

MORE THAN JUST A ROOF

SPECIALISED AND INTERGENERATIONAL HOUSING
FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES



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ROOF

**SPECIALISED AND INTERGENERATIONAL HOUSING
FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES**



HOUSING AUTHORITY

22, Pietro Floriani Street, Floriana. Malta. FRN 1060

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EDITED BY
DR. BRIAN MICALLEF

07

FOREWORD

Hon. Roderick Galdes,
Minister for Social and
Affordable Housing

11

FOREWORD

Matthew Zerafa, Chief
Executive Officer of the
Housing Authority

15

**MORE THAN
JUST A ROOF**

Dr Brian Micallef

29

DAR BLA HITAN

43

DAR TEREŻA

53

DAR IL-QAWSALLA

65

DAR IL-KANTUNIERA

75

**INTERGENERATIONAL
HOUSING**

91

WAY FORWARD



FOREWORD

HON. RODERICK GALDES

One of the primary goals of Malta Vision 2050 is to enhance the quality of life for all residents by ensuring that housing is affordable, sustainable, and inclusive. A crucial element of this initiative is the focus on specialised housing programmes that cater to the diverse needs of the population. Within this framework, social accommodation is addressed under the “Accessible, Citizen-Centred Services” pillar, focusing on the delivery of high-quality, affordable housing and other social support systems to build a resilient and inclusive society.

As our country grapples with a rapidly ageing population, the demand for tailored housing solutions has become more pronounced. Specialised housing programmes are geared towards providing safe, accessible, and supportive living environments for various groups of people with specific needs.

These programmes encompass a variety of housing options, including assisted living facilities, co-housing communities, and adaptable homes designed to meet the needs of residents.

The Housing Authority's specialised housing programmes are designed, among other things, to transform dilapidated properties into inclusive homes for vulnerable groups. These initiatives are part of the broader Vision 2050 framework, which aims to create a sustainable and resilient society. Indeed, they are initiatives based on the key principle of being person-centred, combining state services with NGO efforts, and aimed at ensuring that vulnerable groups have access to adequate housing.

In line with Malta Vision 2050, we aim to consolidate public-private partnerships and community engagement in the development of specialised housing. By engaging various stakeholders, including local authorities, non-profit organisations, and the private sector, the initiative aims to create a collaborative approach to housing development that meets the needs not only of the community but also of other groups with specific needs. This ensures that the housing available under these programmes is not only accessible but also integrates well with surrounding communities, fostering social cohesion.

The broader vision encompasses a holistic approach to urban planning, where specialised housing is part of a larger ecosystem that includes transportation, health care, and communal spaces. The plan envisions neighbourhoods designed for walkability and connectivity, where residents can engage with one another and benefit from local amenities. This integrated approach is crucial for fostering vibrant, resilient communities that can effectively adapt to future challenges.

Examples of specialised housing accommodation highlighted in this publication encompass various types of dwellings, such as assisted living facilities. These solutions aim to provide safe and comfortable living environments that cater to different lifestyle requirements while ensuring accessibility.

By fostering collaboration among the government, private sector, and community organisations, and in line with Malta Vision 2050, we aim to develop a housing sector that not only meets current demands but also anticipates future challenges, thereby ensuring a resilient and inclusive society.



HON. RODERICK GALDES

Minister for Social and Affordable Accommodation

September 2025



FOREWORD

MATTHEW ZERAFA

The Specialised Housing programme marks a transformative shift in Malta's approach to social housing by adopting a tailored approach that directly addresses the complex realities faced by vulnerable groups. It recognises that housing is not merely about providing shelter, but about creating inclusive environments that can break cycles of loneliness, homelessness, mental health struggles and discrimination. Supported through the Housing Development Fund, these projects reinforce and strengthen the safety net provided by social accommodation in Malta.

The vision is founded on the principle that every individual has unique needs that demand equally tailored solutions. In partnership with NGOs and through a national design competition organised with the *Kamra tal-Periti*, architects were challenged to design housing solutions for specific vulnerable groups. At the heart of the programme lies the

strategic rehabilitation of vacant and dilapidated properties, transforming them into residences with a clear social purpose.

Four flagship projects have already emerged from this vision: Dar Bla Hitan, Dar il-Kantuniera, Dar il-Qawsalla, and Dar Tereža. In addition, the Housing Authority is also involved in an intergenerational project, the first of its kind in Malta, which brings together elderly and young vulnerable adults in one community. Each project is designed around a specific set of challenges and a target beneficiary group, demonstrating how this type of housing can deliver deeply personal and lasting transformation for residents. Two more – Dar Mixtla and Dar Simon Soler – are in the pipeline.

A defining feature of these projects is the emphasis on social integration. It was recognised early on that the regeneration of these properties must be accompanied by community engagement to counter the stigma often associated with such residences. Early outreach involved neighbours in open discussion about each project's purpose, the services offered, and the day-to-day realities of living alongside the residents. Although initial resistance was common, this proactive approach was crucial to the success of these projects, fostering acceptance and building reciprocal relationships in which residents actively contribute to their communities.

Sustainability is deeply embedded into this vision. Wherever possible, dwellings were designed to incorporate energy-efficient systems that reduce utility costs while promoting environmental responsibility. In many cases, accessibility has been enhanced through the installation of lifts and wheelchair-friendly features, ensuring inclusivity alongside sustainability.

Ultimately, the Specialised Housing programme embodies a holistic approach to housing policy. Its aim is not merely to provide physical shelter, but to create supportive and inclusive communities that enable individuals to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. By uniting a clear social mission with urban regeneration, sustainable design, and strong community partnerships, these projects present a blueprint for how housing policy can adapt to meet both current and future challenges.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Zerafa', with a stylized, cursive script.

MATTHEW ZERAFA

CEO, Housing Authority

September 2025



MORE THAN JUST A ROOF

DR BRIAN MICALLEF

INTRODUCTION

Housing policy has always been a central concern for governments, yet the challenge is not merely to provide shelter but to create homes that foster dignity and inclusion. In Malta, as in many parts of the world, the housing sector is shaped by a mix of demographic change, economic pressures, and historical legacies in the built environment. In recent years, the Housing Authority has taken significant steps to move beyond a traditional one-size-fits-all approach to social housing, one in which applicants were offered largely standardised accommodation regardless of their specific needs, towards a more nuanced and targeted set of policies. This shift recognises that different policy challenges require different policy responses.

The Specialised Housing projects that have emerged from this change are designed to meet the needs of specific cohorts within society, especially vulnerable groups such as individuals with

mental health conditions, people exiting institutional care, members of the LGBTIQ+ community facing hardship, and intergenerational initiatives pairing elderly residents with vulnerable younger adults.¹

As the title of this publication suggests, these projects go beyond providing a roof over one's head; they address broader issues of social exclusion and reintegration, empower individuals, and strive to build inclusive communities where everyone belongs. They are supported through the Housing Development Fund, complementing and reinforcing the safety net provided by social accommodation in Malta. They are also firmly situated within an international policy framework, aligning with the European Union's EU2020 strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth, and with Sustainable Development Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which advocates for cities and human settlements that are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

This publication aims to raise awareness of Specialised Housing projects and the communities they serve. As part of its outreach programme, the Housing Authority engaged with the NGOs responsible for managing these initiatives, gathering first-hand insights into their operations and impact. The publication combines photographic documentation illustrating the rehabilitation and transformation of these properties with testimonials from beneficiaries, NGOs and professionals involved in the process. It complements a dedicated section on the Housing Authority's website, which provides additional resources, such as short videos showcasing success stories behind these projects.

¹ Housing Authority (2019). *Sustainable Communities: Housing for Tomorrow*. Housing Authority publication, March 2019.

POLICY CONTEXT IN MALTA

Malta's housing challenge is shaped by a combination of factors: a dense population, limited land availability, rapid shifts in property values, and an ageing housing stock.

The country also faces a rapidly ageing population, a trend set to intensify over the coming decades. With one of the highest life expectancies in the EU and the lowest fertility rate, Malta's demographic balance is shifting sharply. Census data highlights this transformation: the proportion of residents over 60 increased from 16% in 1995 to 25% in 2021, and for the Maltese population specifically, it reached 30%. Meanwhile, the share of those over 70 doubled, from 8% to 16%, over the same period. Population projections highlight the growing seriousness of Malta's demographic shift over the coming decades.

The 2021 national census highlighted that a substantial proportion of dwellings are not in regular use, being either secondary homes, seasonal residences, or entirely vacant. This situation has both social and economic implications. Vacant buildings represent untapped housing capacity, yet they also often require significant investment to bring them up to a safe and habitable standard.

Historically, the Housing Authority relied heavily on building new developments to meet demand. While this addressed immediate needs, it did little to tackle the underutilisation of existing buildings or the need for housing solutions tailored to the varied circumstances of applicants. Over time, the Authority recognised that a "one-size-fits-all" approach risked creating mismatches between housing provision and the lived realities of tenants. For instance, individuals recovering from mental health challenges may benefit from accommodation integrated with therapeutic support services. The Authority's research into applicant profiles, such as the 2021 exercise that identified

diverse life situations among those on the waiting list, underscored the importance of more precise targeting.

The shift towards the Specialised Housing programme reflects this recognition. By pairing the regeneration of neglected buildings with socially targeted housing provision, Malta is attempting to address multiple policy challenges simultaneously: housing shortages, social exclusion, and urban decay, all within a sustainability-oriented framework.

THE SPECIALISED HOUSING MODEL

The programme follows a structured, four-stage process.

First, the Housing Authority identified suitable government-owned dilapidated properties. The identification of these properties followed a series of informational sessions and site visits, which were aimed to enable NGOs to make informed decisions and be part of the process from the beginning. This pillar is a cornerstone of the programme's sustainability by prioritising urban regeneration. By rehabilitating derelict buildings, the Housing Authority helps breathe new life into streetscapes.

Second, the Authority worked closely with NGOs, which bring to the table invaluable expertise and a deep, empathetic understanding of the vulnerable groups they serve. The policy encouraged bottom-up participation. NGOs were not just recipients but co-designers and implementers; they were invited to submit proposals that outline both the social needs of their target beneficiaries and the functional requirements for the building. These proposals form the basis of the project's design brief.

The third stage involved an open design competition in collaboration with the *Kamra tal-Periti*. The competition encouraged creative proposals that respected the historic value of the properties while addressing the needs of future users. Crucially, this process incorporated the voices of intended beneficiaries from the outset, at the planning and design stages, ensuring that the resulting spaces are not only physically accessible but also socially and emotionally supportive environments. The projects were reviewed by an independent jury coming from different professions. The competition promoted sustainable and inclusive approaches, such as the use of renewable energy, heritage protection, the installation of energy-efficient systems and design that genuinely reflects community needs.

Finally, stakeholder engagement, particularly at the community level, was ongoing during all the different stages of the process. This was crucial for fostering social inclusion and pre-empting the “Not In My Backyard” syndrome, which can derail even the most well-designed projects. Many specialised housing projects cater to groups that may face stigma—such as former inmates, individuals with mental health challenges, or members of marginalised gender and sexual minorities. Proactive engagement with residents, community organisations, and local authorities helped to address concerns, build acceptance, and integrate these projects into the social fabric of the area.

INTERGENERATIONAL RESIDENCE IN VALLETTA

While not part of the original Specialised Housing programme, the intergenerational project in Valletta, developed in partnership with the Friends of Don Bosco, is another example of a tailored project intended to address the challenges of two distinct groups:

elderly residents and young adults. The underlying philosophy is mutual benefit: vulnerable young residents provide support to older neighbours with errands, technology, or companionship, while gaining mentorship, life experience, and a stable living environment.

Most of the elderly residents were chosen from the Housing Authority's social housing waiting list or through its exchange programme, with priority given to Valletta residents. This approach reflects a deliberate policy choice to promote ageing in place, enabling them to remain rooted in their community and maintain their social networks, rather than being displaced into institutional settings or unfamiliar environments. For the elderly, this intergenerational residence offers an alternative to the traditional housing options of 'care at home' (private) or 'care in homes' (institutional), with the latter often perceived as unsuitable for those seeking greater independence.

The younger adults, many with backgrounds in foster or residential care, take part in a structured mentorship programme that equips them with the practical life skills needed to transition into independent living. Beyond offering support, the programme instils responsibility and a sense of purpose. A key requirement is that all young adults must be engaged in full-time employment or education; in cases of unemployment, they are encouraged to contribute through voluntary work. This approach not only strengthens their skills and resilience but also fosters a culture of giving back to the community.

This four-storey building, which was once abandoned and in a state of severe disrepair, was fully restored through a €1.6 million investment by the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation and officially reopened in January 2023. The dwelling comprises several self-contained apartments, allowing residents to live independently, alongside shared

communal spaces designed to encourage interaction. To enhance accessibility, the building includes two lifts, which are crucial for an elderly population with mobility challenges.

SUSTAINABILITY AND EMPOWERMENT

The concept of sustainability underpinning these projects extends beyond environmental considerations to encompass social and economic dimensions. Environmentally, repurposing existing structures avoids the environmental costs associated with new construction, such as land use, material consumption, and carbon emissions from building processes. Socially, the projects aim to create inclusive, safe, and aesthetically pleasing spaces that are well-connected to public services and community facilities—hallmarks of sustainable neighbourhoods. Economically, they contribute to local regeneration by revitalising abandoned properties, potentially stimulating surrounding property markets and encouraging further investment.

A recurring theme that emerged from our discussions with NGOs running these residences is their shared commitment to go beyond simply providing shelter. Their mission is to equip residents with the skills and support systems needed for a meaningful reintegration in society. This support can take many forms: structured mentorship programmes, practical life-skills training, therapy sessions, rekindling relationships with family members, access to education, and pathways into employment. In some cases, the commitment to residents extends beyond their stay in the residence, with continued follow-up and guidance to ensure long-term stability. At its core, this support is about

fostering independence and empowering individuals with the agency to make their own choices and actively participate in community life.

COMPARATIVE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES

Across Europe, similar housing initiatives have become an increasingly important part of social policy, especially in contexts where demographic changes, such as ageing populations, migration, and urbanisation, are reshaping housing demand. In Scandinavia, for example, co-housing models have been used to provide both affordability and community support, with designs that encourage interaction among residents and shared responsibility for communal spaces. In Germany, multi-generational houses serve as community hubs as well as residences, hosting social services, educational activities, and cultural events under one roof.

Even intergenerational living models have proven successful elsewhere in Europe. For instance, in the Netherlands, the Humanitas project in Deventer allows students to live rent-free in a retirement home in exchange for volunteering a set number of hours per week. Similar schemes in Germany, France, Belgium and Switzerland have been shown to reduce loneliness among seniors, improve mental health outcomes, and foster stronger community ties.

Malta's programmes share many of these features but also face distinct constraints. Space limitations and the high value of centrally located properties make large-scale purpose-built projects rare. Instead, Malta's focus on regenerating existing structures provides a pragmatic solution that is both cost-effective and culturally sensitive. Moreover, the partnership model with NGOs allows for a diversity of projects, each tailored to the

specific expertise of the partner organisation. But overall, it demonstrates how imported policy ideas can be tailored to local needs and conditions.

COMPLEMENTARITY WITH OTHER SCHEMES AND INITIATIVES OF THE HOUSING AUTHORITY

These projects should not be viewed in isolation but as part of the Housing Authority's broader strategy aimed at improving accessibility, affordability and housing quality in Malta.

At the core of this effort is the allocation of social housing to vulnerable and low-income households, which provides a crucial safety net for secure and affordable accommodation.² Between 2017 and 2024, the Housing Authority successfully halved the waiting list for social housing, with more than 550 properties allocated in 2024 alone.

This progress was achieved through a strategy that combines new construction with direct leasing from the private sector through the *Nikru Biex Nassistu* scheme and initiatives to make better use of the existing stock. A targeted scheme also incentivises owners of vacant dwellings to rehabilitate their properties and lease them to the Authority, revitalising unused buildings while adding much-needed supply to the stock of social housing. In addition, the Housing Authority collaborates with third-sector organisations, such as the Foundation for Affordable Housing, to introduce new affordable housing units to the market. Overall, this dual approach of reducing the waiting list and expanding the

² Housing Authority (2025). *Beyond Walls: A Social Housing Story from Post-War Beginnings to Modern Communities*. Horizon Publications.

availability of social and affordable housing constitutes a key pillar of the Government's Vision 2050 for the housing sector.

Affordability is also addressed through financial support for tenants and prospective homeowners. The Housing Benefit Scheme provides rent subsidies to low-income tenants, while rental assistance for households in pre-1995 dwellings effectively operate as a form of social housing.³ At the same time, homeownership remains an important pathway to stability. Through schemes like the Deposit Guarantee, Equity Sharing, New Hope and Sir Sid Darek, the Housing Authority has assisted one family every two days to become a homeowner over the past five years.⁴ Post-purchase grants, such as the First-Time Buyers Scheme and the Grant for First Residence, further boost the purchasing power of young families and help them turn their houses into homes.

A key pillar of this strategy is the renovation and modernisation of Malta's housing stock. Dedicated schemes enable homeowners and tenants to undertake essential renovations and improvements, ensuring their homes remain safe and adequate over time. Other incentives are tailored to individuals with disabilities or mobility challenges, supporting them in adapting their residences for greater accessibility and independent living, for example, through the installation of stairlifts or walk-in showers.⁵ In parallel, the Housing Authority continues to modernise and maintain its own housing stock

3 Micallef, B. and Schembri, J. (2024). *The Housing Authority's Rental Affordability Schemes*. Housing Authority publication, November 2024.

4 Micallef, B. and Schembri, J. (2024). *The Housing Authority's Homeownership Schemes*. Housing Authority publication, September 2024.

5 Micallef, B. and Schembri, J. (2025). *The Housing Authority's Schemes to Boost the Purchasing Power of Homeowners and Improve the Quality of Housing*. Housing Authority publication, March 2025.

through projects such as lift installations, estate embellishments, and regular repair works, to guarantee safe and dignified conditions for its tenants.

At the same time, the Housing Authority is investing in energy efficiency and sustainability. The Net-Zero Housing pilot project in Żabbar is a first step in this direction, serving as a model for how future housing can reduce energy consumption and environmental impact. EU funds are also being mobilised to support this agenda, including the financing of lift installations and future plans to tap into the Social Climate Fund to enhance the energy efficiency of the social housing stock.

Finally, since 2020, the Housing Authority assumed a new role as the regulator of Malta's private residential rental market. This reform introduced long-overdue basic standards in the sector, which had been absent prior to 2020, while carefully avoiding interference with the price mechanism.⁶ Further refinements came into force in September 2024, with regulatory amendments designed to improve the system's responsiveness to real needs, including measures to curb abuse, improve dispute resolution mechanisms and better address issues related to shared living arrangements and overcrowding.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Malta's Specialised Housing programme, along with similar initiatives like the intergenerational residence in Valletta, marks a significant step forward in the country's approach to housing policy. Nonetheless, challenges persist, particularly in addressing the limited capacity of these projects relative to the growing demand. A key policy

⁶ Briguglio, M., Micallef, B. and Gauci, T. (2024). *Tenant and landlord experiences of the Maltese residential rental market: Three years after the introduction of the Residential Leases Act*. Housing Authority publication.

consideration moving forward is how to effectively scale up such initiatives to broaden their reach, enhance their impact, and provide sustained support to a greater number of individuals and communities. Such community-based housing would also benefit from adjustments to planning regulations, which at present do not adequately account for the specific needs of these residences.

By moving beyond a uniform model to embrace targeted solutions, however, the Housing Authority has not only started to address pressing housing needs but is also contributing to wider goals of community regeneration and social inclusion. The combination of repurposing existing structures, partnering with NGOs and architectural firms, engaging communities, and embedding sustainability principles offers a model that is both locally grounded and globally relevant. When viewed alongside similar initiatives in Europe, Malta's experience underscores the value of adaptability: borrowing successful ideas from elsewhere, but reshaping them to fit the unique social, cultural, and spatial context of the islands.

A common theme across these projects—and hence the title of this publication—is that they go beyond providing shelter, focusing instead on enhancing residents' capabilities. Through mentorship, life-skills training, education and employment support, personalised care, and post-residency follow-up, these residences open pathways to independence and meaningful participation in society. At their core, they prioritise empowering individuals with agency, enabling them to make their own choices about housing and life more broadly.

As Malta continues to refine its housing policies, the key will be to maintain this commitment to diversity and sustainability. That will mean not only expanding the reach

of specialised housing programmes but also embedding their principles into the broader housing system, ensuring that every new project—whether aimed at vulnerable groups or the general population—contributes to the creation of sustainable communities where everyone can thrive.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dr. Micallef', enclosed within a horizontal oval shape.

DR BRIAN MICALLEF

Executive Head, Housing Authority

September 2025



Middiam ghad-Dawl
Dar Bla Hi
QR code



DAR BLA HITAN

Inaugurated in 2023 and operated by the Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl Foundation, Dar Bla Hitan in Birgu provides a structured residential programme for inmates serving the final part of their sentence. Eligible participants spend their last months in a supportive environment designed to prepare them for successful reintegration into the community.

The programme focuses on rebuilding family relationships, developing essential life-skills such as budgeting and securing stable employment. With capacity for up to five residents, most remain for around one year. To date, four participants have completed the programme and successfully reintegrated into society.

Dar Bla Hitan offers far more than accommodation. Residents participate in therapeutic sessions, educational courses, community work, and structured recreational activities. A clear framework governs temporary leave, requiring formal requests and risk assessments, thereby fostering accountability and routine.

The project's ethos blends self-discipline with compassion, recognising both as essential to rehabilitation. At Dar Bla Hitan, the closing months of a sentence are reframed as the first steps towards a new chapter—one grounded in personal growth, responsibility, and community connection.



“More than a year later, I am still in employment and am now living in an apartment provided by the Housing Authority. My children stay with me on weekends and public holidays.”

RESIDENT

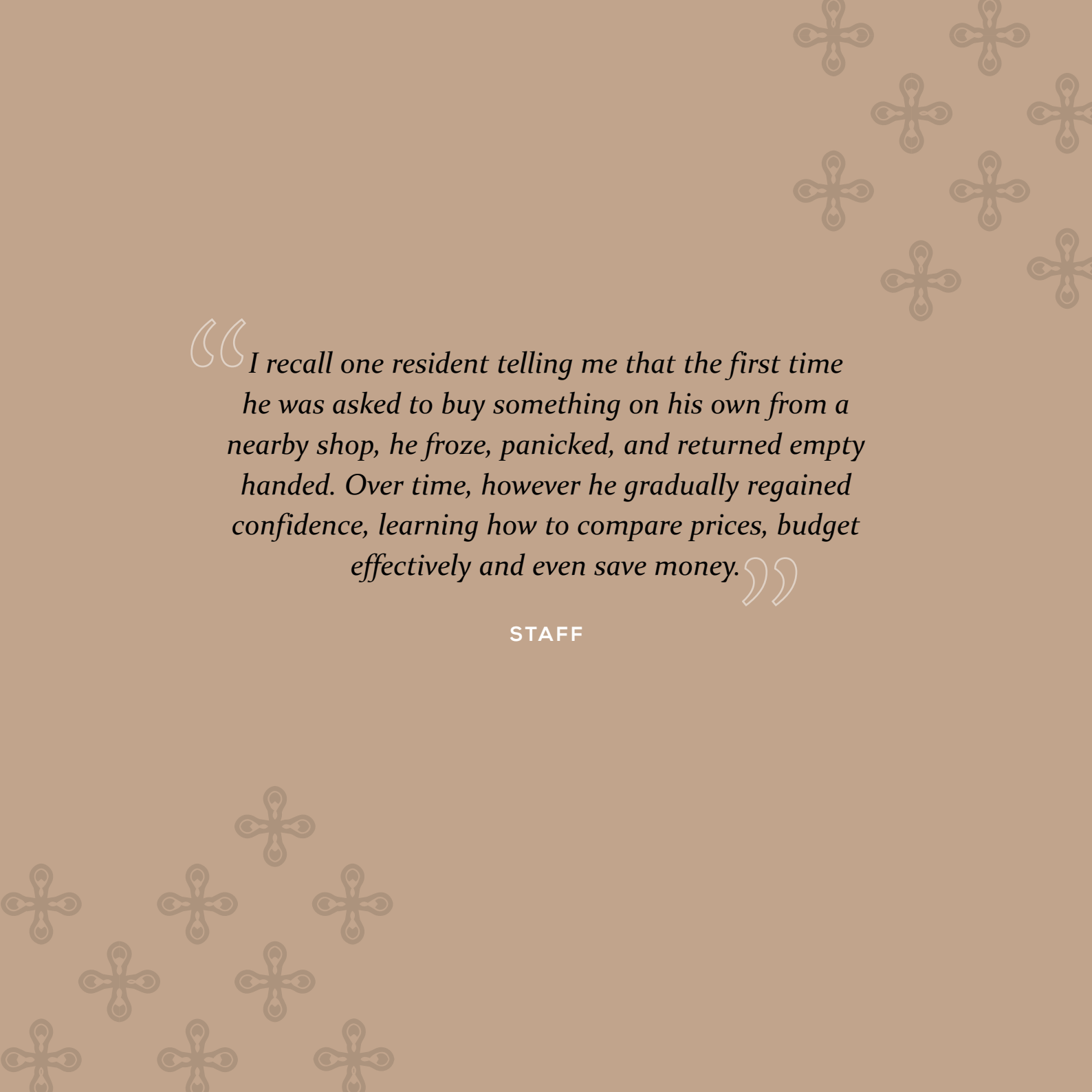
“I have two young children, and from the very beginning of my programme, I worked hard on being a good father and spending quality time with them.

I took responsibility for following their academic progress, and through the support sessions at Dar Bla Hitan, I learnt how to have mature and calm conversations with my children’s mothers.”

RESIDENT







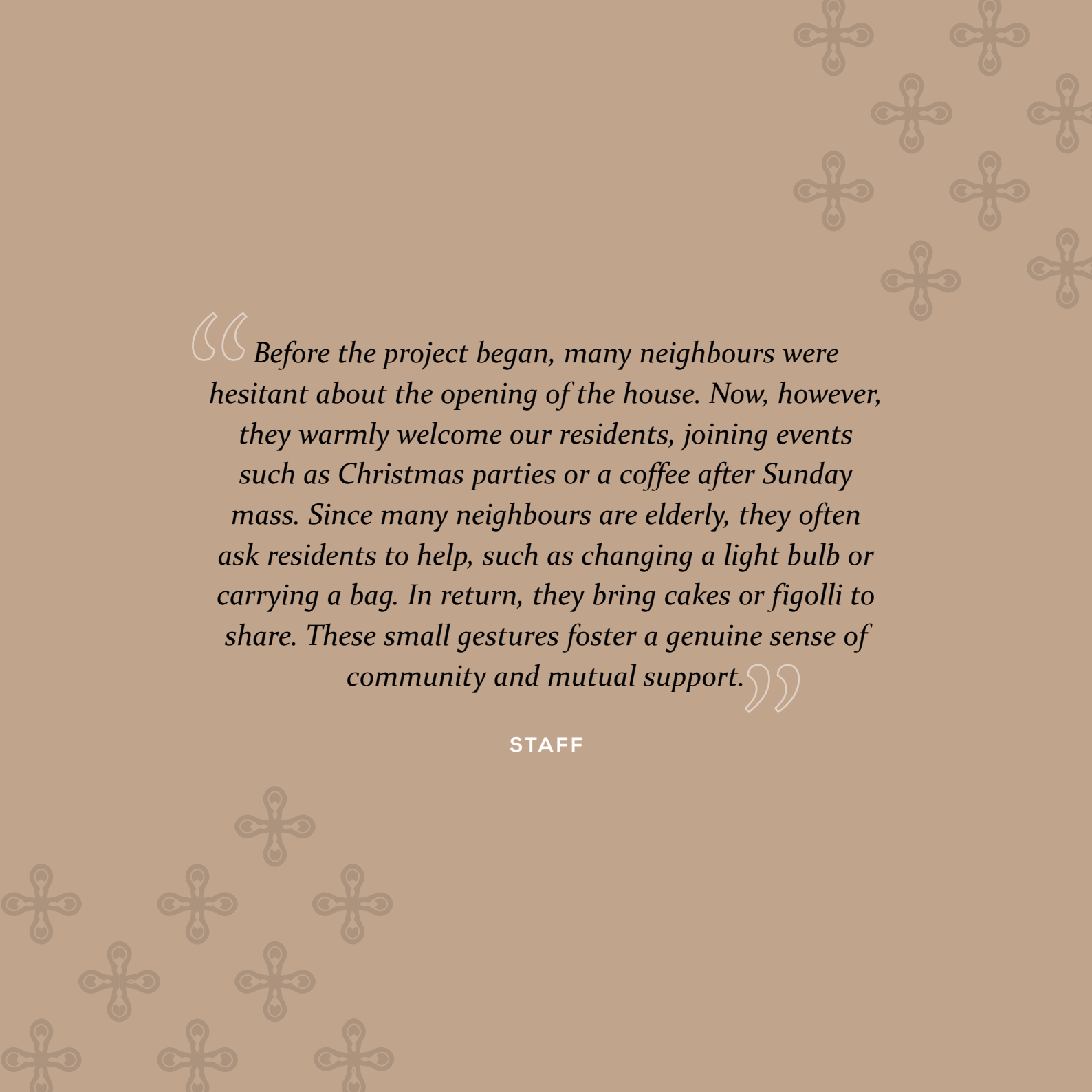
“ I recall one resident telling me that the first time he was asked to buy something on his own from a nearby shop, he froze, panicked, and returned empty handed. Over time, however he gradually regained confidence, learning how to compare prices, budget effectively and even save money. ”

STAFF









“Before the project began, many neighbours were hesitant about the opening of the house. Now, however, they warmly welcome our residents, joining events such as Christmas parties or a coffee after Sunday mass. Since many neighbours are elderly, they often ask residents to help, such as changing a light bulb or carrying a bag. In return, they bring cakes or figolli to share. These small gestures foster a genuine sense of community and mutual support.”

STAFF







“Residents not only gain practical skills, such as cooking and cleaning, but also develop positive routines like morning walks and active community engagement.”

STAFF



As an architect, I believe that the spaces we create can profoundly shape human experience and support positive change, and Dar Bla Hitan stands as a testament to this belief.

The design brief was a demanding one, requiring diverse needs to be accommodated within the significant constraints of an existing building set in a close-knit community. To respond, the architectural approach was guided by the notions of transition, responsibility, and participation, shaping an environment that encourages dialogue and self-reflection. Particular emphasis was placed on natural light, connections to outdoor spaces, and the balance between shared communal areas and private retreats, so that residents could experience belonging and foster a sense of ownership. Private spaces were intentionally kept minimal in design yet personal, allowing individuals to define their own quarters within a shared living framework that supports the rehabilitative mission of the initiative.

One year after completion, revisiting the home revealed how residents had adapted spaces and elements to reflect their own interests and identity, turning the house into a home. It was inspiring to see how community bonds and mutual support grew over time, creating an environment where people could find hope, rebuild family ties, and imagine new futures. These encounters were a reminder that real change begins with people themselves — once given the right environment and support, they not only renew their own lives but also create possibilities for others.



OPENWORK STUDIO,
WINNERS OF DESIGN COMPETITION FOR DAR BLA HITAN





DAR TEREŽA

Administered by the Richmond Foundation, Dar Tereža offers a safe and supportive environment for mothers experiencing mental health challenges who have children under the age of 12 by the programme's conclusion. Its distinctive model keeps mothers and children together throughout the recovery process, fostering family unity and avoiding the need for separate interventions.

Opened in early 2024, the residence accommodates up to five families at a time. Once a dilapidated pre-19th century building in Bormla, it has been fully restored to provide dignified and functional spaces, including a communal kitchen, en-suite bedrooms, and a terrace. The design of these spaces is intended to create an environment conducive to healing and reflection.

Over a three-year programme, each family follows a personalised care plan addressing the needs of both mother and children. Professional psychiatric and social support aim to help families achieve stability, develop self-care skills, and transition to independent living.

Child safety was a priority from the outset, with risk assessments leading to targeted modifications such as window locks and reinforced railings.

This residence stands as a model of how housing policy can deliver holistic solutions by combining secure accommodation with tailored support to strengthen families and contribute to healthier communities.

In recognition of its architectural excellence and social impact, Dar Tereza was awarded the Community Impact Award at the *Premju Emanuele Luigi Galizia 2024*.







“Since being at Dar Tereža, I am learning to live more independently in a safe and spacious home, giving both myself and my son the opportunity for a brighter future.”

RESIDENT

*“Dar Tereza offers me protection and security. Through this programme,
I can give my children the best in a safe and peaceful environment.”*

RESIDENT









“The families I meet are a constant source of inspiration, driven by a deep commitment to their children’s wellbeing and future. This dedication highlights the incredible strength within our community. Seeing minors gain access to a brighter, more dignified life is deeply rewarding, and I am proud to be helping to build a future full of possibilities.”

STAFF



“Working on Dar Tereža has been one of the most meaningful and transformative projects in our practice. This initiative perfectly embodies our belief that architecture should serve as a catalyst for positive social change and community healing.

The project presented us with a unique opportunity to address a critical social need while preserving Malta's architectural heritage. The adaptive reuse of two early 19th-century townhouses in Bormla challenged us to create a delicate balance between restoration and contemporary intervention, honouring the historic fabric while reimagining these buildings as spaces of empowerment and recovery for women with mental health challenges and their children.

The design philosophy centred on three fundamental principles: ensuring safety for individual residents, creating shared spaces that encourage communal interaction, and providing opportunities for integration with the public realm. The resulting architecture is not simply a shared dwelling, but rather a series of thoughtfully designed spaces with varying levels of privacy, enabling residents to develop the skills needed for independent living while maintaining essential support systems.

Dar Tereža establishes a significant precedent for how architecture can forge better societal outcomes through thoughtful reuse. The project continues to evolve through our ongoing post-occupancy studies and the development of a complementary public garden initiative, through Project Green, that further extends the community impact.

The Housing Authority's commitment to innovative social housing solutions made this project possible. Their support throughout the competition and implementation phases, combined with their vision for sustainable community initiatives, created an environment where architectural excellence and social impact could truly converge.”

LOCAL OFFICE FOR ARCHITECTURE,
WINNERS OF DESIGN COMPETITION FOR DAR TEREŽA





DAR IL-QAWSALLA

Dar il-Qawsalla, managed by the Malta LGBTIQ Rights Movement, provides a safe and supportive environment for LGBTIQ+ individuals over 18, including asylum seekers, who face socio-economic hardships, discrimination, or homelessness. Operating as a second-stage shelter, this residence, which is located in San Gwann, offers not only secure housing but also the support needed to rebuild lives and regain stability and empowerment.

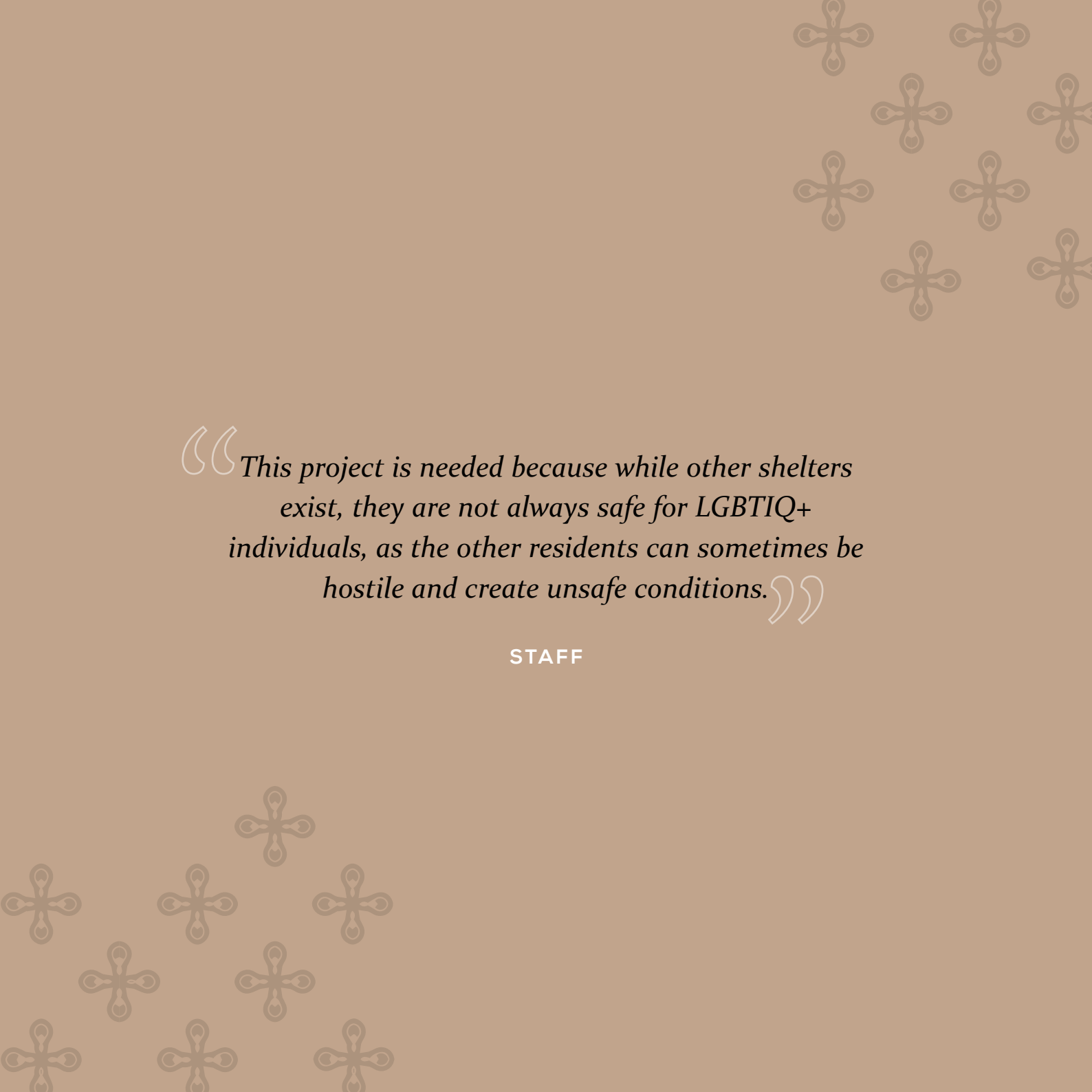
Inaugurated in late 2024, the residence accommodates up to six persons at a time, who may stay for up to eighteen months. It fills a critical gap in existing services, as traditional shelters often pose significant risks for LGBTIQ+ individuals, including harassment or discrimination. Residents are supported in transitioning to independent living or referred to other appropriate services when needed.

Dar il-Qawsalla delivers a holistic programme including tailor-made care plans, therapeutic services, life-skills training, employment and education support, and post-residency follow-up. It also organises community activities and helps residents rebuild social networks, pursue educational opportunities, and restore family relationships.









“This project is needed because while other shelters exist, they are not always safe for LGBTIQ+ individuals, as the other residents can sometimes be hostile and create unsafe conditions.”

STAFF



“A young trans man wanted to live as his true self, but his family’s transphobia made home unsafe.

Paying rent and covering basic expenses while studying and working was very challenging. If Dar il-Qawsalla had existed during that time, he could have focused on his education and part-time work without becoming overwhelmed.”

STAFF











“Beyond the main aim of providing specialised housing, the project also prioritised environmental sustainability by building a reservoir and fitting double-glazed windows to reduce energy consumption.”

STAFF



“From concept to completion, the various technical stages of this project culminated in creating an atmosphere for this residence as a hub that serves a specific social group with an impactful, outward-looking community approach.”

INGUANEZ ARCHITECTS,
WINNERS OF DESIGN COMPETITION FOR DAR IL-QAWSALLA





IL-
KANTUNIERA



DAR IL-KANTUNIERA

Operated by the Malta Trust Foundation, Dar il-Kantuniera in Għarb, Gozo, provides residential support and rehabilitation for individuals facing mental health challenges and substance abuse issues. It caters to those who do not require inpatient hospitalisation but need intermediate care to transition back to independent living. This is a project in collaboration with the Mental Health Association Gozo and the Ministry for Gozo.

The residence serves two main groups: individuals discharged from hospital who need structured support to rebuild essential life skills, and individuals living at home who, while not yet requiring hospitalisation, would benefit from timely intervention to stabilise their condition and prevent admission.

Opened in 2021, Dar il-Kantuniera accommodates up to six residents in three bedrooms, fostering a calm, therapeutic environment that mirrors the home setting residents will return to after rehabilitation. Stays typically last three months, with extensions granted where necessary.

Residents follow a personalised care plan, receiving individual and group therapy alongside practical skills training in communication, employment, time management, and relationship building.

Grounded in a person-centred approach, Dar il-Kantuniera achieves an 80% success rate in supporting reintegration without immediate re-

hospitalisation, assisting an average of 21 individuals annually. This model demonstrates the value of targeted, small-scale interventions in bridging the gap between clinical care and independent living.







*“Thank you from my heart for the care
and help you showed me to overcome bad
moments and make me feel strong again.”*

RESIDENT

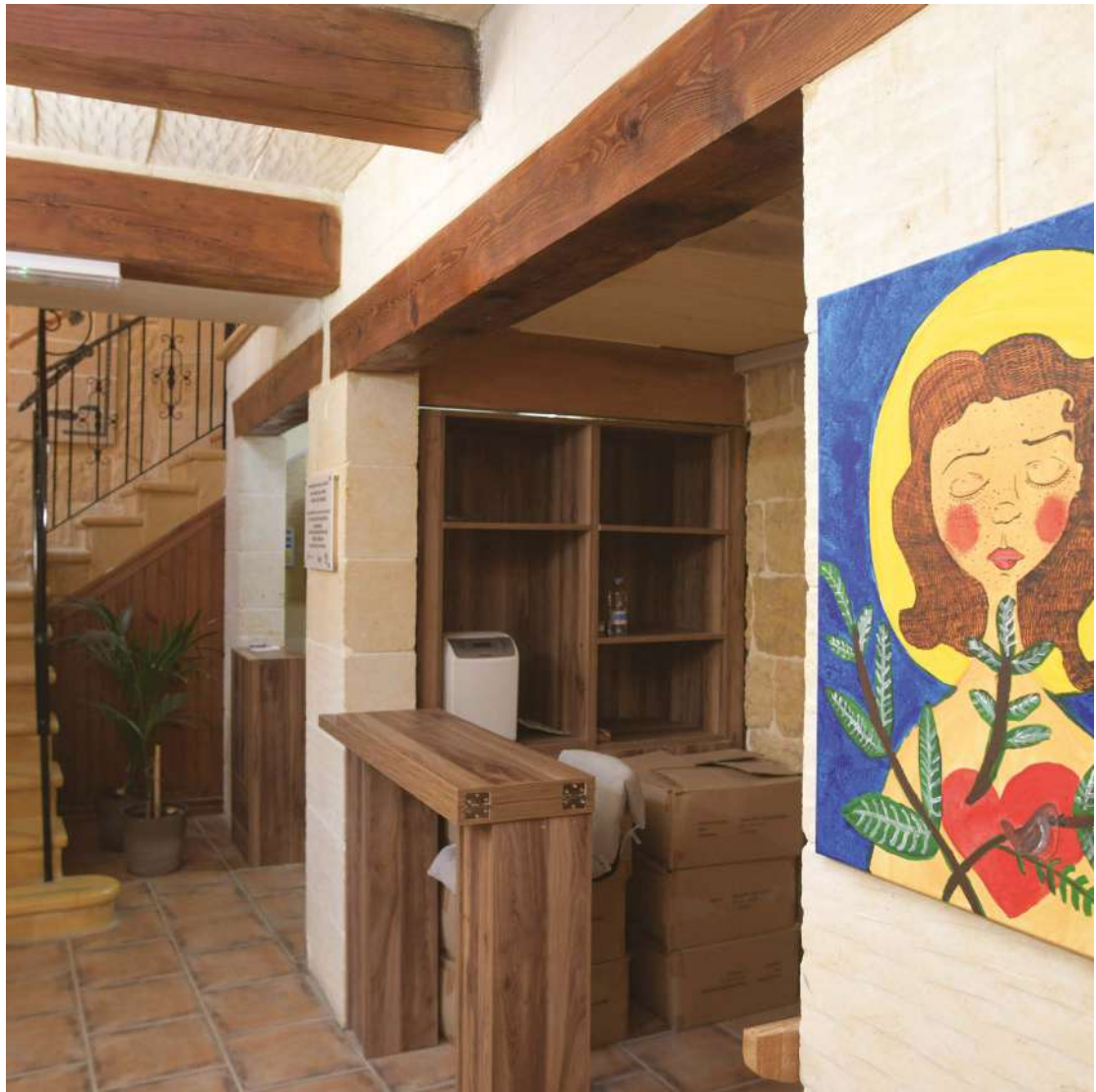




“*The staff were always very supportive, gently encouraging us to maintain a healthy routine.*”

RESIDENT









“It has been both a pleasure and an honour to assist people from all walks of life, providing support to those in need in the mental health sector. I look forward to continuing this mission and helping build a more accepting community, where mental health is prioritised and understood.”

STAFF



“*I am immensely impressed with the professionalism, dedication, and standard of this home. It is not about the home itself, but the love of the staff. Thank you and well done.*”

DR. CHRIS FEARNE,
FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF HEALTH







INTERGENERATIONAL HOUSING

Opened in 2023, the Intergenerational Housing Project in Valletta offers an innovative model that bridges the gap between the elderly and young adults. Run by the Friends of Don Bosco (Salesians Don Bosco), it is the first initiative of its kind in Malta, designed to combat loneliness, address social challenges, and provide a fresh alternative to traditional housing models.

The project fosters meaningful intergenerational relationships by encouraging residents to learn from and support one another. Its architectural design reinforces this mission: 18 apartments are spread across four floors, with at least one young resident on each floor to promote interaction. While every resident has a private room, communal spaces are carefully integrated to balance privacy with community living.

The elderly residents, most of whom are over 65, were primarily selected from the Housing Authority's social housing waiting list or through its exchange programme. Priority was given to individuals from Valletta, enabling them to age in place and remain connected to their community.

Most of the young adults have previously lived in foster or residential care. Beyond housing, the programme delivers extensive support, including mentoring, financial education, practical life-skills training, and personalised care plans. This mentorship programme is reviewed every six months and

typically runs for two years, although support often continues after the young adults leave the residence.

Importantly, the exchange of support flows both ways—while young people assist older neighbours with errands, technology, and companionship, elderly residents provide mentorship, care, and life experience. The result is a dynamic community that embodies solidarity and mutual respect.





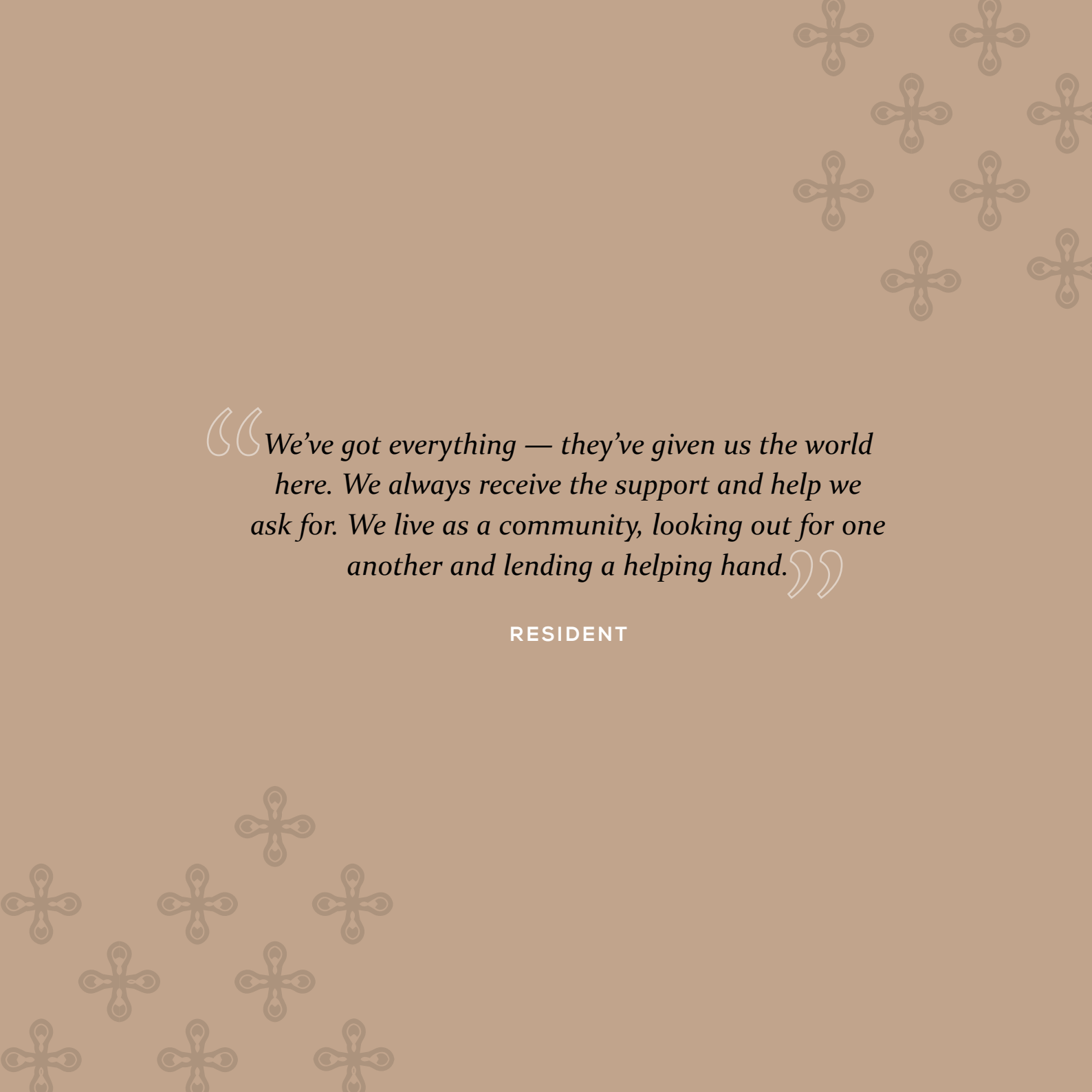


"I was born again here. I was given back my dignity when the building was made accessible to my needs."

RESIDENT







“We’ve got everything — they’ve given us the world here. We always receive the support and help we ask for. We live as a community, looking out for one another and lending a helping hand.”

RESIDENT





"I was given a scooter and telecare. We had a ramp and two lifts installed. We have all the facilities we need."

RESIDENT





*“Here I can do everything myself,
from shopping, to cooking and
doing the laundry.”*

RESIDENT











“This innovative project emphasises the values of community and social inclusion by fostering connections between young people and the elderly, creating an environment that encourages social interaction among residents.”

NGO,
FRIENDS OF DON BOSCO



WAY FORWARD

The Specialised Housing projects have already demonstrated the potential of tailored housing models to address complex social challenges in Malta. Yet the demand for such initiatives continues to grow, requiring a clear path forward that builds on current successes while expanding their reach.

Two new residences are already in the pipeline. Dar Mixtla, developed in collaboration with Fondazzjoni Sebh, will provide a safe and supportive home for young women who are experiencing, or have experienced, domestic violence. With a capacity of 3 to 6 individuals, it will offer not only shelter but also specialised care to help residents rebuild their lives with dignity and independence. Meanwhile, Dar Simon Soler, developed in partnership with YMCA, will focus on accommodating elderly and disabled persons. With space for up to 10 residents, it will provide a model of care that combines accessibility and community integration.

Looking ahead, Malta's housing strategy should continue building on the proven blueprint: regenerating dilapidated properties into vibrant residences, working closely with NGOs and architects, and fostering

strong community engagement to reduce stigma and promote inclusion. Sustained funding through the Housing Development Fund remains essential, enabling NGOs to strengthen services and expand access within communities. By scaling up this model, specialised housing can broaden its reach while maintaining its person-centred character.

Specialised housing goes beyond simply providing a roof over one's head. It is about creating sustainable and inclusive communities where vulnerable groups can find not only shelter but can also thrive and contribute meaningfully. These residences transform housing from a basic necessity into a catalyst for empowerment, stability, and ultimately, social well-being. By complementing the Housing Authority's broader schemes and initiatives, these projects represent another critical step towards ensuring that, in Malta, no one is left behind.

Established in 1976, the Housing Authority operates under the Ministry for Social and Affordable Accommodation. Over the years, its role has expanded well beyond its original remit. Today, it not only allocates social housing to provide a safety net for low-income households but also administers a wide range of schemes and incentives to improve housing affordability in Malta. It oversees the renovation and modernisation of social housing, ensuring regular repairs and upgrades to provide safe and dignified living conditions. Since the introduction of the Private Residential Leases Act in 2020, the Housing Authority has also taken on the role of regulator of Malta's private residential rental market. Finally, it continues to collaborate with other entities to deliver new social and affordable housing units, addressing evolving housing needs while fostering sustainable and inclusive communities.