

15 YEARS  
*Anniversary*



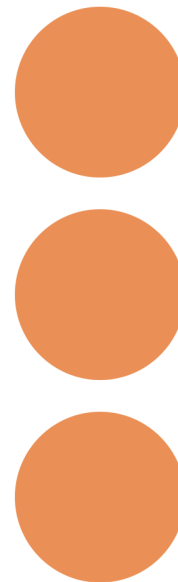
# HOME-START MALTA - GHAWDEX

Ghajnuna f'waqtha  
ghall - familji bi tfal zghar

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020



Foundation for Social Welfare Services  
Here for you



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# INTRODUCTION



This year HS has been challenged with supporting the families during the Covid 19 pandemic. We had to find a way of offering support to families without compromising the health and wellbeing of the families and volunteers.

During lockdown families had the added stress of dealing with children being at home since the schools were closed for a couple of months before closing for the normal summer holidays. Loss of jobs meant that financial difficulties added on to the normal daily stresses.

Our aim was to make sure that the families had the necessary support required during these times. Children pick up on the parents' feelings so dealing with the latter's wellbeing was important. Supporting the parents whilst encouraging them to keep a routine and giving them constant tips on how to keep calm especially when faced with additional unexpected stress were part of our daily interventions we managed to carry out throughout this journey.

Both coordinators of HS Malta and Għawdex kept regular contact with all the families and volunteers. Even the volunteers who could not keep visiting families during this period were being offered the necessary support. This process helped in maintaining interest in our organization.

## Message by the Foundation for Social Welfare Services CEO - ALFRED GRIXTI



***It is with great pleasure that I am writing this forward for the HomeStart Malta and Għawdex 15th Anniversary Conference.***

HomeStart is one of the unsung success stories within the wide breadth of services we offer as a Foundation. I, thus, want to start by paying tribute to the numerous volunteers who have come forward these last 15 years to support vulnerable families cope with the challenges which threaten their and their children's life chances. We could not have achieved what we have achieved without these altruistic people who have given plenty of their time and energy to help these families.

Likewise, I want to thank our small team of professionals who organise the whole thing and keep it together. Their passion and commitment towards the project is beyond question.

This collaboration between the Foundation and the volunteering sector highlights the way we work as a government entity. We do not seek to occupy the entire space by ourselves but we seek out opportunities such as that offered by the HomeStart families where we can work together.

That said, I want to recognise and give special thanks to both the volunteers and our staff for the way they kept this initiative going even throughout the pandemic. Obviously, during the worst months when we were being encouraged to stay home and work from home, family visits could not take place. However, our teams in both Malta and Gozo used the communication platforms offered by the information technology at our disposal to keep in touch with our families and assist them in this way.



Personally, I was very highly impressed by the reading sessions held on-line. As an educator by profession I cannot but praise this initiative enough. Likewise, I want to thank both volunteers and the team for their readiness to revert back to in-person contacts as soon as it was safe to do so.

In conclusion, while once again thanking our HomeStart team and volunteers for their work, I want to re-affirm our commitment to supporting the HomeStart initiative here in Malta and Gozo since it is another success story which has made a difference for the better in the lives of people we are here to serve.



## Message by Home-start National Chairperson - Director Alternative Care



### Remenda Grech

It is with great pleasure that I am writing these thoughts for the annual report of Home-Start as we are celebrating the 15th year anniversary since Home-start's inception on the Maltese islands.

I remember Home-start being introduced in Malta, in a tiny office in Cottonera, a lovely community in the inner harbour area. A project met with great enthusiasm as we began operating for the Cottonera region, from within the same community.

I still recall fondly amongst the first volunteers who joined our team, as they set down for the training, sharing their live experiences and enriching the whole group with their commitment and maturity. It was always a welcoming and homely environment and our organiser always had a pot of kettle ready to welcome all those who popped by her office.

15 years later we are still going strong. Home-Start has evolved, widening its remit to cover all Malta and later establishing itself even on our sister island in Gozo. The concept is so simple and yet so significant, as volunteers are trained to become professional volunteers, aiding so many families in the course of their lives.

I thus would like to thank whole heartedly all volunteers who in one way or another, touched so many lives through Home-Start. They kept going even when the goings where touch and adapted their work, through the use of technology to remain close to our families even when we could not visit, due to the worldwide pandemic.



A great thank you goes to Home-Start committee, who remained a force of strength, helping us to keep the ship together. A massive appreciation goes to our organizers, both in Malta and Gozo for their commitment and dedication towards our service and for stepping in when the need required them to do so.

We remain committed to offer our services towards those families with young children, who require our support, as they will always find in us a listening ear and a helping hand.



## Message by Home-Start Gozo Chairperson - Director Operations FSWS Gozo



### Mgr Dr Joseph Vella Gauci

As I write this introduction for the 2020 annual report, I think of the challenges this year presented worldwide and nationwide. 2020, the year of the pandemic, affected lots of institutions, businesses, households, so on and so forth. Even people in higher social strata became at risk of poverty, let alone those who were already considered vulnerable.

In this context, however, I am proud to say that all of our professional workers did put our clients as top-priority. We were at the forefront to provide them with all the necessary practical and emotional support. We joined forces with other entities, namely the Ministry for Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, the Ministry for Gozo, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Malta Trust Foundation, Dar Padova, Emergency Response and Rescue Corps and various local grocery shops. To cite but one example, between March 2020 and December 2020, FSWS Gozo Branch offered shelter to more than 70 individuals.

Home-Start Għawdex was one of the services within the FSWS Gozo Branch that did not suspend its service during the lockdown period. Rather, Home-Start Għawdex organiser and its volunteers carried on with their commitment towards the service. They provided all the necessary support to the Home-Start families through online sessions and the provision of groceries in situations of unemployment and financial difficulties.

The 2020 Home-Start Għawdex operational plan, changed completely because of the unexpected pandemic. Training for volunteers, activities for families and the Home Start Worldwide Conference were



all postponed. As a Director of FSWS Gozo Branch and Chairperson of Home-Start Ghawdex Management Committee I was looking forward to attend for the Home-Start Worldwide Conference as it was an ideal means to expose our work and to solidify our connections with other schemes around Europe.

Despite the fact that the COVID-19 virus is still present, and hence next year will be another challenging one, I positively look forward to our service provision and to keep on putting our vulnerable clients at the heart of our work.

May I take this opportunity to thank everyone, from our main sponsors, the Ministry for Gozo, the Foundation for Social Welfare Services and the Ministry for Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, members of the Management Committee, volunteers and all other professionals we work closely with.



## Message by Home-start Malta Chairperson - Martin Chetcuti



### ***Home-Start a Tool to Empower our Families.***

Home-start's charisma had been assimilated along the time with the openness of several volunteers who are constantly engaging in a process to contribute towards a just society. A just society which is derived from positive interventions practiced within the home set up. Such believe is a fundamental opportunity for anyone who is working within the social field as we know that our families have great potentials in instilling positive values and abilities amongst our children. Thus, it is of utmost importance to invest and pave the way for our families to be empowered and believe in their respective potential.

Working with the families and not for them: Home-start volunteers and workers constantly team up to provide the necessary support to families who mainly have children aged five years or under. The interventions carried out with the family members are intended to provide the necessary empowerment process so that the beneficiaries of the service will leap towards an independent life. It is thus of utmost importance that our interventions would not be intended to substitute any parental roles but to work together to facilitate a process where in the beneficiary of the service would be able to make the necessary courage to deal with the daily duties and challenges present during everyday life.

Identifying the family's strong points and build on the existing knowledge: These types of interventions are carried out in a non-judgmental approach where in the volunteer or the workers would be seeking to identify the strong elements present within the families and then utilize these positive elements to encourage the beneficiaries of the service. This process is of utmost importance as our intention is to ensure that the



family members would believe more in themselves and at the same time be open to learn by doing. Thus, a hands-on approach is constantly being adopted to facilitate further a process of learning by doing.

Appreciation for our workers and volunteers: Home-start may only carry out our daily interventions thanks to the constant commitment of our volunteers and workers. Without the human capacity of these dedicated persons, we would not be as efficient in helping the families who need our support. A heartfelt appreciation goes to all these wonderful friends and colleagues who are ready to contribute to the well being of people around them.

Covid 19 - A challenging time which is transformed in an opportunity: Apart of our daily challenges we need to face throughout our daily work, during this year we also had to deal with the reality of the covid-19 pandemic. A reality that shook our normal practice and that at the beginning we had to face several challenging doubts and questions. Not withstanding this reality as a service, we managed to stand-up for the occasion and turn these uncertainties into opportunities.

Thus, adopting our way of working to ensure the safety of all whilst providing our support to those who needed it. This experience challenged our thinking processes and opened our horizon so that we would consider different methods of doing things. We are grateful for the openness of all involved and look forward to continuing building innovative methods which may help us to intervene efficiently and effectively amongst those who need our support.



# Support Group for volunteers

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The Covid period provided a challenge not only for the families we work with but also to our volunteers who were also experiencing their toil to survive this moment. In fact a number of home-start volunteers were vulnerable or had members within their respective families who were vulnerable too. This reality had to be addressed through a meticulous process since we were committed not to put anyone at risk during any type of intervention. Despite this process the volunteers of Home-start kept showing constant concern for the families and were willing to provide their respective support through alternative means. Thus, making sure that everyone was safe during the process.



This reality was being processed during the support groups which were being led by Home-start organizer. During such discussions the volunteers came up with alternative plans for the interventions to be carried out through different methods. These sessions involved on-line interventions and periodic phone calls depending on the needs of the families and the existing abilities and resources of the volunteer. Despite this process the volunteers still felt that several families still needed urgent physical attention. Thus, on such occurrences a risk assessment was carried out and eventually upon availability of the volunteer home visits were done whilst observing all necessary health measures. Volunteers who carried out any type of intervention were constantly being asked for feedback to ensure that any current and emerging identified needs would be dealt with appropriately.



# Different Methods of assisting families

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- Volunteers visited the families in their home
- Volunteers accompanied families outdoors
- Volunteers phoned families
- Virtual sessions
- Reading Sessions by phone
- One to one Family visits at HS office
- Donations of food



# Supporting our Families



Home-Start Malta was consulted by a medical team caring for a 3 year old girl who was undergoing treatment for cancer. They confirmed that the mother of this little girl was very overwhelmed by their situation and was finding it hard to deal with the everyday chores of the family while also looking after her daughter. The volunteer who had started visiting the family since December 2019 had a very good relationship with the girl and accepted to continue with the weekly visits. All necessary precautions were taken.



A mother who is registered blind has been followed by a HS volunteer for over a year. Mary (a fictitious name) is a mother of two young boys. This mother is alone during the day as she has no family members to visit her and to accompany her outdoors. In this case the volunteer kept regular contact with the mother by phone but accompanied the mother for important appointments.

Another volunteer supported the family of a mother and 3 boys while going out with them to the park. These three boys have recently been adopted and needed the structure and entertainment from someone other than their mother. Interesting and educational outings were organized to enhance the childrens' personal and social wellbeing.

Another volunteer accompanied the Organiser during an office visit with a vulnerable family who was being followed by Child Protection Services. This family needed one to one visits as

part of a plan to avoid having the children removed from the home. During the meetings the volunteer took an active role in playing with the two young children.

A new project was introduced where we had a kind of lending library for books. The children had reading lessons in both English and Maltese with the volunteer over the phone. The children looked forward to the reading lessons as these also served as social interaction with someone outside the home.

Even though online schooling was being provided by the schools during lockdown, this family did not have access to Wifi or own a tablet. This has now been remedied since the Government has given out a tablet and access to internet to all the families who could not afford to finance their own.

Another initiative was introduced to combat the hardships some families were facing and that was the distribution of essential basic food. HS families were referred for food and received food parcels and vegetables on a weekly basis. The food and vegetables were sponsored by different entities such as the Maltese Government, the Malta Trust Foundation and other private restaurants.



# Positive Parenting sessions



Both Organisers of Home-Start Malta and Ghawdex co-presented Virtual sessions on positive parenting to a group of mothers who had already started attending sessions pre-covid.

Apart from benefitting from the skills and tips provided, the mothers also used the time to share with each other different situations they were going through.



# Christmas Hampers

Participation within Children's Dreams Initiative.

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During the Christmas period it is a normal custom for Home-start Malta to organize a Christmas gathering for the families and volunteers of the service. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic this initiative had to be cancelled to ensure the safety of all prospective participants. As an alternative Home-start Malta decided to treat our families through the allocation of Christmas food hampers. This initiative served as an opportunity for our service to mobilize our volunteers and committee members to reach out for potential sponsorships. This venture was a successful one as through the efforts of all involved, we managed to secure a substantial amount of big food hampers.

Apart of this initiative Home-start Malta participated in the annual Children's Dreams initiative which is organized by the Foundation for Social Welfare Services on a national level. Thus, all children who are benefitting from the Home-start service got a Christmas gift which certainly left a nice smile on their faces. These presents were eventually delivered by our volunteers.



# Family Workshops



As part of Home-Start Malta's drive to support our families we teamed up with the Intake and Family Support Service and LEAP to facilitate a Workshop which aimed to process with the participants methods of positive communication within the families.



Originally the program was planned to be delivered on a weekly basis for ten consecutive weeks. However due to the Covid-19 pandemic sessions we could only deliver two sessions out of the planned program. As a contingent plan for the original interventions all participants were then contacted and offered the possibility to be supported virtually.

This intervention unfortunately was not as effective as meeting one to one however considering the abnormal circumstance, we made ourselves available for all the families who were participating in this process. Several families in fact opted to be supported through the alternative method whilst others were more interested to postpone their respective participation for future opportunities.



# Home-Start Global Conference

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During this year Home-Start Malta was committed to organize the Home-Start Global Conference in Malta during November 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic our local organizing team together with the Home-Start Worldwide committee had to decide that it would be safer for all the prospective participants to postpone the physical global conference for the following year. As an alternative for the physical conference,

it was decided that Home-Start Worldwide would organize an on-line Conference. This was carried out on the 10th of December 2020 and incorporated the Annual General Meeting of Home-Start Worldwide. Home-start Malta participated in this conference through a presentation which was delivered by Home-Start Malta organizer Ms. Jacqueline Vella.

This presentation gave an update on the work carried out locally with our families especially during the Covid-19 period. Furthermore, the national chairperson of Home-start of Malta, Ms. Remenda Grech, gave a presentation at the end of the conference which stressed the intention of our team that during the coming year Malta will host the Global Conference locally. A short vignette of Malta was also presented to the participants of this conference.





# Helpline 1772

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During the first partial lockdown FSWS created a service to help people who were suffering from loneliness. It was mainly the elderly who were targeted to benefit from this service.

All employees of FSWS were asked to offer their service to combat this feeling of isolation. The service was run every day on a four-shift basis.

The Home-Start Organizer was one of the very first to start her shift on the 12th April 2020. As a sign of solidarity with all the other workers even though the support offered was extended beyond families with children under 5 years of age, Home-Start was very willing to take part in this initiative.



# Statistics



## Home-Start data of 2020 ( Jan. 1st – Dec. 31st).

**Number of local schemes**  
2 (Malta & Ghawdex)

**Number of home-visiting volunteers**  
12 (Scheme 1 - Malta)  
3 (Scheme 2 - Ghawdex)

**Number of children supported**  
36 (Scheme 1 - Malta)  
51 (Scheme 2 - Ghawdex)

**Number of families supported**  
23 (Scheme 1 - Malta)

20 (Scheme 2 - Ghawdex) One of the families visited has a child over 6



# Volunteers'

## experience during Covid 19 pandemic

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Due to Covid 19 pandemic home visits by Home Start Volunteers had to stop to prevent spread of the virus. This was disappointing as the visit to the family was always a happy and fruitful experience not only for the family but for the visiting volunteer.

In order to keep the contact with the family alive the Organiser of Home-Start Malta suggested reading on the phone with the child I had been helping with her homework. At first I was a little sceptical but after the first couple of sessions I soon changed my opinion for the following reasons.

1. The one hour or so phone call would start with a short chat exchanging the happenings and experiences of the week in between the calls. Even though we were not seeing each other visually we were still keeping in touch.
2. I sincerely believe that the child's reading skills improved over the months. Whilst reading we often exchanged ideas on the story line and the characters which made it interesting and educational.
3. The family always looked forward to the weekly call and the enthusiasm to learn never wavered. The only problem we experienced was when the land-line was not clear and subsequently we could not communicate clearly which caused some frustration but this fortunately only happened a couple of times.

4. I had already formed a relationship with this family and this made things easier for myself and the family.

5. I am happy that Covid did not prevent me from carrying on with offering my help as a volunteer of Home Start. Although the physical presence in the family was missed by both parties the weekly phone call proved to be a good substitute and it was beneficial for the family and a rewarding experience for the volunteer.



# Success Story

## Home Start Ghawdex 2021

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It was Paul the father who came to seek our service way back in 2012, after his wife Sandra gave birth to their triplets a couple of months before. Sandra has low IQ and all the familial stress was being too much for Paul to handle on his own. In fact, Paul not only had to look after his wife Sandra and their new born triplets but there was also his old mother who lives with them. Sandra's mother used to visit them quite often, however, she was also very limited as to how much she could help because of other family responsibilities she had.

Unfortunately, at the time Paul came to seek our service we had no available volunteer to match with his family. In fact, a volunteer was matched with family Spiteri in 2015. As soon the organizer of Home Start Ghawdex contacted Paul and Sandra to inform them about a good match of an available volunteer to help their family, they soon agreed for the volunteer's visits to commence. Paul and Sandra at that time pointed out that the volunteer would be of help since the triplets were going to start school in a couple of weeks.

As already mentioned, Sandra has low IQ and suffers from OCD. For this reason, she was limiting much of the triplets' creativity in playing and learning. Home-Start Ghawdex worked a lot to change this.



Throughout the 6 years that Home-Start Għawdex was offering its service to Paul, Sandra and the triplets, they had 3 different volunteers. The last 2 volunteers were English speaking volunteers. Despite such fact, both Paul and Sandra never refused volunteers because all they wanted was for their children to learn. They also view the volunteers as a role model for the mother and an opportunity for her to learn about dealing with the children.



Family Spiteri are still in contact with their first two volunteers even though one of them went abroad. Paul and Sandra help the triplets to write letters to this ex-volunteer and they do this very often. The third volunteer went beyond then just helping the triplets in their school work as she used to organize outings at the playfields for the triplets and their mother. They did crafts and cooking sessions together.

A success story is when the organizer, the volunteer and the family agree that it is time to terminate the service. This is the case with Family Spiteri. In fact, when the organizer and the volunteer approached Paul and Sandra to discuss about termination they were able to point out the positive experience Home-Start Għawdex was for their family. Paul and Sandra feel more confident in going out with the children, socialize with other families and support their children in their schoolwork.