



ŻGHAŻAGH
G H A L L - B I D L A

3rd & 4th Meeting
REPORT

MENTAL HEALTH

Mosta Local Council Hall

19th June & 3rd July 2026

MEETING BRIEF



Żgħażaġh ġhall-Bidla continued its trajectory towards connecting youths with activism. After two productive meetings, Żgħażaġh decided to hold a well sought meeting on the topic of **mental health**. In fact, after concluding the 3rd meeting, the group decided to opt for 'part-2', having another meeting on the topic, both being held on the 19th of June and the 3rd of July respectively.

For both meetings, we were joined by psychiatrist trainee Dr Gertrude Fenech. From self-harm to depression, Dr Fenech explained complex issues (and solutions) revolving around mental health. What stood out from both meetings were the pertinent discussions and encounters from our young members. The youths asked important questions, offered their arguments, and engaged in meaningful conversations between themselves and with Dr Fenech.

The following report consists information and policy suggestions that has been shared during the meetings. Considering the nature of the topic, it is worth noting that no sensitive or personal information is included in this report.

Similar to other meetings, different persons continued to express their interest in collaborating, offering assistance, and joining future meetings. There was also some newcomers attending these meetings.

A way-forward for the group will also be discussed in an upcoming meeting, with the possibility of registering as a Voluntary Organisation.

Luke Fenech

Founder of Żgħażaġh ġhall-Bidla

WITH DR GERTRUDE FENECH



Dr Fenech went through the following sequence:

1. Why Adolescent Mental Health Matters
2. Common Risk Factors (Preventable or Modifiable)
3. Mental Health Symptoms
4. Possible Impact of Symptoms
5. On Anxiety
6. On Depression
7. On Self-Harm
8. Common Mental Health Myths
9. Action and Response
10. Support and Treatment
11. Practical Exercises



DISCUSSION POINTS



- The importance of having '**mental health clinics**' at schools. Professionals can go through different schools, offering mental health support and guidance. Students can opt to utilise their services during school hours. This is different than the usual guidance procedure that is already offered in schools. The youths suggested that the current guidance system can be improved, and the guidance teachers can be complemented with other possible therapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists that might be offered through the 'mental health clinics'.
- Educators (including guidance teachers) need **more professional training** on mental health first-aid and mental youth guidance. The youths highlighted that there is a lot of misunderstanding and a lack of empathy present in teachers towards students.
- Students that are displaying mental health symptoms should be tackled **immediately** after the lesson in a professional manner, not to let things escalate. If necessary, the psycho-social school team or the SMT can be contacted henceforth.
- Mental health education is to be included in curricula.
- Young people are facing unprecedented amounts of **pressures**, from different areas. For instance, schooling in Malta is affecting students' recreational time. Education policymaking needs a radical shift, especially in addressing mental health issues that are caused primarily by education itself.
- Ways to **cope with stress** include: practicing hobbies, enjoying time in nature, engaging in organisations/groups/circles, and spending time by yourself. A new white paper can be introduced to explore how young people can have more time to experience healthy coping mechanisms.
- Students are not even allowed to **express themselves freely**, even at University level. This has to change.
- From an educator's perspective, little is done to preserve **educators' mental health**. A 'wellbeing team' from the Ministry of Education are sending *wellbeing calendars* via email, to help educators cope with mental health issues. The effectiveness of such calendars has to be yet explored, raising questions on how serious educators' mental health is being considered.

DISCUSSION POINTS



The following question was asked to the group: *“If you were the teacher and you had a class in front of you, how would you incorporate some small strategies to identify students who may be struggling with signs of depression/anxiety/ADHD etc?”*. The responses were:

- **Change in behaviour by the students:** change of reactions over a short period of time, and constant disassociation of reality which was not present before. One should not ‘jump the gun’ if this happens, but to be particularly cautious when this becomes present.
- **Having one-on-one conversations with students if they ask:** helping students when they ask you for help, and trying to listen to the student to make them feel heard, instead of constantly trying to give advice. This can increase trust between an educator and a student and will give the student the comfort to confide in the teacher, enough for the teacher to recognise the student’s problems and try to adapt their teaching to this new information.
- **Getting to know students professionally:** Getting to know a student’s behaviour, without stepping over any borders, to the point where they feel comfortable enough to talk to you or be honest. Quick professional conversations in the hallways can increase a teacher's knowledge on a student enough to recognise when there’s even a slight change in their characteristics.
- **Activities in the classroom to ease anxiety:** Debates, discussions, hands-on or more ‘informal’ lessons to release tension. Taking ideas from different cultures to make the students feel more comfortable.
- **Being observant:** Noticing when students feel increasingly tired in the classroom, and trying to educate yourself on certain body language which can indicate mental health problem symptoms such as a loss of sleep, poor hygiene, procrastination, stimming, disassociation from the classroom, a loss of concentration.
- **Trying to have more empathy with students regarding deadlines:** Instead of being harsh when students give “excuses” for deadlines that might not actually be excuses to hand it in late because they didn’t feel like it, but to actually look into it and put trust into the student. Obviously if it’s repetitive behaviour then it should be more looked in to, but to try to not make any impulsive accusations.

SNIPPETS





ŽGHĀŽAGH

G H A L L - B I D L A