

The Therapeutic content and process at Komunita' Santa Marija

Most people, if asked about the function of Komunita' Santa Marija, are able to perform a quick mental association with *sedqa*. The majority of people would most probably have a very sketchy idea of what this local residential drug-rehabilitation programme is all about. The probability is that few would be well informed about the day-to-day therapeutic efforts involved in helping ex-drug users to work through their drug dependency.

Over the years, Komunita' Santa Marija has had the aim of targeting a specific group within the wider population of drug-users. This service is geared towards offering shelter to individuals who are somehow incapable of functioning and coping with the demands of life due to their drug dependency.

The incapability to deal with the needs of life implies much more than being unable to perform under the pressure of life's stress. Here, we are speaking of persons who have substantially lost their concept of self-identity.

One may refer to persons whose drug dependency has persuaded their emotive and cognitive spheres to the point where the person loses the sense of being with oneself and others. Consequently, the individual ends up feeling devoid of all feelings, and all energies are focused on the simple act of survival by procuring and abusing of certain substances.

At Santa Marija, we guide persons who have really got close to the point of no return. On average, our client would have gathered an extensive repertoire of several human relationship problems, which when combined to the damaged concept of self, the clinical picture grows beyond proportion.

In understanding the system of approach at the Komunita', first one get acquainted with the idea behind such a therapeutic setting.

Komunita' Santa Marija is a residential drug rehabilitation programme which spans upon a period of a year and a half. It cares for both males and females. After a detoxification treatment at Dar l-Impenn, the person leaves society behind and seeks refuge within the community's closed boundaries. This implies that the person will have minimal and restricted contact with family and the outside world. Employment, where still applicable, is terminated because the person opting for this programme would be centering his or her life within the Komunita'.

This temporary separation from society until the gradual reintegration is re-established, is a primary factor in aiming towards significant change in addictive behaviour. Moving out from society facilitates the process of picking up the broken pieces. It also helps creating distinctive boundaries in between the resident and those dysfunctional relationships revolving around the person. Besides, this physical separation serves the very practical purpose of keeping the person in a drug-free environment since the experience of cravings for the substance of abuse is omnipresent. Obviously, this implies that the person will be safer and the risks of relapse are significantly diminished.

Above all, it is this state of semi-hermitage that presents the person with the golden opportunity for reflection, self-exploration and evaluation of one's reality. These three factors are fundamental elements in the initiation of any psychotherapeutic process of change.

The rehabilitation process evolves from the liaison of community life combined with the intervention of psychotherapy. Community life consists of work, leisure and interactions between individuals and groups, which offers to the client a new rich spectrum within which to function dynamically. Everyday route within the community implies that the person would be experiencing the stress and pressures of life in a controlled environment. Thus, the person would be recognizing destructive behaviour, understanding it and planning its

modification. Such riches of learning evolves from the evade running of the house where the person, by being in a structured way and especially through the interaction with others by which he or she gets feedback about oneself, new insights and awareness are formed.

In coming to terms with the technicalities of living, the person would be meeting oneself all over again. The process of awakening and change acquires extra momentum, especially when supplemented with the obvious beneficial effects of psychotherapy.

Individual and group counselling are the backbone of the treatment offered at Santa Marija. Counselling is built on the simple interaction between the client and the therapist. This therapeutic alliance between both parties aims at the empowerment of the client through a better self-knowledge and thorough the acquisition of new coping skills.

Group counselling, joined at a later phase by individual counselling, walks all the way with the client. Counselling is initially focused on facilitating the client's adjustment to this new lifestyle and then goes on to establish a healthy working relationship with the therapist. Once trust is established within the therapeutic relationship, the real work of restoration can commence.

The beauty of this process of change is in the emergence of the personality of people who can sometimes make radical transformations. This experience and sensation of 're-birth' is in itself a healing experience because it gives impetus to the person who has to slowly move out of the programme's cocooned life to face life again.

Describing the therapeutic process of change somehow always transcends word-power, and one ends up reflecting that at the end, all there is in this mechanism of change can be simply summarised by the notion of self-love.