



European Citizenship Awards

James Muscat – Transplant Support Group

Description of the nominee:

James Muscat, 56 years old, has been the Vice-President of the Transplant Support Group (Malta) for the past twelve years and is very actively involved in various sectors of this philanthropic and voluntary association. He was the first unrelated living kidney donor in Malta and was awarded the Medal of Bravery (M.R.Q) in 2009 by the President of Malta, Dr George Abela. Apart from supporting living donors personally, James is also responsible for the administration of the organisation's social media, communication with local and overseas health-related groups and regular participation on television and radio programmes to promote organ donation in the Maltese islands. James is also very actively involved in conducting motivational talks to local councils, secondary school youths, university students, residents in elderly homes and the community in general. He has been successful in creating an effective awareness campaign and in the registration of scores of thousands of organ donor card applicants throughout the past decade. James, together with other committee members of the support group, has managed to convince the relevant authorities to enact a new bill in parliament that will shortly ensure legal status of donor applicants through an effective opt-in system.

James, a qualified nutritionist and chef, is the author of 'The Kidney Care Recipe Book', a publication distributed gratis to all renal patients in Malta. This book was part of the campaign to commemorate World Kidney Day in Malta in 2012 and also this year. James, a diabetic, is planning to publish another recipe book in the not too distant future for patients suffering with diabetes. James is involved in all fundraising activities pertaining to the group and has, on many occasions, organised barbecues and similar events to help raise funds for kidney patients. Some years ago he accompanied a group of kidney patients to Lourdes in France on their annual pilgrimage trip to the Holy Shrine. His ultimate goal is to be able to reach out to all transplanted patients, including heart/liver/corneal recipients, and their respective families.

James is married to Carmen and they have three sons including a foster child. He is passionate about dogs and assists the local chapter of the Guide Dogs Foundation. James is also a founder member of the Malta Food Bank Foundation. He holds a Bachelor Degree in Hospitality Management from Florida International University. In 2017, James will be handed the Presidency of the Transplant Support Group (Malta) by Alfred Debattista, the Group's founder.

Impact achieved:

Through his personal efforts and determination over the past years, James has successfully managed to boost organ donation awareness in Malta and the sister island of Gozo. He is reputed for being an effective communicator with patients and this is very evident during his regular visits at Mater Dei Hospital, particularly the Renal Unit. When James gets to know about a potential living donor, he will visit the patient, and his/her family, before, during and after the operation and will keep in close touch to provide moral support. A good number of organ recipients are today very good friends of his and doubtlessly James has touched the hearts of many who have crossed his path throughout the years. His sense of altruism can be considered rather special and unique. He will go out of his way to help, assist and comfort those in need of support. James is instrumental in this very important role of communication, not only with other health related entities, but perhaps more importantly with the patients themselves. His biggest disappointment is when a transplant fails or when a patient dies. Such episodes are indeed devastating to all those involved in the transplantation process. James would like to see more professional help provided to patients on the waiting list. This includes the services of a psychologist, dietitian and also a therapist qualified in bereavement practices. On many occasions, James has given talks and organised seminars on healthy lifestyles and balanced diets focusing primarily on renal patients with certain conditions like diabetes, hypertension and poor circulation. As a living donor, James can relate very closely with such patients and can share his personal experience effectively with persons awaiting an organ transplant. Once the new parliament bill is approved, hopefully in a few short weeks, the Transplant Support Group's role vis-a-vis organ donation will be strengthened to a great extent. James looks forward to registering more donor card applicants under the new system.

What makes the initiative innovative?

James's nomination for this award merits his endless initiatives to boost awareness on organ donation in Malta. The European Citizen Awards will recognise nominees for their achievements and goals. James's contribution is deserving of such an award in recognition of his endeavours in this field. This award would be a honour, not only for James and the Transplant Support Group, but perhaps more importantly, for all organ recipients and transplant patients in the Maltese islands. If James manages to win this award he will doubtlessly continue to strive to boost efforts both locally and overseas.

Contribution to European values:

James had participated in the 23rd Annual Volunteurope Conference hosted by the Malta Health Network in November 2014. He was also involved in the organisation of study visits by foreign delegates in Malta in 2013. During that same year James, representing the Transplant Support Group, had travelled to Bratislava to attend a study visit involving participants from various nationalities and representing a number of categories in the volunteering sector. James plans to strive to involve the voluntary group he represents on a more international level with the scope of exchanging views and sharing experiences overseas. His primary objective in 2017 is to provide a greater sense of dignity and recognition to transplant patients and to be a pillar of solidarity to anybody seeking assistance from the group. Moreover, James will focus on patients' needs and their rights with particular emphasis on patients awaiting an organ transplant. A nationwide fundraising campaign is planned so as to reinforce awareness on organ donation and to entice more people to consent to transplantation.

Website or promotional materials:

www.transplantsupport.com.mt;

Facebook: Transplant Support Group (Malta);

<http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2015-05-03/local-interviews/Organ-donation-the-gift-of-a-lifetime-a-receiver-and-a-donor-speak-out-6736134828>;

<http://mariocaruaana.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Malta-Today.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2UhuP5dk70>