



ANNUAL
REPORT
2020

Aġenzija Sapport, Malta **Annual Report, 2020**

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ABBREVIATION LIST

A & I	Assessment and Intervention
AAC	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
AACC	Active Ageing and Community Care
ACTU	Access to Communication & Technology Unit
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
CMS	Case Management System
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CRPD	Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
EAP	Employee Assistance Programme
EASPD	European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities
EAT	Electronic Assistive Technology
EIRA	Employment & Industrial Relations Act
ERFD	European Regional Development Fund
ESF	European Social Fund
ESP	Employee Support Programme
EU	European Union
FSWS	Foundation for Social Welfare Services
HR	Human Resources
ICL	Independent Community Living
ICLM	Independent Community Living Monitoring
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ISP	Individual Support Plan

IT	Information Technology
LSEs	Learning Support Educators
LSM	Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija
MCA	Malta Communications Authority
MEA	Malta Employers' Association
MFCS	Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity
MOP	Manual of Procedures
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAPPI	Non-Abusive Psychological and Physical Intervention
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OT	Occupational Therapist
PAF	Personal Assistance Fund
PAS	People Assistance Schemes
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PSP	Public Social Partnership
RCAB	Residential & Community Allocation Board
SID	Special Identity Card
SLI	Sign Language Interpreter
STILC	Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre
TMTF	The Malta Trust Foundation
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability
VAT	Value Added Tax

Our Mission

Agencija Support is committed to enhance the quality of life of persons with disability through innovative personalised support, expertise, and advocacy

Our Vision

- Equality, choices and opportunities
- Inclusion of persons with disability in all aspects of society
- Holistic, person-centred approach rooted in the principles of shared power and self-determination

Our Values

MUTUAL SUPPORT AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Giving and receiving based on the understanding that both the person with disability and society stand to gain through the advancement of persons with disability as contributing members of society



A portrait of Hon. Julia Farrugia Portelli, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white blazer, standing with her arms crossed. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a flag.

FOREWORD

HON. JULIA FARRUGIA PORTELLI
MINISTER FOR INCLUSION AND
SOCIAL WELLBEING

LOUDER STILL

There is that oft-used expression of “action speaks louder than words” which arguably suffices when it is time to assess one’s input in a given project, ambition and/or strategy.

I dare say it is a measure which this government, through this Ministry, fits into with ease. Indeed, it can be safely said that during the past year, our action has been louder still, a fact which only strengthens our fortitude and steadfastness to what remains to be done, the challenges ahead of us in an ever-changing world.

Our commitment to the disability sector is strictly hinged to promises and pledges made in the 2017 electoral manifesto that guides the present government, but it also follows up on the obligations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD). This will ensure that the rights of persons with disability are prompted and implemented with the full participation of those very same persons with disability. There has been no stone left unturned in our search for better services and treatments as well as for the successful provision of previously-denied rights, a process which happily helped cause a paradigm shift in the lives of Maltese and Gozitan persons with disability, their families and loved ones.

No commitment is possible without a serious fiscal approach to disability strategy plans, and the budgets invested in different ways during the past twelve months highlight this reality as we go on to cement our path to an unmitigated level of inclusion. A total of €954,951 were invested last year in the three Dar tal-Providenza homes, “Dar l-Akkwarell”, “Dar Shalom” and “Dar Pirotta”, while the collective coverage of beds at Dar tal-Providenza, ALS Malta Foundation, Fondazzjoni Wens, Fondazzjoni Nazareth, Dar il-Kaptan and Fondazzjoni Arka for the years 2021-2024 has now risen to €14,256,533.80.

Add to that, a total of €4,057,275.21 to cover service users at Inspire, Malta Autism Centre and Kaptan Day Services.

It is, in the meantime, worth reminding that the Ministry for Inclusion and Social Wellbeing has launched and is seeing through three national strategy plans for child screening, disability and autism. These will no doubt propel more impetus into the Social Care Standards Authority, set up by Social Care Standards Authority Act No. XV of 2018, which carries out announced and unannounced inspections of licensed social welfare services, including residential services and day care centres for persons with disability, based on a set of social regulatory standards with the aim of improving quality and the ascertainment of dignity, safety and welfare of all service users.

We intend to keep it louder than any words of past administrations as we acknowledge this is a continuing story based on chapters that needed re-reading and new chapters written by way of making our legislative and administrative social welfare package a lasting tribute to equality and inclusion in the digital society of the 21st Century.

Hardly anything of this could have been achieved without the buttressing backing and dedication of Aġenzija Sapport and its various teams of professionals who keep a vital and absorbing lifeline to service users, their families and loved ones. There is a special rhythm throbbing within both the spirit and the bodywork of a vision we proudly share and look forward to perpetrating further in the future.



2020 will remain the year that brought about new challenges and new trends in the area of service provision within the disability sector. This year further tested our commitment and our versatility through the new needs and reality imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. We found ways to support each other and have drawn strength from the many inspiring initiatives taking place within our organisation.

FOREWORD

MS RUTH ROSE SCIBERRAS
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The year 2020 started off with the launch of a new Day Centre in Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq, so as to add to the list of centres operated by the Agency and to make the Agency present in another part of the island. It was further marked by an investment in a number of significant projects which will, in the near future, increase the number of day centres, residences and also see the modernisation of current premises. Proġett Soċjetà Ġusta continued to be at the top of the priority list to increase the number of residences within the community for persons with disability. Furthermore, the Żurrieq Residence project was nearing finalisation whilst additional works were carried out at the Qrendi residential home. An additional residential home in Kirkop was also being planned as well as plans for a social hub in Tarxien were also in progress.

During the period under review, we also held more stakeholders' meetings aiming to facilitate communication, coordination of policies, and strategies as well as to address disability from

all the areas which concern our service users. This occurred by networking with different entities, institutions, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), professionals and other bodies, both locally and on an international level, where existing and new relationships were strengthened in order to provide high-quality services which benefit the service user. This year also saw important collaborations with Saint Vincent de Paul Long-term Care Facility, Special Olympics Malta, Malta Employers' Association (MEA), Jobsplus, The Malta Trust Foundation (TMTF) and others.

2020 was also important for the signing of a collaborative inter-ministerial agreement between the health, education and social sectors to prepare and eventually implement a national strategy for the screening of children for intellectual or physical development difficulties, which will address early intervention and aims to provide a holistic service to all service users and their families.



The Agency's commitment is to provide persons with disability with support and high quality services through life, from birth and even in old age. To this effect, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Active Ageing and Community Care (AACC) was signed, aimed to strengthen the relationship in the sector of social welfare in relation to ageing and disability. Further collaboration with the Management of Saint Vincent de Paul Long-term Care Facility was also done in order to proceed with the completion of the Narcis project, which is the first service in Malta that will address the needs of those with an acquired disability, providing them with individualised therapeutic programmes that will address their specific needs with the aim of reintegrating them within the community.

Another highlight of 2020 was the launch of the first Helpline aimed for persons with disability. This helpline aims to be the first point of contact, complementing and facilitating access to the Agency's services.

However, our focus is not only the person with a disability. Our aim is also to support the family within our operations, especially during 2020 which brought forward more challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We were conscious of the effects this was having on the families of persons with disability and the extra support that was necessary. Various services were thus adapted to go online to avoid disrupting service provision as little as possible.





For Aġenzija Support, it is all about further enhancing our services to make an impact that matters

Further to this, a series of online workshops aimed at supporting parents, carers and professionals were also organised. Different topics were discussed each week, chosen specifically to target different needs and different situations.

Further training, including digital literacy, was also adapted and provided for INK project, a person-focused inclusion project, co-funded by the European Union (EU). The aim of this project is to focus on increasing the social inclusion of persons with disability in the labour market.

In conclusion, it is the Agency's commitment to:

- Continue raising awareness about disability services and disability rights. Persons with disability should always have access to education, employment, services, and housing .
- Broaden its remit when speaking about stakeholders and develop a more

consultative process to make the policy drafting process more holistic, both in relation to personal assistance and supported decision-making.

- Invest in best practises, increase accessibility, improve access to information, support rights, change perceptions and to move towards digital accessibility in order to push towards a more inclusive community.
- Protect all persons with disability to progress through their lives so as they do not fall through the gaps of the systems.

The Agency cannot do all this without the financial and human resources invested in the organisation. I take this opportunity to thank all the employees and volunteers who form part of this ever-growing Agency for their commitment that drives us to deliver high quality services and support to the persons with disability.

SERVICES

SERVICE	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS
Assessment and Intervention Service	1126
Day Services	542
Residential Services	73
NGO Services	526
Community Services	137
Independent Community Living Monitoring Services	282
Empowerment Scheme	643
Vehicle Road Licenses Exemption Scheme	345
Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme	124
Grant on the Purchase of Special Equipment	253
Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre	167
Access to Communication & Technology Unit	398
Sharing Lives	67
Sign Language Interpreting Service	95

Table 1: Number of service users who benefited from Support services in 2020

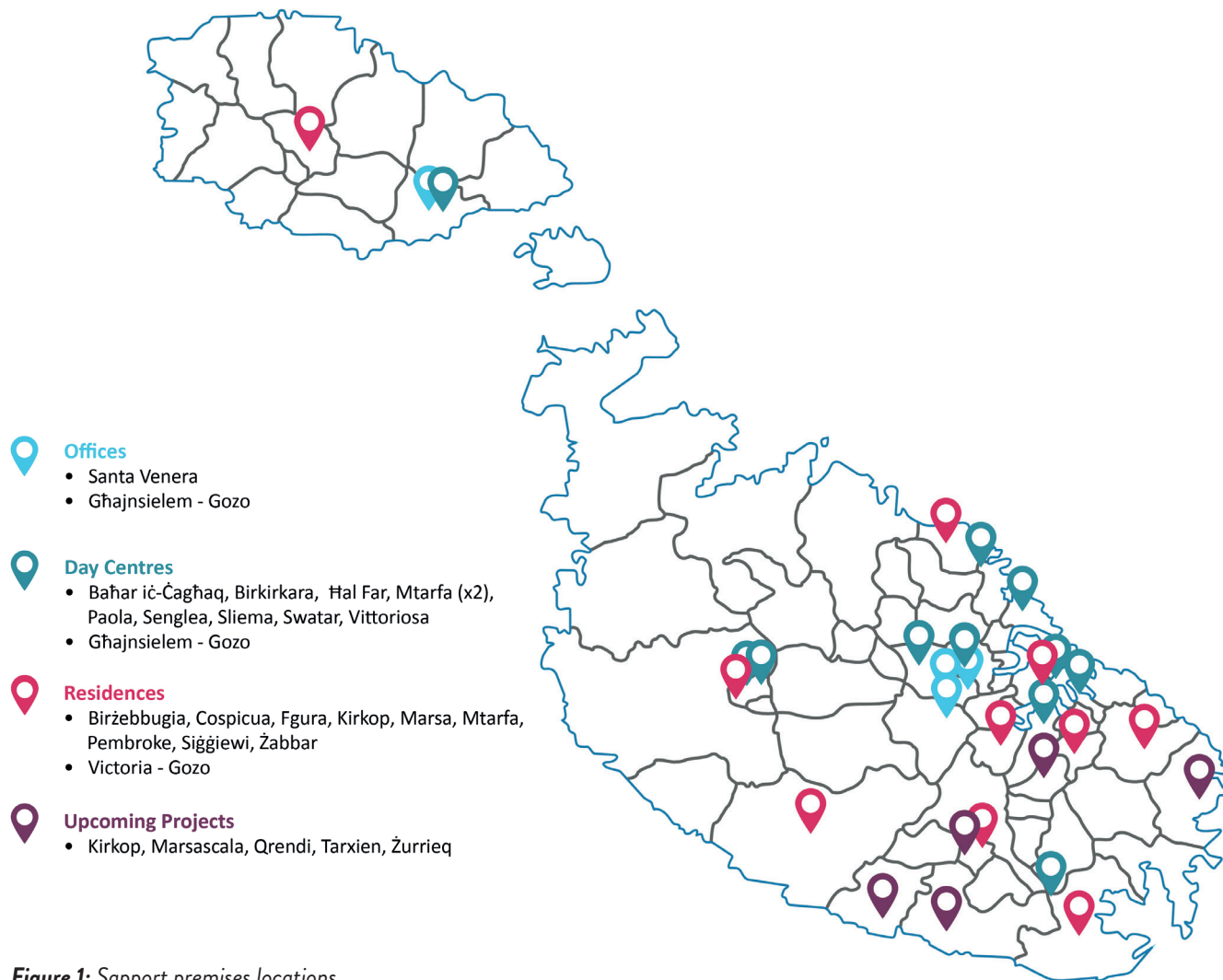


Figure 1: Support premises locations

ASSESSMENT AND INTERVENTION SERVICES

Working with
a person with
disability is not
just a job but it
is a vocation

In 2020, Aġenzija Sapport formed the Assessment and Intervention team (A & I), which team incorporates what was formerly known as the Social Work team. New professionals have been introduced, now encompassing Social Workers, Occupational Therapists (OT), Physiotherapists and Speech & Language Therapists. This multi-disciplinary team is perceived as the engine of all the services of Aġenzija Sapport. This team is the primary point of contact for potential service users and their respective families.

Members of this team carry out a detailed systematic and holistic assessment of each potential service user and services offered differ according to one's needs, reassuring prospective service users that they will be assisted by the professionals in a holistic way. Professionals within this team also act as the link between persons with disabilities and other services, families, guardians and other possible stakeholders.

Since the introduction of the A & I Services, the team received 195 new referrals and in spite of the pandemic, which unfortunately had also its toll on this team, all professionals kept on rendering their services within the community. Indeed, through 2020, the A & I team followed 1,126 cases. There were also 144 reactivated cases.

1,126 – the
number of cases
followed by the
Assessment &
Intervention team
in 2020

The team was also instrumental in assisting the Health Authorities in manning the national Covid-19 helpline that was set up in 2020, particularly engaged to assist vulnerable persons who could not leave the house to get essential products and

medicines. Various Social Workers and other professionals also participated in the weekly webinars that the Agency delivered between April and July aimed to assist parents and family members of persons with disability.



Online Workshops

for parents of children and
adults with disabilities
on a variety of topics



Apart from assessing and carrying out the necessary interventions, the A & I professionals are also constantly on the lookout to seek innovative ways of how to enhance the service users' lives. In this respect, the team members facilitate support groups, which are carried out with siblings of persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the number of support groups had to be limited, however maintaining regular contact with support group members throughout the year.

A keyword that describes all team members of the A & I team is resilience. As a fact, despite the changes and difficulties that the pandemic brought about, several team members collaborated with the Sharing Lives team, whereby a number of workshops were created for the benefit of the service users, including art lessons and music sessions. Professionals also supported service users in embracing the new reality, brought about by the various Covid-19 restrictions and mostly, staying at home. Most of the cases that were followed by the team in 2020 can be seen as highly intensive cases where the need of assistance and intervention from the professionals increased.

The aims of the A & I team members are to continuously develop professionally and to enhance its service provision. Team members regularly attend for specialised training thus investing more in the human resources. To add on to this,

Our service users are our drive to work harder

whilst respecting Covid-19 measures, 4 unit days were also held throughout 2020, with the aim of consolidating the team and build strong dynamics including also the new team members. The team members also contributed towards the setting up of the first Case Management System (CMS) of the Agency, attend our training sessions and meetings until the system could finally kick off towards the end of 2020. Furthermore, the forms used by the various professionals within the team were updated and new ones created thus accomodating the development of the service.

Way forward

The plans for the coming year are that the A & I team will embark on a process to further develop the existent service and excel in service delivery. Incessant work and liaison with different departments are carried out regularly so that the team moves towards a lifelong approach, which will outline continuation between different service providers. This will enable each potential service user to benefit from a systematic tailor-made service provision portfolio that will accompany him/her from birth to old age.

TESTIMONIAL

I have been using Support services since 2010.

I would like to thank the Social Workers and all the management team who have been very supportive and understanding to make my life easier, live independently and give rest to my loving father by being assisted by a 24/7 carer, while remaining in my community.

Jeanesse Abela, Service User

DAY SERVICES

The aim of the Day Services within Aġenzija Sapport is to deliver programmes to meet the needs of service users encompassing independent living, self-advocacy, community inclusion, arts, music, sexuality and general knowledge.

The year 2020 was an unprecedented situation. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Day Services at times had to be adapted to be provided online and at times, on a one-to-one basis. Thus, more easy-to-read resources for programmes and for online use were created. Material was also made accessible on the Agency's website to support the persons with disability even within the community.



Other innovative measures that were adopted by the different Centres during this period included:

- Creation of a virtual day centre in two Day Centres during suspension of Day Services.
- Initiation of friendship calls among service users from different Day Centres.
- Employees continuously held telephone calls and virtual meetings with service users during suspension of Day Services.
- Organisation of online tournaments between service users coming from different Day Centres.
- Organisation of an online Christmas gathering during which each Day Centre presented a performance and service users also participated in a quiz.

In spite of the mitigation measures adopted by the Agency throughout the year to decrease the possibility of spreading the virus, it was deemed equally important that the Agency needed to safeguard the well-being of services users and

families in face of the new challenges posed. Thus, the Day Services' plans also included:

- Outings for service users whose situation was considered urgent during suspension of day services.
- Delivery of online sessions for service users who were not physically attending at the Day Centres even after re-opening.
- Community outings around Malta and Gozo.
- Transfer of service users from Adult Programme to Day Services.
- Organisation of several activities in relation to prominent days such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Pink October, Halloween, Christmas and others.
- Voluntary work by service users at animal sanctuaries.
- Coordination of delivery of food items to residential homes and to service users who could not attend the Day Centre during the pandemic, and also to the Civil Protection Department by Hal Far Day Centre service users as a gesture of thanks for their services.

The operations of the Day Services also progressed during the period under review. Management reviewed the waiting list and carried out assessments of the applicants; the client:staff ratio for each Day Centre was also reviewed through a working group; a new service agreement was implemented to cater for back-to-back attendance to reach more persons; case reviews continued to be implemented; the attendance of service users was evaluated to be able to terminate those who were no longer interested or needing the service and thus being able to admit new service users; various meetings and sessions were held for sharing of information across the different Day Centres; a working group started the process to review the manual of procedures (MOP) of the department; creation and updating of various forms and documents; a centralised system to save data and improve accessibility across the department was created; restructuring of the Day Services through rotation of staff across the Day Centres; a 5-year masterplan in relation to the refurbishment and upgrading of premises and facilities for every day centre was created.





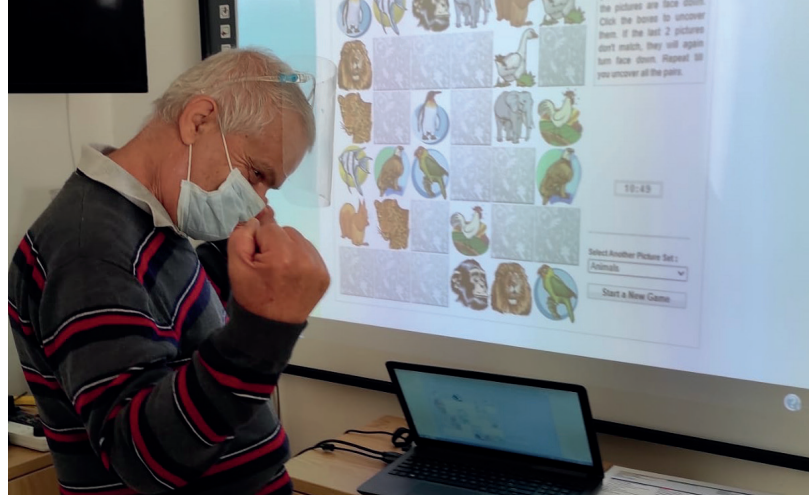
Of particular significance, in 2020 various meetings were held with the Malta Cooperative Foundation, which is supporting the Agency in setting up a new social cooperative with the direct involvement of a number of Day Centres and service users.

Furthermore, an exercise was conducted to gather individual feedback from service users during a number of sessions whereby they had the opportunity to express their views on the service and put forward suggestions for improvement.

Amongst other initiatives, Day Services also collaborated with:

- Aġenzija Żgħażaġh for the provision of training to young service users within Day Services.
- The Foundation for Social Welfare Services (FSWS) Gozo office to support vulnerable families in Gozo during the pandemic, with the specific collaboration with the Ghajnsielem Learning Hub team.
- MCAST regarding student placements within Day Centres.
- Entities within the Ministry of Education regarding placements of students.
- Special Olympics Malta for a swimming training programme and coaching for Day Services service users. Through such collaboration, a number of service users were identified to attend further training in preparation for Special Olympics 2022.





This year also marked the introduction of the role of Senior Support Workers for the first time within the Day Services, together with the allocation of Support Executives within Day Centres and the introduction of a Leader for SPERO and Star25 services. Various calls were also issued throughout 2020 so to strengthen the structure of the service. Furthermore, continuous investment was made in the development of staff through various training opportunities, whilst continuously ensuring their safety and well-being throughout the pandemic not only by providing them with the necessary protective clothing and equipment, but also through regular swabbing for Covid-19 in order to safeguard them, the service users and also their families.

The year 2020 was also important due to the various modernisation projects that took place across the Day Centres. These projects included:

- Upgrading of bathroom and kitchen facilities.
- Upgrading of electrical supply within 2 day centres.
- Installation of more air-conditioners.
- Installation of secure apertures.
- Upgrading of furniture and equipment.
- Works on resource rooms.
- Provision of 25 tablets.
- Continuation of work on cafeteria project plan at Skills Space.
- Increase in vehicles fleet for all Day Centres.



RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

The Agency
operates **10**
residences
across Malta
and **1** in Gozo

Support Residential Services are aimed at providing a residential option to minors and adults with a disability, who for one reason or another, cannot continue living within their own home or with their own family and/or are at risk of being in an institution or already are in an institution. Such residential support is provided within small and personalised apartments or houses, with the residents being provided with the necessary assistance on a 24/7 basis. The main aim for the Residential Services is to enable the person with disability to live as independently as possible within the community. The philosophy of the service is that of focusing on developing the service user's abilities through support rather than care.

Current residences are based in the following localities:
Fgura, Kirkop, Mtarfa, Siġġiewi, Birzebbugia, Cospicua, Marsa, Pembroke, Żabbar, Mosta and Victoria, Gozo.

73 services
users were
benefiting from
residential
service as at
end 2020





• Ages of service users within Sapport residences vary between 11 years to late 70s



128 – the number of Support Workers within Support Residential Services

Each residence has a team of Support Workers, who are the frontliners and have a key role in assisting the service users with various aspects of their lives and to ensure that they are fully participating and included in the community. All Support Workers are followed, monitored and supported by a Leader, a Support Executive and Senior Support Workers, who also have a crucial role in the overall service provision.

In 2020, during the Covid- 19 pandemic, the Residential Services were one of the services that had to adapt service provision to meet the encountered challenges. One of the measures adopted was to introduce a live-in system whereby a number of Support Workers lived in the residence for an average period of two weeks. This was done to limit spreading of the virus and thus protect the service users.



TESTIMONIALS”

I have been residing at Dar Warda for these past 2 and half years. I was in residential care at the age of 14 years. When I first started at Dar Warda, I had a lot of sensory, behavioural and emotional issues. Through the help of the team at Dar Warda I was provided with an Individual Support Plan which was catered to my needs to help me overcome these issues. Over time, I have developed many independent skills which I did not previously have. Through the support provided, I learned to take care of my personal hygiene and developed new skills and interests such as gardening and baking. I am now also able to go on an outing in the community with minimal assistance. Apart from this, my health has taken a turn for the better, I have overcome my fear of eating healthy food, which lead to weight loss. I am currently attending a resource school which is helping further in my education as I aspire to be a gardener. I am grateful for the help that is provided to me.

Alex, service user*

**Name has been changed*

My name is Maria, and I am 48 years old. Here I have the possibility to live independently but at the same time I am also supported when needed. I truly feel at home here. During the day I usually engage in house chores with the assistance of the Support Workers and I also run errands. In the afternoon I have time to relax and engage in recreational activities such as going out for walks and watching TV. Even though the Covid-19 pandemic has limited out lives, the workers at Dar il-Fjuri still do their very best to make our life fulfilling. At Dar il-Fjuri I have also made new friends and I really enjoy spending time with them.

Maria, service user*

**Name has been changed*

I have been working with Aġenzija Support for the past 15 years. I was already familiar with the disability sector due to my previous job, but along my journey within the Agency, my experience grew. I started here as a Support Worker, my main roles and responsibilities were to promote independence amongst our service users to support them in living an independent life in the community by assisting them in their day-to-day needs. My current role as Senior Support Worker consists in assisting the Leader and Coordinator with the running of the residence and also in supporting new staff during their training phase.

The most important thing for me is that as a frontliner, I put empathy in practice and also empower service users.

Pauline, Senior Support Worker*

**Name has been changed*

NGO AGREEMENTS SERVICE

The line Ministry, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Aġenzija Sapport have been working in collaboration to offer residential, respite and/or educational services to individuals with a disability, through Public Social Partnership (PSP) agreements. Our belief is that all persons with disability have the right to continue to live in the community with the required assistance, which they might need, as well as to enhance social inclusion.

Aġenzija
Sapport
manages **13**
PSP contracts

The NGO Department of Aġenzija Sapport was established in 2017 and is now responsible for the implementation of 13 PSP contracts of which 10 are residential homes,



NGO	NUMBER OF SERVICE USERS
Fondazzjoni Arka	18
Fondazzjoni Wens	35
Fondazzjoni Nazareth	29
Dar tal-Providenza	18
Dar Bjorn	13
Fondazzjoni Hajja Indipendenti	1
Dar il-Kaptan	238
Malta Autism Centre	40

Table 2: NGOs and service users followed by Sapport NGO Department, 2020

1 independent living home, 1 respite/day service and 1 intervention day programme.

Amongst other tasks, the NGO Department is in charge of:

- Service user referrals and assessments for admission within NGO homes.
- Regular monitoring of the level of support that is provided to service users within these homes and services.
- Processing and verifying NGO financial invoices for governmental funding.

The NGO Department is also responsible for the implementation of an agreement signed between Aġenzija Sapport and HILA Respite Services. By means of this agreement, persons with disability and their families are able to avail themselves of respite Services at Casa Apap Bologna.

The NGO Department is primarily responsible for assessing potential individuals who would like to make use of this respite service, establish the level of support required, regular monitoring of the service, and processing financial invoices.



134 service users benefited from respite services at HILA in 2020

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Community Services is one of the pivotal services offered by Aġenzija Sapport. Within all the national and international documentation, community living is encouraged and supported in order to enable and empower persons with disability to continue living independently in their setting, when the situation allows it.

Sapport Community Services facilitate this by supporting people with disabilities in Malta and Gozo to continue developing their potentials. Such personalised service targets a variety of needs, which are expressed, communicated and experienced by the individuals themselves and/or their family/ caregivers and involved professionals. Having an essential service in our society enables individuals to be more active, have further access to guidance in achieving independence, choice and inclusion to have a better quality of life.

When a person with disability requests Community Services, contact is established with a representative professional from the A & I team at Aġenzija Sapport. A thorough, holistic assessment is carried out in which the professionals will list the referrals based on the significant and critical needs that are addressed by the individuals.



The plans and assessments are then addressed to the relevant Board. A decision will be taken by the Board and then referred to the Community team.

During the year 2020, Community Service took on a turn, focusing on offering the service to individuals being followed by Sapport Social Workers within the A & I team. Eligible individuals referred to the Community Services are those with social issues that need close monitoring while learning or enhancing new skills to promote participation and independence in the community.



Thus the team got involved in a number of case reviews organised by professionals within the Agency and have been a very essential tool in continuing to provide a good quality service.

Another major milestone for 2020 was the change that saw Community Services dividing from the financial subsidy services that were previously monitored by this team. The Independent Community Living Monitoring team was formed, within the Agency, to ensure that the emerged services are also further developed in providing the necessary support and resources to the service users who require such assistance.

Additionally, three wheelchair accessible vehicles were also purchased to enhance the quality of service provision.

Along the years, the demand for the Community Services has increased and 2020 was no exception. The waiting list was another effort that the team was working on and currently the service is providing 623 hours on a weekly basis. Calls for an increase in human personnel were addressed and new staff was recruited. Having such resources ensures the service delivery to be more adequate in promoting more autonomy and inclusion to the service users.



This was also enhanced with constant training to team members, including specialised training such as Non-Abusive Psychological and Physical Intervention (NAPPI UK), Working with suicidal service users, Mental Health Support, Mental Health First Aid, Applying Sensory Integration, Safer Moving and Handling, First Aid and Food Handling. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Support Workers also invested in skills development by participating in online courses according to the needs of their service users.

Community individual programmes consist of personal assistance, community access, independent living skills, monitoring and intervention. These programmes require different professionals to work closely together and work towards the aimed targets. Another initiative for 2020 was pairing service users together by matching individuals according to their likes and abilities.

This resulted in providing the service users with the opportunity to be more involved in decision making, increase their social skills and work towards self-advocacy. This is done through enabling and supporting the service users in choosing their own activities and at times, even organising the activities themselves.

Community Services also include social groups, which however were temporarily suspended due to Covid-19 measures.

Community Services interventions:

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE – provides direct personalised support to help persons with disability with activities of daily living where and when needed. This support is commonly sought out by, but not limited to, primary caregivers who support persons with severe disabilities.



COMMUNITY ACCESS / INTERVENTION – provides the opportunity to service users to have the necessary support to be able to get involved in the community and do things that they might have difficulty doing within the community. These opportunities also provide the persons with disability to continue developing their skills or receive the necessary guidance and assistance to learn new skills within the community environment. The main goal is to focus on daily living skills, communication and social interaction to prepare persons with disabilities for school, work, day centers, or general socialisation within the community.

Covid-19 and Community Services

Although the year 2020 might be remembered for Covid-19 and the restrictions it has brought with it, Community Services took the opportunity to implement a number of initiatives and adapt to the new, emerging needs.

During this time the Community team remained in constant contact with the service users via phone calls and online sessions so as to retain contact, address any difficulties encountered and thus evaluate how the service can be of support. Covid-19 created more challenging situations to a number of families. At this point the Community team turned its attention on these situations and adapted in providing more hours (even on emergency basis) to those who required more support in the circumstance.

Another challenge was presented as to where the Support Workers could hold their services with their service users. The Community Services team reached out to other Agency's Departments and other entities, and various premises were used to provide Community Services interventions.



Community Services
provide **623** hours of
service weekly

Another reality was the solitude that the team observed in various families, more so enhanced during the Christmas festive season. Thus they prepared food for Christmas Lunch to these service users as a way to reach out and offer further support.

TESTIMONIALS”

During the Covid-19 pandemic the Community Services were very helpful with my situation. Having three children with Autism isn't easy and during that time it was very difficult to cope with all their needs. The Community Services were very helpful and understanding about the situation, I appreciate all their hard work, support and dedication towards the service users and family's needs.

Mary, parent*
**Name has been changed*

Aġenzija Support - the name says it all! My daughter has been receiving this service for some years now and I should say it got stronger every year. Community Services are very important to my daughter and even to me as her parent. She loves going out with her Support Workers and her joy in seeing them coming leaves everyone speechless. This service made a big difference in our lives in a massive positive way. They help us live a better life. Our daughter is progressing her social abilities and physical abilities as well. They support her to choose where she wants to go and what she wants to do. This service also provides me with practical help.

Throughout the pandemic the Agency's professionals also took the initiative to remain in contact with us to check on us and support us accordingly. I do not have enough words to praise the work Community Services within Aġenzija Support does, whilst making our lives much easier.

Dorothy, parent*
**Name has been changed*

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY LIVING MONITORING SERVICES

The Independent Community Living Monitoring (ICLM) unit was initiated by Aġenzija Sapport in 2020 as a response to the felt need for a follow-up system for financial subsidy beneficiaries. ICLM focuses its resources to provide support and follow-up to persons with disability and their families in Malta and Gozo who benefit from financial subsidy to acquire personal assistance. These services aim to assist the persons with disability to live an independent life in the community whilst ensuring that they continue to receive services which are proactive towards their needs.

The service is composed of a multidisciplinary team made up of professionals and Administration Executives, who work in liaison with the Social Workers. Professionals from the A & I team conduct the initial contact with the persons with disability and assess their needs and refer the service users to the Board to be allocated a subsidy for personal assistance. Once this request is approved and service initiated, if the situation does not entail the need for the services of the A & I team, the situation is passed on to the Monitoring team. The ICLM would then be responsible for following the situation, creating an Individual Support Plan (ISP) for

the service user and working in tandem with the service user and the outsourced Support Worker for the benefit of the service users as well as processing of monthly claims. If on the other hand the situation is kept within the A & I team, the administrative section of the Monitoring team would only be responsible for the monthly claims.

The ICLM is committed to ensure that the service users are receiving the most beneficial form of assistance and that their right to a better quality of life is being fulfilled. It values the person's dignity, human strength and needs. The service is strongly led by the purpose to achieve the desired goals of the individual.

Financial packages are approved by three Boards, which can allocate different hours for specific reasons. These include:

DIRECT PAYMENT – A financial package is offered to persons with disability giving them the opportunity to select their own personal carer to provide a service based on conditions and tasks agreed upon between the end service user and Aġenzija Sapport. Direct Payment is to be considered as a subsidy to assist persons with disabilities to manage their selected services.

Services through the Agency's human resources and Direct Payment can be accessed when requests are less than 13 hours per week.

INDEPENDENT COMMUNITY LIVING SCHEME – Similar to Direct Payment, the Independent Community Living (ICL) scheme, is a financial package offered to persons with disability to live more independently or provide more assistance in more intense situations. The package can cover





services provided by a carer for an amount of hours which exceed the maximum offered through the Agency's own human resources or Direct Payment (13 hours per week) up to 30 hours per week. Whilst also offering the possibility of minors with

disability accessing more than 30 hours per week. This service can also be accessed by those already receiving other services depending on the situation and needs.

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE FUND – The Personal Assistance Fund (PAF) caters mainly for carers and service

users who are allocated, after the necessary assessments, a monthly / yearly financial package to subsidise the costs of a carer for more than 30 hours per week of ongoing personal assistance. PAF is mostly targeted towards service users who need 24/7 care.

All financial packages are tracked, and claims are catered for by the administrative section of the ICLM team. The professional team carries out the ongoing assessments of ISPs, monitoring of service, and guides the beneficiaries in any other issues that might arise from time to time.

The team has grown with four professionals who are tasked with taking over case situations from the previous Social Work unit. By the end of 2020, 50 situations were already handed over and another 100 situations identified.

	DIRECT PAYMENT	ICL	PAF
Total number of situations appearing in front of Board	77	139	114
Approved financial packages including increase of funds and yearly renewals	76	136	106
Amount committed	€209,343	€801,231	€1,179,46

Table 3: Number of situations assessed by the respective Board and allocated funds in 2020

	DIRECT PAYMENT	ICL	PAF
Total number of service users availing themselves from funds through respective scheme	95	116	71
New service users out of total number of beneficiaries who started receiving new funding	12	11	11

Table 4: ICLM service users, 2020

PEOPLE ASSISTANCE SCHEMES

The People Assistance Schemes (PAS) Service incorporates three main schemes, which are:

- a. **The Empowerment Scheme**
- b. **Vehicle Road License Exemption Scheme**
- c. **Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme**

Furthermore, the PAS works in liaison with the Value Added Tax (VAT) Department in regards to the Grant on the Purchase of Special Equipment for Use by Persons with Disability Scheme, whereby this office assist those applicants who want to apply to this scheme but are unable to post their application online.

During 2020, due to Covid-19 pandemic, the service had to adapt to working with certain measures in the long run. The service adapted to a flexible system in operating online as much as possible, also encouraging the public to set appointments and refer to the e-forms on the Agency’s website to apply for these schemes.

Empowerment Scheme

The Empowerment Scheme aims to provide financial support and guidance to persons with disability enabling them to purchase equipment which would allow them to lead a more independent life. The scheme is run by an independent Board which includes a number of professionals, who advise and provide information to persons with disability on how they can purchase equipment according to their individual needs.

Applicants benefiting from this scheme would also be entitled to apply for the Grant on the Purchase of Special Equipment, given that one has the Special Identity Card (SID) Card.

The Empowerment Scheme also offers subsidy on individualised transport services to persons with disability who would need to go to work, to a post-secondary education institution, or attend sports activities.



Total number of applicants	661
Total number of cases approved	643
Total number of cases refused	3
Total amount approved by board	€201,338.00

Table 5: Empowerment Scheme applications and funding, January – December 2020

License Exemption Scheme

The Vehicle Road License Exemption Scheme allows people with disability or their parents/carers to be either partially or fully exempted from paying the annual road license, depending on the age of the vehicle. This scheme also involves the assessment by an OT, if necessary, and collaboration with the Ministry of Finance.

345 applications for the Vehicle Road License Exemption Scheme were processed between January and December 2020

Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme

The aim of this scheme is to provide support and financial assistance to persons with disability and their families to acquire a means of transportation suitable for their needs. Similar to the Vehicle Road License Exemption Scheme, the input of the OT in carrying out assessments of applicants is important, where necessary, and also involves collaboration with the Ministry of Finance.

124 applications for the Vehicle Registration Tax Exemption Scheme were processed between January and December 2020

Grant on the Purchase of Special Equipment Scheme

The Grant on the Purchase of Special Equipment provides support and financial assistance to persons with disability and their families in relation to the purchase of special equipment, which is included on a defined list. Although this scheme is not administered by Aġenzija Support, the PAS team collaborates with the Ministry of Finance to assist applicants to submit their application.

253 applications for the Grant Scheme were processed by the PAS team between January and December 2020

SONIA TANTI INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTRE

The Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre (STILC) was transferred to Aġenzija Sapport from the Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) in November 2019. The main aim of the services during the year 2020 was to consolidate the service within Aġenzija Sapport, establish a rapport with the service users and to enhance the service provision.

Several structural works were carried out within the STILC premises so that it could accommodate both the driving and seating clinics as well as the Access to Communication & Technology Unit (ACTU) Services. For this reason, more clinic rooms were created and additional office space was added through the installation of mobile offices on the

premises. Continued embellishment works and maintenance took place within STILC which included a new play area for children and a staff rest area. The service was back receiving service users after a 2-month transition period.

The STILC Services were evaluated and areas for improvement were identified with the aim of offering a more seamless service to the service users. For this reason, a MOP was compiled so that standardised guidelines are in place which guide the service provision. We also worked on strengthening the working relationship with Allied Health through the extension of a MOU and several meetings throughout the year, with the aim of enhancing any areas of growth.

231 individual appointments were given by STILC in 2020





219 new referrals for STILC Services were received and processed in 2020

Due to Covid-19 mitigation measures, face-to-face appointments were cancelled for two months and these were later introduced with added precautionary measures. Driving lessons were also continued with more caution to ensure the safety and well-being of the service users.

During the year 2020, STILC embarked on a process of service development in terms of the physical environment as well as the service delivery. For this reason, embellishment works were carried out, a new database system was introduced, and administrative forms and the referral process in all forms were simplified, whilst also streamlining the content and access to service e-forms on the Agency's website. New equipment for assessment purposes was procured, including new sets of highly-specialised cushions for seating solutions. Work has been carried out to issue a Tender for the replacement of the

driving simulator utilised for driving assessments. This project is envisaged to be completed in 2021.

A new leader for the STILC Services was introduced within the team in November 2020 so further consolidation of the service delivery processes can ensue whilst also seeking new avenues that can be explored to enhance the independent living concept.

In order to maintain communication with the public and Aġenzija Support service users, STILC professionals also participated in a number of webinars in collaboration with professionals from other Agency services. A number of topics were discussed by a panel on each webinar in order to offer a supportive presence and tips to the participants.

ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY UNIT

The Access to Communication & Technology Unit (ACTU) was transferred to Aġenzija Support from the Ministry of Education in November 2019. The year 2020 can be considered a transition year in which the focus was on re-establishing the service within the Agency while attempting to maintain a service to service users.

Main challenge faced was the redistribution of caseloads amongst the newly set-up team, which is smaller than the original team under the previous administration. Thus, large caseloads had to be accommodated. Furthermore, service users' files and equipment were audited, thus providing also a needs analysis for the procurement of new resources, which was completed in the year under review.

The Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre in Hal Far was identified as the place from which the service would be operating. This required changes within the premises, to be able to accommodate the therapists, clinics and service users.

On moving to Aġenzija Support, the ACTU Services were evaluated and refined in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Policies and procedures were updated to reflect the Agency's policies and to ensure that ACTU Service is provided in line with international guidelines.

The Covid-19 pandemic also affected the provision of ACTU sessions. Although face-to-face sessions were cancelled for a period of time, it soon adapted the service provision and started offering telehealth sessions through telephone and emails. Providing sessions in this way required intense preparation and the therapists therefore engaged in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and used this information to prepare new policies to ensure safety and confidentiality of service users. Such good practice was also shared during a webinar by the Person-Centred Member Forum within the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), of which Aġenzija Support is member. 2 members of the ACTU team are active participants in this Forum.

To better support the parents of service users and other professionals working with children with communication difficulties, the ACTU team also organised and held 5



ONLINE SEMINAR

by Access to Communication and Technology Unit (ACTU)

AAC: PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE FROM CHILDHOOD THROUGH ADULTHOOD

Friday 20th November 2020 - 09:00-13:30

 **AĠENZIJASUPPORT**

398 service users
benefited from
ACTU Services
in 2020



webinars in the 2nd quarter of 2020. These webinars were pre-planned by the team although carrying them out online was a necessity due to Covid-19. Attendance was between 70 and 80 for each webinar. An online conference was also coordinated in the last quarter of 2020 with an attendance of 80 professionals and members of the public.

During the year 2020, the ACTU team also initiated a pilot project of Information Days for adults who may require advice and consultation on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and Electronic Assistive Technology (EAT). Information Days were offered on a once monthly basis for the last quarter of 2020. This will be evaluated at the end of the first quarter of 2021.

Capacity building for the ACTU team is also in the pipeline with more professionals expected to be recruited thus addressing better the caseload. As at end 2020, the team was composed of one OT and four Speech & Language Therapists.

An important aspect of ACTU operations is the various collaborations that the professionals maintain with other stakeholders. One such collaboration that peaked in 2020 was that with TMTF, which funded 28 AAC/EAT solutions. ACTU therapists worked to customise this technology and carried out multiple sessions with service users, their families and therapists in order to support the implementation of this technology.

671 appointments
were coordinated
by ACTU team in
2020

ACTU team also worked in collaboration with the University of Malta on two projects, namely the update of the MaltAAC app, which is a Maltese

language AAC app, and another project which aims to develop new access methods. ACTU therapists are further involved in a Maltese language translation of the ACE Centre's Speakbook, a low tech AAC resource which will be available to the Maltese public in 2021.

Way forward

ACTU therapists shall further enhance national and international collaborations through participation in various conferences and webinars. This is of utmost importance both to gain more insight while sharing best practices. This is further enhanced with continuous development of the team members through CPD to ensure up-to-date knowledge of new equipment and assessment/interventions in the field of AAC/EAT.

Another important target is to continue reaching out to parents, professionals and students through online webinars throughout the year and a conference aimed for quarter 4 of 2021.

SHARING LIVES

Quality of life is also determined by the positive relationships we have in our lives that help us grow and become full persons

discover their strengths and passions. Moreover, Sharing Lives also aims to initiate dialogue and collaboration between people with disability and mainstream society by partnering with other local non-governmental organisations and entities. Informal learning and creativity are the tools that Sharing Lives uses in surmounting apparent obstacles that people with disability face in their daily lives.

In 2020, Sharing Lives recruited 26 new volunteers, out of which 16 remained active throughout the year. The latter is a new record for Sharing Lives. Volunteers came from all walks of lives including young students, foreign volunteers, professionals and pensioners. The Agency has recently seen a spike of recruits who are pensioners. These volunteers were involved in helping the Sharing Lives team to organise unique and creative activities and assist service users so that the latter can have better access to activities in the community.

The year 2020 saw the third anniversary since the inception of the Sharing Lives service, officially launched back in April 2017. The service is led by the belief that people with disability have a right to live a full life as any other individual in society.

Sharing Lives aims to enhance the social network of people with disability and facilitate their access to events and activities in the community through which they can experience new things and

Sharing Lives continued to operate even when faced with difficulties and tried by extreme situations like the pandemic through most of 2020. Despite all this, the Sharing Lives team came forward with innovative ways of how they could still enhance the service users' daily lives. The new reality meant that activities were either moved or done online. Furthermore, as physical activities diminished in frequency, more volunteers offered to act as a social contact to people with disability as the online dimensions seemed to give them more confidence and to engage one-to-one with the service users. This allowed for 23 persons with disability to be allocated a social contact in 2020.



26 new volunteers
joined Sharing Lives
in 2020

67 persons with
disability benefited
from Sharing Lives
in 2020





30 new referrals
in 2020

● **113** activities
were carried out
in 2020

Sharing Lives embraces the notion to invest in the volunteers. Throughout the period under review, five training sessions were carried out for the volunteers. Further to this, the volunteers were also thoroughly supported through group supervision.

Out of the 113 activities carried out in 2020, 47 were face-to-face activities and 66 were carried out online. Three of these were exclusively done for service users residing in Gozo. Activities consisted of BBQ, hikes, fishing, quiz nights and other evening outings. Moreover, a number of other programmes were held along the year including Rhythm of Life, rugby training, Arti mal-Ħbieb art sessions and also a number of committee and sub-committees meetings for a dance party. Programmes were held twice monthly and at times, even on a weekly basis.

TESTIMONIALS”

During my placement as a student Youth Worker, I had the opportunity to work on a 3-month programme with a group of young people with various disabilities. It was one of the most learning experiences throughout my course in Youth Work ...

When communicating with young persons, one can develop the programme out of their interests and ideas. Supervision meetings were held monthly, where I could discuss any needs or concerns and celebrate success.

Although I worked with Sharing Lives as part of my course placement, it was also a rewarding experience for myself to work with persons with disability, as they have much more to give themselves.

*Claire Custò,
Youth & Community Studies student*

The aim of the Sharing Lives team is also to enhance collaborations with diverse stakeholders including YMCA, The Brain Foundation, Aġenzija Sedqa, RMJ Horse Rescue, the Malta Rabbit Club, Science in the City, the Jesuit Community in Malta and the University Chaplaincy. Through these collaborations, service users also had the opportunity to give back something to society through voluntary work and full participation in the community.

Way Forward

As data clearly depicts, Sharing Lives is a highly youthful, dynamic and entrepreneurial service. Indeed, 68% out of 136 service users referred to Sharing Lives since its very start, are young people under the age of 35 years. This trend seem to continue from the previous year. In response, the Sharing Lives team is aiming and working for newer projects, which will be launched in 2021, targeting this cohort.

My promise was that through rugby I would contribute to better the life of persons with disability who would thereby attain greater independence and autonomy for the rest of their lives. Of course, rugby's rules: discipline, courage, team work, support of one's companions, sacrifice, resilience and the never-ending attempt to find a solution to bring the ball to destination and the concept of winning together or losing together. Imagine a semi-paralysed man kneeling down and doing push-ups. Yet he succeeds because our motto is zero stigma, 101 stamina. We teach all those who are involved in this programme to reach and surpass their physical and mental limitations.

*Chev. Marco Ortica, KHS President
The Brain Foundation*

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING SERVICE

Aġenzija Sapport offers the service of Sign Language Interpreting (SLI) between Maltese Sign Language (LSM – *Lingwa tas-Sinjali Maltija*) and spoken language (Maltese and English) and vice-versa.

Interpreting Services are offered to facilitate communication in everyday life and therefore include a variety of sectors further aligning Malta with the UNCPRD.

These sectors include (but are not limited to) education, employment, health, law and court, social and leisure activities. This service is available to hearing-impaired individuals and for individuals and entities who would like to make their services or events more accessible to service users.



Photo - DOI - Reuben Piscopo

Offering a personalised service to all the service users, each Sign Language Interpreter takes time to understand the context where interpretation is required to ensure the highest service user satisfaction. For every hour of service offered, at least one hour is required for preparation and several hours dedicated to learning new subjects to best support persons in furthering their education, communicating and enhancing inclusion within society.

The Interpreters also meet with Deaf researchers to assist in developing the language further and individuals to develop new signs to explain specific terminology during their appointments which may not yet have been added to the LSM dictionary¹. Ongoing professional development is essential, requiring the interpreters to ensure they are up to date with the local development of LSM and international standards for SLI. In fact, during the year under review, the interpreters completed around 130 hours each in professional development being part of their Postgraduate Diploma and other webinars.

The demands for service continue to be made with the increased media presence and acknowledgment for the need of accessible media, schooling and services.

The Sign Language Interpreters have provided approximately 3588 contact hours of interpreting service to persons in 2020. Of these, 2407 hours of interpreting services were provided to 16 students in 14 different schools/colleges during lessons, exams, school meetings and course work.

In total, 597 appointments were attended by the Interpreters in 2020 for adult service users during medical, court or legal appointments, employment-related events, courses, NGOs, personal appointments (such as banking or job interviews) and filming for entities wishing to make their videos more accessible. Of these, 130 appointments were related to Covid-19 media briefings/communication.

Interpreting service has also been provided to service users wishing to participate in opportunities which may otherwise not be accessible, including projects and conferences – both locally and online.

597 appointments
were attended by
the Interpreters
in 2020

¹ <https://mlrs.research.um.edu.mt/resources/lsm>

Highlights of 2020

- Sign Language Interpreters interpreted the Covid-19 briefings conducted by the Superintendent of Public Health, as well as other Covid-19 related conferences organised by the Ministry of Health and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). On occasions, the interpreters were also asked to interpret important printed material regarding mitigation measures for the Deaf community.



- During the Covid-19 pandemic, many interpreting services were requested to shift online. Since this is a specialised way of working, interpreters sought online training and webinars to improve their practices. Resources necessary for online interpreting were provided by Aġenzija Support to provide a seamless transition to this dynamic service.
- During March-June 2020 (when schools closed) remote interpreting was provided for online learning and the interpreters also provided support to students, Learning Support Educators (LSEs) and parents who had little or no LSM resources for home-schooling/online learning. When the new scholastic year started in October 2020, interpreters discussed safe ways of providing interpreting in schools which were teaching in-person while online interpreting was provided for those doing remote learning.

- During 2020, the long-standing need for LSM resources for students was highlighted mainly brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. Having less travelling time, the interpreters created resources such as videos and presentations to support students and LSEs. To accommodate these emerging needs, the Agency invested in the necessary resources such as tablets, tripods and backdrops enabling professional productions for the service users.
- Online group sessions were organised for students during the summer and another session in their Christmas recess. The aim was to support their development of LSM skills, provide accessible age-appropriate educational activities and also an opportunity for the students to socialise in their natural language with their peers even if this could only be done online due to Covid-19 mitigation measures.
- Interpreting for the collaborative Banoffee Erasmus+ project went online as travel abroad was not possible.
- Four of the five Sign Language Interpreters enrolled in the Postgraduate Diploma in Sign Language Interpreting and graduated in November 2020.

Way forward

In 2021 the interpreting team will continue to further develop their abilities and skills to better provide for the increasing demand for the service.

Projects in the pipeline include developing more LSM resources for children and adults, as well as collaborations with other entities to become accessible, including heritage and nature sites.

TESTIMONIALS”

I want to thank the team for their constant commitment during Covid-19 briefings. They took our suggestions to have a bigger interpreting box and blue background and passed these suggestions to the relevant personnel. We are grateful that our needs were addressed to. The interpreters learnt quickly how to adapt to remote interpreting considering this kind of interpreting was barely used before.

Loran, service user

Although 2020 was a difficult year for everyone, the interpreting service kept on going without any interruption. The service is always top notch and the interpreters do their best to teach our children and to support us parents.

Rosalie, parent of service users

I was glad to see the LSM interpreters working to interpret the Covid-19 briefings and press conferences. I am also pleased to have the option of a remote interpreting service as it is often more convenient. This year I have also found it useful to be able to request document translations.

Steven, service user

Due to Covid-19, I could not meet the interpreter in person. However, the interpreters supported me with remote interpreting when I had work training. I understood everything just as if the interpreter was present. They were always efficient and supportive during my work meetings.

Alexia, service user

PROJECTS & ESTATE MANAGEMENT

Our mission
is to provide
quality project
management that
will enhance the
quality of life of
our service users
and the Agency's
personnel

The year 2020 presented a number of challenges also to the Projects and Estate Management team. This affected the scheduling of projects which due to the pandemic and changes in way of operating, resulted in rescheduling of certain projects. This period also brought with it other changes such as the change in architects overseeing and managing a number of projects.

That said and notwithstanding the above, the Projects Office maintained at its best of the circumstances throughout the year and in line with its mission, in providing quality service by addressing requests for maintenance interventions and implement project infrastructure as can be noted below.

Progett Socjetà Ġusta

The implementation of the Electoral Manifesto Proposal 07.070 – Progett Socjetà Ġusta – falls under the responsibility of Aġenzija Sapport. The Agency is tasked with the construction and development of new residential homes for persons with disability within the community in accordance with highest international and CRPD guidelines.



€796,000 –
the contract
value for Żurrieq
Residence

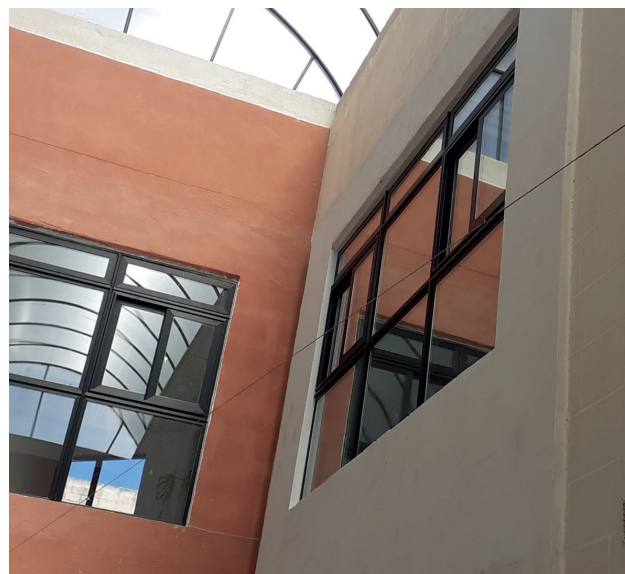
During year 2020, the team successfully completed the Żurrieq Residence project. This will offer a residential placement to 11 persons with disability. The building

is spread over 3 floors, housing separate living quarters and personal spaces for the residents, office area, and also a multidisciplinary area for training of staff and persons with disability.

Works have been undergoing on another residence in Qrendi. This will host 9 persons with disability and will apply the same concept of the Żurrieq Residence, with separate living quarters on each of the four floors. The Agency also successfully negotiated with the Planning Authority and Transport Malta for the acquisition of adjacent land which will be used as a recreational outdoor area.

€950,000 –
the contract
value for Qrendi
Residence

€1m – the
contract value
for Kirkop
Residence



DAY CENTRE	WORKS	TOTAL COST
Mtarfa Day Centre	Refurbishment of the independent living area and adjacent unit including plastering, painting, installing new apertures, sealing membrane, new furniture, replacement of airconditioning units	€47,804
Swatar Day Centre	Retiling of bathroom and refurbishment, installation of fire doors	€18,819
Gwardjola Day Centre	Upgrading the electricity supply from single to 3 phase, installation of new electricity fittings, upgrading of electricity wiring, installation of airconditioning unit, new staff lockers	€24,275
Fleur de Lys Day Centre	Refurbishment of bathroom, plastering and painting, installation of shelving systems, new catering equipment	€17,056
Hal Far Day Centre	Installation of 3 phase electricity supply, re-wiring of electricity system, plastering and painting works of indoor and outdoor areas, refurbishment of units including widening of doors, installation of new apertures and dome skylights, removal and replacement of damaged roof slabs, retiling works, embellishment of the outdoor area	€94,600
Mtarfa Resource Centre	Replacement of balconies and installation of new apertures	€ 11,820

Table 6: Works done in Support Day Centres, 2020

Another project will see the building of a 4-storey corner apartment. The Kirkop project is aimed at being a residential setting that will not only provide support to 9 service users but more importantly serve as a means of training centre to slowly transition service users into independent or supported living into the community. The programme will assess and train the service user to acquire skills relating to independent living. This building will include residential units, counselling and multipurpose rooms.

Modernisation and upgrading of day centres

Electoral Manifesto Proposal 07.078 – Modernisation of Day Centres – is another EMP that has been tasked to Aġenzija Sapport to upgrade the Agency's day centres spread around Malta and Gozo to present a more modern environment for the service users. The Projects team together with the Day Services Management identified those Centres which require the necessary upgrades, involving a needs analysis exercise, preparing plans and technical specifications, issuing of Tenders and requests for quotations and thereafter implementation of refurbishment works.

Minor projects

During the year under review, the Projects & Estate Management team also carried out various minor projects, primarily in either executing full refurbishment of the residential homes or semi-refurbishment works.

Other works

During 2020, an exercise to refurbish the Agency's Head Office was carried out. This included a new set up for new offices in all floors, the setting up of a new meeting room within the reception area, painting of the premises, new office furniture, installation of a roller shutter and aluminium



€60,390 –
total funding for
maintenance works
in 2020

apertures, and the installation of new airconditioners. This project entailed the cost of €41,226. A further €65,659 were dedicated for embellishment works at STILC in Hal Far, including investment in new equipment.

Maintenance interventions

In spite of the Covid-19 situation and the disruptions caused by the pandemic, the team still undertook various works in the various Sapport premises. The number of interventions by the Maintenance team during 2020 amounted to 887 jobs. Such works included complete refurbishment and upkeep of areas within residences and day centres, general maintenance tasks, electrical and plumbing projects and servicing of equipment.

Out of the **887** completed interventions

- **407** were carried out in residences
- **382** at day centres
- **129** at the various Sapport offices

RESIDENCE	WORKS	TOTAL COST
Dar Orchidea, Siggiewi	Full refurbishment of the home involving complete plastering indoor and outdoor areas, new furniture, installation of staff bathroom	€22,893
Villino Maria, Mtarfa	Extensive works in basement level, installation of additional bathroom and bedroom	€45,252
Dar il-Fjuri, Gozo	Extensive maintenance works on all balconies and construction of staff bathroom	€17,367
Dar Warda, Pembroke	Installation of security gates and apertures, refurbishment and upgrading of all bathrooms, plastering and painting of premises	€19,323
Dar Iris, Zabbar	Refurbishment and upgrading of all service users' bathrooms and installation of staff bathroom	€18,332
B'Bugia Residence	Retiling, plastering and painting works and installation of new furniture	€13,980
Fgura Residence	Extensive plastering and painting works, installation of new mineral fibre soffit including light fittings and health & safety installations	€8,915
Kirkop Residence	Extensive plastering and painting works, bathroom retiling and refurbishment	€8,339

Table 7: Works done in Sapport Residences, 2020

Way forward

Upcoming projects for 2021 include:

- **Residences:** the completion of the Qrendi Residence and also the commencement of the civil works at the Kirkop site for the new residence.
- **Tarxien Social Hub:** starting phase 1 of works on this joint project between the Ministry for Inclusion and Social Well-being and the Ministry for Senior Citizens and Active Ageing, from where services will be provided to persons with disability and the elderly.
- **Vajrita Complex:** following the publication of Tender and subject to successful adjudication, demolition works are planned to commence at the Vajrita complex in Marsascale. The process will also include revision and approval of plans, and the preparation and publication of Tenders.
- **Mtarfa Day Centre:** phase 1 of civil works to commence subject to successful adjudication of the Tender, followed by drafting of other Tenders and also architectural plans for phase 2 of works.
- **Sonia Tanti Independent Living Centre:** construction of an additional floor to create more office space for clinical assessments, as well as meeting and counselling rooms.
- **Dar Andrew, Bormla:** civil works including construction of washroom, replacing apertures, construction of stairwell, plastering and painting of premises.
- **Fire Alarm Detection System:** installation and commissioning of nine fire detection systems in eight day centres and one for the Head Office.
- **Bathrooms:** refurbishment of six day centre bathrooms, replacement of apertures.
- **CCTV Installation:** installation and commissioning of CCTV equipment in nine day centres and in ten residences.
- **Kitchens:** phase 1 of replacement of kitchens in day centres and residences.
- **Reverse Osmosis:** installation of eighteen reverse osmosis in residences.



- **Airconditioners:** gradual exercise to replace non-efficient airconditioners in all Agency premises.
- **Day Centres Refurbishment:** refurbishment and embellishment projects to be carried out in the day centres of Bahar iċ-Ċagħaq, Ġħajnsielem Learning Hub, Mtarfa, Swatar, Cottonera and Hal Far.
- **Residences Refurbishment:** refurbishment works to be carried out at Dar il-Fjuri in Gozo, Villino Marija in Mtarfa, B'Bugia Residence and Dar Warda in Pembroke.
- **Maintenance Workshop/Store:** workshop and store for the Projects & Maintenance team.

Other initiatives

MANUAL OF PROCEDURES - During the year 2020, the Projects & Estate Management Office embarked on establishing its MOP which serves as a means of reference on what is required and how arising circumstances should be addressed. It will also serve as a point of reference for newly recruited employees with the team. The MOP is detailed for each responsibility of the Department.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE POLICY - Another initiative taken by the Projects team was the setting up of a Preventive Maintenance Policy, which provides guidelines not just to the Projects & Maintenance team, but also to the Leaders and Coordinators of the respective day centres and residences to take care of assets under their responsibility.

HUMAN RESOURCES PEOPLE MANAGEMENT & EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

The remit of the People Management and Employee Well-being Department, also known as Human Resources (HR) Department, includes recruitment and selection, payroll and data management, training and development, employee relations and people management. It also encompasses a more holistic function including the area of employee well-being and staff engagement.

The year 2020 has brought about different challenges as a result of the pandemic. In close collaboration with other departments and teams, the HR Department managed to, and continues to, address such challenges. Throughout the pandemic, the Agency has also explored different options and ensured that all work process continued, in order to provide a good quality service to its service users. It also strived to continue enhancing the skills and knowledge of its employees by offering online training. By the end of 2020, this Department had eleven employees working on different

aspects related to the field of HR, which contributed somehow towards achieving the aims of the Agency.

Recruitment

Total male employees	130
Total female employees	443
TOTAL	573

Table 8: Support staff complement as at 31st December 2020

As a public sector entity, the Agency follows the provisions of Directive 7 with regards to recruitment processes. Moreover, guidelines and best practices issued by the People and Standards Division and the Public Service Commission are adopted to ensure fair and transparent processes based on the principle of meritocracy.

47 calls were
issued between
January and
December 2020

11 expressions of
interest were issued
between January and
December 2020

OCCUPATION	MALE	FEMALE	TOTALS
Administrative Support Worker	0	2	2
Executive I (Helpline Officer)	0	2	2
Executive II (Finance)	1	0	1
Director	0	1	1
Managers	0	3	3
Part-Time Support Workers	1	10	11
Full-Time Support Workers	3	7	10
Senior Executive I (Personal Assistant)	0	1	1
Senior Executive I (CEO Office)	0	1	1
Senior Practitioner I (Physiotherapist)	0	1	1
Social Worker I	1	3	4
Executive III (Support Executive)	1	5	6
Executive III (Speech & Language Pathologist)	0	2	2
Senior Practitioner I (Speech & Language Pathologist)	0	1	1
Executive IV (Support Executive)	0	6	6
Driver/General Duties II	3	0	3
TOTALS	9	46	55

Table 9: Internal and external calls (including replacements), January – December 2020

Other initiatives

1. Standardisation of HR forms and Employee Handbook

Throughout 2020, the HR Department worked on the standardisation of work-life measures forms. Most of the forms were officially launched in 2020, whilst the remaining forms will be officially launched during the year 2021.

During 2020, the HR Department also worked on producing an Employee Handbook which will serve as an important guide for both new employees as well as those who are already working within the Agency. Whilst introducing the various departments within the Agency, the handbook mostly focuses on areas such as work conditions within the Agency, family-friendly measures, work-life balance measures, policies and memos, access to training, and employee well-being. The purpose of the handbook is to ensure that employees are well-informed about aspects of employment as well as about their rights and obligations.

2. Outreach meetings and consultation processes

During the period under review, when the world was faced with a pandemic, the HR team were involved in an outreach visit at a sixth form. In addition, the HR team held a number of online meetings with most of the Support Day Centres and some of the Residential Services. Through such meetings the Department reached out and listened to the employees and provided a forum of open dialogue and discussion.

3. Employee Well-being

The Agency, through the People Management and Employee Well-being Department, provides psychological assistance to employees going through personal and work-related issues. These schemes include the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) and the Employee Support Programme (ESP). Employees benefiting from such assistance have given positive feedback about the scheme.

4. Training and Development

Throughout the period under review, the Department coordinated and organised a number of training initiatives, in order to cater for the Agency's training needs. Thus, investing in human resources development.



TRAINING NAME	TRAINER	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Easy-to-read Training	Internal – Marketing team	37
Photography Training	Internal – Marketing team	22
EASPD Webinars	EASPD	45
Automated External Defibrillator Training	Technoline	37
Induction Training	Internal	13
First Aid	Jobsplus	26
Moving and Handling	Mr Franco Davies	182
Sex Education for Persons with Intellectual Disability	University of Malta	17
Food Handling	Jobsplus	30
Infection Control	Nurses	200
Manning an exhibition stand	Internal – Marketing team	30
Crisis Prevention Intervention	Richmond Foundation	10
NAPPI Training	Internal – NAPPI Trainers	60
How to fill in a Performance Appraisal	Internal – HR	19
Supervision Training	Dr Dione Mifsud	13
Senior Support Workers Training	Internal	5
Key Performance Indicators Training	Idea Academy	24
Helpline Training	Dr Paul Daniel Micallef Ms Elaine Schembri Lia	14
ISP Training	Mr Josnef Agius	18

Table 10: Training attended by Support staff between, January – December 2020

In addition to the above, due to the pandemic and the restrictive measures introduced, the Agency had to resort to an alternative solution in order to continue providing training.

Thus, employees were following different training/webinars and conferences online on different areas, which included:

- Health needs of persons with disabilities during the Covid-19 pandemic and info on fund inclusion seminar
- Group homes, independent living and smart assistive technology
- Understanding autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Sexuality education: what you need to know if you have a child/student on the autism spectrum
- Adapting services for persons with disabilities during Covid-19 pandemic
- Work-life balance and the impact of remote working
- Dementia
- Depression
- Positive behaviour support

Apart from the above, a number of employees participated in training courses, both locally and abroad, under European Social Fund (ESF).02.063 – Knowledge, Training, Communications and Support Measures in Support of Vulnerable Groups in which the Agency is a partner amongst other entities.,

ESF FUNDS	
Local	22
Abroad	7

Table 11: Training attended as part of ESF.02.063 project, January – December 2020

Furthermore, the finalised Collective Agreement (2017-2021) mentions two opportunities in regards to training and development and for each type, the Department received a number of applications:

TYPE OF FUND	NUMBER OF APPLICATIONS
CPD*	19
Training Fund	26

Table 12: CPD and Training Fund in 2020

**applicable to warranted professionals and for Allied Health professionals, who have a licence to practice issued from the relevant medical board and who practice their profession within the Agency.*



ADMINISTRATION & EU FUNDS DEPARTMENT

 **AGENCIJA
SAPPORT**



ADMINISTRATION, ICT AND PROCUREMENT

The Administration, Information and Communication technology (ICT) and Procurement section within the Administration & EU Funds Department amongst other tasks, coordinates procurement on many levels including the drafting, publication and evaluation of Tenders and quotations as needed on a day-to-day basis.

In 2020, the Covid-19 outbreak brought unprecedented challenges for the Agency as a whole to ensure not only the well-being of its service users and staff but also service continuity. The Agency's procurement strategies had to adapt to the Covid-19 crisis including an extraordinary impact on the Agency's demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), increase in cleaning services, fumigation services and the creation of emergency setups to cover staff and service users' needs.

The Covid-19 crisis also highlighted the fundamental importance of ICT infrastructure, where again the Agency had to swiftly shift to remote working, online meetings, webinars and rainbow systems (a soft phone system) which enables users to use their office phones remotely.

In addition to numerous Requests for Quotation, the Administration, ICT & Procurement section still managed to publish four Calls for Quotations and six Tenders with a total contract value circa €400,000.



INK - PERSON FOCUSED INCLUSION PROJECT

ESF.02.054

The INK project is co-funded by the European Union, under the ESF 2014-2020. It is committed to enhance the quality of life of persons with disability through innovative and personalised support, expertise, and advocacy. The aim of the project is to maximise the abilities of service users along with receiving training and support, and working on the inclusion in the labour market by offering secure job placements and employment. The project strengthens the importance of social engagement by increasing participation in the community, encouraging social involvement and supporting the service users to have a healthy way of living.



The beneficiaries of the project are mainly persons with disability, with other beneficiaries including front-line professionals, parents/guardians of persons with disabilities and employers to complement the main target audience. All groups mentioned above are given specific training that not only focuses on potentially finding a prospective employment for persons with disability but to also improve their overall life quality and follow a holistic wellness approach.

Evaluating the year 2020, its difficulties and the experience of working during the pandemic, there were still many factors that INK participants have benefited from.

Due to the pandemic, training was put on hold between March and May, with emphasis on online participation and contact by phone during most of the year.



51 certificates were awarded to persons with disability in 2020



This led service users to improve their interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate effectively using phone communication and discovering online video communication applications.

More emphasis was also put on outreach amongst employers. As a result, the number of contacted employers was increased to 569 companies from the year 2019, 56 employers meetings were conducted, and 7 service users were assisted on interviews.

INK team members also increased training hours for staff including training on easy-to-read formatting of documents. This training provided the staff with guidelines to make the service users' resources more accessible. INK team also dedicated time to revise project resources.

In spite of the challenges faced, the aims of the project were still met. The objective of the project is to continue to strive to give a smooth, seamless transition into society, break challenges and barriers while focusing on the abilities of the individual. The project has, and will always give dignity to persons with disability, as everyone is entitled to the fundamental human rights.



TESTIMONIALS”

Christine attended INK Project training in 2019 and went on to benefit from a work placement with CareMalta Group at a residential home. This included job shadowing and social support. Christine found a supportive work environment, which enabled her to make new friends and increase her social interactions. She has since been successfully retained as a full-time employee as a laundry and kitchen attendant.



Sammy Joe enrolled in INK Project in Gozo in 2020 where he received further independent living skills training which included transport-training services. As a result, Sammy Joe is now able to use public transport independently. Later in 2020, Sammy Joe started his work placement at Heritage Malta situated in Gozo, while benefiting from the services of a social mentor. Sammy Joe is now employed on a full-time basis, having improved his skills that allowed him to reach his goals and overcome his limitations.

REACH PROJECT

The REACH Project aims at providing a fair and inclusive society that promotes and advocates independent living and employment by supporting the integration of vulnerable persons within the community through public infrastructure. It will provide a place where people with a disability will benefit from training in relation to independent living and housekeeping skills. The project infrastructure, which will be located in Naxxar, is close to various amenities and the village core.

The REACH project will directly target persons with disability who are identified as being at a greater risk of social exclusion, by empowering them in order to integrate them in society and offering skills to develop a better state of living and become an active member of the community.

One of the main aims of REACH is to bring vulnerable persons closer to the labour market through support and training offered within the infrastructure. It shall offer



employment opportunities to both persons with a disability who will be residing at the proposed development and to those who are living in other Aġenzija Support Residences.

The development consists of four 5-storey high (including recessed level), separate blocks, and a basement level covering the whole site area. At basement level, one finds a level of parking, which parking area accommodates approximately 120 parking spaces, sensory pools, and gym facilities. Two of these blocks are for residential use while another block is to be used as offices. The other block incorporates a food court at ground floor level and specialised centres on the overlying floors of the same block. The project also comprises several landscaped areas and open spaces including the central plaza incorporating a universal playground and theatre which will serve as one of the focal points of the development.

From a procurement aspect, two works Tenders have been issued and awarded i.e., excavation works and design-build. A service Tender for the project management services has also been issued and awarded.

During the year under review, works on site have commenced and the majority of the works related to the excavation can be considered as complete. Furthermore, the Design & Build Contractor i.e., the Contractor responsible for the design, execution and completion of the works, continued submitting the necessary information/documentation as per Contract Conditions. In regard to works on site, the Design & Build Contractor provided the necessary site accommodation facilities and continued with enabling works by taking the necessary provisions to safeguard the third-party properties adjacent to the building site by constructing a retaining/perimeter wall.

REACH will promote and develop a community that is all-inclusive, aimed at reducing social exclusion

Originally the REACH Project was meant to be co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund – Cohesion Policy 2014-2020, Operational Programme I [ERDF.08.039] however, due to operational and administrative changes, the project has been withdrawn from the programme on the 3rd August 2020. Moving forward, now the project is to be financed through National Funds. In the 2021 Budget, €4m have been allocated for this project (refer to the Draft Financial Estimates 2021, Ministry for the Family, Children's Rights and Social Solidarity, Vote XI - Capital, Item 7475: REACH - Independent Living and Employment).

RESEARCH, SERVICE AUDIT & QUALITY ASSURANCE

Striving for service
improvement
through monitoring
and evidence-based
recommendations

The Research, Service Audit & Quality Assurance Department was officially established in 2019. Headed by its Director, the Department is composed of Service Audit & Quality Assurance Executives, Helpline Officers and an Administrative Support Worker, who work to monitor and improve Aġenzija Sapport and its services. The Department's mission encompasses both service provision that meets the needs and preferences of persons with disabilities and those of their relatives, and the experience and satisfaction of all professionals that form the Agency.

The Research, Service Audit & Quality Assurance Department aims to monitor and maintain a current picture of Aġenzija Sapport in all its aspects. Such insight enables the Department to evaluate the Agency's operations, services and performance; in terms of adherence to national and international standards and best practices guidelines, but moreover, in terms of stakeholders' level of satisfaction with, and experience of, Aġenzija Sapport.

The information collected and analysed by the Department serves as a basis for the holistic identification of areas requiring

improvement across Aġenzija Sapport. Upon this, the Department may make recommendations for improvements and changes, which the Agency could implement.

The Department's approach to service audit ensures that all voices are heard and all aspects are taken into account. In line with the Agency's person-centred approach, all stakeholders are not just regarded as such, but also as experts in their own field. The fundamental aim is to encourage dialogue, draw upon information received and collected, and develop recommendations by which Aġenzija Sapport could improve.

Three main functions that are run in parallel by the Department ensure that the Agency maintains a comprehensive picture of the various Services offered by Aġenzija Sapport; one that incorporates both internal and external points of view:

1. **The Aġenzija Sapport Helpline** pilot project was launched in November 2020. This service is dedicated to services related to disability that are provided by Aġenzija Sapport, providing assistance, guidance and a focal point for service requests and queries to callers. Besides serving



as a first point of contact for intake of service requests and answering the public's enquiries for information about the Agency's services and initiatives, the information that is confidentially recorded through the Helpline system captures data about the public's requests for services and the type of problems that the service users and their support networks experience with the Agency. This external input is recorded and the Department identifies and makes recommendations for service improvement based on the extent and trends of cases, queries or issues reported and recorded.

2. The Aġenzija Support Consultative Committee is a new initiative, planned to be launched in 2021. This will provide persons who make use of the Agency's services and their relatives and legal guardians with the opportunity to meet every month and give their opinion on various identified aspects and matters. In turn, this provides the Department with a direct account of the service users' and relatives' experience of the Agency, upon which recommendations for development and improvement of services will be put forward.

591 calls received on Support Helpline, Nov – Dec 2020

3. The Situation Analysis will add internal insight and opinions about the Agency by members of staff and a number of stakeholders to the Department's collection of data. The process involves the collection of data through complementary methodologies and analyses of the findings. During the period under review, three discussion groups were held with Support Workers from the Agency's Day, Residential and Community Services and these were followed by a Service Users' Forum held in the first quarter of 2020. Eventually, interviews with each of the Day Services Leaders and the Residential Services Leaders were also carried out. Further discussion groups, fora and conferences are planned.

These three components bring together the various internal and external experiences and points of view about Aġenzija Support for a comprehensive internal audit. The resulting data gives a clear picture on what recommendations need to be put forward with the aims of improving the services to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. This ongoing services evaluation ensures that the Agency evolves and grows concurrently with the needs and goals of all.



STRATEGIC MARKETING & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Support
Facebook page
had **10,100**
followers at end
December 2020,
when compared
to 4,016 followers
in January 2020

2020 was marked by various changes in the way the Agency needed to operate and support its service users and families, such change being caused by the unprecedented pandemic. Such changes were at times drastic in the sense that the Agency still needed to deliver support services in innovative ways thus maintaining its mission statement and values and adapt to emerging situations on a national scale.

The role of the Strategic Marketing and International Relations Department in this matter was instrumental in maintaining an open channel of communication with the public, promoting new strategies adopted and strengthening the brand by emphasising the Agency's constant support during such testing period.

Main achievements of the Marketing Department

During the period under review, the Marketing Department enhanced its collaboration with the other Agency Departments, assisting them in their outreaches and various

innovations. The strongest medium used was undoubtedly social media. The various official platforms of the Agency were the main tool through which content and messages were passed on continuously thanks to a vigorous social media calendar.



286 private messages were answered on Support Messenger between June – December 2020

Initiatives such as the online #teamsupport campaign also saw a 12-week long initiative aimed at promoting the Agency as a professional and equal opportunity employer. This campaign saw a number of employees from across the Agency representing their various roles and permitting the public to get to know the person behind the role, portraying the human aspect of the employee besides his or her duties. This and other campaigns including mother's day and father's day initiatives, greatly increased the exposure of the Agency on the social media platforms and also generating more traffic towards the Agency's website.



The Marketing team also oversees the Agency's Messenger account which is another contact point for the public, together with the Agency's generic email inbox. These are regularly maintained ensuring efficiency and a reliable source of information, thus maintaining the brand and the commitment to be available to provide support whenever required.

Social media was also heavily complemented by TV and radio programmes throughout the year. 72 programmes were indeed coordinated throughout 2020 and represented by the

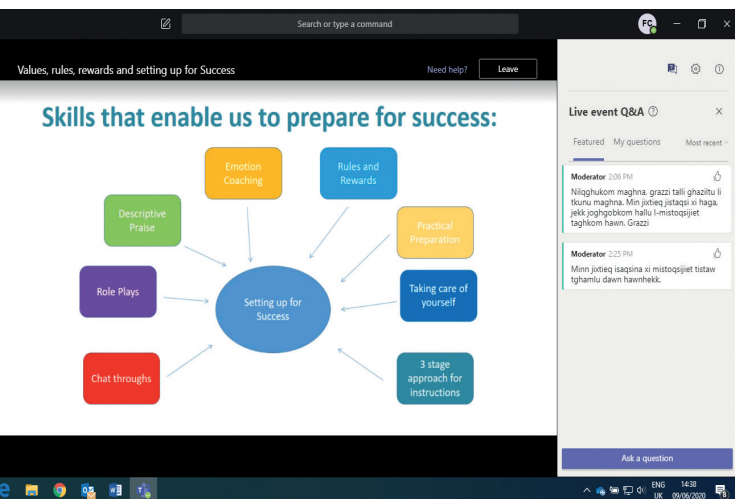


Agency, covering various topics in relation to the disability sector and the Agency's services.

The team also ended the year with a vigorous exercise of analysing the Agency's website and implement a three-tier recommendations report by the Malta Communications Authority (MCA) to improve the website's accessibility and adapt it to be in conformity with the Website Accessibility Directive issued by the European Commission.

Events

A series of events were organised, with most of these having to be adapted according to constantly revised Covid-19 mitigation measures. The year started with the launch of a new Day Centre in Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq. A career expo was also participated in at Junior College at the beginning of the year, to further reach out to students and promote the various career possibilities within the Agency. A series of official visits were also coordinated within the residences and day centres, including a visit by the Prime Minister at Villino Maria in Mtarfa, to support the service users who were restricted



16 webinars and 1 online conference by were coordinated Agenzija Sapporit in 2020

to indoor activities during the pandemic, and the staff who at times were working on a live-in basis in the Agency's Residences.

Other salient events included the launch of the first helpline for persons with disability; the launch of an inter-ministerial committee to work on a national strategy for the screening of children; the coordination of a service users' forum; various other press events such as that covering the signing of an MOU with the Department of AACC for collaboration when it comes to elderly with a disability and the launch of a fleet of 15 wheelchair accessible vehicles, amongst others. Restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic meant that various events also had to be cancelled or postponed. Others were adapted to an online setting, like the number of webinars coordinated and promoted by the team on a regular basis in order to reach out mainly to parents and family members of persons with a disability.

Throughout the year under review, the Marketing team also produced its first edition of the MOP, with extensive procedures and standards that are meant to streamline the team's operations. Other branding initiatives were also coordinated on a regular basis such as the review and standardisation of all forms used by all the Agency's Departments, the production of templates and style sheets for reports and for MOPs and the production of signage including various posters for the Agency's premises in relation to Covid-19 measures.

Constant support was also given to the HR Department in reviewing and promoting all calls issued by the Department.

223 employees attended courses coordinated and delivered by the Marketing team in 2020

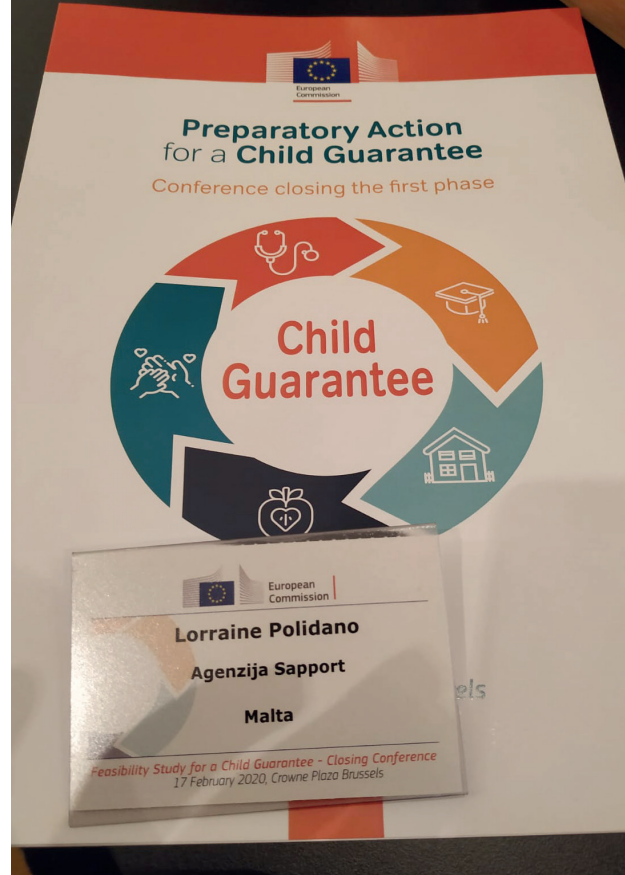
The team also collaborated with the Training section for the design and delivery of training sessions to Agency staff about the production of easy-to-read documentation, manning an exhibition stand and representing the Agency during outreaches, and photography sessions. Ongoing support was also provided to the INK team by liaising with the MEA for the promotion and coordination of 3 online sessions of INK employer training to their members. These sessions resulted in 70 registered participants.

Furthermore, INK documentation was constantly revised to be in line with EU visibility guidelines. A stylesheet for online resources was also created for INK team to use during the pandemic, when training sessions and support were moved online.

International Relations

International relations during the pandemic took on a different pattern. Although due to restrictions, all travel was halted as from March 2020, international relations were indeed strengthened as the pandemic brought about a similar scenario for service providers across the world. A large number of online meetings and webinars were indeed shared by other European and international counterparts and attended by Sappot employees.

These mainly revolved on emerging issues in relation to the provision of disability services and other social welfare support during the pandemic, sharing of best practices and keeping in touch with professionals and entities. Regular sharing of mitigation measures being adopted also took place, together



with sharing of resources such as accessible documents about Covid-19.

The team ensured that such online opportunities are not missed and maintained constant collaboration with the Training Department to inform Sappot staff and encourage registration for such opportunities. Webinars' and conferences' proceedings and reports were also collated into a resource folder accessible for all employees for further sharing of information.

Various opportunities also presented for Sappot guests to participate in panels and facilitate workshops in relation to disability topics and how service provision was being adapted during the pandemic.

FINANCIAL REPORT

The Finance Department is entrusted with the responsibility of the overall financial governance of the Agency. It is responsible for all the accounting transactions, financial analysis and reporting, budgetary allocation and control, and treasury management. All responsibilities are conducted in accordance with statutory obligations, the Fiscal Responsibility Act and other relevant legislation. The members of the Finance Department strive to provide adequate and timely reporting, and to act as a supporting arm to the other departments within the Agency.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The year 2020 has presented its challenges to the Agency and all its respective units. The Finance Department had to adapt swiftly to the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, as the Agency was faced with continued operational challenges as well as the adaptation of working methods, including working remotely. The Finance Department ensured that cash flow was well-monitored to meet additional expenses, as well as reacting rapidly to implement contract suspensions, where possible, to achieve financial sustainability.



This department too had to adapt to a new way of working remotely and, with the use of robust Information Technology (IT) platforms, the team managed to continue to provide services to the other departments without interruptions.

This year also brought about an increase in requests from service users who required home care. In the meantime, residences proved to be a daily challenge to operate, which necessitated strong financial decisions to primarily ensure the safety of our service users, and secondly, to ensure that the Day Services were still provided online, where possible. A significant expense was made to procure protective wear for Agency staff in a timely manner, alongside cleaning and fumigation services, as required.

Government Grants

In order to maintain a sustainable service, the Agency required additional Government investment in the disability sector, which increased over the previous year. In 2020, €22.9 million were received in government grants, programmes and initiatives and capital grants. This equates to a 9% increase over the previous year.

	2018	2019	2020
Government subvention	€13,742,635	€15,500,000	€18,370,770
Other grants	€2,279,037	€5,436,457	€4,533,618
Total	€16,021,672	€20,936,457	€22,904,388

Table 13: Sapport budget, 2018 – 2020



Figure 2: Sapport budget, 2018 – 2020

Recurrent Expenditure

The operational and administrative expenses of the Agency are subdivided into two main cost centres:

- Day Centres, and
- Aġenzija Sapport, incorporating the expenses incurred in the Agency's Residences, Community Services, A & I team, Administration, Management, NGO's and other Schemes.

Operational expense for years 2019 and 2020 is shown in the Figure 3, with the main expense being that of payroll, synonymous to a service organisation.

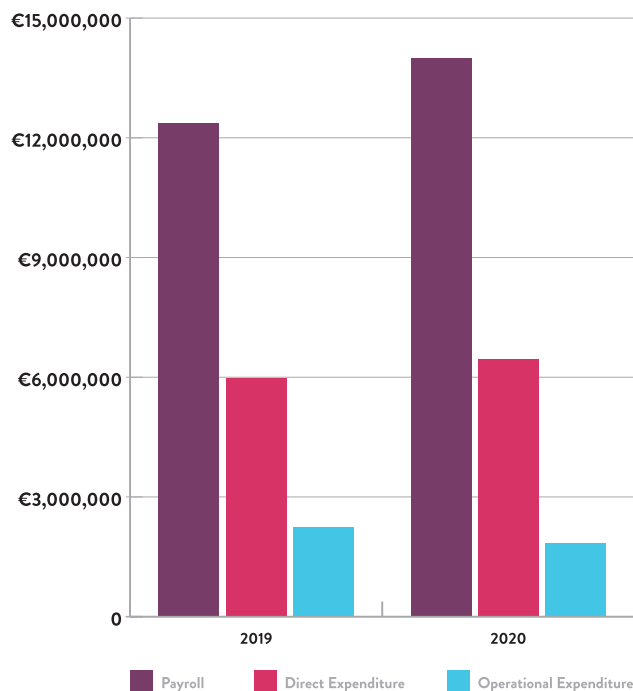


Figure 3: Support expenditure, 2019-2020

In 2020, the most significant increase in operational expense was registered from Collective Agreement increases and increments as well as additional recruitment of several professionals and other workers in the field. The specialised Services continued to increase with the introduction of the new ACTU unit, respite services and assistance provided to service users in the community through the provision of care, goods and assistive technology.

During the year 2020, the Agency continued with the implementation of its EU-funded project INK, with a revised budget of a €2.4 million and the REACH project with an infrastructural total investment estimated cost of €32 million from national funds.

The Finance Department ensures that all expenditure is in line with Public Procurement Regulations and Employment & Industrial Relations Act (EIRA) regulations. Expenses are authorised in line with policies, established procedures and internal controls. All Government grants received by Aġenzija Support were utilised in the most efficient way possible in order to provide the best value for money service to vulnerable service users.

Risk Management

During the year, the Finance Unit was instrumental in the drafting of a Risk Management Policy that will start to be implemented in year 2021. Through this policy, Aġenzija Support recognises that it must systematically manage and regularly update its risk profile to explicitly address uncertainty and facilitate continuous improvement. The Agency has committed to this by developing a risk management framework directed to identify, assess and manage risks that may prevent the achievement of strategic goals and objectives. The policy will instil a risk management culture within the organisation.

Capital Expenditure

The Agency continued to invest in its asset base through the completion of the Żurrieq Residence. More work is planned to complete the Qrendi Residence by next year. Planning works are advanced on the Vajrita and Mtarfa projects and funding has been invested by the Government to complete these projects.

Moreover, refurbishment and modernisation works were carried out at various day centres and residences.



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