



ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

Oh these young people

These stories help us realise that instead of putting a black spot on everything young people do, we need to listen to the pain that quite a few are experiencing. The worst bit about most of these stories is that these young people seem to have been left to their own devices. The following are some snippets of (true) stories, narrated in their own words, stories I have been collecting as part of a wider study which I was commissioned to do for Aġenzija Żgħażaġh.

It was quite late in my adolescence that I started realising I was in fact a lesbian. I initially tried to wipe these thoughts out of my mind and in fact spent a lot of time going out with boys and only then did I realise that I was feeling terribly uncomfortable trying to be someone I wasn't. Adding to this, my friends found it difficult to accept me especially when I was still at secondary school. At school teachers must have realised I was a lesbian but no support was forthcoming. I would be bullied physically and emotionally by my schoolmates and many times left alone with no one to protect me. ...The only NGO that helped me in this situation was the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM). They were the only NGO that supported me especially at the phase of 'coming out'. No other NGO or social service were interested in giving me a helping hand. – Michelle, 20-year-old Lesbian

I am a Maltese Muslim girl. My father is Syrian but my mother is Maltese. I have lived in Malta all my life and I identify completely with the Maltese culture. I was born and bred in Malta and I deserve to be respected. I wear a hijab which I feel is not only a symbol of the religion I pertain to but also an icon of the struggle for religious inclusion. The scarf is part of the 'ideal I believe in', a cultural symbol. ...This hatred that is thrown at me happens all the time on Facebook and as I walk down the street but I still believe that my life is a political statement and I need to pursue this struggle. – Miriam, 22-year-old, Muslim

I am in constant pain. People think I am making a fuss. They just don't understand how terrible it is to feel helpless and without strength and in pain even when in bed. In a way the worse thing about all of this is that people do not see anything wrong in me and so expect me to carry on as if nothing is happening. At times even if I am standing for a couple of hours in a line or during a bus ride, the pain gets unbearable. There are times I just want to cry and kill myself, the pain is way too much and so unpredictable. The pills are expensive and the treatment to lessen the pain is expensive. I can hardly work or travel and I am left without any friends.... I'm not really surprised my own family does not believe me when I describe the pain I feel. What future do I have? Where are the professionals? – Cindy, 25-year-old with Fibromyalgia

I feel so ashamed being in prison but the truth is that I know I have an addictive personality and didn't get the necessary support at any stage of my life. The system has a lot to sort out because it fails us repeatedly. I admit that I was at fault for what I did and do not in any

way try to excuse my behaviour and actions. However, since I was young the immense problems there were at home were for all to see and being so young if some of those issues were nipped in the bud I would have done well for myself. I knew that with the right type of support, I wouldn't have ended up where I am now. The social workers left me on my own – I never got any support from them. When I needed them most they turned their eyes away from me. – Julianne, 24-year-old drug addict and prisoner

I am not very intelligent. I have been treated very badly by my mother. My father ignores me completely – he is not interested in me. My mother used to throw me out of the house when she had her boyfriend at home. There were times I was made to sleep out in the public garden and left without any food and nowhere to wash. My mother used to take all my money, leave me hungry and she would give it all to her boyfriend. ...It was only thanks to a neighbour that I didn't end up completely homeless and on my own. I've been abused by the people around me when they used to see me roam around in the streets on my own. What bothered me most was that I was rejected by my mother and the fact that she did not want me still hurts a lot. The second biggest pain was the nights I spent sleeping in the public garden. – Colin, 18-year-old intellectually disabled person

I am 20 years old. I suffer from a mental health condition called bipolar. I've had to struggle with this condition for so many years. At a certain stage in my adolescence I would drink and smoke and hang around with the wrong crowd which wasn't helping me at all. I think I was doing that because I couldn't take the pressure of feeling so bad at certain moments in my life and so high during others. These so-called 'friends' were pushing me towards drug use. ... At a certain point the psychologist and the psychiatrist did try to help me, with little success. Their fees were too expensive and my family couldn't afford this cost. – John, 21, with a mental health condition

I believe that my first encounter with this problem was when I checked for my Body Mass Index (BMI) in front of the other children in my class. That was a really humiliating situation for me. I consider this as being the main reason that triggered my problems. ...I have lived a lie, probably even I believed those lies but there is a silver lining as slowly I'm learning to love myself and I am allowing people to love me. – Daisy, 23-year-old, suffering from anorexia

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cepted by others. Initially when I started realising I am gay I was on the verge of a depression. This was the time I was at Sixth Form. I even had suicidal thoughts. At that point in my life the biggest wound I had was that I did not have any friends. I felt lost at times, abandoned and with no one to comfort me. – Michael, gay young person

I don't feel vulnerable because I was always able to take tough decisions in my life. At five years, I already had to take care of my sister and cook for her. It is a fact that there were moments when I wanted to hide my past, to forget all I went through because of the pain that that created in me but now I feel relaxed and I accept myself. I remember having to bandage my breasts so that I would look like a boy. I remember I wouldn't go swimming because I was so embarrassed to do so. I remember I was so confused at the time. At 17 years of age, I started having operations to change which caused a great deal of physical pain but I was always satisfied and happy that I took those decisions even though I was still young. In fact, I had to do a hysterectomy, remove my breasts and am now preparing for the most difficult and complicated operation which is the change in the genitalia. ...Nowadays I live a normal life, 'I work, I study, I go out with friends'. – Simon, 20-year-old, transsexual

I am 18 years old and considered an underachiever at school. I believe that my main problem was that I had problems accessing more than one language. 'Schools' did

not understand me. They were unable to accept that I can only function with one language at a time. The teachers did not understand me and attributed my weird behaviour mostly to hyperactivity. I do not have any friends who understand me. – Oliver, 18, low educational achiever, youth.inc

I had difficult times as I was growing up. My parents weren't good role models but I still wanted to have a family. My life was so hard. I know I am a good person deep down. I am so angry at my parents, I lacked so much love. I was brought up in a children's home and the experience was terrible. I had a family history of family members taking drugs; my grandfather was on drugs and so were my mother and father. Eventually even I started taking drugs – it was almost a natural thing to do. I'm not feeling sorry for myself but nothing comes easy for me in life as it is all an uphill struggle. The situation that had the biggest impact on me was when I finished off a relationship which for so many years and in so many ways was such a good experience. ... I would go to Paceville every day and drink through the night. I started going out with another girl. We used to take videos as we were having sex. When I felt that this relationship had to stop she sent the video to the police and they arrested me because I was having a relationship with a minor when I was over 18 years old. I didn't know her age and the Courts did not believe me. ... In prison I've learnt to appreciate and enjoy my own company. I try to make the best use of my time whilst I am here but I must say that there are no services. Even YOURS lacks support services. There are no counsellors I can refer to and no youth workers or any other professional. However, my biggest pain is that at times I feel so isolated and alone, forgotten by everyone. – Silvio, 20, prisoner YOURS

I have been living with the priests for some time now. I came to Malta because of the problems there are in my country. I used to try to work but in most cases I used to spend hours on the street and if I was given work they would not pay me. I started getting depressed and if it wasn't for this religious order that gave me a roof I would be desperate and probably would have killed myself. The social workers didn't know how to help me. All they could do was give me a space in a Portacabin. For months I couldn't contact my family. With the help of the priests now I call them often. I am happy they have helped me but I don't know what is going to happen to me in the future. – Hector, 23-year-old, homeless man

I really have nothing to add.

**Anonymity has been safeguarded*

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