



Research, Teeth, and the Community



Wilfred Kenely



Prof. Nikolai Attard was on the other end of the phone and was passionately describing what he had in mind. 'A mobile dental clinic will be able to reach out to the community, schools, old people's homes, village squares and we'll be collecting epidemiological data on oral health which can then be fed into existing health data. At the same time we'll be providing a free dental examination and advice to thousands of people, which they will then follow up with their personal dentist. This could be a first for Malta.' Nikolai, Dean of the Faculty of Dental Surgery (University of Malta), is determined to expand the Faculty's teaching activities and promote oral health.

That was August 2012 and we (the University's Research Trust; RIDT) immediately set the ball

rolling. We looked at a number of possibilities, including importing a ready-made mobile dental clinic from the UK, but the costs were prohibitive. The most plausible option was to purchase a truck and find someone who could convert it into a high quality dental clinic. This would give us enough breathing space for the RIDT to raise the necessary funds while the project was in progress. Having obtained the necessary quotations it became clear that the project needed a hefty €120,000. In hand we had a clean sheet and zero funds. So we embarked on a fund-raising initiative. In the meantime, Attard and Dr Gabriella Gatt roped in engineer Albert Bonnici, who had experience setting up dental clinics.

The first donations started coming in around January 2013. We bought a DAF truck and,



around March, Bonnici started the conversion work. He laid out all the designs and plans for services, including water, electricity, air conditioning, drains, radiation protection, and so on, while ensuring that the structure of the truck was strengthened where needed. The works were carried out in one of the mega-garages which form part of the Xpress Group Yard in Hal Farruġ, which Albert converted into a workshop. In the meantime, donations continued flowing in from a number of sources.

Today, almost three years later, we are proud to announce that the University of Malta Mobile Dental Clinic will be on Malta's roads by the end of July this year. The clinic is one of a kind: a fully equipped dental clinic on wheels on a par with other dental clinics. The clinic will bring

oral health to everyone on the Island despite mobility impairments thus contributing to the socio-economic wellbeing of our country. It will have see a direct impact on the quality of life of the Maltese population, whilst providing vital information with regard to the current oral health status of the nation. **T**

The Mobile Dental Clinic has been made possible through the generous contributions of GSK (Malta) Ltd, Cherubino Ltd, Bart Enterprises Ltd, Suratek Ltd, ProHealth Ltd, Rahuma International Ltd, the Good Causes Fund, and Xpress Group Ltd. The Research Trust and Faculty of Dental Surgery are deeply grateful to these companies and individuals who made this project possible.