

Statement of Purpose

Fondazzjoni Sebħ (VO/1622) is an NGO committed to social justice and equality. It offers services to children and young people, victims and survivors of domestic violence and families in the community. The organisation has been in existence since 12 September 1956. It continues to grow and develop to keep pace with the changing needs of contemporary society.

Fondazzjoni Sebħ runs the following services:

- **Fra Diego** in Ħamrun – home for 18 children
- **Sagra Familja** in Żabbar – home for 11 children
- **St Theresa** in Żurrieq – home for 6 children
- **St Francis** in B’Kara – home for 12 children, currently being refurbished
- **Dar Qalb ta’ Gesu** – shelter for 12 families, survivors of domestic violence
- **Arzella** – child care centre
- **Community based Prevention** in Ħamrun

Our mission and principles

Fondazzjoni Sebħ has three main services as follows:

- 1) Children in Care Services;
- 2) Domestic Violence Services;
- 3) Family & Community Services.

1. Children in Care Services

These services fall under the responsibility of the Children in Care Service Manager. The mission of our the Children in Care Services is:

... to ensure that wherever possible children remain within their family of origin. When this is not possible we offer a safe and loving Home to children who need out of home care.

Fondazzjoni Sebħ advocates that the place of the child is within the natural family. There are certain situations when this is not possible. Best practice dictates that the field social worker holds a family meeting in the first instance to explore the possibility of a placement with extended family and friends. A placement in out of home care should only be considered if no placement within the family is possible. We run four Children’s Homes in Malta: Fra Diego, Ħamrun; Sagra Familja, Żabbar; St Joseph, Żabbar; St Therese, Żurrieq.

We believe that when a child is placed in care, the following principles are paramount:

- The best interest of the child needs to be implemented;
- Siblings should be kept together where possible unless it poses a risk to either child or it jeopardises the stability of the placement;
- Permanency should be sought at the earliest opportunity.

The principal aim of permanency and permanency planning is for a child to grow up in a stable and predictable environment where temporary care measures are as brief as possible (Maluccio et al, 1986¹). Osmond & Tilbury² (2012) describe three core aspects of permanency have been identified: 1) Physical permanency (i.e. safe, stable living environments); 2) Relational permanency (i.e. stable, unconditional emotional connections); and 3) Legal permanency (i.e. permanence as officially determined by the child welfare system e.g. reunification, legal custody, adoption).

When an out of home care placement is needed, an assessment on the child's needs should indicate the type of placement sought by the field social worker. The needs of most children will be a placement in a family environment. However there are children whose needs will be better met in a residential home. The latter should not be considered a last resort but an appropriate response to children's assessed needs.

Principles

'Fondazzjoni Sebħ' adopts the CARE³ Programme Model for Residential Care (2016) which is built on six practice principles:

- 1) *Developmentally focused*
- 2) *Family involved*
- 3) *Relationship based*
- 4) *Trauma informed*
- 5) *Competence centred*
- 6) *Ecologically oriented*

Fondazzjoni Sebħ focusses on each of the six principles with children who reside in our care. We wish to create a partnership with families in order to help the child grow up in a safe and loving environment while still having close contact with their birth family.

Vision

Our aim is to offer a safe, structured and loving environment to all children and young people. We use a strengths-based approach which focusses on the child's attributes and skills to promote emotional growth and resilience.

Our model of practice is built on the belief in the positive value of residential care focussed on meeting the individual needs of children within a group living experience. We believe in an all-inclusive approach where children are involved in the running and decision making of our Homes.

We strive to be an affirmation of the worth and dignity of every child and a commitment to enable each child to reach their full potential.

Children, young people and their parents (where relevant and appropriate) and any significant other are included in the decision making process about the child's future.

We endeavour to provide each child with a positive experience when transitioning into care. The main objective is for the professionals to minimise distress to the child and the family as much as possible and focus on building a good and trusting relationship with everyone involved.

¹ Maluccio, A., Fein, E. & Olmstead, K. (1986). Permanency Planning for Children: Concepts and Methods. London: Tavistock Publications.

² Osmond, J. & Tilbury, C. (2012). Permanency planning concepts. Children Australia, 37(3), 100-107.

³ http://rccp.cornell.edu/assets/CARE_INFO_BULLETIN_2016.pdf

A child should, where possible and in their best interest, maintain links with their family and community.

Fondazzjoni Sebħ is firmly against institutionalisation and proactively believes in promoting individual care plans for children and young people who reside in our care. We believe that children's place is with their family but also acknowledges that children and young people present with a plethora of needs.

Our Homes will provide three types of placement:

- a. A **short term placement** which is usually less than 6 months but can be extended to 12 months in exceptional circumstances, during which time the permanency plan for the child is being decided.
- b. A **long term placement** is one where a permanency plan has been decided. Any placement longer than 12 months will be considered as long term and the field social worker will need to present a permanency plan. A failure to implement a permanency plan without valid reason (which would usually mean that the parent is still undergoing a formal assessment or rehabilitation programme) will result in a placement breakdown. Usually children in a long term placement will be older than 10 years old, but exceptions for children with mental health, mild learning disability or large siblings groups can be made, at the discretion of the Director.
- c. An **emergency placement** is an unplanned placement that will not last longer than 3 weeks.

Our Homes endeavour to educate all our children with their rights and promote children's rights within our services and in the wider community. Christian values are at the core of our work. We feel it is our duty to promote the child's religious faith and culture.

The aim of this policy is to have guidelines on how a child is admitted into a Children's Home. Reference shall be made to planned admissions and emergency admissions.

Participation

Children's participation is encouraged at all relevant times. Each Home will have a Children's Council where representatives of the children will participate in management decision as deemed appropriate by the Home Manager.

Permanency plans

Children need stability in order to thrive. This means that each child who has been removed from their natural environment needs a permanency plan to be put in place at the earliest opportunity. It is our policy that every child residing in our Homes needs to have a permanency plan confirmed within 12 months by the government agency. Exceptions will only be accepted either if the child or family is undergoing a relevant assessment or if the reintegration plan is being implemented.

A decision to alter a permanency plan must be made in Court, or as prescribed in the Laws of Malta, and must be in the best interest of the child.

The child's wishes and feelings will be given prominence throughout the care plan and appropriate weight will be given to such wishes and feelings depending on the child's age, development and understanding.

2. Domestic Violence Services

“The prudent see danger and take refuge” - Proverbs 27:12

These services fall under the responsibility of the Family Services' Manager. Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu is a second stage domestic violence shelter which offers its services to women and their children who experienced domestic violence.

Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu is a therapeutic centre that offers a holistic service to its clients. Its team is made up of social workers and social support workers. Women and their children are offered a small flat within the shelter for a period of usually 18 months, depending on the individual case and family care plan. The team works with every member of the family to assess their needs and to identify ways the family can be reintegrated safely into society.

The shelter accommodates nine families and the number of service user can be up to 30 individuals. The support offered is as follows:

- Individual therapeutic help
- Training and employment
- Parenting skills
- Financial management
- Maintaining a home, health and hygiene
- Support to understand and deal with issues of anger, rejection and apathy
- Legal support
- Support to find alternative accommodation
- Support to parents to meet their children's needs

Type of placements offered

Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu offers nine family placements in its second stage shelter. For this service it mainly accepts referrals from Aġenzija Appoġġ. Every person who is referred is assessed by a social worker of Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu to ensure that our service can meet their needs. The service also offers an after care service for a period of around six months. The latter may at times include offering short term accommodation to the most vulnerable families.

Only referrals pertaining to domestic violence will be accepted. The programme reserves a right to refuse a referral in the case of a security concern to one of its service users or staff. Such decisions will be taken by the Director in consultation with the Programme Manager of Dar Qalb ta' Ġesu.

All service users are expected to collaborate with the running of the programme.

3. Family & Community Services

These services fall under the responsibility of the Family Services' Manager. As part of our Family & Community Service, Ejjew Għandi currently runs two services. The Preventive Care programme for families and the Arzella Child Care Centre.

Following an evaluation of the preventive services offered by our organisation up until 2016, it was decided to reshape these services in order to compliment the residential services we offer. Outreach is a result of this. When launched in 2018, Outreach will be based in Ħamrun and will offer evidence-based community support to children and families.

Members of Outreach will be expected to build partnerships with existing services in order to complement service provision. The primary aim is to focus on prevention by promoting positive and safe relationships within the family. The team's objectives can be summarised in the following three ways:

- i) Safeguarding the wellbeing of children within families,

- ii) Promoting positive parenting,
- iii) Improve the outcomes for children.

Outreach will use a team around the family approach and develop one family plan which will be managed by one lead professional. The plan will be co-produced with the family and it will be reviewed regularly with the family and other services involved.

Outreach will promote aimed at supporting children who are at the 'edge of care' and to promote a nurturing environment within families. An environment that is free from abuse and violence towards any member of the family. The team will work with all family members where there are concerns of either child abuse or maltreatment or domestic violence.

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