

Malta: New housing scheme to help households with autistic members create a multi-sensory room at home

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The Housing Authority in Malta has just unveiled a scheme that will help households with autistic members to create a multi-sensory room at home as part of a holistic care process.

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Description

As a result of pressure from NGOs in Malta, households with autistic members (children or adults) are going to be able to benefit from up to €6,000 in funds under a new scheme aimed at helping them create a multi-sensory room at home.

The scheme has been created by a government agency with the help of the Autism Parents Association, which has been pushing for the introduction of this scheme for a long time on behalf of parents with autistic children.

The scheme has been named “Sens-Ability”, and will be operated by the Housing Authority. It will also be open to autistic adults who would like to install a multi-sensory room in their home.

In launching the scheme, Social Accommodation Minister Roderick Galdes said that the scheme was not a budget-related measure or a pledge made in the electoral programme, but a response to a need voiced by people on the autism spectrum.

Galdes explained the scheme in the following words: “I wanted this scheme to be a celebration of the abilities of its beneficiaries”, adding that this scheme would help people create the best possible environment in their homes.



Outlook and commentary

This new social measure targets individuals and households that need direct support in their homes, but might not be vocal about their needs. It is the outcome of a fruitful dialogue between state organs and NGOs, addressing a long-standing need for individualised, home-based therapy for children and adults diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Balasco et al. (2020) report that about 90% of individuals diagnosed with ASD have difficulty processing sensory information, and the response to these stimuli can be atypical. They explain that “abnormal sensory processing in autism represents a common feature. (...) It encompasses many aspects of all sensory systems, which has other consequences leading to both central and peripheral defects.” Drawing on this research, the Malta Autism Parents Association rightly insists that this has a negative impact on the individual’s ability to participate in everyday activities and to contribute comfortably to society. The assistance provided by the state will help households follow therapy plans at home and provide these persons with a quiet space where they can calm down.

It is very interesting that decisions such as these, affecting less fortunate members of society, are being taken on the basis of sound scientific research. In understanding and promoting research findings such as this, NGOs are moving beyond their desire to support persons, mostly next

of kin, suffering from various conditions. They are also bringing about a qualitative leap in decision-making in Maltese social policy in general.

The fact that this initiative is the result of the committed involvement of persons outside the official administration augers well for its success, and for a more science-based social policy in Malta.

Further reading

Autism Parents Association:

<https://www.autismparentsassociation.com/>

Balasco L., Provenzano G. and Bozz Y. (2020) "Sensory Abnormalities in Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Focus on the Tactile Domain, From Genetic Mouse Models to the Clinic". *Front Psychiatry*. 2019; 10: 1016. Published online 28 Jan 2020. doi:10.3389/fpsy.2019.01016

Malta Today, 1 September 2020, "Housing scheme helps families with autistic children create a multi-sensory room at home":

https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/104498/housing_scheme_helps_families_with_autistic_children_create_a_multisensory_room_at_home#.X08ennkzY2w

Live News Malta. 1 September 2020. "A grant of € 6,000 for people with autism or difficulties in processing sensory information to have a sensory room in their home":

<http://livenewsmalta.com/index.php/2020/09/01/a-grant-of-e-6000-for-people-with-autism-or-difficulties-in-processing-sensory-information-to-have-a-sensory-room-in-their-home/>

The Times, 2 September 2020, "€6,000 grants for sensory rooms to aid people with autism":

<https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/6000-grants-for-sensory-rooms-to-aid-people-with-autism.815508>

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