



HOME-START MALTA



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Għat-Tfal, Familji, u l-Komunita'

HOME-START MALTA



BIENNIAL REPORT

February 2006 - February 2008



HSBC 



Vodafone
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Foundation

An Introduction from the Chairperson

Home-Start Malta – Ending our Second Year – Looking Ahead

Home-Start Malta has just ended its first two years of funding. These have been two very intense years, having had a lot of ground work done to set things in motion. This involved planning, getting people together to initially form a steering committee, then a management committee. We went through the process of learning, meeting, getting trained and training, sharing information with stakeholders and potential users, exploring and discussing strategies and plans. And, in two years, Home-Start has established itself as a service provider, taking the shape and form that it has today - not without teething problems, of course. However, it is evident that the service is coming to life and now reaping the fruit from the hard work of our first years.

It is wonderful to see that the Home-Start family is growing. We started off with a handful of families and volunteers and now, the number is increasing, as more people are becoming more aware of the service and taking more interest in the Home-Start ethos and what it has to offer.

There have been a number of changes along the way. The Management Committee has changed a number of times, with members leaving, mainly due to personal reasons, and new ones joining. However, there were a constant number of people, including the organiser, who, from the outset, have shown so much dedication and commitment. The new members have also shown great interest and have a great deal to offer. The involvement and support of Agenzija Appogg and the Foundation for Social Welfare Services remains strong and now, Home-Start Malta can boast of a Management Committee which is supportive, committed and full of ideas.

Unfortunately, quite a few volunteers left too, also due to personal reasons. However, most

of them have made their mark on the service and involve themselves whenever they can. Sadly, we lost a friend of Home-Start. Andrea Dixon passed away in September 2007. She was an English lady who offered her help and support in fund raising while she was in Malta. Although her involvement was temporary, her generosity was evident and her loss is a sad one.

Home-Start Malta has developed from a service that was trying to find its way around, to one that is forward looking and preparing itself constantly to serve more families. It has established itself within Home-Start International and looking at ways of how to improve its service provision, ensuring quality service and making more Maltese families happier.

This report hopes to cover the achievements, goals, setbacks and challenges of Home-Start Malta over the past two years.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those people who are or who have been involved in Home-Start Malta and who, through one way or the other, have helped it grow. Many thanks go to Jacqueline, the organiser, the first (and so far the only) Home-Start organiser in Malta; the committee members, both past and present, who have shared their experiences and knowledge for the good of the families and the good of the service; Marija, the Vice-Chair - they have all been a great support to their Chair; to Ms Yvonne Mallia, Operations Director, Agenzija Appogg, for her support and insight; Mr. Joe Gerada, for the constant support that he gives Home-Start; our sponsors, who have shown confidence and interest in Home-Start Malta especially while taking our first steps into the new adventure; our English friends, Margaret Jones (my mentor!) and Margaret Harrison, (the foundress of Home-Start) for their assistance and encouragement; Maggie Rowlands for her important training during our very first weeks as a Management Committee; Tanya Barron, who encouraged the setting up of Home-Start Malta, our friends in Home-Start International, and other members of Home-Start worldwide, who have shared their experiences and knowledge with us; other benefactors and friends who have shared their ideas, skills and resources to help Home-Start Malta grow. Last but definitely not least, many thanks to the volunteers who are the backbone of the service and who, without their enthusiasm, patience, generosity and availability, Home-Start Malta would not be the special service that it is.

THE HOME-START MALTA JOURNEY

The Home-Start Malta journey started many years ago when the Home-Start ethos attracted people at Agenzija Appogg. They started to dream and plan and in 2005, these plans started to come to life. Through contacts with Home-Start International, in 2005 alone, we were able to benefit from 3 training programmes. The APPOGG Service Manager (who, in 2004, was given the responsibility for setting up Home-Start in Malta) attended the New Organiser Induction Residential (NOIR) in Sheffield, England in April. This experience was extremely beneficial because of all the knowledge that she gained and the contacts that she made, that would continue to help and assist throughout the following months.

During the summer of 2005, with the support of the Appogg Management and the Service Area Leader of the Cottonera Community Services (the area targeted for Home-Start), work started on setting up the Home-Start steering committee. A number of people, both from the local community and outside it, were invited to participate in establishing the new service. Three interest meetings were held in Cottonera between June and August, with the aim of informing the public on the service and to invite anyone interested to participate in any way. The first major task was to select the first Home-Start Organiser.

Jacqueline was recruited in September 2005, and she was immediately off to Cheltenham, England, to attend the New Organiser Induction Residential. By the end of summer, Home-Start Malta obtained premises that was to be used as an office. This office, previously used by the Cottonera Community Services (Appogg) for a number of projects, consists of a tiny two roomed flat in a housing estate in Verdala, Bormla. It is kindly being loaned to Home-Start by Agenzija Appogg.

In October 2005, with the steering committee gearing up to start managing the service, and with the Organiser setting up office in Bormla, Maggie Rowlands, the trainer from Home-Start International came to Malta, to train prospective committee members.



The steering committee receiving training from Maggie Rowlands From Home-Start International

The training offered by Home-Start International was particularly important because it gave impetus to the process of setting up the new service in Malta. It was through the help and guidance of Home-Start International, that the steering committee was set up, serious planning started and eventually, the Management Committee was formed to start overseeing the processes that were required to get the service up and running.

In October 2005, Home-Start Malta organised its first awareness campaign, targeting both potential volunteers as well as potential service users.

In November 2005 the Chair and Vice Chair attended the Global Conference held in Slough, UK. Such meetings are always important not only because they are great learning experiences but as well as to meet others who are working hard to bring Home-Start to families all over the world. Meeting these persons is valuable and inspiring.

In February 2006, the main sponsors, HSBC Cares for Children Fund, and Vodafone Foundation Malta, signed a two year contract with Agenzija Appogg.

By April 2006, when the service was finally launched officially, Home-Start Malta had an



Evaluation Meeting July 2006

Organiser, a Management Committee, and the first group of volunteers who were being prepared to start visiting the families.

The targeted area was Cottonera, because Appogg had already a team working in the community. The second preparation course was held between June and August 2006, with 4 volunteers successfully completing the course.

In July 2006, the Management Committee held its first evaluation meeting – with the aim of going through all that had been done to date and planning for the next year. This exercise was extremely positive and helped the committee members share their ideas on the direction Home-Start Malta would best take. The areas discussed were the volunteers, the families, marketing, finance and fundraising, and other issues pertaining to the management of the service. The meeting was attended by a volunteer, who then became the volunteers' representative on the Management Committee.

In October 2006, Home-Start Malta held its very first fundraising activity, a RetroNite, which proved to be success. It is important to say that before the fundraising activities were held, there were a number of donations towards Home-Start Malta (apart from the main sponsors). The general idea for fundraising was to be able to support training initiatives (particularly visits abroad organised by Home-Start International, and marketing material). Home-Start also organised an Open Day at the office in Hubbard flats. The idea was raise awareness amongst the neighbours in the area where the Home-Start office is based. Abacus, a local community drama group, presented a short play on the service offered by Home-Start.



Maggie Rowlands making a point in her training session

In December 2006 there were two trips abroad. whilst the Organiser attended "Training the Trainer" in Amersfoort, Netherlands.

In January 2007, Home-Start Malta had its first social activity. Both volunteers and Management Committee members were invited for a meal in Birgu. It was the first opportunity for both to meet and get to know each other better in an informal environment. After the event, many expressed the wish for a different type of social gathering which would enhance the relationship between the volunteers and the Management Committee. This idea was taken up and, in fact, since then, the social activities took a different style where there was more interaction between the two groups.

A Car Boot Sale was organised in February 2007. This fundraising activity, which managed to raise a substantial amount of funds, was seen as a good awareness activity since it was also raising the profile of Home-Start in the community.

April 2007 was a very significant month for Home-Start Malta. We had the visit from Margaret Harrison, the foundress of Home-Start UK. Ms Harrison had founded Home-Start UK way back in 1973. Since then, Home-Start has grown and has over 300 schemes in the UK and offers services to children and families in around 20 countries worldwide. Ms Harrison showed the desire to see what was happening in Malta and, accompanied by a very good friend of Home-Start Malta, Margaret Jones (from Home-Start, Worcester and



Margaret Harrison in Malta – April 2007

Wychaven), she came for the launch of our first Annual Report. During her stay in Malta, she was able to meet the Chairpersons of Home-Start Malta's main sponsors, Ms Kate Gonzi and Ms Gemma Mifsud Bonnici, the Management Committee, the volunteers and the Appogg management. She also gave a public talk and was interviewed by a newspaper. It was a great opportunity to

hear what she has to say – what inspired her to create Home-Start and what she thinks are the most fundamental values of the service – the care and support to families in distress, to help make the home a better and happier environment for children.

In May 2007, the Organiser and volunteers organised an outing for the Home-Start families in Buskett. There were a number of families who had never had such an outing together as a family unit and found this to be very healthy for them. Later that month, the Vice-Chair attended a Network Meeting in Norway, organised by Home-Start International. The meeting was held with other Home-Start countries which are more or less in the same phase of development as Home-Start Malta.

In June 2007, the third group of volunteers completed the preparation course, with 8 volunteers being prepared to start visiting families.

In July 2007 the Management Committee had their second evaluation meeting. This was attended by both Ms Gonzi from HSBC Cares for Children Fund and Ms Mifsud Bonnici, from Vodafone Foundation Malta. Their contribution in the meeting was extremely valuable. During the evaluation meeting in July 2007, which was attended by the Management Committee one of the decisions taken, was that the next evaluation meeting in 2008 will be followed by a general meeting which will be open to volunteers and other stakeholders. During this general meeting, the evaluation report would be presented by the Management Committee.



*Evaluation Meeting 2007 Management Committee,
with Ms Gonzi and Ms Mifsud Bonnici*

Home-Start Malta took advantage of the fine summer evenings to organise a street theatre. Abacus, a local community drama group, presented a short play on the service that Home-Start offers. This was held on the Senglea Waterfront, which is a popular spot for families to spend their evening.

The Home-Start social event organised in September 2007 reflected the feedback given after the previous event. The environment was very informal where the committee members and the volunteers shared a drink and a bite, and also had an ice breaker, which caused quite a few laughs. Those who attended were very happy with the way it was organised.

The second RetroNite was held in October 2007. It was another pleasant evening, where the Home-Start friends shared the evening together with good music and lots of fun. The fourth preparation course started in October and went on till December. Following the Committee's decision to extend Home-Start to three areas around Cottonera, there was a marketing campaign that targeted the schools in Fgura and Zejtun.

In November 2007, the Chair attended the Chairs' Conference in London, UK. The meeting

was again organised by Home-Start International and there was attendance from Chairs from around 15 countries. Back in Malta, a session for families on the EURO changeover was held in preparation for the introduction of the new currency the following year.

In December 2007, Home-Start volunteers organised a Christmas event for the families. This followed a request by a family who had never had the opportunity to attend a Christmas party together. This was a happy event for the families who attended.



Car Boot Sale

In January 2008, Home-Start Malta organised a social event for all those involved. There were volunteers – both the older ones and those who had just completed the course, the Management Committee, a representative from Appogg, namely Ms Mallia, the Operations Director, and Ms Gonzi from HSBC Cares for Children Fund.

The new group of volunteers received their certificates from Ms Gonzi, who also spoken a few words of congratulations and encouragement. Ms Mallia also showed

appreciation to all those dedicated to Home-Start.

During this event, a sum of money was collected to be sent to Home-Start Kenya, which was facing serious difficulties because of chaos the country was going through. Families were lost and the premises damaged. Our donation was just a way of showing solidarity to our friends in Kenya.

Looking back over the past years, it is clear to see that Home-Start Malta started off as being a dream that we were striving to realise and is now fast becoming a service that is relevant for many families in Malta. We moved from facing a great uncertainty to assisting the service take shape, developing its own identity, so that it will hopefully continue to strengthen and flourish to reach more and more children and their families.

TWO YEARS OF WORK IN HOME-START - MALTA

1 . THE VOLUNTEERS

The volunteers are the major resource that supports a service like Home-Start. They are the very foundation on which the service is built. The main principle of Home-Start gives the opportunity for parents to use their experience in an informal and friendly way with parents who are going through all sorts of difficulties and who would take reassurance and comfort with the support that their new “friends” offer them.

People offer their time and skills for various reasons. They bring with them a baggage of experience and knowledge –a richness that they sometimes are unaware of. This baggage is further strengthened through preparation and constant support from the Organiser.

In 2 years, there were four preparation courses – a pre-requisite for anyone who will start to visit Home-Start families. A total of 30 volunteers were prepared for home visiting, although the present number of volunteers is 23.

PREP COURSE	PERIOD	VOLUNTEERS
1	Jan 06 – Mar 06	9
2	Jun 06 – Aug 06	4
3	Apr 07 – Jun 07	8
4	Oct 07 – Dec 07	9
Total		30

The preparation course, which runs along 10 weeks, does not only provide the prospective volunteers with knowledge and information, it also offers challenges – in attitudes towards others, self-awareness on one’s potential, one’s doubts and style in dealing with various situations. No one is completely prepared to start visiting families. There are doubts as to whether the family would accept them or not and whether they would do the right thing at

the right time. However, with the skills that they already own, added with knowledge gained from the course and, very importantly, their eagerness, the volunteers start their contact with families, to encounter situations they may have never known exist. Importantly, they find that they receive just as much as they give. One volunteer explains:

" Culture change exists also in a small island like ours but the enthusiasm with which the family has accepted me into their lives and how they look up to me to help carry the burden of raising a family single handedly and at times with barely any financial support, is impressive"

The help offered by the volunteers comes in different forms, often in the very simple tasks – helping the families keep medical appointments, attending parents' meetings at school, organising the home – the wardrobes, the kitchen, to bake a cake and decorate a Christmas tree. These things seem simple and maybe insignificant, yet this is one form where families find support and feel valued.

They also help the parents relate better to their children, help them understand their children's behaviour – their acting out, their wish for attention and affection – help them spend quality time with them. They help them see their family's worth. This is quickly transferred to the children, who become happier in their own homes.

The volunteers' input in these families is simple, yet priceless and helps the family find just how special they are, notwithstanding the difficulties they go through.

2 . THE FAMILIES

The families come to Home-Start when a significant person refers them or when they hear about it and pluck up the courage to call and ask for help. In whichever way they come, they have one thing in common – they would be stressed with the pressures of raising young children and feel that they are not coping. Some are wary about having unknown people visiting them at home, others are more open and, perhaps, so desperate that they would accept any form of help.

The changes effected by a Home-Start volunteer are those little things that make the family think differently about the daily events – the way the family members relate to each other – the fights between the children, the arguments with parents and “colourful” language used during the quarrels and squabbles - the time that parents spend with their children, the interest in the child’s school, celebrating events like Christmas and birthdays, appreciating the extended family. The interest that the volunteers take in the family’s wellbeing is so important for the family that the family would be able to see that they could improve things - they can be happier together because they learn to appreciate the family life better.

Significantly, the main carers, who, feeling so desperate and demoralised with the situation that they are facing, start to find more value in their worth as persons. They start to see that they are important, not just because they are bringing up the children, but because they are persons needing attention and appreciation too.

One of the families, a mother of six, commented:

"Since I have been receiving the support from the Home-Start volunteer I have found more time for myself. I am now taking an interest in looking after myself and the home. The improvement is noticeable. My children have pointed out that they like the way I look now and even that the home is tidier."

A mother of an 18 month old child, found complete change in her life when the Home-Start volunteer started visiting her:

"I came to know about Home-Start through the contact I had with a Social Worker at Hospital. Home-Start entered my life at a time when I had just found out that my elderly mother needed constant attention due to a medical condition. She had been living with us. I was finding it very hard to deal with all the responsibility I had been faced with. My child needed lots of attention too. I was finding that I hardly had time to plan and decide what was the best action to take with regards to everyday chores.

Both my mother, due to her condition, and child were very demanding. My husband could not offer much support since he worked till late everyday. He

always found me exhausted and ready to go to sleep. All this pressure was putting a great strain on our relationship.

With the help of the volunteer I was able to organise my life much better – I learnt to manage my time better and also learnt how to deal with my child’s demands. This was especially important when my second child came along. The volunteer helped me to show my elder child how to co-operate and participate by being helpful in little ways on the arrival of the new baby.

Everyone benefited from the fact that I was now much more in control of my life. I came to a point when I felt that I was able to carry on with my life without the support of the volunteer. This was a sad moment as I had grown fond of the volunteer. However this step was necessary and I felt that it was time that the volunteer offer her support to another family”.

	NEW		TERMINATED		TOTAL (end of year)	
	Families	Children	Families	Children	Families	Children
2006	6	14	0	0	6	14
2007	9	22	6	13	9	23
2008*	6	15	1	2	14	36

* till March 2008

3. THE ORGANISER

One of the initial tasks that had to be carried out to get the service going, was the recruitment of an Organiser. Agenzija Appogg took responsibility of selecting the person and supporting her until she settled in her new job.

A Home-Start Organiser is expected to do various things and should be flexible and responsible. She should be able to work on her own initiative, yet respond to the Management Committee. She needs to be a good “people person”, because she would be in touch with prospective families, all of whom would be passing through difficulties, and also with prospective volunteers who would need encouragement, support and guidance.

Home-Start Malta's first Organiser was selected in September 2005. Since then, she has worked on giving the service (and her office) a shape that is people friendly. There was lots to learn; we all had lots to learn. However, her position is pivotal and her input very versatile. Below is a list of all the tasks she has to carry out:

TASKS OF ORGANISER

- Maintaining regular contact with the management committee to whom she is accountable
- Attending committee meetings (writing the minutes)
- Meeting with the chairperson on a regular basis
- Meeting and assessing prospective volunteers
- Training volunteers and preparing them for visits to families
- Meeting and assessing the needs of prospective families (service users)
- Monitoring and supervising the work of the volunteers
- Offering support, individually and through a group
- Running the office – taking care of administrative tasks
- Marketing – attending radio programmes, television programmes and writing articles
- Maintaining contact with stakeholders in the various communities

She has a background in social studies which helps her better on the "social" aspect of the work, which is, indeed, the main focus of the service. She receives supervision from the vice chair and support from the chair and the other committee members. The list is a substantial one. However, she has happily settled in her job and is working hard to establish a good quality service for families.

4 . THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Management Committee started off as a steering committee to get the things started in the summer of 2005. Agenzija Appogg invited people who were either involved in the community where Home-Start Malta was to be based – residents or professionals working in the area, or who had experience in the voluntary field. The first committee was made up

completely of women. This was later changed when a man was invited to sit on the committee.

The steering committee consisted of 8 people, which included the Service Manager at Appogg responsible for Home-Start, who chaired the committee, the Leader of the Cottonera Community Services (also from Appogg), who was vice-chair, the Organiser and 5 other women. With the exception of 1, all were involved, in one way or another, in the Cottonera Community. In fact, two were residents, who had raised their family there. The committee thought it would be significant to have the contribution of people who had family experiences similar to those of the families that were being targeted.

The members of the steering committee received training, kindly provided by Home-Start International. Ms Maggie Rowlands, a very experienced and dedicated Home-Start trainer, came to Malta for a few days to provide this training. This was a very good experience and a good way to start the Home-Start journey.

Unfortunately, the two local residents dropped out because of family commitments. There were other changes too, including the introduction of the volunteers' representative. The present Management Committee is made up of 9 people, including one male member. They bring a variety of skills with them. Their interest and commitment for Home-Start is great and their knowledge and vision is strengthening with the experience they are gaining.

The main responsibilities of the Management Committee are to ensure quality service and to guide the service in the right direction. The Committee meets on a monthly basis to discuss and plan events and share opinions, particularly regarding marketing, finances, training needs, to hear about the developments of the service – new referrals, preparation courses, and other tasks that the Organiser would be undertaking. They also meet early for an evaluation meeting. During this evaluation meeting, the committee gets together to review all that had been done during the previous year and to set the priorities and direction for the following year. The Chairpersons are invited to the meeting for them to hear what is going on in the service, as well as give their input and suggestions. This is an occasion where the Management Committee and the sponsors meet the volunteers who are invited for a drink once the meeting is over. The Management Committee is a source of ideas and has to

deal the challenges that Home-Start faces.

The Management Committee decided that the evaluation meeting should be followed by a general meeting where the volunteers and stakeholders will be invited. The report, drawn up from the evaluation meeting, would be presented to the interested parties. This idea of having the general meeting emanated from the committee members' wish to increase the communication with the volunteers. In fact, there was also the idea of having a speaker to provide some training on a particular topic, pertinent to the volunteers' work with the families.

One of the challenges that Home-Start faced was the slow start of the service in Cottonera which was the primary target for Home-Start. Referrals came in a trickle although there was quite an amount of marketing in Cottonera. There may be many reasons for this seeming indifference in the Home-Start from the Cottonera community – doubt about a new service, uncertainty about having volunteers visit homes, while some families feared that they would have their children “taken away from them”. We feel that Home-Start still had to make a name for itself. In the meantime, Home-Start was receiving referrals from areas other than Cottonera. The Management Committee faced a situation where there were volunteers trained and ready to start visiting families, with not enough referrals from Cottonera to match them to, while other families were trying to make use of the service but were outside the targeted area.

To address this situation, the committee came up with the idea to expand to other communities. However, one had to be sure that the marketing in Cottonera was being effective enough because no one wanted a situation where Home-Start would be provided to families from other localities and have families from Cottonera waiting for the service. On the other hand, having idle volunteers was not a good idea, since they would lose their motivation and drop out before even starting their work. Besides this, it was also very difficult to have referrals from families who were in great difficulty and wanting the service, to be turned down just because they were from outside the target area.

After many discussions, the Management Committee decided to put a time frame for marketing in Cottonera before starting a slow and careful process of expansion, starting

with Zabbar, then going on Fgura and Zejtun. This did not mean that Cottonera would be excluded, but meant that Home-Start would spread to three more localities. In this way, more families would be reached, and the volunteers would be gaining, rather than losing, experience.

The choice of the three localities was an obvious one because Zabbar and Fgura were just outside Cottonera, while in Zejtun, there is another community team (Paulo Freire Institute) that works with families there. Plans for expansion to Marsascula, B'Bugia and Tarxien were to be considered later, according to the developments in the first expansion.

Referrals started coming in regularly and the problem with relation to the balance between the volunteers and the families has decreased substantially. However, we are aware that we would be facing similar situations in the future, since it would not always be possible to have the right match and the right resources for the particular demands of the families. It is an ongoing challenge that we have to face. Hopefully, our experience would help us choose the right resources to match the families' needs, in the most sensitive way possible.

5. FINANCE AND FUNDRAISING

Funds to run the service for the first two years have been kindly provided by Vodafone Foundation Malta and HSBC Cares for Children Fund. Most of the costs of running the service are covered by these funds – these include the co-ordination costs and the costs to administer the office. A financial report of the period October 2007 to February 2008 is found in Appendix 1.

Besides the main financial support from the main sponsors, Home-Start Malta gets donations from companies who show interest in the service and donate smaller amounts of money. Besides this, fundraising activities are held. Throughout the two years, we have had four activities – two yearly. We had the RetroNite, which was such a success, that it was repeated the following year. We are hoping to make this a yearly event, since it is also a way of getting people together in an enjoyable evening. The other activities were Car Booth Sales, which were held in Vittoriosa. These not only brought some funds to the organisati-

-on, but also raised the profile of Home-Start, attracting interest of the general public to the aims of Home-Start. During these events we also managed to attract a few persons who asked to join as volunteers. The money received and raised is used for a particular marketing project (e.g. the use of Abacus Drama Group) or in order to attend meetings that are organised by Home-Start International.

Our contact with Home-Start International is important because of the support that we receive as well as the guidance in ensuring that quality standards in the provision of the service and in working for the well being of children are met and maintained.

Through these initiatives, we feel that Home-Start Malta reaches out more to families in need and to prospective volunteers.

6 . LOOKING AHEAD – OUR CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS

Setting up a new service is no easy task since there is no previous experience in Home-Start.

The experience that has been passed on to Home-Start Malta has come from different countries, which, of course, function in different contexts. Nevertheless, this experience shared has been very beneficial. We have had to take decisions without necessarily seeing the full implications, but using our own life and work experiences to guide us. A few of the challenges we continue to face are:

a. The issue of expansion of service

Our original plan was to establish Home-Start in Cottonera and strengthen it there. However, even in the earliest stages of development, we were getting requests from people residing outside Cottonera. No one in the Management Committee wished to limit the service to one particular area only. Besides this, there were a number of volunteers who had been trained and were extremely keen on starting their work. Not having them matched was becoming a threat, because we felt that we would lose them. Of course, we had to be realistic about expanding the service because, not only was this something new, but because we also had limited resources. Therefore, we didn't wish to expand and create a misleading image of the service. Moreover, we could not place unreasonable expectations on the Organiser.

This issue was discussed over and over again in the Management Committee meetings and finally, we decided to start a very slow expansion. This obviously meant that we would need to gauge our progress very carefully. Our experience to date in this respect has been positive.

b. Balancing Resources and Demands

Another issue related to the one mentioned above, is finding the balance between requests for the services and available resources. The volunteers have to be carefully matched with families and this would mean that there may be families who would have to be placed on a waiting list not because there are no volunteers available, but because the volunteers cannot match the families' needs. Therefore, a waiting list in the case of Home-Start may not necessarily mean that there aren't enough volunteers, but there may not be the appropriate ones for particular situations.

A way of dealing with this problem is by increasing the pool of volunteers, to have a more diverse pool of resources. However, this may cause another problem where we could have idle volunteers, with its consequences. We are aware that this is a problem that we will keep facing and we need to use our insight and experience to ensure that the best decisions are taken.

c. Volunteers

The Maltese society is changing radically. Many women in particular, who would previously have stayed at home to raise their children, are seeking remunerated work, not necessarily because of the financial aspect, but also because the common lifestyle has become more expensive to maintain. This means that the number of people prepared to do voluntary work may decrease, or the resources of volunteers who offer their time may be limited.

This is being faced by other entities that run their services with volunteers. It is important for us to strike a balance between the demands of the service and the availability of the volunteers and those who wish to do voluntary work. Many times we are faced with situations where volunteers, contrary to their wishes, have to give up visiting families due to unexpected circumstances in their personal lives. Home-Start normally seeks a commitment of 2 years once the volunteers are selected and trained to start visiting

families.

d. Funds

As mentioned before, there is only one person who is completely dedicated to Home-Start Malta. The Organiser has a whole list of tasks to carry out. This means that;

- i) she can only take a limited number of families at the same time,
- ii) she is caught up in tasks, such as administrative tasks, that can ideally be carried out by someone else. Yet, the issue of funds restricts the resources.

The financial issue is one which we will always have to deal with. We are aware that we are competing for funds and that there never are enough funds for the amount of work that we wish to do in Home-Start. However, we need to work with these limitations and do our best to get the best out of the service with the resources that are available to us. We should also strive to increase the funds so that we will be able to reach more families in need.

e. Quality Assurance

We are working with Home-Start International on Quality Assurance. We need to work on ensuring good practice in the service provision. There are many factors that we need to look into – the level of training and support to the volunteers, the quality of service that the volunteers provide, monitoring and evaluating the work that is carried out. The list goes on. We need to work on establishing standards of practice, since people deserve quality service and Home-Start Malta needs to keep in line with the universal policies and procedures of Home-Start.

f. Safeguarding children

Home-Start's main aim is to support families to promote a healthy family life for children, while being unimposing and "friendly". Children need to grow up in a safe and happy environment and to be protected from any form of abuse or neglect. We strive continuously to place the interests of the children first in the provision of the service, so that ultimately, it is the children, and their families who will benefit from the service.

g. The Home-Start Family!

The greatest strength that makes us so proud is the enthusiasm and eagerness shared by all

those who are involved in Home-Start. This is also evident in other countries where Home-Start exists. The Home-Start family is distinguishable because of its commitment, generosity, and the big heart that it has. It really is a pleasure to be part of Home-Start and we will work to maintain its ethos and friendliness.

CONCLUSION

The first two years of funding for Home-Start Malta were very crucial and a solid foundation is being built to continue to strengthen the service. In fact, the request from families is increasing now that others have observed the positive effect Home-Start has had on the families who have already received support. The main sponsors' decision to renew their commitment to Home-Start Malta, was a great vote of confidence in all the work that we have done so far, and for that, we are extremely grateful. This confidence in our work will be transformed into a quality service for Maltese families. Home-Start Malta will continue to grow with the help that it has received so far and with the dedication and hard work of all those involved.

HOMESTART MALTA COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2008

Catherine Fleri Soler - *Chairperson*
Marija Zahra - *Vice-Chair*
Jacqueline Vella - *Organiser / Secretary*
Marina Mamo - *Treasurer*
Carmen Galea - *PR*
Sara Bianchi - *Marketing*
Marvic Grixti - *Volunteers' Representative*
Karl Coleiro - *Member*
Rosanne Debono - *Member*

Past Members

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