



Dar Hosea

giving back women their dignity

ANNUAL REPORT | 2023

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List of Abbreviations:

APF	Anti-Poverty Forum
CAP	Coalition for the Abolition of Prostitution
CSA	Correctional Services Agency
DH	Dar Hosea
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
MCH	Mount Carmel Hospital
MDH	Mater Dei Hospital
RENATE	Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation

THANKS AND APPRECIATION

Without the continuous support of the generous contributions donated by various benefactors, the extensive overall running of the holistic work carried out at Dar Hosea would not be possible. As such, it is an immense pleasure to commence this document by expressing our deepest and heartfelt thanks and appreciation to each and every one of our benevolent benefactors. Your generous hearts, kindness, care, and concern, which are expressed through your considerate donations, allow us to carry out and provide a comprehensive approach in our continuous commitment of supporting each and every woman entering our door. Due to enduring trauma, every healing journey is a lengthy and exhaustive process requiring a sensitive trauma informed approach involving the efforts of a multidisciplinary team, hence, every contribution helps during such processes.

Such donations are also supporting us in the extended services we offer outside our premises when reaching out to the community. Observing the confused messages amongst the general public, including the lack of knowledge about the realities of the severe violence and trauma women in prostitution endure, we are continuously committed in raising awareness about such harms, particularly amongst youths, and across society in general. This in parallel to the upsurge of gender-based violence (GBV) which is highly linked to prostitution - simply another form of GBV. Through education, our aim is to be committed and visible within society through awareness raising about the realities that women in prostitution truly experience, including the multiple traumas as an effect to a life coerced in such a harmful and exploitative world.

Such widespread duties and responsibilities require the investment of adequate and appropriate financial support in various areas. These include the expenses entailed with the running of the drop-in centre such as the daily provisions of food, medication, personal care products, stationery and other; the upkeep of the premises; utility bills; and the remuneration of the professionals who provide impeccable services both within the drop-in centre, as well as in the preparation of materials in providing specialised educational content. This brief description of our broad work has been provided as a means to once again express our gratitude to all the contributions received this past year, as without such generous and benevolent financial support, we would not be able to fully carry out such broad and extensive responsibilities.



We are most grateful and thankful, and our appreciation goes out not only for the benevolent contributions, but also for your continued support and generosity, for believing in us, for trusting us, and for walking with us in this purposeful journey we are so committed to.

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Association of International Women in Malta
Banju Boutique
Best Print Qrendi
BNF Bank p.l.c.
BRND WGN
Candylicious
Christian Life Community - CLC Malta
Collinson Group
Confraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of
Charity, Valletta
Djakonija - Arcidjoċesi ta' Malta

Ivy Property
Knisja tal-Erwieħ, Tarxien
Lincs Trading
Malta Food Agency
Maria Regina Middle School
ME Direct
Ministry for Social Policy
and Children's Rights
Montaldo Insurance Ltd

Farsons
Female. Community
GO Cares
GO Hire Ltd.
Greens Supermarket
HSBC



Moviment tal-Fokolari
NRG Netball Club
Oratory MSSP
Paroċċa Familja Mqaddsa, Iklin
Paroċċa Lunzjata, Balzan
Paroċċa Madonna ta' Lourdes, San Ġwann
Paroċċa Madonna tal-Grazzja, Żabbar
PMA Architects

Regal Pharmacy, Msida
RENATE - Religious in Europe Networking
Against Trafficking and Exploitation
Salvo Grima Foundation
Sisters of Charity, St Jeanne Antide
Swan Dry Cleaning
Unwasted
Wellbee's Supermarket

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Our mission is to assist every woman who reaches out to us - whether directly at the drop-in centre or outside our premises - to support her in regaining her self-worth which would have been fragmented by a life in prostitution and accompanied by trauma as a result of repeated violence, abuse, and destructive patterns. Through compassion and care, our team – professionals and volunteers – are committed and trained in providing a comprehensive support process starting from the very core basics, until reaching and completing the full healing process of everyone's journey. Respect, love, and empathy are key factors during this process of supporting every service user, who is guided and held through every step in connecting her shattered pieces and rebuilding herself both emotionally and psychologically, as well as helping every woman acquire her own independence through the exploration and provision of alternate opportunities and life choices. Our aim is to empower every woman in believing in herself, and in reacquiring her own true authentic self.

Most women trapped in prostitution are there by force, fraud, or coercion. As such, whilst maintaining full confidentiality and anonymity as a means of protecting every woman's identity, as well as obtaining consent from them, we also feel it is our responsibility to spread awareness by discussing and sharing the experiences of these women with other external members of society, including NGOs, civil society organisations, and many other who reach out to us to learn more about these realities. During these conversations, other critical factors linked to a life in prostitution, such as childhood trauma, including abuse and neglect; dysfunctional home environments; poverty; lack of alternatives; addiction; mental health issues; homelessness; effects of war; migration paths; social exclusion; lack of safety support networks; and other concerning issues, are also discussed and brought to light (these will be further explained in detail in the coming sections).



Through these discussions, our objective is to provide and present adequate and appropriate education by raising awareness about the realities occurring in prostitution, as regrettably, these are frequently obscured by false glamorous narratives covering the trauma and harm that are truly experienced. We strongly believe that bringing to light and openly discussing such realities, will also serve as a means of removing any negative connotation to women in prostitution, including the stigma they experience, since women in prostitution are amongst the most stigmatised and marginalised group in our societies.

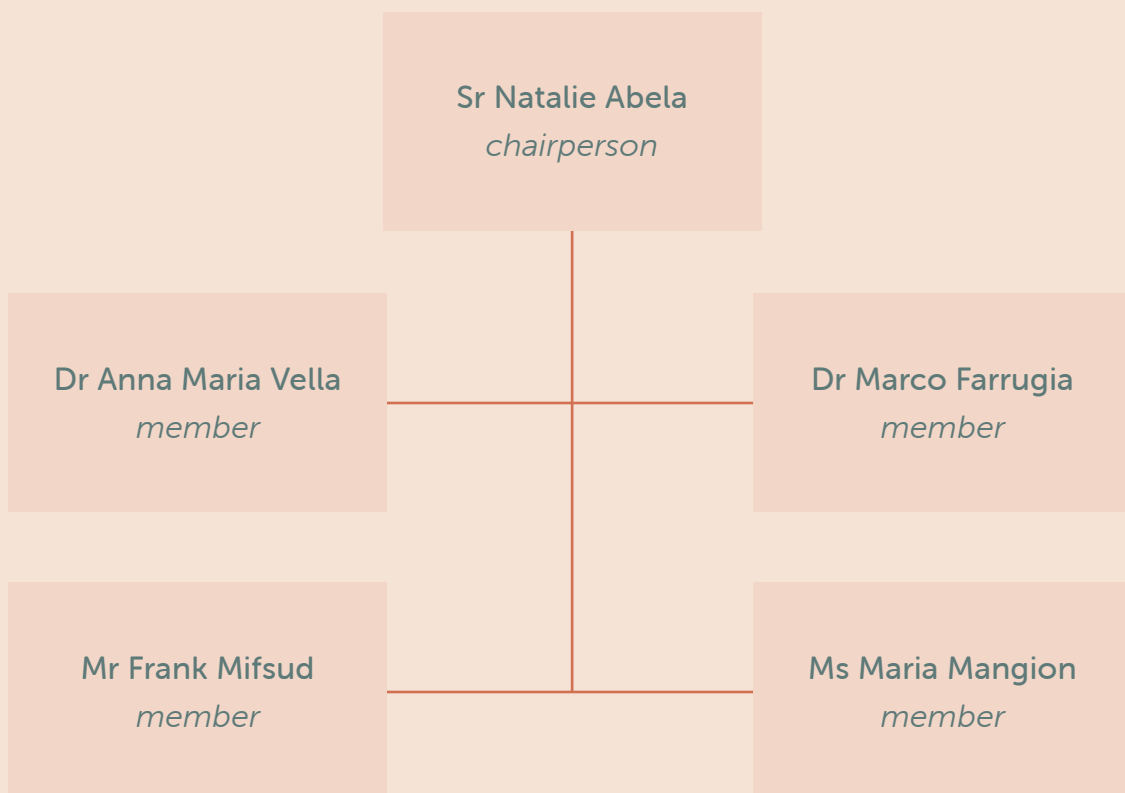
Consequently, our mission is to not only provide a holistic service through each healing journey of every woman exploited in prostitution seeking our services, but to also consolidate a continuous educational dialogue with members of society, particularly the most vulnerable, as well as addressing decision makers. We trust that education is essential and critical in enhancing the prevention of any form of sexual exploitation through continuous comprehensive education and awareness. Furthermore, as an NGO, our aim is to also spread awareness amongst policy makers, as a means of shedding light on the violence within prostitution, and the correlation this industry has with human trafficking for sexual exploitation. Our objective is rather exhaustive, as we are focused on assisting and supporting our service users, providing education within society as a means of prevention, as well as addressing decision makers in the hope to protect those most vulnerable within the nets of our society.



BOARD MEMBERS

DH was established as an NGO in 2013 by St Jeanne Antide Foundation. This was possible through the IRENE Project as sponsored by the EEA Start-Up Fund which allowed for the creation of DH to transpire. Just after the initial year of the opening of its doors, DH amalgamated with the Association of Friends of Thouret - Sisters of Charity. Due to its expanding services, including its role in advocacy and awareness raising, later in 2022 DH became a member of an international organisation - Coalition Abolition Prostitution (CAP) International. Such a membership has enhanced regular collaboration on both national and international projects and campaigns, as well as continuous awareness raising through our social media platforms.

DH, as part of the Association of the Friends of Thouret, is officially recorded on the Malta Council for Voluntary Sector and may be viewed on the following NGO Registration number: V.O. 1365. In 2023, the organisation was administered by a chairperson, and a group of four experts and professionals. These include the following:



THE CREATION OF DAR HOSEA



A decade ago, the realities of the harms of the lives of women and girls trapped in prostitution were unheard of, they were obscured and not spoken about. On the contrary, these women and girls were considered as a burden on society, seen as criminals and deviants. As a result, societal misconceptions only served to bring about denigrating labels such as 'prostitute', removing all form and sense of one's true self-identity and sense of self-worth. Such labels only served in causing stigma, and marginalisation. Rather than receiving support, including appropriate and adequate exit programmes due to multiple traumas endured in a life of prostitution, women and girls exploited and coerced in prostitution, were ostracised by the rest of society causing further spiralling, abuse, and trauma.

It was during years of direct work and support by our professional experts in the field of addiction, that it was understood how other external forces including drug abuse, poverty, homelessness, coercion, childhood abuse, and other damaging factors, were all contributing to trajectories into prostitution. As such, it was collectively agreed amongst the founding members, that concrete and continuous support services needed to be established as a means of assisting such a marginalised group of women and girls. The realisation and knowledge that no form of support to women and girls in prostitution had at the time ever existed, brought about the immediate formation of providing a safe organisation. The significance of such an idea was further solidified by intense and in-depth research regarding the connotation of addiction in the form of drug abuse and prostitution.



It was understood that what was presented in the literature on a global level, was also being reflected locally. As such, the initial plan was to provide a protected space in the form of a drop-in centre where women experiencing trauma because of prostitution, could freely and safely go to. As with every other NGO, the idea and creation of such a drop-in centre brought about significant challenges, such as finances, finding and obtaining suitable premises, recruiting professionals, creating, and forming appropriate and adequate care plans, among many other various difficult challenges. Nevertheless, the perseverance and determination of the founding members made this dream a reality, and in 2013 DH opened its doors.

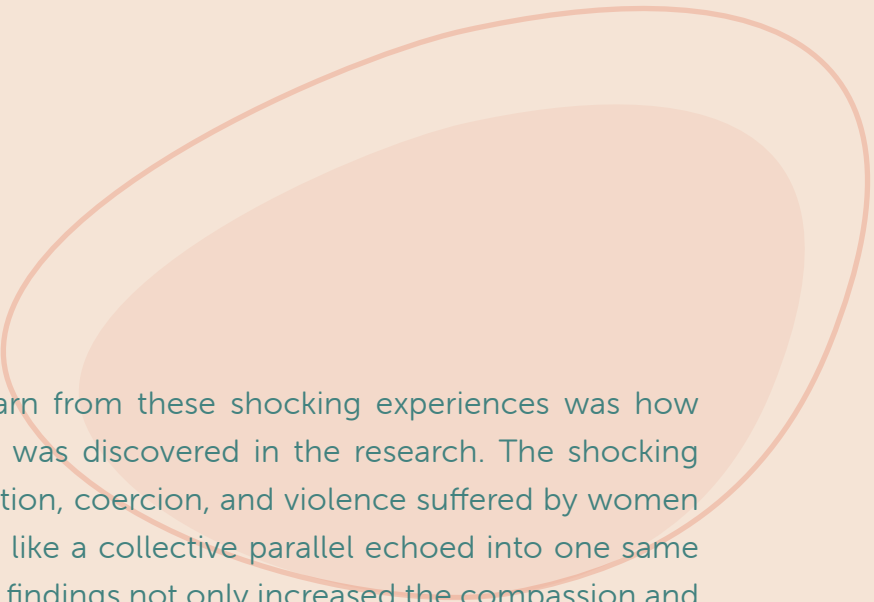


From its very early days, and through the care, kindness, and compassion practised by the initial volunteers and professionals at DH, the women attending our services felt welcomed, safe, and cared for. The provision of such a supportive, and non-judgemental approach, resulted in the deliberate disclosure of the life stories of those seeking assistance at DH. Feeling safe, the women gradually recalled their traumas and pain as experienced in the life of prostitution. They clearly and reflectively recalled the violence and exploitation they endured, and the continuous spiralling into destructive and abusive patterns. With no support services to turn to, they expressed how such distressing experiences only led to other harmful and detrimental pathways such as addiction, which brought further trauma leading to other increased turmoil. Through various yet similar life experiences, the women recounted their pain, fear, and anguish brought about by a dysfunctional life in prostitution. From the experiences recalled by the women, we observed similar patterns by which the women had been groomed and exploited in prostitution. A common narrative was how women explained they had been controlled by malicious and deceitful pretend 'boyfriends', sometimes even their own husbands, who sold them for sex and took all their money. Women recalled how they had been beaten, or threatened to have their children harmed, if they did not go down in the streets. Others recalled how they had been introduced to drugs by 'boyfriends' until they got hooked, and were then sold to other men for sex, whilst other women recalled similar stories of intergenerational exploitation and grooming into prostitution at a young age by family members.




These distressing stories of abuse, deceit, manipulation, threats, violence, and sexual exploitation, although different, all had the same negative results of deeply impacting the overall emotional and physical wellbeing of the women, resulting in continuous and multiple traumas. Furthermore, similar patterns of addiction, isolation, mental health issues, and poverty ensued. Such dark and heavy pathways of anguish, mental and physical pain, seclusion, helplessness, violence, ostracization, no means of support, and no manner of exiting such an adverse life, were only reinforcing trauma, contributing to patterns of self-harm, such as further addictive habits in hope to block out what felt like a dark and painful tunnel, which the women described they found themselves in. These experiences also led to chronic stress such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – ‘a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, or dangerous event’ (NIH, 2023).





What was interesting to learn from these shocking experiences was how such events reflected what was discovered in the research. The shocking patterns of abuse, manipulation, coercion, and violence suffered by women and girls in prostitution, felt like a collective parallel echoed into one same global voice. These startling findings not only increased the compassion and care which was daily exercised by the committed team at DH, who safely welcomed every woman seeking our support, but further ignited the realisation of a need to expand the services by adopting an interdisciplinary method in our work, including the design and creation of a personalised trauma-informed approach to each and every woman, as a means of providing the most appropriate and adequate sensitive client based services. As such, sleeves rolled, experts and professionals got together and brainstormed, in-depth research and training were further carried out, required changes and new approaches were brought at table, sensitivity and trauma-informed methods were designed and disseminated, and any other essential changes and/or requirements and needs were addressed.

All the above is a brief review of some of the intense work adopted by our team who acknowledged that continuous, and non-static, but fluid approach, would be fruitful and beneficial for the sensitive and complete running of DH. The concept that was adopted and shared by every team member was to always strive in enhancing and improving our methods and services, and it was collectively understood that this could only be achieved through a comprehensive and holistic method, which required continuous research, communication, openness, training, the will to change, support, and intense reflection.



THOUGHTFUL PROCESS - RATIONALE BEHIND THE NAME

One of our core principles is giving due merit and profound attention to any detail, it is a philosophy we strive upon and practice. Consequently, such an approach did not fall short when deciding the name of our drop-in centre. Considering the foundations our organisation was designed on, including the aims and objectives, we felt it would only be appropriate to follow with a significant name which would also symbolise and complement our work. Such a decision brought about profound thought, which we ultimately believe resulted in a suited meaningful name – Hosea.



Based on the writings of the Old Testament, Hosea was a prophet who was asked by God to marry a harlot, to respect and love her (Hosea 1:2). The name is of Hebrew origin, and it means 'salvation.'




Accordingly, after thorough reflection, due to the strong connotation between the name Hosea, and the beliefs and core values created and adopted when designing our NGO, this name seemed the most appropriate. This was concluded as the name represented our mission, where each and every woman who had been used and abused, denied any means of support, and marginalised, at DH, (she) would be offered back her former dignity through respect, love, and unconditional support by every member of our team. Through the safety of our premises, as well as through the care, expertise, and compassion of our service providers, every woman seeking our services is warmly welcomed, genuinely loved and respected, provided with a safe and compassionate environment, and embraced and supported in any need she requires. This approach was created to overcome experiences of abuse, violence, and deceit, as experienced in a life in prostitution, which contribute to severe emotional and physical trauma, including experiencing disconnection from oneself. At DH we provide support in restoring that sense of loss, regain a holistic connection with oneself, restore one's broken and shattered identity, where one is then able to heal and move forward in life, eventually regaining the ability to reintegrate into the community. These are the basic core foundations we carefully designed our services on, which continued to evolve and expand over the years.



**THE
ENERGETIC
TEAM
MEMBERS**





DH continues to strive and operate successfully, whilst not shying away from embracing any new challenging yet much needed tasks, only thanks to the perseverance and commitment of its energetic and dedicated team members. The merging of the diversity of each team member creates that special recipe for a thriving and special environment. We respect every individual's unique gift and recognise how such different forms of experience and ability, contribute to the fruitful and effective daily running of our services. Whether it is through the imaginative and resourceful ideas of designing and creating therapeutic crafts, the skilful and caring methods in preparing heartwarming homely delicious meals, the competent ability of maintaining meticulous administrative work, the creative and innovative ideas of designing organisational and training material, the diligence and aptness of running and upkeeping additional tasks outside the premises, as well as the specialised and empowering ability of our professionals, are all recognised as essential ingredients for providing that well balanced environment of a loving welcoming home, supported by compassionate caring members. When all these components come together, and are combined, they translate into the distinctiveness of DH. Every member of our team, irrespective of which background or expertise they come from, are all enthusiastic, dedicated, motivated, energetic, and committed in their unique roles. They all share the same aim, that of welcoming, supporting, and encouraging every woman seeking our services through the whole process of her unique healing journey. Every team member recognises the significance of these key components, and act upon them with kindness, enthusiasm, and determination, thus becoming effective elements to our successful stories.



Regular training from experts

Since the service we offer often involves supporting women experiencing multiple traumas, which often result in different problematic situations requiring particular needs, specific training is regularly provided by experts and professionals. This is done as a means of not only supporting the team, but also equipping the volunteers and professionals with the required knowledge, whilst helping them develop the specific skills which are required when supporting such a complex cohort. Such training is specifically designed and delivered by professional experts in a broad comprehensive manner to cover both the approach adopted by DH, as well as the appropriate method in which the specific needs of the service users should be met. A brief overview of the broad training provided include specific themes such as: Empathy, Resilience, Addiction, Trauma, Mental Health Issues, Gender-Sensitive Approach, and Trauma-Informed Care. To be effective, such training is continuously carried out on a regular basis amongst all team members.



Introducing the team of volunteers

Our team of volunteers come from across all walks of life. Their different experiences in line with their unique skills, make each one of them a meaningful and valuable member within our team, particularly for the women seeking our services. The rich life experiences they are endowed with, their loving care and compassion, including their unique capabilities, convert into extraordinary instruments in the daily tasks they so willingly engage in, especially when in direct contact with the service users. The encompassing wisdom, including the intrinsic kind and caring nature of each volunteer, make each client's experience a truly unique one during their healing journey, where each receive genuine care, respect, unconditional love, and a sense of family warmth, through an inspiring and encouraging approach. We are blessed with several professionals who offer their expertise on a pro bono basis. Doctors, lawyers, dentists, architects, psychologists, counsellors, social workers, hairdressers, nail technicians, teachers, accountants, administrators, and others, all offer their knowledge and expertise so that our clients can be helped and supported holistically.

daily running at DH

As with any other family ambiance, our drop-in centre also requires similar daily settings and organising plans for a beneficial functioning environment. Such duties are mainly carried out by the volunteers who are responsible of seeing to every daily need. Whether it is in the form of preparing daily fresh delicious meals, including healthy breakfast and homely lunches, to other tasty refreshments along the day; or marking any special occasion of every service user, including that of their children; as well as ensuring that special particular events or achievements are appropriately celebrated, as is traditionally done in any other ordinary family home, our team of volunteers have it covered. Regardless if it is celebrating a birthday, or an accomplished milestone such as successfully completing a rehabilitation programme, graduating from a course, or celebrating a cultural festivity, the volunteers ensure that no event or celebration goes unnoticed, they take extra effort and go that extra mile in ensuring that every single occasion is remembered together, as they recognise how each celebration symbolizes unity, provides that sense of belonging, and helps in the process of reconnection to every service user who feels valued and appreciated by a supportive and caring system.



assisting the journey through creative therapeutic processes

The volunteers are also trained and engaged in providing assistance during the healing process of each service user through different therapeutic manual tasks. Such activities have been found to be deeply beneficial and effective in restoring positive moods, personal values, and encouraging beliefs such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. These tasks include the designing and decorating of various artwork through the making and creation of candles, cards, paintings, or jewellery. Other fruitful therapeutic processes include the caring of plants, such as learning the method of pruning, and/or repotting, as well as the daily upkeep of such plants. More collaborative tasks assisted by the volunteers include teaching the service users how to prepare and cook homely and healthy meals, as well as explaining the benefits of such meals. The process of all these distinct yet similar therapeutic approaches, help not only in increasing positive attitudes towards daily commitments and successful achievements amongst the service users, boosting positivity and the sense of care which leads to the concept of self-care, but also help in discovering creative hidden talents amongst the service users. Such realisations often lead to the pursual of related educational courses, eventually leading to more meaningful and purposeful opportunities in life.

Such constructive and pleasant therapeutic tasks carried out by the keen volunteers create that desired ambiance which is truly beneficial for every healing journey of each service user. Through the continuous encouraging support which is always enthusiastically voiced and manifested by the volunteers, the women attending DH feel appreciated, valued, and loved. In turn, this creates that so needed safe space where respect and non-judgement allows for a healthy bond between volunteers and service users to transpire. This connection is usually the first step where service users feel safe to disclose their confined and hidden traumatic stories, which too often hold them back from moving forward in their healing journey. That sense of belonging and acceptance are a result of all the work which is so carefully and compassionately carried out by each and every dedicated volunteer, whose efforts and persistence are the first critical steps in providing that invaluable safety net for every woman seeking our services.

supporting service users outside DH

The volunteers are so dedicated that some of them extend their support to those women who for various reasons are not able to attend or reach the drop-in centre. Such volunteers who are trained in this particular area of outreach services, visit those women seeking or requiring the services of DH at their own private homes, or at any residence they would be residing at. During such outreach visits, if and when permissible, the volunteers offer warm meals as would have been prepared at the drop-in centre, donate grocery bags bought by DH, carry out craft activities as a means of therapy, and provide personalised required training skills, whilst engaging in a friendly and caring conversation. The approach is quite organic and focuses on a client-centred method, it is a positive method focusing on building beneficial connections whilst sharing quality time as a means of providing a genuine and safe environment. Other external support provided by the volunteer team, also includes accompanying service users for medical appointments, or accompanying them to legal offices or court. Such extended outreach assistance is beneficial in allowing continuous effective support to take place, as this is not only carried out when clients make their way to the drop-in centre, but every woman appreciates that she is supported throughout her whole journey, and understands she is not supported in fragments, but throughout every phase along her healing process.





administrative team

Another essential voluntary team is the administrative group. This diligent team is responsible for all the administrative duties which entail a great deal of attention and precision. Their proficiency and competence assist in the transparent and accurate upkeep of all organisational work, including financial transactions, as well as coordinating and filing all administrative records, and other data, including overseeing the scheduling and communication of any related organisational material or other documents.

DH holds a licence to operate from the SCSA which is yearly renewed. This entails a lot of work to ensure that the home is safe and works within a legal framework.

Furthermore, the team is also made up of individuals who are responsible in creating innovative and interesting fund-raising activities, as a means of further providing financial support for the continuous overall upkeep and maintenance of DH.

charity shop team

An additional dynamic team of volunteers oversee the daily running of a charity shop. The efforts carried out by this active and dedicated team, which include collecting, sorting, and organising the shop, not only support in alleviating the weight of the costly expenses entailed by the daily running of DH but has also other beneficial qualities - such as assisting those in need, something we also hold at heart and assist through our extended work within the community.

Moreover, the concept of running a charity shop has been part of our social awareness and commitment goal in our contribution towards the environment, a concern we also appreciate. Adopting such a circular approach helps the environment in various ways, namely, preserving natural resources and sustainability through the reduction of carbon footprint, landfill, and bulky waste pick-ups; promoting re-use, recycle, and upcycling; slowing down fast fashion; whilst saving money to consumers.

Following a recent refurbishment of the premises, a new administration team was formed and the whole process was revisited to make it more efficient and productive. The volunteers working there are also continuously trained because even though they do not meet the service users at the DH, the aim and vision is still passed on to them so that they understand why their work is so important.



maintenance team

As with any other premises, our drop-in centre requires regular maintenance for the complete function of household equipment and household appliances, including ensuring the overall safety and functionality of the premises. This work is carried out thanks to the generous time which is freely provided by some male volunteers who are always prompt in showing up when repairs are required, or who otherwise willingly schedule specific rosters to perform regular maintenance works around the premises - such as painting, inspecting major home necessities, restocking maintenance supplies, or fixing any equipment/appliances which need repairs. Thanks to the dedication of these volunteers, the premises we operate in is fully functional and updated according to health and safety regulations for the protection of the employees and every service user, who is worthy of seeking that safe space in a protective environment. The upkeep of the overall safety of our premises is important not just for its smooth and effective functionality, but it also encapsulates the concept of protection, safety, and care which resonates with our objectives every time a woman is welcomed, received, and supported.



self-care service professional

A professional hairdresser regularly visits DH to provide free haircare consultation and advice to the service users, including offering free services such as hair colour, haircuts, and hair styling, to whoever requires such service. Such self-care sessions prove to be helpful to the service users not only as it boosts their morale through their external appearance, but receiving such care and attention help them understand that they are valued, respected, and cared for. In turn, such an approach is beneficial during the healing journey of every service user, particularly during the process of regaining certain lost personal traits due to traumas experienced in a life of prostitution. Learning about self-care provides a sense of personal worth and value which facilitates the process of regaining and appreciating one's own self-esteem, self-respect, and self-worth. Parallel to the ongoing professional therapy sessions, in line with the work of the social workers, and encouragement from the volunteers, collectively contribute to the overall wellbeing of the service users, in achieving that lost sense of believing in themselves and believing that they are worthy.




professional volunteers

Another essential and valid group of volunteers which complements the rest of the team, is made of a broad group of specialists varying from the medical to the legal field. This group of professionals generously donate their free time from their busy schedules to provide the service users with the most appropriate individualised treatment care plans, as well as providing professional and legal sound advice and assistance where necessary. This diverse team of experts include a professional dentist who offers free consultation and attends to any required personal treatment; a qualified psychologist who assists every client dealing with current and/or past trauma, which is often found to be blocking the healing process; a medical expert who provides regular comprehensive health checks to all service users, whilst attending to any required health needs through compassion and empathy; an experienced midwife who supports the service users by promoting health education conversations, and addressing any other general health issues, whilst guiding them accordingly; professional lawyers who are always ready to provide recommendations and inform the service users about their legal rights and obligations, whilst assisting them in court if and when required; and a skilled architect who is always prompt in managing and ensuring any preparatory plans, applications, design, and planning according to safety regulations in any required construction repairs, maintenance, or alterations.

Introducing the staff members

Our team of professional staff, despite small, is instilled with plenty of enthusiasm, energy, and willingness as is always manifested by each member. Such self-motivated and efficient experts are continuously exploring new innovative approaches on how to maintain a beneficial and practical method, whilst constantly committed in improving their own expertise with latest development training in their unique fields, in line with that of our services. Such proactive attitudes provide a continuous effective and beneficial work approach both amongst the whole team members (including strengthening collaboration and providing support to the team of volunteers), as well as in the comprehensive provided services. The team of experts is comprised of two Social Workers, one of whom is also responsible for the duties of 'Leader of Services'. Another employee is a Project Assistant. This remarkable group continuously work together in harmony, they are always ready to support each other when required, whilst they also provide continuous training and support to the team of volunteers.



“My own grandma introduced me to the world of prostitution. I always knew that it was useless attending classes at school, as none of my older female cousins who were already involved in prostitution had ever worried about school. When I was 14 years old, my dad became my pimp, and eventually my older brother took over. I am now tired of being sexually assaulted violently by random men.”

- Maltese survivor of prostitution

design and planning - gender sensitive trauma informed care

Our staff acknowledges that due to violence and abuse, trauma is a core issue in the lives of women in prostitution. As such, profound consideration through the implementation of a gender-sensitive approach is provided both during the initial stages of support, as well as during the whole healing journey. In the initial steps of the intake sessions, the social worker welcomes the service users through a conversation, introduces herself, and explains the services provided by DH, including any other external support services with whom we collaborate. At a later stage, the social worker explores why support is being sought by gently tapping into the required needs of each service user. Throughout every intake session, the social worker goes that extra mile in ensuring a safe space through compassion and empathy, as this approach paves the way for a strong and trusting relationship amongst the professional and the service user. Such stages allow for trust and a professional connection to transpire, which gradually allows for deeper sensitive issues such as trauma and other related matters to unfold.



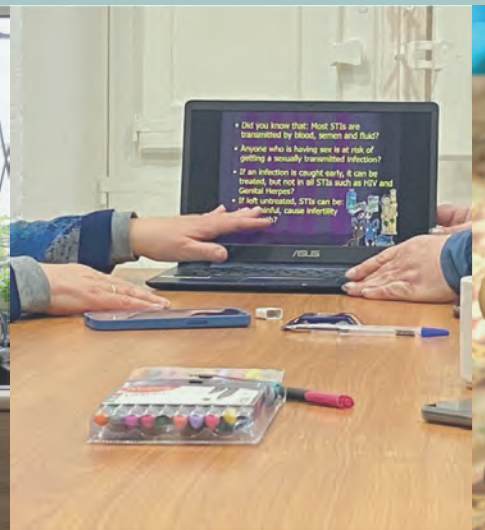
With this concept in mind, and in line with the expertise of our social workers, the method adopted during the whole intake session process, which is crucial in laying the foundations for an effective and adequate programme, is built on a gender responsive trauma informed care. Through continuous compassion, sensitivity, and care, a tailor-made programme is mapped out after recognising, learning, and understanding the different needs of every woman. This intense work, which is carried out in different stages, and only after intense consultation with other different experts, through a multidisciplinary team, each specific programme is holistically designed and aimed for the particular needs of each woman. In line with trauma, other concerns, including gender-based violence, addiction, mental health, isolation, homelessness, disconnection from family, including

other gendered specific needs, are also addressed and explored.

Furthermore, through professional connection and respectful grounds, the social worker gives prominence to every service user's voice, and through encouragement and continuous support, the social worker invites every client to be involved in the design of her own programme. Such an approach not only builds a sense of trust, but also conveys a strong message of value and respect. Through compassion, the social worker provides each service user with a space to be able to safely voice her own narrative, making her the significant expert of her own story. Such an approach improves autonomy, resilience, and provides a further sense of empowerment which is extremely beneficial in the success of each healing and recovery process.

daily responsibilities at DH

As well as designing and creating personal supportive care plans for every service user, the professional members are also responsible in overseeing the daily running of DH through ensuring a safe and supportive environment amongst volunteers and service users. They are prompt to solve any unexpected events, including taking care of any external support duties concerning the service users. As a means of maintaining personalised care plans, the social workers are in frequent contact with other health care professionals - who are experts in their own particular fields - where together they discuss each individual care plan and oversee every process, whilst revising or maintaining any care plan accordingly and as necessary. This multidisciplinary approach ensures that every particular need of each service user is being met and supported from every possible angle.



extending our support

Years of experience in this particular field has taught us that in order to provide a holistic support approach, due to complex and multiple difficulties our service users face, our support should not only be reserved and applied within the walls of DH, but it should be extended and provided to those women who are not able to attend in person. As such, apart from planning and assigning those volunteers who generously offer their time to support such an extended service, the social workers themselves also provide an outreach support programme. This is done in various forms, from reaching out to clients in their own homes, visiting them when in hospital, accompanying them in receiving any rehabilitation support treatment due to addiction, providing training at the Correctional Services Agency (CSA), or accompanying them to medical or legal appointments, including court cases. Such outreach service is always carried out through a gender sensitive trauma informed lens. Furthermore, the social workers interact with the service users using the social worker-client relationship - a means which allows for empathy to be transmitted, and for experiences to be shared, where care is offered, a sense of belonging is founded, and meaning-making occurs (Howe, 2013).



External Visits

Using the same approach as adopted at DH, the social workers visit the service users at their private homes, or at any residence where they would be receiving required care. Such support visits may be at Mater Dei Hospital (MDH), the Correctional Services Agency (CSA), Mount Carmel Hospital (MCH), including any other residential rehabilitation centres across Malta and Gozo. Through an amicable conversation, the social workers assess the progress of the service users, gently explore any particular needs the women might need, evaluate any missing gaps, ensure that all appointments (medical/legal/housing/employment) are being followed, and take the time to discuss the way forward together with each service user. This is done to reassure each woman that her voice is being listened to, that she is supported throughout her journey, whilst ensuring that she is confident and comfortable with any suggested care programmes.

Correctional Services Agency (CSA)

Reports of women in prison show that the majority have suffered domestic violence, including having experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse during childhood (Prison Reform Trust, 2017). Moreover, the research identifies how women in prison have often experienced extensive abuse and are likely to have complex mental health, addiction, and other needs (Cox & Sacks-Jones, 2017). Many imprisoned women are actually convicted on charges related to illicit drug abuse - research shows that up to 85 percent of 'streetwalkers', women loitering for prostitution, are heroin or crack users (Khalidi, 2018). Drugs are frequently abused by many women in prostitution as a means of numbing the degradation and trauma experienced in prostitution (Wiechelt & Shdaimah, 2011).

As such, the social workers together with a few volunteers provide extended support at the CSA, both on a one-to-one basis but also in group sessions doing crafts. These group sessions help the inmates connect indirectly to our staff in a manner that is not challenging. Such support is critical on various levels, as both research and experience taught us about the multiple barriers imprisoned women face, both during life in prison, and upon exiting and trying to reintegrate in society.

The hurdles vary and may include some or all of the following issues - isolation, disconnection from children, neglect from family members, homelessness, poverty, and unemployment. In turn, these result in mental health issues such as depression, PTSD, and anxiety. If not effectively and appropriately supported, such realities often serve as a revolving door leading such a cohort of women back to a life in prostitution as a means of survival, only resulting in further distress and complications.

Most of the women we support at CSA would have been incarcerated due to prostitution, and therefore, they do not only suffer double standards of discrimination due to the exploitation and trauma endured, but they also suffer additional prejudice for the fact of being an imprisoned woman engaging in a life of prostitution. Children are often taken from their mothers prior to being imprisoned, causing further distress not only to the children (since often the mothers are the primary or sole care givers), but also to the women themselves since they experience further isolation and disconnection from loved ones. This causes a ripple effect and further spiralling since as a result to this separation, many end up suffering further depression, frequently leading to addiction in order to numb such immense pain.





Hence, the extended support provided by DH, not only provides a bridge for the women when they exit, as they have a point of reference, a place to contact once back in society, but they also receive continuous support through therapy, training, and counselling by our professional experts and trained volunteers whilst still at CSA. Moreover, extending our support at CSA assists those service users attending DH who are awaiting prison sentences, and upon being detained, they continue building on the care plan which would have commenced at DH, thus keeping consistency throughout the whole care programme. The weekly craft sessions designed to address different specific themes, which are specifically prepared by our volunteers, are effective for creating a healthy relationship between members of DH and the women at CSA. Such craft sessions are beneficial and therapeutic for the healing journeys, including during the reintegration process. These sessions are also beneficial since we are able to reach out to different female inmates, and not only those in prostitution. Such sessions are also considered preventive services since self-respect, self-worth, and empowerment are conveyed through the social worker-client relationship conversations.

Mount Carmel Hospital (MCH)

Due to the severe trauma experienced by women and girls exploited and trafficked into prostitution, and the negative and detrimental impact such experiences have on the lives of these women, mental health issues develop. Research identifies that women in prostitution experience high rates of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Martín-Romo, Sanmartín, & Velasco, 2023). At times, these are impacted so badly that some of the service users end up receiving residential care at MCH due to the severity of the mental health condition. Consequently, to maintain a constant supportive care plan, the professional experts carry out frequent visits at MCH which are similar to those carried out at CSA. These visits do not only allow for the continuation of an effective care plan, but they also strengthen the professional relationship between our professionals at DH and the experts at MCH, allowing for both a multidisciplinary approach to unfold, including a fruitful collaborative approach between professionals for the sole benefit of the service users. Additionally, such a trustworthy and effective method allows for a more effective support care plan when addressing the needs of those service users who are suffering from addiction and mental health issues.

Aftercare maintenance support

As a means of ensuring the overall wellbeing of the service users, providing reassurance and support, the social workers continue to maintain regular contact with the service users through telephone conversations or home visits upon completion of their recovery journey. This support continues even after successfully reintegrating into society, completing any rehabilitation programmes, finding employment, settling in their own homes, and effectively reconnecting and reuniting with loved ones, particularly children. Such connections are fruitful in providing that safe platform that the women feel they could turn to if the need arises. Throughout the years, survivors who successfully regain their independence and achieve their autonomy, continue to celebrate special occasions at DH as they feel that sense of family connection, and express that DH will remain a type of second home for them.

The benefits of a comprehensive team



The different strengths of such a multifaceted professional team are what completes the puzzle of our comprehensive services. It is what connects all the dots in our commitment in providing the best possible overall care to every service user. Whether it impacts them directly, such as providing continuous comprehensive support through a multidisciplinary approach along every step of their healing journey, or whether indirectly, such as through the provision of a regulated safe and healthy environment, we ceaselessly strive towards providing a full complete caring and supportive approach. We continuously aspire towards providing such overall care, as we understand the injustice these women suffer, and acknowledge the traumas they continue to endure. We strongly believe that no human being should ever experience such physical and psychological atrocities which leave everlasting scars. Consequently, we stand firm in our relentless commitment in providing the most suitable and reliable complete support to every woman who has been exploited in prostitution, as every person deserves to be supported not only in her emotional healing journey, but also supported holistically, in any manner that is required to fulfil and complete her own journey in reconnecting with herself, and in rebuilding herself completely, and not just in segments. We are dedicated in constantly supporting and showing each woman that she is valued, respected, cared, and loved by every member of our team. Through their work and commitment, each team member continuously confirms and reassures every woman that she truly and genuinely matters.

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW

- SAYING IT WITH NUMBERS

From the colourful and encompassing team members of DH, we now delve into the number of service users who have benefited from our comprehensive care. At times, children have also been warmly welcomed and supported when attending DH with their mothers – whether helping them with homework, supporting them through educational games, or coaching them in developing their creative skills - the team members were always prompt in responding to the specific needs of every service user’s child. Whether at the drop-in centre of DH, or in any other residence or institution the service users reside at the time of support, the fusion of members - volunteers and professionals - has been a valuable and successful tool in the overall care plan of every woman’s healing journey.

Having such a broad team not only complements each other but also sets the tone for harmony and collaboration amongst the service providers themselves, which in turn results in a more efficient approach when providing services. Moreover, the effect of such a diverse team has proven to be appreciated by the service users as they repeatedly express how such a rich colourful team provides a deeper sense of stability in a well-balanced caring and professional ambiance. The service users voice how through such diversified members, they are able to receive both a sense of a family environment – receiving safety and warmth - as well as being guided by a competent team through the professional support of the different experts. As such, this approach has rendered their experience at DH a more trustworthy and reliable one.

Number of Service Users reached at DH and other settings as mentioned above:



The team of DH consisted of a dedicated team of 41 volunteers; including volunteers working directly with service users, at the charity shop, maintenance and professionals providing pro bono services (including legal, medical and psychological support).

All staff members and volunteers are provided with regular supervision sessions and mentoring sessions. This allows all personnel to be supported through their work with the women at DH, ensuring that all input is professional and that both service providers and service users are safeguarded throughout.

The number of hours given by volunteers are as follows: 3,357 hours at DH and other direct client work, and 2,283 hours at the Charity Shop.

DH organised regular social activities for both staff, volunteers and service users.





ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING - TAKING IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Despite the extreme challenges we face due to logistics and resources, such as requiring additional members when extending our services, and designing different educational and awareness programmes, we realised that being aware of the exploitation and harm in prostitution, we had to reach out way beyond our walls. We realised that in parallel to the comprehensive services we are already providing to our service users - addressing their daily needs and supporting them in rebuilding their lives through counselling and providing psychological support, assisting them with other medical and legal advice, and helping them in finding employment and adequate housing - we also had to continue reaching out to society, share the women's realities, and unveil the dark and real abusive world of prostitution. We understand the strong need of raising awareness within our communities, as the harmful realities of what actually happen in prostitution are far from the ones that are connivingly portrayed by those with a specific agenda to profit from the trafficking of women and girls (and any other human being trafficked for sexual exploitation), or as are deceitfully portrayed across various social media platforms falsely selling the glamourised prostitution myth to young viewers and adults alike as a means of normalising prostitution.

Building on our previous educational campaigns

Understanding such realities, and how trafficking and prostitution are being facilitated through a shift in narrative via the media sphere, which is shifting the social fabric of society, we acknowledge and recognise that education is key. As such, building on our previous successful awareness campaigns, we continued reaching out to society through extended educational talks. Such talks were carried out across different schools where our professionals discussed the issues of:

consent

experiences of youth regarding sexual exploitation

awareness on social realities

Additionally, continuing on the educational programmes from the previous year, two of our trained volunteers maintained regular prevention sessions for boys at the St Joseph Home.

Understanding the broad and diverse groups, and recognizing the need to reach as many individuals as possible, as DH, we engage in awareness sessions with individuals from different social backgrounds. These include addressing different sessions/talks in different group settings, such as university students during seminars and lectures, parish groups, youth groups, participation on panels during other seminars and conferences, and meetings with several stakeholders.



International Conference on the Prostitution System – DH & CAP

As the main and only organization in Malta working in assisting and meeting the needs of women in prostitution, DH seeks to raise awareness and consciousness amongst the general public about the realities these individuals endure. Furthermore, our aim is to highlight the realities of the women we work with, making them more visible to various stakeholders, particularly the policy makers. Consequently, seeing the positive feedback from our various awareness raising and educational conversations, we realised we needed to take this further and organise a large-scale conference addressing different major entities. After several and regular discussions, meetings, and networking, such a conference was finally organised. In collaboration with CAP, DH organised an abolitionist international conference titled:

'NeitherSexNorWork: Listening to Survivors and Understanding the Legislative Approaches'

The aim of the campaign emerged from the heart of the frontliners, activists, and academics working in the area of vulnerable women, to make the faint voices of women in prostitution heard. This conference brought together a panel of experts, state representatives, international survivors, and international institutions, who discussed the best abolitionist approach in the fight against the system of prostitution and human trafficking. This impactful and dynamic conference was held in September at Antoine de Paule Hall, San Anton Palace, as generously offered by H.E. George Vella, President Emeritus.



A day prior to the conference, DH also held a number of advocacy meetings by a team of experts and professionals with several participants, including Members of Parliament, frontline professionals, and relevant stakeholders. The coordination and planning of this significant conference stretching over two days, came in light of on-going discussions in Malta, where the incumbent government seeks to legislate in favour of full decriminalisation and regularising prostitution. It is important to state that if such policies are implemented, in reality, decriminalisation will only be benefiting pimps and traffickers giving them the green light for further pimping and exploitation, and not to protect the women and girls who are trafficked and prostituted. As multiple research has demonstrated (Fein, 2019), proper laws safeguarding and protecting women in prostitution should be the following:



As Andrea Dworkin eloquently states:

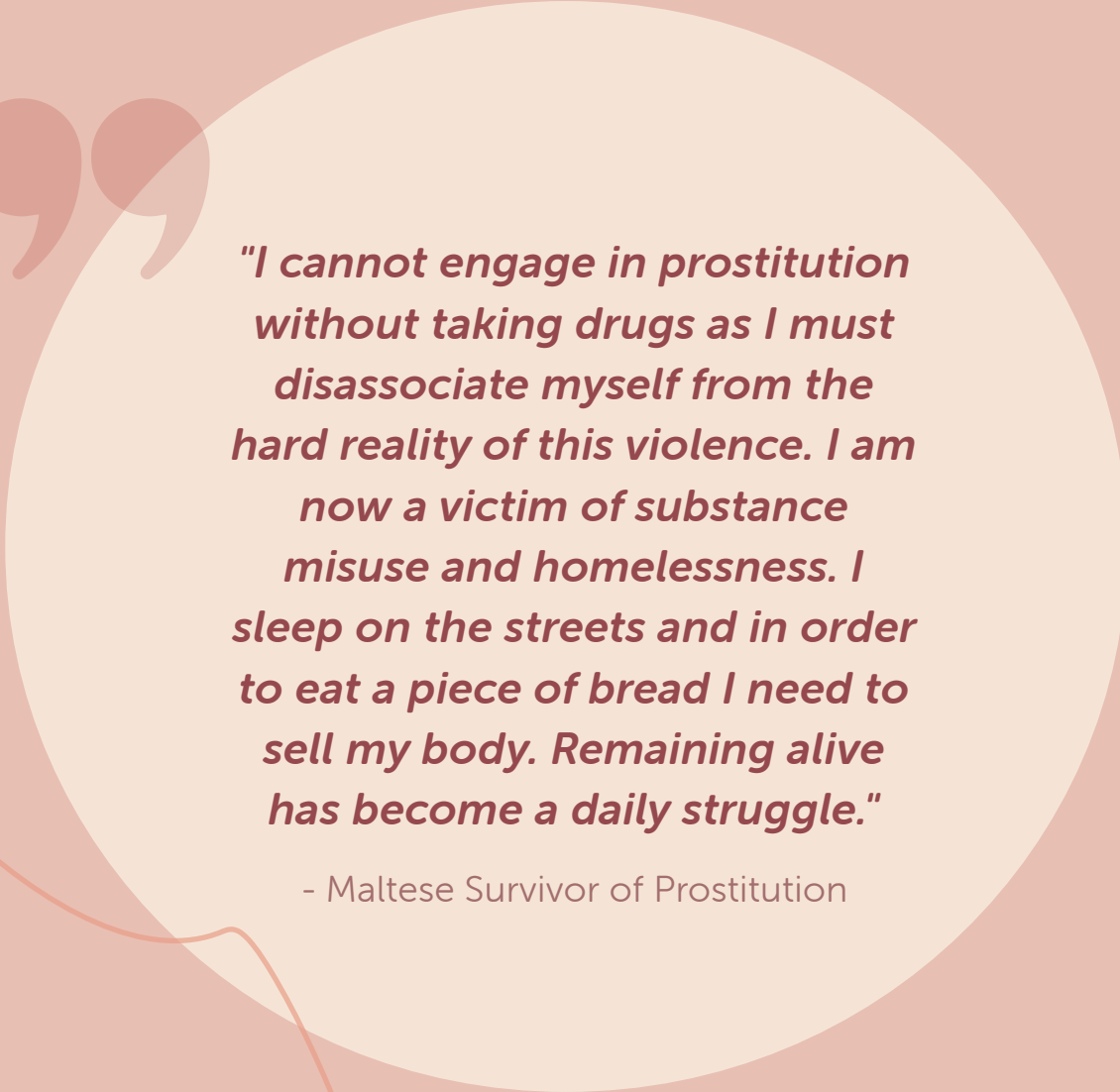
“surely the freedom of women must mean more to us than the freedom of pimps”.



Online awareness campaign

Understanding the need to reach as many audiences as possible, we continue extending our awareness campaign through our social media platforms where we regularly upload information about prostitution, highlighting and combining both statistical data and narrative experiences. Acknowledging that prostitution is violence against women and girls, during the global 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, running from 25th November (the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) until 10th December (Human Rights Day), we augmented our media platform feeds with uploading daily suitable educational awareness information regarding gender-based violence and the links to prostitution.



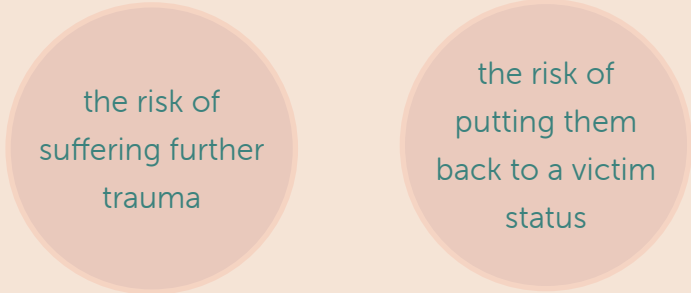


"I cannot engage in prostitution without taking drugs as I must disassociate myself from the hard reality of this violence. I am now a victim of substance misuse and homelessness. I sleep on the streets and in order to eat a piece of bread I need to sell my body. Remaining alive has become a daily struggle."

- Maltese Survivor of Prostitution

Expanding our voice both locally and internationally

Recognising the deep impact of trauma our service users experience and understanding how such trauma is relived when relating their life, we decided that as part of our services as a drop-in centre, we would also be the voice of the women attending DH. After extensive reflection and discussions amongst the professionals, it was concluded that in order to maintain their identities anonymous and confidential, particularly when children and minors are involved, whilst safeguarding and protecting the women from:



the risk of
suffering further
trauma

the risk of
putting them
back to a victim
status

we would be the ones narrating their stories, in order to raise awareness about the violence that occur in prostitution. With the safety and needs of the service users always held at the centre of our decisions, in line with respecting their request to share their stories with society, we extended our voice among different platforms. The expertise of our professionals, including the experience and knowledge gained from all our educational sessions, in line with addressing numerous broad audiences, has enabled this decision, as well as enhanced networking and collaboration with other organisations.



Being so committed, visible, voiceful, and active in our awareness raising and educational efforts, has led us to be active participants across numerous platforms with both local and international organisations. Through these networks, DH has taken on an active role to be the voice and advocate for the rights of persons attending the services. These organisations include the Anti-Poverty Forum (APF), RENATE Europe (Religious in Europe Networking Against Trafficking and Exploitation), CAP, Homelessness Network, and the Platform Against Homelessness and Kummissjoni Djaġonija.

A proactive approach



We realised that by reaching out beyond the walls of DH, we are not only extending our services but we are taking a more proactive approach which of course is more constructive. We understand the strong need and urgency of reaching out to as many individuals as possible, particularly young female adolescents since they are the ones at the highest risk of exploitation. Realising how important the narratives of the service users are, whilst recognising the amplification of a false glamourisation of this harmful industry across social media platforms, which is serving as a catalyst for grooming young girls into prostitution, further fuels our energies and drive to include raising awareness and education. Extending our services has changed our responsibilities, as we are not only catering and supporting our service users but we are

also offering our services to the community through education, which is also beneficial as it is serving as a preventive programme.

We are committed in being a strong voice in the face of injustice, such as that of modern-day slavery, as that is what prostitution truly is – the exploitation and selling of human beings as a sexual commodity. Our decision to reach out to policy makers, and other responsible stakeholders in presenting the truth, and offer our expertise in adequate and appropriate decision making is clearly reflected in our efforts of continuous awareness raising programmes, including our international conference, which has been a huge success amongst all participants, both locally and internationally.



"I remember that I was so young that my mum used to make me sit on the kitchen cupboard for hours during the day while old men fondled my private parts. I thought this was ok, but it still hurt badly. Today I am trying to learn to love myself again, but it has been and remains, a very tough journey."

- Maltese Survivor of Prostitution

FINAL WORDS

This past year has been another amazing journey in our ongoing progress and enhancement in the provision of our overall services. Despite the never-ending challenges we experienced along the way, we can humbly say that we have also witnessed and achieved great achievements. Such fruitful accomplishments were only possible due to the tenacity and determination of our energetic team, whose insight and understanding of the lives of women in prostitution, fuelled their energies when things got tough and rough. In face of challenges, instead of giving up, the strength and unity of the team, empowered by a collaborative mindset, added to perseverance and a group effort in finding solutions. In line with such work, our field of activism also grew strong, and the creation of an international event was also possible thanks to those other external professionals, academics, and activists, who regularly support and collaborate with the team of DH by offering their valuable time in brainstorming and presenting approaches for organising such successful events. Every member of our team is driven by the same aim, that of providing the best possible support service to each service user, since we recognise the realities of the harms and traumas experienced by the exploitation of women. Through continuous research and exploring different methods for improvement, we continue working on enhancing our services both inside DH – through our continuous comprehensive, supportive approach to every woman seeking our services for a holistic healing journey as well as by extending our services and adding awareness raising and education amongst the community.



Building on last year's positive feedback and reactions from the public we addressed, we continued building and improving our training programmes and awareness raising by reaching out to further groups both within schools and university, as well as amongst the general public through youth programmes, community organisations, parish groups, and many other. Acknowledging the need for the further promotion of awareness, we took a bottom-up top-down approach, and further to our work with the general public, we took that other step and through our international event, reached out and addressed those responsible in policy making, government representatives, stakeholders, and frontline professionals. We recognise the need of raising our voices in the face of such injustice – that of trafficking and prostitution, and be active in both our roles of providing services, as well as being active by presenting the realities to those in authority, and by educating the public.



Whilst we are grateful, humbled, and thankful for being able to provide such services to every woman seeking our support, encouraging and empowering her throughout every step of her healing journey, in her quest of regaining her personal self-worth - a complete being without the fragments of trauma, and being able to regain ownership of her own life, of her own independence, and be able to reach and achieve her unique potential - we are also appreciative of every member within our team whose passion and determination make all this possible. As DH, our aim is to continue building on our work, continue expanding on our approaches and techniques through research, and continue our advocacy mission of awareness raising and education. All this is possible since we are open and adaptive to change. We are always exploring new ways of improvement, we are also committed in acknowledging past mistakes, learning from them, changing, and improving where necessary, whilst acknowledging and maintaining what has been beneficial. Through the years, we have understood

that the force fuelling every team member at DH is the same; it is the drive in restoring the dignity to every woman in prostitution who has been robbed of her own true essence through force, violence, fraud, abuse, deceit, coercion, control, or any other manipulative manner used by pimps, traffickers, and sex buyers, by anyone violating and oppressing those exploited in prostitution. The sole goal of our members is giving back each woman who has been prostituted, her own true sense of purpose in life, presenting her with real opportunities, and equipping her with the ability to use her voice, to stand in her own truth, and be able to make her own authentic choices in life. We strongly believe this is a fundamental human right and regardless of nationality, race, religion, language, political preference, or other, we believe that no human being should be bought or sold for the sexual commodification of others. Our work is also possible thanks to every other external organisation and individual member who supports us through any possible way as they too share and believe in our values.



Whilst appreciating and thanking each one of you for taking the time to understand our work, with an open heart we also thank every member of our great team as all our work would not be possible without them, whilst we look forward with positivity, resilience, determination, and a strong team spirit for what the future holds, including facing challenges, celebrating achievements, including building and learning from experiences along the way!



Content created by Romina Gatt Lopez
and designed by Maria Katrina Xuereb

To the nicest people I know

- * You give without thought,
You give without gain,
You give of your hearts,
And help ease the pain.
- * Since the time we first met,
I have felt so truly blessed.
It's an honour to know you all
You are truly the best.
- * We've been through ups & downs,
Many journeys long & short,
But you've always been there,
With your unwavering support.
- * The help that you give,
And the words of advice
I will keep in my heart
Because they broke through the ice.
- * Every smile that you give,
Every touch of the hand
I know deep in my soul
That you all understand.
- * I shall never forget,
The love that you show;
The respect that you give,
And the wisdom you know.
- * Without people like you,
I don't know where I'd be...
But what I do really know;
Is you help me be ME!

*- written by one of the service users as a
dedication to the volunteers and staff at Dar Hosea*

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