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The Community Social Work and Counselling Service an overview - 2010

A key method of reaching out to and supporting vulnerable families is through generic community social work and the development of strong collaborative links with parish structures in neighbouring localities. Being a community-based organisation with a community-based drop-in centre has naturally led to a build-up of a generic case-load. Workers seek supervision and mentoring from practitioners from fields most represented by service users. The Psychiatric Nurse attached to the LWIEN service for family care-givers of mentally ill persons mentors and trains personnel in this specialist field and co-works with team members in outreach work.

Social Work, counselling, home-visiting by a nurse, office-based family consultations, non-formal education and support groups are an integral part of the service. A retired nurse – a Sister of Charity with 30 years of nursing experience – maintains a regular case-load of around 40 frail and sick home-bound elderly who feel lonely and isolated. A few volunteers accompany the nurse during some of the daily home-visits to assist with befriending and other support work. During 2010, the Volunteer Nurse carried out a total of 346 support home-visits.

Service team members encourage service users to indicate their interests and try their utmost to enable them to tap into existing education and training activities run by the state and NGOs at both local and national levels and create opportunities where none exist in specific areas of interest. Service users are moreover encouraged to volunteer as part of their personal growth process.

Service Team

During 2010, the service team comprised the following members:

- The equivalent of 3 full-time Social Workers.
- 1 Volunteer Social Work Supervisor;
- 1 Volunteer Counsellor;
- 1 Volunteer Nurse (part-time);
- 1 part-time youth worker;
- 2 Social Work students who completed a 400-hour practice placement each;
- 3 Masters in Counselling students, all professionals in various fields, who carried out part of their practice placement at the Foundation;
- 2 professionals completing their Diploma in Gestalt Psychotherapy;

- 1 professional completing a Masters in Play Therapy;
- 2 Masters in Adult Education students (a teacher and a social worker by profession) who ran a group each for male and female vulnerable youths cognitive impairments;
- 1 volunteer who undertakes EFT work (Emotional Freedom Techniques) with service users having long-standing emotional blockages;
- 1 group facilitator for Self-Esteem groups for service users.

The team additionally had access to the following professionals:

- two lawyers who offered their services on a *pro bono* basis to represent service users in court,
- a doctor for consultations.

Categories of service users

During 2010, SJAF worked intensively with:

- family caregivers of persons with chronic mental health problems;
- youths with mild-to-moderate cognitive impairments and mental health problems;
- disaffected youths at risk of social exclusion;
- grandparents who regularly care for their grandchildren;
- single mothers;
- frail persons with chronic health problems who feel lonely and isolated at home;
- families facing conflicts;
- women in a marriage or other relationship who are poor since their spouse/ partner leaves them unsupported financially;
- families grappling with financial problems.

Apart from the support offered to 412 individuals from 284 families referred during 2010, the service team continued to provide support to another 150 families who continued to receive support from 2009. 166 cases were closed in 2010. The following chart gives an overview of the number and type of interventions by month undertaken by professional personnel:

Social Work & Counselling Service - Intervention sessions with Service Users and social work supervision sessions by month

	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Office-based sessions	99	86	93	82	110	68	93	143	132	127	135	120	1288
Number of Home Visits	42	60	60	56	47	56	73	77	62	85	69	42	729
Accompanying service users to other services	14	19	31	37	18	17	18	24	15	31	46	10	280
Total interventions by month	155	165	184	175	175	141	184	244	209	243	250	172	2297

Social Work Supervision	10	11	12	11	9	7	11	9	10	10	8	6	114
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Referral sources of families - 2009

Referral Source	No.	%
Parishes	96	34%
Public agencies	48	16.9
SJAF Radio Programmes	46	16.2
Relatives of service users	44	15.4
Self-referrals	23	8.1
SJAF field workers	14	4.9
NGOs	11	3.8
Other	2	0.7
TOTAL	284	100

Locality of Residence of 284 referred families in 2010

47	Tarxien
84	Żabbar
34	Paola
13	Fgura
7	Santa Luċija
99	Other localities

Categories of referred 284 families by main presenting problem - 2010

Main presenting problem	Number of families	% of 284 families
Mental health problems/ needs of family caregivers	95	33
Chronic ill-health & loneliness/ isolation	44	15.5
Financial difficulties	31	11.5
Family relations problems	20	7
Illiteracy / need for learning support	19	6.6
Disability-related difficulties	15	5.5
Marriage separation	12	4.2
Single parents in difficulty	12	4.2
Unemployment	10	3.5
Loss	3	1
Other problems	23	8

At the end of 2010, an internal evaluation of the Community Social Work and Counselling Service was carried out.

Service Procedures

The referral form has been improved and uploaded on the Foundation's website. Most of the external referrals using this form are received from public agencies.

The case data process and tools have been improved for evidence-based evaluation, monitoring of the challenges faced by service user families supported by Foundation as well as for accountability towards funding agencies.

Record keeping tools have also been improved during 2010.

- During 2010, the Social Work Team created a **Case Intervention Overview Tool** as a way of recording Social Workers' work with high support service users. Social Workers use this tool for research and social worker training purposes. The tool was shared with a Psychiatric Firm as a possible tool for case discussions and reviews. It is an effective tool for condensing the wide-ranging interventions into one chart.
- The Social Worker's Monthly Report format has also been revised.
- The method of recording case intake, closure and interventions has been upgraded and incorporated in the new Social Worker's Monthly Report form.

Volunteer Nurse

The Volunteer Nurse, a Sister of Charity, continued to have a steady case-load of around 40 lonely home-bound elderly persons. She visits these persons regularly without fail and is accompanied by two Volunteer befrienders. Another Volunteer Nurse joined the team in mid-2010 but had to terminate her involvement due to sudden ill health. The Nurse maintains records of each visits; these are discussed with the social worker concerned with the case and filed in the respective case file. Family interventions are tackled by the social worker responsible for the case.

Counselling

The following persons provided counselling and therapy interventions during 2010 as part of the Community Social Work and Counselling Service:

- A Counsellor whose service provision is 95% voluntary;
- Three Masters in Counselling students who are professionals in other spheres;
- Two practitioners completing their final year of the Diploma in Gestalt Psychotherapy;
- One therapist (remunerated) for specialised work with a few service users;
- One practitioner who is completing her Play Therapy practicum as part of a masters degree programme with a UK-based university.

Youth Work

Through its outreach work, team members continued to identify and support hard-to-reach socially excluded youths. Although the Kirkop Community Outreach project concluded in December 2009, the youth work element was retained. One youth worker continued to work with around 19 youths from this locality, linking them to new education and training opportunities such as the ICT Courses organised by the Kirkop Local Council and the Youth Employment Programme (YEP) of the ETC.

Collaboration with other organisations

The team works in close collaboration with other professionals from public agencies and NGOs. Regular contact is maintained with Aġenzija Appoġġ service teams, the Mental Health Association, the community mental health clinics and day centres closest to the geographic areas covered by the team, the Department of Social Security, the Diaconia Unit of Caritas agency and parish Diaconia Commissions. The team participates in regular case conferences and reviews called by other agencies or by itself with respect to high support families being supported by different organisations.

During 2010, the Social Work and Counselling team collaborated with Aġenzija Appoġġ in a number of ways:

- A presentation was made to all Service Area Leaders about the work of the Foundation;
- The team solicited referrals of families on the waiting list of the agency's generic team;
- Discussions were held on the 12th of May with three of the agency's community Access teams (Valletta, B'Kara and Qawra) on the nature of community work and community outreach as a tool for community social workers;
- The family of one of the Foundation's Social Work and Counselling team members volunteered to provide emergency fostering to two children whom Aġenzija Appoġġ could not find a placement for;
- A Foundation Social Worker daily accompanies an Aġenzija Appoġġ young service user from the residential care facility to the school;
- Throughout the summer, a Foundation volunteer accepted to assist Aġenzija Appoġġ by helping a child under a care order placed in a residential care facility to dress up and have breakfast before leaving with the nuns for Skola Sajf.

During 2010, the Foundation invited service users to a fun activity to view the Malta Eurovision Song Contest at SJAF. As part of the annual Christmas celebration, this year too SJAF personnel organised a Christmas Mass and meal for 74 vulnerable families. Staff cooked and served themselves.



Community-based Social Work and Counselling Service

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