



# ANDREW ON WEDNESDAY

## All young people in Malta should have a gap year at 18 years of age to do community work - Dr Ruth Falzon

Dr Ruth Falzon is a Senior Lecturer within the Department of Counselling in the Faculty for Social Wellbeing.

Her areas of expertise and research interest include Personal and Social Development and Specific Learning Difficulties focusing in particular on how emotional literacy, transversal/soft skills, performance auto/ethnography and counselling affects the quality of life of persons with dyslexia in the short and long term. She is highly involved in the community and I believe she is one of the many academics whom I consider to be a public intellectual, values scholarship but at the same time is grounded and keen to take knowledge back into the community. Ruth is one academic who stands her ground when it comes to values and principles and I can see very little compromise on this matter.

Dr Falzon says this about literacy, an area of study she is particularly keen on: "Inasmuch as literacy is essential to coping in today's civilization, technology has advanced so much that persons for whom literacy is challenging can use technology to access literacy and present work in literate form."

When asked about how engaged the community is when it comes to quality of life and social wellbeing issues, this is what she says: "An effective fulfilled citizen who has high and continuously developing emotional literacy has a sense of belonging and experiences social inclusion. Social wellbeing embraces culture, ways of living as a community, sharing and respecting value systems, traditions, and spiritual and religious beliefs. Good citizenship is about people who value leisure

and free time as well as working towards the goodness of society. Social wellbeing is directly linked to happiness and quality of life. Social wellbeing symbolises goodness in humanity."

When I asked Dr Falzon if there is still place for doing good in today's society, she said, "Yes there is but the sense of humanity is no longer that strong and we need to keep working at it." She continues to say that, "Unfortunately, people are not coping with expenses and there is not enough time for connections." She makes it very clear that this is a society that still discriminates.

"One of the reasons why we still struggle with inclusion is because we are more keen to 'school' rather than 'educate' our children. Another reason could be fear and hanging on compulsively to the home turf. For example, the irrational fear of immigrants taking our jobs as I once heard during a PSD lesson by secondary students. A further reason could be a lack of understanding and that is why one discriminates."

"I have seen this happening in situations when employers consider recruiting people with dyslexia."

Dr Falzon's take on making society inclusive is by, "Developing emotional literacy, responsibility, respect for others and equity. The educational system should give priority to these areas the same way importance is given to traditional and digital literacy." She also reiterated that not everyone feels part of the community and people are preferring to find solace in the smaller communities they make

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part of rather than towns, villages or neighbourhoods."

In her own words, "Community comes in patches and that the metaphor that some are more equal than others is still very strong." She attributes this sense of exclusion to an infrastructure that does not support such a notion entirely.

"Furthermore, I think that technology has on the one hand given us the opportunity for further communication at a global level but then it has also increased our workload to an extent that we do not have time to enjoy camaraderie on the job, which is unfortunate."

Dr Falzon also imputes a need to invest more in community action. Dr Falzon feels that market forces have taken over our economy and consequently eaten up

our sense of community leading to instances of inequality. However, she also believes that research and policy writing can be influential and can bring about tangible changes in our society.

She says that not enough is being done and that she believes that we need to start by getting all Maltese young people to have a gap year at 18 years of age to do community work: "For example, this could include farming. The average age of farmers is over 50 years. This means that in 10-15 years there will not be enough people to farm the land in Malta. I see it in my village, every time a farmer dies, his land dies with him. This would be one way how one can feel engaged with the community and to then hopefully continue this trade. If you had to think about it, most of us doing voluntary work started when we were in youth group which at times we still belong to, groups whose members we still meet as lifelong friends."

"These experiences have also impacted on the careers we take up. The idea that compulsory education certification includes out of school activities is positive but this should focus also on community work as part and parcel of education."

**What courses will you be offering next academic year?**

This coming October the Faculty for Social Wellbeing will be offering the BA (Hons.) in Social Wellbeing Studies on full-time or part-time.

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12 June 1964

## Nelson Mandela is sentenced to life in prison

On June 12, 1964, Nelson Mandela received a life sentence for committing sabotage against South Africa's apartheid government, avoiding a possible death penalty.

Nelson Mandela, a leader in the African National Congress (ANC), an organization dedicated to protesting the South African government's policy of apartheid, had been arrested in 1956 on treason charges but was acquitted.

Throughout South Africa's early history as Dutch (Orange Free State) and British (Cape) colonies, native Africans were discriminated against. Slavery was formally abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833, but indentured servitude persisted for decades. Even in 1936, nearly all non-whites were effectively banned from voting in South Africa. This discrimination grew worse after the National Party came to power in 1948.

The ANC had been banned by the government in 1960, following the Sharpeville massacre. Mandela was forced to go underground, adopting a number of disguises; sometimes a laborer and other times a chauffeur. The press had dubbed him "the Black Pimpernel" because of his ability to evade the police.

In 1961, believing that non-violent measures would not be successful, Mandela and other ANC leaders formed Umkhonto we

Sizwe (MK), a militant wing of the ANC. Beginning on December 16, 1961, MK, with Mandela as its commander in chief, launched bombing attacks on government targets and made plans for guerilla warfare.

Mandela was arrested on 5th August, 1962, and sentenced to five years in prison for inciting a workers' strike in 1961. A year later, in July 1963, the government launched a raid on the Lilliesleaf farm in Rivonia, which had been used as an ANC hideout. It arrested 19 ANC leaders and discovered documents describing MK's plans for attacks and guerilla warfare.

The government charged 11 ANC leaders, including Mandela, with crimes under the 1962 Sabotage Act. At the Rivonia Trial, Mandela chose not to take the witness stand; instead, he made a lengthy statement from the dock on 20th April, 1964. In his statement, he explained the history and motives of the ANC and MK, admitting to many of

the charges against him and defending his use of violence.

Nelson Mandela concluded, "During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Mandela was found guilty on four charges of sabotage on 11th June. The following day, he and seven on his co-defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment, avoiding the death sentence. Mandela and the other six non-white defendants were sent to the prison on Robben Island, a former leper colony located off the coast of Cape Town.