

PROPOSAL

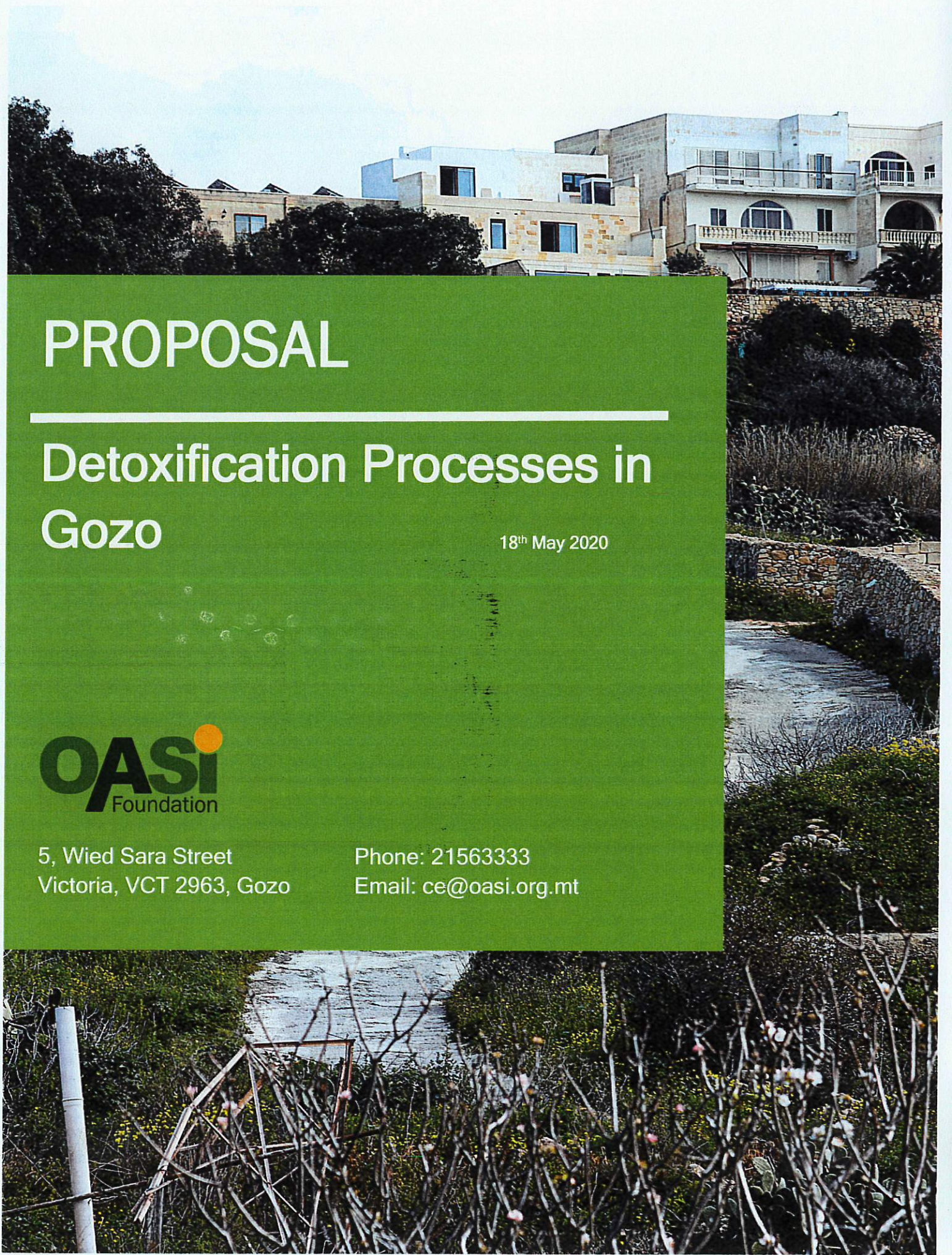
Detoxification Processes in Gozo

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Detoxification Processes in Gozo

Current Scenario

Although on a smaller scale, the substance abuse problem in Gozo is very similar to that of Malta. Due to the smaller number of potential users, it is far more challenging to offer fully-fledged services due to economies of scale.

All types of drugs that are abused in Malta, are being abused in Gozo as well. There were times lately, where Gozo was a tourist destination for special types of drugs, such as ayahuasca and ibogaine, marketed as spiritual retreats and ceremonies. New settlements from Europe are also bringing their underground cultures with them.

Any person residing in Gozo, who has a substance abuse problem (alcohol is also considered in this context as a drug) would require a various services which are dependent upon many factors ranging from the type of substance abused to age, frequency, mental status, biological and genetic predispositions, social factors, etc.

However, the services available to Gozo residents are not on the same level as those offered to Maltese residents and consequently they are less effective. The shortfall is present at every stage namely from the prescription of methadone to residential detox and hospitalization.

One needs to add that not all professionals are keen to offer a service with a smile to those with chemical dependency disorders. This is not a phenomenon that can be attributed only to Gozo.

It is also important to note that substance abusers are still stigmatized. In fact, there are persons who make contact with OASI who would strive to follow a contained detoxification away from the eye of the general public.

HEROIN USE

At the moment there are around 20 heroin users in Gozo who access Heroin Substitution Therapy at Gozo General Hospital. Some have been doing so for years.

A Gozitan needs either to travel to Malta to be prescribed methadone or else wait for an appointment with the authorized doctor who visits the detox clinic in Gozo once a month.

Those who need to go through the residential detoxification process need to go to Malta to receive such a service.

A particular characteristic for the Gozo scenario is the gathering in front of the hospital gate that takes place during and after the methadone distribution hour, where at times even deckchairs were brought to the site by the services users.

Our Proposals

To be able to deal with the substance abuse problem in Gozo, the following 3 proposals are being put forward for consideration.

HEROIN SUBSTITUTION

It is being proposed that a pilot project ~~would~~ be launched where heroin substitution medicine (methadone) would be supplied on door-to-door basis. Since the number of heroin users is small in number, door-to-door methadone distribution will:

- Help in breaking the current practice where methadone users gather outside the methadone dispensing clinic.
- Help monitor the living conditions of heroin users, providing the possibility of even more through psycho-social interventions.
- Support gainfully employed methadone users to retain their job.

OUT-PATIENT SERVICES

Each methadone patient will be assigned a psycho-social worker from OASI who will meet and monitor once to twice a fortnight.

In conjunction with the current out-patient services already being offered by OASI, we also offer to assist in the medical monitoring of the ongoing ~~medical~~ treatment and condition of methadone patients.

Patients could be reviewed medically by the OASI medical doctor (under the tele-supervision of Sedqa medical doctors) once to twice a fortnight while they attend their psycho-social interventions at the OASI premises on appointment basis, while they continue to be reviewed once every 2 months by the Sedqa medical doctor.

RESIDENTIAL DETOX

Persons with substance abuse disorder find it very difficult to ask for help, for numerous reasons.

More often than not, to be able to stop the vicious cycle of going for that hit or that first drink to relieve the anxiety and pain of withdrawal systems, one may require confinement where he/she can be monitored for physical and psychological symptoms and as well as to be emotionally and socially supported to overcome the initial challenging days of living drug/alcohol free.

We at OASI do find that a number of people, who due to stigma, try to find professional assistance away from hectic Malta and come to more peaceful Gozo.

Having the possibility of a residential detox in Gozo would:

- Deal with the kind of beneficiaries mentioned above
- Assist the Gozitan beneficiaries who do find it difficult to cross over to Malta for the service
- Serve as a point of contact that could eventually lead to other services such as outpatient or residential rehabilitation
- Serve to complement the detox and also treatment facilities in Malta.

OASI is willing to work with partners who are ready to invest in this project.