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Stella Maris may soon launch course in therapeutic clowning

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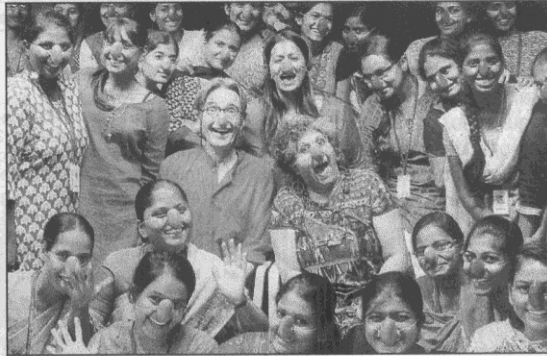
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Chennai: College students are not uninitiated in the art of clowning around, but to be awarded a certificate for the effort is unheard of. Stella Maris may just be the first college in Chennai to take the leap. In their case however, it's clowning with a difference. The college is in the process of launching a certificate course in therapeutic clowning — a form of clowning that takes a more studied curative approach (compared to clowning for entertainment).

The course is being developed by Canadian therapeutic clowns Fif Fernandes and Hamish Boyd, who settled in Auroville two years ago to establish their school of clowning, Komali MeDi Clown Academy. Having deployed humour and role-play in hospitals and community centres in Tamil Nadu to relieve stress and assist in healthcare, Fernandes and Boyd, are now stepping up their efforts in training.

"We've developed a 27-hour course, open to all, on therapeutic clowning," says Fernandes, of Indian origin, whose aunt, Sister Irene Mathias happened to be a principal of Stella Maris. It was her aunt who introduced her to community development work, she says, counting it as the groundwork for her present interest in healing through humour.

The course, still in its preparatory stages and due to begin in September, will cover such rubrics as: clowning as a tool to healing and systemic shifting in healthcare, education and business through



Canadian therapeutic clowns Hamish Boyd (left) and Fif Fernandes during a clowning workshop with 2nd year social work students at Stella Maris college on Tuesday

whole brain education; emerging trends to humanize systems, integrating arts, spirituality and science; the biology of Hope: effects of positive language theory and application; history and theory or therapeutic laughter; and clowning skills, research, methodology. As evident, funny business is serious work.

While the crux of Komali's work focuses on training people to become medical clowns and integrating them into the healthcare system in India, the fledgling academy has started to explore opportunities and applications of therapeutic clowning across various sectors like business, education, community-building and so on. Stella Maris's head of the undergraduate programme, Mary Abraham, who hosted a clowning workshop for the 2nd year undergrads of Social Work on Tuesday, believes the principles of clowning can help her students in the field.

Alternative learning and unorthodox methodologies,

already practiced by progressive schools, are beginning to gain traction in higher education. Dr Albert P'Rayan, who heads the Higher Education Cell at KCG College of Technology on OMR, has introduced storytelling in their communications skills module — a 45-hour programme taught in the 5th or 6th semester. "Storytelling has been part of this module for five years. It enhances creativity, critical thinking, collaboration and of course, communication skills," says Dr P'Rayan, an ELT (English Language Teaching) guide. At Women's Christian College's psychology department, the diploma in expressive arts therapy has been drawing a mixed crowd. Artistes, psychologists, pediatricians, even corporate trainers have looked to the programme — which teaches therapy through dance, movement, drama, visual arts and storytelling — to help them learn more about conflict resolution, team-building and building confidence.