

Home-Start Malta Reaches Out To More Local Families

“With happier parents, the need for children to be removed from living within their own family due to the parent's inability to care for their basic needs is reduced,”

Tanya Barron (former Director of Home-Start International and a current trustee of Home-Start International).

The above statement by Ms. Barron is the main concept behind the Home-Start service, which has been offered locally since April 2006 by Agenzija Appogg in collaboration with Home-Start International, sponsored by HSBC Cares for Children Fund and Vodafone Malta Foundation. Agenzija Appogg already offered a community service in Cottonera which is now being complemented by the Home-Start service, offered in the same localities. Now, the service is also being given to families in Zabbar, Zejtun and Fgura.

Home-Start originated in the UK in 1973 when professionals working with families of young children started to realise and understand the importance of supporting parents in the upbringing of their children. There were many families with young children facing crisis situations, ending up having their children removed from their families. It was felt that support to parents, especially during the child's early years was so vital, that it would reduce the chances of family crisis and breakup and thus keeping children at home. Built on this principle, over 330 schemes have developed in the UK alone. In order to be able to provide such support, Home-Start recruits and prepares volunteers to work with families having young children.

Growing interest in this service led to the development of Home-Start International and there are now over 100 schemes in around 20 different countries including Malta, Australia, Canada, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Sri Lanka and Kenya.

Home-Start Families

Home-Start offers parent-to-parent support to families who have at least one child under the age of 5 years. All parents know that those early years are vital in a child's development and that children should thrive in a secure and happy environment. Home-Start considers parents to be the key in creating that secure childhood. This is why it offers support to parents – to give them the strength to be better parents for their children.

Children at a young age offer many challenges and it is very easy for parents to feel overwhelmed, especially if they don't have any support. Having other difficulties, like illness, multiple birth, post-natal depression, disability, isolation or lack of skills or means to provide good care for infants and children aggravates the situation and the family may easily find itself in a crisis.

It is at this time when Home-Start comes in to offer support.

There is no such thing as a 'typical' Home-Start family – any family with one young child or more might need support. Situations affect people differently and parents cope in different ways. The important thing is that they acknowledge that their difficulties and request help themselves. Moreover, families have the choice as to whether or not they wish to accept a Home-Start volunteer in their home.

Home-Start volunteers are parents themselves, thus they are in a better position to understand and assist other parents. Volunteers come from all walks of life – from young mothers to parents whose children have just started school to 'empty-nesters' and grandparents. The only real qualification to become a volunteer is that of being a parent or have parenting experience.

Families could either refer themselves to Home-Start Malta or be referred through professionals or significant others with the consent and agreement of the referred family.

Anyone who would like to receive help or refer a family to Home-Start Malta or requires further information could call on 21678043 or on 99018398 or send an e-mail to home.start@maltanet.net.

For further information about Agenzija APPOGG and its services, one may call on Supportline 179 or log on to www.appogg.gov.mt.

Agenzija APPOGG forms part of the Foundation for Social Welfare Services which also incorporates Agenzija Sedqa (www.sedqa.gov.mt) and Agenzija SAPPOR (www.sappor.gov.mt).

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