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Attending to the needs of the Maltese elderly in NSW while investing in the youth, the future leaders

My experience with 1st generation Maltese emigrants i.e. Malta-born emigrants through my voluntary work with different Maltese associations: the Xaghra Association of NSW Inc, Hamrun Association (NSW) Ltd, The Maltese Community Council of NSW, and as an interpreter and diversional therapist in aged care centres, is one of pleas to listen and act upon their concerns.

Such needs I will highlight. On the other hand, we need to look at innovative ways to overcome what is happening, encourage the youth to get involved in what matters to their posterity so that the Maltese heritage will live on.

A survey was put out where responses were face-to-face or by telephone. It was anonymous. 30 respondents were 1st generation Maltese who classified themselves as retired people, over the age of 65, still living at home; another 3 particulars as above but 2nd generation and 7 youths, born in Australia of both parents Maltese. Overall self classification: Maltese-Australians - 24, Maltese - 7, Australian - 4, Gozitan - 1. One youth who classified himself as Maltese said: I do not know why in Australia my friends call me Maltese and when in Malta they call me Aussie.

Losses and Looking Forward

The Maltese Herald that ceased publication in April 2013 left a big void which will not be filled. Electronic newsletters are now the go, being more financially viable. Among

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others are *The Voice of the Maltese* from NSW by Lawrence Dimech & Joseph Cutajar, *Journal of the Maltese Diaspora* from South Australia by Frank L. Scicluna and the *MCCV News* by the Maltese Community Council of Victoria Inc. In addition, Maltese migrants can go on different websites to access e-news from Malta, like L-Orizzont, Times of Malta, etc.

In NSW, the Maltese Community Council (MCC of NSW) acquired new premises in 2014 at Mays Hill and is currently in the process of building a resource library. People are donating books which are being catalogued.

Not many Maltese books are held in suburban libraries in NSW. One has to go through the NSW State Library and order in bulk, which will be sent to the requested library with a longer loan period. There are also e-books and audio books that can be downloaded off libraries’ website but one has to be computer literate.

To help overcome some computer illiteracy, last year the MCC held a 6 months' computer course for the elderly, which was well attended. Another course will be starting shortly. Such courses can be inter-generational with the 2nd & 3rd generation Maltese youths giving a hand. The active Maltese elderly need to be pro-active and take on every opportunity that is available to them; also in the mainstream service provision: community colleges, TAFE (Technical and Further Education), U3A (University of the Third Age); it's never too old to learn! Skype can also be a great way to keep in contact with loved ones especially if family members live far away (shrinking the tyranny of distance), if the elderly live by themselves or in a nursing home.

After drastic cuts (5 hours radio programs) last year, an extra half hour of Maltese News on Thursday program sent by PBS Malta was secured weekly to the already existing one. Melbourne and Sydney based community leaders and Malta’s High Commissioner in Canberra negotiated with SBS. The current 4 one-hour radio programs will be revised in 2016, according to that year’s Census, (MCCV News, March-April 2013). For some illiterate Maltese, visual and audio programs are one of the links they have with happenings in Malta. Saying that you do not talk the Maltese language at home in the Census can be to our detriment, so “Use it or Lose It”. Let us be proud of our native language and embark on the younger generation to take up learning it! Instil in them from a young age the love for the Maltese culture and heritage. Visiting Malta as a family with parent and grandparents and the youths as organised groups are rich cultural experiences.
The Minister for Communications Mr Malcolm Turnbull announced in September 2014 that community broadcasters among others, TVS (Television Sydney), have until the end of 2015 to move to an online model. This will affect a 1/2 hour program in Maltese, 'G’Day Maltaussies', repeated twice a week. There is an ongoing campaign right now asking for at least a 3 year transition, (Knox, 2014).

As per survey, Maltese tune in more to watch the news programs on SBS - 65% and TVS - 77% than to listen to the radio programs 47%. Maltese radio programs can be podcasted, downloaded and listened to at a later time or tune in on online. There are other community or private Maltese radio programs available and also the radio program of the MCC of NSW: 2GLF 89.3FM.

**A Maltese Cultural Institute**

We are still lacking a Maltese Cultural Institute in Malta. It would be most welcome if the Maltese Government can help to establish a centre in Australia and any other county where the Maltese live like the Italians have worldwide: Dante Alighieri Society. Others such institutes are Alliance Française, British Council or Goethe Institute. Investing in an entity like this has the assurance of promoting the Maltese culture and language.

There is the need for a "one-stop shop", in Malta, for all resources: literature, CDs, DVDs etcetera. One has the fragmented shopping experience investing in resources (as is my case, working with Maltese groups). There are facilities to order Maltese books on-line but if all resources are available from one location, it is more efficient.

**Cultural, social, religious activities for the Maltese elderly and the needs of youth**

The needs of the Maltese elderly be it social, cultural and religious still need to be met and it is up to the existing associations, committees or individuals to keep doing what they are doing and encourage the youth to come on board and hopefully taking over leadership. It can be done, incorporating the traditional and the modern; we cannot be static and need to introduce the youths’ new ideas for the benefits of the Maltese community. On the other hand, the Maltese need to attend and support these organised activities as apathy has been shown in the past.
Some of the youths' recommendations in the survey were:

- Facebook advertisements to try and involve all and gain awareness of different activities.
- Multicultural (Maltese) festivals to unite the youth, families, and to promote: religious values, traditional food, dancing etcetera
- Sports Carnival
- Maltese Cook Off competitions
- Maltese food to be sold in small outlets where Maltese reside.
- Youth specific social/music events, like 'Made in Malta'
- Invention of Maltese virtual games relating to Malta history

The Maltese community has always shown interest in Maltese type entertainment provided by individuals, groups or associations. The Maltese Cultural Association of NSW promotes young Maltese performers by helping them to showcase their talent. It has been doing so for the last 9 years. The theatrical group ‘Cittadini’ puts on Maltese shows annually. Maltese entertainers come to Australia and tour different states giving shows to the Maltese community.

The Xaghra Association of NSW organised a Maltese Lace Workshop last year, by Dr. Consiglia Azzopardi. The record of Maltese participants was the same as for other nationalities. Participation at the lecture delivered, that was open to the public, could have been better. One has to take advantage of such opportunities when experts offer their services. Maltese language schools’ students and youths would benefit to see such traditions, first hand.

Having an organising group, subcommittee or on a higher level, a government department in Australia in charge of organising such exchanges and events would benefit everyone.

Associations have been established to celebrate a saint’s festa as they used to do in their village in Malta. The Maltese attend church ceremonies, procession with the statue and the fireworks. Usually they organise social gatherings during the year and a dinner dance close to the festa day celebrated in Malta. The Xaghra Association of NSW Inc usually invites a priest who comes to join in the Tal-Vitorja festivities and outreaches to the Maltese community whose Maltese priests are very low in number.
in NSW. The Maltese church hierarchy has noted this when they came on visits to Australia but to date nothing has been done as they say their priests’ numbers in Malta are dwindling also. As per survey, attending festas is still popular: Tal-Vitorja in Greystanes, St Mary’s Cathedral and Horsley Park, as well as Good Friday Procession in same suburb.

As per survey there is the demand for more respite, social, Maltese groups - 36%. There are 7 existing groups which meet once a month through the MCC of NSW through specific grants. The difference between these groups and other Maltese respite/social groups funded by Home and Community Care through other entities is: frequency of group gatherings - weekly, fortnightly, longer meeting hours and transport is provided. As per survey, most Maltese elderly have no transport; if provided, the attendance is higher.

56% of the respondents would love to go and visit Malta as some of them have never been back since they came to Australia, ranging from 45 to 60 years away from Malta. The question put to them was if they had a carer or health care professionals accompanying them would they visit Malta?

**Need for more culturally specific nursing homes/hostels/home visits.**

In NSW there are 2 aged care facilities: St Dominic’s Hostel (low care) 50 beds, 1 respite bed, in Blacktown run by the Dominican Sisters of Malta. The other one is Merrylands Aged Care Centre (high care) 131 beds, in Greystanes run by the Kennedy Health Care Group. Where are all the other Maltese elderly being placed? In nursing homes where one might be lucky to find a health care professional speaking their native language. In cases where the person has dementia the situation can be aggravated as the person reverts back to the Maltase language and has difficulties communicating with others.

In future, more problems will arise that as a Maltese community we need to deal with as there has been no forward planning like the Italians put in place about 30-40 years ago. Let us be on the lookout and apply for any financial help in the way of grants that the Australian government offers. The MCC of NSW has already secured a grant from the Community Building Partnership to upgrade their new premises, The Voice of the Maltese, Issue 92, *Better future for the MCC Centre*, p11.

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Feedback and Communication to the Maltese people Living Abroad

The Council of Maltese Living Abroad was set up with members from Australia representing us. Meetings have been held in Malta and by video conferencing. There is the need to keep the Maltese community abroad updated via bulletins issued by the Foreign Affairs Department in Malta.

Let us all live up to the true meaning of society by being inclusive and attending to the needs of the Maltese community. There is a duty of care from those concerned, be it government, associations, businesses, individuals; we can collectively work for everyone’s wellbeing, especially give back to those who have come before us and instilled in us and passed on the love for our island MALTA, its heritage, culture and traditions.

Recommendations:

- Maltese government can help with book donations.

- A Maltese Cultural Institute (or any other department) in Malta and Australia to organise an exchange of cultural talent between them on an ongoing basis: ghanejja (traditional folk singers), folkloristic dance groups, folk bands; exhibitions - (any form of art), Maltese artefacts, etcetera. Availability of promotional Maltese documentary CDs and DVDs to organisations, community leaders, Maltese respite groups or other interested groups.

- Use of a companion card for the carer and subsidised entries for the Maltese elderly to places of interest in Malta while on holidays.

- The Maltese government to update and consult Maltese people living abroad in regards to the meetings held by them and the representatives of the advisory Council for Maltese Living Abroad.

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