

AUGUST 2021

# CareNet



Care Malta Group

Compassion • Engagement • Professionalism



# Casa Arkati

*in Mosta overlooks the evergreen Wied il-Ghasel  
and enjoys unobstructed views of Mdina*

We have been providing compassionate, high-quality care to people from all walks of life since 1993. Our menu of services is based on a framework of integrity, quality and well-being. Whether you are with us for a long or short stay, we will ensure that you will feel comfortable, safe and happy.



CareMalta 

 **Care**  
COMPASSION • ENGAGEMENT • PROFESSIONALISM

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# Our past, present and future

A year has passed since the last edition of CareNet. And what a year it has been! One full of contrasting feelings – fear and hope, sadness and joy, loneliness and togetherness, numbness and sensitivity, prayer and curse, coldness and warmth, memories and oblivion, action and apathy, darkness and light...

Surely, we have all lost something or someone dear throughout this pandemic but, as Pope Francis said in his book *Let Us Dream*, it's important to look ahead with hope, as we all dream of a better future. We can only do this if we learn to be better persons holistically.

In the magazine, there's a lot about the group's past and the solid foundations of its mother company, the Vassallo Group, born 75 years ago. As the chairman puts it, it's an important and meaningful past.

There's also a strong focus on the present, as the CareMalta Group is still operating in an ongoing crisis. But the vaccine has brought a ray of hope, both locally and worldwide, especially for those who are vulnerable. It has given a new lease of life to our residents, who have spent long months inside elderly homes due to many restrictions in place, and also to our staff.

And there's so much about our future too, which makes life more meaningful! This is why we chose well-being as the magazine's central theme this year. As you browse through the pages, we wanted to let you into our little world. Many new projects are in the pipeline, others have kicked off with a bang, exciting plans are in the making, new initiatives are making a difference in people's lives and the group's future vision is slowly but surely taking shape.

One of the group's strategic objectives in its diversification path towards mental healthcare is to restore a sense of well-being to the client, to the employee and, ultimately, to the family – not through isolation or institutionalisation, but through inclusion.

Community provides a sense of belonging, making you feel embraced and appreciated for your unique qualities. Being part of the community also gives you support, knowing there are people to rely on to feel cared for and safe. People fill different roles, so there's also a sense of purpose – to better other persons' lives – which in turn helps give meaning to life.

Proof of this is a bittersweet story on page 31 about a couple who have finally reunited as husband and wife after 12 years and are now living within the community.

Our front cover this year features a sculpture by Wallace Falzon, entitled *The Heart Giver*, which was unveiled earlier this year at our head office in Mosta. The heart says it all. Without a heart, there is no care.

Simonne



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# THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS BIGGER THAN THIS PANDEMIC

NATALIE BRIFFA FARRUGIA

CEO, CAREMALTA GROUP

Hot on the heels of a pandemic year, Natalie Briffa Farrugia was ever so determined to set up a well-being strategy and policy for the CareMalta Group, "our first and most important investment this year," she says.

"The truth is that the pandemic has felt longer than it actually was. Thanks to the vaccine, the road ahead is more optimistic, although not an easy one. While it is important to stick to precautionary measures in place, we must also have the confidence to let go of what has happened, appreciate the present moment and believe in the future."

There is no doubt that the pandemic has taken a heavy toll on us all. However, Natalie, who has around 1,600 residents under her wing, says this must not dampen our human spirit. "Having been separated from our elderly, I yearned to be with our residents, talk to them face to face and hear what they had to say."

Visiting CareMalta homes during the presentation of long-service awards to employees on June 4, the Vassallo

Group's 75th anniversary, Natalie got the chance to speak to some of the residents after such a long absence. Touched by their resilience and courage in the face of adversity, she says "our older generations deserve to be recognised, valued and admired for their strength. The human spirit is bigger than this pandemic."

The CEO says COVID-19 has stolen many precious joys, both physical and spiritual. People have lost faith, beliefs, friendships, time, space, identity, love... "But, no matter what, hope prevails."

The last time she was interviewed for *CareNet's* 2020 edition, Natalie's biggest fear was that we lived in an ageist world. "Unfortunately, ageism has become more evident during the pandemic, with older persons still bearing the brunt of discrimination and prejudice. Despite being the first to receive the vaccine, they were until a few weeks ago only allowed to go out of care homes accompanied by their relatives," she says.









“We must have the confidence to let go of what has happened, appreciate the present moment and believe in the future”

Elderly residents only started going out on their own from July 19.

Despite all odds, the CEO says the group's main objective is to continue making a difference in people's lives.

“The elderly care sector will be faced with several challenges in the years to come, one of which is a 2,000-bed surplus, which our group had predicted in its 2019 management plan. On the other hand, looking at the bright side, during the pandemic, all care home operators teamed up in a bid to take the sector to a higher level,” says Natalie, who chairs the Malta Chamber's Care Home Operators Section and is involved in the Maltese Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics, “a strong voice for the elderly”.

Looking ahead, Natalie says the group is ready to do so much more through diversification. “We are looking at growth in sectors already operated by our subsidiary HILA (Home to Independence and Living Abilities) and focusing all our energies on opening up a whole new spectrum of services in the mental health sector.”

Born five years ago, HILA operates Casa Apap Bologna in Mosta, Dar Bjorn in Qormi and Casal Nuovo in Paola, offering specialised services to persons living with disability, ALS and other motor neuron diseases, as well as mental health conditions.

“Our well-being policy reflects the group's future long-term vision – making a difference in people's lives through our core values of compassion, engagement and professionalism,” Natalie says.

The group's mental healthcare model is centred around the needs of the vulnerable client, be it an older person or an individual with disability or mental health issues, de-institutionalising the person and doing away with stigma.

“The focus of our care plan is to treat persons living with mental health issues with dignity, welcoming them back into the community with open arms and helping them recreate special connections with their families,” she explains.

“As a group, we have looked at several care models specifically tailor-made for persons facing mental health problems. Whereas in the past, it was generally up to a mental hospital's multidisciplinary team to decide on what is the best way forward, our novel approach looks at every single player on the same level. The family, together with the psychiatric team will be working together in the best interest of the person.”

Natalie says it's all about adopting a different mindset – looking at the problems of persons with mental health issues as your own, since, after all, they are part of our community.

“All our care facilities – whether it's a CareMalta elderly home or a respite or mental health facility operated by HILA – are deep in the heart of the community and this is the way it should be.” ●









# DETERMINATION, DEDICATION AND PERSEVERANCE ARE KEY

## NAZZARENO VASSALLO

### CHAIRMAN, VASSALLO GROUP

Fifty-three years ago, Zaren Vassallo was taught never to put all his eggs in one basket. All his working life, he has put this advice into practice. The successful entrepreneur has steered the Vassallo Group through thick and thin, devoting every ounce of enthusiasm and energy to the business.

"For your organisation to be successful, you can never stop reinventing yourself. If you don't move forward, you begin to move backward." This has been the chairman's mantra ever since he started out.

The group's foundation day – June 4 – means a lot to Zaren, mostly because it takes him back to his roots in the construction industry in a flash. "It is also significant because all the group's milestones are marked on this special day," he explains.

The group's 75th anniversary celebrations this year were spread over two days. The chairman, accompanied by his family, various shareholders, directors and top management officials, presented long-service awards for loyalty to employees at CareMalta and HILA facilities, Vassallo Business Park, Learning Works, CaterEssence, Campus Hub, Vassallo Builders Ltd, Vassallo Group Realty and Vassallo Builders Group Ltd.

A number of other milestones were also marked. The Cake Box turned seven, the Learning Works training hub

turned two, while CareMalta elderly homes Casa San Paolo and Roseville turned six and 11 respectively.

The chairman also inaugurated the Vassallo Business Park's administrative block and the new foyer at the group's head office in Mosta, and unveiled a beautiful artwork by Rupert Cefai that captures the group's past, present and future.

"Our group has grown bigger and we have a lot to be grateful for," Zaren said as he unveiled a commemorative marble plaque by artist Jeffrey Galea on the façade of Villa Amodeo, his office in Mosta – yet another June 4 celebration. Both works of art form part of the Zaren Vassallo Art (ZVART) initiative launched by the group in 2020.

Starting out from humble beginnings, Zaren says Malta's commercial landscape in the 1960s was very different. "There was nothing in those days, except for the odd shop in the village."

But, with a tone of nostalgia, he says he feels privileged to have lived to see all the major changes which took place in Malta over the years.

In a bid to be innovative and explore new niches, Zaren is ever ready to take on a new challenge.

"With private elderly care 30 years ago, we introduced a new culture in Malta. Our group was the first to



The CareMalta Group's launch of services in Gozo on June 5 (from left): Ruben Vassallo, Pio Vassallo, Nazzareno Vassallo, Charlene Vella Vassallo, Natalie Briffa Farrugia, Maryanne Vassallo and Chris Vassallo.



The unveiling of the Vassallo Group's 75th anniversary marble plaque on the façade of Villa Amodeo in Mosta on June 4, with artist Jeffrey Galea (right).





“I’m extremely happy that my five children have followed in my footsteps and are totally involved and part of the success of Vassallo Group”

offer specialised facilities (dementia care, disability, ALS and other degenerative diseases, and mental health). We also introduced the first public-private partnership agreement in 1994 (Żejtun Home), a concept that has grown.”

The chairman says the group implemented an admirable approach to target safety at the start of the pandemic, a time when we knew little or nothing at all about the virus. “We were ahead of everyone, particularly when we took the bold decision to set CareMalta’s 10-week lockdown in motion. We looked at lives first, before summing up costs.”

The group also took a number of stringent measures on all its construction sites. “This wasn’t a straightforward exercise, since it’s difficult for our workers not to mingle on site but, looking back, our internal measures, in tandem with the group’s vaccination strategy, worked out well.”

The COVID-19 crisis has changed the Vassallo Group’s attitude to risk management. “We never dreamt we would be faced with such a huge pandemic. In my days, people spoke of the war. For our children and their children, this world catastrophe will be part of their history,” Zaren says.

“The pandemic has made us more conscious and cautious in all our decisions. But the group remains optimistic and we will continue to invest in new projects. Proof of this is Campus Hub, a 500-plus-room student resident complex we are building just outside the Main University Msida Campus, the Mediterranean College of Sport, our newest project with St Aloysius College, and Vassallo Business Park in Burmarrad, a joint venture with J&D Properties, which offers tailor-made commercial space and storage.

Despite fears that negative effects on businesses will linger throughout 2021, especially in sectors like tourism and property, the chairman looks forward to embracing a more positive 2022.

“The outcome of 2020 was better than we expected, despite the fact that our catering and hotel businesses were hard hit by the pandemic. The group’s diversification of services is surely a feather in our cap.”

Confident that there is always room for development, Zaren says the Vassallo Group will continue to strengthen and diversify itself through further opportunities and investments in sectors such as clean energy.

“The group already generates as much solar energy as is needed for 1,200 households. Renewable energy is definitely on our radar.”

Do you see the group’s future to be that of a family business or a corporation?

The chairman flashes a big smile, saying he is extremely happy that his five children have followed in his footsteps and are totally involved and part of the success of Vassallo Group. However, he says he looks forward to handing over the reigns of the family business in the near future... whenever that might be! ●



The chairman presenting William Scerri with his 30-year long-service award at the Campus Hub on June 4. Also seen are Group CEO Pio Vassallo, left, and Vassallo Builders CEO Jonathan Buttigieg.

# JUST LIKE SPORTS, WE NEED TO BE POSITIVE, SO THAT POSITIVE THINGS HAPPEN

JAMES SCIRIHA

**DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, CAREMALTA**

During the pandemic, the most resonating word or phrase on everyone's mind was probably well-being. How do we regenerate the well-being of residents, employees, our families and ourselves? But what is well-being?

It is being able to experience health, happiness and prosperity. It is about having good mental health, life satisfaction and a sense of meaning or purpose and being able to manage stress. In simple words, it is being able to feel well and positive – a status we all aspire to and work for unknowingly, irrespective of who and how old we are. As a consequence of the pandemic, most of these feelings have somehow been shattered, for one reason or another.

The fear of the virus impacting our health has made our lives much more stressful. Being around people fills us with stress, so we tend to isolate ourselves and have practically nothing to look forward to. The pandemic has taken a bigger toll on our residents because they were separated from their loved ones in the most difficult of times. Therefore, it is extremely important to restore their holistic well-being, targeting not only the physical aspect but also the social and emotional perspectives.







Well-being gives people identity and that is why restoring the well-being of our residents is taken so much to heart at CareMalta. Each resident has their identity and at CareMalta we respect this. With each passing day, we try to enhance it by providing the resources required so that each person shines in their own way.

Well-being is important to CareMalta because it means that our residents are healthy and happy. It means that they are feeling well and at peace with their inner emotions. We want our residents to live their lives in a peaceful and joyful environment, whereby those around them respect them for who they are.

From a personal perspective, running helps me take good care of my well-being, not only physically but also mentally and emotionally. It helps me to release stress, and to think what I believe is the best way forward before taking any decision, both personally and professionally. Sports has helped me grow stronger and face tough situations and decisions in life. It is precisely during a tough moment that you realise how much sports helps us grow in our lives.

With all its ups and downs, sports is a reflection of life. It has taught me that we need to find a balance in every circumstance, in every situation. I have learnt to feel grateful when things are going

## “Well-being gives people identity”

well and to accept that life is not so bad when things aren't going in the direction I want them to.

In both instances, we need to do our best to overcome the challenges we are faced with and to improve ourselves. We can achieve this by staying humble and working hard. The rest will sort itself out for the better. This way of thinking boosts my well-being and mental health, knowing that tomorrow I will be better than today. This is what sports has taught me over the years and which I would like to pass on to everyone I meet.

History is showing us that it is not easy at all to come out of this pandemic. We all have to do our part, each and every one of us. We are like a chain, and we are as strong as our weakest link. If we let our guard down, this virus has no mercy and punishes us immediately. It is fatal, especially to our beloved residents. Therefore, while we all look forward to coming out of this pandemic, we must keep in mind that it is not over yet. This virus is and will be around us for the foreseeable future. So we need to learn to live in a new normality, adapting accordingly.

Just like sports, we need to keep working hard together to get out of this situation. We need to be positive, so that positive things happen. Nothing comes easy. If you want to see the rainbow, you have to put up with the rain. The rainbow is just round the corner wanting to shine. ●



# IT'S TIME TO CHOOSE SCIENCE OVER FEAR

NOEL BORG

**SENIOR NURSING MANAGER, CAREMALTA GROUP  
NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HILA**

Never has the well-being of older persons been put to the test as much as during this unprecedented pandemic.

"COVID-19 has tampered with the dignity and quality of life of our residents, causing them suffering, loneliness and social isolation. This, in turn, has had a negative impact on their holistic wellbeing," Noel says.

In January 2021, the Group kicked off a vaccination campaign to ensure that residents and employees in all CareMalta's facilities were shielded from the coronavirus.

Spearheaded by Noel, a team of nurses worked round the clock with the aim of inoculating everyone within the shortest possible time during a deadly third wave.

"The vaccine was the key we needed to unlock the door in order to be able to move on, for the sake of our residents."

Noel sits at his desk calmly and collectively, poised and level-headed, but you can tell he has a heart of gold when he talks about his nursing profession and being there for the most vulnerable.

"As nurses, we could see first hand what was happening around us and relate to the pain and suffering of our residents. As their wellbeing deteriorated, one of our biggest struggles was that their families could not be physically with them when they needed them most due to restrictions and measures."

He discloses his biggest fear at the height of the pandemic, and the sad look on his face says it all – the dread of losing a resident directly from COVID-19.

"I understand that the frailty of an older person can lead to death, but every time it happened, it hurt. There were times when I could no longer take it."

Now that 95 per cent of residents and employees in CareMalta homes have been

vaccinated, Noel says the time has come to choose science over fear, find the right balance and open our doors.

"At the start of the pandemic we had access to very little data or information about this still unknown virus. But as the situation continues to improve and evolve, we now feel confident that evidence-based research can help us go a long way towards taking future decisions," he explains.

Reflecting on the future of care in Malta, Noel expresses his wish to see a sector focusing more on quality rather than quantity.

"Sadly, we are seeing the opposite – huge residential facilities for the elderly with a ridiculously high number of beds keep sprouting all over the island. Rather than building more institutions, the country needs to follow international recommendations, work on a de-institutionalisation programme, consolidate active ageing, come up with more initiatives and carry out more research on long-term care."

Noel believes that the country's dementia strategy also needs to be adopted without further delay in order to cater for the individual needs of all older persons, without differentiating.

"From a policy point of view, the sector needs to seriously brush up on these needs and invest more in better resources and highly qualified professionals in the field."

Are we just with older adults in today's secular world? "I don't think so," is his prompt reply.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated ageism and the exclusion of and prejudice against older adults is still very rampant within society. I think we really need to work hard to truly see the person before old age." ●







“We really need to  
work hard to truly  
see the person  
before old age”



The vaccination team of nurses







# A FOCUS ON THE HUMAN ASPECT OF PEOPLE OPERATIONS

ROBERT GRECH

PEOPLE OPERATIONS MANAGER, CAREMALTA GROUP

Robert's contagious smile wins you over the minute you walk into his office. And you don't even need to knock, as the door is always open.

A physiotherapist by profession, he joined the group in 2009 as facility manager at Villa Messina and has never looked back.

Feeling a genuine need to make a difference in people's lives, he is super excited about his new role and is determined to give it his all.

"It is such a great feeling to be able to help employees discover their development path and meet their needs. When people feel connected, they work better together and help each other achieve a common goal in a stress-free and fun environment. After all, an organisation is driven by people," he says.

"One of my objectives is to develop a new mindset that highlights the human aspect of people operations, thus reaching out to employees, supporting them and being there for all their needs."

Robert describes his role as both challenging and overwhelming. "Running a facility, you are mostly concerned about the well-being of your immediate team. As people operations manager for the whole group, my duties and responsibilities have increased significantly."

Even though this new job comes with a learning curve, he feels optimistic and confident that people will ultimately get a better employee experience. "The fact that the group also implements an open

door policy is a big boost and a step in the right direction."

Apart from being a people person, Robert has years of experience in the care sector and a thorough understanding of strategic human resources management behind him, having obtained a Master's degree in Strategy, Leadership and Change Management. Both his academic background, as well as a number of management skills he acquired over the years, will serve as guiding tools to putting all that he has learnt into practice.

What role does well-being play in people operations? "Well-being is the glue that keeps the department together. Most work motivation theories generally revolve around well-being. Factors, such as fairness and equity, training and development, communication and feedback, recognition, support from peers and management, safety, trust, feedback and autonomy, all contribute to a healthy work environment and to employees' growth and progress."

The group has just finalised its appraisal policy and is working on a number of

other policies, such as the onboarding and well-being policies, with the aim of empowering employees.

"A performance appraisal is an excellent feedback and communication platform for both employee and employer. It gives individual employees and their manager an opportunity to review current performance, how work can be improved, to look back on what has been achieved during the past year and then agree on future objectives and needs," Robert explains.

"We are also working on an employee onboarding policy, whereby we will be fully supporting new recruits during the first five months of their employment with us through regular meetings and training."

Committed to ensuring the well-being of all employees, especially in the aftermath of COVID-19, the group's employee well-being policy aims to reach out to the needs being felt across the whole company – from the senior management team down to operational level.

"The pandemic has had a huge impact on people operations, forcing us to work in emergency mode and to put all our business plans for 2020 on hold. However, as we slowly recover, everyone is extremely enthusiastic to go back to normality and start afresh." •

"It is such a great feeling to be able to help employees discover their development path and meet their needs"





# IT IS FINALLY TIME TO LOOK AHEAD

JANET SILVIO

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HILA

In our busy lives it's very rare to take some time to stop and think. I believe in living in the here and now and, during the pandemic, that was the only way to remain mentally intact.

Yet I knew I had to take stock of what the pandemic brought with it and what it has left in its wake. I didn't have the luxury to think about myself when we were going through it; I couldn't afford breaking down, so no thoughts of yesterday or tomorrow were allowed, but just taking stock of what had to be done today – another day of keeping everyone safe, of following rules, of ensuring the well-being of our clients and our teams.

It was exhausting yet worth every step of the way. When I exited operations last March, I felt like entering a vacuum. I felt totally disconnected from my emotions and

my new reality. Being back at the office filled me with bittersweet feelings. While missing being in constant contact with the clients and my team, I felt a surge of excitement bubbling inside me. It meant being finally back in my role as executive director – it was time to resume chasing our dreams.

Many exciting projects that were kept on hold and could not materialise due to the pandemic could now be given the attention they deserved. The first one was undoubtedly Casal Nuovo – a dream which we had for years – bringing mental healthcare and support to the community.

Officially opened by Deputy Prime Minister and Health Minister Chris Fearn on June 10, Casal Nuovo has so far welcomed 44 clients. Our thorough research of the sector and attention to design detail were translated in the welcoming and soothing


effect Casal Nuovo has proven to have on its clients. Our team is excited to start implementing the myriad ideas and initiatives which will slowly take shape and materialise as time goes by.

The easing of pandemic measures, together with the vaccination process, also saw our clients both at Casa Apap Bologna and Dar Bjorn finally regain their well-being. It was wonderful to finally be able to start reintroducing a sense of normality, even if slowly and with all necessary precautions still in place. Short visits in open areas with relatives, the breaking of bubbles, resuming attendance to day centres... every small step brought an element of intense joy not only to our clients but also to our dedicated teams.

We should never dwell on the past. However, I believe we need to keep close the memory of how this pandemic has changed us. It was a reality check and an eye-opener, a realisation of the strength present in each and every one of us and an understanding of the importance of cherishing precious moments in our lives. It is finally time to look ahead. ●







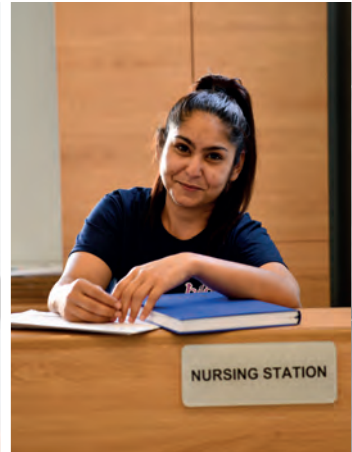
“We should never dwell on the past. However, I believe we need to keep close the memory of how this pandemic has changed us”



# WELCOME TO OUR



Casal Nuovo in Paola – a 50-bed facility operated by HILA – was officially inaugurated on June 10 by Deputy Prime Minister and Health Minister Chris Fearne as part of the 2020-2030 National Mental Health Strategy. It was a special day for HILA as its journey to offer specialised care continues, this time with a focus on mental health. Here are a few snapshots of some of the residents who were relocated from Mount Carmel Hospital enjoying their new home – right in the heart of the community.





# COMMUNITY!

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# CAREMALTA GROUP PLANS TO EXTEND ITS SERVICES TO GOZO

## University to conduct study on island's present and future social needs

The CareMalta Group has signed a 65-year lease agreement with La Stella Philharmonic Society for a property in Victoria to be developed into a 60-bed facility in the heart of the community.

This is an important milestone for the group, which will be extending its services to Gozo for the first time.

Formerly known as the Astra Discotheque in its heyday, the property, built in the shape of a tower, is located at the foot of the Citadel, just behind the Astra Theatre. Inaugurated by Gozo Minister Anton Tabone in 1989, this top entertainment venue changed its name along the years, first to Planet Discotheque and later to KU Club, closing its doors in 2019.

In a short address during a symbolic ceremony held at the Citadel on June 5, Nazzareno Vassallo, chairman of the Vassallo Group, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, said: "Our group had been looking closely at Gozo for some time. When this offer came up, we immediately visited the site and, after a thorough assessment of the proposed changes and extension required to change the building, we decided to go for it.

"Our vision for Gozo has always been that of looking for a location in the vibrant heart of the community, where our specialised services are easily accessible and with all amenities just a mere stone's throw away. The site, located right beneath the spectacular Cittadella, is just the perfect place – away from chaos yet right at the hub.

"While hoping to transform this unused site into a facility that will serve the community in the years to come, I look forward to a long and fruitful relationship and to bringing this important project to fruition."

Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CEO of the CareMalta Group, said the company had come a long way since 1993, growing from strength to strength over the years, increasing its presence and diversifying its services.

"We have also commissioned a study, in collaboration with the University of Malta, in order to establish and better understand present and future social needs in Gozo."

Prof. Andrew Azzopardi, dean of the Faculty for Social Well-being at the University, who will lead the study, praised the decision the group was taking towards understanding communities, saying that it was a step in the right direction and augured well. "It is only through the collection of evidence-based data that we will be in a position to serve our communities well."

La Stella Philharmonic Society and Astra Theatre president Michael Formosa expressed satisfaction at reaching a deal with a reputable group such as CareMalta, especially at a time when the club and theatre were renewing themselves.

"Through this arrangement, the property will be reinvented to offer a valuable service to the wider community. This is a significant development in the club's history, as its assets will be deployed in a manner that is more consistent with its ethos," he said.

Also present for the launch were Pio Vassallo, CEO of the Vassallo Group, James Scirha, the CareMalta Group's director of finance, Ruben Vassallo, director of HILA, Janet Silvio, executive director of HILA, members of the Vassallo family, as well as senior management teams. ●



"The CareMalta Group has come a long way since 1993, growing from strength to strength over the years, increasing its presence and diversifying its services"







# WELL-BEING AT THE HEART OF OUR COMPANY CULTURE

Hard on the heels of COVID-19, the CareMalta Group has kickstarted a company strategy and policy that puts a spotlight on employee well-being. Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CEO and chair of the newly set up well-being committee, says this move is part and parcel of the group's vision for mental health in the future.

People worldwide have experienced fear and worry in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Added to the fear of contracting the virus were the significant changes to our daily lives as our movements were restricted in support of efforts to contain and slow down the spread of the virus.

Stress followed, as we were faced with new realities of working from home, temporary unemployment, homeschooling of children, lockdowns and lack of physical contact with other family members, friends and colleagues. All this left a negative impact on our physical and mental well-being.

"Even though we have been through thick and thin together, the truth is that

our employees were pretty much alone throughout the pandemic. We gave them boots and umbrellas, but they were still caught in the 'rain,'" the CEO says.

"Without a sense of well-being the group is dysfunctional. Unless we sustain and restore the well-being of each individual person inside and out, we will fail. This is our main objective."

Looking ahead to the future and the group's diversification prospects, she adds: "We are extending our attention from the resident to the employee and the resident's family. This is part of our long-term well-being strategy, which we have kicked off with a focus on prevention."

## A WORD ON WELL-BEING FROM THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS...

### LEE XUEREB

*Chief People Officer, Vassallo Group*

**Lee's role on the committee is that of a consultant, due to his background in occupational psychology and extensive experience in the HR field.**

Personally, well-being is a state of mind. Being comfortable in your own skin and feeling well is how I would define well-being. Present and past experiences in life can determine whether we feel well or not.

We all need to strive in order to achieve a sense of well-being.

Professionally, it is all about taking as many steps as possible to ensure that employees achieve and maintain a sense of holistic well-being – encompassing their physical, mental and social health and recognising that their values, personal development and performance contribute to their overall well-being at the workplace.

My background in both occupational and clinical psychology provides me with the necessary tools to help employees achieve well-being on the job, thus being able to listen to their needs.

My role is to contribute to a more holistic view of employee well-being and to ensure that this is developed as a company strategy to achieve the set goals.



Natalie Briffa Farrugia, third from left, with Robert, Denise and Lee.





## DENISE TIERNEY

*People Analytics and Well-being Executive, CareMalta Group.*

**Denise ensures that employees are feeling well, motivated and happy at work by being there for their needs.**

Good citizenship has always been important to me. Being a considerate and caring person gives me the ability to put things into perspective and make human relations more honest and authentic. My vision of well-being is based on strong values and focuses on the holistic development of employees with a sense of responsibility.

According to the World Health Organisation, "A healthy job is likely to be one where the pressures on employees are appropriate in relation to their abilities and resources, to the amount of control they have over their work and to the support they receive from people who matter to them."

A healthy work environment is one in which employees make health promotion a priority and part of their working lives – through activities, initiatives and policies that encourage healthy behaviours and outcomes.

My role is to provide employees with guidance, contribute positively to their performance and productivity, inspire them to become engaged and improve their choices for a more fulfilled life.

The aim of the committee is to generate positivity. Outstanding impacts and results at the workplace will in turn lead to faster and better decision-making processes and goal achievement. Employees will also experience a higher self-esteem and lower levels of stress.

No one is immune to burnout. Therefore, my mission is to support and coach employees, so that they can face challenges with resilience. ●

## ROBERT GRECH

*People Operations Manager, CareMalta Group*

**A physiotherapist by profession, Robert's role on the committee is to oversee a number of new well-being policies, while ensuring that they are in the best interest of employees.**

Rather than focusing only on physical health, well-being must be tackled holistically, taking into consideration a person's emotional, mental and social health. When employees are in a state of well-being, they can develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build positive relationships with others, cope with stress and make a meaningful contribution.

My management experience has taught me that when people feel that their needs are being met and are given the opportunity to grow personally and professionally, they nurture a sense of esteem and feel they can reach their full potential.


My role is to contribute to the strategy through feedback. I am also developing and drafting a number of well-being policies, to further enhance our commitment towards employee well-being.

We recognise that well-being is key to determining the group's longer-term goals. The strategy's main aim is to remove any kind of barriers, provide psychological support and improve communication – in line with the group's policies and core values.





# THE 8 DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING: WHERE DO YOU FIT IN?



Setting goals in each area can help us feel more fulfilled and optimise our health. Eight CareMalta employees pick a dimension that is intrinsically valuable to their lives and share their thoughts on a holistic well-being.

We often think about well-being in terms of physical health, but it is so much more! Well-being is a concoction of dimensions which, if healthy, can lead to good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose and the ability to manage stress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed an enormous strain on healthcare workers, leaving an impact on both their physical and mental well-being.

With this in mind, the CareMalta Group has kickstarted a Well-being Strategy and Policy in order to help employees go through their healing process in a healthy way.





## EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

**JOANNA FARRUGIA**  
**Facility Administrative Assistant,**  
**Casa San Paolo**

Emotional well-being helps you cope effectively with life and build good relationships with others. People with a healthy dose of emotional well-being feel confident, in control of their feelings and behaviours and can handle life challenges.

Employees are the driving force behind every successful business, so their happiness and health should be major concerns for any employer. Factors such as financial stability,

workload, family, personal health and social interaction can all impact our emotional well-being.

There is a direct link between performance and success and well-being. If one suffers, so does the other. This is why the right approach to stress and well-being is crucial.

An employer should first be on the lookout for any changes in behaviour. The next step, usually the hardest, is to discuss and have a conversation with the employee. Guidance and support should follow.

The group's well-being policy will help promote a workplace culture that enables employees to seek help when needed and motivate them. Offering employees support helps cement trust, which in turn has a positive effect on satisfaction and well-being.

## SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

**ANTOINE BORG**  
**Facility Administrative Assistant, Casa Marija**

Spiritual well-being is related to values and beliefs that help you find meaning and purpose in your life. Signs of strong spiritual health are clear values, a sense of self-confidence and a feeling of inner peace.

No matter what our beliefs are, spiritual well-being in our daily life is important. Even though we might all embrace different beliefs, the grounds these are built on are basically the same – loving yourself and others and trying to be a good person to those around you.

I also believe that spiritual well-being is something we need to constantly work on, not a dimension we resort to when we are in trouble or in need. We must cherish and be thankful for the good days we have and be prepared for the struggles and difficult situations we might encounter in life.







## INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

**MARION ABDILLA**  
Active Ageing Facilitator, Villa Messina

Intellectual well-being is when you recognise your unique talents in order to be creative and seek out ways to use your knowledge and skills. When you challenge yourself to acquire a new skill, you are building your intellectual health.

Active participation in activities keeps the mind healthy. Now that measures and restrictions have eased, we are doing our best to reintroduce our residents to daily sessions in order to restore their intellectual wellness.

It is very important for older persons to be part of an active residential life, as daily activities help expand their knowledge and skills, thus leading to active and healthy ageing. Participating in meaningful activities, such as talking, discussing various topics, socialising, intergenerational communication, reading or playing games and music all help maintain and improve one's intellectual well-being.

## PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

**VIVIAN PSAILA**  
Front Office Desk, Villa Messina

Physical wellness is affected by physical activity, healthy nutrition and adequate sleep. Maintaining your physical health can be done through sports, cycling, walking, jogging, skiing, dancing and gardening.

Physical well-being is one of my favourite topics. I started leading a healthy lifestyle at the age of 18. Eating healthily is the most important aspect of physical well-being. There are so many delicious, low-calorie recipes you can resort to if you are following a healthy diet.

Physical exercise also keeps me motivated. I love going on long walks and trekking with my family, friends, or even on my own. To me, exercise is not only important to remain fit but also for my mental health. I go for a walk every day and this does me a world of good. I also like to help and encourage others to lead a better lifestyle. It's never too late!







## SOCIAL WELL-BEING

**ROSLYNN VELLA**  
Facility Manager, Roseville

Social well-being fosters a sense of connectedness and belonging. First and foremost, you are socially well when you thrive to be yourself and develop a good relationship with others. This, in turn, creates stability, peace and harmony in life.

Managing a nursing home for the elderly involves balancing the social well-being of staff, residents and their families.

Keeping residents socially engaged and connected leads to an improvement in mobility and cognitive function and to reduced levels of stress and anxiety.

The social well-being of residents and staff was at high risk throughout COVID-19. Now, with the easing of measures, we have started to restore social well-being both on an individual and community basis, as group interaction is being encouraged. This is being facilitated through daily activities in the home, which aim to stimulate residents in order to enhance their social skills and abilities.

## VOCATIONAL WELL-BEING

**CAROL FORMOSA**  
Lead Carer, Casa Marija

When your job gives you purpose and drive, it becomes your vocation. Maintaining positive vocational well-being improves your overall physical and mental well-being, especially in long-term care. Studies have found that employees who are engaged in their work are significantly happier and more interested throughout the day than those who are not.

Vocational well-being is all about a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment from work which you enjoy doing. Giving your 100 per cent and working from the heart fills you with the energy, focus and willpower to carry on performing your job. In my line of work with older persons, I find a smile on a resident's face to be extremely rewarding.

No two days are the same, and this makes my work challenging but interesting. It is very important that, at the end of a hard day, you switch to the needs of your family and friends, giving them all your attention, and unwind, while also taking good care of your personal needs.







## ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING

**ROMINA APAP**  
Housekeeper, Villa Messina

Environmental wellness is related to the surroundings you occupy. This dimension of health connects your overall well-being to the environment around you.

The core principle of environmental wellness is to show respect to nature. As a housekeeper, I try to minimise environmental harm by practising the three-Rs strategy of reducing, reusing and recycling. I just love to take care of our beautiful garden at Villa Messina. The sight of fresh flowers, birds and butterflies fills me and our residents with a sense of peace and well-being.

When our personal surroundings are well cared for, clean and organised, we experience a greater sense of comfort. Feeling well within a healthy environment enhances our personal health and helps ensure the future health of our communities.

## FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

**JOSETTE MELI**  
Accounts Executive, Head Office

Financial wellness refers to a person's overall financial health and the absence of money-related stress. It's the result of successful expense management and an important part of overall employee well-being.

True financial well-being is when one has control over day-to-day finances, has enough cushion to handle most financial emergencies, is out of debt and able to manage expenses without using a credit card and is on track to meet retirement and saving goals.

When these pillars are followed, it is likely that you will achieve financial stability and personal satisfaction.





# SELF-CARE AND WELL-BEING DURING CHALLENGING TIMES

## **PATRICK PSAILA**

**PSYCHOLOGIST, TRAINING CONSULTANT AND CO-DIRECTOR, PSYPOTENTIAL**

Before the pandemic many were talking about our hectic, frenetic, fast-paced and overly stressful lifestyle. Enter COVID-19 and suddenly our stress levels have skyrocketed to unprecedented levels as we are forced to respond and adapt to the current reality.

Life as we know it has changed and things like social distancing, isolation, fear and uncertainty have become the order of the day. However, there is much we can do to keep physically and emotionally healthy and cope effectively during these difficult times.

When we are immersed in a threatening reality, practising self-care is critical and it may help us survive and even thrive. The following are some easy self-care tips we can practise that will boost our sense of well-being.

### **The Physical Dimension**

- Stay on a healthy diet rich in fruit and vegetables and resist the temptation to snack on sweets and processed food as a quick mood fix. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- Get your seven hours of sleep. Sleep stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps to calm our internal stress response.
- Exercise daily to help you stay strong and healthy and release those positive endorphins. Practise some daily form of guided deep relaxation.

### **The Cognitive Dimension**

- Try to keep your anxiety and worry in check by limiting your daily dose of COVID-related information. Be selective and get your information from reliable sources.
- Keep your mind occupied by learning something new. This could be an opportunity to learn a new skill or to start working on a qualification you always wanted.
- As much as possible, try to focus on things you can be grateful for.

### **The Emotional Dimension**

- Maintain regular connections with friends, colleagues and family, and find practical ways of helping others by reaching out to those in need.
- Start to learn or practise meditation. There are various forms of meditation and you will need to find a style that works for you.
- If you feel depressed, worried or anxious, reach out for professional help. These are normal emotional states in the current circumstances and can be managed.



### **The Spiritual Dimension**

- Practise your spirituality. Spirituality takes various forms and does need to be religious. It is an important source of emotional and psychological strength.
- Use this period as an opportunity to revisit your values and your lifestyle. Reflect and take stock of your life, your priorities and your direction.
- Try to regard this challenge as an opportunity for a deep learning experience. Times of crisis can often serve as wake-up calls for profound transformation.

Every crisis is an opportunity for growth, and this is no exception. While organisations have the responsibility to safeguard our well-being in the best way possible, there is much that we too can do to make sure that we weather the storm and emerge as wiser and better people.

As humans we can adapt to the changing reality of our environment. By supporting each other we can increase sense of safety and security and face the challenge together. This is a time for maximum collaboration and teamwork to overcome this serious challenge. ●



# PANDEMIC FATIGUE AND HOW TO TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR WELL-BEING

NATALIE KENELY

SENIOR LECTURER IN SOCIAL WORK,  
FACULTY FOR SOCIAL WELL-BEING,  
UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

A United Nations policy brief published earlier on in the pandemic warned that the COVID-19 crisis was not simply a physical health crisis but had the potential to become a major mental health crisis too if action to safeguard the mental and emotional well-being of people was not taken (UN, May 2020, p.2).

One year later, local and international research is proving this forecast true. The

mental health and well-being of many people have been impacted to different degrees by this crisis. And mental health professionals are calling for action to be taken in order for this to be addressed urgently and as a major priority.

This pandemic has been and continues to be a particularly challenging and stressful time for care home and supported housing staff. All staff, including care staff,

domestic staff, nurses and managers in residential care homes, have been affected (SCIE nd). Care home residents are especially at risk of COVID-19 because of their age, co-morbidities, prevalent frailty, cognitive impairment and functional dependency (Gordon *et al*, 2020). Residents are also rendered more vulnerable by virtue of frequent close and personal contact with other residents, and carers who attend to their needs.

The spread of COVID-19 hit residential homes for the elderly in Malta – from privately owned to state-run facilities. The Superintendent of Public Health, Prof. Charmaine Gauci, in her update on September 25, 2020, stated that “a quarter of Malta’s COVID-19 deaths have been among residents in homes for the elderly” (*Times of Malta*, 2020).

Malta had managed to safeguard the elderly in residential facilities during the first wave of infection, between March and July 2020. CareMalta itself had introduced lockdowns in their facilities, where staff

“Try to bring some stability into your life – find opportunities to rest, take breaks from work, disconnect from your phone and laptop, get enough sleep, eat normally and healthily, keep in touch with your loved ones”





locked themselves in with the residents for 10 weeks at a stretch. This took a lot of courage and personal sacrifice on the part of the professional workers who participated.

However, during the second wave over the summer of 2020, the number of cases in residential homes around the island was rising steadily. This trend repeated itself in the third wave that happened between January and March 2021, where the numbers of cases in Malta were rising exponentially notwithstanding the roll-out of a vaccination programme.

## Compassion fatigue and burnout

Working in such difficult situations is always fraught with consequences, including psycho-emotional fatigue or, as we also know it, compassion fatigue. This may bring about many negative emotional states – a normal process where one would experience feelings of fear, anxiety and depression, or even a sense of helplessness, when working under such stress and pressure. All these feelings are not signs of weakness or evidence that you are not capable of handling your work. Rather, they are signs that you care so much and are trying your best to keep things going – in your personal, as well as your professional life. ●

# What to do to safeguard your well-being and to develop resilience

Well-being and self-care might sound like modern psychological buzzwords. They are so much more than that. Safeguarding your well-being and mental health, taking action to prevent or reverse burnout and acknowledging your need to be helped are no longer optional extras, but rather what will make you survive this battle and thrive healthily once we are out of it.

1. Try to bring some stability into your life – find opportunities to rest, take breaks from work, disconnect from your phone and laptop, get enough sleep, eat normally and healthily, keep in touch with your loved ones.
2. Find time for exercise, stretching, swimming or walking. Make time for yourself.
3. Avoid unhealthy ways of coping with fatigue and tension, such as increased smoking, alcohol consumption or abuse of substances – these can compromise your mental and physical health in the long run.
4. Remember what helped you cope in previous situations of stress in your life and what helped you improve your emotional state, and return to those practices – these could be simple things like reading, taking up a hobby, spending time in the countryside or by the sea, doing a craft, talking to someone you trust, seeking professional help.
5. Remember that you are not alone – your colleagues are going through similar experiences, so reach out to each other and be of support to one another.
6. Take up offers by your company to participate in any support programmes or training that it offers you.
7. Try to remember that your residents are also worried, afraid, exhausted and feeling similar emotions to yours, so continue showing understanding and draw on the compassion satisfaction that your work offers you.
8. Speak to your superiors and seek professional help if you are feeling burnt out.
9. Think positively – be proud of how you are dealing with your responsibilities and remember what a difference you are making in your residents' lives.
10. Be hopeful – this too will pass. And the more equipped you are to go through this battle safely, the stronger a person you will become by the end.

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# THE BEAUTY OF BEING TOGETHER

ANDREW AZZOPARDI

DEAN, FACULTY FOR SOCIAL WELL-BEING, UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

In a society which is more and more finding comfort in individualism, being part of a community is a rarity. This is indeed unfortunate. Our communities are an important source of survival but also guarantee quality of life and standard of living. We know as a fact that so many are disconnecting from our communities and so we need to work together to avoid leaving people by the wayside.

It seems that as a society we are slowly turning into 'barbicans' with overlooking turrets. We are transforming our support programmes in bricks and mortars, paternalistic clinician-patient relationships and pathologising of difference.

Our social sector needs a good shake-up because in these last years we have morphed into a comfort zone, thinking that all is well because we keep telling ourselves that. We have a 'generous' welfare system, we have close-knit families; we have caring and considerate communities; we have a strong NGO presence and we have an affluent economy, and usually welfare sits high up on the national agenda – so what else do we need?

In a way this might be true, but how could one explain why we are riddled with so many problems in our society and it seems that it is getting worse?

For example, the problem of loneliness which is engulfing our communities and affecting us at all age groups, with an estimated 48 per cent of people feeling lonely prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (data gathered by a Faculty for Social Well-being study). During the pandemic this phenomenon exploded to double that percentage (data gathered during the March 2020 semi-lockdown). Most times loneliness is the symptom of many other problems: isolation, finances, family separations, career pressures, to name just a few.

There is also an increase in the number of people in need of immediate support, namely homeless people and material poverty, that is impacting thousands of individuals and families. The problem seems to be growing. Just to give a small indication, in a recent interview I had with Fr Hilary



“We have turned our society into one that has left us exasperated – it is slowly but surely turning us into a soulless community”

Tagliaferro, during my radio show *Andrew Azzopardi on 103* on 103 Malta's Heart, he said that around five new families a month come to the Millennium Chapel asking for free clothing, food and other forms of support. Now add to these the increase in soup kitchens sprouting everywhere and NGOs that are not keeping up with all the material needs is another indicator of concern.

Apart from that, there are more and more people in our society claiming to have mental health problems than there ever have been and more people are attempting suicide. The list of people in our society being dealt a bad hand is boundless: women who suffer domestic violence, people with disability, people living in substandard housing, and so on and so forth.

We have turned our society into one that has left us exasperated – it is slowly but surely turning us into a soulless community. We have been curdled into machines and what matters is that we produce at the impresarios' contentment. We used to laugh at Charles Chaplin's infamous factory scene in his film *Modern Times*. We are behaving the same.

We are succumbing to the pressure of others and we risk George Orwell's, "Until they became conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious."

If we want change we need social policy makers, politicians, NGOs, service providers and academics to bring their heads together. We are still in time. ●



# HUSBAND AND WIFE REUNITE AFTER 12 YEARS

**Mental health heavily influences our quality of life. So it makes sense that mental health, just like physical health, is taken care of and maintained. And one way that it can be maintained is through finding a sense of community. Manuel and Rita Galea, finally together at Casa Marija, recount their bittersweet story.**

Manuel Galea turned 67 on July 27. His wife of 32 years, Rita, 60, got the surprise of her life when she saw him at Casa Marija, her home for the past two years.

Manuel and Rita hadn't been able to see each other at all throughout the pandemic due to COVID-19 restrictions in elderly care homes.

About two months ago, Manuel decided to move to Casa Marija to be with Rita for good.

During a recent telephone call to his wife, he told her that he would be visiting her soon. She was ecstatic to hear the good news. But little did she imagine that her husband was in the same building, calling her from the third floor – one floor up from her room – where he was following quarantine procedures as a new resident.

"It was a very emotional reunion," says Anna Curmi, the home's active ageing coordinator, who is close to the couple.

Life dealt the married couple a terrible blow 12 years ago when Rita suffered a mental illness and had to be placed in care at Mount Carmel Hospital, where she spent eight years. She then moved to Sa Maison retirement home in Pietà for two years, before finally moving again to Casa Marija.

Manuel was devastated when his wife got ill. Visiting Rita every single



day after work, with a heavy heart he returned to an empty house, had to cook and cope on his own. "I missed her dearly," he says. Having no children, the couple, from Żejtun, have always had each other for company.

Rita's illness has been a major stumbling block in the couple's marriage "even though there has never been anyone else and she is still the only woman I love... and will always be," says Manuel.

Rita became unwell after her mother-in-law passed away. "I was very close to her. She was like a second mother to me. My life without her seemed bare and meaningless. I felt lonely and depressed. Seeing us so close, everyone thought I was her daughter. Losing her meant losing everything," Rita says with tears in her eyes. "Especially around this time of the year, we used to enjoy picking capers. I have lovely memories of days out in the fields together. Those were beautiful times."

Being alone at home without Rita for so many years has been a bitter experience for Manuel. But now that the couple are finally together for the first time in many years as husband and wife is "truly a blessing," he says.

"I feel so much better. I couldn't ask for more. The future looks brighter." ●





# OUR MODEL OF CARE:



## ANNA CURMI

Active Ageing Coordinator, Casa Marija

Anna has been employed with CareMalta for three years. She previously occupied the role of housekeeper. Her typical day starts early in the morning with rounds greeting the residents and encouraging them to participate in daily activities.

"Keeping residents engaged and active in the daily routine of the home is such a beautiful task. We dance, draw, sing, tell stories, have competitions, bingo, water games, pet therapy sessions and say the rosary together.

"The residents appreciate every little gesture and love the activities, since most enjoy being independent and like their freedom. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, they had to give this up.

"I am so eager to make them happy once again"

"I also make it a point to visit residents who are unable to get out of bed, talk to them for a while and organise a number of bedside activities too.

"It was very hard for me throughout the pandemic, especially during those times when I was in quarantine and could not be there for our residents to cheer them up. Now, that we are slowly going back to some normality, I'm so eager to see a smile on their faces once again. We have also started our outings and the residents love them, especially after such a long lockdown experience.

"We all hope that the pandemic will be history, so that older persons can go back to a normal life."





# HOPE FOR RENEWAL

Isolation and confinement throughout the pandemic have had negative effects on the physical, social and psychological well-being of older persons. Now that a number of restrictive measures in care homes have been relaxed and vaccination has proven effective, our active ageing teams are hopeful that they can pick up where they left off and retrieve what has been lost.

## CAROL GALEA

Active Ageing Facilitator, Casa San Paolo

Carol is a beautiful person, inside and out. When she is not working, she loves to spend time with her 86-year-old mother who lives with her and the family, read a book or watch a good film.

"I love coming to work at 7am to find the residents waiting, either to wish me a good day or update me with what has happened while I was away.

"Every day,  
I find the  
residents  
eagerly  
waiting  
for me"

"I then start getting ready for daily activities. Every single one starts with a good cup of coffee. Bingo is a big favourite. We also have a Maltese board game, which takes residents down memory lane and life in days gone by. Many residents talk about the war, while others remember special dates.

"Many talk about how hard it was to raise a family, recounting many a heartwarming story about their parents or children. This makes me appreciate life and the many blessings I have. Every moment is precious. We must live for today, as nobody knows what tomorrow might bring. Whatever life throws at us, we must accept it and keep moving forward.

"The pandemic has been a huge blow to our residents. They felt isolated, being unable to see and hug their loved ones

or even meet up with other residents.

"What I really enjoy about my work is having the chance to make a difference in a person's life by just listening and being there. I try to make every resident feel special by becoming their best friend. I pray that the pandemic will be over soon, so that our residents can touch, hug and kiss their loved ones without restrictions, thus enjoying every moment for as long as God permits."





## CLAIRE CAMILLERI

Active Ageing Facilitator, Żejtun Home

Claire has been working at the Żejtun Home for the past 16 years and she wouldn't change a thing in her life. She started off as a kitchen assistant and worked her way up in no time. Claire's day starts early. She goes round informing residents about their two activities of the day.

"No one ever expected the pandemic to hit so suddenly, but we tried our best to work around it, giving the elderly a normal life as much as possible. During last year's company lockdown in March, I lived at the home for four weeks. When this ended, I had mixed feelings, as I missed my family, but I also missed our residents.

"Spending time with them during activities is what I enjoy most. We knit together, play board games, laugh, cry, read, do crafts with recycling material, watch a good film and even cook and bake. The fact that they appreciate what I do for them is so fulfilling. They are loving and kind and the stories they share are amazing.

"Activities help them physically and mentally and since our timetable is quite varied, they get the chance to move around too. We try to cover and combine all the things they enjoy doing in our daily plan. Now that some restrictions have eased, we are even going on the occasional outing.

"I sincerely hope that these sad times pass quickly, so they can start a normal life."



## MARVIC MUSCAT

Active Ageing Coordinator, Casa Arkati

Marvic, of Żebbuġ, is married to Raymond and has three children, Rebecca, Paul and Luċija. She joined Casa Arkati recently, after being a carer at Villa Messina for two years.

One of seven siblings, "as children, we were always going to my grandparents' house, as they too lived in Żebbuġ. I remember accompanying my mother to take care of her parents, who needed a lot of help. So I was always surrounded by love," she says.

From a young age, Marvic loved sports, being actively involved in the school's netball team. She also enjoyed drama, crafts and socialising. Having attended trade school, she made it a point to learn how to sew, cook and create hand-made items. She is in her element with the residents. Every morning, she organises a daily schedule of activities, encouraging them to take part and remain active.

"My motto is to treat every resident like your own parents, wanting the best for them."

Having faced a few tough challenges along the years, Marvic says: "I have learnt to appreciate every minute of my life. I'm also using all my knowledge and past experiences to do my very best in this new job. With God's help, I hope to make a difference."

"I appreciate every minute of my life"





## MARION ABDILLA

### Active Ageing Facilitator, Villa Messina

Marion has occupied her current role for over two years. She started working with CareMalta as a carer in 2016, after which she was promoted to senior carer, always at Villa Messina. She is currently studying for a Higher Diploma in Gerontology and Geriatrics at the University of Malta.

"I love to spend the little free time that I have in the countryside with my family. Working as an active ageing facilitator is fulfilling and rewarding, as I truly enjoy seeing our residents happy and looking forward to a new day every day."

### "Activities came to a complete halt"

"The pandemic has been a very difficult time for older persons. At the very beginning, during our company lockdown, the residents were cooped inside with us and daily residential life, with its ups and downs, was very much alive."

"But when COVID-19 cases went up and the virus started to spread in care homes, activities came to a complete halt due to strict measures in place. Now that the situation has greatly improved, thanks to the vaccine, and some restrictions have been eased, residents can go out and see their relatives."

"In fact, we are gradually reintroducing daily meaningful activities for smaller numbers in a bid to breathe new life into our home, always following infection control measures and recommendations by public health authorities."

"Our residents love to spend time in the beautiful garden at Villa Messina. Every day, they can join different activities, such as keep fit classes, bingo, outdoor crafts, reminiscence and memory sessions, dancing, singing and reading."







## LAETITIA D'ALESSANDRO

Active Ageing Facilitator, Roseville

Laetitia started working for the Vassallo Group 10 years ago and moved to CareMalta a year later as a care assistant at Zammit Clapp. After three years, she decided to undertake a development course, which led her to become a senior carer. In 2019, she moved to Roseville as active ageing facilitator.

"My mornings are taken up by planning a daily activity schedule for the residents. I then go round their rooms to let them know what activities are on and to encourage them to participate. The home is always buzzing with activity, from crafts and gardening to dancing and games. Lunchtime is a busy affair too and the residents look forward to catching up while enjoying their favourite food."

**"You need to be dedicated, passionate, committed"**

"The afternoons are usually dedicated to those residents who, for various health reasons, cannot engage in group activities. I also help with the daily animation of Mass and administering Holy Communion to residents."

"As an active ageing facilitator, you need to be dedicated, passionate, committed, disciplined and creative to keep a diverse community entertained, while trying to reach out to each individual person. It is wonderful to see the residents' faces on a Monday, as they look forward to activities. So, particularly now that it has become easier to hold activities for the residents as they can move around in small groups, we are also organising small weekend events, such as watching football games."







## NEDY PSAILA

**Active Ageing Facilitator, Zammit Clapp Hospital Residential Home**

Nedy, from the Philippines, has been living in Malta for nine years. She has been working with CareMalta since 2016 and took up her current post only last year. She loves to spend time in the countryside, as it gives her the serenity and calmness, especially after a hectic week.

Her favourite Maltese word is *bonġu* (good morning), and this is the first thing she says to the residents each morning, as she walks in to work.

"Now that some measures have been relaxed, I start off by planning daily activities and outings together with the care team, as well as collecting ideas for upcoming events, even from the residents themselves.

"Fortunately, I can once again pop my head into their rooms to remind them about crafts or any other activity planned for the day. Our activity programmes were put on hold during the second wave

of the pandemic, as residents were mostly kept in their rooms in a bid to keep safe. They all suffered boredom and loneliness.

"Now that we are slowly regaining some normality, it is so exciting to be involved in various activities that will help our residents to keep well physically, socially and mentally. I am already seeing an improvement in their mood; participating helps them forget their aches and pains.

**"This virus has brought us to our knees and created challenges for everyone"**

"This is the best part of my job – seeing the smiles. Music therapy is everyone's favourite activity, followed by gardening, cooking, games, reading... the list is endless.

"This virus has brought us to our knees and created challenges for everyone, particularly our elderly. I hope everyone will be safe."





# ANOTHER STEP TOWARDS NORMALITY

Residents in care homes were greatly affected by restrictive measures that had been imposed since the pandemic broke out in March 2020. For many months they were not allowed to leave their rooms and receive visits from loved ones. But over the past months – following the vaccine roll-out and a drop in the number of people infected by the virus – they were allowed out of their rooms, visits started to resume and, as from June 14, residents were finally allowed out of care homes so long as they were accompanied by fully vaccinated relatives. From July 19, they were given back their full independence. This is what some of our residents had to say...

## RITA ANASTASI, 74

### **Casa Arkati**

Rita has been a resident at Casa Arkati for the past 26 years. When her mother, who was a resident at Casa Arkati, passed away, Rita, who was 47 at the time, decided to move to the elderly home. "Initially, I moved in with my sister Jessica and her family, but after a while I decided I wanted to be where my mother was, as we were ever so close," she says.

"I'm very happy here and feel very much at home. The pandemic has been a difficult journey, especially since I am very close to my sister but could not see her or visit her for an entire year. I am now over the moon that she can pick me up and take me to her house. I can also run my errands at the Mosta square. Best feeling ever."



## GEORGE SPITERI, 93

### **Casa San Paolo**

George was a chief petty officer in the Navy for 25 years before he married. His last trip round the world was six months long. His wife, Inez, who was also a resident at Casa San Paolo, died recently. The couple have four children, Victor, Lina, Norman and Amy, who passed away at the age of 32. They also have seven grandchildren and a great-grandson.

"I miss my wife. She was the best thing I had. We had a very happy life together and we are very united as a family," says George.

"Now that we can finally go out after so many months spent inside, I cannot wait for my children to come and pick me up with the car, so we can have lunch together."

George says he is very happy at the home. "The staff are wonderful and each time I return to Casa San Paolo, to me it's home sweet home".





## JOSEPH BORG, 72

### **Roseville**

"It's such a great feeling to be able to go out," says Joseph. "I was probably the first resident to do this," he chuckles.

The father of two, a son and a daughter, Joseph is extremely independent and his two favourite places are the Kitchen Garden and San Anton.

"I also love to hang around in Roseville's garden. It's beautiful here and the staff are wonderful. I make myself a cup of tea and always find someone to chat with. Since my balcony overlooks the street, during the pandemic I saw my children regularly."

Having spent over a year inside, with entire months confined to his room, Joseph says the pandemic has been a difficult time, particularly since he is a free spirit. "It has affected many residents badly, with some experiencing a sense of confusion and loneliness. But the carers here are extremely helpful and always with a smile on their face," says Joseph, who spends most of his time eating and visiting the bird corner in the garden. "Feeling free is the best thing ever."



## THERESA BUHAGIAR, 89

### **Villa Messina**

Theresa joined Villa Messina in July 2020 to be with her husband Joseph, who entered the home in January 2020. The couple have a daughter and a son.

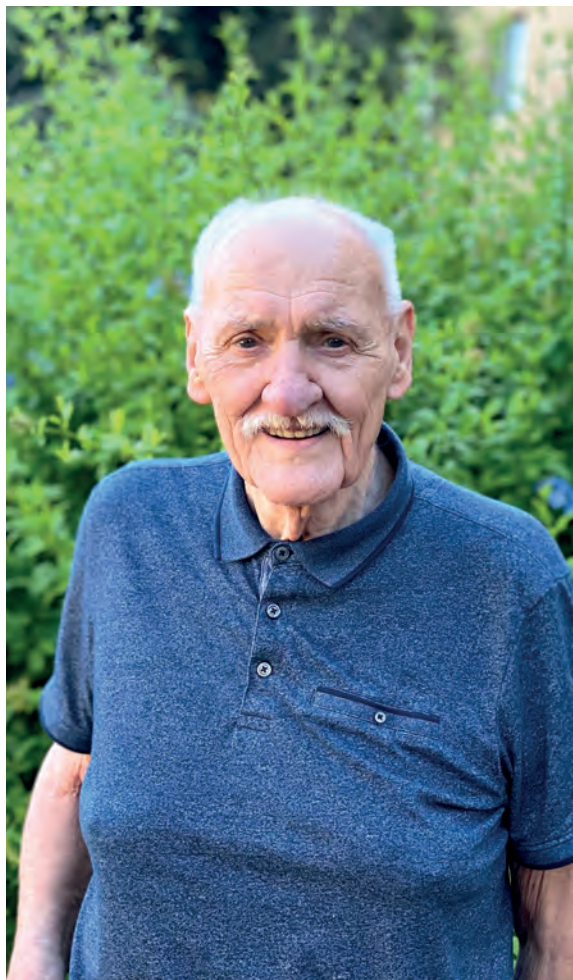
"My daughter, who got the vaccine, has already visited us in our room, which is great, and she can also pick us up with the car and take us out. We missed not physically seeing our children, even though they call us all the time," says Theresa.

The couple both tested positive for COVID-19 in December 2020.

"My husband, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, depends entirely on me," says Theresa.

"He joins me in the garden but doesn't enjoy walking, so I walk twice around the garden on my own every day. I love it. The garden here is beautiful. The most difficult part of this journey has been having to spend around four to five months in our room, not being able to go out for some fresh air. It feels great to be able to go out once again."





## MANUEL PACE, 88

### Mellieha Home

Manuel is a lovely man with an infectious smile and a sense of inner peace.

"One of my daughters, who is vaccinated, picked me up with her car, took me out and bought me presents. It was so lovely to see her again after such a long time spent separated," he says.

A father of four girls, a grandfather of five and a great-grandfather of three, Manuel says the pandemic has been terrible. He missed seeing his four daughters, "as we are a very close-knit family".

The resident, who creates wonderful miniature models using matchsticks, says he has found solace in prayer... and his hobby. "I am also blessed with love and humility, the best qualities."

His workshop, full of recycled bits and bobs which he utilises to create his masterpieces, includes his latest work of art, made out of milk carton caps and matches.

"Somehow, during the pandemic, I always managed to find a kind soul to provide recycled material for my creations."

The toughest times for Manuel have been special occasions like birthdays and Easter, "because, as a family, we always spend these together".

Manuel praises the wonderful staff at Mellieha Home, including nurses, carers, maintenance people, saying he is grateful for "their dedication and kindness".

## RONALD JACKSON, 85

### Żejtun Home

Ronald, from Manchester, has been living in Malta for 16 years. A resident at the Żejtun Home for the past three years, he has one daughter, Christine, who also lives in Malta, two granddaughters and four great-grandchildren.

"I do not go out much, but I am so relieved that restrictions have been eased, as my daughter, who lives in Bugibba, usually picks me up. She is such a loving daughter," says Ronald, who spends most of the day painting by numbers and doing jigsaw puzzles. Many of his beautiful works of art hang on the home's walls.

Ronald makes his way to the dining room at around 8.15am, right after breakfast, where he stays until lunchtime painting away. Right after lunch, he returns to the dining room and stays there till around 4pm. "I hate to sit and do nothing all day long. Before bedtime, I resort to my Criss Cross and Word Search books," he says.

Having worked since the age of 14, first as an apprentice in the watchmaking trade, then as a support staff member with the Greater Manchester Police, he decided to move to Malta after his wife passed away.

He is very happy at the Żejtun Home. "My only drawback is that I do not speak Maltese."







## EDGAR AZZOPARDI, 78

### Zammit Clapp

Edgar has been a resident at Zammit Clapp for 11 months. His wife, Elizabeth, diagnosed with Alzheimer's 14 years ago, has been living at the home for 10 years. Married for 56 years, the couple have a son, Ivan.

Edgar and Elizabeth, who met 65 years ago when they were still at school, are very close and Edgar speaks fondly of his wife. "I used to take good care of her when we both still lived at home. But then, after she got sick, I had to learn how to cope on my own."

Edgar was a professional referee for 25 years and an international one for 14. "Not being able to do any physical exercise during the worst months of the pandemic was the biggest sacrifice I had to endure. Now I feel like a bird that has just flown out of its cage. Being able to go out is a great sensation."

Being active and independent, Edgar can now run errands once again while taking care of his wife. "Elizabeth can recognise my voice sometimes, even though she hasn't spoken for years. Luckily, I was admitted to Zammit Clapp just before the pandemic kicked in, so I could be with her. My room on the first floor has a balcony which overlooks the street, so I saw my son regularly throughout the pandemic, even though from a distance."

## MICHELINA, 90, AND SALVU FARRUGIA, 94

### Bormla Home

Michelina and her husband Salvu, of Ghaxaq, have been residents at Bormla Home for the past five years. The couple have two sons and four grandchildren, two boys and two girls. Even though they can now go out on their own, they prefer to go out with their children.

"It's great that our children can finally visit us in our room or take us out. Before the pandemic, they used to pick us up with the car and take us out to lunch or to their house," says Michelina, who takes very good care of her husband.

"The best thing about going out is that I can finally see my grandchildren. I took care of them when they were newborns so we still have a very strong bond. They love us both dearly. Being able to hug my children and grandchildren once again is such a beautiful thing."



## MARY BAYLISS, 71

### Casa Marija

Mary, of Sliema, comes from a big family of 11 children. Three sisters, one of whom lives in Canada, and a brother are still alive. Her father, a police major based in Sliema, was born in the British Forces' quarters in Kalkara. Her grandfather was Irish. She has been a resident at Casa Marija for the past year.

"I love going out. I also missed the activities and outings organised by the home. But now, as restrictions continue to ease and we can finally go out, I look forward to going out more. But I understand that when cases were high, we had to obey the rules and respect the restrictions. It is for our own safety after all."

Mary, who is single, is very close to her nieces and their children. "I am like a mother to them. They visit me and take me out often, as I don't go out much on my own."





# LONG-SERVICE AWARDS FOR CAREMALTA GROUP EMPLOYEES







More than 150 employees from CareMalta and HILA received long-service awards in recognition of their hard work and loyalty over the past five, 10, 15, 20 and 25 years of employment with the Vassallo Group.

The awards and certificates were presented by chairman Nazareno Vassallo on the group's 75th anniversary. Mr Vassallo, together with his son Pio, the group's CEO, and his daughter Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CEO of the CareMalta Group, toured a number of care facilities to personally hand out the awards to employees.

The CareMalta Group operates 12 facilities, including nine homes for the elderly and three operated by HILA (Home to Independence & Limitless Abilities) – Casa Apap Bologna in Mosta, Dar Bjorn in Qormi and Casal Nuovo in Paola.

Employees reaching retirement age were also rewarded with special bonuses.

"Awarding people who have been employed with us for the past 25 years is very significant for our group, especially when one considers today's fluid work culture. Having seen our employees start off at operational level, climb the corporate ladder over the years and reach management levels fills me with pride," Mr Vassallo said.

Ms Briffa Farrugia said it was an honour to see so many CareMalta Group employees being recognised for their hard work and loyalty, always caring with a selfless smile and working with compassion, engagement and professionalism. ●





## FEBRUARY

### CareMalta Group's vaccination campaign kicks off

A team of nurses was set up to administer the COVID-19 vaccine to residents and members of staff and oversee the vaccination process within all facilities, from beginning to end.

The team – made up of Noel Borg, the group's senior nursing manager, Maria Xuereb, nursing manager, Matthew

Vassallo, lead nurse at Casa San Paolo, Zvetlana Farrugia, manager at Casa San Paolo, Maria Cekic, lead nurse at Casa Arkati, Paul Sceberras, mental health services manager, and Asha Kirar, a nurse at the Żejtun Home – worked closely with the Active Ageing and Community Care team and the Social Care Standards Authority.



## JANUARY

### MAGG webinar

Noel Borg, senior nursing manager of the CareMalta Group, was a guest speaker during a webinar organised by the Maltese Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics.

Entitled 'COVID-19 and Older Persons in Malta: An Unexpected Journey', the webinar addressed health and social work professionals, volunteers working with older persons, policy-makers, as well as the general public.



## MARCH

### International Women's Day

On March 8, the staff at the CareMalta Group's head office in Mosta received beautiful tulips and International Women's Day-themed cupcakes. The day was also celebrated in all CareMalta elderly homes, with residents being hosted to special events.

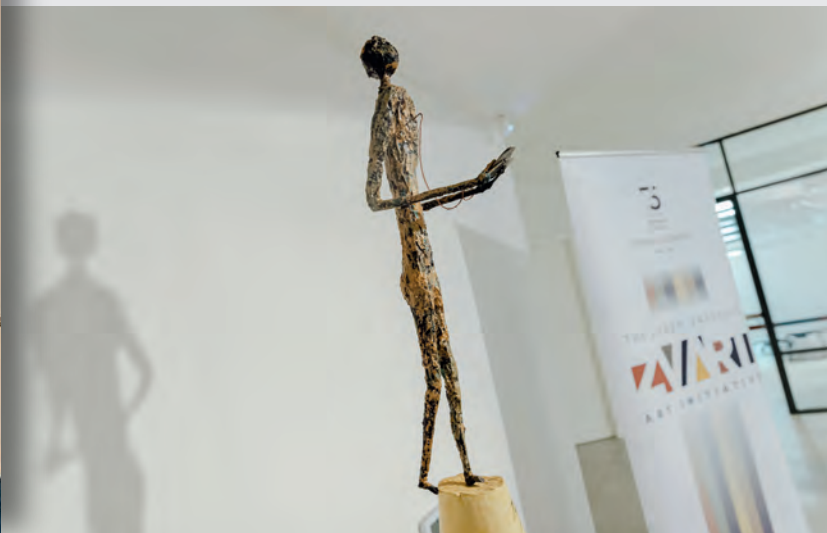


## MARCH

### First ZVART at CareMalta

A sculpture by Wallace Falzon, entitled *The Heart Giver*, was unveiled at CareMalta's head office in Mosta as part of the Zaren Vassallo Art (ZVART) initiative celebrating the Vassallo Group's 75th anniversary.

Commissioned by CareMalta, the group's healthcare arm, this was the third work of art that the group invested in. The event, held on March 9, was attended by the group's chairman, Nazzareno Vassallo, CEO Pio Vassallo, CareMalta Group CEO Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CareMalta's director of finance, James Sciriha, and Charlo Bonnici, chairperson of ZVART.



## MARCH

### Lighthouse sculpture for leadership

Senior nursing manager of the CareMalta Group, Noel Borg, was presented with a Joseph Scerri sculpture by Vassallo Group chairman Nazzareno Vassallo in recognition of excellent leadership, guidance and dedication throughout the pandemic.

Mr Vassallo handed the beautiful work of art – a lighthouse set on a rock battling waves held by a multitude of caring hands – to Mr Borg and his wife Edel in the presence of the Vassallo family and senior management teams.



## MARCH

### CareMalta managers enrol for Women in Leadership course

Three managers from three CareMalta elderly homes – Roslynn Vella, Roberta Agius and Zvetlana Farrugia – have enrolled for the Women in Leadership course by Learning Works, the Vassallo Group's training arm.

Equivalent to an MQF Level 6 Award and accredited by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority, this

one-year intensive course was launched on March 8, to coincide with International Women's Day.

Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CareMalta's CEO and a shareholder of the Vassallo Group, said: "We've heard so much about the advancement of women in society. Through this course of study, women have the opportunity to reach their goals."



**APRIL**

## Chairman distributes Easter *figolli*

Vassallo Group chairman Nazzareno Vassallo, accompanied by Natalie Briffa Farrugia, CEO of the CareMalta Group, distributed Easter eggs to residents in all facilities managed by CareMalta and HILA.

Following COVID-19 protocols and guidelines, Mr Vassallo handed the traditional *figolli* to each manager in the facility's reception area, wishing residents a blessed Easter.



**APRIL**

## Villa Messina library up and running

CareMalta officially opened its library at Villa Messina, with the help of Malta Libraries, in time to coincide with Libraries Week, marked every year between April 19 and 23.

The library features an interesting array of books, which are a treasure trove for both residents and employees who are passionate about reading.



**APRIL**

## Lit up blue

Casa Apap Bologna in the heart of Mosta, operated by HILA (Home to Independence and Limitless Abilities), the specialised care arm of the CareMalta Group, was lit up blue throughout April to mark World Autism Month.



**MAY**

## CareMalta Group CEO re-elected chair of Chamber's Care Home Operators section

CareMalta Group CEO Natalie Briffa Farrugia has been re-elected chairperson of the Care Home Operators business section within the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry. The six-member executive committee includes Sarah Cassar as deputy chairperson (Casa Antonia), Charmaine Attard (AX Care), Marie Eleanor Farrugia (Prime Care), Angelle Falzon (Caring First Ltd) and Fleur Balzan (Age Concern Company Ltd).



## MAY

### Facilities celebrate Mother's Day

For the second year running, due to the pandemic, residents couldn't celebrate as much as they would have loved to with their families on this special day.

But this did not stop them from creating all sorts of Mother's Day-themed items to adorn the homes, from heart-shaped cards to wooden frames, knitted roses and more.

With a number of restrictions in elderly homes eased in the run-up to Mother's Day, they could catch up with their friends over lunch and dinner, physically attend Mass, as well as take part in small group activities that kept their spirits high.



## MAY

### International Nurses Day

The CareMalta Group celebrated May 12, International Nurses Day, across all its facilities.

This year's theme, set by the International Council of Nurses, is 'Nurses: A Voice to Lead – A Vision for Future Healthcare' – a call to all stakeholders to take concrete actions to support the professional growth and advancement of nurses.

The group held a celebration in each facility, highlighting the fact that nurses and healthcare workers have been and still are the group's frontliners and everyday heroes.



## JUNE

### CareMalta Group extends its services to Gozo

On June 5, the CareMalta Group signed a 65-year lease agreement with La Stella Philharmonic Society for a property in Victoria to be developed into a 60-bed facility in the heart of the community.

This is an important milestone for the group, which will be extending its services to Gozo for the first time.

The group has also commissioned a study, in collaboration with the University of Malta, in order to establish and better understand present and future social needs in Gozo.

A memorandum of understanding was signed on July 19 between the University and the CareMalta Group.



## JUNE

### *L-Imnarja* brought to life

There was a joyful atmosphere on June 29 – *L-Imnarja* – in CareMalta's nine elderly homes, as residents were hosted to a number of events, each preparing a different celebration.

The team at the Żejtun Home prepared a culinary feast, complete with traditional Maltese folk music and farm animals in the garden, including a one-year-old donkey, Suzannah, calves, sheep, lambs, chickens and rabbits.

The feast, one of the oldest celebrated in Malta, commemorates two important saints – St Peter and St Paul.



## JUNE

### Father's Day

On this special day, the management teams in CareMalta elderly homes hosted fathers to various events.

The homes were buzzing with activities, with residents creating Father's Day-themed crafts, which were then used as decorations.



## JULY

### ZVART painting unveiled at Casa Arkati

A painting by artist Jessica Debattista, entitled Red Pillar Box, was unveiled at Casa Arkati in Mosta as part of the Zaren Vassallo Art (ZVART) initiative, launched in 2020 to mark the Vassallo Group's 75th anniversary this year.

The painting, which is the group's seventh ZVART initiative, was hung in the home's Sant'Andrija dementia unit.



## JULY

### *Festi Irhula* at Casa San Paolo

*Festi Irhula* is an annual event that brings back memories of the traditional *festa* – that much cherished time of the year when residents would celebrate their village feast and patron saint with friends and family.

The event features stalls serving hotdogs, beer and drinks, as well as Maltese folklore music, shredded paper flakes and confetti thrown from the residents' balconies.

The highlight of this event is a visit by the Nicolò Isouard Band of Mosta, of which Nazzareno Vassallo is chairperson.



# MY EXTENDED *Family*



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**hila**

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