

PRESS RELEASE

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Guardian Angel Foundation Donates Communication Software and Devices for Non-Verbal Children on the Autism Spectrum

The Ministry for Equality is delighted to announce a donation by the Guardian Angel Foundation of ten tablets with specialised communication software.

The donation was made last week to children who attend St Martin's school. These speech generating devices will be used improve communication with non-verbal and minimally verbal children on the autism spectrum, who may have some level of understanding but nevertheless have difficulties communicating.

The donation came about as a result of a seminar organised by the Ministry of Equality, as part of the National Autism Strategy, entitled "Maximising Opportunities for Children and Young Adults with autism to Communicate", delivered by Gaynor Vatvani, Head of the GHA Speech & Language Therapy Service.

Mrs Vatvani recommended the specialised software, called Proloquo2Go, as this is the most effective tool currently on the market that helps children who find it difficult to communicate verbally. Local charity, the Guardian Angel Foundation, purchased 10 of these specialised software programmes, which were installed in 10 tablets that they also donated. The software works by using a collection of stored images, which are then phonetically pronounced by the tablet upon their selection. In essence, the tool thereby acts as a voice to the user.

Mrs Vatvani was very pleased at the donation and said: "If we can't communicate, we cannot make active choices that impact on our lives. These speech-generating devices can empower a child to have a say in what happens in their life, that is why they are so important."

Mr Kevin Hook, founder and Chair of the Guardian Angel Foundation, said: "We heard about the Proloquo2go app and the difference it can make to children who have difficulties in communicating. Being able to communicate with family and your peers is an essential part of life and we are extremely happy that our contribution will make a substantial difference to their communication development. While at St Martin's School we saw the tool being used by one of the children and were touched by this. The Guardian Angel Foundation is once again delighted to partner with the Government of Gibraltar with the aim of improving the lives of children in Gibraltar."

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The Minister for Education, The Hon. Dr John Cortes MP, said: "Technology is playing an ever increasing role in education. Most importantly, this particular system does so much to increase communication and to help us better cater for the needs of these children. Support of this nature from the community is always most welcome."

The Minister for Equality, The Hon. Samantha Sacramento MP, said: "For many people, verbal communication is very difficult or even impossible for a variety of different reasons and yet it can also be taken for granted by the rest of us. Communication, especially nowadays, is not always verbal and you just have to think of how we can communicate using e-mails, social media and through smart phone applications. As we advance technologically, more options become available. The Proloquo2Go application is such an example, which helps many to communicate with those around them. I am grateful to Gaynor for her advice and my staff at the Ministry for Equality for arranging the procurement of this tool. I am once again extremely grateful to the Guardian Angel Foundation: their generous donation of this software and iPads will make an important difference".