



OASI FOUNDATION CONTRIBUTION

To the Children's Policy Framework 2024-2030

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1. Introduction

OASI Foundation welcomes the Policy Framework and all the measures being proposed.

OASI Foundation acknowledges that there are a myriad of factors influencing the upbringing and formation of our children. It is therefore wise that every decision should be based on the awareness of the impact on the current and future generations.

It is a bold step forward, especially when it comes to promoting more professional support while at the same time looking at ravaging factors that can be deterred.

2. Background

OASI Foundation has been working in the field of addiction and substance abuse since 1991. Through our operations, we meet individual and family cases where children are being affected directly and indirectly by substance abuse. Our work takes us also to schools and communities in our society – such work also provides us with realities taking place on the ground, where sometimes these veracities are not reached by statistics, research and statistics.

Our contribution to the proposed Children's Policy framework arises out of these experiences intertwined with the theoretical knowledge gained.

3. Contribution

3.1. Education (Ref: Measure 1.1.2, pg. 42)

The formal education system is one of the major forming and influencing factors that module societal younger people. Although formal education literacy has improved, one cannot say the same for emotional literacy. Inter and Intra personal communication are the major factors that enhance emotional literacy – the basis for sound mental health and mental wellbeing. Establishing Inter and Intra personal communication and relationships the priority in the education system will eventually lead to improved academic performance.

3.2. Sports (Ref. Measure 1.2.4, pg. 45)

Sports does not only improve physical health but also mental and psychological wellbeing. When combined with nature interaction, the benefits increase drastically, as research shows. Malta is surrounded by water, and our seas offer weather challenges for two to three months a year. Introducing and promoting water sports will not only enhance the benefits of physical exercise due to the sports itself but will also improve and promote contact with nature.

3.3. Substance Use (Ref. Measure 1.2.19, pg.47)

Research shows that the earlier the onset of any substance use (including alcohol and nicotine), the higher the likelihood of developing an addiction to any other substance during late adolescence, emerging adulthood and early adulthood stages.

Substance use prevalence is not only proportional to the awareness of harm, but it is also directly proportional to the availability of the substance.

Banning the sale of cigarettes to minors is just one part of the solution to address the wider scenario of substance abuse that is threatening our younger generations. School children are being exposed to vape smoking and Nitrous Oxide (laughing gas) which are easily accessible in stationeries and youth entertainment areas. They are also being exposed to the sale of CBD and HHC, the latter being a substance that is already banned in at least 20 European countries. Our society has children who are being exposed to cannabis use in their own homes. The number of teens who believe that cannabis is not a harmful substance is on the increase.

It is then only natural that action is needed to safeguard children from substance use (including nicotine and alcohol) in their homes, as children learn more by example than by instruction.

OASI Foundation encourages the start of serious discussions of how to provide safe homes and safe environments for our younger generations.

3.4. Training of Professionals (Ref. Measure 1.2.22.2, pg. 48)

Professionals who deal with children need also be trained to identify early onset of substance abuse. Professionals need to be equipped and sustained with policies and frameworks that help them deal with children's familial substance abuse.

3.5. Children serving as Drug Mules (Ref. Measure 1.4.8, pg. 51)

OASI Foundation is aware some of our younger generations are being used as drug mules since 14-year-olds and younger are not legally liable. Initiatives should only be addressed to eliminate

child pornography and prostitution, but also children reared in the drug environment who will be used to serve in the drug distribution.

3.6. Legal Support

3.6.1. **Legal Aid** (Ref. Measure 1.4.5.1, pg. 51): Children who living the reality of the parental legal ligations, especially while undergoing marital separations experience great stress which includes but not limited to fear, anxiety, bullying, etc. Legal assistance should not only include the psychological knowledge, but psychologically trained professionals should form part of the team assisting the child/children.

3.6.2. **Children's Safeguarding** (Ref. Measure 1.4.13, pg. 52): The Child Protection Directorate is doing an excellent task is working to safeguard our children. More work is needed and one way of achieving this is by raising the status of the Directorate to the status of an Authority.

3.7. Free Therapy (Ref. Measure 2.1.2.1, pg. 57)

While OASI Foundation fully supports professional therapy that leads to the growth and wellbeing of our younger generations, studies show that free therapy is not as effective as highly subsidized service. The concept of providing for free should seriously be examined since:

- Nothing comes for free in life.
- That which is given for free is not appreciated as much as that which is provided for a minimal fee.

3.8. Policy Makers, Authorities, Regulators and Boards (Ref. Measure 4.2.1, pg. 77)

The be able to achieve a scenario where laws and policies contain the children's input, one needs to have child-minding persons in posts who can advocate and integrate children and push forward their real and intrinsic needs.