through frequent communication, SOAR assisted 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 works started 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 be or sleep in.

Thanks to a sponsorship from Women for Women Foundation, SOAR was able to organize pest control to sort out the problem. Since Fatima lacks Maltese and English literacy, SOAR team members communicated 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 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 Brijū & Pulled Meat Restaurants and Danny's kitchen, SOAR was able to ensure 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.

During the COVID-19 crisis months, SOAR managed to, swiftly and effectively, adapt to the challenges presented by 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 Parroċċi 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 initiatives | 52 |

MENTORING FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The pandemic brought with it loss of jobs and earnings. Many of the SOAR members found it increasingly 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 annual needs, discussing and prioritizing them, apportioning income for different needs and discussing ways to create more income or ways in which to supplement it.

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 of some of their debts. One family of 5, for example, 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 the 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:

"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 seeing you all virtually, 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 are 10 Memes Created by artist and illustrator Marisa Attard for SOAR and digitalized by MPS Ltd.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

February 2020 saw first femicide of the year. 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 leave 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 violence 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 architectural design and engineering company QPml to confirm the required support by the various departments within QPml and Planning Authority requirements for the project to move forward. Issues were raised and tackled.

A meeting was also 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 tapping of the wooden bobbins knocking each other as busy fingers worked.

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck Malta barely one month into the 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. CONTINUING



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPD) OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOAR STAFF

| Date | Title | Type | 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 Gloucestershire, 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 |

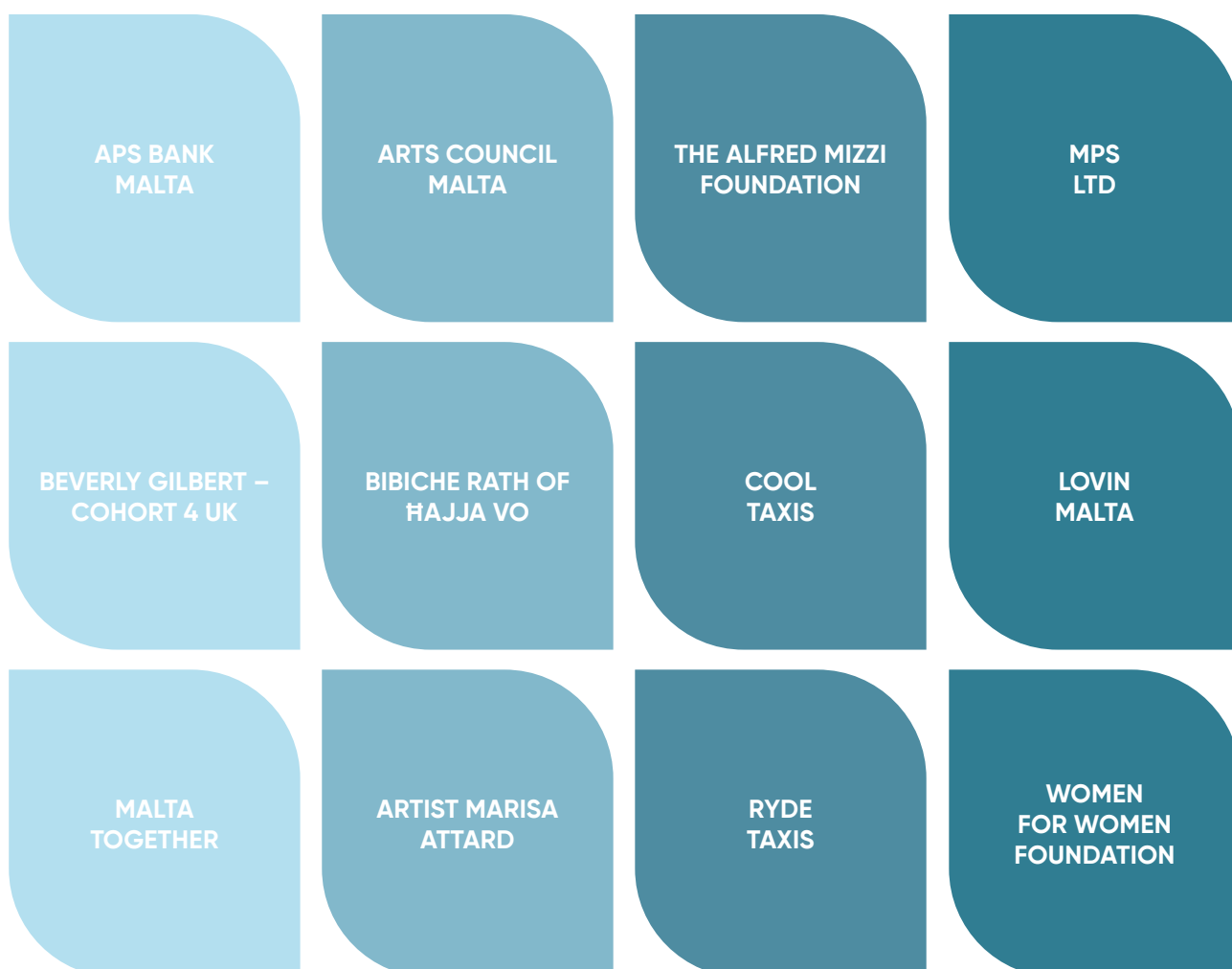
TRAINING PROVIDED BY SOAR

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 - 2020

Foremost donors, partners and sponsors included:



SOAR IN

2021

- 113 women supported; 14 of these were new cases of victims, fearful of asking support from the Police or other agencies. These women were intensely supported from the outset to nurture a readiness to access support from state agencies. Of the 113 women supported, over 32 were high support cases.
- 83 different group activities (online and not) were organized and led by SOAR . These included: 22 non-formal educational sessions; 15 wellbeing and self-care activities; 23 fellowship activities; 25 MERAKEI Social Enterprise production practice sessions.
- 1,510 hours of individual Peer Mentoring were extended to the 113 women;
- 1,484 hours of group-based peer support were provided including web-based sessions and dialogue via a secure SOAR social media platform.
- Two SOAR Facebook pages were maintained to keep in touch with survivors.
- 16 Posters were designed and uploaded on SOAR's Facebook page during the November to December 16 days of activism (each poster had a quote from a survivor).

Of the 113 survivors supported IN 2021, 53 benefited from much-needed food aid, hygiene bank items, clothing for themselves and their children and emergency debt relief to ward off debilitating financial crises. These were women who felt very isolated and alone with their children and feeling lost because of the COVID-19 restrictions and growing over-indebtedness. SOAR produced two non-formal educational tools for use by SOAR Peer Mentors: (a) a Budgeting tool which survivors are trained to use to effectively manage their limited income and reduce over-indebtedness caused by accumulating unpaid bills, and (b) an explanatory tool about Water & Electricity ARMS Ltd bills.

In late 2021, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation set up a SOAR Youth Group which started connecting to plan a youth-focused public awareness raising initiative to combat misogynistic mindsets pervasive in our society.

The SOAR Service Coordinator regularly participated in the Inter-ministerial Committee on Gender-based Violence and Domestic violence.

PEER MENTORING AND SUPPORT

In 2021, the team of 4 SOAR Peer Mentors, between them, supported and regularly followed-up 113 survivors, 32 of whom required high support. Regular telephone calls, office-based visits, online meetings and group activities keep the connection alive. In order to maximise wellbeing outcomes for the women supported, SOAR Peer Mentors collaborated with the women's social workers and support practitioners from other agencies through case reviews. One-to-one Peer Mentoring sessions in 2021 totaled 1,510 hours whereas group-based ones totaled 1,484 hours.

Motivating and empowering survivors of domestic violence involves constant support and guidance to enable them to take control of their lives. Each woman is at a different stage of rebuilding her life. One commonality is that they all need to learn to be kind to themselves by learning about self-compassion. Some women who lived with an abusive partner often find it very difficult to make simple choices about their life as they either lacked such space and opportunity or were punished when they tried.

Enabling survivors to become self-empowered involves learning to make wise and judicious decisions in different areas of their lives. Encouraging survivors to celebrate small achievements is a key SOAR endeavour. Small decisions may include leaving the house on one's own without fear; paying a bill online; exploring further studies; accessing therapy; meeting a friend for a coffee without looking over one's shoulders in fear; and managing their finances.

Throughout the year, the SOAR team organised the provision of a range of in-kind supports as part of survivors' support plan. Such aid is invaluable in alleviating some of the women's pressures, anxiety and distress; it also nurtures coping skills and hope in difficult times.

SOAR Peer Mentors complemented the support work of practitioners from other agencies in the following ways:

- Motivating survivors to keep to the agreed support plan so as to move forward in life with renewed hope and determination;
- Fortify survivors' determination to stay away from the very abusive relationship despite the pull to go back because of a pervasive sense of hopelessness (reasons vary from woman to woman);
- Accompanying survivors through such transitions, such as:
 - (a) planning in detail the steps involved in changing accommodation: packing belongings by category/ rooms, transport logistics, child minding while packing and unpacking and settling in; informing authorities on change of address;
 - (b) requesting the SJAF Ćentru Antida manager to solicit donations of furniture, furnishings, bedding and household items from benefactors;
 - (c) mediating with women's relatives since, very often, they are abusive and controlling and contrarian. This support limits potential disastrous intrusion by relatives;
 - (d) mobilising survivor members of SOAR who have settled down and wish to support other women in their transition between exiting a shelter, settling down, changing children's school, finding work, etc;
 - (e) guiding women to juggle the complex official procedures required to complete a referral to a new service such as admission to a shelter; informing Social Security and Bank about change of address; negotiating payments with landlords; applying for a Housing Authority scheme;
 - (f) supporting women to admit their children to a new school/ childcare/ afterschool programme/ skolasajf and finding educational resources through sponsors;
 - (g) when the need arises, assisting with access to external emergency interventions and assessments by an Educational Psychologist or Parent Coach;
 - (h) emotional support when a woman suffers a loss;
 - (i) matching them with a Volunteer Mentor and preparing them for this new person in their life who will guide and support them along their way.

Despite the fact that, for many, the steps described above may be taken for granted, the women supported by SOAR have lived fractured lives and relationships and struggle to find their way through the complexities of rebuilding their lives.



VOLUNTEER MENTORS

4 very active and committed Volunteer Mentors continued to offer their support. Unlike the SOAR Peer Mentors, these 4 are not survivors of domestic violence themselves. Rather, they are loving-kind friendly guides whose steady and constant support is a reassuring and constant element in survivors' lives. Volunteer Mentors are sometimes invited to share their views of the survivor's situation during case reviews. They highlight in a non-biased way the strengths and achievements of their Mentees.

FLEXIBILITY OF SOAR PEER MENTORS

One of the strengths of peer mentoring is that Peer Mentors are ready to work flexible hours, even late evenings and weekends. Many survivors work office hours and would miss out on much support had SOAR offered its services during normal working hours. Peer Mentors base their support according to the schedule of their Mentees. They connect with them through individual and group video calls, phone calls, office-based sessions and at safe public spaces.

"When I have flashbacks, I suddenly remember that I have moved out from our house where he used to abuse me. But the abuse hasn't stopped. I am renting and he is still in the matrimonial house. I wish to give up and go back because I cannot cope financially. But the regular chats I have online with SOAR Mentors, even late at night, keep me aware of why I left and that I must stay strong. Even though it's not fair I had to move out, my life is no longer at risk. I wish the court can see what we are going through." – a SOAR Survivor

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (CPDS)

In 2021, SOAR Peer Mentors benefited from 15 continuing professional development opportunities. They also led 2 in-house CPD for the SJAF Community Social Work team on SOAR Services and signs of abusive relationships and on the financial management tool created by a SOAR Peer Mentor which can be used by the Social Work team as well.

PROVISION OF IN-KIND SUPPORTS

During 2021, SJAF mobilized funds from its network of benefactors and donors to cover financial and in-kind support needs of a number of service users, including SOAR survivors. These included funds to pay rent when there is a risk of eviction; closure of a contract for a telephony service with one provider before moving to new accommodation which covers telephony by a different provider; nappies and hygiene products; food; shoes and clothing; educational supplies; transport costs for a move to a new accommodation; and snacks after long face-to-face meetings. Food packages were delivered, in some cases, weekly. Other in-kind supports provided included: laptops for studies; assistance with application for Scheme 9; back-to-school packages; and medicine. SJAF staff and Volunteers helped with pick-up of donated items, sorting, packing and with delivery. Peer Mentors also encourage a cost-saving clothes-swap system for members.

Of the 113 survivors supported during 2021, 53 benefited from the above-mentioned supports to ward off debilitating financial crises. These were women who felt very isolated and alone with their children and feeling lost because of the COVID-19 restrictions.

GROUP-BASED ACTIVITIES

A range of small group sessions were held online as well as at the Foundation's Ćentru Antida Family Services hub. In all, 83 different activities (online and not) were organized and led by SOAR throughout the year. These included: 22 non-formal educational sessions; 15 Wellbeing and self-care activities; 23 Fellowship activities; and 25 MERAKI Social Enterprise production practice sessions.

All the 83 activities were aimed at enabling women to further understand the complex and toxic nature of psychological and emotional abuse, in a safe space with others similarly afflicted. They also enable women to re-build self-confidence; speak coherently; reflect about one's life experiences and deriving insights to move forward resiliently; and plan to regain financial independence. Women also learn about boundaries and about the perils of plunging into a relationship because of loneliness and hope for intimacy and need for accommodation and financial support.

Non-formal educational sessions focused on public speaking and presentation skills, skills important for court hearings, why therapy is important for personal growth and development, how to find courses that fit one's interests; personal health; how to support others and introduce them to support services; parental alienation; financial management; and training on maintaining a 21-day personal journal on gratitude.

Full-day fellowship activities were also held outdoor in small groups. These included discussions; painting; enjoying nature; meditation; having fun with one's children; quality time for older SOAR members to reach out to new ones. These outdoor activities involved survivors who were isolated during the COVID-19 months and were seriously deprived of any leisure activities.

The noon-to-6pm Saturday SOAR Club was re-started in 2021 following its closure during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic months. SOAR is a real lifeline for survivors and the Club re-inforces this. Members cook, produce MERAKI Soaps, lunch together, participate in an activity of their choice and, most importantly relate in a meaningful and fun manner.

SOAR members eventually become volunteers. Some of these have also joined the Meraki initiative to produce SOAPS as wedding gifts for guests and as tokens during parties. Others help during events such as the Reverse Advent Calendar food aid initiative of SJAF, do reception work and assist with sorting and storage of donations.

Emphasis on self-care: 15 self-care activities were organized during the year. Our motto: *"We cannot pour from an empty jar."* For many survivors, self-care is regarded as a frivolous notion – important but impossible for them in their situation. SOAR activities re-awaken one's lost inner caregiver.

"As a single parent who has been through a lot and have close to no support, this concept may be something impossible to achieve, exhausting or pointless to consider, mainly due to time and my financial situation. But, thanks to SOAR, I am here, and I am really feeling good. I will continue to practice these routines at home." – a SOAR mother



One poignant outcome was the frequency of the question of how they could be trained to help someone going through what they have been through. For SOAR Peer Mentors, this signifies the readiness of a number of members to move on to access SOAR training in peer support.



"I like to see mommy smiling. It makes me happy." – a young survivor

When mentoring survivors with no support system, SOAR steps in to help each woman build one. Between September and December 2021, SOAR organised a number of birthday parties to help mothers provide beautiful memories to her children. Through these activities, survivors realise how awful the impact of abuse has been and the toll it took.

The truth, however, is that SOAR has had hundreds of calls in the last three months of 2021 from women seeking support, feeling isolated, lonely and under immense pressure to parent, home school and keep their jobs so as to pay the bills. *"My children call you 'aunties'. You back me up when I fall. You know from experience that if I fall, my children fall with me. Thanks for the constant support."* – a young SOAR mother

RISK MANAGEMENT AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Even though SOAR is a service for women survivors of domestic violence and their children, the SOAR team still finds itself in situations where members find themselves in new abusive situations causing risk or new cases of victims who reach out to SOAR for support because they are at a loss as to what steps to take to flee from an abusive relationship.

In 2021, SOAR Peer Mentors dealt with 32 cases needing high-support since their past partners escalated their harassment. SOAR swiftly mobilised interventions by other agencies to protect the women and their children.

Suicidal ideation continued to be common among survivors of domestic violence since, despite all their efforts to disconnect from the toxic relationship, ex-partners never give up.



Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

Published by Melanie Piscopo · 31 August 2021 ·

Good morning! Through our SOAR Service – aimed at providing a range of supports to survivors of domestic violence – we daily 'see' how a woman's capabilities are severely restricted because she is subjected to domestic violence. Women and children who experience domestic violence are at higher risk for low mood, anxiety, fear and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness associated with depression, than women and children who are not so horribly exposed.

All around us, there is a growing interest in MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING. Internationally renowned Indian economist and philosopher AMARTYA SEN has been instrumental in developing the CAPABILITY APPROACH – a set of capabilities that enable individuals to do and to be that which they have reasons to value. Sen has made significant contributions to welfare economics, social choice theory, economic and social justice, economic theories of famines, decision theory, development economics, public health, and measures of well-being of countries. According to Sen, the range of things which people value doing or being may vary from elementary ones (such as being adequately nourished and being free from avoidable disease) to very complex activities or personal states (such as being able to take part in the life of the community and having self-respect).

Political theorist MARTHA NUSSBAUM elaborated further the concept of capabilities across ten domains which include being able to have good health, being able to imagine, think, and reason, having freedom of emotional expression and practical reasoning to enable planning of one's life, affiliation with others in conditions that engender self-respect and non-discrimination, being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities, and having control over one's material environment. Being in a position to 'be' and 'do' things that have value contributes to mental health. [SOAR MALTA](#)

SOAR's constant support is a mental ill-health preventive measure and women regularly express relief at finding such an understanding, loving-kind and supportive sisterhood. Challenges are unavoidable but the fact that SOAR staff are present so intensely in their lives is an anchor for the survivors-in-crisis.

During the Christmas period, there was an increase in calls for support. Being at home alone with the children and lacking a social support network, anxiety, fear and tiredness exacerbate their situation. Late 2021, the SOAR team started a process of taking stock. One of the outcomes was the deployment of a new SJAF Social Worker to support the SOAR team especially in

situations where victims contact SOAR and initially refuse to seek support from the official state channels because of intense fear, especially fear that going to the Police is a useless step which might further endanger their lives. At such a stage, Social Work intervention was being considered as crucial by the SOAR Team members. SJAF embarked on this professional support measure for SOAR through new fundraising approaches.

Following a meeting with Dr Lydia Abela in early 2021, where SJAF proposed the need for research into the link between suicide/ suicide ideation/ suicide plan and domestic violence, the Dean of the Faculty for the Wellbeing of Society at the University of Malta held a meeting with SOAR Coordinator and CEO to discuss the Faculty's plan for such a research project. SOAR will help in any way possible. Until December 2021, no funding had been found by for research on this hidden phenomenon. During the year, SOAR also accompanied a number of service users to the Police GBDV Hub and to Victim Support Agency (VSA) because of re-victimisation.

INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION

SOAR works in collaboration with the Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence (GBDV) Unit falling under the Vice-Squad of the Police, with Community Police, the NGO Victim Support Malta, the state Victim Support Agency (VSA), Legal Aid Malta, the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) of Aġenzija Appoġġ of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) and social workers from other services within FSWS, the Commission on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence, the Department of Gender and Sexualities within the Faculty for the Wellbeing of Social at the University of Malta, the Dean's Office of the Faculty for the Wellbeing of Society, and with other NGOs such as the Women for Women and Women's Rights' Foundation.

SOAR also participates in the regular meetings of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence so as to better highlight survivors' perspectives of the systems created to support them and to make recommendations to policy makers present. SOAR contributed to the panel presentation during a public consultation on Violence, Abuse and Exploitation on July 9, 2021 organised by the Office of the Director General for Research and Social Policy at the Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's Rights.

In 2021, 3 SOAR members took part in Triple R trauma-informed 12-week evening course designed to empower survivors of domestic violence organised by Victim Support Malta. Two SOAR staff members completed the training and will be offering the same training to 25 SOAR survivors in early 2022. Following this, SOAR will continue to extend the training to more survivors.

PROUD MOMENTS IN 2021

Some of the proudest moments SOAR had in 2021 was that of having helped, in October 2021, four Survivors and a young male child of a survivor to invest in their educational journey to make a go of their plan to move ahead in life.

"You have been a lifeline to me! I was about to give up on my last year of studies. Your regular calls were what kept me motivated and truly helped me to overcome my fears which were holding me back. SOAR helped me find inner strength when I needed it most." (source: a young graduate)



SOAR Peer Mentors are where they are because SOAR was there for them in the past. It was SOAR that encouraged them to access educational courses and training. SOAR Peer Mentors know first-hand the value of education especially when their hope is to look forward and shape a new life for themselves and their children with resilience and hope. The majority of the 113 survivors supported during 2021 expressed that their main need was to secure a job that would give them a regular income and financial security. Furthering their education, they say, is crucial for this to become a reality. Although they are 'survivors', many continue to suffer invisible abuse and harassment which is insidious and meant to run them further to the ground.

Unfortunately, in 2021, 5 SOAR members had to make the sad decision to drop out of their university or MCAST course of studies because they could not continue studying while constantly struggling with the never-ending aftermath of domestic violence. Regrettably for many survivors, the systems are not working well for them. Lengthy court cases; incessant vexatious filing of petitions (rikorsi) by the perpetrator; failure by perpetrator to pay maintenance; refusal to appear in court for mediation and for separation hearings; refusal to sign off on sale of matrimonial home; over-indebtedness due to accumulating debts due to failure to meet bill payment deadlines; having to stay at home when school classes were online; inflexible supervised visit dates and time; and many other anxiety-inducing situations.

CASE: In one case, for example, the survivor dropped out of her studies as she was constrained to take her daughter for supervised access visits (SAVs) twice a week by bus. Each time, she had to catch four buses. Apart from that, their son has a condition, and he needs physiotherapy once a week, taking four bus trips each time. In the meantime, the father is still fighting a court battle to (a) have child-support reduced; and (b) be given UNSUPERVISED access to their son even though he was found guilty of exposing the same minor to physical abuse and neglect. Court sessions have already dragged four years. Finally, this January, justice was served. After much advocacy work by SOAR and support to the survivor so as to keep sane. Next year she again enrolls to a full-time course!

SOME COMMON REALITIES AND PLANS TO CONTINUE SUPPORTING THE INVISIBLE

Plans for 2022: SOAR plans regular weekly outreach with SOAR women who are isolated while combating the pandemic in silence. This approach has proved to be a real lifeline in 2021, especially for those who suffer from mental health difficulties; these were found to be slowly shutting off connections with the world around them.

In 2021, as highlighted above, SOAR supported a few women who could not extricate themselves from the clutches of the perpetrator. While doing so, SOAR used its experience and Dash 2009 risk assessment skills to analyse women's risk and, when risk is not present, to continue supporting them in various ways, depending on each woman's situation and needs. In cases of high risk, SOAR guides the women to reconnect with state agencies.

CASE: SOAR has helped an older woman who was blocked from accessing medical treatment for cancer. We have since helped her move to a safe and supportive home elsewhere and will continue supporting her post surgery and recovery.

RAISING A FAMILY ALONE

Long before Covid-19 restrictions were introduced, loneliness and isolation were a common experience for those parenting alone after domestic abuse - where fathers tend to abdicate their responsibilities but create a false social media persona to fight for their fatherhood rights. Living alone with children has meant that parents often feel isolated and in despair. For many, the stigma, obstacles, judgementalism and discrimination that single mothers face can force parents, often without realising it, to keep to themselves, working hard to get it right for their children so no one can point fingers at them. The stigma around single mothers on welfare benefits is still an unfortunate reality in Malta.

"If we women, mothers, were to abdicate our motherhood and parenting responsibilities as so many fathers are doing, our government will have a serious problem with providing accommodation and care for neglected and abandoned children. We should be thankful and support single parents who are doing their utmost to dedicating their lives to care for their children – against all odds and the unfair abuse of the legal system by responsibility-shirking, abusive fathers." – SOAR Survivor

Managing one's life and family life single-handedly often leads to high levels of stress and anxiety. One's self-confidence, self-esteem and mental health often take a dive. Survivors start to find themselves more and more disconnected from the world around them. Accessing therapy for their children too becomes a nightmare as the abusive parent has to sign his consent. In all of this, it is no wonder that children of survivors of domestic violence and abuse start presenting oppositional and challenging behaviour. Often, survivors disclose that their body feels as if it is about to fail them. Many fall ill multiple times a year. For those in employment, this situation becomes a nightmare as they unsuccessfully try to grapple with keeping their job. About a third of children of survivors of domestic violence helped by SOAR have parents struggling with poor mental health. Poor mental health makes it harder for a parent to effectively manage their daily struggles. The constant pressure of parenting and handling everything alone is often too much some days.

Marika: "With the help of the long-term support from SOAR I became determined to live to tell my story after many years of abuse and dependence on support services. I have regained my voice. Now I can safely say "No more!" even though it took me a very long time to do so. The SOAR community – their patience and love and understanding and respect – help me re-inforce my purpose to move on in life, not to give up, and to sustain hope. I want to be able to be like my SOAR Mentors – strong to support others living the ugly trauma of domestic abuse and violence. After therapy and support by state services I asked myself – 'But what next? To whom can I turn to after office hours?' The ugly effects of trauma often resurface. I cannot forgive and forget and let go because I am still co-parenting with a Narcissist; he tries all the tricks and tactics possible to make my life a non-stop living hell. He loves being violent by proxy – using the children to hound me incessantly. But, to the world around him, he is charming, rational, caring, jovial..... No one believed me. Not even my own family. He managed to hoodwink everyone; even lawyers and judges. Who can I talk to when my own family members have no idea what it is like to live with a narcissist? My identity was stripped away. I felt a nobody. For many years, he showered me with insults, belittling me... until I came to believe him. Today, I have my SOAR friends to talk with. They keep me sane and grounded. Each morning, I wake up and think of them and their understanding and unfailing support."

DEVELOPMENTS

SOAR Service Hub renovation works initiative: During 2021, SJAF management worked hard to secure funding for this project. Also in 2021, SOAR set up a youth group which, next year, will focus on awareness raising among youth on the signs of an abusive relationship and domestic violence and what support exists. The group launch will take place in early 2022.



MILESTONES

In January 2021, the St Jeanne Antide Foundation embarked on a Public Social Partnership agreement with the Ministry for Social Justice and Solidarity, the Family and Children's rights for its SOAR Service for peer mentoring and support services to survivors of domestic violence.

Also in January 2021, the Voluntary Solidarity Fund Malta provided funding for 2 additional SOAR Peer Mentors working part-time to focus on entrepreneurship development training, creative self-expression activities and financial management.

Other contributors to SOAR were, among others, the Association of International Women Malta that ran wellbeing workshops and fundraising activities for survivor support; social influencer Tamara Webb, GO and Women 4 Women Foundation.

CONCLUSION

What SOAR women wish: Survivors constantly express that when domestic violence is proven in court and the perpetrator is sentenced, the victim should NOT have to spend the rest of her assets, time, money, and life fighting to separate from her abuser. The criminal justice system and family court should work in tandem and be aware of the tactics increasingly being adopted by perpetrators to misuse the legal system to continue abusing victim. Tactics include repeatedly not showing up for court hearings; not signing legal documents; and bombarding the victim with false Police reports. Such tactics jeopardise a timely case resolution.

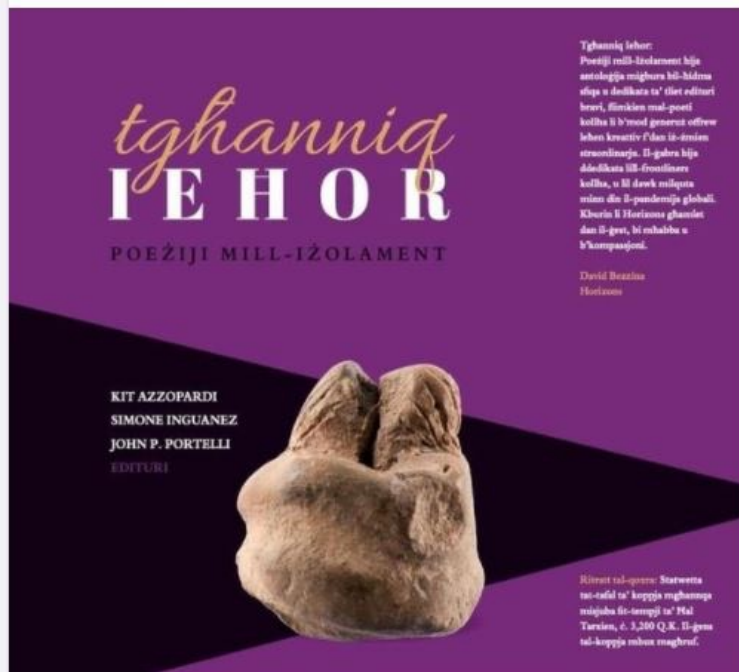


Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

Published by Mark Micallef · 5 February 2021 ·

Tgħanniq lehor – poeziji mill-izolament – hu ktieb ġdid mitbugħ minn Horizons Ltd. Jiġbor fih mal-mitt poezija minn 42 poeti Maltin. L-Edituri tiegħu huma John Portelli, u Kit Azzopardi, Simone Inguanez u John P. Portelli.

L-imxija tal-COVID-19 gabet realtà ġdida li hadd qatt m'għex, jekk mhux l-aktar imġarrba fost il-ġenerazzjonijiet tagħna. Id-distanzi fiżiċi ta' bejnietna kibru. Il-jiem qatt m'għaddew aktar bil-mod. U bosta bibien ingħalqu għal tliet xhur u fuqhom. Fl-is... See more





Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

Published by Melanie Piscopo · 12 August 2021 ·



SOAR MALTA

12 August 2021 ·

GOOD AFTERNOON! From our different services we are coming to realise how insidious and horrendous stalking through social media has become. Many women are rethinking the 'befriending system' of facebook. BUT, another problem has become evident. Male partners show interest in their partner's facebook friends, take note of names and start researching women. They send messages and appear to be kind, friendly, needing to share parenting tips, invite a number (not one!!) for a drink. And that's when it all starts. Women are showing us how the Facebook image male stalkers portray is totally different from their behaviour once they get to know them. The problem is that, unless women are aware of subtle signs of abusive behaviour in a budding relationship, they easily fall prey to a 'mask' of kindness, fondness, interest (feigned!) in them as persons, gifts, interest in their children and commiseration about difficult life experiences.



Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide

Published by Nora Macelli · 9 August 2021 · 🌐



Good morning! Budding poet Amy is a living example of hope. Her poems and illustrations show us how to move forward in life by filling oneself with God's divine light. She is using the pen to show others that letting go is the only way to embrace positive possibilities. We love this new painting of hers.



608

People reached

14

Engagements

↓ -1.0x average
Distribution score

Boost post

SOAR IN

2022 (JANUARY
TO SEPTEMBER)

INTRODUCTION

During the past 9 months, SOAR offered a range of supports to 124 women who experienced domestic violence. Those women were still at risk of harm, and contacted SOAR who guided them until they made the difficult decision to file a report with the GBDV Hub at Police Headquarters, approach the Victim Support Agency for other supports and start accessing social work support from the Domestic Violence Unit of Aġenzija Appoġġ for themselves and their children. For survivors who were still attempting to rebuild their lives, SOAR continued to offer Peer Mentoring, other individual and group-based supports, advocacy, non-formal education and in-kind supports to tide them over the crisis.

SOAR Peer Mentors continues to regularly meet women for one-to-one sessions at the St Jeanne Antide Foundation's family services hub in Tarxien or at a safe space (such as a tea shop), in service users' own home, or online. Peer Mentoring is proving its effectiveness as SOAR is today receiving requests by its members to become volunteers or mentors themselves. For these SOAR members, training is being provided before, and after, matching with a Mentee.

MORE SURVIVORS BEING TRAINED FOR A PEER MENTORING ROLE

So far this year, 124 SOAR survivors have been receiving longer-term support from SOAR. Of these, 33 have completed a course titled Triple-R or trauma-informed domestic abuse programme. This was possible following a Train-the-Trainer course titled Safer Spaces organised by the NGO Victim Support Malta (VSM). VSM trained 6 survivors, 4 of whom were from SOAR. In turn, on completion of the train-the-trainer course, the group split up into teams of 2 each with each duo conducting a Triple R course for survivors. Triple R is the first psycho-social-educational course of its kind being offered to survivors of domestic violence. Triple R consists of 12 sessions of 90 minutes each. At present, SOAR is planning to hold another Triple R course for 12 interested members.

When it comes to working with survivors of domestic abuse, one size does not fit all as each woman and her children has a different pathway to follow. It takes much longer to build a trusting relationship with a woman facing multiple disadvantages. Past traumas will dictate where to go for support and who she feels safe with to explore her onward journey. SOAR therefore continued to invest in group-based planning activities to prepare SOAR Peer Mentors (staff) and SOAR Volunteers for their sensitive role of supporting women lacking a support system. SOAR Peer Mentors, especially the new ones under training, will be followed-up on regular basis. Coaching in peer mentoring is being provided by experienced Peer Mentors.

Most of the potential peer mentors have been receiving one-to-one personal self-development sessions. SOAR requires all of them to have allowed at least 5 years to have gone by since they were in an abusive relationship. Of the existing 11 Trainee Peer Mentors, 4 have divorced their perpetrator; 4 are back in education; 3 are raising young children by themselves and hence are not able to find a job yet.

"I know what it feels like when I had no one to turn to after I got out from an abusive relationship. It was so difficult for me not to return to what I used to call 'home', despite the abuse that went on there. SOAR helped me to re-find myself, re-build myself. The support I am receiving helped me stay away from the abusive relationship I had. So, If I could be of any kind of support to a woman who is willing to build a healthy support network, I am here, happy to support her - with the continuous support of SOAR" – SOAR Trainee Peer Mentor.

The involvement of survivors in the delivery of domestic abuse support services is invaluable as it provides positive and inspiring role models for women embarking on their journey towards recovery.

NON-SURVIVOR VOLOUNTEER MENTORS

We meet persons who wish to become Volunteer Mentors who have NOT experienced abuse in an intimate relationship. The CEO and SOAR Coordinator interview such persons to assess their aptitude for such a sensitive role – in line with the organisation’s policy and procedures on the screening of volunteers. Once accepted, training and matching is provided. Volunteer Mentors are followed up regularly to safeguard all parties concerned.

MATCHING SURVIVORS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS WITH A VOLUNTEER MENTOR

Case 1: The most recently engaged Volunteer Mentor is a Nurse who is ably supporting a survivor suffering from cancer while raising a young child by herself. During the month of December, we introduced the matched Volunteer Mentor to the survivor by undertaking a long home visit. We learnt how much the survivor was struggling as she had no one to talk to, no one to meet, no one to support her. Apart from needing emotional support, the mother had stopped working because of her cancer and needed basic food supplies; a new uniform for her son who had a uniform too tight to wear; money to cover unpaid bills. The Volunteer Mentor immediately linked the woman to cancer-support services. We have helped her build a support network of new friends by creating a team of 3 Volunteers to meet up with her regularly and assist in any way possible, including by accompanying her to appointments. She does no longer feel isolated and lonely.

The Volunteer Mentor wrote us, saying: “By giving a couple of hours a week of my time I am helping another person meet her needs and being closer to reach her goals. From this volunteering experience I am learning that charity is not about giving money but about giving time and sharing. Some people need simple support – company, listening, guidance. These make a huge difference in their lives. The amount of appreciation that I get gives me so much satisfaction.”

Case 2: Another Volunteer Mentor is a teacher by profession. We have matched her with a single mother of four children. The mother is a potential peer mentor. Being a muslim migrant, we plan to train her to support Arabic speaking female survivors of domestic abuse. We have matched her with a Volunteer Mentor with much teaching experience so that her 4 children stand a better chance of making it through school as the mother lacks the ability to assist them with their learning. She speaks no English herself and we are encouraging her to learn it herself. After a couple of office-based meetings, the Volunteer Mentor felt comfortable enough to start home-based learning support with the children. The children got used to her quickly and are always eagerly waiting for her tuition. Having no support network, the children see the Volunteer Mentor as a positive role model in their life. Her impact on the children and their mother’s lives is tremendous. Recently, the Volunteer Mentor informed SOAR that the mother is sitting with her children to learn English as well.

The Volunteer Mentor wrote us, saying: “Fil-ħajja mgħaġġla tal-lum jista’ jkun diffiċli ssib ħin għall-volontarjat. Imma jien xorta ħassejt ix-xewqa li nipprova nsib dan il-ħin. Qed nagħmel volontarjat ma’ familja mill-isbaħ u nħoss li mhux biss qed nagħti imma qed nirċievi ħafna. Il-ferħ u s-sodisfazzjon li nħoss huma kbar u biżżejjed biex inkompli għaddejja b’aktar enerġija. Il-fatt li ltqajt ma’ din il-familja u qed ngħaddi l-ħin magħhom nara li hawn nies li jridu jegħlbu d-diffikultajiet u juruk minn qalbhom li japprezzaw dak li tkun qed tagħmel magħhom għax huma jridu xi ħaġa aħjar mill-ħajja.”

MOTIVATING SURVIVOURS TO KEEP TO THE PLAN SO AS TO MOVE FORWARD IN LIFE WITH RENEWED HOPE AND DETERMINATION

There can be a significant issue about the readiness, or recovery of the survivor of domestic abuse in terms of how healed or ready that individual is when agreeing to support another vulnerable person traumatized by their own experiences. An understanding of risks to self and period of recovery is essential to sufficiently prevent them from impairing the efficacy of the support offered. Time, Dedication, Resilience, Non-judgmental approach, and Empathy are the main key to support women and children through such a difficult time. Resilience can be learned so it can be passed from one successful survivor to another. The approaches involve a development of thoughts, behaviours and actions that allow the survivors to recover from a traumatic or stressful domestic violence events in one's life.

SOAR sessions support survivors to grow on several levels to develop resilience and preserve it in the long healing journey for themselves and their children. For survivors, resiliency involves these elements and mindset:

1. Viewing change as both a challenge and an opportunity, despite the fact that the outcomes may not be the ones hoped for.
2. A commitment to forge ahead with dignity and hope.
3. Recognition of the limitations that need to be overcome.
4. Readiness to tap into the support of others.
5. A closeness with, and safe attachment to, others while shaping new healthy relationships.
6. Having personal goals.
7. Self-efficacy.
8. Learning to manage stress.
9. Acknowledging things that went well in the past and being grateful for them.
10. Having a realistic sense of control and assessing choices before decision-taking.
11. Cultivating a sense of humour.
12. Not being passive but mapping actions to be taken.
13. Being patient.
14. Being tolerant and making a difference between a person and their unacceptable behaviours.
15. Adapting to change.
16. Optimism.
17. Having faith.

These aptitudes are discussed during one-to-one or group-based support sessions through the long-term support plan that SOAR is able to provide for its members. There are times when members stop attending and regress to the cyclical process of self-sabotage. This phase is quite common. In such cases, space is provided for a period. Subsequently, SOAR reconnects with these members. History has shown SOAR that members get back in contact with SOAR after they realize that they still needed support. SOAR then helps them to re-connect with their support system while helping them understand why they needed to go back.

BEING AWARE WHEN THE ABUSER IS NOT MAKING ANY EFFORT TO CHANGE

Research has shown that one of the most common reasons for a victim to decide to go back is because they lack financial and other resources. Drastic changes following a separation are traumatic and overwhelming. Change of school, change of locality of residence. Leaving one's belongings behind. Judgmentalism of relatives, friends, colleagues. Having suffered years of abuse and psychological violence, it is common for victims to fall into a depression and become physically sick. The majority of new cases of women referred to SOAR have mental ill health conditions, physical exhaustion and illnesses ranging from cancer to fibromyalgia.

Typical examples of referred women in 2022 include the following:

- Survivors who have managed to get out from the abusive relationship.
- Perpetrators who still remain in the house, even though the woman owns 50% of the property and has custody of the children.
- Survivors constrained to seek alternative accommodation (often going into a private rental) as the perpetrator refuses to agree to the sale of the commonly owned house, notwithstanding a court decree;

- Survivors who are single-handedly raising children who refuse to spend time with their father because of his abusive behaviour. Although the court refusing child access to the abusive father, the court process took years to reach a conclusion. The resulting anxiety was tortuous to the children.
- Survivors who have to take days off from work in order to deal with false reports made by the abusers to state and other agencies. These vexatious reports often allege that the mother is neglecting or maltreating the children.
- Survivors have to constantly prove themselves during countless meetings, home-visit inspections, and follow ups from state agencies.

SOAR offers support to help survivors maintain their sanity and peace of mind with constant coaching, understanding, nurturing and guidance.

FROM COLLECTIVE DISCLOSURES OF SURVIVORS

What do perpetrators have in common?

- They minimise the abuse or deny how serious it really is.
- They continue to blame others for their behaviour.
- They claim that the survivors are the ones who are abusive.
- They put pressure on the survivors to attend counselling as a couple.
- They repeatedly tell survivors that they owe them another chance.
- They claim that the survivors are forcing them to stay in therapy / counselling / treatment.
- They insist they cannot change unless the survivors stay with them and support them.
- They seek sympathy from the survivors, their children, family, and friends.
- They expect something back from the survivors in exchange for seeking help.
- They put pressure on the survivors to make decisions about the relationship and then blame them.

STRENGTHEN SURVIVORS' DETERMINATION TO STAY AWAY FROM ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP DESPITE THE TEMPTATION TO GO BACK

SOAR Peer Mentors have been through it all. They know, first hand, how difficult it is to stay out of the abusive relationship, put an end to it and navigate around it safely as most of the times abuse does not stop but it changes, especially in those cases where the couple have children, when the abuse will become invisible but malicious on many levels. SOAR has been supporting a number of survivors to leave the abusive relationship. It is very important that survivors are taught how to protect themselves and their children after leaving the perpetrator. Such protection is particularly needed when survivors are still living in shelters or have become homeless.

SOAR has been supporting survivors by giving them the following advice:

Keeping one's new location a secret:

1. Get a prepaid mobile ("burner") phone or an unlisted landline.
2. Use a post-office box rather than their home address. (Survivors have reported that their post has gone missing from their letter box many times).
3. Cancel their old bank accounts and credit cards, especially if they shared them with their perpetrator. When they open new accounts, it was suggested to use a different bank. Nowadays, this is becoming more difficult to do as the process of starting a new bank account is difficult.

The most common advice given to survivors who remain living in the same area is to change their routine in order to minimise stalking and harassment. Follow a different route to work, avoid places where their perpetrator might think to locate them, change any appointments the perpetrator knows about, and find new places to shop and run errands. Another advice to survivors is to keep a cell phone handy at all times and be ready to call the emergency services number when they spot their former abuser and they feel that they are at risk. Between January and March, SOAR were approached by five survivors that are still at risk. Even though we do not cater for women who are still at risk, SOAR follows a safe procedure how to listen, motivate and refer.

The scars of domestic violence and abuse run deep. The trauma of what survivors have been through stays with them long after they have escaped the abusive situation. They may struggle with upsetting emotions, frightful memories, or having a sense of impending danger that they just can't let go of. Or they may feel numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people.

Through the past months, SOAR has referred and paid for survivors' private therapy, and kept support groups for survivors of domestic abuse by helping them to process what they have been through and learn how to build new and healthy relationships.

SOAR encourages its members to remember that:

1. They are not to blame for the battering and maltreatment they endured.
2. They are not the cause of their partner's abusive behaviour.
3. They deserve to be treated with respect.
4. They deserve to live a safe and happy life.
5. Their children deserve a safe and happy life.
6. They are not alone and there are people always ready and waiting to help them.

TRAINING TO PEER MENTORS

Effective peer mentor training is a key dimension of SOAR. Training gives guidance and maps out the path to a successful relationship. An induction 3-hour individualised or group-based training is provided covering:

1. What is Mentoring
2. Personal aptitudes and boundaries to keep
3. Impact of Mentoring on the lives of Mentees.

Many real-life examples of successful peer mentoring relationships are used.

CONCLUSION

The most painful part of Peer Mentors' work: Many women disclose that court hearing delays and a 'one size fits all' protection procedures is demotivating survivors from reporting domestic violence and taking the abuser to court.

"What is the use of reporting the abusive father of my child for harassment, when I know that the Police will be calling him a month after the incident? A month after the incident I would have managed to suppress the abuse into my nervous system, and it would add up to my anxiety and sickness. When called, he would be calm. After each court session, he becomes so riled up that he escalates the harassment and intimidation. Am I believed? Nooo! Why? Because he very well knows that psychological intimidation is hard to prove. He fails to pick up our children from school on purpose so that I am constrained to ask my employer to leave work suddenly. He fails to pay child support in time so that I call him to beg him to do so. Then he takes the opportunity to shout at me. I can go on and on! He wears me down. I become depressed, disheartened, demotivated, anxious, insecure. How can I provide security and safety to my children. How can I prove these subtle tactics he uses to the court. Apart from all this, court decisions are mostly a mere slap his hand! All this indignity when my life would be falling to pieces, my heart full of splinters, eyes wanting to shut tight. The system is failing to protect women in our position, mothers in our position, children in this situation." (SOAR Survivor, having a career but very tired).

(UN)SILENCED – AN ART EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTING THE LINK BETWEEN MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE - A JOINT INITIATIVE OF APS BANK PLC AND SJAF

Through a partnership agreement with APS Bank plc, an important exhibition was organised and launched on the 12th of May. Artworks by two women supported by the St Jeanne Antide Foundation exhibited their life experience of living with a narcissist through their artworks and poems. A video was also produced featuring a team of female actresses who brought to life extracts from the poems appearing in the exhibition catalogue. The exhibition at the APS Bank's headoffice in Swatar was open from the 12th of May until the 4th of July, 2022.

The exhibition, video and artworks plunged the viewer into the unjust and devastating reality faced by so many women supported by SOAR and the Foundation in general. Foundation supports. (un)SILENCED coincided with the European Mental Health Week and its theme of: SPEAK UP FOR MENTAL HEALTH. Through this exhibition, APS Bank and the St Jeanne Antide Foundation jointly spoke up for mental health by sharing survivors' journey towards resilience and faith. Nora Macelli, CEO of the St Jeanne Antide Foundation said of the exhibition: *"Art and writing are truly powerful tools. For us family support workers, our work becomes truly meaningful when the people we support find their 'voice' and express it courageously – like today. Thank you APS Bank for being there for us since 2018. Your support gives us the energy to forge ahead. Partners like you sustain us and energise us to further highlight contemporary social issues through art and writing."*



2022 – RANGE OF SERVICES OFFERED BY SOAR

- One-to-one Peer Mentoring sessions for women.
- Marching vulnerable survivors with a Volunteer Mentor.
- Running of a survivors' online group (by screening and invitation).
- On-going Support Groups and Workshops.
- An online support group.
- A Saturday Social Club.
- Range of fun and therapeutic self-expressive arts and crafts initiatives, groups, courses.
- Outreach work.
- Advocacy work at national policy levels.
- Liaison with other key national service providing agencies active in the field of DV: Police, VSA, FSWS, Schools, other NGOs.
- Depending on availability, training workshops to other organisations.
- Triple R – Trauma-informed Domestic Abuse Programme – training to survivors enabling them to become engaged in supporting other survivors.
- MERAKEI start-up social enterprise.
- Provision of a wide range of in-kind supports to enable survivors to grapple with difficult situations without falling further in over-indebtedness, ill-health, anxiety and mental ill health, and abandonment of life-goals.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF SOAR A NATIONAL SOAR HUB

FONDAZZJONI ST JEANNE ANTIDE



HELP US REFURBISH SOAR HUB

The Hub will be a one-stop-shop for the needs of survivors of domestic violence who are trying to restart their lives in the community. Please support us to renovate and finish this townhouse. Your donation can make the difference help us complete this work, we really need your help!



If you would like to donate you can use our Revolut number 77347791 or scan the following QR Code.

For more information you can visit our website:

www.antidemalta.org

or send us an email at soarhub@antidemalta.org



Soar is working hard to have its own one-stop-shop which we refer to as the Soar Survivors' Hub

The Hub will be like a day centre, open during daytime and evening hours, with access to the range of services and activities offered by SOAR. SOAR will be able to extend and grow its services, offering a pop-up office and library for use by survivors to research, study or photocopy and print. It will also offer patches of the garden for women and children to cultivate their own organic produce. The Hub will have a space that will act as a multimedia and multi-sensory room, opening the doors to a new range of services that will include on-site training, well-being sessions (yoga, meditation, mindfulness etc.) and the occasional movie night. The garden will include a butterfly garden as an outdoor space for well-being activities and a herb garden.

The Hub will also house the SOAR offices, a kitchen to cook and serve Saturday lunch and a consultation room that can be booked by practitioners to meet survivors. Another section of the Hub will be used by Meraki Soaps, SOAR's social enterprise - Meraki Soaps is an initiative that is contributing to the sustainability of the Creative Peer-mentoring Programme.

The initiative started to take shape in 2019 when the Dar Tal-Providenza Foundation offered to provide SJAF the long-term use of an old disused town house in Tarxien which will eventually, after renovation works are completed, become the Hub for the services and 2 social enterprises run by SOAR. A rent agreement has been signed by the Asset Management Office of the Archbishop's Curia and the Foundation. SJAF is very grateful to Dar tal-Providenza Foundation for its support to new gap-filling initiatives requiring a building to house them.

Employees of Vodafone Malta, LESA and the Malta Police Force and others from the 39th Basic Training Course of the Academy of Disciplined Forces volunteered at the SOAR Hub as part of their organisation's corporate social responsibility. The teams spent days carrying out cleaning works in preparation for the eventual renovation of the building.

QPml continued to provide invaluable pro bono professional services. A QPml team has prepared floor plans and a package of applications for the Planning Authority. Meetings and site visits were held throughout 2019 to discuss and plan for water, electrical and drainage services, beam repairs and interior design. The permit application was approved in December.

Once completed, the Hub will be a base for the SOAR services and space for expansion of its social enterprise activities.



APPENDIX

TREE OF FEELINGS – SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As part of one of SOAR's group-based therapeutic programmes, SOAR members carried out an exercise in 2013 to name the things that happened to them because of domestic violence. Members listed the following consequences of domestic violence as branches of a tree drawn on a large poster.

- Loss of basic trust in people
- Isolated because of shame
- Financial difficulties
- Everything in my life was affected; my life went down the drain
- Overwhelmed – having too much to cope with
- Having to bring up the children all alone
- Huge changes
- Feeling stuck and full of anger
- Feeling of utter hopelessness
- Much time alone with my son
- Loneliness and a heavy sense of being let down
- Shock, trauma
- Exhaustion
- Lack of sleep
- Chaos
- Running against time
- Unable to concentrate
- Despair
- Instability; feeling naked.

The women then listed feelings caused by these situations:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Anger
- Blame, shame, guilt
- Fear
- Lack of trust
- Confusion
- Wanting to feel loveable
- Impatience and frustration
- Loneliness
- Self-hatred
- Depressed
- Hopelessness
- Peaceful about the decision to build a new life
- Insecure
- Lost
- Trapped; locked
- Feeling inferior and unworthy
- Disbelief and numbness
- Intimidated
- Anxious and hyper.

What has the abuse done to me?

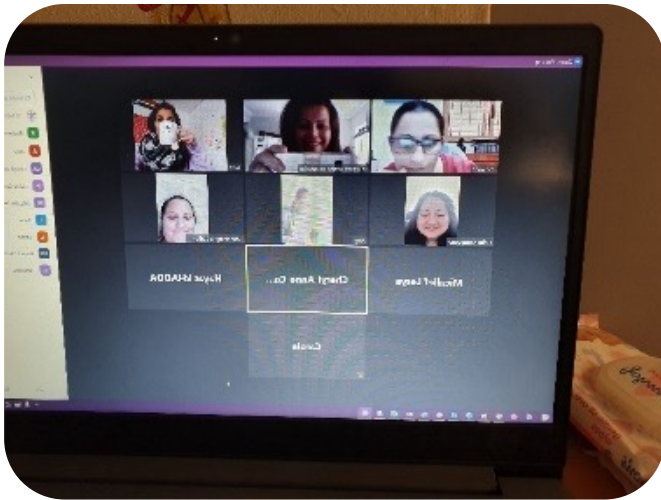
- Sirt passiva
- Traskurajt lili nnifsi
- Bdejt nibla' kemm niflaħ pinnoli
- Naqqast milli nissoċlalizza
- Nirrabja mat-tfal
- Ma norqodx
- Rabja għax il-familjari ma jifhmunix
- Bla saħħa
- Żidt fil-piż
- Dejjem għajjena
- Bla mħabba
- Dipressjoni ; ħadt overdose
- Sirt nara il-ħażin biss
- Kont neżisti biss
- Sirt nargumenta ħafna u niġġieled għad drittijiet tiegħi
- Ittraskurajt id-dar
- Ma jkolli aptit nagħmel xejn
- Ridt l-imħabba fuq kollox
- Inqast ħafna fil-piż
- Nirrabja u ngħid dak li ma rridx
- Naħseb kif nista' nitlaq
- Noħrog waħdi
- Inħossni silġa
- Extreme exhaustion
- Perfectionist
- Naħrab il-ġirien
- Norqod ħafna (biex naħrab il-ħajja)
- Abbandunajt kollox
- Nibla l-pilloli
- Moody; passive aggressive
- Dwejjaq kbar ħafna
- Ninjora u ma nirrispondix
- Waħdi.
-

Good things that have come out of my situation today:

- Sodisfatta li rbaħt fuq l-abbuż
- Freedom
- I can now focus on taking care of my children's upbringing
- I am trying to find a way to live better
- I am working on myself
- Learning art
- Love myself more
- Taking control of my life
- Found more opportunities
- Exploring new roles
- Taking better care of myself and my health
- Active in a support group
- A dream come true
- Taking control back
- Less tension
- Making my own choices
- Self awareness, self esteem, self confidence
- Unafraid to make mistakes
- Unafraid to make decisions
- More friendships
- Stronger relationships
- Ability to enjoy myself
- Not afraid to socialise
- Financial budgeting
- Empathy

- Routine and stability
- Safety
- More quality time with my son
- Inner strength
- Ability to love again
- Ability to trust
- Self-appreciation
- Able to reach out for help
- Grateful
- Able to move on
- More assertive
- I don't feel alone anymore.

OTHER SOAR ACTIVITES



PLANNING A SHOPPING LIST WELL TO SAVE MONEY



WORKSHOP ON SEPARATION AND THE LEGAL SYSTEM



AUTISM-FRIENDLY DAY BY THE POOL



SATURDAY CLUB ACTIVITIES



SAVING MONEY FOR BACK-TO-SCHOOL EXPENSES



DAY BY THE POOL – MAIA GROUP (MOTHERS AGAINST INVISIBLE ABUSE)

SOAR VOLUNTEERS CLEANED A SHELTER TO ACCOMMODATE YOUNG SURVIVORS AND THEIR CHILDREN



THE BENEFITS OF THERAPY



MAKING HOMEMADE PESTO TO FREEZE



**HOW TO REPRESENT YOURSELF IN COURT;
HOW TO COLLECT EVIDENCE AND LODGE A REPORT.**



**MEDITATION - FINDING INNER PEACE
WHEREVER I AM**



COMPASSION



HIGH TEA TO CELEBRATE AUTUMN



SELF-AUTHENTICITY



PASTA-MAKING WORKSHOP



POT PAINTING TRAINING BY ARTIST PAULINE ZARB



DIALOGUE ABOUT PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE FAMILY COURT



POT PAINTING



STORYTELLING BY A HOLISTIC THERAPIST –
COLLAGE ART-



CARD-MAKING ACTIVITY AS GIFTS FOR OTHER SURVIVORS GOING THROUGH A DIFFICULT TIME



PICNIC BASKET – CONNECTING WITH NATURE



LOOKING AND FEELING BEAUTIFUL – THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE



MEETINGS TO DISCUSS AND PLAN ACTIVITIES FOR THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM – FINDING SPONSORS AND DELIVERING FLOWERS TO WOMEN WHOSE SOUL HAS BEEN SHATTERED BECAUSE OF YEARS OF ABUSE. SURVIVORS WROTE LETTERS TO RAISE THE SPIRITS OF OTHER WOMEN





FOCUS GROUP – THE BARRIERS OF HOLDING A JOB WHILE RAISING CHILDREN IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT



PARTICIPATION IN ECO-MARKET AND OTHER MARKETS

SATURDAY SOCIAL CLUB – VOLUNTEERS LOOK AFTER CHILDREN



BEAUTY SESSIONS TO REBUILD SELF-ESTEEM



SOAR HUB CLEAN-UP ACTIVITIES IN COLLABORATION WITH MITA AND INTEKO



KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH COHORT 4 IN THE UK: IN 2019, 6 SOAR PEER MENTORS HAD UNDERTAKEN TRAINING ON PEER MENTORING WOMEN WITH COMPLEX NEEDS AND ON HOW TO ADMINISTER THE DASH 2009 RISK ASSESSMENT LED BY MS BEVERLEY GILBERT, FOUNDING DIRECTOR, OPERATIONS & RISK MANAGER AT COHORT 4 – A PEER MENTORING AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN IN NORTH WARWICKSHIRE.



DURING THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PARENTING PROGRAMME BY THE COLLECTIVE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES A TEAM OF 3 PEER MENTORS LED A WORKSHOP ON BARRIERS AND ABUSE THAT SURVIVORS CONTINUE TO EXPERIENCE PRE- AND POST-SEPARATION.. THE WORKSHOP FOCUSED ON THE CPDS AND CONFERENCES



During the same visit to the UK, Ms Gilbert accompanied SOAR members to a visit SAFER PLACES where the group became familiar with the Triple R Safer Places trauma-informed domestic abuse programme. Triple R has three aims:

- To enable victims/survivors to recognize the abuse and its impacts on them and their children.
- To enable them to recover from the abuse and support their children to do so.
- To develop resilience by building on their strengths and addressing challenges in order to build a better sustainable safe future for themselves and their families.



During the Covid pandemic, SOAR liaised with Victim Support Malta (VSM) for a way to be found to run the Triple R programme in Malta. An agreement was reached and four SOAR Peer Mentors undertook Train-the-Trainers and have already trained 35 female survivors. Triple- R is a 12-session programme with a certification at the end.



SOAR SERVICES

- One-to-one sessions for women
- Peer Mentoring and Volunteer Mentoring
- Survivors online group (by screening and invitation)
- Support Groups and Workshops
- Online Support Groups
- Saturday Social Club
- Range of self-expressive art initiatives, groups, courses, therapeutic groups
- Outreach
- Advocacy Work
- Liaison with other agencies active in the field: Police, FSWS, Schools, other NGOs
- Training
- Triple R Trauma Informed Domestic Abuse Programme



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SOAR SURVIVAL OF ABUSE WITH RESILIENCE

As survivors of domestic violence,
we have a shared experience.
We are trained to support you.
We are here for you.



Soar is working to have its own one-stop-shop (The Soar Survivors' Hub). The Hub will be similar to a day centre, open during daytime and evening hours, with access to the range of services and activities offered by SOAR.

SOAR will be able to extend and grow its services, offering a pop-up office and library for use by survivors to research, study or photocopy and print. It will also offer patches of the garden for women and children to cultivate their own organic produce. The Hub will have a space that will act as a multimedia and multi-sensory room, opening up the doors to a new range of services that will include on-site training, well-being sessions (yoga, meditation, mindfulness etc.) and the occasional movie night. The garden will include a butterfly garden as an outdoor space for well-being activities and a herb garden.

The Hub will also house the SOAR offices, a kitchen to cook and serve Saturday lunch and a consultation room that can be booked by practitioners to meet survivors. Another section of the Hub will be used by Meraki Soaps, SOAR's social enterprise - Meraki Soaps is an initiative that is contributing to the sustainability of the Creative Peer-mentoring Programme.

WHAT'S BREWING

SOAR SERVICES

SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

E-mail: soar@antidemalta.org | Facebook: SOAR Malta | Tel: 2180 8981 / 2180 9011 / 2767 2367

SOAR is a service of the:
ST JEANNE ANTIDE FOUNDATION - VO/0005
51 Tarxien Road,
Tarxien TXN 1090 Malta

www.antidemalta.org | Facebook: Fondazzjoni St Jeanne Antide



St Jeanne Antide
Foundation

With grateful thanks to MRS 135 for the design and printing and for ongoing support.

Soar is a survivor-run support and peer mentoring service. It was founded in 2012 by the St Jeanne Antide Foundation to offer sustained support to women survivors of domestic violence and their children.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS ALL ABOUT POWER AND COERCIVE CONTROL

1 IN 3 WOMEN

are affected by Intimate Partner Violence in Malta and Gozo

Domestic violence is a criminal offence under CAP 581 of the Gender-based Violence and Domestic Violence Act of the Laws of Malta.

You can report abusive and violent behavior to the Police GBDV Hub in Floriana (Tel: 2294 2717/ 2294 2777)

Seek DV social worker support from Agenzija Appoggan (Tel: 179 or 2285 9000).

Other useful contacts:

Victim Support Malta (+356 2122 8333)
Victim Support Unit, Malta Police (+356 2299 9000)

Victim Support Agency (+356 2568 9700)

Violet Support Online (www.vso.org.mt)

Kellimmi.com

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY CALL 112



DIFFERENT FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSIVE BEHAVIOUR WHICH DEGRADE AND RESTRICT VICTIMS' FREEDOM



PSYCHOLOGICAL

Intimidation, threats, incessant ridicule and blaming, denying basic needs, mind games, isolating victim from own children, family, friends and colleagues.



PHYSICAL

Pushing, shoving, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, pinching, punching, attacking with a weapon.



SEXUAL

Rape, sexual coercion, exploitation.



FINANCIAL

Limiting access to money for basic needs, demanding victim's income, not paying maintenance.

FINANCIAL ABUSE often leads to POVERTY.

An **ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP** leads to **MENTAL ILL HEALTH**, helplessness, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation.

VIOLENCE IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

The term "intimate partner violence" describes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological harm and financial abuse by a current or former partner or spouse. This type of violence can occur among heterosexual or same-sex couples.

TESTIMONIAL

Antonella – "For once I felt that others were congratulating me for my courage. They were saying to me: "You have the courage to keep going for each day one after the other. We are here for you to help you put the pain behind you." That's what I really needed to know – that others care for me, for what happens to me. They need me as much as I need them. The amount of support, hugs, love, and respect I have received through the years of being a SOAR member has led me to value myself and this year I will be pursuing a full-time course of MCAST in Health and Social Care. I want to work in the family support field so as to support women and children the way my family was supported."



SOAR
Women Supporting Women Service
Est. 2012

GASLIGHTING

You may be a victim of gaslighting without realising it.

Watch out for these signs.

- You lost your confidence during the relationship.
- You blame yourself for being too sensitive.
- You minimize your partner's actions and excuse them.
- You question yourself constantly.
- You cannot stop apologizing.
- You now believe that you deserve to be alone.
- You feel that you always make bad choices.
- You think that you do everything wrong.
- You are unhappy for no reason.
- You believe that you are not good enough.
- You get confused easily.

WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

A subtle pattern of behaviour which seeks to take away freedom & sense of self through demands, threats, exploitation & surveillance.

Coercive behavior

- Threats
- Humiliation
- Intimidation
- Assaults
- Depriving you of money
- Use of harm, punishment, and fear

Effects of Controlling behavior

- You become a personal slave.
- Ending up feeling unable to cope without them.
- Are isolated & alone.
- Feeling exploited but helpless to do anything about it.
- Unable to meet basic needs.
- Your independence and sense of self are stolen.
- Lethargic, anxious, depressed, afraid.
- Feeling that ending your life is a way out.

"HOW ARE YOU TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF?"

Self-care is very important. It is easy to forget about it when you're just coming out from an abusive relationship. Taking care of yourself can be as simple as eating a good breakfast or getting enough sleep at night – doing it every day is what's important.

"LET'S BRAINSTORM TOGETHER"

Whether you are trying to improve communication with your partner, planning to co-parent with an abuser, or finding ways to feel safer at home, you will always have options. The SOAR team of trained survivors of domestic violence can help you explore and sort through your options to figure out what's best for your specific situation.

"WHAT HAVE YOU CONSIDERED SO FAR?"

You are the expert of your situation. People contact SOAR at various stages of their relationships. So, when meeting you, we'll need to understand what steps you're ready to take in order to provide you with informed support. Our Peer Mentors will never make decisions for you – only you have the right to do that. Discussing your options is a useful way to make your own best decisions.

SHOULD I ATTEND A SUPPORT GROUP?

Online support groups are not meant to replace counselling or therapy. In fact, while most mental health professionals would advise that attending an online or face-to-face support group can be beneficial for your healing, it is important to remember that the groups are not designed to address mental health issues. They are, however, a great safe place to share what you are experiencing and learning with other persons who, like you, have experienced the horrible effects of an abusive relationship.

TESTIMONIAL

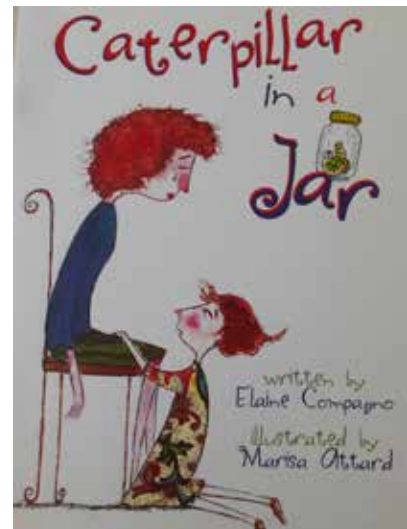
Daniela – "When I went for my first one-to-one session, I felt an instant sense of belonging. I knew that they could really understand everything I went through without the need of explaining everything in detail. At SOAR, I found my extended family as 7 years after my first visit I still meet them often during our social outings, one-to-one sessions or other activities organized from time to time."

OTHER SOAR PUBLICATIONS

2015: Caterpillar in a Jar by Elaine Compagno.

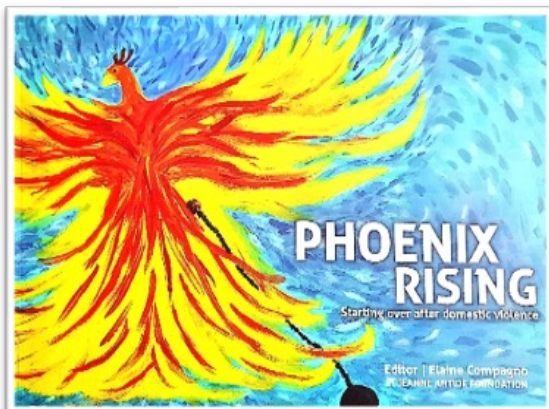
The story reflects on realities that children experience as they grow up in a home where domestic violence occurs. The story goes on to describe how a child witness grows into a teenager who experiences a controlling relationship with her boyfriend and the courage she needed to walk away from it. The book may be enjoyed as an independent short story or as part of a tool for learning on dating violence.

ISBN: 978-99957-0-821-4



2015: Helping Hands Magazine featured 10 pages of articles by SOAR.

2017: Helping Hands Magazine featured 10 pages of articles by SOAR.



Phoenix Rising

starting over after domestic violence – 94 pages. 2016

ISBN: 978-99957-1-009-5

The book brings together survivors' experiences of systemic oppression and re-victimisation, and is used as a tool for advocacy, awareness raising and training. Illustrations by survivors themselves.

SOAR

unlocking human potential



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<https://www.antidemalta.org/make-a-donation-by-paypal-or-credit-card.html>

Online Version

