

DEPARTMENT OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL LITERACY (DESL)
(previously known as the Counselling Department)

The DESL has changed its title from the original name of the Counselling Department. This change is far from being just a cosmetic one, but is a reflection of the ever-evolving service that the department now offers.

The department was originally set up in 1994 to offer counselling services to the Senior Sector. In those early days, Ian Refalo was the sole member. The culture of students attending counselling sessions was slowly developing and with time it was clear that more help was needed to cater for the ever-increasing demand. A part-time counsellor was employed to take care of the Junior Sector and before we knew it, even her work load was starting to be over-stretched. At this point it was evident that the department needed to be even more pro-active, and not rely solely on students or parents to come forward. Further changes were made, finally reaching the present team of 3 full timers and 2 part timers as we stand today.

The team is made up of the following members:

Ian Refalo: B.A. (Hons) Psych., Dip. Gestalt Psych., Dip Supervision Psych., European Certified Psychotherapist. Ian is the head of department with main responsibilities for the Senior Sector. He is also a member of the School Senior Leadership Team.

Natasha Barthet: B.A. (Hons) Psych., M.Psy., P.G.C.E., Dip. Gestalt Psych. Natasha is the coordinator of the department in the Junior Sector, as well as a member of the School Senior Leadership Team. Natasha is also an educational psychologist and also forms part of the Department for Inclusive Education at San Anton School.

Ruth Vella: B.A. (Hons) Youth Studies. Ruth's main work is teaching Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) in the Senior Sector as well as teaching Maltese. Ruth is also highly involved in the Buddy System in the Senior Sector.

Anna Fenech: B.S Psych., Dip GPTIM, Dip Psychotherapeutic Counselling with Children and Adolescents; European Certified Psychotherapist; MA in Expressive Arts Therapy. Anna runs the Peer Mentoring training programme offered to all G 6 students. Anna also offers psychotherapeutic sessions for individual students who may need more intense support and intervention.

Rosanne Agius: B.A. (Psychology and Sociology), B.A. Hons (Psych). Rosanne teaches Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) to the Grade 1, 4, 5, and 7 in the Junior Sector. She also follows up the PSHE programme that is covered by the class teachers in PreGrade, G 2 and 3.

The Department now offers the following services:

1. **Personal, Social and Health Development (PSHE) lessons** to the entire school. Whereas in the first few years PSHE was only offered in the Senior Sector, we have recognised the need for early intervention. Instead of being reactive to situations which the students may face, our approach is much more proactive and we are addressing issues from an early age. Naturally, all sessions are age-appropriate and generally tackle issues or skills that the students may need to develop in order to be more confident and to live better with others. The PSHE sessions are also a means through which we can identify individual concerns, which can then be tackled outside the lesson, through counselling. The sessions also give us a good indication of current trends of thought and behaviour of our students, thus enabling us to keep abreast with their culture.
2. **Counselling Service** to all students. This is the “bread and butter” of the DESL. Once again this service has grown exponentially since its inception 15 years ago. Students make use of the counselling service both in Senior and Junior sectors. Students can be self-referred, or referred by staff members, parents and other students. Understandably, confidentiality, within the normal parameters of safety and ethical practice, is strictly maintained. At San Anton we recognise that outside factors could have an impact on the students’ school life, and to this regard students are allowed to discuss any matter of concern to them. The counselling service is an integral part of the pastoral care that is offered to our students.
3. **Career Guidance:** Students in Grade 9 are given appropriate lessons aimed at helping them make correct choices in connection with the subjects they will be taking for the remainder of their time at San Anton School. They also have individual sessions with the counsellor. Students in Grade 12 are met individually at the start of the scholastic year to ensure that any difficulties regarding post-secondary education are ironed out. This meeting with the School Counsellor precedes the recommendations by the teachers regarding the Paper A and B choice that has to be made by each Grade 12 student. During the meeting, students are given information on entry requirements into all major 6th Form and other post-secondary institutions both local and abroad.
4. **Career Day:** As further support to the students concerning their career path, students attend a Careers, Day at the school itself. In conjunction with the Old Antonians Association, students are able to meet with former students who are now established in various careers, studies and professions in an informal basis at School. Instead of impersonal and at times overly formal career talks at School, this annual event is open to all Grade 12 students. The afternoon programme also include talks and presentations by the Heads of some 6th Forms.

5. **Parents' Meetings:** Parental participation at San Anton School is expected, encouraged and supported. For this reason, the DESL offers the following parental meetings and courses throughout the scholastic year for the following sets of parents:

- Pregrade – Parental talks are held to establish a link with parents as well as to share some important guidelines related to positive parenting approaches.
- Grade 1-7 – Positive Parenting Programme for parents. A number of sessions are held where parenting skills are discussed in detail, in view of empowering parents to manage their children more proactively. This programme is held in the evenings during the first term.
- Grade 9 – assisting the parents to support their children to make the right choice of “option” subjects. This meeting is normally held in January.
- Grade 11- an informative meeting for parents to explain the SEC exam system, as well as details as to how the school and parents will assist the students in choosing between papers A and B. This meeting is held during April or May.
- Parental Skills course for parents whose children are approaching or just starting the teenage years. Topics discussed are the emergence of conflict, sexual growth, Paceville, friends, and other related topics. These are normally held in the evenings over 3 sessions sometime in the first term.
- A bi-annual skills course for Parents of children with ADD/ADHD.

6. **Buddy Sytem:** Introduced at the start of the last scholastic year, the department prepares students in Grade 10 to buddy up with students who the following year will be in Grade 8, their first year in the Senior Sector. The idea behind this is that the Grade 8 students will have, apart from all the other support systems in place, a student in Grade 11 who they will meet up with on a regular basis and who can be of support to them. The Grade 11 students are, in turn, supervised and monitored by the department whose job it is to ensure that the relationships are working out. New students who did not start their schooling at San Anton at inception are also assigned a buddy.

7. **Peer Mentoring:** The Peer Mentoring Programme is an extension of the Buddy System. The programme targets Grade 6 students and aims to develop and enhance relational skills and conflict resolution. Mentoring programmes focus on helping children become more connected in school. This programme aims at training children to become mentors to younger children who are facing problems in the playground. It helps to build a stronger sense of community and integration and stresses that relationships matter. The training is offered throughout the school year and during the last term students actually practice being peer mentors for Grade 3 students in the playground. In Grade 7 students are supported and encouraged to volunteer to be peer mentors.

8. Anti-Bullying Policy: San Anton School recognises that bullying is an anti-social form of behaviour which is prevalent in all schools. We are aware that it is a delicate matter, with victims usually reluctant to seek help, and bullies not recognising the need for help themselves. We have a detailed policy which includes awareness sessions in the PSD lessons, preventative tools such as supervision, reporting systems which are discreet, and then clear guidelines for dealing with individual cases.

9. Miscellaneous:

- The department also organises a number of events throughout the year. The Grade 12s spend 3 days in Gozo, once their SEC exams are over. This is an opportunity for them to conclude their life at San Anton School in a relaxed atmosphere, at the same time using this opportunity to seal their relationships with friends, and prepare for the next stage of their life.
- Throughout the year, the department also invites outsiders to meet the students to share relevant experiences. Last year, Life Force, a Canadian group with a strong pro-life message met the Grade 10s, Caritas held sessions with the Grade 9s and 10s, and an Eritrean refugee met with the Grade 11s.
- New students are a particularly vulnerable group and the department organises group sessions providing a space where they can express their difficulties as well as finding the necessary support and advice.
- The members of the DESL also attend Grade Coordinators meetings in the Senior Sector once a month.

10. Teacher Support:

- The department also provides services to the school staff. Should any staff member require counselling they can make use of the team. Furthermore, last year we introduced a Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP), an informal forum where teachers can be of support to other teachers, as well as discuss best practice.
- As the need arises, we offer talks for the teachers regarding educational issues that are in line with newly identified areas in the field of social and emotional literacy.

11. Cause of The Year: As part of the Social component we try to foster with our students, each year the DESL “adopts” a cause. Although there usually is an element of fund raising, the main impetus and effort is to raise awareness of the particular cause we are adopting.