



# Dar Hosea

giving back women their dignity

ANNUAL REPORT | 2022



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## List of Abbreviations:

CSA	Correctional Services Agency
DH	Dar Hosea
MCH	Mount Carmel Hospital
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NMUPD	nonmedical use of prescription drugs

# SPECIAL APPRECIATION, RECOGNITION, AND GRATITUDE

Dar Hosea (DH) acknowledges the significance of various organisations and other individuals whose altruistic and generous donations contribute to the daily opening of its doors, whilst allowing the efficient running of the drop-in centre. As with any other organisation similar to ours, the daily costs of maintaining a daily drop-in centre and other ongoing projects, are accompanied by a long list of endless expenses. To provide a few examples, these include: staff salaries, utility bills, daily upkeep and maintenance of the home, transport costs, provision of daily needs such as groceries, stationery supplies, and other material used for arts and crafts - which are frequently used as a healing process along with other therapy sessions. As an NGO, we recognise how such items are costly and when expenses escalate, we acknowledge how these may hinder the smooth running of the projects. As such, we appreciate how such kind donations are easing the daily financial burden we experience.

Hence, we would like to commence by heartily thanking each organisation which has thoughtfully donated in any manner, whether through finances, or other useful items such as food and toiletries, including materials for arts and crafts. We are grateful for each and every one of you, for your considerate contributions, as indirectly you are assisting and helping us in carrying our extensive work more effectively. Moreover, we would also like to extend our gratitude to those persons who generously donate as independent individuals. Thanks to all your benevolence, we are able to provide a valuable service to our service users who are deserving of love, compassion, and respect, of which they have been robbed and denied.

## Benefactors

Alan Demartino  
Annunciation Church, Tarxien  
Archbishop's Seminary  
Assocjazzjoni Pia Qaddejja tač-Ċenaklu  
Balzan Parish Church  
Best Print Co. Ltd  
Blue Door English  
Carina Beauty Clinic  
Caritas Malta

JTI Co. Ltd  
Knisja tal-Erwieħ, Tarxien  
Lombard Bank  
Lourdes Pharmacy, San Ġwann  
Maria Pia Tabone  
Marisa Schiavone Schembri  
Mary Spiteri  
Midsea Books Ltd.  
Ministry of Justice

Charitas: Confraternity of the BVM of Charity  
Dare To Be Malta  
Dare to Care Food Bank  
Deloitte Foundation Malta  
Foodbank Lifeline Foundation Malta  
His Holiness Pope Francis  
Holy Family Parish, Iklin  
Jet Freight Ltd

MISCO Malta  
Mgr Charles Cordina, Episcopal Vicar for Diaconia  
Ministry for Social Policy and Children's Rights (MSPC)  
On Point Ltd  
Parish Church of St Mary, Attard  
Periti Studio  
PMA Architects

Ricky Caruana  
Salesian Brigade Sliema  
SEM - Servizzi Ewropej f'Malta  
Sisters of Charity of St Jeanne Antide Thouret  
Spigolatrici della Chiesa  
St Aloysius College  
St George's Basilica, Victoria, Gozo  
The Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem

Through your humane contributions, we can warmly open our doors every morning where we lovingly welcome our service users and provide them with a safe space where they feel protected, respected, and cared for. Such a sensitive approach helps restore broken identities which would have been damaged due to multiple trauma. At DH we believe that when such reconnection with one's self is created, reconnection with others within the community is also possible, which will then spread through society as a whole.

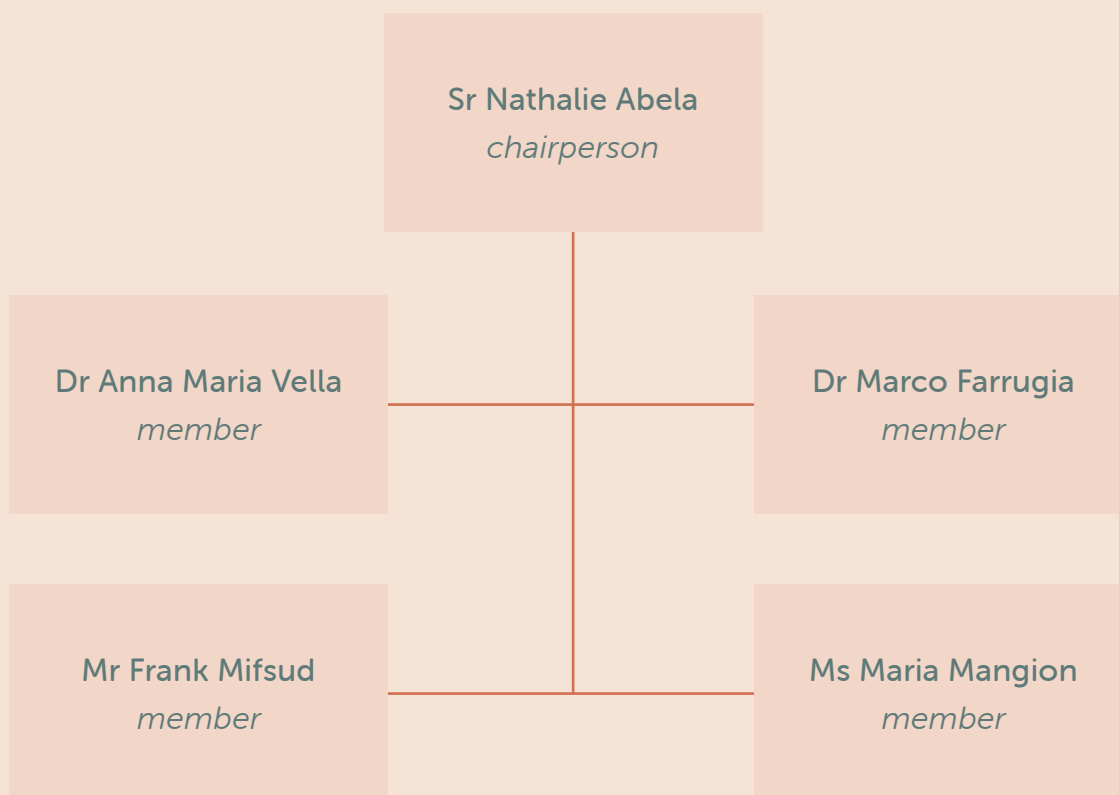
All this process is possible and thanks to all the kind-hearted benefactors who generously donate and help our organisation, we are grateful and thankful for every contribution as we acknowledge how each donation helps us in our mission. Thank you all for your immense kindness and consideration, for believing in us, trusting us, and for helping us carry our work effectively!



# THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF DAR HOSEA

DH is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) originally founded in 2013 by St Jeanne Antide Foundation. The set up of the NGO was possible through the IRENE Project as supported by the EEA Start-Up Fund. Later in 2017, DH joined the Association of Friends of Thouret - Sisters of Charity. DH is registered with the Commissioner for the Voluntary Organisations (NGO Registration number: V.O. 1365). The organisation is overseen by a management team of professionals with ample experience in the field, including a chairperson and other founding members.

In 2022 these included:



# THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF DAR HOSEA

Back in 2013, members of the board recognised how support for women trapped in prostitution was lacking. Not only was there no support, but society did not understand the trauma and exploitation these women suffered, and thus marginalised and shamed them. The understanding of the harsh realities of the lives of women in prostitution emerged from years of experience of working first hand with women involved in substance misuse. It was clearly understood how strong links existed between women caught in drug addiction and prostitution. Backed up with vast research demonstrating how women who are sexually exploited also engage in substance use, it was evident that a similar pattern was also being witnessed here in Malta.

From the narratives of the women, it was clearly understood how drug addiction was not only dragging them further into dark abysses, but in parallel, their life in prostitution was also leading the women into abusive and destructive patterns further damaging their lives. Recounting different, yet similar life stories, each woman spoke about distressing life events, how they were suffering physically, mentally, and emotionally, and how they were also not coping financially. As explained by every woman who was sexually exploited, the anguish they were experiencing was a result of traumas experienced in prostitution, including the substance they were imprisoned on, which they consumed as a means to endure the abuse whilst block out the pain such a life path brought.





The support, compassion, respect, and non-judgemental approach provided to these women by the initial professionals, allowed them to delve deep into their dire life events and recount the severe abuse and exploitation they were experiencing. Consequently, it was on such ground that the concept of DH emerged. The necessity of opening a drop-in centre to assist and support sexually exploited women not only felt natural, but was also recognised as a serious need, since no such services existed. The painful and compelling narratives recounted by the women set the grounds for the creation of DH, where the concept of providing a safe and respectful space through a drop-in centre welcoming women struggling with such cruel and harsh realities emerged.

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NAME - DAR HOSEA



## Dar Hosea

As with any other concept, at DH every tiny detail is given importance and deep reflection. This also applies to the name chosen for our drop-in centre which has a strong symbolic meaning to the work that we carry out.

According to the Old Testament, Hosea was a prophet who was called by God to seek and marry a harlot, and to love and respect her (Hosea 1:2). The name Hosea also means 'salvation'.

Based on such beliefs and the deep meaning this story represents, the name Hosea was chosen for our drop-in centre. The symbolic connotation of the name helped pave the way for creating the values and principles adopted at DH, where every service user is respected, loved, and provided with all the professional support and compassion in restoring back her authentic self, which many times has been destroyed by multiple trauma.

# THE WORK BEHIND THE SCENES - A GLIMPSE AT THE WORK INSIDE DAR HOSEA



Before delving into the comprehensive work carried out by DH during the past year, it is significant to understand the ethos and daily practical ways the members of this organisation run the drop-in centre, what occurs behind the scenes, and what makes this place a truly remarkable and extraordinary drop-in centre.

DH is made up of both professional employees and of volunteers who together daily attend the premises with an open heart and a non-judgemental approach. Each member of the staff understands the significance of providing a safe and loving environment within the premises, as they recognise the traumas the service users experience. This is done through regular adequate training based on intense academic research by experts, as well as from years of experience from the professionals working as frontliners with sexually abused women. The combination of research, expertise, and experience are the solid foundations on which DH operates.

From the first day of opening its doors, the aim of DH was to provide a safe, calm, and protective environment for each woman attending the drop-in centre, some of whom also attend with their young children. It is of utmost importance to understand that the women attending DH would have fallen through all the safety nets within society, and only reach our drop-in centre when hitting rock bottom, losing all sense of hope. As such, our initial objective is in providing the very core basic needs, such as providing a safe, protected, and welcoming environment through the facilitation of a shower, clean clothes, a place to rest, and homemade food which is daily lovingly prepared by our dedicated volunteers. At the very core of these daily needs, and throughout the whole journey of every service user, each woman`s needs are held at the centre of any intervention carried out (as will be discussed in-depth in the coming sections).

DH does not look at any background or beliefs, but through a compassionate and humane approach warmly welcomes any woman who knocks on its doors, irrespective of race, colour, ethnic or social origin, language, disability, age, religion or belief, and political or any other opinion. Even though DH does not operate as a residential programme, nevertheless, a thorough approach is offered through our daily drop-in services.

Being the only drop-in centre in Malta since 2013, DH has always strived to provide refuge and support to women (including their children) trapped in prostitution through a compassionate and professional approach. The drop-in centre represents a safe home, where each service user feels respected and loved for who she is as a person, without any judgement or prejudice, which regrettably are frequently experienced by the women caught in such a dark and exploitative world.





## THE DYNAMIC TEAM

The compassionate and successful services we offer are only possible through our diverse, vibrant, and energetic team. The fusion of our determined professional experts, together with the commitment of our volunteers - who are endowed with the wisdom and richness of life experiences - create this warm and strong atmosphere at DH. Each staff member has her/his own role both within the premises, as well as outside, and work is carried out through both collaboration and/or individually. This is done after assessing each situation and according to each service user's different needs.



## the committed volunteers

The colourful and diverse background of our volunteers provides that added value to our team and is also beneficial to our service users. Their different walks of life, in parallel to the richness of their life experiences, are deeply valuable to our service users as they provide openness, care, warmth, wisdom, and a non-judgemental ambiance.

The duties of the volunteers encompass different and intense tasks, from the basic preparations of daily homely meals, to ensuring each woman is celebrated each time she achieves a special milestone - such as completing a rehabilitation programme; or during any personal occasion such as birthdays; to creating a festive atmosphere according to each particular event. No special occasion goes unnoticed, and every detail is given to celebrate such achievements. Our volunteers are also involved in carrying therapeutic work with the service users through enjoyable manual activities such as gardening, creating different artwork, and producing hand-made crafts such as cards, candle making and jewellery, amongst others. Such activities are extremely beneficial as in line with therapy sessions, working on creativity improves mood and provides deep beneficial emotional healing.

Such collaboration between volunteers and service users provides the formation of a stronger bond which in turn facilitates open conversations. The volunteers are trained in empathic listening and in providing a safe space. As such, through this bond, the service users feel more comfortable in engaging and disclosing their stories, and with the support of the volunteers, through a non-judgemental and a compassionate approach, such conversations allow a space for support, healing, and provides a sense of safety and belonging.

## other external visits and support

Moreover, the volunteers are always eager to assist service users who are unable to reach our drop-in centre. Whether due to physical illness, or emotional/psychological struggles, as well as any other barriers they might be facing, our volunteers reach out and visit the women in their homes, where they provide warm meals, donations such as clothing, groceries, and/or toiletries, as well as lending a listening ear to those who wish to engage in conversation. Loneliness is a common struggle experienced by our service users, so these visits are fruitful as they provide that familiar face of our volunteers who are always empathic, caring, and supportive.



## the administration team and other volunteers

Another small group of energetic professional volunteers work in maintaining the administrative duties of DH. Together with another small dynamic team they work together to creatively develop innovative concepts for fund-raising events.

## self-care services

A hairdresser also regularly provides free hairdressing services and advice to the women attending DH. Such a service is also helpful and beneficial when one is in the process of rebuilding oneself through regaining self-esteem and a sense of self-care, which in turn translates into self-respect and self-worth. Of course, this is intensely carried out through regular ongoing professional therapy sessions where each service user is assisted by dedicated therapists and social workers in reconnecting and healing internally. However, we have also realised how working externally is also fruitful to the service users, as they appreciate such caring gestures which in turn help them understand and accept that they too are deserving of self-care and self-love.



## the maintenance team

As for maintaining our premises, this is done through the generous time provided by our two male maintenance team members. They kindly dedicate their free time to work on different requirements such as repairing/fixing/painting/upkeeping the premises. The role of these volunteers is highly significant in maintaining a functioning and comfortable home for our service users, who are deserving of respect through a welcoming environment reflecting safety and care.



## the charity shop and our responsibility towards the environment

Another team of volunteers assist in managing a charity shop which DH has undertaken. Their work, although not directly with the service users, is immensely useful as it provides external support and financial assistance, whilst also supporting the environment. The team who runs the charity shop is always busy collecting donations, sorting and distributing goods to women in need and to their children, and assists in raising funds for DH.

Furthermore, through this charity shop the idea is to also support the

environment through a circular economy, which helps preserve natural resources, and avoids waste. Whilst clothes are re-used thus maintaining sustainability, the aim is to also help other families within the community who are struggling financially, either by directly donating clothes, toys, books, and other items, or by further reducing our already low prices. As such, we are not only ensuring that the service users are benefiting from the minor revenue of this charity shop, but we are also helping members within the community who are financially struggling.

## the dedicated professionals

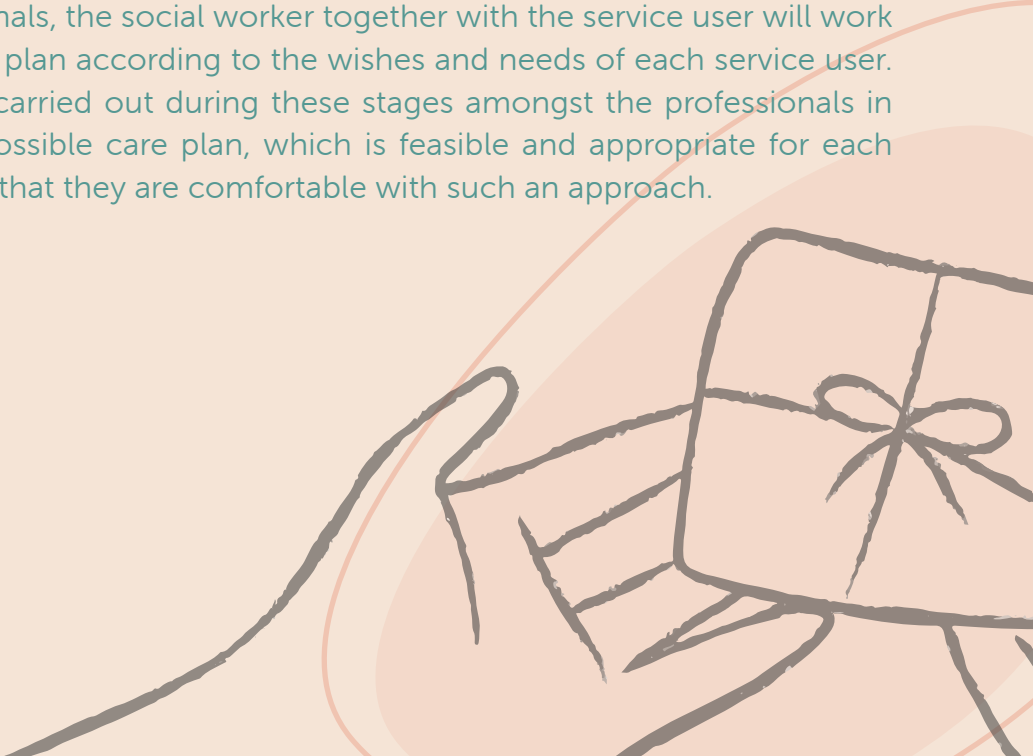
At DH we work through a multidisciplinary team who hails from various fields to assist our service users holistically, whilst providing specific individual assistance. Such an approach is adopted since we understand and recognise that every woman is unique and though similar trauma is experienced, each woman experiences that trauma differently, as such, every person has different needs and requires different methods. Consequently, we strive in providing and designing different support and assistance accordingly. Whether it is by offering emotional and psychological support, legal advice, employment

assistance, and medical assistance or referrals, we are always committed to offer effective and adequate assistance which may not be presented sequentially, but according to the specific needs of each woman. This support is provided by our different experts including psychologists, counsellors, social workers, lawyers, doctors, dentists, and other professionals. Most of our professionals who work on a pro bono basis, collaborate with each other, including with other external experts and professionals, to be able to provide a unique support programme, whilst ensuring the best possible outcome.



## intake sessions – mapping the way forward

All the above services and tailor-made programmes are only possible through the comprehensive intake process as initially performed by our energetic and committed social workers. Each time a new service user contacts DH, she is welcomed by one of our social workers, where an intake session is carried out through a sensitive and compassionate approach. This is done in different stages - initially the social worker introduces herself and provides details of our drop-in services and other services that could support the service user in her particular situation. The primary needs of the service users are also considered during this first stage. At a later stage, and once trust and connection is created between the service user and the social worker, a deeper approach is explored as a means of identifying any type of trauma, addiction, mental health issues, and/or other risk factors, and taking the necessary actions to address these issues through our professionals. Later, when the social worker identifies the healing and recovery process of each woman, and after consulting with other helping professionals, the social worker together with the service user will work together to devise a specific plan according to the wishes and needs of each service user. Continuous consultation is carried out during these stages amongst the professionals in order to provide the best possible care plan, which is feasible and appropriate for each service user, whilst ensuring that they are comfortable with such an approach.



A stylized illustration in a light orange and teal color palette. It features two hands: one at the top left, palm facing down, and another at the bottom right, holding a simple line-art flower with five petals. The background consists of large, overlapping circles in shades of orange and teal. The text is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the page.

## the values of a collective team

Working with such an enriching and diverse team is significant and beneficial for DH, as through each member's expertise, we are able to provide a thorough and sensitive programme to every service user. Such team energy is what drives our commitment and dedication in the smooth running of our operations, which otherwise would be more difficult to achieve. The combination of our team's knowledge, experience, loyalty, compassion, commitment, and energy deeply inspire and encourage us to continue providing the support we offer, which is mostly useful in face of challenging situations, whilst fills us with hope for the future.

Our dynamic team, whether volunteers gifted with wisdom and knowledge life experiences provide, or dedicated professionals who always strive to provide and share their knowledge and expertise, are what make that special, colourful, and enriching team for whom we are most grateful. Their collective and shared efforts are expressed and translated in the holistic and inclusive services offered at our drop-in centre.

# OUTREACH SERVICES AND BEYOND

Working with women in prostitution has provided us with further insight to the complex challenges these women face, including the several barriers that hinder their healing journeys. Through the years we understood that our work with the service users needed to be extended and provided outside our walls of DH. Being aware of the complexities the women who are sexually exploited experience, we created outreach services to be able to reach out to more women and girls who due to different and various obstacles are unable to attend the drop-in centre.



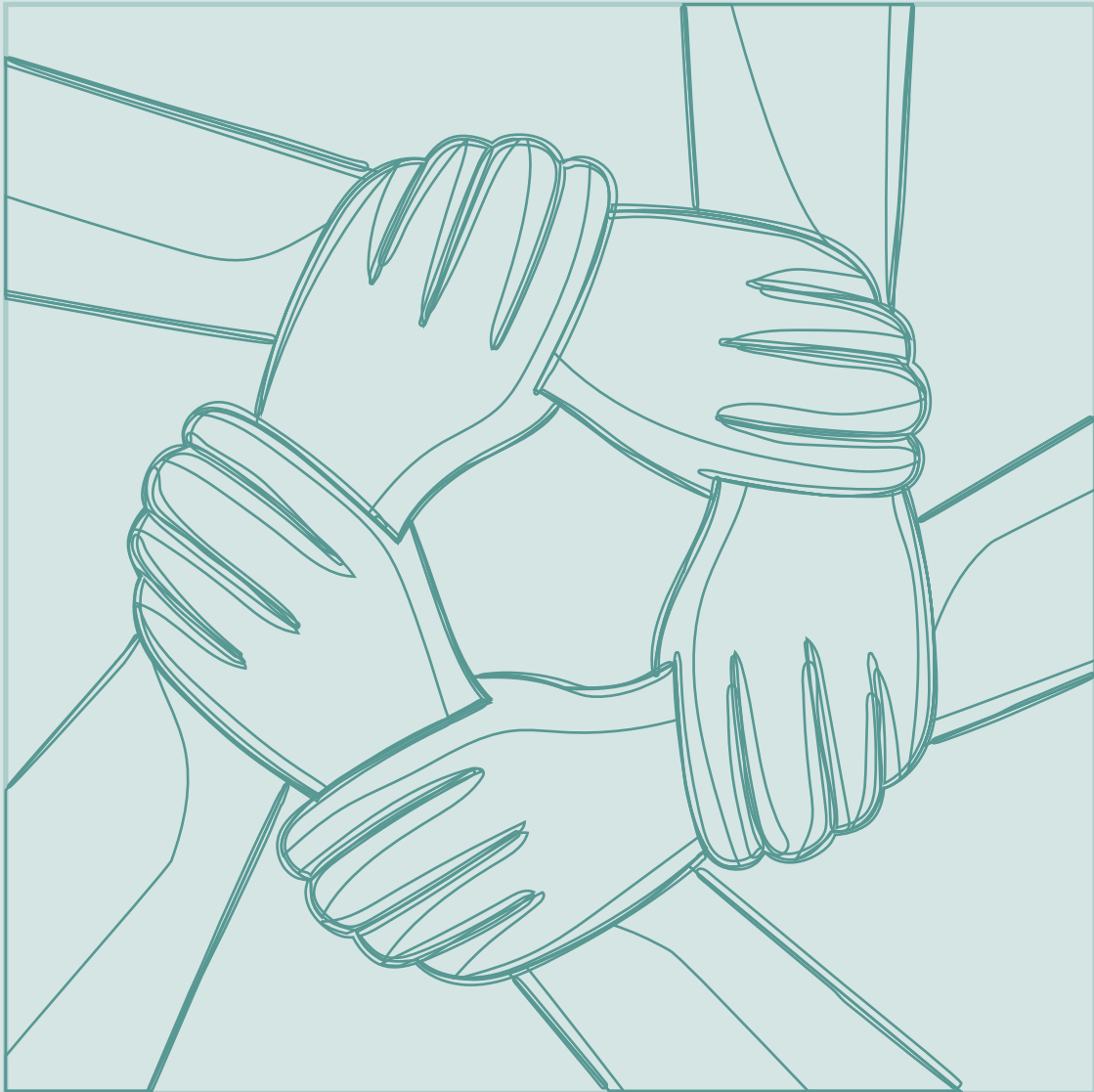
## reaching out at the Correctional Services Agency (CSA)

Recognising how being trapped in a life of prostitution, and the laws that are currently in place, many women end up in prison, facing multiple obstacles when trying to reintegrate back into society. Many women recall how very often they encounter closed doors once back in society. Amongst many other barriers, many experience no support from family members, difficulty finding employment, loneliness, disconnection from their children, homelessness, and no financial support. Facing such hurdles, which are multiple at times, often serve as a catalyst for re-entering prostitution or using substance as a way of escaping and numbing the pain.

Hence DH provides an outreach support service as a preventive programme to vulnerable women who are at high risk of falling back into the traps of prostitution, which as described, experience double standards when trying to reintegrate back into the community.

Through weekly crafts sessions designed and prepared by our volunteers and social workers, our staff work together with the women at the CSA. These sessions not only serve as therapy, but they enable the creation of a safe connection through a sense of belonging. In turn, this facilitates individual sessions between the social worker at DH and the women at CSA, as a means of providing one-to-one assistance and support. Information about DH and its services are provided, since experience taught us that many times it is the first place the women contact once they exit. Conversely, through these open channels with CSA, those service users attending DH who would be awaiting trial due to prostitution, continue receiving the same support from our social workers once entering CSA. Such ongoing support is essential for their healing journeys.

## reaching out at Mount Carmel Hospital (MCH) and other Rehabilitation Programmes



Acknowledging the correlation between prostitution, mental health issues, and/or addiction, and in order to maintain a reliable multidisciplinary approach in the support plan provided to our service users, we strive in maintaining a strong professional relationship with different experts in specific fields. This provides better communication channels which eases collaboration with other experts in devising appropriate rehabilitation care plans. Furthermore, this also assists us in reaching out to service users who occasionally attend rehabilitation programmes due to mental health issues and/or addiction problems.

# THE SHOCKING REALITIES OF OUR SERVICE USERS

This section will cover the experiences as shared by our service users. Such narratives are essential as they highlight the violence and exploitation that truly occur in prostitution. These are also strongly reflected in the research which is continuously carried out by the professionals at DH.



## child grooming through sexual abuse – *'boot camp'* for prostitution

Similar life experiences disclosed by numerous women attending DH include patterns of **violence, abuse, deceit, coercion, and exploitation**. An extensive body of literature identifies the correlation of childhood maltreatment, such as physical and sexual abuse, and emotional neglect in childhood, as trajectories towards prostitution (Wilson & Widom, 2010; Kraus, 2016; Donevan, 2021). Sexual abuse of children is described as *'boot camp'* for prostitution, where familial sexual abuse functions as a grooming process into prostitution (Dworkin, 1997).

Most women attending DH recall how at a tender young age (twelve years old and at times even younger) they were groomed and exploited into prostitution. Various women recall how as young girls they were often sexually abused by family members, and relatives, including close family friends who they had trusted (the women explain how exploiters were mainly male). The narratives continue how the perpetrators would later introduce the then young girls to older men where they were asked to perform the same sexual activities they had been taught, in return for money, which they were then instructed to forward to the abuser.

Such sexual abuse and deceit cause **deeper trauma** as not only do the women suffer violence and harm on a physical dimension as children, but they also suffer trauma on an emotional and psychological dimension due to the betrayal by those who were meant to protect them.



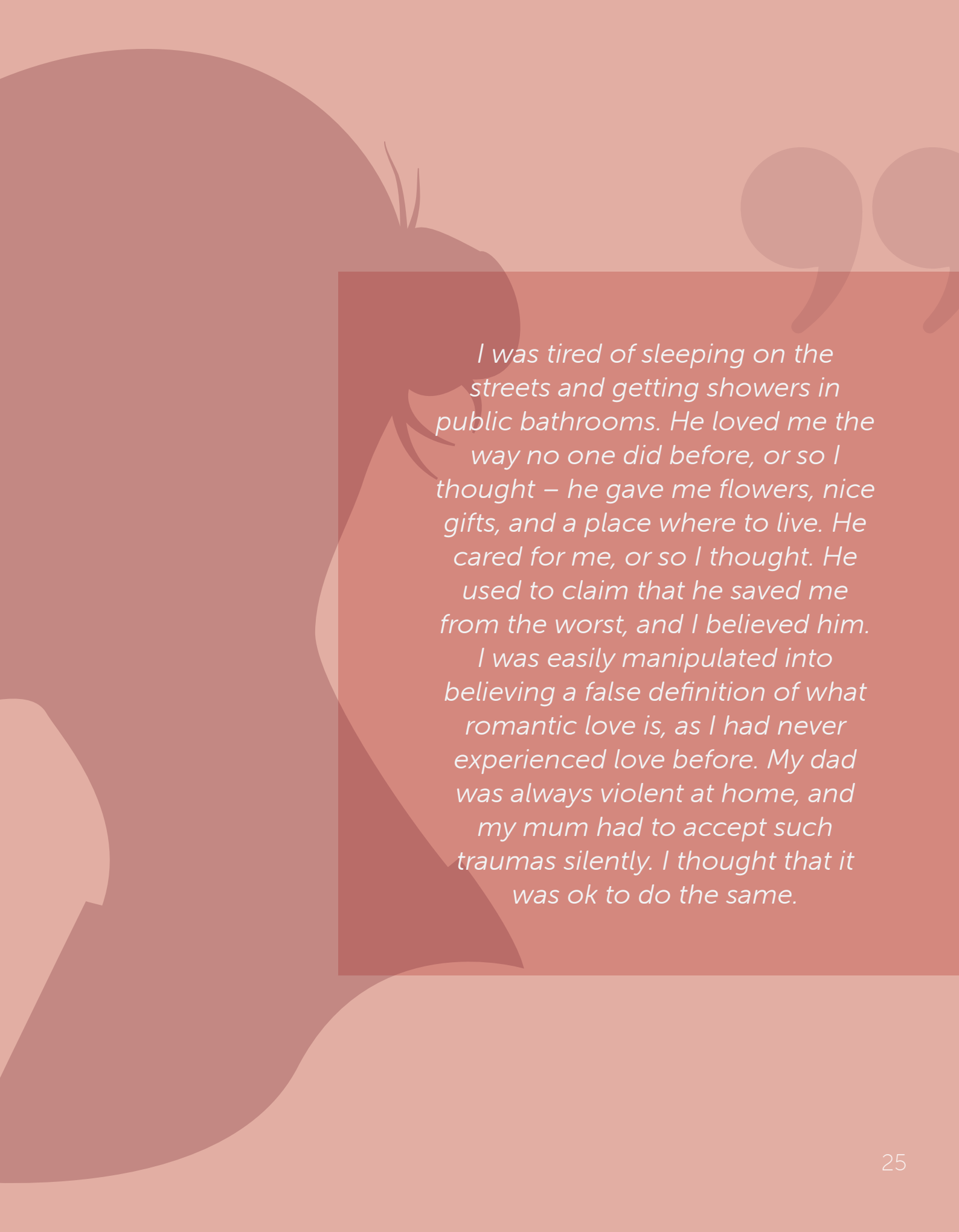


## grooming through romance – the ‘loverboy’ method

A common pattern by which the ‘loverboy’ operates is through establishing a romantic relationship with young women who are often minors, which then turns to different forms of abuse: emotionally, psychologically, and physically. Other service users recall how pimps who initially acted out as ‘boyfriends’ tricked them into prostitution through emotional attachment, subliminal control, and other financial bonding. The service users mention how at the beginning of the relationship, they were lured into believing they were being loved, supported emotionally and financially, whilst showered with material gifts when they felt at their lowest. Such deceitful and conniving tactics by pimps were soon followed by emotional and later physical control. The service users explain how such control commenced with isolating them from family and friends, as a means of maintaining control and a sense of ownership (some women describe they were still young adolescents at the time). Isolation is a similar common pattern used by abusers of domestic violence to obtain further control over their victims. After the isolation phase, threats and physical violence were quick to follow if the women failed to comply with the demands of the ‘pimp-boyfriend’. The women describe how after such manipulation, they were sexually exploited through arrangements made by their pimps who acted as ‘boyfriends’. According to Europol, this is the most common method of trafficking for sexual exploitation of minors across Europe (Europol, 2018).

Research shows how a strong bond is often created between victim and abuser which is referred to as ‘**trauma bond**’, a psychological response to abuse also regularly referred to as Stockholm syndrome (Casassa, Knight, & Mengo, 2021). Consequently, this makes it even more difficult for the trafficked and prostituted women to leave the relationship and abuse. Such patterns have also been observed and identified by our professionals when providing counselling services to the women attending DH.





*I was tired of sleeping on the streets and getting showers in public bathrooms. He loved me the way no one did before, or so I thought – he gave me flowers, nice gifts, and a place where to live. He cared for me, or so I thought. He used to claim that he saved me from the worst, and I believed him.*

*I was easily manipulated into believing a false definition of what romantic love is, as I had never experienced love before. My dad was always violent at home, and my mum had to accept such traumas silently. I thought that it was ok to do the same.*

## the link between prostitution and domestic violence



Similar to victims of domestic violence, sexually exploited women are often victims of violence characterized by power and control (WomensLaw, 2016).

Pimps/traffickers and sex buyers - often referred to as 'johns' or 'punters' also use power and control over their trafficked victims (Farley, 2018). Various women attending DH describe how they were sexually exploited and trafficked into prostitution by their abusive husbands/partners. Women recall how they experienced further physical violence from their intimate partners if they returned home with insufficient cash, whilst others describe how they had been threatened by their husbands/partners with harming their children if they did not prostitute themselves. Such manipulation and violent behaviour by abusers are done as a means of exerting one's power over their victims.

Prostitution is used as a weapon to not only control victims, but to also profit from the trafficking of their own wives/partners. These harsh realities clearly uncover the connection between prostitution and domestic violence, whilst also exposes the misogyny that sadly still exists within our patriarchal societies. Regrettably, same as with grooming through romance, a similar pattern of trauma bond is also found in such violent and abusive situations, hence making it more difficult for the trafficked women to leave the relationship.

## the interdependence of substance use and prostitution

Due to the violence and harm in prostitution, sexually exploited women often turn to self-medication with high consumption of painkillers and sedatives, including substance abuse (Kraus, 2016). Women attending our services describe how due to the multiple traumas experienced through their life in prostitution, end up consuming different substances. They explain that this is done in order to be able to survive the harmful, violent, and horrifying encounters they regularly face when in prostitution. These substances often include alcohol, drugs, or nonmedical use of prescription drugs (NMUPD). The women explain how such substances are used to block out fear, anguish, and pain (physical and emotional) which are inherent to the life in prostitution.

Regrettably being dependent on such substances create further barriers during the healing journey of the service users. Often, the women share how due to various traumas they feel disconnected from their sense of self, and being dependent on substances make it even more challenging to exit such a harmful way of life.



## the impact of trauma

Such violent and abusive experiences leave profound internal psychological scars. As Gabor Maté explains, “Trauma is not what happens to *you* but what happens inside *you*” (Maté, 2022. p.20). Accordingly, it is significant to highlight how such trauma causes internal disconnection which does not only affect the self, but the disconnection is further extended to families, and to the rest of society. Such disconnection is difficult to understand since it happens gradually and at different intervals. As a result of the trauma, individuals see the world from a broken and shattered perspective, something we frequently stumble on when we are providing counselling to our service users.

## similar echoes

A common theme which is echoed amongst the women who have been prostituted is how they feel they have been robbed of so many prospects in their life. These include their autonomy and agency, their sense of self, their sense of safety, their sense of trust, their sense of connection to themselves and others, their own self-worth, their dreams and hopes, and real life choices and opportunities. The women relate how their life was devised for them by their abusers before they were even given a proper chance in life. Given choices, the vast majority of women in prostitution say they would prefer not to do it - 9 out of 10 women report that they would leave if they could (Farley 2003). Poverty, coercion by pimps, traffickers and/or partners, lack of education, psychological trauma, isolation, homelessness and insecure housing, and immigration status keep people trapped in the sex trade (Dunphy, 2020).

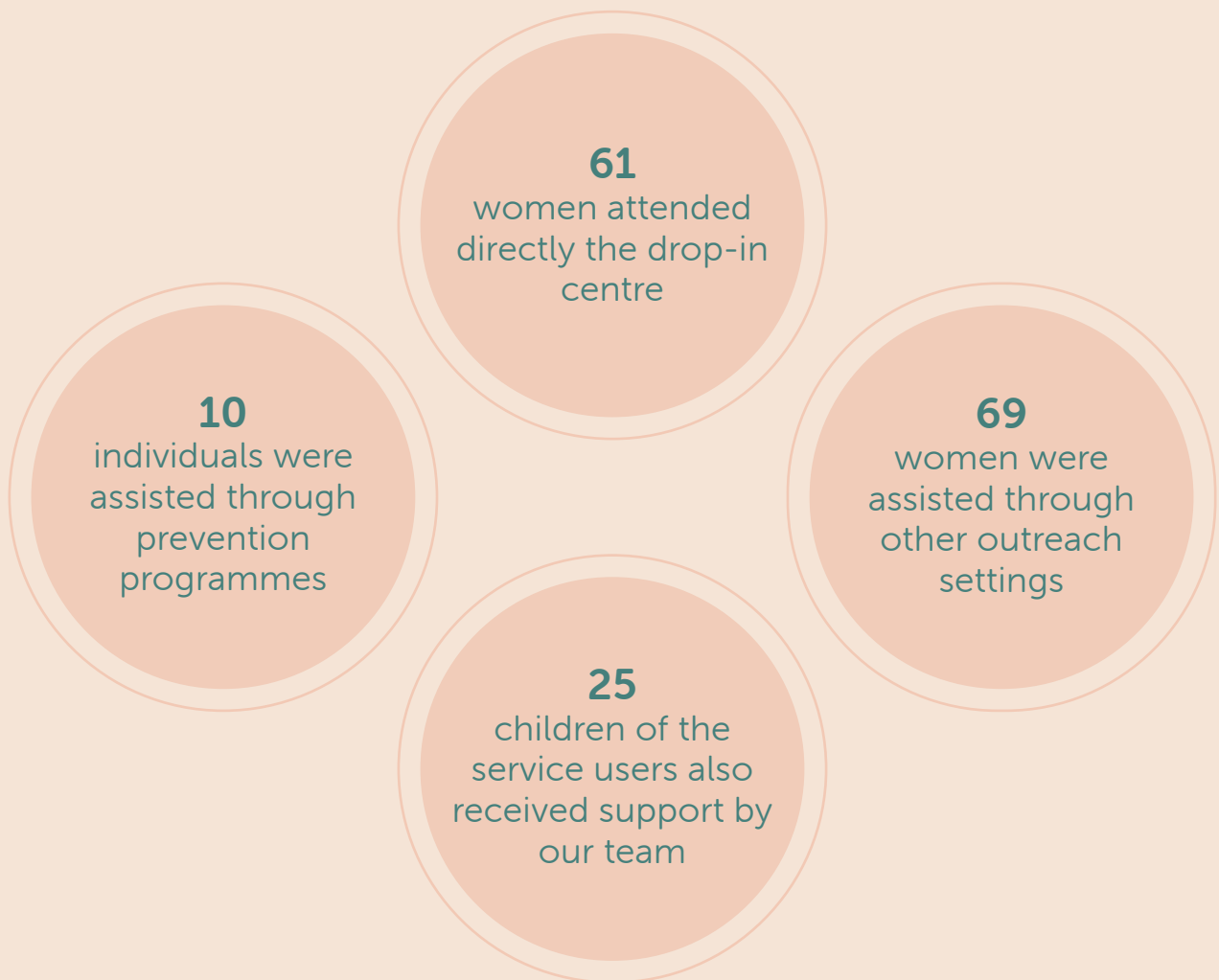
These are also the dreadful and horrifying authentic life experiences of the women attending DH, which sadly entrap them into the violent life of prostitution and frequently to the use of substance to block out the anguish. Their healing journeys are thus slow, lengthy, and filled with numerous emotional pitfalls. Nevertheless, the tenacity, perseverance, and expertise of our professional team intertwined with the dedication and compassion of our volunteers, are strong supportive elements which ease the challenging work we experience.



*robbed of their sense of self, their sense of safety, their sense of trust, their sense of connection to themselves and others, their own self-worth, their dreams and hopes, and real life choices and opportunities*

# SPEAKING THROUGH THE NUMBERS – STATISTICAL REVIEW 2022

From the raw and intense narratives of the women attending DH, we will now review the number of women who in 2022 sought the support and assistance of our organisation, whether through directly attending the premises, or through outreach services. These numbers provide a clear picture of the dire situation, which in turn fuels us with courage to continue providing adequate and reliable services.



Thanks to our perseverance and dedicated diverse team, a total of **165 individuals** received comprehensive support and care designed for each person's needs, and based on the expert knowledge of our professionals.



# CLARITY THROUGH THE PAIN - LEARNING AND TAKING ACTION

Listening to the authentic, raw, and exploitative narratives recounted by the women attending DH taught us invaluable lessons. The suffering and harm they endure whilst in a life of prostitution has provided us with a deep understanding of the violence and trauma they experience, whilst provided us with further insight as to how grooming at a young age is one of the primary trajectories into prostitution. Deception, manipulation, and coercion are other common traits which are usually used by pimps and traffickers to entrap women and girls into prostitution. The women attending DH helped us form a profound understanding of the dark and hidden realities of what truly occurs in prostitution, understand how they have been deceived into such trajectories, and provided us with further insight into why it is so difficult for them to leave such a harmful lifestyle. Such clarity was significant as we realised that we had to do more than what we were already doing within the premises of DH.

As an NGO working in this field, we felt that our responsibilities should not only include that of our service users, but realising how easily women and girls could fall prey into such an exploitative and harmful world, we understood that our work should be extended to our communities, such as providing appropriate and adequate awareness and education within our society. DH needed to change from that of a drop-in centre to a holistic service centre, where our services would not only be extended to reach out to women who are already victims of prostitution, but to the members of society who have also been deceived by the false glamourisation of prostitution, and by the conniving narrative that prostitution should be considered as a 'normal' job. The violence, betrayal, coercion, deceit, manipulation, and abuse that are in place to groom young women and girls into prostitution, together with the violence the women in prostitution constantly endure, definitely do not make prostitution a 'normal' job and should never be considered as such.

As an NGO working for a decade in this field, we have learned that, simply put, prostitution is –

an **exploitative world** forged from the **imbalance between women and men**

the **abuse of physical, financial, and cultural components between genders**, such as

- the link between violence against women and prostitution
- the link between prostitution and human trafficking for sexual exploitation

**violence against women and girls** who are predominantly exploited into prostitution (we recognise that any other individual, including boys, men, or transgendered people may be exploited and harmed in this violent trade, and in no way are we implying that it is less harmful for them. We simply emphasise on women and girls since we acknowledge that prostitution is a highly gendered issue).

As such we felt it is our duty and responsibility to bring forth the harmful realities of what a life in prostitution truly is, whilst raise awareness through campaigns and educational platforms which are also aimed as preventive programmes.

# SHIFTING FROM DROP-IN CENTRE TO SERVICE CENTRE

As part of our service centre responsibilities, we felt it was essential to commence with the provision of a number of various talks and educational sessions amongst different organisations within the community. These organisations included different types of groups and contrasted from youth groups to parish groups. This was done in order to reach as many different age groups as possible, and also to reach a diverse audience. Whilst acknowledging that victims of sexual exploitation are affected directly, we also acknowledge that family members, and other close individuals, may too suffer indirectly. That is another reason why we provided educational and awareness talks to different groups. These covered a wide range of information, from:

the harms, trauma, and violence women in prostitution suffer

the manner in which young women and girls may be targeted and exploited

how to recognise a perpetrator, grooming and exploitation

healthy sex education based on a gendered lens

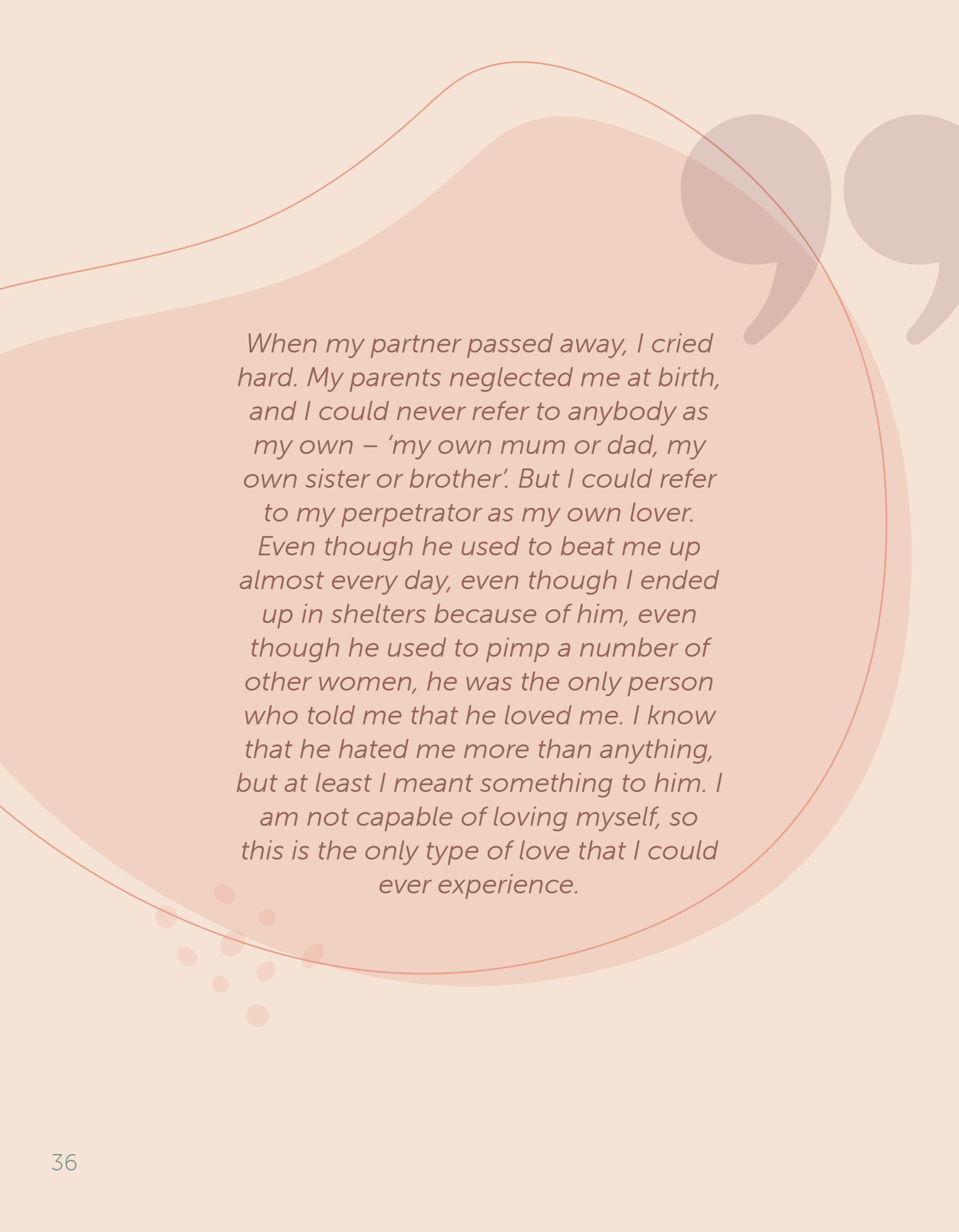
information about our services and where to reach us.

These events were carried out by a professional representative from DH who not only provided the relevant information, but also allowed and created a safe space for participants to freely and openly discuss any difficulties or questions they had. Such an interactive space allowed for an open discussion and understanding of how through the work of professionals and volunteers at DH, women attending our services are restored with a sense of dignity, they are assisted in their healing journeys from trauma, are encouraged in regaining ownership of their own lives, and are supported when deciding to reclaim their personal independence from a life dependent on prostitution. Furthermore, the role of society and how the community could play an essential role in contributing towards safeguarding the well-being of women involved in prostitution was also deeply discussed.

## online awareness campaign

In order to reach a larger audience as part of the awareness raising campaign, DH applied for funding via the Voluntary Organisations Project Scheme managed by the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector. Through these funds, it was possible for DH to embark on an intensive online project on our social media platforms. Based on extensive scientific research, and the narratives of the women attending DH, different posters, videos, stories, short documentaries, and reels, were regularly uploaded in order to address and highlight different aspects regarding the harms of prostitution.





*When my partner passed away, I cried hard. My parents neglected me at birth, and I could never refer to anybody as my own – ‘my own mum or dad, my own sister or brother’. But I could refer to my perpetrator as my own lover. Even though he used to beat me up almost every day, even though I ended up in shelters because of him, even though he used to pimp a number of other women, he was the only person who told me that he loved me. I know that he hated me more than anything, but at least I meant something to him. I am not capable of loving myself, so this is the only type of love that I could ever experience.*

# IN CONCLUSION..

From the initial days DH opened its doors, up till the very present, has been one huge challenge, and a significant learning curve for all of us striving to provide an effective and adequate service to the women seeking our support. Invaluable lessons have been learnt from all the deep narratives recalled by our service users, who despite the multiple traumas they suffered, have been brave enough to trust us with the dark and painful events they endured, and which at times they are still currently experiencing.

Such lessons not only brought new insights, but also made us recognise that we had to shift from our current services, extend beyond the doors of DH, and shift our aims and objectives. We realised we needed to invest in awareness raising and preventive programmes within society. This realisation was brought about after witnessing numerous similar patterns which transpired by the life experiences as recounted by the women attending DH.

As challenging as it was, thanks to the perseverance of our multi diverse, committed, and energetic team, this year we may humbly say that we successfully managed to take our services further and be present in the community through our educational programmes and awareness raising campaigns. Whilst thanking every member of our team working with DH, we also thank every person who helped to bring this educational perspective together, those who created, and delivered such significant awareness and insight amongst the members of our communities. Additionally, we are continuously committed to maintain a key role through our work, and that is to be able to give a voice to every woman seeking our services, whilst provide them with support, respect, dignity, and love each individual truly deserves.

Looking forward for the new challenges and new visions of what the future work at DH will bring!



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