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HOW TO GROW A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE



HOW TO GROW A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

*An extended case study following
the journey of a student-led
mission to start and sustain a
successful social enterprise*

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Having followed and supported the development of the Step Up For Parkinson's (SUFPP) initiative since its inception, I am very pleased to have been asked to write this Foreword. On the one hand, this report describes the inspirational journey of a social enterprise founded by young people wanting to use their knowledge and skills to help patients with Parkinson's disease and their carers. On the other hand, it tells the story of the incredible commitment of a large number of people who have helped to make this a success. This report therefore serves as a useful guide for other social enterprises wishing to convert a 'good idea' into a sustainable service.

A mark of a mature and thriving society is surely its ability to work together to help those who face difficulties in whatever form those challenges present themselves. It is particularly encouraging to see the young founders of SUFP turn their talent and energy to address issues that impact primarily, but not exclusively, on the older generation. It is self-evident that the passion and commitment shown by SUFP's Founder, Natalie Muschamp, has been a key element in success. However, it must be recognised that sustainability could not have been achieved without help from a dedicated team within SUFP and the support of so many others in the broader community of Malta.

Working together, we can achieve so much more than working alone no matter how worthy the cause. I therefore want to thank all those who have contributed to SUFP on behalf of the beneficiaries - patients with Parkinson's and their carers – and to congratulate you all on the success that you have achieved together. It is my sincere hope that other young people will rise to the challenge of finding innovative ways of helping members of our society that face adversity. The future is surely in the hands of the younger generation. And what this initiative demonstrates is that when you find a way to shine the light of hope and joy into the darkness of despair, the people of Malta stand ready to support you.

'I am truly proud of you Natalie and all the team at Step Up for Parkinson's'.

Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca KUOM GCMG
President Emeritus
Patron, Step Up For Parkinson's



The beginnings of this journey for Step Up for Parkinson's can be found around 2015. I truly believed that I could help people through dance. I envisioned dance classes happening all over Malta for people with Parkinson's and they would be free for everyone to attend. It was an excellent idea and lots of people agreed; the first stumbling block came when they asked how I planned to do it.

Coming from a performing arts background, my knowledge of starting an organisation and running a business were limited. How would we make money if we didn't charge people? How would we sustain ourselves? I had no idea. Until the University of Malta's TAKEOFF business incubator taught me three very powerful words: Problem, Solution and Benefit. I had the answer to all my questions right there.

Starting a social enterprise is challenging and it requires determination and passion. You have to know what you want to do and know why you want to do it. If you're looking for success and wealth, then this path is not for you. Starting an organisation with a philanthropic aim is very different from starting a business where any profit comes to you. There are sacrifices to be made, both financial and personal.

With a social enterprise the priority is on the user, the service or the planet. So without an altruistic aim, you will not manage. Does this mean you cannot make a profit? Of course you can and hopefully you must (otherwise you have to stop trading), but getting there will take a little bit longer. You will have to face uncertainties, take risks, and at the same time not lose focus on your Problem, Solution and Benefit.

Situations can force you to change and you have to be able to adapt. This global pandemic is a perfect example. We cannot always be in control. Money comes and goes overnight. This year has shown us that. It has seen us stripped from the community we built. It has taken away our sense of connection and belonging. However, regardless of all the things we have lost, we are still here. We have overcome the odds and continue to do so every day. I am determined to focus on what we still have, and what we can rebuild in the future. There is hope yet and we shall hold on to it always.

For those dreaming of starting a social enterprise, of making positive change in the world; please, go for it! Just be sure to get ready. There are mountains to climb and ravines waiting for you to fall down. But if you learn how to get up elegantly, there's a wonderful view waiting for you on the other side.

Natalie Muschamp
Founder and Managing Director
Step Up For Parkinson's

September 2015

The seed that started it all: THE IMPORTANCE OF WHY



When tragedy strikes, reactions vary. For some, distraction is a balm; others face grief with shoulders squared. When Ineke Spoorenberg lost her partner to Parkinson's disease in 2010, everyone would have understood if she decided to take pause and process her sadness at home, surrounded by the familiar. Instead, Ineke channeled her loss into a drive and walked a pilgrimage from Amsterdam to Rome, helping raise over €13,000 for the Dutch Parkinson's Foundation.

Years later, Ineke's niece Natalie Muschamp was furthering her education at the University of Malta (UM) after years of touring Europe as a professional dancer. Struggling with her path, she was looking to create something more meaningful. 'When you're younger and you're dancing, it's all about you' said Natalie, 'but at that point, I was looking for something more. We're not in this world to think only about ourselves. We're here to care about other people.'

At a meeting with her lecturers and tutors from the Dance Department at the School of Performing Arts, Francesca Tranter showed Natalie a dance program for people with Parkinson's in New York. Something clicked. Seeing an opportunity to follow in her aunt's footsteps, Natalie dedicated the time she had left at the UM to research how dance could be therapeutic for Parkinson's disease.

It was a whirlwind time dominated by studies and academic papers. Natalie combed through everything she could find from the last 20 years, and piece by piece, the evidence began mounting; specialised movement classes can improve balance, motor function, and quality of life, imbuing people with confidence.

And so, when she found that no form of dance therapy was widely available in Malta, her mission became clear. It was time for that to change.

March 2016

First steps: MEETING MPDA AND AMY DIMECH



With the idea for Step Up for Parkinson's taking shape in her mind's eye, Natalie wasted no time connecting with her intended audience. She needed to know if her idea would be welcomed. Natalie's first point of contact was the Malta Parkinson's Disease Association. She met with MPDA President Veronica Clark and attended some of the sessions the organisation provided for the community. Clark then introduced Natalie to fellow dancer Amy Dimech.

A kindred spirit and a physiotherapist by profession, Amy was already giving her version of dance classes for Parkinson's to MPDA members during their monthly meetings. Her thinking was similar to Natalie's, focusing on improving mobility through dance after having come across studies on the topic during her research for her own master's thesis.

Embracing the clear overlaps in their work, Amy and Natalie joined forces and gave a structured demonstration class to MPDA members. The result was magical. 'My sister Rachelle was filming it, trying not to cry,' Natalie remembered. 'The video really captured the benefit of the dance classes that both Amy and Natalie believed could make a difference to the members of the Association,' added Veronica.

The decision to document the session would later prove critical. The footage would go on to become a valuable asset, used on multiple occasions to garner support as well as for funding applications and marketing purposes.

Realising their potential to better the lives of the Parkinson's community in Malta, the MPDA invested in Natalie and covered the costs for her to get certified to work with people with Parkinson's. A few weeks later, Natalie was in Plymouth attending a training program with People Dancing UK, a foundation working with the Dance for Parkinson's Partnership (UK).

April 2016

The pilot project: A STEEP LEARNING CURVE



Returning from the UK newly certified, Natalie was welcomed back with a fresh opportunity. The MPDA wanted her and Amy to set up a 10-week pilot project, a test run of sorts for their idea.

The initial pilot saw eight participants coming together for dance classes once a week at a local ballet school. In an attempt to inject sustainability to the efforts, a €6 fee was introduced. But while the participants enjoyed the classes and benefitted from them, the format just wasn't working.

'We didn't have enough people attending, but we also needed to return some of the investment the MPDA made. I couldn't keep investing my own money long-term either. It wasn't sustainable at all. Worst of all, we weren't having the impact we wanted to have,' Natalie said. 'We needed to pause and reevaluate.'

During this time, Natalie took note of lessons learnt. The first big change that needed to happen was obvious. Parkinson's disease is expensive to manage as is, and the cost of classes created a financial barrier. Going forward, they had to find a way to cut costs so that sessions would be free and accessible to all. On that note, Natalie also wanted to start including carers in their area of focus.

'These classes weren't just about movement and physicality. It was about connection between people and building a community,' Natalie explained. 'We were building a safe space for people to express themselves.'

It was clear at that point that much more energy and resources needed to be invested in the project. It was also clear that Natalie needed more help.

June 2016

Recognising the need to rally: ASSEMBLING THE TEAM



Growing a social enterprise requires a person of passion. But passion alone does not sustain a business. From day one you have to be aware that you need others to help you create the circumstances necessary for success.

Natalie knew she needed to surround herself with a special group of people that could help translate her ideas into actionable steps. That was when Natalie's sister, now SUFP's vice chairperson, Rachelle Muschamp stepped in.

Herself reading for a master's at the University of Malta's Centre for Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation, Rachelle pointed Natalie toward her own mentors at the TAKEOFF Business Incubator.

TAKEOFF welcomed Natalie with open arms, mentoring, and plenty of resources. 'TAKEOFF were there to push us from the very beginning, but also to open doors and make sure that when we fell we didn't crumble,' emphasised Natalie, 'They were critical. Absolutely.'

Another supporter whom Natalie was working on recruiting was the President of Malta herself, Marie Louise Coleiro Preca. Having recently set up The President's Foundation of the Wellbeing of Society, President Coleiro Preca was outwardly taking steps to better the lives of diverse groups all over the island. Natalie believed those living with Parkinson's fell within that remit.

With that, Natalie attended every event President Coleiro Preca was scheduled to appear at. All she wanted was a brief chat to share her work with SUFP. In the end her persistence paid off. Natalie secured her meeting, and it was the beginning of a fruitful relationship.

July 2016

Free dance classes become a reality: A HUGE WIN



With the pilot project, Natalie realised that she had to find a way to cut costs when it came to setting up the classes. Conducting the sessions in public spaces was an option, but of course, accessibility was a priority too. Participants whose walking was impaired or used wheelchairs couldn't meet just anywhere.

The solution came from TAKEOFF. The incubator had a space at the University of Malta which they offered to Natalie and Amy free of charge, as she was a student. This was a massive breakthrough, the benefits of which became immediately clear; more people joined.

From just eight participants, attendance quickly doubled to 16. They enjoyed the success for a good few months, but after a busy summer, financial resources ran dry, and classes had to stop.

Michelle Firman, an early supporter and dance teacher, remembered the struggle and the impact it had.

'Being so close to this project right from the beginning made us aware of the physical benefits our participants were gaining with their balance and coordination. On another level, they also had something to look forward to on a regular basis, which kept the participants motivated from one week to the next. It was quite a sad time when we were forced to stop giving classes due to lack of funds.'

October 2016

Jumping the gun: THE FIRST SOCIAL IMPACT AWARDS



Eager to garner more support fast and bring in some money, Natalie submitted a proposal to create a documentary about SUFP through the Malta Social Impact Awards. 'I saw the documentary as a way to build awareness,' Natalie reflected. 'I thought it would create it in Malta and possibly travel outside of Malta too, and more people would be willing to help.'

This effort did not reap the rewards she wanted, however. Her application was rejected.

'Coming from a background in film and TV, I know the power an image can hold, and I wanted to jump ahead,' Natalie admitted. 'But I had it the wrong way around, and TAKEOFF had a tough time changing my way of thinking. First we had to make an impact, then we got to make the documentary. Now I know,' she laughed.

Reflecting on this hurdle, **Natalie Muschamp** also noted how it taught her a lot about impulsivity; the need to mitigate it and opt for focus.

'In the beginning, I got excited about everything. The creativity of it all, the ideas and the projects. I got involved in everything and wanted to help everyone. But all that did was lead me down lots of roads that brought little to no return on investment and lots of burnout. Now, I focus more. I prioritise more. I mitigate risk and allocate time and energy in the right places. TAKEOFF's guidance was essential in this learning process.'

January 2017

SUFP is born: STEPPING IN TO THE LIGHT



With a 10-week pilot project under their belt, a dedicated team, and a growing group of participants, Natalie and SUFP had come to a pivotal point in their journey. They had to formalise their progress.

Spurred on by advice from both President Coleiro Preca and TAKEOFF, Natalie registered the organisation with The Office of the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations. At this point, the SUFP team consisted of Natalie as founder and chairperson, Rachelle as vice chairperson, Ezgi Harmanci as legal advisor and treasurer, as well as teachers Amy and Michelle. And with that, doors began to open.

As an individual, Natalie had little access to funding, but as a registered voluntary organisation (VO), SUFP now had many more opportunities it could tap into. Essential to this process was a business plan. Here, Rachelle took the bull by the horns.

With TAKEOFF's guidance, Rachelle plotted a realistic path towards Natalie's vision of free specialised movement classes for people with Parkinson's and their caregivers. They considered the resources they already had, the costs they could expect, and the avenues available for funding. SUFP had a solid team and a space, but it needed to train and pay its team and teachers.

'Being a social enterprise, we're not selling a product, we're not selling a service. We tried that in the beginning, and it didn't work, both from a business model point of view and a moral one. So yes, for us it's harder to be sustainable. We had to look at what funds are out there, what we can target,' Natalie explained.

The Malta Community Chest Fund (MCCF) was on the top of that list.

March 2017

Getting the green light: THE MALTA COMMUNITY CHEST FUND



It had been at least 12 months since Natalie had first reached out to the MPDA. There was a year of taking concrete steps to bring SUFP into the world before money made any sort of appearance.

The proposal for the Malta Community Chest Fund was a difficult process, but with Rachelle's business plan and TAKEOFF's counsel, it was easier for Natalie to communicate her aims effectively to the evaluators. 'This time round, we made it very clear where the money would go,' she elaborated. 'It would go towards running the organisation for two classes per week for two years. It was concrete and measurable.'

'I got the news that we got the funding on my birthday, March 2nd,' Natalie remembered. 'We were in a bar and Rachelle called me to say that we got the funding. I could finally start building something that I really believed in. I had already received some positive feedback from Malta, yes, but this was evidence that the service I was proposing had weight to it, and this investment created a real opportunity to start.'

The MCCF funding was a total of €36,000. That money was earmarked primarily for teachers' wages as well as marketing and advertising to spread the word and get as many participants as possible. Premises were provided for free either by TAKEOFF or later by local councils at different locations. There was also liability insurance taken out that covered all teachers should any injuries occur during a class. As chairperson, Natalie did not give herself a wage for the first two years. For her, the priority was always on getting the organisation's engines pumping first.

The time had finally come to put the pedal to the metal.

April 2017

Embracing the unexpected: MMDNA FUNDING



Sometimes opportunities present themselves, and one needs to be ready to grab them.

Earlier in the year, when Natalie and the team were submitting their paperwork to register as a VO, Ezgi heard of another association that was closing its doors.

After 70 years of offering its services to Maltese society, the Malta Memorial District Nursing Association (MMDNA) was distributing its assets to community projects. Unfortunately, they had already been evaluating projects and giving funding out for almost two years. 'We thought we were too late,' Natalie said. Still, she got in touch. And, as Chairperson **Grace Jaccarini** said:

'Meeting Natalie and learning about SUFP was like a breath of fresh air. I especially liked the way that Natalie evolved her idea. She asked influential people for support, she sought out mentors to give her business sense and strategy, and finally, she demonstrated sustainability by educating other teachers.'

After seeing for herself the impact that SUFP was having on class participants, as well as going through the administrative process to ensure that SUFP satisfied all the requirements set by MMDNA's auditor, Jaccarini was thrilled to see the last of MMDNA's funds go to SUFP.

The €17,500 donated by MMDNA ticked the research and development box for SUFP.

July 2017

Soaring popularity: INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY



Seeking to spread the word about their classes, Natalie booked as many newspaper and magazine articles, TV interviews, radio shows, and meetings with local councils as she could. Usually, the return on investment of this kind of work is difficult to quantify. Not so for SUFP.

'We went from 15 participants to 60 to 100 in a flash,' Natalie giggled. 'With every class, new people would walk through the doors. It was amazing, and it proved that the service was needed and was having a positive effect on the people joining us.'

Class participant **Hadrian Attard Bezzina** explained that the sessions created an ongoing sense of belonging.

'At the lessons, everyone feels as if they belong — irrespective of whether you are the one diagnosed with Parkinson's or their carer. It is great to have a community with whom you can share such a life-changing experience.'

Naturally, this translated into a heightened sense of responsibility for Natalie. If it wasn't clear enough before, it became acutely so now. SUFP wasn't a project she could do for a while and then stop. People were depending on her, and their wellbeing was directly affected by her enterprise. The weight of that knowledge was not insignificant.

The key, now more than ever, was to focus on long-term sustainability.

October 2017

Amy and Natalie go to New York: STAYING ON THE CUTTING EDGE



Complacency has a negative impact in most situations, but in business and healthcare it is downright dangerous. It had only been about six months since SUFP officially began their sessions when Natalie and Amy invested some of the money they received from MMDNA to fly to New York to take an advanced training workshop with Dance for PD.

Founded by David Leventhal in 2001, Dance for PD offers specialised classes for people with Parkinson's, along with their families and carers. This was the best training available at the time and an important part of SUFP's investment in continued excellence.

For both Amy and Natalie, the best part about the experience was the opportunity to confirm that what they were doing in class, their methodology, was the correct one. 'It was a validation that we were on the right path,' asserted Natalie.

While attending the programme, Natalie also considered the option of operating under the Dance for PD franchise. Such a move would provide legitimacy and a host of resources offered by a massive brand with a decade of operation under its belt. However, after looking into the costs SUFP would have to incur, Natalie decided against it.

SUFP would continue forging its own road, and as **Amy Dimech** said:

'The training received in the US was a validation that we were doing the right thing. We felt extremely lucky that we had obtained the necessary funding to attend, because otherwise we wouldn't have had the opportunity to confirm this.'

November 2017

Research focus: LEGITIMIZING METHODS THROUGH SCIENCE



Despite the plethora of studies stating the benefits of artistic expression on our wellbeing, when artists propose projects for community wellness, eyebrows still rise, and shoulders still shrug. Understanding that her work could be met with scepticism, Natalie kept research at the heart of SUFP since the very beginning.

While reading for her bachelor's in Dance Studies, Natalie's research provided crucial knowledge she consistently integrated into the classes' methodology as well as into funding applications and pitches, giving important data and evidence. However, now Natalie needed to put her own classes under the microscope.

Her master's research focused on both the person with Parkinson's and the person caring for them and sought to accurately outline and quantify the impact that movement as an artistic and expressive medium had on quality of life. 'The research gave me space to analyse footage of classes, to understand the process, and to get real, tangible data from my work. Ultimately, the aim was and continues to be that the government becomes a partner and supports the organisation directly. So this kind of evidence is very important to make that happen,' Natalie explained.

'While pills can change the physiology of the brain and other body parts, the dance therapy provided by SUFP is reaching far more benefits. I could see from the research performed by Natalie and her team that they were following good leads from other medical studies that were being undertaken around the world.'

Dr Anton Grech - Chairman of Mental Health Services, Psychiatrist, Senior Lecturer & Consultant

February 2018

Teacher training: WIDENING REACH



People make organisations. Everyone knows this, but few act on it. With the number of participants rising, the demands of the business were skyrocketing along with it. For the SUFP team, sustainability and human resources became the focus.

'We had about four or five classes per week happening at the time. I was working on a fundraising project and trying to get ethical approval for the classes I needed to run for my master's. I couldn't be everywhere at the same time,' Natalie laughed, 'We were in dire need of more teachers!'

To extend their teaching capacity, Natalie and Amy issued a call for people with a background in physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and /or a background in dance. Sixteen applications came in, and they came together for SUFP's first teacher training seminars on the TAKEOFF premises at the University of Malta.

The two-day seminar introduced teachers to Parkinson's disease, made them aware of the needs of both the patients and caregivers, and taught them the SUFP class format.

The SUFP class differs from those given in other countries as it includes a creative meditation at the beginning and at the end of each session.

'I included this meditation to work against anxiety and as a way of centering participants' minds and bodies,' Natalie clarified. 'We have found it to be very effective, and it's an important part of our format. I'm currently working on some kind of recognised accreditation for the SUFP teacher training but this is still in progress.' Natalie explained. The SUFP family continued to grow.

April 2018

The First Fundraising Gala: CAPITALISING ON POPULARITY



Public funding is one way of raising the capital needed to run a social enterprise, but with the following SUFP was gaining, Natalie believed she could raise money through other means.

With support from the Corinthia Palace Hotel & Spa in Attard and the help of Cassandra Straub, a new friend and fellow dancer who would later become a board member, teacher, and primary collaborator, SUFP held its first-ever fundraising gala.

The event was SUFP's first opportunity to invite participants, supporters, public figures, and media to come together and celebrate the work of SUFP. Of course, this was to be done with flair, so Natalie and her participants prepared a surprise performance for the evening.

The experience of rehearsing and performing in front of an audience was a first for most of SUFP's participants. It took them out of their comfort zone, but the effect on their wellbeing was lasting. The sense of accomplishment and pride was palpable. People who had been unwilling to even share their diagnosis with others were suddenly proudly participating in a performance. The evening was a clear testament to the power of SUFP's classes and the sense of community they fostered.

As Natalie later said:

'When the participants emerged from the tables and started to dance to the music... it was one of the most beautiful moments of my life.'

November 2018

Malta Social Impact Awards Success: A FOCUS ON SUSTAINABILITY



It had been about a year and a half since SUFP had last locked in funding. When they applied for the MFCC and MMDNA grants, the plan was to give two classes a week. In reality, they were running six per week. The result? Very happy participants! But money was running out, and fast.

Applying for the Malta Social Impact Awards (MSIA) was a steep learning curve for SUFP. The application itself was hefty, and it also involved a pitch as well as mentoring in the final stages. With a background in business studies, Cassandra took the reins and compiled the documentation requested, working closely with Natalie to demonstrate the social impact SUFP was having on the participants. But even with the two of them burning the candle at both ends, it still took months to complete.

'It was do or die at that stage,' Natalie recalled. 'I was struggling financially, but getting a job was out of the question because we would have had to stop classes. We were hanging on by the skin of our teeth.' Thankfully, their efforts paid off. Natalie and Cassandra won second place at MSIA, securing €24,000 for SUFP, which allowed the organisation to continue operating six classes a week for a full year. The money also went towards hiring Cassandra as a part time administrator and Michelle as the organisation's coach for new teachers, helping to ensure a continued high level of care. Finally, there was a wage increase for Natalie.

Sarah Gasan, from MSIA, offers some golden rules for all funding applicants:

'The first thing to do is to make sure that no one else is doing the exact same thing already within the community. Once they have found their niche then it is important to learn to network and sustain relevant relationships. Researching potential investors early on is also key.'

February 2019

Rheumatism Training with Dance for Health: AN EXERCISE IN PRIORITISING



Inspired to increase their impact, Natalie and the SUFP team applied for a €10,700 grant from the Voluntary Organisations Projects scheme to put towards classes aimed at participants with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) and Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Both diseases disproportionately affect older generations, and the thinking was that there would be a significant portion of SUFP participants dealing with these ailments too. So knowing how to handle them would be an added asset for the teachers.

The funding supported two extra classes to run for a period of eight months and a research project focused on the effect expressive movement could have on people with MS. To tackle the first half of the project, Natalie invited her colleague Mark Vlemmix, founder of Dance for Health, to Malta to train the team. Specialised in dance classes for people with Parkinson's, MS, and RA, Vlemmix was exactly the right person for the job. As a result, SUFP now offers classes that also cater to those with RA.

Unfortunately, the second half of the project examining the effect of movement on MS, had to be reconsidered. Upon further inspection, existing research in the area was very limited, and Natalie soon realised that the funds they required to run the programme responsibly would be much higher than they had budgeted for.

'If you have MS, you need a whole different dance methodology. It would have been irresponsible to do a pilot and then open up classes with such little data. So we opted out,' Natalie asserted.

Going back to the original Problem, Solution, Benefit model that Natalie had learnt from her mentors at TAKEOFF helped SUFP reiterate their focus. Developing a whole new branch for MS would have required more energy and funds than the organisation could cope with, and might even have limited its ability to deliver high quality services to participants. The priority was clear.

June 2019

Presenting research in Japan: CONNECTING WITH THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY



In spring, a colleague emailed Natalie a link to the World Parkinson's Congress in Kyoto, encouraging her to send in her abstract. Natalie wasn't convinced. 'I really felt that I was not good enough,' she admitted, 'I wasn't up to this standard.' Luckily, with some coaxing, Natalie bit the bullet and sent in her work. A few weeks later, she was invited to attend and present her findings.

Funding the trip was going to be a challenge, until someone from Natalie's close circle shared the news with President Coleiro Preca. Ever the supportive presence, she found Natalie some sponsors and managed to collect the funds needed.

The good news wasn't well received by all participants at first. There was an incident where one of the group members even started crying when Natalie told them she was going to Japan. 'We explained that the short visit was associated with the work Natalie was doing for SUFP. We later found out the lady thought Natalie was leaving for good and just could not bear the news,' long-time class attendee **David Borda** explained.

Japan was a unique opportunity. There, Natalie shared the results of her research proving that movement as an expressive and artistic medium improves wellbeing and sociability in both those with Parkinson's as well as their caregivers. Participants reported better moods and energy levels, as well as reduced anxiety.

The response was immensely satisfying. The World Parkinson's Congress created a link between SUFP and top worldwide Parkinson's researchers, opening up a new world of possibilities. 'The whole experience was great and very validating for me' Natalie said.

October 2019

Good Causes and theatre: MOVING FORWARD



After the second fundraising gala in April, the positive effect that performing in front of an audience had on class participants became crystal clear. 'The Monday after the gala, they all looked 10 years younger,' Natalie remembered. 'It was so wonderful. And it got me thinking. I needed to create more performances as this is something to look forward to, something to dream about, hope for, live for.'

The result of that train of thought was a project called #Brainlife Goals funded by The European Federation of Neurological Associations, an umbrella group representing pan-European neurology patient groups.

The show was a performance by the SUFP participants with filmed interviews as a backdrop, sharing their experiences of living with Parkinson's. The tour was meant to start at Teatru Salesjan in Sliema and continue at various other locations, spreading the work of SUFP and giving participants multiple opportunities to perform.

Natalie was thrilled about the tour and what it would bring. 'I really wanted this to be a big hype that increases awareness and a big event for the participants. I wanted to make a piece of art,' she said.

The good news was followed by more as Natalie received word that SUFP was granted the National Lotteries Good Causes Fund. Set up to help social initiatives (among others), the €50,000 fund secured another year of all-hands-on-deck operation. Things were looking healthy and happy.

December 2019

Gieħ ir-Repubblika: HONoured BY THOSE WHO MEAN THE MOST



'In December, I was working, I forget on what,' Natalie recalled, 'And I got a phone call from the Office of the Prime Minister informing me that I was nominated for the Republic Day honours and awards. I was blindsided. They ask you if you accept to receive the honour. I said yes, obviously!'

Natalie's SUFP family had nominated Natalie for the award. Godwin Cassar, who had been coming to the classes almost since the very beginning with his wife Elizabeth led the effort, also roping in Ronald and Margaret Agius to contribute to the lobbying efforts. 'They told me they contacted Professor Smith, from the University of Malta, for help too. And I had no idea. It was the best kept secret ever,' Natalie laughed.

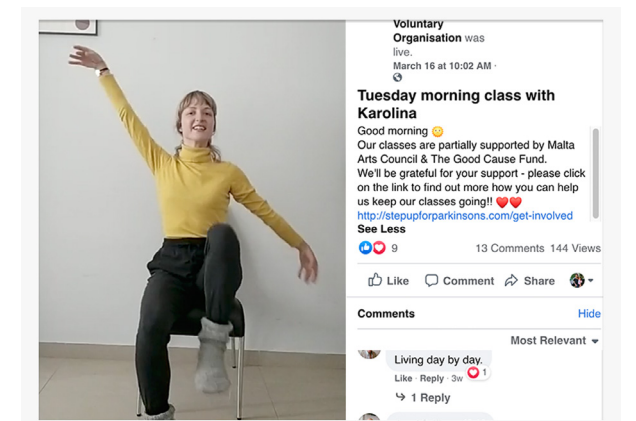
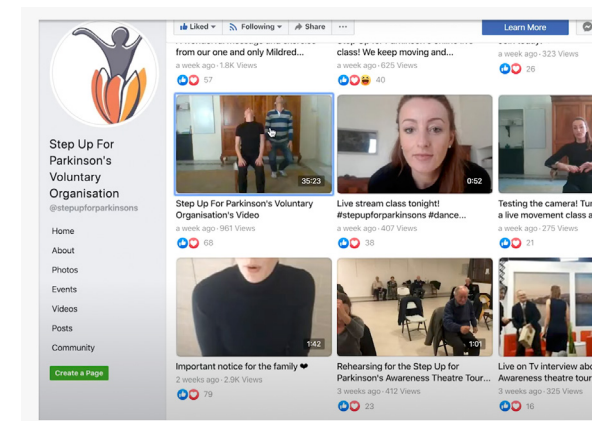
'It was a really intense moment. When I sat there, everyone was almost double my age. For them, they had been working their whole lives towards this lifetime award, and there's me sitting there in the middle of them. The biggest gift was knowing that the participants had gone and done it of their own accord and lobbied for me to get it. I was really blown away.'

But that morning was about much more than the medal. Natalie also met Minister of Health Dr Chris Fearn and had the chance to share her work. 'As SUFP, we had tried many times to get a meeting with the Minister to discuss the classes and our research and see if there was a way for the government to support our work. But we never managed,' Natalie admitted.

Mr & Mrs Agius were amongst the seven participants that formed the very first class when SUFP started. They believe utterly that the dance classes are providing a lot of benefit to the Parkinson's community.

March 2020

The COVID pandemic: A FORCED EVOLUTION



'Almost immediately after COVID-19 hit, we had to stop classes,' Natalie explained. 'For healthy individuals, not working out has an impact on our jeans size, but for people living with Parkinson's, it's much more than that.' Isolation and depression take their toll. 'And when the theatre tour was cancelled, it was heartbreaking. Some of our participants have really started declining,' she revealed.

Natalie reacted fast, taking classes online. But some of SUFP's participants struggled with the digital medium. That's when local television station ONE TV got in touch.

ONE TV asked Natalie to record a few segments with exercises for people at home in lockdown, making sure to also cater to the elderly and people with disabilities. Natalie jumped on the opportunity, and the features aired from March until November. From there, Natalie identified the 'in' for an idea she had brewing; a show called *Step Up*.

Step Up was a daily show providing exercises for the elderly and people with disabilities. 'When we got the green light, Amy, Mildred, Michelle, Roberta, Rowanne and myself, we all came together to film and find sponsors.' The show aired from January 2021, a resounding success. In the meantime, Natalie also got to work repurposing the footage from the cancelled theatre tour. The result was a feature length documentary called *One Day We Will Dance Again*.

'There are days when we all get sad about how things have turned out. But what can you do?' Natalie asks. 'I try to think about the fact that most organisations don't make it to the two-year mark. We're going on to five and we're surviving a pandemic. If we have to stop now, we will find a way to start again. We'll take risks and sacrifice time and money and do it. This is the thing with social enterprise. You have to really want it. And the SUFP family, we all want this. So we'll see what the future brings.'

What some of Step Up for Parkinson's Participants' had to say

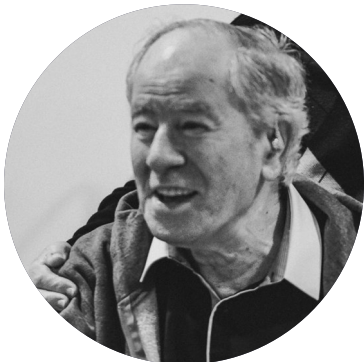


"The lessons are an important part of my weekly routine. I make sure that I never miss the twice-weekly Swieqi lessons because they provide me with an opportunity to meet other people that are going through struggles similar as mine". - Mrs Carmen Seychell

Carmen is certain that she has gained a lot of confidence through SUFP and repeatedly mentions that the staff are extremely helpful

Mr Joey Saliba was very sceptical about attending SUFP and only made it to the first lesson through the perseverance of his late wife.

"My wife was the outgoing one and she jumped at the chance to take me dancing, especially if it was going to help my Parkinson's diagnosis, so I gave it a try. Now I am the outgoing one that welcomes new members to the group. It is as if I have found another family."
- Mr Joey Saliba



Valerie Bezzina's attends the twice-weekly Swieqi class with her husband, and dance partner, Hadrian.

"Rather than staying home idle, mulling over the future, the SUFP dance classes help keep me physically and mentally active", Valerie explains.

Hadrian, on the other hand, loves the sense of community that SUFP provides. "At the lessons, everyone feels as if they belong – irrespective of whether you are the one diagnosed with Parkinson's or their carer." - Mrs Valerie and Mr Hadrian Attard Bezzina



Mr & Mrs Agius were amongst the seven participants that formed the very first class when SUFP was initiated as part of a thesis study. They have continued to attend classes throughout the past three years and believe that the dance classes are providing a lot of benefit to the Parkinson's community. Margaret highlights the fact that she has seen with her own eyes how the mobility of many participants has improved through continuous attendance.

Ms Miriam Cassar was diagnosed with Parkinson's at only 39. Fortunately, on the day of the interview she was celebrating her 53rd birthday with her newfound SUFP family. She brought along ice-cream to share with everyone after the class.

"Parkinson's is an illness that keeps you at home. Having a reason to socialize is very, very important. SUFP has helped me find this reason", Miriam concludes.

She praises all the dance teachers but has no issues admitting that Ms Natalie is her favourite. - Ms Miriam Cassar



Mr David Borda currently holds the title of being the youngest member of the SUFP community. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's at age 40 just a few years ago. Having three children of his own, he can easily think of worse scenarios that he could find himself in.

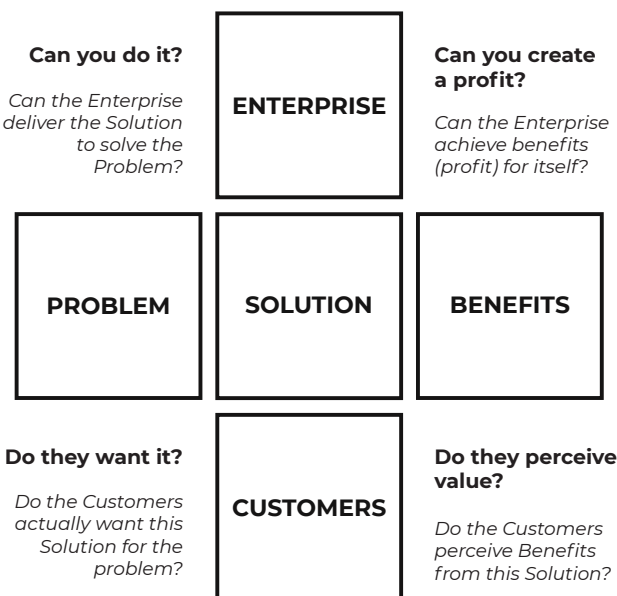
While he has nothing but praise for all the teachers at SUFP, he is convinced that a lot of the members attend because of Natalie's endless energy and enthusiasm.

TAKEOFF Guide to Social Enterprise

Since you are reading this, then you are very likely to be interested in starting a social enterprise and so we salute you. Setting up a venture to help others, who are less fortunate than you, is a noble aspiration. But be warned... a successful social enterprise is neither a hobby or a project but a real business that will require a lot of hard work and commitment. And the business is not something to run for a short period of time and then stop... that is a project. Remember that if you plan to provide a service (or a product) to a group of people in a disadvantaged situation then you will let them down if you suddenly stop. So you must plan for sustainability of the social enterprise from the outset.

The first thing to recognise, is that your social enterprise needs to have sustainability, year on year. Which means that you must bring in more 'income' than you spend every year. Now that income may be composed of grants, donations or even fees but the key thing is that you must make an annual profit. The 'P' word is often shunned by people in the social enterprise sector who wrongly-think that it refers to making a profit from the very people they are trying to help – the beneficiaries. So let's get rid of that problem... let's call it a 'surplus' rather than a profit.

This financial surplus, year on year, is one aspect of sustainability. The social enterprise must also be sustainable in terms of its most valuable asset: its people. It is very common for a social enterprise to be founded by someone who has experienced directly – or knows someone who has, perhaps a relative – a tragedy or another type of life-changing experience. That 'Founder' may be highly-committed and have clear aspirations to provide a service to others for the foreseeable future. But things happen and circumstances change. Those things can be wonderful, like falling in love, getting married and having a baby. Or they can be awful, such as personal illness or external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether good or bad, the only way for the social enterprise to be resilient is for it to develop a team of like-minded people that can reduce the need for over-reliance on the founder. And so any founder must build a team and a network



Most founders decide to create a social enterprise that will deliver some kind of service or product (a 'solution') to 'customers'. The adjacent figure shows that as the central column into which founders can simply 'take the plunge'. A much better approach, is to look carefully at the problem that is experienced by a particular group of people and to consider it from their perspective. The next step is to look at potential solutions to that problem and then to consider the benefits that such a solution can provide. But we can combine these aspects together as shown in the adjacent figure.

This figure is very helpful since it throws up four simple, but critical, questions explained as follows.

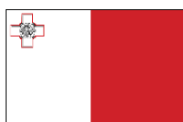
- The first question is very simple: '**Can you do it?**' In other words, can the enterprise deliver the solution to solve the problem? It does not matter if the founder cannot do it alone... what matters is that the founder must be able to create a team that can deliver the solution to customers.
- The second question goes a stage further: '**Do they want it?**' The founder may assume that customers want the offered solution to a problem but it is essential to ask them. This is market research. Nothing complicated... do they want the solution or do they prefer another from a competitor?
- The third question is: '**Do they perceive value?**' Now bear in mind that in social enterprise, the 'buyer' and the 'beneficiary' is rarely the same person. The buyer may be someone who donates money, or a grant-funder, whilst the beneficiary is the disadvantaged individual that you are trying to help. So remember that both buyers and beneficiaries must perceive value.
- The fourth question is value for the enterprise: '**Can you create a profit?**' If the enterprise has more costs than income, then it will have to cease trading. The surplus does not have to be large but it cannot be a loss over the period (typically the year).

The team behind the social enterprise will need to continually seek funding so that costs can be met. And you really need to be planning one year in advance so that you do not run out of funds. There are two main reasons for running out of funds: inadequate fund-raising activity and a lack of planning around what costs will be incurred. You therefore need a plan for the social enterprise (usually looking out over three years) and an associated budget which is termed a 'cash flow forecast'. Nothing complicated about either and the TAKEOFF website has lots of useful videos that explain what you need to do together with templates such as an EXCEL spreadsheet for the financial forecast.

Any enterprise will need an accountant to help register with the authorities, to help prepare annual accounts and to check financial forecasts. Some accounting firms may offer reduced fees to social enterprises. And some accountants may volunteer their services to a social enterprise that they wish to support. No founder should try and do the accounting function as well as run the social enterprise... that takes specialist knowledge and, in any case, we need the founder to run the enterprise!

If you are unsure about what is involved in setting up and running a social enterprise, then TAKEOFF can help. We can provide a business environment with meeting rooms for you to get started. We can provide monthly mentoring regarding your progress. And we can introduce you to our alumni network and accredited mentors who may wish to volunteer their help. But success in social enterprise is not a matter of luck. Rather, it is about dedication, perseverance and hard work. You will have frustrations. Your friends and family may believe it has 'taken over your life' and be critical and proud of you at the same time.

And so our best advice is DO NOT JUMP BLINDLY INTO SOCIAL ENTERPRISE. Spend at least six months planning and then start... but only if your team and your advisers are behind you.



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