

Education for Rehabilitation: The Experience of RISE Foundation

L'educazione per la riabilitazione: l'esperienza della Fondazione RISE

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Abstract

The article delves into the educational component delivered by RISE Foundation, an entity that provides a continuum of rehabilitation services for inmates in preparation for their release into Maltese society. It describes the work of RISE Foundation in detail and delves into its educational pedagogical components, including formal and informal education, mixed abilities and co-education. The article uses secondary descriptive statistical data issued by the entity related to the educational themes covered, the number of hours the entity dedicated to the education component and the number of beneficiaries. The discussion on the descriptive statistical data reconfirms the importance of education as a protective factor against recidivism. It also proposes several recommendations, such as extending the eligible criteria to reach others pursuing their rehabilitation journey.

Keywords: education; rehabilitation; protective factor; recidivism; integration.

Sintesi

L'articolo analizza la componente educativa offerta dalla RISE Foundation, un'entità che fornisce un continuum di servizi di riabilitazione per i detenuti in preparazione al loro rilascio nella società maltese. Il contributo descrive il lavoro della RISE Foundation e approfondisce le sue componenti pedagogiche, con particolare riferimento all'educazione formale e informale, alle abilità miste e alla co-educazione. L'articolo utilizza dati statistici descrittivi secondari rilasciati dall'ente e relativi ai temi educativi trattati, al numero di ore che l'ente ha dedicato alla componente educativa e al numero di beneficiari. La discussione sui dati statistici descrittivi conferma l'importanza dell'istruzione come fattore protettivo contro la recidiva. Propone inoltre diverse raccomandazioni, come l'estensione dei criteri di ammissibilità per raggiungere altre persone che stanno proseguendo il loro percorso di riabilitazione.

Parole chiave: educazione; riabilitazione; fattori protettivi; recidiva; integrazione.

1. Introduction

“A progressive vision for criminal justice reform seeks to shift the paradigm from punishment to rehabilitation” (Vicente & Raza, 2023, p. 1). Such a vision of corrections acknowledges that punishment is not an end in itself but a means to an end – the end being rehabilitation and reintegration. Thus, punishment should attempt to address the root cause of the offending behaviour by effectively addressing underlying problematic criminogenic factors, such as psychological and mental health difficulties, addictive behaviour, trauma, poverty and material deprivation, lack of education, and social inequalities (Forsberg & Douglas, 2020).

Given the negative repercussions of imprisonment on the physical, mental, social and emotional domains of wellbeing (Beckett & Goldberg, 2022; Edgemon & Clay-Warner, 2019; Gabrysch et al., 2020; Hewawasam, 2023; Minson, 2024; Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013; Yang et al., 2009), alternatives to incarceration such as through diversionary programmes, community-based supervision orders, and rehabilitative and treatment programmes within the community through half-way houses offer not only a more humane approach but also a more cost-effective means of correction. Instead of isolating and excluding individuals, such initiatives enable offenders to remain within their communities while receiving the necessary supervision, treatment, rehabilitation and support for effective reform and reintegration. Such community based rehabilitative sanctions thus reduce the negative ramifications of imprisonment, including loss of prosocial connections with significant others and other community ties, and disruption of education and employment endeavours which can contribute to recidivism.

Indeed, extant evidence demonstrates that community-based alternatives tend to be more efficient and cost-effective than incarceration for reducing recidivism and reforming individuals due to their proactive engagement in holding offenders accountable for their wrongdoing (Koops-Geuze et al., 2023; Petrich et al., 2021; Sapp, 2023; Syahwami & Hamirul, 2024; Vicente & Raza, 2023). Such proactive engagement entails active participation in programmes such as counselling, cognitive-behavioral therapies, substance abuse treatment, mental health and psychological therapy, vocational skills training, and education. It may also entail participation in restorative justice initiatives such as victim-offender mediation and compensation, and community service as way of restoring the harm done to the victim and society.

Such initiatives grounded in evidence-based practice help offenders to address the underlying causes of criminal behaviour whilst bestowing them with the necessary skills and tools for effective reintegration, thus breaking the vicious cycle of criminality and the revolving door of incarceration. The effectiveness of such programmes also lies in the recognition of people as individuals with unique needs and circumstances, who require tailor-made treatment and rehabilitative care plans to effectively address their criminogenic risk factors (Sapp, 2023).

Moreover, by focusing on rehabilitative and restorative justice approaches and addressing the root causes of criminality, community-based measures help to address social inequalities by promoting social mobility through facilitating access to education and employment. Thus, community-based sanctions also contribute towards greater social justice.

By focusing on the diverse domains of wellbeing (Sapp, 2023) on both the individual and structural level, rehabilitative and restorative justice approaches help to foster more meaningful collaboration not only between the offender, victims, and the community but

also between the diverse stakeholders involved in the justice process including those operating directly within the criminal justice system such as law enforcement, courts of justice and corrections, but also those who are less directly involved, such as policymakers, the media, civil society, and the general public. This leads to increased transparency, ownership, and accountability of the criminal justice process.

Indeed, as an inherent aspect of a progressive vision for criminal justice, such alternatives to imprisonment shift “the focus from punishment to rehabilitation, recognizing that addressing the underlying causes of criminal behaviour and promoting social and economic justice are key to reducing crime and promoting public safety” (Vicente & Raza, 2023, p. 2).

Such a progressive vision of corrections is what RISE Foundation envisions and aspires towards within the local Maltese context.

2. RISE Foundation

RISe Foundation is a non-governmental organisation offering different services based on the concept of restorative justice. Its services include outreach to the general or specific segments of the population, the rehabilitation programme by the name Sr Maria Adel Baldacchino, the hub (that offers wellbeing services such as social work, psychological and psychotherapeutic services), employment services, educational services and aftercare services (RISe Foundation, 2022).

2.1. History, mission and vision

RISe Foundation was founded on 3rd June 2013 by Fr Franco Fenech and Mr Charlie Mifsud (RISe Foundation, 2016). The foundation created its services in collaboration with Exodus Netherlands, a Dutch service provider with over 30 years of experience in dealing with the reintegration and rehabilitation of offenders within society (Exodus, n.d.). Other local stakeholders such as the Correctional Services Agency were also pivotal for the setting up and implementation of the programme.

The foundation established its mission on the concept of restorative justice. It aims to collaborate with different entities, namely, but not exclusively, the Correctional Services Agency to support the offenders’ reintegration within society. The ultimate aim of safety to society remains at the forefront, and the foundation strives to secure it by preparing offenders to re-enter society after prompting several protective factors against recidivism, one of which is education (RISe Foundation, 2016). Given this mission, the vision of the RISE Foundation focuses on providing a rehabilitative structure to offenders who would complete the prison sentence within a year from admission or are eligible for parole within the year. The programme offered at Dar Sr Maria Adel Baldacchino aims to address the offenders’ dysfunctional behaviours and attitudes and to empower them to become productive citizens. RISE Foundation constructed its model on the concept of graduality to give the offender enough time to undo and relearn healthy ways of social participation and integration. The component of graduality is emphasised throughout the programme and embedded in the structure of the programme itself (RISe Foundation, 2016).

2.2. The residents

RISe Foundation services are offered to males aged 18 and older. Before enrolment,

residents undergo an assessment to determine if the programme meets their needs and addresses their risks. For example, the programme does not extensively address addiction issues. Therefore, for individuals needing intensive addiction treatment, a drug rehabilitation programme is more suitable to meet their needs and address their risks. RISE Foundation's programme is designed to provide a rehabilitative framework for offenders who are within a year of completing their prison sentence or are eligible for parole within that timeframe. Thus, they can benefit from RISE Foundation's services while still serving their prison sentence.

Tabone (2021) reports that out of 40 men who followed the programme of the RISE Foundation between April 2016 and March 2021, 25 dropped out of school, and 10 were illiterate. Tabone (2021) identifies lack of education and illiteracy in the risk factors checklist for participants who were service beneficiaries of RISE Foundation throughout the indicated period. Given this information, the educational component within the programme retains its importance in creating a safety net against recidivism. However, even those with an academic background committed crimes, and received the services of the foundation. In view of this, the foundation provides its services to everyone irrespective of schooling-related achievements. Therefore, its educational component is also based on mixed abilities, which enables the residents to learn from each other about the different aspects taught. The main challenge of dealing with mixed abilities requires course facilitators to adapt the content to meet these different needs. Residents also have the opportunity to discuss the educational content during the individual sessions held with the professionals, allowing the psycho-educational component to sustain the learnings from the educational groups (Mangion, 2023).

Most of the residents joining RISE Foundation need to cover debts, pay pending fines, and financially support their family members following years of incarceration where they were financially maintained by their family members. In view of this, once they reach the programme they need to work on the impact of incarceration, the underlying issues that lead to criminal behaviour and their employment prospects. Therefore, this leaves little time for the residents to pursue formal educational and vocational training. Having said this, some still pursued formal education during their stay at RISE Foundation or during the aftercare period where once they stabilised themselves in the community, they opted for a part-time course to progress in their careers.

2.3. The structure of the programme

The structure of the programme is crucial to prompt and sustain the educational component. The programme is based on the Risk-Needs-Responsivity model by Andrews and Bonta (2006). Therefore, apart from identification of needs and risks, the programme identifies the best way to respond (responsivity) to them through tailored interventions consistent with the strengths, abilities, and learning style of the offenders (RISe Foundation, 2016). The daily structure of the programme is in itself a tool for identifying and unlearning dysfunctional ways of being and learning those that support reintegration. The daily structure does not remain the same throughout the whole programme because the programme is divided into three distinct phases, each underpinned by specific values that direct welfare providers in delivering consistent services and prompts the gradual development towards reintegration. Phase 1 is driven by the principles of respect, responsibility, and discipline. Phase 2 builds upon the values of balance and flexibility. The final phase focuses on reintegration, highlighting the importance of participation in society. Each phase spans roughly four months, with a gradual approach being a key element

throughout, influencing various facets such as employment and engagement with the informal support network. Phase 1 emphasises the educational component the most, with a majority of the educational group sessions occurring in this initial stage (RISe Foundation, 2016).

2.4. The educational component

RISe Foundation attributed importance to the educational component since the planning phase of the programme. In the initial service plan, the foundation included the role of the Education Officer at that time amalgamated within the remit of the Employment Officer (RISe Foundation, 2016). In 2020, the role of the Employment and Education Officer split into two to expand both elements as a prerequisite to successful reintegration (Bozick et al., 2018; Miller & Drake, 2006; Nuttall et al., 2003). Both sectors expanded, and today, the educational component within RISe Foundation does not only focus on the offenders; it extends its educational services to schools to sustain prevention, to the general public through media intervention, to prospective service providers by offering students' placements and welfare providers through courses such as "Working with Offenders: An Introduction". This paper will focus on the educational component delivered to offenders and welfare providers.

Where the residents are concerned, the foundation generally holds closed educational groups except for morning meetings and evaluation groups that target all residents. The morning meetings take place daily, and the evaluation meetings weekly. These educational groups include all residents participating in the programme. Other sessions, such as "First Aid", are sometimes organised mainstream where the residents of RISe Foundation attend with the general public. As for the rest, the idea of closed groups works because it enables the formation of group cohesiveness that prompts self-expression. Howard and Wie (2021) mention various authors who consider cohesion and self-expression as prerequisites for changes in behaviours for sex offenders. Therefore, the need for closed educational groups within this specific sector retains its value. Within the RISe Foundation, closed educational groups are possible and viable because residents are admitted in small groups.

The aim of the educational component is that of facilitating integration (Brown & Rois, 2014). The foundation delves into different topics, for instance, employability through the "Pre-employment Skills", "Employment Sessions", "Fire-Prevention Awareness" and "Health and Safety Sessions". Other topics focus on the social and psychological components of reintegration, such as "Living with Myself and Others", "Social Skills", "Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Skills", "Communication Skills", and "Family Skills". Other sessions address directly criminogenic needs, such as the session on "Victim Support" and "Sedqa Awareness Sessions" and "Responsivity Sessions". The tutors engaged are effectively qualified and/or experienced to facilitate the learning on the topic in question. Some groups are delivered by the professionals working in the programme (in-house) however, the foundation also engages third parties and other stakeholders to deliver group sessions, as in the case of "Seqda Awareness Sessions" delivered by Seqda Agency, Foundation for Social Welfare Services.

Although the educational component is primarily provided in the first phase of the programme, the structure allows residents to revisit their learning by reviewing responsivity and the psycho-educational elements implemented in the programme's structure and professional sessions.

2.5. Formal and informal education

The daily structure and the phases of the programme allow for the formal and informal education to unfold through the way the programme is organised. The daily structure of the programme was designed to identify needs and risks and to respond to them immediately. It has been often referred to as the ‘safe’ representation of the outside world where one is allowed to identify dysfunctional behaviours, unlearn them and learn the ones that support effective reintegration. For instance, emphasis is placed on punctuality. When someone is constantly late, it could be a sign of a lack of motivation or difficulty with time management. The Residential Support Workers take the opportunity to discuss this component and support the residents in developing a plan to meet the identified need or risk (RISe Foundation, 2016). This informal way of learning is essential because it takes place promptly, and the gradual component allows the residents to unlearn and consistently learn the necessary skills. Some of these needs and risks are at the core of the educational group sessions. Courses and educational group sessions that adopts an informal educational approach include those of: “Social Skills”, “Family Skills”, “Drama Therapy”, “Spirituality” and “Hiliet fil-komunita`” (Abilities within the Community). Formal education includes “Health and Safety”, “First Aid”, and “Food Handling”. Those attending formal training are awarded a certificate of participation that supports their employment prospect. Even though the other group educational sessions delivered are regarded as informal, they could be accredited and thus formalised, especially since their content is necessary to enhance employability as much as they prompt reintegration.

This section provided an overview of the RISe Foundation’s programme, beginning with its history, mission, and vision, then describing its structure and service beneficiaries. It continued with a discussion on the educational component and concluded with an overview of the formal and informal educational components provided by the RISe Foundation.

3. Aims, objective and methodology

Following this brief explanation of the history, mission and vision, and the structure of the RISe Foundation programme within the context of the relevance of education for reform and rehabilitation, the following section will provide an overview of the educational component of RISe Foundation through a secondary data analysis of figures on its formal educational endeavours. Such analysis spanning across the eight years of RISe’s inception will specifically focus on the type of courses offered, the total amount of hours dedicated to the educational component and the number of participants. Finally, suggestions will be presented with regards to consolidating and expanding the education services offered by the entity.

4. Results

This section presents data on the educational component within the RISe Foundation programme. It starts with the presentation of the hours of educational group sessions delivered to the service beneficiaries throughout RISe Foundation’s operational years. It delves into the categories of the groups delivered and whether the groups were accredited (certificate awarded) or non-accredited (informal) and whether they were delivered in house or by third-party stakeholders. This section also delves into the course delivered to welfare providers, “Working with Offenders: An Introduction”.

4.1. Education group sessions delivered to RISe Foundations' beneficiaries

Since April 2016 to date, RISe Foundation delivered a total of 6,180 hours of educational group sessions with an average of 343.33 hours per intake. A total of 85 residents (excluding dropouts) benefitted from these sessions. It is noted that there have been 18 intakes at various points since April 2016. While the project is ongoing, the data provided here concentrates on the timeframe from April 2016 to August 2024.

Intake	Period	Total Number of educational group sessions	Total number of residents who benefitted from the educational group sessions
Intake 1	April 2016 to July 2016	185	10
Intake 2	March 2017 to June 2017	222	7
Intake 3	October 2017 to January 2018	287	6
Intake 4	March 2018 to June 2018	350	3
Intake 5	August 2018 to November 2018	250	5
Intake 6	December 2018 to March 2019	318	4
Intake 7	June 2019 to September 2019	351	3
Intake 8	November 2019 to March 2020	318	4
Intake 9	June 2020 to October 2020	343	3
Intake 10	November 2020 to March 2021	380	4
Intake 11	April 2021 to July 2021	404	3
Intake 12	August 2021 to December 2021	476	5
Intake 13	January 2022 to April 2022	486	4
Intake 14	July 2022 to November 2022	450	6
Intake 15	October 2022 to February 2023	362	3
Intake 16	March 2023 to August 2023	340	5
Intake 17	November 2023 to March 2024	300	6
Intake 18	April 2024 to August 2024	358	4
		6,180 hours	85 (excludes drop outs)

Figure 1. Education group sessions per intake¹.

4.2. Categories of educational groups sessions

The educational sessions delivered have been categorised into five main rehabilitative and reintegrative distinct yet interrelated categories. These include “Employment”, “Social Relations and Life Skills”, “Restorative Justice”, “Self-development” and “Healthy Living”. The “Employment” category consists of those sessions focusing on enhancing employment prospects by equipping the residents with skills to engage and remain active in the labour market and to obtain certificates that support them in finding employment. The “Social Relations and Life Skills” sessions aim to enable the residents to unlearn and learn new skills that strengthen their social relations and life skills. “Restorative Justice” consists of those sessions that target the criminogenic risks of the residents whilst enabling them to understand the impact of their crimes on the primary and secondary victims. It also

¹ Figure 1 displays the hours allocated to educational group sessions and the total number of residents who benefitted from these sessions.

prompts them to take responsibility for their criminal behaviour and to contribute to society. The sessions on “Self-development” enable the individual to develop personal qualities and enhance their quality of life by becoming more self-aware of where they are and where they want to be. The “Healthy Living” focuses on promoting a healthy lifestyle and environment conducive to a stable life.

Area/ Course	Employment	Social Relations and Life Skills	Restorative Justice	Self- development	Healthy Living
1.	Basic Computer Skills	Social Skills	Victim Support Sessions	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy	Health Talks
2.	Life Skills for the Workplace	Communication Skills	Community Work	Art therapy	Sedqa Awareness Skills
3.	Employability Skills	Family Skills	Programme Structure	Evaluation Sessions	Wasteserv Talks
4.	First Aid	Living with Myself and Other Programmes	Responsivity Sessions	Drama Therapy	Philosophy for Life
5.	Social Security Benefits	Financial Literacy and Income Stability Core Programme	Hiliet fil-Komunita`	Psychology Processing	Strengthening Emotional Skills
6.	Food Handling	Housing and Household Stability Core Programme	Living in Society	Spirituality Sessions	
7.	Pre-employment	Parenting and Relationships		Dare to Be	
8.	Supported Employment Programme- MAZE	Budgeting Skills		Accessing the Power Within	
9.	Fire Prevention Awareness			Internal Arts	
10.	Employment sessions			Armed Forces of Malta Team Building Session	
11.	Geared for Work - Geared for Life Programme				
12.	Health and Safety				

Figure 2. Categories of educational group sessions².

² Figure 2 details the categories of education group sessions delivered since the beginning of the foundation’s programme to date. It divides the educational group sessions into five distinct categories.

4.3. Accredited and non-accredited educational group sessions

In this context, an accredited course or educational sessions mean that once the sessions are completed, the participants are awarded a certificate of participation. It also means that the entity delivering the educational group sessions possesses a license to deliver the accredited educational component. Non-accredited (informal) educational group sessions are still delivered by competent and qualified persons or professionals, yet they have not completed the process of accreditation.

Educational Group Sessions	Accredited	Non-accredited	Inhouse	Stake holders
Basic Computer Skills		✓	✓	
Life Skills for the Workplace		✓		✓
Employability skills		✓	✓	
First Aid	✓			✓
Social Security Benefits		✓		✓
Food Handling	✓			✓
Pre-employment		✓		✓
Supported Employment Programme-MAZE		✓		✓
Fire Prevention Awareness		✓		✓
Employment Sessions		✓	✓	
Geared for Work - Geared for Life Programme		✓		✓
Health and Safety	✓			✓
Social Skills		✓	✓	
Communication Skills		✓	✓	
Family Skills		✓	✓	
Living with Myself and Other Programmes		✓		✓
Financial Literacy and Income Stability Core Pgm		✓		✓
Housing and Household Stability Core Programme		✓		✓
Parenting and Relationships		✓		✓
Budgeting Skills		✓		✓
Victim Support Sessions		✓		✓
Community Work		✓		✓
Programme Structure		✓	✓	
Responsivity Sessions		✓	✓	
Hiliet fil-Komunita`		✓		✓
Living in Society		✓		✓
Cognitive Behavioural Therapy		✓	✓	
Art Therapy		✓	✓	
Evaluation Sessions		✓	✓	
Drama Therapy		✓		✓
Psychology Processing		✓	✓	
Spirituality Sessions		✓		✓

Dare to Be		✓		✓
Accessing the Power Within		✓		✓
Internal Arts		✓		✓
Armed Forces of Malta Team Building Session		✓		✓
Health Talks		✓		✓
Sedqa Awareness Skills		✓		✓
Wasteserv Talks		✓		✓
Philosophy for Life		✓	✓	
Strengthening Emotional Skills		✓	✓	

Figure 3. Accredited and non-accredited group educational sessions³

4.4. Training with Welfare Providers: “Working with Offenders: An Introduction”

Where welfare providers are concerned, RISE Foundation delivered “Working with Offenders: An Introduction” course twice in 2022 and in 2023. The number of persons attending both courses amounted to 146. The course that ran throughout 2022-2023 was successfully completed by 104 participants and the one that ran during 2023-2024 was completed by 42 participants. The foundation also delivered Community of Professional Educators’ sessions (CoPE) within the educational sector and lectures at the University of Malta mainly in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing. These contributions coupled with the project in schools support the component of integration which is actually two sided as opposed to programmes that regard it as a mono action. This is crucial because the risks and the needs of the individual coupled with social stigma towards incarcerated persons exacerbates the challenges of reintegration (Goger et al., 2021). Therefore, such educational interventions by RISE Foundation enhance the reintegration processes for offenders.

Session Number	Topic	Frequency (in sessions)	Duration (in hours)
1.	Philosophy	2	4
2.	Criminal Justice	2	4
3.	Victims	1	2
4.	Criminology	2	4
5.	Psychology	2	4
6.	Social Work	2	4
7.	Communication	2	4
8.	Conclusion	1	2

Figure 4. Description of the course: topics, frequency and duration⁴.

5. Discussion and recommendations

As observed from the above data on the educational initiatives delivered by RISE Foundation as part of their rehabilitative programme, apart from the inherent informal and

³ Figure 3 provides an overview of the type of educational group sessions delivered whether they are accredited or non-accredited and the entity delivering the group educational sessions.

⁴ Figure 4 presents the training to welfare providers, delivered during 2022 and 2023.

non-formal pedagogies forming an intrinsic part of the programme, its educational component encompasses a wide span of courses, ranging from elementary literacy programmes such as “Budgeting Skills” to accredited training programmes such as “First Aid” and “Food Handling”. RISE Foundation also collaborates with formal educational institutions and social welfare providers for the pursuance of accredited programmes by its service users. In fact, as seen in Figure 3, 27 educational group sessions were delivered by stakeholders. In this context, education is conceived as an important conduit for rehabilitation, acting as a midway process between incarceration and community reintegration. The importance the programme gives to education is substantiated by the number of hours RISE Foundation invested in this sector during its eight years operation, 6,180 and the different types of educational session exhibited in Figures 2, and 3. Education thus is seen as an important component not only for enhancing employability and preventing relapse and recidivism but also as a form of personal development and self-actualisation. Tabone (2021) reports on the effectiveness of this part of the programme and argues that RISE Foundation has helped offenders engage in an educational programme and change their attitude towards education.

RISe Foundation offers a good practice example for the rehabilitation of offenders within the community in the local Maltese context. The consolidation and expansion of its various residential and community services should thus promote a more progressive approach to corrections by emphasising rehabilitation and reintegration through a restorative justice approach. Apart from the allocation of additional material and financial investment by the relevant authorities, including the sustained engagement of professional social welfare and education employees, this consolidation and expansion of service provision could be enhanced through additional initiatives as per proposals presented below.

Despite its small size, Malta offers varied educational and vocational courses by a multitude of entities at primary, secondary, and tertiary level across the non-formal, informal, and formal pedagogical domains. Such courses which are offered by state, private and voluntary organisations extend across a wide range of courses across various disciplines. Enhanced collaboration with such entities depending on the specific needs of RISE Foundation’s service users should help to promote offenders’ participation within more mainstream educational and vocational programmes. Participation by offenders in mainstream courses offered by other entities and educational institutions to the general public would help to reduce overlaps and replication in service provision whilst facilitating their inclusion and gradual integration in the community. Whilst this has already been undertaken in some mainstream programmes such as “First Aid” courses, it could also be extended for example to other courses, such as, “Basic IT” skills. This would also enable RISE Foundation to focus on the consolidation of its core programmes which are more specifically targeted to the needs and risks of offenders. This is obviously a two-way process, and institutions need to be open to integrate offenders in their programmes. The government should create more incentives that encourage institutions to be more receptive to educating offenders and ex-offenders.

As outlined by Brown and Rios (2014), the accreditation of core programmes which are currently offered by professional educators would tangibly offer recognition to the rehabilitation and the rehabilitation efforts sustained by ex-offenders participating in the programme, whilst helping their re-integration by facilitating employment and engagement in further education. RISE Foundation is working on this component however, cooperation from other institutions is necessary to achieve this milestone.

Further collaboration could be enhanced with the University of Malta and other higher educational institutions. Currently, students from the Faculty for Social Wellbeing carry out practicum placements with RISE Foundation, in the process receiving professional mentorship and experience by its professionals. The foundation is also very open to participating in research initiatives undertaken by both students and academics in the social welfare sector. The extension of this collaboration with other entities beyond the welfare sector such as medicine, law, architecture and engineering would help to promote the mission and vision of the foundation across disciplines, whilst sensitising students in such fields on rehabilitation and reform. Other courses, such as those delivered to the general public (“Working with Offenders: An Introduction”) which ran twice and were rated relatively high in terms of its relevance and application to the personal and professional lives of the attendees (RISe Foundation, 2024) should continue to be organised. Ideally, they become accredited so their academic relevance is recognised. Given this, adequate and consistent funding is necessary to expand these spaces that educate society to become more open to integrating offenders.

Due to current eligibility criteria, the services of RISE Foundation are limited to a distinct number of offenders; those who would complete the prison sentence within a year from admission or are eligible for parole within the year. Extending the educational service provision for those who are on parole but did not follow RISE Foundation’s programme, or those who are on a community-based supervision order under the Probation Act (Chapter 446 of the Laws of Malta) including a probation order, treatment order, a community service order or combination order would help to augment uptake of services. Current eligibility criteria could also be extended to those who are awaiting trial as part of provisional orders of supervision, also provided for under the Probation Act. As indicated in Figure 1, 85 individuals (excluding dropouts) benefitted from the educational component. Extending these eligibility criteria would enable more people to benefit from the rehabilitative and educational services offered by RISE, leading to crime prevention and reduced recidivism. This also means providing the RISE Foundation with the necessary financial and physical space to extend its services. Moreover, reforming existing eligibility criteria for parole, which as per Article 10.3 of the Restorative Justice Act excludes a significant number of people with a migrant background would help to make rehabilitative and education services more inclusive and egalitarian.

In recognition of the existing lacunae in rehabilitation residential services for women within the local context, RISE Foundation is currently in the process of opening a specific home for justice-involved women, expanding on its current service provision for males. Further consideration needs to be given to co-education to include non-binary people. Co-education as opposed to single-sex based education promotes gender equality (Debono & Mifsud, 2016) and discourage gender stereotypes (Bigler & Liben, 2007). However, for successful co-education, certain topics such as violence against women, and also certain minority groups require preparation to co-ed with others. Society’s dominant discourse on a given topic may impact the participation of a specific minority group that may not be on equal footing with the privileged white males who so far make up the majority of the programme’s beneficiaries. Through a wider eligibility approach and targeted measures to address specific needs, RISE Foundation’s educational and rehabilitation services would become more egalitarian, moving away from the typical stereotypical young, Maltese white male service user to a more heterogeneous appreciation of those who may encounter the criminal justice system due to diverse forms of violations. This will make opportunities for community-based reform and rehabilitation more inclusive. This also requires the facilitator to be able to deal with mixed abilities that are dependent on various factors, not

only IQ but also neurodivergence and ethnicity that need specific pedagogical approaches. Other factors that may act as barriers to co-education and mixed abilities cohorts include logistics issues such as residents starting the programme at a different time rather than having an intake starting at the same time.

However, educational programmes should remain part of a continuum service because education on its own does not decrease recidivism (Sapouna et al., 2015). Given this component, RISE Foundation is required to continue designing its educational component in relation to society's emerging criminogenic risk factors, specific trends and other components that ensure that its work meets the needs of service beneficiaries and society.

In the recognition that regular appraisal and assessment of rehabilitation programmes is pivotal for the improvement of services, RISE Foundation is currently partaking in an external evaluation process as part of an independent academic research process with the aim of engaging in a lessons-learned approach and improving on its service provision through evidence-based practice. Such evidence-based practice indeed constitutes an important cornerstone for RISE Foundation as it partakes in ongoing research projects and initiatives to guide the evolution of its interventions and strategies.

Addressing such initiatives through greater investment in material, financial and human resources ultimately rests on political and ideological backing which is amenable towards education, rehabilitation and restorative approaches.

6. Conclusion

The above overview of the educational and rehabilitative services offered by RISE shows that despite its relatively recent inception, RISE Foundation has led to great strides in the provision of rehabilitative and educational services for offenders. Considering pedagogy and penology as two sides of the same coin, complementing and consolidating each other, RISE programmes aim to promote the rehabilitation of offenders through education. Education is seen as a way of helping individuals who have transgressed the law to gain insight into their wrongdoing whilst empowering them to proactively engage and contribute to their community as reformed individuals. Education and rehabilitation programs extend beyond employability as they lead to personal development, instill a sense of worth and holistic wellbeing, whilst promoting greater social justice and mobility thus addressing fundamental root causes of offending. Such vision has led to the diffusion of the rehabilitative and restorative justice model across other spheres as RISE Foundation continuously networks and collaborates with other entities and organisations on a community level beyond the area of corrections. Through such a grassroots approach, the criminal justice system is increasingly democratised in the recognition that reform and education is the responsibility of everyone for the benefit of all.

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